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HYPER

Deus Ex Mankind Divided

Adam Jensen returns to a world on the verge of cybernetic civil war

games
of the
future

32 must play
games
from E3

Gaming Hotware

*The hottest new gaming
technology around*

Zelda: Breath of the Wild

*Link has a new challenge
to face - open world design*

The VR Wars

*Hands on with Oculus
Rift, HTC Vive, PSVR
and HoloLens*

WHEN THE LIGHTS GO DOWN

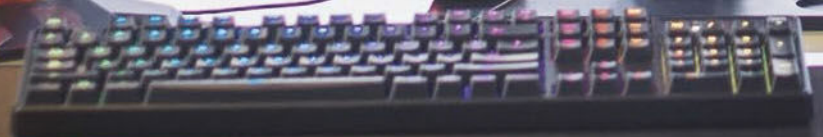
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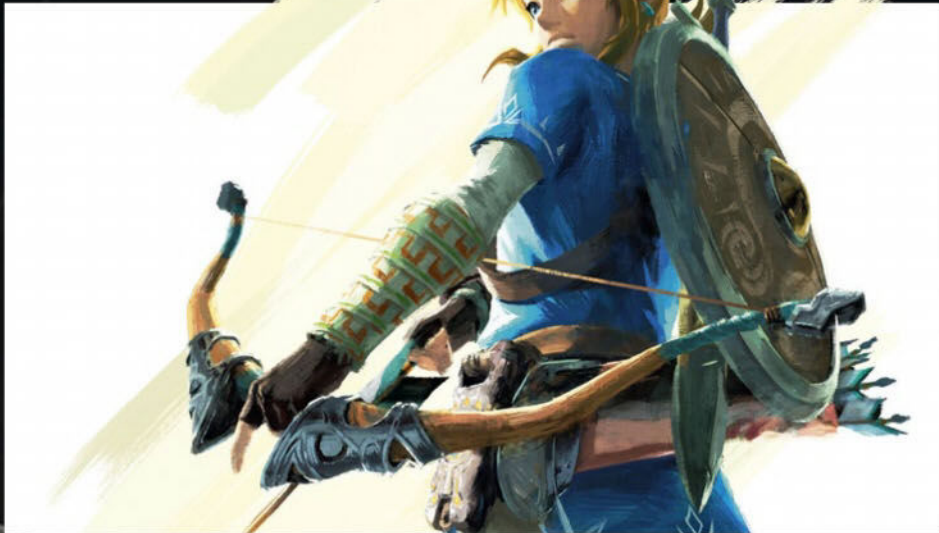


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I watched E3 from the outside this year, and it appears my experience was a little different from those who went to America's biggest gaming expo. People on the ground said the show felt a little subdued and smaller than in previous years, but from the outside looking in, it was one of the best years in memory thanks to the huge number of new IPs (and of course sequels and remakes) announced at the show. For me, there were a few real standouts. The ballet themed PS4 platformer *Bound* has me entranced. I want to cut off cyborg limbs to improve my gear in *The Surge*. I can't wait to see if the crying koala makes a return appearance in *South Park: The Fractured But Whole* and I long for the ludicrous machismo of *Yakuza 0*. How about you?

DANIEL WILKS
EDITOR



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The background of the page is a stylized, low-poly illustration in shades of purple and blue. It depicts two characters from the game Deus Ex: Mankind Divided. On the left, a character with white hair and a dark, segmented suit is shown in a dynamic, forward-leaning pose. On the right, another character in a similar suit is shown in a more upright, slightly crouched pose. The overall aesthetic is futuristic and geometric, with sharp angles and a sense of depth.

DEVELOPER	Eidos Montreal
PUBLISHER	Square Enix
PLATFORM	PS4, Xbox, PC
RELEASE DATE	23 August, 2016

Deus Ex Mankind Divided

The politics of today, tomorrow
John Robertson

Human Revolution, Deus Ex's most recent offering, was predominantly a game about hope. Adam Jensen, enigmatic protagonist, found himself coming to terms with mechanical augmentations applied to his body and engaging with that most striking of cyberpunk questions: what does it mean to be human in an increasingly mechanised, digital world? Most of the answers were optimistic regarding cross-pollination between humans and machines.

How times change. Events at the end of Human Revolution saw the cyborg dream come crashing down and the populace begin to treat augmented Homo sapiens with fear

and suspicion. The Renaissance was over; a world of division was born.

It's this that Deus Ex: Mankind Divided takes as its narrative entry point, the game seeking to explore the tensions that arise when one social group exists in sharp friction to another. If Human Revolution was a game of optimism, Mankind Divided is one of pessimism. With 'pure' humans fearful of anything that is remotely different to them, the world is ripe for propaganda and evocative, nebulous lies to be used as a means for those with dreams of power to win hearts and minds and, eventually, take control of a newly unstable world.

"It's definitely got a darker, more



No point corner peaking if your gun is showing, Mr Jensen



A game within a game. How very Inception *insert horn here*

NEAR-FUTURE

Mankind Divided takes place in 2029, two years after the events of Human Revolution. The original Deus Ex game, released in 2000, was set in 2052 – making this upcoming release both a sequel and prequel within the wider context of the franchise and its narrative.

pessimistic perspective,” explains Mary DeMarle, NBarrative Director. “Realistically, when you have an event that the whole world is caught up in, no-one is paying critical attention to the messages being broadcast until later. By the time people are ready to handle the real information there has already been such a mass of disinformation that people are afraid of the new world they’re in. That triggers people to get caught up in the paranoia and the conspiracy theories and view the whole world in that way.”

This is a world of apartheid, where the augmented are increasingly forced into ghettos and restricted from engaging with the rest of society. Jean-Francoise Dugas, Game Director, explains that inspiration for how much of this segregation is depicted revolves

around what was occurring in the United States of the ‘50s and ‘60s with tensions between the black and white populations of the country. Perhaps even more powerfully, however, many of the tones that emit themselves from what we’ve played of the game are similar to political events happening in the present day.

The rise of Donald Trump in the US and the increasing power of far-right and left parties across Europe, combined with the threat of global terrorism, the racism it spawns and the way certain parties seek to bend and enhance subsequent policies to suit their own agendas, mirrors many of the themes commented upon in Mankind Divided. Perhaps unwilling to stake a claim at Deus Ex being a political commentary on our present world, Dugas

diplomatically states that such events merely “represent a bit of a weird coincidence in that there are similarities with what we’re doing.”

Political themes and ideologies are not the only similarity Mankind Divided shares with our present reality. Augmentations themselves are becoming increasingly common and sophisticated, from artificial organs to entire limb replacements that are connected to our nervous systems to allow us to control them using our brains. This is a double-edged sword for a game set in the future: on one side it helps ground the player in the experience by making connections between real and fictional worlds, but can it also make it more difficult to surprise and wow the player?

“That’s a really interesting question. We did so much research



“**DEUS EX IS STILL CYBERPUNK IN SOME RESPECTS, BUT WE'RE LOOKING AT THE WORLD OF TODAY JUST AS MUCH AS WHAT IT MIGHT BE TOMORROW**”



ON HUMOUR

Dugas: "Even though [Mankind Divided] is a more pessimistic vision, characters still have a lot of character to them. They're still able to laugh about things and there are still lights left across humanity, but it's definitely not like it was during Human Revolution."

on Human Revolution, a game that took four years to make, and by the time we'd finished the game some of those things that we'd been predicting were already starting to happen," explains DeMarle.

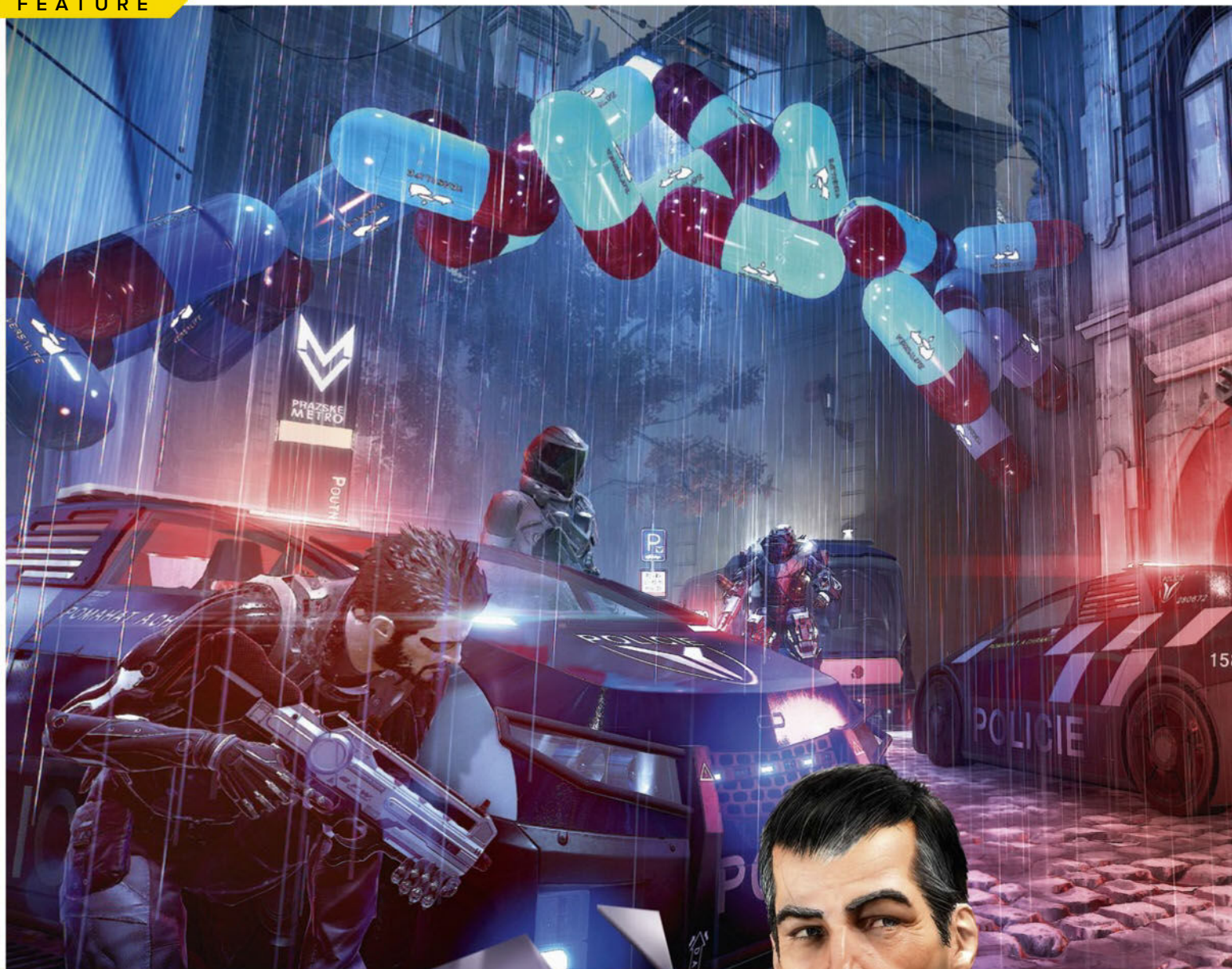
"What surprised us then was how quickly these technologies were coming into being. And, again, the same kind of thing is happening with Mankind Divided. I don't know if that makes it more surprising to challenge the player, although I am also reminded of William Gibson, the father of cyberpunk, when he said that he didn't want to deal with cyberpunk anymore because the world has caught up to it."

Dugas continues the point by explaining that the term 'cyberpunk' is simply a quirk of language, a word used out of familiarity more so than it provides

an accurate description of what is trying to be achieved in Mankind Divided. He prefers to centre his description of his game's genre around the word "anticipation". "With the essence of the game we're trying to look at the future of tomorrow," Dugas elaborates.

"We're looking at where the technology of today is going to go. We're looking to anticipate what's going to happen with the technologies we've got now. Yes, Deus Ex is still cyberpunk in some respects, but we're looking at the world of today just as much as what it might be tomorrow. Cyberpunk is all about that, too, but for me this is more about anticipation."

Given that he has already been through the process of adjusting and learning how to use his augmentations, Jensen starts the



story here as a far more powerful entity than he did during the opening of *Human Revolution*. His mechanical adaptations gift him greater strength and speed, while active camouflage allows him to cloak himself for short periods of time and his digital components mean he can interact with computer systems to a degree that would otherwise be impossible.

An opening sequence set in Dubai introduces us to the wider narrative, re-establishes Jensen in the leading role and offers a structured environment in which to learn, or relearn if you're a returning *Deus Ex* player, what these augmentations are capable of. The Dubai sequence takes around 45 minutes to conquer, after which time you're thrown into the game 'proper' and beset with all of the freedom of action, choice and consequence that we've come to expect from this franchise. The incorporation of what is, from a gameplay perspective if not a narrative one, a tutorial is necessary here in order to not have players feel overwhelmed with Adam Jensen's myriad abilities.

"We worked hard to deliver a certain pace to the opening level," says Dugas. "Our goal was to make sure that players could, within the

game, become acquainted with the new mechanics and/or ones that they've forgotten from *Human Revolution*.

"In Dubai we're teaching you things, but at the same time we didn't want to show you everything. It's tempting to put everything in the first level, but you realise that it can become overwhelming and the pacing suffers because of that. We had discussions about how much we should put into that early section without reaching that overwhelming point. It's always a struggle to get that pacing right, which is one of the reasons that Dubai isn't as open as other parts of the game."

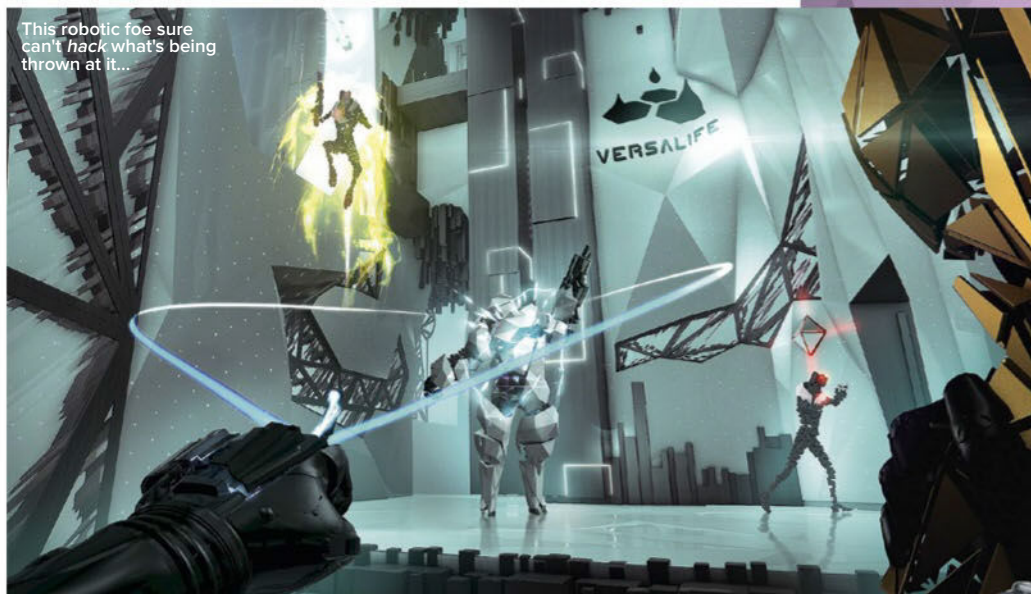
Dubai is one of two sections that we've played, the other set within the brutalism-inspired architecture of the fictional Golem City district of Mankind Divided's vision of Prague. Golem City is a reference to the myth of the Golem of Prague, a protector envisaged by the city's 16th century Jewish community to keep them safe from anti-Semites of the Holy Roman Empire. The district is home to an augmented population, its design





In the future, suppositories are much, much larger

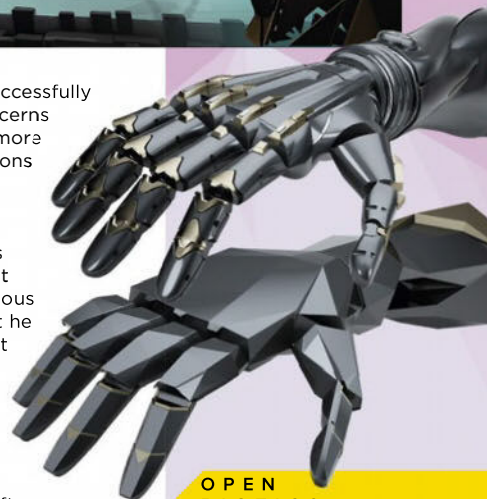
||
IT'S TEMPTING TO PUT EVERYTHING IN THE FIRST LEVEL, BUT YOU REALISE THAT IT CAN BECOME OVERWHELMING AND SUFFERS



This robotic foe sure can't hack what's being thrown at it...

used to subtly hint at the mindset of its inhabitants. Architectural angles are sharp and unwavering, simultaneously lacking ambiguity and leaving nothing up to interpretation. They depict clearly and unsympathetically the fear that exists within the augmented community regarding how they're going to be treated and discriminated against moving forward. The same black and gold visual palette that was used in *Human Revolution* to mimic the kind of aspiration and progress these colours portray in Renaissance-era paintings are also used here, albeit in a more muted, desaturated manner that references the fading of augments in society. These kinds of continuation of theme, both visual and ideological, are going to be recognised by those that paid sharp attention to, and sought to interpret, the messages behind *Human Revolution*. However, the design team is adamant that *Mankind Divided* can be enjoyed by newcomers to the series. It's difficult to disagree with the sentiment given just how much of

this offering seems to successfully tap into worries and concerns of the present day and, more aptly, how today's decisions are going to impact our lives tomorrow. Jensen's personal motivation and quest might not mean as much to you if you've not played through the previous game, but the world that he inhabits says much about us as a society today. That, at least, is the potential on offer here. It's difficult to make accurate judgements on a game that promises to consume tens of hours after experiencing just a tiny fraction of that, but what can't be questioned is the intent to create something that is philosophically and ideologically meaningful within the context of our present existence and how we're currently wrangling with the problems thrown up by increasing technological capacity. If *Mankind Divided* can offer a new perspective on these issues then it will have succeeded in securing a place among the most hallowed cyberpunk anticipation messages of our time. Augmented fingers crossed. ☞



OPEN BIOTICS

Developer Eidos Montreal has partnered with robotics company Open Bionics with the intention of making some of *Mankind Divided's* ideas and designs a reality. Open Bionics is seeking to create fully bionic hands, for instance, with *Deus Ex's* visual designs influencing development. It's a stark case of fiction informing reality.

PREVIEW

Gears of War 4

Meet the new boss, same as the old boss, but with more slime, writes **Andrew Whitehead**

DEVELOPER	The Coalition
PUBLISHER	Microsoft Studios
PLATFORM	Win10, Xbone
RELEASE DATE	11 October, 2016

A lot has changed with shooters since Gears of War first hit the scene. So the big question is: how does developer The Coalition evolve the series and keep Gears of War 4 relevant without losing its personality? Easy. By not doing too much of anything.

"At The Coalition we talked about doing it right before we do it different," says Matt Searcy, Lead Campaign Designer. "We went 25 years after the end of Gears 3 in order to give ourselves space and have new characters, new settings, a new conflict and a whole new enemy."

After some lengthy hands-on time with Gears 4, I can assure you Matt is right. This is the Gears you know right down to your chainsaw-cross-machine-gun Lancer and your trusty Gnasher shotgun.

"But that doesn't mean we didn't do anything new inside the game," says Matt. "We have a lot we focused on, but [we focused] especially [on] the story. We went 25 years after the end of Gears 3 in order to give ourselves space and have new characters, new settings, a new conflict and a whole new enemy."

The story takes place over the course of one night as three soldiers, including JD Fenix, son of Marcus Fenix, go in search of their missing friend. In my short time with this band of misfits I actually found them pretty likeable and believable, more than the Marcus and his pals. There's still a hint of melodrama but they're also more human.

"We tried to take back a little bit of that intimacy from [the first Gears

of War]," says Matt. "It's a little bit different to the Gears of the past where you were dropped into the middle of a war ... It's more about the journey of these three characters, and a few other characters as well."

Along the way you'll be tearing through your new enemy, the Swarm, who stepped up after the Lambent and Locust were wiped out at the end of Gears 3. Yet despite being a new breed of baddies, there are a few familiar classes within their ranks. A Hammerburst-wielding soldier, a grenadier, a sniper; it's the usual suspects. There's even new Wretch-like enemies called Juvies.

One all-new enemy I encountered was the Pouncer. Think of it as an Alien-like Xenomorph on steroids. Leaping around the battlefield, these nimble bastards require you to stick close together, keep moving, and take them down one blast at a time.

There's something reassuring about how Gears of War 4 fits into the current shooter landscape. It's the same, but different. Thankfully, The Coalition hasn't added jet packs or an open-world design. They've stayed true to the series roots, and the game is better for it. It may feel anachronistic, but it also feels genuine. It's an unashamed gore-filled, cover-based shooter that won't win any new fans, but will certainly please existing ones. «

“IT'S A LITTLE BIT DIFFERENT TO THE GEARS OF THE PAST WHERE YOU WERE DROPPED INTO THE MIDDLE OF WAR. IT'S MORE ABOUT THE CHARACTERS”



Not the best time to bring a shank to a boss fight

DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

Square Enix
Square Enix
PS4, Xbone
TBA 2017

PREVIEW

Final Fantasy XII

The Zodiac Age

THE ZODIAC AGE GIVES FFXII A WELL-DESERVED HD MAKEOVER, REDOING ALL OF THE VISUALS DOWN TO TINY DETAILS, INCLUDING THE DISPLAY FONTS

Return to a (somewhat) forgotten age, writes Heidi Kemp

Final Fantasy XII is perhaps one of the more overlooked instalments of the storied saga. Many factors contributed to the game not getting quite as much attention: its protracted development time, general JRPG fatigue among the public beginning to set in, and perhaps most importantly, the English language version's 2006 launch being next to the debut of not one but two consoles. No matter how good a game is, it's hard to keep excitement high in the face of shiny new hardware. The fans that did play through FFXII, however, found a superbly crafted RPG masterpiece with a striking visual design, fresh and engaging combat mechanics, as well as a story and setting that felt far different from any FF before it.

So when a game is good and its fan base is passionate, it's likely that the game will get a second chance to enchant a new audience. That's exactly what Square Enix is doing with the upcoming release of Final Fantasy XII: The Zodiac Age for PlayStation 4 and Xbox One.

The Zodiac Age returns us to the tumultuous land of Ivalice, where scheming, politics, and Magick combine to create a tempestuous mix. The desert kingdom of Dalmasca has been forcibly annexed into the Archadian Empire and their crown princess has gone into hiding.

Amid this turmoil, a small team of dreamers, rebels, sky pirates, and disgraced soldiers band together to uncover a deeper plot being hatched within the Empire - one that could have a drastic impact on all of Ivalice.

Being a late-gen PS2 game - and a Square Enix game, at that - meant that Final Fantasy XII was among the prettiest titles on the platform, both in terms of sheer art design and pushing the console to its graphical limits. The Zodiac Age gives FFXII a well-deserved HD makeover, redoing all of the visuals down to tiny details - even the display fonts have been remade in crisp HD format. If you saw the quality of FFX and X-2's HD remaster, then you know exactly what to expect here.

Perhaps more exciting to seasoned fans of FFXII, however, are some of the new features that will be coming to The Zodiac Age. Dual-language audio allows players to hear the voices in either English or Japanese - a first for an FF game on console. Numerous features from the Japan-only Zodiac Job System version of the game will also make their Western debut. The Zodiac Job System ups the number of ability-granting License Boards from one to 12, allowing players to mould characters to fill specific roles in battle. Optional speed features can control the pace of the game's battles, allowing players to zip through fights

if they please - a welcome feature for taking on some of the incredibly time-consuming ultimate bosses. Other additions, like a New Game+ mode, auto-saving, easier use of party-controlling Gambits, and a Trial Mode whereby players take on a gauntlet of fierce monster encounters all in a row, will also feature prominently in this particular remaster.

Final Fantasy XII: The Zodiac Age is scheduled for release in early 2017 for Xbox One and PlayStation 4. Thankfully, that gives us plenty of time to finish Final Fantasy XV beforehand. ☞

More colourful than Just Dance 2017, except with more dragons





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PREVIEW

Bound

You're bound to have a good time in this toe-tapping title, writes Andrew Whitehead

DEVELOPER	Plastic Studios/Santa Monica Studios
PUBLISHER	Sony Interactive Entertainment
PLATFORM	PS4
RELEASE DATE	August 2016

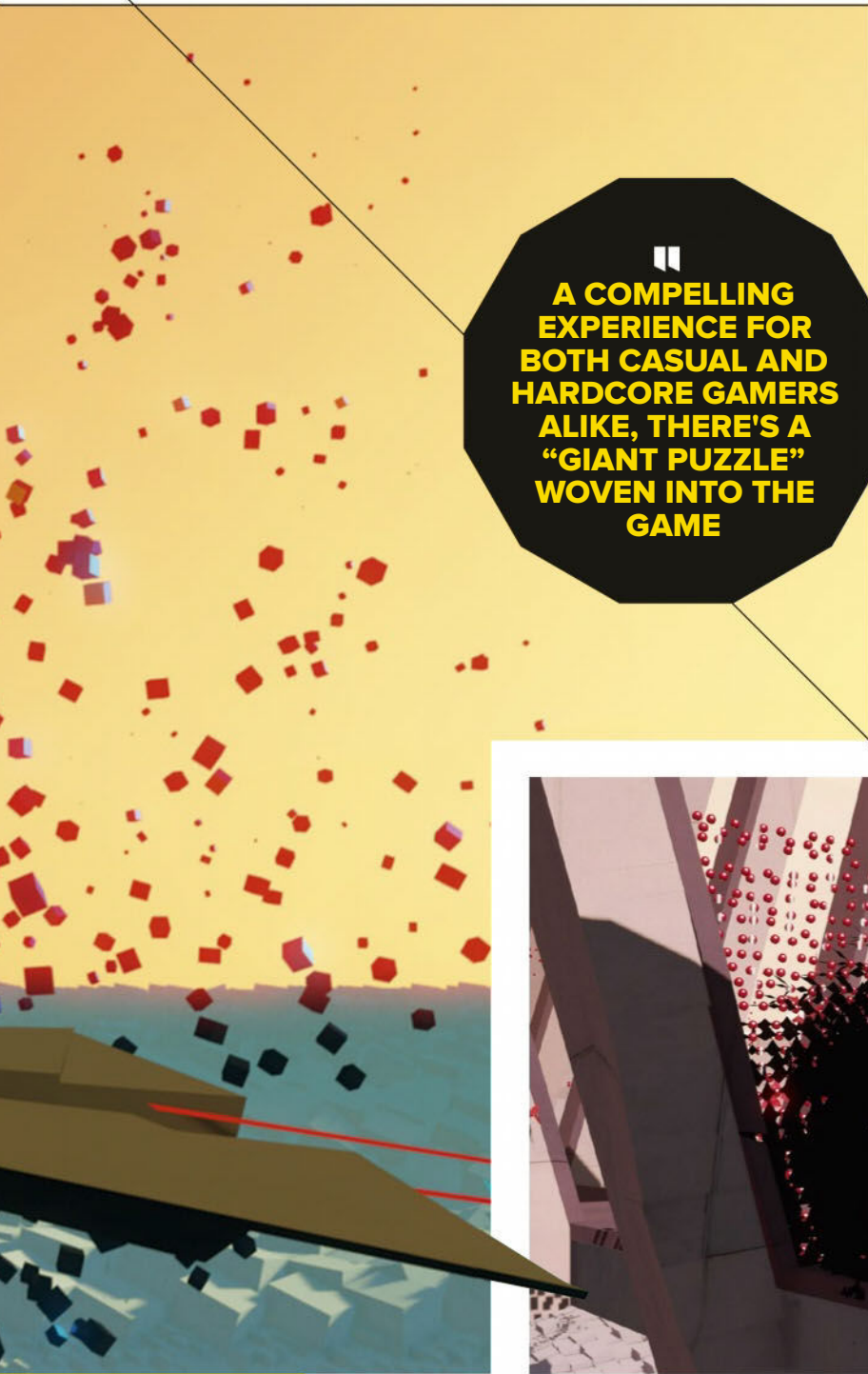
When you think of SIE Santa Monica, you probably think of big, angry bald men eviscerating various mythological beings in a shower of blood and frothing rage. You probably don't recall the multitude of various PlayStation exclusives the studio has helped out on, though... and you most assuredly don't think of dainty ballerinas prancing their way through colourful, abstract environments. Right?

So you might be surprised to hear that, alongside the new God of War, Sony Santa Monica is currently helping developer Plastic wrap up development on Bound, a stunningly beautiful platform adventure game designed around the colours, movements, and imagery of dance.

As you begin your adventure in the world of Bound, you encounter a conversation between a young woman and her mother - revealed to be the Queen and Princess of

this strange land. A vile monster is destroying the Queen's beautiful kingdom, and it is up to you, as the Princess, to help ward him away from this world.

Bound is a game all about movement. In most cases, that statement would mean that there's a lot of precision platforming, but Bound instead focuses on the lovingly rendered animation of its heroine. The developers has clearly spent a great deal of time studying and capturing grand dance moves, and every motion your character makes reflects that. Jumping from platform to platform is done with graceful grand jetés, while traversing narrow crossings is done en pointe with the grace of a pro tightrope walker. When faced with threats, like being assaulted by malevolent forces or encountering treacherous terrain, you can hold down the R2 button to dance in a glorious shower of colour and motion,



A COMPELLING EXPERIENCE FOR BOTH CASUAL AND hardcore gamers alike, there's a "GIANT PUZZLE" WOVEN INTO THE GAME



Rare moment of poise before dancing up a world-changing storm



It's a bird! It's a paper plane! It's... wait. It's the second thing

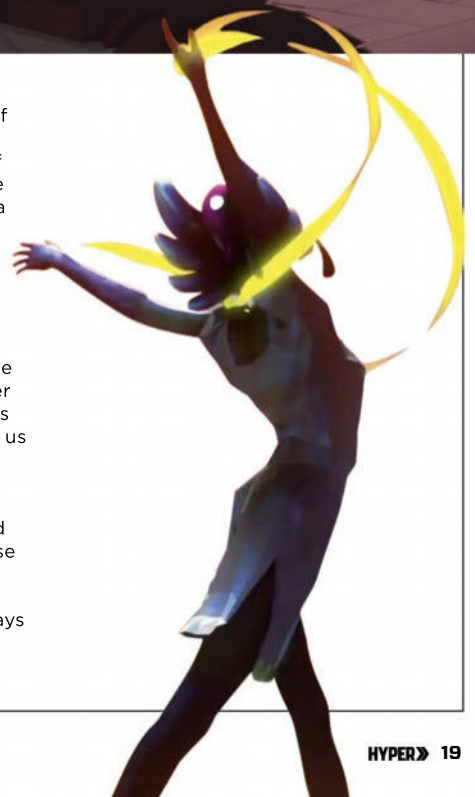
keeping the things that would harm you at bay.

The world of Bound – and the story surrounding it – are very abstract. We only know that there is a wicked force that is causing havoc in this world of motion, geometry, and colour. Bits and pieces of dialogue are delivered through cinematics, and subtle background elements convey abstract messages that ask the player to pay attention to the world around them. At one point in our demo, things got very strange, transferring us to a strange, abstract scene frozen in time of what appeared to be a father playing a board game with children. Clearly, there is more to the story than what we have seen, to date, on the surface.

The developers are promising a compelling experience for both casual and hardcore gamers alike, with a "giant puzzle" woven into the game that will require many

players working together outside of the game to decipher. The controls are easy enough to get the hang of quickly, and punishments for failure (such as falling off a platform into a bottomless pit or treading through damaging areas) are relatively lax. What's going to draw attention to Bound is not a particularly trying challenge, but the strength of the game's imagery and the mysteries of its world. Based on how eager we are to see the rest of the game after the demo we encountered at E3, it's already doing a fine job of drawing us into its web.

Fortunately, you're not going to have to wait long to enter into Bound's rich tapestry of visuals and motion, as the game's set for release on the PlayStation Network next month (August). Get your twinkle toes ready to digitally dance the days away in a game that's poised as a stark contrast to God of War. **«**



Call of Duty Infinite Warfare

Andrew Whitehead knows that the haters are gonna hate, hate, hate, hate, hate

DEVELOPER	Infinity Ward
PUBLISHER	Activision
PLATFORM	PC, PS4, Xbone
RELEASE DATE	4 November, 2016

Set in the distant future, and in its own separate Call of Duty universe, Infinite Warfare portrays an Earth stripped of its natural resources, relying on the newly formed United Nations Space Alliance (UNSA) for survival and to handle off-planet colonisation.

Now, a militant group known as the Settlement Defense Front (SDF) has declared war on the UNSA and killed the captain of the space-faring warship, the Retribution. It's up to Lieutenant Nick Reyes to step up, take control of the Retribution, defend Earth, and yeah you get the picture. It's Call of Duty, not Tolstoy.

Clichéd storyline aside, right now Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare's biggest problem is its uphill battle against swarms of haters online. And I can understand why; packaging in the remastered version of Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare as an exclusive extra is a bit of a dick move and, in some ways, shows a lack of faith in the next CoD on the block.

And, look, I'll say it: Call of Duty campaigns have fluctuated between average and awful for a while now. Infinite Warfare's plot probably isn't going to be the series' best. But everything I've seen of the actual game makes me believe it's worth the benefit of the doubt.

For one thing, Infinite Warfare doesn't just feature a linear campaign anymore. Instead, there are now optional side-quests called Ship Assaults where players can try and take down SDF ships to unlock weapons and equipment.

"You, as the captain of the Retribution, are able to make a choice of where you're going to point your ship," says Studio Art Director Brian Horton. "Set a course, pick one of the SDF ships, go there and go from the Jackal, which is your small fighter jet, to zero-g combat, to getting inside the SDF ship and then exfiltrate."

The Jackal spaceship sections aren't on-rails shooting galleries, either; this is real from ground to space flight that takes you into proper ship-to-ship combat. There's been flight modes in Call of Duty before, but never with this degree of freedom.

Twisting the Call of Duty formula even more are the tools you have to deal with the zero-gravity battles you'll be fighting as you invade one of the hulking SDF ships. For one thing, you have grenades that can lock-on and home-in on enemies, plus a speedy grappling hook that can pull you towards objects or drag an enemy towards you, allowing you to crack open their space helmet.

"We spent three years developing this game," says Brian, "and we wanted to innovate; we wanted to push the boundaries. And we wanted to find a theatre that's different than anything else we've done before."

Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare probably won't revolutionise gaming the way the game it's packed in with did, but it's clear Infinity Ward is giving the Call of Duty series the kick up the arse it desperately needs if it's going to compete in the increasingly diverse shooter genre. ☞



Yes, this actually really is a screenshot from the next Call of Duty game

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Strong themes and violence, online interactivity

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Warhammer 40,000 Dawn of War III

Andrew Whitehead scoffs at tabletop war game nerds from behind his piles of Pokémon cards

Watching someone play Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War III is both engaging and intimidating. It looks like chaos, but the one behind the keyboard and mouse knows it's a controlled chaos. Often real-time strategy games lack the flair of other action-focused genres, making them less fun for newcomers to watch. But man, when that orbital laser came down to wreak devastation across the icy planes of Acheron, I couldn't help but think how much I wish I was the one doing that.

"It's been seven years since the main Dawn of War II and about five years since the last expansion," says Philippe Bouille, Game Director on Dawn of War III. "So we're well aware of that, and we really wanted to make a game that appealed to the fans of the franchise but was also open to everyone that was new to it."

To ease newcomers into the world of Dawn of War, the campaign features one long narrative featuring all three playable factions. The first, and easily the most identifiable, is the Space Marines. These genetically engineered soldiers specialise in concentrated firepower and can call in reinforcements with drop pods.

"That means you can be facing one Space Marine scout squad and think, 'Oh, I've got this covered,' and then bam, bam, bam, there are heavily armoured soldiers there," says Bouille.

Relic was staying tight-lipped about the other two factions, but did talk a little about the Eldar, a race of space elf warriors who view Space Marines with complete disdain. During the demo their superior mobility helped them move quickly across the battlefield to perform fast hit-and-run-style attacks.

The final faction of the game wasn't on show at this time, but what would a Warhammer game be without Orks?

Usually, acting as the comic relief in the series, the Orks will apparently play more outwardly aggressive, but Relic isn't revealing much about them at this point.

TELL ME A STORY

The story of Dawn of War III follows the aforementioned factions as they descend onto the frozen planet of Acheron after learning of a secret weapon hidden beneath the planet's surface. Some familiar faces are returning, including Ork horde leader Warlord Gorgutz and Farseer Macha of the Eldars, while the Blood Raven Space Marines are led once again by the celebrated and victorious commander Gabriel Angelos.

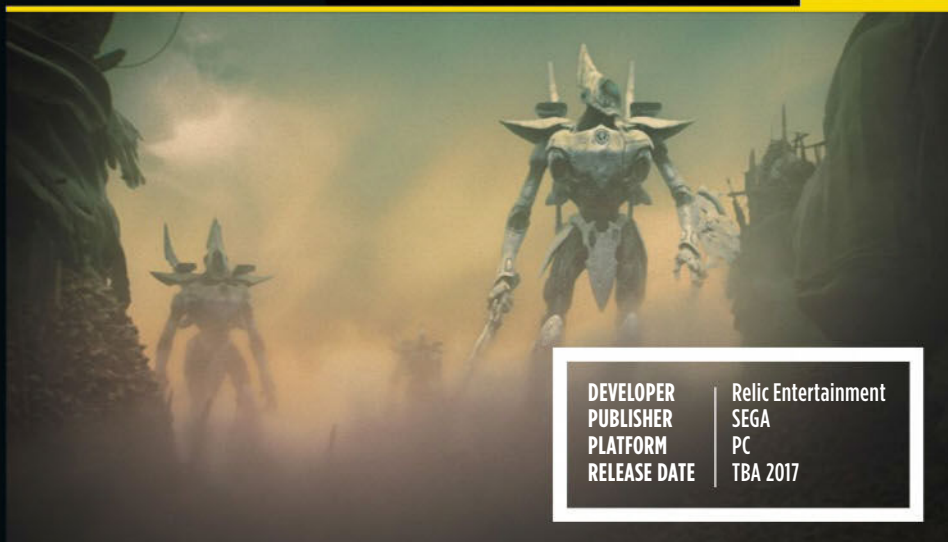
"I've been playing Warhammer 40,000 on and off for 25 years," says Bouille. "But there was a time when I knew nothing about it and I just fell in love with that little miniature ... So

we wanted to do that same thing. We have a big epic story, but a small cast where you're focused on a few characters that you guide through this whole story. We spent a lot of time and effort on it and I think people will be really happy with it."

Within each faction's armies are your regular units and the more powerful hero units. At the beginning of the live demonstration, the legendary Space Marine Gabriel Angelos arrived on his own on the planet of Acheron quickly cuts a bloody path through a group of Eldars. Soon after, though, enemies begin a ranged counter-attack from across a ravine, but the quick use of his God-Splitter ability sees Gabriel launch at his new enemies and completely annihilate them.


Adding another layer of planning is choosing your three Elite Units. A story-centric hero like Gabriel will

It's called 'Warhammer', not 'Stand-around-looking-cool-hammer', dammit!



DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

Relic Entertainment
SEGA
PC
TBA 2017



||
**BASE BUILDING
[WAS] LARGELY
ABSENT FROM DAWN
OF WAR II BUT WAS
VERY PRESENT IN
DAWN OF WAR. IT'S
BACK IN DAWN OF
WAR III**

MODIFIED WARFARE

The Dawn of War modding community has been the backbone of the series for a long time now, and Dawn of War III Game Director Philippe Boulle knows it.

"We're not really ready to talk about modding," says Boulle, "but I've got to say the amount of mods for Dawn of War II and Dawn of War is really gratifying, and is definitely something we want to support."

almost always take up one slot in the campaign, but you can customise the remaining slots with power units of your choice.

After few more skirmishes, backup arrived in the form of a 15-metre tall Imperial Knight mech being piloted by Lady Solaria. New Eldar warriors closed in, but her Gatling Barrage cut them down where they stood. As the battle progresses, more Space Marines arrived in drop pods and joined the fight. There were moments when things got too intense and the weaker Space Marine had to take cover inside emplaced dome shield systems, rather than having to take cover from certain angles like in Dawn of War II.

At this point the developer taking the demonstration commented that he had gotten too cocky and may not be able to finish the mission.

But eventually the hero

unit Gabriel was able to call down an orbital laser strike and clinch victory.

It's hard to explain in words how Dawn of War III looks when being played. It's a violently beautiful game that juxtaposes burning red lava beneath frozen blue platforms or ice lit by the white-hot glow of machine gun fire. Relic has made sure to use just about every colour in the palette to paint the perfect picture of interstellar warfare.


THE HIDDEN DETAILS

Relic isn't ready to talk about multiplayer just yet, but there were assurances that it will be revealed sometime soon as they know how important it is to the series and its fans. In fact, the team has been listening to fans throughout the development of Dawn of War III and vetting which requests make the most sense for the game and which should


be left behind this time around.

"Things like the return of base building," said Boulle, "[it was] largely absent from Dawn of War II but was very present in Dawn of War, it's back in Dawn of War III. There were gameplay reasons we wanted to bring that back but it was definitely also because the fans missed it, so we brought it back. People also enjoyed the heroes in Dawn of War II, so that gave us a little incentive to leave them in there."

From what I have seen of Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War III, I'm convinced this game will continue the already strong legacy the last two games established. And what makes it even more enticing is Relic is consciously making Dawn of War III the perfect jumping-on point for newcomers while still welcoming back fans who have stuck by the series for over a decade. ||



In Warhammer, a hero's death is the only kind you should strive for



DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

Dontnod Entertainment
Focus Home Interactive
PS4, Xbone, PC
TBA 2017

PREVIEW

Vampyr

When you're immortal, life really is strange, writes Heidi Kemps

French developer Dontnod has given us an interesting string of titles in the past few years, starting with the Capcom-published *Remember Me* and continuing on into the heart-wrenching, episodic stories of *Life is Strange*. Dontnod's next title, *Vampyr*, feels like a bit of a departure from their previous titles. In fact, it's a departure from humanity altogether.

While *Remember Me* and *Life is Strange* were action-adventure and cinematic-adventure games, respectively, *Vampyr* is an action-role playing saga set in jolly old turn-of-the-century London, circa 1918. Well, okay, maybe we should scratch that whole "jolly" part - things are pretty bad, with the Spanish Flu claiming lives left and right. But that's not the only communicable disease being passed around on these streets; there's been a noted increase in vampirism, of late. Among those who have joined the ranks of the immortals is your player character, Dr Jonathan Reid.

Dr Reid is living a rather interesting conundrum. He's researching vampirism and believes that it can, in fact, be cured. But as a vampire himself, he's wrestling with the ethics of doing what he needs to survive: feeding on the lifeblood of others. This forms the central mechanism for player choice in the game: namely, the when, where, and upon whom you choose to feed.

The results can have far-reaching

consequences. The more you feed on the blood of the populace, the stronger Dr Reid is - acting as a surrogate for typical XP gain in RPGs. Killing certain people, however, can have an impact on the game world. In the demo we were shown, Dr Reid kills a man who laments having to leave his son fatherless as he dies. Said NPC was hardly a good man - he was shaking down a local merchant for money - and his death will benefit said merchant. His son, however, will become a very different person than he would have had his father survived. As you can imagine, *Vampyr*'s world is filled with NPCs, all of whom have a complex interweaving web of relationships. You can actually enter into a menu to check these relationships, which will undoubtedly be crucial when you're trying to decide who will become the good doctor's next meal.

NPCs aren't the only living beings you can interact with, however. There are some other vampires floating around London, such as the Lady Ashbury, a long-lived matriarch of the local bloodsuckers. Many vampires, however, are nowhere near as friendly: the nasty combination of vampirism and Spanish Flu has given rise to a new breed of vampire called 'skulls': nasty, feral creatures whose blood lust is uncontrolled and who Dr Reid must defend himself - and the populace of London - against. The is yours: what

sacrifices will you make for the greater good of everyone?

The choices presented to you in *Vampyr* are hazy, and the release date is likewise somewhat ambiguous: it's set to hit PlayStation 4, Xbox One, and PCs sometime in 2017. ☞

Not the kind of love bite you show off in the sunlight

AS A VAMPIRE HIMSELF, DR REID IS WRESTLING WITH THE ETHICS OF DOING WHAT HE NEEDS TO SURVIVE: FEEDING ON THE BLOOD OF OTHERS





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Yakuza 0

We're gonna kick arse like it's 1989, writes Heidi Kemp

DEVELOPER	Sega
PUBLISHER	Sega
PLATFORM	PS4, PS3
RELEASE DATE	TBA 2017

Back in the 1980s, Japan looked poised to dominate the global economy. The country seemed to be unstoppable: it dominated multiple industries, property values were sky high, and the standard of living seemed to be the envy of the world. It was a period of extreme excess, and those who had gotten rich off of the economic bubble – particularly those involved in Japan's underground organized crime syndicates – were living large and burning money like it was going out of style.

In other words, it's the perfect setting for a Yakuza game.

Yakuza 0 takes us all the way back to the end of 1988. Series hero Kazuma Kiryu returns, younger and more fresh-faced, but no less a brutal badass than he will become 15 years

down the line. Kamurocho is still the seedy morass of bars, stores, and brightly lit back alleys filled with dubious businesses we've come to know and love – only now it's got a thick coat of Japan's '80s excess layered on top of it. People with more money than sense have made Kamurocho a hotbed of activities, of the legal and illegal varieties, transforming the area into a powder keg ready to explode.

The spark that sets everything alight is the fated first meeting of Kiryu and future rival-and-companion Goro Majima. The duo are caught up in an incident that draws the ire of numerous underground organisations across Japan, and though they come from different backgrounds, the pair needs to piece together the mystery of "the empty lot."

IT'S
**PEOPLE WITH
 MORE MONEY
 THAN SENSE HAVE
 MADE KAMUROCHO
 A HOTBED OF
 ACTIVITIES, AND
 IT'S READY TO
 EXPLODE**

Moonlighting as a toy salesman wasn't really paying off...



Playing a game within a game. How delightfully meta of Sega!

For the first time ever in the franchise, recurring NPC and fan favourite Goro Majima joins Kiryu as a playable character. The duo will explore a familiar-yet-different Kamurocho and Soutenbori, modelled as they would have been in the 1980s, complete with arcades, bowling alleys, seedy bars, dance halls, and plenty more. As an open-world game, you're free to take either Kiryu or Majima wherever you'd like and partake in some of the numerous pleasures that pre-mobile-phone Japan has to offer, be it dropping into



the arcade to play some of Sega's biggest hits from 1988, showcasing your disco skills to wow beautiful women, or even dialling a mystery woman to try and get her hot and bothered over the phone. (If you want to be more, ahem, professional, there's also a real estate management mini-game, too.) Of course, it's not all fun and games, even with Japan at its economic apex. There are plenty of people out to rough up Kiryu and Majima, ranging from drunken street punks to high-ranking organised crime elite. You'll need to combat your enemies through

the series' trademark brutal-yet-stylish street battles, where your characters will have to lay a beating down on foes using martial arts skills, weapons and objects lifted off the street, and environmental elements. There's nothing quite as satisfying as pouncing an uppity punk with his own bike, then confronting his annoying buddy by slamming a traffic cone on his head and tossing his body like a ragdoll against an electric storefront sign. As you progress through the game, your arsenal of moves and weaponry increases, as well, so fighting always keeps on feeling fresh. Yakuza 0 is due to hit the PlayStation 4 sometime in 2017. Get your wooden swords ready, because once this game rolls into stores, the Heat is on. ☪

Battlefield 1

Andrew Whitehead misses his lock-on missiles and infrared scopes

“**BATTLEFIELD 1 FEELS LIKE DICE DIALLED BACK THE MADNESS AND PUSHED FORWARD A TRUER SENSE OF BEING IN A WARZONE**”

I never understood why some gamers insisted Battlefield was the more realistic shooter when compared to its rival Call of Duty, let alone why that was a positive. I admit I enjoy the little touches of realism, like muzzle velocity and bullet drop, but it's the crazy action that keeps me hooked on Battlefield. Jeeps strapped with C4, attack helicopters crashing into tanks. Realism be damned; I like my shooters big, loud and dumb.

Battlefield 1 feels like DICE dialled back the madness and pushed forward a truer sense of what it feels like to be in a warzone. Well, as best a videogame of this type can. There's less random craziness, and more atmosphere and dread. For example, during one of my play sessions on a map set in rural France, my squad and I captured a flag at the beginning of the round in a small town. The houses provided good cover from enemies, and the surrounding shrubs were used as hiding spots from snipers. But towards the end of the round the village was a shouldering mess of rubble and craters from relentless shelling and grenades.

What impressed me the most was after my second play-through the destruction of this same town looked very different. Buildings didn't collapse like they did in the previous round, even the landscape deformed in new ways. And these weren't just superficial divots from tank shells, either. These deep scars cut into the ground that we ended up using as trenches for cover.

Another dynamic element affecting the battlefield was the changing weather. Both of our rounds started on a bright sunny day that turned into a freezing rainstorm. It dramatically altered who and what I could see and hear. I spent more time hiding and firing from cover with my squad than I ever did in the recent Battlefields.

Literally, the biggest addition to the series in Battlefield 1 is the behemoth vehicles. These massive monsters spawn in for the losing side and can flip a battle late in the game if not taken care of quickly. DICE was only showing off a zeppelin in this play test, and I can assure you that bastard rained down hell on us. Pilots and soldiers on the ground had to work together to take it down. Two other behemoths confirmed but not detailed just yet are the dreadnought warship and the armoured train.

A lot has changed in Battlefield 1, not the least of which is the tone of the game. As I mentioned before, I love Battlefield for being a big, dumb action game. And I'm going to miss slamming burning jets into tanks. But, frankly, the series needs this game. It needs a return to pure combat. Battlefield 1 may not be the exact sequel I was hoping for as I unapologetically still enjoy modern military shooters, but it did get its hooks into me deep enough that I'm keen to get my hands on it again. “

DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

DICE
Electronic Arts
PC, PS4, Xbone
21 October, 2016

DRAGON BALL 2

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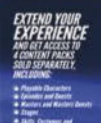
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The Legend of Zelda

Breath of the Wild

Nintendo proves, once again, you can't rush greatness, writes Andrew Whitehead

You have to respect Nintendo's commitment to The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. Nobody could accuse Nintendo of rushing it to market in an attempt to keep its flailing Wii U console alive. Let's face facts: that ship has already sunk. But after getting some solid hands on time with Breath of the Wild, it's clear why it's taking so long.

For starters, the world of Breath of the Wild is around 360 square kilometres in size, or 17 times the size of Twilight Princess. I got to play around in just a small fraction of that total area in a place called the Great Plateau, but even that section felt huge and filled with things to discover.

There are new gameplay elements here, too, such as resource gathering for crafting, hunting and gathering to cook meals, and weapon degradation. All of this feeds into the Breath of the Wild living up to its name: Link is truly alone in the wilderness and has to be self-sufficient or he will end up suffering the consequences.

Long-time Zelda series producer Eiji Aonuma has been open about the brilliant A Link Between Worlds for the Nintendo 3DS being a testing ground for a number of ideas they wanted to incorporate into the next mainline Zelda game. And it seems he and his team reached the same conclusion their fans did: give players the tools to



DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

Nintendo EPD
Nintendo
Wii U, NX
TBA 2017



enjoy your game early on and let them choose their own path.

I can't say how weapons will be doled out when the final game releases, but in my demo I was able to obtain a bow and some arrows straight away. And when that bow broke I discovered a Bokoblin camp with an archer on a watchtower, so I quickly took him out and stole his. It was that easy.

These once key items feel more disposable now that they're easier to come by. And in some ways they do feel less special, but it also makes sense in Breath of the Wild. There were times when I felt like I was playing a Zelda-themed survival game so, of course, Link is going to be resourceful enough to steal the equipment he needs. Seriously, why hasn't he been doing this all along?

THE ADVENTURES OF LINK

My demo for Breath of the Wild was split into two segments. The first and longest part of my time with the game was a spent free-roaming, while the second part was focused on the story.

I went into the first part of my demo wanting to run everywhere and see everything, but I kept spotting things off in the distance or encountering enemies to fight and steal from. At one point I lit a tree branch on fire, lured Bokoblins into the long grass and then set the whole area ablaze. I couldn't help myself.

I did manage to make it to ice-cold Hylia River and had to pull out my trusty jumper to stay warm and to stop poor Link from freezing to death. From here I headed up Mt Hylia to get a better view of my surroundings. Climbing feels natural in Breath of the Wild and doesn't rely on vine-covered walls. All you need is a surface with a bit of grip and to keep an eye on your depleting stamina meter, and let it recharge now and then, much like the one used in Skyward Sword.

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

A notable change in Breath of the Wild that took a while to hit me was the silence. Though the game isn't devoid of sound effects, there was a distinct lack of music playing while exploring the overworld. Thematically, it makes sense as Breath of the Wild feels more down to earth than other Zelda games, but it's one of those things I couldn't un-notice when it properly dawned on me.

At one point I found the Temple of Time, spotting it in the distance and recognising its steeple instantly. But when I got there is was just a shell of its former self. It felt forgotten about, abandoned and virtually empty other than a broken-down guardian octopus monster sitting forlornly inside the ruins.

And yet, I was drawn to it. It's a strange feeling for a fan of the series like myself because that temple was such a defining place in Ocarina of Time. Seeing it like this felt symbolic of how hard Nintendo is trying to move on from that seminal game. In fact, it was a place like this that added to a sense of darkness hanging over Breath of the Wild. It's a game filled with mysteries and, as of yet, not a lot of answers.

Don't get me wrong, though, the Zelda sense of humour is still here. Watching my ingredients of bugs and mushrooms dance around my frying pan only to produce a 'Dubious Meal' item did make me laugh. It's just great to see Breath of the Wild playing with that balance of darkness and the light.

Another thing fans will have to get used to is no longer finding hearts and rupees when cutting down grass. It is still worth hacking into the foliage to find any hidden ingredients, but

I LOVE AMIIBO, THEY'RE SO BAD

Three new amiibo for Breath of the Wild have been revealed, including one based on the stone octopus monsters called 'guardians' that features poseable tentacles. But their functionality is still a mystery. Also, owners of the Wolf Link amiibo from Twilight Princess HD can use it in Breath of the Wild to unlock a wolf companion that has the same number of hearts you unlocked in the Cave of Shadows.



There's so much to do in Breath of the Wild, you'll never feel boar-ed (soz)





Mount Doom tends to ruin every picturesque shot. Nice on, Sauron!

restoring health is now done by stuffing Link's face with food. Rupees can only be earned by selling items, though where this can be done I can't say as I didn't find a single shop during my play through.

During my play-time I stumbled upon a Shrine of Trials, which is one of over a hundred scattered around the world. Acting like mini-dungeons, these shrines are filled with traps and enemies as well as housing monks who bestow Link with new powers and abilities. I had one of these abilities at the beginning of my demo: the power of magnetism. With it I could lift and move metallic objects around, which led to a number of small physics-based puzzles for me to solve.

WAKE UP, LINK

After wasting time surfing on my shield and cutting down trees to craft more arrows, I was ready for the story to begin. Starting in an alien-like temple called the Shrine of Resurrection, Link is urged to open his eyes by an unseen woman before emerging from a shallow pool of water. Here Link obtains the Sheikah Slate tablet, which resembles a stone-age smartphone, as well as some much need clothes. After being told he is the light that "must shine on Hyrule once again", he heads outside into the daylight.

Outside and looking down at the valley of the Great Plateau, the music swells as Link takes it all in before heading downhill and greeting a mysterious character simply known as Old Man. After a small argument over a baked apple that I may or may not have stolen from him, he points me towards the run down Temple of Time before lamenting the downfall of Hyrule.

Leaving him for now, I followed my mini-map to a pedestal that I activated with my Sheikah Slate. Suddenly, a massive tower appeared, bursting

out of the ground and ascending into the sky. Again, the disembodied woman's voice spoke to me, telling me I've been asleep for 100 years while showing me a distant kingdom engulfed by a shadowy monster.

Heading back down, I see the Old Man once more and we come up with a deal. He'll let me borrow his hang-gliding contraption if I go inside of a Shrine of Trials and bring back what I find. For everything that's new and different about Breath of the Wild, it's hard to deny how very Zelda that last sentence sounds.

The demo ended soon after this. I went to the shrine, made it through, and handed over my findings only to be told I need to do more work to earn my reward. Again, it's Zelda. People don't just hand you things, even if you are trying to save the world.

KEPT YOU WAITING, HUH?

What shines through the most with Breath of the Wild is how willing Nintendo has been to take more risks with the series. Nintendo has pulled it apart and put it back together, throwing out

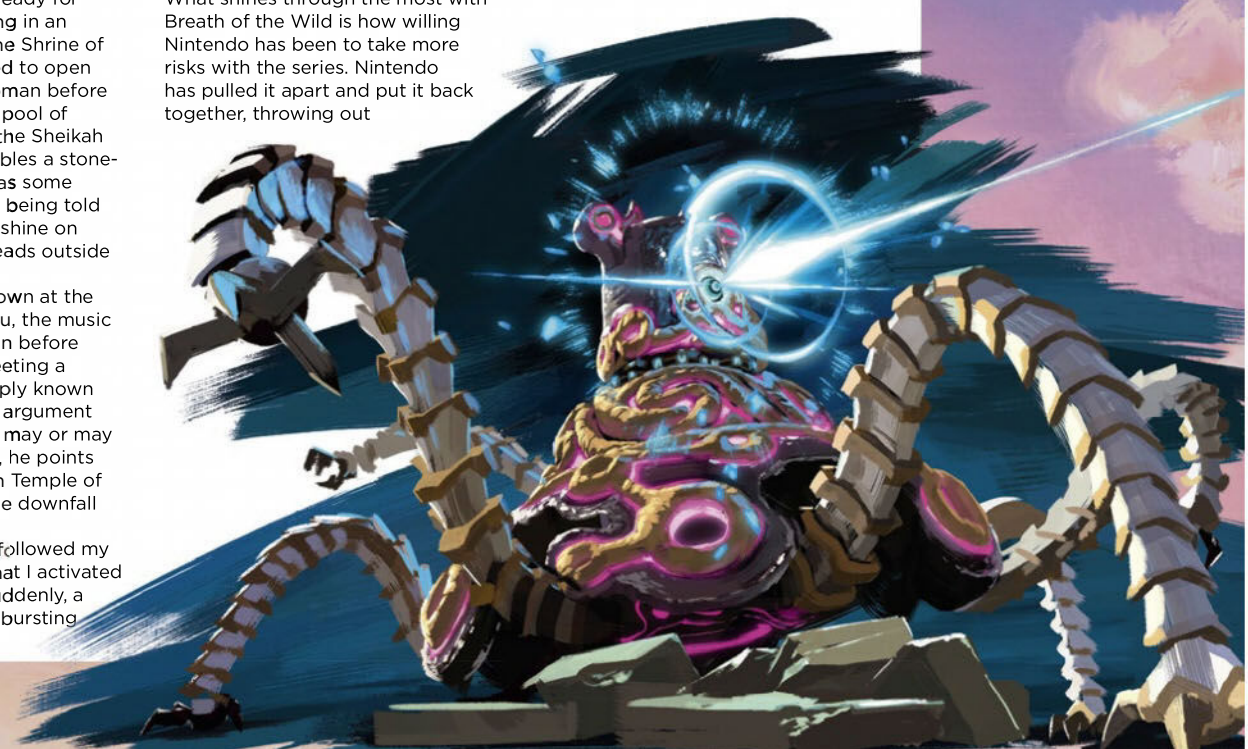
some things and adding in others.

It's been announced that Breath of the Wild is launching on both Wii U and the Nintendo NX, or whatever the next machine ends up being called. So, much like Twilight Princess on the Wii, our blond hero is once again tasked with stacking the chairs and turning off the lights on another console before heading over to the welcoming party for the new one.

I don't want to make excuses for Nintendo, and its unpreparedness for the challenges of this generation has been painfully obvious. But I can assure you that The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild is a big step forward for the series, and from what I've played I'm confident it'll prove to be more than worth the wait. If only there was a proper release date to match the hype. ☞

HUNTERS & COLLECTORS

To survive in Breath of the Wild you're going to have to hunt animals for protein, which includes hiding in long grass, moving slowly, watching your noise meter and then taking you shot with a well-placed arrow. But don't worry: this is Nintendo, Link doesn't have to gut animals like it's Red Dead Redemption. Instead, the hunted beast disappears into a puff of smoke and two juicy steaks fall to the ground. Just like in real-life.





Brings new meaning to 'armed and dangerous'. Look at that thing!

PREVIEW

The Surge

It's like Dark Souls... with robotic dismemberment, writes Heidi Kemp

Deck 13 is a developer that's been around for a bit, but who really burst onto the scene through *Lords of the Fallen*, an action-RPG that took a fair share of influence from FromSoftware's venerable *Souls* series. The game was warmly received, and now all hands are on Deck 13 again for another tough-as-nails action-RPG adventure, but this time, we're going to be fighting for our lives in the far-flung future.

The world of *The Surge* is that of the technology that shapes our daily lives gone awry. Corporations rule the roost, citizens live in a surveillance state, the environment's gone haywire due to global warming, and the best you can hope for in life is to land a cosy manufacturing job at a government-funded firm that says they're going to take care of that nasty greenhouse effect. That's exactly what happened to our hero, William. But things have a terrible tendency to go wrong in these messy mechanical societies, and as William wakes up in the company junkyard enclosed in a powered, mechanical exoskeleton, he knows something's gone horribly wrong. The robots have gone haywire, his co-workers (in their own powered

exoskeletons) are attacking him, and the whole world seems to want him dead. Talk about the louisiest day at work, eh?

You'll take control of William, guiding him through the surprisingly bright and colourful world of his former workplace. Exploration is non-linear, and while we only saw the junkyard in our demo, it was indicated to us that later areas would look quite different. The game's still at a very early point in its development. William is free to roam wherever he wants, though certain obstacles – namely, enemies and barriers that require a certain level of 'Overcharge' power to open – can prove insurmountable at certain points in the game. In some cases, you'll need to return to previously explored areas later on in order to pass an obstacle that you couldn't overcome at first.

But while exploration is important, it simply wouldn't be a *Souls*-style game without challenging combat. As you engage foes in primarily melee-based combat, you'll utilise the typical array of strikes, parries, and dodges, all while keeping a careful eye on your stamina. You also have access to a 'combat energy' meter that can be utilised in a variety of ways depending on what sort of gear you have equipped.

Said gear is a big part of the experience. When fighting enemies, you can choose to target specific points on their bodies. You can hack off heads, limbs, and mechanical appendages, claiming the gear and materials that once adorned them. Oftentimes, you'll be forced to choose between quickly dispatching a foe or fighting it more carefully to claim the loot it holds. When you do get some sweet gear, you can take it back to your base of operations where you can further enhance it to suit your specific gameplay needs.

The Surge is still quite early in development, with only a vague 2017 release date given. From everything we've seen, however, it's shaping up to be a solid sci-fi *Souls* successor and we're looking forward to more. **[[**



DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

Deck 13
Focus Home Interactive
PS4, Xbone, PC
TBA 2017

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Loading Human

LOAD 'HUMAN', 8, 1, writes Heidi Kempf

If 2016 is remembered for anything in the history of the gaming medium, it'll be the year when the dream of home virtual reality was finally attained. With a multitude of PC VR headsets already on the market and PlayStation VR just around the corner, it's an exciting new frontier in immersive gaming experiences that has the potential to create new game genres - or, in the case of Loading Human, bring an old genre to new heights.

Loading Human is a VR-exclusive adventure game that's been incubating for a while. It began as a successful Kickstarter project a few years ago, and has been improving gradually since. While there have been a few changes over the course of the title's development, every demo we've seen of the game shows just how far the concept and gameplay have been advancing over time.

The story of Loading Human is set in a technologically advanced future. As young Prometheus (a name that we're sure is loaded with plot meaning), you find yourself summoned back to the lab of your father, a brilliant scientist. As you arrive in his Antarctic lab, you learn that he is on his deathbed, and that he has a mission for you. You are to find the 'Quintessence', a metaphysical force of immense power, so powerful, in fact, that it may be the key to cheating death. This journey

will take you through fragments of Prometheus' memory, from his training in the Antarctic to his mission in the deepest depths of space.

Loading Human is the evolution of the classic adventure game, meaning that you'll progress by searching through various environments for key interactive elements to advance the story and/or solve puzzles. While the interface of choice for the PC adventure games of yore was the mouse, the primary means of interacting with the world of Loading Human are your hands. (In our case, as we were playing our demo session on PlayStation VR, our hands were a pair of PlayStation Move controllers.) Everything in this virtual world, much like in reality, is accessed with our hands. See an item you need? Pick it up. See a weapon or tool? Pick it up, then swing, twist, or poke with it as needed. Find a book you want to read? Open it up and leaf through the pages, looking for the information you seek. Need to turn a knob, or pull open a door? Yes, you'll need to mimic the actual activity of doing so. It sounds a bit cheesy on paper, but when you're actually immersed in this world, interacting with things using your virtual hands starts to become second nature. By interacting with everything, you realise just how much detail has been packed into these environments.



The train line to the house that Tron built

The mood of the game isn't entirely a leisurely object hunt, however. In one portion of our demo, we had to use various devices to repair a broken elevator, crowbar open a busted door, and solve a puzzle in order to restore power to a seemingly defunct facility. Other clips that have been showcased display sequences of needing to use your arms and tools to rescue people in need and taking care of dangerous situations (such as putting out a raging fire with an extinguisher).

Loading Human is planned to span three episodic instalments, the first of which is scheduled for release late this year. If you're craving an immersive adventure to accompany your jump into the world of virtual reality, Loading Human should scratch that itch nicely. **C**

LOADING HUMAN IS THE EVOLUTION OF THE CLASSIC ADVENTURE GAME; YOU'LL PROGRESS BY SEARCHING THROUGH VARIOUS ELEMENTS TO ADVANCE THE STORY AND/OR SOLVE PUZZLES

DEVELOPER	Untold Games
PUBLISHER	Maximum Games
PLATFORM	PS VR, Rift
RELEASE DATE	TBA 2016



South Park

The Fractured But Whole



Andrew Whitehead promises he tried to keep this preview as clean as possible

DEVELOPER	Ubisoft San Francisco South Park Digital Studios
PUBLISHER	Ubisoft
PLATFORM	PC, PS4, Xbox One
RELEASE DATE	6 December, 2016

The South Park kids are about to cook up a whole mess of trouble



It took a long time to get a South Park game that didn't suck. Now the sequel to *The Stick of Truth* is nearly here and it's clear everybody involved is bringing their A-game once more. *The Fractured But Whole* sees the return of the New Kid, or King Douchebag as you are now known after the last game. But the kids of South Park don't care about fantasy junk anymore; it's all superheroes now.

Now they fight over who will get a spin-off and how those spin-offs will tie into their bigger franchise plans. As you join them they're right in the middle of their own civil war, which is clearly a paper-thin allusion to the Marvel Cinematic Universe. But, then again, when has South Park ever been overly subtle?

The aforementioned civil war refers to the ongoing fight between Cartman and his squad, known as Coon and Friends, against the newly formed Freedom Pals led by Timmy as a Professor X-type character.

In my short demo of the game there was plenty of uncomfortable humour on show. Things like the wheelchair-bound Timmy using his telekinetic powers to beat down and "brain fuck" Cartman is a good example. I mean, clearly I can't do the delivery justice, but I will say as a former fan of the show who hasn't made time for it in years, it did make me laugh.

On the more cringe-inducing end was the inclusion of Total Ass Control, which involved controlling the New Kid as he took a dump into the toilet.

Said crap was then added to my inventory in the form of 'dingle berries'. Why collect this stuff? Because there's a crafting system.

Soiled underwear, semen-stained clothes, lubricant and blindfold; these are just some of the items found inside Cartman and his mother's bedroom. What they can be used for I wasn't told, but I did see a user-crafted Crappuccino Enema weapon and a health-restoring burrito.

Combat is deeper now, too. There are multiple superhero personas you can choose from, including Brutalist (think The Hulk), Blaster (Cyclops) and Speedster (The Flash). Later on, you can unlock more personas and cross them over to make a mixed hero class.

Fighting is turn-based and the play area is a grid, so positioning on said grid will affect what kind of attacks you can unleash as well as what kind of attacks you can defend against. Environmental attacks and knocking lined-up enemies into each other is another viable attack option now, too. It's not a complicated system, but then again it doesn't need to be. It just works, dammit.

The Stick of Truth got so much right that it's no surprise *The Fractured But Whole* is sticking close to the template. But don't think of this as a lazy sequel; the love that has gone into this game is clear, even from what little I've seen. Plus there's a bit where you team up with the Human Kite and use farts to reach platforms above you. Enough said. ☹

Final Fantasy XV

Boy Bands vs The Apocalypse, writes Heidi Kemps

It's been a long, rough road for Final Fantasy XV. When the game was announced as part of a larger "Fabula Nova Crystallis" mythology spanning three games - under its original name of Final Fantasy Versus XIII - it was a PlayStation 3 exclusive. But the spotlight soon shifted to Final Fantasy XIII proper, and as that game received the bulk of Square-Enix's international publicity push, Final Fantasy Versus XIII fell by the wayside. As years went by with only brief staff assurances that "it's still being worked on", fans assumed the game was vapourware.

Now, here we are, 10 years later, and Final Fantasy XV is a very real game. It's been a long time coming, and in a few short months, we're going to be playing a game many people believed might not even exist. The strange journey of this game through the annals of development hell, however, may be nothing compared to the road-tripping, monster-slaying, warp-jumping RPG trek we'll soon be partaking in.

A HERO'S JOURNEY

The hero of Final Fantasy XV is young Noctis, Prince of the kingdom of Lucis. Many years ago, all of the countries in the world of Eos possessed a crystal that granted them immense power. Of course, over the course of many conflicts, most of

the crystals were destroyed. The sole remaining crystal is now in the hands of Lucis, which has made use of its energies to bolster its magic power. Because of this, Lucis has been locked in fierce political struggles with the other nations of the world.

The empire of Niflheim has worked to advance its technological prowess to match that of Lucis. Through its military might, the empire has



DEVELOPER	Square Enix
PUBLISHER	Square Enix
PLATFORM	PS4, Xbone
RELEASE DATE	30 Sept, 2016



||
**BECAUSE OF
BOLSTERING
MAGIC POWER, LUCIS
HAS BEEN LOCKED
IN FIERCE POLITICAL
STRUGGLES WITH
THE OTHER
NATIONS OF THE
WORLD**



want to investigate it," is something the developers are hoping you'll really enjoy about travelling in FFXV. (Thankfully, if you're the type that wants to just watch the world pass by rather than sit behind the wheel, you can have the game auto-steer to specific locations.)

Noctis isn't alone in his road journey across Eos, however. He's accompanied by three faithful companions: Gladiolus, Noctis's loyal bodyguard; Ignis, a brother-figure and master tactician; and Prompto, a dear friend of Noctis. While Final Fantasy XV is a single-player game, you'll be spending plenty of time with your teammates, bonding across your journey as both dear friends and comrades-in-arms.

"Even though it's a single-player game, it's very much designed so that your companions feel like living, breathing people," said Tabata. One such example Tabata gave was during the game's camping scenes. Final Fantasy XV features an in-game day/night cycle, and when the team sets up camp for the night, they can do things like cook for each other, have conversations, and build their individual skills.

FIGHTING FANTASY

The other factor that makes FFXV so "leading-edge" is the game's real-time battles. As the Final Fantasy series has evolved, there's been a gradual shift away from the blue-backed menus of Final Fantasies past to more dynamic, real-time combat that feels more akin to that of an action game. Final Fantasy XV moves it more solidly into the "action" part of "action-RPG".



Someone call Tom Cruise. War of the Worlds just arrived

managed to subjugate most of the rest of the world. A peace treaty is proposed between Niflheim and Lucis, but at the ceremony where the paper is to be signed, Niflheim launches a brutal attack, and the entire royal family is reported to have perished in the struggle.

In truth, Prince Noctis, along with several faithful companions, are far away from the carnage in Lucis. Noctis begins a journey to reclaim his kingdom and take revenge on Niflheim, but he has one hell of a long road ahead of him.

HERE IN MY CAR

Square-Enix is presenting Final Fantasy XV as a "leading-edge" game. They're seeking no less than for this title to become the sort of vaunted genre classic previous Final Fantasies have ascended to, and the past 10 years of development have been poured into making the game exemplary in visuals, world interaction, and combat. At a stage event at this year's E3, several staff members of the game came up to explain just what makes FFXV so special.

One of these factors is the theme of a "road-trip adventure". The road-trip theme was chosen, explained Director Hajime Tabata, because it's a relatable sort of journey for many people: driving around the world in a car, seeing the sights, and stopping at things that catch your fancy.

The road trip doesn't begin particularly well, however. When you begin the game, Noctis and his companions are stuck pushing a broken-down car along the road. Not exactly a princely thing to be doing, but better than being stuck in the middle of nowhere. Fortunately, you manage to get the car to the mechanic Cindy, and the game immediately opens up to you. "We want to give you the freedom to explore the world right away," Tabata explained.

In some ways, FFXV's world feels fairly grounded – at least, at first. Your first few steps of freedom will take you into a sprawling outback, littered with shrubs, rocks, and mounds of dirt that stretch out as far as you can see. It's not the prettiest of sights, but there's something instantly relatable about it if you've ever taken a lengthy road trip. It's later that you'll be encountering the sort of massive summons and monsters that remind you that, yes, you're playing a Final Fantasy game.

Of course, nondescript wilderness won't be the only thing you see in FFXV, as you both drive and walk around, you might catch a glimpse of certain sights in the distance – such as a South-East Asian-inspired casino town. If it catches your eye, you can go there and check it out. The feeling of, "Hey, this looks cool - I



There might not be massive differences in the core game between the Xbox One and PS4 versions of FFXV, but there's one key feature exclusive to the PS4: VR support. No, you don't get to play the full game in VR – you'll get a separate 'episode', likely as DLC, where you play specific battles as Prompto, the team's sniper, then spend some time with Cindy.

"You feel a more visceral, physical involvement in the combat of FFXV," says Tabata. "It really feels great."

The combat engine, this time around, is dubbed the 'Active Cross Battle System'. You'll mostly be in direct control of a single character, Noctis, and rather than picking commands from a menu, you'll be using controller face buttons to access them with ease in the heat of combat. Positioning is done in real-time with the analogue sticks, and there's no transition screen from map to battle - where you go in the world is also where you fight. While your companions are AI-controlled for the most part, you'll be able to issue them special commands mid-battle if you need their assistance. In some battles - such as the demo shown at E3 with the massive Titan - you may also need to engage in QTE-style events during specific moments.

Don't like real-time combat? You're in luck - as per FF tradition, there's also a 'wait mode' for folks who might prefer something a little closer to traditional RPG combat. When wait mode is turned on, the player can momentarily pause the action, view their surroundings, target specific enemies, and choose their action before things resume motion again.

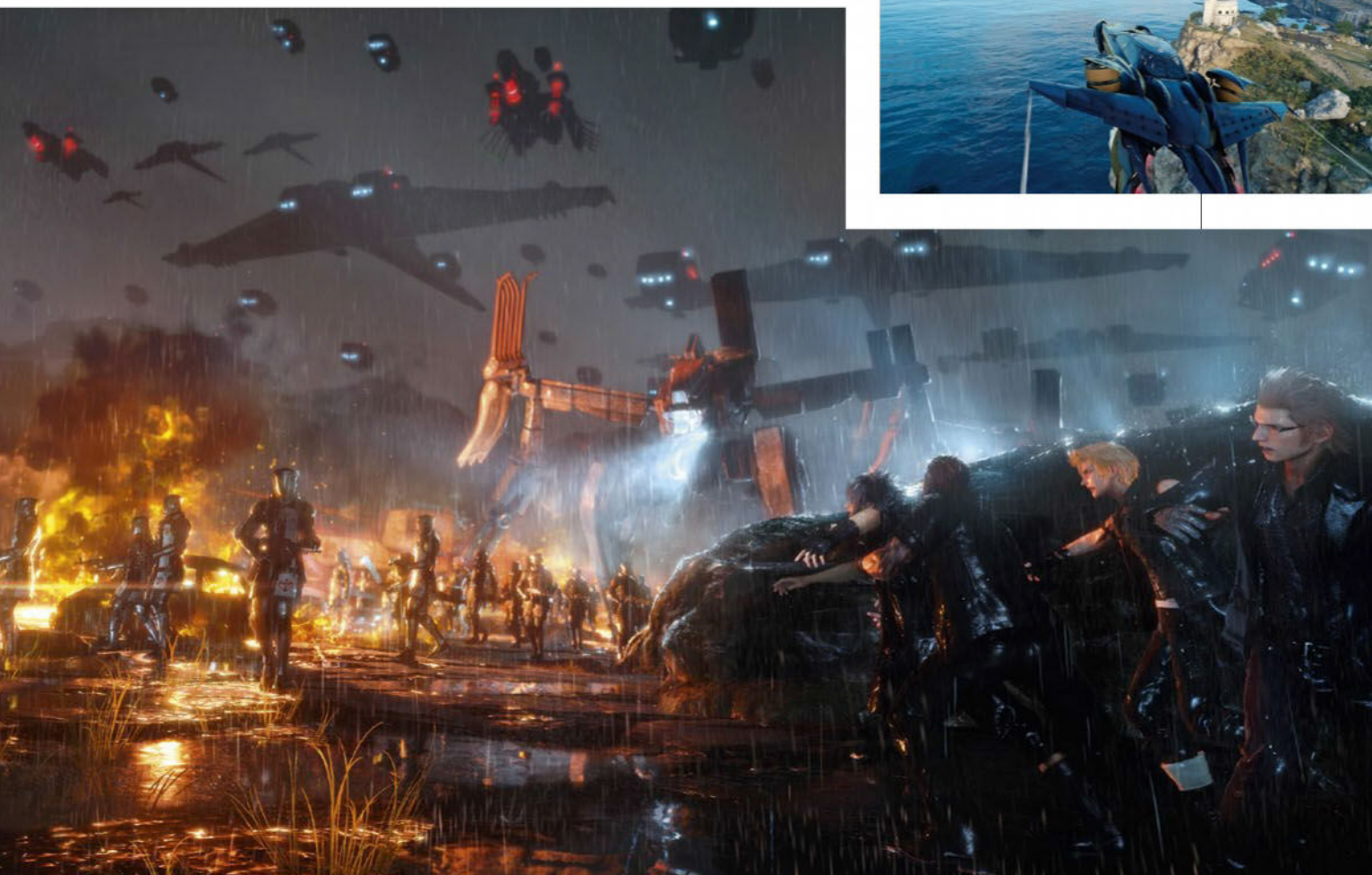
A key component of combat will be wise use of magical skills, and there will be several points in the game where you'll need some more effective spells. In order to power up these attacks, you'll need to find special areas of the world where you can gather energy. By using this energy, you can customise magic to have additional effects. We saw Noctis wielding a fire spell that had an HP-restoring effect tacked onto it, meaning that the spell would heal its user while simultaneously

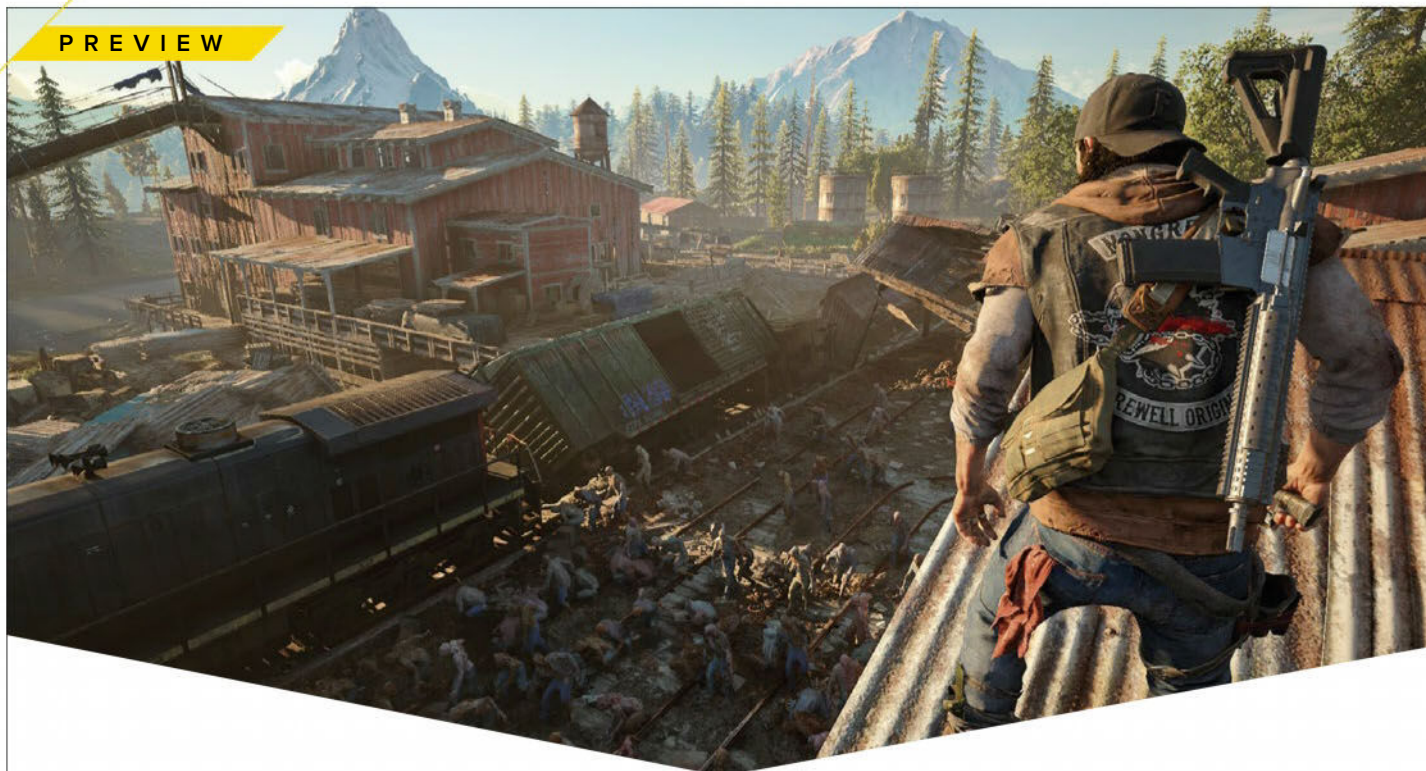
dealing damage to foes. While we're not yet sure just how many possibilities this magic-making system offers, it has the potential to be incredibly cool.

JOURNEY'S END

Within just a few short months, we'll be hitting the road with Noctis and friends. While there's still a bit of trepidation towards FFXV from the franchise faithful after recent series missteps, Square Enix is hoping that the fast-paced combat, large explorable world, and character dynamics will make FFXV as important to the current generation of JRPGs as FFVII was 20 years ago. When the game releases on the 30th of September, it'll feel like the end of one long adventure, and the start of an entirely new one. ☞

Can't wait until September to get your FFXV fix? Don't worry, Square Enix has you covered - they're blitzing the web with FFXV multimedia right now. You can check out the official FFXV prologue anime, Brotherhood, on various online streaming services. Soon after, you'll get to watch Kingsglaive, a full CG-animated feature from the FFVII: Advent Children production team. And if that's still not enough FFXV material for you, there's also Justice Monsters V, a mobile title based on one of FFXV's hottest arcade games.





Days Gone

It's hard to stay ahead of fast-moving zombies, writes Heidi Kempf

**DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER**

SIE Bend Studio
Sony Interactive
Entertainment

**PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE**

PS4
TBA 2017

Let's face it: in the current crowded gaming market, you're going to need a really good gimmick to get a game about the zombie apocalypse noticed. Yes, the term 'zombie' has fallen out of favour - a lot of games use some other term for their brainless, flesh-eating once-human figures but, come on, they're still zombies.

So in a release schedule packed with upcoming zombie games - Dead Rising 4, Dead Island 2, State of Decay 2 - what does Days Gone have to set it apart from the pack? Well, quite a few things, actually.

Days Gone is the story of Deacon St John, a man who once lived a carefree existence as a biker in the lush, green forests and towering mountains of the Oregon wilderness. That is, until the cataclysm happened. People across the globe fell ill to a pandemic, mutating into creatures called "freakers" that only barely resembled the humans they once were. The uninfected huddle into safe, quarantined outposts, afraid to step outside the safety of their enclaves into the den of disease and danger that surrounds them. Deacon, however, is not one of these kinds

of people. His motorcycle gang has long since perished, and he's been searching for a reason to live since. But holing himself up in the safety of an encampment is no way to exist. Deacon is prepared to make a living taking on the dangers of this harsh new world head-on - using his bike, his wits, and a whole arsenal of makeshift weaponry.

There's an emphasis on story and the transformation of Deacon's character here. As *The Last of Us* so expertly exemplified, you can tell a fantastic tale of humans struggling and connecting in the face of a terrible, mutant-filled catastrophe. Deacon isn't exactly a role model - he's brash, reckless, and has an appetite for destruction - but over the course of the game, he'll meet and bond with other survivors and drifters like him.

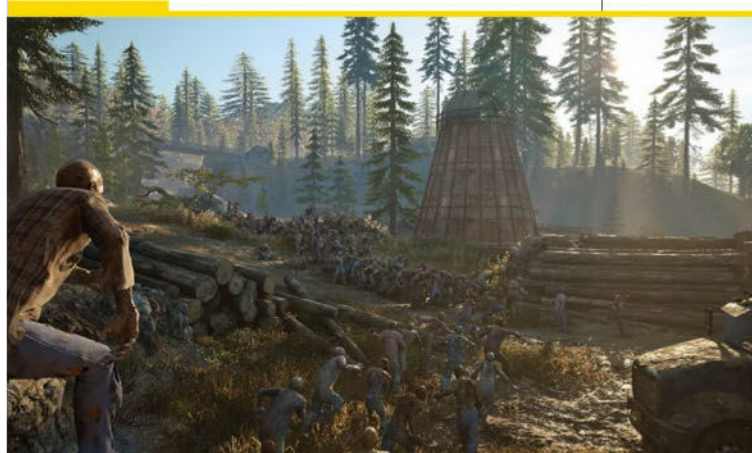
The choice of the Pacific Northwest makes for an intriguing setting, as well. Days Gone developer Bend Studio is based out of Oregon, so they know the lay of the land very well. The clash between the beautiful, scenic wilderness of Oregon's forests, mountains, and caverns, and the wreckage of small towns and enemy-overrun outposts is striking. This is an open world that looks like it'll deliver visually as well as gameplay-wise.

It wouldn't be a zombie - excuse us, freaker - game, however, without some down-and-dirty combat with roving hordes of the less-than-human. The freakers in Days Gone, however, aren't mere pushovers that fall by the dozen to swings of

your melee weapons. The demos we saw had Deacon struggling for every kill, stringing items found in the environment together to create makeshift weaponry and traps. Environmental implements can be utilised to try and gain the upper hand, as well. You're going to need all the skills and ingenuity you can muster, because not only are these foes resilient, they also come in massive, seemingly endless hordes that showcase just how much the PlayStation 4 can put onscreen at once (which is a lot, apparently).

Days Gone's release date is still up in the air, but it's a guaranteed PS4 exclusive. Until we get more details, you can sit tight, knowing that the end of the world is still a ways away. ☹

Just when cardio seemed like such a strong post-apocalyptic skill...





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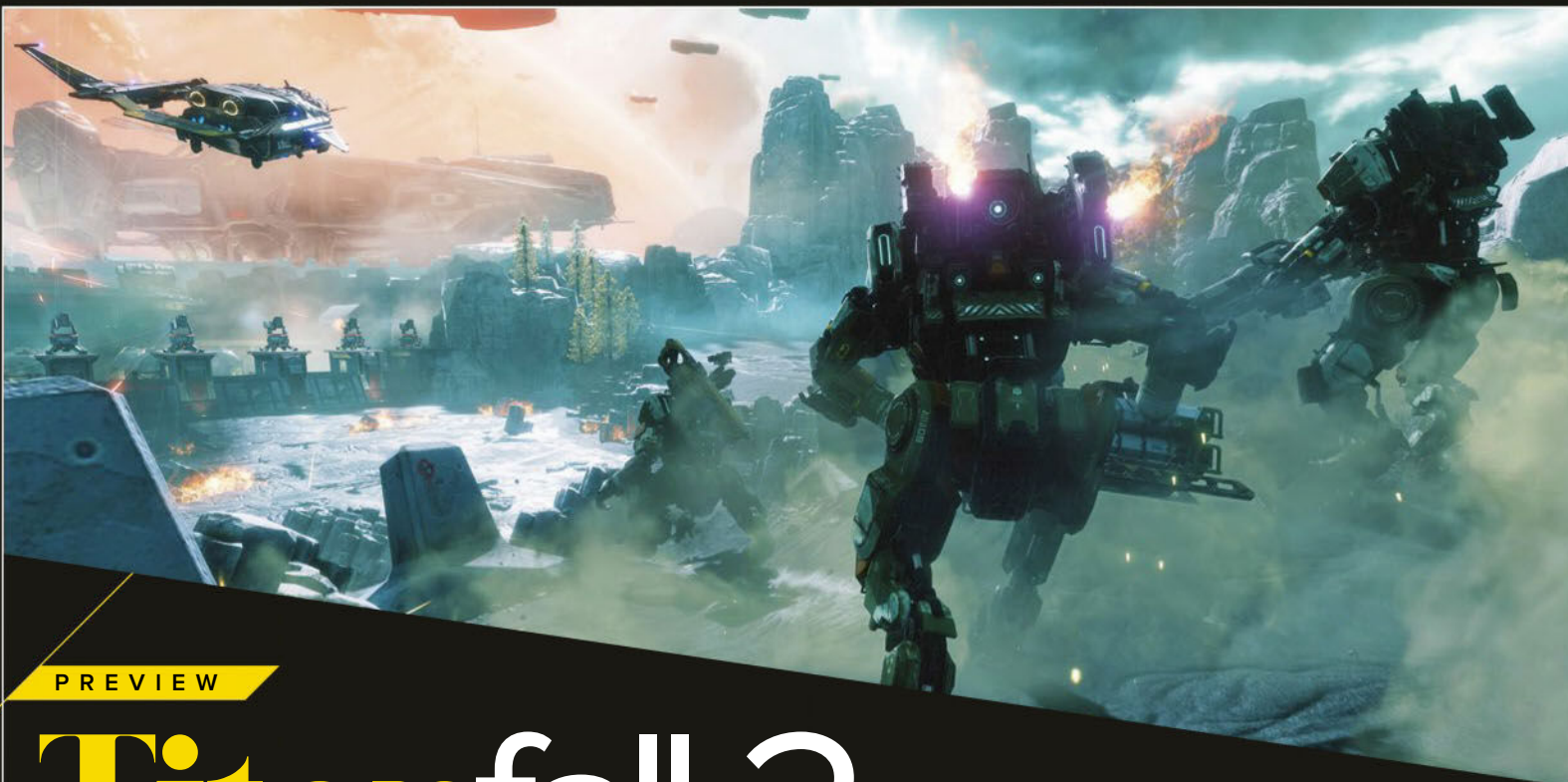


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PREVIEW

Titanfall 2

Andrew Whitehead is worried he won't be able to bail out if his Titan starts crying

If there's one complaint that was yelled loudest of all about Titanfall it's that the game badly needed more content. More weapon unlocks, a real campaign, just more of everything. Well, Respawn Entertainment have heard your pleas and are happy to oblige. Aren't you lucky!

Multiplayer is getting a much needed upgrade and will feature a new levelling system designed by Call of Duty 4's multiplayer progression mastermind Todd Alderman. In addition to this, every new map and mode will be included as free updates for all players. Who needs a season pass, right?

"We've actually changed a lot [in multiplayer]," explains Jon Shiring, Lead Engineer on Titanfall 2, "but we tried to make sure it still felt like Titanfall. So there's a lot of stuff the non-hardcore won't even pick up on but there's been a lot of tweaks and balance changes."

A proper story-driven single-player campaign is also being added to Titanfall 2, replacing what was essentially a multiplayer training exercise from the first game. The story follows Jack Cooper and

his newly acquired Titan named BT as they journey across varied environments and rely on each other for help.

"People wanted to know more about the universe we've created," says Shiring, "and the characters that are in it. It's a story that has a chance for quiet moments and dialogue."

Details about the campaign are scarce but we do know for sure that BT is more than just a walking tank; he has personality and talks to Jack. Shiring tells me Respawn won't go into a lot of detail on the single-player because they "want it to be a surprise when people play it in October." Fair enough.

Something they're happy to talk all about is multiplayer. Aside from the aforementioned free new maps and modes, Titanfall 2 also offers a few key upgrades to how the player traverses the levels. Pilot mobility was at the core of what made Titanfall feel so unique, and now it's even easier to get off the ground and moving at full speed with the grappling hook.

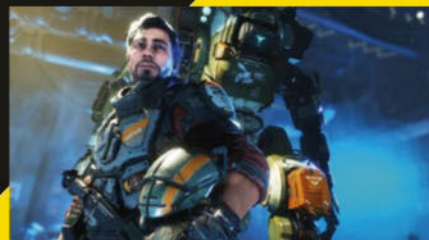
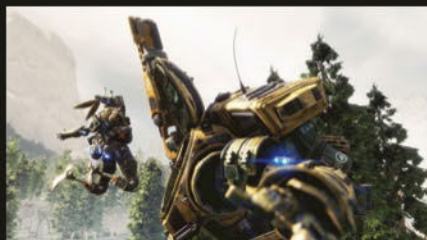
Fired at almost any surface, the quick-fire grappling pulls you in any direction. It saved my life a few times

during my hands-on sessions, too, when I just wanted to get up and out of the way of an incoming Titan. So too did the new slide mechanic, which allowed me to lower my profile while staying on the move.

"You can chain those together," adds Shiring. "So you can do a wall-run, then jump into a slide and connect it to a grapple to go back to a wall-run. We're trying to give lots of mobility options so that [players] feel free and fast."

New Titans have also been unveiled including the flamethrower-enabled Scorch, a laser canon-toting Ion and the robotic samurai Ronin. In all, there will be six Titans for players to choose from. But we'll have to wait until October to see all that Titanfall 2 has to offer. And going off what I've seen, it's been worth the wait. **[[**

YOU CAN DO A WALL-RUN, THEN JUMP INTO A SLIDE AND CONNECT IT TO A GRAPPLE TO GO BACK TO A WALL-RUN. WE'RE GIVING LOTS OF MOBILITY OPTIONS





DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

Respawn Entertainment
Electronic Arts
PC, PS4, Xbox
28 October, 2016



DEVELOPER	Atlus, P Studio
PUBLISHER	Atlus
PLATFORM	PS4, PS3
RELEASE DATE	TBA 2016

Persona 5

The JRPG that'll steal your heart away, writes Heidi Klemms

The Persona series has been an unlikely success story outside of Japan. Originally a spin-off of Atlus' Shin Megami Tensei RPG franchise, the series mostly languished in obscurity in PAL territories until the release of Persona 3 on the PS2. It was the popularity of

Persona 4 that propelled the series into gaming's collective consciousness globally. A dungeon-crawling RPG about kids solving a murder mystery in a small Japanese town - and coming to terms with their own inner darkness - became the most beloved JRPG in years.

To say that Persona 5 is highly anticipated is an understatement. It's the first numbered instalment in the series since 2008, for starters. It's also the first time a Persona game has been tailor-made for a high-definition platform. Perhaps most importantly, it's a game that could prove that JRPGs still have the style, stories, characters, and gameplay quality to hold their own in a Western market that seems to be increasingly shifting away from them.

BREAKING THE LAW

Many a story set in modern-day Japan begins with the tale of the mysterious transfer student. The hero of Persona 5 fits this role perfectly, having just moved to Tokyo. He's newly enrolled at Shujin High, where he meets a host of new companions: requisite goofball Ryuji, the shy half-Caucasian Anne, Makoto the student council president, and charming art student Yusuke.

Unfortunately, he also manages to get into trouble early on. After getting into a scuffle with a man he sees stalking and abusing women, he's arrested and taken to prison. While he manages to get off with probation rather than jail time, the incident leaves him disillusioned. As he lives out his school life and his probationary period at the cafe a family friend owns, he finds himself drawn into the mysterious 'Velvet Room': a place beyond reality as we know it. There, he is told he must "rehabilitate" to find true freedom.

Soon after, the hero and Ryuji

are given a smartphone app from Igor, the long-nosed curator of the Velvet Room. This app gives them the power to visit another world called "the Palace", where the wicked and hedonistic desires of adults in society thrive. Elaborate, ostentatious structures in the Palace house treasures made from the dark aspirations of human hearts. In order to "rehabilitate", these treasures must be stolen. Thus begins the transformation of ordinary high school students (and one extraordinary cat creature) into otherworldly Phantom Thieves...

SOCIAL MEDIA

One of the biggest reasons why recent instalments of the Persona series have been so well received is because of the games' unique balance between dealing with the everyday life struggles of a Japanese high schooler and fighting twisted creatures in an alternative world. These two worlds are separate but linked: when you maintain good relationships with friends and family in the 'normal' world, the strength that comes from the bonds you make, called Social Links, powers your "Personas" - supernatural extensions of your inner self that you do battle with in the Palace world. P5 takes modern elements such as social networking services and SMS messages into account, and allows you to converse and build social links with certain characters (including your party members) with such elements. With such an emphasis on keeping close to others, it's fitting that much of Persona 5 takes place in Tokyo's Shibuya district - a place known for being a popular meeting spot and social hangout.

As you go about your daily routine, you'll find that you have a furry friend with you all the time. Morgana is a black cat that seems like a normal animal to most folks. Morgana isn't any old feline, however - they're another member of the Phantom Thieves, revealing their true form when you enter the other world. Morgana looks like they will be the closest companion the hero has, but much about them - their cat form, their shapeshifting ability, the speech, and where they even come from - has yet to be revealed. (If they turn out to be half as funny as Teddy in Persona 4, they'll be a welcome party member for sure.)

It's not enough to be just a social butterfly, either. You'll also need to keep tabs on things like your obligations to school, sports teams, part-time jobs, and other

various elements required of a good member of Japanese society. Time management is a must: when you and your friends want to raid the Palace, you'll need to fit it into an in-game calendar that ticks away with every activity you do. In some cases, you'll need to complete a Palace mission before a certain time limit - if you don't, the game is over.

THE RAID

When night-time cloaks the land, it's the perfect time for thieves to go about their business. You can enter the Palace at night, and it's there that you'll fight against the embodiments of humanity's dark impulses.

Atlus hasn't shown too much of the actual dungeons yet - if they're themed in the same way Persona 4's were (which is likely, given that they're tied to individual characters), simply pointing out their existence could be a spoiler - but what we have seen shows something more elaborate than the randomly generated floors of Persona 3 and 4. While we don't know if the dungeons are pre-made this time around, we do know that they offer a lot to interact with and push the 'thief' motif. You'll need to use an ability called 'Third Eye' to see puzzle solutions and hidden items, while making use of stealth techniques and environmental objects to creep around and get the drop on your foes.

While the core combat system is similar to that of Persona 3 and 4, there are some notable improvements. First, a feature that sets you skip a character's turn in exchange for giving the character after them a boost to their stats. Second, a lot of basic battle commands are mapped to face buttons, letting you skip a lot of time that would normally be spent paging through menus. Finally, the ability to talk and negotiate with enemies - a feature from the mainline Shin Megami Tensei titles and Persona 1 and 2 - makes its return, though exactly what benefits this negotiation can confer are still vague.

CATCH THE HEART

We've been waiting a long time for Persona 5, but now that release dates have been set for Japan (September 2016) and North America (Valentine's Day 2017), it's only a matter of time before we find out when PAL territories will be able to run away with this highly anticipated JRPG on both PS3 and PS4. Let's just hope we're not stuck with a wait akin to Shin Megami Tensei IV's excruciating PAL delay: seeing our pals across the pond playing Persona 5 for a year before us would truly be a crime. ❗

WHILE THE CORE COMBAT SYSTEM IS SIMILAR TO THAT OF PERSONA 3 AND 4, THERE ARE SOME NOTABLE IMPROVEMENTS

TREASURE BOX

Like limited editions? The limited edition version of Persona 5 is one of the coolest boxes we've seen. The package comes with a Morgana plush, a Shujin academy school bag, a deluxe hardcover artbook, and a soundtrack CD. Fingers crossed this arrives in PAL territories.

DEVELOPER	Rare
PUBLISHER	Microsoft Studios
PLATFORM	Win10, Xbone
RELEASE DATE	TBA 2017



Sea of Thieves

Videogame piracy is more fun than ever,
writes **Andrew Whitehead**

“**EVERY PIRATE IN THE WORLD IS A PLAYER, WHICH MEANS IF YOU SEE ANOTHER SHIP, THAT’S ANOTHER SHIP CREWED BY REAL PLAYERS**”

Bucking the recent trend in videogame trailers relying on maudlin cover songs playing over slowed-down game footage, Rare chose to actually show Sea of Thieves being played by real people. Real, overly excitable people. They wanted you to see gamers adventuring with friends in a massive open world. Having a few laughs, getting pissed, falling into the ocean, being left for dead. Typical pirate stuff.

“[Sea of Thieves is] all about you and your friends going on adventures together in an emergent shared world,” says Rare Studio Head Craig Duncan. “You’ll see other sails on the horizon and you’ll know – because every pirate in the world is a player – if you see another ship that’s another ship crewed by real players.”

The basic idea is you’re a pirate with a ship, in an uncharted world, and while you can go it alone, there’s more than a slight nudge that you should ask for help with managing you sails, cannons and steering.

Because it’s still in development, Rare wasn’t quite ready to show off all aspects of the game, so I can’t say

how the guns or swords will work in combat. But rest assured you’ll be boarding enemy ships blunderbuss muskets blazing when Sea of Thieves is ready for market. Another aspect still being tinkered with is the consequences of death and how to make dying a meaningful event without it feeling like a massive set back. Quite the plank-walk.

One thing that has been confirmed is the inclusion of sea shanties. Anyone can whip out an instrument and get the party started while others come along and follow their lead. The game has heaps of little team-building tasks, like searching for loot and repairing the ship during an attack, all of which are part of Rare’s plan to foster emergent social situations to bond over.

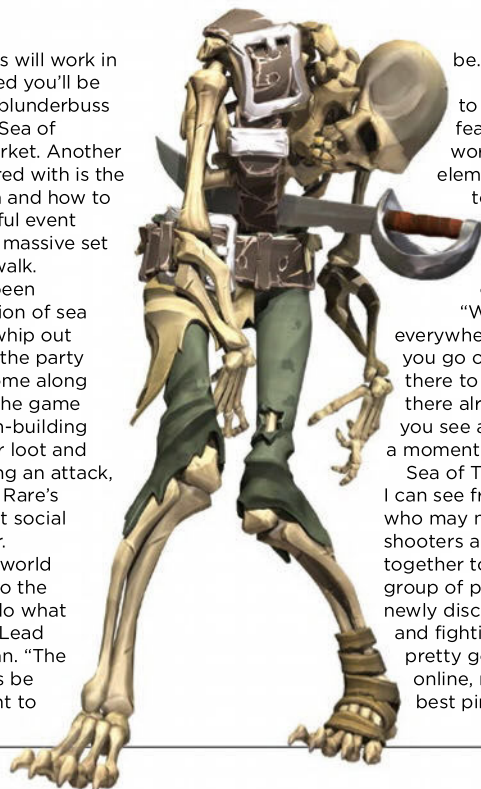
“We’re creating this world and we’ll hand it over to the players then let them do what they want to do,” says Lead Designer Mike Chapman. “The thing we keep saying is be the pirate that you want to

be. That’s a big thing for us.”

The developers were keen to point out Sea of Thieves features a fully handcrafted world with some procedural elements layered into the game to keep long-term players on their toes. They also want to make a shared world for all players, but not an overcrowded one.

“We don’t want ships everywhere,” adds Duncan. “And if you go on an island, we don’t want there to be hundreds of people there already. We want every time you see a sail on the horizon to be a moment.”

Sea of Thieves is the type of game I can see friends – particularly those who may not have the reflexes for shooters and the like – banding together to play. Gathering a small group of pirate on a ships, exploring a newly discovered island, singing songs and fighting krakens. It sounds like a pretty good way to spend a night online, me hearties. Best prep your best pirate dialect. ☞





Make It Yours.



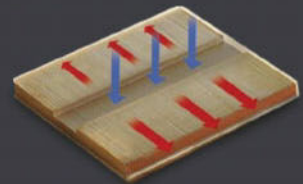
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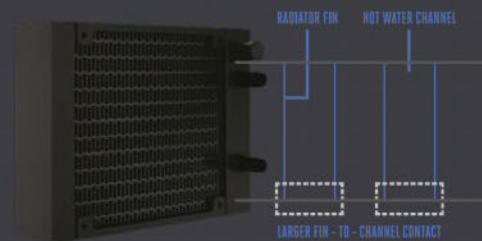
FlowOp Technology



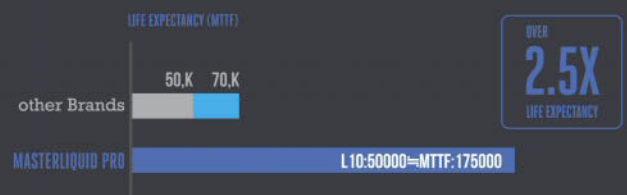
"Spraying" the CPU



Sqacious Squares for Air



Patented Dual - Chamber Technology



HOURS



DEVELOPER	Quantic Dream
PUBLISHER	Sony Interactive Entertainment
PLATFORM	PlayStation 4
RELEASE DATE	TBA 2017

Detroit Become Human

Andrew Whitehead has seen things you people wouldn't believe

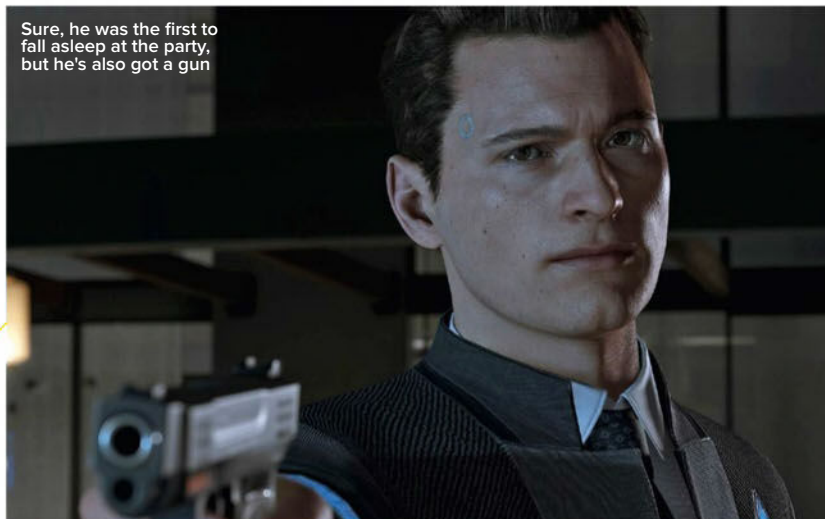
Would you trust an android to live with you? To work as a teacher? Or drive you to work? Well, in *Detroit: Become Human*, a near-future neo-noir thriller, millions already do. But this isn't just a story about humans trusting androids, *Detroit* also asks whether androids trust humans.

"I wanted to talk about us, talk about humans," explains game Director David Cage. "Our emotions, our society, about our past, our present, maybe our future. And this is what was really important to me. Using androids was just a way for me to talk about us."

The size of the playable ensemble cast of *Detroit* is not yet confirmed, but we do know each of them is an android with unique abilities. More on that later. For my demo I watched as police android Connor, a model designed to hunt down his own kind,



Being blue-blooded in this particular future isn't as regal as it sounds



Sure, he was the first to fall asleep at the party, but he's also got a gun

||
THE GIRL WAS SAVED. BUT CONNOR HAD TO SACRIFICE HIMSELF TO DO SO. HE DIED, SHE LIVED, AND THE GAME ROLLS ON IN ONE POSSIBLE OUTCOME

attempted to negotiate with a fellow android who has taken a young girl hostage after a murderous outburst.

The first play-through was a disaster. Connor hastily headed to the penthouse balcony to confront his target and after some clumsy negotiating the rogue android threw himself and the hostage off the edge. Connor failed. You failed. But there's no 'game over' in Detroit; you bear the consequences of your actions and move on to the next scene regardless.

The second attempt went better. This time, Connor examined the

crime scene thoroughly with his 'mind palace' ability, a power that allows him to seemingly freeze time and examine his surroundings. Now he was able to visualise how a struggle played out based on physical evidence, such as ballistics and blood splatter, and uncover a downed officer's handgun hidden under a table. Further intelligence-gathering led to Connor learning the name of the android and why he flipped out in the first place.

With this information, he headed out to the balcony. Connor lied about having a gun, he called the android by his name to gain his trust and sympathised with his anxiety at finding out he was going to be replaced. An on-screen percentage meter let us know Connor had an 80 percent chance of successful negotiation this time, and in the end

the girl was saved. But Connor had to sacrifice himself to do so. He died, she lived, and the game rolls on. This is just one of a dozen ways this scene could play out, I mean we didn't even get to use our gun.

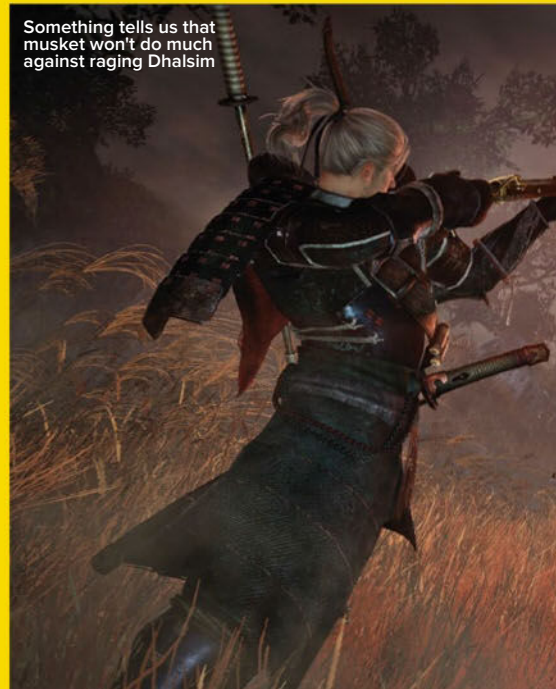
It's clear that Quantic Dream has built upon what they started with Beyond: Two Souls and have come a long way from the stilted performances featured in Heavy Rain. What little I saw of Detroit: Become Human featured believable dialogue that felt natural and was delivered by competent motion-captured actors.

All the elements needed to make a great story-driven game are here, now all that remains to be seen is how compelling the narrative is over the course of the entire game. From what I've seen, Detroit: Become Human looks like the most promising Quantic Dream game, to date. ❧

DEVELOPER Team Ninja
PUBLISHER Koei Tecmo
PLATFORM PS4
RELEASE DATE TBA 2016



Something tells us that musket won't do much against raging Dhalsim



PREVIEW

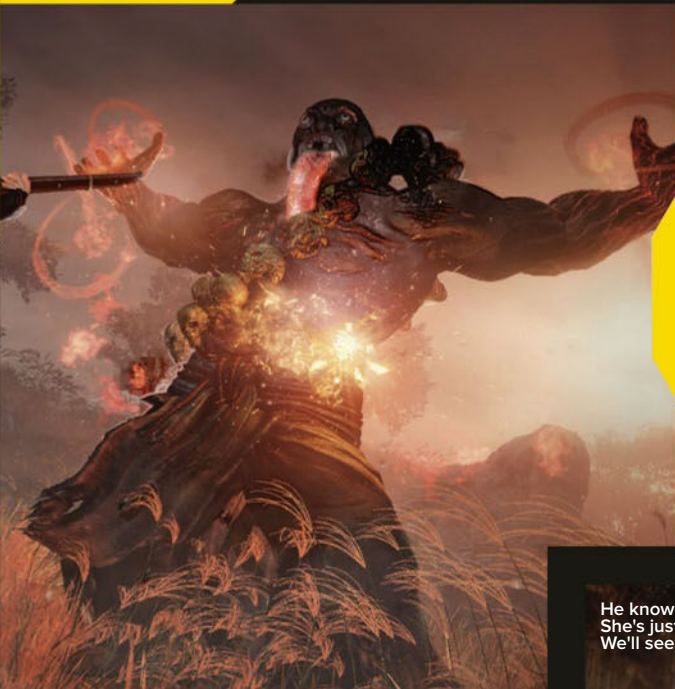
Nioh

Andrew Whitehead has travelled Nioh and far to bring you this preview

It's hard to believe that Koei Tecmo's Nioh actually exists. This was a game that was announced by Koei all the way back in 2004 and originally conceived as a strange tie-in to an unfilmed Akira Kurosawa film script. After that fell through, the game was retooled for the PS3, targeting a 2006 release... which, obviously, never happened. Fast-forward to 10 years later, where things have changed dramatically: Tecmo and Koei tied the corporate knot, the PS4 is leading the market, and games like Dark Souls have become massive global success stories. So, when Nioh re-emerged last year, recreated by Team Ninja into a tough-as-nails action-RPG, people were genuinely surprised it still lived.

Of course, languishing in development hell for over a decade is certain to set off a few alarm bells – remember the messes of Duke Nukem Forever and Aliens: Colonial Marines? But we've got good news: Nioh's looking like a superb Sengoku-era adventure. Hooray!

Players assume the role of William (based on real-life historical figure William Adams), a strangely Western samurai in a Japan that had gone to great lengths to shut Westerners out during that particular period in history. Unfortunately, William's rugged blue-eyed, blond-haired appearance isn't just drawing



NIOH TAKES A PAGE FROM THE FROMSOFTWARE PLAYBOOK FOR ITS COMBAT DESIGN, WHICH MEANS CONSTANT PRESSURE



He knows how to fight. She's just winging it. We'll see ourselves out



attention from his human peers on the Japanese islands. There's a whole host of demons, ghost, and other assorted yokai out for his blood for reasons as of yet unspecified. While there seems to be some hints of an interesting backstory here - and there are rumours that fictionalised versions of other Japanese historical figures from the Sengoku period will put in appearances - most of the emphasis in the demos and hands-on time Koei-Tecmo has given us has been on the gameplay.

Team Ninja's forte is action-based gameplay with a hefty challenge level, and that's precisely what you're going to be getting here: Nioh takes no prisoners in its combat. But don't be expecting to zip around the play-field with the acrobatic combat of the Ninja Gaiden games here. Nioh takes a page from the From Software playbook for its combat design (a fact the developers proudly proclaim), making it so that every movement must be carefully considered under pressure. A stamina meter drains away with every slash, dodge, and guard William performs, leaving him nigh helpless if he expends it fully. Foes don't go down easily, though, and players will need to fight many times to learn effective strategies against their assailants. You'll also be able to make use of

mythical guardian spirits that grant passive effect bonuses, protect your valuable accumulated Amrita, and transform into living weapons that can grant immense attack power.

Team Ninja seems determined to make Nioh a fantastic experience, and they've already taken feedback from an earlier playable alpha on the PlayStation Store into account, eliminating weapon durability,

rebalancing stamina use, adjusting the camera, and expanding the playable tutorial to help else players into the adventure before it cruelly tears you apart. A second, limited-time demo is slated for August, so take it for a spin if this sounds like your bloody cup of tea. You can look forward to leaving this mortal coil many times over later this year on the PlayStation 4. **[[**

Always strike a pose when enemies catch fire. Always...



Forza Horizon 3

Andrew Whitehead shows us how to burn rubber Down Under in this latest racing sim

Since I moved to America I've been told my home country of Australia is 90 percent desert, has two cities (Melbourne and Sydney), and is bursting with snakes and spiders. And koalas. Thankfully, UK developer Playground Games did a little bit more research than that for their open-world racing game Forza Horizon 3, set entirely in 'Straya.

"Australia has always been one of our top choices for Horizon, ever since the beginning," says Forza Design Director Jon Knoles. "We knew we couldn't do Australia right until we could do beach driving, driving through the surf, and driving through lush rainforests. A lot of people don't know Australia has got some serious forests." (It's true!)

Promising a world twice as large as Horizon 2, this latest entry in the series features local landmarks like the Coober Pedy and the vineyards of the Yarra Valley. The beachside town of Byron Bay is also here and is connected to Surfer's Paradise by

the Great Ocean Road. Geography be damned, apparently.

Yeah, you read that right. This isn't quite the Australia you know. It's more like a greatest hits compilation of a bunch of the places that makes Australia great, reworked to be more fun than realistic.

"What we do want to do is realise the spirit and the beauty of Australia," says Creative Director Ralph Fulton. "We were really inspired by the country when we researched it and we want to reflect that within the scale of the world we've created."

And what a world it is. The graphical detail in Forza Horizon 3 is better than ever. It's quite possibly the best-looking racing game ever created and could almost be used to justify that 4K-enabled Xbox One S purchase.

Even the skies were meticulously recorded over a long summer in Australia. Then there's the roaming wildlife, the detailed environments and, of course, the cars themselves.

With over 350 of them,



the cars remain the star of the show including a selection of local favourites like the Holden Sandman and the Ford Falcon XB. Of course, there's also exotic supercars like the Lamborghini Centenario; but can it really compete with a Torana A9X?

Additionally, Horizon 3 supports cross-platform multiplayer with Windows 10 gamers. And, if purchased digitally, you can take advantage of Xbox Play Anywhere to play the one copy of the game on PC or Xbox One.

Making their return are the user-created Drivatars, but with a twist. Unlike other Horizon games that made you work your way up from rookie status, this time you're the boss of the Horizon festival. Instead of competing against your friend's ghost, you can hire up to four of them to work for you and earn you extra rewards. And if a friend's Drivatar is underperforming? Fire them. That won't be awkward or anything. Eesh.

Home country bias aside, Forza Horizon 3 looks amazing. And better than that, it looks fun. I mean sports cars look great on the track, but I can't want to try and slam one into the Twelve Apostles, and I reckon revheads will feel the same way. 🗨️

IT'S QUITE POSSIBLY THE BEST-LOOKING RACING GAME EVER CREATED AND COULD ALMOST JUSTIFY THAT 4K XBOX ONE S PURCHASE

DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

Playground Games
Microsoft Studios
Win10, Xbone
27 September, 2016

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PREVIEW

Steep

It's time to conquer snowy mountains, writes Andrew Whitehead

It's clear Ubisoft Ancey is passionate about Steep. Every inch of this game looks and feels like a love letter to its part of the world and its natural beauty. Set partially in the Alps, the game focuses on snowboarding, skiing, paragliding and wingsuiting in an open world designed from the ground up to be a seamless multiplayer experience.

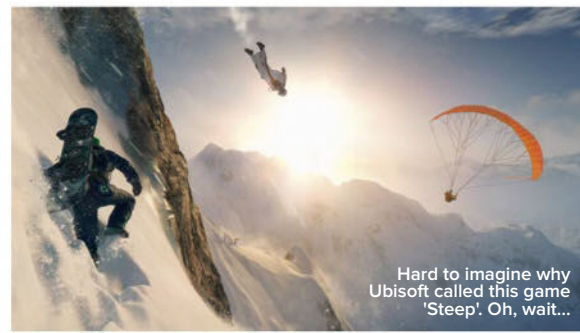
How you get around the map is up to you, and you can switch your equipment at any point. This gives you the freedom to, for example, paraglide to one section of a mountain, bust out your snowboard, and ride all the way down to the bottom. The game

also features an eagle-eye view of the mountain range that allows players to teleport to drop zones they've already discovered in their snowy travels.

One thing I didn't expect from Steep is for it to make me laugh as much as it did. And not because it's intentionally funny. But it's hard to not laugh when watching my poor avatar smash into an oncoming tree, then roll down the side of a cliff.

Trees and rocks will always pose a threat, but players can turn off collision with other players if you'd rather focus on competing without it becoming Mortal Kombat on ice. And if you

**IT'S
PLAYERS
CAN TURN OFF
COLLISION IF YOU'D
RATHER FOCUS ON
COMPETING WITHOUT
IT BECOMING
MORTAL KOMBAT
ON ICE**



can't be bothered to finish an event you're going to lose, just hold down the dedicated reset button. Five or so seconds later and you're back at the start of the event.

The controls for skiing and snowboarding don't feel quite as videogamy as something like *SSX*, but that's not to say the game feels entirely realistic either. You can still pull off complicated tricks like a pro, but you have to pay attention if you want to stick the landing. I did have an issue pulling off the same trick twice, though, as grab tricks are performed by holding down a shoulder button and

tilting the right analogue stick. It wasn't hard, per se, but it's just not as precise as what I'm used to in sports games.

Up in the air, the controls for the wingsuit are fairly forgiving. It's easy to bend the rules of how aerodynamics actually work to regain lost altitude. Wingsuit events usually emphasise flying close to obstacles for points or just straight-up downhill racing. Paragliding was the weakest of the four gameplay types and felt more like a way to take in the scenery than an actual competitive sport. All modes are also playable in either first-person or third-person.

The screenshots alone should tell you how great the mountains look. And up close the terrain is brilliantly realised, right down to how the snow moves realistically beneath you. The scale of the mountain range, too, is impressive; it's just calling out to be explored by players looking to find hidden valleys and slopes.

How much fun the game will be in the long depends on how large of a fan base *Steep* can garner to create new events. But for now, the game feels like a brave step in the right direction for a genre of gaming that has been pretty dormant of late. ❧

It's a surprisingly populated space for such a desolate place, right?

The PlayStation Vita is a console that deserved better. Ignored by most consumers outside of Japan and basically abandoned by its parents, it now exists as a home for niche Japanese games and ports of indie titles. But it wasn't a complete waste, either: the Vita was (and still is) home to some excellent titles. Thankfully, one of the Vita's best games is getting a sequel – albeit on the PlayStation 4.

Gravity Rush was a beautiful, high-concept game developed by Sony's Japan Studio. It followed the adventures of Kat, a young amnesiac girl in a strange city with the power to bend gravity to her will. It was one of the Vita's achievements, and was recently reissued as a PS4 remaster.

But Kat's adventures in physics manipulation were not to be ended by a handheld's premature death. Gravity Rush 2 is coming exclusively to the PlayStation 4, and it picks up directly where the previous title left off.

Gravity Rush 2 follows in its predecessor's foot steps: it's a semi-open-world game where Kat can explore a bustling, culture-filled cityscape, complete quests, and fight off mysterious black monsters called the Nevi. While Kat doesn't have much in the way of tools or weaponry, her ability to shift gravity more than makes up for it. By changing the way gravity works, Kat can alter the position of objects, fly to faraway platforms, and cling to otherwise unscalable surfaces.

The demo we played was brief; however, it reassured us that everything we'd fallen in love with from the original Gravity Rush was still here – and better than ever. Like the original game, most of the cutscenes and dialogue bits are presented in a 'motion comic' style format, giving the game the vibe of a classy European sequential art story. We were presented, in this manner, with a mission: to locate some cargo of dubious content that had gone missing. Easy enough, right?

The thrill of Gravity Rush kicks in the moment you start playing with its physics. With a simple button press, Kat can levitate in the air, at which point you can aim at an object, wall, or platform and turn that into the centre of gravity – which will send her careening through the air until her feet plant down upon it. Gravity Rush 2 adds onto this by introducing different types of gravity: Lunar style makes Kat's movements lighter and floatier, while Jupiter makes things heavier and more forceful.

Using our gravitational manipulation skills, we were able to locate the cargo in question – only to have the area immediately besieged by threatening Nevi monsters. Gravity powers are key to combat, as well – and while fighting was the weakest part of the original game, it's been spruced up quite a bit for the follow-up. Targeting specific foes with gravity-powered kicks feels less cumbersome, and using the Lunar and Jupiter gravity styles in combat gives Kat access to some new – and quite powerful – special attacks. Unfortunately, the cargo mission was a loss, but the content exposed some shady dealings going on that we'd have to handle later.

You still have plenty of time to try the original game before Gravity Rush 2 lands. You'll be glad you did. ☪

Gravity Rush 2

Andrew Whitehead
has sympathy for the
PlayStation Vita

THE THRILL
OF GRAVITY
RUSH KICKS IN THE
MOMENT YOU START
PLAYING WITH ITS
PHYSICS, WHETHER
FLOATY OR
HEAVY



DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

SIE Japan Studio
Sony Interactive
Entertainment
PlayStation 4
TBA 2016

Strafe

Andrew Whitehead knows how to use those 'A' and 'D' keys

Wearing their love of '90s first-person shooters proudly on their sleeve, the team at Pixel Titans are making sure Strafe pays homage to the classics like Quake and Doom without being slaves to outdated design.

"We aren't trying to recreate that look exactly; we do put in some real-time lights and add some crazy physics," explains Lead Programmer and company Co-Founder Stephen Raney. "It has some of the great modern amenities of new games, but also keeps some of the great stuff from the old fast-paced shooters."

For example, remember when classic shooters made you carry a tonne of different weapons? Or how you saved up those precious rockets and never used the launcher? Strafe does. So, to counter that, you can start with one of three primary weapons, including an automatic rifle, a shotgun and a railgun. Then after that you'll rely on just one additional weapon you can find within the game.

The catch is these extra guns are always found low on ammo and you can't pick up extra rounds. It's a way of subtly encouraging players to actually use these weapons then toss them and find another instead of hoarding them for a later fight.

Something you do want to hold onto is scrap metal. Strafe's very basic plot involves you being a scrapper: someone who searches planets for

any kind of valuable junk. Scrap can be found hidden around the level, or by killing enemies, and is used at crafting stations to make items like armour or to produce credits. Credits can be used at the merchant shops to buy abilities like double-jump or speed boosts.

Another update to the classic formula is Strafe is both a roguelike, meaning you get one life before it's game over, and procedurally generated levels. In order to keep the game logical and flowing, the developers have made a number of handcrafted pieces that will be randomly stuck together on each play-through, but I assure you my multiple test sessions all felt very different.

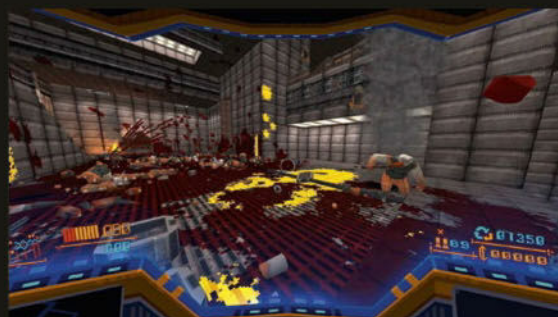
The big question is: how does it play? And the answer is it's as tight as the original Quake, but it felt even more unforgiving. I kind of forgot how, back then, enemies weren't looking for cover or working together, they just want you dead. The golden rule of survival in Strafe is to just keep moving.

Another half-step out of the '90s planned for Strafe is Oculus Rift support, but a console release, online co-op, and supporting HTC Vive are things the team won't commit to at this stage.

"Our team is small," says Director and company Co-Founder Thom Glunt, "so although there's a lot of cool things we want to put in it, there's always the concern that that'll come at the



Navigation is easy: avoid rooms filled with loads of bloody corpses



expense of us finishing the things we want to put in it."

For now, their focus is on getting Strafe out and into the hands of gamers who need to get their simple, blocky first-person-shooter fix with all the modern trimmings. ☞

DEVELOPER	Pixel Titans
PUBLISHER	Devolver
PLATFORM	PC, Mac
RELEASE DATE	TBA 2017

STRAFE HAS SOME OF THE GREAT MODERN AMENITIES OF NEW GAMES, BUT KEEPS STUFF FROM OLD-SCHOOL SHOOTERS

DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER

NetherRealm Studios
Warner Bros. Interactive
Entertainment

PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

PS4, Xbox
TBA 2017

PREVIEW

Injustice 2

Where fighting games, superheroes, and loot collide, writes Heidi Kempf

NetherRealm Studios has had a pretty eventful year. Besides hosting the massive ESL Mortal Kombat X Pro League – a globe-spanning tournament series that young fighting game prodigy SonicFox won days before E3 opened – the studio's been busy planning their next one-on-one fighter – the sequel to 2013's *Injustice: Gods Among Us*. While the original *Injustice* was a fairly straightforward fighting game, albeit one with a very dark take on the DC superhero universe, *Injustice 2* looks to shake things up by upping the stakes – and the rewards – on every battle you engage in.

The tyrannical Superman has been imprisoned by Batman at the end of the first *Injustice*, but things have hardly returned to normal in this alternative superhero universe. As Bruce and others struggle to reconstruct society, those who still believe in Supes' regime are working to counteract their efforts. All the while, a new, bigger threat is rapidly approaching: one that puts all of Earth at risk.

At the time of writing, eight members of the 28-strong roster had been revealed. Besides returning favourites (and DC icons) Superman, Batman, and Aquaman, three new characters were introduced to the mix. Supergirl is a fan favourite that was surprisingly absent from the original game's cast, while the other two characters, Gorilla Grodd

and Atrocitus (with cat companion Dex-Starr) are some rather out-of-left-field villains who, nonetheless, make for very interesting additions to the character collection. Flash and Wonder Woman are also set to make a reappearance, though they were not playable in the E3 demo we sampled.

In the demos we played of the game, several familiar systems made their return. The clash system, where players wager their super meter for a life or damage advantage, is once again a key competitive component. Stage transitions make a reappearance and, in the case of the revamped Atlantis stage, new transitions have been added to make the fights even more dynamic. Interactables, the environmental elements that players can attempt to utilise to get an edge in a fight, also return.

The biggest addition to the game, however, is the all-new gear system. The slogan for *Injustice 2* is, "Each battle defines you," and this comes true in the form of rewards granted to both victor and loser at the end of each fight. Every hero or villain comes with numerous slots to equip gear they have acquired in their fighting career: armour, weapons, accessories, and more (Atrocitus could put Dex-Starr in a variety of kitty costumes). Gear drops vary in rarity and have assorted effects like stat boosts, increased health, even granting access to certain special abilities. This system allows for players to personalise

characters, and for two of the same character to look and fight in very different ways. (A 'tournament' mode that keeps the playing field level has been mentioned by series showrunner Ed Boon, though specific details on it are still scarce.)

It's clear that *Injustice 2* will offer comic fans a heaping helping of fan service – the pre-battle dialogue, which varies with every character combination, is enough proof of that. But with a new rewards system and some welcome new character additions, NetherRealm is also showing that they're here to please fighting game fans, as well, be they casual warriors or diehard tournament competitors. **C**



You know what they say:
better Red Lantern than
Dead Lantern



PREVIEW



I Am Setsuma

*Not to be confused with the citrus
John Robertson*

DEVELOPER	Tokyo RPG Factory
PUBLISHER	Square Enix
PLATFORM	PS4, Vita, PC
RELEASE DATE	20 July, 2016



In this era of 4K visuals and elite processing power, many older game ideas are being limited to the regurgitation of conveyor belt that are remasters and re-releases. Why make a new RPG in the classical form when you can simply upgrade an existing classic and sell it to an audience either drunk on nostalgia or eager to play a game that was before their time now that it comes with all the modern conveniences?

The creatively named Tokyo RPG Factory's response is to show just why some ideas have become classic in the first place. I Am Setsuna, the studio's first game, adheres to many of the staples that Japanese-made RPGs of the likes of Chrono Trigger, Dragon Quest and Final Fantasy were built upon. It's perspective is isometric, dialogue is read and not heard, combat is turn-based, a world map must be traversed, and its narrative is one of tragic gravitas. And yet, beautifully, it's an outing that - after

Brings a whole new meaning to the concept of 'turtling'...

three hours of play, at least - feels neither derivative nor clichéd.

Protagonist Endir plays the repentant hero, an individual struggling to understand his place in the world after his understanding of his position within it is suddenly toppled. Setsuna, the titular character, at first seems every bit the weak, helpless female that shamelessly typifies many RPGs, until she reveals a personality of stern determination tempered by empathy even for those seeking to kill her. These entities are framed within a world of relentless snow and ice, forcing a sensation of melancholy and hopelessness that is skilfully coupled with hope through the quality of the narrative design.

It's this fine balance that makes I Am Setsuna such an intriguing proposition, not least because the combat forces a similar collusion of readings. The usual turn-based system of waiting for a meter to build up before you can act is diversified by a 'Momentum System'.

Instead of acting on their turn a

character can wait and do nothing, allowing points to build up that can be later unleashed in one go. Use those points during a healing spell and more characters can be patched up at one time. Use them during an attack and you might do more damage, or you might inflict a negative status effect on your foe. There are a multitude of

outcomes that can occur, with

characters also able to

team up to spend

their Momentum

Points in unison

by unleashing

'combos'

in which

everyone

acts at once.

The risk, of

course, is that

you wait so

long for that

perfect attack

that the enemy

has damaged you

beyond repair.

Tempting

intelligent use of this

risk/reward system is

going to be key in making sure

that the going remains stimulating

throughout what is likely to be an

experience that straddles the longer

side of normal. From what we've seen

and played, however, the potential is

here for I Am Setsuna to become one

of the sleeper hits of 2016. ☞

SETSUNA
REVEALS A
PERSONALITY
OF STERN
DETERMINATION
TEMPERED BY
EMPATHY EVEN FOR
THOSE SEEKING
TO KILL HER



It may look like they're just standing around, but really... no, they are



Attack On Titan



Koei-Tecmo's Omega Force team have to be some of the busiest folks in the industry. Ever since *Dynasty Warriors* became a huge hit, the company's been laser-focused on taking its proven formula to new and interesting frontiers beyond historical fantasy. We've recently seen *Fist of the North Star*, *One Piece*, *Dragon Quest*, *Zelda*, and even *Gundam* get the 'one-man army decimating hordes of weak foes' action-game treatment. Now, Omega Force is taking on the biggest anime and manga property in years, *Attack on Titan* – but they're changing things up quite a bit.

In the world of *Attack on Titan*, humanity is under siege, living in fear of grotesque, gigantic humanoid beings known as titans. Little is known about these massive, mysterious monsters, except that they consume humans for reasons unknown. Eren Yeager watched as his mother was killed by a titan, and years later, he and his friends Mikasa and Arin have joined the elite Survey Corps – a military group specially trained to combat the titans, who have few weaknesses and can regenerate quickly.

Considering the premise, it's clear that a traditional *Warriors*-style game wouldn't work – Titans don't go down easily. Instead, Omega Force has created a game that captures the intense struggle the Survey Corps must undergo in order to slay these terrifying creatures. Players control characters equipped with Omni-Directional Mobility Gear, which allows them to achieve the mobility and

height necessary to strike at Titan weak spots while also zipping around large battlefields. By using a combination of the ODMG and a fuel-powered booster, the player can vault around large areas very quickly – a vital technique when multiple titans are attacking at once and people all around the level need rescuing from the monstrous foes.

Striking a titan down isn't as easy as mashing a button for a flashy combo, either. In order to kill a titan, you must target the vulnerable points on its body by anchoring your ODMG to the beast, then leap and jet in for a swift, clean kill. Depending on where you target the titan and how well your button-press timing goes, it's possible to slay some titans in a single slash. You may want to focus on chopping off limbs and appendages, however, as they can debilitate the titans as well as drop valuable supplies. Judging when to take your time to carefully dissect titans and complete auxiliary stage goals is important, as is realising when to ignore everything else for the sake of the primary mission target.

You won't just play as the human characters, however. You'll also have the opportunity to control a titan several

Heidi Kempf takes on a titanic preview and lives to tell the tale

times as part of the story. Titan battles are very different – you'll still be fighting against other titans, but as a fellow slow, lumbering monstrosity. Here, you can perform simple combo attacks, pick up and throw foes, and even unleash a devastating Titan Rage attack. But don't expect speedy *Warriors*-style combat here, either – as a titan, your movements are slow and cumbersome, and you'll need to take that into account as you confront your towering enemies.

Genuinely interesting anime-to-game adaptations are few and far between, but Omega Force has done a superb job here of making the life-or-death stakes of titan combat feel tense and exciting. You won't need to wait long to take them on, either:

Attack on Titan: Wings of Freedom is slated to hit at the end of August. **»**



DEVELOPER	Omega Force
PUBLISHER	Koei Tecmo
PLATFORM	PS4, PS3, Vita, Xbone, PC
RELEASE DATE	26 August, 2016

DEVELOPER | Concept, Armature Studio
 PUBLISHER | Microsoft Studio
 PLATFORM | PC, Xbox
 RELEASE DATE | 13 September, 2016



“**JOULE EMBARKS ON A QUEST FOR ANSWERS WHILE TRYING TO GET THE MALFUNCTIONING ROBOTS BACK TO WORK**”

ReCore

Andrew Whitehead can't wait to get off this stupid planet and live among the robots

It's going to take a while for gamers to get over Mighty No. 9 and start to trust Concept founder Keiji Inafune again. And rightfully so. But the man has also been involved in a number of brilliant games, so here's hoping ReCore will go some way towards repairing the damage done.

If you need more assurance, just know that the game is being developed in partnership with Armature Studio, and has the benefit of Game Director Mark Pacini's years of experience from working on the Metroid Prime series to draw from.

Set in the the distant future where Earth is but a memory, ReCore sees mankind heading out into space to

Joule looks a whole lot jumpier than her robotic companion



terraform once uninhabitable planets. The story begins with protagonist Joule waking up from cryosleep then realising she is one of the last remaining humans on the desert planet of Far Eden. Teaming up with her dog-like robot companion Mack, she embarks on a quest for answers while trying to get the malfunctioning terraforming robots back to work.

"I think the world that this game takes place in really offers a great opportunity for story," says Producer Keiji Inafune. "It's really deep world and filled with character development, combined with the expertise Mark and his team bring to the game design aspect. It really kind of fuses together a great game and a great partnership on all aspects."

Each worker on Far Eden is given a robotic companion that was designed to match its owner's personality. For example, Joule's robo-pet Mack has a blue core, indicating he's a friendly robot, while yellow core robots are more likely to be scared easily, or red cores more aggressive.

You're given a number of basic projectile attacks and can already double-jump and dash to move quickly through the environment. Shooting uses a lock-on system to keep things simple in the heat of the action.

The main challenge comes from managing teams of robots while staying safe in the hostile environment. You'll also have to use friendly robots to your advantage and colour-match your attacks for extra damage by switch your ammo colour by way of the D-pad.

Joule can also drain the core of weakened enemies for more attack power, or call on her companion Mack for help her in combat. Though the demo only showed Mack in action you'll be able to customise a whole team of different Corebots.

Once things quiet down Joule will also rely on other robot allies to perform actions like climbing walls covered in magnetic tracks to get to new areas. Obviously, the developers don't want to spoil too much, but the environmental puzzle elements of ReCore are as much a part of the game as the combat.

A few things were briefly shown during the demo but not discussed, such as the experience points system for unlocking new abilities and what you can do with collected items. What I can tell you is that ReCore is looking like a solid action platformer that should hopefully rebuild some broken bridges for Inafune and deliver a compelling action-platformer. ☞

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Police brutality is definitely on the cards in *We Happy Few*



We don't care if it's fresh, we're still not going to eat it

We Happy Few

We few, we happy few, we band of downers, writes Andrew Whitehead

With one of the most interesting art styles I've seen in a videogame for a long time, *We Happy Few* is a dystopian survival game set in a retro-futuristic English village called Wellington Wells. You start the game working for the Ministry of Truth as a redactor, censoring the news and removing unhappy stories from history, all while popping the emotion-suppressing drug Joy.

But, of course, things take a turn for the worst when you finally go off your meds and begin to see the world for what it is. After being labelled a "downer" and escaping the Ministry you emerge in the derelict town above and resolve to find a way off this bizarre island.

The town of Wellington Wells is procedurally generated and changes with each play-through, so replays are highly encouraged. Also, *We Happy Few* uses permadeath and features no save system, meaning you'll need

to think two steps ahead at all times if you want to survive, let alone escape. You're not totally helpless, though, and you can defend with melee weapons, but from what I've seen of the game in action, fighting shouldn't be your first option.

"It was a really interesting challenge to introduce story in a rich fashion inside the world," said Compulsion Games Founder Guillaume Provost, "all while not really knowing where things were laid out: not holding you on a leash throughout the whole experience."

What helps *We Happy Few* rise above the often ill-defined story-driven games that have flooded the market lately is its emphasis on player agency. You're not just listening to moody dialogue or collecting boring journals. This isn't a story being told to you, it's a story happening around you and because of you. You make choices and those choices matter. You can

even take the Joy pill at the beginning of the game if you want to.

The final release date for *We Happy Few* isn't set in stone yet, but it is coming to Xbox Game Preview and Steam Early Access first. Players will be able to play through the game's introductory area, the town and end on a cliffhanger while the developers continue to work on the game's lore and the main character's own personal backstory.

"The main piece of narrative, the character development arc, we're not releasing during the game's preview program," said Provost. "[The game preview has] a number of unique locations inside the world that will tell you about how the world got to be the way that it is. That's something our Kickstarter backers really wanted us to get into."

Compulsion Games has done everything right to ensure *We Happy Few* doesn't get bogged down in the high-concept hyperbole that often drags down narrative-driven games. Both its game elements and story potential are clearly defined enough to be intriguing but not over-explained so as to spoil what's coming down the line. And did you see those Dalek looking bins in the trailer? *We Happy Few* is easily one of my most anticipated games of the year. Joy! 🗨





DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

Compulsion Games
Compulsion Games
PC, Mac, Linux, Xbone
26 July, 2016 (Xbox Game
Preview, Steam Early
Access), TBA (Final release)



God of War

Heroes never die... they just settle down, writes Andrew Whitehead

If there's one artistic medium where characters never truly stay dead, it's videogames. Take the ending of *God of War III*, for example: it pretty solidly wraps up the saga, and it doesn't seem like there's any way Kratos could have survived, though, to this day, fans continue to write up their own theories and takes on what the ending really meant.

Well, perhaps now we can put some of those forum arguments to rest. Not only has Kratos survived against hugely stacked odds, he seems to have left to go somewhere far, far away from the turmoil in fantasy Greece, but perhaps most surprisingly of all, Kratos has embraced part of his old life: fatherhood.

DAD OF WAR

God of War for the PS4 is technically the fourth instalment in the franchise, but there is no number or subtitle to denote that. The reason why is because it's an entirely new story for Kratos: a tale of bonding with his child as father and son go on an epic journey. The creators of the franchise believe that, after years of Kratos being the archetypal "angry badass" protagonist, this opens up an entirely new world for him, both in terms of the narrative and gameplay-wise. So just who is this scrappy youngster

under Kratos's care? The few glimpses we've seen of *God of War* so far don't tell us all that much about Kratos' son. His name is never mentioned (he's simply called "boy"), his mother is barely brought up (though she, apparently, taught the child the basics of hunting with a bow), and there's a distinct possibility that he may not even be Kratos' biological son. Sony Santa Monica isn't dropping a lot of information just yet, but that's to be expected – we'll be learning more as the game progresses.

What we do know, however, is that Kratos and this boy share a very strong bond. The demo of the game we were shown involved Kratos taking the child out for a trial hunt in the cold, harsh wilderness of the game's new Norse mythology-inspired setting. The kid's enthusiastic about finally being able to show off his skills and impressing Dad, while Kratos is tough and stern, instructing the child as he chases a wild buck. You see a few flashes of the old Kratos at times – during one scene, where the child makes a rookie hunting mistake, you see Kratos's rage meter begin to flash as he scolds the boy – but it quickly subsides as he simply tells him to "be better". The scenes between the two are filled with little flourishes like these that hint at Kratos' violent,

bloody past, but also point to how he's grown as a character now that he has someone to care for.

THE KID IS ALRIGHT

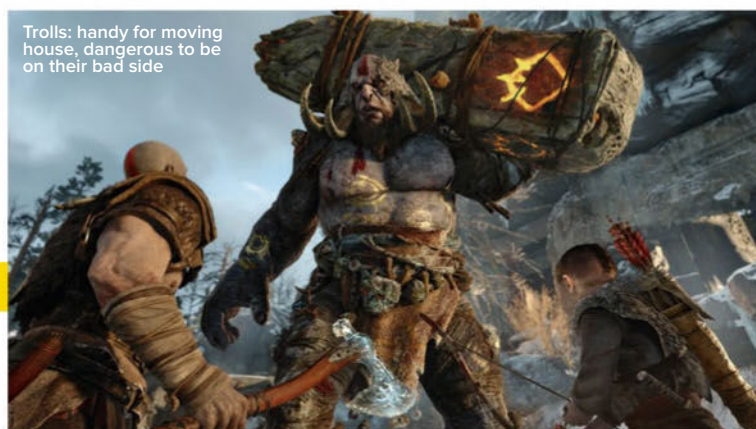
Kratos' son tags along with him constantly – in fact, the game's camera is positioned deliberately low behind Kratos, in a third-person view, in order to keep the boy within the player's field of view at all times. It's a dramatic shift from the camera style of the previous *God of War* titles. But don't fret – this game isn't designed to be a massive escort mission.





DEVELOPER	Santa Monica Studios
PUBLISHER	Sony
PLATFORM	PS4
RELEASE DATE	TBA 2017

Looks like this particular foe is already throwing the fight. He's taking a dive!



Trolls: handy for moving house, dangerous to be on their bad side

For example, having to accompany a child doesn't mean that you can't wander around a bit and find some cool stuff – our game demo showcased some of the collectables Kratos can find by smashing various objects in the environment. “We wanted the levels to breathe a lot more so there are a lot of paths and opportunities to explore around more,” explained John Davis, Lead Level Designer on the game.

The player will have some control over the son, who will attempt to aid his father however he can. In fact, there's a dedicated 'son' button, and its use is contextualised depending on the player's current situation. It's been hinted that the child will prove crucial in progression and puzzle-solving, though it remains to be seen how.

BACK TO THE BATTLE

It wouldn't be a God of War game without combat, though, and we got to see a few very fierce fights take place in our demo sessions. Kratos' iconic blades are gone, but in their place, he now has a battleaxe. At certain points during the fights he was able to imbue the axe with magical energy to take advantage of enemies' elemental weaknesses. He can also put the axes aside and engage in pure hand-to-hand combat.

HONING THE CRAFT

We haven't seen much of Kratos' arsenal yet, but one thing we will be seeing in this game is crafting. Crafting resources will be scattered around levels, making exploration (and, of course, smashing lots of stuff) worthwhile to players looking to upgrade their gear. What kind of gear, you ask? Well, we'll have to learn more about that on another day...

The game actually features a new control scheme to facilitate new elements in combat. Rather than using the face buttons to attack, players will be controlling Kratos' actions with the shoulder buttons, leaving the face buttons open for more specialised functions. At least one of the face buttons will be utilised to call upon the son as a support – he'll attempt to aid you in battle however he can by using his archery skills to chip away at enemies.

Of course, Kratos is known for his anger, and once again you'll be able to make use of his overflowing rage during combat. During one sequence, in which a gigantic troll threatened the child as the boy stood atop thin ice, our demo player activated Kratos' Spartan Rage, allowing him to grab hold of the troll's head, smash its horns, and put it in a headlock for his son to attempt to slay with his arrows. This teases that some of the rage sequences could be contextual,

and might make for some great story moments in the heat of combat.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

The demo ends with Kratos' son managing to shoot the buck he's been pursuing. However, the boy can't bring himself to put the slowly dying creature out of its misery. As the youth holds a dagger, Kratos has to guide the boy's hand to the beast's vitals, helping him force the blade in to end the deer's life and finish his hunt. It's a powerful, quiet moment in a game series not known for such things, and it marks just how different things will be with God of War going forward.

As the two stare out into the harsh winter wasteland, we get hints that a greater conflict is brewing out there, and that this is only the beginning of a journey between father and son. It's a whole new world for a man who once slayed gods and, both physically and emotionally, it might be his most perilous journey yet. ☞



Alienate your
underbosses
and it's war



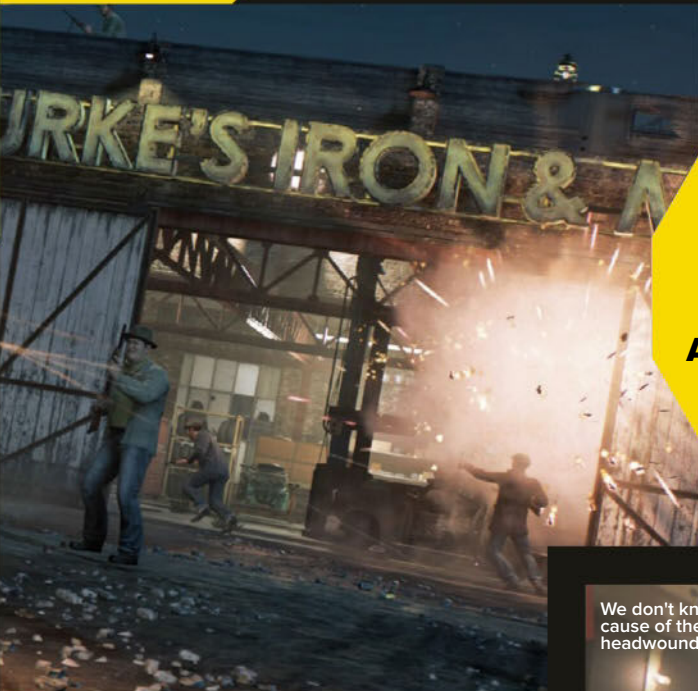
PREVIEW

Mafia III

*Hyper knows you never mess
with a man's family*

The first two Mafia games followed a similar narrative structure – the rags-to-riches (and back to rags) story of a man rising through the ranks of the Mafia detailing both the camaraderie and the horrors of life as a Made Man. Mafia III sees the series heading to a new developer and is taking a very different approach to la Familia. Rather than once again charting the rise and potential fall of a Mafioso, Mafia III is instead concerned with dismantling the Mafia from the outside. Even with the change of approach, the tent-poles that have made previous Mafia games so enjoyable; a fictional city based on real world locations, a protagonist with a history and believable motivation, a soundtrack ripped from the era, great combat mechanics and a strong driving engine.

This time around the action moves to New Bordeaux, a fictional city based almost solely on New Orleans. It's the late 60s and Lincoln Clay, an orphan and Vietnam veteran finds the family he never had in the Black Mob, and a life of organised crime.



FIGHTING A WAR ON MULTIPLE FRONTS IS NEVER AN EASY THING, BUT ADDING A NEW AGGRESSOR INTO THE MIX IS DEFINITELY NOT A GOOD IDEA.



We don't know the cause of the massive headwound as yet



When the Black Mob are betrayed by the Italian Mob and Lincoln's chosen family are killed he goes to war with the Mafia, determined to dismantle it not only for revenge but to replace it with something of his own design. In the War Lincoln worked with the CIA as a covert operative with expertise in psychological warfare. These skills definitely come in handy during his war on home soil.

New Bordeaux is broken up into ten districts, each with its own flavour and criminal element that must be dismantled to aid in the war on the Mafia. The French Quarter, for instance, is the party town (much like the New Orleans French Quarter) and is run by "Uncle Lou", the brother of the boss of the New Bordeaux Mafia. Disrupting Lou's activities - robbing his bagmen, killing his dealers, rousting his pimps and callgirls - weakens his grip on the Quarter and severely limits the amount of money he can kick back to his brother, weakening the position of the Mafia in the process.

Once a district has been captured, Lincoln can put one of his underbosses in charge to shore up the ne2 criminal empire and gain perks, but players will have to be careful in how they dole out territories. Each of

Lincoln may be an expert in psychological warfare, but he isn't subtle

the underbosses, Cassandra, leader of the Haitian gang, Burke, a former ally of the Mafia turned sworn enemy and Vito Scaletta, protagonist of Mafia II, sidelined by the new mob bosses and looking for vengeance, have their own aims, and favouring one over the other can have serious effects on loyalty. Ignore an underbosses demands

enough and they will betray Lincoln, adding yet another enemy to the list. Fighting a war on multiple fronts is never an easy thing, but adding a new aggressor into the mix is definitely not a good idea.

Mafia 3 is already looking polished and hugely playable, so the wait until October is going to be a long one. ☹



PREVIEW

Tekken 7

The King of Iron Fist returns to battle for the fighting game throne, writes

DEVELOPER	Bandai Namco Studios
PUBLISHER	Bandai Namco Entertainment
PLATFORM	PS4, Xbox One, PC
RELEASE DATE	TBA 2017

Tekken 7 feels like it has been a very long time coming. While the game's been doing very well for itself in arcades in Japan and other South-East Asian countries, the rest of the world has had to be content with replay movies and occasional playable showings at gaming and fighting game-oriented events. But with Tekken 7 on console finally confirmed for early next year, the Iron Fist Faithful can finally breathe a sigh of relief knowing that their long wait is almost over.

The console (and, for the first time ever, PC) version of Tekken 7 will be an enhanced version of Japan's recently released arcade revision, Tekken 7: Fated Retribution. The Tekken team has always gone above and beyond to put extra bells and whistles in the console versions of their fighters, and this time around, it looks like particular emphasis will be put on the game's story mode. During the Tekken 7 demos at E3, we saw this firsthand, with Tekken's usual high-quality CG story cinematics transitioning into QTE-inspired tests

of reflexes, then shifting seamlessly into one-on-one fighting gameplay.

It wouldn't be a fighting game sequel without some fresh faces, and Tekken 7 has plenty of those. New to the seventh King of Iron Fist Tournament are Shaheen, a Saudi Arabian military fighter; Josie, a Filipino woman with some killer kickboxing skills; Claudio, an elegant Italian man who is fighting against those bearing the Devil Gene; Katarina, a sassy and showy Brazilian lady; Lucky Chloe, a kitty-eared, twin-ponytailed otaku girl (designed by Fire Emblem and No More Heroes artist Yusuke Kozaki); Gigas, a hulking and seemingly part-organic machine; and Kazumi, matriarch of Tekken's ill-fated Mishima bloodline. While the newly bridal-attire-adorned assassin Nina Williams wasn't in the original Tekken 7 release, she makes her return to the franchise in top form in the console version.

The biggest addition to the roster, however, is Akuma from Capcom's Street Fighter series. While Capcom released Street Fighter X Tekken



Pretty hard to throw down if you're not facing each other





Normally, this would be weird, but this is Tekken, after all... right?



**AKUMA IN
TEKKEN 7 MIGHT
BE THE CLOSEST
WE EVER GET TO
BANDAI-NAMCO'S
TEKKEN X STREET
FIGHTER EVER
EXISTING**

a few years back, Bandai-Namco's Tekken X Street Fighter has yet to emerge - and, according to a recent interview with Tekken mastermind Katsuhiro Harada, the game's been put on indefinite hiatus.

Akuma in Tekken 7 might be the closest we ever get to that game existing - but it's hardly a downgraded compromise.

Bandai-Namco and the Tekken team have been eager to emphasise that Akuma's role in the game is a major one.

The game's reveal movie, which shows Heihachi and Akuma discussing crucial story developments before going into battle, hints at just how important the master of Satsui no Hado's presence will be.

Street Fighter fans will also enjoy seeing how Akuma's deadly techniques - Hadokens, Shoryukens, Hurricane Kicks, and even Raging Demon - have translated to the Tekken combat system.

Tekken 7 is due to hit Xbox One, PlayStation 4, and PC (via Steam) sometime in early 2017, so there's still plenty of time to, as they say so often in Tekken games, Get Ready for the Next Battle. **«**



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It's hard to believe that it's been four long years since the original Rift Developer Kit 1 was advertised, before being released in March 2013. That's over three years, but continual updates to the hardware not to mention drip-feeding of information has made that time feel much shorter. Well, the Rift Consumer Version 1 is here, and it's everything VR promised... from a headset perspective.

Compared to the HTC Vive, the Rift is a much simpler kit. You get the Head Mounted Display, a small tracking camera, an Xbox one controller and a very simple Oculus remote. Think of the latter as a small clicker with a couple of buttons on it, used to navigate forwards through very simple VR scenes with no directional control.

The headset itself is based around a twin OLED screens, one for each eye. Each delivers a resolution of 1080 x 1200 to each eyeball, for a combined screen resolution of 2160 x 1200. The reason Rift has gone with twin screens rather than the single screens of its prototypes is so that users can easily adjust the interpupillary distance between each eye; basically how far apart our eyes are. A small slider on one side adjusts this, making it easy to dial the IPD in perfectly.

What isn't quite so perfect is the vertical adjustment. For this you'll need to strap the unit tightly to your head and adjust it manually up and down until vertical alignment is just right. Each screen runs at 110Hz, and delivers a field of view of 110 degrees.

A small IR camera is provided on a stand to help track the unit, but there's also an Accelerometer, gyroscope, magnetometer, and 360-degree positional tracking. The addition of tracking LEDs on the rear mean it's possible to turn the full 360 degrees and still be tracked, and the system works much like the IR tracking of the TrackIR head tracking unit we've been using for years.

To run the Rift you're going to need the equivalent of a GeForce GTX 970 or R9 290 or better, along with an Intel i5-4590. It's for this reason that AMD is releasing the budget Radeon RX480, which is also fully VR certified. 8GB of RAM is necessary, along with a single HDMI 1.3 port and twin USB 3.0 ports.

Setting it up couldn't be simpler. A short five minute tutorial walks the user through the process, using illustrative videos where necessary to explain some of the finer details. The lengthiest part of the process is downloading the 840GB Oculus software, which includes the Oculus Store.

Despite weighing only 80 grams less than the Vive, the Rift is by far the most comfortable unit. The mounting system simply seems better designed, and it's less front-heavy. Each side strap extends by about an inch when it's being mounted, making it a breeze for those with glasses to put the HMD in place. It also seems to breathe better, as there's a small gap at the bottom to allow fresh air into the gap between the eyes and screen, leading to less lens frosting.

As for image quality, the Rift has both pluses and minuses. Despite having an identical resolution and field of view as the Vive, the field of View on the Rift definitely feels a little smaller. While this leads to more of the scuba-mask effect, it also makes pixels and the pixel structure between them a little harder to see. They're still quite obvious though, so games with fine detail and long draw-distance such as Elite and DCS don't work so well. Those titles designed specifically for VR though, where the detail is minimal and everything is up close to the camera, are an entirely different experience - revelatory in fact.

There's another issue with the image quality that the Vive suffers

from too - God Rays. They're most noticeable when a light object appears on a dark background, with a bright halo emitted from the light object. Clever game design where the entire image is bright seems to negate this though.

So far so good, but there is one major area where the Rift loses out to the Vive - interaction with the VR world. Players have a simple Xbox One controller or Oculus remote, so can't actually reach out and manipulate objects. It's as if you're in the virtual world, but you just can't interact with it. The good news is that Oculus is releasing the Touch controllers later this year which will enable this feature.

The Rift is also designed to be a seated or stationary standing experience, which can lead to a little simulator sickness. Hopefully the Touch controller will solve this, as it comes with a second camera - currently the Rift is limited to a tracking area of 5 by 11 feet.

One area that has gamers a little concerned is that many of the Oculus Store games will not run on the HTC Vive. Oculus has poured vast sums of money into creating proprietary games, and does not want Vive owners to be able to play them - it's simply a competitive difference.

So then, which is the kit to buy? Right now the Rift is the better headset of the two, but it's lacking in interactivity and room-scale tracking. However, both of these issues may be solved by the impending release of the Oculus Touch controller, but nobody knows how much extra these would cost. Our ideal VR kit right now would be the Rift HMD with the Vive motion wands and room-tracking, but in the meantime the Vive gets the nod as the best overall experience. BENNETT RING

PLAYERS HAVE A SIMPLE XBOX ONE CONTROLLER OR OCULUS REMOTE, SO CAN'T ACTUALLY REACH OUT AND MANIPULATE OBJECTS

No motion controls
Closed Oculus store
No room-tracking

VERDICT

It mightn't be perfect, but it's a damn sight better than previous HMDs. Now all it needs are some motion controllers to unlock it's true potential

RIFT vs VIVE



Motion controllers
Room-tracking
Solid HMD quality



HTC Vive

An all-encompassing experience

PRICE	\$1200
COMPANY URL	www.htcvive.com



Nobody expected Valve's VR gurus to team up with mobile phone maker HTC to deliver the Vive, but that they did. The result is the most comprehensive VR experience currently on the market, though it doesn't come without a few downfalls.

Setting up the Vive is a bitch of a job. This is because of the room-tracking scaling. Twin lighthouse scanning boxes need to be mounted on opposite sides of the playing area, the minimum play size is 6 feet 6 inches by 5 feet, but it can go even bigger. You'll need to mount each tracking box close to the ceiling - brackets are included for permanent installs, but they'll also fit onto standard camera tripods. If there's anything in the way of the two boxes, such as a light fixture, you'll need to connect them via a synchronisation cable, and each tracking box requires its own power supply.

The HMD plugs into a special link box, which then plugs into your PC. The handy thing about this is that if you accidentally pull out the Vive cord, it just comes out of the link box, rather than yanking out a USB or HDMI port on your PC. Once everything is in place, you'll probably need to do an obligatory firmware update, which we found failed a couple of times. Only then can you map out your play space, simply by walking around the playing area while holding a motion tracker. We'd

highly suggest a buffer zone between the play space and your wall though, as many games will see you swinging wildly outside of the play zone - we managed to bruise more than a few knuckles.

The HMD itself has identical specs to the Rift, though weighs a little more. That means twin 1080 x 1200 screens running at 90Hz, with a field of view of 110 degrees. Yet putting the Vive on reveals a slightly wider field of view, making it feel like

you're wearing less of a mask. This is a good thing, but on the other hand it makes the pixels and pixel structure a little more obvious - we'd go with the Rift if you're looking for the finest of detail. The Vive also suffers from the same god rays as the Rift, but doesn't tend to be quite as noticeable.

As far as comfort goes, the Vive loses hands down. The strap system sits too high on the back of the users' head, while it's quite front-heavy. It's also slightly heavier, and the lack of any slot around the eyes means that sweat often causes the lenses to fog up. There's also that huge tether that allows it to do room-scale tracking. You can and will trip over it many a time. Thankfully there's a small camera built into the front of the HMD, so a quick tap of a button allows you to see the world around you. An easy solution to this problem is to install a rotating hinge in the ceiling to hold the tether out of the way, but it's a big commitment for a gaming room.

So the headset might not be quite as good, but where the Vive blows away the Rift in terms of interactivity are the twin motion control wands that it includes. Looking similar to a Wii-mote with a donut glued to the end, they allow the player to reach out and grab objects in the virtual world. From sword fights with skeletons to shooting balloons with bow and arrows, the increased immersion compared to a crappy Xbox One controller is exponential. We did find they'd occasionally lose tracking, drifting off into space and requiring a reboot, but it was the exception not the rule. We also

found our playing area would drift on a daily basis, requiring it to be recalibrated.

Then there's the room scaling, which again opens up a whole other door to immersion. Sure, you'll walk into stuff all the time, but because you're actually walking around and your inner-ear can detect this, the chance of simulator sickness is greatly reduced. I managed to play for around six hours straight without feeling any nausea whatsoever.

In terms of hardware required to drive the Vive, it's very similar to the Rift. An Nvidia GeForce GTX 970 or AMD 290 or greater is required, along with an Intel i5-4590 or equivalent.

However, the Vive only needs 4GB of memory, along with one HDMI 1.3, 2 x USB 3.0 and a USB 2.0 port. What the specs don't include are the number of power ports - one each for the tracking boxes, one for the link box, and two for the controller rechargers.

Once this thing is installed, your room is going to look like a spaghetti-like mess, unless you're a pro at hiding cables.

It might not have quite the same quality headset as the Rift, but as an overall VR experience the Vive blows the Rift away. It's all about those twin controllers - rather than being a passive bystander inside these virtual worlds, you're an active participant. It shows just how important the full VR kit is, and not just a great HMD. There's also the added benefit that SteamVR is an open platform, which should allow for a much wider range of games than the Rift. BENNETT RING

SURE, YOU'LL WALK INTO STUFF ALL THE TIME, BUT BECAUSE YOU'RE ACTUALLY WALKING AROUND AND YOUR INNER-EAR CAN DETECT THIS

Less comfortable
More pixilation
Tether is annoying

VERDICT

Until Rift releases the Touch, the HTV Vive is the kit to buy, hands down. Or should that be hands up?

PlayStation VR hands-on

A new dimension of console gaming looms large, writes Andrew Whitehead

Sony is in a unique position when it comes to virtual reality. Of their console rivals, only Microsoft has expressed interest in actually entering the space, and that won't be until the end of next year when its Project Scorpio console is released. Sony's nearest competitors, Oculus and HTC, both have quality headsets of their own, but they're relying on the high-end PC market and are far more expensive devices.

Meanwhile Sony has sold around 40-million PlayStation 4 consoles worldwide, and each one of those units is a potential PlayStation VR customer. And if gaming history has taught us anything it's that victories aren't dictated by superior technology: just look at the PlayStation 2 versus the Xbox and GameCube. It's about

connecting with an audience. And that's something Sony is clearly aiming to do.

THE HYPE TRAIN

The first thing to get out of the way is the hyperbole that surrounds VR and the three major headsets competing for gamer eyeballs. The most telling difference is the screen. The Vive and the Rift have a screen resolution of 1080x1200 per eye, while the PSVR runs at 960x1080 per eye and uses a single 1920x1080 screen.

But PlayStation VR is on equal footing in terms of build quality. The headset is well-built, futuristic-looking, and comfortable. And it comes with a bunch of quick-release buttons for fast adjustments and a clicky tightening wheel that keep the hunk of plastic firmly on your head.





TAKE ME BACK TO HELL

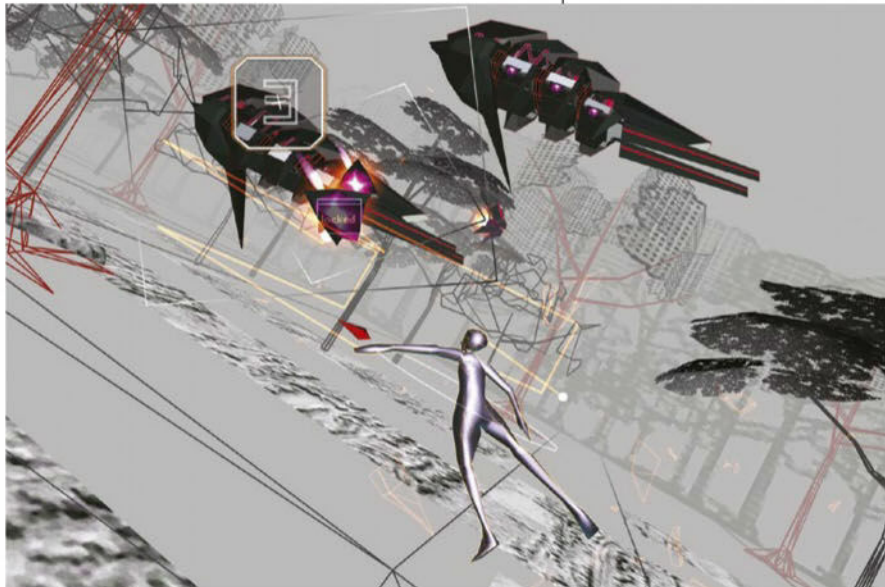
Surprisingly, what sold me on PlayStation VR was Resident Evil 7: Biohazard. By now you've probably downloaded the demo from the PSN Store or seen the reveal trailer and know this isn't the same Resident Evil fans know and love. With a renewed focus on horror and a shift to a first-person perspective, it's a remarkably different game than what the series has become of late.

Even on a TV screen it's a tense game, but as I was walking around that creaky farm house in VR, there were times when I had to stop and remind myself where I was in the real world. I know how bizarre that sounds, but there's something about true one-to-one head movement that immersed me into the world of Resident Evil 7 more than any other horror game has before.

Initially, all I could focus on was how the edges of everything had that low-resolution jaggedness to them, but by the end of the demo I was frantically hurrying to the back door exit. I literally jumped out of my chair during the final jump scare and gasped as a crazy old man pulled me back into his run-down home after I thought the nightmare was over.

I'd heard talk of people who played Resident Evil 7 on PlayStation VR feeling sick and nauseated afterwards. Even the helpful PR representative let me know it's okay to bail and to give them feedback on how I felt. But I didn't experience anything like this. The only part that made me feel sick was the fear I felt from playing the game in the dark and not wanting to go up to the attic to see what was making all that noise.

It was a group of mannequins and, no, I don't want to talk about it.



INFINITELY UP-REZZED

Way down on the other end of the emotional spectrum is Rez Infinite, a game that continues to be relevant some 15 years after its initial release to the point where I'm convinced Tetsuya Mizuguchi's masterpiece was made for the PlayStation VR. My demo was an abstracted version of Area Four, which fans will recall is the one with the most visually stunning boss battle of the game, the 'running man' made up for hundreds of transforming cubes.

Rez was always a simple on-rails shooting game, but VR gives it a new-found sense of depth and scale. A nice side effect of the VR head tracking is the ability to aim wherever you're looking. Holding down the X button, I was able to chain groups of attacks much quicker than I could with the thumbstick, though I could switch between the two at any time.

Then came the area boss. As the game pulled me around tight corners and threw me down long tunnels, I couldn't help but feel like I was falling, then being pushed forward like on a rollercoaster. And I loved it. This feels like how this Rez Infinite was meant to be played: a fully immersive journey through a bizarre early-2000s vision of cyberspace.

DEAL OR NO DEAL

So should you buy a PlayStation VR? That's a hard question to answer, but I strongly encourage everyone tries it. Personally, and depending on how finances are at that time of year, I plan on getting one. And not just because it's the more affordable VR option. Sony appears committed to its new device with a number of big titles confirmed for PlayStation VR including Farpoint, Batman: Arkham VR, Until Dawn: Rush of Blood, 100ft Robot Golf, and Gran Turismo Sport.

Early adopters of new technology know what it's like to be burnt and know to be sceptical of bullshit claims about products claiming to redefine entertainment. (Remember 3D TVs?) But I can confirm PlayStation VR is no gimmick. It's a step forward in gaming as important as the introduction of optical storage, thumbsticks, or online multiplayer, and it's one I want to be a part of... after my new credit card arrives, naturally. ☞

THE COST OF REALITY

Launching in October this year, the PlayStation VR will cost \$549.95 but also requires a PlayStation Camera, which retails for \$89.95, so all up that's \$639.90. It's not cheap, but neither is its competition. The HTC Vive has set its Australian pre-order price at US\$899 (AU\$1100, give or take) while the Oculus Rift costs US\$599 (around AU\$750).



Hell is augmented reality

David Hollingworth takes a trip to the AR side...

Holy freaking balls, there's a giant insect on the table.

Like, seriously, it's bigger than a goddamn football, it's covered in spikes, and its chitinous shell is just sitting there, gleaming at me. For now, it's not moving, but I think, if it did, I would wonder which of the CSIRO jerks leering at me now in mute understanding have slipped me some acid. Was it in the coffee? No, too mundane... Maybe one of them is some LSD-exuding mutant, the last survivor of a secret initiative now forever shut down by our tight-arse government. Maybe.

Either way, they know what I'm seeing. They can probably sense all of my fear.

The bastards are smiling.

"Hey, why don't you see what's outside the room?" One of them suggests? 'Is this the tripping patient zero?' I wonder. Or is it his mate, who seems to be able to see the same things I'm seeing. He's weaving his hands through the air like a genuine shit-wizard, and I can only wonder what they'll subject me to next.

Scientists, basically, are bastards, and these two are really enjoying themselves. I step out of the room, watching them both, bugged out eyes swivelling in my head as I try and watch both of them at once. I'm holding it together, calm and cool; can't let the boffins know that I'll be dreaming of that damn god-bug for years to come.

And outside - I shit you not, readers - there's a lunatic astronaut, hanging there in the air. No wires, no projections. The idiot's just... floating, weightless, waving at me. Thankfully, he's only three-feet tall, but then again, pygmy space explorers have got to be a bad sign.

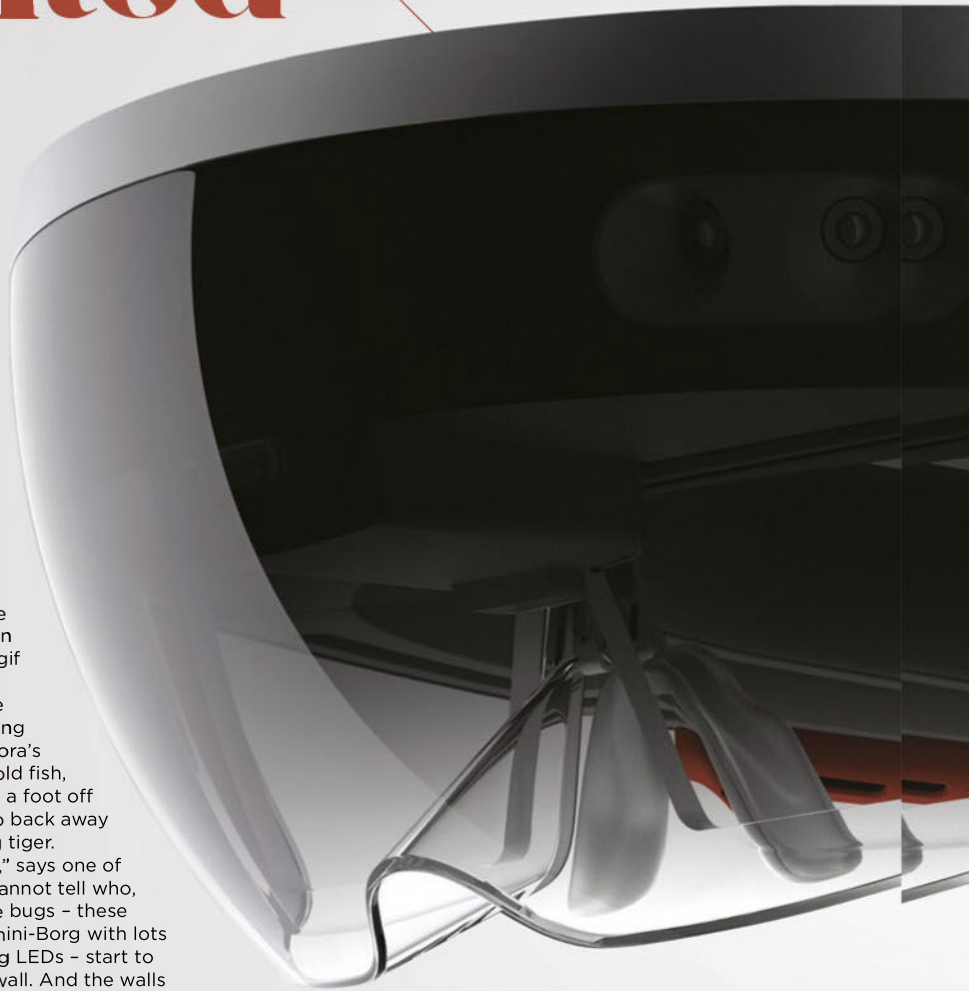
"Walk around the corner," one of them suggest, and his mate is waving his arms again, an incantation calling forth fuck knows what nightmare this time. I walk around the corner, projecting calm, projecting the idea that I am not seeing a bloody tiger sneaking through the grass that is sprouting out of the carpet. It shakes its tail, the precursor to a

leap, a signal seared into the shrinking, wisened monkey brain of all higher primates.

But that's all - the thing is content to pause, wriggle, pause again. I am in some sort of hell stuck on endless shuffle. A gif of the damned.

There's an entire cornucopia springing up around, a Pandora's box of things. A gold fish, swimming placidly a foot off the floor, as I try to back away from the repeating tiger.

"This will be fun," says one of my tormentors, I cannot tell who, because now more bugs - these one metallic, like mini-Borg with lots of legs and blinking LEDs - start to swarm out of the wall. And the walls



are collapsing, too, revealing this gaping existential void beyond. Is this a building? Or another dimension?

Just what the hell was in that damn coffee?

The bugs are rushing at me, though. "Click on them," one of the CSIRO goons screams, and so I try to click like a madman, knowing that I am now truly one of them, flailing meaningless, trapped in my own world of horror. I click, tapping my thumb and forefinger together like I'm trying to make a scientist nervous. I click-

tap, the bugs explode. 'Power!' I think to myself. Is this, I muse, the sense of encompassing might that turned my cackling companions from the shining path of science to... this?

I don't care. There are more bugs now. I click. I cackle, too, knowing that I am lost to whatever eldritch power they have cast upon me. Perhaps it's not blotting acid, but something older, deeper. Is that a whistling on the wind, I hear? What fresh horror springs now from impossible angles!

IA SHUB NIGGURATH!

Actually, it's a HoloLens

And, quite seriously, it's pretty damn awesome

Virtual reality may be the buzzword(s) on everyone's lips, but let's not forget augmented reality. This is the process by which you don't so much remove yourself to another, virtual world, but instead overlay new things on the one you're currently in. AR is often conceived as everything from an excellent travel tool (in conjunction with a smartphone, for instance), a gaming environment, or the perfect advertising medium.

Microsoft, however, has bigger ideas. The HoloLens is its first head-mounted device, and unlike bulky VR headsets that rely on an external



**I CLICK.
I CACKLE,
TOO, KNOWING
THAT I AM LOST TO
WHATEVER ELDRITCH
POWER THEY HAVE
CAST UPON ME.
PERHAPS IT'S NOT
BLOTTING
ACID**



computer, it's also a complete system in its own right. Having used both VR when tethered to a desktop, and in conjunction with a backpack-mounted PC for mobility, the real, fantastical freedom that the HoloLens offers cannot be overstated.

And it's good at what it does, too. Built into the headset is what Microsoft is calling a Holographic Processing Unit, which has a raft of sensors that map your environment, and a set of goggle-mounted displays that can then 'project' images into your field of vision. My rather... colourful account of my time using a HoloLens may be written for entertainment as much as anything, but colour aside, that's what you see - things float in your vision, tagged to a specific location thanks to wireless connectivity and GPS tagging.

It was the CSIRO that was showing the unit off, so of course they showed off their science chops - the bug was one scanned by them, and damn impressive, too. They were also keen to talk about how a device like the HoloLens could be used for things like data-visualisation, collaborative engineering products, even superior teleconferencing.

But it was the game - clicking on those bugs to smash them - that caught my attention. The environment mapping was precise enough that it could match 'damage' to flat surfaces, curved pillars, even hard edges. And as I moved about the room, that damage stayed in place. Minecraft looks well and good in all the promotional videos, but imagine a zombie simulator that mapped itself to your own house, like an augmented reality version of DayZ, or whatever game tickles your fancy, really.

Virtual reality is certainly good - but augmented reality is possibly even more exciting. It's kind of like how Microsoft shifted beyond waggle-sticks for Kinect, while Sony and Nintendo were still bound to them for their motion-controlled gaming experiences. Except, hopefully, unlike Kinect, HoloLens can offer practical experiences that justify the tech beyond the initial apparent gimmick of yet another reality-bending technology. ■

Let the GPU Wars commence

Bennett Ring is our frontline correspondent in the latest GPU offensive

Every year both Nvidia and AMD release new graphics cards, but over the last couple of years they've been minor updates rather than major refreshes. This year is similar in some ways, with both companies relying upon existing designs, but there's a been one huge change – in the way they're made.

THE MANUFACTURING PROCESS

All GPUs are made from tiny building blocks called transistors – the same as every silicon chip, in fact. For the last five years both AMD and Nvidia have relied upon the Taiwan Semiconductor Company (TSMC) to design these transistors, and they've been stuck on a 28nm process. This means each transistor is 28nm in size. Usually, we'd expect to see a shrink in size every couple of years – this brings lower power usage, and allows more transistors to fit onto an existing size of silicon chip.

However, TSMC has had major issues bringing the size down, and are actually two years later with their latest design. They've finally managed to deliver the new transistors, though, 16nm FinFET transistors, which Nvidia is using at the heart of its new Pascal design. FinFET is a new type of three-dimensional transistor that helps get around the issues of such a small transistor. Intel has been using FinFET transistors since 2012, but they were actually first invented way back in 2002 – it's taken this long for them to become widely popular.

AMD usually use TSMC for their fabrication process, as well, but this year around went with Global Foundries. It's been over a decade since they haven't used TSMC, but Global Foundries was able to deliver 14nm FinFET transistors, a small leapfrog over Intel.

These new transistor sizes are the major changes in both Nvidia and AMD's new ranges, but there have also been a few other minor alterations along the way.

AMD'S POLARIS

AMD has just launched three new products in the form of the Radeon RX 460, 470, and 480, but unlike Nvidia, they're aiming at a very different audience. Traditionally, these companies

release their flagship products first, then slowly release cheaper versions. AMD is turning this process on its head, releasing the Radeon RX 480 first. With a US pricepoint of \$199 for 4GB and \$229 for 8GB, it's right in the sweet spot of the 84 percent of gamers who spend between \$100 and \$300 on GPUs. It's also the cheapest card on the market right now that is verified by both Oculus and HTC to be VR-ready. Unfortunately, Aussies have to pay a heck of a lot more for these products, with the average price of an entry-level RX 480 AU\$440 – that's more than double the price basically. At this price it's going head to head with the R9 390X, a more powerful product. However, if the price does become competitive, it'll make for an excellent mainstream product, though we think the main barrier to VR is the price of HTC Vive and Oculus Rift, not the hardware necessary to drive them.

At the heart of the new RX 480 is the Polaris 10 GPU. It has 36 Compute Units (compared to 44 on the R9 390X). This gives it a total of 2304 Stream Processors, AMD's equivalent to Nvidia's Stream Processors (down from 2816 on the R9 390X). Also, 144 Texture Units and 32 ROPs are included, compared to 176 and 64 on the R9 390X.

It's been give a bit of a speed boost, though, with the base clock running at 1120MHz, while the boost clock is 1266MHz. This compares favourably with the R9 390X's boost clock of 1050MHz, which is probably why it's not that much slower than an R9 390X. The 8GB version uses 7-8Gbps of GDDR5 (it'll vary depending on the manufacturer), while the 4GB version runs at 7Gbps. Both use a 256-bit memory bus, much smaller than the 512-bit bus used on the R9 390X.

With 5.2 billion transistors, it's got 20 percent fewer than the 6.2 billion on the R9 390X, but AMD claims a 15 percent performance increase for each Compute unit, compared to the R9 290X. Total TDP is 150W, but recent analysis has shown that the card can draw up to 200W when overclocked, a problem AMD is looking to solve via firmware updates, as it's currently drawing too much power over the PCIe bus (at the time of writing).

NVIDIA AIMS FOR THE TOP

Nvidia has gone straight for the high-end with its new products, the GeForce GTX 1080 and GeForce GTX 1070. Both use the new GP104 GPU, using the new Pascal architecture, which remains very similar to its highly successful Maxwell architecture from the previous generation. The 1080 has 2560 CUDA Cores, compared to 1920 on the 1070. Texture units drop from 160 on the 1080 to 120 on the lesser model, while both share 64 ROPs. They both also use the new GDDR5X high-speed memory, with the 8GB on the 1080 running at 10Gbps, while the 1070's same amount runs at 8Gbps. They also both share a 256-bit memory bus, and are comprised of 7.2 billion transistors. If we compare these numbers with the previous GeForce GTX 980 Ti, we can see that there have been drops in each major area, with one exception – frequency. It's here that Pascal shines, with simply incredible clock speeds. The 1080 has a base clock of 1607MHz and a boost clock of 1733MHz, while the 1070 has a base clock of 1506MHz and a boost clock of 1683MHz. Yet during our testing while the cards were set to factory overclock mode, we often saw them break the 2GHz barrier, which is simply incredible.

One major change to the Pascal design is the inclusion of Simultaneous Multi-Projection technology which, basically, allows the chip to render a scene once, then provide multi views. This can double VR performance, making it the VR chip of choice.

Once again, though, Aussies are forced to pay much more than our US overlords. The 1080 has a US price of US\$599, but local pricing starts at \$1099, basically a doubling. Meanwhile the 1070 has a US price of US\$379, yet Aussies are forced to pay a minimum of \$699.

Nvidia has one more product waiting in the wings in the form of the GeForce GTX 1060, which will start at US\$249. Ouch. We don't have one in for review yet, but we're very interested to see how it'll go against AMD's new RX480. We also don't have RX460 and RX470 samples yet, hence the lack of reviews.



GIGABYTE

GTX 1070

nvidia

AMD Radeon RX 480

Designed for affordable VR



PRICE | \$440
COMPANY URL | www.amd.com

Welcome to the card that AMD predicts will be in over 100-million PCs within a couple of years. A bold claim indeed, but if they can lower that Aussie price, there's a good chance it'll be the \$300 card of choice. If there's one thing AMD is promoting about this card, it's that it's VR-ready, and after testing it with several of the launch VR titles, we can confirm it runs basically all of them without a stutter.

It's nice to see that AMD has finally jumped onboard the HDMI 2.0 bus, with a single HDMI 2.0 port, alongside triple DisplayPort 1.4 ports. These are all fully High Dynamic Range ready, waiting for the upcoming range of HDR TVs and monitors that will start to take over the market in the next couple of years.

Available in two flavours – 4GB and 8GB – we were currently only able to find the 8GB version on sale in Australia. AMD has gone with a blower design cooler very similar to those seen on Nvidia cards, and

it's a ripper. Measuring a mere 44dB under load, it's one of the quietest we've heard, making it inaudible when inside your case. This is likely due to the card only requiring 150W of power, fed via a single 6-pin connector. However, PCPer.com recently discovered the card pulls up to 200W when overclocked, overloading both the PCIe bus and 6-pin power plug. AMD has sent out a press release saying they know of the problem, and that a fix is on the way via driver and firmware updates.

Speaking of driver updates, there's a new overclocking tool called WattMan, which handles GPU voltage, engine and memory clocks, fan speed and temps. A new histogram shows exactly what the card does while playing games, allowing users to build profiles that push the card right to the edge on a per-game basis. We managed to hit a boost clock of 1345MHz, up from the default of 1266MHz, while memory speeds increase by 10 percent to 8800MHz.

Given this card's focus on VR performance, we're a little perplexed that it doesn't feature something similar to Nvidia's Simultaneous Multi-Projection tech. This means the RX480 has to render each scene twice during VR. While today's very simple VR games run perfectly fine with the RX 480, which have the most basic of visuals, we're a little concerned about how the RX 480 will handle the next generation of games. There's also the fact that 4K HMDs are just around the corner, which will require drastically more horsepower to run.

There's also the issue of cost – for the same price it's possible to buy an R9 390X card, which is around 10 percent faster than the RX 480. Hopefully, this will soon resolve itself as more RX 480s hit the supply chain and prices drop, but until then the R9 390X is the better buy.

AMD has made a major gamble on the Radeon RX 480. Here's hoping that it pays off.

Slower than R9 390X
May not handle 2nd gen
VR titles well

METRO LAST LIGHT – 1440P ULTRA

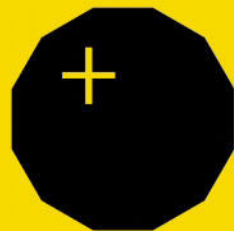
Card	Min FPS	Avg FPS
Asus Strix GeForce GTX 1080	34	103
Gigabyte G1 Gaming GTX 1080	34	101
MSI GeForce GTX 1070 Founders Edition	31	81
Asus Strix Radeon R9 390X	32	65
AMD Radeon RX 480	31	59

A fabrication shrink is fine and dandy, but we think the Polaris 10 GPU needed a few more architectural changes to help boost performance.

8

Asus Strix GeForce GTX 1080

The king of all 1080s



PRICE | \$1249
COMPANY URL | www.asus.com

Strix is a new brand within the Asus Republic of Gamers range, and is meant to illustrate best of the best. If the Strix GeForce GTX 1080 is any indication, Asus is on the right track. Stacked with unique features, it might be one of the most expensive GeForce GTX 1080s on the market, but these extra goodies go a long way to solve this.

As somebody who uses VR on a regular basis, having twin HDMI 2.0 ports is a godsend, as it makes setting up the VR kit and a secondary monitor that much easier. Most GeForce GTX 1080s only have a single HDMI 2.0 port with triple DisplayPort 1.4 outputs, so one of the DP ports has been sacrificed in the process.

Asus' new DirectCU III cooler is a dual-slot design, and uses new patented Wing-Blade fans that apparently increase static air pressure. If you're doing 2D work, the fans turn off, making it totally silent. When in action, Asus claims the new cooler is 3 times quieter than the

default cooler yet 30 percent faster, so we were rather surprised to record a rather noisy 50dB. We should point out that this card was tested in OC mode, though, so will likely be much quieter in game mode. When things get really hot, the unique inclusion of twin fan headers allows the user to connect case fans directed at the card, a feature we've never seen before, and love.

The new overclocking software allows the user to select 'silent', 'gaming' or 'OC' modes with the click of a single button. We still think manual overclocking using EVGA's Precision X 16 will deliver better results, but it's a convenient way for noobs and lazy people to push up the core speed. In OC mode, the boost clock jumps all the way to 1936MHz, while the base clock hits 1784MHz, making this one of the fastest factory overclocks on a GeForce GTX 1080 we've seen. During testing, it actually hit 2050MHz, which is incredible considering this was an automatic

and not manual overclock.

This is possibly because Asus has decked out this card with an extra power point, with another 6-pin plug alongside the usual 8-pin. A ten-phase power system is used (8+2) to ensure the cleanest, most stable power supply, which undoubtedly helps when it comes to overclocking.

The final unique feature is the new Aura lighting system. Like all graphics cards these days, this one is decked out head to toe with RGB lights, but plug it into an Asus board with Aura lighting and the colours synchronise. It's based on sound, so you can make it shine red if there's a gun shot, blue if there's lightning. Sadly, we didn't have an Aura motherboard to test out this feature.

It might cost a tad more than the average GeForce GTX 1080 but the inclusion of so many unique features really makes this card stand out. There's also its outstanding overclocking performance, making this one killer of a card.

SHADOW OF MORDOR - 2880 X 1620, ULTRA SETTINGS

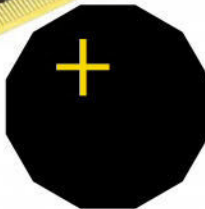
Card	Min FPS	Avg FPS
Asus Strix GeForce GTX 1080	74	102
Gigabyte G1 Gaming GTX 1080	74	101
MSI GeForce GTX 1070 Founders Edition	53	77
Asus Strix Radeon R9 390X	31	54
AMD Radeon RX 480	28	49

It's nice to see a few new features on a graphics card, when so many others are basically identical.

9

Gigabyte G1 Gaming GeForce GTX 1080

Comparatively affordable power



PRICE | \$1139
COMPANY URL | www.gigabyte.com

There's a reason I tend to go for Gigabyte products in my home builds. They're well-made, cover the basics and, most importantly, offer good value. The Gigabyte G1 Gaming GeForce GTX 1080 fits the bill in all of these regards. There's nothing especially remarkable about it, apart from the fact that it's one of the cheapest GeForce GTX 1080s on the market today.

Gigabyte has decked out this card with its new Windforce 3X cooling system, which uses three rather huge fans to keep the heatpipes and cooling fins cool. The new blades have special grooves on them that supposedly improve airflow by 23 percent, but we're used to hearing these claims every time a new board comes out. We measured a fan noise of 47dB in OC mode, which is quite reasonable. A nice touch is the LED indicator on the side of the card that shows when the fans have stopped, which is usually when it's not doing any 3D work. If it's lit up while the

card is gaming, though, you'll know straight away that there's a problem. Another clever feature is a small flashing led next to the 8-pin power connector that indicates if there are any problems with the power supply.

It's a shame that this card only comes with one 8-pin power connector – another would have been better for overclocking. At least it comes with a 10-phase power supply (8+2) to help deliver clean power. Gigabyte apparently bins the chips that come on these cards, claiming, “Forged with only the top-notch GPU, the Gigabyte G1 Gaming graphics cards guarantee higher overclocking capability in terms of excellent power switching.”

In terms of pre-factory overclocking, the gaming mode comes with a base clock of 1695MHz and a boost clock of 1835MHz. Hitting the OC button in the included software increases the base clock to 1721MHz, with a boost clock of 1860MHz. That's a solid 65MHz drop from the Asus

equivalent, but as our benchmark results show, it doesn't make much difference. Please note that we increased the res on our benchmarks for these cards, as they're simply not designed to run at 1080p. Having said that, they're also not capable of 4K 60Hz gaming with Ultra detail – you'll need two for that. Nvidia is now focusing on SLI on twin cards only, so don't bother buying three or four.

As with all GeForce GTX 1080s, this card comes with a hefty backplate, and is festooned with more RGB lights than the inner city during Christmas time. Thankfully, the lighting on this one is a little bit more subtle than most, so it won't look like you're in a nightclub every time you fire up this baby for a gaming session.

As you can see, there's not a lot of unique features here – it simply does what it says on the back of the tin. And as one of the cheapest GeForce GTX 1080s on the market, it's a great way to get all that power for the lowest possible price.

Only one 8-pin power connector
Not many extras

3DMARK FIRE STRIKE EXTREME (2560 X 1440)

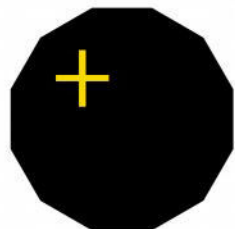
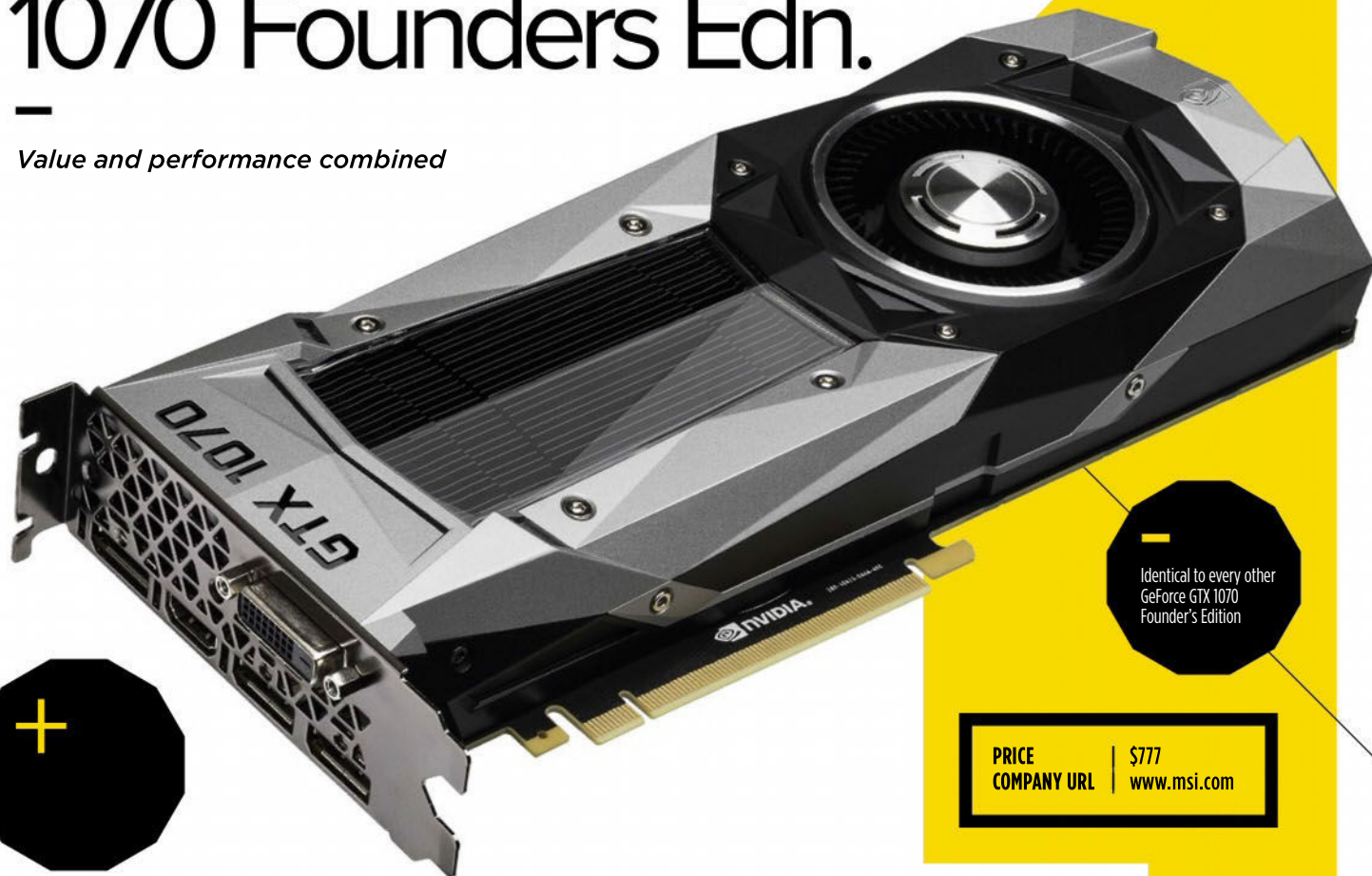
Card	Score
Asus Strix GeForce GTX 1080	9895
Gigabyte G1 Gaming GTX 1080	9682
MSI GeForce GTX 1070 Founders Edition	7829
Asus Strix Radeon R9 390X	7829
AMD Radeon RX 480	5144

It may be lacking in bells and whistles, but it's still a strong choice for a 1080 card.

8

MSI GeForce GTX 1070 Founders Edn.

Value and performance combined



Identical to every other GeForce GTX 1070 Founder's Edition

PRICE | \$777
COMPANY URL | www.msi.com

Nvidia has taken a new route with its reference cards. In the past, when they released a new graphics card, they'd initially ship out reference cards for the first few months, until their third-party manufacturers could roll out their own stock in volume. However, with the GeForce GTX 1070 and 1080, they've replaced this with "Founders Edition" cards, which will be around for the full life span of the product. Using a custom Nvidia cooler, third-party manufacturers are free to sell them as well, but they're all identical. So, an MSI Founders Edition 1070 is absolutely identical to a Gigabyte Founders Edition 1070.

Strangely, these cards are a little more expensive than their third-party counterparts overseas - except here in Australia. The MSI GeForce GTX 1070 Founders Edition is one of the cheapest GeForce GTX 1070 cards on the market, at around \$120 less than other GeForce GTX 1070 cards, yet it's built to such a high quality the price difference makes little sense.

The main difference to other cards is the absolutely stunning Nvidia cooler. This aluminium angled cooler is, in our opinion, the best looking cooler on the market, and it's damn quiet, coming in at 44dB. As a reference design, it doesn't come factory overlocked, with a stock base speed of 1506MHz and boost clock of 1683MHz. Nvidia claims that despite the price being slightly higher, it's also not hand-selecting the best chips for these - they're identical to other GeForce GTX 1070s. Yet we managed to get the boost speed up to 1930MHz, making it just as fast as more expensive, pre-overclocked GeForce GTX 770s. Note that we didn't run our benchmarks in OC mode, though, as we'd hand-overclocked this, which wasn't really fair to the other cards.

This also means it has the stock video outputs - triple DisplayPort 1.4 and a single HDMI 2.0 port. There's also one 8-pin power plug, and the total TDP of the card is a mere 150W. Another bonus of the reference design

is that this thing isn't covered in coloured lights. Call us old and boring, but we think the RGB fad is just a tiny bit tacky.

Despite the lower price, this card comes with a full 8GB of GDDR5X memory, though it's slightly downclocked from its big brother to 8Gbps. As you'll see, though, the performance is still blistering. Instead of the 20 SMs (these are the building blocks that contain the CUDA cores and Texture Units) of the GeForce GTX 1080, it only has 15 but, again, the performance drop isn't as high as we had anticipated.

As the cheapest GeForce GTX 1070 Founders Edition on the market, MSI has delivered all of the power of the more expensive units in a beautifully built package. It might require a little more effort to extract the maximum overclock potential out of it, but when you're getting much of the power of a GeForce GTX 1080 for almost half the price, we can easily deal with that comparatively small issue. ☞

3DMARK FIRE STRIKE

Card	Score
Asus Strix GeForce GTX 1080	17456
Gigabyte G1 Gaming GTX 1080	17345
MSI GeForce GTX 1070 Founders Edition	14717
Asus Strix Radeon R9 390X	11579
AMD Radeon RX 480	10361

If you're looking for maximum bang for buck in the mid-range, you've found it.

9

Gaming Tech of the future

Bennett Ring looks into his crystal ball...



VR

After recently returning from the world's biggest PC hardware show, it was impossible to ignore the biggest trend sweeping PC makers - Virtual Reality. It makes perfect sense really. Only 14% of gamers have PCs powerful enough to run today's HMDs at the required 90Hz for a smooth experience, so it's no wonder that every motherboard and graphics card maker wants a piece of the VR action.

Nearly every product at the show had VR-Ready printed in large logos over it, even though many of these products have not been certified by Oculus nor HTC. The fact that each of these VR kits cost over \$1100, plus need a \$1000+ PC will be a huge deterrent to many who want to enjoy the VR craze, which is where the Playstation VR hopes to capture a huge niche.

Slated for a release price of US\$399 in October, it's obviously not going to have the same specs as

the high-end PC kits. It'll use a 5.7 inch 1080p OLED display with a 100 degree field of view. Sony claims the screen will refresh at 120Hz, but it's actually using some software trickery to double the native 60Hz refresh rate. According to those who've worn one, it's actually far more comfortable than the Vive or Rift, and there's no risk of fogging as there's a large amount of open space around the lens.

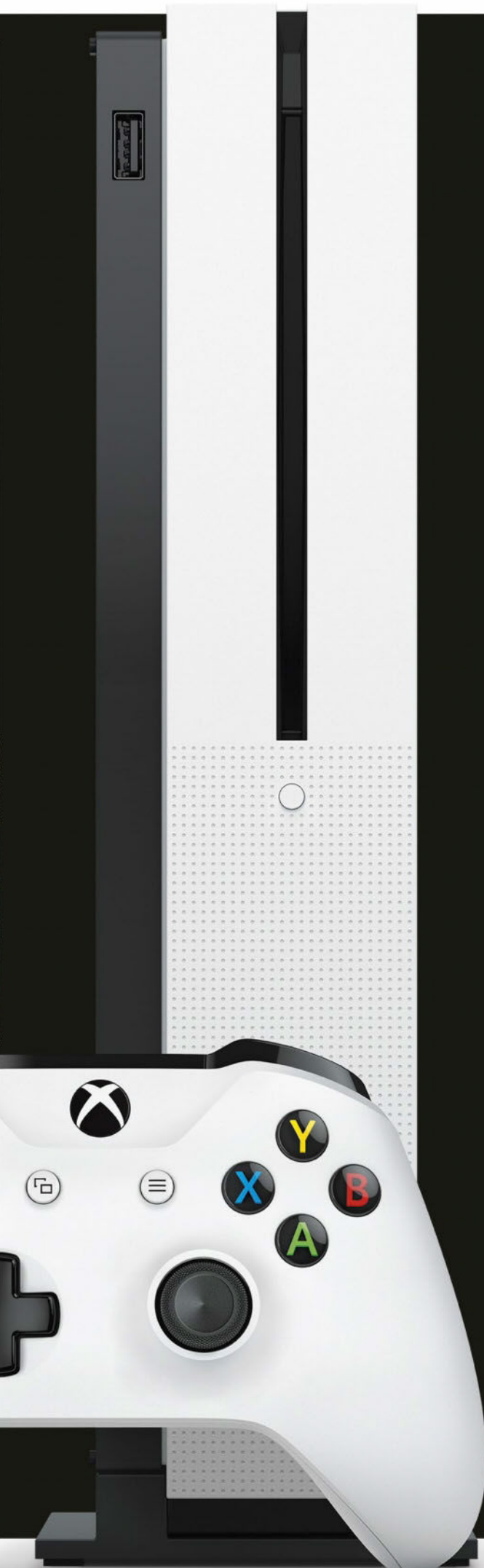
Sadly it won't come with motion controllers - you're going to need to fork out for the Playstation Move Wands and Camera for that feature. Sony is planning on having 50 titles ready by launch, including the new Resident Evil. It'll come with a breakout box to deliver the extra horsepower necessary to run the twin screens at such high resolution, though there are rumours that the new PS4.5 will have the necessary grunt to do away with such a box.

Whether you believe it or not, the

ONLY 14% OF GAMERS HAVE PCS POWERFUL ENOUGH TO RUN TODAY'S HMDs AT THE REQUIRED 90HZ FOR A SMOOTH EXPERIENCE

industry is getting behind VR in a big way. It's no surprise really - we're at day one of the VR revolution and the experiences are already mind-blowing. Give it a couple more years of development and we think it'll become the preferred way to play.





Candy Crush of the future!



UPDATED CONSOLES

The console cycle as we know it is now over. Both Sony and Microsoft are releasing mid-cycle systems, refreshes that aren't just smaller versions as we've seen in the past, but with new GPUs and CPUs to deliver better gaming performance. Let's look at Sony's version first.

The PS4.5 is claimed to be able to deliver 4K gaming, but again it does so via software trickery. Rather than natively render the game at 4K, which would require \$2000 worth of GPUs, it simply upscales today's games to the new resolution. However, it should hopefully include the new Ultra HD Blu-ray standard, which will run movies in true 4K resolution.

According to leaked specs, the PS4.5 (aka Neo) will have a faster CPU, running at 2.1GHz vs the 1.6GHz of the existing model. More importantly, it'll double the GPU horsepower. Today's PS4 has an integrated AMD GPU with 18 Compute Units - Neo will double this to 36. Even better, they'll run at 911MHz compared to the 800MHz of today's PS4s. The difference this will make in performance simply cannot be understated. The memory will also be faster, up 24% from 176GB/sec to 218GB/sec.

These are some serious hardware upgrades, but existing PS4 owners need not fret. Every game made moving forward must support both versions of the PS4, with the newer version obviously having enhanced visuals.

On the other hand, Microsoft announced two new consoles at this year's E3. First is the Xbox One S, which should bring 4K upscaling and 4K Blu-ray support to the table. It also has HDMI 2.0, which supports HDR. Microsoft were mum on the improved internals, but it is 40% smaller than today's Xbox One.

More exciting is Microsoft's new "Scorpio" Xbox. At this year's E3, Phil

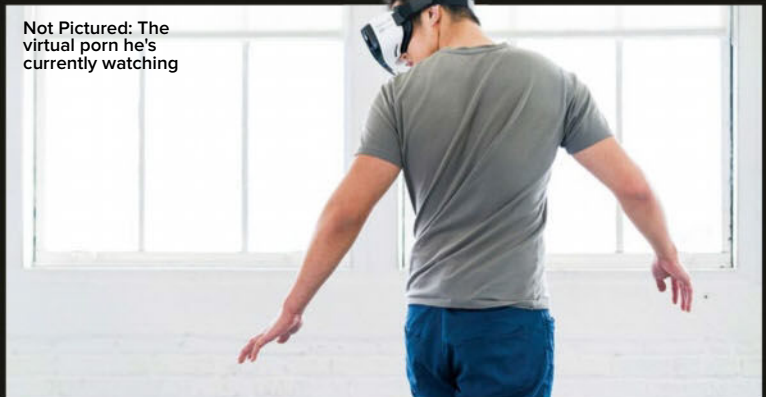
Spencer promised it would be the fastest console ever made, and it's due for release in 2017. Many believe this may actually be the Xbox Two, and not just a simple upgrade to today's Xbox One. Again, MS remained very quiet about what's inside, but they did claim it has six Teraflops of performance, five times that of today's Xbox One. It'll also run Windows, and is going to be powered by an AMD APU.

Finally we have Nintendo's NX console, which it refused to reveal at E3. Due in March 2017, it's rumoured to be as powerful as today's PS4... which means it will be thoroughly outclassed by both Sony and Microsoft's new machines. Yet Nintendo has rarely ever been about brute strength, so we can expect a far more competitive price point than its competitors. As for the controller, patents suggest Nintendo is sticking with a design very similar to the Nintendo Wii U controller, which we're not so sure is a good idea. It's just a rumour though - don't be surprised if Nintendo blows us out of the water with some new form of controller.

MOBILE GAMING

Finally, wrapping up our look into the future of games is the continued dominance of mobile gaming. Deloitte Global predicts that in 2016 mobile games will be the leading game platform in terms of game sales, generating US\$35 billion. That's a huge 20% increase over 2015. There are currently over 800,000 mobile games on the market compared to 17,000 for PC and consoles, and it's all thanks to the low barrier to development. However, now that the market is absolutely jam packed with titles, most forecasters expect growth to slow. Hopefully that doesn't mean yet another version of Candy Crush in the near future. ❗

Not Pictured: The virtual porn he's currently watching



Computex Hotware

With the current round of trade shows done, we decided it was time to sift through our memories of all that we saw, and report back to you with gadgets and tech we felt most worthy of your attention. Peruse these pages, and perhaps you'll find something you can con a partner into purchasing!

PS4 Neo

While we don't know what it looks like yet because it wasn't shown at E3 this year, Sony did finally officially confirm the PS4 Neo: a newer, faster, 4k gaming-capable version of the console.

THE HYPE: A boost to CPU speed, GPU speed and capacity, and memory speed, means the PS4 Neo will be ideal for the first wave of 4k console gaming, and will also have the grunt necessary to drive gaming with the PSVR headset.

THE GRIPE: Isn't part of the point of consoles that you don't need to upgrade as often? There goes that benefit.

PRICE	\$TBA
DISTRIBUTOR	Sony
COMPANY URL	www.sony.com



PlayStation VR

The PSVR has the potential to bring VR to the masses in ways neither the Rift or Vive are likely to achieve due to their restrictive prices and computer system requirements. The PSVR on the other hand has a huge consumer base of PS4 owners, and Sony to drive and support the development of game integration.

THE HYPE: 5.7 inch 120Hz OLED screen to give your eyes a 100 degree view and 3D audio for the best possible VR experience. Cinematic mode means you can view content on a virtual cinema screen.

THE GRIPE: It's hard to be down on VR. Bring on the future!

PRICE	\$549.95
DISTRIBUTOR	Sony
COMPANY URL	www.sony.com



MSI Backpack PC

A novel solution to the problem of wires getting underfoot during VR gaming, the Backpack PC from MSI keeps everything contained so you can experience virtual reality without worrying so much about real reality, and should be out later this year.

THE HYPE: 5kg of GTX 980 powered PC with 16GB RAM and a 6th generation Intel Core i7 CPU. Battery life somewhere 'round an hour and a half – probably more than enough for a VR session.

THE GRIPE: Can't see this taking off for home use, despite the apparent convenience – seems more targeted towards demonstrators.

PRICE	\$TBA
DISTRIBUTOR	MSI
COMPANY URL	au.msi.com

Xbox One S

The original XBone is a bit of a beast; a fact of which Microsoft is quite aware, so now they're making the Xbox One S, a slimmer, sleeker version. Which we're going to be calling "Xbones" from now on.

THE HYPE: Up to 2TB of storage, an internal power supply, and a size reduction of 40% makes this the console it probably should have been from the start. HDR should give games and movies a bit of extra pizzazz too.

THE GRIPE: It's proudly displaying its 4k capability, but in reality this just means streaming/Blu-ray content, not 4k gaming. If you're a current Xbone owner (Xboner?) it's probably not worth the upgrade because Project Scorpio should be hot on its heels (a year later).

PRICE	\$549
DISTRIBUTOR	Microsoft
COMPANY URL	www.microsoft.com



Xbox Project Scorpio

"The most powerful console ever", says Microsoft, but there's not a whole lot of information around, since we're probably talking the end of 2017 before a release. Will it outgun the PS4 Neo? Who knows!

THE HYPE: 6 Teraflops of GPU power for buttery smooth true 4k gaming at 60Hz. 8 CPU cores, over 320MB/s memory bandwidth, and probably support for VR?

THE GRIPE: It's mostly speculation at this point, with no way of knowing if it will live up to the dream Microsoft has set.

PRICE	\$TBA
DISTRIBUTOR	Microsoft
COMPANY URL	www.microsoft.com



Asus ROG GX800 Laptop

On the one hand, we have gaming laptop makers trying things like the Razer Blade Stealth, ultrabooks that become gaming machines when plugged in at home. On the other we have 18" behemoths like Asus' ROG GX800.

THE HYPE: Liquid cooled GPU and CPU, SLI, anti-ghosting backlit mechanical keyboard, and a 4k display. And like the aforementioned Razer, the laptop hits its gaming stride when plugged into a base station (which in this case provides water cooling).

THE GRIPE: Requires – wait for it – TWO 330-watt power supplies. Also needing a liquid cooling dock to operate at optimal capacity means that it's really not very portable, and the better part of 10 grand will buy you one heck of a desktop PC.

PRICE	\$8000
DISTRIBUTOR	Asus
COMPANY URL	www.asus.com



Asus Zenbo

In the immortal words of Invader Zim "Finally, a robot slave of my own."

THE HYPE: Roves the house, taking everything in with its facial-recognition capable camera, giving you reminders, entertaining the kids, and annoying the pets. Zenbo can play music, respond to spoken word commands, and with an AI on-board, will also learn your preferences to work into your routine.

THE GRIPE: Someone really needs to put all this tech into a BB8, it would at once make it cooler, and solve the problem of its creepy voice. Though you'd need to learn to understand droid.

PRICE	\$TBA
DISTRIBUTOR	Asus
COMPANY URL	zenbo.asus.com

Asus ROG Claymore

And if you're going to spend 10 large on a laptop, you probably wouldn't think twice about adding Asus' latest gaming keyboard, called the Claymore, to your setup.

THE HYPE: A choice of red, blue, brown, or black cherry MX RGB mechanical switches, customisable RGB back-lighting, n-key rollover tech, and an aluminium-alloy frame with a Mayan-inspired pattern design. What's particularly cool is if you have an ROG motherboard, you will also be able to use hotkey keys to control, fan speed, BIOS access, and overlocking of memory and CPU.

THE GRIPE: Not suitable for sword combat.

PRICE \$TBA
DISTRIBUTOR Asus
COMPANY URL www.asus.com



Tt eSports Ventus Z

Taking design elements from the excellent Level 10M Advanced mouse, the new Ventus Z mouse looks like it's going to be one of our new favourite PC peripherals.

THE HYPE: Large honeycombed section to keep your hands cool and sweat free during extended gaming sessions, features the Avago ADNS 9500 laser sensor capable of up to 11,000 DPI sensing via hardware acceleration, Omron switches, programmable macros and onboard memory.

THE GRIPE: The sensor may be fast, but hardware acceleration can sometimes be a little problematic.

PRICE \$59.99 USD
DISTRIBUTOR Tt eSports
COMPANY URL ttesports.com

Asus ZenBeam E1 Projector

For all those times when you've just been like "Gee, I sure wish I had the ability to project a 1080p source at 854x480 and 150 lumens, on to that yonder wall right now," the Zenbeam E1 is 11cmx 8.3cm, fitting right in your pocket, so can go with you just about anywhere to make that wish a reality.

THE HYPE: Throw an image up to 120-inches (diagonally) for up to 5 hours thanks to the LED light source and the 6000mAh battery, which also doubles as a power pack to recharge your phone. Most useful in travel situations; family holidays, camping trips, and the like.

THE GRIPE: While it's easier than lugging a gaming monitor or TV around, its resolution leaves something to be desired.

PRICE \$TBA
DISTRIBUTOR Asus
COMPANY URL www.asus.com



Oculus Touch

One of the things the Vive had over the Rift was a control set made for VR. Oculus is finally bringing something more VR-friendly to the table.

THE HYPE: The Touch features a similar layout to a standard game controller but with a layout designed to be more intuitive for doing things like picking up virtual objects. It features movement tracking, and comes with an additional sensor ensure accuracy.

THE GRIPE: Should be pretty handy for all the no games you play on the Rift.

PRICE \$TBA
DISTRIBUTOR Oculus
COMPANY URL www.oculus.com

MSI GT73 Laptop

The lightest SLI laptop around, the GT73 sports twin GTX 980M cards (and most likely their successors when they are announced by Nvidia).

THE HYPE: Hugely customisable but a Core i7 will be standard, up to 64Gb RAM, multiple SSDs in Raid 4, 17.3" full HD 120Hz screen and all the bells and whistles you could hope for in a high end gaming laptop.

THE GRIPE: The \$2500 price tag looks like it will be the starting point. If you want all the goodies you can expect the price to skyrocket.

PRICE \$2500+ USD
DISTRIBUTOR MSI
COMPANY URL au.msi.com



Nvidia Shield Android TV Console



Want an Android TV box that also lets you stream games? The Shield has you covered.

POWERED UP: Streaming games from the cloud with a Tegra X1 processor and 3GB memory! It's 4K ready, too which will be great when 4K content becomes more prolific.

PLAYED OUT: 30MB/s download requirement for its streamiest features, and as we know that isn't achievable for a large portion of our population. Costs in the region of an Xboxone for the basic 16GB HDD model and pretty much does nothing better than an Xboxone. At this price you don't even get the gaming controller - you'll have to lash out extra for that privilege.

PRICE	\$270+
DISTRIBUTOR	Nvidia
COMPANY URL	shield.nvidia.com

Parrot Disco

Look we're not going to lie. This Parrot Disco is actually a lot less exciting than the image that popped into our heads when we first heard those two words together.

THE HYPE: A lightweight drone with programmable flight plan and 45 minute flight time and auto-landing capability. So yes, after hurling it into the air, it can be autonomous, or you can control interactively with a radio controller, or the much cooler first person view SkyController which supports VR-like glasses that have you looking from the 14MP nose camera as it flies.

THE GRIPE: Not a single parrot in flares.

PRICE	\$TBA
DISTRIBUTOR	Parrot
COMPANY URL	parrot.com



Seagate Barracuda Pro

There is no such thing as too much storage. Every gamer has faced the Sophie's choice of having to delete a game off their system to install a new one, but thanks to Seagate that may be a problem of the past.

THE HYPE: Up to 10tb storage with a five year warranty. If that's not enough it's also very energy conscious, drawing only 6.8W.

THE GRIPE: The Barracuda Pro may be the fastest large capacity HDD around, but it's still not a patch on a SSD in terms of transfer speed.



PRICE	\$TBA
DISTRIBUTOR	Seagate
COMPANY URL	seagate.com



Retro Freak Console

The perfect system for collectors/retro gamers who want to play their diverse library of games, but don't want to have all the consoles plugged in at all times.

THE HYPE: Support for 11 legacy console formats including Famicom, SNES, Mega Drive, Genesis, and a bunch of Game Boys, all upscaled to 720p. Can also read ROMs right SD card.

THE GRIPE: Basically only good if you want to utilise the multi-format compatibility with vintage original cartridges, otherwise there's no way you wouldn't just spend \$50 and set up a Raspberry Pi emulator instead.

PRICE	\$275
DISTRIBUTOR	Cybergadget
COMPANY URL	www.cybergadget.co.jp

da Vinci Mini W

Later this year it's going to be entirely feasible for you to buy a 3D printer and... well, 3D print stuff! The da Vinci Mini from XYZ Printing is within an affordable price bracket, assuming you're moderately serious about printing things in 3D.

THE HYPE: Compact, with the printing area screened to protect ever intrusive child hands, and it supports Wi-Fi printing so you don't need to be tethered to the thing. Sure could save you money on that Warhammer 40K habit.

THE GRIPE: 3D printers seem to have limited appeal, because if you aren't a crafty type, or don't have something you desperately need to make, there's no real reason to have one like you would with a regular paper printer. Also, it's too small to print a Ferrari.



PRICE	\$360
DISTRIBUTOR	XYZ Printing
COMPANY URL	us.xyzprinting.com

Atom AR2

This weird-looking lightbulb is actually a security robot with multi-core CPUs.

THE HYPE: Hears, sees, talks, and auto-tracks 360 degrees in day or night, to ensure you're as safe as can be. Can detect and send snaps or HD video streams of the faces of intruders to your phone, and even challenge them. The light bulb base

THE GRIPE: You can buy multi-camera home security systems for this kind of scratch, but we suppose those aren't as easy to set up as screwing in a lightbulb.



PRICE	\$400
DISTRIBUTOR	Amaryllo
COMPANY URL	www.amaryllo.eu



Aerocool Dreambox

Imagine if you built a computer case out of LEGO Technic. That's the Dreambox.

THE HYPE: Really though, you don't even have to use the 118 pieces including aluminium piping to make a PC case. You could make a chandelier, a cup tree, a shoe rack, a more different shoe rack, a scarecrow, or whatever you can imagine. We've run out of things already but you've probably got more ideas.

THE GRIPE: Yes you could probably also make your own things from materials you source and cut yourself, and yes it probably wouldn't cost you as much, though it would likely be a whole lot more effort.



PRICE	\$260
DISTRIBUTOR	Aerocool
COMPANY URL	www.dreambox.com.tw

Corsair Lapdog

A rock solid and heavy duty stable table for playing your PC games from the couch.

THE HYPE: The Lapdog is an enclosure for a full sized Corsair keyboard designed so that it sits on your lap for lounge room gaming. Amazing aluminium build quality, comfortable cushioning and more than enough space for your mouse.

THE GRIPE: It's not cheap by any stretch of the imagination as it doesn't come with either a keyboard or mouse. Expect a price tag more along the lines of \$350 or so all kitted out. The magnets used to attach the cushion are a little too weak to hold everything together during intense sessions.

PRICE	\$159
DISTRIBUTOR	Corsair
COMPANY URL	www.corsair.com



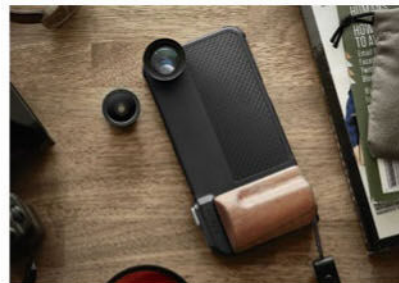
Intel Core i7 Extreme Edition 6950X

You may be wondering what makes a CPU worth the cost of an entire (excellent) PC, and we're not sure that this money is justified, BUT if the cash was literally burning a hole in your pocket, this is Intel's current top of the line desktop CPU.

THE HYPE: 3GHz base clock, turbo to 3.5GHz. 25MB Cache, and 10 hyperthreaded cores supporting quad channel 2400MHz DDR4 RAM. Uses the older 2011-3 socket, which means you may well be able to plug this straight in as an upgrade (following a BIOS update).

THE GRIPE: Uses the older 2011-3 socket, which means missing some of the newer features of more recent motherboards.

PRICE	\$2600
DISTRIBUTOR	Intel
COMPANY URL	www.intel.com.au



Bitplay Snap! Pro

Since our smartphones are also our most prevalent cameras, it makes sense to want to improve the photographic capabilities of the phone, rather than carrying around a separate camera.

THE HYPE: A physical shutter button is built right into the case (which also functions as a regular protective case), to make it feel close to a proper camera. Interchangeable lenses for close ups, for group shots, for any situation you could want.

THE GRIPE: For iPhones. Are people still using those? Also it's not like this doesn't add complexity to the quick phone snap process. Are you really going to whip out your phone, rummage around for the right lens, and swap it in, just so you can share that entrée on Instagram?

PRICE	\$100
DISTRIBUTOR	Bitplay Inc
COMPANY URL	snap.bitplayinc.com



PRICE \$500
DISTRIBUTOR Acer
COMPANY URL www.acer.com

Acer Revo Build

The Revo Build is Acer's shot at building a modular PC, something that the industry could really benefit from if done correctly, allowing people to upgrade components easily

THE HYPE: Start with a base unit, and add the bits you want. Modules for storage, speakers, microphones, and wireless charging, all snap on magnetically, and can even function independently of the PC.

THE GRIPE: Not completely modular in the way that makes this technology useful - you're still going to run into the same issues when the CPU or memory is no longer enough, because you'll have to spend a wad of cash to replace the base unit with a faster/better one, and by that time they'll probably have a different module format so you'll need all new modules too!

Acer H277HU Type C Monitor

Oh USB type C, where have you been all our lives? This monitor supports the aforementioned USB type C, which allows users to display content from notebooks or smartphones with the same level of ease, as well as transfer data and charge the attached devices at the same time.

THE HYPE: 1440p 27-inch IPS screen with a 4ms response time, built in speakers, and both DisplayPort and HDMI 2.0 inputs.

THE GRIPE: Speakers are an anaemic 3w, and the stand lacks height and tilt adjustment options.

PRICE \$700
DISTRIBUTOR Acer
COMPANY URL www.acer.com



Zotac EN980 Plus

Everyone seems to be pushing the VR angle as hard as they can, selling themselves as VR-ready, and this PC from Zotac is no different. It's a toaster-sized PC featuring a GTX 980 inside. It's got the size to fit anywhere and the power to play just about anything you care to throw at it.

THE HYPE: Core i5-6400 and GeForce GTX 980, both of which are liquid cooled via a closed-loop cooler. There are also two HDMI ports, two DisplayPorts and four USB 3.0 ports on the back while the front has USB 3.1 A and C type, as well as an SD card reader. And all this wrapped in a 9x8x5 inch package.

THE GRIPE: The 980 is not a full desktop card, but the laptop variant.

PRICE \$2000
DISTRIBUTOR Zotac
COMPANY URL www.zotac.com



PRICE \$7000
DISTRIBUTOR Acer
COMPANY URL www.acer.com

Acer Predator Z850

Unlike the Zenbeam, this is a projector made for gaming. You can tell from the Decepticon-esque logo that Acer likes to stamp on its gaming "Predator" line of products.

THE HYPE: 24:9 ultrawide native resolution of 1920x720 that can be projected to a size of 87" diagonal, and a lamp life of 20,000 hours. That's 20,000 hours of gaming. Compatible inputs are HDMI USB, VGA, and composite video, and there are ports for both USB and Ethernet. The general design is cool if you're into stuff that looks like it's made "for gamers".

THE GRIPE: Projectors need much more specific conditions to function effectively than do, say, monitors. This is one pricey bit of kit, and replacement lamps are usually a bunch to the wallet as well. ⚡

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