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43 GAMES PREVIEWED!

games of the future

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YAKUZA 6
MARVEL VS CAPCOM INFINITE
SEA OF THIEVES
FORZA MOTORSPORT 7
SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY
EXTINCTION
NI NO KUNI 2



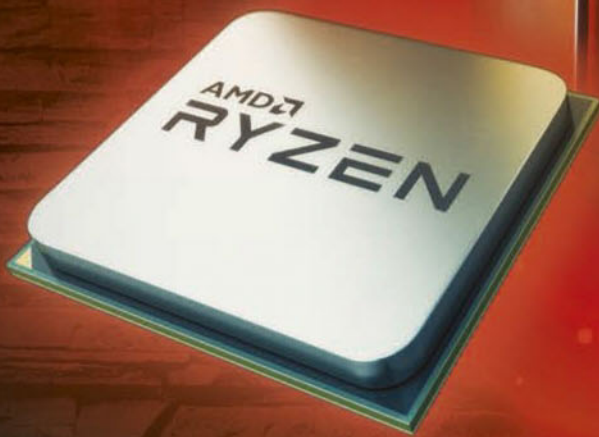
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MONSTER HUNTER WORLD
DARWIN PROJECT
CALL OF CTHULHU
NEED FOR SPEED: PAYBACK
THE SWORDS OF DITTO
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STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT 2

Not too far in the future, on a server close by...



This year's E3 was a slightly more subdued affair than the last few years, but that didn't stop all the big names in gaming from announcing a slew of new games, and give players the chance to go hands on with their hotly anticipated titles. In the following pages we've highlighted 43 games we think look outstanding. There are games from every style and genre. On top of that we bring you all the hottest upcoming gaming tech from this year's Computex and E3. It's a cracker of an issue. Enjoy.

DANIEL WILKS
Editor

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This machine kills fascists

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SUBSCRIPTION

You know you want to



HYPER

EDITORIAL

Editor: Daniel Wilks

Group Art Director: Malcolm Campbell

Art Director: Oliver Barles

Group Editor Tech & Gaming: Ben Mansill

Sub Editor: David Wildgoose

EDITORIAL ENQUIRIES

dwilks@nextmedia.com.au

CONTRIBUTORS

Bennett Ring, Heidi Kempf, Andrew Whitehead, Julian Rizzo-Smith

ADVERTISING

National Advertising Manager:

Tech, Gaming and Science Division

Sean Fletcher

(02) 9901 6367

sfletcher@nextmedia.com.au

Group Advertising Manager:

Tech, Gaming and Science Division

Cameron Ferris

(02) 9901 6348

cferris@nextmedia.com.au

Pre-press Manager: Jonathan Bishop

Production Manager: Peter Ryman

Circulation Director: Carole Jones

Subscriptions

www.mymagazines.com.au

1300 361 146 or +61 2 9901 6111

Locked Bag 3355, St Leonards NSW 1590

Building A, Level 6, 207 Pacific Highway,

St Leonards, NSW 2065

Locked Bag 5555, St Leonards, NSW 1590

Chief Executive Officer: David Gardiner

Commercial Director: Bruce Duncan

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www.nextmedia.com.au

TECH of the FUTURE

Every year companies from all over the world compete to show off the most impressive new PC and gaming hardware at both Computex and E3. Here are some of the products that really impressed us this year.



COOLERMASTER COSMOS II 25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION/COSMOS C700P

For the longest time the CoolerMaster Cosmos II was the case of choice for the Beast. For the 25th anniversary of this formidable case, CoolerMaster is releasing a special edition case with rounded, tempered glass sides. For those wanting a new iteration of the case, never fear. At Computex CM also unveiled the C700P, the true new Cosmos case.

PRICE \$449 (25th Anniversary Edition), TBA (C700P)
DISTRIBUTOR CoolerMaster
URL www.coolermaster.com



INTEL COMPUTE CARD

A few years ago Intel launched the Compute Stuck, a tiny form factor PC capable of making any TV smart and performing a number of other computational duties. The Compute Card is the next iteration of this technology. Slightly longer than a credit card and as thick as around five credit cards, the top specced Compute Card boasts a Core i5-7Y57 processor, 4Gb DDR3 ram and a 128Gb SSD.

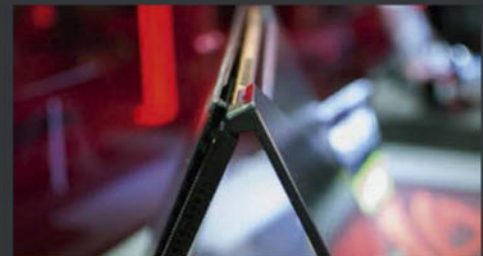
PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR Intel
URL www.intel.com



ASUS ROG ZEPHYRUS

Although not the first Max-Q laptop, the Zephyrus, named after the Greek god of the west wind is an absolute beauty and fully shows off the new design philosophy. At only 17.9mm thick and weighing 2.2Kg, it boasts an i7-7700HQ, 16GB RAM, a GTX 1080 and a 15.6" full HD screen. That's a serious gaming laptop that is still ultra-portable. We're not sure of the local pricing as yet, but you can rest assured a Zephyrus will set you back a pretty penny.

PRICE Expensive
DISTRIBUTOR Asus
URL www.asus.com/au



NVIDIA MAX-Q COOLING TECH FOR MOBILE

Not so much a technology but an approach to design, Nvidia Max-Q design philosophy is about maximising airflow through clever engineering ensuring this, light gaming laptops. Acoustics are also a major concern for the Max-Q design philosophy with the maximum output of Max-Q laptops being 40dBA.

PRICE N/A
DISTRIBUTOR Everyone who makes gaming laptops
URL N/A



AORUS X9 LAPTOP

The Aorus X9 is the flagship Aorus gaming laptop and it's quite the beast. The black matte metal chassis makes the unit look like it was designed to be a sports car and the guts of the machine seem to match that ambition. The specs are yet to be set in stone but the X9 will feature an i7 CPU, SLI GTX 1070 or 1080 cards, a full mechanical keyboard and a 3K or 4K 120Hz G-Sync screen.

PRICE \$3500 (APPROX.)
DISTRIBUTOR Gigabyte
URL www.gigabyte.com.au



MSI INFINITE A GAMING DESKTOP

The new MSI Infinite A series of gaming desktops are all built around the Infinite case. We're usually fans of understated and elegant cases, but there's something seriously appealing about this gaudy, angular, RGB studded case. The individual gaming machines will be customisable, with a range of i5 and i7 CPUs compatible, up to 64GB RAM and up to a GTX 1080. All the internals (at least those parts that MSI manufacture at any rate) will be from MSI stock.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR MSI
URL www.msi.com



MSI SEA HAWK 1080 TI

Each new generation of cards now seems to see MSI and Corsair combine forces to develop a closed loop watercooled monster of a card, and the Seahawk 1080 Ti certainly doesn't disappoint. The boost clock, base clock and memory frequency run 1683 MHz / 1569 MHz / 11124 MHz (OC), 1657 MHz / 1544 MHz / 11016 MHz (Gaming), 1582 MHz / 1480 MHz / 11016 MHz (Silent) while still having headway for some serious overclocking.

PRICE \$1399
DISTRIBUTOR MSI
URL www.msi.com



GEIL DRAGON RAM

Other companies may be putting bigger and brighter RGBs on their RAM, but this Geil kit goes the other way. The high end 2800-3333MHz DDR4 RAM is "frost" white with a gold dragon design painted on the face, and a blue LED for the dragon's eye. Lower end RAM is black with a gold dragon.

PRICE \$349 (32GB 3000MHZ)
DISTRIBUTOR Geil
URL www.geil.com.tw

GIGABYTE BRIX VR GB-BNI7HG6-1060 (REV.1.0)

The Brix VR isn't exactly a new product - there was a previous version of the Brix featuring a GTX 960 - but this year's model is a killer mini-PC. The tiny tower (measuring 220x110x110mm) contains an i7 CPU, GTX 1060, space for two M.2 SSDs and another 2.5" HDD or SSD, all the connectors you need for VR headsets or a regular monitor, dual band Wi-Fi, Bluetooth 4.2 and up to 64GB SO-DIMM DDR4.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR Gigabyte
URL www.gigabyte.com.au



CORSAIR ZEUS

The Zeus concept mouse is a fine example of a beautiful idea. The Zeus is a Bluetooth mouse with exchangeable sides. The mouse pad it comes with serves as the Bluetooth dongle but also serves as a wireless recharging pad, not only for the mouse, but for any compliant wireless recharging device placed on one of the active charging zones.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR Corsair
URL www.corsair.com



ASROCK X299E-ITX/AC "LITTLE MONSTER" MOTHERBOARD

As you can see in the image, the ITX/ac format of the board is tiny. A huge part of the board is dominated by the CPU but ASRock has still managed to cram in a hell of a lot of functionality. The board can support up to 63GB quad channel-DDR4, three M.2 SSDs, two Intel 1219-V gigabit Ethernet interfaces, 802.11ac WLAN, Bluetooth 4.1 and a PCI-Express 3.0x16 expansion slot. The "Little Monster" is a little marvel.

PRICE \$300 (APPROX.)
DISTRIBUTOR ASRock
URL www.asrock.com



CORE I9 X SERIES

Do you have all the money in the world? Do you want a ridiculously powerful CPU with 18 cores and 36 threads? If so, then the Core i9-7980XE is the CPU for you when it comes out. Only the lowest specced of the i9 X series has concrete specs as yet, but it's still a monster, with a base 10 cores and 20 threads, a base clock of 3.3GHz and boost clocks of 4.3GHz and 4.5GHz all for the low, low price of somewhere around \$1300.

PRICE \$2600 APPROX. (CORE I9-7980XE)
DISTRIBUTOR URL Intel www.intel.com



MSI IMMERSE GH70

The GH70 won a Design and Innovation award at Computex, and looking at the specs it's easy to get excited about this headset. The headset features Sony certified Hi-Res drivers as well as a DAC for 7.1 virtual surround. The earcups look nice and big, held together with a springy metal headband for a good clamp. The earcups also feature the omnipresent RGBs with effects through MSI Mystic Light Sync.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR URL MSI www.msi.com



RYZEN THREADRIPPER

The AMD answer to the high-end Core i9 X series cards is the formidably named, and sized, Ryzen Threadripper. This enormous chip features 16 cores, 32 threads and 64 PCI lanes. Aside from that we don't really know much about the Threadripper, aside from the fact that it will probably be a good deal cheaper than the Core i9 equivalents.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR URL AMD www.amd.com



RYZEN 3

The soon to be released Ryzen 3 is the AMD answer to the low-powered i3 chipset. The details of the first Ryzen 3, the 1200, have leaked online and it looks like a compelling little CPU for streaming boxes and media centres. The Ryzen 3 1200 will contain a Summit Ridge core with four cores and four threads with a clock speed of around 3.1GHz.

PRICE TBA (BUT CHEAP)
DISTRIBUTOR URL AMD www.amd.com



RYZEN MOBILE

Asus debuted the first gaming laptop with a Ryzen CPU at Computex, but with the launch of the Ryzen Mobile chipsets a little later in the year we should see a lot more. The Asus ROG Strix GL702ZC boasts a mobile version of the 8-core Ryzen 7 1700 as well as the first mobile version of the RX580 GPU. As good as that sounds, what we're really looking forward to seeing from AMD is the new "Raven Ridge" range of APUs.

PRICE Varies
DISTRIBUTOR URL AMD www.amd.com

AEROCOOL PROJECT 7

Like pretty much everyone else in the gaming market, case and cooler manufacturer AeroCool have a racing seat style gaming chair coming sometime this year. It's a nice looking chair but there is little to differentiate it from all the others. Although little information was given, the company is also developing other chairs - one something like an armchair and the other being a beanbag gaming chair. We really liked them.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR URL AeroCool aeroool.com.tw



ROCCAT LEADR MOUSE

The mouse is currently available but that doesn't stop it from being one of the best input devices we saw at Computex. This wireless 14 button mouse uses the modified Pixart optical sensor that Roccat has dubbed "Owl-Eye", giving it better performance in the 400-3000DPI range than many of its competitors. Rather than having a small USB dongle, the wireless hub is instead built into the large charging stand.

PRICE \$259
DISTRIBUTOR URL Roccat www.roccat.org

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X399 CHIPSET MOBOS

Motherboards made for the enormous Threadripper CPU also dominated many stands. In addition to the nice bit of one-upmanship in the name, a few of the mobos also impressed us. The Asus X399 Zenith Extreme looks a little cramped thanks to the sheer size of the 4096 pin chip but still has space for eight RAM slots, and a nifty expansion card that fits in a truncated PCI-E slot and allows for an extra two M.2 SSDs to be connected.

PRICE Varies
DISTRIBUTOR Varies
URL Varies



X299 CHIPSET MOBOS

With the X series chipset comes the X299 motherboard. Every manufacturer worth their salt had at least one new mobo on display at Computex, but there were a few that really caught our eyes. The Aorus Gaming 9 is a RGB covered powerhouse, the Asus ROG Rampage VI supports four-way SLI, has a 10GB Ethernet chip and an OLED display showing your system stats, and the ASRock Little Monster X299E-IYX/ac mentioned on page 9.

PRICE Varies
DISTRIBUTOR Varies
URL Varies



QNAP TVS-882BR

A NAS isn't the sexiest bit of kit, but after you've used one you'll wonder how you ever did without for storing files, streaming to different devices, downloading and backing up your PC. The TVS-882BR features eight HDD bays and two M.2 slots for a hell of a lot of storage, and also has a Blu-Ray drive for an extra way to transfer data or to just stream movies to a number of different devices simultaneously.

PRICE Pricy
DISTRIBUTOR QNAP
URL www.qnap.com

FLARETECH PRISM SWITCHES

We were wowed by these optical key switches last year, but now we have more details we're even more impressed. The Flaretech Prism switches use an infra-red optical switch rather than a digital membrane switch or mechanical switch. What this means is that the switches are entirely unsoldered and self-contained, so the entire switch can be removed and are waterproof. Being optical, the switches are also analogue, so can tell how far they are depressed.



PRICE Varies
DISTRIBUTOR Varies
URL flaretechinc.com



ASUS ROG STRIX XG27UQ

The ROG Strix XG27UQ reads something like a wishlist for everything we want to see in a display. 1000 cd/m2 brightness, 4K, 144Hz, G-Sync, HDR, Quantum Dot. It's a hell of a display at 27" and from what we understand there will also be a 32" version of the screen. The only thing we don't love about this display is the stand, which is a little too showy for our liking.

PRICE Not cheap
DISTRIBUTOR Asus
URL www.rog.asus.com



CORSAIR CONCEPT CURVE

The Curve is a concept case and, at least in its current form is never going to go into mass production thanks to the over \$10,000 of carbon fibre in the chassis. The concept case is based on last year's Graphite 780T case. In addition to the carbon fibre, the Curve updates the Graphite with a huge, curved tempered glass side panel that gave an unimpeded view of the elegant liquid cooled system inside.

PRICE Over \$10,000
DISTRIBUTOR Corsair
URL www.corsair.com



PHANTEKS EVOLV SHIFT X

The Evolv series of Mini-ITX cases have been HYPER favourites for some time but the Shift X is really a thing of beauty. Rather than opting simply for small, the Shift X (and slightly less appealing Shift) are instead designed with a minimal footprint in mind while still having enough room for water cooling and a full sized GPU. The Shift X is the taller of the cases and, if the picture is correct, is also designed to attract hand grease.

PRICE \$200 approx.
DISTRIBUTOR Phanteks
URL www.phanteks.com



INWIN 806

The InWin 806 isn't what you would call a huge leap forward in case design. Aside from a new style of latch for the smoked glass side panel the case doesn't really do anything new, but just look at it. The curved, light wooden panelling is stunning and the smoked glass makes for a wonderful contrast. It's one of the nicest looking cases we've seen in a very long time.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR InWin
URL www.inwin-style.com

QNAP/IEI AFOTOT ROBOT

The AfoBot is a smart digital assistant (like Amazon Echo, Google Home or Apple Homepod) by IEI, designed to be an easy interface for automation and communication. Unlike its rival products, the AfoBot is very much a visual assistant as well as a verbal one, so it can perform basic security duties, act as a Skype caller and more.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR QNAP
URL www.ieiworld.com



TESORO OPTICAL SWITCH

Similar to the Flaretech optical switches, the Tesoro optical switches are hot-swappable and water/spill resistant. We haven't had a chance to go hands on with them for an extended period of time as yet, but from what we understand, the design of the Blue switches (similar in feel to Cherry Blue) eliminates the problem the Cherry switches have with hysteresis. Colour us intrigued.

PRICE Varies
DISTRIBUTOR Tesoro
URL tesorotec.com



THERMALTAKE LEVEL 20

The Level 20 concept case from Thermaltake takes the multi-chamber design of the Level 10 and goes a little nuts. The case has three individual chambers, each enclosed in 5mm thick tempered glass. One chamber houses a liquid cooling pump, another the PSU and the last the actual guts of the PC, ensuring maximum cooling potential and good looks.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR Thermaltake
URL www.thermaltake.com



COOLERMASTER MASTERWATT MWS 500P

Power supplies aren't particularly sexy, but the MasterWatt MWS 500P comes pretty close. This 500W, Platinum certified PSU has no fan and runs at a max temperature of around 40 degrees. What this means is that the PSU is completely silent, still runs quite cool and has enough oomph to power most regular PCs. That's pretty damn neat.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR CoolerMaster
URL www.coolermaster.com

MSI GS63VR STEALTH PRO LAPTOP

The 2017 refresh of the Stealth Pro is one seriously appealing gaming laptop. Closed, the laptop is only 17.7mm thick and weighs 1.9kg. The full HD 15.6" display has a 120Hz refresh and a response time of 3ms and has a GTX 1070 under the hood. The Stealth Pro also has Sabre HiFi audio, a SteelSeries keyboard and a Kaby Lake CPU while remaining the lightest laptop in its class.



PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR MSI
URL www.msi.com



INWIN WINBOT

The Winbot is nuts, in the best possible way. It's an acrylic spherical case that houses your PC and is capable of interacting with the user thanks to motion sensing and facial recognition cameras as well as a voice command system. The case looks like a cross between a cyberpunk Pac Man and a funky new Death Star. It will likely cost about as much as a good PC, but we love the Winbot for its excess.

PRICE Real pricey
DISTRIBUTOR InWin
URL winbot.in-win.com



VROC – VIRTUAL RAID ON CPU TECHNOLOGY

This technology, currently being used on Asus X299 mobos allows M.2 SSDs, either plugged direct into the mobo or via a Hyper M.2 X16 card to be piped directly to a Skylake X CPU, avoiding any bottlenecks. At the moment the technology is severely hampered by the fact that it appears as though only Intel SSDs are bootable with VROC, but hopefully that will change.

PRICE N/A
DISTRIBUTOR Varies
URL www.intel.com

ZOTAC GEFORCE GTX 1080 TI MINI

Despite the name, the Zotac GTX 1080 Ti Mini isn't a tiny card. It's still relatively large at 8.3" but compared to a full sized 1080 Ti, some of which push 11" it's quite the midget. At 8.3", the Zotac Mini can easily fit in all but the tightest of mini ATX cases, meaning you won't have to skimp on power if you want a small PC.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR Zotac
URL www.zotac.com



AORUS GTX 1070 GAMING BOX

While many companies have developed some form of external graphics card enclosure, the Aorus approach to external graphics is probably the best we've seen so far. Instead of simply making an enclosure and then expecting users to go out and buy a card to fit in it, the Aorus Gaming Box is an all-in-one with a GTX 1070 already installed. Even better, the price of the whole unit is less than some other manufacturers are charging for the enclosure alone.

PRICE \$660 approx.
DISTRIBUTOR Gigabyte
URL www.gigabyte.com.au



ACER PREDATOR X35

We've liked the idea of curved, ultrawide monitors for quite a while, but for the most part the vertical resolution has been too low for them to be particularly great for gaming. The Acer Predator X35 is one of two 3440x1440 (4K widescreen) 1800R curved monitors debuted at Computex. In addition to the excellent resolution, the display is also 144Hz, HDR, 1000 cd/m2 and G-Sync. We'll take a dozen.

PRICE Not cheap
DISTRIBUTOR Acer
URL www.acer.com.au



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STARVR

Promising 5K resolution and a massive 210-degree field of view, the StarVR headset, developed by Acer in partnership with IMAX and Swedish game studio Starbreeze is shaping up to be the future of VR. It looks as though StarVR will be marketed to B2B and arcades at the moment but retail could be a reality somewhere down the line. IMAX has an experimental VR arcade in LA at the moment and tickets have been selling like hotcakes.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR Acer
URL www.starvr.com



KILLER XTEND

Built in to some new motherboards and available on others through an expansion card, Killer Xtend turns a PC into an Ethernet switch and Wi-Fi extender. In addition to the network extension capabilities, anything routed through Killer Xtend will be prioritised with gaming in mind, so any downloads, torrents and the like will be prioritised lower than whatever game you may be playing, no matter the device you're doing it on.

PRICE Varies
DISTRIBUTOR Rivet Networks
URL www.killernetworking.com



AORUS 720 MOTION PLATFORM

The Aorus 720 Motion Platform is without a doubt the most awesome and bonkers thing shown at this year's event. A pod mounted on a multi-axis arm/gimble that follows the movement of an in-pod joystick, accurately simulating the movement of whatever vehicle you are controlling in game. Aorus used the hyper-fast racing game Redout to demo the unit, and left attendees either elated (as was the case with Ben and Bennett) or ready to vomit.

PRICE \$26,000 approx.
DISTRIBUTOR Gigabyte
URL www.gigabyte.com.au



COUGAR CONQUER CASE

The Cougar Conquer case looks a little like a Transformer started to change into a futuristic motorcycle and got stuck halfway through. That's not a bad thing. The case has a bold design that still looks quite clean and elegant. It's also quite interesting in terms of design. The back is open for extra airflow and the mobo is mounted at a 30-degree angle because it looks pretty rad.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR Cougar Gaming
URL cougargaming.com

MSI MOTION PLATFORM CHAIR

We don't have a lot of detail about the MNSI VR racing rig as yet, but according to reports, MSI is planning on releasing the premium VR peripheral for somewhere in the range of \$5k-8k USD. It's not cheap by any means, but the cockpit is hydraulic and can simulate pitch, tilt and yaw. The model on display featured a Fanatec Clubsport wheel V2 and Clubsport V3 pedals, but we're not sure if they are included in the asking price.

PRICE \$6500-\$10500 approx.
DISTRIBUTOR MSI
URL www.msi.com

INWIN MARS COOLER

The Mars fan is a new approach to PC cooling and honestly it's pure genius. Instead of the fan and bracket being one single unit, the bracket and fan are separate, so the fan can be angled towards the area that needs the greatest cooling. The fan is mounted on a 360-degree rotating hinge and modular cable design allows for multiple connection options, so you should be able to fit the fan wherever you want.



PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR InWin
URL www.inwin-style.com



HYPERKIN DUKE

We thought Wilks was pretty much the only person in the world who actually liked the original Duke controller, the massive plastic Xbox peripheral rather caustically nicknamed "the potato". It appears we were wrong. Hyperkin, makers of retro consoles is soon to release a limited edition Duke controller to coincide with the release of the Xbox One X.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR Hyperkin
URL www.hyperkin.com

HYPERKIN RETRON 77

If 120 built-in Atari games playable at 720P isn't enough for you, Hyperkin has your back. The RetroN 77 features a fully functional Atari 2600 cartridge port and can display the games in crisp 1080p. The pixels will look squarer than they ever have before and the likes of Custer's Revenge and Beat 'Em & Eat 'Em will take on a whole new pornographic brilliance.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR Hyperkin
URL www.hyperkin.com



SEGA GENESIS FLASHBACK

The Sega Genesis Flashback features 85 built-in games including classics such as Mortal Kombat, Sonic (when he was rad) and Shining Force, as well as a fully functioning cartridge port that is compatible with almost all Genesis and MegaDrive cartridges. Like the Atari Flashback, the Genesis Flashback can output 720p and has two wireless controllers.

PRICE \$79.99 USD
DISTRIBUTOR AtGames
URL www.atgames.us



ATARI FLASHBACK 8 GOLD

There are a few different versions of the Atari Flashback 8 retro console, but the Gold is definitely the cream of the crop. This Atari 2600 replica will come with 120 built-in Atari 2600 games, two wireless controllers and the capability to output at 720p. If you're looking for a more portable option, there is a handheld sku as well with 70 built-in games and a 2.8" screen.

PRICE \$79.99 USD
DISTRIBUTOR AtGames
URL www.atgames.us



8BITDO SNES30 PRO

With the upcoming launch of Nintendo's classic games service for 8-bit and 16-bit titles it's only fitting that someone would make the perfect controller for playing them. The SNES30 is an accurate, albeit wireless, reproduction of the original SNES controller with the added bonus that the Bluetooth connection means that the controller is compatible with PCs and mobile devices as well.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR 8Bitdo
URL www.8bitdo.com

8BITDO NES30 ARCADE STICK FOR SWITCH

Tired of getting your butt whipped in Streets of Rage for Switch because the controls aren't great?? Well here's a solution for you. The NES30 is a wireless arcade stick compatible with the Switch, Windows, Macs and mobile devices. The stick is releasing some time in Q3, and although there are no details of the components as yet, the previous model of the NES30 arcade stick featured real Sanwa parts.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR 8Bitdo
URL www.8bitdo.com





NYKO NINTENDO SWITCH PORTABLE DOCKING KIT

The official Switch docking bay is big, bulky and not the best for travelling with, not to mention expensive if you want a second dock for another TV. Enter Nyko. Although the portable dock lacks the two integral USB ports found on the official dock, meaning that an Ethernet adapter can't be attached, it's small, functional and half the price of Nintendo's dock.

PRICE \$45 USD
DISTRIBUTOR Nyko
URL nyko.com



NYKO POWER PAK FOR NINTENDO SWITCH

The Power Pak is an external battery for the Nintendo Switch that clips on the back of the console, delivering 5000 mAh of power – enough to double the time you can play the console away from the charger or dock. The battery pack also features an integral kickstand so you can use the console in table top mode. The pack doesn't block any ports or vents, so you can still connect headphones and the like with impunity.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR Nyko
URL nyko.com

RAZER PANTHERA FIGHT STICK

We just got one of these in the office to help us with reviews of Tekken 7, Injustice 2, Blazblue: Crazy Subtitle and a few other fighting games and it's a revelation. Not only does the Panthera use genuine Sanwa parts, making it feel extremely accurate, the stick is also beautifully built, giving easy access to the innards is you want to switch out buttons or tweak performance.

PRICE \$349.95
DISTRIBUTOR Razer
URL www.razerzone.com/au-en



PLANTRONICS RIG 800LX

The new line of RIG headsets due out in Q4 sees Plantronics team with Dolby to deliver a line with integrated Dolby Atmos surround sound. The 800LX is the flagship model and boasts 40mm drivers, 24-hour battery life, a noise cancelling mic and the same extremely lightweight and comfortable design that has made the RIG range one of our favourites.

PRICE \$249
DISTRIBUTOR Plantronics
URL www.plantronics.com



ZEN GAMING DESK

If you've ever thought about a standing desk, then this Australian company has you covered. Zen Space Desks is looking to break into the gaming market, and there's a lot to like about their range. These sit/stand desks are automated and can move to a number of pre-programmed heights at the touch of a button and feature built in cable management options to save you from spaghetti.

PRICE Starting at \$799
DISTRIBUTOR Zen Space Desks
URL www.zenspacedesks.com.au

LG C7 55"

You haven't appreciated how good games can look until you've seen them running in HDR. Black isn't a single colour but rather a spectrum of blacks, and white is equally nuanced. HDR TVs can reproduce 1 billion colours and your eyes will love you for showing them. Although it isn't necessary for HDR and 4K, we still recommend an OLED panel over Quantum Dot.

PRICE \$4099
DISTRIBUTOR LG
URL www.lg.com/au



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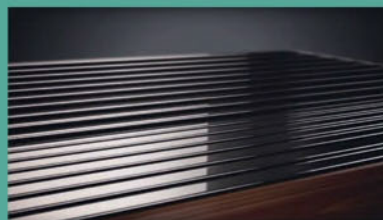
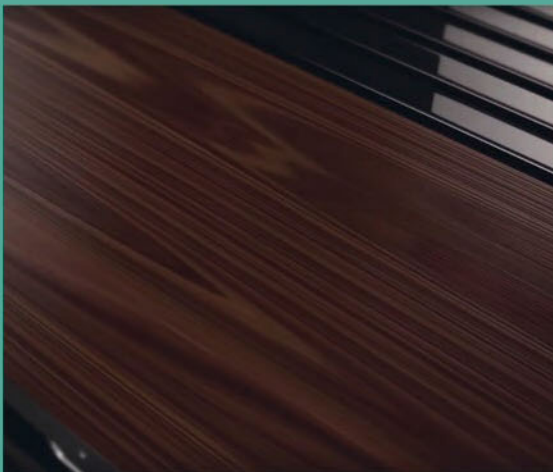
XBOX ONE X

The Xbox One was never a particularly good name, especially with it coming on the heels of the Xbox 360. Now there are two new skus of the Xbox One - The Xbox One S and Xbox One X - the unwieldiness of the name comes into starker relief. Now we have the Xbone, the smaller but more powerful Xbones and now the .5 upgrade unit, the Xbonex, which sounds like some kind of dog worming tablet or an exercise device that is sold on one of the home shopping networks.

Although the One X is the most powerful console ever made as far as specs are concerned, it isn't a new generation of machine. Instead, much like the PS4 Pro, it is an upgrade of the base 8th generation Microsoft console, but an impressive upgrade it is at that. The CPU is the fastest ever in a console. So fast and hot in-fact, that it requires liquid cooling. Along with the processor, the One X boasts 12GB DDR5 RAM, a custom GPU clocked at 1.172GHz with six teraflops of performance (around two teraflops more than the PS4 Pro and around half the performance of a desktop GTX 1080 Ti). What that means on paper is that the Xbox One X is fast. Really fast, and powerful enough to do multiple things at once, unlike the PS4 Pro.

The Sony console often asks users to choose between 60 frames, HDR and 4K, whereas the Xbox One X should be able to deliver all the upgrades at once, should the game feature them, of course. Like the Xbox One S, the One X features a UHD Blu-Ray drive so it can play 4K, HDR content. The console will also be able to upscale older games to 4K UHD and thanks to the increases processing power should be able to increase the image fidelity of images on 1080p screens as well. As with the One S, the One X isn't backwards compatible with physical 360 or Xbox games, but some digital purchases will carry over and Microsoft is looking at bringing a number of older games to the Xbox One family through the digital marketplace. Although it doesn't appear as though there will be any Xbox One X exclusive games (outside of some indies and tech demos that will inevitably appear on the marketplace), all of the games that were announced or showcased during the E3 Microsoft press conference will feature 4K and HDR compliance, with Crackdown 3 looking to having th greatest amount of potential to shine on the upgrades console.

PRICE \$649
DISTRIBUTOR Microsoft
URL www.xbox.com/en-AU



ATARI BOX

The strangest tech announcement of E3 would have to be that Atari is looking to get back into the hardware game with an as yet unnamed new "console" that will be based around PC hardware. Whether this will simply be an Atari branded mini-pc, a Steam Box or an entirely new console remains to be seen. All we know is that it isn't a retro console a-la the Nintendo Classic.

PRICE TBA
DISTRIBUTOR Atari (maybe)
URL ataribox.com



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DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

DICE
Electronic Arts
PC, PlayStation 4 and Xbox One
14th November

Star Wars Battlefront 2

This is not the Julian Rizzo-Smith you are looking for

In a galaxy not so far away, Star Wars Battlefront 2 is making great strides to respond to fans criticisms. EA President Andrew Wilson commented during EA's E3 press conference that DICE are actively responding to both positive and negative feedback from the original Battlefront.

"When we think about the feedback we focused on most, the first thing is that single player story," said Producer Craig McLeod. "People said, 'we love your multiplayer. It's really great. We're really happy with it but where's the story?'"

From here, DICE began developing a campaign co-developed by Motive Studios, the team currently working on former Uncharted writer Amy Henning's and Visceral Games' Star Wars IP. It follows Iden Versio, the leader of the Inferno Squadron, an elite Special Forces unit in the Galactic Empire, and their journey to avenge their fallen Emperor.

"It's a continuous story with a beginning, middle and end," Game director Mark Thompson told Eurogamer. "You follow Iden's journey for 30 years from the end of [Return of the] Jedi to up to the Force Awakens at Starkiller base."

"It isn't a discrete set of missions or separate war stories like Battlefield 1," he continued. "You do follow Iden through this journey whilst from time to time, switching sides and playing from the perspective of one of the iconic heroes because again, that's just part of Battlefront's DNA. Sometimes you're a Trooper, sometimes you're a pilot and sometimes you're Luke Skywalker with a lightsaber."

Motive Studios want to tell a new, untold story, and saw that in the Star Wars universe, we don't know much about the Empire.

"We really wanted to put ourselves in their helmet and think about who they are as people," Motive Studios' Content Producer Paola Jouyaux told PlayStation

Lifestyle, "and give this other perspective on familiar events that we saw in the movies... We are really taking the open, authentic experience DICE is known for into single player. You have this 360-combat approach, the progression system that the multiplayer has to single player, and there is some player choices in the way you evolve your character, as well."

Commander Iden is accompanied by a companion droid who plays a role in the narrative and in battle.

"He gives her abilities that elevate her above the usual Stormtroopers," Jouyaux said. "You give him specific actions to do... he can slice, he can shoot, he can take down enemies. He has these wide set of abilities coming from the Empire that you're able to use and customize as well."

According to design director Niklas Fegraues, DICE subconsciously adopted a Battlefield approach to designing the multiplayer, introducing a class-based system and vehicular combat. Tanks patrolling the streets and starfighters firing from above create a sense of breadth and depth DICE aimed to deliver in the 2015 shooter. Weapons are locked to certain classes and like Battlefield, a well-balanced team is one that communicates, with roles that support each other.

"The foundational idea with introducing a class system is to focus on team play," he said, "which is another thing we heard from players who played the first game. They wanted more ways to team up, play together and strategize; that's the main reason why it's there. We have a really broad and appealing set of classes that appeal to very different types of play styles and sub-play styles."

These include an assault class, equipped with classic aggressively offensive weapons, such as an assault rifle and frag grenades; a defensive heavy role; the specialist who can snipe from long-range

In an effort to keep the community alive, EA announced that all downloadable content for Battlefront 2 will be free. Finn and Captain Phasma will be the first post-game characters as well as a planet from the upcoming film, *VIII: The Last Jedi*, which will be playable before the movie's release in theatres.



distances and the supporter, which is the officer's class.

"[The supporter] can give everyone bonuses and lay down these turrets that can defend different angles," said Fegraeus. "If you have a big multiplayer sandbox with soldiers and vehicles and so on, of course it's similar to Battlefield, but the important thing for us is to make sure this feels like a Star Wars battle."

One way the team has done that is with the return of hero and special unit perks. Unlike the previous game which used blue collectables found around the map, you can take on the role of heroes from the films or classes separate to the four available

with in-game points unlocked during matches as a reward for completing objectives and assisting your team.

"When you become a hero it's such an awesome moment," Criterion's Matt Webster told Eurogamer, "but [in the first Battlefront,] it was becoming a brief experience for the lucky few, or people were just hunting and hanging around the spawn locations for tokens. So we wanted to expand the hero play within a battle, we wanted to increase that scope but also have a better system for players to be able to become a hero than just picking up a token."

"It was really important for us that with each of these heroes, they

Once again, Porkins fails to pull up because he is too close.

embodied the character of that hero," said McLeod. "When I play as Boba Fett, I want to feel what it would be like to strap on that jet pack, fly around and rain destruction from above. When I think about Darth Maul, he's incredibly acrobatic, spinning and wheeling, great at close combat – really just pushing through hordes of enemies. Rey does mind tricks, so she's very different. Han is your typical smuggler. He's got his crack shot, shoulder charge and bullies his way into the battle."

Like McLeod says, multiplayer encounters prioritise team play. In one match, I saw a group of four trooper soldiers take down Darth Maul quickly and efficiently. Two heavy units laid down cover fire while an officer buffed them from behind and a specialist moved to an advantage point to snipe.

"I saw this amazing thing happen just a little bit earlier," he added, "where Rey performed a mind trick on a whole bunch of enemies and Han dashed past, threw detonate charges and blew them all up. Our heroes aren't all powerful anymore, [either,] they have strengths and weakness. You need to use heroes smartly to really get the most out of them."

DICE aim to create a similar synergy within their heroes as with their trooper types. In many ways, McLeod likens their approach to the three Star Wars eras to how the Rogue One film brought the original trilogy into a more modern time.

"We're bringing all three eras together to create a cohesive experience," he said. "We're taking



Another feature, large-scaled space combat, will be co-developed by Criterion, who worked on the speeder bike missions from the first game. DICE weren't willing to go into any more details at E3 but described them as big battles with high stakes.

the essence and the fantasy of this prequel era and these prequel battles and bringing it into something that's really modern, feels very cohesive as you play through these differing eras."

"From a multiplayer perspective, people want[ed] all the eras... more heroes, more Star Wars characters, more progression and more team play," he continued. "All these things that create that breadth and depth that a DICE sandbox is so well known for."

As shown in the extended cinematic trailer, Star Wars Battlefront 2 boasts locations from all three eras, and feels authentically grounded in the mythos of Lucas Arts films.

"What's really important is that we're trying to tell a story of the location [and] a fantasy," said McLeod. "When we think about what worked really well in the first game, [maps like] Walker, Song and

Hawk worked because [we] finally got to be a part of the battles we'd hoped for."

"When I think about Theed [the map playable at E3] and Naboo, this huge invasion that's the fantasy a lot of people want to live out," he continued, "it's about telling that story. Here [with Theed,] it's about escorting them up to the palace to breach the palace, to then get inside to that second stage, shut down the security, override the system, get into the palace and have that final last stand. That will not be the same fantasy you'll have on Yav or the same fantasy you'll have in Starkiller Bay."

"This is what's going to make this galactic assault signature game mode so unique. It will play differently to each location you go [to] but will be familiar to you as a Star Wars fan."

DICE's interpretation of the co-op Instant Action mode from

the original Battlefront series by Pandemic Studios returns. Skirmish was in the previous game a post-game update available only offline, joining players together against AI, but according to McLeod, will be fully featured from the start of the game.

"Couch co-op has always been there for us," he said. "It's been really important. I love watching Star Wars, either with my wife, my kid or a friend, and the ability to bring them into the game is really powerful. We saw that in the first game and we brought Skirmish and people got really excited."

"When we say, 'we want this to be the essential Star Wars shooter,' we can back that up with a story, with space, with deep multiplayer, with couch co-op and really all those elements that people love," he continued. "No matter how you want to engage with our entertainment and our game, you can do that." ❧

If you think about it, villainy in Star Wars is a bunch of cloned Kiwis following a guy in a bath robe.



Mario + Rabbids Kingdom Battle



*I wonder how Rayman feels about being left out of Kingdom Battle, writes **Andrew Whitehead***

Should anyone have been that surprised Ubisoft would team up with Nintendo to make a Mario and Rabbids game? Perhaps it's only in hindsight that it makes a lot of sense. Ubisoft and Nintendo have had a good working relationship for years, but Nintendo letting someone else use Mario shows a lot of trust. Thankfully, Ubisoft has done a bang up job with Mario + Rabbids Kingdom Battle.

The simple story takes place in the Mushroom Kingdom after a mysterious portal opened up in the sky and flooded the land with Rabbids. Annoying, chaotic Rabbids. And to set things right Mario teams up with four slightly less insane Rabbids who have dressed up like Luigi, Peach, Yoshi, and even Mario himself.

Leading the charge is Beep-o, a Roomba-looking robot who leads Mario and his team around the land, helping them collect coins while exploring the world outside of combat. It's only when you walk into a designated combat zone that the game suddenly shifts to turn-based strategy mode.

RABBIT SEASON

Kingdom Battle plays like a cutesy version of XCOM in combat, with cover-based mechanics, chained attacks, and an overwatch ability to fire upon enemies who cross your path. Some of these skills depend on your loadout, which can be customised between battles.

During my play session I teamed up with Rabbid Luigi and Rabbid Peach, then set off to rid the land of... other Rabbids. In the final battle of my session, my sole aim was to

get at least one of my teammates to the end zone. But to do it, we had to fight a couple of 'roided up Rabbids, and avoid the Chain-Chomp hanging out in the middle of the map.

One strategy I put into play was chaining movement, attack, and defence with my Rabbids. In order to get to a distant enemy I moved Rabbid Luigi over to Rabbid Peach, who then launched Luigi into the air, and over to a warp pipe. Once on the other side of the pipe, I directed Luigi to run and attack his target, then dash back into cover and hide. In one move I chained together a huge combo, but I also had to be wary of the same trick being used against me now.

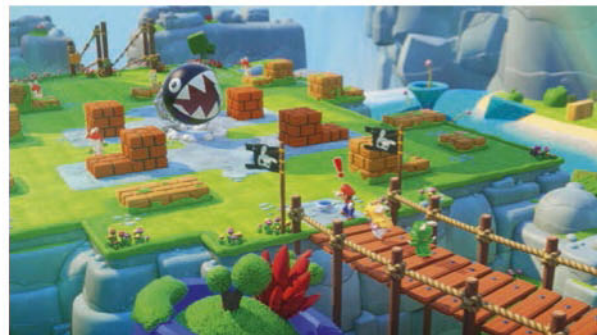
I also realised that I'd messed up and left Mario exposed to Chain-Chomp after placing him in the wrong spot on the map. Thankfully, Chain-Chomp is a third-party in the fight and doesn't care who it attacks. It just bites whoever is closest, and luckily it wasn't anyone on my team. The battle raged on, Chain-Chomp inadvertently helped out, and we completed our objective.

CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

What I played of Mario + Rabbids Kingdom Battle really impressed me. It looks stunning in a way that's usually reserved for first-party Nintendo games, and despite the inclusion of arm cannons and deep combat mechanics, it's still got that nice veneer of cartoonish Nintendo fun.

My only hope is that Ubisoft are serious about making the game challenging. It's a great looking and playing game, but I don't want it to be over all too soon. ☹️

DEVELOPER	Ubisoft
PUBLISHER	Ubisoft Paris, Ubisoft Milan
PLATFORM	Nintendo Switch
RELEASE DATE	August 29, 2017



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Marvel vs. Capcom Infinite

Another fighting game wants to emphasise its story. Heidi Kemp tags herself into the bout.



It seemed unlikely that another Marvel vs. Capcom game would ever happen. With Disney having bought up the fabled comics publisher, numerous cans of worms had been opened that looked like they would prevent another grand-scale crossover between the two entertainment companies from ever happening again. But against all odds, Marvel vs. Capcom Infinite exists. But if you're expecting another minor upgrade to the Marvel vs. Capcom 3 formula, you're in for quite a surprise: Marvel vs. Capcom Infinite is once again shaking up the foundations of tag-team fighting action.

Perhaps as a response to criticism of Street Fighter V's initial lack of single-player content – and a response to the elaborate story mode of the Injustice games – Capcom took great pains to highlight MvCI's story mode at E3, making an elaborate trailer showing

characters from both universes interacting with each other as Ultron Sigma rises to power.

A demo was also released on PSN to showcase a sampling of the game's story mode at the same time, which you may have already played. It's clear that the story mode will be a big part of the game.

However, the demo that took front and centre stage at E3 was quite different, showcasing the competitive versus play that will keep players coming back long after story mode is over and done. Here we got a proper sampling of the game's updated roster: adding Zero, Dante, Arthur, and Spencer





DEVELOPER	Fighting
PUBLISHER	Capcom
PLATFORM	PC, PS4, Xbox One
RELEASE DATE	September 2017



Fights are two-on-two this time, instead of three-on-three.

on the Capcom side and Rocket Raccoon, Doctor Strange, Thanos, and Nova on the Marvel end. (Black Panther was also shown, and confirmed to be an upcoming DLC character.)

In terms of gameplay, things have changed a fair bit from the frenetic three-on-three fighting that made *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* such a spectacle. The teams are now two-character, and controls have been simplified to increase accessibility: four attack buttons: two punches (light and heavy) and two kicks (also light and heavy). By tapping light punch repeatedly, beginning players can access an auto-combo to help them get a feel for the game's attack flow. Pressing heavy punch and heavy kick together executes a Hyper Combo move, while regular special moves are executed with either simple quarter-circle forward and back motions or by double-tapping

down. A quick tap of the shoulder buttons summons in your tag partner, even in the middle of an attack string.

Of course, accessibility doesn't necessarily equal simplicity, and Capcom's working on putting a meaty fighting game behind these easy inputs. For example, a "counter switch" system allows you to hold down the character swap button while being hit or blocking to call in your teammate to take the attacks instead at the cost of hyper gauge meter. Infinity Stones, which are selected before battle, grant characters special powers, either as reusable special moves or super-powered "Infinity Storms" unique to each stone. It all makes for a distinctly fresh-feeling clash of universes. Fortunately, with a September release date, we won't have to wait too much longer to take our heroes to battle. ☞

Strange Brigade

Like an ancient Egyptian delivery man, **Andrew Whitehead** wants to know if your mummy is home

Borrowing heavily from the 1930s adventure serials, *Strange Brigade* is a four-player cooperative shooter that is best described as *Left 4 Dead* meets *The Mummy*. And I mean the light-hearted Brendan Fraser version, not that Tom Cruise rubbish. The game puts you in control of a member of a secret team of adventurers who work for the British government, investigating paranormal activity around the world.

Its tongue-in-cheek nature shines through in nearly every aspect, but is perhaps best showcased by the terribly English narrator who calls the action in real-time, though often with a twinge of hyperbole and some very distinct British-isms. "It's challenging to capture something that will [work] not just in the United Kingdom, but in other parts of the world too," said Zoltan Fejes, Lead Producer of *Strange Brigade*. "But we're fortunate to have a great writers on board."

THE GOOD OLD BOYS (AND GALS)

Players can choose from one of four characters, each with their own special abilities. I chose Professor Archimedes De Quincy, an Oxford

scholar and rifleman. Also in the *Brigade* is a marksman named Frank Fairburne, a Maasai warrior called Natangu Rushia, and a northerner named Gracie Braithwaite.

"My favourite character is Gracie, the engineer girl," said Fejes, "I like her special the most, it's like a game within a game. Her special is she can pull an enemy in towards her and then direct them where you want to punch them. So if you're skilled enough, you can take out enemies in the air, or direct them into a group and create a bowling ball like effect."

Fejes said that you'll have to use each character to uncover all the hidden areas and access different routes. If you're playing as just one character, you won't see everything. He also hinted at the desire to add new characters down the line, but wants to focus on getting the game done first.

RIGHTO, FORM UP

My time with *Strange Brigade* was spent entirely by myself, and I had a blast, but as mentioned before, the game can be played with up to four players. There's no split-screen, but you can play online, or even link

consoles together and play over a LAN, if you can manage that sort of setup.

In order to keep the action moving, the penalty for death is merely waiting a few seconds to respawn in a nearby unearthed coffin, and the loss of some gold coins used for upgrades. Fejes said the team is still working out exactly how to penalise death in a way that feels impactful but not too harsh.

Speaking of death, each map comes riddled with deadly traps for you to lure enemies into, or become a victim of yourself. I can't tell you how satisfying it was watching a horde of undead bastards meet their doom in a giant spinning blade trap.

When my session was over I can honestly say I wanted to play more. I went into *Strange Brigade* knowing basically nothing about it, and walked out ready to prepare myself for some late nights when it releases. "

“
EACH MAP
COMES RIDDLED
WITH DEADLY
TRAPS FOR YOU TO
LURE ENEMIES
INTO

DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

Rebellion
Rebellion
PC, Xbox One, PlayStation 4
TBA



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KIRYU CANNOT EVADE
THE LONG ARM OF
THE LAW FOREVER**



DEVELOPER	Sega
PUBLISHER	Sega
PLATFORM	PS4
RELEASE DATE	Early 2018

Yakuza 6: The Song Of Life

Heidi Kempf thought she was done with the thug life



Kiryu Kazuma just can't seem to escape getting embroiled in the Japanese criminal underworld, no matter how hard he tries. When we last met Kiryu, he was attempting to leave the Yakuza behind and work as a cab driver in Fukuoka, only for his past to catch up with him once again. Alas, even a badass like Kiryu cannot evade the long arm of the law forever, and he was once again imprisoned for three years. But as Kiryu once again re-enters society, he's immediately given a shock: his foster daughter, Haruka, was involved in a serious car accident and is now comatose.

After three years in prison, Kiryu Kazuma's pimp hand is still strong

Even more of a surprise, however, is what she was doing when the accident happened: protecting a baby named Haruto. Questions abound as Kiryu digs deeper: was this truly an accident? Who is this child's father? And why does every criminal low-life in Kamurocho seem to want to abduct the kid? Kiryu's got to find the answers before more awful things happen to the ones he holds dear.

Earlier this year, *Yakuza 0* took us back to 1980s Japan, but *Yakuza 6* returns to the modern Kamurocho we've come to know and love, which looks better than ever thanks to the power of the PS4 hardware. You'll come to appreciate the sights and sounds of this fantasy slice of Tokyo more than ever before, with little details like neon signs, dilapidated back streets, and dimly-lit back alleys making you feel like you've just hopped on a jet to a somewhat-seedy part of a big Japanese city. It's here where you'll advance the story and beat down clueless street thugs looking to prove themselves. But *Yakuza's* not all about high crime drama: you'll be able to take on a sidequests, meet other curious personalities around the area, and enjoy plenty

of minigames – including playing a fully-functional version of *Virtua Fighter 5 Final Showdown* and managing a cat café.

The combat, too, is wilder than ever: you have more freedom than ever when it comes to beating the piss out of punks, and can even take your fights from the streets into stores and other open buildings, resulting in some awesomely amazing beatdowns and property damage. Kamurocho isn't the only haunt where Kiryu will be causing havoc, either: new to the series is a location based out of Hiroshima. Other recent installments in the *Yakuza* series have had locales based on districts in large Japanese cities like Osaka, Nagoya, and Fukuoka, so the relatively quiet harbor city of Hiroshima is quite a change of pace, feeling distinctly different from any other location we've yet seen in the franchise. Of course, that doesn't mean that you won't be kicking lowlife ass while you're there – this is a *Yakuza* game, after all.

We'll be able to solve the mysteries of *Yakuza 6* early next year – until then, why not whet your appetite for an asskicking with the *Yakuza Kiwami* remake? **U**



DEVELOPER	Rare
PUBLISHER	Microsoft
PLATFORM	PC, Xbox One
RELEASE DATE	2018



PREVIEW

Sea of Thieves

Live the pirate life you always dreamed of, but with less syphilis, writes **Andrew Whitehead**

Rare made quite an impression when they announced *Sea of Thieves*, mostly because of how willing they were to show raw, unscripted footage of gamers enjoying it. Now, after nearly a year of radio silence, they're back and ready once more to show us why we'll all want to live the life of a scurvy riddled sea-dog.

I was lucky enough to have three other people to play with during my time with the game, and we soon found out that we had to work together to do just about anything. Including getting our ship moving. One of us raised the anchor, another to adjust the sails, a third person got ready to steer, and I headed below deck to compare our treasure map to the world map. We settled on a distant island and took off into the unknown.

There's no waypoint markers, no fast travel, and no mini-maps in *Sea of Thieves*. You want to get to that island? You'll have to find it the old fashion way, and do all the work to get there. You know, like a pirate.

DON'T CURSE AT ME

"Players are going to become the

Black Beard of their world," said Mike Chapman, design director on *Sea of Thieves*. "You'll be able to play the way you want to play, and do these directed voyages in a play style that appeals to you, and earn a reputation in that area. The bigger your reputation, the bigger voyages you'll be able to go on, the better unlocks you're going to get, better cosmetic items, better weapons."

Eventually, my crew and I made it to the island. Once there we dropped anchor, jumped ship, and went looking for treasure. After a brief battle with the local skeletons, we discovered a cursed treasure chest that seemed to be crying, and once on our ship its tears would very slowly fill up our hull. I started to bail out the water while the rest of the crew began loading the cannons after spotting a ship on the horizon. It was filled with players, and they might want our sobbing box of gold.

Everybody is going to die in *Sea of Thieves* at some point, and when pirates meet their doom in this world, they'll be taking a short vacation aboard the roaming ghost ship. Chapman explained



that players on the ghost ship can't hurt each other, and they're hoping players will bond over death, maybe team up when they're brought back to life.

EVERYBODY PLAY NICE

As much as I enjoyed my time with *Sea of Thieves*, it did leave me wondering two things - how varied will the quests be, and will it attract the 'right' kind of players? Treasure hunting quests are fine, but we don't want another repetitive *No Man's Sky* situation on our hands. Nor do we want a game wholly dependent on the kindness of strangers. But hey, it's not like the open world pirate simulator is exactly an overstuffed genre, so for now I'll remain cautiously optimistic about *Sea of Thieves*. ☞

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PREVIEW

Mario And Luigi: Superstar Saga + Bowser's Minions

This remake is more than just a fresh lick of Mario Paint, writes Heidi Kempf.

It's hard to remember a time when Mario didn't appear in RPGs regularly, but back in 2003, the original Mario and Luigi for Gameboy Advance was a big deal. Joined by his taller, lankier (and some would argue infinitely cooler) younger brother, Mario went on a big adventure to the Beanbean Kingdom. There, a nefarious plot was hatched by the wicked witch Cackletta and her lovable henchman Fawful to conquer both the Beanbean and Mushroom Kingdoms, and the famous Brothers Mario had to put a stop to their ambitions.

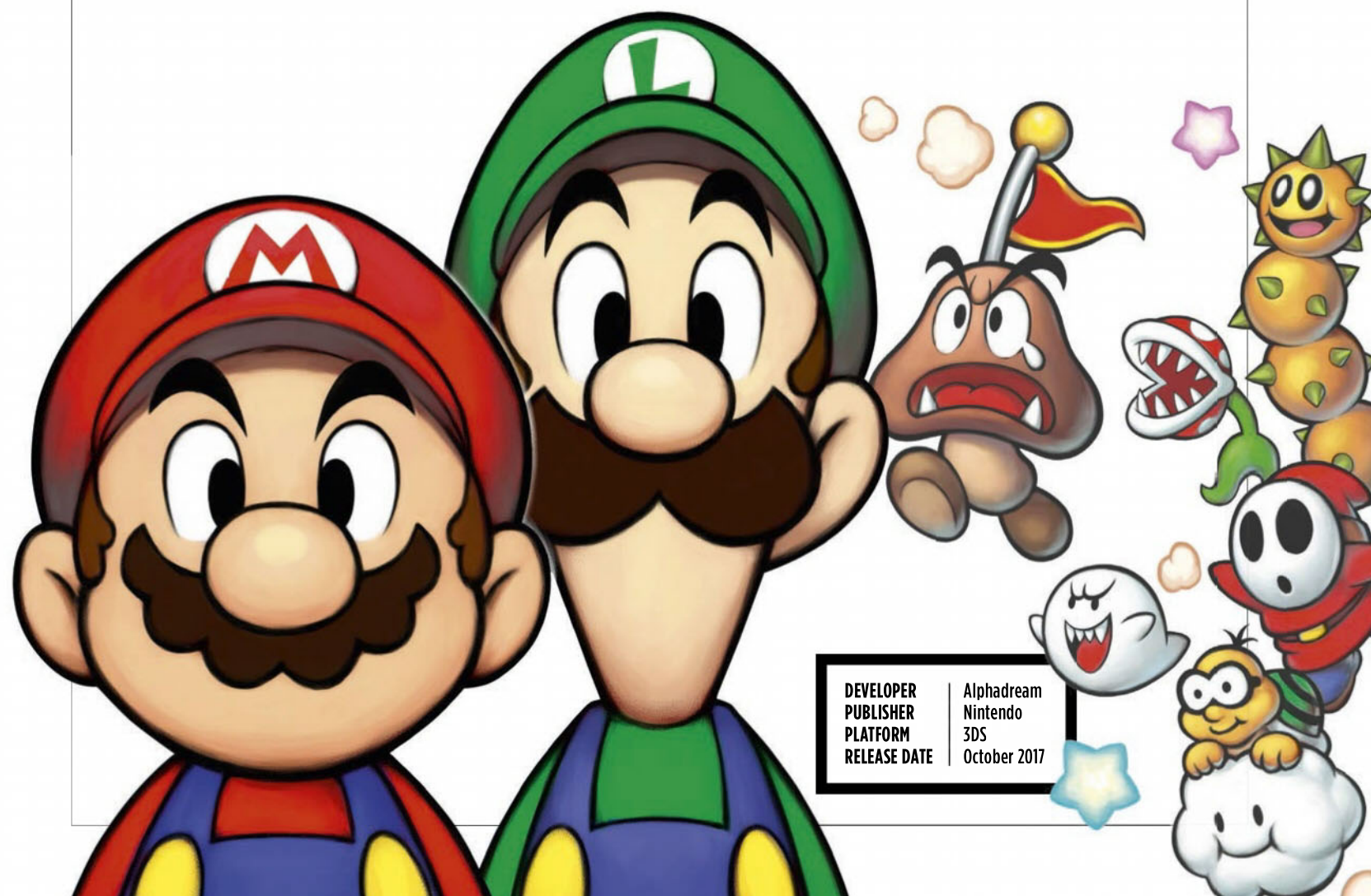
Ever since the series debuted on the GBA, the Mario and Luigi games have come to be recognised for having some amazing 2D art. While the original GBA Superstar Saga still looks fantastic, comparing it to this remake is like night and day: environments have more colour and details, animations have been completely redrawn, and the expanded screen space and resolution of the 3DS makes the whimsy of the game's world really pop out.

Gameplay improvements abound as well, taking into account the way the series' dual-character turn-based/action hybrid combat and navigation has evolved over the past decade and a half. The second screen on the 3DS displays Mario and Luigi's vitals and detailed information during the middle of battle, as well as providing new assistance options. Outside of combat, the second screen can be utilised to easily switch

between the various techniques the brothers must use to navigate the game's assorted puzzles and obstacles. The emergency guard, which allows Mario and Luigi to reduce damage received from foes in battle, makes a return from Paper Jam Bros – a useful skill for enemies whose attack patterns are tough to dodge. And if you know the game's cutscenes by heart – or if you just want to get to Fawful's delightful dialogue a bit faster – you can hold the R button to speed past text more quickly.

While the meat of this remake is obviously Superstar Saga, Minion Quest: The Search for Bowser is also part of the package. Taking place parallel to Superstar Saga, this side story involves Bowser's army searching for their missing leader. Captain Goomba leads a motley crew of assorted Mario enemies against the enemy forces of Beanbean. Battles in this mode play out with you deciding what forces to deploy in an ongoing series of automated army-on-army skirmishes. By sending out the right troops and giving out commands when necessary, Captain Goomba and his squad can rout the enemies, assimilate their forces, and come closer to locating the whereabouts of the Koopa king.

With this, Metroid: Samus Returns, and other titles like Etrian Odyssey V in the wings, it's clear that Nintendo intends to keep the 3DS going strong. Look for the new and improved Superstar Saga to hit this October. ☐



DEVELOPER	Alphadream
PUBLISHER	Nintendo
PLATFORM	3DS
RELEASE DATE	October 2017

“
**THEY AIM TO
DELIVER FULL 4K
HD LOCKED AT 60
FRAMES PER SECOND
ON PC AND XBOX
ONE X**”

Forza Motorsport 7

Julian Rizzo-Smith was on hand to witness the power of the Xbox One X

Forza Motorsport 7 features a sleek visual style and authentic attention to detail. It was unveiled at Microsoft's conference to showcase the power of the company's new 4K Xbox One X model.

“Forza Motorsport 7 was built from the ground up for PC and the Xbox One X,” creative director Dan Greenawalt told Motorworld Hype. “Those things kind of converge. The Xbox One X is like an incredibly high end gaming PC but is well optimised for console.”

Designing for the PC and Xbox One X has allowed the team to introduce a 24 hour dynamic weather system, day and night cycle and incredibly detailed environments in the 30 tracks available at launch. According to creative director Bill Geise in a presentation, they aim to deliver full 4K HD locked at 60 frames per second on the two platforms.

“With Forza Motorsport 7, we want to blow out what it means to be a campaign mode,” said Geise. “We're letting players tailor and progress how they see fit.”

Forza's new career mode, called Forza's Driver's Cup, features six major championships that span different series and cover over 700 cars.

“What's great about that is you get the authenticity of series point scoring,” said Geise. “We're giving players things they wanted like race-length pools, trophies and new driver gear.”

“The amount of diversity that we have in our divisions is incredible

so we allow you to find your own path,” added Greenawalt. “We didn't want to make this into a linear progression, we wanted to open it up and allow you to go where you want to go.”

Given its being marketed as an example of the power of Xbox One X, especially in Microsoft press conference, developer Turn 10 were mindful to design the game for players of all Xbox One consoles.

“You can buy the game and play it on PC, Xbox One, Xbox One S or Xbox One X,” said Greenawalt. “The game also supports crossplay to unify that community. Our focus is on building the biggest community we can.”

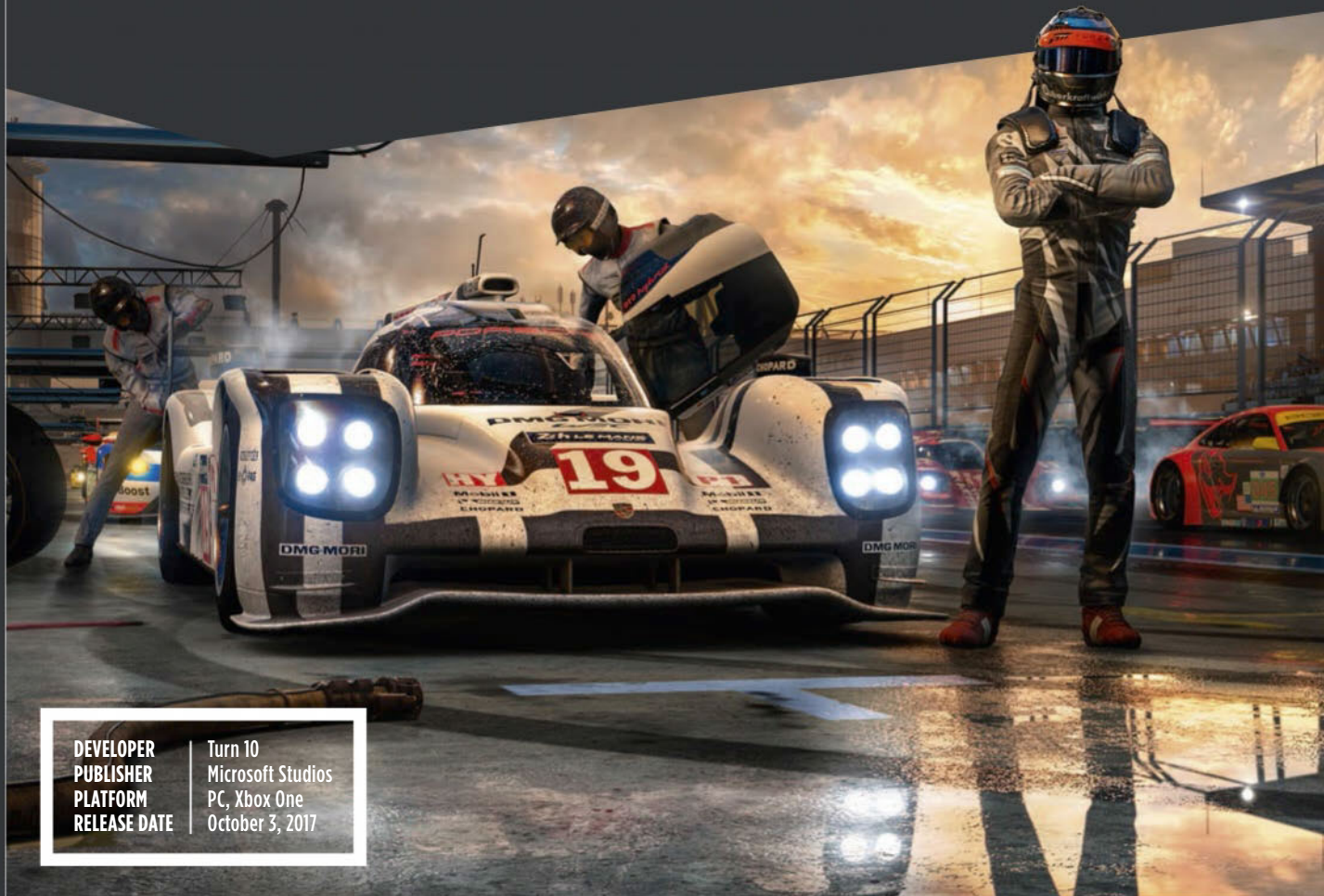
Your driver plays a greater role in Forza 7, too. You can customise their appearance, see them prepare for the race and get in the car and also feature in multiplayer lobbies.

“I think [the characters] might be the coolest opportunity for us to really kind of depart from Forzas in the past,” said UI artist Scott Lee. “I think it's really kind of a nod to where we want to go with the franchise. The car becomes a lot more personal, it's, 'oh it belongs to somebody, it's something.'”

There's a new league system to multiplayer matches, too, emphasising the new six series championships in Forza's Driver Cup.

“Our multiplayer is actually done over the course of a few weeks,” Geise said, “and we worked with our community to make them better.”

“We've really designed Forza Motorsports 7 to be the best Forza experience.”



DEVELOPER	Turn 10
PUBLISHER	Microsoft Studios
PLATFORM	PC, Xbox One
RELEASE DATE	October 3, 2017

PREVIEW

Super Mario Odyssey

*Renew your passport and check the exchange rate, we're going on an Odyssey, writes **Andrew Whitehead***





DEVELOPER | Nintendo EPD
PUBLISHER | Nintendo
PLATFORM | Nintendo Switch
RELEASE DATE | October 27, 2017



"Thanks for the ride!" said Mario, winking at caption writers everywhere.

Ever since I put down the Joy-Cons and walked away from Super Mario Odyssey, I've been thinking about all the things I could have done differently. This is a game bursting with secrets and begging for players to try out their off the wall ideas to see if they work.

You can thank Cappy for that feeling. That's the sentient hat worn by Mario that lets him possess different people, enemies, and objects in the world. For example, at one point in an area called the Desert Kingdom, I needed to clear a large gap between two stone towers so I threw Cappy onto a passing Bullet Bill, took over its body, and flew my way to safety.

Another time I had to get to the top of a building, so I used Cappy to possess a power pole and turn Mario into a bolt of electricity capable of traveling along the lines. In my time playing I found over a dozen different ways to use Cappy, so I can't even imagine how many things you'll be able to take over in the final game.

THE SURREAL WORLD

Something else that impressed me about Odyssey is how it manages to merge hints of realism with the cartoon-ish aesthetics of the Mario universe. In trailers and screenshots Mario looks a bit out of place in his own game, but when playing it all comes together brilliantly. Take the region called the Metro Kingdom, which features Nintendo's take on New York City, dubbed New Donk City.

Big yellow taxis drive down the city streets where towering brick buildings are densely packed together like the streets Manhattan.

It looks amazing, yet all of this realism is made surreal when you notice how the city seems to be an island in the sky, inhabited by well-dressed ghost-like people that are seemingly oblivious to their own bizarre situation. Then comes Mario, who looks like a one-metre tall cartoon character that fell out of a television screen and started roaming the streets.

It may sound like a mishmash of art styles, but it all works together beautifully. It's got that level of detail Nintendo reserve for their big games, like Mario Kart or Smash Bros., which makes you question how they managed to make their little console do so much with so little.

MARIO IS GETTING PAID

As you may have guessed by the title, Super Mario Odyssey is about Mario's journey through various kingdoms. And while he doesn't seem to need a passport, he does need local currency. You can combine local money with regular gold coins (which are still found everywhere), and use them to buy cosmetic upgrades from Crazy Cap stores.

You know, there's still so much I want to say about the game despite my limited time playing it, so I'll wrap this up by saying this is the most excited I've been for a Mario game since Super Mario Sunshine on the GameCube. Super Mario Odyssey is shaping up to be a must-have game for Switch, and potentially a reason to buy the console if you haven't already. **4**

PREVIEW

Ni no Kuni 2

*Ni no Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom is a charming reimagining of the world of Studio Ghibli. **Julian Rizzo-Smith***



DEVELOPER	Level-5
PUBLISHER	Bandai Namco Entertainment
PLATFORM	PlayStation 4, PC
RELEASE DATE	November 10, 2017



Gather the green critters toward you for a defence boost.



Revenant Kingdom tells a story of coming of age, adventure and fantasy through the eyes of a young boy. Evan is the young cat prince of the once peaceful kingdom of cats and mice, Ding Dong Dell. After the death of his father and a coup overthrowing him as rightful heir, Evan is banished and sets out to unify the whole of Ni No Kuni.

"In the first game, we witnessed the child leave his mother and grow," director Akihiro Hino told Polygon. "In the second, there is a similar transition, a coming of age. Our protagonist starts as a young adult who has no leadership skills or experience in a position of a leader. He must learn. There are a lot of trials, questioning, prodding and poking at his qualities of leadership."

Evan's journey will have him meet characters and locations each inspired by different eras of Studio Ghibli. A mysterious well-dressed man from the real world, the adopted daughter of a sky pirate, a treacherous rat aristocrat and a casino called Goldpaw run by a dog

named Pugnacious.

"In the first game, Drippy played a big role of being the comedic relief, a sidekick who was always there to bounce jokes off," said Hino. "There are similar characters in No No Kuni 2 [and] a lot of opportunities for jokes."

"What really gives these characters the source of their humour is their strength as characters," he continued. "The more you can pack and condense into the uniqueness of these characters, the more you have to work with, regardless of what culture it's being localised into."

The team has made a lot of changes to combat, too. As a response to fan criticisms, Level 5 has replaced the original's turn-based combat and Pokemon-like creature training familiar mechanic with an action role-playing style.

"The biggest change in the fighting system is the transition from inputting a command and watching it play out to a system in which all the commands are executed in real-time," said Hino.

In Revenant Kingdom, you can draw upon elemental spirits called higgledies to cast magic. Drawing on a cluster of red higgledies gives you a temporary resistance to fire damage and green coloured critters can boost your defence.

"This opens up possibilities," Hino said. "This is something much closer to real-time action."

The world of Ni No Kuni 2 is grounded in the Ghibli universe, but according to Hino, the fact it's connected to a real world is what differentiates it from other fantasy stories.

"Somewhere in the back of everyone's mind they can project a fantasy which they can compare and contrast to their own reality," he said. "People like to think about these worlds where there are a whole different set of rules."

With an engaging combat system, lovable characters and news of an online multiplayer mode, Level-5 aims to creating an experience mirroring Ghibli's films and the first game, "leav[ing] a very strong impression." ❧

Project Cars 2

*If only **Andrew Whitehead** bought more bitcoins back in the day, he'd have his own Ferrari by now*

In the same way titles like *Guilty Gear* are designed to appeal to fighting game purists, so too is *Project Cars 2* squarely aimed at hardcore digital petrol heads. Designed to replicate what driving actually feels like, not just how we think it should be, *Slightly Mad Studios* are back with another challenging racing simulator that doesn't hold your hand.

Featuring over 200 licensed cars, *Project Cars 2* also has support for VR (Oculus on PC and PlayStation VR being "worked on"), 21:9 aspect ratio, 12K resolution, and triple monitor displays. Obviously most of those features are for PC gamers only - I mean consoles only just started doing the 4K thing - but it gives you an idea of how serious the developers are about making the best racing game on the market.

KEEPIN' IT REAL

Doubling down on the realism, *Project Cars 2* features dynamic weather that not only changes how the cars handle, it also affects certain areas of the course. If the

afternoon rains hit hard enough, you can expect to find a few puddles on parts of the track that could cause you to lose control.

One area the developers have simplified is the menus and overall presentation of the game. The depth of car customisation remains, of course, but new players won't feel quite as overwhelmed this time thanks to the cleaner interface.

Regardless of your skill level, there's plenty to see and do here with over 50 unique locations and more than 200 courses. There's a bunch of different modes too, with eight different racing disciplines through all kinds of terrain - track, dirt, snow, you name it. During my play session I jumped from a quick race around a closed track in a Ferrari to drifting in the dirt in a rally car. All bases are covered here.

DRIVE LIKE YOU MEAN IT

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of *Project Cars 2* is how realistic the AI is, and how reactive it is to your driving - good or bad. I still consider *Gran Turismo* the gold

standard for this type of racing simulator, but in past entries the cars weren't always the most dynamic of foes. In *Project Cars 2*, I saw my fair share of spin-outs and overly aggressive competitors, jostling for position like real race drivers would.

Still, I don't want to prop up *Project CARS 2* by simply tearing down other racing games. In truth, I think I'll always be a *Gran Turismo* fan, thanks largely to its balance of realism and video gamey-ness. And the recent *Forza Horizon 3*, which featured in a condensed version of Australia's east coast, was just what I needed after moving to Los Angeles and feeling sort of homesick.

But I also know that this is a game designed for a very specific audience of car nerds, and while I may not fit that profile I can respect *Project CARS 2* for filling that niche. Like the last game, it's not going to be for everyone, but at least the developers are making exactly the kind of game they want to make without compromise. «



DEVELOPER	Slightly Mad Studios
PUBLISHER	Bandai Namco
PLATFORM	PC, Xbox One, PlayStation 4
RELEASE DATE	September 22, 2017



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DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM

Inti Creates
505 Games
PS4, PC, Xbone,
Vita, Switch

RELEASE DATE

TBA

Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night

Luckily, **Heidi Kempf** remembered to pack her bloodproof parasol.

Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night has some serious expectations to live up to. Not just because it's the brainchild of Koji Igarashi (known to his fans as "IGA"), the brain behind many of Konami's later Castlevania titles, but because it was one of the most high-profile gaming Kickstarters of recent memory. With other big gaming Kickstarters like *Mighty No. 9* and *Yooka-Laylee* leaving fans cold, there's understandably a bit of trepidation about how *Bloodstained* will turn out. Well, good news: it's coming along, it plays great, and it feels like an IGA *Castlevania* game through and through.

Young Miriam is an average girl living in 18th century England. Well, normal except for the alchemist's curse she's been stuck with that's trapped a bunch of magical crystals inside her body. After being asleep for a decade, she wakes up to find that the alchemists who did this to her also had a little demon-summoning experiment that went horribly awry, and now there's a castle filled with unholy horrors. Time to kill some demons, collect a bunch of ability-granting items, and explore every nook and cranny of the castle to fill out that map.

When you first pick up *Bloodstained*, you'll notice just how fluidly Miriam controls. Though the game is rendered in 2.5D rather than 2D sprites, Miriam's movements and animations are speedy, without any of the "lag" that can affect the feel of polygon-rendered characters in a 2D sidescrolling world. As Miriam jumps, runs, and kicks through the castle, she'll pick up various equipment along the way, allowing her to equip and use a vast array of weapons: swords, knives, axes, and yes – whips.

The abilities Miriam collects, however, affect her play in considerably dramatic ways. Occasionally after defeating foes, they'll drop some manner of crystallised ability, which Miriam will then absorb by dramatically impaling herself with it. (It's quite a shock the first time, but you get used to it, weird as that sounds.) Abilities granted include magic attacks (several of which can be

aimed using the right analog stick), summoning familiars like demonic monkeys and skeletal hounds, and movement skills to help you access previously-inaccessible areas. Many of these skills consume Miriam's MP when used, so keeping tabs on when and how to use them best is crucial, especially during boss fights.

Speaking of boss fights, we got to play a boss encounter during our demo, and it's here that the game really earned its name. A sultry, demonic-looking woman, clad in a red dress, emerged from a bathtub full of dark liquid and began

attacking us with a series of parasols that sprayed toxic blood with each swipe. As her HP depleted, she began covering the walls of the room with the liquid, leaving us to scramble under her aerial projectiles to shield ourselves from a rain of acid blood. It was a pretty intense fight, to say the least.

Bloodstained is still a ways off – the release date is slated for a nebulous "sometime in 2018." But if that's how long it takes to make a worthy successor to games like *Symphony of the Night* and *Aria of Sorrow*, it'll be worth it. **U**

Bloodstained is as close to another *Castlevania* game as we'll ever get.



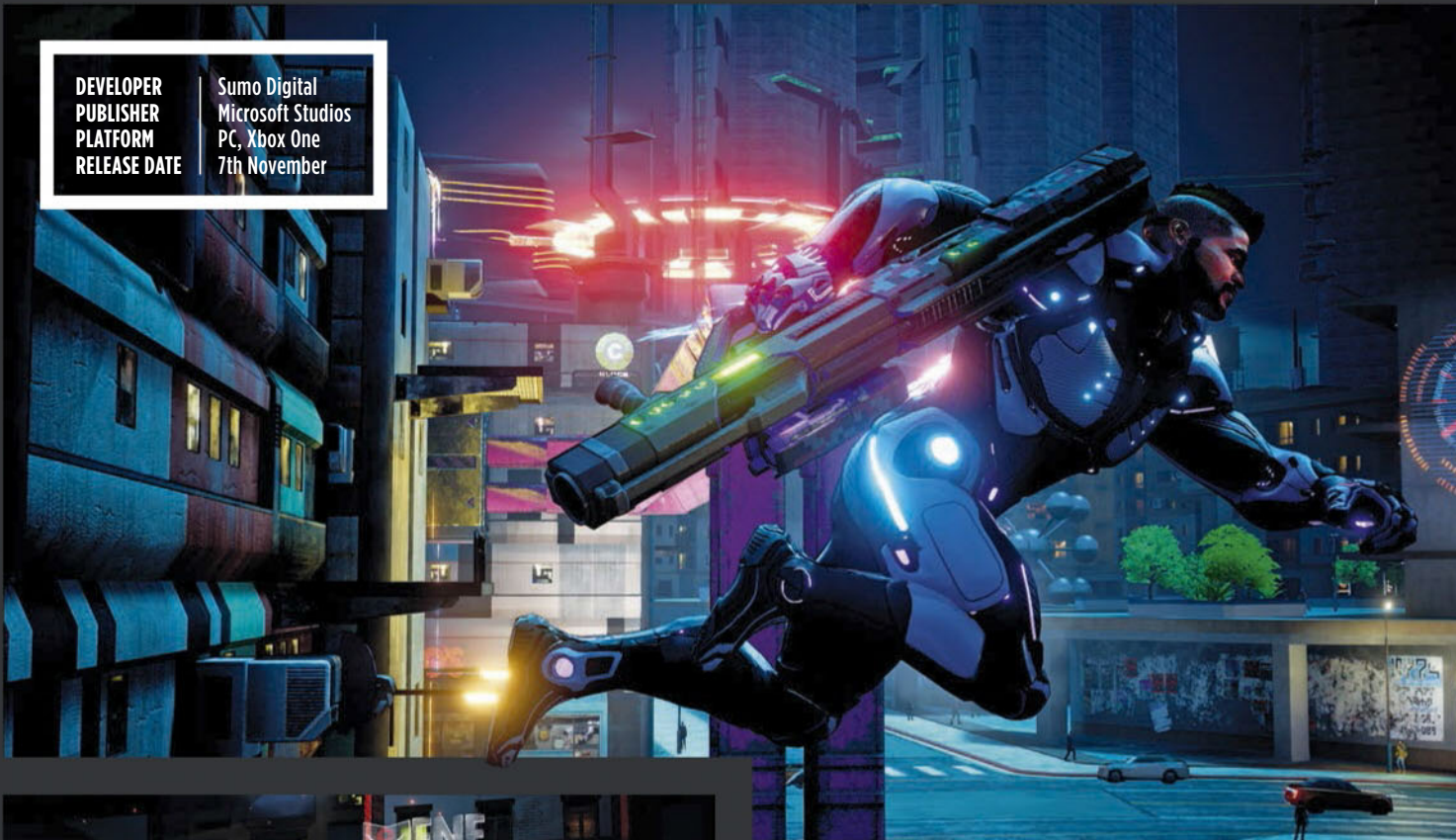


PREVIEW

Crackdown 3

*Orb Hunting Simulator 2017 is back,
writes **Julian Rizzo-Smith***

DEVELOPER Sumo Digital
 PUBLISHER Microsoft Studios
 PLATFORM PC, Xbox One
 RELEASE DATE 7th November



Good agents never miss Squat Day.

IF YOU HAVE THREE CO-OP BUDDIES AT LEVEL FIVE THEN YOU COULD TOTALLY GO STRAIGHT FOR THE KINGPIN

Crackdown 3 is an explosive sandbox with few restrictions. The game boasts an open world with no invisible walls, extreme draw distance powered by the Xbox One X, and the true freedom to take on any mission at the start of the game.

"It's really a reimagining," said design director Gareth Wilson. "It doesn't follow directly from Crackdown 2."

You play as the last surviving agent sent on a mission to uncover a massive global attack on the seats of power, tracing the attacker's signal back to an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean called New Providence.

"It's been run by a corporation that's a mask for a global criminal network," Wilson said. "You have to establish contact with the agency, who thinks everyone is dead, through the intel towers. From there, you

meet up with the local resistance on the island, and have to find all of the bosses in the area, work out who they are, what areas they're responsible for, and go take them out one by one."

These bosses are organised by a gang system: a kingpin in an ivory tower commands a small number of lieutenants and their subordinate captains. You venture out to each captains' and lieutenants' territories, vandalise their area and take them down to help reclaim the city.

"If you want to go and take out the kingpin right at the start of the game, you'll probably get your ass handed to you," said Wilson. "If you have three co-op buddies at level five then you could totally start the game and go straight for the kingpin."

Combat incorporates an explosive range of weapons, including a singularity gun and plasma assault rifle. Each of these abilities evolve the more you use them and by finding similarly coloured orbs around the map.

"The skills in the game are the same [as what] was in the original title, but they've all been augmented and upgraded," Wilson said. "You've got agility, which makes you jump

higher; strength, which is the ground-pound, that allows you to whack people across buildings and knock them in the air; firearms and explosives which all level up as you level up, [giving you] bigger explosions and more firearms; [as well as] driving."

Another abstract feature in Crackdown 3 is the star of Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Terry Crews, who plays an integral role to the game's narrative.

"The guy is a living agent," said Wilson. "Originally we were only going to use him as part of the narrative, but he came back to us and was like, 'could you make me a playable guy,' and we were like, 'we can totally do that.'"

Terry Crews isn't the only thing that sets Crackdown 3 apart from its predecessor, it's also one of the first game's designed with the Xbox One X in mind.

"It's not like the gameplay changes or you have fifteen different special moves with the One X Version," said Wilson, "but what you do have is 4K and the levels of detail and draw distance. You can stand on top of a tower that's two and a half miles up in the air and look down, and see it going off into the distance." ❄️



DEVELOPER Warhorse Studios
PUBLISHER Warhorse Studios, Deep Silver
PLATFORM PC, Xbox One, PlayStation 4
RELEASE DATE February 13, 2018

PREVIEW

Kingdom Come: Deliverance

Kingdom Come: Deliverance wants you to not just experience history, it wants you to feel it too. Set in medieval Bohemia (which is now the modern day Czech Republic), Deliverance tells the tale of Henry, son of a blacksmith, whose world is turned upside down when the King of Hungary burns down his village. Now on his own, Henry joins the resistance led by Lord Radzig Kobya, and pledges his life to freeing Bohemia.

This may all sound a bit dramatic, but Warhorse is not just drawing inspiration from history, they're trying to retell it as accurately as possible. The king, the resistance, the war for Bohemia - all of it happened. And if you want to know more there's

As it turns out taking an arrow to the knee is kinda funny, writes Andrew Whitehead

pages and pages of documents in the game for you to read through.

HISTORY IS COOL, GOT IT

This love of historical accuracy permeates throughout all parts of the game, including combat. During one section of my play session, I found myself deep in the woods with a group of resistance fighters facing off against a general and his small army. It took me about four or five attempts before I even felt like I was making any progress.

Take heavy armour for instance - it behaves like real heavy armour. It blocks your vision considerably, it makes you tired quicker, and if you couple it with a long sword you better be ready to deal with the long wind up to swing your sword. Eventually I found the right balance - I wore leather armour and hung back with the bow at first, then charged in and helped my men finish off the stragglers. Combat is a balancing act, and relying on your allies isn't just a fun tactic - it's the only way you'll survive.

BEGIN LAUGHING TIME

As serious as Deliverance is, it still has those weird open-world moments that deliver a few laughs. When trying out the story side of the game I was tasked with getting the

town dickhead to pay an overdue bill. Naturally, he didn't take kindly to being called out for being tight with his money, and we got into a fist fight. Fortunately, I won, and I was able to take anything of value from his home that I wanted. But it wasn't an all or nothing mission, and like Skyrim or The Witcher, the script would adapt to my choices. There's one ending, but how you get there is up to you.

When I wasn't beating or stabbing people, I did take some time to enjoy the landscape and appreciate how much effort has gone into making the world feel alive. Comparing what I saw in the game with real life photos, it's incredible how well Warhorse has recreated the land of Bohemia. By using photographs, on location scouting, and historical records, they've clearly spared no expense making an incredibly accurate depiction of medieval Bohemia.

History nerds are going to love this game, but it's RPG fans that may need some convincing. There's no magic or monsters here, just historically accurate drama and combat. My gut tells me Kingdom Come: Deliverance won't be a mainstream success, but it has all the hallmarks of a cult classic that'll find its audience and be loved by them. «



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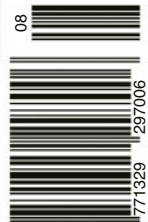
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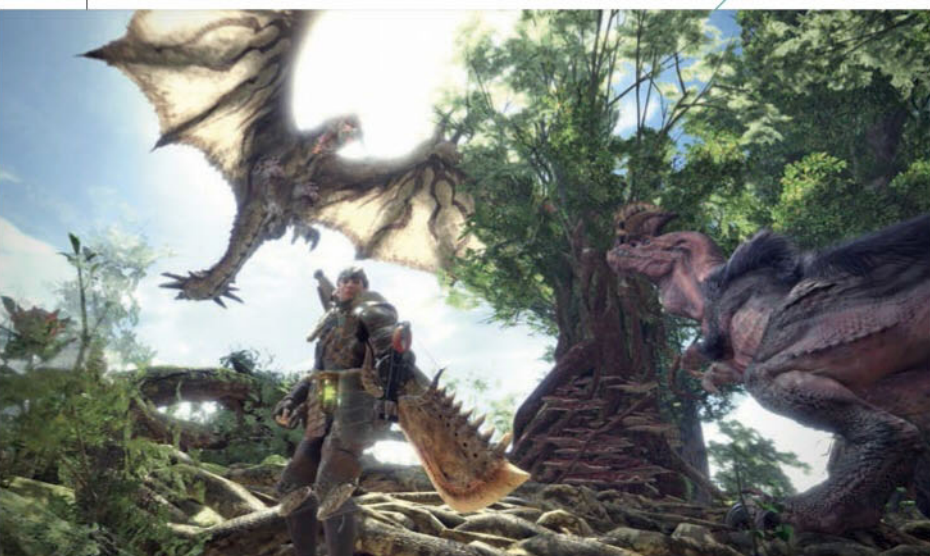
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PREVIEW

Monster Hunter World

Julian Rizzo-Smith sets up camp and cooks the perfect monster steak.

Monster Hunter World is a console return for the series, introducing seamless open world environments and a more accessible experience for newcomers.

"Monster Hunter has never shown the health bars on the monsters," director Yuya Tokuda told Glixel. "That's something you have to understand yourself, by watching the monster's behaviour or reading a guide."

The UI won't show a creature's health but will detail how much damage you deal, making the experience slightly easier to understand. Bowguns are designed like a heavy machine gun in a traditional third-person shooter and you can run by simply clicking the joystick instead of holding a trigger.

"We don't want to discard the series' tremendous legacy, of course - that's why [they're] all optional," said Tokuda.

"Scavenging interactions, survival of the fittest - all that stuff is really

Online co-op is completely drop-in and drop-out.



DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

Capcom
Capcom
PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One
2018

important to Monster Hunter," added producer Ryoza Tsujimoto. "We've always wanted to include it in the past but the technology limited us. Now, we can have as much detail as want, not just in the environments but also in the monster AI and how they interact with each other."

World's bestiary boasts a living ecosystem with a food chain, mob mentality among creatures and unique animations to each species. During a hands-off demo presentation, Tokuda demonstrated that monsters will often target each other and assist in battle if they acknowledge you as an ally and realise they have a chance to take on a larger traditionally stronger foe.

"The concept of the 'open world' is exactly what we always wanted," said Tokuda. "We're always aimed to make each map a little compact ecosystem. We don't want to have some massive space where you have to chase the monster for miles."

"It's not about having a big world," he continued, "it's about having a deep [one]. In a way, it's the ultimate expression of what the concept that's been there from the very start [of the series], but only now are we able to make it the way we want."

Capcom aim to simultaneously release the game worldwide, deliver global servers and introduce a seamless drop in and out co-op experience exploring other player's worlds.

"We look[ed] at everything that makes up Monster Hunter, put it all on the table and [thought] hard about what really works and what really doesn't," said Tsujimoto. "With people commuting on trains in Japan, it was a lot easier to find people to form a hunting party with to take down a big monster. [With the game coming to] current gen,

MONSTERS WILL OFTEN TARGET EACH OTHER AND ASSIST IN BATTLE IF THEY ACKNOWLEDGE YOU AS AN ALLY

online play means that you can access an incredible global community of veteran hunters, not your one friend."

"We want to make sure that newcomers don't have the same experience they had with previous Monster Hunter games," added Tokuda. "This is absolutely a multiplayer Monster Hunter game but we have to introduce what exactly a Monster Hunter game is to a wider audience, so we just began with the single player portion."

With over ten weapon classes, various creatures - each with their own physical strengths and weaknesses, role in the ecosystem, and behaviour - and a seamless open sandbox environment, Monster Hunter World is promising to deliver an accessible experience that's genuinely enjoyable and fittingly Monster Hunter. **«**



Extinction

Heidi Kempf will definitely play Monster Hunter of the Colossus.

You might not be too familiar with developer Iron Galaxy, but if you play fighting games at all, chances are you've encountered something they've had a hand in. Besides porting the likes of *Street Fighter III Third Strike* and *Darkstalkers Resurrection*, they've also developed *Divekick* and have been instrumental in the continued development of *Killer Instinct* from season two onwards. But Iron Galaxy's newest project, surprisingly, isn't a fighting game – in fact, the best way to describe it might be *Shadow of the Colossus* meets *Attack on Titan* with a tiny bit of *Monster Hunter* thrown in for

good measure.

In the fantasy world of *Extinction*, mankind is facing a terrifying threat. As kingdoms went to war with each other, they became blind to a different threat: giant, ferocious armies of Ravenii ogres and their underlings, capable of crushing cities and slaughtering humans with but a single pound of their massive fists. Only those called "Sentinels," armed with the knowledge and expertise needed to slay these mammoth monstrosities can put an end to their reign of terror.

We were given a sneak peek at a pre-alpha build of the game during E3, and while the slice of gameplay

The best way to bring an ogre down to size is chop off its legs.

we were shown was short, it gives a general idea of the sort of giant-killing combat players can expect from the final product. Avil, the game's hero, is one of the specially trained Sentinels who is capable of dealing with the Ravenii. His comrades have fallen in battle, so it's up to Avil to shoulder the immense burden of taking down these formidable foes.

As you might expect from a game featuring towering monsters to slay, vertical movement plays a crucial role. Avil can zip around the environments with acrobatic running and leaping movements – including wall-running – as well

DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

Iron Galaxy
Maximum Games
PS4, PC, Xbone
TBA



as climb and manoeuvre with the aid of various equipment. This movement is crucial for not only killing monsters both big and small, but coming to the aid of NPCs who would otherwise be defenceless against the monstrous hordes. A skill tree will be in place to build up Avil's combat repertoire over time, allowing for even more dexterous feats as the game progresses.

Our demo included one of the battles with the giant ogres, and it was quite a sight. The monster was immensely powerful - a single fist-pound could annihilate Avil - so strategy was necessary to slay the monster. While it had a weak point

on the nape of its neck, it was also wearing wooden armour: not terribly resilient, but a pain in the butt to climb. So what's the best way to get to the neck? Why, chop off the creature's other limbs and leave it a bloody, debilitated mess, of course! While the creature was immobilised, Avil scaled its massive back and shattered the armor protecting its neck, leaving it open to the kill and saving a city from being trampled.

There's still a ways to go before *Extinction* hits stores, but what we've seen so far looks promising. Look for more news to come from Iron Galaxy and Maximum Games as development progresses. ☞





Dragon Ball FighterZ

DEVELOPER	Arc System Works
PUBLISHER	Bandai Namco
PLATFORM	PC, Xbox One, Xbox One X, PS4, PS4 Pro
RELEASE DATE	2018

ROUGH-ISH EDGES

I say 'almost' because the cartoon-like graphics, while impressive, are not entirely flawless. I want to stress that I played an early version of FighterZ, but I did occasionally see a jagged edges on character models whenever they got too close to the screen.

Generally speaking, though, FighterZ is on track to be an incredible game both on and underneath the surface - it just needs a little more work. But with developer Arc System Works at the helm, I'm confident the end product we be polished to perfection before release.

At the end of the day, Dragon Ball FighterZ is probably not going to be for everyone, and I'm sure the more casual fighting game fans will gravitate towards Marvel vs Capcom Infinite. Yet I can't help but respect Arc System Works for taking the time to make a serious fighting game that respects the player and the source material equally. **«**

Alright fellow nerds, it's frame counting time again,
writes Andrew Whitehead



I haven't watched the Dragon Ball anime series since Cheez TV was on Channel Ten, but even I was blown away by the reveal of Dragon Ball FighterZ. This game looks just like the cartoon - from the character designs, to the over-the-top effects, and even the locations. Everything about FighterZ is incredibly detailed, with the 3D character models being so expertly textured and lit that they appear almost hand drawn.

My time with FighterZ was spent playing a three-versus-three format, using a combination of the announced characters - Goku, Vegeta, Gohan, Cell, Frieza, and Majin Buu. Attempting to learn a fighting game's mechanics in one play session is basically an impossible task, especially given the depth of FighterZ, which was apparent from the moment I started playing.

A common complaint amongst fighting game fans lately has been the watering down of some of their favourite franchises. Take Street Fighter V, a game that remains popular in the competitive scene, but has alienated some long-time players and pros who believe the technical side of the series has taken a backseat to accessibility. Though I'd have to spend more time

with the game to give a definitive answer, FighterZ feels like a real old school, learn your moves or die, 2D fighting game.

HARDCORE LEVEL 9000

Recently I spent some time playing Marvel vs Capcom Infinite in a one-versus-one setting during a behind closed doors session, and because of its comic book-ish style and 2D fighting roots, it feels apt to compare it to FighterZ. The biggest difference I could see between FighterZ and Infinite was how much it felt like Bandai Namco's game was being geared towards hardcore fighting fans, while Capcom's was being designed to please casual and hardcore players alike. It's not that FighterZ is inaccessible, or that Infinite is too easy, but to see FighterZ at its best, you're going to have to work.

Perhaps the biggest compliment I can pay Dragon Ball FighterZ is it knows exactly who it's made for and how to appeal to them. It's a love letter to the long running manga and anime series. Every aspect of its presentation is made to look like the cartoon, yet it still plays like a deep, technical 2D fighting game that looks almost perfect.

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The Swords of Ditto

Save the world, one bite-sized Zelda dungeon at a time, writes **Julian Rizzo-Smith**

The Swords of Ditto is a micro action RPG inspired by the visual fun aesthetic of Saturday morning cartoons and the puzzle-solving dungeons of The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past. It's described by game designer Sam Robinson as a condensed version of a Zelda experience, lasting around three to four hours long.

The game is designed with a procedurally generated overworld map, so dungeons, gadgets, even NPCs can be located in randomised spots each run.

"Every time you play [or die], the world's randomised, your character is randomised and you [begin your journey again] stuck on the island of Ditto," he said.

According to Robinson, the permadeath feature plays a role in the game's lore, too. You begin the game waking up in a faraway beach house on the island of Ditto, tasked to pull out a sword from inside an elaborately designed sword-shaped shrine to the past heroes (and your past lives). As a child of prophecy,

you're destined to save the island from a cursed by an evil spirit: monsters and critters roam the lands and the only way to restore peace is to compete in the spirit's trials and games.

"There's this ancient Mayan-like civilisation that love toys and have created these whole dungeons based around using a certain gadget," said Robinson. "These are meant to be short cerebral dungeons that aren't too challenging."

During my twenty minute co-op demo, we ventured through a dungeon that required a retractable throwing vinyl record. Using the record, I'd pick up flames from a lit torch to light nearby ones. In another, we interacted with tactile plates on the floor and switches to deactivate sets of pike traps, communicating with my co-op partner to set of series of switches to progress.

There's a highly endearing charm to the world of Ditto. Each of your gadgets are quirky interpretations of real world items and can be

used in combat, including a giant yeti foot raining from the sky that knocks out enemies, a golf club that knocks them back, and a silly nerf gun for long-range attacks. Reviving an ally is animated by one player rushing over towards the fallen one, hugging them tightly and expanding their love heart till it fills the entire screen. The world of Ditto is colourful and fun; it doesn't take itself too seriously and is made for both children and adults to enjoy.

Although not fully available in the demo, you can modify your stats using stickers found in the world, taking packs of them to merchants to open.

"Stickers might give you faster regen at night-time or increased sword range," said Robinson. "You can apply stickers to all one slot, like to your armour or weapon."

Onebitbeyond is currently developing for PC and PlayStation 4, and when asked if it'll come to the Nintendo Switch, Robinson said that he'd like to but it wasn't a priority. Still, playing this with a PlayStation 4 controller, I couldn't help but imagine it working very organically with the Switch's portability. 🐱

Venturing deep into the dark and spooky cave, our hero came face to face with a giant pussycat.





DEVELOPER | onebitbeyond
PUBLISHER | Devolver Digital
PLATFORM | PC, PlayStation 4
RELEASE DATE | March 2018



REVIVING AN ALLY IS ANIMATED BY ONE PLAYER RUSHING OVER TOWARDS THE OTHER AND HUGGING THEM TIGHTLY





DEVELOPER	Mark Essen
PUBLISHER	Devolver Digital
PLATFORM	PC
RELEASE DATE	Summer 2017

PREVIEW

Nidhogg 2

“
**FREAKISH
 CARICATURES OF
 HUMANITY LIKE THE
 UNHOLY OFFSPRING
 OF HOMER
 SIMPSON AND
 THE RABBIDS**”

We now live in a world where people take competitive gaming seriously. League of Legends, Street Fighter, Counterstrike GO, even Rocket League – these games have inspired international competitive scenes. But if there’s any justice on this planet, the glorious, gruesome competitive carnage of Nidhogg 2 would get the same level of recognition as all of these titles, inspiring an enthusiastic eSports community. But even if it doesn’t, it’s still going to be some of the most frenetic and fun one-on-one competitive gaming you’ll ever have the joy of experiencing.

The original Nidhogg was an exercise in simplicity, both visually and gameplay-wise. Players took control of a pixel-person fencer

This is fencing the way it was meant to be, writes Heidi Kemps.

who was trying to reach the end of a lengthy arena to be consumed by the titular Norse worm. Standing in the way, however, is a seemingly endless procession of Player Twos, all of whom had the same set of swordfighting, jumping, and running skills as Player One. If the player blocking the way is defeated, players could advance further, given a precious few seconds before their competitor respawns. If the advancing player is defeated, however, their slayer becomes the focus, able to proceed in the opposite direction to meet with their own Nidhogg and claim victory. It sounds more complex in writing than it actually was, but the mindgames players could execute were very real: Do you engage your foe in close-range swordfighting? Do you throw your rapier at them to try to pick them off from afar, but lose your weapon in the process? Or do you just try to find a way to vault past them and progress further?

Nidhogg 2 takes this formula and builds upon it in several ways. Gone are the minimalist pixel graphics of the original, replaced by freakish caricatures of humanity that look like the unholy offspring of Homer Simpson and the Rabbids. Their strangely lovable ugliness is accentuated by their ridiculous,

exaggerated animations: there’s a sick satisfaction in seeing your malformed mannequin curb-stomp your opponent into a nondescript pile of guts and colored goo. Backgrounds, too, are significantly more detailed, and varied terrain has a notable effect on the way you attempt to progress in the back-and-forth combat.

The overall gameplay is much faster-paced as well, with players respawning much more quickly to impede the other’s progress (and possibly take the advantage). The overall control of your player character feels a lot smoother, as well, allowing you to run, slide, slash, and do sick jumps at a fevered pace. Finally, the weapons you wield will change from respawn to respawn, as well: while you may be swinging a sword at first, you can also wind up wielding crossbows or a big old battle-axe, changing up your strategies on the fly.

Nidhogg 2 is an insanely fun time with a friend, and has the potential to be a massive hit among the competitively-minded – it’s simple enough to learn easily, but relies on smart, sometimes reckless decisions in an intense tug-of-war. While a specific release date’s still up in the air, it doesn’t look like we’ll have to wait much longer. **R**



Absolver

Julian Rizzo-Smith forgives an online open world combat role-playing game by a team of former developers from Ubisoft Paris.

You play as a masked fighter in the post-cataclysmic world of Adal. Tasked with exploring the decayed environment in search of powerful enemies, you must prove yourself to the rulers of the land and join their elite group of martial artists called absolvers.

Combat is fast-paced and inspired by realistic martial arts. You begin understanding the basics of one of three styles, and gradually learn new moves as you encounter fighters using them in battle. Stone pillars found in the world act as fast-travel hubs and bonfires, allowing you to spend resources to unlock new abilities and customise your fighting style from a deck of cards representing fighting moves.

"You will be able to use the attacks of each different fighting style with any other fighting style," said lead artist Paul-Emile Boucher. "You'll be able to pick and choose different attacks to build a custom combat deck."

"You can customise your bare hands combat style but also sword and combat gloves," he continued. "When you have a weapon, even if it's not yours, you will have control of your full fighting style."

There's a lot of personalised layers to combat that Boucher hopes will

blend into the game's competitive scene. Learning to customise your own personalised fighting style and incorporating moves from different directions creates an interesting meta-gameplay in multiplayer matches. Class-based super abilities, like a heal or a shockwave attack, can help you when overwhelmed, and the drunken fighting swagger style is unpredictable.

"We made them not to have an advantage over one or another," Boucher said. "It's pretty neutral and defines how you play the game. There will probably be one fighting style that's stronger than another but we will be there to balance things."

When exploring an area, players seamlessly join your world, and can challenge you to duel, invite you to a party or completely ignore you and explore on their own.

"It's a bit like Journey," said Boucher. "You could play Journey alone, but you would miss a huge chunk. You can play Absolver alone but you'll miss a lot of the game and you won't be able to reach the final goal of the game, which is to be an Absolver."

"At some point in the game, you'll have doors that will need certain prerequisites to open," he continued.



"[Some of these include] exploring and fighting mini-bosses but mainly you'll unlock doors by playing 3v3 or 1v1 matches."

"The main of [the starting] zone is to be a giant test to pick and choose the next absolvers, so most of the NPCs you'll encounter are fellow or rogue absolvers," he said. "Everything revolves around a huge tower [but] you will also have urban environments, a swamp, and coliseum - a bunch of variations."

Absolver is coming first to PC and PlayStation 4, releasing on the Xbox One shortly after. When asked about the Nintendo Switch, Boucher said they currently don't have plans but you "never know." ❧



DEVELOPER	Slocap
PUBLISHER	Devolver Digital
PLATFORM	PC, PS4, Xbox One
RELEASE DATE	August 29, 2017

PREVIEW

Call of Duty WWII

*It turns out the thing war is good for is Call of Duty's multiplayer, writes **Andrew Whitehead***

It's no secret that Call of Duty lost some of its shine after the Infinite Warfare and Modern Warfare Remastered debacle. But after spending time with Call of Duty: WWII, it feels taking the series back to its 'boots on the ground' roots was just what the series needed.

My time with WWII was spent in the multiplayer mode War, which is somewhat reminiscent of a mode by the same name from World at War, except it now feels like the star of the show and not just an also-ran idea.

The basic idea of War is an attacking team must take over a control point to move the action further down the map, then take over the next one and so on until the final control point is theirs. Meanwhile, the defending team must try to fend them off until the clock runs out.

WWII features maps designed specifically for the mode, complete with their own little storylines. I played Operation Breakout, a map set in the French countryside that has Allied troops attempting to take over an Axis controlled mansion, then push forward from there and destroy the enemy's AA guns.

I'M FEELING SO ATTACKED RIGHT NOW

Starting out as an attacker, I choose the Sten submachine gun and began lobbing smoke grenades into the mansion's windows. As I pushed forward with my fellow troops, our heavy gunners stayed back and provided covering fire from a bombed-out house nearby. After a long battle we gained control of the point and headed to our next objective.

Separated from the opposition by a river, most of my team opted

for longer range weapons. M1 Garands and bolt-action sniper rifles came in handy, as did the Lewis light machine gun, which could be deployed and used as a stationary weapon to dampen its recoil.

To continue we had to build a bridge, so a few of us stayed close to the construction area to keep it going. The building of the bridge happened automatically so long as a player was in range. After an intense battle we completed the bridge with just seconds left on the clock. We pressed on.

ESCORT THE PAYLOAD

After taking out an enemy weapon cache we were nearing the final objective which required us to escort a friendly tank. The catch was it would only move if we had troops nearby. It was possible to enter the tank and use its mounted machine gun, but it also made you a sitting duck.

Pushing forward through the smoke and gunfire, nearly everyone on my team switched to submachine guns or shotguns. The battle was tighter than ever, and to win some of us had to stay right up close to the slow moving beast. Time ran out, but with a few troops still on the tank we went into overtime and clinched victory.

It was in that moment of victory I knew that Call of Duty: WWII was exactly what this series needed. Wall-running and double jumps have their place, but this feels like home for Call of Duty. Welcome back old friend. «

«
**THE
MULTIPLAYER
MODE WAR IS
REMINISCENT OF A
MODE FROM WORLD
AT WAR, EXCEPT IT
NOW FEELS LIKE
THE STAR OF THE
SHOW**
»



Dude, if only we had invented jetpacks, we'd be outta this damn trench by now.

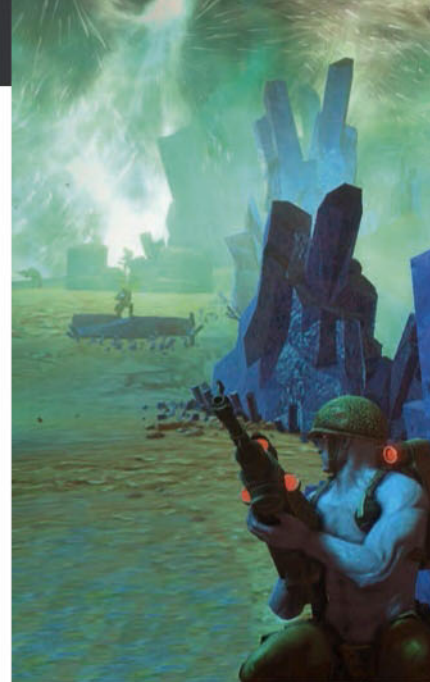




DEVELOPER	Sledgehammer Games
PUBLISHER	Activision
PLATFORM	Xbox One, PlayStation 4, PC
RELEASE DATE	November 3, 2017

DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

TickTock Games
Rebellion
PC, Xbox One, PlayStation 4,
Nintendo Switch
2017



PREVIEW

Rogue Trooper Redux

Julian Rizzo-Smith squeezes his entire squad into his backpack.

Rogue Trooper Redux is a remaster of the cult-classic 2006 third-person shooter based on the British 2000 AD comic series.

Fans of the comic will recognise a familiar story: you play as Rogue, one of the last genetically engineered super soldiers fighting in the war on Nu Earth.

"All the genetically engineered units you'll meet are from the comic," said programmer Rich May. "Each of them has a biochip that records their experience in the battlefield and their knowledge. When they die, they live on inside biochips that you can apply to your equipment, with apply names [such as] Bagman, Helm and Gunnar.

"Bagman is your quartermaster, he gives you all the ammo you'll need," he continued. "When he ends up in your backpack, he'll end up manufacturing ammo you'll salvage around the world... Gunnar can stabilise your aim with a

sniper scope..."

The original Rogue Trooper was quite innovative at the time. It was one of the first few games to include squad members, a cover mechanic and an upgrade system.

"We've taken the original gameplay and added up-to-date graphics and rendering techniques, parallax mapping, dynamic lights, dynamic shadows - everything you need to bring it up to date and make it look as good as the other games out there," said May. "We've tweaked the game slightly with a few additions to bring it up to date to modern standards [and] changes to the controls to bring the game in line with what you expect of a modern cover based shooter."

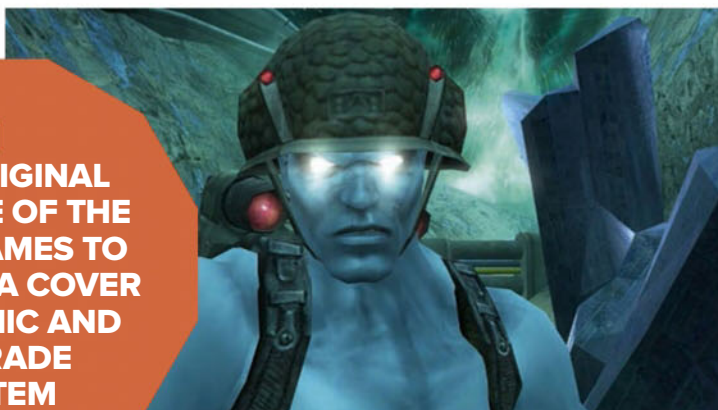
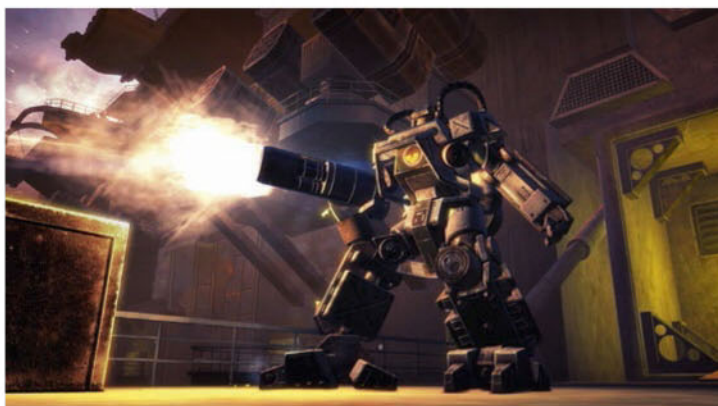
Yet, what I played was not a very good build, even considering it was pre-beta. Environments lacked colour and detail, and looked

incredibly grainy. It made it difficult to know where I was meant to go or what was climbable. Moments where I would mount a machine gun turret to take down incoming aircraft or hijack a lock-on bazooka from an enemy to destroy turrets on a tank looked promisingly exciting with blockbuster action set pieces, but ultimately felt dull.

Although unavailable in the demo, according to May, there's a lot of depth in how you take down enemies, with



With Vegas now in ruins, the Blue Man Group had to find an alternative source of income.



“**THE ORIGINAL WAS ONE OF THE FIRST GAMES TO INCLUDE A COVER MECHANIC AND UPGRADE SYSTEM**”

various stealth-based kills use of the environment.

“There’s plenty of exciting animations for you to enjoy,” he said. “Various gruesome deaths you can inflict on the Norts.”

When asked about the difference between versions, a Rebellion spokesperson told Gamespot that they were “aiming for complete feature parity,” and aims to launch on all consoles at the same time.

“As of now, we don’t know what extra features [the Switch version] will have, if any,” they said. “We’re still experimenting with the Switch platform. It’s still pretty recent that we got our kits so we don’t quite know what that will be.”

Despite an additional online multiplayer mode, there’s not a lot from my time with Rogue Trooper Redux that left me wanting more. Unresponsive mechanics, unflattering graphics and awkwardly placed environments give an image of a game stuck in the past. ❧



Pokkén Tournament DX

Like a gaming grave robber, Nintendo is plundering the Wii U's tomb for treasure once more, writes
Andrew Whitehead

The reveal of the original Pokkén Tournament for Japanese arcades was sort of a surprise, but it also made total sense. Pokémon had been beating the crap out of each other ages now, so why not control them directly instead of yelling commands from the sidelines?

Clearly the formula caught on, and around 18 months after its initial home console release, Pokkén Tournament is getting an upgrade in the form of Pokkén Tournament DX for the Nintendo Switch. In case you don't know, Pokkén is a 3D arena fighting game with a roster made up entirely of Pokémon. Players can choose from 21 different fighters to battle, and can also select a support Pokémon team to jump into battle and help out should they need it.

Though the title is a reference to the Tekken series, Pokkén plays much differently than most fighting games. Players switch between two phases, Field Phase for moving around the battlefield, and Duel Phase for engaging your opponent on a more 2D-ish plane. It takes some getting used to, but it feels analogous to how Pokémon battles have been presented in the anime.

BUY IT AGAIN

Pokkén Tournament DX has an extra five Pokémon over the Wii U version, including one exclusive to the Switch that isn't available in the arcades. Returning players should keep an eye out for new fighters Croagunka, Empoleon, Darkrai, Scizor, and the Nintendo Switch exclusive Decidueye, who join fan favourites like Charizard and Pikachu.

There's also 16 support Pokémon teams to help you out in battle - that's two Pokémon in each team for a total of 32. DX now features a Pokémon Sun and Moon team with Litten and Popplio appearing for the first time. Plus, if you bought the Hori Pokkén Tournament fight pad for the Wii U, you're in luck. Nintendo are working on a patch so it'll play nice with DX.

SPORTING CHANCE

The competitive Pokkén Tournament scene has grown to be surprisingly robust, so don't judge this book by its cover. In a lot of ways it's a game for kids, but then again Super Smash Bros. was never meant to be a hyper competitive title, and yet here we are. The point is that like Nintendo's other surprise hit Splatoon, a dedicated group of gamers have elevated Pokkén above being a simple Pokémon spin-off and made it into a serious eSports game. All of which says a lot about its hidden depth.

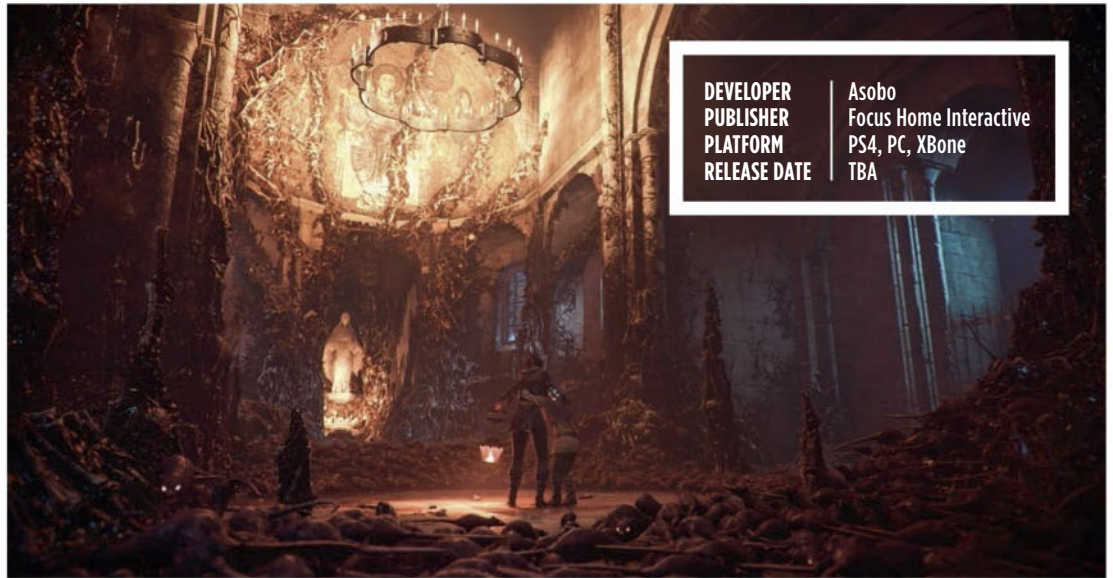
In terms of graphics and presentation, DX is basically the same as vanilla Pokkén, which already looked great. It's still running at 60 frames per second, and the detail of the Pokémon remains incredibly high.

Pokkén Tournament DX isn't a lazy port, and being able to slide off the Joy-Cons for on-the-go multiplayer makes it an incredibly compelling package. If you were done with the original, there's not a lot new here for you to enjoy. But if you're craving more Pokémon-on-Pokémon violence, you've come to the right place. **[[**

DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

Bandai Namco Studios
Nintendo, The Pokémon Company
PC, Xbox One, PlayStation 4
September 22, 2017





DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

Asobo
Focus Home Interactive
PS4, PC, XBone
TBA

A Plague Tale: Innocence

Turn on the bright lights, says Heidi Kempf.

Before we go another further, I must ask: Are you afraid of rats? Does the idea of hundreds of rodents spilling onto the streets, climbing walls, scurrying all over a human body leave you with a cold sweat and a petrifying fear?

I ask because after playing *A Plague Tale: Innocence*, you'll likely develop a horrible, crippling phobia of rats.

In this dark action/adventure game, a young sister and brother in 14th century France, fighting against both the onslaught of the Black Death and the hunters of the Inquisition with little more than makeshift weaponry and their wits. The demo we were shown by developer Asobo was a very small chunk of the game, but it nonetheless left us intrigued with its dark, brooding atmosphere and creeping horror.

During our gameplay demo, we witnessed the heroine, Amicia, rescuing her younger brother Hugo, who was being held hostage by Inquisition soldiers in the black of night. Amicia is a teenage girl who doesn't wield advanced weaponry: her main tool is a slingshot she utilises in various ways. There's no way a few slung stones would win in a swordfight, though, so Amicia needed to find a different way to free Hugo.

One thing stood out about the environments in this game from the very beginning: they are covered - covered - in rats. Literal waves of red-eyed, disease-riddled rodents, ready to overwhelm you, kill you

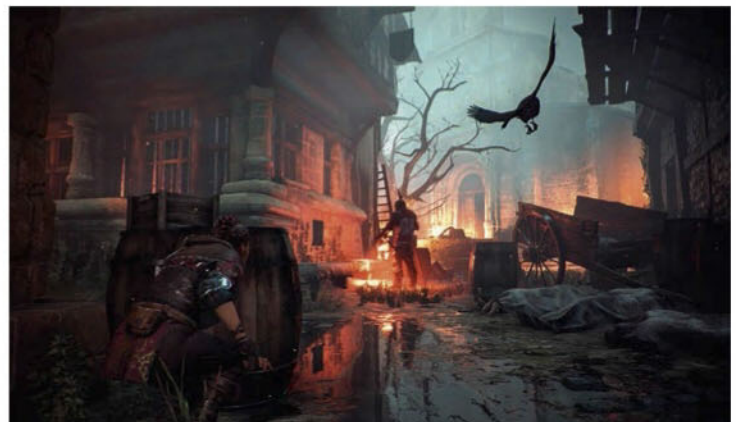
with a million infected incisor bites, and eat your dead, rotting flesh. You've never seen these vile vermin like you have in this game, blanketing walls, floors, and objects with their putrid presence. One false step at any point would mean Amicia would become rat feed.

But the rats have a weakness: they hate the light. And so, the way to solve the puzzle of defeating the guards became evident: if their lanterns were to be extinguished, the rats would surely devour them in the darkness. A few well-placed slingshots later, and the Inquisition opposition had perished in a truly horrifying manner, with hundreds of rats immediately overtaking them.

Upon rescuing Hugo, the pair heard an otherworldly call from their mother in a nearby church. This area, too, was infested with rats, the

constant squeaking and pattering of feet boring into our brains. Through a combination of Hugo's small size and Amicia's slingshot, we could solve a series of environmental puzzles involving space and light to keep the rats at bay. As we ventured deeper into the chapel's catacombs, things took a turn for the even more unnerving, with the flood of rats giving way to a series of passageways lined with the bones of seemingly thousands of dead people. As our heroes' mother called to them, the demo ended, leaving on a serious cliffhanger.

A Plague Tale is still early in development, but it did a great job of combining exploration, puzzle solving, and the constant fear of creeping, squeaking death. One thing's for sure: this game's going to create a lot of new musophobes. **K**



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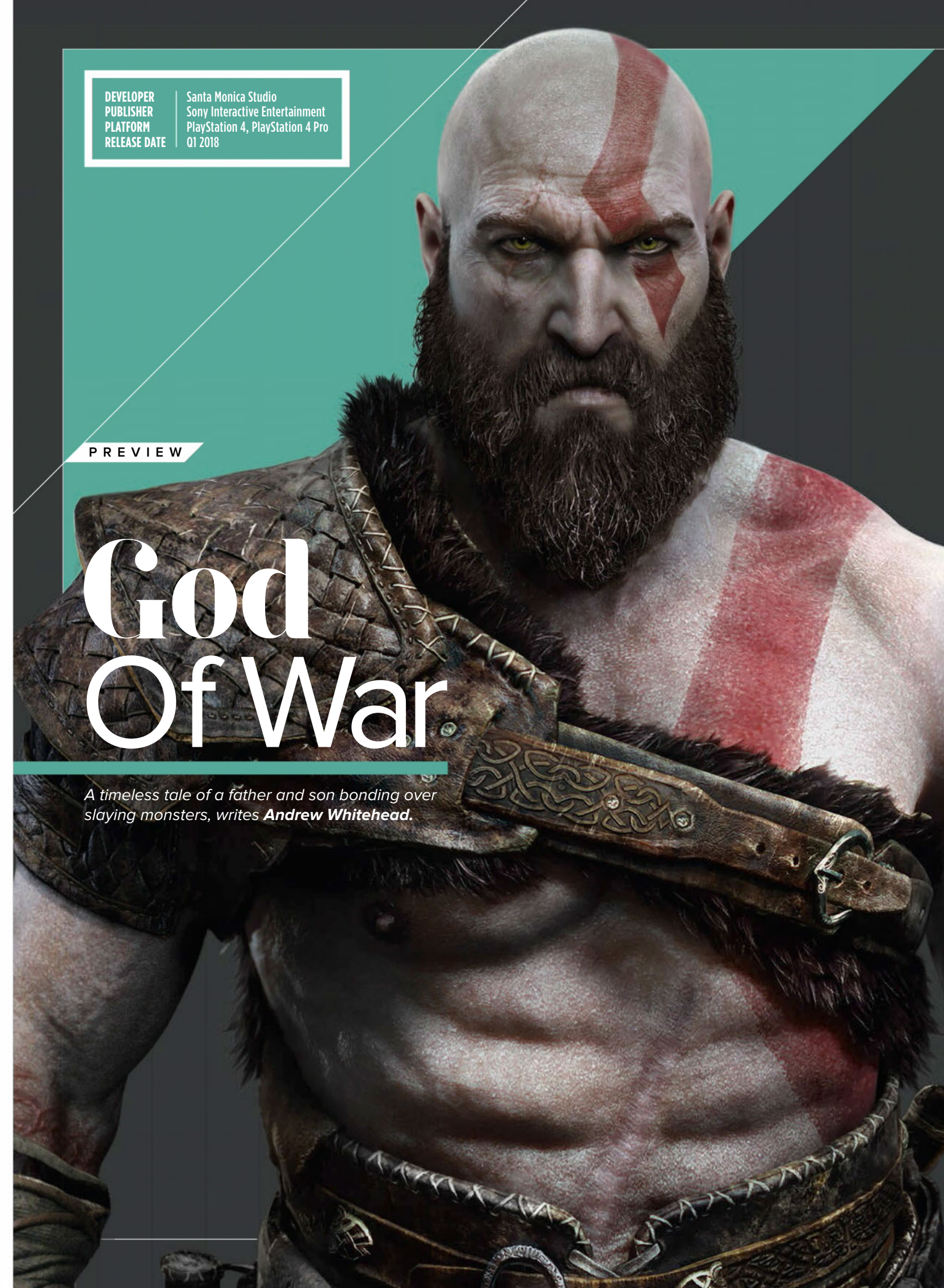
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DEVELOPER | Santa Monica Studio
PUBLISHER | Sony Interactive Entertainment
PLATFORM | PlayStation 4, PlayStation 4 Pro
RELEASE DATE | Q1 2018

PREVIEW

God Of War

*A timeless tale of a father and son bonding over slaying monsters, writes **Andrew Whitehead**.*



Coming off the bench for the first time since 2013, the latest God of War may lack a number or subtitle, but it's definitely not a reboot - it's an evolution. Building off its established lore, the latest entry in the ongoing saga of Kratos trades in Greek gods for a new take on Norse mythology, giving newcomers a clear entry point while not alienating existing fans.

Cory Barlog is in the Creative Director's chair this time, returning from a long hiatus after finishing up God of War II. Drawing inspiration from his own life as a new dad, Barlog forged a fresh challenge for Kratos - how to be a father to a son he barely knows.

"I think there was a real deep connection for him there," said Aaron Kaufman, Senior Online Community Strategist at Santa Monica Studio, "and for a lot of us at the studio as parents. Those of us who were parents then, and those who, like me, are parents now - it's a very meaningful story."

DAD'S HOME

Much of what has happened since the end of God of War III remains a mystery, and it'll stay that way until the game hits shelves next year. Kaufman explained that the backstory of Atreus, his yet unnamed mother, and his ability to speak with monsters, will be key parts of the storyline and not

something they want to spoil.

Kaufman was also quick to assuage any fears fans may have of God of War becoming one long escort mission. "You never have to worry about the son being a burden, that would be the exact opposite of his design and the way he plays in combat. His core role is being your strategic support in combat. They've both got primary weapons, [Atreus has] got the bow, [Kratos] has got the axe. His arrows are magical, they're [powered by] lightning, and both characters have upgrade paths, so you can upgrade the bow, upgrade the axe."

Atreus has a button dedicated to him that allows players to call upon him when in need, but he'll also act autonomously in combat such as jumping onto the backs of enemies and firing arrows into them. He

might be new to fighting, but Atreus is still the son of Kratos.

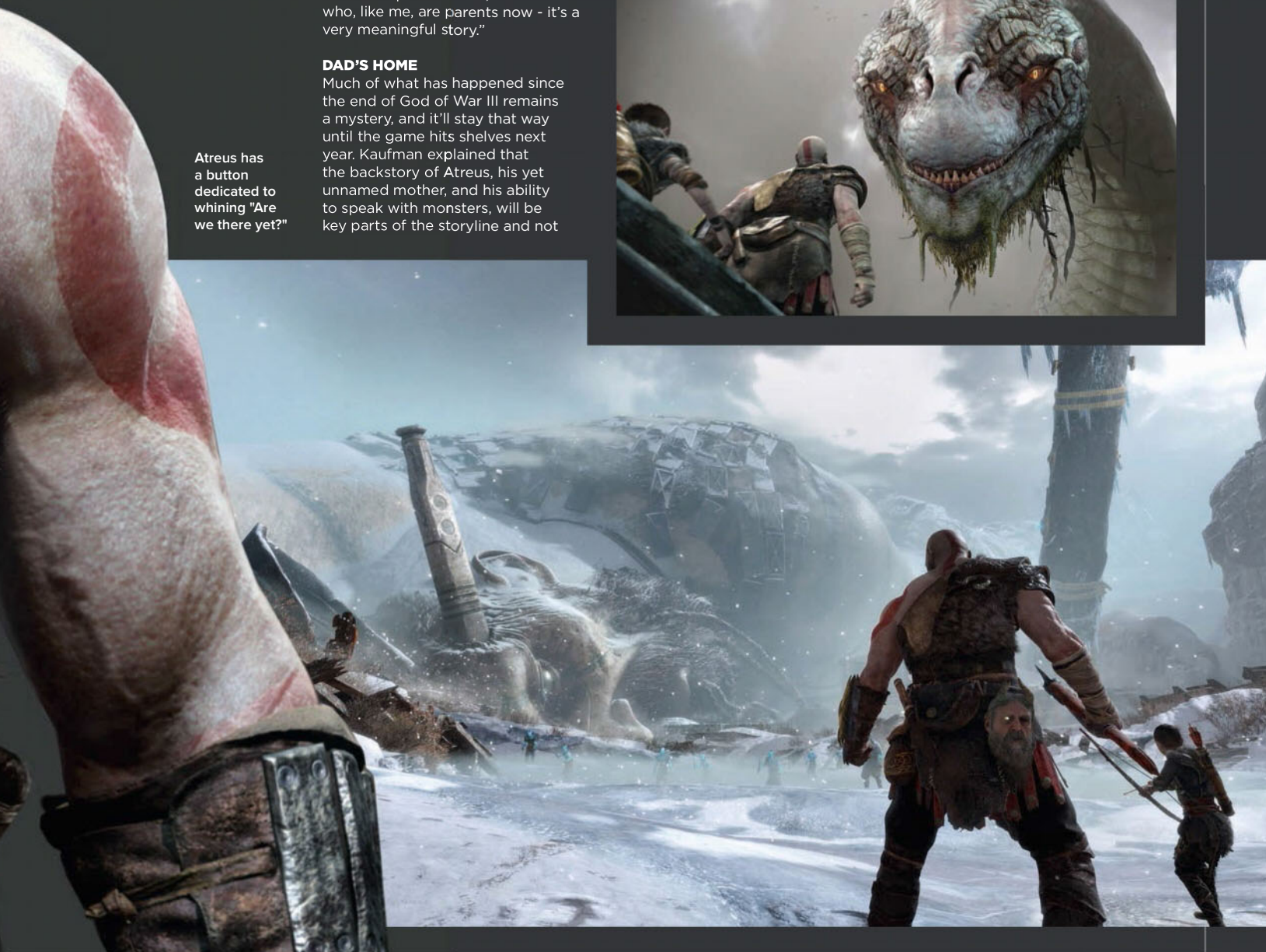
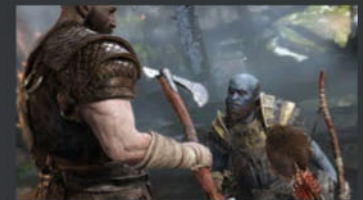
THE STORY CONTINUES

The fundamental formula that makes God of War work as an action game looks to be on point once again, with Kaufman noting that the "core DNA of the team" is the same group of developers who that worked on the first two entries.

What makes this God of War really stand out is how dedicated the team is to telling a good story while building off their own mythology. Atreus is the entry point for new players, while Kratos remains a world weary godslayer for returning fans. In many ways it feels like the perfect example of how to a long running series can reinvent itself by simply starting a new chapter rather than throwing the whole book away. **U**

YOU NEVER HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THE SON BEING A BURDEN... HIS CORE ROLE IS BEING YOUR STRATEGIC SUPPORT IN COMBAT

Atreus has a button dedicated to whining "Are we there yet?"



DEVELOPER | Dontnod
PUBLISHER | Focus Home Interactive
PLATFORM | PS4, PC, XBone
RELEASE DATE | Q4 2017

PREVIEW

Vampyr

There's a lot at stake in the new adventure from the developers of Life Is Strange, bites Heidi Kemps.

Immortality actually kinda sucks. I mean, yes, it sucks in that you get to watch everyone you know and love wither away and die time and time again, but when it's the result of vampirism, it also sucks in the most literal sense: you must kill to survive. It's even worse when you're a doctor, a person sworn to protect lives: the need to consume the life force of others goes against everything you live for. How can you balance your need to live against the precious lives of others, and how will you decide who lives and who dies? This is the moral quandary that lies at the heart of *Vampyr*, a dark action/RPG from the studio behind *Remember Me* and *Life Is Strange*.

Dr. Jonathan Reid is keeping quite busy in early 20th century London. The Spanish Flu is reaching epidemic status, sickening many people – but there's a more vile disease appearing, as well, one that causes a mental deterioration that drives those it infects to cannibalism. Dr. Reid, however, is suffering from a very different affliction – he has,

for reasons yet unknown, become a vampire. This not only puts him in the sights of the city's vampire hunters, but has left him needing to feed on the blood of the population to stay alive. This moral quandary lies at the heart of the story: Dr. Reid must stave off illness and discover the cause behind the uptick in cannibalism, yet he must kill these same people to survive.

And kill you shall. In the demo of the game we were shown at E3, the developers made it very clear that that game would be exceptionally difficult complete without feeding. This is because of the character development system the game employs: the absolute best way to level up is through drinking fresh blood, which you can then use to enhance various character abilities. Sure, you can try and survive off what you get from enemies you slay in the game's Dishonored-style combat, but it's not going to give you nearly the strength of a fresh kill. Without blood to power your vampiric abilities, you'll be

left significantly weaker in the long run, and will need to adjust your playstyle both in and out of combat accordingly.

But it's not as easy as sneaking up on someone and sucking them dry. Every NPC you encounter in *Vampyr* plays a role, and whether they live or die affects a complex web of character relationships that can alter story outcomes. In our demo, we met a son and his old mother. While the son described his mother as the most important person in his life, he harboured a dark secret: he was a serial killer, and his kindly mom knew nothing of his habit. Killing him seemed like the easy choice – but his blood quality was significantly weaker than that of his mother, and it's hard to judge how his mother would react to his death. Which of the pair would you choose to kill? Hard choices like this are frequent.

Vampyr's been in the works for a while, but you won't have to wait much longer to sink your teeth into it. Look for it to hit most major platforms late this year. ☞



“
**WITHOUT BLOOD
TO POWER YOUR
VAMPIRIC ABILITIES,
YOU'LL BE LEFT
SIGNIFICANTLY
WEAKER IN THE
LONG RUN**”

PREVIEW

Final Fantasy Dissidia NT

Julian Rizzo-Smith has been summoned into battle.

Final Fantasy Dissidia NT (New Tale) hosts a nostalgic roster of fighters with deep multi-layered action gameplay. The game features 3v3 PvP battles in 3D semi-destructible environments, pitting some of the series' most iconic characters against one another.

In battle, you have two types of attacks: HP and bravery. HP attacks damage your target's health but are based on your bravery points, while bravery attacks drain their power - and triggers a staggered "break" status whereby they cannot inflict HP attacks and take extra bravery damage. You can also cast magic, buff and debuff and summon iconic Final Fantasy beings, so there's a lot of strategy to Dissidia.

In this way, according to director Takeo Fujiraoka, who has worked as a battle planner for the original Dissidia PSP games, Kingdom Hearts II and the Final Fantasy XIII trilogy, combat is designed as an MMORPG in a fast-paced action setting.

"One of the big elements of the Final Fantasy series is exploring with your party and overcoming obstacles with them," he said. "We understand the battles can seem a little chaotic at first but once you really get into it, you start to learn the strategic elements of the game."

Everything about the game's mechanics is grounded in the multiple Final Fantasy universes. The game opens with the main theme from the series, crystals and moogle. Cloud charges into battle swinging his beloved greatsword, Kefka dances around the map casting cataclysmic black magic and Vaan can switch between job classes mid-battle to alter his fighting style.

"Terra and Lightning use magic in their original titles [Final Fantasy VI and Final Fantasy XIII]," said director Takeo Fujiraoka. "When we thought about bringing them into our game we thought they should use magic because it's what they do in [their own] game."

Characters are class-based, too. Vanguards are the game's token tank build, as are Assassins nimble but lacking in attack, Marksman are excellent at long-range but struggle with close-combat and specialists are made up of unique, difficult to

define fighters.

"Having those four different types separate those characters so we can then pursue how unique we can make them within that class," said Fujiraoka. "

The team plan to update the game with as much content as



possible, including characters and locations from Final Fantasy XV and a 1v1 PvP mode with assisted AI. Yet, Fujiraoka understands that it can be difficult incorporating characters that have a similar weapon loadout.

"There were some characters that we had to avoid because we already have a [similar] character," he said. "Cloud has a greatsword, and when we think of another character that uses a greatsword, we have to think of another type of uniqueness that associates with that character to include them in the roster."

"A lot of fighting games involve you fighting against other people. Dissidia NT is unique [because] there's a lot of strategy and cooperation, so you'll be able to get a different experience with the game." ❧

Team Ninja should be a safe pair of development hands for a fighting game.





DEVELOPER	Team Ninja
PUBLISHER	Square Enix
PLATFORM	PlayStation 4
RELEASE DATE	2018



||
**CLOUD
CHARGES INTO
BATTLE SWINGING
HIS BELOVED
GREATSWORD, KEFKA
DANCES AROUND
CASTING BLACK
MAGIC**



Fire Emblem Warriors

Warriors.... Warriors never changes, writes **Andrew Whitehead**

Ditching its hardcore strategy roots in favour of pure action, Fire Emblem is the latest video game franchise to get the Warriors treatment. I'm a big fan of the Fire Emblem games, with part of the appeal for me being how every decision matters. They're games about consequences where allies can be lost forever in battle, so you better make sure you calculate all the risks.

Fire Emblem Warriors does away with any notions of consequence in favour of mowing down hundreds of troops that never really pose much of a threat anyway. In short, it's quite a shift for the Fire Emblem series.

EVERYONE'S HERE

There's a good mix of playable characters on offer here, including Chrom from Fire Emblem Awakening, Marth from Shadow Dragon and the Blade of Light, plus Ryoma, Xander and a female Corrin from Fire Emblem Fates. They're joined by four new heroes - Rowan, Lianna, Darius, Yelena.

The game makes use of the Weapon Triangles from the regular Fire Emblem series, such as classic the 'Sword beats Axe, Axe beats Lance, Lance beats Sword'. Finally, Support Conversations also make a return, which allows characters to get to know each other better and boost each other's performance in battle.

The gameplay at its core is what you'd expect of a Warriors game, so be ready to storm a lot of castles and wipe out hordes of weaklings before taking on more challenging bosses. Despite these familiar elements, there are a few unique additions to the Warriors series featured in Fire Emblem Warriors.

NEW TAKE ON AN OLD FORMULA

Players are in charge of multiple heroes at once out on the battlefield, which means a lot of switching back and forth between them. But this is Fire Emblem! So instead you can issue commands from the map screen to your heroes and set them on their way. They're not as effective on their own as when you're in direct control, but they're not brain dead either.

A small feature found only in Fire Emblem Warriors is a stun gauge for officers. If you can empty the stun gauge the officer will be staggered, allowing you to land critical hits. And finally, just like in Fire Emblem Awakening, you can pair up characters on the battlefield to boost their effectiveness in combat. See, it's still a strategy game at heart. Sorta.

PERFORMANCE ART

While playing Fire Emblem Warriors on the Switch version I did notice some serious performance issues and pop in. Fellow journalists have also reported the New 3DS version isn't running the best either, similar to what happened with Hyrule Warriors. If you're not familiar with the situation, Hyrule Warriors on Wii U often looked like it was struggling to keep it together, as did the 3DS version despite its much simpler art style.

Thankfully, Fire Emblem Warriors is a Switch and New 3DS exclusive, so here's hoping the developers can harness that extra power before launch and do Chrom, Marth, and the rest of the cast justice. 🗡️

DEVELOPER

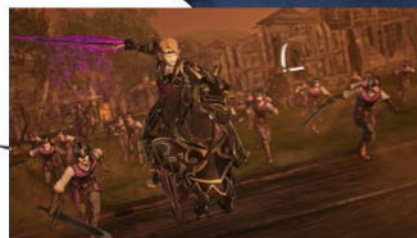
Omega Force, Team Ninja, Intelligent Systems

PUBLISHER PLATFORM

Nintendo, Koei Tecmo
Nintendo Switch,
New Nintendo 3DS

RELEASE DATE

Q3 2017





Middle-earth: Shadow of War

DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

Monolith Productions
Warner Bros. Interactive
PC, Xbox One, PlayStation 4
October 10, 2017

*Would you mind if I took it off now? The oil is burning my finger, writes **Andrew Whitehead***

Though I wrote the cover story for Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor for Hyper a few years ago, even I was surprised at how well that game turned out. I mean, I knew it was going to be good, but I don't think a lot of people knew it was going to be that good.

Middle-earth: Shadow of War continues the story of our dead-but-not-dead hero Talion, and the spirit of the elf lord Celebrimbor living inside him. After the two of the defeated Sauron's physical form, Talion and Celebrimbor forged the Ring of Power in the hopes of using it to overthrow the Dark Lord once and for all. Now the time has come to put their plan into action and crush Sauron and his marauding Nazgul forces once and for all. Hey, I mean what could go wrong?

SWEET CASTLE MAN

The much-loved Nemesis system remains, which if you don't know is a system that procedurally generates key enemies with various strengths and weaknesses. They're

also given a unique name and look, plus they can grow in strength if they defeat you in combat, or if they somehow manage to escape your wrath and flee in humiliation.

Possessing and controlling orcs remains a key part of the game, but this time you really get a sense that you're growing an army - and you're going to need one. Taking over and controlling enemy castles is key to victory. During my first castle raid, I sent my orcs to the front gate and left them to smash their way inside while I climbed the outer wall fought my way to the first control point.

The aim here is to take over as many of these control points as you can, then enter the throne room, take out whoever own this stronghold, and then claim it for yourself. Fighting alone in the courtyard took its toll on me, but when my boys burst in and started to lend a hand the tide soon began to turn.

PARRY, THRUST, KILL

Combat in Shadow of War remains

largely the same as it was Shadow of Mordor, using a simple combo system and a parrying mechanic that uses visual cues to inform the player when to react. Over time fighting grows more complex as you mix in dodges, throws, and supernatural abilities.

Shadow of War keeps a lot of what made the first game great intact, but there's more than enough new elements thrown on top to justify its existence. There's a surprising amount of humour thrown in too, with the orcs now given much bigger personalities. This feeds into the bodyguard mechanic that allows you to work alongside an orc of your choice. But be careful, an incapacitated friendly orc can reawaken unpossessed and become bloody furious at you. Fair enough, I suppose.

When Shadow of Mordor ended, I figured we'd see a sequel one day, I'm just glad it wasn't rushed out the door. Monolith have taken their time, and it really shows - Middle-earth: Shadow of War is on track to be a great sequel. **»**

Need for Speed: Payback

Please drive faster and more furiously, asks Julian Rizzo-Smith

Need for Speed: Payback is the unofficial Fast and Furious video game we've always wanted. Ghost Games boast a full 24 hour day and night cycle, dynamic lighting and a first for the series: off-road racing.

"We have a wider variety of gameplay, including the addition of action missions," creative director William Ho told IGN. "It's a nice counterpoint to street racing, so much so that off-road is a key part of the single-player campaign."

The key difference between Payback and earlier Need for speed games is "a shift in focus from racing to action driving."

"I looked to the last Need for Speed as a sharply focused experience," said Ho. "It just nailed authentic car culture, deep customisation, and accessible racing in a gorgeous open world. [With Need for Speed Payback,] we viewed our core gameplay through a blockbuster movie lens."

"We came up with five distinct car classes: Race, Off-Road, Drift, Drag, and Runner," he continued, "which is decked out for stealth and built for dodging cops and threading through rush hour traffic. Everyone will build up a stable of cars that's diverse enough to win any race and complete any mission, but exactly what you choose to build is entirely up to you."

The team has also responded to fan feedback on Need for Speed 2015, namely the inconsistent level of detail available in designing your car in Wrap Editor. According to Ho, they've "refined the visual customisation experience," creating more parts to mix and highly

detailed levels of refinement.

Payback's story follows three characters competing in tournaments and hijacking vehicles in the abandoned casino town of Fortune Valley.

"We're introducing three characters with different skills and points of view, all working towards the same goal - to bring down The House," said Ho. "Tyler is the rising street racer, Mac is the gonzo showman and Jess is the consummate wheelman for hire. You'll play each character's personal quests, but also at times, help them team up against some stiff competition."

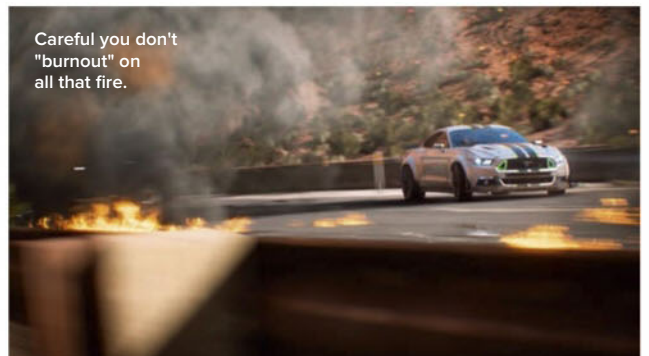
During a ten minute demo, I seamlessly transitioned between characters and their perspectives in high stakes blockbuster set pieces. Playing as Tyler, I smashed nearby cars protecting a truck on a highway, driving close enough for Jess to sneak in and hijack the 18-wheeler; transitioning to playing as her outmanoeuvring the police. It wasn't clear when playing if this was just a tutorial or preview build or if the full game will be as seamless but these narrative sequences are tense and exciting to play.

According to Ho, it's that "white-knuckle, high speed driving and battling that ends with an action movie payoff," the team aim to recreate.

"It's ambitious but it all just kind of fits together," he said. "Need for Speed Payback is built on a solid racing core that our fans love [but] it has a wider palette of driving fantasies, including a series of blockbuster action movie sequences." ❧



DEVELOPER | Ghost Games
PUBLISHER | EA
PLATFORM | PC, Xbox One and PlayStation 4
RELEASE DATE | November 10, 2017



Careful you don't
"burnout" on
all that fire.



DEVELOPER	MachineGames
PUBLISHER	Bethesda
PLATFORM	PC, Xbox One, PlayStation 4
RELEASE DATE	November 27, 2017

Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus

*Blazkowicz is back and ready to kick some Nazi ass... once he's feeling better, writes **Andrew Whitehead***

I think a lot of gamers were caught off-guard by how good *Wolfenstein: The New Order* was when it came out. Developer MachineGames knew exactly what the *Wolfenstein* series needed when they created *The New Order*, and proved they could do it again with the follow-up prequel *The Old Blood*. The big question now is can they do it for a third time in *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus*?

In case you're out of the loop, it's the 1960s and the Second World War didn't end the way it was supposed to. Nazis now rule America, so unless you're a credit to the Aryan race, you should probably head underground and join the resistance.

Fans will recall our hero, B.J. Blazkowicz, was presumed dead at the end of *The New Order*, and I'm here to say I still don't know how he survived. I was told by a developer, however, that my play session would skip some of the introduction that explains what has happened in the past five months while B.J. was in a coma, and how he ended up on this cargo ship.

Soon after waking up, B.J. is helped into a wheelchair by his partner Anya, who is revealed to be pregnant, and is then pushed back into his favourite pastime of killing Nazi as they storm the ship in search of him.

MICROWAVED NAZIS

It was clear that B.J. was in no state to fight, but with Nazis coming in from every angle choices had to be made. Your elderly scientist friend Seth Roth somehow managed to setup a number of microwave traps all over the ship, which B.J. can use by flipping a switch and cooking some Nazi scum alive. It buys you some time as you roll your chair to safety.

Later, in a secured room, B.J. and

Roth debate what they should do next, while off in the background creeping Nazis are being fried alive in the microwave traps. Just like in previous games, *The New Colossus* isn't afraid to throw in a few gory, yet light-hearted moments in amongst the action.

Despite having some power once more, I couldn't help but feel vulnerable in a way I hadn't felt in the previous games. I was stuck in a wheelchair and only able to clumsily aim my gun while barely containing its recoil.

DEAL OR NO DEAL

Oddly enough, my favourite part of the demo was right at the end when Irene Engel, the returning Lieutenant General of SS, had me down on the floor during a prisoner exchange deal that was clearly a load of Nazi shit.

It was great to see how eager MachineGames still are to flesh out the world of *Wolfenstein*, yet still keep the story personal and intimate.

But look, this is MachineGames making a new *Wolfenstein*, so it's not a question of whether it will be good or not. It's just a matter of how good will *The New Colossus* be when compared to its predecessors? Frankly, it's not a bad problem to have. «

Wolfenstein 2 is, by our count, actually the 11th game in the series.



Sonic Forces

DEVELOPER	Sonic Team
PUBLISHER	Sega
PLATFORM	PS4, PC, XBone, Switch
RELEASE DATE	Holiday 2017

Green Hill is now a war zone, writes **Heidi Kemps**.

Things have just become really weird in the Sonic Universe. Yes, even weirder than that one time when Sonic died and had to have a creepy, realistic human woman kiss him to save the world. See, somehow Eggman's forces appear to have conquered the world, thanks to power bestowed to him through a mysterious being known as Infinite. What's more, several villains from across Sonic history – Shadow, Metal Sonic, Chaos, and Zavok – have all come back and are working towards the world's destruction. Things have gotten so out of hand that Sonic's massive cast of characters have come together to form an organised resistance to Eggman's armies, and are turning to three heroes for help: Sonic, another Sonic from an alternate dimension, and you. Yes, you!

Sonic Forces focuses around three types of gameplay: classic sidescrolling stages in the vein of Sonic's Megadrive outings (albeit in high-res 3D graphics) with "classic", 3D platforming sequences with "modern" Sonic, and a mixture of both featuring an anthropomorphic avatar character you create yourself from a variety of selectable parts and abilities. As Sonic Forces was conceived as a 25th anniversary project like the much-loved Sonic Generations, there's a lot of familiar faces and scenery: our playable demo included the Green Hill Zone

and a city level very similar to Sonic Adventure 2's City Escape. While other characters feature in the game, they act as support from the sidelines, radioing in to the three heroes as they run through the levels to offer advice, relay story details, and keep tabs on how the organised resistance is going.

The stages themselves feel fast and fluid, filled with the sort of fast-paced 2D/3D enemy-smashing and platforming that made Sonic Generations such a fondly remembered outing. Fan-favourite characters from across the franchise like Amy Rose, Vector the Crocodile, and even Silver the Hedgehog were constantly communicating with us, giving us advice on where to go and what the current state of the resistance was looking. Monitors bestowing the usual array of bonus rings, invincibility, and extra lives littered the landscapes, but they were joined by the Wisps from Sonic Colors and Sonic Lost World, which would grant the heroes temporary special abilities to help them through the stages.

The avatar character offers some very interesting twists on gameplay, as well. You can pick from one of several animal species, and almost the entire body of your furry incarnation can be dressed up with a huge variety of parts. Some of these elements are more than just cosmetic: The species you pick



bestows specific abilities, like double-jumps or ring magnetism. You can also assign your avatar a "Wispon" – a weapon that utilises Wisp power in new and unique ways to both attack foes and move around the levels. Depending on your Wispon and character choice, the way you play can change dramatically.

Can Sonic, Sonic, and Original Character put things right and destroy Eggman's ambitions? We'll find out later this year. Until then, you'll have to settle for fanfiction to put yourself in the Sonic universe. **[[**





PREVIEW

Sonic Mania

DEVELOPER	Sega
PUBLISHER	Sega
PLATFORM	Xbone, PS4, Switch, PC
RELEASE DATE	August 16, 2017

This one's for the fans, writes Heidi Kempf.

Sonic is a franchise with a long and storied history, filled with ups, downs, and loop-de-loops – both figurative and literal. While the “modern” 3D Sonics have seen a drastic upswing in quality since the low points of Sonic 2006 and Sonic Unleashed, there’s still been a very vocal part of the Sonic fanbase that insists that the games have never been good in 3D, and that the classic 2D Sonic games on Megadrive will forever be the best Sonics. Well, I hate to break it to them, but once Sonic Mania hits the scene, those old Megadrive titles may no longer be considered the gold standard of classic Sonic gameplay.

Sonic Mania is a collaboration between Sega and Christian Whitehead, a longtime Sonic fan who got his start creating fangames based on the world-beloved hedgehog. He has been tasked – along with developers Headcannon and Pagoda West – with creating an all-new Sonic game in the style of the beloved Megadrive classics with a bit of a modern twist on top.

The base gameplay is modeled after the groundbreaking Megadrive masterpieces. Sonic will run,

jump, bounce, and zip his way through an array of colourful stages, taking on the robotic forces of Eggman along the way and enlisting the help of his buddies Tails and Knuckles. But Sonic Mania isn’t just about coasting on fan nostalgia – it’s packed with an incredible amount of detail in everything to the controls to the smallest of character and enemy animations, and constantly surprises you in terms of visuals, level design, and gameplay.

Take, for example, one of the game’s classic levels – the Chemical Plant Zone from Sonic 2. The first Act of the zone is a blend of Acts 1 and 2 from the Megadrive classic with a few new twists, such as being able to control where you go through the high-speed tubes and a newly created mini-boss at the end. Act 2, however, puts a completely new spin – pun semi-intended – on this beloved stage, introducing all-new, never-before seen mechanics like purple goop that lets you stick to walls and ceilings and bouncy gel that you bounce across like a gelatin



trampoline, all before throwing you into a surprise boss encounter that resolves in a way I wouldn’t dare reveal.

While the retro-throwback levels are a big part of Sonic Mania – Flying Battery, Green Hill, and Stardust Speedway are all in the game – the team has also developed some truly impressive original stages like Studiopolis, an old-timey Hollywood level with a cybernetic twist, and Mirage Saloon, a Western-themed desert with giant guns that blast Sonic out like a bullet. New gameplay elements, like the drop dash, which lets you speed up immediately after a jump, make the fluid, fast movement of classic Sonic feel even more intuitive. Even just watching the game is a feast of beautiful 2D visuals, with background elements paying homage to obscure ‘90s Sega adverts and small details in character animations inspired by games on fringes of Sonic’s old library. Everything about Sonic Mania is an utter delight, and fans both old and new can look forward to a modern-retro experience later this winter. ☞



PREVIEW

Far Cry 5

*Religious cults and gun toting maniacs - that sounds like America, writes **Andrew Whitehead**.*

There I stood in the bright Montana sunshine, staring at the steeple of a white weatherboard church ahead of me, holding a Star-Spangled baseball bat in my hands. I walked forward towards the edge of the hill towards the church and watched as the town below came into view.

In the street below men with guns were ranting loudly about salvation to a couple of terrified people who'd forced down onto their knees. It was clear that if I didn't do something soon these people were dead. It was around this time it became clear to me that Ubisoft Montreal weren't pulling any punches - they wanted to make a point about their vision for Far Cry 5.

WELCOME TO AMERICA

This isn't a tropical island in the middle of the Pacific, or a dark jungle in deepest Africa, or even a fictional country in the Himalayan Mountains - this is present day America. The land of the free, home of the brave. And it's more than a little fucked up right now.

Hope County has been taken over by a bible-bashing cult called Eden's Gate led by deranged preacher by the name of Joseph Seed and his siblings John, Jacob, and Faith. Over the years Far Cry became known for its strong villains, and the Seed family looks set to continue that tradition.

One big change from previous Far Cry games is players now create their own character. The story puts you in control of an unnamed sheriff's deputy who got caught up in this madness, but their look,

gender, and race are all up to you.

FRIENDS HELP FRIENDS KILL PEOPLE

At the start of my play session I was given the choice of three 'Guns for Hire' - two of them human and one of them a dog named Boomer. As you progress through the game you'll unlock new allies, which will also include a few more 'Fangs for Hire', such as a bear and a cougar.

I chose Boomer to help me liberate Hope County, partly because of his ability to go unnoticed by enemies. To them, Boomer is just another roaming mongrel. Unfortunately, we were too late to save the innocent civilians, but in our brief time together Boomer and I caused a hell of a lot of chaos and destruction.

FAMILIAR TERRITORY

Though Far Cry 5 features a different setting from earlier games, there's still a lot of familiar elements here. The wingsuit is making a return, as is the ability to get around in a variety of vehicles. But there are some tweaks to the formula too, such as the removal of the mini-map, and the lack of towers to climb to reveal more of your surroundings.

Far Cry 5 isn't trying to reinvent the series, but I don't think anybody was asking it too. It's the same game loved by fans with a new environment, story, and a few gameplay tweaks. As the old saying goes, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. «

“
**AMERICA.
THE LAND OF
THE FREE, HOME
OF THE BRAVE. AND
IT'S MORE THAN A
LITTLE FUCKED
UP RIGHT NOW.**”

DEVELOPER	Ubisoft Montreal
PUBLISHER	Ubisoft
PLATFORM	PC, Xbox One, Xbox One X, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 4 Pro
RELEASE DATE	February 27, 2018







Cleverly, blocking and special attacks use the same meter.

“
**CAREFUL
 USAGE OF
 MOVES AND
 STRATEGISING
 PAYS OFF**”



DEVELOPER | Lab Zero
 PUBLISHER | 505 Games
 PLATFORM | PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch
 RELEASE DATE | TBA



Indivisible

Heidi Kempf also knows her way around an axe.

Most indie games are a labour of love to some degree, but *Indivisible* from Lab Zero games is a title that its creators have very clearly poured their hearts into. After wowing the fighting game world with the stunningly hand-drawn visuals and polished fighting engine of *Skullgirls*, the team decided to make their next game a 2D action/RPG with a bit of inspiration from classics like *Castlevania* and *Valkyrie Profile*. The result is a game with very distinct visual and gameplay style that feels like a real breath of fresh air.

Indivisible follows Ajna, a young girl and martial artist who has awakened to mysterious powers after a tragedy befell her village. As she sets out to learn the truth behind the mysterious events that unfolded, she befriends a large and varied cast of characters, explores Southeast Asian-inspired landscapes and ruins, and fights fierce foes in a hybrid of turn-based and real-time combat. Along the way, she'll discover new items and abilities to help her navigate and fight – as well as encounter some familiar faces

from other well-known indie titles.

Exploration in *Indivisible* is done through classic 2D side-scrolling action. Areas are big and complex, spread out both horizontally and vertically, and Ajna will need to utilise acrobatics like jumping and sliding to navigate the terrain. Items you obtain, such as the axe we picked up during our E3 demo, also aid in exploration: in this case, Ajna was able to use the axe to scale walls by jumping on its handle. Scouring the stages yields treasure and progress, but also leads you to encounter many enemies.

It's not a stretch to say that *Indivisible's* combat is what helps make it such a unique experience. When Ajna encounters an enemy on the map, the game seamlessly switches into battle mode, with three of her companions joining her to take on enemies. The actions of individual characters are mapped to the face buttons on the controller, and by combining button presses with directional inputs, characters execute different attacks. This can be used strategically: one character can launch an enemy up

into the air while another follows up with a juggle while the enemy is defenseless, or a character may opt to wait to use a certain attack in order to get in a few hits that will make that skill more powerful. You can't just spam attacks, however: it takes time for characters to recharge after striking, so careful usage of moves and strategising pays off tremendously.

Players also have to pay special attention to the ways enemies strike. There's a blocking mechanic in the game that reduces damage taken from enemies, and while you can just hold down buttons to block, there's a meter that depletes the longer you hold the buttons – which is the same meter used to perform devastating special moves. By blocking skillfully, you can not only save this meter, but nullify most enemy damage, encouraging you to really pay attention and play well.

Though there's still a ways to go on *Indivisible*, it's shaping up to be a fantastic-looking game. Plus, with a Switch version newly announced, you'll be able to take this action/RPG on the go. **«**

DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

Deck Nine Games
Square Enix
Xbox One, PlayStation 4, PC
August 2017



Life is Strange: Before the Storm

In the past, you can't rewind time, warns Julian Rizzo-Smith.

Life is Strange: Before the Storm is a three-part prequel to the first season of Life is Strange, stripping the player of Max's supernatural time-travelling powers for a more intimate relatable story. Set three years before the events of Life is Strange, you play as Chloe, Max's blue-haired edgy best friend before she develops into the teen punk.

"We want to explore [the setting of Life is Strange], Arcadia Bay through Chloe's eyes," said lead writer Zak Garris. "Chloe sees very differently from Max's [and] the tone of the game will reflect some of those core differences.

"With Max, you could take pictures of things, the perfect example," he continued. "Fundamentally, it's a very passive thing to do. Max is hiding behind the camera and looking at a static object that's interesting. For Chloe, our version of that is graffiti. She gets to go around the world and where Max is documenting stuff she sees visually, Chloe is putting her attitude out on the walls and other objects."

Some of these differences were further demonstrated in an E3 demo: sneaking into adult-only venues, stealing and vandalising. Her identity as a normal sixteen year old girl plays into her decision-making, too. Unlike when playing as Max, you can't rewind time to choose the more appropriate outcome and are forced to live with the consequences.

"What we're exploring is how sixteen year old girls can be powerful, fearless when they need to be, or terrified and still act if they have to. There's a real heroism inside Chloe, and that's right alongside all of her vulnerability, frailty and her fear. She's all of those things wrapped up into one character because that's what people are.

"Chloe's sixteen, a couple years after her father's passed away. [Her mother,] Joyce is moving on by dating someone new. Max has left, leaving Chloe all alone. She's

alienated. She's trapped in a prison of grief and loneliness."

From here, Chloe meets Rachel, a popular almost perfect student who on the surface has everything Chloe lacks: a perfect family, friends and stable life.

"Rachel is privileged in ways that Chloe isn't," he said. "She seems perfect but she's actually really close to breaking.

"The nature of Chloe's relationship with Rachel from the first game is never clear," said Garris. "In Before the Storm, we're giving the player a chance to develop that relationship in whatever way that they want to."

While Max will appear in the

standalone fourth episode, Farewell, and some characters from the first season will return, Before the Storm's emotional and relatable characters are expected to make it as accessible as the original.

"A big part of what Life is Strange is about is finding stories from maybe traditionally marginalised spaces and not being afraid to explore complicated personal issues about identity, sexuality and coming of age," Garris said. "How all of that gets wrapped up in this time period of a teenager's life, and how loud everything is and uncertain and changing. We've really tried to embrace that." "



Issues of identity, sexuality and coming of age are tackled.



Super Lucky's Tale



The cute mascot platformer is one of the most fondly remembered of genres for those who grew up during the '90s. Nowadays, however, they are exceptionally rare – while a new Mario or Sonic might come along every so often, what few attempts there have been to create new cute character-driven action games have mostly fizzled out. (Even Skylanders, which has been a tent pole for Activision in recent times, was absent from E3 this year.)

This is why Super Lucky's Tale felt so strange when Microsoft unveiled it at their E3 press conference amidst a wave of shooters, racing games, and mature-oriented adventure titles. Super Lucky's Tale has managed to become a cornerstone of the upcoming Xbox One X lineup, launching alongside the enhanced platform in October.

Lucky is a big-eyed, fluffy fox in a cape out on an action adventure. He and his sister must recover a magical book from the clutches of a sinister villain named Jinx. It's a simple story, sure, but we

all know that these games aren't built around Shakespearean plots – they're all about the little joys of running around their colourfully-constructed worlds, meeting funny friends, playing with gimmicks, and finding hidden treasures and secrets along the way.

The world of Super Lucky's Tale certainly delivers on sucking you into a beautiful cartoon world. On the Xbox One X, the game runs at a full clip of 60 fps at 4K resolution, making it perhaps the most technically advanced game of its kind. The little details you can see in the environments and the wild and wacky characters you meet – both friend and foe – are a delight to see in motion. In the demo we played, we had to find the heads of golems scattered about and bring them back to their bodies, showcasing the kind of cute questing that will be a cornerstone of the game.

Of course, no matter how strong the visual component is, a platformer lives and dies on the strength of its controls and stage design. While it's hard to get an

Xbox finally gets a mascot to replace Blinx, writes a relieved Heidi Kempf

overall feel for the game from a brief demo, what we played of Super Lucky's Tale felt very promising, with precision controls making all our movements and jumping (and double-jumping) feel solid. Lucky's special skills – a tail attack and the ability to burrow – worked well with the variety of gimmicks and hazards strewn throughout the stage. The developer promises things like mini-games and challenge stages in the final game, and it'll be interesting to see how those look.

While some Xbox diehards may be wondering why Microsoft hasn't released Blinx the Time Sweeper out of cold storage, it's worth noting that Super Lucky's Tale isn't totally new: it's actually a sequel to an Oculus Rift-exclusive 3D platformer (hence the "Super" in the title). This time around, however, you won't need a headset to enjoy some classic platforming action – or even an Xbox One X, given that the game will run on Windows 10 PCs and current Xbox One systems, too. ☞



DEVELOPER	Playful Corp
PUBLISHER	Microsoft
PLATFORM	Xbox One, PC
RELEASE DATE	Nov 7, 2017



Songbringer

DEVELOPER	Wizard Fu Games
PUBLISHER	Wizard Fu Games
PLATFORM	PC, PS4, Xbox One
RELEASE DATE	Winter 2017

Songbringer is an indie Kickstarter success story that's been some time in the making. Pitched as a procedurally generated Zelda-style game that challenges your ability to explore and adapt, it was modestly funded in 2015 and has been in a beta stage for a while. As the game wraps up its development and expands out to more platforms, it's shaped up to look like a fantastic time for anyone looking for a roguelike that's easy to get into, challenging... and just a little bit weird.

Roq, the game's hero, is described as a "carefree dude" who's on an epic quest to... well, he more or less stumbled onto this sweet-ass sword on a planet he landed on, and now he's awoken some sort of ancient menace that needs killing. Armed with a sword, a... top hat, and... cactus?... he's out to complete his amazing quest through a pixelated world filled with threats unknown.

We're not kidding when we say there's a lot of stuff to explore in Songbringer: there's somewhere in the area of 300 million potential

This procedurally generated Zelda-alike could Roq, writes Heidi Kemps

procedurally generated worlds in this game. You can either go in randomly, or enter a seed code to get a guaranteed set of stages - the choice is up to you. But once you're in, it's time for some good old-fashioned top-down exploration in a variety of different landscapes.

Joined by his endlessly sarcastic floating (and moustachioed) floating robot companion Jib, Roq must clear ten dungeons linked by an overworld to save the day. Besides his standard-issue sword swings, he has a dodge move for evading hazards and enemy attacks, along with a deadly top hat that acts as a projectile weapon. (Some of these items may have been in there for demo purposes - there were indications that these might be things you collect over the course of the game). During our dungeon exploration, we also acquired some bombs that we could use to blast through walls and other suspect structures, furthering our exploration through a dark and musty dungeon that looked like a mix between ancient ruins and a derelict spacecraft.

Despite the simplistic look of the pixel graphics in still screens, there's a surprising amount of detail in the game's environments and character animations. Roq's fluid movement with his sword slashes and dodges is mesmerising to watch, and the dungeon and overworld environments are all memorably distinct when you're exploring your way through them. Munching on a hallucinogenic cactus turns the screen into a wild psychedelic ride - besides granting Roq mysterious special powers, these cacti transform the world into a rainbow-fueled party of colors and awesome. Well, until they wear off, anyway.

Given the recent popularity of unofficial Legend of Zelda randomisers, it's easy to see the players who enjoy those getting into the randomly generated worlds and quests of Songbringer. For those interested, developer Nathanael Weiss has documented his work on the game extensively on his Youtube channel and on Twitch at wizard-fu. It's a good way to whet your appetite for adventures to come in this weird world. **«**



PREVIEW

Etrian Odyssey V: Beyond the Myth

Though its release history in the PAL territories has been spotty, the Etrian Odyssey series of handheld RPGs has nonetheless won over fans across the globe. It's not the sort of sweeping JRPG epic with angst-y teenagers and threats of world-ending cataclysms: instead, the series focuses on a more old-fashioned experience: the thrill and wonder of exploring vast 3D dungeons step-by-step, the feel of creating your party from scratch and raising them to become fierce warriors, and the triumphant victory/heartbreaking defeat of conquering/getting annihilated by fearsome enemy encounters. With the announcement of Etrian Odyssey V: Beyond the Myth at E3, fans of this franchise will once again have the opportunity to discover the wonders of Yggdrasil.

Legends say that those who can reach the top of the World Tree, Yggdrasil, will be able to see their wildest wishes granted. A city rests at the roots of the great tree, where adventurers congregate in their quest to ascend to its highest branches.

But, as is typical for the Etrian Odyssey franchise, there's something deeper behind these myths and mysteries – and as you and your guild of adventurers climb the many strata surrounding Yggdrasil, unpleasant truths will be revealed...

Of course, you can't adventure without creating a party first, and character creation is where some new additions to the Etrian Odyssey formula become very clear. For the first time ever, you're able to pick from four different races based on the fantasy archetypes of humans, elves, dwarves, and beastmen. Every character in your party can be assigned a different race, as well as unique facial features, gender, skin tone, and voice, leading to a dramatically increased level of character customisation. Each character can be assigned one of ten different classes, as well, each with a unique skill tree that can be filled out how the player chooses: it's possible for two characters of the same class to play wildly differently depending on your skill tree builds.

From there on, you can catch your

More hit than myth, predicts Heidi Kemps.

bearings in town before venturing off into the untamed wilds surrounding Yggdrasil. Dungeons are rendered in a first-person 3D view, and are mapped on the console's touch screen step-by-step, much like the grid-based mazes from classic RPGs of yesteryear. It's up to you to be a good cartographer and mark important places on the map, because these places are filled with traps, treasures, hidden passages, and – perhaps most famously – extremely vicious monsters known as FOEs. Running into an FOE unprepared means almost certain doom unless you are either very skilled or very lucky. Fortunately, you can hone your skills on less threatening foes in menu-driven, turn based combat before trying to take down FOEs and bosses – though even the most non-threatening enemies can drive warriors to their knees if you don't consider your combat strategies carefully.

Etrian Odyssey V is due out in early 2018, so it's still a ways off – but hey, at least that gives you enough time to finish Persona 5 first! ☞

Minit

*Do not adjust your magazine, this page is not a printing error, writes **Julian Rizzo-Smith**.*

Minit is an interesting dungeon crawling adventure with a basic premise: every 60 seconds, you die. You respawn where you begin your adventure, in a wooden house near the beach, and return to exploring.

It's an incredibly unique design choice by a four man team of former AAA developers. Their aim with Minit is to create a simple to play experience with light-hearted pleasant moments that don't take themselves seriously.

"Let's go in a completely different direction to other games and make a game about being nice to people," said programmer and designer Jan Willem Nijman. "We all just really loved the idea of making a simple game [and] putting all these restrictions on ourselves: only two colours, a time limit and using only one button, and making this a really minimal game."

"Because it's so simple, if we have ideas we want to make, we can put them in right away," Nijman said. "For Horizon: Zero Dawn for Kitty [the game's artist and co-designer,] if she wanted to implement something new it would take weeks, and you would have to go to meetings. Here, it's like, 'if you hit the boat, it should break.' Then, five minutes later, it's in the game."

You begin your journey waking up in a cabin on the beach, with little direction. Your only controls are directional movement (up, down, left and right) and an action button, used to interact with the world, pick up items and swing your sword.

The world and exploration is ever

growing, too. Hidden traps, puzzles, small villages of NPCs with quests and skeleton enemies populate the world map. Each time you spawn, you progress slightly further through a room, realise the solution to a puzzle or, for an exhaustingly slow turtle who speaks one word per second, hear a character speak.

"The dead ends that you haven't quite figured out yet will just keep growing," said Nijman. "We have this time limit so even the simplest maze is a challenge."

You learn new abilities to progress through the world by picking up items, as well. The flashlight brightens your way through dark spaces, you can defend yourself with a sword and the watering can does "something else".

The identity of the playable character - a small duck looking creature - isn't necessary to the game, and according to Nijman, is merely a vessel for the player to explore the world.

"We're not going to say who he is or what they are," he said. "For us, it was a case of, 'let's make something anyone can identify [with]. It's cute and curious."

"You hear this really low-fi quality and the music's uplifting and we have realistic seagull sounds," said Nijman. "It all comes together in a world that looks very simple but in your head becomes [a lot] bigger."

"And for us, this game is about all the little details," added Callis. "We don't want to have this big world that's empty. We want to have a small dense world that's packed with secrets." ❧

**YOU CAN
DEFEND YOURSELF
WITH A SWORD AND
THE WATERING CAN
DOES "SOMETHING
ELSE"**

DEVELOPER

Jan Willem Nijman, Dominik Johann, Jukio Kallio, Kitty Calis

PUBLISHER

Devolver Digital

PLATFORM

PC, Xbox One and PlayStation 4

RELEASE DATE

2017



PREVIEW

South Park: The Fractured But Whole

*Thank god I bought that 300cm 4K telly just in time for this, writes **Andrew Whitehead***

Back in the day I used to never miss an episode of South Park, but now there's entire season I haven't seen. I still have a lot of respect for it, but I drifted away from South Park and I'm not really sure why. Yet despite my indifference to the show, I'll happily admit to laughing out loud quite a bit while playing South Park: The Fractured But Whole. Make of that what you will.

Fractured ditches the fantasy tropes of the previous game, The Stick of Truth, and instead pokes fun at a more modern theme - superheroes. There's a civil war going on between Cartman's team Coon and Friends, and a rival outfit called the Freedom Pals. Right in the middle of this conflict is you, The New Kid.

NO PLACE FOR CHILDREN

My time with Fractured was spent inside a strip club where I was trying to find a stripper named Classi. Searching the club with

DEVELOPER	Ubisoft, South Park Digital Studios
PUBLISHER	Ubisoft
PLATFORM	PC, Xbox One, PlayStation 4
RELEASE DATE	October 17, 2017



Proving once and for all that video games are indeed (f)art.

Captain Diabetes, we eventually realised the only way we'd find her is if we knew what she looked like. We shifted our focus to a couple of businessmen who we managed to convince that we were strippers, then took them to a private dance room and began slowly grinding information out of them.

So there I was, spinning the left control stick around and making a young boy rub his butt on some random dude. Oh, and to stop him from getting too frisky, I had to keep on farting on him. Eventually I was twerking my way to victory, rapidly moving the analogue stick up and down while ripping massive farts right in his face. Sadly, our plan didn't work, and get the information

we needed Captain Diabetes and I were going to have to fight for it.

FARTING AND FIGHTING

Like the previous game *Fractured* uses turn-based combat, but it now also uses a grid system which means positioning matters. While battling the businessmen I used Captain Diabetes to do some long range attacks and my own character for close quarter combat. A simple trick I discovered involved lining up the two men, then hitting the front one hard enough to stagger him backwards into the one behind.

Fractured might feature some seriously low brow toilet humour, but the actual mechanics of the

game are not half-baked at all. It's a solid turn-based RPG that rewards you for thinking a few moves ahead.

Eventually we got the information we needed, which kicked off phase two of our plan - putting some jizz and bacteria in a drink to get the club's DJ sick. Why? So we could use his microphone to call Classi out to the stripper pole. Makes sense, right?

As I mentioned before, I'm a lapsed fan of the show, but even I'm excited for *Fractured*. None of the elements feels like it's being left behind in favour of another. The writing is great, the mechanics are fun, and it looks just like the show. Now just cross your finger and hope it gets released uncensored. «

Call Of Cthulhu

Heidi Kempf descends into madness.

H.P. Lovecraft's writing were incredibly influential on the horror genre; Books, film, and games all owe the man a tremendous debt for establishing many of the genre conventions we tend to take for granted. Given how well-regarded his work is, though, it's somewhat puzzling how few games are based in the universe he helped establish. While Call of Cthulhu is based on the pen-and-paper RPG of the same name, it also marks one of the few times the Lovecraftian mythos has been embodied in game form. Going from the preview session we saw at E3, this will be a hard game to put down – and we don't know if we'd escape with our sanity intact.

It's the early 1920s, and you step into the shoes of private investigator Edward Pierce. You're tasked with uncovering the mysteries of what is a mundane-seeming case on the surface: the death of a well-known artist and her son. Of course, this being a Lovecraftian horror tale, things start to become anything but mundane as you start to unravel what was really going on. Can you solve the mystery of what happened here, and, perhaps more importantly, can you do so without going mad?

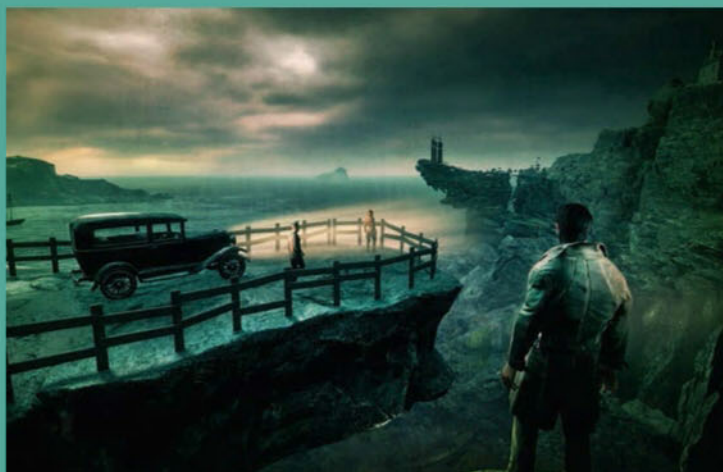
The setting for the game is Darkwater Island, a dark and musty place with an unsettling air about it that's populated by a cast of equally suspicious personalities. Early in our demo, we met with a gravekeeper who didn't seem particularly enthused by our presence on his grounds, even coming at us with an axe. We had to negotiate our

way out of potentially dangerous situation using a dialogue tree, the results of which were determined by what the developers call the "skill sheet" – statistics like Persuasion and Intimidation that can be put to use in confrontations like this. We succeeded in calming him down first by bluffing with physical threats and then going to more peaceful conversation, eventually yielding valuable investigative information.

Investigation is the heart of this game, and much of your efforts will be spent piecing clues together to discover new truths. Later in our demo, we were investigating a scene where the fire that killed the artist and her son took place. We had a police report with us, and looked at the scene to compare it to what was written down. However, we found a few inconsistencies – the stopped clock was at a different time than that listed in the filing, and the position of objects indicated some sort of foul play.

But as Pierce gets closer to the truth, he puts his sanity at risk. The finale of our demo showcased with might happen as Pierce begins to descend into madness – as he stares at a painting, an otherworldly horror seems to crawl out of it, poised to strike him down. The reality behind the horror must be uncovered – but at what cost?

After a lengthy time in development, Call of Cthulhu's intriguing mix of investigation and light survival-horror elements is hitting PC, Xbox One, and PS4 later this year. Keep your wits about you – you're going to need them. **C**





DEVELOPER
PUBLISHER
PLATFORM
RELEASE DATE

Cyanide Studio
Focus Home Interactive
PC, PS4, Xbox One
Summer 2017

PREVIEW

The Darwin Project

The evolution of the multiplayer sandbox survival game, writes **Julian Rizzo-Smith**

DEVELOPER	Scavengers Studio
PUBLISHER	Scavengers Studio
PLATFORM	Xbox One X
RELEASE DATE	Q1 2018





Hunt your friends.
And kill them.

The Darwin Project is a PvP survival game combining battle royales, investigation and Darwin's survival of the fittest. Six players begin in separate locations in a hexagonal shaped map, and need to scavenge resources, craft equipment and hunt others to be the last person standing.

Players need to manage their health, cold and hunger, too. Crafting and scavenging resources leaves a footprint in the snow, which adds an intricate risk reward mechanic that according to lead designer Keane Tan, makes combat more streamlined for casual play without sacrificing engaging strategy.

"People don't really stay in one spot, they'll keep moving," he said. "That's part of the Manhunt. You leave behind a clue and you know that someone is hunting you based on those clues. You need to get away from those clues as fast as possible [because] when you pick up another player's clue, you know where they are and can hunt after them.

"That's why there are more strategies to win by crafting, ambushing and hunting," he continued. "It made matches feel more like conscious social games rather than ones that are competitive."

In this way, The Darwin Project differs from the usual deathmatch mode in first-person shooters, where you need to be good at shooting to win. The controls are simple to learn, swinging an axe with the press of the right bumper and the option to have an aim-assist when firing

arrows from your bow.

"[Another] one of the players is directing the show," he added. "Instead of playing as a competitor, he can give hints to the other players, talk to them and be able to give them powers. He's the omnipotent guy that hosts the show."

The idea of a show director pulling the strings adds an interesting entertainment value that Tan believes would work well in a YouTube or Twitch setting.

"A very entertaining person will be able to attract their audience to play and then act as the show director," he said.

Scavengers Studio have plans to develop more environments than the snowy mountains playable at E3 but believe the game has a long way to go.

"We'll see how we space out the content but definitely, we will go step by step," said Tan. "We're a small team - there's 12 of us - and making one map polished takes a long time. This map is going to be polished in a few months and we already have some concepts for the new maps in place."

"We started this project in September and a big part of it was analysing what works because it's quite a new genre," he continued. "In September last year, even PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds was unknown."

Still, despite being very early days, what I played was engaging. Managing your body heat, other's whereabouts and what you're leaving behind creates a unique multiplayer survival experience. **«**







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