

FREE
MAGAZINE



BATMAN 3

BEYOND GOTHAM



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BATMAN 3

BEYOND GOTHAM



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SHARE YOUR GAMEPLAY HIGHLIGHTS FOR A CHANCE TO WIN

SPACE TRUCKING

I spent the better part of a fortnight this issue terrified. Every evening come sunset I'd knock the living room lights off, pull my chair closer to the TV, turn the sound as high as I dared and booted up *Alien: Isolation*. I was less concerned about the game's soundtrack annoying neighbours: my embarrassingly loud shrieks would easily drown that out. I'm terrible at horror games, but with *Isolation*, I felt compelled to play it this way. Even if my play style was less Ace Rimmer, more Dwayne Dibley (yes, I made a Red Dwarf reference), it was the right call to make. Sometimes you want to help in any way you can to invest yourself into the fiction, into the sense of *being* there. And Creative Assembly has done such an amazing job as it is making me, and you, feel like you're aboard a fastly decaying space station in the backwaters of the universe. That sci-fi environment is so true to the source material you wonder if they stole the build from some untapped-set design from the original film. (They didn't. They're just that good at their craft).

We'll never make it into space in our lifetime (and even if I could, my imagination would run wild with the idea of skulking alien creatures in every dark corner of a ship, as much as I hear that iconic score from *Jaws* anytime I dip a foot in the ocean), but games such as *Isolation* give us that escapism to feel like we've experienced it. Equally we'll never don an exo-suit or pilot a mech: *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare* and *Titanfall* allow us to buy into the fiction; visuals, audio and mechanics selling us an experience that can feel totally engrossing. I love games for that. I may never go backpacking across exotic locales, drive super cars or be part of a world-class football team, but the likes of *Far Cry*, *Forza* and *FIFA*

can make me feel, for a while at least, that I can. For the price of a retail game or download we can fantasise of being somewhere else, someone else. I'm glad I've the opportunity to be part of these stories, and will continue to appreciate them. Enjoy the issue.

GILLEN MCALLISTER
EDITOR IN CHIEF



SUPERIOR HARDWARE

The first of this month's specialist features sees us return to *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare* via our chief specialist in the franchise - GRTV's Nick Holmberg. Over a series of events and months he sunk time into "a series-changing" multiplayer. This is his report.



CONNECTED

Kickstarter refocuses, Lohan sues, witches survive culls, Batman gets spotlighted and DLC is downloaded.



ART

Creative Assembly get into the mind, and movements, of sci-fi's greatest icon as we look at *Alien: Isolation*.



PROJECT CARS

Our own pro-driver Petter Hegevall came back from his time with the crowdfunding project by Slightly Mad Studios believing the title would be delayed: as we went to press, that prediction came true. Read up his thoughts on a promising idea that needs more time.



COMING SOON

We're back in Kyrat for a play of the latest *Far Cry 4* build, and dig into the mythology behind the game's story.



REVIEWS

Our latest perfect score, an angry Ranger, a hard-boiled detective, a fleet of cars, sci-fi shooters and a xenomorph.

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CONNECTED

KICKSTARTER'S RENEWED DIRECTION FOR 2014

Proven ideas and long-awaited sequels give way to innovative concepts.

> There's been a stark difference on Kickstarter this year to last's. A recent comparison found that whereas last year's backer funds pulled in an impressive \$58 million for the whole year, the first half of 2014 contributions only weighed in at \$13 million. That's not to say there's been a decline of successful projects, but rather there's been a decline of high-profile projects with established fan followings.

This is not necessarily a bad thing though. It can be argued that fewer, safe and proven ideas open up the platform for more innovative and forward thinking concepts.

"The number of successfully funded video game projects is actually up this year vs. the same period last year. Kickstarter's mission is to bring creative projects to life — so from that perspective it has been a great year so far," says Kickstarter representative David Gallagher.

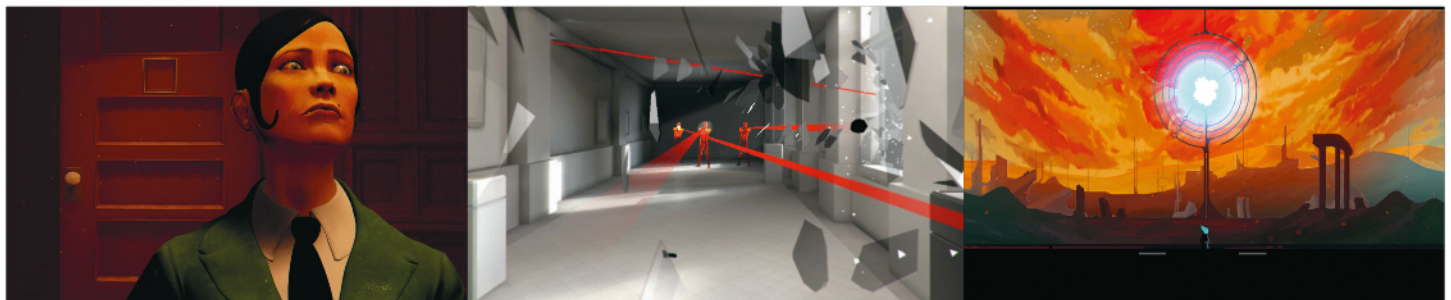
Highly successful projects so far in 2014 include Warhorse Studios' *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*, that saw backers pledge over £1 million for a realistic open world sandbox RPG set in medieval Europe, and Harmonix's *Amplitude* (sure, it's a sequel, but not one with a huge following) that secured just under \$850,000. Other funded campaigns that deserve a mention include *The Universim*, *Pathologic* and *Superhot*.

So, what's currently being pitched? There's Uber Entertainment's interesting *Robots*

vs. *Cthulhu* real-time strategy offering *Human Resources*. There's also imaginative *Elegy for a Dead World* that sees you explore dead civilisations and write fiction about them. We have *Mojo Bones*' post-apocalyptic survival adventure *Impact Winter*. And a couple from teams made up of former Irrational Games employees — *The Flame in the Flood* by The Molasses Flood and *The Black Glove* by Day for Night Games.

The Flame in the Flood reached its target of \$150,000 in days and is currently reaching for additional stretch goals.

"I think succeeding on Kickstarter is very important for our future endeavours," says the title's lead designer, Forrest Dowling. "Having a high profile Kickstarter succeed means the world of games sees you succeed, which opens up doors which help you succeed more. This could be people stepping forward to offer help, or the press taking interest and covering our games. On the other hand,



“KICKSTARTER IS MUCH MORE WELCOMING IF YOU CAN DEMONSTRATE A GREAT CONCEPT”

if you fail, the world of games has seen that, too. The game will still need funding to be made, but the people who can provide it will know you're on the ropes.”

Some analysts suggest that perhaps Steam's Early Access program is in some part responsible this change.

“I saw a few different avenues for helping fund development while considering Kickstarter,” says Dowling. “Early Access is interesting, but you need a very complete and playable game in order to go that route. Kickstarter is much more welcoming if you have a great concept, and can demonstrate the ability to do it well. I don't think Early Access or Kickstarter are in any way exclusive from one another. In fact, many of our backers are asking for early access as a reward for kickstarting. Kickstarter can be helpful at any point in development, Early Access is really only suitable for the last leg.”

The future of Kickstarter may be a little different that during the boom years when Tim Schafer, David Braben, Chris Roberts, Peter Molyneux, Brian Fargo, Chris Avellone, Keiji Inafune and Richard Garriott used their renown to help grow the platform and finance long-awaited spiritual successors and sequels.

“Our community of backers has never been stronger, and this whole approach to bringing games to life is still in its infancy. The best is yet to come,” says a hopeful David Gallagher.

Kickstarter projects include *The Flame in the Flood* (opposite page), *Human Resources* (top), *The Black Glove* (mid-left), *Superhot* (middle) and *Elegy for a Dead World* (mid-right).

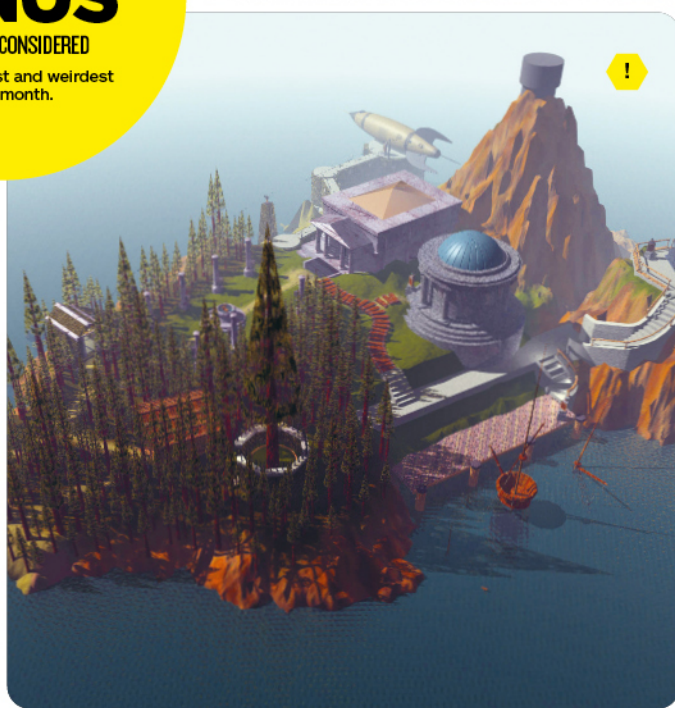
NEW HALO TITLE A sequel to twin-stick shooter Spartan Assault is coming to Windows Phone. You can pick up the 343 Industries-created Halo: Spartan Strike this December.



PLUS & MINUS

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

The best, worst and weirdest of the month.



+ IRONSIDE ON VIDEO GAME EQUALITY

It's sadly more typical than anything that the industry gets hit on issues of exclusion and being a bad influence on people. So it was heartening to hear Michael Ironside, the original voice actor for Sam Fisher, talk up the diversity that Splinter Cell - and gaming - can bring. "The great thing I've found [is] that a lot of people from different backgrounds have a worldwide conversation [through games]. It hits every socio-economic group."

- BAYONETTA 2 ALMOST CANNED

Wii U's exclusive is the first game since last year's The Last of Us to earn the perfect 10 from us (and the original's no slouch either), so Nintendo must be patting themselves on the back for picking up the title when no one else could. Franchise creator Hideki Kamiya revealed the game was almost cancelled after Sega halted production, and Platinum couldn't find a publisher. Happily Nintendo stepped in, and the game finished development.

? KINGDOM HEARTS III GETS UNREAL

The reveal that Kingdom Hearts III will be shifted over to the Unreal Engine 4 as the current development on the in-house engine Luminous is scrapped would suggest that the game's had a setback (despite claims from director Tetsuya Nomura that they're "on schedule" for development), and that the creator has stated that he's still working on "scenario writing and world selection". It may mean it'll be some time before the title arrives.

! MYST RETURNS - AS A TV SERIES

While it was a horrifying (and not in a good way) surprise that Resident Evil would get a follow-on TV series after the conclusion of its cinematic entries (call us cynical, but...) it was nothing like the curveball of a reveal that a deal had been signed between Myst creators Rand and Robyn Miller and Legendary Entertainment to produce a TV series based on the PC adventure series. The sale is even more confusing than the original game.



06

THINGS ABOUT...

Play the numbers game with the latest news

LEGO BATMAN 3

With the cast list expanding and new details aired, we look at the blocky Dark Knight before release.

1 CLIFFHANGERS

While most Lego games neatly tie up the stories told in their respective campaigns, Lego Batman 3 sees us catch up with the cowed avenger after the events of the second game. "A bit of a spoiler," explains executive producer Philip Ring. "Brainiac shows up at the post credits [of Lego Batman 2]... we wanted to do something different, we wanted to go into space."

2 DC UNIVERSE

"In Lego Batman 2 we kind of introduced the DC universe," explains Philip Ring. "Now we're digging in. This is our love letter to the DC world. So we've got some brilliant characters in there. We've got people like Plastic Man... one of my personal favourites, Bat-Mite, is going to be in the game." But that's not the weirdest set of characters they've got coming...

3 HOLY CAMEOS

Every Lego game has had a few fun additions for extras, and the best has been the extra characters you unlock as you play. While TT is pulling from the wider DC universe, they're also looking beyond the comics - so that's why we see actor Adam West, who played the caped crusader in the 60s TV show, appear. But we also get a cameo from U.S. TV show host, Conan O'Brien.

4 BAT FUTURE

Exclusive to the PS3 and PS4 versions will be a Batman of the Future pack, that draws inspiration from the Batman Beyond cartoon series, which saw an ageing Bruce Wayne play mentor to Terry McGinnis, who donned a high-tech Bat-suit to wage war against crime. The two, plus their dog Ace and numerous villains from the show, will appear in the downloadable pack.

5 FAMILIAR VOICES

He's the most prolific voice actor in the games industry today, and Troy Baker manages to earn the accolade of voicing both the Joker (as heard in Batman: Arkham Origins) and Batman himself in Lego Batman 3 (he also voiced the character in the direct to video movie, Lego Batman: The Movie - DC Super Heroes Unite). Not bad going for a gaming career.

6 MOVIE MAGIC

Batman may be squaring up to Supes in Dawn of Justice, as Ben Affleck pulls on the suit for the new wave of live-action flicks, but his Lego alter-ego is also getting a solo big screen outing in 2017 after nearly stealing the show as part of the ensemble cast in last year's Lego Movie. It may be a standalone film, but we're sure he'll reappear in the 2018 Lego Movie 2.

PS4 GROWS A MO

Charity initiative to tie in with Movember.

Sony is adopting the Mo. The publisher has announced it'll officially partner with Movember next month, as the men's health organisation gear up to its annual push to raise the awareness of male cancer and health care by getting folk to wear weird and wacky moustaches.

For Sony, it'll be introducing a number of initiatives that include the Mo Glow ("a limited-edition vinyl for the light bar of your DualShock 4 controller", that you can share a photo of with the hashtag #PS4Movember) and the re-design of characters such as Sackboy (Little Big Planet 3), Iota (Tearaway), Delsin (Infamous: Second Son) and even Ellie (The Last of Us), redesigned by illustrator Tom Mac.

Sony will be giving away some of these unique artworks as framed prints, as well as Champions League tickets, PS4 and PS Vitas along with a selection of games.

Finally, there'll be a yet-to-be-revealed Music Unlimited playlist "featuring some of the greatest Moustache-clad musicians of all time", so we're expecting some good Freddie Mercury songs to sing while we wait for our facial hair to grow over the course of the month.

For more information on Sony's tie-ins, go to blog.eu.playstation.com and for Movember, point your browsers to uk.movember.com.



PC BRINGS ROGUE UNITY Seems the PC will be getting both Assassin's Creed Unity and Assassin's Creed Rogue, with the latter confirmed for release on the platform next year.



YOUR DLC UPDATE

The latest in digital downloadable goodness this month.

Good news if you didn't pre-order Alien: Isolation. The Crew Expendable DLC, which features the original crew of Ripley, Dallas and Parker from the 1979 film, is also being offered separately as digital download for a few quid. The side-story takes place during the events of the original film, as the three have to try and track down the xenomorph after it makes its explosive entrance aboard the Nostromo. Creative Assembly managed to get the actors back on board to voice their characters once more, leading to an even more authentic experience in an already very authentic game.

On top of this CA has prepped six month's worth of content, and further down the line focus is set to rest primarily on the incoming Survivor Mode, whereby players will take on the Alien and the clock across a series of new Survivor maps. The first add-on for this new mode is set to include three new maps and is due to be released on October 28 (with more to follow in November).



FORZA HORIZON 2

The Mobil 1 DLC for Forza Horizon 2 is the first new piece of content to land for the Xbox-exclusive open-world racer, and it includes five new cars, plus a sixth that's free to all players. However, this is only available on Xbox One. It was only revealed post-launch that Playground will not be supporting the Xbox 360 version of the game (developed by Sumo Digital) with additional content.



CKII & EUIV

Paradox is expanding on both of their flagship strategy games; Crusader Kings II and Europa Universalis IV. The Charlemagne expansion for CKII is out now and includes an earlier start date and thus another hundred years of history to play through. The Art of War is coming to EUIV at the end of October and will feature an overhauled map and a focus on war.



THE EVIL WITHIN

Shinji Mikami's The Evil Within is being supported post-launch by three pieces of add-on content. The first serving will have players assume the role of The Keeper (aka Boxman) in a collection of mission-based maps. The second and third add-ons form the basis of one story-driven expansion starring Juli Kidman, who'll meet "unthinkable" enemies during this two-part story.



F2P UPDATES

Free-to-play games are regularly updated to very little fanfare, but there's three this month that all warrant a mention. Planetside 2 has received a huge update, and the implications for the game could be far-reaching. Crytek's Warface is also getting a load of new features and maps added. Finally, new maps, modes and vehicles are being added to War Thunder. Get downloading.

YOU SAID WHAT?

A CULTURED GUIDE TO GAMING TERMINOLOGY



HUD

An acronym that stands for heads-up display, the HUD is the primary delivery method for key information required by a player while they're in-game, and quickly communicates information such as level progress, health status, remaining ammo, visibility to enemies, position on the track or map, and even the distance to upcoming objectives.



EARLY ACCESS

Crowdfunding method whereby developers sell an unfinished game to their community. It offers significant benefits to developers on top of raising money for the game's continued development, as it engages paying players as unofficial game testers. Although paying for games before they are finished does carry obvious risks to the consumer.



DEATHMATCH

A term first coined by John Romero with regards to iconic shooter Doom, a deathmatch, or a team deathmatch, is a multiplayer battle whereby individuals stalk each other through various environments, wielding guns and melee weapons with the express intention of destroying their opponents, earning the most kills (or frags) guarantees victory.



PORT

When a game does exceedingly well on one console, it may well be ported to a larger, more successful platform. Towerfall: Ascension is a case in point. It sold relatively well on Ouya, and was thus ported onto both PlayStation 4 and PC. Another example is Tomb Raider, which did good business on the old-gen platforms, and so was updated for PS4 and Xbox One.



RAGEQUIT

Sometimes, no matter how patient the player, there's nothing to be done other than abruptly and unceremoniously quitting a game. This is done because of annoyance at a particularly tricky moment in a single-player mission, or because of frustrations due to unbalanced teams in a multiplayer game. Frowned upon behaviour, which devs are now addressing.

TETRIS RETURNS TO HANDHELD Ubisoft is releasing Tetris Ultimate on Nintendo 3DS on 11 November, with PS Vita, PS4, PC and Xbox One versions to follow at a later date.



BAYONETTA 2

24 OCTOBER

Has the wicked witch found her natural home on Nintendo's Wii U? Platinum Games will certainly be hoping so, and as you can read elsewhere in this magazine, we definitely think it's a good job that Nintendo came in when they did and rescued the game after it looked like it might end up on the scrapheap following Sega's withdrawal of financial support. Bayonetta 2 is yet another essential title for a platform that's quietly and steadily been growing a very healthy collection of quality must-buy titles, and it's an even sweeter deal when you consider the fantastic first game is also included in the package. Flip to our review section now.



LEGO BATMAN 3

14 NOVEMBER

It wouldn't be the holiday season without the release of a Lego tie-in from TT Games. This latest offering revisits the DC universe, and sees Batman and friends take a trip out of this world. We all know what to expect by now; loads of fan service, fun for all the family, some tongue-in-cheek humour, and plenty to stuff to do. It may also be the most cameo-filled TT game yet, as the game will also include characters from the TV show Arrow and TV host Conan O'Brien.



SUNSET OVERDRIVE

24 OCTOBER

Microsoft is going all in with Sunset Overdrive, and are releasing the game alongside a new-look white Xbox One. It's the platform holder's first spin with Insomniac Games, and they'll be hoping it paves the way for many more. The game's unusual thanks to the playful colour palette and focus on high-score chasing arcade thrills. Check out our review this issue.

INCOMING

THE BEST OF THE MONTH AHEAD

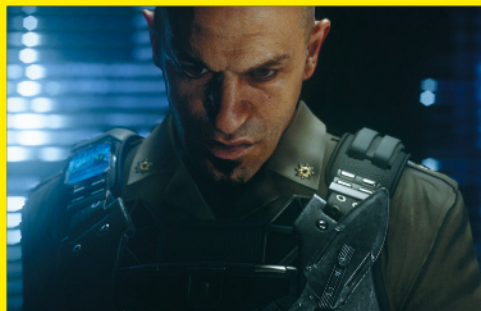
Keeping you up to date with the biggest events



PRO EVO SOCCER 2015

13 NOVEMBER

It's better late than never, as Pro Evolution Soccer 15 takes to the field once again this month. With FIFA's healthy head start, Konami are going to have to score a screamer if they're to make up any lost ground. At least it's going to make it onto new-gen consoles this time around, and as it runs in the Fox Engine, it's certainly looking the part.



ADVANCED WARFARE

4 NOVEMBER

Advanced Warfare is the first Call of Duty title developed solely by Sledgehammer Games, and it's also the first to benefit from a three-year development cycle. Kevin Spacey and a futuristic exo-suit promise a few changes at the very least.

HALO: THE MC COLLECTION

11 NOVEMBER

All the numbered Halo games, collected together along with all the multiplayer modes from the same classic Xbox shooters. Perhaps the community will be spread thin across the multitude of modes on offer, but this package promises to be incredible value.



ASSASSIN'S CREED

13 NOVEMBER

November is chocker with AC games (and not just the new-gen Unity and old-gen Rogue if you also count iOS action-RPG Identity, also out in the same month), which is perfect if you like your games filled with hooded assassins.



DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION

20 NOVEMBER

Bioware's third entry in their fantasy RPG series looks every bit worthy of carrying the Dragon Age tag. We're expecting the usual formula of RPG-infused action, big decisions and a hugely detailed world to explore.



FAR CRY 4

18 NOVEMBER

Ubisoft's next entry in the Far Cry series attempts traversal on a mountainous landscape. There's a few similarities between 4 and its tropical predecessor, most notably the psychotic antagonist that'll torment the player during their time in Kyrat. However, there's some new stuff in there too, such as the co-op mode PlayStation players will be able to invite a friend to join them in the game.

POST-LAUNCH BLUES

Online titles Driveclub and Destiny have bumpy opening weeks.

In today's connected world, a game launch is only the start for some studios. Titles with a heavy online focus need careful and constant maintenance if they're to prosper, and there's two cases this month that illustrate what a minefield it can be. Driveclub has had a hard time of it since launch, and hopefully by the time you're reading this, its problems will be fixed and it'll be business as usual for Sony's PS4-exclusive racer. Server load issues have resulted in the delayed release of the promised free PS Plus version of the game. Destiny, on the other hand, had a very different set of problems. After extensive alpha and beta tests, the connectivity was there (Bungie announced they've got an impressive 3.2 million players on their servers every day), but after extended play they were forced into making changes, after fans complained that the late game was a grind.



LOHAN VS ROCKSTAR

The legal battle continues. The ongoing legal dispute between the creators of Grand Theft Auto V and actor Lindsay Lohan took a more serious turn this month. The game's publisher - Take-Two - first sought to have the case dismissed and Lohan sanctioned on the basis that the "claim is so legally meritless that it lacks any good-faith basis and can only have been filed for publicity purposes."

In direct response, the legal challenge was amended. Originally the actor accused developers Rockstar of basing a rather unflattering character on Lohan, suggesting that Lacey Jonas was an "unequivocal" reference to her.

That has since escalated and now Lohan's legal team has presented new evidence that marketing materials used in GTAV's promotion were used to "to evoke the persona and image" of the actor. Take-Two denies these new claims. So, onto Round 3...

YOUR
GENRE
HISTORY

THIS MONTH: TWIN-STICK SHOOTERS

ROBOTRON: 2084 Released: 1982



When Robotron: 2084 hit arcades back in 1982 it was a bonafide hit, and this was largely down to the twin stick controls that saw players controlling their character on one joystick and shooting with the other. It was a frantic thrill ride with crowded screens. Creator Eugene Jarvis also had a hand in Defender.

SMASH TV Released: 1990



Another game produced by Jarvis, Smash TV landed in 1990, and it had many similarities to its predecessor. Another arcade hit, it had players battling through single-screen areas flooded with enemies. Unlike its predecessor, this made a splash on consoles: SNES and Mega Drive ports cemented its place in history.

STARDUST Released: 1993



One studio with real pedigree in the genre is Housemarque, and their most iconic title is Stardust. Developed under the banner of Bloodhouse (who would later join forces with Terramarque), the first game was released in 1993. They perfected the formula with Super Stardust in 1996. Sony released a HD version back in 2007.

GEOMETRY WARS Released: 2003



Originally only available to play inside racer PGR2 on Xbox, Geometry Wars was repackaged and released in 2005 on Xbox 360 under the subtitle Retro Evolved. The game's crisp visuals and fiendish high score chasing captured the attention of a new generation of gamers. Geo Wars was key in the genre's renaissance on console.

SPARTAN ASSAULT Released: 2013



Included as a result of this month's announcement of Halo: Spartan Strike, this twin stick shooter set in the Halo universe was released on Xbox One shortly after the console's launch. It fits nicely into the setting and works Halo's features in the new setup. With microtransactions being removed from the sequel, it should be better.

POCKET GAMING THIS MONTH

A thumb through the titles that are trying to hog your mobile screens.

Something's a success when even Nintendo copy it. Yet they and Disney will have a hard time matching the raging success of Skylanders, which sees plastic figures and digital gaming crossover. It's hit every platform going, and now makes a (non-pocket-friendly) grab for the mobile space.

A full version of the franchise's latest, *Trap Team*, is coming to mobile, with only a slight visual downgrade from the console versions. The App's free, and comes with two digital Skylanders to begin. It's a 1.3GB download, the size of which will swell as you need to purchase new worlds and characters in-game.

You can call Skylanders a child-friendly dungeon crawler, as there's some fun exploring to be done and enemy-filled areas to clear out, but additionally there's some tower defence and other mini-games included.

You can play that with touch controls. But Activision are also releasing a tablet Starter Pack (RRP: £49.99) to give you the full experience. Inside you get the familiar Portal along with a couple of physical figures, and a controller. The joystick is roughly the shape of a miniature version of an Xbox controller, complete with analog sticks, face and shoulder buttons. It feels plastic and cheap, but does the job it's intended for. It's a commendable idea and brings the proper Skylanders experience to a new audience.



ZOMBIE HIGHWAY 2

IOS PRICE: FREE

You may remember the original endless runner type game that has been sitting on the App Store and Google Play since the early days of both. Now it's got a sequel - though it's only available on iOS - so far. You still need to slam zombies off walls or other cars and survive as long as possible. You can upgrade your ride and weapons, and buy new vehicles. It's little different from the original, but it may be just enough for you.



TAIL DRIFT

IOS PRICE: £0.69

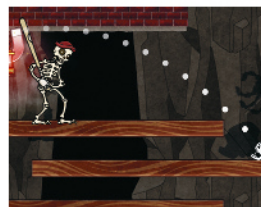
This feels like a simpler version of Gamecube's F-Zero title, with roller coaster-type roads and vibrant colours slamming into your face at high speeds. Though it's not as heavily detailed, there's seven varied courses, three event types and a couple of Tours to play through to make this worth a download. For racers looking for precise controls, you can switch between tilt and touch to suit your favourite play-style.



CONTEST OF CHAMPIONS

ANDROID/ IOS PRICE: TBC

If you're looking for a fighting mobile contender to match Capcom's Marvel SuperHeroes or Vs. series then this freemium title isn't it. That said, even with the simple swipe and tap system in play as you tackle a wealth of Marvel's biggest names who have been rolled into this contest, it's still surprisingly enjoyable to play (though don't expect it to get the pulses racing). It'll release on both Google Play and App Store in December.



SKULLDUGGERY!

IOS PRICE: £2.99

"Headshots! Paperwork! Semi-organic autonomous Skulls collecting taxes from the Deadbeats of the Afterlife" reads Skullduggery's official synopsis on the App Store page, and we can't help but be sold on the premise. Gameplay wise, this is a platformer with Angry Birds-like controls, firing your skull through levels collecting coins and treasure as quickly as possible. Simple stuff, but filled with great ideas.



ORCS VS KNIGHTS

IOS PRICE: FREE

If you like your Clash of Clans-inspired titles, then add another to your stockpile. Orcs Vs Knights is full of great characters and a solid interface that allows for a greater degree of control over your troops than some games out there. As is tradition with the freemium genre, it's a case of wait, fight, then wait some more. It's a beautiful game, but it's up to you whether the slower-pace is right for you or you want something faster.

ALIEN: ISOLATION

i

Art

The video game visual
discussed.

The developers at **CREATIVE ASSEMBLY** on recreating Giger's sci-fi masterpiece.

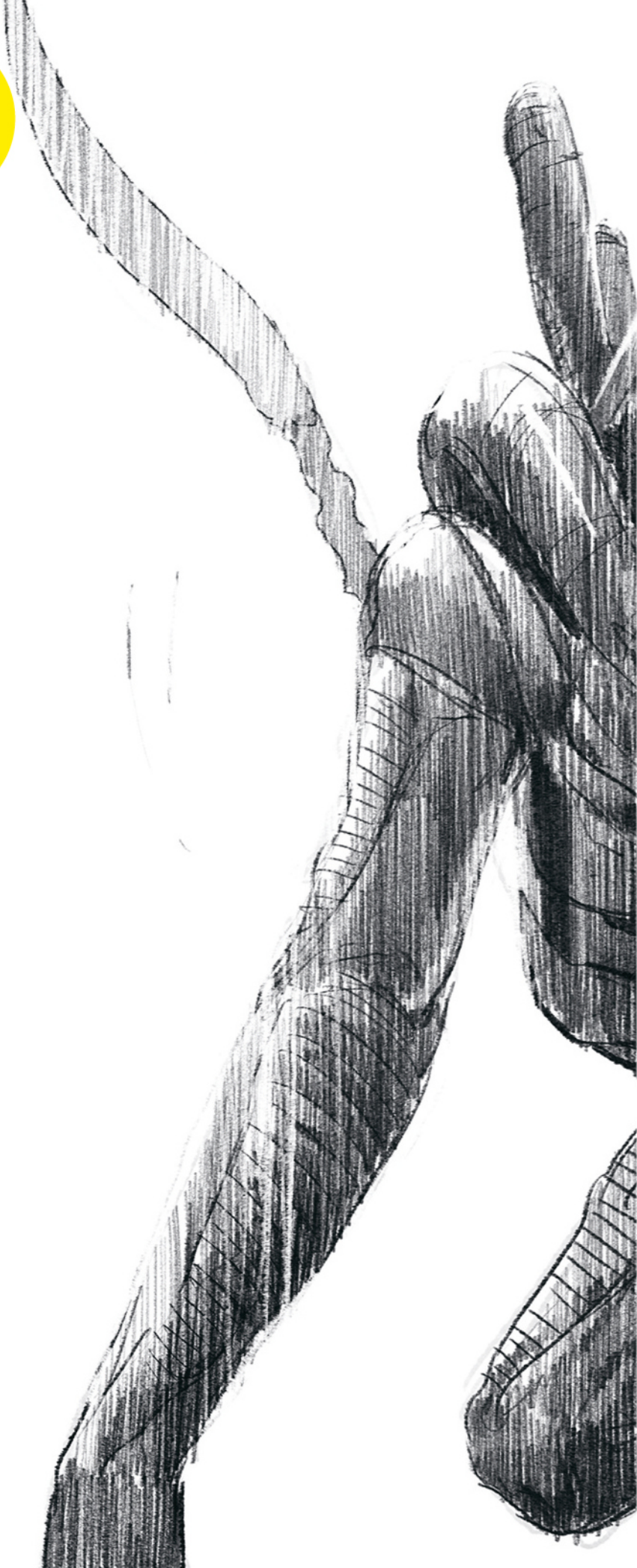
"It's threatening and sexual, beautiful and ugly." Creative Assembly's lead artist Jude Bond sums up what is so iconic about the creature designed by H.R. Giger for the 1979 sci-fi classic. The studio artists would focus on design concepts for their game that touched on the animalistic nature of the Alien - it spends most of the game hunting you after all. "I really tried pushing the feral nature [of the creature]," comments artist Bradley Wright.

But a big piece of the puzzle was deciding on the movement of the Alien in the game. The original xenomorph was only glimpsed on screen, partly to retain its mystery for most of the movie, but also to hide the restraints of having an actor wearing what was a heavy, rubber suit that didn't allow for much movement. No such problems for game creators.

"I enjoyed figuring out the character of the Alien," explains Wright. "It isn't a faceless enemy, it has purpose and drive. I tried to show this in sketches [such as the one to the right], like the hulking powerful Alien, or the leaner, skulking vicious Alien. And although the movie version of the xenomorph had a more limited range of movement, it was great to draw *that* Alien with a lot more motion and animal traits."

The original Alien towered over the cast at an impressive 7 feet 2 inches, and Creative Assembly wanted to capture that sense of a hulking figure dwarfing the player. "We wanted an Alien that was physically huge, one that looked down on the player," explains designer Alistair Hope. "This was an Alien we felt hadn't been experienced in games based on the franchise before."

These excerpts were taken from the *Art of Alien: Isolation*, published by Titan Books and is available at retailer now.





COMING SOON



FAR CRY 4

What wouldn't a man do to fulfil his mother's dying wish? Would he travel to the country of his birth, bringing along his mother's ashes, to scatter them where she wanted to rest? Would he, upon finding out that the country is in a state of civil war and that his parents were somehow involved with starting the resistance movement, take up his parents' cause, or would he simply do what he came to do and leave his countrymen to fend for themselves? After all, he hasn't considered himself one of them since childhood. Why should he care? This is a dilemma that you, Ajay Ghale, must face as you set out into Kyrat.

Ajay considers himself an American and pronounces his name as you'd expect an American to pronounce it. The people of Kyrat, however, refuse to do so as his last name is well known. This is deliberate, according to Lucien Soulban, one of the writers on the project, as it emphasises the duality of Ajay's character; the inner fight between the man he is, and the man he is destined to be. In fact, the people of Kyrat tend to treat him as something of a celebrity. As the son of Mohan Ghale, a man he barely remembers but who the people of Kyrat consider an icon of the resistance, your return rekindles the hope in the hearts of the fighters of the Golden Path.

As you help the Golden Path in their struggle against Pagan Min's oppressive reign, you'll be able to influence the story by taking sides on certain issues. The Golden Path is lead by Amita and Sabal, two very different individuals who have very different ideas for the

future of Kyrat, but agree that it must be one free of Pagan Min.

Amita is a progressive woman who believes that women will have a much bigger role in shaping the future of the country than they had in its past. Being the first woman to take up arms and fight alongside Kyrat's men, she's won over many supporters with her ideas of equality. Knowing the importance of financial stability to a country's future, she's not above using its thriving opium industry to aid her cause. Sabal, on the other hand, firmly believes that tradition and faith will unite the country once Min is gone. As they go head to head at certain points in the story, you'll have to break the stalemate, ultimately deciding which path to give your golden touch.

Woven into this story is the quest for Shangri-La. Based on James Hilton's famous mythology first described in *Lost Horizon*, Shangri-La is the cultural backbone of Kyrat. Throughout the game you'll find pieces of tapestry which, once reassembled, will reveal the story of Kalinga, a legendary warrior; the white tiger protector of Shangri-La; and paradise on earth itself.



FRIENDLY HURK

The game will come with Keys to Kyrat codes that you can give to friends and allow them to join you - for a two hour limit - in your game. You can't play Story missions, but can explore the world freely in that time.

When on your spirit quest for Shangri-La, you'll encounter different enemies that operate under a different AI than those of Kyrat do, so they'll not only look different but they should feel different as well. While the skills system is Shangri-La themed, it looks very much like the setup from Far Cry 3, although the three trees have been merged into two, the tiger tree and the elephant tree, containing a total of forty-eight skills.

Throughout our time with the game, we were surprised at how similar it was to Far Cry 3. The second game in the franchise differed very much from the first, and the same can be said about the third, but Ubisoft appears to be quite happy with the formula they cooked up two years ago and have elected to add to it, rather than change it up. There are, of course, multiple aspects where the game differs from its predecessor: one of the biggest changes is the setting.

Set in the Himalayas, the map features a lot of ups and downs. When fighting in snowy areas, you'll be able to use grappling hooks to climb, cause overhanging snow to fall on your enemies, and use the lack of visibility to gain a tactical advantage. While the square mileage of the map is roughly the same as Far Cry 3's, the added verticality makes the distances feel more substantial to the extent where we felt it took longer to get between points of action than was the case in the game's predecessor. Movement around the map is helped by the addition of new ways of getting around.

New modes of transport include a gyrocopter and, as you've probably already seen, elephants. A new feature in Far Cry 4 is the ability to use firearms while driving. This has forced the developers to change the way you drive, using only one analogue stick for steering and acceleration/reverse. This method can be reverted to the classic driving mode, but that change removes your ability to fire while holding the wheel.

Far Cry 3 suffered from bad pacing as your friends and family were always just on the verge of being sold into slavery no matter how long you spent in side-pursuits. By making FC4 more about a grand scale civil war, you're still free to roam around but assaults and story missions should fit better with your personal play-style.

From what we played, the amount of polish and bug-fixing needing done doesn't bode well for a release only a month away. However, if they manage to avoid both, this is shaping up to be another explosive sandbox adventure.





PROJECT CARS

Will the team behind Shift, GTR2 and GT Legends give Forza and Driveclub a run for their money? Our pro-driver Petter Hegevall tested the latest game build and talked to Slightly Mad Studios.



Producer Andy Tudor looks a tad annoyed. I guess my last two questions sounded too negative, which was not my intention. Though I do want answers, I choose to assure the man behind Project Cars that I really like what I've tested so far. It's easy to read how much he wants to convey the studio's vision of the ultimate racing game to me, and by extension, you. I can't blame him. Three years of development and millions of pounds spent to create cars and tracks as authentic as possible is an ambitious project.

After putting in 25 laps around Silverstone in an Aston Martin DBS GT3, I ask Andy if the tyres grip a little too well, as it seems almost impossible to put the back end out or get the grip to drop in the front end. Tudor looks at me as if I was born yesterday, then explains the team decided to activate every car assist that exists in the game to prevent those attending today from experiencing Project Cars as the world's toughest racing title. I ask for them to be turned off completely, and get to grips with the revised tyre physics.

An hour later, I'm sweaty and satisfied. Project Cars isn't as unforgiving as GTR2, but it still feels very close to the real thing, and the

car's balancing feels amazing. Just like in Forza Motorsport 5, it's easy to know where the car's centre of gravity is, dependent on whether I

PROJECT CARS ISN'T AS UNFORGIVING AS GTR2, BUT IT STILL FEELS CLOSE TO THE REAL THING

accelerate or brake, while the tyre grip provides an indication of how close to the limit I am.

There are some issues, however. The PlayStation 4 version I try suffers from an unstable framerate, and I wonder whether Slightly Mad Studios are trying to cover too much ground and pull in too wide an audience in the time they have left on the project.

"I have read that several others are concerned about the same thing," Tudor responds when I field the latter question to him. "And I honestly do not understand the criticism. As developers we were starting from scratch, taking arcade physics and steering them towards a racing simulator. Now we've started on the other end, and it changes everything."

"We spent over a year perfecting our already amazing physics engine that we used in games like GT Legends, GTR 2 and Shift. What we have today is so realistic that professional drivers like Oli Webb and Ben Collins are more than happy to use Project Cars as a training tool. What we did after is insert a series of aids for the less-informed drivers and made them easy to activate. The game will be no less fun for it, just



less unforgiving."

I follow up about that frame rate. With little over a month before the game has to be submitted to review by Sony and Microsoft, the issue is worrying, as is the lack of content we're seeing: today's demo only covers two courses and two cars.

"I would first like to highlight the fact that this is the world's first racing simulator that from day one has been developed in close cooperation with our fans," says Tudor. "We would never have been able to make this game if it were not for all that. Crowdfunding aided the development and gave us incredibly valuable feedback since its inception. With that said, we have some work to do before we feel completely satisfied and we are still working on the optimisation of the PS4 and Xbox One versions."

That said, there's obviously a lot more work to go. We find out weeks later, just before this magazine went to print, that the game is delayed from this winter to spring next year.

The producer goes on to explain how the project has been exciting since inception, and how it was originally pitched as a competitor to Gran



Turismo and Forza, but “no publisher was willing to bet on the title”. The high-risk nature of the concept, according to Tudor, is the reason the studio turned to its fans instead, and with Kickstarter still a pipe dream in 2011, they created their own crowdfunding model.

I ask art director Darren White how the team are approaching the aesthetics of the game. GTR2 was realistic in both handling and design, but the Need for Speed: Shift titles leaned more towards a Hollywood look with exaggerated lighting effects and shadows.

“You’re right,” agrees White. “With Shift and Shift 2 we focused on an exaggerated look somewhere between a JJ Abrams movie and a traditional racing simulator. Something I think worked excellently for just those games.

“In Project Cars, we have worked hard to offer a look that really screams photorealism. There is no exaggeration, no Hollywood-esque lens flare effects or excessive bloom. During development, we have all noticed that as soon as we tried something a bit exaggerated aesthetically, it pulled the player out of the driving

experience we’re trying to offer.”

I air the criticism levelled at the Shift games for cramming fictitious trackside details in real life courses. Darren laughs.

“I know what you mean. We tried for that festival feeling, and the hardcore fans were up in arms. I understood them. But at the same time, I wanted a more lively and eventful feel to the design, especially in Shift 2.

“But with Project Cars, there’s nothing like that. We have, as I said, worked extremely hard to try and offer a 100% accurate picture of what it really looks like when you yourself are sitting there behind the wheel. 85,000 players are playing Project Cars every day and we keep hearing about it if something is wrong. Many of our fans are incredibly dedicated.”

I return to the game and drive out in the Dubai Autodrome in a LeMans car built by Audi. Sweat beads on my brow as I fire the prototype rocket around the curves of the track, and the sun sets as I race, throwing down dark yellow rays onto the track. The effect is



one of delicious contrast. There's no doubt Project Cars looks as good as it feels. If Slightly Mad Studios manages to achieve what it set out to do, and homogenise the various racing fields, then both Gran Turismo and Forza are in trouble. The unique driving sensation is amazing, even though it feels like I have a little too much tire grip all the time.

“85,000 players are playing Project Cars every day and we keep hearing about it if something is wrong. Our fans are massively dedicated” - art director Darren White

Ben Collins, a multiple champion in various different racing disciplines, and the man who was The Stig in Top Gear for nearly nine years, walks past. I pull him over to talk, and ask him his thoughts on the tyre grip.

“The tyre physics in the game are extraordinary. I have played every single simulator available and for the most part, they don't work well. There is seldom any discernible difference between hot or cold tires.

“In Project Cars you feel a clear difference. The same goes for tyres which are worn in the wrong way by an overly aggressive driver who drives too hard, too fast. The cars have provided me the perfect amount of grip. That whole thing with skidding off the road at the slightest touch of the throttle [like other games do]? Not a problem with this game.”

Collins has spent about 100 hours testing different versions of Project Cars. He tells me that he struggled to get through some changes that made the game more realistic, but that he is now very proud of the product.

The ex-Stig is right. And after racing go-karts in my



BEN COLLINS

EX-STIG, CURRENT CARS TESTER ON COMING ONBOARD FOR THE PROJECT

You have said several times how much you dislike games like Gran Turismo and Forza. Why you do not like racing games?

There are racing games that I like, but you are right that I have on several occasions expressed annoyance at how the cars behave in those titles. I love, for example, the old Microprose Formula 1 game that I spent an awful lot of time with. I also believe that Project Cars is brilliant, even though we have much work left to do.

What is it that makes Project Cars better than any other modern racing game?

Let me put it like this; the vast majority of today's simulators are too difficult. Driving in several of the racing simulator gamers consider to be the best is always more difficult than driving a race car on the verge of reality. Racing in reality is certainly not easy, on the contrary, but in many of the racing games that I previously criticised, the tyres react wrongly. It makes things uncontrollable.

You worked as The Stig for eight years before leaving Top Gear and became a consultant. What was it like working there?

It was really fun eight years that I obviously will never forget. Sometimes I miss Clarkson, Hammond and May but right now I have great fun with trying to create the perfect realism of Project Cars.

I read somewhere that the guys at Top Gear are not doing as much driving themselves. Is it true and why not?

That is correct. They have stunt drivers driving for them, for the most part. Fundamentally, they are three fairly mediocre drivers, and of course you can't have the hosts of the world's biggest TV show drive around at 350 km/h all day every day.

younger days and racing for the last ten years, I can feel the difference in Project Cars as well. As we break from our hands-on for lunch, I talk to Collins further about his favourite cars and racing games.

"My favorite car is the Ferrari 458 Italia, for sure," he answers immediately. "Of all the cars I've ever driven, it is my absolute favourite. The balance of the chassis and the feel of the steering is unbeatable. Too bad it sucks in the game right now. Ferrari are difficult to work with, it costs a lot of money to license their cars, and we have not yet begun to look at the Project 458 Cars, but we will."

Even though it has nothing to do with the game, I feel compelled to ask about the incident when The Stig drove the hyper car Koenigsegg CCX on the Top Gear test track, and crashed it into a tyre wall.

"It was a pretty fun incident. it was almost undrivable without a wing on the trunk, it could barely take a curve at over 60 km/h. Our crash caused them to assemble one wing, and we could then set a fast time with the car. Now in hindsight Koenigsegg refuses to admit that it was I who got them to change the car's design and include a downforce at the back end of all their existing models. But yes, it does not matter. Koenigsegg may be super quick going straight forward but is lousy at taking curves, even with the new models."

Given how little of Project Cars I have seen, I feel a tad worried about whether the studio has the time to put everything together. The sudden delay proves unsurprising, but ultimately will benefit the game. If the team deliver on everything they want to put in, we could have a new worthy racing franchise on our hands.



S.K.I.L.L.

A LOOK AT THE MULTIPLAYER ACTION OF ONLINE PC TITLE SPECIAL FORCE 2

What is Skill?

S.K.I.L.L. - Special Force 2 is a military-style shooter that's been built on the Unreal Engine 3. Released in South Korea in 2011, the game transferred to servers in Europe in September 2013. Since then it has been updated with new maps, game modes, weapons as well as other tweaks. You can download the game onto your PC and start playing against other players in the world.

What's the game's setting?

You play the role of an elite soldier in an alternative near-future: the nations of the Earth find themselves in a new Cold War and are carrying out armed conflicts whilst an alien race has landed on the Earth.

Who's behind the game's creation?

That'd be South Korean development outfit Dragonfly, who also handled development of the 2004 original Special Force, which like its successor is a free-to-play online title. Gameforge - who also look after Aio and Tera: Rising - handle the game's publishing in Europe.

What game mode and weapon options are there?

There are 14 different game modes if you discount the training courses that show you the ropes, which break down into standard variants such as the usual free-for-all or team-based Deathmatches, or Hardcore mode which offers increased damage and no HUD. There's also a seasonal snowball fight mode. Weapons range from pistols through to machine guns.



Head to en.skill.gameforge.com to download the game client for free and start playing.

Can I fight against players around the world?

Currently you can only play against those registered on the European servers.

Where is it available and how much HD space do I need?

You can download the game client from Gameforge's official website. Just point your browser url to en.skill.gameforge.com, and make some space for 3.75GB to get the game downloaded.

Are there different load-out options?

You're allowed one main weapon, a sidearm, a knife and grenades. Most new

weapons can be bought (or you can rent them for a set period of time) through in-game currency earned through play, and you can swop loadouts between matches.

Is gameplay balanced so players aren't outclassed by better weapons?

Balancing is achieved through skill. Other weapons provide different gameplay (e.g. Sniper Rifle, vs Shotgun), but not necessarily greater firepower. There are dedicated map servers for newcomers to learn the ropes.

How much does it cost?

It's free to download and play, though there are micro-transactions for cosmetic items for your character.



A dynamic scene from the video game Call of Duty: Warzone. In the upper center, a soldier in a red and black tactical suit is jumping over a stone wall, with a bright orange and yellow explosion trailing behind him. In the lower right, another soldier in a green and black tactical suit is crouching, aiming a rifle. The background features a large, rusted metal bridge structure under a clear blue sky. The ground is wet and reflective, with some debris scattered around.

SUPERIOR HARDWARE

Our resident Call of Duty expert Nick Holmberg has spent the last few weeks testing the biggest changes to the franchise's multiplayer with this year's Advanced Warfare. Welcome to his frontline report.

This could be the new Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare. A statement that mightn't mean much to you if you're not a Call of Duty fan. If you are though, as I am, you'll understand the weight of that prediction. It's a comparison that feels true after spending a significant time at the controller playing Advanced Warfare's multiplayer and seeing some single-player in action.

Call of Duty as a franchise may be an easy seller at retail, but dropping your first entry into this multi-million dollar series is nerve-wracking, no matter what your pedigree.

We get a new Call of Duty title every year. Some people complain about that, saying they are basically the same. I don't agree, and have along with other fans, something new to dig into every year. But that doesn't mean there's nothing to critique.

The franchise hasn't had a huge change since the first Modern Warfare. Alterations have been tweaks, touch-ups only. I liked Modern Warfare 2's introduction of Spec-Ops, loved Black Ops II's theatre and broadcaster modes. But neither had that essential advancement the series started to really need. Infinity Ward's shift from the past to modern day frontline felt seismic. Press still talk about its first reveal at E3 in 2009, and the game still charts on many people's Top 5 lists.

For some it was their first entry into the series, and the point which competitive Call of Duty was born. Not since Halo 2's console multiplayer years before had a first-person shooter impacted and influenced the industry so much. XP upgrades, Perks, Killstreaks, Custom classes... things that are now seen in so many games today.

THIS COULD HAVE THE SAME SEISMIC SHIFT AS THE ORIGINAL CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE

RETURN TO WARFARE

Advanced Warfare is about the future, and in more ways than just the near-future sci-fi of the campaign story. Sledgehammer are introducing new ideas that they believe are needed to reinvigorate the franchise: exoskeletons, a loot system, firing ranges to test weapons on while maps load. They're also bringing in fan favourites that disappeared in Ghosts: Hardpoint, Capture the Flag, and the competitive features from Black Ops II.

Yet it's understandable that you weren't blown away by Advanced Warfare's introduction. I wasn't. As usual, they debuted with single-player, and while the exoskeleton provided some cool moments - like ripping a car door off and using it as a shield - it didn't feel that different from every other marketing push the franchise has offered previously.

It wasn't until we heard about multiplayer and had some hands-on, that I felt some degree of excitement. Sledgehammer Games co-founders Michael Condrey and Glen Schofield took to the stage at Gamescom, and shared far more information and gameplay on multiplayer than what we're usually used to.

It felt way too early. It spoke of confidence in what they were doing, yet they presented themselves in a very humble way. Similar was our time with them at the studio a month later. That time offered a vital understanding of how they're walking the fine line between innovation and keeping conventions.

It's still Call of Duty, yet it's different. They've listened to fans, but also trusted their own instincts and vision for the game. You



get the sense this is a studio that knows exactly what they're doing: it may be someone else's franchise, but this is their project.

The game's development began at the same time as Ghosts, and the extra year of development time - three rather than the usual two - shows. Twelve extra months is important to cram in these new ideas and flesh them out.

The addition of the exoskeleton is huge, embodying the marketing slogan for the game: "Power changes everything". It's not just about Kevin Spacey monologues. It's about what Sledgehammer are bringing to the digital battlefield to change the dynamic of Call of Duty multiplayer so completely.

After spending ten hours plus on a range of maps, I have to agree. We're used to playing Call of Duty in two dimensions. X and Y are now joined by Z, as jump boosts add verticality to the match flow.

Initially I thought it'd add little. We've had it in some aspect previously, working our way up two or three story buildings. But this is very different. Professional Call of Duty player Matthew Haag, better known as his alias Nadeshot from Optic Gaming, said that he'd "just keep going back to old Black Ops 2 maps" and imagining what they'd play like with the exos.

"I just think of old setups with Hardpoint, and you can imagine someone just jumping over you. It's just really gonna change how the game is played," he explained when we talked during one of the breaks between our hands-on with the new game's multiplayer.

I have to agree. The addition of the exo has meant the addition of verticality, and that's added new complexity to any choke point as you're having to cover anyone jumping over walls now.

KEEPING THE POWER BALANCE

"Multiplayer has a much larger burden on balancing," says Creative Director Bret Robbins when we ask him about incorporating these new abilities into the franchise. "Much larger. In the single-player game we can get away with it, you know because you are fighting AI rather than other players, so it doesn't exactly have to be fair. You can go a little crazier with the abilities."

SMALL CHANGES MATTER: FANS WENT CRAZY WHEN A SNIPER RIFLE'S ZOOM TIME WAS ADJUSTED BY .3 OF A SECOND.

I bring up one of the worries fans who played the game had: the lack of the Dead Silence Perk. It's an optional ability that removes the sound of your footsteps. It might sound weird and unrealistic, but it makes the game better. With players being able to 'sound-whore' (as it's called in the community), it makes it more beneficial to sit in a corner wait for your enemies to come to you. The game is more fun if it pays off to move around the map and attack.

Michael Condrey's answer is a great example of the studio's desire to innovate but knowing that keeping the balance is more important.

"Yeah I understand why people use it, especially in Search and Destroy. It's about the fact that without it you were at a competitive disadvantage. That's not balance. That's not

Call of Duty to us. You do not want to be in a position where you have to take Dead Silence to remain competitive."

Condrey goes on to explain that secondly, the game's audio has been written in such a way that the perk's now meaningless, "We've rewritten the audio engine. It's a new audio engine for us. And our audio system handles audio exclusion in a way that's more elegant than in the past generations. Largely making Dead Silence unnecessary."

That said, fan feedback could, will, make a difference. "We've got competitive players coming in. We've got public matches happening all the time. And what you can tell your fans sincerely is if by November Dead Silence needs to come back in some form, it will be back in some form". It may be Sledgehammer's take on Call of Duty, but the most important voices are still going to be heard.

So they'll try to innovate. They'll try to get rid of things that you basically needed to use. If it's not a viable choice to play without, then why have it?

In most Call of Duty games there have been perks that you should always use. And smaller changes matter a lot to fans. This recent year they went crazy online when a Sniper Rifle's zoom time was changed by .3 of a second. That's how much hardcore players know this game.

ALL'S A WEAPON, ALL'S A GAME

Playing through multiplayer, I focused on the newer additions. After the movement with the exos, the biggest change to me was Supply Drops, which is the game's loot system. You get drops either through XP earned, completing challenges like we are used to from COD, or time played: the idea is that even if you're not the best player in the world, you'll still get access to the cool stuff.

Supply Drops give you three things: Weapon Loot, Character Gear



and Reinforcements. These are split into three categories, from common to rare: Enlisted, Professional and Elite.

Weapon Loot is guns. When I sat down with the game the guns looked pretty similar to what we usually get, but there's always something different. Last year we got Marksman Rifles, this year we get a heavy weapons category which includes some energy weapons. There were three submachine guns, three assault rifles, a sniper rifle and so on. They felt good, robust.

But after playing with them for a while you start unlocking different versions. Now instead of just having the 35 weapons, you basically have 350. So for each weapon you'd unlock different variations of it. I unlocked a version of an assault rifle outfitted with a different barrel and built-in red dot sight. I unlocked a submachine gun with built-in silencer. A version of the very powerful Magnum-like pistol with a built-in ACOG-scope, basically turning the pistol into a sniper rifle. Not bad.

This does several things to the game. First, it's awesome getting loot. Especially if it's something that is rare. Second, getting the assault rifle with a scope on meant I could use my attachment slot for something else. I could add a silencer or a foregrip and make the gun better. Third, getting guns like the sniper-pistol made me discover something new. I would never have put an ACOG on that pistol, and it turned out great. I did better with that than with the normal sniper rifle. So I would change up my usual shotgun + sniper class. Now I didn't have to use Overkill (which allows you to carry two primary guns instead of one). Instead, I use the shotgun as primary, and pistol as secondary, freeing up a pick in my class. It really gives players more tactical opportunities. And, of course, all these weapons also have different camo paint jobs.



"You can be a little more overpowered with certain weapons. Some weapons can be just a lot better than other weapons in the campaign and that becomes a reward for the player... in multiplayer you are gonna piss everyone off if you show up with some overpowered weapon. Balancing is king in multiplayer," the team explain when we ask about the headaches of trying to balance the increased load-out of weapons this time.

Character Gear could be a helmet, boots or a new exo for your character, though this is more cosmetic in nature. In a game as fast as CoD, your enemies mightn't have time to check out your outfit as you thunder by, so there's a new lobby system to let you have some gear envy before the match begins. But there's some tactics here as well - you get to see what weapons and attachments they're carrying.

But I ended up spending most of my time in-between matches on the Virtual Firing Range. At any time when you are setting up your custom classes you can hit a button to instantly teleport to a

THE WORRY? THAT IT'S TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE - IT FEELS FRESH AND FULL OF INNOVATION

firing range and get a feel for your new guns. It's a great way to test out new equipment without risking your stats in-game. And it's actually a lot of fun.

Reinforcements are one-time use Perks or Killstreaks that get delivered at a set time in your next map through a care package. Again, even if you're not a great player, you get to tinker with the big stuff.

KILL 'EM ALL (TOGETHER)

Another way of getting Killstreaks is through co-op. Let's say your buddy is really good and he earns one of those cool helicopters, flying around wrecking havoc on the enemy team. Now you can press any button and join him. He'll fire missiles, and you control the machine gun.

Sledgehammer has taken the Pick 10 setup from Black Ops 2 and included scorestreaks, now calling it Pick 13. That means you can now choose whether you want to use those three extra points on scorestreaks or something else - like perks or attachments for your gun. If you feel you are never going to earn your streaks you might as well use the points on something else.

As usual you earn streaks by scoring points by killing enemies, but also capturing or returning flags in Capture the Flag, confirming or denying kills on Kill Confirmed and planting or defusing the bomb in Search & Destroy. So playing the objective matters.

The other new thing Sledgehammer have added to the system is the ability to modify your scorestreaks. Say your base Sentry Gun costs 600 points. You can now modify and make it fire missiles for another 100 points, or make it detachable from its stand - also costing another 100. It makes the scorestreak better, but it takes longer to earn. The choice is up to you. You don't lose the points when you use them on a streak, but it does reset when you die.

GRABBING EXO

One of the main problems with Ghosts for more serious Call of Duty fans has been the lack of skill gap (for the uninitiated, this meant the ceiling of how good you could get was far too low). Advanced Warfare looks to have the highest skill gap in a Call of Duty title.

The addition of the exoskeleton is a big part of that: it adds more possibilities for the player. More possibilities to make the

wrong decision. That might sound bad, but it's not, because it means the better players, who make the better decisions, will win. It means it's worth getting better. But even more important than skill gap is the fact that the game is fun to play. It's fun dashing around with the exoskeleton. You feel empowered. The same goes for the abilities. So even if choosing to use the hover ability at a certain moment wasn't the right one, you'll have fun using it.

MAPS, MODES AND SPEEDBALL

We played through five different maps, and four different modes. The maps were medium size, but as Michael pointed out they feel more like small maps because of the exos. You move around the map a lot faster. Which also means you are more quickly back into the action after getting killed. Even after ten hours of multiplayer I still feel very new to the game. There is so much to learn.

The maps also have different unique things about them, that alter them or introduce an environmental danger. Part-way through one game on an ocean-side map, klaxons started sounding, and soon after a tsunami wave slammed through the lower levels of the area. Such additions are better than the ones we saw in Black Ops II, but if I could, I'd like the inclusion of a mode which opted out of these map-changing moments.

Of the modes we played, Team Deathmatch was good fun and a great way of learning the game. Hardpoint and Capture the Flag both make fantastic returns, and we rounded things off with the new mode Uplink.

I didn't like Uplink at first. Maybe it was because I was on a team with some inexperienced players. but we got steamrolled. In Uplink it's important - more so than usual - to play together as a unit. It's similar to Capture the Flag, but at the same time it's also very different. It's growing on me, much like Hardpoint did back in the day.

Then we had Speedball. In this mode a ball spawns in the middle of the map. Toss it through the enemy portal for a point, and jump through with the ball in your hands for two points. But when you pick up the ball, you holster

your gun (though you get a shield buff). You can throw the ball to your teammates, which means you can move the ball around quickly. A trick that people started using very early on was throwing the ball to the enemy, freeing up your gun just as they're forced to put theirs away. Take them out, pick up the ball, continue running. Like myself, the pro players I talked to were skeptical at first, but ended up excited to see how it work in the competitive space.

POST-MATCH REPORT

I already have some fun stories to tell about my early encounters that has happened for me in the game. There are so many possibilities for tactics, and yet it's still about having fun. And adding loot to a game that is already way too addictive... I'm worried about the time sink.

In the end my main fear about this game is it's a little too good to be true. The game feels fresh and full of innovations. But it also still feels like Call of Duty. It feels just as easy, if not easier, to jump into for new players, and yet the skill gap and the possibility to improve and grow within the game looks bigger than it ever has before. There's definitely a pull here to join the frontlines again.

The multiplayer is fun, and has features we've been missing since Ghosts included. I haven't had hands on with the single-player yet. The story sounds interesting, and I'm a little surprised that they have dared to go for a subject like private military corporations. It looks extremely polished, as CoD campaigns do, but also includes a few too many QTEs at the moment (which CoD campaigns also do). We'll have to wait and see how that pans out in the final game. I really hope this proves to be the next big thing for Call of Duty, and those Modern Warfare comparisons don't prove unfounded.





REVIEWS

SUNSET OVERDRIVE

P PLATFORM **XBOX ONE** GENRE **ACTION** DEVELOPER **INSOMNIAC GAMES** PUBLISHER **MICROSOFT** RELEASE **31 OCTOBER**

You can see on first glance that Sunset Overdrive is going to be a lot of fun. The question that's piqued our interest since our first hands-on months ago is a simple one: how long that can that last? Turns out, it has an equally simple answer: quite a while.

We knew that sticky, super-sweet energy drinks are bad for your health in the long run, but the fictional Fizzco Corp has tapped into something far worse with its own distillation of unique ingredients. Any visitors to the company's launch party - and that's all of them - who have supped on the canned beverage find themselves turned into aggressive mutants via an overdose of Delirium XT. They and the city may have gone to hell, but it does mean we can quit our temporary job cleaning up at the event - which reminds us of a tacky version of Forza Horizon's - and become Sunset City's very own have-a-go hero.

What that colourful vigilante looks like is up to you. A brief customisation menu follows your successful escape from the venue, one that's not particularly complex on facial restructuring. But it does offer a small range of oddball clothing and accessories that lets you shape an identity in the game: somewhere on the spectrum between cool and stupid (leaning towards the latter, and even more heavily as you unlock increasingly bizarre outfits to combine).

So slip into something uncomfortable and show off your style, either to rampaging mutants in a huge single-player campaign or to friends and strangers in co-op mode. You'll get a chuckle in every respawn clip as your downed hero returns to the city in a variety of crazy ways.

Colourful and crazy: two words that sum up Sunset Overdrive. The cel-shaded look, always an eye-catcher, is a visual feast with its new-gen overhaul. Gameplay revolves around absurd weapons and endless grinds along ledges and over electrical lines. The experience reminds heavily of the best of Sega's offerings from the 90s, drawn from punk rock and the skate scene.

There are multiple parodies of mainstream phenomena in the game, but even if you ignore or miss the digs, it's as much fun stringing together grinds along telephone lines, railings and gutters, then bouncing off car roofs onto higher buildings to keep building up your Style meter. Pulling off these tricks gradually earn you rewards in the form of



currency, which you can spend on new weapons, clothes and various improvements.

Improvements come in the form of Amps and Overdrives, which have to be partially put together using collected ingredients such as mobile phones and sneakers. They have all sorts of effects on weapons and skills, which are assigned to an additional Style bar. The setup is quite complex, and somewhat confusing, but it does offer plenty of possibilities to adapt abilities and weapons to your preferred play style. For example, Amps can turn an extremely ineffective Vinyl-firing gun, with rapid fire but low damage, into a weapon Mr. Freeze would be proud of after installing Ice Amps.

The fictional Californian Sunset City is huge, and filled to the brim with objectives. Even after several hours we barely touched the fast travel system - and why should we? The wall runs, jumps and grinds are too much fun to skip out on. Tricks are easy to perform, and so even in frantic moments you have little problem keeping your Style combo going - only by repeating the same type of grind or keeping in the same area does your combo disappear. And of course, there's plenty to collect along the way.

The main story and side quests provide plenty to do, and there's a varied mix of chases, attack or defence missions and boss fights, and throughout there's the odd surprise to dabble with besides acrobatic tricks and shooting orgies. You'll also find small time-based challenges that have you completing tasks under a ticking clock.

These challenges come attached with a high-score table to give you incentive to replay them. But there's also another time sink in the form of co-op mode Chaos Squad. It's an eight player mode that unfortunately we couldn't sample for this review, as we were playing the game before it hit retail, and therefore lacking willing partners to come join us. Still, it's a nice to know there is more waiting for us when servers go online, with several missions to tackle, and players fighting towards rewards at the concluding battle. All's fair in punk and rock'n'roll.

Sunset Overdrive has all the flash and dynamic of a brand-new arcade machine. It also holds close the virtues of the arcade scene in its presentation and gameplay, and is as much akin to the likes of Jet Set Radio and Crazy Taxi, but still has all the polish and additions expected of a modern day video game. This is just a really beautiful and fun arcade-like experience.



BORDERLANDS: THE PRE-SEQUEL!

7 PLATFORM PC PS3 XBOX 360 GENRE ACTION DEVELOPER 2K AUSTRALIA PUBLISHER 2K RELEASE 17 OCTOBER 2014

When we first saw the Hyperion base and moon in *Borderlands 2*, we knew we'd travel there someday. And the vessel taking us there turned out to be *Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel*. In the role of one of four "new" hunters, we witness the rise of Handsome Jack, the antagonist of the second title. The story is set between the first and second games, and revolves around an intergalactic rescue mission, revenge and - of course - a treasure trove of alien technology.

We have Athena, who has a protective shield that absorbs damage from enemies for a short time and casts back the stored amount at her attackers. This makes her a great support character. William the Enforcer is a fighting machine and has numerous cybernetic implants. His action skill includes the two drones Saint and Wolf who will fight alongside him for some time. Nisha is a cowgirl with a strong whip as a melee attack. Her action skill offers auto-aim and her shots gain a huge damage boost.

Then there's Claptrap. The short robot is well-suited to the *Borderlands* universe, because he equals absolute chaos. Claptrap's action skill is a random program that responds differently depending on the situation. His arsenal ranges from helpless jumping rubber ducks to a laser-firing disco ball - and that makes him a ticking time bomb. In addition the small metal box has access to all the other action skills and can just as easily play as ninja, Gunzerker or Mechromancer. Unfortunately you can never really be sure what he's going to do next, and so any new activation of the skill is a real gamble, as not all skills are helpful to the current situation.

Fans will inevitably recognise many of the iconic figures from previous games, and

the narrative focus from four different perspectives offers a lot of additional information about the universe.

The humour of the series is still present. Be it cleaning up pollution in the name of an animal rights organisation or to draw the legendary weapon 'Excalibastard' from a stone, things always turn out differently than what you may imagine. The range of the quests is great, even if there's the occasional amount of backtracking.

Pandora's moon offers gameplay additions. Since there is no oxygen in large parts of the game, we have a special kit that provides the hunters with a limited oxygen supply, a jet engine and a ramming attack. The reduced gravity allows us to jump very high and walk much faster. But the lunar location leads to a bland look across most of the game. Unfortunately you find the same monotony in the new alien races that you'll fight against.

There is a lack of new, innovative ideas: this is just more of the same (great) stuff. It's a truly crazy action role-playing game with bitter black humour, magnificent gameplay and a fantastic universe. But it's not on par with *Borderlands 2*.



THE EVIL WITHIN

PLATFORM PC PS3 PS4 X360 XBOX ONE GENRE HORROR DEVELOPER TANGO GAMEWORKS PUBLISHER BETHESDA RELEASE 14 OCTOBER 2014

Castellanos is your stereotypical hardboiled detective. He's been through a lot in his time, both in the line of work and in his personal life. We've all seen this character in countless films and games. It's not the most interesting choice for a lead, but then again why mess with a formula that works. He gets called to the scene of multiple murders at Beacon Mental Hospital in Krimson City, but after he arrives there he finds himself anywhere but in Krimson City – or anywhere else in the real world for that matter. It's all in his head. Or someone else's.

It's your surreal Japanese horror experience, and things aren't quite what they seem. Castellanos and his colleagues will have to make their way past chainsaw-wielding burlap-wearing butchers, spider women, and self-resurrecting men with safes for heads. Throughout you're thrown into situation after situation unprepared for what is expected of you next – adapt to the situation or die. It gives the game something of a trial and error flavour, as you'll likely spend your first couple of tries with a major boss figuring out what you need to do.

At times flight is your best option. At other times you need to figure out a good combination of weapons to take them on or use an element of the environment to your advantage. Or combinations of these strategies. It can be frustrating, but this is part of the DNA of the genre.

This also speaks to one of the great strengths of the game and that's the massive amount of variation it provides. Not just when it comes to environments and encounters, but there are a lot of set pieces and one-off scenarios to make sure you never feel like you're just going through the motions of a run-of-the-mill chapter.

The plot is a roller coaster, but the main story treads a fairly steady path and there is a lot of foreshadowing in play. Overall

it kept our attention and it works thanks to or in spite of (depending on your point of view) cheesy dialogue and overly stiff and glass-eyed characters we see.

In terms of mechanics the game sticks within familiar Japanese survival horror standards. The camera is typically your most difficult enemy and Castellanos' movement isn't what you'd expect of a police detective (you can sprint for a mere 3 seconds until you upgrade the skill for instance). Your weapon choice is fairly standard, aside from the agony bow. This crossbow allows you to shoot arrows with various properties (ice, explosives, electricity, etc.) and while it is a fairly slow weapon it also lets you set up traps by shooting arrows on walls or floors where enemies may step.

From a purely technical point of view the game isn't very impressive and it comes with thick black borders top and bottom. We tested the PS4 version for this review and in addition to the levels being fairly small in size and there being texture pop-ins and, at times, severe clipping issues; it just comes across as a game that is limited by its cross-generational nature.

Rather than the next generation of Japanese survival horror, *The Evil Within* is a greatest hits compilation that includes not just the classics but also all those outdated elements we'd rather forget. That said it certainly will appeal to fans of the early *Resident Evils* and *Silent Hills*.

7



FIFA 15

PLATFORM MULTI GENRE SPORTS DEVELOPER EA CANADA RELEASE 24 SEPTEMBER 2014

Fifa 15 is everything you'd expect it to be: a solid football sim, crammed full of modes, topped up with accurate teams, and sprinkled with the dust of controversy. It's business as usual over at EA Sports Canada, and once again they've served up a decent digital representation of the game.

For the most part, we're happy with what we've been given. As a football sim it's bordering on untouchable. But is it better than FIFA 14? Well, maybe. Probably. No. Yes. Yes. It's certainly different. Not drastically different of course, but there's been enough of a rebalance that seasoned players will notice the new AI of the keepers, the blunted defenders, the improved dribbling. Enough has been tweaked and changed that regulars will have to relearn and adjust, and it's complicated enough now that newcomers (or those returning after an extended absence) will have so much to learn that the subtleties will be lost and it'll just feel like the same FIFA that they've played before, even though it's not.

The upgrade will be felt most keenly by those making the generational leap. The additional horsepower afforded by the new consoles means improved graphics, more detailed crowds, expansive AI and smoother textures.

The rebalance this year has been made in favour of attacking players. It's easier to dribble, twisting and turning in dangerous positions, and, at the same time, defenders are harder to control, their ability to contain the opposition forwards has been somewhat blunted. There are also some moments when the AI fails to keep up with the action. Off the ball runs are getting better, granted, but they're still not quite right yet.

A few years ago FIFA was close to perfection. This most modern entry proves that progress towards perfection is slowing considerably. FIFA 15 is a good game, but it's not a great game; it looks like we're going to have to wait at least another year for that.

8



BAYONETTA 2

1 PLATFORM **WII U** GENRE **ACTION** DEVELOPER **PLATINUM GAMES** PUBLISHER **NINTENDO** RELEASE **24 OCTOBER 2014**

It took us all of 30 seconds to realise that Bayonetta's world is as crazy as it's ever been. We're battling winged centaurs atop a jet plane as it roars through a city as flocks of bloodthirsty angels fly nearby. We tackle giant dragons, tentacled monsters, and end up summoning a giant demon out of Bayonetta's hair to chomp down on hulking enemies. It's hard to argue that any of the absurdity or insanity of the series has been toned down.

The original lost some of its frantic pacing due to being swamped with backstory. While story isn't taking a backseat this time round, Platinum Games has learnt its lesson; most cutscenes see Bayonetta and company dispatch spirited one-liners before gameplay swiftly resumes.

And there should be no doubt that combat is the main attraction here. Battles are just as insane as our first time wearing the pistol stilettoes. There's rarely a moment to breathe, and it's important to keep moving, juggling enemies and calculating tactics to adapt to new combinations of foes, dodging both melee and long-range attacks. Witch Time returns, slowing down time if you dodge an attack successfully at the very last second, and in turn letting you pummel angels and demons easily. This is where the essence of Bayonetta lies - you'll be given plenty of opportunity to link up brilliant attacks if you first master the art of timing your movements.

It's rapid-fire combat, but responses need to be measured, planned. Combo chains weave out with possibility, and you need to know exactly the distances and directions required for Bayonetta's attacks. This is a game that makes a point of punishing the

player's lack of caution. If you barely make it through one battle, you're quickly thrown into the next encounter without proper time to heal. It comes across as a little unjust, even if it only punishes your mistakes. But as a result, it's easy to fall head over heels (pun intended) in love with the combat system, and it quickly becomes a quest to perfect the fluidity with which you traverse the levels and deal damage.

There are bosses all over the place. You will be drowning in them and it keeps up the variation. Your next boss encounter will always be bigger, more impressive and more difficult than the last one, and we repeatedly found ourselves with mouths ajar at how fantastically exaggerated they are, and several end in spectacular fashion, that we won't spoil here.

After completing each fight you're assigned a grade depending on how well you did in terms of combos, avoiding damage and finishing within a reasonable time. Much like in its predecessor it is extremely addictive to chase after the highest grade. We went back several times to replay chapters for the sole reason of bettering our



OCEAN VIEWS

You angel-kicking trip takes you to the mountain Fimbulvinter, by way of a beautiful island and seaport that are the game's backdrops.



scores and gaining better rewards that are used to purchase new costumes, powers and abilities. The selection is vast.

Bayonetta 2 is a visual tour de force. Everything from the beautiful harbour town, the journey to Fimbulvinter and everything - screen-sized enemies, increasingly preposterous combos - is gorgeous to behold, running at a silky smooth 60 frames per second. This is without a doubt the best looking game on the console (and doesn't look half-bad played through the GamePad either).

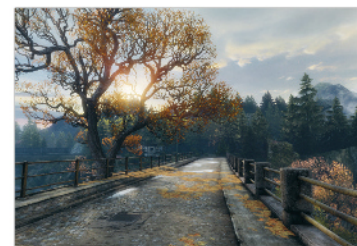
As the story reaches its conclusion, there are Verse Cards that you can use in a multiplayer mode called Tag Climax, letting you play co-operatively online with either a friend or stranger. Verse Cards, selected by both players, determine the combination of enemies you face and you bet credits that one of you will reach the end of the scenario. The higher your bid, the higher the reward, but the difficulty also scales: from being able to take a sustained beating to suffering only two blows before collapsing. Good thing then that there's two of you as your fellow witch can revive you. You can also play with a computer controlled partner, but it takes much of the fun out of the mode. The Tag Climax mode is sure to keep Bayonetta 2

alive for a long time. Extremely addictive and lots of fun.

If you're new to Bayonetta you should make sure to get the Special Edition of Bayonetta 2, as it includes the first game. The predecessor has been polished up and made to shine for the re-release on Wii U - even the frame-rate has been given an overhaul and it is now running at 60 frames per second.

Come the credits we were left completely exhausted. It's been a very long time since a game required this amount of energy and reward all the frustration it takes to master the game. Anyone can jump in and start being violent, but when you're really skilled the result is something of elegant, brutal beauty. It's wholly satisfying from beginning to end, and a workout that's in a class of its own. It's one of the most compelling reasons to pick up Nintendo's console if you haven't already.

10



THE VANISHING OF ETHAN CARTER

PLATFORM PC GENRE ADVENTURE
DEVELOPER THE ASTRONAUTS RELEASE 25 SEPTEMBER 2014

This PC-only adventure (it'll be coming to PS4 next year) has you playing detective Paul Prospero and investigating the disappearance of a child in Red Creek Valley. Prospero specialises in the unexplained, the supernatural, and can see into the past through a sixth sense that allows him to piece together the events that lead to the crime scenes he investigates along the way.

Standard summary, but it doesn't capture just now unique this game really is: it's different, unusual, even unique. Aided by photogrammetry, artistic vision, a tremendous attention to detail, a brilliant soundtrack, and a sophisticated minimalistic design, development studio The Astronauts has been able to create the most convincing game world we've had the privilege of getting to know.

As is with its genre colleagues like Journey, Dear Esther, and Gone Home, the user interface is non-existent, but unlike these games The Vanishing of Ethan Carter manages to combine gameplay, atmosphere and slow paced storytelling in one neat package. Where the first of these elements has been criticised by some, by neglecting some of the distinguishing characteristics of the videogame medium The Vanishing of Ethan Carter breaks new ground.

That said, the game does stumble with its puzzle design, which are clichéd at times, and break the illusion the title had managed to affect on us until then. In a way, Carter's sublime excellence elsewhere makes these issues and others, like poor voice-acting, all the more acute.

It's the type of game that anything apart from the briefest description of the mechanics would spoil the surprises in store. And the surprises are such, and so different from what we've seen before that they'll stay with us for a long time, and any future adventure game will be measured against.

9



MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOW OF MORDOR

PLATFORM PC PS3 PS4 X360 XBOX ONE GENRE ACTION DEVELOPER MONOLITH PUBLISHER WARNER RELEASE 30 SEPTEMBER 2014

Talion's story takes place between the events of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and it would be easy to assume that an afterthought meant to bridge the gap between a prologue and a trilogy would come across as watered down and without consequence. However, the story of *Shadow of Mordor* surprises us and we find ourselves captivated by the events and characters.

This is a challenging game, at least in parts. This is mainly due to the ingenious Nemesis system that sees your enemies level up and challenge each other for power. If a normal grunt kills you (and you will die a lot, especially in the early stages) he will be upgraded to a captain and will start levelling up. In theory he can rise to the top of the hierarchy and the two of you can have a back and forth rivalry going for much of the game. Captains have various traits, things they are scared of, attacks they are immune to or susceptible to, and knowing your enemy is half the battle.

As a whole the Nemesis system adds intrigue and character to fights that would otherwise not be nearly as interesting. As with all procedural and random content it can cause issues with game balance and difficulty spikes.

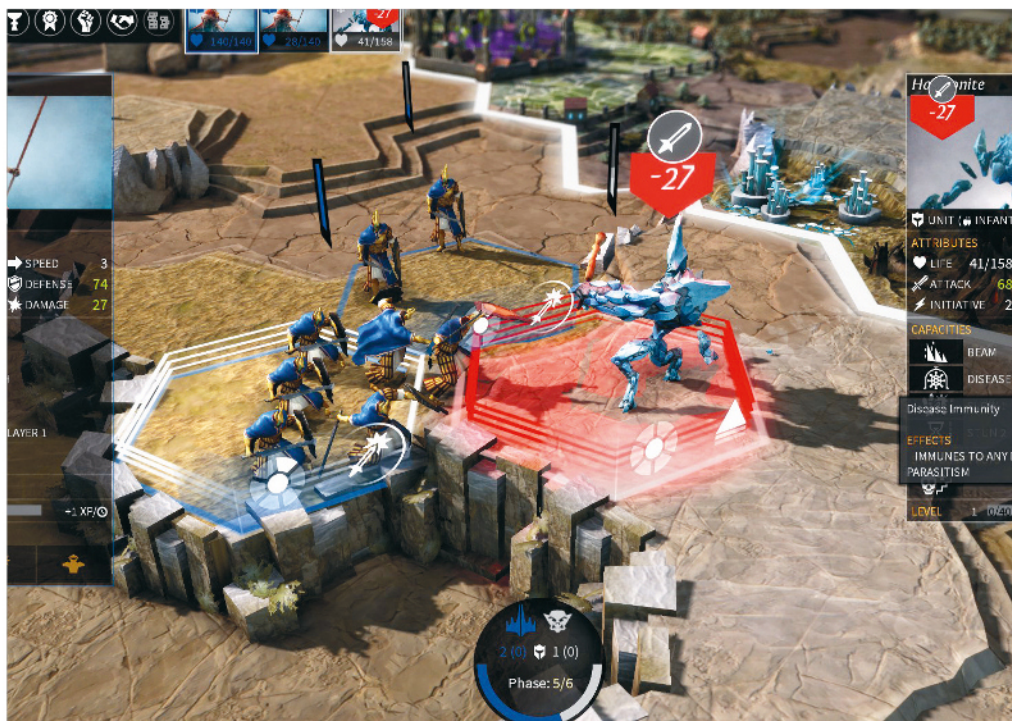
When *Shadow of Mordor* was first announced the game was often compared to *Assassin's Creed* and it's easy to see why. The sneaking, the unlocking of areas by climbing forge towers (only visible to you as a Wraith), even the way the story plays out with a lot of focus on characters, it's all very similar. But the combat feels closer to the *Arkham* series, and strongholds filled with Orcs running for alarm bells made us think of *Far Cry 3*. But the setting, the Nemesis system, and a well crafted

progression and runes system means that it very much feels like its own game at the end of the day.

But all is not sunshine in the world of Mordor and one thing that really disappointed us (initially at least) was the size of the sandbox world. Once you gain the ability to mount and ride Caragons (wolf-like creatures) you can traverse the length/width of the map in no time at all, and there are even main quests where you sneak after another character that will take you across the entirety of the map.

Some of the main quests were less than stellar, but we did appreciate some of the side quests such as weapon-specific challenges and finding artefacts and ancient symbols. All of these tie in to a multi-tiered progression system that sees you gain Power to unlock ability tiers.

At the end of 20-odd hours spent in Mordor we have to say that we thoroughly enjoyed our time with Talion. Riding Caragons and Graugs, plotting to overthrow Orc Warchiefs with your branded Captains, and honing our skills with the brilliant combo-based combat system, were highlights in what is easily the best *Lord of the Rings* game in a decade.



ENDLESS LEGEND

PLATFORM PC GENRE STRATEGY DEVELOPER AMPLITUDE STUDIOS PUBLISHER ICEBERG INTERACTIVE RELEASE 29 AUGUST 2014

There's so much going on in Endless Legend that it's difficult to know where to start. As good a place as any is the style of game; Amplitude's latest title is a 4X strategy (eXplore, eXpand, eXterminate, and the one we always forget, eXploit). It's in the same vein as Civilization V, in that it's turn-based and plays out on maps broken up into hexagonal chunks. That's really where the similarities end, though.

It's got a fantasy setting, at least at first, because as each game progresses it becomes increasingly technology-focused; there's an undeniable sci-fi edge to the late game.

The map is littered with minor factions that must be conquered one way or another. There's fantastic variety in this area, and although the units might not have wildly different stats or abilities, they look varied and run the gamut of fantasy creatures and races. Once these minor factions have been conquered they can be absorbed into the empire, their units becoming available when building subsequent armies.

On top of the numerous minor factions, there's eight playable races available to choose from. These eight are another of Endless Legend's big strengths. Each plays differently to the next, meaning there's incredible longevity to be had from the game, and sometimes the differences between them can be quite drastic. There's some real game-changers in there.

It's a really nice medley of factions, and at the same time as giving the player different directions to take each game in depending on who they play with, facing off against the different major factions also presents a variety of problems to overcome before anyone will be victorious.

Victory can be achieved via one of several different win states, ranging from controlling huge chunks of the game map, to stockpiling Dust, or researching a certain number of

technological advancements during the game's sixth and final scientific era. Depending on which faction you choose, there's going to be more than one way to win a game.

Clashing with opponents also reveals the occasionally pedestrian AI, whether in battle or in the wider game. There's several options in terms of difficulty if you want up the challenge, and you might need to; the standard setting is a bit of a walkover and your opponents seem naturally conservative.

The late game, as is so often the way in the 4X genre, can be a bit cumbersome and unwieldy, but there's so many options that can be tinkered with when setting your preferences before a game, that you can adjust it to suit your style and it needn't be a big problem in the long run. You can tweak the size of the map, put a timer on each turn, reduce the number of factions; there's options aplenty. There's even multiplayer, but the pacing of the game means you'll have to put aside a few hours if you want to enjoy it.

Endless Legend is certainly a game that boasts longevity and depth. There's a lot to take in and learn, with complex systems and diverse factions ensuring that even those well versed in the genre will have plenty to ponder.

It's a huge, deep and compelling game, and even though it's not perfect, 4X fans will find plenty to enjoy in the rich fantasy world.

8



DRIVECLUB

PLATFORM PS4 GENRE RACING DEVELOPER EVOLUTION STUDIOS RELEASE 8 OCTOBER 2014

This ambitious racing title was meant to release alongside PlayStation 4 last November, but to everyone's surprise it was delayed at the last minute. Shame that despite nearly an extra year in the garage, it's not the perfect racer.

Its foundation is a selection of race tracks where you can compete in several different kinds of races. In the case of Driveclub this includes classic events with 12 cars, time trials and drift challenges - each requiring a specific driving style and expertise. These races are part of Driveclub's Tour Mode, which simply allows you to compete in these categories across a bunch of tracks around the world, but simultaneously challenge you with Face-Off, small, side objectives within each race.

There's sadly no escaping the fact that Tour Mode grows a bit repetitive towards the end, when every Face-Off challenge has been conquered, and the at first impressive tracks start to feel over-familiar, and the limited selection of cars - 50 - adds to the repetition.

Driveclub thankfully has an ace up its sleeve, and that's the Club aspect of the game. Your Club, that you either create or an existing one you sign up to, is a loose racing team where you and five friends work together to dominate the track and earn points and prestige. The Face-Off challenges can also involve your Club - and this alters the nature of the game completely.

We actually completely abandoned Tour Mode and found ourselves engaging in Club challenges, online face-offs and hard to beat online lap times... that we just had to beat. This is where Driveclub really comes to life and it offers the best online component we've ever seen in a simulation racer.

Another one of Driveclub's strengths is how different the cars behave from each other: every category offers a unique driving experience.

Clubs give Driveclub an energy and dynamic that it needs, and as a result, we'll be on the tracks for a while.

7



ALIEN: ISOLATION

T PLATFORM PC PS3 PS4 X360 XBOX ONE GENRE HORROR DEVELOPER CREATIVE ASSEMBLY PUBLISHER SEGA RELEASE 7 OCTOBER 2014

This is a first-person adventure that favours stealth and diversion tactics over straight shooting to survive a trek through deep space station Sevastopol. You play as Amanda Ripley, daughter to the movie franchise's Ellen, who's travelled there to listen to the recovered Nostromo flight recorder and find out what's happened to her mother.

Despite its flaws, which are more obvious if you're not as invested in the fiction, this is an ardent love letter to the 1979 Ridley Scott film, that captures the feel and look of that cinematic classic. The environment work has to be commended, retro-engineered from set designs of the Nostromo to mimic that low-fi living in deep space, and the audio lifts generously from the original movie score.

You arrive to find a station in disrepair, most of its inhabitants missing or murdered, and what few are left welcome you with the barrel of a gun instead of a handshake. As you piece together the events of what's happened prior to your landing, you've to deal with murderous androids that have gone rogue and a familiar, hulking behemoth with cheetah speed and keen senses that hunts you throughout the game.

We'd worried that the Alien encounters would be a one-trick pony that'd bore after a while with their repetition. They don't. It's appearance is more heavily reliant on player action: any loud noise will see it drop down from the air vent system above where it spends most of its time and investigate - killing you on sight. As a result you're forced to go slow and try and work your way round other threats rather than attacking them, and filching parts from around the station to craft distraction devices

such as noise emitters and smoke bombs to give you a chance of escape, and use a motion tracker to check for enemies beyond your eye line.

The level of stress, of tension in everything you do and the continual trio of threats that can end your time on the station successfully mask what is otherwise fairly routine adventure mechanics - hit switches, fire up generators, unlock doors and solve light puzzles - that without the fear factor would feel rudimentary.

It's only in the last stretch that the game begins to feel overlong. The tension remains, but there's an increasing escalation of events that feel one fake ending too many, and the finale, while great and in keeping with what we'd expect from the title, leads to a sudden, short ending that doesn't satisfy nearly as much as the previous eighteen hours worth of gameplay and story.

But that's only a footnote issue when taking the package as a whole. This is a quality licence tie-in the

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kind of which you rarely, if ever, see. If you're a horror fan, an Alien fan, you need to play this: for you, this is the best game of the year.



FORZA HORIZON 2

PLATFORM X360 XBOX ONE GENRE RACING DEVELOPER PLAYGROUND GAMES PUBLISHER MICROSOFT RELEASE 3 OCTOBER 2014

If Forza Horizon 2 managed to continue its momentum past those electrifying opening hours it'd have easily skyrocketed into the 10 category. And even if it drops down a gear or two as familiarity with the open world and its events starts to grind the experience from sublimely eclectic to uncomfortably formulaic, Playground Games offers up one hell of a road trip.

The different car class championships available to race through and spread across artistic interpretations of France and Italy, sees Forza Horizon 2 offer its take on the great racing experiences, both on and off-road. Nor is this a Frankenstein monster cobbled together from other developer glories either. The feels suitably iconic, but the vision is Playground's. It's one connected sandbox that you're free to take what car you want where you want.

Playground lets you decide where on the arcade/realism spectrum you drive, though you better have a steering wheel handy if you want to try it with assists off. Advice? At least crank up the Drivatar difficulty from average to skilled once you've got used to the lay of the land. The former makes races a sedate country drive, while the latter will see you continually neck and neck for pole position come the last few turns.

Horizon divides its online and solo worlds through a two-choice menu option to take your ride into a shared world by the event-roulette of Road Trip, or the freedom to express your driving desires that is Free Roam. With online multiplayer, there are still things missing we'd have liked to have seen (offering a richer voting system, the ability to race multiple car classes against each other). Some seem an obvious addition, others because we're just spoilt with choice in racers these days.

The world's littered with diversions. Speed traps stack you up on online leaderboards, measuring your top speed as you pass

them. Well-hidden barns hide classic vehicles. Even pre-release the custom decal livery's got a few notable designs to copy onto your own car, and we sunk some time tinkering with our ride's paint jobs.

Just beating out racing trains and planes for the game's highlight are the Bucket List challenges. These task you with driving some insane vehicles to some nicely cocky objectives that flash up as you approach these parked rides.

Hopping between different pursuits is recommended, because otherwise you start tiring of the formula that's all too apparent at times. Single-player feels lacking compared to the variety and progression layers of the original. You've a fairly simple Championship structure to run through, with the odd fun event on the side. We'd have loved to have seen a more wacky playlist of racing events, or the ability to curate group challenges from the community.

Graphically Forza Horizon 2 is a knockout, and you'll want to use Photo Mode for more than pornographic shots of your cars. There's a lush level of detail that embraces the idealised summer that was the hallmark of Sega's blue sky-kissed 90s racers - every turn leads to a postcard landscape. We've missed those days, and if you have as well, then this is the closest you'll get to them in modern racing.

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PIX THE CAT

PLATFORM PS4 PS VITA GENRE ACTION DEVELOPER PASTA GAMES RELEASE 7 OCTOBER 2014

This action puzzle title came out of nowhere to become our new handheld addiction this month, with a main Arcade mode that's best described as a mix of Sonic Team's ChuChu Rocket!, Pac-Man and Snake.

The concept is that you navigate grid-based levels, picking up eggs (that hatch ducks) and transport them to holes (nests?), while avoiding wandering ghosts and mines. As a timer steadily counts down you need to build up your speed by timing your turns against walls until you boost enough to enter Fever mode - at which point you can kill the level ghosts, and try not to tap your foot in time to the escalating music.

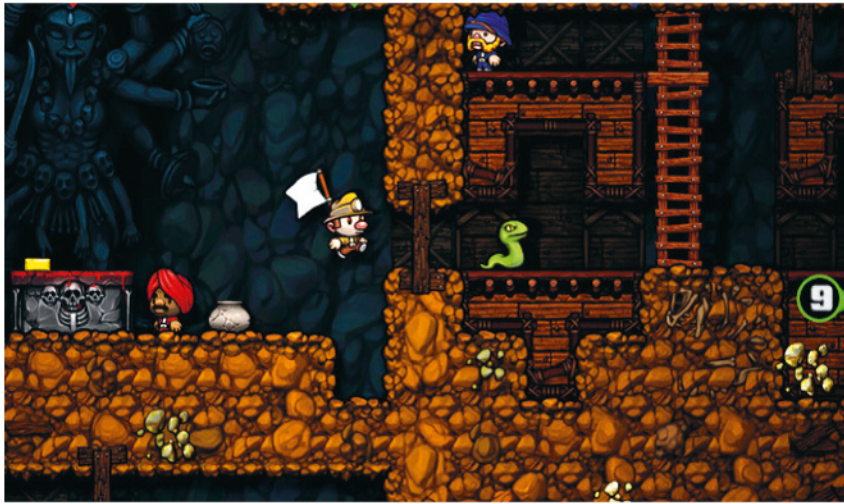
The game has a nice progression system in place for unlocking further content, such as increasingly difficult sets of arcade maps, the four-player arena multiplayer mode (exclusive to PS4), though we'd have liked to have had everything unlocked from the start as some modes - such as Nostalgia mode - take a lot of effort to unlock.

The art-style is easy on the eyes, even if it may not be as iconic as say ChuChu Rocket! or Pac-Man, the games it draws inspiration from.

We've played the game on both PS4 and PS Vita, and there are benefits and drawbacks to both versions. The Vita's D-Pad felt superior for control, but then there are some levels where the camera is zoomed out to an extent it's apparent they're designed with a TV screen in mind - though they never become unplayable.

Pix the Cat borrows a lot of elements from the games mentioned in the first paragraph, but it does so without ever becoming derivative. It's addictive and challenging both in terms of quick reflexes, and for those Trophy hunters its selection will make for some tough times ahead, in a good way. The nature of the game itself makes it a great fit for the handheld (and for couch gaming as well), but it really should be enjoyed with headphones on.

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SPELUNKY

PC PS3 PS4 PS VITA XBOX 360 MOSSMOUTH

There's few games that are as easy to pick up and play, but underneath this veneer of accessibility is a platformer of surprising depth and nuance. Procedurally generated levels ensures that no pass is ever the same, except for perhaps the inevitable restart screen. Don't be fooled by the cutesy graphics: this punishing rogue-like is more than happy to kill you.



SUPER HEXAGON

PC IOS ANDROID TERRY CAVANAGH

The premise simple, the design hypnotic: this iOS fast-paced puzzler has you spinning your on-screen avatar round a central circumference to avoid oncoming walls. The only title you play on hard to practice for the slower easy mode.



MONACO: WHAT'S YOURS IS MINE

PC XBOX 360 POCKETWATCH GAMES

It's Pac-Man meets Ocean's Eleven. It's tense moments and exciting last-ditch escapes. It's a great soundtrack accompanying sharp visuals. It offers a tactical single-player experience and some of the very best couch co-op ever made.



SUPER MEAT BOY

PC XBOX 360 TEAM MEAT

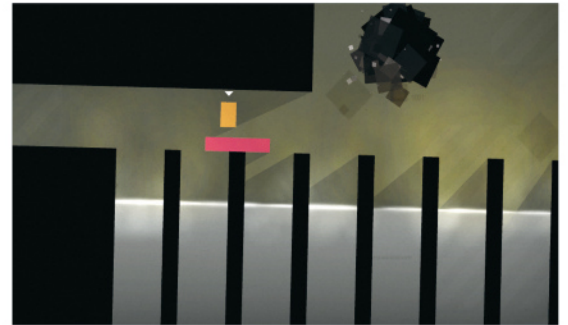
Precision platforming with horribly gory ends if you mistime a leap makes this ode to 16-bit gaming feel like a Saw version of Super Mario, but it's also a pure-breed platformer that flicks the fingers up at the simplicity of its modern brethren.



PAPERS, PLEASE

PC PS VITA LUCAS POPE

Life as a border-control bureaucrat is bleak and thankless. Everyday there's papers to process but through the avalanche a compelling story emerges, as you balance your morals with the need to feed the family back home.



THOMAS WAS ALONE

PC PS3 PS4 PS VITA Wii U IOS ANDROID MIKE BITHELL

Indie puzzle platformers are a dime a dozen, but there's nothing quite like Mike Bithell's Thomas Was Alone. At first simplistic, then as the game carries on we're given increasingly challenging tasks to complete, while the marriage of simple shapes (AI entities) and a narrative full of character is one we cannot help but smile at.



HOTLINE MIAMI

PC PS3 PS4 PS VITA DENNATON GAMES

There are many video games where your actions can best be described as those of a psychopath killer, but few excel at putting you in the mind of a psycho like Hotline Miami. The hypnotic music, the masks, the systematic way you clear room after room like it was a puzzle game, is challenging, addictive and unsettling.



FTL: FASTER THAN LIGHT

PC IOS SUBSET GAMES

FTL scratches the starship captain role-play itch, and it does so by tasking you with carrying information vital to the survival of the empire. Your mission will have you evading your relentless enemy across an unpredictable galaxy. Expect top-down tactical battles, RPG elements and some tough decisions along the way.

Hall of Fame

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BEST OF 2014

PLAYSTATION 4



MGSV: GROUND ZEROES

Kojima Productions Kojima

Short game, but ultra replayable.

RESOGUN

Housemarque Sony

Score attack-heavy arcade shooter.

TOWERFALL: ASCENSION

Matt Thorson Sony

Fast-paced four player local battler.

LAST OF US REMASTERED

Naughty Dog Sony

Naughty Dog's horror masterpiece in HD.

XBOX ONE



FORZA HORIZON 2

Playground Games Microsoft

Currently the best racer on console.

TITANFALL

Respawn EA

Online FPS that's distinct from the rest.

DEAD RISING 3

Capcom Vancouver Microsoft

Zombie-mashing fun solo or with friends.

KILLER INSTINCT

Double Helix Microsoft

Digital-only fighter that's quite decent.

PC / WINDOWS



CIVILIZATION V

Firaxis 2K Games

The pinnacle of the strategy genre.

DOTA 2

Valve Valve

The most competitive game on the planet.

DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION

Eidos Montreal Square Enix

The definitive version of a modern classic.

ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM

Bethesda Game Studios Bethesda Softworks

Looks great on PC, even better with mods.

WII / WII U



SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2

Nintendo Nintendo

The best Mario platformer on console.

METROID PRIME TRILOGY

Retro Studios Nintendo

The complete first-person sci-fi story.

BAYONETTA 2

Platinum Games Nintendo

The perfect third-person combat game.

MARIO KART 8

Nintendo Nintendo

Multiplayer arcade racing at its finest.

PS3 / 360



RED DEAD REDEMPTION

Rockstar Take-Two

Rockstar's Western - better than GTA.

UNCHARTED TRILOGY

Naughty Dog Sony

The whole globe-trotting adventure.

GEARS OF WAR 2

Epic Games Microsoft

Best of the sci-fi blockbuster trilogy.

BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY

Rocksteady Studios Warner

Engrossing multi-mission adventure.

3DS / PS VITA



SUPER MARIO 3D LAND

Nintendo Nintendo

The best Mario platformer on handheld.

FIRE EMBLEM: AWAKENING

Intelligent Systems Nintendo

Deeply satisfying turn-based fantasy title.

GRAVITY RUSH

Japan Studio Sony

Wonderfully bizarre PS Vita platformer.

TXK

Llama Soft Llama Soft

Addictive digital-only old-school shooter.



Broken Age Act 1

PC iOS Android Double Fine

Double Fine's return to the adventure genre via a successful crowd-funding campaign yielded up this fantastic gem for the PC. The dual storylines, tracking space-faring Shay and village girl Vella are presented with a lovely cartoon style and top voice work. Now can we get Act 2 please?



Titanfall

PC Xbox 360 Xbox One Respawn Entertainment

Microsoft's big exclusive mightn't have set the online worlds alight for as long as they had hoped, but for our money Titanfall was one of the most interesting and unique FPS multiplayer experiences of the year, and one we'll be returning to over the winter break for a titanic reunion with friends.



Super Time Force

PC Xbox 360 Xbox One Capybara Games

Hardcore 2D shooters are always going to pique our interest here at Gamereactor, but there's few that drop gameplay mechanics of such unique variety into the mix. Letting you replay levels alongside your past selves to build up a fearsome killing force is a fully bananas idea that works brilliantly.

THE MISS LIST - GAMES TO AVOID



LOCOCYCLE

Xbox 360 Xbox One Twisted Pixel Games

If this was a two quid knock-off flick in HMV, we could find some guilty pleasure. As a Kinect title, it's just really, really bad.



RECORD RUN

Android iOS Harmonix

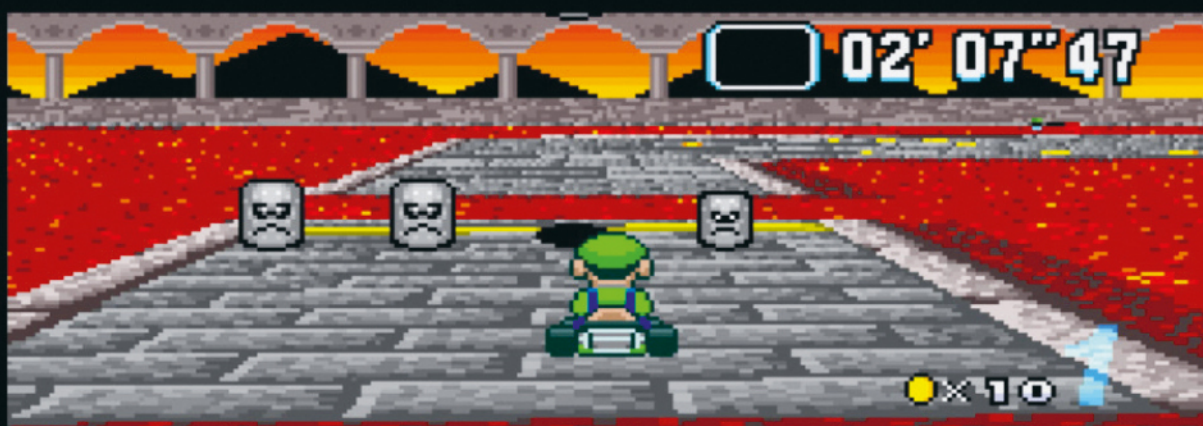
The creators of Rock Band should be booted off the creative stage. It doesn't matter that the game's free: it's broken beyond repair.

CLASSIC

SUPER MARIO KART

Forza Horizon 2's **RALPH FULTON** pays homage to the greatest racing game there ever was: the original SNES version of Mario Kart.

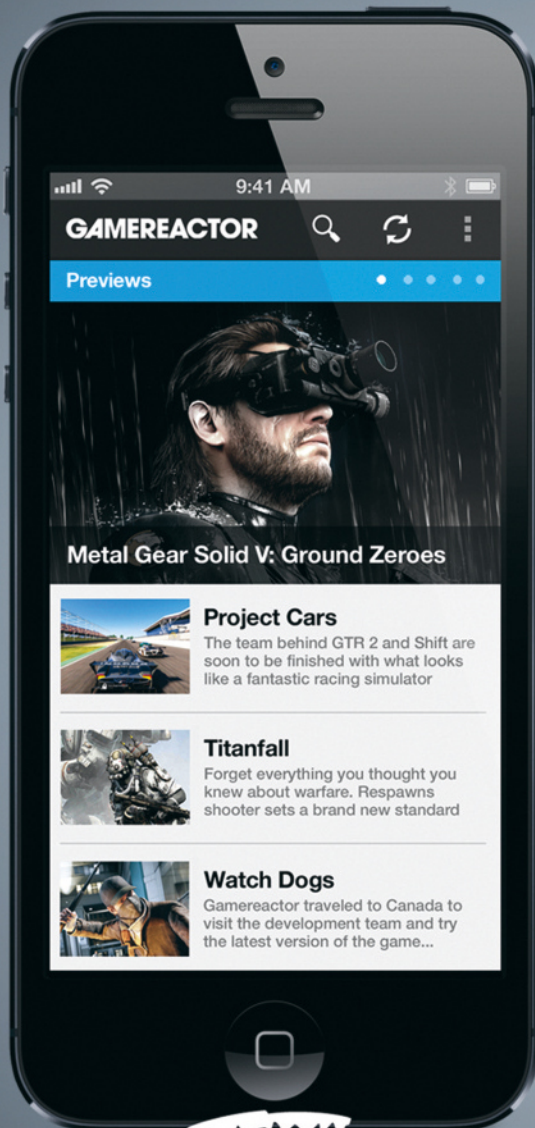
"Favourite game? For me, hands-on down: Super Mario Kart on the SNES. I've spent more time on that game than any other. For me, it's brilliant in terms of pure game design and it's so incredibly well balanced, and so simple, but has such incredible depth... I absolutely love everything about it. There's been great Mario Karts since, but for me, that SNES version is the definitive version, and I'd say is still my favourite game. I was at University when I first experienced it: one of my housemates got a SNES. I think we had two games: we had Super Soccer - which was a pretty reasonable football game for the time - but we had Super Mario Kart. I think between us, we basically spent all our waking hours playing it, over and over. I nearly failed second year uni because of it. Me and one of my housemates, we were pretty much world class by the time we graduated. I still from time to time dig out a SNES to play it. One of these days it'll stop working, and that'll be a painful time."



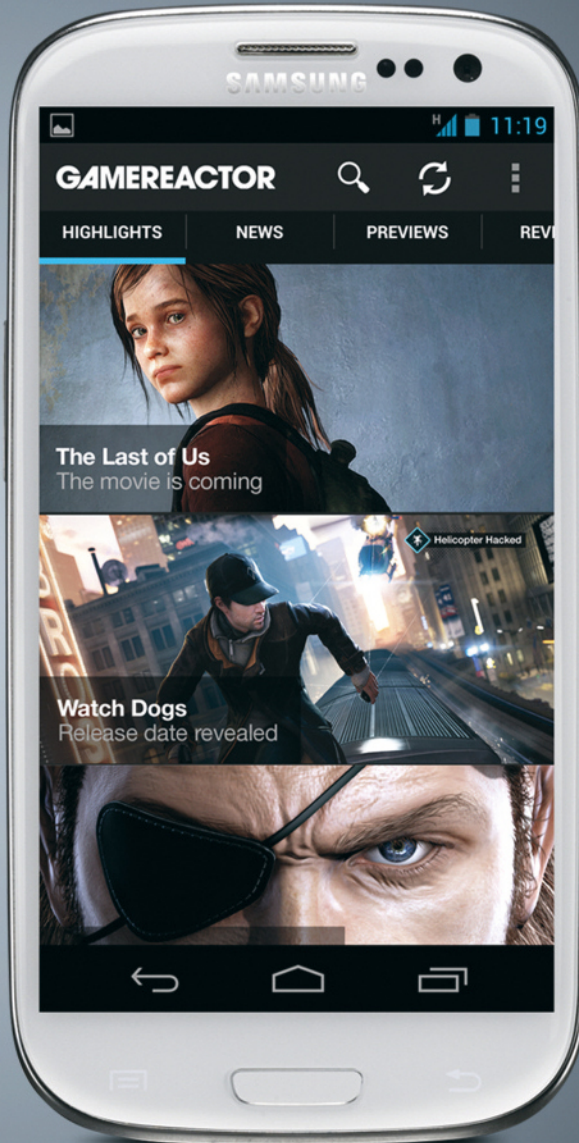
PLAY IT

While you can try and track down a working SNES and copy of the game second hand, it's simpler to head to the Wii U's eShop and download a digital version for £5.49.

iPhone

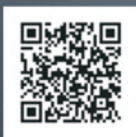


Android



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