

RED DEAD REDEMPTION 2 NEW DETAILS REVEALED

# PLAY



ISSUE 294



PLAYTEST  
SHADOW OF  
THE TOMB  
RAIDER

300  
PS4 & VITA  
GAMES RATED

THE FUTURE OF

# FORTNITE BATTLE ROYALE

EPIC REVEALS WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE BIGGEST GAME ON THE PLANET

PLUS SPIDER-MAN • KNIGHTS AND BIKES • DETROIT



PS4 PS VR PS3 VITA PSN

# Welcome **PLAY**

A closer look at all of the best games on the horizon



## THE THRILL OF THE KILL



### **FORTNITE: BATTLE ROYALE**

is one of the biggest games in the world. Had you asked me this time last year whether I believed that Epic Games' free-to-play gamble stood even a remote chance of making the splash that it has there is a very real chance that I'd have died of laughter right there in front of you. What do I know, eh? That's why **Play** has taken this opportunity to assess where *Fortnite* has come from, where it could indeed go next and what impact this will all have on the wider games industry. We sat down with multiple members of the Epic development team to get a sense of how it is parsing the success and how it plans on keeping up with the, frankly, ridiculous update schedule it has established for itself. Genuine phenomenons in gaming don't come around all that often, and that's why it is well worth celebrating them when they do.

Of course, while *Fortnite* may indeed be all that the Internet is talking about that doesn't mean that the industry has taken a breather. In this issue of **Play** you'll also find our first hands-on impressions of Eidos Montreal's *Shadow Of The Tomb Raider*, exclusive insight into one of 2018's coolest indie games, *Knights And Bikes*, and all new information and screens of *Red Dead Redemption 2*.

It's funny to think that E3 2018 is just a few weeks away. You remember E3, don't you? That chaotic time of the year where almost ever development studio in the world scrambles to announce, tease and reveal upcoming projects in just a few short days while the entire gaming community watches on excitedly. It's funny because there is just so much going on right now that it has sort of snuck up on us. Sony Santa Monica just unleashed the best PS4 exclusive of the generation in *God Of War* and, yes, you can read our review inside this issue. We've also got fresh looks at *Spider-Man* and *Detroit: Become Human*, too more excellent exclusives that continue to defy expectation.

I hope you will join in just a few short weeks as we watch on as the entire games industry implodes under the weight of so many awesome new announcements.

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**CURRENTLY PLAYING**  
*God Of War*

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The future of PlayStation gaming looks something like this...

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ETA OCTOBER 2018 | PUB ROCKSTAR GAMES | DEV IN-HOUSE

# Red Dead Redemption II

It continues to look better and better



It's difficult to believe, but it's almost here: a brand new open-world experience from Rockstar Games.

The company has been hard at work on a sequel to *Red Dead Redemption* for a number of years now and we are finally starting to get our first real taste of what to expect from this sprawling new western.

*Red Dead Redemption II* is going to be a prequel to the 2010 classic, giving us a first-hand look at how Dutch and the gang became such infamous outlaws. Through the eyes of protagonist Arthur Morgan we will see their transformation from a gang of nobodies to a group that is feared by everybody – from a decidedly younger John Marston to the law enforcement that are hot on the tail of the crew after a number of high profile crimes.

This is all highly exciting, but what we are indeed most interested in seeing is how Rockstar is once again setting a new bar for open world game design. From what we've seen already it's clearly going to be stunning, a vehicle for some of the most detailed and dynamic environments ever seen in this style of game. That's particularly important here because Rockstar is giving us a huge degree of freedom to shape the world and the lives of the NPCs that inhabit it.

The Honor System will be making a return from the original, although it will be hugely improved this time out. That system, if you recall, affected how settlements and NPCs treated the player – reflecting your decisions and ever-shifting morality. That is being expanded, giving Arthur even more presence and power in the world; every one of your actions, from looting camps to engaging in acts of violent conduct, will alter the way in which character perceive and treat you. How you behave can create small waves – shop keepers may charge more or less for their wares, for example – to much larger ones, with Arthur quickly finding an influx of bounty hunters on him should he continue to break laws and disrupt communities.

Couple all of this with some notable changes to the combat system and it's clear we are in for a real good time. That's exciting too, because the studio has clearly learned plenty of lessons from *Grand Theft Auto V*, implementing

△×□ The design of the open world is what has our jaws hitting the floor. The level of detail is incredible here. If you haven't gotten yourself a PS4 Pro or a 4K TV yet this may indeed be the game that makes you take the hit!



them here for all to see. *Red Dead Redemption II* will lean heavily on slow-motion kills to help frame the action and give it a cinematic edge, while the gunplay itself has also been retooled to be far more realistic. Balancing realism and fun is always a challenge for any developer, but Rockstar is hoping it can strike a fair one here as it looks to improve the depth to *Red Dead*'s play. This means that players will have more control over rifles and revolvers, letting you finely tune how the weapon fires to give you far more freedom when dealing with deadly duels.

We find ourselves saying this every time we are presented with a brand new Rockstar game, but this is clearly going to be one of – if not the – most authentic and immersive open world game ever created. But then again we expect nothing less, this is a studio that continues to defy expectation, even when anticipation is higher than it has ever been before. *Red Dead Redemption II* has been a long time coming, and we are still struggling to believe that we will have it in our hands this October. What

## JOHN MARSTON RETURNS



We always figured he would make an appearance given that this is a prequel and all, but we didn't expect good old John Marston to be so prominent in the pre-release material. Just how he got those scars (not to mention that burning hatred towards Dutch and the gang) will clearly be explored here in great detail. Expect betrayal, expect heartbreak, and expect some awesome shoot outs. If John Marston is in the picture you just know there is going to be trouble. It'll be interesting to see how much screen time Rockstar gives the lone wanderer, particularly as it attempts to set up the new hero and fresh story in this brand new installment.



## WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- ▲ It is the long-awaited prequel to the 2010 classic *Red Dead Redemption*
- *Red Dead Redemption II* will feature one of the most immersive open worlds ever
- ✕ Rockstar Games is overhauling the combat systems to make them more authentic
- Following the success of *GTA Online*, we expect this will have an epic multiplayer

we are eager to see now, of course, is how everything ties together and what Rockstar has in store for the multiplayer. Rumours continue to fly – from the introduction of a MMO-style experience that will build off of what we saw in the original game, to a sprawling battle royale that takes inspiration from *Fortnite* – but the success of *GTA Online* has effectively ensured that *Red Dead Redemption II* will come with its own incredible multiplayer offering. The single-player campaign will be great and all, but we are suckers for some awesome online action.

Whether you're a fan of westerns or not, it's clear that *Red Dead Redemption II* is going to be the only game everybody is talking about come October. It looks like a true step forward for open world gaming and an incredible look at what's next from the industry's leading developer of interactive entertainment.

**RED DEAD REDEMPTION 2** is the latest project from the talented folks at Rockstar Games. Find out more here: [rockstargames.com](http://rockstargames.com)





### BRAINS, NOT BRAWN

In order to survive the criminal encounters in *Spider-Man*, you're going to want to rely on clever strategies to survive. Peter Parker may be able to do whatever a spider can, but that doesn't include beating down every enemy to a pulp. Using stealth and Spider-Man's various skills will go a lot farther in combat situations than trying to get by on brute force.

ETA 7 SEPT 2018 | DEV INSOMNIAC GAMES

PUB SONY INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT

# Spider-Man

Insomniac's hard work is paying off for its newest title



**Insomniac has put a lot of care into creating the best superhero title on the market.** It's been a while since

we've seen a big superhero title come out, and *Spider-Man* is looking to take

the Batman Arkham series' throne as the best in the genre. Taking inspiration from the Dark Knight's games while blazing its own trail, *Spider-Man* is not resting on its licence's laurels, and is sure to wow us all come release day.

Meticulous detail has gone into how Spidey controls both inside and outside of battle, and Insomniac is making sure that everything is fluid, yet easy to execute. Travelling around New York City is smoother than ever before, and may be the first game to earn the Spider-Man name to really nail the feel of swinging through the air. But if the high-flying acrobatics aren't your thing, you can also explore the lively city on foot, view the sights and sounds at ground level and interact with the citizenry. *Spider-Man* may be Insomniac's most ambitious title yet, and the company's over twenty years of experience is being well used for this new game.

**SPIDER-MAN** is the latest project from the talented folks at Insomniac. Find out more here: [insomniac.games](http://insomniac.games)



### WEB-SLINGING COMBAT

Combat in Spider-Man lets you play by your rules, letting you improvise as you take down criminals. Peter Parker is more than Spider-Man; he's also a genius inventor, and has created a variety of gadgets that combine his web-slinging abilities with helpful technology to assist in crowd control. Of course, you can also use old-fashioned martial arts to dispose of your foes.



### SUIT UP

Not a fan of Insomniac's specially designed suit for this game? Worry not, as you'll be able to don a number of different suits in Spider-Man. The suits aren't just for looks either, as each one has different abilities and skills to take advantage of. Insomniac has done its homework too, with a wide variety of niche suits from Spider-Man's long and diverse history

### SWINGING AROUND TOWN

Arguably one of the most important parts of Spider-Man is how you'll be controlling Spidey as he gets around. Thankfully, Insomniac has put a lot of work into making movement around the open world both easy and smooth. Spider-Man can swing from building to building with his web at the press of a button, and also knows a bit of parkour so that traversing on the ground isn't a chore.



ETA TBC | PUB UBISOFT | DEV UBISOFT MONTPELLIER

# Beyond Good & Evil 2

Yes, it is actually coming out and, yes, we have new details



The team at Ubisoft Montpellier wants to keep fans of *Beyond Good & Evil* as involved and updated on the development of its sequel as possible and the most recent example of this was a Twitch

livestream that offered us some deeper backstory to the game as well as a glimpse of some early gameplay. Development is still very early with even a 2019 release date seemingly a little too early to call, but what's there is already very impressive.

We've talked previously about how the game will allow inter-planetary travel without any loading screens, taking you from murky streets to space in a matter of moments, but now we understand a little more about the moments in-between. *Beyond Good & Evil 2* will have you living the life of a space pirate with massive ships, space combat, lower atmosphere combat and PvE combat all happening. And you should be able to hop between these modes as and when you wish depending on the circumstances. We doubt for instance that hand-to-hand combat is best utilised in the vacuum of space, but we could be wrong.

Anyway, here are a few key facts and reveals that stood out to us that you will want to be up to speed on as *Beyond Good & Evil 2* creeps ever closer.

**BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 2** is the latest project from the talented folks at Ubisoft Montpellier. Find out more here: [Ubisoft.com](http://Ubisoft.com)

## GET SOME FOCUS

*Beyond Good & Evil 2* will be focused around a single solar systems called System 3. It is one of five systems that humanity escaped to after an exodus from Earth in the year 2108. The game itself is taking place at some time after 2360, so many, many years after this event. When the different ships went to their respective systems they could no longer stay contact, so nothing is known about these other populations.

## CHARACTER CREATION

You'll be able to create your own playable character in the game who will also be the captain of your crew as you get a larger ship and begin hiring a crew. Your captain can be human or hybrid and any gender you prefer (the developer seems to be suggesting non-binary options will be available). Your crew is also yours to select as any characters you meet can be hired and assigned a role.



### CLASSIC GAMEPLAY

Two key gameplay elements of the original game will be returning, which is excellent news. The first is a focus on melee combat with some incredible motion capture footage revealing some really fluid and exciting double-bladed staff work. The other element is the photography mechanic, which returns in the form of a kind of spyglass with which to take images and scan for information. A nice little pirate update to keep *BG&E2* in theme.

### PLAY WITH FRIENDS

The last detail that Ubisoft Montpellier has wanted to stress is that you will be able to play *Beyond Good & Evil 2* any way that you want to. That means it will handle solo play and give you a rich and involving storyline in this format or you can join or invite friends to team up and crew a ship together, still continuing the epic story you're a part of. This is an action adventure RPG above all else.

### REMEMBER THE PAST

Ubisoft Montpellier remains coy on the relationship of this game to *Beyond Good & Evil*'s lead character Jade, but it has revealed that she is born not long before the events of this game. So, at least in terms of the timeline, the events of this game are before the original, but may overlap with Jade's life a little. What they did confirm is that she's born during a period of great turmoil as the 'Age Of Piracy' begins.



91% COMPLETED

# THE HOSTAGE



## MISSION START

*Detroit* seems to be presenting its scenarios as short vignettes that will later intertwine as each of the three main characters begin to come together. Of course, every story needs to start somewhere and the early parts of the flowchart will give you a handful of incidental decisions to make to get you in the correct frame of mind for the mission ahead.

## SEARCH FOR CLUES

In the hostage situation, you are given the opportunity to poke your nose into every corner of a beautiful apartment complex, gaining a better understanding of the unfolding situation before you confront the deviant android. This is a time-sensitive situation, so the longer you spend gathering clues, the harder it might become to save a little girl from certain death.

## TAKE THE GUN

Androids aren't allowed to hold weapons, it's against the law in *Detroit*. Some clever recreation and manipulation of the murder scenes will eventually lead you towards a gun that is hidden in the apartment. Pick this up to make your first of many bad decisions – if other characters or members of public see you with a weapon, it too could have broad implications to the story.

ETA 25 MAY 2018 | PUB SONY INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT | DEV QUANTIC DREAM

# Detroit: Become Human

How a series of bad choices can quickly get Connor killed



**Detroit: Become Human is about choice and consequence.** That should go without saying; this is a Quantic Dream game after all. What is becoming clearer still, however, is just how much opportunity we are really going to have to shape this wild narrative adventure come 25 May.

One of the loudest criticisms directed at *Heavy Rain* (and, to an extent, its sequel *Beyond: Two Souls*) was that while it spent a lot of time assuring you that its scenarios could indeed play out differently depending on the decisions you made it never really established how, or why, or when this would actually happen. *Detroit*, however, is circumventing this entirely by putting it all in front of you; a fluid flowchart can be accessed from the pause menu at any time, and it cleanly maps out all of the choices that

you make as you progress through the game's story – all while still giving you but a hint of what the paths in the story that you either failed to unlock or pursue might have looked like.

It's an incidental addition to the game, but it does work in *Detroit's* favour. By giving us the ability to track out our progress we'll finally get a real sense of just how bendable this narrative environment is. While the flowchart seen here is a simple example of an early encounter, we have been led to believe that amount of late-game scenarios will begin to push into the triple digits. Settle in, *Detroit* is going to be a choose your own adventure the likes of which we have never before experienced.

**DETROIT: BECOME HUMAN** is the latest project from the talented folks at Quantic Dream. Find out more here: [quanticdream.com](http://quanticdream.com)

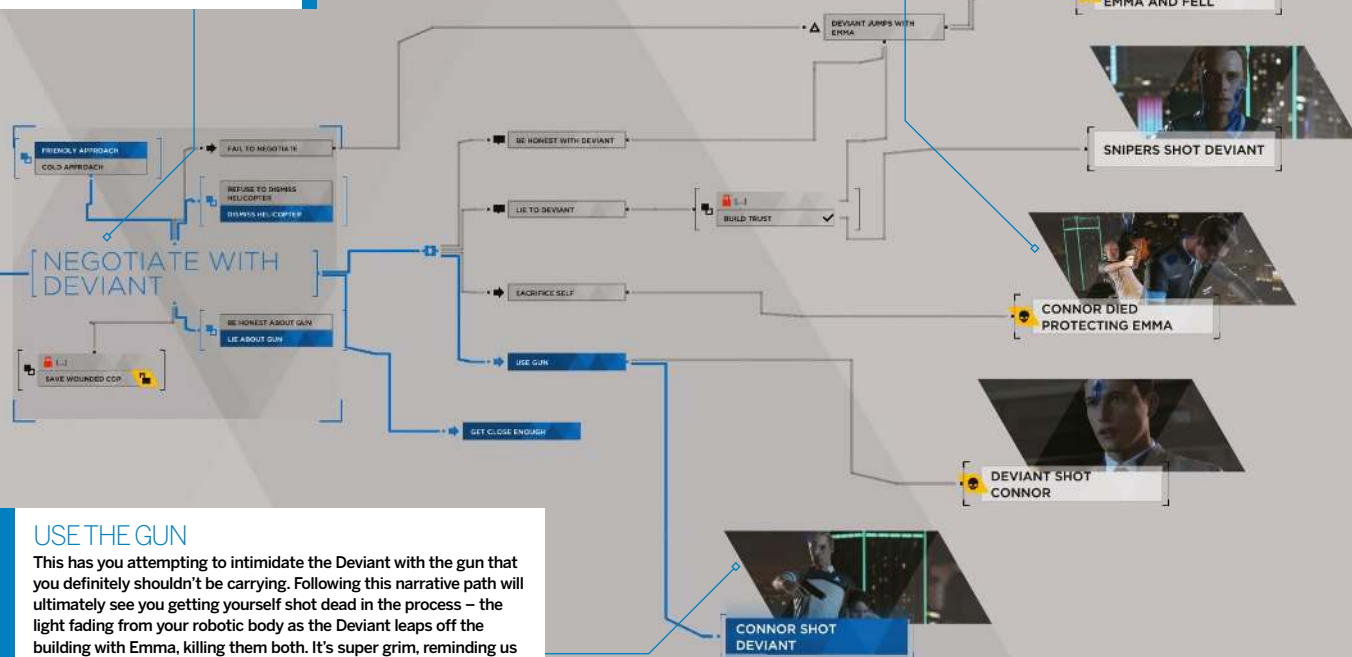


## NEGOTIATE WITH THE DEVIANT

This is when you use all of the information that you've collected to try and reach an amicable resolution to the standoff. As you can no doubt see on the flowchart, there are a number of different ways this moment can go. Some options are inconsequential, filler to heighten the drama, while others will begin to snake off into new narrative paths.

## SAVE THE GIRL

In this situation there are four ways to kill Connor, potentially ending that character's storyline for the rest of the game, and only two ways to save Emma. Ultimately, the two worse ways involve the gun. One has you shooting the Deviant, saving Emma at the cost of drastically affecting the perception the world has towards android hostility.



## USE THE GUN

This has you attempting to intimidate the Deviant with the gun that you definitely shouldn't be carrying. Following this narrative path will ultimately see you getting yourself shot dead in the process – the light fading from your robotic body as the Deviant leaps off the building with Emma, killing them both. It's super grim, reminding us that guns are bad and that every action has a reaction in Detroit.



ETA Q2 2018 | PUB CHUCKLEFISH | DEV IN-HOUSE

# Wargroove

Chucklefish is taking the fight straight to Intelligent Systems



**We have to confess that we haven't been completely straight with you.** While

we have indeed reported on numerous occasions in the past that *Wargroove* is practically the modern living embodiment of *Advance Wars*, we aren't certain that that statement is entirely accurate. Not now that we've had a fresh opportunity to sit down with the upcoming title.

It's been 17 years since Intelligent Systems' GBA classic first made its debut and, as it should happen, when a group of hard-working developers spend all that time ruminating on what it is that makes it so bloody wonderful, they may just come up with something that surpasses it entirely. That's right, we're going there; Chucklefish is putting together a wonderful package in *Wargroove*, the charming 2D grid-based tactics game that's scheduled to arrive later this year.

It's easy to understand why the game has been lauded as a spiritual successor. It is, after all, an extension of the formula, exchanging modern warfare for fantasy battles whilst retaining the

same tempered pacing and intoxicating visual style. But there's something about the way that it handles itself – the way that it presents its complex systems and an ever-engaging to-and-fro of tempered warfare – that just feels right. Refreshed and ready to carve out the space to stand on its own two feet independent of any nostalgia that might hold it up.

While *Stardew Valley* (published by Chucklefish) sought to directly mirror *Harvest Moon*, the development team on *Wargroove* is sprinkling in an extra layer of complexity and challenge to its title to stand it apart from the crowd. One small (and yet oh-so integral) example is the way in which it handles hero units. While it's true, *Advance Wars* did indeed feature characters with special abilities, they weren't units on the ground – directly in the line of fire and liable to receive damage. *Wargroove* brings specialised heroes into play, not only giving you – and a friend, should you be engaged in multiplayer battles – the ability to turn the tide of a fight in your favour, but it also significantly raises the stakes. While these units may be your most powerful asset, they are also the catalyst to continue playing – if they die,

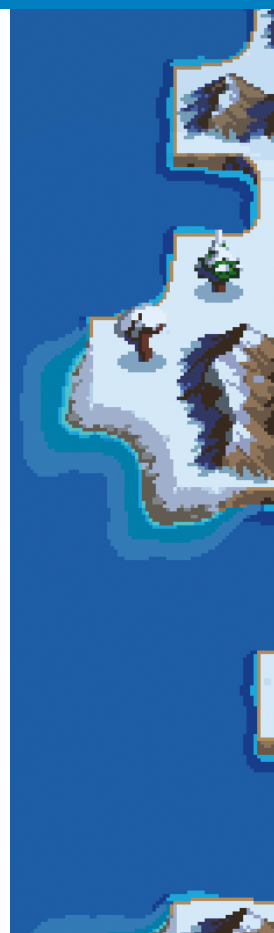
then the game will grind to an untimely end.

Chucklefish is also leaning heavily on the inherent creativity its most ardent followers will want to express, building powerful creation tools into the base product. While simplistic on the surface, they will allow players to establish their own maps and units before pushing them out into multiplayer and even campaign scenarios. It ensures that *Wargroove* will live long beyond its initial release, growing as the player base does.

*Wargroove* is special. It's a delight to play and beautiful to behold. And sure, Chucklefish had one hell of a template to work off of, but there's no denying that it has stepped up to the mantle and will, we're certain, make it quite difficult for Intelligent Systems should they ever decide to have another crack at the beloved series.

While we are still waiting for Chucklefish to announce a release date for the PS4 version we are hopeful that it will arrive not too long after its debut on other platforms.

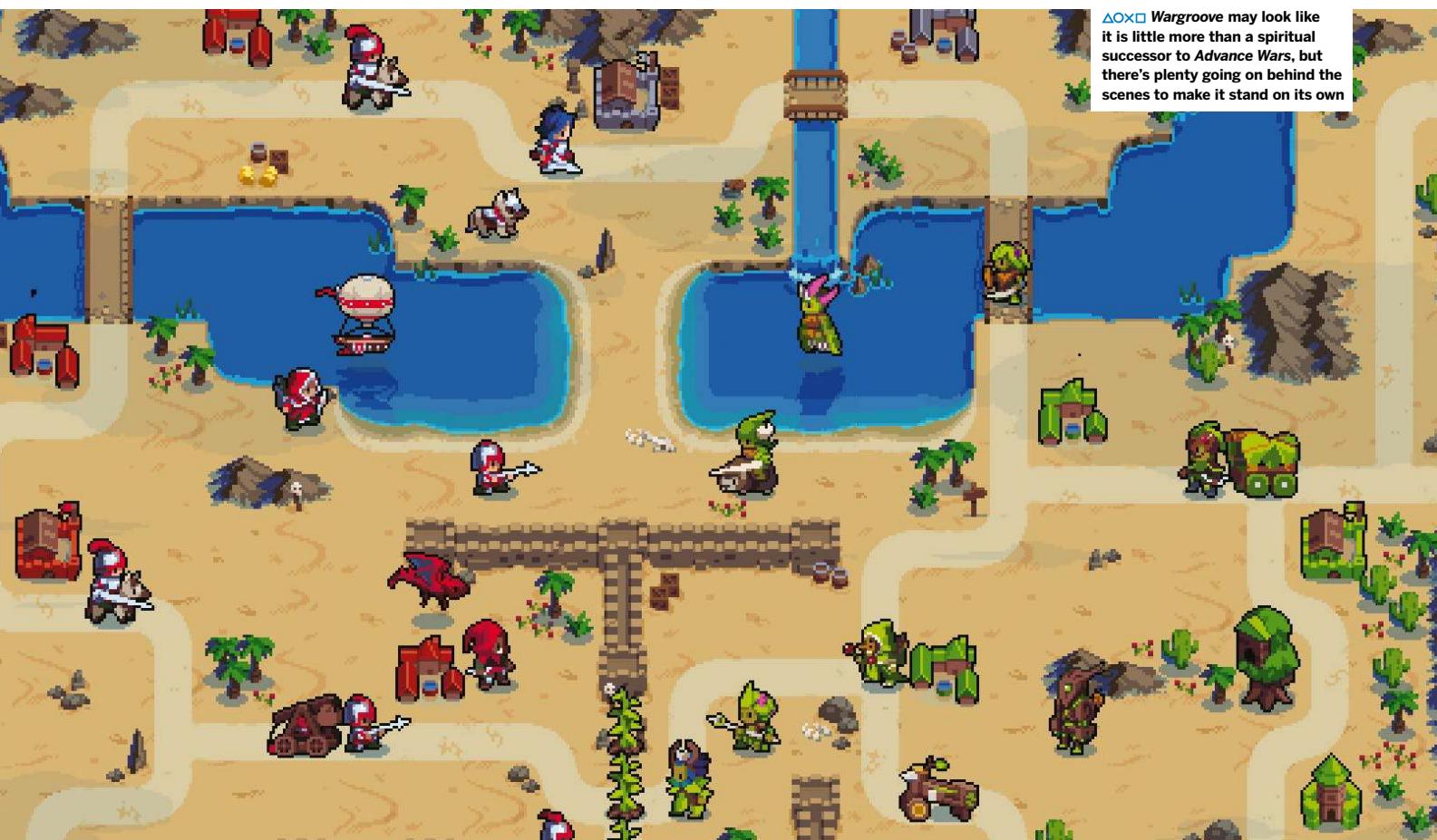
**WARGROOVE** is the latest project from the talented folks at Chucklefish. Find out more here: [wargroove.com](http://wargroove.com)





## WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- ▲ While it may indeed look pretty adorable, Wargroove is actually pretty challenging
- ◻ This grid based tactics game uses a rock-paper-scissors system for combat
- ✕ An easy to use map maker comes bundled in, letting you build your own arenas
- When you're done with the campaign you'll find robust multiplayer waiting



△×◻ Wargroove may look like it is little more than a spiritual successor to *Advance Wars*, but there's plenty going on behind the scenes to make it stand on its own

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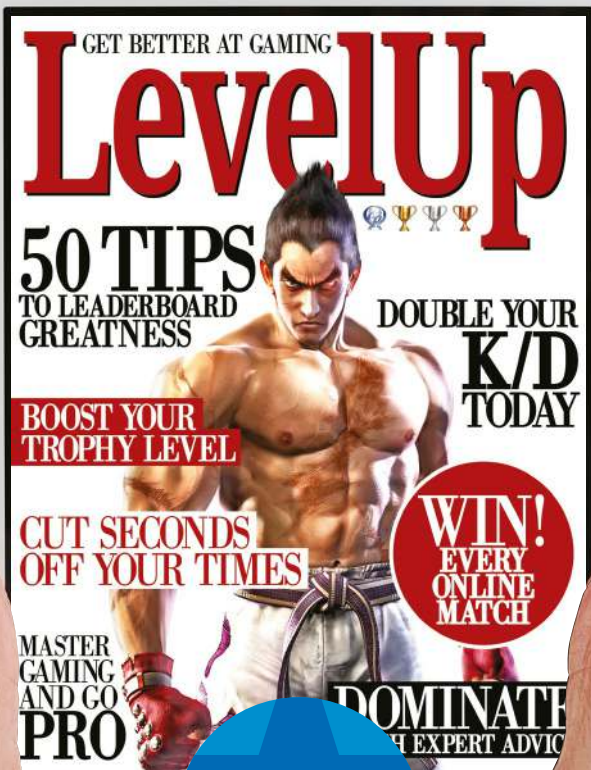
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# WINNING OF

**PLAY** SPEAKS WITH KEY MEMBERS OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS TEAMS AT EPIC GAMES TO INVESTIGATE THE INCREDIBLE RISE OF BATTLE ROYALE, THE STATE OF SAVE THE WORLD, AND WHAT THE SUSTAINED SUCCESS OF THESE TWO TITLES COULD MEAN FOR THE FUTURE OF THE GAMES INDUSTRY



# THE HILL



**F**ortnite was never supposed to become a global attraction. Then again, few creations ever are, and few videogames ever do. From casual players to seasoned gamers, for school children and celebrity icons, *Fortnite: Battle Royale* has become something of a genuine obsession. It has reached a plateau reserved for those special few videogames that are able to confidently pierce the consciousness of the general public while still igniting a spark of imagination in the minds of players around the world. The *Fortnite* IP has found itself in a position that few in the industry ever imagined it was capable of reaching – and that includes its creator, Epic Games.

It would be easy enough for this level of attention and success to act as a rush of blood to the head, but the veteran game creator and engine maker is humble in its assessment of the cultural compulsion it has found itself at the heart of after a whirlwind seven months. “We’re really lucky that we’ve become a part of this cultural phenomenon,” Kim Libreri, Epic Games’ chief technical officer, tells us as we attempt to navigate the storm that is currently enveloping the influential studio. “We just wanted to entertain people, but we’re a part of the zeitgeist now, just like the community that is playing the game.” »



“So, where has it [the success] all come from? I don’t know, was it the chicken or the egg?” laughs Libreri, though he failed to elaborate any further on the analogy, so stick with us on this one. The egg, we surmise, is *Fortnite: Battle Royale* itself; the chicken, the players that have appeared in their millions to play it, the two utterly inseparable from one another when considering 2018’s most unlikely success story.

But that success is there, and it is clear for all to see. There are YouTube and Twitch streams viewed millions of times over; we’ve seen confused cable news anchors scramble to process its impact, and it has pushed politicians and pundits to crawl back out of the woodwork to once again decry the influence of videogames on society. The industry hasn’t seen anything on this scale for quite some time, and it’s electrifying to witness it in real-time.

It has even surprised Epic’s founder and CEO, Tim Sweeney – a creative force that we’d suspect has just about seen it all after his 27 years at the forefront of the industry. Sweeney is watching on with interest, eager to see where *Fortnite* could possibly go next. If he’s certain of anything though, it’s that it isn’t going far without the support of the community that has formed around it. “I have to say, because I really do wonder, but who are the real developers of *Fortnite* now? By definition it is Epic, but actually if you look at what’s happening on Reddit, and between the players, the streamers and the content creators on YouTube, it’s like we are all designing the game together.”

As a sentiment, it’s one that is shared by many of the developers working to keep *Fortnite* up on its feet and moving forwards. Eric Williamson, design lead and systems engineer overseeing what is arguably the most popular game on the planet, is one such developer – working diligently to ensure that an open and honest dialogue will keep Epic from straying too far in the wrong direction as it sets its sights on bringing *Battle Royale* out of early access in the coming months. “From the start, we wanted the development to be a conversation. When we first launched *Battle Royale* we knew we had work to do. We had an idea of where the game would go, but [we] wanted to stay open – not only to listening to feedback, but actually being able to act on it,” Williamson tells us. “We think of the game as a canvas and a set of tools for players to use and have fun with. It’s really cool to see the things they come up with – whether it’s rocket riding or a unique way to use building. Giving them new tools to play with is just a lot of fun.”

It is a lot of fun; so much so, that it’s easy to forget that, for Epic, this is also a critical time. There is no precedent set for managing this level of sustained success; there is no playbook for catering to an audience as large and varied as the one that has formed around *Battle Royale*. It has undergone a period of sustained and

focused iteration, growth and expansion since its low-key launch in September 2017. Epic is processing and acting on feedback from the community in record time, and the community is responding in kind by pumping more and more of their time into it.

It’s funny, because in spite of the success, this wasn’t the future Epic had originally envisioned for *Fortnite* – a game that the studio had incubated in one way or another since 2011. It took six years to get *Fortnite: Save The World* (as the core PvE co-op mode is now known to the public) to a stage in which Epic felt comfortable releasing it into paid early access on 25 July 2017. It also took just two more months for it to approach virtual irrelevancy in the eyes of many.

*Save The World* amassed a passionate and dedicated audience, but something about it clearly failed to resonate with the masses. Some in the industry – us included – had started to worry that Epic would eventually begin to divert its resources and personnel towards its other early-access experiment, *Paragon*. Perhaps public perception isn’t everything. *Fortnite*’s VP of publishing Ed Zobrist would later expand on the current state of *Save The World* at GDC in a rare comment about the survival co-op mode. “It exceeded our expectations. It laid the groundwork for our game to continue to grow as it marches on towards its free-to-play status that will be out later this year. I’m happy to say that retention is high, and here we are over six months later, and our player base is larger than it has ever been – [and that’s] for *Save The World*, not just for *BR*. This has worked out extremely well for us.”

While *Save The World* is still fighting for attention, it’s impossible to overlook the impact of *Battle Royale*. It landed out of nowhere, and there’s no clear explanation as to how it has continued to defy all expectation. It arrived, in September 2017, just as the battle royale genre had begun to reach its zenith, with console and mobile players eager to try the experience for themselves after listening to PC players and media outlets prattle on about *PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds* for the better part of a year. And better still, *Fortnite*’s family-friendly version of the game mode was free-to-play, entertaining to spectate, and easy to get to grips with.

This is a part of the story that we are all intimately familiar with. There have been hundreds of thousands of words written about the launch of *Battle Royale* with outlets attempting to surmise its success. We aren’t going to waste your time with another such speculative pursuit. Instead, we wanted to use our time and access to the development team and studio to uncover how any of this was made possible; to understand how Epic positioned itself in such a way that it could spend six years developing a core experience, only to take over the world on a whim just two months later.



**Fortnite: Battle Royale** has emerged as one of the biggest and most popular games in the world in just seven months. Its lack of explicit violence, the fact that its free-to-play, its vivid art-style and fast round time all factoring into its huge success.





# SAVE THE WORLD

HAVE YOU PLAYED THE ORIGINAL FORTNITE GAME MODE?



Given the popularity spike of *Fortnite: Battle Royale*, there's a fairly good chance that you either haven't played its companion, *Save The World*, or have no real understanding of what it is. That's why we wanted to take this quick opportunity to reintroduce you to the game that started this huge experiment for Epic.

"*Fortnite* is a cooperative, action, building game where you loot, craft and build giant forts and ultimately defend them from giant hordes of monsters, all in a procedurally generated world so that the game experience is never the same twice," *Save The World* creative lead Darren Sugg told us when the game first launched in paid early access.

"Our game started with everybody having this simple idea of building forts... whether it's Harry Potter making the last stand at Hogwarts or it's Aragorn on the battlements of Helm's Deep, the few against the horde is a very visceral thing. With *Fortnite* we wanted to take that idea, which is very primal for a lot of kids in their young experiences and through adulthood, and put our particular spin on it," says Sugg, noting that the team was eager to push away from the gritty visual style it inherited after its creation in a game jam in 2011 and, while the team couldn't have known it at the time, it's this key decision (we'd wager) that has also pushed *Battle Royale* so far into the spotlight. "We thought, what if we took another spin on it and we made it a bit more stylised and a bit more vibrant and it was a place that players could spend hundreds of hours and feel it's cool to be a part of this world. It won't be dark and fatiguing... *Fortnite* as a whole continued on into that vein both visually and tonally."

*Save The World* is a fun co-op PvE experience that only seems to get better as every month passes by. We're confident that, when it finally emerges from paid early access in 2018 and properly links up with its battle royale cousin, it'll find real success. Keep your eye on this one and don't pass it up; it's directly benefiting from the work concluded in the battle royale space, and it's only getting better because of it.

## "NOW THAT THE CORE OF THE GAME IS MOSTLY IN PLACE, WE'RE ABLE TO HAVE A LOT OF FUN"

And believe us, it really was a whim: "*Battle Royale* was the nucleus of about 20 people," Sweeny tells us excitedly. "It was basically the *Unreal Tournament* team that [came in] and decided, 'Hey, we love these battle royale games, lets build one on top of *Fortnite*'. That's how the game emerged."

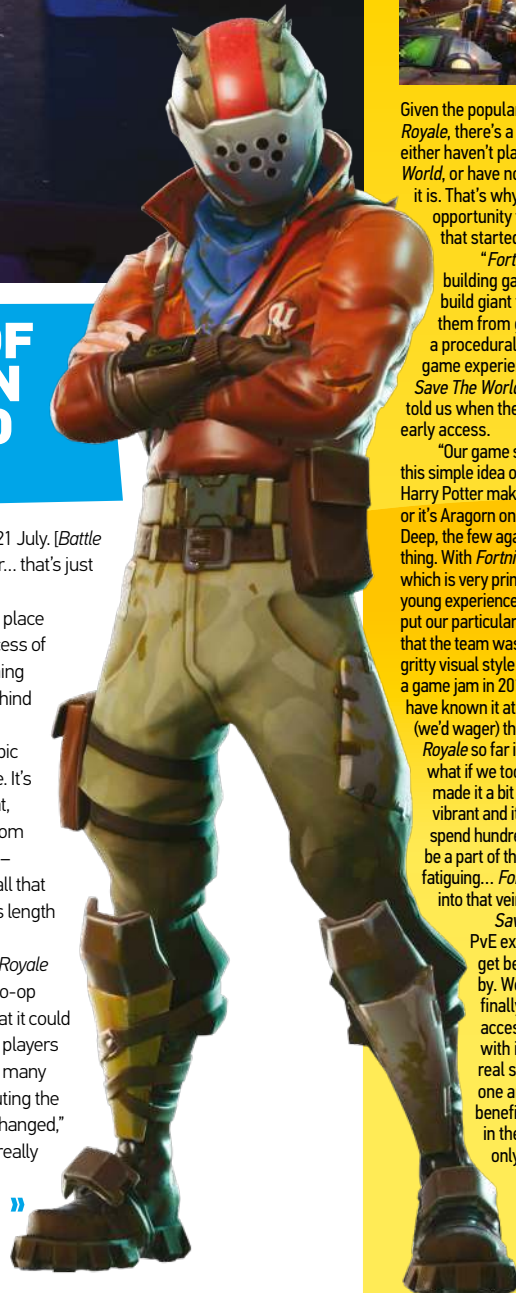
Given that *Fortnite* was originally conceived as part of an internal game jam back in 2011, it seems only fitting that a mod – from the team behind *Unreal Tournament* no less, a franchise that has found extreme sustainability over the decades largely because of such support – should ultimately be the catalyst for *Fortnite*'s ascension on the world stage.

Zobrist would later expand on this process. Because if *Battle Royale*'s origins weren't spectacular enough already, we were pretty shocked to discover how quickly the team at Epic put this thing together and got it out into the hands of the public. "We started working on this just about the time *Save The World* was coming out," Zobrist revealed, reaffirming how eager the team were to make a competitive PvP shooter work within the boundaries of the original PvE-driven design. "So let's do some math: *Save The*

*World*, the PvE game, launched 21 July, [*Battle Royale*] comes out 26 September... that's just two months in development."

There's an element of 'right place at the right time' behind the success of *Battle Royale*, but there's something more purposeful and defined behind this story too. This was all made possible because of how agile Epic can be in the development space. It's that element of the company that, ultimately, saved *Battle Royale* from launching into relative obscurity – trapped behind the same pay wall that has held *Save The World* at arm's length for so many players.

Epic had planned for *Battle Royale* to be a mere companion to the co-op experience, enough of a draw that it could bring in some of the competitive players that had put their trust in Epic so many times over the years without diluting the core of the game. "Then things changed," Zobrist noted. "We were getting really close to launch. We had already started marketing it as this PvP »





# BE KIND, REWIND

WHY BATTLE ROYALE'S NEW  
REPLAY MODE COULD HAVE  
HUGE RAMIFICATIONS

Epic is investing considerable resources into the YouTube personalities and Twitch streamers that have helped turn *Fortnite: Battle Royale* into such a global phenomenon. The company announced at GDC 2018 that it was developing a new replay editor for the Unreal Engine; effectively, it puts professional grade recording and editing tools into the hands of the players. The first game to make use of this system will be *Fortnite*, and the results are certainly impressive. .

The tools will allow *Fortnite* players (and soon, any developer using the Unreal platform) to really enshrine their favourite moments and share them out across the web. "In the replay system you can go set up cameras, follow a character, do long shots, wide shots, we've even got drones in there that you can use to follow [the action]," Epic's CTO Kim Libreri tells us. "Not only is it great for telling the story of what happened in a game, but if we had the replay system a few months ago, when people worked out how to ride the rockets, we would have been able to go into that game and actually film it."

That's important to note, as it gives us a clear view of where Epic wants to take, not only these tools, but *Fortnite* in the future. "It starts to open all these new possibilities," Libreri tells us excitedly of the replay system that has been expanded from its original implementation in the ill-fated *Paragon*. "We literally have the technology right now in the engine that we could beam a shooting crew into your live match, like a documentary crew – we just make the characters invisible and they'll follow you around."

"Once we begin to think about competitive tournaments for *Fortnite*, we can go in live and film that action... can you imagine? It's gonna be like ESPN or like any major sports event, but in the virtual world of the game," he says, and it's clear to us that the potential for these tools to be used across the esports scene could be huge, particularly as studios look towards TV franchising and expansion. "We could even do episodic content, where we combine the best of performance capture and real actors driving faces, and then put them into the world of *Fortnite*. As a gamer you could have your 15 seconds of fame where we can incorporate what happened in *your* game into a story that we tell. There is all sorts of crazy stuff that we can do [in the engine]... honestly, I think five years from now we'll look back and go, wow, entertainment totally changed."



■ The YouTube and Twitch communities have really rallied around Epic's latest in a big way. Statistics would indicate that, as of writing, *Fortnite* is the most watched game in the world. It's averaging close to 140,000 views on Twitch every week, which is double the traffic of rival *PUBG*.

mode that was going to be inside of *Save The World*. From what we can tell, people even started to buy *Save The World* in anticipation of being able to play it..."

It's around this time, just two weeks out from *Battle Royale* going live on public servers, that Epic saw an opportunity and grasped at it with both hands. It decided to take a huge risk, to separate *Battle Royale* out from *Save The World* and launch it as a free-to-play early access experience – one that runs through the same client, but ultimately circumvents the inherent restrictions and uncertainties attached to paid early access. "You can imagine how difficult this was in just two weeks time to get through," Zobrist said defiantly. "I doubt any major publisher could have pulled off this kind of pivot in the time we ended up doing it."

To be fair to him, he isn't wrong. That sort of herculean effort from every department across Epic – from those charged with game creation and optimisation right down to UX designers and marketing – represents an agility and determination that simply isn't reflected in many other 'triple-A' game companies, if any.

So how has Epic found itself in this position? It's been a long, arduous process of self-reflection and transformation. Internally the company refers to itself as Epic 4.0 now, a title that reflects its dedication to pursuing online-experiences and live game development. This process began five years ago, just ahead of the launch of the PS4 in 2013.

Epic sensed this change on the near horizon. It could see the rise of games-as-a-service and began to pivot its business in pursuit of it. Look back five years ago and you'll find a company with fewer than 100 employees, with an identity largely inseparable from the Xbox exclusive *Gears Of War* IP.

*Gears Of War: Judgement* would be Epic's final flirtation with a franchise that helped Epic become synonymous with core gamers on the console platform, and effectively established the Unreal Engine 3 as the last generation's most powerful and versatile game creation tool. Many of the company's biggest stars would walk away in search of a fresh start, all of this coming to a head as the ink dried on a contract giving Chinese Internet behemoth Tencent a 40 per cent stake in Epic for an estimated \$330 million.

It was a cultural shift as much as it was anything else for Epic – a move made in earnest to get ahead of a trend. To be frank, a game like *Battle Royale* simply wouldn't have been possible without it. The model of traditional game design that served Epic so well in the past was becoming unsustainable, too slow and cumbersome to give the studio any real agility or leverage to respond to increasing demands and interest from players. Epic sensed the development space was quietly shifting beneath its feet, and it knew it needed a response. It's the results of that response that



is delivering new weapons and modes through *Battle Royale* to us every week.

"We're on a weekly release cycle [now], and the team works really fast. The Unreal Engine 4 enables a really quick workflow where you can make changes, you can test them quickly and, you know, within a few days you've deployed them to five platforms across this huge set of device families," Sweeny tell us, noting how happy he is with the launch of *Battle Royale* on the iOS and Android platforms to complement the PC, PS4 and Xbox One releases. "It's a really wonderful process, and I think that's kind of the model of the future, right?"

"With *Gears Of War* we would put out a game, and then we would get player feedback. 'Oh they liked this, didn't like that' and so, okay, we'll incorporate all of that in the next version," Sweeny laughs, giving us an insight into how gruelling traditional triple-A game production can be on a studio eager to please its fans. "And then *three years later* it finally releases... no, now it's every week!"

Maintaining this gruelling weekly schedule isn't easy. In fact, Epic has had to quickly increase its team size to manage the workflow. *Fortnite's* combined development team has ballooned from 60-strong to now encompassing an outfit that is "bigger than the *Gears Of War 3* team" Sweeny confirms with a smile, "but not

## "WE HAD ALREADY STARTED MARKETING IT AS THIS PVP MODE THAT WAS GOING TO BE INSIDE OF SAVE THE WORLD"



by a huge amount". This is necessary due to the huge effort that is going in to optimisation, content creation and community engagement. "It wasn't always that way," confirms Libreri. "But it's now [necessary] because we have to sustain this massive player base; they want new stuff all the time."

It might have been a successful transformation for Epic, but it hasn't been an easy one. Shrewd business manoeuvres and shifting internal philosophies are only one part of the picture; the road to *Battle Royale's* success, to this epic internal transformation, has also been paved by difficult decisions and cancelled videogames.

It's funny to think, but there was a time when *Fortnite's* existence was being called into question by the very community that now calls it home. There seemed to be no end in sight to its protracted development, and (externally at least) Epic looked to be diverting more and more resources into its community-driven MOBA, *Paragon*. "You know we poured our hearts and souls into the game. We set out to build a MOBA that had triple-A production values that put

you right in the centre of the action," laments Sweeny. "I feel the team really achieved that and did an amazing job building a game that really lived up to that goal."

Sadly for Epic, it wasn't meant to be. The release of *Battle Royale* would act as a surprise death knell for *Paragon*. With Epic struggling to improve player retention, it made the decision to give fans what they wanted: more of a good thing. By January 2018, most of *Paragon's* team had moved on to *Battle Royale* – assisting with quality of life improvements to the map, helping to develop new weapons, and get the recently-revealed Replay system into play. Eventually, Epic was forced to shut the MOBA down for good – issuing refunds to the players that had stuck with them over the years and bid farewell to the game that existed in one state or another for three years. "It was kind of a heartbreaking exercise within Epic, to cancel a project that was so dear to our hearts," Sweeny considers. "The difficulty with *Paragon* is that for every hundred players who came in, a month later less than five were still playing. Over time we made a lot of incremental improvements; we made some big leaps – some were liked, some were hated – but nothing really fundamentally changed those numbers much."

"We came to that realisation after *Fortnite* came out, with numbers that were many-many-many times higher than [*Paragon's*]. There was just some magic there and the best thing we could do was to put all of our resources into that."

Epic is now fully focused on two distinct areas of business: getting the full *Fortnite* package – encompassing *Save The World* and *Battle Royale* – out of early access as fully-fledged free-to-play games and on continuing to push innovation through its Unreal Engine 4. While these focuses may sound as if they are separate from one another, they are in actuality tied together in a very fundamental way.

The impact *Fortnite's* sustained growth and expansion could have over the games industry is quite unprecedented. When it comes to figuring out what the future holds for *Fortnite*, there's more to consider here than the mere introduction of new maps, modes and weapons to the sprawling carnival of death that is *Battle Royale*. The future of *Fortnite* is intrinsically tied to the future of Epic Games, the Unreal Engine and, in many ways, to the future of the games industry itself.

"*Fortnite* is a leading edge research vehicle for driving the Unreal Engine forward. All of the systems we're building are benefiting everybody," says Sweeny, who is clearly overjoyed that *Fortnite* is finally fulfilling its role – it's hard to believe, but *Fortnite* was, once upon a time, to be the very first game to utilise the Unreal Engine 4. It has effectively become the *Gears Of War* for the current generation, the tip of the spear, as it were, for showcasing the power and potential



■ The speed in which Epic has been able to release updates for *Battle Royale* and *Save The World* is truly impressive. We're particularly impressed by the quality of life improvements it continues to make to the map, improving its points of interest, variety and stability.



■ Demonstrating its commitment to feeding back any improvements or advancements it makes back into the Unreal Engine, the new and impressive Replay system for *Fortnite* will soon be available on GitHub for other Unreal developers to make use of.



# FORTNITE DOMINATES MOBILE

WHY BATTLE ROYALE IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND IS GOOD FOR GAMERS EVERYWHERE

While much of the conversation surrounding Epic has been on its pivot towards exploring online experiences and live-game development, the studio's engineers have also been quietly focused on bringing hardcore game experiences to mobile platforms.

"The thing that's important to Epic right now is the emergence of serious games for gamers across all platforms, including mobile," says CEO Tim Sweeney, who's elated with the launch of titles such as *Ark: Survival Evolved*, *PUBG* and *Fortnite* on mobile devices to great success.

"We're seeing for the first time in the western world console quality games coming to these mobile devices. The thing we've really been trying to push hard with *Fortnite* is making it possible to play with all of your friends across all platforms," continues Epic CTO Kim Libreri. "So *Fortnite* for iOS isn't just like some teen imported the game; it is the full game live and in sync with the rest of it. You can play with all of your friends on PlayStation, [Xbox], and on PC and MAC and play all together in one session."

The mobile version of *Fortnite*, truth be told, incredibly impressive. While the touch controls are a little on the cumbersome side, which is to be expected given the size of the device (the only platforms that support *Fortnite* on mobile thus far are the: iPhone SE, 6S, 7, 8, X; iPad Mini 4, Air 2, 2017, Pro). Elements to help improve movement and control, such as slight auto-aim and more prominent visual cues, help to improve the playing field when engaged in cross-platform play. How has Epic been able to achieve such success? It all comes back to the engine.

"It's the same game. The engine is just super highly optimised, and we put a lot of effort into making sure... we didn't want to make multiple versions of *Fortnite*; we just didn't want to do that," continues Libreri, with Sweeney jumping in to celebrate how great it feels to finally cross such a monumental hurdle for the industry.

"This isn't a low-fidelity indie experience; this is the full game. It's this nine square kilometre island which streams in – it's



just several gigabytes in size – and has a hundred different player characters that can be streamed in. It's absolutely like a high-end PC or console game that now runs on mobile. The hardware is now fantastically able to handle that. This is an awesome thing for gamers."





of the platform, for road testing, demonstrating and distributing huge new innovations for all in the industry to use. "Our business only succeeds when our partners succeed. Our interests are 100 per cent aligned, so anything we can to benefit Unreal engine developers benefits Epic.

"We feel like there's so much synergy in building a game engine and a game together and iteratively improving both based on the experience; that's the best of Epic, that's our history, and that's our future."

## "FORTNITE FOR IOS ISN'T JUST LIKE SOME TEEN IMPORTED THE GAME. IT IS THE FULL GAME, LIVE AND IN SYNC WITH THE REST OF IT"

We questioned whether Epic now considers *Fortnite* – rather than the Unreal Engine – to be the modern face of the company, just as Unreal Tournament was in the Nineties and *Gears Of Wars* in the Noughties. Libreri isn't so certain that there's a delineation to be made. "They're not separable, our games and our engine. That's the reason we have such a great engine; we make an engine that benefits everybody," he continues. "If you're making a game that uses the Unreal engine, then you can take advantage of the same stuff as us. We want our customers to make awesome games, and we want to make awesome games. We want an engine that powers that... it's just the way that we think!"

The Unreal Engine 4 is one of the most widely used engines in the industry. It's used by developers such as Bluehole to create *Fortnite* rival *PUBG*, and it is utilised by The Coalition to create *Gears Of War 4*; it powers the incredible competitive VR dogfighter *EVE: Valkyrie* and it's making the ambitious nature of titles such as *Crackdown 3*, *Kingdom Hearts III* and *Sea Of Thieves* all possible. These studios and hundreds of others will ultimately benefit from where Epic is putting its priorities in regards to the future of *Fortnite*.

But what does that future look like? It's difficult to say for certain because Epic itself isn't certain.

The studio isn't kidding about its intention of viewing the evolution of *Battle Royale* as an open dialogue; until the conversations are had with the community – be that over social media platforms or through analysing statistical play data – Epic isn't setting anything in concrete.

But you only have to look to what the team has already improved to get a clear sense of where its priorities sit. The team has invested considerable time to improving the core movement and shooting systems, while simultaneously working to stabilise the netcode and optimise the servers; *Fortnite* now runs at a smooth 60 frames-per second on PC, PS4 and Xbox One, vastly improving the feel and functionality of the game. The map has been refined and improved considerably, as too have the weapons, the building mechanics and the progression systems in an effort to improve player retention and its extreme streamability.

For *Battle Royale's* lead designer this isn't enough though, he believes there is still plenty of work to be done. "We're evaluating the game's shooting model, which is something we tested as part of a Limited Time Mode a while back. We weren't 100 per cent happy with it, and

had also been listening to some feedback from players. So we'll continue to look at that, and likely make some changes in the future," confirms Williamson, clearly eager to improve the game for the players without disrupting the key loop and inherent fun that the game can provide. "Now that the core of the game is mostly in place, we're able to have a lot of fun, whether it's new gameplay types, new weapons, or new POIs [points-of-interest]. We'll also look at ways we can improve what's already there, though, whether it's performance or tweaking a mechanic."

The Limited Time Modes remain a point of contention across certain corners of the industry. It's these modes, alongside excellent revisions to the building mechanics and systems, that are breathing new life into the battle royale genre – some have taken umbrage with seeing exciting new modes such as 50 Vs 50 or splitting all 100 players into groups of 20 removed after short spans on the servers. This, Williamson attests, is done with our best interest in mind. "We want that core battle royale experience to always be the focus. We see the Limited Time Modes as a fun palate cleanser, so players can definitely expect more of those in the future," he continues, noting that his team views them as an opportunity to fulfil certain fantasies rather than the direct future of the game type. "We expect some of our Limited Time Modes will speak to certain types of players more than others, and that's okay. The real opportunity is being able to try things that probably wouldn't make sense for our core game modes."

When *Battle Royale* first launched in September, it was difficult to look at it as little more than a cynical attempt to ride on *PUBG's* (at the time) unprecedented success. But as the

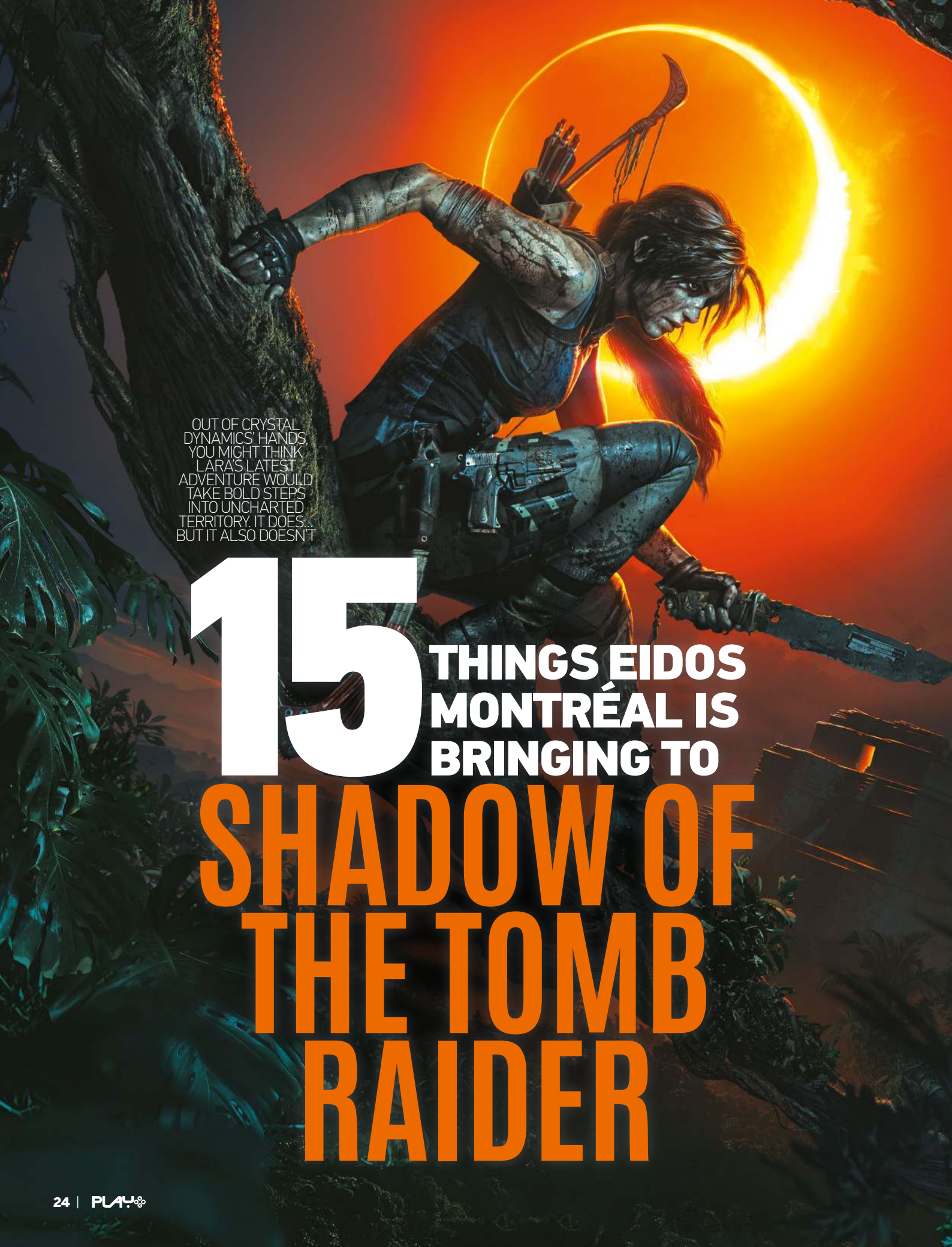
months have wound on, as Epic has worked hard to expand on and improve the elements that made *Fortnite* unique to begin with, it began to carve out its own niche within the niche. The building mechanics should never have worked within the setting, and yet they have become the magic ingredient that helps *Fortnite* stand tall above its competition.

"Initially, we just thought it might be fun to add the action building mechanics of *Fortnite* with a battle royale mode. We had a lot of different scenarios in our head on how it would play out, but we weren't sure what it would be like when we put it into action," admits Williamson. "Even early on, there were a lot of people who weren't sure why you'd ever have to use building, especially with the closing circle. Why spend time and resources to build up, when you'd just be forced to leave it behind? But the more we played, the more unique scenarios started to arise. And once we released it, players absolutely floored us with how they were using it, whether it was for traversal, defence, or offense. It's been a lot of fun to watch."

Considerable time and energy has been exerted from the *Fortnite* team to bring quality of life changes to these systems. The recent release of Turbo Building – the ability to quickly and fluidly build structures on the fly – is the biggest indicator yet as to where Epic is positioning its efforts on the development of *Battle Royale*. "Making the 'feel' of building better, especially in fast-paced combat situations, was always something we want to do," says Williamson. "This is particularly important in PVP. Turbo Building, along with automatic material swapping, and being able to build through things, just makes the building seem more fluid. As for how it has changed the game, now players of varying degree of skill can use building more easily. And for high-level players, they're able to do even more now, and hopefully we've alleviated a lot of their frustrations. Like everything else, if we can improve it even more, we're open to taking a look."

Improving the core mechanics ultimately improves the core fun and expands the wealth of situations players might find themselves in (and battling to get out of) throughout the game. All of this will instantaneously feeding back into the iterative development of the Unreal Engine, which in turn will be harnessed by developers all around the world on this generation's biggest and most exciting independent and triple-A videogames. It's this, all of this, that will be key in the months ahead as Epic looks to leave early access behind and take the full *Fortnite* experience to the next level – should such a thing be possible. "Again, the conversation between the players and the development team is really important," concludes Williamson. "It's one of the things that is shaping both games. *Battle Royale* will continue to be free, and *Save The World* will be free in 2018."



A full-page background image of Lara Croft from the game Shadow of the Tomb Raider. She is shown in a dynamic pose, climbing a large, gnarled tree trunk. She is wearing her signature dark, weathered outfit and has a quiver of arrows on her back and a handgun holstered on her hip. The scene is set against a dramatic, low-angle sunset or sunrise, with a large, bright sun partially obscured by a circular frame. The lighting is warm and orange, creating a sense of adventure and mystery. The overall composition is action-oriented and visually striking.

OUT OF CRYSTAL  
DYNAMICS' HANDS  
YOU MIGHT THINK  
LARA'S LATEST  
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TERRITORY. IT DOES.  
BUT IT ALSO DOESN'T

# 15 THINGS EIDOS MONTREAL IS BRINGING TO

# SHADOW OF THE TOMB RAIDER



# LONELY PLANET



**01** With Lara's latest globetrotting adventure Eidos Montréal has gone all out in trying to represent the locales – and cultures – shown to players that bit more than just a thin stereotype. An early indication of this is Croft's trip through a Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebration in Cozumel, Mexico – the environment is riddled with neat little touches and details that make it pop and bring the scene to life. It's gorgeous, and as close as many of us will get to witnessing the actual holiday, though there is always the worry of exoticification and how that could impact how things are presented – though so far, the signs are all positive. And gorgeous. Did we mention gorgeous?

**02** One way in which Eidos Montréal isn't changing the playbook is by introducing Lara – and therefore you – to many a situation where the walls, ceilings and gaps to squeeze through are all a little bit *too* close. Those of an anxious disposition may want to smack the pause button at semi-regular intervals should it become in any way overwhelming. It almost feels like a cheap trick now after we've been through so many of these tight gaps through which to squeeze since 2013's original reboot – but there's no denying the efficacy of putting the player under such panic-inducing pressure, causing so many of us to hurl expletives in the direction of the screen as we try furiously to free Lara from the underwater crag she's caught in.



# CLAUSTROPHOBIA



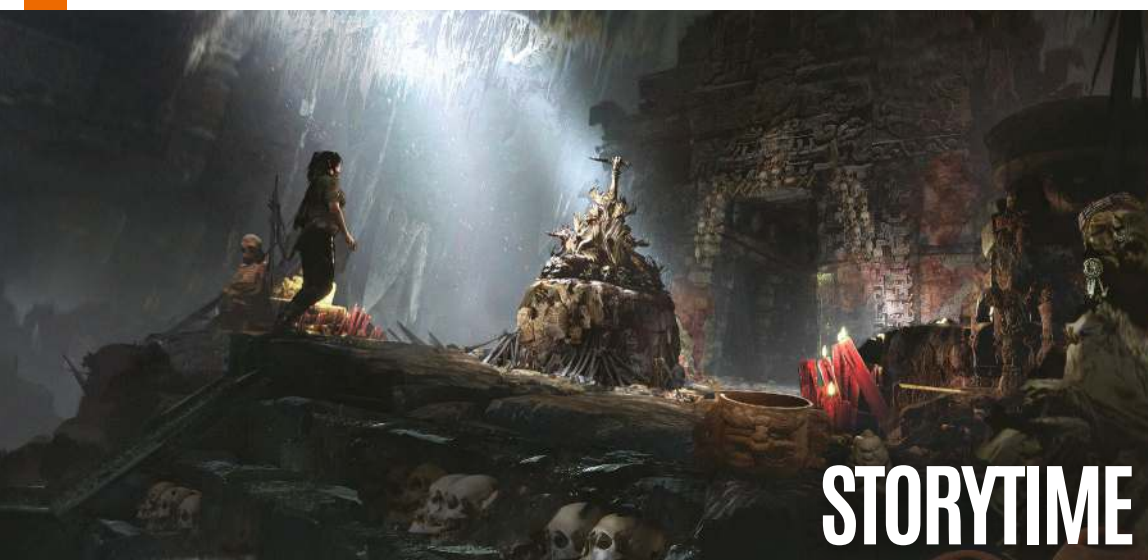
# MIRACLE-GRO

**03** Once again we are met with a Lara Croft who is young, growing as a human and learning what it means to take on the mantle of the raider of tombs. She has changed since the earlier games, of course: a more confident and comfortable woman while on her adventures and in combat – certainly not a 'cornered animal' here – and it's been nice to see her develop into the character we were all introduced to back in the Nineties. Hopefully this will be it, though, as we're not sure how many more lessons Lara can learn about how, actually, it's okay to make mistakes sometimes. Something tells us *Shadow Of The Tomb Raider* will take our heroine on a much darker path this time around, though.

**04** It wasn't really there in the 2013 game. It made a much bigger appearance in *Rise Of The Tomb Raider*; but it's *Shadow* that's really doubling down on the tombs to raid for Lara. This time around we should – all things going accordingly – be spoiled for choice with the ancient ruins to scramble around, traps to avoid (aah, Mayan pointy sticks...), flooded chambers to try not to get lost and drown in and millennia-old puzzles to ponder over for half an hour each. The early parts of *Shadow Of The Tomb Raider* show a mix of exploring ancient ruins and the modern series' combat leanings – we sincerely hope the game leans far more on the former than the latter.



## TOMBS TO RAID



## STORYTIME

**05** Lara Croft knows something the bad guys don't – where an ancient artefact is. She also knows something they do – where another, related artefact is. On using her considerable tomb raiding talents to, shockingly, raid a tomb, Lara relieves the ancient locale of its artefact and – according to the prophecies foretold – brings about Armageddon. As you do. Has she *actually* brought on the end of the world? That we don't know – nor would we throw spoilers so wildly here – but *Shadow Of The Tomb Raider's* story will tell a tale of Lara grappling with wildly varying requirements and emotional battles as she tries to stop the big bads, not get lost in her own head, (potentially) save the world and try not to argue with long-time chum Jonah too much.

**06** Lara is once again up against the forces of Trinity, the ancient organisation that has been snapping at her heels since day one of the modern trilogy. While they do try to shoot her in the face, Trinity's local bossman, known as Dominguez, does take time to chat with Lara about their motivations this time around. Pure-evil world domination? Well... yes, sort of. Blaming young Croft for setting in motion a good old-fashioned apocalypse, Trinity wishes to rebuild and remodel whatever is left over of the world into an image of its own creation. So, effectively, making an omelette on a global scale. What this translates to in game is another series of seemingly unlimited mercenaries to get into shootouts with.



## BAD BOYS

**07** With this being the third in a series, it's no surprise to see *Shadow Of The Tomb Raider* returning to a style of combat we've seen from the previous games. In all honesty, very little has changed here – Lara still dips in and out of plentiful cover either with ease or too easily, depending on how you look at it, and it's still way more fun to pick people off with a bow and arrow than it should be. It's one area in which the new game won't be winning over any new fans, because really there's nothing particularly new to it, and if you've played any third-person action/shooter in the post-Gears Of War world, you know what to expect.



**08** While the out-and-out combat hasn't changed much at all, stealth has seen some tweaks and touches to make it both more fun and more rewarding to engage in. You've always been able to approach combat on the sly, picking people off quietly and hoping/planning not to be noticed as you go, but in *Shadow Of The Tomb Raider* if you are noticed, you're now able to (if you're good enough) hide again afterwards. It's no longer a binary stealth/no stealth situation, which makes the stealth play that bit more appealing. Lara also has more options when it comes to hiding and striking from the shadows, blending into the bushes and undergrowth as though she's part plant, before emerging and... well, stabbing someone to death, frankly.

**09** Surrounding the adventure are the usual broader game elements we've again come to expect from Lara's latest travails – you'll be constantly smashing pots and looking out for shiny things to collect and examine as you amass XP to level up skills and equipment, collect scrap to manufacture new survival tools and shoot animals in the face to harvest what you need from them. Lara no longer cries when she shoots a deer, thus meaning she is either used to it now, or fully on the way to becoming the endangered species-murdering psychopath from the original Core Design series. Maybe that will be covered in the game at some point, or just bolted on as DLC later down the way. Either way the broader mechanics of *Shadow Of The Tomb Raider* remain as unchanged and familiar as the combat is. That should mean we can jump into the action nice and fast and get on with all that tomb raiding we've been looking forward to.



## OLD ROPE



**10** Actually it's probably new rope – well, we hope it is, or Lara will be having a very bad time. One new skill she's learned this time around is how to rappel from certain situations, usually when utilising her climbing axes. It's a simple addition – and let's not go crazy here, it's one we've seen in plenty of other games – but a welcome one, adding the ability to lower from height, swing about and generally reach otherwise unreachable areas in a fun way. Is it something you'll develop as the game progresses? Probably not. No, this one is firmly in the realm of 'functional, realistic skill to add to someone's repertoire'. We just hope it really isn't old rope.

**11** Would you believe it, *Shadow Of The Tomb Raider* is a very good-looking game with some beautiful character models dominating cut scenes and genuinely atmospheric design in the environments surrounding said characters. With *Rise* proving one of the poster children for 4K gaming on console, it's no surprise Eidos Montréal would want to keep that momentum going – but there's real competition out there this time around, with everyone else wanting a piece of that... umm... 4K... pie. Basically, while none of it *actually* matters that much, the effort being put into *Shadow* graphically needs to be applauded, and it's sure to be one that captures a lot of imaginations on its release – especially with such detailed, atmospheric locales.



## LOOKS



## THE DARKNESS

**12** The 'survivor' Tomb Raider games have all had an air of darkness throughout them – personal suffering, potential catastrophe, the loss of loved ones (and many others) – but it feels at first play like *Shadow Of The Tomb Raider* might be looking to ramp that element up a fair bit. The personal suffering Lara goes through in the opening hours of the game is one thing, but what she – and you as the player – witnesses along the way takes things into a whole new world of dark. The hero's journey is a well-trodden path, but it looks like *Shadow* may well have stumbled off it and into a ditch somewhere, leaving Lara to make her own way through her own troubles and with her own demons.



# QTES

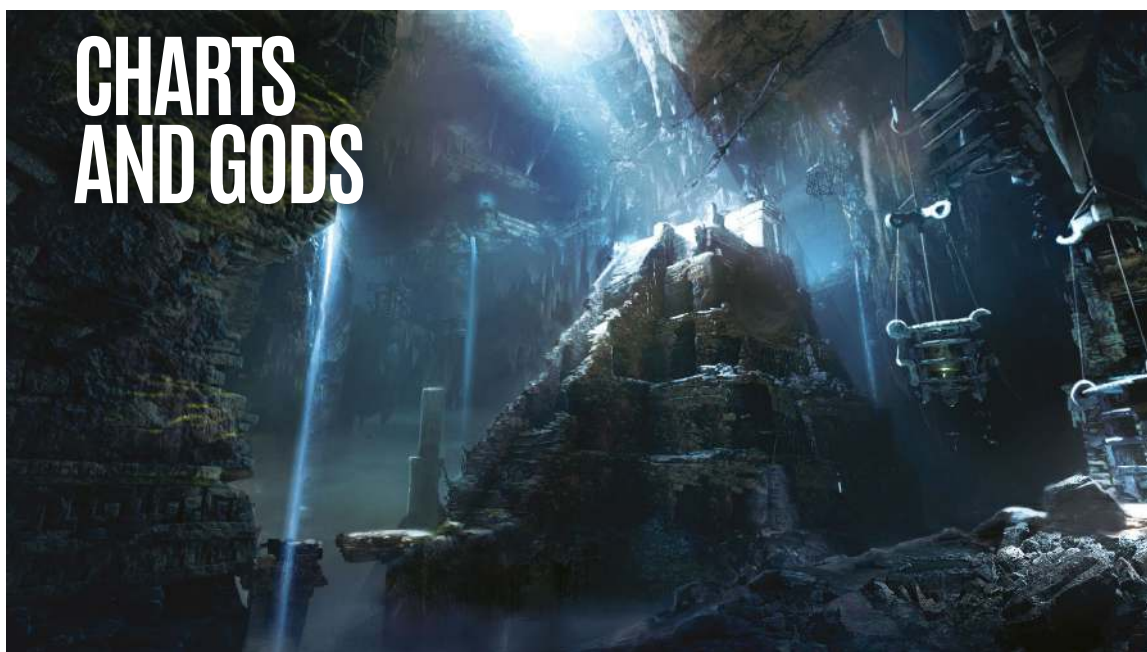
**13** Well what do you expect with a heading like that? *Shadow Of The Tomb Raider* takes so very much from the previous two titles in the series and seemingly ignores the advances made by so many other games in the genre. It does indeed still stick with countless QTEs popping up to tell you to press a button to not die, or tap a button repeatedly to not die, or press something with the right timing to not die and so on. Is it unique? No. Is it particularly interesting? No. Is it very Tomb Raider? Absolutely. And maybe that's the point: in a world where everyone else has given up on 'press X to survive', Lara Croft hangs on to the dream (by pressing X quickly enough).

**14** While Lara may experience the Day of the Dead one time, she can experience her own death countless times. Huzzah? Yes, it's that old chestnut – the thing where Crystal Dynamics accidentally made it a *thing* that Lara Croft has to be utterly brutalised whenever she dies, so Eidos Montréal has (as with many other elements) just picked up the mantle and carried it on. Plummeting, stabbing, shooting, oh-so-much impalement, drowning and more – you'd think we'd either be desensitised or bored of it by now, but really we're just uncomfortable in more ways than can be comfortably fit into this relatively small space. It does, in an odd way, make you want to keep Lara alive much more than you otherwise would – the alternative is frequently *horrible*.



# MUERTE

# CHARTS AND GODS



**15** What *Shadow Of The Tomb Raider* is presenting in its early look isn't something anybody is going to be surprised with: there's a formula, it's being stuck to by the new dev team behind the game at Eidos Montréal and the end product will in all likelihood be good fun. But there's the question of what's happened in the meantime. *Tomb Raider* released in 2013. *Rise* in 2015. There's been a lot over those years – *The Last Of Us*, *Uncharted 4*, the sublime *God Of War* and other non-Sony titles too – and it's going to take a hell of an effort from Lara to make something that can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the absolute best of the genre. Can *Shadow*? Of course. Will *Shadow*? That's for us all to find out.

There's a period of time as a child where every venture out through the front door is an odyssey. Whether you're fully conscious of what your true destination is or whether you have a destination in mind at all, stepping through that portal of safety and out into the world is a step into the unknown and, perhaps as a kind of defence mechanism, we turn it into something grand, bold and heroic. Or at least we did, and so did *Knights And Bikes* creators Rex Crawl and Moo Yu.

"It was very loose," former *Tearaway* creative lead Crawl says of the initial concept for *Knights And Bikes*. "It was 'What would a *Goonies* RPG be like?'. That was the initial starting point. Although we stay true to that and it definitely helps with a Kickstarter to be able to say '*Goonies*' to get people excited, bearing in mind that this was before *Stranger Things* came along and ripped off the *Goonies* as well. We had this idea of controlling a gang of kids and sending them on treasure-hunting adventures, but the more time we spent with the idea the more we identified the various strengths, and in particular which of the characters in the gang we liked most, and really honed it down into its own standalone project."

The *Goonies* spirit then, more than the plot points of the film itself, is what the duo is attempting to tap into with their indie venture Foam Sword. They bring with them over a decade of game development experience each, from studios like Media Molecule (where they worked together), Lionhead and Insomniac, as well as indie projects, mobile companies and social media startups. But now they wanted to, "have some time to go around each other's houses and play at making a videogame together," as Crawl puts it.

"I've definitely oscillated between indie and studio life all the time where I go indie and start a project and then realise I don't know any of the things that I need to know, then I go to a studio and keep that in mind to see which one of those things I can learn at the studio," gameplay programmer Yu tells us. "When I did the Facebook startup, which Rex was part of as well, I realised I knew nothing about the business side of things, so quickly after that I joined a Silicon Valley startup and then I joined Mind Candy because obviously they could teach me a lot about business. Once I had



WE SPEAK EXCLUSIVELY TO KNIGHTS AND BIKES CREATORS REX CRAWLE AND MOO YU ABOUT THEIR UPCOMING RPG AND THE ENDLESS INSPIRATION OF CHILDHOOD

been through all of that I felt a little bit more confident about trying it all again for *Knights And Bikes*."

So, what is this indie project all about? Essentially it's an RPG inspired by the games, both digital and real life, that Crawl and Yu played as children themselves, like *Secret Of Mana* and *EarthBound*. It's a game that sees two young girls head out around their home island of Penfurzy, where adults are going missing. This is where some of the *Goonies* spirit comes into play, as the adventures of these kids may just be what saves the island and its inhabitants against all odds.

So, what we have is a beautiful wheel of influence as childhood experience and memories merge with influential games and movies to feed back into an experience about being a kid that plays like the classic games of old. "It's also about thinking of ways to break out of that as well," Crawl insists. "We don't want it to be an echo chamber where we're purposefully recreating those games.

For instance, our two main characters are girls, and we're trying to push ourselves in some different directions by going for that decision so that we're not just putting ourselves in the game."

But those influences are very personal, as Yu tells us. "So much of childhood was focused around videogames. The friend who I think about the most when I'm making this game is a friend called Won, a Korean guy rather than the typical Juan you would meet in Southern California, but the way I met him was that he had just moved to our block and he literally for the first three days would spend five or six hours riding around the block, and to every kid he saw he would stop them and say 'Do you have Nintendo? Yes? Then we can be friends'. And he would write down your address and then the next week he would come back and check what games you had and what games he had and what you wanted to trade with, what you wanted to play together, that kind of stuff."

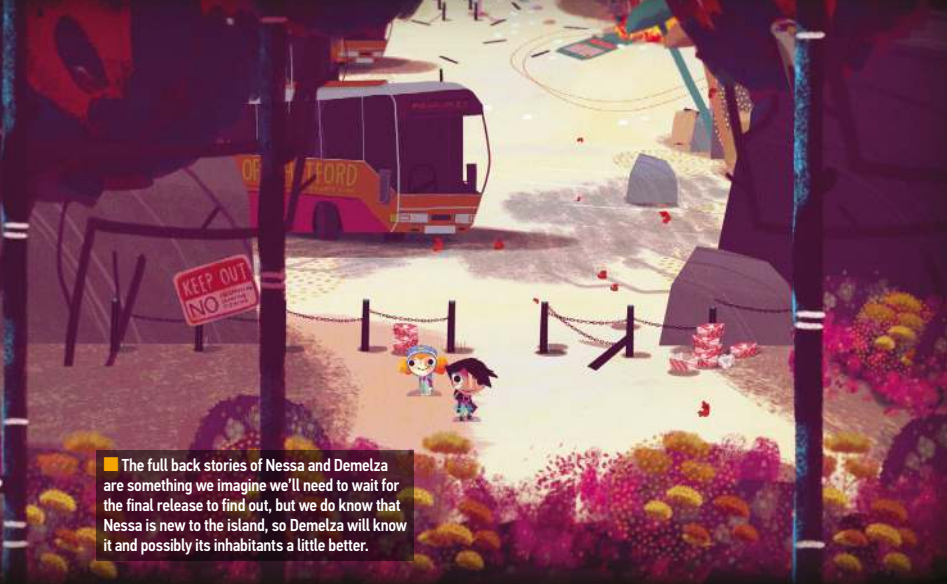
And for years to come Yu and Won would reunite to play *Secret Of Mana*. "I remember specifically in *Secret Of Mana* there was a boss that was just a wall with a face on it and Won could never beat that with the AI characters," he continues. "So any time Won started a run on *Secret Of Mana*, you know that two days from then Won's going to call you and say, 'I need some help on wall face! The sprite just won't cast the spells correctly!'" »





DEATH  
JOUST  
1.000mm

NOTICE OF EVICTION  
FALONS PEAK  
SILVAN PARK  
SEPT 87  
VACATION OF +HE  
IS EXPECTED 20 DAYS  
PENROSE  
ENTER



■ The full back stories of Nessa and Demelza are something we imagine we'll need to wait for the final release to find out, but we do know that Nessa is new to the island, so Demelza will know it and possibly its inhabitants a little better.



■ Rex Crawl has name checked the artwork of Eric Carle, famous for the children's book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, as an inspiration behind the game's gorgeously textured and layered backgrounds. Nothing appears to be a single shade anywhere in the game.



# LOTS OF PAINTING

## REX CRAWLE TALKS KNIGHTS AND BIKES ART STYLE

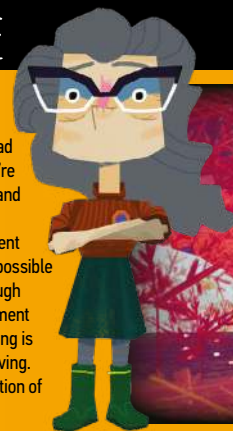
### THE CHARACTER DESIGN

"I try to draw attractive people, it just never quite comes out that way [laughs]. I definitely try to put a lot of the elements of the adults I grew up around in my Cornish farmhouse upbringing. Everyone was kind of craggy. There were a lot of characters. A lot of big personalities who had quite strange styles of dress or manners of speaking or hobbies, like building dinosaurs out of scrap metal and all of these strange things. I'm definitely trying to bring some of that in as well. And it's kind of fun to think about how the kids are going to perceive these characters as well, particularly as one of the main characters doesn't come from the island, so she's seeing things a little differently."



### THE CONSTANT BACKGROUND MOVEMENT

"For the art style I wanted it to look a little bit like the kids had drawn it themselves or at the very least art directed it. They're coming up with all of these ideas and changing their minds and telling all of these stories and I'm just trying to keep up with everything that they're telling me to paint next. That movement plays into that kind of stop-motion animation, so wherever possible I try to draw everything three times and then just cycle through those frames so that it's just constantly moving. That movement can transfer on to the player. When you're playing if everything is alive and moving it gives you an energy yourself to keep moving. Essentially it's just trying to convey that energy and imagination of kids. But yeah, it just takes a lot of painting basically."



■ Riding around on your bike is going to be a lot of fun. As you can see, you can leave trails and skid around on them, upgrade them with different flags and more. Your bike is one of your major signposts of progress through the game.





All of that is now filtered through the experience of making games like *LittleBigPlanet* and *Tearaway*. "It's the experience that we had 15 or 20 years ago processed through us growing up, and a decade each of game-making experience," Yu adds. "Something else that seems almost entirely different comes out at the other side from what we actually experienced in the first place."

But childhood game influence is only one part of what makes *Knights And Bikes*, as the other, more significant part is building out from childhood experience and turning it into game mechanics. Paramount among those is the role of the titular bikes. "I think a really key thing in *The Goonies*, in *E.T.* and in *Knights And Bikes*, are bikes and the way that when you get your first bike that's when as a kid you first have a little bit of independence," says Crawlé. "That's very much the kind of feeling that we want to get into the game, where you start out in a relatively safe environment, you slowly get away from that parental influence."

And so for Demelza and Nessa, our heroes in *Knights And Bikes*, their wheels are at the heart of the experience. As you travel around the island and help its inhabitants you will earn upgrades for the bikes, building them out into more and more powerful vehicles to take on the next challenge. And where in the real world adding reflectors, pinning streamers or placing a card in the spokes is just a cosmetic upgrade, in the game it will have a real impact, the way as kids we liked to pretend that doing these things made us faster or allowed our bikes to fly. And all of this needs to be bought in game with the kinds of treasures that a kid would care about.

"My particular favourite one is the Owl Pellets," Crawlé tells us. "I don't know how many of our target demographic have dissected an owl pellet before, but I definitely used to, and it's fun to find all of the bones and bits of mice that are tucked away inside what an owl had regurgitated. It's just trying to be as creative as possible with having some really weird things that you collect and some slightly more relatable things that you can find, like buttons and badges and

earthworms. Essentially we're trying to simulate the pockets of a kid's trousers [laughs]. That's such a weird thing. That's a strange genre to have created."

Spending these items may prove a little tricky, however. "We kind of have fun with them in the game in that these items are currency and ultimately you do have to go and barter with some adults in order to upgrade your bike and they're obviously expecting you to turn up with a couple of ten pound notes in your pocket and you turn up and empty a giant bag of worms and maggots and owl pellets and things all over their shop counter," continues Crawlé. "And then you try and convince them that they should give you some sort of sweet upgrade for your bike. It's a real moment of child world meets the harsh financial realities of adult life."

This is just one way in which fantasy and reality collide in an interesting way in *Knights And Bikes*, many of which are very much to the benefit of Demelza and Nessa on their adventures. The way that Foam Sword has taken classic childhood mindsets and behaviour and turned it into gameplay mechanics is very exciting.

"I think the main thing we focused on was making sure that the girls' abilities interacted with one another so that you could do these combo things," says Yu. "One of the first sets of weapons that we made were Demelza's wellies and Nessa's water balloons. The basic mechanic there was that Demelza can do a ground-pound that would do a bit of damage and a bit of area of attack, but obviously if Nessa lays down a big water balloon and Demelza pops it and jumps in that puddle she can do a big splash and affect a lot more things." And what child can resist jumping in a puddle with their wellies on?

"It's just simple things, like Nessa can throw her Frisbee and Demelza can give it a quick kick with her boots if she times it perfectly," adds Crawlé. "And it doesn't necessarily help in a massive way – it makes the Frisbee go a bit further – but there's something a bit fun about when you learn that."

"I guess we kind of learned this on *LittleBigPlanet*, but there's always a joy when you design something »

"ESSENTIALLY WE'RE TRYING TO SIMULATE THE POCKETS OF A KID'S TROUSERS"

REX CRAWLÉ



## FIRST WHEELS

WE TALKED TO REX CRAWLÉ AND MOO YU ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF A KID'S FIRST BIKE, SO WE ASKED WHEN THEY GOT THEIRS



**Rex Crawlé:** My first bike I had at a very young age, probably about three years old. It was very tiny, bright yellow and with stabilisers on. I soon outgrew the bike, but my dad gradually customised it, as he's quite artful with a welding torch. He added on extra pieces of pipe to raise the seat and handlebars far beyond their original heights. So basically it became a kind of teetering tiny-bicycle/siege-tower combo. With stabilisers on.



**Moo Yu:** I was on the opposite side of the age spectrum. I got my first bike when I was nine. It was some weird knock-off Chinese branded thing handed down from one of the church kids. It was dark red with a super-wide frame (I think trying to make it look like a motorcycle). My dad procured some bright-green training wheels from who knows where and stuck them on. Being the last kid on the block to get a bike, it wasn't pretty but I was glad to finally join the fun.



# WHAT'S IN A NAME?

## WHERE DO THE NAMES NESSA AND DEMELZA COME FROM?

We love the names of the heroes in *Knights And Bikes*, but wondered where they came from. Interestingly, neither of them is from where many have speculated. "I think one thing we should say is that [Nessa's] got nothing to do with Ness from *EarthBound*, and Moo was really horrified because we just hadn't made the connection at all and someone made it on the Kickstarter or something," Crawle tells us. "But then Demelza is named after a little village very close to where I grew up. It's this tiny little place. There were only 26 people in my entire school and I think three of them were called Demelza. It was a really popular name where I grew up. There's probably not that many schools that have that proportion of Demelzas, but there were a lot of them that year. But again, since we've been working on this, *Poldark* was relaunched and has a strong Demelza character as well, and some people have asked, 'Oh, did that come from *Poldark*?' and I have been similarly pissed off, as if I had just nicked it off BBC One on a Saturday night. But essentially everyone in the game has a Cornish place name as a name. So, there are a whole bunch of other people who are named after places near where I used to hang out."



for mostly working together, but then you put those little hints of working against each other as well," Yu picks up. "So, as Rex mentioned, Demelza can kick Nessa's Frisbees, and Nessa only has one Frisbee, so if you keep kicking that Frisbee she's never going to get it back, and she can't do anything until she gets it back. Just like how you are as kids, you want to get along for the most part, but you also want to mess with each other when you get the chance."

To test that these abilities stand up on their own, they even stripped the game down to test them in isolation, like two kids finding a way to have fun in an empty space. "The two of us have just stood around on a field with nothing there and I've just been throwing Frisbees and Moo's been kicking them and kicking them towards me or kicking them further away," Crawle explains. "We kind of had a milestone a while back where we just wanted to make sure that even in a completely blank level you could still have fun between the two of you and all of the abilities that you have."

And this will even be tested while you're on an adventure, as the kids get a little distracted or decide to play a side game as they travel. From races to objectives to treasure hunts, the girls will constantly be egging each other on and having fun as well as searching the island to uncover the mystery that threatens its citizens. "Just like we want to make sure that even in an empty room you can have fun with the game, it just reminds us how children can entertain themselves at any point by making up games; defining rules and challenging each other really are recurring themes," Yu explains. "As a child these things are very, very real to you and of critical importance in the moment, capturing that idea of having a lot of entertainment in the game in an environment that might not actually provide that for you."

One of our favourite additions to the experience that plays into this child's-eye view of the world comes through the sound design, where Crawle and Yu sought some assistance from former *LittleBigPlanet* and *Tearaway* colleague Kenny Young. "He's fantastic to work with because he has incredible attention to detail," Crawle tells us. "Any time he comes to join the project – because he's not on it full-time – it's a

really nice moment because everything we've created is suddenly presented back to us in a new way. It's sometimes hard to maintain a bit of distance when you're working on something so closely. But when he can bring the audio in and give everything a new twist you suddenly see it freshly again."

And while friend of Crawl's and Hollywood composer Daniel Pemberton brings some emotion and craft to the soundtrack, it's Young who has implemented little audio cues that give us an insight into the minds of Demelza and Nessa from moment to moment. "Some of the great moments are things like when you get on the bikes you hear in the distance (or perhaps just in their heads) the sound of horses whinnying, almost as if our little heroines are becoming knights on their steeds when they get on their bikes," Crawle reveals. "And in the races they pretend they're almost like attack planes, they've got their arms out and they're doing all of the aeroplane noises and what have you. Although they're racing and they're deadly serious about it, they're not afraid to just go for it in terms of imagining that they're jet planes at the same time."



"YOU WANT TO GET ALONG FOR THE MOST PART, BUT YOU ALSO WANT TO MESS WITH EACH OTHER WHEN YOU GET THE CHANCE"

Moo Yu

So where is Foam Sword with the game now? It's in full-polish mode, although not quite ready to pin down a release date. "I think at big studios you always orchestrate things in a very particular way because you need to get everyone on the same page; there are so many moving parts and you need to stay efficient," Yu tell us. "For us there's just an infinite amount of work at all times and always will be. Right now we're focused on polishing up the first half of the game and just trying to get that to a point where we can actually play through it and it feels like a proper released game. That's the point that we're at now."

"It is definitely all coming together and it's now more about getting the little moments of, not necessarily cutscenes, but the animation and the story elements are all coming across rather than being at a time when we're actually trying to figure out all of the building blocks of the game," adds Crawle. "We can very much play it and feel the atmosphere of the world and the characters and what have you, and now it's all about maximising that and making sure that we're definitely delivering the game that we promised to everyone."



“WHEN YOU GET YOUR FIRST BIKE THAT’S WHEN AS A KID YOU FIRST HAVE A LITTLE BIT OF INDEPENDENCE”

REX CRAWLE



■ How much of what’s happening on the island of Penfury is real or just in the minds of the two girls is really left open for the time being. What’s clear though is that their adventure is going to take them to some classic playground spots for kids growing up like woods, work sites and abandoned theme parks.



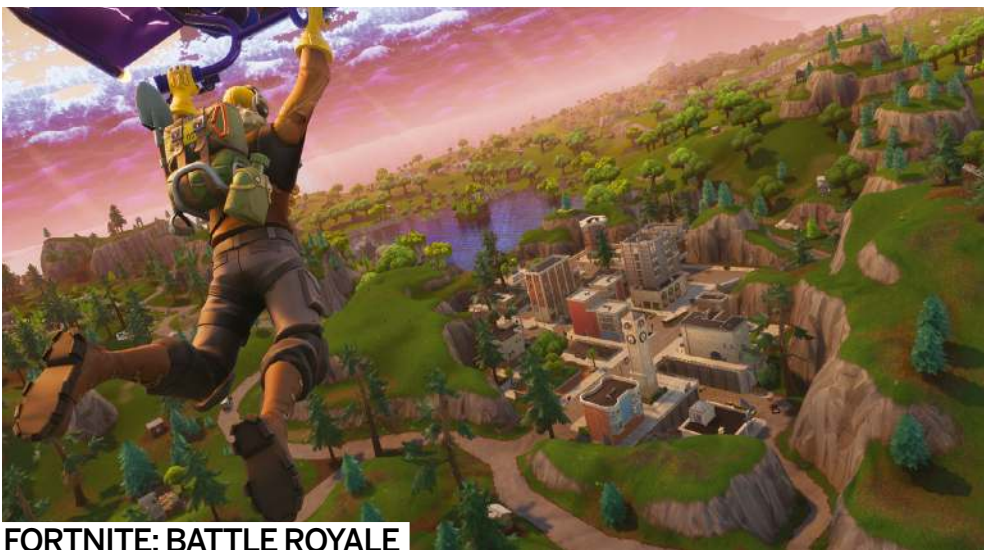
■ Enemies in the game can be taken out by each of the girls, but combining your moves will get the job done faster. The team tells us it doesn’t think people will find all the combinations that are possible, there are that many.





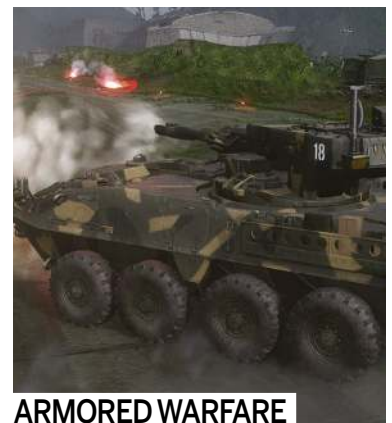
★★★★★ TEN OF THE BEST ★★★★★  
**FREE-TO-PLAY GAMES**

THE TITLES YOU CAN PLAY WITHOUT HAVING TO SPEND A PENNY



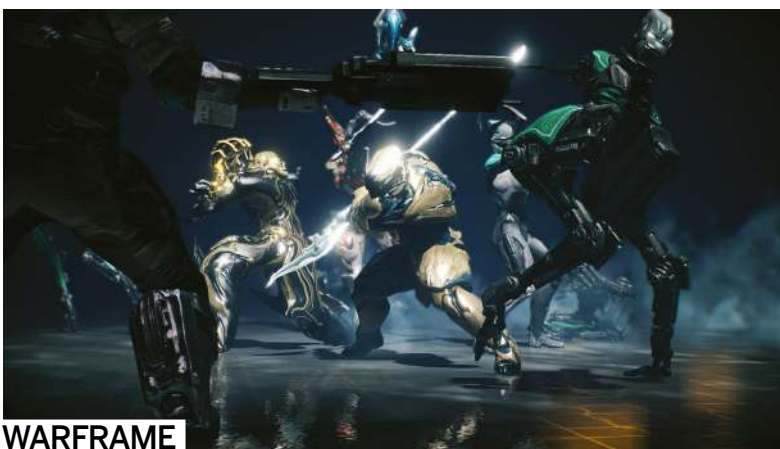
**FORTNITE: BATTLE ROYALE**

■ **ARGUABLY THE HOTTEST** game on the planet right now, *Fortnite: Battle Royale* is an absolute must play if you aren't already. Epic Games' free-to-play shooter sees you and 99 other players dropping into a sprawling map with nothing but the clothes and a pickaxe on your back – there can be only one left standing by the end of it. Gather resources, find loot and gear up as you do anything you can to survive. Battle Royale is a fantastic experience that deserves all of the accolades that it is receiving.



**ARMORED WARFARE**

■ **IF YOU HAVE** gotten a little bored of *World Of Tanks* but still want to get in on some tank-versus-tank action then perhaps you should consider giving *Armored Warfare* a bit of your time. It takes rather familiar vehicle combat to modern battlefields, giving the battles a new flavour and feel. The gameplay is dynamic and challenging, where one shot can be the difference between victory and defeat.



**WARFRAME**

■ **IT MIGHT HAVE** had a bit of a rough start, but *Warframe* is now one of the very best free-to-play games on the PS4. With over 26 million players involved in the action, there's a thriving community out there just waiting to invite you

in on the fun. What is especially impressive about *Warframe* is that it never feels like it is squeezing you of your money, in fact it's easy enough to reach the end-game without ever opening your virtual wallet!



**SMITE**

■ **THIS IS PROBABLY** the only MOBA in the world that feels as fun to play on console as it does PC. *Smite* was specifically designed to feel and play like a traditional third-person shooter, layering on light MOBA and RPG elements on top of sturdy foundations to create an experience that is quite unique on the PlayStation platform.

## LET IT DIE

■ **THERE IS ALWAYS** something excellent about a Suda51 game, isn't there? This hack-and-slash adventure sees your pushing through level upon level of filth and violence, utilising every bloody weapon at your disposal to create maximum carnage. It's a silly and memorable game that seems to have little (if any) restraint, drawing you in with its wild style and hectic combat. Give *Let It Die* a chance, we promise it will not let you down.



## PLANETSIDE 2

■ **THIS IS ONE** of the most ridiculous first-person shooters ever made. The scale of it is off the charts, with *PlanetSide 2* pushing hundreds of players together to battle over the planet Auraxis. It's fast, it is frantic and oh god is it difficult to stay alive. Truth be told, *PlanetSide 2* can be a little overwhelming at times – as you'd expect with so many people getting in on the action at once – but as you settle into its rhythm you'll find that it is actually one of the better sci-fi shooters available on the PS4.



## WORLD OF TANKS

■ **ONE OF THE** longest running and most successful free-to-play games in the industry, *World Of Tanks* continues to show no signs that it is running out of steam. Developer Wargaming has gotten this down to an art now, with *World Of Tanks* rolling in with a stable monetization system, fast-paced action and a wide variety of tanks to choose from and upgrade. Admittedly, this isn't a game that everybody will enjoy – it couldn't be any more niche – but if it gets its hooks into you you'll soon find that it is dominating all of your time.



## TROVE

■ **IF YOU THINK** of this as a free-to-play version of *Minecraft* or *Dragon Quest Builders* you would be thinking along the right lines. *Trove* is an awesome little voxel-based action MMO that splits its time between letting you go off in search of epic loot, exploring wild realms, building brand new worlds or doing battle with deadly monsters with your friends. *Trove* offers 16 character classes, a plethora of realms to explore and some pretty fun building mechanics.



## DCUO

■ **HAVE YOU EVER** wanted to be a superhero, teaming up with others to save the world from life-threatening threats? Well, *DC Universe Online* is probably the closest you are ever going to get to realising that dream. It lets you build your own hero and dive into the DC Universe, taking on its biggest foes and exploring its most famous locales. *DCUO* is getting on a bit so it isn't the best looking game in the world, but it sure is fun to play and has a huge bank of quality content inside of it.



## CROSSOUT

■ **DO YOU MISS** *Twisted Metal*? The folks behind *Crossout* sure did, because they have effectively build a spiritual successor to it here and cast it out across the wilds of the MMO space. Craft your own unique vehicle, gear it up so that it becomes a killing machine, and then ride it out into the apocalyptic wastelands to cause some carnage. *Crossout* has some server issues, but the core play it super fun.

# God Of War

Rock me, Atreus



**It's no easy feat, humanising an antihero like Kratos.** An unflinching wall of sinew and muscle, he's as cold as the frost crunching beneath his feet, neither relatable nor likeable, just blunt and a little bit broken, seemingly unmoved even by the soft sobs of his only child.

And it's strange, seeing our Kratos – that crazed murderer of Gods, hitherto driven by just rage and revenge – so stripped down. To know that he lives a simple existence in a modest single-roomed shack, that this plain, ordinary space is where this terrifying, extraordinary god eats and sleeps, drinks and thinks. Though still every bit the brick you-know-what-house we've come to know over the years, Kratos is now aged, his face ashen and lined, his beard flecked with grey, his shoulders stooping with the weight of every soul he's ever crushed, every heart he's ever ripped from the safety of its ribcage. He seems hollow now, as cold as the lifeless corpse of his son's recently deceased mother, his body a roadmap of scars, including those from where he had once strapped Blades of Chaos to his arms.

Throughout this story Kratos occasionally turns and picks up his son, Atreus, to help him down from a steep height. He lifts the child as though just picking a daisy, his hands – those huge, strong, terrifying hands that we've seen snap necks like pencils – dwarfing the child's entire midriff. Sometimes, Atreus clings to his father's back in a lopsided piggy-back, implicitly trusting his father to get him safely up the mountain side, or across the precipice. But not once does Kratos touch his boy in any way that looks comforting or supportive. There are no moments of affection or connection. And while *God of War* doesn't quite deliver the paternal pain of Sony's other poster child, *The Last of Us*, every time we watch Atreus try and reach out to Kratos only to be unceremoniously spurned, it hurts a little more.

But this isn't even Kratos' story, really. It's dressed up that way – that's who you play as, the camera pulled in tight over his mountainous right shoulder – but as you pick your way through the story – a simple tale of a grieving man and child trekking through the snow to fulfil their dearly departed's dying wishes – you'll notice things, small things, like the way the bestiary is written from the perspective of an awed child. It's just window-dressing, a simple vehicle through which *God of War's* spectacular set-pieces and legendary hack 'n' slash combat are driven.

It's all a bit flamboyant at first, though. You'll ooh and aah at the beautiful set-pieces – the frozen vistas, the craggy shorelines, the huge monoliths glittering above dark, still waters; you can't help but be impressed – but until you get to grips with the game's unique, if perplexing, world, it's all a bit clinical and showboaty. Yes, the travel sequences can be overly long, but does Atreus need to cram each silence with unsolicited lore and exposition? It detracts from an otherwise timely opportunity to collect your thoughts and plan your next steps, especially as, most frustrating of all, half of these interruptions end with: "Know what? I'll finish this story later."

At first, the latest offering in Kratos' franchise is a confusing one, your environments stuffed with things you can't do, reach or interact with and the 'fast travel' system is hilariously unhelpful and unuseable for much of the game. And it's peculiar, how *much* you can't do, especially as it's unclear – beyond the occasional hint from Atreus, although that's not always a given – if you can't do something because you don't yet have the skill or equipment to do so, or if it's just because you're... well, a bit crap.

And he's not a fun chap to be around, that Kratos. Sure, he's always been something of a mardy bum, but parenthood has done little to sweeten this grumpy fecker up, which means it's harder than ever to connect with him given he can't spare a moment to console his grieving son. On a handful of occasions you'll see Kratos reach out, hand hovering inches from his son's small shoulders as if to comfort him, only to withdraw it with a weary sigh, but it gets tiresome, those curt, cutting replies to Atreus' innocent ponderings. Depending upon your viewpoint, you'll find it a simple shortcut to illustrate a father struggling to communicate meaningfully with his son... or a well-trodden cliché that falls just on the wrong side of contrived.

The narrative beats don't always match the action in front of you, either. One moment, Atreus is tearfully pleading with you, the next he's mooching around like a sullen toddler. One second he's muttering "whatever" under his breath, the next – summoned to your side to translate something, perhaps – he'll instantly respond with an upbeat "Yes, SIR!". No, it's not a hangable offence, but it is jarring, momentarily kicking you out of a story that you might only have a slippery grasp of in the first place. (There was also a strange five minutes when Atreus incessantly screamed: "THE FIRE'S OUT – PORTSIDE!" long after we reached terra firma.



## DETAILS

**PUBLISHER**  
Sony

**DEVELOPER**  
SIE Sony Santa Monica

**PSN PRICE**  
£52.99

**PLAYERS**  
1

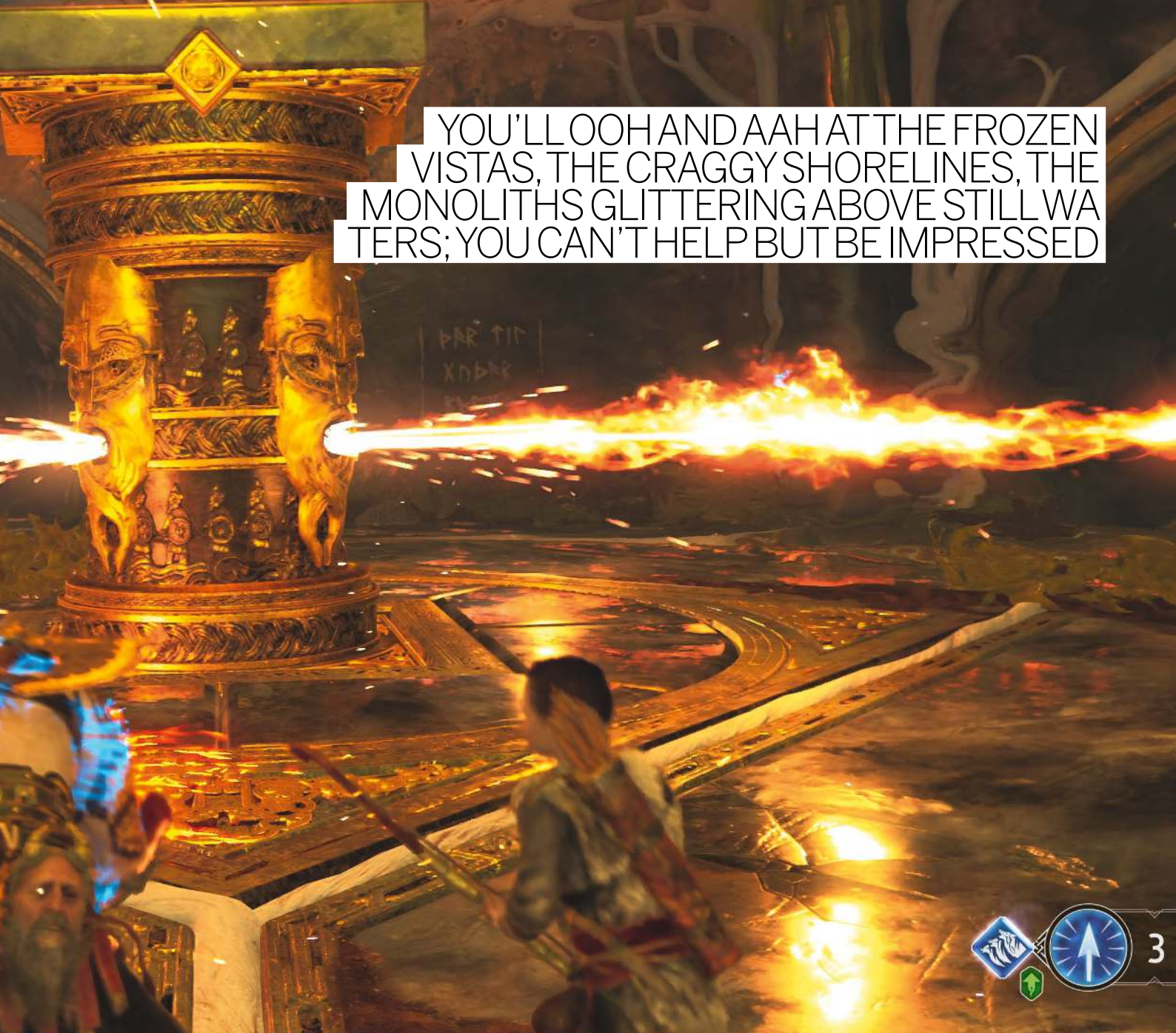


△×□ "Do as I say, not as I do, kiddo. Just because I got this tattoo when I was plastered on a stag do in Benidorm doesn't mean it's okay for you to go out and get one, too."



△×□ Yes, that's a guy melded into a tree. Yes, he has one glowy eye and horns. No, it will not be the strangest thing you see in this game. We're just thankful he grew moss to cover his most, uh, sensitive areas.

YOU'LL OOH AND AAH AT THE FROZEN VISTAS, THE CRAGGY SHORELINES, THE MONOLITHS GLITTERING ABOVE STILL WATERS; YOU CAN'T HELP BUT BE IMPRESSED



## RUNIC REWARDS

Throughout the realms you'll stumble across dozens of treasure chests, ranging from small boxes Kratos can simply rip open with his bare hands, to others that are mysteriously sealed by runic magic.

Simple, right? Except it isn't. Some won't always be available right away – Kratos or Atreus may be missing the specific tool or ability to even access them – and others require Kratos to either find the special seals and break them, or ring bells in a specific order. It's worth doing as many as you can, though; unlock them and you'll be able to feast on the goodies within, with rewards ranging from boosts to your rage and life bars, to precious resources needed to level up your talismans.



△○×□ It'll take a while to be granted the ability to unlock them, admittedly, but eventually you stumble into one of the Hidden Chambers of Odin. Secreted within you'll find treasure and several angry enemies pretty keen on murdering you...



△○×□ Can't decide if these poor souls perished from an undercooked salmon mousse or someone's refusal to put on the central heating. Wait – what's that frozen in the ice on the left? This isn't going to end well, is it.

## LEVELLING UP

The fastest way to beef up for your battles is to get familiar with God of War's bewildering stats and loadout screens. The former helps you finesse Kratos' performance to your preferred fighting style, boosting your: strength (duh), runic (attacks and elemental damage), defence (as you'd expect), vitality (health and resilience), luck (boosts XP and Hacksilver gains), and cooldown (the time it takes to recharge your special abilities).

But as well as upgrading with your XP, you can also tweak these stats by utilising talismans you'll find secreted throughout the realms. These are attached to weapons rather than passive skills, so couple these with regularly trading XP for your skill-tree – again, chiefly weapon-based – and you'll be formidable in no time.







Again, it's not a deal breaker, we know, but... well, we could've done without it.)

It's not all so serious, though. There's a smattering of light relief, brought most notably by the dwarf siblings tasked with keeping your weapons razor sharp and stabby, but Kratos remains ever surly and serious, often stopping to lecture Atreus on the spoils, sacrifices and sobriety of war. And by gods, do you kill a lot of stuff, while admittedly Sony has pared back the visceral violence the series has become renowned for, there's still plenty of bodies to pummel, with some foes – chiefly larger enemies and boss battles, as you might expect – retaining the eye-wateringly painful finishing moves so many of us hate to love... and love to hate, of course.

The combat itself is as satisfying as ever, your Blades of Chaos – lost at the end of the

Atreus truly shines – just look in the direction of the enemy you want him to attack, hit the action button, and it's done.

And pretty much every type of battle is here and up for grabs. Spectacular boss fight on the back of a dragon? Check. Arena-based hordes secreted in hidden chambers? Check. A stunning, hectic battle set atop a flying Norse ship? Check. Fighting enemies in *God of War* may be repetitive, but it's rarely a chore.

Progression is a slog, though. It'll take hours upon hours to unlock the whole of the duo's skill-trees, and longer still to keep buffing your RPG stats – strength, defence, luck, vitality and so on – to acceptable levels. You'll amass XP with each defeated enemy, puzzle and/or mission – slowly, at least at first, but building in generosity the more you play – and Hacksilver, *God of War's*

(home of the humans) and the craggy inlets dotted around the enormous Lake of Nine (little delights us more than the sound of clunking over the Alheimian light bridges). There's a considerable amount of backtracking, though, and while the game is certainly less rigid than its predecessors, it's not quite a sandbox, either, offering a smattering of side-quests that can be soaked up in-between the otherwise pretty linear, if not meaty, campaign missions.

The environmental puzzles, too, are delightful, offering the perfect cerebral respite from the hack 'n' slash combat. Again, you'll encounter many things you'll be unable to interact with on your first visit, but revisiting these areas once you've completed the campaign and carry the full set of tools invariably offers a wonderful array of stashed secrets, your curiosity – especially if you're a lover of collectibles – forever piqued by the "percentage explored" score sitting on the map of every area. They're not all easy, either, with some of the chests locked by mystical runes offering a fair few surprises as you experiment with your arsenal, learning to scour each area carefully, looking up as well as down.

Exploring comes with its own challenges, and not all are just enemies out to murder you, either. Climbing or descending the craggy terrain requires you to look directly at the place you wish to move to next, so unless you've already planned out a route, you can't just hammer the action button with one hand and drink a Coke with the other and hope to reach there (Nathan Drake, we're looking at you). Nope, unless you *know* where you're going, Kratos will just hang there. A small but fabulous detail, we hope you'll agree.

It's a game of two halves, *God of War*. For the first dozen or so hours you may find yourself frustrated by the slow levelling up, a bewildering map system, and perplexing storyline stuffed with gated areas and treasures. Stick with it, though; the more you do, the more of the realms you'll open... and that's when the fun *really* begins.

## TO BEGIN WITH, YOU MAY FIND YOURSELF FRUSTRATED BY THE SLOW LEVELLING-UP, A BEWILDERING MAP SYSTEM, AND SO MANY GATED AREAS

previous game – are replaced by the Leviathan axe, our shiny new toy. While it's a perfectly adequate replacement, strengthened further still by the talismans and new abilities you unlock along the way, it lacks the Blades' fiery finesse. But combat remains meaty and frenetic, with each tweak to your RPG-esque stats screen – though outrageously convoluted at first – keeping your fights fresh and frantic.

Atreus, to his credit, is a worthy companion too, especially if you've managed to up-skill his abilities and bow sooner rather than later. While your axe has decent damage and range, you'll come to rely on Atreus' long-range and precision accuracy more than you might have expected. And it's not just a matter of hacking anything that moves, either; a selection of elemental enemies, some of which are immune to the icy shot of the axe, require tactical forethought, and it's here that

internal currency, available freely throughout the realms, too (pro tip: smash every single destructible prop you can find, as many coins can be found at the bottom of vases and wooden crates). Frustratingly, some of those skill-tree combos and bonuses – though available once your weapon's at the right grade and you have enough cash – are tied to these stats, resulting in a strange scenario where you're able to unlock skills but can't use them, your vitality score still sitting at, say, a measly 45 when you need 125 to utilise it.

Your journey will take you to some gorgeous places where the snow crunches underfoot and exotic flora and fauna dance in and out of sunbeams. Rooted wholly in the nine realms of Norse mythology, each place offers its own distinct landmarks, although much of your time will be spent in and around Midgard

### VERDICT

Like Kratos, this game gets better with time.

9/10





# Extinction

An abundance of killer instinct can lead to...



## DETAILS

**PUBLISHER**  
Modus Games

**DEVELOPER**  
Iron Galaxy

**PSN PRICE**  
£29.99

**PLAYERS**  
1



**On paper it sounds thrilling – one man against an army of ogres both small and gargantuan, combining the fast-paced combat of, say, a Bayonetta with the light puzzle aspects of tackling giants from, say, Shadow Of The Colossus.** Sadly, *Extinction* falls way short of its stated goal, instead offering lukewarm (though still fast-paced) combat on the ground and is an exercise in frustration when it comes to battling the big boys.

The world under siege in *Extinction* sets the stage with some back story and (too much) in-game exposition, but really it's just window dressing for a few dozen missions both short in length and with little to keep your interest. It basically boils down to: kill x ogres, protect x civilians/buildings, or survive for x amount of time. During any of these missions you'll be scuttling around at a quick pace, tapping a single attack button as if channelling your inner *Dynasty Warrior*, and eventually tackling a giant ogre in a sequence far easier than it should be. It's straightforward to the point of banality – and while rarely outright bad, *Extinction* does nothing of real note. It's the challenges and the same frustrations on repeat.

Strategy comes into play at points, with the giant ogres kitted out in different forms of armour. Some are broken with one 'rune strike' – your special, time-slowing super-hit – while others require careful aiming at weak points before they can be shattered. Some can't be broken at all. This is where the extremely light puzzle aspect of things comes into play – how can you get to an ogre's weak point, its neck, if you can't ground it? The solution usually involves jumping or using your grappling whip to drag yourself up its body. And, really, that's about it for strategy.

It very quickly becomes apparent that there isn't much below the surface of *Extinction*; a few different timings to learn, which button presses activate different combos, and a few new powers can be unlocked and quickly learned a few missions into the seven-chapter campaign. But there's nothing to keep your attention once the initial fun of running up a giant's back and lopping its head off has faded – and really, it fades all too quickly.

*Extinction* tries to keep players involved by offering daily challenges, 'extinction' (survival against waves of giants), and randomly generated skirmishes. It's a fair effort, but when the *more* you're being offered

**△OX□** Civilians require rescuing throughout, and offer a bonus to your XP should you get them out with the teleport crystals they huddle around. When you have to protect a certain amount of civvies, though, *Extinction* becomes an exercise in incredible frustration.



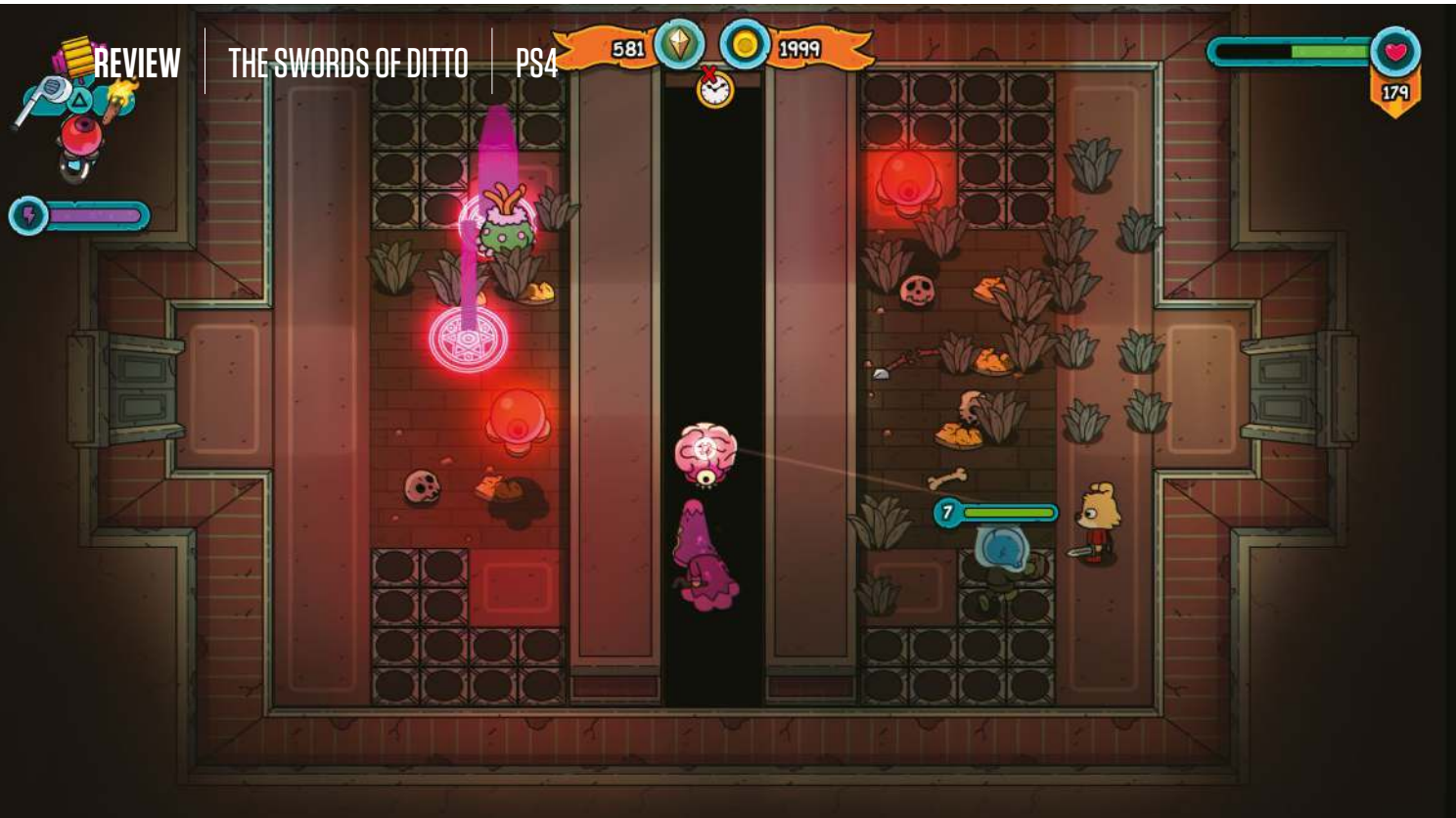
**△OX□** Skills are unlocked using XP earned in missions, and can follow whatever path you choose. Ultimately, you can unlock everything – but it's a genuine question whether or not you'll even still be playing the game.

is more of the thing that's already worn incredibly thin, it makes little to no difference. It's a shame, as *Extinction* is a good idea – it's just pulled off with next-to-zero panache, and before the first couple of hours are up you'll either be willing it to finish, or just turning it off.

## VERDICT

Misguided, unfair and boring: a poor mix

4/10



# The Swords Of Ditto

If Ouroboros remade The Legend of Zelda



## DETAILS

**PUBLISHER**  
Devolver Digital  
**DEVELOPER**  
One Bit Beyond  
**PSN PRICE**  
£15.99  
**PLAYERS**  
1-2



**We love the clever concept that underpins *The Swords Of Ditto*.** We're fans of the game's many cool ideas. The catch, though, is that we're not sure that those ideas and that concept quite find themselves in equilibrium.

*The Swords Of Ditto* opens with you washing up on the shore of a beach, à la *Link's Awakening*. That's a signal that the game owes a big debt to The Legend of Zelda series: 2D sword-based combat, tools that can be unlocked by completing puzzle-filled dungeons, and a reality where slashing away at small clumps of grass is a viable way of earning money. The twist here is that after four days of exploring the game's compact world, you will be forced into a confrontation with the final boss: an evil witch named Mormo. If she defeats you (and she will), you take control of a new hero on a remixed map 100 years in the future, grab the eponymous Sword Of Ditto from the grave of your predecessor and start all over again.

Much of *Swords Of Ditto* is about time-management, then. Should you focus on collecting cash that will be passed on to the next hero, or spend it all to give yourself the best chance of taking Mormo down? Do you have time to explore, or should you focus on

completing the dungeons that will remove Mormo's 'anchors', weakening her for your next fateful encounter? Those decisions become more interesting as the game progresses and you unlock the ability to carry over items to the next run and rewind time, the latter making failed runs far less annoying than they can be in the early going.

Less annoying, but still annoying. New dungeons are procedurally generated, but the relatively shallow ideas they use are repetitive and the bosses are too similar, so redoing key dungeons that were enjoyable the first time around can feel like a chore. *Swords Of Ditto*'s simple combat becomes increasingly compelling as you gain new tools to add variety to the slash, roll and repeat formula that forms its foundations – a golf club that you can use to thwack enemies off of ledges and into the abyss is one of our favourites – but get killed and lose those options and combat becomes boring again until you get some of those tools back. That's *Swords Of Ditto*'s fundamental problem: it *is* fun, but too often you have to push through limitations and repetition to find that fun. At times, you wonder whether the game wouldn't be better as a more traditional Legend Of Zelda-style RPG and that tells you that the balance isn't quite right when it comes to its rogue-like elements.



**△○×** The roguelike elements that *The Sword Of Ditto* mixes in with the more traditional *Legend Of Zelda*-like exploration should work well together, and often do, but sometimes the balance is way off.

The experience of playing *The Swords Of Ditto* is as cyclical as the story it tells. It contrives to frustrate you, but then it reminds you that it can be enormous fun. It turns you off from playing it with a bad idea, then impresses you with a good one. Then it does it all over again.

## VERDICT

An unbalanced but often enjoyable RPG rogue-lite.

**6/10**



△○×□ There's a good variety of enemies with different attack patterns. Fortunately, you can accrue a range of tools to match, including new weapons and stickers, which can be equipped to buff your abilities.





△○×□ There's a good variety of enemies with different attack patterns. Fortunately, you can accrue a range of tools to match, including new weapons and stickers, which can be equipped to buff your abilities.





# Forgetting Anne

Something to remember

## DETAILS

**PUBLISHER**  
Square Enix

**DEVELOPER**  
ThroughLine  
Games

**PSN PRICE**  
£15.99

**PLAYERS**  
1



**When it comes to detailing the virtues of games, the term 'cinematic' is bandied around so often that its significance is all but lost.**

However, there are few games as deserving of the accolade as *Forgetting Anne*. Its picturesque visuals and the seamless transition between cutscenes and gameplay make this one of the most cinematic adventures we've ever had the pleasure of playing. The striking anime style makes it feel every bit like you're playing through a Studio Ghibli production, while its tone and narrative is delightfully reminiscent of the Eighties live-action/animated movie *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*.

*Forgetting Anne* explores the concept of Forgotlings. Think of that missing sock, discarded toaster or old journal you've cast away or lost: in *Forgetting Anne* all of these abandoned items end up in another world where they can walk, talk and do things far beyond their intended purpose. For instance, a handgun heads up the police, while a fridge spends his days tending the local bar. It all makes for a set-up that's wonderfully zany and undeniably endearing.

You play as Anne, tasked with maintaining order by dealing with the world's rebel objects. Underneath *Forgetting Anne*'s painterly visuals and colourful characters lies a surprisingly dark and layered plot that's rife with player choice. Dialogue options give you the opportunity to be a merciless law enforcer or more sympathetic towards the plight of the freedom fighters, and player actions have an effect on the story and the outcome of events.

While narrative is the main focus here, gameplay certainly hasn't been overlooked. Anima is the life-force of this world and its inhabitants, and it serves as the driving force behind the game's intricate puzzle elements. Most conundrums involve redirecting the flow of anima through pipes to power levers and open doors to progress forward. Puzzles often have multiple components that require a decent amount of thought, however, they don't jeopardise the flow of the story by being overly taxing or numerous.

Light platforming sections are also present. Anne can run and jump around this gloomy, industrial city, and thanks to some mechanical wings, she can even soar into the air. While the animations are spectacular, the controls can feel rather unintuitive and clunky. As well as context-sensitive climbing sections that require pinpoint accuracy, Anne wings require manual activation, so feats like running jumps require four buttons to perform. This becomes particularly cumbersome later in the game when obstacles such as timed platforms are introduced.

With an engaging plot that's as much a commentary on consumerism as it is a tale of morality, *Forgetting Anne*'s inspired narrative is backed up by some solid and engaging gameplay. A fair warning, though, discarding everyday objects will be met with a considerable amount of guilt after playing this.

## VERDICT

An anime adventure you're not likely to forget

8/10

# Minit

Short and to the match point



**It is generally ill-advised to pick up swords you find parted from their masters.**

Whether they be embedded in stone or seemingly left out for anyone to take, there's usually a good reason for their placement. In this case, it's a 60-second death curse; no matter what you do, as long as they're bound to that cursed sword, your adorable Tamagotchi-esque protagonist will keel over every time a minute ticks down. You're going to need to get a move on if you want to change your fate.

With only items and key events persisting through every minute run, *Minit's* retro, roguelike influences are obvious. Its scope and length pales in comparison to modern behemoths of the genre, such as *Spelunky* or *Rogue Legacy*, but though small it is perfectly formed. It's not one to out-stay its welcome, achieving only what it set out to do and then getting the heck out of there, much like you will be doing throughout your own playthrough.

The humour of the briefest lines of dialogue is pure-hearted, coming from a cast of cute characters that presents a world well worth getting to know. The ever-ticking timer encourages you to explore efficiently and there are few areas or puzzles that set out to purposefully waste your precious seconds. Anti-frustration design ensures none of your deaths feel wasted or cheap, however, and instead creates a 'popcorn effect' until, after a chain of deaths, you find yourself staring down the endgame asking, "Where did the time go?"

As you explore, you're able to discover new 'homes' to respawn into after your untimely demise, enabling you to cover more ground in your next life. Due to the game's simple visual aesthetic, each screen is distinct in a way that minimises the likelihood of you losing your bearings as the sand in the hourglass runs out. Because of a stubborn adherence to a two-toned palette, against the current wave of vibrant retro-styled titles, *Minit* presents something new by going even further back.

The timer can complicate troubleshooting for certain conundrums, though thankfully solutions can either be discovered close to home or within what time you have left. Time-wasting design only presents itself when you begin hunting for secrets and the frustration of these treasure hunts can be easily counteracted by other hidden goodies if you're willing to dig for them. Your first run is rewarding as it is, however a second playthrough still has plenty to uncover.

Between the pitch-perfect length, a cast of cheeky characters you just want to pinch and a distinct visual style you'll be left with a lasting fond impression. Short, sweet and filled to the brim with charm, you won't want to drop this one in a hot minute.



## DETAILS

**PUBLISHER**  
Devolver Digital

**DEVELOPER**  
Vlambeer

**PSN PRICE**  
£6.99

**PLAYERS**  
1

## VERDICT

A short but sweet Rogue-lite adventure.

8/10

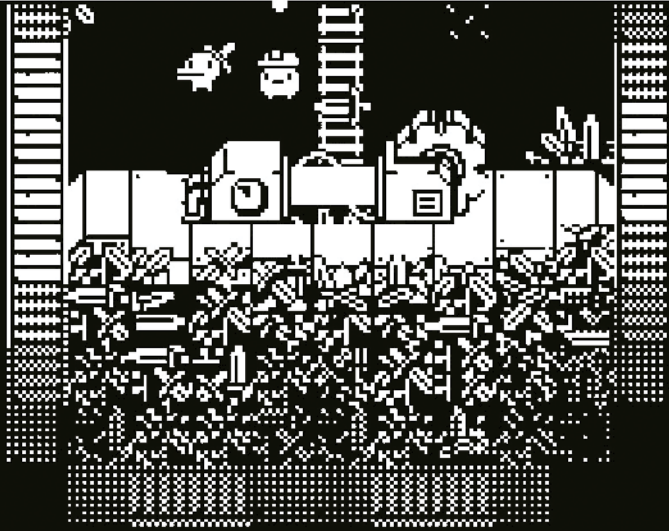




29



THE SWORDS ARE GOING BACK UP!  
GO AND PUT AN END TO THIS!



△×□ It's not all bad in Minit. Sure you're under a very bad, no-good death curse and the world is rendered in only two tones, but at least the characters you encounter have a sense of humour.

34



I MET THE WRONG CROWD,  
WE EVEN GOT TATTOOS!  
I'LL STAY AT THE HOTEL...





# SPLINTER CELL CELL

We explore how sticking to the shadows put Ubisoft into the spotlight



**W**hen it comes to considering the increasingly vast history of classic titles in the games industry, it can be hard to find some sort of conclusive evidence as to which and why certain games have entered into the ethereal hall of fame while others were left nipping at the heels of those greats that stood before them. For the earlier games of the Eighties it's a little easier to understand: these are often games that 'did it first' or, if nothing else, at least did it better than anyone else. The Nineties still offer a little more leeway for evidence, with developers finding their feet in the 16-bit era, but truly discovering innovation with the invention of genuine 3D gaming. It's in the early 2000s where things start to get a little bit tougher; on paper. As a relevant example, it would be tough to point to *Splinter Cell* as a surefire, multi-million selling game. Ubisoft certainly believed it would be, but it was hard to say that a shooter based on the more subdued brand of military from Tom Clancy would have found much success, and even with the release of *Metal Gear Solid*, stealth still seemed less marketable than action equivalents. But *Splinter Cell* was never meant to be 'just' a stealth game. In fact, it started life as something else completely.

"I was working at Ubisoft as a project lead, as the creative director for a project," says Francois Coulon, the man who would become the key creative vision behind *Splinter Cell*. "The game was supposed to be a revolutionary title," he explains, "that was a blend between two types of gameplay. You would have a strategy core layer where you would see something from above – a map like *Warcraft II* – and then you could go into any unit and play them in third-person or first-person view."

Despite the inventiveness of it the game was ultimately scrapped, the hardware at the time simply unable to meet the demands of such a concept. However, the original universe – a "shattered world" with a series of islands based on key capital cities – was kept, and it was here with this licence where Coulon would continue his work.

"At some point something happened at Ubisoft Paris," recalls Coulon, "called Ubi Free. It was a virtual union that had

△○×□ The addition of a visibility meter was important for the player to know when they were safe and when they were likely to be spotted.



I WAS GOING TO TAKE THE TOM CLANCY LICENCE AND I WAS GOING TO MAKE A VERY MASS-MARKET CONSOLE GAME WITH THE LICENCE

been set up by three people, I believe, and they sent an email to everybody at Ubisoft to say that the Guillemot brothers were dictators, that the work conditions were very bad, and so on. It was pretty weird to be honest, because that was not the case." Despite that it still caused some pressure for Ubisoft Paris, driving the Guillemot brothers to "sort of overreact". Gerard Guillemot, in particular, saw it as a bigger problem, and decided to take action. "He said, 'Okay, there is nothing we can do in this country, we cannot run a creative company here, so I'm leaving France and I'm going to New York and I'm going to bring some creative people with me over there.'"

Coulon and a number of creatives from Ubisoft Paris left to form a New York office, with the Shattered World IP following along as part of the divorce settlement. "We went to New York and we went there to try and create this shooter, which was – at that time – the first shooter that Ubisoft had been doing." Up until that point Ubisoft had primarily been known as the *Rayman* developer. The popular PS1 platformer had given the company some recognition for making games rather than publishing, but it arrived at a time when the age of the 2D platformer was coming to an end. The company already needed something to stand out in a totally different and not so cutesy way. "It's not that they were against violence," adds Coulon, "but no violent game had been released by Ubisoft so far."

While work on the shooter had already begun, and the Shattered World universe allowed for some interesting sci-fi elements, there was one particular gaming example that had sparked inspiration within Coulon for what form – particularly in terms of how it should be presented – Ubisoft's first shooter should take. "I remember showing the Guillemot brothers the



△○×□ Full-on combat was an option, too, but a challenge to achieve and not nearly as satisfying.

# TOOLS OF THE TRADE

The innovative mechanics that Sam Fisher brought to gaming

## HEAT-VISION GOGGLES

While night vision wasn't a totally new concept, *Splinter Cell's* combined use of infrared and heat signature detection enhanced a feeling of covert action while empowering players with information. It became just as iconic for the series – in part due to the familiar activation sound pinging in your head right now – as many of the other recognisable traits.



## DYNAMIC LIGHTING

While technology like dynamic lighting wasn't invented by *Splinter Cell* – it was mostly a reward of using the Unreal Engine – it was still a relatively new feature set for developers around the time and the first time a stealth game implemented AI that was affected by it. The function made the game feel more 'real' and made absolute sense for any stealth game since to implement.



## SPLIT JUMP

The split jump ability ended up becoming so iconic to Sam Fisher that it was impossible for any other game to copy this concept wholesale. It must've inspired others to be more inventive with their movesets, however, especially considering the multiple ways that the split jump could be used.



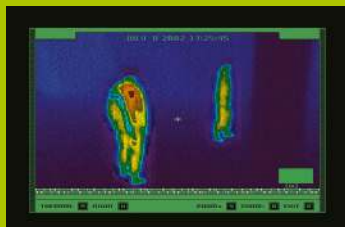
## INTERROGATION

While this also wasn't exactly brand new, the way that Ubisoft utilised it provided a multitude of gameplay benefits that hadn't really been done before. Gathering information was an obvious one, but gaining access to locked areas, using hostages as a body shield or disabling enemies without murder all helped Fisher feel like the super agent he was.



## DEPLOYABLE CAMERAS

With an array of techy, sci-fi gadgets at his disposal, Fisher really did fit the mould of an in-his-prime Jason Bourne. Players could approach situations in any number of ways, so recon was important. This is where the numerous cameras came into play, the snake camera feeling particularly rewarding when discovering an ambush behind a door.



## GREATER AGILITY

The athleticism of Fisher enabled a number of new ways to explore the environment. It's hard to know if rappelling was a totally new concept at this point, but certainly the freedom of this range of agile movement around a map allowed players to devise their own plan of action through a stage – one of the central pillars of *Splinter Cell's* gameplay.



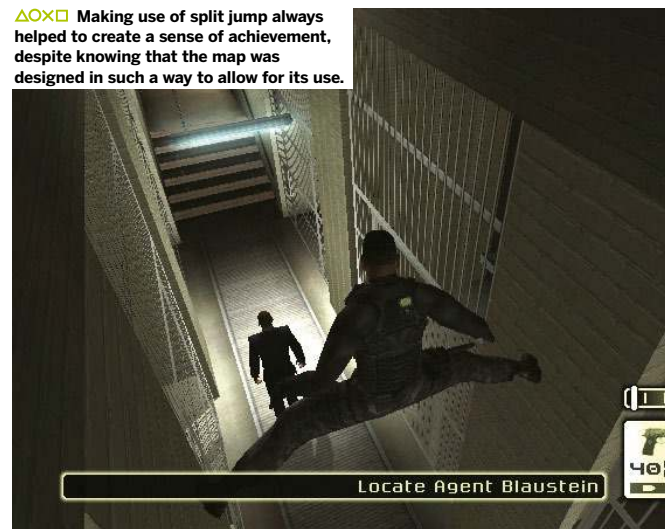
first *Metal Gear Solid* and saying, 'Look, this is the game that we should be doing'. *MGS* was only using one engine and they were doing the cinematics of the game in the engine. It was totally seamless between the videos and the gameplay: it is mise-en-scene, and that's where we should have been going." That was the direction that Coulon wanted to take, but not initially for its stealth gameplay but instead the way it was a "mix between a movie and a game," something that – with the new offices in New York – Coulon and his team would start prototyping for a similar sort of cinematic experience.

What that ultimately meant was a long gestation period. For almost two years the team were prototyping gameplay elements within this Shattered World universe, leveraging the concept to create new and interesting ways of playing games. Unbeknownst to them, however, the shooter was being held back while Ubisoft looked for a suitable IP to attach it to. The company was keen on developing the idea but averse to risking a new, original franchise on new platforms like the PS2 and the Xbox. And so prototyping continued, all the while these interesting gameplay systems were being taken and implemented into other games that were being developed by Ubisoft.

In fact, during this period the New York studio was downsized due to costs, and many of the team members were then sent to Ubisoft Montreal. The creator of this Shattered World would leave at this point, taking the concept with him and in fact producing an animated series called *Skyland* (with no relation to the toys-to-life series). With nothing but a generic shooter left and no licence to attach it to, it was about time something came along. "Then one day I heard that Ubisoft had bought Red Storm Entertainment," says Coulon, "which was a studio created by Tom Clancy and that had done the first of the *Rainbow Six* series." This was finally the opportunity that the game that Coulon had been working on for so long needed.

"I said to them that Tom Clancy is super mass market in terms of his books, selling millions literally and movies with Sean Connery, Harrison Ford and this kind of stuff. Very reputable actors, all with the licence of Tom Clancy." Coulon adds that there was little knowledge of the name in videogames besides *Rainbow Six*, which itself was a 'hardcore' experience and not very mainstream at all. "I decided I was going to take the Tom Clancy licence and I was going to make a very mass-market console game with the third-party licence," says Coulon.

△×□ Making use of split jump always helped to create a sense of achievement, despite knowing that the map was designed in such a way to allow for its use.





△○×□ As Coulon had intended, *Splinter Cell* managed to reach key points throughout the story just by having the player take part in them without the use of cutscenes.

Next came a need to figure out what it was with the Tom Clancy licence that the team could actually leverage for its shooter. "I called the head of legal, I asked what the rights that we bought were and what could we use. We couldn't use a lot of things, because actually Tom Clancy is divorced and so we couldn't use certain licences due to his ex-wife." Without a licence, then, it was up to the team to devise something that could be used, and as a result they ended up setting a precedent for the name Tom Clancy and videogames: while they wouldn't utilise existing Clancy products, they could still produce something that felt like Clancy. "And so we read all the books, saw the movies – which we had seen already anyway – and we tried to define Tom Clancy: it was a thriller, that was the word, he's some kind of insider, he has some kind of gadgets and he's very geo-political – it's always set in a different country, and so on. And so we said, 'Okay, let's do this; it's like James Bond without the humour.' And that's how it all started."

It was actually here, and not with the *Metal Gear Solid* inspiration, where the game switched to incorporate a much more stealthy form of gameplay. "We did the first prototype, and we thought about the stealth thing from the beginning. We changed the gameplay from being a shooter to, let's say, a smarter shooter. The inspirations were basically *Metal Gear Solid*, but also *Thief* and a bit of *Deus Ex* also – for the freedom of the character and the way that you could do many, many things."

These were essentially the central aspects of this prototype and the game that would come to be known as *Splinter Cell*: an emphasis on stealth, the ability to extinguish lighting and to control the shadows, and the liberty to tackle a stage or situation however you wanted. It goes without saying that the prototype blew Ubisoft management away and the game was greenlit immediately, throwing the team

into production and giving Coulon the opportunity to expand his team considerably. Better still, he was to get a producer, freeing him up to remain in charge of the creative direction of the game itself.

"The original team [before moving into production] was actually five people from New York who were absolute beginners that we had hired fresh out of university. Those people came to Montreal, they followed me to do this game." They included Nathan Wolff, lead designer, whose gameography begins and ends with *Splinter Cell* since he departed the industry after its completion. Then there was Ed Byrne, who designed many of *Splinter Cell*'s intricate levels, David Kelina who worked on its AI, and then JT Petty, who was the scriptwriter for the first two games. "For all of those people this was their first game ever," adds Coulon.

It may well have been a blessing in disguise, however. Videogame development had now reached a point at which it had settled into a groove, and while the team sizes have escalated over the last few years, the processes were mostly set in stone by the turn of the millennium. As such, the idea of hiring complete newcomers to become leads of a brand new IP is something many would have balked



△○×□ Something *Splinter Cell* did well was empower players to make them feel like covert secret agents, and gadgets like the snake camera were pivotal in doing just that.



IF YOU PUT THE PEOPLE IN THE RIGHT UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT YOU'RE DOING THEN YOU'RE EMPOWERING THEM TO BE CREATIVE

# WE HAD BEEN ADVISED TO CHANGE THE STORY, IT WASN'T CLEAR WHAT WOULD HAPPEN SO IT WAS A BIT TOUCHY

knows exactly the game that he wants and is going to impose it on everyone. I don't know the game I want, so I have more dialogue with everybody. Which means my role is to make sure that everybody understands the



at. Coulon never said so while speaking to him, but there's a sense that the small five-person team prototyping ideas for two years before production even began had lead to a number of innovative and clever twists on standard shooter gameplay that had never been seen before. Facets of *Splinter Cell*, such as the remote cameras and the split jump, the heat vision goggles and the means to read how hidden Fisher were just some of the more well-known additions to the game that helped it to stand out.

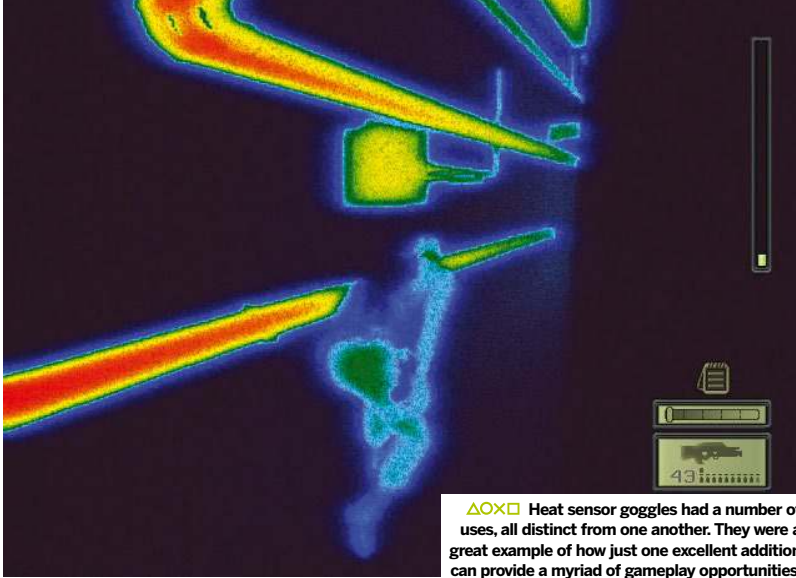
*Splinter Cell* felt fresh in so many different ways, but its numerous gameplay mechanics – and how they could all be utilised to play the game in the way that you wanted to – was undoubtedly the thing that made it stand head and shoulders above its competition. Even better was how one feature's inclusion would then end up inspiring another team member to use that tool in a new or intriguing way, a particularly memorable example being the ability to use the heat vision goggles to track the buttons pressed on a keypad. "That was smart, I admit," Coulon laughs. "That came from the coders, that's why I think it's smart." He goes on to explain that his method as a creative director was to inspire idea sharing, not to belligerently enforce the kind of game that he wanted. "As a creative director, the way I work – and I've done the same all throughout my career – is that I am not the kind of guy who

creative vision of the game, what we're going for, what are the main pillars of the gameplay, and just to have everyone come up with cool ideas."

This method, as it happens, is why *Splinter Cell* is so rife with cool tech and fun gadgets to play around with, tools for the player to make use of. "So a coder came up with this heat-sensing light treatment, which was pretty innovative at the time. And then someone suggested some goggles at some point, and then somebody else said, 'What if we could use the thermal goggles for the keypad?' So it was a communal idea. If you put the people in the right understanding of what you're doing then you're empowering them to be creative. And many of these ideas came about like that. I have no way to tell you that this one came from me, this one came from this guy. They all come from many people."

Yet while it's clear to see how two years of pre-production could lead to so many interesting new features that ultimately became iconic to the *Splinter Cell* franchise, one thing that wasn't quite so clear was how Sam Fisher, a man who was meant to be a forgettable sleeper agent, ended up becoming such a well-loved character. So we had to ask, how did Coulon help shape this aspect of the game too? "I was not involved," he admits, "because I am a French guy. I can't allow myself to judge American names or voices, I left this to the American





△OX□ Heat sensor goggles had a number of uses, all distinct from one another. They were a great example of how just one excellent addition can provide a myriad of gameplay opportunities.

△OX□ A GBA version of the game was developed and released at the same time, but naturally - with a 2D perspective - it couldn't achieve anything like its console equivalent.



# LET LOOSE

Coulon on the real challenge of making a stealth game



"The biggest problem is that you're not supposed to trigger the alarm, which means you have to do whatever you can to kill the guard before he rings the alarm. This is cool, but what happens if you trigger an alarm? It's super frustrating if you trigger an alarm and 'Boom! Game over'. I could've killed the guy, if people come in I could've fought, I could've hidden. The balance is stopping at the first mistake, which can be very frustrating, or letting the player play out the consequences which can also be hassle because, what, 25 soldiers are going to come, you're going to kill them all and the map is going to be empty? There's a right balance between those two things and, in my opinion, this is the tricky thing for stealth games."

people. The first script that we had in New York we did with a French scriptwriter; this was before JT Petty, and when we were doing the story at the very beginning the name of the character was Mr Cayden. We thought it was cool, except that everybody laughed at us. They told us that he sounded like a dumb guy or whatever, so for titles and for names I left all that for native people."

However, Coulon's interest in geo-politics was a natural help, even assisting scriptwriter JT Petty in crafting a globe-trotting experience that would match Clancy's novels. "I was not involved in the name Sam Fisher," he explains, "but only in deciding who he was. JT Petty was not super familiar with geo-political plots, so I told him how I wanted it to be in terms of the geo-political story."

The story itself felt darker, covert and so much more tantalising than any other shooter of the time. It was hard not to get a sense of the brooding Jason Bourne from the grizzled voice of veteran super soldier Sam Fisher. The game's original name of Third Echelon, in fact, was born from the news of the early 2000s that the United States, under a secret government code name of ECHELON, had enabled powers to intercept and monitor a wide range of telecommunications – something that outraged many citizens. This is where the fictional Third Echelon was born, the name of Fisher's secret government operations employer. It all added to a sense of intrigue and concern around the covert actions of nations on a global scale.

"We wanted it to be Clancy," highlights Coulon about

the story itself, "and you know, in the end America wins... well, it's not that simple, it's much more subtle in general. But the interesting thing about the story is that the game started in '99 and of course it began development in 2001. If you remember *Splinter Cell* starts with an oil problem in Georgia, except initially – when we first did it – it was Azerbaijan. Because of 9/11, and because Azerbaijan was a Muslim country, we didn't want to portray this. We had been advised to change, it wasn't clear what would happen from this event and what would go on with the world, so it was a bit touchy." This only helped the game tap into a particular global mood of the time. As such, while Ubisoft made further efforts to capitalise on what was already a promising package – the marketing surrounding the iconic three-light goggles for example – it becomes so much easier to see why the original *Splinter Cell* became such a smash hit, going on to sell over 6 million copies and becoming one of the best-selling games on PlayStation 2.

Coulon explains how it felt at the time, as it might have for any developer of big name games: "So when you say you have Tom Clancy, the gameplay is very real, from a technical standpoint it works perfectly, the story is cool and you have a great voice actor – it should work. Of course it's going to be a success, you believe in it, but many things can make you doubt." Coulon pauses for just a second: "Somehow it worked out."



# PLAY+ PLUS

EXTENDED PLAY ◦ DLC ✕ MULTIPLAYER ◦ TROPHIES ◦ VIDEO

INTERVIEW



## SCAVENGERS

Josh Holmes resurfaces after leaving Microsoft behind, establishing brand new studio Midwinter Games

### YOU LEFT 343 INDUSTRIES BACK IN 2016; WHAT'S BEEN GOING ON, JOSH?

I've been pretty stealth for the last year, haven't I? I've been hunkered down in a little group...

### MIDWINTER GAMES ESTABLISHED IN LATE 2016! HOW HAS IT BEEN?

There were four of us – three of us came from the Halo team at 343. Throughout the course of 2017 we have been working on the concept for Scavengers and building the team out; now we are about 17 people and I hope we can peak it out around 25. We are trying to build a small tight-knit group of developers that are all passionate about the game that we are building.

### TALK TO US ABOUT SCAVENGERS... WHAT'S THE DEAL?

Okay, so Scavengers is a multiplayer, session-based game in which players compete to explore, loot, level up and escape a frozen, winterised world. It's set in the not-so-distant future where a cataclysmic event has plunged the world into a new ice age.

### WHAT ARE WE TALKING GENRE-WISE, A SHOOTER?

The core mechanic of the game has a basis in shooting, yes. You know, a lot of us come from a background in the triple-A action-shooter world, where we have worked on things like Halo, Battlefield, Battlefront and Call Of Duty. We are trying to build an experience that brings together elements of PvE and PvP where teamwork and collaboration is really key – where killing other players isn't the only way to win a game.

### HOW IMPORTANT HAS WORKING WITH IMPROBABLE AND ITS SPATIALOS TECHNOLOGY BEEN FOR SCAVENGERS?

We are trying to build this really large, vibrant, living

world; it has many players, and AI entities are certainly a part of it too. One of the biggest challenges with this is scale: how do we deliver this level of scale while still maintaining that fast-paced, low-latency shooter experience? SpatialOS was an awesome solution for us.

### WHAT'S THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU'VE ENCOUNTERED IN ATTEMPTING TO REALISE THIS AMBITIOUS PROJECT?

We quickly run up against the limitations of what you can simulate on a single-server instance. This is something that we dealt with very intimately on Halo 5's Warzone mode. We were constantly having to balance the maximum number of players, the maximum number of AIs and how sophisticated their behaviours can be, for example. As we started thinking about Scavengers, we knew this would be something we would have to address and find a solution for very early on... as a small team, having the ability to leverage something like SpatialOS to solve those problems is a huge boon to us.

### HOW HAVE YOU FOUND THE LEAP FROM TRIPLE-A TO SMALLER SCALE DEVELOPMENT?

They both have their strengths and advantages. When you are working on a massive-scale project, I think the things that you can accomplish as a team are pretty incredible – but everybody can get very compartmentalised and there's almost like a factory assembly-line method to the production. That's just a necessary way to operate when you have that many people, so that it doesn't devolve into chaos.

For us, as a small team, it's much more like a band jamming. We are building on inspiration from one another and it's like we are discovering the game as we go. It's a little more organic and, as a small team, you can be more nimble to react to some of the ideas and thoughts that emerge through that process.



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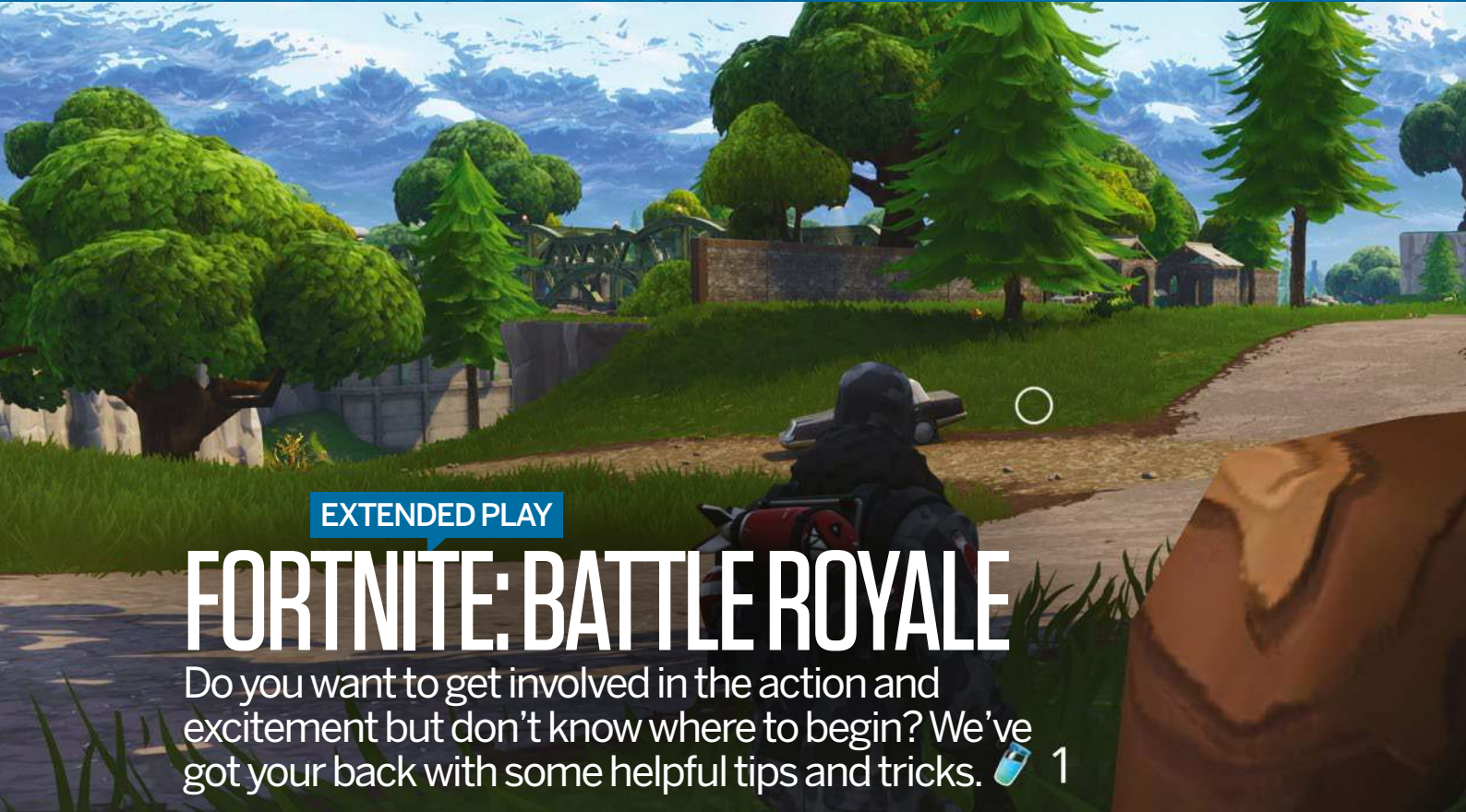


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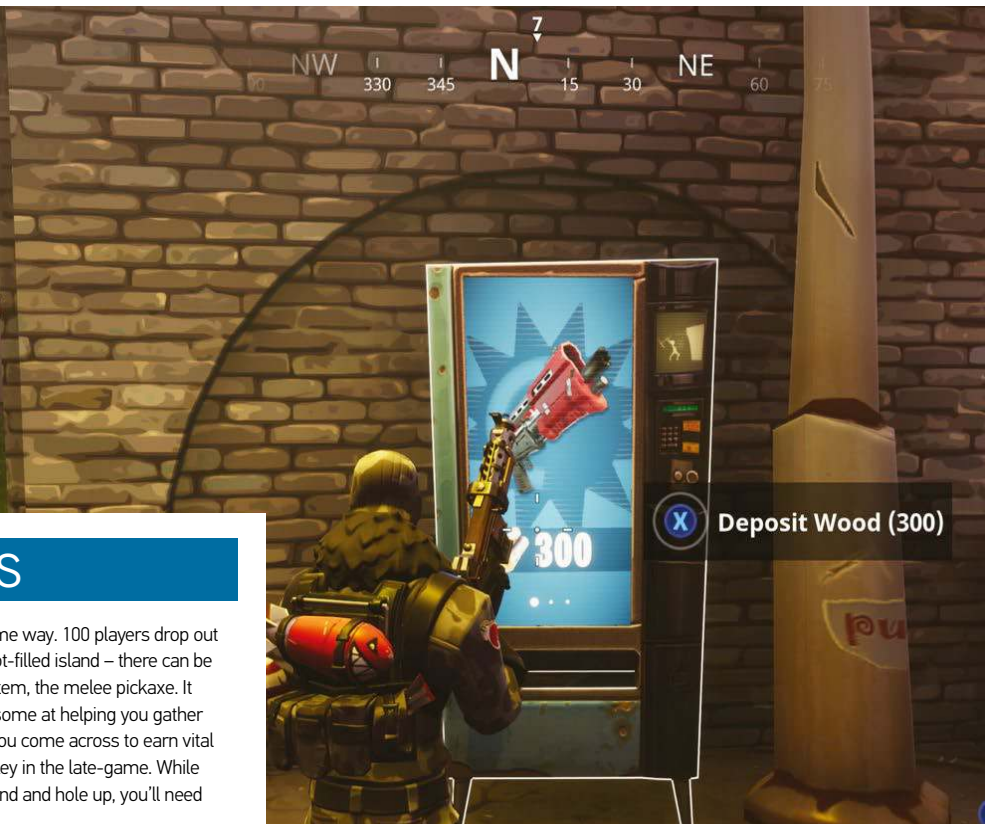




EXTENDED PLAY

# FORTNITE: BATTLE ROYALE

Do you want to get involved in the action and excitement but don't know where to begin? We've got your back with some helpful tips and tricks.  1



## GATHER RESOURCES

■ **EVERY GAME OF** *Fortnite* begins in the exact same way. 100 players drop out of a Party Bus and fight for survival on a sprawling loot-filled island – there can be only one winner. Everybody starts with one essential item, the melee pickaxe. It isn't particularly effective in a fight, but *it is* super awesome at helping you gather resources. Use it to smash and bash everything that you come across to earn vital materials – wood, brick and metal – as these will be key in the late-game. While it can be tempting to just grab any weapons you can find and hole up, you'll need materials if you want to earn that Victory Royale.



## GET BUILDING

■ **BUILDING IS EASIER** than you might expect. Go into Settings and make sure that Turbo Building is activated, this will let you create objects incredibly quickly. Of course, just because you can do something quickly doesn't mean you can do it well. You need practice! Once you've got your hands on some resources you'll want to start trying to build small structures. While this isn't key to success it will certainly help you along the way – structures can be used to get you out of trouble or creatively utilised to provide cover and assistance to reaching higher ground. You need to get comfortable using the turbo building system, so spend a few games off in the woods practising.



## WEAPON RARITY

■ **BATTLE ROYALE IS** all about fighting until you're the only one left standing. To do that you are going to need to get your hands on some gear; the map is littered with items, from long-range weapons to support items, such as shield potions and bandages, and you'll need to get as much of this as you can before you begin fighting players. Weapons come in several varieties and rarities. You want to keep an eye out for anything with a coloured aura around it and, as a general rule, the higher tier of rarity the more powerful and useful it will be. If you see something glowing purple, orange or gold grab it *at all costs*.



## PICK YOUR BATTLES

■ **JUST BECAUSE YOU** managed to luck your way into getting that gear and those lovely resources doesn't mean that you should immediately start charging towards the first person that you come across. It's actually surprisingly easy to get into the final 15, you just need to avoid dangerous combat situations wherever possible and pick your battles. What we are trying to say is only engage with another

player when you're absolutely certain that you can win it. Noise will attract the attention of other players and that's the last thing you want to be dealing with. If it does go all wrong for you, try to think creatively to get out of trouble by utilizing the build menu and, most importantly, learn from your mistakes. The quickest way to get better at the game is by observing other players and attempting to imitate.



## BE WARY OF STRUCTURES

■ **AS THE PLAYER** numbers begin to dwindle and the circle starts getting really tight, you'll likely notice some pretty radical player fortifications – towers and strongholds – beginning to pop up around you. You should avoid approaching them if you can, as it means another player is in there and has the higher

ground. If you *do* need to attack one of these player build structures try to use weapons with a high-rate of fire or explosives to attack the base of the structure. Basically, if you see a building going up you should be prepared for a tough battle – it is absolutely a viable tactic to run off in another direction.

## TROPHY GUIDE

## PS PLUS TROPHY GUIDE



## BEYOND: TWO SOULS

PLATFORM: PS4 DIFFICULTY: 3/5

TROPHIES: 46 🏆 1 🏆 3 🏆 6 🏆 36

■ **QUANTIC DREAM IS** known for making a certain style of videogame, narrative-driven dramas where choice and consequence is everything. While they are a lot of fun to play they do also take quite a bit of time to complete, so you better believe that *Beyond: Two Souls* is going to make you work hard for that Platinum Trophy. We're talking two (if not three) complete runs through the game, with a total time of 30-40 hours on the clock. That's a lot of work but, thankfully, *Beyond* happens to have a pretty engrossing story with plenty of twists and turns. Most of the Trophies are tied directly to decisions and endings so we won't spoil any of those here but rest assured you'll be better served taking your time with this one and getting as much out of the experience as your possibly can. We promise that you'll have a good time with it!



## RAYMAN LEGENDS

PLATFORM: PS4 DIFFICULTY: 5/5

TROPHIES: 38 🏆 1 🏆 4 🏆 12 🏆 21

■ **JUST TO BE** perfectly clear, we aren't saying that it is *impossible* to obtain a Platinum Trophies on *Rayman Legends*, it just so happens to be incredibly difficult... so incredibly difficult, in fact, that it may indeed be virtually impossible. That isn't because the game itself is difficult – you may find little difficulty spikes here and there but for the most part it is pretty delightful – but because the only way that Platinum Trophy is unlocking is if you somehow conquer the online challenges and grind out Awesomeness Levels. If you want any hope of doing this we recommend that you get on top of the daily online challenges as soon as the game will let you and don't let up!





## RISEN 3: TITAN LORDS

PLATFORM: PS3 DIFFICULTY: 2/5

TROPHIES: 51 🏆 1 🏆 3 🏆 5 🏆 42

■ **WHILE WE DO** quite enjoy a bit of Risen action from time-to-time it presents something of a problem for you Trophy hunters out there. You see, when it comes to *Risen 3: Titan Lords* you'll find that the *grind is real*. You'll need to make tactical saves ahead of joining a Faction, there are Trophies tied to each of them; you'll also need to watch the morality system closely, as there is another Trophy waiting for those that finish the game with a soul level lower than ten. Conversely, you'll also need to grind out 2,000 kills if you want any shot at the Platinum which, we can assure you from experience, takes one hell of a long time. *Risen 3* is a fun and deep RPG, but it's also a bit of a pain for those looking for quick Trophies.

“IT IS A PAIN FOR THOSE  
LOOKING FOR QUICK  
AND EASY TROPHIES”

## EAT THEM!

PLATFORM: PS3 DIFFICULTY: 2/5

TROPHIES: 13 🏆 0 🏆 1 🏆 3 🏆 9

■ **IF YOU HAVE** ten hours to spare then you can find yourself as the proud owner of 13 brand new Trophies. *Eat Them* isn't a difficult game, in fact, it's pretty damned easy going. Smashing through your first run of the levels will actually net you the vast majority of the medals but you may need to make a second pass to ensure you have all of the Gold rewards. If anything is going to trip you up it will be the Trophies associated with causing maximum carnage, so play close attention to the state of the arenas and make sure that literally everything is levelled to the ground to mop those final few rewards up.



## KING ODDBALL

PLATFORM: PS4/PS VITA DIFFICULTY: 2/5

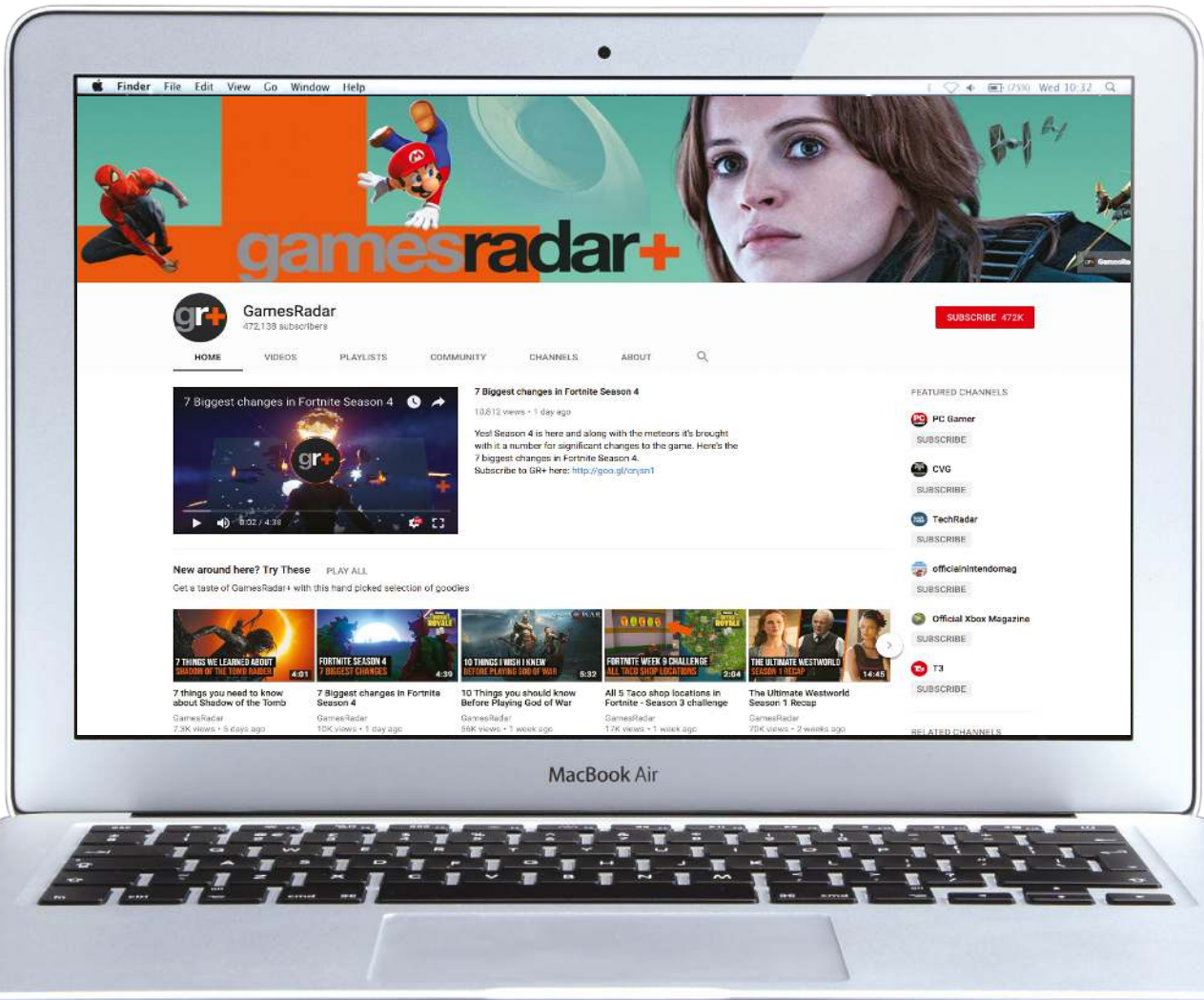
TROPHIES: 16 🏆 0 🏆 1 🏆 2 🏆 15

■ **THIS SIMPLE PHYSICS** based puzzle game sees you flinging rocks at a world you are eager to destroy. Listen, the setup isn't going to win any awards but that's okay, because at least the gameplay is pretty damned fun. With just 16 Trophies on offer you'll likely find that this takes more work than it is worth, but essentially you need to keep your eyes on completing every one of the bonus One Rock and Grenade levels and then, once you've nailed all 131 levels, prepare to redo each and every one of them using just two rocks to best every challenge. It isn't super difficult but it is a little time consuming.

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### FORTNITE SEASON 4



**SEASON 4 OF Fortnite: Battle Royale** has brought about a number of significant changes, get the low down on all of them right here.

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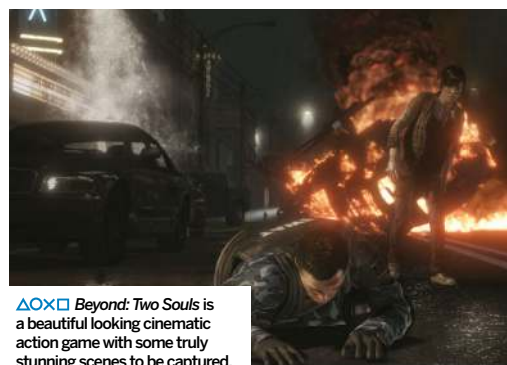
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- 1** Search for Play\_Mag\_UK in the Friends menu, select our profile, then navigate down to 'Communities'.
- 2** Press X to open the Play Community, then press X again to join it. Welcome to the family!

## SEND US YOUR BEST SCREENS



△○×□ *God Of War* might just be one of the best looking games ever made and we need to see all of your awesome photography!



△○×□ *Beyond: Two Souls* is a beautiful looking cinematic action game with some truly stunning scenes to be captured.



△○×□ *No Man's Sky* just received a pretty sizable update, so get your best looking ship and take it space-side already.

YOU HAVEN'T PLAYED... ?

# NO MAN'S SKY

Hello Games has turned an excellent idea into a truly excellent experience in the last 12 months. This is one space sim that you *need* to try for yourself to truly appreciate.



■ **HAVE YOU EVER** dreamt that you were exploring space, plotting a course through the stars and leaving your mark on planets across the universe? You have? Then you really should be playing *No Man's Sky*! This ever-expanding space exploration sim is one of a kind, a strange and surreal experience from developer Hello Games.

In *No Man's Sky* you jet from planet to planet, gathering resources, learning ancient languages, discovering new mysteries to solve and, occasionally, will be forced to befriend or battle alien life-forms both on the ground and out of atmosphere. This is a slow and solitary adventure, but it's one that displays a startling amount of beauty; every one of the planets in *No Man's*

*Sky* is procedurally generated, which is to say that they are practically unique. When you discover a planet for the first time you are given the opportunity to name it, casting the name and its newly generated ecosystem in stone for other players to later stumble upon. You see, *No Man's Sky* isn't technically an MMO, though there are millions of other real-world adventurers out there all discovering and leaving their mark on the galaxy simultaneously.

Hello Games has done a phenomenal job in keeping *No Man's Sky* feeling fresh over the last year. The studio has continued to defy expectation, releasing updates that build out the single-player story, introduce base-building, and so much more. You really should check it out.

## THE BEST BITS

Three of our favourite parts of *No man's Sky*



## THE BEAUTY

*No Man's Sky* is a truly beautiful game. It's the sort of thing you want to relax with after a long day at work.



## THE WORLDS

The planets in *No Man's Sky* are procedurally generated, meaning you never know what you might find.



## THE STARS

You can blast straight off from the surface of a planet and into the stars with no loading screen. It's awesome.



# FOR PEOPLE WHO ♥ RETRO GAMES

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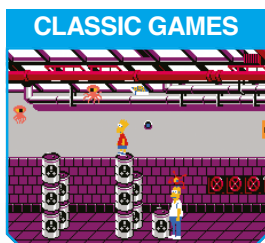


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# PLAY+PLUS PlayList

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT A GAME SCORED THEN THESE PAGES ARE FOR YOU

## LET'S PLAY... OFFICE FAVOURITES



### FORTNITE BATTLE ROYALE

Okay, so we need help. We can't stop playing *Fortnite: Battle Royale*. It's all we think about, it's all we talk about and I'm pretty sure we have started having dreams about it too. *Fortnite* is ruining our lives in the best way possible.



### FIFA 18

With the World Cup almost upon us we have decided to dip back into EA's latest in an effort to re-learn all of the controls in preparation of the inevitable office tournament. Listen, we aren't coming in last... not after what happened last time.



### DESTINY 2

With Bungie continuing to do excellent work updating *Destiny 2* ever since its launch last Winter, we have now found ourselves back for another round of shooting 'n' looting. It feels better than ever, so if you're thinking about giving it a try now is the time!



### THE ELDER SCROLLS ONLINE

With a brand new expansion on the way we have dipped back into *TESO* in an effort to tie up any loose quest ends and get our characters in fighting shape for all of that lovely new content coming our way. There aren't enough hours in the day for this.

## PS4

GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
Absolver	286	7
Abzu	273	7
Agents Of Mayhem	286	4
Alekhine's Gun	270	3
Alien: Isolation	249	9
Alienation	270	8
Amplitude	266	8
Arizona Sunshine	285	5
Arslan: The Warriors Of Legend	268	5
Assassin's Creed Chronicles: China	257	7
Assassin's Creed Chronicles: India	266	7
Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag	237	8
Assassin's Creed Syndicate	264	4
Assassin's Creed: Unity	251	6
A Way Out	293	8
Axiom Verge	256	9
Batman: Arkham Knight	258	9
Batman: The Telltale Series - Episode One	274	4
Battle Chasers: Nightwar	287	5
Battleborn	271	6
Battlefield 1	276	7
Battlefield 4	238	8
Battlefield Hardline	256	7
BioShock: The Collection	275	7
Black The Fall	284	5
Blazblue Central Fiction	277	8
Blazblue Chronophantasma Extend	264	9
Bloodborne	256	9
Bloodborne: The Old Hunters	265	9
Bound	274	7
Bound By Flame	245	6
Broforce	268	6
Call Of Duty: Advanced Warfare	251	8
Call Of Duty: Black Ops III	264	8
Call Of Duty: Ghosts	238	7
Call Of Duty: Infinite Warfare	276	5
Celeste	292	9
Child Of Light	244	7
Crash Bandicoot: N. Sane Trilogy	284	8
DariusBurst: Chronicle Saviours	266	8
Dark Souls III	269	9
Day Of The Tentacle Remastered	269	8
Daylight	245	2
Dead Nation: Apocalypse Edition	242	7
Dead Or Alive 5: Last Round	254	7
Destiny	249	9
Destiny: House Of Wolves	258	8
Destiny: Rise Of Iron	275	8
Destiny: The Dark Below	252	7
Destiny: The Taken King	262	9
Destiny 2	286	8
Deus Ex: Mankind Divided	274	6
Devil May Cry 4: Special Edition	258	8
Diablo III: Reaper Of Souls	248	9
Dirt 4	284	9
Dirt Rally	269	9
Dishonored 2	277	9
Disney Infinity 2.0	249	8
Disidia NT Final Fantasy	293	6
Divinity: Original Sin Enhanced Edition	264	8
Doom	271	8
Dragon Age: Inquisition	251	8
Dragon Ball Xenoverse	255	5
Dragon Ball FighterZ	291	9
Dragon Quest Builders	276	8
Dragon Quest Heroes	263	8
Dragon Quest Heroes 2	283	6
Drawn To Death	281	6
Driveclub	250	8
Dying Light	254	9
Dynasty Warriors 9	293	5
EA Sports UFC 3	292	8
Enter The Gungeon	269	8

GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
Ether One	258	8
Everybody's Golf	287	7
Everybody's Gone To The Rapture	261	8
Everything	282	7
Evolve	254	6
Extinction	294	4
Fallout 4	264	9
Far Cry 4	251	8
Far Cry 5	293	7
Far Cry Primal	268	8
Farpoint	283	8
Fez	243	10
Fe	293	6
FIFA 16	262	9
FIFA 17	275	8
Final Fantasy Type-0	255	8
Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn	243	9
Final Fantasy XV	277	9
Firewatch	267	6
Forgotton Anne	294	6
Furi	272	8
Game Of Thrones: Iron From Ice	253	8
Geometry Wars 3: Dimensions	252	9
Get Even	284	7
Ghost Recon: Wildlands	280	5
Gnog	283	7
God Of War	294	9
God Of War III Remastered	260	8
Grand Theft Auto V	251	10
Gravity Rush 2	279	8
Grim Fandango Remastered	254	8
Guilty Gear Xrd -Revelator-	272	9
Guilty Gear Xrd REV 2	283	9
Guilty Gear Xrd -SIGN-*	253	9
Guitar Hero Live	264	8
Hand Of Fate 2	289	8
Headlander	273	6
Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice	285	8
Hidden Agenda	289	5
Hitman	268	9
Hohokum	248	8
Homefront: The Revolution	271	6
Horizon: Zero Dawn	279	9
Hotline Miami 2: Wrong Number	255	9
I Am Setsuna	273	8
inFamous: First Light	249	5
inFamous: Second Son	242	8
Injustice 2	283	8
Invisible, Inc.	270	9
Just Cause 3	265	7
JStars Victory VS+	260	6
Killing Floor 2	277	6
Killzone Shadow Fall	238	8
Kingdom Come Deliverance	292	4
King Of Fighters XIV	274	7
King's Quest: A Knight To Remember	261	8
Knack	238	6
Knack 2	286	5
Lara Croft And The Temple Of Osiris	252	5
Lawbreakers	286	7
Lego Batman 3: Beyond Gotham	252	6
Lego Dimensions	263	7
Lego Marvel Super Heroes	238	8
Lego Marvel Super Heroes 2	289	7
Lego Jurassic World	258	7
Lego Star Wars: The Force Awakens	273	6
Lego The Hobbit	244	6
Lego Worlds	280	6
Little Nightmares	282	8
Life Is Strange: Before The Storm	290	8
LittleBigPlanet 3	251	9
Lords Of The Fallen	251	7
Lost Sphear	291	5
Lumo	271	7
Madden '16	262	8
Madden '17	274	9
Mad Max	262	4
Mafia 3	276	8

GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
Marvel Vs. Capcom: Infinite	287	6
Mass Effect: Andromeda	281	5
Matterfall	285	6
Mercenary Kings	244	8
Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes	242	8
Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain	261	9
Metal Gear Survive	292	5
Middle-earth: Shadow Of Mordor	250	8
Middle-earth: Shadow Of War	287	7
Minit	294	8
Mirror's Edge: Catalyst	272	6
Monster Hunter World	291	7
Mortal Kombat X	257	9
Murdered: Soul Suspect	246	4
N++	261	8
NBA 2K17	275	8
Need For Speed Payback	289	4
Need For Speed Rivals	238	8
NHL 15	249	6
Nidhogg 2	286	7
Nier Automata	280	8
Nioh	279	8
No Man's Sky	274	8
Not A Hero	267	6
Nuclear Throne	266	8
Observer	287	7
Octodad: Dadliest Catch	244	6
Outlast	241	7
Outlast 2	282	8
Overcooked	273	9
Overwatch	271	8
Oxenfree	271	6
Pac-Man Championship Edition 2	275	6
Persona 5	280	9
PES 2016	262	9
PES 2017	275	8
Planet Of The Apes: Last Frontier	290	5
Plants Vs Zombies: Garden Warfare 2	268	8
Prey	282	7
Prison Architect	273	8
Project Cars	258	6
Project Cars 2	287	9
Puyo Puyo Tetris	282	8
Pyre	285	8
Rainbow Six Siege	265	8
Ratchet & Clank	269	8
République	268	7
Resident Evil HD	253	8
Resident Evil 7	279	9
Resident Evil Revelations 2	256	7
Resogun	238	9
Resogun Heroes	247	9
Rime	284	6
Robinson: The Journey	277	6
Rock Band 4	263	7
Rocket League	260	8
Rogue Legacy	248	9
Salt And Sanctuary	269	8
Sébastien Loeb Rally Evo	267	5
Serial Cleaner	286	8
Shadow Of The Colossus	291	9
Shantae: Half-Genie Hero	279	8
Sheltered	270	9
Sherlock Holmes: The Devil's Daughter	272	6
Shinies: The Lightning Kingdom	282	8
Shovel Knight	258	9
Skylanders Imaginators	276	7
Skylanders Swap Force	238	7
Skylanders Trap Team	250	7
Sniper Elite 4	280	8
Sniper: Ghost Warrior 3	282	5
SOMA	262	8
Songbringer	287	7
Mad Max	262	4
Sonic Forces	289	7
Star Ocean: Integrity And Faithlessness	273	6
Star Wars Battlefront	265	6

# THIS MONTH'S NEW ENTRIES

The newest games, freshly squeezed among all your old favourites

God Of War	9
Forgotton Anne	8
Minit	8
The Swords Of Ditto	6
Extinction	4

GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
Star Wars Battlefront II	289	6
Statik	282	8
Star Trek: Bridge Crew	284	8
Street Fighter V	267	9
Styx: Shards Of Darkness	280	6
Super Time Force Ultra	262	9
Switch Galaxy Ultra	253	8
Syberia 3	283	2
Tales From The Borderlands: Zer0 Sum	252	7
Tales Of Berseria	279	7
Tearaway Unfolded	262	7
Tekken 7	284	8
Teslagrad	253	7
The Banner Saga 2	272	8
The Binding Of Isaac: Rebirth	251	9
The Crew	252	5
The Escapists 2	286	7
The Evil Within	250	8
The Last Guardian	278	6
<b>The Last Of Us Remastered</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>10</b>
The Order: 1886	254	8
The Surge	283	7
The Sims 4	290	6
The Swords Of Ditto	294	6
The Vanishing Of Ethan Carter	260	8
The Walking Dead Season 3 E1&2	278	5
<b>The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>The Witness</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>10</b>
Thief	241	7
Thimbleweed Park	285	7
This War Of Mine: The Little Ones	267	7
Titan Souls	257	7
Titanfall 2	276	7
Tokyo 42	284	7
Tom Clancy's The Division	268	9
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 5	263	3
Torment: Tides Of Numenera	280	8
Toukiden 2	281	8
TrackMania Turbo	269	8
Transformers: Devastation	263	8
Transformers: Rise Of The Dark Spark	247	3
Transistor	245	9
Trials Fusion	244	8
Ultra Street Fighter IV	258	8
Umbrella Corps	272	3
<b>Uncharted 4: A Thief's End</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>10</b>
Uncharted: The Lost Legacy	285	9
Uncharted: The Nathan Drake Collection	263	8
Unravel	267	7
Until Dawn	261	8
Valiant Hearts	247	6
Virginia	275	8
Warhammer 40K: Deathwatch	280	7
Wasteland 2: Director's Cut	264	8
Watch Dogs	245	8
Watch Dogs 2	278	7
What Remains Of Edith Finch	283	9
Windjammers	287	6
Wolfenstein: The New Order	245	8
Wolfenstein: The Old Blood	258	8
Wonder Boy: The Dragon's Trap	283	7
World Of Final Fantasy	276	7
WWE 2K16	264	5
XCOM 2	275	9
Yakuza 0	279	9
Yakuza 6: The Song Of Life	293	7
Yooka-Laylee	281	6

GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
Aliens Vs Predator	189	7
Alpha Protocol	193	8
Amy	215	1
Arcana Heart 3	207	7
Armored Core V	217	6
Army Of Two	164	8
Army Of Two: The 40th Day	188	6
Army Of Two: The Devil's Cartel	231	4
Assassin's Creed	161	5
Assassin's Creed II	186	9
Assassin's Creed III	225	7
Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood	199	9
Assassin's Creed: Revelations	212	7
Assassin's Creed: Rogue	251	7
Asura's Wrath	216	7
Atelier Ayesha: The Alchemist Of Dust	230	6
Batman: Arkham Asylum	183	8
Batman: Arkham City	211	9
Batman: Arkham Origins	237	8
Battle Fantasia	176	7
Battlefield 1943	182	9
Battlefield: Bad Company	168	8
Battlefield: Bad Company 2	190	9
Battlefield 3	212	8
Battleship	219	4
Bayonetta*	187	9
The Beatles: Rock Band	184	9
Beat Hazard Ultra	213	7
Beat Sketcher	201	8
Beyond Good & Evil HD	207	8
Beyond: Two Souls	236	7
Binary Domain	216	7
Bionic Commando	179	8
Bionic Commando Rearmed	169	8
Bionic Commando Rearmed 2	203	6
BioShock	172	9
BioShock 2	189	8
BioShock Infinite	230	9
BlackSite	163	4
Bladestorm: The Hundred Years' War	160	5
BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger	190	8
BlazBlue: Continuum Shift	198	9
Blur	193	8
Borderlands	185	8
Borderlands 2	223	9
Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel	250	6
The Bourne Conspiracy	168	7
Braid	188	9
Brothers: A Tale Of Two Sons	233	8
Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway	171	7
Brütal Legend	185	7
Bulletstorm	203	8
The Bureau: XCOM Declassified	235	5
Burnout Paradise	162	8
Call Of Duty 3	151	5
Call Of Duty: World At War	173	6
Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	160	9
Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2	186	9
Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 3	212	8
Call Of Duty: Black Ops	199	9
Call Of Duty: Black Ops II	226	8
Call Of Duty: Bound In Blood	181	8
Call Of Juarez: Gunslinger	232	8
Call Of Juarez: The Cartel	208	3
Captain America: Super Soldier	208	7
Castle Crashers	200	9
Castlevania: Harmony Of Despair	212	7
Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow	197	9
Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow 2	241	8
Catherine	215	6
Chronicles Of Riddick: Assault On Dark Athena	178	8
Civilization Revolution	168	9
Clive Barker's Jericho	159	6
The Club	163	8
Colin McRae: DiRT	158	9
Colin McRae: DiRT 2	184	8
Conan	160	7
Condemned 2	165	7

GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
Costume Quest	199	7
Counter Strike: Global Offensive	223	9
Crysis 2	204	7
Crysis 3	230	6
Damage Inc: Pacific Squadron WWII	223	3
Dante's Inferno	189	8
The Darkness	154	9
The Darkness II	215	7
Dark Sector	165	6
Dark Souls	211	9
Dark Souls II	242	9
Darkstalkers Resurrection	230	8
Dark Void	188	8
Darksiders	188	8
Darksiders II	221	8
DC Universe Online	202	8
Dead Or Alive 5	223	7
Dead Island	210	7
Dead Island: Riptide	231	6
Dead Rising 2	197	8
Dead Space	172	9
Dead Space 2	201	9
Dead Space 3	228	7
Deadly Premonition: The Director's Cut	231	8
Deadpool	233	6
Demon's Souls	193	9
Destroy All Humans: Path Of The Furon	178	2
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	209	9
Devil May Cry 4	163	9
Devil May Cry HD Collection	217	8
DIRT 3	206	8
DIRT Showdown	219	7
Dishonored	224	9
Disney Infinity	235	8
DJ Hero	186	9
DJ Hero 2	198	8
Doctor Who: The Eternity Clock	220	3
DmC Devil May Cry	227	9
Dragon Age: Origins	186	8
Dragon Age II	203	6
Dragon's Crown	235	8
Dragon's Dogma	218	8
Driver: San Francisco	209	7
Duke Nukem Forever	207	3
Dungeon Siege III	206	8
Dynasty Warriors 8	234	7
EA Sports MMA	198	8
Eat Lead	178	3
echochrome	169	8
EDF: Insect Armageddon	208	6
Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	152	9
Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	212	9
Elefunk	170	4
El Shaddai: Ascension Of The Metatron	208	7
Enslaved: Odyssey To The West	197	8
Epic Mickey 2: The Power Of Two	226	5
Eternal Sonata	176	8
Everybody's Golf: World Tour	165	9
<b>Fallout 3</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>10</b>
Fallout: New Vegas	198	8
Fantastic Four: Rise Of The Silver Surfer	155	3
Far Cry 2	172	7
Far Cry 3	226	8
Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon	231	8
FEAR	151	8
FEAR 2: Project Origin	176	8
FEAR 3	208	6
Fight Night Champion	203	8
Fight Night Round 4	181	8
Final Fantasy XIII	190	8
Final Fantasy XIII-2	214	8
Final Fantasy XIII: Lightning Returns	240	8
Fist Of The North Star: Ken's Rage	198	5
Folklore	158	6
Front Mission Evolved	198	5
Fuse	232	7

\*denotes import review

## TEN YEARS AGO BEST REVIEWS (166)



1 Grand Theft Auto IV (98%)



2 Time Crisis 4 (69%)



3 Wild ARMs 5 (60%)



4 Iron Man (58%)

# PS3



3D Dot Game Heroes	192	8
50 Cent: Blood On The Sand	177	7
Ace Combat: Assault Horizon	211	7
The Adventures Of Tintin	212	5
Alice: Madness Returns	207	6
Aliens: Colonial Marines	230	4

## PLAY'S BEST GAMES IF YOU LOVE...



### SHOOTING GUNS PLAY: TITANFALL 2

It might not have gotten the love and attention it so clearly deserved, but *Titanfall 2* is one of the best multiplayer shooters of this generation! It also happens to have a pretty rad single player to it too.



### GREAT VR PLAY: BATMAN: ARKHAM VR

Take on the role of one of the very best superheroes of all time. This wicked little VR experience is surprisingly excellent, giving you an opportunity to slip on the iconic cowl and roam the rooftops of Gotham.



### DRIVING FAST CARS PLAY: BURNOUT PARADISE

EA put out a truly wonderful HD remaster of *Burnout Paradise* earlier this year and let us tell you, it hasn't lost any of its allure. It's fast, it's furious and it is one hell of a good time!



### INDIE CLASSICS PLAY: FEZ

A beautiful example of how intuitive and ingenious videogames can truly be. *Fez* has some mind bending puzzles, but it's well worth taking the time to figure it out and uncover all of its secrets.



### CRAZY HARD PUZZLES PLAY: THE WITNESS

We aren't sure why Jonathan Blow is so intent on breaking our brains. *The Witness* is clearly brilliant but it's also clearly ridiculous, one of the toughest puzzle games around. Don't forget to bring your graph paper.

GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
Genji: Days Of The Blade	151	3
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2	157	8
Ghost Recon Future Soldier	219	6
GI Joe	183	2
The Godfather	151	3
The Godfather II	178	4
God Of War III	190	9
God Of War: Ascension	230	9
God Of War Collection*	188	9
God Of War Collection: Volume II	210	7
Gotham City Imposters	216	7
Gran Turismo 5	200	8
Gran Turismo 6	239	8
Grand Theft Auto IV	166	9
<b>Grand Theft Auto V</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>10</b>
Greed Corp	191	7
Grid 2	232	7
Grid Autosport	246	6
GTT Club+	174	7
GTA: Episodes From Liberty City	191	9
Guardians Of Middle-earth	227	7
Guitar Hero III	160	9
Guitar Hero 5	184	8
Guitar Hero Greatest Hits	182	7
Guitar Hero Metallica	179	8
Guitar Hero: Van Halen	189	6
Guitar Hero: Warriors Of Rock	197	7
Guitar Hero World Tour	173	9
Gundemonium Collection	197	8
Gunstar Heroes	181	8
Harry Potter And The Half-Blood Prince	182	6
Harry Potter And The Order Of The Phoenix	155	3
Haze	167	6
Heavenly Sword	157	7
Heavy Rain	189	9
Heavy Weapon	187	7
Heroes Over Europe	184	4
Hitman: Absolution	225	9
Hitman HD Trilogy	230	7
Homefront	203	6
The House Of The Dead 4	218	8
The House Of The Dead: Overkill	212	7
Hunted: The Demon's Forge	207	5
Hustle Kings	190	8
Hyperdimension Neptunia	202	2
I Am Alive	217	6
Ico & Shadow Of The Colossus HD	210	9
The Incredible Hulk	168	5
Infamous	180	8
infamous 2	207	8
Inferno Pool	181	8
Injustice: Gods Among Us	231	8
Inversion	220	4
Iron Man	166	5
Iron Man 2	193	5
The Jak And Daxter Trilogy	216	8
Jak And Daxter: The Lost Frontier	187	5
James Bond 007: Blood Stone	199	6
James Cameron's Avatar: The Game	187	6
JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: All Star Battle	244	8
Journey	216	9
Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights	159	7
Jurassic Park: The Game	194	6
Just Cause 2	190	8
Kane & Lynch: Dead Men	160	7
Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days	196	7
Katamari Forever	184	8
Kick-Ass The Game	194	6
Killer Is Dead	235	7
Killzone 2	176	9
Killzone 3	202	8
Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 ReMIX	236	8
Kingdom Hearts 2.5 HD ReMIX	252	9
Kingdoms Of Amalur: Reckoning	215	7
The King Of Fighters XII	182	7
The King Of Fighters XIII	213	8
Kung Fu Panda 2	207	2
LA Noire	206	9
Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light	198	9
The Last Guy	171	9
Last Rebellion	191	4
Legend Of Spyro: Dawn Of The Dragon	174	5
Legendary	173	6
Lego Batman	173	6
Lego Batman 2	221	8
Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4	194	7
Lego Harry Potter: Years 5-7	213	6

GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
Lego Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	167	7
Lego Indiana Jones 2: The Adventure Continues	187	7
Lego Pirates Of The Caribbean	206	7
Lego Rock Band	187	8
Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga	160	7
Lego Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	204	8
Lego The Lord Of The Rings	227	7
Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust	180	2
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*Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance* is another world-class entry in gaming's most fundamentally playable genre.

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**XCOM: Enemy Unknown** Thinking, planning, failing and dying is back in fashion. XCOM is a phenomenal reimagining of a classic title and an instant classic in its own right.

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## WHAT WE'RE PLAYING...

Watch out! Games!



**WHAT** (have they been playing?)  
**God Of War**

**WHY** (was it chosen?)  
Because what else is there?

**JOSH WEST**

I NEVER REALLY believed that Sony Santa Monica would be able to pull it off. That isn't to say that I thought the studio would release a bad game – that couldn't be any further from the truth – I just didn't expect that it would be able to unleash something so hellishly groundbreaking. *God Of War* is an incredible work; Sony Santa Monica has taken elements of the past games and brought them forward through time, letting them mature and breathe a little before giving them a swift kick up the ass. This, my friends, is *God Of War* reborn. I mean, sure, Kratos is still quite clearly full of a murderous anger and burning hot rage, but then I never really expected him to change all that much. But everything else around him has.

The combat is incredible, fluid and visceral in a way that I never really believed it would (or could) be; the game world itself is sensational too, this is clearly one of the most visually appealing videogames ever made. That isn't hyperbole either, *God Of War* looks freaking incredible. Honestly, if you don't already own a 4K TV and a PS4 Pro I'm afraid that this will inevitably become the excuse that you've been looking – it's time to empty out the ol' bank account.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that I always expected *God Of War* to be brilliant fun but I never thought, not even for a second, that it would be so transformative. It has set a bar for the action genre that is so high that few are even going to come close to matching its splendour. It doesn't matter if you loved or loathed the original trilogy of games, this is one *God Of War* experience you need to play.

\*denotes import review

# GOING OVERGROUND METRO EXODUS

We break down all of the essential info and get exclusive new details on Metro's earth-shattering return

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