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→ NEW INTERVIEW

MASS EFFECT IS BACK

How EA is Shepharding in a new era of remakes

FINAL FANTASY XIV: ENDWALKER

EXCLUSIVE ACCESS

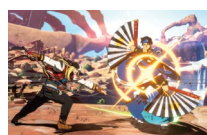
Naoki Yoshida takes the online RPG to the moon on PS5

→ DEV INTERVIEW

OUTRIDERS – DIABLO WITH HUGE GUNS?

Don't miss PS4 and PS5's hottest summer shooter

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→ FIRST PLAY
WHY GUILTY GEAR STRIVE IS A SMASH
We go hands-on with the year's best new brawler



→ INTERVIEW
25 YEARS OF TOMB RAIDER
Crystal Dynamics reveals its year of Lara surprises





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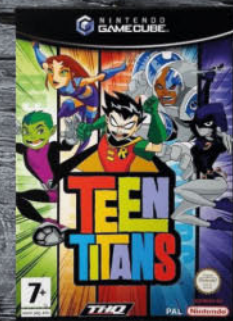
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>Welcome



It's underpinned PlayStation since the 1990s and has succeeded in step with each console generation. Now Final Fantasy is set for PlayStation 5 and it's poised to usher in a new era of RPGs on

Sony's new-gen console. This issue we take a look at the future of RPGs.

We sit down with series producer and legendary developer Naoki Yoshida to discover his views on PlayStation 5 and where he intends to take Final Fantasy.

On p50 you can discover what's new in Final Fantasy XIV (Yoshida's phenomenal online RPG), and how forthcoming expansion Endwalker is literally taking us to the moon. This is Square Enix's first Final Fantasy on PS5, and marks a line in the sand between the past and the future. It's an important release.

What happens with Endwalker may affect how the developer approaches its PS5-

“THIS IS THE FIRST FINAL FANTASY ON PS5 [...] ENDWALKER IS AN IMPORTANT RELEASE.”

exclusive numbered entry, Final Fantasy XVI. On p58 we take a closer look at this epic in the making and detail the ten reasons you need to put this one at the top of your PS5's most-wanted list. Powered by PS5, it also has one eye on the past with a high fantasy setting not seen in the series for quite some time.

Knowing where Final Fantasy has come from is important too, and this issue we bravely rank every numbered entry playable on PlayStation. Our No.1 may surprise you.

The RPG theme runs through more pages this issue. We take a closer look at Mass Effect Legendary Edition on p34, and BioWare's Mac Walters explains how this series is making use of current consoles. On p46 we meet the team behind The Elder Scrolls Online's new expansion, Blackwood. If you like your RPGs with more firepower, then People Can Fly devs share why Outriders' delay has been a good thing on p6. It's a stat-blast.

Ian Dean
EDITOR

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GAME OF THE MONTH
Control Ultimate Edition
FAVOURITE FINAL FANTASY
Final Fantasy VII



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THIS MONTH'S CHOCOBO-WRANGLERS



Oscar Taylor-Kent
DEPUTY EDITOR

"They're all 10/10," says Oscar. Nevertheless he's ranked every Final Fantasy on p66; ready your hot takes.

GAME OF THE MONTH
The Nioh Collection
FAVOURITE FF
Final Fantasy XII



Jess Kinghorn
GAMES EDITOR

School's not out for Jess as she reviews Little Nightmares II on p78. Is this sequel a class act? Find out this issue.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Can Androids Pray: Blue
FAVOURITE FF
Final Fantasy IX



Miriam McDonald
OPERATIONS EDITOR

Moogoo-loving Mim set about our Final Fantasy special issue with a caffeine boost; a kupo-coffee or five.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Persona 5 Strikers
FAVOURITE FF
Final Fantasy IX



Milford Coppock
MANAGING ART EDITOR

Cloudy with a chance of Lightning? Cid down and take in all of Milf's hard work making our Final Fantasy special.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Control Ultimate Edition
FAVOURITE FF
Final Fantasy VI



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ENDWALKER

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Final Fantasy XVI

From real-time combat to a darker tone, ten reasons why the next Final Fantasy will be a must-play



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“THESE CONFRONTATIONS GET RIGHT TO THE HORROR OF CHILDHOOD POWERLESSNESS.”

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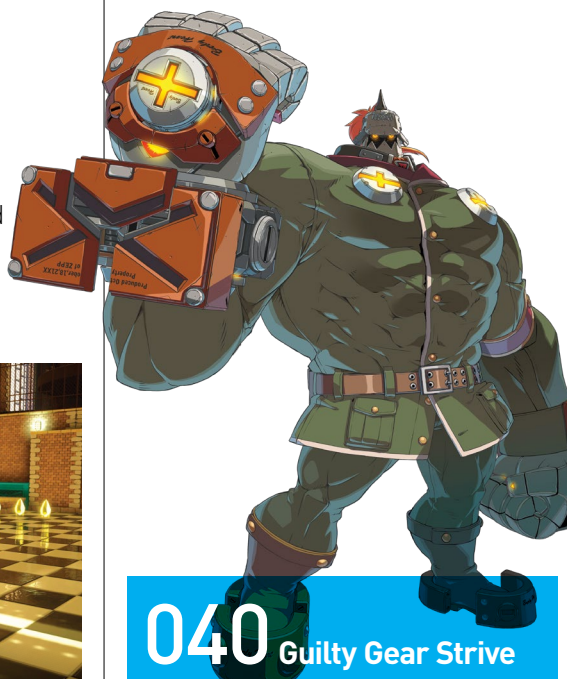
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Getting you closer to PlayStation's most exciting stories, people, and culture

Build your own unique character from rare loot earned in the game.

▶ You can transfer your progress to the [retail] game. You won't have to start from scratch. ▶

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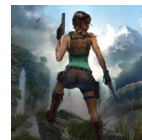
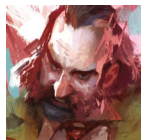
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Crystal Dynamics on 25 years of Lara Croft



Outriders shoots back to the top

A recent demo, six months of extra development time... Outriders impresses

People Can Fly's gritty shooter ticks off most of our teenage wish list of killer ideas: guns with elemental powers, RPG-style customisation that floods across everything, a roaring soundtrack, an exotic alien landscape that resembles Avatar remade by Eli Roth, and explosions. Lots of explosions. But of course, you've discovered this for yourself in the free demo, out now.

As the haze settles on the demo, we meet creative director Bartek Kmita and lead designer Piotr Nowakowski, who tell us they're tracking data and player responses to make tweaks to Outriders ahead of release. They also reveal your hard work levelling up your customised character won't go to waste. "You can transfer your progress to the [retail] game," confirms Kmita. "You won't have to start from scratch." The team also tell us there's a free upgrade from PS4 to PS5, and game saves, including your demo data, can be transferred across.

It's just one of the signs People Can Fly has spent the six months granted by the delay polishing its loot-shooter. Every cloud has a silver lining. "A blessing, it's a blessing for us," says Kmita, "because we always want to improve things and make it as polished and as finished as possible for launch. This isn't a game as service so it's quite important for us to have the right product. This additional time was basically needed to finish it as best as we can."

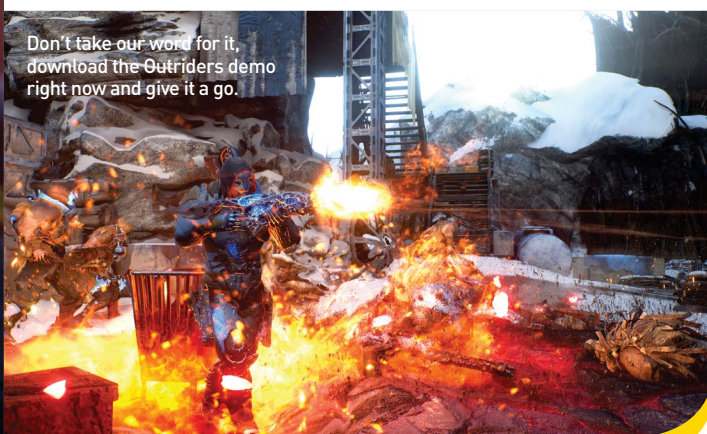
With Outriders releasing in the shadows of similarly positioned games such as Godfall and Marvel's Avengers, we see Kmita and Nowakowski tense up at the suggestion it may get cast in the same light as those RPG-tailored games.

"I like to believe we have our own identity," says Nowakowski. He's right. Outriders is a shooter underpinned by RPG levelling, loot, and weapon crafting. But its loop is different. It boasts a 40-hour campaign that can be played solo or in three-player co-op. Its Tier levelling pushes the balance between risk and reward; the better you do, the higher the AI difficulty and the more exotic the rewards. The story straddles what Kmita calls a "hub and spoke system" – environments laden with side-quests, lore, activities, and storytelling. "You'll learn more about the world and earn rewards," says the developer, but tellingly, "you won't hit a block in the story and need to farm or grind or repeat missions to progress".

ENDLESS TIMES

Where Outriders will stretch its armoured legs is in its endgame offering. Unlike Godfall, for example, Outriders won't be repeating content in its Expeditions. These are challenging post-campaign missions played against the clock, with loot dropped when the last enemy is defeated. The faster and better you perform, the higher the grade of loot you earn. There will be 14 Expeditions missions to plough through, with a 15th ultimate challenge awarded for those who complete the first set.

Adding to the sense of progression in the endgame is news the character cap is set to 30, but gear and weapons can be levelled up to 50, and enemy level AI will upgrade to 50 as you shoot up the Tiers.



Don't take our word for it, download the Outriders demo right now and give it a go.



THINK BIGGER

Outriders features an Ultrawide mode designed to be used with PC monitors, but it will also be compatible with wide screens connected to PS4 and PS5. Is it time to invest and experience games in this new, grand cinematic scale?

It's similar in concept to The Division's World Tiers or Diablo's Torment levels. As we dig into the post-campaign setup we suggest Expeditions has more in common with Diablo than recent loot-shooters.

Kmita agrees: "We drew a lot of inspiration from the Diablo games, so of course our game shares a lot with it, and to be honest we have a lot more in common with RPGs like Diablo, or other adventure games, than with looter-shooters."

DEMO SCENE

Comparisons matter because Outriders' blend of ideas – fast-paced action, RPG loot levelling, and post-game challenge missions – are ideas we've become used to, but there's a magic sauce squirted on here that transcends the core ideas. It's why the playable demo matters. Until you've experienced the game its nuances, such as adaptive AI that reacts to your team's style of play, are hard to sell.

"We have a new IP in a new era, so we've struggled with it," admits Kmita. "That's why we decided to show the game and make this demo live for everyone. We strongly believe when you're playing the game everything starts to be clear."

Nowakowski adds: "We have quite a few interesting solutions in Outriders, and while on the first look they may appear similar to other things known from the other games, in fact they are not exactly like that, so it's challenging to sell these ideas. In the end you feel the game is different [...] something fresh, and it's always challenging."

Outriders has a wealth of ideas. As well as each class' unique abilities, which vary from pulling lava up from below enemies to launching them into the air, we're able to layer elemental powers into our guns. "The game gives you this opportunity to basically build crazy, crazy things," laughs Nowakowski. A shotgun can freeze

enemies in place, for example. And *everything* has a skill tree to tinker with. Classes, weapons, abilities, and mobs fold into one another for unique combinations.

Armour works in a similar way, with new sets boosting a class' innate powers. The Pyromancer's Reforged armour increases the character's power and range of attacks, for example. Nowakowski tells us it's been important to ensure every ability and unlock is visibly represented.

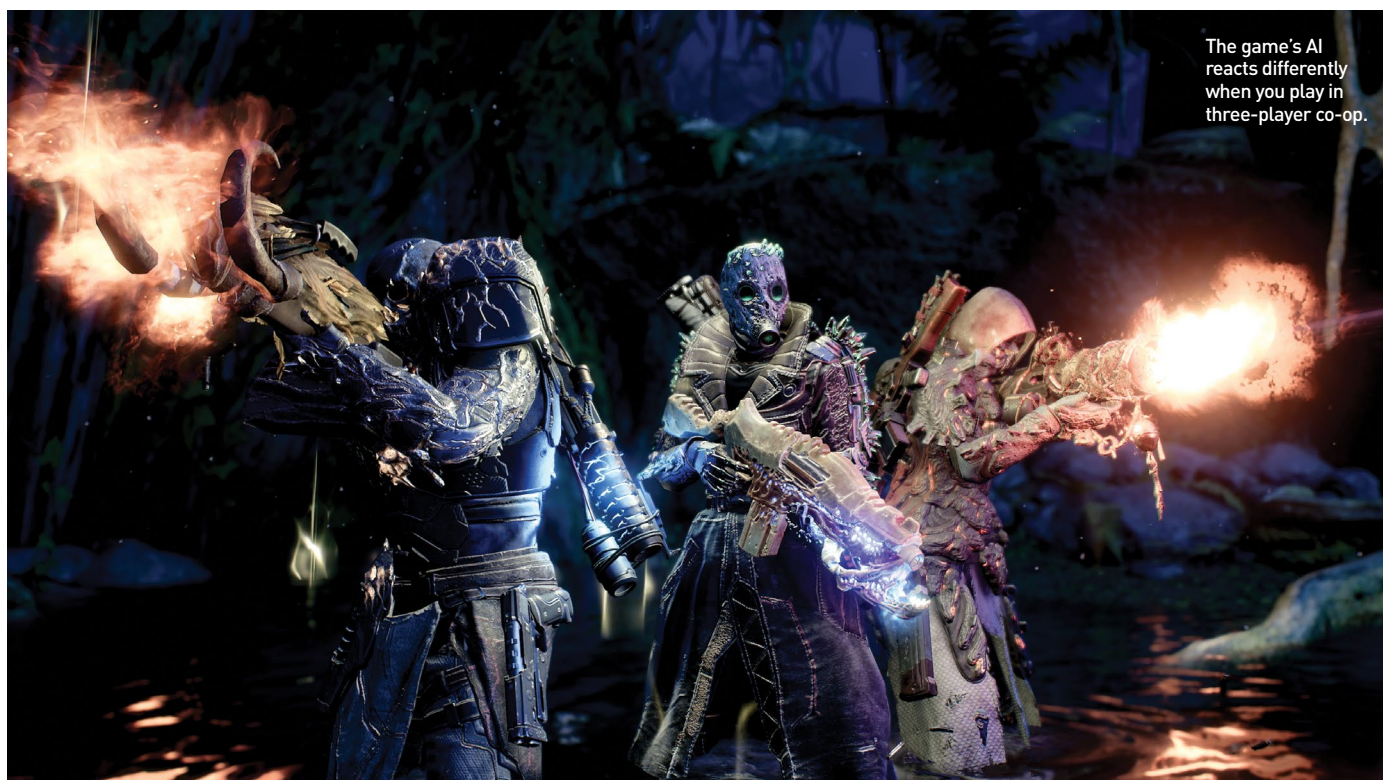
PLAY ON

When it comes to the PS5 edition the developers are keen not to overpromise. The game will run at 4K, 60fps confirms Kmita, but he explains the dev team are still experimenting with the console, and are keen to embrace new technology, such as Unreal Engine 5 (Outriders is built in Unreal Engine 4) for future releases.

Does that mean we'll see a sequel to Outriders or new content set in this universe? "If people like it and will support this idea, then of course we want to be in this world and we want to create more things," says Kmita.

*** Play the Outriders demo now. The full game will be released on 1 April.**

▶ In the end you feel the game is different [...] something fresh, and it's always challenging. ▶



The game's AI reacts differently when you play in three-player co-op.



1



2



3



4



5

1 Side-quests can be found in the combat zones as well as the hub areas, and include Monster Hunts that pit you against boss creatures and their underlings. **2** Complete events and missions to unlock more armour sets. These affect your character's class powers (and look *really good*). **3** Creatures during hunts have exotic names – Bigjaw, Moldfang, and the Oreyard Queen. **4** Forget the 'one look to rule them all' approach of Godfall; every armour set brings a new style in Outriders. **5** Mini-bosses can crop up mid-mission so always prepare for the unexpected.



FUTURE PERFECT

Dreams is impressive, but what features could possibly be added to it? "For me, I honestly don't want anything new. Those things would be nice, but there is already so much in Dreams that I haven't used," says Pixel Gorilla.



Taylor-made news Oscar Taylor-Kent's news slap

When it comes to pure, distilled character action, Japanese developers often offer some of the best, and it seems the hits don't stop coming. Playing **The Nioh Collection** for review this issue, with its satisfying weapons and soulslike action, I couldn't help thinking 'I hope Team Ninja remasters the **Ninja Gaiden** games too.' And the studio is, for PS4 anyway, as **Ninja Gaiden: Master Collection**. Sure, the third game might be a bit iffy, but it's thankfully no **Yaiba Ninja Gaiden Z**, which Team Ninja's blessed us by omitting.

Koei Tecmo hasn't stopped there. Omega Force served up **Persona 5 Strikers**, making us itch for more Warriors-style gameplay. Like Nobunaga Oda and Mitsuhide Akechi stepping onto the battlefield,

Samurai Warriors 5 has arrived. Those two are the focus of this revamp of the 1v1,000 battler (which I've always preferred to **Dynasty Warriors**, to be honest).



Prize Dreams

Media Molecule announces Impys winners



Lock is a devious and immersive puzzler – one of the best we've played in some time.

With Mecha Whale buzzsawing its way on stage, and Pig Detective himself handing out awards, the second annual Impys was the kind of celebration only Media Molecule could pull off. These awards are for creations made using the studio's Dreams software, which enables any PS4 owner to make amazing things. Picking up Creator Of The Year, Creation Of The Year, and Best Gameplay was Pixel Gorilla with first-person puzzler **Lock and Press X To Puzzle** respectively.

"The main reason I'm drawn to puzzle games is they allow me to be ambitious about game design without having to be equally ambitious about the technical aspects of building a game," says Pixel Gorilla. "I think it's very common to want to jump right out of the gates and make a big RPG or a sprawling metroidvania. But those types of games require a ton of work and loads of asset creation to get elevated into something most players would consider a 'full' experience."

Full is the word. Lock is a great Dreams project, but also a great game in its own right when you consider it away from the software. "It's very easy to think because the creation tool is inside a PlayStation it is somehow 'less than', or somehow unable to make 'traditional' games, but this is simply not the case," says Pixel Gorilla. "Dreams as a game creation tool is much more robust than what

existed back in the NES/SNES days.[...] Making games is almost entirely about the design and the idea versus the technology or coding required to make it."

PEN AND PAPER

"The first thing I do is start writing things down. Oftentimes the ideas in my head seem fully fleshed-out, but as soon as I have to put them into real words, all the holes in the idea become obvious," says Pixel Gorilla, when we ask how they start making a new game. "I'm an over-planner so I tend to want to design the whole game out on paper before even touching Dreams." Of course, it's important to be open to changing that plan too. "It's very important that while I'm building the game in Dreams to be open to discovering new things about the game. And to be willing to strip away parts of the game that don't support the most interesting aspects of it," says Pixel Gorilla.

*** Have you made anything in Dreams? Tell us about it at opm@futurenet.com.**

Maestro is Hulk gone bad and mad after all his friends die. For some reason, he hates Hawkeye. Show him the point.



Moving on up

Free PS5 upgrades give PS4 games a second lease of life

The era of the free upgrade is upon us. No longer will we have to kick ourselves for buying the PS4 version of a game just before the new-gen version is announced. In the case of some games, waiting for the new-gen-native versions is actually the better choice (especially when their name rhymes with Hyber Hunk).

Despite a divisive launch, Marvel's Avengers has been quietly tweaked over

past months, refining the surprisingly mechanically fresh online brawler. Dropping 18 March as a free upgrade alongside the Future Imperfect story update, the PS5 version comes with the usual bells and whistles and even hero-specific DualSense haptics. This could give the game the chance to bounce back – if the update adds enough activities to do online, that is.

Meanwhile, Metro Exodus: Enhanced Edition (release date TBC) is another free

upgrade that adds ray tracing and global illumination so the post-apocalypse is finally as shiny as it can be. As 4A Games has been well ahead of the curve when it comes to using new tech, arguably this is the way it's meant to be experienced.

The same could be claimed of Crash 4's 13 March upgrade. It's a tricky platformer, so the responsiveness of 60fps will be transformative (and 4K cartoony vibrant visuals are going to pop).

Bolt on Yakuza: Like A Dragon's recent free PS5 upgrade, and Judgment's (not free) 23 April remaster, and we're just getting started. PS5 is a gem-polishing machine that'd make a jeweller blush.

📌 The PS5 version of Marvel's Avengers comes with the usual bells and whistles and hero-specific DualSense haptics. 📌

*** Playing any of these for on PS5? Tell us what you think opm@futurenet.com.**

DEV Q & A

Dancing onto PlayStation

Helen Hindpere talks to us about bringing ZA/UM's detective RPG Disco Elysium to PS5 and PS4



Lead writer Helen Hindpere told Variety a Disco Elysium TV show is in the works.

Glance at it, and Disco Elysium seems to be cast in the same mould as many other classic RPG revivals of the modern era. But after only a few minutes hands-on with it it's clear there's nothing else like it. Playing an amnesiac detective, you have to solve a murder in a strange, magical realist world. It's compelling stuff. We spoke to Helen Hindpere, the game's lead writer, about how ZA/UM is

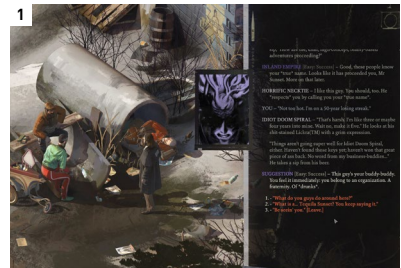
sofa, there's some distance between me and the screen, I can just enjoy the game.

OPM: When creating RPGs, what are some of the benefits to newer hardware like PlayStation 5?

HH: I've talked a lot about the world and the dialogue system, but none of it would work without the visuals. The art department always had this vision of pushing top-down graphics to its absolute best. You know the guys who are always after graphic fidelity, pushing their rigs to the max? We wanted them to look at our game and go, 'Woah. Look at that. An isometric RPG that looks handsome, modern and inviting.' PS5 makes achieving all that technically so much easier.

OPM: At what point was the decision not to include any traditional combat made?

HH: If you were to see our early concept art you would discover that in the beginning traditional combat was very much part of



1 Talk to people around town, it's fun. **2** Pick up rubbish for extra cash. **3** There might be more to scenes that only certain skills will reveal. **4** The game feels like a moving painting.



■ No-one likes to read on their TV – but now we have full professional VO to make up for that. [It] feels very lush. ■

bringing an expanded version – The Final Cut – to PS5 this month.

OPM: How hard has it been translating an RPG like this onto a controller? What's the approach been there?

Helen Hindpere: It's a rather easy game to bring to the consoles. We don't have complex combat mechanics, so there's not much to translate. The only real stumbling block has been the fact that no-one likes to read on their TV – but now we have full professional VO to make up for that. The entire experience feels very lush.

Honestly, I'm looking forward to the official release on PlayStation so that I can get another playthrough in. Even before the release we had the habit of playing it with a controller. It's the only way I don't go into full 'work-mode' – I can relax on the

our plans. We grew up playing classic RPGs – Planescape Torment, Baldur's Gate, the Fallout series – and that's how we put together the first blueprints: here's the dialogue, here's the dungeon crawling, here's the final boss.

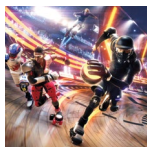
But over time we discovered that including traditional combat just wasn't feasible. It didn't work with the story, it didn't work with immersion. We were focussing so much on skill checks inside



the dialogues that at some point it started making more sense to move combat there as well. Because we wanted to make these scenes tense and psychological – it's not just your hand/eye co-ordination participating with a gun in its hand, it's an entire cacophony of voices, from Half Light that controls your fight-or-flight response to Rhetoric that tries to solve conflicts verbally. Every one of them has their own take on the situation and it's up to the player to decide which one of these cocksure fellows to listen to. It gives us freedom to design much more diverse conflicts – now we wouldn't dream of going back.

OPM: Why did you decide to go for dice rolls – physically represented – for the skill checks?

HH: We wanted to capture the moment Fortuna hasn't yet decided which way it is going to land. To introduce this moment of



"ON THE RINK ALL PLAYERS ARE EQUAL, THERE ARE NO CLASSES OR SPECIAL ABILITIES. THIS MEANS YOU CAN CREATE YOUR OWN CHAMPION AND SHOW YOUR IDENTITY THROUGH YOUR CHARACTER."

VÉRONIQUE BOUFFARD, COMMUNITY DEVELOPER, UBISOFT MONTREAL

PlayStation Voices

The month in
mouthing off

"WE BELIEVE THAT IT'S GOING TO USHER IN A NEW GENERATION FOR BATTLEFIELD GAMES AND BATTLEFIELD FANS AND WE'LL BE [...] BENEFITTING FROM THE FULL POWER OF NEXT-GEN PLATFORMS." EA CEO ANDREW WILSON HAS BIG EXPECTATIONS FOR THE NEW SHOOTER ON PS5.

"HIS TENGU MASK GIVES HIM A LOT OF CHARACTER, BUT HE'S ALSO SUPER-RIPPED AND LOOKS AMAZING!" STREET FIGHTER 5 PRODUCER SHUHEI MATSUMOTO LOVES DAN'S DRAMATIC, BUFF NEW LOOK IN SEASON 5.



"WE'RE THRILLED [TO] AMP UP THE EXPERIENCE WITH NEW FEATURES." J. ALLEN BRACK ON PS4'S LOST VIKINGS, ROCK N ROLL RACING, AND BLACKTHORNE.

Rolling towards an esports future

Roller Champions is an online slam dunk



Definitely a contact sport. You'll want to make sure you're well padded before giving this one a go.

Offside rules aside, the core of any sport is usually fairly simple. That simplicity doesn't mean it's easy when you play it, however. But our extensive hands-on with Roller Champions proves this unique sport has the makings of a legend.

Put briefly, it's 3v3 roller derby with a twist. Taking large, sloping circuits at top speed and protecting a ball as you go, you can get serious momentum, the high walls helping you stay on track. Completing a lap entitles you to claim points, which you do by lobbing the ball through a goal. Each match is only five minutes long, and you only need five points to win. With one lap netting one possible point; two laps, three; and three laps a full five points, there's always plenty to play for. If you're intercepted, unbanked points are lost.

CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

That's all straightforward enough – but other players will get in the way and complicate matters, of course. Nasty tackles can slow you down, while smart team plays can leave you trying to grab at air. Skitching behind your

teammates can grant boosts of speed, and you can chuck the ball some distance, banking checkpoints towards a full lap even as it passes through the air. Will you spread out to relay the ball around the circuit quickly, or group up to protect a vulnerable player? Every match plays out differently, and a well-synergised team is a force to be reckoned with.

The skating controls are easy to grasp and feel incredible, ensuring you'll be grabbing air and crouching for extra momentum on slopes in no time. The core game itself is compelling enough to keep you coming back, and quick enough to be pleasantly bite-sized. With more modes teased, and a seasonal battle pass (for winning skater customisations) proposed, this futuristic sport could make waves.

*** Playing the beta? Let us know what you thought of it at @OPM_UK.**

Pedro Pascal's going to have to ditch the smart suits to play Joel.

Live-action videogame projects are levelling up

The Last Of Us and Borderlands boast big names

The Last Of Us television series, announced last March, has finally found its twin leads. The Mandalorian star Pedro Pascal will play Joel and Game Of Thrones' breakout actress Bella Ramsey will take on the role of Ellie.

That's far from the only news in the videogame adaptation arena, as a slew of big names have been confirmed for the Borderlands movie. So far, Jack Black is set to voice wisecracking robot Claptrap, Cate Blanchett will play ethereal Siren Lilith, Jamie Lee Curtis will portray Pandoran archeologist Dr Tannis, and comedian Kevin Hart will play Roland the

soldier. Acclaimed horror director Eli Roth is set to call the shots from a script penned by Craig Mazin. Mazin himself is best known as the creative force behind 2019's historical drama TV series Chernobyl and is also set to write alongside Neil Druckmann for the aforementioned The Last Of Us.

STAR POWER

Over the next 12 months, we'll see the release of the Tomb Raider sequel, the latest Mortal Kombat flick, and the Uncharted film featuring Spider-Man star Tom Holland as a young Nathan Drake. With Oscar Isaac set to play Solid Snake in Jordan Vogt-Roberts' Metal Gear Solid

picture, dare we get just a tiny bit hopeful about the future of videogame movies?

Question marks remain for the rest of The Last Of Us series' cast, but we have a wishlist – doesn't everyone? As Isaac is real-world pals with Pedro Pascal, he may well be a good fit to play Joel's brother Tommy. We suspect Isaac's schedule wouldn't allow for it, though, so instead Pascal's Mandalorian co-star Timothy Olyphant – himself no stranger to videogame adaptations having played Agent 47 a lifetime ago – could bring an interesting dimension to the character. Speaking of Hitman, Pascal and Ramsey's Game Of Thrones co-star Sean Bean has to be a shoe-in for at least one short-lived role in the series. We think Bean would make a memorable zombie. As for Abby? After seeing Lulu Wilson eyeball Kevin James in Becky, well...

* Joking aside, who would you want to see cast? Tweet us @OPM_UK.

Game Of Thrones' breakout actress Bella Ramsey will take on the role of Ellie in The Last Of Us.



GEAR: STUFF WE LOVE

This issue, Mondo guilty pleasures



THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT T-SHIRT

MONDO / BECKY CLOONAN \$25 MONDOSHOP.COM

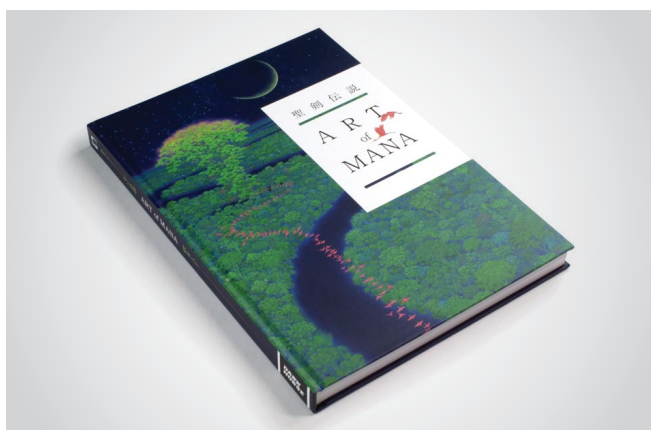
Artist Becky Cloonan, creator of the award-winning graphic novel trilogy of Wolves, The Mire, and Demeter, designed this distinctive The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt T-shirt. She taps into a passion for classic fantasy illustration to deliver an image that's certain to turn heads, and we love it. The shirt's unisex and comes in sizes from XS to 4XL. Hunt it down.



MARVEL'S AVENGERS - ORIGINAL VIDEO GAME SOUNDTRACK LP

MONDO MUSIC \$25 MONDOSHOP.COM

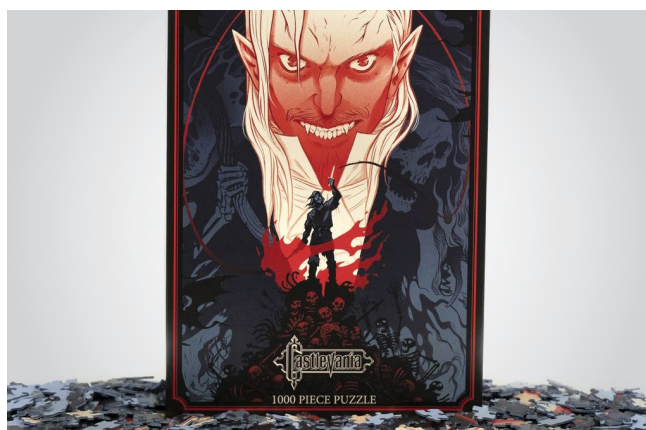
The game may be so-so but the soundtrack by Rise Of The Tomb Raider's Bobby Tahouri is exactly the kind of sweeping epic you'd expect from a Marvel franchise. With new artwork by Phantom City Creative and pressed on 180g tri-colored vinyl, the overall package is collector's heaven.



THE ART OF MANA

DARK HORSE BOOKS \$39.99 MONDOSHOP.COM

Our love of this retro Square Enix RPG series, an offshoot of Final Fantasy back in 1991, has been reignited in recent years with a series of remakes on PS4. This book gathers over 400 illustrations from the original design team, as well as new interviews, sketches, design documents, and concept art. If you've enjoyed the recent series revival then cast an eye over where it all began.



CASTLEVANIA 1000-PIECE PUZZLE

MONDO / BECKY CLOONAN \$20 MONDOSHOP.COM

Becky Cloonan's back with another Mondo art collectible, and it's a puzzler. This 1,000-piece jigsaw features the 2016 poster by the artist chopped up for you to put back together. It's a must for anyone who's a fan of the Dracula vs Belmont(s) saga, or who just appreciated a good puzzle. What better way to survive lockdown?



DRESS FOR SUCCESS

You may die a lot but you'll look good doing it in this collectible T-shirt, The Dark Souls Trilogy Limited Edition by VaatiVidya. Order this striking design at fangamer.com.



1 Cook And Becker has a new series of **The Elder Scrolls Online limited edition fine art prints**; our pick is the Thieves' Guild. Order from cookandbecker.com. 2 Sony has a bunch of new merch at gear.playstation.com, including the **PS5 Crew Neck Sweatshirt** 3 the **PS5 Women's Colour Block Long Sleeve**, 4 the PS5 decalld **PS5 Inspired Joggers**, 5 and the swish **PS5 Logo Timbuk2 Backpack**. 6 Over at grindstore.com we have the **Crash Bandicoot 4 Parch-mental** coffee mug, our pick of the Bandicoot's designs that also includes 7 the **Mask Off** and 8 **Spotlight** designs. 9 Turn back the clock to celebrate a gaming superstar with the **Pac-Man: Birth Of An Icon** pack, featuring the hardcover book, seven-inch single, and coin. Order at cookandbecker.com.



JESS'S REAL DEAL



You don't love videogames unless you love targets. And this Overcooked! measuring mug taps into the gamer-brain in me that needs to hit those goals. How will I know if I need to drink another 1/4 cup of hot chocolate unless the little glass mug shows me? Take it from me, as someone with a love/hate relationship with dairy, this cup's neat

measures are a lifesaver. Of course it's really designed to help me cook up a tasty meal after a hard day's OPMing, but that's what food delivery apps are made for, right? Try as I might there's no way my Overcooked! measuring mug will order me an egg bap and chips. But I do know exactly how much tea I have consumed.

Get the Overcooked! measuring mug from fangamer.com and meet those coffee goals.



DEV ACCESS

A PlayStation treasure

Crystal Dynamics' Tomb Raider's 25th anniversary will be marked by a year of celebratory events



Celebrating 25 years of puzzling over traps, slaying dinosaurs and hunting mythical treasures, Tomb Raider remains one of PlayStation's most enduring series. This year Square Enix and developer Crystal Dynamics has already revealed Lara Croft has a bright future, including confirming a new movie sequel starring Alicia Vikander and directed by Lovecraft Country's Misha Green. But what makes Lara so enduring? To answer that, we go back to the beginning...

"Tomb Raider and Lara Croft changed the game industry upon their arrival. It was on the bleeding edge of 3D gaming, built on a foundation of incredible tech and cinematic music, and featured a standout character that captured the spirit and cultural zeitgeist of 'Girl Power,'" argues Crystal Dynamics' Meagan Marie. "That cemented the Tomb Raider in the hearts of many gamers, especially young women like myself, who were looking for more representation. So, I'd say the incredibly strong foundation of the franchise and the talented teams of people, who have constantly pushed the series into new territory, are both essential to its endurance today."

Marie points to Lara as a character, her unapologetic nature and desire for adventure, that ultimately won over gamers and has endured. She ventures into the unknown and explores for pleasure. It's a very '90s mindset; a search for a euphoric feeling and sense of excitement at the world that's opening up. Lara and Tomb Raider were perfect bedfellows for the untapped technology of PlayStation. "It is not performative," says Marie. "She researches and travels and raids for her own satisfaction [and saves the world]. I think that resonates with people."

LOST TREASURE

We ask which game left an impression on Marie, and she has two answers for us. "For Core, it's easily Tomb Raider II," she answers. "Lara's sequel introduced vehicles, urban environments, and even more thrilling settings. The Wreck

of the Maria Doria was stunning and terrifying, and I loved exploring the upside-down interiors of the sunken cruise liner."

With her Crystal Dynamics hat on, Marie says Rise Of The Tomb Raider is a personal favourite. "I loved seeing Lara emerge from Yamatai stronger and more determined. When she first meets Jacob after being captured by Trinity, he questions if she can make it alone; she looks him dead in the eye and says, 'You don't know how far I've come.' Perfection."

Marie's answers serve to highlight the challenge ahead for Crystal Dynamics' next Tomb Raider game as it attempts to unify old and new timelines, as well as bring together old and new fans. "It's important to move in this direction," she

[The next Tomb Raider] allows all fans the ability to know their favourite Lara is canon.

tells us. "Personally, I love that it allows all fans the ability to know their favourite Lara is canon, that she has grown and evolved as a character, just as we all do throughout our lives."

To date, Marie says, creating new Tomb Raider games has been a balancing act. "It's impossible to make changes or update a beloved character and franchise in a way that will please everyone. If too much remains the same, then the game has failed to innovate or be relevant for new audiences. If there isn't enough DNA from the original games, then you've lost sight of what made the franchise great. Everyone is allowed their opinion on our



Crystal Dynamic's Meagan Marie shares her love of Lara as Tomb Raider marks 25 years.

recent reboot trilogy, but I'm incredibly proud of Lara's journey."

It's a journey the character is still on, of course. As well as a new game, new movie – "I adore Lovecraft Country, and there was more than once when watching it I thought; this gives me major Tomb Raider vibes!" – and a Netflix animated series in the vein of 2007's Tomb Raider Re\isioned, Crystal Dynamics has planned a year of events designed to celebrate the series' rich history.

"We've commissioned reimagined box art for each of the games from iconic artists," explains Marie. "We intentionally chose artists with diverse art styles since Lara is iconic no matter how she's drawn."

The first of these is pictured on these pages. Crystal Dynamics' art director Brenoch Adams reimagined the first game's box art in fine style.

Finally we ask the *really big* question: would Nathan Drake and Lara Croft get along? "I think she and Nathan, but probably more so Elena, would get along well." Girl Power!

*** Visit tomraider25.square-enix-games.com all year for a Lara Lara love.**

1 Meagan Marie's best Crofty moments include The Lost Valley... **2** The emotional delivery of Lara's first kill... **3** And the equally tear-jerking 'death of Lara' from The Last Revelation.





Brenoch Adams' reimagining of the original game art – expect more exclusive art throughout this year.



DEBATE

Are games becoming too expensive?

Are we being ripped off or paying the price of costly development? Our team voice their opinions



MILFORD COPPOCK
MANAGING ART EDITOR



I CAN STOMACH HIGH PRICES IF I HAVE THE CHOICE TO BUY CHEAPER.

There's no doubt that for some publishers the cost of making a game has soared. A title like *The Last Of Us Part II* can take five years to make with a team of 500. While some developers chase headlines and pay over the odds for Hollywood talent, often the high cost comes from new tech, revisions, scrapped content, and... perfection. What we're missing this gen is a strong double-A scene to sit between indies and the big devs; more games such as *A Plague Tale*, for example. Expensive games are fine if we, as fans, have choice. Let's rebalance. ■

What we're missing this gen is a strong double-A scene. ■



OSCAR TAYLOR-KENT
GAMES EDITOR



AS GAMES GET MORE EXPENSIVE, IT'S NICE TO FEEL REWARDED FOR LOYALTY.

What will I do if I ever need to pass out on command? I'll simply look at the receipts to see how much I've spent on games over the years. Gaming can be expensive. I'd love to see benefits for buying games new besides the likes of rubbish special weapons. How long has the PS Store existed, and how few times have we received loyalty rewards? PS Plus Members should get better rewards than 10% off, like a voucher system or the ability to earn discounts for regular play. It's good to feel rewarded and valued with truly special offers. ■



JESS KINGHORN
STAFF WRITER



WHILE YOU WAIT FOR THAT TRIPLE-A TO HIT THE SALES, PICK UP AND PLAY AN INDIE.

My gaming habits before entering the industry were charmingly retro, not just for the hipster cred but because that's what I could personally afford. Don't ask me what year I finally got a PS4 – you won't like the answer. For many people, forking out 70 quid for a triple-A release is at best a rare treat and more often a big ask. Thankfully, smaller studios are offering new-gen thrills at a fraction of the cost, with PS5 launch title *Bugsnax* a case in point at less than £20 (or free if you'd subscribed to PS Plus last year at launch).

Could this competitive edge from the historically daring indie scene be the shakeup we need? This year some of the more interesting games are coming from small teams at pocket-friendly prices – games such as *Solar Ash*, *Seasons*, and *Oddworld: Soulstorm* could surprise. It's a thought to snax on. ■



IAN DEAN
EDITOR



EMBRACE THE SPECTRUM OF WAYS WE HAVE TO PLAY, AND SAVE MONEY.

Games have got more expensive just at a time when life has become harder. But nowadays there are more ways to play than buying into the latest triple-A hype. I remember the days of renting from Blockbuster, scouring its aisles for a weekend's play. These days we can get free games from PS Plus – *Destruction AllStars* and *Control Ultimate Edition* have already made it worthwhile this year, and last year we had the 20-game PS Plus Collection for PS5. Include a sub for PS Now and for just over £10 a month you can fill up on hits. Include free-to-play in the roster, such as *FFVII Online*, and you're good to go. Does it justify charging £70 for a new PS5 game? No, but it is a workaround we never had in past generations. ■

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IN THE MOOD FOR...



Hospitals

These PlayStation games know how to treat you in the emergency room

1 THE INPATIENT

It's all too easy for games to conflate hospitals with mental institutions for cheap shocks. Nonetheless, the prequel to *Until Dawn* tries to do something interesting by having you play as an amnesiac inpatient at Blackwood Sanatorium. Relying on the immersiveness of PS VR, it's a mystery and a chilling psychological horror.

2 YAKUZA 6: THE SONG OF LIFE

Kiryu's swansong in *Yakuza 6* is bookended by hospitals. It begins with the Dragon Of Dojima recovering in hospital, and he's back there again at the end when he makes a life-changing decision. But we can't forget the moment he's reunited with Haruka - have a hanky ready.

3 THE LAST OF US

Joel and Ellie's adventure culminates at Salt Lake City's general hospital, the Fireflies' headquarters. If you want a happy ending, you're in for a shock (and if you still haven't played it, look away now) as Joel dooms humanity by choosing to rescue Ellie.

4 SILENT HILL

Hospitals can be creepy places, so of course *Silent Hill* has multiple across its history. The first of these is Alchemilla Hospital, the oldest hospital in town, where care for its patients is negligible at best and the fourth floor leads to the Otherworld. Yes, really.

5 TWO POINT HOSPITAL

An obvious choice, perhaps, but this business simulation is hilarious. In contrast to clinical real-life hospitals, here the mood's lighthearted. Even the ailments you're treating are entirely fictitious and ridiculous - their version of a 'Pandemic' is someone having a pan for a head.

6 PERSONA 4

The hospital is surprisingly significant in this JRPG. You come here to comfort drama club student Yumi, who's struggling to make peace with her estranged and dying father, and later you can get a part-time job as a janitor here and meet nurse Sayoko. It's also the scene of a tear-jerker where your choices will affect how the ending plays out.

7 HITMAN

The GAMA private hospital in Hokkaido, Japan is the last mission in 2016's assassination sandbox, where one of your targets is being prepped for heart transplant surgery. There's a number of ways Agent 47 can take them out, not least messing with the equipment, destroying the donor heart, or convincing the head surgeon to get revenge.

8 METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN

MGS V begins properly in a way that's both courageous and laborious after the taut brilliance of its prologue mission, with Snake waking up in a hospital, his right arm replaced with a prosthetic. After an assassination attempt, a patient calling himself Ishmael helps Snake escape the besieged hospital.

9 RESIDENT EVIL 3

Even badass Jill Valentine has trouble standing on her own two feet when shot with a strain of Nemesis' T-Virus. So it's Carlos the hairy hunk to the rescue! He blasts his way through Spencer Memorial Hospital in search of a vaccine.



HONOURABLE MENTIONS

Wolfenstein: The New Order

After being in a coma and cared for in a Polish psychiatric hospital, hero BJ Blazkowicz awakens ready to kill Nazis once again.

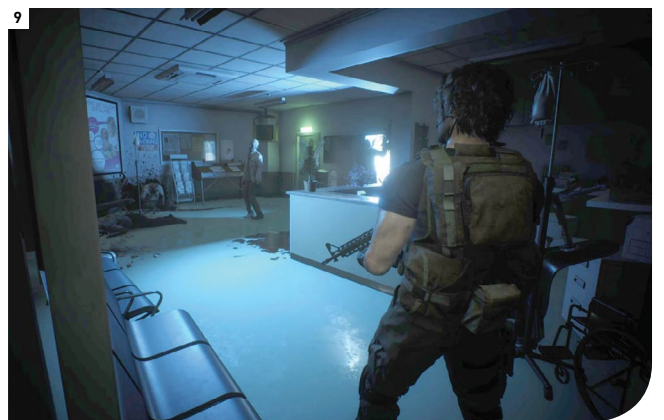
MediEvil

Foregoing atmosphere for arcade action Sir Dan Fortesque's hospital visit turns into a series of frantic button-mashing arena fights.

The Evil Within

All might have gone to hell at Beacon Mental Hospital, but the asylum Sebastian can retreat to in his mind is a calm haven.

Did we miss your favourite hospital? Got a brilliant In The Mood For idea? Show and tell at twitter.com/opm_uk.



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THE PERFECT GIFT, EVERY TIME

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OPINION

“PLAYSTATION 5 HAS A LOT OF POWER – BUT WHAT’S THE BEST WAY TO USE IT?”

Simply opting for better graphics isn’t always the best path forward



WRITER BIO

Oscar Taylor-Kent embraces new tech. That’s why 60 paintings hang in his bedroom; he claims the frames give him better performance. Ooer.

Like a cartoon dog sniffing a delicious meal from next door, I have a devil and an angel on my shoulder. Except in this case I’m sniffing my PS5, and it’s Demon’s Souls and Marvel’s Spider-Man: Miles Morales on my shoulder.

Both games are phenomenal, and their amazing visuals do a lot of the job. Of course, it’s not just due to new-gen PS5-o-vision, but fab art design. Both games sported two primary visual modes at launch, Resolution and Performance, mirroring the display preferences you can set as defaults in your PS5’s settings.

The thing is, despite both being flagship first-party launch titles, when booted fresh, without any preferences influencing the decision, each defaults to a different style. Demon’s Souls prioritises responsiveness and game feel, opting to champion 60fps by cutting back on graphical features (though it’s still a gorgeous game to my eyes), whereas Miles Morales wants you to continue to walk the first game’s 30fps path but bask in accurate reflections created by ray tracing and advanced visual effects. Each game aims to give you a very different first impression by using this new technology for something different. Which raises a

dilemma with PS5’s settings: which setting should we choose as our default? Or do we just let the games do their thing?

FRAME TRAP

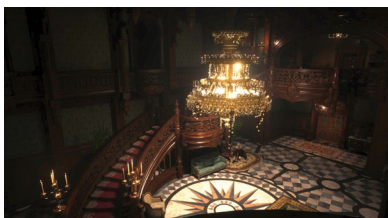
While I played through Miles Morales’ story in the fidelity mode, I switched to 60fps to mop up side-content and the difference was like night and day. It was hard to go back. Since launch, Insomniac has even managed to adjust other settings to make a third mode possible – one which *does* include ray-traced reflections alongside the higher framerate.

We’ve got better graphics we’ve seen before, but for my money the smoothness of stable, high framerates (paired with great graphics) is the real leap forward for console gaming, allowing for levels of immersion and responsiveness we could only dream of before.

Some games push this even harder if you have a 120Hz-compatible TV (look for the HDMI 2.1 port), with the likes of Dirt 5 and Devil May Cry 5 plunging us into a new world with 120fps. Sure, DMC5’s highest graphical settings look pretty, but dialling down the frames just makes devil hunting feel worse.

Perhaps the biggest tell comes from PS4, though. We’re always mining the back catalogue to uncover the best boosts PS5 gives to PS4 games, and while sometimes resolutions will improve, the most effective improvements we’ve seen are possible thanks to using the new console’s power to run at a locked 60fps.

Is ray tracing great? Yes. But it’s not a ‘make things look good’ button (Watch Dogs Legion’s mirror-like streets are proof of that). The future lies in using PS5’s tools to bring visuals and performance together. Resident Evil Village’s castle foyer (from the Maiden demo) is a great example, using reined-in ray tracing just where it counts, combined with amazing lighting diffusion. But when you need to run? It’s a smooth-if-panicked escape.



Capcom’s managed the perfect balance of smooth and slick in the Maiden demo.

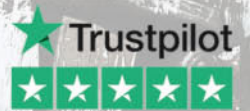
Which display setting, Resolution or Performance, should we choose?



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REPLIES

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#185 The lady who's on everyone's minds was also on our cover.

MS MORE

I like to see your magazine contain more pages as some games deserve more attention. Back in OPM2 days each magazine contained 146 pages every month, which was brilliant. I would pay more for such a brilliant magazine. Keep up the good work – I look forward every month for next issue.

Simon Cole

Ah, the heady days of 1990s publishing when pages grew on trees and editors had private chefs, we like to think. We'll do our best to keep packing every page we do have with

quality (and we'll keep bringing out our special 180-page bumper issues several times a year – there's one soon).

SALES POINT

Playing on my PS4 during the last year, when I have spent ten months of it shielding instead of working as a carer, I looked forward to getting a PS5 (naïvely, I think). I can't see me getting one this year. I understand the impact Covid has had, but

the scalpers and bots have ruined this release. However, we as consumers have a lot to answer for: if we didn't buy off the scalpers they would be less likely to take stock. Why are people paying more than the RRP for a console? Sony should be doing a lot more to stop this practice and I feel the government should also be looking at this. I will continue my wait for a PS5 and will hopefully get one by the time Final Fantasy 16 is released.

Steve Hill

We're not sure what Sony or governments could do to put a stop to scalpers. Really the onus is on retailers to do something about it as they know who's ordering consoles and can see if large numbers are being bought on the same card or being shipped to one particular location. But it is unfair to genuine fans, and as you say, buying at unfair prices encourages the scalpers.

"IF WE CONSUMERS DIDN'T BUY OFF THE SCALPERS THEY WOULD BE LESS LIKELY TO TAKE STOCK."

STAR LETTER OUTSIDE THE BOX

After eagerly reading about all the excellent titles for the next gen (PS5), I've been left stunned to see there are no boxing games planned for the PS5 this year. It's a knockout blow to me as I love playing boxing sims. So, this is my plea to publishers – get in the ring and sort it out!

Adrian Fisher

Big Rumble Boxing: Creed Champions is due out on on PS4 this year, but you're right, we don't know of any being released on PS5. There are loads of other good fighting games on PS5, though – Mortal Kombat 11's already

out and Guilty Gear Strive is being released soon, so why not give one of those a whirl while you wait for a realistic boxing game?



CAN I GET A RT?

The most pleasing tweetings from the @OPM_UK timeline...



@beaktastic
Can't wait to reunite with my fellow red headed girl Aloy in Horizon Forbidden West.



@Reyiell
I shouldn't have read this while drinking my tea. Maybe brain stains or blood would have worked better.



@W1ckedShort
For the record, there is not a greater feeling on this earth than the wind catching your beard.



@Reeves_Reus
Although FFXVII was the first one of the series I ever played and I loved it, FFX had this magic of old that entangled you at first glance. I fondly remember the opening scene of the game with that amazing soundtrack. Easily one of the best Final Fantasy, hoping for a remake.

TROLL OF THE MONTH



@theotherscottj
People gonna get sweaty in their underoos again [Lady Dimitrescu has a lot to answer for – ed]



@Ginzi0
I just want remakes of the first two MSX2 Metal Gear games with David Hayter doing the voice of Solid Snake with the look of 80's Michael Biehn



@vikingdad278
I downloaded Ratchet & Clank off the PS Plus Collection recently and am really enjoying it!

f "IT WOULD BE AWESOME TO HAVE A RESIDENT EVIL GAME WITH HIM [ALBERT WESKER] AS A PLAYABLE MAIN CHARACTER."
GREAT IDEA, ALEXANDRA TASHKINA



f "RESIDENT EVIL 7 DIDN'T NEED HIM, 8 DOESN'T EITHER. TIME TO MOVE ON."
THAT'S HERESY, NOEL KELLEHER

READERS' MOST WANTED

Which games are bleeping loudest on your radar?

01

Horizon Forbidden West
 Aloy's still holding on to the top spot. We can't wait to tackle a new species of robo-dinosaurs out west.
Format PS5, PS4
ETA 2021



02

God Of War: Ragnarok
 Kratos creeps up a place this month. Can Aloy hold him off when gods have already failed?
Format PS5
ETA TBC



03

Kena: Bridge Of Spirits
 Also moving up a spot, it's this beautifully animated adventure. You could say you're getting Kena! [No, please don't - ed]
Format PS5, PS4
ETA TBC



VOTE NOW!

Tell us the five games you can't wait to play at opm@futurenet.com

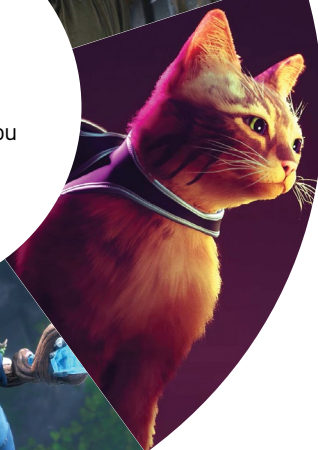
05

Resident Evil Village
 It appears Lady Dimitrescu doesn't have a taloned finger in every pie, as she's only got the fifth wedge here.
Format PS5, PS4
ETA 7 May



04

Stray
 Everybody wants to be a cat, because a cat's the only cat with a cute back pack...
Format PS5, PS4
ETA October



EXIT POLL

Our Facebook fans answer a final question

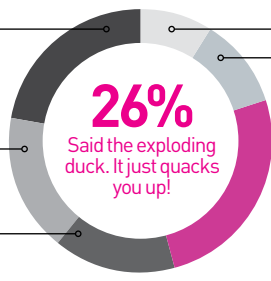


WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE WEAPON IN HITMAN 3?

22% Chose muffins/cakes. Silly season for 47, is it?

17% Picked a rifle. Something sensible at last.

15% Said feather duster. *sigh*



9% Chose the versatile crowbar.

11% Opted for a garotte. Now we're getting somewhere.

NEXT MONTH

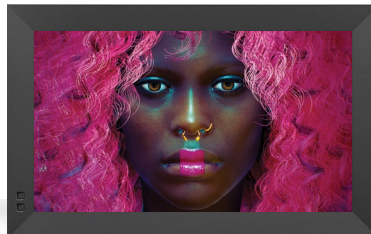
Who's your favourite person to romance in Mass Effect? (Admit it, we've all done it!)



THIS MONTH'S THEME CLOSE-UPS

Hot Shots

We're celebrating your very best PlayStation photo mode moments



WIN! A Nixplay Smart Photo Frame worth £269.99

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"PLAY, PLAY AND ENJOY. LET THE GAME TRANSPORT YOU AND DO NOT BE PREJUDICED."



Winner

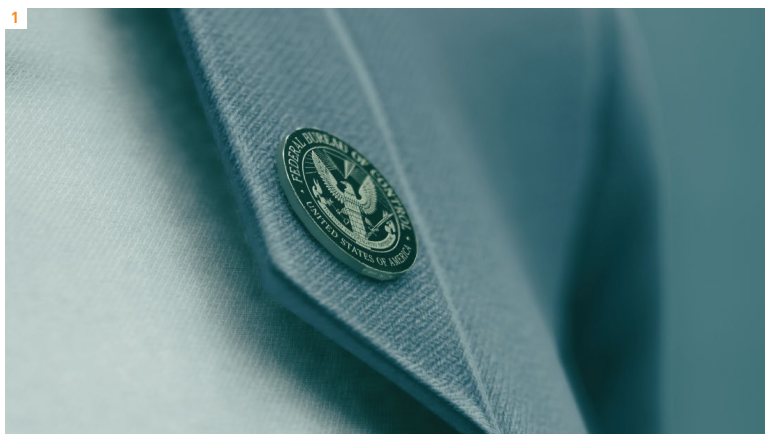
Paolo Mantoan
Game: *Cyberpunk 2077*

Reader Paolo Mantoan took ten minutes to create this stunning close-up from *Cyberpunk 2077*. The wall of pink hair frames the character's face perfectly. He tells us as soon as he saw the character he had to take this shot. "It was in that moment, I saw her and went for it," he says.

Asked if he has any advice for new photo-moders, the

Italian *Cyberpunk 2077* fan states: "Play, play, and enjoy. Let the game transport you and do not be prejudiced."

Well, it looks as if Paolo has been taking his own advice. His portfolio is full of *Cyberpunk 2077* shots, delivering a bold mix of portraits and close detail. So what's next? "Control and *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order*," he shares. Good choices.



HONOURABLE MENTIONS

1 Finn Dobney
Game: *Control*



"Control has, out of all the photo modes I use, one of the best focus distance options. So for close-up shots, detail was paramount and *Control* seems like the perfect choice," says Finn, who headed to the game's Panopticon location for this shot. "It has very good soft light," he adds. The FBC never looked better.

2 Serjio Gutierrez
Game: *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order*



This creature shot took Serjio Gutierrez 15 minutes to take. He tells us to have confidence in the shots you're capturing, "but most importantly, have fun! Do not worry about 'keeping up with the Joneses.' We all have our own way of showing our creativity," he says, clearly taking his own advice.

3 Kenneth Vega
Game: *Death Stranding*



After avoiding combat in *Death Stranding* Kenneth Vega found the weapons, and "realised just how unique the designs were." It drew him to this detail shot. He advises we spend time focussing on lighting. "I know once somebody puts an emphasis on lighting, their work can and will improve immediately."

NEXT MONTH'S THEME PORTRAITS

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I COULD GO ANYWHERE IN LIFE



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“EDEN PRIME’S HORIZON-
MASKING RED MIST IS REPLACED
BY A BRIGHTER, CLEARER VISTA.”

Expect 4K visuals, including improved textures, character models, and lighting on PS4 Pro. The game is 'forwards compatible' on PS5.



PREVIEW



FORMAT PS4 / ETA 14 MAY / PUB EA / DEV BOWARE / PLAYERS 1

Mass Effect Legendary Edition

Drell into the details of this remastered series with project director Mac Walters

Can I romance Garrus?" is one of the internet's most-asked questions. Seriously. But there's more to this space opera than who you lust after. Naturally, fans are obsessing over the minutiae of the remaster (yes, you can now play as femme Shepard as a default character in Mass Effect) but there's more here than fan service.

Mass Effect Legendary Edition remasters and unifies all three games, delivering improved visuals across the series. This means we get revamped dynamic shadows, volumetrics, depth of field, and updated lighting, as well as improved textures and character models. It's an impressive roster of tweaks.

CHANGE OF SPACE

Project director Mac Walters tells us this "set dressing" brings the series together and improves the experience. He says the team drew lines to not cross, so the story remains the same, the highs and lows remain intact, though he admits they did consider adding new story paths and ironing out kinks.

Even when it comes to adding content or refinements, he says "we weren't

changing the footprint of a level." This means critical path missions that often felt sparse in the first Mass Effect – lacking detail, for example – have been built up. Walters identifies idyllic Eden Prime as a case in point. It was meant to be a vibrant garden world but always felt empty. "So we're able to add all these elements up on the cliffs to make it feel a little bit more like a lived-in world.

And then of course, you start layering on the VFX, and smoke and particles, and it

starts to get more of that feeling of a beautiful planet that has been attacked."

Given the original Mass Effect launched in 2007, far more work has gone into bringing it up to speed than its two sequels. As well as incorporating new props, environmental details, and weather features, Mass Effect benefits from a greater draw distance. Eden Prime's horizon-masking red mist is replaced by a brighter, clearer vista.

"I think the worlds and the world building hold up but it was always a bit sparse, it was always a bit rough around the edges," admits Walters. "We were learning a lot along the way and so being able to kind of go and smooth some of those edges off and really build out some of the worlds and

FACTRICK

1. HOT SAUCE!

The original Mass Effect's romance options caused controversy, and it was briefly banned in Singapore.

2. WALL OF SOUND

Jack Wall was lead composer on the soundtracks for the first and second games in the series.

3. END GAME

Fans of the series were so disappointed with the ending of the third game, EA released a new one as DLC.



BioWare has made some of videogames' greatest RPGs, including the Mass Effect and Dragon Age series on PlayStation. It also made Anthem and Mass Effect: Andromeda, so has something to prove.



» environment the way that we had learned to do in the engine for Mass Effects 2 and 3, I think those are probably some of the best improvements.”

THE MASS AFFECT

Adjustments to the animation, camera, and handling give us a fresh take on a classic. “Primarily it was our evolution from being an RPG first and an action game second [...] that’s where we wanted to sort of uplift Mass Effect specifically, because it still felt like it was sitting on a fence uncomfortably.”

The team haven’t stopped at making visual and gameplay improvements; the sound design has also been revamped. With better compression and higher sample rates the audio has needed tweaking. “In Mass Effect specifically we’ve been able to go through and do some extra mix passes on some of the cinematics and some of the key conversations,” says Walters. “We actually did that throughout the trilogy and in key areas where we could spruce them up and make sure that they’re mixed appropriately for the sort of visual improvement they’re getting.”

You will want to play on PS4 Pro or PS5 (it’s forwards compatible), however, as Mass Effect Legendary Edition only

supports 4K, HDR, 60fps enhancements, and faster loading on these consoles. It’ll be worthwhile, as Walters reveals his impressions of revisiting Omega in Mass Effect 2: “I was just astounded seeing it at 4K on modern hardware [...] some of those environments were as I remembered them in my mind’s eye.”

When not cooing over the new visuals and audio, you’ll be swamped by content. This Legendary Edition includes the DLC for all three games – a healthy spread of extra story missions, unique weapons, and exotic armour packs. It caused some headaches for the team as rare weapons you shouldn’t have would technically be playable in earlier games. “You had access to all of these weapons or armours from the get-go, which basically short-circuited the progression in those games,” admits Walters. The solution has been to feed the DLC into the games as you play, balancing progression and creating an epic unified trilogy. This alone is cause to celebrate.

IMPRESSIONS

A robust remaster of an iconic series. It’s hard not to be impressed by the work BioWare is putting into aligning all three classics. On PlayStation, this will be the best way to experience Mass Effect.



1 With improvements to textures and new assets, Eden Prime has never looked better than in this PS4 remaster. **2** Thanks to new VFX and lighting, the Reapers’ Sovereign ship looks more impressive and fearsome than ever. **3** Even though we know The Illusive Man’s true motivations, it’s going to be fun rekindling the mystery. **4** Running at 60fps on PS4 Pro (and PS5) ensures this trilogy feels like a modern game.



FORMAT PS4 / ETA 2021 / PUB NACON / DEV ABRAKAM ENTERTAINMENT / PLAYERS 1

Roguebook

Does Magic: The Gathering's creator play his cards right?

Even poker is a roguelike if you think about it. Each game a new set of hands is dealt, and if you lose, you're out of money and need to start all over again.

Card games and the concept of trying runs again and again go perfectly together – after all, what kind of luck is easier to understand than the good old-fashioned luck of the draw?

Roguebook isn't the first card-based roguelike, but it is the first one made in partnership with Richard Garfield, Magic: The Gathering's creator.

Transported into a faerie tome, you need to journey across the pages to have any hope of breaking free.

CARD SHARP

At the start you form your party with two heroes, able to mix and match combinations of fighters to form the perfect partnership (though our hands-on only gave us two to try). From where you begin on the page, hexagonal tiles sprawl out all the way to the boss gate, which you can challenge at pretty much any time should the route be clear.

Do that, though, and you're liable to get stomped quicker than a Pontin's dancefloor during the Cha-Cha Slide. Only by spending Ink can you reveal detours on the page, turning hexes into traversable terrain. Earned in battle, Ink comes in a variety of styles that reveal different shapes. Spending and accruing it wisely makes a big difference to the cards and boon-granting artefacts you have available.

With just two party members, battles might seem simple, but there's a deceptive amount of strategy –

“MIXING OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE CARDS IS IMPORTANT.”

mixing offensive and defensive cards, and switching who's out front and who's at the back, is important. The more cards in your deck, the trickier the hands you might draw, but the smarter the plays that could be available to you. Enemies can pile on serious damage if you're not thinking about how to balance dealing damage and blocking. Because of that, you'll need every advantage you

can muster against the bosses. Brutal? Yes. But we want to draw more.

IMPRESSIONS

This unusual roguelike demands a fair bit of thought, and should keep lovers of card games drawing again and again.

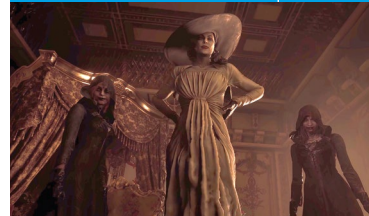


With only enough energy to play some of your hand each turn, you'd better pick well.

ON THE HORIZON

The next six months, mapped out

02 months

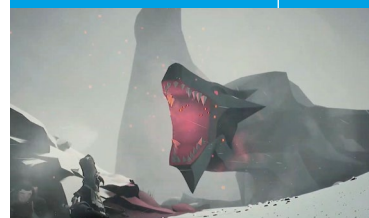


RESIDENT EVIL VILLAGE

Can you escape the horror of literally larger-than-life vampire ladies? Find out in this first-person local horror for local people.

FORMAT PS5, PS4
ETA 7 MAY / PUB CAPCOM

04 months



LITTLE DEVIL INSIDE

Experience the reality of hunting monsters in this 19th-century world.

FORMAT PS5, PS4
ETA JULY / PUB NEOSTREAM INTERACTIVE

06 months



GHOSTWIRE TOKYO

Throw some hands to exorcise demons in modern-day Japan.

FORMAT PS5 / ETA OCTOBER / PUB BETHESDA SOFTWORKS



F FORMAT PS5 / ETA 2021 PUB NEOCOREGAMES
DEV NEOCOREGAMES / PLAYERS 1

King Arthur: Knights Tale

Round table, square tiles

Excalibur's main man, King Art himself, has gone rogue. Once Britain's champion, he's embraced something darker. Who could possibly topple him but his nemesis, Sir Mordred? Armoured in spiky plate, and with plenty of sassy, mean dialogue options, he's a piece of work too, but sometimes you have to fight darkness with darkness (and relish it).

You've got the Lady In The Lake to thank for your resurrection: you'd previously perished alongside Arthur in a fight to the death, but she resurrected you in the hope that you can slay him once again, and bring peace to Avalon, where she rules. Thanks to Arthur, the heavenly, legendary land is becoming riddled with dark fantasy creatures.

BAD BOY

As Mordred, though, you don't have to play by the Lady's rules. It's up to you whether to revel in your dastardly in-life nature or to try to become a better man. This affects the rest of your knightly round table of heroes; as your moral alignment changes, your knights can obtain buffs or even leave you for good.

From Camelot onwards, you and your party take on main missions and side-missions, upgrading skills and nabbing new loot. Who you take with you when you level up is also a tricky choice, as once a knight's dead they're gone for good, and vitality damage is even harder to regain than armour. Grid-based fights litter the top-down area of exploration, and the process is easy to understand, with big melee scuffles and debuffs aplenty and the occasional bow and arrow for good measure.

IMPRESSIONS

'Dark fantasy Arthurian legend mixed with strategic XCOM battles' is a simple, engaging concept. This is one dark knight that's arising.



Grid-based combat always means one thing: it's time to put the Thinking Helm on. Now, where did we leave ours?



F **FORMAT** PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 2021
PUB BANDAI NAMCO, ARC SYSTEM WORKS / **DEV** ARC SYSTEM WORKS / **PLAYERS** 1-2

Guilty Gear Strive

Hands-on with Arc's dojo of the future

Long a respected developer of fighting games, Arc System Works has stepped into the mainstream with licensed games, bringing us excellent titles such as Dragon Ball FighterZ and Granblue Fantasy Versus. Now we're taking a look at how its reinvention of its own flagship fighter, Guilty Gear, is progressing.

Arc is the master of visual flair and stylish combos, but the thing you'll notice immediately about Strive is how focussed it is compared to its complex predecessors. Flick to the command list of any character and it's immensely readable: a couple of meter-depleting finishing moves, a handful of special moves, and only a few command normals.

With most fighting games you'd have to get out your training mode pickaxe and mine the list for the commands that worked for the kind of combos you're hoping to pull off, but here every character's basic toolkit of moves is easy to grasp. Extremely helpful descriptions accompanied by little videos in the command list itself help you visualise them too, suggesting how each one should be used – which ones are anti-air, have a quick windup, or are safe when blocked by your opponent, for example.

COMBO BREAKER

Combined with chunky visuals, elegantly animated characters, and punchy text that makes it impossible to miss what's going on (huge "COUNTER" text fills the entire screen whenever you perform one), it's perhaps the simplest Guilty Gear in a while, harkening back to the neat, compelling design of the PS1 original.

But that doesn't mean it's an easy game. Your tools might be obvious, but how you use them together still creates an opportunity for creativity. The simplicity just levels the playing field, making things easier to understand – even if it's just you coming to terms with exactly how an opponent online is kicking you behind. You still need to slot attacks into special moves and figure out how to respond to onslaughts from your opponent. While some specific moves can automatically trigger chains of hits with multiple presses, Strive takes a step back from automatic options. Arc System Works' goal seems to be to make the controls accessible enough that automatic options won't be needed, and so far it's succeeding.

IMPRESSIONS

It's impressive that a fighting series over 20 years old can still feel fresh and exciting. In addition, this is one of the best-looking we've ever seen. With netcode that made every online match we played pretty smooth sailing, it's a bout worth fighting.

TRACK RECORD Founded in 1988, Arc System Works is best known for developing a superb selection of fighting game series, including Dragon Ball Z, BlazBlue, and yes, Guilty Gear.





“HERE EVERY CHARACTER’S BASIC TOOLKIT OF MOVES IS EASY TO GRASP.”



FACTRICK

1. FOUR-TONED SUN

Despite plenty of version rereleases, this is technically only the fourth complete revision of the fighter.

2. HOME TO ROST-ER

Strive will launch with 15 fighters (some new to the series), and there are at least five more to come as DLC.

3. GONE TRAVELLING

This is the first Guilty Gear to feature stage transitions. Creator Daisuke Ishiwatari wants to avoid corner locks.

Newcomers Giovanna and Nagoyuriki are great additions that bring something new to the roster. The former has a spirit wolf and the latter is a vampire samurai.



FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 26 MAR / PUB SQUARE ENIX / DEV BALAN COMPANY / PLAYERS 1-2

Balan Wonderworld

Hands-on with *Nights Into Dreams'* spiritual successor

This unexpected new 3D platformer from former Sonic Team luminaries Yuji Naka and Naoto Ohshima should automatically become the stuff of legend, especially with Square Enix behind it. But playing this game after coming fresh from *Astro's Playroom*, the current build of *Balan Wonderworld* simply doesn't feel or look good enough. To dismiss it on aesthetics alone, though, could be a very big mistake.

The action feels like it's come straight from an early noughties 3D platformer. That's arguably exactly what 2017's *Yooka-Laylee* was supposed to offer, and this game really does have a nostalgic quality, especially since the two-child storyline in the wonderfully cinematic intro is so reminiscent of the development duo's 1996 Sega Saturn classic *Nights Into Dreams*.

After clearing the rather basic core path through each *Wonderworld* level, it's the return visits that provide the most fun, as you build up a collection of colourful costumes and switch to them in order to reach hidden Balan statues. There are 80 costumes in the game, with names like Tornado Wolf and Jumping Jack, but you can only hold three at any time, and if you get hit you lose the one you're wearing (you're switched instantly to the next – there are no

Ghouls-'N-Ghosts-style pants to laugh at here, sadly). Collect a fourth costume and the game pushes one into your storage wardrobe, which you can access from any checkpoint. This system may be long-winded, but it means that the loop of plan-execution-reward feels ultra-satisfying when it works out.

GET A-LIFE

There's an impossibly brightly-coloured hub world area, complete with a disarmingly cute A-life system. Similar to *Nights Into Dreams*, *Balan's* gaudy world is inhabited by small, rotund creatures – here named 'Tims' – which evolve depending on your actions. After the first level is complete, a little fan-like device appears, acting rather like a hamster wheel. Level up your Tims and you can make this ticker hit 'Sub Objective' milestones, unlocking new scenery elements for your Tims to play with, including a 'Tims Tower', which is a lot like a living marble run. It's neat but seems completely pointless so far, though the Tims that follow you into the main levels do sometimes pick up Tim eggs and gems for you, so the furry beasties themselves are at least slightly useful.

The drop-in/drop-out co-op allows two players to team up, though the ability to jump a little higher as a duo means some of the hardest work in single-player mode can be easily completed with a friend. Interestingly, both children can be controlled in unison by one player when necessary, which will really help family play in difficult sections. The game is family-friendly and kids appear to like it, announcing happily: "It's like *Spyro*."

SIMPLE AND CLEAN

Two main worries remain as we wait for the finished game. Superb character movement used to be a given in any game from Yuji Naka, but *Balan's* controls feel simple and rather stiff, giving the game a comparatively low-budget feel. It's certainly nowhere near as glossy as Square Enix's recent releases such as *Kingdom Hearts III*. Case in point: the beautiful CG intro is nothing like the actual game.

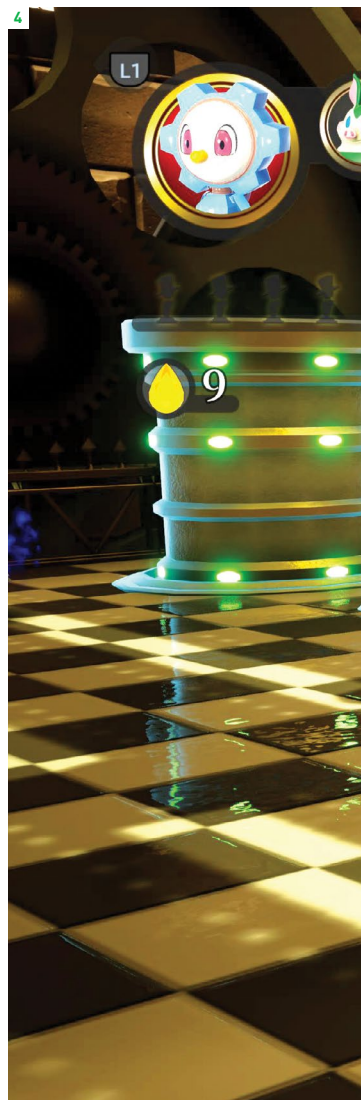
The second problem is the game's rather sedate nature. There are some interesting enemies to fight and the costumes offer varied gameplay, but your main aim is to find all 228 Balan statues, rather than to match up to a ranked scoring system as seen in the pair's earlier works. Given that each Act only has eight statues to find, even

though it's a pretty sizeable game quite how it'll sustain repeat play after you've found them all remains to be seen. So while it's still wonderful to have what is essentially a new

game from the 1990s Sonic Team in all but name, it's not yet as action-packed as it claims to be. Let's hope for an unexpected rabbit from *Balan's* hat.

IMPRESSIONS

Balan's already a well-designed platformer, but whether it can achieve legendary status is questionable. Still, if anyone's likely to have a trick up their sleeve, you'd bet on a showman, right?



4 The clock tower section looks gorgeous in 4K, but some areas appear disappointingly basic right now. 5 The cutscenes reflect the hair and skin tone you choose for Emma or Leo. 6 The 'Balan's Bout' minigames see Balan fly like in *Nights*, but interaction is limited to tapping X.

FACTRICK

1. YOU WOT?

Balan seems to speak nonsense in the intro – he's pronouncing words as though they're spelt backwards.

2. ETERNAL BALANCE

Balan is the star, while the antagonist is named Lance. Put them together, what do you get? No, not Balanlance!

3. PS4-PS5

If you buy the PS4 version of the game, you will be able to play the PS5 version for free. Woohoo!



Yuji Naka and Naoto Ohshima were programmer and character designer on the original *Sonic The Hedgehog*, respectively. They also made *Phantasy Star*, *Burning Rangers*, *Billy Hatcher*, and *Sonic Adventure* before parting ways in 1999.



1 The game feels like a '90s throwback, with cheery anthropomorphised animal characters and bright colours everywhere. **2** When you complete a level, the characters all have a dance to a theatrical song. **3** The hub world area has distinct Chao Garden vibes, echoing Sonic Adventure's evolutionary A-Life system.





Engage your Homer gene and drool over Nour's glorious iced doughnuts.

F FORMAT PS5 / ETA TBC / PUB PANIC / DEV TERRIFYING JELLYFISH / PLAYERS 1

Nour: Play With Your Food

So mouth-watering, you'll want a pizza this

Dropping a cube of butter onto a pile of fluffy pancakes and watching it melt into the warm maple syrup, then drizzling over our... even Marks & Spencer would have trouble competing with this game's glorious food porn. Just try not to lick your DualSense.

"Mostly that it's so universal; everyone from any walk of life has some sentimental attachment to food or some sort of fond memory," says Nour: Play With Your Food creator TJ Hughes when we ask why people love staring at luscious images of food. "Whether you're a foodie or not, it's something that sparks a memory in all of us," he adds.

A LITTLE CHEESY?

How much 'game' is in Nour remains to be seen. It's more art installation project than points-chasing arcade fun. But there's something engaging about literally playing with your food, albeit polygonal depictions of candy-speckled ice cream, silky ramen, and a waterfall of doughnuts.

"I really wanted to thread the needle between an experience that is both weird and artistically interesting, but also accessible and has a fairly wide appeal," says Hughes, adding: "I want everyone to feel

like they can pick the game up but not be too on-the-nose about it and actually make it an experience with depth to its tone. Games are capable of a lot more than what the average person sees in popular games, and I think those alternative avenues are worth exploring."

Because it's on PS5, we have a close connection to what's happening. Hughes tells us he's grateful to the DualSense controller, which enables this. "Imagine the adaptive triggers simulating the resistance of cutting a fruit, using

the gyro to poke and prod your food with kitchen utensils, or just being able to feel the thud of a potato hitting the table," he says. Mmm, we're imagining.

IMPRESSIONS

We can't take our eyes off Nour's sumptuous food. Why is slicing an apple or prodding a doughnut so engrossing?

"ADAPTIVE TRIGGERS SIMULATE THE RESISTANCE OF CUTTING A FRUIT."



1 Who doesn't want to noodle around with their PS5 and DualSense? Handling food in Nour is half the fun. **2** We're getting hungry just looking at this buttery breakfast spread. Nour is weird, but deliciously fun.



“NEWCOMER MEITENKUN FIGHTS HALF ASLEEP, PILLOW IN HAND.”

F FORMAT PS4 / ETA 2021 / PUB SNK / DEV SNK / PLAYERS 1-2

The King Of Fighters XV

This brawler is electric

Following the success of SNK’s Samurai Shodown reboot, which proved to be one of 2019’s best fighters, this long-running series’ return shows equally exciting promise. Don’t worry if you’re new to the soapy, bloated story; the hits land hard enough to ensure you won’t care.

The King Of Fighters XV roster is rumoured to be 40 characters long, which is actually on the light side for this personality-packed series. Five fighters have been revealed, including the returning Benimaru Nikaido, who leads the team of newcomers, which includes Shun’ei and Meitenkun (who fights half asleep, tasselled pillow in hand).

The King Of Fighters 3v3 team mode returns, giving a tactical edge to pre-fight selections. It also offers multiple stories and endings depending on which team you pick. But back to those newcomers, and Shun’ei, who’s the game’s main protagonist. Along with his friend, the sleep-deprived Meitenkun, they’re here to push their abilities. Aren’t we all?

IMPRESSIONS

The new characters are some of KOF’s quirkiest yet, and the return of the lightning-charged Benimaru will excite fans. This could be 2021’s best new fighter.



1 New hero Shun’ei can command godly hands. **2** Benimaru can charge electrical strikes. **3** Sleepy new fighter Meitenkun is able to use his pillow as a weapon. **4** Benimaru’s tall, foppish hair and camp mannerisms return. **5** Meitenkun is deadly even when he’s getting 40 winks.

FORMAT PS4 / ETA 8 JUN / PUB BETHESDA / DEV BETHESDA STUDIOS / PLAYERS 1-12

The Elder Scrolls Online: Blackwood

Reopening the gates of Oblivion

Eight hundred years before the events of *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, life was... actually very similar. People roamed the land smacking each other with swords, looting crates, and rifling other peoples' bookshelves for lore. The odd bottle of wine was welcome, too.

"We picked a time that was kind of unknown in the lore; it was The Time Of Struggles, when there were a lot of emperors, a lot of kings, and it was perfect for what we wanted to do," says studio director Matt Firor. It's a setting that offers familiar places, environments, and people, then, but with the scope to do things differently from offline *Oblivion* and *Skyrim*.

One of the stories from that long-ago time is *Blackwood*, the new Chapter expansion coming this summer that slots neatly into *The Elder Scrolls Online's* year-long *Gates Of Oblivion* narrative arc. You'll be tasked with uncovering the plots of the Daedric Prince Mehrunes Dagon, across 30 hours of new mainline story content, side-quests, and additional events.

FACTRICK

1. THREE UP

Blackwood is the first of three Chapters coming this year. Each will form part of the *Gates Of Oblivion* arc.

2. HOT TAKE

Ahead of *Blackwood* you'll be able to download the free *Flames Of Ambition* DLC in March, setting up the story.

3. BEAR LOOT

Preorder and receive the Nagahide Welwa Ravager mount and Nightmare Bear Cub pet. Oh, special.

MARSH MELLOW

You may remember the swampy southern area of *Blackwood*, which borders on *Elsweyr*, from *Oblivion*, but it's being fleshed out and expanded upon for this online game's Chapter. "It has a whole area which players have never been to before, which is western Black Marsh by the city of Gideon," reveals Firor. "Players hadn't been there in a while, to that part of it, but there's a whole new area which is brand-new which they haven't been to. We look at the map, look for fun areas that tell great stories," he adds.

Other places you'll be ransacking in *Blackwood* include the lush *Niben Forest*, the *Blackwood Bog* which stretches out to *Black Marsh*, and the city of *Leyawiin*, which we were previously able to explore in *Oblivion*, where it's a cheerful, prosperous trading hub. The city forms the central hub from where you begin your quests, and while this urban location will be familiar, and features a largely similar layout to the one it has eight centuries later, new city *Gideon* hasn't been seen since *The Elder Scrolls: Arena* on PC, back in 1994. That one really piques our interest!

"THE NEW COMPANIONS SYSTEM ENABLES YOU POSSE UP WITH NPCs."

While the environments featured will blow cobwebs off your memories, there are fresh ideas coming to *ESO: Blackwood*. The new *Companions* system enables you to posse up with bespoke NPCs, special characters who will journey with you across *Tamriel* and slay your enemies. It's possible to tailor these heroes for hire and adjust their loadouts. Discovering each character's backstory will improve your bond and they'll fight alongside you when on quests. This suggested to us that *Bethesda* is accommodating lone wolf players within its online world.

TRIAL MIX

This is, however, fundamentally an online RPG, and the new *Rockgrove Trial* celebrates *ESO's* ability to draw in huge numbers of players. This new Trial supports teams of 12 on a mission to rid the town of *Rockgrove* of the Daedric-worshipping *Argonians*, smashing their ritual before the *Mehrune Dagon's* dark legions can be summoned. Similarly, the *Oblivion Portal* events task you with finding and entering mysterious portals found around the world map, to destroy the *Daedric* constructs that lay inside.

Your reward for taking on these new events, side-quests, and main story missions is a tempting prospect: a whole pile of *Oblivion-touched* loot. There are six powerful gear sets, an array of 'dark' collectibles, Achievements, and special items to earn. Best sharpen your sword, befriend the largest Companion you can find in *Tamriel*, and get questing.

IMPRESSIONS

These annual Chapters – ESO's expansions – continue to ride the fine line between a hit of fun nostalgia and pushing the series to new heights with added features. This one looks good.



4 Team-up with unique NPCs for the entire *Gates Of Oblivion* story arc with the new *Companions* system.

5 Why go with one hammer when two will do? 6 The fiery *Daedric* army serves the villainous *Mehrune Dagon* but what deal have the lords and leader done?

TRACK RECORD

Studio director Matt Firor has been working on *The Elder Scrolls Online* for 13 years and has been involved in all five Chapter expansions. *Blackwood* is the latest, but previous entries took us back to *Morrowind* and *Skyrim*.



1 New tutorial quests will bring newcomers up to speed with *The Elder Scrolls: Online*'s features. **2** Return to the maze-like sprawl of Leyawiin (last seen in *Oblivion*) in this latest online Chapter. **3** Exploration is still a major draw in Blackwood, and there'll always be a gruesome-looking Haj Mota or two for you to smash with a hammer.



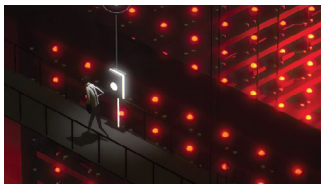


"60FPS ENSURES THOSE MARTIAL ARTS MOVES HIT YOUR EYEBALLS."

Judgment

F FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 23 APR / **PUB** SEGA
DEV RYU GA GOTOKU STUDIO / **PLAYERS** 1

Return to the streets of Kamurocho, Tokyo this April – they’ve never looked better. Coming next month is Ryu Ga Gotoku Studio’s PS5 edition of its detective adventure set in the Yakuza universe. Featuring refined and improved visuals that make use of PS5 and solid 60fps to ensure those martial arts moves hit your eyeballs, as well as a boost to load times and all the previously released DLC, Judgment on PS5 impresses. Not played the PS4 release? Recap time: as disgraced attorney turned private eye Takayuki Yagami you’re embroiled in a series of grisly murders. Mixing detective minigames with Yakuza’s quirks, it’ll be worth rediscovering Kamurocho on PS5.



The Plane Effect

F FORMAT PS5 / ETA 2021
PUB PQUBE / **DEV** STUDIO KIKU,
 INNOVINA INTERACTIVE
PLAYERS 1

There's something oddly retro about this atmospheric adventure's premise: leaving the office and travelling home. Who does that now, right? This simple setup hides The Plane Effect's melancholic underbelly. The world isn't what it seems, and we're not even sure protagonist Solo has a home and family waiting for him. What follows is a stylishly rendered journey through a world of small but escalating problems as Solo must contend with commuter travel and, erm, a giant, bridge-eating bug. (This is not an average journey home, as far as we remember.) There's also the suggestion someone or *something* is watching the chaos play out. Flex your puzzle muscles later this year on PS5.



Winds & Leaves

F FORMAT PS VR / ETA SPRING
PUB TREBUCHET / **DEV** TREBUCHET
PLAYERS 1

Releasing exclusively on PS VR, this contemplative free-roaming adventure challenges you to bring life to a barren world. The simple act of planting trees, watching them grow, and picking fruit from their branches is made engaging in virtual reality. You move about the world on stilts, actively pulling yourself through the colourful landscape. You can raise and lower your height to snag hard-to-reach fruit, or just take in the view. Winds & Leaves is a simulation too, which means you'll need to discover where to grow your plants for the best results, as well as develop new tools and upgrades to open up your grow bag to a wider selection of rare and wonderful crops. Winds & Leaves is a grower.



Narita Boy

F FORMAT PS4 / ETA SPRING
PUB TEAM17 / **DEV** STUDIO KOBA
PLAYERS 1

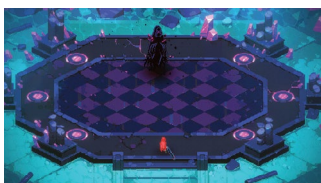
A funky synth soundtrack, a Tron-like 'sucked into a computer world' setup, and the promise of wielding a 'techno sword' – it's really hard not to be drawn into Narita Boy's heartfelt homage to the 1980s. In it, the world of The Digital Kingdom exists inside the hit videogame Narita Boy. The Creator has been wiped by Him, The Stallions (creatures from the Horror Dimension) are coming, and Motherboard drags you into this world to save it – and maybe the universe at the same time. It's another pixel art side-scrolling metroidvania that recalls the golden age of 16-bit gaming but Studio Koba delivers its vision with total authenticity. Hand-crafted frame by frame, Narita Boy is impressive.



Maskmaker

F FORMAT PS VR / ETA 20 APR
PUB MWM INTERACTIVE
DEV INNERSPACE VR / **PLAYERS** 1

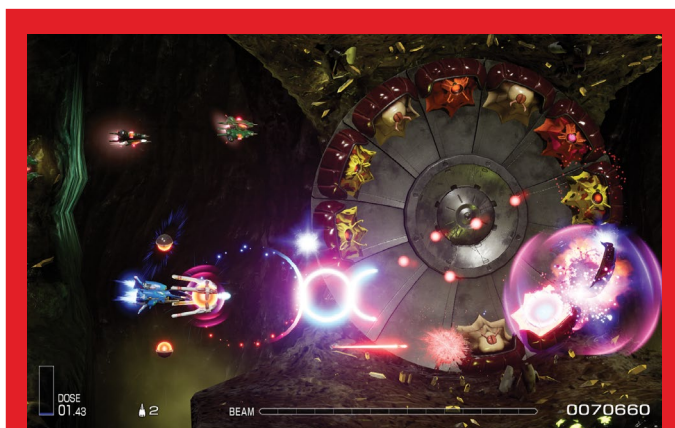
The act of making an ornate mask by chiselling it from wood before painting and decorating it with ornate details is engaging in virtual reality. But when you place the mask over your head you're transported to new worlds. Each mask unlocks a new environment to explore, including a forest, a desert canyon, and a serene tropical beach. Gather new items to adorn your masks – sea shells, branches, and feathers – and they'll unlock more places when attached in combination. Some extra resources can only be discovered by helping the guardians of each realm, others from solving puzzles. The more brain-teasers you complete, the further you can venture in one of PS VR's most unique games.



Eldest Souls

F FORMAT PS4 / ETA SUMMER
PUB UNITED LABEL / **DEV** FALLEN
 FLAG STUDIO / **PLAYERS** 1

Gods, eh? Always meddling. The Old Gods were imprisoned and in their absence humankind has prospered. But in an act of revenge they've unleashed a Desolation on the world, causing you to pick up a massive sword and enter the Citadel, the Old Gods' prison, and slay 'em all. Eldest Souls is a slick boss rush adventure where every defeated Old God offers a new power and upgrade path; you're stealing their powers and turning the tables. The pixel-art visuals impress at every turn, with neat details and animated touches bringing this dying world to life. Combat is immediate but the game's upgrade paths and item management hints at hidden depths. If you're in need of a challenge, start your quest here.



R-Type Final 2

F FORMAT PS4 / ETA 29 APR / **PUB** NIS AMERICA
DEV GRANZELLA INC. / **PLAYERS** 1

R-Type was the daddy shooter that started the whole thing, and this is a sequel to the PS2 edition. The classic side-scrolling gunplay returns – fly your tiny ship into the heart of the resurrected Bydo empire and kill everything. What's new is a fresh look that's unafraid to dazzle, a unique adaptive difficulty setting, and an incredible number of customisation options. Just when you think you've cracked it, R-Type Final 2's stages evolve around you.

Kitaria Fables

F FORMAT PS5 / ETA 2021
PUB PQUBE / **DEV** TWIN HEARTS
PLAYERS 1

A cute, janky Harvest Moon-alike or the best thing since Cat Quest? It all depends on the strength of your kitty-tinted glasses. When not busying yourself with the lives of the residents of Paw Village, and doing a bit of farming and crafting, you're called upon to venture into the wider world of Canoidera to discover why the wildlife is becoming more aggressive. Presenting a broad quest footnoted with side-missions and the grind of keeping your farm going, Kitaria Fables is very Harvest-Moon-like in approach. Resources gathered and grown enable you to buy and craft new gear, including getting Shamrock, a bear blacksmith, to create weapons for you. We want to be cynical sods but who can look their customisable cat in the eye and not enjoy the cuteness of Kitaria Fables? Potential gaming catnip.



FFXIV: ENDWALKER



The Final Countdown

Final Fantasy XIV: Endwalker takes players to the moon – and to PS5. We talk with Naoki Yoshida about the future of the console exclusive MMO

Remember Paris in 2019? Naoki Yoshida walked the stage in front of excited Final Fantasy XIV Online players, dressed in the full garb of a Gunbreaker (a Job class in the game). When he asked the audience where they thought they'd be going next, one fan shouted out "The moon!" Yoshida laughed and grinned. "The moon? Maybe that's 7.0!"

In a way, the lunar setting of forthcoming expansion Endwalker (due this autumn) is another in a long line of promises Yoshida and his team have made and kept for fans of the Final Fantasy MMO. "I said [that] half-joking," says Yoshida when we ask him about that moment. "We did actually have that already in mind, back then." Yoshida's penchant for running a well-oiled machine is one of the

things that enabled the team to bounce back from the original failed PC incarnation of Final Fantasy XIV, rebooting it as the beloved A Realm Reborn in 2013, and his involvement in Final Fantasy XVI is one reason why fans have so much confidence in the project.

SEASON FINALE

Of course, Endwalker is considered Version 6.0. The plan has long been to wrap up the Hydaelyn and Zodiark story arc in either 6.0 or 7.0, and thanks to the positive response to Shadowbringers (which we gave 9/10 in #165), the dev team decided to go for it. "We wanted to keep the momentum going," explains Yoshida. "There was enough volume to actually incorporate that into [Endwalker]." Plenty will be packed in, with the narrative firmly concluding by the end, leaving updates between this expansion and the next to begin telling a new story.

Putting a bow on a narrative that began all the way back in 2013 is a massive undertaking, and a bold

one. "If we take an example of a TV drama, for example, if we're just dragging out the story, and people don't want to watch it, then of course, that's not going to do us any good," says Yoshida. "People would be really sick of it, you know, then they really wouldn't be able to stand it any more. So there was kind of a sense that, you know, we shouldn't really drag this on for no reason at all." Like TV writers, Final Fantasy XIV Online's hope that while working on the next instalment in their story, the great and completed arc that precedes it will continue to attract people. "I think that it's appealing to new players in the respect that they would think, 'Oh, yeah, I really want to get stuck in and get started from the beginning,'" Yoshida says.

The announcement that Endwalker would be akin to a season finale was joined by the revelation that the game is also coming natively to PlayStation 5, with an Open Beta as soon as 13 April. It'll be the first Final Fantasy developed for PS5, and owners of the game on PS4 will be able to upgrade for free – meaning those who started on PS3 will have been able to bring forward their licence for the game across two

You're a long way from home, but at least there's air on this moon. Will there be FFIV-style Hummingway moon rabbits?

FFXIV: ENDWALKER



Naoki Yoshida has worked on many Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest titles.

generations. And with a free trial offering new players the chance to try the game up to level 60, it's a compelling offer for any PS5 owners who're looking for something different that'll make plenty of use of the new-gen tech under the console's glossy white hood.

"Really, as an MMO developer, the two big things that really appeal from this hardware is first of all the memory size – there's a huge increase in the memory size," says Yoshida. "And also there's much faster loading speeds. [...] I think they're also things that the players can really imagine would make an impact on the gameplay experience." Capture from the PS5 version shows this in action; we can see how the gorgeous 4K visuals really bring the fantasy world to life, and there's almost instantaneous loading between areas rather than the fairly lengthy wait we're used to from the PS4 hard drive.

Few MMOs have managed to make the same commitment to PlayStation as Final Fantasy XIV Online, where crossplay and version parity mean everyone's on a level playing field. "Very simply put, that is because this is Final Fantasy," says Yoshida of this dedication.

"I WANTED TO MAKE MMOS MORE ACCESSIBLE TO GENERAL GAMERS."

"As you know, spanning over 30 years, maybe 35 years, this franchise has been on consoles. Really, the home of Final Fantasy is on console." It's true; every numbered game in the series has been playable on PlayStation over the years, with last year's Final Fantasy VII Remake and the upcoming Final Fantasy XVI both being PlayStation-exclusive.

"Because of that it's really our duty to ensure that people who are playing on a console have an experience which is by no means inferior to those playing on PC," says Yoshida. It's an issue close to his heart. "Personally I'm quite a big MMO fanboy. So I really do like my MMOs," he says. "But you know, traditionally, there's been this view that MMOs are a very niche genre, really hardcore gamers are playing MMOs. So I actually wanted to change that outlook, I really wanted to change that perception of MMOs. And, I wanted to make MMOs more accessible to general gamers. So, in a way I wanted to make the genre itself more popular." Few big online RPGs feel as welcoming as FFXIV, and respectful of player time – if you want to check in only for the big updates every few months, it's totally doable. "So, actually delivering this on the console as well, it played a part in changing the perception of MMOs. But that was actually more a personal kind of goal of mine," Yoshida says.

FAR FROM FINAL

As games get more complicated, the time and cost of game development grow to match, meaning numbered entries in established series



You'll be able to take on the new dungeons with NPC allies instead of other players.

Anima was creepy enough in FFX. Given the Giger-like Moon designs in Endwalker, we can't imagine what it'll be like this time.



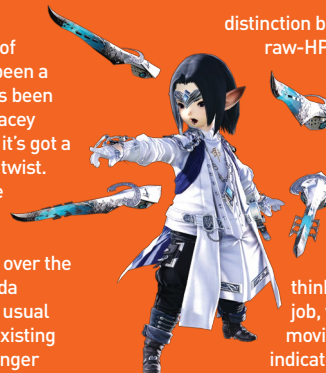
SAGE ADVICE

God save the queen?

The first of two new Jobs coming to FFXIV as part of Endwalker is the Sage. It's been a while since a new healer has been added, and thanks to the spacey ambitions of the expansion, it's got a cool futuristic Gundam-like twist. Wielding Nouliths, four little robo-lasers, they're able to channel aether to zap foes while erecting barriers over the party to protect them. Yoshida promises that as part of the usual expansion-wide tweaks to existing material there will be a stronger

distinction between barrier-style healers and raw-HP delivering healers.

As for job number two? At time of writing all we know is it's a DPS class that has yet to be announced, but Yoshida usually leaves little breadcrumbs for fans to speculate on, this time focussing on his *The Filth And The Fury* T-shirt. What could a *Sex Pistols* documentary have to do with FFXIV? Some fans think it could indicate a scythe-wielding job, while the big-brained think the movie's director, Julien Temple, could indicate something a little more holy.



FFXIV: ENDWALKER

NEW SHORES

More Final destinations



There's more than the big sky orb coming to Endwalker. The island of Thavnair, a subtropical area that seems to be influenced by south-east Asian cultures, will be the other destination. Its city of Radz-At-Han will be the smaller of the new cities, but it looks gorgeous. The island is home to friendly Matanga – chill, talking elephant people.



While the true nature of the Moon is something Yoshida is still keeping close to his chest, the architecture that houses the villains we'll be facing has a detailed, Giger-like design that's certainly otherworldly. One new dungeon we've seen incorporates twisting, bone-like spinal columns, and new Primal Anima (a revised version of the FFX Summon) is similarly ghoulish.



Those who took part in the Ishgardian Restoration event have helped everyone unlock an area for player housing right in the Holy See Of Ishgard itself. Actually obtaining housing is tough, though, as it's so highly sought-after. It's something the devs have promised to try to improve over time as part of the new area.



And if that's all a little too much, then brand-new to Endwalker is the Island Sanctuary. This idyllic retreat allows you to plant crops and raise animals much in the style of Harvest Moon. This could prove to be a favourite way to take some time out and just soak up good vibes.



It's not all about the moon. Thavnair promises a luscious subtropical island to explore. Say hello to the friendly elephants while you're there.



Long-time ally Alphinaud has switched his job from Summoner to Sage.

» become more and more spaced out – which is the case with Final Fantasy. As a result, Final Fantasy XIV is often in the spotlight, delivering the latest offerings for fans of the series.

But the game’s significance doesn’t faze Yoshida, “With respect to the Final Fantasy franchise, I don’t actually feel any responsibility,” he says. For him, it’s about treating FFXIV as an individual project in and of itself, and the responsibility he has is more to the fans than the franchise. “In that respect, yeah, there is a responsibility that we have to really deliver the best experience for the players.”

“THERE IS A RESPONSIBILITY THAT WE HAVE TO REALLY DELIVER THE BEST EXPERIENCE FOR THE PLAYERS.”

Yoshida’s also pulling producer duty on FFXVI, where he’s similarly committed. “With respect to that title, of course, I really do want to be able to deliver that title quickly to the Final Fantasy fans.” Even so, during the Endwalker announcement, he reiterated his commitment to FFXIV, calling it his “life’s work” after fans were concerned this meant he was moving on from the MMO. “Even [when we release] Final Fantasy XVI, that’s not going to be the end of XIV,” he says when we ask about the future. “Because we’re constantly updating XIV, even after XVI is released [...] in that respect XIV is in a sense the latest Final Fantasy.” And, as long as the updates keep on coming, it always will be. “Until, you know, the number will seem old – then, we could change the number. How about Final Fantasy 20?” he laughs. “That would have a good

that serves as a motivation as well for me to aim for higher places.”

THE ROAD AHEAD

They’ve walked a long road, but even after Endwalker the developer has no intention of stopping any time soon. Just as this expansion adds an exciting narrative conclusion and more jobs, dungeons, and areas to explore, so too will the future of the series stretch further still. “For any title that you’re actually having as a live service over a long time span, it’s not really a peachy experience to support that title for such a long time,” says Yoshida. It’s constant work on every level; engineers need to be ever-ready to fix things and other members of the team constantly designing and programming upcoming additions.

When a new online game releases and has wobbles (think back to Anthem and Marvel’s Avengers), thanks to Yoshida Final Fantasy XIV is often cited as a reason to believe it can bounce back. But few other games are able to invite players in so earnestly, or to explain so captivatingly the nuance behind adjusting battle numbers while on stage. It’s all part of a symbiotic relationship between these devs and the fans. “We do have a sense of trust with our fans over these ten years, that really does play a big part [in] motivating us,” says Yoshida. “It would be a different story if they don’t want to continue on this ride together. But as long as the fans are continuing to express their support, that’s really assuring. We can leverage our trust with the fans and continue providing an amazing experience by working on this title.”

Yoshida’s led his team in turning a title even Square Enix admitted was a failure into one of the most popular online games ever, and is about to take us to the moon. We’re staying on the ride, if only to see where they will take us next. ■

ring to it. For a while at least that will keep us ahead of the game!”

Yoshida and the team have earned a lot of respect from fans through their efforts to revitalise the game over the years, and it’s not something he takes lightly. “Having people that need you, that actually is important, I feel. So you know, it might be the company, they say, ‘Oh, man, you know, without you, we can’t make this game, we really need you to be there for us,’” he says. “And in the same way that actually applies to the fans as well. If there are fans there, and they say ‘We really want you to be working on this title,’ that is really assuring and really comforting. And in a way

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Clive Rosfield, First Shield Of Rosaria, is on the warpath. The fire in his eyes shows he's a man prepared to set off down a dangerous path of vengeance. Against the Imperials? Against the Eikons? Against the very Mothercrystals that have brought prosperity for generations? You'll have to find the details out for yourself, but you can rest assured that he is determined: "I'll kill you, if it's the last thing I do."

Final Fantasy XVI represents a bold risk on Square Enix's part as it's an unadulterated action RPG that brings the series back to its high fantasy roots. It's being developed by Square Enix's Creative Business Unit III – the team behind Final Fantasy XIV Online, with Naoki Yoshida as producer and Hiroshi Takai (The Last Remnant and Saga series) as director. Here's everything we know about one of the most anticipated RPGs coming to PS5, and how it lays out a new path for the series.

FINAL FANTASY XVI

I

HIP TO BE SQUARE

Square Enix's first PlayStation 5 exclusive

While Square Enix plans to release many forthcoming games (such as *Outriders* and *Balan Wonderworld*) on both PS4 and PS5, *Final Fantasy XVI* will be the developer's first title to run exclusively on the new-gen hardware. The visuals shown in the reveal trailer may not instantly tap into PS5's full power, but it's early days yet. In any case, we prefer seeing a prototype (and a beautiful prototype at that) showcasing how it plays to another unrealistic CG trailer. The game has reportedly been in development for four years so we're confident we'll see greater graphical improvements by the time a release date is confirmed.

"THIS WILL BE SQUARE ENIX'S FIRST TITLE TO RUN EXCLUSIVELY ON THE NEW-GEN HARDWARE."

There's a bit of *Final Fantasy XIV* in the visuals. Both games are being produced by the same person.



FINAL FANTASY XVI

FINAL FANTASY XVI

II

LONE HERO

Clive may have big shoes to fill

From what we've seen, it appears you mainly play as Clive (like how Noctis took the fore in FFXV), so party-based character swapping is potentially gone. That said, we also see Clive with a group hunting a Dominant, and armies are bound to clash. If he's mostly a lone wolf, it'll be intriguing to see the game's epic sweep from the perspective of one man.



Clive will face many larger-than-life foes, but fleeing is a tactic too.

III

FAMILY AFFAIRS

Meet the cast of Final Fantasy XVI

While we anticipate an epic tale – Valisthea's factions could mirror the geopolitics of Final Fantasy XII's Ivalice as empires, kingdoms, and republics clash – FFXVI's story also has a personal touch. Its principal characters are members of the Grand Duchy Of Rosaria's Rosfield family. It seems wherever your adventures take you, and whether you're acting as protector or confidant, family (by blood or circumstance) comes first.



CLIVE ROSFIELD

The elder son of the Archduke of Rosaria, Clive is a skilled swordsman who at the age of 15 has proved himself in the Ducal Tournament, where he is sworn to be the shield to his brother Joshua, who destiny has chosen as the Dominant of the Phoenix. Despite not being the chosen Dominant, he can fight with a part of the Phoenix's fire.



JOSHUA ROSFIELD

Clive's younger brother by five years, Joshua became the Dominant of the Phoenix soon after his birth. Unlike his stronger, braver brother, he's a gentle soul – though that makes him warm and kindhearted towards his father's subjects. However, a tragic event will awaken his frightening power, one that's beyond his control.



JILL WARRICK

A princess from a foreign land, Jill was taken from her homeland of the Northern Territories at a young age, when the two nations were at war. Regardless, the Archduke insisted that she be raised alongside his sons, and so she has become very much like family to Clive and Joshua, who both treat her as a trusted confidant.



IV

WAR OF THE REALMS

A quick guide to the six realms of Valisthea

Square Enix has a knack for creating beautiful fantasy worlds, and FFXVI is set to deliver. Valisthea is a vast continent made up of six realms, each with its own form of government and use for the Eikons. The uneasy truce that has existed between the realms is sure to be broken.



THE GRAND DUCHY OF ROSARIA

Home to our heroes, Rosaria in western Valisthea draws its aether from a Mothercrystal in a volcano called Drake's Breath, off the coast. The Duchy was formed from a group of provinces which decided they were better together.



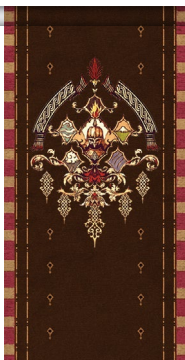
THE HOLY EMPIRE OF SANBREQUE

Valisthea's theocracy is home to an abundance of aether, and its Holy Emperor is worshipped by the populace as the living incarnation of the country's one true god. Sanbreque's Dominant serves as its champion in times of war.



THE KINGDOM OF WALOEED

This kingdom claims the whole eastern part of Valisthea as its own, though it also frequently deals with orcs and beasts. Their Dominant and king rules with brute strength, amassing a huge army and intent on expanding Waloeed's territory.



THE DHALMEKIAN REPUBLIC

In the south of Valisthea, this republic is made up of five states, which in turn all have a voice in its parliament. However, the parliament's decision-making is influenced by its special advisor, the Dominant of Titan.



THE IRON KINGDOM

Formed of a small group of islands to the west of Valisthea, this kingdom's people follow an extreme crystal-worshipping faith, a source of tension with Rosaria. Dominants are considered unholy abominations and executed here.



THE CRYSTALLINE DOMINION

After many battles over this small but strategic plot of land around the tallest of the Mothercrystals, this is an autonomous domain led by a council of representatives from each surrounding nation. It's not home to a Dominant.



Feel that Devil Trigger burning in battle – oops, that’s a different game. Or is it?



V

IT'S ABOUT (REAL) TIME

Combat looks set to get plenty of DMC TLC

Forget old-fashioned time constraints: Final Fantasy XVI fully embraces slick, lightning-fast, real-time action combat with combos and pyrotechnics that look straight out of Devil May Cry. That makes sense when you know that Ryota Suzuki, previously a designer for Devil May Cry 5 and Dragon's Dogma at Capcom, is on the FFXVI team as battle director. And the director is Hiroshi Takai, whose career at Square Enix in battle effects means we can expect every swing of the blade or magic blast to look clear and impactful. We also hope this means we'll see some tactile implementation of DualSense's adaptive triggers.



FINAL FANTASY XVI

VI

MOTHERCRYSTAL CHRONICLES

Enter Valisthea, a land founded upon crystals

Crystals have long been a staple of Final Fantasy, and they're back in this entry. On the continent of Valisthea, where the game's set, mountains of crystal known as Mothercrystals tower over the land, blessing it with aether. Aether allows people to use magicks to live comfortable lives, which is why multitudes flocked here. Over time six powerful realms developed in the shadow of the Mothercrystals, though the uneasy peace they've existed under for ages is now under threat thanks to the spread of the Blight. For some residents, however, the power of the crystals has shaped Valisthea's history for long enough.



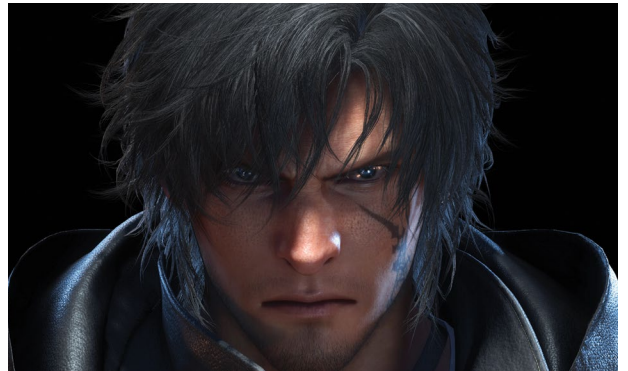
The aether of the Mothercrystals is one way of keeping the lights on.

VII

TWO TIMELINES

How it started; how it's going

As Final Fantasy XVI's story begins Clive, Joshua, and Jill are but children thrown into a situation where they'll be forced to grow up fast. But it's clear this growing up won't just be metaphorical. As we've seen glimpses of a more mature Clive in battle and in his scarred and rugged close-up, we know the story will be set across at least two time periods, most likely split between the tragic event triggered by the Blight and the awakened Eikons. Final Fantasy games are no stranger to time skips (FFVI and FFXV are prominent examples, but there's more besides), but less clear is how events will be split for this game.



With that tattoo, you don't want to look at old Clive the wrong way.

FINAL FANTASY XVI



VIII

YOU'VE BEEN SUMMONED

What are Eikons and who are their Dominants?

Final Fantasy's tradition of Summons gets revamped with Eikons (incidentally the name also given to the Primals of Final Fantasy XIV). Valisthea's most powerful creatures actually reside within a human who is blessed (or cursed) with the ability to call upon their power. These Dominants are at the heart of each realm, sometimes treated as royalty, like the Rosarian Archduke's son Joshua, while others are feared or forced to serve as living weapons of mass destruction. So far, four Eikons have been confirmed: Shiva, Titan, Phoenix, and Ifrit. The latter pair's fiery incarnations are seen in the title logo, so expect them to be pretty important.

**"SO FAR, FOUR EIKONS HAVE
BEEN CONFIRMED: SHIVA, TITAN,
PHOENIX, AND IFRIT."**

Ifrit's appearance turns the story to its dark, tragic path – the moment of ignition, you could say.



FINAL FANTASY XVI

IX

DARK FANTASY

There will be blood

After a fair few years of straddling science fiction, steampunk, and a bit of everything in between, Final Fantasy XVI marks the series' return to high fantasy, with its medieval European flavour. In a bid to appeal more strongly to Western audiences, who have a taste for the rough stuff, the new game will also have a darker tone akin to that of Game Of Thrones or The Witcher. With its themes of war and vengeance, this is Final Fantasy at its most mature (and bloody) yet. Let's hope that the grittiness doesn't diminish the magic that fans love the series for.



Blood? In Final Fantasy? We're not in Eorzea anymore.

X

CREATURE COMFORTS

There's still a familiar fantasy in here

Staunch fans may dread the dark overhaul to the Final Fantasy formula, but you'll still feel at home when you spot some familiar fauna, such as a Chocobo as your faithful steed. Expect to encounter many monsters from the series in the field as well, from the traditionally difficult Malboro to the paralyzing wildcat Couerl. While it's not confirmed, we can but hope to see Clive's blade clashing with a Tonberry too. ■



Chocobo look adorably fluffy but are fully capable of charging into battle.

Finally ranking the Fantasies



We consider every entry in the JRPG series to determine which are the ones you absolutely shouldn't miss on PlayStation



When you think about RPGs, the very first thing that probably springs to mind is Final Fantasy. Square Enix has established a beloved series that's almost synonymous with all things story-heavy and number-crunchy. Ranking all of them is a difficult undertaking,

especially given every numbered release has appeared on PlayStation. But it had to be done. We've revisited all of them to determine which hold up the best, and which you should be playing right now, any and all rose-tinted equipment be damned. We've even noted which ones are backward-compatible (BC). Read on...





FINAL FANTASY XI

First released 2002 Where to play PS2 Cost £14.99 (eBay)
Best hair Kam'lanaut

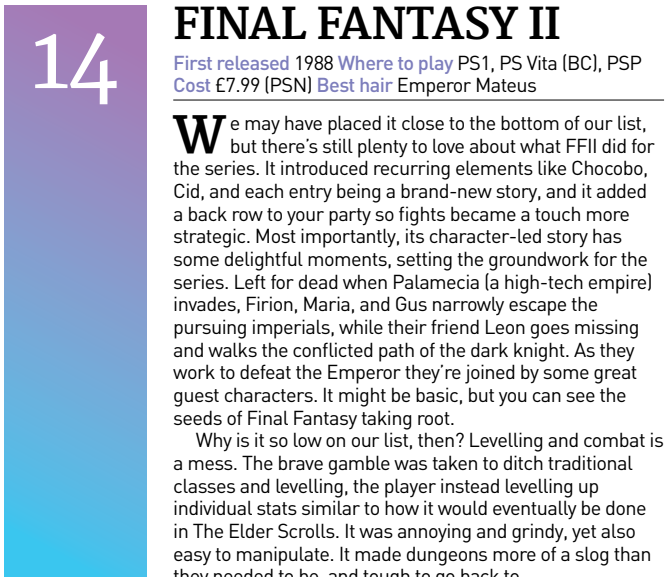
This was loved in the early 2000s for its deep Job system and community spirit, but A Realm Reborn does both better while sanding off FFXI's excessively menu-based edges. As one of the first cross-platform console MMORPGs, the most impressive thing about FFXI today is that it's still going, though the PS2 servers have been shut down. The prospect of jumping into this now is daunting, were it even possible on PS2.



FINAL FANTASY

First released 1987 Where to play PS1, PS Vita (BC), PSP
Cost £7.99 (PSN) Best hair Warrior Of Light

The original did a lot. The side-on turn-based battles were novel for the time, and the classes you can assign at the beginning laid the ground for Jobs later on. Even the crystal-laden plot is twisty, merging fantasy with science-fiction touches. But it's all so very basic now. The simplicity is neat (the game just dumps you on the map at the start), but there's not much to come back for other than the novelty.



FINAL FANTASY II

First released 1988 Where to play PS1, PS Vita (BC), PSP
Cost £7.99 (PSN) Best hair Emperor Mateus

We may have placed it close to the bottom of our list, but there's still plenty to love about what FFII did for the series. It introduced recurring elements like Chocobo, Cid, and each entry being a brand-new story, and it added a back row to your party so fights became a touch more strategic. Most importantly, its character-led story has some delightful moments, setting the groundwork for the series. Left for dead when Palamecia (a high-tech empire) invades, Firion, Maria, and Gus narrowly escape the pursuing imperials, while their friend Leon goes missing and walks the conflicted path of the dark knight. As they work to defeat the Emperor they're joined by some great guest characters. It might be basic, but you can see the seeds of Final Fantasy taking root.

Why is it so low on our list, then? Levelling and combat is a mess. The brave gamble was taken to ditch traditional classes and levelling, the player instead levelling up individual stats similar to how it would eventually be done in The Elder Scrolls. It was annoying and grindy, yet also easy to manipulate. It made dungeons more of a slog than they needed to be, and tough to go back to.



FINAL FANTASY V

First released 1992 Where to play PS3, PS1, PS Vita, PSP
Cost £7.99 (PSN) Best hair Faris Scherwitz

Featuring a refined version of FFIV's ATB system, and a greatly revamped Job system that defined how FF handles classes, this snazzed up the series. Ability Points allow for Job levelling distinct from XP, which made multi-classing possible for the first time. The problem? While it has its moments, Bartz' adventure feels by-the-numbers, and so it was the first in what had been a series of compelling narratives to fall short.



FINAL FANTASY III

First released 1990 Where to play PS Vita (BC), PSP
Cost £7.99 (PSN) Best hair Xande

This game only made its way outside of Japan in the form of this 3D remake (and we can only judge what we're able to play, so that's what we're commenting on). It was the first entry to feature the Job system, which was huge for FF's evolution. Characterisation is sparse, improved in the remake. You don't get more classic than thinly sketched fantasy heroes, but the way the mechanics come together makes it worth a revisit.

FINAL FANTASY RANKED



11

FINAL FANTASY XIII

First released 2009 Where to play PS3 Cost £3.00 (CEX) Best hair Lightning

This first part in an eventual trilogy follows a former soldier as she fights first against a government that has branded her sister an enemy of the state and then an apocalyptic prophecy about herself. Much maligned at the time for its linearity (though it opens up a bit as it goes along), and a science-fiction story that throws a ton of setting-specific jargon at you, it notably remains one of only a tightly clasped handful of entries with a female lead.

Protagonist Lightning was originally intended to be reminiscent of series golden boy Cloud Strife, acting in a similarly no-nonsense fashion. But her chilly exterior masks a strong desire to help people and a vulnerable side she reveals only to her loved ones.

FFXIII is also notable for how it shook up combat. Not dissimilar to XII's Gambits, the Paradigm system offers six different roles to assign to your AI-controlled party members.

As you control only the party leader directly, this allows you to direct the flow of battle in a limited capacity. FFXIII's twist on the ATB system further streamlined fighting, allowing you to unleash multiple attacks or perform a number of actions in rapid succession. It garnered rightful praise for being more involved than earlier entries' turn-based fights, and this battle system remains one of the most welcoming mechanically.



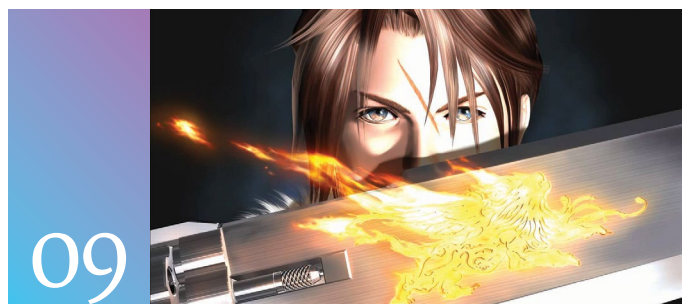
10

FINAL FANTASY IV

First released 1991 Where to play PS3, PS1, PS Vita, PSP Cost £11.99 (PSN) Best hair Barbariccia

The point when the series evolved from 8-bit to 16-bit graphics, there's an extra vibrancy here and much more personality in the tiny sprites. Cecil's fall from grace as Captain of the Red Wings, stripped of his position after questioning his King's brutal methods, represented a step towards ambitious storytelling that paid off. Even now it's a tale that sticks with you.

The evolution of FFXIII's Job system plays into the narrative, as Cecil is haunted by the things he's done in the name of the Kingdom Of Baron, and must take steps to cleanse himself so he can become a Paladin. This is also the game that introduced the ATB system for fights, meaning you wait a certain amount of time to take action while enemies keep attacking.



09

FINAL FANTASY VIII

First released 1999 Where to play PS5 (BC), PS4, PS3, PS1, PS Vita, PSP Cost £15.99 (PSN) Best hair Sorceress Edea

To a degree, FFVII's successor followed the path already laid out, leaning into a more cinematic approach. But it was wildly ambitious too, and still stands up today. Character models were realistically proportioned all the time, and pre-rendered backgrounds mixed with video to create epic scenes that felt alive. The story follows Squall and his fellow mercenary-trained classmates, who end up facing a genuinely creepy Sorceress.

It's let down by just how bizarre the story becomes, and a combat system that, while fresh (you can get magic by collecting it from enemies), doesn't quite click in the way that others do. Still, its sheer ambition and inventiveness makes it stand out from the crowd, and it's well worth a play today.



FINAL FANTASY XV

First released 2016 Where to play PS5 (BC), PS4
Cost £7.49 (Amazon, or free in the PS Plus Collection) Best hair Ignis Scientia

Few games spend ten years in development without some turmoil, and FFXV is notorious for its travails. You can understand why it took a decade to make, though. Not only was it the first Final Fantasy developed for PS4, it was also the first to use Square Enix's Luminous Engine, and the first to tackle an open world of the type seen in modern gaming – the devs aimed for beautiful, grounded visuals blended together with the fantastical. Given such lofty ambitions, some stumbles were inevitable.

But what *is* here is sublime, and ludicrously immersive. Prince Noctis and his pals are on a road trip before his arranged marriage to Lunafreya, which will unite the kingdoms of Insomnia and Tenebrae. In their absence disaster befalls Insomnia at the hands of the Niflheim Empire, and Noctis and co need to track down special weapons, the royal arms, to restore the prince to the throne.

The world is beautiful (though a little barren), and as you drive along roads with your friends at your side it really feels like you're on a journey together. You can even pitch

a tent and have cookouts, and encounter random bonding events where the four boys will discover something of interest in the world, sharing laughs along the way.

In combat you play only as Noctis, sometimes issuing commands to the others (though you can switch members thanks to post-launch DLC). The power of the royal arms gives him zippy teleport abilities too. It's a fluid combat system that can feel satisfying in certain duels, but isn't as effective for tackling large groups of enemies.

The further into the game you get, though, the more the ropes holding FFXV together begin to fray, and in a sort of reverse FFXIII situation it becomes incredibly linear the further you progress, ditching any semblance of being an open world about halfway through and becoming corridor central – you can feel the corporate cutting knife all over this one. Post-launch updates and DLC attempted to bolster things, but some of the announced DLC was unceremoniously cancelled, so the game still feels incomplete. When it shines, FFXV warms the heart, but this boy-band-like foursome deserved better.

WE WANT TO BE EVIL

What good is a hero without a villain? Here's the best of the rogues' gallery.



Sephiroth (FFVII)

The original shirtless bad boy, he has legions of fans. Joking aside, his descent into darkness and his manipulation of protagonist Cloud make him one of the series' most enduring villains.



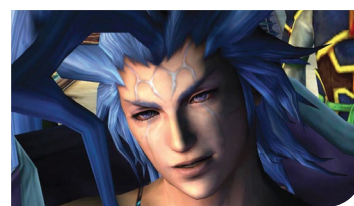
Kefka (FFVI)

What do we need to say beyond 'what a laugh,' right? A classic force-of-nature villain who's only good at being bad.



Ardyn (FFXV)

Darin de Paul's performance makes this character a villain we absolutely love to hate. Bags of screen presence plus his own playable side-story make him one of FFXV's most appealing elements.



Seymour (FFX)

Well, he's persistent – we'll give him that. Having envisioned the worst of Spira, this horned villain makes a compelling foil to Yuna, who only sees the good in things.



Sorceress Ultimecia (FFVII)

Seeking to reign supreme over all of time, this is one iconic villainess. Her ability to possess friend and foe alike makes her a compelling, ever-present threat.



NEVER ENOUGH

Sometimes you want more of a good thing, and that's where these followups come in



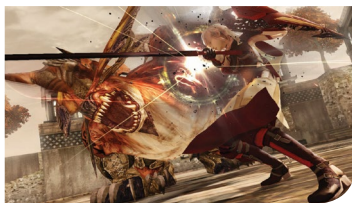
Crisis Core (FFVII)

Focussing on the untold story of Cloud's BFF Zack Fair, this game retells everything before and including his ultimate sacrifice. Our PSP remains tear-streaked to this day.



FFX-2

The first true sequel features *two* musical numbers that have to be seen (and, indeed, heard) to be believed. Dresspheres gave the Jobs system an unexpected but welcome magical girl twist.



Lightning Returns: FFXIII

The FFXIII trilogy's conclusion takes Lightning to the end of time as she tries to pull the world back from the brink. Introducing a time limit and a new battle system, it's worth a flashback.



FFXIII-2

This direct sequel ditches its predecessor's linear story through a time travel conceit and further develops the Paradigm Shift battle system.



Kingdom Hearts

Yes, *it counts* – alongside the Disney cameos, the Final Fantasy characters act like alternate-universe counterparts and offer a different take on your favourites.

07

FINAL FANTASY X

First released 2001 Where to play PS5 (BC), PS4, PS3, PS2, PS Vita
Cost £15 (CEX) Best hair Lulu

Ah yes, the first truly next-gen Final Fantasy. Well... for its time. Announced alongside its original PlayStation predecessor and online-only successor at the Square Millennium Event, it's far from an awkward middle child. Ushering in a suite of firsts for the series – voice acting, large-scale 3D environments, and eventually a direct sequel – it is fondly remembered as one of the best games of the PlayStation 2 era.

Underwater fantasy footballer Tidus finds his sporting career knocked off the rails when an eldritch abomination destroys his hometown and sends him careening into a far-flung future. One thousand years later he discovers the same monster, Sin, is still tearing across the world. Tidus soon meets Yuna, the woman who is determined to defeat Sin once and for all, and he later joins the band of heroes who have sworn to protect her with their lives.

The setting of Spira was notable for a number of departures. For one, unlike earlier entries, which drew on European sources of

inspiration, Spira took its cues for everything from architecture and names to vegetation and topography from southeast Asia. And as the party embarks on an epic globetrotting pilgrimage, the journey completely forgoes the use of an overworld map, with each town or ruin flowing into the next.

Random turn-based battles returned but with a number of unique flourishes. For starters, you can freely chop and change party members mid-battle, and for seconds you can make each one thoroughly your own thanks to the Sphere Grid. Rather than gaining predetermined stat increases with each level, the Sphere Grid allows you to spec each party member exactly how you want. For example, this makes it possible for you to turn heroine Yuna, who is traditionally a character geared towards healing, into a heavy-hitting powerhouse.

The PS4 remaster looks great, and when you buy it you'll even get FFX-2 into the bargain. Worth a replay? We'd say so!





06

FINAL FANTASY VI

First released 1994 Where to play PS3, PS1, PS Vita, PSP Cost £7.99 (PSN) Best hair Terra Branford

Numerically this is no longer the mid-point Final Fantasy, but it still feels like the bridge between the new style and the old. The final 2D, pixel-based game in the series, it represents Square Enix at the top of its game. It oozes confidence. And that self-assertion allowed for a creativity that laid the foundation for the epic narratives to come.

Set in a world undergoing an industrial revolution, there's a steampunk vibe to things.

Much of the world and its people are under the thumb of the Gestahl Empire. Starting as Terra, an encounter with an Esper frees you from the Empire's control, and you join a revolution against it. Butting heads with antagonist Kefka, it culminates in a legendary back half, famous for being developed only because the team were ahead of schedule. Excellent combat and an interesting magic system make it great to play even now.

The ensemble cast features 14 main party members, as well as guest characters. FFVI was the first game in which you could switch your party at will. Each member has a terrific backstory. The narrative is full of memorable, stirring moments (who can forget the opera?). It doesn't feel nearly as old to play as it might look, and is a true modern classic. If you play only one old-school 2D Final Fantasy, you owe it to yourself to make it this masterclass.



05

FINAL FANTASY VII

First released 1997 Where to play PS5 (BC), PS4, PS3, PS1, PS Vita, PSP Cost £12.99 (PSN) Best hair Sephiroth



Massively influential to this day, Final Fantasy VII needs no introduction. Back in 1997 this was many a PlayStation fan's first introduction to the series, delivering emotional beats that still resonate through cutting-edge FMV cutscenes.

When ex-SOLDIER Cloud Strife joins ecoterrorist cell AVALANCHE, it's just another job. Megacorporation Shinra is carelessly harvesting the planet's resources, making for a villain that feels timely more than two decades on. After an attack on one of Shinra's reactors goes wrong, Cloud falls into the slums below and meets Aerith Gainsborough. Shinra has taken a nefarious interest in the enigmatic flower girl and she remains one of the entire series' most iconic characters.



04

FINAL FANTASY XIV

First released 1997 Where to play PS5 (BC), PS4, PS3 (now offline) Cost £17.95 (Complete Edition on Amazon, or Free Trial up to Lvl 60) Best hair Zenos yae Galvus

Debuted in 2010, this entry began by learning all the wrong lessons from its MMORPG predecessor XI. It relaunched as A Realm Reborn in 2013, in one of the single best comeback stories in videogames to date. Since then it has gone from strength to strength under the guidance of Naoki Yoshida, a man who dual-wields the roles of director and producer.

What's most interesting about this rise from the ashes is that the original iteration forms a pivotal moment within the fiction of its successor. The world of Eorzea is attempting to rebuild in the wake of the seventh umbral calamity while also trying to navigate the threat of the encroaching Garlean Empire.



03

FINAL FANTASY IX

First released 2000 Where to play PS5 (BC), PS4, PS3, PS1, PS Vita, PSP Cost £16.99 Best hair Kuja

This swansong for the original PlayStation era harkened back to earlier games' high fantasy trappings, departing from more recent entries' sci-fi dystopias, while the art direction traded realistic proportions for

something cartoonier. In fact, this shift was so stark that at the time many speculated it would be a spin-off rather than a mainline entry.

The story of this fully fledged fantasy pushed character development to the fore. Almost

every party member has a memorable brush with the game's core themes of life and death, making for a tale that is as warm as it is poignant. Here are some of the moments that have stuck with us through over two decades.

KEY MOMENTS

Four reasons Final Fantasy IX has a place in our hearts



I

The play's the thing
 As a series, Final Fantasy frequently flirts with theatricals. FFI's opening act gleefully rips off the bard, not only teaching you the combat but also deftly foreshadowing pivotal plot beats that don't pay off until *much* later. That it culminates in a theatre troupe kidnapping a princess – who even gets a chance to show off her own improvisation skills – is just icing on the cake.



II

Last Dance
 Vivi's character arc is one of the most tragic and gets right to the heart of the game's themes. After discovering the true purpose of the Black Mages and seeing what is ostensibly his family callously cut down by Black Waltz No. 3, Vivi delivers a fiery rebuke. His act of courage poignantly denounces the villains' insistence that the Black Mages are just 'mindless dolls.'



III

Wouldja, Kuja?
 After an unwinnable battle you're left lying in the pouring rain, surrounded by a party on their last legs. The mysterious silver-haired Kuja steps forward to regard main protagonist Zidane, saying he could become a problem. But rather than capitalising on the party's lowest moment, he makes an enigmatic exit. The curtain has finally been pulled back and the true villain revealed – what a way to end disc one!



IV

Asking Alexander
 Kuja's bloodthirstiness is fully revealed in Alexandria when he summons Bahamut. Princess Garnet and young summoner Eiko join together in prayer, desperate to summon an Eidolon that can protect the kingdom. The answer to their prayer manifests as a pair of enormous angel wings that curl protectively around the castle. The stunning visual is made all the more memorable by how their Eidolon gets the dragon to turn tail.

02

FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE

First released 2020 Where to play PS5 (BC), PS4 Cost £32 (Amazon) Best hair Sephiroth. Again.

Whereas the '97 original boasted ambition that vastly outstripped the tech of the time, Remake does far more than simply realise the original vision. As we covered in OPM #183's game of the year rundown, this really is an all-singing, all-dancing reimagining – that's clear long before you get to the Honeybee Inn.

Remember Advent Children or that PS3 tech demo? Remember how back in 2005 we thought Cloud and co had never looked so good? A decade and a half later, FFXVII Remake blows both out of the water with its modern reinterpretation of those classic designs. Not only that, but an excellent localisation allows every member of your party plenty of

opportunity to endear themselves to you all over again. None of them is a slouch when it comes to combat either, each cast member having an almost character-action-style moveset that encourages you to switch between them throughout fights. The clever reinterpretation of the story's structure also means you won't be left awkwardly shuffling party members or grinding for experience unless you absolutely want to. Many aspects of the original game have been refined in a similar way, making for one of the paciest entries on this list by far.

What makes Final Fantasy VII Remake so fascinating, though, is that it goes far beyond rehashing familiar beats – in fact, FFXVII Remake covers fewer than half the events on the original disc one. Instead, it ends on a note that not only interrogates the classic game's legacy but also makes an apparent commitment to tell its own story with these much-beloved characters. It seems strange to say that the best part of this Final Fantasy is yet unwritten, but the first entry in the Final Fantasy VII Remake series leaves the door open to a world of possibility. Watch this space.

SPINNING OUT

This is Final Fantasy but not as you know it. These are our favourite spin-offs



Final Fantasy Tactics

In the kingdom of Ivalice, cadet Ramza slowly untangles the evil plot behind the Lion War. Fights in this TRPG take place on an isometric battlefield, and you must manage your units to victory.



Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles

The recent remake not only introduced online multiplayer to this storybook action adventure but also brought the tale to PlayStation for the first time.



Final Fantasy Type-0

Featuring a darker story than usual for Final Fantasy as well as real-time combat encounters and larger, strategy-based battles, Class Zero definitely has a varied curriculum, to say the least.



World of Final Fantasy

We are helpless in the face of all of our FF favourites' big-headed chibi charm. Stack everything else on top – often literally – and this adorable RPG is a winner.



Dissidia Final Fantasy

This one brings all of your favourite characters together for the ultimate showdown. It's Final Fantasy fighting – what's not to love about that?





FINAL FANTASY XII: THE ZODIAC AGE

First released 2006 Where to play PS5 (BC), PS4, PS2 Cost £10 (CEX) Best hair Wayne Carudas Solidor

At launch on PS2 in 2006, Final Fantasy XII was divisive as it shook up so much of the traditional Final Fantasy formula. This was, after all, where random encounters were shown the door in favour of what was likened to MMO-style combat at the time. But, with an epic, sprawling, grounded world full of political

intrigue, it feels like a saga in its own right, and it's still fantastic to revisit.

PS4's FFXII: The Zodiac Age remaster brought a deeper Job system, plus the option to speed up movement to make the bigger areas (and some are huge) less of a trek for players. It holds up – a massive, gorgeous adventure like little else, and it's a complete, well executed vision.



INTO IVALICE

Created by Yasumi Matsuno, Ivalice is a world shared with Vagrant Story and Final Fantasy Tactics, though the individual titles only allude to one another. Matsuno helped to conceive the concept of Final Fantasy XII, and it bears his stamp. It's a beautiful and complex world rich in lore, where magic and airships mix. The game centres on Dalmasca, a kingdom caught between the warring Rozarria and Archadia, and the unfurling political intrigue is captivating and realistic.

Ivalice feels great to explore, featuring huge open areas stitched together as zones. With monsters roaming in front of you, and the ability to travel mostly from one end of the map to the other on foot (you eventually unlock fast travel via airship), it feels utterly tangible and filled with secrets off the beaten path. Nabudis, for instance, is largely optional – devastated by nethicite (a weapon of mass destruction), it's an especially sombre and memorable place to investigate.



RISKY GAMBIT

When you come up against monsters, instead of being transported to a 'combat zone', you fight them right there on the map. It was a big change to combat, forcing players to make strategic choices to avoid being overwhelmed by groups of enemies, and to dodge the odd roaming creature that was vastly stronger than their entire party.

To avoid getting repetitive, the gambit system means you can program your party rather than having to issue commands one by one (and unlock more as you go along). For instance, your healer can automatically know they need to heal anyone who falls below 50% health. How complex you want to get with these commands is up to you. Some people might say it renders battles too easy, but that's not the case with harder fights, and coming up with the right gambits for a specific situation is as satisfying as they come, making you really feel like your party has good synergy and strategy.



AGENT TWELVE

FFXII's Hunt system remains one of the best side-activities in the entire series. With 45 marks to take on, with involved methods of uncovering them and often tricky fights, it's immense. Here are four of our favourite quarries.

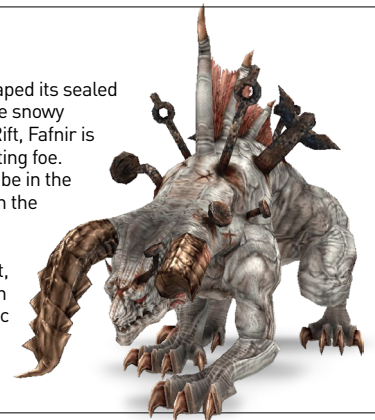
Deathscythe

Deathscythe is a Reaper that haunts Nabudis, born from the collective desire for revenge from the warriors who all perished in an instant once the nethicite dropped. Can only be goaded out by a party member below 10% health.



Fafnir

Having escaped its sealed prison in the snowy Paramina Rift, Fafnir is an intimidating foe. You have to be in the right zone in the middle of a blizzard to encounter it, making it an atmospheric as well as pretty battle.





IV

THINK LIKE AN ESPER

FFXII's versions of Summons are Espers. They can be linked to a single party member only and then summoned to physically join in battle at critical moments. What's great is how many of them are completely optional (eight, versus the five in the main story), hidden away in the corners of Ivalice. Their locations always feel like they make sense within the lore of the world, and uncovering one always feels like you're unpicking a mystery. They can be some of the toughest fights in the game, and victory is all the sweeter when you can then call upon them in battle.



III

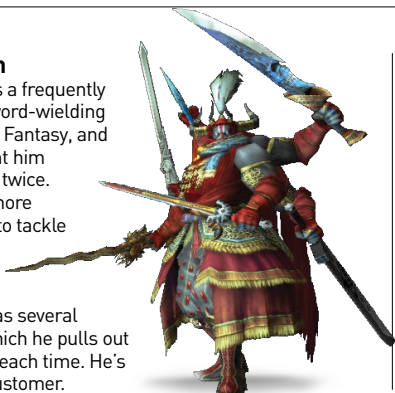
PARTY ROCK

No Final Fantasy is complete without a great group of characters, and FFXII produced some of our all-time favourites. It helps that they're highly customisable, being able to take on two Jobs apiece in the Zodiac Age. Exactly how they end up specced will become unique to you by the time

you reach the endgame, and you might have taken a completely different route to a friend. You begin with Vaan, a headstrong youth who dreams of becoming a sky pirate; he and his childhood friend Penelo quickly end up joining together with charismatic sky pirates Balthier and Fran, and then a princess in Ashe who wants to reclaim her kingdom, and her disgraced yet loyal knight Basch. Guest characters are strong too, as are the villainous Judges with intricately designed, foreboding armour and helmets – they're almost Darth-Vader-like.

Gilgamesh

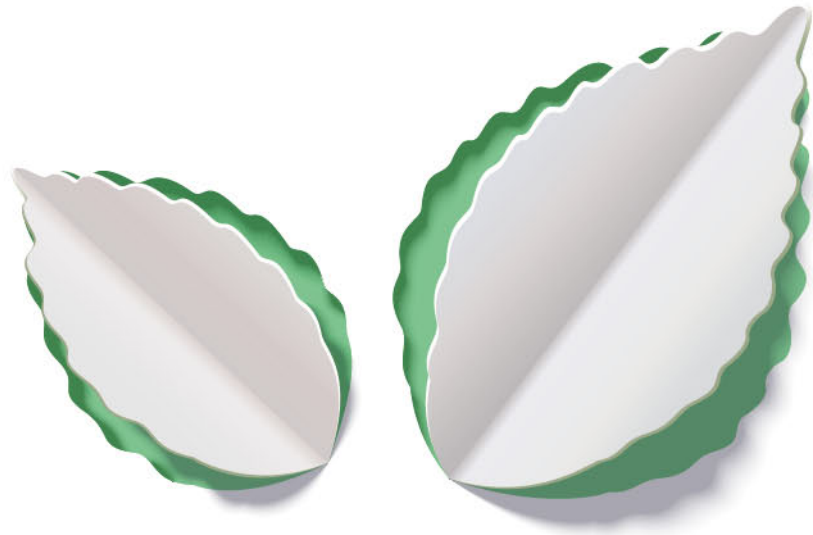
Gilgamesh is a frequently returning sword-wielding boss in Final Fantasy, and here you fight him not once but twice. He's much more challenging to tackle the second time around. Each fight has several phases in which he pulls out new swords each time. He's one sharp customer.



Yiazmat

Yiazmat is simply the ultimate challenge. Only available once the other hunts are complete, it awaits you in an ancient colosseum. Even with the best equipment, it's a lengthy fight that'll keep you on your toes, taking a good couple of hours if you don't dare to speed it up on PS4.





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Little Nightmares II

A sleepy puzzle platformer to doze through? Dream on!



INFO

Format PS4
Price £24.99
ETA Out now
PUB Bandai Namco
Dev Tarsier Studios
Players 1
Length 5 hours
Accessibility Nothing, not even audio description subtitles. Some puzzles involve unavoidable audio cues too.



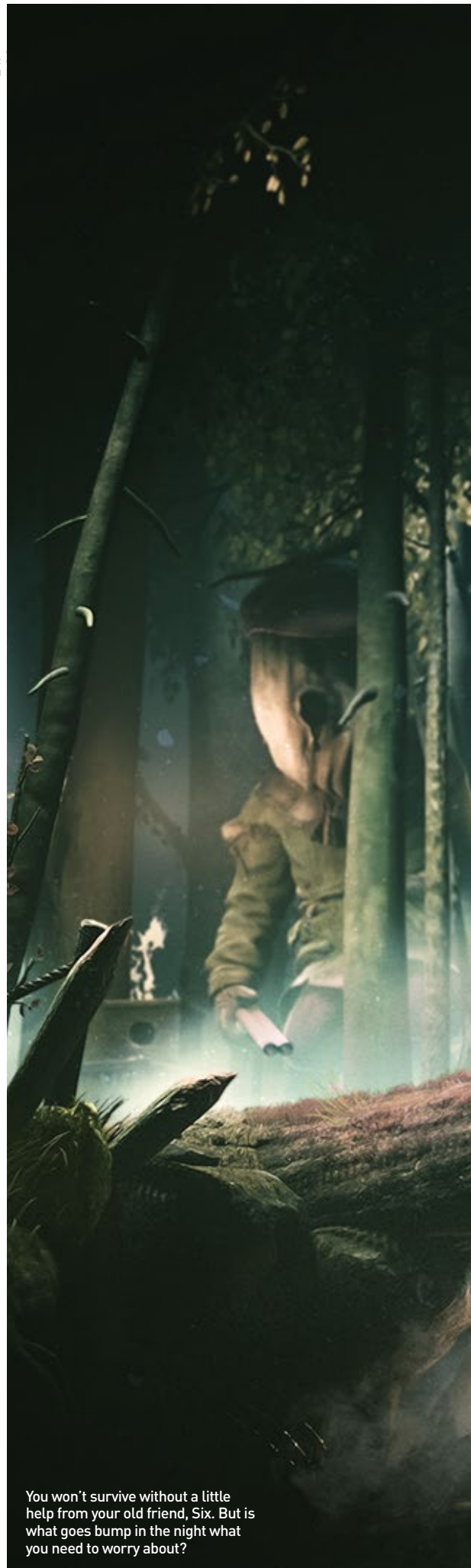
Leaving the decks of the Maw, the first game's sinister ship, and its hungry ghosts behind, this spooky followup signals a shift in focus. She of the iconic yellow raincoat, Six, is only along for the ride; Mono – a boy with a penchant for putting things on his head – takes the lead in exploring what is the opposite of a sweet dream.

Like the first game, this has stretches of platforming and puzzling punctuated by running away. Mercifully, as you leap towards safety, fall damage this time around is much less likely to take out your pint-sized protagonists. However, you're still bound to miss your fair share of jumps in this 2.5D platformer.

Directing small children in real life is often not dissimilar to herding cats, and that's a dynamic replicated here. There's a slight lack of responsiveness to the controls that on the one hand definitely adds to the illusion of being a tiny child trapped in an overwhelming world but on the other causes more than its fair share of frustration when you're trying to act. The otherwise-sound puzzle design is complicated by these issues. Multiple times we bang our head against a wall, believing we've exhausted all options, when actually an interaction just hadn't triggered the first time we tried something. While we appreciate how asking for a fresh pair of eyes on a puzzle mimics the co-operative dynamic between Mono and Six, fighting with the controls takes the bite out of the game's best scares.

TRIAL AND TERROR

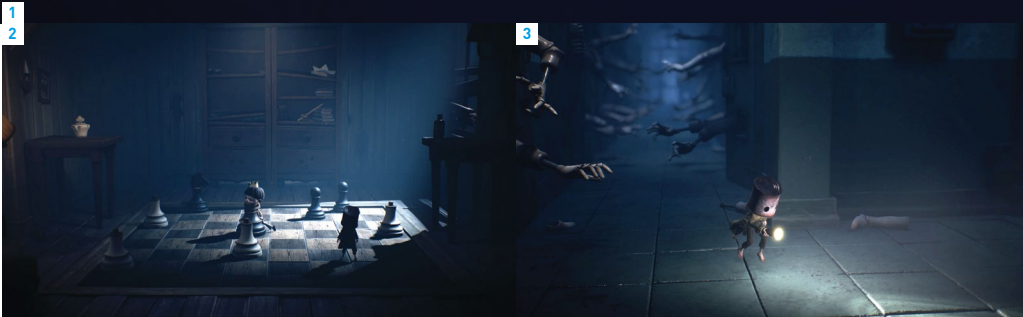
Trial-and-error gameplay has always been a part of the series and there are a handful of 'videogame deaths as game design' punchlines that, alongside generous checkpointing, we couldn't help cracking a smile at. However, when you're once again



You won't survive without a little help from your old friend, Six. But is what goes bump in the night what you need to worry about?

■ Asking for a fresh pair of eyes on a puzzle mimics the dynamic between Mono and Six. ■





1 Drink it in! Or, ah, maybe don't... what we mean to say is that you won't be able to tear your eyes from this one. **2** Puzzles are far from fiendish but the controls may well conspire to stump you. **3** In our restless dreams, we see this game's best scares.

▶ running down a narrow corridor with grasping hands on all sides, it's difficult to ignore how little tension remains after three or four deaths between the same two checkpoints.

These issues can rear their head when you're simply scampering through the game but there's absolutely no escaping them during your confrontations with the still-rudimentary but now more direct combat mechanics. A number of set-pieces are undercut by resets that could've been avoided were it not for a) an awkward camera angle obscuring the distance between you and whatever beastie is currently desperate to eat you and b) just a brief moment of insufficient co-ordination. All of that said, when you do finally splat the baddie your attack lands with satisfying weight, and the novelty of seeing teeny-weeny bag-headed Mono waving around an axe as big as he is does not wear thin.

ASTRAL PROJECTION

The words 'AI co-operation' may strike fear in the hearts of gamers of a certain age but we assure you there's no need to worry here. Six returns as an

asset to your fight for survival, not just offering a leg up to hard-to-reach places but also signposting how to move forward, sometimes telegraphing when it's safe to leave your hiding place – after all, she's got the experience.

How her time aboard the Maw has affected her is a question ever-present at the back of your mind. The answers offered here only serve to lead you further down the rabbit hole but also leave us feeling like more tension could've been drawn out of your uneasy alliance with her. The narrative beats that bookend the story suggest this dynamic was the intention but it doesn't land, ironically due to Six being a reliably helpful AI partner. She won't hold your hand through every obstacle (though you can choose to keep her close by pressing **LB**) but when she is taken out of the picture, it's not because she's chosen to ditch you.

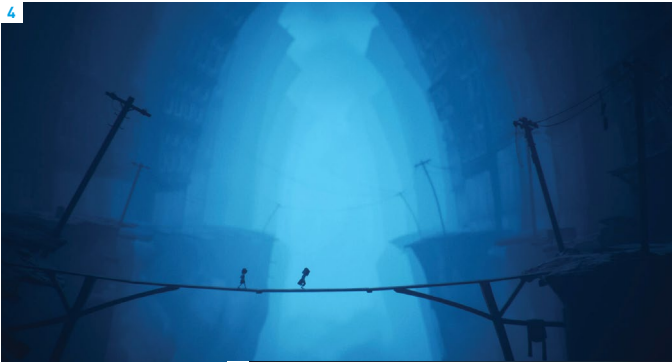
What definitely *does* meet its mark is the stellar art direction

and environment design. Presenting an expanded take on its predecessor's world of childhood fears brought to twisted life, highlights include the towering pursuers of your tiny tots. These range from a sack-masked hunter with an unfortunately very particular quarry to a teacher with an ever-watchful gaze that's bound to make your skin crawl, and a classroom full of truly sinister students. Each one is paired perfectly to their stalking ground and is heralded by their own crudely crafted following.

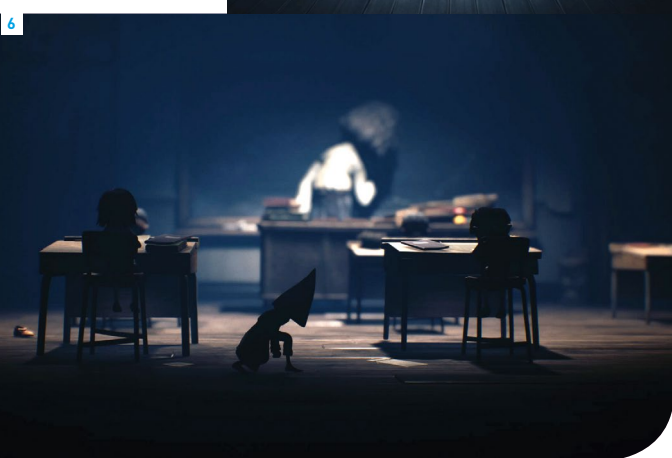
OVERGROWN-UP

The third pursuer you have to evade has perhaps the most memorably creepy gameplay gimmick but the big bad themselves is built around the tired horror trope of presenting larger bodies as grotesque. It's a disappointing way to follow an opening half that otherwise shows such creativity in realising its villains. Overall, the closing act villains feel less well

▶ Pursuers range from a sack-masked hunter to a teacher with an ever-watchful gaze. ▶



4 Terrifying vignettes emphasize the scale of the Pale City. **5** Many ideas, like this late-game mechanic, left us wanting more before changing the channel. Do touch that dial! **6** Sneaking and creeping is as tense as ever. Trust us.



realised and not nearly as scary as those you encounter earlier on in the game.

The first game was constructed upon the horror of insatiable hunger and it's clear that the sequel doesn't throw its thematic stones too far away. This is *definitely not* a game for children; these confrontations get right to the horror of childhood powerlessness in a way that feels more direct than ever before. Little Nightmares II has far more to say beyond that, but untangling the fraught symbolism of this bad dream is an experience we don't want to spoil here – especially when it comes to what you're left with upon waking.

While leaving the cramped, submerged decks of the Maw and opening up the setting is the right call, the Pale City itself

feels far more disparate in comparison to the ship. We enjoyed each landmark and, um, scary tour guide we encountered along the way, but this nightmarish cohort of grotesque grownups are only loosely connected and things don't feel as cohesive as a result. At the same time, we were left wishing each variation on a theme went just a bit deeper.

In many ways, this sequel feels like a recurring dream; playing it was both nightmarish and strangely familiar. That's not to say it was a dream we were desperate to wake up from as even now its stunning, deeply shadowed visual direction calls us back for a cat nap. However, even though the puzzles are much less fiendish this time, the controls present an unwelcome case of déjà vu.

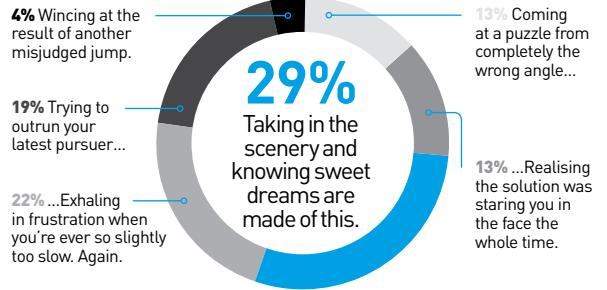


The deaths caused by the controls being not as responsive as we'd like may annoy, but there's a whole world out there you're going to want to feast your eyes on. **Jess Kinghorn**



THE OPM BREAKDOWN

WHAT YOU DO IN: LITTLE NIGHTMARES II



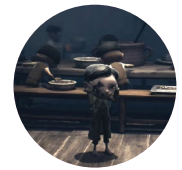
FRIENDS & ENEMIES



SIX
Offering a guiding hand, her presence raises more questions than it answers.



THE TEACHER
Ruling the school with an iron fist and ruler, you don't want to draw her attention.



STUDENTS
They only play nice for their teacher. Get too close and you'll learn they're badly behaved.

SECOND OPINION WORST NIGHTMARE



Better to control and with mesmerising shot compositions, this learns the right lessons from its predecessor, though moments that emphasise combat are clunky, and breezy puzzles mean you don't stay in each area long enough for them to develop much identity. Compared to the Maw, the horrors in the Pale City feel more disparate, and the ending less satisfying as a result. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**

HOW TO... SOLVE LIFT SHENANIGANS



Once you've found the key stashed in a desk drawer, ride the lift back down, then climb back up the wooden slats and through the crawl space. Then, with a little help from Six, pull the lever to the left to call the lift. Time your jump just right and ride the top of the shaft to the next area.

TROPHY CABINET



BRONZE
Reunite Six with what she once thought was lost. Luckily, it's hard to miss!



SILVER
During the second bout of lift fun, look out for a suitcase. Deliver the letter inside.



GOLD
See what's waiting for you behind the last door. You were always heading here.



INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £34.99
ETA Out now **PUB** NIS America
DEV YummyYummyTummy **PLAYERS** 1



Fallen Legion Revenants

Fallen at the first hurdle

Three weapons transformed into people, like a trio of violent Pinocchios, commanded by a ghost? Story and action that alternate between this and a politician who supports the group with diplomacy and stealth? A great idea... that is let down by pretty much everything else.

Despite a grand backdrop of humanity in peril, it's a claustrophobic experience. The diplomat Lucien very quickly runs against the same few backdrops in the castle he's trying to wrest from a tyrant, while the ghost Rowena and her crew travel through an oddly homogenous world. The story is thin, though the actors do what they can with the rough dialogue¹ (which isn't a lot). Multiple endings dependent on your choices are welcome, but you're unlikely to stick around long enough to see them all.

Lucien's sections tend to be time-limited, adding an edge to negotiation and searches for clues, and extra frustration to his terrible and essentially pointless stealth sequences. The game largely hinges on combat, which is sometimes enjoyable but fatally flawed.

Rowena can take three 'Exemplars' with her at a time, assigned to **○**, **⊗**, or **⊙**. Attacks rely on action points, which regenerate fairly quickly, allowing for tactical thinking while keeping combat fast-paced. You can block at any time, and AP can be restored by perfect blocks. So far, so good. Bosses represent hideous difficulty spikes, however, and the system for reviving Exemplars (hold down their assigned button while wrestling with the rest of the DualShock) forces your right hand into unnatural positions. Frustration is bad enough, but pain? Unacceptable.²

Luke Kemp



FOOTNOTES ¹ Most dialogue is muffled, as though the actors recorded it wearing masks. ² This game is a write-off for anybody who struggles with pads.

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £15.99 **ETA** Out now
PUB Focus Home Interactive **DEV** Passtech Games **PLAYERS** 1



Curse Of The Dead Gods

The Dead Gods are watching

We're getting used to seeing developers working roguelike elements into different genres to create something fresh, and this effort is a worthy contender.

Playing as an unnamed explorer, you venture into a cursed temple in search of riches and divine powers. It's you against swarms of enemies, traps, and statues that seem to watch your every move in this top-down action roguelike. The Hellboy-like deep shadows coupled with the Mesoamerican temple motifs serve up a visual feast, especially in the midst of combat.

You unlock power-ups and new weapons the more you play, but you have another weapon: the temple itself. Whether you lure enemies into traps or hide in the darkness for stealth kills, being inventive will make all the

difference to how far you make it into each run.

Combat is the highlight here and fights are quite technical (making clearing a room particularly satisfying), but there's a difference between being difficult and just being punishing.¹ Along with health damage, you're susceptible to corruption, which increases with every area you explore. When your meter's full, one of 14 curses befalls you, from causing treasure chests and enemies to explode to quite honestly falling under the curse of frustration and boredom. It's a system that deters you from exploring, not an exciting risk/reward.²

After a handful of runs you may feel as if you've seen everything. The combat system still makes this worth a try if you're itching for more roguelikes.

Tundun Folami



FOOTNOTES ¹ You can heal at sanctuaries you find, but it will, as you can guess, cost you. Blood fountains, for example, will raise your corruption level. ² You could call a curse a double-edged sword. One edge is bad, the other is worse. Often they affect your corruption or health levels – one raises your corruption whenever you open a chest.

INFO **FORMAT** PS4 **PRICE** £5.35
ETA Out now **PUB** Apriori Digital
DEV Apriori Digital, Natalie Clayton **PLAYERS** 1



Can Androids Pray: Blue

Mechs, no violence

Time is running out. Stranded by mechanical failure, mech pilots Beatrice and Cort are unable to do anything but contemplate their own mortality before a severed fuel line sends everything sky-high at sunrise. Unable even to wave hello to each other, at least the onboard messaging app still works.

Like the misses the two pilots ping back and forth, the game gets to the point, with your first playthrough unlikely to run over 20 minutes. It sounds like a lightweight experience but it's impressive just how much the small development team squeeze out of the limited presentation. Opening tableaux of a battlefields are bookended by scripture¹ and, coupled with Priscilla Snow's driving industrial score, will hook you until the end.

Your sole interaction with the world is through dialogue choices, telling a complete story. The pilots' preoccupation quickly becomes explicitly religious but the writing will draw in those who aren't even remotely spiritual by leaving them with questions that cast a broader philosophical net. Xalavier Nelson Jr's writing deftly shoulders propulsive character banter² and world building, as well as a heap of existential dread. It's impressive just how much food for thought the economical dialogue chomps through, and our minds haven't wandered far from the pilots' final resting place since playing.

While there's no ignoring the limitations of the production, everything culminates into a laser-focused indie experience that is very much more than the sum of its parts. For a sunrise you won't soon forget, this is more than worth the just-over-five-quid price of entry.

Jess Kinghorn



FOOTNOTES ¹ You can't skip the prelude in subsequent playthroughs. ² Screenshots return a black screen half the time so it's difficult to share your favourite lines.

INFO FORMAT PS4 PRICE £49.99 ETA Out now
 PUB NIS America DEV Nihon Falcom PLAYERS 1



Ys IX: Monstrum Nox

It's a Monstrum knock-out!

Do you get JRPG fatigue? **Ys IX avoids inducing that. It doesn't change or add things for the sake of it, instead offering a refined iteration of JRPG tropes that also nimbly dodges many genre pitfalls.**

Everything in Ys IX builds up in layers, like a moreish role-playing cake. None of the plot elements feel dragged out, with chapters dedicated to each party member and the many side-quests therein still progressing

side-quests. The steadily growing Dandelion entourage will have you filling in all corners of the map, scoping out shops, gathering recipes, and more. It's a routine that works.

NOX A PROBLEM

Combat is well balanced. There are options for enhancing equipment and changing character attack type attributes, but the fundamentals are easy to follow and ensure action is genuinely satisfying. Party member switching means you

■ The Monstrums' Gifts make navigating the mind-blowingly expansive city enjoyable. ■

the underlying mysteries of the story and providing further insight into life in Balduq (the prison city where you find yourself trapped).

The chapters are formulaic but comfortably so. You battle small-fry enemies and complete quests to build your Nox gauge and unlock another part of the city, explore it, face a dungeon, and repeat. There's always time to wander off collecting items or grind away at long-term

get a feel for the whole team's weapons and skills.

The Monstrums' Gifts make navigating the mind-blowingly expansive city enjoyable, even with the curse keeping you stuck primarily within its walls. As you progress, you uncover more, reaching new areas and those treasures you've been eyeing up all game. They look stylish in action, and soon you'll be gliding around and running up walls like you own the place.



Whether you're dipping in and out or hunkering down with it for a long ol' gaming sesh, Ys IX is captivating, rewarding, and worthy JRPG. **Max Williams**



THREE TO PLAY

PSN games you might have missed

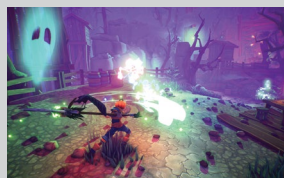


The horror! Whether it's the undead coming back with a chain-smoking habit, a MediEvil clone out of time, or just the thought I may miss out on games sneaking onto the store, terrors come in all shapes. This month, even though it's not Halloween, PSN has some shockers.



When is a remaster not a remaster? When it's **Stubbs The Zombie In Rebel Without A Pulse**. That's not a joke. This former Xbox exclusive from 2005 is finally on

PlayStation and publisher Aspyr is so pleased not a jot of effort has gone into delivering the kind of bells and whistles expected of a modern remaster. This is the game as it appeared 15 years ago, albeit in a higher resolution. The goal of creating and leading a zombie army by chewing on the denizens of Punchbowl is unique, and Stubbs has a darkly comical humour that will raise a smile. Combat includes farting green gas at enemies and weaponising Stubbs' noggin to take down the teens of this '50s-inspired town. Is it essential? Nope, but Stubbs' blend of humour and nostalgia is oddly comforting.



In a similar vein is **Pumpkin Jack**, a Halloween adventure that shamelessly lifts its cartoon style, throwback 3D platforming, and wry sense of humour from MediEvil. That's

no bad thing. We love MediEvil. As Jack, the mythical Pumpkin Lord, you're on a quest to spread evil. Drawing inspiration from PS2's heyday and adding very modern physics-based puzzling, companion AI creatures, and fast responsive gunplay and melee combat, it's easy to get lost in Jack's 'toon world. The sense of déjà vu is unavoidable given a game that wears its influences with pride on its hemp shirt, yet if you want to enjoy the spirit of Halloween in March, look no further than this adventure.



Taking a more nuanced approach to horror is co-op adventure trilogy **We Were Here**. New to PlayStation, the first game in the series was released for free on PS4 in

February (for a limited time). The trilogy is now out, and it's a neat take on two-upping together. In the Antarctic two lost explorers stumble across a mysterious medieval castle – Castle Rock – and venture inside, where they're separated and must work together to escape. Uniquely only playable with a friend, there's a degree of real tension at play as you spy your pal from afar, but... can't... quite... get there. In the final game, **We Were Here Together**, we get to explore beyond Castle Rock.



Aren't you tired of being nice? Don't you wanna just go ape?

UPGRADED FOR PS5

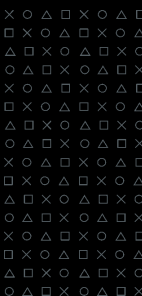
The Nioh Collection

Sitting atop a throne of blood made for two



INFO

- FORMAT** PS5
- PRICE** £69.99
- ETA** Out now
- PUB** Sony
- DEV** Team Ninja
- PLAYERS** 1-3
- LENGTH** 180+ hours
- ACCESSIBILITY** Subtitles, adjustable loot colours, adaptive trigger strength, and font sizes (not just for subtitles)



Like soulslikes? Then how do you fancy almost 200 hours of two of the best, enhanced for PS5? You can't say you don't get bang for your buck here, and thanks to Team Ninja's unique flavour these samurai slashers are like nothing else in the genre.

We rated both games 9/10 when they were first released. Not only are these improved versions, but they include all the DLC (it's a massive package). To top it off, they're free upgrades that allow you to transfer your saves.

While some textures might show their age, and naturally utilising PS5-specific features like the DualSense's haptics are minimal (and won't light your bonfire quite like Demon's Souls did), Nioh has always been about action and performance. Leveraging the power of PS5, both run like a dream. Comboing with your chosen weapon, dodging, blocking strikes, and counter-attacking at just the right time feels all the more satisfying.

FRAME ADVANTAGE

Like Devil May Cry 5: Special Edition, both Nioh games feature three visual modes. Both the 4K mode and the PS5 Standard mode target 60fps, with the former gunning for native 4K, and the latter settling for around 1800p. Don't be fooled though, PS5 mode isn't just for people without 4K TVs. It actually utilises PS5's power to add other graphical enhancements, like better lighting, shadows, and draw distance. In terms of visual

quality, both games look and run better in this mode, at the cost of that true 4K sharpness.

The duology joins the ranks of 120fps PS5 games (you need a TV that supports it). As the games are all about responsive combat, it's a great addition – though we did see noticeable drops in Nioh 2, which can feel

You might want to skip doubling up the frames on Nioh 2, but it runs better than ever nonetheless, and the effects, characters, and certain environments are still magnificent to behold. This isn't just thanks to increased frames, but the SSD too. Respawnning after a death and even loading

■ The first game fares better from the upgrade and is nearly flawless in every mode. ■

inconsistent against the locked lower 60fps. The first Nioh manages to pull it off better, hitting 120fps much more smoothly. It's a less demanding game overall, especially as far as particle effects go, so it fares better from the upgrade, and is nearly flawless in every mode.

into levels fresh takes only a couple of seconds. These games might be harder than a cursed blade's steel, but with blazing loads and extra responsiveness the fight against yokai has never felt so fair. And if it's too tough? Ask a friend (or stranger) to hop in for a true co-op samurai epic.



Two of the best in the genre are running better than ever natively on PS5. While not startlingly novel, if you missed out before, you're in for a treat. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**



INFO **FORMAT** PS4, **PRICE** £19.99
ETA Out now **PUB** Headup Games
DEV Cracked Heads Games **PLAYERS** 1



Silver Chains

Doesn't even win bronze

Silver Chains kicks off promisingly, but never seems to break through the barrier of 'this is gonna get good soon' and resolves before really taking you anywhere but dizzying circuits of its exceptionally spacious, dubiously accurate 1900s manor house. Seriously, the house is excessively large, with rooms that seem to serve no purpose but to confuse you, as though you're a ghost in the Winchester Mystery House. Upon stumbling into yet another bathroom you heave a sigh and ask yourself if anyone in this house is even worth saving, if that is in fact actually the goal.¹

Effort's been made to build an unsettling atmosphere, and it comes very close to succeeding. Unfortunately, it relies on random dolls and sheets thrown over things to the point that it all feels a bit hackneyed. Similarly, the ambient clutter makes finding items a slog, leading to trial and error rather than exploration. It's a pretty accurate simulation of those times in horror movies when the protagonist paces around yelling "what do you want from me?!" at shadows on the wall. Or the floor. Or any surface. It's very dark in there.²

The story is muddled and not engaging, which could be forgivable if the action was more involving. Using the monocle to see clues is a nice idea, but it's underutilised and poorly implemented (though it's possible some of this could be a porting error). The encounters with the Mother are successfully tense, and the (few) monster designs are good. It's almost a shame you don't see more of them. Silver Chains does achieve some solid jump scares and would be worth a run-through with friends if you can pick it up in a sale.

Overall, though, it sadly lacks both substance and polish. **Max Williams**



FOOTNOTES ¹ The fear of being trapped in the house forever is real at least. ² Would you like some blue darkness with your yellow darkness?

INFO **FORMAT** PS4, **PRICE** £7.99, **ETA** Out now
PUB Teamcoil, **DEV** Teamcoil, **PLAYERS** 1



Puss!

On a psychedelic tin roof

Ever been trapped without your PlayStation and had to resort to a buzzy wire maze to get your thrills? You know the ones; they challenge you to move a metal loop over a wire shape from one end to the other, and if loop hits wire it buzzes and you lose. Well, Puss! is that, but a videogame. **Albeit one that can only be described as a shifting, psychedelic, vaporwave nightmare.**

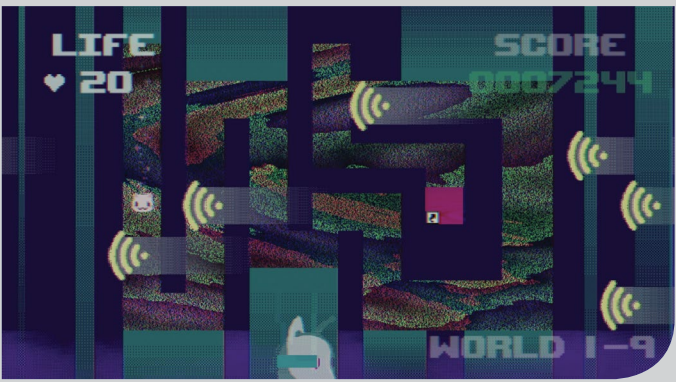
You play a kitty who is transported to a strange, trippy dimension by entering a TV. There you control your cat¹ from a top-down view, its round little head serving as your cursor as you guide it through mazes. Touch the side of the maze and you'll fuzz the screen in static, having to start again (or from a checkpoint) at the cost of a life. Trying to discern what's going on through the bizarre visuals is part of the fun, and while the core of the game is quite basic

there's enjoyment to be had from, say, avoiding lines of prawns that are rolling themselves into a deep fryer.

You'll need to keep your lives around and earn more by beating levels fast, as at the end of each ten-level world is a tough boss that'll have you mewing lives away. Forget old adages; you may well find nine lives aren't nearly enough. The bosses all have shoot-'em-up DNA, but unique mechanics.² Lose all your lives, and you'll need to start the world again (with those beyond the first able to be picked from in any order).

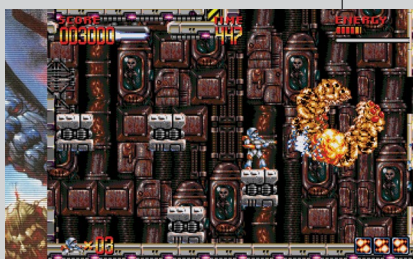
Levels are served at random, so you're not forcing yourself to do the exact same thing over and over again, but we ran into a lot of repeats. There's something to love here, but it's all incredibly basic, and perhaps a bit too fiddly to quite deliver with how the controls are translated to an analogue stick.

Oscar Taylor-Kent



FOOTNOTES ¹ You can change the visuals of your avatar from the pause menu. With 51 to choose, it's as many lil' growlers as you could want. ² And they all feel like a fever dream. Fight the statue of David or a three-headed chihuahua named Cerberus? It's more than the average moggy gets up to, that's for sure.

INFO **FORMAT** PS4, **PRICE** £24.99
ETA Out now **PUB** Inin Games
DEV Factor 5, Ratalaika Games **PLAYERS** 1



Turrican Flashback Collection

Don't shoot back in anger

Back in the '90s great games were defined by smooth scrolling, a thumping techno soundtrack, and more hyperactive nonsense than Nicolas Cage's entire career. Turrican straddled this decade as one of the 16-bit era's best, and even playing now, 30 years later, it remains an engaging and fraught shooter.

Aping Metroid and Contra, the Turrican grind involves exploring colourful, blocky 2D maps, seeking secret routes and bonuses, and stumbling into boss battles. The endless upgrades and mix of inventive weapons reward exploration – shoot invisible blocks and bonuses rain from the sky.¹ Design choices other developers have ditched over the years, such as dead ends, leaps of faith, and harsh restarts, are still present but this collection eases any suggestion of being dated away with a rewind button and save states. That said, it is from the era of pixel-perfect platforming, and can be unforgiving.

Alongside the original this collection features sequel Turrican II: The Final Fight, and the two console editions, Mega Turrican and Super Turrican. By ironing out the wrinkles in the original's ideas Turrican II is the best of the bunch. The console editions lack the labyrinthine fun and replace exploration with focussed linear shooting, and so stray a little from the formula.²

It's rare to get top-quality Amiga games on PlayStation. Yet this collection can feel bare-bones, with extras only stretching to affectionate TV filters. If you've never played Turrican this is a curiosity. If, however, you grew up on the series there's a sugary hit of nostalgia



FOOTNOTES ¹ Weapons include 360 degree beams and multishots, and can help uncover secret routes. ² Smaller levels and less exploration reduce the fun.

Combat's colourful. Phantom-dash at environmental objects to blow 'em up, swing on 'em, or even skateboard.

Viscid Rotting Meat

The enemy's dizzy! This is your chance—start whaling on 'em!



Persona 5 Strikers

On a jailbreak roadtrip all across Japan

Despite being developed by Dynasty Warriors developer Omega Force and being in a completely different genre from Persona 5 (turn-based battles are out, real-time hack and slash is in), letting the opening hours of Strikers roll over you feels like you've just put in a disc for Persona 5, part 2.

Front-loaded with a lot of story, it's a joy just to spend time with all your faves from the core cast. It might not revive the golden years of our Persona 5 youth, but that doesn't mean making new memories can't be fun. Some raised eyebrows at the vocal mixing aside, both English and Japanese dubs are great, and all bar some minor scenes are fully voice acted. With the whole party assembled from the last game, latecomers get plenty of time to shine this go around.

Just like the JRPG before it, Strikers is often slow-paced. You won't have polished off your first dungeon until about seven hours in. That's frustrating if you're here only for the Omega Force mashy-mashy, but *exactly* what you want if you're a fan looking for more of what you loved about Persona 5. It embraces what's beloved about the original's story so well that it's simply a must-play if the 100-hour RPG left you wanting even more from Joker and co. If you're not already a fan, you'll probably be a tad bewildered by the shared history of these friends, feeling like a tagalong at a



INFO

FORMAT PS4
PRICE £54.99
ETA Out now
PUB Atlus
DEV Omega Force, P-Studio
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH 40+ hours
ACCESSIBILITY Basic subtitles, difficulty options



ramen party you're too dorky to have been invited to.

SHIBUYA SCRAMBLE

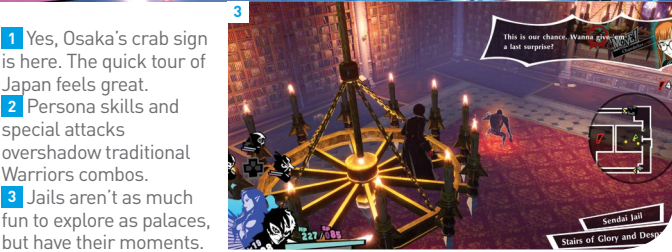
Each dungeon has a simple design that's often repetitive to explore (and they become more basic the further you get), and the combat is never very interesting. Don't get us wrong, we love Warriors-style action, and we've happily mashed **Ⓞ** enough to make a delightful homemade jam, but this isn't the best example of its kind. Using **Ⓞ** for light attacks and **ⓐ** for combo finishers is all well and good, but you can also freeze time using **Ⓜ** to use Persona spells, in keeping with the series' RPG roots. The latter is often the most effective way to deal with enemies, meaning

you never really need to engage much with the musou combat.

Checkpoints allow you to return to the real world to fully restore HP and SP, and with no calendar system (it's present to structure the narrative only), there's no reason not to have more than enough SP to spam spells at all times. You're either steamrolling over mostly everything, or getting trapped in a corner and hit with a wealth of status ailments. It never really comes together into anything satisfying, even against the optional stronger minibosses.

In rare moments you can delight at plentiful enemies on screen, but smaller encounters – for example, if you ambush enemies walking around the map, opening them up to an

It's simply a must-play if the 100-hour RPG left you wanting even more from Joker and co.



- 1 Yes, Osaka's crab sign is here. The quick tour of Japan feels great.
- 2 Persona skills and special attacks overshadow traditional Warriors combos.
- 3 Jails aren't as much fun to explore as palaces, but have their moments.

all-out attack from the off – can feel a bit 'blink and you miss it'. These features definitely make Persona 5's DNA, but combine that with things like a barebones Persona fusing system, and the result is not favourable. It's so close to the original that it feels unavoidably lesser.

JAILHOUSE BLUES

The dungeons you're fighting through are jails – new cognitive metaverse threats. Popping up all over Japan, they're presided over by monarchs who are sucking up humanity's desires. Finding an abandoned AI who can physically manifest within that world, the Phantom Thieves end up taking a roadtrip through Japan to free each city from the grip of the jails and prevent

them appearing. Along the way they team up with Zenkichi, a police detective who thinks there's more to the incident than appears. It's nice to see an older character important to the central story – it's somewhat reminiscent of PS1's Persona 2: Eternal Punishment.

Both new characters are fantastic additions, and the story is, for the most part, rock-solid too. You could easily imagine the plot supporting a full Persona game. Sure, all the twists are predictable, and because it's a spin-off there can't be any big changes to the status quo, but the jails, focussing more on traumatised rulers than absolute rotters, are a refreshing twist, and often involve personal stakes for the Phantom Thieves.

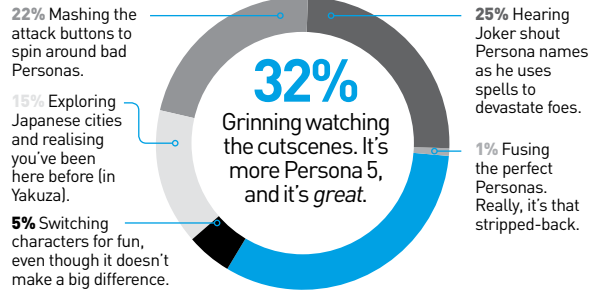


Fans of the original need to play this. A fun story sits beside what made the last game special. Combat is mediocre, but flashy enough to bash through. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**



THE OPM BREAKDOWN

WHAT YOU DO IN: PERSONA 5 STRIKERS



STATPACK

10 Characters to play as, each with their own persona, combos, and elemental affinities. Which you choose doesn't make much difference, though.

02 Graphics settings to choose, defaulting to Performance mode to improve the framerate. It runs smoothly even with plenty of action.

08 Jails to conquer, though four of them are very basic maps that feel a little bit rushed. We prefer the original RPG's palaces, to be honest.

FRIENDS & ENEMIES



FUTABA SAKURA
A hacker, not a fighter. She buffs you in fights, and you need her to get past certain gates.



ZENKICHI HASEGAWA
An unconventional detective on loan from Public Security.



SOPHIA
This helpful AI assists the Phantom Thieves, but what's the truth of her origin?

LOVING/HATING



CHEF'S SPECIAL
Cooking for your friends fits Persona so naturally that it's a surprise it's not been an important mechanic before.



COMBAT TRAINING
Real-time fighting is flashy yet uneven, often leaving us wishing for Persona 5's slick, carefully crafted turn-based fights.

IS IT BETTER THAN?



NO
Royal introduced a third term that's a better, though slighter, follow-up to Persona 5's story.



YES
This open-world twist on Omega Force's Three Kingdoms-set series was a dull, janky chore.



YES
It's a close one, but Strikers' joyful roadtrip is more of a must for fans than the Dragon Quest take.



Compared to Performance mode, Graphics mode adds far more depth and drama to every confrontation with the Hiss.

UPGRADED FOR PS5

Control Ultimate Edition

A new weird tale that demands a fresh perspective



INFO

FORMAT PS5
PRICE £32.99
ETA Out now
PUB 505 Games
DEV Remedy Entertainment
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH 26+ hours
ACCESSIBILITY Adjustable vibration strength and trigger effects on DualSense, adjustable assist mode (with aim assist, one-hit kills, and immortality), fully featured subtitle options



We return once again to the shifting halls of the Oldest House. Jesse Faden's bizarre adventure wowed us in 2019 as Remedy's most confident vision to date. But PS4 struggled to tame this new weird tale, and the experience was marred by dropped frames, long loading times, hitching when shifting between menus, and none of the PC build's bells or whistles. The Ultimate Edition addresses all of this and more on PS5, adding support for Activities as well as DualSense.

In many ways it's the definitive way to play. Collecting together the base game and all DLC, it's the perfect introduction for first-time players. However, as PS4 saves cannot be carried over, Oldest House old hands picking this edition up for the upgrade will have to dive in as though it's their first time too. Remedy says this is due to the differences between 2019's version of its in-house Northlight engine and the current build, but it's nonetheless disappointing. Still, despite pouring as many hours into investigating the FBC as we have, we find there are plenty of steps forward that make it easier to forgive this step back.

WELCOME BACK, DIRECTOR

Graphics mode, which offers 30fps with ray tracing, more than justifies a photo-mode-focussed second playthrough. For starters, framerate hitching when closing menus has been greatly reduced. It's now only noticeable during busier combat sequences,

and even then it's 'blink and you'll miss it.' Loading times, while still present, are similarly much shorter and make fast travelling (or dying) around the Oldest House much snappier.

Like Marvel's Spider-Man, Graphics mode is joined by a Performance mode which offers 60 frames sans ray tracing.

The effect feels subtle at first but the more you stop to snap a selfie, the more you realise just how far-reaching the effect is. Ray tracing adds depth and drama to what were already compelling scenes.

Like the best films, the best games deserve to be played more than once. It's not just the

Ray tracing adds depth and drama to what were already compelling scenes.

While this proved to be the way to play for many webheads, FBC agents may not find the choice as simple. As much as we love hurtling around the Oldest House at 60fps, we find just as much reason to play with a cut rate of frames thanks to the artful application of ray tracing.

little nuggets of foreshadowing dropped in dialogue that make more sense now, the impressive destruction system, or the fantasy of being stuck indoors *somewhere else* that keep us coming back, it's that and more. This world-within-a-location's layers are worth peeling back.



Not being able to carry over save data is a huge drawback. However, we enjoyed uncovering the bureau's secrets all over again, with ray-traced drama. **Jess Kinghorn**



INFO FORMAT PS5, PS4 PRICE £15.49 ETA Out now PUB Skookum Arts DEV Skookum Arts PLAYERS 1



The Pedestrian

Much more than middle of the road

Abstract puzzle-platformers often place you in totally unexpected situations – jumping through portals in the hopes of receiving cake, say. But while most indie examples usually force you to navigate through a dark and dingy setting, *The Pedestrian* adds some welcome lightness to the genre. Here how you act and think must effortlessly intertwine. The kicker this time around? No city road sign is safe.

What could have easily remained a cute gimmick is actually well implemented. You play as the pedestrian of the title, who in this instance is the stick figure you commonly see on safety signs littered around buildings. This 2.5D adventure sees you transfer and hop between signs (you'll have passed through hundreds by the story's end), with getting from point A to point B always requiring you to complete some wild feats of logic. Sometimes this involves completing puzzles within the signs themselves, but more often it requires you to rearrange and reconnect public signs in an appropriate order.

It's precisely because of this two-layered approach to puzzles that *The Pedestrian* is no slouch when it comes to difficulty, especially as additional

mechanics like connecting electrical circuits and bouncing platforms are gradually introduced as your skills and familiarity with the puzzling grow. Preventing you from pulling your hair out is the knowledge that there is always one definitive solution to each puzzle, and the connectable nodes between signs have a finite number of others they can link to. You can solve it.

ONE WAY SYSTEM

The Pedestrian would have been perfectly fine without the real-world framing device that sees your person travel from the subway to a university campus and beyond, but the camera swooping between signs and locations lends the game a nice cinematic quality. By the end of the journey, you may even find yourself caring deeply about the little safety-first figure at the centre of it all.

Though an extremely simple concept, *The Pedestrian* makes guiding a road-sign person from place to place thoughtful enough that it never grows tiresome – and far more than just a surface-level novelty. The adventure is short, yes, at just three or four hours, but the realistic city surroundings, beautiful accompanying music, and genuine challenge of later puzzles will make you want to Go rather than Stop.



If you're tired of 2.5D puzzle-platformers with a horror tinge, *The Pedestrian's* sign-switching action will serve as a refreshing roadside alternative. **Aaron Potter**

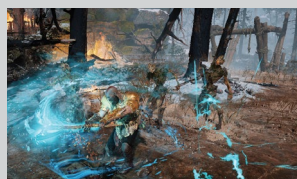


BANDWIDTH

PS4-to-PS5 game updates chewed on



Games don't need to be brand-new to get something out of PS5, but simply slotting in PS4 discs won't make magic happen. Patches can allow older-gen games to use the new tech, making them almost 'forwards compatible'. They're leading the way this month...



Sony Santa Monica's electric 2018 reinvention of the **God Of War** himself is still a console highlight. Thanks to PS4 Pro settings, we could awaken the power of 60fps

via backwards compatibility before the new generation PlayStation arrived, enabling us to hurl Kratos' Leviathan axe around more smoothly than ever, but without the cutting-edge detail (ha!) 4K enables. Well, our prayers to the gods themselves (or whoever in the pantheon Kratos left alive, anyway) have been answered, as the game now supports 4K/60fps on PS5. Those two numbers really are proving to be the magic ones for performance this generation; we can easily see it becoming the new standard within a couple of years.



Tom Clancy's The Division 2

also had to get in on the number-boosting action, with Patch 1.30 bringing support for – you know it – 4K/60fps. This Washington-DC-set post-outbreak loot shooter might have managed to hit a little close to home twice in a row with its virus and Capitol-infiltrating shenanigans, but it's comfortably one of the best in the genre. We can't wait to see how Ubisoft Massive eventually makes use of PS5 tech natively in its Star Wars game, but this update is as impressive a start as any. As a bonus the new patch ushers in the loot shooter's Resident Evil crossover.



We reviewed **Atelier Ryza 2: Lost Legends & The Secret Fairy** last issue on PS4, but this is one series that *has* made the leap to PS5 natively as a free upgrade.

The higher framerate really makes the action feel different. You may not think it's important for a game of this sort as opposed to, say, a shooter where split seconds make all the difference, but running around, whacking enemies, and gathering alchemy ingredients in this breezy, warm-hearted JRPG simply feels more enjoyable. Controlling an Atelier game has never felt this good. High framerates don't only benefit twitchy action games, they can make simply wandering around a colourful world that little bit more fun. [Oscar, you owe me a post-Lockdown pint for including this one – ed]



TOP FIVE ONLINE GAMES

Team up with pals or take on the world



NBA 2K21

To be perfectly clear, it's the PS5 version we're recommending

here. If you can look beyond the irritating microtransactions, this PS5 upgrade is one of the best sports games on the console technically, with plenty of players to compete against.



GENSHIN IMPACT

Running better than ever on PS5, the open-world RPG's first map expansion has been

transformative. We've been enjoying Dragonspine, a frozen region. It's been great to explore as we clear quests, climb mountains, and just *chill*.



F1 2020

Codies always brings the goods, perhaps nowhere better than its

stalwart F1 racers, elegantly bringing the super-speedy racing sport to interactive life in a sim that plays as good as it looks. Train enough, and you could be the new star.



DEMON'S SOULS

Destruction AllStars isn't the only PS5 exclusive embracing online

play. Demon's Souls might be a tough single-player experience, but things get a little easier with a friend to help out, and exploring the dark world becomes a lot more lively.



STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT II

Now that The Mandalorian is over again, fill the

Star-Wars-shaped gap in your heart with this excellent battle game. From large conflicts to hero-centric PvP duels, Battlefront II has evolved into something worth celebrating.

Destruction AllStars

Knocking the scrap out of people online



INFO

FORMAT PS5
PRICE £6.99 per month (PS Plus subscription)
ETA Out now
PUB PlayStation Studios
DEV Lucid Games
OFFLINE
REVIEW N/A
PLAYERS 1-16
CROSSPLAY N/A

Looking like a cross between Destruction Derby and a child's birthday party, this online-only car combat game gets our engines revving as soon as we make it past the title screen. Colourful and cartoonishly violent, we gleefully dive in after the brief tutorial. Constantly busy servers ensure that we have no shortage of victims (and tormentors), so we drive these roads again and again.

The controls are a slice of arcade loveliness. The very definition of 'pick up and play', they become second nature almost immediately. They're largely as you'd expect from an arcade racer, except that you get a brief burst of forward or sideways speed (which works on a cooldown) from flicking the right stick. Your objective, broadly, is to bash and destroy as many opposing cars as you can – but it's not quite as simple as ramming your rivals off the road or thumping their bumpers off.

You can exit your vehicle at any time. Why would you want to? Well, if your current car is almost destroyed, you can jump out and take one of the regularly replenished replacements dotted around the arena. If you can get close enough, you can also jump on somebody else's vehicle, where the two of you battle via QTE for control. The defending player needs to rapidly waggle the left stick, a DualSense stress test we're not entirely comfortable with.

CRASH COURSE

Before hitting the track you choose one of 16 'hero' characters, each of whom has an



▀ The controls are a slice of arcade loveliness, the definition of 'pick up and play'. ▀

on-foot special ability and a hero car that you earn through play, which has a cooldown-dependent ability of its own. Most vehicle abilities are distinct and useful, on-foot abilities less so. Of the four modes currently available, only one gives you reason to leave your vehicle for more than a few seconds at a time, making pedestrian elements largely redundant.

On foot, you're vulnerable to damage when knocked down

and when recovering, which seems a tad unfair. Also, it's not always clear why your vehicle being wrecked sometimes KOs your character and sometimes simply ejects them, and, as good as Destruction AllStars is, it's not really deep enough right now to support particularly lengthy play sessions. Nonetheless it's great fun, and hopefully future updates will turbocharge it and give us more reasons to stay on the track.



Shallow, but also attractive and a lot of fun. Take Destruction AllStars for a spin, and you're guaranteed a good time whenever you slip into the driving seat. **Luke Kemp**



MXGP 2020

Shouting into the muddy online void

INFO

FORMAT PS5, PS4
PRICE £49.99
ETA Out now
PUB Milestone Srl
DEV Milestone Srl
OFFLINE REVIEW #185, 7/10
PLAYERS 1
CROSSPLAY N/A

The lack of crossplay really hurts the PS5 version of MXGP 2020. Logging in to find nobody, or maybe one lobby containing three to seven people, is common – that new-gen grid capacity's largely redundant. Still, besides the obligatory one guy who manages to be seven seconds a lap faster than everyone else, the racing is close and fun. Rival bikes can lag around, most likely due to the complex track surface, but the racing holds together surprisingly well. You can vote for tracks, weather, and race length, and the countdown timers are short, keeping the action flowing. It's all unranked, but for drop-in fun, decent battles await. **Justin Towell**



Auto Chess

Watching the pieces come together

INFO

FORMAT PS4
PRICE Free
ETA Out now
PUB Dmodo Studio
DEV Dmodo Studio
OFFLINE REVIEW N/A
PLAYERS 1-8
CROSSPLAY PS4, PC, mobile

Get frustrated by the twitch reaction gameplay most online megahits require? Then Auto Chess might be for you. Leaving combat up to the computer, you draft, equip, and arrange your heroes on a board. Then you cycle through head-to-head matches with other players and NPC configs, upgrading as you go, until you're the last player standing. Then you do it all over again. Rounds earn you coins, which you can spend on heroes or experience to allow you to place more pieces on the field in the short break before the next battle. Built-in guidance makes it simple, but with enough nuance to be compelling. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**





EXPANSION



£3.29

Dying Light – Viking: Raiders Of Harran

Zombie killing? You have my axe!

Assassin's Creed Valhalla not enough Vikings for you? Happily, Dying Light is getting in on the nordic action with the Viking: Raiders Of Harran bundle. Offering up a double dose of Björn (or triple, if you whack on some ABBA while you play), in it two Vikings have somehow stumbled upon the zombie-infested city of Harran instead of Asgard.

Believing themselves to have ended up in Helheim, they do what any Vikings would do... ready themselves to spill blood in a battle for the ages. Both Björn the Warrior and Björn the Berserker are playable characters, and just as capable of dealing with infected as anyone from the modern day.

Using Asgard's Protector, a sturdy shield, they're able to keep zombies at

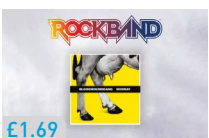
bay when they get too close, and strike back with their Aesir one-handed sword or go large with the Ragnarök double-handed heavy axe. All three items come in both a regular, moddable variant and one that dishes out fire damage too. The Björns even have their own buggy, Reinen, which they refer to as an "Earth Boat" and is

designed to mimic a longship. Just like their weapons, a variant of the buggy can spew flames, turning even masses of undead into nothing more but ash.

Techland is proving that the original Dying Light is far from over, even as we wait eagerly for more news on Dying Light 2. There's never been a better time to get back into it.

■ The Björns have a buggy which they refer to as an 'Earth Boat'. ■

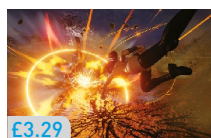
ALSO ON PSN



£1.69

ROCK BAND – THE BAD TOUCH – BLOODHOUND GANG

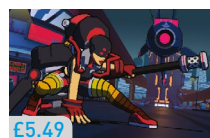
Just how do mammals procreate? Forget the Discovery Channel, this song will show you the way as you play along. [Note: this is not suitable for children – Ed]



£3.29

JUMP FORCE – YORUCHI SHIHOIN

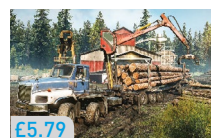
Time to get the Bleach out. The 13th DLC character to join the crossover fighter is a speedy heroine who transforms into a small black cat in the manga, gaining cat powers here.



£5.49

LETHAL LEAGUE BLAZE – DOOMBOX AND SONATA VISUALIZER BUNDLE

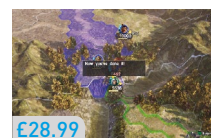
This stylish take on dodgeball adds new outfits for Doombox and hammer-toting Sonata. Try out a fresh look for both online!



£5.79

SNOWRUNNER – LOCATE & DELIVER

Ushering in this delivery sim's third season, it adds the region of Wisconsin, plus more missions, trailers, and vehicles. Now there's logging! Can you contain your excitement?

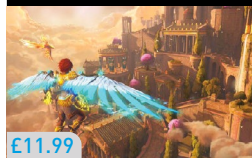


£28.99

ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS XIV – DIPLOMACY & STRATEGY EXPANSION

With Outlander Cities, Geographic Advantages, and Eurasian trading, unite China under one ruler – yourself – like never before.

DLC



£11.99

IMMORTALS FENYX RISING – A NEW GOD

Overcome the trials set for you by the Gods of Olympus, and prove yourself worthy to take a place among the mythical pantheon. Subsequent pieces of DLC will introduce new heroes to play as, so this is your chance to relish the heights of Fenyx while you can.



FREE

WRECKFEST – WRECKNADO

This new track puts the skills of crash lovers (which, let's face it, is most of us) to a real test. With four massive loops, drivers meet in the middle, and it's a disaster if you're not able to get one up on the other drivers. Wreck as many others as you can, or win the race, in the new car, Gorbie. Victory feels smashing.



£7.39

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION VI – VIETNAM & KUBLAI KHAN

Embrace a new civilisation as Vietnam enters the mix, with Bà Triêu serving as leader. Plus, there's Kublai Khan as an alternative leader for China. Vietnam has interesting environmental abilities to build strength.



LIVE GAMES



LIVE GAMES

Online games still keeping our attention

Last month, Lunar New Year was upon us and it was time to embrace the Ox. As one of the major holidays that's often celebrated as part of ongoing live service games, we couldn't wait to hop on and see what our favourite games had in store for us this year.

Weekly challenges which could net you some skins came to **Overwatch** throughout its Lunar New Year celebration. We've been playing *Overwatch* for so long, it's become one of our go-tos for seasonal events. *Bounty Hunter Brawl* was a great new arcade mode that kept us hooked: in it one player was hunted by everyone else, and whoever killed that player then became the target. Legendary skins included some favourites for the Lunar New Year. Ashe's Tiger Huntress outfit even came with a makeover for robotic ally BOB, turning him into a hulking, muscular tiger (just keep him off your Frosties).

Meanwhile in **Genshin Impact** we had the Lantern Rite event. Players who kept up with the challenges as part of the event could even net a free four-star hero, with Xiangling, Xinyan, Beidou, Ningguang, Xingqiu, and Chongyun to choose from. As part of the wider **All That Glitters** update, the long-awaited five-star hero Xiao also arrived, giving players of this free-to-play open world game plenty to chase after. With the game's colourful, anime-like design, the sight of all the festival lanterns was really beautiful too.

UPDATE

Begin the Initiation Protocol

Hitman 3's updates challenge Agent 47

The trilogy's story has ended, but that doesn't mean rich and powerful meanies can rest easy. Throughout February, *Hitman 3* received its first batch of extra challenges through the Initiation Protocol, adding not only brand-new content to the newer suite of levels, but boosting some of the ones that could be brought forward from the first two games too.

For Deluxe Edition owners (an upgrade is available) there are two new Escalation Contracts: The Proloff Parable casts you as a white-clad ninja tearing a warpath on a train in the Carpathian Mountains; and The Gauchito Antiquity dresses you as a guru with an affinity for emetic poisons. Two more escalations arrived free for everybody: the box-destroying challenge The Sinbad Stringent; and highlight The Baskerville Barney, which tasked you

with offing Dartmoor's entire wealthy family via convenient 'accidents'.

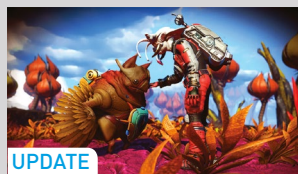
Rounding out the month was an elusive target in Sapienza, a one-time all-or-nothing challenge that gave us good reason to return to a favourite map, and two sets of featured contracts designed by influencers MinnMax and KindaFunny, which were fun. If this is the start, we can't wait to see how IO Interactive supports *Hitman* going forward.



UPDATE

GODFALL – PRIMAL UPDATE

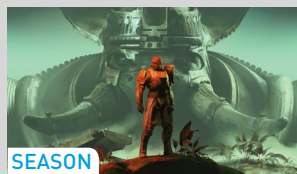
Reached the endgame of *Godfall* and looking for more challenges? Counterplay Games has you covered with the latest free update, adding a primal modifier to weapons. These massively buff a piece of loot's main trait, and aid in taking on the Tower Of Trials 2.0, which features objectives, rewards, Ascension Levels allowing you to power up beyond the level cap, revised Dreamstones to help you snag better loot, and vendor Zenun, who can assist in your loot journey.



UPDATE

NO MAN'S SKY – COMPANIONS

What started as a solitary space journey has gradually grown more friendly, and nowhere is this truer than in the new Companions update. You can now adopt pets, breeding them, raising them, and trading eggs. The pets system features customisation tools to make your pal feel unique. You can even talk to them as they explore by your side. Actively useful, pets can ping resources, use mining lasers, and even dig up treasure. You can ride them too, of course.



SEASON

DESTINY 2 – SEASON OF THE CHOSEN

There's no need to wait for big expansions for more story. *Season Of The Chosen* continued the narrative as the Pyramids and Xivu Arath caused problems, alliances were proposed, and you and the Guardians had to step in. New mode Battlegrounds adds a three-player activity pitting you against Empress Caiat's warriors, classic *Destiny* Strikes The Devil's Lair and Fallen SABER returned, and over 25 weapons were added on top of seasonal kit.



PS5 Hall of fame

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE NEW GEN'S GREATEST GAMES



01



Demon's Souls

This faithful recreation of FromSoftware's classic not only does justice to the original's design but it also proves to be one of the most accessible soulsbornes around. Bonus points are awarded for making full use of PS5's hot new tech: the DualShock brings every hit to life in your hands and the quick-loading SSD ensures you're back in the grind near-instantly. Just got a PS5? Put this at the top of your must-play list.



Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales

A new hero for a new generation, Miles Morales swings onto PS5 with a new sense of purpose. The low-key story offers a more intimate Spider-adventure than Parker's bombastic escapade, but when the action kicks in the ray-traced visuals light up the screen.



NBA 2K21

Not to be confused with the lacklustre PS4 version, on PS5 NBA 2K21 delivers both spectacle and exciting gameplay. A new courtside camera, improved framerate, fidelity, animation, pro moves, shot selection, game modes... On PS5 it's a whole new game.



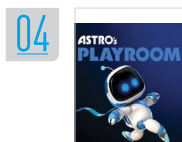
Hitman 3

On PS5 Agent 47's latest hit list looks beautiful – oh boy, those reflections. The good news is not only can you play the latest missions on PS5, you can replay all missions from Hitman and Hitman 2 inside IO's new PS5-developed engine. That's a lot of content.



Observer: System Redux

The original PS4 game gets a PS5 makeover and it wows at every rain-soaked turn. Making use of ray tracing to bring its cyberpunk world to life, this detective horror adventure feels like a new game. So good even aging cyber-sleuths should log back in.



Astro's Playroom

Free and pre-installed on your PS5, this is more than a showcase for your new console's best, most innovative features. Astro's Playroom is a beautifully-crafted, if short-lived, platform adventure that takes a tour through everything that makes PS5 so special.



Sackboy: A Big Adventure

A slow burn, this platform adventure gradually overwhelms even the most cynical player with its sense of whimsy. Whether you go solo or with a pal in co-op Sackboy's world is a delight to explore. A Big Adventure is one of the most imaginative adventures on PS5.



Mortal Kombat 11 – Ultimate

You may have played Mortal Kombat 11 before, but you've never played it like this. In 4K at 60fps this PS5-upgraded Ultimate edition plays faster, smoother, and better than ever. Making good use of the quick-loading SSD, the game's fights come thick and fast.



Immortals: Fenyx Rising

Don't be fooled by the 'Assassin's Creed, jr' tone, this open-worlder is something quite different. Packing in more puzzles than a Ravensburger factory, Immortals Fenyx Rising tests your cognition more than your combo skills. Ubisoft's best new IP in years.



Dirt 5

On PS4 Dirt 5 is one of the best sim-cade racers around; on PS5 Codemasters' racer offers various performance modes to make the colourful action sing. This is one of the few games on PS5 to currently offer 120fps, which ensures a super-smooth race.



Devil May Cry 5 Special Edition

Slugging your way through double-digit hordes of enemies at 120fps ensures this PS5 remake of the PS4 classic impresses. If you want visual pizzazz over framerates then turn on ray tracing and play at a solid 60fps. Special in name and nature.



The Pathless

The Journey and Abzû developer returns to PlayStation with a beautifully stylish open-world adventure that recalls Ico and Shadow Of The Colossus. When not battling massive monstrous beasts we're encouraged to pet our eagle, and that's not a euphemism. Charming.



Godfall

It throws everything PS5 can do at the screen – 60fps, 4K resolution, ray tracing, SSD loading, and DualSense touchy-feely controls. Where this sparkly loot-slasher stumbles is in offering a long-term challenge. But for fans of the grind, it's a worthy spectacle.



Bugsnax

You are what you eat in this peculiar adventure that's not afraid to walk (and crawl) its own path. Scour Snaktooth Island for its missing denizens, and wolf down a handful of Snax... and see what happens. It doesn't push PS5 but it will test your imagination.



FIFA 21

The PS4 version has been relegated and on PS5 FIFA 21 found itself back in the top flight. The core game remains the same but with new animation, SSD-powered incidental cinematics, and improved physics and lighting EA has signalled the future of FIFA.

THE GAMES GLOW UP

PlayStation 4 hits replayed on PlayStation 5



Loading is faster than on PS4. This is more enjoyable for it.

The Evil Within 2

Disgusting on PS5, in the best way possible



While it's a given that newer PS4 games such as *God Of War* are going to perform well on PS5, older hits that may have snuck under the radar are the ones finding a new lease of life on the console.

One such game is *The Evil Within 2*. On PS4 this horror sequel from Tango Gameworks (which is currently working on PS5's *Ghostwire: Tokyo*) was overlooked by many. Perhaps for good reason, as it could

realm much of the game exists within – and this horror sequel could drag.

Playing now on PS5 we get, perhaps, the game the developer intended. Locked at 60fps at a resolution of 1296p, *The Evil Within 2*'s focus on gunplay and melee escapism shines. The action speeds along and the textures and VFX ping from the screen. We can see in detail the gruesomely creative nature of the creatures hero Sebastian Castellanos goes up against.

■ The action speeds along and the textures and VFX ping from the screen. ■

drop to 25fps on base PS4s and rarely broke 60fps on PS4 Pro. Add in long load times to enter the game's meta-world of the Barrows – a maze of secret locations hidden below the psychic

Better still, the game employs PS5's SSD to load in its worlds and levels often faster than the pre-made animations, designed to mask loading, can take to run. It's time to catch up.

Also on test this month



Dreams

Media Molecule's newest is one of the quiet winners from playing on PS5. There's a resolution bump from 1080p to 1440p, running at 60fps. PS4 Pro ran at 1440p but 30fps. Better still, expect improved lighting on PS5, ensuring your hard work looks even better.



F1 2020

One of the best racers in recent years shines when played on PS5. You get the same improved reflections, lighting, and textures as you do when switching from PS4 to PS4 Pro, but now these races run at a dynamic 1800p resolution, locked to 60fps.



Infamous: Second Son

Insomniac's PS4 launch title still impresses, but on PS5 everything gets pumped to new heights. The increased particle effects seen on the PS4 Pro version are backed by a locked 60fps (up from 35-45fps on Pro) and at a stunning 1800c resolution.



Knack

Running at the same 1080p resolution as the PS4 version, the only benefit here is a locked 60fps (up from a variable 25fps on base PS4s). Sadly it comes at a cost, with noticeable graphical glitches. Still, Knack's fans will enjoy rekindling their love of the game on PS5.



Killzone: Shadow Fall

Another early PS4 release gets a boost on PS5 though it only stretches to an improved framerate, from a variable 30 to 60fps to a locked 60fps, at 1080p. It's enough to make Guerrilla Games' shooter impress visually but can't mask the lacklustre gameplay.



PS4 Hall of fame

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE LAST GEN'S GREATEST GAMES



01



Uncharted 4: A Thief's End

Nathan Drake's swan song is a daring evolution. It combines series-defining set-pieces, quietly devastating storytelling beats, and sprawling levels that make you feel like a real-life explorer. This franchise finale retains its signature charm, with the wisecracks firing as fast as the bullets, while the new characters each justify their inclusion. With an astonishing attention to detail, it's Naughty Dog's best yet.

02



Red Dead Redemption 2

There are a lot of open-world games, but none that make you feel like you're a part of a world in quite the same way as Arthur Morgan's wild west adventure. Tremendously physical, an epic story, and some of the most satisfying headshots you'll ever find.

09



Assassin's Creed Odyssey

A beautiful open world where every Greek island tells a unique story. AC Odyssey is an epic in the truest sense, with lively writing, mythical beasts to battle, and a poignant Assassin's Creed story that lays the bed for all the lore to come. A brilliant spectacle.

03



Grand Theft Auto V

Laughing in the face of other cross-gen ports, GTA V on PS4 is more than a mere HD remaster. Upped to a glorious 1080p, it weaves everything that made the PS3 original great, with new music, more dynamic weather, and a game-changing FPS mode.

10



Horizon Zero Dawn

A staggeringly large world that condenses cracking combat, accessible systems, and uncut eye candy into an action RPG that will please anyone. In Aloy, PlayStation might just have a new icon. Come for the robo-fights, stay for the exquisitely dense mythology.

04



Final Fantasy VII Remake

It feels like the game you remember from PS1, and that's Square's greatest achievement. Everything is dragged up to date, from the combat to the visuals. This remake even manages a late-game twist that could reset the franchise. Brave, bold, essential.

11



Marvel's Spider-Man

Borrowing heavily from Rocksteady's acclaimed Batman series, this delivers the heart and soul of Marvel's superhero. It ticks every box you could ask for: perfect web-swinging, a powerful story, a roster of classic villains, and all of New York City to defend.

05



God Of War

A departure in some ways but a resounding return in others, Kratos is back with a son and a ruddy big axe. Taking the legend from Greek to Norse mythology, this entry brings a lot to the table while improving on what was core to the earlier series' identity.

12



Persona 5 Royal

The most stylish JRPG ever made finds its definitive form in expanded release Royal. It combines dark and moving teen angst with unforgettable friendships that power you up in the heart-invading dungeons, and sets the gold standard for the genre.

06



The Last Of Us Part II

Arguably the original is holistically better but there are few games that push PS4 to its limits as this sequel does. With near photoreal visuals, emotional twists that land, and enough new ideas to ensure you're always thinking, this is a slick followup.

13



Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice

FromSoftware's latest adventure repackages its unflinchingly difficult combat into a fantastical take on feudal Japan. More accessible than Bloodborne but layered with equally clever and subtle ideas, this is director Hidetaka Miyazaki's best yet.

07



Dreams

This is a feature-laden platform of artistic tools that enables you to create everything from characters, elements, and scenes to entire games, and resets any ideas about what a console 'game' should be and do. Dreams should be installed on every PS4.

14



Bloodborne

With the finest third-person melee combat in gaming, droolworthy art design and the most twisted monsters imaginable, this is a gorgeously gothic must-have. The Old Hunters expansion adds enough nightmare fuel to make a return to Yharnam essential.

08



The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt Game Of The Year Edition

The White Wolf's epic journey is an RPG experience like no other on PS4. It's been made even more spectacular with this gigantic pack stuffed with DLC, making it a must-have part of any gaming library.

15



Monster Hunter: World

Presenting a vibrant open world, light on story but heavy on monster-mashing action, this is the most accessible entry in the series yet. Perfecting the feel-good grind through its complex systems and pitch-perfect multiplayer, it's a PS4 must-play.

16



Resident Evil 2

Powered by the RE Engine, this remake is more than a classic game with a facelift. The new Tyrant and improved zombie AI add tension, and fresh areas not seen in the PS1 classic update the core gameplay making this Resi 2 a celebration of PS1 and PS4.

17

NEW



Hitman 3

Rounding out the World Of Assassination trilogy, Agent 47's latest is a celebration of everything we love about the series: playful maps, experimental gameplay, and endless replay value. This full stop on 47's career to date feels like a good ending to a great series.

18



Control

Running, gunning, flying, flinging – this one has it all. Satisfying gunplay plus a slew of telekinetic powers make a winning combination as you explore one of the most compelling settings on PS4 to date, the Oldest House. (New) weird and absolutely wonderful.

19



Days Gone

On the surface this seems to be a step backwards: a testosterone-fuelled Freaker-killing adventure, one man and his bike versus the apocalypse. Slowly you realise Bend Studio's playing with you, and everything's flipped on its head – while the action's excellent throughout.

20



Devil May Cry 5

Another classic PlayStation series returns to cracking form on PS4. Slicing up demons and doing so stylishly has never felt better, especially when each of the three characters (Nero, Dante, and V) plays so uniquely. It looks stunning, and is even better to play.

21



Resident Evil VII: Biohazard

Capcom's greatest series returns to terrifying form thanks to a trip to Louisiana to meet the Baker family, who stalk you around their mansion. While the second half of the game doesn't match the intensity of the first, this is still essential for any horror fan.

22



Dishonored 2

The follow-up to a PS3 great, mixing a creative skillset with impressive level design to create a Kaldwin-ning immersive sim. From the shifting rooms of The Clockwork Mansion to learning to link your powers, there's so much scope for experimenting.

23



The Last Of Us Remastered

This modern masterpiece just gets stronger with age, like a full-bodied stilton. A brutal, emotionally honest take on the end of the world, Naughty Dog's stealth shooter is simply one of the best games ever, even if this PS4 port doesn't add much to it.

24



Metro Exodus

Larger but maintaining an emphasis on storytelling and experimentation, this sequel to Last Light pulls no punches. If you're looking for one of the best narrative-led shooters on PS4 this mix of FPS, horror, stealth, and survival shouldn't be ignored.

25



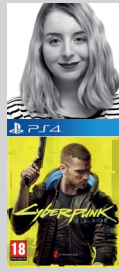
Shadow Of The Colossus

Bluepoint completely overhauls the visuals of Team Ico's masterpiece but still manages to match the original step-for-step in its remake. New controls and a beautiful photo mode add to the package. Wander's tragic quest has never looked or played better.

STILL PLAYING

Games that continue to hold our attention

PICK #1

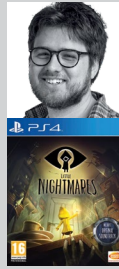


Cyberpunk 2077

Jess Kinghorn is back for her best girl

As there's not much room for romance in a review on a deadline, I've only just taken Judy Alvarez on a date. Night City's premier Brain Dance editor is compelling company though the city has lost even more lustre. Playing on PS5 had previously smoothed out a lot of graphical issues seen on PS4, but now they've proved inescapable. And yet I keep coming back – even as it stumbles and falls, I see something that I want more of. Personally, I'm hoping that planned DLC focusses on Judy and the Mox.

PICK #2



Little Nightmares

Oscar Taylor-Kent is peckish for some puzzles

With the sequel gracing shelves about when this mag is in your hands, it seemed the right time to finally polish off Tarsier's original. The grotesque Maw and its chilling inhabitants are still incredibly creepy, keeping me going through some of the awkward platforming puzzles. It's all about the atmosphere, and it really carries you through the main game (the DLC, less so). Don't skip playing this one, it's a classic. But you'd better finish it now as the sequel baits you from the sidelines.

■ The grotesque Maw and its chilling inhabitants are still incredibly creepy. ■

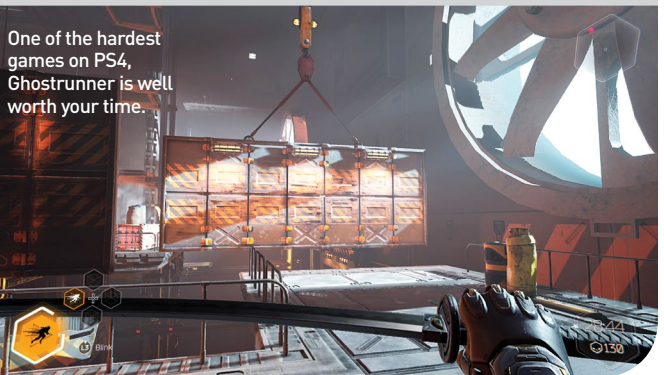
PICK #3



Ghostrunner

Ian Dean doesn't know why he does it to himself

If you think modern games lack the challenge of the ones you loved on past consoles, then pull up your big kid pants and slip Ghostrunner into your PS4. This cyberpunk platformer plays like Mirror's Edge if Dice's classic were to gut-punch you at every turn. The challenge is why I keep coming back. Every run gets me closer to shaving frantic seconds off my best runs, and with it my sense of mastery over this uncompromising game grows. I just need to keep telling myself it'll be worthwhile in the end.



One of the hardest games on PS4, Ghostrunner is well worth your time.



PS VR Hall of fame

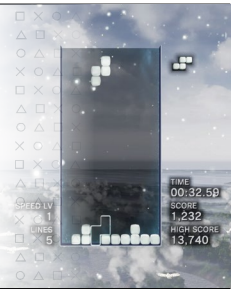
THE VIRTUAL REALITY HITS YOU HAVE TO PLAY

01



Tetris Effect

Tetris, yeah? It might be a great game, but it's easy to understand why you'd brush this version off as 'just more Tetris' at a glance. Yet Tetsuya Mizuguchi's trippy, transcendent take on the block-based puzzler is nothing short of a masterpiece. Sure, you can play it without PS VR, but in the virtual space it really becomes next level, transforming one of the tightest puzzle games ever made into an emotional ride.



02
NEW



Hitman 3

Every mission in the World Of Assassination trilogy can be played in PS VR via the latest entry in the series. That's a lot of murderous action. It all plays brilliantly too, with the act of puzzling through hits as Agent 47 perfectly suited to virtual reality. One of PS VR's best.



Keep Talking And Nobody Explodes

Who knew bombs could bring people together? With one headsetted Defuser, and as many Experts as you can fit around a 23-page manual, no other VR game comes close for inclusive, endless multiplayer fun. Just make sure you don't let lan issue any instructions - KABOOM!



The Persistence

This first-person horror roguelike offers perfectly sized chunks of survival bursts. It's everything you'd expect from a full PS4 release, but in PS VR it's filled with clever ideas, unique weapons, genuine jump scares, and fab looks - plus great couchplay as well.



Statik

Saw meets Portal in this fantastic puzzler. It makes ingenious use of the DualShock 4 by giving every button a specific function. You'll need to use them all to free your hands from the strange box in which they're trapped. An intriguing concept done well.



Rez Infinite

Tetsuya Mizuguchi's vision becomes reality in PS VR. This psychedelic rhythm rail shooter has achieved its final form. Its crowning achievement? New level Area X; it's powerful enough to bring players to tears. Worthy of its name, this is a timeless title.



Firewall: Zero Hour

There's only one game mode, a cat-and-mouse assault to find and either destroy or protect a laptop, but when the shooting is this laser-focused, who could want more? A PS Aim controller is a must to get the most from PS VR's standout shooter.



Astro Bot Rescue Mission

This pint-sized adventure packs charm in spades even if it isn't exactly chock-full of challenge. Bringing the classic puzzle platformer formula bang up to date in PS VR, it won't take many levels before you're calling out, "Beam me up, Botty!" Also, the nippers will love it.



Resident Evil VII: Biohazard

Can you can go eye-to-eye with the Bakers? Playing in VR raises the tension to almost unbearable levels and has gameplay benefits such as face-aiming, which makes shooting a lot easier. A brilliant example of how VR can improve already great games.



Star Wars: Squadrons

A fan's dream come true: experience epic Star Wars space battles from the cockpits of the films' most famous starfighters. Whether you're flying a TIE fighter or X-wing there's absolutely no thrill like skimming the surface of a Star Destroyer in PS VR.



Doom VFR

A new take on a classic game, this proves first-person shooters can shine in PS VR. A mix of control choices, including the PS Aim controller, ensures Doom is as fast and fluid in VR as it's ever been. Every PS VR owner needs this demon-slaying outing in their collection.



Iron Man VR

With a finely-crafted control setup that enables flight within small sandbox maps, and gives you the option to inhabit the designer shoes of the billionaire playboy too, Iron Man VR is an almost-perfect interpretation of the famous Avenger. It's a PS VR must-play.



To The Top

This creative platform-puzzler enables you to scamper, jump, and skate across its 35 sandbox worlds with the aid of your PS Move controllers. It's as physically demanding to play as it is perplexing, and all the better for it. To The Top is a PS VR one-off.



Blood & Truth

The truth? You can't handle the truth. But if you can, then you'll discover one of PS VR's best shooters, tied to the kind of slick cinematic narrative we're used to from Sony's non-VR releases. Blood & Truth is one of the most complete games for PS VR.



Star Trek: Bridge Crew

Mixes the fanboy fantasy of nestling in the Captain's chair (or taking control of the helm, weapons, or engineering section) on a USS starship with the strongest co-op experience on PS VR. This is Star Trek's finest hour on PlayStation, and the community's great.

16



Everybody's Golf VR

Golf and virtual reality go together like ham and eggs or rhubarb and custard. Mmm, tasty. In PS VR you swing and chip shots, lean over putts, and become immersed in the act of putting a ball in a small hole. It's near perfection, and one of PS VR's essentials.

17



Sprint Vector

A crazy mix of SSX racing and obstacle course hijinks, Sprint Vector makes use of the best control setup on PS VR to deliver a near-perfect experience. A single-player Challenge mode and online races impress; only the poor single-player AI holds it back.

18



Batman: Arkham VR

Not only is the training mission an unparalleled exercise in wish fulfilment (Wayne Manor! The Batcave! Batarangs!) but the defiantly sharp, if short, campaign is the epilogue to Arkham Knight we needed and deserved. Bats off to you, Rocksteady.

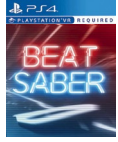
19



The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim VR

Though compromises have been made to texture detail and controls, you get all – yes, *all* – of The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, including the expansions, inside PS VR. It's immense. The scale and organic nature of the world at your feet overcomes any shortcomings.

20



Beat Saber

With your PS VR headset firmly on and PS Move controllers in hand, Beat Saber feels like the game both pieces of hardware were made for. In it you have to master songs and challenges by swiping your neon swords through the air and dodging with your head.

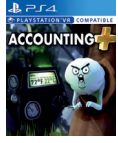
21



Moss

Guide adorable mouse heroine Quill through a fantasy storybook world full of virtual puzzles, fights with insects, and perfectly pitched Disney influences. There's no need to say cheese, because you'll be smiling as you play, all day long. This is effortlessly charming.

22



Accounting ++

One of PlayStation's funniest games is a dark, twisted journey into the world of accounting. No, don't walk away now! It's an Inception-like dive into increasingly bizarre and frequently hilarious scenarios that will scratch the itch of any Rick And Morty fan.

23



Farpoint

This sci-fi shooter is a brilliant showcase for the PS Aim controller, a versatile bit of kit that makes the satisfying range of weapons it stands in for feel weighty and real. The game matches it, delivering a strong story and challenging co-op for great VR action.

24



Knockout League

Punching things is possibly the least creative use of the VR medium, but when it's used to create a classic arcade boxing sim that plays like a brutal puzzle puncher, it's irresistible. It's also good for you: it tracks your calorie count as you work up a sweat.

25



Apex Construct

This story-driven FPS demonstrates five-to-eight-hour adventures can work in PS VR. Building its narrative organically through physically exploring the game's world while fending off mechanical creatures with a trusted bow and arrow is a delight. Ambitious.

PLUS POINTS



The month's freebies reviewed



This was a weird month. Usually my little PS Plus column is a roundup of the best old games and missed curiosities offered for free on Sony's online service. But in February the tables were turned and we were given not one but two new releases, for free, on PS5.

Serving up a pile of twisted metal for PS5 players, **Destruction AllStars** is the delayed exclusive arena combat racer from Sony and Lucid Games. It's a hot mess of vehicular carnage that updates the classic Twisted Metal formula for our latest console, and adds a sprinkle of Overwatch's hero appeal. You can read our review on p90.

Likewise you can read our verdict on Remedy's built-for-PS5 version of **Control Ultimate Edition** on p88. It's another new game for PS5 that's heading to the console on day of release for free with a PS Plus subscription.

Coming off the back of **Bugsnax**, **Worms Rumble**, **Maneater**, and the impressive 20-game **PS Plus Collection**, Sony's subscription service is fast-becoming an essential part of our new-gen ecosystem. The road ahead was set with the release of Rocket

League and Fall Guys: Ultimate Knockout, but recently Sony has raised the temperature of its free releases – these are *hot*.

Couple these with classics like **Concrete Genie**, the latest PS4 release to turn up on PS Plus, and its clear Sony has an impressive vision for the evolution of the service. This could be just because we're in the early stages of PS5's launch, when early adopters are being rewarded, but I would love to see Sony commit to releasing a blend of new and old for PS Plus in the future.

It does come with the footnote that PS3 and PS Vita games have been omitted from PS Plus. If you want those you'll need to stump up the cost of a second service plan with PS Now. And that's a whole different kettle of killer fish, erm, sharks.

Still, for now it's back to Jesse's PS5 debut.



Control Ultimate Edition for PS5 is free on PS Plus.

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OFFER

FOR PRINT
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DEALS, TURN
TO PAGE 56

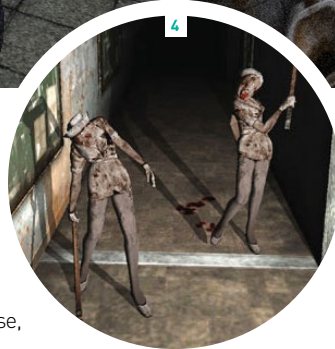


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Famous last – or should we say first? – words: “I guess I really don’t care if it’s dangerous or not. I’m going to town either way.” Like many of us over the past 12 months, maybe grieving widower James Sunderland should have stayed at home.

This utterance, slightly deadpan in delivery, opens one of the most loved and acclaimed survival horror games of all-time. It completely understates what is to follow: roaming around a strange town steeped in mist, blood spattered all around and trailing every which way, with all manner of monsters lurching from within those foggy tendrils. What Silent Hill 2 accomplished, beyond anything, was making you fear what might be hiding around the next corner. Or indeed, what might not be.

Silent Hill 2, a remake of sorts of the PlayStation title from 1999, was more psychological than other survival horror games of the time. Where Resident Evil wore its grisly flesh with pride, Silent Hill toyed with players endlessly before pulling back the curtain to reveal

And unnerving is probably the best word to describe Silent Hill 2. Even when the gruesome monsters stagger to centre stage, they carry a sense of the unknown. Bandaged and bloody nurses, disjointed creatures of rotten flesh, and, of course, Pyramid Head; a hulking form, head completely obscured by the geometric shape, machete in hand. All of whom enter the town of Silent Hill and the player’s consciousness with little to no fanfare or explanation. They are simply there, much like a nightmare creeping up from the most primitive part of our brains. As players we are forced to wonder why; as a character, James is forced to relive awful memories and wonder *why him?*

LOST IN THE MIST

Lead writer Hiroyuki Owaku was happy to let players be confused. Our first steps into the mist-filled town are baffling. With map in hand we traipse down dead-end roads, and walk back and forth circling areas worth exploring on our map. As we explore, we’re urged to collect medkits and weapons, mimicking the action games of the PlayStation 2

“As players we are forced to wonder why; as a character, James is forced to relive awful memories and wonder *why him?*”

something more monstrous than they could have imagined. This could only have been achieved by Japanese developers, who look at horror in a very different way from those in the West. For the original dev team, what was scary seemed to come from how we as humans feel about grief, death, and losing our minds. When a Western studio got its hands on the licence, it went all out on trying to raise the levels of blood to drowning point. Silent Hill 2 didn’t necessarily want to shock you, it wanted to unnerve you.

era. However, this videogame has more in common with television and film, with players variously likening Silent Hill 2’s overtones and scenarios to Twin Peaks, Alfred Hitchcock’s work, and Japanese cult flick, Ringu. We’re always left wondering about the meaning of it all, and as the game is filled with vague dialogue and offers six endings (three main endings and three bonus ones achievable through replays), the entire plot is left loose and up to interpretation.

It was a daring choice given that 2001 would also give us GTA3 and Devil May

- 1 A letter from James’ dead wife calls him back to their favourite place.
- 2 The mist drenches everything in the town.
- 3 The opening moments, as James begins to unravel the mystery.
- 4 The nurses, wrapped in bandages and coated in blood, still terrify.
- 5 How James treats Maria affects which ending you see.



INFO

PUB Konami
DEV Team Silent
RELEASED 2001
GET IT NOW
 PS Now (£8.99 per month)

NEED TO KNOW

- 1 Rereleased for the Silent Hill HD collection, you can play it on PS Now.
- 2 The narrative of the game was inspired by the novel Crime and Punishment.
- 3 The corpses seen throughout the game all use the same character model as James.

Cry; action games filled with bombastic moments and reams of exposition. Team Silent took a chance on letting the town of Silent Hill – and its cast of humans and monsters – lead the way. The gamble paid off; the game was widely acclaimed, with over a million copies sold within a month of release, and Silent Hill 2 still regularly appears on listings of the greatest horror games of all time.

UNDER SIEGE

Nothing is more unnerving than feeling lost physically or mentally and Silent Hill 2 slaps you with both, pushing and pulling you in various directions, assaulting you with dead-ends and terrifying monsters. Everyone takes something different away from Silent Hill; for some it’s the fear of going up against the infamous Pyramid Head, for others it’s the feeling of grief which spurs James on. No matter how scared you might be or how confused you may feel, you’re going to town either way. ■





FIND THE TIME

Dipping back even further into gaming's past. Can you remember this? Do you even want to remember it?



10 YEARS

In April 2011, the PlayStation Network went down for 23 days after it was hacked, and 77 million accounts were affected. When the network returned to service after, Sony compensated users with free games including LittleBigPlanet.



15 YEARS

Tomb Raider: Legend, the first game in the series to be developed by Crystal Dynamics, launched in April 2006. OPM2 magazine – our ancestor! – slapped 8/10 on it and said Lara's quest for Excalibur was "only let down by the short lifespan and lack of challenge."



20 YEARS

PlayStation 2 got its first Gran Turismo – Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec was released in Japan in April 2001. It wouldn't come to Europe till July, but nonetheless managed to sell a million copies within three days. That's one fast mover.



OPM YEARBOOK

Five years ago in OPM

We took an early step into Kickstarted space exploration No Man's Sky in OPM #121

NO MAN'S SKY

HELLO, WORLDS!

Curious rover Jen Simpkins takes one small step for OPM into the brave new worlds of No Man's Sky – and discovers a planet teeming with NSFW creatures...

...ell, 2.016m. It's across these jagged ridges. Dark creeps over the never-before-explored planet; possibility stretches out toward the horizon. A soft thumping heralds the arrival of some form of life. We hold our breath... as an octopus-headed, crablike bottomed ballbug with tentacle arms hops across the landscape. Hello Gamer! Sam Murray and David Roman exchange a wide-eyed look. "What is that?" we ask. Murray replies, "We have no idea."

PlayStation Official Magazine UK

Above As we marvelled at the procedurally generated animals and planets, we couldn't help wondering if we wouldn't get a little lonely all on our own in space. Five years and some meaty updates later, we're still crossing that final frontier from time to time.

Below left One place we knew we definitely wouldn't be lonely was in hero shooter Overwatch.

Below ...Actually, that was too many people. Time for a refreshing dip into the watery world of Abzu.

PREVIEW

OVERWATCH

Why you really should be watching the 'superhero team shooter'

...IT GETS SO MUCH RIGHT IN AREAS OTHER SHOOTERS GET SO WRONG.

WATCH AND LEARN

PREVIEW

ABZU

SINK OR SWIM?

What lurks beneath the ocean's surface? Matthew Pollitt dives into the depths of Abzu and discovers a journey like no other.

PREVIEW

FINAL FANTASY XV

...NOCTIS CAN NOW DISPOSE OF ENEMIES SILENTLY THEN ESCAPE AT WARP SPEED.

NADA GAMING GOES ZERO ZILCH

FREE! €0 \$0 €0 ZIP

...IT'S FAST-PACED BLOODY AND FEELS ENGAGINGLY DIFFERENT FROM JUST ANYTHING ELSE.

FEEL FREE TO BRIDGE

FREE TO PLAY GAMES

Warframe

...IT'S FAST-PACED BLOODY AND FEELS ENGAGINGLY DIFFERENT FROM JUST ANYTHING ELSE.

FEEL FREE TO BRIDGE

Far left In space or under water, you can never escape Final Fantasy. But why would you want to?

Left Games cost money. Everything so far might leave you weeping for your wallet, but we had the answer to every skint player's prayers.



DEFENDING

Albert Wesker

Luke Kemp thinks Resident Evil's best-known baddie is just misunderstood. A bit...

Goth Ken doll Albert Wesker is one of gaming's most notorious villains. Okay, so he betrays his STARS colleagues, leading them into a mansion full of deadly monsters. Sure, he directly attempts to murder people multiple times and, yes, he wants to wipe out all life on Earth and replace it with a race of mutants that he would rule over like an emperor powered by hair gel. But does that really make him a *bad guy*? Er, yes. However, it's not quite as simple as that.

As with all the best villains, Wesker isn't being evil for the sake of it, but because he believes that what he's trying to do is right. You need to sift through a lot of cheesy posturing to discover this, but if you do, you'll find that he's disgusted with humanity's determination to destroy itself and everything around it. This might be something of a self-own, but... he's kind of got a point? Although I don't agree that the logical next step is to kill everybody on the planet.

Admit it; you like Wesker more than you'd say in polite company, and not just because he's the only Albert you can think of who's cool *and* scary. You know it's true, and Capcom does, too. The Resident Evil series has no shortage of creatures that would work well as beat-'em-up characters, but Wesker is one of very few to appear in *Marvel Vs Capcom*. People want to *be* this deliciously horrible guy. Whenever he appeared as a playable character in a spin-off or bonus mode, you went straight for him, didn't you? Of course you did; he's your hero.



SURE I'M NOT HUMAN ANY MORE, BUT JUST LOOK AT THE POWER I'VE GAINED!"

I'll admit that Wesker can be just a bit selfish at times.



INFO

BEST GAME
Resident Evil 4

STATS

Three actors have played Wesker in the live-action movies, including the upcoming seventh film, a reboot.

SPIN-OFFS

Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles

Resident Evil: The Darkside Chronicles

Umbrella Corps

HOW TO PLAY?
PS NOW, PSN, PS3



Resident Evil Village is almost upon us, but you could argue that the VIII in the name is slightly misleading. In the 25 years since the original game widened our eyes on PS1, we've seen remakes, side-stories, lightgun games, and more rain down like T-Virus-corrupted blood, filling every new generation of PlayStation console with devastatingly infectious fun. So just before we dive into the eighth numbered instalment on 7 May, let's look back at 25 moments in the history of the quintessential survival horror series – some we'll never forget (no matter how hard we try) and some we never knew.

THE LIST

RESIDENT EVIL'S BEST MOMENTS

Justin Towell steps back into the Resident Evil series – where he'd just begun to feel safe



■ This looks pretty safe. We'll just casually saunter past these obviously-solid windows... Aaargh! The pain, the pain...

Zombie dogs crash through the windows

GAME RESIDENT EVIL / **FORMAT** PS1
RELEASED 1996 / **TRIVIA** ZOMBIE DOGS APPEARED IN EVERY RESIDENT EVIL FILM

01

This incredible moment in the first Resident Evil comes exactly when your nerves are properly shot. You're carrying damage, and almost certainly reeling from the first zombie encounter. You also really wish you hadn't tried the front door of the mansion because there are very bad dogs outside. But just for a second you think you're safe. It's quiet. You breathe. You know that the prerendered backgrounds don't move, and that this particular corridor is empty. You can see all the way to the end, where... okay, yep, there's a corner. The fixed camera angles make you wonder about corners, and there's probably something nasty lurking around this one because the lead up to it looks so safe. In the meantime, this is just an empty corridor. And so you make your way down it, slowly, carefully. BOOM! That's when the windows smash and the world is a maelstrom of broken glass and zombie dog. It's the perfect amalgam of your own imagination running absolutely wild and the game delivering something even scarier. It's also one of gaming's best-ever jump scares and you only have to say the words 'zombie dogs' and 'windows' to see a flicker of remembrance in friends' eyes as they recall the moment Resident Evil properly got the better of them.





Dragged body

GAME RESIDENT EVIL – CODE: VERONICA / **FORMAT** PS2
RELEASED 2000

02 Just how do devs raise tension when horrible things are a given? By making you imagine even more horrific things that never occur, that's how. The corpse getting dragged into a gap that you then have to walk (safely) past is genius.



Chainsaw controller

GAME RESIDENT EVIL 4
FORMAT PS2
RELEASED 2005

03 A contender for coolest peripheral ever. Resident Evil 4's special edition contains a PS2 controller shaped like a chainsaw, with blood splatters unique to each limited-edition model. And best of all? The **START** button is an actual pullcord.



Chris punches a boulder

GAME RESIDENT EVIL 5 / **FORMAT** PS3 / **RELEASED** 2009 / **TRIVIA** CHRIS IS BEEFY IN RESI 5, BUT LOOKS EVEN BIGGER IN VILLAGE – WILL HE BE PUNCHING MORE BOULDERS?

04 Chris Redfield was buff enough in the first game, but his subsequent diet of protein shakes and steroid sandwiches pumped him up to ridiculous proportions by Resident Evil 5. Beefcake! But even with arms thicker than his entire head, you would never expect him to punch a boulder into flowing lava. And yet (sigh) that's exactly what he does. Internet memes may have been invented purely to make use of this scene. Nobody considered this the moment that Resident Evil 'jumped the shark' (amazingly, it never has), but everyone has to accept this is the time Chris punched a boulder.

First zombie

GAME RESIDENT EVIL / **FORMAT** PS1 / **RELEASED** 1996 / **TRIVIA** IN AN INTERVIEW, DIRECTOR SHINJI MIKAMI DUBBED THIS FIRST-ENCOUNTERED UNDEAD THE 'TURNING AROUND ZOMBIE'

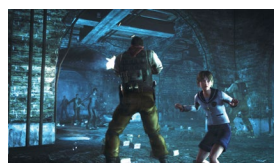
05 The first zombie encounter in the first Resident Evil is impeccably crafted and still has the ability to scare newcomers. You can't see what's around the corner, which is always an unsettling situation to be in, and when you venture forward the game switches to a prerendered cutscene with that famous over-the-shoulder reveal. What follows is sheer panic as you back away down the corridor, realising every door is locked and the creature's now between you and the only exit. You're fumbling with the menus, trying to equip your gun, work out how to aim... and before you know it, your neck is the second course in the zombie's evening meal.



Nemesis

GAME RESIDENT EVIL 3: NEMESIS
FORMAT PS1 / **RELEASED** 1999
TRIVIA IN JAPAN, CAPCOM RELEASED A RING MODELLLED ON NEMESIS' HEAD

06 Resident Evil 3's almost-indestructible antagonist is notable for so many reasons. Smashing through walls at the most inopportune moments, uttering "STARS" in acknowledgement of its sole mission: to kill the STARS team members. But it's the various stages of destruction this body goes through that make this so memorable. What seems invincible starts to slowly corrupt with every encounter until it's unrecognisable, but still incredibly dangerous. One of gaming's best-ever enemies, no question.



The shooter we wished had been killed before launch

GAME RESIDENT EVIL: OPERATION RACCOON CITY / **FORMAT** PS3
RELEASED 2012

07 Eeeesh, what a disaster this PlayStation 3 entry turned out to be. A squad-based shooter with awful AI, dull action, and little atmosphere. Clear symptoms of the Blah Virus consigned this one immediately to history's biological waste bin. Good riddance.



It was all just a dream!

GAME RESIDENT EVIL SURVIVOR 2 – CODE: VERONICA
FORMAT PS2 / **RELEASED** 2001

08 This arcade lightgun game takes place in Claire Redfield's post-traumatic nightmares, and was ported to PS2 in 2001, gaining a Western release the following year. Nemesis returns to provide the obligatory 'hurry up'



Mia says 'that hurt'

GAME RESIDENT EVIL VII: BIOHAZARD / FORMAT PS4 / RELEASED 2017
 TRIVIA EVELINE REFERS TO MIA AS HER MOTHER. DOES IT BODE ILL FOR VILLAGE?

09

Resident Evil VII's opening is quite the departure from the previous games' schlocky terror, instead nailing the 'unsettling psychological horror' genre. After exploring an obviously cursed, dilapidated house, you find your missing wife, who's been gone for three whole years. Unlikely though it is, she seems to be alive and physically okay, if behaving a bit strangely. Without warning, though, she does a commendable impression of Lisa from PT – clotted veins and all – and attacks you. You're left with the dilemma of whether to let yourself die by being stabbed through the face (not very appealing, but let's hear option two, yeah) or to embed an axe straight into your spouse's jugular.

That also has its drawbacks, you're right. Without a third option, it's you or the Sadako wannabe, and she's soon dead in a pool of blood, back to her normal self, only deader. It's a harrowing moment unlike anything else in the series. But that's not the moment that makes this list, oh no. She reanimates when you leave the room, first scurrying around in the dark before jumping out at you and... *apologising*. Then comes another scary switch to crone mode and she uses a screwdriver like a thumbtack to secure you to the wall. This is where things get out of hand – literally. While you're pumping at **R2** to free yourself, Mia returns with a chainsaw and frees you from both the wall and your left hand, causing the stump to spurt claret in front of your eyes. You know what, lover? I think it's time for us to see other people.



Silliest moments

Resident Evil can be harrowing. But it can also be very, very silly

Steve Monster

GAME RESIDENT EVIL – CODE: VERONICA
 FORMAT PS2 / RELEASED 2001

10 Floppy-haired Steve turns into a huge green monster and tries to kill Claire... before remembering he's in love with her.

Defensive dagger

GAME RESIDENT EVIL REMAKE
 FORMAT PS3 / RELEASED 2015

11 The remake added defensive daggers to stop a zombie attack. But it often doesn't finish the job, creating a Halloween 'knife through the head' look.

"The Master Of Unlocking"

GAME RESIDENT EVIL / FORMAT PS1
 RELEASED 1996

12 Hamming it up along with Barry Burton is one of Resi's, if not life's, purest joys. "It might be handy if you, the Master Of Unlocking, take it with you."

"Hope this is not Chris' blood"

GAME RESIDENT EVIL / FORMAT PS1
 RELEASED 1996

13 Indeed, Barry hits two for two. If you've ever been in town the morning after Friday night, it's *really* hard not to say this line.



Resident Evil movies on PSP

GAME N/A
FORMAT PSP
RELEASED 2005

14 Back in 2005, running Resident Evil starring Milla Jovovich was one of the coolest ways to show people what your new PSP wondermachine could do. Four Resident Evil films made it to UMD, including the all-CG film, Resident Evil Degeneration.



Old guy on the train

GAME RESIDENT EVIL ZERO
FORMAT PS3
RELEASED 2016

15 In this prequel, while most of the passengers on a crashed train have become zombies, it appears one old man is still okay. Rebecca says: "Sir..." but his head then falls off and he splits apart, turning out to be full of slimy jelly bugs. Should've guessed.



What is it with windows in these games? It's enough to make us never open a curtain again.

Licker outside the window

GAME RESIDENT EVIL 2 / FORMAT PS1 / RELEASED 1998 / TRIVIA IN THE FAN-MADE RESIDENT EVIL 2 REMAKE VR PROJECT, YOU CAN PET THE LICKER. AW, WHO'S A GOOD BOY?

16 The Resident Evil 2 remake may be superb, but the original's fixed cameras ensure this moment is experienced the same by everybody. Just as your mind processes the new scene, something moves outside the window. It's gone in a moment, but it was definitely something. It didn't move like a zombie – this thing seemed to be on the window, scuttling past. You'll start to imagine what horrors are lurking just a thin pane of glass away, but even your wildest imagination wouldn't picture a creature that can lick your head clean off your shoulders... which it soon does. Sluuuurp. Bump.



Resident Evil 1.5

GAME N/A / FORMAT PS1 / RELEASED N/A / TRIVIA LEON WAS AN EXPERIENCED COP, NOT A ROOKIE, IN THIS GAME; STUDENT ELZA WALKER HAD THE FEMALE ROLE

17 This is super-cool. Capcom had almost finished making Resident Evil 2... then scrapped it, claiming the quality wasn't high enough. The team set to work again and made the all-time classic we know as Resident Evil 2. The backgrounds and story were redone, moving 1.5's rather boring police station into a more atmospheric former museum. Files from the unfinished game made it onto the internet and were pieced together by the fan community, making for a couple of hours' worth of playable (if unpolished) gameplay. Considering it was scrapped for being too dull, don't worry that you might have missed anything special.

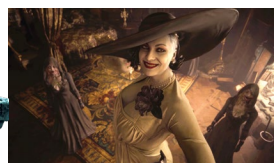
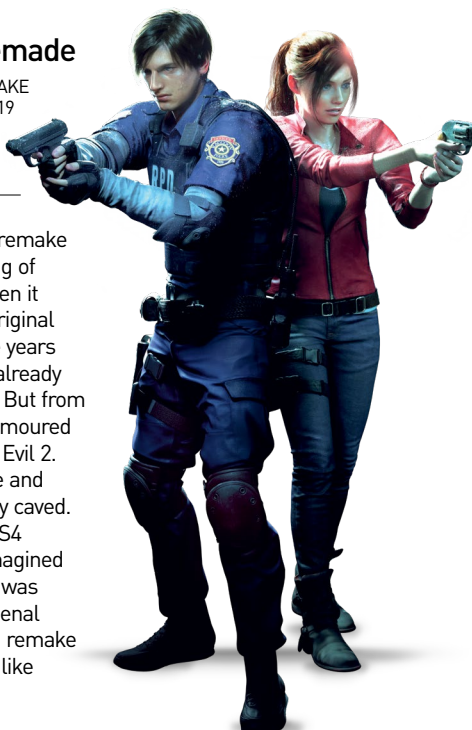


Leon, you're okay! What was the commotion up there?

Resident Evil 2 remake

GAME RESIDENT EVIL 2 REMAKE
FORMAT PS4 / RELEASED 2019
TRIVIA CLAIRE'S ORIGINAL HOTPANTS WERE SWAPPED FOR PRACTICAL JEANS

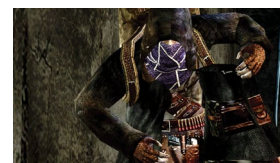
18 The first Resident Evil remake was something of a surprise when it was announced, as the original game was only about five years old at that time and had already received a Director's Cut. But from that moment on, fans clamoured for a remake of Resident Evil 2. They did this for a decade and half before Capcom finally caved. By this time, of course, PS4 meant everything fans imagined they were seeing in 1998 was now rendered in phenomenal clarity. And then we got a remake of RE3 immediately. Just like buses, these remakes.



Lady Dimitrescu's reveal

GAME RESIDENT EVIL VILLAGE
FORMAT PS5
RELEASE 2021

19 The reveal of Resident Evil Village's Lady Dimitrescu captured the community's imagination instantly. With her voluptuous figure and razor-sharp fingerblades, fan art was suddenly everywhere. 'Enjoy' meeting her in the Maiden showcase demo.



Resident Evil 4 comes to PlayStation

GAME RESIDENT EVIL 4
FORMAT PS2
RELEASED 2005

20 31 October 2004: the day dreams came true and Resident Evil 4 was confirmed for PlayStation 2. It's not only a great port of one of the best games ever, it was made even better by the inclusion of a brand new side-quest, Separate Ways.



Resident Evil 3.5

GAME N/A
 FORMAT N/A / RELEASED N/A
 TRIVIA CAPCOM SCRAPPED THREE PROTOTYPES OF THE GAME

21 A third-person Leon Kennedy fighting ghosts in a haunted house? In another timeline, that would be our Resident Evil 4, complete with the traditional third-person viewpoint in some places. But with the fully 3D backgrounds providing over-the-shoulder gun aiming, it appears Capcom had a better idea late into development, and so scrapped it completely in favour of the Resident Evil 4 we know and love today. It's amazing just how finished the game looks in the footage that exists, complete with animated environments and frankly spectacular lighting effects given it's some 20 years old.

Silliest moments

The daftness continues!

Moonlight Sonata

GAME RESIDENT EVIL REMAKE
 FORMAT PS3 / RELEASED 2015

22 Perhaps the pinnacle of the old series' atmosphere sees Jill playing Moonlight Sonata on the old grand piano. Rebecca's attempt? Causes Chris to literally facepalm.

Jessica's sexy leg

GAME RESIDENT EVIL: REVELATIONS
 FORMAT PS3 / RELEASED 2013

23 A wetsuit with one leg cut out of it is not what we'd call appropriate field attire, but Mrs Robi... – sorry, *Jessica* – is intent on seducing Chris Redfield.

"You were almost a Jill Sandwich!"

GAME RESIDENT EVIL
 FORMAT PS1
 RELEASED 1996

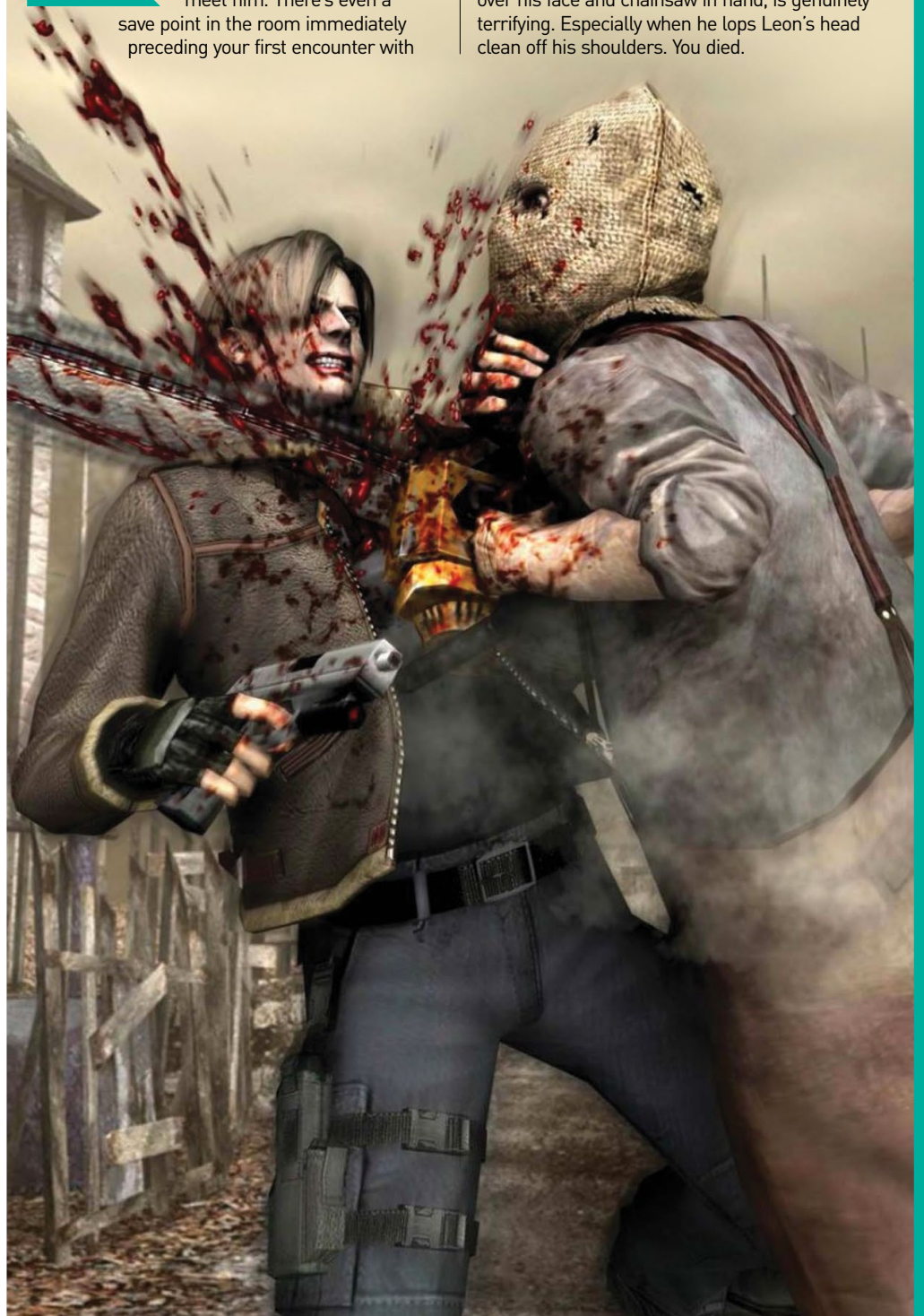
24 Another Barry Burton cracker as Jill escapes a descending ceiling. It's also referenced in Resident Evil: Revelations 2 because apparently Barry tells everybody the story. Cute.

Chainsaw guy

GAME RESIDENT EVIL 4 / FORMAT PS2 / RELEASED 2005
 TRIVIA LEON'S DECAPITATION WAS CENSORED IN THE JAPANESE VERSION

25 One of the most terrifying enemies in the whole Reserverse, Resident Evil 4's Chainsaw Guy is designed to beat you the first time you meet him. There's even a save point in the room immediately preceding your first encounter with

him, and there's little room to run past him. He is what's known in the trade as a 'bullet sponge', soaking up damage like he eats lead for breakfast. Brilliantly, you hear him before you see him, and then seeing the figure approaching, sack over his face and chainsaw in hand, is genuinely terrifying. Especially when he lops Leon's head clean off his shoulders. You died.

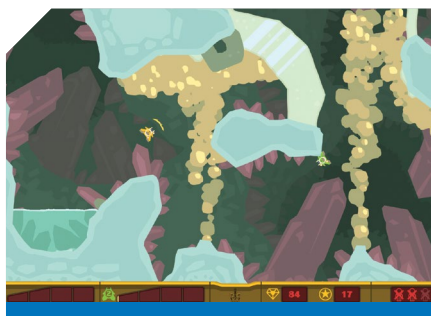




PLAY NOW

Retro shooters

Three to play for free on PlayStation Now. These hot shots are on target



PIXELJUNK SHOOTER

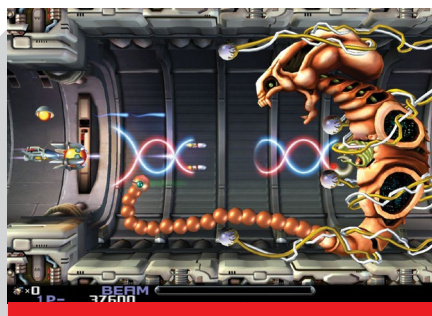
FORMAT PS3 / RELEASED 2009
DEV Q-GAMES

Breakout brand PixelJunk¹ was hugely popular in the noughties. A cool label that guaranteed retro games running at 1080p HD/60fps backed by dance tunes, it took indies out of the bedroom and into the clubs, even if the dance floor was metaphorical. PixelJunk Shooter was the fourth game in the series and one of the best.

On the surface this is a retro shooter that pays lip service to arcade hits such as Asteroids, but as you blast further into its caverns and alien worlds a puzzle element begins to take over. Each level is crammed with stranded astronauts to grapple to safety, diamonds to collect, and secret paths to uncover. Blasting away rocks can alter the path of water to cool lava, which you can then chip away at with shots to open new routes. It's a neat setup that makes the game more than just another retro-inspired shooter.

Tellingly, PixelJunk Shooter doesn't forget about the shooting. When the aliens feed onto the screen your bug-like little craft will be spinning, darting, and blasting frenetically to stay alive.² It's an addictive blend of classic ideas, novel-for-the-time twin-stick shooting, and physics puzzles. Far from its branding, this is no pixel trash.

FOOTNOTES 1 Developer Q-Games was the brainchild of former Argonaut Software programmer Dylan Cuthbert. **2** Shooting in all directions requires skill as a stray shot can kill an innocent astronaut.



R-TYPE DIMENSIONS

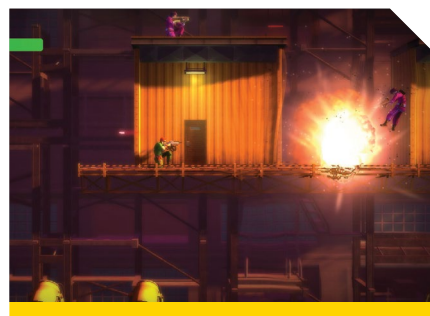
FORMAT PS3 / RELEASED 2014
DEV TOZAI GAMES, SOUTHEND INTERACTIVE

The king of shoot-'em-ups, the shooter from which almost all shooters have nabbed ideas, remains instantly playable. On PS Now you may have expected some lag or delay to cloud the old-fashioned wave-based, side-scrolling blasting, but R-Type Dimensions plays incredibly smoothly.

The draw of this 2014 release on PS3 is that it remakes the first two R-Type games in swish 3D, giving each stage added depth and filling the screen with then-gen VFX.¹ It can be dazzling, and unlike many 3D remakes retains the timing and tonal feel of the originals. If it's all too much you can hot-swap between 3D polygon models and classic pixel-art sprites at the tap of a button.

There are new ways to play to match the revamped visuals. While Classic mode is exactly as you'd expect and replicates the arcade difficulty with limited lives and strict restart points, Infinite mode goes easy on us with unlimited lives and the chance to respawn where you died.² Ultimately this is the same shooter, where clever use of the floating weapon module – it can be placed around your ship tactically – and skilful dodging of bullets remain vital.

FOOTNOTES 1 The game's music has been reworked too, though you can use the original soundtrack. **2** Handily you can fully upgrade your ship at the touch of a button, ensuring you won't be underpowered.



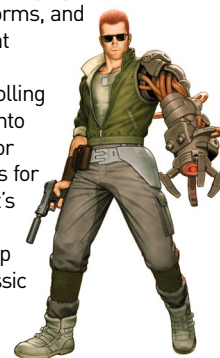
BIONIC COMMANDO REARMED

FORMAT PS3 / RELEASED 2008
DEV GRIN, CAPCOM

This precursor to the full-fat relaunch of Capcom's stretchy-armed hero went on to overshadow its big brother. Rightly so, too. It manages to retain the feeling of the original 8-bit platform shooter while wrapping itself in a very modern metroidvania structure.¹ Even by today's standards this rekindled retro adventure feels fresh.

Moving about the overworld of platforms can take some getting used to as there's no jump button and progress is made purely via the swing of Nathan 'Rad' Spencer's extendable grapple arm. With time you'll gain satisfaction from skilfully swinging up and over enemies, under platforms, and hurling exploding barrels at puzzle-like bosses.²

From the main side-scrolling areas you can drop down into computer rooms to hack for benefits or explore bunkers for new items and weapons. It's great to hit a wall only to find a new flare can light up the way ahead. Mixing classic ideas with a modern twist, this is perfect for PS Now.



FOOTNOTES 1 This game is based on the NES release, not the arcade game. **2** In one boss fight you can unscure the enemy's weak spot using Spencer's arm, proving a great blend of puzzle and shooting skills.

HAVE YOUR SAY

OPM readers tell us what they think of our choices



STILL OWN A PS3 AND PLAY ON IT AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK."

Robbie Cooper



SUCH A TOUGH GAME..."

Samuel Hamilton



THOUGHT IT WAS ARMLESS AT A STRETCH."

Liam Smyth

▶ PlayStation's hit **fighters** of yesteryear bruise our thumbs

A BRIEF HISTORY OF Ridge Racer

Expand your knowledge beyond the meme



The original Ridge Racer hit arcades in October 1993, showcasing 60fps textured polygon graphics. *Amazing.*



Then it was a PlayStation launch game in 1994, which brought the arcade megahit into your home at 30fps. *Unreal.*



A 'Hi-Spec Demo' of the original came with Ridge Racer: Type 4, providing 60fps Ridge Racer on PlayStation.

Ridge Racer was a launch game for every PlayStation console before PS4 and PS5. The series' playable loading screens were a patented idea by Namco. However the patent expired on 27 November 2015. So... go nuts.

THE LOW POINT

What's a Mappy?

Aside from the playable snippets of arcade games like Galaxian and Rally X, the cars in the games are regularly branded with names from old Namco arcade games. Mappy (1983) is a police-mouse who recovers stolen property from thieving cats, Solvalou is a 1991 entry in the Xevious series of shooters, and Pac Team Racing is based on '80s classic Pac-Man. Waka and, indeed, waka.



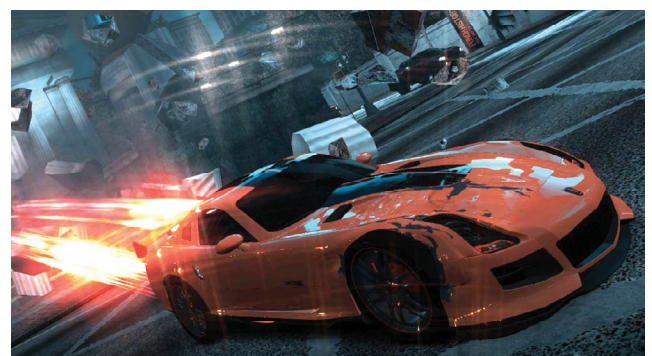
EIGHT YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE THE LAST CORE ENTRY, WHICH WAS AT PS VITA'S LAUNCH BACK IN 2012.



Ridge Racer V's gorgeous (for its time) intro is rendered in realtime.



Unlocking all the cars in Ridge Racer: Type 4 gets you a Pac-Man car.



The last game in the series for non-handhelds, Ridge Racer Unbounded was made by Flatout's developer, Bugbear.



Ridge Racer 2 on PSP is so similar to its launch title predecessor you could be forgiven for checking the UMD to confirm what game you're playing.



RECORD BREAKER

Forwards and backwards

The Guinness World Record for one lap of the PlayStation version (High Difficulty) is held by Alex T Trammell at 1 min 0.757. Less officially, Ridge Racer was the first backwards-compatible game to boot up on PS2, according to engineer Tetsuya Iida. Reiko Nagase's sprite was corrupt, but everything has to start somewhere.

▶ Next issue: You ready for this? **Street Fighter** steps into the spotlight

LOOK AWAY!
SPOILER
ALERT



#102

It's stuck in our head

With bombs to disarm and a city to save, it's easy to get distracted by a song in *Batman: Arkham Knight*

F FORMAT PS4 / **PUB** WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT / **DEV** ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS / **RELEASED** 2015 / **SCORE** 9/10

We'll admit it, the first time the Joker started belting out this show tune we just sat back and watched. We took in the whole musical number, and then watched as Johnny Charisma's bombs blew and our game came to an end. A toe-tapping, shoulder-shrugging, musical end nonetheless.

This Vegas-style musical hit comes just as you begin to think *Arkham Knight* is too dark, too po-faced for its own good. It would be easy for Rocksteady to have

continued down that rabbit hole of sombre nihilism... but this is no Snyder cut.

Gotham City's crown prince of crime continues to croon...

"I'm stuck in your head and I'm laughing!

"I filled you with dread and I can't stop laughing!

"Your parents are dead and I can't stop laughing!"

Joker's lyrics ring with caustic humour and Mark Hamill delivers every line perfectly on pitch. Better still, the song is a smokescreen, a

clockwork timepiece designed to help you switch roles to Robin and dart around the scene's background disarming bombs under the nose of Charisma, who's unaware, while the joke plays out, that you're really saving the day.

The deft delivery and lightness of touch offers a respite from the murk and murder rife in *Arkham City*. It's a wonderful oasis of nonsense.

The Joker sings our sentiments perfectly until the end:

"I am the clown prince of crime. "And we've had a hell of a time." ■

TIME TO PLAY?

The Joker's musical ditty comes just past the game's halfway mark as Batman must enter Panessa Studios and recapture Johnny Charisma, Albert King, and Christina Bell, who have all succumbed to the Joker blood virus.

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PLAYSTATION 5: NOW AND NEXT

The world's biggest developers give their verdict on PS5!
Plus, the hottest new games you need to play this year

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