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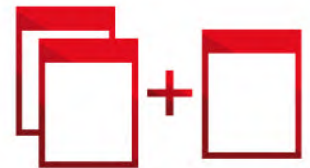
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**12
ISSUES** OF GAME INFORMER
MAGAZINE



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Best E3 Ever?



ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
andy@gameinformer.com

Read my column or
comment on this letter at
gameinformer.com/mag or
follow @GI_AndyMc

As someone who has attended every Electronic Entertainment Expo since its inception in 1995, this was one for the record books. It's hard to say if it's the best in E3's 20-year history, but there is no denying that it was the strongest of the last decade and that it supercharged the industry and gamers alike. I left with a renewed excitement for the industry I love so dearly.

I heard E3 2015 dubbed many things over the five-day event: *The Return of Triple A*, *The Year of the Woman*, and *The Year of VR*. The crazy thing is, I believe every one of these is right, and that was the reason the show was so powerful.

Independent developers still had an amazing showing at this year's E3 (and as you may have noticed, an indie title from the groundbreaking studio behind *Gone Home* also dons our cover this month), but there was no denying the power of big budget triple-A at this year's show. Last year, the blockbuster lineup was thin, but this year the line of promising big games extended around the block (check out the Hot 50 starting on page 46 – you won't be disappointed). Return of the Triple A? Check.

Gamers the world over have been demanding more choice in who they play, and this year it finally feels like game developers and publishers are listening. More games that featured female protagonists or the ability to play as a female lead were shown than ever before. The industry still has a long way to go on the diversity front, but this year was a great step in the right direction. Both Microsoft and Sony revealed new series that featured a female lead in *ReCore* and *Horizon Zero Dawn*, respectively. *Tomb Raider* and *Mirror's Edge* stood tall with their returning leading ladies, and other titles like *Dishonored 2* and *Assassin's Creed Syndicate* gave players the option to play in new ways. To top it off, games that featured character creators like *Fallout 4* let players continue to play their adventures however they want to play. Year of the Woman? Check.

Finally, while virtual reality still has a long way to go, we played more VR games this year than before that felt more like games than just demos. I still think VR has to overcome some hurdles before it becomes a mainstream entertainment medium, but some of my best memories of this year's E3 were found in the strange and wonderful VR space. VR may not have won E3 yet, but it most certainly left its mark.

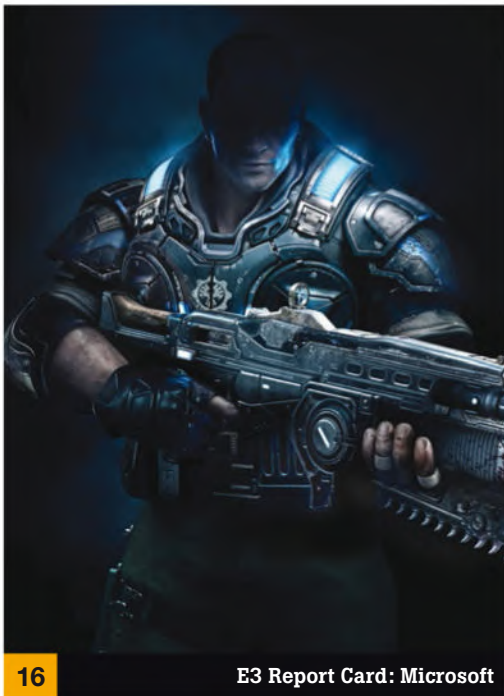
If you read this issue and don't find something to love, then you may be reading the wrong magazine. Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,



Tacoma

Fullbright made a splash in 2013 with the contemplative character- and narrative-focused *Gone Home*. We had a chance to take a deep look at the studio's next project, *Tacoma*, which takes players to space to explore a mysteriously abandoned space station as they play with gravity and try to figure out what happened. **by Kimberley Wallace**



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E3 Report Card: Microsoft



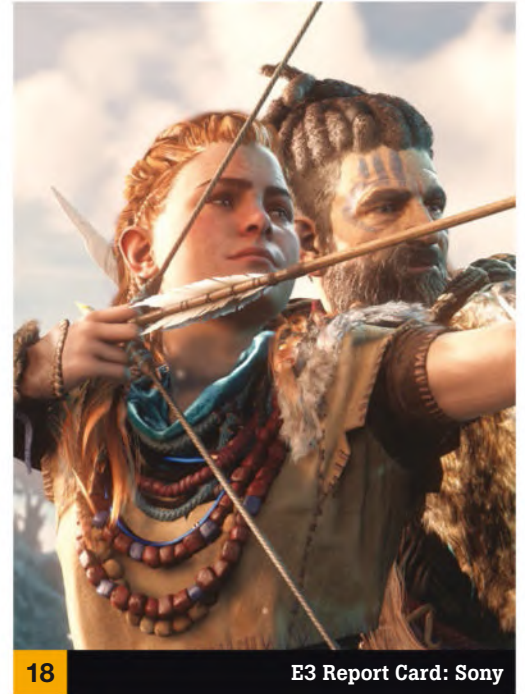
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regulars

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This month readers question our Nintendo coverage, share which Star Wars characters deserve their own dedicated video games, and reminisce about a time when military shooters covered multiple eras, and not just the future.

» 10 Connect

We have our annual report cards for Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo's E3 press conferences, as well as additional reporting from the show. We played with virtual reality and discuss the games we weren't able to get our hands on.

» 46 Previews

We played a lot of games at E3 this year. As it turns out, that's the whole purpose of the show. From the big AAA titles, to the small indie games that are easy to miss, we've returned with our annual list of 50 games we think are worth your attention.

» 84 Reviews

This issue is all about looking forward to the future of video games, but that doesn't mean we didn't spend plenty of time in the present. We have reviews for Batman: Arkham Knight, Splatoon, and Blizzard's long-in-beta Heroes of the Storm.

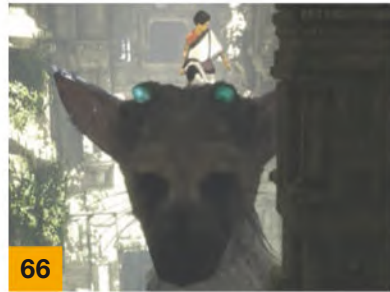
» 100 Game Over

There were a lot of games at E3 this year, but that didn't distract us from a few big-name titles that were nowhere to be seen. Games like Zelda Wii U and Final Fantasy XV were absent this year, and we missed them.

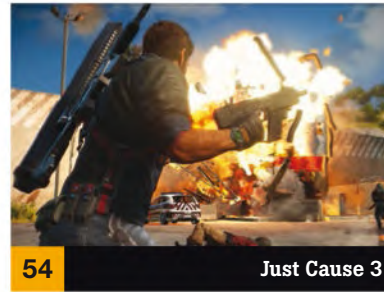
CORRECTION: In our Lego Dimensions preview last issue, we said that the game was for one player. It supports local two-player co-op. Additionally, the game is coming out September 27.



68 No Man's Sky



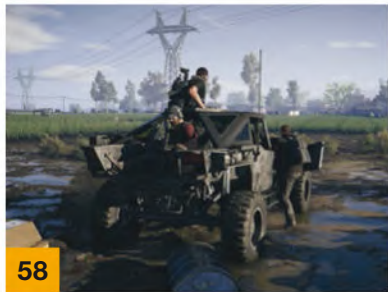
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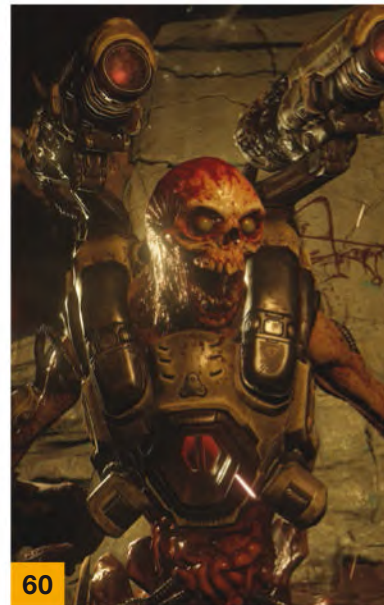
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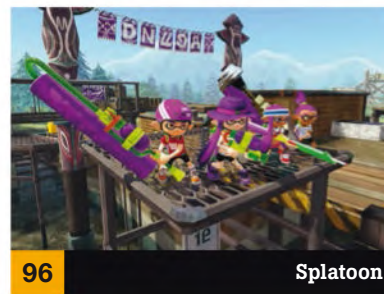
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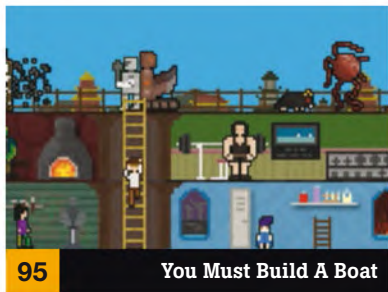
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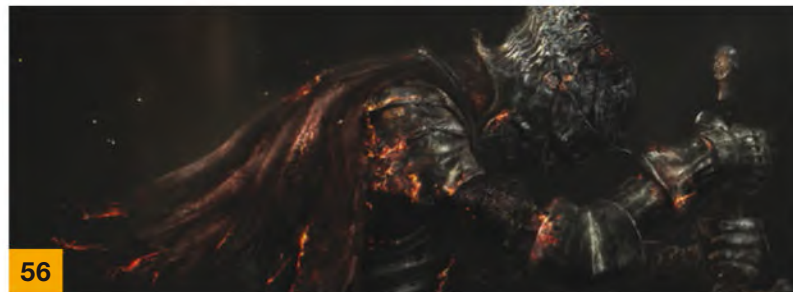
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5 ASCENT GUM

AN INTENSIFYING WINTERMINT



STIMULATE YOUR SENSES



Futuristic shooters, free DLC, and the legality of Let's Play videos are all debated by readers this month, while others highlight Star Wars characters worthy of their own games. Or not.

Back To The Future?

I am to blame! Every year I mindlessly shelled out money for the newest Call of Duty game. Many people did the same thing and aside from Battlefield, Activision now basically has a monopoly on the military shooter. The problem I have with this is that I hate futuristic shooters – games that have technology that does not exist, robots, and post-apocalyptic settings turn me off in the worst way! That is all that recent Call of Duty games have featured, and Black Ops III is no different. This is why competition is a good thing, because now there is a serious lack of past- and modern-day shooters because companies are afraid to invest against Activision's big gun!

John Patterson
via email

I've been playing Call of Duty for a few years and am more and more impressed with each new game. However, every time the next game is announced there is always a long line of people waiting to get on the hate wagon. Most of them complain because they want more WWII-era games and not the futuristic stuff. I'm just curious why they would want to play the same old boring game year after year when the futuristic elements make the experience much more exciting and challenging. I think they'll complain about it until it comes out and they (or their parents) buy it – then they'll complain more but secretly love it.

Brandon Showaker
via email

The fact that Call of Duty: Ghosts, Advance Warfare, and Black Ops III have all focused on futuristic warfare certainly doesn't help refute the age-old criticism that "all Call of Duty games are exactly the same." While that assertion still isn't true (sorry, haters), the near-future setting clearly doesn't appeal to all Call of Duty fans. We hope the series' rotating developer lineup goes back to exploring different eras and conflicts in the future – if they don't you can be assured someone will eventually fill that vacuum.

Expiration Date?

Do you think there will ever come a time when game companies decide to release all their old DLC for free after a game becomes so many years old? I think it's unfair that games that are probably getting little-to-no sales still think they can charge people the same price for DLC, even though sometimes you can buy a used or new copy of the game for less than the cost of their season pass. I also think it would be a great way to incentivize people to go back and replay some of their old favorites, or even buy games they never played.

Jose Arias
Chicopee, MA



We don't see how it's "unfair" for companies to continue charging money for their own DLC, but giving it away for free would certainly be an incentive – which is exactly why Respawn made all of Titanfall's DLC free a year after the game launched. However, given the popularity of game-of-the-year editions and remasters, we don't expect other developers will be as generous with their older titles; if there's a chance to make more money on a game, most companies will take it.

Contact Us

feedback@gameinformer.com

First-Person Perspective

I recently read your damage-control article on Adam Orth (Game Over, issue 266) and was insulted. You're trying to humanize him in the wake of him showing his true colors. It is an increasingly disturbing trend from the media – not only in the gaming industry, but for any corporate blunder that may come to light in this country. I've also noticed that when the big boys like Sony, Microsoft, Bungie, and EA Sports promise the world and then don't deliver, you cover for them without even blinking an eye. Why are you covering for these corporations and the people working for them that are blatantly lying to the consumer?

David Staab
via email

Well, that's the first time we've ever been condemned for "trying to humanize" someone. Orth's 2013 comment that gamers who don't like always-online restrictions should "deal with it" was certainly misguided (as we said at the time), but it shouldn't make him a pariah for the rest of his life. We've never shied away from criticizing big companies when it's earned (including all the ones you listed). However, those companies are still made up of human beings. People make mistakes – and more often than not, they learn from them. If you're insulted by us giving someone a second chance, there's plenty of unabashed hate and cynicism on the Internet for you to read.

Fair Is Fair

I rarely find myself disagreeing with your responses to people's letters, but in the case of YouTubers profiting from Let's Play videos (Let's Pay, issue 266), you guys are wrong. The games are copyrighted and someone's intellectual property. What people like Pewdiepie are doing is no different from what Napster did in the early 2000s, unless they get expressed written permission to use the games by the companies that make them. After all, how many CDs did you go and buy after downloading a song from Napster? Metallica's Lars Ulrich sued Napster and won. That legal precedent makes LP vids nothing more than piracy and bootlegging.

Ben Abernathy
via email



Show & Tell

Ever since I subscribed in March 2014, I have started to notice an absence of something in your magazine. That something is Nintendo games on the cover. Even when big titles like Super Smash Bros. 4, Mario Kart 8, or Kirby come up, they're barely featured in the magazine. In issue 266, Splatoon was the only real Nintendo IP featured, and it just got a preview. I know the games that get huge, fancy cover stories are chosen for your fan base, but there still are Nintendo fans! Great games appear on their platforms, and you should acknowledge that.

Jamie M.
via email

While some fans may scoff at the notion, we try just as hard to cover Nintendo's games as we do every other system on the market. However, not all systems are created equal. The Wii U still lags behind the other current-gen systems in terms of noteworthy titles, and Nintendo is more secretive about their upcoming games than other publishers. As this month's cover story demonstrates, a game doesn't have to be a triple-A juggernaut for us to share it with our readers – but we can't tell you about a game if Nintendo doesn't show it to us in the first place.

We've never seen a topic draw so many false comparisons as the legality of Let's Play videos. Simply put, Let's Players recording commentary over gameplay video is nothing like illegally downloading a copy of a song. There's a real legal case to be made that LP videos qualify as fair use, be it as parody, commentary, criticism, or other type of transformative work. Additionally, watching a game is not the equivalent to

playing one; unlike an MP3, the gameplay experience differs depending on the player, especially in titles featuring choice-driven narratives. There currently is no clear legal precedent one way or the other, so until a case goes to court, the issue is up in the air. However, one thing is for certain: No one wins when game companies try to strong-arm YouTubers into compliance with threats of litigation.

Short Answers To Readers' Burning Questions:

"Why are people cool with there being so many Call of Duty games, but complain that there are too many Final Fantasy, Zelda, and Mario games?"

You have that completely backward.

"Why do they not make the games for all systems like they did in the '90s?"

That never happened.

"My friend dared me to ask you guys to hide a picture of a slipper somewhere in your next magazine. Please?"

Done. Happy hunting!

Worst News Tip Of The Month:

"i likes sports"

Reader Gibberish:

"why does no one address game play like a lack of hardcore game modes hate ricochet call of duty hate death cam battlefield if a player kills is same as deaths score should be 0"

Question Of The Month:

What's your most anticipated game coming out of E3 and why?



(Left) Minnesota United FC stopped by to shame Bertz and Kato in FIFA 15. From left to right: Brent Kallman, Eric Durkee, and Tyler Polak.

(Right) Recently Kim caught up with Wattam creators Robin Hunicke (Journey) and Keita Takahashi (Katamari Damacy). Sadly, no junkballs were rolled.

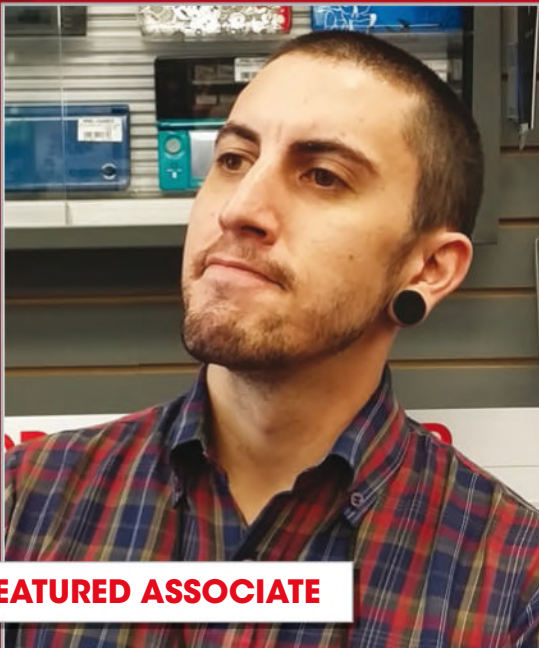
GI SPY

continued on page 10

PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

GET TO KNOW THE **PROS**

Say hello to the friendly faces of **PowerUp Rewards**.



FEATURED ASSOCIATE

VICTOR / Smyrna, TN

Xbox, PS4, or WiiU?

All 3! I've owned each of them more than once.

Best moment of your gaming career?

Shooting Handsome Jack (Borderlands). I really loved/hated that guy.

How long have you been a gamer?

3 weeks....wait that's not right.

Give us your best gamer pickup line.

I've got next.

What's the best thing about being a member of the GameStop family?

Doing what I love and Protecting the Family.

MIKE / Smyrna, TN

What kind of gamer are you?

Recreational. I just like to unwind and have fun with games. I play mostly RPG's but some action games and platforms also.

How long have you been a gamer?

30 plus years.

What's your gaming setup?

PS4, PS3, PS2, Genesis, NES, SNES, N64, GameCube, Wii, WiiU, Xbox 360. I use Sony Pulse sometimes on my PS4 and PS3 but mostly game without a headset.

What's the best thing about being a GameStop customer?

There's so many things. Where do I start? Getting treated like Caesar and being fed grapes is probably tops though.

If you could play co-op with anyone (alive or dead), who would it be?

I would love to play Rock Band or Guitar Hero with Elvis Presley. The King is alive!!!



FEATURED MEMBER

HOTTEST STUFF FROM THE POWER UP REWARDS CATALOG

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4,500 POINTS



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10,000 POINTS



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12,490 POINTS



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6,500 POINTS



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On Your Mind



- Star Wars Dream Games
- E3 Anticipation
- Indie Adoration
- Black Ops Opinions
- Irate Nintendo Fans
- Copyright Confusion



A New Star For Star Wars

In issue 265, we asked readers what Star Wars character is worthy of their own game. We received a ton of creative ideas starring iconic characters from the original trilogy, but surprisingly a near-sighted scrap pile turned out to be one of the most popular choices.

I think the full depth of Jar Jar has never been fully explored. The game could be an origin story, where you start off as a tadpole or whatever the hell their young are. You could even implement the Kinect's motion sensors to teach Jar Jar how to flail his arms as he grows up and use voice commands to teach him famous quips such as, "Meesa scared!" and his most memorable line, "Aaaaaaaah!"

Steven Bender

I want to see R2-D2 star in a puzzle game, where he humbly hacks devices and floats from place to place. The twist? There's a battle going on in each level, such as a gunfight or a clash between Jedi, and you have to solve the puzzles while trying to avoid being destroyed.

Martin Johnson

I want a Jabba the Hutt strategy game where you manage an entire intergalactic crime syndicate. You could choose where to send illegal goods, which smugglers you would hire, and how to smuggle contraband into planets. You would also compete with other crime lords and manage your estate as you fight to become the biggest crime lord in the galaxy.

Louis Chiarito

(Left) This month, Joe, Kim, and Wade visited Fullbright to get the lowdown on the studio's new game, Tacoma. In honor of *Gone Home*, they also rummaged through the team's belongings while they weren't around.

(Right) Brian Shea got some one-on-one time to talk with Yu Suzuki about the incredibly surprising resurrection of Shenmue III. Dreams really do come true!



GI SPY

continued on page 12

THE REAL COST™



BECAUSE I DON'T PRESS PAUSE. EVER. [#ReasonsNotToSmoke](#)

With a toxic mix of over 7,000 chemicals in a single puff, any reason is a brilliant reason not to smoke. Share yours.



1



WINNER

1 Nino Valencia

We still don't understand why Master Chief needs a cloak, but it definitely gives him a bit of flair

2 Arthur Lashkiba

We would play the hell out of a Destiny/Limbo crossover game

3 Jason Speight

Here's what it looks like to be on the receiving end of one of Sagat's rising attacks

4 April Borchelt

Real friends? Or does Link just want the Rupee?

2



3



4

» Submit your art for a chance to win our monthly prize. Please include your name and return address. Entries become the property of Game Informer and cannot be returned. Send to: Game Informer Reader Art Contest | 724 First Street North, 3rd Floor | Mpls, MN 55401 or Email to: ReaderArt@gameinformer.com

(Left) Who needs virtual reality? This year at E3, Kato caught up with legendary pro skater Tony Hawk at an actual skate park. **(Right)** Mike and Reiner got the thumbs up from Platinum Games' Yusuke Hashimoto and Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto and Yugo Hiyashi. Not for their piloting skills, mind you.





FUN



FUN



FUN



TO EACH THEIR OWN SATISFACTION

connect

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E3 2015



After two years of cautiously ramping up their efforts, both Sony and Microsoft finally found their comfort zones at E3 2015.

With the mistakes of the past like bundled Kinect and the always online debacle disappearing in the rearview mirror, Microsoft focused all of its efforts on its game lineup, showing off new titles like *Gears of War 4* and Keiji Inafune's *ReCore*, fan service collections like *Gears of War: Ultimate Edition* and *Rare Replay*, and outlining hardware improvements like a revamped dashboard, a new Xbox One bundle with a 1TB hard drive, and backward compatibility with Xbox 360 games.

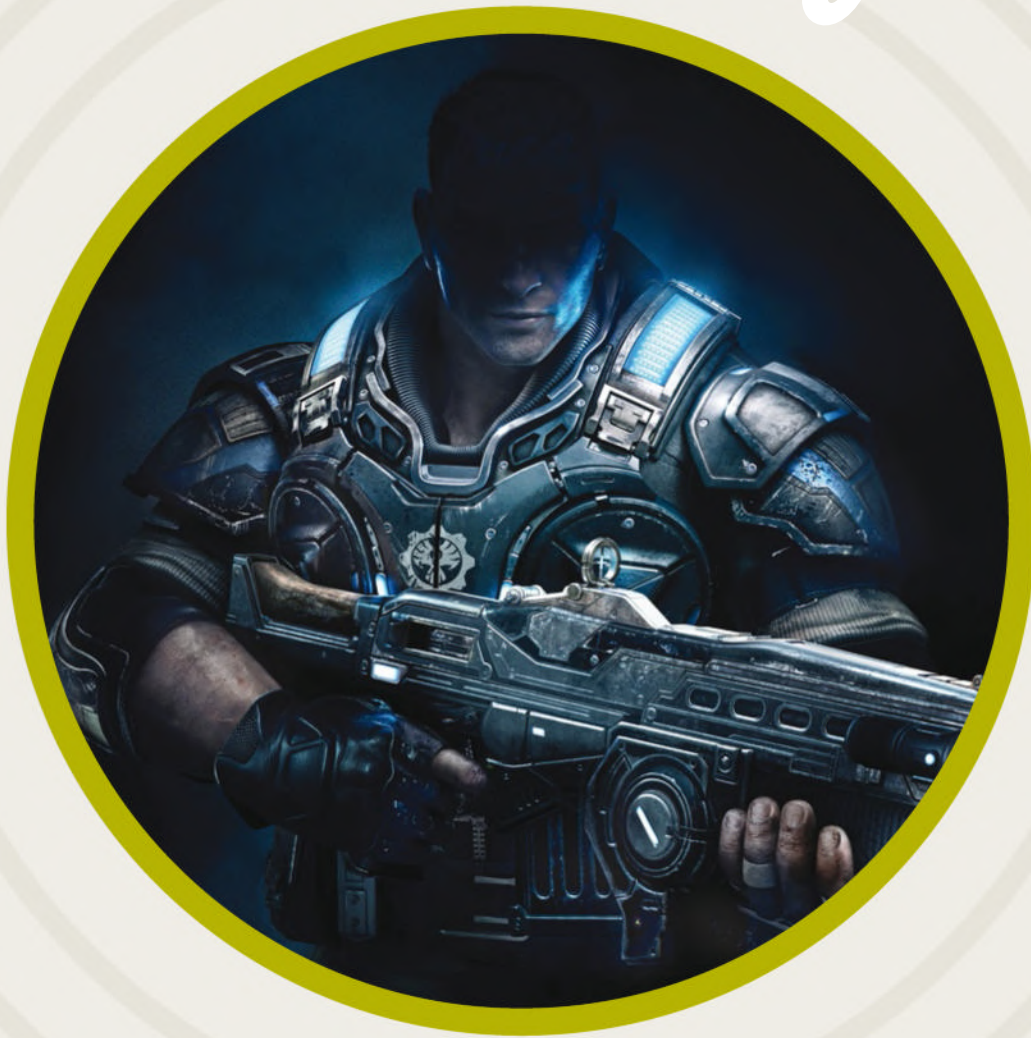
Still holding its pole position globally in hardware sales, Sony used its E3 platform to cater to the PlayStation 4's hardcore base. After showcasing new first-party IP like Guerrilla Games' *Horizon Zero Dawn* and Media Molecule's *Dreams*, the publisher finally revealed the revamped Ueda title *The Last Guardian* and even gave stage time to Yu Suzuki to unveil his *Shenmue III* Kickstarter.

Nintendo once again forewent a live press conference in favor of an E3-flavored Nintendo Digital Event video. Classic franchises like *Super Mario Bros.*, *Zelda*, *Metroid*, and *Star Fox* drove the discussion as always. The big N also doubled down on the moneymaker *Amiibos* but those expecting a 2D *Metroid* or some grand announcement for the *Wii U* successor were left wanting.

An impressive slate of third-party games and another advancement for virtual reality technology rounded out the best E3 we've seen in years. Read on for a comprehensive recap of everything you need to know about the platform holders, technology, and games that wowed the *Game Informer* staff.

MICROSOFT NAILS THE IMMEDIATE & DISTANT FUTURE

Microsoft



Many companies say that their press conference is all about the games, but they always slip in some informational tidbit on a video streaming service, a health tracker, or sales numbers. This year, Microsoft delivered a presentation 100-percent devoted to gaming.



by Bryan Vore



“These games make up what I believe is the greatest games lineup in Xbox history,” said Xbox head Phil Spencer onstage. This set the tone for the presentation and teed up gamers’ expectation for some big announcements. For the most part, the conference lived up to fans’ hopes.

First out of the gate was 343 Industries head Bonnie Ross to show off Halo 5: Guardians. This opening salvo over-delivered with a new trailer, new campaign gameplay, and the announcement of the large-scale Warzone mode, in which 24 players battle it out against each other and NPC enemies.

Directly after that, Microsoft debuted a new first-party title called ReCore. This collaboration unites Mega Man creator Keiji Inafune’s Concept studio and Armature, a studio consisting of several ex-Retro team members (Metroid Prime). The only other internal new franchise was Rare’s pirate-themed Sea of Thieves, which takes an online multiplayer approach to Assassin’s Creed IV: Black Flag’s ship-to-ship battles and island exploration. The developer also announced Rare Replay, a collection of 30 of its classic games coming to Xbox One in August. ReCore seemed to garner a better reaction than Sea of Thieves, but we’ll have to see more of both titles before weighing judgment.

Most of the spotlight went to returning Microsoft franchises. Forza Motorsport 6 debuted a new trailer after a new Ford GT was lowered from the ceiling, because why not? Timed Xbox One exclusive Rise of the Tomb Raider showed off a tense live gameplay demo of Lara scaling a snow-covered mountain. The free-to-play Fable Legends popped up to announce cross-platform multiplayer



Halo 5: Guardians



A NEW TAKE ON BACKWARD COMPATIBILITY

In one of the show's bigger surprises, Microsoft revealed the fruits of a longtime quest to make Xbox One backward compatible with Xbox 360 games. Only certain games will work, however. Mass Effect, Super Meat Boy, and Geometry Wars Evolved are already available for preview program members, and 100 titles will be available for all this holiday, with hundreds more expected going forward.

If you already own an approved game digitally, it will simply appear in your account. If you own the disc, you put it in the Xbox One and the system will download the digital version. These 360 games also support DLC, cloud saves, achievements, and multiplayer as long as the game's servers are still active. Publishers must approve backward compatibility support for their games, but other than that almost any game should be able to make the jump. As an added perk, companies like Bethesda and Ubisoft are including free copies of Fallout 3 and the Rainbow Six Vegas games with Fallout 4 and Rainbow Six Siege, respectively.

between the Xbox One and Windows 10 PC editions (Xbox Live Gold is still required on consoles). The biggest announcement belonged to Gears of War 4. Developed by The Coalition (formerly Black Tusk) the holiday 2016 title already had a live gameplay demo to show featuring an all-new cast and return to the creepy atmosphere of the first game. Microsoft also confirmed the long-rumored Gears of War: Ultimate Edition, a full remake of the first game, and a surprise open multiplayer beta that was playable during the week of E3.

The standard assortment of third-party publishers appeared to show off their titles on the big stage and announce special Xbox One bonuses. Bethesda showed new in-game footage of Fallout 4 as Todd Howard announced the realization of a longtime dream – mods created on PC will finally work on Xbox One. Bethesda later clarified that it hopes to bring mods to PlayStation 4 eventually as well.

EA debuted Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare 2 and promoted its

subscription-based EA Access service on Xbox One, offering a free week to all during E3. Players could try the newly added Titanfall and be tempted to sign up by the future inclusion of Dragon Age Inquisition.

Ubisoft showed off new trailers for The Division and Rainbow Six Siege, revealing an exclusive first beta in December for the former and free copies of the Rainbow Six Vegas games playable on Xbox One via backward compatibility with the latter (see sidebar).

Bandai Namco announced Dark Souls III with a trailer, but no Xbox exclusive features were touted. Surprisingly absent from the third-party roundup was Activision, which has offered Call of Duty DLC first on Xbox platforms for many years. At Sony's press conference later in the day, Activision revealed that the DLC-first deal has moved over to PlayStation 4 for Call of Duty: Black Ops III. This is a big blow to COD fans who invested in the Xbox One thinking it would always have an advantage in accessing new multiplayer maps before

other platforms.

Indie games received their own showcase in the middle of the show under the ID@Xbox banner. Titles like Tacoma, Ashen, Beyond Eyes, and Cuphead showed off trailers outside of the traditional indie sizzle reel and all pledged some kind of Xbox exclusivity, whether it be forever or timed. As an added exclamation point on the indie lineup, DayZ creator Dean Hall announced his new game, Ion, is coming first to Xbox One and PC.

Ion, along with games like The Long Dark, Sheltered, Elite: Dangerous, and DayZ, were the first titles to be confirmed for the new Xbox Game Preview program. Inspired by Steam's Early Access, this allows players to purchase and play a game before it is in a finished state. Microsoft requires every title in Game Preview to offer a free trial period so that gamers can sample the offerings and see if a game is in a suitable state before they hand over money.

Microsoft showed support for virtual reality and augmented reality tech alike.

The Xbox One controller is being bundled with the Oculus Rift at launch, and Xbox One games will be playable using the Rift via streaming games from the console to a Windows 10 PC.

Microsoft also showcased its augmented reality driven HoloLens tech thanks to a special camera that could display what the AR visor shows. The Minecraft demo came across well, but our later hands-on tests showed that AR elements are limited to a floating rectangular viewing area in front of one's face instead of the enveloping experience shown onstage (read more on page 24).

Also on the hardware front, Microsoft revealed a new official Elite Xbox One controller featuring extra buttons, swappable components, and adjustable analog stick and trigger resistance (read more on page 32).

First-party games like Quantum Break, Scalebound, and Crackdown were no-shows, though Spencer promised that they would appear later in the year at Gamescom in Cologne, Germany. ♦



Final Grade

Since the rocky reveal of the Xbox One two years ago, Microsoft has steadily improved its subsequent E3 showings. The failed Kinect wasn't mentioned once in the entire press conference, confirming its slow and silent death. To fill the futuristic gaming void, the company is wisely hedging its bets with both VR and AR. In the meantime, consumers aren't forced to pay for the tech (as with Kinect) or deal with half-baked gimmicks. In the short-term, we get backward compatibility with the Xbox 360 and some massive exclusive games from established franchises while we wait for promising new games like ReCore and Gears of War 4. "If you've been waiting to move from your Xbox 360, now is the time," Spencer said. With last-generation titles drying up and a lineup like this on the horizon, we're inclined to agree.



SONY'S BIG SURPRISES LEAN TOWARD THE HORIZON

Sony



Before E3, PlayStation CEO Andrew House admitted to investors that Sony's first-party lineup this year was "a little sparse," but that didn't mean the company had a boring E3 press conference. While there weren't any surprise first-party announcements to bolster the PS4 in 2015, the shocking reveals of Final Fantasy VII Remake and Shenmue III and the warm receptions given to The Last Guardian and Guerrilla Games' new IP Horizon Zero Dawn set the company and its system up for the future.



by Matthew Hite



While Sony doesn't have a lot of first-party software to trumpet from now until the end of the year, the E3 address didn't devolve into beating the audience over the head with slide shows of numbers touting how well the PlayStation 4 is doing. Instead, Sony focused almost exclusively on talking about software.

The Last Guardian kicked off the press conference with a brief gameplay demo (see our E3 Top 50 section starting on page 46 for more info on some of Sony's first-party titles, including The Last Guardian on p. 66), not only proving that the game is alive, but that its core concept is still in place. Given its numerous delays, we're disappointed with the broad "2016" release timeframe, so while seeing the game running on the PS4 is exciting, we're not out of the woods yet.

Media Molecule's Tearaway follow-up, Dreams, also received prominent stage time. The project was first unveiled a few years ago more as a philosophical tech demo than a tangible game. The concept is more crystalized now. Player creation is at the heart of Dreams, which technical director Alex Evans explained while showing a trailer of various environments, characters, and different genres all created in the game with a PS4 controller. Whatever you create you can share, but how the characters and environments fit into traditional game structures and how intuitive the creation tools are remains to be seen.

Guerrilla Games' new IP Horizon Zero Dawn stood on more firm footing. The open-world action/RPG title built around a bow-wielding female protagonist in a distant future version of Earth where robotic animals roam the post-apocalyptic landscape. The polished demo showed promise for Guerrilla's first departure from the



Uncharted 4: A Thief's End



Dreams



The Last Guardian

first-person shooter series Killzone.

New titles rightfully grabbed headlines, but perhaps just as important is what the company is doing for existing titles and deals along the margins with third-party partners. Outright exclusives are rare these days, but Sony picked up a big coup by getting first dibs on Call of Duty: Black Ops III's map packs and the beta in August, as well as those for future Call of Duty games. This is a role reversal with Microsoft, who used to have timed exclusives for the FPS franchise.

Sony also announced that its special relationship with Destiny continues with the Taken King expansion. PlayStation gamers get an exclusive strike, gear, and multiplayer map. Similarly, Disney Infinity 3.0, Hitman, and Assassin's Creed Syndicate have exclusive content for Sony's platforms.

The biggest third-party news, however,

were the reveals of Final Fantasy VII Remake and Shenmue III. The PlayStation 4 will be the pair's first stop on home consoles, and we imagine Sony's long relationship with Japanese developers and continuing success in the Japanese market (as compared to Microsoft) helped the company nab these exclusives. It's worth noting, however, that neither has a release date so we may not see them for a while.

Regardless of how far off the release of Shenmue III and FF VII Remake are, they are powerful emotional talismans for many fans – a possibly important X-factor for a console manufacturer trying to convince the public that its system is the way to go. The footage for FF VII Remake shows the different take this title will take on the RPG classic, while Yu Suzuki is following his original course to complete the tale he set out to tell more than 15 years ago.

Yu Suzuki Kickstarted Shenmue III right after he announced it, but the frenzy was tempered after the fact by Suzuki and Sony's unclear explanation of the project's funding. On stage, Adam Boyes, SCEA vice president of developer and publisher relations, said Shenmue III was "very much their project," but it later came out that Sony is helping fund the game since it met its Kickstarter goal. During the presentation it was odd that Sony was so enthusiastic about the project, but not enough to back it, but afterward the question turned to why it needed gamers' money in the first place for what will likely be an expensive project.

Yu Suzuki's Shenmue III aside, indie development wasn't as big a theme, even though Sony's support of indie games hasn't necessarily abated. Campo Santo announced Firewatch is coming to the PlayStation 4, and

publisher Devolver Digital put the spotlight on four games making their console debut on the system first: Ronin, Eitr, Mother Russia Bleeds, and Crossing Souls.

No new initiatives for PlayStation Now or Vita were announced, and the pair weren't even directly mentioned, which underscores how unimportant they've become. Sony hasn't announced PS3 games streaming for PS Now even though Now was out before Microsoft announced its Xbox One backward compatibility program with select Xbox 360 titles.

Uncharted 4: A Thief's End concluded the press conference. The demo wouldn't start at first, and then hung up when the gameplay portion started, but all was forgiven once it kicked in gear and the audience was taken on one of the series' customary heart-racing, long action sequences. ♦

Morpheus game RIGS was a standout at the show, but Sony did not announce a price or release date for the VR device



Final Grade



This press conference will long be remembered for new IP reveals like Horizon Zero Dawn and the rapturous reaction to Final Fantasy VII Remake and Shenmue III. It was a good showing for Sony, but not a home run. Looking at the current lineup, the first-party/exclusive third-party software remains weak for this holiday season. The Last Guardian or even No Man's Sky coming out before the end of the year would have been big news, but those announcements didn't happen.

Furthermore, Sony did not address the fact that Microsoft's Xbox One had a good E3 showing itself and is making aggressive moves to catch up. You can get a 1TB Xbox One and a game for the same price (\$399) as a 500GB PS4 bundle, and the base 500GB Xbox One is available for \$349.99 – a price point you cannot buy a new PS4 for. Sony makes a 1TB PS4, but as of the time of this writing, it's only available in Europe.

This year's future-leaning press conference was better than last year's thanks to some new IP reveals, return of beloved franchises, and the Call of Duty coup, but it feels like Sony is in the same position as last year – waiting for the future and hoping the competition doesn't overtake it in the meantime.

3DS REMAINS THE DESTINATION AS NINTENDO BUYS TIME



This year's E3 marks Nintendo's third year running with the streaming-presentation format. These polished, pre-recorded Digital Event reveals have replaced Nintendo's live E3 press conferences of the past, reducing the chances of controller malfunctions or a *Wii Music*-caliber blunder. Last year's E3 excited fans with reveals like the collectible Amiibos, inky new IP *Splatoon*, more on *Super Smash Bros.*, and a glimpse at the upcoming open-world *Zelda* game for *Wii U*. It was a humble step in the right direction for *Wii U* support, but overall it didn't restore confidence in the *Wii U* as a major player in the console market.



by Jim Iuri



Nintendo tempered fans' expectations heading into this year's E3, announcing no new details would be coming about *The Legend of Zelda Wii U*, its mobile-game partnership with DeNA, or its next console, codenamed NX. Nintendo delivered a few fun surprises even with these hefty projects on the back burner, but *Wii U* owners walked away with little to look forward to while the 3DS stole the show.

Similar to the 2014's silly *Robot Chicken* created action-figure performances, Nintendo kicked things off with a goofy puppet intro. Jim Henson Muppet versions of the company's elite – Nintendo president Satoru Iwata, Nintendo of America president Reggie Fils-Aimé, and legendary developer Shigeru Miyamoto – dramatically strut down a backstage hallway before bizarrely transforming into *Star Fox* characters. The Nintendo leaders' metamorphoses into Peppy, Fox, and Falco (respectively), set the stage for a dive into the *Wii U*'s heavy hitter for 2015: *Star Fox Zero*. The single-player sci-fi flying game spices up the action with first-person cockpit motion controls, but overall looks like a competent-yet-overly safe entry in the classic series.

Nintendo's consoles are infamous for lacking meaningful third-party support, but Nintendo did announce a cool partnership with Activision, and publisher of the popular *Skylanders* series. The companies are joining forces to release special *Donkey Kong* and *Bowser* figures, which will both work as Amiibos and *Skylanders*. The big bruisers' cameos are a fantastic idea, but the obvious platform exclusivity comes with some stickiness (see sidebar).

After the *Skylanders* news, the video goes on a wild spree of announcements



Fans of fast, cartoonish sports rejoice! Mario Tennis: Ultra Smash is coming to the Wii U

NO MAN'S SKYLANDERS/AMIIBOS

Nintendo's announcement that Donkey Kong and Bowser are playable on the 3DS and Wii U as both Amiibos and Skylanders was exciting. However, after the Digital Event we learned you can only get these figures by purchasing Skylanders: Superchargers Starter Packs. That means if you want to own both Donkey Kong and Bowser, you have to shell out over \$140. You can already hear the collective groans of die-hard Amiibo collectors everywhere.



Mario & Luigi: Paper Jam

that should get 3DS owners excited, for the most part. Tri Force Heroes is a new local and online co-op Zelda game that unites friends as they stack on top of each other and swap magical outfits to clear puzzling dungeons. Mario & Luigi: Paper Jam injects the adorable 2D characters from the Paper Mario series into the character-juggling action of the Mario & Luigi series. Hyrule Warriors Legends brings the Wii U title by Omega Force/Team Ninja to the 3DS with all previously released DLC and a boatload of Wind Waker content. We also got another glimpse at Fire Emblem Fates, an entry in the critically acclaimed strategy series previously released in Japan that features dual storylines focusing on both sides of the war. Nintendo also reminded everyone in the West that they'll see the release

of Yo-Kai Watch this year, the ghost-catching Pokémon-style RPG that's already a huge hit in Japan.

The 3DS games on the horizon are looking solid overall, but one toyed with the hearts of those eagerly awaiting the return of intergalactic bounty hunter Samus Aran. Metroid Prime: Federation Force by Next Level Games comes across as a Metroid game in name alone, as the third-person gameplay seen so far focuses on anonymous characters in blocky space armor competing in minigames. It's an odd first showing for a woefully underused franchise, but we won't know if it delivers on Metroid Prime's quality until we learn more about the co-op campaign.

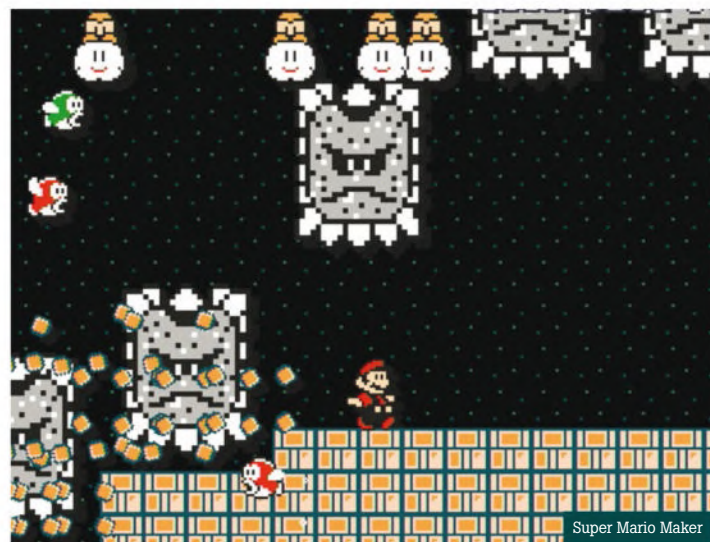
Metroid fans were left confused, but Animal Crossing enthusiasts had two announcements to get excited

about. Animal Crossing: Happy Home Designer is a 3DS title with an emphasis on decorating your home, letting players freely drag and drop items rather than laboriously push and pull them using a character. Animal Crossing: Amiibo Festival for Wii U is a Mario Party-esque title that lets Amiibo collectors trot out their toys in a virtual board game. Happy Home Designer looks like a no-brainer for fans of the series, but Amiibo Festival is less certain given Nintendo's rocky past with the board-game style.

The final game Nintendo showed off was the newly retitled Super Mario Maker. The create/share/play-focused Mario game not only features the look and feel of four different Mario games, but Nintendo also introduced Amiibo support in the form of Costume Mario.

Tapping Amiibos to your GamePad allows Mario to dress up as 8-bit versions of characters like Isabelle, Marth, and the Wii Fit Trainer. It's a neat gimmick, and Super Mario Maker captured fans' attentions with its cleverly punishing levels at the Nintendo World Championship 2015, but the game's success or failure will likely depend on how robust the level-sharing options are.

Nintendo showed off a lot of promising 3DS games during its Digital Event, but it was difficult to ignore the death knell of the Wii U. Both big Wii U titles shown off – Super Mario Maker and Star Fox – were already announced last year. With Zelda Wii U and the NX on the horizon this year's presentation felt like more of a ho-hum stopgap than previous years. Next year's E3 seems to be the one fans should be excited for. 🍄



Super Mario Maker

Final Grade

Like the company's first-party games, Nintendo's prerecorded presentations are some of the most entertaining and polished in the industry, exciting announcements withstanding. This year's Digital Event was succinct and informative, with only a few pace-breaking developer stories about the games' inspiration. The new entries in fan-favorite series like Zelda, Star Fox, and Mario & Luigi look like solid offerings. And overall, Nintendo drives home that now is perhaps the best time to be a 3DS owner with more Animal Crossing and Fire Emblem on the way.

On the other hand, while the 3DS becomes a warm home for Nintendo fans, more tumbleweeds continue to blow across the Wii U landscape. Super Mario Maker and Star Fox Zero look like fun, but the lack of new Zelda Wii U news hurt the presentation. Making matters worse, Nintendo got Metroid fans' hopes up with a multiplayer entry while series hero Samus was a no-show. Even more, Nintendo's lack of any meaningful third-party support remains a blemish on its systems' appeal and longevity. Nintendo's E3 this year wasn't a train wreck, but we hope the company has new tricks up its sleeves for next year with a new console and increased focus on mobile development.



VISIBLE *But* NOT PRESENT

Our E3 Hot 50 list is made of all the best games we got our hands on (or watched being played), but we saw plenty of new games appear in trailer form that we're still looking forward to. These games were ineligible for our Hot 50 list because they didn't have gameplay demos at the show, but nonetheless inspired excitement.

✕
by Kyle Hilliard



Ashen

PLATFORM: Xbox One

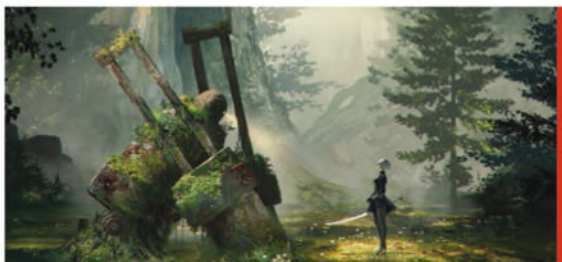
One of the highlights of Xbox One's indie push, Ashen shows a pair of faceless explorers in a dark world full of fantastic creatures – some friendly, some dangerous. The trailer's highlight occurs in the end, where a whale-sized creature is seen flying through the air above a mountaintop.



Dishonored 2

PLATFORM: PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC

After a successful first entry in 2012, Dishonored is returning with a second playable protagonist in Emily Kaldwin, the young princess from the first game. Emily and Corvo have distinct extraordinary powers granted by The Outsider, and the game takes place in the southern city of Karnaca.



Dreams

PLATFORM: PlayStation 4

It's unclear exactly what the creators of Tearaway and LittleBigPlanet are offering with Dreams. We can confirm it is a game, but it can also be used as simplified animation and editing software. The ethereal trailer for the game showcased a collection of abstract, disconnected vignettes seemingly built from clouds, giving it a surreal look and feeling that Media Molecule specializes in.



Final Fantasy VII Remake

PLATFORM: PlayStation 4

Rumored for years and teased by Sony on multiple occasions, fans are finally getting the remake they've wanted since the game's opening was remade with modern visuals as a technical showcase of the PlayStation 3's graphical capabilities at E3 2005.



Ion

PLATFORM: Xbox One, PC

Dean Hall, the creator of DayZ, used Microsoft's press conference as an opportunity to showcase his next game, Ion. The trailer only teased the new MMO, but it looks like it will take place in a vast, explorable galaxy and feature modern NASA technology. The trailer ended with a glimpse of a human wrapped in plastic, presumably in some sort of cryosleep.



Kingdom Hearts III

PLATFORM: PlayStation 4, Xbox One

Square Enix's bizarre Disney mash-up is well overdue for a core console entry, and E3 2015 offered the first extended look at gameplay. We saw Sora using his signature acrobatic attacks, Donald and Goofy joining the fray, and got a better look at a special attack involving a gigantic boat.



Mass Effect Andromeda

PLATFORM: PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC

Mass Effect is BioWare's biggest franchise, and while we knew the studio planned to continue exploring its fiction after Mass Effect 3, it was nice to get a title for the game and an admittedly small taste of what we can expect for the first new-gen Mass Effect entry.

Nier New Project [Working Title]

PLATFORM: PlayStation 4

Nier is the definition of a video game cult classic – adored by its fans but generally unheard of by the average gamer. Square Enix signed on Platinum Games to handle the sequel and revealed it at E3, but the company didn't have much to show and warned the project wouldn't see release for some time.

Project Setsuna

PLATFORM: TBA

Square Enix announced a new RPG studio and a new game codenamed Project Setsuna. We only saw concept art for the game during Square Enix's press conference, but it's hard to ignore what looked like a giant clock in one of the images, prompting many to conservatively ask, "Chrono Trigger?"

ReCore

PLATFORM: Xbox One

Mega Man creator Keiji Inafune and his studio, Comcept, are involved in a new Microsoft-published project with Armature Studios, a team made of former members of Retro (Metroid Prime). Not much is known about ReCore, but based on the trailer, players command robots while exploring a desert landscape.

Sea of Thieves

PLATFORM: Xbox One

Microsoft brought Rare into the Microsoft family for millions of dollars back in 2002, but its output for the Xbox platform holder has been disappointing. With Sea of Thieves, Rare is leaving Avatars behind and returning to creative world-building with a new pirate-themed online playground.

South Park: The Fractured but Whole

PLATFORM: Xbox One

South Park's creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone were certain they wouldn't return for a sequel after shipping The Stick of Truth. Despite their own stated reluctance, however, Ubisoft opened its E3 conference with one of the biggest surprises of the show and a title you can't help but giggle over every time you say it out loud. ♦

BACK TO THE FUTURE *of* GAMING

We check in with Oculus, Project Morpheus, and the HoloLens to see how much progress is being made in the virtual and augmented-reality spaces.

✕
by Andrew Reiner



For years we've heard about virtual reality being the next frontier of video games. That future was convincingly telegraphed through dozens of game demos that illustrated how VR could bring new experiences to our favorite entertainment medium. As exciting as these demonstrations were, the future of VR still felt like it was forever away. As time progressed and the hardware behind these VR demos improved, both Oculus and Sony felt comfortable enough with their respective VR players – Rift and Morpheus – to announce they're coming to store shelves in 2016.

These rapidly approaching release dates put a bull's-eye on E3 as the place we'd likely get our hands on with launch games for both platforms. This year's show didn't disappoint; Oculus and Sony brought a variety of demos for games slated to launch in 2016. Microsoft also surprised showgoers with HoloLens demonstrations for Halo, Minecraft, and more – giving us an idea how this headset's augmented reality or "holograms" could apply to games.

Here's our report on how all three hardware manufacturers performed at the show.

Oculus Rift

You won't see Oculus Rift's Toybox in our E3 Hot 50 list (as it isn't truly a game), but it was one of the coolest experiences at the show. The Toy Box shows just how intuitive the Oculus Touch controllers are, which were announced the week before E3. Like Valve's SteamVR controllers, you hold one in each hand, and both are tracked in three dimensions so your hands can appear virtually in whatever application you are running. Both controllers have an analog stick, a couple of face buttons, and a triggers on the back side.

Within seconds of using them, I was making fists, pointing, and using the controllers to pick up items – ranging from lighters to laser guns – with ease. Outside of not feeling the objects in my hands, this experience seems natural. I threw balls accurately, carefully placed blocks on tall towers, used a remote control to drive a tank, and even had the precision to flip open a Zippo lighter, hold a firework's fuse to it, wait until it was almost fully burned out, and throw it at the Oculus representative who was in the virtual space with me. The Toybox clearly showed how the Touch controllers could apply to other game genres like first-person shooters. It was the most convincing VR demonstration I've seen, and it was made in under six months by an internal development team at Oculus.

The other game demos at the show were played using an Xbox One controller, which thanks to a partnership with Microsoft will be bundled with each Oculus Rift. Most of the games impressed and showed off a wide variety of ways that VR can be used in games.

(continued on page 26)

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(continued from page 24)

Insomniac Games' *Edge of Nowhere* (see page 80 for a full preview), *Playful's Lucky's Tale*, and *Gunfire Games' Chronos* convincingly demonstrated how traditional third-person action games can find new life in VR. *Lucky's Tale* is a 3D platformer following the exploits of a fox, and *Chronos* is an adventure game that pits a hero with sword against a titan and imps in a dungeon filled with puzzles.

VR Sports gave us an interesting look at how hockey can be adapted to VR. In this demo, I played a goalie trying to block shots coming from the left or right. The challenge comes from tracking the puck. Behind the goalie's mask, it becomes increasingly difficult to keep your eye on the puck since skaters block your view and passes and rebounds are not picked up. This gameplay was simple in scope, but surprisingly intense and enjoyable.

With its impressive demos and intriguing new Touch controller prototypes, Oculus had the best virtual-reality showing of the show. After wearing the Rift for 40 minutes, none of the demos gave me simulation sickness or affected my vision. Here's hoping most of these games become launch titles or are at least transformed into day-one demos. Now we continue waiting for the price point.

Project Morpheus

Sony's VR offering at E3 was all over the place, often putting the emphasis onto peripherals other than the Project Morpheus headset. We played demos that could only be played using two

Move controllers or a gun peripheral, and the strangest demo had players riding a bicycle to simulate riding a horse. Yes, you read that correctly.

The most polished and legitimate game that Sony had on hand was a futuristic sports title called *Rigs Mechanized Combat League*. Players hop into heavily armored mechs that feature jump jets and chain guns. I was a part of a three-on-three multiplayer match, which was surprisingly heated. When someone grabbed enough orbs to activate a goal, the opposing team tried to gun that mech down – a feat that required platforming given the goal's position in the multi-tiered arena. After spending 20 minutes in *Rigs*, my stomach felt queasy almost like I just got off a coaster at Six Flags. That sensation lasted for a good 15 minutes afterward.

Some of the other demos for Morpheus show Sony already has strong indie and third-party support pledged to the system. *Capcom's The Kitchen* gives us a look at just how terrifying a horror game can be in VR. Strapped to the chair with a dead body lying feet away, you are positioned in front of a camera, helpless, and waiting for all hell to break loose. The demo transitions to gore, giving you an intimate look at a murder and torture. Some people who played the demo said they legitimately panicked or had muscle spasms when a demonic woman who emerged from the shadows thrust a knife into one of their legs.

One of the best-playing Morpheus demos was *Superhypercube*, a puzzle game in which you must fit a growing chain of cubes through a hole in a barrier.

Chronos



Morpheus' technology is solid, but the game lineup at E3 didn't impress as much as Oculus'. Regardless, it appears as though Sony is all in on launching this VR hardware with a sizeable lineup come 2016. But as with the Oculus, we still have no idea how much it will cost.

HoloLens

The videos Microsoft has released for HoloLens have all been misleading. The headset's field of vision isn't panoramic, and is much smaller than you would expect. If you hold an iPhone 5 about two inches from your eyes, you get a rough approximation of the AR field of view. This is the number-one complaint people cite while using the HoloLens prototype. They want to see more in their peripheral vision.

But even with this detracting factor at play, Microsoft brought a number of promising HoloLens demos to E3, including one that serves as an introduction to *Halo 5: Guardians'* new Warzone multiplayer mode. Through the HoloLens, waypoints appear in midair, in a room modeled to look like *Halo's Infinity* ship, leading you to your next destination.

At our first stop, a porthole appears on an ordinary wall, giving the player a look at a 3D hanger filled with ships and soldiers. We are then asked to crowd around a table with other players wearing HoloLens glasses. A hologram of Commander Palmer appears on the table, much like holographic technology seen in the *Star Wars* films.

The *Minecraft* demo was also fun to play with, giving a window-like view at a world that almost feels real. Using a voice command we call down lightning to scare a resident in a castle. Pinching our fingers together allows for the terrain to be scanned. Raising the fingers up exposes the underground, pulling them horizontally reveals more of the terrain. This demo successfully showed off how HoloLens can view *Minecraft* worlds, but didn't give us any indication of if the game can be played in the traditional way.

The final HoloLens demo we saw was called *X-Ray*, which seems like a prototype for a game based on *Cyclops* from *X-Men*. The goal is to use your head movement to target bugs that are crawling out of holes that appear on the walls and ceiling. Once a bug is centered, pulling the trigger on the Xbox One controller fires an eye laser that hopefully disintegrates the foe. Some enemies even fire back, forcing the player to physically move or duck to dodge the blasts.

HoloLens showed well in barren rooms, but it's hard to imagine how it will work in rooms cluttered with bookshelves, art, and things found in homes. Microsoft repeatedly told us that it was still in the early prototype phases, but it's already clear how it can be used as optional accessory to games. Whether it has the capacity to be an integral part remains to be seen. ♦



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The Good



E3 is about the future, but this year gamers were also treated to more immediate rewards. The beta for Gears of War Unlimited Edition (Xbox One), Earthbound Beginnings (Wii U virtual console), and Fallout Shelter (iOS, shown) all hit while the show was going on.



Quotable

“It was pretty much a corporate decision by Sony. And that’s where we’ll leave it. [Laughs]”



— **Fumito Ueda**, The Last Guardian creator, on the title’s long delay.

The Bad



NINTENDO punks its own fans by teasing them with a new Metroid during its E3 Nintendo Direct that turns out to be...Metroid Prime Federation Force – a four-person co-op first-person shooter on 3DS. Does that sound like the Metroid you’ve been panting for?

The Ugly

PELÉ will always be a soccer icon, but he will never be mistaken for a great E3 spokesperson. The interview with the Brazilian soccer star single-handedly tanked the Electronic Arts E3 press conference with rambling conversations that were as embarrassing as Brazil’s 1-7 drubbing at the hands of Germany in the World Cup. EA should have known Pelé wasn’t to be trusted with public-speaking duties the moment he backed Sepp Blatter for re-election before the FIFA scandal. ❖



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THE BEST TECH OF E3 2015

by Jeff Cork & Ben Reeves

Video games are the centerpiece of E3, but tech and peripheral manufacturers of all stripes head to the convention every year to show off their wares. This year we saw a handful of exciting products that could better your gaming experiences; here are some of the most exciting pieces of tech on display.



Xbox One Elite Wireless Controller

Microsoft unveiled a new controller aimed squarely at pro gamers. The Xbox Elite Controller has been designed with those players in mind, built with high-end components and made to survive the stresses that leave standard controllers begging for mercy. Both analog sticks can be removed with a firm tug and replaced with longer variants to fit your ergonomic needs. There are four sticks similar to the default Xbox One controller (two pairs of tall and short versions), as well as a pair of convex rubberized thumbsticks. The d-pad is magnetized, and can be lifted out and swapped between a traditional plus shape or a circular, faceted alternative. The back of the controller features a hair-trigger toggle and four programmable paddles. Players can create their own game-specific profiles and swap between two of them with the flip of a switch. There's also a standard 3.5mm stereo headset jack – no dongle needed. Microsoft's new controller releases this October, and while it is pricey, it's clearly not meant for people who only play Threes.

\$149.99 | xbox.com

1 Turtle Beach Elite 800X Wireless Xbox One Headset

Last year, Turtle Beach released one of the best wireless headsets for Xbox One, and the headset wizards are upping the ante with the Elite 800X. Synthetic leather and memory foam ear cups should keep you comfortable during all-day gaming marathons, but the tech inside these cans is just as important. Simulated 7.1 surround sound, dynamic chat boost that automatically amplifies your vocal chatter, and active noise cancellation that blocks ambient room audio all helped drown out even the craziness of the E3 show floor.

\$299 | turtlebeach.com



2



2 Logitech G920 And G29 Racing Wheels

Logitech's G29 racing wheel for the PlayStation 3 and 4 features a few bonus hot buttons, but it's functionally identical to its Xbox cousin – both units even work with PCs. A dual-motor force feedback system simulates the difference in driving over asphalt, dirt, and gravel. Meanwhile, the pedal floor unit has enough heft to prevent it from sliding away while you're pushing for first place, and the nonlinear brake pedal mimics the performance of a pressure-sensitive brake, which further adds to the authenticity. Logitech's new wheels offer the closest thing to a real racing experience that you can have in your living room.

\$399 | gaming.logitech.com

3



3 Mad Catz L.Y.N.X. 3

Most mobile game controllers are either too awkward to lug around or too small to play comfortably. Mad Catz thinks it has solved this dilemma with a transforming controller that folds up into a portable capsule. The L.Y.N.X. pairs with most Android devices, offers up to 30 hours of game time, and can be pinned directly to your phone using an additional clip. A companion app offers setup tips, tutorials, and customization options for tweaking stick and trigger sensitivity.

\$69.99 | madcatz.com

Media Shelf



THE FANGIRL'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY: A HANDBOOK FOR GIRL GEEKS BY SAM MAGGS

The geek world sometimes feels like a boys club, but all genders are welcome. This ultimate geek handbook tackles everything from how to make nerdy friends to writing fanfiction and defeating Internet trolls. The book includes interviews with famous fangirls such as Jane Espenson, Erin Morgenstern, and Laura Vandervoort.

\$15.95
sammaggs.com

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST GRAPHIC NOVEL

Nintendo's classic SNES title once got the comic treatment from legendary manga artist Shotaro Ishinomori (*Cyborg 009*, *Kamen Rider*). Link's adventures saving Zelda were first serialized in the pages of Nintendo Power Magazine in the early '90s, and now Ishinomori's colorful artwork is being collected for the first time in more than 20 years.

\$19.99
perfectsquare.com

LUMBERJANES VOL. 1 BY NOELLE STEVENSON AND GRACE ELLIS

A lighthearted and enduring look at the lives of five young women at a summer camp for "Hardcore Lady Types," this wild adventure forces its heroes to band together to defeat three-eyed creatures and con their way past hipster Yetis guarding a mysterious lighthouse.

\$14.99
boom-studios.com

SEVENERES: A NOVEL BY NEAL STEPHENSON

Sci-fi legend Neal Stephenson returns with a tale about the annihilation of Earth and the harrowing journey that takes several survivors across the galaxy. This optimistic look at human survival is a classic sci-fi story that spans 5,000 years.

\$35.00
nealstephenson.com

August

03 The International

Last year, The International Dota 2 tournament netted a prize pool in excess of \$13 million, and its final matches were shown on ESPN. This year's event kicks off today and runs throughout the week. The prize pool has already exceeded \$13 million. Sixteen teams are battling for it, and all of the matches will be streamed online and through the Dota 2 client.

04 New Releases

› Etrian Odyssey Untold 2: The Fafnir Knight (3DS)

05 GamesCom 2015

Held in Cologne, Germany, GamesCom 2015 kicks off today and is once again expected to be the busiest video game show of the year with over 275,000 attendees. We expect a handful of big announcements from game publishers this year over the span of the show's five days.

06.1 Salt Lake Gaming Con 2015

If you live in Utah and you want to put your gaming skills to the test, this three-day expo features tournaments for Super Smash Bros., Call of Duty, Dota 2, Mortal Kombat X,

and more. This expo draws over 25,000 people across its three days, and is home to a wide variety of gaming activities.

06.2 The Daily Show Finale

Jon Stewart's amazing run on Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* ends tonight. We suspect this will be a hell of a send off that doesn't pull any political punches.

07 Finally Fantastic?

After releasing two miserable Fantastic Four movies, someone decided we needed another one. This third iteration, simply called *Fantastic Four*, is a reboot with new actors filling the roles of The Thing, Invisible Woman, Human Torch, and the horribly named Mr. Fantastic. The big difference we see so far: Their costumes are black instead of blue. That should help this movie eclipse its predecessors.

11 New Releases

› Everybody's Gone to the Rapture (PS4)
› Garfield Kart (3DS)
› Paddington: Adventures in London (3DS)

18 New Releases

› Armikrog (PC)

21.1 New Releases

› LBX: Little Battlers eXperience (3DS)
› Risen 3: Enhanced Edition (PS4)

21.2 Agent 47 Returns

Rupert Friend and Zachary Quinto star in today's theatrical release, *Hitman: Agent 47*, a reimagining of the video game classic on the big screen. Most video game movies don't fare well, but we like what we've seen of it in the trailer. It has

a *Transporter* and *Bourne Identity* vibe to it. Here's hoping Hollywood can finally do a beloved video game series justice.

25 New Releases

› Madden NFL 16 (Xbox One, PS4, PS3, 360)
› Until Dawn (PS4)

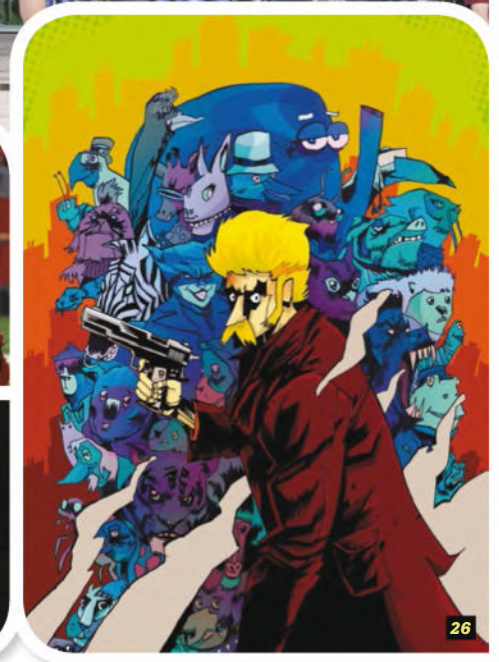
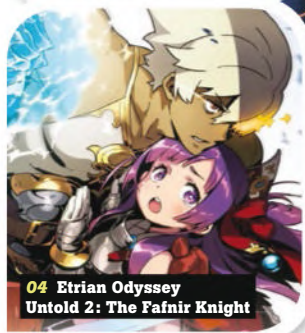
26 Howard the Human

Marvel's Secret Wars event is doing strange things to its universe, including turning Howard the Duck into Howard the Human, the only person on a world full of animals. The first

issue of *Howard the Human* hits comic book shelves today, and is penned by Skottie Young of *Rocket Raccoon* fame.

28 PAX Prime 2015

Video games' big fan event, PAX Prime, begins today in Seattle, and runs through the weekend. This show boasts great panels, an indie game showcase, and a large number of cosplayers showing off their new creations. We'll have up-to-the-minute coverage of PAX on gameinformer.com. ♦



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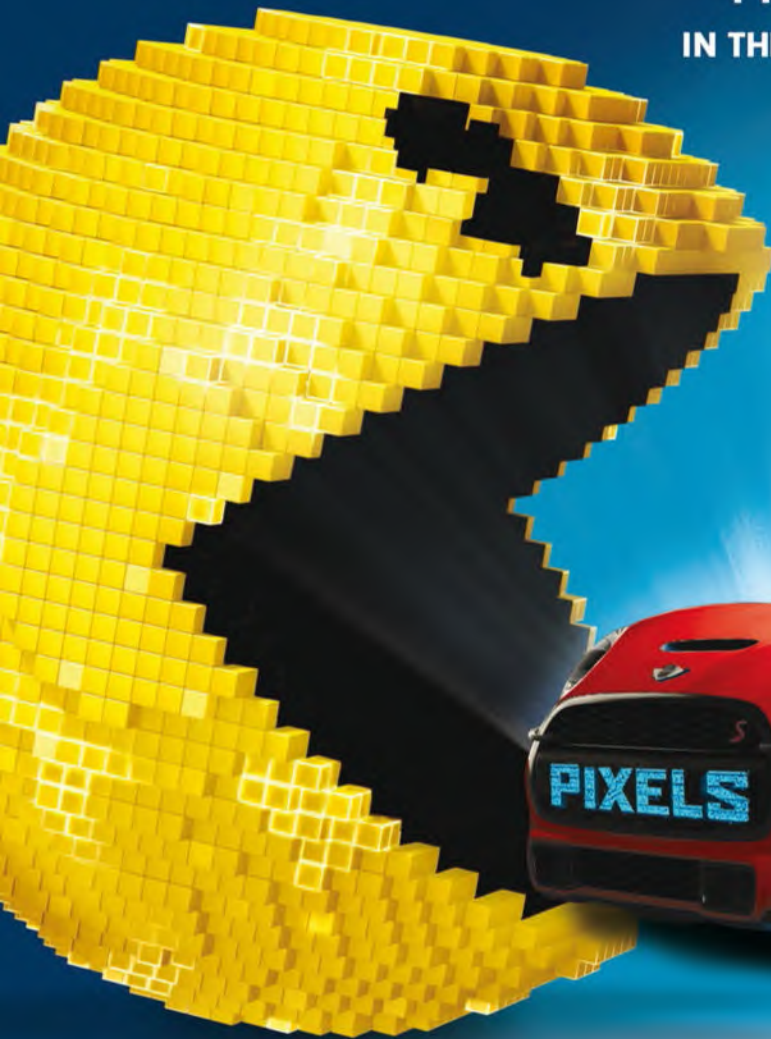


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TACOMA HOME FOR SPACE



FULLBRIGHT
TACKLES
SCI-FI AND
ISOLATION
IN TACOMA,
ITS NEXT
EXPLORATION
GAME

by Kimberley Wallace

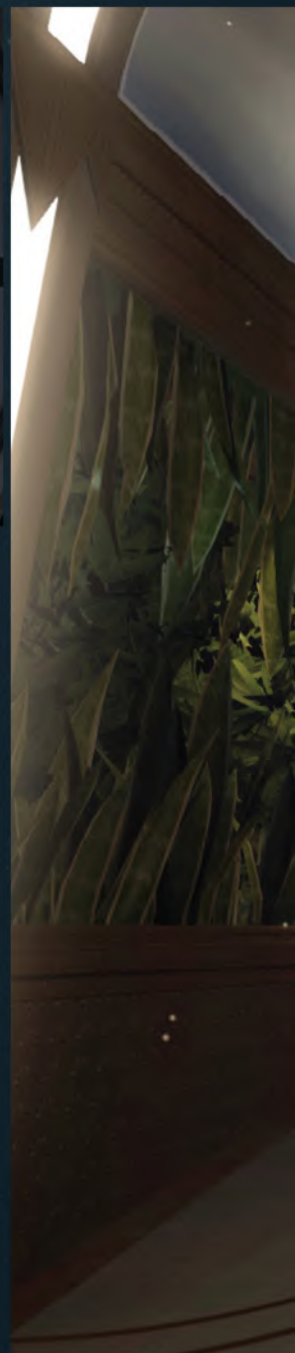
JUST TWO YEARS AGO,



Fullbright was getting ready to launch its debut game, *Gone Home*. Back then, three members of the four-person development team were living in a house together, working from the basement to create a game they weren't sure anybody wanted. Could a game simply about exploring a house without any combat succeed? The answer was yes.

Gone Home challenged some gamers' expectations of what a game could be, but it also felt like a breath of fresh air in interactive writing and exploration. The game launched to critical acclaim, earning an 86 rating on Metacritic. Industry praise followed, including GDC Choice and BAFTA awards for best debut. More importantly, *Gone Home* sold well enough for the small studio to move forward and create another game.

This time around, Fullbright isn't working from a basement; it has an actual office, and it's doubled the size of its team for its next project: *Tacoma*. Outside of people knowing that the game takes place in the future and in space, *Tacoma* has been shrouded in mystery. After a visit to Fullbright's studio in Portland, Oregon, we discovered the team isn't changing its approach, but is instead pushing further in what it can accomplish with first-person exploration and a fresh new setting.





Vegetation is all around to give off oxygen, and the crew grows some of its food

Finding A New Path

Tacoma wasn't always a game about a space station. In fact, when Fullbright co-founders Steve Gaynor and Karla Zimonja first started brainstorming ideas in April 2014, what they initially came up with was a lot closer to the setting of *Gone Home*.

Gaynor and Zimonja knew they wanted to create another first-person exploration game about discovering people's lives. Their first idea was to have you exploring a house in a fresh setting: Tacoma, Washington. You also would have found out about a much different person than *Gone Home*'s Sam, and they planned on having more detailed ways to investigate objects. Gaynor had crafted all the characters and even got Fullbright's artist, Kate Craig, to start working on it. The first floor of the house was laid out and Craig

started creating the detached garage, which would hold a recording studio.

But something didn't feel right to Gaynor, and it kept nagging at him. "It was just like, 'I don't think we can do something that close this soon...both for the audience being interested and for ourselves,'" Gaynor says. It hit him more and more as he watched Craig create more furniture for the house. "A big part was seeing Kate make another couch," Gaynor says. "I don't want to make Kate make another set of bedside tables."

Gaynor didn't have the answer until he went on a trip with his wife that July to Crater Lake in Oregon. The lake was formed by a volcanic crater, and in the middle of it stands Wizard Island. Gaynor and his wife took a boat out to it and hiked to the top, and he confided that he didn't want to make another "house game,"

but he couldn't figure out a solution. He knew it needed to be set in an isolated place that players couldn't just walk away from, and so he started spitballing ideas, such as an arctic base, a boat lost at sea, an oil platform, and a space station. His wife immediately jumped on the space station idea, and when Gaynor returned home he pitched the team on a new game. As Gaynor puts it, "Why stay in your comfort zone? You can do something that is going to be harder, but that is going to force you to do something that surprises yourself."

It was just the creative spark the team needed; suddenly they were asking themselves the who, what, where, when, and whys of the space station they were about to create. What they came up with was a detailed and creative setup much more exciting to explore.

Taking On Sci-Fi

The title Tacoma no longer refers to a Washington city, but instead a space station that serves as a waypoint between the moon and Earth. "It's basically an airport terminal," Gaynor says. The game is set in 2088, and space tourism has taken off. No longer are highly trained astronauts the only people allowed in space; if you have the dollars to spend, you can take a trip to the moon. This is a luxury vacation that only millionaires can afford. "Our functional fiction is that by this point in the timeline, there's a space elevator that's based in Singapore, and so people can move materials, supplies, passengers, and workers up into orbit," Gaynor explains. "Getting into zero gravity is less of a risky proposition now, so the process is: You go up to the top of a space elevator and there's a spaceport there that basically takes you to Tacoma."

The elevator's spaceport doesn't have shuttles with landing capabilities, so people need to wait at a transfer station like Tacoma.

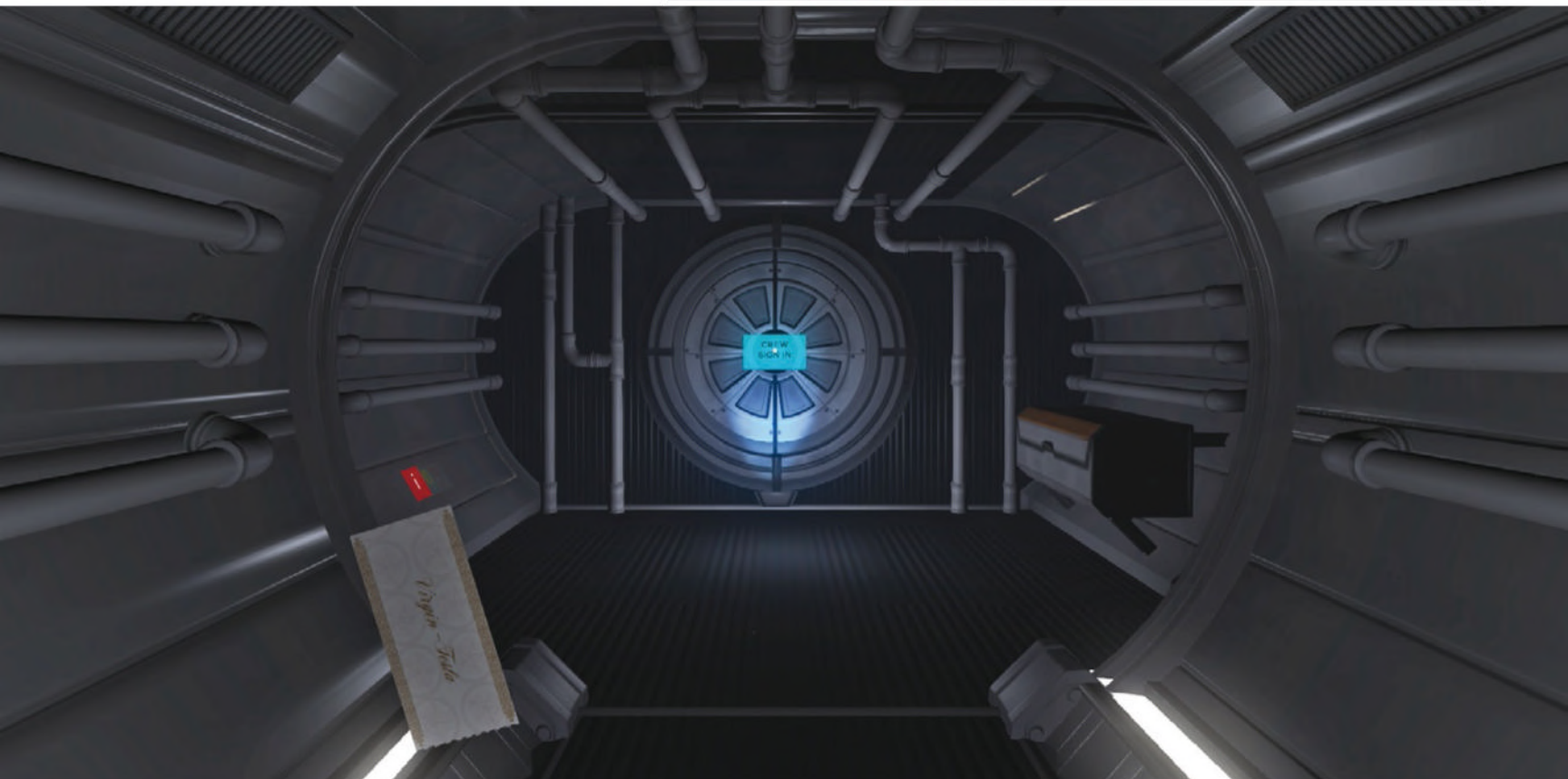
This may all be speculative science fiction, but Fullbright wanted to create something that actually had the potential of existing. The team did exhaustive research to get the little details right. For instance, Tacoma is located on Lagrange Point 1 (points that are positioned between two gravitational fields), which actually does exist between the Earth and moon. At this location, the dueling gravitational fields would help keep a space station in orbit without expending much fuel. Lagrange Point 1 is also only a

short distance from the moon, making it an ideal place for Tacoma. The space elevator is located in Singapore because the location had to be on the equator, so shipments wouldn't move around too much, and the elevator would be close to global shipping lanes.

Even the name of the space tourism agency is clever: Virgin Tesla. "We thought it through," Gaynor says. "Virgin is a travel company and they're a luxury company, and we are positing that Tesla ends up patenting the high-efficiency energy cells that allow them to do this service without a bunch of rocket fuel involved."

The team researched the small details, like how people wash their hair in space and how

long people can stay in space before they permanently damage their bone density. NASA has been a vital resource for getting an idea about life in space. "We're trying to create something that's so close to our own reality that you can at least say – with the trajectory of how things are going – it would be really interesting if it ended up that way and you could totally buy that," Gaynor says. "For *Gone Home*, it was like everything had to be something that could be in the '90s. 'This feels right and could have existed.' It's a similar thing here; we aren't happy if we're like, 'It's a space station, we're in space. We want to be invested enough in how this might really work if we're going to do it at all.'"





Part of the fun is seeing familiar objects in their space-adapted containers

brings up the fact that Tacoma isn't exactly the best job posting you can get. "You're basically the help," he says. "You're stuck on the most remote, least cushy posting in the whole system for a year at a time, stuck in one spot. Think of the crew in those terms: 'Who ends up here and why?' It's gotta be people that are competent, but they had no choice but to take this posting. They're all here for different reasons and have complicated motivations for ending up in this place, and now they have to deal with each other."

Fullbright spent time researching people who live on arctic bases and in submarines to get into the minds of those who choose to live in isolated places. "There's a lot of baggage that comes with being in a small group of individuals who have all been thrown together into this isolated situation," Gaynor says.

Tacoma's narrative centers on discovering how all these different personalities (see sidebar on page 44) ended up together. "It's like if you were housemates with people, but could never leave the house," Gaynor says. "A lot of it is exploring how they first learn to cope with each other, and then growing into being each other's support systems. They are as close to being a family as they can be because they have to learn how to rely on one another."

Expect exploration to be more engaging in Tacoma thanks to the microgravity environment. Objects float before you, and you can always change your orientation and walk on the ceiling to find extra passageways, maintenance shafts, and messages. You're not floating – magnetized boots tether you to the floor, but as a trained technician, you can always explore what's above you.

Raising The Bar With Story And Gameplay

Just because Fullbright is tackling science fiction doesn't mean the team isn't putting its own unique stamp on the genre. You can still expect narrative to be front-and-center, and plenty of personal stories to be the focus. "It's not a save the world, fate of the galaxy situation," Gaynor says. "Here it's the fate of the few people that you get to find out about."

In Tacoma, you play as Amy Ferrier, who is arriving for her first day on the job as the new operations specialist. When she shows up, nobody is around, leaving her to search for answers and piece together what's going on. She plays a similar role to Katie's in *Gone Home*. "The most important part of a character in this situation is how a character acts in it, so we'll be focusing more on who Amy is by what she does in real time than [her backstory]," Gaynor says.

That doesn't mean Amy doesn't have intriguing things to uncover. "Her background is a little mysterious," Gaynor says. "She got pulled off her last posting on short notice and sent over to Tacoma, so you'll probably find out a little bit more of what the circumstances around that were. There's some territory to be explored there of why she's the one who got pulled in instead of anybody else."

Amy talks more than Katie did, and she also has more abilities. "Amy is slightly more empowered in the environment; she can log into things," says Fullbright co-founder Karla Zimonja. Gaynor adds: "She's a trained technician, so she interacts more with the technical side of the station." Essentially, as Amy, you need to bring the station back online by

opening up different modules.

Just like *Gone Home* was more about Sam than Katie, Tacoma is the story of the station's crew. You get to know about six different crew members by searching their belongings, reading their digital messages, and watching AR recordings (via 3D holographic representations). The different recordings you see span over nine months, but most are from the immediate past, closer to Amy's arrival. Everybody who steps foot in Tacoma agrees to have their conversations and body's positional information tracked to make sure workers are in their correct positions and to alert others if things go awry. You can watch these recordings of the crew and see them interact to get an idea of their personalities, relationships, and the situation before Amy's arrival. Expect to see everything from celebrations to arguments. "It's like one big dangerous group house," Zimonja says.

When Amy arrives, the only communication she has is with the station computer she called ODIN. This mysterious A.I. will only give her certain information. Fullbright wants you to question what it provides you and why (see sidebar below).

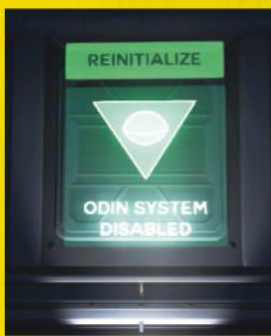
Focusing on a six-member crew is something Fullbright thought would be interesting, especially in terms of how people cope with being in space. For starters, people who work on Tacoma sign up for a one-year stint, which is as long as you can be in space before you do permanent bone damage. Gaynor also



MEET ODIN

During Tacoma, Amy only has one real-time contact: a station computer called ODIN, the Operational Data Interpreter Network interface. ODIN monitors all of Tacoma's daily functions, and provides the crew with any information they should need. ODIN can understand intent, but is clearly withholding certain information from Amy. Following in the classic sci-fi footsteps of independent A.I. like HAL and GLaDOS, part of Tacoma will be figuring out just what's behind ODIN and if you can trust the only guide you have through the space station. Don't just assume that ODIN turns out to be evil, however.

"I was thinking a lot about unreliable narrators in games," says Fullbright co-founder Steve Gaynor. Gaynor didn't want to make it the main character, but thought it would work well to make a player guess about an A.I.'s trustworthiness. "Here's this force that has a lot of control over what's going on in the station, and it's [Amy's] only real-time contact, and [you] can't completely tell if it's withholding information because it wants to or because it's been programmed to, or if it even has the idea of wanting to do anything," Gaynor explains. Your job will be to figure out how much you think the A.I. has been manipulated by outside forces, adding a new layer to the mystery. Fun fact: ODIN is voiced by Carl Lumbly, who voiced C.M. Porter in *BioShock 2*'s Minerva's Den DLC.





Entering Tacoma

It's one thing to learn more about Tacoma, it's another thing to see it in action. We got hands-on with the introductory public area of the station, which is accessible before the crew members' personal and work spaces. As we enter the space station, we feel a sense of awe and wonderment, similar to when we first stepped into Rapture in BioShock. This isn't all that surprising, as half of the team is made up of developers who worked on the BioShock franchise. Fullbright has never been shy about embracing its work on

these games, and you can often find clever nods to the franchise littered throughout its games, like the Ken Levine salad dressing in Gone Home.

Entering Tacoma feels like you're walking into something grand and different. As Fullbright noted, space travel is a high-end attraction. Tacoma's aesthetic matches that, akin to walking on a luxury cruise ship. Vegetation is everywhere, as it's the primary source of oxygen, but the greenness of it all adds a good contrast to the golden interior. Each side of the public corridor has

sculptures donated by rich families. As you walk toward the middle of the entryway, classical music welcomes you. Different objects drift in the venue, from food items to anti-nausea medication. Part of the fun is discovering through these items how people live in space.

While there's a definite beauty to Tacoma, an eerie feeling also permeates its halls. Amy calls out to control, to anyone, only to be met with silence. Reaching a locked door to the crew's chambers, Amy must reset the computer system, ODIN, before proceeding any further. Moving through the first area,

we find various messages between crew members, along with the occasional newspaper tucked away in a bathroom stall. An airborne sanitation drone roams the area, cleaning up debris. Just as in Gone Home, you can touch various objects to examine them or throw them. This extends to the sanitation drone, which responds with a polite "excuse me" should you toss it. Fullbright teases that later in the game you find these drones doing more than just cleaning, as crew members have hacked them to do more interesting activities.



E.V. runs the show, making sure Tacoma operates smoothly





POPULARIZING A SUB-GENRE

Recently, more studios are putting story and exploration at the forefront of their projects. Games like *Dear Esther*, *The Stanley Parable*, and *Gone Home* have no doubt helped popularize a first-person exploration sub-genre. “It feels like there was kind of a turning point, where it was like, ‘Oh, so there’s a way to make a game that’s about being player-driven and being immersed in a world that doesn’t have to be about combat or stealth.’ There doesn’t have to be physical danger to you,” says Fullbright co-founder Steve Gaynor. “There’s enough there that we can build a full experience by just [putting players] in a place, finding out about it, and the people who were there. Just being able to be a part of a movement of these games is really great.”

When Fullbright released *Gone Home*, this formula still seemed unproven, but now it’s a full-blown trend. More developers are taking note, as we have games like *Three One Zero’s* *Adrift* and *Campo Santo’s* *Firewatch* on the horizon alongside titles from developers who helped popularize the trend. *The Chinese Room* (*Dear Esther*) is set to release a first-person-exploration game called *Everybody’s Gone To The Rapture*, and Fullbright didn’t hesitate to make another game in this format. “It’s definitely our niche for now,” says Fullbright co-founder Karla Zimonja. “I don’t know if it will be forever, but for now it feels good to create exploratory, narrative-focused games.”

Both Gaynor and Zimonja believe this type of format has a lot of power for storytelling. Zimonja speaks to how the more specific that they got with details, the more universal it became to people – one of Fullbright’s biggest lessons from *Gone Home*. “You can be vague and people won’t really identify with it, but if you add some personal details and make it a real possible event and get very specific with it, people will find ways to identify with it and that’s a very powerful tool,” she says. “It points to the power that this type of storytelling has that makes you invested in finding out what happened to these people,” Gaynor says. “The only reason there’s that tension is because you feel like you’ve gotten to know these people.”

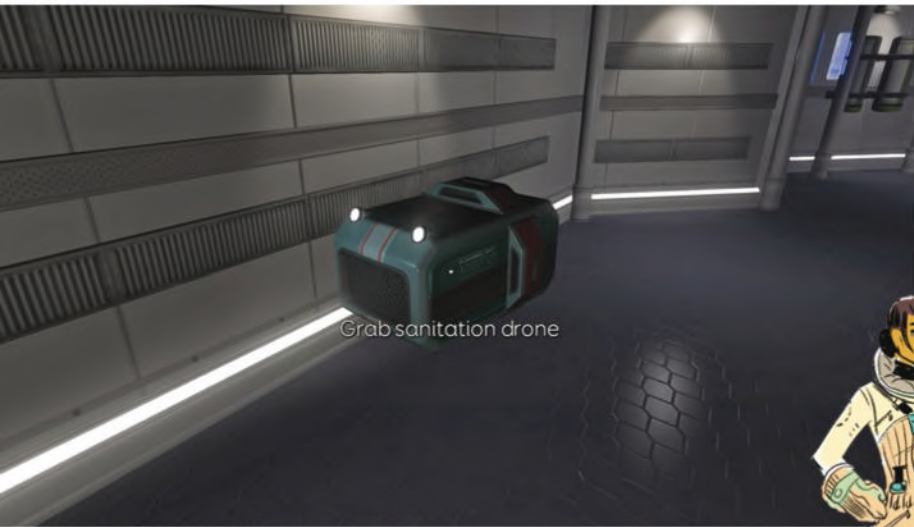
One of the first AR recordings involves the whole crew interacting and watching a decommissioned station being nuked. Upon inspecting a message, we come to find it’s an old Howard Johnson resort station. Gaynor says their thought process behind it was, “What if they tried to revive Howard Johnson as the accessible, middle-class brand for people who are single millionaires, not multi-millionaires?” Obviously, this tier of space tourism failed to be successful, and this event shows the crew watching the orbital platform get detonated and vaporized. Since the event happened well before Amy’s arrival, we’re only left with a picture to visualize the actual explosion.

Playing the AR recording, multiple people are talking at the same time with their own distinct voices. “What we’re basically trying to do is capture that feeling of being at a party with multiple conversations going on,”

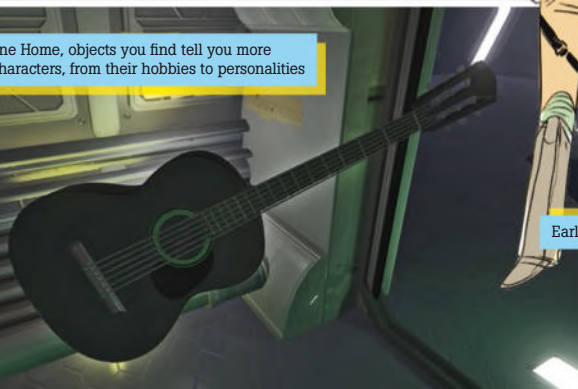
Gaynor explains. You can replay these conversations to get multiple perspectives. Every crew member has a static profile photo of them that shows up over a 3D, positional model of them. You never see their actual faces during AR recordings; they’re merely recreations of the crew’s different body positions represented by color. “It’s more valuable to us to say, ‘Here’s where they were and how they were moving at the time, and it’s in the player’s head to picture what their face looks like, what outfit they have on, and how their hair is moving,’” Gaynor says. Fullbright liked that people used their own imagination

to visualize scenes in *Gone Home*, and the studio wanted to do something similar here. The voice acting and natural dialogue make these recordings fun to encounter.

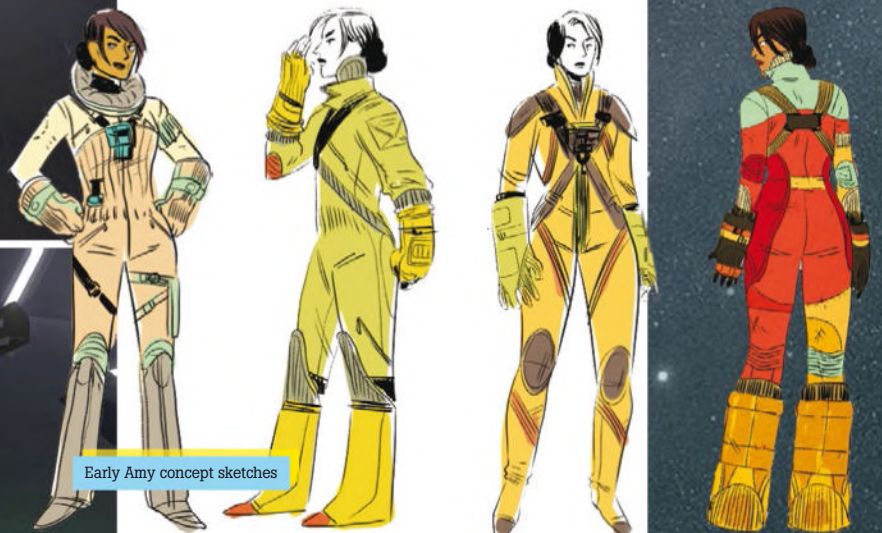
Every conversation reveals interesting threads, from their excitement of seeing the Howard Johnson station destroyed to finding a bald crew member joking about not being concerned that they’re low on shampoo, but down to three razor blades. These are thus far the strongest part of the experience; everything is a discovery and plays into the different narrative threads. For instance, we find out the crew missed a supply shipment and had to wait six weeks before a new one would come. Later, we discover one of the crew members has a heart murmur and had to leave Tacoma three months early, which is why Amy was called in. Listening to the AR recordings and following characters’ movements can reveal secrets like their passwords to open their belongings. In one private compartment we find a drug which seems harmless enough until we discover in a later exchange that a crew member has developed a dependency to it, causing sleepwalking issues.



Like *Gone Home*, objects you find tell you more about characters, from their hobbies to personalities



Early Amy concept sketches



MEET THE TACOMA CREW

Amy Ferrier (player character): Amy is a “Spacer,” a free agent that maintains her own small space freighter, salvaging resources from abandoned orbital platforms that float just outside Earth’s atmosphere. Hired on short notice as Tacoma’s new operations specialist, she quickly discovers that everything on Tacoma is not as it should be. Amy is voiced by Sarah Grayson (*Gone Home*).

Evelyn Victoria “E.V.” St. James (Station Administrator): E.V.’s family has worked for generations in the aerospace manufacturing industry in Tacoma, Wash., but E.V. is the first of her family who’s gone to space. She is the station administrator in charge of keeping space station Tacoma (her hometown its namesake) and its crew running smoothly. E.V. is voiced by Dawnn Lewis (*Futurama*, *A Different World*).

Clive Siddiqi (Operations Specialist): Clive is responsible for making sure all of the little things on the station run smoothly, from scheduling and task management to getting everyone’s laundry done. Clive was once the head concierge on a high-class orbital spa and resort, but when the company he worked for was acquired, they shut down the resort and shipped him off to Tacoma, a much less desirable posting. He’s trying his best to show his new bosses that he deserves to be returned to a higher-status position. Clive is voiced by T.J. Ramini (*24*, *Uncharted 3*).

Andrew Dagyab (Botanist): As the botanist on Tacoma, Andrew cares for the plants that regulate the station’s air supply, but other responsibilities fall to him as well, such as cultivating the protein supply for the crew’s food and acting as station cook. He is central to the station’s function, but sometimes feels taken for granted. Andrew is voiced by Randall Park (*Veep*, *The Interview*).

Sareh Hasmadi (Medical Officer): Sareh is responsible for the crew’s medical care, physical fitness, and ensuring the rest of the crew have enough first aid knowledge in case of an emergency. Due to the stresses of her position, Sareh has developed a reliance on a highly addictive prescription sleep medication, which she keeps hidden from the rest of the crew. Sareh is voiced by Karen Dyer (*Resident Evil 5*, *Ultra Street Fighter IV*).

Roberta “Bert” Williams (Mechanical Engineer): Bert is responsible for making sure all the major systems of the station keep running efficiently, and keep the crew safe. Bert was posted to Tacoma along with her wife, Natali, the station’s computer engineer. Bert has a big, outgoing personality, which functions to cover up her own insecurities. Bert is voiced by Abigail Marlowe (*Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor*).

Natali “Nat” Kuroshenko (Computer Engineer): As a teen, Nat gained some notoriety for hacking the public augmented reality system at Disney World, but has since turned her abilities to legitimate network security. She’s spent a number of years working at higher-profile facilities, but heads to Tacoma for her wife, Bert. Nat doesn’t find the work on the space station very challenging, and channels her energy into more recreational uses of augmented reality. Natali is voiced by Natasha Loring (*Telltale’s Game of Thrones*).

After *Gone Home*, The Fullbright Company officially rebranded itself as Fullbright

Even little tender moments revealing more about the crew’s relationships are littered throughout the world. For instance, one crew member named Roberta is learning to play guitar to write a song for her anniversary with her wife, Nat. Some of these exchanges are humorous; the lyrics to Roberta’s song don’t fit into a melody, for example. “An important part of doing a setting like this is reminding people that people are still people,” Zimonja says. “It’s not a strange, crazy world where you don’t recognize these ideas anymore.”

“We’re giving you all this access to build this portrait of who these people are as people, and so when you don’t know if they’re okay, you actually care about that,” Gaynor adds.

After searching the various areas and doing some surface transfers, which allows us to walk on the ceiling, we discover more is awry than we initially realized. Surface transferring is fast and seamless and only takes a click of the button, but it takes us some time to remember we are in space and can always shift to the ceiling for new information. We then find out that the crew isn’t only low on

supplies; with nuts and bolts flying around outside of the panel to restore ODIN, it becomes clear that somebody sabotaged it. An AR recording exists, but it only features a staticky and unidentified figure disabling ODIN by force. We get ODIN back online and now can open the doors to the crew quarters.

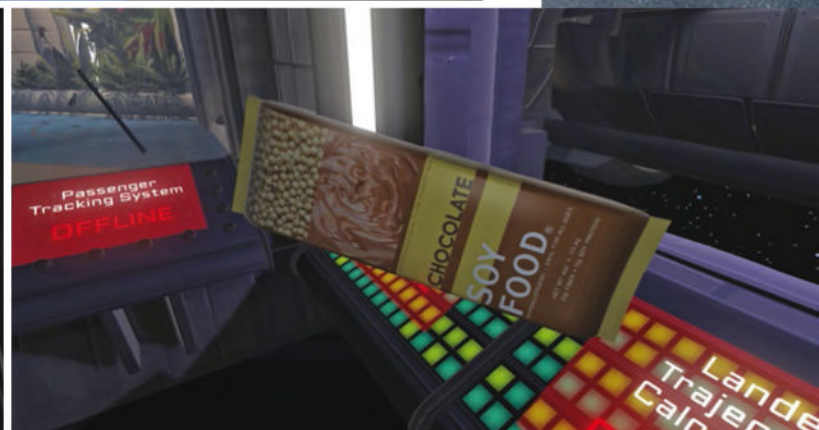
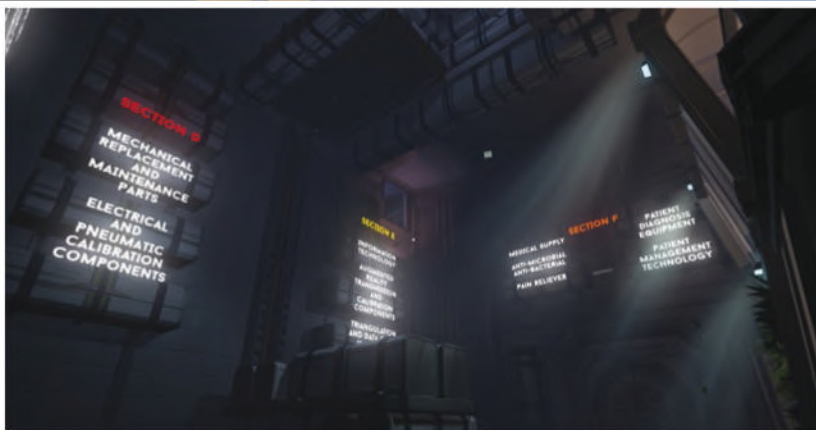
Another AR diary reveals that the team had to access the crew safety chamber, which is only available in emergency situations. Things aren’t looking good, and we turn to ODIN before going through the crew quarters. ODIN asks how it can help us, but won’t elaborate on its brief answers to any of Amy’s questions regarding the crew and its whereabouts. ODIN says it’s classified information. We have no choice but to progress through the door. The intensity heats up as Amy asks ODIN, “What am I going to find behind this door?” ODIN replies, “You’ll see.” The demo ends with us walking through and the screen fading to black. Fullbright says we only saw the public area, but players get to explore the crew quarters and their work spaces in the next part of the game. The final scene of the demo builds plenty of tension, making us feel



Grab medicine bottle



A crew member receives some bad news that jeopardizes their time on Tacoma



uneasy about what is behind the door. For those who played *Gone Home*, it evokes a similar experience to walking up to the attic. A part of you needs to know what happens next but another part is fearful of what it actually may be.

For now, Fullbright has us guessing about its next move – and that’s exactly what the development team wants. “Clearly, there is some reason you’re seeing a subset of these recordings and messages,” Gaynor says. “It’s wrapped up in the fact that when you arrive at the station, everything is put on pause by this outside event that has happened. That’s going to be part of the discovery. Did someone place these here for me intentionally, or do they have some other connection? What is the reason they were singled out at all?”

Moving Forward

When developing *Gone Home*, the team just asked themselves if the game they were making, however unconventional it seemed, would be something they would be excited to play. Fullbright is approaching *Tacoma* the

same way. “The thing we tried to do in [*Gone Home*] did work out well, but now it’s a different challenge. We had one thing people were excited about, and we can’t just do that again,” Gaynor says. “We have to find a version of that that we’re excited about and others will be excited about.”

It requires the team to constantly ask themselves questions and try not to get too mired in what was already achieved. “It’s all about balance,” Gaynor says. “I think it can be really easy to stick too close or go totally off the rails.”

Tacoma is more involved than *Gone Home*, but don’t expect an epic-length game. Although *Gone Home* received some criticism for being on the short side, Fullbright wants to stick with more compact experiences that allow easier access to closure. “We’re still aiming for the type of game that you can play in a couple of evenings,” Gaynor says. “In no way are we aiming for a 40-hour epic or anything. There’s a little bit more going on. There are more characters, more moving parts, more places to explore differently.”

Fullbright clearly has knowledge of creating compelling first-person exploration games. This time around, it’s not creating a familiar point in history, but a future reality. “Hopefully people come into *Tacoma* feeling like it is a pleasant surprise to see the team that made a game like *Gone Home* can also bring an interesting version of a reality that’s not anything like ours,” Gaynor says.

The stakes may be higher, but Fullbright is ready for the challenge. “There’s more to live up to this time around, but we definitely have more things figured out,” Zimonja says. One thing is clear from our visit: The team has a lot of enthusiasm for the project, even having its own whiteboard filled with possibilities of what the future looks like – much of which isn’t in the game. Even so, it’s clear *Tacoma* still holds a lot of what made people fall in love with *Gone Home* – Fullbright’s ability to capture the human condition so authentically and meticulously. ✦

Head to gameinformer.com/tacoma for video interviews with the team and in-depth features on *Tacoma* all month long

The 2015

E3 HOT 50

After multiple years of safe-bet reveals and a severe lack of new concepts pushing the boundaries of the medium, the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One finally hit their stride at E3 2015 with a string of high-profile reveals, new game announcements, and impressive virtual reality demos. Maybe publishers and developers were waiting for the console install bases to reach a certain level before rolling out riskier ventures, but whatever the reason, nearly everywhere you looked at this year's E3, creators were stepping up their game. The E3 lineup was so deep that many highly visible games and charming indies didn't even make the cut. Which titles impressed the Game Informer staff the most? Read on to find out.



Legend



ACTION



ADVENTURE



FIGHTING



MOBA



MUSIC



PLATFORMING



RACING



ROLE-PLAYING



SHOOTER



STRATEGY



FALLOUT 4

Bethesda drops an atomic bomb at E3

✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Action/Role-Playing ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Bethesda Softworks ✦ **DEVELOPER:** Bethesda Studios ✦ **RELEASE:** November 10

After nearly four years of development, Bethesda finally took the veil off the next game in the Fallout series at the company's first-ever E3 press conference. What a debut it was.

War never changes, but settings do. As many fans have speculated over the years by parsing together clues found in the previous game, Fallout 4 is heading to Massachusetts. Known in Fallout lore as the Commonwealth, the city of Boston and its surrounding region is home to the Institute, the education beacon of the world built out of the remnants of M.I.T. The Commonwealth has some advanced android technology not seen in the nation's former capital or New Vegas, and

a group known as the Railroad stands in opposition to the research institute responsible for their creation.

The Commonwealth is the most detailed, dense environment Bethesda has made to date. The game has so much content that game director Todd Howard says even he hasn't seen everything it has to offer.

The extra graphical horsepower provided by the new consoles gave the development team the tech backbone necessary to iterate on its Creation engine and add more dynamic details. Full physical-based rendering and dynamic volumetric lighting help create more atmosphere in the world, opening the game up to

enhanced environmental storytelling. The setting is varied and has more vivid colors than the predominant grays and browns of Fallout 3. The region has a full weather system complete with radiation storms that drift across the nuclear wasteland.

In a first for the series, players start Fallout 4 before the bombs fall. You name your character and cycle through the many facial alterations you can make while standing in front of a mirror. Both female and male protagonists are playable, and you begin the end of mankind as we know it as a tight nuclear family, complete with a spouse, baby, and servant robot known as Codsworth.

Coming off of Fallout 3, Bethesda Studios recognized the previous game's narrative shortcomings. Telling a powerful story while also giving players the freedom to do what they want when they want isn't easy, but Howard still wanted the team to brainstorm ways to enhance the narrative. One of the ideas they landed on is giving your character a voice to bring more emotional nuance to situations – another first for the series. Fallout 4 also has more branching paths and overlapping "if this then that" scenarios than previous games. Howard says they want the game to handle all potential fail states for missions so players don't feel like they need to reload saves.

Notice the new HUD elements while commanding the T60 power armor



After you play through the evacuation sequence on the day the nukes fall, you emerge from a cryosleep some 200 years later as the sole survivor of Vault 111. The vibrant suburban neighborhood you once called home is now in permanent disrepair, but not everything is gone. Your robotic friend Codsworth greets you as you return to your former home. With nobody else around, you find company with a friendly dog, much like in previous Fallout games. The steadfast sidekick has learned a few new tricks since we last saw him, as you're now able to give the dog commands by pointing at things in the environment. He'll even fetch items for you.

When the wasteland gets hostile, combat is unavoidable. Bethesda put considerable effort into making sure the shooting mechanics are on par with modern shooters, meeting with fellow Bethesda studio id Software to learn some tricks of the trade and hiring former Bungie staffers to make sure combat feels right and reacts correctly. You can use insights in first person, play in third-person perspective, or pull up the V.A.T.S. system to make more selective attacks.

V.A.T.S. operates largely the same as in Fallout 3, with a couple notable alterations. Pulling up V.A.T.S. still allows you to focus fire on a particular limb or body part, but it now operates on a slow-motion system instead of a full

pause. Critical hits have been reworked to give you more control over when you use them. As you rack up kills in V.A.T.S., a critical bar will fill. Once it's fully loaded, it's up to you when you want to activate the critical attack. Your luck still determines how fast the critical bar fills, and some perks can alter how critical attacks work.

Wasteland survivors will need all the help they can get, because Bethesda is altering its auto-scaling system to make regions more dangerous. "We call it rubberbanding," Howard says. "We'll have an area [where enemies scale from] level 5 to 10, and then this area will be level 30 and above. You'll run into stuff that will crush you, and you will have to run away."

The wasteland is an unforgiving environment, which is why it's smart to build up settlements that provide respite. Several settlement locations are available throughout the Commonwealth, and you can build up each one to your liking. Materials that seemed worthless in previous Fallout games are now extremely valuable. You can scrap any item in the world for materials and use that to build fortresses fortified with defenses. As your settlements grow, A.I. characters will start joining your community or you can recruit them, and you can set up caravans to shuttle supplies to and from other established settlements.

Customization expands beyond building structures and into weapon and armor alterations as well. You can mix and match everything from scopes, muzzles, barrels, stocks, grips, and more. If you're running low on supplies, simply scrap old weapons and use their parts for furthering the creation of your master weapon. Because of these additional uses, Howard says he's noticed more playtesters

hoarding items for customization rather than selling them off to merchants.

With a November 10 release date, we won't have to wait long to play Fallout 4. We hope to learn more about the skill and perks systems, and the Commonwealth political situation in the coming months, but the deep dive we saw at E3 was more than enough to earn the game our best in show award. ✦ *Matt Bertz*



Fallout 4 places player freedom above all else. You can go where you want to go, do what you want to do, and kill who you want to kill



A new weapon customization system allows you to mix and match parts to create a super weapon

IT'S A MOD WORLD

The mod community has always been strong with Bethesda games. With *Fallout 4*, their creative ideas will reach beyond PC and into consoles. Modding tools are expected to become available on PC in early 2016, with Xbox One owners getting access to their creations shortly thereafter.

Game director Todd Howard says Bethesda has been advocating to get mods on Microsoft consoles since 2001. Its hope is to not curate the content, but instead have its ecosystem stay as close to the PC experience as possible. When you play a modded version, the game will make a copy of your save file so your pure game state is preserved.

Once the modding is thriving on these two platforms, Bethesda hopes to work on extending this content to PlayStation 4 as well, but Howard wasn't comfortable putting a timetable on that.



UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END

Another wild ride for Nathan Drake



02

✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4 ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Action (Online TBA) ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Sony Computer Entertainment ✦ **DEVELOPER:** Naughty Dog ✦ **RELEASE:** Early 2016

For the second year in a row, Sony ended its E3 press conference showing off Uncharted 4: A Thief's End. Even though we've become accustomed to the Indiana Jones-like adventures of Nathan Drake, seeing the game running in all its glory proves yet again that few developers can choreograph an action sequence quite like Naughty Dog, and fewer still can make it look as gorgeous as the first-party developer.

Similar to previous games in the series, the demo shown behind-closed-doors was a long, multi-faceted action sequence highlighting cinematic camerawork to make the action interesting, continually fresh, and surprising for the player.

Nate and Sully start in a crowded city market overlooking a scenic bay and historic monuments. The pair aren't there to shop for souvenirs, but are looking for Nate's brother, Sam. Nate and Sam are in a race to retrieve a legendary pirate artifact, but a duo named Rafe and Nadine want the treasure for themselves. With Rafe and his goons hot on Sam's tail, it's not hard to pinpoint where he's located. An explosion that rings out in the distance likely signals his whereabouts.

Suddenly Rafe's henchmen ambush Nate and Sully in the market, shooting up everything in sight in an impressive display of the game's physics and destructibility. Objects are blown apart and sent flying in the firefight, made all the more

difficult by the heavily armored truck that stalks the duo.

The two run and shoot their way through the city with the truck hot on their heels, running in and out of buildings and climbing their way to momentary safety and for a more advantageous bead on the soldiers in their way. Gunplay has never been a strong suit of the franchise; hopefully enemies are smarter about using cover and moving around for

Uncharted 4 to make combat more interesting and fun.

Eventually Nate and Sully secure a jeep and start driving it down the hill toward the bay. The scenic winding streets give the player opportunities to drive down side streets in an effort to shake the persistent truck. Scared citizens dive out of the way as the machine guns fire and your jeep tears through fences, scaffolding, and fruit stands.

Eventually, Nate and Sully reach Sam—who's escaping on a motorcycle with his own coterie of trailing enemies. A convoy follows him along a bridge, and the only way Nate can catch up is to aim his grappling hook at the crane arm of one of the trailing trucks and hold on for dear life as it swings him around. Once on the opposite bank of the river, Nate's dragged along the ground as he fires at an enemy jeep racing alongside. During





this sequence the camera switches perspective at various times and zooms in and out, framing the action perfectly.

Nate makes his way up to the bed of the truck and eventually to the front of the convoy where he jumps down and commandeers a jeep. As Nate argues with Sam as to whom should jump onto whose vehicle, Nate is suddenly t-boned by a charging truck. The scene is a violent and jarring end to the chase.

Nate gathers himself after the accident, trapped in the flipped-over jeep. A fire breaks out in the vehicle, and the player performs quick-time events to get Nate out of danger. As he starts to crawl out, some of Rafe's thugs approach with guns drawn before Nate guns them down.

Sam rides up and gives Nate a lift on his motorcycle. The reprieve is short lived, however, before the armored truck starts the chase anew. What follows is a classic Uncharted sequence where Sam is driving the bike toward the camera while the pursuing truck is close behind. Nate fires back at it, but it doesn't do much good.

Sam makes his way onto a loading dock full of cargo trailers and stevedores. The chase ends as Sam skillfully slides the bike under a cargo bed as the truck crashes and explodes magnificently. Both Sam and Nate chuckle, unfazed at what has been another in a long line of adventures between them.

The pair reunite with Sully at their hotel, and Sam is giddy at what he's found in his escape – clues that reveal the location of the mythical colony of Libertaria, just northeast of King's Bay. The supposed utopia holds a vast wealth. Nate is also swept up in the revelation until he enters his hotel room. As the demo ends, Elena is there waiting for them, and she is clearly hurt that Nate has lied to her about his whereabouts. ✦ *Matthew Falvo*



The camera changes multiple times during this part of the sequence to highlight the action



The debris and particle effects take the game's graphics to a new level





03

HORIZON ZERO DAWN

Surviving in a strange new land

✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4 ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Action/Role-playing ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Sony Computer Entertainment ✦ **DEVELOPER:** Guerrilla Games ✦ **RELEASE:** 2016

Guerrilla Games started working on *Horizon Zero Dawn* in 2011, when the company solicited internal ideas for a project outside of the *Killzone* franchise. Around 40 concepts across all genres emerged for its first new IP since the PS2 era, and *Horizon* was the winner.

Horizon represents a mix of old and new: It has some elements Guerrilla had previous experience with, but it's also a huge risk considering the studio has never developed an open world environment or a role-playing game. So far, the results look promising.

Horizon takes place thousands of years after the fall of mankind. Humans still exist, but their dominance on the planet is over. Reduced to scattered tribes making a meager living, they live in the shadows of machines that look like synthetic and organic hybrid animals. How they came to rule the planet is one of the core mysteries, and the fall of man is an ominous backdrop – our buildings and infrastructure exist, but have been reclaimed by nature.

Horizon follows the story of Aloy, an able hunter of one of the remaining tribes. Like the machines that rule the world, her weapon of choice – a bow – is a mix of found technology crafted with more primitive materials. Anything discovered in the world can be used for crafting or sold, and crafting can be done in real-time via the radial weapon menu or in a

traditional pause menu. Although Guerrilla hasn't finalized the entire menu system, it says it doesn't want the crafting menu to be overly simple, but it needs to be more user friendly than games like *The Witcher 3*, for example.

During a sequence we saw, Aloy uses a range of her abilities to sneak up on a sentry protecting a herd of Grazers (which look like robotic deer), lures the Grazers into a trap using different types of ammo for her bow, and takes on a Thunderjaw many times her size by using her wits. While this action was in pursuit of a specific goal – capturing some canisters on the Grazer's backs – Guerrilla says there are different ways to achieve this goal and that these kinds of encounters can happen anywhere in the world. The game features no loading, and lets you explore it whatever the consequences, even if you wander into an area you're not yet ready for.

The battle between Aloy and the Thunderjaw is one we wouldn't want to run into too early. The machine is an 80-foot long, 30-foot wide beast resembling a *Tyrannosaurus Rex* with pincers. Its arsenal includes a mouth laser, tail disc launcher, tail stomp attack, charge attack, and more for a total of a dozen different ways to hurt you. On the flip side, it also has 93 armor plates that can be hit and destroyed to expose the machine's vulnerable spots (which cause three-times the

damage when hit). Its biggest weaknesses are the brain and power core.

Aloy's nimbleness allows her to scamper around and selectively shoot vulnerable areas of the beast while avoiding its myriad attacks. She even turns the tables on the machine, blowing off its disc launcher, grabbing it, and using it against the Thunderjaw. While it's a powerful feeling, Guerrilla says these weapons can't be taken very far from the battlefield since they are often too large for Aloy to carry

and will run out of ammo quickly.

Such battles are routine in Aloy's hard-scrabbled world, where survival is balanced with a need to understand what happened with those who came long before Aloy and the tribes. Even their relationship with the machines themselves is a mystery. It's symbiotic and yet clearly dangerous at the same time. With our bow on our back and the world before us, we're excited to scour the lands of *Horizon* to find our answers. ✦ *Matthew Hale*





There are different kinds of tribes in the world, and how you interact with them is an as-yet-unexplained part of the game



Aloy and the tribes' relationship with the world's machines isn't always adversarial



JUST CAUSE 3

Taking destruction to the next level



✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Action ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Square Enix ✦ **DEVELOPER:** Avalanche Studios ✦ **RELEASE:** December 1

Whenever you play Just Cause, you can expect over-the-top antics and plenty of explosions. The next entry isn't changing that. In fact, just when you think the series couldn't get more insane, it has, and you're performing high-wire acts on a breathtaking Mediterranean-inspired island that has plenty of cliffs, caves, and water for all your extreme ventures.

This time around, your playground is the beautiful country of Medici, but some ugly things are going down in it thanks to a brutal dictator named General Di Ravello. As you walk around any city, you'll find the military putting people in line, usually

harshly and unfairly. As Rico Rodriguez, you take matters into your own hands, fighting back against the oppression. If you help the civilians, they might even fight with you, giving you an edge against Di Ravello's lackies. I enjoyed feeling like my destruction was helping turn the tide of war. Bringing down Di Ravello takes you to military bases, harbors, prisons, and more.

Everything that makes Just Cause great returns and is better than before. The grappling hook can fire multiple tethers, giving you new and creative ways to bring destruction. You can grapple on to anything you see, as no specific grapple

points exist. The tension of the cord is now controlled by the analog stick, so you can feel the weight as you pull objects apart. I destroyed propaganda speakers using this tactic, but my favorite moment was tethering a hand of a large government statue and slapping it in the face with itself. You can also do with this people and have them hit and kick themselves. Better yet? After ripping apart the statue, you can pull the head around to use it as a weapon for more destruction.

Everything feeds into the idea of big explosions. Avalanche eliminated quick-time events, because why open a door when you can blow it up? This concept is

ingrained into every action. Do you want to blow apart a massive bridge? Attach some C4 (which is an infinite resource) and watch the concrete construction collapse from the explosion.

Movement seems better than before as well. While you can travel on foot and by vehicle, the best way to charge at enemies and get around is through the air. The parachute has slowed down a bit, so you can focus and shoot from it. The new wingsuit is how you get around quickly. Spend too much time on the ground, and you're bound to see a game over screen. Just Cause 3 encourages you to attack from above; it's more fun that way, anyway.

Avalanche also put in a racing engine. You can drive through the streets in everything from flashy sports cars to speedboats and tractors. You can even hang upside down from a helicopter if you wish... or attach a car to it. Any vehicle you collect has nitrous to help make the explosions more memorable, and weapons are especially over-the-top. The standard RPG launcher is boring, but what if you had a shotgun RPG launcher that split into eight explosions?

Just Cause 3 is a big game and looks to be shaping up fantastically so far. I can't wait to see what other crazy things I can do to really stick it to General Di Ravello.

✦ *Kimberley Wallace*

The world is gorgeous, too bad an evil dictator is running it





RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

Lara's archeological skills pay off in our first look at tomb gameplay

✦ **PLATFORM:** Xbox One, Xbox 360, Other Platforms TBA ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Action ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Microsoft Studios ✦ **DEVELOPER:** Crystal Dynamics ✦ **RELEASE:** November 10 (Xbox One, Xbox 360)

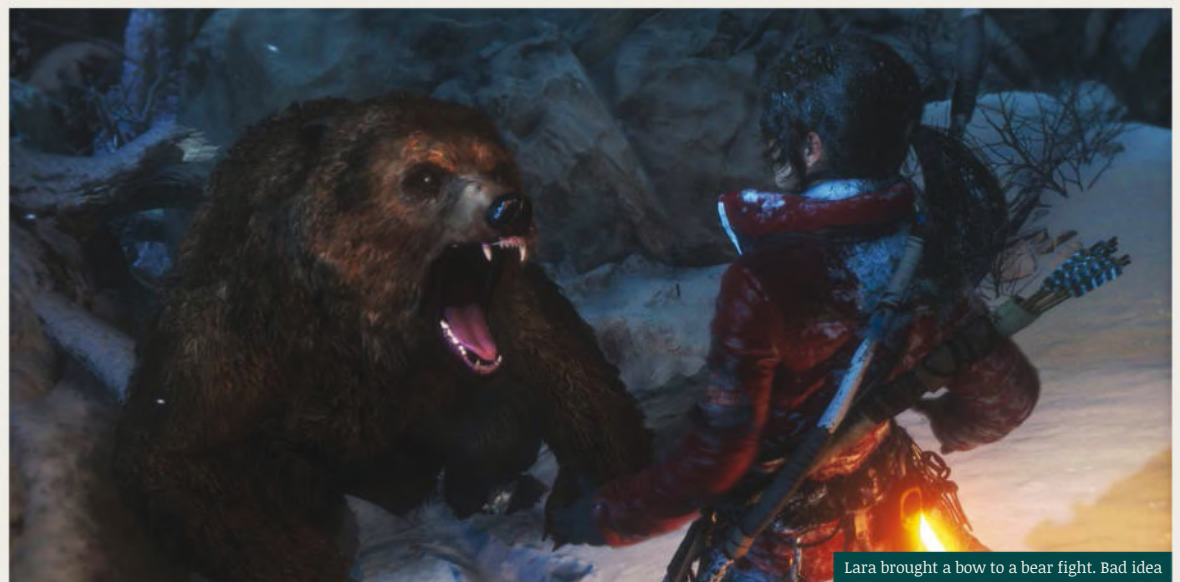
Microsoft played host to Rise of the Tomb Raider in its E3 booth, showing Lara Croft's familiar blend of stealth-combat gameplay, as well as a first look at what she does best: raiding tombs.

The opening minutes of the demo recapped what we saw during our March cover story, but it remained just as exciting. Lara is climbing a mountain with her comrade Jonah, when nature puts the kibosh on their plans. An avalanche tears the pair apart, and soon Lara is alone.

From there, she trudges through knee-deep snow and establishes a small camp, building a fire, and gathering materials to put together a bow. Her fire attracts some unwanted attention from Trinity, a sinister organization that has patrols near Lara's position. She manages to get the drop on them with a combination of stealth and smarts – building that bow was a great idea.

Those tactics don't work as well on a grizzly bear, which manages to be a deadly pest. Her attempts to flee are all for nothing, and one mighty swat from a giant paw knocks her off the edge of a small cliff. She's relatively OK, but she gets a discouraging look at the massive camp that Trinity has set up in the area. Whatever it was that she was looking for here, she's not alone, and she probably won't be able to find it without further incident.

From there, we jump to a tantalizing glimpse of a tomb, in this case The



Prophet's Tomb. In an earlier mission, she encountered some kind of mystical phenomenon. If Lara's instincts are correct, that could point to other so-called myths having one foot in reality. With that in mind, she heads into the desert.

Lara reels from the heat, finally finding respite in a nearby cave entrance. Walking deeper, she trudges through a shallow stream. It gets dark, and she lights a blue glow stick to illuminate the passageway. It eventually opens up into

a larger area, which is filled with artifacts. For an archaeologist like Lara Croft, this is a breathtaking discovery.

She walks around the area, interacting with several points of interest. She stops by a large mosaic, calling out details, and gaining language XP in return. As players explore more of the world and interact with more objects, Lara becomes more adept at deciphering ancient text for clues. For example, a nearby obelisk is meaningless for Lara at this point – she'll

have to return to this place later to determine its full value.

Upon spying shafts of light peeking from behind a wall, Lara tears it apart to reveal a hidden passageway leading to a hidden courtyard. The ruins of a temple are nearby, and it's filled with vegetation – a stark contrast from what we've seen in the area so far. Unfortunately for us, this is where our journey ends for the time being. Don't worry; we plan on returning to this tomb as soon as we can. ✦ *Jeff Cork*



DARK SOULS III

Stunning beauty in a withered world

✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Action/Role-Playing (Online TBA) ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Bandai Namco ✦ **DEVELOPER:** From Software ✦ **RELEASE:** Early 2016

A spidery, snakelike humanoid entity slowly descends from the ceiling in a darkened room, locking gaze with you as it reveals a sword engulfed in flames. Atmospheric music wafts into the room as the Dancer of the Frigid Valley moves gracefully toward you, an unnatural ballet that's enchanting yet somehow horribly wrong. A flowing, transparent cape and eerie mask hide the true nature of the terror before you as the fight continues. Tension threatens to throw you off your game as you attempt to clear your mind to deal with transforming attacks and a shifting environment during the course of the battle. This Dark Souls III boss encounter echoes the nature of the popular franchise – deadly, dark, mysterious, and beautiful.

Hidetaka Miyazaki (Dark Souls, Bloodborne) returns as director to lead

the charge on the third entry in From Software's iconic dark fantasy franchise, and the influences are noticeable immediately as we watched a behind-closed-doors E3 demo. The area we were shown pays homage to Undead Burg (one of the first areas in the original Dark Souls) with vast castle ruins, towers, shortcut-driven level design, and interior locations, brought together by a dragon encounter that players familiar with the first game will instantly recognize.

The technical capabilities of current-gen hardware give common settings like castles and parapets new and awe-inspiring clarity, in some ways similar to how the King's Field series became Demon's Souls and beyond. You can tell that some things that had to be tabled in past iterations of From's dark dreams are only now becoming translatable with new technology.

Speaking of tabled items from the past, let's get a big one out of the way first; Dynamic light sources and wind-blown cloth and ash are all part of the new visual kit. Having to use your torch in dark environments, something that was often heralded in preview footage for Dark Souls II, makes its triumphant return. Let's hope it stays that way. We were treated to several dark interior locations that make the torch an essential item for sight, forcing players to put their shields away to gain insight on prowling terrors and potential ambushes.

Dark Souls III is also bringing something new to the table – special moves by weapon type, with combat that's slightly faster than Dark Souls. Despite the quicker attacks, expect the difficulty to be on par with the series or harder. During the demo we saw a massive greatsword

lunge that dishes out massive damage and sends enemies flying in the air (Miyazaki actually referenced greatsword-wielding protagonist Guts from popular manga/anime *Berserk* here, a series often referred to as inspiration for various aspects of the Souls series). We also saw a dual-wielding scimitar whirlwind that mopped up a mob of lesser foes, and a speedy short-range bow that gives a bit more reach than standard melee options – perfect for a dexterous combatant, rolling and shooting without careful time to aim. As always with the Souls games, using a well-placed firebomb or other consumable item at the right time can save you a ton of healing, running, and death.

The enemies ranged from Souls staples to the exotic. We saw standard lightning-fast skeleton dogs and undead shamblers with all sorts of equipment, some



Dazzling castles, towers, and parapets bring the world of Dark Souls III to life



Dynamic lighting and torch mechanics add intensity to dark areas

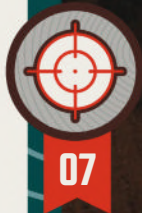
adhering to the traditional “one-two-three” wild-swings of the ever-popular “oh god, a level one enemy killed me by flailing” thralls. We also saw a variety of deadlier opponents that were clear nods to the Black Knight enemies from the original Dark Souls and a black, squirming mass of jellylike goo that seemed like it would be right at home in Bloodborne.

The centerpiece of the demo was the boss encounter with the Dancer of the Frigid Valley. The player wanders into a large, dark room with a singular glowing object resting on the floor. After it’s picked up, the doors close and the battle begins. Boss battles are the gem of the Souls series, and as a veteran of the franchise’s challenging roster of monstrosities, this one in particular seemed immaculate – a combination of what I’ve come to expect from the denizens of the Souls series

infused with the nightmarish elements of something from Bloodborne. While I often feel tension, terror, and eventually accomplishment during traditional Souls boss battles, this one conjured up notions of sadness – a hint of the bittersweet victory against Maiden Astraea in Demon’s Souls, mixed with an unsettling, unhinged madness. There’s something alluring but disturbing about the way the Dancer moves, a razor-edged waltz that, as usual, has considerable consequences for the player that misses a beat.

I have every expectation that this could be the best game in the franchise based on what we’ve seen so far. As technology advances, frustrating framerate drops disappear and drab green pixels become lush realities that allow masterful creators to take us deeper within their brilliantly crafted worlds. ✦ *Daniel Jack*





GHOST RECON WILDLANDS

Taking the fight to the open world

★ PLATFORM: PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ★ STYLE: 1-Player Shooter (4-Player Online) ★ PUBLISHER: Ubisoft ★ DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal ★ RELEASE: TBA

Carving out a unique space in the shooter genre is a tall order considering the proliferation of blockbuster campaigns, cooperative experiences, and multiplayer-centric games over the past several years. That said, the campaign-driven, four-person cooperative shooter set in a modern open-world checkbox has curiously been left unchecked by major publishers. Ubisoft is planting a flag in this unspoiled territory with Ghost Recon Wildlands.

After years of offering limited sandbox experiences, the Ghost Recon series is finally jumping to a full open world. At the same time, Wildlands shelves the futuristic arsenals of Advanced Warfighter and Future Soldier in favor of a modern-day setting with contemporary weaponry.

Wildlands takes place four years into the future, where a Mexican drug cartel named Santa Blanca has turned Bolivia into the world's biggest cocaine exporters with the help of a corrupt local

government. To turn around the fortunes of this narco state and cripple the cartel, the United States taps its clandestine special operations team.

With no option for a full-fledged military invasion on the table, the Ghosts must operate independently and secretly, slowly picking away at the cartel's power base and rooting out government corruption in the largest open world Ubisoft has ever made. Every action you take as the Ghosts helps destabilize the entrenched powers.

Our first demo of the game shows off the four-player drop-in/drop-out cooperative play. The Ghosts are tracking one Luis "El Chango" Alvarez, a Santa Blanca cartel member in possession of some valuable information. The fetch mission is made more complicated because the cartel knows he's a snitch and has imprisoned him in a cage in a remote location.

At the start of the mission, the four

players are split up doing their own thing. The huge open world allows players to work on their own, but Ubisoft tells us that your chances of survival decrease greatly the more you wander alone. In this instance, the four players are simply trekking in vast expanses of empty territory. Experience points are awarded as they uncover new locations, which feeds into the global progression system.

One Ghost finds a cartel member in a small village and interrogates him for Alvarez's location. With the intel in hand, the Ghosts pair up to secure a helicopter for the main mission. They locate a helipad just beyond a bustling village filled with civilians, cartel members, and UNIDAD soldiers – the army that works for the corrupt government. Like an Elder Scrolls game, every A.I. character has schedules they adhere to over the course of the day. Many go to their jobs, return home for dinner, and then hit the sack after a long

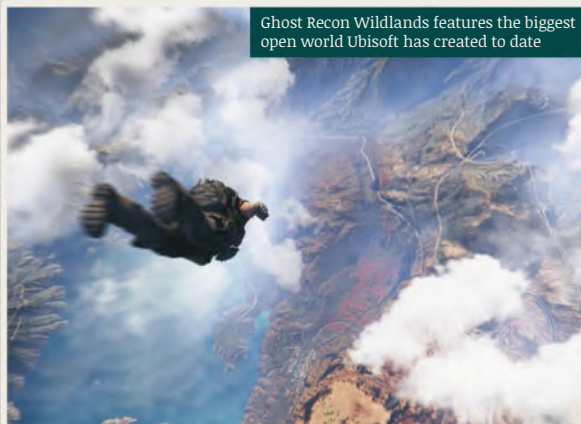
day's work. The Ghosts could wait until nightfall to steal the chopper, but the UNIDAD presence opens up a good diversionary opportunity.

The cartel and UNIDAD don't always get along, and you can use this unease to your advantage. A Ghost positioned hundreds of yards away snipes a cartel member, which causes his compatriots to pull their weapons on the UNIDAD. The Ghosts wait until the factions kill most of each other off before intervening and stealing the chopper.

Once the chopper is secured, they fly over to Alvarez's location. Two Ghosts base jump out of the chopper and parachute into the hillside that rises up to the cartel encampment while one holds the chopper in position and the other mans the .50 cal. The gunner starts out by spotting enemies, which immediately marks them on the ground team's map, but he's also in position to open fire should things get hairy for the tandem



The Ghosts can split up to find new tactical possibilities. For instance, while two Ghosts move in on a target, the other two could be hovering in a chopper above, spotting enemies and providing fire support when things get dicey



Ghost Recon Wildlands features the biggest open world Ubisoft has created to date



moving in to secure the target below.

Sneaking through the village, the two synchronize stealth kills before popping the lock on the cage and grabbing Alvarez. The remaining cartel members spot them during the escape and open fire, so the Ghost's chopper drops into range and the soldier on the minigun lights up the landscape. This suppressing fire allows the duo to escort the target to a car and start the descent down the hillside. Before they escape the encampment, an enemy pulls the alarm and alerts nearby enemies to the chaos. A frantic chase fight ensues as the duo works their way down to the salt flats where the chopper is waiting to extract the target.

This demo showcased how flexible and effective cooperation can be in the open world, but four-player co-op isn't the only way to play. You can also play solo, issuing orders to the three other A.I. characters.

Whatever way you want to play, this third-person, open-world shooter shows loads of promise. If Ubisoft can fill the mountains, canyons, salt flats, and city centers with activities while staying true to the tactical heart of the series, Ghost Recon Wildlands could carve a prominent and unique space for itself in the crowded and highly competitive shooter space. *✦ Matt Bertz*



Wildlands is the first four-player cooperative open world modern military experience we've seen from a major publisher



DOOM

The original shooter returns with a renewed dedication to ultraviolence

✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Shooter (12-Player Online) ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Bethesda Softworks ✦ **DEVELOPER:** id Software ✦ **RELEASE:** Spring

The last time we saw the Doom series, creators id Software strove to frighten and surprise gamers with atmospheric, foreboding environments and monster closets. After an 11-year hiatus that included one scrapped concept, the first-person shooter that put the genre on the map returns with a new look much more closely aligned with the bombastic original.

To be successful at Doom, gamers need to unlearn all the conventions that have dominated the shooter space over the last decade. You won't be hiding behind cover while exchanging bullets, retreating from battle when your health is low, or keeping your distance from menacing beasts. Instead, Doom urges players to run head-first into the fray with complete abandon.

This play style, which developer id Software has dubbed "push forward combat" is the only way to stay alive. No ammo crates or health packs are to be found in many of the arena environments, so players must kill enemies and collect the loot that spills out of their remains to resupply. The best loot comes from conducting melee executions, which id has dubbed "glory kills" to fit the spirit of the series.

Glory kills are not for the faint of heart, but they are quite impressive. In the gameplay demo shown at the Bethesda showcase, we saw a stunning variety of brutal finishers, and they are programmed contextually so if you move in for the kill from the side or from above you won't

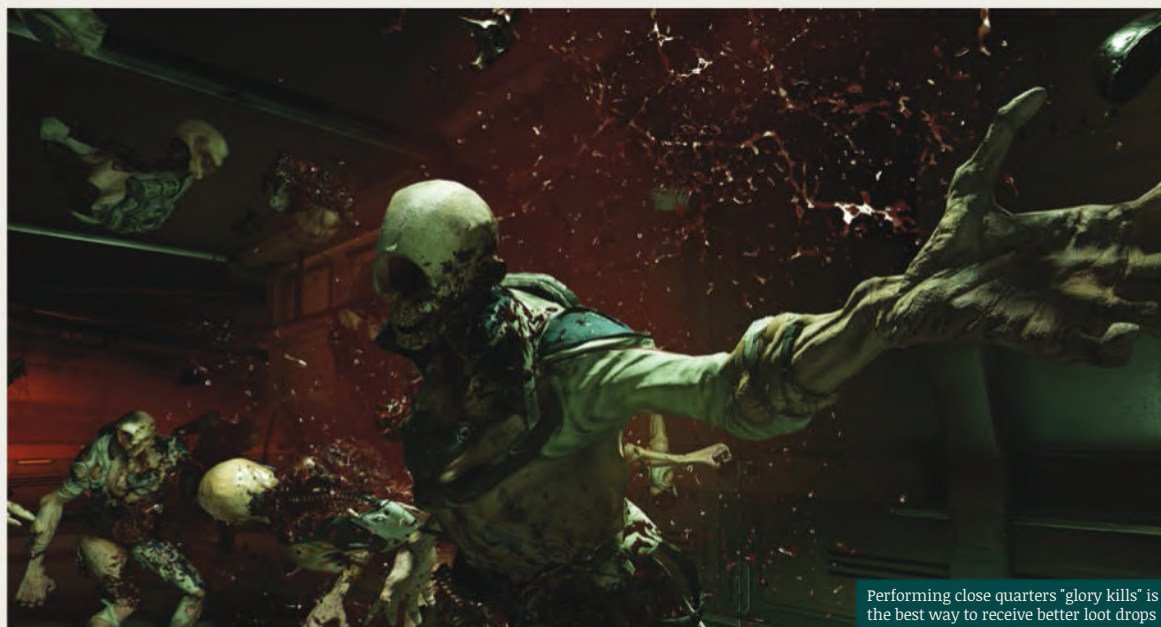
become disoriented from snapping into a preloaded animation.

The action is fast-paced, with no manual ammo reloads to worry about, a double jump that lets you get to vertical spaces, and a full array of classic weapons at your disposal like the double-barreled shotgun, missile launcher, and BFG. To survive, you need to take the fight to the enemy and constantly improvise as more demons join

the fray. If you really want a challenge, tackle the fabled nightmare difficulty.

In between the intense arena battles, id sprinkles in exploratory environments where players can learn more about the narrative, uncover secrets, and outfit upgrades and weapon mods. "We love the comic-book nature of Doom and as game players we like to have a thread of intrigue that pulls us through, so we

are building a story that I think players will like," says executive producer Marty Stratton. "It's taking the notion that players come to Doom with the idea that they want to kill demons, and we're twisting our story off that idea and hopefully planting a lot of seeds and thought. You've got these cybernetically enhanced demons and you have the UAC. What was going on there?"



Performing close quarters "glory kills" is the best way to receive better loot drops



As you fight through levels you will gain new weapon modifiers to enhance the classic Doom arsenal

Through all the flying bullets and brutal glory kills, id wants to keep the idTech 6 engine humming at 60 frames per second in 1080p resolution.

Doom is also joining the multiplayer fray with a six-on-six experience that calls to mind Unreal Tournament and Quake. Speed is once again the name of the game, and pickups are littered around the arena for players to fight over. Right now id has only confirmed three modes – domination, freeze tag, and clan arena – but it plans to reveal more at a later time.

If you're looking for more variety from your multiplayer, you can make it yourself via the new Snapmap technology. This empowering and easy-to-use creation engine lets players dream up their own challenges, design levels, program enemy A.I., and even create new modes. The creation tools support four-player co-op as well so you can make horde-style challenges or tower defense modes with waves of enemies. All of the creations can go across all the platforms, and players can search for new experiences to play via the Snapmap hub.

With kinetic combat that cuts against the grain, super gory finishing moves, and an interesting set of creation tools, Doom looks to be following in older brother Wolfenstein's footsteps toward rejuvenation. We hope to get our hands on the game ourselves at Quakecon later this year to see if this fast-paced combat holds up over the course of longer game sessions. ✦ *Matt Bertz*





METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN

Infiltrating the legendary soldier's open-world playground

✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Action (Multiplayer TBA)
✦ **PUBLISHER:** Konami ✦ **DEVELOPER:** Kojima Productions ✦ **RELEASE:** September 1

Konami showed off a new slice of The Phantom Pain at E3, featuring Big Boss' quest to rescue a captured comrade being held by Russian enemies somewhere in a desert in Afghanistan. The third-person open-world design allows players to tackle any objective from any angle they wish, so I tried out two opposing play styles throughout my tour for the prison camp.

I set my sights on a dusty camp located between my current position and the larger complex I'm destined for. After whistling to call in Big Boss' white steed (think Epona), I hop on and canter into the base with a silenced automatic rifle at the ready. My experience with MGS V: Ground Zeroes' excellent control scheme quickly comes back to me, and suddenly peppering enemies with bullets from horseback feels like second nature. I quickly burn through my suppressor before clearing out this first encampment. A smarter soldier would've sabotaged the communications dishes populating the rooftops, cutting off my prey from their reinforcements at headquarters.

The dynamic day/night cycle clicks over to dusk as I approach the main base. A look through my binoculars reveals a huge number of sentries

patrolling, manning spotlights, and driving around the perimeter. My galloping cavalry approach clearly won't work this time, so I leave the trusty steed behind. Stealth in The Phantom Pain feels as natural as the full-on gunplay. Automatically adhering to nearby walls for cover and grabbing enemies from behind is spot-on. I attempt to evade as many enemies as possible as I slink toward the center of the base, but I'm forced to silently dispatch a few. My attempts to interrogate a couple enemies fail since Big Boss doesn't know Russian (kidnapping a translator with the Fulton Recovery System would've helped). My demo ends with the successful rescue of Big Boss' teammate, triggering a series of events that has me excited for The Phantom Pain's story (but I won't spoil it here).

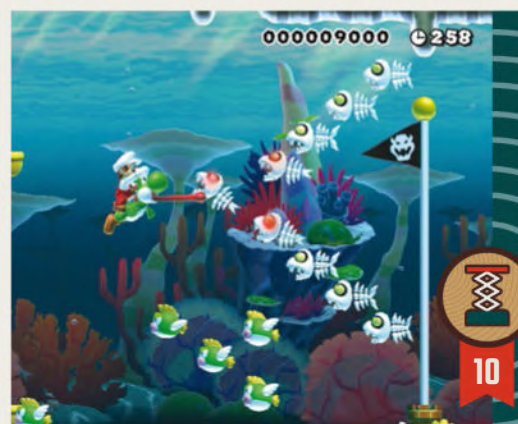
Hideo Kojima and Konami have been all over the headlines lately, but not for the right reasons. The stories of Kojima's falling out with his studios' longtime parent company may have you nervous about the fate of the series creator's presumably final Metal Gear game, but my hands-on time suggests the open-world stealth game is shaping up nicely.

✦ *Tim Turi*



SUPER MARIO MAKER

Channeling your inner creator



✦ **PLATFORM:** Wii U ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Platformer
✦ **PUBLISHER:** Nintendo ✦ **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo
✦ **RELEASE:** September 11

The Super Mario franchise has a long history of ingenious level design. With Super Mario Maker, you can get a taste of that history for yourself, as Nintendo is providing Wii U owners with the means to create, edit, and share the Super Mario levels of their dreams.

Using the Wii U GamePad and a menu full of different enemies, items, and building elements, you can easily take your ideas and place them into the game. The creation tools are simple and intuitive, and with a book of design tips included with every physical copy, Nintendo is making it easy for anyone to create levels.

The creation tools also enable you to swap the assets of your level out for other games in the series. If you create a level using Super Mario Bros. assets and decide you'd rather play it in Super Mario World, you can do so with a tap of the touchscreen. Using this feature, you can swap between Super Mario Bros., Super Mario Bros. 3, Super Mario World, and New Super Mario Bros. U assets.

When you change the asset sets, your physics also change, meaning the game will play like the one you select. When you complete several levels, the game allows you to section them off into "worlds" the way actual Mario games do, enabling you to create your very own Super Mario game. Once you create your masterpiece, you can upload it to share with the worldwide community – granted you can beat it without dying.

Between the creation tools and the community features, Super Mario Maker has so much promise for Wii U owners. If the title's community features catch on, it could very well provide uncapped replayability for the truly devoted.

✦ *Brian Shea*





DEUS EX: MANKIND DIVIDED

A flexible future

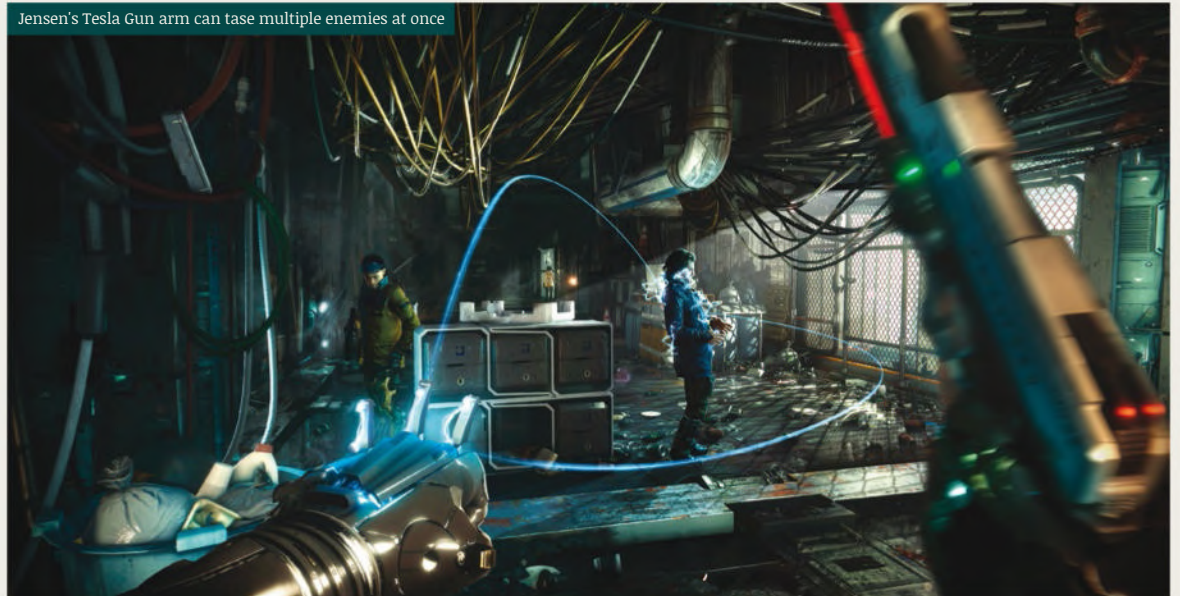
✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Action/Role-playing ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Square Enix ✦ **DEVELOPER:** Eidos Montreal ✦ **RELEASE:** 2016

Eidos Montreal's Mankind Divided aims to continue the Deus Ex lineage with a mix of shooter gunplay, stealth, exploration, and social mechanics all mashed together into a massive choose-your-own sci-fi adventure. While we extensively covered the title in our cover story in issue 265, during E3 we eked out a few extra details about Jensen's return outing.

At the beginning of our E3 demo, Jensen is riding a train into Prague to meet up with one of his contacts in the hacktivist group called the Juggernaut Collective. Prague is a beehive of activity. Business people and tourists bustle from one train to the next, and guards in heavily plated armor stroll through the station demanding government-issued IDs. Jensen's papers are in order, but these low-rent iron men aren't the source of his biggest headache. As Jensen makes his way off the train platform and through a security station he hears the crowd behind him erupt in screams. An explosion shakes the tiles underfoot and Jensen turns just in time to see a wave of smoke billowing toward him. The next detonation takes out the adjacent wing of the train station and knocks Jensen unconscious.

When our hero awakes, he learns that Task Force 29 has pinned the bombing on a man named Talos Rucker, the leader of a group called the Augmented Rights Coalition. Jensen is dispatched to an outpost called Golem City in order to bring Rucker in for questioning. This simple extraction quickly turns heated. (For

Jensen's Tesla Gun arm can tase multiple enemies at once



more on this mission see our coverage in issue 265.)

Jensen is a more seasoned agent this time around, and his new suite of augmentations, weapons, and tools give him a lot of flexibility in combat. We've previously seen Jensen use his Icarus Dash ability to move horizontally and vertically across the battlefield like the Flash, but this time around we watched him use the skill to mount distant ledges, helpful for finding the perfect sniper's perch. A new Focus ability slows down time, giving

Jensen an extra few seconds to line up his shots.

Stealthy players will discover just as many options for navigating through a hazardous environment. Jensen can now hack computers and drones remotely through a timed button pressing minigame, which might offer Jensen a new path around a security checkpoint or deactivate a defensive drone. Jensen's tesla-gun arm can lock onto several enemies at once, sending a paralyzing jolt of electricity through their system. This

is especially handy since players receive bonus XP for non-lethal takedowns. We even watched Jensen get the drop on a foe by smashing through a wall and knocking him out cold.

Deus Ex: Mankind Divided's levels are twisted caverns of opportunity that encourage players to explore and experiment. Adam Jensen is a one-man Swiss Army knife and we can't wait to flip through all of his multi-tools before cutting to the heart of this sci-fi conspiracy.

✦ *Ben Reeves*



XCOM 2

We lost the war; we can't lose our humanity

✦ PLATFORM: PC ✦ STYLE: 1-Player Strategy (2-Player Online) ✦ PUBLISHER: 2K Games ✦ DEVELOPER: Firaxis Games ✦ RELEASE: November

More than 20 years have passed since the first wave of alien invaders breached Earth's atmosphere and started mutilating our cattle and our marines, and 20 years ago the world's leaders raised the white flag and offered an unconditional surrender to our new alien "benefactors." The planet is now ruled by a hive of alien dictators that have built shiny new cities, promising a new era of human prosperity. However, one small resistance group sees through the cracks in our overlords' masks and are pushing back against the aliens' secret sinister agenda from the shadows. These are the remnants of the XCOM defense force, and they're going to use every guerrilla tactic and every piece of stolen technology to send these alien freaks packing.

Firaxis knows that a lot of players failed to save Earth their first time playing 2012's XCOM: Enemy Unknown. The alien invasion simulation offered up several layers of deep strategy, and many players

watched their XCOM team succumb to the advancing alien armada. It seemed only natural to continue the narrative from that perspective. Fortunately, Firaxis' grim vision of the future is only one item in a long list of new features that should surprise and delight fans of the series.

Our E3 demo kicks off with a ragtag group of XCOM renegades heading out on a mission to take down a statue being erected in memorial of the 20th anniversary of Unification Day. Since XCOM is now a resistance movement, your units often start a mission concealed from their foes. This allows the forces to sneak up and even plan ambushes on patrolling units. We watched two XCOM units approach an unsuspecting patrol group and activate their overwatch ability. When a third unit finally opens fire, the enemies scatter, triggering our units' overwatch attacks and ending the battle before it even begins.

XCOM character classes have evolved

a lot over the last 20 years as well. The Assault class has morphed into the Ranger – a sword-wielding unit that dashes across the battlefield and deals massive amounts of damage at close range. Rangers also make great scouts and have a few upgrades that help them remain hidden from enemies. Meanwhile, Specialists are like an upgraded form of the Support class from Enemy Unknown. These tech-heads stroll onto the field with a drone tagalong that can hack enemy tech, assume control of defensive turrets, or buff nearby units.

Unfortunately, our alien overlords have a few new heavy hitters of their own. A new enemy called the Viper is a giant snakelike creature who can use her elastic tongue to reach across the battlefield and pull units out of cover before coiling her body around them and squeezing the life out of their bones. Classic foes, such as the Sectoid, have gotten upgrades as well. After incorporating human DNA into

their genepool, Sectoids are larger and stronger – both physically and mentally. These mental masters even have the newfound ability to psionically reanimate enemies or fallen XCOM units.

If XCOM 2's new foes overrun you your first time out and you have to start the game over from scratch, at least you won't be replaying old maps a second time around. All of XCOM 2's levels are now procedurally generated. Even gameplay objectives are sometimes randomly generated, creating a unique experience each time you lead your team onto the field.

After the critical success of XCOM: Enemy Unknown, a sequel seemed all but assured. Thankfully, Firaxis has ensured that this sequel isn't iterative. Fans of Enemy Unknown's rich but challenging tactics will face an even meatier strategy experience when they start fighting for human independence this November.

✦ *Ben Reeves*



Berserkers are evolved forms of the Muton; they are brutal enemies and might one-shot some of your heroes

SO, IS THIS COMING TO CONSOLE?

Even though XCOM: Enemy Unknown was highly rated on consoles, Firaxis has decided to focus solely on PC development for the sequel. When we asked senior producer Garth DeAngelis about this switch, he explained that developing for only one platform allows the team more time to polish the experience. When we ask if the team has any intentions to bring the game to consoles at a later day, DeAngelis says, "Right now, all we're saying is that we're focusing on the PC." At least it wasn't a "no."

One upshot of focusing solely on PC development is that Firaxis can better integrate community mods into the game. "We think mods are critical," says DeAngelis. "It's probably the one external pillar that we wish we had pushed further in Enemy Unknown, and with being PC-focused right now we want to get modding right, so we're giving the community our editor, we're giving them our gameplay source, and people can do partial mods to just tweak abilities or add their own text if they want to do story bits. We can't wait to see what the community comes up with."



Your units start each match concealed. This allows you to set up ambushes and catch your enemy unaware



THE LAST GUARDIAN

Rediscovering the game's emotional core



* PLATFORM: PlayStation 4 * STYLE: 1-Player Action * PUBLISHER: Sony Computer Entertainment * DEVELOPER: Team Ico, GenDesign, SCE Japan Studio * RELEASE: 2016

The Last Guardian isn't one of the big games of this year's E3 simply because it was officially announced for PS4, but because it's an impressive title in its own right. The game has famously been in development hell the past few years as it transitioned to the PlayStation 4, but its gameplay and emotional core – the boy and the creature

Trico – are still intact.

Sony showed a gameplay demo behind closed doors that highlighted both the pair's growing bond with each other, as well as some of the obstacles they must overcome as they escape the castle structure seen in all the footage so far.

The demo opens with Trico and the boy trapped behind a gate. The animal itself

is immobile – it's hurt. Two large, broken spear shafts are lodged in its back. The boy comforts the animal by gently stroking its muzzle before climbing on its back and dislodging the spears. No onscreen prompts or icons are visible here or anywhere during the demo, so we don't exactly what controls are used to remove the spears, but when the boy pulls them out, Trico lets out a pained cry.

During the demo, the boy throws some barrels at Trico, who eats them up. Previously, creator Fumito Ueda has said that throwing barrels is a method of getting Trico's attention, but it's unknown if eating them restores the animal's health or serves another purpose. Either way, Trico helps the boy access a gallery above the gate by allowing the boy to climb up its back. From here the boy can access a gate control on the other side to let his friend through.

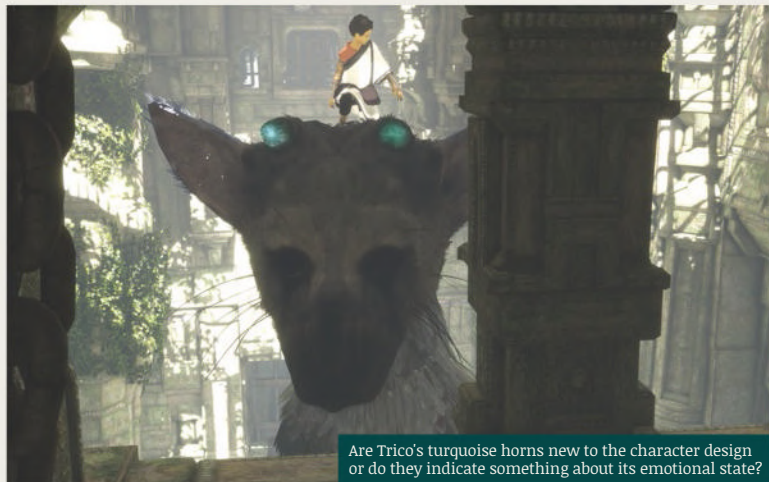
Once through the gate and out into the daylight, the large scale of the environment contrasts the cramped interior and provides a verticality to the area that Ueda says is designed to make players feel uneasy. Indeed, when Trico helps the boy across some crumbling bridges by catching him with its mouth or by

extending its tail, the camera rises and swivels down, highlighting the perilous fall below.

The boy also does his part to help his friend, moving a hexagonal windmill-like trolley that the animal has an adverse reaction to – hissing, eyes turning red. When the boy moves the trolley out of sight of the animal, the ensuing chain-reaction brings down the bridge the pair are standing on. Trico jumps and hangs on tenuously to a wooden ledge across the way that crumbles under its weight. The boy scrambles up the animal's back, and as it desperately hangs on, moves a fallen pole in place for Trico to grab onto so the pair can leap to safety above.

While the demo was pure gameplay, with no heads-up-display, icons, or prompts, it's hard to understand what inputs players will use to make these moments happen. However, Ueda says that players can miss jumps, so what we've seen isn't completely scripted. Given how connected with the pair I've already become in the small part of the game I saw, I don't think Ueda or anyone can exactly map out the kind of emotional connection players will form with them.

* *Matthew Flate*



Are Trico's turquoise horns new to the character design or do they indicate something about its emotional state?



HALO 5: GUARDIANS

343 unveils new campaign level and massive multiplayer mode

✦ **PLATFORM:** Xbox One ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Shooter (24-Player Online) ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Microsoft Studios ✦ **DEVELOPER:** 343 Industries ✦ **RELEASE:** October 27

After visiting 343 Industries' offices and spending two days learning about Halo 5: Guardians for last month's cover story, we thought we had more than enough intel on the upcoming game. We dove into the story, played a section of Master Chief's campaign both solo and cooperatively, and jumped into the new Arena multiplayer. But 343 pulled out all the stops only a month later, showing gameplay of Spartan Locke's side of the campaign and debuting the all-new Warzone multiplayer mode.

Battle of Sunaion

Locke's Fireteam Osiris drops into the Covenant's final stronghold, Sunaion, based on a tip he received from the Arbiter. Master Chief and Blue Team were last seen there and Fireteam Osiris must try to pick up their trail and win the race to the Guardians (whose function is still clouded in mystery).

Locke uses the Artemis Tracking System to scan the landing zone and finds a point of interest. It's Master Chief's discarded assault rifle, meaning he has a head start on finding the Guardians. As the team chats, we find out that the Arbiter is breaking the Covenant in the battle going on in the background, looking to end the civil war once and for all.

As Locke emerges from a tunnel, we see a Guardian for the first time. Spartan Buck (played by a returning Nathan Fillion) ponders if Chief is onboard it, making us wonder if Guardians are more of a vessel than a living creature. The Guardian rears up and sends out an energy pulse that wrecks flying ships and starts cracking up the ground beneath Locke's feet. Fireteam Osiris springs

ahead as the balcony starts to crumble. Locke almost slides off the edge into the sea below, but catches himself at the last minute.

They battle a few Prometheans, and a new Phaeton ship takes down Spartan Vale. Showing off the new squad commands, Locke orders Buck to destroy the Phaeton and Tanaka to revive Vale.

In the next area, Locke scans and discovers a weapon cache up on a balcony. He and Buck head up there while the other two take the low road. Locke uses the new plasma caster on the unsuspecting enemies below. This fires plasma projectiles that stick to targets and explode just like the grenades we know and love.

Finally, they make it to the enormous Guardian, but a Promethean materializes in front of it. He claims to be the Guardian's keeper and protector before knocking Locke to the ground with a sword slash. He claims that Master Chief has already been approved and let through, but Locke is denied. The last image is of energy blasts coming out of the warden's eyes at point blank range.

Warzone

We played the all-new Warzone multiplayer mode on the show floor at E3. This 12v12 battle pits players against each other and enemy A.I. alike on a massive map four times the size of the biggest Halo map from games past. Teams are challenged to be the first to earn 1,000 victory points or to destroy the opposing team's base power core within an 18-minute time limit.

The Warzone scenario we played, called "Escape from A.R.C.," took place at a shuttle launch facility in a rocky canyon.



Your team members jump out of a dropship and must retake their home base overrun by non-player Prometheans. Once it's secure, it's up to you what to do next to start racking up points.

You can attack or defend capture points, or track down powerful A.I. bosses that appear throughout the match. Capturing all the points unlocks the enemy base and exposes their power core. Killing a boss drops anywhere from 25 to 200 points depending on how challenging they are. While this may seem straightforward on the surface, you're constantly trying to weigh what you think will help the team the most.

Will you attack your opponents while they're fighting a boss, or form a temporary alliance against it? While you're doing this, are other opponents capturing the garage or your armory? Should you

just find a high perch and snipe players as they run through a congested area? All of these are valid strategies that allow players more flexibility to take on different roles than in the more traditional Arena multiplayer mode.

Anything you accomplish contributes to your requisition level, which can be spent at req stations to summon powerful weapons and vehicles if you have the specific req card in your inventory. These card packs and cosmetic items are earned through ranking up in any competitive multiplayer mode. The choice here is to spend frequently on cheaper weapons and vehicles or save up for heavy hitters like the Mantis mech suit. This ensures that matches will start out low key and turn progressively more chaotic by the end with power weapons and vehicles everywhere. ✦ *Bryan Vare*



DESTINY: THE TAKEN KING

Bungie reveals Destiny's first major expansion

★ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 ★ **STYLE:** Online Multiplayer Shooter
★ **PUBLISHER:** Activision ★ **DEVELOPER:** Bungie ★ **RELEASE:** September 15

Bungie has promised since early on that Destiny is planned as a 10-year project. After the base game and two smaller expansions closed out year one, The Taken King is opening the second year of that extended plan. Bungie took advantage of E3 to make its case for The Taken King as a major installment that can sustain the game's voracious player base, showing off new subclasses, multiplayer modes, and story areas.

For most players, the biggest addition is new subclasses, each meant to fill in the gap of an absent elemental type. The Warlock Stormcaller may as well be called a Sith Lord, thanks to supers, melees, and grenades focused on blasts of arc lightning. The Sunbreaker Titan wields a solar hammer that can be flung into foes, effectively making players into flame artillery on the battlefield. The Nightstalker gives Hunters a support-oriented build in which they wield a void-powered bow to pin and slow enemy combatants.

The new powers are meant to combat a major new threat with the arrival of the villainous Oryx and his warped army of Taken soldiers. While this new

enemy type shares the visual outlines of existing enemies, their behaviors and attack patterns are redesigned. Players face off against these extra-dimensional horrors aboard Oryx's dreadnaught, a massive enemy ship with multiple zones to explore, as well as promised (but as yet unseen) new strikes and a raid.

Crucible enthusiasts are getting at least two new game modes. The insane Mayhem offers rapid recharge of all powers, including supers, which leads to chaotic throwdowns. Meanwhile, the new Rift game type is a more strategic affair, offering a variation on classic capture-the-flag. Guardians grab a floating spark and must deposit it in the enemy rift to destroy it and score. Bonus points come from distance moved toward the enemy rift, and for stylish backflip "dunks" of the spark.

Bungie has implied there's a lot more to learn about The Taken King, and the developer believes the content justifies the \$40 launch price tag. We're hoping for more info about gear, missions, and structural changes to the game in the lead up to its September 15 launch. ★ *Matt Miller*



The Warlock's new super unleashes a continuous blast of chain lightning

NO MAN'S SKY

Hands-on with Hello Games' ambitious space adventure at long last



★ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, PC
★ **STYLE:** 1-Player Action/Adventure ★ **PUBLISHER:** Hello Games
★ **DEVELOPER:** Hello Games ★ **RELEASE:** 2015

No Man's Sky has both intrigued and perplexed players since it was announced two years ago at the 2013 VGX awards. It offers a breathtaking scale – budding space explorers can land on a near infinite amount of planets in a universe – as well as a chance to discover untold numbers of unique creatures and plantlife. It's all procedurally generated, so even the developers at Hello Games don't know what they'll see on any given planet. The big question for many, however, is how the game works. It's a question that we got most of the answers for in our January 2015 cover story. At this year's E3, we finally got our hands on the controller to clear up any lingering doubts.

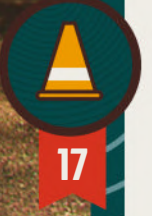
When I pick up the controller I zoom through the galaxy map past countless stars. I finally settle on a random planet. As I approach the surface I realize the planet is mostly aquatic, with a few islands scattered throughout a green sea. I land and hop out of my spaceship, continuing on foot and use my jetpack to get up to a higher area. When a goat-like animal starts chasing me, I shoot it with my laser and immediately feel bad because it's actually kind of cute looking. This activates the Sentinel robots placed on the planet to protect the wildlife and resources. They chase me around, and after shooting down a few I have to hop in my ship and get the hell out of there.

Up in space, all sorts of pirates, police, and traders swarm a fleet of freighters. Lasers crisscross the screen and it takes a moment to realize that someone is trying to kill me. Turning around and trying to target the aggressors is not the most intuitive thing I've ever done, but I eventually take them out once I have them in my sights.

Next, I see a space station and hit the "mini" warp drive to speed over to it. As opposed to zapping you to another corner of the galaxy as seen in *Star Wars*, this is more like a fast-forward button, allowing you to go extremely fast while still maintaining control. Landing is a breeze, and I watch several ships fly in and out. Shopping or buying these vessels isn't active yet, but it's cool to see a sample of the bustling ecosystem.

Even though it was a brief hands-on, I'm excited by all the possibilities in No Man's Sky. Checking out this minuscule amount of the universe only gives me a taste for more. I can't wait to have unlimited time to explore, fight, trade, and catalog however I want. A solid release date is still unknown, but I'm hoping it's still on track for 2015.

★ *Bryan Vore*



NEED FOR SPEED

Putting the franchise at your fingertips

✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Racing (8-Player Online) ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Ghost Games ✦ **DEVELOPER:** Electronic Arts ✦ **RELEASE:** November 3

It seems odd that the Need for Speed series needs a reboot – especially considering how well the last game, *Rivals*, was received. Our recent hands-on with the title, while not necessarily disparaging of the previous game, more than made the case for itself.

Customization is one of the main aspects that developer Ghost Games wants to focus on for NFS, which is evident as soon as you walk into the garage. Roughly 20 customization points are highlighted on your car. Some are macro, like being able to apply a whole body kit, while others are more granular than your normal racing game. Aftermarket and manufacturer-made parts cover areas like the rim of each wheel, side mirrors, brake lights, the exhaust, back spoiler, canards (little bumper wings on the front and/or rear of the car), and different colors can be applied to the brake calipers.

Handling customization is also a huge part of the experience, and here again the options range from large to small. If you simply want to move the drift slider to make the car more drift-y vs. grippy, you can, and the corresponding sliders under the hood will be moved accordingly. However, you can also dive in and tweak things like the sway bars, whether you want a specific button for the drift-enabling parking brake, and much more.

Once we were done customizing our cars, we hit the streets to participate in specific races and cruised around in the open world, accumulating as much reputation as we could for drifting, close calls, and other racing feats. In the world it is

easy to join with others for a race, and the AllDrive online system can also pull in anyone who's interested in racing. This includes cops, who can invade a user-initiated race as long as they aren't in full-on, hell-bent pursuit mode or involved in a specific story-based scene.

The racing itself – only during the night – while seemingly limited, looks and feels great. Though the darkness hides

details on the car and the environment, I wouldn't say that the title looks bland or that it's devoid of detail. The city environments and streetlights of Ventura Bay, as well as the headlights of oncoming traffic, make the world feel vibrant, and there's something to the trailing glow of taillights and shiny streets that makes the racing feel fast and dangerous.

Need for Speed is all about the open

world of Ventura Bay and the cops that prowl the street. True to some installments of the wide-ranging series, it has a story filled with street racers to take down. Ghost Games is taking the story a step further than the normal cheesy cutscenes, promising branching story paths. We're not sure where these will go, but we certainly know how we're going to get there – fast. ✦ *Matthew Kato*



Cops can be brought into multi-player races, crashing the party

RAINBOW SIX SIEGE

Terrorist Hunt returns with bigger and badder enemies



18

✱ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ✱ **STYLE:** 1-Player Shooter (10-Player Online) ✱ **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft ✱ **DEVELOPER:** Ubisoft Montreal ✱ **RELEASE:** October 13

The past several Rainbow Six games have had destination campaigns, but after resolving the story of the elite covert group, cooperative-gaming fans have traditionally flocked to Terrorist Hunt, where players team up to take out all the enemies on a map. Being successful requires a patient approach and flexibility to react when enemies start flanking and attacking from multiple angles. For Rainbow Six Siege, Ubisoft Montreal is reviving this fan favorite with a new coat of paint and a deeper experience. Now dubbed Terrohunt, the classic mode is refreshed for a new generation of Rainbow Six.

The centerpiece of Terrohunt is a new A.I. that Ubisoft says is the most challenging CPU-controlled force it's ever made. Ubisoft Montreal programmed the A.I. to become "siege experts" who are equally capable of attacking or defending. While on the offense, the A.I. surveys your defense, rappels to find a good entry point of attack, disarms your fortifications, and breaches walls to create new angles of attack. While defending, the A.I. fortifies its position, monitors its surroundings to identify your point of attack, and sets up traps to halt your progress. You can play solo or cooperatively with up to four other players in both attack and defend

scenarios. If you play solo you are truly on your own, with no A.I. controlled teammates to issue orders to or bail you out should you get incapacitated.

The hands-on demo placed our attacking group outside of the French consulate. Our goal: Diffuse two bombs placed in different locations before they explode. After choosing from among the eight operatives available, my SWAT team spawns outside the building. Smart teams would use drones to get the lay of the land before moving in, but my team is from the Leeroy Jenkins School of Advancement. Without bothering to look for weaknesses in the enemy defense we immediately rappel up the side of the building to find a breach point.

After disabling some nitrate bombs and cutting through barbed wire, picking off a few hostiles on the way, we reach the bomb. While the bomb is being disarmed, the action shifts from offense to defense, with enemies attacking from multiple sides, breaching through walls, and creating a general sense of chaos. We survive the wave of attackers fully intact, healing a couple of our fallen comrades during the skirmish, and repeat the same process with the other bomb to emerge victorious.

We meet our match when Ubisoft ups the difficulty for the second round. Currently Terrohunt has three levels of difficulty – normal, hard, and realistic, which

is the most ruthless of all.

Bomb diffusion isn't the only mission style in Terrohunt. Three other different sub-modes are also available – classic Terrohunt (where you eliminate every enemy), hostage rescue, and hostage protection. Each sub-mode is playable in the 11 globetrotting maps, each of which can be experienced in day or night scenarios.

Many fans have wondered aloud when Ubisoft would get around to detailing the single-player campaign. This proved problematic because like Titanfall and Evolve before it, Rainbow Six Siege is taking a more simplistic approach to single-player content. Yes, the studio tabbed actress Angela Bassett to serve as Six, the leader who reactivates Rainbow Six to face off against the White Mask terror group, but don't expect a big-budget, set-piece driven narrative. In its place is the new Missions mode, which allows lone wolves or cooperative groups to complete standalone challenges that expose players to the mechanics used in the other modes.

Every mode we've played in Rainbow Six Siege thus far has shown promise. Will they be enough to lure and retain fans without the centerpiece cooperative campaign element that proved so popular with the Rainbow Six Vegas games? We'll find out when the game ships on October 13. ✱ *Matt Bertz*



Terrohunt randomizes several objective types and locations to create a dynamic experience each time you play



FOR HONOR

Knights, vikings, and samurai battle it out in an alternate-history realm

✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Action (Multiplayer TBA) ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft ✦ **DEVELOPER:** Ubisoft Montreal ✦ **RELEASE:** TBA

Ubisoft's *For Honor* is one of the few new franchises announced at E3 from a triple-A studio. At first glance it may seem like a fancier *Dynasty Warriors* or a different take on a MOBA, but it's more like a multiplayer shooter with creative melee combat instead of firearms.

The game features an alternate-history take on battles between knights, vikings, and samurai. The playable demo at E3 only showcased a knight faction character, the Warden. This jack-of-all-trades uses a two-handed longsword in battle, featuring a balance of attack, defense, and speed. The final game will feature several character types for all three factions, each with different traits. Ubisoft wouldn't talk about other classes or character upgrades at this time, but promised they would add diversity to the battles.

What separates *For Honor* from the pack is the unique "Art of Battle" combat system. Players hold the left trigger to lock onto other warriors and bring up a guide for one of three stances. A flick of the right stick jumps between a left, right, or high stance. If you match a stance to and enemy attack from the same direction, your character will block it. On the other hand, you want to change stances and attack quickly (R1) or heavily (R2) against an opponent who isn't currently posing in a way that matches your current slash. This results in combat that's not just a competition in who can mash the buttons the fastest. Every battle involves a rock-paper-scissors evaluation of your opponent for every moment of combat until one of you falls.

The Dominion multiplayer mode pits two teams of four against each other for control of three zones: A, B, and C. A and C represent traditional tower bases near each team's spawn point. B represents the front line where weak NPC soldiers constantly battle it out in a futile scrum. If you take your hero into battle against these foes you can slaughter them easily for meager points contributing to the overall team tally, but killing player characters and capturing points are the most significant contributions to your team's victory. The first side to 1,000 points "breaks" the other side, preventing any respawns unless the rival team can

rally back.

If you manage to get on a roll in combat, you are awarded feats. For the Warden, the first award is Slayer, which awards double the points for killing NPC soldiers. Level two, Inspiration, causes your soldiers to push harder against enemy forces. Level three, Focus, allows you to heal yourself on the fly. And the final feat summons a catapult that allows you to target a specific section of the map.

At this early phase in development, *Dominion* provides a unique take on melee battles while encouraging you to dash all over the battlefield to claim and

retain as many battle points for your team as possible. One-on-one fights could go either way between two rookies, but if you have two, three, or four characters against one, you're practically guaranteed to fail. This constant threat of always reinforcing the right zone at the right time keeps things interesting and forces alternate strategies.

The game has several more multiplayer modes and a dedicated single-player campaign, though Ubisoft isn't talking about anything outside of the demo for now. *For Honor* currently doesn't have a release date, so it could be awhile before we hear anything new. ✦ *Bryan Fore*





STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

DICE simplifies its shooter formula for mainstream appeal

✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Shooter (40-Player Online) ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts ✦ **DEVELOPER:** DICE ✦ **RELEASE:** November 17

Since its announcement last year, fans have been buzzing about Star Wars Battlefront. Many questions have dominated the conversations online about the direction of the franchise. How close to the original Pandemic games would new developer DICE stay? Would the game have the depth of DICE's flagship Battlefield franchise, or skew more mainstream? We finally got our hands on the high-profile shooter at the EA booth to gain a better understanding of what Battlefront is all about.

It only takes a few minutes of play to realize that Battlefront is a much different experience than its modern military cousin. Spotting, teammate revives, ammo drops, and hardcore mode have been left behind. The same goes for four-player squad play and classes, but Battlefront includes a way to partner with another player. Like Medal of Honor Warfighter's fireteams, players can respawn on their buddy. While you are moving across the battlefield, your partner is highlighted in yellow.

Since blasters don't need extra ammo, DICE replaced it with a cooldown to the

weapons. If you shoot continuously for too long, the weapon overheats and initiates an active reload system like Gears of War. Timing your "reload" correctly can get your weapon ready for battle much quicker. The gunplay feels more forgiving and accessible than most shooters; an enhanced auto-aim makes it easier to get a bead on an enemy than Battlefield, and you spawn immediately back into the action after you die.

We read a lot of speculation (based on early trailers) that Battlefront vehicles are on rails rather than player-controlled. That's largely not the case. When finding power-ups littered throughout the environment in Walker Assault mode, players gain access to various vehicles. Once you have a power-up, you can take control of the vehicle by holding L1 and R1 simultaneously. Players have full control of X-Wings, TIE Fighters, speeder bikes, snow speeders, and AT-STs. The only vehicle we currently know about that players don't navigate directly is the AT-AT. When in the walkers, players instead control the weapon systems.

While playing as the Empire it felt like you had the flexibility to either stay on the ground and fight other infantry or seek out a power-up and hop into a vehicle. When playing from the Rebel perspective, however, the constant threat of the oncoming AT-ATs drove us to seek the randomized power-ups with hopes of getting more firepower than a blaster rifle.

The power-up system is the same way that players gain control of heroes over the course of battles. Only Luke Skywalker, Darth Vader, and Boba Fett have been announced, but EA says it has a few more surprises up its sleeve.

Battlefield games are known for their intricate collection of weapon modifiers that let you tweak your rate of fire, accuracy, scope, etc. Battlefront doesn't have this type of system because EA says it wants to stay authentic to the Star Wars universe. The collection of guns in the demo was relatively small, and no options exist to modify the weapons, but that doesn't mean you don't get to put a personal stamp on your play experience. As you level up and gain experience, this

is translated into a currency that lets you purchase Star Cards.

Star Cards are essentially loadout options that let players mix and match skills and secondary attacks. Options we saw in our hands-on time include thermal detonators, a mortar barrage, a temporary shield, jump jets, and a weapon enhancement that momentarily strengthens your firepower. EA says Battlefront features "a lot" of Star Cards, and players can prepare multiple loadouts to switch between during respawns.

Players can share their Star Cards with friends, which is a great way to help new players integrate into the game instead of them feeling underpowered and overwhelmed.

Thus far DICE has only revealed two multiplayer modes: the 40-player Walker Assault mode we played on the Hoth map (which is essentially a Star Wars variation on Battlefield's Carrier Assault), and a close quarters, infantry-only 8-player mode called Drop Zone. EA plans to reveal more multiplayer modes as we move toward the November 17 release date. ✦ *Matt Bertz*



Survival missions pit you against 15 waves of increasingly difficult Empire forces



Contrary to early speculation, the majority of vehicles are not on rails. You can control X-Wings, snow speeders, TIE Fighters, speeder bikes, and AT-STs

WANT A SINGLE-PLAYER STAR WARS EXPERIENCE? THIS MAY NOT BE THE GAME YOU ARE LOOKING FOR

Battlefront games have always had meager single-player offerings, and the new version from DICE is no different. In the place of a full-fledged cinematic campaign, DICE is offering Missions. These single-player or two-player cooperative modes are the only way to play Battlefront in a non-competitive way.

Missions come in four basic forms. Trials are essentially training exercises that familiarize you with the basic mechanics. Battles operate like a traditional bot match. Hero battles place you in the role of an iconic Star Wars character. The last type, survival, is essentially a horde mode where you face off against 15 increasingly difficult waves of enemies.

We tried our hands at the survival missions at E3. This mode begins with a cinematic sequence and features the orders of Admiral Ackbar, who pits my fireteam against waves of Empire soldiers on the desert planet of Tatooine. The fireteam shares a respawn pool that begins with only two extra lives, but more lives can be found in the environment.

To gain some extra firepower while fighting off the stormtroopers, it's a good idea to capture downed pods as they appear. These pseudo treasure chests grant you special power-ups like an orbital strike, which can help fend off large vehicles. Survival mode features three difficulty levels to test the mettle of seasoned Rebels.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TRI FORCE HEROES

Three's company



✦ PLATFORM: 3DS ✦ STYLE: 1 to 3 Player Action ✦ PUBLISHER: Nintendo ✦ DEVELOPER: Nintendo ✦ RELEASE: Winter

The Legend of Zelda Wii U was absent at this year's E3 (as Nintendo warned fans before the show), but there was a surprise new Zelda title on hand in the form of Tri Force Heroes for 3DS. Modeled with the same aesthetic as 2013's A Link Between Worlds, the game takes place in a yet-unnamed world that isn't Hyrule. An ambiguous event occurs putting a princess (who isn't named Zelda, Nintendo confirmed to us) in danger, and a trifold of Links stand up to be the heroes the court needs.

Memories of Four Swords Adventures immediately pop up, but plenty separates this game from Zelda's first foray into multiplayer. For one, this is a more cooperative game, whereas Four Swords encouraged

competition and screwing over your friends. In our demo, we spent most of our time solving puzzles and avoiding obstacles as opposed to fighting enemies.

One of the hooks is the ability for the Links to stand on each other's shoulders and form a totem. Shooting an arrow through a flame to light a faraway torch is a familiar Zelda puzzle, but in order to pull it off in our demo, we had to place the arrow-firing Link on top of the totem in order to fire through a tall flame. The totem mechanic also features heavily during a boss fight. First we get the bomb-carrying Link on top to blow up the head of a tall boss, and then we quickly reassemble to make sure the arrow-firing Link is on top to fire at the beast's newly exposed eyeball. It requires

communication, but is undeniably satisfying when everything goes according to plan.

Outside of each Link taking his own secondary weapon into battle, each also has the option to pick an outfit that augments his abilities in some specific way. The non-Hyrule world where the game takes place is obsessed with fashion, and one of the main motivators for continued play is the ability to unlock new outfits. Our demo featured the Spin Attack Attire, the Lucky Loungewear, and the Big Bomb Outfit. Spin Attack Attire dresses Link like a Samurai and makes his charged spin attack more powerful. The Lucky Loungewear makes it look like Link is ready for bed, but increases luck so that he is less likely to take damage from

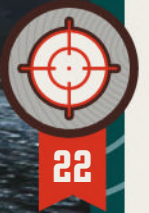
getting hit. The Big Bomb Outfit lets Link throw giant bombs. Despite these options, however, in our demo we all chose to wear Zelda's dress, which makes hearts appear more often.

For those who prefer Zelda as a single-player game, Tri Force Heroes can be played alone. A single player rents two paper doll Links called dopples and alternates control among all three heroes. Oddly, there is currently no option to play two-player and have a third player be a doppel. You can either play with one or three players through the campaign, but there is a competitive coliseum where two players can battle each other.

In terms of timeline in the Zelda canon (an important question for the Zelda-obsessed), director Hiromasa Shikata wouldn't commit to a Zelda era. Despite the visual similarity to A Link Between Worlds – Shikata's previous directorial project – he had little to offer. "The Zelda timeline is 'complicated' and if you look at the history of Zelda you will see there are three branches. I can't really designate which one of those branches we're looking at," Shikata says. "As far as the design itself, we looked to Link Between Worlds. But it's not – as far as a timeframe – it's not before or after. We haven't really settled on that."

Tri Force Heroes has a lot going for it compared to Four Swords. Three players are easier to coordinate than four, and the concept also plays into Zelda's long-running triforce theme. Plus, as long as everyone has a 3DS, you're good to go with no need for additional hardware. Online and download play are also options. The latter is especially nice, since three players only need one copy of the game to play together. ✦ *Kyle Hilliard*





GEARS OF WAR 4

Turning a new page

✦ **PLATFORM:** Xbox One ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Shooter (Multiplayer TBA) ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Microsoft Studios ✦ **DEVELOPER:** The Coalition ✦ **RELEASE:** Holiday 2016

We've had a long wait for information on the next entry in the Gears of War franchise, with nothing more from Microsoft than basic confirmation of its existence. Developer Black Tusk Studios recently changed its moniker to The Coalition, and just in time to offer up a first teaser for its long-in-gestation Gears of War project. With different protagonists and enemies on display, we have high hopes that Gears is reinventing itself for a new platform generation.

The E3 demo opens on two new characters in the lead roles; JD and Kait appear to be Gear soldiers on the hunt for a dangerous monster. Exiting an overgrown forest, the two enter a collection of ruins that begs a question: How long has it been since the conclusion of Gears 3? The two new heroes make their way toward an abandoned fortress only to witness a catastrophic lightning tornado crackling in the distance. Retreating to the interior, JD encounters a pulsing organic pod that spews glowing goo onto his uniform.

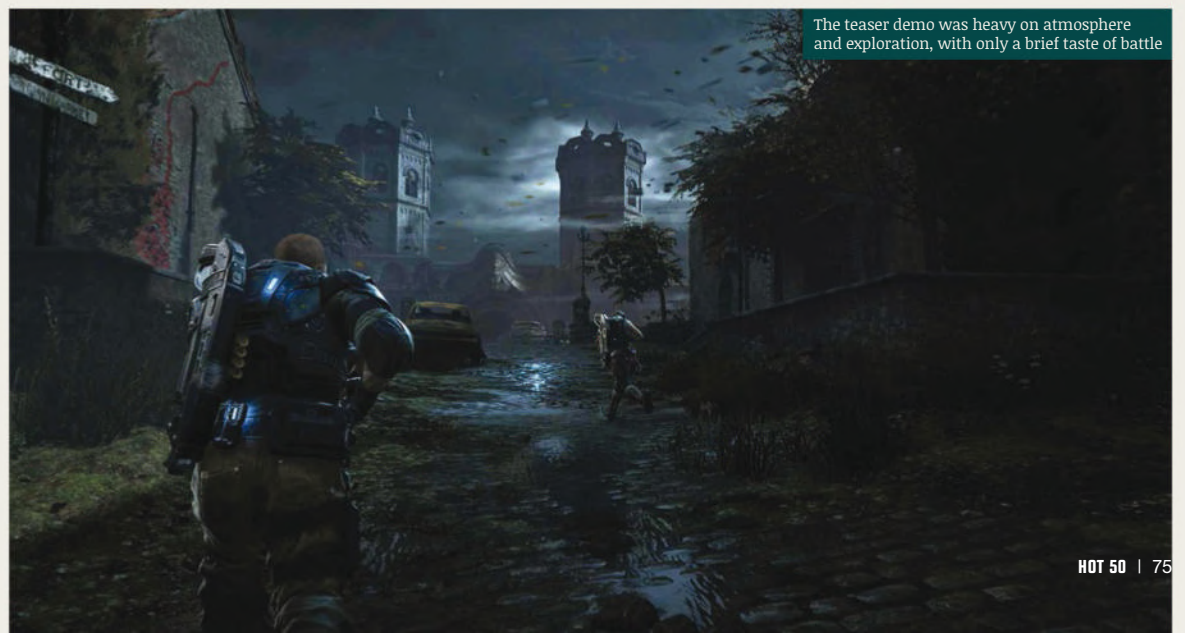
After some further tracking, our two hunters emerge into an open courtyard to confront the hulking beast – a leaping monstrosity called a pouncer. The creature flings spines from its tail for a ranged

attack, but also exhibits a more aggressive attack by leaping onto the Gears as they wildly fire blasts from chainsaw lancers and gnasher shotguns.

The introduction of new gameplay, characters, and enemies speaks well to the potential of Gears 4. The third numbered installment offered a suitable

conclusion to Marcus Fenix's adventures, and I'm hopeful that after the side trek that was Gears of War: Judgment, this new game can return to the roots of the experience. Namely, I'd love to see a focus on taut action, moments of frantic terror, and a chance to uncover new secrets about the world of Sera after the

apparent destruction of the Locust Horde. While the holiday 2016 release date is a long way off, fans will have a chance to reacquire themselves with the franchise soon as The Coalition also announced a remake of the original game (called Gears of War: Ultimate Edition) slated for later this year. ✦ *Matt Miller*



The teaser demo was heavy on atmosphere and exploration, with only a brief taste of battle



HITMAN

For the love of blood money

✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Action ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Square Enix ✦ **DEVELOPER:** IO Interactive ✦ **RELEASE:** December 8 (digital), 2016 (retail)

While many enjoyed Hitman: Absolution's mix of stealth and action, some fans felt that the game was too linear. For IO Interactive's first outing on the newest round of console hardware, the Danish studio has decided to return to the formula some fans preferred found in Hitman: Blood Money.

Agent 47 explores a series of open-ended environmental sandboxes and slowly works his way toward his targets using whatever tools he finds along the way. However, this time these sandboxes are six to seven times larger than anything Hitman fans have seen before.

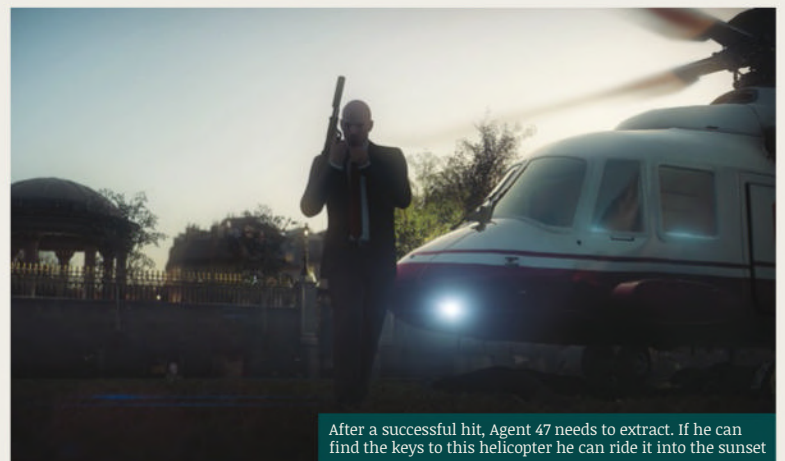
Our E3 demo starts off with Agent 47 arriving at a Paris museum, which is being dressed up for a fashion show. A villain named Viktor Novikov has obtained a list of MI6's covert agents and is auctioning it off to various black hats in a locked room above the show. Agent 47's task is to infiltrate this show, assassinate Novikov and his colleague, and then disappear before the last heel clicks down the runway.

Hitman's environments are full of objects and people to interact with. As Agent 47 enters the show, he sees a reporter talking into a camera, explaining how she'll be

interviewing Novikov later that evening. If Agent 47 can get his hands on a film-crew uniform he can exploit this opportunity to get closer to his target. However, if players walk into the reporter or disrupt her taping, they may never learn about this planned meeting. In that case, Agent 47 might continue to explore the environment, where he discovers a drainpipe to climb up to the museum's second floor. Or he could knock out a bartender and slip a small bit of poison into his target's drink. The options seem extensive.

Each level of Hitman is filled with up to 300 unique A.I. routines that dictate the behavior of the NPCs, who dynamically react to player actions. At one moment in our demo, we watch a bodyguard discover one of Agent 47's mines, disarm it, and then take it into an evidence holding area. This is annoying, but Agent 47 can also trick the guards into smuggling other things into restricted areas. Imagine sneaking a listening device or even a disguised bomb into a building that is otherwise locked down.

The museum grounds have various interactive objects that Agent 47 can improvise with. A speaker system hanging off a



After a successful hit, Agent 47 needs to extract. If he can find the keys to this helicopter he can ride it into the sunset

balcony can be tampered with so that it falls on someone's head long after Agent 47 has left the scene. Along the river on the other side of the map you could find a set of firework launchers prepped for the evening's celebration. If Agent 47 can find the detonation key, those fireworks will make a great distraction.

IO Interactive compares its levels to

Swiss cheese, because there are so many entrances and exits everywhere that Agent 47 shouldn't have any trouble snaking his way through the environment. Hitman's levels look so diverse and open to experimentation that they might be as fun to play a second or third time as they are when you first pick up the controller.

✦ *Ben Reeves*



CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS III

Warfare's next stage of evolution

★ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC ★ **STYLE:** 1 or 2-Player Shooter (TBA Online) ★ **PUBLISHER:** Activision ★ **DEVELOPER:** Treyarch ★ **RELEASE:** November 6

Though the settings may seem similar, Call of Duty: Black Ops III developer Treyarch is not satisfied with just continuing what Advanced Warfare started last year. Set in the year 2060, Black Ops III is going big with future technology, starting with the DNI – Direct Neural Interface – which changes the way soldiers communicate and coordinate in battle. Though the DNI is crucial to Black Ops III's story and universe, when it comes to what's new with Black Ops III, it's just the beginning.

Cyber Cores and Cyber Rigs give campaign players special abilities that help them attack objectives in different

ways. From deploying drones to attack opponents from above, to an ability that causes robotic enemies to burst into flames, you have a big arsenal of futuristic tactics to use in Black Ops III's cooperative campaign.

Treyarch is allowing players to use these abilities during the campaign whenever they see fit, which is in stark contrast to past entries that restricted special abilities to specific gameplay segments. This goes along with Treyarch's desire to make the campaign more replayable through open battles that allow players to approach sequences in different ways.

Taking a jump to the multiplayer

side, Treyarch is replacing the generic soldiers from previous games with unique Specialist characters. Black Ops III includes nine of these personality-fueled soldiers when the game launches, but to this point, we've learned about six of them – from Reaper, an advanced robotic soldier prototype, to Ruin, a hardened veteran who volunteered for these enhanced augmentations.

Each Specialist possesses distinct abilities and power weapons that charge over the course of a match. Players have access to weapons like a high-powered revolver that obliterates anything in its path, a bow with explosive bolts, and an arm that turns into a minigun. Specialist abilities range from a multiplier that helps you grow your score streak faster to a speed boost that temporarily makes you faster than anyone else on the field.

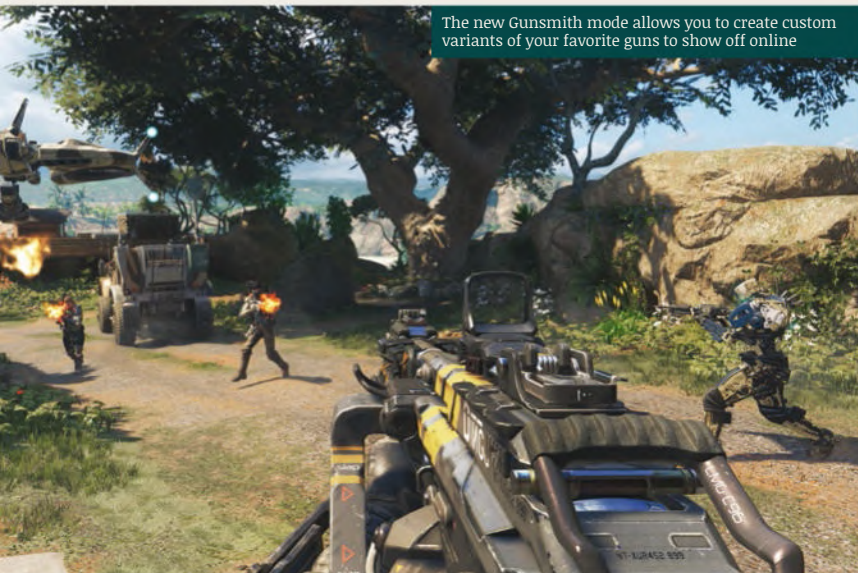
Multiplayer combatants also have access to a suite of new movement abilities like wall runs, power slides, and thrust jumps. In addition, players can take the fight underwater with the new swimming mechanics that add a new layer of strategy to how you approach a map. If you find yourself underwater and want to get out, you can thrust jump out just as quickly as you plunged in.

The multiplayer package is tied together with an intuitive Gunsmith mode that allows you to customize your guns with emblems and camo and show them off to the world.

Treyarch is still keeping Black Ops III's continuation of the beloved zombie mode under wraps, but says it features a greater emphasis on storytelling and has a full experience-based progression system.

★ *Brian Shea*

The new Gunsmith mode allows you to create custom variants of your favorite guns to show off online



MORE SPECIALISTS ENROLL

Black Ops III's multiplayer Specialists play a major role in the landscape of online play, and at E3 2015, we learned about two more of the characters.

PROPHET

- **Background:** A soldier who is said to be on the cutting edge of human weaponry on the battlefield
- **Power Weapon:** Tempest – A powerful lightning gun that chains an arc to all enemies around the target
- **Ability:** Glitch – An ability that allows Prophet to teleport to where he was two seconds prior

NOMAD

- **Background:** The last surviving member of an elite rapid deployment force that specialized in jungle warfare
- **Power Weapon:** Hive – Pods that Nomad can deploy around the map that release nano drones that swarm and attack any enemy unfortunate enough to get too close
- **Ability:** Rejack – Injects a serum right into his bloodstream, causing him to recover



UNRAVEL

An adorable yarn doll to capture your heart

★ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ★ **STYLE:** 1-Player Puzzle/Platformer
 ★ **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts ★ **DEVELOPER:** Coldwood Interactive ★ **RELEASE:** 2016

A little yarn doll made his debut at EA's E3 press conference, instantly capturing the hearts of showgoers and becoming one of the most talked about characters at the event. Appropriately named Yarny, this little red darling is the star of a new game, *Unravel*.

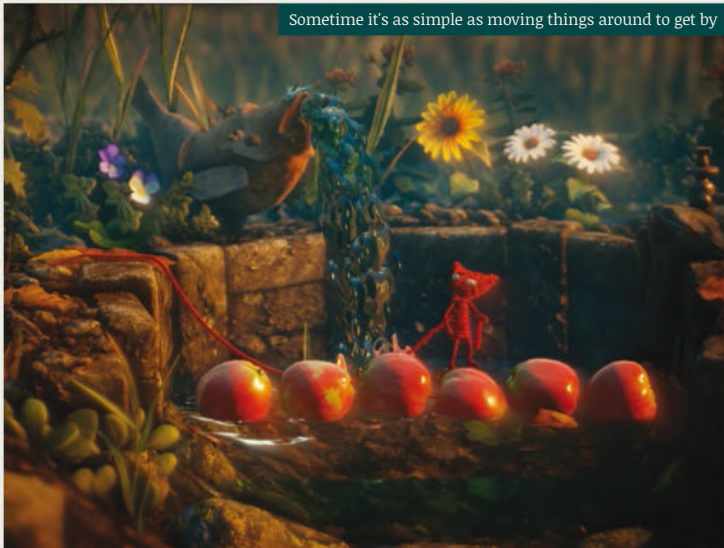
The inspiration for the atmospheric platformer came from a lyric in Björk's song called "Unravel," which goes: "While you're away my heart comes undone and slowly unravels in a ball of yarn." Creative director Martin Sahlin kept thinking about that line and how it sounded like a game character to him. "He unravels more and more, the further away he gets away from the things he loves," Sahlin tells us. "The concept grew into, 'What if this yarn is actually kind of a symbol for the bonds between people?' It's like that red thread that runs through your life and connects everything."

Unravel's premise tackles a broken bond, and Yarny acts as a messenger to mend things, collecting memories from various family members along the way. "The core of it is reaching out and overcoming difficulties," Sahlin says. Yarny travel through areas like deep forests, snowy landscapes, gardens, ice rivers, and more – all inspired by the developer's homeland of Sweden.

Yarny needs to unravel himself to get past obstacles within the different environments. This means using his yarn to move objects to swinging it as a lasso to get across platforms to tying it to two posts to walk across. You can even slingshot him off bridges.

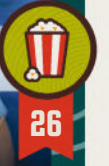
From what we played, *Unravel* feels like it has the best of both worlds. The story elements are charming and the puzzle/platforming elements provide their own satisfying challenge. Plus, Yarny's too adorable to not want to help. ★ *Kimberley Wallace*

Sometime it's as simple as moving things around to get by



DISNEY INFINITY 3.0

Getting a closer look at Disney's mega mash-up



★ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC, Wii U, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360
 ★ **STYLE:** 1 or 2-Player action (4-player online) ★ **PUBLISHER:** Disney Interactive Studios
 ★ **DEVELOPER:** Avalanche Software, Ninja Theory, Studio Gobo, Sumo Digital, United Front Games ★ **RELEASE:** Fall

There's a lot to say about Disney Infinity 3.0, as we demonstrated in our recent cover story. During our visit to the studio's Salt Lake City offices, the team hammered on the point that we were getting demos of a game that was still in development, and that it would be getting several coats of polish in the coming months. They weren't kidding. At E3, the game looked and played significantly better – and it wasn't a slouch back then, either.

Our demo was refreshingly free-form; the team asked what I wanted to see, and they took it from there. We bounced around various parts of the game, including the Toy Box hub world, the farming area, and the Villain Takeover Toy Box game. A personal

highlight was another look at the Toy Box Speedway racing game. The track was based on *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, and Sumo Digital nailed the film's look and feel. It felt authentic, from the bizarre buildings and music down to the intricately scrawled surface of the track itself.

PlayStation owners got early access to Disney Infinity 2.0's Hulk character last year, and Sony has secured a similar deal with 3.0. This time, Sony fans get the first chance to play as the notorious Star Wars bounty hunter Boba Fett. He will be available individually after the holiday season, but until then, there's only one way to get him – with the Star Wars Saga Starter Pack on PS4 or PS3. ★ *Jeff Cork*



For some reason, we don't think Han ends up in carbonite this time



MARIO & LUIGI: PAPER JAM

Folding Mario's long-running RPGs together

✦ PLATFORM: 3DS ✦ STYLE: 1-Player Role-playing ✦ PUBLISHER: Nintendo ✦ DEVELOPER: AlphaDream ✦ RELEASE: Spring

Super Mario RPG: Legend of the Seven Stars may have kicked off the plumber's role-playing career, but the Paper Mario and Mario & Luigi series are where Nintendo's mascot and pals have been leveling up for years. Those RPGs, which have been running in parallel since 2003, are finally colliding in Mario & Luigi: Paper Jam.

The game is set in the universe of Mario & Luigi, complete with overworld exploration where Paper Mario can use his slight

profile to squeeze into narrow passages. Running into an enemy on the overworld warps players to a separate battle screen. But now, Paper Mario joins the two flesh-and-blood brothers to fight both paper-thin and normal versions of Koopa Troopas, Goombas, and more. Each bro's attacks and defensive moves are mapped to a face button, forcing players to think fast. Paper Mario can make duplicates of himself for intense barrages, and all three can join forces to crush foes with a towering

and adorable Papercraft Mario attack.

The combination of these game worlds makes sense for battles and exploration, but they also fit well together in regards to their light-hearted tone. Bowser's flimsy doppelganger shows up, which is sure to result in some goofy dialogue from the incompetent tyrant. The King of Koopas has been playable in several of Mario's RPG titles, so his presence might suggest another alliance. Speaking of additional playable characters, we haven't seen

Paper Luigi in action yet, but his presence seems like a no-brainer. Managing four bros simultaneously in Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time was a fun challenge, and Paper Jam looks to be taking a page from that game's book.

Both the Paper Mario and Mario & Luigi series have oozed with charm and hilarious characters for over a decade. Seeing these worlds collide in such a colorful way is a delightful treat for 3DS owners.

✦ *Jim Juri*

CUPHEAD

A delay doesn't dim our enthusiasm

✦ PLATFORM: Xbox One, PC ✦ STYLE: 1 or 2-Player Action ✦ PUBLISHER: Studio MDHR ✦ DEVELOPER: Studio MDHR ✦ RELEASE: 2016

Cuphead was a hit at last year's E3, and Studio MDHR has slowly released more information on the hand-drawn game since then. It reappeared at this year's show, but it was a good news/bad news situation. The good news was it was playable on the show

floor. The bad news? It's getting delayed until 2016.

The good and bad news are deeply related, as it turns out. One of the reasons Studio MDHR cites for the delay is it is working to ensure that the game has as much content as possible, and that it's

of the highest quality the small team can deliver. We got our hands on several of the boss fights – the game is essentially a collection of boss battles, after all – and if the others are anywhere near as good, we're in for a treat.

One battle is reminiscent of the dragon boss fight from Mega Man 2, with Cuphead darting from cloud to cloud as he avoids incoming blasts of fire. It's as much a test of endurance as it is in accurate platforming (which the game does quite well, by the way). If you get distracted, you're going to see your health

whittled down to nothing, accompanied by an animation of Cuphead's ghost leaving his body.

Another battle features a pair of punching frogs at a cantina. The duo has multiple forms, and they split up from time to time. Cuphead (and Mugman, if a second player joins in) has to hop over projectiles that the frogs belch up, and take potshots at the pesky amphibians with his bullet-firing finger. Eventually, the frogs transform into a giant slot machine. At this point, we're not even going to ask why. We're more interested in knowing when. ✦ *Jeff Clark*



No, it's not just you. If you think about Cuphead for too long, none of it makes any sense



EDGE OF NOWHERE

The virtual mountains of madness

✦ PLATFORM: PC ✦ STYLE: 1-Player Action ✦ PUBLISHER: Oculus ✦ DEVELOPER: Insomniac Games ✦ RELEASE: TBA

Insomniac Games, the studio behind Xbox One's *Sunset Overdrive* and PlayStation 4's upcoming *Ratchet & Clank* reboot, is working on another platform-exclusive title for Oculus Rift called *Edge of Nowhere*. Mixing treacherous platforming with the creeping horrors of an H.P. Lovecraft story, *Edge of Nowhere* shows us how Oculus Rift can transform a traditional third-person action game into an entirely new experience.

Although few story details have been revealed, *Edge of Nowhere* takes place in the glistening white Antarctic mountains, and tasks the player to locate a missing expedition team. Equipped with nothing but standard survival gear like flares and a rope, a journey that begins as a standard search operation quickly becomes an unpredictable descent into the unknown – filled with

monsters and scenery that messes with the mind.

Much like Naughty Dog's *Uncharted* games, the action in *Edge of Nowhere* is scripted and pulls players along a path. In my short time playing, I leapt across unstable ice, ran across a crumbling bridge, and slowly lowered myself by rope into a cavern that was dancing with monstrous shadows. Most of us have had a hand in gameplay sequences like this before, but Oculus Rift adds a new dimension to these endeavors.

Third-person gameplay may seem like a strange bedfellow for a virtual reality experience, but *Edge of Nowhere* shows us that giving the player head control of the camera can be a powerful experience. At one point in my demo, I entered a scenic clearing of ice and water. As I explored,

I lifted my head up to a degree that I was no longer looking at the character on screen, but a huge, tentacled, Cthulhu-like beast that was bearing down on his position. If I didn't look up, I never would have seen it. I lowered my head to my character again and booked it to safety.

On the unstable ice, another large quadruped monster that looks like it was stripped out of *Shadow of the Colossus* walks dangerously over my character. I tilted my head in a way that allowed me to keep an eye on my character, who I was still controlling, and the titan. As I descended down a rope, I looked as far down as I could to see what I was lowering myself into.

We often see freedom of camera control in third-person games of this ilk, but Insomniac is making it a central mechanic

that illuminates more of the world, and most importantly, feels natural when tied to the gameplay.

The demo ends with the explorer reaching an environment that couldn't be more out of place – a Victorian library nestled in a mountain cave. Before I have time to explore the Lovecraftian surroundings, tentacles wrap around the screen, which then goes black.

Edge of Nowhere may not be the most immersive VR experience coming to Oculus Rift, but the platforming it delivers is fun and harrowing, and the VR applications open up a new world of possibilities for both third-person games and scaring gamers. No release date has been given yet, but it would make one hell of an Oculus Rift launch title.

✦ *Andrew Feiner*

This dark cavern is filled with dancing shadows and beasts that eventually give chase



The entire gameplay demo was free of combat, and instead focused on evading creatures



STREET FIGHTER V

The Variable System adds a triple-layer of strategy

* **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, PC * **STYLE:** 1 or 2-Player Fighting (2-Player Online)
 * **PUBLISHER:** Capcom * **DEVELOPER:** Capcom * **RELEASE:** Spring

Capcom's genre-defining fighting game is back with Street Fighter V. I got my hands on a fight stick at Capcom's E3 2015 booth to get my knuckles bloody with the new Variable System, which adds layers of complexity exceeding that of the excellent Street Fighter IV.

Street Fighter V still plays as slick as you remember, with hadouken motions and other familiar combos unleashing fireballs and spinning kicks of doom against your opponent. The Variable System mixes up SF V's action with three different functions, all of which are pulled off by pressing a direction and two buttons simultaneously. The V-Skill is unique to each character and offers new strategic depth, like M. Bison's ability to throw back fireballs or Ryu's parry move. V-Skills can be pulled off for free, but V-Triggers and V-Reversals tap into a new gauge which is built up by receiving damage. V-Triggers tend to amplify your basic moves for a limited time. Ryu's V-Trigger causes his powered-up

fists to crackle with electricity and lets him charge up fireballs. V-Reversals exchange some of your Variable System gauge for a combo-breaking comeback, which is handy when you're being mercilessly pounded into the corner.

The EX gauge returns, and it still gets filled by dishing out damage. When filled, you can unload the whole gauge in one huge attack similar to SF IV's Ultra Combo Attacks, instead those ultimate onslaughts are now called Critical Arts. Pulling these devastating moves is a blast and they're oftentimes humorously brutal, like ruffian Birdie's Critical Art, which involves wrapping combatants up in a chain and jumping rope with them.

The Variable System is intimidating at first, especially compared to SF IV's more straight-forward Focus Attack mechanic. However, the added character-specific moves should add some welcome nuance to the roster's veterans. I can't wait to play more during the beta starting soon. ** Jim Juri*



Cammy's pigtails attempt to keep up with the action

MAD MAX

Breaking and entering with Mad Max



* **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC * **STYLE:** 1-Player Action
 * **PUBLISHER:** Warner Bros. Interactive * **DEVELOPER:** Avalanche Studios
 * **RELEASE:** September 1

Mad Max and his car have been so closely intertwined that you could consider them a package deal. I explored the Wasteland for hours while visiting Avalanche Studios, but I spent the bulk of that time cruising around behind the wheel of the Magnum Opus. At E3, I decided to spend equal time on foot, to meet new people, and knock 'em into the dust.

I start out driving, which is a much more efficient way to scout the enemy outpost I'm about to destroy. As I approach, I encounter a nomad with a telescope who tells me about a side entrance I can use. It's not likely to draw as much attention, so I decide to see if I can find it. Unfortunately, the nearby sniper towers take notice of my ridiculously loud vehicle, and they start firing.

I work around the perimeter, using my

harpoon to pull the towers down. That gives me a little space to approach the front gates – protected by twin flame-throwers – and see what I'm up against. Flames have to have a fuel source, and in this case it's from a pair of enormous gas tanks. Two explosive thunderpoons later, and I can walk right in.

It's not that easy, unfortunately. A cluster of goons surrounds me, and I start swinging. Combat is similar to the Arkham games, but Max doesn't sprint to attack foes like Batman. Meanwhile, a war crier beats his drum above the action, giving his warriors a buff. That's enough. I fire one of the few shotgun shells in my inventory his way, and he's no longer a problem.

Another shot leaves Scabrous Scrotus' fuel depot in flames. One down, many more to go. ** Jeff Cork*





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BATTLEBORN

Fighting for star fire

✦ PLATFORM: PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ✦ STYLE: 1-Player Shooter (10-Player Online) ✦ PUBLISHER: 2K Games ✦ DEVELOPER: Gearbox Software ✦ RELEASE: Winter

Since our cover-story reveal last year, we've detailed several of Battleborn's multiplayer modes, but during E3 we got extensive hands-on time with Battleborn's story-driven campaign. Gearbox's newest shooter may be trying some new things for a console multiplayer shooter, but its campaign structure and humor would feel right at home in the Borderlands series.

While Battleborn's campaign mode can be played solo, it really excels with a few friends. Unlike most story campaigns, however, you won't be locked

into playing as the same character the whole time. You could choose to play as any of Battleborn's 25 heroes during each level. Since Battleborn's lightning-fast leveling system allows you to fully upgrade a character through a single mission, it's nice to have the option to shake things up between levels. If you stick with the same character, these levels reset, allowing you to explore a different upgrade path. Gearbox has even teased a loot system as well as an overarching upgrade path that will affect all your characters, but wouldn't go

into detail about either.

During my first mission, I played as Bolder, a stubborn, axe-wielding space dwarf who is an ideal tank. Bolder's Boldurdash skill allows him to plow through rows of enemies, knocking them off of their feet, and dazing them for a few seconds. Meanwhile, an energy shield enables him to absorb an obscene amount of damage, which can be upgraded to grant a healing boost or augment his critical hit percentage. Considering that most of Battleborn's combatants are ranged attackers, I found it refreshing to

step into the shoes of a close-quarters fighter. The campaign mission structure itself is a series of linear levels, but these are being designed by the same team that brought us Borderlands so they should be filled with all kinds of zany and offbeat objectives.

Gearbox has been criticized for incorporating MOBA elements into this console shooter, but our hands-on time assured us that Battleborn's basic gunplay feels tight and its overall campaign missions feel similar to what fans of the Borderlands series have grown to love. ✦ Ben Reeves



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MIGHTY NO. 9

A dangerous highway and stealth platforming

✦ PLATFORM: PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Wii U, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Vita, 3DS, PC
✦ STYLE: 1-Player Action (2-Player Online) ✦ PUBLISHER: Deep Silver
✦ DEVELOPER: Concept/Inti Creates ✦ RELEASE: September 18

One glance at Mighty No. 9, and its promise as a spiritual successor to the Mega Man series is obvious. While it contains plenty of aesthetic and gameplay similarities to those games, our hands-on time at E3 demonstrated what's different for Mega Man fans.

One new stage takes place on a highway, forcing Beck to carefully leap and dash between moving vehicles as a mysterious blonde robot swipes from the shadows with its blades. It's the toughest sequence I've played yet, requiring the precise platforming and fast reflexes of old-school platformers to finish off foes by dashing into them.

Call's sequence is much different, focusing on disabling and evading intimidating enemy robots in a prison. The stealth segment of Beck's female companion offers a welcome break from the hardcore action of the core levels.

Mega Man co-creator and Concept founder Keiji Inafune raised Mega Man fans' hopes up high when he announced the Mighty No. 9 Kickstarter and partnership with side-scrolling veterans Inti Creates. So far, Beck and Call look to deliver on fans' hunger for more old-school Mega Man-style action.

✦ Tim Turi

ADRIFT

Surviving one breath at a time



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✦ PLATFORM: PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ✦ STYLE: 1-Player Adventure
✦ PUBLISHER: 505 Games ✦ DEVELOPER: Three One Zero ✦ RELEASE: September

You might think that Adrift's deliberately paced gameplay wouldn't come through at a busy convention, but the weightlessness and life-or-death situation were abundantly clear at E3.

Any bumps while you're navigating the semi-destroyed space station trying to find out what happened clip off your health, so you must plan your routes carefully. My curiosity lures me outside of the station, and while there aren't

walls to bump into, the distance to my objective taxes my oxygen supplies. Furthermore, my unsteadiness at the controls makes attaching to a ladder on a relay harder than I expected; luckily, I grab onto interactive points like consoles by holding down the square button when prompted. I don't accomplish anything in my time with the game, but I survive, and that's more than just a first step.

✦ Matthew Skala



FORZA MOTORSPORT 6

Challenges around every turn

✦ PLATFORM: Xbox One ✦ STYLE: 1 or 2-Player Racing (24-Player Online) ✦ PUBLISHER: Turn 10 Studios ✦ DEVELOPER: Microsoft Games ✦ RELEASE: September 15

Given how seriously developer Turn 10 is about racing and the Forza franchise, it's surprising that the series hasn't had night racing or rainy weather yet. Those aren't the only additions for Forza Motorsport 6, which also integrates split-screen multiplayer and some twists to the formula that help refresh the franchise. The first Forza on the Xbox One set the table, but now the franchise is making moves to really take off.

Night racing is self-explanatory in the

way it restricts your field of vision. Of particular note is how it plays on endurance races and places like the Le Mans race, where the unusual darkness of the Circuit de la Sarthe's backstretch presents its own challenge. I also noticed how it played with my perception on normal tracks as my lights bounced off the reflective paint of the retaining walls.

Rain is another factor to contend with. Apart from how it feels when you hit the brakes, water also pools in dips

in the track; larger puddles can cause you to hydroplane. In my playtime at E3, this caused me to lose control slightly a few times. It's not overpowered, but it definitely gives you something to think about.

Night racing and rain aren't available on every track, but the game is delivering more content overall, addressing a criticism of Forza 5. Not only does Forza 6 come with 26 tracks (10 of which are new), but the career mode clocks

in at 70 hours and offers variable paths suited to the types of cars you're into. Furthermore, mods (interchangeable add-on challenges for extra XP) create race-to-race variety.

You can point to various details regarding what's new in this entry, but what's more important is how they feel on the track when you put them all together. Here the game's prowess is already evident, making Forza 6 a potentially formidable package.

✦ *Matthew Hata*



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Student work by: John Rogeles & George Stoll



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DIVINITY: ORIGINAL SIN – ENHANCED EDITION

Much more than a port

✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ✦ **STYLE:** 1 or 2-Player Role-Playing
✦ **PUBLISHER:** Focus Home Interactive ✦ **DEVELOPER:** Larian Studios ✦ **RELEASE:** 2015

Divinity: Original Sin wowed us on PC last year, and now it's coming to consoles with all-new controls, split-screen co-op, and a smattering of improvements across the board. The enhanced edition is a free upgrade for current owners of the PC version; it features full voice acting, new characters, revamped quests, skill tree rework, and intuitive controls for consoles and controllers.

A core PC RPG harkening back to the Baldur's Gate days may not seem like a natural fit for a controller, but after some hands-on time on PS4, I can say it feels amazing – maybe even better than mouse-and-keyboard setup, and that's not something I say lightly. The skill revamp is highly significant, and allows for meaningful progression by investing heavily in trees to unlock powerful master skills

like meteor shower. Previous systems encouraged a jack-of-all trades lifestyle to grab a bunch of powerful but disparate abilities.

Dual-wielding and some other cool things like grenades have also been added, giving melee-oriented players some additional ways to take advantage of the elemental interactions that make up some key aspects of combat – tossing lightning into water sets up a stun field, and throwing fire on a poison cloud sets off an explosion.

Divinity: Original Sin was a great experience on PC, and kudos to Larian for bringing the new version to existing players at no cost while letting console players experience the game for the first time. If any game can bring the classic PC RPG experience to console and enthrall a whole new audience, this is it.

✦ *Daniel Jack*



RATCHET & CLANK

Renewed and improved



37

✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4 ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Action/Platforming
✦ **PUBLISHER:** Sony Computer Entertainment ✦ **DEVELOPER:** Insomniac Games
✦ **RELEASE:** Spring

Ratchet and Clank have been romping through the galaxy for three console generations. In that time, the duo has had its share of highs and lows, but next year's theatrical release could send Insomniac's gun-toting heroes into a new stratosphere of fame. In conjunction with this hopeful feature film, Insomniac is reimagining the original Ratchet & Clank game for the newest generation of hardware. Thankfully, this game is more than just a quick HD port – it has enough new content to virtually make this a new experience from the heroes' first outing back in 2002.

During our E3 demo, we boarded a hovertrain in Metropolis and used our grapple line to swing across the gaps as flying cars whizzed by in the background. The most exciting element of any Ratchet & Clank game has always

been the inventive weapons, and this entry is full of old favorites like the Groovatron – which forces enemies to break into disco – as well as several new ways to disintegrate foes. A shotgun called the Pixelizer atomizes enemies, turning them into a shower of low-res cubes. Insomniac also teased a new weapon-upgrade system inspired by role-playing games.

One of the most surprising aspects of this new Ratchet & Clank title is how good it looks – I wouldn't be surprised if the in-game cutscenes were indistinguishable from the upcoming film.

Ratchet & Clank is a retelling of the galactic duo's origin story from Captain Quark's perspective, but considering its wealth of new content, even those familiar with the original origin may want to make a return trip to the Solana galaxy. ✦ *Ben Reeves*



This Ratchet & Clank is a reimagining of the original title, but it features a lot of new weapons, environments, and new bosses



STAR FOX ZERO

A new view of a classic franchise

✦ PLATFORM: Wii U ✦ STYLE: 1-Player Action ✦ PUBLISHER: Nintendo ✦ DEVELOPER: Nintendo/Platinum Games ✦ RELEASE: Fall

Shigeru Miyamoto has been making video games for roughly 35 years, and the infectious smile on his face shows us that he still enjoys the craft. “I’m not tired of it,” Miyamoto told us at a private screening of *Star Fox Zero*. “I still love making them. It’s my favorite thing.”

Miyamoto took us on a guided tour of *Star Fox Zero*, a game jointly developed by his team at Nintendo and Platinum Games. Yugo Hiyashi, who was in charge of development of *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* and *Wii Fit U*, now serves as *Star Fox Zero*’s director, and Yusuke Hashimoto (*Bayonetta 2*) is helping design the project.

“The way I tend to make games nowadays is to work with a smaller team internally to make the core of the game,” Miyamoto says. “Once that’s done, I look inside and outside Nintendo for what would be a good development team to work on this game. And right about that time, it was when *Bayonetta 2* was finishing up. It occurred to me that Platinum would be a great company to work on *Star Fox*. Now we’re working very closely. We’re working the same way we would with an internal team. We have meetings every day. We’re looking at the ROM every day.”

Star Fox Zero is a direct follow-up to *Star Fox 64* in terms of look, gameplay, and narrative. The visual details are decidedly

classic, yet still capable of dazzling through the scale of the conflicts that Fox McCloud and his fellow Arwing pilots are thrown into.

The big hook to this *Star Fox* experience is how the TV and Wii U GamePad screens are used. The TV screen shows the classic behind-the-ship view, whereas the GamePad shows Fox’s view from the cockpit in first-person. The action demands that the player use both, darting the eyes back and forth for the best view of the challenge at hand.

When I ask about the dual-screen setup, Miyamoto says they want players to have more control over targeting. “It was very important to me,” he says. “I’m happy to see that even beginners are able to aim at things and shoot them. I think one thing that’s interesting about having the two screens is that it opens up a lot of strategies and ways to attack each course. In *Star Fox 64*, taking out every single enemy in a stage was kind of impossible. Now with these new controls, and being able to look around, it’s actually an achievable goal to shoot down every enemy.”

The GamePad screen gives players direct control over the Arwing’s turret. One new enemy land walker, the Strider, is designed to push players to use the manual targeting system, as its only weak spot is on its canopy. This means the

player must fly over the strider and point the GamePad down to have a clean shot of the hit zone.

Meanwhile, the TV screen delivers the classic *Star Fox* experience of dodge rolling between falling objects and locking on to numerous targets for a charged energy blast.

In my hands-on session, I struggled with the dual-screen setup for a few minutes, but eventually got the hang of it, and found myself viewing the GamePad screen more for the sheer fun that the precision targeting brings.

The Arwing isn’t the only controllable craft in *Star Fox Zero*. In certain stages, the Arwing can transform into a Walker, which looks like an AT-ST from *Star Wars*. The Walker was originally going to make its debut in *Star Fox 2* on Super Nintendo, but that game never made it to retail shelves. When I ask if we would ever see *Star Fox 2* on Virtual Console, Miyamoto laughs and says, “I think it’s okay for *Star Fox 2* to just remain a memory. The things I wanted to achieve in *Star Fox 2* I’m doing in this game.”

Nintendo also showed off the return of the Landmaster, the tank from *Star Fox 64*, which offers improved mobility and aerial thrusters. The only all-new addition is a vehicle called the Gyrowing, a slow-moving

helicopter used for stealth operations. The Gyrowing is equipped with a tethered robotic helper called The Direct Eye. This handy little robot is used to navigate small spaces in the environment that may contain collectible items or terminals that open doors.

The six levels I played offered everything we’ve come to expect from *Star Fox* over the years – flying dangerously along enemy-infested planet surfaces, dogfighting in deep space against dozens of opponents, and taking on gargantuan bosses. Last but not least, Fox once again must save Slippy from certain death over and over again.

“In terms of what you saw in *Star Fox 64*, with the actual map with the different planets and lots of different branches, this time it will be simpler, but more variety in terms of different missions on the same planet,” Miyamoto says. “We want it to be that you can complete the course of the game in the same amount of time you would spend watching a movie, so it’s a cinematic experience. While there are still some branching paths, the main thing we are focusing on is having second and third missions available for each planet.”

Star Fox Zero won’t ship with competitive multiplayer support, but Miyamoto isn’t ruling out the possibility of it returning in a future patch. ✦ *Andrew Reiner*

ASSASSIN'S CREED SYNDICATE

Trying the new tools and vehicles



✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Action ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft ✦ **DEVELOPER:** Ubisoft Quebec ✦ **RELEASE:** October 23 (PS4, Xbox One), Fall (PC)

At this point, everyone expects a new Assassin's Creed at every E3, but as long as Ubisoft continues to offer compelling showings, we're on board. A pair of Assassin's Creed Syndicate demos gave us a chance to experience the new 1868 London setting and several new gameplay additions to the series.

One mission features protagonist Jacob Frye (the game also stars his sister Evie), and involves taking on the Blighters gang, who are backed by the Templars. They've kidnapped some allies and I need to sneak in, free them, and take out the 10 goons guarding the area.

I drive one of the new carriages to the waypoint. It controls somewhat similarly to a video game car, albeit slower and less responsive. Once I get to the mission zone, I go into sneak mode, trading my top hat for an Assassin hood. I fire the new rope launcher to the top of a building and zip right up. It's like the traditional counterweight ropes in older AC games, but you can use it anywhere. Eliminating slow climbing mechanics (when you prefer) definitely speeds up the pace of movement.

On top of the roof I see a wide courtyard with a few enemies below. I shoot the rope launcher horizontally this time, climbing out to hang from the wire over the courtyard. If you've played the Arkham games, this feels similar to the line launcher. Again, it saves a lot of time from jumping down into

a hay bale, running across the street, and climbing back up the other side. Another benefit is that you can target enemies below for all manner of mischief.

The hallucinogenic dart, which functions similarly to the berserker dart of past games, now affects multiple targets if you shoot it into a fire. I do so from the tight-rope and manage to get three enemies crazed and fighting each other. One of my hostages tries to escape at that point and ends up fighting one of the berserk goons. In case it goes the wrong way, I decide to perform a traditional air assassination on the enemy, and my ally runs off to safety.

Later on, I come upon another patrolling enemy who happens to walk beneath a cluster of crates suspended by a rope. Using a throwing knife, I slice the heavy payload and it crashes down on the unsuspecting target.

Once the hostages are all rescued and guards eliminated, I move on to the next section of the demo. A quick cutscene shows a gang's arrival, led by a woman named Bloody Nora. Here I'm tasked with beating up all of the gang members and taking out Nora. I don't have any blades, but I break plenty of limbs and smash several faces into the ground. Once the numbers are thinned out and Nora is disposed of, another cutscene plays and Jacob and Evie declare in a rousing speech that they

have now absorbed the defeated Blighters into their own gang, the Rooks. Expanding your gang into a massive network (the titular syndicate) is one of your primary goals.

In a different, non-playable demo, Jacob chases after Templar leader Robert Strain in a carriage. Goons ride alongside you trying to ram you off the road. If that doesn't work, they jump over to your carriage and try to hijack it. Jacob climbs out of the driver's seat and punches an enemy off the roof of his carriage, then shoots another off the carriage riding alongside. Jacob jumps to the other vehicle and highjacks it from the driver.

Next, he follows Strain into Victoria Station. The foe crosses the tracks just before a train comes through. Jacob shoots the rope launcher into the rafters and uses eagle vision to spot his prey. Strain is escaping on an outbound train, so Jacob uses the rope launcher to get to the top of the boxcars. He beats up several goons as he moves toward the front of the moving train along the rooftops. Just when he's about to get to the target, Strain separates the train cars. Jacob jumps the large gap and kills him with a hidden blade, ending the sequence in traditional Assassin fashion. ✦ *Bryan Vore*





SWORD COAST LEGENDS

Die in your own dungeons

✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PC ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Role-Playing (5-Player Online) ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Wizards of the Coast ✦ **DEVELOPER:** n-Space ✦ **RELEASE:** 2015 (PC), TBA (Consoles)

Sword Coast Legends features a full single-player Dungeons & Dragons campaign, but the focus at E3 was on Dungeon Master Mode. This allows one player to create a complete dungeon crawl experience from scratch, then invite four adventurers to come inside to discover traps, monsters, and treasure.

The dungeon master has a surprising amount of control during the setup period; you can create NPCs like quest-givers and shopkeepers, as well as make monsters and

set trap positions. Each room can be set up with easy-to-use tools that also offer a good deal of customization for those DMs that want to dial down and handcraft everything like dialogue, quest triggers, and perfect mini-boss encounters.

My experience at E3 pit four players against a player DM in a mission made from scratch – a rather traditional setup that had us exploring a dungeon to rescue an elf that had an unfortunate run in with a massive spider boss. As a surly dwarf

rogue, I joined up with a party composed of a warrior, necromancer, and cleric to scour the unexplored depths for the missing character.

My search skill was particularly invaluable for locating and disarming traps, something that felt fluid, with all the dice-rolling and checking happening behind the scenes. It feels a lot like an action/RPG, with much of the Dungeons & Dragons math happening off-screen, allowing you to focus on real-time gameplay and ability combos.

If the spiders or wandering ogres take you down, your friends can pick you back up. Alternately, you can use a limited supply of expensive self-resurrection items to get back in the action after a short period of time. We did manage to beat the giant spider at the end of the dungeon, and it was an exciting, fun experience – and that was an encounter whipped up in minutes. I can't wait to see what other players come up with after they get access to dungeon tools later this year. ✦ *Daniel Jack*



MASTER OF ORION

Remaking strategy history

✦ **PLATFORM:** PC ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Strategy ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Wargaming ✦ **DEVELOPER:** NGD Studios ✦ **RELEASE:** TBA

Master of Orion was one of the hallmark real-time-strategy games that brought 4X (explore, expand, exploit, and exterminate) into the limelight. In fact, the term “4X” was coined in a 1993 preview of the original game. This property may seem like an offbeat acquisition for the free-to-play framework that powers Wargaming’s stable of tanks, planes, and warships, since this reboot will be a standard retail title with zero microtransactions.

The genre has experienced a resurgence over the last few years, with core franchises like Civilization remaining strong and Steam providing a platform to introduce newcomers. 4X can be a difficult genre to work with today; games can devolve into overly complex turn-fests without much meaning or development. However, what we saw at E3 was extremely promising for this remake, remaining true to the title’s roots and offering modern day nuance and

sensibility. It’s the same 4X game we grew up with and loved long ago, but with much attention focused on improvements across the board.

All of the races in the original game return with their own special foibles, ships, and perks. Leaders and advisors have voiced dialogue, and you are treated to cutscenes for important accomplishments. A multitude of U.I. enhancements help playability, and you are able to choose

your own route to victory. Like most 4X games these days, you can win whether you’re looking for complete annihilation of your opponents through war or a technological race for supremacy.

The original Master of Orion was a landmark for PC gaming, and if what we saw at E3 is any indication, the remake could be both an admirable homage to the original title and its own powerful force in the 4X galaxy. ✦ *Daniel Jack*



UNTIL DAWN

Be the voice of reason in an interactive horror movie

✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4 ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Adventure

✦ **PUBLISHER:** Sony Computer Entertainment ✦ **DEVELOPER:** Supermassive Games

✦ **RELEASE:** August 25

Supermassive Games' developmental path sends red flags flying. Until Dawn was originally slated for release on the PlayStation 3 with support for the PlayStation Move motion controller. When it reemerged last year, last-gen and Move support was dropped, making it a PS4 exclusive. Despite the seemingly bumpy road, Until Dawn is an intriguing and bizarre horror adventure game.

The story is clichéd, but Supermassive understands the inherent campiness of young adults partying in a creepy lakeside cabin with a killer on the loose. The corniness doesn't come across the same way as horror games traditionally do, with rough character models and awful voice actors trying to convey real fear and the will to survive. Instead, the highly realistic character models and solid voiceover/motion-capture makes the entire spectacle seem like an interactive B-horror film, which is something I never knew I wanted.

The E3 2015 demo kicks off with a young couple trapped at the edge of a

cliff as a herd of menacing looking deer encroaches. The two bicker about what to do, and you've got to decide whether plant your axe in one of their heads or try to squeeze through the pack as interspecies tension rises. Other choices range from simply how to respond to a panicked friend (sarcastic or reassuring), or whether to save yourself or a friend as a burning tower collapses. Supermassive claims these choices follow you throughout the game, culminating in hundreds of possible outcomes for the unlucky characters. Like many modern adventure games, when you're not making choices, you spend time exploring environments and examining objects to keep the story moving.

Like a killer from a slasher flick, the horror-game genre is enjoying a second wind after a lengthy dormancy. At its current state, Until Dawn looks to be among the next exciting experiences in that upswing. Whether or not it truly delivers the scares will be determined when it arrives later this summer. ✦ *Jim Juri*



BELOW

Deeper into the underground



✦ **PLATFORM:** Xbox One ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Action ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Capybara Games, Microsoft Studios ✦ **DEVELOPER:** Capybara Games ✦ **RELEASE:** 2015

Below is a bit of a departure for Capybara Games, known for colorful action games like Super Time Force and Might and Magic: Clash of Heroes. Even its mobile hit, Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery, had an optimistic tone alongside its muted blues and purples. Comparatively, you won't see many bright colors in Below outside of the occasional droplets of blood, and the scale of the world above you weighs heavier and heavier as you move deeper underground with each level.

Drawing clear inspiration from Dark Souls' oppressive world and unforgiving combat, Below tasks players with delving into a series of randomized caves as you watch your torchlight slowly peter out. Meeting death means a new visually distinct hero takes over where the previous left off, with the option to retrieve

the remaining collection of pick-ups.

Our E3 demo started at the very beginning of the game. We fought small rats and later speedy humanoid monsters that make you bleed if they catch you. Thankfully, you can also make your enemies bleed; one of my favorite interactions was pricking one of the humanoid monsters with my sword and staying just out of reach until he bled out.

After more deaths, we jumped ahead in the game where we encountered a mysterious manmade building, as well as a giant pit that spit out a large number of enemies. As the last enemy lay dead on the ground, a collection of tentacles sprang from the pit and the demo quickly cut to black. When asked if we can expect to encounter bosses in the game, Capybara remained coy, offering neither confirmation nor denial. ✦ *Kyle Hilliard*





ROCK BAND 4

Getting the band back together

✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One ✦ **STYLE:** 1 to 4-Player Rhythm/Music (TBA Online) ✦ **PUBLISHER:** Harmonix ✦ **DEVELOPER:** Harmonix ✦ **RELEASE:** October 6

The Rock Band franchise was born of Activision's acquisition of Guitar Hero and the notion that Harmonix could innovate on that formula in new ways. The result was the critically acclaimed series that revolutionized the concept of console downloadable content. With Rock Band 4, Harmonix is going back to basics with its approach – stripping away the pro instruments, keyboard peripheral, and the Rock Band Network infrastructure – but that

doesn't make it any less ambitious.

The big addition at E3 was the new freestyle guitar solos, which enable you to inject some of your personality into your favorite songs from the Rock Band library. Based on suggestions the note highway gives you, you are scored on how you improvise during the guitar solos of each song. If you'd rather play the original solo as Harmonix charted it, you can toggle that on the fly.

Many of Rock Band 4's additions are about adding your own flair to your performance. From rewarding you for improvising as the vocalist to playing dynamic drum fills on the sticks, Rock Band 4 is more about expressing yourself than any other title in the series.

Your previous downloadable content is all playable in Rock Band 4, giving you a strong starting point. Though Rock Band Network songs are not likely to make the

jump from last generation, the more than 1,500 songs that currently exist in Rock Band's Music Store will, meaning Rock Band 4's library is already vast.

Instruments from last generation are also planned to carry over to current-gen. If you'd rather grab new instruments, Mad Catz has made various improvements, including quieter drum heads and a mic with better pitch recognition.

✦ *Brian Shea*



LEGO DIMENSIONS

A big, mixed-up brick pile

✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Wii U, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360
✦ **STYLE:** 1 or 2-Player Action ✦ **PUBLISHER:** WB Games
✦ **DEVELOPER:** TT Games ✦ **RELEASE:** September 27

Dorothy and her crew are happily skipping along the yellow brick road until Batman bursts into the scene. He tells The Wizard of Oz characters that there's a heartless villain among them. Confusion abounds. Scarecrow's a good guy, and besides, the Tin Man's the one without a heart. This is Lego Dimensions in a nutshell, TT Games' franchise mash-up and its first dip into the toys-to-life genre.

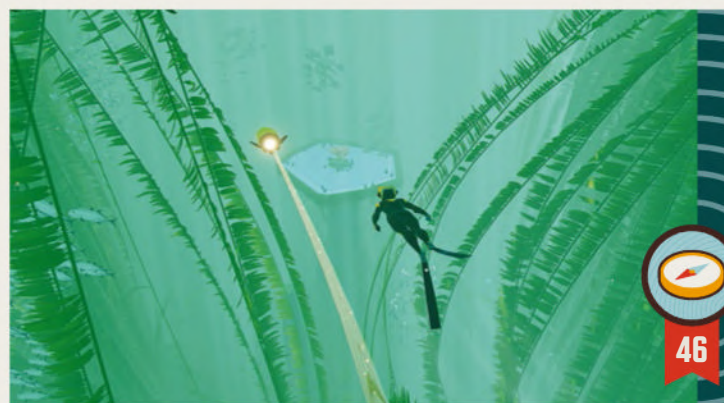
The basic gameplay is instantly familiar to anyone who's played contemporary Lego games; characters have

special abilities, like Chell's Portal gun or Scooby Doo's digging, and players have to use them to solve rudimentary puzzles. The highlight here is not only the weird crossovers, but in the game's Toy Pad base. Unlike many games in this budding genre, it's interactive as well. Players must keep a close eye on it to solve puzzles (saving characters from spells, for example), and find hidden objects.

Lego Dimensions might be relatively late to the party, but they brought treats for everyone. ✦ *Jeff Clark*

ABZÛ

Deep waters



✦ **PLATFORM:** PlayStation 4, PC ✦ **STYLE:** 1-Player Adventure ✦ **PUBLISHER:** 505 Games
✦ **DEVELOPER:** Giant Squid ✦ **RELEASE:** 2016

We got our hands-on the E3 demo last issue, but Abzû's wondrous seas did not disappoint a second time around. In fact, I was even more struck by many of the smaller details that enrich the underwater environments. The fine grains of sand at the sea floor. The majesty of multiple schools of fish swimming and intertwining with each other. The way imposing kelp forests gently sway and react as the

diver passes through their long stalks.

The demo ended differently than the one we played. Instead of our drone ominously being crushed by a shark, the demo concludes by opening up into a much wider reef in which you can visit specific points of interest. These branch off to other areas of the game for exploration of its mysteries and uncovering your purpose.

✦ *Matthew State*



TRANSFORMERS: DEVASTATION

A hard hit of nostalgia

★ PLATFORM: PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC ★ STYLE: 1-Player Action ★ PUBLISHER: Activision ★ DEVELOPER: Platinum Games ★ RELEASE: Fall

For many children of the '80s, the Transformers cartoon offered an early taste of serialized science fiction storytelling, complete with outlandish technology, character betrayals, and thwarted plans for world domination. Platinum Games clearly has affection for that early incarnation of the Transformers, as the newly announced Devastation embraces the look and story vibe that governed the adventures of those defining robots in disguise.

A bright, cel-shaded aesthetic powers the visuals of playable characters Optimus Prime, Bumblebee, Sideswipe, Wheeljack, and Grimlock. Characters pop into idle animations that reflect their overblown character archetypes, from Prime's authoritative crossed arms to Bumblebee's relaxed hands behind his head. Many of the cartoon's original voice actors return, including Peter Cullen and Frank Welker. Behind the action, an appropriately thrumming metal rock

soundtrack accompanies the battles.

The story finds the Autobots working to once again thwart Megatron, who has happened upon mysterious technology that is cyberforming Earth into another version of the Transformers home planet. In one scene, Optimus Prime descends into a lost Cybertronian ship deep beneath the Earth, fighting past a horde of Insecticons before confronting Soundwave and his tapes in a furious boss battle. In another sequence, Bumblebee drives circles around enemy Decepticons on an embattled bridge. A third level finds Sideswipe's slick sports car form chasing after Megatron, who is crouched in the back of dump truck-formed Longhaul, firing fusion blasts. Most exciting, one section of the demo had us confronting the massive combiner robot Devastator in an impressive battle in a city's central square.

Action stays close to form for Platinum, whose previous work includes Bayonetta

and Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance. Much of combat is melee combo driven, with special moves for transforming into vehicle form and slamming into enemies. Other character specific moves take advantage of the characters' morphing physique, like Prime summoning his trailer for a room-clearing donut spin. In addition to brawling mechanics, Devastation also includes ranged combat, providing everything from sniper rifles to slow-gel launchers. All told, the game boasts 150 distinct melee and ranged weapons, of which four can be equipped by a given character at one time.

Beyond combat, Transformers: Devastation includes a leveling and upgrade system. Each of the playable leads can increase their eight stats through play, as well as acquire and improve weaponry that scales in quality from 1 to 99. Weapon synthesizing combines the best traits of two weapons into a new and improved version, while timing-based

minigames allow the creation of equippable tech items that boost everything from health to item find.

In keeping with its cartoon inspiration, Platinum's game is lighthearted yet action-packed, and I witnessed a number of allusions to the source material, from obscure character references to nods at '80s arcade game culture. But even with the strong nostalgic undercurrent, the sequences I played were characterized by responsive and smartly paced action that should appeal to any action gamer. Platinum promises a 50-level challenge mode for hardcore players looking for an additional layer of difficulty.

When all the characters, story missions, and extra modes are added together, there's good reason to hope that Devastation will offer the vision of Transformers that lives in our rose tinted rear view of the '80s cartoon.

★ *Matt Miller*



Platinum's take on the Transformers is a single-player experience, but expect A.I.-driven companions to join the fight



The calculating Soundwave and his collection of tapes make for an impressive boss battle



GIGANTIC

Leviathan versus leviathan

✦ PLATFORM: Xbox One, PC ✦ STYLE: 10-Player MOBA ✦ PUBLISHER: Microsoft Studios, Motiga ✦ DEVELOPER: Motiga ✦ RELEASE: 2015

The team at Motiga reluctantly self-identifies Gigantic as a MOBA. It seems many developers don't want to be seen competing directly with juggernauts like League of Legends, or be written off as trying to capitalize on a profitable and popular style of game. E3 showed off some new gameplay and characters for the multiplayer game, and while it's undeniably a MOBA,

I understand why Motiga feels it can separate itself from the ever-growing pack.

Gigantic borrows many core mechanics from MOBAs, like mid-match leveling and a diverse set of characters. However, the moment-to-moment gameplay is third-person action. Our demo showcased Wu, the melee-focused frog. Motiga describes him as a squishy character who is not

the fastest or strongest, but will hopefully appeal to fans of fighting games. He's a high-skill character who doesn't fire guns, but can leap in and out of fistfights quickly. He jumps from spot to spot like a sling-shot is propelling his body. The hypnotic movement made me jealous of the person showing the game; I wanted to try him out.

Another mechanic that sets Gigantic

apart is the bases you're trying to overcome and protect. They are enormous mobile creatures who have no problem placing themselves right in the middle of the firefight. To see your beast help you take on the other team, or watch it grapple with your competitor's leviathan is awe-inspiring and distracting in the best way.

✦ *Style Hilliard*



THE FLAME IN THE FLOOD

Up that one creek without a paddle

✦ PLATFORM: Xbox One, PC ✦ STYLE: 1-Player Action ✦ PUBLISHER: Microsoft Studios, The Molasses Flood ✦ DEVELOPER: The Molasses Flood ✦ RELEASE: TBA

The Flame in the Flood has an impressive team backing it. Former Irrational and Bungie members who worked on games including BioShock and Halo are behind the project, and fans took notice to successfully Kickstart it late last year.

It's a survival game where you and your dog Aesop are traveling on raft down a river, stopping periodically to gather

supplies to keep your energy, thirst, warmth, and hunger at reasonable levels. The game has an attractive art style that demands exploration of its difficult world.

Everything plays into survival, from what you craft to where you dock your raft. If something goes terribly wrong – which it will – you start over on a new procedurally generated river.

✦ *Style Hilliard*

KING'S QUEST: A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

A promising start for a long-awaited adventure



✦ PLATFORM: PlayStation 4, Xbox One, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC
✦ STYLE: 1-Player Adventure ✦ PUBLISHER: Sierra Entertainment
✦ DEVELOPER: The Odd Gentlemen ✦ RELEASE: July

King Graham is no longer a young man, and his days of adventuring are seemingly done. Fortunately for his granddaughter Gwendolyn (and the player), Graham's mind is as sharp as ever. In The Odd Gentlemen's take on the beloved adventure-game pioneer, the familiar hero provides advice to his young relative by revisiting his memories while she excitedly goads him and asks questions.

Unlike the linear days of yore, players have a chance to determine how Graham solves the myriad challenges

that he encounters. He can take on tasks using compassion, subterfuge, or his comparatively limited strength. Players can expect a wide array of branching paths, which we saw in an encounter with a bridge troll. Graham convinces the creature that he's also a troll, and he proves it via a dancing minigame. Depending on how you play, you may or may not even know moments like these exist.

King's Quest's return is off to a good start, and we're excited for our return to Daventry. ✦ *Jeff Cork*



Review

gameinformer
GAME OF THE MONTH

94 Batman: Arkham Knight

Batman: Arkham Knight's story is littered with twists and turns, and serves as the centerpiece of Rocksteady's conclusion to the Arkham series of games. The Scarecrow's fear toxin poses a great threat to the Dark Knight, but is just a small plot point in this remarkable tale. The game continually throws interesting side content at the player, but exploring it proves difficult when you just want to see where the core story goes next.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

| | | | |
|-----------|--|----------|---|
| 10 | Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed. | 5 | Flawed. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience. |
| 9 | Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition. | 4 | Bad. While some things work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole. |
| 8 | Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so. | 3 | Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme. |
| 7 | Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end. | 2 | Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all. |
| 6 | Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience. | 1 | Forcing iconic video game characters to play sportsball. |

AWARDS

| | |
|--|--|
| gameinformer PLATINUM | Awarded to games that score between 9.75 and 10 |
| gameinformer GOLD | Awarded to games that score between 9 and 9.5 |
| gameinformer SILVER | Awarded to games that score between 8.5 and 8.75 |
| gameinformer GAME OF THE MONTH | The award for the most outstanding game in the issue |



SO SWEET YOU
CAN'T HELP BUT CHEW.



A Sweet Piece of Fun.

Batman: Arkham Knight

The sum of all fears

9.5

gamerformer
GOLD

gamerformer
GAME OF THE MONTH

Style 1-Player Action Publisher WB Games Developer Rocksteady Studios Release June 23 Rating M

PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» Concept

The final installment in Rocksteady's "Arkham" series. The story steals the spotlight, diving deep inside of The Dark Knight's mind for a cerebral and terrifying journey

» Graphics

A stunning version of Gotham loaded with tiny details and impressive environmental destruction. The character models are eerily realistic, and are captured beautifully through well-scripted cinematic moments

» Sound

Some of the dialogue is hokey, but the all-star lineup of voice actors mostly delivers. Scarecrow, Arkham Knight, and a few other secret characters shine

» Playability

Every gameplay mechanic is better refined and balanced, leading to the best playing Batman game yet. The Batmobile, unfortunately, is a part of far too many blasé tank encounters

» Entertainment

Outside of a couple of irritations, this is one of the most enjoyable Batman stories I've experienced

» Replay Value

Moderately High

Batman: Arkham Knight is a narrative juggernaut crammed to capacity with excellent heroes, villains, battles, drama, humor, fan service, and the mother of all plot twists (you won't see this one coming, folks). Arkham Knight is easily the most engaging story in the series – a tale that caters just as much to people seeking a high-octane, rock 'em sock 'em superhero war as it does those cerebral storyphiles looking for a jaw-dropping narrative. Outside of one of Batman's wonderful toys having a flat tire for a significant chunk of this experience, Arkham Knight is a welcome assault of comic-book bliss and stunning new-gen visuals.

Most of the videos and information shared prior to Arkham Knight's launch are from its introductory moments and side content. Rocksteady Studios, WB Games, and everyone involved in the project kept the majority of the story under lock and key. Once the secret plot developments take root, just looking at the TV or hearing the game for a few seconds can ruin one of the coolest twists I've seen in a Batman story. It happens within the first hour or two of this adventure, and remains a constant for most of the experience. Through that wild development and others, we see Rocksteady at the height of its game for visual and aural storytelling, going to great lengths to find the best perspective for a shot, whether it's from first-person, third, panned, or through the eyes of a different character.

Without giving away any spoilers (of which there is an exhaustive supply), this chapter picks up nine months after the events of Arkham City, showing how Gotham has healed itself after the death of one of Arkham Asylum's perennial guests. Peace has returned to the city's streets, allowing people to leave the safety of their homes to enjoy the nightlife and arts in boroughs that were once only for people with a death wish or sinister intentions.

That's when Halloween night brings a grim reminder of the past. Scarecrow resurfaces, and he wants to destroy Gotham with a fear toxin. The citizens have until the next morning to leave. Of the 6.3 million people that call Gotham home, not many remain when Batman begins his hunt for Scarecrow. A mysterious character named Arkham Knight complicates matters and unleashes an army against the Caped Crusader. It's a cheesy video game setup that is used to quickly establish an axis



and – to a lesser extent – explain why the city's streets are free of ordinary people.

Gotham is a beautifully realized playground for Batman, ranging from a borough filled with century-old architecture to another glowing with a bombardment of Times Square-like advertisements and light. He can glide overhead with ease thanks to an increase in speed and refinement in the controls. He can also take to the streets in his iconic Batmobile, a vehicle that controls remarkably well and is almost as fully featured as any lead character in a game. For roughly three quarters of the game, it's the equivalent of Robin – a sidekick that does some cool stuff, but is mostly annoying. I love how it's used for puzzle solving and specific environment navigation, but its combat applications disappoint for the majority of the game, and they are called upon often.

The Batmobile doubles as a tank that glides across the ground effortlessly in 360 degrees. Its opponents are usually rival tanks, which are a part of Scarecrow and Arkham Knight's ridiculous army (which must have cost them billions). The Batmobile packs a satisfying punch with its cannon, but is slow on the reload, making the battles chug along. Batman's hand-to-hand combat is instantly satisfying (and always has been), and ramps up in difficulty as the game progresses. The Batmobile's combat eventually becomes intense and twitch-worthy, but you spend a significant amount of time slogging through easy fights to get there.

When he's not lollygagging in his car, Batman is a force to be reckoned with. And he isn't alone; Catwoman, Nightwing, Robin, and Azrael are all playable for certain combat sequences. The player can switch between Batman and one of these allies, or can call upon them for stylish tag-team finishers. I found combat to be much easier than previous entries, as the timing window for counters appears to be longer. Batman can also freely beat the snot of downed foes with standard punches (although the somewhat slow "ground takedown" is still an option).

Batman's gadgets are used in ways we've seen before, but not as frequently. Yes, he rips

the covers off of vents, hacks security doors, and needs to use his grapple line to zip across vast chasms, but these familiar navigation elements are tapped sparingly. Most of the story mission environments are loaded with variety, or play off of that excellent plot twist to sew in unexpected sequences or dramatic shifts in visual design. Batman unveils a couple of new toys (which I won't spoil) that bring interesting diversionary tactics to stealth combat and more. Detective vision finds new life through a nicely designed murder mystery involving a villain that is a deep-cut for Batman fans, but is used largely for the same song and dance from the previous Arkham titles. It's a necessity for studying enemy formations and searching for secrets.

While many of Batman's iconic foes get face time, there aren't many traditional boss battles against them. Two-Face is a standard enemy in a stealth sequence, and he can be taken down just like any other foe. Other battles against characters are tied to cinematic moments, which may or may not require input from you. All of the final exchanges with villains are well thought out, and you never know what to expect from them. The Batmobile unloads ammo against bosses with health bars, but most hand-to-hand boss conflicts are free of repeating the same tactics numerous times.

At the end of it all, Batman: Arkham Knight delivers a great sense of closure for this series. Rocksteady leaves a few plot threads dangling to tease and taunt us, but the grim tale that started all the way back in Arkham Asylum is done. I walked away from Arkham Knight shocked, satisfied, and in dire need of someone to discuss the story with. Rocksteady built a special experience that dazzles with its cleverness, intelligence, and ability to shift from kick-ass Batman moments to emotional gut punches to scenes stripped straight from some of Batman's greatest comic book stories. Lock yourself away, avoid social media and friends, and finish this game. You won't want this one spoiled for you. » **Andrew Reiner**

This review pertains to the PS4 version. The game is also available on Xbox One and PC



You Must Build A Boat

She's seaworthy



Style 1-Player Puzzle Publisher EightyEight Games Developer EightyEight Games Release June 4 Rating 4+

EightyEight Games' endless-runner-meets-match-three masterpiece, 10000000 finally has a sequel in *You Must Build A Boat*.

Your Pitfall Harry-inspired avatar teams up with some monsters to make a boat that gets bigger as you progress. Newly recruited crew members populate the hold, opening shops and granting special bonuses. All this relies on gathering resources by running through dungeons, following the same basic structure as the original.

Your character runs across the top of the screen while you match up attacks and defensive tiles on the puzzle board below to help him run and fight his way through. Quests offer tasks to complete each run, like making it a certain distance. The best ones force you to master a specific element rather than counting on luck. The latter can get annoying, but the investment system keeps you going.

Between runs you visit with the ever-expanding shopkeepers to buy upgrades. The number of things to buy constantly grows, sucking you into an addictive puzzle-and-shop loop.

Core gameplay systems have been deftly expanded and improved from the original. Tile sliding feels responsive and quick, and you can move them while they're in the middle of clearing to create additional matches if you're

skilled enough. New drone-like traps fly at you with a specific tile type to match before it gets there. If you're too late, you receive a nasty status effect. These are a pain, but train you to keep tabs on the action up top. Sometimes these things screw you over, but in a game full of random elements, it's all about how you adapt.

Gameplay remains compelling throughout the campaign, but the investment system loses luster toward the end. I was always in need of some resources and overflowing with others. You'll also get stuck waiting for the rare Dust item to drop. It feels great to finally finish the titular boat, but the only thing you can do afterward is dryly grind for remaining upgrades and crew. You can also start over with a harder difficulty, but you'll lose everything you've earned. You earn a rank at the end, but without information on how it compares to others, you don't know whether to be pleased or ashamed.

Despite the slight drop-off toward the end and the low replay value, *You Must Build A Boat* is a great experience while it lasts. For a good six to nine hours, building a boat will indeed become the most important task in your life. » **Bryan Vore**

This review was based on the iOS version



9

PC • iOS • Android

» Concept

A follow-up to the puzzle hit 10000000 with a deeper, more addicting experience

» Graphics

The pixelated look is charming, and tiles are slightly bigger this time around

» Sound

A catchy chiptune soundtrack will stick in your head long after completing the game

» Playability

Touch-controlled tile sliding feels responsive, and the tiles clear quickly

» Entertainment

Your addiction to this game will burn white hot for a couple days, then drop off after completion

» Replay Value

Moderately Low

Devil May Cry 4: Special Edition

An expanded encore



Style 1-Player Action Publisher Capcom Developer Capcom Release June 23 Rating M

With the recent wave of re-released games from the last generation, we know what to expect when see words like "definitive" and "remastered" in the title. Those terms tell us that, apart from visual upgrades and small changes, the games are as we remember them. The "special edition" attached to this version of *Devil May Cry 4* is different. Yes, it looks better and runs smoother (among other tweaks), but the addition of three playable characters – Vergil, Lady, and Trish – adds new companions to this trip down memory lane.

Vergil's playstyle is the most familiar, since he's based on his incarnation from *Devil May Cry 3: Special Edition*. He has some additional tricks to learn, but his style still leans toward precision. I like how his concentration meter encourages calculated assaults, but he still has the weapons and abilities to completely tear through opponents when you get on a roll. Vergil is the most traditional of the new offerings, but he's also incredibly satisfying – especially for longtime fans of the series.

If you want to focus less on finesse, you should start playing as Lady. With her huge bazooka, I was afraid that she would feel too gimmicky, but her emphasis on ranged combat forces you to approach encounters differently. Instead of getting up close, you're controlling the crowd and keeping your distance to buy

time to charge up your big damage-dealers. This new dynamic makes her unique, effectively removing the melee component and infusing old content with a fun new angle.

To use Trish, you need to start with Lady. They share the same split between missions that Nero and Dante do, with each one tackling different levels. Trish is interesting because you don't manually swap her weapons. This makes her seem simple at first, but combined with her array of abilities, it makes her a complicated character to control. Making Trish do something cool is easy, but making her do what you want her to is harder. I still enjoyed her combat style, but for the kind of precision required to use her well, I'd rather stick to Vergil.

The new playable cast is the main draw, but they don't successfully divert attention from all

of *DMC 4*'s old problems. The whole second half is replaying the levels you beat in the first half (including the same bosses) under slightly different circumstances. That remains the major issue, but occasional bad camera angles and vague objectives still left me frustrated in some missions. The agonizing board-game-meets-boss-gauntlet near the end also deflates the fun. These were all problems in 2008, and they have only gotten worse with age.

Stylish action games have evolved a lot in recent years, and this release skillfully straddles the line between new and old. The extra characters offer more variety and versatility that any fan of the genre should appreciate. They don't completely mask the other problems, but the inventive twists on the content ultimately outweigh the legacy complaints. » **Joe Juba**



8.5

PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» Concept

Three extra characters give a familiar adventure an infusion of new blood

» Graphics

Everything looks great and runs smoothly, even when you're surrounded by demons

» Sound

Music and sound effects are not highlights of this re-release

» Playability

Some of the characters feel better than others, but they all add something different and fun

» Entertainment

Combat is as cool as ever, though the basic structure feels outdated

» Replay Value

Moderately High

Splatoon

An inking of a good time

7.75

Wii U

» Concept

Use a variety of weapons to win messy battles that largely consist of spreading your color of ink around

» Graphics

The art style is cute and colorful and remains appealing several hours in

» Sound

Equal parts infectious and high-octane, the soundtrack fits the experience

» Playability

The accessible gameplay makes the online battles a good time for nearly everyone, and the single-player mode is a great addition to the online suite

» Entertainment

An enjoyable experience, but it needs more content and some streamlined design

» Replay Value

High

Nintendo's 2002 platformer, Super Mario Sunshine, gave players a singular mission: Clean up the world with a water pack. Splatoon, on the other hand, is all about coating the world with ink. While this messy disposition may seem like Sunshine's antithesis, the inspiration of Mario's adventure abounds in Splatoon. The controls, the physics, and even the level design deliver a familiar level of Nintendo polish.

Splatoon puts you in the shoes of Inklings, human-like characters with the ability to transform into squids. With a focus on multiplayer, you square off against another team, blasting paint everywhere and coating the map with your team's color, making rounds unpredictable and fun. One moment, you're running around as an Inklings covering the map and splattering opponents. The next, you're a squid submerged in ink and cruising to the next area.

Steering the squid as it speeds along ink-covered pathways and walls is a blast. Splatoon defaults to motion controls, but they're unreliable and awkward, so I recommend switching to the more precise standard option. With the developers hitting the mark so squarely with the traditional controls, the online matches are fun from the first round.

As of this writing, players can battle it out in two online modes. Turf war puts Inklings in two teams as they engage in a struggle to coat the map with as much of their ink as possible. The action is so speedy within this mode that the absence of any type of voice chat capabilities isn't a major issue.

The other online mode, splat zones, brings a slightly different twist on the formula of turf war. Rather than painting the entire battlefield with your ink, these matches focus on controlling one small area of the map, making the battles more intense with all players converging on the same location.

Splat zones is currently relegated to the ranked battles section, which doesn't unlock until you reach level 10. With your success and leveling in ranked battles being based entirely on your team's performance, this is where Splatoon's lack of voice chat is most damaging.

You are thrown back into the action quickly after a match, delivering a rapid-fire experience. However, you need to back out of the matchmaking lobby in order to change your equipment or weapon. If you're playing with a good group, but want to switch your loadout, it means backing out and almost certainly losing the group in the process.

This issue is accentuated by the fact that you cannot create an online match with your friends. You can currently join a single friend who is already in matchmaking, but Nintendo isn't planning to add party-based functionality until August. Those who really want to play with friends can do so using the local one-on-one multiplayer mode, which presents you with a single underwhelming challenge: Pop more balloons than the other player.

Your multiplayer performance earns you money to unlock more equipment. Each item



Amiibo Functionality

Using the three compatible Amiibo figures, you can access challenges that put special twists on levels from the single-player mode in order to unlock exclusive gear for multiplayer. If you use the Inklings Boy Amiibo, you complete these stages and boss fights using a melee-based ink roller as your primary weapon. Use an Inklings Girl Amiibo, and you face the same challenges with the long-range charger ink gun as your primary weapon. The most enjoyable challenge maps come when you use the Squid Amiibo, which lets you play through the same maps yet again, except your character can morph into the powerful Kraken.

has a unique set of abilities, ranging from increased damage from your primary armament to an attribute that makes your ammo deplete at a slower rate. As you level up, you gain access to more weapons with a wide range of capabilities and super powers. With so many options, I excitedly backed out of the matchmaking lobby to check out what was new in the store whenever I gained a level.

Multiplayer is important to the Splatoon package, but it's oddly barebones; launching with just the two modes and only five maps. Rather than delivering all five maps at once, a rotational system feeds players two maps at a time for each mode. With so few maps to begin with, it's detrimental to restrict the ones that can be used, especially when players are expected to spend the bulk of their time in these modes.

While the multiplayer falls short on content, the single-player campaign is surprisingly

engaging, featuring 27 creative stages. These levels feature a strong mix of platforming, puzzle-solving, and shooting. The levels feel influenced by the Mario Galaxy series, with that same inspiration being carried into the boss fights. Whether you need avoid being eaten by a submerged boss and then smash in its teeth to loft a bomb in its mouth, or dodge a rolling beast while coating areas of your own ink to get it stuck, the boss battles require you to think about your plan of attack.

Splatoon has all the trappings of something fans have wanted from Nintendo for a long time: a unique IP that shows Nintendo can still dream up new experiences. As entertaining as it is fast-paced, Splatoon is a strong addition to the Wii U lineup. My enjoyment of what Splatoon has to offer is only offset by Nintendo's scant offering out of the gate.

» Brian Shea



Heroes Of The Storm

Majestic multiplayer mayhem



Style 1-Player MOBA (10-player online) **Publisher** Blizzard Entertainment **Developer** Blizzard Entertainment **Release** June 2 **Rating** T

9.25

PC • Mac

» Concept

Play as characters from the Blizzard universe in a multitude of matchups and maps

» Graphics

Vibrant and detailed, bringing heroes and maps to life

» Sound

Outside of the battle itself, each character's voice and dialogue enhance the experience

» Playability

Highly accessible for those looking to try the MOBA genre, it takes aim at eliminating the burden of knowledge associated with knowing hundreds of characters and items before playing

» Entertainment

The focus is on the fun, and it shows. Whether you're just looking to revisit your favorite characters from Blizzard franchises in new ways or are ready for a more competitive experience, various gameplay modes allow players to enjoy things at any level of engagement

» Replay Value

High

Jaina Proudmoore summons a water elemental as Azmodan's demonic army prepares to assault nearby towers. Kael'thas calls upon the Phoenix God Al'ar and sends Illidan and Kerrigan flying into the air, and Sgt. Hammer sets her siege-tank sights on a dazed Diablo. Elsewhere on the battlefield, an annoying-but-adorable baby murloc named Murky is splashing around, wasting the enemy's time and resources. This isn't some outlandish Blizzard fan fiction; it's a typical game of Heroes of the Storm, an incredibly accessible MOBA that taps into the heart and soul of Blizzard's established franchises and brings them together for fast-paced and fun matches.

Heroes of the Storm puts you on a five-person team with the end goal of destroying the opposing team's base, complete with lanes of auto-spawning fodder that march toward the enemy base with unwavering devotion. Like other MOBAs, the highlights of each match are the team vs. team interactions, with big ability combos, exciting chases, and daring raids into enemy territory. While Heroes of the Storm may appear to be similar to other genre offerings, significant differences make it more fun and easier to delve into. It is not as mechanically demanding as other MOBAs, and this works for it in a big way, especially for new players.

In stark contrast to other games in the genre, there are no items to memorize or purchase during the game, and no last-hitting (scoring the last hit on a monster to acquire the experience and/or gold) lane minions. Team experience is shared so that no single player can be locked out of the game through continued harassment, and there's no farming component that leads to games dragging on and on as teams prepare their "carry" (a character usually weak in the early game that scales well with items and abilities) for the endgame.

The action is constant from the first moments to the last. Heroes of the Storm is completely team-oriented – even if you're a rock star, you

won't have a huge impact on matches by yourself. This isn't a bad thing, but it can dull the "Whoa, look how awesome I did last game" factor, as things are more of a combined effort.

Heroes of the Storm offers a wide variety of battlegrounds, and in many of the modes you won't know which one you're playing on until your game starts (though more competitive modes let you know beforehand so you can prepare a suitable team). These maps each have their own special flavors and themes, but they all have players working together to complete objectives like collecting special resources or capture points. These objectives provide the motivation to get battles involving many players happening early and often, providing hefty advantages to the team that can edge out the other. This balance works immaculately for driving the action – especially in public games where there may not be any communication; since the goals in any given map are known, players can instantly size up the situation and determine what they need to be doing.

While it's important to know where things spawn and how the maps work, loading screens provide essential bullet points, so you're never going in blind. After a few games, you understand that you need to be fully healed and ready to explore the mines when it comes time to go building your Grave Golem. This understanding of maps, objectives, positioning, and timing expands as you move into more competitive modes, where you start selecting your hero and abilities to suit the objective-oriented engagements.

The attention paid to bringing characters from the Blizzard universe to life in Heroes of the Storm is wonderful. The voice and ability selections are perfect; despite being pulled from different franchises and genres, the cast feels right at home inside Heroes of the Storm. Iconic characters have been distilled down to signature abilities that call back to their appearances in other titles. Sgt. Hammer is a

great example of this – even far away from the confines of StarCraft, you feel like you're playing an actual siege tank, complete with siege mode. Blizzard perfectly captures the essence of its heroes, from Nova slinking in the shadows planning a perfect ghost snipe to Uther bringing down the light on your foes while healing your allies.

While many characters fit clearly defined roles in team composition like tanky initiators, fragile damage dealers, or supports, Blizzard isn't shying away from playing with wild concepts and cool ideas that break the mold. The Zerg evolution master Abathur, The Lost Vikings, and Murky offer more advanced gameplay styles. Abathur can dictate the flow of battle from afar like a real-time strategy commander; in fact, many new players simply assume the Abathur is sitting AFK in the base. The Lost Vikings are three characters in one, leading to some interesting opportunities on maps that require you to toss a character into the Dragon Knight or Garden Terror, or "soak" experience across multiple lanes while your entire team pushes hard into a single location. Murky is a frail baby murloc who dies easily and often, but he can immediately respawn and continue annoying your opponents while your "real" teammates either do work across the map or take advantage of the enemies wasting their abilities on your "mrrglrlrlrmgrrr!" meanderings. These diversions from standard archetypes add a great deal of fun while still feeling balanced.

Heroes of the Storm succeeds like so many other Blizzard titles by taking what makes a genre great and distilling things down to the fun, and it does so with plenty of charm and character. With quick and action-packed games, Heroes of the Storm is accessible to new players, but with enough depth to ensure that you are still learning new ways to use your abilities in different situations and battlegrounds after hundreds of games. As with many games in the genre, Heroes of the Storm is best experienced with friends. » **Daniel Tack**

PLAYSTATION 4

| | | |
|---|------|--------|
| Apotheon | 9 | Apr-15 |
| Assassin's Creed Chronicles: China | 7.25 | Jun-15 |
| Axiom Verge | 9.25 | May-15 |
| Battlefield: Hardline | 8 | May-15 |
| Bloodborne | 9.75 | May-15 |
| Citizens of Earth | 7.5 | Mar-15 |
| Crew, The | 7 | Feb-15 |
| Dark Souls II: Scholar of the First Sin | 9 | May-15 |
| Devil May Cry: Definitive Edition | 9 | Apr-15 |
| Dragon Ball Xenoverse | 7.5 | May-15 |
| Dying Light | 8.5 | Apr-15 |
| Evolve | 8.5 | Apr-15 |
| Final Fantasy Type-0 HD | 6 | May-15 |
| Game of Thrones Episode 1: Iron from Ice | 8.5 | Feb-15 |
| Game of Thrones Episode 2: The Lost Lords | 8 | Apr-15 |
| Game of Thrones Episode 3: The Sword in the Darkness | 8.25 | Jun-15 |
| Geometry Wars 3: Dimensions | 8 | Feb-15 |
| Golf Club, The | 8 | Oct-14 |
| Grim Fandango Remastered | 7 | Mar-15 |
| Hand of Fate | 8.75 | Mar-15 |

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|---|------|--------|
| Helldivers | 8.5 | May-15 |
| Hotline Miami 2: Wrong Number | 8.5 | May-15 |
| Life is Strange: Episode 1 – Chrysalis | 8.5 | Mar-15 |
| Life is Strange: Episode 2 – Out of Time | 6.5 | May-15 |
| MLB 15: The Show | 8 | Jun-15 |
| Mortal Kombat X | 9.25 | Jun-15 |
| Never Alone | 6.5 | Feb-15 |
| OlliOlli2: Welcome to Ollivood | 8 | May-15 |
| Order: 1886, The | 7.75 | Apr-15 |
| Project Cars | 8.5 | Jul-15 |
| Resident Evil HD | 9.5 | Feb-15 |
| Resident Evil Revelations 2 | 8 | May-15 |
| Saints Row: Gat Out of Hell | 7.5 | Mar-15 |
| Secret Ponchos | 5 | Feb-15 |
| Super Stardust Ultra | 7.25 | May-15 |
| Switch Galaxy Ultra | 5 | Mar-15 |
| Tales from the Borderlands: Episode 1 – Zero Sum | 6.5 | Feb-15 |
| Tales from the Borderlands: Episode 2 – Atlas Mugged | 6 | Jun-15 |
| Titan Souls | 8.5 | Jun-15 |
| Tower of Guns | 7.75 | Jun-15 |
| White Night | 7.5 | May-15 |
| Witcher 3: Wild Hunt, The | 9.75 | Jul-15 |
| Wolfenstein: The Old Blood | 7.5 | Jul-15 |

XBOX ONE

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|---|------|--------|
| #IDARB | 8.25 | Mar-15 |
| Assassin's Creed Chronicles: China | 7.25 | Jun-15 |
| Battlefield: Hardline | 8 | May-15 |
| Crew, The | 7 | Feb-15 |
| Dark Souls II: Scholar of the First Sin | 9 | May-15 |
| Devil May Cry: Definitive Edition | 9 | Apr-15 |
| Dragon Ball Xenoverse | 7.5 | May-15 |
| Dying Light | 8.5 | Apr-15 |
| Escapists, The | 6 | Apr-15 |
| Evolve | 8.5 | Apr-15 |
| Final Fantasy Type-0 HD | 6 | May-15 |
| Game of Thrones Episode 1: Iron from Ice | 8.5 | Feb-15 |
| Game of Thrones Episode 2: The Lost Lords | 8 | Apr-15 |
| Game of Thrones Episode 3: The Sword in the Darkness | 8.25 | Jun-15 |
| Geometry Wars 3: Dimensions | 8 | Feb-15 |
| Hand of Fate | 8.75 | Mar-15 |
| Life is Strange: Episode 1 – Chrysalis | 8.5 | Mar-15 |
| Life is Strange: Episode 2 – Out of Time | 6.5 | May-15 |
| Mortal Kombat X | 9.25 | Jun-15 |

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|---|------|--------|
| Never Alone | 6.5 | Feb-15 |
| Ori and the Blind Forest | 9.5 | May-15 |
| Project Cars | 8.5 | Jul-15 |
| Resident Evil HD | 9.5 | Feb-15 |
| Resident Evil Revelations 2 | 8 | May-15 |
| Saints Row: Gat Out of Hell | 7.5 | Mar-15 |
| ScreamRide | 6.5 | May-15 |
| State of Decay: Year-One Survival Edition | 7.5 | Jul-15 |
| Tales from the Borderlands: Episode 1 – Zero Sum | 6.5 | Feb-15 |
| Tales from the Borderlands: Episode 2 – Atlas Mugged | 6 | Jun-15 |
| Tower of Guns | 7.75 | Jun-15 |
| White Night | 7.5 | May-15 |
| Witcher 3: Wild Hunt, The | 9.75 | Jul-15 |
| Wolfenstein: The Old Blood | 7.5 | Jul-15 |

PLAYSTATION 3

| | | |
|---|------|--------|
| Dark Souls II: Scholar of the First Sin | 9 | May-15 |
| Dragon Ball Xenoverse | 7.5 | May-15 |
| Game of Thrones Episode 1: Iron from Ice | 8.5 | Feb-15 |
| Game of Thrones Episode 2: The Lost Lords | 8 | Apr-15 |
| Game of Thrones Episode 3: The Sword in the Darkness | 8.25 | Jun-15 |
| Life is Strange: Episode 1 – Chrysalis | 8.5 | Mar-15 |
| Life is Strange: Episode 2 – Out of Time | 6.5 | May-15 |
| Mortal Kombat X | 9.25 | Jun-15 |

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| Life is Strange: Episode 1 – Chrysalis | 8.5 | Mar-15 |
| Life is Strange: Episode 2 – Out of Time | 6.5 | May-15 |
| Resident Evil HD | 9.5 | Feb-15 |
| Resident Evil Revelations 2 | 8 | May-15 |
| Tales from the Borderlands: Episode 1 – Zero Sum | 6.5 | Feb-15 |
| Tales from the Borderlands: Episode 2 – Atlas Mugged | 6 | Jun-15 |

XBOX 360

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| Crew, The | 7 | Feb-15 |
| Dark Souls II: Scholar of the First Sin | 9 | May-15 |
| Dragon Ball Xenoverse | 7.5 | May-15 |
| Game of Thrones Episode 1: Iron from Ice | 8.5 | Feb-15 |
| Game of Thrones Episode 2: The Lost Lords | 8 | Apr-15 |
| Game of Thrones Episode 3: The Sword in the Darkness | 8.25 | Jun-15 |
| Life is Strange: Episode 1 – Chrysalis | 8.5 | Mar-15 |
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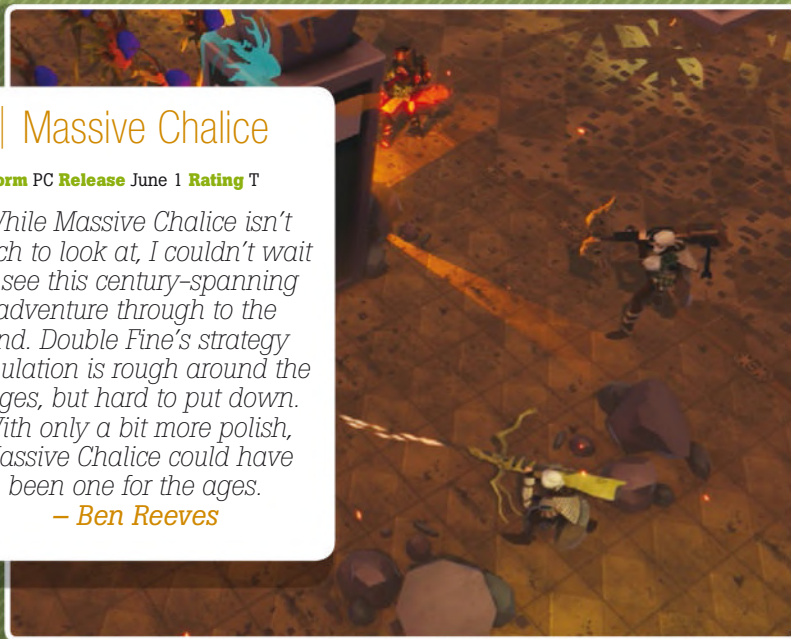
the score

8 | Massive Chalice

Platform PC Release June 1 Rating T

While Massive Chalice isn't much to look at, I couldn't wait to see this century-spanning adventure through to the end. Double Fine's strategy simulation is rough around the edges, but hard to put down. With only a bit more polish, Massive Chalice could have been one for the ages.

– Ben Reeves



7.75 | Ronin

Platform PC Release June 30 Rating NR

If you love stylish action, but always find yourself wanting a little extra time to figure out the next tactical move, Ronin could be just what you're looking for. – Matt Miller

7.25 | Magicka 2

Platform PC Release May 26 Rating NR

Magicka 2 delivers more of the magi-mayhem that the series has become known for, but doesn't really take things in any new or interesting directions. If you enjoyed the first game you will probably enjoy this new journey. – Daniel Tack

6 | Lego Jurassic World

Platform PS4, Xbox One, PS3, 360, PC Release June 12 Rating E10+

When it comes to experimentation, this title marks a first for the whole Jurassic Park franchise: It doesn't go far enough. The action rarely deviates from previous Lego titles, but when it does, it goes in the wrong direction. – Joe Juba

8 | Game of Thrones Episode 4: Sons of Winter

Platform PS4, Xbox One, PS3, 360, PC Release May 26 Rating M

Unlike previous episodes, Sons of Winter shows the good guys making progress. This feat will likely be short-lived in the end, but we have a little while to enjoy the feeling of "maybe there's a chance." – Andrew Reiner

5.75 | Sunset

Platform PC Release May 21 Rating NR

For such a fresh and intriguing concept, the unexciting gameplay and snail's pace of this first-person exploration title don't do the subject matter any favors, bringing down the entire experience.

– Kimberley Wallace

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| ScreamRide | 6.5 | May-15 |
| Tales from the Borderlands: Episode 1 – Zero Sum | 6.5 | Feb-15 |
| Tales from the Borderlands: Episode 2 – Atlas Mugged | 6 | Jun-15 |

Wii U

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| Affordable | | |
| Space Adventures | 8 | Jun-15 |
| Citizens of Earth | 7.5 | Mar-15 |
| Kirby and the Rainbow Curse | 7.75 | Apr-15 |
| Mario Party 10 | 6 | May-15 |
| Mario vs. Donkey Kong: Tipping Stars | 8 | May-15 |

PC

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| Aaru's Awakening | 6.5 | May-15 |
| Apotheon | 9 | Apr-15 |
| Assassin's Creed Chronicles: China | 7.25 | Jun-15 |
| Battlefield: Hardline | 8 | May-15 |
| Broken Age: Act II | 9.25 | Jun-15 |
| Chroma Squad | 7 | Jul-15 |
| Cities: Skylines | 8.75 | May-15 |
| Citizens of Earth | 7.5 | Mar-15 |
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| Crypt of the Necrodancer | 8 | Jun-15 |
| Dark Souls II: Scholar of the First Sin | 9 | May-15 |
| Dungeons 2 | 8 | Jun-15 |
| Dying Light | 8.5 | Apr-15 |
| Elite: Dangerous | 7.5 | Feb-15 |
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| Evolve | 8.5 | Apr-15 |
| Galactic Civilizations III | 8.75 | Jul-15 |
| Game of Thrones Episode 1: Iron from Ice | 8.5 | Feb-15 |
| Game of Thrones Episode 2: The Lost Lords | 8 | Apr-15 |
| Game of Thrones Episode 3: The Sword in the Darkness | 8.25 | Jun-15 |
| Geometry Wars 3: Dimensions | 8 | Feb-15 |

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| Gravity Ghost | 7.25 | Apr-15 |
| Grim Fandango Remastered | 7 | Mar-15 |
| Grow Home | 6 | Apr-15 |
| Hand of Fate | 8.75 | Mar-15 |

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| Hearthstone: Blackrock Mountain | 9 | Jul-15 |
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| Hearthstone: Goblins vs. Gnomes | 9.25 | Feb-15 |
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| Homeworld Remastered | 8 | May-15 |
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| Hotline Miami 2: Wrong Number | 8.5 | May-15 |
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| Invisible, Inc. | 8 | Jul-15 |
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| Kerbal Space Program | 8.5 | Jul-15 |
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| Life is Strange: Episode 1 – Chrysalis | 8.5 | Mar-15 |
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| Life is Strange: Episode 2 – Out of Time | 6.5 | May-15 |
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| Lumino City | 7.5 | Feb-15 |
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| Mortal Kombat X | 9.25 | Jun-15 |
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| Never Alone | 6.5 | Feb-15 |
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| Ori and the Blind Forest | 9.5 | May-15 |
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| Pillars of Eternity | 9.25 | Jun-15 |
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| Project Cars | 8.5 | Jul-15 |
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| Resident Evil HD | 9.5 | Feb-15 |
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| Resident Evil Revelations 2 | 8 | May-15 |
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| Saints Row: Gat Out of Hell | 7.5 | Mar-15 |
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| Scrolls | 7.75 | Feb-15 |
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| Sid Meier's Starships | 7 | May-15 |
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| Sunless Sea | 8 | Apr-15 |
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| Tales from the Borderlands: Episode 1 – Zero Sum | 6.5 | Feb-15 |
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| Tales from the Borderlands: Episode 2 – Atlas Mugged | 6 | Jun-15 |
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| Talos Principle, The | 9 | Feb-15 |
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| This War of Mine | 8 | Feb-15 |
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| Titan Souls | 8.5 | Jun-15 |
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| Total War: Attila | 8 | Apr-15 |
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| Tower of Guns | 7.75 | Jun-15 |
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| White Night | 7.5 | May-15 |
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| Witcher 3: Wild Hunt, The | 9.75 | Jul-15 |
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| Wolfenstein: The Old Blood | 7.5 | Jul-15 |
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| Citizens of Earth | 7.5 | Mar-15 |
| Code Name: S.T.E.A.M. | 8 | May-15 |
| Etrian Mystery Dungeon | 8 | May-15 |
| Gunman Clive 2 | 8 | Apr-15 |

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| Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask 3D, The | 9.25 | Mar-15 |
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| Mario vs. Donkey Kong: Tipping Stars | 8 | May-15 |
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| Monster Hunter 4 Ultimate | 8.75 | Apr-15 |
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| Puzzle & Dragons Z + Puzzle & Dragons Super Mario Bros. Edition | 9 | Jul-15 |
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| Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor 2 | 8 | Jun-15 |
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| Record Breaker | 8 | Jun-15 |
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| Story of Seasons | 7.5 | May-15 |
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| Xenoblade Chronicles 3D | 9 | May-15 |
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STAFF

Publisher
Cathy Preston cathy@gameinformer.com

Editor-in-Chief
Andy McNamara andy@gameinformer.com

Executive Editor
Andrew Reiner reiner@gameinformer.com

Managing Editor
Matt Bertz mattbertz@gameinformer.com

Digital Editor
Bryan Vore bryan@gameinformer.com

Reviews Editor
Joe Juba joe@gameinformer.com

Previews Editor
Matt Miller miller@gameinformer.com

News Editor
Michael Futter mike@gameinformer.com

PC Editor
Daniel Tack daniel@gameinformer.com

Senior Editors
Matthew Kato kato@gameinformer.com
Jeff Cork jeff@gameinformer.com
Ben Reeves ben@gameinformer.com

Senior Associate Editors
Jeff Marchiafava jeffm@gameinformer.com
Tim Turi tim@gameinformer.com

Associate Editors
Kyle Hilliard kyle@gameinformer.com
Kimberley Wallace kim@gameinformer.com
Brian Shea brianshea@gameinformer.com

Creative Director
Jeff Akervik jeffakervik@gameinformer.com

Senior Production Director
Curtis Fung curtis@gameinformer.com

Graphic Designers
Laleh Azarshin Tobin laleh@gameinformer.com
Jason Pflitzer jasonpflitzer@gameinformer.com
Samm Langer sammlanger@gameinformer.com

Web Designer/Programmer
Margaret Andrews margaretandrews@gameinformer.com

Video Producer
Ben Hanson hanson@gameinformer.com

Video Editor
Wade Wojcik wadewojck@gameinformer.com

Circulation Services
Ted Kautzung ted@gameinformer.com

Audience Development Manager
Paul Hedgpath paul@gameinformer.com

Senior Product Manager
Lisa Wagner lisa@gameinformer.com

ADVERTISING SALES

Associate Publisher
Rob Born rob@gameinformer.com

West Coast Advertising Sales Director
Damon Watson damon@gameinformer.com

East Coast Advertising Associate
Amy Arnold amy@gameinformer.com

West Coast Advertising Associate
Janey Stringer janey@gameinformer.com

Marketing Coordinators
Rachel Castle rachel@gameinformer.com
Mark Burger mark@gameinformer.com

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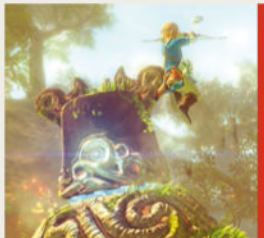
*Bureau of Labor Statistics

E3 MISSING *in* ACTION

Despite all the excitement and announcements from this year's E3, we couldn't help but notice a few big games that didn't make it to the party.



by *Kyle Hilliard*



The Legend of Zelda Wii U

We knew going into E3 that Zelda's Wii U entry would not be present at the show, but it didn't make us miss it any less. The Wii U is still struggling, and even a taste of its most anticipated game would have gone a long way.



Final Fantasy XV

Thanks to a playable demo available to the public earlier this year, many have gotten a good sense of what to expect from the next Final Fantasy. A new trailer or a release date – or both – could have kept momentum going strong.



The Witness

The next game from the creator of Braid seems like it should be close to release. It was on stage when the PlayStation 4 was announced, so it was surprising to not see an extended or playable demo of The Witness this late into development.



Beyond Good & Evil 2

Now that The Last Guardian, Final Fantasy VII Remake, and Shenmue III are real projects, it's time to start campaigning for the next announced, but seemingly dead video game. Ubisoft says it's real and has even shown teasers, but we haven't heard a peep in years.



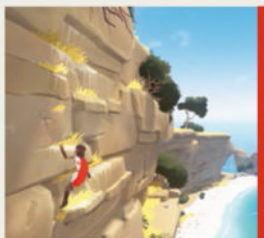
Inside

The next game from the Limbo creators was a highlight of Microsoft's press conference in 2014, but was conspicuously absent this year. We're hoping it's an indicator that developer Playdead is hard at work trying to finish the game.



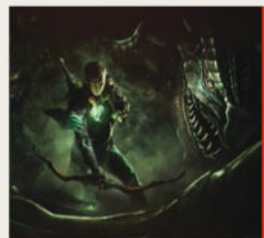
Crackdown

Microsoft warned that its open-world superhero-police sequel wouldn't be at E3 this year, which is unfortunate because it has the potential to be an important pillar in Microsoft's library of exclusives.



Rime

Even among Sony's impressive collection of indies, Rime stands out with its colorful world and clear Ico inspirations. Sony showed off a lot of indies at E3, but Rime was not among them.



Scalebound

Platinum was all over E3 with announced work on myriad projects, but its mysterious fantasy/science-fiction crossover (and Xbox One exclusive) was missing in action. We still have a lot to learn about this game, and E3 would have been good platform to start rolling out more details. ❖



@PDPGaming

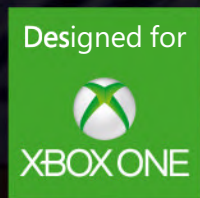
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