

BATTLEBORN HANDS-ON: A BORDERLANDS BEATER?

WILL FAR CRY PRIMAL BE A MAMMOTH HIT?

EARN 10,000 ACHIEVEMENT POINTS IN JUST 24 HOURS!



HALO 5: GUARDIANS

REVIEW SPECIAL

XBOX ONE'S HOTTEST GAMES

Is this the greatest lineup in Xbox history? All the biggest Christmas games reviewed and rated!



RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER



FALLOUT 4

UPGRADE YOUR XBOX
 TECH, TIPS AND TRICKS FOR AN EVEN BETTER XBOX ONE



ASSASSIN'S CREED SYNDICATE

Microsoft

SUNSET OVERDRIVE

A high-velocity open-world shooter with unconventional weapons, crazed mutants, and massive carnage.



MATURE 17+
M
COMPLETE RATED BY
ESRB
Blood and Gore
Drug Reference
Sexual Themes
Strong Language
Violence

Microsoft
Studios

INSOMNIAC

SUNSET OVERDRIVE is the trademark and INSOMNIAC GAMES and the INSOMNIAC logo are the registered trademarks of Insomniac Games, Inc. Copyright 2014, Insomniac Games, Inc. All rights reserved.



#sunsetoverdrive | xbox.com/sunsetoverdrive

 XBOX ONE

EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to the reviews issue



"THIS MONTH WE HAVE OUR MOST EXCITING REVIEWS SECTION IN YEARS"

Has there ever been a better time to leap into the current generation? Xbox One's new interface is a transformation of Ugly Duckling proportions: it's faster, smarter, and comes with our hallowed backwards compatibility. And look at our bulging reviews section: *Halo 5*, *Tomb Raider*, *Black Ops III*, *Assassin's Creed Cockney Edition*... this is our most exciting reviews section in years. It's a great time to join the Xbox One club (note: not a real club) and so I tasked the team to compile a feature on how to supercharge the machine straight out of the box. Whether it's cool add-on tech, free games or easy Achievements, *DXM* has you covered.

EMAIL matthew.castle@futurenet.com
LIVE OXM Pesto TWITTER @mrbasil_pesto

Meet the... OXM CONTRIBUTORS



Alex Dale
Deputy editor

Live [ChocoboOfDoom](#)

Twitter @
[SporadicDaler](#)

There was only one man with the natural charisma and range of facial expressions necessary to fill the Master Chief's boots – and unfortunately, he was on holiday. So we gave the *Halo 5* review to this toad.



Tom Stone
Staff writer

Live OXM [Tom Stone](#)

Twitter @
[TheTomStrange](#)

We exposed writing-machine Tom to our Special Highly Radioactive Edition of *Fallout 4*, in the hope of cloning his work ethic and allowing us to slack off more. He came back with feet for hands. Oh.



Emma Davies
Production editor

Live OXM [Emma](#)

Twitter @[emcetera](#)

Emma's packing for Berlin as we speak. Given the German devil-may-care attitude to capitalization, carnage is the only likely outcome. She wants to see the Berlin Wall, apparently. Er, wait: didn't they knock that down?



Joe Skrebels
Community manager

Live OXM [Joe](#)

Twitter @[2plus2isjoe](#)

Latvian-Australian mash-up 'Uncle' Joe Skrebels picked up some locomotion tips from *Black Ops III*. He now wall-runs up the stairs, boost-jumps to his chair and transforms into a robot with a fountain pen for an arm.



ISSUE #183 / January 2015

EDITORIAL

Editor-in-Chief: Matthew Castle
matthew.castle@futurenet.com [Live: OXM Pesto]
Deputy Editor: Alex Dale
alex.dale@futurenet.com [Live: ChocoboOfDoom]
Art Editor: Rob Crossland
robert.crossland@futurenet.com [Live: OXM RobC]
Production Editor: Emma Davies
emma.davies@futurenet.com [Live: OXM Emma]
Staff Writer: Tom Stone
tom.stone@futurenet.com [Live: OXM Tom Stone]
Community Editor: Joe Skrebels
joe.skrebels@futurenet.com [Live: OXM Joe]

Writing: Martin Kitts, Chris Schilling, Mark Field, Paul Taylor, Chris Thursten, Tom Sykes, Ben Maxwell, Alice Bell, Dom Reseigh-Lincoln, Jenny Baker, Elizabeth Elliott

BUSINESS

Vice President, Sales
Stacy Gaines, sgaines@futureus.com
Vice President, Strategic Partnerships
Isaac Ugay, iugay@futureus.com
Account Director
Michael Plump, mplump@futureus.com
Account Director
Tad Perez, tperez@futureus.com
Account Director
Austin Park, apark@futureus.com
Account Director
Jessica Reinert, jreinert@futureus.com
Account Manager
Elizabeth Fleischman, efleishman@futureus.com
Director of Marketing
Robbie Montinola
Director, Client Services
Tracy Lam
Director, Retail Sales
Bill Shewey

PRODUCTION

Production Manager Mark Constance
Production Controller Nola Cokely
Project Manager Clare Scott
Production Assistant Emily Wood

SUBSCRIPTION QUERIES

Visit us on the web at www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/gaming/
official-xbox-magazine-subscription, email us at contact@myfavouritemagazines.com, call us toll free at 1-844-779-2822, or write to us at Official Xbox Magazine Customer Care, P.O. Box 2024, Langhorne, PA 19047.

BACK ISSUES

To order back issues, please call us at 1-844-779-2822, or visit us on the web at www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/gaming/xbox-the-official-magazine-back-issues/

REPRINTS Please contact us at Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080

Phone (650) 872-1642

Fax (650) 872-2207

Website www.futureus.com

ISSN 1534-7850

© 2015 Future US, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Microsoft, Xbox, and the Xbox logo are trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or in other countries and are used under license from Microsoft. All other trademarks and copyrights are the property of their respective holders.



Future is an award-winning international media group and leading digital business. We reach more than 49 million international consumers a month and create world-class content and advertising solutions for passionate consumers online, on tablet & smartphone and in print.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR).
www.futureplc.com

Chief executive Zillah Byng-Maddick
Non-executive chairman Peter Allen
Chief financial officer Richard Halsey

Tel +44 (0)207 042 4000 (London)
Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244 (Bath)

President, US Charlie Speight
Vice President, Marketing & Operations Rhoda Bueno
Vice President, Product Development Bart Jaworski
Finance Director Frederick Alfredo
Senior HR Generalist Mary Mauck
Future US, Inc. is part of Future plc. Future produces carefully targeted special-interest magazines, websites, and events for people who share a passion. We aim to satisfy that passion by creating titles offering value for money, reliable information, and smart buying advice, and that are a pleasure to read or visit. Today we publish more than 150 magazines, 65 websites, and a growing number of events in the U.S., UK, France, and Italy. Over 100 international editions of our magazines are also published in 30 other countries across the world.

XBOX ONE & WINDOWS 10 EXCLUSIVE

ALL FOR ONE, OR ONE TAKES ALL

FABLE LEGENDS

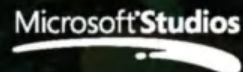
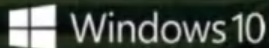
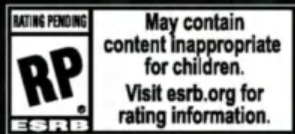


IT IS A TIME OF HEROES IN ALBION.

But while every fable needs a hero, every legend needs a villain.

Play for free and experience cross-device multiplayer on Xbox One* and Windows 10 PC.

FableLegends.com



*Requires Xbox Live Gold membership, sold separately. Game offers in-app purchases.



CONTENTS

FEATURES

26 Get More From Your Xbox One

Free games! Gamerscore boosting! Killer tech! Maximise your new-gen console's potential.

44 One Day in the Wasteland

Our Tom kept a diary of the trials and tribulations he faced during his first day in burnt-out Boston.

PREVIEWS

36 Battleborn

38 Everspace

39 Layers of Fear

40 Deus Ex: Mankind Divided

REVIEWS

54 Halo 5: Guardians

60 Call of Duty: Black Ops III

62 Rise of the Tomb Raider

66 Need for Speed

68 Tales From the Borderlands: Season One

69 Divinity: Original Sin – Enhanced Edition

70 Assassin's Creed Syndicate

74 WWE 2K16

75 Guitar Hero Live

76 Life is Strange

78 WRC 5

79 Transformers: Devastation

80 Wasteland 2: Director's Cut

82 Metal Gear Solid V Online

83 Destiny Online

84 The Witcher 3 – Hearts of Stone

85 Disney Infinity 3.0 – Rise Against the Empire

85 Lego Dimensions – Portal Level Pack



PAGE
62

RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

Ain't no mountain high enough.



PAGE
36



PAGE
40



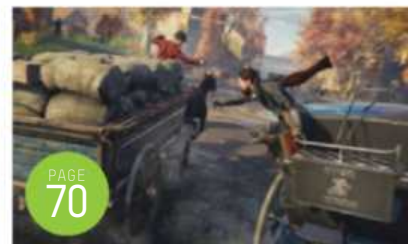
PAGE
54

HALO 5: GUARDIANS

Hail to the Chief.



PAGE
60



PAGE
70



NEED FOR SPEED

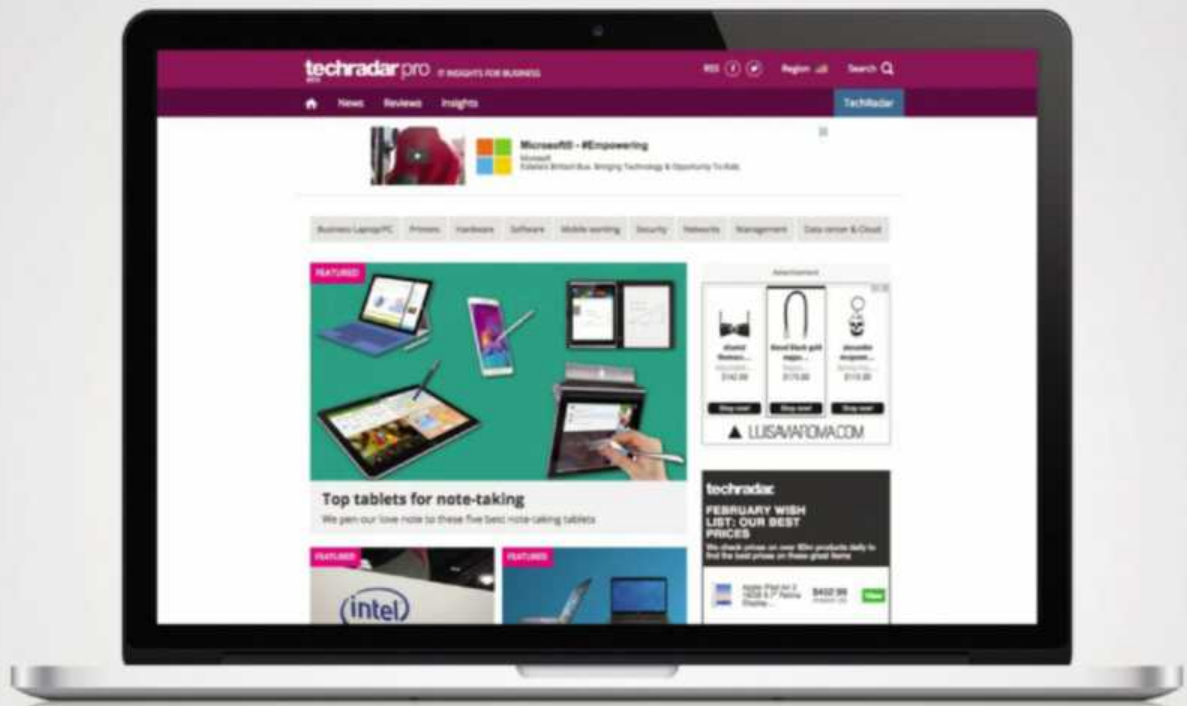
Back to basics, or back to being basic?

PAGE
66

OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE (ISSN 1534-7850) is published 13 times a year, monthly plus Holiday issue following December issue by Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Phone: (650) 972-1642, Fax: (650) 972-2207, Website: www.futureus.com. Periodicals postage paid in San Bruno, CA and at additional mailing offices. Newsstand distribution is handled by Time Warner Retail. Basic subscription rates: one year (12 issues) US: \$24.95; Canada: US\$29.95. Canadian orders must be prepaid. Canadian price includes postage and GST #R128220688, PMA #40612608. Subscriptions do not include newsstand specials. POSTMASTER: Send changes of address to Official Xbox Magazine, PO Box 5852, Harlan, IA 51593-1352. Standard Mail enclosed in the following edition: None. Ride-Along enclosed in the following editions: None. Returns: IMEX Global Solutions, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2, Canada. Future US, Inc. also publishes @Gamer, Crochet Today!, MacLife, Maximum PC, and PC Gamer. Entire contents copyright 2015, Future US, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. Future US, Inc. is not affiliated with the companies or products covered in Official Xbox Magazine. Reproduction on the Internet of the articles and pictures in this magazine is illegal without the prior written consent of Official Xbox Magazine. Products named in the pages of Official Xbox Magazine are trademarks of their respective companies. PRODUCED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

techradar.pro

IT INSIGHTS FOR BUSINESS



<http://www.techradar.com/pro>

INSIDER

XBOX NEWS, ANALYSIS, CULTURE, OPINION & MORE

More player-controlled soldiers = more unpredictable variants = more exciting gaming. We hope.

NO PLAYERS, NO PROBLEMS?

ALL ABOUT THAT (PLAYER) BASE

With winter dominated by multiplayer-focused games, OXM speaks to the developers of Rainbow Six Siege and Battleborn



Fallout 4 gets fizzy

Target is selling a mock version of fluorescent cancer-drink Nuka-Cola Quantum in celebration of 2015's biggest poisoned water simulator. In the UK, Carlsberg has concocted a limited run of *Fallout* beer (radiation-free, hopefully).



Mirror's Edge delayed until May

Originally scheduled for February, EA DICE senior producer Sara Jansson says the delay to *Catalyst* is so that the team can make its open-world parkour game "as entertaining, impressive and memorable as it can be". Here's hoping it works.

//ACTIVISION IS
RELEASING THE XBOX
360 VERSION OF *CALL
OF DUTY: BLACK OPS III*
WITHOUT ANY SINGLE-
PLAYER AT ALL//



A new multiplayer game from the *Borderlands* team, *Battleborn* is a risk for Gearbox.

We don't like to think of our gaming purchases having a limited shelf life. Far fewer Xbox Ones would be sold if they all had expiry dates stamped on the top. It's just one reason why multiplayer-focused games can be so cautiously received.

Pay \$60 for *The Witcher 3* and you're guaranteed entertaining gameplay every time you take the disc for a spin. But paying the same amount for *Evolve*? That game's only as good as the number of players online and, sadly, *Evolve*'s community is gradually becoming extinct.

But that hasn't stopped a games industry that seems more multiplayer-focused than ever. Ubisoft has *Rainbow Six Siege* – which, bar several training missions, is multiplayer-only. Gearbox is releasing multiplayer shooter/MOBA hybrid *Battleborn* (full preview on p36), *Star Wars Battlefront* is EA's biggest holiday release, and Activision is releasing the Xbox 360 version of *Call of Duty: Black Ops III* without any single-player at all. Does this mean players are getting better multiplayer experiences, or risking their money on games that no one may be playing in a year?

Chris Hendry, senior environment artist on *Rainbow Six Siege*, argues that the focus on multiplayer in their game doesn't mean players are losing out: "When you look at what we have to offer in terms of multiplayer – the 20 operators, 11 maps, the destructible environments – there's a ton of replay value in the multiplayer alone." Arguably more importantly, the game has had a substantial beta testing, making sure it's balanced for online play from day one. "The good thing we've seen from the beta already is the game is already in a solid state," says Hendry. "We've already looked at it and made some small tweaks but we really need to kind of let the game settle first and then make the appropriate changes afterwards."

Randy Varnell, creative director of *Battleborn*, agrees this balancing is crucial to holding the player base's attention. "As soon as we knew we wanted competitive multiplayer to be a significant part of the game, [we had] to start thinking balance," he says. "The game is actually balanced for multiplayer first, and then we do things to make it awesome in single-player, so we have to keep that in mind."



Destiny ace rocks Crota's world

Want to see a *Destiny* player stove Crota's face in using the *Rock Band* drums as a regular controller? Of course you do: head to bit.ly/1MZxt2U and marvel at the skill.



That could sound like single-player is an afterthought, but focusing on multiplayer is essential for a game of *Battleborn's* ambition. For example, how do you even begin to balance 25 unique characters, even with a multiplayer-focused development period? "With a lot of fear and screaming! You got to remember [that] we come from *Borderlands*... so we're used to balancing systems that have big numbers.

"But we are definitely committing at launch to look and watch, listen to the community, watch the numbers and kind of discern the truth and make patches and keep the game supported. Make sure it's balanced and fun for everybody as it can be."

MEANING BUSINESS

That level of commitment isn't cheap, and it's easy to forget about the fact that the risks involved in multiplayer-focused games aren't just on the players' end. But craft a hit and the rewards can be lucrative. Activision has been open about *Black Ops III* being developed with eSports in mind – aiming to make a game that's as fun to watch as it is to play. "We have the Spectator Cam," explains Hendry, referring to an option in *Siege* that enables you to watch the game live

Rainbow Six Vegas was a big hit, but also had a substantial single-player campaign.

from different perspectives, "so we're definitely providing the tools to fit that.

"As for eSports in general, that's not going to be up to us," he continues.

"We have to wait, see how the game settles, what people want. We're definitely going to see people making their own tournaments first, and we'll go off that once we get there."

Varnell agrees that you can put the tools in place, but you can't force a

community to embrace your game. "We hope [*Battleborn*] goes there. I mean, that would be cool. It's very arrogant to say that 'It's an eSport'. If people love it, people play it competitively. We want people to love watching the game. There are some other things we really need to do to grow into that space, but it'd be awesome – and if it goes there, I'd love to go with it."

Publishers know that when their game is so reliant on multiplayer success, they're asking players to take a gamble, and Ubisoft recently announced that all the DLC for *Rainbow*



Honestly, we're looking forward to *Battlefront's* single-player about as much as the Empire is to universal peace.



Tekken 7 coming to Xbox One

Maybe. Bandai-Namco announced it's heading to PS4 during Paris Games Week, but constant references to 'home consoles' suggest Xbox One is on its radar.



Last-gen copies of *Black Ops III* are multiplayer-only. Just giving fans what they want?

Six *Siege* will be free. "We're going to be having maps for free. We'll really pay attention to the game, sticking to it and we're going to keep adding content and making sure people are still engaged," explains Hendry, and these maps are already deep in development "Now that we know how to make the maps too, they're going to start coming out a bit quicker and faster and be more fun to work on!"

Battleborn may have prioritized multiplayer, but the game will launch with a full single-player campaign – one that can be played in split-screen co-op. So even if it fails to build an online community, you can always kidnap a friend and have a multiplayer session on your sofa. It'll be a substantial game at launch, which is why no DLC has been planned yet. "We haven't talked so much about content

post-launch," says Varnell. "That always depends on how well received the game is... if no one buys the game, we're not going to do anything!"

No one was disappointed to hear that *Rise of the Tomb Raider* dropped its predecessor's weedy multiplayer. Why should it be any different when multiplayer games dismiss forgettable single-player asides? Gone are the days when a tacked-on deathmatch mode was enough, especially in a winter where you're up against the likes of *Star Wars Battlefront*.

Arguably, multiplayer games are just catering to an audience that demands more sophisticated online experiences. Without taking the odd risk, we'd never get the tense shoot-outs of *Siege*, the jamboree that is *Battleborn*, or be spending the holidays on Hoth courtesy of *Battlefront*. For those rewards, multiplayer-focused games feel like a risk worth taking. Who's up for another 600 rounds of *Warzone*?

TOM STONE

//GONE ARE THE DAYS WHEN TACKED-ON DEATHMATCH WAS ENOUGH, ESPECIALLY AGAINST THE LIKES OF *BATTLEFRONT*//

THIS MONTH WE LEARNED...

p14



Why mammoths are stomping their way into the *Far Cry* series.

p16



What could have been, had we been ready for an online Xbox One.

p20



That Agent 47 has had yet another change of murderous plan.

p21



How teens partying alone on an island isn't always a great idea.

p22



Which Marvel superheroes are the new kids on the block.

TEN PRO TIPS

THIS MONTH:

HOW TO CRAFT THE NEXT INDIE MULTIPLAYER SENSATION

Chainsawesome Games' Jean Simon Otis on how Bomberman, Gauntlet and more paved the way for Knight Squad



It might not look like much, but *Knight Squad's* competitive multiplayer is headbutt-your-best-buddy levels of hilarious.

1 Throw ideas about
To begin with we did a super quick game jam with no orientation at all and we ended up with a prototype that made us think, "Well, it's *Bomberman* meets *Gauntlet*." That became the base for the game.

2 Keep the design lean
When we looked at existing multiplayer maze games that we liked, we determined that the ones we liked most were really simple, where anybody could just grab a controller and start playing it.

3 Lock down the rules
This was the subject of a lot of debates. We'd go, "Okay, we could introduce this rule," and then it would need an additional button that we had to implement, and we were like, "No, we don't want that; we just want to keep it super simple" – so we just trashed it rather than make the game more complicated. So it needed to fit these rules so that

everything is just one button, you move around, and that's it.

4 Make it immediate
I showed *Knight Squad* at Game Developers Conference, and people will just walk by, grab the controller and be like, "Okay, well if I push this button it does that; if I push this other button it does the same thing. I've got it." You can reach more people with games that are designed to make sense right off the bat.

5 Take inspiration from the past...
It can be difficult to break away from the past and be seen as your own thing. When people start playing *Knight Squad*, they immediately draw comparisons to other games like *Pac-Man*...

6 ...and then embrace it
...but to be honest, I'm no longer trying to break away

BACKGROUND CHECK

NAME Jean Simon Otis
JOB TITLE Co-founder, Chainsawesome Games

BIO Founded in October 2012 in Quebec, Canada, Chainsawesome Games is a three-man studio consisting of lead programmer Jean Simon Otis, designer David Haré and artist Jade Bélanger. Otis previously cut his programming teeth at local companies such as Bkom and Frima Studio. The studio's first game was *BeatBlasters III*, a rhythm/platformer mash-up released for PC, Mac and Linux in 2014.

from this, because those are great games – and if people are associating my game to this, then I feel like I've done something good. I'm not revolutionizing anything, but if you're having fun then my job is pretty much done.

7 Identify what makes you different
While we're not revolutionizing the genre, we're still distinctive in our own way. I think having so many power-ups adds a lot, and having so many game modes as well, because it's kind of dumb. We compare it to *Bomberman* and *Gauntlet* but if you consider how it's built, it's pretty much a first-person shooter but seen from up top.

8 Build it around the controller
At the studio, we're big controller fans. I play every single game I can play with controllers. So every single game we do, we're like "Well, we'll build it with a controller," so it's not really an issue getting it on console. For us, it's the opposite problem – it's actually more of an issue getting it to work on PC!

9 Don't discount Games with Gold
It's a great opportunity to just get the game out there and have people playing it. I don't really think it's hurting in any way, really, because people get a free game and if they like the game it's just even better, because they're like "God, I didn't know about that game, now it's free!?"

10 Don't let yourself be pigeonholed
Steam is pretty flooded with [indie] stuff, and Xbox One doesn't really have this problem. Right now... you're treated like any other game, so it's still a good place to get visibility. **OXM**



Outlast 2 creeps onto Xbox One

You've got nine months to strengthen those shrieking cords - the horrific *Outlast*'s sequel is set for release in Fall 2016.

DASHBOARD



Well, it looks like Master Chief has his outfit sorted for the Christmas party.

CRYSTAL DYNAMIC

Say hello to the Master Chief Swarovski helmet

In the spirit of giving, Microsoft Taiwan teamed up with the Make-A-Wish Foundation this month. Why, you ask? To run an eBay charity auction featuring an ultra glitzy Master Chief helmet jam-packed with jewels, of course. Adorned with a monumental mega-cluster of Swarovski crystals and weighing in at approximately five kilograms, we can only imagine holding the crystal-clad curio might be similar to cradling a spiky house cat.

The one-of-a-kind helmet was created by Taiwanese cosplayer Hsu Chia-Hao, aka Braid Clarke, and luxury jewellery designer Jenny Manik Mercian. If you're wondering why it looks like it's been lifted straight out of a glossy fashion magazine, that's because it's spent most of its time in the hands of an haute

couture veteran. Manik Mercian is well-known for crafting the bejewelled body armor, metal corsets and angel wings flaunted by the catwalk models of Victoria's Secret, so she's no stranger to ambitious projects - the iconic helmet features a grand total of 25,000 Swarovski crystals in a wide range of shapes and sizes.

Despite its gaudy, devil-may-care outer shell, the Master Chief Swarovski helmet sold for over \$34,000. All the proceeds are set to benefit the Make-A-Wish Foundation, a charity that grants wishes for children and young people fighting life-threatening conditions. But the generous

winning bidder didn't just fork out for the seriously sparkly dinner party centerpiece. They also had to stump up an additional \$200 shipping fee. That's one pricey bit of headgear.

Of course, this isn't the first time Swarovski crystals have been used to create a unique piece of videogame memorabilia. Just a few years ago Microsoft Australia commissioned luxury brand CrystalRoc to embellish an Xbox 360 with 11,520

Swarovski crystals for a promotional campaign - not too shabby. Whatever will be plastered in Swarovski sparklers next? The Pip-Boy perhaps? Please don't do that.

//WHATEVER WILL BE PLASTERED IN SWAROVSKI SPARKLERS NEXT?//

IN NUMBERS > DATAPOINT: NEWS IN NUMBERS > DATAPOINT: NEWS IN NUMBERS

\$400M

The amount of moolah *Halo 5* raked in worldwide during its first week on sale (includes hardware sales).

45M

Number of REQ packs that were opened in that time. That's around 568 million REQ cards!

#1

Position *Halo 5* entered the UK charts - knocking *Assassin's Creed Syndicate* off its perch.

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

MAMMOTHS AND SABRE-TOOTHED TIGERS VERSUS OUR... SHARPENED STICK. OH

Far Cry Primal goes back to the origins of man

What's the story?

The *Far Cry* series goes back 12,000 years – to a time when running around stabbing people with pointy sticks was more socially acceptable. You'll be crafting weapons to defend yourself and hunt animals, but this is 10,000 BC and man is much further down the food chain. You'll have to work with your tribe to survive, especially when saber-toothed tigers start leaping for your throat.

Why should I care?

Prehistoric times feel like the perfect setting for *Far Cry* – crafting weapons from animal bones makes more sense when you can't just give up and buy grenades on the black market. Starting with nothing, you'll rise to power until you're leading your own tribe – the usual arc of a *Far Cry* game, cleverly mirroring the rise of humanity as a tribal species.

What happens next?

It's out on 23 February, so we'll soon see if this new direction pays off. Survival and open-world games are crowded genres – but this mix has real potential, exploring a period of history we rarely see in games. If it embraces the limitations of its setting, rather than trying to cheat them (we're not interested in crafting a mammoth-bone sniper rifle, thanks) this could be the most immersive *Far Cry* yet.

EAT, PREY, LIVE

You'll hunt animals for food. Obviously food's important for avoiding that darn 'starving' thing in real life, but we'll have to wait and see how crucial chowing down on mammoth burgers will be for survival in *Primal*.

TRIBE VS TRIBE

Unlike 2015, where everyone's lovely and there's no world conflict at all, people didn't care much for each other in 10,000 BC. You'll attack other tribes for dominance, and also be responsible for keeping your own tribesmen alive.



Force is wrong with this one?

Red Fly Studio wants to pitch a Darth Maul game to EA after its first attempt to bring ol' red-head to consoles was canceled. The early prototype looked like *Ninja Gaiden* with lightsabers.

WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

Thanks to the prehistoric setting, there'll be no guns or vehicles this time around. Better be prepared to stretch those legs then, although rideable animals wouldn't be unexpected...

SLEEP TIGHT

Predators aren't stupid, and know their prey (you) is more vulnerable at night. Saber-toothed tigers are terrifying enough by day, so we're already nominating the rest of our tribe for night watch. Cowards live longer, kids.

MYSTERIES OF HISTORY

The developer admits that this period is a historical gray area, so there's more freedom to invent how people fought and moved around the world. Don't expect a history lesson, then, but an interesting twist on core combat.

UPPERS & DOWNERS

This month's temperature, taken
WHAT'S HOT?

1



FALLOUT 4'S HEADSHOTS

Watching a Raider's eyeballs bounce off the walls should be old hat by now, but our inner 13-year-old will always laugh.

2



ORI AND THE BLIND FOREST

Moon Studios took home Best Audio and Best Xbox Game at the Golden Joysticks. Greenlight that sequel already.

3



HALO 5'S ANNOUNCER

Does anyone enjoy their job quite as much as this guy? The way he purrs "from the grrrravel!" is delicious.

WHAT'S NOT?

1



HALO 5'S GROUND POUND

Most useless move ever? Nine times out of ten you get sniped out of the sky/beaten to death when you land.

2



LONDON CLICHES

"Cor, 'av ya seen me top hat, ya bloody wanker?!" *Assassin's Creed* continues to perpetrate some cruel British myths.

3



TOMB RAIDER'S SNOW

By definition, 'not hot' – even if Crystal Dynamic's powder-rendering tech did get us sweaty under the collar.

“THE WORLD WASN'T READY FOR AN ONLINE CONSOLE IN 2013. LET'S HOPE IT IS BY THE TIME XBOX TWO COMES DOWN THE PIPE”

Alex imagines a world where Microsoft's dream of an always-online Xbox One came true



With the new Dashboard update hitting by the time you read this, the Xbox One's metamorphosis from the console Microsoft originally envisaged, to the very different one it would eventually become, is complete. So now seems a good time to look back over the events of the past two years and play a little 'what if?'. How would history have changed if Microsoft had resisted the backlash to its 'always-online' blueprint and powered through with its vision for Xbox One?

Well, I should probably begin by saying that the backlash was far from unwarranted; with fibre-optic broadband still yet to be rolled out in many areas, the world is no more ready for an always-online console today than it was in 2013. More damning still, it seems Microsoft itself wasn't ready for the demands of managing an always-online console infrastructure – the proposed requirement that your console 'check in' at least every 24 hours was an inelegant and punitive form of rights management that threatened to throw the very concept of game ownership into existential crisis.

But it goes without saying that Microsoft didn't intend for the Xbox One to be an online-only console just to piss everyone off. Revisiting the original blueprint reveals a raft of innovative features and ideas that had to be flushed down the toilet with the online requirement, and it's fun – if a little heartbreaking – to imagine these features existing within the framework of the console we have today.



With an always-online console, cataclysmic scenes such as this could become the norm. That's good, right?

One such feature that would be particularly welcome, given Xbox One's renewed focus on indie gaming, is the original proposal that you'd be able to share digitally purchased games with one of your Xbox Live friends. Since indies thrive on word of mouth, I'd imagine this would be an arrangement smaller devs would cherish, rather than fear – most I speak to tell me that the



Online-orientated titles such as *Fable Legends* have presumably had to be heavily revised.

biggest challenge of all is getting their games in front of eyes in the first place. Besides, how many of you would be more willing to take a punt on one of the indie scenes' shorter, more eclectic offerings if you knew you could split the bill? Similarly, it was originally intended that you'd be able to resell your digital games (at the publisher's discretion) – another safety net that would have given you a chance of recouping some of your cash if you splashed out on a bad game.

The downside – and I think this was the part that rankled the public more than the worry that you wouldn't be able to get a Wi-Fi signal in a submarine or wherever – is that the DRM setup would have made it difficult, if not impossible, to trade in your physical games. A blow, for sure, but one counterweighted by

enabling you to play your game collection without the need for a disc. Considering that Geralt has been wasting away in Skellige for a month now because I can't be bothered to take season six of *Friends* out of the drive, I think you could make a convincing argument that the practical benefits are easily worth as much as the bag of-navel-fluff trade-in price you get from most stores.

Really, though, convenience and financial safety nets are one thing. But if you really want a gut-wrenching demonstration of how good an online-only Xbox One could have been, wait till your eyes get a load of *Crackdown's* online mode – with its fully destructible city, and incredible physics engine only made possible because the console can draw additional power from the cloud. The world isn't ready for an online-only console yet. Let's hope we are by the time Xbox Two arrives.

//RESELLING DIGITAL GAMES WOULD GIVE YOU A SAFETY NET IF YOU BOUGHT A BAD GAME//

NEXT MONTH What would Xbox One have been like if you could *only* use Kinect? And *only* use Surface as a screen? And other nonsense.



Activision crowns itself king

Activision Blizzard has bought *Candy Crush Saga* creator, King Digital Entertainment, for \$5.9 billion. *Candy Crush* DLC for *Black Ops*?

DASHBOARD



An exclusive screenshot of Phil Spencer riding to work at the Xbox monolith each morning.

THY KINGDOM COME (TO XBOX ONE)

Another acclaimed PC game turns green

This is blockbuster season for Xbox One, with *Halo 5*, *Rise of the Tomb Raider*, *Black Ops III*, *Fallout 4*, *Star Wars Battlefront* and our favourite new game, *Somehow Finding the Time To Play all These*. But if the big games rule Christmas, it's the smaller titles that have us intrigued for the start of 2016. Such as *Kingdom*, a side-scrolling strategy game with surprisingly deep mechanics that's been a hit on PC.

The game starts out deceptively simple. You're a king on horseback, scrolling from left to right and chucking coins at people to rally them to your cause and encourage them to build structures for you. You'll have

to invest in weapons, including bows and arrows, as a swift day-night cycle keeps you on your toes. Monsters attack at night, and it's easy to get overwhelmed.

Sound simple so far? Good, because none of this is explained to you by the game. *Kingdom* wants you to discover everything for yourself, like how eating grass improves your horse's speed, or how having weapons ready makes villagers more likely to get behind your cause with added

enthusiasm (hey, if you wanna get eaten by monsters, guys, that's fine by me). Failing is inevitable, but the game entices you to keep retrying, as you learn a little more about how to keep your kingdom flourishing each time. It looks full of smart ideas and is beautifully presented, with pixel-art graphics that remind us of the wonderful *Fez* and the not-nearly-as-wonderful *The Deer God*.

ID@Xbox, more PC ports and

other indie gems make for yet more games on a new-gen machine that finally has its killer lineup. With 2016 just around the corner, we're as hyped for *Crackdown*, *Quantum Break* and *Scalebound*

//IT REMINDS US OF THE WONDERFUL FEZ AND THE NOT-NEARLY-AS-WONDERFUL THE DEER GOD//

as anyone else, but we're hoping that *Kingdom* continues the escalating trend of exciting PC ideas finding a welcoming home on Xbox One.

EASTER EGG On PC, the game became profitable in just 24 hours.

YOU'RE FIRED! > QUOTES OF THE MONTH > BLAH BLAH > HE SAID WHAT? > YADDA

"We will use these few extra months to make sure... it's as entertaining, impressive, and memorable as it can be."

Mirror's Edge Catalyst producer Sara Jansson, explaining the game's delay.

"Being the best game of the year in the eyes of so many people is a great honor. Probably the greatest we could have."

CDP's Michał Nowakowski, on *The Witcher 3*'s well-deserved Golden Joysticks win.

"I'd love to go do a xeno-archeological expedition to the original Halo ring... And it wouldn't require shooting."

Halo franchise chief Frank O'Connor, on the prospect of a non-shooter game in the series.

WARRING STARS

BATTLE OF THE BATTLEFRONTS

Fresh footage of Free Radical's cancelled Battlefront III has surfaced – between that and the upcoming DICE game, which has us the most starry-eyed?

For *Star Wars* fans, the upcoming film has been a long time coming – the last proper film (we're not counting the *Clone Wars* films) was released in 2005. Which, coincidentally, was also the last time we saw a *Battlefront* game – Pandemic Studios' *Star Wars: Battlefront II*, which was released on the original Xbox in October of that year.

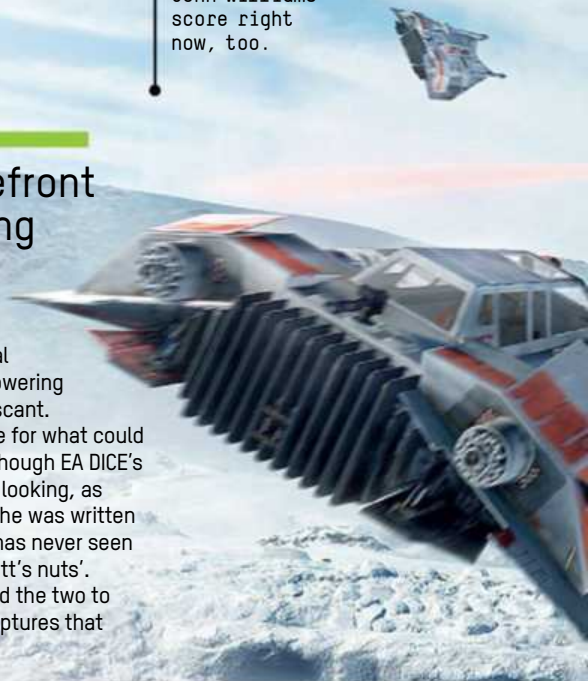
But our wait could have been

a lot shorter. In 2006, it was confirmed that Free Radical Design, the studio behind hits such as *TimeSplitters*, was working on a threequel; unfortunately the game was cancelled two years later due to the studio's financial woes. But although it never saw the light of day, the occasional footage leak whets the appetite for what could have been, and the latest is the most appetite-whetting of

them all, showing swoopy, epic aerial battles over the towering cityscape of Coruscant.

It makes us pine for what could have been, even though EA DICE's new *Battlefront* is looking, as Yoda might say, if he was written by someone who has never seen *Star Wars*, 'the mutt's nuts'. So we've compared the two to see which best captures that *Star Wars* magic.

Yeah, our brains are playing the John Williams score right now, too.



1 ANY GOOD CHARACTERS IN IT?



VS



Why yes, all your favorites! We know you can play as Luke, Darth Vader and Han Solo – and we've also seen Leia and Boba Fett. The launch trailer features the Emperor, although we're surprised he's a playable as he probably doesn't have the cold-weather booties necessary for Hoth.

The leaks show Leia (in classic white dress/Chelsea buns hairstyle ensemble), Han, Luke, Vader, Obi Wan and Yoda as playable characters, which is pretty much the whole classic cast. *Battlefront III*, however, was still tied to the terrible trilogy of the '00s, so Jar Jar Binks is in there too. Yep, we're out.

WINNER:
BATTLEFRONT 2015

2 DO THE LASERS GO 'PEW!'?

Well, there were around 293 million kills with the classic E-11 blaster in the beta, and each made the proper noise. All the sound design seems pretty spot on so far, especially TIE Fighters screaming overhead, Imperial Walkers stomping about and, yes, the all-important 'whoom' lightsaber noise.

The audio is missing on some of the footage, but what you can hear sounds pretty great. *Star Wars* has an established sound and the laser blasts, space ships, and ominous heavy breathing of you-know-who are all on point, giving the necessary atmosphere. And isn't that the most important part?

WINNER:
TIE (FIGHTER)

3 HOW'S THE AERIAL COMBAT?

Pretty fun. You can swoop about and shoot people up in iconic fighters, and there's terrific ambient audio over your comms when you're piloting. There are missions built specifically for aerial assaults and some that mix gun- and dogfights – you can even hop in the Millennium Falcon. Just don't get cocky.

Oh, man. There's more than one bit of footage showing continuous gameplay with the player going from the surface of a planet, into a fighter, right up into space, and landing in the hanger of a ship. Can you imagine the scale of those multiplayer battles? It'd be chaos. Delicious, delicious chaos.

WINNER:
BATTLEFRONT III



Metal Gear Online studio closes

Konami is on a roll, of sorts: following *Metal Gear* creator Hideo Kojima's departure, Konami has closed its Los Angeles Studio, founded in 2013 to work on *Metal Gear Online*.

//THE OCCASIONAL FOOTAGE LEAK WHETS THE APPETITE FOR WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN//



4 WHAT OTHER THINGS CAN I DRIVE?

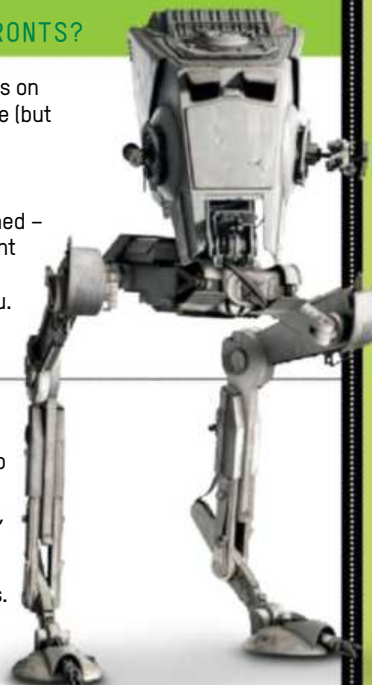
TIE Fighters, X-Wings, A-Wings, AT-ATs and AT-STs (the big walking things that look sort of like dogs and chickens, respectively), land speeders – and you can hop on turrets you find on the battlefield. It's a little early to say definitively, but that's a whole lot of fantasy fodder already.

What's the temperature inside a Tauntaun? Luke warm! Get it? Seriously, though, you could ride a Tauntaun. That aside, there are no real absolutes: we know land speeders and standard fighters were available, but no real confirmation of, say, controlling Imperial Walkers and feeling totally badass.

5 WHAT ABOUT THE ACTUAL BATTLEFRONTS?

The beta showed off maps on Hoth, Sullust and Tatooine (but we know there are other classic settings, such as Endor, in the full game). They're really well-designed – each has a totally different look, feel, and terrain working for or against you. Honestly? There's not much to hate so far.

When you compare the two, the modern Hoth map looks eerily similar to the version you can see in the *Battlefront III* leaks, which speaks to a) how far into production and b) how well-designed it was. That team knew what it was doing – and it knew *Star Wars*.



WINNER:
BATTLEFRONT 2015

WINNER:
TIE (FIGHTER)

HOW TO SPEAK DEVELOPER

Your guide to translating those interview gems

"We have a creative community of players who are constantly testing the boundaries of our content and sharing the results."

Please stop breaking our game so you can post it on YouTube.

"We wanted to keep a link to what made the series great, and have something for fans of the original games."

We've done a 'Classic Look' DLC with the characters' old outfits in it, but hoo boy will it cost you.

"I'm delighted to say we'll be shipping the game in October 2016!"

We'll be shipping the game some time in 2017!

"It's a great collaboration of ideas and everyone shares the same vision."

None of the teams know what the others are doing and I have no idea what the finished game will be like.

DASHBOARD

UPDATES - NEW INFO ON THE BIG GAMES

You'd look this angry too, if you'd just paid to see that dire new *Hitman* movie.

UPDATE

PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX / DEVELOPER IO INTERACTIVE / FORMAT XBOX ONE / ETA 11 MAR

HITMAN

Everyone's favourite assassin misses the Christmas release target

I can't wait for this one! Roll on December 8!

We're going to take a shot in the dark here and assume you haven't heard about the delay – we won't be seeing this until March 11 now. Disappointing, but the game was planning to launch with one sandbox level (the plan being to regularly release more). At least when we get it in 2016, it should be a more substantial package.

More levels from launch, huh? Like what?

The Paris fashion show looked big, but the newly revealed Sapienza looks massive. Not so much a level as an entire Italian village, complete with golf course, cafes, churches, people just trying to go about their day without dying... we wish them luck. Just because it's broad daylight doesn't mean there aren't plenty of hiding spots for Agent 47.

Looks good. Yet also strangely familiar...

Some have observed the similarity to Villa Borghese, which was the opening of *Silent Assassin* (although obviously, this is on a much bigger scale). It could be a knowing nod to the past, or even an assurance that this will be going back to the gameplay of the 'proper' *Hitman* series, after the mixed response to 2012's *Absolution*.

So it's launching with just two levels, then?

Three – Paris, Sapienza and Marrakesh, hosting six campaign missions between them. Contracts mode returns with around 800 targets for you to assassinate, and then there'll be a new sandbox stage set in a different part of the world added monthly. In April we get Thailand, USA in May and Japan in June, assuming there are no more delays.

Sigh... must every game be a sandbox now?

No, but we're starting to wonder how we played *Hitman* any other way. The best games in the series were the ones that gave you the most freedom to take out your target your way. The staggering scale of that Italian village already has us salivating and cooking up dastardly schemes for how to take out our victims. Keep this one in your sights.



UPDATE

Dialog options range from 'caring' to 'total asshole'. The dev clearly knows its teenagers.

PUBLISHER NIGHT SCHOOL STUDIO / DEVELOPER NIGHT SCHOOL STUDIO / FORMAT XBOX ONE / ETA JAN 2016

OXENFREE

Attractive teens partying alone on an island. What could go right?

Oh cool! It's *Hang Out on the Beach Simulator!*

Not quite. From Night School Studio, newly founded by ex-Disney and Telltale developers, *Oxenfree* is the story of Alex. She's a senior who brings her stepbrother to a beach party with her friends on Edwards Island. Some have brought alcohol (gasp!) and cigarettes (ban this sick filth!), while Alex brought along her radio (appalling!).

Well, nothing's more hip than a pocket radio...

Claws away, reader. Alex has a radio for a reason. Edwards Island is a decommissioned military station, and sometimes they can hear weird sounds on her radio. It starts innocently enough, until Alex starts tuning into something more sinister. From what we've seen, it looks like whatever

she's tapping into may be possessing her friends...

The horror event of 2016?

Potentially, but this reminds us more of *Life is Strange*, with its teenage characters, subtle dialog options and focus on storytelling over gameplay (we've seen some cave exploring and the radio interacting with objects, but that's about it).

Noooo! I only just finished crying over the ending of *Life is Strange!*

Dialogue between the teens is fun ("Chug! Chug! Chug!"), it has the look of a cel-shaded point-and-click adventure, and it tonally reminds us of coming-of-age classics like *Stand by Me*, while still having a style of its own. Show us more of how the radio is used for gameplay, and this party could be unmissable.



The party starts out fun for the gang. For the sake of a fun game, hopefully it won't stay that way.

DASHBOARD

UPDATES - NEW INFO ON THE BIG GAMES

Typical Iron Man - always showing off that suit of his.

UPDATE



PUBLISHER WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT / DEVELOPER TRAVELLER'S TALES / FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE / ETA JAN 26

LEGO MARVEL'S AVENGERS

No locked-off levels that force us to buy more toys? Marvel-lous!

Hope it's less dull than *Lego's* last adaptation...

This'll hopefully avoid *Lego Jurassic World's* stumbling block of playing it too straight. *Avengers* features people dressed as hot dogs, Tony Stark having a slap fight with Captain America, and Hulk finding his soulmate in a chicken. The Marvel movies have always had zingers, so feels a perfect fit with the games' humor.

Based on *Avengers Assemble*? Three years late, surely?

Probably, but it's not just based on the first movie. We'll also have stages based on the overstuffed *Age of Ultron*, the unsurprisingly dull *Captain America: The First Avenger*, the surprisingly great *Winter Soldier*, the crappy *Thor: The Dark World* and *Iron Man 3*. We quite liked *Iron Man 3*.

I thought I was reading *OXM*, not a film mag...

Our point is you're getting a lot of Marvel for your money, with over 100 characters that weren't in 2013's excellent *Marvel Super Heroes*. Fin Fang Foom, the Jane Foster version of Thor, Ms Marvel, Scarlet Witch... the Marvel Universe is probably bigger than ours at this point, so TT had plenty to choose from.

So it's just loads of different costumes?

Far from it, as all the individual powers will be present and correct. Quicksilver's speed lets him run rings around Hydra agents. Captain America can deflect bullets and frisbee his shield into goons. And Agent Coulson has the ability to be our favorite despite not *technically* being a superhero.

Individual powers? Aren't the Avengers meant to be a team?

Absolutely, and standing next to a fellow Avenger lets you do more powerful moves. Have Black Widow team up with Captain America for a spin-attack. Or bash Thor's hammer against Captain America's shield, creating an energy blast that bursts everything to bricks. Hopefully once we've unlocked some villains, we'll be seeing some more dastardly team-ups too. Much as we've enjoyed previous *Lego* games, their co-op play is far too often used for lame puzzles of the 'stand on two switches simultaneously' variety. With so many heroes, and these superhero team up moves, the series might have finally built co-op worth assembling for.



Where's our *The Unbeatable Squirrel Girl* movie? Thanks for failing to enrich our lives.



It's lazy to slam Hawkeye for not being a real superhero. Let's laugh at his glasses instead.

We've upgraded

NEW
SITE LIVE
NOW



- ✓ Designed to suit every screen
- ✓ Complete round-the-clock news
- ✓ The best PC reviews and features
- ✓ In-depth hardware coverage

PC GAMER.COM THE GLOBAL AUTHORITY ON PC GAMES

Messages

OXM, 5 Pinesway Industrial Estate, Ivo Peters Road, Bath

Love letters, death threats, and some stuff about games... your comments on the mag and on Xbox

CONTACT US [f facebook.com/oxmuk](#) [t @oxm](#) [e oxm@futurenet.com](#) [w gamesradar.com/oxm](#)

With so many great games out, who has time for nostalgia? You lot, apparently, as we've had letters praising the past, even wanting backwards compatibility to *original* Xbox games. Aha, some *Battlefront* feedback! We were worried we'd opened 1985's mailbag...



Returning to Xbox One, and without the lame soundtrack of the PS4 version. Double win!

Star Letter

Prize: *Fallout 4*

The best piece of correspondence wins a game from Matthew's goody bag



NOT THE MODES YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

I couldn't wait to get stuck into the *Battlefront* Hoth level that's been teased all year. A text box warned me to get good first, but I ignored that patronising rectangle and dived in. I couldn't have been more confused. How do you destroy AT-ATs? Why am I not Luke Skywalker yet? What the hell's going on? Grumbling, I tried Drop Zone, and found the game I'd been looking for. Stormtroopers! Pew-pew laser blasts! Grenades that sound like mini-raves! Screw Hoth: Sullust is my new home.

Harriet Price

We'd judge you for ignoring an amazing mode, but Tom's spent less time on *Battlefront* than he has *Pool Nation FX*...



Indie for the win-die

I recently purchased the fabulous *Instant Indie Collection Vol. 1*, for a bargain price of just under £18. I hope Microsoft really supports and encourages smaller companies to get their Xbox 360 games backwards compatible. Some of my favorite games came from Xbox Live's indie devs and XBLA titles. Without the same pressure to release blockbuster hits, they release entertaining, charming and addictive titles, often at a fraction of the cost of big-budget games. It's great that Microsoft is really pushing its ID@Xbox program.

Steve Peach

We couldn't imagine our directory without fantastic indie *Kalimba* in our top five. The excellent *Super Meat Boy* was one of the first essential indies confirmed for backwards compatibility, so we're optimistic for a lot more on the way.

Cracking down on hype

How DARE people say they're looking forward to *Crackdown* after seeing that Gamescom footage? My friends and I bought the original for Xbox 360 (and not just for the *Halo 3* beta) and played it to death. Ever since a new *Crackdown* got announced for Xbox One, we've been excitedly waiting for more news, and trying to ignore all the idiots jabbering about *Quantum Break*. Then, some cloud-computing footage

of an entire city going KABLAMMO hits the internet, and suddenly everyone's harping on about how much they're looking forward to this new game called *Crackdown* - which is the third game in the series! Why do true fans like me get burnt the moment something gets popular?

Shaun Harrington

Ah, but when playing online, you'll have two games' worth of experience on those noobs. Burn *them*. Burn them good.

Return of the Empire?

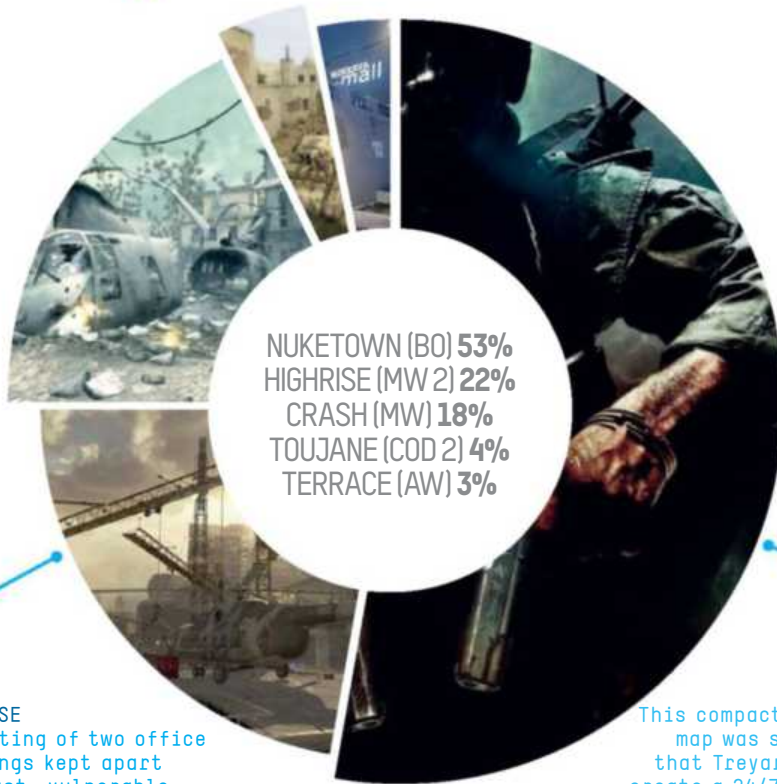
I love looking at the old games that some of you guys play every month in the Xbox Extra section. It got me thinking if there's any chance some of the old 'first generation' Xbox games might ever make it into the games store. With the excited reaction to backwards compatibility, it seems that even some first-gen games may still be fan favourites. I'd love to see *Jade Empire* in the store! Are there any games you guys would like to see?

Terrence Mangold

Phil Spencer himself said he'd like to see original Xbox backwards compatibility, but the focus (understandably) is getting our Xbox 360 games running on Xbox One first. But we'd love to see it happen, and *Timesplitters 2* would take our most-wanted spot. Give us an HD re-release, damn it!

YOUR VOTE

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE COD MULTIPLAYER MAP?



HIGHRISE
Consisting of two office buildings kept apart by a vast, vulnerable construction area, *Modern Warfare 2*'s Highrise is an all-time Domination classic.

NUKETOWN
This compact, chaotic map was so popular that Treyarch had to create a 24/7 Nuketown playlist just so that *Black Ops*' other multiplayer maps could get a look in.

The Annotated... **Fallout 4 controller**

Your thoughts on Bethesda's piece of Xbox One Vault-Tec



Hot topic

What film/TV/book characters should be added to *Lego Dimensions* next?



Adventure Time. Then we could finally see Finn and Jake in a decent game...
Liam Johnson



Kingsman: The Secret Service. Just for that epic fight scene.
Mac Dinollie



The Big Lebowski, as a movie, and the cast of *Band of Brothers* as characters.
Andy Raab



Alien, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, *Looney Toons*, *Animaniacs* and Power Rangers!
Harry Obsidian Jones



Charlie Chaplin, Sherlock Holmes and *Cast Away* please!
Dylan Sarich



My first pick is definitely *Firefly*, but I would also love to see Sheriff Carter along with some of the cast from *Eureka*...
Edwin Cordero



Pirates of the Caribbean movie. (Er, that's already a Lego game – Ed)
Carrie Henderson



Scarface and The Godfather.
Tony Po



Lego Scooby-Doo! (Well, if you buy *Dimensions*, you'll be in for a nice surprise... – Ed)
Christopher H Peltz



The IT Crowd. Have you tried turning the game on and off again?
Adam Wilson



Pirates of the Caribbean (Seriously, did no one play this game?! – Upset Ed)
Daniel Ryan

FEATURE



UPGRADE

YOUR

XBOX ONE EXPERIENCE

The tech, tricks and tips you need to squeeze every last drop of performance from Microsoft's big, black behemoth

So this is Christmas / And what have you done? / Eaten two dozen mince pies / And bought an Xbox One? As you read this, we're in the thick end of a festive season that has given us arguably The Greatest Xbox Line-Up In History. (Unless, of course, it's July 2016 and you've picked up this issue in a dentist's waiting room. Those mince pies don't seem like such a good idea now, do they?) With killer exclusives such as *Halo 5*, *Rise of the Tomb Raider*, *Forza 6* and more besides cementing Xbox One's position as this

season's must-have console, now's the perfect time for loyal Xbox 360 owners or PlayStation 3 infidels to start leaving 'subtle' hints to Santa that they want to upgrade. (Scrawling 'Get me an Xbox One you tight beardy git' on your roof in reindeer blood should be sufficient to get the message across.)

And if you're lucky enough to find an Xbox One under your tree this year, then great news – *OXM* has your back. Make Boxing Day Xbox-Unboxing Day, kick back in front of an open fire as your new bundle of joy happily updates its software, and let us tell you how to get the most from your family's newest addition...

ACHIEVEMENT: GET!

Give Jack Bauer 24 hours to stop a terrorist threat and he'll get results. But to get 10,000 Gamerscore in 24 hours, you'll need Team OXM's top tips...

01>

RARE REPLAY (2 hours)

Tons of Gamerscore here, but let's stick to the fastest 1,000G. For loading each game in the collection you get up to **15-20G**, totaling **520G**.

Watch the end credits for **Curtain Call (30G)**. Start *Knight Lore*, wait 40 in-game days, and you'll achieve **Long in the Tooth (15G)**. In *Killer Instinct Gold*, during the character bios screen input the following – View, A, right-stick right, View, A, X – to unlock Gargos. Play as him for **A Historic Victory (30G)**. In *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, type in cheat code **WELDERSBENCH**, unlocking every level and **Easy Does It (30G)**. Select 'The Vault' level from 'Heist' for the **Conker's Quest (20G)** achievement. That's **645G**, without technically playing any games.

Still if you *must* play something, completing all the Snapshots (**10G each**) is fast, as they're basically mini-games. Press 'fire' in *Gunfight* 250 total times for **Ask Questions Later (15G)** and spending five minutes on horseback gets **Hi-ho, Panto Away! (15G)**. Play every multiplayer mode in *Conker's Bad Fur Day* five times apiece, for **140G**. Die in single-player and you'll unlock **Conked Out (30G)**.

ACHIEVEMENT REGRET

Completing the insanely difficult *Battletoads* gives you a pathetic **15G**. Yeah, thanks.



02>

FORZA HORIZON 2 PRESENTS FAST & FURIOUS (3.5 hours)

Finished the opening drive? Have two Achievements! Then just keep buying cars as you complete the campaign. **Chain Reaction (30G)** demands a skill-chain worth 50,000 or more, but that's as it gets. Getting 1,000G here is as easy as deciding not to go and see Vin Diesel in *The Last Witch Hunter*.

EASILY MISSED

Selfie! (30G) take a photo of the 1970 Dodge Charger R/T.

ACHIEVEMENT REGRET

A fine drive and easy Gamerscore. Our only regret is celebrating by watching the dire *The Pacifier*. Sorry, Vin.

04>

THOMAS WAS ALONE (3 hours)

There are two easily found collectibles per level, worth **60G** per level, and **100G** on offer just for completing the game. Best of all, bouncing on Laura 100 times earns you **Part of the Problem (70G)**. Warning: don't jump on actual women called Laura. Learn from us.

EASILY MISSED

Jump 1,600 times to earn **Experienced Jumper (80G)**. No, 1,599 times isn't good enough, you inexperienced, flat-footed fool. Hop to it!

ACHIEVEMENT REGRET

We're sorry, Thomas, for getting **Huge Success (70G)** by letting you perish 100 times. Is it healthy to cry this much over the death of a rectangle?



03>

ANOTHER WORLD (3 hours)

Well, you're almost guaranteed to get **Determination (100G)** for dying a hundred times, and **675G** is unmissable while completing it. But otherwise...

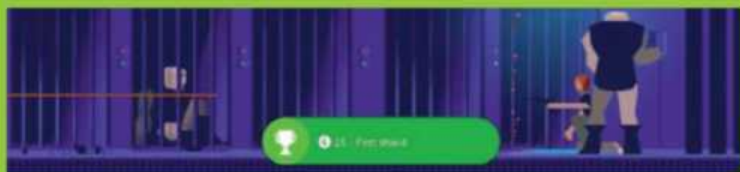
EASILY MISSED

Near the start you'll escape a cage and grab a gun. Wait for a **Secret UFO**

(100G) to appear. Then run through the prison, keeping an eye out for a lift. Ride to the top floor and go to the window for **Explorer (50G)**. Near the game's end, your partner throws you across a gap. Fall down the gap anyway for **75G**.

ACHIEVEMENT REGRET

What, can't complete this *easy* action-platformer in three hours? Don't write in saying it's actually really difficult and unforgiving. You're just rubbish.



05>

BEYOND EYES (3 hours)

Explore thoroughly, achieving **200G** for witnessing every cutscene, and **100G** for 'seeing' what everything is (follow every sound). **Courage (80G)** is for feeding a cow (don't think that takes courage? Try fighting a cow), and **Bravery (60G)** is for approaching the scary dog. Find all the butterflies for **Attraction (80G)**, feed the ducks for **Thoughtful (60G)**, and sit on a swing for **Lonely (60G)**.

EASILY MISSED

Adventure (80G) - In chapter 4, feed seagulls and cross a bridge. You'll be able to pick a flower, which Rae drops in the water. Cross back over the bridge, through a gate, over another bridge, and dislodge the flower from the rock in the water.

06>
MONOPOLY PLUS (2 hours)

God invented videogames so we wouldn't have to endure this tedium ever again. Still, you'll get **Good Start (30G)** and **Investor (30G)** just for owning your first property/building your first house. Play a few games and you'll have all the similar Achievements.

EASILY MISSED

Win a local six-player game for **Champion (50G)**. Win a game using a house rule for **Your Way (50G)**. Just when you think *Monopoly* can't get any more exciting... it doesn't.

ACHIEVEMENT REGRET

Wipe this from the hard drive and let's never speak of it again.

07>
NUTJITSU (2.5 hours)

"The game might experience a wave of popularity due to its easily achievable Gamerscore points. 5/10" - OXM, 2014. Bring on the wave! This ninja take on *Pac-Man* gives out Achievements for meeting certain criteria a set amount of times (such as collecting ten acorns). Keep buying power-ups, playing missions and completing levels, and practically all of it will come naturally.

EASILY MISSED

Speed Run (100G) Collect 30 acorns with the Ninja Speed power-up.

ACHIEVEMENT REGRET

This was repetitive to begin with, so endlessly repeating ourselves in the name of Achievements didn't help.

08>
#IDARB (1 hour)

Create a character, then copy it 20 times for **75G**. Do the same in the song and logo creator for another **150G**. Make a team, using your custom logo and song. Copy the team ten times for **Team Spirit (125G)**. Scoring a 15-point shot nails **Boom Goes the Dynamite (100G)**. Stun an online friend 25 times for **Dizzy Dealer (100G)**. Snap Twitch and type #achievement into the chat for another easy one. Score exactly 42 points for **Deep Thought (100G)**.

EASILY MISSED

An **Alley Oop! (100G)** is when you receive a pass and score, all in mid-air.

ACHIEVEMENT REGRET

#noregrets

09>
SIXTY SECOND SHOOTER PRIME (1 hour)

It takes 60 seconds to complete levels of this twin-stick shooter, but it'll take roughly 60 times that to rinse it. There's **50G** given every five levels, but the toughest challenges are scoring 1,000,000 in classic and 2,000,000 in Infinity mode.

EASILY MISSED

Beyond level 5, surviving the full 60 seconds nabs **Seize the Minute (50G)**. Tougher than it sounds, as is **Minuteman (50G)** for destroying ten enemies with a single missile.

10>
NEVER ALONE (3 hours)

An educational platformer, which gives **350G** for just finishing the story. The rest are for finding 'Cultural Insight' collectibles. Whenever you hear an owl hooting, just follow the sound until you find the object.

EASILY MISSED

Achieving **Insight (200G)** requires watching each educational clip that comes with a Cultural Insight collectible. Relax. Exit them as soon as they load, and you'll still get the Achievement.

ACHIEVEMENT REGRET

We didn't buy an Xbox One to learn things. Sorry, brain.

B-B-BONUS ACHIEVEMENT!>

THREES! (3 seconds)

Oh Snap! - Snap the game to the side and you'll get **199G**. Seriously. Great game, though.

FEATURE



01>

ELITE CONTROLLER \$149.99

"Oh don't be such an elitist," moan the peasants. But how's being an elitist an insult when you have a controller like this? It has rubberized grips for comfort, and you can swap out the analog sticks, D-pads and finger grip paddles to craft the perfect controller for whichever game you're playing. There's an App you can use to reassign buttons however you like, and it works with any PC that has Windows 7 and above. Consider us elitists for life. microsoftstore.com

ESSENTIAL XBOX ONE ACCESSORIES

We've compiled a wishlist that would give Santa a heart attack. Max out the cards, remortgage the house and keep track of when guard shifts change at your bank...

02> BEAT PEOPLE UP PROPERLY \$199.99

Why punch your friends in the face with the wrong controller? Invest in a **Razer Atrix arcade stick**. It has a proper arcade-cabinet analog stick, can take a beating and even lets you store the wires inside the box. razerzone.com



03> USB RECHARGEABLE BATTERIES \$12.99 for two

'Play and charge' kit? More like 'pay and be overcharged' kit. Get a couple of packs **Moixa USBCell AA batteries** instead. Whenever you're out of power, plug two batteries into your Xbox One's USB ports to recharge, while using the other two to continue playing. No more wires, and roughly the same cost. usbcell.com



04> EXTERNAL HARD DRIVE \$99.99

500GB of Xbox One hard drive space sounded brilliant. Then game downloads got bigger, patches we never asked for demanded more and more gigabytes and now we can't even read the 'Xbox One needs an update' screen without bursting into tears. Luckily, a 2TB **Seagate Game Drive for Xbox** adds essential storage to your Xbox One for an excellent price. Should last us for at least another three updates. Hopefully. microsoftstore.com

05> THE SOUNDS OF SAVING \$79.95

For great audio quality on a smaller budget, the **Turtle Beach Ear Force XO ONE headphones** have your ears covered. They're not the cheapest option, but excellent for what you get. Light, comfortable and great audio quality make these a... *sound* investment. microsoftstore.com



06>

REINVENT THE WHEEL \$899.90

You're using a regular controller to play *Forza*? Proletariat scum, you're not fit to lick the asphalt crumbs from our tyres. Correct that with a **Fanatec ClubSport steering wheel and base**. Customizable settings and belt drive make it feel like a real steering wheel, and the big shifter paddles are fully adjustable in distance, width and angle (or taken off to save weight). Fans of driving games will be in petrol heaven. fanatec.com



FREE GAMES



07> A WORTHY TV \$5,999.99

Recently won the lottery? The **Samsung UE65JS9500** has a curved 65-inch screen, so your neighbors should find it easier than ever to watch television through your windows. 4K upscaling means Xbox One games will look better than they do on an HD TV. If you've recently stolen \$6,000 we can think of few better ways to enjoy your Xbox One games. Before you go to jail. amazon.com

08> USE YOUR OLD HARDWARE WITH XBOX ONE \$24.99

Already have a beloved headset that you wish could be used for Xbox One? This **Official Stereo Headset Adapter** lets you plug in the headset of your choice. You can use your own headphones, too, shifting the audio output from your TV to the controller (meaning none of the eye-strain of having to sit inches from the screen because of stupidly short cables). microsoftstore.com



09> HAVE A SEAT \$249

The **X Rocker Pro Series Pedestal 2.1 Wireless Audio Gaming Chair** has a surround sound system embedded deep in the stuffing, meaning the sound from your game comes out of the chair itself – from two high-quality speakers and a subwoofer, no less, so you'll be more immersed than ever. Just think! When you get shot in *Halo*, it'll sound like you've actually taken a bullet to the spine! Isn't the future exciting? It's also ridiculously comfortable, the perfect way to enjoy your game. So long as you have no interest in ever getting up again. www.walmart.com



10>

THE BEST HEADSET \$300

The **Astro A50** is a wireless headset that's comfortable, has great chat quality and outstanding audio (Dolby 7.1 Surround Sound) that's great for multiplayer – sounds are easily defined and it's always clear where they're coming from – perfect for any FPS deathmatch. An audiophile/multiplayer must have. astrogaming.com

1,057 HOURS OF FREE GAMING

Investing in a solid games collection is all well and good, but most of us aren't bottomless pits of money. Well, *we are* but presume you're not. Freebies? Read on...

01>

WARFRAME (190.5 hours)

Those fully invested in this oddball shooter about warring alien races have sometimes been known to simplify its premise down to 'Destiny, but free'. Considering that some members of the team have recently lost their minds, eyes and finger-tendon tensile strength to Bungie's grand experiment, that makes this an attractive – and reasonably worrying – proposition.



02>

KILLER INSTINCT (76 hours)

Xbox One's first foray into free-to-play is arguably its best, a distinguished take on the old-school fighter with an unusual approach to its roster. Without paying a cent, you can dip in, get up to speed with a new character and earn enough to buy some items. Being forced to eventually switch characters could even teach you a few things.



03>

HAPPY WARS (23 hours)

This is that rarest of things – a free-to-play game that you won't be ashamed to share your addiction to. It's hobbled a tad by pay-to-win bias, but there's with full split-screen support for up to four players – it's a more than a passing diversion with some friends alongside you.



04>

SALTYBET.COM (39 hours)

One of mankind's greatest inventions: a fighting platform that throws thousands of characters into a single, creaking engine and endlessly matches up AI opponents while screaming nerds bet fake money on who'll triumph. This one's a bit cheeky, as you can't fully play (it runs with Flash, which isn't supported by the browser), but do what we do – stream it on Xbox One's Twitch app and make your own bets at home.



05>

SPORTS GAME DEMOES (32 hours)

Honestly, we can't believe that any sports publishers still put up samples of their games every year – they could probably double their sales just by withholding those six free teams. Who needs the latest instalment of FIFA? We've got 4.46 gigabytes of it and we're happy to leave it at that, thanks.

06>

SMITE (111 hours)

Somehow, *Smite* is the MOBA nobody has really heard of, despite the fact that it has millions of players and massive tournament prizes. Closer to a third-person action game than the genre's usual weird-RTS style, it fits on to console snugly too, with a huge roster of deities to select from and typically arcane systems for you to lose your social life to. Perfect.

07> BROWSER GAMES (18 hours)

Your Xbox browser can handle HTML5 – and sites like PlayBoxie collect free HTML5 games handily formatted for controllers. Sure, *most* are total crap, but knock-off *Tetris* is still *Tetris*, and we've been playing it since we were knee-high to a Soviet grasshopper.

08>

XBOX FITNESS (15 hours)

Arguably, the greatest game of all is staying alive – and this should help you not to lose. Your life, that is. 30 workouts come with the free version of this personal trainer, which should be more than enough to keep you from keeling over while you put hundreds of sedentary hours into the rest of this list. Be warned – you will need Kinect.



09> MAGIC DUELS: ORIGINS (87 hours)

This is a surprisingly comprehensive, and often generous, introduction to the world's greatest, most enormous card game. A little under-featured for experienced players, perhaps, but there's tons for neophytes to get into here – mainly because it wants you to go on to buy the apocalyptically expensive real cards as a result.

10> YOUR OLD XBOX 360 GAMES (135 hours)

As of now, backwards compatibility is coming to Xbox One, with around 100 last-gen games being made available to play on your new console. With most publishers onboard, that number's only going to grow, meaning you can replay classics or forgotten gems just by keeping hold of your old disc collection.



11> WORLD OF TANKS (63 hours)

The Russian free-to-play sensation has arrived on Xbox One, with even muddier mud and more metallic gunmetal. At first, you may wonder why anyone plays something so slow – days later, while choosing the perfect track treads, you'll wonder how anyone ever stops.



12> PINBALL FX2 (11 hours)

Designed for you to pay for favourite franchises (for a while, Matthew couldn't be torn away from the *Star Wars* tables), this wouldn't be on this list if it wasn't for the free Sorcerer's Lair table. Zen's approach to the classic bar game is so good, however, that you can spend weeks mastering just that.

15>

USE KINECT TO SEE IF YOU CAN DETECT GHOSTS (0.5 hours)

Settings -> Kinect -> What else can Kinect See? These few short commands have led us to literally minutes of pleasure, as we tried to use the Thermal setting to catch out any errant spectres lurking in our houses (à la *Paranormal Activity 4*). We are a lonely, if resourceful bunch of people.



13> PROJECT SPARK (152 hours)

Microsoft's in-house game-creation project didn't go quite as well as hoped – but that's our gain, as it's now completely free. Best of all, there's a *huge* number of user-created games to play once you've gotten tired of making your own.



14> NEVERWINTER (104 hours)

We cut our teeth on free MMOs back in the day, so *Neverwinter* brings some nostalgic flair for more than that reason than its *D&D* associations. What's more, most of the transactions are kept pleasingly hidden, meaning you can get to grips with the (surprisingly deep) systems in peace.



INSTANT EXPERT

Master the nuances of this year's three biggest online shooters with our explosive multiplayer tips guides

Halo 5: Guardians

Smarten your Spartan with these five tricky Arena tips

1> KEEP MOVING

The amount of damage your Spartan can absorb is less than in most other shooters – if you come under fire there's only a tiny window of opportunity to scramble for cover. Save your thruster pack (mapped to B by default) for these moments, and remember you can boost left to right as well as back and forth.

2> AIM FOR THE HEAD

Firefights tend to be brief, and decided not by the person who shoots the most, but who shoots smartest. Get into the habit of aiming for the head, and reconsider the default magnum – it's not some puny sidearm, but a close-quarters powerhouse that delivers more damage than the assault rifle.

3> HOVER BOTHER

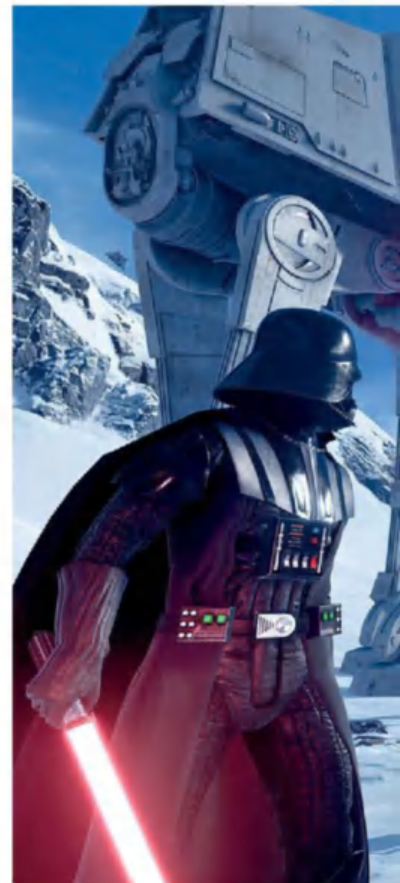
Aim down your sights while jumping and your Spartan will actually hover briefly in mid-air to stabilise the shot. You can use this unorthodox ability to your advantage by creating new shooting angles, and also to disorientate attacking enemies.

4> CROUCH NO MORE

In previous *Halo* games the only way to stay off the radar was by crouching. That's no longer the case – as long as you're moving slowly, the other team won't be able to detect your movements. Crouch jumping has also been made redundant by the addition of the clamber system.

5> PROJECTILE VOMIT

If you spy an incoming enemy, throw a grenade in their general direction – with luck it'll deplete their shields and give you an advantage going into the firefight. Even if you miss with the explosion, you stand a good chance of penning them into a dead end.





Call of Duty: Black Ops III

Make your multiplayer Specialist that bit more special

1> KNOW YOUR ROLES

Your choice of Specialist and the ability they use should completely change how you play, meaning you should unlock a few for use in different modes. In a Deathmatch? Grab the creeping death of Prophet's Tempest rifle. Playing Safeguard? Reaper's Psychosis ability will put off potential killers for crucial seconds.

2> GREAT WALLS

Your Specialist's more nimble than you know. While certain walls are clearly set up to be dashed across, almost any vertical surface can be traversed – use cliff edges to cross gaps or just use a walldash to freak out your ground-bound opponents.

3> WATERY GRAVEDIGGER

Most multiplayer maps hold at least one body of water. Not only are they perfect for sneak attacks, but you can also lure enemies after you and hide under a pond's murky meniscus, before popping up for an easy kill.

4> JUMP FOR PLOY

The double-jump is like floating through bitumen – it might seem like a nice way to put off an attacker who has the jump on you, but you'll more likely offer them a nice, still target. You'll be better served by staying on the floor and ducking for cover.

5> YOUR ASS IS GLASS

Your radar might be noise-activated, but there's plenty of racket it doesn't pick up. Best of all, listen out for breaking glass – not only is it easily done, but there's often only a few places it could be coming from.



Star Wars Battlefront

Bend the battlefield to your will with these insights from our expert Jedi

1> SHOOT FROM THE HIP

As any *Star Wars* fan knows, it's all about who shot first. Aiming down sights is actually a disadvantage: technically, it's no more accurate than shooting from the hip and it actually slows your movement speed. In the split second it takes to raise the sights, you could be getting that first shot in.

2> GO DLT OR GO HOME

Kit the DLT as your primary weapon – it's solid at long range and has an incredible firing rate. Offer it some Star Card backup with Thermal Grenades – which offer great range and are easy to one-hit kill with – and the Cyclor rifle, the latter being able to cut through energy shields for easy enemy takedowns.

3> GET SOME PERSPECTIVE

The game defaults to first-person, but it's beneficial to get to know the third-person option. Not only does it offer a wider view, making it harder for enemies to sneak round and flank, but also camera adjustments let you peer around corners and over ledges.

4> PICK YOUR SPOTS

Just grabbed a Hero power-up? Identify where enemy forces are (flashing red radial wedges on the radar) before activating – there's nothing worse than calling Luke Skywalker into a distant corner of Hoth where there's no one for him to unleash the Force on.

5> JUMP (FOR MY HOTH)

Equip the jump pack as soon as you have it. It opens a vast number of higher ground areas that let you either get the drop on enemies or make it to an objective in faster time. Better still, weapon accuracy is unaffected by jumping, so rain down laser death from above.





PUBLISHER 2K GAMES / DEVELOPER GEARBOX SOFTWARE / FORMAT XBOX ONE

Battleborn

Where to go when there's no more *Borderlands*? Try the end of the universe...

Fun fact! Some day, every star will implode and the universe will end in eternal darkness! Hmm, that's awful dark for a fun fact, but also the premise of Gearbox's new half-MOBA, half-shooter, hopefully all-fun *Battleborn*. 25 warriors have gathered to fight over the galaxy's last living star. The end of the universe we can accept, but so many characters with unique powers, abilities and unlocks, all facing off in the same game? Never mind the stars – our minds verge on imploding just picturing this level of chaos.

The warriors do little to quell our potentially fatal headache. Boldur, a

Metadata

BEST BIT...



Every character has a post-kill taunt. Rath licks the katana he's just slaughtered you with – ooh, edgy. Another character, Oscar Mike, does a press-up. Erm, best work on your buns a bit, Mike.

Bluffer's Guide

The creator of *Borderlands* gives us another loot-obsessed co-op campaign, but with a massive cast and some of the craziest PvP you'll find on Xbox One.

man so muscular he probably uses entire gyms as weights. ISIC, a mech who can surround himself with shielding energy balls. Like the best shields, these have the potential to hurt others. Mellka has a clawed left hand, nasty-looking pistol in her right. Benedict thankfully keeps things simple by just toting a gun. Oh, and he's also a birdman who can soar through the skies, Michael-Keaton-insanity-style. Good grief, and that's not even a quarter of the total cast.

Fast, furious shooting followed when we tried some of the gun-wielding warriors, a reminder that the creator of *Borderlands* knows how to make an FPS. It's created some excellent melee fighters too, with the locked first-person perspective making close-quarters combat more intense. These stabbiest warriors are natural attackers, the clear favorites being sword-wielding Phoebe and spin-attacking Rath (think Crash Bandicoot, but with dual katanas). If you want to play a support role, pick characters like mushroom-man Miko

and archer Thorn – they have weaker attacks, but can heal allies. For defence you want a brute like ISIC, capable of shielding and taking massive hits. If 25

characters overwhelm you, the three attack/support/defend archetypes are a number you can wrap your head around.

Or not? Characters fit these roles initially, but then RPG elements are

introduced, gleefully mixing things up. Levelling gives you a choice between two power-ups. Usually one offensive – increased special attack power, say – and one defensive, such as a stat boost that can be used on yourself and your allies. Expect to level every few minutes, matching the combat's furious pace. Naturally, the higher level you are, the more game-changing the unlocks. ISIC's a bulky defender, slower than someone trying to install *The Nathan Drake Collection* on their Xbox One. But level him high enough, and he'll temporarily be a dual-cannoned death mech, capable of blasting the living numbers out of foes.

This is an ultimate ability, unlocked when you reach the level cap of ten.

ETA
FEB 9



Melee combat's fine, but never quite matches the impact of a good ol'-fashioned gun blast.



//Fighting other warriors directly isn't always the smartest option//

These mean the final few minutes of a match are often absolute chaos – and they weren't exactly calm to start with. You'll learn each character's strengths and weaknesses, but due to everyone restarting each game back at level one you're never quite sure what powers the player controlling them opted for until they're using them against you.

You might expect people to just opt for offensive powers, were player-vs-player limited to simple deathmatches. Instead, we have modes such as Meltdown where teams of five have to protect drones as they slowly death march into an incinerator. You have to ensure they reach the incinerator safely (so they can, er, burn to death) to score points. Fighting other warriors isn't always the smartest option, and you can instead opt for darting around the map collecting Shards (in-game currency), buying turrets and setting up other defences to block enemy progress. RPG-style resource

collection and levelling, with tower-defence turret placement, all in a close-combat arena? It sounds fussy, but a few rounds in it started to click.

It's also a great example of how vibrant use of color can not only make a game look distinctive, but also train you how to play. A spin of red means Rath's blades are incoming. Green dashing towards you means Mellka is

Action gets chaotic. Sometimes the real battle is figuring out what's going on.

rushing in for the kill. A flap of wings overhead has you readying to blast Benedict out of the sky.

Given the roster size, *Battleborn* is impressively well-balanced. Although the promise (threat?) of another ten characters joining the 15 we've seen means that could still become an issue. But it's a more accessible shooter/MOBA/tower defence/RPG than that genre mish-mash sounds. All presented with outstanding animation in a rainbow of color. Perhaps the end of the universe won't be so dark after all.
Tom Stone



Split-screen machine

Playing in the same room? Witchery!

"It's critical for us," says creative director Randy Varnell, explaining the importance of keeping split-screen in the game. "It requires a lot of work and dedication. We have to dedicate some programmers, some engineers. But split-screen is so important; we hear that from the fans. We know so many people who love to play the campaign together. We've heard dozens and dozens of stories from our community about that, so [it] was a was big deal for us."



PUBLISHER ROCKFISH GAMES / DEVELOPER ROCKFISH GAMES / FORMAT XBOX ONE

It looks beautiful – but trust us, it does all want to kill you.

Everspace

My god, it's full of (procedurally generated) stars

Bluffer's Guide

Astonishingly gorgeous space roguelike that prioritizes action over simulation. Figure out why you keep being reborn, while trying not to die in the first place.

Xbox One might not have *No Man's Sky* to brag about, but between *Elite: Dangerous* and now *Everspace*, we're doing pretty well on the space front. While the former is more of a simulation, offering a vast universe filled with trading opportunities, politics and complex docking, *Everspace*, well, isn't.

What it is, however, is a stonkingly pretty action game – featuring all the lasers, nebulae, explosions and other glowing spacey things you'd expect from a team that made a game called *Galaxy on Fire*. The Newtonian physics model is nowhere to be found; instead, we should expect a game that's easy to pick up and control straight out of the docking bay.

Despite appearances, *Everspace* is something of a roguelike, plonking you in an “ever-changing” universe with a mysterious destination to try to reach, and with lots of pirates, traders, wormholes, derelict ships and other galactic entities standing... er, floating in your way. To jump from system to system, and bring yourself closer to your goal, you'll need to upgrade your ship, and scavenge fuel to power your jump drive – and you can do this in pretty much any way you desire.

Want to rob traders of their precious supplies? Or would you prefer to plunder wrecked spaceships? You could spend ages mining asteroids, if you prefer. Don't worry: there'll be plenty of dogfighting, and tussles with freaky

space phenomena, along the way. When you die – and, this being a roguelike, you will die – you'll be reborn in a shiny new ship.

Unlike most roguelikes, *Everspace* isn't overly mean. Upon death, you'll be able to use your universal space-bucks to improve your starting conditions, grafting on permanent upgrades that will make each new run slightly easier over time. Moreover, dying will reveal new story titbits – you'll have to die to learn what the heck's going on.

Beginning the game as an amnesiac, you're given a new endpoint each time you're brought back to life, keeping any acquired blueprints or story progress. Rockfish promises a non-linear story, and indeed a bigger story component than in many similar games.

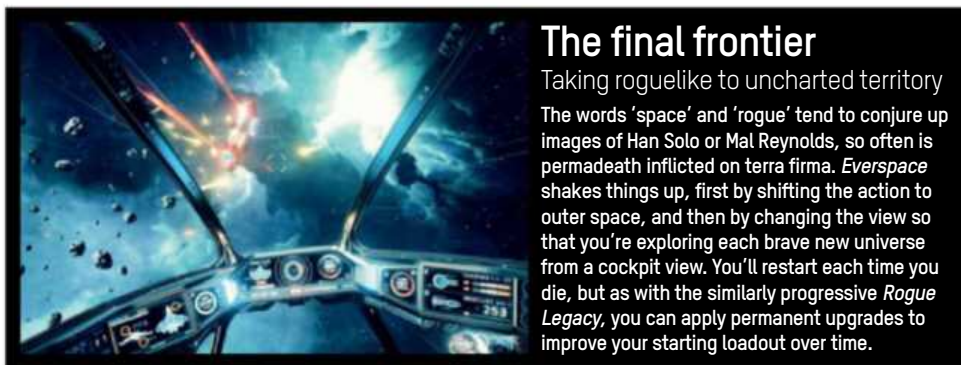
You can upgrade your ship on the fly to stave off death for a little longer – by sticking a cloaking device on your trusty vessel, for instance. Or you could improve your laser so you can bypass their shields. Or you could paint your ship a lurid Xbox green.

Though the (successful) Kickstarter campaign has ended, Rockfish is continuing to raise money on its website, and it's just got enough cash to add a Hardcore mode. While this hasn't been detailed in its entirety, the developer promises permadeath and other “nasty surprises” – so if you like your roguelikes old-school, *Everspace* is gunning for you, too.

Tom Sykes

ETA
2016

//When you die – and you will – you're reborn in a shiny new ship//



The final frontier

Taking roguelike to uncharted territory

The words ‘space’ and ‘rogue’ tend to conjure up images of Han Solo or Mal Reynolds, so often is permadeath inflicted on terra firma. *Everspace* shakes things up, first by shifting the action to outer space, and then by changing the view so that you're exploring each brave new universe from a cockpit view. You'll restart each time you die, but as with the similarly progressive *Rogue Legacy*, you can apply permanent upgrades to improve your starting loadout over time.



Whatever's under that sheet, we probably don't want to see it.

PUBLISHER BLOOBER TEAM / DEVELOPER BLOOBER TEAM / FORMAT XBOX ONE



Layers of Fear

A masterpiece of horror... about a masterpiece of horror?

Bluffer's Guide

A creepy first-person horror game where you explore a terrifying maze of a house, and don't look too hard at any of the paintings.

To be trapped forever by your own tortured psyche: surely there's no worse fate possible? It looks like *Layers of Fear* is really going to put that to the test. It's oozed its way out of the collective psyche of indie developer Bloober Team, and, if the Xbox preview version we've played is anything to go by, it's an ambitious, clever and strangely beautiful horror game.

Layers of Fear is, for want of a better term, a first-person walking simulator – but one that takes you on a jaunt through gothic romance and ghosts. It does so via the twisted insanity of a once great artist, a man now seemingly stuck exploring his own creaking mansion and in a quest to

create one last great painting through very dubious means.

There's some truly fantastic design on display here, with recurring themes subtly set up early on (rats, alcoholism, fire, memory, reflections) that are drawn further out as you explore the house. Each turn you take around the once-grand family home renders it increasingly grotesque, as you begin looping back on yourself and revisiting the same rooms, gradually losing any grip on what is and isn't real. The whole environment can change with just a move of the camera. Turn around and you may find the room is totally different – a fountain of broken dolls heads may have erupted, for example. Shudder.

ETA
TBA

There are little clues scattered throughout the house – mainly in the form of old diary entries and newspaper articles – that hint at a horrible backstory involving disfigurement and obsession, but they can be tough to find. Almost every drawer and cabinet can be opened using analogue tweaks as surrogate

hands, but most of them don't have anything inside. It would be nice to find the pieces of story more often.

You're also plagued by ghosts in some fun jump shocks, though the antagonist we're more worried about is a sinister and hulking pursuer (who may or may not represent yourself) who appears a couple of times, dragging his feet with a heavy step. Although *Layers of Fear* is a strictly non-combat game, the sense of real danger could be easily ramped up a bit if he made more frequent showings. We'd happily settle for the vague threat of him, with those footsteps heralding his arrival like the stomp of a T-rex rippling water.

Layers of Fear does tend to lean on horror clichés, too. It is, after all, pretty standard for murderers and/or psychopaths to daub their thoughts over the walls – but you would have thought that in a painter's house it would be done a bit more creatively. That aside, this is shaping up really well, with excellent use of sound, color, and movement all coming together in a very layered experience. Oh, right! *Layers of Fear*. Got it. Alice Bell

//The environment can change with just a move of the camera//



Putting the pain in paint

More than your average finger painting *Layers of Fear's* protagonist is an artist, and so drawings and paint are a big feature of the game. Often paintings will morph as you look at them, and more than once they trigger a change in the entire environment, or hide a clue to help you progress deeper into the mansion. They're also universally unsettling. We don't get to see how the artist's final masterpiece turns out yet, but it's a shoo-in that – by the time the game's finished – it's going to be horrifying.

PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX / DEVELOPER EIDOS MONTREAL / FORMAT XBOX ONE

Deus Ex: Mankind Divided

Our hands-on aug-urs well

Bluffer's Guide

The sequel to the great reboot of the most revered name in cyberpunk chin-strokery. Will you fight a bleak future with violence, stealth, or a good chat?

Adam Jensen begins his new outing – the first returning role for a *Deus Ex* lead – in a contemplative mood. “Sometimes you just have to let go,” he says, with a voice like a sexy living tree, “and embrace what you’ve become.” The problem is, Ad, that means precisely nothing, because *you* can become anything. *Human Revolution*’s lofty goal of allowing you to play through the entire game (boss battles excluded) in any number of different styles was more or less a success, and our hands-on with *Mankind Divided* reveals that that’s not just the continued focus, but seemingly the entire point of the game.

We begin our demo in 2029 Dubai, a blackly comic take on the world’s most obviously unfinished city – it never got finished, and is now being swallowed on both sides by creeping desert and yawning sea. This is the game’s tutorial level – Adam Jensen drops in from a jump-jet filled with his new Task Force 29 buddies, a yammering group of colonial marine knock-offs tasked with keeping the (world) peace, and sets about making things difficult for the local Jinn crew, one of the game’s many warring terrorist factions.

It’s a *Metroid Prime*-style tease of a first level, granting Jensen many of his late-game upgrades, letting you get a feel for the multiple play styles – from Typhoon-aided destruction, to using active camo and mighty strength to

craft your own non-violent paths. It’s purposefully linear, with only a couple of sneak-some vents, and a single optional objective along your way. By making your only real choice that of *how* you proceed, not *where*, you’re immediately drawn to trying out as many colorful tactics as possible.

After being attacked by separatist group the Augmented Rights Coalition, and watching the building begin to collapse as the *Mad Max*-grade sandstorm you’ve been admiring on the horizon strikes, the level ends. Seemingly, so too does Adam’s ability to harness a full game’s worth of powers.

Theater of screams

Which leads us to the Dvali Theater, a mid-game story mission set in an eastern spit of the game’s huge Prague hub world. Here, we’re given a far more open mission – get into the seedily repurposed building (a gang runs some bleak, *Taken*-style operations in here) and into a local crime boss’ basement office by any means necessary. It’d be easy enough – you can enter any window on the ground floor, there’s a ventilation shaft on the roof, a wall that can be broken through on the first floor and, of course, you could just use the front door – but it’s incredibly well-guarded.

For the hands-on, we’re given three different sets of equipment and augmentations to use in our pursuit

of break-and-enter success – each is meant to represent a potential course Jensen could have taken in the game up to this point. Stealth offers us a tranquilizer rifle, the ability to turn invisible, and the Tesla arm upgrade, which fires arcing EMP darts into any mechanically aided adversaries. Combat plonks two big guns into the inventory and drops the Titan shield – which turns you into a walking polygonal statue – into the aug wheel.

A more balanced loadout is perhaps the most interesting – it comes with a Battle Rifle that can be modded with a scope to become an effective sniping tool, but offers a Typhoon attack that fires stun gas, taking down close-range crowds without a single casualty.

Each offers some obvious optimal routes through the level, but what becomes most interesting is how much work has been put into making each approach’s weaknesses a fundamental part of the design. The temptation with a combat build is to simply wade through a sea of blood to the objective – but the theatre’s also patrolled by robotic guards, who take an absolute pounding, giving every other guard the time to hide and take potshots. Stealth’s Tesla ability makes short, silent work of these, but once you’re into the main building, all cramped backstage areas and guard-packed box seats, every tranq dart becomes precious, and you begin to watch your quickly drained energy bar like a hawk, saving juice for the moments where you absolutely need to switch on your Glass-Shield Camo and make a dash across occupied territory.

In the first couple of runs, finding our way safely through the warren-like building takes an hour and a half. Come our tenth, we can speedrun it in four minutes. The message is clear. Become something, learn everything you can about the abilities you choose to use, then embrace it. It seems that Adam has a point.
Joe Skrebels

ETA
FEB 23



Word on the street

Why can't we all just talk this out?

In order to preserve the secrecy of plot points (and also, presumably, because it would be really hard to show in a small section of the game), our hands-on contained barely an ounce of *Mankind Divided*’s other main gameplay system: conversation. We’re told, however, that the ability to manipulate, intimidate or charm the world’s NPCs is deeper than ever – and the effects of even small events can resonate throughout the whole game.

Upgrade your hacking skills enough and you can disable electronics remotely, with a golf game swing-style activity.



While Eidos has abandoned much of the iconic black 'n' gold color scheme, it will return in thematically appropriate areas.



Insta-swapping ammo types and upgrades on weapons makes you feel like Judge Dredd – and is thus the best feature in the game.

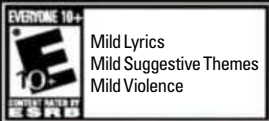


The Tesla's a silent option, but ammo seems as limited as it was for the Typhoon in the last game.



Microsoft

LEAVE YOUR LIMITS





FORZA **HORIZON 2**

Open it up in a truly massive open-world. From day to night, dirt to pavement. Connect and race with friends in the most realistic—and unreal—driving game out there with more than 200 of the world's greatest cars. Get the demo now on Xbox One.

Features and requirements subject to change. Features vary between Xbox 360 and Xbox One version of game (each sold separately). Xbox One games for use only with Xbox One systems. Games made for Xbox 360 will not work on Xbox One. Xbox LIVE Gold membership (sold separately) required for online multiplayer; multiplayer between Xbox 360 and Xbox One not supported. On Xbox 360, some cars require download from Xbox LIVE (ISP fees apply) and a hard drive. For Xbox 360 4GB, Arcade and Core consoles (hard drive sold separately). Demo available for Xbox One only. Download from Xbox LIVE. 12GB required. ISP fees apply.

 **XBOX ONE**

FEATURE

1 DAY IN THE WASTE

Fallout 4 is finally here. All of Boston, begging to be explored. Only question is... Where in hell do we go next?

Writer: Tom Stone



LAND

"THE IMPACT OF THE BOMBS' DESTRUCTION HAS NEVER BEEN SO VISCERAL"

Hands up, who remembers the story of *Fallout 3*? Liam Neeson? Water supplies? Daddy issues? No you dolt, we mean the *real* stories – running off the beaten track, discovering the wonders/horrors of the wasteland, occasionally surviving to tell the tale. *Fallout 4* is no different. Because by now we all know how this starts. 2077, at home with your wife, child and robot butler, Codsworth. Just another day, until: "Master Tom! You might want to come and see this!" Never listen to anyone who tells you flattery won't get you anywhere, as Codsworth referring to us by *our actual name* instantly wins *Fallout 4* game of the year.

Codsworth is an absolute delight, and easily my favorite member of my family. Sure, my wife flatters me too, but she never calls me by name, so this is clearly on the rocks. She suggested going on a trip to the park. The news suggested running for our lives before we're destroyed by nuclear annihilation. We decided to go with the latter option.

"ID SOFTWARE HELPED IMPROVE THE SHOOTING AND BOY DOES IT SHOW"

FEATURE

A stunning view of the... Hang on, what's a *Minecraft* skyscraper doing here?

HP

TIME 12:00

200 YEARS & ONE HOUR LATER... >

■ Saying what happened in Vault 111 would be delving into spoiler territory. But the initial bomb drop was a stunningly executed set-piece, and the view as I first left the vault, a couple of centuries later, was breathtaking. Juxtaposed with the bright suburban landscape you saw only (real time) minutes ago, the impact of the bombs' destruction has never been so visceral. One of the brownest series in gaming (and it's up against some pretty stiff competition) has finally figured out how to make nuclear annihilation look enchanting.

13:01

IT'S A BLAST >

■ After 200 lonely years, my heart pines for human companionship. So when I first see another person, I punch him in the back of the head and steal his gun and clothes.

Id Software helped improve the shooting, and boy does it show. Weapons feel more satisfying, shots feel meatier and VATS no longer feels like cheating (well, not as much). Instead of freezing time, VATS now slows it down, meaning you're still getting shot, beaten and chased while trying to decide which limb to blow off. It's a more limited advantage, forcing you to act faster, resulting in hectic gunplay that's far and away the best this series has seen. A brilliant example of how small, smart changes can make an old experience feel fresh again.

14:20

UNLEASH THE BEAST! >

■ Screw the small guns, I just found my first suit of power armor. Entered Iron Man-style, it makes me strong enough to rip a minigun off a downed airship. I then leap off the roof and down into the city streets (power armor stops you taking any falling damage) and make bloody mincemeat of the raiders below. Their shots fail to even cause scratches on me, while my minigun fire sends their limbs flying. I feel invincible. I feel cocky. Surely nothing can interrupt this feeling?

14:30

ON SECOND THOUGHTS, PUT THE BEAST BACK IN THE GROUND >

■ Just like that, a Deathclaw crawls out to meet me. It wipes out raiders with single hits, but those are just snacks – I'm the main course. Gulping, I spray it with minigun fire, watching hopelessly as my lead whittles off mere atoms of health bar. Deathclaw blows send my robot flying backwards, the raiders long since forgotten. "But I'm wearing power armor!" I whine. Uncaring, the Deathclaw tears me in half.

A quick reload and I am ready for the attack this time. Naturally, I die again. Stop sniggering: Deathclaws are one of *Fallout's* deadliest enemies. Gigantic, ferocious beasts with skin like a tank, no weak points and even less mercy. My minigun out of ammo, I leap out of my power armor and run for the hills.

FOUR COMPANIONS JUDGED

Dogmeat – *Dog, Treat Enthusiast*
Man's best friend, if you're a loser of a man who can't make human friends. Will call your attention to items and loot corpses for you. Still never as adorable as a cat, though. 6/10

Piper – *Journalist, Good Liar*
The editor of *Publick Occurrences* is also good in a firefight. Has a list of printed responses to letters her newspaper has received, followed by a private list of much nastier responses she wishes she could have printed. If she ever wants a job editing our Messages page, it's hers. 9/10

Strong – *Super Mutant, Slow everything else*
A brutal melee brawler, but one that can get in the way when we're trying to line up our headshots. Also doesn't give much back in a conversation. Frankly, you'd be better off talking to the dog. 3/10

Codsworth – *Robot Butler, Optimist*
British, charming, capable of saying our real name and loyally waited two centuries for us to come home. He's like an Android version of Alfred, only better. The perfect companion. 10/10

Neon signs add some welcome color to the wasteland.



You can even craft your own ammo. Highly recommended.



FALLOUT 4

FOUR ESSENTIAL CHEMICALS

ULTRA JET
1 Bloodleaf + 1 Fertilizer + 1 Jet + 2 Plastic
Gives you 15 seconds of slowdown time and maxes out your action points – perfect for sprinting away or unleashing total VATs domination.

OVERDRIVE
1 Acid + 1 Nuka Cola + 1 Psycho
For eight minutes, you'll deal an extra 25% damage. Better yet, there's a 25% increased chance of scoring a critical – and *Fallout 4* is never more satisfying than when heads pop and blood pours over the screen. Don't look at us like that.

PSYCHO JET
1 Jet + 1 Psycho
Fifteen seconds of slowdown time, a 25% damage boost (and +35 damage resist), plus 40 bonus action points to play with.

ORANGE MENTATS
1 Asbestos + 3 Carrots + Mentats
These probably taste awful, but are worth it for the eight minutes of improved perception and 10% VATs accuracy boost you get. Actually, carrot pills? Forget we said anything.

14:40

BORN TO RUN. LIKE A COWARD >

■ Sprinting is swifter, but my enemies are much faster. Feral ghouls literally leap at you – that's how desperate they are for a taste. Great for map navigation, this shot of adrenaline also means this is a wasteland that's never felt more openly hostile. I've always feared Super Mutants, but now mere Mole Rats are giving me the screams every time they scurry towards my legs. All creatures, great and small, feel like they have a fair chance of finishing you. Between the deadlier enemies, the refined VATs that removes mid-combat pausing and sprint cooldowns, Boston now feels so dangerous, I'm starting to suspect Hidetaka Miyazaki is the one who dropped the bomb.

15:10

YOU CALL IT 'MOLDY', WE CALL IT 'FREE' >

■ I visit an abandoned Super-Duper mart, and help myself to plates of moldy food. Hacking a terminal lets me free a Protectron. Changed its settings first, just to be sure it didn't celebrate its newfound freedom by killing me.

Luck runs out when ghouls start clambering through the windows and sprinting for me. Come on guys, no need to eat me, plenty of moldy food for everyone. This negotiation tactic didn't go over well ("*but I have ten points in charisma!*"). Luckily, the Protectron steps in, laser-blasting the ghouls while I cower behind. Make a mental note to invest in new gun power perks and kiss the Protectron gratefully on the cheek. Flee before it retaliates to my lips with burning laser fire.

16:23

CAN I PLAY TOO? >

■ Fiddling with the Pip-Boy radio taps into a police station distress signal. I swing by, take out a few ghouls, and impress the station's leader, Paladin Danse. I agree to join him on a mission, but soon regret it. Danse has an irritating habit of running ahead and playing *Fallout 4* for me, blasting the baddies while I'm still rummaging through filing cabinets for bottlecaps.

Danse thanks me for my help, having somehow failed to notice I was as helpful as a concrete parachute. He even offers me a place in the Brotherhood of Steel, with free power armor. I turn him down, not ready to commit to Brotherhood life. Fifty ghoul bites to my undefended flesh later, I regret that decision.

FEATURE

This gentleman asked us to tone down the gore. He was punished accordingly.

FOUR ESSENTIAL SIDEQUESTS

VAULT 75

Make sure you search every school you find. One has a secret vault underneath, the pretence being it was to save the children and their parents (if they could afford it). The truth is far more horrifying, even for this series, and that's *really* saying something.

TROUBLE BREWIN'

It's not all doom and gloom in the wasteland, as this charming adventure proves. Salvage a beer-brewing robot, while wondering if Bethesda come up with the pun first, then write the quest after. We're not judging. That's how 90% of *OXM* is brewed.

OUT OF THE FIRE

Stop impressionable youngster Jake from joining sinister Raider gang The Forged. Seriously, these guys are truly evil. Feeding-people-eyes-for-sleeping-on-their-shift kind of evil.

HERE KITTY, KITTY

Rescue Erin's cat. Look, you're going to commit some truly horrible sins in the wasteland. The least you can do is return this lost kitty. Think of your soul.

17:11

"I'M LISTENING" >

■ Paladin Danse takes my rejection well, considering I was barely listening to him. Brilliantly, if you turn subtitles on and skip through the text, your character will say non-committal 'sure, I'm tooooooally listening' phrases between sentences, regardless of what's being said. Leading to conversations like this:

"The raiders have slaughtered our village!"

"Uh huh."

"They're coming back! Tonight they shall dine on the flesh of our elderly, washed down with the blood of our children!"

"Sure."

It's always good to stay calm in a crisis.

18:00

"PLEEEEEASE LET ME IN!">

■ Discover Vault 89. It is sealed shut and well guarded, with a stubborn asshole on the intercom who (understandably) won't let strangers inside. But he is no match for the ten perk points I'd funneled into charisma, meaning I can charm my way into the vault with this immortal line: "But I'm a fellow vault dweller! Can't you just let me in?" Don Draper, eat your heart out, because this *actually works*. Never underestimate the terrible power of whining.

19:05

WELCOME TO LIFE, KID>

■ A child offers me a tour of Vault 89 if I pay him a handful of caps. Use my high charisma to refuse paying him. Not only do I get the tour and keep the caps, I also earn experience points. The karma system is gone, so finally we have a *Fallout* that rewards you for ripping off kids.

The tour's pretty beneficial, especially if you steal as much stuff as I did (no karma system, so who cares?) Good voice acting and a wide range of characters help sell this as a community on the mend. But I didn't play a *Fallout* game to hang out in a vault, and soon abandon the people of 89 for the fresh radioactive air. Celebrate my return to the open-sky by killing some people so I could sleep in their beds. No karma, no problems.

CRIT

X EXECUTE CRITICAL B ABORT

FOUR ESSENTIAL WEAPONS

JUNK JET

At last! A weapon that fires all those useless rusty tin cans we're always accidentally picking up. Will launch any junk loaded into it and the longer you hold down the trigger, the more powerful the impact. Means it's now possible to defeat a shotgun-wielding raider with a pair of safety scissors.

SYRINGER RIFLE

Craft poisons at chemistry benches, then fire them into your enemies. Highlights include one that makes them bleed out for an agonising 30 seconds, or a shot that makes them think you've vanished into thin air. You know, just like people do all the time. Idiots.

ELECTRIFIED SWORD

Bring a big knife to a gunfight and the Super Mutants will rightfully giggle as they minigun you to shreds. Burn off their laughing gobs by crafting an electrified blade – it's the closest you'll get to wielding a lightsaber outside of *Battlefront*.

ANY LASER WEAPON

Does disintegrating an enemy into red, steaming particles ever get old? No. No it does not.

Sit, relax, enjoy a drink, stand up, run, run for your life...

FALLOUT 4

Radiation poisoning means it's no longer safe to drink seawater. Shame, we used to love doing that.

When stabbing just isn't enough, go electric.

ELECTRIFIED SERRATED CHINESE OFFICER SWORD

INVENTORY

MOD SLOTS

MODS

* No Upgrade

Serrated Blade

Electrified Blade

Speed

Weight

Value

125

20:20

LET THERE BE LIGHT >

■ I investigate one of Boston's subway tunnels. It's far brighter than the often pitch-black *Fallout 3* – I haven't even used the torch yet. Another feral ghoul attack occurs like clockwork, but by now I've found a weakness to exploit – blast their legs off and they shamble uselessly along the floor. I'm feeling pretty smug about this, until the Glowing One emerges, a neon green undead who is a *bastard* to kill. Leg shots won't cut it, headshots don't fare much better, and my weeping only makes it stronger (probably). I soon abandon the subway, having once again been punished for my cockiness. Never mind the plastic Pip-Boy, this game should come boxed with a thick slice of humble pie.

21:00

NOT ONE FOR INSECTOPHOBES >

■ After my humiliating subway defeat, I decide to vent my rage by shooting some bugs. But laugh off insects at your peril, as everything has a fair shot of killing you in *Fallout 4*. Bloodbugs are particularly nasty, sucking out your red stuff and then spitting it back in your face. Even Dracula would think that's a little OTT. As for performance bugs, they've been surprisingly rare. The occasional dip in the framerate and mismatched subtitles are uncommon enough to be ignored, meaning this might be the best-running Bethesda game I've played. Which is almost a compliment.

22:08

FALLOUT 3.5? >

■ Cities have more explorable buildings than ever, and Trinity Tower rises over all. A distress signal from someone trapped inside means I can't resist investigating. The lost soul doesn't mention anything about a reward, but that's why God invented blackmail. It's an action-packed ascent, the Super Mutants guarding the tower refuse to go down easy. A top-floor tussle with a minigun-packing brute leads to a particularly tense stand-off. But improved combat handling aside, this all feels a little overfamiliar. Are we really seeing anything that wasn't done just as well in the mighty *Fallout 3*?

23:02

"SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES" >

■ The trapped human, Rex, is an actor/idiot who thought he'd try to teach the Super Mutants culture by strolling into the building with a copy of *Macbeth*. Yeah, didn't go so well. But it had worked on one Super Mutant. His name is Strong, and he tells me the distress signal was a trap. With a new wave the Super Mutants incoming, I jump in a cable car and start descending rapidly down the side of the tower. Now this feels new – rain lashes down, while I minigun-blast floor after floor of Super Mutants, a pretentious actor quoting *Macbeth* on my right, as the cable car hurtles towards the ground. Forget that Michael Fassbender nonsense, this is the modern adaptation William would have wanted.

FEATURE

A shopping centre run by robots. And they say the future is bleak...



0:01

HOLLYWOOD HORRORS >

■ I happen upon Good Neighbor, a town populated by ghouls, with the novel twist that none of them are trying to eat me.

I visit Kent, drug addict and massive *Silver Shroud* fan. *The Silver Shroud* was a radio show about a crime fighter in a dapper coat who killed baddies with a silver machine gun. Kent wants the costume they used to film the doomed pilot for a *Silver Shroud* TV show. After bleeding him dry for caps (or cutting off his drug supply, depending on how you look at it), I head over to where they filmed the pilot.

Gotta say, back in 2077 they really knew how to make quality television. These ghoul props are so realistic, it actually feels like they're eating my face! Ah, the magic of the movies.

01:01

CREATIVE DIFFERENCES >

■ Terminals reveal bitchy notes between the producer and writer about the direction the pilot was going in. The writer's desk is littered with mentats, a cute detail that is absolutely not relatable at all. *Fallout* is always best when it just gives you a location, fills it with corpses and clues, then lets you join the dots to figure out what happened. I find the *Silver Shroud* costume, but also nab a comic book that promises me an extra 5% damage with alien blasters. Oh *Fallout 4* you extra-tease-estrial, did you just hint that aliens are incoming?

02:20

LEGEND OF THE SILVER SHROUD >

■ Kent makes me an incredible offer – to become the new *Silver Shroud*! He'll broadcast news alerts on the radio, then I'll track down the criminal and exact machine-gun flavoured justice, long after the crime has been committed and it's far too late to save the victim. Genius! No one eludes me now. I am the man who shrouds. Nothing feels more like justice than murdering thieves, then looting their corpses. Someone offers to join me in the fight against crime, but I refuse. The *Silver Shroud* works alone. Mainly because the *Silver Shroud* invested in a perk that lets him carry 50 more weight when he works alone. Sorry kid, but you can't fight crime with me. You make the *Silver Shroud* feel fat.

03:00

THE LEGEND ENDS >

■ Spot some nice-looking leg armor. In my haste to put it on, I fail to notice that this removes my *Silver Shroud* costume. Wasn't until much later, when VATs showed me in the third person, that I realized I'd been exacting justice in my underwear. So, er, if you read about a naked superhero in *Publick Occurrences* this month, bear in mind that it was an honest mistake. *Silver Shroud*, away! My reputation in tatters (probably, I am too scared to check the paper), I wander the streets, the rain not helping my melancholic mood. Mainly because I get caught in a radioactive thunderstorm. Lightning jolts from the murky heavens and my rad levels rise fast. I dart into the first building I see, the friendly-sounding *Hallucinogen Inc.*

FOUR TIPS FOR LEVELLING UP

LET'S COOK

Almost every creature you meet drops some sort of irradiated meat. See a campfire, and you can cook almost all of it for free – and receive some XP every time to boot. If only actual cooking was this rewarding!

LOCKPICKING

Even if finding out what's in that toolkit/safe/cabinet doesn't interest you, successful lockpicking gives a hit of XP, with none of the death risk. Just don't blame us for the rage you'll feel upon breaking your last bobby pin.

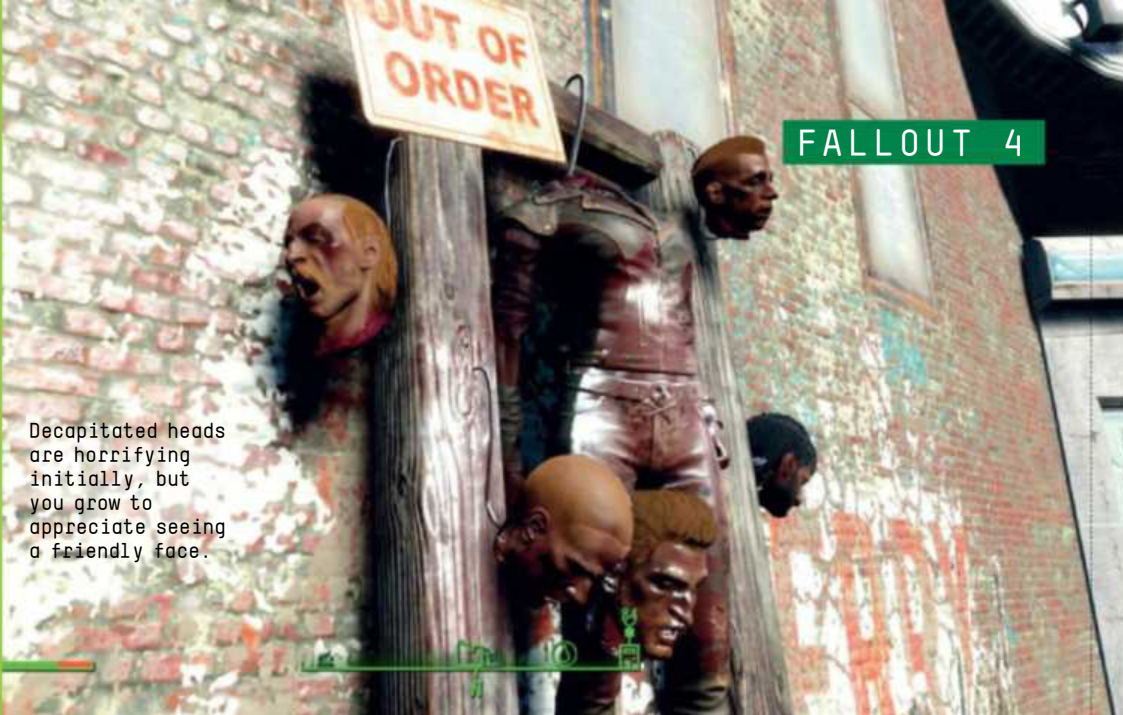
EXPLORE

You get XP every time you discover a new location, so simply sprinting across the map can level you up a few times. Just make sure to quicksave regularly. Burnt-out Boston isn't the safest place for a gentle jog...


FINISH IT

It's easy to accidentally start a quest (e.g. finding a valuable item before you've met the person who wanted you to fetch it). Have a regular read through of the quest log. Often you'll see that you just have to hand over something you picked up without thinking to complete a quest – always resulting in a huge XP spike.

FALLOUT 4



Decapitated heads are horrifying initially, but you grow to appreciate seeing a friendly face.



This robot asked us what love is. We like where this is going...

04:34

WE'RE NOT A BAD PERSON, RIGHT? >

■ It's good to be safe from the storm, in a nice, dry building full of mysterious gas that's making people try to kill each other. Intrigued, I explore further. Sneaking past the gunners and raiders isn't so hard when they're too focused on slaughtering to say, "Hey! Isn't that the naked superhero we used to respect?"

I find a room where I can test Hallucinogen Inc's many weapons on the floor below. There's a lot of people on that floor, but they've all gone crazy anyway. Surely the immoral thing to do would be to *not* test the weapons? This is what happens when you get rid of your karma system, Bethesda. I've lost all sense of morality, so I test all the weapons. It's *extremely* satisfying.

05:40

CREATURES OF THE DEEP >

■ Successfully running away, I start exploring nearby docks, hoping for some relative safety. A boy excitedly tells me he's spotted a monster in the sea. Yeah, cheers kid. I don't know what he's so excited about, considering Mirelurks (mutated crab-beasts a.k.a *actual* sea monsters) are found everywhere. Nice try, sonny. Call me when you spot a mermaid. Oh, who am I kidding? I *have* to know more. Sometimes you've just got to take a deep breath and go for a relaxing dip in the +10 radiation-a-second waters. Don't be alarmed if I emerge with a new set of gills.

06:15

PEACE AT LAST >

■ I use every RadAway I can find, which takes most of the radioactive sting out of my stupid swim. But my health is painfully low. Luckily, I stumble upon a care home run by several Mr Handy units. After charismatically lying that I'd booked ahead, Handy gives me someone else's room key and I limp off for a much needed recovery nap. But the first room has a corpse in it where the bed should've been. "Typical," I tut, walking into the next room only to find another skeleton sprawled across the bedspread. Had I been a paying customer, I would've been straight onto Trip Advisor with some stern words. Luckily this used to be a retirement home, so there's no shortage of medication. Good ol' old people.

07:18

BLOWN TO PIECES >

■ Hear more guests arriving. Then I hear gunfire. Several armed Synths are now inside the building, shooting to kill and blocking the only exit. Synths are Terminator-style cyborgs created by the shady Institute and feared all over Boston. Spotting me, they open laser fire. I return a few shots, blasting off metal plates to reveal the intricate circuits and cold inhumanity underneath. An enemy that gets creepier every time you successfully shoot it? Brrr.

Why are the Synths here? I'm still clueless, and even with 24 hours of exploring behind me, so much is still yet to be uncovered. Now, can someone mark The Institute on my map so I can start sprinting in the opposite direction?

SUBSCRIBE & SAVE 77%



> Stay up-to-date with the latest Xbox news, the most reliable reviews and the best features

> Get every issue delivered straight to your door

> Pay just \$24.95 per year - saving an incredible 77% off the cover price!

Subscribe to Official Xbox Magazine today and get every issue delivered to your door for just \$2.08 per issue!



Download OXM to your phone or tablet and try two FREE issues with a 30-day trial*

SUBSCRIBE NOW

Get your print or digital subscription at bit.ly/1ieaXv7

* PRINT EDITION: Savings compared to buying 12 full-priced issues from US newsstand. This offer is for new US print subscribers only. Overseas savings may vary. Prices correct at point of print and subject to change. DIGITAL EDITION: Free trial available to new subscribers only. 30-day free trial available via Apple Newsstand, Google Newsstand and Kindle Fire. 14-day free trial on Nook. No free trial via Zinio.

REVIEWS

The most important Xbox releases rated

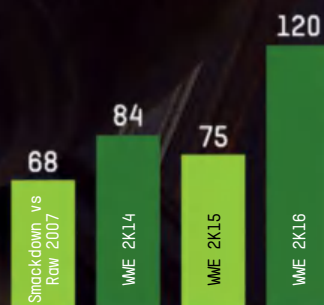


HALO 5: GUARDIANS

Spartans Locke and Chief collide in Xbox One's biggest, most epic shooter (p54)

THIS MONTH IN FACTS

WWE ROSTER SIZES
THROUGH THE YEARS:



CHIEF VS LOCKE

20%
MISSIONS YOU PLAY AS CHIEF

80%
MISSIONS YOU PLAY AS
MR CHARISMA

WHAT CITY WE'D LIKE
ASSASSIN'S CREED TO
'DO' NEXT:

Matthew: [Dubrovnik](#)

Alex: [Mumbai](#)

Emma: [Berlin](#)

Tom: [Lubbock, Texas](#)

THIS MONTH WE...



Augmented ourselves silly p60



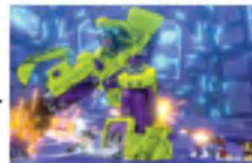
Braved frostbite p62



Stacked spoilers sky-high p66



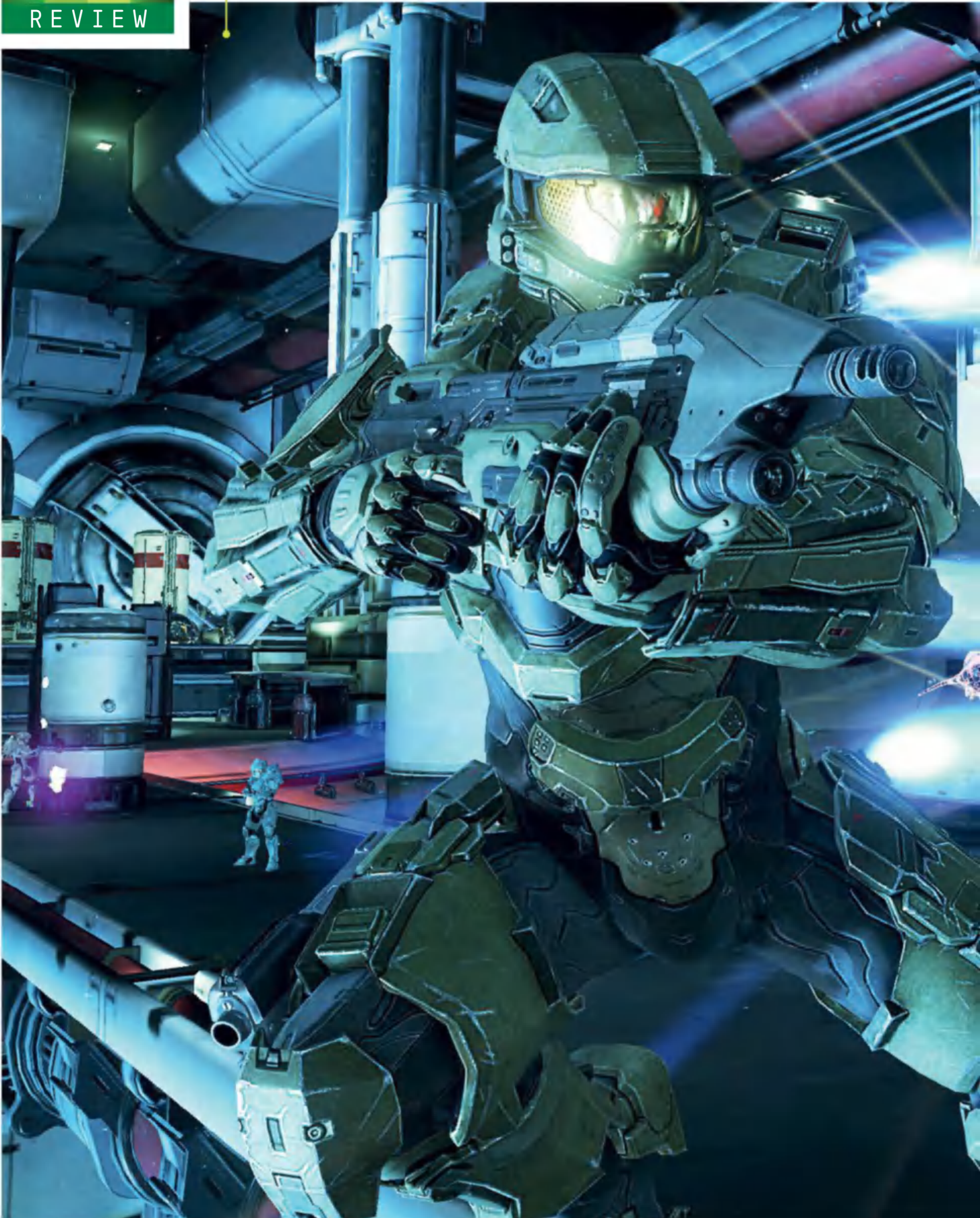
Shredded our fingers to bits p75



Battled the jolly green giant p79

The Spartan dodge technique allows Master Chief - or whichever Spartan you're manipulating - to duck out of gunfire with an instant speed splurt.

REVIEW



HALO 5: GUARDIANS

Xbox's most iconic series comes home – but as a hero, or a traitor?

Here's the secret to experiencing *Halo 5: Guardians* at its brilliant, belligerent best – play it outside of your comfort zone. Usually play on Normal? Crank the dial to Heroic. Heroic is your default difficulty? Ratchet that sucker up to Legendary. Already intending to begin on Legendary? Oh man, good luck with that.

If you ignore that advice, then in all likelihood you'll spend the first two-thirds of the campaign wondering whether 343 Industries has soiled the proverbial bed. The reasons the Campaign mode doesn't hit the spot initially all stem from the fact that during the single-player campaign you're flanked by three Spartan team-mates, which can make your life a little too easy at times.

When the narrative calls for Master Chief to take center stage (which is nowhere near as much as I suspect fans are going to like), he's accompanied by his Blue Team, a team of skilled Spartans with names plucked straight from your mom's Facebook friends list. (Fred! Linda! You just know they share Minion memes, don't you?)

Newcomer Jameson Locke, meanwhile, mobilizes his Fireteam Osiris squad to track down and capture the Blue Team, who have supposedly gone renegade, and it's through their visors that we experience the bulk of *Halo 5's* story.

Given the amount of screen time Locke and his gang receive, it's obvious 343 has big plans for them in the future, which makes the lack of meaningful character development over the course of the story doubly disappointing. During quieter times Osiris appear to be little more than exposition devices on legs, although given how weighty/baggy (delete according to

your own sensibilities) *Halo* lore can be in places, it's undeniably handy to have a squad that acts like an audio guide to remind you why you're traipsing around the galaxy in the first place.

Storyline conceits aside, Blue Team and Osiris are along for the ride to facilitate *Halo 5's* very modern 'drop-in, drop-out' co-operative play, with AI Spartans filling

in the blanks where necessary. It's a tidy way of allowing human players to drift in and out of other people's games without breaking the game's fiction, but it's also forced 343 Industries to make several alterations to *Halo's* tried and tested design, and during my first playthrough of the campaign on Normal difficulty, I felt it's hamstrung the flow of the action to such a degree that I couldn't help but wonder if it was a case of the tail wagging the dog.

The most notable twist is that there's now a revive mechanic. Unless you do something truly cretinous, like tumble into a bottomless pit or squat in a Ghost until it explodes, death is no longer necessarily the end. Instead, you'll lay prone where you carked it, and your team-mates have a good 10-15 seconds to reach you and scrape you off the floor. Which doesn't sound like long but, trust me, it's an eternity in the supercharged world of

Halo. Given that an entire team has to die before you're sent packing to the last checkpoint, you can understand how I managed to power through the first nine levels on Normal without 'properly' dying once (pit mishaps notwithstanding).

I feel this is something of a misstep. One of the most important ingredients to the *Halo* formula, for me, is fear: the lung-sucking terror that comes from scanning the battlefield and spotting, in the corner of your eye, an energy sword-wielding Elite rushing in on your position. »



REVIEWER

ALEX DALE

Live ChocoboOfDoom
@SporadicDaler

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

Cortana sends Master Chief a message, setting off a chain of events that puts two Spartans on a collision course.

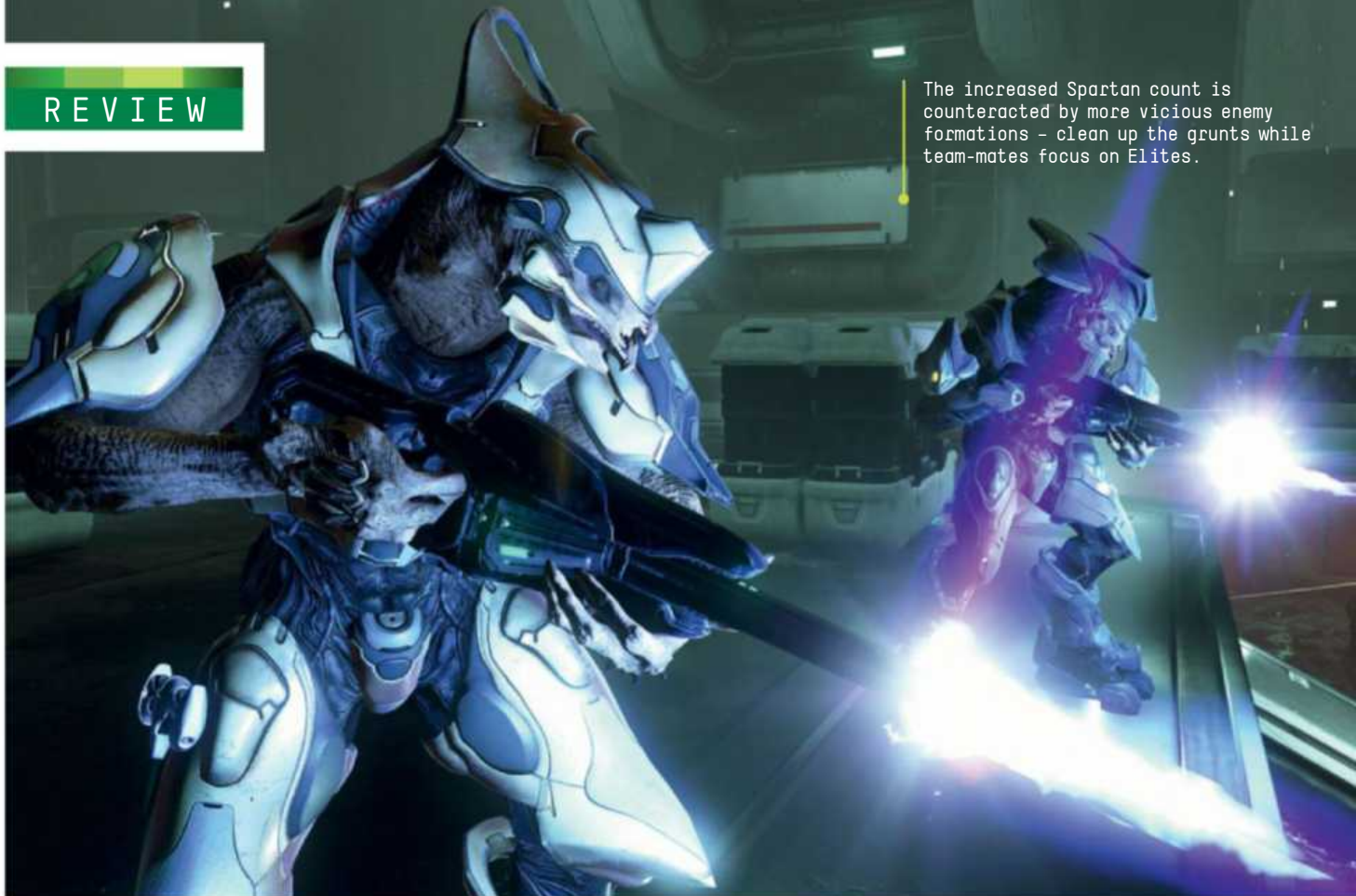
WHAT'S IT LIKE?

A flawed but fun campaign is bolstered by the best multiplayer since *Halo 2*.

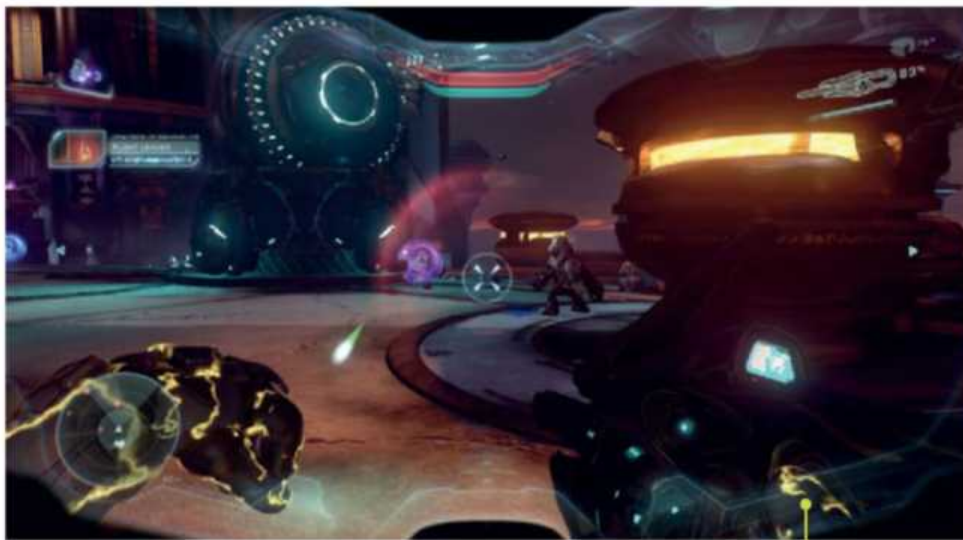
WHO'S IT FOR?

Xbox One owners, basically. After recent splutters, this is Master Chief back on top form.





The increased Spartan count is counteracted by more vicious enemy formations - clean up the grunts while team-mates focus on Elites.



It might seem weird to eulogize the one-hit kill, but in *Halo*, the prospect of several minutes' hard graft being suddenly and fatally undone by a single direct hit from a Wraith, or a solitary swipe of an energy sword, is a vital part of the game's balance, adding much-needed stakes to skirmishes that the player, cast in the role of a cybernetically-enhanced supersoldier, is designed to dominate. Although it never quite feels like a battle of attrition, like the original *BioShock*

does, as an example, there are times where *Halo 5* comes close.

The team orders, too, tarnish the purity of the gunplay on lower difficulty settings. They are issued entirely with up on the D-pad, which should give you some hint as to the system's complexity, and basically involve drawing your team's attention to whatever your reticule is pointing at. You can order your team to concentrate their fire on a specific target, pick up a specific weapon, or revive a downed

The Battle of Sunaion, as seen at E3 2015, occurs surprisingly late on in the game.

team-mate who's too far away. Again, at first sight this seems a wild misfire. Early on it's possible to order your team to do the brunt of the work for you while you prat about on the sidelines, which is anathema to the classic *Halo* concept of the player as general.

But then, after six hours of effortlessly swathing through enemy forces like a hot knife through Brute, and almost before it's too late, *Halo 5* suddenly, majestically finds its feet, counteracting the increased Spartan count by throwing new, aggressive configurations of enemy forces at you in ways that test your combat and teamwork skills to their limits.

Extra sauce

A dash of difficulty has always been the secret sauce that makes *Halo Halo* and, as it turns out, all *Halo 5* needs to bring out the flavours of its interlocking systems is a little extra. That's why I urge you to skip the initial malaise and begin *Halo 5* outside of your comfort zone. With the difficulty upped, battle arenas that seem sparse and baggy on a first playthrough reveal their hidden tactical depths, with multi-layered designs that challenge you to find new, inventive ways to engage the enemy.

Halo's appeal has always stemmed from its epic-scale warfare hosted



“Skip the initial malaise and begin outside of your comfort zone”

in vast, sweeping arenas, so it isn't necessarily the larger size of *Halo 5*'s battlegrounds that make them distinctive – it's the way they're constructed. Interestingly, many battles begin by allowing players to seize the initiative over unaware enemy patrols, scouting nearby rock formations and vantage points for the ideal location from which to jump down and kickstart the fight. This test of your team's initiative is an omen of things to come, with open-ended arenas that boast multiple entrance/exit points, and destructible walls that can be knocked down by getting a good run-up and ploughing through them, opening up new routes and revealing hidden goodies. (Exploration, even mid-battle, often pays dividends – in one stage, for example, I stumbled upon an underground tunnel that allowed my team to entirely bypass a tricky Wraith section).

Layouts are more vertical (read: taller) than they were in previous *Halo* titles, reflecting a more general trend in

first-person shooters in 2015. But this hasn't been implemented in a gimmicky way. Instead, it's designed to give you the agency to control the distance you engage with the enemy, as the weapons you happen to be carrying at the time dictate. Mid-air boosts and a new clamber system gift your Spartan

Meet the Warden Eternal. He turns up so often he's less a boss, more a new enemy type.

the upward mobility to move around these environments unfettered, and the level designers constantly find mischievous ways to challenge you to chain these skills together, both in and out of combat. It pays to poke around every last nook and cranny – not only are there gameplay-altering Skulls to be found, but also one-time use special weapons with cool names such as 'Blaze of Glory', too.

In combat, *Halo 5* is at its best when it has the confidence to throw the kind of odds at your team that would overwhelm a solitary Spartan. You'll



Sandboxing clever

The large-scale, 12v12 Warzone mode has become an office lunchtime favorite. It's basically a mash-up of everything good about *Halo*, with objective-based multiplayer skirmishes interrupted by periodical drops of Covenant and Promethean thugs. Matches have a pleasing sense of escalation, thanks to the requisition system (see 'Get REQed').



encounter more Hunters – the giant, armoured gestalts that can only be killed by attacking their vulnerable backs – in *Halo 5* than probably in the rest of the *Halo* series combined. It makes sense that they feature so prominently, as the need to draw their attention and then flank them naturally lends itself to teamwork, but it sometimes feels as if the game leans on them, and their Promethean near-equivalent Knights, a little too heavily.

Speaking of Prometheans, after their clumsy debut in *Halo 4*, 343 has taken the robo-faction back to the garage

for recalibrating, and while they still lack the charisma of the Covenant, subtle tweaks to their various forms and functions – such as reducing the amount of damage it takes to kill them – mean it's far more enjoyable to wage war with the glowing goons.

The revamp means the Prometheans behave more like a collective unit this time around – like the Covenant, they're an assortment of different fighting styles and types that complement each other perfectly and which the game designers can remix endlessly to make each fight

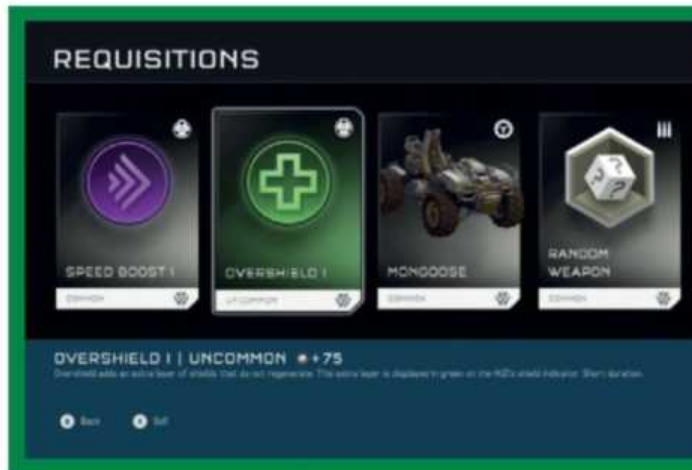
Multiple entrance/exit points allow you to pick a route that suits the guns you're lugging around.

feel substantially different to the last. And so long as you've selected a difficulty setting that doesn't instruct them to pull their punches, you'll no longer groan at the telltale glow of Promethean soldiers converging on the horizon – now their forces deliver some of the most frenzied skirmishes we've seen in a *Halo* game.

Design sense

In the midst of these firefights, design decisions that seemed barmy on Normal begin to make perfect sense, such as the way your Spartan can't move or fire while he's waiting to be revived. It's a punishment that dissuades you from rashly jumping into danger. Collapse at the feet of a Promethean Knight, and the chances are that you'll lead your team-mates to their doom one by one as they attempt to rescue you, like some kind of Pied Piper of incompetence. Enemy tagging, too, becomes less a luxury, more a necessity later on as snipers, manned turrets and those horrible Watcher things that heal their Promethean team-mates sprout up like they're going out of fashion in the game's bombastic closing stages.

If single-player is a bold reinvention, then multiplayer is classic, streamlined old-school *Halo* – and it's all the better



Get REQed

Piggybacking off the success of *FIFA*'s Ultimate Team packs, REQ Packs are earned in-game across all three game modes, or you can stump up actual money for booster packs. Inside you'll find customisation options (visors, assassination animations and so on) and one-time use vehicle/weapon cards for Warzone. Die and it's gone forever, so use your ultra-rare cards wisely.



The hulking Hunters are actually made up of millions of tiny slugs. Eeeeeek!



“It’s far more enjoyable to wage war with Promethean soldiers now”

for it. In an age where most online shooters are aping the heady chaos of *Call of Duty*, with its endless perks, weapons, killstreaks and whatnot, *Halo 5*’s Arena mode is refreshingly pure; four on four, everyone starts with the same guns, with maps seasoned with weapon upgrades that tempt players into open, hazardous areas. Breakout – *Halo 5*’s team-based elimination mode – is particularly mischievous on this front, coaxing players into pushing forward for the best weapons, and rewarding players who force the issue instead of sitting back and picking their spots. With all the extra-curricular

Call of Duty nonsense stripped, *Halo 5*’s maps are pleasingly tactical – by studying the sound of gunfire and your team-mate’s positioning, you can instinctively pick up where the other team are, and what range of weapons they’re likely to be packing (handy as the radar is severely limited). Luck, in as much as it can be in this sort of thing, is almost stripped from the equation. Thus, a multiplayer that at first appears slight soon reveals the kind of nuances that come from good design, rather than loud design. It’s an instant classic – Xbox One owners are likely to be playing this for years.

Everywhere you look in *Halo 5* there’s a sea of vibrant oranges and purples.

Fears that 343 Industries was steering *Halo* away from its trademark battle rhythm and towards a reliance on *Call of Duty*-esque set-pieces (eventually) prove unfounded, then. Indeed, one of my biggest gripes about *Halo 5* is that it doesn’t find a dramatic or memorable moment for its titular 1,000-foot tall Guardians to partake in. Nonetheless, *Halo 5*’s story hits all the emotional highs we’ve come to expect from the series, and has an incredible twist which – no spoilers – finally gives rise to the iconic villain the Haloverse has been craving for years.

After a rather flat Spartan vs Spartan marketing campaign for *Halo 5*, this reveal should suitably whet the palate for *Halo 6*, but for now, *Halo 5* offers a new, dynamic challenge that you’ll be revisiting for years. Just remember to crank that difficulty setting up before you begin, Spartan. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

THE RIVALS

- GEARS OF WAR: ULTIMATE ED **9**
- CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS III **8**
- BATTLEFIELD HARDLINE **7**

BEST PRICE



WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

No Campaign DLC is currently planned, but 343 promises 15 free new multiplayer maps by June 2016.

COMPLETION CLOCK



OVERALL

The slavish devotion to co-op can cause *Halo 5* as much grief as reward, but when it works with rather than against its teamwork mechanics the result is an epic, high-octane shooter.



Save your Specialists' abilities for the perfect moment - they charge slowly enough to become game-changers.

REVIEW



PUBLISHER ACTIVISION / DEVELOPER TREYARCH / FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE (REVIEWED) / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER
JOE SKREBELS
Live OXM Joe
@2plus2isjoe

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

The little sub-series that could, returns with another near-future explosion-fest.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Have you heard of *Call of Duty*? It's that. But also with a bit of MOBAs, sci-fi films and (shock) *Destiny*.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Everyone. Honestly, it's absolutely enormous, you're sure to find something.

CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS III

The series' latest operation is a triple bypass

Saying that each new *Call of Duty* is, in fact, three different games is beyond cliché. Campaign, multiplayer and Zombies are now expected heads on Activision's cash-belching Cerberus. *Black Ops III* does not fly the nest - on the contrary, it builds on that nest, fashioning a spacious, three-room apartment, each stuffed with unique and shiny trinkets.

In the context of an industry that prefers to sell major games in piecemeal fashion, it's an almost absurdly generous package. Each prong offers more than ever, each in different ways: the campaign secrets massive chunks of bonus content behind what's already a lengthy sci-fi romp; multiplayer is an

endlessly customizable heap of modes, stretching all the way from dumb Gun Game matches to MOBA-style drafting; Zombies is a return to Treyarch's roots, by which we mean it's screamingly tough and satisfyingly obtuse, rewarding many, many replays.

What's particularly notable is how little they have in common. Zombies is the obvious outlier, brilliantly relocated from *Black Ops'* near-future to an alternate-history Jazz Age. But multiplayer - commonly designed to be an extension of the main story - brings with it different powers, an entirely distinct cast of characters, and even changes how you move on a base level.

The upshot of this is that *Black Ops III* is an unwieldy, dissonant thing: often brilliant, always feature-

packed, occasionally infuriating. Take the campaign. The series' first customizable lead character (well, sort of - you get two genders and an assortment of haircuts) heads up a story that reaches far further than its increasingly gung-ho predecessors, riffing on the likes of *Source Code*, *Black Mirror* and (gasp) *real-life issues* as it posits a future where soldiers who have all their limbs torn off get turned into Robocop's militarised siblings and have tech-sistential crises.

It's worthy of respect, even getting into some booming psychedelia as the barriers between reality and virtuality break down - it's also one of the worst-told videogame stories in recent memory. It seems pretty clear that whole sections have been dropped, and the exposition used to paper the cracks is laughable - as is the juvenile focus on gory mutilation scenes amid a story that purports to be Very Serious.

From a game perspective, there are similar problems. Major glitches forced us to restart missions twice. One dull tank enemy type makes up about 90% of the 'boss fights'. Cyber Cores - which augment your usual weaponry with ersatz superpowers - are a neat



New world

Shooters are a different place these days. *Call of Duty* might be a veteran series, but it's still keeping up. There's MOBA-style character drafting and equipment bans in eSports-friendly Hardcore multiplayer modes, and Codcaster mode returns to aid those who want to be shoutcasters.

The zombies are familiar, although they have a weird habit of screaming "Yes! Yes! Yes!" for no reason.



REVIEW



"It posits a future where soldiers have tech-sistential crises"

idea, but are annoying enough to switch between that you'll end up just sticking with the ones that kill certain enemy types instantly.

Essentially, it's good old *CoD* reaching too far and somehow coming up short – odd when you consider that multiplayer attempts the same trick and succeeds brilliantly. This is the twitchy, feisty game of old (ditching *AW*'s thrusters, but keeping double-jumps and wall-running), with some very modern touches.

Most obviously, we're introduced to Specialists, the lineup of nine named supersoldiers you now play as. This doesn't affect the returning Pick 10 loadout system – instead, each Specialist brings with them two unique abilities (only one of which can be used

at a time). It's a decidedly post-*Destiny* touch, and one that's sure to raise questions about balance, but we feel it works beautifully.

It adds an almost fighting game-like frisson – you need to understand what enemies can do as much as you do your own capabilities. There's nothing like recognizing a Specialist and successfully adjusting your tactics to account for their skills.

The worst we can say about multiplayer is that we have some quibbles with the general map design. Despite all the extra mobility, *Black Ops III*'s levels still feel squat, covered in invisible walls to stop you from trying out more outlandish ambush tactics.

Despite getting the most impressive visual overhaul, *Zombies* feels the most

"Regrets. I have a few. Like how I'm about to become corpse-chow."

familiar. The initial campaign is a brassy tale of four ne'er-do-wells pulled into a part-Romero, part-Lovecraft horror. Scattered shrines allow members of the team to turn into the Cthulhu-like Beast, which has a short time to one-hit-kill the undead and see secrets the rest of the crew can't. It's hard to judge at this point (partly because the story will be told over a DLC season), but it's a vibrant extension to *Zombies'* playful lineage – not least because Jeff Goldblum is unbelievably funny as the team's magician gone rotten, Goldblumming harder than ever.

Black Ops III is by no means perfect, but its sheer enormity is its saving grace. Where other franchises pour manpower into making colossal experiences that simply repeat ideas over increasingly enormous spaces, Treyarch has made something more substantial. Yes, *Call of Duty* is three games but, for the first time, it really feels it could have been sold on three discs. And yet here it is: massive, uneven and quite delightful. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

THE DIFFERENCE ON...
XBOX 360



The last-gen version of the game drops to 30fps, won't get any future DLC and, most oddly, doesn't include the campaign mode at all. Not the biggest loss, that last one.

KEY INFLUENCES



85% *Guns & Ammo* magazine
10% William Gibson novels
5% *Destiny*

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

? Treyarch goes into hiding, and one of Acti's bevy of devs will reveal the next non-*Black Ops CoD*. Yay, franchises!

OVERALL

Treyarch might not always hit its targets, but this remains a genuinely fresh take on an old sub-series in an even older franchise. A game as well-oiled as its cyborgian characters.



A prologue flashback whisks Lara to Syria and a taste of tombs to come. This one tastes of hidden spike pits and water level puzzles. Delicious.

REVIEW





PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX / DEVELOPER CRYSTAL DYNAMICS
FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE (REVIEWED) / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW

RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

It's not all tomb and gloom in Lara's survivalist sequel

When did survival games become a "thing"? Surviving, by its very nature, isn't hugely fun – it's a means to an end. You survive the snowstorm so you can go home and binge on Pringles. You survive a bear attack so you can live to enjoy season four of *House of Cards*. To survive is to earn a shot at eventual happiness, which makes it an odd focus for a videogame – a medium that is, for many of us, a reward for surviving a day in the rat race. It's bother enough managing our own warmth/thirst/hunger meters, without worrying about a virtual victim.

Rise of the Tomb Raider certainly sets us up for a struggle. Where most sane humans would take the horrors of the first game's Yamatai Island as an invitation to find a safer line of work, Croft opts to pursue mystical doodads in the snowy Siberian wilderness. An avalanche strips her equipment (her flares conveniently survive for purposes of show-off lighting effects) and a quick scan of her skill-tree picks out a concerning number of references to crafting and resources. You'd be forgiven for thinking you're in for a chore.

So it's good to see the rise of a more relaxed kind of survivor. All the talk of Lara's struggle against the elements amounts to little more than basking in staggering snow particle effects and light-refracting glacial tech. Likewise, foraging for upgrade materials rejects the crafting simulation of *Don't Starve* or *Minecraft* for something more simplified and videogame-y. Common resources fall under eight categories, and those who don't want to hunt deer or snap saplings

for arrow shafts can rely on survival caches liberally buried across the land.

Crafting feels like an organic skin for what came before. You still explore nooks and crannies in massive hub areas, but rather than it ending with a box of generic salvage you get to chip explosive minerals off cave walls or pin rabbits to the floor with arrows. It's only in combat that scavenging diligence shines through, as special ammo and health can be made from your pickings. Prioritizing items from

limited ingredients lends this a frisson of risk, but it's felt more by raising difficulty to *Seasoned Raider*. The default setting offers auto-heal in battle, sapping the tension of dwindling herb-encrusted bandages.

For a more potent sting, Survivor mode removes auto-healing entirely, creating a constant hunt for medicine as the screen grows more blood-flecked with every tumble. This panic is heightened with fewer resources, costlier upgrades and a price to light campfires (where said upgrading occurs). In a world where 'difficulty' is often shorthand for 'stretch the enemy health bar, shrink the hero's', Survivor's rules create a genuinely more cautious game. Lazy habits – over-relying on poison arrows, for one – no longer hold up, and you begin

to favour sensible skill upgrades, such as XP boosts, over flashier gimmicks. Like the moment you're grown-up enough to know you should be buying brown bread instead of white, it's sobering stuff.

For this reason, Survivor is best left to a second playthrough. Like the reboot before it, *Rise* should primarily be enjoyed as a cinematic romp – even more so than its predecessor, in fact, due to it starring the empowered heroine who emerged from Yamatai's baptisms of fire/lead/wolf teeth. Gone is the lady who quietly



REVIEWER

MATTHEW CASTLE
Live OXM Pesto
@mrbasil_pesto

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

Accident prone heroine hunts for immortality. Probably for the best, really.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Platforming, puzzling and pummelling with a dash of *Metroid's* drip-feed of gadgets.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Series fans, Bear Grylls wannabes and those dreaming of a white Christmas.

Note the guard on the left, wilfully ignoring the death gurgles of his strangled friend. Poor show.

REVIEW



wept over a murdered deer, replaced with, weirdly, the world's greatest bomb-maker, building them from liquor bottles, walkie-talkies, jam jars, tin cans, dead bodies... They should call it *Rise of the Boom Maker*.

It's semi-ridiculous – who left liquor in a seemingly untouched tomb? – but her toys do lend fights an aggressive forward-momentum. It also makes for prettier slaughter, as Molotov fire bounces off the wet stone catacombs in a way that makes you go 'oooooh' as the victim goes 'aaaargh'. Combat is surreally beautiful throughout *Rise*, in fact, whether it's the sight of laser sights ominously swaying through fog or the searing, rainbow pyrotechnics that kick in during the more mystical final hours. The lighting's arguably the best we've seen this generation.

Bombs are but one page of Lara's guerrilla warfare handbook. A new

stealth bent sees her slinking through bushes and scampering up trees to unleash ferocious instant kills on oblivious guards. There's a hint of squad AI – Lara's returning 'instinct mode' reveals when guards are out of sight – but it's generous stuff, with idiot soldiers failing to notice noisy deaths performed meters away, or investigating thrown bottles despite their pals vanishing mere seconds before doing exactly the same. It may seem mechanical and lifeless in the post-*Phantom Pain* age, but it does fulfil the power fantasy of clearing out camps with clockwork efficiency. Don't like it? One gunshot is all it takes to turn a scene into an action set-piece.

The great expedition

If anything, stealth lives a happier life outside of the main game, in Expedition mode. This has you replay sections of

Reaching the hidden tombs can be a real mission – how did builders get there to begin with?

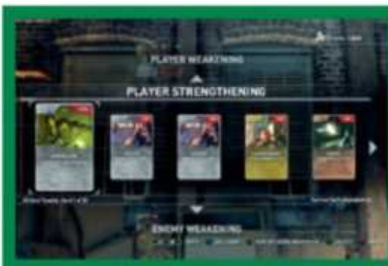
the story against the clock, with score multipliers for chaining kills, shooting targets and grabbing blobs of magic flames dotted across the level. Using those pick-ups to try to maintain a combo meter as you sniff out a racing line that balances speed and severity reminds me of Xbox 360's underrated *The Club* – only where that murder-race suffered for being a standalone game, Expeditions is a meaty add-on to an already substantial story mode. As extras goes, it's far more welcome than *Tomb Raider's* middling multiplayer.

Rise ticks many boxes in terms of building on its predecessor: prettier, deadlier, bigger. Which makes it a shame Crystal Dynamic's much-vaunted tomb renovations don't quite cut it. The challenge tombs look more like forgotten temples than the first game's raggedy cave squats, but they're often single-puzzle affairs that are over in minutes. The riddles require fun lateral thinking around distinctive concepts – pulley-steered rowboats, rising water levels, explosive gas – but fail to escalate to any grand puzzling crescendos. If you played *Underworld*, you'll know Crystal Dynamics can build bigger and better tombs than this.

It's also a shame that the majority of these ancient structures are consigned to optional side tasks, leaving the

House of cards

Expedition mode, like 99% of all modern games, features a collectible card element. Here the cards act as modifiers for score attack runs, adding bonus points for using nasty cards – ones that set all guards on fire, for example – and subtracting them for using beneficial items such as, er, chicken bombs.



Poison arrows are crafted from fungi, scaring a whole new generation of kids off eating mushrooms.



REVIEW



“The final hours smash together the fantastical with the bombastic”

first chunk of the story to play out in wilderness and military facilities that, while smothered in all-new leg-engulfing snow, often echoes our time on Yamatai. Make no mistake, this is a vast graphical leap but déjà vu does kick in. This is more prevalent in the first ten hours, where Lara’s gradual discovery of returning equipment can’t help but mimic the similar beats of *Tomb Raider*. The reboot did such a good job of constantly handing out new toys and tricks that simply repeating that process feels slightly unambitious.

Thankfully, once Lara has her old equipment back – joined by a snazzy

grappling wire – the game really hits its stride. A stodgy section tending to a village of noble tribesmen (marginally less annoying than her jerk friends from the first game) is followed by hit after hit: a substantial tomb built around ancient napalm; preying on guards through cracks in the ice; a daring arctic rescue; not to mention stealth sequences that finally allow you to try out those horrible moves you’ve been learning. The final couple of hours are everything you want from *Tomb Raider*, smashing together the fantastical with the bombastic in a way that can’t help but leave you with a giddy smile.

Lara’s a bit of a killjoy: all those ziplines and not a single “wheweeee!”

Ultimately, for all Crystal Dynamics focuses on smartening up its underlying systems, it’s its eye for environmental spectacle and the surprise set-piece that stick with you: the mad dashes to freedom through crumbling masonry, or emerging from a tight glacial cavern to observe vast wonders stretching out below. Gameplay is always king, but there’s no shame in having a gorgeous Xbox One exclusive to ogle over. And in a Christmas line-up sagging with 100-hour time-hogs, there’s also something to be said for a game that crushes its thrills into a dense 20 hours instead.

Maybe it’s all the virtual snow I’ve ingested, but *Rise* feels like a great holiday season game – a chance to tuck up nice and warm and conquer the digital cold. At the very least, it’ll offer welcome respite from those squabbling family engagements. Now that’s my kind of survival game. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

PROS/CONS

- ✔ Lara’s jiggling hair – it’s hypnotic
- ✔ TV-speaker-rattling gun blasts
- ✔ Lighting so good it’ll make the sun jealous
- ✘ Tombs never quite find their bite
- ✘ The story won’t win any prizes
- ✘ Too easy to over-rely on Survival Instinct

PRO TIP



Turn off Survival Instinct to stop highlighted objects solving most of the puzzles for you.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

❓ DLC will add more animal combat, a new tomb based around the Baba Yaga myth, and an extra-hard Endurance mode.

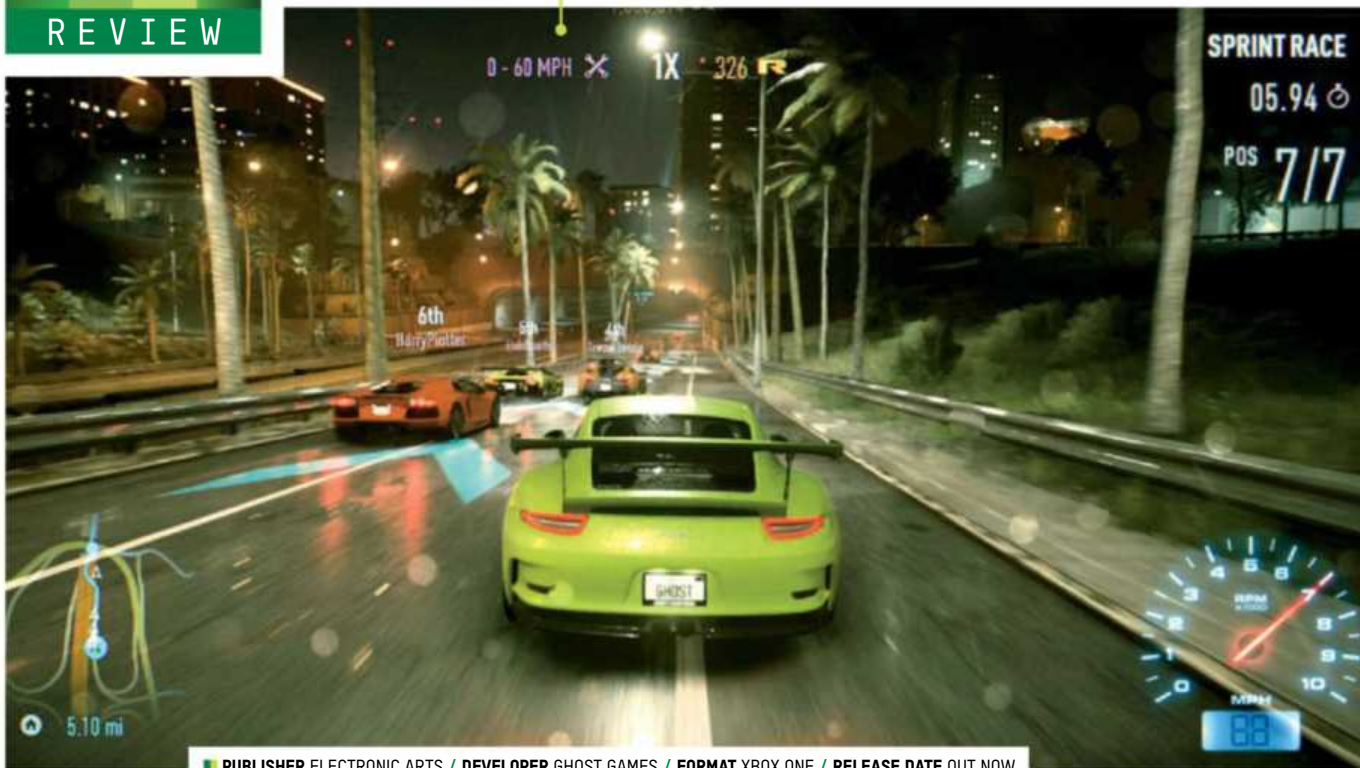
OVERALL

Not quite the evolutionary leap we’d hoped for, but this beautiful and bombastic adventure remains one of the most purely entertaining things you can put in your Xbox One this Christmas.



REVIEW

Street lighting is varied in hue and brightness, but even this doesn't delineate the city enough.



PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS / DEVELOPER GHOST GAMES / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER
ALEX DALE

Live ChocoboOfDoom
@SporadicDaler

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

A reboot of the long-running, and many tentacted, *Need For Speed* series.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

An atmospheric take on illegal racing that's unfortunately let down by poor execution.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Fans of *Need For Speed: Underground* who've wrung *The Crew* dry and are willing to compromise.

NEED FOR SPEED

Ghost takes NFS out for another spin and stacks it into a wall

For many, the *Need For Speed* series doesn't exist prior to 2003's *Underground* installment. Nearly a decade's worth of supercar-focused, winding-open-road-based racing games preceded it, but EA Black Box's smart decision to steer the series into illegal street racing warmed the hearts of a legion of baseball-cap-wearing Nova owners – all of whom put what little money they had that wasn't tied up in disproportionate exhaust tips and neon under-lighting right where their mouths were. Now, two years since Ghost Games first took the series' keys for the underwhelming *Rivals*, the Swedish studio is attempting to rekindle *Underground*'s hooning purity with the subtitle-less *Need For Speed*.

It's a sharp change of direction that's only surprising for the fact that it's come from the same studio that delivered the sun-drenched Californian roadways of *Rivals*, but this is a series that's no stranger to shifting its focus – consider the touring car violence of Slightly Mad's *SHIFT* efforts compared to Criterion's *Burnout*-emulating *Hot Pursuit*, for example. This is Ghost's attempt at rebooting the series and cohering all those loose threads.

The result certainly looks the part. Ghost has ditched Xbox 360 and let DICE's Frostbite 3 engine, the chassis of this game, really stretch its legs. The game's setting, Ventura Bay, is a city locked into a perpetual drizzly nighttime that just about reaches that pre-alarm early morning light

before plunging into blackness again, its glistening streets illuminated by countless streetlights. It's an initially striking aesthetic, but the constant mix of gloom and glare becomes wearying. Worse than that, it makes recognizing the various parts of the city difficult. We passed a waterfall several times before noticing it was there, such is the shroud that's draped over the world. *NFS* does a good job of conjuring up the atmosphere of underground racing, but you'll wish there was more variety to take in along the way.

It would be easy to overlook this sense of encroaching homogeneity were the act of throwing the game's cars around Ventura Bay's sinuous and all-but-deserted streets a pleasure. Unfortunately, they feel curiously lumpy, weighed down by a heavy-handed physics model that seems to sap the joy out of every manoeuvre. A well-designed tuning system allows you to turn any of the game's vehicles into a rubber-shredding, constantly sideways deathtrap or, if you prefer, a grippy, high-speed cornering deathtrap, but whichever end of the spectrum you favour, the game's handling model never quite sparkles.



Solo drive

While the player count has risen to eight, you can't fast-travel to anyone's position and the world feels no more populated. But when you do encounter someone else, you can challenge them to impromptu races and drifting challenges, and invite crew members to participate in missions with you.

Forget the weird handbrake - drifting is best done by pushing too much power through the rear wheels.



REVIEW



“Cars feel lumpen, weighed down by a heavy-handed physics model”

Things improve slightly once you've upped your hatchback horsepower output into four figures or saved up for one of the more modern machines available, but any gains made here are quickly clawed back by opponent AI whose lack of charisma is only matched by regular bouts of stupidity. Cars will often end up facing the wrong way during events (often managing to zero in on your bonnet in the process) and some rather over-zealous rubber-banding ensures you rarely feel like you're racing anything more than a pre-recorded Scalextric session. The laudable focus on tuning becomes the unwitting enabler for a difficulty curve that you simply pay to ascend. Can't beat a race? Just whack in better parts and rather than watch your opponents

shoot off at the lights, you can enjoy the harrying rubber-banded pests' uncanny ability to stay right behind you for as much of the race as you can manage without making a mistake.

At least there's some personality in the game's vaunted live action cutscenes. Starring a cast of really rather good actors, blended with CG cars and sets, and doing their best with a script that tries a little *too* hard to be cool, the intermissions make for an enjoyably hammy narrative and a welcome change of pace from the uniformly murky racing. Inviting you into their crew, these individuals each specialize in a different type of driving - speed, style, build, crew and outlaw - and invite you to participate in their preferred types of driving events

We wish we had enough money to scuff up an F40 and still walk away smiling.

via an in-game phone, which you can access at any time. It's a clever system for delivering missions, and you can choose to ignore incoming calls. Other mechanics aren't as well thought through, however. Starting missions requires you to come nearly to a stop and be facing in the right direction even though most events begin with a rolling-start cutscene. And there's no way to quickly restart an event if you fail it, either - if you do hit the restart button during a race, the game simply warps you to the starting spot and asks you to trigger it again.

There's fun to be mined from customizing and modifying your cars, but so much of this supposed fresh start feels too much like a backwards step and any nuggets of pleasure you uncover are quickly tarnished by the game's user-unfriendly design and overly prescribed physics. It's all the more disappointing for the fact that so much of *Rivals'* promise has been tossed out of *Need For Speed's* tinted windows in the process. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

PROS/CONS

- ✓ Innovative use of live action footage
- ✓ Some wonderful use of lighting and rain effects
- ✓ Powerful customization tools
- ✗ The samey environment becomes wearying
- ✗ Slightly clunky handling
- ✗ Excessive fist bumping

PRO TIP



Tune vehicles for particular disciplines to avoid messing with sliders between events.

COMPLETION CLOCK



OVERALL

A disappointing start to *NFS's* next epoch that while benefiting from a distinctive character, can't compete with other open-world driving games like *Forza Horizon 2*, or even *The Crew*.



REVIEW



PUBLISHER TELLTALE GAMES / DEVELOPER TELLTALE GAMES / FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE (REVIEWED) / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER
JOE SKREBELS
 Live OXM Joe
 @2plus2isjoe

TALES FROM THE BORDERLANDS: SEASON 1

Telltale's telling of tall tales tails off

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?
 Five episodes of high-gloss, loud-laughing adventure-comedy.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
 Any other Telltale game, but with a wry smile and bigger guns.

WHO'S IT FOR?
 Everyone. *Borderlands* fans will love the homage; adventure fans will love the storytelling.

Telltale has defined its recent output with a single question: what do you think the best thing to do is, right now? Whether that's giving a racist some chocolate or stoving a Lewis Carroll character's head in, its games constantly force you into moments that ask you to question whether what you're doing will help you survive. *Tales from the Borderlands* shifts that focus slightly – your characters are in almost constant mortal peril, so the idea of survival never really matters. Instead, you start asking yourself, "What's the *funniest* thing I could do, right now?" Taking place almost entirely in flashback, it follows the unwillingly entwined lives of Rhys – a smart-laced Hyperion exec in thrall to the

memory of series baddie, Handsome Jack – and Fiona, a lifetime conwoman caught up in the scheme of, well, a lifetime. Each finds themselves on the hunt for a Vault Key. Unfortunately, almost everyone wants one. Our heroes meet friends, betray competitors, scar enemies and meet a bevy of the series' most memorable existing characters (thankfully more fan-service than in-jokes). In more sedate circumstances, *TfTB* could be gaming's first sitcom. But this isn't a sitcom. It's Telltale's trickiest, most action-packed project. Twists come at a rate of about three per episode, and fight scenes run the gamut from slapstick to shocking violence. It's a worthy homage to *Borderlands'* hyperactive run-and-gunning, and Rhys and Fiona don't

get an out just because they're not traditional gun-toting Vault Hunters. As ever, Telltale's engine (in need of retirement, ASAP) can barely cope with the most frenetic scenes, but even that can't quite spoil the spectacle. One of the chief criticisms of Telltale's work is that your choices don't add up to much. *Tales from the Borderlands*, in appropriately cheeky fashion, sidesteps that to an extent. By making comedy its chief concern, you're not looking to change the world – you're looking for the best punchline. When one of those hits unexpectedly, it feels more rewarding than almost any Momentous Decision. It might not have the emotional heft of the developer's better projects – but that doesn't mean it isn't Telltale's best game. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

THE BEST BIT



Every episode opens in spectacular style, with licensed music to back it up. Classy.

COOLEST CHARACTER



HUGO VASQUEZ
 Vasquez is the best slimeball businessman since the guy who says "Hans! Bubby!" in *Die Hard*.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

? No spoilers, but the ending teases the possibility of a second season in rather odd fashion. We'll take it.

OVERALL

A funny, thrilling, quietly subversive take on the well-worn Telltale formula – this feels like a genuine step forward for the genre. But, more importantly, it's just good fun, almost constantly.



Can't be bothered to swot up? Don't expect to immediately understand what's going on here, then.

REVIEW



PUBLISHER FOCUS HOME INTERACTIVE / DEVELOPER LARIAN STUDIOS / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER
CHRIS THURSTEN
Live Exitwarp
@cthursten

DIVINITY: ORIGINAL SIN – ENHANCED EDITION

Dig out your dusty old robe and wizard hat

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?
An old-school RPG with unusual levels of player freedom.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
Complicated but charming, rewarding investment with a light-hearted fantasy romp.

WHO'S IT FOR?
RPG fans looking to try something deeper than the norm.

This is an old-school top-down RPG that packs an enormous amount of ideas into every square inch. Most games like this owe something to tabletop role-playing, but *Divinity: Original Sin* feels like playing around a table with a dungeon master in a way that few RPGs manage. Playing solo, you create and control two custom characters as part of a maximum party of four. The fantasy world you trek through is governed by consistent rules that allow you to solve problems as directly or as laterally as you wish.

A blazing fire in your way? Move a barrel of water nearby and break it with your sword – or cheat and create a rain cloud. Wet from the rain? Congratulations: you now conduct

electricity. Blood conducts electricity, too, so think twice next time your lightning wizard is up to his knees in orc bits. This philosophy also applies to questing. Your first adventure is a murder mystery. You can follow a breadcrumb trail of clues if you like, but break into the right house and discover the right thing at the right time and the game will happily skip you ahead. A lot of effort has gone into enabling you to improvise solutions – something we wouldn't normally expect to find outside of tabletop.

Tabletop role-playing tends towards funny rather than serious and so does this. While the plot concerns a dire threat to time itself, *Divinity* never takes itself particularly seriously. It's a little cheesy in places, but it has a

strong, refreshing streak of Pratchett. It makes it more fun to play in co-op, too, whether split-screen or online.

The downside to all of this freedom is that *Divinity* is a complicated game. There is a lot to learn, both for you and your co-op partner. If you haven't played an old-school RPG before then you'll need to read and consider every tutorial message that pops up. The developer has done as well as can be expected to get a game like this to work on a pad: the UI is slick, clever and helpful. But it isn't a pick-up-and-play game – you won't enjoy it as much unless you pay attention to the instructions. On that basis, this feels destined to be loved passionately by a dedicated group of people. It's worth seeing if you're one of them. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

PRO TIP



Get a character with the 'Pet Pal' perk, so you can talk to animals.

KEY INFLUENCES



50% *Dungeons & Dragons*
35% *Discworld*
15% *XCOM*

BEST PRICE

\$
57.74
AMAZON

OVERALL

A surprise gem, particularly in co-op. Be prepared to put in a bit of learning time, but it's well worth it so you can appreciate the unusual freedom at your fingertips. Also: you can talk to dogs.

9

REVIEW





PUBLISHER UBISOFT / DEVELOPER UBISOFT QUEBEC
FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW

ASSASSIN'S CREED SYNDICATE

Ubisoft Quebec knocks up a pretty tasty Frye-up

Should the pressure be on, it doesn't show. *Assassin's Creed Syndicate* is a game with a spring in its step and a twinkle in its eye, and yet it could have been so very different. In its first time at the helm of the thundering *Creed* locomotive, Ubisoft Quebec has not only had to deal with the fallout of its predecessor's obvious technical failings, but plenty of negative pre-launch buzz besides. There are no game-changing additions here, but if the hefty blobs of grease applied to its inner workings aren't quite enough to prevent those cogs from grinding on occasion, the machine runs smoother than you're probably expecting. An industrial evolution, if you will.

Syndicate is set at a time of significant change, of course, but without a single era-defining event to tether itself to, this is an episodic kind of adventure – the machinations of the Templars underpinning a series of missions that are otherwise loosely tied. As such, it's a little lighter on its feet than usual: unbound by the weight of historical tragedy or conflict, Jeffrey Yohalem's script flits about amusingly, stuffing recognizable names into a condensed 19th-century London until it's groaning at the seams. Twin Assassins Jacob and Evie Frye are your fictitious chaperones to the vaguely factual figures, inserting themselves into key events like Victorian Forrest Gumps with cane-swords and kukri blades.

This is certainly a romanticized vision of 1868 London. You'll see chimneys belching smoke, sure, but its skies are often blue, and thoroughfares are unnaturally clean and wide. Even the slums aren't as

ramshackle and grubby as they probably should be. Although some might be disappointed that this isn't a warts-and-all rendition, it wouldn't fit the general tone: *Syndicate* is pitched as a light-hearted romp in a world where horse-drawn carriages are capable of drifting around corners. Yes, really.

Assassin's Creed has always been silly; this just happens to be the year it properly acknowledges it. Dickens and Darwin turning up is to be expected, but there's also Florence Nightingale and Karl Marx – the latter introduced during an argument with a station guard who rudely points out that he looks like a hobo. Self-referential humor is always a tightrope, but Yohalem negotiates it with nimble grace. "Not enormously subtle, is it?" remarks

one character, as Evie plays a piano melody and a stone floor reveals an underground passageway. And on one of the rare occasions you're whisked back to the future, there's even an apology.

A likeable Alexander Graham Bell, meanwhile, is your Da Vinci surrogate, taking time out from inventing the telephone to equip our heroes with electricity bombs and a rope launcher that allows them to Batman up to spires and rooftops. It's not integrated with quite the same elegance as in *Arkham Knight*, but it's still a fun and fast way of getting around. Likewise, the coaches – London's a big place, and negotiating it all on foot simply isn't an option for all but the most patient player. Reaching vantage points

opens up a fast-travel option, but loading times mean that's something of a misnomer. You're better off getting your grapple on, or hijacking a carriage and cracking the reins. »



REVIEWER

CHRIS SCHILLING
Live Rockin Stroll
@schillingc

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

Historical stab-'em-up reaches Victorian London. No, it's not really steampunk.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

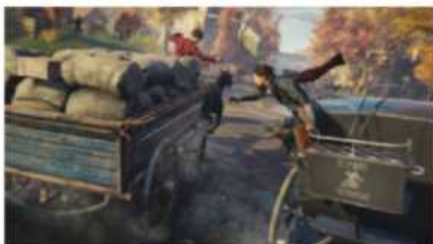
All the better for taking itself less seriously.

WHO'S IT FOR?

People who were disappointed with *Unity* for mostly technical reasons.

REVIEW

Dynamite crates can be placed to blow up Blighter cargo. There's even a perk so you'll find more.



You'll rarely be able to reach your destination entirely peacefully, mind. London's been taken over by a red-coated gang who call themselves the Blighters, and they're an aggressive bunch. Liberating each borough from their control is a matter of freeing children from workhouses, kidnapping key personalities or simply taking down a given number of Blighters to allow your green-garbed followers, the Rooks, to move in – all variations on familiar themes. If you've not already spent your money on weapons and gear, you can invest in gang upgrades that toughen up your recruits, bolster their vehicles or simply put more of them on the streets. Some asides – particularly those that ask you to destroy contraband or hijack cargo – are generously remunerated, further tempting you from the main missions. Some players will resent a firmer

shove towards side quests, but it's undeniably satisfying to successfully lead your Rooks into a gang war, prompted when all of a borough's activities have been cleared and its snarling leader emerges.

Ironically, you'll have to spill quite a bit of claret to ensure London's a little less red. Combat is brisk and brutal, lacking some of the heft of previous games, with the trade-off of improved responsiveness. The timing for counters may be absurdly generous, but you'll be glad of it when you're assaulted from all sides: the Blighters might not be the smartest opponents, but they make up in number and force what they lack in intelligence.

Again, it's not quite up to Rocksteady's peerless fluidity, but it's particularly gratifying to let Evie loose. Her take-no-prisoners style is perfect for battering brutish chumps

Kidnap missions ask you to bundle crims into carriages for the police. They'd prefer them alive, so be careful who you're stabbing.

in the bare-knuckle fight clubs, and if occasionally you only feel partly responsible for the bone-cracking finishers, there's a thrilling high-wire act to stringing together a combo.

Indeed, almost every time we had a choice between the two leads we plumped for Evie. Jacob has a certain roguish charm, a ruffian with a heart of gold whose bludgeoning approach is rather at odds with Evie's smarter, more measured tactics (indeed, she increasingly has to deal with the fallout of his attempted good deeds). Yet he's just not as fun to use as his sister. What a pity, then, that the game's third act sidelines her for long spells.

Identical twins

For all Ubisoft Quebec's efforts to differentiate its two leads – Evie favors stealth, where Jacob prefers to go loud – the pair's skill trees are remarkably similar, with only a trio of unique abilities for each. Still, it's understandable that Ubisoft might want to cater to multiple playstyles, and if the missions don't necessarily play to their individual strengths, at least forced stealth is rare. If the prescribed sneaking tasks induce clammy-palmed tension, it's not always by design. You fear failure not because punishments are harsh or checkpoints unfair – far

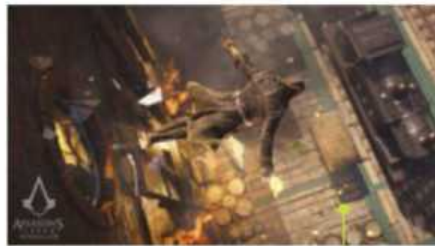
Chuffing great

Evie and Jacob get a mobile hub in the form of a train, whose interior grows more luxurious as your influence spreads. You'll need to return every so often to empty your safe or to accept missions from a handful of travelling allies, although most of its functions are available in menus elsewhere.





Carriage handling is more responsive than in real life, but you'll be glad of it.



“Evie’s take-no-prisoners style is perfect for battering chumps”

from it – but because restarts take an excruciatingly long time.

Missions generally seem of shorter length than usual. Perhaps that’s partly down to the speed of locomotion, but even multi-part set-pieces rarely outstay their welcome. Which isn’t to say that quality control isn’t an issue, of course. It may simply be a reality of having so many different studios involved, but invariably some parts don’t hang together as well as others. On the one hand, poor Dickens accompanies us to the least scary haunted house we’ve ever visited; on the other, there’s a terrific stealth-

focused mission in which you’re asked to remove evidence and hide a corpse under the nose of dull-witted cops. Templar assassinations are the most handsomely staged, usually offering up to three infiltration routes. Storming the Tower of London with a consort of guards might not be the most elegant of entrances when you can pilfer keys, but there’s something to be said for chaos as a distraction technique.

Elsewhere, optional objectives enliven what might ostensibly seem routine. The Thames is comically dense with boats, but attempting a crossing without touching the water

The ability to zipline down to street level means fewer swandives into hay carts this time.

plays out like a 19th-century *Frogger*. Time limits and a damage meter turn a sedate carriage journey into something resembling *Assassin’s Crazy Taxi*.

It still creaks and groans around the edges, the result of an approach to game design that prioritizes quantity over quality. And yet any time *Syndicate’s* overstuffed world threatens to come apart, there’s always something to drag you back in. It might be the spy score, folding in elements of classic British songs like *Rule Britannia*. Or perhaps the verbal sparring between two oddly good-natured murderers. Maybe it’ll even be London itself, prettier and more welcoming than it’s ever been. *Assassin’s Creed* could still benefit from a year off, but this rattles along with enough energy that most players, like a certain Dickensian favorite, will happily appeal for another serving. **OXM**

■ The OXM Verdict

THE BEST BIT



Pursuing a carriage by zig-zagging between buildings with the rope launcher.

THE WORST BIT



No inside-out faces, but the Thames traffic caused instances of flipbook framerate.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The season pass offers Jack the Ripper DLC – even given that it’s set 20 years later, it could be a bit of a tonal mismatch.

OVERALL

Syndicate plays fast and loose with historical fact, but can’t quite escape the series’ lingering problems. It gets by on the breezy charm of its leads, its sprightly score and winning script.

7



PUBLISHER 2K GAMES / DEVELOPER YUKE'S / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER

ALEX DALE

Live ChocoboOfDoom @SporadicDaler

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

The biggest *WWE* game ever celebrates the biggest *WWE* star of all time – ‘Stone Cold’ Steve Austin.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

All-round control and animation tweaks mean it's slicker than ‘slick’ Ric Flair.

WHO'S IT FOR?

The bulging roster and restored match types will satisfy those burned by *2K15*.

WWE 2K16

The granddaddy of them all

My favorite thing about *WWE 2K16* turned out to be the thing that I initially liked the least: the pin system. It's been reworked into a kind of *Tiger Woods* swing-o-meter, and I've yet to encounter someone who hasn't been completely flummoxed by it on their first kick-out attempt. The idea is to stop the meter within the green area, which gradually shrinks as you absorb damage until it's little more than a slither. You get three cracks at it: on the one-count, at the two-count and at 2.99999 recurring, for those dramatic last-gasp escapes.

But once you get into the groove, you'll realize how brilliantly it reflects the contemporary *WWE* house style, with its matches loaded with heart-

stopping near-falls and finishing moves that never quite manage to finish people off. Bouts between two evenly matched players in *WWE 2K16* are just as pulsating – no matter how much of a licking you take, there's always a small, green window of hope. Absorbing a top-rope finisher, but still somehow managing to dig deep and raise your shoulder at the last second, is an air-punching moment and one that sees the *WWE* series finally nail that balance between technique and luck that has always driven its gameplay.

Disappointingly, I can't sing the same praises for the submission system. It's the same cat and mouse mini-game from last year, but the balance is all wrong. Getting trapped in routine submission holds can easily

end the match prematurely, even if you've dominated up until that point, which can infuriate.

Mode-wise, Steve Austin's Showcase is a predictable highlight, chronicling his Attitude Era glory days from 1996-2001. There are also unexpected bonus matches that break the mode's chronology and take you back to highlights from his pre-*WWE* career.

Indeed, if you're a wrestling historian there's plenty to get stuck into, with a series-high 100+ grapplers to pick from, ranging from '80s stars to NXT up-and-comers. Couple the wealth of content with all-round refinements and a superior pinning system, and you've got a winner – as long as the sticky submission system doesn't make you tap, of course. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

THE BEST BIT



We love the authentic WCW/ECW retro arenas. Check out Bash at the Beach '94!

COOLEST CHARACTER



STING
WCW legend Sting is finally in a *WWE* ring! Choose between his 2015, 1999 and 1991 beach bum iterations.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

? The season pass kicks off with the 2015 Hall of Fame class, with rare bouts featuring Kevin Nash, Alundra Blayze and more.

OVERALL

ffy submission system aside, this is the smoothest and most authentic *WWE* game to date. But there's a ceiling for a game that takes control out of your hands so often, and that ceiling is...





PUBLISHER ACTIVISION / DEVELOPER FREESTYLE GAMES / FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE (REVIEWED) / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER

EMMA DAVIES
Live OXM Emma
@emcetera

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

A revamped rhythm-actioner with an entirely new controller.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Stripped-down, but closer to real guitar-playing than ever before.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Those sick of color-coded clacking, or without enough mates to make *Rock Band* a worthwhile purchase.

GUITAR HERO LIVE

The series is back in black... and white

Are you okay?" asks a stage hand, as band members psych themselves up. A roadie thrusts a guitar into your hand, then suddenly you're up in front of a huge crowd. As the title suggests, this *Guitar Hero* revival sets you in front of an audience of actual, live-action people. Wrong notes draw boos from them and disgust from your bandmates. It's simultaneously exciting and stressful.

An even bigger shake-up is the new guitar controller. Out is the line of five rainbow-colored keys, in favour of six buttons arranged in three pairs of black and white. This simplifies the interface – notes appear in one of three lanes, and are color-coded to tell you which button (or both) to press.

It's a welcome break from the finger gymnastics of before, which had you desperately trying to recall how far down the fretboard you'd moved. Now, with just a little practice, even the tone-deaf can pull off chord transitions that feel at least vaguely authentic.

In terms of multiplayer, it does lag behind *Rock Band*. You can add in a second guitar and a mic, but both fret-botherers are playing the exact same riffs – it's a straight head-to-head than camaraderie-heavy co-op. And while the decision to strip away the other instruments has led to a more refined guitar experience, we miss the variety of being able to hop between roles.

Given the slight, rather disjointed nature of the career mode – you play in various bands spanning pop to metal,

like the world's most versatile session musician – the real meat is found in the new *Guitar Hero* TV online mode. Here, you've got the option to strum along to channels of proper music videos, competing against others. It's a pseudo-DLC means of padding out the game's 42 on-disc tracks. You've got the option to insta-select tunes at the cost of one 'play'. You earn these by levelling up, or can buy them with in-game currency (won by completing tracks)... or, of course, with real money. It's a shame not to have the choice of buying tracks, but it is at least possible to access these extras without spending a dime. It may not please a crowd like *Rock Band 4*, but *Guitar Hero Live* has made some big, brave and ultimately successful changes. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

PROS/CONS

- ✓ New guitar layout feels more authentic
- ✓ Guitar Hero TV greatly increases the tracklist
- ✓ Live-action footage is detailed...
- ✗ ...but often left us feeling passive
- ✗ Our controller quickly developed a squeaky strum bar
- ✗ No option to purchase tracks

THE WORST BIT



When your hands start to feel like arthritic crab claws after a few solid hours of play.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

✓ A new *Rock Band* has also just come out, so could we see a resurgence of the rhythm-action war of the mid-'00s?

OVERALL

A strong reimagining of the *Guitar Hero* series that does enough to differentiate itself from both past entries and its closest rival to remain relevant. A Bowie-esque reinvention.

8



PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX / DEVELOPER DONTNOT ENTERTAINMENT / FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE (REVIEWED) / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER
CHRIS SCHILLING
 Live Rockin Stroll
 @schillingc

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

An episodic drama about teen friendship and time travel.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Occasionally scrappy, but rich, moving and deeply involving throughout.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Anyone who's ever experienced the horrors and delights of teendom.

LIFE IS STRANGE

How slow-burn drama blossomed into one of 2015's best games

Being a teenager is simultaneously rubbish and brilliant. It's a period of your life where everything feels huge; the hormones whizzing around your body convincing you that bad times are literally the end of the world and good times are the greatest moments of your life. You care far too much about most stuff, and not enough about the things you probably should. If *Life is Strange* is only remembered for one thing, let it be that it captures these sensations of adolescence better than any game.

If there's a second thing, though, surely it'll be the central relationship between protagonist Max and former BFF Chloe. The latter careens back into Max's life when she is shot after

an altercation in the restroom of the elite academy where Max is studying photography. Witnessing the fight, Max suddenly finds herself able to rewind time to save Chloe, but soon learns there are consequences to her temporal meddling – and we're not just talking about the odd nosebleed.

Max's powers make for a neat narrative hook, and factor into a few clever puzzles and a subplot that assumes greater importance as the series unfolds. This leads to some of *Life is Strange's* biggest surprises, and yet it's not as interesting as the process of simply watching Max and Chloe resume their friendship as the former struggles to negotiate the perils and pitfalls of senior high-school life in a social media-savvy world.

After five years apart, it's naturally a fuzzily wistful, golden-hour haze that somehow recreates that feeling of magical moments shared with someone for whom we deeply care. So much so, in fact, that it's not nearly as ruinous as it could be when the characters' mouths move with all the grace of a wooden marionette, or when dialogue often lands with an almost audible clunk. On occasion you can practically hear the voice actors wince, but it says much that the conversation



Playing percentages

There are dozens of smaller decisions spread throughout the five episodes, some of which you might not have even noticed unless you've spent some time in the Choices menu. There are birds to rescue and messages to erase, and – perhaps most importantly of all – house plants to keep alive.



Poor Alyssa frequently finds herself in harm's way - happily, you're usually in a position to save her.



"It captures these sensations of adolescence better than any game"

surrounding the first episode centred on the sometimes clumsy writing and yet still most players were excited to see what came next.

And, aside from a monumentally tedious bottle-hunting mission in a junkyard, it's the second chapter where *Life is Strange* really tightens its grip. After a few hours testing the extent of Max's powers in a variety of interesting and playful ways, there's a moment of stark realization that they might just have limits, exploited superbly in a sequence of almost unbearable tension. From then on, through to *Episode 4's* cliffhanger ending, Dontnod keeps ramping up the dramatic stakes.

As the finale begins, it seems the developer might finally have dropped the ball, but it recovers in time for a

bravura set-piece of dreamlike horror as Max's doubts and fears are brought into sharper focus. Beyond that, we are in danger of straying into ruinous spoiler territory - suffice it to say that the final choice has almost divided players right down the middle, despite one of the two endings suggesting Dontnod expected most of its audience to lean that way. It's a choice similar to those we've made before in other games, but here it's determined by your feelings about that central relationship, and how you were able to shape it with your responses throughout the story.

Either way, most players will be sad to wave goodbye to Arcadia Bay and its residents. For all that Chloe and Max's friendship is the beating heart of *Life is Strange*, you'll likely feel an

The pair's meeting with the unpredictable Frank can play out multiple ways depending on earlier choices.

affection for the supporting characters, too. After the first episode you'll have pigeonholed most of them, but it's unlikely you'll feel the same way by the end. Through Max's interactions with them, we get the rare opportunity to experience issues and scenarios with which most of us can identify or empathise, from bullying and social-media shaming to the simple desire to fit in and to connect with others.

Yes, in the fullness of time, we may come to mock *Life is Strange's* awkwardness, uneven script and infrequent tonal missteps. But there is an emotional potency and maturity here that is missing from so many of its peers, and that is undoubtedly worth celebrating. Indeed, there's something fittingly adolescent about the way it chooses to express itself, and it's that disarming openness and honesty that helps set it apart. Ask yourself this: can you think of a portrayal of teenage friendship in games more powerful and affecting than that of Max and Chloe? We're not sure we can. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

THE BEST BIT



Max confronts her innermost fears in arguably the game's most daring sequence.

KEY INFLUENCES



40% *My So-Called Life*
35% *Gone Home*
25% *Donnie Darko*

COMPLETION CLOCK



OVERALL

Much more than the sum of its parts, this is absorbing whether forcing us into tough choices or capturing the joy of the mundane. It's not perfect, but you won't forget it in a hurry.





PUBLISHER BIGBEN INTERACTIVE / DEVELOPER KYLOTONN GAMES / FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE (REVIEWED) / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER

PAUL TAYLOR
Live Paulus McT
@mynameispt

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

A very official, slightly tuned-up rally game with licensed drivers, stages, etc.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

A slightly dented-in version of *Colin McRae Rally* back in its heyday.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Rally obsessives who can look past the scrappy presentation.

WRC 5

Handbrake turn, over crest and into the pits

Should you have failed to pay attention to real-world WRC for a while, you'll be surprised to see that the beefy WRXs and Evos of yore are now comparatively smaller boxes. Just as their physical size has diminished, so too has the videogame equivalent.

Codemasters' *DiRT* series went very dudebro for a while, trading authenticity for rapid-fire thrills, and Milestone trod a narrow path with the official licence. This year, Kylotonn has done what it can to reinvigorate the series – *WRC 5* embraces the spirit of the sport wholeheartedly, and it's probably the best *WRC*'s been for a while – despite many shortcomings. If nothing else, it ticks the boxes of what you'd expect a modern and authentic

rally game to do. There's the one-manufacturer J-WRC league in FWD Citroëns, the mid-range WRC-2 class and the full-beans WRC, yours to race across 14 countries over mud, gravel, sand, snow and asphalt, with (sort of) variable time and weather.

Fancy a quick spin? No problem – you can jump straight into the hero car and inevitably ding it on the first corner. Take your time, progress through the career and you'll learn the subtleties of how each class of car handles. They're all different, and Kylotonn's done well to make them unique. But. You'll need to readjust your eyes if you jump on this after playing *Forza 6*. Despite there being only one car on the road, *WRC 5* is very lumpy, lurching around in 30 frames per second with infrequent

but noticeable screen-tearing. In a lower-specced car it's not so bad, but progress up to the 300HP+ beasts and the game feels too slow.

Go skittering off the course into the scrub or forest and occasionally you're automatically placed back in the middle of the road – bearable (if unusual) for those who want instant gratification, but for rally fans it's insulting. And all that's a pity, because there are some wonderfully thought-out stages that are equal parts technical, punishing and joyful, and there are plenty of moments when the game really sings. While the real WRC machines may be smaller than you'd like, they're no less potent. *WRC 5*, however, feels like the turbo's fallen off and is only firing on half its cylinders. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

PROS/CONS

- ✔ Cars have a great sense of weight
- ✔ Inventive and engaging stages
- ✔ Great engine and environment sounds...
- ✘ ...but your co-driver is thoroughly robotic
- ✘ Framerate is frequently choppy
- ✘ Inconsistent off-road spawn

THE BEST BIT



Finland. Heltter-skelter stages on gravel, at night, in a forest. Watch us go!

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

? *WRC eSports* begins mid-January, in which you can compete in multiplayer tournaments in line with the 2016 WRC.

OVERALL

The best off-road game on your Xbox One until *Forza* decides to do something about it or *DiRT Rally* leaves PC. Low-budget, yes, but there's a beating heart here behind the technical misery.





PUBLISHER ACTIVISION / DEVELOPER PLATINUMGAMES / FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE (REVIEWED) / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



Of the five, only Grimlock with his brute strength plays much differently.



REVIEWER
ALEX DALE
Live ChocoboOfDoom
@SporadicDaler

TRANSFORMERS: DEVASTATION

The robots' latest outing proves such heroic nonsense

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?
Bayonetta, but in the skin of the '80s *Transformers* cartoon. *Bayonetta* in disguise, if you like.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
Fast, furious and energetic scrapping, but feels a little rusty outside of combat.

WHO'S IT FOR?
A little slight for hardcore Platinum fans, but enough of the dev's magic still shines through.

Ah, *Transformers*! Pretty much every kid who grew up in the mid-'80s will fondly remember leaving the theatre shellshocked after the Decepticons brutally wiped out half their toy collection in the opening five minutes of the movie. And now you can bring that underlying childhood trauma back to the surface with *Devastation*, which is by my calculation the first true G1 *Transformers* game on Xbox.

Devastation might lack the gloss of High Moon Studios' *Cybertron* games, but it more than makes up for its bargain-bin feel with authenticity. This is almost completely faithful to the source material, as much as trademarks and voice actor availability allows at least, and from the moment Optimus Prime

lets rip into a horde of Seekers with his iconic glowing axe, G1 fans will be enthralled. Half the fun is seeing who rocks up next – Megatron's brought all of his mates with him in his latest attempt to trash Earth for giggles, including a few you might not expect.

There's little time for sentiment when you're in the thick of the action, however. After the disappointment of its first licensed title, *The Legend of Korra*, the usually excellent Platinum has designed *Devastation* in the image of its acclaimed beat-'em-ups. Not a bad template to work from, by any means. *Bayonetta* in particular is clearly a big influence; the 'Witch Time' mechanic (which slows time if you duck an attack at the last second) has been lifted wholesale, and as before, it

dictates the way you play – deliberately positioning your 'bot in harm's way, looking out for telltale glints that indicate your opponent is about to attack, and then using it to give yourself the time and space you need to launch into a vicious combo. The fighting is not as nuanced or finessed as *Bayonetta*'s sublime systems, but it's got enough depth to condemn button-mashers to the scrapyard.

Outside of combat, *Devastation*'s low-budget roots begin to show; platforming is Dinobot levels of clumsy, and there isn't enough variety between the five playable Autobots to encourage replayability. But while this isn't Platinum's finest or most lavish game, there's no, ahem, disguising the quality that lies underneath. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

THE BEST BIT



Plundering iconic Decepticon weaponry, such as Mensor's sword – for yourself.

PRO TIP



Synthesize weapons frequently – your existing gear quickly becomes useless.

COMPLETION CLOCK



OVERALL

Much of *Devastation*'s appeal lies in being reunited with childhood heroes, but scratch beneath the surface and there's a deep game that gives out as much as you're willing to put in.





PUBLISHER INXILE ENTERTAINMENT / DEVELOPER INXILE ENTERTAINMENT / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER

MATT GILMAN

Live 6-maniacal

@Gmaniacal

WASTELAND 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT

Born to survive, if not to thrive

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

Sequel to gaming's first proper post-apocalypse.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Eating a meaty steak that looks as appetizing as a slab of bison underbelly.

WHO'S IT FOR?

People keen on numbers, toasters, and who like filling in bio sheets for made-up characters.

Way back when, in the decidedly bleak age when trendy kids were doing the Locomotion while *Police Academy 5: Assignment Miami Beach* played in the background (we're talking about the bowels of 1988), a subset of PC owners were sampling gaming's first proper post-apocalypse. Think of how many of those we've fought, shot, snuck and crafted our way through since. From *Rage* to *Metro 2033*, all the way up to *Fallout*, the first *Wasteland* can be said to have influenced them all. *Wasteland 2* is the Kickstarted return to the epicentre of the end times' proliferation through game-dom.

Thanks to the myriad inspirations that the first game spawned, the setup

feels a touch familiar. You take on the role of a freshly recruited squad of Desert Rangers, four of them to start with. The immediate locale of Arizona requires a crew of hardy types to head out into the titular irradiated landscape to, initially at least, investigate the murder of a veteran Ranger. What follows is a spiralling series of minor storylines, weaving around one another as you steadily get to the bottom of that first mystery and the implications that those discoveries entail.

What you actually find yourself doing, however, is chatting up colorful locals on your travels, pondering your way through conversation trees brimming with juicily written dialog, occasionally stopping to tinker with your squad, battle through a combat

section or attempt to solve rudimentary puzzles. The first of these three additional ingredients is by far the most delectable. From the outset you're able to imprint your crew with personality, via an initially off-puttingly in-depth array of stats and traits. You can build a sniper who's great with animals or an engineer who's as adept with a wrench in a fight as he is when fixing... uh... toasters. We especially appreciated the talents of our team surgeon who was amply skilled when putting our pals back together post-brawl and had enough points in the Smart-Ass skill to ensure he always had some suitably brash response ready when faced with one of the world's many troublemakers.

Gear plays a huge part in all of this, too. This gear evolves through neatly delivered degrees of necessity. First you'll learn to survive the turn- and grid-based combat, with weapons that jam when you least expect it and a ragtag sense of always being a knife-edge away from failure (and permadeath makes that prospect a potent one). After that, you find yourself keeping tabs on an ever-growing inventory of pistols, rifles, melee weapons and more, steadily



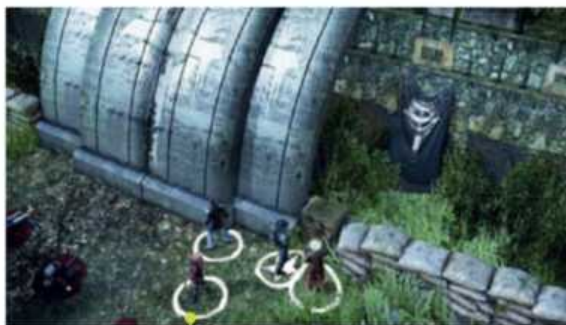
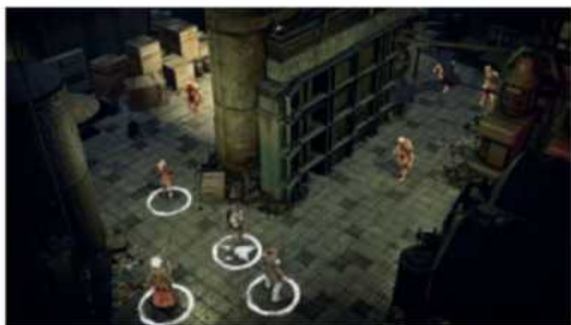
Far side

Wondering who the 'director' is for this *Director's Cut*? Why, it's Brian Fargo, the very same chap co-responsible for the original *Fallout*, *The Bard's Tale* and, erm, *Hunted: The Demon's Forge*, among many others. We're fairly sure he'll forgive you for having forgotten that last one, mind.



There's a satisfying sound that plays as your team reloads collectively after a fight, which is delightful to hear.

You can select from active or usable skills at any time with a press of the triggers.



“Steadily peeling back the layers is an RPG purist’s pleasure”

increasing your team’s individual proficiencies. Get all that nailed down and you enter the realm of weapon crafting. There’s loads to get to grips with, and carefully peeling back the layers is an RPG purist’s pleasure.

There’s a real sense of survival against the odds, too. Your crew develop injuries over time and healing resources are scarce. There’s a mildly effective water mechanic, forcing you to keep hydrated, but the magic really lies in the palpable sense that your ability to overcome what’s thrown at you hides in smart tinkering.

Unfortunately, there’s a mutated fly-beast lying legs-akimbo in the *Wasteland 2* soup dish. The interface is about as smoothly implemented as a pineapple suppository. Its tiny fonts,

muddy icons and awkward prompts make navigating the menus a huge chore. If you’re going to bury a tonne of complexity in menus intended for pad-based navigation, you need some uniformity. *Diablo III* has it nailed, with radial menus that are mirrored across different areas of the UI. In *Wasteland 2*, trying to find your way around each tab on your menu is like sticking your head into an assortment of beehives.

One particular bugbear is that during combat the font revealing your percentage chance for a strike to hit is both tiny and rusty red, making it near-illegible at times. Throw in a camera prone to leave these essential nuggets of info out of the frame and you can perhaps understand why our dentistry bill

If you are born with a giant white circle under your feet, you are destined to be an RPG character.

was so high this month (it was the frustrated grinding what did it).

Time can make these elements bearable. The same can’t be said of the game’s general visual quality. It looks oppressively bad, but not like it was designed to be. Character models share the same brown palette as almost everything in the environments. For all of the personality you attach to these malleable minions, none of that feels fleshed-out visually in how they’re represented on-screen.

Those aforementioned environments do vary, but none can be said to be impressive, or to entice in their design. It’s a tough ask, to make a landscape as alluring as it is grim, but that’s what needs to happen if we’re to plug our eyes into it for the full 60+ hours required. It’s a factor that will see many people bounce straight off of *Wasteland 2*, which is a huge shame. Even as its progenitor did way back when, there’s a unique blend of survival combat here which others could and should learn from. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

PROS/CONS

- ✓ Deep, satisfying character-building
- ✓ A core sense of survival
- ✓ Tactile weapons that feel suitably beat
- ✗ A UI so ugly a mother would heave
- ✗ Not the best of lookers generally, either
- ✗ Camera can go off on one, on occasion

THE RIVALS

DIABLO III: ULTIMATE EVIL ED. 8

HAND OF FATE 8

COSTUME QUEST 2 7

COMPLETION CLOCK

60+ HOURS

OVERALL

Proof that PC-based RPGs can work on pads – and how not to implement their weighty UIs. Visual mediocrity will push many away, but trudge on through and there’s much to love.

6



You can save a chum from extraction by popping the Fulton balloon with lead.

PUBLISHER KONAMI / **DEVELOPER** KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS / **FORMAT** XBOX 360, XBOX ONE (REVIEWED) / **ORIGINAL SCORE** 10/10

METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN

Giving a whole new meaning to 'boss fight'



REVIEWER
Matthew Castle
LIVE OXM Pesto
@mrbasil_pesto

WE SAID
By reining in his madness, Kojima lets his ideas breathe, resulting in one of the finest stealth games ever.

Teabagging is dead, grabbed by the throat by a soldier as another runs up and pops a cap in its face. This humiliating new tag-team ritual is the result of transplanting *The Phantom Pain's* Big Boss into an online mode: all the abilities gleefully unleashed on AI soldiers are suddenly unleashed on you. You can be grabbed, interrogated, have your throat sliced or be choked out and extracted by Fulton balloon, the latter netting the other side bonus points that can act as the decider in a draw.

Hanging from a balloon is properly shaming, as you beg for help with preset quotes – "Lend me a hand!" This is vital to Bounty Hunter mode, where Fultoning a foe on a killstreak (earning them the titular bounty) wins back the lives they've taken from your team's depleting pot. As bounties build with consecutive kills, star players can become liabilities and a simple team deathmatch evolves into a defensive scenario.

"Outfoxing defenders provides a genuine heart-in-mouth thrill"

It's a really clever twist on otherwise well-trodden ground. Even better is Cloak and Dagger, a mode where teams take turns to steal data discs from the other side. The *Metal Gear-y* wrinkle here is that robbers wear stealth camouflage that briefly deactivates whenever a single member of the squad is attacked. Do you gun it for the disc, relying on team-mates not to blow your cover? Or do you edge between the shadows to minimise risk? The answer, we find, is to let idiot lone wolves get gunned down in the first minute and use the ensuing peace to make your own move.

If impatient team-mates are a persistent pain – running in like Rambo, getting schooled like Dumbo – it's nothing compared to the unbalanced might of the defenders. Not only do they benefit from easy camping opportunities but their lethal equipment is horribly overpowered. C4's a real problem – you place it by the data disc and the second the announcer calls out a robbery you detonate. Boom. One dead Boss. By all rights, defenders should win every round; outfoxing them provides a genuine heart-in-mouth thrill. There's less ingenuity in the final mode, Comms Control. Stripped of the Fulton/stealth emphasis, this simple King of the Hill variant reveals *MGO's* limitations more clearly. Despite

ARE WE HAVING FUN YET? Our first hour rendered as a wavy line...





Only a madman would hide in a cardboard box in *MGO*. You stand out like a sore thumb (hiding in a box).

Different times of day/weather types lend slightly new flavors to maps.

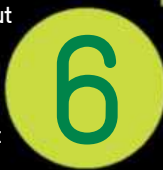


having three character classes, their unlock trees do little to differentiate them; Scouts benefit from sniping (if they can adapt to the weird sway not present in single-player), but many players gravitate towards assault rifles no matter what their class. And with only five levels, it's not long before matches begin to blur together.

This isn't to mention a myriad of technical problems, from weirdly unresponsive CQC to unbalanced team numbers to the lag and sudden match quitting that comes from not offering dedicated servers. There's plenty of gripping stuff here, not least those manly arms around your throat, but *Metal Gear Online* is in need of polish and more modes. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

Smart ideas, but too often feels like a game from 2007 attached to one of the best games of 2015.



PUBLISHER ACTIVISION / DEVELOPER BUNGLIE / FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE / ORIGINAL SCORE 9/10

DESTINY: LEGENDARY EDITION

Is *The Taken King's* honeymoon over?



REVIEWER
Chris Thursten
LIVE Exitwarp
@cthursten

WE SAID
Destiny still demands your time, but the reward is one of Xbox's most well-rounded games.

The *Destiny* community has a complicated relationship with the game's developer. It's hard to shake the notion that Bungie is unusually responsible for the happiness of the hundreds of thousands of people who log in to shoot space guns at every hour of every day.

The Taken King was an act of divine benefaction, an update that smoothed out old bumps and made a well-trodden, well-loved experience new and rewarding. It was a beautiful couple of weeks before a few old concerns reasserted themselves and a few new ones emerged.

Let's start with the old. The return of the Iron Banner event highlights *Destiny's* year-long lag problem in competitive

modes. It was particularly bad shortly after the release of *The Taken King*, and still continues to annoy despite Bungie's insistence that it's a top priority.

There have been some incredible bugs, too, including one that lets the Hunter class use their Super ability forever. In severe cases like this Bungie has been quick and communicative about a fix, although it's been typically cautious about making balance changes even as a new, one-sided competitive metagame emerges. At the time of writing, the *Taken King's* Titan Sunbreaker subclass rules the Crucible to an undesirable degree.

On to a fresher concern: microtransactions. *Destiny* now has an in-game store,

with special emote animations available for small sums of Silver, a new premium currency. This is fun and harmless at present. Many fear a slippery slope, however, with Bungie having to fend off a million conspiracy theories about nefarious future uses for the store.

Microtransactions are, it says, a way of ensuring future content updates can be free. This is amazing news if true, another paradigm shift in *Destiny's* accessibility and value to the average player. Bungie's ongoing responsiveness to problems will give us the measure of this. It's time for it to step up and prove the benefit of paying for the game in a new way.

A few months in, *The Taken King* is still brilliant. I don't think the problems that have emerged take much away from that. It's simply that *Destiny* is still a work in progress, no matter how good it gets. **OXM**



The Iron Banner acts as a stress test for both the community and their internet connections.



The OXM Verdict

Destiny is still fantastic, but it's also still an MMO: problems continue to come and go.



ON THE DOWNLOAD

Latest add-ons and indie games rated

Possibly Geralt's finest quest, and he even manages to have some fun along the way.



A bit more enthusiasm, witcher. You know you just might enjoy yourself.

PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO / DEVELOPER CD PROJEKT RED / FORMAT XBOX ONE / REVIEWER TOM STONE / PRICE \$9.99

THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT – HEARTS OF STONE

The sidequest king pulls off an extraordinary epilog

Geralt of Rivia has saved many lives. He's saved villages from monsters, saved captives from criminals and now he's on his most crucial saviour quest yet – to save the game. Seriously, *save Hearts of Stone* over and over, and keep a few backups too. It's possible the DLC's many glitches – one progress-destroying, as this critic unfortunately discovered – will have been patched by the time you read this. Until then, backup saves are a must.

Otherwise, *Hearts of Stone* is unmissable. It manages to juggle comedy, horror, intrigue, brutal violence and tragedy with the skill of the best *Game of Thrones* episodes. Look past the glitches and we have a strong contender for expansion of the year.

It begins with a traditional monster hunt (one of a few tough boss fights), that goes very, very wrong. Soon, Geralt is locked into a sinister pact to complete three seemingly impossible tasks, involving a wedding, a heist and a haunted manor. Don't expect a gameplay revolution, simply the same strong combat, puzzle-solving and fun investigating of the main game.

What is new is a refinement of the excellent storytelling 3's best sidequests gave us. Recruiting from a choice of criminals for the heist may be the toughest part, because the characters are so strong throughout *Hearts of Stone* you'll want to bring them all.

//We have a strong contender for expansion of the year//

It also does a great job of subverting narrative tropes. At first the ghostly manor you visit seems haunted only by tiresome jump-scare clichés. But it soon becomes a far more interesting journey into the flashbacks of a dying relationship. It's sad, scary and even somewhat funny – an outstanding wedding

sequence will have you grinning for weeks. We won't spoil how, except that the developers

finally lighten up grumpy old Geralt. That even this comical quest manages moments of intrigue and horror without feeling tonally inconsistent just goes to show how far the developers' storytelling abilities have come. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

Arguably, Geralt's greatest quest yet. An excellent tale, confidently told and at a bargain price. Essential.

9



Geralt dancing with this hip-thrusting gentleman? We swear this all makes sense in context.



ALSO RELEASED

From best to worst, the latest additions to Xbox Live Marketplace



1 PROJECT CARS – JAPANESE CAR PACK

Hate cars? This isn't for you.
Price: \$3.49



2 GEARS OF WAR: UE – ESPORTS SEASON 1 WEAPON SKIN

Proceeds go towards eSports prizes. Maybe you'll win the money back?
Price: \$4.99



3 MINECRAFT – STAR WARS PREQUEL SKIN PACK

50 prequel trilogy character skins inspire us to say something nice about it for once.
Price: \$2.99



4 PURE POOL – SNOOKER PACK

We didn't buy a game called *Pure Pool* so we could play snooker...
Price: \$4.49



5 METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN – TUXEDO

Dress Solid Snake up in a Tux and star in the James Bond remake of your dreams.
Price: \$0.99



6 FARMING SIMULATOR – OFFICIAL EXPANSION (GOLD)

20 pieces of equipment/vehicles! That have to be paid for again in-game!
Price: \$14.99

Han's sarcastic, but don't expect any decent zingers - this still never matches *Lego Star Wars* humor.



FORMAT XBOX ONE / REVIEWER TOM STONE / PRICE \$34.99

Chell and the Sentry Turret minifigs are superbly realized.



FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE / REVIEWER PAUL RANDALL / PRICE \$29.99

REVIEW

DISNEY INFINITY 3.0 - RISE AGAINST THE EMPIRE PLAY SET PACK

We were pleasantly surprised by *Disney Infinity's* first *Star Wars* instalment earlier this year - a tight platformer with fun hack-and-slash lightsaber combat. But it was let down by a short run-time, too-large levels and dull *Star Bores* story.

A lot's improved for *Rise Against the Empire*, a loose retelling of the original trilogy. Planets still have the great sense of scale, but now they're more focused, and less walking is required to get to the really juicy stuff. One gentle jog and you're trashing Jabba's palace.

But 'collect 2,000 credits' or fetch-and-carry quests are still too frequent and uninspired, even

if they're achieved with the same decent platforming and satisfying combat as last time. Spaceship combat is surprisingly immersive and easy to pick up, and barrel-rolling the Millennium Falcon to avoid laser blasts will make even the most jaded fan smile.

Infinity 3.0's plastic stand is still just a holder for your figures.

But you can complete all of *Rise's* new levels with the included Leia and Luke figures.

It's short for its price, and adding more Toy Box-tat still isn't enough to make that mode more than *Rise of the Generic Platformer Generator*. But if you want a family-friendly *Star Wars* game, based on the *real* films, this is ideal. **OXM**

//One gentle jog and you're trashing Jabba's palace for credits//

//The test chamber trek feels like a true part of Valve's saga//



The OXM Verdict

Should be at least \$10 cheaper, but it's still the best children's *Star Wars* videogame since Lego's take.



The OXM Verdict

A very expensive escapade, but it feels like a true *Portal* add-on with three great toys for collectors.



Indie Roundup / The latest hidden gems and DIY disasters



BLOCK KING 2
Be the last block standing as the floor fades beneath you. For *Block King 3*, how about some fun?



AIRPORT ANARCHY
Redefine 'anarchy' with this dull plane-landing sim. If you dream of working at an airport, we pity you.



FIRST SOUTH BEER PONG
Awful, with horrible presentation. Like drinking a warm beer and finding a cigarette in it.



LOOTFEST 360
Looks nice but this pretty 3D platformer is duller than watching a painting dry of the grass growing.



GEOLOGY BUSINESS
'Tap X to mine rock!' over and over. Handy if you need to break a controller/thumb quickly.



NEXT MONTH

YEAR OF THE DRAGON?

PLATINUM'S BEASTLY BRAWLER LEADS
OUR MONSTER 2016 PREVIEW ISSUE



THE OXM AWARDS: WE CROWN 2015'S BEST

FALLOUT 4'S MADDEST SECRETS REVEALED

RAINBOW SIX AND JUST CAUSE 3 REVIEWED

ON SALE
01/05/16

SUBSCRIBE ON
PAGE 52

All contents subject to change. Sorry about that.

XBOX EXTRA

Squeezing more from your machine every month



THE ULTIMATE GAME

Halo's shields + Doom's guns = gaming nirvana.



88 OXM Investigates

We make like Frankenstein (he was the scientist, you know) and build our dream game from disembodied Xbox parts.

90 Now Playing: Batman: Arkham Knight

Louise delivers brutal justice to the contents of the much-maligned season pass.

92 Now Playing: Assassin's Creed Unity

Alice discovers that when you start playing badly, it adds a certain *je ne sais quoi*.

94 Live Spotlight

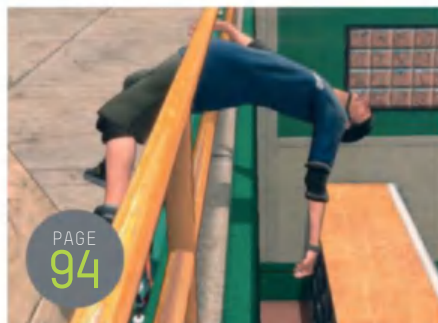
Did you know *Metal Gear Solid V* has a second game buried deep within its code? Elsewhere, we're still looking for the game in *Tony Hawk 5*.

96 OXM Replay

Last month, we revisited *Deus Ex* reboot *Human Revolution*. This month, we revisit that other Xbox *Deus Ex* game. The one you forgot existed

98 17 Halo multiplayer crazes that could be the next teabagging

Fairly self-explanatory this one, we feel.



OXM
INVESTIGATESUncovering
the other side of
Xbox gaming

THE ULTIMATE GAME

We've taken the best bits from a dozen games and augmented them into something perfect

What would you change about yourself, if you could pick one thing? We'd get gills, obviously, which would go great with our go-go gadget legs. But what if you could change one thing about each of your favorite games? Or, better yet, take the best parts of all of them until

you've built something perfect? A frankengame, if you will.

In the spirit of *Deus Ex*, we've augmented the perfect game, by stealing from *Halo*, *Dishonored*, *Sunset Overdrive* and more, and grafting everything together like that inspirational dude from *The Human Centipede*. You'll never need another game again...



Setting

THE HUMAN MIND FROM THE EVIL WITHIN

Perhaps this one is cheating, but what better place to set a game than in the mind? Our brains can take us anywhere, from deepest space to the creepy collection of haunted domiciles featured in *The Evil Within*. It's a world that defies logic, but one that feels consistent, atmospheric and horribly alive.



Hero

DAUD FROM DISHONORED'S DLC

Corvo Attano was something of a cipher: a mute protagonist who represented the player, but who wasn't exactly memorable in his own right. Daud – head of the assassins' guild and star of the DLC – was infinitely cooler. He's gravel-voiced, world-weary and the perfect guide for pretty much any destination.



Villain

GLADOS FROM PORTAL

Who else could it be, really? GLaDOS is the true star of Valve's devious *Portal* series: a rogue AI who gets a sadistic kick out of testing humans in the name of science (and sometimes killing them with lasers). She's evil, yes, but hilariously petty with it – we could listen to her insult our species all day.



Enemies

THE NAZIS FROM WOLFENSTEIN

We hate these guys, and that's probably why it feels so good to turn them into pâté. They're one of the few guilt-free enemies – the other being the undead – which is why *CoD's* Zombies is so appealing. The intelligent kind are rarer, and far more interesting to fight.



Story

THE WITCHER 3'S GRIPPING PLOT

CD Projekt RED knows how to tell a story, and in *The Witcher 3* it's managed the rare feat of a compelling narrative in an open-world environment. It's down to the characters, who feel real even as they chug potions and swat monsters. Welcome aboard, CDP!



Weapons

DOOM II'S GRATIFYING ARSENAL

It's been years since *Doom II*, and while we've had the odd gun that's felt satisfying since, few have come close to the meaty weapons of id's classic FPS. The BFG and chainsaw are both devastating, but it's the chunky double-barreled shotgun that takes the grisly biscuit.



Gimmick

SHADOW OF MORDOR'S NEMESIS SYSTEM

Critics predicted that *Shadow of Mordor's* celebrated Nemesis system would be stolen by every game going but those idiots were wrong. So it falls to us to filch the game's best feature: a living hierarchy of warlords that you can disrupt to your tactical advantage.



Stealth system

METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN

Every good game needs a stealth system, which is why shoehorned-in stealth sections are always greeted with such approval. But which game to copy for that level? *MGS V*, obviously. Its stealth is creative, chaotic, generous and a lot of fun.



Health system

HALO'S RECHARGING SHIELD

Bungie's classic didn't invent recharging health, but it did arguably perfect it. Take too many hits and the Chief will be as vulnerable as a fluffy kitten, meaning you'll need to hide somewhere to give it time to recharge. It's an often agonizing delay that instils panic.



Art design

THE EXQUISITE ORI AND THE BLIND FOREST

Ori is a cartoon come to life: it's as simple as that. While most good-looking games sacrifice mechanical depth in favour of prettiness, this is a smart, tough puzzle-platformer as well. So obviously we need Moon Studios' art team to draw every single game from now on, including our magnum opus here.



Color palette

SUNSET OVERDRIVE'S VIBRANT CITY

There used to be colors, but over the previous generation they were slowly stolen from us by Unreal Engine 3. Thankfully, this console generation has them coming back in a big way – and few games are as astonishingly bright as *Sunset Overdrive*. Its vibrant city packs in more colors than a Glidden truck.



Soundtrack

BASTION'S EXTRAORDINARY MUSIC

Bastion as a game wasn't too much to write home about, but its exquisite soundtrack made its world of floating islands and collapsing cities feel incredibly rich. Supergiant's action game uses vocals at key moments to tug at your heartstrings, and our game could do with a bit of emotional depth.



NOW
PLAYING

The games we're
still going back
to, and why

The season pass is almost enough to make you miss those Arkham Knight-narrated mandatory stealth-tank sequences. Almost.

Louise Blain is playing...

XBOX EXTRA

Batman: Arkham Knight



BECAUSE... "It's time for some justice when it comes to the season pass"

▲ **LOVING** The hipster joys of the new photo mode ▼ **HATING** The fact that none of the new cars are functional

My Gotham is safe. Well, as safe as it ever gets in the Caped Crusader's home town. Why anyone ever chooses to actually live in the same ZIP code as 40 supervillains we'll never know but, for now, Gotham has been neutralized. And don't worry: there'll be no Arkham Knight spoilers here. He's long gone from my game. The streets are empty of tanks, all bombs have been defused and the Gotham Police patrol the skies. Given that there's only so many times you can turn off the music, put on Hans Zimmer's *Dark Knight* soundtrack and swoop around, it's about time that the season-pass content arrived. Or is it?

A Rocksteady Batgirl game already had its own dedicated shrine in a Hannibal Lecter-style palace in my mind. This meant that when I finally sat down

to play the *A Matter of Family* DLC, it felt like all my dreams coming true. Okay, it turned out to be made by WB Montreal, but... a creepy amusement park! Barbara Gordon! Yellow boots! And it was all of those things until it finished 40 minutes in and unceremoniously (yellow) booted me back to the menu with no way to play as Babs in the main game. Ouch. If that isn't just an electricity-stick to the jaw.

Perhaps the new skins for the Batmobile would be better? Oh yeah, I'll show those goons who's boss with my 1989 Burton-style awesome-mobile. Except, no, I won't, as Keaton's sleek monstrosity doesn't have any of the functionality of Rocksteady's, so all you've got is a couple of themed races. Not to mention the chance to develop an unhealthy obsession with taking pictures of it in the rain in the newly added photo mode. Nolan's 'does it

DETAILS

Released

Jun 2015

Dev

Rocksteady

Pub

Warner Bros Interactive

Format Xbox One

Score 9/10

Recap

In the final act of Rocksteady's trilogy, the *Dark Knight* is up against all of Gotham's villains, headed up by the mysterious Arkham Knight.

come in black?' Tumbler is in exactly the same Batboat. Big. Beautiful. Beastly. And utterly unusable when it comes to assisted takedowns or AR tank challenges. Back to photo mode I go. There must be more to life than an empty Gotham, endless skins and the Waynetech equivalent of Instagram.

Even the releasing of all 'exclusive' pre-order DLC in the shape of the Harley Quinn and Red Hood story packs doesn't help matters. While the Joker's favourite baseball-bat wielder's story might be short but reasonably sweet, Red Hood's is brutally limited. Effectively just two rooms, it's the essence of everything that's wrong with retailer incentives. It's twice as insulting in the season pass.


Is this what I paid \$40 for? Almost as much as *Arkham Knight* itself? After the heady heights of the game, each DLC drop has become a sad affair. At least Nightwing's *GCPD Lockdown* is linked to the story, but it all feels painfully tacked-on. Perhaps the incoming *Catwoman's Revenge* will fix all ills. For what we paid, we both needed and deserved more. It's a sad end to the Knight. ■

// There must be more to life than an empty Gotham and the Waynetech equivalent of Instagram //



Ignoring the Batmobile for a second, all of those trees are *Nightmare Before Christmas* references.




 NOW
PLAYING


Arno Dorian, blending in perfectly in the urban camouflage look from the 'Spring 1789' collection.

Alice Bell is playing...

Assassin's Creed Unity



BECAUSE... "A useless Assassin is more fun than a competent one"

▲ **LOVING** The Assassins' natural showmanship ▼ **HATING** The yokel English accent that every Parisian inexplicably has

During November 2014, I played *Assassin's Creed Unity* for an entire week before I got distracted. But *Syndicate* is now sitting in my hard drive and, pressed to finish *Unity* so I'm up to date with the tangled story, I've slunk back to my French paramour like the regretful ex she'd do better without.

I've encountered a problem, though, because I can't remember a thing about how to play the game – and although *Assassin's Creed* has some reliable control defaults, I am now abjectly terrible at even the most basic moves. This has happened to me before, but with *Unity* it's actually enjoyable, because it follows that smoldering

frontman Arno Dorian is now an abjectly terrible Assassin. I cannot overstate how much fun this concept is to me.

Cower before Arno! Arno, the strong right hand of the Assassin order, reaching out across Paris and plummeting to the cobbles below as he completely misjudges a jump. See the Parisian peasants marvel as he forgets where exactly he keeps his smoke bombs and randomly throws them in the street! Watch as he alerts every guard within a half-mile radius and has to run away, dragging a tail of enemy soldiers behind him like a frilly-shirted comet!

Arno's adherence to the titular Creed is now passing at best, especially the tenet of hiding 'in plain sight'. Together, he and I operate on the basis that he

DETAILS

Released

Nov 2014

Dev

Ubisoft
Montreal

Pub

Ubisoft

Format Xbox One

Score 8/10

Recap

Your favourite historical parkour- and-stabbing-adventure tours the French Revolution.

can't be detected if there's nobody left to do the detecting, and have been slaughtering the guardsmen of France out of this necessity. The other day, Arno killed five men just to steal some wine.

Fortunately, *Unity* allows me to embrace this audacious angle. I've dressed Arno in the most flamboyant clothes I can find, with the most eye-watering color schemes available. He now resembles a murderous Maypole dancer, and his instant blending into crowds requires such huge mental backflips from witnesses that my glee is unconfined. "Where's the murderer?" "Beats me, Pierre. I'm sure the heavily armed man dressed head to toe in canary yellow doesn't know either."

I am an admitted fan of *Assassin's Creed*: despite any technical issues, I'm with it to the end. But now the unfortunate truth is that I never had as much fun with an *AC* game as when I started playing one badly. I think I might start doing it on purpose from now on. ■

// I operate on the basis that Arno can't be detected if there's nobody left to do the detecting //

Martin Kitts is playing...

Halo 3



BECAUSE... "Teabagging is the greatest online taunt ever devised"

▲ **LOVING** Tag 'em and bag 'em. It's the only way to be sure ▼ **HATING** Where did all the players go?

Halo 3 was probably the first real online 'event' game. We'd waited years for it. I remember hooking up with friends on launch day and there were 1.3 million players online. Finding a match wasn't exactly difficult. I played it again recently and found only 864 hardy souls left. Alas.

One of my favorite things about *Halo 3* is the one thing no other game thought to steal. Even subsequent *Halos* seemed to forget about it. Was it an accident? A side-effect? An embarrassment?

I'm talking, of course, about teabagging: *Halo 3*'s darkest art. For the uninitiated, it's the practice of squatting over one's victim and lowering one's balls onto their chin. Repeated



vigorously, the action resembles the dunking of a teabag. It can be seen in pretty much any online FPS with a crouch button, but three things about *Halo 3* made it particularly enraging.

One: you couldn't just respawn instantly. For several long seconds, you were given an extended third-person view of your corpse and anything that

DETAILS

Released
Sep 2007
Dev Bungie
Pub Microsoft Studios
Format Xbox 360
Score 10/10

might happen to it. Two: unlike most other games, the ragdoll physics weren't turned off when you died. And three: neither was the controller vibration.

So when that post-kill rush of testosterone hits you, and you stand over your foe and – thumpthumpthump – your opponent has to watch his own corpse jiggle with the impact. And *feel* it through his controller. Force-feedback!

It used to send some people *crazy*. The red mist would descend and they'd go on a suicidal vendetta, repeatedly rushing headlong for revenge and most likely the same fate as before.

Many, many people rage-quit on me. Yes, I was that guy – responsible for at least some of *Halo 3*'s lost players – but I had my fun and am unrepentant. ■

Alex Dale is playing...

Ultra Street Fighter IV



BECAUSE... "It looks like it's time to oil up!"

▲ **LOVING** Rolling around like a rocket-fueled Zangief ▼ **HATING** Uh, he's not exactly the most 'aspirational' avatar

Fire up the player-select screen and you'll find no less than 44 pairs of eyes blinking back at you (well, 43 pairs and Sagat, but you get what I'm saying).

The choice is overwhelming, like being in a Willy Wonka factory of national stereotypes, each one pleading a different case why you should make them your champion.



So maybe it makes sense that a new wave of fighting games are opting to launch with more austere roster numbers that you can expand by only buying the fighters you intend to use – so you don't have to pay just to have weirdos like Rolento on the subs bench.

It's a smart idea, but it's also a little self-fulfilling. A huge problem with *Street Fighter* is that people tend not to drift out of their Ryu/Ken comfort zones, and paywalls are only going to further discourage them. I'll admit that I'm as much a Ken-fiend as the next guy, but in an attempt to broaden my horizons I've recently tasked myself with learning a new fighter every month.

This month's misfit is essentially the poster child for the above argument:

DETAILS

Released
Jun 2014
Dev Capcom
Pub Capcom
Format Xbox 360
Score 9/10

Hakan, a gross, oil-drenched wrestler. Heck, you'd pay money to get that freak *off* your roster. But add a little elbow grease of your own and you'll discover he has a fighting style that makes him distinct from the rest of the pack.

Hakan is, in effect, Zangief with speed and range – his oily exterior causing him to slip and slide, enabling him to close the gap on his opponents quickly and lethally. The trade-off is that to remain effective, he has to constantly, time-consumingly, 'oil up'.

He's a batty, brilliant character who offers a gameplay twist that even many veterans won't have experienced – and if *USFIV* had adopted the microtransaction model, he would surely have been left to dry up completely. ■

LIVE
SPOT-
LIGHTReports from
Xbox's biggest
communities

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 5

You'd have more fun cleaning an actual skatepark. With your tongue

Details Dev Robomodo / Pub Activision / Reporter Tom Stone



Fun, forever locked away. Why would you do this to us?!



Some of the crumpled bail landings amuse, at least.

The single-player was about as fun as a spine transfer, but user-created content has saved many a bad game from total mediocrity. Sure enough, there are some inventive skateparks to be found, built by online players who know more about what makes a fun skatepark than Robomodo (almost a compliment). But they're trapped in a mode that's even more broken than the regular horror show.

In Create-a-Park, you can fill your level with ramps, rails, obstacles and even double-jump power-ups, if you're a cretin who wants to ruin a skating game. We built a rail that went from one side of a room to the other. Hardly the Sistine Chapel, but still more than *Pro Skater 5* could handle. We tried grinding along it several times. Sometimes it threw us off randomly, or we'd just stop grinding for no reason. We almost gasped upon being granted the honor of grinding down the whole rail in one

ON THE CLOCK
How we spent our time in the game



20% Filling our park with rails
30% Breaking Tony's back skating into rails
10% Trying to stop our eyes getting sick after witnessing the framerate
40% Watching online skaters try our park, then ragequit. Wise

// Why bother going for the high score, if your combo could be broken by a glitch?//

go. In good *THPS* games, your biggest fear was bailing. Now it's whether the game will actually acknowledge the rail's existence. Other user-created levels are full of these glitches, like falling through ramps, or getting stuck in place.

You can put challenges in your park, such as combo letters and a hidden DVD. We put our DVD high in the air, making sure it was impossible to reach. The game let us upload this level anyway, meaning there are potentially hundreds of challenges online that literally *aren't possible to achieve*. So even if somebody created the perfect skatepark, it still wouldn't be fun to skate in. Why bother going for the high score, if your combo could be broken by a glitch? Why go for combo letters, when there's a chance they can't actually be reached? One level we tried was dull and empty, yet we glimpsed a more interesting-looking skatepark. It was behind a fence, one that couldn't be jumped. So we were left standing out in the cold, staring through the chains at the fun that could've been. Sums up *Pro Skater 5* perfectly. ■

IF YOU DO ONE THING IN THPS5 THIS MONTH, MAKE IT... Trying our level 'OXM'. If you manage to snatch the DVD, we'll give you a copy of *Halo 6*.



Not sure who he thinks he's impressing with that weapon...



Project Spark

Microsoft has freed the DLC, but has it freed our imaginations?

Dev Team Dakota / Pub Microsoft Studios / Reporter Chris Schilling

Project Spark owners recently awoke to the news that it would be "transitioning to a free incubation engine". Translation: we're not making any more DLC, and you can have all the previous packs for free. The reception has been mixed. Early adopters who spent a fortune are understandably angry, especially as only those who downloaded premium packs after the end of July qualify for a refund (don't get too excited; it's only Windows Store credit). Others are concerned that this is the end for Project Spark: it's not, but those at Team Dakota responsible for making stuff have been assigned new roles on other Microsoft projects. Those who remain will curate existing content and release title updates that refine the existing toolkit.

//Even the best stages have player numbers in the low four figures//

This is Microsoft's way of admitting its big user-generated experiment hasn't really been the success it had hoped. Even the best and most heavily featured stages have player numbers in the low four figures; most creators can expect tens rather than hundreds. Perhaps that will change as more people are tempted to try it out, but talk of 200,000 creators and 300-400 new game uploads per day are misleading to say the least. It's a pity.

Whether this incubation engine will birth a fresh litter of budding world-builders remains to be seen, though the existing community will no doubt welcome Team Dakota's decision to double the terrain and prop limits. This should encourage creators to dream a little bigger – and hopefully that'll mean more than just a series of sprawling open-world adventures starring Conker. ■

IF YOU DO ONE THING IN PROJECT SPARK THIS MONTH, MAKE IT... Creating a game without Conker or dragons. Please.



XBOX EXTRA

Don't snigger at the graphics – this is actually what videogames used to look like. Really.



Police Station Hanakuma
Yamakawa Mansion
Toshi's Apt.
Onto the Boat

Yasu: Where are we going?
BOSS: ?

Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain

"That's the murder victim in this case, boss. He probably doesn't need an alibi"

Dev Kojima Productions / Pub Konami / Reporter Tom Stone

We thought they were crazy. They probably are crazy, but they've still done it. The Metal Gear community have dug deep into the code, and found a retro game hidden deep within The Phantom Pain. It's a 22-year-old title called The Portopia Serial Murder Case. A point and click murder mystery with an open world, suspect interrogation, non-linear gameplay, dialog choices and alternative endings – standard for 2015, but way ahead of its time in 1983. Think LA Noire, but with slightly less sophisticated graphics.

Parts of its code have been found in Ground Zeroes and The Phantom Pain, and fans are already trying to get it running. Not just to get their hands on a free game, but in the hopes of finding more secrets. Forums are buzzing with those convinced that this isn't just a humble Easter egg, but something more – perhaps even a vital clue towards unlocking MGS V's secret real ending. Okay, definitely crazy. But then, if any developer would put the ending of his Xbox One game in a two-decade-old NES title...

Kojima's referenced the game as an inspiration before, and you can clearly see its influence on Metal Gear. It has a character constantly referring to you as 'boss', tons of unnecessary (but entertaining) dialog, and ends on a twist so ridiculous it's kind of amazing. Spoiler alert: your assistant who's worked hard to help you solve the murder... did it!

But even with all the online sleuthing, no one's figured out if this holds deeper secrets. Never underestimate the mysterious innards of a Hideo Kojima game – the internet hive mind might finally have met its match. ■

//Standard for 2015, but way ahead of its time in 1983//

IF YOU DO ONE THING IN MGS V THIS MONTH, MAKE IT... Somehow playing The Portopia Serial Murder Case. Maybe it'll inspire you, too.

THE OXM
REPLAY

Revisiting the
resolutionally-
challenged

You can choose
protagonist Alex D's
sex and appearance.

Deus Ex: Invisible War

Andy Kelly revisits the ambitious, but flawed sequel to one of the best games ever



DETAILS

Dev Ion Storm

Pub Eidos
Interactive

Released
Dec 2003

Scored 9/10

The original *Deus Ex* is a masterpiece. Deep stealth systems, huge multi-path levels, and a brilliant conspiracy-laden story have sealed its place as an all-time classic. But its sequel? Not so much.

It isn't a terrible game: just one that is, unfortunately, cowering in the shadow of its predecessor. It's a first-person RPG with a focus on choice and creative play. The protagonist, Alex Denton, can be upgraded with nano-augmentations, letting you tailor him (or her, should you prefer) to your own play style. This essentially means you can shoot everyone you meet or simply sneak past them, but with a lot of granular variation in between.

Set in a grim cyberpunk future where corporations rule the world, Alex finds himself caught between several factions with different ideas about how to fix the planet. The hero of the previous game, JC Denton, wants to bio-modify the world's population to

'equalize' the human race, and you can decide whether to help him or not. The fact that you're both named Denton isn't just a coincidence.

As is *Deus Ex* tradition, *Invisible War* sees Alex traveling around the globe as he embarks on missions for various factions. His travels take him to Egypt, Germany, New York City and even the Antarctic. Built on the second version of the Unreal engine, the object physics and real-time dynamic lighting were hugely impressive at the time. But, even back in 2003, the characters looked like lifeless, dead-eyed robots.

The biggest complaint about *Invisible War* is that it feels dumbed-down compared to the original. City hubs are *much* smaller – a product, some say, of having to squeeze the game onto the Xbox – and the RPG elements were severely reduced. It's not nearly as rich or deep a game as the first one. But compare it to other Xbox games of the era and it's impressively ambitious. The variety of ways to complete objectives, including talking your way out of trouble, was a rare thing on consoles in the early 2000s.

One of the most controversial design decisions is to implement a universal ammo system. Pick up ammunition

in *Invisible War* and it works in any weapon – from a pistol to a rocket launcher. This is another example of the game being simplified, and is just really dumb. There's probably an explanation in the game's dense mythology for it, but I can never take it seriously. No game has attempted it since, and with good reason.

Being able to switch allegiances mid-game and work for other factions is a cool idea, but it makes the story feel messy. It's possible to miss entire sections of the plot by working for the wrong faction, and the ease at which you can switch undermines the importance of your choices somewhat. It's a much more open-ended story than in other *Deus Ex* games, but at the expense of consistency and a strong narrative hook.

And when it comes to making a final decision at the end about which faction to side with, deciding the fate of the world in the process, none of them feel like the right choice. Maybe that's the idea, though. *Deus Ex's* future has always been bleak and hopeless. But it leaves you with a bad taste in your mouth, and a feeling that you're leaving the world in even worse shape than you found it.

// Pick up ammunition and it works in any weapon – from a pistol to a rocket launcher //



Sure, this interface might look all glowy and futuristic, but you still only need one type of bullet to power it all.



INFLUENCED BY...
DEUS EX

The original classic that this fails to better.



INFLUENCE ON...
HUMAN REVOLUTION

Some elements made it into this superior sequel.

But, hey, at least *Invisible War* is a better shooter. The FPS combat in the first game was horribly basic, and you'd find yourself avoiding fighting people just so you didn't have to endure the weedy gunplay. But the sequel makes turning to open violence a much more enjoyable, and viable, option. *Invisible War's* environments – including seedy bars and the neon-drenched shopping malls of the future – are also much prettier, and just about hold up today.

Ion Storm had one more great game in it before it sadly closed shop in 2005 – the superb *Thief: Deadly Shadows*, also available on Xbox – but *Invisible War* would be its last *Deus Ex* game. Now, thanks to Eidos Montreal, the series is on good form again, and *Mankind Divided* looks like an improvement on the already fantastic *Human Revolution*. *Invisible War* is the black sheep of the series, but it was a brave – if ultimately foolish – attempt to streamline the complicated original for consoles. ■



WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

It was eight entire years until the next game, *Human Revolution*, was released – and it was great. Phew.

GAME ROULETTE



Every month, OXM dips into its Games Cupboard of Doom and plucks out a random game from Xbox history. Will it be a classic or a howler? Let the balls decide...

**THIS MONTH...
BINARY DOMAIN**

Expectations were lower than a snake's nutsack as we went into this one. That boxart! Like a Harlequin romance novel gone rogue.

And that name! Sounds more like something Staples would call its internal newsletter than a sci-fi third-person shooter epic,

methinks. And so did a great many of you think, because

Binary Domain sold about as

well as chocolate cakes made out of poop. But yet, from the moment you first squeeze the right controller trigger, it's clear that you're actually dealing with something a little bit special.

Feedback is the x factor that enables *Binary Domain* to break out from the rest of the pack. Your robo-enemies don't just fzzt and keel over when you shoot them –

they crumble apart in a hailstorm of shrapnel, as the armor is plucked from their bodies until they look like the last turkey left in the shops the day before Thanksgiving. It's not just ridiculously satisfying – it's ripe for tactical exploitation, too, as you take out their legs to incapacitate them, or attempt to take out as

// Your robo-enemies crumble apart in a hailstorm of shrapnel! //

much of their metallic bodies as possible before going for a *coup de grâce* headshot, so as

to harvest the maximum amount of credits on offer per kill.

And talking of feedback – what other shooter allows you to respond to your teammates' questions with zingers such as 'you idiot!' or 'I love you'? *Binary Domain* was criticized in some circles for being a very Japanese take on the third-person shooter genre – but that's exactly what makes it so great.



17 CRAZES THAT COULD BE THE NEXT TEABAGGING

Halo players are renowned for their friendly, respectful competition and jolly post-kill humour. But since teabagging is all a bit 2006, how will Guardians experts demonstrate their wit, creativity and superiority following a particularly inflammatory kill?



01 Crisping
Your killer stuffs a fistful of cheesy potato chips into his mouth and crunches loudly into the microphone. Yo sucker, you've been crisped!

02 Remembrance service
Other players gather to form a congregation while your murderer delivers a sermon about how much he enjoyed killing you.

03 Kiss chase
A player hits you once to remove your shield – but rather than finish you off, he runs around in a circle, giggling and shrieking. Chase me! Chase me!

04 Adoption
Your killer obtains legal adoption papers, obliging you to call him 'Daddy', and to show him some goddamn respect while you're under his roof.

05 Autographing
Showing deft control of an automatic weapon, a player signs his name in bullet holes on the floor next to your body.

06 Human centipede
A dominant team offers to spare further injury to your

K/D ratio if you and your friends line up in the centre of the arena and shuffle round on your hands and knees, connected at... er, we'll presume you already know the drill... until the timer runs out.

07 Sympathy card
Your killer writes a note to your next of kin, explaining how he's sorry for their loss but war is war and he was honestly just doing his job.

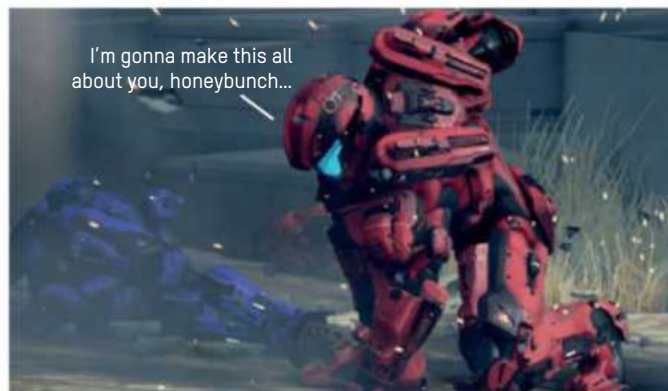
08 CoD noob
The other player suggests in no uncertain terms that you go back to playing *Call of Duty*. He later kills you in *Call of Duty* and tells you to go back to playing *Halo*.

09 Cocking a leg
The act of marking one's territory via urination, in the canine manner. Any other player who later passes the spot will sniff excitedly and howl.

10 Autopsy
A thorough post-mortem dissection is conducted on your fresh corpse in order to determine the cause of death. The results are announced at a public inquest six months later.



14 Ghost fairies
Any player who kills you puts a sheet over his head and runs around going "wooooo!". Once every opposing player has a sheet, you must send a group message saying you believe in fairies in order to make them stop.



11 The smoothie
Hunched over your corpse, the other player slowly rotates and clicks both of their analogue sticks while saying, "Mm-hmm, that's right baby. You like it like that, huh.?"

12 The Macarena (Shotgun Mix)
Whereby the killer stands astride your corpse and performs '90s dance atrocity *The Macarena*. The epic payoff line (heyyyyy macarena!) is punctuated by a wholly unnecessary shotgun blast to the balls.

13 The wormy dog
Your killer sits on the floor, lifts up his feet, and drags his ass across the ground, encircling your corpse. After which even

your own teammates will scatter at the sight of you. Don't touch him; he got dogged!

15 Dutch master
The winning team poses in the style of a painting by Rembrandt or Vermeer. To save face, the losers must quickly identify which 17th-century masterpiece is being portrayed.

16 Motherphone
Your killer contacts you via private chat and demands that you pass the headset to your mum. What is said during the rest of the match is for your mum, and for her alone.

17 Lucky biscuit
Your nemesis hands you a fortune cookie revealing your exact respawn location and the method by which he'll kill you next. After it comes true three times in a row, you quit in terror.

NEXT ISSUE OF OXM ONSALE JAN 5. SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE MONEY: SEE PAGE 52 FOR DETAILS

PROJECT
SPARK™

WHERE PLAYERS CREATE AND CREATORS PLAY

CREATE interactive levels, games and worlds.

PLAY and remix a constantly expanding universe of games.

INSPIRE and be inspired by Project Spark's unique gaming community.



JOIN THE FREE BETA
PROJECTSPARK.COM



techradar.



The home of technology

techradar.com