

FREE ISSUE

PREVIEW MORTAL KOMBAT 1

REVIEW FINAL FANTASY XVI

ISSUE 95 SEPTEMBER 2023



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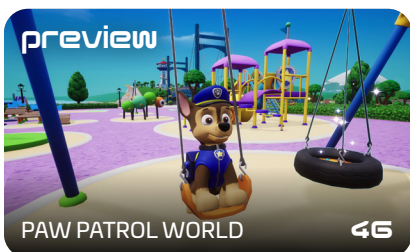
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A game based on true events.

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welcome

FROM THE EDITORS



KNOWN UNKNOWN

One topic we've touched on a few times in this space is the prevalence of sequels and remakes in the world of video games. Even in this very issue, almost every game we're covering has a numeral or subtitle tacked on, or is based on preexisting characters from other forms of media.

But then there's our cover game, *Starfield*, the new spacefaring RPG from Bethesda Game Studios and by far one of the most anticipated releases of the year. It's not a sequel, and it's not based on any existing sci-fi property (even if it does appear to take inspiration from a number of touchstones in the genre). But even as an original title, it's nevertheless poised to become a huge blockbuster.

The reason why, we think, is a chance to talk about another neat aspect of the maturing gaming industry. Now that games have a few decades of history under their belt, we've reached a point where individual developers and publishers can become known for having a sort of house style, much in the way that a film director can tell a new story with each project but still maintain a consistent creative vision throughout their career. When you go to

the theater to see the latest from, say, Quentin Tarantino, you may not know the story or the characters, but you know the sort of experience you're getting.

Along those lines, when Bethesda launches a role-playing game set in a new universe, you know where the studio excels. You understand, to some degree, what to expect from the gameplay that will make it special and set it apart from other RPGs. There will be exploration, and loot, and dialogue trees, and meaningful choices, and quests that veer off in exciting and unexpected ways. And there will be a distinctive spin on all of those things that makes the game *feel* like a Bethesda RPG in a way that a feature list can't really convey.

You can view plenty of other studios in a similar light—take Rockstar Games, FromSoftware, Naughty Dog, Arkane Studios, and Supergiant Games, to name just a handful. Even if they're exploring a new genre or an original story, these developers have earned a strong enough reputation for their design sensibilities that there are millions of fans willing to follow them somewhere new. It's a positive development for those of us who love to see new ideas flourish alongside continuations of our favorite series.

Of course, alongside *Starfield*, this issue also features a number of sequels and adaptations that are all tremendously exciting in their own right, including previews of *The Crew Motorfest* (a sequel), *Lies of P* (an adaptation), *Paw Patrol World* (an adaptation and a sequel), and *Mortal Kombat 1* (confusingly, still a sequel).

Whether you prefer the thrill of an unexplored new frontier or the next chapter in an adventure you know and love, be sure to keep reading *Walmart Gamecenter*, the magazine that keeps you at the center of all things gaming.

Josh Harmon and Mollie L Patterson

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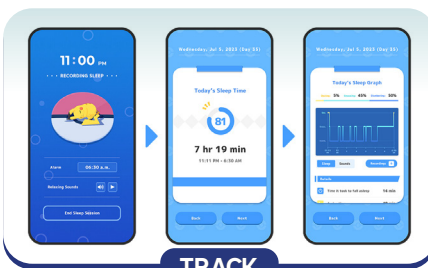
and track your rest rhythm

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TRACK

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DREAM

Place the Pokémon GO Plus + accessory by your pillow to track your rest rhythm on the Pokémon Sleep** app.

The Pokémon Company



Game Shown:



*This accessory requires a compatible smartphone (using Android or iOS) with the Pokémon GO and/or Pokémon Sleep apps installed. Visit <https://support.pokemon.com/> for more information.
 **Pokemon Sleep will be released Summer 2023. Not compatible with the Nintendo Switch family of systems. It also cannot be used on its own. Pokémon GO Plus + measures sleep based on the lack of movement. Please do not use Pokémon GO Plus + while operating a vehicle (car, bicycle, etc.). Before purchasing Pokémon GO Plus +, make sure to check the system requirements of this device as well as those of the apps it works with. If the performance of your Pokémon GO Plus + seems unstable, it may improve if you update your operating system. Pokémon Sleep can also track your rest rhythm using your smart device.
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UBISOFT ANNOUNCES FIRST-EVER OPEN-WORLD STAR WARS GAME

Lucasfilm Games, Ubisoft, and developer Massive Entertainment recently gave *Star Wars* fans around the world a first look at *Star Wars Outlaws*, a new game that promises to take the franchise to some new corners of the galaxy.

Set between the events of *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*, *Outlaws* centers around Kay Vess, a friendly-yet-fiery scoundrel who's hoping to escape the criminal underworld. Along with her pet Nix and a BX-commando droid companion, Kay plans to pull off that "one big heist" that could lead her to a new life and a fresh start. Of course, it wouldn't be much

of a story if doing so was easy, so Kay—and players—will have to deal with troops from the Galactic Empire, criminal syndicates, and many more obstacles along the way.

Right from the start, *Star Wars Outlaws* will be notable as the first open-world video game to be part of the *Star Wars* franchise. The team at Massive promise that Kay and her crew will have a large amount of freedom in their travels, as they pilot Kay's ship, the *Trailblazer*, to places such as the dense jungles of Akiva and the sweeping savannahs of Toshara.

Gameplay in *Star Wars Outlaws* also looks to offer players with a wide variety



of options for what to do next or how to approach a situation. When things go bad, Kay can always pull out her trusty blaster and engage foes in some fast-action third-person firefights. Or, if shooting first *isn't* the right choice, she can overcome sticky situations with high-tech gadgets, some smart use of distractions, or a bit of good-old stealth tactics. Outside of combat, players will need to decide how our hero approaches more diplomatic moments, too. How she deals with others can determine if Kay forms a bond with a new ally who may be the key to important new opportunities, or finds herself with yet another enemy with the potential to make everything go wrong.

There's still a lot left to learn about *Star Wars Outlaws* as we get closer to its release next year. Until then, you can find out more about the game, or check out other exciting adventures in a galaxy far, far away—like *Star Wars Jedi: Survivor*—on Walmart.com or at your local Walmart store.



93 million

Hours of *Diablo IV* played in the first four days after early access launch

489

Star Wars Jedi: Survivor players who died to joke boss Rick the Door Technician in the game's first week

21 million

Xbox Series X/S consoles sold as of July 2023, according to the first-ever official numbers from Microsoft

\$3,499

Launch price of Apple's Vision Pro mixed reality headset

\$1

Fee author Steven King charged Remedy for the right to use his quote during the opening of *Alan Wake*

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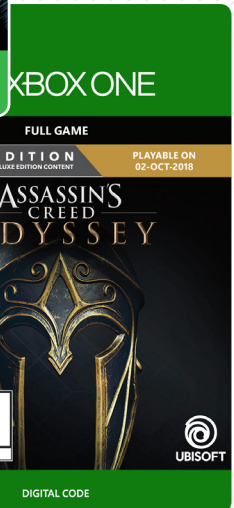
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Redeem the code printed on your receipt in your game console to download (when available) and then Play First without returning to the store!

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22 IMMORTALS OF AVEUM
EA / XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, PC24 BLASPHEMOUS II
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SPIKE CHUNSOFT / SWITCH, PS4, PC8 FAE FARM
PHOENIX LABS / SWITCH, PC12 SUPER BOMBERMAN R 2
KONAMI / XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, SWITCH, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC14 THE CREW MOTORFEST
UBISOFT / XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX ONE, PS4, PCYOU MIGHT BE
PLAYING A FUTURE
HIDEO KOJIMA GAME
IN SPACE

Game creator Hideo Kojima is famous for constantly wanting to break the boundaries of gameplay and storytelling in his works, but now the father of *Metal Gear* might also be looking to break free from the boundaries of our planet.

At the recent premiere of *Hideo Kojima: Connecting Worlds*, a new documentary



about his life and career, Kojima had a very interesting answer to a question about the kinds of video games he would like to craft in the future.

"I want to go to outer space," Kojima replied. "I want to go to outer space, and create a game you can play in space. So, please someone send me up to space!"

It's safe to assume that Kojima's answer was more of a lighthearted one that wasn't really meant to be taken seriously. But, at the same time, *maybe it was*. Kojima is no stranger to creating games better experienced under very specific circumstances. For example, he was the producer and designer of *Boktai: The Sun Is in Your Hand*, an action RPG for the Game Boy Advance. *Boktai* had a photometric light sensor built into its cartridge that would help power up the main character when playing in sunlight.

If you're looking for something more terrestrial-based, pick up a copy of Kojima's latest, *Death Stranding: Director's Cut* on PlayStation 5, from your local Walmart store or Walmart.com.

CALL OF DUTY
AIN'T AFRAID OF
NO CHEATERS

If you see people walking around in the world that aren't actually there, it could mean that you have some amazing supernatural ability. If, on the other hand, you see people who aren't actually there when playing *Call of Duty*, it may mean that you're a cheater.

In the latest update to Activision's Ricochet Anti-Cheat features, the team behind the tech introduced a rather interesting new active mitigation technique: hallucinations.

"Hallucinations place decoy characters within the game that can only be detected by cheaters that have been specifically flagged by our system," a member of Team Ricochet explained. "These false characters are undetectable by legitimate players, and they cannot impact a legitimate player's aim, progression, end of match stats or overall gameplay experience, but serve to disorient cheaters in a variety of ways."



We've got to say, finding cheaters by tricking them with fake players that aren't really there is a pretty smart idea. If you want to jump into *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II*, then pick up your copy on Walmart.com or at your local Walmart store—so long as you promise not to cheat.



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NINTENDO REVEALS FIRST MAJOR DETAIL ABOUT NEXT-GEN PLANS

Nintendo president Shuntaro Furukawa has confirmed that your Nintendo Switch Online account will carry over onto the company's next platform—when-ever it arrives.

Furukawa delivered the news during a recent investor Q&A session, with Nintendo of America providing an official translation of his comments. "In the past, hardware was the only way for us to connect with our consumers, and so with each new platform, we needed to rebuild our relationships. But in the case of Nintendo



remember "friend codes" on the Wii?)

What's more, this announcement does offer some other insights into what Nintendo may have in store. First, and most obvious, Nintendo is far enough along in planning for the next console that it's already thinking about its online services. Second, one of the most touted benefits of a Nintendo Switch Online subscription is the ability to play a curated selection of classic games through emulation. The company has continually expanded the feature, and titles from six different platforms are now represented: NES, SNES, and Game Boy in the basic plan, and Nintendo 64, Sega Genesis, and Game Boy Advance added in a premium tier. Even if Nintendo's next console isn't fully backward compatible with current Switch games—the company has historically, but not universally, supported such features—there's reason to hope the classic game library, being such a key feature of the service, might carry over onto the new platform.

The Nintendo Switch has now been on the market for 6 years, with the hybrid console showcasing some serious staying power and still delivering major hits like *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom*.

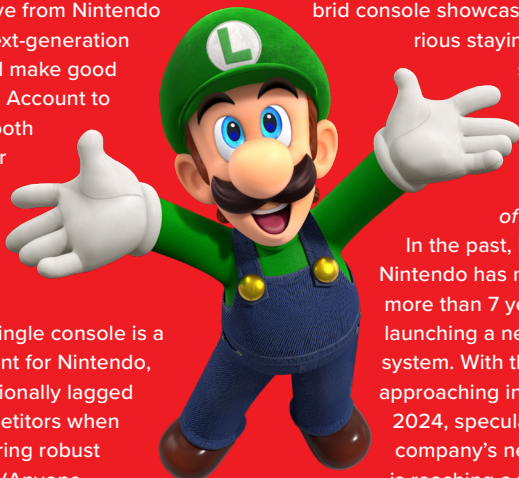
In the past, however, Nintendo has never gone more than 7 years before launching a new home system. With that milestone approaching in spring of 2024, speculation on the company's next hardware is reaching a fever pitch.

NINTENDO ONLINE
Nintendo Switch Online



Switch, we can directly connect with a wide range of consumers via Nintendo Accounts," Furukawa said, noting that players around the world have created 290 million Nintendo Accounts. "Regarding the move from Nintendo Switch to the next-generation platform, we will make good use of Nintendo Account to make this a smooth transition for our consumers."

As Furukawa noted, this shift to an account system that outlives a single console is a new development for Nintendo, which has traditionally lagged behind its competitors when it comes to offering robust online services. (Anyone



GAMING WORLD HONORS LANCE REDDICK'S MEMORY

When actor Lance Reddick passed away suddenly in March, he left behind an impressive body of work across film and television, including memorable roles on *The Wire* and in the *John Wick* franchise. But some of the most heartfelt tributes to Reddick's life were tied to his recent work in video games.

In honor of Reddick's performance as Sylens in *Horizon Zero Dawn* and its sequel *Horizon Forbidden West*, developer Guerrilla Games patched the recent *Burning Shores* expansion to include a tucked-away tribute. The in-game memorial sits on a peaceful cliff overlooking the Hollywood sign, featuring the actor's name as a sparkling hologram, surrounded by flowers.



Reddick was also a favorite among *Destiny* players for his voice work as Commander Zavala in the series. Following news of his death, players began to gather around Zavala in the game's Tower hub, kneeling in front of the character to pay their respects. In a statement posted to Twitter, the actor's wife, Stephanie Reddick, thanked *Destiny* players for the gesture. "Lance loved you as much as he loved the game," she wrote.

To appreciate some of Reddick's final video game performances, you can pick up *Horizon Forbidden West* and the latest *Destiny 2* expansions and bundles at Walmart.com or your local Walmart store.



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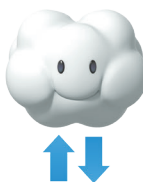
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Games Shown:



See [Nintendo.com/switch/online](https://www.nintendo.com/switch/online) for a full list of membership features and options.

*Any Nintendo Switch Online membership (sold separately) and Nintendo Account required for online features. Nintendo Switch Online + Expansion Pack required to play the Nintendo 64 – Nintendo Switch Online, SEGA Genesis – Nintendo Switch Online and Game Boy Advance – Nintendo Switch Online collections of games, and to access the Mario Kart 8 Deluxe – Booster Course Pass, Animal Crossing: New Horizons – Happy Home Paradise and Splatoon 2: Octo Expansion DLC at no additional cost. Membership auto-renews after initial term at the then-current price unless canceled. Persistent Internet, compatible smartphone, and Nintendo Account age 13+ required to access some online features on the app, including voice chat. Data charges may apply. Online features, Save Data Cloud, and Nintendo Switch Online smartphone app features available in compatible games. Not available in all countries. The Nintendo Account User Agreement, including the Purchase and Subscription terms, apply. [nintendo.com/switch-online](https://www.nintendo.com/switch-online)
**Full version of game required to use DLC.

Nintendo





1

* BUY NOW

PIKMIN 4

PUBLISHER NINTENDO / DEVELOPER NINTENDO / PLATFORMS SWITCH / RELEASE DATE 07.21.2023

"In *Pikmin 4*, you're an explorer who befriends tiny plant-like creatures who selflessly follow your directions. You can direct and throw Pikmin at obstacles, objects, and even enemies. Once assigned, Pikmin will work as a group to pick up resources or attack enemies. The more Pikmin assigned to a task, the quicker a task is completed. You are now able to play from a perspective closer to the Pikmin's own view, down near the ground and closer to the action. Oatchi [the Rescue Pup] is a new addition to the franchise [who] complements what the Pikmin can do—he can carry them to navigate faster, break objects, and more. [New] Ice Pikmin can freeze targets and water, allowing other Pikmin to cross safely. There is also a 'Rewind Time' feature if you happen to lose many Pikmin or want to try something different."

BILL TRINEN, NINTENDO TREEHOUSE

"You are now able to play from a perspective closer to the Pikmin's own view, down near the ground and closer to the action."

5 to play





2

* BUY NOW

MADDEN NFL 24

PUBLISHER EA SPORTS / **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON / **PLATFORMS** XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC / **RELEASE DATE** 08.18.2023

"*Madden 24* builds on the great gameplay of *Madden 23* with innovations in three key areas: realism through enhancements to FieldSENSE, deeper immersion with dozens of improvements to Foundational Football, and the introduction of new SAPIEN Technology. We've added new contested catch tackles, which provide more control to play the receiver. New tackle types like Wrap tackles, Scoop tackles, and Hit-Stick animations add personality and more variety on defense. Enhancements across blocking, ball carrier pathfinding, QB decision making, and DB pass coverage improvements not only give you confidence your AI teammates will execute your game plan the way you intend, but they also deliver the authentic challenge our players have been asking for. And our new EA Sports SAPIEN Technology rebuilds character skeletons with greater detail to deliver a leap forward in player realism with more body definition that improves the fluidity of athletic motion."

"... our new EA Sports SAPIEN Technology rebuilds character skeletons with greater detail to deliver a leap forward in player realism..."

CONNOR DOUGAN, SENIOR GAME DESIGN DIRECTOR, EA SPORTS





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ATLAS FALLEN

PUBLISHER FOCUS ENTERTAINMENT / **DEVELOPER** DECK13 / **PLATFORMS** XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, PC / **RELEASE DATE** 08.10.2023

“The two things that we wanted to emphasize in *Atlas Fallen* were choice and game-play freedom. That is, having the players experience the game in their own fashion. This requires more options and, in turn, more freely accessible features and locations. So, we spent a lot of time trying to find the right balance between guiding the players and having them figure things out by themselves. Another important feature is the shape-shifting weapons. As everything you’re doing with the Gauntlet is transforming sand into solid, magical items, your weapon can change its shape in an instant. The more charged [the Gauntlet] gets, the more the power increases, the weapons change shape, and the attacks become more impressive—up to the moment where you can perform a devastating final ‘shatter’ attack. But also, the stronger your attacks get, the weaker your defense will be, so this is a strategic decision too.”

“...we spent a lot of time trying to find the right balance between guiding the players and having them figure things out by themselves.”

 **JAN KLOSE, MANAGING DIRECTOR, DECK13**



4

* PREORDER

ARMORED CORE VI: FIRES OF RUBICON

PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO / DEVELOPER FROMSOFTWARE / PLATFORMS XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC / RELEASE DATE 08.25.2023

"Armored Core is a mech action series in which you create your own mech by reassembling its many parts, then use that customized mech to carry out various missions. In *Armored Core VI*, the player finds themselves in the middle of a war over a substance called Coral, which, half a century ago, led the distant planet of Rubicon 3 to be burned to the ground. As for the gameplay, we focused on making this series' unique aspects—dynamic three-dimensional mech action and full mech customization—even more robust. Mechs can now fly freely through the air and use multiple weapons at once, allowing for dynamic and aggressive combat that really takes advantage of three-dimensional space. We also focused on the individuality of the melee weapons, and wanted to make sure there were unique ones, such as the chainsaw and the laserlance, each of which have their own unique actions."

YASUNORI OGURA, PRODUCER, FROMSOFTWARE

"... we focused on making this series' unique aspects—dynamic three-dimensional mech action, and full mech customization—even more robust."



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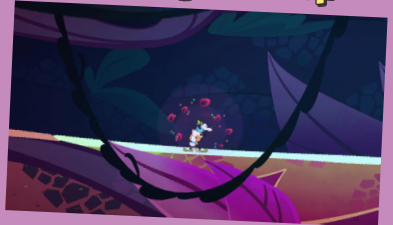
Choose your favorite character and perform high-flying platforming feats, solve fun puzzles and take on epic boss battles.

Reveal the mysteries of Disney Illusion Island



Run, jump, swing, and swim your way through a beautiful yet mysterious island, meet strange yet intriguing characters, and uncover hidden secrets.

Fun with friends in 4-player co-op*



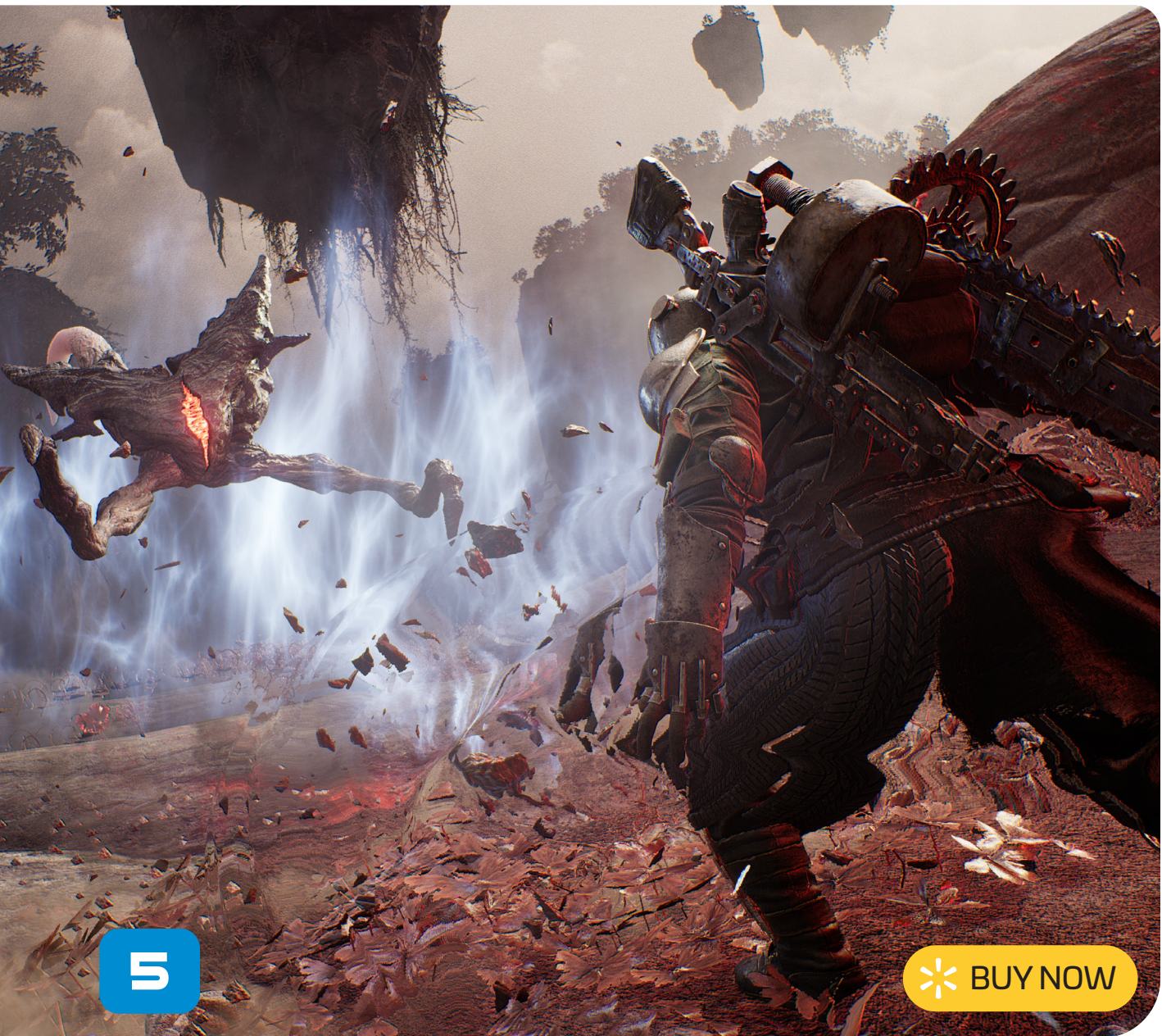
Play solo or grab up to three friends to save the island of Monoth in 4-player couch co-op.



*Additional accessories may be required for multiplayer mode. Game, systems and some accessories sold separately. Nintendo Switch Lite plays all games that support handheld mode. © 2023 Disney. Nintendo Switch is a trademark of Nintendo.

Nintendo





5

* BUY NOW

REMNANT II

PUBLISHER GUNFIRE GAMES / DEVELOPER GEARBOX PUBLISHING / PLATFORMS XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, PC / RELEASE DATE 07.25.2023

Like the previous game, 2019's *Remnant: From the Ashes*, *Remnant II* is an intentionally tough third-person shooter—think *Dark Souls* if they added guns, or *The Division* if Manhattan had god-level enemies. Playable co-op or solo, *Remnant II* is set on an alternate version of Earth, one that's been overrun by The Root, an evil from another dimension. For this sequel, world generation has been massively overhauled, offering a greater diversity in places to explore, with every area having its own enemies, rewards, and upgrade opportunities. Maps also have multiple pathways and branching storylines, boosting replayability. *Remnant II* further offers gameplay diversity by expanding its Archetype progression system, which gives you new powers and passive abilities. You can even unlock multiple Archetypes to customize your character's combat repertoire as you see fit.

Remnant II is an intentionally tough third-person shooter—think *Dark Souls* if they added guns, or *The Division* if Manhattan had god-level enemies.

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NINTENDO SWITCH – OLED MODEL

Meet the newest member of the Nintendo Switch family. The new system features a vibrant 7-inch OLED screen with vivid colors and sharp contrast. The Nintendo Switch – OLED Model also includes a wide adjustable stand for more comfortable viewing angles, a dock with a wired LAN port for TV mode (LAN cable sold separately), 64GB of internal storage, and enhanced audio in Handheld and Tabletop modes using the system's speakers.



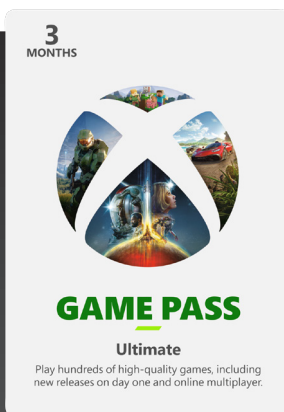
NINTENDO SWITCH™ NEON BLUE/RED

Nintendo Switch is the hybrid home video game system from Nintendo. In addition to providing single and multiplayer thrills at home, the Nintendo Switch system can be taken on the go so players can enjoy a full home console experience anytime, anywhere. The mobility of a handheld is now added to the power of a home gaming system, with unprecedented new play styles brought to life by the two new Joy-Con controllers.

**There may be software where the game experience may differ due to the new capabilities of the system, such as the larger screen size.*

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STARFIELD

NEW HORIZONS



How big of a deal is *Starfield*? Well, the last time the team at Bethesda Game Studios launched an original role-playing universe, you couldn't use the phone and the internet at the same time, "The Sign" by Ace of Base was at the top of the Billboard Charts, and Timothée Chalamet was negative one years old. Technically speaking, "Bethesda Game Studios" didn't actually even exist, as it hadn't yet been spun out from Bethesda Softworks.

That universe was, of course, *The Elder Scrolls*, now one of the best-selling and most acclaimed fantasy RPG franchises of all time. And though the same team is also behind the recent *Fallout* games, Bethesda didn't originally create that series or its post-apocalyptic setting.

So if we're being sticklers, *Starfield* is only Bethesda Game Studios' second crack at building an original RPG world. Actually, it might be even more accurate to say worlds, plural. The

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
BETHESDA
SOFTWORKS
DEVELOPER
BETHESDA GAME
STUDIOS
PLATFORMS
XBOX SERIES X/S, PC
RELEASE DATE
09.06.2023

242

spacefaring science-fiction adventure, set in the 24th century, actually features more than 1,000 distinct planets to explore, built through a mix of handcrafted design and procedural generation informed by real-life scientific data. Add to that the vastness of space connecting it all—the so-called Settled Systems stretch about 50 light years outward from Earth—and the ships and space stations scattered throughout, and you're left with what might be the most ambitious setting ever attempted in a game of this type.

Of course, any quest that takes you across such vast distances must feel equally epic. *Starfield's* solution is diving into one of the biggest mysteries

of space travel: Are we alone in the universe? You play as a new recruit to Argos Extractors, a space mining corporation. When you stumble upon what seems to be an alien artifact, you catch the attention of Constellation, a small group of explorers dedicated to unraveling the mysteries of the universe. As the newest Constellation recruit, it's up to you to follow the trail of those artifacts and their mysterious power, wherever, and to whatever answers, it leads you.

Then again, Bethesda RPG fans are already well aware that the main quest is just the beginning. While exploring the universe, you'll encounter dozens of other side stories, large and

The spacefaring science-fiction adventure, set in the 24th century, actually features more than 1,000 distinct worlds to explore...



Starfield boasts the deepest character creation system Bethesda has ever built. To allow players more freedom and diversity in crafting their own explorer, the studio built up a massive data set from high-resolution 3D scans of real people—faces from a variety of age groups, genders, and ethnicities. You'll start by selecting one of 40 preset designs, and from there you'll be able to tweak just about everything with settings and sliders. The system is so robust, it's actually what the developers used to build the NPCs you'll encounter in the game. If you see someone you like in a screenshot, you can steal their look.

Of course, physical appearance is just the start. You'll also be able to select your character's background, which informs your starting skills and may offer special opportunities during the story. Are you a former diplomat, and therefore gifted in the art of persuasion and commerce? Or did you work as a cyber runner for the megacorps, giving you training in stealth combat, hacking, and pickpocketing?

Finally, you'll be able to round out your character by selecting up to three optional traits, which offer both advantages and disadvantages. If you're an introvert, for example, you'll get a buff when adventuring solo but a debuff when you're with a companion. If you're wanted, you'll do increased damage when your health is low, but mercenaries will occasionally show up to try to kill you. You can even pick a religious background, opening up new opportunities with people who share your faith but potentially closing doors with those who worship differently.



■ *Starfield's* advanced lighting actually takes into account the makeup of each planet's atmosphere, and the location and distance of nearby stars.

small. Expect to find yourself wrapped up in plenty of intrigue between the major factions, like the formerly warring United Colonies and Freestar Collective, the Crimson Fleet pirate armada, and megacorporations like Ryujin Industries.

At the heart of it all is the personal journey of the hero you create and level up throughout the course of the game. (See sidebar "Genesis" for more details on character creation.) With five skill trees, over 80 distinct skills, and four different ranks per

skill, players will have a ton of options when deciding what proficiencies to focus on. Maybe you want to go into every situation with your laser guns and jetpack blazing. Maybe you want to take a more social approach, focused on intimidation or bluffing your way out of trouble. Maybe you're all about stealth, sneaking around for surprise kills and pickpocketing unsuspecting victims. Or maybe you want to focus on science and technology, hacking doors with ease and taming alien wildlife to fight for you. The freedom-first approach that has made Bethesda Game Studios so beloved among RPG fans is alive and well in *Starfield*, just hadron-smashed together with all the things we love about science fiction, too.

At the heart of it all is the personal journey of the hero you create and level up throughout the course of the game.



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VOYAGER

Mal Reynolds and *Serenity*. James T. Kirk and the *Enterprise*. Han Solo and the *Millennium Falcon*. No sci-fi captain becomes truly iconic without an equally memorable starship. Good thing, then, that *Starfield* lets you put just as much effort into customizing your spacecraft as into your hero.

While you're always free to just buy a premade ship and start hopping around the galaxy, players who care a bit more about their interstellar ride can dive deep into detailed building tools. By swapping out and rearranging individual components, you're free to change not just the layout and appearance of your ship, but also its capabilities. An upgraded grav drive will let you jump further across the galaxy, while better



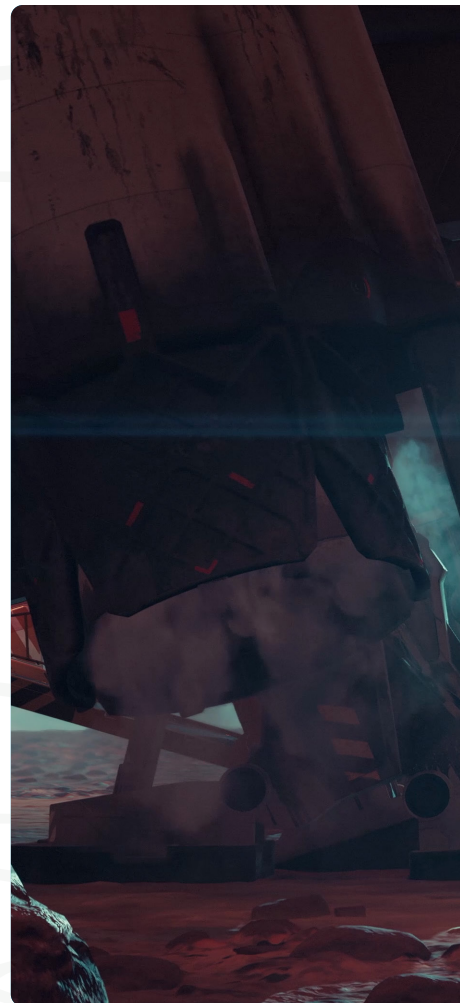
shields and weapons will help you hold your own in space combat, and a larger cargo hold will allow you to transport (or smuggle) more in a single trip.

The decisions you make will even be reflected in the interior layout. Yep, you'll be able to explore your ride fully as your character, walking around and using the equipment you've installed onboard.



Even in the 24th century, sometimes the best approach to a problem is to whack it with something sharp.

And one of the most compelling things about *Starfield*'s approach to sci-fi is how Bethesda is using the breadth of the Settled Systems to explore so many different traditions and aesthetics from within the genre. We've seen settlements that look plucked from the glittering, immaculate future of *Star Trek* and neon-soaked cyberpunk metropolises à la *Blade Runner*, but also dusty frontier worlds that look fresh out of a *Firefly*-style space Western and mining colonies with grungy tech that would be right at home in *Alien*. (For more on some of the confirmed settlements, check out the "Magellan" sidebar.) Rather than picking a single flavor of science fiction, *Starfield* looks to offer a whole buffet, a smorgasbord of places to go and things to do with something to satisfy every kind of sci-fi fan.





While such an expansive approach to the genre might run the risk of feeling disjointed, there is a unifying design sensibility tying it all together, something Bethesda calls “NASA Punk.” The technology you’ll encounter in *Starfield* may be more advanced than anything we have today, but it all feels visually grounded in the principles we’ve been using

to explore space for decades—think physical switches, hydraulics, and chunky, sturdy-looking panels.

There’s perhaps no better example of this approach than VASCO, the long-limbed robot crew member who’s become something of the game’s unofficial mascot. Is NASA about to build a humanoid robot equipped with laser weapons? Prob-

There is a unifying design sensibility tying it all together, something Bethesda calls “NASA Punk.”

ably not, but if they did, we imagine it’d look a lot like VASCO.

Alongside VASCO, you’ll be able to recruit characters you encounter out in the world to work aboard your ships, accompany you on missions, or even staff the bases you leave behind throughout the galaxy, allowing you to collect resources even when you’re away. A handful of these crew members are fully fledged companions, with their own dedicated quest lines to complete. From what we’ve learned so far, the closest allies on your journey will be the other members of Constellation, including its leader, for-



MAGELLAN

As you may have heard, *Starfield* features over 1,000 planets to explore. Here's a complete list of every world in the game and what to expect when you land on them.

Just kidding. Instead, we're going to highlight a few of the major cities and memorable locations you'll be able to venture to across the Settled Systems.

CYDONIA // MARS // SOL SYSTEM

In *Starfield*'s universe, the Red Planet is now home to the largest mining colony run by the United Colonies, Cydonia. The city is largely subterranean, carved out of rock to protect against the inhospitable Martian environment. Given its history and function, the vibe here is very much industrial.



NEW ATLANTIS // JEMISON // ALPHA CENTAURI SYSTEM

The first major human settlement outside of our solar system, the capital of the United Colonies, and the home of Constellation, New Atlantis is gleaming, glass-paned futurism at its finest. It's also the largest in-game settlement Bethesda has ever built, both in sheer size and in amount of detail.



AKILA CITY // AKILA // CHEYENNE SYSTEM

The independent-minded Freestar Collective made its capital in Akila City, which has the feel of a frontier town, complete with saloons, gun-slinging rangers, and so, so much dust. The entire city is also enclosed by a protective wall to keep out deadly creatures known as the Ashta, which Bethesda has described as a cross between a wolf and a velociraptor. Cuddly!



NEON // VOLII ALPHA // VOLII SYSTEM

Originally a fishing platform on the watery planet of Volii Alpha, Neon has since reinvented itself as a pleasure destination with little in the way of rules. Hey, every sci-fi universe needs a wretched hive of scum and villainy, right? And as you can probably guess from the name, there's a heavy cyberpunk influence here as well.



EARTH // SOL SYSTEM

Yes, Bethesda has confirmed that we'll be able to visit Earth and find out what's happened to humanity's home planet. Judging by the shot we've seen of a dusty, desolate desert surrounding what sure looks to be the St. Louis Gateway Arch, we're assuming it won't be a happy ending.



mer soldier Sarah Morgan, and Sam Coe, a space cowboy with family ties to the Freestar Collective. Like previous Bethesda RPGs, who you bring along can have a big impact on how the story unfolds. In *Starfield*, on occasion you'll even be able to ask your companions to speak for you. Maybe they've got an expertise you don't to help get you out of a jam.

In truth, Bethesda Game Studios has put so much effort into making *Starfield* a sprawling space epic that we don't have the space to tackle every exciting detail in these pages. We haven't even touched on the robust space combat, which lets you redirect power between your ship's shields, weapons, engines, and other subsystems during a fight. We haven't talked about space piracy (you can actually board ships you encounter and steal their cargo—or the whole darn ship), or surveying (you can catalog the alien wildlife and plants





HUBBLE HUBBLE

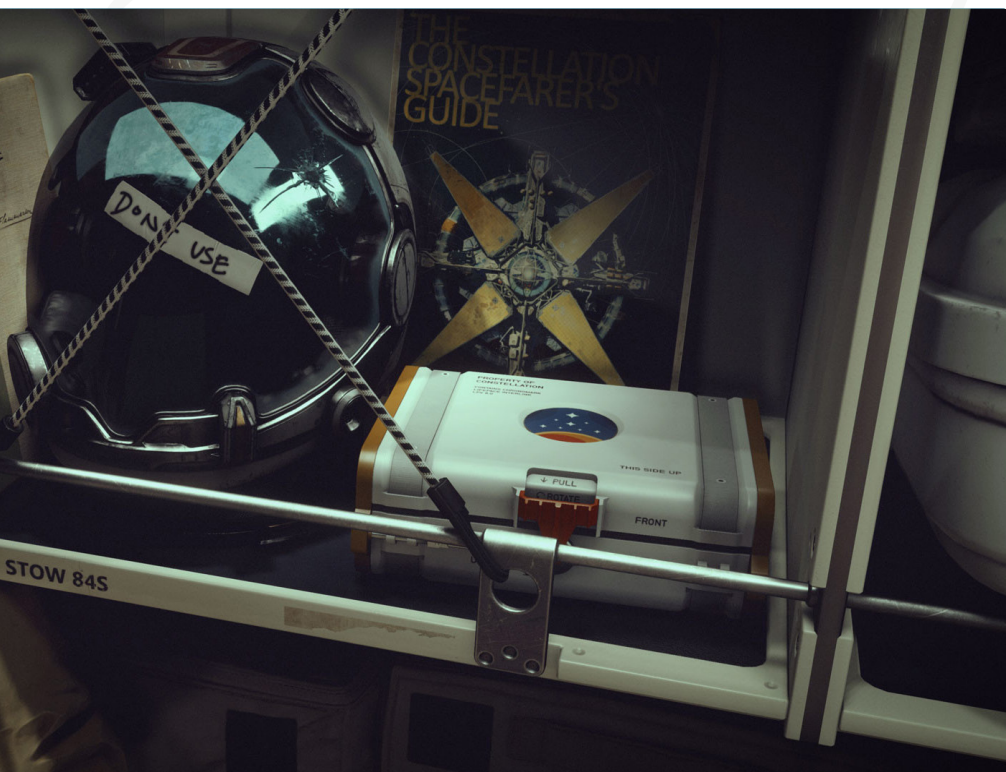
Starfield's companion system also supports another classic RPG feature: romance options. That's right, while you're rocketing your way across the galaxy, you'll also be exploring the deepest reaches of the human heart. Or something like that. But you should be aware that not every crew member is available for a love connection. The only characters you'll be able to court are four of your fellow Constellation members, with Sarah Morgan and Sam Coe confirmed as two of the potential love interests. Our deepest condolences to anyone who wanted to smooch VASCO.

in each system), or how the different atmospheres and gravities of planets will make them feel distinct, or the mysterious looking, seemingly supernatural abilities that may or may not be tied to your search for intelligent alien life, or—

Well, let's just say we don't even have room to write the list of things we don't have room to write about.

The best Bethesda RPGs make it feel like you could play for thousands of hours and still discover something you've never seen before.

Much like there are diehard fans still playing older *Elder Scrolls* and *Fallout* games years (or even decades) after launch, *Starfield* is shaping up to be the sort of adventure you can lose yourself in again and again. The best Bethesda RPGs make it feel like you could play for thousands of hours and still discover something you've never seen before. With the expansive scope and depth of *Starfield*, that sentiment might be more literally true than ever. ©



MORTAL KOMBAT 1

FORGING A NEW KONTINUITY

* PREORDER

For fans of fighting games, things have been going pretty great lately. A new generation of *Street Fighter* is upon us, Bandai Namco is showing off the upcoming *Tekken 8*, *Guilty Gear Strive* is still going strong, and we're almost at the release of *Mortal Kombat 1*.

Wait—*Mortal Kombat 1*? Weren't we just on the eleventh mainline game in the series a few years back? Indeed we were, but the team at

NetherRealm Studios decided that now would be the perfect time to give said series a fresh start. Not only is a continuity reboot a good way to bring new fans to a long-running franchise, but it's also a chance to return things back to a simpler, more focused starting point after years of expanding upon old ideas.

"Perhaps the main reason why we decided to restart was because the stakes in *Mortal Kombat 11* got so big

that it was difficult for us to introduce yet another villain even more powerful than Kronika," NetherRealm Studios chief creative officer and *Mortal Kombat* co-creator Ed Boon told us.

Another challenge was figuring out a direction to take the game's iconic cast of characters that would both meet the expectations players have for their favorite fighters, while also using them to tell a story that wouldn't just feel like a retread.

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
WARNER BROS. GAMES
DEVELOPER
NETHERREALM
STUDIOS
PLATFORMS
XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5,
SWITCH, PC
RELEASE DATE
09.19.2023



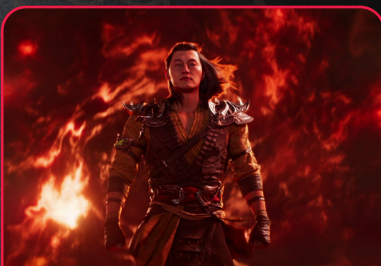
"We didn't want to change the characters too much, because they have been established now for over 30 years, and redefining them too much would be taboo. That balance between a new story using existing characters was one of the bigger challenges we had," Boon added. "We wanted to change the story but keep it familiar at the same time—if that makes any sense."

"We didn't want to change the characters too much, because they have been established now for over 30 years..."

ED BOON, MORTAL KOMBAT CO-CREATOR



Thankfully, there was a perfect jumping off point for rebooting the series: the ending of *Mortal Kombat 11*. Though exact plans for the reboot weren't worked out at the time, that game's finale left open the possibility through Liu Kang's transformation into a fire god, while also "paying homage to the lore established in the *Mortal Kombat* comic book that was made to support the first arcade game," according to Boon.



LOOK WHO'S KOMBATING

In *Mortal Kombat 1*, NetherRealm Studios has introduced Kameos, a new system where players pick a supporting fighter who can then provide a bit of assistance at any time during the match. On a gameplay level, it makes sense as an additional option for mixing up how each match goes, as community manager Tyler Lansdown explained to us.

"A big goal for the design team was allowing players to have more creativity in what they can do," he said. "[For example], sometimes there are characters that are really good at offense, but maybe their defense is scaled back a little. Now, there are some Kameo fighters that may have some defensive capabilities so you can kind of help out your character's main move set."

That's all well and good, but there's another aspect to Kameo fighters that we find especially interesting: the ability for characters to show up who might not otherwise have made the main roster. For example, there's Goro, who's already confirmed as a Kameo, but who potentially wouldn't make sense being a bigger part of the reboot. Or, there are original-era versions of Sonya and Sektor, complete with their laughable (but lovable), outdated old-school costumes. And then there are all of the *really* obscure or unexpected picks the team will be able to choose from, like the already-confirmed return of Kurtis Stryker.



It might seem a bit extreme to stress so much over things like lore in a game where two people punch each other into oblivion, but such elements have long been important to both *Mortal Kombat's* fans and creators. For *Mortal Kombat 1*, Boon told us that "characters would retain most of their signature characteristics, visuals, and abilities, but their relationships with each other would change" as part of the reboot.

"Perhaps the biggest example of this would be Scorpion and Sub-Zero, who have historically been bitter enemies. Now, they are literally blood brothers," he added.

Still, *Mortal Kombat 1* is indeed a fighting game, so all of the new backstory and cast reworks won't matter if the core combat isn't deep and satisfying. Thankfully, *Mortal Kombat 1's* fighting engine feels both streamlined yet expanded, harking

■ From the fantastic character redesigns to some stylish new stages, the *Mortal Kombat* series has never looked better.

Each fighter we've seen so far feels more rounded and developed in their moves roster without relying on gimmicks to make them interesting to play.



LIES OF P

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From signature moves to those trademark Fatalities, *Mortal Kombat 1* still feels as brutal as ever.

back to that duality Boon spoke of earlier. Each fighter we've seen so far feels more rounded and developed in their moves roster without relying on gimmicks to make them interesting to play. Instead, that additional layer of variation comes from the new Kameo system, which is as



much about creativity in personal playstyle as it is giving the team an excuse to bring some old faces back to the franchise (see sidebar "Look Who's Kombatng").

With so much change being brought to the series, one thing thankfully remains the same: from signature moves to those trademark Fatalities, *Mortal Kombat 1* still feels as brutal as ever. NetherRealm's long-running franchise may look different on the outside, but its guts are the same as they've always been. **G**

■ No matter if it's fire, or ice, or even a little rain or smoke, old favorites have some new elemental tricks up their sleeves.

ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE

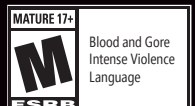
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 Microsoft



preview

* PREORDER

LIES OF P

HE HAD STRINGS... BUT NOW, HE'S FREE



While it may not have been as important in shaping the future of the video games industry as its older sibling *Dark Souls*, FromSoftware's dark gothic action RPG *Bloodborne* is still hugely influential on its own. One upcoming release that clearly looked to the Hunter and their journey through Yharnam for inspiration is *Lies of P*, a new Soulslike from Neowiz Games and developer Round8 Studio.

However, as many similarities as there are between *Lies of P* and *Bloodborne*—from the Victorian-era setting, to a more aggressive approach to combat, to some familiar takes on how story and gameplay are presented to the player—there are also just as many elements that set the two titles apart.

What may initially seem like strange source material to build off of is now looking more and more like quite an inspired choice.

First, of course, is the narrative core at the center of *Lies of P*. The “P” in this case is Pinocchio, as the characters and world of the game are loosely based on *The Adventures of Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi. What may initially seem like strange source material to build off of is now looking more and more like quite an inspired choice. The fairy tale's theme of puppets translates into Krat, a city that's become a place of horrors due to

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
NEOWIZ GAMES
DEVELOPER
ROUND8 STUDIO
PLATFORMS
XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5,
XBOX ONE, PS4, PC
RELEASE DATE
09.19.2023



A PUPPET'S DARK PAST

Turning Pinocchio from a cute wooden boy to a human-esque automaton tasked with destroying his mechanical kinfolk may seem like quite a departure from the story we know and love. The thing is, that Disney version of the classic tale was in itself a sizable shift from the original elements of Carlo Collodi's work.

Pinocchio's life started as a log of wood that cried in pain after an Italian carpenter tried to turn it into a table leg. After receiving the log, puppeteer Geppetto crafts it into a wooden boy—who proceeds to kick his creator in the leg and run away. Upon meeting a talking cricket, instead of becoming friends, Pinocchio smashes the bug with a hammer. From there, Geppetto gets sent to prison, Pinocchio has his feet burned to ash, he bites off the paw of a thieving cat, the puppet meets a dead fairy, a group of undertaker rabbits come to collect Pinocchio's corpse, and a flock of woodpeckers get tasked with chiseling down the boy's nose after telling too many lies. And, that's not even getting to the gorilla judge, the giant snake that laughs until it dies, or other events that get so weird that we're not sure we should even mention them here.

The point is, *The Adventures of Pinocchio* was an epic tale filled with some seriously bizarre twists and turns—which makes for a perfect source of inspiration for a new Soulslike, if you ask us.



the revolt of its automaton servants. While this dashing new interpretation of Pinocchio doesn't see his nose grow when he lies, choosing whether to tell the truth or not throughout the game looks to offer some deeper consequences. And, let's be honest: Much like FromSoftware's works of fiction, children's fantasy stories of old were often tales of terror filled with strange characters, macabre themes, and dire fates for those both good and bad (see sidebar "A Puppet's Dark Past").

It's in that gameplay that we're also getting excited for what the

development team is crafting in *Lies of P*. In terms of the basics, there's a lot here that'll feel familiar if you've played other similar titles. Combat is more about careful swings of your weapon and good stamina management than wildly hitting buttons or unleashing flashy combos, and well-timed parries or counterattacks can mean the difference between defeating an enemy or returning back to a checkpoint to try again.

One unique new element to those parries in *Lies of P* is that, if you perfectly block a foe's attacks enough times, you can actually break


■ "Pinocchio will face off against a host of terrifying robotic monstrosities" is not a sentence we ever thought we'd be typing.





Combat is more about careful swings of your weapon and good stamina management than wildly hitting buttons or unleashing flashy combos...

their weapon, lessening the threat they pose against you. (Your own weapons can also break, but Pinocchio's mechanical Legion Arm comes complete with a device that can sharpen them back up to new at any time.) Speaking of weapons, each melee option exists as two pieces, a hilt and a blade, and you can swap those parts to make new combinations that open up a larger roster of offensive possibilities. Pinocchio's Legion Arm is also upgradable with its own special abilities, from deadly elemental attacks to the aptly named "Puppet String" grappling harpoon.

At this point, we've played more than our fair share of games from developers trying to recapture the magic of FromSoftware's offerings. Even so, from its promises of deep, satisfying gameplay, to its unique take on a timeless tale, *Lies of P* is quickly shaping up to be one of the more interesting ones to come along—and that's no lie. 

preview

* PREORDER

THE CREW MOTORFEST

SPEEDING THROUGH PARADISE

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
UBISOFT
DEVELOPER
UBISOFT IVORY TOWER
PLATFORMS
XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5,
XBOX ONE, PS4 PC
RELEASE DATE
09.14.2023



More than any other racing game series, *The Crew* seems to be constantly reinventing itself. The first game in the series already stood apart in the genre, with its focus on RPG-style leveling up and a map that encompassed all 48 contiguous United States (albeit greatly condensed). The second game kept that massive scope but mixed things up by adding boats and planes to the mix—and letting you instantly

swap between them, mid-race, at the press of a button.

For the third outing, *The Crew Motorfest*, developer Ubisoft Ivory Tower is tweaking the series even further, and taking it in a new direction. To begin with, the open-world map is narrowing its focus from nearly the entire U.S. to one of the few states that hasn't made the cut before: Hawai'i. More specifically, *Motorfest* is set on O'ahu, home to the state's largest city, Honolulu, and most of its

Developer Ubisoft Ivory Tower is tweaking the series even further, and taking it in a new direction.

population. While the major landmarks and geographical features are all accounted for, it's not a one-to-one recreation, with the designers taking creative liberties to make the map more varied and fun to drive.

PICK YOUR POISON

At launch, *The Crew Motorfest* will feature 15 playlists, each with a specific focus on a certain aspect of car or racing culture. Not sure exactly what that means? Here's a selection of some of the playlists Ubisoft has revealed, along with what you can expect from their events.



VINTAGE GARAGE

This playlist is all about vintage car culture, with events designed to take you from '50s and '60s classics up to the '80s muscle cars. It's not all about racing, either. One early event tasks you with using landmarks, rather than your GPS, to navigate to a destination—just like you would've had to do way back when.



OFF-ROADING ADDICT

Not only do events in this playlist take place off the tarmac—meaning you can expect to drive a whole lot of lifted trucks and buggies, over slippery conditions, across hills and around mountains—but they also involve more freedom in how you get to each checkpoint. Sure, it's faster to cut the corner and take that shortcut through the trees, but it's also riskier.



MADE IN JAPAN

With a focus on tricked-out, souped-up Japanese imports, this playlist naturally encompasses a whole lot of urban street racing and drifting around corners at night. Events also give a bit of a Tokyo-style makeover to Honolulu, with plenty of bright neon adding to the Japanese vibe. Seems expensive to redecorate a whole city for each race, but who are we to judge?



MOTORSPORTS

This is the playlist you'll go to when you want to scratch that "serious motor racing" itch. Events focus on circuit races and feature a tire degradation system—you'll need to make pit stops every few laps, otherwise you'll start to lose grip. It's not all Formula One-style open-wheel racing, either. There's even a (not actually) 24-hour endurance race around Hanauma Bay.



AUTOMOBILI LAMBORGHINI

Look, not everything has to be complicated. You want to drive some Lamborghinis? This playlist will let you drive some Lamborghinis.



■ One of the tweaks *Motorfest* makes to its O'ahu map is the addition of a massive dried lava flow. Not accurate, but fun for offroading!

You're a racer who's come to the island to participate in the titular motorsports festival. *Motorfest* is broken up into playlists for different disciplines and fandoms. Each playlist unfolds like a mini campaign, introducing you to new characters and working up to a big showpiece event. (For more details on some of the announced playlists, see sidebar "Pick Your Poison.")

Of course, those playlists are just the beginning. *The Crew 2* launched way back in 2018, and it's still getting regular seasonal updates with new content and challenges five years later. *Motorfest* will receive similar live-service support, with new playlists coming to the festival's "Main Stage" regularly after launch. And those RPG mechanics introduced in the first game are back, so you can

level up favorites in your car collection to peak performance. What's more, players who've already been busy building up their dream garage in *The Crew 2* will be able to transfer their entire collection over into *The Crew Motorfest*, at no cost.

The developers have also teased the return of boats and planes in some capacity, so it's a safe bet the game has even more surprises awaiting players beyond what we've already seen.

With this latest reinvention of *The Crew*, Ubisoft Ivory Tower appears to be aiming for a more focused open-world racer with a more defined identity. Rather than shooting for awe-inspiring breadth, *The Crew Motorfest* is aiming for depth—picking a lane and putting the pedal to the floor. [G](#)

It's a safe bet the game has even more surprises awaiting players beyond what we've already seen.



preview

* PREORDER

PAW PATROL WORLD

IT'S A DOG-SAVE-DOG OPEN WORLD

Since 2018, Outright Games has worked together with a roster of studios to develop a line of action games based on the pups of the Paw Patrol. While most have focused on more linear experiences, the franchise's next outing will take Ryder and his canine companions somewhere they've never been: an open-world adventure.

Previously, missions would lock players into specific pups with strict limits on where they could go or what they needed to do. In *Paw Patrol World*, players can now swap between the members of the Paw Patrol at any time, as they freely run around various familiar locations in order to stop Mayor Humdinger's latest scheme.

"[We wanted] players to feel like they were in the world of *Paw Patrol* with the freedom to explore, play, and have fun as the pups," explained Martin Willingham, producer on *Paw Patrol World*. "They can switch





FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
OUTRIGHT GAMES
DEVELOPER
3DCLOUDS
PLATFORMS
XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5,
SWITCH, XBOX ONE,
PS4, PC
RELEASE DATE
09.29.2023



■ *Paw Patrol World's* gameplay may be more styled around open-world adventures, but you can still hop in and play together with a friend.

between all eight from the beginning, and at any time, they can switch from being 'on paws' as a pup to driving their pup's vehicle."


It's only fitting that the entirety of the *Paw Patrol* should always be part of the action this time around, given the game's story is both about a festival to celebrate Adventure Bay's heroes, and the celebration surrounding the series itself.

"As it's the 10-year anniversary of *Paw Patrol* in 2023, we wanted that to factor into the narrative," Willingham said. "So, we came up with the festival for Paw Patrol Day."

One especially fun twist on that theme is that, as players recover

stolen festival posters, they'll unlock bonus missions inspired by holiday episodes from the series.

"The best example [is] 'Pups Save the Trick-or-Treaters,'" Willingham said. "We redress one of the areas as if it's Halloween, and have a spooky time. It's really fun, and brings even more variety to the game."

From gameplay that better encourages *Paw Patrol* fans to play how and with which pups they want, to an improved selection of accessibility options (including full voice acting for those too young to read on-screen dialog), *Paw Patrol World* looks to expand the franchise in some pawsome new ways. 

"[We wanted] players to feel like they were in the world of *Paw Patrol* with the freedom to explore, play, and have fun as the pups..."

MARTIN WILLINGHAM, PRODUCER, PAW PATROL WORLD





90
100

GAME OF THE MONTH

FINAL FANTASY XVI

A NEW RPG WORLD BORN FROM FLAME

Across its 35-plus-year history, the *Final Fantasy* series has consistently offered players experiences that worked to redefine the RPG genre while charting new territory for the franchise itself. Outside of the rare times when we received direct

sequels, no mainline game has ever been bound by what its predecessors did, meaning that each new release could have its own chance to feel fresh and new from what's come before.

And yet, even with that said, *Final Fantasy XVI* is unlike anything the se-

ries has previously seen to a degree that caught us by surprise. In many ways, the tale of fallen prince Clive Rosfield and his crystal-destroying quest to save the world is quite similar to its forebears on a surface level. It's in how the game portrays Clive, the rest of the cast, and the drama that unfolds in the world of Valisthea that will be striking for longtime fans.

From the return to a fantasy-forward setting, to the focus on a war between kingdoms and their Eikons (*FFXVI*'s versions of summons), everything has a more grounded, mature, and emotionally developed nature to it—even when introducing the fantastical ideas that are key to *Final Fantasy*. Not every story beat or character arc that's attempted works as well as it should, but this is definitely a case where we can forgive the missteps given how ambi-

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
SQUARE ENIX
DEVELOPER
CREATIVE BUSINESS
UNIT III
PLATFORMS
PS5
RELEASE DATE
06.22.2023





■ This is what the new era of combat in *Final Fantasy* games looks like—and we're actually okay with that.

tious the game's scope and narrative side are.

Gameplay is another area in which *Final Fantasy XVI* strives to be different, and it's mostly successful there as well. Make no mistake, we do at times miss the days of turn-based battles—but, if the action is going to be more fast-paced and visceral, this feels like a better execution of that

over what we saw in *Final Fantasy XV*. The various Eikon-powered elemental attacks Clive unlocks over the course of his journey offer up a wide variety of ways to tackle combat, making fights just as fun the 500th time as they were the first. That's definitely a good thing, as enemies *do* tend to have more hit points than we'd like to see, which



can leave some encounters dragging on a tad too long.

We also must mention the Eikon-focused battles, which offer up thrilling, cinematic wars between superpowered beings that are as fun to play as they are to watch. The entirety of the game itself is a pleasure to look at, from the lush landscapes to the incredible character models (at least for the main cast).

What's taken us most by surprise about *Final Fantasy XVI* is that, if we're being honest, it's at its weakest during those moments when it feels the most chained to the legacy of its franchise. Square Enix's Creative Business Unit III clearly has some grand ambitions for what the future of *Final Fantasy* could look like, and we hope that what they've created here won't end up cast aside when it comes time for whatever's next. ©

The entirety of the game itself is a pleasure to look at, from the lush landscapes to the incredible character models (at least for the main cast).





1 ON 1

DISNEY ILLUSION ISLAND

AJ GRAND-SCRUTTON

CEO DLALA STUDIOS

The Nintendo Switch platformer *Disney Illusion Island* finds four iconic characters—Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, Donald Duck, and Goofy—heading off to a mysterious island to recover four magical books and save the world. The game has turned heads with its distinctive 2D-animated visuals and co-op mechanics designed to help players of different ages and skill levels have fun playing together. To find out more about what went into its creation, we talked with AJ Grand-Scrutton, CEO of developer Dlala Studios.

Walmart Gamecenter: One thing that sets *Disney Illusion Island* apart from similar platformers like *Metroid* and *Castlevania* is that there's no combat. How did you settle on that approach?

AJ Grand-Scrutton: [Creative director] Grant [Allen] and I would lock ourselves away in a room, and we put Post-Its up of everything the game could be. As we refined the experience, naturally, some stuff just came off the wall and went in the bin. Combat always sat there. We never spoke about it. Eventually, one of us went, "Is there any reason that combat Post-It even exists, bar the fact that we think, because we've used the word 'Metroidvania,' that we have to have combat?" The answer was no. It literally only existed because

of baggage we had brought in. And it's Mickey and Friends! If anyone can go on a platforming adventure and not beat people up, it's those four. So we took it off and we threw it in the bin.

WGC: What were your goals with co-op?

AJGS: It was big for us that we got people back on a sofa together, and we wanted it to feel worthwhile. We didn't want a second player to feel like "player two." It was important that all of the characters were equally balanced, and then we added in multiplayer-specific mechanics, like rope drop, which allows any player to drop a rope and any other player can jump on it and climb up. We have leap frog, where you can get a bit more distance [on a jump], and

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

BATTLETOADS (2020)

then the one that is everyone's favorite, hug, where you can literally hug each other at any time, and all players involved will get a temporary extra bit of health.

WGC: The game also emphasizes approachability, with optional settings for infinite health, easier timings, and simplified jump mechanics. Why was that important?

AJGS: This is going to sound like the cheesiest line in the world, but Disney is for everyone, right? And no one is for everyone more than Mickey Mouse. We wanted to be challenging to those players who enjoy core platformers—get that steep difficulty curve, get that experience—but then we wanted to be welcoming. What options can we put in to allow younger players to jump in, or players with slower reaction times? It was really important for us that that welcoming feel was built in from day one, but not at the cost of an engaging and challenging experience.

WGC: There are tons of beloved platformers starring Mickey. Did you look to the classics for inspiration?

AJGS: The most depressing story I can tell you is, Grant and I sat down with the whole team and we got out our old Sega Genesis and Super Nintendo, and we were like, "Okay, so we want everyone to play *Castle of Illusion*, *World of Illusion*, *Magical Quest*." And then we looked, and we realized there was a chunk of the team that weren't even born when those games came out. Some people on our team played a [Genesis] for the first time for the research for this game. But we really kind of looked at what had come before and what we loved, and how we could make a Mickey game for 2023.

WGC: *Disney Illusion Island* includes tributes to many classic Mickey Mouse shorts.

If you had to spend a week in one of the old cartoons, which one would you visit?

AJGS: My favorite is *Lonesome Ghosts*, but I worry if I spent a week getting chased by ghosts I'd come out wrong. *Thru the Mirror* was the weird, almost wonderland-y one. I think that would be great to spend a week in. Or, you know, *Potato Land*, just go to Idaho and enjoy potatoes. That one could happen! [G](#)

"It was big for us that we got people back on a sofa together, and we wanted it to feel worthwhile."

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