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PRESENTS

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Nintendo Switch

INSIDE!

Zelda: BOTW
Mario Odyssey
Skyrim
loads more!



Future

WELCOME

A note from the editor...

Welcome, reader, to this Gamesradar+ Nintendo Switch special: a huge preview of the long-awaited new console launch from the master game makers.

Over the next 148 pages, you'll read about the innovative and exciting new hardware that'll let you play games in all-new ways. Plus, we've got the latest on all the Switch's launch titles – as well as those being released later on in the year.

With The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild providing the triple-A launch goods, and the return of Mario in both an updated Mario Kart and a brand new adventure, Mario Odyssey, many are predicting that the Switch could see Nintendo back on top, following relatively poor sales of the Wii U.

Of course, support from third-party developers and publishers is critical for the success of any new console. Nintendo have managed to attract franchises including FIFA, Minecraft, LEGO, The Elder Scrolls and Sonic – but it's certain that they'll need many more if the Switch is to become a real contender to the PS4, Xbox One, and their inevitable future iterations.

But one thing's for sure: no-one makes games quite like Nintendo. So in celebration of Breath of the Wild's release, throughout this special, we also take a look at some of the finest Zelda games ever made, and the geniuses behind them.

We hope you enjoy reading.

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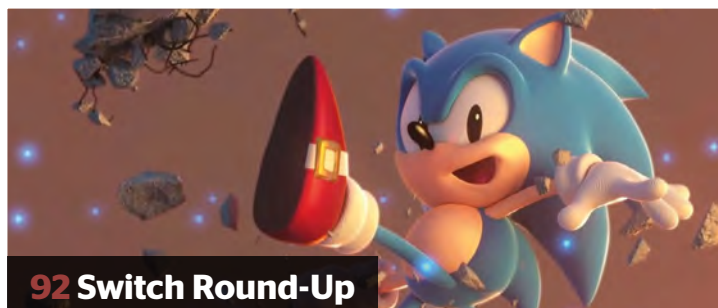
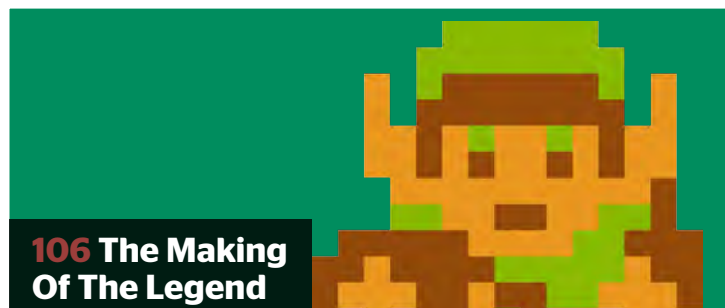
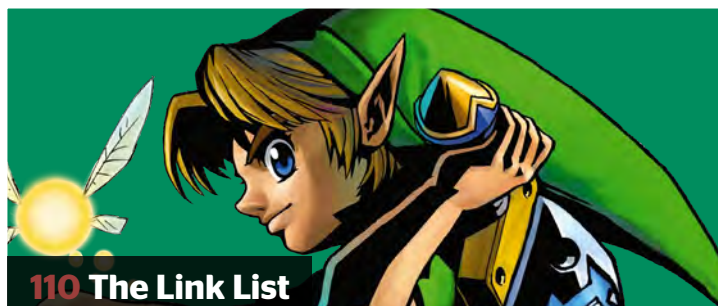
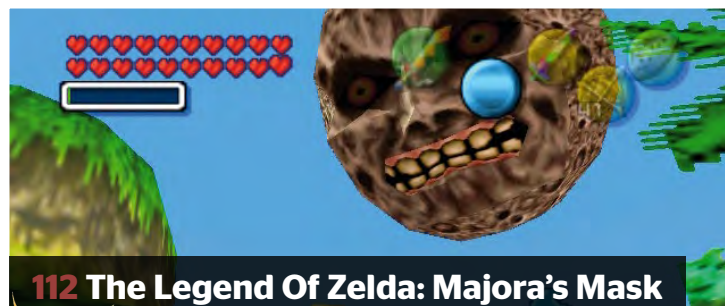
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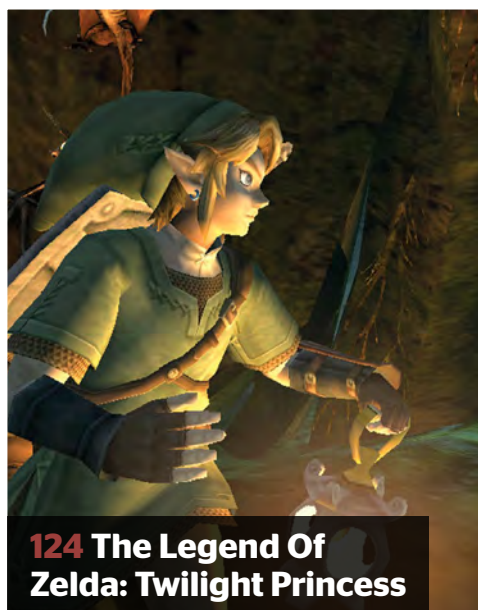
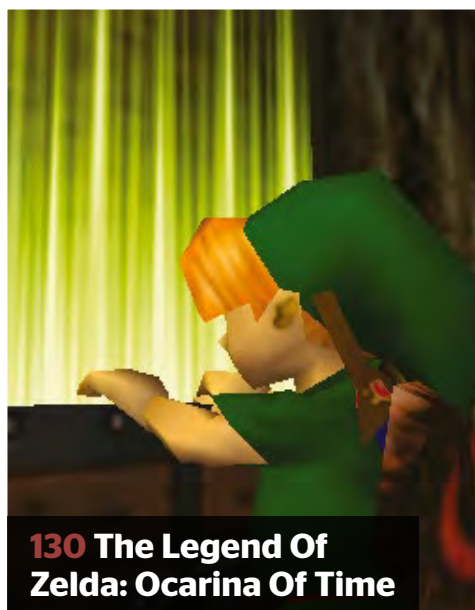


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JOY
DIVISION

JOY DIVISION

Part console, part handheld: can Nintendo Switch put the house of Mario back on top?

By Nathan Brown



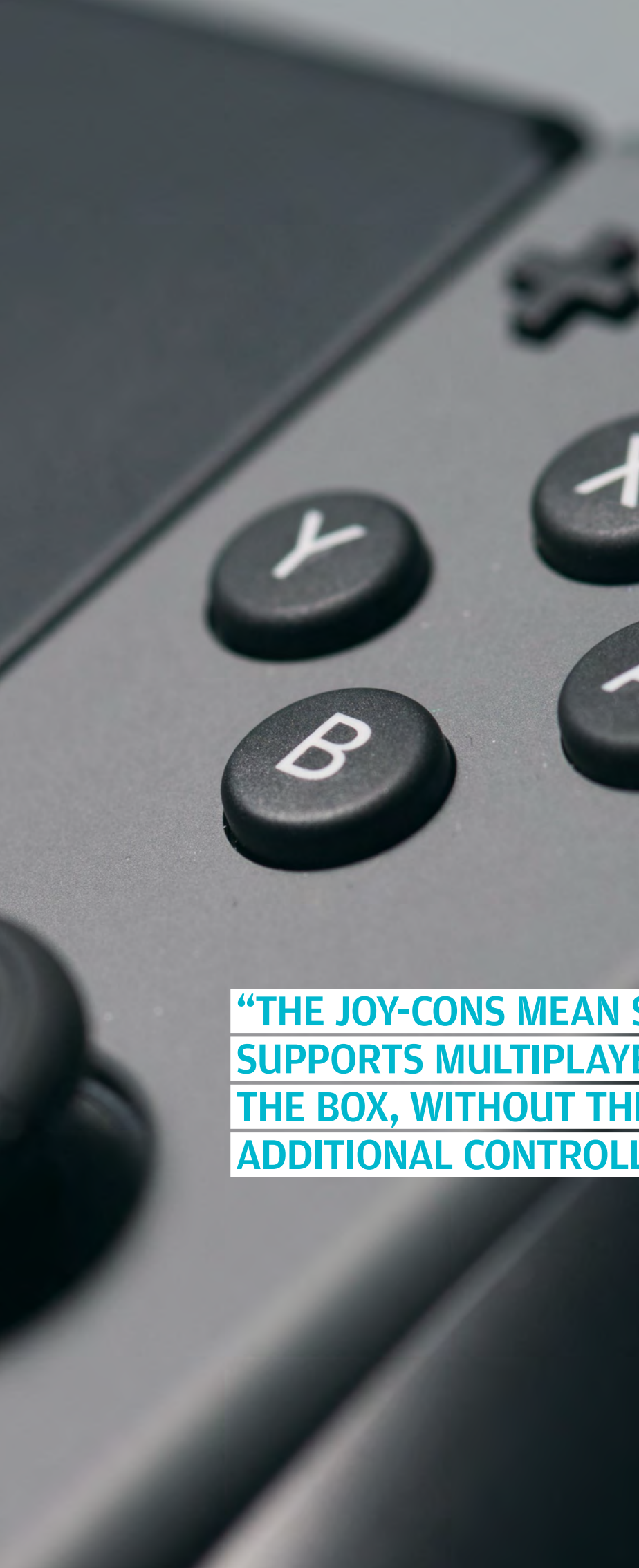
The first real moment of magic comes, inevitably, in *Breath Of The Wild*. Disappointed as we are by Nintendo's decision to set Link's Switch coming-out party in the same area of the game as E3 2016's Wii U demo – this is our fourth playthrough of the new Zelda game's opening section – that's not really what we're here for. After pottering around as Link, using the new Pro controller, for a few minutes, it is time: we slide the Switch from its dock and, instantly, the biggest Zelda game to date is running on a 6.2-inch screen in our palms. We have played big-screen games on handheld displays before, of course, but the transition has never been so elegant, the results never so natural in the hands. A few minutes later the process is reversed, the tablet returned to its base station, the action returning seamlessly to the TV, resuming as quickly as we can pick up the Pro controller.

This, we had thought prior to Switch's unveiling, was its central hook, its USP. Yet *Breath Of The Wild* is the only game we see at Nintendo's London event that even shows off the feature. Indeed, around half of the *Breath Of The Wild* demo units are locked away behind Perspex casing, preventing plenty of showgoers from even experiencing what we had assumed to be the console's headline feature. Instead, this event has been designed to show everything else Switch can do.

Joy-Con tricks

It can do an awful lot. The Mario Kart 8 Deluxe area, for instance, has wireless multiplayer on eight networked consoles in handheld mode, a two-player Battle Mode throwdown using the new, endearingly dinky steering-wheel peripheral, and another two-person setup played with the detachable Joy-Con controllers and the handheld screen propped up on its kickstand, which Nintendo calls tabletop mode. Elsewhere are games playable only in tabletop, or with players using a Joy-Con each, or pairs of them. There's nothing at the event to show it off, but Switch has a capacitive touchscreen in handheld mode, too. The overall impression is of a console, and a company, that is in a bit of a muddle about what it wants its new system to be, and has decided that it should be everything. And this unveiling suggests, whether by accident or design, that in fact Switch's greatest trick isn't its much-hyped hybrid blend of portable and big-screen consoles after all.

Instead, it's the Joy-Cons that are brought to the fore. In hindsight, we were foolish to think that Nintendo would focus solely on a new console's

A close-up, black and white photograph of the Joy-Con controller's face buttons. The buttons are circular and black with white lettering. The 'Y' button is in the upper left, the 'X' button is to its right, and the 'B' button is below the 'Y' button. The 'A' button is partially visible to the right of the 'X' button. The buttons are set into a dark, textured surface.

“THE JOY-CONS MEAN SWITCH SUPPORTS MULTIPLAYER OUT OF THE BOX, WITHOUT THE NEED FOR ADDITIONAL CONTROLLERS.”

output method, without also seeking to innovate when it came to designing its input device. While we knew the Joy-Cons could be detached from the tablet screen and held side-on for on-the-move multiplayer, we had no idea about what Nintendo calls ‘HD Rumble’. Showcased best in launch title 1-2-Switch (see p44), it offers a depth and variety of feedback that makes Xbox One’s buzzing triggers and even the Steam Controller’s excellent haptic fizz feel positively old hat. It says much about Nintendo’s justified confidence in the feature that all of 1-2-Switch’s minigames are played without looking at the TV screen, the developer secure in the knowledge that the controller itself will communicate everything you need to know.

Feel the Joy

It means Switch can offer that rarest of multiplayer videogame experiences: eye contact. The inescapably masturbatory Milk is all the better for it – though we don’t necessarily recommend it for family get-togethers – and Wild West quick draws and bank-heist safe-cracking are similarly elevated by being able to look your opponent squarely in the eye. The readiest comparison to what 1-2-Switch offers is Johann Sebastian Joust; the fact that so many attendees felt compelled to reference a four-year-old Danish indie game whose impact was largely felt on the conference circuit speaks volumes about the way Nintendo has contravened expectations by making a console that offers a way to play that, while perhaps not entirely new, is at least new enough.

The Joy-Cons solve plenty of problems for

Nintendo. When docked to the handheld screen, they offer traditional, dual-analogue controls, ensuring that even the most complex 3D games are playable without compromise when on the move. When detached and shared between two players, they mean Switch supports multiplayer out

of the box, without the need for additional controllers, both within and without the home. Built-in gyroscopes mean Nintendo can return its gaze to motion controls, something that always felt like a fudge on Wii U, where motion could only ever be an optional extra, rather than the de facto standard, relying on users to dig out their old Wii Remotes. HD Rumble, meanwhile, offers the platform holder the new-way-to-play hook that feels so essential to each new piece of Nintendo hardware.

However, that’s an awful lot for one controller to do – even if it is, in fact, two controllers in one. The

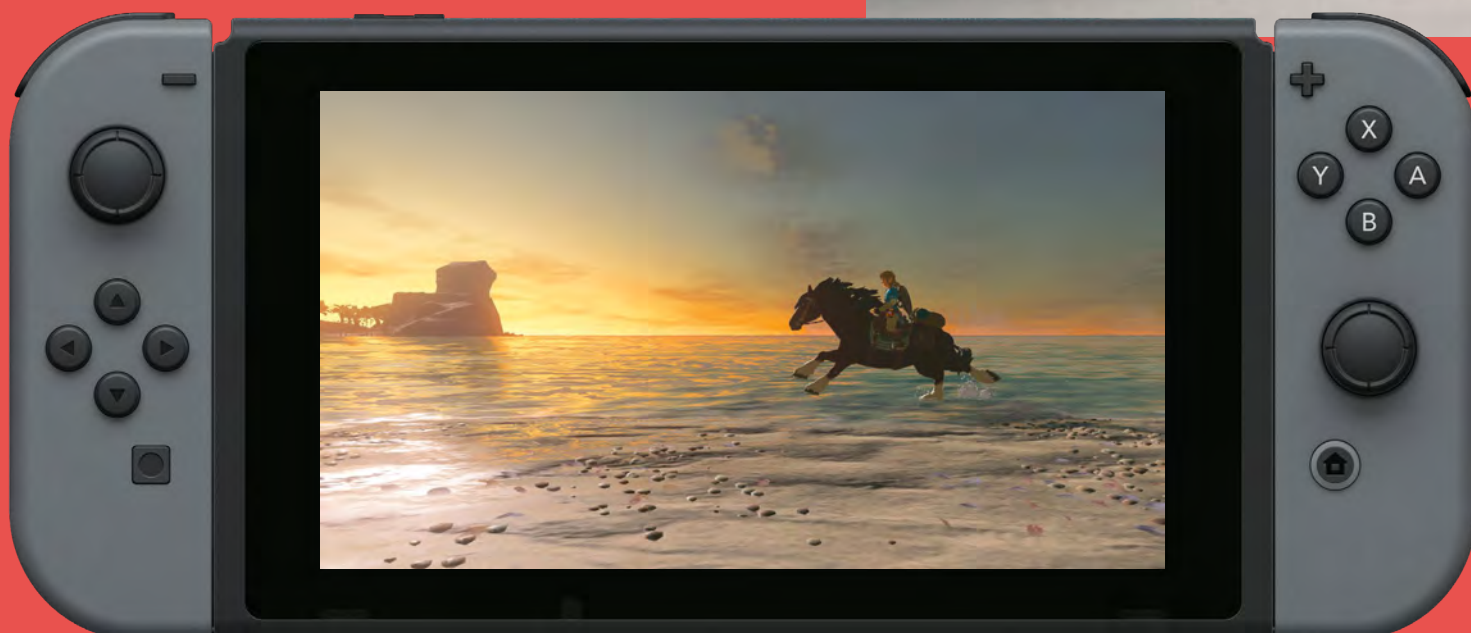
While *Breath Of The Wild* is the only game that we see showcase Switch's display-swapping feature, every game for the system will support it. It's as much a new Nintendo handheld as it is its new home console.

left Joy-Con on its own offers up an abundance of buttons: two on the inside edge that slots into the tablet unit, serving as shoulder buttons when the controller is held sideways; two triggers on the top; an analogue stick; pause and screenshot buttons; and a set of face buttons that doubles up as a D-pad, a necessary, but oddly inelegant, solution from a company whose controllers have always seemed to have been designed to simply melt into the hand. Throughout our lengthy hands-on Switch sessions we're unable to escape the feeling that, by reaching for a D-pad direction and instead finding a button, we are somehow doing it wrong.

Hold everything

They're a touch too small, too, an unavoidable consequence of their needing to sit flush with the handheld display. We see the commendably patient staff on hand to demonstrate *Arms* continually having to stop play to remind players of how the Joy-Cons should be held – side-on, with the inner edge pointing towards the screen – and playing 1-2-Switch's *Milk* right-handed using the left half of the Joy-Con is just baffling, despite our repeat visits to the booth after urging fellow attendees to indulge in its uniquely onanistic style. Are we supposed to hold it upside down? Back to front? Maybe both. Either way, it never feels intuitive, and for perhaps the first time ever, we find ourselves grateful for the assistance of a demo bod's trained pair of hands.

The resulting impression is of a console that, by offering so much, has been forced into a series of compromises. Its controllers are detachable from the tablet screen, so are a little too small; they can be shared by two players, so the D-pad must instead be





a set of face buttons; they can be held in multiple orientations, so none ever feels quite right in the hands. Across its history, Nintendo's hardware has tended to be defined by a single goal: N64's analogue stick, Wii's motion controls, 3DS's stereoscopic display, or Wii U's offscreen play. We thought Switch was going to be a smart convergence of its maker's previously separate console and handheld businesses. Instead, we leave Switch's first public showing thinking about the old gag about the real definition of a camel: that it is a horse designed by committee. Switch is, as pledged, a hybrid handheld and TV console. But it is also a Trojan camel for motion controls, for touch, for flighty, fun but forgettable games such as 1-2-Switch, rather than the lustrous, indulgent, full-fat games we thought, based on the reveal trailer – with its Mario, its Zelda,

its Skyrim and Splatoon – were going to be the rule, rather than the exception, in Nintendo's Switch-era software strategy.

Perhaps Switch will fulfil the undeniable promise of its core premise in time, but it seems unlikely to do so at launch. Given the contents of the announcement video, and the timing – Switch's public debut was timed just seven weeks ahead of its release – many expected that Nintendo was going to make us all an offer we couldn't refuse. In the absence of concrete information from the platform holder, the rumour mill span into overdrive, predicting a launch lineup for the ages, and it seemed plausible enough.

Yet this is the most slender day-one offering Nintendo has ever served up, if not in terms of volume then certainly in terms of quality. Third-



The Pro controller adopts a partially translucent design, and also includes gyroscope technology for motion support.



party support is even worse than at Wii U's launch, when the big names were at least prepared to give it a go. The remake of Mario Kart 8, and the deceptively named Splatoon 2, had seemed like bankers for launch day, designed to lure in those who never bought a Wii U. Instead they are being used to pad out a miserably barren release schedule leading up to the holiday-season launch of Super Mario Odyssey, which some had suggested would launch alongside the console in March. It's especially frustrating given that, knowing Nintendo, Odyssey is already all but finished, but will sit in a drawer until winter, when its maker has decided it will be most useful. We were led to believe that, as a consequence of joining up its console and handheld businesses, Nintendo's development teams would be able to work at a faster lick. On this evidence, little has changed.

The cost of innovation

Odyssey will be here for Christmas and will no doubt be brilliant. But by then it may be too late. A UK launch price of £280, without even a bundled game to sweeten the pill, is a good deal higher than we'd hoped – and a €330 price tag on the continent means we can't even blame Brexit. The £60 levy for a Pro controller and eye-watering £75 for an extra Joy-Con set is even more painful. Yet it is the software pricing that truly takes the biscuit. The Switch version of Breath Of The Wild will run you £60 on launch day, a £20 markup over the Wii U release. Ultra Street Fighter II, a gently updated port of an eight-year-old remaster of a 23-year-old SNES game, is priced in Japan at the equivalent of £35.

1-2-Switch, novel and enjoyable as it is, contains minutes of actual gameplay, and will cost £40. Mario Kart Deluxe, with its handful of extra characters and complete absence of new tracks? £50 to you. On top of that there will be a new, paid-for online service, which finally offers voice chat – but only through an app on smart devices, not via the console itself. You'll also get one free game per month, including NES and SNES titles featuring all-new online play. Inevitably, however, there's a catch. The game is only free for that month, meaning you lose access at the end of the period unless you cough up.

These are bad decisions in isolation that only look worse in a wider context. At launch, a Switch with Breath Of The Wild will set you back £340, and that

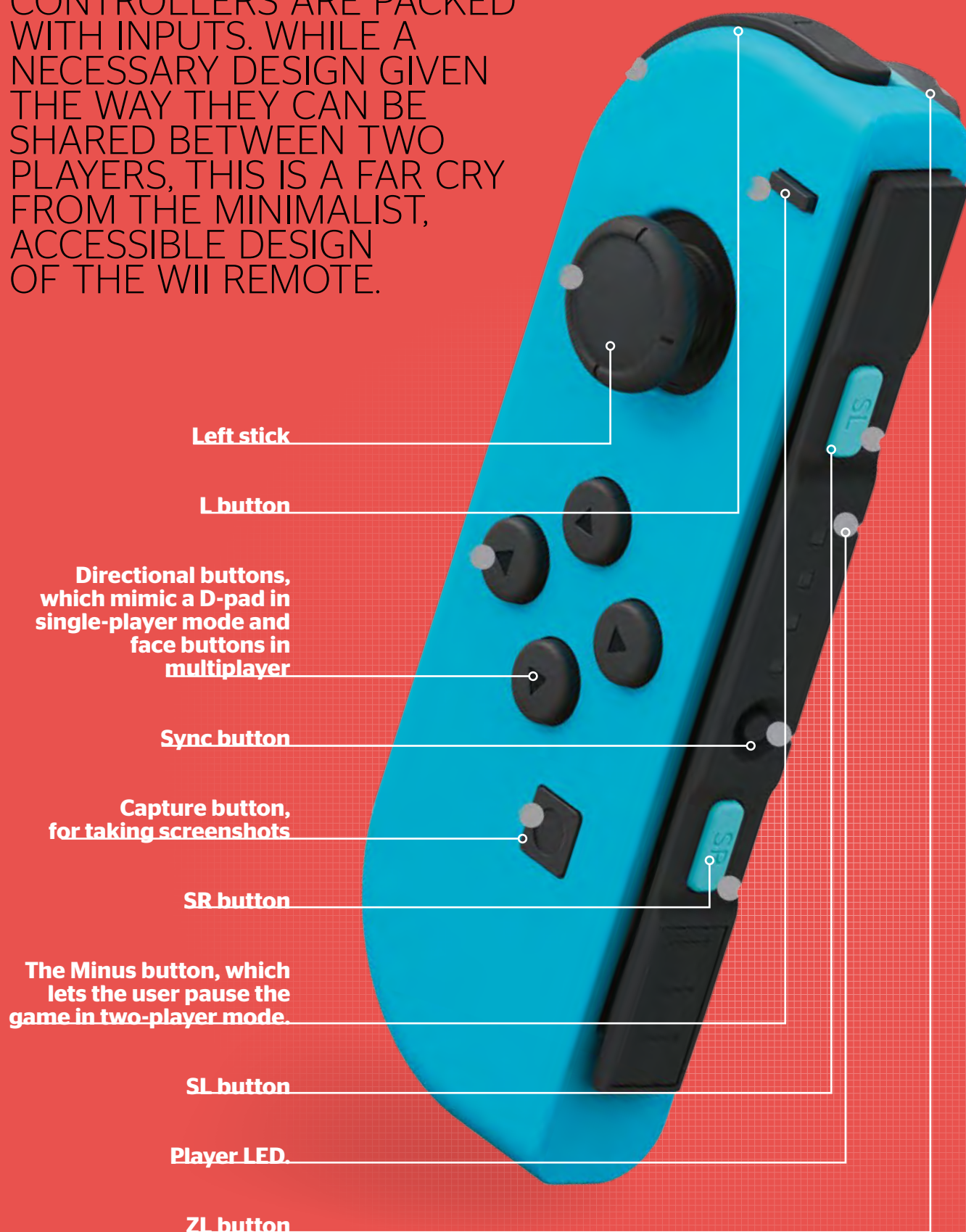
buys the fan of videogames an awful lot in 2017. Add an extra tenner and it will get you PS4 Pro or PS VR hardware. You could buy a Slim PS4 with Uncharted 4 and keep £140 in your pocket. You could get an Xbox One S with similar cash to spare, or leave it all in the bank and put it towards Microsoft's Scorpio – which, as its maker is so keen to remind us, will be the most powerful console in the entire known universe.

Or, most worryingly for Nintendo, you could carry on playing free games on the smartphone or tablet you already own, and forget about the new console from the company that got you into games in the first place. Nintendo has said that its belated move into mobile would be a handy way of introducing the planet's largest videogame market to the unique appeal of Mario et al; that giving people games for free would be a small price to pay if it meant being able to sell them full-price software, playable only on hardware of its own design, later on. Judging by the state of the comments we received in the days following the event, Nintendo has failed even to persuade many of its long-serving fans that Switch justifies its required investment at launch. What chance of it convincing an audience that has been trained to expect everything for free? Suffice it to say that Nintendo stock ended the day of Switch's full unveiling down by almost six per cent. Worse may be to come.

Switchcraft

Still, we depart choosing to focus on the positives, even if there are caveats to almost all of them. Switch is a fascinating piece of hardware with tremendous potential for play, whether indoors or out, alone or with others. There is magic in this console: the witchcraft of changing displays; the playful, flexible functionality of the Joy-Cons; the intriguing new twist of HD Rumble. The Legend of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild still astounds, and while it's a big investment, it runs better than the Wii U version in TV mode, and offers parity with it on the handheld. This, it seems, is the most flattering way to look at Switch: while it may disappoint when considered as a home console, it's a brilliant handheld, powerful, generously well-featured, and a true generational leap over 3DS that can be connected to the family TV for a hefty bump in resolution and performance. Viewed from the other direction, it's a fully portable Wii U that supports multiplayer gaming and motion controls straight out of the box. It is too expensive, certainly, its first year of software looks patchy, and it lacks the singular clarity of purpose that we associate with Nintendo's most successful past hardware. Perhaps there are better ways to spend your money in 2017, but nothing else on shelves may offer quite so much potential to surprise. ■

THE SWITCH'S JOY-CON CONTROLLERS ARE PACKED WITH INPUTS. WHILE A NECESSARY DESIGN GIVEN THE WAY THEY CAN BE SHARED BETWEEN TWO PLAYERS, THIS IS A FAR CRY FROM THE MINIMALIST, ACCESSIBLE DESIGN OF THE WII REMOTE.





Q&A: EIJI AONUMA

Eiji Aonuma is one of the most important people at Nintendo. As a senior member of creative staff, he's been involved in the design of Switch since the concept was in its infancy. And as producer of *The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild*, he's helmed development on a game that is both the star of Switch's launch lineup and Wii U's software swansong. Here, he reflects on Switch's development, on the reception to its unveiling, and on why it always seems to fall to him to make a game for two generations of hardware.

How does making *Breath Of The Wild* for Switch and Wii U compare to your experience of making *Twilight Princess* across GameCube and Wii?

With *Twilight Princess*, the hardware was very similar, so there weren't many problems. This time, comparing Wii U to Nintendo Switch, the hardware is completely different in terms of structure and functionality. So we thought that we might encounter some difficulties there, but actually the programmers said it was easy. One area where we had to put a lot of effort in was the controls. We wanted to make use of the touchscreen functionality of the GamePad for the Wii U version; for the Switch version, we needed to consolidate that down into a one-screen display. That required a lot of effort.

Do your bosses see you as the guy they call when they need a game made for two generations of hardware?

I don't really think I'm thought of that way within Nintendo! *Zelda* is an extremely popular franchise, and one that, when we have a new system, we know will grab people's attention. In an ideal world, as a developer, I would look forward to carefully planning and creating a game that I could focus on just developing for one platform. I'd love to do that in the future, maybe for Nintendo Switch.

You were involved in Switch's development from very early on. How did it evolve from the initial concept?

It started from the core concept of being able to play the game on the TV, then just pick it up and take it



Eiji Aonuma, series producer for *The Legend Of Zelda*.

with you and continue to play. That core concept really was there from day one. The smaller and more detailed aspects like the Joy-Con were added during the process, but even the idea of having the Joy-Con slot into the sides was there from a very early stage. In terms of the development of the hardware it's been, conceptually at least, quite smooth, and not much has changed from the original idea.

The final product packs in plenty of Nintendo innovations from down the years. Portability aside, what do you think is its most important feature?

I think a very important point about the Switch is tabletop mode – being able to set up a local multiplayer game wherever you are.

That's been your goal for years, right? You've been trying to make handheld gaming more social since the Game Boy.

That's right. A handheld system is quite a personal thing; handhelds naturally lend themselves to single-player. We wanted Switch to be about sharing:



**“I’M NOT OVERLY WORRIED BY ANY
NEGATIVE REACTION, BECAUSE I’M
CONVINCED THAT OVER TIME IT CAN
BE CONVERTED TO POSITIVITY.”**

you can take not just the single-player experience out of the living room, but the multiplayer experience as well. That’s important for us, and something we’ve wanted to achieve [for a long time].

The reception at the Switch event was largely positive among people who had hands-on opportunities, but there’s a lot of concern over the price, and the release slate. What’s your response to those sentiments?

There will always be negative reaction to anything that you do in life. With Switch, the people that are getting it in their hands understand its appeal, and how good it is. I’m not overly worried by any negative reaction that might have come out, because I’m

convinced that over time it can be converted to positivity, when more people have had the chance to play with the hardware and see what it can do.

How about speeding up development processes? Does the Switch architecture mean you can unify your handheld and console software teams?

There’s an element of that, but it doesn’t automatically mean things will happen more quickly or easily. Plus, Nintendo 3DS still has plenty of titles in development. The concept of the Switch is that you have a home console that you can take with you on the go, and in that respect it is both home console and handheld, but it doesn’t mean for us that the concept of a dedicated handheld will disappear. ■

Game previews



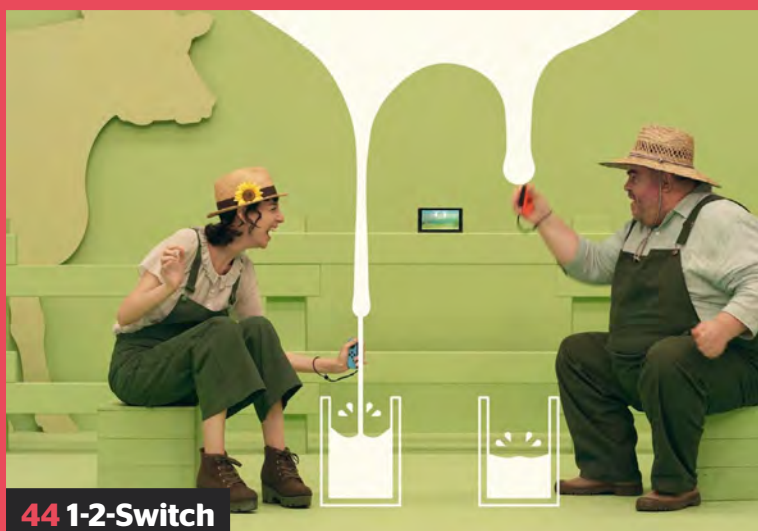
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A full-page illustration of Link from The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. He is climbing a massive, golden, textured tree trunk that rises vertically from the bottom left towards the top center. Link is positioned on the left side of the tree, looking upwards with determination. He wears his signature blue tunic, green pants, and a brown hat. A sword is visible on his back, and a quiver of arrows is attached to his belt. The background features a vibrant sunset or sunrise sky with hues of orange, pink, and purple. In the distance, rolling hills and a small, ornate structure are visible at the base of the tree.

LINK'S REAWAKENING

Breath of the Wild is
Nintendo's most
ambitious game in years

Bounding emphatically out of the mouth of a mountain – from a tomb encased in stone – Link once again finds himself proving the old idiom true: you can't keep a good hero down. The young hero quickly finds himself standing on the edge of the world; his eyes weary from a hundred-year sleep. They settle on a beautiful, sprawling vista quite unlike anything he has seen before across his adventures through time. Luscious green fields and forests greet the distant horizon, the calm blue sky unfazed by the calamity occurring beneath it. Silhouettes of ancient Hyrulian landmarks, such as the Bridge of Eldin, Death Mountain, Hyrule Castle and the Temple of Time, cast long shadows against the expansive landscape; relics of an old world in need of restoration. Link's memory of the kingdom may have vanished, but its legend survives on the breath of the wind.

All of this space is yours to conquer. The untamed wilds of Hyrule are yours to explore, their mysteries waiting to be uncovered by the brave and the bold. The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild's opener is a stunning statement of intent from Nintendo, quite unlike anything we've ever seen from the series or studio. It's an immediately striking moment and the sheer (almost daunting) scale of the world is worth taking pause in. All of this was built by long-standing Zelda manager Eiji Aonuma and his team at Nintendo EPD, a group that has long been criticised for failing to stray from the beaten track.

But no claims of resting on familiarity could be made in regard to this upcoming Wii U and Nintendo



Switch release, as *Breath Of The Wild* introduces mechanical upgrades and systemic innovation to just about every aspect of *Zelda*. It all spirals out of the colossal overworld, some 12 times the size of the one found in 2006's *Twilight Princess*. That revelation may cause some concern, and justifiably so, as some gamers feel *Twilight Princess*' vast Hyrule Field is a hollow façade; something that looks impressive but fails to engage in any real tangible sense. But it's clear that – even at this early stage – this iteration of Hyrule has countless secrets to discover, dungeons to explore and creatures to encounter.

A deep Breath

The Great Plateau, an area that represents just two per cent of the total map space, was the playground in which we could run wild in our lengthy hands-on session with *Breath Of The Wild*, and it felt more expansive than anything we've seen before in a *Zelda* game. The tragedies of this land's past may have been obscured by the unchecked aggression of nature, but rich environmental storytelling ensures that there's always something impressive to be

left to explore the open world at your own pace, directed by your own initiative. Whether you decide to follow the story, visit the villages, or head out in pursuit of dungeons is your decision – Nintendo is done with hand holding.

Which makes *Breath Of The Wild* something of an oddity among modern Nintendo releases. It's a difficult game, obstinately challenging at times in fact. *Zelda* veterans will have no trouble getting into *Breath Of The Wild* – the basics of its real-time combat largely unchanged – though mastering it is clearly going to take some time.

Given the open-ended nature of the game, every moment of *Breath Of The Wild* feels like a puzzle in and of itself. Your control over Link has been upgraded, as the hero is now able to manoeuvre himself around the environment freely with a dedicated jump button. You can scramble up just about any surface too, from trees and mountains to even the bodies of some of the larger enemies – all of which is governed by a stamina gauge. Link can swiftly paraglide from great heights and even use his shield to surf down hills or slopes, firing arrows as he skims across the environment.

“GIVEN THE OPEN-ENDED NATURE OF THE GAME, EVERY MOMENT OF BREATH OF THE WILD FEELS LIKE A PUZZLE IN AND OF ITSELF.”

marvelled at. It's easy to be left awestruck by the scope of Nintendo's vision and simultaneously difficult to understand how *Breath Of The Wild* has been patchworked together to run on the Wii U.

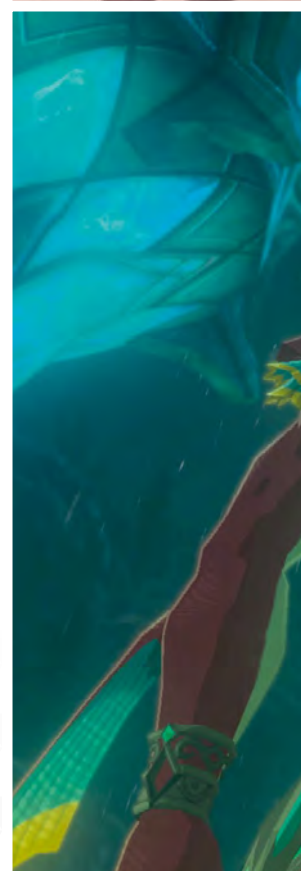
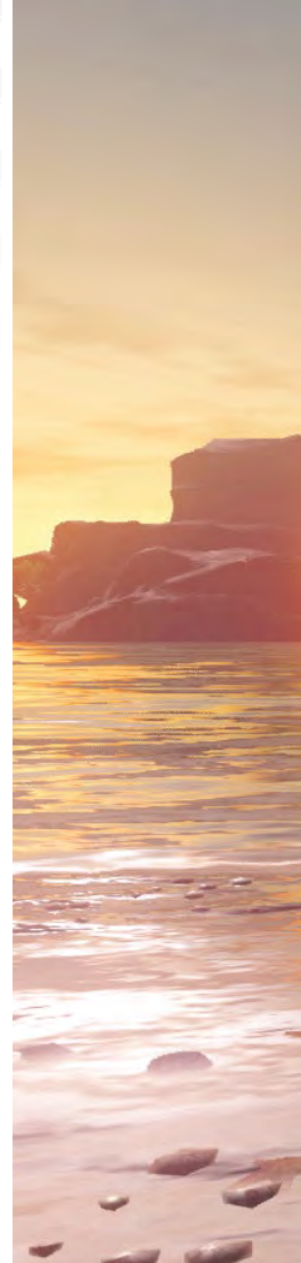
Exploring led us to stumble upon Shrines, mini-dungeons of sorts, which you are free to enter at any time and in any order. Over a hundred of these are scattered across Hyrule. Entering one could reveal unique treasures and items to be used during your adventure, while diving deeper will eventually lead to a mysterious Sheikah monk. A Spirit Orb is the reward for overcoming the Shrine's intricate puzzle rooms, though the use of such a powerful item is still unknown. The usual dungeon-sized trials are out there to be discovered too, though they proved to be far too elusive during our time with the game.

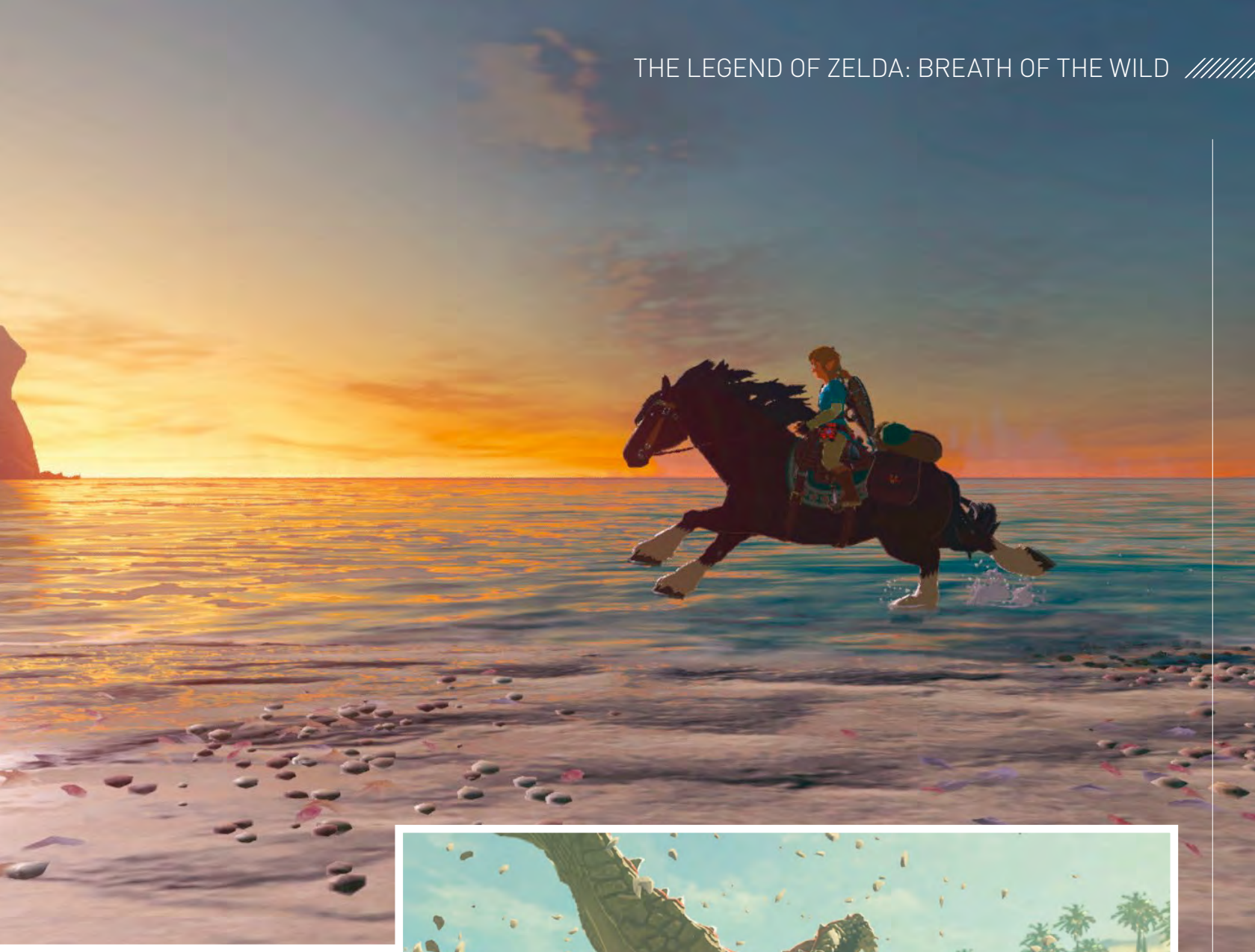
That's not for want of trying, either, but *Breath Of The Wild* has a purposefully open design. Looking at the mountain ranges and fields, corrupted castles and farmers' huts, enemy encampments, and hidden dungeons, it's clear that this game has more in common with 1986's *The Legend Of Zelda*'s design than any of the games that have followed it. While the map highlights a few points of interest, you are

You could stumble onto an enemy encampment at just about any time and it's upon finding one of these outposts that you'll start to push the game, to see what will bend to your will and what will break it – though *spoiler alert* it seems Nintendo has thought of just about everything. You can crouch, utilising stealth to sneak up on targets; enemies' actions change depending on the time of day. You could scale a building and attack from above, pushing Bokoblins into a state of chaos as they struggle to locate you. Or, of course, you can charge straight in with sword held high and alert all the enemies to your presence.

Swing when you're spinning

Link is still able to hack at enemies through a press of the attack button, and holding it down will still enable Link to unleash his signature spinning attack, though combat now has a sharper edge. It doesn't matter what weapon (or shield) you're holding: be it a straight sword, fiery twig or overbearing enemy battle axe, it will deteriorate and eventually break. Your sword could crumble to ash in the middle of a





Combat is familiar, though deteriorating weapons now give it a tactical edge. You'll have to rely on swords and shields you find in the world, stumbling across new ones or stealing them from enemies.



WHERE DOES BREATH OF THE WILD FIT INTO THE TIMELINE?

Which of the three timelines does this adventure slot into?

Fallen Hero

Ganondorf defeats Link at the conclusion of OOT

The Fallen Hero timeline essentially chronicles Hyrule falling further and further into disarray following Link's failure in OOT. We see the Temple Of Time standing in ruin and Calamity Ganon has overtaken Hyrule Castle - a shadowy force to be contained, a threat not unlike the one teased during the fail-state of Link's Adventure.

Nintendo keeps referring back to the original Legend Of Zelda and how it has worked tirelessly to recreate its famous imagery; this version of Hyrule is beautifully barren, an open wasteland not unlike the one found in the first game, while the presence of the Sheikah is telling. Could the Link we see waking from a 100-year slumber be the one we first played as 30 years ago?



Young Link

Link reverts back to his younger self after defeating Ganondorf

There is plenty of evidence that Breath Of The Wild could indeed slot into the timeline after Twilight Princess. At a basic level, the Amiibo support for Twilight Princess' Wolf Link is either dysfunctional fan service or a hint of what's to come, while Nintendo still affirms that returning to the game will prove useful for fans of the lore when

Breath Of The Wild is released. Then there are recognisable locations, such as the Bridge of Eldin to consider - is this the link (ahem!) to the past we we've been searching for? Perhaps, but there are inconsistencies, such as the condition of The Temple of Time. It was in complete ruin by Twilight Princess.

Convergence

Elements from all three timelines can be seen in Breath Of The Wild. That's leading many to consider that this new instalment is a convergence of the parallel universes. There has been a strong insinuation that the Link we are playing as is one we have spent time with in the past, so which one is it? Is this the Hyrule ravaged in the Fallen timeline or the one swallowed by the sea in the Adult variant? Nintendo should probably have left the timeline bickering to the fan theorists; the introduction in 2011's Hyrule Historia has only given the firm more headaches - is this the way it finally clears this (awesome) mess up?

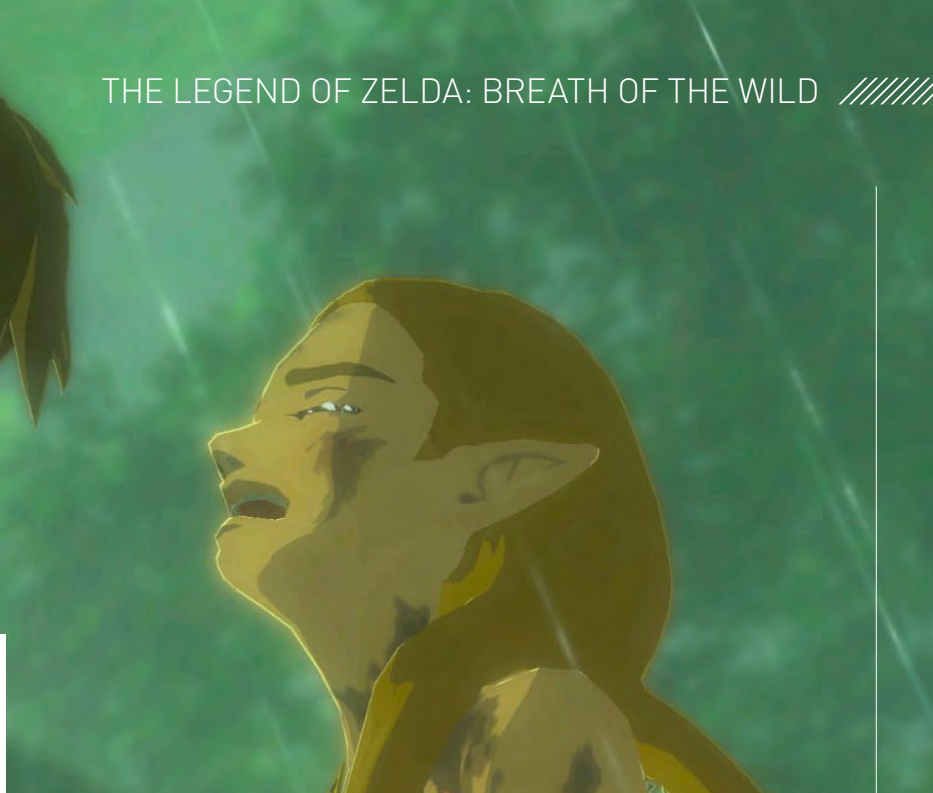


Adult Link
Ganondorf is sealed away following Adult Link's triumph



The placement of Koroks and the discovery of an item called Rock Salt in the mountains, which supposedly originated from an ancient sea receding, makes a strong case for Breath Of The Wild being set in the Adult Link timeline. Could this be the Great Sea from The Wind Waker? Did the evolved Koroks succeed in their plight to rebuild

Hyrule after the sea, as the Deku Tree prophesied, swallowed it? Adult Link disappeared after the OOT events - leaving a new hero to emerge in Wind Waker - could this be the original MIA for 100 years? Then again, Spirit Tracks has the hero searching for a new land to replace Hyrule, which seems to throw this theory into the sea.



battle, or your shield could snap leaving you defenceless, forcing experimentation with split-second accuracy. Do you attempt to quickly equip a backup weapon from your bag by utilising a handy pop-up menu (controlled by the D-pad), or do you make a dash towards the corpse of a fallen enemy and appropriate its weapon? Do you make a swift retreat, using a bow and arrow to snipe at an enemy from afar or attempt to use the environment against them, kicking boulders down from a height to crush everything in its path? Never quite knowing whether you'll have the tools to take on a foe, especially when you come up against some powerful and strange new threats, is genuinely thrilling, as is finding a powerful weapon that makes you a (temporary) force to be reckoned with.

Modern warfare

Much like Breath Of The Wild's open-ended design structure and staggering open world, this approach to combat feels less of a nuisance and more of an awakening; it's made Zelda feel refreshingly modern. For 30 years, Zelda's combat has revolved around a now-iconic structure: at the centre of the experience is Link's trusty sword and shield, beyond that is an array of tools which can double up as weapons that you can collect as you progress through the linear narrative. Of course, Wind Waker toyed with the idea of picking up and utilising enemy weapons back in 2003, but Breath Of The Wild is all in; a dramatic and welcomed change to the dynamic.

Each weapon has its own stats (which are incredibly easy to parse), attack animations and durability. It's different, but fluid in a way we haven't seen demonstrated from the studio in some time. It's as if Nintendo has taken the standard found in every other action-RPG currently on the market and simplified it. It's increased the fun factor without diluting the inherent challenge such systems impose on a game experience. Basically, it's largely impressive stuff.

These changes also apply to the loot and resource systems too. No longer are you able to slash through long grass to find rogue hearts or break pots to find



rupees; now you'll need to spend time foraging and preparing for... well, anything that the game may throw at you.

You are going to need to rely on food that you have found and cooked to keep you going, not only in battle but during exploration too. Fruit can be found and gathered from bushes, while hunting a pack of boar will fill your pouch with uncooked steaks. Enemies will sometimes leave behind other consumables, along with their weapons and armour, that you can gather too. You'll need to find a fire to light a cooking stove, put the ingredients together from the pouch and then sit back and watch through an adorable animation as Link whips it all together.

Not everything will combine to become a tasty dish, though smart assembly of your ingredients will produce hardier meals. Potions and elixirs that have application outside of health regeneration can be created this way. One may boost your speed while others will make you quieter. Some may even bestow a temporary health boost – increasing the amount of hearts you have is perfect prep for a boss battle.

We've even managed to whip up an elixir that provided benefits outside of combat entirely, helping

If you want a real challenge, you can play through Breath Of The Wild as a nearly-naked Link, forgoing the option to wear any armour at all. Saucy!



us to explore further and deadlier parts of Hyrule than we would have been able to with our basic equipment. During Link's time in stasis, nature has reclaimed the world, and that means that the natural elements hold all the power. Venturing into snowy mountains will make you freeze, while heading into heat will also have an adverse affect on your survivability; both noise and temperature factor into how Link reacts (and survives) his surroundings, each monitored by an on-screen gauge. To combat this, certain elixirs will increase your aversion to heat or cold, or you can dress Link up in a wardrobe of different items. That's right, the classic green tunic is gone – or it isn't the standard attire, at least. Take thermal clothing into the snow, you'll stay warmer for longer or – if you are happy to risk putting your weapon away – strike a twig against an open flame and you'll be able to turn it into a torch.

If you can't stand the heat...

Of all of the core changes to the Zelda formula being made in Breath Of The Wild, cooking was perhaps the one that worried us the most. It's an abrupt upgrade, changing a principle of play that we have grown accustomed to over 30 years. But just like the alterations made to combat, it only helps immerse you deeper into the adventure. The system is far simpler and faster than it looks or sounds – think of it as a streamlined version of Monster Hunter's preparation system. You need to prepare all of the items that you think you'll need to tackle a situation and just go for it. If it turns out you've forgotten something, well, you'll have to find a solution on the fly or die trying. Breath Of The Wild starts you off with literally nothing – in shorts, no less – and then leaves you to survive; the survival theme permeates through every new mechanic in the game.

“BREATH OF THE WILD STARTS YOU OFF WITH LITERALLY NOTHING – IN SHORTS, NO LESS – AND THEN LEAVES YOU TO SURVIVE.”



LINK'S 30-SECOND MEALS

Cooking is an integral part of Breath Of The Wild. Putting ingredients over an open flame or (preferably) a stove will provide you with game-altering elixirs and hearty foods to get you back in the fight. The game doesn't expressly tell you what food combinations will and won't work, but we managed to discover a few Hylian ingredients that complement each other nicely.

Meat & Mushroom Skewer

1 x Steak

1 x Hylian Shroom

Restores three red hearts, perfect for a jolt of health when you need it most.

Hearty Steamed Meat

1 x Steak

2 x Hearty Truffles

2 x Hearty Radishes

Full health recovery and eight bonus yellow hearts, ideal for those occasions where you're facing a tough boss.

Hasty Elixir

1 x Bokoblin Fang

1 x Frog

Found yourself lost on a mountain with no way down? This elixir speeds up Link's movement speed for two minutes and 40 seconds, perfect for a quick clamber.

Spicy Elixir

1 x Bokoblin Horn

1 x Sizzlewing Butterfly

In the cold without a jumper? This warms your body from its core for little over three minutes.





the environment, and it gives you the chance to kill enemies in inventive ways.

There's another Rune called Stasis, which lets Link lock certain objects in time for a short period. It's perfect for overcoming certain puzzles, though it can even be used as a way to gain momentum; freeze an object, whack it with a weapon and watch as the object breaks free of its stasis and unleashes a huge wave of built-up kinetic energy. There's a Rune that lets you summon Amiibos into the world, such as Twilight Princess' Wolf Link (the timeline is in tatters) and, finally, there's a Rune called Cryonis that replaces the Ice Arrows of old, giving Link the ability to create pillars of ice from water to help create platforms and lift up certain objects. Runes are clearly going to have a huge impact on Breath Of The Wild, though we still don't know how many of them are waiting to be found – they are treasures to be earned from those Shrines we mentioned earlier.

Breath of fresh air

Ultimately, Breath Of The Wild feels like a huge transformation for The Legend Of Zelda. Much of what we played and saw during our time with the game was hugely innovative for the series, even if many of the concepts are incredibly common in other action-RPGs. The influence of Skyrim, The Witcher III, Monster Hunter and, yes, even Dark Souls to an extent, is clearly felt, in both its open world and with Link himself being more adept and customisable. Then again, the influence the original The Legend Of Zelda had on the aforementioned games is pretty clear. This is a Nintendo we haven't seen for a long time, drawing inspiration from standardised practices in the industry and streamlining them to create its own masterpiece.

Sure, Breath Of The Wild looks beautiful, but it's the way in which the game ties so many ideas together that it truly shines. From its emergent world design to its intuitive exploration systems, Zelda feels fresh and innovative in a way that it hasn't for years. The combat and AI is built to be reactive, always forcing you to be aware of your surroundings and opportunities, and suddenly Zelda feels peerless. Breath Of The Wild has the potential to be the Zelda game many have been waiting 30 years for, where you are free to go in any direction and to any dungeon from the outset, just to see what happens. Where you are free to forge your own adventure and improve your play experience by learning from your mistakes. Imagine how The Legend Of Zelda must have looked and played on the NES back in 1986 – impossibly reactive, fresh and innovative. Breath Of The Wild is all of these things. It's a new dawn for Link, his most important awakening yet; the Hero Of Time is back in action, just when Nintendo needed him most. ■



Speaking of themes, Legend of Zelda games have traditionally been named after a central object or character – Majora's Mask, Wind Waker, Ocarina Of Time... we're sure you get the gist of it. But Breath Of The Wild has been named to pull focus onto the world itself, which means it can be all too easy to overlook the biggest new addition of them all: the Sheikah Slate. Multiple items and abilities are tied to this new mysterious tablet gadget, which also happens to replace a number of classic Zelda items.

The Slate has basic applications – the telescope of the past has been replaced with its scope, for example, allowing you to tag enemies and mark points of interest on the map. But the Sheikah Slate can also be imbued with Runes (we know of six so far), and this is where it gets interesting. Gone is the bomb bag, as the Slate can summon two types of explosives (a Round and a Square Bomb) into the world on a whim after you've acquired the appropriate Rune. Each of these bombs operates with a short cool down and is triggered remotely. There's a Rune for Magnesis, which allows you to pick up and manipulate metallic objects. Better still, when you move objects with Magnesis they abide by the laws of physics; it's a very entertaining way to play with

It's actually possible to skip over most of the story, if you want to. Should you know where to head, you can take a direct shot at the final boss from the start of the game, though you'll be woefully undergeared and underprepared.

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SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY

If Nintendo gets it right, Odyssey
could be Sunshine meets Galaxy

Developer Nintendo Publisher Nintendo Release Q4 2017

They say 30 is the new 20. They also say 40 is the new 30, and 50 is the new 40, and perhaps we should be concerned about whether or not these people understand numbers, but the point is this: if you think you're confident and put together at 20, just wait a decade and you'll be surprised at how wrong you were.

Mario, the plumber who's never actually plumbed in his entire career, is 32 this year, and despite looking every bit his age, he's currently experiencing that '30 is the new 20' renaissance (just don't call it a quarter-life crisis, okay). After a difficult few years as a teenager, during which the somewhat contentious Super Mario Sunshine came out, Mario hit his stride in his early 20s with Super Mario Galaxy, a game that stunned us all with its intelligent and inventive level design. It was the Mario game we'd all been waiting for: a Super Mario Bros for the new age. It's also been ten years, ten whole years, since Super Mario Galaxy came out – and, let's be honest, Mario has lost his way since then.

Super Mario 3D World is fine. It's a party game. It's fine. Super Mario Maker is great, but that's mostly down to the imagination of the community making the levels. And smartphone game Super Mario Run? Meh. So when Super Mario Odyssey was announced during the Nintendo Switch preview event, people were understandably sceptical. Will this game usher in the second Mario renaissance we've been waiting for, or be another relative disappointment for our rotund friend?

Super Mario Real World

Well, we won't know more fully until this winter, when the game is due to release – barring any delays between now and then. But from what we've seen already, it looks like it's going to be a modern update of Super Mario 64, but instead of a castle hub world and magical paintings that hide new levels behind them, it'll be a bit more like Skyward Sword meets Super Mario Galaxy, as you fly between levels in an airship.

We know a fair bit about the hub world, and not all of it is good. For starters, it takes place in a real city (not a real city,



because New Donk City is not a place that has ever existed) which raises a lot of interesting and slightly philosophical questions. The city is populated by humans, actual humans, who are twice the height of Mario and much more well-proportioned. Is Mario human? What do the other people think of this cartoonish, chubby Italian man running around their city? Can Mario get run over by the taxis? What happens if he jumps off the top of a building? We can only predict that many, if not all of these questions will be answered by vigilant YouTubers, because Mario's arrival in the real, human world makes for one hell of a good meme.

In the trailers, we can see Mario climbing lampposts and traffic lights, vaulting off skyscrapers and bouncing off cars. Though this is only a hub world, it's not too hard to imagine that there will be things going on here, too –





HAT-TASTIC

We've only seen one of Mario's hats in the trailers, which serves as a bouncing platform and Frisbee. But what other hats could we see? A hat that makes Mario fly, like in *Super Mario 64*? Or a hat that turns him into a wall-climbing cat, like in *3D World*? There will definitely be new abilities in this game - so what about a hat that makes Mario look like all the regular humans in New Donk City, allowing him to live out a peaceful human life like a normal guy? Meet a girl who doesn't keep getting kidnapped, raise some kids, rent an apartment you can't afford and work as a genuine plumber. That's the dream!



there's a bit where Mario plays with a skipping rope with some random faceless women, which is certainly interesting, though it's not entirely clear if that's an actual useful thing to do in the game or not. Will the city area be like a Mario version of *Assassin's Creed*, where you're constantly trying to figure out how to climb up to the next area, or will it be more like *Lego Marvel Superheroes*, which is set in New York City, and only lets you climb certain buildings?

Of course, the hub world leads to other exciting and incredibly weird levels, in traditional Super Mario style. The billboards and signs around New Donk City hint at the places you'll go. There's Kogwald, a factory-like place with dark colouring that's reminiscent of Banjo-Kazooie's Rusty Bucket Bay and Clanker's Cavern; there's a really lovely-looking, neon-pastel world that's filled with

anthropomorphic food; and a bright Dia de los Muertos-style desert town that looks like something out of a Western. Those might not be all the worlds, but they're certainly a good start - even if the colour palettes are a little jarring when compared directly to each other.

But what's the actual plot of this game? Though you can assume the usual (Peach gets kidnapped, Bowser has a dastardly plan, several minions have to be defeated before you can get to the big boss himself) it's a little different this time round. Firstly, Bowser is forcibly marrying Peach, which is really





quite creepy. Yes, kidnapping is creepy enough, but there's something unpleasantly non-consensual about the whole marriage thing that, eh, is maybe best left in the 1900s. This is 2017, after all – can we not have a plot in which people don't want to marry Peach? It doesn't even make that much sense. Marriage is a social construct, which doesn't change the fact that she

The urban setting of *Odyssey* appears to have a bunch of fun references to Mario's first appearance as Jumpman in *Donkey Kong*, such as all the girders and construction gear you'll see around.

“Bowser stomps on Mario's iconic red cap, apparently rendering it useless... but in exchange Mario gets a new hat – one that's alive.”

doesn't like you, dude. She'll just run away again. You don't own her. Anyway.

Another new part of the plot is the subtraction and addition of a hat. Bowser rather unkindly stomps on Mario's iconic red cap, apparently rendering it useless as a hat, but in exchange, Mario gets a new hat – one that's alive. This is the second time in this preview

that a Rare game will be mentioned, which makes the Rare comparison seem like it might even be on purpose, especially given the upcoming *Yooka-Laylee* (see p60), but the hat looks like something out of *Banjo-Kazooie*. It's even got those trademark Rare googly eyes, which is fine, but considering that *Banjo-Kazooie* came out nearly 20 years ago, it's a weird nostalgia piece.

Either way, this cap seems to be an evolution of the hat mechanics in *Super Mario 64*. As a plain old hat, it'll give you something to jump on, and seemingly functions as a frisbee, maybe for attacks? It also seems like you'll be able to upgrade the hat or buy new versions of it, as there are weird purple tokens in each level that – and we're maybe speculating too much here – could be used to purchase hats, since that seems to be a big part of this game. There are billboards for a hat shop, 'Crazy Cap' in New Donk City, and later in the trailer Mario is seen going into one of them. Maybe those hats will then unlock new areas or abilities? Who knows.





The strange thing is that we don't actually see in any of the trailers what the actual game is. Sure, we see Mario jumping around, collecting mysterious purple tokens and doing other things like jump rope and dancing to a beatbox, but none of those things are the actual game. What will we be collecting? How will we be beating Bowser?

It's a safe guess to assume that there will be some kind of system similar to Stars or Shine Sprites at the end of each level, probably in a similar way to Super Mario Sunshine, which had Shine Sprites as rewards for cleaning up, winning races, beating mini-bosses and various other quests. It looks like there will be bosses, too – some menacing-looking rabbits turn up halfway through the trailer, and Mario is seen fighting one a few seconds later. There's also a mad caterpillar thing that

climbs up a skyscraper, King Kong-style, presumably to fight Mario as well. There's also a very short section where Mario chases a small pink rabbit with a turnip – there were rabbit chases in Super Mario 64, but they were frustrating, so a return to those wouldn't exactly be the most exciting thing.

Epic mystery

But, still, it would have been nice to know what needs doing in this new Mario world. Just an idea of a central mechanic – Super Mario 64 explored the platforming genre in 3D for the first time, Sunshine focused on graffiti-cleaning and Super Mario Galaxy had self-contained levels that you had to perfect as well as complete. Odyssey looks fun to explore, but whether or not it has substance is unclear. The other great Super

The common theme of hats is a striking one with Mario's new sentient headgear and Bowser's snazzy top hat, but Mario also appears to fly around in a hat house to get from one stage to another. How TARDIS-like is that titfer inside?

Mario games had something unique about them, whether that was location, mechanics or pitch-perfect level design. Putting eyes on a hat is not enough if you won't show us what that means.

Super Mario Odyssey may represent the more stable years of the Super Mario franchise, and here's hoping it does. There's not much to go on – that hat likely plays a big part in what makes Odyssey unique, but we won't know more for a while – but this could be a return to a more complicated Mario after years of resisting that direction. A Mario world that's full of things to do, secrets to find, and, uh, stuff to jump on, rather than the Super Mario 3D World approach of keeping things simple, limited and obvious. Odyssey could be the game Sunshine might have been if it were more confident, and that would be truly special. ■

SKYLANDERS IMAGINATORS

Make your own hero

As Skylanders slowly conquered the world, gamers have come to know its heroes as their very own. There's Spyro, the purple dragon who moved away from his own series of videogames to kickstart the Skylanders adventures. There's Washbuckler, the bubble-shooting octopus who acts as a pirate. There's Stink Bomb, who uses his own smell to hide himself and launch sneaky stealth attacks on enemies. But now Skylanders Imaginators is letting you do something the series has never allowed before – you can create your own hero.

When creating these Imaginators, you have full control over every aspect of the character. You can choose their battle class (knight, swashbuckler, brawler, etc) and elemental class (earth, water, fire, and so on). Then you choose their names, voices,

Developer
Toys For Bob
Publisher
Activision
Release March

“Skylanders is letting you do something the series has never allowed before – you can create your own hero.”

appearances, colours, size, and powers. Or you could be lazy and have the game create a random Imaginator for you. There are hundreds of bits and pieces to create your Imaginator from but once you've assembled your warrior, you can replace its parts with any new ones you find during the game. These are split into Common, Rare, Epic, and

Ultimate categories, the ideal goal being that you create an all-powerful, all-conquering Imaginator made with Ultimate parts and show it off online to your friends. Called Poop Lord. Or Bantersaurus Rex. It's entirely up to you.

It adds a new dimension to Imaginators, as finding parts becomes the main incentive to play. As a nice added touch, you can even take a selfie of your Imaginator at certain points in the game. But whether you use an Imaginator or one of the classic Skylander heroes, the Skylanders gameplay is the same mixture of solving puzzles, platforming, and fighting that it's always been. The levels have been spiced up with lots of cool gimmicks, such as 2D platforming sections or rail-grinding. The variety keeps it interesting, as you bounce between different gameplay styles throughout.

One nice extra is the return of former PlayStation hero Crash

Bandicoot, who even has his own Thumpa Wumpa Islands level. The venerable orange marsupial is up against his old rival Dr Neo Cortex, and to make sure he fits in properly with the Skylanders series, the developers changed the life mechanic and even gave him a spin attack. So it's just as he used to be! Except with much better graphics.

There is some bad news, however. Skylanders Imaginators on Switch won't support traps or vehicles, both of which were prominent parts of previous games Skylanders SuperChargers and Skylanders Trap Team. On the plus side, Skylanders Imaginators does offer something the other versions don't have – a digital library of more than 300 toys taken from the series. What's more, you can store them directly on your Switch. If you can handle the pain of not seeing the actual figures standing on your shelf, it's a perfectly feasible solution to the problem. ■





The developers added tribal markings to Chopscotch, so she didn't look too cute and had an air of menace about her.

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A large, close-up, 3D-rendered face of Mario, the iconic Nintendo character. He has a large orange nose, thick black mustache, and wide blue eyes with black pupils. He is smiling, showing his red tongue. He is wearing his signature red cap and a blue collared shirt. The background is white.

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SPLATOON 2

Can the all-ages shooter stay fresh the second time out?

Developer

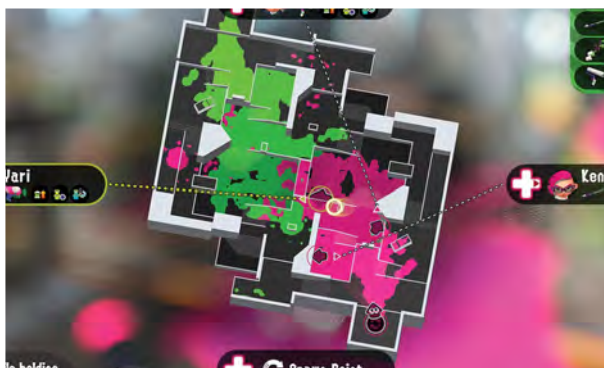
Nintendo

Publisher

Nintendo

Release

Summer 2017



As one of the few highlights of Wii U's brief shelf life, Splatoon was an unexpected success that stood out from Nintendo's other first-party offerings. Not only did it utilise a brand new IP to successfully put a family-friendly spin on the competitive shooter, but it was a predominantly online-focused game from a company not traditionally known for making them, and it sold an impressive 4.5 million copies as a result.

Splatoon 2 can't be the surprise hit that its predecessor was, but everything we've seen so far suggests that the game will offer plenty of worthwhile upgrades over the original experience.

The core gameplay mode of Splatoon 2 remains the Turf War, a four-on-four battle in which teams compete to cover the surface of the stage with their colour ink. All of the weapons from the first game return, including the Splatling and Slobber types introduced in the long-term DLC support. We've also only seen one new type of weapon so far (see the 'Splat

Dualies' for more on that). Special moves are all brand-new, and we've seen a few fun ones so far – the Tenta-Missiles that snake through the air before splatting their target with an enormous amount of ink, and the String Ray, a narrow long-distance blast that is powerful enough to pierce walls. Nintendo has revealed new sub-weapons, and there are brand-new stages to wage warfare in, but we're not entirely sure how many of each are included yet.

Moving away from the Wii U gamepad hasn't done any harm to the game, for the most part – gyroscopic aiming remains responsive whether you're using the Switch itself or the Pro Controller. However, losing the permanent presence of the touchscreen map is a tad disappointing. While you can still bring it up and 'super jump' to assist teammates at the touch of a button, it's never quite as seamless as it was on Wii U, where a quick glance between thumbs could tell you the next area in need of your colours without any substantial interruption to the fun.

SPLAT DUALIES

The only new weapon on show during our time with Splatoon 2 was the intriguing Splat Dualies – a pair of low-damage, high-speed handguns that do the most damage when your target is centred and thus in range of both your targeting reticules. While using these, your Inklings character gains the secondary ability of an evasive combat roll, which can be used twice in succession. However, the most spectacular ability of the Splat Dualies is the special weapon mode, the Inkjet – your Inklings fires both guns straight at the floor with sufficient speed to lift itself into the air, covering the ground below with ink and doing major damage to anyone foolish enough to wander beneath you.



Despite the fact that Switch has a bit more graphical grunt than Wii U, Splatoon 2 doesn't show much evidence of this – in fact, it looks near-identical to the original game both in stills and in motion.



Improvements beyond that are largely structural. One of the most surprising decisions with the original game was the lack of communication options; this has been rectified with Splatoon 2, which will offer voice chat via the smart device app that Nintendo has placed at the centre of its online offering. Also welcome is the increased focus on offline multiplayer – while the original game only offered one-on-one Battle Dojo matches, Splatoon 2 allows for full eight-player Turf War matches over a local wireless network. The simple presence of voice chat and local multiplayer

will go a long way to making this worthwhile for hardcore fans of the original.

What's more, Nintendo is promising that Splatoon 2 will receive substantial post-launch DLC support, just like the first game received ongoing updates with extra stages and weapons, so the game that exists on day one is unlikely to resemble the one we're playing after six months.

While existing fans are likely to love it and the players who missed Wii U will have no reason not to, our concerns with Splatoon 2 are mostly centred on those who enjoyed the Wii U version for a

while before moving on, as we're unsure how far it can differentiate itself from the original game. Right now, it feels largely like an expansion pack for the original, offering a very similar experience with a variety of added bonus elements – but in part that's because we don't know what the final balance will be between new content and returning content, not to mention any additions to the first game's short-but-sweet single-player content. If Nintendo does prove able to keep things sufficiently fresh, Splatoon 2 is likely to be one of the first great Switch exclusives. ■

Remember Dr Robotnik at the end of Green Hill Zone? This is the revamped version of that classic boss encounter.



SONIC MANIA

Gotta go fast...

Sonic is going back to his roots!" are words every Sonic fan has come to dread. This phrase is usually wheeled out by Sega before it foists another half-hearted outing starring the blue hedgehog onto the world, usually one that completely ignores his roots. In recent times we've had Sonic Boom: Fire & Ice (glitchy mess), Sonic Unleashed (Sonic turns into a werhog), and Sega Superstars Tennis (well... it's tennis). But Sonic Mania does actually seem to be recapturing what made Sega's mascot famous.

Play through Green Hill Zone, the classic opening level of Sonic The Hedgehog, and it hits the right notes of nostalgia. You run

Developer Sega

Publisher Sega

Release 2017

forward, see the first ring box, bounce on the first mechanical crab, run across the bridge where piranhas snap at your heels, race through the loop-the-loop, and roll into speed tunnels. This isn't just a simple retread of one of gaming's most famous levels, though. Sonic has his brand-new Drop Dash move, where he can come out of a jump into a spindash. He also has items that were introduced in later games,

"It feels fresher and faster, without losing any of the gameplay that made Sonic a classic to begin with."

such as the electricity shield from Sonic 3. Most of all, Sonic has his sidekick Tails with him, a foxy chap who can carry him across gaps and help attack enemies.

The level has also been tweaked slightly, with ramps in new places and floating platforms bridging gaps, so it's not *quite* being a replica of the original's blueprint. It feels fresher and faster, without

losing any of the gameplay that made Sonic a classic to begin with. Remember the boss at the end of Green Hill Zone, Dr Robotnik swinging a deadly ball and chain to and fro? That challenge has also returned in tweaked form, with two giant spiky Robotnik

heads attacking Sonic and Tails in a similar manner. If this seems like a lot of talk about Green Hill Zone, it's because Sega's gentle reworking of a classic level is symbolic of the Sonic Mania project overall.

There are new levels as well. Studiopolis Zone is one such example. Set in a high skyscraper at night, it looks and plays like a cross between Chemical Plant Zone and Casino Night Zone, both from Sonic 2. The neon lights, the quick changes of speed, the clever gimmicks sprinkled in throughout the level – it's a world away from the straightforward blitz through Green Hill Zone. But even though it's an entirely different level, it still feels and plays like classic Sonic. Another new zone, Mirage Saloon, goes even further. Themed after the wild west, it has a pistol that fires Sonic into new areas, piano keys to bounce on, and indoor saloons. Again, through all this, it keeps the traditional Sonic gameplay – fast, simple, instinctive, fun.

That's the key. Sega knows what makes Sonic work but rather than adding to the classic platforming gameplay and causing the framework to buckle, it's working within it. Nothing here drastically moves Sonic away from what made the original games great to begin with. Sonic Mania is like a whirlwind visit through the hurrying hedgehog's greatest hits, refreshing classic levels from years gone by while using that same design philosophy to create new ones. It's no wonder Sonic fans are excited. For the first time since the series began, Sega might actually be keeping its promises and taking Sonic back to his roots... ■



1-2-SWITCH

Cracking safes, milking cows, and eating lunch

Competitive milking is the unlikely star of this motion-controlled game compilation because, well, when was the last time you milked a cow in a game – or in real life, in fact? Exactly. Milk is, we are supremely unqualified to tell you, eerily close to the actual process.

You grip one Joy-Con upright like a teat and jiggle it rhythmically, pressing and releasing the SL and SR buttons to squeeze out that precious white gold. Your Joy-Con vibrates with each tug, and the sound of sloshing fluid accompanies successful extractions. Whoever fills the most cups with liquid calcium by the time the bell rings is the winner. It's slight, if strangely satisfying, and a much easier way to break the ice at parties than leading an actual cow into your flat.

Developer

Nintendo

Publisher

Nintendo

Release 3 March



All the joy of eating a sandwich, apart from little things like flavour and nutrition.

Another favourite from our hands-on is Ball Counting, in which you tilt the Joy-Con to work out how many virtual balls are inside. It's the best example of the Switch's HD rumble – so clear that you're sure you can hear each ball rolling around. Another great rumble demonstration is Safe Crack: rotate the Joy-Con like a safe's dial until you feel tiny mechanical tremors, then hold it in place to unlock the door.

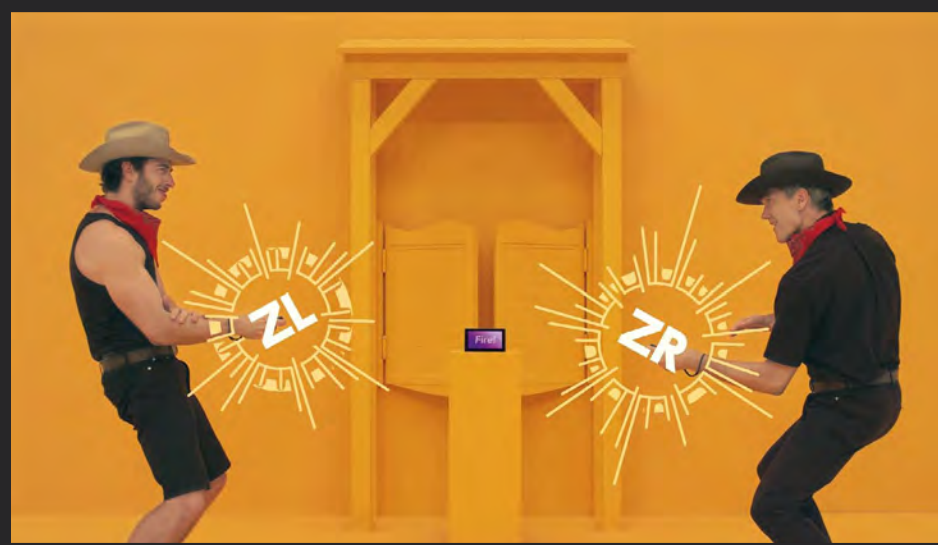
Smooth moves

Then there are Quick Draw and Samurai Training. In the former you face a partner with Joy-Con lowered and lift it when you hear the prompt; in the latter you basically play schoolyard slapsies – one person slashes their Joy-Con down and the other quickly clasps both hands around theirs in a bid to 'catch' the blade. You

don't even need to look at the TV for the most part with games like these, as sound and haptic feedback from the Joy-Con give all the info you need. A table tennis game, for instance, is playable entirely by listening to the ball whistling through the air.

1-2-Switch is a system showcase in the vein of Wii Sports and Nintendo Land, and the test will be how many microgames (you couldn't call these minigames) it contains. Nintendo has revealed sandwich eating, plate spinning, shaving, yoga, pose holding, and more, although we doubt anything will beat the experience of competitive milking. ■





You don't *have* to dress up as a farmer to play Milk, but Nintendo strongly advises it.



MARIO KART 8 DELUXE

Wii U's number one bestseller revs up its engines ready to make the Switch

One of the big problems with the Wii U's poor sales has been that many of its best games ended up reaching a smaller audience than usual. Mario Kart 8 is a perfect example: although it sold, fittingly, eight million copies worldwide, it's still a fraction of the 37 million that Mario Kart Wii shifted.

That's a shame, because Mario Kart 8 is arguably the best entry in the series. But thankfully it's now coming to Switch, meaning that those Sad Goombas who missed out on the fun the first time around will get another chance to take it for a spin.

Luxe interior

Although a straight port of the Wii U game would have been good enough for us – especially considering it already runs

Developer
Nintendo
Publisher
Nintendo
ETA 28 April

flawlessly in the Switch's handheld mode – this 'Deluxe' version actually adds a few new features, most notable of which is the return of a proper battle mode. Mario Kart 8 already has a battle mode, but it's a rubbish one which uses the game's normal tracks instead of special battle-only arenas. This time Nintendo's seen the error of its ways and

“Nintendo's added four custom levels to host the two battle modes: Balloon Battle and Bob-omb Blast.”

added four custom levels to host the two battle modes: Balloon Battle and Bob-omb Blast.

To keep things interesting for anyone who owns the Wii U game,

a bunch of new characters has been added to the already hefty roster. Dry Bones, Bowser Jr, and King Boo return from previous Mario Kart games, and Splatoon's Inklings make their karting debuts (along with their own battle arena). The fact that Nintendo has also included all the DLC from the Wii U game – 16 extra tracks and seven characters, including Link and the Animal Crossing villagers – means that this is now the biggest Mario Kart game ever.

Let's be honest, most of us would rather have a brand-new Mario Kart game than a port of one released three years ago. But these things take time, and having the best Mario Kart so far, on a console we can play on the move, will probably keep us happy for now – especially if Nintendo can build a strong new online community around it. **GM**



The Feather and Boo items from the original Super Mario Kart on the SNES make their return in battle mode.



SUPER BOMBERMAN R

A blast from the past makes an unexpected comeback

There was a time back in the day when Bomberman was considered the king of multiplayer gaming.

Don't believe us? Back in the last century, Bomberman '93 on the TurboGrafx-16 was a multiplayer must-have – just the thing when you had a bunch of pals over.

Over the years, though, Bomberman's star has faded, and these days the series only sees the light of day in an occasional digital release. It's safe to say that Bomberman hasn't been doing too well for himself. What he

Developer

Konami

Publisher Konami

Release 3 March

across a variety of arenas and using different gimmicks to blow one another to smithereens.

As you'd expect, there's a lot of fun to be had here, but there's also a major issue: you can only really play multiplayer on a TV. We tried a two-player match using the Switch's 'tabletop' mode (where you prop it up with the kickstand) and it was nearly impossible to play properly because the characters are simply too small. Both of us were squinting and trying to get as close to the Switch as possible to see what was going on, and that was with just two people: with eight of us it would have been a complete shambles.

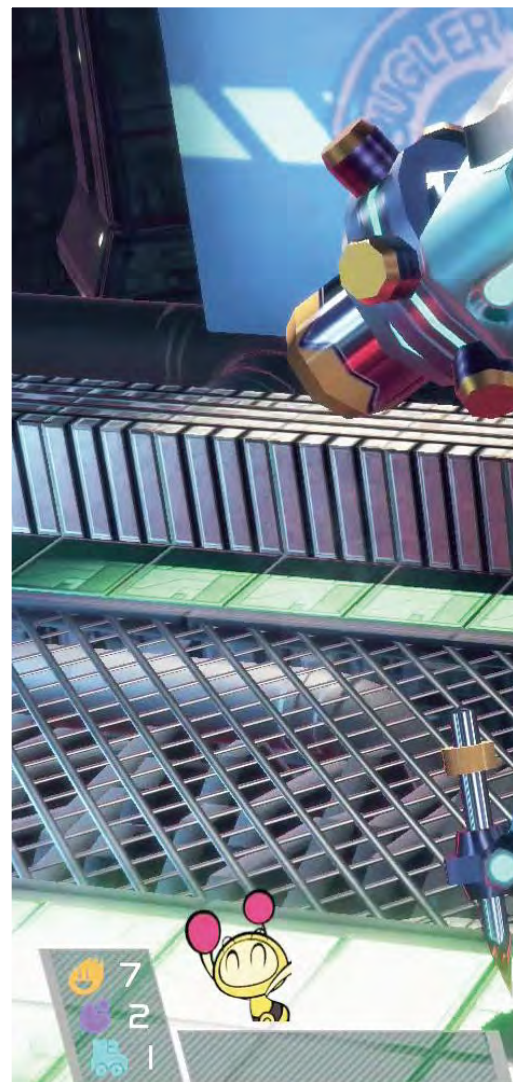
Will it bother people that multiplayer Bomberman isn't really making the most of Switch's portability? If it doesn't, this has the potential to be a return to form for the flatlining series, and the addition of a 50-stage solo campaign makes sure we can still have a blast, even without our mates. ■

“Battle mode is the star attraction, with every player dumped into an arena and armed with unlimited bombs.”

needs is a new home – if only there were a console that came with multiplayer support straight out of the box...

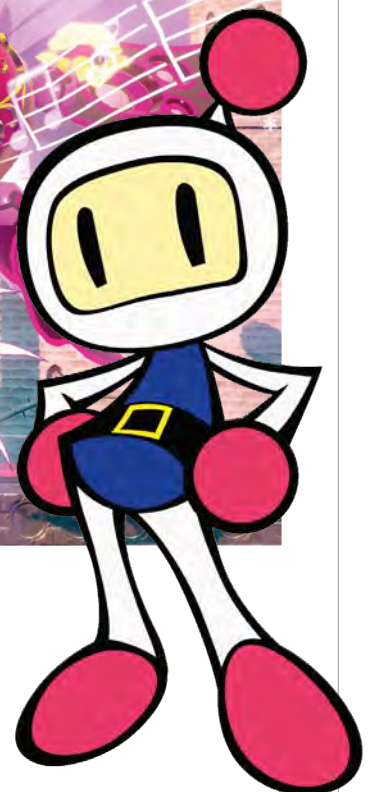
Fighting fire with fire

Konami has decided the Switch is the place to resurrect Bomberman, and it's made the right call on where to focus the action. As in the previous releases, R's battle mode is the star attraction, with every player dumped into a square arena and armed with an unlimited supply of bombs. The aim, as always, is simple: to blow holes in the walls so you can reach your opponents, then try to force them into the path of your explosions, picking them off until a sole survivor remains. Up to eight players can take part this time, fighting





Dinky, square arenas lead to frantic multiplayer fun. This is set to be a couchplay classic.



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PUYO PUYO TETRIS

Building walls – the perfect way to make friends

Drake and Josh. Knife and fork. Gravity and idiots. There have been many great pairings throughout history, but this remaster of the 2014 Japan-only mashup might well stack up to be the best. On one side of the screen: Puyo Puyo (which you might know under its original UK release name, Puyo Pop). On the other: Tetris. Whoever scores the most points in their game wins.

Up to four players can join in, and several game modes vary the action. Fusion drops tetrominos into your puyo field and vice versa

Developer Sonic Team

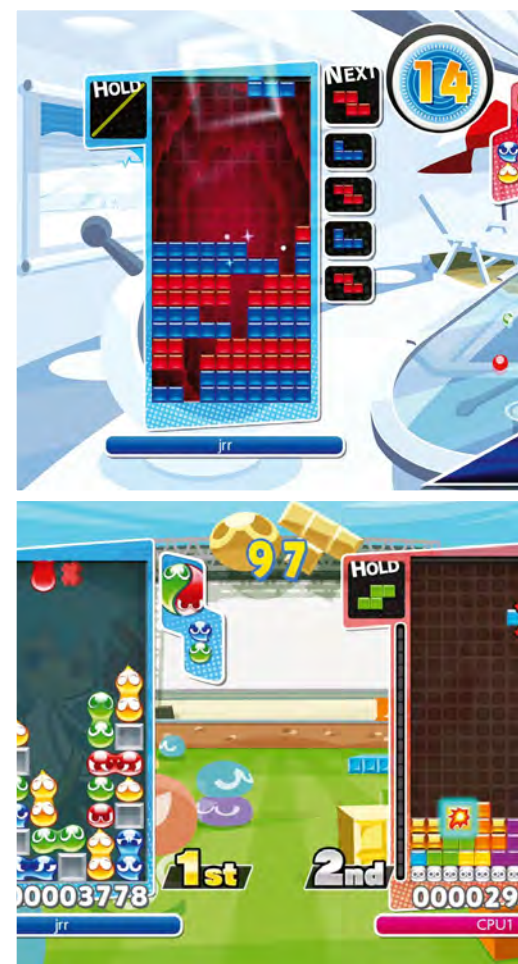
Publisher Sega

Release Spring

to allow for mixed chains; Swap switches the gametypes after a set length of time; Solo Arcade contains matches and endurance against the CPU; and Sprint tasks you with clearing a certain number of lines from your game within a time limit.

Opposites attract

As in the best combinations, the subtle differences between Puyo Puyo and Tetris complement one another. The former is chaotic, like scooping water from a sinking boat, the latter's ordered, like demolishing a block of flats with a hammer and chisel. It's a killer combo, with Switch-only additions including online support, new characters, new skins for puyos and tetrominos, and fresh backgrounds. ■

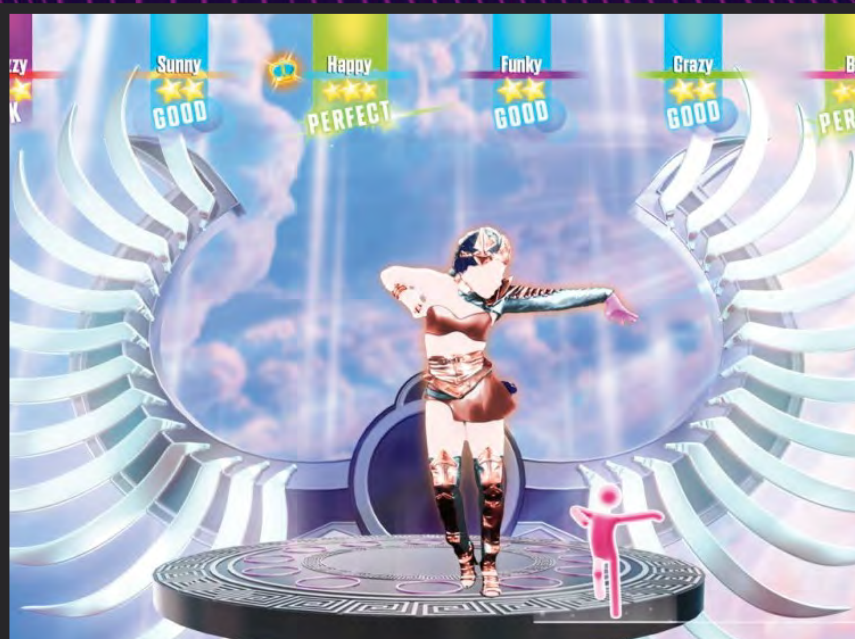


A worlds-colliding story sees Amitie and co team up to solve the case of the falling tetrominos.

“On one side of the screen: Puyo Puyo. On the other: Tetris. Whoever scores the most points in their game wins.”



The dance moves are appropriate for the style and tempo of each song, so Justin Bieber dances are different to Maroon 5, for example.



JUST DANCE 2017

Kick off your shoes and dance

Just Dance 2017 is a game that needs no introduction. Not just because the last outing, Just Dance 2016, sold roughly 87 million copies (possible exaggeration). No, it's because the series is called Just Dance. That's what you do in the game. *Dance*. In the same way that Mario could be called Just Jump or Street Fighter could be called Just Fight, there's nothing complicated about what you have to do in Just Dance. You... well, you just dance.

More to the point, you have to copy the dance moves on the screen. A small boogieing silhouette in the corner indicates what the exact move is, and you

Developer Ubisoft Paris
Publisher Ubisoft
Release Launch

have to pull that move off – in time, as accurately as you can. You have to shuffle around, flail your arms, spin around, punch the air, and do all sorts of moves that expose a near-criminal lack of rhythm and co-ordination. However, Just Dance 2017 is lenient with its scoring, so you won't feel bad about it. In fact, it'll just push you to do even better next time, with a score at the end of each song letting you track your performance.

You don't need to buy any fancy peripherals to play Just Dance. You don't even need an extra Joy-

momentary lapse into marketing speak. Just Dance 2017 packs a truckload of songs (and yes, 'truckload' is an officially recognised unit of measurement). Examples of songs included with the game are "Can't Feel My Face" by The Weeknd, "Don't Wanna Know" by Maroon 5 and "Sorry" by Justin Bieber. If you're particularly sharp, you'll have noticed 'songs included with the game' is an odd turn of phrase, and that's because you also get a free three-month subscription to Just Dance Unlimited. This music service adds over 200 tracks, including 'How Deep Is Your Love' by Calvin Harris. New songs are added to the service all the time – hence the name Just Dance Unlimited. Ubisoft definitely got the art of naming things spot on here, didn't it?

Switch yourself fit

Because Just Dance has been around for a while, Switch owners will benefit from the developer having had time to add all sorts of new bells and whistles to the series over the years. You can create 'Sweat' playlists so you can get fit while you dance, as the game tracks your time spent dancing and total calories burnt.

Or you can get serious about your art. You can take on other dancers around the world via the online World Dance Floor mode, or even collaborate and form a dance crew. There are tournaments you can take part in and special prizes for the winner. Whether you've got the moves like Jagger or you're a budding Bieber, Just Dance 2017 gives you all the tools you need to turn your living room into a dancefloor. ■

"Six of you can dance at the same time to the same song without having to shell out any extra money."

Con. Thanks to voodoo magic cast by the technological sorcerers who work at Ubisoft, you can use your phone to play. You download an app and it somehow, somehow, knows what your dance moves are. It means six of you can dance at the same time to the same song without having to shell out any extra money. You can take pictures of the six of you in action, slap some fun filters on the result and share them on Facebook and Twitter to be praised/mockd depending on your dancing skills. And if you really want to show off to the world, you can submit your dancing videos to Ubisoft, which features the best efforts in a Community Remix video every two months for all players to see.

There's no way to make a list of songs exciting, so pardon the



ARMS

The most surprising
fighting game
of the year
launches this
spring







Ten years since Wii's arrival, Nintendo has proved that motion controls and depth needn't be mutually exclusive. It turns out the answer was staring – okay, smacking – us in the face all along: the fighting game is where austerity means strategy, where a sparse selection of inputs is able, in the right hands, to give rise to spectacular, deeply tactical action. So it is with *Arms*, Nintendo's first new IP since *Splatoon*, and a game that puts a similarly silly, and effective, spin on established genre conventions.

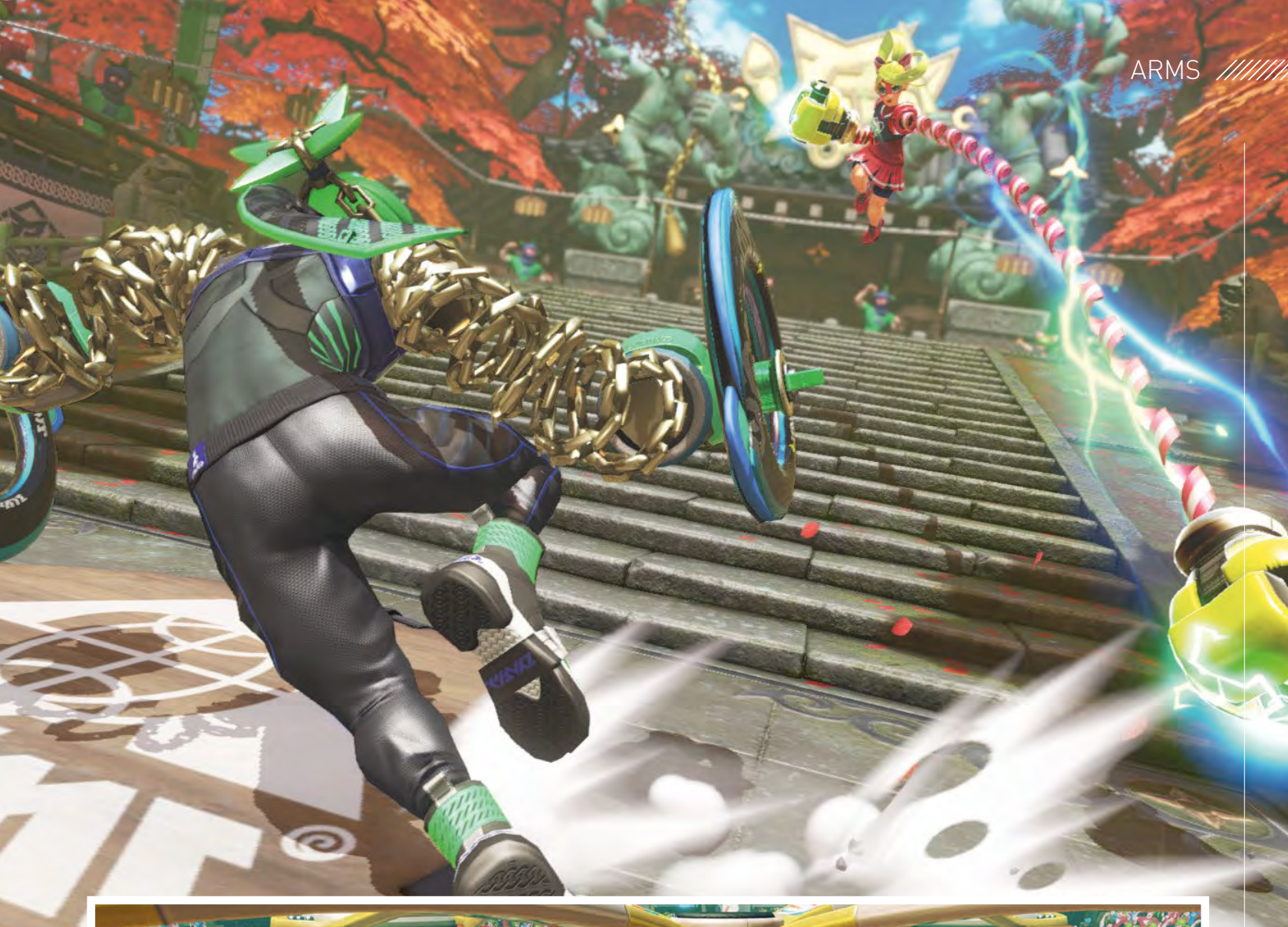
The game is played with a Joy-Con in each hand, and puts two characters in a succession of enclosed 3D arenas. As is tradition, each fighter has a health bar, and a super meter that fills as they deal and take damage. You move by tilting the controllers; the left shoulder button performs a quick dash, and the right one a jump. Push a hand forwards and your character throws a punch with the appropriate arm; push both hands

Developer
Nintendo
Publisher
Nintendo
ETA Spring

at the same time and you'll attempt a grab; bring both hands together, as if offering up two fist bumps, and you'll block incoming attacks. When your meter's full, a tap of either trigger launches your super, which gives you a few seconds to unleash a frantic flurry of punches.

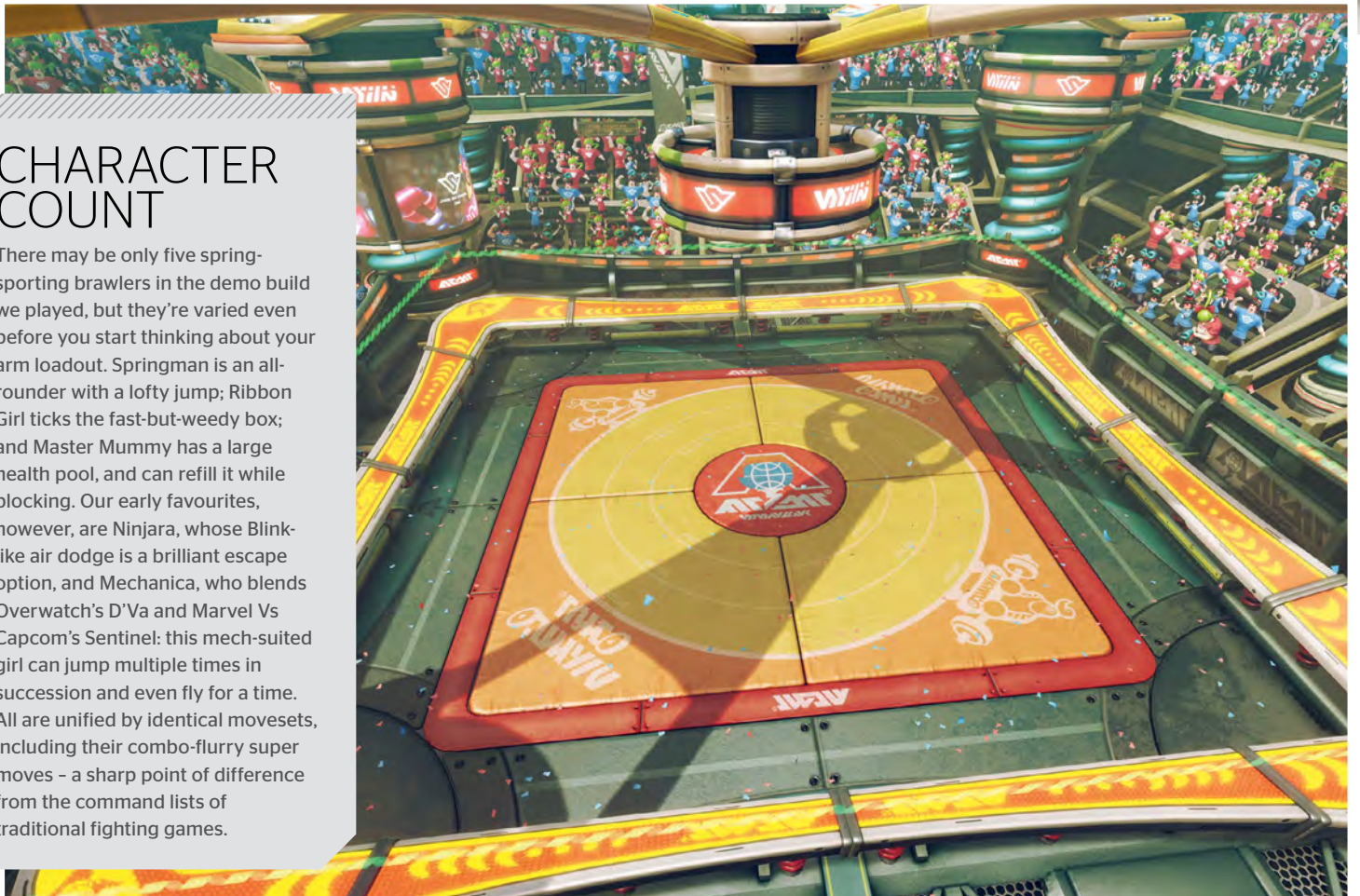
Those are the building blocks, the required fundamentals for the rock-paper-scissors design that has powered the fighting game across the decades: block beats attack beats grab beats block. There's a simple kinetic thrill in just successfully performing these basic moves – a punch that lands feels all the better when you've actually thrown it – and the fact that you and your opponent are using motion controls adds a delicious layer of tactical awareness to proceedings, since a watchful player will see an incoming blow before the on-screen animation has begun.

That's assuming you can take your eyes off the screen, admittedly. While *Arms* is far from the fastest-paced fighting game around, it feels a lot more



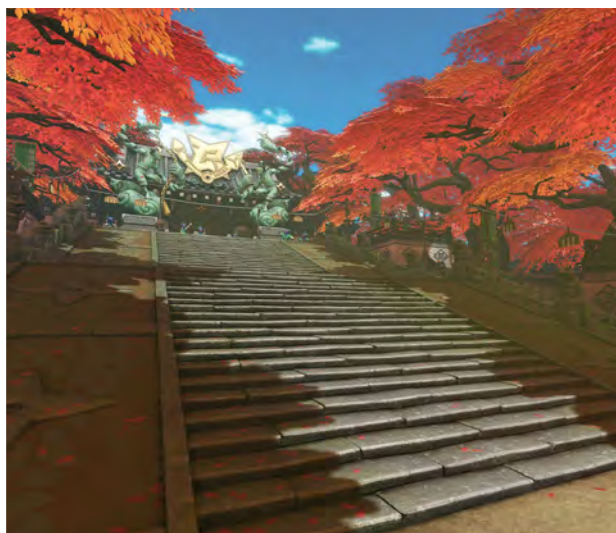
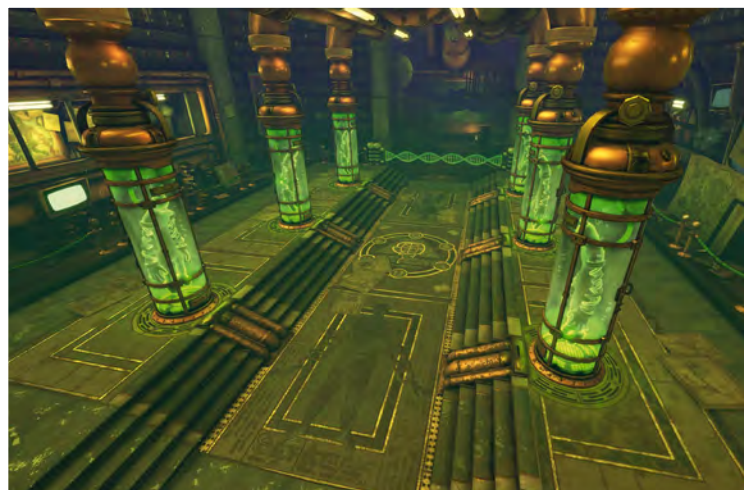
CHARACTER COUNT

There may be only five spring-sporting brawlers in the demo build we played, but they're varied even before you start thinking about your arm loadout. Springman is an all-rounder with a lofty jump; Ribbon Girl ticks the fast-but-weedy box; and Master Mummy has a large health pool, and can refill it while blocking. Our early favourites, however, are Ninjara, whose Blink-like air dodge is a brilliant escape option, and Mechanica, who blends Overwatch's D'Va and Marvel Vs Capcom's Sentinel: this mech-suited girl can jump multiple times in succession and even fly for a time. All are unified by identical movesets, including their combo-flurry super moves – a sharp point of difference from the command lists of traditional fighting games.





Jumping feels more powerful than in traditional fighting games, due in part to the fact that you can initiate a grab attempt on a grounded opponent while airborne from just about anywhere on screen.



The maps we see in our demo are basic in nature; this staircase is about as complex as they get. Perhaps Nintendo will experiment in the final game but, for our money, these spaces' austerity is an asset.



dynamic than it is, since your quick little real-world jabs are translated into lengthy animations as telescopic arms are flung across the arena. While presumably designed to mask any delay between the start of a player's punch and it being replicated on the screen, it also affords little tweaks to the fighting game's tactical formula. If two punches meet in mid-screen, they'll cancel each other out, like projectiles clashing in a game of Street Fighter and fizzling out. The same will happen if both players try to throw at the same time. As such, movement is key, since a dash or jump can change your angle of attack, reducing the threat of a punch being cancelled out and countered.

There are further benefits to fighting from such range, ensuring this is more than just a game in which two powered-up Dhalsims do battle in silly costumes. Punches can be bent like football free-kicks, a curved

punching motion launching a blow that arcs out, then back in, making it harder for an opponent to counter. The distance of Arms' engagements also means Nintendo can be creative in weapon design: each character can choose between three punch types for each hand, the selection going from spring-loaded boxing gloves to homing missiles via lobster claws and buzzsaws.

The results are intoxicating, and while comparisons spring to mind – Punch-Out,

Splatoon and Virtual On, among others – nothing quite hits the mark. This is a singular game, easy to understand but deeply tactical, the blend of accessibility and complexity that is the fighting game's holy grail. We leave our demo reluctantly, hungry for more.

In a running theme for Switch's software lineup, content is a concern. Just five characters are available in the build we play, and as we go to press Nintendo has yet to confirm if more will

feature in the final game. With that in mind, price becomes an issue, especially given the fact that playing Arms in local multiplayer will necessitate the purchase of an extra set of expensive Joy-Con controllers. The game is playable without motion, using the sticks and buttons of a Pro controller or Joy-Con, but it simply wouldn't be the same.

There is no more resounding endorsement of a motion-controlled game than that. ■



YOOKA-LAYLEE

Has Playtonic crafted the feelgood hit of the spring?

Originally penned to launch on Wii U alongside versions for other consoles in April, developer Playtonic Games has changed plans and is now working on a version for Nintendo Switch. The game owes a debt to the 3D platformers built by its makers when Rare was in its N64 prime, and the studio's much-anticipated, part-crowdfunded debut feels like it truly belongs on a Nintendo platform. After spending some time with the latest PC build, we're confident that less capable hardware would surely have meant technical compromises.

Gamers who backed the project for its Wii U incarnation will be offered the game on another platform. You can opt to get it on PS4, Xbox One, PC, Mac or Linux on 11 April, or to Nintendo Switch, though that version will have a

Developer
Playtonic Games
Publisher Team17
Release 2017



Poor old Dr. Puzz here had an accident with her DNRay. However, she's the boffin who helps Yooka and Laylee transform.

later release date. Those who preorder on Xbox One, PC or PS4 now will be given access to the Toybox, a prototype world designed to showcase the game's controls and systems, which was previously available only to Kickstarter backers. It's a bold choice in many respects, but it also demonstrates Playtonic's confidence in the core of its new game. Few players, once they've spent some time rolling and leaping around this inchoate sandbox, will be asking for their money back.

It feels good, then, which is half the battle with a platformer. And it undeniably captures the spirit of its late-'90s forerunners, from the cast of outlandish characters and their babbling speech patterns to the custom typeface used for dialogue. (Long-term Nintendo fans with fond memories of Banjo-Kazooie will


know exactly what we mean.) Then there are the myriad puns, quips, single- and double-entendres that litter the script – even if it's not quite the barrage it was in earlier builds. Writer Andy Robinson describes the editing process as “slightly soul destroying,” but admits that a little dad-joking goes a long way. Exchanges are now brisker and less self-indulgent, and funnier as a result, while some near-the-knuckle gags have been excised.

Collection point

Otherwise, Yooka-Laylee is defined less by the Rare favourites it resembles, and more by how much it builds upon their classic shared formula. Yes, there are various collectibles, but finding them gives you more than just a virtual pat on the back. Quills aren't just squirrelled away in hidden nooks, but scattered in places designed to draw the eye or to encourage feats of skill. The HUD is conspicuous by its absence; collectibles will be acknowledged in the top right of the screen when you grab them, but otherwise it's refreshingly clutter-free. As such, you can take in the full scale of these sprawling stages, which combine size and detail in a way that would've been impossible on N64.

The lack of a mini-map is another surprise. Anyone accustomed to being led by the nose will be shocked that there are no giant flashing mission markers, glowing breadcrumb trails or waypoints to help guide them. Playtonic is confident that its players are smart and curious enough to find their way around. That naturally extends to how you





“Exchanges are now brisker and less self-indulgent, and funnier as a result.”




progress through the game – whether you spend the Pagies you’ve obtained to unlock later worlds or maximise the current one; whether you’re a casual tourist or a die-hard completist. You’ll be able to take things at your own pace, in other words, but we discover that’s not entirely true when a developer is keen to show you the highlights: Robinson intervenes more than once when we spend a little too long hunting down Quills.

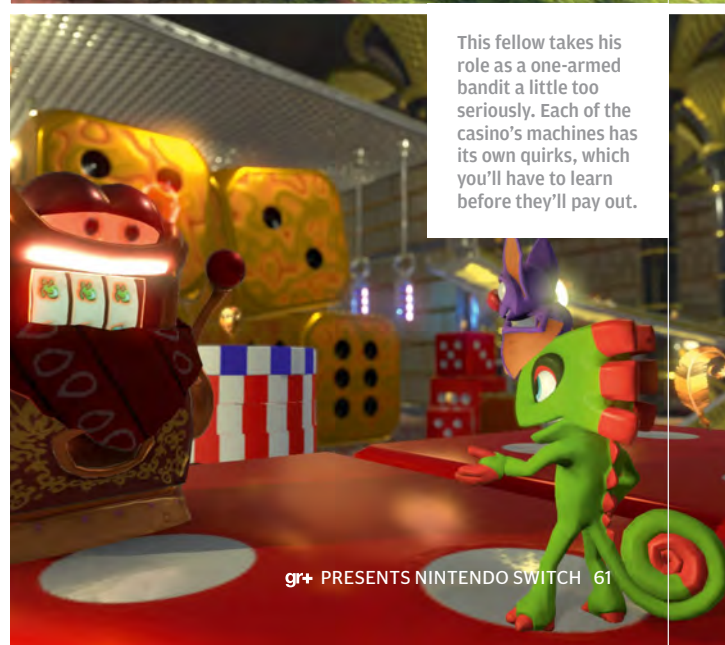
A whistle-stop tour around a later level, a tackily extravagant casino, demonstrates a pleasing willingness to vary the pace. Here, you’ll earn tokens by completing games and activities,

which you’ll exchange for Pagies with an unscrupulous banker. We’re keen to see more, but Playtonic is playing coy. It’s not about hiding weaknesses, creative lead Gavin Price insists, but maintaining the element of surprise for backers who’d rather go in cold.

Not everything works so well. An angry golem, the boss of first world, Tribalstack Tropics, gives us some trouble until we realise Yooka’s uphill momentum can be arrested, increasing the height of his jump: a counterintuitive moment. It still looks great, though. We’ll be waiting for the Switch version, because this feels perfect for a Nintendo console. ■



This fellow takes his role as a one-armed bandit a little too seriously. Each of the casino’s machines has its own quirks, which you’ll have to learn before they’ll pay out.





LEGO WORLDS

Traveller's Tales builds on Lego's creative side

Think of the ideal Lego game and it's likely that none of the instalments in Traveller's Tales' long-running series of block-smashing 3D platformers fits the bill. Not to take away from their incredible success, but the games have only barely scratched the surface of the creative medium on which they're based. Then Minecraft came along and seemed to beat Lego at its own game.

But on June 1, 2015, Lego Worlds was simultaneously announced and released on Steam Early Access. This open sandbox game, set in procedurally generated worlds, allowed free shaping of the land, placing prefab constructions such as houses, and bespoke, brick-by-brick constructions. While this focus on building seemed to place it close to Minecraft, its intentions were quite different. It entirely lacked

Developer

Traveller's Tales

Publisher

Warner Bros Interactive Entertainment

ETA Feb 24

any kind of survival element, which rather confused players at first. Instead, exploration was largely driven by finding items which, once found, appeared in players' menus of objects they could place in the world. Steam players soon complained that there wasn't enough to do, that the game lacked direction, and that there were no threats or crafting systems.

Early Access has been a critical process for a game that has imposed a very different way of working upon Traveller's Tales. It's taken three years to make, compared to under a year like the developer's other Lego titles. Sophisticated tech had to be developed that could manage hundreds of thousands of bricks in the world, all of which could be removed, added to, or blown up. The game has undergone constant iteration and updating as a result

of player feedback; its controls and features have been greatly refined, and a good deal of new content, from tools and weapons to biomes and blocks, have now been added.

Still, Lego Worlds feels of the same lineage as Lego Star Wars. It has the same floaty jump and punch controls, four hearts, and that beguiling plasticky rattle as you collect studs. Despite its debut on Steam, Traveller's Tales has kept its eye firmly on the players who have appreciated Lego titles most so far: the parent and child. "There aren't that many games that do it still," executive producer Loz Doyle tells us.

But Steam players' call for a greater sense of direction have caused one important course correction. Traveller's Tales was quick to quash any hopes for a survival game on the game's forums: "It wasn't right for this

“You might be asked to build a castle, and there are procedural dungeons to be discovered too”



Lego Worlds features local multiplayer for two people on console and PC, with support for four players online on PC. Online play on consoles will be limited to two from launch, with more set to be added later.

game, for the way we wanted to go, for kids to do what they want,” Doyle says. But quests and progression systems are coming, all procedurally generated. “So the player has to work for them a bit more, rather than just walking up to a character,” Doyle says, giving the example of coming across a wizard who might want you to give him a dragon’s egg. So you’ll need to defeat a dragon, but that’s only possible if you can get a gold sword.

Or you might be asked to paint a house or build a castle, and there are procedural dungeons to be discovered, too, featuring locked chests and traps to avoid. Succeed and you’ll be rewarded with

golden bricks, the key to the progression system. You start the game on a small island which takes only 30 or 40 seconds to traverse, but with golden bricks you can power up your rocket and blast off from this world to a new, larger one, with the ultimate aim of becoming a ‘master builder’.

With so many months in Early Access under *Worlds’* belt, it’s doubtful it’ll have put a foot wrong for what it’s trying to achieve. It’s a Lego sandbox in which you can build and play with the same blend of accessibility and promise that underpins the greater Lego series. And it’s not simply a Minecraft clone. For that, it’s all the stronger. ■



THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM

From the dungeons to the mountains...

FUS-RO-DAH. Skyrim's famous war cry unites anyone who has ever picked up a pad, as all gamers recognise it as the sound of the powerful in-game spell that blasts away anyone and anything in your path. It became the soundtrack to a thousand viral videos, the crescendo of the epic title theme, and the concussive force that sent your followers tumbling down a snow-specked mountain when playing Skyrim itself. Bellowing FUS-RO-DAH, in case you haven't worked it out, is a *lot* of fun.

Nintendo fans will get to FUS-RO-DAH their way through Skyrim's world for the first time, thanks to its Switch release. Skyrim is the story of you versus an enormous dragon known as Alduin, also known as the World-Eater (because as a name, Alduin obviously doesn't make it clear how powerful he is). You discover

"Skyrim's huge world, epic storyline, and unpredictable gameplay make it an all-time classic."

your true lineage and unlock your dormant powers throughout the game, which means you also get the chance to shape your adventurer. This is where the initial hook of Skyrim lies. As you find your feet in its massive world, you can take your first tentative steps as anything from a powerful sorcerer to a distant archer to a sneaky thief to a

Developer

Bethesda

Publisher

Bethesda

Release

Q3 2017

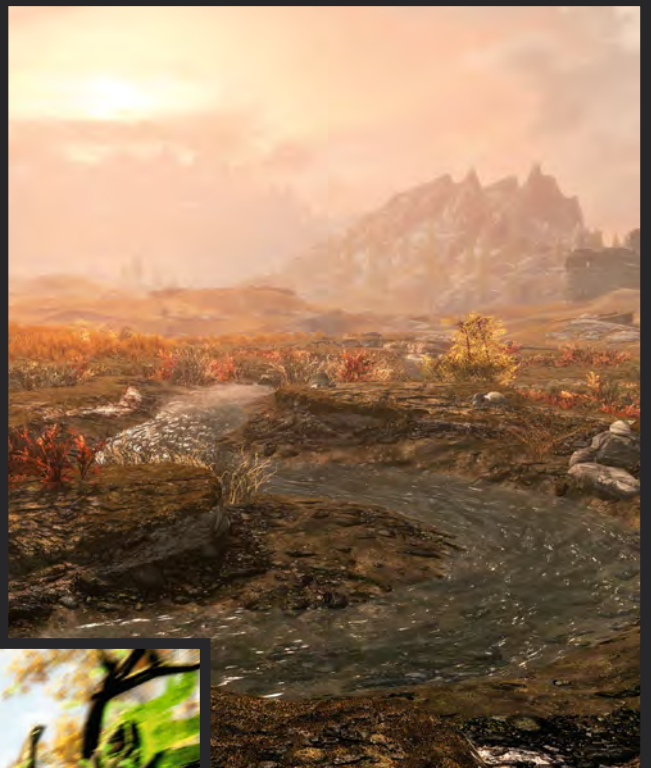
blunt-force warrior. You can develop other skills too. Blacksmiths can create their own armour, for example, while alchemists can make their own potions. Do you want to use strength potions to punch your way through the entire game using your bare hands? It's difficult, but it can be done.

It's not just the gameplay that's varied either. Your adventure is too. You'll journey across reaches far and wide, battling skeletons in dark dungeons, defending small towns from dragon attacks, scaling mountains to reach monk sanctuaries, and wading across giant rivers when you're too lazy to find the bridge. If this all sounds a bit too sober and serious for your tastes, the moment-to-moment gameplay provides lots of laughs. You can attack a giant and lead it to a bandit camp, before hiding and watching the chaos unfurl. You can put buckets on the heads of shopkeepers, so they can't see you stealing apples. You can lead your loyal followers into traps and pratfalls in dungeons, just because you can. Skyrim's world is a giant medieval sandbox to play around in. It might be powered by the drama of its world but you'll stay glued to the pad by the way it consistently rewards your curiosity and ambition with surprising results.

"We can play Skyrim on the move!" was one of the loudest reactions to Bethesda's RPG being announced for Switch, and the thought of playing Skyrim on the bus/toilet/slumped on the sofa covered in crisps shards (delete as appropriate, we won't judge) is

strangely appealing. Yet there's bigger news here besides a portable version of Skyrim making its gaming bow. It also helps that this will also be the Special Edition of Skyrim. It means Switch owners will be getting the enhanced graphics of the recent rerelease on Xbox One and PS4 rather than the slightly worn, slightly tattered original.

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim has rightfully earned its place in gaming's hall of fame. Its huge world, epic storyline, and unpredictable gameplay make it an all-time classic. Most of all, Skyrim has a bittersweet, enchanting atmosphere that no games outside of series can match. The world is packed with life but achingly lonely, as you venture through by yourself. The music is uplifting but sad, hinting at the turmoil and tragedy inflicted on the world. It makes Skyrim an unusual game in Nintendo's bright and colorful universe, adding a new dimension to your Switch library alongside the worlds of Zelda and Mario. ■



Images courtesy of PS4/Xbox One version of Skyrim



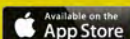
There's a massive world to explore in Skyrim, with lots of areas that each have their own distinct history and personality.

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SNIPPERCLIPS

Chop till you drop in this crafty co-op puzzler

You and a friend control Snip and Clip, two shapes with an apparent death wish. You see, when they overlap you can press the D-pad right and make them cut chunks out of each other. This deleted area can be anything from a thin sliver to a massive slab, leaving behind little more than a pair of cowboy boots. But there's a bigger, friendlier goal here – you'll use your new gaps to solve puzzles together.

Things start off straightforwardly. You busy yourselves with overlapping in

Developer

Nintendo

Publisher

Nintendo

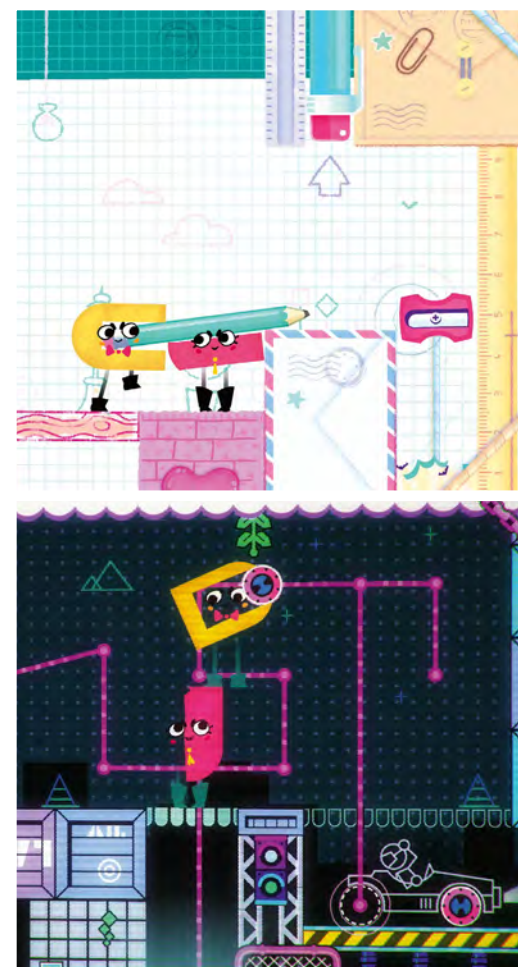
Release March



the right place to snip the correct bits – thankfully you can reset your body if it goes wrong by pressing the D-pad left. Then you rotate your bodies using SL and SR and both get into position to create the shape demanded by the level, such as a heart or a toucan.

Cut scene

It gets rather more devious when the physics puzzles come along. Each level adds new challenges, such as having to dunk a very bouncy basketball in a net. First, we duck down to allow our friend to jump on our head and slice, the shape of his rounded bum forming a basketball-sized groove. Now we can catch the ball in that dent, gently walk right, and jump to throw it. A fun co-op game that makes the cut. ■



The cutting is just the start – the real fun comes when you interact, working together to lift, push, or throw.

“We duck down to allow our friend to jump on our head and slice, his rounded bum forming a basketball-sized groove.”



Learning to rotate lanes between your party members at the right time is the key to success in Has-Been Heroes.



HAS-BEEN HEROES

Put your thinking helmets on

Switch's library caters for every type of gamer. Those after high-speed thrills can play Fast RMX. Adventurers can choose between The Legend of Zelda or Skyrim. Switch owners who want to lay the smackdown on their friends have Ultra Street Fighter II. But what about those who love to use their brains as much as their virtual brawn? Which game caters for the armchair generals who prefer strategy as their weapon of choice?

Has-Been Heroes has taken up the quest of filling that niche. It's not a serious game by any means – the plot is that you have to escort the King's twin daughters to Princess Academy – but it's definitely a challenging one. The game takes place in three lanes, with a mage, a thief, and a warrior each taking position in a lane. Waves of monsters slowly amble

Developer
Frozenbyte

Publisher
GameTrust

Release March 28

down the screen and you have to rotate your party between each of the lanes to defeat them.

It sounds easy enough, and certainly *seems* easy enough to begin with, as you move party members around when it's their turn to attack. The difficulty comes when stronger monsters appear and you begin to feel the pressure, as the screen fills with more and more enemies for you to take out. You encounter enemies who can attack from distance, plus enemies that are only weak to certain attacks or spells (such as the yetis made from ice, who

adapt rapidly because Has-Been Heroes is a rogue-like game, which means permadeath. When character dies, they're gone. Forever. All that time you spent levelling them up, pouring experience points into them... lost. It makes Has-Been Heroes a really tense affair when you head into a difficult battle.

Beens means fights

You do have help on your side. The game auto-pauses every time you attack, which gives you a chance to review your tactics and assess the situation. Or, more often than not, just to take a breather from the action. You also have a wide range of special moves on your side, depending on your hero. The mage, for example, can use debuff moves such as Curse of Frost, which freezes an enemy in place for five seconds following a successful attack, or Doublestrike, which allows for a stronger follow-up attack. Keeping in line with the ridiculous plot – don't forget, you're escorting a pair of junior royals to Princess Academy, not saving the world from menacing evil – some of the spells are ridiculous. The warrior can throw a hot potato at the enemy, which burns them for a few seconds. Because why not?

Has-Been Heroes doesn't have the looks to compete with the upper tier of Switch titles, nor does it have the flashy combat to get disbelieving eyes popping out of skulls. But very close to the console's launch it fills a niche that no other Switch title does and with the developers promising 300 hours of gameplay, you should definitely get your money's worth. ■

“The difficulty comes when stronger monsters appear and you begin to feel the pressure as the screen fills.”

you encounter in the mountains) and before long, you'll start losing hair through the stress of trying to keep up with it all. And that's before you even get to bosses, who have the nastiest tricks of all, such as summoning shadow versions of themselves who can kill you in one hit...

Has-Been Heroes isn't designed as a game where you can memorise what's coming next and learn to plan in that manner. Each map is randomly generated, so you'll never get the same experience twice. As you play, you'll also discover over 300 spells and 200 items to use, with 12 heroes to choose from for your party. So the trick isn't memorising what's coming next but learning how to be flexible, so you can quickly adapt to any situation. You need to learn to



STARDEW VALLEY

Outstanding in its field

Who knew farming could be so much fun? No-one. Even farmers didn't know. The thought of waking up before 6am to head outside and shovel dirt to dig crops in is abhorrent to... well, just about everyone who doesn't wear overalls and a straw hat for a living. And yet somehow, Stardew Valley has taken laborious farming and turned it into one of the most compelling, addictive games ever made.

But how? The opening of Stardew Valley doesn't give much away about the captivating adventure that lies ahead. You start by inheriting a run-down farm from your grandfather. It's falling apart and surrounded by soil overrun by weeds. Your first task is to breathe life back into broken farm, slowly repairing it and digging up the ground

Developer
ConcernedApe
Publisher
Chuckfish Games
Release 2017

outside. Eventually this leads to you buying seeds to plant, watering crops, and then selling the fruit and vegetables that grow. So far, so simple. Yet these humble beginnings lead to a much bigger adventure.

As you earn money, you can buy more equipment for your farm, more seeds, then earn more money. You can explore the world of Stardew Valley, meeting the eccentric residents of the town, who all have their own stories to tell. Some of them will ask for your help and completing these side-quests will yield rewards. You can even romance residents of the town and marry them if you give them enough gifts – how life-like! You build your own house alongside your farm, filling it with furniture of your choice (including rare one-off items if you manage to find them, such as a crystal chair), all while


continuing to push out further and further into the reaches of Stardew Valley.

Pick yourself a winner

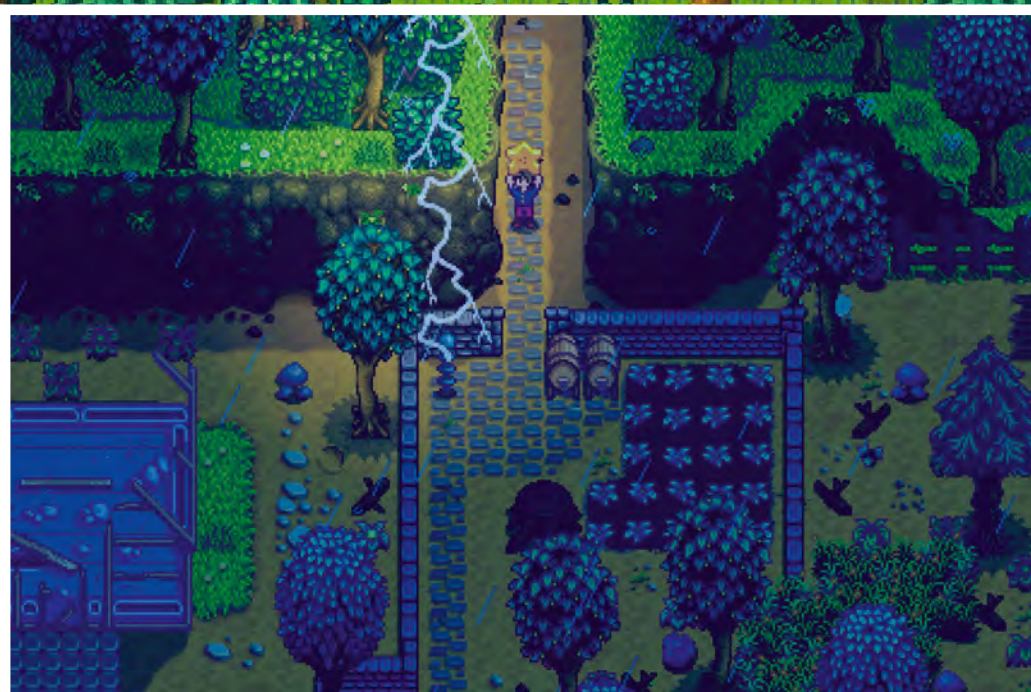
The more you explore, the more fascinating secrets and side stories you discover along the way. From bears in the woods to UFOs, from the ancient fruit greenhouse to the journey of the prairie kings, from hidden Santas to the mystery of the merpeople, Stardew Valley is stuffed with all sorts of goodies for enterprising players to pick out. And underneath it all is the farming that brings you back time and time again, as you learn to manage the seasons, the day/night cycle, and your own energy level. It's not just planting crops and watching them grow either – there's fishing, foraging, looking after livestock, and mining too. You learn how to craft new items with the resources you find, whether it's an aesthetic addition for your farm or a sword to tackle monsters in distant caves. There's always something to do in Stardew Valley, and that's what made it a surprise smash hit when it was first released.

What's more remarkable is this has been painstakingly put together by just one man, Eric Barone. Eric was inspired by his love of the Harvest Moon series, and with no new Harvest Moon games on the horizon, he set about making his own farming game. After many years of hard work – coding the game, making the graphics, working out the mechanics, doing literally everything – the end result is Stardew Valley. It might not have the epic scale of The Legend of



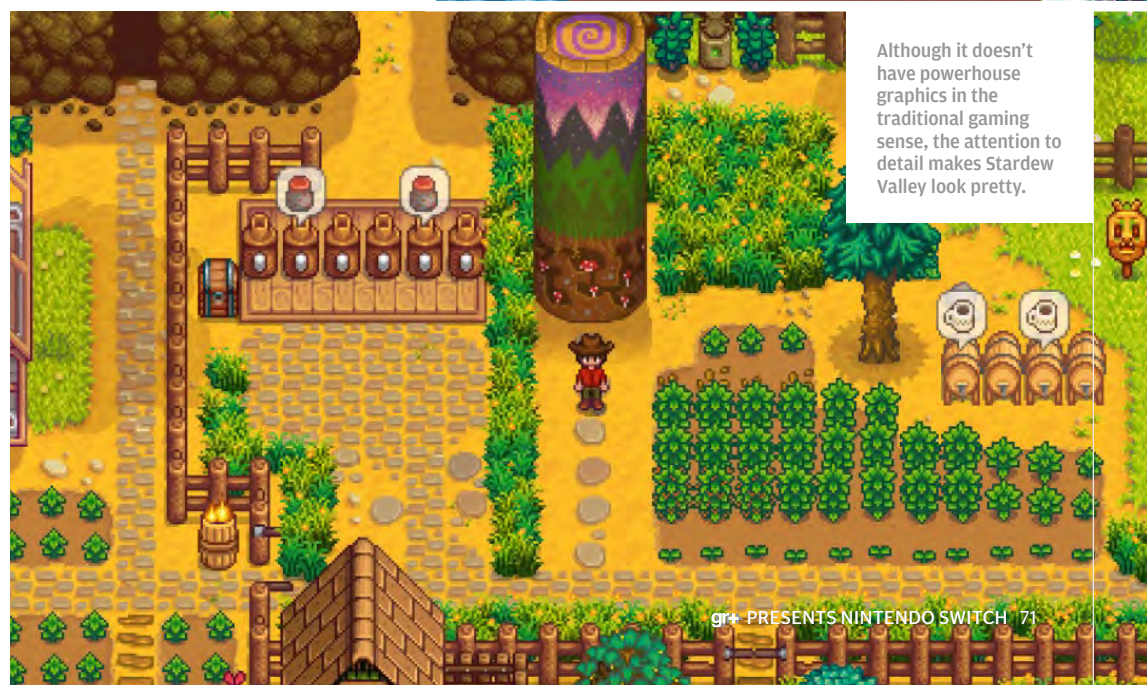


"It's not just planting crops and watching them grow – there's fishing, foraging, and mining too."



Zelda or the high-end drama of Skyrim but Stardew Valley feels like a more personable adventure. You get to craft your farm as you see fit, and soon you feel like you're having fun in a playground crafted by your hand.

There aren't any new additions for the Switch outing of Stardew Valley but arguably, it won't need them. This isn't a game that lives and dies on a plethora of game modes or by pushing technological boundaries. Stardew Valley is a game that proves sometimes, the best things come in small packages. ■



Although it doesn't have powerhouse graphics in the traditional gaming sense, the attention to detail makes Stardew Valley look pretty.



ULTRA STREET FIGHTER II: THE FINAL CHALLENGERS

Round two... fight!

Multiplayer gaming doesn't get much better than fighting games. Two players, one stage, best of three rounds. It's a genre that has been around almost as long as gaming itself. So long, in fact, that Ultra Street Fighter II: The Final Challengers isn't as new as it might initially seem. Final Challengers is a new version of Super Street Fighter II Turbo Remix, which itself was a modern update of Super Street Fighter II Turbo, which was originally released back in 1994. In gaming years, this is the equivalent of Ryu's teacher Sheng Long, a wise old grand master returning to show the young pretenders just how it's done.

The main addition to this outing are the two new faces, the Final Challengers referenced in the game's title: Evil Ryu and the

Developer
Capcom
Publisher Capcom
ETA 2017

hilariously-named Violent Ken. Unless you are really into fighting games, to the point where you live in practice mode and call crouching light kick "c.LK," then Evil Ryu will play much like regular vanilla Ryu. He's picked up a few tricks from Akuma, in the form of a teleport, a fancy new air hurricane kick, and Akuma's notorious Raging Demon

"If you're not sure which fighter you prefer out of Evil Ryu and Violent Ken, you can use them as a team."

super, but he's still largely the same fireballing, shoryukening warrior he's always been. Just evil. Obviously.

Violent Ken, as opposed to who we can only assume is Peaceful

Ken, sports a wicked grin and rocks wild stumbled-out-of-bed hair. In terms of story, he's been brainwashed by M.Bison and now has M.Bison's Psycho Power flowing through him. In terms of gameplay, Violent Ken has a brand-new command dash, which lets him slip past fireballs and stay in his opponent's face, while his super move is a rush of attacks that ends with a flaming shoryuken. Violent Ken has cropped up before, bringing his wild hair and devilish grin to fighting game curio SNK vs Capcom: Chaos, but this is the first time we'll be seeing him in a mainstream Street Fighter game.

If you're not sure which fighter you prefer out of Evil Ryu and Violent Ken, you can use them both as a team. Dramatic Battle has been brought in from Street Fighter Alpha 3, and this mode pits two fighters versus one at the



Street Fighter II has endured this long for a reason - it is multiplayer perfection.



same time. It's something of a novelty mode, because it removes the strategy in favour of throwaway chaos, but it's still fun to play around with Dramatic Battle because of the new combo potential it opens up. Think about Evil Ryu on one side of your opponent, Violent Ken on the other, and the sort of combos you can do when your opponent is unable to block. It will almost certainly be the bedrock of crazy combo compilations on YouTube.

Street Fighter veterans will notice other slight changes under the hood. You can tech out of throw attempts, which wasn't possible in previous versions, and the combo window has been widened. Neither of these are huge changes but they're ones

that help make Ultra Street Fighter II easier to play, rounding it into a more appealing package for newcomers. Don't worry about how you're going to play it, either. While Street Fighter pros will opt for Hori's upcoming arcade stick for Switch, Ultra Street Fighter II works just as well with single Joy-Con, both Joy-Cons or the Pro Controller.

It might be an updated version of an old game but it doesn't look or feel like it. From its new characters to its Dramatic Battle mode to the time-tested multiplayer fun of the gameplay itself, Ultra Street Fighter II: The Final Challengers has something everyone can enjoy. It even has evil and violence. How many fighting games can boast that? ■

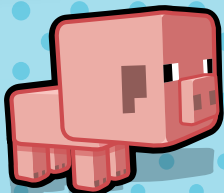


A brown, blocky dog sitting on a blue background with white stars. The dog is made of simple geometric shapes, giving it a pixelated or blocky appearance. It has a square head, rectangular ears, and a small pink nose. The background is a solid blue color with a pattern of white, four-pointed stars.

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The book cover for 'Minecraft Mayhem' features a vibrant blue background with a pattern of small white dots. The title 'MINECRAFT' is at the top in white, blocky letters with a black outline. Below it, 'MAYHEM' is written in large, bold, green letters with a thick black outline and a 3D effect. The words 'ON SALE NOW!' are at the bottom in yellow, slanted letters with a black outline. In the top right corner, there is a small inset image of a Creeper with the text 'BAKE A CREEPER!'. To the right of the main title, the words 'TIPS • BUILD' are visible in white on a red background.

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FAST RMX

F-Zero in all but name

When Nintendo had its glitzy Switch event to show its new console off to the world, the company's fans had their fingers, toes, eyebrows, and everything else crossed for a new F-Zero. The futuristic racer set pulses racing on SNES and GameCube but has been dormant since Game Boy Advance's F-Zero Climax for 2004. Switch's event yielded a brightly coloured racer, where you blaze around futuristic tracks at eye-peeling speed, but it isn't F-Zero. It's a brand-new game called Fast RMX.

It's the third game in the Fast Racing League series, following

Developer
Shin'en Multimedia

Publisher
Shin'en Multimedia

Release Launch

“A brightly coloured racer, where you blaze around futuristic tracks at eye-peeling speed.”

on from Fast Racing Neo on Wii U as an evolution of that game. One gameplay mechanic that makes Fast RMX stand out is colour switching. Each track has dots or strips that are coloured blue or orange. You need to match the colour of your engine to the colour that you're driving over for a speed boost. Get the colours wrong, and you'll slow down instead. Imagine a racing game take on Ikaruga and you can see how panicked and frantic colour-changing will become when you've already got the track layout, aggressive opponents, and your own ridiculous speed to contend with. There are also track hazards you need to avoid, something that isn't often seen in

the futuristic racer genre (not that the genre is crowded these days).

If anything, Fast RMX takes its cues from PlayStation's famous WipEout series rather than Nintendo's F-Zero series. If you've played Fast Racing Neo on Wii U, you will notice a lot of tracks have returned alongside plenty of new circuits, bringing the total number of tracks to 30. The studio says it's rebuilt the game from the ground up to take advantage of Switch's power, and that's clear in the huge number of visual improvements made since Fast Racing Neo popped onto Wii U's digital store.

The frame game

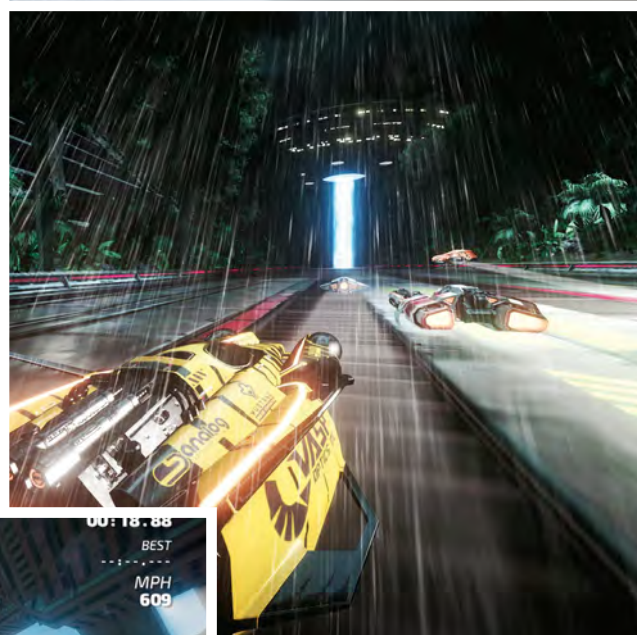
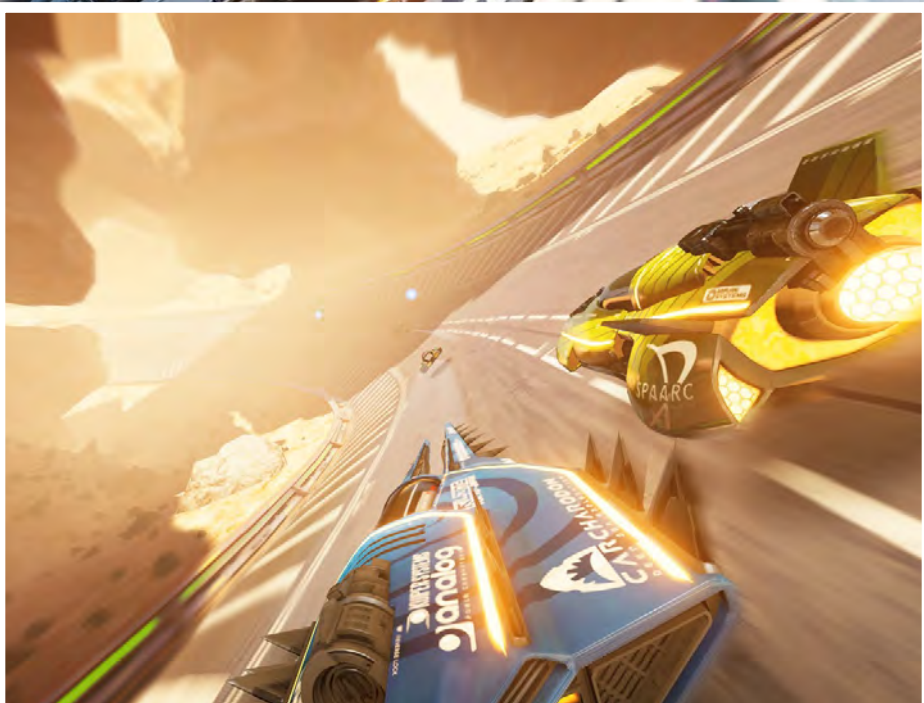
Fast RMX is going to be an easy choice for Switch owners looking for a game that make quieten cynics about the console's power. It runs at 60fps and 1080p when docked, switching to 720p when playing it on the move. That's fairly impressive, given the blistering speed of the Fast RMX gameplay, but that's not what really stands out here. Fast RMX also supports four player split-screen, while keeping the action running at 60fps. That's the sort of technological sorcery that would have you throwing your Switch into the nearest duckpond to see if it floats. It's an absolute marvel, and particularly praiseworthy given split-second is something of an afterthought (if we get it at all) in most games these days. As further proof of how much effort has gone into it, each player in split-screen can customise their own controls.

Not that online modes have been neglected: the eight-player online racing is where Fast RMX

owners are likely to spend most of their time. The developer says it spent a year working on the controls to make sure racing feels right; that's tricky to do when there's no real-world equivalent of a race-car that hovers around the track. There's also the benefits of the Switch hardware itself, as HD Rumble means you can 'feel' where the bumps and collisions are coming from. The slick control and HD Rumble should make the online modes more engaging, as you can concentrate on your battle against other players without anything to distract you.

It might not be F-Zero, but Fast RMX doesn't have to be. It has its own unique gameplay identity, a plethora of game modes, and some of the hottest graphics on Switch. What else could you want from a launch title? ■





Not only does Fast RMX support four players on split-screen, it keeps the action running at 60fps too.

Exploring underground tombs and caverns will yield treasure, if you're prepared to search every nook and cranny.



I AM SETSUNA

Back to the old-school

RPGs are lavish games. They're multi-million-dollar projects that encompass epic stories, huge battles, and cutscenes that would make Hollywood directors flush with envious anger. When you play one, you could find yourself exploring enormous underground caverns teeming with creepy skeletons or tackling enormous dragons on cloud-piercing mountains. RPGs are the biggest, boldest games around, designed to make publishers' accountants look at their development budget spreadsheets and cry. And yet,

Developer
Tokyo RPG Factory

Publisher
Square Enix

Release Launch

despite being an RPG, I Am Setsuna is nothing like that.

That is precisely why it's so appealing. I Am Setsuna is stripping back the excess of the modern-day RPG in a throwback to the genre from ye olde SNES era. Without an enormous world to get lost in or eye-melting graphics to rely on, I Am Setsuna puts its faith entirely in its story, its characters, and its gameplay. Those are the three essential pillars that form the basis on any good RPG, no matter what era it's from, and it's refreshing to see an RPG that displays such confidence in the foundations of the genre.

pore of the game, conveyed by the heroine's planned doom, the isolated world, the haunting piano music, and the muted colours. It doesn't blow you away with bombast or draw you in with its upbeat drama, nor does it push you towards the next expensive set-piece, eager to strap you into a linear rollercoaster of cutscenes. Instead, it allows you to soak up its unique atmosphere at your own pace, as you poke and prod around I Am Setsuna's lonely and mournful world.

Guess your wait

I Am Setsuna is also a throwback to older RPGs with its gameplay mechanics too. The tried-and-tested Active Time Battle system, where you wait for a meter to fill up before you can attack, cast magic, or use a special combat ability, has been brought in for I Am Setsuna. Instead of attacking straight away when your meter is full, you can wait for a team-mate's meter to fill as well, so you can combine both of your abilities for a stronger attack. Is it worth risking holding off on a normal attack for a stronger combined attack? Learning when to attack is one of the keys to mastering the combat in I Am Setsuna.

If you've just plucked your factory-fresh Switch from its packaging and want an RPG to make your new console sweat, the mind-boggling ambition of The Legend Of Zelda or sweeping, dragon-baiting drama of Skyrim are better choices. But if you are after something different from the genre, something that keeps its gameplay low-key and nostalgic, I Am Setsuna will definitely fit the bill. ■

"It doesn't blow you away with bombast. Instead, it allows you to soak up its unique atmosphere."

The story follows Setsuna, a maiden who has been selected as a sacrifice to appease the angry demons who are attacking a snowy island. Accompanied by a mercenary, a traveller, and a soldier, Setsuna has to journey to the far reaches of the world where the sacrifice will take place. It's no spoiler to say her journey isn't straightforward, as you slowly learn more about Setsuna, her companions, and the world you're trying to save.

Because I Am Setsuna hasn't been made on an eye-watering budget, it's given the developers more room to try something a little different. In this instance, they have made I Am Setsuna a 'sad' RPG, one that has a sorrowful atmosphere. The melancholy seeps through every



RIME

Back to the island

It's perhaps unfortunate for Rime that it will be released so close to the blockbuster that is a new Zelda game – after all, the two games look similar, feature a young adventurer exploring a lush land, and feature puzzles and exploration extensively. However, what excites us about Rime isn't its similarities to the Zelda franchise; it's the differences.

The game will undoubtedly be likened to Zelda – if not *Breath of the Wild* for its colour, then to *The Wind Waker* for its island location. But Rime promises to be a much more intimate, more isolated experience. It tells the tale of a young boy mysteriously shipwrecked on an island with more strange structures and buildings that you can shake a magical conductor's baton at.

As you explore the island as this young boy, you meet a friendly

Developer

Tequila Works

Publisher

Grey Box Games

Release

TBC 2017

This is the young boy that you control in Rime. The only way to find out more about him is through exploration.

fox, which will help you along your adventure, among other animals and strange ruins. It's not yet totally clear how the fox will help you on your adventures, but we suspect he'll act both as a partner in some of the puzzles, and as a hint system, to help to point you in the right direction if you get stuck. We suspect that will happen a fair amount, too, after seeing some of the more than 500 puzzles that the ruins provide. At the centre of these strange ruins is a huge, foreboding tower that might just hold the secret to the island, and to why the boy washed up there...

To reach it, you'll use sound, light and perspective to change the world around you. Some puzzles will only reveal themselves from the right angles, while others will be activated with a shout. Most interesting of all are the interactive elements that control time itself – as you push a boulder around a circular platform, you'll realise that you are literally fast forwarding the clock as the moon flies past overhead and the sun rises

seconds later. Some puzzles will only unlock during the night, while others will need the light of the sun for a solution, adding an extra level of depth.

There are also platforming sections mixed in with the puzzles, odd machines powered by who-knows-what, a peculiar figure in a cloak that pops up repeatedly in the game's trailer, and beautiful views to just sit and gaze at adoringly. The island's design was inspired by Mediterranean landscapes, and beautiful, serene music will make you wish you were actually there, running along a beach in the sun.

It's packed with secrets, too – artefacts and collectibles are dotted across the island, and while collecting them will be totally optional, finding them will uncover more of the boy's story. We already know we'll spend hours looking for these, just to find out who the boy is and how he came to be washed up in such a strange place.

Few games have kept fans waiting as long as Rime. The game was originally announced in 2013 as a PS4 exclusive, but almost immediately it went totally off the radar. Then, in 2016, Sony pulled its publishing deal, and we started hearing about the game again. Now we finally know that Rime is going to be a multiplatform release, and is scheduled to land on Nintendo Switch some time in 2017 – unfortunately we still don't know exactly when, despite it releasing on Xbox One and PS4 in May. We're happy to wait a little longer if needed, though; we're just excited at the prospect of playing what is shaping up to be one of the best puzzling adventure games of the year. ■



“There are platforming sections mixed in with the puzzles... It’s packed with secrets, too.”



Some puzzles will literally fast forward or rewind time, allowing you to solve different puzzles.





SHOVEL KNIGHT

Can you dig it?

In the absence of a certain Italian plumber at launch, Switch is looking surprisingly light on the platforming front. Thankfully, Shovel Knight will help you scratch that itch with some delightfully old-school design.

This isn't exactly the biggest news – Shovel Knight has already been released on pretty much every console you can think of – but it's certainly a bonus for those worried about the quality of Switch's launch lineup. Shovel Knight was one of the games of the year in 2014, combining classic gameplay and beautiful pixel graphics to create an experience that took us right back to our NES days. Everything from the world map to the enemy design ooze character, while

Developer
Yacht Club Games
Publisher Yacht
Club Games
ETA March 2017



tricky jumps and tough boss fights will test even the most seasoned players when you push up the difficulty.

The story in the main campaign will be unchanged for the Switch release, following Shovel Knight as he attempts to defeat the evil Enchantress and save his love, Shield Knight. Along the way he must face off against The Order of No Quarter, a collection of other knights who have been dispatched by the Enchantress to stop him. Along the way, he meets a colourful range of characters, digs up a dragon-pleasing amount of treasure, and can buy upgrades to help him survive.

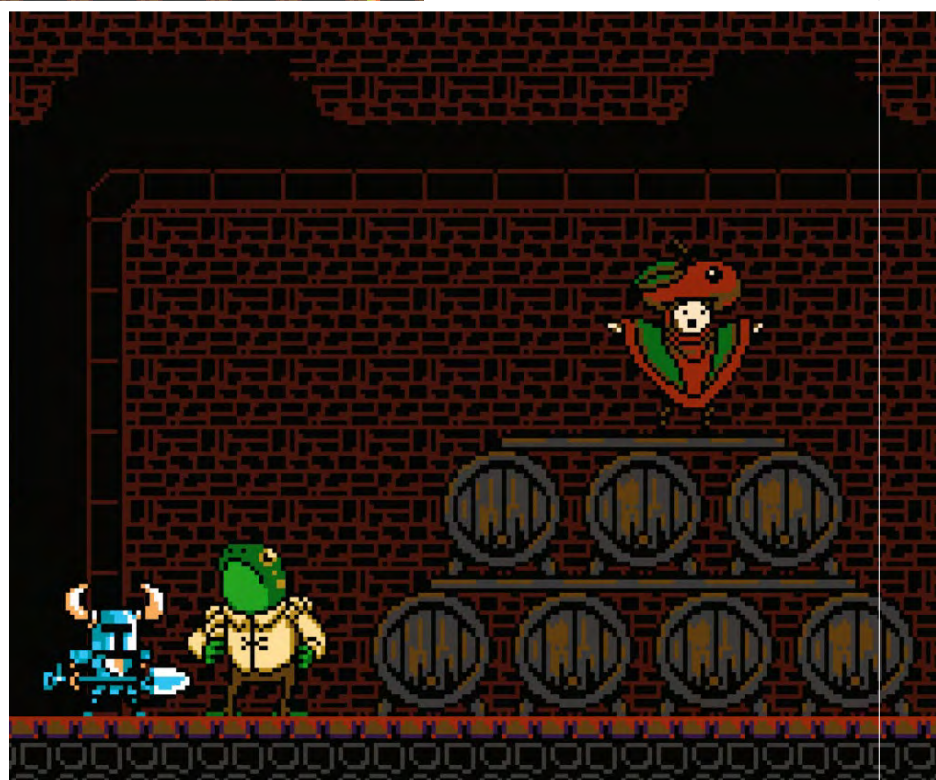
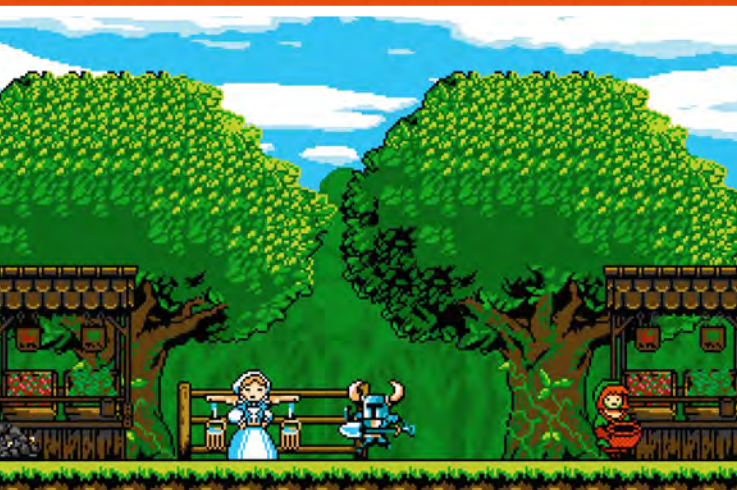
The Switch version of the game brings with it a new way to buy and play the

game and its expansive DLC packs. On other consoles, players could purchase Shovel Knight, and then got access to all the DLC for free. To date, we've seen two story-based expansions from Yacht Club Games, each adding new levels, and allowing you to explore parallel storylines from some of Shovel Knight's dastardly foes. The first, Plague of Shadows, was released in 2015, and saw players take on the role of Plague Knight. In March, alongside Switch's release, players will also be able to play through the Specter of Torment campaign as Specter Knight.

However, with the launch of Shovel Knight on Switch, Yacht Club Games is changing the way the game is distributed entirely. The original game will be renamed Shovel Knight: Shovel Of Hope, and players will be able to buy it on its own. Each DLC pack



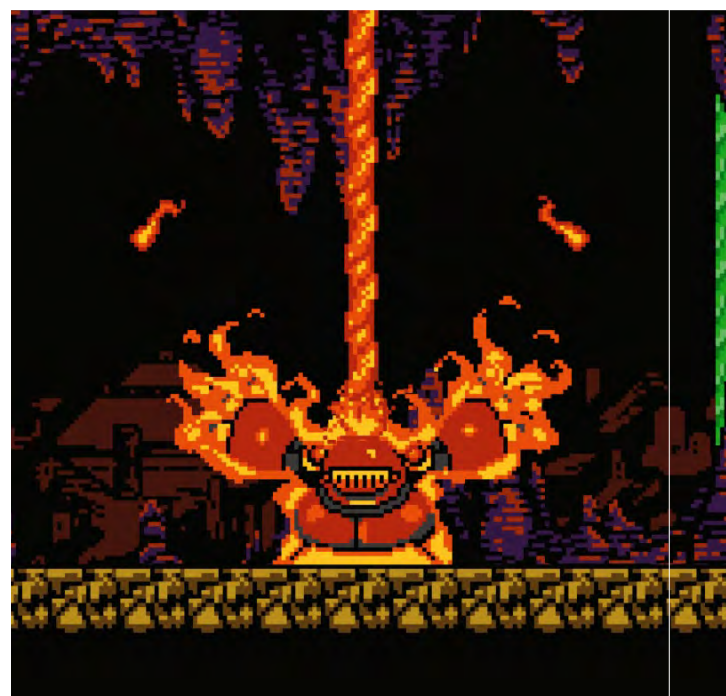
The Plague Knight DLC offers a whole new character, with unique moves and new levels.



will also be available as a separate game, so if you've already played Shovel Knight's main campaign and just want to explore the DLC stories on your Switch, for example, you can choose to just buy those you want. Alternatively, you can buy all of the above (and future expansions) in one, in the form of Shovel Knight: Treasure Trove, for \$24.99.

Oh, and in case all of that isn't confusing enough for you, there are a few other updates that will be released for the game. The first is a 'Body Swap' mode, which includes redesigned sprites and animations for body-swapped versions of the main characters. Two-player co-op will also be

coming to the Switch version of Shovel Knight – previously this was limited to the Wii U version of the game, but it's the perfect fit for Switch when you consider the two Joy-Con in the box. Without any extra kit, you'll be able to jump into the campaign with a buddy, which is pretty cool. Add in the Battle Mode DLC that will be available later this year and you've got a really decent pack of content making its way to Switch. If you haven't played Shovel Knight already (where have you been?), this is a great time to dive in, but even if you have there's probably a DLC pack you'd be interested in when the game launches in March. ▀



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REDOUT

Who needs F-Zero?

Every Nintendo event is a chance for the Japanese company to announce a new F-Zero game, and yet every time Captain Falcon and his futuristic friends get passed by. The last F-Zero game was made in 2004, and wasn't even released outside of Japan. If you ever wanted an example of a series that was due a reboot, F-Zero is it. But fans of the franchise (and there are lots of them) do have some hope on the horizon. Redout is the spiritual sequel to both F-Zero and PlayStation's WipEout series, and it might just be even quicker than both of them.

The racer feels like a child of both games, and one that has been dunked into a bucket of neon paint to boot. The courses swerve and twist through futuristic cities, with kilometer-long leaps and energy barriers that will

Developer
34BigThings
Publisher Nicalis
ETA Spring 2017



damage your rocket-powered vehicle. Your car (or space ship, or whatever the hell it is) has a set energy reserve, and if you boost it will eat through some of this energy. Energy recharges over time, so the risk/reward system can mean a boost might win you the race, or see you explode in an impressive ball of fire.

There are plenty of modes, too. Aside from the obvious race mode, you'll find ones that ask you to stay above a target speed to knock seconds off your time, or to

take part in an endurance sprint across multiple maps without dying, add some welcome variety. As you progress you unlock new abilities and skills that you can activate as you race to slow down other racers or improve things like handling. Whether the game has the same depth as the titles that inspired it remains to be seen, but we're just pleased to see an impressive, fast-paced racer landing on a Nintendo console. We just wish it had the Blue Falcon in it. ■

DISGAEA 5 COMPLETE

It's all about finding the right person for the job

In the dizzying world of RPGs, there are plenty of sub-genres to consider as well. There are JRPGs, which stands for 'Japanese RPGs' and usually means linear games like *I Am Setsuna* (p78). There are action RPGs, which are games like *The Legend of Zelda* (p20) that tilt towards action over turn-based battling. There are MMORPGs, made famous by *World of Warcraft*. One sub-genre that doesn't really get enough love is tactical RPGs, and the *Disgaea* series has long stood at its summit with an addictive blend of strategy and humour.

First, a quick introduction. Tactical RPGs take place on a

Developer
Nippon Ichi
Software

Publisher
NIS America

Release Q2 2017

"The Switch version will include all the DLC content that bolstered the original release – seven side-stories and seven new characters."

battlefield divided into squares. The trick to combat is learning the range of your attacks, the range of your opponent's attacks, and then moving around the battlefield to attack your enemies from a safe range. There's just as much emphasis on where you are in combat, as there is on what you're actually doing in combat.

Disgaea 5 is a game that exposes you to lots of difficult situations. Whether you're battling against a giant or a giant army of enemies, fighting on a wide-open battlefield or a narrow map, you need a team that's flexible and efficient. A big part of the tactical RPG appeal is creating your own team from the sheer number of

jobs available, and this is where *Disgaea 5* excels. We've seen RPGs with Warriors and Thieves before. But how many games can you name that let you play as Skulls, Maids, Celestial Hostesses, or Pirates? Each job has its own distinct playing style too, so the unusual jobs here aren't just standard RPG classes with an unusual name. Maid can use her variety of teas to buff allies' movement, for example, while Pirates have 'Accelerated Shot,' allowing their guns to do more damage over range.

Work smarter

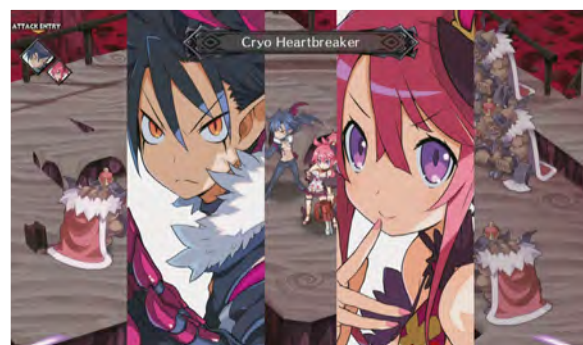
There are 40 races and jobs to choose from and finding out how these classes synchronise and work with each other is an important part of the game – you might want to use Maid to help Pirates gain more distance from enemies, so they can do more damage with Accelerated Shot. You can even unlock Alliance Attacks if you prove adept at fostering relationships within your party. There's also Revenge Mode, which is new to the series, and gives your characters bonus stats when they see their allies taking a beating.

Screenshots don't do justice to *Disgaea 5*'s looks. It's not the sort of game that demands its screenshots are printed out and hung in an art gallery but in motion, it looks glorious. Attacks fizz and pop with neon colours, smooth animation breathes life into the art, and every location is rich with detail. It's the sort of game that should thrive on Switch when it's removed from the dock, as the visual combination of razor-sharp detail and explosive

special effects should make the smaller screen sing. Neither do screenshots convey the humour of the game, which ranges from enemies squabbling over their curry being stolen to the main characters pretending to understand art.

There's a wealth of content here too, as you'd expect from a game called *Disgaea 5 Complete*. The Switch version will include all the DLC content that bolstered the original release, which means Switch owners will get seven extra side-stories and seven new characters, such as Nisa and Kunoichi, for free. That's without taking into consideration the size of the main game, which has difficulty spikes that stop you in your tracks unless you've been paying close attention to your team's formation. With the huge number of jobs to play around with on top of that, *Disgaea 5 Complete* should keep RPG fans happy for a long, long time. There might be a dizzying number of RPG sub-genres out there but at least the choice is clear when it comes to tactical RPGs... ■





Finding the right combinations of jobs is important to succeeding, as you need to account for lots of different combat situations.

You can ride animals to speed up your exploration of the vast plains in Xenoblade Chronicles 2.



XENOBLADE CHRONICLES 2

When nature and technology collide

What would science fiction look like if you could measure it and somehow crank it up to 11? A

ridiculous question, you may be thinking, and you're right. But that's just our elaborate and slightly unusual way of saying Xenoblade Chronicles 2 is a game that takes sci-fi concepts and pushes them as far as they can go. Floating cities, colossal moving structures, combat mechs, planet-dwarfing ships, all set amid lush green fields for a nature-vs-technology backdrop.

Nintendo has done little more than tease the forthcoming Xenoblade Chronicles 2, with a trailer that doesn't give too much away, but that's enough to get Switch owners salivating. The Xenoblade series has slowly grown in status from a hidden left-field RPG gem to an explosive action RPG extravaganza, and its

Developer
Monolith Software

Publisher
Nintendo

Release 2017

ambitions grow larger and larger with each outing. The original Xenoblade Chronicles was released for Wii in 2010 as a spin-off of sorts from the main Xenoblade series. Critics gushed over its battle system, open world and smartly-designed quests. A spiritual successor, Xenoblade Chronicles X, was released for Wii U in 2015. Again, the open world drew praise from all quarters, with the power of Wii U added some visual muscle to the series that matches its gameplay.

Despite the name, we don't know if Xenoblade Chronicles 2

"The Xenoblade series has always had the conflict between technology and nature at its heart."

will follow on from the original's storyline, which ended with protagonist Shulk becoming a god. Shulk won't return for Xenoblade Chronicles 2 – an as-yet-unnamed hero will be replacing him – and all we know about the return is that it focuses on the hero's quest to reach Elysium. It will also take place in a brand-new world and will sport a fresh art style, with a cutesy 'chibi' art style over the gritty realism of the previous Xenoblade Chronicle outings.

What we do know is that Xenoblade Chronicles 2 will keep the trademark open-world gameplay that powered Chronicles and Chronicles X. In fact, it will be the first open-world RPG for Switch, pushing the freedom it gives the player to explore even further than even

The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild will. It's worth noting that the developers have had a much closer look at Nintendo's famous series than any other studio in the world. Nintendo brought in Monolith Soft to help with the 'graphics and other artistic elements' on Skyward Sword, and Nintendo has called on the studio's help again with Breath Of The Wild.

What is clear, even from the brief tease, is that Xenoblade Chronicles 2 will keep the elements that have made the series such a draw for Nintendo fans. The open-world shows verdant fields stretching out for miles, with towering structures and colossal enemies looming menacingly in the distance. Airborne cities show off the ambition and the scale of the game, with the action taking place among the clouds as well as on the ground. Meanwhile, there are already intriguing elements to Xenoblade Chronicles 2, such as the enormous whale-like creature that drifts past in the distant sky. Is this a ship? An animal? A mixture of both? The Xenoblade series has always had the conflict between technology and nature at its heart, and it looks like this game will keep that theme.

There's a long way to go yet, as Xenoblade Chronicles doesn't even have a release date at the time of going to press, while the finer workings of its combat and gameplay are being kept under wraps. But one thing is clear – the history of the series, the talent involved, and the dizzying ambition in what we've seen so far have already made Xenoblade Chronicles 2 one of the most exciting games on Switch. ■



STEEP

Falling with style

Some people love skiing and snowboarding, but throwing yourself down a mountain that is entirely covered with a cold, slippery substance isn't everyone's idea of fun. And even if you are in love with winter sports, they're an expensive, seasonal pastime. With *Steep*, though, the stress of skiing or snowboarding melts (ha!) away, leaving you to throw a virtual person down a virtual mountain from the comfort and warmth of your home.

Steep has been available for PS4 and Xbox One for a few months now, and is gaining praise for its varied challenges, and the joy that emanates from purposely making your character leap of a clifftop and launch headfirst into a giant boulder. While details on the Switch version are sparse, it seems that the game will be a

Developer
Ubisoft Ancecy
Publisher Ubisoft
Release TBC

Pulling tricks isn't the main focus of the game, but you can do some awesome flips as you ride.



straight port, bringing over the same mountain and (hopefully) the same DLC as the original.

In a world where *SSX* and *1080* Snowboarding titles are just fond memories, we have to say that it's great to finally see another winter sports game debuting on a Nintendo console. *Steep* expands on those classic titles by adding skiing, paragliding, and wingsuiting (in which you basically glide like a sugar glider) to the mix, giving you more ways than ever before to get from the

top of a slope to the bottom. Wingsuiting is undoubtedly the highlight – you'll need fast fingers to avoid rocky outcrops, dive through crevasses, and skim right over the surface of the snow as you race your friends. Skiing and snowboarding offer the classic gameplay that you'd expect, as you weave your way down slopes that certainly live up to the game's title. The paragliding is a far more sedate affair, as you sail over the mass of Mont Blanc with only the sound of the wind, and the flaps of your paraglider, to distract you.

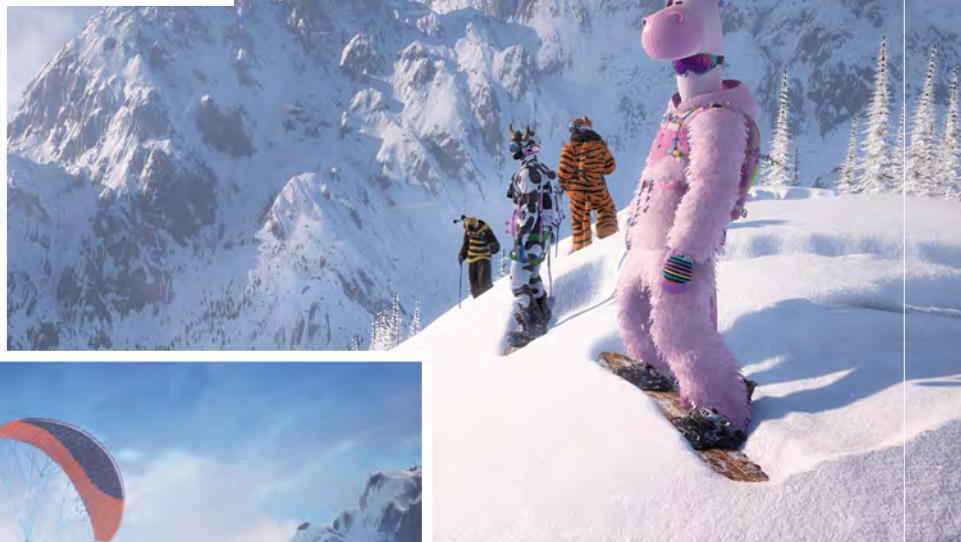
Billy snow mates

What really sets *Steep* aside from similar games, though, is its multiplayer aspect. Join with up to three friends and you can explore the mountain together, completing challenges and races, or just heading off in opposite directions to explore. This side of things makes for some entertaining distractions – you may not even bother with the game's central challenges, and instead may delight in simply seeing who can get the furthest down the hill by crashing and tumbling, as your in-game avatar screams, "Not in the face!" If there's one thing that Switch is built for, it's social gaming –





Customise your outfit in ridiculous ways so your friends can spot you easily online.



playing with three others in the same room, each with a Switch in their hands, is sure to be great fun. Even if you don't have three friends who own the game, though, you'll see random online players dotted around the mountain, which makes the game feel more alive – it's a small thing, but it works really well.

The game mixes things up with unique challenges, too. Yes, you'll find the standard races and time trials in there, but there's more depth here. Some will challenge you to get as low as possible while wingsuiting without crashing, while Mountain Stories are in a whole realm of their own. These sections offer totally off-beat

challenges – in some, the mountain itself will speak to you, telling their stories as you follow ghostly riders. Others will have you destroying snowmen, finding treasure, or even flinging your body into church bells to summon a singing fir tree. No, we aren't making this up. The tonal shift can be a little jarring after you've spent an hour pulling gnarly stunts on your snowboard, but it offers welcome variety.

There's still no word on exactly when this will be available for Switch, but we suspect we may have to wait until the end of the year now – we don't imagine many people will be thinking about skiing in mid-August. ■



SWITCH ROUND-UP

The rest of the great games coming soon to a Switch near you

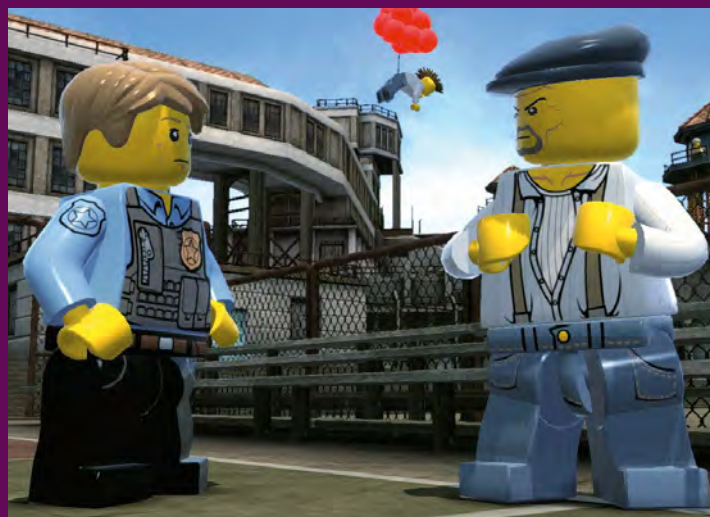


The Binding Of Isaac: Afterbirth+

Release date 3 March **Genre** Roguelike

What is it? A grotesque-yet-cute, relentlessly tough, top-down dungeon crawler that's still fun and challenging after hundreds of hours.

Why it's so interesting? You're probably familiar with the sad, sacrilegious story of Isaac, a naked tot thrown into the randomised, Zelda-dungeon-esque confines of his basement with only his weaponised tears to fight back against legions of faeces-themed horrors. Being a baby is *tough*. And though you might have braved these dark depths on Wii U and 3DS before, Afterbirth+ adds even more content to the staggeringly extensive item, enemy, and room variations, ensuring that no two permadeath runs will be the same. We're talking years of incremental updates and new twists crammed into one deluxe, diabolically difficult, darkly humorous package.



Lego City Undercover

Release date Spring 2017 **Genre** Open-world

What is it? A port of the surprisingly delightful open-world Wii U game.

Why it's so interesting? So no-one bought Wii U, and Warner Bros. has this really great Lego game that basically ten people played. Rather than let it languish in obscurity, Lego City Undercover is getting ported to Nintendo's new system, and you really shouldn't let it pass you by this time. It's an open-world game in the vein of Grand Theft Auto, only featuring kid-friendly Lego. As policeman Chase McCain, you'll explore a sprawling metropolis made out of plastic bricks, take on missions for people, solve puzzles, and much more. It's also legitimately hilarious, sending up cop dramas and general pop culture in equal fashion. It's the rare kind of family game that is just as much fun for the kids as it is for the parents, and it's finally getting the second chance it deserves.

Project Sonic 2017

Release date Winter 2017

Genre Platformer

What is it? A new 3D-rendered Sonic game, developed by Sonic Team (the same folks who made Sonic Generations and Sonic Colors).

Why it's so interesting? We don't know much about this new Sonic game beyond its cinematic trailer, but what's there checks out: the blue hedgehog is running and spin-dashing past incoming debris at breakneck speeds. It also brings back the dynamic duo of double Sonic we got in Generations, where classic Sonic teams up with his modern Adventures counterpart. Sonic Team's track record more or less guarantees that this won't be a Sonic Boom-level disaster, so there's already far less chance of getting burned by excitement for Project Sonic 2017.



EA Sports FIFA

Release date 2017 **Genre** Sports

What is it? A Switch version of the world's biggest sports franchise, getting rid of an attached year entirely for what could possibly be a continuously updated platform.

Why it's so interesting? Though we have scant few details on this new FIFA (and no visuals as of yet - this screen is from last year's game), the fact that it doesn't come with a number attached is pretty exciting. Imagine not having to buy another version of FIFA each year, and instead owning a consistently updated tentpole game (like Street Fighter V) that's reinvigorated with more modes and refreshed player rosters as time goes on. Sports fans should definitely keep an eye on this one.



Farming Simulator

Release date 2017 **Genre** Simulation

What is it? The hook's right there in the title: simulate owning your very own farm, where you need to till the soil, plant and harvest crops, and raise livestock to turn a profit.

Why it's so interesting? Rather than the light-hearted stylings of Harvest Moon, Story of Seasons, or Stardew Valley, Farming Simulator aims for complete realism, where your trusty tractors (replicated from real-life brands) drive at exactly the sluggish speed you'd think they would. These sorts of sim games certainly aren't for everyone, but for Switch owners who want to build a farm up to prosperity without actually getting up at 5am and getting their hands dirty, Farming Simulator should be just the thing.



NBA 2K18

Release date 2017 **Genre** Sports

What is it? The premier basketball game is coming to Nintendo Switch.

Why it's so interesting? The last time NBA 2K showed up on a Nintendo platform was at the Wii U launch with NBA 2K13, so it's exciting to see it back in the limelight. It even got prominent placement on Nintendo's first reveal trailer for Switch back in October. It'll be pretty similar to the other versions of this year's NBA 2K game, but portable and with some interesting use of the Joy-Con. There are no concrete details yet, but if that video was any indication, you could play local multiplayer with both Joy-Con, or sync multiple systems together for four-player action.

Dragon Ball Xenoverse 2

Release date TBC **Genre** Fighting

What is it? Choose one of many iconic Dragon Ball Z characters, or create your own, and kick the crap out of everyone you meet.

Why it's so interesting? Dragon Ball Xenoverse was a huge surprise when it launched, giving DBZ fans a chance to explore their favourite locations, play as their favourite characters, and even create their own warrior, customise their super moves, and do battle against the forces of evil. Dragon Ball Xenoverse 2 is largely the same, but more – more characters, more quests, bigger locations, a better hub city, and more things to fight. Whether you go it alone or strike it out with a buddy online, Dragon Ball Xenoverse 2 is basically the best fan service anyone could ask for.



Minecraft

Release date TBC **Genre** Survival

What is it? If we need to tell you, where *have* you been? It's the global phenomenon that lets players create, build, explore, and battle in procedurally generated worlds.

Why it's so interesting? It's Minecraft. It's the world's premier crafting/survival sim, and it's enchanted millions of kids with its charming presentation and limitless creative potential. It seems like such a natural fit for a Nintendo console, but it only showed up on Wii U in 2015, well after the system had lost its momentum. While the mobile version on phones and tablets is a smashing success, it's also an incomplete version of the full game, allowing the Switch version of Minecraft to potentially have a leg up on the competition.



Syberia 3

Release date TBC **Genre** Adventure

What is it? The long-awaited third entry in the cult steampunk adventure series.

Why it's so interesting? There's a good chance you've never heard of Syberia, as the first two chapters were released in the early noughties during a minor renaissance of European point-and-click adventure games. The series follows lawyer Kate Walker as she travels to a sleepy French village to finalise the takeover of a toy company by a multinational conglomerate. Her journey leads her to cross paths with an eccentric inventor, steamwork contraptions, and the fabled existence of Earth's last remaining woolly mammoths. Announced back in 2009, Syberia 3 was meant to close Kate's story, but a series of platform changes and financial troubles caused the game to undergo numerous delays. 2017 looks to be finally be the year Syberia 3 sees the light of day, though, and it'll be heading to Nintendo Switch then.



Project Octopath Traveler

Release date TBC **Genre** RPG

What is it? An all-new JRPG from Square Enix.

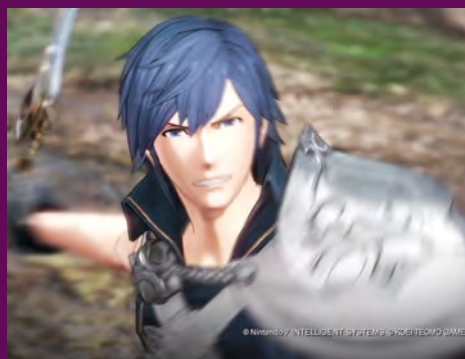
Why it's so interesting? Besides the weird name (which may be a mistranslation of the Eightfold Path and not, you know... octopi), not much is known about Project Octopath Traveler yet. What we do know is that it's made by the team behind the Bravely series on 3DS, and sports a very PS1-era look, blending 3D environments and watercolour-inspired sprite-based artwork.

Fire Emblem Warriors

Release date 2017 **Genre** Hack-and-slash

What is it? An action-packed take on the classic strategy franchise.

Why it's so interesting? Having already shown that it can successfully turn just about anything into a chaotic action game, Omega Force – the developer behind the popular Dynasty Warriors games – is back to do exactly that to the Fire Emblem franchise. As well as showing this brawling title off at the Switch reveal event, Nintendo also confirmed that a 'proper' Fire Emblem title is in development for Switch, which will come as good news if mashing buttons to kill hundreds of dudes in a few seconds isn't your idea of a good time.



Rayman Legends: Definitive Edition

Release date TBC **Genre** Platformer

What is it? The ex-Wii U exclusive is getting an update on Switch.

Why it's so interesting? Funny story, Rayman Legends was originally a Wii U exclusive set to release a few months after the system's launch. Ubisoft delayed it for months to release it alongside PS4 and Xbox One versions. Now we come full circle, as Rayman Legends: Definitive Edition comes out some time this year. In addition to taking advantage of four-player Joy-Con action, it'll feature some additional content, including new gameplay options for its raucous competitive multiplayer mini-game, Kung Foot, and touch controls if you're using Switch in its portable mode.

Minecraft: Story Mode

Release date TBC **Genre** Adventure

What is it? A Telltale adventure game set in the Minecraft universe.

Why it's so interesting? It's Minecraft, but different. Telltale has a history of crafting taut stories around a handful of colourful, realised characters within various licensed properties. Somehow the studio did the same for Minecraft, a game that has no story or characters. This version will include all five episodes from the first season, along with the additional three Adventure Pass episodes released last year.



Shin Megami Tensei (title TBC)

Release date TBC **Genre** JRPG

What is it? The next entry in a series of JRPGs set at the end of the world, where you partner up with various demons and together do battle against an assortment of terrors. Basically 18-rated Pokémon.

Why it's so interesting? The long-running apocalyptic JRPG series is coming to Nintendo Switch, following its previous two successful entries (Shin Megami Tensei 4 and SMT4: Apocalypse) on 3DS. Like a lot of games on this list, details are scarce – all we've had to date is a single reveal trailer featuring some of the series' more iconic demons hanging out in a derelict building. Heck, we don't even know if it's coming to the West yet. Hopefully we'll get some confirmation soon.



Snake Pass

Release date 2017

Genre Puzzle-platformer

What is it? A simple-sounding slither-'em-up where a snake takes on an obstacle course.

Why it's so interesting? Platform games are typically all about jumping, so an entry that doesn't even involve leaving the ground instantly interests us. Instead, you'll wrap Noodle the snake around objects to try and climb them, with a little help from hummingbird friend Doodle, who is apparently strong enough to lift a fully grown snake thousands of times its own weight. But hey, videogames. Looks like it should be a lot of fun and the developer is known for its eye for quality - Sumo Digital previously gave us Out Run 2 and Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed, after all.

1001 Spikes

Release date 2017

Genre Hardcore platformer

What is it? An insanely difficult platform game in the vein of Super Meat Boy.

Why it's so interesting? It's been out for a few years on other platforms already, but we're all for more people having the chance to frustrate themselves silly with this absurdly tough retro-style platformer. You'd think 1,000 lives would be more than enough to get through a game, but that number falls so rapidly that you'll soon start to worry, and the catacombs steadily get even harder (somehow) to truly test your skills. Nicalis will also be bringing classic platformer Cave Story to Switch - if you're a fan of platform games, Switch definitely looks like it'll be the best place to play.



96 gr+ PRESENTS NINTENDO SWITCH



Derby Stallion

Release date TBC **Genre** Sport

What is it? A new title in the long-running horse racing series.

Why it's so interesting? The franchise has been running since the Famicom/NES era, and while it's popular in its home country, it's never been given a chance to travel overseas. While that's unlikely to change in the case of this latest in a long line of horse racing games, the fact that Switch is region-free means that would-be jockeys will still be able to import the game if they so desire. It's played pretty straight - not like the bonkers hilarity of Japan World Cup - but its loyal following means it must be doing something right.

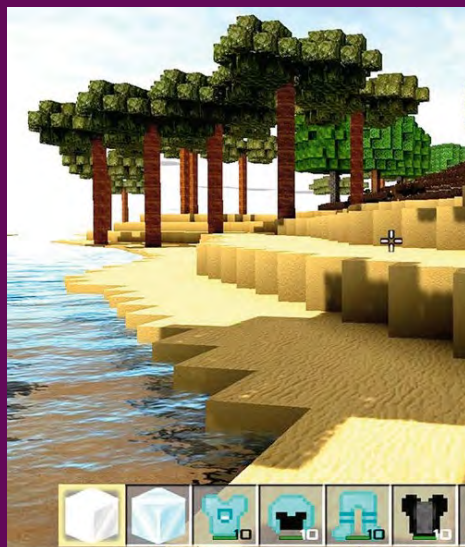


Constructor

Release date April **Genre** Real-time strategy

What is it? A city building sim with a difference - it's all about driving the competition out of business.

Why it's so interesting? This fan favourite is actually 20 years old this year, and developer System 3 is celebrating with this full-on remake. It's kind of like a more hands-on Sim City, with players building up their town before inviting in various ne'er-do-wells to interfere with the operations of rival construction firms by rioting, stealing and sabotaging. There's nothing else quite like it on Switch - and not a lot like it out there in general these days, to be honest - so it should certainly scratch any strategy/city-building itches Switch owners might have.



Cube Life: Island Survival

Release date Spring 2017 **Genre** Survival

What is it? A blocky open world to explore, craft and survive in. Sound familiar?

Why it's so interesting? Originally released on Wii U to fill the gap left by Minecraft's absence, this looks and feels more than a little similar to the popular survival game. That's something that is being addressed with this new updated version of the game, however, and a host of more realistic textures, physics and effects now give this a more original feel, although the core gameplay loop remains the same – build, break, fight, craft, survive or just generally mess around in the cube-based open world.



Dragon Quest Heroes I & II

Release date 2017 **Genre** Hack-and-slash

What is it? Colourful and over-the-top action fighter from the Dynasty Warriors developer.

Why it's so interesting? Omega Force is a studio that likes to keep busy, and its main hobby seems to be turning other games into Dynasty Warriors. It's at it again with this content-loaded double pack that brings together the original game and its expanded sequel, which is currently only out in Japan. While there's a clear focus on classic Dragon Quest characters and enemies, you don't need to be a fan of the series to enjoy this. You'll certainly get more out of it if you are, though.



Minna De Wai Wai! Spelunker

Release date 2017 **Genre** Platform

What is it? An update of PS4 release Spelunker World, with F2P elements stripped out.

Why it's so interesting? While it might look and feel like a Spelunky rip-off, this tricky platform series actually dates back to the '80s, as should be clear from its punishing mechanics. It's unclear whether or not Minna De Wai Wai! Spelunker will get a global release – the game it's based on, Spelunker World on PS4, didn't ever launch in Europe – but as Nintendo Switch is region-free means, fans of the challenging franchise will still be able to play this one even if it doesn't get released globally.



Wonder Boy: The Dragon's Trap

Release date 2017

Genre Platform/RPG

What is it? An 8-bit classic remade for modern consoles.

Why it's so interesting? The first of two upcoming updates to the beloved Master System adventure of the same name (see p98 for the other), Wonder Boy: The Dragon's Trap gives the classic adventure a fresh lick of paint. It's seemingly just a visual overhaul, but we're fine with that – the original isn't exactly the best-looking game but its mechanics and structure hold up just fine, so there's no need to fix what isn't broken in this case. The more people that get to play this classic game, the better!



World Of Goo

Release date 3 March **Genre** Puzzle

What is it? Physics-based construction puzzles galore!

Why it's so interesting? While it might be almost a decade old now, this indie favourite is just as much fun today as it was when it was originally released. The object is to get a certain number of goo balls to the exit, achieved by using those selfsame blobs as makeshift construction tool to create bridges, towers, or anything else that may help reach the goal. Efficient use of goo is critical, as any blobs used in structures aren't counted towards your final score - clever planning and creative building are key.



Monster Boy And The Cursed Kingdom

Release date 2017 **Genre** Platform/RPG

What is it? A spiritual successor to the Wonder Boy games, with the series' creator on board.

Why it's so interesting? Whereas The Dragon's Trap (see p97) is a straight-up remake of an older game, Monster Boy picks up where the series left off to deliver the same kind of experience but with all-new content. Wonder Boy creator Ryuichi Nishizawa (who is also helping out with the remake) is involved in creation to help ensure that the game stays true to the design and feel of the games it is based on. True to form, there are a bunch of different animal powers to collect and use as you switch between characters, with their abilities aiding in combat and exploration.



Graceful Explosion Machine

Release date Spring 2017 **Genre** Shoot-'em-up

What is it? Resogun's colourful, angular long-lost cousin

Why it's so interesting? Some of the best indie games in the business take their cues from the shooters you'd once have seen in arcades, and this bright and bold side-scrolling offering is looking to take its place alongside modern classics like Resogun and Geometry Wars. With four unique weapons (blaster, missiles, energy sword and sniper beam) always available, you'll need to quickly react to each situation and answer accordingly. Using the best tools for the job will help you score big and rack up huge combos, perfect for when you're chasing leaderboard supremacy. And you *will* be chasing it.



Oceanhorn: Monster Of Uncharted Seas

Release date 2017 **Genre** Action-adventure

What is it? A seafaring adventure that's more than a little similar to The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker.

Why it's so interesting? When it first launched on iOS back in 2013, the best thing about Oceanhorn was that it offered a Zelda-like experience on a platform that didn't have the real deal. That's no longer the case as the game sails onto Switch – where Link will be ready to rock from day one in Breath Of The Wild – but that's not to say this colourful adventure isn't worth trying. While it makes no secret that it takes inspiration from Wind Waker, the new Zelda game's focus on open-world adventure means this solid homage won't feel *too* much like it's stepping on Link's toes.



Taiko No Tatsujin

Release date TBC **Genre** Rhythm-action

What is it? The taiko drum equivalent of Guitar Hero.

Why it's so interesting? You might have seen Taiko No Tatsujin (or Taiko Drum Master, to give it its Western title) as a centrepiece in an arcade, and while its huge drum controller isn't the easiest thing to replicate in the home, Bandai Namco has done a solid job in the past. Home versions of the game have been bundled with a shrunken version of that giant arcade drum controller, but more recent handheld releases have instead used touchscreen controls, and given Switch's portability, we expect that to continue here. It's not quite the same as bashing away on a drum controller, but the games are still great fun.

* Image from Wii U version



Romance Of The Three Kingdoms XIII

Release date 2017 **Genre** Strategy

What is it? The latest in a long line of historical strategy games.

Why it's so interesting? Allowing players to recreate and relive some of history's greatest battles has long been the main appeal of Creative Assembly's Total War games, but Koei is no slouch either when it comes to adding a dash of strategy to the past – in this case, second-century China. We'd usually doubt whether a Western release would happen as only a handful of the many games have been localised, but as this came out worldwide on PS4 and PC last year, we haven't given up hope.



* Image from Tales Of Berseria

New Tales Of... (title TBC)

Release date TBC **Genre** Action-RPG

What is it? A brand-new entry in Bandai Namco's popular RPG series.

Why it's so interesting? There was never any doubt in our minds that Switch would have great game support from Japanese third parties, and with this announcement sitting alongside that of Dragon Quest XI, Switch is already the home of two of the three biggest JRPG franchises in the world. Details are scant right now – which is hardly surprising, given that the game doesn't even have a proper title yet – but we wouldn't expect it to deviate too much from the anime-style action RPGs the Tales series is known for.



Tank It!

Release date 2017 **Genre** Action

What is it? A more political World Of Tanks.

Why it's so interesting? While so many military games glamorise weapons and warfare, this anti-war game is taking a somewhat different approach. Its goal is to drill home the message that war kills, although doing that in a game where a remotely controlled tank ploughs through everything in its path – terrorists, civilians, buildings, flora... whatever, basically – seems like an odd way to put that message across. We'll have to wait until we get our hands on it to see just how well the panzer of peace succeeds in its mission. ■

A TO Z



After our extensive hands-on, Let us walk you through the essential details of **The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild** one letter at a time...

C

Cooking



Welcome to Actual Chef Ben Griffin's Cookery Corner. I, Actual Chef Ben Griffin, have prepared a three-course meal using ingredients hand-picked from Breath Of The Wild.



Starter

Diced Hylian Shroom on a bed of raw Spicy Peppers. A pinch of Rock Salt on request.

EDITOR'S TASTE TEST: Literally the hottest thing I have ever tried to eat.



Main

Lightly seared Bokoblin Liver, with a whole Hearty Radish, garnished with Hyrule Herb.

EDITOR'S TASTE TEST: What? Ben, this isn't liver. This is rice pudding.



Dessert

Burnt Apple encased within a Chu Jelly prison and slathered in Courser Bee Honey.

EDITOR'S TASTE TEST: Please stop cooking and shouting. You're not a chef and we have a magazine to write.

Arson

You're pretty much a pyromaniac in Breath Of The Wild. Anything that looks like it'll burn - dry grass, bundles of twigs, the loincloths of flammable foes - can and will. Infernos blaze and can spread until areas

the size of tennis courts go up in flames. Ignition comes from striking flint, launching blazing arrows, or throwing burning branches, and wind direction affects the ensuing fire's course. During our hands-on, we box in a group of Bokoblins by setting the field behind them aflame and cutting off all escape routes. Upper hand safely established, we're free to charge in like a mad firebug and take them down. Truly, it's a pleasure to burn.



Bokoblin

These bad tempered, bat-faced footsoldiers made their debut in Wind Waker and form your rank-and-file foes in the early stages. They come in several colours and classes, some wielding chunky clubs, some poking at us with spears carved from tree boughs, some playing defensively with rusty broadswords and wooden shields, and some waiting atop lookout towers, arrows nocked. They're more reactive than ever - the imp-like infantry jealously guarding treasure chests in camps, resorting to rock-throwing if you've knocked their weapon away, and even dozing at night with sleepy bubbles (eww...) emanating from their noses.

Dungeons

Themed puzzle chambers form the backbone of Zelda games, usually taking a good few hours to complete. While they're not going away any time soon, there are now around 100

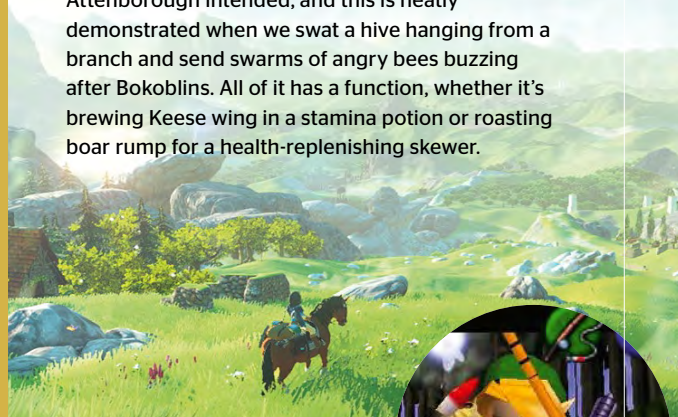
smaller challenge shrines in addition that take roughly 15 minutes apiece. These shorter, punchier locales are set underground and often pivot on a single puzzle, such as solidifying a body of water and raising it to bring up a sluice gate. The fact most are entirely optional means players will have differing experiences - one shrine contains an iron sledgehammer we wouldn't otherwise have found.



Ecosystem

The great outdoors is stuffed with more rogue wildlife than a pet-hoarder's apartment, and includes boars, birds, lizards, toads, bats, pike, ducks, deer, squirrels, and

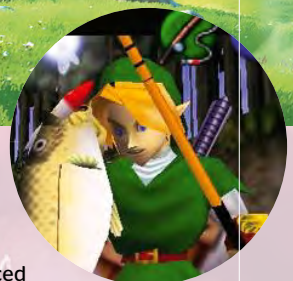
dragonflies. And that's just in the early forest area. Everything interacts with each other as Attenborough intended, and this is neatly demonstrated when we swat a hive hanging from a branch and send swarms of angry bees buzzing after Bokoblins. All of it has a function, whether it's brewing Keese wing in a stamina potion or roasting boar rump for a health-replenishing skewer.



Fishing

The Game Boy classic Link's Awakening introduced us to what has since become Zelda tradition, and while we

haven't yet discovered a dedicated fishing area in Breath Of The Wild, the fish we see in rivers and lakes are a strong hint there will be angling on offer, especially when you consider how the Ocarina Of Time version came about. Its creator, Kazuaki Morita, said in an interview with former Nintendo CEO Satoru Iwata, "I had a model of a fish for putting in an empty bottle. I borrowed that and had it swim in the pool in the dungeon, and when I saw it swimming around, I thought, 'Oh! I can go fishing!'" If there's fish, there's fishing.





Guardian

The massive, arachnid-like, tentacled stone sentinels that burst out of the ground are called Guardians, and they make a strong case for being Link's most fearsome foes yet. We have a hostile encounter with a derelict one half-buried in dirt, and even that's enough to

give us some serious problems. We're forced to quickly take cover behind a wall in order to dodge a one-hit-kill laser and target its eye (which is also the source of the lethal beam) with bomb arrows before running up and slashing away. Hyah!-rrifying.



Hero of Time

Some Zelda games portray Link as a successor, and others as the same mythical figure awakening from hibernation. The Link here seems to be the latter, as the opening

cutscene references him sleeping for "100 years". His adventure is likely the timeline's most recent, as the Temple Of Time and Bridge Of Eldin look a little worse for wear, and the Master Sword is absolutely battered. It's almost certainly post-Wind Waker, as an ingredient called rock salt references the game's 'ancient sea', and its forest guardians, the Koroks, return. It's implied they created this post-Hyrule Hyrule using the same seed-planting methods employed in Wind Waker.



Infinite bombs

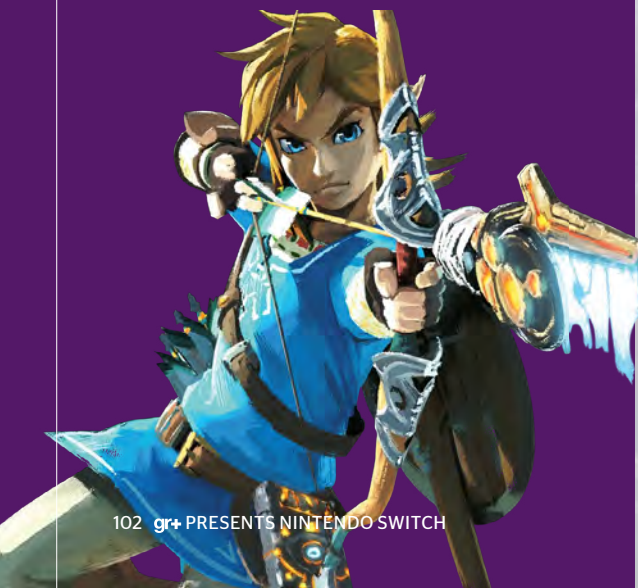
Bombshell! As anyone who has ever played a Zelda game before will know, explosives have always been a finite commodity in the series - players either needed to buy them, find them in chests, or loot them from enemies. Not so here. Because they're made from the same mysterious blue energy powering your multipurpose Sheikah Slate tool, Link's bomb supply no longer runs dry, so all you have to do is wait ten seconds for the meter to recharge before you can drop or throw them. We use them to blow apart cracked walls, and explode red barrels to trigger massive screen-filling blasts.



Kinesis

The stasis power has huge implications for Hyrule, letting Link freeze a

specific object or enemy in place, spam the attack button to rack-up considerable kinetic energy, then unpause time and deliver all that damage at once. This usually results in whatever soaked up all those hits flying way off into the distance. One example sees us use the power on a boulder blocking our path, whacking it with a hammer, then starting time to send it cannoning away like a pinball.





L

Little Touches

Zelda games have always been packed with delightful detail, and Breath Of The Wild is no exception. If you kick a metal chest, Link now winces and grabs his foot in pain as it cracks open. His face flushes when you experience frigid temperatures. If you jump into a body of water from high enough, the pointy-eared wonder fluidly enters a diving animation on his way down. If you screw up cooking you'll create a 'dubious' green gunk that's so embarrassingly putrid and unsanitary as to be blurred out.

M

Map

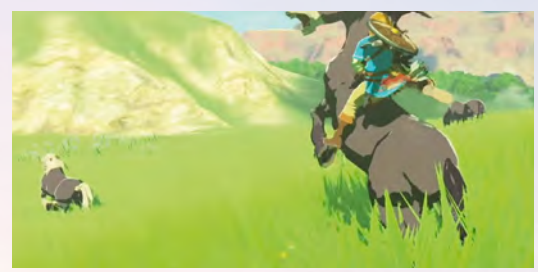
At a whopping 12 times larger than Twilight Princess, this is the biggest, broadest landmass in Zelda history. What's more impressive is that everything you've seen and read about Breath Of The Wild - by that we mean everything journalists have been given access to - has taken place in an area representing roughly 2% of the overall world. The titles of Zelda games usually refer to a magical item (Ocarina Of Time, Minish Cap, Majora's Mask etc), but such is the heightened sense of place here, Breath Of The Wild refers to a location. Specifically, um, 'the wild'.



N

Nature

Whether it's wildlife, enemies, drifting clouds, or swaying trees, there's something moving within Link's field of vision at all times. This captures the spirit of the very first Legend Of Zelda, which had creatures milling about on the opening screen. Indeed, environments are freshly vibrant thanks to a host of visual touches, like dappled sunlight cast through treetops, and singing birds darting about overhead. There's tons to pick up and interact with, too, like apples, mushrooms, nuts, and nightshade. It's Hyrule at its most idyllic.



O

Opal

In-game text for the opal details how it's "traded for rupees but can also be used in accessories". This almost certainly points to the existence of merchants in towns who you can flog this to, although the opal's role in crafting is unknown at this point. We do know they're rare, however. Across our numerous playthroughs we only discover one hanging off a rock formation which we have to smash apart. There are other gems too, such as topaz, sapphires, and rubies, each selling for a high price and bestowing unique properties through crafting, such as electric, ice, and fire.

P

Paraglider

This item functions just like the sailcloth, Deku leaf, or flapping Cucco of past Zeldas, allowing you to glide through the air. It's mandatory if you ever want to escape the Great Plateau, which is much too high to climb down from. To get your hands on it you must complete four shrines and exchange the spirit orb you acquire with a mysterious fellow known simply as 'Old Man', who may or may not turn out to be the King Of Hyrule in disguise (same bushy white beard you see). Cool bit: if you glide over fire, the hot air actually propels you upwards. The paraglider gives you a helpful way down in a game where climbing is prevalent.

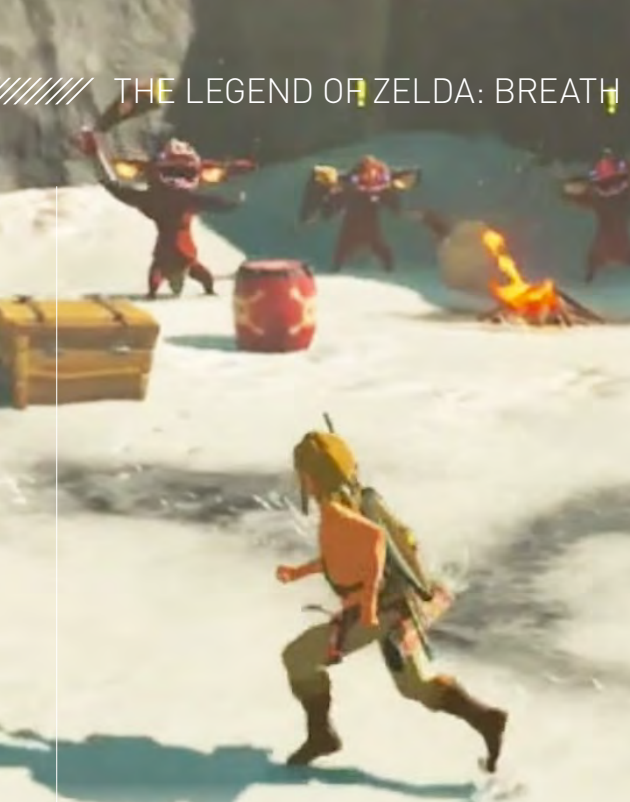


J

Jumping

For the first time ever, you can make Link leap on command using the X button, so you're no longer restricted to hopping automatically whenever you approach a ledge. This immediately opens up the environment, turning it into an actual world, rather than a series of constrictive channels. Dive into pools of water, hop onto a wall for a better vantage point, and jump straight off a cliff to witness the fairy boy's new, disturbing, ragdoll death.





Question Mark

Nintendo borrows a page from Metal Gear Solid's guide to game design by adding question marks above the heads of enemies. This subtle visual indicator enhances stealth, because

now there's a clear signifier for how aware foes are of your presence. Question marks indicate their blissful ignorance, while exclamation marks show that they've discovered you and are likely on their way to smash your face in.



Riding

Equine fanciers will be overjoyed to know Link's faithful steed Epona returns in Breath Of The Wild. She'll be crucial in galloping the grand expanse of Hyrule in good time, but if you'd prefer to have a break and saddle-up on some other horses, there are also wild ones you can tame. Your riding exploits aren't just limited to nags, however. Link can brace a shield under his feet and slide down hills, which is especially awesome on snowy mountains, turning the game into a sort of fantasy SSX. Firing arrows as you shield-surf is a highlight - take that, Legolas.



Sheikah Slate

This super useful, multi-functional device is essentially Link's stone smartphone. He receives it at the beginning of his

adventure, shortly after waking in the Shrine Of Resurrection. The Slate acts as a map (routes can be marked with multiple waypoints), an enemy scanner that can safely assess an opponent's hit points before you engage, and it's also where Runes are housed. Mostly acquired by successfully navigating trial shrines, Runes unlock magical abilities, like these three examples:



Cryonis

Create pillars of ice from water. These can be climbed to reach otherwise inaccessible areas, provide cover, and to lift objects submerged in water. Also good for annoying ducks.



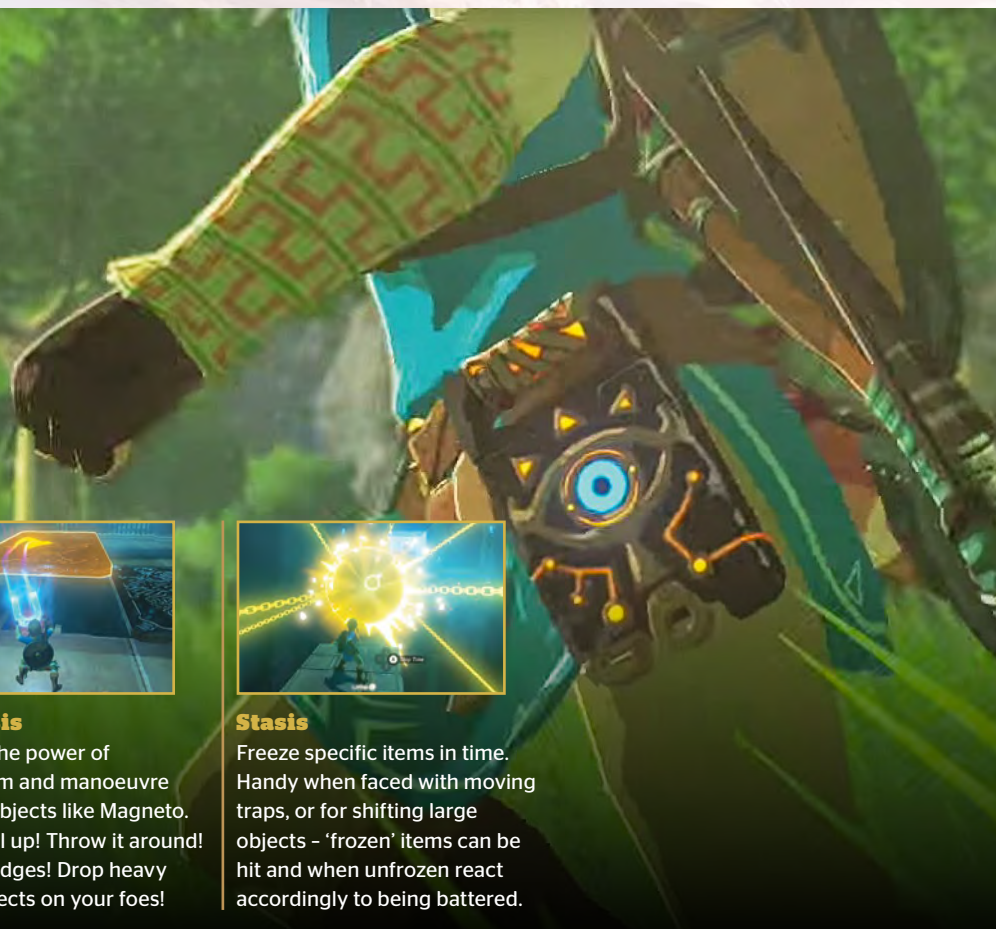
Magnesis

Harness the power of magnetism and manoeuvre metallic objects like Magneto. Pick metal up! Throw it around! Create bridges! Drop heavy metal objects on your foes!



Stasis

Freeze specific items in time. Handy when faced with moving traps, or for shifting large objects - 'frozen' items can be hit and when unfrozen react accordingly to being battered.





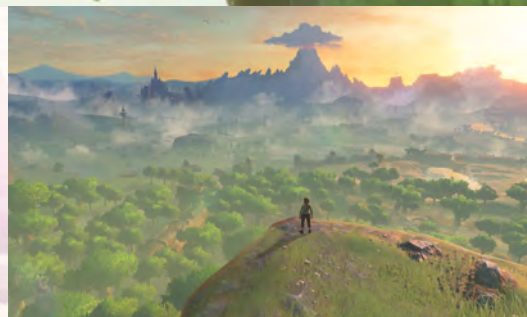
Threads

Link can don a variety of clothes, and they're not just for looking cool. His champion shirt, for instance, gives him six points of damage resistance, while his quilted shirt only offers four points but, on the upside, it's lovely and warm and resistant to cold - so, when worn, it means Link can explore icy areas without freezing. If you feel inclined, you can remove your tunic and trousers and gallivant around the Great Plateau in your pants. Full suits of armour offer better protection, obviously.



Up

Link's grippy hands can scale mostly anything, and at any angle, with the only thing preventing him from ascending out of the world being a stamina meter (which can be extended by certain food and potions). Climbing to a high position isn't just used for navigation, either. One way to defeat the stone miniboss, Steppe Talus, is to climb up his back and hack away at the brittle rocks on his shoulder.



Voices

In another exciting first for the long-running series, along with jumping and cooking, the normally quiet conversationalists of Hyrule have gained the power of audible speech. Not all characters have been bestowed with adequate vocal chords, mind - Link is still incapable of making any intelligible utterances which could pass as actual words - but as you explore the world you'll often hear fully voice-acted lines. The very first line is spoken, for example, so hopefully the story starts as it means to go on. Even if its plot beats are still bottled up tighter than a trapped Poe soul at this point.

W

Weapons

A vast array of hitty-stabby implements await



Tree Branch

DAMAGE: 2

A branch. From a tree. The least effective melee 'weapon' in the game, but it is organic and locally sourced. And you can set it on fire.



Farmer's Pitchfork

DAMAGE: 2

Weird - and this is a game where you can use a pot lid as a shield and a leaf as a weapon. Popular with angry mobs.



Bokoblin Arm

DAMAGE: 5

Skeleton Bokoblins come out at night. Send them back to bed by whacking them with their own arms.



Soldier's Spear

DAMAGE: 10

This has the best moveset of the lot, letting Link keep foes at bay and poke from range like the world's tallest and most annoying boxer.



Iron Sledgehammer

DAMAGE: 12

Now we're talking. Discover this Norse-looking noggin-basher in a shrine and find out why Thor wouldn't leave home without his.



Soldier's Broadsword

DAMAGE: 14

Along with the spiked Boko Bow and Soldier's Shield, this is the very best weapon we find. We decide to use it wisely by hitting frogs with it.



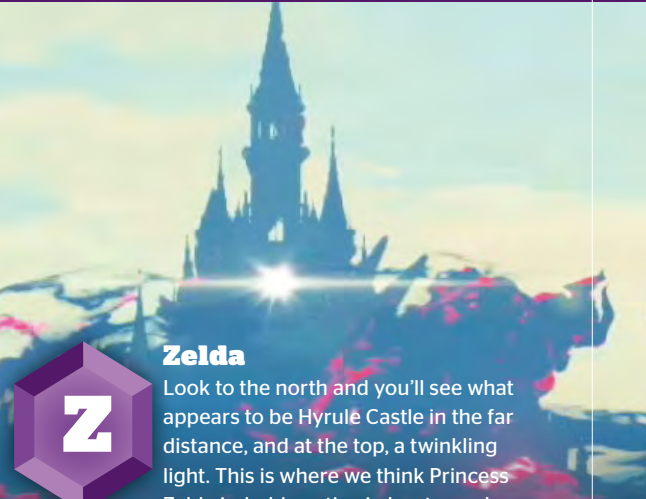
X Marks The Spot

OK, so X doesn't mark the spot, but we couldn't think of anything Zelda-related beginning with X (give it a go, it's really fun). What marks spots in Breath Of The Wild are skulls. If you see a skull on the map, you know there's something waiting there, whether it's the bouldery boss Steppe Talus, a staff that shoots gym-ball-sized fire orbs, or a camp of Bokoblins guarding rare crafting materials.



Yellow heart

Link's health is divided into two portions: red hearts and yellow hearts. Red hearts can be replenished, and yellow hearts cannot. Think of them more as temporary armour. They make you stronger while they're there, but when they're gone, they're gone for good. Well, until you get more yellow hearts by cooking food or making potions. Somewhat realistically, you can no longer scythe the grass or smash pots to find hearts, although this is a game in which deer drop perfect meat medallions upon death, so it depends on your definition of realism.



Zelda

Look to the north and you'll see what appears to be Hyrule Castle in the far distance, and at the top, a twinkling light. This is where we think Princess Zelda is, held captive in her tower by the dark malicious spirit of Calamity Ganon, who's circling like a shark. "You have been asleep for the past 100 years," says a voice (likely Zelda). "When the beast regains its power, this world will end." Whoever the voice does belong to, she's your guiding Navi, Fi, or King Of Red Lions-type figure. At one point we enter the ruins of the Temple Of Time and she tells us we're not meant to be there yet. Oops. ■

THE MAKING OF THE LEGEND

How far the Zelda series has come in its 30 years is itself one of gaming's greatest stories. Join us as we look back at how the adventure unfolded

The Hero Of Time has humble beginnings. In 1985, as Nintendo toiled on the first Mario game for Famicom (later released over here as the NES), three men sketched extra puzzles and dungeons on graph paper and bound them in a folder labelled 'Adventure Mario'. They were Takashi Tezuka, Toshihiko Nakago, and Shigeru Miyamoto, and this was the groundwork for an epic 1986 adventure called The Legend Of Zelda.

It's easy to see Miyamoto as Link's co-dad, but he's more like Link himself, the lifelong Ninty dev drawing from his own childhood adventures in the small town of Sonobe, Kyoto, exploring caves, rambling through fields,

and pushing into the unknown. "When I travelled around without a map, trying to find my way, stumbling on amazing things, I realised how it felt to go on an adventure," says Miyamoto in the 1993 book, *Game Over*.

Where Mario was linear, Zelda was open. Where Mario was immediate, Zelda let players find their own action. This was a title so ambitious it was originally slated for arcade cabinets, a format hosting Nintendo's most successful title at this point (*Donkey Kong*), but the Japanese giant's intent to conquer living rooms gave it the drive to cram Zelda onto Famicom and break new ground. Innovation was everywhere. This was among the first virtual worlds to have an

**Hey!
Listen!**

Miyamoto named Zelda after the wife of American novelist F Scott Fitzgerald. Why? Just because he liked the sound of her name.



in-game economy, an inventory system, a vast multi-route world (you could actually work your way to end-boss Ganon without ever finding a sword), and most important of all, save files.

Saving the day

You could record your progress, giving your ongoing quest a persistence other games lacked. It was pure coming-of-age – you’d return to a scary dungeon that gave you trouble earlier and find it trivial in light of your amassed experience. Exploration was an alien concept at the time, however, and Nintendo feared without direction players might become stressed – or worse, bored. They used a Japanese compound word to describe it: omotsurai, a combination of ‘fun,’ omoshiroi, and ‘painful,’ tsurai. But the Legend Of Zelda was Nintendo’s first million-selling console game.

The second instalment, *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link*, released in Japan in 1987, and possibly tipped a little too far into the realm of tsurai, introducing tough side-scrolling stages. Subsequent entries, however, such as 1991’s *A*

Link To The Past and 1993’s *Link’s Awakening* (the series’ first outing on a portable console), struck an almost perfect balance.

Then N64 arrived and gave everybody an extra dimension to deal with. But Miyamoto’s guiding hand was always there to steady the course. During a series of in-house interviews called Iwata Asks, late Nintendo president Satoru Iwata questions *Zelda* designers on Miyamoto’s habit of sending teams scrambling to implement changes. *Zelda* character designer Keisuke Nishimori says how he “worked on the final adjustments to games while living in constant fear of Miyamoto ‘upending the tea table’” – a reference to the classic Japanese comic and animated series, *Star Of The Giants*, in which a strict father flips out over dinner. For *Ocarina Of Time* co-ordinator Mitsuhiro Takano it’s “like playing Reversi against someone who really knows what they’re doing. You think you’re winning at first, but before you know what hit you, all the pieces are black”.

Big time

The two analogies capture both Nintendo’s keen eye for detail and the sense of the bigger picture necessary to make 1998’s *Ocarina Of Time* the fastest-selling



videogame ever (2.5 million units in its first month). Fast-forward past two more milestone releases – *Majora’s Mask* (2000) and *Wind Waker* (2002) – and to the latter stages of development on 2006’s *Twilight Princess*, where Miyamoto’s tea-table-turning continued. Take, for instance, his request players spend three days getting to grips with the game in the starting village rather than one. This sent shockwaves through staff who had to drastically alter the script, localisation, NPC placement, and quantity of items in the level at short notice.

Whether it’s coming up with a slingshot to ease players into the practice of firing arrows, or the clever touch of slowing down time so they could line up shots, Miyamoto approaches development with the enthusiasm of a player. According to *Twilight Princess* scriptwriter, Aya Kyogoku, Miyamoto would regularly send emails describing things he wanted to add to the game, and how their current absence made him sad. “In the

THE TRY FORCE

The masterminds behind *Zelda*’s success



Eiji Aonuma

Manager of *The Legend Of Zelda* series. From *Ocarina Of Time* dungeon designer to either director or producer for every *Zelda* game since on both console and handheld. Eiji ‘The Authority’ Aonuma lives and breathes Link.



Shigeru Miyamoto

As well as being the man behind *Mario*, the peerless Nintendo designer created *Zelda* and remains the series’ key steward, birthing it from his own adventurous childhood and driving it on with his still-insatiable curiosity.



Takashi Tezuka

He may be the least known of the *Zelda* trio, but he’s worked on every game in some capacity. He made his series directorial debut on *Game Boy’s Link’s Awakening*, and he delivered expected quality in unexpected packages.



Concept sketches for the original *Zelda*. Some nice felt-tip pen work here – 8/10.



later stages of development, there was a sob story email every night!" Kyogoku recalls.

No-one can fully define Zelda, but they'll know it when they see it. "During development, you would hear the phrase 'that's just not Zelda-esque' all the time," says Takano. "On occasions, someone would lose their temper and say something like 'what is Zelda-esque anyway?' No one could give an answer to that! But whenever someone came up with a good idea, you'd hear 'that's it – that's Zelda!'"

A perfect example of something 'Zelda-esque' would be the classic jingle that plays when you solve a puzzle. "We're actually changing it, little by little," says Eiji Aonuma, producer of multiple Zeldas. "But we can't change it too much. If we changed it drastically, it would turn into something completely different. They're like a venerable restaurant's secret sauce. And we've inherited them."

Some of the series' huge appeal has to be attributed to Link – he's inherently relatable. Twilight Princess art director Satoru Takizawa explains how the green-clad character is purposely designed to not look too cool: "We thought he should retain a kind of unsophisticated air, a certain lack of style. For instance, compared to illustrations of Link, the actual character in the game has slightly shorter legs. The legs are only just long enough to give the player

that sense of the feel of the ground under their feet when they control Link." Touches like these make him feel human (even though he's an elf).

Roam free

If you had to reduce Zelda to its essence, however, it's the exploration of a fantasy world packed with authenticity, one in which actions carry appropriate reactions. A cracked wall can be blown apart with a bomb. A floor switch can be pressed by dragging a big pot over it. Nintendo planner Kentaro Tominaga believes focusing on the right kind of realism is key to this authenticity: "I don't mean the kind of realism where each individual strand of hair is accurately depicted, but rather the fact that a shop owner is not likely to give a hearty welcome to a child that comes into their shop in the middle of the night." It's more than giving you a space to roam – it's making that roaming rewarding.

Breath Of The Wild is next and, from what we've played so far, it's going to be the most divergent Legend Of Zelda experience ever. And, yet, it's the same. Because, when you think about it, a series encompassing 2D platforming, top-down dungeon-crawling, cel-shaded sailing, and steam train exploration, really boils down to a simple story of an inquisitive kid investigating the unknown, like Miyamoto all those years ago. ■

HONOUR ROLE

Six unforgettable moments from the legendary series



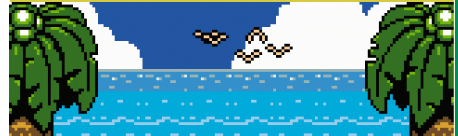
The Legend Of Zelda

As Link stepped out onto the first screen of the original Zelda way back in 1986, Hyrule brimmed with possibility, intrigue, danger, and excitement.



A Link To The Past

The game's map was already massive, so it caught everyone by surprise when they discovered they could enter a whole second, evil-tainted version of it called the Dark World.



Link's Awakening

One of the most heartfelt moments in all of Zelda sees our silent protagonist chilling on a sunny beach with his romantic love interest, Marin, as she daydreams aloud to him.



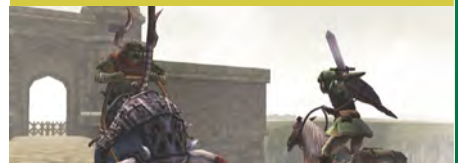
Ocarina Of Time

Entering the Temple Of Time and turning the clocks forward transformed you into Adult Link and offered a frightening glimpse of future Hyrule, desolate and in ruins. Thankfully, you could revert back to childhood.



Wind Waker

You head out onto an azure ocean, unfurl the sails, the wind catches, and the Great Sea Theme strikes up. Duh doo doo duh duh! It's enough to reduce actual adult people to tears.



Twilight Princess

Saddling up on trusty steed Epona and galloping through a more expansive, more realistic take on Hyrule Field, and engaging in mounted combat against Bokoblins on boar-back. Truly thrilling!

THE LINK LIST

Over 30 years we've seen more than a few Zelda games...
But how many on our comprehensive list have you played?



LINK'S AWAKENING

Matt Sakuraoka-Gilman

“Why do I always pick this as my favourite Zelda? Partly it's down to the great dungeon design and incredible soundtrack (Tal Tal Heights remains one of the best Zelda tunes ever), but it's also because this was the first one I finished. There's something about holding the whole world in your own two hands, along with the dreamlike themes, that makes it extra special.”



Hey! Listen!

A glitch in A Link To The Past using the Pegasus Boots lets you access a mysterious secret area called 'Chris Houlihan's Room'.

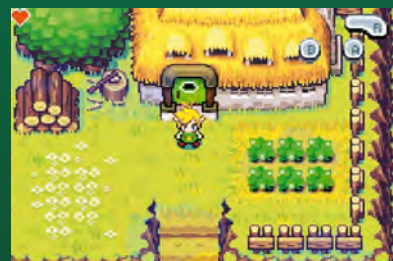


- **The Legend Of Zelda**
Format NES Year 1987
- **Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link**
Format NES Year 1988
- **Zelda Game & Watch**
Format Game & Watch Year 1989
- **The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past**
Format SNES Year 1992
- **The Legend Of Zelda Game Watch**
Format Wristwatch Year 1992
- **The Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening**
Format GB Year 1993
- **Link: The Faces Of Evil**
Format CD-i Year 1993
- **Zelda: The Wand Of Gamelon**
Format CD-i Year 1993
- **Zelda's Adventure**
Format CD-i Year 1995
- **The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time**
Format N64 Year 1998
- **The Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening DX**
Format Game Boy Color Year 1998
- **The Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask**
Format N64 Year 2000
- **The Legend Of Zelda: Oracle Of Seasons**
Format Game Boy Color Year 2001
- **The Legend Of Zelda: Oracle Of Ages**
Format Game Boy Color Year 2001
- **The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker**
Format GameCube Year 2003
- **The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past & Four Swords**
Format GBA Year 2003
- **The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time Master Quest**
Format GameCube Year 2003
- **The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap**
Format GBA Year 2004
- **The Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures**
Format GameCube Year 2005
- **The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess**
Format Wii, GameCube Year 2006
- **The Legend Of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass**
Format DS Year 2007



THE MINISH CAP

James Nouch



“Development of The Minish Cap may have been spearheaded by Capcom, but the game retains just about everything that made the 2D Zeldas so elegantly playable while introducing a gorgeous new art style. Add a preoccupation with hats, and you have a game that ticks all my boxes.”

Hey! Listen!

Crazy Tracy, the flirty potion-brewer from Link's Awakening, cameos in off-kilter Wii adventure Captain Rainbow.





Hey! Listen!

There's a caged shark at the bottom of a lake in Ocarina Of Time, said to represent Ninty's dislike of the GameShark.



OCARINA OF TIME 3D
Ben Griffin



Hey! Listen!

Ocarina Of Time's Malon wears something special on her neckerchief: a bronze brooch of Mario's famous rival, Bowser.



MAJORA'S MASK 3D
Robin Valentine



■ Link's Crossbow Training

Format Wii Year 2007

■ Freshly-Picked Tingle's Rosy Rupeeland

Format DS Year 2007

■ Tingle's Balloon Fight DS

Format DS Year 2007

■ The Legend Of Zelda: Spirit Tracks

Format DS Year 2009

■ The Legend Of Zelda: Skyward Sword

Format Wii Year 2011

■ The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time 3D

Format 3DS Year 2011

■ The Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords Anniversary Edition

Format DS Year 2011

■ The Legend Of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds

Format 3DS Year 2013

■ The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD

Format Wii U Year 2013

■ Hyrule Warriors

Format Wii U Year 2014

■ The Legend Of Zelda: Tri Force Heroes

Format 3DS Year 2015

■ The Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask 3D

Format 3DS Year 2015

■ The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess HD

Format Wii U Year 2016

■ Hyrule Warriors Legends

Format 3DS Year 2016

■ My Nintendo Picross: The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess

Format 3DS Year 2016

“ I never completed the N64 classic as a kid. I rinsed this one. Not only is Link's adventure extra immersive in 3D (I felt like I was *in* the world, just behind him), but the passing of time from idyllic youth to responsible adulthood was all the more meaningful. ”

Enough of our jibber-jabber: it's time for you to tick off the list and work out which of the Zelda games is your favourite. (Choose Ripened Tingle's Balloon Trip Of Love and you're either a terrible fibber or terrifyingly warped.)

How did you score?



Only in Japan

The ones that never made it to the west...

BS The Legend Of Zelda

Format Satellaview Year 1995

The Legend Of Zelda: Ancient Stone Tablets

Format Satellaview Year 1997

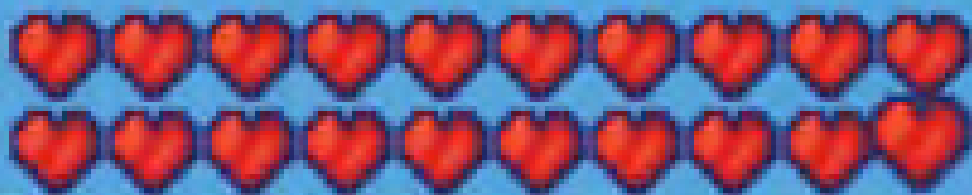
Ripened Tingle's Balloon Trip Of Love

Format DS Year 2009

Too Much Tingle Pack

Format DS Year 2009

“ With its Groundhog Day time travel and transformative masks, Majora is a Zelda game like no other, a wonderfully weird experiment. As a child I thought I'd never see anything scarier than that moon. Little did I know Nintendo would one day make it 3D... ”



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA MAJORA'S MASK





How do you follow
the greatest game
of all time?
By messing with
time itself...

Nintendo writer Mitsuhiro Takano describes Majora's Mask like this: "The characters look familiar but something is different somehow."

That's putting it mildly. Because this sixth addition to the Zelda family is The Weird One. The game's early title of 'Zelda Gaiden,' meaning 'sidequest,' was spot-on, because from the very first screenshots, it was clear that everything in Majora's Mask is off to one side, all strangely left-of-centre and surreally tilted, as though we are looking at the Ocarina Of Time universe in a wobbly funhouse mirror. It is also, of course, absolutely brilliant.

The Mask of Majora itself, though? Despite kicking off the plot by turning a Skull Kid into a megalomaniacal little monster, the mystical facecovering is a red herring. Talk to anyone who's played the game and they'll rock back and forth and

KEY ELEMENTS

This game's sprite stuff...



Magic Beans

Returning from Ocarina Of Time, these sprout into platforms when planted and watered. Fair enough – but in a lovely bonus touch, they also burst into life immediately when it is raining.



Goron's Mask

It takes a lot to make riding Epona seem boring. But this mask's fuel-injected rolling does the job, letting you tear around Termina Field like a missile with a face.



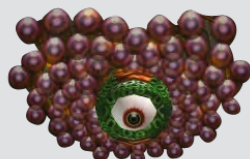
Little Brother Beaver

Nintendo's character designers were clearly getting too much coffee and not enough sleep. That thing on his tummy actually spins around, you know.



Real Bombchu

From a distance, Zelda's cuddliest enemy. From less of a distance, belligerently explosive suicidal vermin. Makes you wonder why rat poison hasn't been invented in Link's universe.



Wart

Much fiddly sword/hookshot switchery required to pop this boss's bubbles and reach the vulnerable eye. You'll never look at bubblewrap the same way again.



Fierce Deity's Mask

Us: "We're getting a bit tired of child Link now." Nintendo: "Okay, how about Link as a two metre-tall glowing-eyed energy-spitting badass?" Us: "Mummy!"



Ice Arrows

You can almost hear the developers chuckling when you stumble on this weapon's crafty secret: it can freeze water to make impromptu floating platforms.

weep as they remember the game's true villain: the moon.

Wherever you are on the game world's surface, you can look up and then shrink back as megatons of grey rock, angry eyes and even angrier teeth stare back. The moon is truly terrifying: an unusually evil moment of Nintendo design brilliance. And it is on a collision course for Clock Town, the capital city of the game's parallel world of Termina. It will take three game days (just a few real-life hours) to crash down, taking Link and everyone else with it.

But here's the trick: with a few toots on the Ocarina, Link can repeatedly turn back time to day one. That buys you time to solve dungeons, smash bosses and, ultimately, save the world. But it also means Nintendo have cleverly given us Groundhog Day: The Game, building a gratifying set of puzzles around studying the habits of Termina's citizens, who innocently go about their same three days of business, over and over again.

And who, over and over again, are horribly doomed. Majora's Mask is sad. Every day begins with a thunderous full-screen Caption Of Doom telling you how many hours remain. Every day sees worried characters rue the past and fear the future. On day three, everyone flees, and you are left wandering through an eerily empty ghost town, under a moon



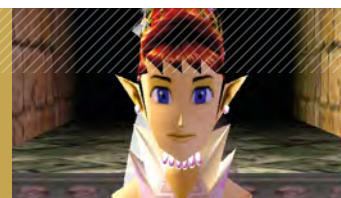
now so close its terrifying face filled the sky.

Director Eiji Aonuma – in his first time helming a Zelda game – is the master of melancholy. There is a heartbreaking moment where you free a young girl's father from a zombie curse, but, even as they are tearfully reunited in a rare moment of joy, you know that none of it actually matters because these poor souls were eventually going to die in a flaming moon inferno. To this day Majora's Mask remains the most tummy-punchingly emotional Zelda game.



5 LEGENDARY MOMENTS

Zelda saw in the new millennium with these brilliant bits that still make us tingle. No, not that tingle...



Anju and Kafei

One of the series' most heroically involved and long-winded side-quests sees you acting as go-between for this pair of cursed lovers, rushing to meet 13 separate appointments in three days.



The Great Bay Coast
- you eventually get
to swim in it.



But, like we say, the game is weird too. It was put together in record time by core Ocarina Of Time coders: we'd barely learned about Majora's Mask in mid-1999 before the gold cartridge was in our hands. They pulled it off by reusing its predecessor's characters, scenery and items, but tweaked with new names, new roles and new stories. As such, it is downright odd meeting all these old friends who not only don't remember you, but who don't remember themselves.

The 24 wearable masks cement the game's off-centredness.

When he puts them on, Link literally becomes a bouncing Deku Shrub, a rolling Goron, a swimming Zora. And other masks – fairies and bombs and crying faces and bunny ears – trigger insane but meaty sidequests and subplots where aliens abduct cows and marching chicks spontaneously transform into full-grown Cuccos.

But, odd as it is, it is The Legend of Zelda through and through. The focus is less on dungeons and more on mini-quests, so Majora's Mask will always be remembered more for its strange atmosphere

than its actual gameplay. But what dungeons there are prove to be mind-bending caverns of pure gaming wonder, intricately interlocking jigsaw puzzles that remind you why you got into videogames in the first place. Nintendo even threw in a hernia-inducingly complex water temple for old time's sake.

So it's a wonder that gamers were ever worried Majora's Mask would turn out to be a thin, rushed imitation of Ocarina Of Time. It's the moon they should have been worried about.

Oh god. That moon...■

Rolling around as a Goron is always going to be fun.



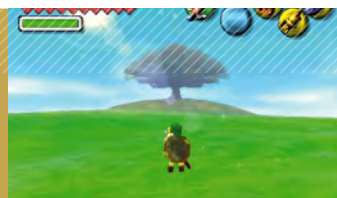
Mountain Village

Zelda's first real snow world is a shiveringly spectacular sight, and marks the return of Ocarina Of Time faves, the Gorons. Finishing Snowhead Temple brings springtime melting.



Elegy of Emptiness

In keeping with the game's off-kilter feel, this song creates horrifying Link statues with soulless eyes. They come in handy for depressing switches. And for depressing generally.



The surface of the Moon

Ahead of the final battle, you are unexpectedly transported to this surreal, dreamlike field. One huge tree, and no music – just a gentle breeze. Stunning, unforgettable stuff.



Majora's Wrath

Ganon seems about as frightening as a pet teacup pig after this battle. The mask turns into a terrifying whip-armed stick-figure nightmare who'd be right at home in a Silent Hill game.

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A collage of video game characters. In the center is Kratos from God of War, a large man with a red and white striped face and a beard, holding a large axe. To his left is Aloy from Horizon Zero Dawn, a woman with red hair. To his right is Link from The Legend of Zelda, a young man with blonde hair and a blue tunic. On the far right is a blue robot from the game Borderlands. The background is dark with some light effects.

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THE LEGEND OF ZELDA THE WIND WAKER

The game that saw the Zelda series sail the ocean blue – and take on the cartoon visuals that the next generation of DS owners would come to adore...



If there's one treasured moment that all Wind Waker players remember, it's the feeling you get when you see that you have mail. It's the little details that count in this game, you see, and when you cruise into an island's harbour and see a jaunty red post box bouncing excitedly from side to side it genuinely warms all four pieces of your heart.

Everything in the game is beautiful, cheery and fabulously presented – from the 'schnaaay?' noise a Fishman makes as he scribbles local islands on your small fry map all the way up to the final showdown with a puppet-themed Ganondorf. While the clouds of animated purple smoke that billow as you slice Moblins make it feel like a Disney cartoon, the boomerang, bombs and bow make it feel like home.

These days it's strange to think that the game's iconic cel-shaded look was so controversial, but it took purists a frighteningly long time to convert. What it brought to the game, however, were characters and animation with more life, vitality and humour than the series had ever mustered before. The face of Link's grandmother as he first departs from Outset Island is still one of the most heart-breaking Nintendo images, while the character invested in the sparky tomboy pirate leader Tetra (who

"Sail a stretch of ocean peppered with islands to explore."

happens to look very Zelda-ish, doncha think?) through cheeky/vicious smiles, winks and proud strutting is unforgettable. Likewise the hilarity as Link is catapulted in a barrel towards certain doom in the Forsaken Fortress, painfully bounces off ancient walls upon the appearance of the Tower Of The Gods or looks nonplussed after plucking something rubbish out of a chest is priceless.

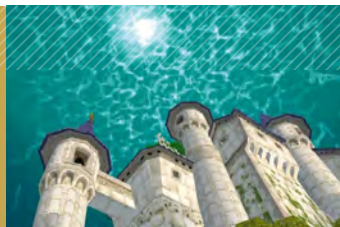


The story posits this new Link as an ancestor of Ocarina's Hero of Time in a stretch of ocean peppered with islands to explore, oddities to bash with his sword, and piglets to rescue. The plotline runs deep in every sense of the word, with a familiar castle that has been frozen in time lurking within the depths, yet despite the usual Triforce presence it feels very much a separate story to the Zeldas that preceded it.



5 LEGENDARY MOMENTS

Wind Waker's high spots are personal – times when the wind fills your sails and you are bouncing full-pelt on the waves in pursuit of adventure. There's still plenty to reminisce about, though...



One moment in time

Hyrule Castle sits on the ocean floor: forever monochrome and frozen in time. Spooky grey baddies stand like statues until, of course, Link retrieves the Master Sword. Cue carnage.



Meet Link the pig

Forget boring old Cuccos; in Wind Waker's opening you hunt piglets, and the one you collect is summarily named after you. Return later to find he's got much bigger, and hungrier...



Seagull mind trick

Ever wanted to stare viciously at the world and steal children's ice-cream? Through the Hyoi Pear, Link can take over gulls' minds, using them to Hoover up rupees and slam into high switches.



Link's boat, The King Of Red Lions, was Wind Waker's Epona.



Beedle's about

Beedle is a big-nosed topless salesman. His finest moment comes when hard graft shopping has finally earned you a Complimentary ID in his store. It gets you... a compliment from Beedle.



Deadly Medli

This duck-billed Rito moonlights as the Sage of Earth - meaning that she finds herself under your control in the Earth Temple as she flutters around and twangs her light-deflecting harp.

KEY ELEMENTS

Wind waking ingredients

Ganondorf

After his puppet form, the true Ganondorf comes out to play, and ultimately the last remnants of Hyrule are swept away beneath the ocean. He's a scary chap, with quite the temper on him.



Makar

Makar's a lovely chap. He's a leaf-faced Korok, and a somewhat itinerant musician who can't stop getting himself into trouble. He's late for a vital ceremony, so, of course, it's Link to the rescue...



The Pirate Gang

A group of swarthy pirates ably led by a small (and rather bossy) girl. Tetra took over the family's nautical robbery business after the sad loss of her mother. They have a soft side, but don't like admitting it.



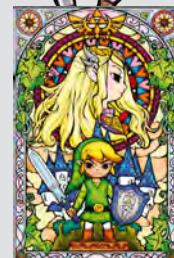
Tott

Tott's a strange one. He dances non-stop on top of a grave trying to turn day into night, and describes himself as "The World's Charismatic Dancer Extraordinaire". Amazingly, it's a feat he achieves with your help.



Stained glass wonder

Cel-shaded toon stylings aren't the only art ingenuities in Wind Waker - beautifully imagined stained glass windows and wood carvings also help tell the story. This is one church we'd go to every Sunday...





WELCOME, TRAVELLER... TO WINDFALL ISLAND!

Take a break from your relaxing Great Sea cruise by docking at this buzzing island metropolis!

MINGLE!

Pursue young ruffians The Killer Bees around town, and demand that they return to school!



PHOTOGRAPH!

Befriend old men and become a paparazzo with a Deluxe Picto Box! Take sneaky photos of ignorant townsfolk, or simply Lenzo's favourite coastlines!



SHOP!

Meet a man who wears an Eskimo suit on even the sunniest day! Buy a sail from him, and possibly much more besides!

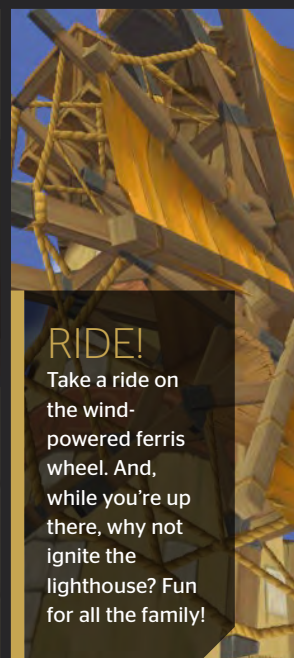
BOMB!

Buy bombs from Windfall Island's very own bomb shop, then explode them at your leisure! What are you looking at? That's totally normal!



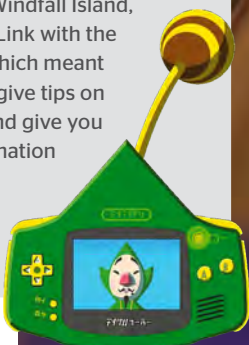
RIDE!

Take a ride on the wind-powered ferris wheel. And, while you're up there, why not ignite the lighthouse? Fun for all the family!



A LINK TO THE GBA

The cel-shaded stylings were a clear innovation, as was the way that Link's wide eyes would drift towards items of note in his surroundings. A fascinating, if under-used, tool was the way the game could link up with a Game Boy Advance. Once rescued from prison on Windfall Island, Tingle presents Link with the Tingle Tuner - which meant your GBA could give tips on your progress and give you extra map information when you were delving deep in dungeons.



Hero's Clothes... too warm, and Link was hoping for something red.

Wind Waker's greatest joy is in sailing. Much like the very first time you galloped Epona over Hyrule Field, taking Link's boat (called The King Of Red Lions) into the open seas is a revelation. The seagulls soar as high as the music as you bounce over waves and (later on) begin to fend off vast Octos surrounded by whirlpools and purple shark-like Gyorgs. The game works on a 7x7 grid - meaning that there are 49 areas to explore and the sense of discovery and completion as you tick off each one is electric. A central gimmick is that you can change the direction of the wind - filling your sails to take you in your favoured direction to

discover ghost ships, secret caves and treasures to be dredged up from the murky depths.

This isn't, however, a perfect Zelda. Despite a later ability that can fast-travel Link away to other areas on a sea-tornado, many gamers tired of the sea navigation, and the game's occasional focus on stealth (hello, Forsaken Fortress!) is misjudged and mishandled. Above all, however, the game's rushed development led to two major dungeons being dropped from the end game - and it shows. The Triforce was instead put back together in an inelegant and deathly-dull fetch-quest, while green-suited man-child moron

Tingle was allowed to effectively hold the world to ransom in exchange for deciphering some maps. (After this incident many gamers would never be able to trust him again.)

The Wind Waker remains, however, an outright Zelda classic - a worthy forefather of the Phantom Hourglass and Spirit Tracks games that would continue its story on DS. The high seas bring a spirit of open adventure to a familiar template and, amid the delights of dungeons like the Tower Of The Gods and Dragon Roost Cavern, is as pleasant to rest your eyes upon on as it is to actually play. Piracy isn't all bad, it seems. ■



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA TWILIGHT PRINCESS

The biggest Zelda ever made – and quite possibly the best, too...

The cynics would have you believe that Twilight Princess was a step backwards for Zelda: a return to trusted and traditional ground after the divisive cartoon style of Wind Waker. In a sense, that's true: Nintendo blamed Wind Waker's slightly sluggish sales on the public's perception of its child-friendly visuals, and Twilight Princess was a concerted effort to court the older gamer by rooting the game in a darker, more 'realistic' world. You only have to look back at the reaction to the first trailer, unveiled at Nintendo's 2004 pre-E3 press conference, to see what a successful move this was: grown men cheered as Link charged on-screen, fighting Moblins from horseback and galloping across a detailed Hyrule Field. This is what the fans wanted, right? The cynics would have you believe otherwise.

Time has, quite rightly, reconsidered Wind Waker's stature, and its astonishing, expressive visuals

KEY ELEMENTS

This game's sprite stuff...



Link

Early in the game, Link is just a humble farm boy, resigned to a quiet life of herding goats and being the object of adoration for his young friend Colin.



Midna

The greatest Zelda supporting character ever? We say yes. This mischievous and powerful imp is a fantastic creation, and not quite what she seems...



Agitha

This insect-obsessed freak lives in Castle Town and gives you one of the game's few side-quests – to collect golden bugs so she can live out her fantasy of being the “Princess of bugs”.



King Bulblin

This giant Bulblin kidnaps Link's friends Ilia and Colin, and later Link fights him several times, including a memorable joust on the Bridge of Eldin.



Skull Kid

A disturbing and frustrating creature who leads you through the Lost Woods, Skull Kid's presence is announced by the glow of his lantern.



Ball And Chain

Although you really only use it in Snowpeak Ruins, this magnificent item is hugely satisfying to use, smashing through ice and enemies with ease.



Spinner

Of most use in the Arbiter's Grounds, the Spinner allows Link to move speedily along wall-mounted rails to get to hidden destinations.

remain timeless – unusual for videogames, a medium in which each generation of console hardware makes the games from the last one look outdated and creaky. Twilight Princess, in the years since its release, hasn't fared quite so well: some of its textures are a little rough and ready; TP's Kakariko Village will never be Nintendo's finest graphical moment; the motion controls – a legacy of the game's transition from GameCube to Wii – aren't as comprehensive as was originally hoped; the side-quests are frankly meagre; it takes a while to get going, with the first dungeon – the superb Forest Temple – not coming along until a few hours in.

Princess perfect

But these are the only criticisms of that can be made of Twilight Princess, and the cynics are wrong. Twilight Princess is, quite possibly, the greatest Zelda game ever made (until, of course, Breath Of The Wild comes to town). Any faults you can level at it are the result only of its gloriously sky-high ambition. Twilight Princess is certainly the biggest Zelda ever made. It is a colossal affair, and it'll take a good 50 hours or so to see and find everything in it. If not longer. The Hyrule present here is an enormous land mass, containing myriad hidden areas and some of



A memorable joust on the Bridge of Eldin, which disappears at one point.

the series' best-ever dungeons. From the dank, deep secrets of the Lakebed Temple to the heaven-bound strangeness of the City in the Sky, Twilight Princess's dungeons are rammed full of incredible sights, brilliant fights and some of the best puzzles Nintendo have ever constructed. Who can forget walking on the ceiling using the Iron Boots and the magnetic rock structures in the Goron Mines, or using cannons to smash apart icy walls in Snowpeak Ruins, or using the Spinner to revolve entire rooms in the Arbiter's Grounds? Here Nintendo outdid itself, with even the majesty of Ocarina of Time's Forest Temple fading into the background.

But the dungeons are just one part of a glorious whole. Every Zelda game since Ocarina of Time has been a rebalancing of that game's main-quest-to-side-quest ratio. Majora's Mask went radically far in the side-quest direction and proved to be a



5 LEGENDARY MOMENTS

With the biggest Hyrule to date, there's so much to see and do in Twilight Princess that it's mind-boggling...



Hyrule Field

As ever, venturing out on to Hyrule Field for the first time is a magical moment, with lush fields rolling out before you and Hyrule Castle visible on the horizon.

Deku Babas are nastier than ever. If you get trapped by them, do a spin attack to get free.



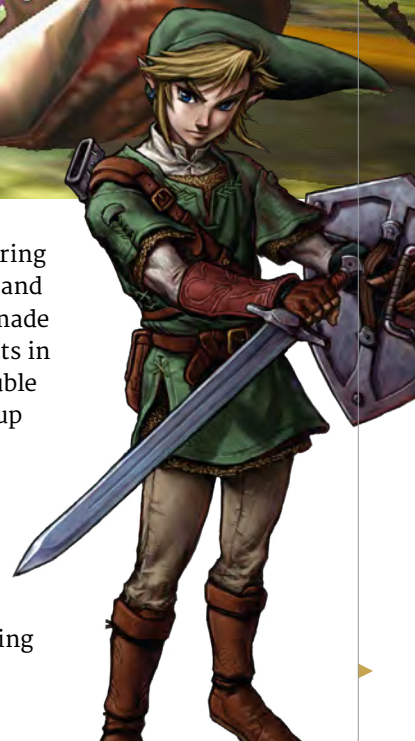
distinct and different experience to its predecessor. Twilight Princess, by contrast, left most of the side quests behind and offered a truly epic main quest. You'll collect golden insects, hunt down Poes and spend entire days searching for hidden heart pieces, sure, but the meat of the game is a frankly enormous adventure. There's no time-twisting here or other clever narrative tricks, just a (relatively) straight ahead and exhaustive journey into a world

unlike any other. Just when you think you might be on the home stretch, you'll enter the Twilight Realm to for a surprise dungeon. When you've defeated the villain Zant, you've then got Hyrule Castle to negotiate before you even get to Ganondorf – and then you've got a massive, multi-stage fight to end all fights to get stuck into. Twilight Princess is a game that gives, and gives, and gives some more. It's colossal, and awash with wondrous set-pieces

and a frankly belief-beggar amount of items to collect and use, including many that made their Legend of Zelda debuts in this game, such as the Double Clawshots for scrambling up vertical surfaces.

Combat rocks

Then there's the combat, which refines and expands the glorious fighting found in Wind Waker to



Lake Hylia

You can always gauge the quality of a Zelda by its sunrises – and watching the sun come up over Lake Hylia is a breathtakingly beautiful moment.



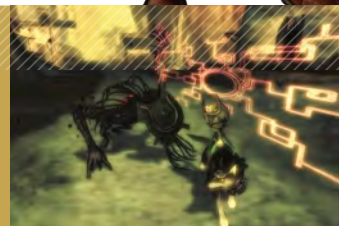
Cave Of Ordeals

In the Gerudo Mesa you can enter this punishing trial-by-combat: 50 floors of relentless fightiness that culminates in a hardcore ruck with three Iron Knuckles!



Snowpeak Snowboarding

To get to Snowpeak Ruins – a fantastic icebound mansion – you'll need to surf down Snowpeak Mountain in a race against a Yeti. True!



Wolf Action

Early in the game you're forced to traverse the cursed twilight version of Hyrule in the form of a wolf. It's hugely atmospheric and very, very spooky.



HEY! LISTEN

"To me Zelda is a game that isn't really a game. It's really a place that you go - a place where you go to touch things in the world and interact with them and you explore and you experience this vast world all around you. And that's really what it's about." - Eiji Aonuma on Twilight Princess

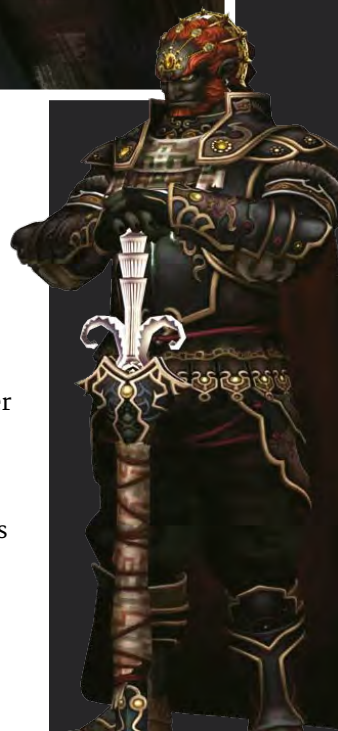
a remarkable degree. Link can find and learn special moves that add several dimensions to the basic, robust swordplay, and the elegant, bloody dance that is fighting an Iron Knuckle - the armoured giants that prove to be Twilight Princess's toughest bad guys - is exciting and tense beyond measure.

But perhaps most of all, Twilight Princess simply nails the one thing that Zelda has always done best: the sense that you're exploring an entire fantastic

world, one just behind your television screen. As a simple travelogue, Twilight Princess outstripped everything its predecessors had done. From the gorgeous tranquillity of Lake Hylia to the heat-shimmered sands of the Gerudo Mesa, from the serene beauty of Zora's Domain to the frosted elegance of Snowpeak Mountain, this Hyrule has sights and sounds to enthrall and astound, and behind the classic visual style lies a subtle and entirely glorious sense of

design, colour and lighting. Long after the fight has been done, you'll be revisiting Twilight Princess to see the sights of its Hyrule, and marvel constantly at the glory of its environs.

So, then. Twilight Princess is the biggest and arguably the best Zelda yet. Some people may prefer Skyward Sword, with its more compact and packed gameworld, but it's definitely less expansive. So until Breath of the Wild arrives in our sweaty hands, it's something we can all savour. ■



WORLD OF WONDER

Join us as we take you on a magical mystery tour through the wonders of Twilight Princess's Hyrule



1 Kakariko Village

This is your first port of call once you leave Ordon Village. It's a dusty, flyblown frontier town that contains the gateway to Death Mountain and the Gorons.



2 Zora's Domain

A simply gorgeous area, this. A water-filled canyon with a glistening waterfall, home to the aquatic Zora. Watch the sun set here for a truly magnificent sight.



3 Arbiter's Grounds

This desert dungeon is a spooky affair, home to sand-strewn skeletons and rooms where you physically turn the walls to proceed. Mind-bending and marvellous.



4 Lakebed Temple

Deep beneath Lake Hylia is this Zora dungeon, where water flows need rerouting to allow access to deeper areas. Home to a hugely impressive fish-boss.



5 Snowpeak Ruins

An unusual dungeon, this, in that it's a ruined mansion rather than a subterranean network of rooms. This snowy abode is also home to a friendly Yeti couple.



6 Secret Stuff

Secret areas abound in Twilight Princess, such as this hidden cavern to the side of the Bridge of Eldin. You'll need all sorts of items to access them and their treasures.



7 Temple of Time

You can get here from the rustic, ruined beauty of the Sacred Grove. Here you'll find the Dominion Rod, with which you can control statues.



8 Cucco Flight!

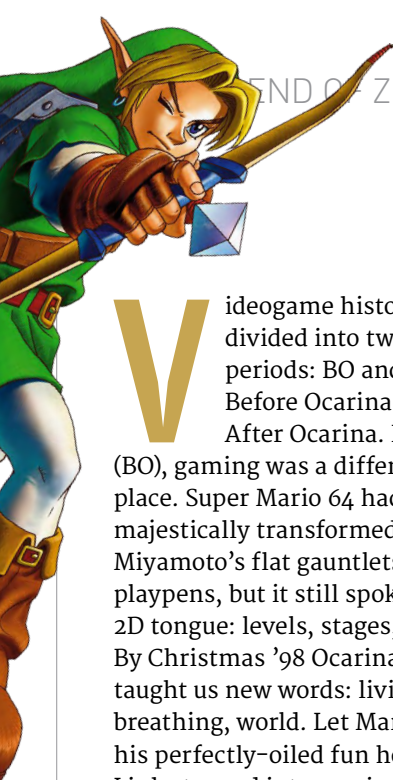
Want to get to Lake Hylia? Then you'll need to get there by Cucco. Pay Falbi 20 rupees, grab a Cucco, and enjoy a gentle flight down to the sun-dappled shore. Lovely.





THE LEGEND OF ZELDA OCARINA OF TIME

Welcome to a living,
breathing Hyrule.
See how one hero's
journey into a 3D
land redefined the
gaming landscape...



Videogame history is divided into two periods: BO and AO. Before Ocarina and After Ocarina. In 1998 (BO), gaming was a different place. Super Mario 64 had majestically transformed Miyamoto's flat gauntlets into 3D playpens, but it still spoke with a 2D tongue: levels, stages, courses. By Christmas '98 Ocarina had taught us new words: living, breathing, world. Let Mario enjoy his perfectly-oiled fun house. Link stepped into a universe where the sun rises and sets. Where monsters emerge at night and people risk coming out during the day. Where past decisions impact on future worlds. Ocarina changed everything.

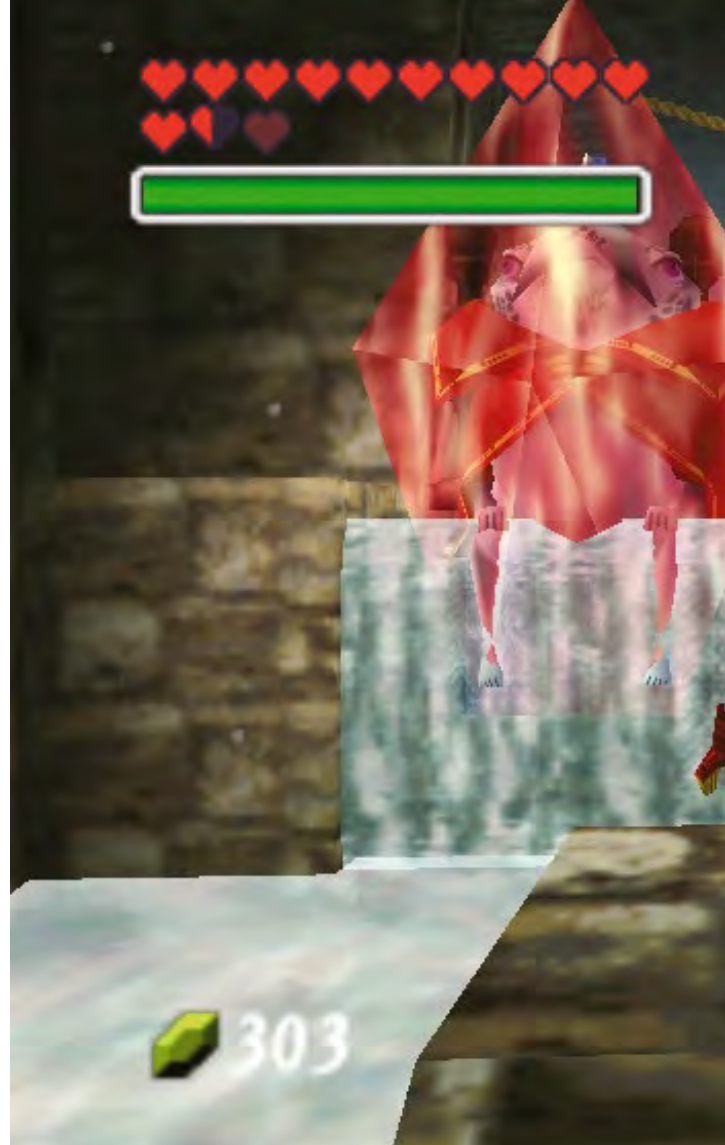
Talking of past decisions, Ocarina was nearly an altogether different game. While Nintendo put the finishing touches to Mario's 3D 'tache, a smaller team hammered out Link's 3D future. They desired cinematic swashbuckling, based on traditional samurai movies, or 'chanbara'. How to achieve this was up for debate: one dev pitched a polygonal remake of Zelda II, while Miyamoto suggested a first-person perspective. He imagined exploring Hyrule in an FPS, flipping to third-person in the event of combat. Thankfully, Link's 3D character model was considered too good to hide away

and the idea was canned. Yes, Mario's dad *can* get it wrong.

What emerged in 1998 was the result of every key Nintendo brain throwing in their two cents. At its core there's a simple yarn about a little boy trying to save the world. He becomes a big boy in the process – thanks to the Master Sword – but this is hardly Dickens. No, the game's real magic is in the world itself. Hyrule, so squat and dinky viewed from above, was injected with N64's graphical oomph. Mountain tops rose and lake beds sank. Rolling plains rolled on and on and dark caves wormed into the ground. All the imagining we had to do in 2D, Nintendo now did for us, leaving our minds to marvel at the scale of it.

Curiouser and curiouser

Miyamoto says Zelda was born in a childhood spent exploring hills and caves in his surrounding countryside. Ocarina taps into the same sense of curiosity. See the mountain in the distance? Climb it. See the shiny rupees at the bottom of a watery abyss? Dive to them. Cracks can be bombed, soil patches sown with magic beans and rapids ridden from source to watery end. Local characters catch your attention with hearsay: noises in the graveyard, well-dwelling scientists and mysterious organ-players in the



Poor old King Zora. First his son gets gobbled by their ceremonial whale, then his aquatic palace freezes over. Sucks to be you, your majesty!

windmill. Ocarina has more mysteries than seven seasons of Lost combined. The difference is, Nintendo is willing to let you find the answers.

All this works because of Hyrule's unmatched sense of place. Give players the same free rein in, say, Croydon, and they wouldn't be bothered to leave the house. Sightseeing in Hyrule is a game in itself, making your way from Link's leafy home to the



5 LEGENDARY MOMENTS

What, we only get five? Ocarina is 40 hours of legendary gaming! Oh well, here goes...



Field of dreams

When Link stepped onto the sprawling Hyrule Field, 3D gaming changed forever. It seems small by modern standards, but back in 1998 all that virtual grass made grown men weep.



Sunny delight

Once Hyrule Field weeping subsided, watching the sunrise over Lake Hylia set us off again. Day/night cycles were technological witchcraft; the resulting orange hues truly beautiful.



Sworded affair

Claiming the Master Sword skips Link seven years into the future. Not only does he fast-forward through the embarrassment of puberty, he can now play with grown-up weapons.



ferocious magma lakes atop Death Mountain – a location so hot, Link can only survive for one minute without a fire-retardant tunic. And the time travelling mechanic – hopping Link seven years into the future – means you see everything twice. Spotting how tiny childhood changes alter the future is like starring in your own version of Back To The Future.

Believe it or not, amid gawping at forests and weeping at sunrises,

there's an actual game. And what a game. Zelda's dungeons are what 3D was made for – that extra dimension giving architects elbow-room to do elbow-drops on our cerebral cortex. Eureka follows eureka: realising wooden combat staves can burn, feeding bombs to armoured lizards, sinking into a whale's stomach lining to reach new organs, learning to defeat Link's exact mirror image... we could fill this



Grand slam

Ganon's phantom doppelgänger guards the Forest Temple and must be beaten in a game of lightning tennis. Time Link's sword swings precisely to thwack energy bolts straight back in his ugly mug.



Link? LIIIIIIINK!!!

Sneaking around Gerudo Fortress' fearsome lady guards is like Metal Gear Solid without the five-hour phone conversations about Godzilla and cherry blossoms. And we think it's all the better for it.

KEY ELEMENTS

Packed with goodness

Ocarina of Time

It ages heroes, summons storms and turns night into day. Ironically, it was this innocuous tooter that allowed Ganondorf to seize power. Bet Link wishes he'd kept up the recorder.



Navi

Link's fairy helper pushed most gamers to the brink of madness with her endless shrill requests to "Listen!" and "Watch out!" She just about redeems herself with boss fighting tips.



Hookshot

Dragging Link from point A to point B, the hookshot is the tool of choice for the lazier hero. It also let Nintendo flex its 3D muscles creating vertiginous spires to yank your way up.



Sheik

Harp-plucking stranger stalks adult Link and teaches him songs. That stranger your mum always warns you not to talk to? Yeah, this is him/her/it.



Bongo Bongo

Named after the giant bongo drum he rhythmically pummels intruders on. Link has to wield the lens of truth to reveal this shadowy cad.



Poe

Named after the poet, not the Teletubby, the ghosts of Hyrule's deceased rise from the grave at night. In a sick twist, Link can bottle them up and sell them for a tidy profit.



THEY TOOT HORSES, DON'T THEY?

Forge a bond with Epona as child Link, and as an adult you can make her yours

**1 Epona's Song**

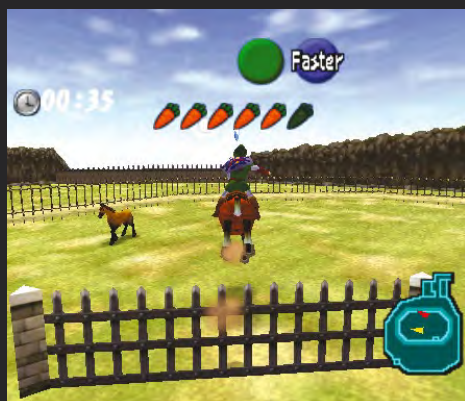
Child Link visits Epona (who's only a foal at this point) and learns Epona's Song. This creates a musical bond set to last seven years.

**2 Toot toot!**

And seven years later, tooting Epona's Song as an adult will call the steed to your side. Alas, she's currently held captive by weasly rancher Ingo.

**3 Pay the man**

Seven years ago Ingo was a lowly ranch hand. He's since risen to power and now hires out horses for extortionate prices.

**4 Dangle that carrot**

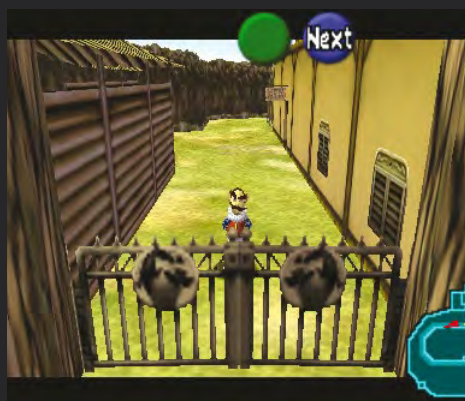
Get to grips with riding before making a bid for freedom. Regulating speed boosts (carrots) prevents Epona running out of steam.

**5 Win the race**

Impressed by your jockey skillz, Ingo challenges Link to a horse race. Utter cad that he is, he gets an unfair head start.

**6 Bad loser**

Trounce Ingo once and the rotter demands a rematch, this time wagering Epona. Win this second race and Epona is yours...

**7 Trapped!**

Er, if you can escape Lon Lon Ranch, that is... Ingo locks the front gate, dooming Link to a life of trotting among the chickens.

**8 Jump for freedom**

Only joking. This is the Hero of Time we're talking about here. Hoof it towards the gate and Epona bounds it in a single majestic leap.



Link must creep through the Garden of Zelda, roamed by the Princess' stern royal guards.

entire Switch special with descriptions of Ocarina's puzzling majesty. We won't, though – robbing Zelda newcomers of Ocarina's lightbulb moments would be a heinous crime.

Big, bad bosses

And as a reward for your cleverness, Nintendo allows Link to get his head caved in by some of the best bosses in the business. Ganondorf may be the big bad, but the route to his castle is littered with the corpses of bigger, if not badder, bads. Bongo-thumping ghosts, lurid spider queens, elemental witches – Ocarina invented the blockbuster spectacle that defines triple-A titles to this day. Kratos may give

his foes messier farewells, but he'd still be fighting diddy minotaurs if it weren't for Link. That's the problem with coming fresh to Ocarina in 2017 – so much has been borrowed it seems surprisingly familiar.

Luckily for Link, there's a feel to his fights that remains his own. Combat is acrobatic and deadly, turning swiftly from Cirque du Soleil graceful to Conan the Barbarian stabby. By anchoring combat around a revolutionary target lock-on, fights resemble the one-on-one duels that fill our cinema screens. Somersaulting around lizard men on platforms teetering on a lava field is about as good as combat gets. The combo of Link's helium yelps ("Hai! Har! Hoo!"), an arcing

blade and a flashing red damage indicator gave every wallop a tangible heft. When time comes to spank Ganon, the spank is one for the ages.

The magic of Ocarina is in no single element. Rather it is the outcome of the finest gaming minds on the planet putting their heads together to decide how an adventure should look, sound and feel in 3D. In giving gamers their first taste of a living 3D world, it created an appetite that has defined the form to this day. The Legend Of Zelda pursues the revolutionary as a matter of habit. Ocarina Of Time achieves it on every level. We loved the world it showed us, and we benefit from living in a world it shaped. Legendary indeed. ■

THE HISTORY OF Nintendo

Join Damien McFerran as he digs deep into the past, present and future of one of the best-known videogame companies on the planet

The games industry has undergone seismic levels of change over the past few decades, but since the 1980s one name has stood out as a constant in the ever-shifting sands of interactive entertainment: Nintendo. At one point, Nintendo was a brand totally synonymous with videogames as a medium, such was the company's domination of the console market.

Since the glory days of the NES we've seen the Nintendo rollercoaster dip and rise; systems like the SNES, Game Boy and Wii have achieved the kind of critical and commercial success that their rivals could only dream of, while missteps such as the Virtual Boy and the Wii U have proved that, despite its legendary status, Nintendo is just as prone to mistakes as any other corporation. Arguably one of the most influential companies operating in the videogame space, Nintendo has sold over 670 million units of hardware and 4.23 billion units of software to date, and despite the less-than-stellar performance of its most recent home console, is still a creative force to be reckoned with.

Firm foundations

With the company already making waves on smartphones with Super Mario Run and, at the time this magazine hits the shelves, just about to launch its latest innovative console, now is the perfect time to look back on its illustrious history and chart the highs and lows which have made Nintendo such an

iconic and noteworthy challenger in the interactive entertainment arena.

Nintendo may have joined the videogame industry around the same time as companies such as Sega, Namco, Taito and Atari, but it has a history that far outstrips those of these firms – and every other major player in the videogame arena. “Nintendo was founded in 1889 as manufacturer of playing cards,” says Erik Voskuil, founder of Before Mario, a site devoted to covering Nintendo's early history. Established by Fusajiro Yamauchi in Kyoto, the company would focus almost exclusively on the production of Hanafuda cards for the first 70-odd years of its life.

By the '50s, Fusajiro's grandson Hiroshi had ascended to power and became aware that sticking with playing cards was limiting Nintendo's potential for expansion. He signed licensing deals with Disney to maximise the appeal of its range, but by the '60s sales had dipped dramatically, forcing a rethink. “In an attempt to grow business, Nintendo started branching out in a wide range of other markets – mostly short-lived endeavours including instant rice, a taxi company and opening a ‘Love Hotel’ – before settling on toys and games,” explains Erik.

It was the arrival of Gunpei Yokoi in the '60s that took Nintendo in an exciting new direction. “Yokoi provided Nintendo with its first original toys and laid the foundation for what would eventually become known as Nintendo's approach to product design, practised to this day,” explains Erik. “It was no surprise that his design philosophy was embraced by Nintendo, as his inventions became million-sellers, ▶





earning the company lots of cash to fund further growth and more innovations.”

Yokoi's first best-seller, the Ultra Hand, was created during his initial role as a lowly maintenance engineer. “His role in catching the eye of President Hiroshi Yamauchi cannot be overstated, effectively kicking off the move into videogame entertainment,” says Nintendo Life's Thomas Whitehead. The Ultra Hand was the firm's first million-selling product, and the follow-up, a baseball pitching device called the Ultra Machine, would be even more successful.

The period that followed was packed with innovation, with Yokoi dreaming up products which captured the imaginations of people of all ages.

1969's Love Tester gave young couples the means to ‘prove the strength of their relationship,’ while the

Kousenjuu lightgun toys allowed the normally withdrawn Japanese public to live out their cowboy fantasies in the privacy of their own homes.

Despite initial success, these products couldn't give Nintendo the long-term commercial stability that it craved. Given its penchant for electronic toys, it is unsurprising that when the

home TV gaming revolution began, Nintendo was one of the first Japanese firms to release a product. It distributed the Magnavox Odyssey in 1974, and would produce its own console – the Color TV-Game – three years later. It is at this point that an important figure enters the story. Design student Shigeru Miyamoto was fresh out of college when he joined Nintendo in 1977. One of his first tasks was to design the casing for one of the Color TV-Game variants.

Entering the arcade

While Nintendo's first forays into the world of domestic gaming were significant, the arcades were



where the real money was to be made at the time. Now-iconic titles like Space Invaders and Pac-Man had turned into money spinners, and Yamauchi was keen to muscle in on this lucrative market. Nintendo wasn't totally wet behind the ears when it came to location-based entertainment, though. “Nintendo's first arcade games, launched at around the same time as Atari's Pong in the early '70s, they weren't videogames but electromechanical lightgun games that incorporated film and later video footage,” says Erik. “These were original games, based on Nintendo's own very early lightgun toys for use at home, but had no commercial success.”

The company's first true arcade title was EVR Race (designed by Genyo Takeda, who is still with Nintendo today as a technology fellow), and clones of Breakout and Space Invaders followed. None of these

“1981's Donkey Kong was Nintendo's last throw of the dice, but thankfully it was a triumph”

NINTENDO KEY PLAYERS



Fusajiro Yamauchi

Yamauchi founded Nintendo in 1889 as a playing card business. The company grew rapidly. Yamauchi would retire in 1929, leaving his son-in-law Sekiryo Kaneda in charge of the business.



Hiroshi Yamauchi

The grandson of Fusajiro Yamauchi, Hiroshi became the third president of Nintendo in 1947 and would guide the company away from playing cards and into videogames.



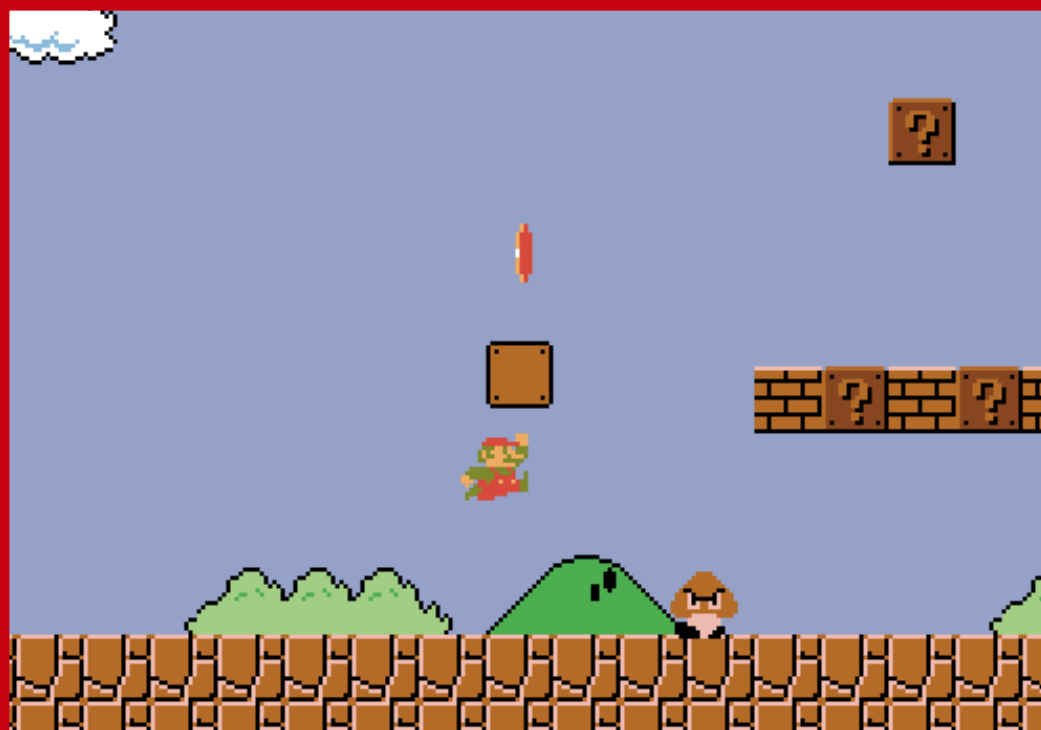
Shigeru Miyamoto

The creator of some of the most iconic games – including Super Mario, Zelda and Star Fox – Miyamoto joined Nintendo in 1977 and his breakthrough success was the smash hit Donkey Kong.



Gunpei Yokoi

Responsible for some of Nintendo's most successful ventures. He came up with the Game & Watch, Game Boy and produced many famous games. He was killed in a traffic accident in 1997.



gave the company the smash hit Yamauchi wanted, and 1979's Radar Scope almost proved to be the final nail in the coffin. The game had performed well in Japan but had flopped in North America – the market Yamauchi was desperate to crack – and Nintendo was faced with the prospect of disposing of unsold Radar Scope cabinets. As resourceful as ever, Yamauchi proposed using the inventory for a new title, and the relatively inexperienced Miyamoto was tasked with creating the concept. 1981's Donkey Kong was Nintendo's last throw of the dice, but thankfully it was a triumph and has gone on to become one of the most famous videogames of all time.

"Donkey Kong was very important," states Erik. "It was a huge arcade hit that established the company as a worldwide player in videogames and put Nintendo Of America on the map. The game design

by Miyamoto has been hugely influential in many ways, including being the first platform game to use a jumping character – a jumping character who evolved into one of the most enduring videogame icons." Erik is, of course, referring to Mario, who has gone on to become one of the most recognisable faces in entertainment.

Super Mario Bros. was a huge success for Nintendo, and helped sell its NES console to the masses.

The golden years

Donkey Kong was a turning point for Nintendo, and elevated the company's status in North America – arguably the biggest market of them all for videogames. Home conversions quickly followed on the popular consoles of the period, earning Donkey Kong and its maker even more fame. Nintendo's next venture was with games you could effortlessly slip



Minoru Arakawa

Hiroshi Yamauchi's son-in-law and the founder and former president of NOA, Arakawa was instrumental in making the NES a success in the US. He is also credited with giving Mario his name.



Howard Lincoln

Lincoln assisted Nintendo in its legal case against Universal Studios in 1981. He would join Nintendo in 1983; by 1994 he was chairman. He is the current CEO of the Seattle Mariners baseball team.



Satoru Iwata

Iwata started as a programmer at HAL Laboratory. In 2000 he joined Nintendo and two years later assumed the role of company president. Iwata sadly passed away after a battle with cancer.



Tatsumi Kimishima

Mintendo's current president, Kimishima was president of NOA from 2002 to 2006. His background is in banking, but he has been with Nintendo since 2000.

TEN INNOVATIONS NINTENDO IMPROVED ON

How Nintendo helped shape the games industry



Digital control

Joysticks were the input method for gaming of the '70s and '80s, but were too bulky to be used on portable devices. Nintendo came up with the D-pad and used it on the Game & Watch version of Donkey Kong. It became an essential control method, and has been used ever since.



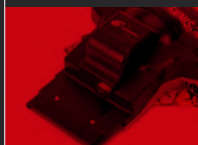
Kiosks could be used to put new games on old ones

The Famicom Disc System is another Japan-only peripheral, and Nintendo introduced kiosks which allowed users to wipe discs and write new games to them for a reduced fee.



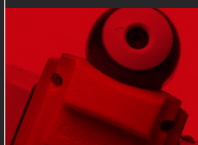
Wireless data transfer

The Game Boy Color came with an infrared port on the top which was pretty much only useful for one thing – exchanging data in the popular RPG Pokémon. It was another example of Nintendo leveraging cheap and common tech in new and interesting ways.



The Game Boy Advance e-Reader

Using special bespoke cards and the GBA e-Reader device, it was possible to access special content for certain games. Sadly the peripheral was not a success, but the curio lives on as a collector's item.



The Game Boy camera

Today, we're used to having a camera at all times thanks to smartphones, but back in the '90s Nintendo caused a storm by releasing a monochrome snapper for the Game Boy. The pictures were terrible, but they have a strange appeal to them.



Memory management

PC owners are used to adding RAM to improve performance, and Nintendo applied this to the N64. Demanding titles like Donkey Kong 64, Perfect Dark and Zelda: Majora's Mask worked with the 4MB RAM pack to offer better visuals.



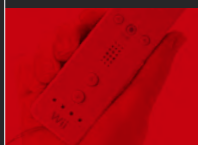
Rewrite, not fade away

The 64DD – or 'Bulky Drive' as it was known – never saw release outside of Japan, but the idea was genius. To combat the high cost of N64 cartridges, 64DD games would come on magnetic discs which were cheaper and could be written to.



Touchscreens

Sure, touch panels existed prior to the launch of the DS, but Nintendo's handheld really popularised the technology, introducing it to a new generation of gamers and paving the way for smartphones and tablets.



Motion control

The Wii might have been underpowered compared to its peers, but the inclusion of motion control helped set it apart in the console war at the time. Nintendo opened up gaming to casual players and sold over 100 million Wii consoles in the process.



Auto-stereoscopic 3D

The 3DS introduced glasses-free 3D to the masses in 2011, taking cutting-edge tech and planting it into the handheld. The New Nintendo 3DS refines the tech by using a camera to sense the position of the user's head.

into your pocket. Inspired by the sight of a businessman idly tapping away at his pocket calculator while on the train to work, Yokoi created the Game & Watch line in 1980. While they used crude LCD visuals and were limited in terms of scope, the range was a massive commercial success and sold over 80 million units between 1980 and 1991. It also inspired a flood of copycat releases from the likes of Tiger and Bandai.

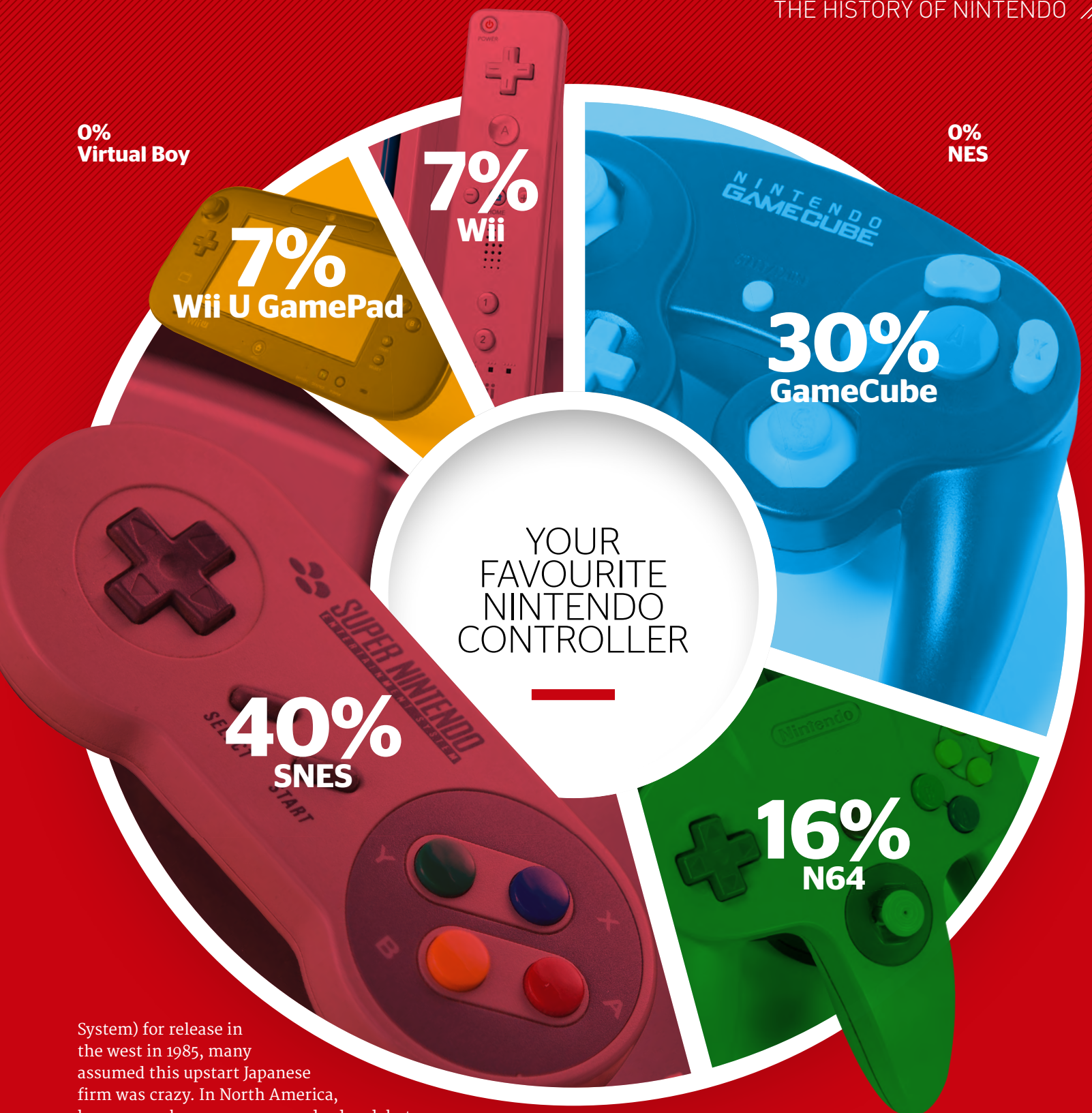
"A lot of people were building battery-powered handheld game systems, but they tended to revolve around rudimentary display hardware such as grids of LED lights," says Rare's Paul Machacek. "While the images on the LCD screens that Nintendo used were pre-baked rather than very low resolution software-driven pixels, they were immersive and packed tightly enough to take you beyond noticing such limitations and really get engrossed in the gameplay. The twin-screened units, preceding Nintendo's DS handheld by decades, seemed particularly futuristic at that time."

Erik adds that gameplay was the driving force behind the success of this range. "They were playtested and fine-tuned until the result was a fun and challenging game," he says. "The graphic design and quality finish also played a role. They looked desirable and provided a lot of value, which attracted customers and made them come back for more." Game & Watch was also notable for introducing the world to another innovation – the Directional Pad, or D-pad, as it is now known. Used on the 1982 Game & Watch adaptation of Donkey Kong, the pad has since become an ubiquitous feature on pretty much every gaming controller you could mention.

Home Famicom-forts

Growing in confidence, Nintendo decided to push forward in the home console arena with a new piece of hardware. 1983's Family Computer, or Famicom, as it was more commonly known, launched just as the videogame industry in the West was about to implode. The crash of 1983 destroyed Western consumer and retailer faith in home gaming, but it didn't reach Japan, where the Famicom became a commercial success. By the end of 1984, it was the nation's most popular home console. "Nintendo's first-party titles were a big attraction – Super Mario Bros., Zelda, Metroid – combined with many fantastic third-party releases, such as Final Fantasy, Dragon Quest and Mega Man," Erik comments. "Nintendo was also lucky with the timing. Entering the market with a new system after the crash was risky, but once it succeeded Nintendo had a monopoly for many years. In this period playing videogames and playing Nintendo were synonymous."

When Nintendo revealed its plans to repackage the Famicom as the NES (Nintendo Entertainment

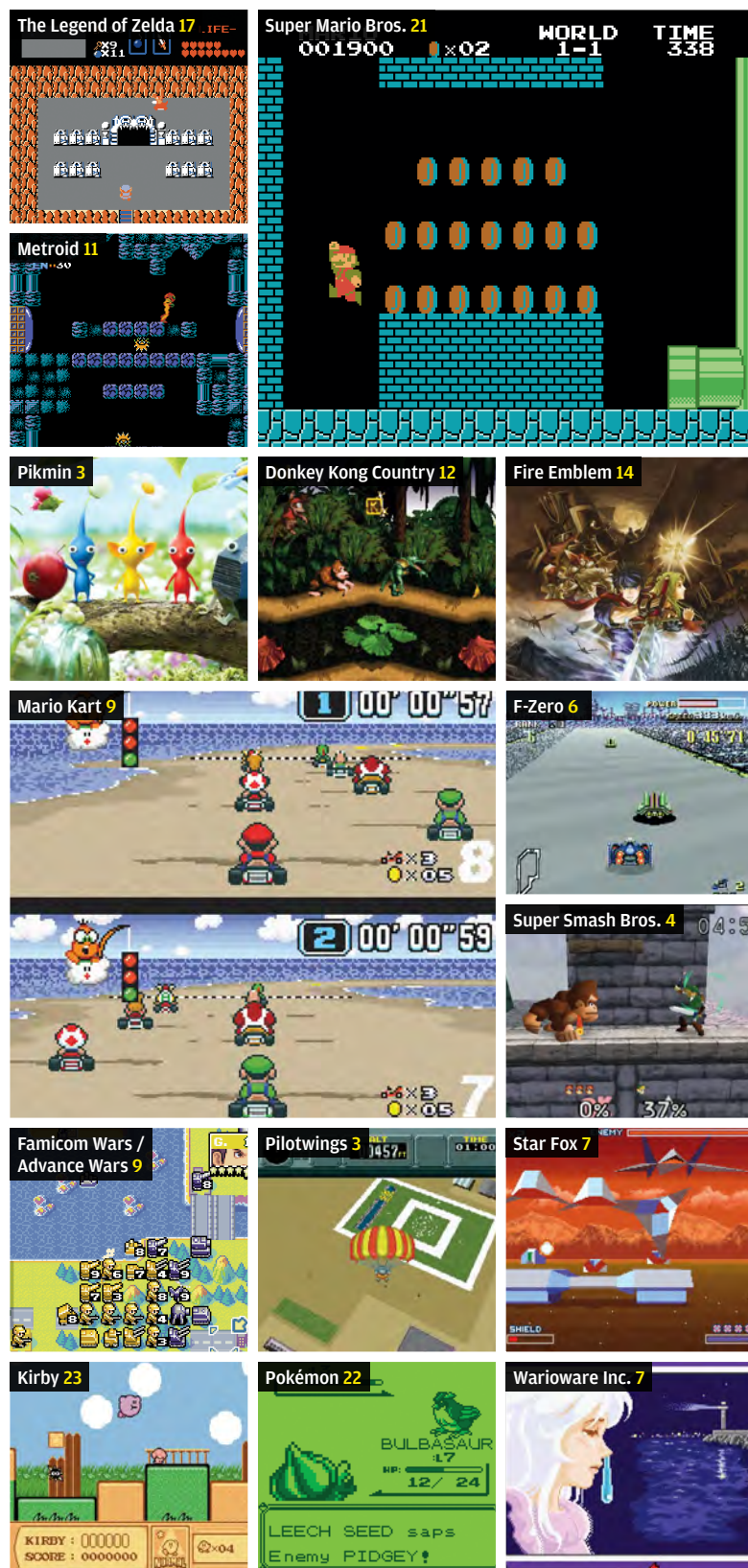


System) for release in the west in 1985, many assumed this upstart Japanese firm was crazy. In North America, home consoles were seen as a dead end, but Nintendo persevered and soon enjoyed a near-complete domination of the US market – a mirror of its overwhelming triumph in Japan. It is during this time that the company began a relationship with tiny UK developer Rare. Paul, a Rare employee since 1988, reveals that the company was set up to fully exploit the success of Nintendo's hardware in the US and Japan. "Just as Ultimate Play The Game had largely been a success in the UK and was not hugely known in those distant territories, so Rare was to conquer abroad where the NES was strongest, and not have the visibility in the UK that Ultimate did for a while," he remembers.

In the days before Nintendo invested in Rare, the latter used the former as a sort of guide for game-making quality. Whenever outside games were brought into the developer's studio for inspection and analysis, Rare's founders – the legendary Stamper Brothers Tim and Chris – encouraged the staff to have a hands-on with Nintendo's offerings. "We largely only brought in other titles on Nintendo platforms in the early years because I think Tim and Chris wanted everyone to see that market, and understand what worked and why," continues Paul. "So we were all exposed to a sort of Nintendo ethos –

FRANCHISE STARTERS

Nintendo has created some of the industry's most enduring series – see how many games there are in each



the Super Mario series was the true ‘North Star’ that guided us.”

Nintendo would complement the all-conquering NES with the Game Boy in 1989. This handheld console was a direct successor to the aging Game & Watch line. Another Yokoi masterpiece, the portable system became a cultural icon and must-have gadget, with many comparing its popularity to that of Sony’s Walkman. However, as the ’90s dawned it was becoming abundantly clear that Nintendo no longer had the global games market all to itself. Japanese rivals such as Sega and NEC launched viable challengers, such as the Mega Drive and PC Engine, at the end of the ’80s, and these began to slowly but surely chew away at the market share of Nintendo’s 8-bit system. In the US, this encroachment was felt especially keenly; an aggressive Sega attacked the NES via a combination of savvy marketing, licensed sports titles and arcade conversions, eventually managing to become the nation’s best-selling home console – an event which would have been unthinkable just a few years previously. New blood was needed, and it came in the form of the Super Famicom, or Super Nintendo as it was branded over here in the West.

The births of legends

Regarded by some as Nintendo’s best console and one of the most acclaimed home systems of all time, this 16-bit powerhouse played host to some of the period’s most critically-lauded videogames: hits such as Super Mario World, The Legend of Zelda: A Link To The Past, Secret Of Mana and EarthBound.

When it became clear that 3D visuals were slowly overtaking 2D graphics in terms of popularity, Nintendo was smart enough to make sure that the SNES could stay the course. It introduced the Super FX chip with 1993’s Star Fox, and gave the console a massive shot in the arm in its battle against the Mega Drive. “Everything came about because of a 3D demo I had developed for the Game Boy,” recounts Dylan Cuthbert, former Argonaut staffer who worked on the iconic title. “Jez San, my boss at the time, was showing the demo around at the CES show in America and a Nintendo Of America exec saw it and realised the potential of new technology and hooked everything up very quickly to Nintendo Japan. They flew us to Kyoto and we had lots of meetings, out of one of which, the FX Chip was born.”

Dylan set up shop in Nintendo’s Kyoto HQ for some time afterwards, and is ideally placed to explain what made the company such a magical place during this period. “Nintendo was a peak point,” he says. “The cost of games development was so low and teams so small, yet each game was selling millions and at quite a high price. It helped it have a lot of freedom.” Dylan also got the chance to work



alongside the legend that is Miyamoto. “It was a lot of fun,” he recounts. “We went to lunch with him every day for most of the development of Star Fox, primarily because he wanted to learn English, I think. We were quite a novelty for Nintendo at the time and probably the first group of ‘gaijin’ to be located there for so long.” Argonaut and Nintendo arguably pushed the SNES to its limits, and today Dylan has a soft spot for the console. “It was simple, and fairly easy to do a lot of interesting things on,” he smiles. “The sound chip was amazing at the time, giving games a richness that was beyond the simple sprites and colourful backgrounds.”

The decline

The success of the SNES was tempered by the fact that Nintendo now had a powerful rival in the form of Sega, which had pushed Nintendo hard in the West. To make things more complicated, other firms were entering the arena with their own hardware. 3DO, Atari, Philips and Sony all made inroads during this time, and Sega leveraged its arcade lineage to produce the 32-bit Saturn, which used CD-ROM for game distribution. Sony’s PlayStation – a system born out of an earlier agreement with Nintendo, which was cancelled in dramatic fashion when Nintendo decided to ditch Sony at the last minute – also utilised CDs, and was perhaps the most worrying rival. Nintendo’s new console, the Nintendo 64, was announced around the same time but delayed until 1996, by which point both Sony and Sega had gobbled up many consumers.

While its competitors switched to cheaper and higher-capacity disc-based media, Nintendo stubbornly stuck with cartridges, claiming that they avoided long load times and prevented piracy. While both of these points were true, carts were expensive to produce and couldn’t hold as much data as a disc, and many publishers turned their backs on the console as a result – notably Squaresoft, which switched development of Final Fantasy VII from the N64 to the PlayStation. To make matters worse, Nintendo’s focus was weakened by the Virtual Boy, the company’s most noteworthy hardware failure. Released in 1995, it tanked and Gunpei Yokoi apparently left the company under a cloud of shame, his legacy seemingly tarnished due to a single failure. He would be tragically killed in a traffic accident in 1997.

The N64 was host to some of the most influential videogames of the time, such as Super Mario 64, GoldenEye 007 and The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time (see p.130), but it failed to replicate the sales performance of the NES and SNES. While former rival Sega stumbled with the Saturn and eventually bowed out of the hardware arena with the Dreamcast, Sony was unstoppable, and its PlayStation became the NES of its era. As the next console war loomed, Nintendo had to deal with the presence of yet another challenger in the form of Microsoft, which announced it was entering the games arena with its own games console, the Xbox. Nintendo’s 2001 offering, the GameCube, was arguably the one and only time that the company

Shigeru Miyamoto and Takashi Tezuka have been instrumental to the success of Nintendo.



While the 3D could be gimmicky, the actual 3DS boasts some incredible games.

Resurrection

"I joined Nintendo UK the week that Mario Kart Wii was released," says former Nintendo UK brand manager Roger Langford. "At this point both Wii and DS platforms had already begun to take off and it

For Thomas, the company's ethos of marrying software with hardware came to the fore at this time. "The funny thing is that this approach didn't seem prominent in the NES and SNES era, but arguably became more relevant with the N64, with iconic games like Super Mario 64 utilising the



controller and technology in amazing ways,” he says. “Particularly since the Wii and DS era, this design approach of producing hardware and software in tandem has delivered some memorable, game-changing experiences. Nintendo made touch gaming popular before smartphones rose to prominence on the DS, and had millions of ‘non-gamers’ playing Tennis on Wii Sports or doing exercise with the Wii on Wii Fit. It ultimately benefits customers because this approach can deliver distinct, wonderful entertainment, and it benefits Nintendo as it helps the company to stand out.”

Uncertain times

While the Wii and DS have sold in excess of 250 million units combined, Nintendo found that the market had changed by the time it launched their successors. The rise of smartphone and tablet gaming has had a marked impact on the handheld arena, and while the 3DS has managed to shift more than 50 million units globally, it is way behind the performance of the DS, which clocked up three times that figure in its lifespan. “I feel smart devices have had a huge impact,” says Roger. “DS really caught fire before smartphones were around and it was the norm to see people playing out and about. When

NINTENDO CONSOLE HISTORY

Your instant guide to Nintendo's many consoles and how much they sold

- 1 Nintendo DS series 2004
154,000,000
- 2 Game Boy series 1989
154,000,000
- 3 Wii 2006
101,006,000
- 4 Game Boy Advance series 2001
81,510,000
- 5 Famicom/NES 1983
61,910,000
- 6 Nintendo 3DS series 2011
54,340,000
- 7 Super Famicom/SNES 1990
49,100,000
- 8 Nintendo 64 1996
32,930,000
- 9 GameCube 2001
21,470,000
- 10 Wii U 2012
10,730,000
- 11 Virtual Boy 1995
770,000

smartphones arrived the DS became redundant, as it was more convenient to play apps on phones.” The Wii U, however, has been a shocking dud for the company. “Timing can be everything, and when Wii U was released technology had moved on since the launch of Wii,” says Roger. “The idea of the GamePad was and still is revolutionary, but I do not feel that a killer title ever nailed the use of it. With the Wii, Wii Sports was a great demo of how to use Wii and really set a positive benchmark for the system. Wii U never really had this.”

Thomas feels that the Wii U is a great platform that was simply dealt a bad hand. “The more I consider the Wii U, the more I think it just got caught out by bad circumstances,” he says. “I imagine at the design phase – when tablets were only just gaining popularity, the Wii was dominant – the idea of the name, GamePad and approach would have seemed right. Unfortunately the GamePad concept just wasn’t exciting enough to many, and the controller also contributed to the system being too expensive. The graphical power of the console also meant that those with a PS3 or Xbox 360 won’t have rated that aspect, while third-party developers of various types were starting to look at the more powerful technology of PS4 and Xbox One. It struggled to appeal to anyone beyond core fans. Nintendo systems sell at their best when they’re affordable luxuries, cheaper and more creative than rivals. The Wii U was at a premium price when it launched and lacked a killer app, so only dedicated fans were willing to take a punt.”

Switch on for the future

Nintendo has already learned from its experiences with the 3DS and Wii U. It made its first move onto smartphones with free app Miitomo, and launched Super Mario Run in December 2016. While many feared that Nintendo’s smartphone venture could be seen as grim tidings for the veteran, Thomas had a positive outlook from the start. “All roads point to [Switch] and key releases on smartphones, and if both work together there’s potential for iOS and Android to make the company a lot of money while [Switch] maintains the dedicated gaming business. Regardless of its lows, Nintendo has brand power and recognisable IPs. Those trump cards can see Nintendo make a comeback. Let’s not forget times were a little tough in the GameCube era, and Wii and DS changed the whole picture – when Nintendo misreads trends it can often recapture them. I think 2016 could be hugely exciting.” And for anyone asking whether Switch can have any impact on the current gaming scene: “I seem to remember such a question being bandied about ten or so years ago and then they launched the DS and Wii,” chuckles Paul. And now the doubters have been proved wrong. ■

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