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# FAR CRY 5

Hands up if you've got a gun



Gaming is one of the great escapes, taking us into other worlds and giving us powers far beyond the scope of mortals, but sometimes all you want to do is shoot a baddie. This is the issue for the latter. There may be magical worlds and strange powers, but shooting baddies is ultimately what the FPS Special is all about.

**DANIEL WILKS**  
*Editor*



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# HYPER

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# Far Cry 5

*More than just a dull echo of the previous Far Cry games, writes Nathan Lawrence*

In some key respects, Far Cry has long been the open-world-shooter series that could. The potential has always been there. Getting caught up in those unscripted moments of gunplay, when the brown stuff hits the fan, but you manage to shoot, ram, or explode your way to victory have always felt satisfying. But whether it's tacky protagonists, lacklustre storytelling, or undercooked mechanics, Far Cry has consistently fallen short of being downright addictive.

Ubisoft Montreal is gunning to

change this for Far Cry 5. From the outset of my hour-long hands-on time with Far Cry 5, in gorgeous 4K on a PS4 Pro, it's clear the devs are leaning heavily into championing player empowerment. The best and most obvious way to achieve this goal in any sandbox shooter is by continuously tempting players with equally compelling choices.

The fictional Hope County setting feels like a lived-in place with plenty to do and, more importantly, a whole mess of potential for those emergent gameplay moments that make these types of shooters much



Road safety rules require you to stop for all crazed cultists driving bulldozers into other crazed cultists.

### Baptism by firearm

Boomer had spotted a couple of river-lingering cultists, so I was able to see their outlines through a vision-obscuring boulder. At first, it looked like they were performing some sort of crazy water-based yoga. Upon closer inspection, they were forcibly baptising some hapless soul. My Uzi had a 40-round objection to that.



fun to play. My first main choice was for a companion, and they all changed the way I played.

Of the three choices, I first went with Boomer, an Australian Cattle Dog-looking canine who's less Dog from Mad Max 2 and more Ghost from Game of Thrones. He's not massive, but he is an obedient and seemingly omniscient mutt who switches between guiding, following, and ripping out throats. The latter is activated by the player and makes it easier to maintain a stealthy state.

I felt compelled to stay quiet, at least initially, with Boomer as my companion. As soon as I was spotted, though, I shifted to my favourite loud-and-proud mode, and quickly noticed how great Far Cry 5's gunplay feels. The enemies work together to take you down, teaming up and flanking in refreshingly wide arcs to get the drop on you.

Recoil management is a must when the lead is flying, as it's easy to miss seemingly straightforward shots with an assault rifle or SMG if all you do is spray. What's more impressive is how easy it is to move around the world, especially when you're under fire. You can tap jump to automatically smash through windows or vault over low cover, and doors don't even require any input: just run into them to bust through.

This means clunky or absent mechanics aren't getting in the way of playing how you want to, and immersion is maintained thanks

to a lack of artificial movement hurdles. My first run at that opening skirmish ended with me lobbing dynamite at a petrol tanker to finish off the few remaining cultists. Hold that dynamite for too long, though, and you risk revisiting the respawn screen.

The next time I played the opening skirmish, I did it with bush pilot Nick Rye as my sidekick. Rye is built for run-and-gun players. He circles above your position in an Americanised (read: militarised) seaplane. He's about as good at spotting enemies from above as Boomer, but his signature move is dropping bombs: more of the explosive than the f-bomb variety.

Whether starting or finishing a fight, watching Rye bank in for a bombing run as I cackled maniacally at the subsequent epic explosions never got old. I imagine he'll be tweaked for the final version of the game, because the option to drop unlimited multi-kill bombs on enemies felt more than a smidge overpowered.

The final companion on offer for my Far Cry 5 demo was sniper Grace Armstrong. You can direct her where to move, which is why I put her in a high vantage point above the initial band of baddies. I was able to mark the enemies I wanted her to prioritise, but she didn't fire until I'd taken the first shot.

As I took cover while reloading, I could hear the booming shot of





**DEVELOPER** | Ubisoft Montreal  
**PUBLISHER** | Ubisoft  
**PLATFORM** | PC, PS4, Xbox One  
**RELEASE DATE** | 27 February, 2018

her sniper rifle, and popped my head up to see the deadly effects of her work. These three companion choices emphasise the freedom for players to play their own way, and to have the support required to facilitate those gameplay intentions. Assumedly, in the final version, you'll be able to mix and match companions to suit your mood.

Even without a partner in open-world crime, Far Cry 5 is actively trying to distract you away from what you thought you wanted to do. Main missions and side quests are par for the course in sandbox shooters, but they're only part of the temptations for swelling your things-to-do list in Far Cry 5.

For instance, I wanted to go fishing: an odd urge, but a first for the series. The idea is that off-brand tasks like fishing will be part of the player-choice puzzle in Far Cry 5. I jumped in a pick-up truck, and was immediately thrown off by the Hillsong-like music blaring through the radio. It was only a few hundred metres to what I was told was a decent fishing spot, so I tolerated it.

Not even a minute into my drive, the Christian soft rock gave way to the angry yells of a cultist on a tractor with a mean bit of farming equipment on the front of his ride. He rammed me and started firing. I put him down easily enough, but then I was distracted by a field full of cows.

I tried my hand at cow tipping, and during my attempts, I

### Pretty fly fishing

I eventually did make it to the fishing spot, but I couldn't actually manage to wrangle a catch. The first hurdle was a fellow fisher who was stealing my bites. I made him sleep with the fishes. Fishing isn't simplified, and aside from an element of randomness for which fish will bite, there's a lot of skill involved in reeling one in.

inadvertently pissed-off a bull. This alerted more nearby cultists who signalled for reinforcements. Running away from heavily armed God-botherers, I chanced upon a bear, which started chasing me. I led the bear back towards the cultists, and hid while the bear started mauling the religious extremists.

As it turns out, I was hiding behind that same tractor. Cover became a weapon, as I jumped inside and used it to mulch the final few cultists and, if we're being honest, a cow or two. Another "liberated" area later, and I was doing my best Rye impersonation, taking part in a flying mission that involved bombing stationary targets, strafing a convoy, and getting caught up in a dogfight to a Top Gun-like soundtrack.

I've always played Far Cry games with somewhat curbed expectations. After my time with Far Cry 5, my mind is reeling with possibilities for the kind of crazy adventures I'll be able to have in the final game, either alone or in full campaign co-op with a buddy. 🐔



PREVIEW



# Star Wars Battlefront II

*A promising new hope, according to Nathan Lawrence*

It really isn't hard for Star Wars Battlefront II to improve on the shortcomings of the 2015 reboot. The loudest gripes for DICE's 2015 attempt are easily addressed: add more content, throw in a campaign, and boost multiplayer depth. Sorted! (Sorry, devs.) So far, what I've seen and played of Battlefront II shows that, like John Williams' iconic film scores, the developers are targeting all the right notes.

There's promising compartmentalisation, with three studios playing to their strengths. DICE is in charge of the bulk of multiplayer. The newly formed narrative-focused Motive Studios is handling the campaign. And master-mechanics Criterion Games,

renowned for the Burnout series, are rebuilding and tuning the vehicular parts of the game.

Criterion's Starfighter Assault mode was the recent star of my hands-on preview. And it shines brightly. My first hands-on experience with Battlefront II was with Assault on Theed: the same map and mode from the DICE-forged infantry mode that was showcased at E3.

The potential of the ground-based modes is there, but it's hard to look past the prevalence of chokepoints in the second phase of the map, impossible to gauge the depth of the interplay of the class system, and frustrating to realise that the limited heroes are your

only hope of digging out a well-entrenched defending team.

Starfighter Assault, on the other hand, was a night-and-day experience when stacked next to Battlefront's shallow Fighter Squadron mode. The immediacy of the depth and reward for skilled play was beaten only by the reality that Criterion has nailed the ship handling. It's not just in the necessary additions, like the ability to roll your starfighter; it's also highlighted in the class-based logic behind the starfighters.

Hero ships are powerful and self-explanatory, and the roster has been expanded to include the likes of Poe Dameron's Black One X-wing, and Darth Maul's Scimitar, the latter

*Sabrefights are just part of the battle. There's space combat and blaster shootouts, too.*





DEVELOPER	Dice, Motive, Criterion
PUBLISHER	EA
PLATFORM	PC, PS4, Xbox One
RELEASE DATE	17 November

## THE ROSTER HAS BEEN EXPANDED TO INCLUDE THE LIKES OF POE DAMERON'S BLACK ONE X-WING

of which is incredibly deadly with the right pilot behind the stick. But while TIE fighters and X-wings are part of the same balanced Fighter class, they handle differently.

Similarly, Interceptors, like the Rebel A-wing and Imperial TIE interceptor, fly differently but are both glass cannons: perfect for

speedy hit-and-run attacks. Then there's the all-new Bomber class, like the Y-wing and TIE bomber, which sacrifice speed but make up for it with strong armour and stronger armaments. The space-based Fondor map offered a satisfyingly asymmetrical battle, with the Alliance tasked with destroying objectives, and Imperials in charge of vapourising Rebel scum.

The asymmetrical mode means Rebel pilots are rewarded for playing the objective, and Imperials are incentivised to focus on Y-wings, which tend to deal the most damage. This meant that if the Imperials play the objective well, Rebel pilots are forced to evolve their tactics, and diversify their fleet with A-wings and

X-wings to protect the harder-hitting Y-wings. This, in turn, means that Rebels who'd rather duke it out with Imperial pilots aren't punished for supporting their teammates who are playing the objective.

When it comes to dogfighting, the skill factor has been upped. Forget about lock-on cannons, that's suffered the same fate as Alderaan. If you want to use lasers to obliterate a foe, you need to land those hits manually. The result: kills feel a whole lot more earned and, therefore, satisfying. Starfighter Assault shows that the devs care about content, depth and, perhaps more importantly, creating a skill gap to separate the aces from the greenhorns. ☞



### Roll the DICE

Star Cards are back, but they now have different rarities. You can mix and match Star Card abilities between ships, but you'll need to unlock them first. Randomly. That's right: RNG has invaded Battlefront II, and the option to purchase Star Card packs is likely why all of Battlefront II's DLC will reportedly be free of charge.





<b>DEVELOPER</b>	Sledgehammer Games, Raven Software
<b>PUBLISHER</b>	Activision
<b>PLATFORM</b>	PC, PS4, Xbox One
<b>RELEASE DATE</b>	3 November





# Call of Duty: WWII

*Where we're going, we don't need recoil, explains*  
**Nathan Lawrence**

After years of blazing further into the future, Call of Duty has finally returned to its World War II roots. It's a bold step, for sure, even if there's been a vocal percentage of the fan base calling for this kind of move for years. In fairness, CoD is on a three-year development cycle, which means, like an aircraft carrier, it's not so easy to turn around.

On one hand, a viable response to future fatigue, the promise of grounded weaponry, and a return to squad-based battling are all strong pros to justify the return to CoD's roots. On the other, the escapability born of the sci-fi gadgetry of tomorrow's fictional battlefields has been left back in the future. Considering Call of Duty has always been (and continues to be in WWII) a high-lethality shooter, the lack of escapability may prove to be the most controversial exclusion of the franchise's time warp.

As far as I'm concerned, it's a worthy sacrifice, and there's no need to hold X to pay respects. The increasing emphasis on advanced movement, most notably in CoD's recent multiplayer outings, was necessary because of the high-tech fire-and-forget weapons that were also part and parcel of the futuristic setting.

But Call of Duty: WWII doesn't have this issue, care of the familiar setting. There's no confusion with weapons, for starters. Shotguns, pistols, rifles, LMGs, SMGs and machine guns aren't offset by futuristic pew-pews whose names and function have little meaning at first glance, sound, or even after limited use. It helps that the sound design in WWII is spot-on to the point that it may even rival DICE's award-winning soundscapes.

It's also great that the booming weapon shots are complemented by weapons that play to their ranges. For the most part. Recoil is still too deep inside forgiving territory for my tastes, but I appreciate that a shotgun is only deadly at point-blank ranges. I appreciate that sniper rifles are deadly at range. And I respect that LMGs are just as effective at suppressing mid-range foes as they are at eviscerating bunched-up baddies.

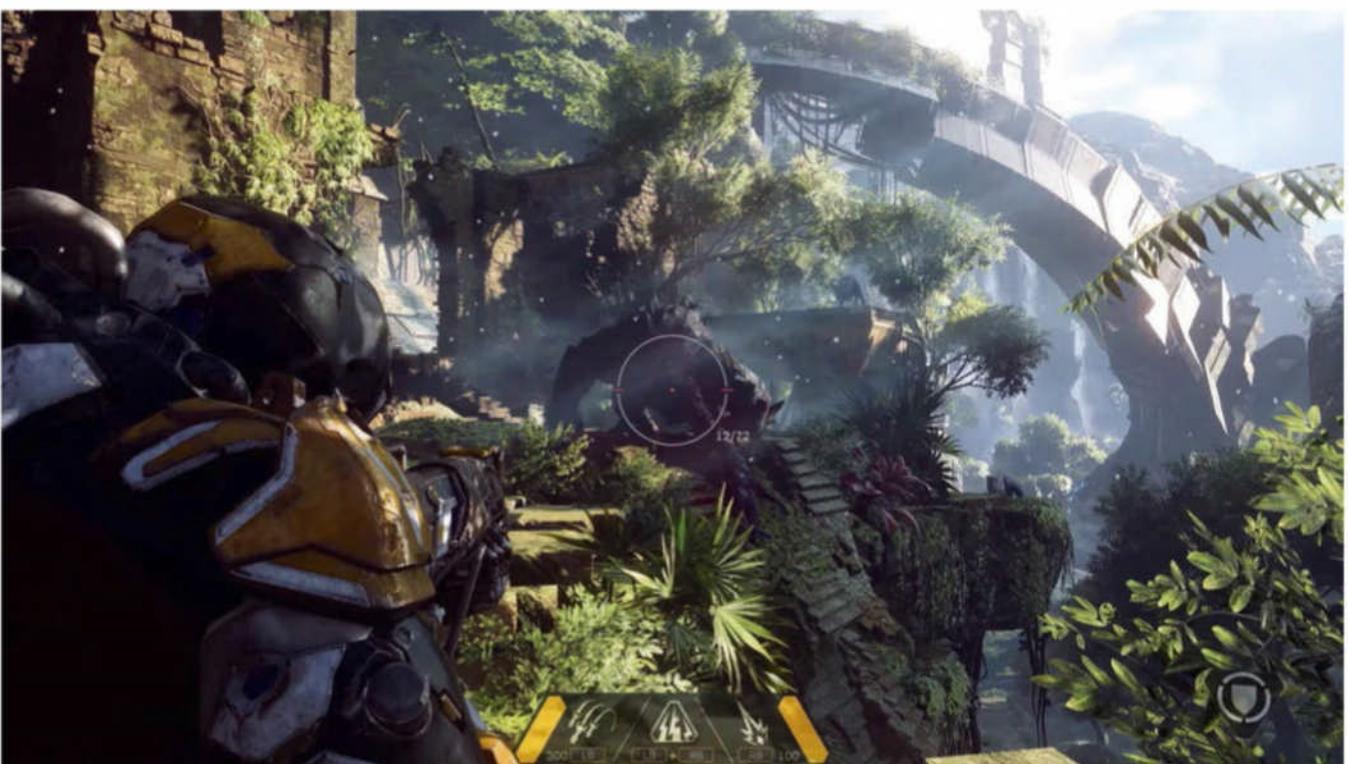
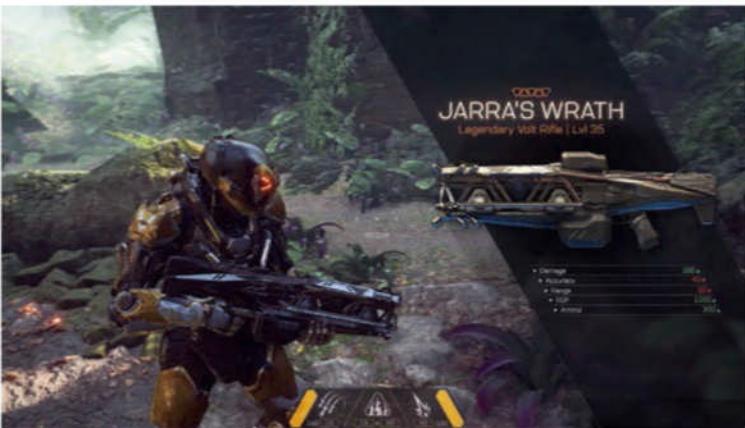
The regular team deathmatch mode feels more reminiscent of World at War than it does of any recent futuristic entry, and that's a feather in CoD's cap. Where Call of Duty: WWII starts to flex a bit more is in its offence/defence objective-based War mode. Not only does it incentivise and reward the average lone-wolf CoD player to play the objective (there's no listing of kills or deaths on the scoreboard), it concentrates fighting around focused points of interest.

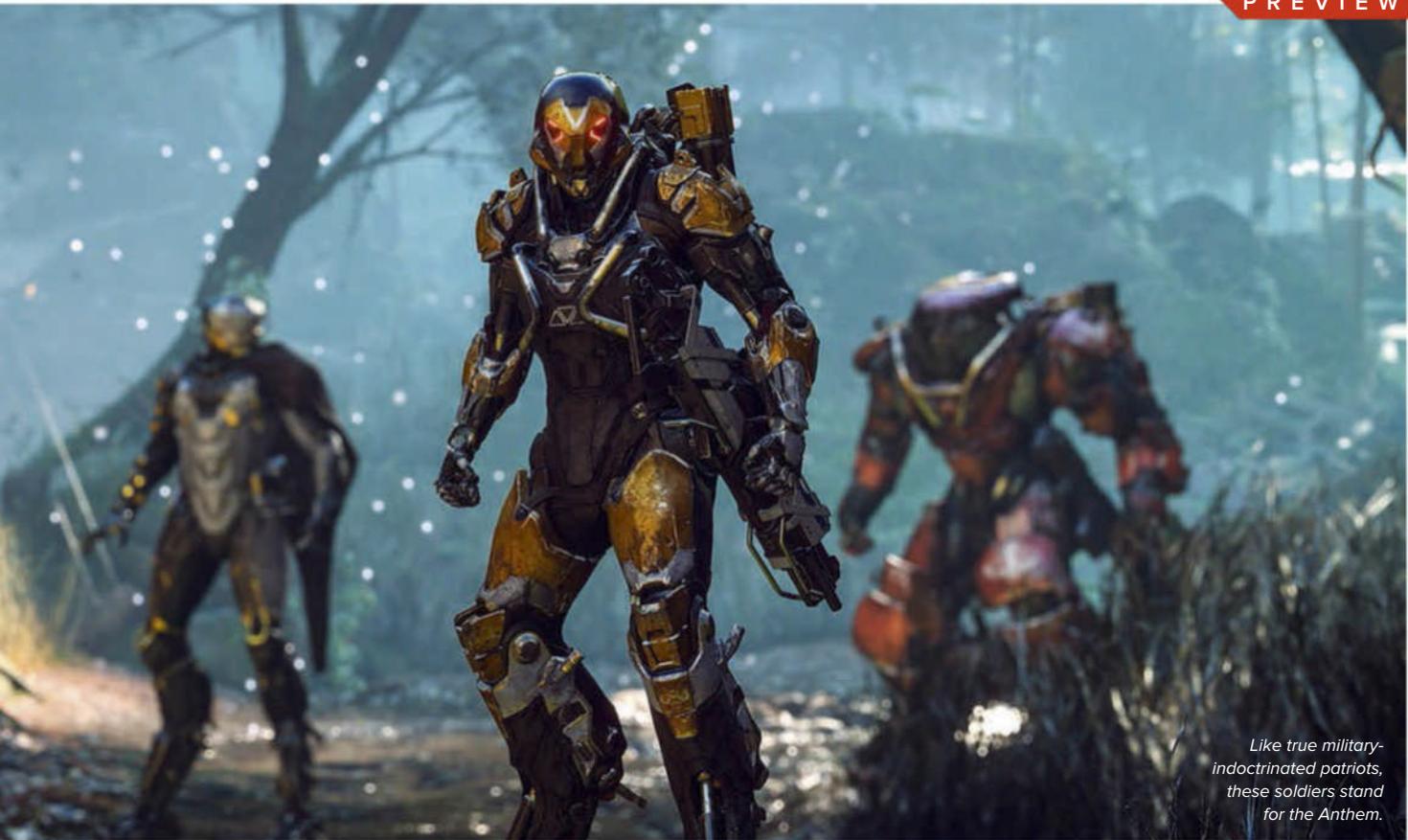
This leads to intense gun battles, flanking manoeuvres, and by-design requirements to have faith in your teammates to cover potentially exposed angles that you cannot. CoD's fast pace and faster respawning is right at home in War mode, because it means dying is only a temporary setback, and throwing yourself at the objective for a last-minute steal is both viable and satisfying.

This pace also helps mask what might otherwise feel like a comparatively low player count, despite the smallish maps. It's been a long time since I was genuinely excited for a CoD game, especially in terms of its multiplayer, but my time with Call of Duty: WWII combat-booted me right in the nostalgic feels. Consider me enlisted to try more. ☞

*Call of Duty takes us back to the good old days of war where death was meaningless.*

DEVELOPER	BioWare
PUBLISHER	EA
PLATFORM	PC, PS4, Xbox One
RELEASE DATE	2018





*Like true military-indoctrinated patriots, these soldiers stand for the Anthem.*



# Anthem

*BioWare wants its share of the shared world pie, writes* **David Wildgoose**

**A**nthem will likely be one of the highest profile games - shooter or otherwise - of next year. But despite being in development for four years and the star of EA's stage show at E3 2017, it remains a game shrouded in mystery. To be honest, we're still trying to answer the question: what is Anthem?

We know it's in development at BioWare, the RPG powerhouse best known in recent years for its Mass Effect and Dragon Age games. Specifically, we know development is being headed up by BioWare's Edmonton studio, the same studio that took the lead on all three Dragon Ages and the Shepard trilogy of Mass Effect before that series was handballed to BioWare Montreal. We also know

that Casey Hudson, who served as creative director on the first three Mass Effects has recently returned to BioWare Edmonton as general manager in order to oversee production on Anthem. All these facts mean we feel confident in saying that Anthem is in safe hands.

BioWare and EA have described Anthem as a "shared world action-RPG" where players can band together in groups of up to four to explore a "contiguous open world" and embark on various quests. It's not entirely clear whether you will see other players - outside your group of four - in the same world, as in Destiny, or whether it's more of a Borderlands approach to online play. We would expect the former, but BioWare has yet to clarify.

We know that it's a shooter. The minimal footage made public so far has shown players wielding sci-fi shotguns, sniper rifles and mortars. It's also shown them taking down a large enemy and being unexpectedly rewarded with a special named rifle, so it appears to also have random loot drops. There are also XP pop-ups when players discover new locations and kill

enemies, so it appears to qualify as an action-RPG.

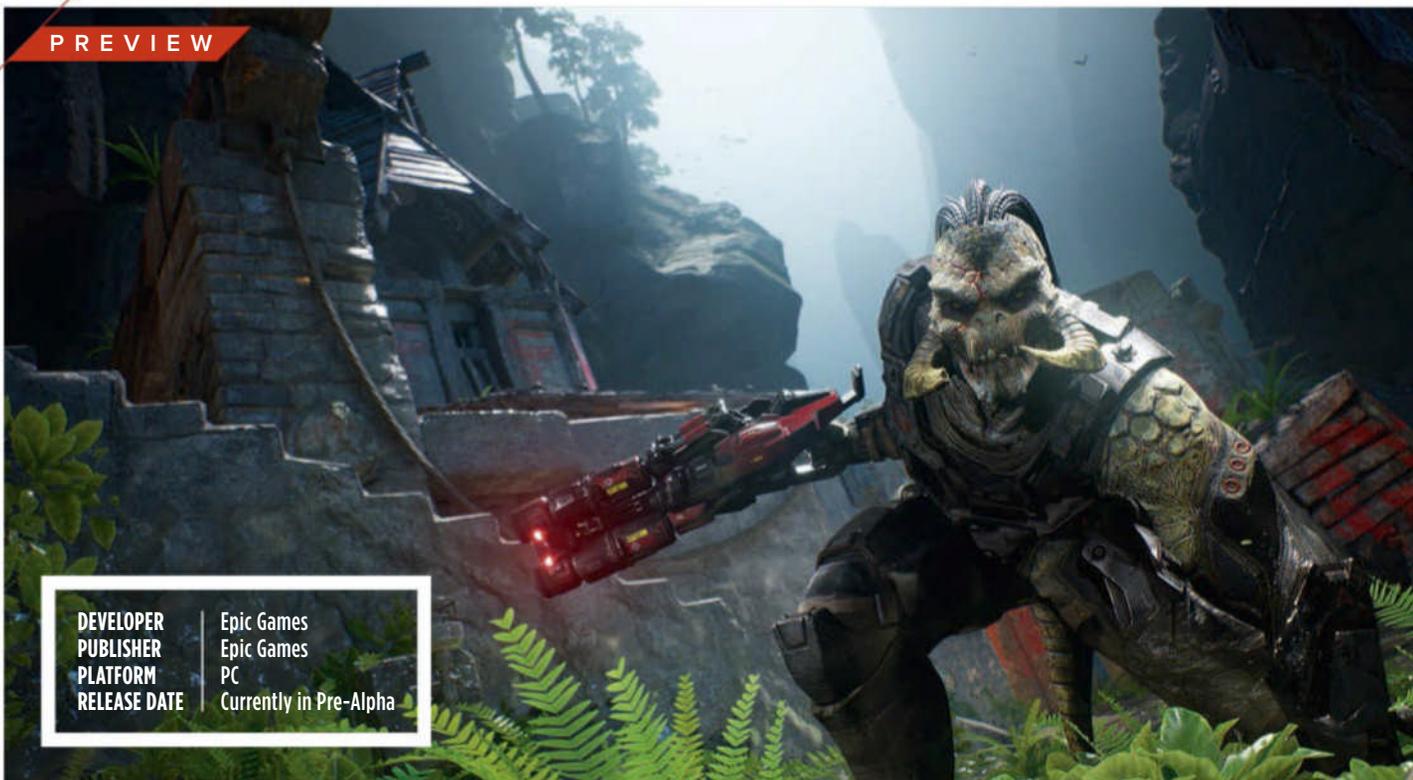
We know that players inhabit exosuits that confer various abilities, including a jetpack that allows them to fly. We know there's an all-rounder one and a heavy, tank-like one, which means that the only thing left to do is wait for the lightweight but nimble one to be revealed. Hopefully there's more than three exosuits to choose from.

We know that Anthem plays from first- and third-person. Footage appears to show the first-person view limited to the social, hub area with the third-person view swapping in when players leave to start shooting and looting. We don't know whether this is forced or optional.

We know Anthem looks super pretty. We know there's some jungle bits and some ruined buildings. We know there's some caves and you can fly your exosuit underwater. We know players can join you mid-game. We know there's a market area that looks a bit like a Star Wars desert planet. And that's about it.

Except the thing we know most of all is we need to know a lot more about Anthem. ☹

**THE ONLY THING LEFT TO DO IS WAIT FOR THE LIGHTWEIGHT BUT NIMBLE ONE TO BE REVEALED**



DEVELOPER	Epic Games
PUBLISHER	Epic Games
PLATFORM	PC
RELEASE DATE	Currently in Pre-Alpha



# Unreal Tournament

*Daniel Wilks always did love a good mutator*

*A side effect of crowdsourced development is training a new generation of devs in Unreal Engine.*

When it comes to arena style shooters there are two names that pop up time and time again as being the cream of the crop – Quake 3: Arena and Unreal Tournament. Unfortunately, even though Epic Games released a number of sequels to Unreal Tournament, the series never really picked up the steam it needed to flourish. Unreal Tournament 3 in 2007 was the last UT game until a new arena shooter simply titled Unreal Tournament was announced in 2014. You can definitely be forgiven for thinking that three years of development is a heck of a long time to get something into Pre-Alpha, but when you find out who is actually making the game it all makes sense.

Rather than simply developing a new game and looking for a community to play it, Epic Games has instead brought in the community as an integral part of the development team. Unreal Tournament is a crowdsourced game in the most literal way. Anyone can download the Unreal Tournament version of the Unreal

Editor to take a look at the code and develop mods, plugins, models, meshes, textures, maps and more for the game. Even if you're not up with coding, the developers still want anyone interested to suggest, comment on, critique and share ideas on the forums. In an interview with PC Gamer, Steve Polge, one of the key programmers over the entire Unreal series, said that Epic "will have a very open and inclusive process for establishing how the core of Unreal Tournament evolves. We'll build consensus and make sure the community buys into the direction we establish together. Design questions will be discussed on the forum and in regular Twitch streams, and the decision process will be inclusive and transparent. Players will be able to make their voice heard, and participate meaningfully in setting the direction of development. We will release playable alpha versions and use those to get hands-on feedback from players as well."

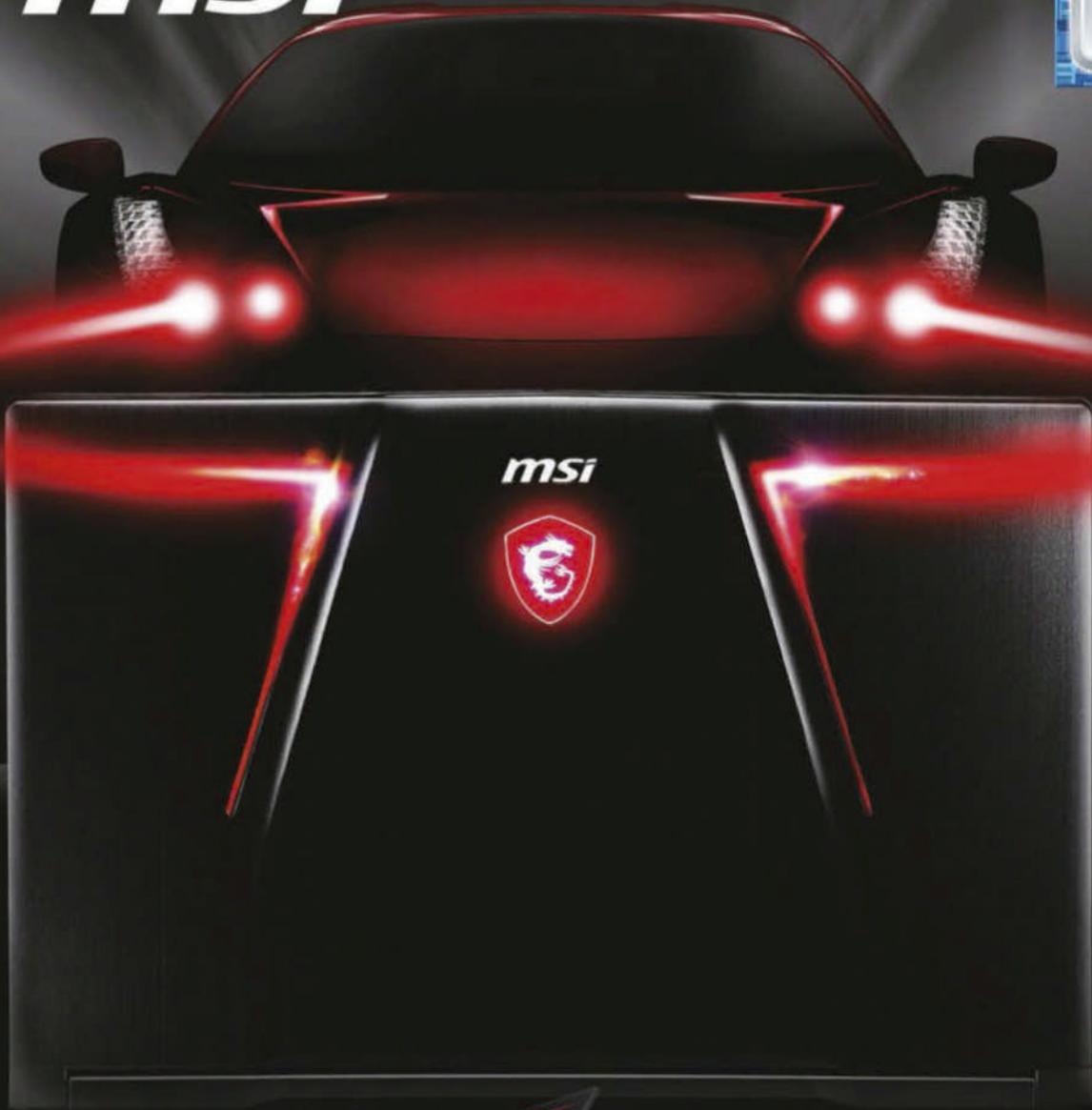
The playable Alpha is currently up to 0.1.12, but even at this extremely early stage of development

when some maps still don't have completed textures and fixes keep coming to stabilise framerates, patch weapons and the like, Unreal Tournament feels good. It's extremely fast and the amazing range of weaponry that made the original games so much fun perform like they should. There's still great satisfaction in lobbing the perfect Flak Canister into a group of players or hitting your own shock orb with a blast from your Shock Rifle to obliterate the opposing team. We haven't been able to play with any of the traditional mutators (Unreal mutators are mods that change certain gameplay aspects) as yet, like Low Gravity and Quad Jump, the combination of which can turn any map into an aerial ballet with guns, but we still can't wait to see what is coming.

Due to the nature of development it doesn't look like Unreal Tournament is going to be finished any time soon, but even so, there's a great deal of fun to be had. When the game is finished it will be entirely free, without any type of microtransaction at all. ☞



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DEVELOPER	id Software
PUBLISHER	Bethesda Softworks
PLATFORM	PC
RELEASE DATE	Early Access



PREVIEW

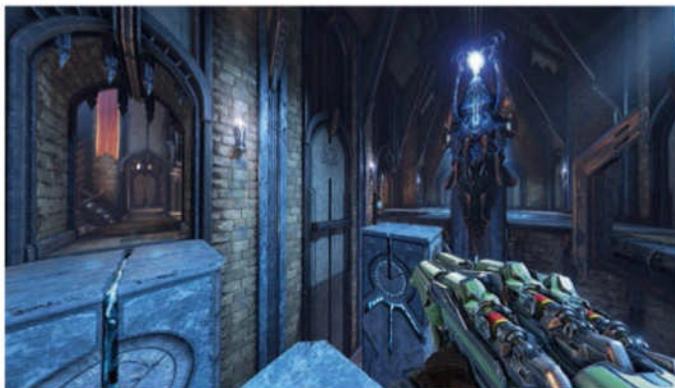


# Quake Champions

Where the heck is Q3DM17, asks **Daniel Wilks**

Quake Champions sits uncomfortably between two eras. There is something impressively and addictively old-school about the map design and the speed of play that makes Quake Champions feel like a blast of high-resolution Quake 3: Arena, but there is also a fine spray of unwelcome modern features that muddy the affair somewhat. Instead of all the characters being nothing but model swaps, Quake Champions goes the Hero Shooter route and gives each “Champion” their own special powers. And then there are the ubiquitous loot boxes with cosmetic pieces. Rather than taking over the game, however, these modern additions just feel out of place and more than a little unwelcome. At its core, Quake Champions is still Quake.

For those who never had the pleasure of playing Quake 3:



*Will character classes and micro-transactions improve Quake? The jury's out for now.*

Arena, picture an ultra-fast shooter with excellent maps, regular and reliable weapon and pickup spawn points, excellent, straightforward weapons and an absolutely level playing field. With the exception of the level playing field, Quake Champions delivers on the basic Quake premise, albeit with a new coat of paint. There is a new visual style in Champions that is excellent. Rather than being the same dark or sombre colours as the maps, the weapons and pickups are now highlighted in bright, colours. This not only helps when it comes to actually seeing a pickup, it also lets you know at a glance what pickups are available even when the details aren't obvious - if you see red you know there is a rocket launcher available if you're fast enough. These brightly coloured pickups also seem to serve as beacons for firefights, drawing players

together to squabble over who gets the prize. The new engine, a combination of id Tech and Saber Interactive tech is excellent. While it may not be the prettiest game in the world, the engine seems to be extremely scalable while still maintaining a high frame rate.

Although the greatest of Q3A maps, The Longest Yard, hasn't made an appearance in Quake Champions as yet, the selection of maps in early access does give us a good indication that the design is still great, giving players enough open spaces, jump pads and corridors to suit their chosen approach

Leaving aside the loot boxes and the ever-present threat of microtransactions in games that feature them, the only real problem with Quake Champions is the fact that characters are no longer just different meshes on

the same base. Each character has their own health and armour levels, movement speed and special abilities, but none of it feels either balanced or ultimately necessary. Characters look to be balanced around grouped team combat, with characters with healing abilities (that require you to stand still, something not advisable in Quake), tanks, high speed but vulnerable flankers and the like. With the exception of a few characters though, like B.J. Blazkowicz and his dual wielding (doubling damage output for six seconds) and Scalebearer and his Bullrush (a massive damage charge attack), the special abilities feel underpowered. Underpowered to the point that many players seem to forget about them altogether. There is no need for modern trappings if they don't add anything to the experience. ❧



# Metro Exodus

*Mind the gap, warns David Wildgoose*

The key moment arrives halfway through the first announcement trailer for Metro Exodus. We've been watching through the eyes of what is presumably the main character as they make their way through a section of ruined subway tunnel. The air is murky with dust, decay and the occasional green radioactive cloud. For a moment the only sound is the clank of a scavenged clip being loaded into a makeshift rifle and the echo of heavy breathing inside a gas mask.

Suddenly they're attacked by at first one and then a pack of what can only be described as mutant dogs. They fend off a few but they keep coming. The unnamed protagonist scrambles up a ladder and makes for a door, slamming it shut behind on the skull of a pursuing dog. They look down - there are flowers on the ground. They turn and look up - it's a

brilliantly sunny day. They remove their gas mask and take a deep breath. Metro games aren't meant to be this way.

The third in the series after Metro 2033 and Last Light, Exodus is based on the new book "Metro 2035" by Russian author Dmitry Glukhovsky, who is also closely involved with the development of the games. Again, players take on the role of Artyom, one of the Rangers tasked with protecting those trying to survive beneath post-apocalyptic Moscow and keeping the peace between the various factions vying for control of the tunnels. But some things have changed.

In both previous games, the gas mask was essential to your survival. Above ground - and even some areas underground - the air was toxic and you had to keep your mask on at all times. You had to replace filters when they expired, too, which when you ran out would mean a frantic rush to the nearest breathable air, soundtracked by Artyom's increasingly desperate gasps. In Exodus, developer 4A Games is promising large expanses

above ground where you can take your mask off and not choke to death. They were sick of the tunnels, apparently, and wanted some fresh air for a change.

This desire to fill their lungs with clean oxygen comes hand in hand with a rethinking of how to present the world of Metro. Perhaps by virtue of the subway tunnels in which they were mostly set, both 2033 and Last Light guided players through a linear series of mostly cramped passageways interspersed by the odd foray into slightly wider outdoor environments. Exodus isn't an open world game as such, but the idea is to give players much bigger areas to explore top-side that will provide a refreshing contrast to the more claustrophobic areas below. The STALKER games, with their large inter-connected maps rather than a seamless open world, is a useful comparison - understandably so given many of the 4A Games team worked on the first game in that series.

Metro Exodus is scheduled to depart the station sometime - more late than early, we're guessing - next year. ❧

*Metro Exodus isn't exactly an open world, but it's a relief to escape the underground.*



DEVELOPER	4A Games
PUBLISHER	Deep Silver
PLATFORM	PC, PS4, Xbox One
RELEASE DATE	2018

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# System Shock 3

How can you challenge a perfect, immortal machine, asks **David Wildgoose**

It's been eighteen years since the last time - and a further five years since the first time - an unnamed hacker awoke from a coma aboard a space station overrun by an artificial intelligence known as SHODAN. Which is an exhaustingly roundabout way of saying that this is the direct sequel to a game that came out last century. System Shock may have spent nearly twenty years out of the public eye, but its influence - both subtle and overt - has been felt in many of the best games since.

Deus Ex and its sequels, Invisible War, Human Revolution and Mankind Divided, have all found inspiration in System Shock's multi-faceted approach to the RPG-shooter. BioShock's heritage is evident in its very title, a namecheck reinforced by its structure and plot twist being lifted wholesale from Irrational's earlier game. Dead Space was initially conceived as a System Shock game - Electronic Arts having published System Shock 2 - and retains more than a passing similarity despite the

eventual decision to pursue more of a survival horror feel. More recently, Dishonored and Prey have revitalised the core tenets of the "immersive sim" and continued to empower players to choose how they want to tackle missions and encounters without prescribing a particular playing style. In some ways, System Shock has never really been away.

In late 2015, a development studio by the name of Otherside Entertainment announced it had secured the rights to make a System Shock sequel. Despite it being their first game as a team, they had the balls confidence to call it System Shock 3. Otherside, however, are not cocky upstarts; their number includes a bunch of people who worked at Looking Glass on System Shock and at Irrational on System Shock 2. And since that first announcement they have brought on board Warren Spector, who served as producer on System Shock and then the creative lead on Deus Ex, to head up the project. To put it mildly, Otherside is brimming

with veteran developers with experience crafting action-RPG-shooter hybrids like this.

Right now, there's little concrete information out there around System Shock 3. Spector has confirmed it is a direct sequel in the sense its story will continue from where System Shock 2 left off. That means SHODAN is of course still around, having successfully taken possession of Rebecca Siddons, one of only two survivors of the Von Braun, now heading back to Earth in an escape pod. SHODAN has pretended to be a human before, but it would be a very different experience for her to actual take physical form. We're curious to see where Otherside run with that.

As we wait for System Shock 3, there's a System Shock remake on the way. Night Dive Studios is busy recreating Citadel Station 23 years later, and from what they've shown so far it looks set to be a faithful modern adaptation. It's genuinely incredible to think we could be playing two new System Shock games in the next couple of years. **»**



*SHODAN remains one of the all-time great sci-fi villains in gaming history.*



DEVELOPER	Otherside Entertainment
PUBLISHER	Starbreeze
PLATFORM	PC, PS4, Xbox One
RELEASE DATE	TBC



DEVELOPER	id Software
PUBLISHER	Bethesda
PLATFORM	Vive, PSVR
RELEASE DATE	1 December



# Doom VFR

*David Willgoose prefers his meatsack intact*

**D**oom VFR is Doom with virtual reality support, specifically on PC with HTC Vive and on PS4 with PSVR. But it's not, as you might be forgiven for thinking, a tweaked version of 2016's Doom ported over with a few VR bells and whistles. It's actually a brand new game.

You don't even play as Doom Guy this time around. (That's his name, isn't it?) You play instead as Doom Science Guy, a labcoat from the BFG research project who dies under mysterious-but-

gibtastic circumstances and finds his consciousness conveniently uploaded to the facility's computer system. So you're an AI scientist in a VR game, which is possibly the nerdiest thing ever.

It's still all about shooting demons in the most spectacularly gruesome manner imaginable, though. As an artificial intelligence you're able to hack into various droids, machines and even good old Doom Guy's space marine suit, and as a result you still have access to the wide range of shotguns and plasma rifles you'd expect to find in a Doom game.

What's really different here is the way you move around. Like a lot of first-person VR games, Doom VFR uses a teleport system to get you from A to B. Holding the left trigger slows time and lets you place a teleportation marker where you're aiming; releasing it instantly zaps you to that location in a fashion highly reminiscent of Bethesda stablemate Dishonored's blink ability. We're not sure of the restrictions placed on teleporting - i.e. how far or high or often you can do it - but what we've seen suggests the idea is to ensure you

can use it whenever or however you want to. It'll be interesting to see how a game series built on a foundation of strafing to dodge enemy fire can support a completely different movement system. Early indications are that it retains the fast-paced feel, if not the same mode of travel.

We do like how VFR adapts the "glory kill" melee execution moves from Doom 2016 by letting you teleport literally inside of a staggered enemy. Only one of you survives this close encounter with their meatsack intact. We also appreciate how this echoes the long-forgotten FPS concept of telefragging.

Away from the all the killing, there are quieter non-combat interludes. Taking advantage of your scientific prowess, and the irresistible "Doomba" pun, you can take control of a little cleaner robot who can not only squeeze into nooks and crannies (i.e. ventilation shafts) but also engage in some light puzzle solving. There's even a hacking minigame for those who play a Doom game for the world simulation.

At thirty bucks, we think it's wise to expect a solid chunk of game, but not a full Doom campaign. ☞

*Doom Science Guy can still go toe-to-toe with the worst demons from space hell.*





# Paladins

Lay your hands on me, pleads **Daniel Wilks**

Part Overwatch, part MOBA, part deck building, Paladins sure wants to be liked.

When Paladins was first shown it was quite quickly brushed off as something of an Overwatch clone. At the time the claim was understandable as a number of characters looked very similar and had all but identical suites of skills, but as development has progressed and the character roster has grown the comparisons have become less and less obvious. There are still a few characters with a resemblance to those in Overwatch, but more than any other hero shooter on the market, Paladins feels like a first-person MOBA.

Two teams of five battle against each other over four different game modes: Siege, in which the teams battle over a central capture point then the successful team tries to push a payload that spawns there to the enemy base; Payload, a similar mode but with one team pushing and the other trying to stop

them; Survival, a small map team deathmatch with no respawns; and Onslaught in which the teams battle to capture control points to raise their score. The 35 characters currently in the roster are broken into four different categories. Front Line characters are your bullet sponges and tanks with high health or shield pools and defensive abilities. Damage characters do what it says on the tin. Support characters are buffers and healers and Flankers have high mobility and some form of self-sustain to make up for their lack of health and the fact that they can rarely rely in the cover of a tank.

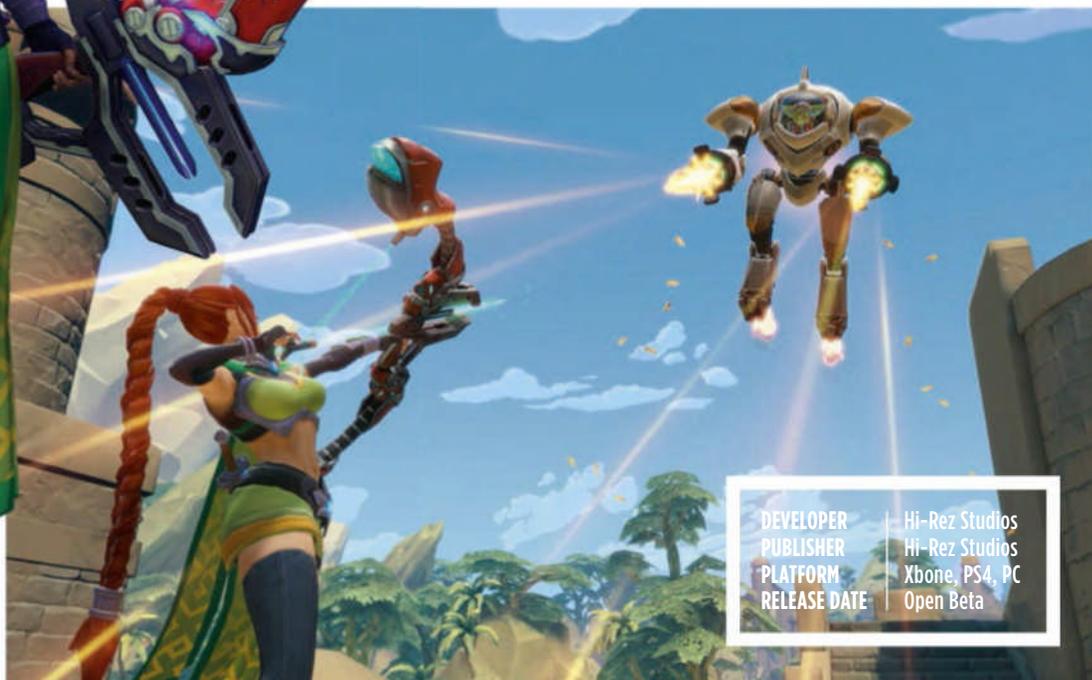
Although these four categories of character define their purpose, each character has five basic skills to call upon; primary and secondary fire, and separate skills attached to Q, F and E (or face buttons on console).

This range of skills makes the characters feel more interesting and nuanced than the cartoonish design might otherwise indicate. Pip, a support character that looks something like a Chinese bootleg of Ratchet (or maybe a chibi Jak) hurls potions that can cause significant damage to enemies, others that

can heal allies and can even turn enemies into chickens. Androxus, a flanker with a six-shooter does decent damage at medium range but also has dash moves and a short term damage shield that reflects 75% of the damage absorbed.

In addition to the basic skills, Paladins also features a deck building mechanic that allows players to customise their characters as well as an in-game Burn Card mechanic that lets players spend currency they earn in game for short term buffs that last until the end of the round. Players can equip five cards with a maximum value of 12 points combined to augment their character. These cards are found in-game, crafted with in-game currency and can be found in loot boxes. The more powerful cards are worth more points and may have drawbacks to balance their power. The Burn Cards can be bought back at the spawn point and give buffs until the end of the round, giving faster movement, cooldown reductions and the like.

Paladins is free to play, but if you don't want to have to unlock characters there is a "Founder's Edition" available for \$20 USD with all of the characters unlocked, a few new skins and some loot boxes. ☐☐



DEVELOPER	Hi-Rez Studios
PUBLISHER	Hi-Rez Studios
PLATFORM	Xbone, PS4, PC
RELEASE DATE	Open Beta



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# Real-time illusionists

## The state of shooter netcode

*Nathan Lawrence is your host*

**O**n the surface, the core netcode of your average online shooter hasn't changed a whole lot in recent years. But dig a little deeper, and there's a wealth of tweaks, improvements and, in some instances, backward steps that greatly impact the all-important feel of playing shooters online.

Back when we were all high-ping bastards (HPBs), online multiplayer required players to take their latency into account to hit players running across their aim. Even for shooters that used hitscan ballistics, like Counter-Strike of old, a player with, say, 200 latency would have had to lead their target by 0.2 of a second to ensure a hit.

As HPBs became low-ping bastards, developers advanced netcode technologies to further push the illusion of real-time interaction between players. In reality, even though fast broadband connections facilitate interactions measured in milliseconds, all players connected to a server are effectively interacting with the recent-past ghosts of other players.

It's easier for comparatively slower-paced games, such as real-time or even turn-based strategy games, to sell this illusion. But for fast-paced genres such as shooters that require constant authoritative validation (from the server) to maintain the illusion, things can start to fall apart.

Basically, your average online shooter is constantly sending and receiving updates about your individual input and measuring it against other player's input and, most importantly, what the server accepts to be the true state of the game world at a particular point in time. For input that doesn't

clash with other players, such as movement commands, this tends to be handled client-side (on your gaming machine) and is automatically accepted as true.

The only time it's rejected, and usually after the fact, is if the server determines that your movement contradicts with an intersecting input from another player. This might be as simple as colliding with another player. It also might mean you had already jumped off a ledge on your screen, but you'd been headshot on another player's screen before or during the jump. Remember: you're interacting with the recent history of other players, so it's actually less important about what you see now on your screen as it is compared to where you were milliseconds ago.

This is also why it feels like you take damage behind cover in certain games. Counter-Strike: Global Offensive uses 64Hz tick rate as standard, and even offers the option of 128Hz tick-rate servers. Tick rate is a fancy term for describing the amount of times the server sends updates to players every second. It's complemented by the player update rate, which is how frequently updates are sent from player to server. Generally speaking, the higher the tick rate, the smoother and more accurate the online experience.

The Battlefield series was, not so long ago, forced to overhaul its netcode, including its tick rate, because of the disastrous launch of Battlefield 4. At launch, Battlefield 4 players suffered from unreliable servers, rubber banding, and other related netcode issues that ruined the online experience. Fast-forward to years after release, and Battlefield 4's tick rate was doubled

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Pinging pgnmowrplay.com on 119.9.39.101 with 32 bytes of data:
Reply from 119.9.39.101: bytes=32 time=3ms TTL=112
Reply from 119.9.39.101: bytes=32 time=3ms TTL=112
Reply from 119.9.39.101: bytes=32 time=4ms TTL=112
Reply from 119.9.39.101: bytes=32 time=4ms TTL=112
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Ping statistics for 119.9.39.101:
    Packets: Sent = 4, Received = 4, Lost = 0 (0% loss),
    Approximate round trip times in milli-seconds:
        Minimum = 3ms, Maximum = 4ms, Average = 3ms
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Pinging hqper.com on 119.9.39.101 with 32 bytes of data:
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Reply from 119.9.39.101: bytes=32 time=4ms TTL=112
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Reply from 119.9.39.101: bytes=32 time=3ms TTL=112
Reply from 119.9.39.101: bytes=32 time=3ms TTL=112
Reply from 119.9.39.101: bytes=32 time=4ms TTL=112
Reply from 119.9.39.101: bytes=32 time=4ms TTL=112
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Ping statistics for 119.9.39.101:
    Packets: Sent = 4, Received = 4, Lost = 0 (0% loss),
    Approximate round trip times in milli-seconds:
        Minimum = 3ms, Maximum = 4ms, Average = 3ms
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### Hitscan vs projectile

In basic terms, projectile-based ballistics modelling is used in games that require players to take into account real-life factors such as bullet drop and the time it takes for a round to reach a target. Basically, bullets are modelled as objects in the world. Hitscan games or weapons hit the target instantaneously.

from 30Hz to 60Hz as part of a netcode renovation.

Battlefield 4 also introduced clever technologies that tamed the otherwise overwhelming information that comes from 64-player servers that involve infantry, vehicles, and destructible environments. Basically, an invisible field-of-view cone in front of infantry, and a larger one in front of vehicles, updates at a faster rate, and everything outside that cone, which is less likely to impact the player, updates at a slower rate. This helps maintain the real-time illusion and reduces server demand.

Server demand was a hot talking point for Rainbow Six Siege, which recently pushed back a core DLC drop to prioritise Operation Health: a back-end refurbishment designed to improve online play. One of those issues was server demand, which resulted in crashes (both client and server-side), higher-than-normal latencies, and problematic hit registration.

Hit registration is one of the most complained about factors for online shooters. When Call of Duty games dynamically switch between dedicated servers and peer-to-peer (P2P) hosts, assumedly to facilitate faster matchmaking, they create issues. CoD's client update rate is so low – a mere 10 updates per second in P2P matches – that it can create a phenomenon called 'super bullets'.

Super bullets occur when a gun's fire rate is faster than the game's update rate, which can result in players taking double

damage from fast-firing weapons. One of the bigger issues with P2P matches, though, is the player who's automatically designated host effectively has zero latency, because their machine is acting as the server.

The host player has a distinct advantage over other players whose inputs must be sent to and confirmed by the host machine. On top of this, automatic host selection may pick a player in a different region or with a low-bandwidth internet connection. Additionally, there's no control over the performance of that hosting player's machine (which is more important on PC), whether they're using Wi-Fi to play online (which can cause packet loss), or other networking factors that can impact the real-time illusion.

Even games that use dedicated servers aren't free from netcode issues that impact the smoke and mirrors required for an online game to feel responsive. Anecdotally, smoke is one of the hardest things to keep fair online, because client-side smoke propagation is often different between players. This is true of Playerunknown's Battlegrounds, which also wrestles with other netcode issues.

There's noticeable lag at the beginning of matches, which isn't so bad if you don't land with enemy players, but is immediately and frustratingly noticeable when input commands don't register, despite a client-side animation playing on-screen.

One of the more concerning issues is that Battlegrounds uses a 20Hz tick rate, which is likely the

## PLAYERS ARE EFFECTIVELY INTERACTING WITH THE RECENT-PAST GHOSTS OF OTHER PLAYERS

cause of some of the hit registration issues, synchronisation concerns, and also why it appears that players take damage behind cover. This latter point is particularly egregious because of Battlegrounds' unique sound design that already makes it hard to pinpoint the location of the player shooting at you.

If you take damage behind cover from a shot that actually hit before you reached cover, you might be fooled into believing the enemy is behind you. It's something that Blizzard addressed not so long ago in Overwatch by bumping the tick rate from 20Hz to 63Hz.

Regardless of the online shooter, the reality is that no matter how fast an internet connection is, players are at the mercy of a game's netcode and the network models supporting it. Netcode has improved in more recent years, but there's still room for refinements. A push for network-model uniformity across online shooters would make them feel closer to the responsiveness of a single-player shooter. **||**

*The higher a game's tick rate, the smoother the online experience.*



# “It’s fine, everything’s fine.”

by James O’Connor

I was bunkered down in a featureless building with the other members of [bog] squad, my medic-issue MG36 light machine gun pivoting from entry point to entry point. There was a lot of time left on the clock, and the enemy forces had pushed us back to the final point awfully quickly. Their tanks advanced on us, and the building we were in was already being torn apart. As long as I lived, I could keep reviving anyone downed; as long as someone on the squad survived, I could warp back quickly after death. But the writing was splattered on the wall in human brains, and we all knew it.

I’d been playing Bad Company 2 with [bog] squad for a while at this point, and I decided, as my teammates started to admit that defeat was coming, that it was best to maintain a positive attitude. ‘No, it’s fine’, I said, whenever someone bemoaned our situation. ‘Everything’s fine.’

I don’t remember, honestly, just how much sarcasm was intended in these remarks. What I do know, though, is that after a while I started to believe it. ‘No, it’s fine. Everything’s fine. We’ll keep killing them when they come, I’ll keep reviving you, the building won’t go down. It’s fine, guys. We got this. Don’t worry.’

Eventually the building went down, and we lost the match with a solid four or five minutes left on the clock. We continued to play the game for months, getting together at least twice a week. We were a strong team, and my stats were better than they’ve ever been in any other online shooter.

That practiced assurance really stuck with me. What I loved about Bad Company 2 was that, if you were good enough at it, you could go and get shit done even if the rest of your teammates weren’t pulling their weight. There’s a very noticeable shift in how a team is playing after one member runs ahead and captures B by themselves. All you have to do is look at that ticking clock as your teammates explode around you and think ‘it’s fine, everything’s fine. I’ll just deal with it.’

It’s been a long time since I’ve played Bad Company 2, and I never really got into future Battlefield games in the same way, as much fun as Battlefield 1 is, but ‘it’s fine, everything’s fine’ became a mantra that I adopted into my everyday life. I’ve got another friend who started using it too, although over the last six years it has softened, for him, into ‘it’s probably fine’.

At some point, a cartoon dog in a burning house made ‘this is fine’ a meme, and I realised that other people do the same thing. The older I get the more I wonder whether it’s a good attitude to have, and whether it was a coincidence that it came to me a digital battlefield. Haven’t wars, traditionally, been fought by young people who signed up under the assumption that everything would be okay? Isn’t this an attitude that leads to deaths? Could it be that, in that moment, hunkered down in that house, I experienced the brand of apathy that might have doomed us all by the time we realise that we badly needed to care more about the things that were happening in the world?

I mean, it’s fine, though. Everything’s probably fine. ☐☐



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# Game Changers

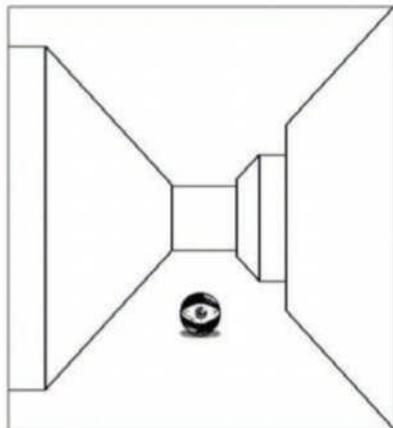
The history of the first-person shooter is a series of small steps, huge technological leaps, bold gameplay advances, and the odd wrong turn. **David Wildgoose** is your spotter...

## 1974

### GAME CHANGERS

**Maze War** (Steve Colley, Howard Palmer, Greg Thompson)

Probably the first first-person shooter, Maze War put players in a vector wireframe, 3D grid they could navigate one step at a time. If you spotted another player you could shoot them. While Spasim may have a credible claim to being the first first-person shooter, it's clear that Maze War is closer to what eventually became the genre. This truly is the very essence of the FPS. Over numerous iterations it was also so far ahead of its time in terms of what we would now consider staple genre features - networked multiplayer, a level editor, mod support, and a spectator mode - that it's easy to suspect some sort of sorcery at work. It would not be at all unreasonable to argue Maze War is the most important and influential video game of all time.



Bomber  
Killer 20

### EVOLUTIONARY BRANCHES

**Spasim** (Jim Bowery)

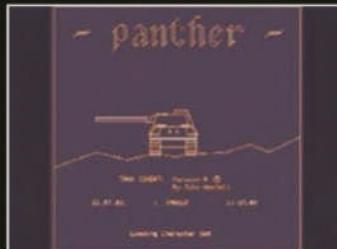
While MIT students were busy making Maze War, in the same year over in Illinois a chap named Jim Bowery was making Spasim. It's a space shooter with a first-person cockpit view and may well have predated Maze War by a matter of months. But it's not an FPS as we know it; it's a space sim - it's right there in the title.

## 1975

### EVOLUTIONARY BRANCHES

**Panther** (John Edo Haefeli)

A precursor to Battlezone, Panther was a first-person shooter that had players piloting a tank. Notably it featured a team-based mode that is likely the earliest example of team deathmatch.

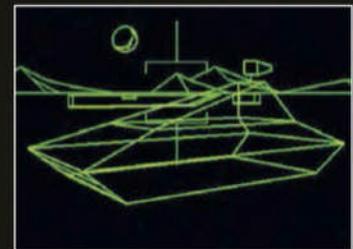


## 1980

### GAME CHANGERS

**Battlezone** (Atari)

Certainly the most popular of the early arcade "tank" games, Battlezone is also the best known early arcade FPS. Players could use indestructible pieces of the terrain as shields in something of a basic cover system.

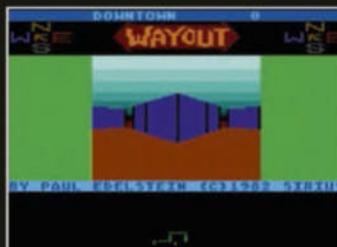


## 1982

### GAME CHANGERS

**Wayout** (Sirius Software)

Although not a shooter, Wayout merits its place here for innovating on first-person graphics technology. It was probably the first game to use a rendering technique known as ray casting, which allows for smooth, full 360-degree movement on the horizontal plane. Wayout was a maze game rather than a shooter, but the likes of Wolfenstein 3D built its graphics engine around the same concept of ray casting.



## 1983

### GAME CHANGERS

**Capture the Flag** (Sirius Software)

Paul Allen Edelstein followed up Wayout by, just casually, inventing one of the most popular FPS game modes ever. Capture the Flag built on Wayout by adding a second player whose goal was to stop the first player from escaping the maze. It's basically a game of chase set inside a randomly generated first-person maze.

### EVOLUTIONARY BRANCHES

**Star Wars** (Atari)

Atari sensibly distilled what was by then a trilogy of iconic sequence: destroying the Death Star. Split into three phases - dogfighting versus TIE fighters, shooting turrets on approach, then finally the trench run itself - the Star Wars arcade game captures the thrill of the films like few other games have managed since.

## 1987

### GAME CHANGERS

*Driller (Incentive Software)*

Another notable technology leap on the way to the FPS we now know and love came by the way of this unassuming off-world exploration game. While players could shoot at various hostile security systems, *Driller* is important because it's the first example of a full 3D polygonal environment we can recall in a commercial game. And the bonkers coders at Incentive somehow managed to get it up and running on a humble ZX Spectrum.



## 1991

### GAME CHANGERS

*Catacomb 3D (id Software)*

John Carmack had prototyped a fast, texture mapped 3D engine earlier in the year with *Hovortank 3D*. His studio, id Software, then had the brilliant idea to turn its top-down shooter *Catacomb* into a first-person shooter using a new version of this engine.



## 1992

### GAME CHANGERS

*Wolfenstein 3D (id Software)*

Finally, here we are, at the game that may not have been the *first* first-person shooter, but the game that inarguably defined the FPS genre. Building on the tech developed for *Hovortank 3D* and *Catacomb 3D* the year before, Carmack and id Software gave us the fastest, smoothest first-person 3D anyone had ever seen. And they gave us Nazis and Mecha-Hitler to shoot. The FPS was born. Except even in 1992 we hadn't yet started calling them first-person shooters. That would come later.

### EVOLUTIONARY BRANCHES

*Ultima Underworld (Blue Sky Productions)*

If *Driller* sported the first 3D polygonal environment in a game then this first-person RPG boasted the first 3D polygonal environment that was fully texture-mapped, had an actual lighting model, let players look up and down, and allowed parts of the level to exist on different points of the y-axis simultaneously, so for example you could walk under and over a bridge. Seriously, no one had done this sort of stuff before!



## 1993

### GAME CHANGERS

*DOOM (id Software)*

It's fair to say *DOOM* changed everything. *DOOM* had it all. Lightning fast 3D, evocatively detailed texture maps, and varied and dynamic lighting in each level. It also featured floors that weren't all at the same height - there were steps and everything! And the .WAD file system let users add their own custom content to the game in one of the first instances of truly accessible modding. Best of all, *DOOM* embraced the only gamer power fantasy that could beat shooting Nazis: being a space marine shooting space demons.



## 1994

### GAME CHANGERS

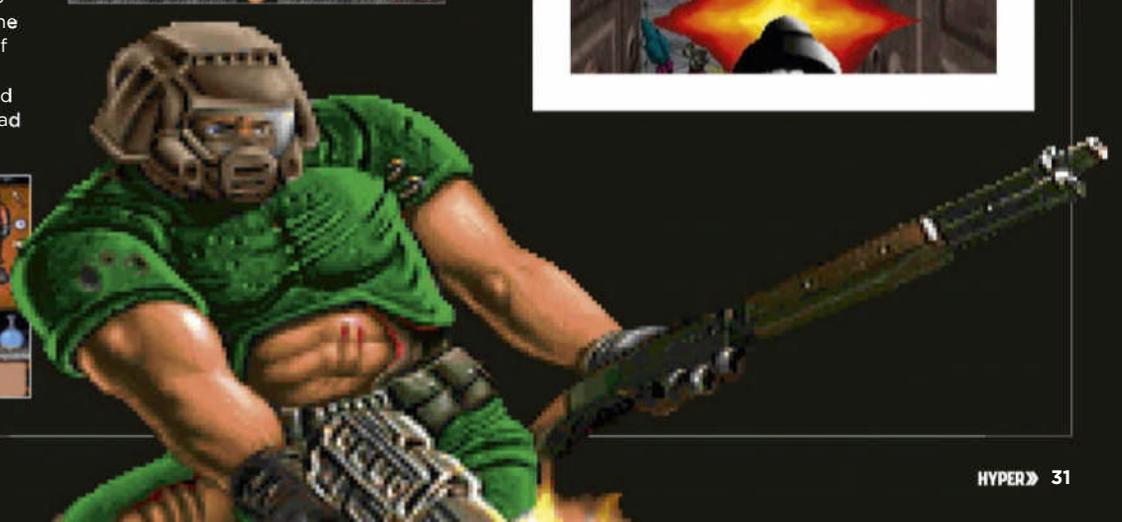
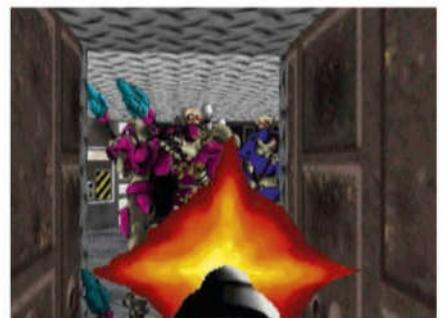
*DOOM II (id Software)*

*DOOM II* isn't a game changer for the purposes of this feature. *DOOM II* didn't really add much in the way of gameplay or technology improvements over the original *DOOM*, aside from just a general and all-pervading sense of doing it all better. *DOOM II* may not be a game changer, but it is probably the best FPS package ever made.

### EVOLUTIONARY BRANCHES

*Marathon (Bungie)*

Meanwhile, some development team called Bungie or something were making this "DOOM clone" about aliens and AIs and things. Don't worry about it.



## 1995

### EVOLUTIONARY BRANCHES *Descent (Parallax Software)*

After a couple years of mostly flat corridors to shoot in, the freedom of *Descent* was a revelation. It was also rather confusing not being able to tell which way was up as you pitched and yawed your way around its intimidatingly convoluted network of mining tunnels.



## 1997

### GAME CHANGERS *GoldenEye 007 (Rare)*

Rare took advantage of Nintendo's genius decision to have four controller ports on the Nintendo 64 by making an equally genius FPS that supported four-player split-screen deathmatch. Dedicated players would affix strips of cardboard to



their TV screens so that players couldn't "cheat" by looking at their opponents' view to work out where they were in the level.

### EVOLUTIONARY BRANCHES *Outlaws (LucasArts)*

We remember *Outlaws* with much fondness. It wasn't all that great, but man it had personality. And there just aren't enough games set in the wild west.



## 1996

### GAME CHANGERS *Quake (id Software)*

By this point the name id Software was synonymous with the FPS, or "DOOM clone" as they were often called. *Quake* ensured that Carmack and co. would also become the yardstick by which all PC graphics technology would be measured. *Quake* was the first major game to showcase full real-time 3D rendering using the nascent 3D hardware accelerator cards. It also took multiplayer deathmatch out of the preserve of office and university LANs and online, thanks to the pioneering work of *QuakeWorld* and *QuakeSpy*.

### EVOLUTIONARY BRANCHES

#### *The Terminator: Future Shock (Bethesda)*

You know how you play an FPS with the mouse to look left, right, up, down, and all around? It's called "mouse look" and this game was the first to have it. Believe it or not, before this you'd have to press PgUp and PgDn to look up and down, if you could even look up and down at all.



## 1998

### GAME CHANGERS *Half-Life (Valve)*

Until now the story of most FPSs amounted to little more than "shoot all the things". Then along came upstart developer Valve Software with, let's not forget, their debut game and soon every new FPS needed a story that players cared about, cinematic scenes where players retained control of their character rather than being shown a cut-scene, and a believable world populated by believable characters rather than just another level.

### EVOLUTIONARY BRANCHES *Unreal (Epic Games)*

*Quake* vs *Unreal* was the big FPS rivalry of the late '90s and early '00s, though to our mind the choice was always clear. *Quake* had the better tech and the better gameplay. *Unreal's* legacy, in the ubiquitous *Unreal Engine*, suggests the choice perhaps wasn't as clear as we thought.



## 1999

### GAME CHANGERS *Counter-Strike (Minh Le, Jess Cliffe)*

What began as a team-based mod for *Half-Life* resulted in its two creators being hired by Valve, nearly two decades as one of the most popular multiplayer games on PC, and a regular at esports tournaments all over the world. *Counter-Strike* remains an inspiration to modders everywhere.



## 2000

### EVOLUTIONARY BRANCHES

#### *No One Lives Forever (Monolith)*

Taking its cue from Austin Powers, NOLF gave us a story-driven FPS that was as smart as it was sassy. Sadly, we still rarely see a woman lead in an FPS.



## 2001

### GAME CHANGERS

#### *Halo 2 (Bungie)*

We'd argue that Halo: Combat Evolved, though a fine shooter and a better game than its sequel, didn't really do much that GoldenEye hadn't already done several years earlier. Halo 2, on the other hand, benefitted enormously from the launch of Xbox Live and the subsequent ease with which millions of people around the world could meet up online and squat suggestively over the limp body of a defeated opponent.



## 2007

### GAME CHANGERS

#### *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare (Infinity Ward)*

Call of Duty may have debuted in 2001 but it wasn't until its fourth outing that it became an industry phenomenon. Modern Warfare was the dominant multiplayer game on the dominant online service of the last console generation, and its perks and levelling systems and fast-paced deathmatch have been aped by countless imitators. The shadow of Modern Warfare still hangs over every FPS of the past ten years.



## 2008

### EVOLUTIONARY BRANCHES

#### *Far Cry 2 (Ubisoft)*

A huge open world shooter that prioritised emergent, improvisational play, Far Cry 2 was the anti-Call of Duty. It pulled the rug out from under the FPS power fantasy, debilitating the player at every turn, as your guns broke, you passed out from malaria, or a stray spark lit a fire around your sniper's nest.

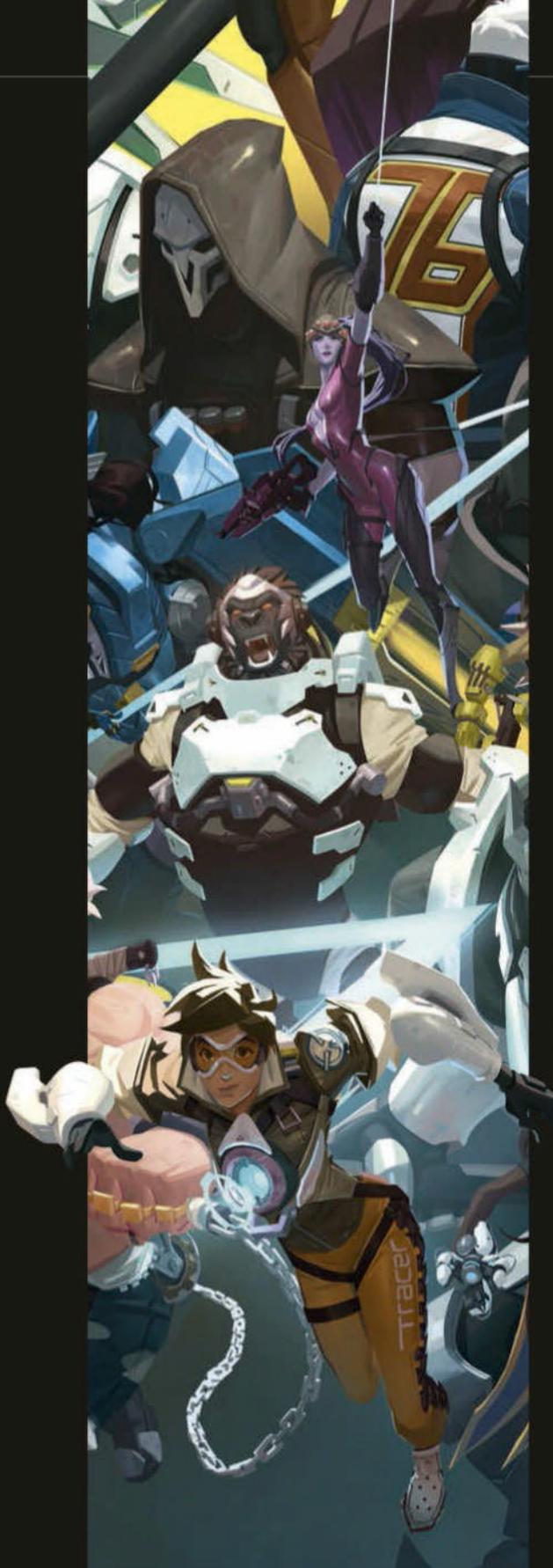


## 2016

### GAME CHANGERS

#### *Overwatch (Blizzard)*

Overwatch is Blizzard at its most Blizzard, taking a well-worn genre and sanding off all the rough edges until nothing remains but the most polished and frictionless game mechanics. Everyone can play and enjoy Overwatch and - fifty bazillion copies sold later - everyone did. «



# I Coulda Been a Contender

by *Terrence Jarrad*

Unlike many gamers my age, my love of FPS didn't arrive with Wolfenstein. Sure, it was cool, but it was also a game I couldn't play for very long without getting lost or bored. Similarly I let Doom pass me by; another neat game, but I found I still had little patience for key-hunting. Duke Nukem 3D's puerile humour and partial nudity added a layer of the forbidden over the whole approach, and I played it a lot for that reason rather than any love of the genre.

Quake was the game changer for me, but not for its full 3D, or its dark satanic tone and Reznor-built soundtrack; it was the first time I experienced competitive online gaming. Not that I was particularly competitive to begin with, because I played keyboard-only and it took weeks of getting my butt kicked, before I conceded that a mouse might be necessary, and things got serious.

I heard about a thing called Team Fortress - a "mod" for Quake - and that became my life. I played a lot. The kind of "a lot" where I knew player movement so well that even with a ping of 250+ on dialup I could snipe enemies through the opaque surface (no fancy OpenGL effects on my crappy laptop) of the water separating 2Forts and Rock. I obsessed over my stats on The Champion's League for Quake (theclq.com - now defunct) which monitored tens of thousands of servers and hundreds of thousands of players worldwide amongst which I ranked somewhere in the top 3-400. I was thoroughly addicted to being better at shooting

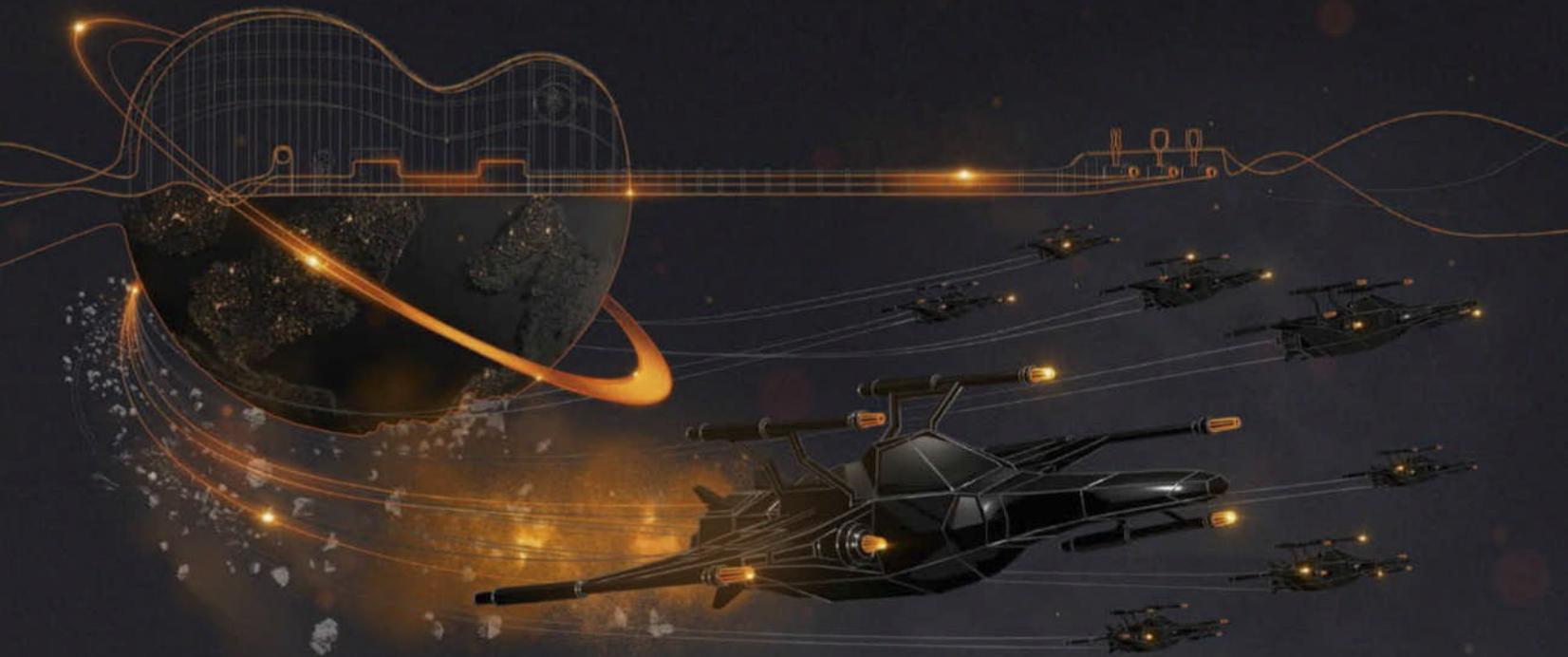
people than they were at shooting me. But it was more than that too, because it could be done cooperatively, as a team, each member playing a vital role to secure victory. At the time it seemed gaming would never get better than this.

Then a friend introduced me to Counter-Strike (1.3), and I forgot all about Team Fortress. Since this discovery occurred immediately prior to my moving out of home to attend university, you can probably guess what my average day consisted of: a lecture or two, and Counter-Strike. Furthering my habit, a LAN café opened up near the uni, and since a lot of internet was still dialup in those days, I spent a lot of time there playing over high speed internet or on the local network. I got pretty good. Café patrons knew me, and whispers rippled around the room when I walked in. I guess it was cool in a "king of geeks" kind of way, and it fed my desire to be the best FPS player I could. I once started a session at 11am on Friday, and walked out of the café at 11am Sunday morning with maybe a couple of hours sleep in between. My bike, left at the train station for two days, had the seat stolen.

Life's different now. I don't have much free time and I tend to prefer my FPS with a start and end, rather than the continual chase of unattainable perfection in never ending rounds. I sometimes wonder if there's a version of me in the multiverse who followed through and became a pro-gamer. Hmmm... maybe I'll just play a couple more rounds in Overwatch... 🗡️



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**H**igh refresh rate monitors. Low-latency, high-precision mice. Powerful GPUs and CPUs. Super speed storage. As gamers we're always told that we need the very best of the best to unleash our potential as competitive gamers, but is this always true? On the professional eSports scene, every speed boost is a boost closer to the first place, but what about average gamers who play from home? We're going to look at the pros and cons of the very latest in gaming peripherals, and see whether you really need

them or not. Let's start with one of the most popular topics - high refresh rate monitors.

#### **HIGH REFRESH DISPLAYS**

When we're referring to a display's refresh rate, we're talking about the rate at which a full screen is drawn, pixel by pixel. This is reliant very much upon the rest of your PC, as the screen can only draw a frame once your PC has created one. Until recently, most gamers were happy with 60Hz screens, which means these displays draw a fresh screen sixty times per second.

These screens were often capable of higher refresh rates, but due to the likes of V-Sync, gamers would limit them to 60Hz, to stop screen tearing. This occurs when a display draws half a scene, then starts on the next one, leading to a visible line in the scene, where polygons don't line up.

Several years ago, tweekers realised they could increase their display settings to overclock the panel speed, hitting speeds of 75Hz and sometimes even higher. Display manufacturers took note and started to focus on higher



## INPUTS ARE SNAPPIER AND YOU CAN AIM MORE ACCURATELY WITH MORE FINELY GRAINED MOVEMENTS

refresh rates, starting around 144Hz. This brings several tangible benefits. For starters, the feeling of smooth motion is greatly increased; once you've used a 144Hz display, moving back to a 60Hz display

feels very obvious. It feels like your game is moving much less smoothly than on a 144Hz display, and even on the Windows desktop your mouse pointer will seem less responsive and accurately.

Secondly, it means that there is less latency between the gamer's input and the outputted display, which is very important in competitive gaming, where local networks bring latency between gamers down to 1ms or so. So control inputs are snappier and more accurate, and you can also aim more accurately as you can with

more finely grained movements.

Until recently, Twisted Nematic panels offered the fastest frame rates compared to IPS, or In-Plane Switching. This is because in an IPS cell, the liquid crystals can rotate freely. However, TN crystals can only move a smaller amount, which means they can respond faster. As you might know, TN doesn't have the same colour accuracy or viewing angle as IPS, so TN was the go-to tech for gaming monitors for years. Yet in the last few years we've seen IPS panels, along with their benefits, hitting high refresh

**The 24Hz myth**

Many people think that because film runs at a mere 24 frames per second, that's all we need to run our games at. This is simply untrue. Because of the way film is projected, it has inherent motion blur, allowing our brain to fill in the gaps and lead to an image that looks smooth. You'll still probably notice on long panning shots that it can stutter though.

*You want a low pixel response time to eliminate unsightly motion blur.*

rates, giving gamers the best of both worlds. Yet serious eSports players are still sticking with TN, as they are now hitting refresh rates of 240Hz. When playing a game like CS:GO, it doesn't require the fastest hardware to hit 240 frames per second, though to be honest we here at HYPER find it very hard to spot the difference between 144Hz and 240Hz.

**WHAT'S YOUR RESPONSE?**

These high refresh rates introduce a new problem though - the pixels need to be able to keep up with the intended screen refresh rate. This is referred to as pixel response time. On a 60Hz display, it takes 16.67ms per frame, while on a 120Hz display it's 8.33ms per frame. Now, all of the pixels that make up the display need to change their colour before the time it takes to change the display. If the pixel response time is higher than the frame time, you'll notice

things like motion blur. Ideally you want the pixel response time to be less than half the time it takes for a screen refresh to remove the problem of motion blur entirely. Thankfully most 144Hz high-speed screens have a pixel response time of between 1 and 4ms. It's definitely an important spec to look for though.

But wait, there's more! One other technology we want to talk about is Motion Blur Reduction, which comes under various names depending on the manufacturer - LightBoost, ELMB, and DyAC. They all tend to work the same way, using a strobing backlight that matches the refresh rate of the display. However, it can increase latency, and the quality of the technology varies greatly by display. So we suggest you test your display with it both on and off; BenQ's solution is especially well known for being excellent.

The final tech that influences

your high-speed monitor decision is frame-synching, as offered by G-Sync and FreeSync. These both work by tying the speed that the GPU spits out each frame to the time it takes to render a new screen on the monitor. They offer the benefits of low latency and smoother motion, without requiring screens to run at quite such high speeds; anything over 80Hz looks superb.

**THE EYES HAVE IT**

So, should you shell out on an expensive gaming display with a high refresh rate, or is 60Hz good enough for you? There are a number of factors that come into play when making this decision. If you're a pro eSports player, you'll definitely want the edge these lower latency displays give you. Secondly, do you have the necessary PC grunt to power these screens? There's no point buying a 144Hz display if your PC can only





**PALM GRIP**



**CLAW GRIP**



**TIP GRIP**

output 75 frames per second. On the other hand, once you've used a 144Hz display in action and hitting those speeds, it can be very hard to go back to 60Hz, as the difference in smoothness of motion is huge. Which comes down to the final point – can you afford the price premium? You need to take into account the cost of the display, as well as the extra PC grunt required to hit those framerates. And remember, just because you have a faster display doesn't mean you're automatically going to be topping the scoreboard in your favourite game; player skill is definitely more important than the latency decrease. But boy do they look stunning in action.

#### **THE MIGHTY MOUSE – ONE OF YOUR MOST IMPORTANT COMPONENTS.**

While high-refresh rate monitors may not have a huge impact on your in-game performance, the same can't be said of your mouse. This is one of the most important pieces in the PC gaming ecosystem, as a good mouse will make you much more competitive on the battlefield than a lesser controller. But which specs really matter when it comes to delivering the best performance?

Firstly, you need to figure out what kind of hand posture you use. These have been grouped into three basic types – the palm grip, claw grip and tip grip. Most popular is the palm, which around 50% of people use. Here the palm rests entirely on the mouse, making it the most comfortable. They tend

to be wider, longer, and have a steeper arch to support the palm. Unfortunately they're not the best posture for gaming, as they are slower to move.

Next is the Claw Grip, where the player arches their hand to form a claw shape, minimising their contact on the mouse. These mice are smaller than Palm mice, but are also more agile. They've become a favourite amongst action-RTS gamers these days. Finally there's the Tip Grip, where only the extreme tips of the fingers hold the mouse. It might not offer the best ergonomic support, but the Tip Grip allows for the rapidest form of movement. The flipside is that speed can come at the cost of accuracy.

#### **DPI**

Mice makers seem to be obsessed with the DPI of a mouse. This is the number of steps per inch that the mouse's sensor can read, and is also known as CPI, or counts per inch. The higher the DPI, the faster your on-screen cursor or reticule will move. Currently the fastest mouse on the market, the Redragon Titanoboa 2 M802 24000 DPI Gaming Mouse has a DPI of 24,000, but this can be adjusted via software all the way down to 1,000.

Bigger numbers move boxes, but a high DPI isn't always a good thing. There's a reason that the world's top CS:GO players use a DPI of between 400 and 800, well below the limits offered by today's mice. Yet many DOTA 2 pros use 2000 to 3000. Also, many of these sensors weren't designed to run at these

**BIGGER NUMBERS MOVES BOXES,  
BUT A HIGH DPI ISN'T ALWAYS A  
GOOD THING**



high DPIs, which can introduce accuracy problem. Another spec that is also important is mouse polling, which measures how quickly the mouse communicates with your PC. It's standard for 1000Hz on most gaming mice these days, though wireless mice tend to use 500MHz. In the past wireless mice introduced latency, but today's better models only add a single millisecond, which is impossible to notice unless you're a robot.

Arguably the most important facet of your mouse is the sensor within. Most high-end mice tend to have extremely accurate sensors, but there's debate about whether optical versus laser sensors are better. Well, in reality a laser sensor is an optical mouse, it just uses a VCSEL (vertical-cavity surface-emitting laser) instead of an infrared or red LED as seen in an optical mouse. According to François Morier at Logitech, in a brilliant interview at rockpapershotgun.com, "... laser-illuminated sensors have a 5-6 percent variation in tracking at different speeds. For the best optical sensors, that number is below 1 percent." There's also the misconception that laser mice suffer from 'acceleration issues'. However, this oversimplifies the problem, which is how accurate the mouse is at certain speeds. Apparently it's difficult to make the cursor travel the same distance if you move the same physical distance at different speeds. Currently the trend seems to be that optical is the way to go, especially if you're using a soft pad, whereas laser sensors work better on hard pads.

A couple of other things to consider is the total number of buttons on the mice; do you need over a dozen to macro your spells to, or is a simple, clean design better for basic shooters? Also, lift distance is important, which measures how high the mouse can be lifted from the mouse pad before it loses tracking. This is a very personal preference, as some people lift their mouse much higher than others. Finally, there's also the fastest acceleration a mouse can handle, but with most mice hitting above 50Gs it's a moot point.

#### MECHANICAL SWITCHES

If there's one segment that has taken off in the last few years, it's mechanical keyboards. They're annoyingly loud, rather expensive, and often lack the extra macro buttons of ye olde membrane keyboards. So why the popularity?

The first is the most obvious - they simply feel better. It's much easier to know when your keystroke has registered on a mechanical keyboard than competing types, and they tend



*Mechanical keyboards are built to last. Pop that cherry today.*

## BY FAR THE MOST IMPORTANT COMPONENTS ARE THE GPU AND CPU, AS THEY HANDLE ALL THE WORK



to actuate at half the height of a membrane keyboard. This leads to faster response times in games. They're also available with a wide range of different key types, allowing you to choose the Cherry MX colour that feels just right for you.

Last but not least, they're built to last. The mechanical nature of the switch is much more rugged, allowing between 20 and 50 million keystrokes, more than long enough to type out our last manifesto when Trump hits that big red button. So a good mechanical keyboard is definitely recommended if you want the best results in-game.

#### PC HARDWARE

Now we come to the rest of the setup, the PC itself. Budget is often a determining factor in which parts are important, and we can roughly arrange them in order of priority to help you figure out where to allocate your dollars. By far the most

important two components are the GPU and CPU, as they handle all the work of generating the game scene. The GPU is arguably the more important of the two, provided you're not wanting to game at 4K, and combining one with a decent graphics card with middle of the road CPU is a good compromise.

Memory is also rather important, provided you have enough of it. These days 16GB of DDR4-2666MHz is the sweet spot; don't get suckered into the hype that super-fast, super expensive DDR4 will give you a noticeable increase in 99% of games. We've tested this at length, and it doesn't make much difference unless you're multitasking.

What about these new-fangled NVMe M.2 SSDs though? To be frank, they have very little impact on actual game performance. They're fantastic when booting up the OS or games, and running multiple apps on the desktop, but once you're in-game, the amount of



onboard VRAM on your GPU is far more important. Most games can fit entirely within the graphics card's memory, and clever technology allows them to predict what they'll need to pull into system memory before it's needed.

The last piece of the pie is the motherboard and PSU. To be honest, you won't notice a lot of performance difference between various chipsets. It's more about the feature set and overclocking options that separates motherboards. As for your PSU, with today's superbly power efficient components (if we

**don't count Threadripper and Radeon RX Vega), anything around the 600W amount should do the job fine, provided you go for a quality brand. But if you're loading your**

machine up with multiple GPUs and a small hard drive farm, you may need to upgrade the PSU.

#### **TO BUY OR NOT TO BUY**

So there you have it. The monitor is probably the biggest component difference between mainstream gamers and eSports players; the latter absolutely need it for the low latency, while the former will enjoy the additional immersion offered by their silky-smooth movement. Surprisingly, the mouse and keyboard are key parts in your system, as that's how you interact with it. As we've explained, a high DPI is a marketing myth; anything that can do up to 5000 or so will be fine. Mechanical keyboards definitely deliver a latency advantage, and will last the long haul. When it comes to the rest of your system, that decision will likely be made by your wallet. ❧

# Gaming Gear Reviews



## ASUS ROG GLADIUS II

Let's get started in the big leagues. At \$119, the Gladius II is Asus' entry into the premium mouse market. Its key selling point is the ability to swap out the Omron switches thanks to the ROG 'Switch Socket'. Sure, they're rated to handle 50 million clicks, but after a few thousand they lose that responsiveness, so MOBA folks will make the most of this feature. Or you could always go for a different feel, as this mouse supports the Omron D2F Series switches: D2F, D2F-F, D2F-01, D2F-01F

And Omron D2FC Series switches: D2FC-3M, D2FC-F-7N, D2FC-F-7N(10M), D2FC-F-7N(20M).

There's three thumb buttons, one of which is for DPI, yet once again it's limited to just two preset DPI profiles. The sensor can handle

12000DPI, and is apparently using the newer Pixart 3988 Optical sensor. Asus' Aura lighting is in full effect, with three different light zones.

The ability to swap Omron switches combined with the excellent sensor make this a mouse worthy of note. And yet, when it comes to Asus' mice, we still think they have a lot to learn from the competition.

### 8 VERDICT

*Great sensor and super slippery feel, but lacking buttons and programmability.*

DISTRIBUTOR PRICE | Asus \$119

## ASUS IMPACT STRIX GAMING MOUSE

This mid-range mouse from Asus also requires the same software of the mouse above, and once again it's limited to just two DPI presets. Considering many gamers use three, it's a strange omission. At just \$60, we can't expect the removable top of the Strix Evolve, nor much else to be Frank. The physical design is relatively short, at just 120mm, making it fine for claw gamers.

There are a mere three buttons - the usual left/right, as well as a DPI switcher. Both main switches are Omrons, rated to handle 50 million clicks, while the sensor within is an optical sensor that can do 5000dpi. Asus hasn't mentioned what type it is, but the industry consensus is that it's the Pixart PMW3360, which is rather average. At least the mouse is nice and light, at 112 grams, but

the feet don't feel as slippery as the Strix Evolve. Lefties will be happy with the ambidextrous design, but it's facing off against some stiff competition at this price point.

### 7 VERDICT

*Not quite enough to compete with other \$60 mice.*

DISTRIBUTOR PRICE | Asus \$59

## ASUS STRIX EVOLVE GAMING MOUSE

Why must manufacturers force us to install software just to use a mouse? Asus aren't the only ones guilty of this, but to fully unleash the usability of this mouse you're going to have to. At least you don't have to give them your email details.

Heading into the software reveals that only two levels of DPI can be set, but it also allows for angle snapping, speed of hand movement (?) and even button response times, though why you'd want to set it to 32ms is beyond us. The hardware itself is super slippery on a hard mouse pad, yet the sensor feels extremely accurate. Asus doesn't reveal which sensor it uses, but it's an optical model with a 7200 DPI and 1000ms polling rate. A total of eight buttons are included, but most impressive is the removable top, which changes the overall ergonomics of the mouse, from quite high to low.

It's accurate, nice and light, moves smoothly across the mouse pad and has a great sensor. We just wish we could set more than two DPI levels and it'd be perfect.

### 8 VERDICT

*A good all-rounder with a solid set of features.*

DISTRIBUTOR PRICE | Asus \$99



## COOLERMMASTER MASTERKEYS PRO S

The focus on this keyboard is totally quality over quantity. Forget blingy lighting schemes, though it does have that, this mechanical keyboard is all about a solid, reliable piece of hardware. The Cooler Master software is incredibly easy to use, allowing you to map each of the keys to one of 16.7 million colours. Rather than use Macro keys, simply

hitting the FN key plus another one will switch profiles, record macros and do more. For a keyboard of this price, it's no surprise to see Cherry MX switches, and it's nice and small thanks to the tenkeyless design.

It may not be the most affordable mechanical board on the market, but the attention to detail and build quality is obvious the moment you take this keyboard out of the box. Highly recommended.

### 9 VERDICT

*This keyboard just feels right; with a heft and solidity that suggests it's not going to have any issues over long-term use.*



**DISTRIBUTOR PRICE** | Coolermaster \$144



## ASUS ROG PUGIO OPTICAL

I'm a little surprised that this mouse is \$10 more expensive than the ROG Gladius II, because at face value it's lacking many of the features that make the Gladius the better mouse. There is the fact that it's ambidextrous, but other than that I'm not sure what the deal is. It's a slightly lower form factor, better for claw and tip gamers, but it's got one button less. And yes, you guessed it, you're stuck with two DPI presents.

At least the software opens up the calibration feature for difference surfaces. It's also got the ability to swap out the main L/R Omron switches, supporting the same range as the Gladius. As for the sensor, it's a 7200 DPI, optical sensor, but we couldn't find out which one it is; going by the price we're assuming it's the same Pixart 3988 as seen in the Gladius.

### 7 VERDICT

*At \$10 more than the Gladius, we'd go for the Gladius instead, although your mouse style might change your mind.*

**DISTRIBUTOR PRICE** | Asus \$129



**DISTRIBUTOR PRICE** | [www.epicgear.com](http://www.epicgear.com) \$79

## EPICGEAR MEDUZA

How does Epicgear manage to fit twin sensors into a mouse at this price? It has both laser and optical, as well as HDST, where both work together. This gets around the limitations of both technologies, and means you can use it on both a hard or soft mouse mat. It also feels great in the hand, though the larger size means its best for palm gamers. The software interface is a bit garish, but at least doesn't take long to figure out how to bind the seven different buttons. Max laser DPI is 6030, and this can be set to one of four presets, while optical maxes out at 3200 DPI.

It feels great in the hand, and the fact it's so versatile makes it a steal at this price. The perfect mouse for those who want the benefits of both laser and optical.

### 9 VERDICT

*Optical and laser sensors in the one mouse? Ingenious.*



FEATURE



**LOGITECH G213 PRODIGY**

At this price it's obvious this keyboard doesn't use mechanical keys. Instead it's based on Logitech's proprietary 'Mech-Dome' keys. According to Logitech, they, "are specially tuned to deliver a superior tactile response and performance profile similar to a mechanical keyboard." Each require the full 4mm height of other keys, yet a mere 50 grams of force to actuate. Better still, they're silent, but whether or not you like the feel will be a matter of taste; we thought they felt a little soft.

RGB lighting is included, but it's per zone, not key, while the keyboard is also spill resistant. Full media macro controls are included

along with two-level stands. Whether you go for this board will entirely depend on your reaction to the key type. If you like the feeling, it's a ripper, but it's definitely not the same as a mechanical board.

**8**

**VERDICT**

*Well-rounded keyboard, but your decision will ultimately come down to how you feel about the Mech-Dome keys.*

**DISTRIBUTOR PRICE**

**Logitech \$75**



**DISTRIBUTOR PRICE**

**Valve \$89.95**

**STEAM CONTROLLER**

If you haven't tried a Steam Controller yet, now is the time to do so. It's finally available locally for just \$90, and after spending a week getting used to it, we fell in love with it. The twin touch pads are exponentially more accurate than analogue sticks, but they do require plenty of practice. The community-created profiles that automatically load every time you fire up a game is a stroke of genius, as it does take a lot of fiddling to really get the Controller set up right. There are literally hundreds of different settings that can be tweaked. Luckily if the community hasn't created a few dozen different options, then Valve or the game's developer usually has. At less than \$100, this is one of the most impressive shake-ups of the game input we've ever seen. Just give it a week or so to get used to.

**9**

**VERDICT**

*With practice, this thing almost rivals a mouse for accuracy.*



**DISTRIBUTOR PRICE**

**Aten \$109**

**ATEN PHANTOM S**

The Phantom S is something of a solution looking for a problem. It's a small emulator that allows users to connect a keyboard and mouse to a console for more precise control in FPS games. It works quite well for what it is, with a combination of plug and play connectivity and fine control and customisation available through a connected PC or console controller, the former having in-depth drivers allowing for individual key mapping and the like, and the latter giving users the ability to change mouse DPI on the fly. Some PC FPS feel a little odd playing with a keyboard and mouse given the fact that they are optimised for a less accurate control method, but by and large the experience is analogous to PC play with the exception of the lack of analogue movement controls, leading to having to boost the mouse DPI crazy high to turn quickly, or to be forced to constantly have to lift your mouse and reposition because you run out of mousing space.

**8**

**VERDICT**

*A solid solution to a rare problem.*



**CORSAIR K70 RAPIDFIRE**

This is our favourite keyboard around. It's expensive, features a numpad and no dedicated macro keys, as well as a secret weapon - Cherry MX Speed Silver Switches. These have an actuation point of just 1.2mm, almost half that of a normal Cherry MX key. This means you can literally cut down your reaction time by 50%.

There's also the fact the key has a frameless design, making it easy to blow clean. It's wonderful to see a nice big rubber wrist rest for those who type all day, while the RGB lighting can be programmed in thousands of different ways. There's limited media keys but we really like are the super responsive keys, which makes the K70 our pick of the litter.

**10**

**VERDICT**

*Super-fast reflexes give this keyboard the edge.*

**DISTRIBUTOR PRICE**

**Corsair \$199**



### ROCCAT KOVA

It might be getting a little long in the teeth, but we still love our Kova. It was one of the first mice to include an 'EasyShift' button; click this in and every other key has a different function. The Ambidextrous design includes three thumb buttons on each side, as well as a DPI rocker in the middle. The white and black design is slick and easy to hold, while five contact zones make it smooth as silk on a pad. Due to the age, it's built around the PMW3320 IR optical sensor, which has been digitally boosted up to 7000DPI and a 1000MHz poll rate. It feels perfectly accurate in use, great for shooter and MOBAs alike. Best of all, it's damned cheap - oh yeah, the software is also masterfully designed. For \$70 you can't beat the Kova, it's as simple as that.

**10** **VERDICT**  
*Got \$70 for a mouse? Then get the Roccat Kova.*

**DISTRIBUTOR PRICE** | Roccat \$71



**DISTRIBUTOR PRICE** | Steelseries \$75

### STEELSERIES RIVAL 300

This is another slightly older product, and as such uses a slightly older sensor, the Pixart PMW3310. This can handle 6500 DPI, and SteelSeries claims an astonishing tracking accuracy of 1:1. The chassis is designed for Palm or Claw, and there is a total of six buttons on the mouse. The main L/R are Omron, rated for up to 30 million clicks.

It feels a little chunky in the hand, thanks to the 130 grams of weight,

and its height of 70mm and height of 133mm. Unfortunately it's for right handers only, but at least it comes with a nice long two metre cable - many of the other mice come with cables that we felt could be a big more generous in length.

**8** **VERDICT**  
*Sadly this mouse is outdone by the Roccat Kova at this price, but it's a close second.*



### GIGABYTE XM300

We're noticing a trend by now - optical mice are in, digital are out. The XM300 is just the next in the growing range of optical mice; a year ago it'd would have been hard to find one. It's based around the new Pixart 3988 Optical sensor, delivering up to 6400 DPI. Having said that, it's actually limited to 3200 DPI, but uses digital enhancement to increase this. It's a little lacking in the button department, with just two thumb buttons and twin DPI switches, and it's also only designed for right handers. But it does feel good in the hand, with a rather comfy design. It's definitely built for palmers with its wide base and support for your entire hand.

At just \$50, this is a bargain. The sensor is excellent, and it just feels right. It'll be hard for other mice in this price range to match the comfort and accuracy of the XM300.

**8** **VERDICT**  
*Great value for \$50, with both excellent accuracy and comfort.*

**DISTRIBUTOR PRICE** | Gigabyte \$49

### STEELSERIES APEX M500

We've long been fans of Steelseries products, as they tend to function on quality over bling, and the APEX M500 follows the same trend. Want RGB lights? Too bad, you get blue LED illumination and that's it. Want a bucket load of dedicated macro keys? Suck it up buddy. Hell, it doesn't even have USB pass through.

What it does have are Cherry MX switches (ours came with red) and excellent software that can be used to macro your standard keys. It's also got a very solid build quality, and the keys just feel perfectly

lined up and laid out. If you value substance over style, the APEX M500 is a prime contender. «

**8** **VERDICT**  
*Beautifully built but with minimal features, the focus here is on quality.*

**DISTRIBUTOR PRICE** | Steelseries \$135







# A Very Haxor History

*From glitches to wallhacks and aimbots to manufacturer-championed cheats, **Nathan Lawrence** takes a closer look at the nefarious past and present of cheating in online shooters.*

Wherever there's competition, there will be cheaters. It's an unfortunate reality of life outside of games, but it's an increasing concern when it comes to online shooters. Cheating in games has existed for almost as long as games themselves, and the same is regrettably true of online gaming. Amateur, semi-pro, or at the highest competitive level, there'll always be those seeking a competitive edge that's unfair.

The more popular the game, the more likely it is to be targeted by opportunistic players looking to ruin everyone's fun. Online shooters have a long and sordid history of cheats.

Surprisingly, these cheats aren't always created by players, either, as hardware manufacturers have confused 'competitive edge' with 'downright cheating'.

At times, it can feel like online cheaters are more rampant than Ashley Madison's leaked database. As fans of PC gaming will know, the open-source nature of the platform is both a boon and boot-worthy: great for versatility, but that adaptability tends to lead to widespread cheating (at least compared to consoles). That said, consoles aren't completely free of cheating controversies, either.

Let's take a closer look at some of the more infamous instances of

cheating in online shooters.

## **A VERY, VERY QUAKEWORLD**

While the original Quake brought the first-person shooter genre into true 3D-rendered space, id Software also forever changed the way that people play shooters online with QuakeWorld. The QuakeWorld service was designed as a way to let players effectively LAN online, instead of being restricted to modem-to-modem deathmatches. After all, back in the days of QuakeWorld, high-speed internet wasn't a reality.

To be fair, online cheating in shooters originally started as a debate about the viability of

exploiting game code to gain a competitive edge. Some players considered exploits such as bunny hopping in Quake - which was later rampant in Counter-Strike, before being tamed by Valve - and texture-climbing as exploitable glitches, while others considered them to be cheats.

But while a glitch is implicitly permitted by a developer, if only in the fact that it's exploitable within gameplay, cheats are player-activated assistance external to what's allowed for within a game's engine. Developers can, of course, patch out glitches (where possible) that they deem to be an unfair advantage at odds with their multiplayer design intentions. That said, skiing in Tribes, which let players gain a massive speed boost, started off as an exploitable movement glitch but went on to become a staple and developer-championed part of the series. The same is true of rocket jumping in Quake.

QuakeWorld's cheating controversies may have started as debates over the skill gap created by movement glitches, but it soon flew into full black-and-white territory when players started using skin hacks. Cheaters in QuakeWorld found ways to disguise their player models as shadows, harder-to-see items and, eventually, pixels, which made them almost impossible to see.

There was a time in the history of Team Fortress, a mod for the original Quake, where using a minimal number of cheats was considered fair play to stand a chance against rampant cheats.

**X-RAY VISION**

Skin hacks have been around for years, and aren't just used to make cheating players harder to see. In another form, skin hacks can over-brighten player models to the point where it looks like a cheater has player-specific Predator vision. This means player models are a lot easier for cheaters to see, even in dark spaces that would normally make them harder to spot.

In a more dangerous form, this visibility boost can be complemented by wallhacks. That said, players don't need to be brightly coloured for a wallhack to be effective, and if used in the right hands, wallhacks can be difficult to track.

This is why killcams have long been used as an in-game way of spotting cheaters. While a dishonest player pulling off no-scope 360-degree headshots with every bullet from an LMG in Call of Duty is obvious to spot (yup, that's a real cheat), the savvy cheater will try to hide their ill-gained competitive edge. Killcams in series such as Call of Duty or recent games like Rainbow Six Siege let a suspicious and recently deceased player review their own death from the perspective of their killer.

Sometimes, this helps determine

whether it was skill or perhaps luck that led to their death, and at other times, such as in the case of a wallhack, it's made clearer when a cheating player is tracking their prey without having line of sight. In terms of Siege, the killcam was originally disabled in the highly competitive Ranked mode, but was later enabled to help players weed out cheaters.

Tracking players through a wall is one thing, but certain wallhacks have been boosted with speedhacks and/or the option for cheaters to move through otherwise impassable surfaces to get the unexpected drop on enemy players. Chokepoints don't exist when you can ghost through walls at Flash speed.

**BOOM! HEADSHOT!**

By far the most notorious and, usually, easiest-to-spot hack in online shooters are aimbots. These have come in a variety of forms over the years, but they all result in an unfair automated aiming advantage. This mostly used to take the form of automated headshot alignment, which still required line of sight on an enemy. They've evolved over the years to allow cheaters to target different parts of an enemy, assumedly in an attempt to mask the obviousness of successive, seemingly impossible headshots. But that's only for the cheating player eager to mask their hacks.

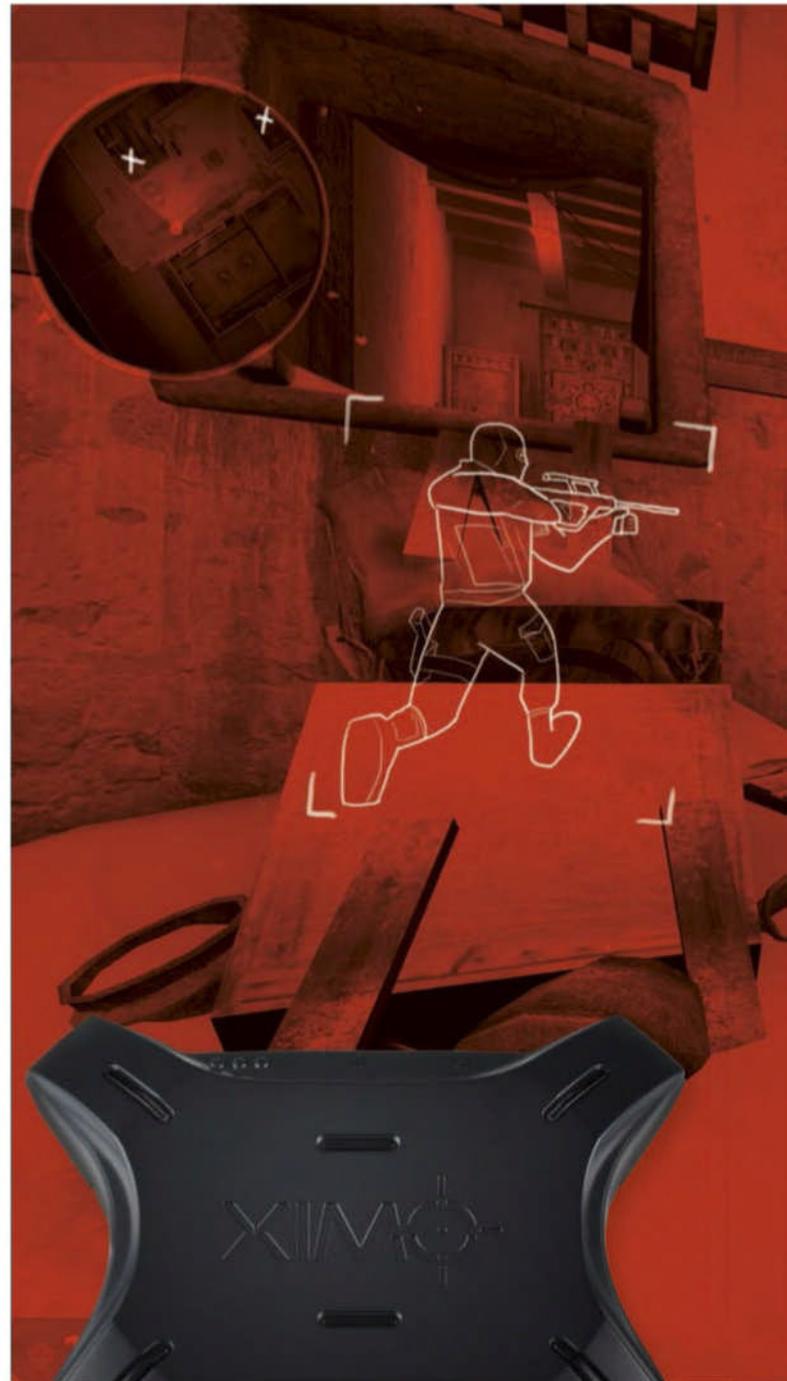
Linked to the aimbot logic are hacks that influence rate of fire, either boosting the firing rate of a fully automatic weapon, or taking advantage of the accuracy boost of single-shot firing modes, albeit at an inhuman rate.

In more recent years, aimbots have evolved to levels that are even more automated than their predecessors. Call of Duty suffered from aimbots that didn't even require cheaters to have line of sight on enemies. As soon as a team would respawn, they'd be immediately wiped out, and the killcam would show the cheating player on the opposite side of the map, shooting at a wall. There's a hack in PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds that lets a cheater automatically single-punch a server to death, before anyone is on the ground.

**MACRO PEEN**

It's worth noting that certain PC shooters allow players to rebind the fire option to mouse wheel up and down, meaning they can fire at a faster rate than what would be achievable tapping with your index finger. If that fails, there's always macros that can be bound externally to the game that allow for similar functions. It's debatable whether such player tweaks constitute cheating, but developers and publishers are concerned about their impact.

"Most of the software for mice or keyboards, macros for instance,



*Peripheral manufacturers enable all kinds of unfair advantages to players with the right gear.*



### Cheating DRM

Certain websites charge cheaters a monthly fee to access various hacks. Some of these sites reportedly use online digital rights management (DRM) services to confirm that only actively paying subscribers are using their cheats. Valve got into hot water a few years ago for allegedly checking people's DNS records. Valve co-founder Gabe Newell claims this was a temporary (and since abandoned) attempt at finding cheaters that use these kind of DRM websites.

### Kick-ban challenges

Even banning suspected cheaters isn't without controversy. If left to a democratic in-game voting system, skilled players can be kicked. Some anti-cheat systems punish highly skilled players with bans. Furthermore, while games like *Siege* make it easy to report suspected sussy play with a single click, titles like *Battlefield 1* have a more complicated process that deters reporting.

come embedded with the mouse and keyboard you actually buy," says Alexandre Remy, brand director of all things Rainbow Six. Unfortunately, the options for combating such things are limited for game creators. "What we can do is educate, reinforce the fact that you do not use software or hardware that creates a competitive advantage."

This is also an area where peripheral manufacturers for consoles have started making money out of the grey area of hardware-cheating controversies. Nowadays, console players can buy adaptors that allow the stealth connection of a keyboard and mouse, which can provide a massive accuracy advantage in online shooters, especially in games that have inbuilt auto-aim already. Hell, Sony gave its blessing to the release of a gamepad/mouse combo that

cuts out the adaptor intermediary and connects directly to the PlayStation 4.

Remy touched on the comments of tackling this issue. "On console, there are now players who can actually use a keyboard and mouse," says Remy. "It's the same sort of issue or question: 'When there's hardware that gives you a clear advantage, how do we tackle this? It depends. It's a case-by-case situation.'"

Unfortunately, for fans of fair play, the debate about manufacturer-sanctioned cheating goes beyond macros, key bindings, and controller replacements.

### MANUFACTURER-FORGED CHEATS

One of the more infamous instances of wallhacks was championed by hardware manufacturer Asus. A set of drivers in 2001 were designed to offer players a competitive edge, complete with a press release that

bragged about features such as Transparent View, Extra Light, and Wireframe View: all designed to boost visibility in an unfair way, including through solid surfaces (in compatible shooters).

Such was the backlash to the press release, the drivers were never officially released, but they did still somehow end up online, allowing dishonest players with a compatible GPU to install Asus-created hacks. Popular anti-cheat service PunkBuster was eventually updated to detect and ban players using the drivers, but only on servers protected by the service.

In more recent years, Asus released Sonic Radar software that offers players with compatible hardware the option to toggle an onscreen overlay that creates a real-time visual map of in-game sounds, relative to the player's position. The on-screen tracker would visually



map footsteps, gunshots, and even call-outs. To put that into context in terms of fair play, *Battlefield 3* players with Sonic Radar installed reportedly had to disable the software to be allowed to even start the game.

To be fair, while the official Sonic Radar page first mentions it's meant for pro and amateur gamers, it also flags that it's designed for players who are hard of hearing. That said, Sonic Radar isn't the last instance of Asus introducing questionable features in the name of providing its customers with a competitive advantage.

GamePlus is a feature on compatible Asus monitors that lets players use hotkeys to activate onscreen functions. Some of them are innocent enough, such as a frames-per-second counter or display alignment. Others are more dubious, like the option to activate a fixed crosshair or an onscreen timer, which is intended for RTS, but is handy for monitoring the ever-shrinking circles in *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*.

The crosshair function is particularly troubling as there are certain online shooters or hardcore modes that disable crosshairs entirely, or for certain weapons (like the AWP in *Counter-Strike*). This means the GamePlus crosshair can provide an unfair advantage

not supported by the game design. Couple that with shooters that have 100-percent first-shot accuracy, even with hip-fire, and no-scope kills become easier when there's a hardware-supported option to remove any doubt of where you're aiming.

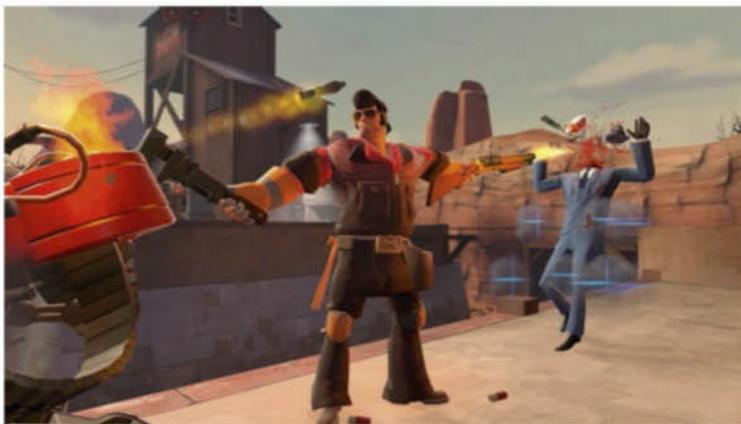
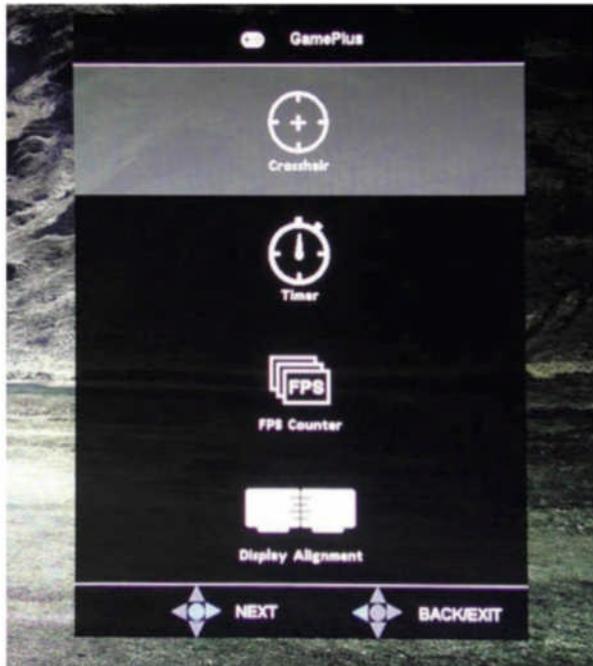
Asus isn't alone in championing unfair competitive advantages, though.

#### COMPETITIVE EDGING

Scout Mode is a proprietary technology compatible with specific Creative Sound Blaster peripherals. Instead of creating a visual map for noises it allows players to hear sounds at a greater distance, beyond what was intended in the game. Scout Mode can be enabled or disabled with a hotkey, which means it can be used selectively to stop the player being overwhelmed by a cacophony of nearby and far-away sound sources.

While it may be frustrating for the average amateur player to come up against such technologies in public online matches, it's refreshing to hear that things are much more closely monitored on the competitive stage. "If you're serious about competition, the point where you're going to end up playing at the level field, we are monitoring things much, much closer," says Remy.





### PC: the cheater's platform

Cheaters tend to be most prevalent on PC. It's an unfortunate symptom of the open nature of the platform. That said, consoles have had cheating in their history. Both the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, specifically, were hacked and let technically apt users mod games to cheat online. Lag switching, which deliberately spikes and levels-out latency, can also be used to exploit online netcodes and gain an edge across gaming platforms.



"The moment you go for the serious competitive programs that we're bringing [in Rainbow Six Siege], there are extra layers of monitoring. With ESL - ESL Wire and ESL MOSS - these are tools you install on your PC making sure that, on top of our anti-cheat, you're not using software [that provides a competitive edge]. For instance, it takes screenshots every 30 seconds or so, so we monitor exactly what you have on your screen.

"If you have [unapproved] software, it will be able to say, 'Hey, that thing is not playing the proper way,' and you're disqualified from the tournament or the competition. That's on the highest level of competition, while making sure that the integrity of the competition is as respected as possible. In the case of the [LAN] finals that we see, you can't choose your PC. It's a machine where you can bring your keyboard and your mouse, and those are checked by admins. We're paying a lot of attention there."

### THE CHEATING GAME

Back when free cheats were rampant, it was actually better than it is today. Free cheats meant that developers or the administrators of anti-cheat software, could access the cheats, too, and reverse engineer them to improve the security of the game's code. Nowadays, cheats for online games have become a million-dollar business.

Reportedly, coders are incentivised to create cheats for certain premium cheat-providing websites with a cut of the sales of their game hacks. Not only does this drive certain coders to bypass anti-cheat systems in online games, it also motivates them to update their cheats whenever they're blocked. The scary reality is that these cheats are supposedly updated and working again within days or, in some cases, mere hours after being blocked.

On top of this, seasonal sales on digital platforms reportedly also lead to a spike in hackers. Digital platforms like Steam use anti-cheat software like Valve Anti-Cheat (VAC) to sniff out and ban hackers. While VAC is effective at weeding out cheaters, game sales, particularly those with drastically reduced prices, allow cheaters to repurchase games or buy multiple copies of a game and spread them across their accounts.

These cheaters can then get straight back into a game after one account is banned. If that fails, there are always free-to-play shooters like Team Fortress 2, Dirty Bomb, and Tribes: Ascend where cheaters only have to create a new account. The recent user reviews on the Steam page for Tribes: Ascend stand as a warning for would-be new players. Avoid: here be cheaters.

The larger problem is that cheating doesn't appear to be

illegal. In fact, the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, the same act that was used to defend people's rights to jailbreak their smartphones and tablets, technically protects cheaters from being prosecuted for digitally tampering with software that they have legally purchased.

This may be part of why ex-lead Steam engineer John Cook said, "Cheating is more of a serious threat than piracy."

### COUNTER STRIKE

When rumours of wallhacks in Counter-Strike reached the Valve offices, the juggernaut developer/publisher started taking cheating seriously. Prior to this, PunkBuster had been used to monitor online cheaters in Counter-Strike and in other Half-Life mods. VAC has evolved since its inception of dishing out 24-hour bans to permanent bans as of VAC2. The unofficial estimate as of July 2014 is that VAC has banned more than 2.1 million Steam accounts.

To use VAC, though, a game has to be part of the Steam architecture. Non-Steam games use other anti-cheat services such as FairFight, PunkBuster, EasyAntiCheat, or BattlEye. Like most anti-cheat services, these all have varying levels of success at finding cheats and banning cheaters. But sometimes a single anti-cheat service isn't enough to combat cheating, especially in popular online shooters.

Rainbow Six Siege, for instance, launched with FairFight, but there was a point when cheating became so rampant that another solution was required. Instead of ditching FairFight, Ubisoft Montreal complemented it with BattlEye. When BattlEye was switched on for the first time, the legitimate Siege community playing at the time saw scores of continuous notifications indicating that players had been banned from their specific server cluster for cheating. To this day, Ubisoft Montreal talks about a darker time before BattlEye, and a fairer time after its introduction.

This two-fold approach is also used by Tripwire Interactive, even though its games are used within the VAC-protected Steam platform. Tripwire complements VAC with PunkBuster for Red Orchestra 2 to protect against hackers. Prior to this, cheating was a massive issue, particularly because Red Orchestra 2 at launch lacked server-side validation for hit detection, which meant cheaters were able to tweak their games to pull off impossible headshots.

Unfortunately, cheating in online shooters isn't likely to go away anytime soon. That's not to say that developers and publishers should relax their anti-cheat standards. Active online communities can dwindle if there are too many cheaters. As long as there's demand for cheats and people willing to pay for that edge, anti-cheat services will have their work cut out for them. ☹

# The Survival FPS Revolution

If there's one genre that can bring out the uttermost vile behaviour in gamers, it's the survivor style of FPS. There's just something about them that often brings out truly ghoulish behaviour, where murder clubs are formed and ritualistic fights to the death become rites of entry to other places. The flipside is also true; in such dangerous worlds, it make sense to have some buddies to back you up. It could be as simple as giving a stranger a bottle of water, or taking them to your camp and helping them with rations. These games are fantastic microcosms of life – generally after the apocalypse

– and the possibilities for emergent gameplay are nearly endless. So where did this genre start, and how has it progressed?

#### GARRY'S AT IT AGAIN

One of the very first survival FPS games was Garry's Mod, or a version of it. This game is based on the Source engine from Valve, and allows modders to create weird and whacky creations. It also allows multiple players to inhabit the same space, so it didn't take long before modders came up with creative ways to keep them busy. One of the first mods was Stranded, where the player was stuck on a desert island

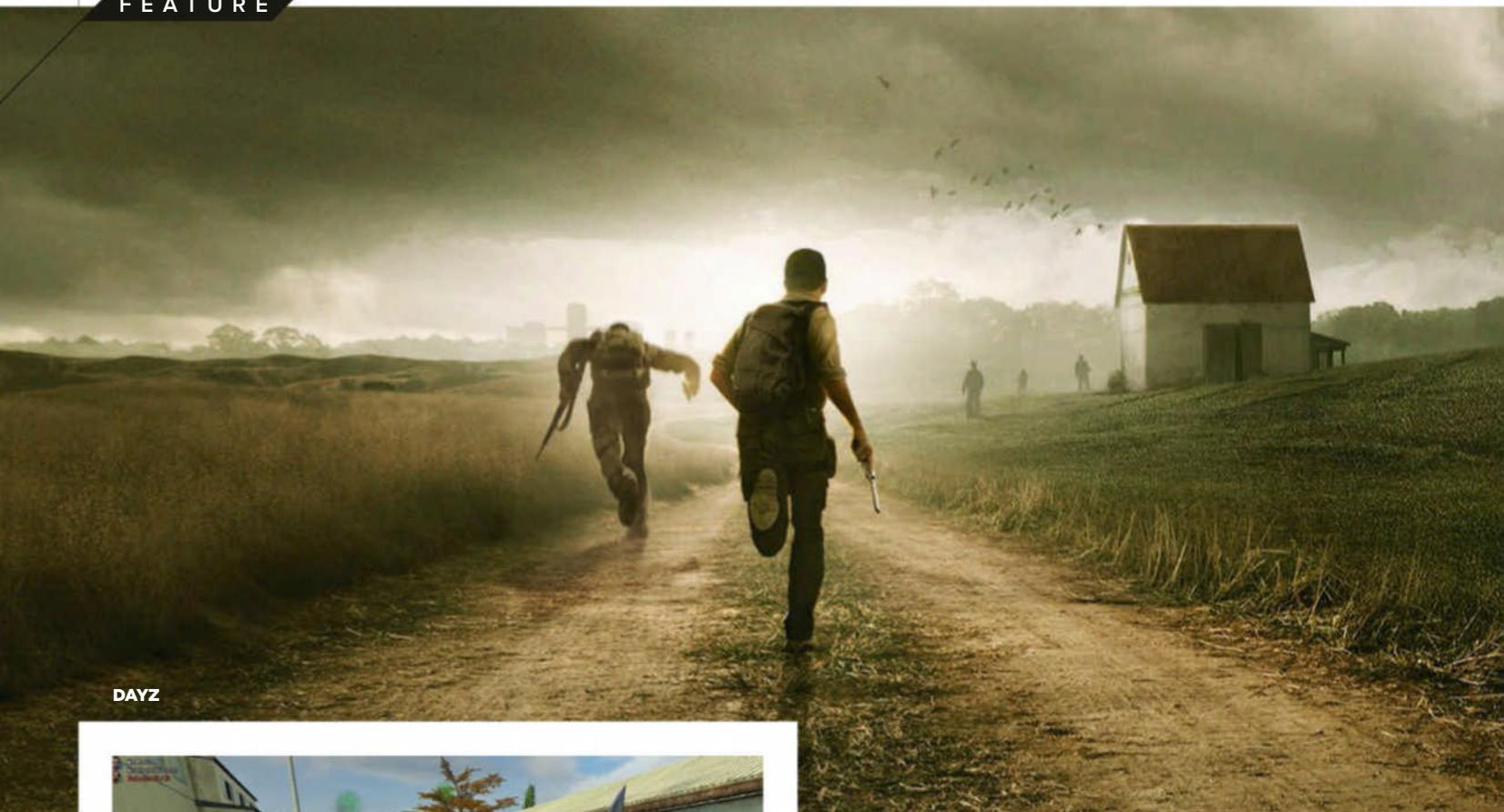
and had to find resources to stay alive. It was relatively basic though, but even earlier than this were the single player survival games. The Far Cry series are arguably the most popular on the market, not to mention beautiful. Far Cry 2 took things a little too far though with its inclusion of the player having malaria, which would often cause you to die if you didn't find pills. Unsurprisingly this mechanic was later removed.

#### MINECRAFT AIN'T JUST A KIDS GAME

On the surface, Minecraft might look like a cute virtual version







DAYZ



of Lego, but at its black-beating heart it's actually a rather terrifying proposition. Players have to scramble around by day, building up defences and gather as many resources as possible, then hide away at night as a bunch of skeletons, zombies, creepers, endermen and spiders come and try to eat them. This was one of the first online survival FPS, and its success is testimony to the addictive and winning formula of the genre once you throw a few players together.

**THE ZOMBPOCALYPSE BLOWS UP**

The one game that really blew up the popularity of the genre is the modification for ARMA 2, DayZ. This was where we really started to see the endless possibilities offered by throwing a few dozen players onto an island, spread weapons and items around the place, sprinkle a few extremely dumb zombies here and there, and sit back to watch chaos reign. While it was possible to find friendly players, it soon became a game where players would fire upon each other as soon as they saw each other, even if the other was unarmed.

It really called into question how humans would react if the world really did go to shit – hopefully a damn sight nicer than the majority of DayZ players.

Unfortunately DayZ was incredibly large in its scope, which led to a lot of bugs. Creator Dean Hall worked his butt off to fix these, along with his team, but it seems they ended up giving up. Many of the flaws in DayZ are actually a result of the ARMA 2 engine, and re-engineering a game engine from the game up is no easy task. Yet the team did manage to release a version of DayZ that didn't require the ARMA 2 engine; it was totally standalone. Then a new problem struck the DayZ playerbase – mods. With every man and his zombie dog making mods for special modes of DayZ, newbies would often be greeted by a mod or file mismatch error when trying to connect. Let's just say it wasn't the most polished experience.

**ALL ABOARD THE ARK**

Another game that stumbled perhaps a little too early out of Steam early access was ARK.

Graphically stunning, it dropped players onto an island wearing little more than a loin cloth. Unlike other games in the genre, ARK had inhabited its world with a living breathing ecosystem of dinosaurs that could be hunted, tamed for riding and even bred. Needless to say with this complex system, running alongside Unreal 4 level graphics, ARK ran like a pig when it came out. Not only that, but severe networking issues meant players would often disconnect or warp large distances.

Thankfully, ARK today is an entirely different game. It runs much better, and even has two expansion packs. It's possible to build structures for your farm, and to keep the bad guys out, and there's even versions for PS4 and Xbox One. Crafting is a huge part of the game, like many others in this genre. You'll need to head out into the wild to grab ingredients to build things, and the rarer the item, the higher the chance it's going to be sitting amongst a bunch of rather large killing animals.

**THE CURRENT KING OF BATTLE ROYALE**

Seemingly coming out of nowhere is Playerunknown's Battlegrounds (aka PUBG or Plunkbag), and it's taken the PC world by storm. A regular top-seller on Steam since launch, the peak player numbers have hit an astonishing 960,950. That's more than both CS: GO and DOTA 2, no small accomplishment for game made by a company nobody has really heard of before, BLUEHOLE INC.

*Despite a world filled with zombies, other players are the real danger in DayZ.*





The concept is simple. 100 players all get aboard a C-130 Hercules and then fly over an island. On the map display, the island has a large white ring. If you land outside that, you can expect your health to start slowly dripping away. As soon as you land, it's on like Ron. The best thing to do is run to the nearest building and upgrade your crappy backpack and total lack of armour. If you're lucky you'll also find a weapon, and the upgrade system for this is incredibly deep, with suppressors, scopes, quick load mags and more. Best of all, the upgrade screen is simply drag and drop, so you can swap out your gear in seconds.

After a few minutes, players are given a warning that the white circle will contract, and they must get inside the circle to stop losing health. This simple mechanic stopped the camping that made games like DayZ often boring, as you wouldn't spot anybody for hours at a time. Yet by ever decreasing the playing zone, you're forced to come into contact with more players whether you like it or not.

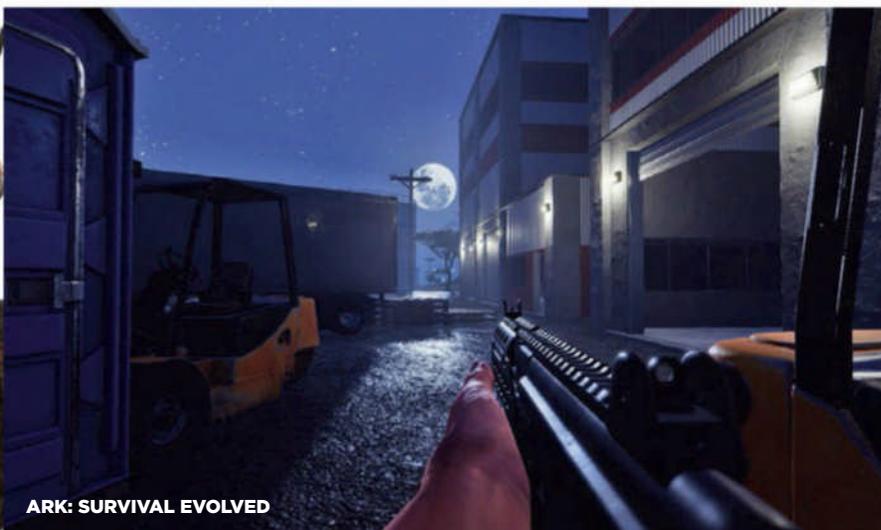
There are also red circles, which are areas that are being carpet-bombed. Every now and then a C-130 plane will fly overhead, dropping off a crate filled with goodies - should you rush in all

guns blazing, or set up an ambush for those who rush in head first? While all of this is happening, there's a counter in the top right slowly ticking down each time a player from the original 100 is killed, adding to the tension.

What impresses us most about this game is the level of presentation and completeness of systems. Even though it's still in beta, most features seem to work fine, and the game looks like a dream (provided you have a fast enough PC for the incredibly long draw distances). Gunplay feels tight and satisfying, though the jumping/mantling system needs work. But for now it's definitely the king of survival online FPS games, and we can't recommend it enough.

#### WHAT NEXT?

The explosion in popularity of this genre over the last few years has been truly tremendous. And yet it's not really the friendliest of genres, and can be downright frustrating and nasty at times. We understand why games like Battlegrounds encourage combat, but we'd love to see more games that foster a sense of community. Hopefully the likes of newer games like Fortnite will see more of a focus on co-operation than blood lust. ☹☹



ARK: SURVIVAL EVOLVED

## JUST A TASTE OF THE UPCOMING SURVIVAL SANDBOX FPS:

**Aftershock: Outbreak** - Survive after a quake

**Subnautica** - Survive underwater on an alien world

**Miscreated** - Post-apocalyptic survival against mutants, players and Mother Nature

**Rust** - Survive a toxic community

**The Forest** - Survive forest cannibals

**Hurtworld** - Build vehicles, explore, kill players

**Last Man Standing** - 100 player battle royale

**The Darwin Project** - Survive an asymmetrical Most Dangerous Game

**The Culling** - Battle Royale:

The gameshow

**Desolate** - Lost with more guns and monsters

**Survival: Postapocalypse Now** - Amnesiac survival in Siberia

**Nomad** - Base-building meets zombies meets Minecraft meets guns

**CrossWorlds: Escape** - Huge survival sandbox falls foul of broken English

**Exile to Death** - Find a habitable planet for humanity to live on and beware of cyborgs

**Rend** - Fantasy siege warfare with crafting

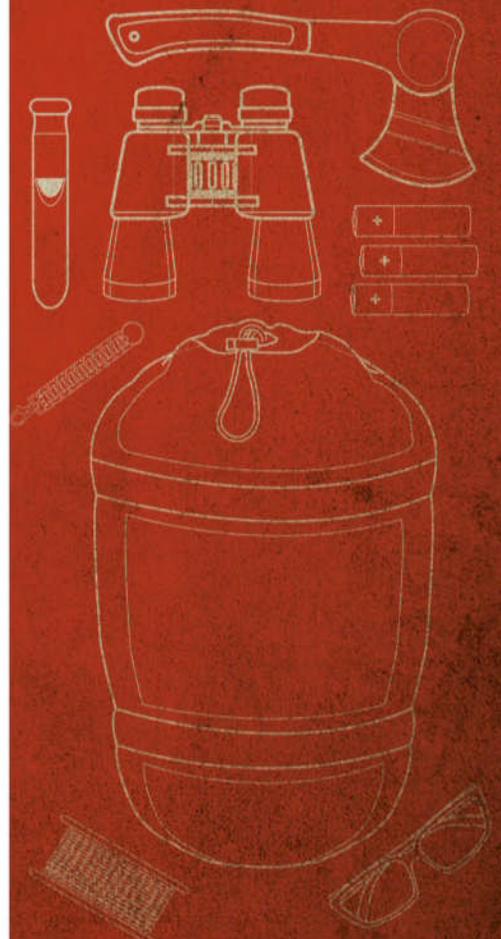
**MetaTron** - Clones fight to survive and mutate

**Next Day** - Survive toxic fog in Eastern Europe

**Hellion** - Survive a ruined space station after awaking from cryogenic hibernation

**Conan Exiles** - Survive penis sliders

**Escape from Tarkov** - Survive in a lawless, gang and mercenary controlled city



FEATURE



# Battlegrounds of Eternity

## The Best Maps of All Time

*Steven Bogos charts our very favourite places to fight*

For multiplayer shooters, maps are everything. An FPS could have the best gunplay, the deepest mechanics, and the coolest characters, but if the maps suck then the whole game falls apart. A good map blends all of the other elements of the game together seamlessly, while a really great map is often more memorable than the game itself. If I were to mention a game like Unreal Tournament, Quake or Counter-Strike, I guarantee you the first thing to pop into your head would be one of their iconic maps.

There have been a lot of shooters with a lot of maps over the years, and we think it's high time that the best of these levels get the appreciation they deserve. We all have our favourites, but there are a select number of undeniable greats that have stood the test of time, and have influenced map design for years to come. Why are these maps so great? What sets them aside from the rest? Let's start with the one you've been thinking about since I said Unreal Tournament in my opening paragraph.

### **FACING WORLDS: UNREAL TOURNAMENT**

I dare you to think of Unreal Tournament without conjuring up

the image of two floating pyramids suspended in space. Before Facing Worlds, maps in online shooters were usually confined to claustrophobic little hallways. Players didn't want to waste time running to where the fighting was, they wanted to spawn right into the thick of it.

Facing worlds showed us that a huge, open map could be just as fun, especially when paired with the Capture the Flag game mode. The otherworldly map also taught us to fear the sniper. Before 360noscope was a thing, sniper duels from the tops of Facing World's towers were the true test of a gamer's FPS skill. An uncontested enemy sniper could shut down an entire enemy team, and it's thanks to Facing Worlds that we still sprint across open areas in shooters in a serpentine motion.

### **DE\_DUST2: COUNTER-STRIKE**

In a way, de\_dust2 is Counter-Strike. When Counter-Strike was released in 1999, it changed the way we played shooters. Gone were the hectic, instant-respawn fragfests of the arena shooter, replaced instead with the tactical, objective-based, single-life gameplay of this new kind of FPS. Counter-Strike taught us to play carefully, as a team, and like our lives depended on it. The

game featured several different gamemodes but defusal is the one that most of us remember, and de\_dust2 is the king of the defusal maps.

Dust2 is as close to a perfect map as you can get. If you pull the whole thing apart, you'll see that the map is basically designed as a figure eight. You have a clearly defined left, middle, and right side of the map, as well as a clearly defined top, middle, and bottom. From spawn, you are immediately given fast access to all three main passageways, and each of the two bombsites has three points of entry. It's an absolute balance dream, and has so many tactical options that give neither side has a clear advantage, in spite of the fact that the counter-terrorists need only defend an objective, while the terrorists have to expose themselves by planting a bomb.

In fact, Dust2 is so perfect that it actually causes issues for prospective map makers, as they lament the fact that everything they ever make will be held up to and compared to Dust2.

### **BLOOD GULCH: HALO**

Halo taught us that, yes, you can have a successful, competitive, first-person shooter on a console.



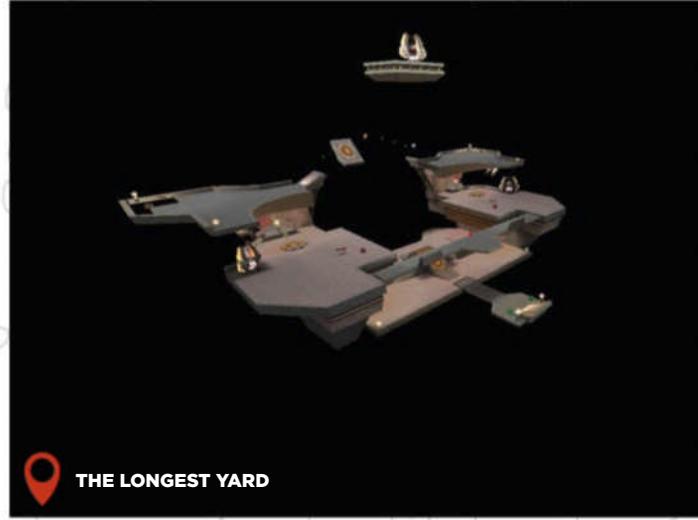
 DE\_DUST2



 BLOOD GULCH



 FACING WORLDS



THE LONGEST YARD



FACILITY



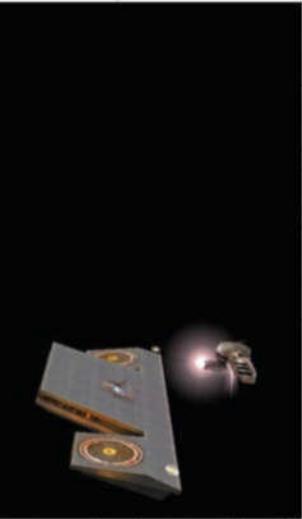
NUKE TOWN

THE LONGEST YARD SHOWED US THAT A BATTLEGROUND WHERE YOU HAVE LITERALLY NOWHERE TO HIDE IS SUPER FUN



WAKE ISLAND





Features like vehicular combat, regenerating shields, and a two-weapon limit were designed with the console limitations in mind, but ended up becoming mainstays of the genre. Halo was a lot more “arcade-y” than the direction shooters headed after Counter-Strike, and there was no better map to show this off than Blood Gulch.

The map’s popularity stems from the fact that there’s a little something for everyone. If you want to roam around in a banshee or warthog and mow down players, you can. If you want to sit in the base with a shotgun protecting your flag, you can. If you want to go up on the hill and snipe, you can.

### THE LONGEST YARD: QUAKE 3

You’d think that a successful FPS map would need to have, like, some walls, right? The Longest Yard showed us that a battleground where you have literally nowhere to hide not only works, but is super fun. From the second you spawn on The Longest Yard, you are exposed. You have to immediately start moving or you’re apt to be picked off by the guy on the far platform with the railgun, or blown to smithereens by a stray rocket.

Frantic battles over the map’s central Megahealth pickup are amplified by five bouncepads. Taking a bouncepad to cover some ground quickly seems like a good idea, until you realise that your predictable trajectory makes you easy pickings for a well-timed rocket or railgun slug. The Longest Yard was one of the last hold-outs of arena shooters, but I have to say it’s a pretty brilliant note to go out on.

### WAKE ISLAND: BATTLEFIELD 1942

The Battlefield series has had so many memorable maps over the years, from Battlefield 2’s Gulf of Oman to Battlefield 3’s Metro to Battlefield 1’s Amiens. It was hard to pick just one. Ultimately, we had to go with Wake Island, originally from 1942 but re-imagined in both Battlefield 2 and 3. What makes Wake Island so fantastic is the same stuff that makes Blood Gulch work – it’s a massive playground for all of the game’s working parts.

There’s an aircraft carrier and airstrip loaded with your aircraft of choice for all the aerial aces. There are tanks for you wannabe tank commanders. There are boats. There is the “sniper island”. There are even a bunch of bunkers to run around in if you prefer to get your hands dirty as a ground troop. The really cool thing about Wake Island is that none one of these elements feels overpowered. Because the map is so open, Tanks can easily be taken out by a skilled pilot. Aircraft can be easy pickings for anti-air troops. Ground troops can be picked off by snipers. It really emphasises the whole rock-paper-scissors dynamic of the Battlefield series.



### NUKE TOWN: CALL OF DUTY BLACK OPS

I felt it appropriate to have Call of Duty follow Battlefield, considering the fierce rivalry between the two franchises, but I decided to juxtaposition Battlefield’s huge, open Wake Island with Call of Duty: Black Ops tiny, cramped Nuke Town. Nuke Town, like many of the other “killbox” maps like Metro or Shipment, has a very polarising effect. You either love it, or hate it.

Lovers love that the map forces players to play the game in a very different way. Usually, Call of Duty games play out with a sense of suspense and attrition, but Nuke Town is all about speed and chaos. Haters hate it for the same reason: rather than slowly and tactically making decisions, shotguns, grenades, and the dreaded “n00b tube” grenade launchers are fired seemingly at random in desperate attempts to explode unsuspecting players.

Nuke Town also has a really cool aesthetic to it. Modelled after the fake towns they built in the 1950s to test nuclear weapons, the map oozes style from the time period.

### FACILITY: GOLDENEYE

Ah Goldeneye, the one time that a movie franchise tie-in game was actually not awful. Goldeneye had a lot of fantastic maps, like Stack, Temple or Archives, but we really think that Facility takes the cake. What’s perhaps most interesting about it is that the map wasn’t actually built for multiplayer: it’s just a modified version of the singleplayer level from the game’s campaign. In fact, Goldeneye wasn’t even originally going to have multiplayer – it was a last minute addition from Rare.

It’s crazy that despite this, the game’s multiplayer is what became the most memorable aspect. Goldeneye worked so well because it was simple, satisfying, and fun, even though it had some pretty clunky controls (and an even clunkier N64 controller...). Facility struck a chord with many because it is based on the explosive opening scene of Peirce Brosnan’s Goldeneye, which brought James Bond to a whole new generation of viewers. Goldeneye’s success

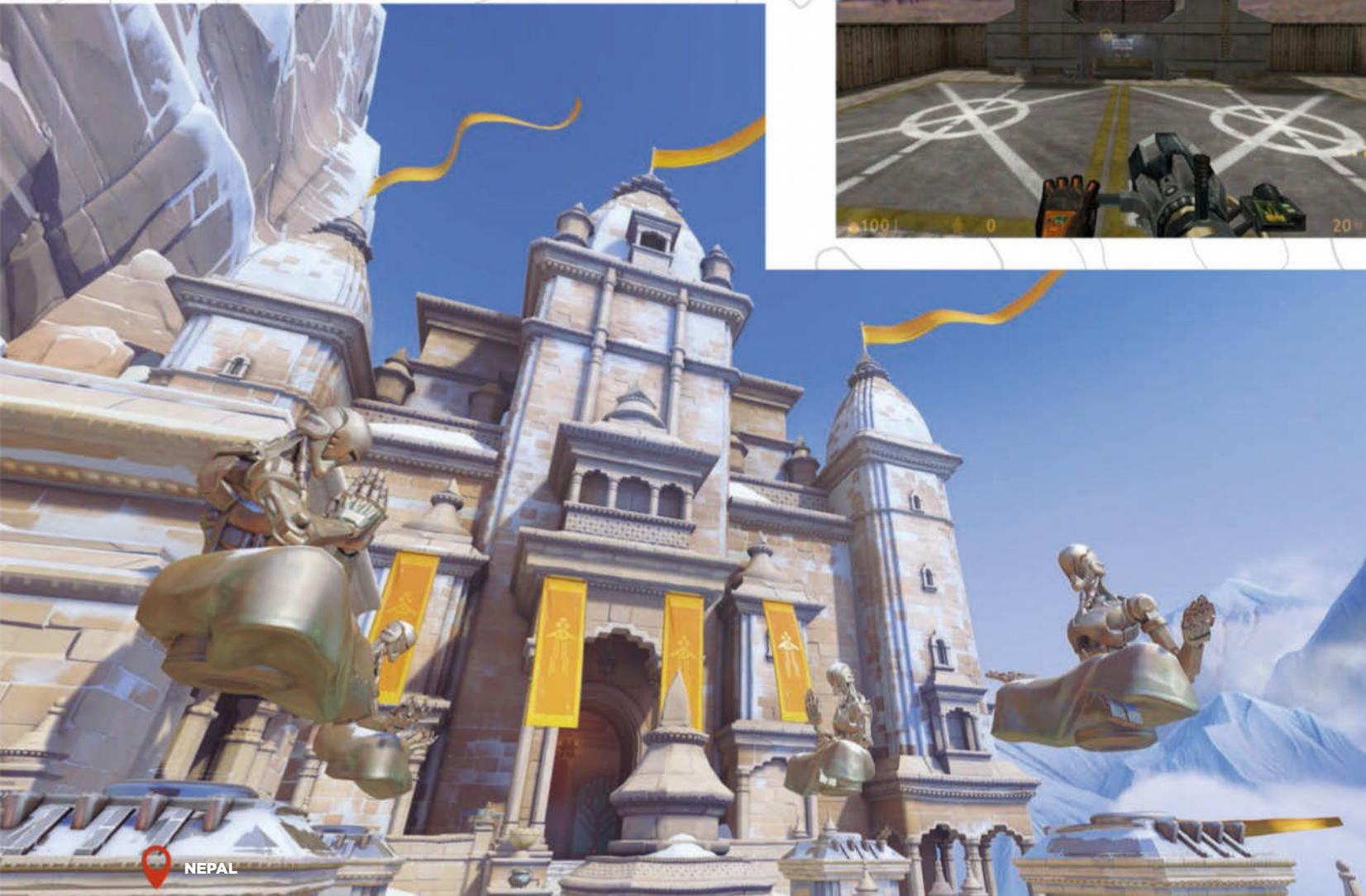
### Map Trivia: Expelled for Making a Map?

Ever made a map so rad that it got you kicked out of school? The ease of making maps with Valve’s map editor meant that everything from the Death Star to Mario Kart was re-created in Counter-Strike, and budding mappers could bring any location they wanted into the game world. Back in 2007, one 17-year-old Texas high school student got the bright idea of making a Counter-Strike: Condition Zero map out his school. Unfortunately, over in the United States, the idea of a bunch of teenagers running around a virtual version of a school shooting at each other with guns rubbed quite a few people the wrong way (especially so soon after the Virginia Tech massacre), and the poor boy ended up getting expelled.

DUSTBOWL



CROSSFIRE



NEPAL



also paved the way for FPS games on console to be taken seriously, and was the precursor to titles like Perfect Dark, and even Halo.

#### **CROSSFIRE: HALF-LIFE DEATHMATCH**

Okay, I'll admit this one is a bit more of a personal favourite than one of the best maps ever designed, but I thought it really interesting that just like Goldeneye, a game designed as a purely singleplayer experience ended up having a pretty decent multiplayer scene. Half-Life Deathmatch is also significant for its mod-ability, which allowed players to easily make new maps, game modes, weapons, and more. If it wasn't for HLDM, we never would have had games like Counter-Strike and Team Fortress.

I picked Crossfire because of its gimmick. On the surface it's a pretty stock standard deathmatch map, with an open area and a bunch of closed areas. But, deep inside the bunker is a button which when pressed, starts a countdown that kills everyone locked out of the bunker after a short delay. Pressing the button on Crossfire caused chaos in a way that no other map has managed to match since. HLDM's experiments with environmental hazards are something that would be replicated in other games to come.

#### **DUSTBOWL: TEAM FORTRESS**

Blasphemy! I'm talking about Team Fortress in a best maps article and I'm not talking about 2fort? Look, I love 2fort as much as any other sniper or spy, but it's been done. 2fort is a very well-designed map, and perhaps the most "iconic" TF2 map, but the "two bases with an open space between them" has already been discussed twice in this feature, in Facing Worlds and Blood Gulch. I think that the most significant map from Team Fortress, and later Team Fortress 2, is Dustbowl, because once again it changed the way we play.

Before Dustbowl, the concept of "attack/defend" maps hadn't really crossed most people's minds. You played CTF, or team deathmatch, or King of The Hill if you were a little crazy. Counter-Strike sort of did it with defusal, but not quite in the same way. Team Fortress really changed things up with its classes, giving us very distinctive offensive, defensive, and support roles. The asymmetric gameplay of Dustbowl highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of each role, and showed us a new way to kill one another.

"Dustbowl can just be a straight up slog; as the attacking team you were always trying to crack the nut that the defence presented. The areas around each capture point felt

like they were designed so well, and the way they flowed the attacking team to an objective had a lot of influence on our own map design. I remember spending so many nights on Dustbowl B attacking the second point and just trying to find a way either through the central building or around it only to have an ubered Heavy storm our mines and clear us all out. It was so much fun," says Overwatch Assistant Game Director Aaron Keller of the map.

#### **NEPAL: OVERWATCH**

Speaking of imitation, here's Overwatch! While the game certainly does stand on its own merits, it's also a textbook example of how all of the elements from these legendary FPS maps influenced the design of their successors. The Team Fortress 2 inspiration is obvious, but Overwatch actually incorporates map design rules from a number of different games.

Aaron Keller provided us with some further insights on the game's map design, telling us that Call of Duty: Modern Warfare and Team Fortress 2 – in particular the maps Crash and Dustbowl – were the biggest influences. "Call of Duty is just so good at directing flow around a level. I always feel like I have an option in order to attack different points, but there are still areas that you can lock down and force a conflict," he said.

On Nepal, Aaron explained that it was the first "Control" map developed for the game, and the reason why it seems so polished is that the development time for it was really long compared to other maps. "Creating maps around a new game mode is really difficult. The game mode and the map both need to evolve and iterate, but any of these changes can affect the other."

Aaron went on to tell us that his team actually tried hard to completely avoid the entire phenomenon of having that one "best" map that everyone wants to play. "Early in development we talked about whether or not we ought to have separate queues for our different game modes, but we value the variety in gameplay that having a large map pool brings," he said. "I think players tend to gravitate toward a single map or a single hero because it really allows them to specialise and focus, but each of our maps can bring something unique to play, especially considering the strengths and weaknesses of our heroes."

#### **SO WHAT MAKES A GOOD MAP ANYWAY?**

"Good maps vary from game to game, but in the end a map needs to support a game's mechanics while

also delivering a particular fantasy," says Aaron. He believes that scale is a very important aspect – making sure spaces don't feel too big or too small – as is the encouragement of teamwork. "The core of an Overwatch map is how it brings two teams together to fight over a singular objective. The design of the area around an objective or a choke and the flow that funnels players into it is what can make or break any of these spaces."

But often times, even the best map developers can't predict which maps will become iconic greats. ID Software's Creative Director Tim Willits recalls how Quake's DM6 came to be. "John Romero came into my office one day with Gabe Newell. He said, 'Hey, this is Gabe. Show him how to use the editor.' Usually when you make a map you like to think about things, plan it out, but Gabe just sat down next to me, and I thought, 'Okay... what do I do?' So I just hit new map, and then made a big circle in the middle of the map, and just started expanding on it from there and after a few hours there was DM6." DM6 went on



to become one of the most popular maps for the game.

In fact, there was a time when the whole concept of multiplayer-only maps was laughable. Shooters used to simply use singleplayer levels for their multiplayer maps, and it wasn't until Tim managed to convince John Carmack and John Romero to let him build multiplayer-only maps for Quake in 1996 that it became commonplace. Tim's one, unquestionable piece of advice for multiplayer map design: don't use teleporters. "Teleporters are crutches for bad level design," is his mantra.

In the end, the main reason we remember these maps so well is because they felt so good to play on. Maps are so much more than simply an arena to battle in, and the benefit of having good map design could mean leaving an impression that lasts long after the last rocket has been fired, the last flag has been captured, and the last player has logged off a game's server. ☞

#### **Map Trivia: Surf's Up!**

Sometimes a map is so creative it manages to completely change the way you play the game. Surf maps are probably the most famous of these, transforming Counter-Strike from a shooter into a kind of bizarre puzzle/racing hybrid. The basic goal was to use the game's physics to "surf" along the terrain, making each kill with a different level in one motion without falling off the edge. Jump maps turned shooters into platformers, Team Fortress 2's hide-and-seek maps tasked a single pyro with limited ammo to find players disguised as objects, and Gun-game, the CS map-type that tasked players with making each kill with a different gun became so popular that it was eventually imitated in Battlefield and Call of Duty as an official game mode.





FEATURE

# The kids are alright

The lives of teen esports players

*James O'Connor seeks the fountain of youth*

**K**im "Geguri" Se-yeon is considered the world's best Zarya player in Overwatch. She's the first female player signed to an APEX team, has a win rate of 80%, and endured a scandal during the Nexus Cup qualifier where she was so good she was accused of cheating (she wasn't).

Geguri is also 17 years old. Young people have better reactions - studies suggest that reflexes start to deteriorate at just 24 - and are prevalent within the various FPS esports scenes. In the same way that your high school's best footy player was later signed to the Crows, the kids who are mastering headshots now have reason to think about how this might impact their future.

#### **NERF THIS**

Leyton Gilchrist, 15, is excited about his Overwatch team DarkSided's impending first sponsorship deal. He mains off-tank ("the tanks that can also do damage and protect team") for one of the top four

teams in Australia, and has been taking FPS games seriously since he was 12 years old, when he got very into Halo. "One of my friends showed me CS:GO on his computer about a year later and I instantly fell in love with the competitive nature of the game", he says. "I bought a computer and played the game heaps. When there was a major tournament on, I tuned in to watch the best people in the world play the game. It was amazing: the crowd cheering, the commentators really getting into it, and the atmosphere was like nothing else."

It took six months of playing Overwatch for Gilchrist to consider that he could "make something out of gaming". Right now, he plays the game 4-5 nights a week, which he does around his schoolwork by sticking to a regime. "My average day consists of me going to school, then 4-6pm I do my homework, and 7-10pm I play Overwatch and practice with my team", he says. "Sometimes I can feel busy and I may need some extra time to do my work; usually my team is flexible and can work around that". He takes Fridays and Saturdays off, usually, to maintain his social life and avoid burnout. Although Overwatch is a major part of his life, he's learned to compartmentalise it: "I usually don't talk about games and Overwatch with my mates. I feel like school is a good time to separate the gaming and just chill with them."

Despite Gilchrist's success, the infrastructure does not exist yet to profit from Overwatch at his level. "There haven't been many competitions or tournaments lately", he says. "There have been some announced that are coming within the next few months that I'm excited to participate in and hopefully win." While Gilchrist's "ideal future" would be to play games professionally, he knows that it's important to focus on his education too, and to not rely on Overwatch. "If Overwatch gets big enough I might take a 'gap year' playing games; however, it's pretty uncertain right now. Who knows what the industry holds in the future."

#### THE YOUNGEST PALADINS

Paladins has been big with younger players for a simple reason - it's free to play. This makes it more accessible to gamers with low disposable incomes, including teenagers. This was the case for Munadi, who plays as xParagon, and is currently on the team 'Kings',

the dream."

Joel Shiels, younger brother of Kanga Esports team captain Hayden Shiels, has followed his brother's footsteps and joined the team too. He's 17, and plays Paladins for around 35 hours a week. He's made money from the game - "somewhere in the five figures" - and hopes to make a "full time career" out of the game. "The game undoubtedly takes up a lot of your free time", he says, "but if you can manage your time wisely it shouldn't be a problem to balance gaming and school. In saying that, you do have less time to do your studies." As a member of Kanga, currently the best team in the country, Shiels has been able to travel to other countries to compete alongside his brother.

#### THE CoD KID

Call of Duty has a huge following with teenagers, despite their age ratings. Reef 'Eminence' Galloway is 19 now, but he's been playing Call of Duty competitively since he was 15. He lives in New Zealand,



## MUNADI SAYS HIS PARENTS WERE SKEPTICAL WHEN HE FIRST ASKED TO TRAVEL OVERSEAS TO COMPETE. "I'M ONLY 14, YOU KNOW."

ranked 4th in the Paladins Pro League. He's 14, and usually plays the game on his laptop. "It's very hard - the screen is small, and I have low frames", he says. "I live in a family of five, with two siblings, and they're constantly using the wi-fi. I usually play with high ping and low frames per second."

I spoke to him moments after his team had competed against Kanga Esports at the Road to Dreamhack Valencia Grand Final (Kings lost, but were excited to have taken a set against Kanga). For Munadi, playing with professional equipment made a huge difference. "It's so much easier to hit shots. If I shoot my projectile, it'll actually go forward and not to the right. Because of that my skills have skyrocketed. I've done so many things I could never have done on my laptop. It's like I've entered a whole new dimension."

Munadi, who lives in New Zealand, had just met most of his team for the first time. "When they got to the AirBNB and came in... I looked at their heights and my heart dropped", he said. "These guys are pretty tall, and I'm pretty small. I think Mr Flexi is double my age. But it's been fine. I've really gotten along with them." Right now, Munadi is trying to save up for better equipment so he can play at home as well as he had at the tournament. "I really like this game, and I'd give up everything just to make this my job", he says. "That's

and is a member of the team SYF Gaming. "I'd been playing CoD casually since 2009", Galloway recalls. "After watching the first Call of Duty Championship, I stepped into the competitive scene with the goal to make it there one day. I achieved this on my first attempt in 2016, when I became eligible to compete." Galloway is clearly confident in his abilities, but the first competitions he entered were a "rude awakening", he says. "I thought I was the best around, but some kid who dominated in a casual scene wasn't so dominant in a competitive environment. Not at first that is..."

At 16, Galloway was presented with a big opportunity - entrepreneur Kim Dotcom approached him with an opportunity to move in with him and focus on his esports career. "Kim really wanted to provide an environment where I could put all the effort into my career and boost myself into the pro circuit", he says. Moving out at 16 to pursue a career is unusual in any field, but Galloway took the opportunity. "I had left school a little earlier and I had to determine what I wanted to do with my future", he says. "I was getting into the theatre industry wanting to be an actor, but gaming





REEF 'EMINENCE' GALLOWAY



JOEL SHIELS

really took over. I was playing 12 hours a day and loving it. I always put the important things first in life but took every minute I had free to grow as a player."

Galloway's success in the game has allowed him to focus on it full time. "I had a rather successful year last year, so I haven't needed to get a job". Galloway explains, although that interest waned slightly this year. He "didn't really like" Infinite Warfare, which has "resulted in less effort and commitment to the game". He still loves to compete, though. "2017 for me was really about finding what I wanted to do next in my career and life which I can gladly say I have figured out what I want to aim for next."

#### FAMILY CONNECTION

There's an old Gary Larson Far Side comic where two parents watch their son playing Nintendo and imagine abundant future 'help wanted' ads for Super Mario experts. We're not quite there yet, perhaps, but these four players all said that their families have been supportive.

"My family are ok with me playing Overwatch", Gilchrist told me. "They didn't used when I was younger, but now, as long as I'm keeping on top of schoolwork they don't mind at all." He said that his dad often comes with him to esports events and has formed a deeper understanding of the industry. "My parents are supportive of me playing and trying to make something out of gaming",

he's glad to say. Galloway is very thankful that his parents have let him take the chances he has taken, especially when they let him move out of home to pursue his passion. "Most parents wouldn't allow their 16-year-old kid to take that type of opportunity", he says. "They flew to LA to watch me compete in Call Of Duty Championships in 2016. I am seriously lucky to have them, and wish I could see more parents show the same support for other competitors around me."

Munadi says that his parents were "skeptical" when he first asked if he could travel to compete. "Going overseas, on your own, with a bunch of guys - I'm only 14, you know." They changed their minds, though, once their son explained that he'd be earning money from the game. "I'm really happy to bring back a medal to show them that I can go to high levels if I put my mind to it", he says. But he also knows that his parents won't necessarily feel the same way about their son trying to make gaming a career into adulthood. "I know they want me to do well at school, go to university, get a high-paying job... all the things a parent would want," he says, with a clear recognition of the fact that these are sensible concerns for parents to have. "But I think once they start seeing how well I do, and what I'm taking in, in terms of cash and other things, I really hope that they understand, and see that this is something I enjoy. This is my passion." ❧

# For Whom The Boom Tolls

by **Nathan Lawrence**

I mustn't let this register on an emotional level. This sniper, perched on high like a disgruntled postal worker, is quashing any hopes of little ol' lone wolf me rushing behind enemy lines with his 360-degree view of the battlefield.

The surface-level problem is my lack of respect. My on-foot frontal assaults are all for naught. The deeper issue is this sniper has popped more heads than an acnephiliac. It's time to try something new. Thankfully, *Battlefield: Bad Company 2* offers variety in explosive spades.

Like any shooter, I could sneak around. But that's boring. Maybe I counter-snipe. While poetic, in a *Saving Private Ryan* kind of way, it's not the calibre of frag my nemesis deserves. Jets, choppers, and tanks are in high demand, and probably better used for anti-vehicular uses rather than my vengeance on this sniper, even though he ain't Vasily-come-lately.

Besides, it's unlikely any of these delectable war beasts are sitting around waiting for me. It's time to think laterally. I'm looking to discombobulate or, more specifically: detonate. I lay down some fire at his nest from afar, making him duck down. As I sprint in, I have a sneaking suspicion he's being reinforced by a Support player, which means his unlimited supply of motion sensors will let them both know I'm coming.

To rush into the building and up the stairs would mean certain death. I could try my luck with a frag, but I don't back my Kobe skills. Then it hits me. Sniper Steve can't shoot from on high if he doesn't have a tower. I whip out my C4 and put my Red Faction Guerrilla anti-architectural knowledge to good use, slapping an

oblong-shaped kaboom stick on the corners of the building.

With a squeeze of the kind of stress-button device that'd make Arnold Schwarzenegger sigh, the corners of the bottom floor blow out. Then the building topples. Finally, I'm awarded two zero-risk frags. It's the end of them, but the beginning of an obsession for me.

The next time the same map rolls around, I vapourise the tower before anyone can perch on high. But *Bad Company 2*'s destructibility isn't just for deterring campers. I use it wherever possible. A frag grenade to open a door before I get to it. A grenade launcher to weaponise rubble for a hapless foe I know is waiting on the other side.

I use rocket launchers to take out floors and ceilings. C4 to make dusty flanking routes. Hell, I level entire towns with an attack chopper to force the fighting out onto a literally level playing field. Destruction is the real MVP of *Bad Company 2*. This is why I and, I like to imagine, many others feel that *Bad Company 2* is Dice's best *Battlefield* game. Still.

It's surely an intimidating challenge to create maps knowing that boom-happy fraggers like me will flatten everything. But it's that freedom to create an explosive playground that made combat feel fresh every time in *Bad Company 2*.

I knew my enemies were just as explosively empowered as me. And that's why *Battlefield* needs to be less about nitty-gritty damage and more about the option to level everything. No pressure, Dice, but please channel your inner Chris Taylor and bring back the total annihilation. ❧



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FEATURE

# Git Gud

Try it sometime, says *James O'Connor*

**Y**ou get Play of the Game frequently in Overwatch. Your KDR in Call of Duty is 2.0. Nobody has ever gone viral with a video of you getting wrecked in Rainbow Six. You're good. But how do you become great? I reached out to the best players around to talk about how they've mastered their FPS games of choice.





## OVERWATCH

Andrew 'RQT' Haws

*Captain, Australian Team (World Cup)*

**If someone was looking to improve their skills, would you advise picking a position and really working on it, or having a shot at everything and seeing what works?**

I think there's two aspects to that. The first would be making sure you do something that's fun, where you'll be motivated to play. But also, it makes more sense to focus on one role and define yourself as that player. Since there's not too many heroes per role right now, other than maybe the flex-support or flex-tank, it's easier to focus on a few specific heroes that are in the meta right now.

**What is the current meta? Who are the integral parts of a team that you need?**

Right now it's really focused on the two tanks, Winston and D.Va, and the DPS Tracer. Some teams opt to drop Tracer in favour of running Soldier/Genji, but Tracer's

still really important. Unlike other metas, where it was a lot slower and you'd push with a Reinhardt, in this meta it's more fast-paced. Both tanks can dive pretty much anyone on the enemy team. Those tanks really enabled a lot of aggression that wasn't in the game before. That's been the meta for a fair while now - for about four months.

**When you're training, is it like training for any other sport? Do you run through drills? Or is it just a matter of playing a lot?**

We do at least three scrims a day usually, two hours each. In addition, we do mod review, going over our games or another team's games, for an hour or two. And then there's time for solo comp and stuff like that. It ends up being at least nine hours a day, six days a week.

**You quit your job for this - is that only possible at the absolute highest level of**

**play? Is it a risk, even at your level?**

It depends on where you are. For us, as Australians, it really is hard. The culture's not really caught up to where it is in other regions. In Australia, you really need to be at that top level to support yourself, and even then it definitely is a risk.

**What does a player need to train to deal with right now?**

It depends on the attacking combinations. If an enemy team is playing both Tracer and Genji, the supports on your team need to look out for you. You need to have the best possible support ultimates to deal with them. You'll want a Zenyetta or Lucio ult every time they have the Genjiblade. Sometimes that's not possible. The shot caller needs to know if you have a D.Va alt, or if Lucio can try to right-click the Genji. Planning against Genji is really important in the current meta. You need to stay on top of the enemy's ults. That's such an important part of the game - knowing what the enemy team is going to do in the upcoming fight, and trying to strategise around that.

## PALADINS

Hayden 'Haydz' Shiels

Captain, Kanga Esports

### **When did you realise that you were good enough at Paladins to compete?**

All the players in Kanga eSports have been playing competitive games from when they were kids. But when Overwatch came out, I brought them all together and we realised that we were one of the best teams in the region. From there we decided to take it to the next level. That involved making the move to Paladins because of the much better international opportunities they had to offer.

### **To succeed in Paladins, do you generally need to be good at FPS games generally, or are there less traditional roles you can fill and succeed with?**

To succeed at Paladins you need to be able to aim well with both projectile and hitscan champions because there are so many different styles of champions all within the same role. In Paladins' banning and drafting system you're only allowed one champion per match, so if the other team picks it your forced to play another. On top of that, both teams get to ban a champion before the match starts. You could be put on anything and you always have to be ready.

### **For a player starting out, what would you recommend they do - train with one character/role, or switch around a lot?**

I suggest getting every champion to level 5 at least. You need to be familiar with what all the champions do and how they work. From there you can start to specialise in a certain role, like tank/healer/DPS.

### **Is it possible to succeed in Paladins without spending any money in the game?**

Paladins is free to play, free to compete in official tournaments, and has nothing you can buy that affects gameplay. They only really sell cosmetic items. It is possible to spend real money to unlock champions, but the game lets you unlock them at a pace faster than you can learn them anyway.

# RAINBOW SIX SIEGE

Jayden 'Dizzle' Saunders

*Captain, Mindfreak*

## What are the best signs that a Rainbow Six player is ready for competitive play?

A high win/loss or a strong K/D ratio can be good indicators of a player's individual performance, but that only scratches the surface. Other things such as map knowledge, game sense, and strategy are also important things to consider when preparing for competitive play. Certain people excel at the game mechanics, like aiming and winning gunfights, and others excel at providing intel, understanding strategy and counter-strategy. Identifying where you excel and then practicing to get better in the other areas, will allow you to become a much better player in time.

## What are the main mistakes you think people make that lose them games?

One of the biggest is a lack of patience. Have the patience to use your drone to gather as much actionable intel as possible. Have the patience to gain map control on attack, or on defense, have the patience to hold your area. This will allow you to make the necessary flank or play your team needs. Being impatient or unnecessarily reckless can lead to an early death, which puts a lot more pressure on your teammates.

If you are a utility player or VIP, make

sure you do your job before you engage in a firefight where possible. When the situation is heated, it's important to not make any hasty decisions that will lead to losing the round. Try to relax, talk it through and listen to your team so you can plan your next move.

## What can you do if you feel like you're a great Rainbow Six player, but the team you're on isn't working for you?

There are a few things to try first. Can the team change roles or operators around to improve the composition? Are the right members on your team playing the right operators/positions for their play style? This can be a good fix.

If you are that much better than your teammates and you want to take it to the next level, I would suggest to play against the best players in your region that you can find. Play against them constantly and try to prove yourself.

If you are offered to join another team think very seriously before you make the leap. Play with the other team a bit before making your decision. This will be as much for them as it will be for you. It isn't a good look if you jump from team to team as it will deter other teams from offering you a spot on their roster.

## What's your best advice you give to anyone who wants to improve at Rainbow Six?

Practice, especially your aim and muscle memory. Most of us spend a lot of time in Terrorist Hunt, a game mode where you go against enemy AI. The reason for this is you are constantly shooting and moving which helps to build muscle memory, aim and recoil control. Watching the pro players is also a very good way to learn, the knowledge they hold is incredibly vast and in-depth. You'll always learn from watching the best.

Have the mindset that you will lose and that's okay, you are going to learn from it. Make sure you play against players that are better than you. Watch the killcams and see what you did wrong and what you could have done differently. Embrace the loss - it's a development opportunity.

**HAVE THE MINDSET  
THAT YOU WILL  
LOSE AND THAT'S  
OKAY, YOU ARE  
GOING TO LEARN  
FROM IT**

## COUNTER-STRIKE GO

Sarina Bruce  
*Kings Gaming Club*

**Counter-Strike has been around for a long time. Does the meta shift much now, or has the game settled somewhat?**

The meta shifts each time Valve release a new update. Previously we saw how strong UMPs were compared to AKs/M4s, which are meant to be the set gun buy in buy rounds. Pistols are currently overpowered and each pistol is slowly getting nerfed. Movement also changes sometimes, as we saw the 'jump glitch' at the major punishing players. I don't think the game will settle and that's what keeps it interesting. It keeps us on our feet.

**How often do you need to train, and what does your training look like?**

After we finish from our jobs/studies for the day we jump on and practice. From Sunday through to Thursday we train for around 4-5 hours a day, not including any official matches we might have. Training can vary from scrimming teams or dry running, as well as watching demos and other players for strategies or to learn different types of play. Outside of these hours we would

be deathmatching/aim maps to improve individual aim as well as watching how other players play.

**What are some of the common mistakes other players make, that let you get the drop on them easily?**

Some common mistakes other players make are not trading their teammates after they die. If you start running out one by one you will easily get dropped unless that player is straight on the ball. If a team can't adapt to your play style its easily punishable too, as well as if they play the same spots each round and don't switch it around.

**How viable is it to enter the Counter Strike esports scene right now, as a new face? Is there a well-established 'old guard' now?**

It's a little hard to enter a scene that is well established. Everything is easier with connections and once you're in its very easy to stay in; however, if you put in enough work and prove to people around you that you want it and are willing to work for a place in the industry there's a high probability that you will earn your spot like that.

## QUAKE CHAMPIONS

Dan "Astroboy"  
De Sousa

*Quake World Championships qualifier*

**What unique skills do you need for Quake, compared to other modern shooters?**

I'd say the most unique aspect of the Quake series is the timing of items. A lot of Quake's gameplay focuses on having a greater amount of health and armour than your opponents and timing is critical to maintaining this. As Fatal1ty once said, it's all practice, practice, practice. There are two major stages to learning timing: mentally computing when items will next respawn, and playing around that knowingly. I find newer players often do the first but forget the latter.

**If you were a hotshot in an earlier Quake game, what do you need to know, or how do you need to change, to succeed at Champions?**

The game still has a lot of the raw Quake skill set from previous iterations, but now the game works a lot around the abilities. If you know how, when and what to do with the abilities it opens a lot of opportunity for

outplaying your opponents. Learning the health, armour, movespeed and movement of all the characters is another learning curve previous Quake players must overcome to get good.

**You qualified for the championship with 200+ ping - do you think needing to overcome this made you a better player?**

I wouldn't say overcoming the ping was necessary to improve my game but it did allow me to look at the game in a different light. Instead of relying so much on my aim saving me in bad situations I had to focus a lot more on out-thinking my opponents. Some of the weapons are not so bad on high ping and others are massively delayed, so I had to adapt my play style around this.

**How large is the competitive scene in Quake right now? How many hours do you need to put in to get good enough to compete?**

It's not large at the moment compared Quake Live at its peak. The game is still early in development and people don't like to play unfinished games. Time will tell how big it can get. I spend about three hours a day playing and probably around the same time watching games and learning what my opponents do to see if there is anything I can bring into my own game. On my days off you can double those numbers!





## CALL OF DUTY

Mitchell 'BuZZO' Mader

Team Mindfreak

**Do you need a different skillset for each version of Call of Duty, or do a lot of your skills carry over between them?**

Most of the skills you develop carry over in each game. However, Infinite Warfare was a game which required fewer of those normal Call of Duty traits and was a lot more reaction-based. A standard skillset for most Call of Duty games includes spawn knowledge, movement, communication, aim and composure. Most of it is just refining on each skill every time you practice to make sure you are becoming a better player and teammate.

**If you're serious about playing Call of Duty at a high level, which Call of Duty game should you be playing right now and why?**

I would recommend playing Call of Duty: WWII. It's going to be amazing for casuals and competitive players - I think it will definitely light the spark for the Call of Duty franchise by going back to its roots.

**If you want to improve, is there a particular weapon/perk combination you would suggest practicing with?**

It depends on your playstyle. If you are a more setup and position type player, learn to use the assault rifles as best you can and learn the best positions on the map for each objective. If you want to be that run-and-gun, "go in first" guy, get used to the sub-machine guns and practice different situations. Your goal might be to go in first and get an entry frag or something, but just running in blind isn't always the best way. Perk-wise, there will only ever be a few set perks that competitive players will use, so stick to the meta but also try to push the boundaries, explore and be a playmaker with something different to the norm.

**Do you do anything outside of the game to improve your reflexes and reaction times?**

I don't, but I really want to. If you look at any other professional athlete in other sports disciplines, they try to improve their skills outside of the game to perform better for when it matters most in the game. I have only ever done one full day of training last year at the NSW Institute of Sport at the Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare Academy with Jarryd Hayne. We endured a series of physical and mental challenges to help enhance our skillsets as professional esports professionals alongside Jarryd. My team and I would love to do it again on a consistent basis.

**What are some of the common mistakes Call of Duty players find themselves making?**

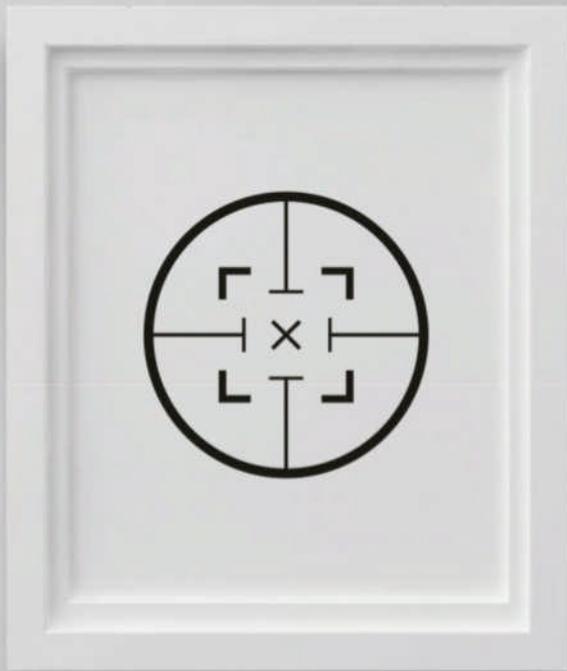
Playing without a schedule is one example. I'm a believer in making good use of your time, which is what a lot of players and teams don't do. Not to the extent of having a written schedule, but if your team are all online and ready to go, you make use of that time instead of messing around and put in the work. ☹

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**MA/268**

# How Counter Strike got me a job as a technology journalist

by *Bennett Ring*

As a teenager I spent four years doing an Ansett aviation scholarship, training to be a pilot for an airliner that most of you no longer remember. One slight problem though – I'd never flown before, so when the flight training began I discovered at the time that I was terrified of heights.

This led to my fall back plan – anything to do with IT. As a six year old, my stepfather used to bring the first x86 PCs home for work, as he worked in computerised payroll software. This gave me the chance to tinker and play with it as much as I liked, and I was soon in love. This then led to the best Xmas present ever, a Commodore 64 with matching monitor. I'll never forget playing Chase HQ all that day.

When I graduated high school, I figured programming was the way to go, so did a Level IV IT Certificate in commercial programming at TAFE. This led to a role at an IT company where we programmed the software to remotely do the accounting for service stations in Malaysia. There I met my first editor, who was starting up PC Gamer Australia – a miracle in Perth. He gave me a shot as the car game reviewer, but the jobs were few and far between. Meanwhile, I was feeding a fiendish CS Beta 0.7 addiction with every spare hour I had.

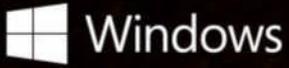
Next stop on the journey was a Computer Science degree at Murdoch University, again specialising in programming... and Counter Strike. I was part of an East

Coast clan called Total Consciousness, and by some weird fluke my house was literally 100m from the local exchange. This gave me pings of 90ms or so to the East Coast, making me a viable player. Over my first two years at uni, I saved up enough cash to buy a new PC, this time with a Duron 600 CPU. I just happened to be chatting to some Russians on a message board about this thing called overclocking, and they showed me how I could use a pencil to increase the speed from 600MHz to 900MHz, perfect for a starving student like me. I slowly learned how to overclock other components over the following year, all the while my clan was kicking serious butt in Australia, winning the prestigious 700-person UWA LAN.

And this is where things get weird. It turns out many of my clan mates were tech journalists on PC Tech Authority, and they were launching a magazine focusing on overclocking and gaming called Atomic. I mentioned my experience, wrote a trial article and had a quick chat with the Editor at the time, Ben Mansill. Two days later I was living in Sydney instead of Perth, as the staff writer on my dream job. And it was all thanks to Counter-Strike, as well as a connection to the overclocking scene.

So the next time your mum tells you playing games isn't going to get you a job, feel free to discuss my very lucky journey, for which I still pinch myself every day. «





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### Blackjack • Thief (series)

The blackjack is the iconic weapon of the Thief series. As a stealth game, your chance of survival increases the more distance you put between yourself and, well, everyone else. But the blackjack requires you to get up close to an enemy, to the point where you're literally breathing down their neck. Not only does it crank the tension to almost breaking point, knocking someone unconscious doesn't count as a kill and thus the blackjack becomes an essential tool on higher difficulties where murder is forbidden.



### Rail Gun • Quake 3: Arena

Anticipation is the key to being a very good Quake 3 player. If you can aim and have learned the layout of the map, you might be a good player. But to take the next step you need to have an understanding of what your opponent is going to do next. Nothing better exemplifies this than the railgun. Sure, it's a powerful weapon, capable of one-shotting unless its target is at max health, but that slight delay between where you've aimed and the time it takes for the beam to arrive means you always need to anticipate where your target is going to be in the next moment.



### Drill • BioShock 2

Putting you in the shoes of its predecessor's best-known enemy is a cool twist for a sequel. Aside from the bulky diving suit allowing you to walk around outside Rapture the highlight of playing as a Big Daddy is undoubtedly that bloody enormous drill bit where your right hand should be. Spot a splicer across a room, wind up the drill then dash towards your foe, splattering it across the nearest wall. It's brutal, messy and never fails to deliver a satisfying kill.



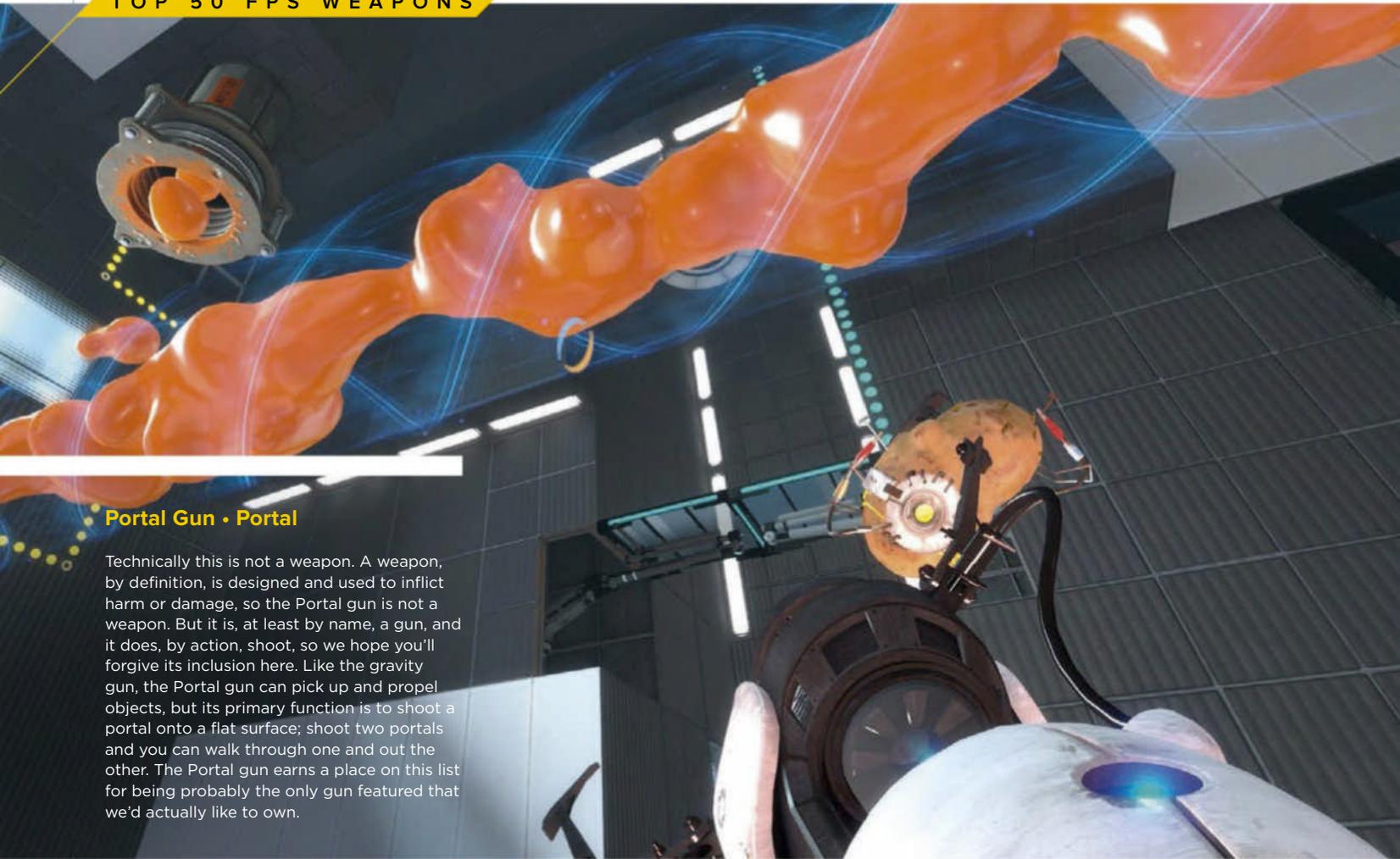
### Rocket Launcher • Quake

Quake's rocket launcher don't look like much. A murky browny greyish pipe poking up phallically from the bottom of the screen, it is faintly ridiculous. But then you click the left mouse button and it shoots its load, and a sparkling trail of orange, yellow and white particles illuminate the heavy metal space dungeon surrounds. Then the rocket hits, and in a cloud of smoke its target transforms into red polygonal chunks flying in opposite directions.

### Shrink Ray • Duke Nukem 3D

Perhaps because it took forever to get a proper (and terrible) sequel, Duke Nukem 3D clung to a reputation for being a funny game. It wasn't, of course. Stolen one-liners and misogyny are rarely very funny. But if anything deserved to elicit a chuckle it was the shrink ray. Score a direct hit on a pig cop and the shrink ray does what it says on the tin, scaling the previously intimidating sprite down to a size barely larger than Duke's heavily booted foot. Which he then raises before gleefully stomping down and squishing the little piggy.





### Portal Gun • Portal

Technically this is not a weapon. A weapon, by definition, is designed and used to inflict harm or damage, so the Portal gun is not a weapon. But it is, at least by name, a gun, and it does, by action, shoot, so we hope you'll forgive its inclusion here. Like the gravity gun, the Portal gun can pick up and propel objects, but its primary function is to shoot a portal onto a flat surface; shoot two portals and you can walk through one and out the other. The Portal gun earns a place on this list for being probably the only gun featured that we'd actually like to own.

### Flamethrower • Return to Castle Wolfenstein

Let's cut to the chase: the flamethrower is overpowered. A continual stream of fire that ignites and damages anything caught in its path at short and mid-range. About the only thing it can't do is headshot someone on the other side of the map. The one in Return to Castle Wolfenstein is our favourite not just because it's the most fun to use, but because when you catch sight of the glowing blue flame being carried by a Nazi about to charge you, it's absolutely terrifying.



### Mini Crossbow • Deus Ex

In the opening Liberty Island mission of Deus Ex, the first choice of any consequence you're given is this: sniper rifle, rocket launcher or mini crossbow? It sounds absurd. Who in their right mind would opt for a dinky little dart gun over two staples of conventional FPS warfare? Of course, the choice is easy. The mini crossbow, with its silenced firing mechanism and clip of tranquillising darts, is the ideal weapon of choice for humanitarian stealth players. Not least because you're gonna feel real bad for killing all those NSF troops real soon.



### Gravity Gun • Half-Life 2

Valve's big bullet point feature for Half-Life 2 (other than, we guess, "the sequel to your favourite single-player FPS campaign") was physics. In 2004 it was a revelation to be able to move objects around and have those objects interact with each other in primitive but realistic ways. Much of this was due to the gravity gun - or physics gun, as it was often nicknamed. Our favourite uses of it included picking up doors or radiators to double as makeshift shields and those rotary saw blades that would decapitate the population of Ravenholm when flung with the right velocity and accuracy.

### Wazer Wifle • Fallout 3 & 4

In the Fallouts there are only two reliable categories of weapons: small guns and energy weapons. The latter are most effective at robotic or mechanical enemies, both of which are remarkably plentiful in the irradiated wasteland. Our favourite energy weapon is the Wazer Wifle, a unique laser rifle featured in both Fallout 3 and 4. The one in Fallout 3 is good, offering a damage and durability buff, but the one in Fallout 4 is the best. Unlimited magazine capacity? Check. Never needs to be reloaded? Sold.



### Lincoln's Repeater • Fallout 3

Our favourite "small gun" in a Fallout is Lincoln's Repeater, a unique hunting rifle found only in the Museum of History in Fallout 3. It's the best bang for your buck gun in its class, delivering huge damage with near-perfect accuracy. The only catch is it uses the somewhat rare .44 magnum round, but we'll let that slide. If it was good enough for Abe, then it's good enough for us.



### Fat Man • Fallout 3, New Vegas & 4

While the sensible way to play a Fallout is with either small guns or energy weapons, sometimes you have to mix things up. The Fat Man, named after the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki in 1945, is a handheld nuke launcher for the player who is determined to not learn from history.



### Experimental MIRV • Fallout 3

But maybe a mini nuke is not enough. This is where the Experimental MIRV comes in. A unique version of the Fat Man, it is all but identical except for how it can launch not one, not two, not three... [time passes]... but eight mini nukes simultaneously. Nothing in Fallout 3 will survive this, possibly including yourself, but the chances of having eight mini nukes in your inventory at once are sadly slim.



### Shotgun • Doom 2

Every other shotgun in video games wishes it was the shotgun from Doom 2... [cont'd]

### Super Shotgun • Doom 2

... except for this, the ingeniously conceived double-barrelled Doom 2 shotgun. It's the best video game shotgun, but doubled.



### BFG • Doom (series)

Yeah, it's a Big Fucking Gun. Doom's BFG is designed to be used as a short-lived superweapon, best employed against the game's toughest enemies, such as archviles and cyberdemons. That's not to say it's simply a fire and forget smartbomb; the fire rate and blast damage of the BFG require skill to master. But it does work as a palate cleanser, or a temporary turning of the tables. Let's just forget how the laughable 2005 movie referred to it as a Bio Force Gun.



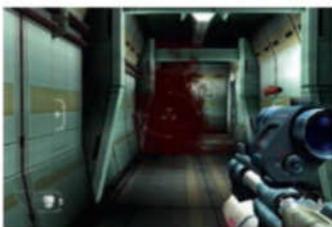
**Golden Gun • GoldenEye 64**

So, this isn't the best gun in GoldenEye, we admit. The cheat-enabled Gold PP7 is clearly the better weapon. It can one shot anyone and can carry seven rounds to a clip. However, the Golden Gun, which can also one shot anyone, has two things in its favour. One, it looks way cooler, and two, knowing it holds only one bullet at a time, meaning you have to reload after every single shot, makes scoring multiplayer kills with it feel so much more badass.



**Flare Gun • Far Cry 2**

The desiccated African landscape of Far Cry 2 is not just a sandbox of improvisational gunplay; it's a tinderbox, too, where one stray spark can trigger a fiery apocalypse. Now, often this happens by accident, which is of course all part of the game's core appeal. But the flare gun is a vital tool for the more cunning mercenary, enabling players to start a blaze where and when they want it, and from distance. Smoke the enemies out of hiding then pick them off with the bolt action rifle.



**Injector • TimeSplitters: Future Perfect**

Everything mentioned in this feature does horrific, gruesome or cruel things to a video game character. This might just be the ghastliest of the lot. The Injector shoots darts that - and we're not sure how this really works - cause their victim to start to inflate. Yes, like a balloon. You can see the character model warp as it expands. Hit them with a few darts in rapid succession and they'll puff up and explode in a grisly mess. It's really gross.



**Plasma Pistol and Needler • Halo (series)**

Consider these two as one entry. Alone, they're serviceable, but together they pack a formidable one-two punch. First, a charged plasma pistol shot takes out the enemy's shield. Second, a barrage of shards from the Needler, its tracking ability causing them to home in on the target as it tries to flee, build up and trigger an explosion, killing the target and doing splash damage on any nearby enemy. Sometimes the unsung tools are the most effective.

**Plasma Pistol and Pistol • Halo: Combat Evolved**

Consider these two as a slightly more advanced one-two punch. The same principle behind the plasma pistol and needler combination applies here: drain shields with a charged plasma pistol shot then hit them with the pistol when they're vulnerable. Only this time, instead of a tracked volley of needler shards, you need to nail a headshot. Sure, it's a tougher shot, but - at least in Halo 1 thanks to its slightly overpowered pistol damage - your victim will be out cold.



### **Bigun • Metro 2033 Redux & Last Light**

Like many of the guns found in the post-apocalyptic subways of Metro 2033 and its sequel, Last Light, the Bigun is jury-rigged from scrap salvaged from everyday objects, in this instance the various bits and pieces of a bicycle. As a high-damage, low-accuracy shotgun, it's perfectly adequate. But how many other shotguns have a bicycle bell on the side that your character will honk if left idle for long enough?



### **Shepherd Arms P38 9mm Pistol • No One Lives Forever**

For a secret agent as cool and classy as Cate Archer there can only be one sidearm for her to use, the cool, classy and compact Walther P38 from Shepherd arms. The P38 was the sidearm for the British military during WWII but is perfect for the spy due to its compact size, the fact a silencer can be fitted and its use of different types of specialised ammo to knock out enemies, do extra damage or even set them on fire.

### **Darkness Arms/Serpent Heads/Demon Arms • The Darkness (series)**

The physical manifestation of the demon living in Jackie Estacado, the Serpent heads are two black tentacles that protrude from Jackie's back and help with gory executions, some challenges and the slightly unpleasant act of eating hearts to replenish Jackie's health. If that's not enough, the Darkness (the source of the arms) is also brought to life by Mike Patton, the voice of Faith No More, Mr. Bungle, Fantomas and more, as well as voice work in Portal, Left 4 Dead 2 and more.



### **XR-005 Hailstorm • Resistance: Fall of Man**

Throughout the Resistance games and the Ratchet & Clank series, Insomniac Games developed a reputation for letting players shoot a wide variety of imaginatively designed guns. The Hailstorm is an obvious favourite, despite its presence in the otherwise lacklustre original Resistance. Hailstorm rounds bounce off hard surfaces, meaning you can angle shots around corners or just spray and hope that they'll eventually hit something soft and squishy.



### **Bullseye • Resistance 3**

Our second favourite, and the quintessential Resistance weapon, is the Bullseye. Featuring in all three games in the series, its most notable feature is the tag function, a secondary fire mode that lets you tag a number of enemies and then hit them all with perfect accuracy with every successive shot. Think of it as like "painting over" enemies in a game like Rez. Rez-istance, perhaps? We'll show ourselves out.

**Flak Cannon [or Nuke] • Unreal Tournament**

There's nothing about the Flak Cannon that isn't wonderful. It sounds devastating, it looks intimidating and both the look and sound are immediately identifiable by other players. The primary fire has an erratic shrapnel pattern and those superheated projectiles can bounce off hard surfaces. The secondary fire throws a highly damaging grenade in a short parabolic arc. It's also potentially lethal to the user in the cramped confines of some of UT's maps, as grenades don't like small rooms. It's genius.



**Screwdriver • Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay**

What makes the screwdriver in Escape from Butcher Bay such a great weapon is not the abilities of the weapon itself but rather what it represents. In combat the screwdriver is just another shiv, but it's so much more than something stabby. The screwdriver represents progress and freedom - you know while playing that you need a screwdriver to start your escape. Once you have it you know that more adventure lies in store.



**The Disk • TRON 2.0**

Originally considered to be the true sequel to TRON, the Monolith developed TRON 2.0 has all but been forgotten by the gaming public. More's the pity, because not only was the game great, it was also very funny. Although protagonist "Jet" Bradley had access to four different weapon bases (each of which could transform to other weapons), our pick of the bunch is still the Identification Disc. Bouncing the disc off walls to destroy enemies never gets tired.



**AWP • Counter-Strike**

Speaking of identifiable sounding weapons, the AWP (Accuracy International Arctic Warfare Police) is the sound of dread in Counter-Strike. One of the few weapons that can all but guarantee a one shot kill, the AWP is a devastating bolt-action sniper rifle and the perfect example of a high-risk, high-reward weapon. To get the most from the AWP, players have to be at range, scoped and stationary, leaving shooters potentially more vulnerable than any other weapon in game.



**Tommy Gun • Serious Sam**

The Serious Sam Tommy Gun is great for one reason - it's crazily overpowered to the point of nearly making every other weapon in the game obsolete. Not only did the Tommy Gun have a high rate of fire and a huge damage potential, it was also super stable, accurate and had a massive range, essentially making the Tommy a fully automatic, dead stable sniper machine gun.

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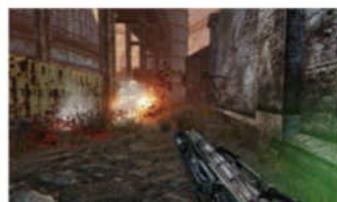
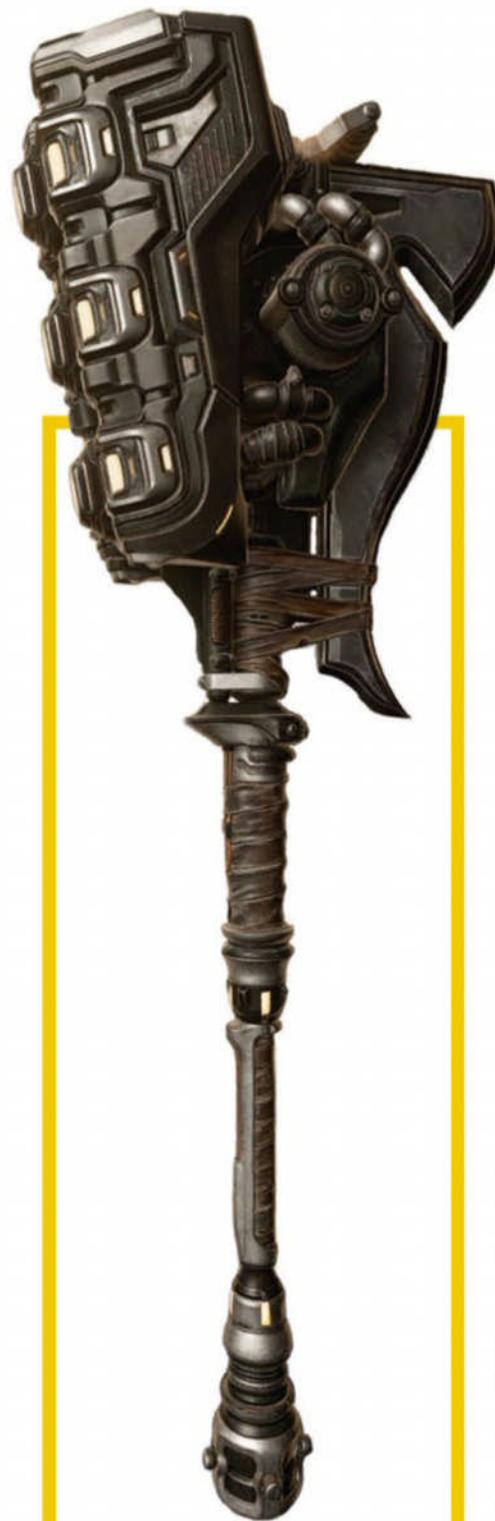


**Heavy Weapon's Guy Minigun • Team Fortress 2**

If you want a weapon that personifies a character then there is really no better example than Sasha, the Heavy's Minigun in Team Fortress 2. This devastating short range weapon can chew enemies apart up close but has a severe damage drop off at longer ranges. Like the massive man wielding the gun, Sasha is glorious brute force. When firing the Heavy moves slowly, or can't move at all in a crouch. He and Sasha are meant for one thing only - sending massive quantities of bullets towards the enemy, laughing all the while.

**Assault Cannon • Dark Forces**

The ultimate weapon in Kyle Katarn's arsenal, the Assault Cannon is a monster of a gun, taking up a huge amount of screen real-estate. The lack of peripheral vision is worth it though, as the Assault Cannon is massively powerful, spewing out streams of plasma with primary fire and rockets with the secondary fire mode. There's not an enemy in Dark Forces that won't melt in front of this mighty gun, but use it sparingly - ammo for the Assault Cannon is as rare as the weapon itself, so don't waste it.



**Stake gun • Painkiller**

The goofy, violent and over the top FPS Painkiller was a blast. Players were charged with killing four of Lucifer's lieutenants to stop a war between heaven and hell, the reward for doing so would be getting into heaven so you could see your wife. Killing demons is always fun, but what is even more fun is shooting giant wooden stakes to pin them to walls, leaving them flopping around to the Havok physics engine. Alt fire shot a grenade with a very short range, but with some practice you could shoot the grenade with a stake and turn it into a kind of wooden rocket.



**Type-7 Particle Weapon • F.E.A.R.**

Arguably the best ever energy sniper rifle in a game, the Type-7 is a staggeringly powerful long range weapon capable of reducing all but the most powerful or armoured of enemies to nothing more than a charred skeleton (occasionally an explosion of blood and meat) in a single shot. Even though the Type-7 has a fairly limited clip, the gun is powerful enough to be able to take out a group of weak enemies or a single powerful enemy before requiring a reload. Of course, enemies also have access to the Type-7, so keep your eyes peeled.

**Gravity Hammer • Halo**

The ceremonial weapon of the Jiralhanae, better known in the Halo universe as Brutes, is a high tech warhammer that uses gravity manipulation to render enemies into puddles of goo. The official mythology grants the Gravity Hammers with a number of abilities including creating gravity vortices, but the real power of the weapon is in its potential for one hit kills that can launch the corpse of your target into the wide blue yonder. It's not a subtle weapon, and it's not fast, but god is it satisfying.





### Eternity • Realms of the Haunting

It's criminal that Realms of the Haunting isn't more famous as the FPS/FMV/Adventure game was both ahead of its time and unique to this day. Not only did it show that action based games could tell a deep and expansive story, it also featured weapons with multiple uses. The Eternity Sword, our pick for weapon of the game, is essentially the ultimate weapon in the game, and can be used either as a sword or to fire powerful magical bolts.



### Shock Rifle • Unreal (original and beyond)

This gun is great because of its versatility. Fire a slow-moving ball of death for decent damage. Fire a hitscan primary shot for okay damage. Or fire the fast-moving primary shot at the slow-moving ball to create an explosion that deals epic damage. Apparently inspired by the death of a goon in Hard Target when Jean-Claude kicks a can of gas at an enemy and shoots it with a shotgun.



### M1 Garand • DoD, Various Battlefields/CoDs

Discounting the fact that the M1 Garand is an absolutely iconic weapon used by the Allied forces in WWII, there is one reason above all that the rifle has made such an impact on the gaming environment. The sound. The eight round En bloc clip self-ejects after all rounds are fired with a very identifiable "TING!". It's a sound you don't want to hear in the middle of a heated firefight, but you will, and you'll panic every time.

### Laptop Gun • Perfect Dark

HYPER's sister publication, Nintendo Gamer gave Perfect Dark a better than perfect score when it came out. While we don't hold to that, we do think that the Laptop Gun is a pretty much perfect spy weapon. This laptop converts to a SMG and can also be used as a sentry turret. Is it overpowered? Most definitely. Is it a fun and flavourful addition to the game world? You bet.



### Farsight XR-20 • Perfect Dark

What's better than being able to pick off enemies at a distance? Being able to see enemies through walls by looking at their heat signatures. What's better than just being able to see them through walls? Being able to hit them through walls thanks to some serious armour piercing rounds. This infra-red sniper rifle showed players something that they hadn't seen before and in the process changed the way both players and developers look at weapons.





### Dark Matter Gun • Quake 4

Does anyone remember that Quake 4 was actually a thing? Although the game featured some pretty good world building and a couple of good setpieces, for the most part it was very forgettable. What wasn't forgettable was the game's version of the BFG, the Dark Matter Gun. It's slow to fire and the projectile moves at a snail's pace, but it sucks smaller enemies into a miniature black hole and does massive damage to larger enemies. You only have once chance to find and use it, but it's worth the effort.



### Razorjack (renamed the Ripper in Unreal Tournament) • Unreal

The Razorjack or Ripper fires a serrated spinning blade capable of decapitating an opponent (or at least headshotting them) with primary fire. These blades can bounce off walls. The alternate fire mode allow players to control the flight of the blade. Arguments persist to this day as to whether the Ripper rewards skill or is just a gun for spammers but ultimately the answer doesn't matter. Shooting spinning blades of death and bouncing them around corners to kill your mates is fun.



### Cerebral Bore • Turok 2

If we didn't include this weapon, then there would be some definite hate mail. The Cerebral Bore is the height of the gross, over the top and ridiculous weapons that typified many FPS at the time. The Cerebral Bore is a weapon of unknown origin that scans and locks on to brainwaves, firing a homing projectile that will latch onto the head of the victim boring in with a drill before exploding. Kind of like the Tall Man's silver balls but in gun form.



### LaserKraftWerk • Wolfenstein: The New Order

Aside from having one of the most enjoyable to say names of any weapon on this list, the LaserKraftWerk is one hell of a gun. Functioning both as a laser cutter and a laser rifle (depending on the setting) the LKW is a powerful and versatile weapon, made even more enjoyable with upgrades including a flash that blinds opponents, a built-in generator that slowly restores the battery, a targeting scope that allows players to target multiple enemies simultaneously or even the ability to bounce shots off reflective surfaces.



### Dual Crossbow • Darkwatch

Not only was the sadly forgotten horror/Western FPS Darkwatch the source of one of HYPER's longest running pseudonyms (Dirk Watch), it also featured a host of extremely enjoyable weapons, chief amongst them being the Dual Crossbow. This powerful crossbow can fire two explosive arrows simultaneously, long distance on a flat trajectory, making it something of a sniper rocket launcher.



### Boganella • Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel

Any of the eleventeen billion guns in the Borderlands series could be on this list. The prefix/suffix style loot generation system remains a marvel, but for our money, Boganella from Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel is the gun that best typifies the series. It's a good shotgun, sure, but what makes the gun great is how talkative it is and how off-colour the commentary quickly becomes. Just a sample, reload and the gun screams in a broad Aussie bogan accent, "STICK IT IN ME!"



### Lucio's Sonic Amplifier • Overwatch

All of the characters and weapons in Overwatch are pretty great, but for our money, Lucio's Sonic Amplifier is the best of the bunch, and one of the best weapons ever in competitive FPS. Switching between actual damage and knockback (boop!) is a joy and challenges players not only to use their gun offensively, but to use the map offensively as well.



### Excalibat • Rise of the Triad/Shadow Warrior/Fallout 3

It's a stupid name for a goofy weapon, but the Excalibat typifies the over the top silliness of Rise of the Triad. This enchanted baseball bat can launch explosive baseballs, hit enemies for home runs and even launch a spread of explosive baseballs in a devastating "Excaliblast". In tribute to the original 1995 RotT Excalibat, the 2012 remake featured a new version of the weapon, as did the Shadow Warrior remake. A version of the bat was even available in Fallout 3 (though only by console command with the item code 000c80bc).



### Waggleton P. Tallylicker • Bulletstorm

While we could have easily included the wacky physics of Bulletstorm as one of the best FPS weapons of all time, that honour instead has to go the best weapon in the game full stop. Waggleton P. Tallylicker is a giant remote-control robotic dinosaur with laser eyes. You only get to play with Waggleton for a few minutes before he dies, but those minutes are some of the most gloriously over the top and stupid of a gloriously and stupidly over the top game.

### Frying Pan • PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds

You'd be hard pressed to find a more beloved weapon than the PUBG pan at the moment, and it's no wonder. Not only is the pan a surprisingly formidable melee weapon, it also can serve as a piece of armour for strategic locations. Ultimately though, the pan is just a giver of joy - there are few better feelings than running in to a firefight wielding nothing but cookware and coming out victorious. 🍳



# The Rise, Reign and Fall of Team Fortress 2

by *Steven Bogos*

The year was 2007, and the Half-Life franchise had yet to become a running joke. Half-Life 2: Episode 2 had just hit the shelves as part of The Orange Box, which the vast majority of us bought just to play the next (final?) chapter of the Half-Life saga. Little did we know that Episode 2 would actually end up being the least influential game of the bundle.

The other two games included in The Orange Box were of course Portal, which managed to meme its way into the hearts of everyone on the internet (something something cake is a lie hur hur), and Team Fortress 2, which revolutionised the world of multiplayer shooters.

Before TF2, shooter developers had this obsession with gritty realism. It sort of started with Counter-Strike, but was solidified with Call of Duty 4 and Battlefield 2. Long gone were the wacky, mile-a-minute frag fests of Quake and Unreal Tournament, replaced instead with slow, tedious, “realistic” combat. Guns killed in one or two hits. The colour palette was brown, grey, and a slightly darker shade of grey. Characters moved slowly, regenerated health, and spent a lot of time lying prone in the grass.

TF2 blew all of that out of the water. I remember the first time I played it, and I was just completely blown away by how fun and different it was. Every class was like playing a new game, and the balance was just sublime. The bright colours and hilarious characters seemed like they were out of some super-violent

alternate-universe Pixar movie. Health and ammo packs were back, and firefights lasted longer than 0.5 seconds, with rockets and grenades and bullets flying all around you in every direction at all times. It was mayhem, and it was glorious.

The game quickly became a LAN party favourite and something my friends and I would spend hours and hours playing. It was such a huge breath of fresh air in a genre that had become stale, and the influence it had on the industry is unquestionable. Just look at Overwatch for a quick case-in-point.

Unfortunately, at some point Team Fortress 2 did lose its way, at least in this writer’s opinion. One of the saddest moments of my life was when I booted up the game to write this feature, after a very lengthy hiatus. I discovered that Team Fortress 2 had become no more than a vehicle for cosmetic unlocks. The delicate balance the game maintained for years had been shattered by the addition of hundreds of new items, including a sword and shield for a class that traditionally used explosives as their main form of damage. Team Fortress 2 used to be a game that anyone would jump into and quickly understand, but now it’s just a huge confusing mess.

Do yourself a favor. If you loved Team Fortress 2 when it first came out, don’t go back and play it now. Remember it for the industry-changing game that it was, not the lifeless husk it is today. «



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# Forgotten FPS

Not every FPS was Doom or Quake. **Terrence Jarrad** remembers the fallen



## TERMINATOR: FUTURE SHOCK

Bethesda • 1995

The soundscape in this game was phenomenal for the time. The pneumatic hiss of doors, the whirr of mechanical limbs and heavy thud of enemy footsteps, gun blasts and explosions, all punching through a background of appropriately tense atmospheric music. It created an eerie setting in which to explore the open level design and blast a range of robotic adversaries, making use of multiple weapons and a couple of vehicles along the way.



## IRON MAIDEN - ED HUNTER

Synthetic Dimensions • 1996

Synthetic Dimensions worked with Iron Maiden to make this on-rails FPS (think House of the Dead or equivalent light-gun arcade shooter) to tie in with a double disc "best of" type compilation. The player takes on the role of Ed Hunter, trying to find Iron Maiden's mascot Eddie, and blasting everything in along the way. It's almost painful to admit I own a copy of this game because it just isn't good, but look, it came with some great music which also features across its nine-odd levels.

## OUTLAWS

LucasArts • 1997

It wasn't completely out of character for LucasArts to make something that wasn't an adventure game; it had, after all, developed the Dark Forces FPS based in the Star Wars universe. So when LucasArts turned that engine towards its own IP, Outlaws was the result. The Wild West setting was somewhat rare at the time, there was a unique "capture or kill" mechanic for outlaws with greater reward for capture, and the game is also credited with being the first game to feature a sniper zoom on the scope. The novelty in lighting dynamite with your cigar before hurling it at foes can't be understated either. And to top it all off, the story was lovingly told through gorgeously animated cutscenes.



## SHOGO: MOBILE ARMOR DIVISION

Monolith • 1998

In 1998 FPS heavyweights Monolith gave us a game in which you could play a heavy weight... with arms and legs and okay fine it's a mech/gundam/anime thing. Players chose from a few Mobile Combat Armor models with different defence and speed stats, and then set off to take out a rebel leader. Fair enough. Along the way various sections of the game would necessitate transforming the MCA into a hovercraft, or leaving the MCA and proceeding on foot, which served to add some variety. Combat featured a critical hit system which simultaneously returned health to the player and dealt extra damage to foes, but also allowed the player to be critically hit, leading to frustrating one-shot deaths.



**SIN**  
Ritual Entertainment • 1998

I know I played SIN, but when I tried to recall it off the top of my head, it was mostly boobs. The game's antagonist Alexis SINclair (see what they did there?) was scantily clad, hyper sexualised, and prominent in advertising for the game. The forgettable wannabe Duke Nukem protagonist, John Blade, fights his way through some fairly standard shooting with a fairly standard line up of weaponry, but there's also a little of the object interactivity Duke Nukem popularised, and some basic hacking abilities to disable security alarms and open doors. Some levels could also be completed with stealth and in addition to primary objectives, frequently offered optional secondary objectives, and some actions and choices could affect the game later down the line. There's more to SIN than appears at first glance, but in this case it may be one better left forgotten.



**WHEEL OF TIME**  
Legend • 1999

Based on Robert Jordan's book series of the same name, the game is set in a high-fantasy world, centred around Elayna Sedai, a practitioner of mystical arts. Combat worked through the acquiring of over 40+ magical foci called ter'angreal, each allowing a type of spell to be cast, and also allowing players to combine ter'angreal to create devastating custom spells. The effects of ter'angreal could be weapon-like, such as chain lightning, defensive, like reflect damage, or support, like freeze. Fans of the series will know this isn't exactly how the magic of the universe operates, but for the purposes of delivering an interpretation into game form, it worked. Wheel of Time also implemented environmental damage: electricity + water, whirlwind + cliff, etc, and the effect was a more strategic shooter.

**NO ONE LIVES FOREVER**  
Monolith • 2000

Of all the comedy stealth first person shooters set in the 1960s with a female secret agent protagonist released in 2000, No One Lives Forever was definitely the best. Cat-burgling con turned spy, Cate Archer snuck and shot her way through the forces of H.A.R.M to stop its evil

plans. It had decent enemy AI, was uniquely funny, and drew on myriad spy tropes without the absurd parody of something like Austin Powers, though given its '60s setting and secret agent subject matter, this was perhaps one of the things it was most likened to on its release. Even today NOLF sits slightly apart in the genre of shooters, with only NOLF2: A Spy in H.A.R.M.'s Way for company.



**STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE**  
Raven • 2000

If you asked me what the most inappropriate subject, IP, or media franchise to be adapted into a first-person shooter was, right after I said "Garfield", I'd follow up with "Star Trek". Shooting is the opposite point of everything the universe is about, and while yes there's combat, and fighting,

and wars, and the Federation is essentially operating like a military organisation, it really defies belief anyone made this game. And despite this rant it was fairly well received, finding a thematically appropriate niche. Missions offered a variety of objectives, with decent level design and weaponry, and if the friendly AI was a bit rubbish at times and allies got in the way... well they were obviously red shirts.



**CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING**  
EA • 2001

Set in 1923 and bearing all the hallmarks of survival horror, Undying saw the player take on the role of a WWI veteran Patrick Galloway, who'd accepted the task of helping a family beset by supernatural horrors. In addition to a range of typical shooter weaponry, Patrick could cast a range of spells from mystical missiles to shields, allowing

for some unique dual-wielding gameplay. Spells consumed Patrick's mana and could be upgraded in power as the game progressed, though one of the more interesting abilities was the Scrye spell, which gave Patrick supernatural sight. This feature was used to reveal clues about how to progress the game, but also allowed EA to up the horror factor by giving players a view of past events or revealing ordinary objects to have terrifying supernatural aspects.



**TRON 2.0**  
Monolith • 2003

It's not a huge leap to realise the source material of the movie Tron is perfect for a video game, and Monolith did an excellent job in constructing that realisation. Computing terminology abounds in this beautifully stylised FPS, with so many sly nods to geekdom that Monolith may in fact be a bobblehead. The shooting is very

solid and the player gains an approximation of experience points to upgrade abilities and weapons, and skill loadout can be swapped at any time. But let's face it, we're all here for two things: lightcycles and the disc weapon. Both are some of the most memorable aspects of the game, and for some this means memorable for the wrong reason, but this writer loved every aspect of Tron 2.0.

**XIII**  
Ubisoft Paris • 2003

Enchanting, is the word that comes to mind when recalling XIII. Not in a fantastical fairy-tale sense, but rather, being spellbound by the presentation of the game's art. The gorgeous cel-shaded graphics, the captioned effect when nailing a headshot, and the onomatopoeic sounds effects drawn in words on screen, showed the game's comic book inspiration. It also had some high profile personalities like David Duchovny and Adam West providing voice work. Its presentation was unique, and even if its reception was mixed, it deserves to be remembered.



**CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK:  
ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY**  
Starbreeze • 2004

Set before the film, the game aims to give background and develop Riddick as a character through a protracted prison break storyline. Laden with stealth gameplay, EFBB is a departure from the typical FPS, utilising silent takedowns and hand combat in addition to shooting stuff. Interestingly there's no HUD. Instead, other visual cues work to inform the player, such as a blue screen tinge to show **stealth**, and **ammo count displayed on the weapon**. An avid video and tabletop gamer, Vin Diesel lent his voice and direction during the development of the game, and it works. As part and parcel of the action movie genre this was inspired by, there are also a bunch of clichéd tough-guy one-liners which Diesel manages to help come off on the funny side of cheesy.





**BREAKDOWN**  
Namco • 2004

The hook with Breakdown is that it does everything from first-person, down to quite a low level. Need some ammo? Better bend down and pick it up. Got a security card to swipe? You better believe you have to actually swipe the card on the reader. It also focusses melee combat and martial arts combos over shooting, though there are still a number of weapons you can wreak havoc with. While I don't know if there's such a thing as using the first-person perspective TOO much, I do know that if there was an award for "Best First-Person Vomit Sequence" this game has a good chance of winning it.



**DARKWATCH: CURSE OF THE WEST**  
High Moon • 2005

Of all the steampunk western horror games released... wait I've done this joke already. But if you wanted to play as a gun-slinging vampire fighting the undead in the Wild West, this is the game for you. It's also one of those games that never seems to stop shooting. Ever. There is so much shooting. On foot, on horseback... in a buggy-thing? So it's a good thing that this game doesn't take itself at all seriously and shooting is fun, if a bit samey in a Serious Sam kinda way. It was popular enough that it spawned some spin-off media: a soundtrack, art book, and comic. Unfortunately its planned sequel was canned, and a film adaptation that has been in the works for over ten years will probably never see the light of day. Which is good. Because, vampire, remember?

**REPUBLIC COMMANDO**  
LucasArts • 2005

A Star Wars FPS with a more tactical slant, Republic Commando saw the player leading a four-person squad of clone troopers during the Clone Wars, assigning positions and targets for squad members to best their specialties (tech, sniper, and demolitions) to overcome

enemy forces. It featured a downed state where squad members could be ordered to revive the player, allowing for extra chances to get through difficult sections. It did its thing very well and was a heck of a lot of fun to play - a feat all the more impressive given it followed a series of Jedi Knight games and managed to make being a soldier in a the Star Wars universe entertaining. **W**





# FPS That Aren't

First-person doesn't always mean shooting. **Terrence Jarrad** holsters his gun...



## DUNGEON KEEPER

Bullfrog Productions • 1997

Be the bad guy, build a dungeon, and defend it against goody-goody heroes - this was Dungeon Keeper's premise. But wait, you say, DK's a real-time-strategy! And you are correct, however in addition

to the top-down management of a den or ne'er do wells, DK also allowed the player to "possess" its minions. Possessed minions gained attack and defense bonuses, and allowed players to turn the tide battle by taking control of the right minion at the right time.



## ZENO CLASH

ACE Team • 2009

One of the problems the FPS doesn't have to deal with in its combat is depth perception. Typically the player has a gun, points it at something, and that something explodes or otherwise dies. This is much more difficult in melee range. It's harder to judge distance from the player viewpoint to the enemy, incorporate the length of the player's arms, and position to strike accordingly. It was an issue that the exceptionally weird Zeno Clash faced. A first-person brawler, Zeno Clash had the player fighting in increasingly difficult arenas, chaining moves - dodges, blocks, and strikes - for high-damage combos, as well as throwing in the occasional melee and ranged weapon. It worked surprisingly well, but this game is worth experiencing for the art and story alone, if you haven't already had the pleasure.

## DARK MESSIAH OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

Arkane Studios • 2006

Dark Messiah took first-person gaming into the realm of medieval high fantasy. Its shooting was arrows and fireballs, and sometimes instead of shooting, it was melee combat with a big sword. Or it was picking up and hurling an object into a support pillar to bring a roof down on your enemy. Or it was kicking them into spike trap. Or it was setting the oil under their feet alight. Or it was freezing the ground behind them, giving them the boot, and sending them slipping and sliding off a cliff. With levelling and skill-unlocks, Dark Messiah was a game about options. Play stealthy, or play aggressive, but always be aware of your positioning and environment to maximise the systemic opportunities available.





## MIRROR'S EDGE

EA DICE • 2008

EA's futuristic parkour platformer proved that first-person action could be exciting without also having to be about blasting stuff. Its parkour implementation was for the most part, quite good, with clean lines and bold colour contrast giving players the information they needed to make quick decisions while running and leaping at a breakneck pace, allowing them to perpetuate the flow of movement. Consequently, battling it out online in Mirror's Edge was not a test of twitch trigger skills, but rather a leaderboard of timed runs, where the fastest reigned supreme. The singleplayer campaign hosted multiple unavoidable encounters with enemies, in which the ability to disarm was handy, however these sections were the least interesting parts of the game and it would have been much neater if the parkour could have continued without devolving into shooting arenas that detracted from the game's strengths.



## OUTLAST

Red Barrels • 2013

Of all the FPSs that aren't, Outlast is perhaps the most-not. It's a survival horror game in the style made famous by Frictional Games' Penumbra, and Amnesia. It removes the power a weapon grants the player, in order to terrify them utterly. To say there's no shooting in Outlast wouldn't be accurate however, because the player takes on the role of a journalist, using a video camera to document the questionable goings-on in an asylum. The camera is equipped with a night vision mode, and much of the asylum is dark (because of course it is), so naturally players spend a lot of time seeing the world with a greenish tinge through its viewfinder. That is, until the batteries run out and players are left alone in the dark. Wait... not alone. RUN! HIDE!



## REALMS OF THE HAUNTING

Gremlin Interactive • 1996

An odd mash of genres, at its core ROTH probably shared more with the classic point and click adventure than it did with FPS, but with large levels to explore, health pickups and ammo to consume, and a range of increasingly powerful weapons to find and use, one could easily mistake its intent. The first-person perspective delivered Doom-style 2.5D sprite-based enemies, but its shooting was... odd. Rather than a bottom-centre-screen weapon requiring player movement of the viewable area to target enemies, ROTH had players moving the floating mouse pointer across the screen to target enemies, with the weapon following across the screen. It even claimed location-damage, in that targeting certain parts of your foes did more damage (and saved ammunition), though in practice this was rarely noticeable. It also had some strange movement key bindings which certainly didn't support players wanting to play it like an FPS. None of this dulled the incredibly creepy atmosphere of its otherworldly old English mansion setting however, and the FMV wasn't all terrible either!



## HELLGATE: LONDON

Flagship Studios • 2007

Action role-playing games are typically a genre one associates with a top down, isometric perspective a'la Diablo, but in 2007, some ex-Blizzard North devs under the banner of Flagship Studios released a post-apocalyptic ARPG MMO called Hellgate: London. Amongst the XP gain, loot drops, and skill trees, its combat was fast, frenetic, and more importantly, first-person for ranged classes (with third-person also an option). With myriad weapon types, damage modifiers, crafting, and special skills, it was a bit like Borderlands, only, fun to play. Unfortunately Flagship sunk, and the only remnant of the game these days is on mobile platforms.



## THE FPS THAT NEARLY WASN'T

id Software • 1992

Arguably the most iconic FPS ever released and grandfather of them all, Wolfenstein 3D, almost wasn't the shooter we all played. It was going to be a first-person stealth game, inspired by the 1981 seminal stealth game, Castle Wolfenstein, on the Apple II. There were plans for features like sneaking around, dragging and hiding bodies, and disguising yourself with guard uniforms. With a little bit of imagination, you can see the roots of this gameplay in the persistent ability to run up behind unsuspecting enemies and knife them in the back. Of course, id Software decided that it was "much more fun" to just run around shooting things, and the rest is history. If you're interested in more Wolfenstein trivia, check out this 20th anniversary commemorative play-through with commentary by John Carmack! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LV34y9p079g> 🗨

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