

PlayStation 3 Forever

The Lord of the Rings Games

Star Trek

The Bureau: XCOM Declassified

Narrative Driven Games

& More

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Team Update

Matt

Editor

With the summer holidays keeping me rather busy, I have found myself having less time for gaming but here's what I still managed. I got quite hooked on Pokemon again and found myself trying to complete the Pokedex on **Brilliant Diamond** and **Legends Arceus** for the Nintendo Switch. Aside from that I am still working on the fantastic **Kingdom Come Deliverance 2** for the PlayStation 5, that's a record for the 3rd issue running, and I've also been playing some **Metal Gear Acid** on my PlayStation Vita which I never really got into the first time around but am loving now.



Letter From The Editor

Why Physical?



It's been a busy summer and in the UK we have continued to have so many heatwaves that it's been too unbearable to sit in my office playing on the PlayStation 3 let alone adding to the fear that the extra heat will break the console.

We've also had more sad PlayStation news from Sony with their announcement that physical games are no longer going to be produced for the PS5. Whilst this is probably not a big shock, it's still sad for us who love physical media and marks the end of an era. So it makes me think, **why physical?**

I've never had a problem with digital games, I own many, but for most of the time, when I have looked, physical games have been cheaper or at least comparable in price. And even if it was a bit more expensive, if I have a physical game I can sell it if I don't like it or am done with it. I never understood why people would give up on those potential benefits. On some consoles at least, it also took up less disk space if you had a physical

copy and saved the churn on managing your disk space.

There is also something about having a shelf with the artwork, the books, a physical presence that reminds me "Oh yeah I want to play that again". And with physical media came all the video game shops and markets which were fun to explore.

The PlayStation 3 sits on a special borderline where for most of the games in the library, there is enough content on the disc to remain playable long after servers are shut down, I think the PlayStation 4 and especially 5, they are glorified digital keys.

It's a predictable but sad progression in the video game culture.

If you have any thoughts or stories about physical collections, please send us a message at contact@playstation3forever.com or message us on our socials.

The Lord of the Rings Games



The Lord of the Rings: The War in the North is being re-released for modern consoles. I remember playing this back on the PlayStation 3 and not having a great deal of positive things to say about it, little did I know the game captured a cult following and many were happy to see this new chance to revisit it.

Many Lord of the Rings games have been unable to be ported to modern consoles due to being stuck in a licensing battle of one kind or another. So with this re-release, it seemed like a good opportunity to revisit all the titles on the PlayStation 3

and see which ones were worth the journey.

Lord of the Rings Conquest

This is a game I spent a lot of time with when it came out, especially with my friend and contributor Jon where we could play the local co-op together. It is basically just Star Wars Battlefront, which first became popular on the PlayStation 2 but re-skinned for the Lord of the Rings.

Just like Battlefront, each level starts right in the middle of a battle that is currently

underway, you choose your character and spawn point and then complete a series of objectives. If your character dies you simply re-spawn with a new character in a new location, the only downside being enemies can make progress against your objectives whilst you wait for this respawn.

You can choose between a warrior and archer which are standard Lord of the Rings character types, a scout, who can use stealth to kill unseen and you can also choose a mage. Correct me if I am wrong but I am unaware of any rogue mage characters in the Lord of



the Rings universe, let alone them being part of an army, but whatever, they have cool spells.

One of the best parts is taking control of the heroes when offered. All the big names are there like Gandalf, Aragorn, even an Ent and from the evil side you can be a troll, a Balrog and Sauron himself. It is such fun to play as these heroes (and villains).

It is a faithful Lord of the Rings movie game. The iconic movie locations are brilliantly replicated. The very first level has you play in the battle of Helms Deep and whilst the scale might be noticeably downsized, it still feels like you are taking part of this great battle.

This game is personally painful for me as there are a large

number of trophies that are only accessible through the games online multiplayer which has long since shut down and the platinum is now unobtainable for me - I only had two trophies left!

Still, a good game for fans, a really good couch co-op experience but does come with a surprisingly hefty price tag these days of around £15!



Lego Lord of the Rings

I'm going to have to assume that the reader has played at least one Lego game in their time and this entry is all the same formula and I don't mean that in a negative way.

The comedy is there and the faithful replication is there. As with a lot of later Lego titles, there is an open-world hub which serves as the level selector but is an interesting area in its own right with lots to explore. For this, it is the whole of Middle-Earth, not to scale with the characters, but you can walk from the Shire to Mordor, it is so satisfying.

This is one of the first games I ever received a press pack for in my early days of video game journalism and it was so exciting to get it through the mail with a few little extras.



The game has a really straightforward platinum trophy run too and can be played co-op as well. It's also one of the cheaper ones in this list being available for around £10.

Lord of the Rings: Aragorn's Quest

This is a very odd title. I didn't manage to pick up a copy of this to re-play but I did rent it back on release. It was around this time in video game history, 2010, where the world was starting to go mad with motion controls again. I feel like Aragorn's Quest was very much trying to capitalize on this with the Wii being one of the primary supported consoles.

It's also surprising to me that Sean Astin reprised his role as



Samwise, who acts as the narrator for the story.

It feels a bit like it's Lord of the Rings for kids. The art style is very odd, the characters are small, simplified, game-like but then they have these weird maps of the actual actors faces overlaid on top.

On the PlayStation 3 the game was developed for use with the PlayStation Move, although not exclusively. The Move Controller itself was used to perform your sword attacks and then the regular controller or the Navigation controller was used for movement.

If you are looking for games to play with the move, it's not terrible, it uses it quite well and in less of a gimmicky way than some but I find the overall art style not to my taste and it



doesn't expand on the Lord of the Rings universe in a way I find interesting. It's no wonder that this is the cheapest of the bunch coming in under £10.

Lord of the Rings: The War in the North

The War in the North was developed by Snowblind Studios who had previously worked on Baldur's Gate Dark Alliance, a local multiplayer RPG that I actually really liked. The studio merged with Monolith studios after the release of War in the North and eventually went on to work on more franchise titles such as the Shadow of Mordor which met to much more critical acclaim.

This game was one of the first in a while to explore a new Lord of the Rings story using part new material and part inspiration from Tolkien's rich world and it also takes and leaves certain aspects from the styles the Lord of the Rings movies established, unlike

Conquest and Lego which remained much more faithful.

It was a complete disaster and I still don't know if it was avoidable or if they have fixed it on the remaster but it was hilarious at the time watching him die in one or two hits.



The game is a third person RPG played with three players in the party, when playing online all three party members can be played by humans but when in local mode only two local players can play. Nevertheless this marks another Lord of the Rings game having some version of local co-op mode which is pretty awesome by my books.

The game didn't review too well on release. I personally found it to be underwhelming to say the least. The game doesn't look particularly pleasant, the graphics are a bit muddy, the voice acting is not great, the fighting mechanics were fairly basic and the enemies were sponges. I distinctly recall seeing some enemies so filled

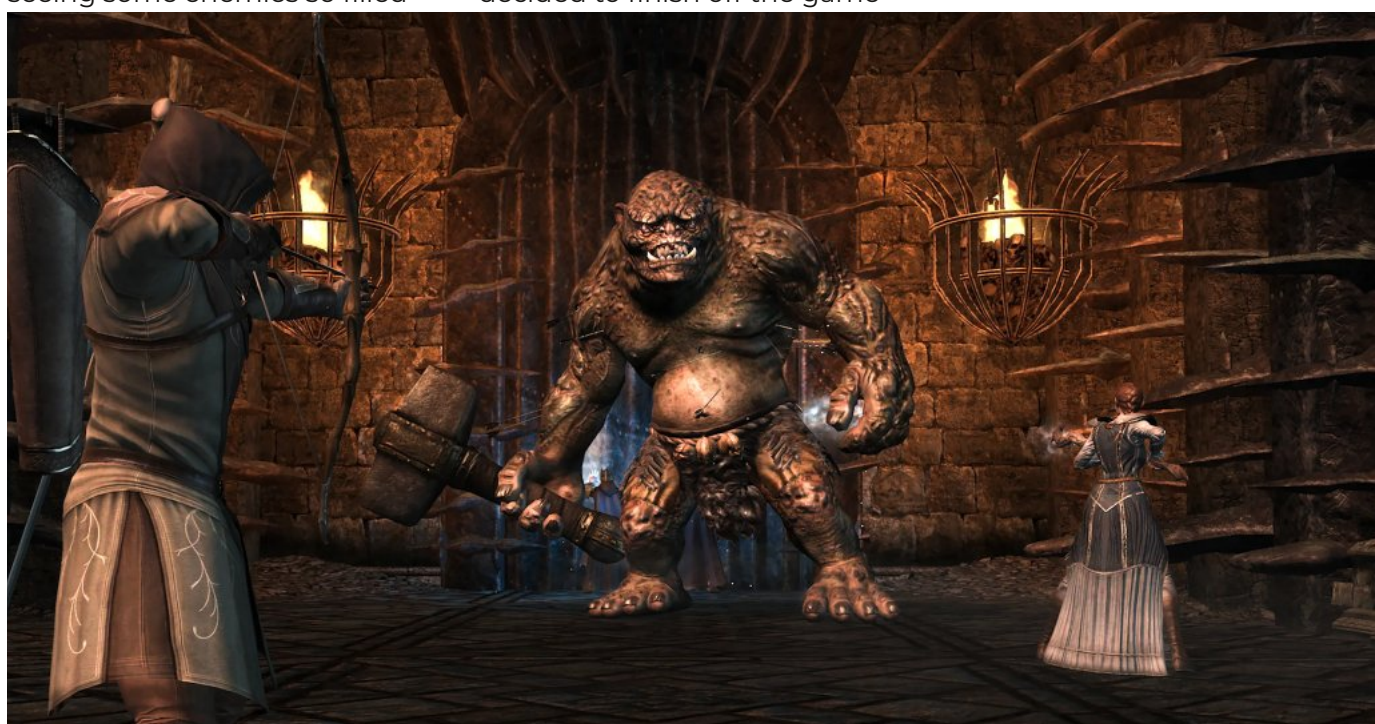
with arrows they looked like a hedgehog.

Surprisingly to me the game garnered a bit of a cult following over the years, I guess in hindsight I can see why, it's one of the last Lord of the Rings titles to come out over the past two decades and it's an RPG and it has multiplayer.

There are a few side quests for you to do along your way alongside a fairly standard skill tree and upgrade path. Your characters gain experience from killing enemies. I first played this game with a friend who jumped on and played one of the characters. After he had left I continued playing until near the end of the game. When they came back over we decided to finish off the game

together. What we discovered was that his character remained at the experience level as when he first played, the NPC had not leveled up whilst I continued to play and whilst I had continued to get stronger. It was a complete disaster and I still don't know if it was avoidable or if they have fixed it on the remaster but it was hilarious at the time watching him die in one or two hits.

If you are interested in this one I would strongly recommend looking at the remaster as it fixes a lot of the performance issues and it is probably cheaper with copies for this on PlayStation 3 currently going for around £25-30.



Star Trek

Kirk and Spock's Big Adventure

SCI-FI COVER SHOOTER

RELEASED 2013



I consider myself a fan of Star Trek but like many franchises they have their good, their bad and their video game adaptations. This Star Trek game, released in 2013, is modelled on the reboot series of movies started in 2009 now known as the “Kelvin Timeline” trilogy and it is a full, 3rd person, cover based shooter. Whilst I want to moan that action is one of Star Trek’s less interesting genres, it is a heavy focus of the movies this game is based on, so I probably have to let that slide.

The characters in the game are modelled after their movie actors and the primary cast from the films actually voice their characters, which really surprised me but also makes sense as I was initially thinking that whoever they got to do the

voices were doing some very good impressions.

The graphics are quite good for the time. The game shares the same flashy art direction as the movies with bright lights, lots of lens flare and all round shiny





surfaces but when you get into some of the details and especially the faces, it doesn't hold up quite as well.

It's a very standard third person shooter. Again it's not a strength of the films but the elements that make Star Trek stand out don't feel meaningfully explored here and you could re-skin this game to almost anything you wanted to. The gameplay loop is mostly to find cover and shoot the bad guys who in this game are largely the Corn.

There is some light platforming which is unfortunately underpinned by some fairly bad mechanics and some light exploration with your tricorder where you can open doors, manipulate electronics or collect information.

If there is one good reason to seek this game out, it's for its

full, local, co-op campaign. If anything I would say that this game is intended to be played co-op, one as Kirk and the other as Spock. The game does make use of its dual lead characters by making different players perform actions to unblock the other and move them along. In single player your partner is replaced by a mostly competent, but sometimes buggy, AI player. And by AI I am referring to the old video game meaning of AI, not this 2020 era AI definition.

This game is packed with all the tropes of a mid-generation PlayStation 3 title, even Spock and Kirk grab hold of ledges and leap from pillar to pillar in the style of Assassins Creed or Uncharted. There really isn't much to say about it. I would say only look it up if you are looking for some couch co-op games or are a huge fan of these movies.

The other most interesting thing I could find to say about it was you can lock the in-game doors. So many games have locked doors that require a mechanic or puzzle to unlock them, but how many games let you then re-lock it afterwards. Why is that here? I can only assume for each of the co-op players to play some pranks with each other. 10/10 door mechanics.



The Narrative Driven Game

Matt

The PlayStation 3 was the first console where I was introduced to what I am going to call the narrative driven game. These are your cinematic games and walking simulators where the mechanics take a backseat and the story and visuals take over.

These games tend to review well and get high scores but a large number of gamers just don't like them because they have turned up to play and not watch and whilst I completely understand their point of view, I just can't help but get captured by these games.

Heavy Rain

One of the earliest games I played that introduced me to this genre was Heavy Rain. At the time, I had not played its predecessor Fahrenheit, known as Indigo Prophecy in North America, but picked it up and played it through in a few short days. Heavy Rain has a bit going on mechanically, you walk around, look at things



and use motion controls and buttons to interact and perform actions but your choices and failures all impact the story and its outcomes. Knowing that choices had meaning, it meant that I poured every ounce into each action trying to get it right or trying to pick right and worrying when I didn't. I was completely hooked.

Telltale games

The Telltale games were another franchise that started to become popular around this time. I first encountered them on the console with their Back to the Future game delivered in five parts from the PS Store. These were actually pretty good but they're bigger success came with The Walking Dead.



Based on the comics of the same name these games streamlined the mechanics even more, making most of the narrative drama driven by fairly straightforward binary choices. Take this action or take that action. But the game would constantly tell you that actions have choices, and



that certain characters would remember things. This provides that decision dilemma, constantly second guessing and building the drama.

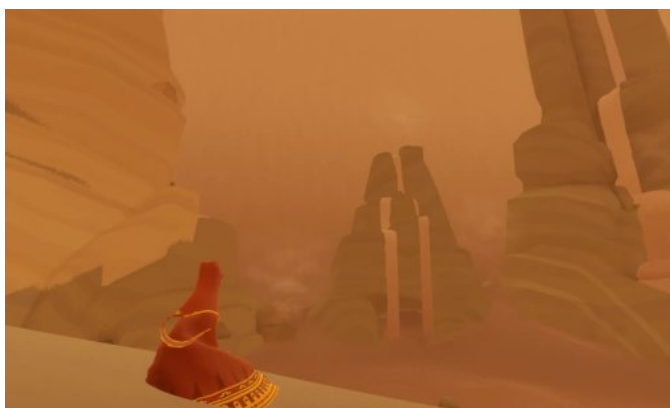
Telltale would later go on to make *The Wolf Among Us*, *Tales from the Borderlands*, *Game of Thrones*, *Minecraft Story Mode* and *Batman* all available on the PlayStation 3 and all decent narrative driven games.

The Unfinished Swan

The Unfinished Swan is a wonderful indie title. It's short and has mechanically more going on than some of the above but it is largely a walking simulator. The story is told to you through drips and drabs, discovered at your own pace and with your own interpretations. It's a really great game and one I want to replay.

Journey

Journey is one of the console's most acclaimed titles and its legacy as a small studio title is huge.



It's not straightforwardly a walking simulator. There is another interesting mechanic that I will leave unsaid in this review, but the narrative is not told by any words, it is understood through gameplay, lighting, music and this other mechanic. It really is a must play for anyone interested in these games and I was absolutely blown away by it. I completed it in one sitting in one night and it was a formative moment.

Rain

Rain, not to be confused with *Heavy Rain* although there is quite a bit of heavy rain in it, is a fascinating title that is arguably also a puzzle game instead of a straight up narrative exploration game. No words are spoken and your character is invisible unless the rain is falling from the sky and you must explore, solve some puzzles and escape from other ghostly creatures.



Even if the mechanics are taking a back seat, the medium of games still provides a unique angle into exploring a story, whether it's through the choice driven mechanic or by exploring at your own pace. These games are also some of the most accessible for non-gamers to dip their toes into the water. I absolutely love this style of games and despite their lack of gaming mechanics I think they can provide some of the most nail biting, dramatic stories.

The Bureau: XCOM Declassified

SCI-FI SQUAD SHOOTER

RELEASED 2013



This might land me in a lot of hot water but I am not a big fan of XCOM. The series is well known for its system of soldiers whom you can name, nurture, love and bring with you from battle to battle, only for them to permanently die at the hands of the unforgiving random number generator that comes up with a hit despite them being in 90% cover.

Whilst this iconic mechanism is one of the reasons people love it, my brain could never accept and absorb the defeats. It's just incompatible with this and for

that I am sorry, but The Bureau is not a standard XCOM game and so there was a chance I could like this one.

The XCOM fan base is a passionate and vocal one and so when a studio dares to take the name of this beloved series and apply it to something so different, it should have known it was playing with fire.

One of the primary issues, and partly why so many studios





don't like to reveal anything about their game until they are ready, is that an early trailer released at E3 with the title XCOM showed a different game to what The Bureau ended up being. (link video embed?) This game was set slightly earlier, was first person, had stronger horror elements and X-Files like influence.

If the resulting game was exceptional then no one would have cared, but as The Bureau didn't quite live up to exceptional levels, many fans were disappointed about the game as it could never live up to the trailer and the game they thought they were going to get.

What we did get was a bit of a mixture, it is mostly a 3rd person shooter, an almost over used genre by the time of release, sprinkled with some squad based mechanics. The original XCOM titles use a turn-based system, and the studio

attempted to weave the two together by allowing a time slow down ability in order for you to issue commands to your squad.

Now that the dust has settled and we can revisit these games I think people were too hard on it. I think the graphics are quite good, I think some of the world building elements and alternate history is fun to explore. Although I will say the story started out with potential and quickly went off the rails.

I found myself having fun with



the combat when it opened up. Some of the squad's abilities are great and you need to think of clever ways to combine squad member abilities for maximum impact. Enemies are varied and require different tactics to help take down effectively.

I think it's still quite a divisive title to this day. I can't help but wonder if the XCOM name did more damage to it than good. Overall I think people were too hard on it and there are some good things to say about it. It's also cheap to pick up so I would say if you are interested in a 3rd person cover based shooter with sci-fi elements then this definitely might appeal to you.

Accessory

PlayStation Move Navigation Controller

The PlayStation Move's primary controller has always been the stick with a ball on and it was great for capturing one type of motion, typically pointing at different parts of the screen whilst capturing the motion.

But it quickly became clear that if you wanted to play a more conventional game where your character moved through space as well as pointed at things we would need something else.

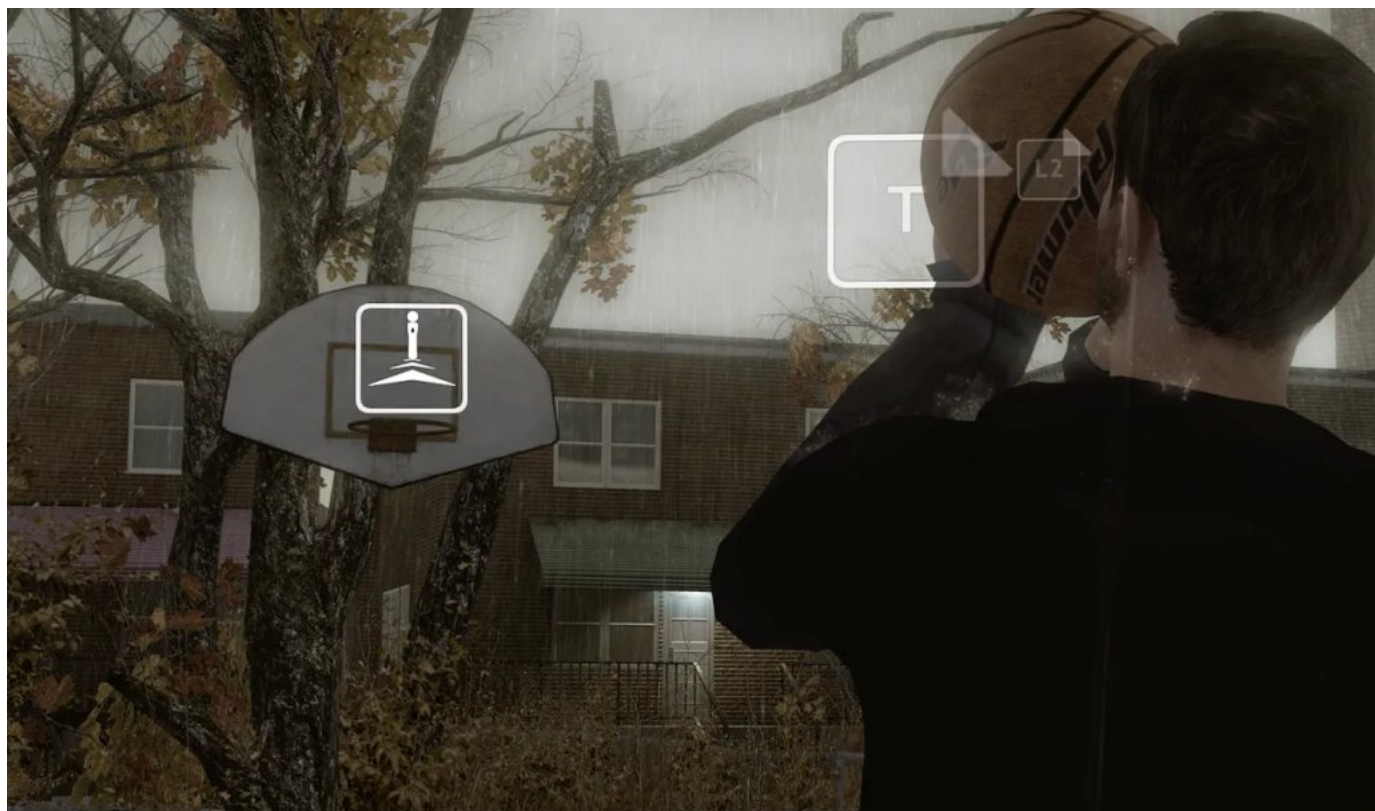
This should not have been a surprise as this is how all dual analog controllers work and even Nintendo had already worked this out with their Nunchuck complementing the primary Wii controller through the slightly awkward connecting cable.

Some games got around this by offering your left hand the use of the left side of the

PlayStation 3 controller. This would let you use the thumbstick, L1, L2 and perhaps if you were dexterous enough, the directional pad, but that was awkward so some genius decided, what if we made that but as a controller of its own and unlike the Wii's nunchuck, we made it wireless.

I am a big fan of this little gadget. Its use is limited, but I have to say there isn't much else like it. In fact I feel like a lot





of modern day VR games could do with a similar device as so many of them rely on teleporting to get around the limitation that VR controllers suck for directional movement.

My first and possibly best experience with the controller was with Heavy Rain. A while after the game's release, a patch was delivered providing full PS Move support and a new PS Move version of the game was released too. The whole game could be played with the Move Controller and the PS3 Controller or instead the far superior navigation controller.

The controller also improved all first person shooters. You can comfortably navigate a world

with this and use the Move Controller solely for aiming and shooting, it even clips into some of the accessories like the SharpShooter to allow you to move and aim whilst holding it.

Whilst the PlayStation Move found a second wind with its use in PS VR on the PS4, the PlayStation Navigation Controller didn't get proper support, with only a handful of titles supporting it, but I have never utilized it on there myse lf.

It's just a nicely made, ergonomic little controller and I always enjoy using it as part of the Move. My only criticism is the battery life!

