

The nostalgic déjà vu of re-mastered games.

By Gerard Campbell

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The video games industry seems to be in love with re-masters of old video games

right now – and I can't say I like it that much.

A video game re-master is when a game that (generally) appeared in a previous

generation of games machines – for examples, The Last of Us, Halo Master Chief

Collection, State of Decay, Tomb Raider – are re-done and re-released for current

generation consoles like the PlayStation 4 and the Xbox One.

Love them or loathe them, re-masters aren't going to go away soon, and last

week, rumors were circulating that there are current-gen re-masters planned for

the Xbox-exclusive Gears of Wars series and the steam-punk Dishonored.

I guess my problem with re-masters is that I don't want to be playing games that

I played several years ago on my Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, on my shiny, new

PS4 or Xbox One. I have the new consoles because I want to

play games that push

the new hardware to its limits and offer me new experiences,
not games that I've

already played before, no matter how good they might be.

Look, I can see why re-mastered games are a thing. Game
publishers know that

they're not taking a risk with a re-master like an untested IP
(intellectual

property), and with the new generation of consoles not being
backward

compatible with their older siblings, re-masters mean
publishers can play on the

nostalgia that gamers have for their favourite franchises and
experience that on

their new hardware.

Personally, I suspect that video game re-masters are a
publisher-driven thing

rather than a gamer-driven scenario, where boards of directors
see new

hardware as a chance to get a "second bite of the cherry", so
to speak, or "double

dip", earning more revenue from an ageing franchise for the
cost of up-scaled

graphics and some bundled DLC (downloadable content).

I have to admit that some re-masters are done right,
especially those that offer a

perspective, like the first-person view of GTAV, but some re-

masters just defy

belief and you wonder what a publisher was thinking by green lighting a re-

make. The recently released State of Decay Year One Survival edition on Xbox

One is a case in point: It was a re-make that definitely wasn't needed and I

actually thought I was playing the Xbox 360 version again: The graphics were

that poor.

My fear is that the current generation of gaming will start to stagnate if

publishers insist on putting re-masters ahead of new titles. Personally, I'd rather

see sequels to games like Red Dead Redemption (which I'm playing again at the

moment on Xbox 360) for the current generation than started up version of

games I've already played.

After all, didn't we buy PlayStation 4s and Xbox Ones for new IP and games that

push that hardware to its limits, not games that we've already played before?

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Video game soundtracks: Worth a second listen?

By Gerard Campbell

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I can't imagine a world without music in some shape or form.

I'm listening to some music as I write this blog and it's something that just causes the creative juices in my mind to flow but what's that got to do with video games, I can hear someone ask?

Well, quite a lot, actually.

The next time you fire up your favourite modern game, zone out the gunfire, explosions and other ambient sound effects and listen carefully: Is there a stirring orchestral score in the background playing as you ride a horse through a desert landscape? Is there deep foreboding soundtrack as you creep through the bowels of an alien spaceship, unsure what lies ahead?

That'll be the game soundtrack designed to create atmosphere and emotion.

Sadly, though, many gamers overlook video game soundtracks, but good game music deserves a second look – or second listen, if you will.

If you're a video game soundtrack aficionado, you'll already know about Video Games Live, the long-running series of concerts around the world that showcase soundtracks from some of the world's most popular video games. From Halo to Donkey

Kong to Metal Gear Solid, the Video Games Live show puts the focus on a part of gaming that is often underestimated.

To me, if a video game soundtrack is doing its job right, it will create all sorts of emotions as you're playing and will immerse you more into the experience. These days, video game soundtracks are huge affairs, too, with world-renowned composers writing the score and often world-class orchestras tasked with bringing to life the musical score.

One of my most favoured soundtracks is from the game Deus Ex Human Revolution, particularly a track called Icarus. You'll find the full Human Revolution soundtrack by Mark McCann [here](#). (In fact, do a search in YouTube for video game soundtracks and you'll get a huge list of options).

In my mind, McCann's work on Human Revolution is nothing short of mind-blowing. Every time I listen to it I'm transported into the futuristic cyberpunk world created by Eidos Montreal – which means that McCann has succeeded in creating a soundscape that immerses the player. Each piece fits perfectly into the scene that has been created.

Other sound tracks that have impressed, too: the Halo series with its instantly recognisable Gregorian chanting at the beginning, Bioware's Mass Effect 3, The Last of Us, Journey and Red Dead Redemption (if you've heard the music that plays when the game's lead character James Marsden crosses over into Mexico you'll know how powerful a soundtrack it is).

For me, a great video game soundtrack is just as important as a compelling narrative and great gameplay but how about you? Are you a gamer that pays close attention to a game's soundtrack, letting it draw you in and immerse you, or are you a gamer who goes to the menu and turns the music slider all the way down?

While we're at it, if you're a fan of game soundtracks, what is your most favoured? Post it in the comment section below.

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Ori and the Blind Forest, visually sumptuous yet littered with frustrating pricks.

By Gerard Campbell

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Every now and then a game comes along that captures you completely with its visual style and its touching narrative. Ori and The Blind Forest is one of those games.

Amazingly spell-binding to look at and with a haunting soundtrack, Ori and the Blind Forest is a platform game in vein of old-school Metroidvania but don't be deceived: It's also fiendishly hard at times and has difficulty spikes that will have you tearing out what hair you have left.

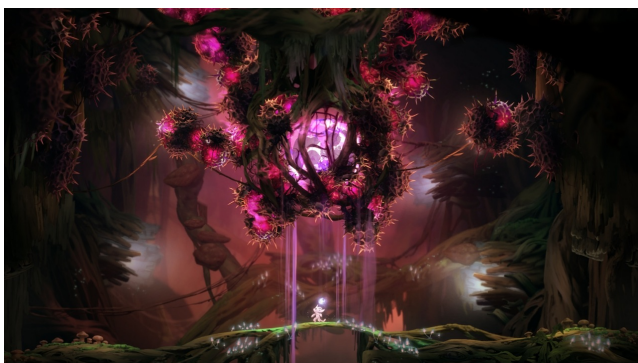
The game opens with the spirit-like Ori arriving in the titular forest, following the destruction of a magical tree. Ori is taken under the care of a gentle bear-like creature but over time the forest dies and decays, forcing Ori and his spirit guide Sein out to confront the evil that has befallen the land.

Ori and The Blind Forest plays like a traditional 2D platform game but is Metroidvania-like in that the game world is one giant map, unlocked as Ori progresses. The forest is also a deadly place, with no shortage of poisonous enemies, spiky plants and platforms to navigate as Ori completes his quest.



Like most platform games, Ori starts off relatively weak in terms of how far he can jump but as he unlocks new powers thanks to absorbing the essence of long-dead spirits he can jump further, meaning he can reach new areas, unlocking more of the game world. Ori himself can't attack foes but Sein, his spirit guide, can, firing projectiles towards foes, both animal and plant.

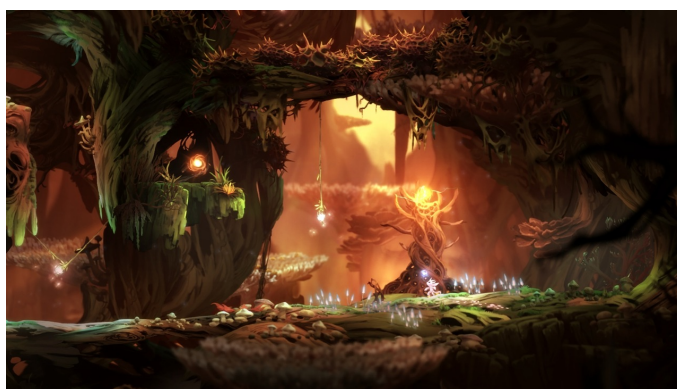
Visually, Ori and The Blind forest is a feast to your eyes with its sumptuous environments and the way light is diffused and layered around the world. It truly is a stunning game.



For all its good things, though, Ori and The Blind Forest can be unforgivingly frustrating at times. It's not uncommon to replay entire sequences time and time again because you mistimed a crucial jump while trying to avoid a row of spikes or a prickly bramble bush. At times, I was close to giving up I'd died so often on the same section, be warned: There are some yell-at-the-TV-in-a-sweary-voice-and-throw-the-

controller-across-the-room moments! The game's early easy difficulty belies how difficult things will get later on, especially when you have to chain together jumping and bounding in quick succession to avoid deadly lasers or other dangers.

Part of the frustration I had with having to replay the game's most difficult sections has a lot to do with game's save system, which lets you save anywhere you like provided you have enough save orbs. The orbs are plentiful enough around the world but still, it's a minor frustration.



As gorgeous as it looks, Ori and The Blind Forest's difficulty spikes mean it'll be the sort of game that many people will play for a bit then when things get really, really tough – prompting them to start spouting expletives at the TV and threatening to do harmful things to their controller – then put it down and not come back to it.

And that would be a shame because Ori and The Blind Forest is a hauntingly beautiful game worth playing and one that harks back to the platformers of old when games expected you to work for your rewards.

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Life is Strange, a coming-of-age tale with a unique twist?

By Gerard Campbell

@gamejunkieNZ

In recent times, Telltale Games has emerged as the king of episodic content – that special breed of game where the content is released bit by bit over a period of months.

Telltale has proved that episodic content based on The Walking Dead, A Wolf Among Us and more recently Game of Thrones is a hit with gamers keen to play their games in more manageable chunks.

Other developers are starting to jump on board the episodic content train and that can only be a good thing. Developers like France's Dontnod, which has created Life is Strange (SquareEnix, various formats), a five-part episodic content game that reveals the story every six weeks or so.



The main character in the game is Max Caulfield, a young teenager who after five years living in Seattle has returned to Arcadia Bay, Oregon, the small seaside town she grew up in. As well as having to solve the mystery of a missing young woman also has to deal with the fact that she can rewind time.

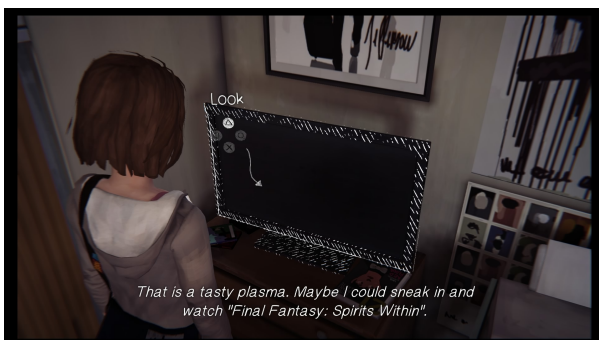
Oh, and she's also having visions of a menacing storm that is set to destroy the town sometime in the future.



Rewinding time was something that Dontnod explored in its fun (but flawed) game Remember Me, which had a protagonist who could get into people's heads and rewind specific memories, altering events. I liked Remember Me, though many people didn't, but I think part of the reason was the ability to alter memories, changing what happens.

Using the rewind ability to change events in Life is Strange that have already been happening, thereby changing the future, is at the forefront of Life is Strange and it's a mechanic that DontNod has integrated well into the story.

The time rewind ability means that Max can re-play situations and bring a better outcome or more positive result, such as giving the right question to an answer so she can leave class early to prevent a disastrous event or give herself enough time to avoid a rolling pile of logs during a storm. And if you're not happy with what's happened – the game will often question whether you've made the right choice – you can just rewind and do something else.



While the story shows promise in its premis and I was intrigued enough to finish the first episode, it just has a few rough edges that will hopefully be ironed out in future episodes.

Firstly, the dialogue is cringeworthy at times. I mean seriously cringeworthy. Someone needs to tell the writers that teenagers don't use the word "hella" all that often. At least not the ones I know. Or say things like "Are you cereal?" instead of "Are you serious?". It's as if the adult writers wrote what they thought teenagers talked like.



The first episode is also quite pedestrian, too, with the first few moments guiding Max through a high school hallway and in a photography class, or later parts having to search for a pen drive in a dormitory, but I'm OK with that: It's setting the scene with what is to come so it's understandable that time will be spent introducing key characters and future events.

The game promises that decisions you make in one situation could impact on future situations so it'll be interesting to see whether this really happens or it's just hype to draw the player in.

Life is Strange will live or die on how well Dontnod can deliver the story using an interesting gameplay mechanic. If done right, Life is Strange could be a compelling coming-of-age tale with a unique twist. If handled badly, it could just become another cliché-riddled teenage drama that gamers will

soon forget. Life is Strange has four more episodes to convince us it's the former.



What are your thoughts on episodic content games where the game is broken up into more easily digestible chunks and released in instalments? Are you all for them or do you hate them with a passion? Leave your thoughts below.

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The Order 1886, a game that impresses and frustrates in equal measure.

By Gerard Campbell

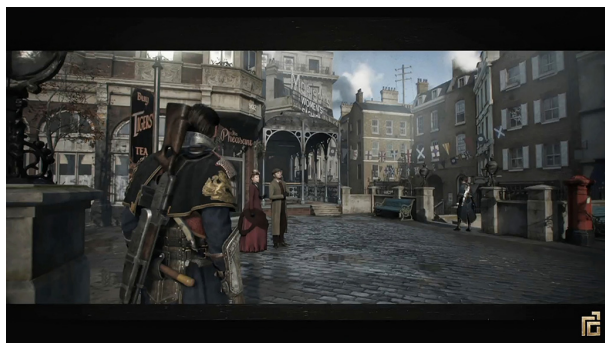
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The Order 1886 is the poster child for the PlayStation 4.

It's the game that you want to show off just how powerful Sony's current console is and the one to show your mates on your new 50-inch OLED TV.

The Order 1886 is also a game that impresses and frustrates in equal measure.

Set in London during a steam punk inspired era, The Order 1886 modernises the legend of King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table, giving players control of Sir Grayson Galahad, a senior Knight having to uncover a lycan (werewolf) threat that has pervaded London's politics.



The Order 1886 is a tightly scripted and cinematic game that is, without a doubt, the best looking game on the PlayStation 4. It has a story that I really got into and some truly amazing weapons – the M86 thermite rifle that fires a flammable powder into the air that can then be ignited by a grenade was a personal favourite – and the attention to detail is incredible.

Developer Ready At Dawn have lavished The Order with some amazing visuals, with as much love applied to the game's character models as to its streets and environments. It's a sumptuous smorgasbord of graphical goodness. The visuals are also backed up by some of the best voice work I've heard in a game for a long time and a rousing orchestral score that suits the game perfectly.

Before the game was released, though, much was made of a YouTuber who posted a play through of the game claiming it could be completed in 5 hours or so. The Order 1886 has problems but length isn't one of them.



I'm guessing it took me around 8 hours or so and I don't have a problem with its length. It actually felt nice to be playing a game for a change that was focused on the narrative and not distracted by side missions and fetch quests.

One of the problems I had with the game was the over reliance on Quick Time Events, a design feature that isn't new to games and one I don't have a problem with, provided they're used sparingly. The Order 1886 is littered with QTEs from start to finish, even using them to pull levers or swing Galahad across a rooftop.



Transitions from cut scene to in-game are seamless but the game wrestles control from the player too many times in an effort to reinforce the movie-like experience. There were times when I was guiding Galahad towards his objective – one time I was guiding Galahad through a poorly lit hospital in Whitechapel – when suddenly a cut scene kicked in. It just broke the immersion for me.

The combat is satisfying enough, thanks to some great weapons, but I lost count how many times I put down the controller just to watch another cut scene.

But perhaps what is most galling is that the game's two main boss battles are QTEs where success is dependent on moving the right control stick in the right direction to avoid the werewolf's powerful attacks then slashing him with your knife.

A lot of the time I felt I was watching rather than participating in The Order 1886.

And I'd be lying if I said I wasn't frustrated at times playing The Order 1886, especially during a stealth section near the end of the game where cocking up the QTE button press to stealth kill patrolling guards results in an instakill. Eventually, I decided to forgo the stealthy knife kills and took down guards with my crossbow. It proved less frustrating.



Look, The Order 1886 isn't a bad game but it's an average game that relies on its sumptuous visuals too much and over does the Quick Time Events at the expense of game play. In its quest to create a movie-like experience the game's makers have lost sight of what gamers really want: compelling game play.

I'd suggest if you want to play The Order 1886 first try and borrow it from a friend or see if you can rent it from somewhere. With no replayability, \$120 is a lot to pay.

Let's hope the sequel – and I'm sure a sequel has already been green lit by Sony and besides, the game drops enough hints that there will be a sequel – focuses more on the game play and less on the cinematics, despite how gorgeous The Order 1886 is.

Evolve, a game of cat and mouse.

Reviewer: Gerard Campbell

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If the game Evolve has taught me anything, it's that I'd make a rubbish monster.

Coming from the same studio that brought last-generation's brilliant co-op game Left4Dead, Evolve is a multiplayer game with a ratio of 4:1. The twist: the fifth player is a monster that must evolve and kill four human hunters before they kill it.

The narrative is flimsy – the hunters must defeat the monster that is causing trouble for planetary colonists – but the twist is a nice change for the same old, same old MP modes.

After each player has been assigned a role – support, medic, assault, trapper, or monster – the hunters free fall to the planet's surface, tasked with scouring the map environment for a monster.

Think of Evolve as a game of cat and mouse, except in this case the mouse is a pretty big and ugly monster, and each human character has a specific role to play in catching the monster (Oh, and the planet has vegetation and predator animals that also want to eat you for lunch!)



The assault role, for example, is charged with laying down hurt on the monster, wearing down its armour and health, while the trapper is responsible for tracking down the monster and keeping it confined so it can be defeated. The game ends when one of two things happens: The hunters defeat the monster or the monster defeats the hunters. It's that simple.

In my first game I was tasked with being the monster (you can indicate to the game what your preferred role is but you won't necessarily be assigned that role), the entry level Goliath (as the game progresses you can unlock the wraith and the kraken). Key to success for the monster is to evolve to Stage 3 as quickly as possible so you have to feed on unsuspecting indigenous wildlife that will speed up the process. All was going according to plan, it seemed.

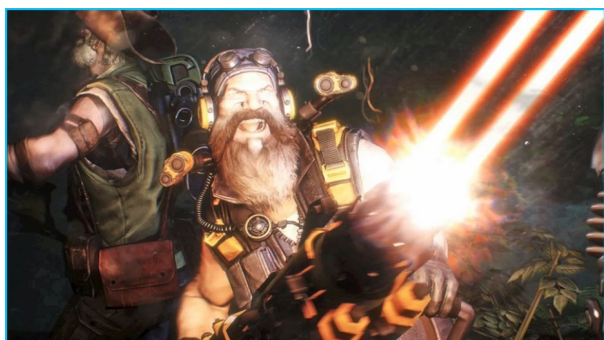
Sadly, I underestimated how quickly I should have moved about the map, eating indigenous wildlife- behaving monster-like, and how well the group of hunters worked together. Before I knew it, they were on me, cornering me in a tight ravine, unable to go anywhere thanks to the impenetrable barrier the trapper had set.



I threw rocks at the hunters, swiped at them with my claws and sprayed them with my fire breath, but it wasn't enough. My health was depleting fast and the writing was on the wall: I was going to die here – and quickly! And die I did, before I'd even evolved to Stage 2. Frankly, it was a pretty poor start to my time with Evolve.

I fared better in the next two games, which saw me play support class Hank, a bearded, cigar-chewing brute of a man, and working together, we soon found the monster, herded him to where we wanted and defeated him. I quickly realised that Evolve is the sort of game where teamwork is paramount to success.

Yes, you have a robot dog called Daisy that handily points in what direction the monster might be and clues like glowing footprints and flocks of birds circling the discarded carcasses of monster food give strong clues, but if you don't work as a team then it'll end in bloodshed. Probably yours if you're playing as a hunter.



I can't stress enough how important it is for players to work as a unit, and if you can find the monster quickly then the chances of defeating it are much more likely.

Evolve does have a single player component but it's essential the MP component but with bots, so MP is the best way to play it but be prepared to wait as it took time to find games. I'm not sure whether that's because not many people are playing Evolve or it's a server side problem, but sometimes I waited several minutes for a game to start. After waiting 15 minutes

for one game to find four other players, I gave up.

Another frustration is that much of Evolve's content (weapons, character skins and perks) are initially locked and it takes a lot of groundwork to unlock them. I know locked DLC is becoming more common in today's business model but Evolve's seem unnecessarily harsh.

At its heart, though, Evolve is a game of seek and find, which means there will be lots of crisscrossing the game map trying to find the monster (or the hunters if you're playing the monster). So be ready for matches to take time and be prepared for lots of footwork (and jet pack work as hunters are equipped with jet packs). If you're a player who likes their MP matches over in a few minutes then Evolve isn't the game for you.

After playing a lot of Evolve I've decided that it's a game that lives or dies on how well the four hunters work together. Success at defeating the monster is paramount on how well the hunters work as a team. But if the four humans playing the hunters act independently and do their own thing then the situation quickly gets out of hand, the monster gains the upper hand and it's all over Rover.



Look, Evolve is a game that does some things well, and when you're in the middle of a tense standoff with a Stage 3 Goliath in a tight ravine, engaged in a chaotic battle it's exhilarating stuff, but sadly, Evolve's "Wow" moments don't come often enough and after a while things do become repetitive – but that could be said of any game after you've

played it for a while.

Evolve does a good job in trying something different with the standard multiplayer formula and the four vs one idea is a breath of fresh air but the big question is: Is that point of difference enough for gamers to want to still be playing the game in a few months time?

I'm not so sure it is.