

# 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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## The Samsung Galaxy S6, cunningly curvaceous.

By Niall McCarthy

With just a matter of weeks before its expected launch in New

Zealand, the new Samsung Galaxy S6 comes with a few surprises. The battery is no longer replaceable, there's two versions to choose from- the S6/S6 Edge and Samsung have announced an Apple Pay competitor named *\*drum roll please\**.. Samsung Pay!

Unveiling their latest addition at a press conference at the Mobile World Congress in Spain, eagerly awaiting Samsungites got a nice surprise. Unlike Apple's iPhone 6, Samsung have released two almost identical versions of the S6. The S6 Edge differs due to its curved-screen, yes curved! The aesthetics don't stop there, the S6 comes with a new metal casing design unlike its predecessors plastic exterior. Looks like Samsung have listened to their customers.

Both versions run on Android 5.0 Lollipop with a 5.1-inch Quad HD Super AMOLED high-resolution 2560×1440 with 577ppi. Although the S6 Edge has a curved screen, it doesn't boast a larger display. The benefit however is its 5.9 grams lighter than the S6. From what I see, it's really personal preference. Other features include updated fingerprint scanner, built-in wireless charging support and compatibility with a new version of the Gear VR virtual reality headset. Colours to come as standard; White Pearl, Black Sapphire, Gold Platinum, Blue Topaz and Green Emerald.

Never mind the wrapping, it's what's on the inside that counts! The specs; 16MP camera with optical stabilisation, LED flash, 4K video and 5MP front facing camera for even clearer selfies! The storage options include 32GB, 64GB and 128GB and 3GB of RAM. Battery specs are 2550 mAh and S6 Edge 2600 mAh which is smaller than the predecessors S5 which boasted a 2800 mAh battery. In saying this, one benefit for those who purchase the wireless charging station, can reap the benefits of its built-in wireless charging capabilities. A 4 hour standard battery life from just 10 minutes on charge.

During the conference held in Barcelona, Samsung announced

that Samsung Pay will work with almost 30 million merchants with NFC compatible registers plus Magnetic Secure Transmission technology. This is considerably more than Apple Pay's present 700,000 merchants. Sadly Samsung have said that Samsung Pay won't be available for Kiwi's this year. However, those of you on Spark can avail of this innovative technology through [Semble](#), an integrated mobile wallet technology in New Zealand.

Release date and prices will vary in New Zealand depending on your phone network however the Galaxy S6 is expected here in April. For more information and to pre-register click [here.](#)

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

By Gerard Campbell

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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.



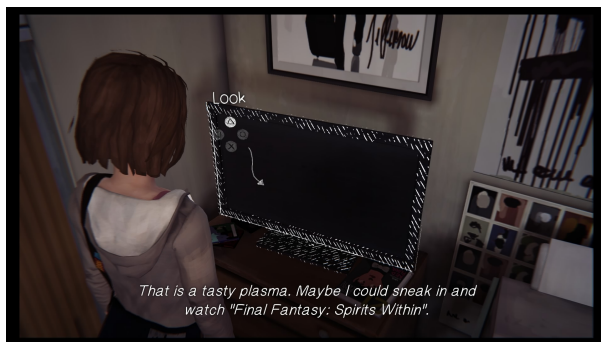
Rewinding time was something that Dontnod explored in its fun (but flawed) game Remember Me, which had a protagonist who could get into people's heads and rewind specific memories, altering events. I liked Remember Me, though many people didn't, but I think part of the reason was the ability to alter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

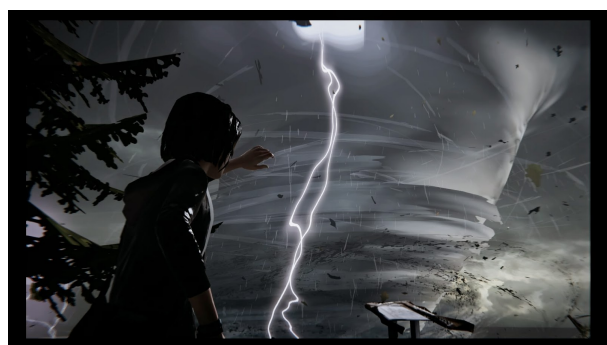
Firstly, the dialogue is cringeworthy at times. I mean seriously cringeworthy. Someone needs to tell the writers that teenagers don't use the word "hella" all that often. At least not the ones I know. Or say things like "Are you cereal?" instead of "Are you serious?". It's as if the adult writers wrote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

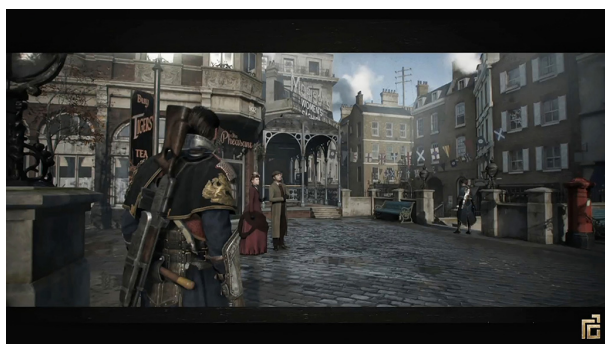
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The Order 1886 is the poster child for the PlayStation 4.

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.

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