

Crackdown guru is no ordinary Joe

MICROSOFT legend Joseph Staten has an epic list of titles on his CV — Halo, Destiny, ReCore and now Crackdown 3.

The senior creative director told STUART CULLEN how the challenge was to constantly push the boundaries.

He said: "Crackdown 3 takes all the elements that made the first games special and brings them to new heights, literally."

In Crackdown 3, players will explore a city that's twice as big and twice as tall — and filled with tons of different enemies, from armoured troopers

to robotic hordes to towering mechs.

"The campaign has lots of other activities, including jumping and climbing to collect fan-favourite Agility Orbs! And then we have Wrecking Zone, our explosive multiplayer mode that utilises Azure cloud in a totally new way to enable fully destructible battle arenas."

The series started life with Dundee-based Realtime Worlds in 2007 and Joseph reckons they have kept some of the Scottish DNA. He said: "Franchise creator Dave Jones served as the original thought leader for Wrecking Zone. Based on his vision, we've brought



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Cracks show in Agency reheats

"DEVELOPMENT hell" are two words all gamers fear — and the past is littered with titles that could have been contenders but never saw the light of day.

But, once in a while, a game gets through the hard times — and Crackdown 3 is the latest to break the "development hell" chains.

It's no secret the game has been through the mill. Some even questioned whether it would make it, and why the multiplayer side was split from the main campaign at launch.

But kudos to UK-based Sumo Digital for pulling it out. Well, sort of...

Disclaimer alert: as yet the multiplayer powered by Microsoft Azure cloud tech is still not available. It is still being tested so this is all about the campaign.

The plot has moved on ten years from Crackdown 2. A terrorist attack kills power

Crackdown 3 Xbox and PC £46.99

across the globe so the Agency sends a squad of their best agents, led by Hollywood star Terry Crews, to New Providence which is controlled by the mysterious Terra Nova.

You are blown up, found, cloned and sent back. There is no real mission structure other than beat up the bad guys, so the rest is up to you. The map is split into areas controlled by different enemies, who report to their boss who in turn reports to the head of Terra Nova. You need to bring them all down.

The gameplay is very similar to Crackdown 2 — you earn orbs to buff your powers and grow your skills. You shoot, drive and bash your way through side missions to get access to new toys

like weapons and vehicles. That said, the driving side feels a bit redundant because you can jump up buildings and travel around the map through spawn points you unlock. And that sums it all up — it has not really moved on from the last game. This is Crackdown Reheated.

It is neat having a pool of agents to pick from but you never hear them talk. That is a shame because there is a Glaswegian. That could have been fun.

The graphics are cool and full of colour, but the highlight is world at night as the city is bathed in a neon glow. The soundtrack is OK and Michael McConnohie returns as the Agency voice while Crews is wonderfully over the top. Fans will love it but, ultimately, it is a forgettable journey.

STUART CULLEN



Exodus is a world away from the past

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



THE Metro series made its name in the maze of Moscow tunnels after a nuclear war, but 4A Games executive producer Jon Bloch has warned fans that Exodus will be... a BLOCH-BUSTER.

In a chat with STUART CULLEN, Jon insisted: "The Redux games were a sort of remaster of Metro 2033 and Metro Last Light — Exodus is a move to a more open sandbox style of gameplay and levels."

"The Metro titles had been very linear, story-driven tales where we set the pace and craft the experience the way we want the player to play it. In Exodus we have let the player set their own pace in places which gives them more opportunity to explore the world."

Jon admits they have kept true to the lore and the best-selling book, but tried to make it easy for newcomers to join the adventure. He added: "There will be information about the past about what sort of experience they are about to begin. That can be a refresher for people who have played before."

The 4A Games team have drafted in series author Dmitry Glukhovsky to help with the tale. Jon said: "There is the main story of Artyom and the group of Spartans, but there is also what has happened in the world over the 20-odd years since everything blew up. There has been a lot of detail put into crafting the environments to make interesting experiences."

The game has already been compared by some to classic PC title S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow Of Chernobyl. Jon admits there is a flavour, but it is definitely a Metro game. He added: "There are still those classic Metro moments when the sense of danger is around every corner. There is a term I like to use — we like to create a level of managed anxiety so they always think 'I need more resources' or 'I need to keep an eye on my ammo count.'"

A big part of any Metro game is the guns that you bolt together, and Jon feels they have gone the extra mile. He said: "The options have been carefully crafted to fit the weapon you want to mod. There are some that can be used on more than one weapon but most core aspects of the mods are bespoke."

"Some of the team have mechanical engineering degrees and the like, so they spent a lot of time to make sure the weapons are as real as can be."

"For example, at last year's E3 we showed off the crossbow which fires explosive arrows. There was a big debate on the team about the arrow tips — the artist wanted to make it bigger so you can see it's an explosive, but the guy working on the crossbow didn't think it would fit through the barrel. They would have to make it bigger to make it work, but that threw out another bit of the crossbow."

"They were really getting into the mechanics of how a crossbow works. That gives you an idea of the level of detail that has gone into the game."

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Tunnel vision's gone



THE Metro series has built a strong fanbase over the years with its tales of survival in the Moscow subway tunnels.

But 4A Games have seen the light — literally. The new game brings you above ground.

The scene is set in 2036 — two years after the events in Last Light. Artyom is back on a post-apocalyptic Earth devastated by a nuclear war, but searching for life beyond Moscow.

However, he discovers more than he expected. He flees the city with his wife Anna and a group of Spartan Rangers and they try to find the perfect spot to start a new life.

They travel in a train called the Aurora which serves as a hub on each stop but also lets the game breathe because you can visit locations never seen before in a Metro game.

Each stop along the way gives you a healthy-sized area to explore with loot and resources to find as well as pockets of humanity.

You can adopt an all-guns-blazing approach to bandit camps or sneak around picking enemies off... or even blend the two tactics together.

The biggest change is that you no longer have bullets as the in-game currency. That led to a shoot-or-don't-shoot dilemma. Now, there is a workbench system where scrap is vital.

You can add new bits to your weapons as you move around, which is a neat move because it allows you to adapt your assaults on enemy towers. You can snipe any guards, then change the 4x scope to a red dot sight as you close in.

Master the kit-swap and you'll soon find which guns best suit the conflicts you're facing. You also need to time your moves. Move around during the day and you WILL meet hordes of human enemies. Venture out at night and the creatures WILL be out to play.

You'll fight a mix of terrors from mutated wolves, dogs, huge prawn-like things and bears... and that's before

Metro: Exodus Xbox, PS4 and PC £49.99

you get to what was once a human. Kudos to 4A Games for taking the leap of faith and opening the world up. The anxiety and tension is still strong and there are some real "jump" scares along the way.

The game looks stunning — from the reflections on your gas mask glass to the light and atmosphere of the underground sections. The soundtrack works hard but you feel they could have done more with it and the voice acting is a mix of good and not-so-good with a truckload of questionable Russian accents.

And for a first-person shooter, the actual firing is a bit hit and miss. It feels rough around the edges and is too stiff for its own good.

We opted to make tea and have a biscuit to pass the time.

But none of that hides the fact that Metro Exodus takes what was great about the series and refines it. It adds new elements. It may not satisfy the run-and-gun fans, but if you take your time then there is a great adventure waiting for you.

STUART CULLEN



ASSASSIN'S Creed 3 Remastered will be out on March 29 on Xbox One, PS4 and the PC. It looks to have had the full treatment, so expect a shinier version of the 2012 original which saw the series move into North America. To sweeten the deal Ubisoft is including a healthy amount of bonus content — the spin-off title, Liberation, and all single-player DLC including the King Washington storyline which is worth playing on its own. Extra news: if you picked up the Assassin's Creed Odyssey season pass you'll also get the Remaster for free. However, it will still be sold separately.

DIRT Rally 2.0 is coming to the Oculus Rift. Codemasters revealed it should be available later this year but not in time for the launch. No word yet on any PSVR appearance.

HYPE for the Mortal Kombat 11 is building nicely, with fight fans chomping at the bit for more juicy details like who has made the roster. Well, developers NetherRealm have revealed the return of the fans' favourite masked swordsman, Kabal, and the insectoid D'Vorah. Kabal first fought in the series in Mortal Kombat 3 way back in 1995. He was actually intended to be one of the good guys. The revelation came with a trailer of him in action, though it is a bit gruesome. D'Vorah last appeared in 2015's Mortal Kombat X. She was unveiled during last week's Inside Xbox livestream. Unlike Kaban, NetherRealm have yet to show her in action in the new game. We're not sure fans will be satisfied yet. They'll want more.

IT'S gong time. Valve's 2018 Steam Awards saw players vote for their top games in eight categories. Playrunknow's Battlegrounds took Game of the Year while Polish firm CD Projekt Red bagged Best Developer and Best Environment for The Witcher 3. There were also Best Alternate History and Better With Friends categories. Assassin's Creed Odyssey took the former, with Rainbow Six Siege taking the latter. Overall, it was a fairly low-key affair, but well done to the winners.

TOP 5 GAMES THIS WEEK: 1 Red Dead Redemption 2, 2 FIFA 19, 3 Kingdom Hearts III, 4 Resident Evil 2, 5 Call Of Duty: Black Ops 4. BIZARRE story time: Ubisoft have teamed up with a group of footballers to help promote Tom Clancy's The Division 2. But it's not an international star or even a Premier League player, they have signed up some EFL League 2 acres — like Swindon Town's Matt Taylor, Kieran O'Hara of Macclesfield Town and Yeovil star Omar Sowunmi — as game ambassadors. Adam Merrett, senior PR manager at Ubisoft, said: "We're thrilled to have signed up the very best players in their own division as ambassadors for the release of Tom Clancy's The Division 2. Watch out for more to come on unique signings." The real PR coup is signing Division 2 football players to promote the Division 2 game.

PRIMES WHO: Ollie Kitchen (vocals/bass), Sarah Monteith-Skelton (guitar/vocals), Reece Ryan (drums/vocals). WHERE: Falkirk. FOR FANS OF: Foo Fighters, Feeder, Kings Of Leon. JIM SAYS: If you want to plug into the vibrant Glasgow and Edinburgh music scenes, Falkirk's proximity to both looks like a pretty good base. Sometimes acts from smaller towns are tempted to say they are from a bigger city. Perhaps they think it gives them more kudos. There's something to be said about building things up in your local scene. Who knows, you might be the ones to put your small town on the map. It seems to be working for Primes. It's the first step to winning wider acclaim as they tout their exciting brand of pop-tinged alt rock. Frontman Ollie said: "Falkirk has its peaks and troughs. There's some fantastic music coming out of the town and a lot of hardworking people within the scene. The Write Angle and Alt Music in Falkirk hold live events and blog about the local scene. There isn't a whole lot of venues for music but the ones that are there are perfect. They don't have huge capacities, but it creates an amazing atmosphere and it allows a great interaction with our fans." Ollie admits they have been excluded from some Edinburgh and Glasgow opportunities, probably because promoters expect a local act to pull a bigger crowd, but often bands from elsewhere can attract a large travelling support. Primes sold out their first King Tut's gig in Glasgow, just a few months after they got together. After five singles their reputation continues to grow. Their latest, Don't Forget Your Memories, actually dates back to when they were first finding their feet as a band after forming in 2017. Ollie said: "We actually started writing it on the day we first got together! We were friends of friends and had known each other through the local scene. I was in another band at the time and Sarah was a solo acoustic artist and was looking to form a band. "We were on a night out and she asked if I'd want to be in her band playing bass and I decided to see what would happen. Reece was on board already as the drummer, and as soon as we started jamming we knew it was working. They are part of an impressive bill at Party At The Palace in Linlithgow on August 10-11 which includes The Charlatans, Deacon Blue, Wet Wet Wet, Fun Lovin' Criminals and KT Tunstall. Linlithgow may not be far from Falkirk, but Primes are also scheduled to play a festival even closer to home. The inaugural Vibration Festival takes place on May 25 at Caledonian Park in Falkirk with Feeder, The Coral and Alabama 3 joined by a host of emerging Scottish acts. Primes have plenty of gigs before then, including Broadcast in Glasgow on Friday and a headline show at Behind The Wall in Falkirk on March 2. MORE: facebook.com/primesbandofficial Jim presents a weekly showcase of New Music on Amazing Radio on Sundays 2-4pm. amazingradio.com jimgellatly.com Watch a video of the band at: thescottishsun.co.uk