THE PHOTOMODE

ISSUE 32

COVER BY MSZOMBIE.VP

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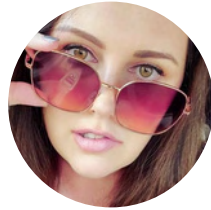
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OUR PAGE IS YOUR STAGE

We dedicate our pages to the Virtual Photography community.

We love the art form of Virtual Photography and believe inside you'll find the very best this community has to offer.

If you love one of the featured artists within the mag simply click their work and it will take you directly to their Twitter profile so you can show them some support.

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Want to be featured?

Tag us or use #ThePhotoMode

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VP MINIMALISM

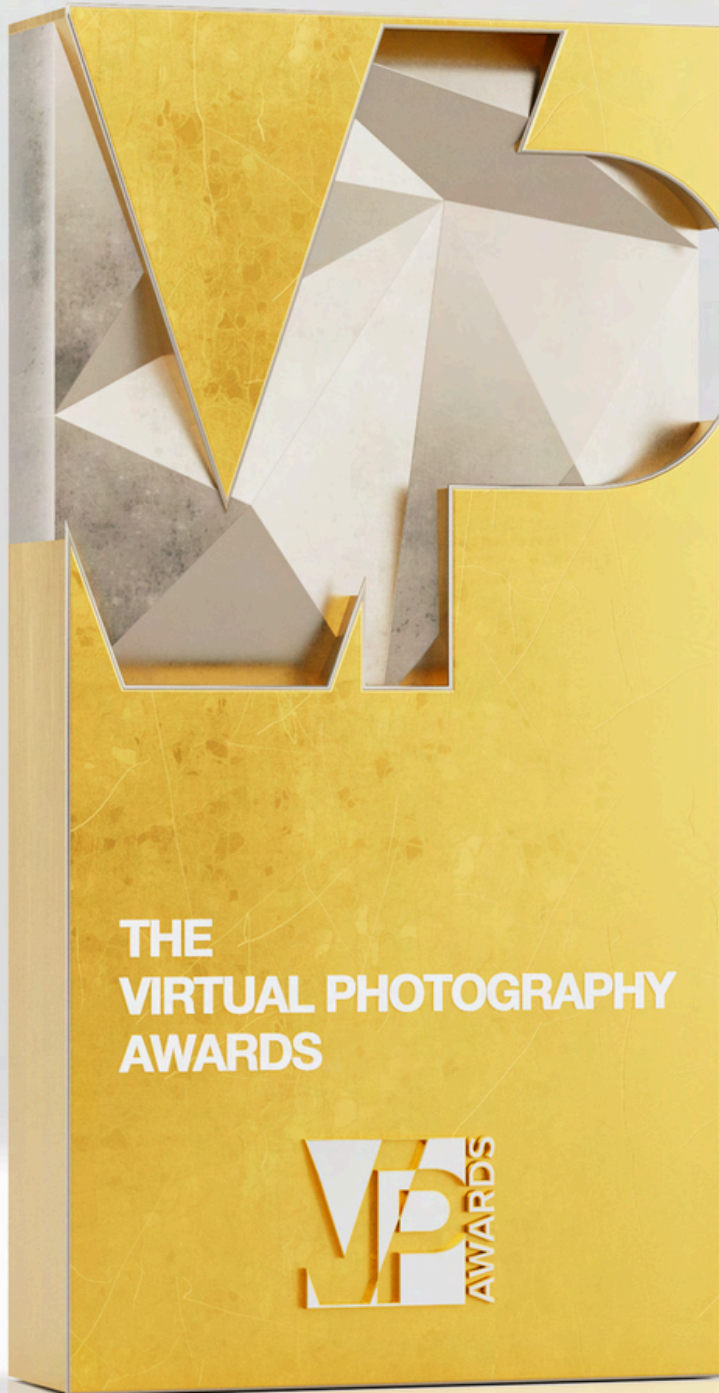VIRTUAL PHOTOGRAPHY
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THE
VIRTUAL PHOTOGRAPHY
AWARDS

THE
VIRTUAL PHOTOGRAPHY
AWARDS 2024

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Virtual Photographer of the Year Categories:

ENVIRONMENT CATEGORY

Broad interpretations of the varied and wonderful virtual worlds of video games. This category welcomes anything from traditional landscapes and nature to urban areas and fantasy worlds.

CREATIVE CATEGORY

An open category that allows more artistic creations. Make full use of third-party mods, more extensive edits, or imaginative digital artworks based on your in-game captures.

DETAIL CATEGORY

Whether close-up shots of in-game models, or things that are easily overlooked, use your eye for detail and capture the finer elements that make for a believable virtual world.

PORTRAIT CATEGORY

Shots that focus on a single or small group of characters as the subject, and that convey a sense of personality, emotion or other connection to the viewer.

ACTION CATEGORY

Anything from movement and combat to sports and racing, action shots should look to capture motion and excitement in a single frame.

COLLECTION CATEGORY

More than just a single image, this category is about a larger body of work. Get imaginative with a set of 2 or more images that share a common artistic theme, style, or vision. What that vision is, is up to you.

Industry Award Categories:

BEST LIGHTING

The game that offered the best lighting for virtual photography, including both natural in-game lighting and through photo mode options

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The studio or publisher that has given the best support to the virtual photography and capture art produced by their respective community

PHOTO MODE UX

The game that provides the best user experience for in-game photographers, including the photo mode user interface, general workflow, and useability of the available tools & options

MOST INNOVATIVE

The game that has brought the most innovative photo mode features, whether through new and inventive ideas or by pushing the possibilities of virtual photography & capture art to the next level

BEST SUBJECT

The character or in-game content that has provided the most compelling photographic subject of the year

BEST PHOTO MODE

The game that has delivered the best overall photo mode of the year, taking into account everything from camera function, creative features, and photographic opportunity

THE ONES WHO CAME BEFORE

VIRTUAL PHOTOGRAPHY COMMUNITY

The Ones Who Came Before VP Community is hosted by Aaron Young from The AC Partnership Program. Every week Aaron and his team, Turid, Renzo and Jack pick their favourite Assassin's Creed shots and showcases them on The Ones Who Came Before website as an article. The idea is to promote virtual photography and talented content creators within the community.

Aaron is a keen virtual photographer and loves to post his journey through Assassin's Creed on Twitter. Keep an eye on the site as more weekly articles are added. You can participate either through tagging your shots to #ACFirstCivVP or by joining the Community.

This issue will be sharing Aaron's top picks from the previous months. Be sure to join the community HERE, and to read all previous articles visit theoneswhocamebefore.com.

One of my favourite games to play in October is Assassin's Creed Valhalla, especially the Wrath of the Druids DLC. The mood and tone of that expansion perfectly lends itself to the spooky vibes. The hallucinations Eivor experiences such as in this creepy capture from Mel really added a new element to the game. The shadowy figure looks so ominous, while Eivor stands there with axe and flail in hand. I think his dark hair and tattoos add to that eerie feel. Everything kind of aligns in this shot to make it a worthy winner for our Halloween theme.

"FOR A HUNDRED YEARS THERE WAS CHAOS IN OUR LANDS."

Assassin's Creed Valhalla gives you the perfect platform to showcase those Norse inspired shots. Such as this one which looks like its straight out of the movies. Lauren has really brought the drama with this epically framed portrait of chaos. The flames encircling the gateway bring so much theatre, while the bodies hanging from the rafters show the brutality of the time. The shadows serve the shot well by emphasizing the light at the end of the tunnel. Eivor has that hero pose as she walks away from another triumph over the order. The foggy battle ensuing in the distance shows that this fight might not yet be done. Congratulations on capture of the theme.

"I HAVE FACED MY PAST. MY PAIN. EMBRACED IT".

If you think back to the release of Assassin's Creed Mirage there was that standout image of Basim surrounded by the red smoke. For me this shot gives off the same vibes thanks to the gorgeous mix of light, fog and shadows. I adore how well the colours work creating an almost coffee glass approach. That warm orange hue is delightful, and Basim's stance is so good. Basim appears to be rising from the darkness mirroring the split personality he portrays in the story. The shadows can often betray you but the one who embraces them will be rewarded. I really hope this isn't the last we see of this complex character.

In some ways it is the perfect theme for the minimal queen. When Malin won the code for Assassin's Creed Mirage, I knew we would be in for some different and distinctive captures. This theme really breaks away from the standard Assassin's Creed shot and delves deeper into the finer details. Malin's beautiful photo mixes vibrant flowers against some soft calming negative space. I just can't get enough of the colours in this shot. What I love about it though is the fact you could not tell which game this is from. A worthy winner for the peaceful theme.

I cannot claim to be an expert at minimal photography, but Malin has taught me a thing or two over the years. I find it quite fascinating how well Assassin's Creed virtual photography fits with the minimalistic approach. WonDerNoob has produced many fantastic photos since joining our community, but I agree with Malin that this particular shot is special. I love the negative space and how this capture could so easily be used as a phone wallpaper. The forward role in a hood atop a Greek column could not really be anymore Assassins Creed. This shot just takes me back to all those breath-taking CGI trailers of Assassin's scrambling around on rooftops.
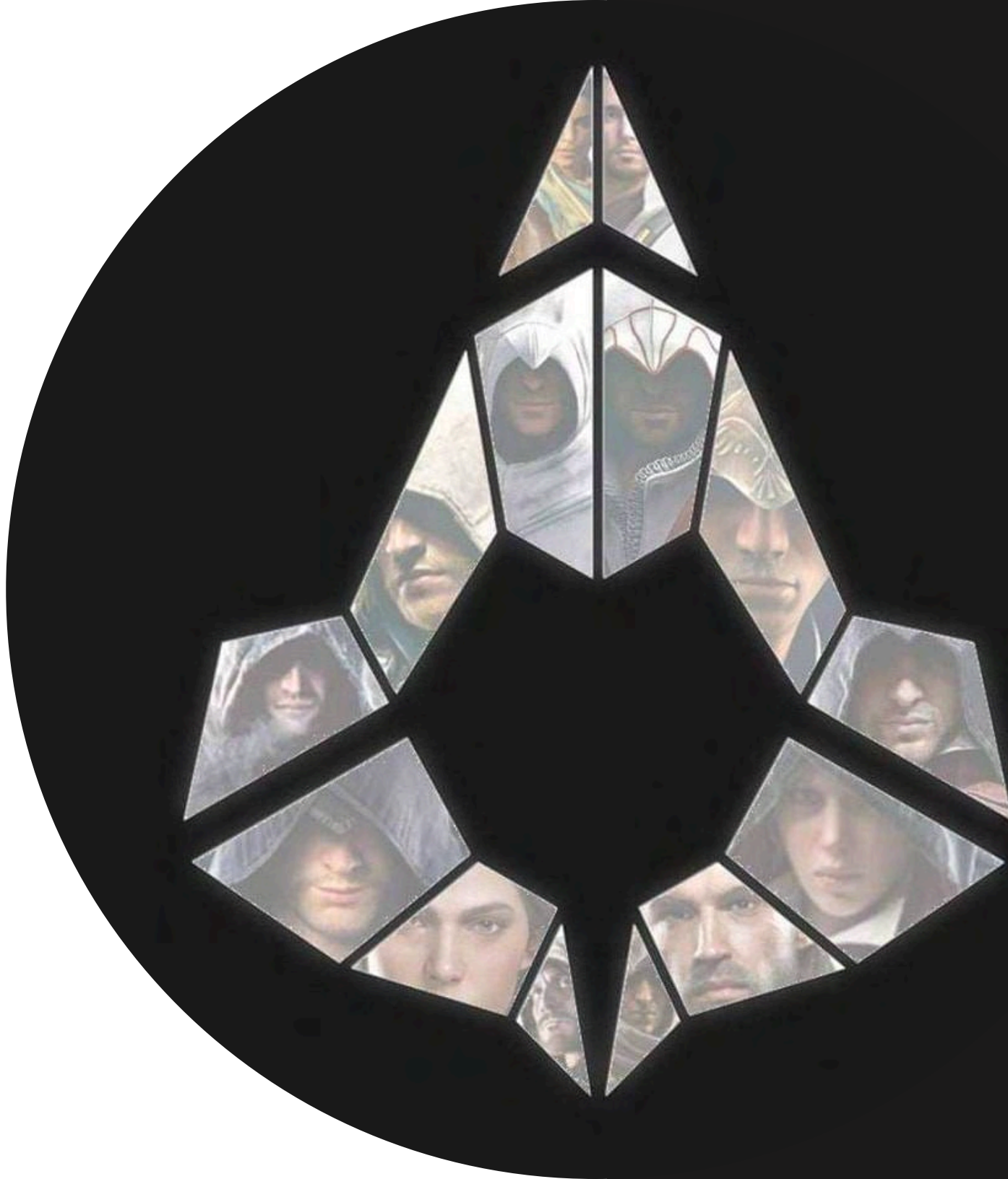
THE
ONES
WHO
CAME
BEFORE

TPM COMMUNITY FEATURES

CLLEAR

SILENT HILL 2 REMAKE SINNED_1

I'm Sinned_1, a passionate virtual photographer whose journey began with Cyberpunk 2077. What started as an immersive way to explore Night City—a place that captivated me from the start—soon grew into a deep passion that extended to many other games. Virtual photography became my escape, a lifeline during a time when reality felt overwhelming and difficult. I truly owe my continued existence to CD Projekt Red and the vibrant world they created. Without them, I may have never discovered this creative outlet that has become such an integral part of my life.

In my shot here from Konami's recent Silent Hill 2 Remake, I aimed to capture the visual contrast that I've always admired— the blend of an eerie atmosphere marked by death and decay, juxtaposed with light gently washing over it. Here, the light contrasts with the wilted, lifeless plant that becomes the central focus of the scene. The dead plant, with its dried leaves sprawling over the windowsill, symbolizes decay or abandonment, sharply set against the hope or warmth suggested by the filtered daylight. This combination tells a story of neglect, forgotten life, or perhaps a broader theme of desolation set against the promise of a world just beyond reach.

Music has been a huge inspiration for me in the two and a half years I've been doing virtual photography and I mainly focus on dark, moody and atmospheric landscapes that are usually in cool blues and greens. I had been wanting to strengthen warm and rich shots which led me to dig for more inspiration and I found the song Magic Feeling by Ødyzon. The warmth, reverb and soft textures led me to this super distant shot of silhouettes in front of a setting sun in Ghost of Tsushima.

AMICH_VP GHOST OF TSUSHIMA

GOD OF WAR RAGNOROK XAVIBM97

As videogames get prettier the easier it is to just lose yourself and immerse in these incredible worlds, so I got into Virtual Photography by trying to take pictures of certain beautiful moments that stuck into my mind while playing and show it to people to see if they can feel the same.

I don't know what to say about me, but I'm a person that loves movies, videogames, photography, all type of visual arts. When it comes to photos in videogames it's like all this stuff in my mind comes together and it feel like I'm making art from others forms that I think are beautiful. Sharing these and seeing what others are making is inspiring, I believe everybody needs to express everything that comes to mind artistically speaking. The developers that make worlds and stories to be explored by us are so inspiring. Art attracts art like love attracts love.

MADDOG7794   RISE OF THE RONIN

HORIZON FORBIDDEN WEST ESMEEELISABETHH

Hi! My name is Esmeé, I am 29 years old, living in the Netherlands with my 2 lovely cats.   My hobbies are creating Virtual Photography and figure skating! I am not really a writer but for something as fantastic as this, I like to write something.

I was so excited that a photo of me was asked to be included here, I am so honoured! The inspiration in this photo comes from the passing of my mother almost 2 months ago. She always said to me, know that I am watching over you and when you look up at the stars I will see you. Since the passing of my mother and the emotions that come with it, I have a lot of creative ideas and I can express my emotions very well in my VP, it helps a lot for my grieving process, so I am so happy that I have this amazing hobby. Also I am very fascinated by the stars and the moon in general, because of the spiritual meaning behind it.   I love to take night photos for my VP, especially in Horizon Forbidden West, the game is beautiful for that. I made the collage in Photoshop express with 3 small photos, when I was done with that, I went to Lightroom to edit the colours and details.

I've been a huge fan of Avalanche Studios since the original Just Cause so when it was revealed they were making a Mad Max game, I was already interested. When it originally came out, I didn't spend much time in photo mode but I've always felt it's a severely underrated game. It has some extremely satisfying car combat and it's even fun to just drive around the wastes.

This year I finally decided to play through the game and do a photoshoot and knew the storms in the game would make for great shots. With virtual photography, you can't be afraid to take some damage or put your character in dangerous situations. You never know what you'll be able to capture!

My name is Damon, I'm from the United Kingdom and currently studying towards my Animation & Games Art degree at University. Hobbies include photography, fitness, art, etc.

My virtual photography journey first started 2 and a half years ago with the launch of Horizon Forbidden West, the game opened up a whole new creative outlet for me to express myself in ways I didn't think were possible, and introduced me to this community. So Horizon Forbidden West holds a special place in my heart.

I took this shot on my PlayStation 5 and then used apps such as Lightroom & Photoshop express on my phone to adjust the lighting in certain areas alongside the contrast, saturation and shadows.

A favourite quote of mine is 'Failure is success in progress.' I try to remind myself of this now and again when I'm experiencing self doubt in life whether that's virtual photography related, goals I've set myself in my personal life etc.. and to motivate myself to keep trying until I succeed.

INTERNAL SOLACE HORIZON FORBIDDEN WEST
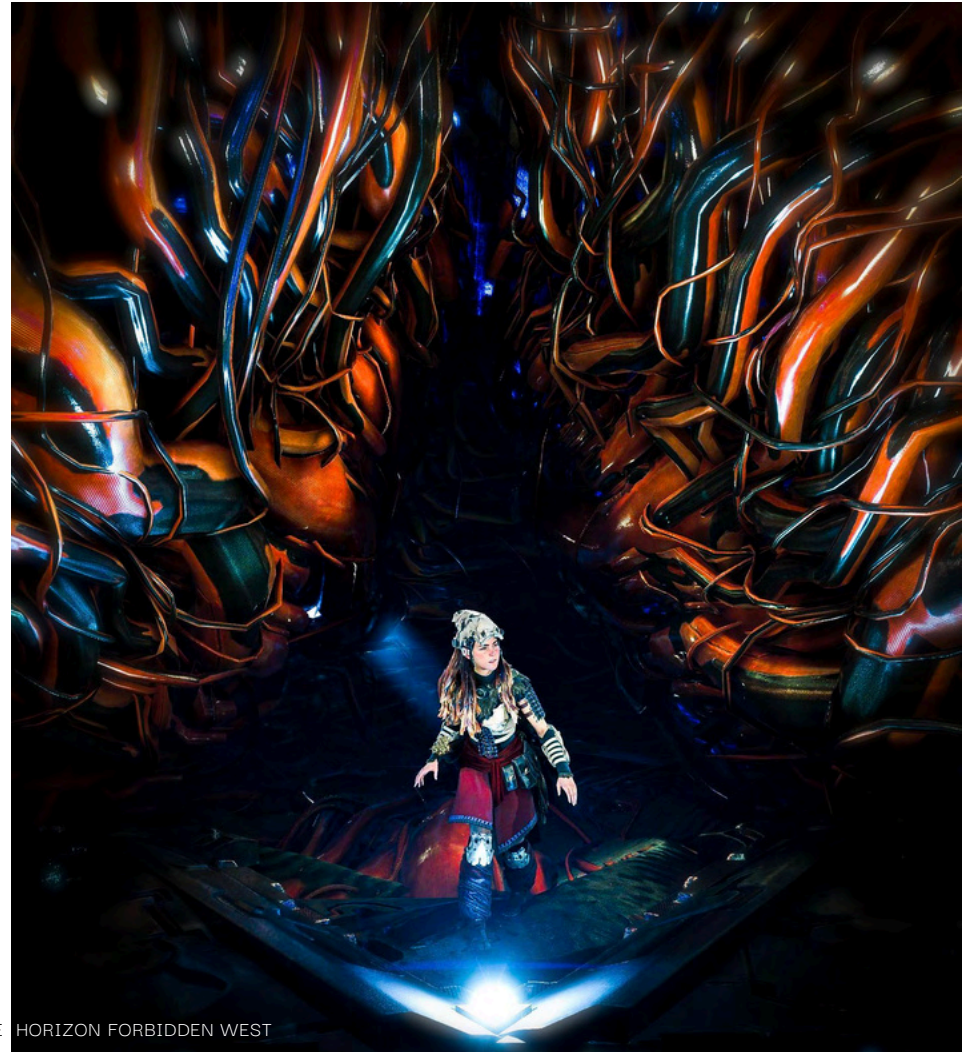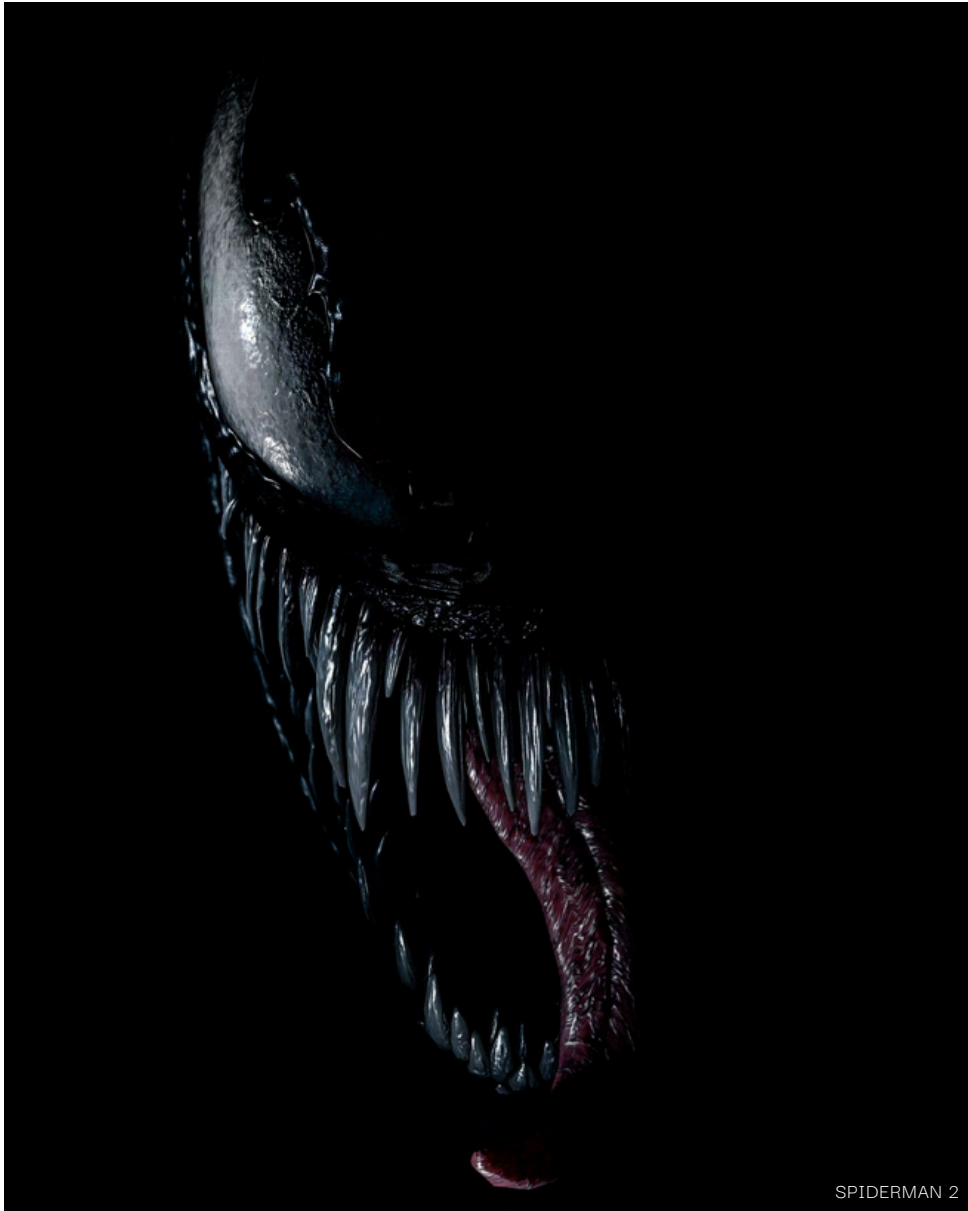
The fear of long words is called

Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia

Toussaint is one of my favourite places to visit in The Witcher 3.
It's such a contrast to much of the world. So vibrant and
absolutely perfect for virtual photography!

Sometimes in the waves of change we find our true direction.

Hi, my name is Jeltje (a rather typical old Dutch name)! 31 years old and born and raised in The Netherlands. I'm also better known as Mistress-light.

I think my love for VP began in 2015, with the release of The Witcher 3 Wild Hunt. But what totally got me hooked, were freecam mod tools. I am fascinated in discovering and capturing 'hidden' emotions of characters or viewpoints of landscapes, especially during cutscenes. I often feel kind of limited by default photo modes, and with a freecam, I can break free of those bounds, opening up so many shot opportunities. The possibilities are endless! For example, I'm a absolute fan of Frans Bouma's freecam tools.

And well, as for this shot? I think the Aliens movie, by James Cameron, was my first horror film that I saw as a child, and I was terrified! So, you can image what Alien Isolation still does to me. The Xenomorph is always there, lurking from the darkness, stalking its prey. I don't feel safe anywhere in this game. And that is the feeling I wanted to convey in this shot, the perfect organism just pops up out of the shadows and drags the player into a certain death.

Alien Isolation doesn't have a photo mode of it's own, so you can imagine how thrilled I was that there were freecam tools available. I still need to build up the courage to let the Alien appear, in order for me to take the shot. The sweaty hands I get!

MISTRESS2LIGHT   ALIEN ISOLATION

Virtual Photography can allow you to really appreciate the worlds which you're playing, the intricate detail, and the characters. This shot in particular I wanted to highlight Alan, the duality of half of his being captured in shade, and the other in solemn light. An artist lost within his own creation.

VP&ME WITH

MSZOMBIE.VP

In this issue we catch up with the talented MszombieVP. We touch upon what kickstarted her virtual photography journey, her creative process, highlights and more.

Hi MsZombie, could you tell us and everyone reading a bit about yourself and how you came to discover virtual photography?

Hello, my name is Jana, I'm from Germany and go by mszombie.vp online. I've always been mainly on Instagram, but on rare occasions dip into X or Bluesky.

My passion for gaming started with Skyrim, after coming across a Lets Play in 2012. Finding out about mods only further enhanced the enjoyment and possibilities in playing it. To this day it's one of my top 3 favourite games of all times.

It's also what got me into virtual photography, the oldest upload on my private account is actually my very first Skyrim dragon capture in 2014. After discovering the community on IG I created my own account in 2017 to regularly share some of my screenshots as well.

What's your favourite game to capture and why?

Probably Red Dead Redemption 2, it's such a comfort pick to capture and play. I feel like Rockstar really nailed the emotional connection between the player and Arthur Morgan to always make it feel familiar when you pick it back up. It's also very visually pleasing and includes a lot of nature, which i like.

Do you have any other hobbies outside of VP?

I enjoy walks through the woods and nearby open fields on a regular basis, and this year, I have reignited my love for books this year and cooking. I also visit the gym regularly, basically anything to encourage and maintain a balanced lifestyle to support my health, and last but not least, I love going out for coffee or food with friends.

Your style is so clean with amazing and often unique compositions and subjects, but what would you say is your favourite style to capture?

I appreciate that! It's definitely capturing details in games. I spend an almost ridiculous amount of game time hovering the camera over the floors, character clothes, background decorations and small objects. The higher the tiny details are, the more excited I am. I believe it's something that's often and easily overlooked by the average gamer, but developers put in so much work and effort, which I love to highlight and bring attention to.
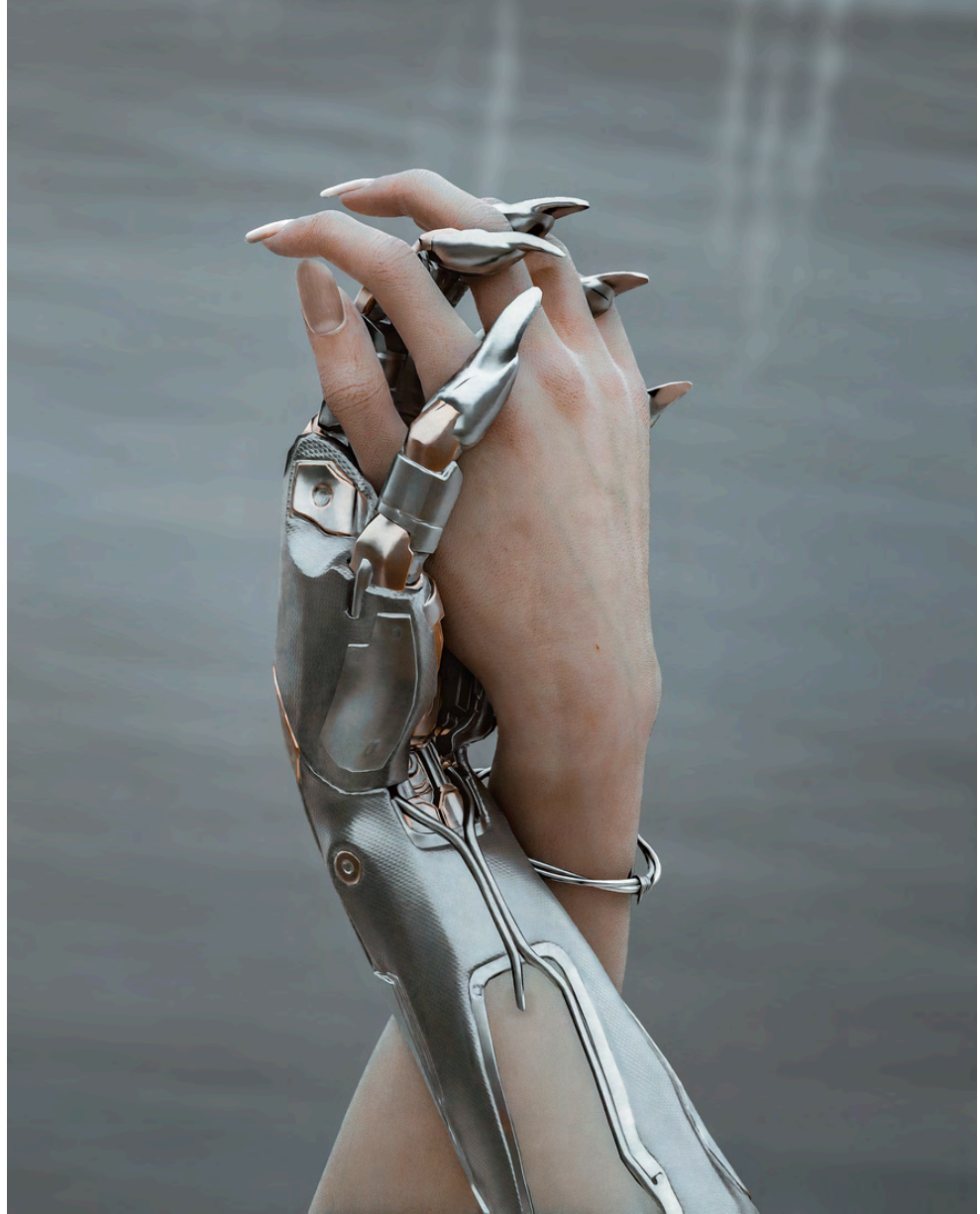
How do you stay so creative with your shots?

Seeing how virtual photography continues to evolve is the biggest factor for me. With each year we're given new possibilities and more creative freedom.

Coming from relying on single console command in Skyrim to enable a free cam, adjust the FOV, hide the HUD, stop the time, change the weather or to move a character. I remember having a little notebook with handwritten commands and codes just to set up a screenshot.

After that cheat-tables and hotkeys helped make things easier. Then some of the first photomodes came along and almost felt like a step backwards due to the limitations, but overall they got better (despite some of the newer ones still being poorly executed, sadly).

Now thanks to Otis_Inf, we've got proper camera tools that leave little to nothing left to be desired.

With each new bit of feature and innovation, there are new things to try and experiment with.
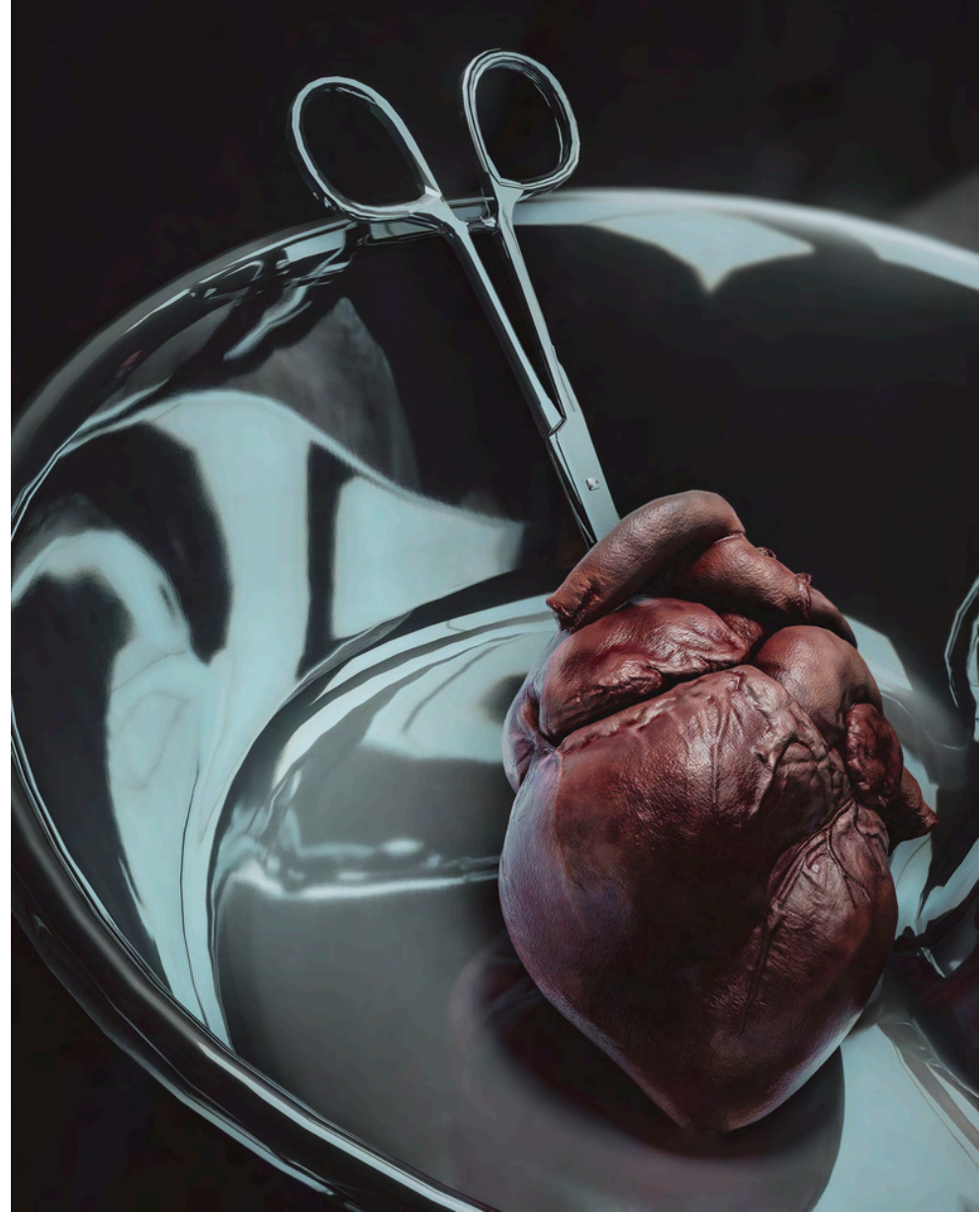
What's your favourite memory from your VP journey so far?

I don't think I have "one" specific memory, but rather the overall collection of moments with the people I've gotten to know throughout the years, thanks to VP. The community is one of my favourite parts about all of this. Finding others who share that (in a general sense, rather niche) hobby with you. Connecting with people from all corners of the world, learning about each others lives, and even building real friendships over all those years. The support and kindness within the community has always been something I cherished a lot.

Do you have any tips and tricks for those looing to start virtual photography that can really elevate their shots?

Learning about the basics of real life photography is a good start, because it also translates into in-game. Depending on which platform you're capturing on, its worthwhile to educate yourself on reshade and/or editing in general. I would also recommend trying different styles to find your groove, you might discover something you wouldn't have expected to like. The biggest factor is definitely to enjoy what you're doing. In the end it comes down to this being a hobby we pursue for fun and creativity. Its easy to get lost in like counts and engagement, but you're doing this for your own enjoyment. And that's what should be the priority.

UBISOFT
PHOTOMODE CONTEST

We talk with Justin Levy, Senior Director of Global
Brand Marketing and Content.

## What is Ubisoft's stance on virtual photography in the gaming industry?

Justin Levy - Virtual photography is a really fascinating part of user generated content (UGC) along with fan art, cosplay, fanfic, all that kind of stuff that we love. We don't see one as better or worse than the other. We see them all as equals. My personal perspective is that I think we're used to seeing fan art and cosplay out in front. Photo modes are an excellent way to highlight the diversity and detail of our worlds, the amazing work that our teams have done to make them photo realistic and a type of UGC that maybe hasn't got as much limelight as some of the other types of user generated content. That being said, we're huge fans. As you can tell by how many of our games have a photo mode and by our commitment to running this contest and working with the virtual photography community.

TPM - That's really good to hear your view in an official sense, because everyone in the community, we all have our own theories and thoughts about how the industry views virtual photography.

JL - I love it. I think it's fascinating, and I think that there's this other element that's almost magical when people who aren't gamers or in the community see in game photography for the first time, it really just blows their mind. Now that doesn't necessarily change Ubisoft's perspective on it, but it's definitely something that I've noticed now that we've had two of these expos when people who aren't gamers see the work printed and hung in a gallery space, the reaction is completely different and so inspiring compared to some of the reactions that I've seen to other user generated content.

We believe virtual photography can extend a game's appeal, as great in-game photos can influence purchasing decisions even years after a game's release. Do you agree that photo modes are an effective marketing tool for games?

JL - Honestly, I've never thought about it like that, and I don't think we have any data for that. I'm not sure anybody sees a photo mode as a marketing tool. I think the images, certainly, the images are stunning and could inspire people to play. We like to show off the breadth of the games that we make. Most players want a game for them, if we make 100 games, they may only play two or three games that are really important to them. So for us, it's a great way to remind people how many amazing games we have, you know, Ubisoft has been around for almost 40 years. But as a direct marketing tool its probably not at the top of the list. This is for our players. This is to highlight creativity and talent and the beauty of our world in a fun way.
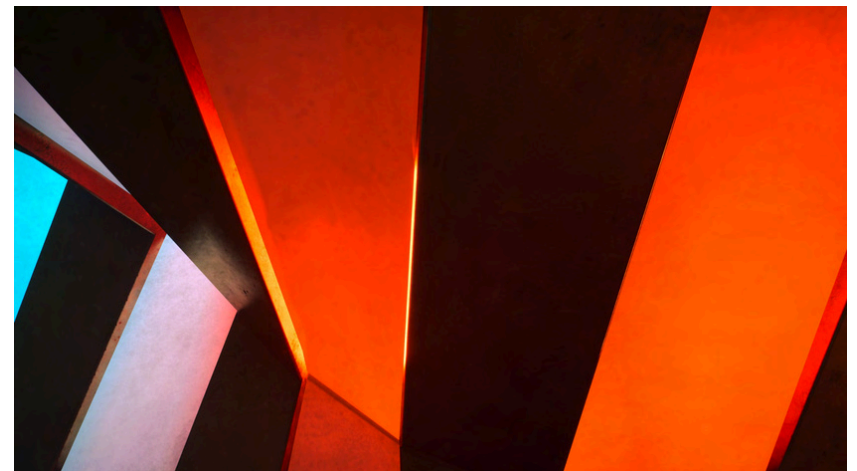
(capture by Matthew Pearce)

(capture by MissRosePlays)

What was the inspiration behind launching a dedicated photo mode contest, and how long did it take to bring this idea to life?

Justin Levy - It took a while to bring the idea to life for the first time, certainly the fact that we wanted to have a physical Expo. The physical printed Expo is the real innovation here. We're not claiming that we're the first to have a photo mode contest. Now, that's not to say that every photo mode competition has to do the same thing, but for us, we felt that there was a certain magic in creating the physical Expo. I still stand behind that. So the first year there was definitely a little bit of convincing to do. People were like, well, can we even print them out? Like, how? What? What is it going to look like? Can we print them out in high enough quality? Are we going to shoot ourselves in the foot when we try to print them? The first Expo was in a beautiful photo gallery in New York, and it was jaw dropping and from that point on we knew we were going to try to do this every year.

TPM - Taking that step from a digital contest to having something where the general public can go in person, Ubisoft have so many games with a photo mode, so for us you are the ideal candidates to take that leap into that next stage.

JL - We think so.

What would you change in the future contests? For example, will you consider adding different categories?

JL - The first year we actually did have categories. I'm not sure that they necessarily added anything to the contest. In the first year, we also commissioned professional artists so we had three layers to the original contest. We had the commissioned artists, the internal contest, where all of our internal Ubisoft teams could participate and of course the external player contest. Right now the one thing we'd like to do is just continue to grow it. To grow it year on year, to have more people feel comfortable submitting. To continue to have the physical space, to have more people see it, to have the expo open a little longer. We just want to keep sharing this with more and more people, to either discover virtual photography, or to simply express themselves. If you're a traditional photographer or filmmaker, there are lots of ways and lots of platforms for you to express yourself. So if we want to continue to grow this into a platform for this community to grow around, to celebrate the community and each other. They're our hopes for the coming years.

TPM - The idea of it being a platform for everyone to express themselves sounds amazing.

JL - For me it's about self expression and recognition. You know, a question I get sometimes is, "Is it art?" and my answer is always if the person taking the photos was trying to create art, then yeah, it's art. These are beautiful images, stunning and creative and fun, and the quality is incredible. It's an intoxicating mix of self expression and recognition that we're trying to tap into.

(capture by
Carsten Nichte)

Did you anticipate the contest to be as popular as it is?

JL - Yes. I mean, the first time you do something, you never really know how it'll be received. I look at the spaces where the virtual photography community gather and there aren't millions of people. It's very niche. But my instinct told me that there was magic in here somewhere. I still think there's unlocked potential in sharing that magic, inspiring people to try our photo modes.

(capture by
Vicky Fernando)

The grand prize of a studio tour was a fantastic choice. It is every gamer's dream. How did you come up with this idea, and why was it changed from previous years' contests?

JL - Well, we wanted to find something that would inspire our core audience, the people we most want to do this for above anything else, which is our players. The first year, maybe we went a little far on the art side of it all. Our thoughts were, well, what's a huge benchmark if you're an artist? Having a show in New York City for many artists, I think, would be considered a great career benchmark. Now, when we looked at the prize again for the second year we thought "what can we do that would be tuned more towards a player?" We thought of sending the winner to Los Angeles for Ubiforward, and we thought about the studio tour, but the timing, the studio tour, VIP visit, and the expo, all hosted in Ubisoft Montreal, just came together perfectly. I would also like to take this opportunity to give a huge shout out, and thanks to the team from Ubisoft Montreal, who hosted us and made a lot of this possible.

TPM - I must admit, coming up with the grand prize being the studio tour was genius. As a gamer it would be amazing to go there and walk around the studio, to have that experience. It's just total nerd moment.

JL - I was lucky enough to be there with Filip, our winner this year. What a pleasure. It was wonderful to meet Filip. He's a real stand up individual, a pillar of the photo mode community and just like the nicest guy. It was wonderful to watch him have that experience. People at Ubisoft Montreal were excited to meet him. It was really just everything we had hoped for from that type of experience.

A free exhibition dedicated to virtual photographs is a remarkable thing to see. What was the general public's reaction to the contest winners' display?

JL - People were blown away. Yeah. People were floored. Gamers are aware of the quality of modern games. They know what they look like. Most gamers have probably heard of a photo mode, even if it's not their thing. People who haven't played a video game since the 90s, who are seeing this thing for the first time in 30 years. They're like, wait a second, these are the games!!? And that reaction is beautiful. I spent the whole day there. There were hundreds of people that came to see the exhibit. And it was, I have to say, it was really energizing and gratifying to have that type of reaction from the general public and from the press. In Quebec we had two pages in print.

Do you personally use photo modes when you game? And if so, which ones?

JL - I'm not a big open world player. I tend more towards car games. But when it comes to photo modes, I would say I am more of a photo mode observer.

TPM - That was the last one. Thank you. Thank you for your time and your insight Justin, really appreciate you talking with us and sharing more with the community.

(captures by Phillip Anderson, Ata Goksoy,Denis Savov

PACIFIC DRIVE

We speak with Cassandra Dracott, Founder and Creative Director of Ironwood Studios about the eerie goings-on of Pacific Drive.

It's very rare for a game to make you feel on edge the entire time, your vehicle really does act as your haven when out driving. I found whenever I left the car to grab something the world just closed in on me. The sound design is incredible and had me on high alert the entire time. How did you achieve such an intense atmosphere?

Cassandra Dracott - Yeah, all the audio that wasn't music was done by A Shell in the Pit Audio. They're a BC based company. They're incredible, every week on the project they were adding some new little touch, for example you can now hear the music differently if the doors are open or closed and stuff like that. They're just absolutely mind blowingly impressive.

Like you said, Audio is a huge, huge part, right? Like when we sat down with A Shell in a Pit there was a lot of talk of not going too far, really letting there be silence. You're in the middle of the woods that doesn't have people in it. There's no planes, there's no cars driving on the highway, and so that does a lot. Then taking into account how far away something creepy should sound right? Like, if there is an anomaly nearby, how nearby before you can hear it? If it's too far, you would hear too many of them. But we went above and beyond. We had a whole system for just creating sounds that were appropriately strange just around you, it would check and grab data from where you are in the woods, whether you were alone or not etc. It would pick from a little library of stuff that would keep you a little bit on edge at all times. But yeah, without a doubt, they killed it.

Was there a reason you set the game in the Pacific Northwest?

CD - So we have some remote folks, but our physical office is in the greater Seattle area. I grew up in the northwest, when I was younger, I was always out with my family, going camping, going to the beach, stuff like that. Then as I got older I was working driving jobs, and I was driving around in the family station wagon, going camping and to the beach on my own. I think that really stuck with me, both as a very relaxing and interesting experience. This is where my soul is, you know, there is everything from mountains to trees to beaches, it is incredible here. So I took these experiences and combined them with my artistic interests, my background is in indie artwork and I loved that juxtaposition of industrial in nature. So I started going on these trips to these abandoned locations, and I would do it in my old station wagon. While I was doing that, I started getting this idea of like, oh, there's something here. There this interesting experience between you and your car and not having anyone else around. It's just your music and the forest. I think that was very much the earliest point at which Pacific Drive was Pacific Drive, even before it was called anything close to that.

it's interesting too, because we talk about the feel of the zone, but I grew up here, so for me, I'm comfortable going out at night. I won't feel weird out at all in the woods alone. But there are some people who, very rightfully, feel uncomfortable driving around it in the woods at night, in a spooky anomaly filled forest.

TPM - Right? It's almost that primal fear rooted in our brains from deep within the past.

CD - Definitely, I mean, it's fear of the unknown, right? That's why I am terrified of deep water. Games like Subnautica, just scared the willies out of me, I could not play that game because it has a day night cycle. I spent the nights of that game up on the raft above the water surface, and there's no click to skip night button. I literally just sat there for 15 minutes at the time, because I was just too terrified. But yeah, its been interesting because we didn't set out to make a horror game by any stretch. We certainly set out to make a game with atmosphere. We leaned into it in a couple of different ways, with a couple of the anomalies and some of the sound design, but it certainly wasn't the goal, we didn't set out to scare the pants off people in their car.


Captures by Ayghan

From concept to execution which ideas/visions changed most drastically?

CD - Early on the game we hadn't actually planned on making it more of like a trip based experience where you had the garage and you would go to and from the garage... but we found that it was such an integral part of the game. By the time we had the second prototype of the game it was like, this is it? This is one, right? Being able to have a chill place to work on your car was a great contrast from going on missions and it helped to build that relationship up, which is really important. Also figuring out how much value was brought to the relationship with the car when you could physically work on it yourself too. Early on, you were just repairing the car through menus, lots of menu based interaction, and that all got swapped around to the system that we have in the game today where you can hold the tool and you have to look at the part you want to repair. It certainly is better for it, for sure.

Another example would be, early on we were trying to tell the story of the zone, and we very quickly started to change it to a story in the zone, or a story of the zone. We didn't want to try to explain everything. To keep a little bit a legend or an urban myth, a bit of mystery. I think that made the entire experience much stronger.

The amount of customisation you have over the vehicle is amazing, my personal favourite being the scooby inspired decal. Going in I expected paint work and decals but was pleasantly surprised to see how much we could customise. What was the thought behind having so much, even down to the rear-view mirror and antenna figures?

CD - I'm glad you liked it. Jacob, our foreground artist, did like, 99% of stuff on the car, including the car itself. It was a lot of work figuring out which part should be customizable, what can you interact with, what's too small, what has impact, etc. Because there's things that we could let you change that would just be meaningless, so we went with high visibility stuff, like the steering wheel and painting system. In fact, going back to the last question. The very first version of the painting system, paint and decal were merged, and it wasn't till later that we realized that, hey, we actually have the tech to split them apart where the paint could be completely independent from the decal, which was a very fun discovery, and we're still building on it, in one of our previous content updates we let you use spray paint. We added it so you can spray paint all of your lights on your car. So now you can change the colour of your car lighting, which certainly adds more expression, right?
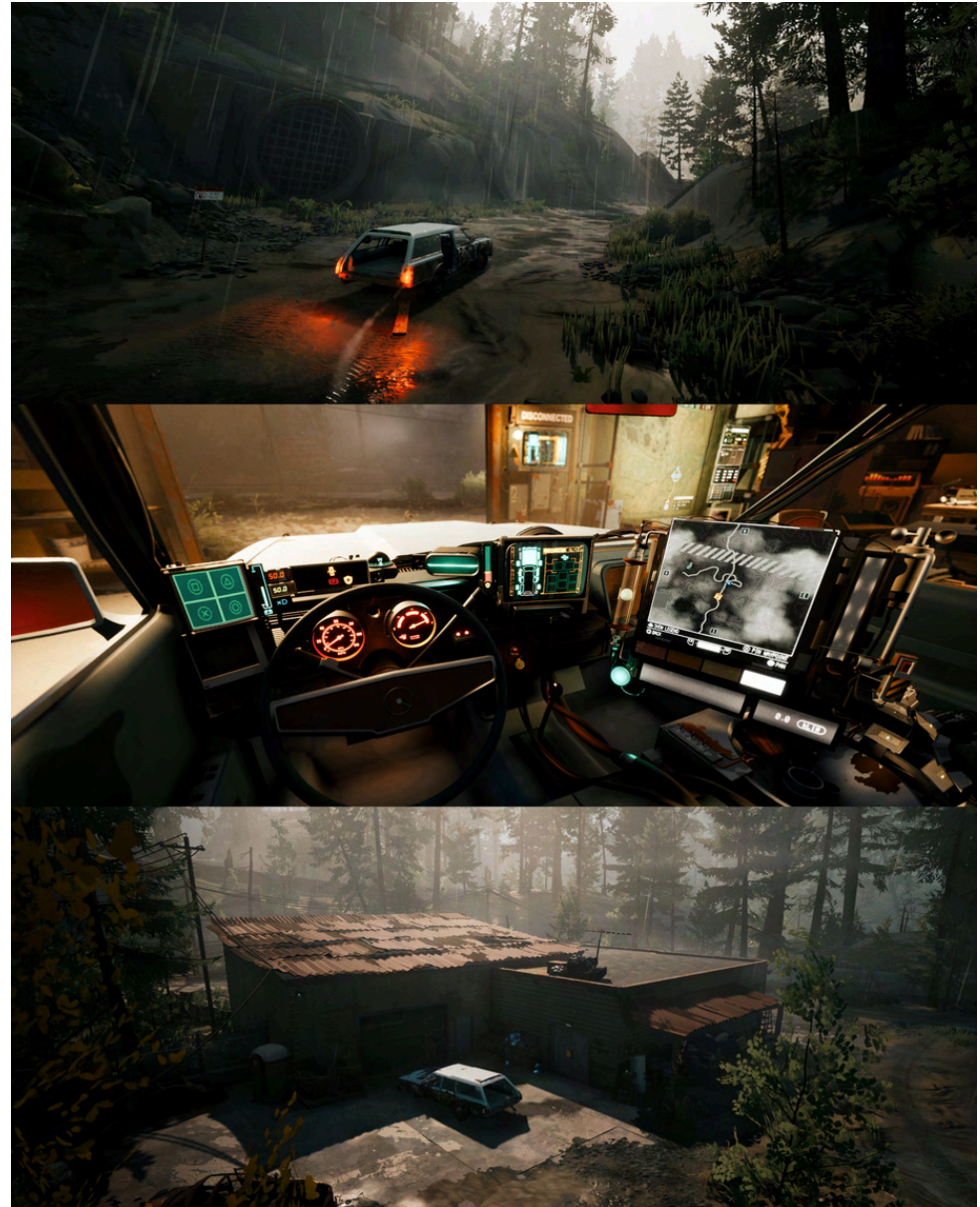
Capture by photomodereview

What made you include a photo mode? Was it always on the card to add one after release?

CD - Oh, we definitely wanted to do it at some point. I do a lot of lighting and rendering, that was my niche within a niche of special effects and tech art environment and stuff like that. So I took a lot of the marketing screenshots. I just love taking renders of stuff like that. It was like, we've got to do it, right? We have to include one. We made this game look so amazing. The art team did such a cool job that we have to find a way to show it off. And so we had talked about doing it before launch, but even if we could have it would have been very, very slapdash. Instead, we said, no, let's put in the work, and let's make something that really sings. We're super stoked with how it turned out.

TPM - Were there other games that you took inspiration from?

CD - I helped out with some of the tech group, but Frankie, one of our engineers was the mastermind of how we were going to do this and getting everything to work. He deserves the lion's share of that call out, and I talked with him a little bit before the interview to clarify some things. We were looking at Spider Man, because the Miles Morales photo mode was excellent, as well as the Horizon series photo mode and The Last of Us. There's some really, really nice examples. For me, I'm always curious about what time of day settings are exposed, because I think that's such a huge part of it. So I was very, very passionate about figuring out, okay, how do we expose that on our end? How do we let you change the preset, or change the time, or change even the angle of the light, like nothing was really off the table there.

How do you balance creative freedom within a photo mode and the need to maintain the games story telling integrity?

CD - We can do our best to tell you how we think the game could be experienced in an ideal world. But it's not really on us to tell you if that's for you or not. So we wanted to expose as many options as we could. Like, if you want to turn off damage, okay, turn off damage. If that's how you're going to enjoy the game, great, have fun. We're here for it. We'll support it if we can, and I think the photo mode also captures that attitude. You can make some truly God awful, ugly things appear on your screen if you're messing around in photo mode. But the fact that it is you have to pause the game to enable photo mode. It's a separate interaction which means it's not going to really mess with the main story and all. I also think the nature of our game is, you know, it's very loose, right? In some ways, it is a physics sandbox that you can play around with, you can strap a rocket to the front of your car and go backwards really quickly, if that's how you want to use your nitro boost then go for it. If anything, we had to hold off and not go too far. It's like we probably could have kept going and adding stuff. There's always stuff that doesn't make the list.

Capture by photomodereview

What's been your favourite memory of working on the game?

CD - So we all got together when the game launched, and we're a remote team, and there were people that had never been in the same area before due to COVID lockdowns and generally getting our heads down and working on the game. But after the game came out, we all got together and that was an incredibly special thing to see just how many of us there was, and all of their loved ones, the game would not exist without them all.

Another memory would be that we actually took out my station wagon for recording sessions. So we would strap boom mics to it with an omni mic inside and we drove around, there are sounds in the game taken right out of my station wagon. In fact, there is a couple station wagons used by some of the folks over at Shell in the Pit who also recorded some of the sounds from their station wagons.

Do you use photo modes when you play in your own time?

CD - I definitely use our photo mode now. It's funny because I had to make a thread in our company chat because I was spamming too many example shots while we were working on it. It was tricky because I had to make a conscious effort to work on it, not play with it. A battle of will at times.

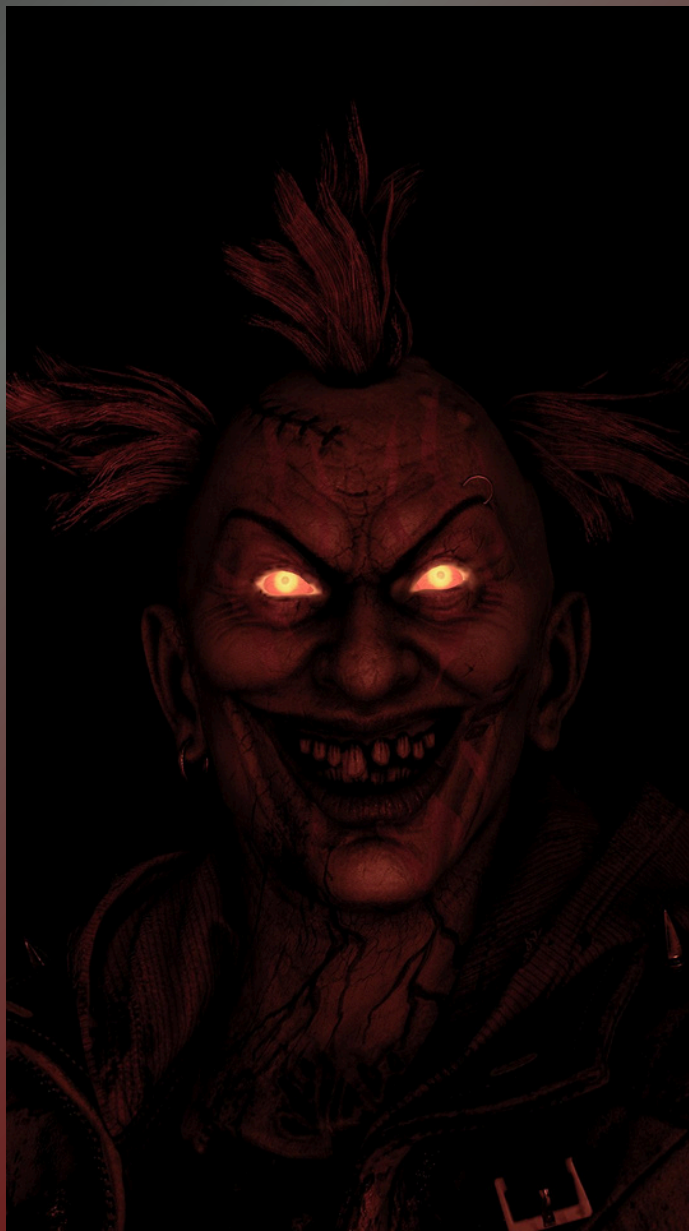**TPM** - Thanks a lot for your time Cassandra, its been amazing talking with you.

TPM Spooky
Community Theme October, 2024
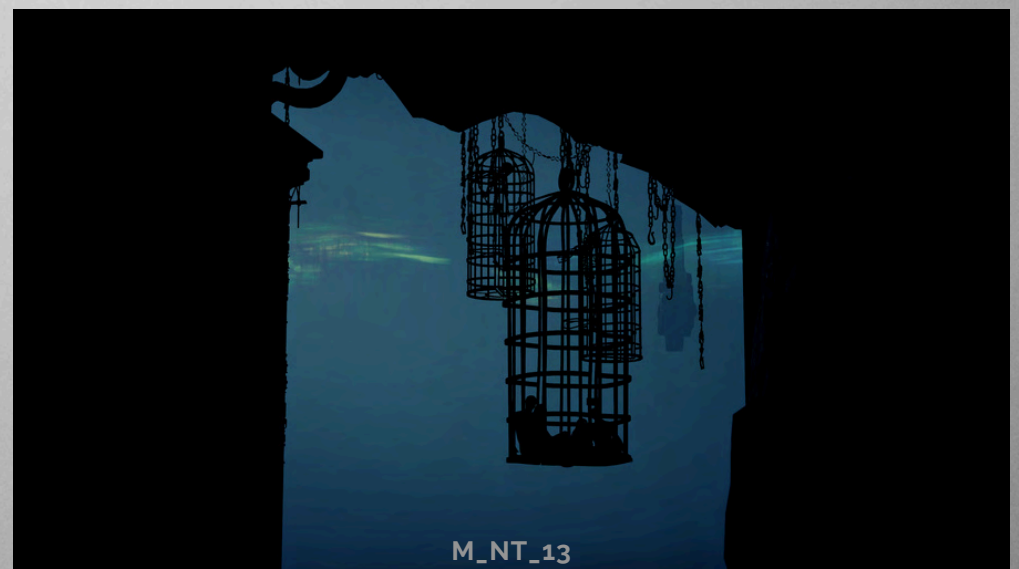

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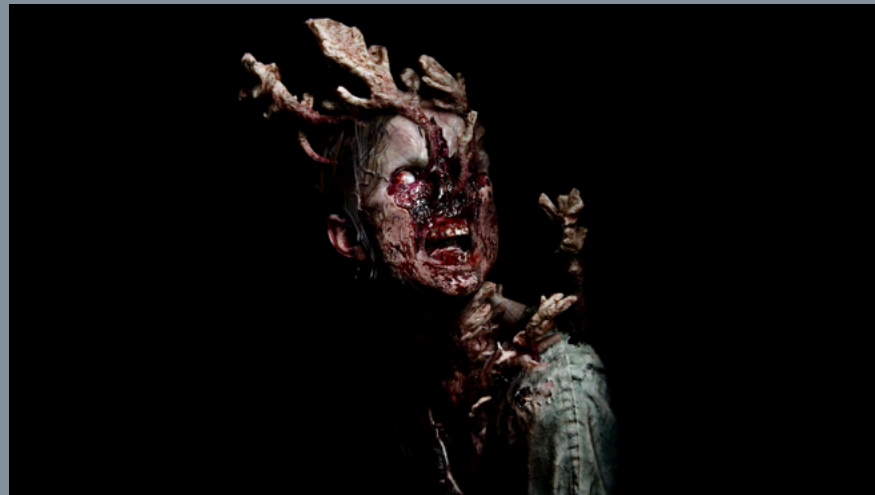
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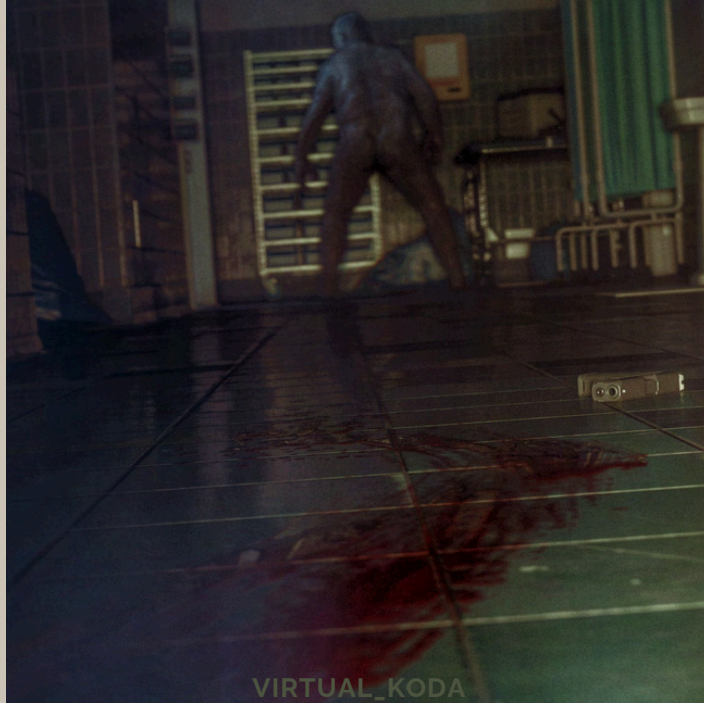
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TPM Autumn Vibes

Community Theme November, 2024

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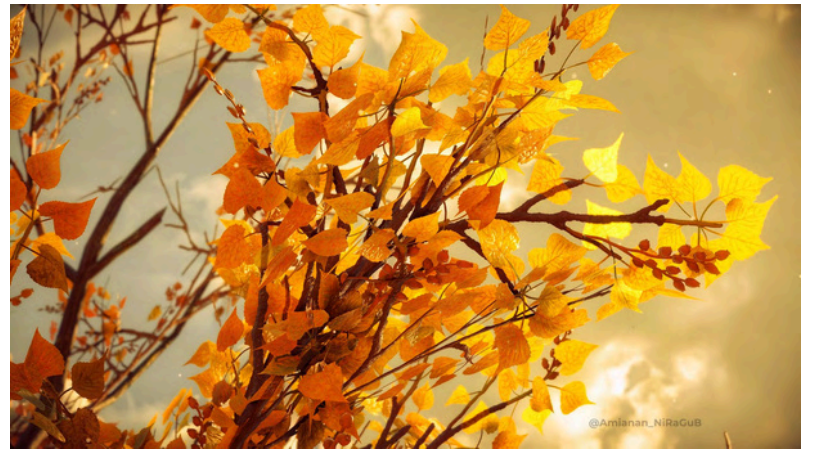
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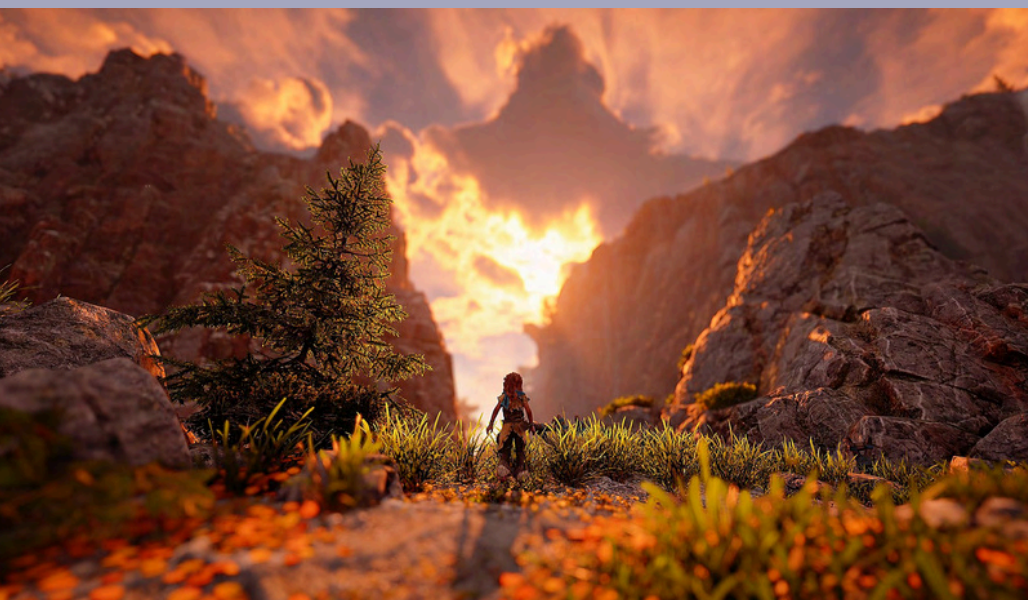

GAMINPIXELS

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