

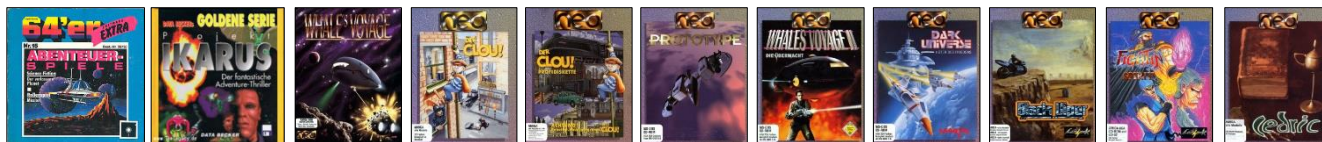


# Hitman Season 1 From Executive Producer to Showrunner

**Hannes Seifert**  
**Studio Head Io-Interactive**

# About myself

1987



1996



2007



2016

# What I am going to talk about

- Short Hitman overview
- Hitman “2016” from vision to today
- Key lessons learned, takeaway points
- Q&A

A close-up, high-contrast image of a man's face, likely the character Hitman, holding a handgun. The image is heavily tinted with a dark red color. The man's eyes are visible, looking directly at the camera. The background is dark and indistinct.

A short overview

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# About Hitman

16 years of Hitman

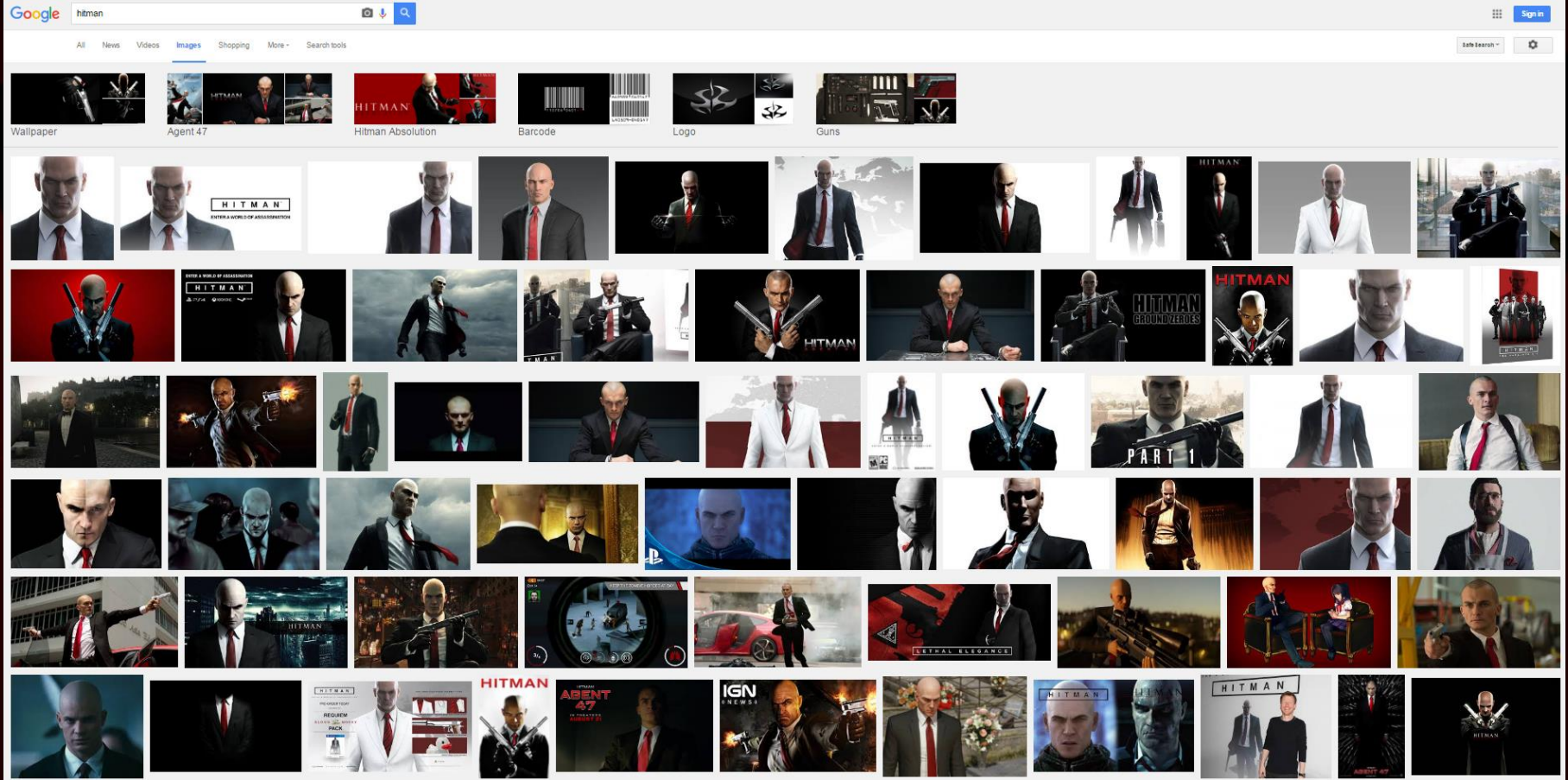
# The Starting Point

- 5 major games in 12 years
- Hitman: Absolution - best selling Hitman by then
- Winner of 41 best game awards
- 11.3m tracked unique online players
- 3.3m users played Contracts, the multiplayer mode
- 1.4m users created 3m Contracts
- Over 30m Contracts were played so far
- The top contract was played 1.4m times
- Still 300k unique active monthly users
- In a game for which we did #@!# to sustain a community





# "Hitman" = Agent 47



## Brand recognition and association

# A Love Brand

- Hitman is more than a game series...
- ...and connects extremely well with pop culture
- 2 movies
- Novels
- Figurines
- Clothing lines...
- ...and becomes a big part of people's life



A man in a dark suit is shown from the chest up, holding a handgun in his right hand. The image is heavily overlaid with a dark red color. A horizontal white line is positioned below the text "Why change anything?".

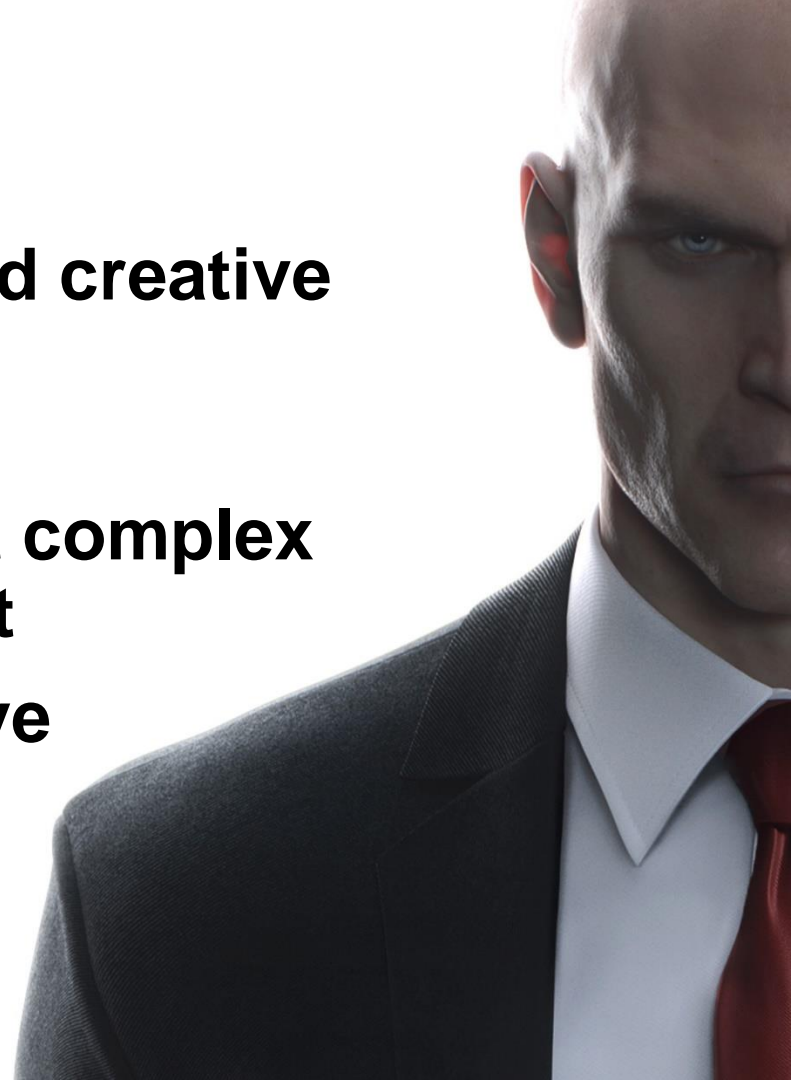
Why change anything?

# The Vision



## **HITMAN (2016)**

- **Focus on player freedom and creative sandbox gameplay that made the series great**
- **Create the biggest and most complex Hitman sandboxes ever built**
- **Build the foundation for a live and ever expanding “World of Assassination”**



# Opportunities

- Already 2014 the overall market started transitioning into digital, also on consoles
- You can be much more open and inclusive towards your fans
- Your margin per unit is over two times bigger than disc
- Therefore you can tailor your game to your fan base rather than aim for the lowest common denominator
- You can innovate faster, engage longer and improve more often than with a traditional one time release
- You can create more coverage with frequent releases
- Flexible pricing models have the potential to acquire new customers and fans and you are in control of the pricing
- You are close to your players and your players are close to you!

### Destiny, Hearthstone, WoW push Activision Blizzard to record Q3

By James Brightman

Recommend 27 Tweet 30

TUE 04 NOV 2014 9:13PM GMT / 4:13PM EST / 1:13PM PST  
PUBLISHING FINANCIAL RIGHTS

The company is raising its full-year non-GAAP outlook thanks to the better than expected performance

Activision Blizzard has just announced its third-quarter earnings, showing improvements year-over-year in both sales and profits. The company's total revenue rose 10% to \$1.17 billion while net income rose 15% to \$195 million. The company's earnings per share rose 15% to \$0.55. The company's revenue from digital channels accounted for 67 percent of the company's total (43% for Activision and 67% for Blizzard).

The publisher demonstrated its increasing digital strength as GAAP net revenues from digital channels accounted for 67 percent of the company's total (43% for Activision and 67% for Blizzard).



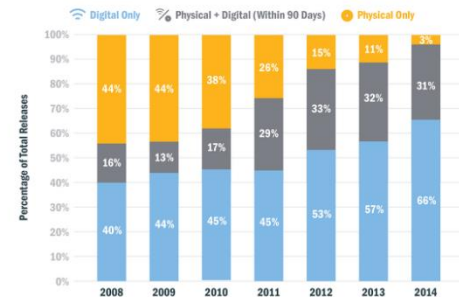
ACTIVISION BLIZZARD  
Activision Blizzard

### Digital-only games account for 66% of console releases - EEDAR

By Sartori Bernbeck

Recommend 52 Tweet 79 Share 35

PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL RELEASES BY DISTRIBUTION TYPE  
[MICROSOFT, NINTENDO, & SONY CONSOLES]



SOURCE: EEDAR

Who needs to be on board?

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# A Change of Minds

- The Shareholders
  - The Development Team
  - The Publishing Teams
  - The Sales Teams
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Parties
  - The Distribution Partners
  - The Players
  - Press
- ▶ A completely new sales and development strategy
  - ▶ Uncertainty facing the unknown
  - ▶ No experience with selling big numbers digitally
  - ▶ Fear for their jobs
  - ▶ Policies don't allow for such a model in the full price space
  - ▶ "Where's our margin?"
  - ▶ "You are selling us an unfinished game!"
  - ▶ "We understand! But, how does it work again? What can we call it?"

Research, validate, evangelize

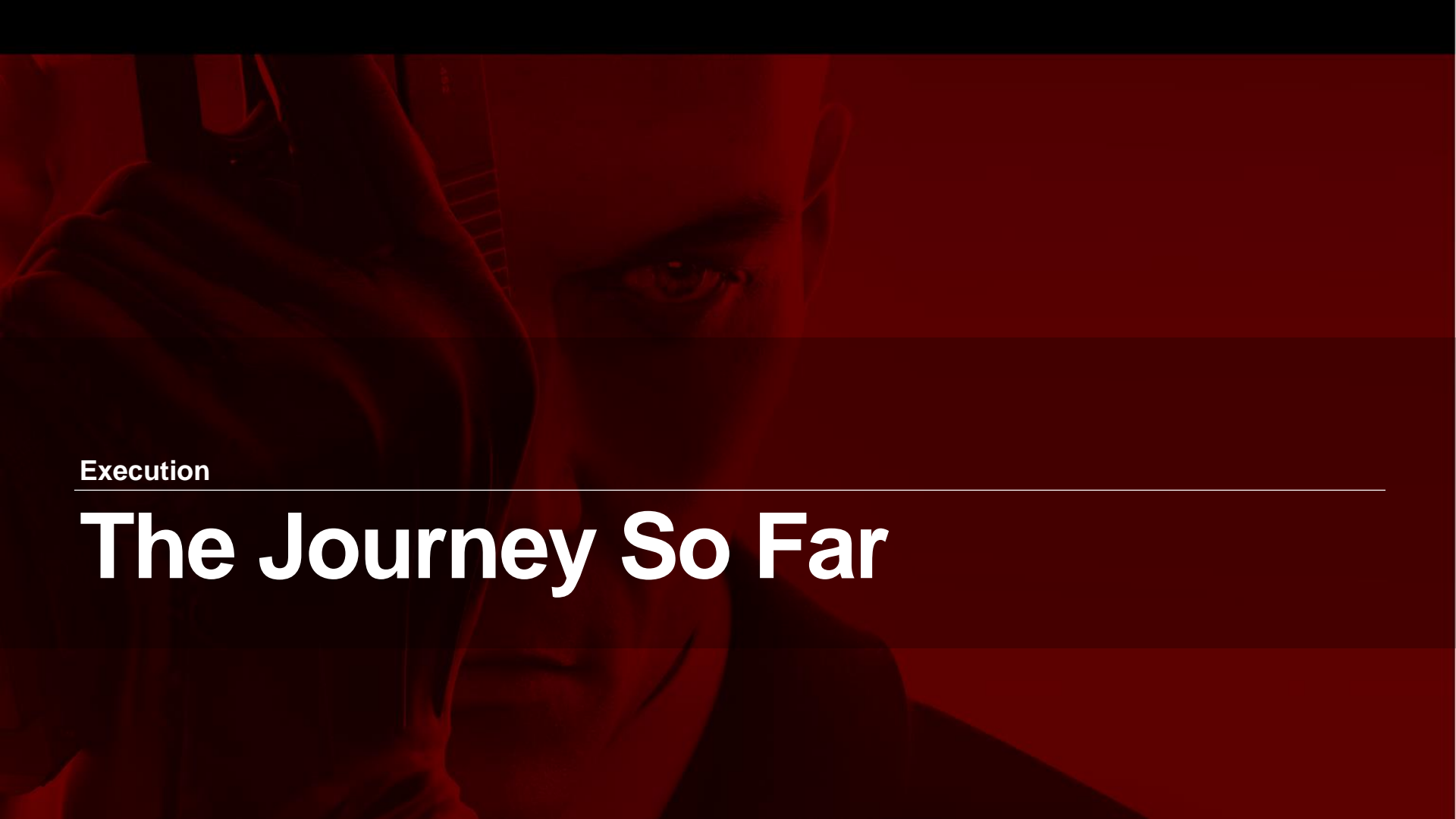
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# Partners & Tools



- Continuous market research
- Continuous user research
- Established steering group and war-room group
- Created “Hard Facts” and “Soft Facts” collection and analysis methods





Execution

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# The Journey So Far

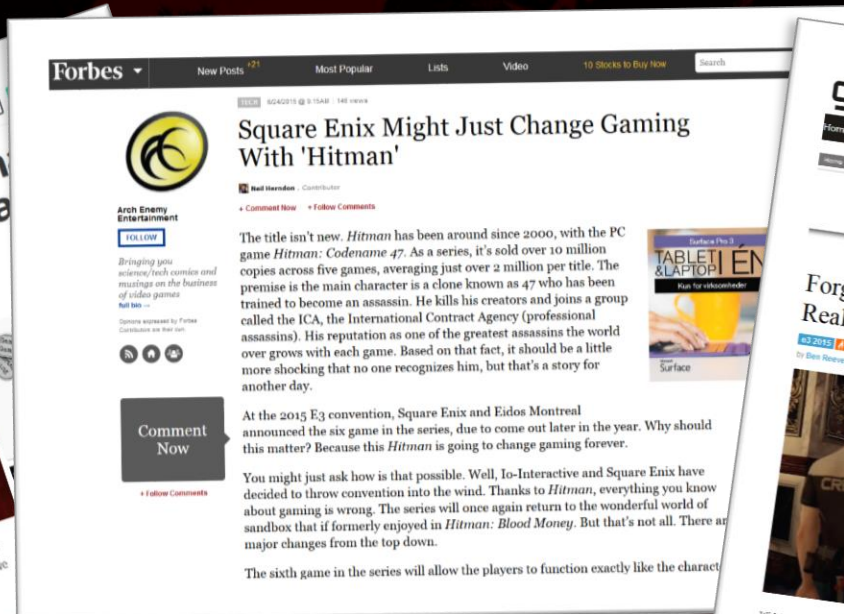
The journey so far

# Overview



E3 reveal initial reactions

# Surprise



Then...

# Confusion

gameinformer

Home PlayStation 4 News Reviews Previews Explore Take Part Magazine

replay Limited time offer Free laptop or a reward of your choice when you join Sky TV online

## Hitman

IO Interactive Explains Hitman's Confusing Digital Release Plan



## IO Interactive explains the HITMAN situation



There's a new Hitman game, bringing everyone's favourite bald, murderous (and dashing in a black suit) psychopath Agent 47 back to gamers' screens. It's going to be a little different though. Instead of being released as a straight-up retail game, it'll be released digitally, with new content being added in 2016, and beyond. Not quite Early Access, and not quite episodic. It's caused both consternation and confusion for Hitman fans.

Looking to clear things up, developer IO Interactive has explained in detail how the game will work, after being obtuse and vague since the game's announcement at E3.

Here's the skinny, in Q&A format:

### How exactly are you releasing HITMAN?

We're doing things a bit differently, as you may have read in our 'Reimagining HITMAN' blog post. HITMAN will launch on PS4, Xbox One and PC on December 8th this year as a digital download. That's when the experience will begin. And it's really important to us that this is understood as a 'beginning'.

What we release on December 8th is not the full game. It's a sizeable chunk of it. Throughout 2015 we'll release more locations and missions until the story arc is done and finished. All of that content is included in the \$60 price.

### Is HITMAN an 'early access' game?

No. Early access can often mean something unfinished or unpolished. That's simply not the approach we're taking. All of the content we release live to our players will be complete and polished, whether that's the locations and missions we release on December 8th, the live events or

Home Discussions Games News Features Videos

## Hitman confusion hints at gamer mistrust

By Caroline Peacock 10 Comments 12 Likes 1,108 Views 10/10/2015

#egmr

HOME NEWS REVIEWS

By Azhar on 17 Jun, 2015: published about 2 months ago

## Hitman Demands Publisher Trust We Don't Have



The Hitman franchise is one of my favourite in gaming. In particular Hitman: Blood Money is one of my all-time best games, and encapsulates everything I look to do in my leisure time. Perhaps that's a bit more revealing of my character than I'd like to admit, but it's the truth. I can't count the number of times I've replayed that game, and I even thought Hitman: Absolution was a pretty great game despite the criticisms I had of it. However after I was set to part ways with my man juices when Square Enix step



Meanwhile in the community

# More Confusion



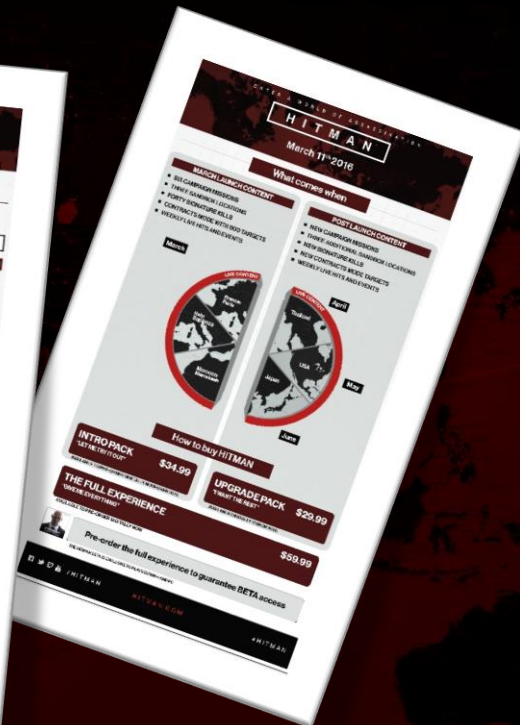
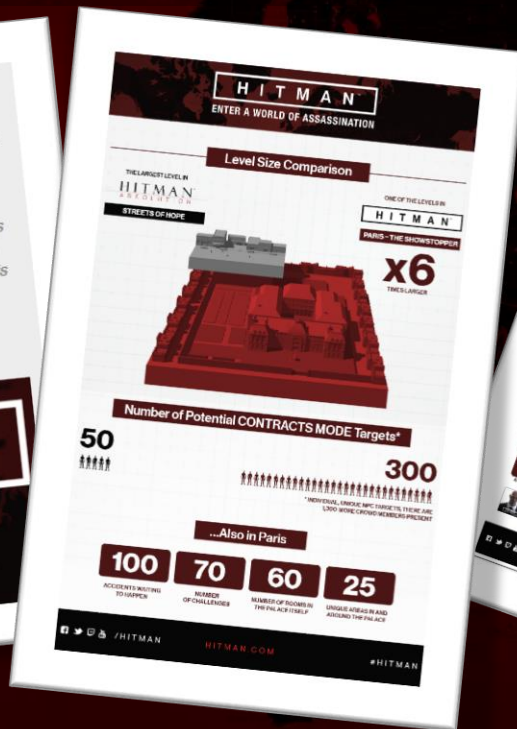
Finding the right voice

# No Perfect Way to Answer

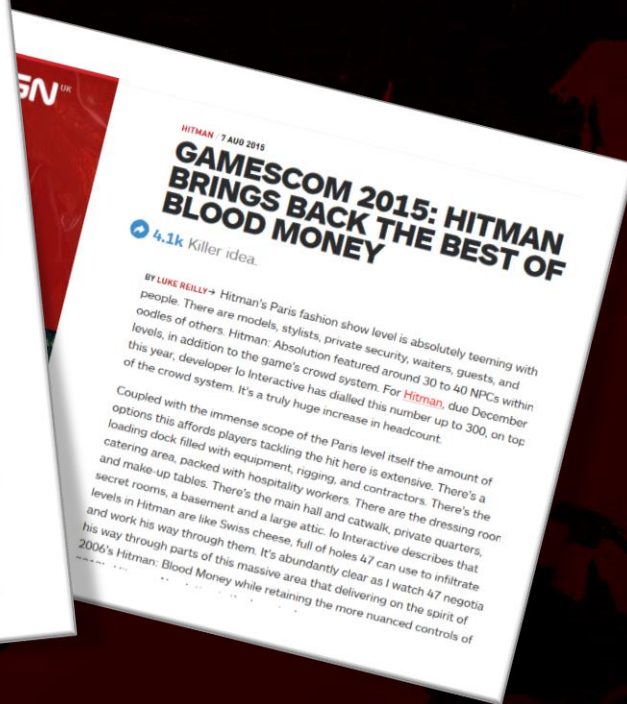
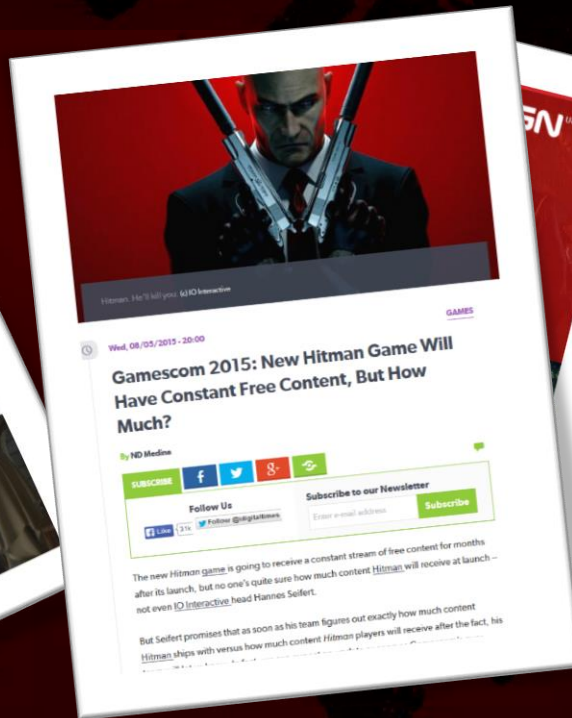
Ever since we announced **HITMAN** at E3 last month, we've been following the discussions you've been having, opinions you've been sharing and the questions you've been asking. Thank you for all of it. Keep that coming, we're listening – and to show that, we thought it would make sense to answer some of your most asked questions.

[Editor's Note. On September 22, 2015, IOI posted a [blog post](#) with details about the release date moving from December 8 2015 to March 11, 2016. We've updated the dates in the post below to keep the information on this page relevant.]

So here goes.



# More Details Needed



# Important Lessons Learned

- Being transparent can hurt (a lot) and nobody trusts a publisher
  - *Choose what fits your vision and take it through*
- Finding the right language is a huge challenge
  - *Use existing terms wherever possible*
- A live game must not be static (what's the point then?)
  - *Don't promise deliverables, promise ambition and work with partners that are able to think the same way*



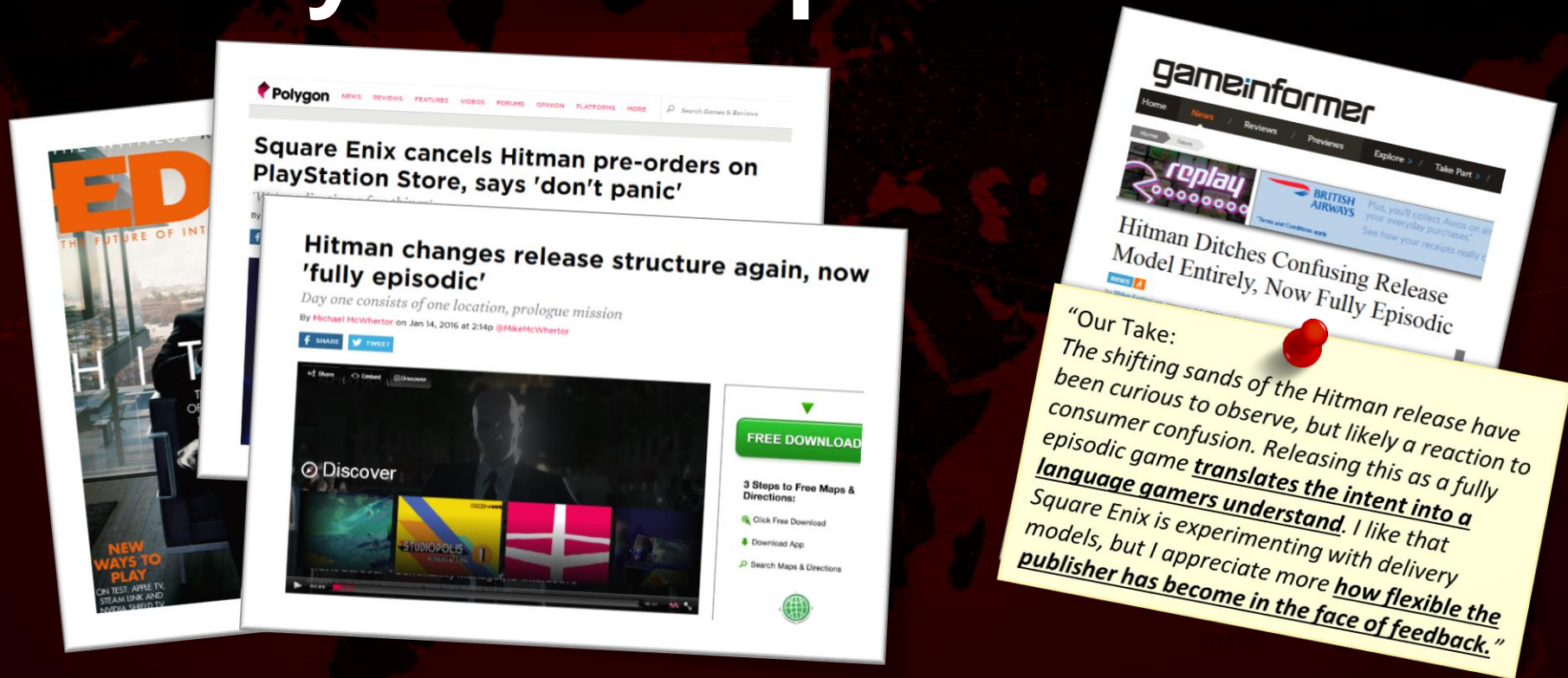
The journey so far

# Overview



Changing the tone

# Clarity and skepticism



A build speaks more than thousand words

# The Beta & Previews

Eurogamer.net

The new Hitman looks like up you've been waiting for  
Agent of change.



Fra hvilken alder kan du blive pensioneret?

Hvis du har investeringer for mere end 2,5 mio. kroner, kan du downloade en guide, skrevet af Forbes' skribenten og formueforvalteren Ken Fishers firma. Selvom du allerede har en plan, indeholder denne guide vigtige undersøgelser og analyser, du kan bruge med det samme.

Download din vejledning nu!

FISHER INVESTMENTS NORDEN

New Hitman embraces all that the series great

Wednesday, 10 February 2016 13:00 GMT

Share on: [f](#) [t](#) [v](#) [g](#)

Slow, silent, and kind of gloomy. Being Agent 47 does not mean you can't be anyone. But then the mischief begins.



"IO intends to introduce Elusive basis, each with their own back story assassins to the limits of their



EricTheAussie Regular

4h

Oh my days I think they've done it. This might turn out the best Hitman yet. So much detail from the sounds of things. Excited!



EpicMcDude

Man does anyone else absolutely love the ragdoll in this game? It's like a handmade Euphoria physics engine and it's so great. I love headshotting people in the distance with the silverballer and seem them tumble over



Agent47nl

my wife and I are big Hitman fans, Just under 1 hour she managed to check all of the 13 challenges on the boat map. I think we will have a great discussion on march 11 who can play first.



eeefaa

4d

Just completed Silent Assassin, Suit Only for the second mission. Man, that was a lot of fun. The more I play the beta, the more I realise how many different ways there are to do this, even aside from the set challenges



Sharpy47DeadlyShadow

1 2h

- Visually the game looks absolutely STUNNING. Wow, just wow... The way it looked in Alpha and now is like a day and night. Incredible!
- I also saw new animations like neck breaking, pipe climbing etc etc - looks great.

47 looks great

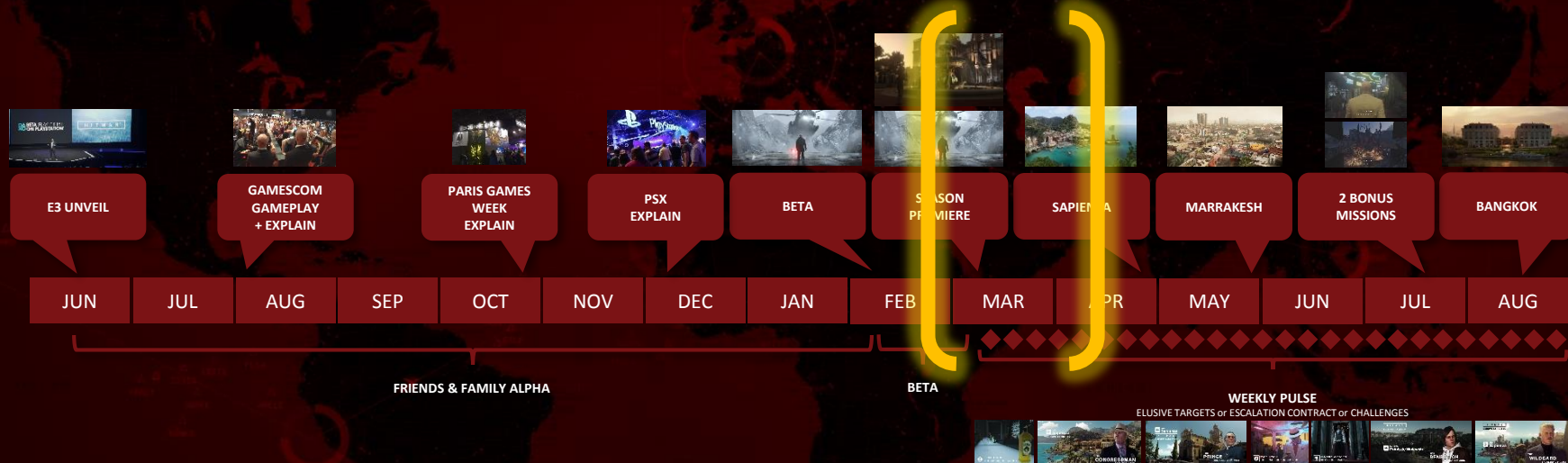
# Important Lessons Learned

- If your message is complicated, don't deliver many at once  
→ *Message one "headline" at the time*
- If you are groundbreaking in one area, be conservative in others  
→ *Choose what to innovate and what to keep steady*
- A Beta is a huge help for development and marketing  
→ *Time your beta accordingly, polish it, and leave room for changes*



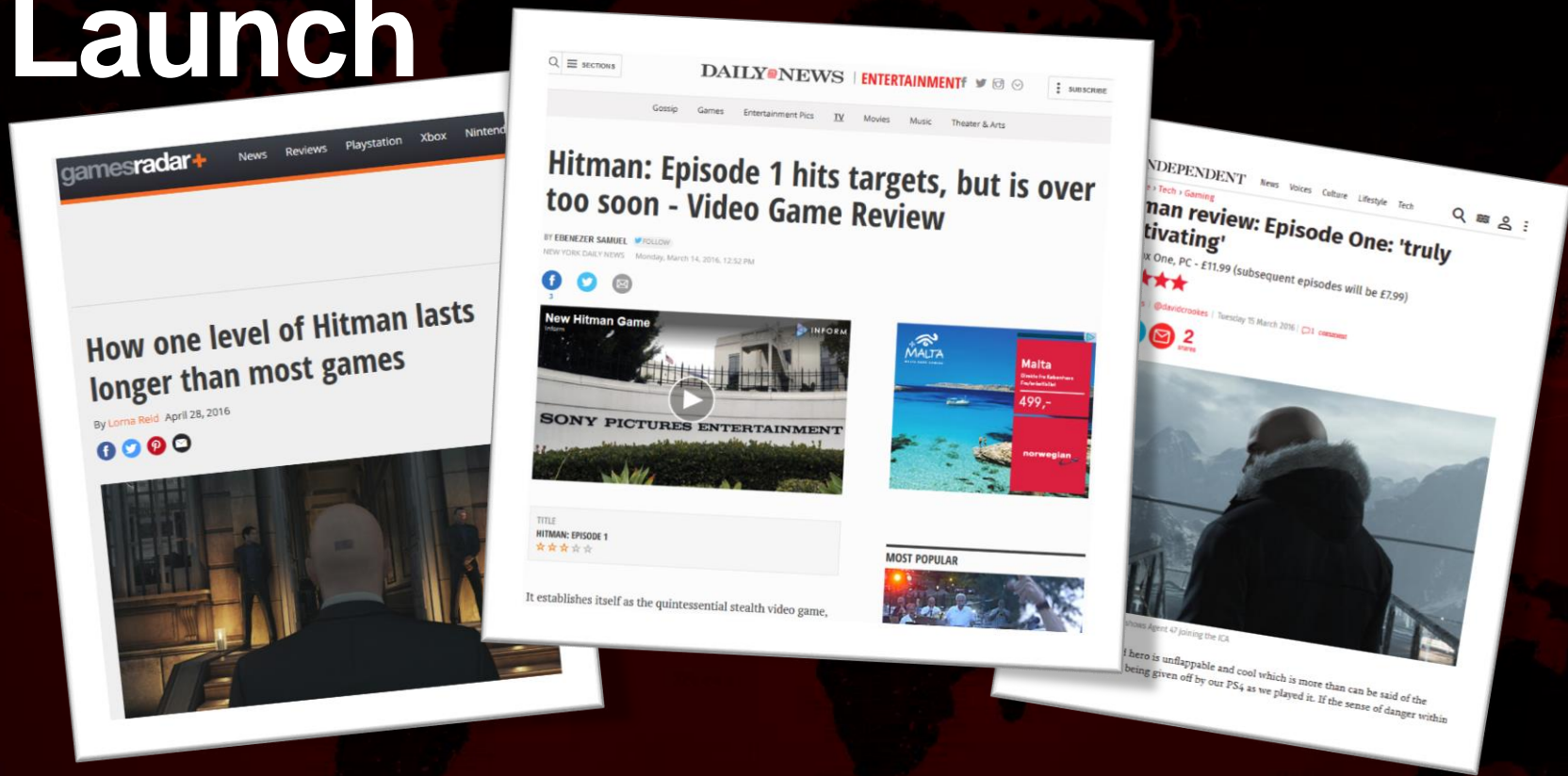
The journey so far

# Overview



Season premiere time...

# Launch



# Praised For

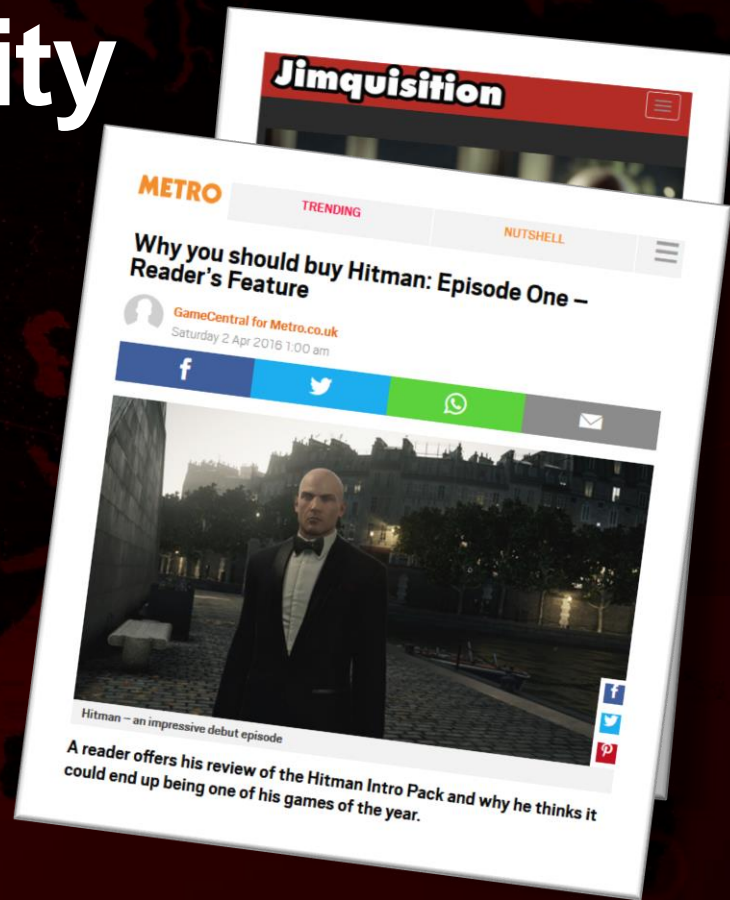
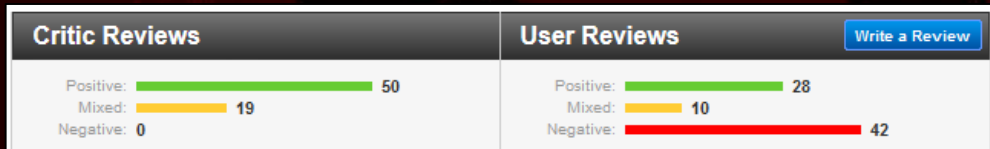
- The best of Blood Money and Absolution
- Huge replayable non-linear sandbox
- Level design and gameplay quality

# Criticized for

- Episodic release model
- Requires live connectivity + launch server issues
- Load times on some consoles

# Polarized Community

- Very strong voices pro and con
- Most negativity from people who haven't played the game
- Strong opinions on "how it should be"
- "I'll wait for the disc" meme...
- ...clashes with "It fits perfectly" from active players

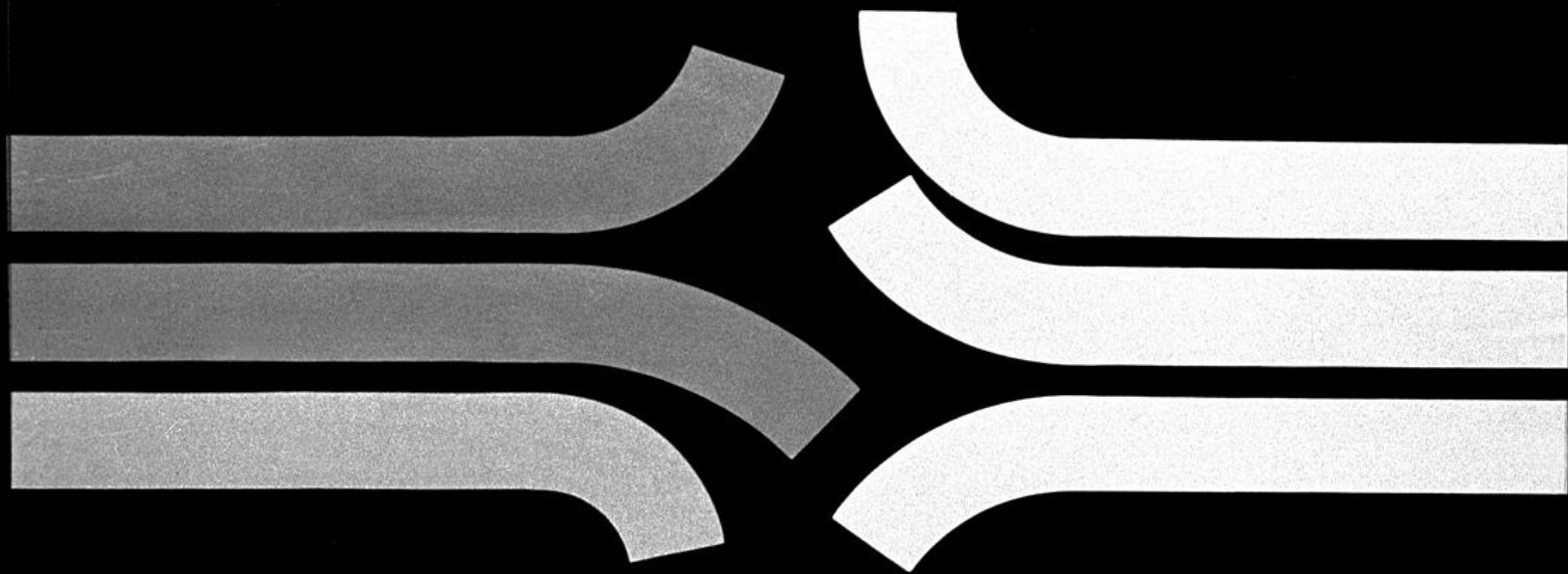




# Now You are Showrunner

- Submission after submission will follow
- You are heavily dependent on 3<sup>rd</sup> parties:
  - ISPs
  - Cloud service providers
  - 1<sup>st</sup> party authentication servers
  - Distributed global release teams
  - ...





Wir bedauern...

# Important Lessons Learned

- Changing something as fundamental as a release model will affect your score
  - *Focus on the roots and don't neglect what made the franchise great*
- Everything is your fault, no matter where the issue lies
  - *Tightly integrate your community team into the development team*
- Avoiding death-march style crunch becomes mission critical
  - *Don't create a live team, manage your workload*

The journey so far

# Overview

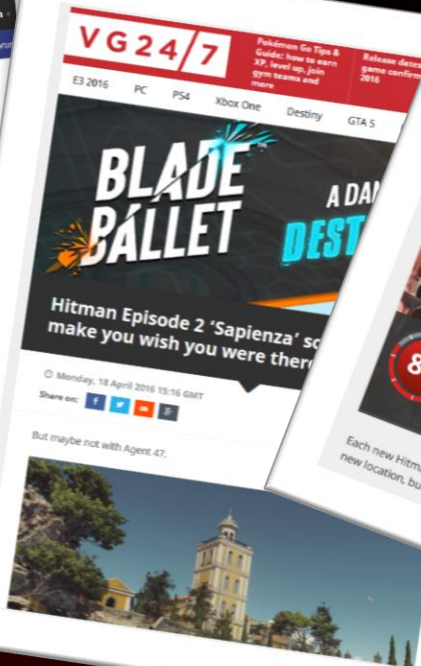




Mid season sentiment change...

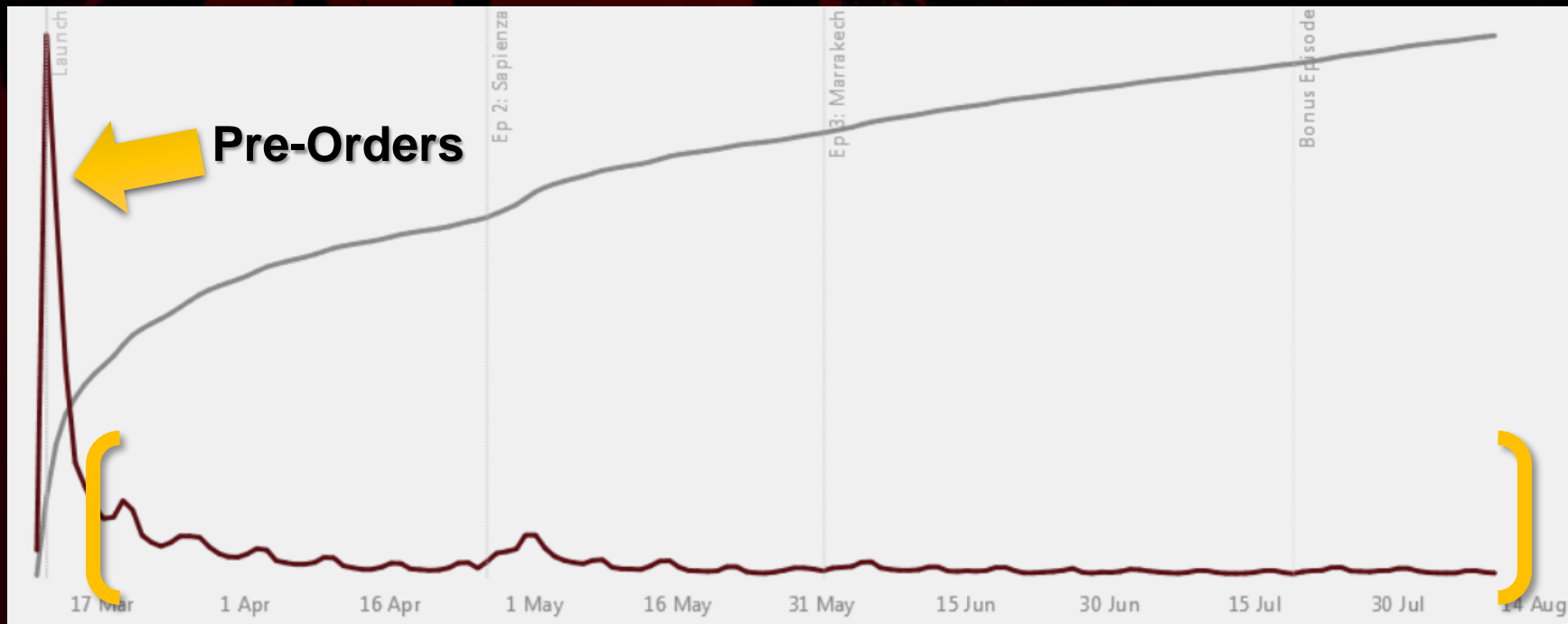
# Appreciation

"If IOI still has something to prove with this episodic version of Hitman – and judging by the amount of people saying they'll wait and see how it goes, or just pick up the disc version sometime in 2031, it definitely does – then this second episode has to be good enough to finally convince players of the worth of its new direction. It succeeds, in terms of mission quality at least, and is filled with so many accidents, incidents, and multi-part assassinations that it may very well go down as a classic hit."



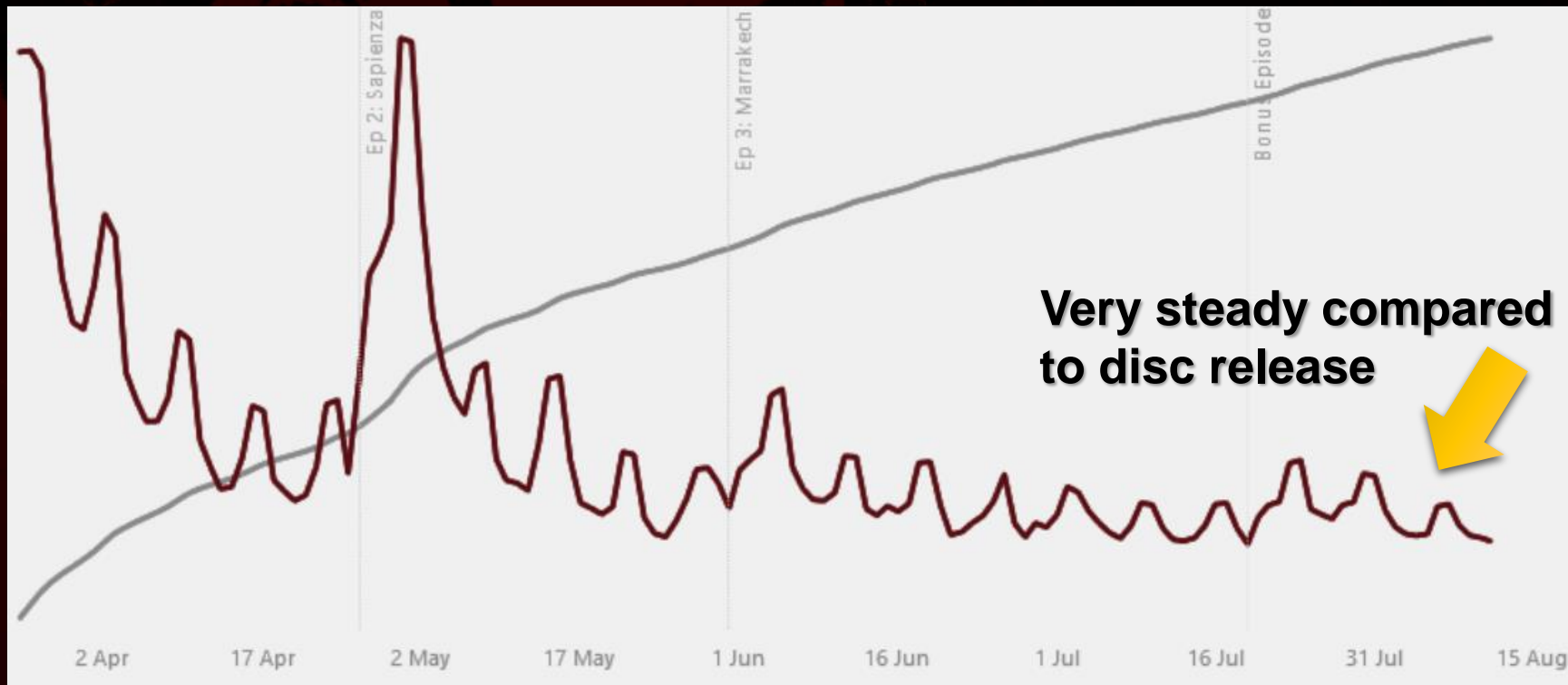
A long game

# Daily New Players



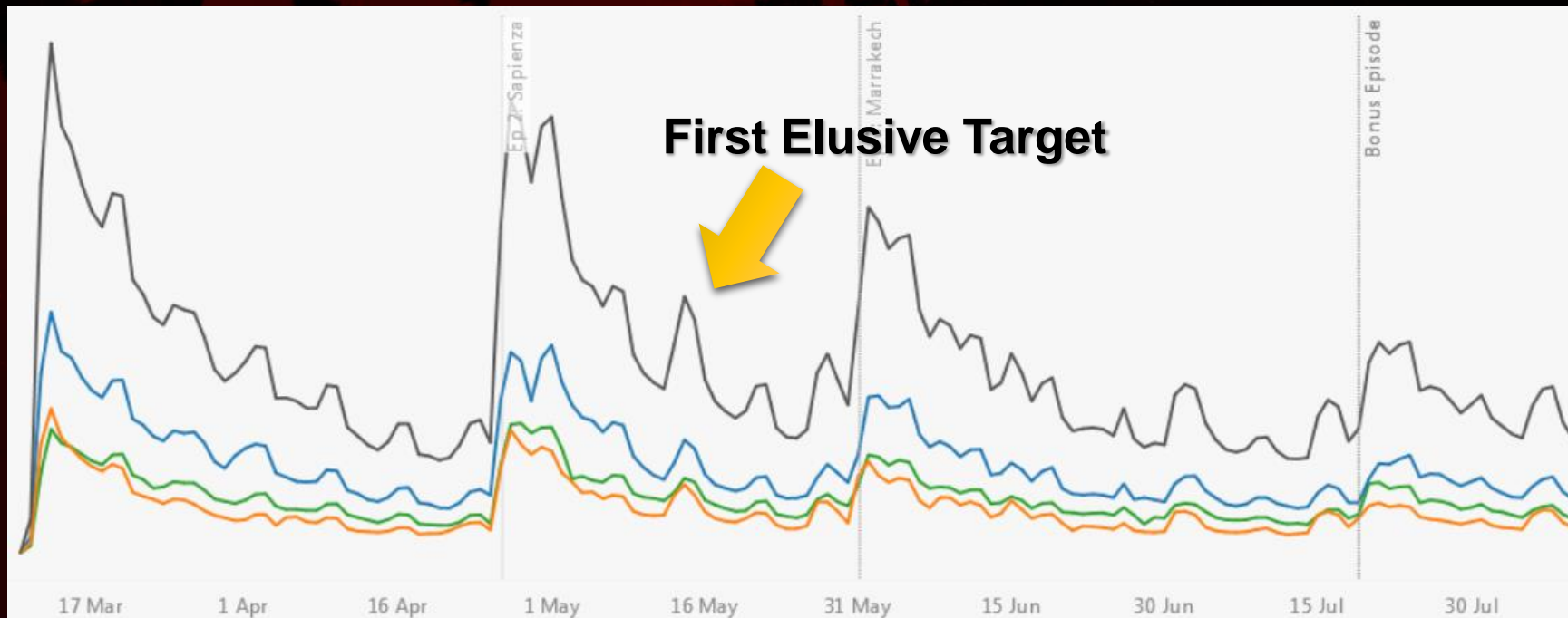
A long game

# Daily New Players



Daily active players

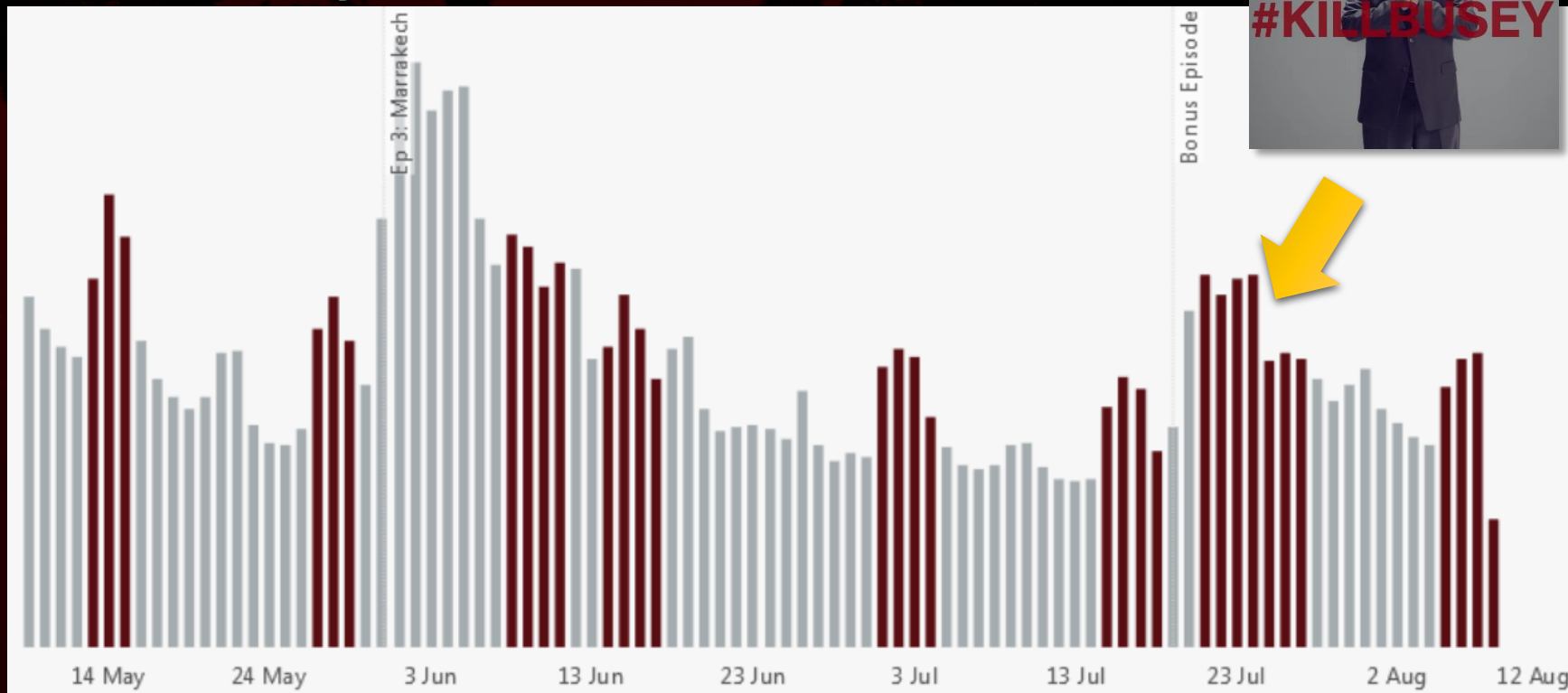
# Monthly Beat



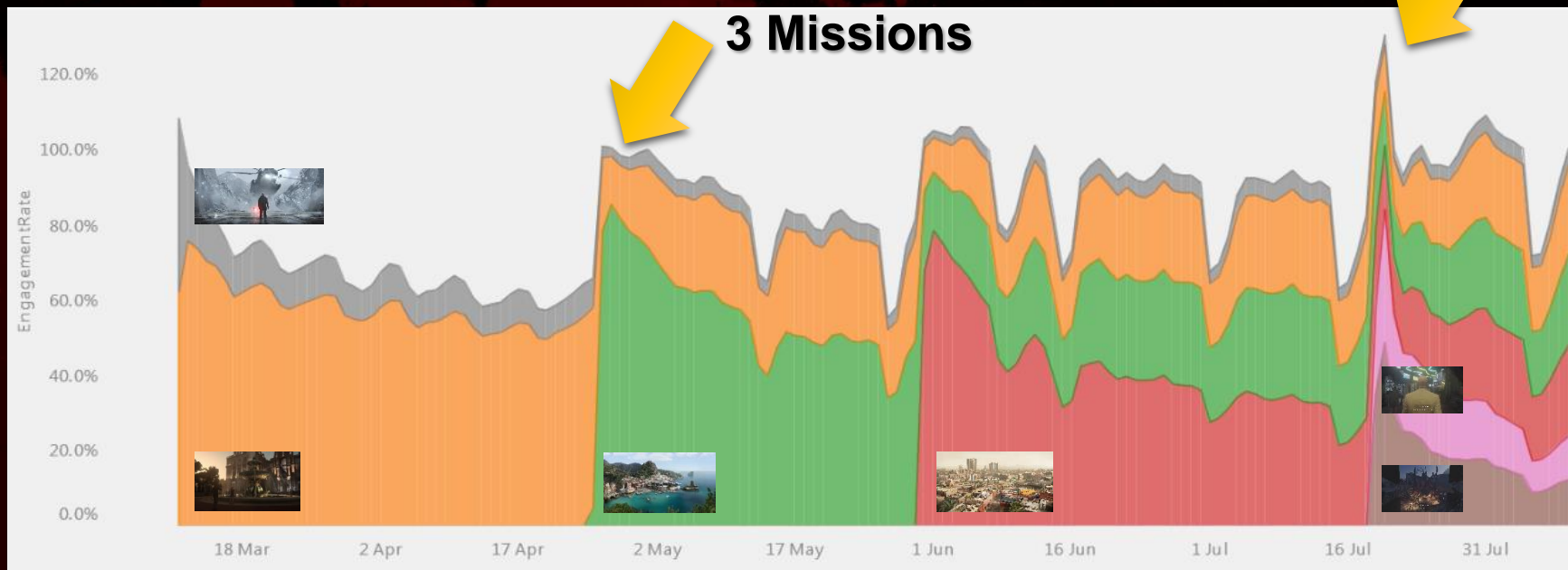


Escalation Contracts, Featured Contracts, Elusive Targets

# Weekly Pulse

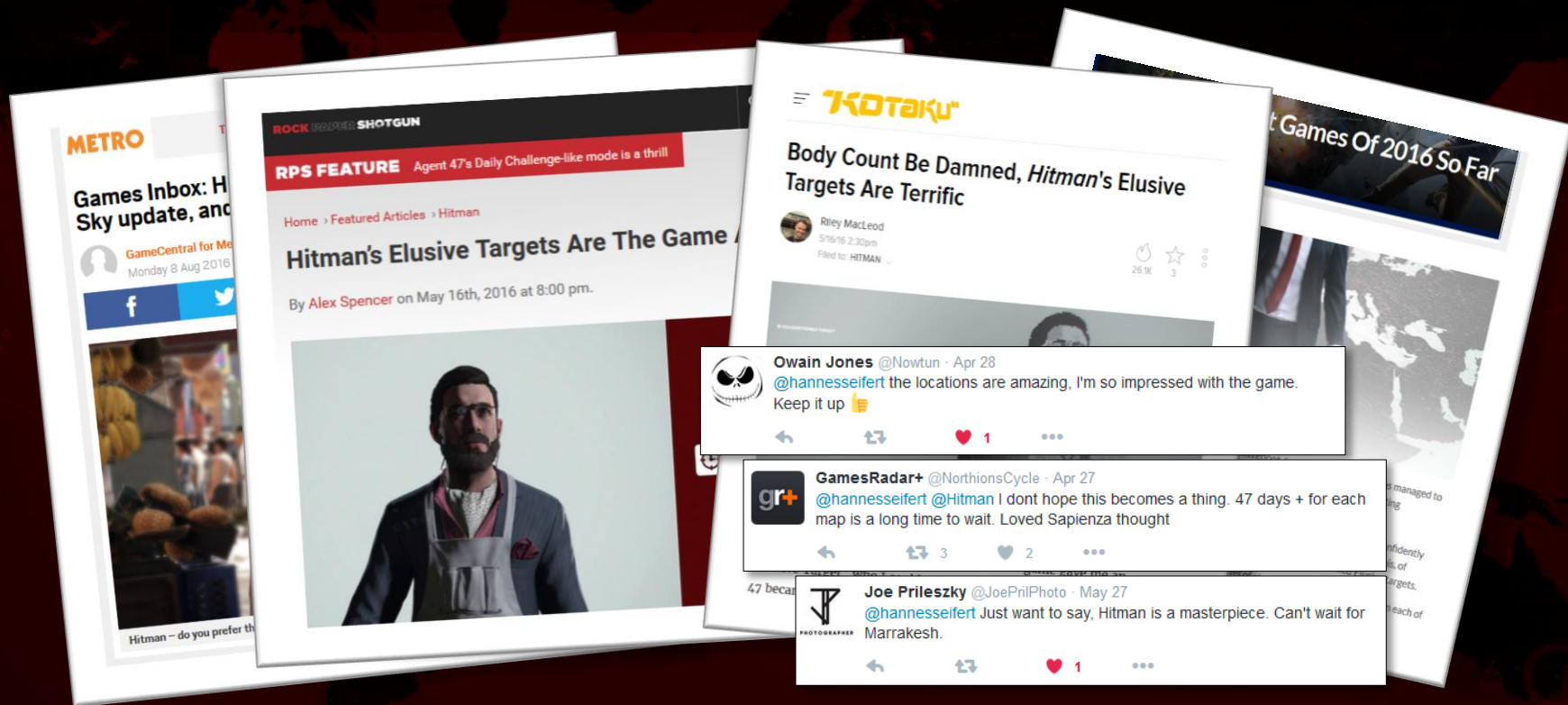


# What Players Play



Mid season sentiment...

# It Starts to Work



An interesting observation

# Episodic Games & Scores



Game  
PS4

**76** [Life is Strange: Episode 1 - Chrysalis](#)  
Release Date: Jan 30, 2015  
Rating: M  
Publisher: Square Enix

Chrysalis is an introduction to the world of Life is Strange. You'll see Max and Chloe reunite and you'll make important choices that will influence their destiny. You will observe some of the...

Game  
PS4

**78** [Life is Strange: Episode 2 - Out of Time](#)  
Release Date: Mar 24, 2015  
Rating: M  
Publisher: Square Enix

Reunited with her friend Chloe, Max begins experimenting with her power and starts to wonder if it is related to her visions or the weird snow from the previous day. But life goes on in Blackwell...

Game  
PS4

**81** [Life is Strange: Episode 3 - Chaos Theory](#)  
Release Date: May 19, 2015  
Rating: M  
Publisher: Square Enix

In the third installment of Life is Strange, Max & Chloe ramp up their investigation to find out what exactly is going on at Blackwell Academy and the whereabouts of Rachel Amber. Secrets will be...

Game  
PS4

**81** [Life is Strange: Episode 4 - Dark Room](#)  
Release Date: Jul 28, 2015  
Rating: M  
Publisher: Square Enix

Darkroom follows the antics of series protagonist, Max, as she attempts to uncover the mystery behind the disappearance of Rachel Amber and get to the bottom of the bizarre happenings in Arcadia...

Game  
PS4

**81** [Life is Strange: Episode 5 - Polarized](#)  
Release Date: Oct 20, 2015  
Rating: M  
Publisher: Square Enix

In Episode 5: Polarized Max learns that time is impossible to control as she moves inexorably towards the most agonizing decision of her life. Arcadia Bay, meanwhile, is preparing to weather a huge...

Game  
PS4

**85** [Life is Strange](#)  
Release Date: Jan 19, 2016  
Rating: M  
Publisher: Square Enix

Life is Strange is a hand drawn work of art and every action enacts a butterfly effect - but with the power to rewind time, what would you change? And would it turn out to be a change for the...



Game  
PS4

**77** [Hitman - Intro Pack](#)  
Release Date: Mar 11, 2016  
Publisher: Square Enix

With the Intro Pack, you'll get an introduction to the world of HITMAN, with the Prologue and Paris episode. You'll get full access to Contracts Mode, Escalation Mode, elusive targets and all other...

Game  
PS4

**84** [Hitman - Episode 2: Sapienza](#)  
Release Date: Apr 26, 2016  
Publisher: Square Enix

The 2nd installment of HITMAN finds Agent 47 traveling to the beautiful, sun-drenched coastal town of Sapienza, Italy. This episode adds a new story mission, new challenges, new weapons and gear...

Game  
PS4

**75** [Hitman - Episode 3: Marrakesh](#)  
Release Date: May 31, 2016  
Publisher: Square Enix

Hitman Episode 3: Marrakesh presents players with a range of new in-game Challenges and Opportunities that keep them busy along with an entirely new setting for Escalation Contracts and Elusive...



# Important Lessons Learned

- Episodic games tend to score higher later, once fully understood
  - *Keep your price point as steady as you can afford*
- Talking about improvements and new features “after the fact” makes things very clear and reduces cynicism
  - *Use release notes to talk to players and press*
- Content extensions bring people back and events retain them
  - *Plan for activities and regular additions*



Some more lessons learned...

---

# Concluding Recommendations

# Attitude Change

- Internal “First Live” build      ▶ Overcoming fear of shipping something early
- Updating this internal build      ▶ Practice “CRM”, running a service, applying updates while played
- Upgrading to vertical slice      ▶ Monthly release mindset, backwards compatibility
- Upgrading to closed alpha      ▶ First touch point with real consumers

# Effect on Team

- Game first      ▶ Technology focused developers also need to love the game
- Deployment and runtime stability      ▶ Technical QA even more important
- Engine advancement      ▶ Introducing flexibility, deterministic deployments etc.
- Inclusive build delivery model      ▶ All builds come via Steam and platforms

# General Recommendations

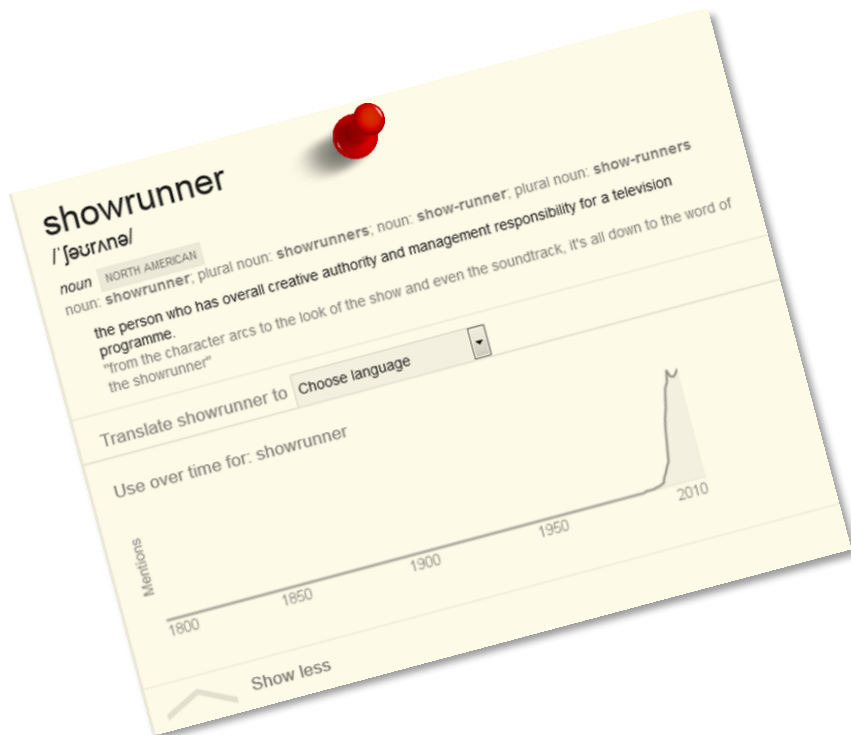
**The digital distribution has fully reached the console market**

- **Think about how your brand can utilize these opportunities**
- **A transition takes a long time and needs patience and education across the entire organization**
- **Be mindful not to force a live episodic model onto a concept that can't benefit from it**
- **Exposing yourself to your players allows you make better games**

**And that alone is worth it!**



# Questions & Discussion



Thank you!

Hannes Seifert

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