

## Nouse Game of The Year Awards 2016

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Last year was marked by some spectacular successes in the gaming industry. From start to finish we saw an impressive display of games, with early releases such as FromSoftware's Dark Souls 3, to the almighty market changer Overwatch from Blizzard Entertainment Inc., not to mention the continuation of hit franchises such as Uncharted, Battlefield and Gears of War. Fans of every genre had something to get their teeth into this year, whether that be managing your own roller coaster empire in Frontier Developments' Planet Coaster, or managing an entire frontline in Paradox's grand strategy Hearts Of Iron IV. 2016 has really been a year of choice and innovation. Niantic's fan favourite Pokémon Go exploded onto everyone's phones in July, showing the huge reach of video games into today's culture, going as far as to cause mass hysteria in New York's Central Park, as eager players rushed to capture a rare Pokémon. Meanwhile, Oculus finally released their finished headset, along with HTC's VIVE, allowing gamers to jump into virtual reality scenarios once only dreamed about. In console news it was Nintendo's time to announce their latest console after months of speculation. The Nintendo NX, incorporating a portable gaming tablet and detachable controllers on either side is their attempt at shaking up the hardware market, now firmly in the control of their rivals Microsoft and Sony. For their part, Microsoft and Sony have announced the latest iterations of their current consoles, all aimed at 4k gaming. The Playstation Pro and the Xbox Scorpio both pose a huge threat to the Switch. 2016 will be remembered as a year of ups and downs in gaming. Despite some titles certainly progressing the industry, a couple of the highlights which we examine here, (the stuttering start of virtual reality headsets, the decline of huge series such as Call of Duty and Fifa and the new skepticism of gamer towards the hype train surrounding new titles) will have lasting impacts on the industry.

### Game Of The Year: Overwatch



The Nouse 'Game Of The Year' award has been fiercely competitive, but after counting the extremely close results of our poll, our expert team here at Nouse gaming has come to its conclusion. The year's winner is the phenomenal *Overwatch*, by developers Blizzard Entertainment Inc. For many people the success of *Overwatch* was not a surprise. Blizzard has a pedigree for doing games right, with huge hits such as *World of Warcraft*, *Diablo* and *StarCraft*, showing their flexibility in tackling a number of gaming genres, from card games, (most notably with the excellent *Hearthstone*), to strategy titles and RPGs. A first person shooter was very new ground, yet they tackled it effortlessly. Through combining fun, fast-paced action game play with a rewarding character progression system, the developers have created an online sensation, gaining over 20 million players in five months alone. Combine this with their excellent promotional material that's led to fans really connecting with the characters, and giving players access to unique skins whilst not splitting off their player base with troublesome DLC, *Overwatch* is a magnificent gaming experience.

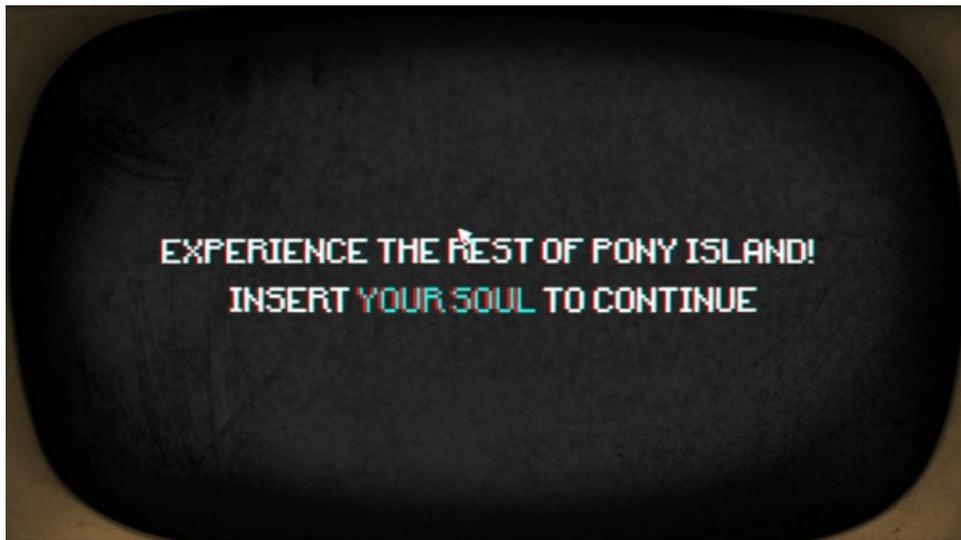
## Let-Down Of The Year: No Man's Sky



Whereas the Game Of The Year Award was a very close run competition, Nouse's Biggest Let Down Of The Year presented a more clear cut reception from gamers. Commanding an overwhelming majority, the award goes to Hello Games' *No Man's Sky*. Oh dear, where do we begin? In the sweet summer of 2015, *No Man's Sky* was on top of the world after receiving countless awards for best upcoming title. However, if Blizzard managed to do everything right with *Overwatch*, Hello Games did exactly the opposite with *No*

*Man's Sky*. What we were promised was a huge sprawling galaxy of strange aliens and unexplored worlds, with unknown treasures and dangers lurking among it all. We were even shown on countless occasions exactly that, beautiful graphics twinned with a slick UI; no wonder we were all excited. Perhaps the limelight went to your heads, perhaps Sony corrupted your sweet, innocent little indie hearts, but the tide of lies and misinformation that swirled about the game led to by far the biggest backlash and gaming disappointment of the year. Featuring grinding, often crippling hard game play, with a lackluster amount of things to do and seemingly no overall objective, few people had fun with *No Man's Sky*. What's worse, the multiplayer so many people dreamed of was a complete illusion, a lie aimed simply at stoking hype for the game. The title has never recovered from its woeful launch, and probably never will.

## Most Interesting Game: Pony Island



Pony Island was a very early release coming out on the 4th of January 2016, despite this it has managed to stick with me through the whole year. Initially, the game seems like an infinite runner where you play an 8-bit pony running through fields of joy or some such. Though you can probably guess that this doesn't last very long. Not to spoil too much it quickly turns out that the game was "made" by Satan and everything is not as it seems. This interesting and creepy aesthetic aside the game play is formed from relatively simple puzzles and running sections. But there's far more to it than that, this is a game that messes with you. I'll leave most of it to be explored but even down to the settings and the fact that you're playing it on steam (the only place it's currently available) is used. *Pony Island* subverts the media of video games itself and manages to produce both a clever and compelling experience. There have been games with more involved and more complicated hidden depths such as *Oxenfree* in 2016. But *Pony Island* stands out as the one that manages to use the least to say the most.



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