

'Assassin's Creed' stars as Xbox teases new games

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Microsoft on Thursday offered the first glimpse at games for its new Xbox console coming this year, playing to fans hungry for escape in a time of pandemic.

The latest addition to Ubisoft's blockbuster "Assassin's Creed" franchise called "Valhalla" was the star attraction during a streamed event featuring game studios from around the world.

The event highlighted Microsoft's efforts to ramp up its gaming with a new-generation console and popular game titles to help it compete with Sony's leading PlayStation devices.

The new Xbox X console is expected later this year, although Microsoft has not yet announced a release date.

Sony is also to release its PlayStation 5 model later this year. PlayStation 4 consoles have trounced Xbox One in sales since the rival gaming systems launched in late 2013.

The Microsoft streamed event included a guest appearance by Super Bowl-winning Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes.

An animated version of Mahomes also took the field in game-play from a coming EA Madden sports franchise US football title.

"Developers are using the hardware to achieve their dreams, and their nightmares, in amazing ways using the power to optimize their games the way they want," Aaron Greenberg of Team Xbox said of the upcoming console.

Greenberg said that Microsoft's own game studio is hard at work on hit franchises such as "Halo" only offered on Xbox or Windows-powered personal computers.

Xbox Games Studio head Matt Booty said titles from Xbox game studios will be shown off in July.

While many titles may be played on different consoles, Sony has a strong library of exclusive content such as Horizon Zero Dawn, God of War and Marvel's Spider-Man, according to analysts who point out that Microsoft has a difficult challenge.

"While, from what we have been told so far, we know the Xbox Series X will, on paper, have stronger specifications than the PS5, Sony has a tight grip on the gaming market," said market tracker Futuresource.

The stars on Thursday were third-party studios including [game](#) world giants Ubisoft and Electronic Arts.

Assassin's Creed fans got a glimpse of a keenly-anticipated "Valhalla" installment to the franchise, set in a time of Vikings.

"It's highlighted by the invasion of England by this very large, hungry Viking horde and at the time England was a dark tangle of broken warring kingdoms," said Valhalla creative director Ashraf Ismail.

Other teased titles touched on science fiction, horror, vampires, dystopian futures, and car racing.

Video games have been seeing exceptional growth during the COVID-19 pandemic which has shut down real-world activity and kept billions indoors.

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