BAFTA Games Awards 2017
Thomas Arthur

Last week on the 6th April, BAFTA announced the winners of the British Academy Games Awards at its annual awards ceremony, hosted by Danny Wallace at Tobacco Dock, London. Since 2004, the awards have served to celebrate outstanding creative achievement in games, with 16 categories ranging from artistic achievement to game innovation. Here's our rundown of everything you need to know about 2017's winners.

Uncharted 4 (Best Game)
Platform: PS4

Naughty Dog were top dog at this year's Games Awards, winning Best Game for the fourth and final instalment of their critically acclaimed Uncharted series. Set three years after the events of the previous game, *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* concludes Nathan Drake's globetrotting adventure, exploring the relationship between Nate and his presumed-dead brother Sam in their search for a lost fortune. Over a sprawling 15 hours of game time, *Uncharted 4* balances the franchise's action-packed gameplay with a grounded and more mature story than its predecessors, with actors such as Richard McGonagle (Victor Sullivan) and Emily Rose (Elena Fisher) reprising their roles from PS3 and PS Vita games.

BAFTA's jury of industry practitioners were just as impressed as we were with *Uncharted 4's* conclusive narrative, impressive sound

design, and high graphical fidelity. Accompanied by an impressive soundtrack from composer Henry Jackman, its staple gameplay of parkour, puzzle, and shooter sequences takes players across the world from the Scottish highlands to Italian streets and Madagascan jungles.

In addition to winning the Best Game award, *Uncharted 4* was also nominated for Artistic Achievement, Audio Achievement, Music, and Narrative; with Nolan North, Emily Rose, and Troy Baker each nominated for the Performer category for their respective roles as Nathan Drake, Elena Fisher, and Sam Drake. Other nominees for the Best Game award were *Firewatch*, *Inside*, *Overwatch*, *Stardew Valley*, and *Titanfall 2*.

Inside (Artistic Achievement, Narrative, Game Design, Original Property)
Platform: PS4, Xbox One, PC

Inside, the follow-up to Playdead's *Limbo*, collected a number of awards across the board at this year's ceremony. Not only was the eerie puzzle platformer deemed the best in the Original Property category, it also scooped up awards for Narrative, Game Design, and Artistic Achievement, with multiple nominations in other categories. The 2.5D sidescroller puts players in control of a young boy traversing a washed-out city of lifeless, mind-controlled people. Over an average play time of three and a half hours, *Inside's* dystopian setting presents the player with tense environmental puzzles throughout rural and urban areas, including farms, factories, and laboratories.

Devoid of all dialogue, *Inside's* narrative unfolds as players progress through its Orwellian locales. The game's art style is dark in both a figurative and literal sense, presented in a muted palette that takes notes from *Limbo's* monochrome aesthetic. Although the premise of each game is different, there are undeniable parallels between Playdead's platformers, with the critical

consensus favouring *Inside* for its evolution in gameplay and level design.

In addition to winning the Artist Achievement, Narrative, Original Property, and Game Design awards, *Inside* was also nominated for Best Game, Audio Achievement, and Music. A full list of nominees can be found on [BAFTA's website.](#)

Firewatch (Debut Game)

Platform: PS4, Xbox One, PC, Mac, Linux

Launched in 2013, San Francisco-based developer Campo Santo proved with their debut game *Firewatch* that the recently-coined 'walking simulator' genre could be more than just a satirical Steam tag. The first-person adventure places you in the role of Henry, a man seeking to escape the burdens of his daily life by accepting a job as a fire lookout in Wyoming's Shoshone National Forest. Far from being limited by its simple mechanics, *Firewatch* was praised by critics and players for its gimmick-free gameplay focused on dialogue and exploration.

Set in 1989, *Firewatch's* mysterious narrative unravels as you investigate disturbances and potential fire hazards throughout the game's open wilderness, with sequential scenes strung together by the acoustic guitar instrumentals of Chris Remo's original soundtrack. Dialogue is presented over radio communication with your fellow lookout Delilah, presenting players with tough choices over the course of the summer. While the game's score was absent from this year's Music award nominations, Cissy Jones won 2017's Performer award for her role as Delilah.

In addition to winning the Debut Game award, *Firewatch* was also nominated for Best Game, Narrative, Original Property, and Game Innovation. Other nominees for the Debut Game award were

Overcooked, *Oxenfree*, *The Witness*, *Virginia*, and *That Dragon, Cancer*.

Overcooked (British Game, Family)
Platform: PS4, Xbox One, PC, Nintendo Switch

Developed by Cambridge-based Ghost Town Games; a two person studio comprising former Frontier Developments employees Phil Duncan and Oli De-Vine, *Overcooked's* medley of frantic gameplay and accessible couch co-op design earned it both the British Game and Family awards for 2017. Designed for one to four players, *Overcooked's* multitasking mechanics put you and your fellow players in the role of chefs who must cook and serve orders for hungry customers against the clock.

The game is set in The Onion Kingdom, with level design ranging from standard kitchen settings to more imaginative scenarios such as speeding trucks, ice floes, and even a pirate ship. Featuring a cooperative mode and a head-to-head mode for teams of two, *Overcooked's* control scheme is designed to be simple enough for players of all ages, while the real challenge lies in effectively communicating with your team.

In addition to winning the British Game and Family awards, *Overcooked* was also nominated for Debut Game, and Original Property. Other nominees for the British Game award were *Batman: Arkham VR*, *Forza Horizon 3*, *Planet Coaster*, and *Virginia*. Other nominees for the Family award were *Lego Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *The Playroom VR*, *Pokémon Go*, *Ratchet & Clank*, and *Toca Hair Salon 3*.

The Last Guardian (Audio Achievement)
Platform: PS4

Fumito Ueda, director and lead designer of *The Last Guardian*, has a

reputation for using sound and music to immerse players in the fantasy worlds of his games. Following in the stylistic tradition of his previous projects, *Ico* and *Shadow of the Colossus*, *The Last Guardian* tells the story of a young nameless boy who befriends a giant bird/mammal hybrid by the name of Trico. The single player game requires the companions to cooperate on obstacles and puzzles as the boy helps to free Trico from the confines of a mysterious castle.

Aural presentation continues to play a significant role for Ueda in *The Last Guardian*. Composed, conducted, and orchestrated by Takeshi Furukawa, the third-person adventure's cinematic score was performed by the London Symphony Orchestra, Trinity Boys Choir, and London Voices. Ueda also created a fictional language for the game's voice actors, with The *Last Guardian's* narrative framed as a flashback from the perspective of the boy as an older man.

In addition to winning the Audio Achievement award, *The Last Guardian* was also nominated for Artistic Achievement, Music, and Original Property. Other nominees for the Audio Achievement category were *Battlefield 1*, *Inside*, *DOOM*, and *Uncharted 4*.

Virginia (Music)
Platform: PS4, Xbox One, PC, Mac
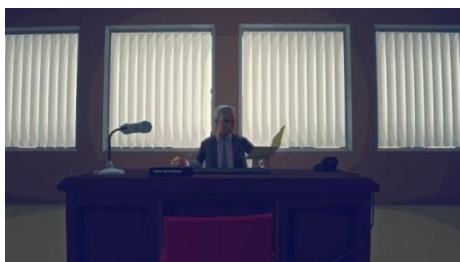
Virginia took home this year's Music award for its cinematic soundtrack composed by National Film & Television School alumnus Lyndon Holland. The game's music was recorded live by the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra to accompany the first-person, crime thriller gameplay of Variable State's debut game. Comprising 26 original tracks with bonus title and trailer music included in the downloadable soundtrack, *Virginia's* score is an ever-present element in its sinister and often-surreal narrative.

In *Virginia*, players assume the role of graduate FBI agent Anne Tarver as she investigates a missing person case in the small town

of Kingdom, Virginia. Set in 1992, the game is inspired by stories such as Twin Peaks, Fargo, and True Detective, and features cinematic, jump-cut editing in the style of movies and television. *Virginia* has no dialogue, relying on visual and audio cues to convey its narrative, with the game's soundtrack setting the mood for each scene.

In addition to winning the Music award, *Virginia* was also nominated for British Game, and Debut Game. Other nominees for the Music award were *ABZU*, *DOOM*, *Inside*, *The Last Guardian*, and *Uncharted 4*.

Overwatch (Multiplayer)
Platform: PS4, Xbox One, PC

Currently boasting over 25 million players worldwide, *Overwatch* is one of the most successful game launches of the past year. Winner of this year's Multiplayer award, the hero-based shooter is set in a futuristic version of Earth and draws inspiration from teamwork-oriented shooters like *Team Fortress 2*, as well as competitive MOBAs (multiplayer online battle arenas) such as *DOTA 2* and *Heroes of the Storm*. *Overwatch* pits two teams of six players against each other across five game modes and 15 maps.

Widely praised for its diverse roster of characters, *Overwatch* has 24 heroes for players to choose from, each with unique abilities and specific class roles within the team, such as offence, defence, tank, and support. Character design ranges from a genetically-engineered gorilla to a ninja cyborg, with unlockable customisation options for each available hero. Blizzard Entertainment continues to support its playerbase with themed maps and gamemodes for seasonal events, new hero releases, and videos and web comics exploring the stories and motivations of its characters.

In addition to winning the Multiplayer award, *Overwatch* was also nominated for Best Game, Game Design, Original Property, and

the AMD Esports Audience Award. Other nominees for the Multiplayer award were *Battlefield 1*, *Forza Horizon 3*, *Overcooked*, *Titanfall 2*, and *Tom Clancy's The Division*.

Pokémon Go (Mobile)

Platform: iOS, Android

Pokémon Go dominated the mobile gaming market upon launch, with over 500 million players seizing the opportunity to go outside and catch their favourite Pokémon in 2016. Built on a free to play model with in-game purchases, the augmented reality game utilises an updated version of developer Niantic's mapping technology from its previous title, *Ingress*, requiring players to explore the real world to complete their Pokédex. Originally released with 146 Pokémon, its core gameplay consists of catching Pokémon, hatching eggs through walking, and battling AI opponents in gyms. Niantic continues to support the game with regular updates for themed events, new Pokémon, and additional gameplay features.

The game encourages players to explore new areas, with gyms and item-dispensing Pokéstops situated at the sites of local landmarks, and rarer Pokémon appearing more frequently at different locations across the world. The popularity of *Pokémon Go* has attracted sponsorship from companies such as Starbucks and Sprint, and has even been used to impact local economies, with its Lapras event raising over ¥2 billion (approximately £14 million) in tourism revenue for Japan's Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima prefectures, all of which were affected by the 2011 tsunami.

In addition to winning the Mobile award, *Pokémon Go* was also nominated for Family and Game Innovation. Other nominees for the Mobile award were *The Banner Saga 2*, *Dawn of Titans*, *Deus Ex Go*, and Pokémon *Sun and Moon.*

That Dragon, Cancer (Game Innovation)

Platform: PC, iOS, Ouya, Mac
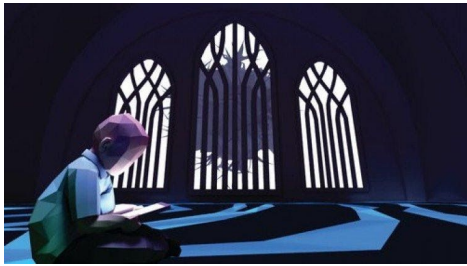
That Dragon, Cancer is a game created by husband and wife Ryan and Amy Green as a tribute to their son Joel, who was diagnosed with a teratoid rhabdoid tumour at 12 months old and died at the age of five. Developed by Numinous Games, its unique approach to a difficult subject matter combined with unconventional gameplay elements earned it this year's Game Innovation award. Crowdfunded on Kickstarter with financial support from Ouya, the point-and-click game employs both first-person and third-person perspectives in its two hour interactive memoir detailing Joel's four year fight against cancer.

Praised for the honest, emotional approach of its autobiographical narrative, *That Dragon, Cancer* stands apart from conventional point-and-click games, utilising the interactivity of the genre to relate the Greens' own experiences of their son's terminal illness through abstract scenes. A documentary about the game's development entitled *Thank You for Playing* released in 2015, receiving several award nominations and winning the Best Documentary award at Twin Cities Film Fest.

In addition to winning the Game Innovation award, *That Dragon, Cancer* was also nominated for Debut Game. Other nominees for Game Innovation were *Batman: Arkham VR*, *Firewatch*, *Pokémon Go*, *Unseen Diplomacy*, and *The Witness*.

Rocket League (Evolving Game)
Platform: PS4, Xbox One, PC, Mac, Linux

Released in mid-2015, driving-based arcade football game *Rocket League* has undergone numerous changes since launch, with frequent patches, updates, and new content earning it this year's Evolving Game award. Rocket League is a sequel to *Supersonic Acrobatic Rocket-Powered Battle-Cars!,* featuring eight player online matches

with competitive cross-platform gameplay. Developer Psyonix intends to continue releasing new content for *Rocket League*, and in December 2016 added support for custom player-made arenas through the Steam Workshop.

Psyonix's updates to the game include 'mutators' that modify aspects of gameplay such as gravity, ball size, and bounciness, and a crate system incorporating special unlocks for car customisation. New gamemodes include the ice hockey and basketball-inspired 'Snow Day' and 'Hoops', 'Rumble' which adds physics-affecting power ups, and the recent damage-focused 'Dropshot' mode. Dismissing any current plans for a sequel, vice president Jeremy Dunham stated in an interview with Kinda Funny Games "Our goal was to keep making Rocket League better and better so that we don't lose any of the people that want to play."

Other nominees for the Evolving Game award were *Destiny: Rise of Iron*, *Elite Dangerous: Horizons*, *EVE Online*, *Final Fantasy XIV: Online*, and *Hitman*.

Clash Royale (AMD Esports Audience Award)
Platform: iOS, Android

Returning for its second year, the AMD Esports award exists to acknowledge the most popular Esports games among players and audiences over the past year. This year's winner is *Clash Royale*; a mobile strategy game from Supercell that combines mechanics from MOBA, card game, and tower defence genres on a 'freemium' model. Since its launch in January 2016, *Clash Royale* has been updated to include tournaments, leagues, and Victory Challenges. Battles between two players are won by either destroying the most towers or by destroying an opponent's King's tower through the use of cards dealt from a player's chosen deck.

Having previously established an audience for mobile Esports with its predecessor, *Clash of Clans*, Supercell's *Clash Royale* has

featured at Esports events such as ESL, ESWC, and King's Cup, with prize winnings of up to $100,000. The decision to announce *Clash Royale* as 2017's winner has already sparked controversy in the Esports community, as many – including competitor Backstabx, who won the Clash Royale North America Open – holding the opinion that the award should have gone to one of the other nominees, all of which have a much larger Esports following.

Other nominees for the AMD Esports Audience Award were *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*, *DOTA 2*, *League of Legends*, *Overwatch*, and *Street Fighter V*.