# IT'S ALL **GREEK** TO ME

Assassin's Creed Odyssey:
An Epic Greek tale for everyone.

**D**uring the unveiling of Assassin's Creed Odyssey at Ubisoft's E3 press conference, Ubisoft Quebec described the latest entry in the series as an "epic RPG". As Ubisoft Montreal began to change the series' linear action adventure roots to that of a more action-focused RPG in Assassin's Creed Origins, Ubisoft Quebec continued to develop the franchise into what fans of epic player-drive role playing games love; creating a lovechild of Ubisoft open worlds and the beloved consequential deep roleplay universes of CD Projekt Red, Bioware and Bethesda.

"The Elders Scrolls V: Skyrim, Fallout, those two are probably some of my favourites," Director Scott Phillips told *GameSpot*. "And if you look at those games, they give players a lot of options. For us, that was what we wanted to push Assassin's Creed as a franchise into: more choice for the player."

### MYTHS AND LEGENDS

Set in Ancient Greece in 431 BC during the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta, you play as the child of Leonidas, the legendary Warrior King of Sparta. After a prophecy predicting you will curse the Spartan Empire, Leonidas deems you an outcast and throws you off a cliff. Surviving, you eventually become a Spartan-turned-mercenary wielding the great Spear of Leonidas, unravelling the secrets of your family's history, and some of Ancient Greece's greatest myths.

Set hundreds of years before Bayek and Aya created the Assassin Order, Odyssey tells of the ideology behind the hidden group of freedom fighters. In this way, while Assassin's Creed Origins' RPG-centric gameplay shifted

ASSASSIN'S
CREED:
ODYSSEY

"One day, my Spartan,
all this shall be yours."

it away from the series but still within the family, Odyssey's story completely divorces it from the traditional Assassin's Creed narrative to create an even more historically-grounded and unique role playing experience. According to Phillips, you'll experience parts of the game in the present, implying that the Assassin Order arc will tie into the overall narrative at some point, but it's clear that the team is focused on creating a fully realised beautiful Mediterranean paradise.

"I wanted to make sure we didn't give it an academic treatment," Odyssey's Creative Director Jonathan Dumont told *IGN*. "I fell in love with the concept of going back into antiquity and showing it like it was… to see that they were human and not just a statue."

From famed philosopher Socrates to mythological creatures, Ubisoft Quebec is drawing on all aspects of Greek myth and history to design a sense of realism never quite captured in many contemporary images of Ancient Greece. An over the shoulder shot of the player facing off against a Minotaur hints at Witcher-like battles with mythological beings. Colossal statues of Gods and the supernatural, and legendary ancestral weapons, populate the world. When asked whether there will be more than just the one fight with a supernatural creature, and what that entailed, an Ubisoft representative declined to comment. That said, there's a lot of potential in how Ubisoft Quebec can adapt these iconic stories of tragedy and heroism into an epic RPG narrative.

There's a beautiful vast open world to explore, either by land or by sea. Ubisoft open worlds have always felt somewhat gamefied and artificial, with points of interest defined by


ROMANCE ALL THE THINGS!

objectives rather than organically part of the world, but Odyssey's environments feel lived in. Adventuring outside a bustling merchant port city and making my way to a nearby cliff, I witnessed the sun setting on the horizon over the foreground of a meadow of flowers, a merchant travelling by horse and cart to his next destination, and mercenaries scouting the plains for Athenian rebels.

It's a rich, but organic setting.

## AN ODYSSEY FOR ALL

Ubisoft has come a long way since claiming that animating female playable protagonists in Assassin's Creed Unity was too difficult and costly. For the first time in the series, the developer is giving players the choice to play as either a male or female character.

Unlike Assassin's Creed Syndicate, which had you switch between the perspectives of twins Jacob and Evelyn, playing as either Alexios or Kassandra is a permanent choice, and the two are, according to the Ubisoft Quebec developer guiding my hands-on session, their own characters. While they share a similar strong-willed compassionate personality, their facial and vocal expressions in conversation are different. Playing as both, I quickly preferred the sassy abruptness of Kassandra, perhaps because she represents a different perspective in the Assassin's Creed franchise.

Another milestone in Assassin's Creed Odyssey is that players can create personalised relationships with characters, and romance male and female NPCs irrespective of their playable gender. Much like other popular roleplaying games, players interact with NPCs through a series of dialogue choices, yet the decisions you make in these conversations aren't as clearly defined as

> **"Just because you're clicking the heart doesn't mean you're going to get it,"** MacCoubrey said.

Paragon or Renegade. As Narrative Design Director Mel MacCoubrey told *IGN*, these grey decisions translate into how you approach romancing characters.

Although the team didn't want to explicitly tell the player that "X would remember that," their reactions to you are evident in how they present themselves. Being deceitful may be seen as charming to one character and unlikable to another, just as doing what is generally deemed morally right may not be universally accepted by the world of Ancient Greece.

"Just because you're clicking the heart doesn't mean you're going to get it," MacCoubrey said.

Playing as Kassandra, I played my interactions with Kyra, the leader of a small unit of rebels, as flirtatious and playful, and I felt a real chemistry between us. When I tried romancing her as Alexio, she was less responsive, almost as if she admired Kassandra's brute strength and heroics as a Spartan woman. Of course, these romances aren't always as obviously defined and you can choose to reject characters, too. According to MacCoubrey, the team drew inspiration from the romantic tragedies and comedies of the time, such as Aristophanes's Lysistrata, to capture the distinct sexual tension of Ancient Greek society.

"I would say Kyra is a mid-level romance to put it in a weird way," Phillips explained. "There are some side characters, and other characters where it's a shorter thing, but you

can still recruit people to be on your ship crew. And with some of these romanceable characters, you can recruit them to be on your ship and with you for the rest of your journey, or you can never see them again; it's sort of your choice."

"There are also family relationships which you'll make decisions about, and will impact, ultimately, who's around or who's there for help as you get further in the game. You'll see a lot of variation based on the way you've played the game."

"We're telling a story of a family that has been torn apart and a family tragedy," MacCoubrey added. "We thought it would be better to place those romances in the world, to have player's own stories to be able to develop those stories further, instead of forcing an opinion on you as a player."

### PUTTING THE EPIC IN EPIC RPG

Early in my demo, I accepted a mission from Socrates to rescue a freedom fighter. Sneaking into the open house where he was kept, I took out each of the guards and managed to free him. As I helped him escape, he announced himself as a radical and attacked me, so, naturally, I defended myself and accidentally killed him. When reporting back to Socrates, he was disappointed to hear of what had happened, and my choices led to a discussion on ethics and morality: *Was it right to kill a man in self-defence or to let him be free to kill himself? Did he deserve to live? What is "justice?" What are ethics?* Although my conversation with the wise philosopher was short, it was perhaps one of the most memorable parts of the demo and emphasised that my choices had consequences.

From there, I tried to explore the open sea and crashed into a nearby island. I joined up with Kyra, a Delosian rebel leader with bandit group of misfits, and Thaletas, the last of a Spartan army dispatched to Delos, as they planned to attack a nearby Athenian camp and reclaim Delos from enemy territory. Kyra's and Thaletas's tactics differed - Kyra preferred the stealth approach and wanted to cull the camp's resources to weaken them,
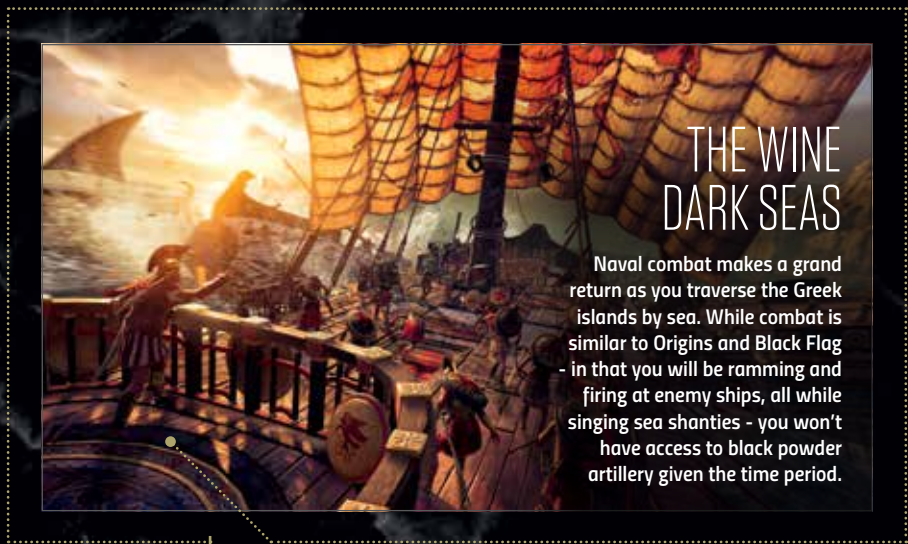
which could take time but eventually make the mission easier, while Thaletas wanted to bombard them with one direct frontal assault - and it was up to me to decide which route to take. Playing as Kassandra and wanting to see a romance between the two, I chose Kyra's plan and visited a nearby Athenian outpost and set fire to their resources.

Marching in, we raided the camp and attacked anything in our way. Kyra stood inanimate and in between objects - a game-breaking bug that lead to a Ubisoft developer restarting the console - before appearing in a cutscene bloody and sweaty from the very fight she failed to engage in. We, or rather, I, had weakened most of what was left of the Athenian-occupied state of Delos, and all that was left was one final epic battle at the beach.

Three hundred soldiers: one hundred and fifty Delos soldiers and I against one hundred and fifty Athenians, faced-off. The chants and battle cries getting louder as chaos ensued. The passionate red colours of Delos and Sparta and the blue and yellow shields of Athenians mixed in the battlefield. All that I could behold in front of me was sand particles, metal clashing and bodies falling. Dancing around the battlefield striking nearby enemies with a spear, sword, and axe, I quickly became overwhelmed. I was surrounded by four soldiers wielding a sword and shield, another taller brute carrying a large mace, and one more dual-wielding short swords.

Spartan-kicking (I believe it's called it a front kick - Ed) the heavy man, I quickly grabbed each of the men's shields and violently knocked them back with them and fired a multi-arrowed shot. I switched to my spear and struck the nimble dual-wielding soldier from a distance, switching back to my sword and shield to best prepare myself for the brute approaching me. After a gradual dodge and strike tactic, oftren accidentally attacking other nearby enemies, I took him down and was swarmed by another five. Six down, one hundred and forty-four more to go,

and their powerful captain, a collosal of a man dual-wielding shiny maces charged at me as he violently pushed through enemy and ally soldiers alike like a concentrated cannon.

It was a hell of a fight.

### PICK A SIDE

At its core, this is a game designed around choice and consequence. Every interaction you have causes a reaction in some way. Even small choices, like choosing to loot a presumably abandoned chest in a deserted village, have consequences. Most loot found in the world is owned by someone else, and carelessly looting a chest and getting caught will increase your notoriety and chance of being hunted by fellow mercenaries. If you're a masterful communicator, however, you can always try and recruit whoever hunts you as part of your ship crew via the deeply improved dialogue tree.

Every mission you complete influences either side of the Peloponnesian conflict, and bargaining your morals in the process can lead to economic and political gain. You can fight for honor, hunt bounties for coin, or even defy your Spartan upbringing, but ultimately the world will react to your choices. Territories, political hierarchies and economies are constantly changing, and given the war lasted for 30 years, Ubisoft Quebec has the freedom to let you change the events of the war as you see fit, while still resulting in the famous Spartan victory.

Ubisoft Quebec is building on the very solid foundations of Ubisoft Montreal's Assassin's Creed Origins, while also trying a lot of things new in the franchise, to create a refined and personal, but still epic RPG. If my concerns are resolved in time, I might finally return to the Assassin's Creed series. Assassin's Creed Odyssey is already shaping up to be the best game in the series and an experience that could potentially sit among some of the greatest role playing games of the last five years. *JULIAN RIZZO-SMITH* PC



## THE WINE DARK SEAS

Naval combat makes a grand return as you traverse the Greek islands by sea. While combat is similar to Origins and Black Flag - in that you will be ramming and firing at enemy ships, all while singing sea shanties - you won't have access to black powder artillery given the time period.

... and the horse you rode in on!


Are we getting sick of "THIS IS SPARTA!" jokes? I really hope not...