

The attacking player's FIFA

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With a new season, comes the next installment of the iconic EA Sports franchise, FIFA. The hype surrounding FIFA 18 has been massive! A viral marketing campaign along with a couple of eye-catching features helped promote the game well and generated a significant pre-release expectation.

With their second run with the Frostbite engine, EA Sports have amped up its presentation, be it off or on the field. The bright color palette in the menu helps to evoke a celebratory atmosphere. A well-rounded soundtrack makes it even better (especially Tash Sultana's *Jungle*). But what makes FIFA stand out from its peers is the in-game presentation. Martin Tyler and Alan Smith make an amazing commentary team with their play-by-play analysis.

While, at times during Kick Off matches, they might feel a bit repetitive, they mix it up with regular updates on real life transfer news and match updates from elsewhere in *The Journey* and Manager Mode. Licensed presentations of the Premier League, La Liga, Bundesliga and the MLS are top notch and make up a realistic experience.

While the Frostbite engine's initial run with FIFA 17 was fun, the second time out with FIFA 18 feels a bit more refined. A slowed down gameplay makes for more strategic implementation during attacks and players now tend to hold on to the ball during close control. AI teammates have improved as well. They now tend to make more intelligent runs and try to open up spaces more often. Crosses have been worked on as well as more headed goals

can now come from normal lobbs from the wings. What makes things even better for attackers is that even more beautiful goals can now be scored. Long range efforts have a better chance of getting in. And the new replays make the goals even more worthwhile. What ends up being bothersome is how the work done of defense in FIFA 17 has now gone to waste as FIFA 18's defense mechanism has gone down a step or two. In the attempt of making long range efforts easier to make, the defense system tweaks have backfired as standard defending has been made even harder to control and the 50/50 chances more often than not end up going in the attacker's favor. But the main highlight this year is that certain players feel lifelike, especially Cristiano Ronaldo - the cover athlete of this year's edition. They run, dribble, shoot like we see them do on TV and its surreal how far technology has

come. But most teams other than Real Madrid sadly do not seem to have found their identity, thus making the matches a bit bland. Career mode now has cutscenes where players sit down with the managers during transfers and you can even add clauses to players' contracts as well.

FIFA 18 has been promoted with two massive features, Icons and *The Journey*. Icons have been introduced to include legends in FIFA Ultimate Team to mix it up. Each Icon has three different cards and each card represents them at their best in a particular era. Ultimate Team has mostly been left untouched as EA Sports continue to cash in through their winning formula. The introduction of Squad Battles bring out an unique experience for players preferring to play alone rather than playing against someone online as they can now play against some of the community's best

assembled teams.

The Journey Returns is the main marquee feature of this year's release as players step back into the boots of the ever rising Alex Hunter. Last year's *Journey* felt a little hit and miss for me but this year, things have amped up for a pretty engaging tale. While one complaint would be that the choice system mechanism really doesn't lead up to things being different except for a certain teammate-choosing sequence. More plot development and the ability to play as other characters adds depth to the story as this year's story mode shapes up into a tale well told.

All in all, FIFA 18 has turned out to be a game that seems to have prioritized a bit more on style over substance. The gameplay tweaks work in some ways, while they fail in others. But I really hope that EA comes up with a patch soon to work on the defense mechanism. Even if they take it back to 17's method of defending, it will work. But with beautiful presentations and licensed teams and an addictive online platform, it's very obvious why FIFA stands as the best sports game around. One can only hope that the story of Alex Hunter gets to continue on to next year or EA serves us with an expansion pack during the World Cup. So prepare your strategy for success and get your copy as soon as possible.

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