

# Under siege

Drawing on their own life experiences, the makers of **Hollow Home** tell a tale of survival in Ukraine

Maksym is 14 years old when the bombs drop. His parents are away, and he must fend for himself as the city he knows disintegrates around him. Shells hit his neighbourhood as hard as they impact his morale, and he must use every resource at his disposal to survive. This is the reality of war in Ukraine that *Hollow Home* seeks to replicate. He doesn't know it yet, but Maksym must survive for 20 days in the besieged city, finding solace in helping others while seeking an escape route and trying to reunite with his parents. Structurally inspired by *Disco Elysium* and *This War of Mine*, *Hollow Home* draws directly on real-life stories from the invasion of Ukraine, with Maksym's ordeal symbolising the suffering of civilians in cities such as Mariupol, Kherson and Kyiv.

"The story and all the characters are fictional,"

**Valerii Minenko,**

co-founder of developer Twigames, tells us. "But we wanted it to look realistic, to show our experiences, our reflection of the events, and our pain and horror."

When Russia first invaded Ukraine in 2022, the small Kyiv-based Twigames team moved with their families to two houses in the Carpathian mountains. This sowed the seeds for what would become *Hollow Home*: rather than the terrors of the frontline, Minenko and his colleagues wanted to capture how the war eroded everyday life, emphasising the mundane brutality of regular electrical outages, fuel shortages and queuing for food. "It's not

a game about war," Minenko continues. "It's a game about civilians, ordinary people who are trying to survive and adapt and understand the world that's dramatically changed around them."

**When the team** moved back to Kyiv a couple of months later, as the Russian forces retreated from the region, they were forced to adapt to a new normality of missile strikes and evacuations, working amid Russia's continuous attacks on the Ukrainian capital. "We had problems with destroyed infrastructure,"

Minenko says, "with light, electricity, with heating during the winter. We had an attack a few weeks ago, and a building was destroyed just two blocks from our office." Ever resourceful, Twigames bought a generator to put on its balcony – something Minenko says is now commonplace in Kyiv –

and installed solar panels, literally trying to keep the lights on while the bombs fall.

As in this brutal new reality, survival in *Hollow Home* requires more than stockpiling fuel or topping up 'hunger' and 'thirst' gauges with food and water. To emphasise both the psychological toll of the invasion and the spirit of the Ukrainian people, your most vital resource is 'resolve', which you can build up by interacting with NPCs and finishing quests. Providing aid to friends and neighbours will bolster your mental defences for when the explosions come. While the battle on the streets is not represented – there is no

**MUSIC OF MARIUPOL** While most of the Twigames team is based in Kyiv, composer Danylo Dunets is from Mariupol itself. "When we made the first announcement and received letters from people, one was from a composer from Mariupol, [who] left on the last evacuation train," Minenko says. "He proposed to create the music for the game." The team brought Dunets on to create the game's soundtrack, providing another connection between its fictionalised events and the real siege. The 20-track score reflects the events and emotions of each in-game day, from the despair of the siege to more uplifting scores as escape starts to seem possible.



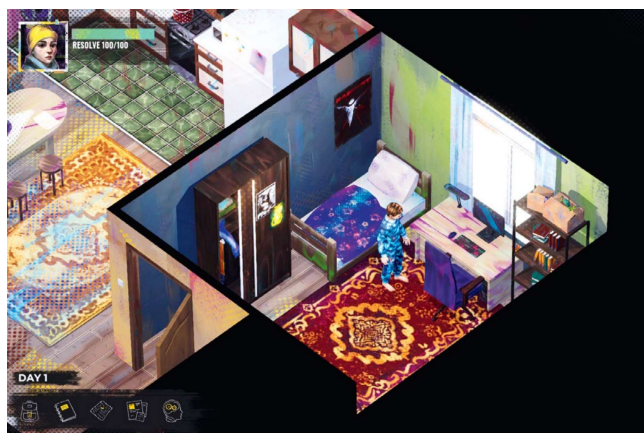
Valerii Minenko, founder, Twigames

combat, and no Russian soldiers are in the game – the fight to stay emotionally strong is relentless.

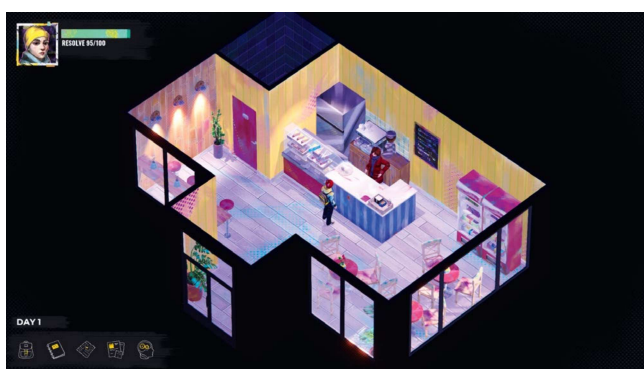
Authenticity was vital to Twigames, which employed a journalist to create a report on the siege of Mariupol, including everything from residents' testimonies to a record of the weather conditions. The resulting document was 600 pages long, and was crucial for recreating the history of the invasion. The snowstorm of March 8, 2022, for example, became the inspiration for one of *Hollow Home*'s most acutely observed survival mechanics: just as the people of Mariupol had to melt snow for drinking water, so must Maksym.

As development progressed, more people came to Twigames to tell their stories directly. "When we made the first announcement, there were some people who started writing to us and shared their diaries," Minenko says. "There were some events that repeated for different people, like people taking water from their heating systems [to drink]."

Due for release in late 2026, *Hollow Home* feels exceptionally hard-hitting as a result of the team's extensive research and own experiences, and the end result aims to depict the hardship of life in wartime in painstaking detail. When Minenko talks about the hurdles the studio has overcome, he could just as easily be describing Maksym's plight. "We're trying to show how different people react to the events, because challenges change people a lot," he concludes. "Some people find something new in themselves – new sides of their character. You keep finding solutions for every new challenge that you have. You just keep fighting." ■



ABOVE Twigames starts work on *Hollow Home* from a house in the Carpathians after fleeing Ukraine's capital. LEFT Maksym wakes up in a typical Ukrainian teenager's bedroom. Little does he know the next three weeks will be anything but typical



ABOVE Food shortages were common during the siege of Mariupol and will impact Maksym in the game as they did many ordinary Ukrainians in reality. RIGHT Finding time to play between the missile strikes is important for Maksym's mental health

