

After two years of delays, Minecraft's visual upgrade has been canceled

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- This gallery serves as a reminder of the *Minecraft* that could have been. It looked incredible.
Mojang / Sam Machkovech
- A panning shot over a blocky world bathed in a sunset.
- Go to your favorite search engine and type "define:crepuscular rays" if you want to know more about the visual trick used here.
- Click back and forth between this image and the next for a good look at the pack's dynamic lighting model.
- Notice the appropriate mix of shadows and ambient occlusion here.
- That's a pretty advanced example of screen-space reflections, what with the lanterns' glowing effect *not* appearing in the water below.
- Oh, and it would have all run in "4K!"
- If this had launched, we would've operated a server that ran exclusively in "sunset" time.
- A final pan over the tree-lined world.
- Nice view. Shame.

After announcing a plan to completely overhaul *Minecraft's*

visual engine in 2017, the game's developers at Mojang have finally come clean: the "Super Duper Graphics Pack" is no longer coming to the hugely popular sandbox game.

The update's E3 2017 announcement sent tongues wagging thanks to an incredible trailer, which bathed the game's familiar, blocky environs with a newly dynamic shadow-and-light model, crepuscular rays, screen-space reflections, material-based lighting, and more. Keeping in line with its description as a "pack," the update left the game's raw assets untouched, which made it seem similar to other existing "texture packs" sold within modern *Minecraft* games. All of this would even run in 4K resolution on supported hardware, Mojang said, and it promised a free launch by "fall 2017."

Once that date slipped, Mojang became wholly mum about the pack's existence until Monday. That's when Mojang confirmed the project's cancellation in a brief, official blog post. In it, the company told fans, "Unfortunately, the pack proved too technically demanding to implement as planned." Instead of offering technical details, Mojang went on to blame the update's problems on "how the pack performed across devices."

Thanks to this brief statement, we're forced to read between the lines and remember that the Super Duper Graphics Pack was originally announced as a free update for Minecraft on Windows 10 and Xbox as opposed to power-starved platforms such as Nintendo Switch or smartphones. And we learned in December 2018 that Microsoft was officially done supporting the game on Xbox 360 consoles. This may very well have been a crucial brick to lay in moving forward on "Xbox One-only" console support for the pack.

So that "across devices" line may very well point to the non-X version of Xbox One as a performance sticking point. But neither Mojang nor Microsoft is saying.

Shortly after the pack's 2017 announcement, Microsoft rolled

out a *Minecraft* “beta test” channel via the Xbox One Insider channel. But that test version of the game never included any hints of Super Duper Graphics Pack bonuses or even a jump to 4K resolution. However, that doesn’t mean Microsoft is done pushing *Minecraft*’s limits on its existing platforms. The Monday blog post included a tease of *some* technical upgrade possibly coming: “We’re constantly trying to make the most of the technical architecture of each [platform]. We’ll be able to share more on that subject very soon.”

And in good news, *some* of the Super Duper update’s graphical touches appear to have found a home in the promising spin-off game *Minecraft Dungeons*, slated to launch sometime next year.

Listing image by Mojang / Sam Machkovech

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