

NAG

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING TECHNOLOGY & COMPUTING MAGAZINE



MADE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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- MOTHERBOARDS - 10 OF THEM <<
- BATTLE FOR MIDDLE EARTH REVIEW <<
- CONSTANTINE PREVIEW <<
- RUGBY 2005 FIRST LOOK <<
- NFSU2 REVIEW <<
- MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION REVIEW <<
- DOOM BOARDGAME <<

PC Xbox GameCube Mobile GBA PlayStation 2



Preview Battlefield 2

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WITH EXPEDITIOUSNESS

Experimental
Concept



www.nag.co.za
february 2005

Editors: Sebastian 2 | Curtis Arnold 2 | Publishers: Samie Miller 6
Managers: Cosmin 1 | Stephen West (Head) (July 05) | Adam Smith Volume 2 | Sir City | Spillies Oak 2 MP
The Secret for Middle Earth | War of the Worlds | Front of the Matrix
Drivers: 602 Graham 6 51 | Windows XP 2002 | XBOX 360/PlayStation 2/3 | Windows XP 2002 | Devil 801
Anime: PCP 10 | Magazine: Volume 9 | February 2005
Cheats: Cheatful (October 2004) & All Update Support | Tomtom 1 | DMW 1 | Fx Oy | Technology Dem.

sponsors

Electronic Arts | MegaRom Interactive
Minimum Specification (February 2005): 1.2GHz CPU | 256MB RAM | 20MB DVD Video Card | 300MB HDD

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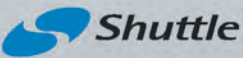


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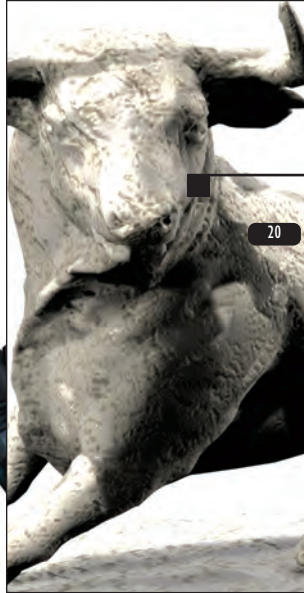
Graphics processor : NVIDIA GeForce 6600 GT, Core Clock: 500 MHz
Memory : 128 MB 128-bit GDDR3 SDRAM, Memory Clock: 1000 MHz
Bus system : PCI-Express X16
Extra : SLI Compatible



Stock Available



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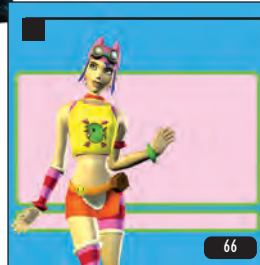


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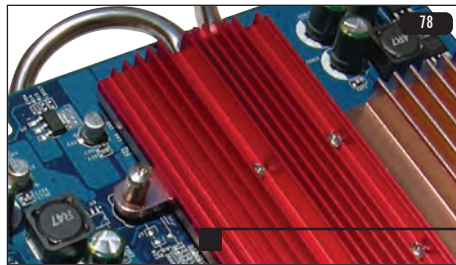


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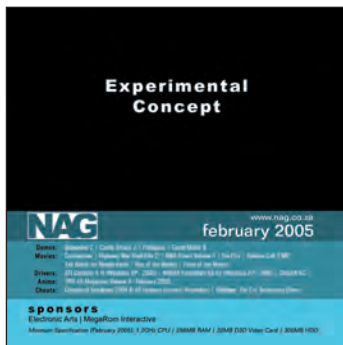
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 Movies: Constantine | Highway War [Half-Life 2] | NBA Street Volume 3 | Sin City | Splinter Cell 3 MP
 The Battle for Middle-Earth | War of the Worlds | Flash of the Month
 Drivers: ATI Catalyst 4.11 [Windows XP - 2000] | NVIDIA ForceWare 53.03 [Windows XP - 2000] | DirectX 9C
 Anime: .PDF LO Magazine: Volume 9 - February 2005
 Cheats: Cheatbook Database 2004 & All Updates [current: November] | Utilities: Far Cry Technology Demo

These few brave companies make the Cover CD a reality every month... Think fondly of them!



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PlayStation 2



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War is the sudden stop that breaks the jar of peace - deep!

One of the things that makes this job so much fun is that you never know what's going to happen next. One hour you're sitting at your desk trying to look busy and the next you're calling your travel agent about a trip overseas for some press function, product launch or otherwise interesting factory tour. One of these great unknowns of each issue is the cover of this magazine - because it's usually the last thing anyone thinks about. For example, the CD with the artwork for this month's cover arrived 2 whole days before this magazine went to the printer [thanks to Claire for pulling through again, can we send you Swiss chocolates and fine wine - serious]. Some magazine professionals might call this lack of planning irresponsible and they'd probably be right. But where's the fun in life if you have to plan everything a month in advance? Enjoy the feature on Battlefield 2 - this game is going to rock and roll so get yourself an ADSL connection and prepare for battle ... or just go to page 38 and pretend your 56K modem is up to the task.



It really is a circus with bad clowns and a limp elephant

James suggested that I use this space to beat on about the fact that Electronic Arts is trying to buy the whole gaming industry and why that might be a bad thing. I mean, they can't possibly think that buying up all the competition is good for any system of commerce. What's next on the shopping list - Microsoft? They should rather go after Nintendo - maybe then we'd occasionally get a few games in for review. But we usually don't listen to James much and we're currently having a love affair with the idea of Battlefield 2. So instead I've decided to cover a whole pile of different topics and hope he doesn't notice. So hang on tight and remember to let go if you feel any burning or stinging.

Before you send a mail

Yes, we know. This month's cover CD isn't what you'd call stuffed to the gills with exciting demos and playable code. It is just the way things are this time of the year and not some evil conspiracy bent on ruining your life. We hunted, searched and grabbed all kinds of goodies here and there - the CD's not terrible, it just feels wrong that there's no big game demo on it. So wrong I felt compelled to say something here.

No games

While on the topic of that time of the year, we're also a little light on games. Not this issue so much as the next one. There are plenty of previews but hardly any new games on the shelf. Blame Christmas! However, after the lull cometh the storm and 2005 should be very different from 2004 by offering a large number of blockbuster releases from a very diverse range of genres. Instead of all the major releases falling into one genre, or something like that, the bottom line is that 2005 will roast your noodle.

Expand

Do yourself a favour and grab a copy of SA Computer Magazine; specifically the February edition which will be on-shelf on 2 February 2005. Why am I plugging this magazine you might be wondering? Well wonder no more all will be revealed in a few ... [sigh]; printed text is just not the same as those fake home shopping adverts on TV. Anyway if you do open the February issue of SACM you'll recognise a few familiar names here and there. Besides the mighty NAG we're now also publishing SA Computer Magazine. Yes, it just means more hard work with no extra pay but hey, did you really think that shooting root all day, while playing games wasn't going to come at a price? On that note we can also reveal who the mysterious Tom Taylor really is. Go to the hardcore section to find out. If you're the lazy type read this: Tom Taylor is really Regardt van der Berg from SACM. Say thanks for saving you a trip.

SACM will focus on all those interesting topics, which

may have an influence on your life from a technological or business point of view, but are never covered in NAG. Have a look - you'll probably learn something useful. The major benefit in publishing 2 magazines is that we have improved the quality of copy in NAG [this should hopefully eliminate those very rare spelling and grammatical errors]. Say hello to Chris Bistline [Art Director] and Nati de Jager [Copy Editor]. Chris will be tearing the April 2005 issue of NAG apart and will hopefully come up with a professionally designed magazine. From this issue Nati will be checking the copy for problems [so please feel free to point out any mistakes - we dock R1 off his pay for every mistake you find and donate the proceeds to our favourite charity, my 3D card upgrade fund]. The bottom line is that NAG is stronger than ever and this is good news for everyone.

We moved

With the above mentioned expansion we've also moved to a new office. This was an episode from hell while we tried to assemble desks, run cables and get the carpets cleaned ... and all of this during the December holidays when we were supposed to be sunning our butts on the beach. So now that everyone is settled in, things feel very different, there's much more space and we have a jar of jellybeans in the entrance hall. I'm sure there's some kind of rodent that travels through the power conduits at night so we might be laying a few humane traps here and there. It's fun to be able to shout Quake and within a few second there's a server up somewhere. We're considering getting Miktar to set-up an office Webcam ... we'll see. Someone made an interesting remark the other day when a reader arrived at the office to collect a magazine [January was sold out in a number of stores]. He mentioned that it was the first time that anybody had ever looked impressed when they first saw the NAG office. I'm not sure if that's good or bad.

Don't miss it...

The next issue is the March issue and it's important that you get it, because in it you will find something that will empower you to change the future of the magazine forever. Your clue is red paper and white text - don't miss it! If you do, don't blame us when things turn out bad for you.

Bigger than Elvis

Also, turn over to page 38 for our Battlefield 2 preview. Keep reading NAG because Electronic Arts, Arena 77 and NAG are putting something interesting together when the game is launched. As they say, watch this space for more exciting information.

I guess I should stop now ... this should be an exciting year - prepare for higher energy.

Michael James
[Editor]

Caption of the Month

Each month we'll select a screenshot from one of the games in the issue and write a funny caption for it, well... we'll try and make it funny...

Your job is to see if you can come up with an even funnier caption and send it to: ed@nag.co.za
Subject: **February Caption**

If you use the wrong subject in your e-mail it'll get deleted...

Your prize: Our sponsor for the screenshot of the month competition is Vivendi Universal Games. They said they'll give us something interesting each month... if we don't want it we'll be sure to send it along to the winner mentioned under this block of text.



NAG's February Caption



'But I just washed it...' - NAG's [99.9% lame] effort

November winner



"Did he say we crashed because of the FLAT AA batteries or because of the FLAK AA batteries? I better call the AA for help" - **Jean Hulicjar**

NAG REVIEW RIGS SUPPLIED BY:

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Specification:

Intel P4 3.2 GHz CPU | Gigabyte I915P PCI Express MOBO
Gigabyte ATI X800 XT 256MB
AOpen A90E 19" Monitor | Corsair 2GB RAM DDR II 533
Seagate Barracuda 80GB HDD
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Front USB & Audio
1394, S/PDIF support



XC cube - AV Edition

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Intel 865G chipset,
Support P4 800MHz
Front USB & Audio & 1394,
& S/PDIF support
Support Dual DDR400
Built-in TV card /
FM Tuner & Remote Control



SPECIFICATIONS:

		EX65PE	EX65	EX18
CPU	TYPE	Intel P4/Celeron	Intel P4/Celeron	AMD K7
	FSB	400/533/800	400/533/800	200/266/333
CHIPSET		Intel 865PE / ICH5	Intel 865PE / ICH5	nForce2-GT/MCP-T
VGA		None	8X AGP (OnDie)	8X AGP (OnDie)
SOUND		AC97 5.1	AC97 5.1	AC97 5.1
LAN		10/100/1000	10/100/1000	10/100/1000
SATA		2	2	None
USB2.0		2	2	2
IEEE1394		2	2	1
DIMENSIONS		300(L) x 200(W) x 185(H)mm	300(L) x 200(W) x 185(H)mm	300(L) x 200(W) x 185(H)mm

Bad PlayStation Acting

words james francis

At the moment I'm indulging myself in the comedy series *Spaced*, made by the same friendly people who bought us the excellent *Shawn of the Dead*. Okay, not everyone liked that foray into horror, but I have a soft spot for *Zombie* movies and I'll watch pretty much anything that involves seemingly lobotomized humans go around trying to take healthy chunks of flesh from hapless, living victims.

Whoever saw the move will recall that in the beginning the two housemates witness a game of *Halo* on the Xbox being played - and to my disbelief it was being played properly! Any gamer or computer user can quickly tell you one of their pet hates: when you see someone use a PC or play a game on the movie screen, but it's dreadfully obvious that they don't have a clue what they are doing. I suspect that racing drivers feel the same when they see an actor jerk and jiggle a steering wheel during a scene, usually because they don't actually drive the car. And it's always painful, because exactly how hard is it to fake playing a game? Sometimes actors don't even seem to know how to hold the controller, least of all that they are button-bashing the analogue stick. Thus enter *Spaced*. With the miracle of DVD I get to listen to the director and writers' commentary and it didn't take too long (Episode 3, which features oodles of *Resident Evil 2* footage) for them to coining my new favourite catch phrase: *Bad PlayStation Acting*. Apparently the two writers (and lead roles) did another project that featured this and they wanted to do anything to avoid it happening again. The nice thing is that it shows. So what, you might think. Granted, it's not really that big a deal, but it did confirm that I prefer seeing decent gaming on-screen than nitpicking over bad scenes. It's just a sign of respect of the hobby (and it's clear that some of *Spaced*'s cast are big gaming fans). With games becoming more and more popular, we should encourage this trend to continue. Alas that might also mean watching everything that Vin Diesel stars in (since he is an avid gamer), but a quick poll with the women I know confirms this isn't a problem - at least not for them. So take your girlfriend to see Vin Diesel, buy anything made by the *SotD* guys and take chance of the first chance in recorded history to fight *Bad PlayStation Acting*.

on the wire



Molyneux honoured by the Queen

Game legend gets more legendary

Peter Molyneux is a name that already finds itself on most gamers' lips, thanks to a legacy of great games released from his Bullfrog and Lionhead studios. Now the Queen of Britain has included him on her New Year's list to receive the Order of the British Empire, a merit given to subjects of the UK who have achieved great merit. First instituted in 1917 by King George V, the awards are based on recommendations from the Prime Minister, who in turn gets suggestions from other ministers and the public.

Molyneux, known for games like *Populous*, *Dungeon Keeper*, *Theme Hospital*, *Black & White*, *Syndicate* and *Fable* was surprised at the appointment when interviewed by the BBC. He isn't the first UK developer to get the honour, though: entrepreneur and *Argonaut* founder Jez San has received the distinction as well.

American McGee on a writing spree

American McGee has been rather busy, of late. He recently completed a film script for "The Forgotten Faery Tale", which deals with a teenage boy who must bring balance to a world with too many happy endings. Furthermore, he has been enlisted by Jerry Bruckheimer to write a script for the film *Oz*; this has led to McGee reviving his *Oz* game project, which was shelved when Atari pulled out. McGee is also looking for someone to publish *Scrapland*, a murder mystery game set in a robot world.

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Fight Night Round 2

EA puts their boxing gloves back on

EA Sports will release this boxing game for the PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube next month. Its cover athlete, Bernard Hopkins, says it is the most realistic boxing simulator to date; this claim is backed up by the fact that as a fighter is pummelled during the course of play, he weakens and is less able to defend himself, as would be expected in reality. The PS2 and Xbox versions will include online multiplayer support.

Rainbow Six 4

The next instalment of UbiSoft's successful Rainbow Six franchise will reach PC, PlayStation 2 and Xbox in the next couple of months. Developed by Red Storm Entertainment and UbiSoft's Montreal Studios, the game continues the counter-terrorist theme; the main innovations being of a technical nature, rather than in terms of concept.



A leaked memo from EA revealed that employee overtime changes are being planned to the company's working policy. The publisher got sued by several employees last year for poor employment practices.

Nvidia has bolstered its position in the console market by joining Sony to develop a graphics chip for the PlayStation 3. The unit is expected to be unveiled at the end of 2005.

Konami has announced a new Castlevania game on the Nintendo DS. The game will still be 2D, but the publisher promises that it incorporates elements of the new technology seen on the handheld.

Apparently a slight twist on the PSP causes the UMD CD to fly out of the unit, leading some to speculate what would happen during an exuberant game play session. It's not clear if Sony will address the problem before the US launch.

Nintendo, previously uninterested in the online gaming market, arguing that it forms a minority among consumers, is facing up to the inevitable, with plans to enter that sector in 3 or 4 years. Intriguingly, the company appears to be working with Square Enix, a staunch partner of Sony, on implementing an online system for the DS, presumably by means of its wireless capabilities.



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Elite Warriors: Vietnam

As you read this, Elite Warriors: Vietnam may already be available. This first-person shooter was developed by nFusion Interactive with assistance from relevant experts. Players will assume the role of Green Beret commandoes in the famous Southeast Asian conflict.



Tortuga: Pirate's Revenge

This is the sequel to Tortuga: Pirates of the New World. The game has a strong focus on story, and includes trade elements as a way of restocking your ship or for offloading booty plundered from victims. The game is expected in the next month or two, on PC.

Digital Retro book

This is, essentially, a history book relating the period from 1975 to 1988, and covers some pretty obscure hardware. The retro technology described and illustrated within will be totally unknown to most modern computer users, and thus, as well as being stylishly presented, Digital Retro is quite informative. Each item's manufacturing company's details are presented, as well as what impact it had on the industry and little-known facts about it. The author, Gordon Laing, has been heavily involved in the computing press for many years.



EA and Vivendi have thrown their weight behind Blu-Ray, Sony's standard to replace DVD technology. Blu-Ray will already be resident on the PlayStation 3.

In an interview at CES Bill Gates said that Microsoft wants the Xbox 2 to broaden the digital entertainment sector and bring multimedia to the masses, indicating that the next console will be far more than a simple gaming machine.

Lionhead Studios and Jeff Minter have been collaborating on Unity for the GameCube, but the project has now been abandoned. The reason for this decision is the fact that either the project could be rushed, or it could be properly developed and be released far too late in the GameCube's commercial life cycle. This begs the question: might this title be revived in a different format?

Square Enix is at work on a "new concept brand", but remains tight-lipped about it. Speculation has it that whatever it is will be presented across various media formats, much as Final Fantasy has been handled of late, with films and concerts being produced. The company owns several US trademarks derived from the name Code Age, which is virtually all that's been revealed about the new franchise.



CSI: Double Pack

Become a CSI agent working alongside Grissom, Catherine and the rest of the CSI team. This first-person adventure will test players' nerves and intellect as they question witnesses, examine crime scenes, and analyze evidence utilizing the latest in forensic equipment. Building off the success of CSI: Crime Scene Investigation, CSI 2: Dark Motives features a number of improvements including in-depth evidence examination, scalable difficulty and more interactive lab functionality.

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PSVRatings enter Gaming

ESRB finds itself with new competition

Movie ratings body Current Attractions has decided to implement its PSVRatings system for video games. In a move to clarify game content to parents, which Current Attractions feels are not being informed adequately with the industry standard ESRB system, the system simply breaks a game's content down into three categories: Profanity, Violence and Sex. The intensity of each section is indicated with one of three colours: red, yellow and green. This is to help parents make a quick decision on the content of a title.

The ratings are determined through playing a game extensively, listing all forms of abuse that would fall under these categories. Then using the PSVRatings database, it is determined what the game's rating should be. The original aim of the system was to create an industry-independent rating system for the movie industry, which uses a voluntary system, and Current Attractions feel that because the ESRB system is firstly native to the industry and thus possibly biased towards sales potential, not to mention a bit too complicated and confusing for parents, their system will give a far clearer picture what to expect.



Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

The European (PAL) versions of MGS3: Snake Eater will boast features not available in the Japanese and American versions of the game. The game is essentially a prequel to the other Metal Gear Solid titles, with a 1960s Cold War setting, and most action taking place in jungle environments. Among the PAL version's enhanced content is a Duel Mode, whereby players can tackle bosses individually, and Demo Theatre, which allows players to view the story sequences in order. Snake Eater is scheduled for release on PlayStation 2 next month.



China repels supposed British invasion

The Chinese Ministry of Culture has banned Football Manager 2005, from London-based Sports Interactive, on the grounds that it threatens "China's sovereignty and territorial integrity" by listing Taipei, Hong Kong and Tibet as separate countries. This is apparently contrary to Chinese law and the government will actively prosecute anyone distributing the game. SEGA, publisher of the title, has countered by stating that this pertains to the English language version of the game, which most likely reached China via illegal means, and that the Chinese localised version complies with Chinese policies.

Handhelds to the rescue? Can the PSP and DS make the upcoming transition smoother?

2005 could be a tough year for the gaming industry as it is a transition year. Traditionally when new hardware is introduced into the market, it affects the growth negatively, since most consumers tend to wait for the new hardware instead of spending money on current platforms. This translates into tough times for game developers, since they have to manage higher development costs and lower yield for products released in this time. The problem truly showed its head with the launch of the PlayStation 2 - the market rushed out to meet the console, leaving the ageing PlayStation behind, but there weren't enough games on the new platform to make up for the money taken away from the PS.

This time the industry plans to make the transition easier and some analysts feel that this will come in the guise of the new handhelds, namely Nintendo's DS and Sony's PSP. Wedbush Morgan Securities analyst Michael Pachter believes that the new hardware will help usher in growth in the sector otherwise lost to consumers waiting for the release of the Xbox 2 in December and the Sony PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Revolution somewhere in 2006. The PSP and DS both saw great numbers upon their release, showing that the public appeal is there and Pachter predicts a 10% growth in the software side of the industry.

Not everyone agrees, though, as some analysts point out even with the boost in the handheld market it won't be enough to support flagging sales expected with to precede the arrival of the next generation of consoles. For instance, while the PSP is doing well, it is expected to be more expensive in other markets, not to mention that purchasing a second battery is almost a necessity to use the hardware effectively. The DS might look strong as well, but Nintendo's name doesn't have the same brand appeal as Sony's gaming hardware, clearly shown by the PlayStation 2, a more expensive unit, outselling the GameBoy Advance.

New C&C Red Alert game on its way

In a clever public relations move, Electronic Arts recently revealed to fan-site administrators via e-mail that a new Command & Conquer Red Alert game is in the works, and that it will make use of an evolved version of the Sage engine, which was first used in Command & Conquer Generals and, more recently, in The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle Earth (reviewed in this issue). Official information should be appearing on EA's site or in press releases soon.



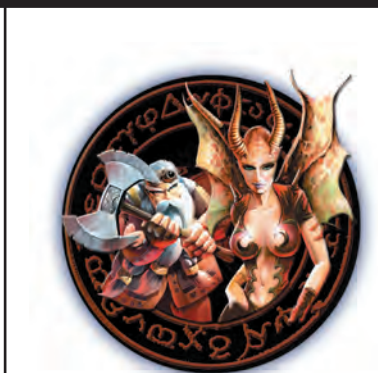
Conspiracy: Weapons of Mass Destruction

Next month should see the release, on PC, PlayStation 2 and Xbox, of Kujū's and Oxygen Interactive's first-person shooter Conspiracy: Weapons of Mass Destruction. Little has been made known in terms of story-line, but the title is likely very self-explanatory.



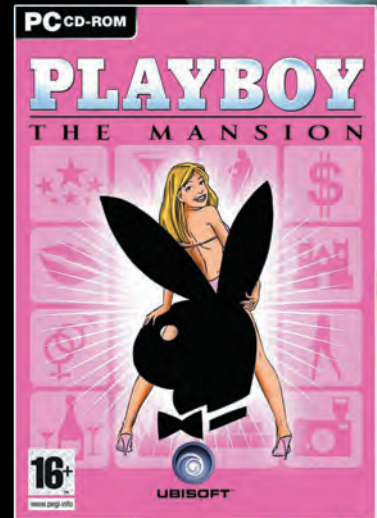
SACRED Underworld

This is the upcoming expansion pack for Ascaron's role-playing game of last year, expected in April. The add-on expands the game world and adds new characters, antagonists, weapons and items.



Juiced

Juiced, from Juice Games and THQ, has been scheduled for release in May. The two companies are currently engaged in final adjustments and enhancements. The game will be released on PC, PlayStation 2 and Xbox.



Playboy: The Mansion

Playboy: The Mansion blends state-of-the-art social simulation with traditional role-playing and an empire-building play dynamic. As Hugh Hefner, you build the Playboy Mansion and magazine into a dynamic cultural icon and powerful brand. Rub shoulders with stunning women and stimulating celebrities as you pursue the ultimate Playboy lifestyle. Just make sure the kids are in bed!

Available
February
PlayStation 2

PC
CD



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Microsoft Game Studios have finalised their move out of the sports games market by selling Indie Built to Take Two Interactive. The latter has already recently signed a deal with SEGA for publishing rights to its ESPN range of games. As for Microsoft, the company has been gradually pulling out of this genre, which is quite saturated enough, particularly with Electronic Arts' strong presence with the EA Sports label.

Nintendo is planning a peripheral for the Game Boy Advance that will allow the handheld to play back MP3 audio and MPEG4 video. It has been tentatively named Play-Yan, plugs into the cartridge slot and allows SD-cards carrying media to be plugged into it. It also carries a headphone socket. This device may be available as you read this, or soon thereafter.

Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil whispers

Fans of Doom will be aware of this upcoming expansion and the fact that a "timeless and evil artefact" is mentioned in the marketing comments. Well, word has it that this device will absorb the special powers of each of three demonic hunters that will pursue the character in the expansion, allowing the player to use these powers. The abilities themselves are said to be berserk (similar to the one in Doom), slow motion (presumably something akin to bullet time) and invulnerability. There is speculation of the possibility of a cooperative mode, given that Resurrection of Evil's story centres around two characters.



A compilation of classic Atari games is being developed at Taniko for release on the Nintendo DS. The collection, which will include the likes of Asteroids, Pong, Lunar Lander, Missile Command and Breakout, is expected to be released in March in the US. The games will include new features such as support for the DS's touch pad and wireless capabilities. The set will also allow players to activate backdrops from popular graffiti artists.

After a series of successful concerts in Japan and one sold-out performance in Los Angeles last year, Square Enix has announced a series of concerts of Final Fantasy music in America starting on 19 February. The performances will include philharmonic orchestra and choir. Should you be travelling that side of the world during the next month and if you're interested in finding out more, you can visit www.ticketmaster.com/venue/32892.

web scores

	[PC] LOTR: Battle for Middle Earth	[PC] NFS Underground 2	[PC] Zoo Tycoon 2	[PC] Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines
NAG [100]	82	80	78	79
gamespy.com [5]	4	4.5	3.5	4
gamespot.com [10]	8.4	7.4	7.2	7.7
pc.ign.com [10]	8.3	9.1	7.5	8.4
	[PS2] The Urbz: Sims in the City	[PS2] Mortal Kombat: Deception	[PS2] Jak 3	[PS2] LOTR: The Third Age 2
NAG [100]	75	78	90	82
gamespy.com [5]	4	2.5	3	3.5
gamespot.com [10]	7.3	8.5	8.6	7.7
ign.com [10]	7.5	8.8	9.6	8.5



Age of Empires III

Ensemble Studios and Microsoft Game Studios have announced the next chapter in the Age of Empires saga. This third instalment will take place primarily in the New World, and will boast new physics representations by means of a new graphics and game engine. The developers also promise to add new game dynamic innovations. Age of Empires III is set to appear in the second half of the year.



Elixir was founded by a former Bullfrog game designer, and is responsible for Republic: The Revolution and Evil Genius. With three currently ongoing projects, one of them a sequel to Evil Genius, the company has been involved in a round of fund-raising, and has garnered support to the tune of a million Pounds. However, its staff of over 60 is about to be trimmed by almost a quarter. Details on the other projects are not currently available.

Retribution is a first-person shooter that is under development at U-235 Studios, to be released on PC and Xbox 2 no earlier than some time next year. The developers are focusing on the photo-realistic graphics, but also cite certain mercantile and role-playing aspects. It will feature first-person and third-person perspective play modes, and a variety of multiplayer game modes.

Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade

Sony Online Entertainment is planning Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade, a multiplayer "role-playing" (given the hack-and-slash nature of the play dynamic, this term is hardly appropriate) game to be launched with the PSP.



Brandon Routh is new Superman

After thousands of auditions, Brandon Routh was selected to be the next actor to depict Superman. The 25-year-old actor has had television and film experience, but is as yet relatively unknown. The film from Warner Brothers will be directed by Bryan Singer.



Settlers: Heritage of Kings

The Settlers: Heritage of Kings is a world-building strategy game with fully rendered 3D visuals and an unavoidably addictive play dynamic. In this latest instalment of the Settlers franchise players can dive into a detailed medieval world offering a unique mix of RTS and simulation gaming. A fully functioning community can be created; new advancements can be discovered, and enemy forces will be repelled!

Available
February

PC
CD



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usa release dates



February 2005

Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth
 Creature Conflict: The Clan Wars
 Empire Earth II
 Fahrenheit
 Gary Grigsby's World at War
 Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death
 NASCAR SimRacing
 Nexus: The Jupiter Incident
 Project: Snowblind
 Pro Rugby Manager 2005
 Silent Hunter III
 SpellForce - The Shadow of the Phoenix
 Star Wars: Republic Commando
 Star Wars: Knights of the old Republic II
 Street Racing Syndicate
 The House of the Dead III
 The Settlers: Heritage of Kings
 Will of Steel

February 2005

Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill
 Constantine Adventure
 Death by Degrees
 Fear Factor: Unleashed
 Gran Turismo 4 Racing
 Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death
 Kessen III
 King of Fighters
 Monster Jam 3
 Motocross Mania 3
 NARC
 NBA Street V3
 Phantom Crash 2
 Project: Snowblind
 SEGA Ages: Phantasy Star Trilogy
 Shadow of Rome
 Tekken 5
 Tenchu: Fatal Shadows

February 2005

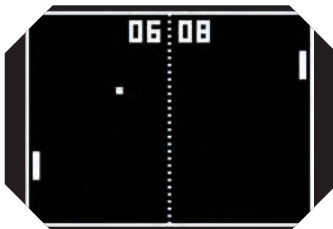
Brothers in Arms
 Chicago Enforcer
 Constantine
 Demon Warrior
 Forza Motorsport
 Iron Phoenix
 Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death
 Monster Jam 3
 Motocross Mania 3
 NARC
 NBA Street V3
 Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis
 Phantom Dust
 Project: Snowblind
 Resonance
 Star Wars: Republic Commando
 The Roots
 Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict

February 2005

Chaos Field
 Fire Emblem
 Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death
 Mortal Kombat: Deception
 NBA Street V3
 Star Fox: Assault
 TimeSplitters: Future Perfect
 Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2
 World Championship Pool 2004

february at a glance

05
Legend
 Nolan Bushnell, the founder of Atari and creator of Pong was born on this day in 1943



10-13
Gaming
 CPL World Tour
www.thecpl.com

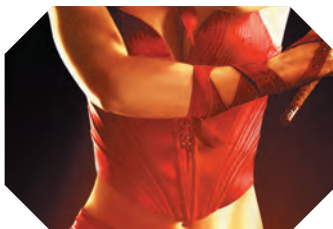
1 GAME
 10 CITIES
 10,000 COMPETITORS
 \$1,000,000 PURSE

Presented to you by the cyberarena professionals • Inaugur

11
Movie
 Elektra
www.elektramovie.com



14
History
 Valentine's Day was named after Valentine of Rome, a Christian martyr thought to have been executed February 14, 269 A.D



19
Gaming
 SA GameOver PlayStation Expo and Tournament
www.geocities.com/sagameover

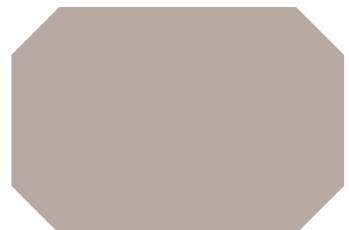
2005
 19th of February.
 Port Elizabeth, South Africa.
 UPE: University Sports Hall of Port Elizabeth

*Based on Games & Anime from Japan.
 *manga's, Fun, Sports, Japanese.
 *Races, Anime, New, Old, Unique...

ENTERterENTER



26
Gaming
 Mayhem Open LAN
www.mahem.co.za



A word from Prophecy

words jian reis

PH Balanced

Telkom recently aired an advert at cinemas which depicted a Cape Town heart surgeon operating on a sickly child in Tanzania. The amazing thing about this advert wasn't the fact that the surgeon and the patient were 3,000 km apart, but, according to Telkom such an operation could be possible with ISDN technology.

Remote surgery does exist. It's very much a reality. Using a high resolution camera, an intuitive and highly responsive control system and a very good surgeon, it's possible. In fact, it's been done before, many times. The first remote surgery ever was a gall bladder removal performed over three years ago by American surgeons on a patient in France. However, remote surgery has never been done in South Africa before which means that the Telkom advert, which masquerades as a documentary of sorts, is complete fantasy.

What really got people's attention was the fact that Telkom claimed that the (fictional) operation was performed using ISDN technology. In the gall bladder operation mentioned earlier, a secure fiber-optic line was provided by France Telekom. The cost of the operation was over US\$1 million - a significant portion of that cost was for bandwidth. Anyone who has used ISDN will know that you can hardly stream Internet radio, let alone use a high-resolution camera to peer inside someone's chest cavity in real-time. What happens if the line drops? Was the surgeon using R7 call? I hope so because time-intensive surgery like that could run up quite a phone bill. Never mind the fact that Tanzania doesn't even have ISDN.

It's a ridiculous advert which tries to make ISDN into something it isn't. But then considering how heavily Telkom invested in ISDN, I'm not entirely surprised. After several consumers complained, the Advertising Standards Authority pulled the ad. Telkom's response to the criticism the advert garnered?

"The ad makes no product claims. It's a corporate ad, demonstrating the culture behind Telkom, not its capabilities."

www.prophecy.co.za

Counter-Strike Gamers League Opens the 2005 Season



Chris "Apocalypse" Lautre from team Identity is the man in charge of the first competitive initiative to grace our 2005 gaming screens. The league has already been filled and will consist of four pools, based on skill level. At the end of each month, the two winners of each pool will move up, and the two losers will move down, eventually balancing the seedings and giving the newer teams time to improve. Top local names such as Evolve, Identity, Ace, Krenk and Element have all signed up, and the standard of play promises to be high as preparations are made for the ESWC Qualifier which will probably be held around April or May this year. The league will run on servers provided by Mweb and will receive comprehensive coverage by means of Half-Life TV, scorebots and possibly a shoutcast. Counter-Strike 1.6 is still being played by the competitive community, and as such it is the chosen version for the league. The CPL has announced its decision to switch to CS:Source, but the ESWC is sticking with 1.6 for now. WCG will probably be running Source. A Source league will begin after the 1.6 league is completed, so visit the website or the IRC channel to secure your team's spot. For more information visit [#csgl on irc.shadowfire.org](#).

Lan2k "Postponed"



After shocking the local gaming community by announcing it would be running a 2000 player gaming tournament at Canal Walk shopping centre in Cape Town, the retailer PC Gameworld then brought further skepticism upon itself by claiming to have so many registrations that it was expanding the number of participants to 6000. Now, in the latest development in the Lan2k saga, the "main event" (being the 6000 man LAN) has been postponed until April. The January event will be a 300 player trial. For more information, visit www.capetowngateway.com.

Global Gaming League & Clanbase form strategic partnership



The Global Gaming League (GGL), the leader in competitive videogaming entertainment, announced a strategic partnership with ClanBase.com, Europe's leading competition organiser for online gamers. The partnership will see the two companies working together to take competitive online videogaming to the next level by combining their respective communities and talents. Together, they form the world's largest online gaming community with more than a million players from 190 countries around the world. For more information, visit www.ggl.com or www.clanbase.com.

International News

The Winter CPL

The Cyberathlete Professional League, now in its eighth year as a competitive tournament organisation, recently held its second main event of 2004. The Winter and Summer events complete the upper-bracket competitive calendar, alongside the World Cyber Games and the Electronic Sports World Cup. This marks the end of a long chapter in the CPL's history, which has frequently been marked by controversy.

The choice of questionable competitive titles (such as Halo and Doom 3), the enforcement of non-standard game settings and a seeding system which seems to display a complete lack of knowledge about the international scene have all cast doubt on the abilities of the organisation to become a true world leader. However, it cannot be denied that the CPL has contributed much to the growth of competitive gaming, and it remains an event to which gamers flock each year. In the coming season, the CPL embarks on the next phase of competitive gaming - its much talked about World Tour, featuring the FPS title Painkiller from Dreamcatcher Interactive. If the 2004 Winter event was anything to go by, the tour is something to be looked forward to.

Thankfully, this time the CPL is making headlines due to the exceptionally high standards of competitive play shown by the participants, and no longer due to faults in the organisation. There were still several seeding disputes, but in the end, the results turned out to be a good reflection of the players' skills. Four titles, sharing a total of \$160,000 in prize money were featured: Counter-Strike, Painkiller, Doom 3 and Day of Defeat.

The CS tournament stood apart from every other in the last two years. Multiple world champions Schroet Kommando Sweden had announced they would not be attending in order to give their German squad the chance to compete. (The CPL does not allow more than one team per clan to enter an event). Without SK, it seemed certain that Eyeballers would take the victory for the second time in a row. However, after some controversy and a point penalty against EYE early in the tournament, the world renowned cross between Norway and America, NoA, came from behind to finally claim the win they had been seeking for over a year. NoA won twice with scores of 16-14 and 16-5, both on de_inferno, becoming the first team ever to win a CPL from the loser's bracket. The final match broke the world record for the highest number of simultaneous spectator connections at 37000. Team Gamer Co (formerly known as Rival) finished third.

Painkiller saw the return of Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel as well as the Dutch double world champion Sander "Voo" Kaasjager. The tournament was billed as a rematch of the Summer CPL, where Voo beat Fatal1ty from the loser's bracket. This time round, it was Voo who won the Winner's bracket final, in the closest matchup in Painkiller history: (three maps: 27-12, 2-24 and 17-16). Fatal1ty was expected to be back in the Superfinal shortly, but his tournament was cut short by a surprise victory by the German, Zyz, a relative newcomer to the game. He had already lost to Fatal1ty in the Winner's bracket, but managed a comfortable win in the consolidation final to face Voo in the Superfinal. Voo, however, kept Zyz at bay to claim first place for the third consecutive time.

Doom 3 had very few recognised players participating, as it has become clear in recent months that Painkiller will be more readily supported in tournaments in the coming years. Yang "Rocketboy" Meng, a famous Chinese Quake 3 player and the only person to ever have beaten Fatal1ty during his Doom 3 career (earning him a comprehensive sponsorship from Abit), came out on top with relative ease. Day of Defeat was won by Team Highball, with second place going to Check Six.



interview

Name: James Schwikkard
Nick: Prem
Age: 21
Games: Counter-Strike

Achievements:

- 4th place at rAge 2004 (Team : zE)
- 4th place at WCG Qualifier 2004 (Team : zE)
- 2nd place ESWC Qualifier 2004 (Team : zE)
- 2nd place in the Mayhem Offline League 2004 (Team: zE)
- 1st place at rAge 2003 (Team : DC)
- 2nd place WCG 2003 Finals (Team : DC)
- 3rd place in the Mayhem Offline League 2003 (Team: DC)
- 3rd place at ESWC Qualifier 2003 (Team: DC)
- 2nd place at 1000manlan 2003 Tournament (Team : DC)

Give us a brief history on your new team, Ace.

Ace is a mix of players from Zero Effect and Destrukt. After zE's poor performance at WCG, we decided to give it one last go at Rage. After underperforming there, the team split up and my brother (ReBs) quit CS. Destrukt had lost 2 of their players after Rage as well, and Warren (Dr4k) and myself had always planned to stick together. So with those players we formed Ace. All of them have a lot of talent and we get along very well. I'm pretty excited to see how we will perform at the next major competition.

Has your brother's absence affected your gameplay?

At first it was quite frustrating. You get very used to playing with someone, and when it's a brother it's almost like you know exactly what he's doing. I have always rated my brother as one of the best players in SA. I did everything I could to get him to stay. Past that, though, I'm not sure it has affected me all that much. Dr4k has taken over his role as the person I work with, and we have a good understanding of each other.

What do you think of the impending transition to CS:Source?

To be honest, I haven't played the game much at all. I have to admit I am normally pretty anti change. I really like CS 1.6 and I don't want it to change, but I will switch when I have to. At the moment, I'm not even sure that it is going to be played at the Electronic Sports World Cup.

Once at the top, do you think it becomes more difficult to keep improving?

I think the top players are constantly improving. If you don't learn to adapt, you won't stay there. The SA community in particular has been improving in the past 6 months, a lot more than in the past. It's definately getting harder to stay at the top. Sometimes you get comfortable and don't work as hard as you used to, but eventually you lose and it gives you a wake up call.

Who do you think will prove to be the strongest of your opponents this year?

Evolve are still the team to beat. No matter what anyone says, they have the most experience and are five very skilled players. Identity are also a good side, but I know three of their players very well, which makes it a lot easier to play against them. I don't think we will have trouble beating any other teams in SA at the moment.

People who think they know everything really annoy those of us who do...

The Domain of The_Basilisk




DÉJÀ VU

Do YOU have what it takes? Are you READY to compete with the BEST GAMERS IN THE WORLD? All 6000 of them! In a SHOPPING CENTRE in Cape Town! They're coming from all over the world! You'd better reserve your spot NOW to AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT! The network and the power? Why, we've got the BIG BOYS in to do that! Money, staff, and logistical planning? Oh, we PROMISE we've got it sorted! Don't worry; we have enough LOVE and PASSION to make this work! Now, if you'll excuse me, I must go looking for my arse - I appear to have laughed it off.

I have been cutting the organisers of Lan2k far too much slack. Since this so-called "event" was announced (www.lan2k.com), I have waited kindly and patiently for my doubts to be laid to rest, for a detailed event plan to be made public, for the announcement of sponsors, schedules, network providers, power schematics, prizes, accommodation, travel packages and even a functional Website. The site first went live in October 2004 and we still have no concrete information whatsoever. I'll be the first to say that if this event were to succeed, it would boost local gaming a substantial amount. But should it fail - and the way things are looking at the moment, this option seems most likely - it will damage the community even more than 1000manLAN did in 2003. Possibly the most disturbing thing about this whole affair is that there are actually a fair number of people gullible enough to trust in the almighty organisers purely because they give their word. Does nobody learn from history? And whatever happened to critical thinking? This is the kind of blind acceptance that made Nazi Germany possible. Therefore, I'm going to give you, my cherished readers, a run down of the problems staring Lan2k in the face. Let us begin with the problem of numbers. How will this event attract six thousand people? Are there even that many active gamers in South Africa? #Zagamers on shadowfire IRC, South Africa's premier gaming channel, has only 972 registered users. Most national tournaments pull in between 300 and 600 people (rAge was 500; previous Worfaire events reached up to 600). 1000manLAN (which was held in Pretoria) put in far more advertising than Lan2k and there were no more than eight or nine hundred people seated simultaneously. Of course, the organisers of Lan2k have thought of this problem and so hordes of international gamers are suddenly falling over themselves to attend. I find it strange, then, that the event has not been men-

tioned on a single international gaming Website and when "Googled", "lan2k" merely turns up a host of German sites. I also find it suspicious that before they removed the ability to view the registered users of the site there were roughly 70. Before they removed the hit counter the site had approximately 5000 hits during October and November. My own clan Website is more popular. If they'll lie about one thing, they'll lie about others. I smell an entire colony of rats. But let's assume, just for a moment that between 2000 and 6000 people will actually rock up at Canal Walk. Where are they going to stay? On the official Website the response is: "Various Accommodation places will be hosting the Gamers, watch for the packages to come . . . We will set up a demarcated sleeping area for any Gamers who would like to stay over at the event." There has been no further information. Merely stating "there will be accommodation" doesn't mean they've taken care of it. Do they even realise how many people 6000 are? As far as we know, they're planning to have everyone sleep on the floor. And when awake, 6000 seated gamers will each need a space of about one square metre for their PCs plus another m² between them and the row behind them. Let us be generous and say 1.5m² per player, which gives us an area of 9000m² taken up by seating. To account for this, the organisers have said that excess gamers will be placed in the parking lot. But aside from the obvious hazards of playing outdoors, where will anyone actually park their cars? And let us also not forget that 6000 people will need to be fed for the weekend. Lan2k's answer - MacDonalds! Moving on to the network, power and security. The official solution is as follows: "The company doing the networking currently owns 7 major networking companies in the Western Cape and caters for large Corporate Companies and Business users. Canal Walk Centre Management is in charge of the Power. These are the BIG BOYS, they know their story. Security issues

have been taken care of by the nominated outsource (sic) security company." Now, what have they actually told us? We don't know who is doing the network and even if we did, corporate networks use between 10% and 20% of network capacity whereas gaming networks use close to 100%. Corporate network companies are not prepared to handle a LAN of this size. What is needed is a team with extensive experience in gaming LANs specifically. As for power, 6000 PCs each sapping between 300W and 900W amounts to a lot more than Canal Walk has ever had to provide before. I pray they've made special arrangements with Eskom or Cape Town is headed for a blackout or perhaps a meltdown at Koeberg. As for security - who is the outsource company? Finally, to pull off an event of this scale, they will need an insane amount of capital. Yet, to this day, three months after the announcement of the LAN, it has no sponsors, and no prize details have been released. Are we just supposed to believe that some eccentric millionaire is pouring unlimited cash into the event but refuses to have his name or intentions made public? Who is paying for all of this? No offence to PC Gameworld but as chain stores go they're not particular large. Having said all this, it comes as no surprise that the original date for the LAN has been scrapped. In its place is a "prelim / trial" event consisting of 300 people (if they even get 300, I'll be impressed), with the "main event" moved to April. Initially, the LAN was to be held in January because it was "the only time Canal Walk could give us (the Lan2k organisation)". But suddenly, April is available. What else aren't they telling us? I predict a complete and utter failure. Unless much reassuring information is made public and made public soon, I can categorically warn everyone not to waste their money on a ticket to Cape Town. Call me a cynic, but LOVE, PASSION, ENERGY, and all that other tree-hugging hippy crap is not going to put a 6000 man LAN together by itself 

SA Computer MAGAZINE



HARDWARE: Shuttle's new Small Form Factor XPC reviewed

LINUX: Tangent brings the Meridian gateway server to Linux users

SOUND OF MONEY: Musica launches its pay-to-download service

HOW-TO: Set up your Logitech Harmony 655 remote



RELAUNCH ISSUE ON SALE FEBRUARY 2

INBOX

Letter of the moment

FROM Zac
SUBJECT Old Games

There's a very worrying trend I've noticed amongst gamers these days (Durban gamers at least). It seems that they believe any game more than a year old must suck and can't be worth even looking at (Counter-Strike seems to be the exception). I noticed this when I decided to replay Final Fantasy 7. So far I'm about half-way through and really enjoying it. But when I told my buddies about this, they looked at me as though I was the devil incarnate and ran off muttering something about '...Must get rag-doll physics and anti-aliasing...'. Sure modern games may look better and have better physics. But you need to ask yourself: 'Does all that really mean that a game is more fun to play?' The answer is a resounding no! Just because you can push barrels down hills onto evil mercenaries or scream when all the lights go out and five demons charge you doesn't mean that the game is actually better to play. I'll admit that great graphics and physics can really do a lot for a game, DOOM 3 and Far Cry are good examples, but they don't automatically make the game good.

In the end it all comes down to how the game plays. If a game is fun to play, then it's a good game. If it's horrible to play, then it's a bad game. Looks come after that.

A real gamer (and anyone with enough brains to read this) should decide which games to play based on fun, not the game's graphics and technology. **All too true, it's a game not an interactive art gallery right? Since the invention of the 3D card, the focus in gaming has changed from providing a solid play dynamic to shoving eye candy down our collective gaming throat. Perhaps when graphics are indistinguishable from reality we'll see things swing the other way. But, until then just try and enjoy the ride. If your friends laugh at you bend one of their fingers back until you hear a wet pop. NAG Ed.**

FROM ChApS
SUBJECT Various

Hi Ed, two issues back (November 2004) I asked you which hand you played games with and if you play inverted. Now I'm also left handed and when I play games with my left hand I play inverted but when I play with my right hand I play normally. The reason I told you this is because you're the only left-handed gamer I know and since you are older and wiser than me I just wanted to know if this is normal? I was also wondering if you could replace the plastic sleeves, the cover CD's come in, with proper jewel case and raise the price of the magazine by +\ - R 2.00?

Generally most left-handed players choose to play with their right-hand - inverted opposed to the opposite, as you'd expect them using their right-hand. Equally, you'd find that because they're left-handed, it implies that inverted control is the 'right' way to play. May I suggest seeing someone about your condition? When you play right-handed you're probably putting too much strain on your brain, with all the inverted and conflicting signals leading to a serious slowdown in hemisphere communications. Increasing the price of the magazine for the sake of a jewel case is not a smart option. NAG Ed.

FROM Alter_Ego
SUBJECT Ego stroking

I know you guys are always complaining about how you leave everything to the last minute and how trying to meet your deadline is very similar to high school exam studying (i.e. done the night before). But I also know how you are all congratulated often on your achievement, a superb magazine. I've

noticed that while people compliment you, they compliment you on the big things - like an amazing 3-page review. I believe that you do an excellent job in these sections and just wanted to write and say thanks for the little things. I absolutely love the little captions with the pictures in your reviews and the Ed's sarcastic yet honest remarks. I also really thought it was cute how, on the last page of your magazine (where you mention everyone involved in the magazine), you occasionally poke fun at yourselves. Anyway, I just thought you might like to know that someone notices these little things and hopes you don't neglect them in future! All the best for that future, and I'm holding thumbs that, one day, NAG might get to over 200 pages...

Somehow, I always feel better about everything when I get a letter like this. After a while, working at the office, you just get so tired of it all. It's tough pretending to be interested in whatever James is droning on about, putting on a brave face when Walt starts sharing what only a doctor should ever know about someone, and pretending that Miktar's obsession with consoles is normal behaviour ... and that's just Monday morning. So thank you for making this pitiful existence more bearable. NAG Ed.

FROM Some reader
SUBJECT Big Problems

I have got some huge problems and I need help like big time. My PC is doing some bad stuff. I lent (sic) Vice City from a friend, installed it and started playing. When I got to a cut scene it kicked me out. When I tried to install the POP and NFSU2 demos the same happened. WTH is happening? A blue screen says I must turn off shaders or some other thing or put the PC on safe mode. Please no sarcastic answers.

No sarcastic answers hey... the short reply is upgrade your 3D card, it doesn't support shaders and you probably don't have enough video memory. If you have no idea what I'm talking about go look up 3D card technology on the Internet. I'd be more helpful if you actually included some useful details - like what kind of PC you have. NAG Ed.

FROM The Not So Mighty Bob
SUBJECT A statement, a complaint, a question and a thank you.

Great magazine as always. I have a statement, a complaint, a question and a thank you. First the question, I've seen your advertisement searching for a female gamer. I was wondering is this so she can write articles about a female viewpoint on gaming and games? Or is this a shameless way to meet woman (sic)? I personally think it's the latter. Secondly the complaint, your "International Release Dates" page in December was crap. It contains numerous mistakes. Here are a few, Backyard Wrestling on PC, Divine Divinity 2 for Q4 2004 (wasn't it released months ago?), American McGee's OZ (tell me if I'm wrong but I'm pretty sure it was canned). Come on people your magazine has always been top notch don't let it slip now. Thirdly last month Miktar wrote about consoles being better than PC's. I wanted to write in and complain about Miktar's incompetence. But I decided everybody has a right to an opinion even Miktar. This month he writes about shoving his hand into a fan. What kind of idiot would shove his hand into a fan? Oh yeah, a person that thinks a console is better than PC. Lastly rAge was awesome. I thank you for the great experience.

Yes, we waste space in NAG to pick up women. You caught us... I mean why use our glamorous jobs, luxury German sedans and rugged good looks to net the babes when we can just use a fake job application? The international release dates are there for guidance. Games are released in different

SHORTS

FROM Stuart
SUBJECT I don't know
Is the plural for a PC mouse mice or mouses?
Ask a zoologist who has also studied computer science. NAG Ed.

FROM Someone
SUBJECT NAG Subscription question
I decided to subscribe to NAG, but then this question hit me: what do you guys at NAG do to ensure that the CD and the magazine safely reach their destination. Or isn't that your job? The average post box only fits letters and the magazines get either folded or rolled up. What would happen to the NAG CD when it gets folded and stuffed into a minuscule hole? And would the CD survive postage travel as well? Anyway, love the magazine.

We test the system each month by subscribing ourselves to the magazine. It has never, to date, arrived damaged. And our post box is, umm, let's say, smaller than most. NAG Ed.

FROM Zaheer
SUBJECT Game Developments
To Whom It May Concern
I am emailing (sic) to ask about the latest gaming developments and to find out what a Gaming company would cost. If you can help in any way please do not hesitate to reply.
Yours faithfully
Yes, we actually get letters like this from time to time. Amazing isn't it? NAG Ed.

FROM Grant
SUBJECT Updates
Has anyone noticed that your computer runs games fine when you buy them, but when you upgrade them your system doesn't meet the requirements and won't run them? Why is that? It's happened to me with KOTOR, DOOM 3 and Far Cry! Can anyone tell me why this happens or is it just my legendary bad luck? It happens with every @\$%& game that I buy these days.
We did a quick check around the office and not a single person has ever heard of this phenomenon. It must be the luck thing or you're just making stuff up to get noticed because your parents don't really love you. NAG Ed.

territories at different times all the time. We print the USA release dates as they usually get their games first, sometimes however Europe and SA have earlier release dates as was the case with Divine Divinity 2. American McGee's Oz hasn't been cancelled - it's just on hold until the film gets the go ahead. Lastly what Miktar didn't share with you is that he was performing a complex routine on the office dance mat when the incident happened - he now realises it was a bad karma thing generated by his jealous PC. NAG Ed.

FROM Byron
SUBJECT Work
Do you guys test the games and then rate them? Are there any computers better than a P4? Why don't you put any cheats in the magazine as the PlayStation has cheats on disc and in the magazine? Where is the closest gaming competition to me? I live in Amamzintoti. Where is Arena 77? I heard computers will be made smaller in future, is this true?
No we rate them then we play them - duh. Yes



The 'Letter of the Moment'
prize is sponsored by EA Africa

The winner receives 2 games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch

there are better computers than the Pentium 4. There are cheats on the Cover CD almost every month. Visit www.langames.co.za for competitions in your area. Arena 77 is based in JHB. I heard that one day we'll travel to the stars - it's hard to say what will happen in the future. If I could, I'd be a billionaire sunning my butt on a yacht somewhere off the coast of Mexico instead of sitting here taking antidepressants and replying to your letter. NAG Ed.

FROM Matthew

SUBJECT Budget Games and Disclaimers

As all readers of this great magazine, I am a gamer looking for a good game or two. I have noticed that budget games are easy to find and are fairly cheap. I am asking you to include a single page on budget games. If you could provide a short list of worthwhile games and a score it would open new doors for me. The person who writes the disclaimers in the magazine should really get a small raise or a nice pat on the head. These provide a few more laughs in my monthly humour.

We always review what we're given. Local distribution companies in South Africa don't always give us all the budget games - even though they would probably sell tons of them if all our cash-strapped readers knew about them. Oh well, we do try you know. Hey, those disclaimers are serious legal chatter written by our lawyers to prevent anyone trying to squeeze cash out of us for calling them stupid; and lawyers steal enough cash as it is so no raise for anyone. NAG Ed.

FROM Klaus

SUBJECT Nintendo

I sometimes wonder to myself, why the "Nintendo GameCube" isn't doing as well as it should be. Is it because people refuse to accept that there is actually a machine out there that's better than the PS2 or is it because of the lack of games that are out for the GameCube? None of the games for the PS2 even come close to the few for the Cube. I just want say that PS2 is a waste of money and time because they do not care what the public wants - they make anything and don't even care how the final product turns out.

I'll tell you why Nintendo is doing poorly in South Africa. No marketing, poor pricing, no retailer education, and most annoyingly, no reviews in local gaming magazines. Nintendo neglects to supply local magazines [okay, NAG] with products, no matter how many different ways we ask, plead and beg. So while Nintendo has amazing platforms in both the Cube and upcoming DS, South Africans will never really benefit because the local Nintendo office isn't covering the basics. NAG Ed.

FROM Brack

SUBJECT Reviews becoming too average

Being an avid reader of your magazine I've recently become concerned about your reviews. The PC reviews specifically. The review scores for the games in the December magazine are as follows: Evil Genius [86] | Full Spectrum Warrior [86] | Rome: Total War [85] | Colin McRae Rally 2005 [85] | Tiger Woods PGA 2005 [82] | Star Wars: Battlefront [81] | Pacific Fighters [74] | Tribes: Vengeance [71] You might have noticed the 85% trend. I know reading the complete review is needed to get a good idea of the game, but the score is important as well, because it creates the first and last impression. The review is about the game and the score is how good the game is. It seems to me that your reviewers are afraid of giving a game a solid good or bad score. They all tend to go to the 80% average. Rome, a game that changed strategy standards and deserves at least 90%, was given a

mediocre 85%. Colin McRae 2005, which never improved after Colin McRae 2 (other than a damage engine), got 85%. It seems after you talked to your reviewers about giving too high scores (I think I read that?), they became afraid of committing themselves to giving more than 86%. In the past six months, only three PC games got more than 86%: DOOM 3 (barely deserving?) Sims 2, (one of my friends is trying desperately to sell it without success) and Chessmaster: 10th edition? P.S. I've made my point, but if you want more nonsensical scores try these: Thief 3 and Streets of LA both got 83%, while Tiger Woods got 82%. Thief 3 deserves more than a percent more than Tiger Woods?

I always appreciate reader input. I read somewhere that people usually complain about a product or service if they really like the product and want to see it improve, so that's how I see any kind of mail from readers. So I'll be nice. Remember the whole comparing apples to pears analogy. The same applies to game reviews. Games fall into different genres to cater for different people and must all be rated on their individual merits in their category. Don't ask me why one game [golf] receives a better score than another [action stealth]. Older games may have received a better score than a newer one (in the same category) because back then the original Quake was a major breakthrough for the industry, much the same as Half-Life 2 is today. However it is possible that Quake, back then, made a bigger impact on gaming than Half-Life 2 does today. Therefore Quake would get the better score even though it's 10 years old. We're not scared to give a game a high or low score - the December issue just had a large number of decent to good games - no conspiracy. Stop thinking the score is everything - it's only there because it has to be. If I were really brave I'd scrap the whole scoring system and see what happens. NAG Ed.

FROM Kevin

SUBJECT Let it go...

In the past few months the most popular topic has by far been the "age restrictions" problem. Every single letter or forum post says the same. Why? I would love to know why people have a problem with age restrictions in gaming in specific, and why they pick NAG as the place to voice their opinion (not that it's a bad place). If there is an issue, e-mail someone who has something to do with the publishing or sales of the games. There is not as much of a fuss about 12 year-old kids getting into 16-rated films, or about your son purchasing the latest Eminem album and getting his mind stuffed with "explicit lyrics." So why target the gaming industry? Rather not create problems for this growing interest. Think about it, they can leave the ESRB ratings and make a difference for at least some people, or they can take them away completely... I think that readers should put a bit more thought in before they throw around their accusations.

I'm not entirely sure if you're making a point here or not, but if more people followed the advice in the last line of your letter the gaming industry and dare I say, the world, would be a better place. NAG Ed.

FROM Neil Cochrane

SUBJECT Twisted games

I know this doesn't only happen to me but you just never seem to totally win when it comes to games for reasons as such. You purchase a copy of The Lord of the Rings to find that your copy sucks and you can only play Sam the stupid Hobbit no matter what mission you choose or character you select - you're always Sam. This might not be so bad if your character was Legolas or Gandalf but no, it has to be a crap Hobbit. Or. You buy a copy of C&C:

Generals and your copy makes your machine freeze after 10 minutes of play but Rome: Total War and others with high system requirements run fine. Lastly let's say you're some poor guy who lives in the thriving Metropolis of Grootvlei total population 120 and you read about all these brilliant games in your copy of NAG but will never get to play these titles because the stores you can purchase games from never have them for sale. (Boiler Engineer on contract work for Eskom hence the town). On that thought stores that sell games need to really spruce up on their selection don't you think and how can we make them aware of this short of stoning the branch manager as an example to others?

I do feel your pain brother, but doesn't it feel better now that you've got it off your chest? The only advice I have for you is move back to civilisation as quickly as you can. You raised a valid point with your comment on stock levels. I've been to plenty local computer shops and a number of international ones and the one thing that always stands out is that local retailers seem to be afraid of stocking computer games. There are exceptions and those exceptions are doing amazing business. All we can hope is that a strong international game retailer opens shop in SA and shows everyone the potential of the market. But then I run a magazine not a computer shop, so what do I possibly know about all this retail stuff? NAG Ed.

FROM De-void

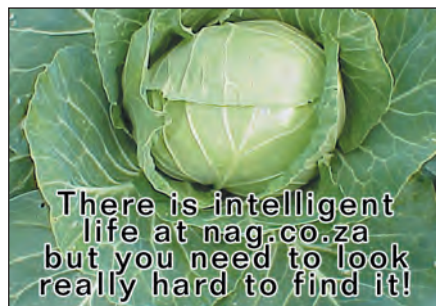
SUBJECT Half (a product) Life 2

I recently purchased HL2. I was slightly disappointed with the presentation of the product. The box was nice and all, but to pay R300 for a cardboard pallet containing 5 CD's in sleeve pockets (with no proper protection) is hard to swallow! And the manual, my mistake I mean the 1 sheet of paper with the keyboard configuration... - I'm sure you'll agree not up to standard. Anyway I installed only to be kept waiting for an about an hour for updates to Steam and the decryption of files to occur, only to find I had to reinstall the entire game! Once I started playing though, all the gripes I encountered faded into insignificance as I for the first time appreciated the splendour that was City 17! Could not have said it better myself. NAG Ed.

FROM Kyle

SUBJECT Hole in Head

Hi! Could you guys please help me, in providing me with a source whereby I can access information regarding DOOM 3 i.e. Monster Names and Details etc...? Also, I am considering becoming a computer programmer, and would like to know do you have any tips or precautions that should be taken when playing too much PC games which can, if prevented, cause serious illnesses e.g. "Fits". Unfortunately it looks like playing too many games has already made you stupid or mentally unstable, I'll need to actually talk to you more to figure out which it is. I suggest giving up your plans of becoming a programmer and find a solid counter job at McDonalds.



Greetings Comrade!

It is time for the Gaming Proletariat to throw off the oppressive shackles imposed on them by the Bourgeois Game Industry Capitalists who try to determine our entertainment destinies!

It is time to give Power to the People, and for those People to Rise Up and seize their Rights through Vocalisation of their Opinions!

To teach those who doubt the Doctrines of this New Order, we offer the following document, which clearly illustrates the effectiveness of our Anti-Plutocratic approach to deciding which Games should be awarded the highest accolades (although all games are, of course, created equal.) To make sure that the Bourgeois Game Industry Capitalists could not enslave us with their mind numbing Advertising Propaganda, we restricted the choices available to the Gaming Proletariat to include only games that were featured between January 2004 and December 2004 in the People's preferred magazine, NAG. This is for the protection of the people, of course – to help defend them from the abusive and exploitative forces of hype and bad installation protocols.

We are willing to listen to the Voice of the People, rather than impose our thoughts upon them! We give strength to the voices of the Masses! See the power that True Unity and Equality brings!

Read...



THE nAG
**PEOPLE'S
AWARDS**

Action game of the year : **Mafia**



Developer: Illusion Softworks
Publisher: Take 2
Distributor: Megarom Interactive

Comrade Benny Pretorius:
"Mafia is simply a brilliant game with a rock solid story and decent gameplay."

Runners Up:



Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy



Manhunt



Adventure game of the year :

Broken Sword The Sleeping Dragon



Developer: Revolution
Publisher: THQ
Distributor: WWE

Comrade Charl Steyn:
"A great return from the good old days. If there was a title to truly bring back the joys of adventure games, then this was it."

Runners Up:



Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban



A Dog's Life



Need for Speed

Arcade Racer of the year : Underground



Developer: Electronic Arts
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Distributor: Electronic Arts

Comrade Matt Benic:

"Absolutely fantastic racing game. Stunning visuals, a great soundtrack (not my taste, but suited to the theme of the game), a good approach to customisation that doesn't alienate the casual player and great tracks."



Runners Up:



Burnout 3



Mario Kart: Double Dash!!

First Person Shooter of the year : Doom 3



Developer: id Software
Publisher: Activision
Distributor: Megarom Interactive

Comrade Roscoe:

"It`s simply one of the most polished titles released in many years, also the scariest game ever released bar none."

Runners Up:



Far Cry



Unreal Tournament 2004



Management Sim of the year :

The Sims 2



Developer: Maxis
 Publisher: Electronic Arts
 Distributor: Electronic Arts

Comrade Megan Hughes:
 "Will Wright has done it again - created a game for the masses that is actually also for the hard-core gamer. It's absorbing, it's funny, it never ends, and its only limit is one's own imagination. What more could you ask for?"



Runners Up:



Evil Genius



Championship Manager 03/04

Platformer of the year :

Prince of Persia Sands of Time



Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
 Publisher: Ubisoft
 Distributor: Megarom Interactive

Comrade Gareth Brickman:
 "No reason needed. It was the boss in this category, no questions asked."



Runners Up:



Jak 2: Renegade



Ratchet & Clank:
 Locked & Loaded



Puzzle game of the year :

CSI: Dark Motives



Developer: 369 Interactive
 Publisher: Ubisoft
 Distributor: Megarom Interactive

Comrade Agarash:

"Kept me awake till the early mornings... never knew mousing over the entire screen could be so much fun."

Runners Up:



Chessmaster 10



Ballance

Racing game of the year :

Toca Race Driver 2



Developer: Codemasters
 Publisher: Codemasters
 Distributor: Megarom Interactive

Comrade Cole Matthews:

"The most realistic and most agravating racing title released this year."

Runners Up:



Gran Turismo 4 Prologue



Colin McRae 2005



Rythm game of the year :



EyeToy: Groove

Developer: SCEE
 Publisher: Sony
 Distributor: Ster Kinekor

Comrade Aaron Scheiner:

"I'm not a rhythm gaming sort of person, but the EyeToy was the first of it's kind and the idea certainly was a unique input concept. (In spite of the ease of cheating)"

Runners Up:



DJ: Decks & FX



Singstar

Role-Playing Game of the year :



Knights of the Old Republic

Developer: Bioware
 Publisher: LucasArts
 Distributor: Electronic Arts

Comrade Graham Ziervogel:

"I was originally rather sceptical as to the quality of this rpg but after playing it for a while, I realised that I had been playing one of the better RPGs ever made."

Runners Up:



Sacred



Final Fantasy X-2



Warhammer

Realtime Strategy game of the year :

40k: Dawn of War



Developer: Relic
Publisher: THQ
Distributor: WWE

Comrade SpaZtic:

"Blood everywhere, death animations everywhere, coolness everywhere. It brings the speed and glory the RPG-fans have been craving ever since they first commanded an army. It makes the Warhammer 40K universe proud!"



Runners Up:



Rome: Total War



War of the Ring

Turn-based Strategy of the year :

Worms 3D



Developer: Team 17
Publisher: Sega
Distributor: WWE

Comrade Jean dela Hunt:

"Those darn worms just don't know when to die. Excellent blend of carnage and humour.. "

Runners Up:



Civilisation 3: Conquerors



Magic the Gathering: Battlegrounds



Role-Playing Game of the year :

Silent Hill 4

The Room



Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Distributor: Ster Kinekor

Comrade Epoch:

"A new twist in the scariest game series ever conceived. Not the best in the series, but still miles ahead of other games that still pretend they are scary."



Runners Up:



The Suffering



Forbidden Siren

Role-Playing Game of the year :

Splinter Cell:

Pandora Tomorrow



Developer: Ubisoft
Publisher: Ubisoft
Distributor: Megarom Interactive

Comrade Des:

"This is the best stealth game to date. Sam Fischer is king."



Runners Up:



Counter-Strike:
Condition Zero



Hitman: Contracts



PC Game of the year: **Doom 3**



Developer: id Software
Publisher: Activision
Distributor: Megarom Interactive

Comrade Keenan:

"DOOM 3 definitely. It brought a lot of new things to gaming, such as graphics, sound, environment, atmosphere. It paved the way for future titles of the genre. It's hard to say that a game of the year should be from a specific genre, but DOOM 3 deserves it hands down!"



PlayStation 2 Game of the year:

Burnout 3



Developer: Criterion
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Distributor: Electronic Arts

Comrade Lansanah Marah:

"Hands down the most furious and out-of-control racer I've ever come across. This game captures the "sense" of speed and consequences of driving like a mad man on the highway!"



The People's Game of the Year : **Far Cry**



Developer: Crytek
 Publisher: Ubisoft
 Distributor: Megarom Interactive

Comrade Barney:

"Of all the games this game is the gamest."

Comrade Lee Solomons:

"Good graphics, AI, sound and story. The best game I've played this year. I must still find one that can out do it."

Comrade Nabeel Panjwani:

"Blew me away, can't wait for the sequel!"

Comrade Andre:

"Far Cry is by far the best first person shooter I've ever had the privilege of playing; there seems to be little or no limitations on the Crytek engine. The game is like a discovery or quest and reminds me so much of the first Tomb Raider, in many ways you just had to push on to see what's next. Long Live Jack Carver!"

Comrade Marc Mostert:

"That jungle was alive. Really good game with a decent story to keep you hooked."

Comrade Ahmed Khota:

"Although Doom 3 might be everyone else's choice, I have chosen Far Cry. I felt that although both games were absorbing gaming experiences, Far Cry just seemed less repetitive. In Doom 3, it was a case of going from level to level killing monster after monster, even if it was the most gloriously rendered experience. In Far Cry however, I felt that there was more freedom, not only in that the surroundings were much more expansive, but the techniques one could use to kill the enemy were slightly more varied: one could run and gun as in Doom 3 or pick them off from a distance."



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- Support Gigabyte V-TUNER 2 overclocking application
- Feature DVI, TV-OUT and D-Sub connectors
- Bundles: PowerDVD, SpellForce & Order of Dawn



GV-N55128DP



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- Support AGP 8x
- High Performance 128MB DDR
- Features 64-bit memory interface
- Support Gigabyte V-TUNER 2 overclocking application
- Feature DVI, TV-OUT and D-Sub connectors
- Bundles: PowerDVD



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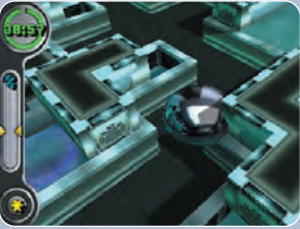
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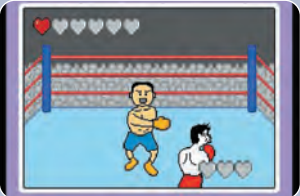
Previews

NAG's Wanted List



Mercury
PSP
Q1 2005

Navigate a blob of Mercury through a level by tilting the level and regulating the blob's speed. After seeing Balance in action, more physics-based puzzle plat-forming sounds right up our alley



Warioware: Touched!
Nintendo DS
TBA

Warioware on the touch-screen of the DS - does this really need any more clarification. We are worried, though about the DS screen, seeing how quickly the GBA buckled under Warioware's challenges...



Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict
Xbox | March 2005

The Unreal engine has an interesting flag that deftly switches it between the Xbox and PC platforms and the melee-combat based Liandri conflict is really looking good - but the first game set a strong standard for this tier in the series, so what else would you expect.

February is never a bumper month for previews, since the industry places all of its focus on the games hitting the shelves in the all-important Christmas period. Still, 2005 holds a lot of promise early on, foremost with the impressive Battlefield 2. Movie-cum-comic game Constantine also looks promising and we managed to squeeze in the newly-announced Age of Empires III, boasting a sterling engine and a whole new continent to dominate.

Feel the Magic XY/XX

Developer **Team Sonic** Publisher **Sega** Platform **Nintendo DS** Release Date **TBA**



Or 'Kimi no Tame Nara Shineru' in Japan, if you want to appear culturally rich (or like a know-it-all prat). Naturally the Team Sonic development credit is a big reason to keep an eye on this, the other being that it's going for the same terrain as Warioware. Since Warioware appears to still be the number one-and-then-some reason to get the DS, because Nintendo's handheld is just so perfect for puzzle games, it just seems logical that Feel The Magic deserves the same distinction. What's it about? A guy wants to impress a girl and he employs the help of performance artists Rub Rabbits to do his bidding. Okay, we'll bite.

Juiced

Developer **Juiced Games** Publisher **THQ** Platform **PC** | **PS2** Release Date **March 2005**



It's not a new game, but we're taking the opportunity to flaunt that Juiced will be out in March after signing a publishing deal with THQ. The abortive Xbox version wasn't great at all, but the beta builds showed a lot of promise, so here's hoping that Juiced Games are making use of the extra time and THQ's input to polish the edges and get a great game out there to really present the definitive street racing title. Can you name another recent racer that allowed you to manage a team and even build a career purely by betting on race events?

The Incredible Hulk

Developer **Radical Games** Publisher **VU Games** Platform **PS2** | **GCN** | **Xbox** Release Date **Q2 2005**



The former Hulk game wasn't great at all, but the new one promises that as the Hulk we can walk anywhere, climb anything and destroy whatever the hell we feel like - even entire buildings. Grant Theft Hulk? Quite possibly, since it looks like the developer is taking a leaf out of Treyarch's open-ended Spiderman 2 for the PlayStation 2. If anything was missing out of emerging game play, it's the ability to Hulk-smash the living daylight out of anything that annoys you.

WipEout Pure

Developer **Sony** Publisher **Sony** Platform **PSP** Release Date **Q1 2005**



"Distills the essence of anti-gravity racing." Since we've never actually experienced anti-gravity racing in the real world, we'll take Sony's word for that. WipEout is, of course, a very old series, having debuted as a PlayStation launch title. The road since then has been a bit bumpy with a distilled version hitting the PS2, but we've never lost faith in the high-speed wonder. The PSP version is a completely new game and not a port of former titles in the series, hence another reason to look forward to this one.



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PlayStation 2



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WAR IS HELL

fun as



Battlefield 2

Developer: **DICE**
Publisher: **EA**
Platform: **PC**
Expect it: **March 2005**

By 2002 multiplayer gaming was in a pretty dismal state. Most titles have moved into elitist realms where gamers were serious about raking in the kills and establishing themselves as the kings of the game at hand. Even as new options emerged, these games either got sidelined quickly or joined the ranks of high-skill, low-tolerance online play.

Then Battlefield 1942 arrived. DICE's masterpiece quickly took the world by storm - mainly because of its inherently chaotic (or, as DICE prefers to refer to it, rock-paper-scissors) nature, because it meant that refined and often fun-killing game play didn't emerge. There were just too many people eager to fly aeroplanes into tanks. In Counter-Strike it's about a team's pace and skill and in Battlefield it was 'mob rules' to the profoundest proportions.

The game wasn't without its shortcomings though, a lot due to the ageing Torque engine employed to power the world, resulting in high machine specifications and load times that were legendary for their retardation. Even the successive expansion packs and the stand-alone Battlefield: Vietnam did little to remedy problems fans had with the genre. That of course, leaves a lot of room for improvement, something that Battlefield 2, the official sequel, plans to take full advantage of.

To kill a misconception, Battlefield 2 is not a PC port of Battlefield: Modern Combat, the PlayStation 2 addition to the series. The latter is being developed by a separate team while series creators DICE Sweden have been hard at work on Battlefield 2 for quite some time - something that clearly shows when you experience the game. The studio dropped the Torque engine in favour of a far more versatile proprietary one called Refractor 2.0 that takes full advantage of today's graphical and physics technologies. In short it looks stunning. Battlefield 2 takes place in a Middle Eastern setting, an obvious move

especially when you consider the amount of desert combat "mods" and maps that have started to appear soon after 1942's release. Players will be able to play either as US Marines, China or the Middle Eastern Coalition, all equipped with numerous combat classes, heavy artillery and flying vehicles. Fans will welcome the return of the familiar elements that made the games so much fun, but DICE have added a host of polishes to the game play. Graphically the visuals are well beyond anything we've seen in the previous games. When a player climbs into a tank, for instance, his look will change into that of a tank commander. More thought has also gone into the respective class costumes and for that extra effect realistic "rag-doll" physics have been added (which thankfully look far more realistic than the oft-ridiculous "rag-doll" effect seen in a lot of games). In terms of the environment the levels are far more destructive than before. Materials act accordingly, it is possible to shoot through wood or sheet metal and a physics engine allows gamers to interact with a lot of elements in the environment.

More thought has gone into the control aspect as well. Players can now create squads with other players, helping one track your squad and not get lost in the midst of battle. A career screen keeps track of your profile's performance over all the games played and medals are awarded for specific deeds, ranging from the very brave to the unbelievably stupid.

But stupid is what it's all about. DICE assures us that if anything, the point behind Battlefield is still intact, i.e. to give players a multiplayer sandbox in which to have fun. It just happens to look a lot better and work a lot faster and more effectively. In terms of a sequel, Battlefield 2 has blown our minds and while it's ethically questionable to declare a game a winner before its release, it's very hard to see how this one can fail.

Q&A

For the definitive authority on what you could expect in *Battlefield 2*, we spoke to *Battlefield 2*'s Senior Producer Sean Decker and Product Manager Dean Montgomery on pretty much everything you'd want to know...

To clear up some misconceptions, *Battlefield 2* and *Battlefield: Modern Combat* are two separate games, right?

Yes. *Battlefield 2* is the latest instalment in our *Battlefield* PC series, following the acclaimed *BF1942* and *BF Vietnam*. We'll be releasing it worldwide in March 2005. *Battlefield: Modern Combat* is a completely separate initiative – our first console version of *Battlefield*'s unique gaming experience, planned for release in fall 2005.

Is this the first *Battlefield* game the full DICE team has worked on since 1942?

Yes, the complete DICE team including Sweden and other locations have been involved fully in development of *Battlefield 2*.

How big an influence did *Trauma's Desert Combat* "mod" have on *Battlefield 2*?

Desert Combat was clearly a very popular "mod" – it highlighted several game play dynamics that our team have incorporated into *Battlefield 2*, though of course *Battlefield 2* goes much further. More broadly, it indicated that gamers are excited to play in the modern arena, which as you know is the focus of *Battlefield 2*.

The *Battlefield* series relied on the Torque engine. Why did you opt for a proprietary engine with the sequel?

We simply felt that the existing engine would not have allowed us to fully realise the innovations we wanted to see in *Battlefield 2* ... at least not without substantial rewrite. The new Refractor 2.0 engine is completely new and built in-house here in Stockholm, Sweden. The new graphics engine allows us to give the player a much more immersive experience with more detail on vehicles, players and buildings. Dynamic shadows, more destruction in the environment, new effects like helicopter rotor-wash effects and tinnitus visual effect when an explosion goes off too close to your character are all new to the *Battlefield* world.

When brainstorming ideas for the new game, what effect did player feedback have?

As with any game development project here at EA and DICE, we continually touch base with our gamers in various different ways, both at the outset and during development. That way we know we're delivering a great title that gamers will love. As an example, one lesson learned was that people want to be free to try crazy things. They want to do parachute base jumping off bridges or stand on the

wings of a bomber in flight. They want to be able to stack a jeep full of explosives and use it to destroy an enemy tank.

Based largely on gamer feedback, *Battlefield 2* will offer a lot more to the *Battlefield* veteran. Players will of course be able to play with modern weapons and vehicles, such as wire guided anti-tank missiles, laser guided bombs and the Joint Strike Fighter. We've also done quite a bit of research on what type of maps people enjoyed, including the size of the maps, the vehicle ratio, and etcetera. The result was that people didn't really care about the size of the map as long as it was balanced. One of the important facts that became apparent was that people felt that a huge map like *Gazala* wasn't balanced or fun if there weren't a lot of people on it. While a map like *Berlin* is a blast to play with 16 players, it feels crowded with 64 to the point of not being fun. Armed with that information, we have made each map scalable from 16 players to 64 players. When a level is set for a particular number of players, say 32, the playable area, spawn points and number of vehicles, are all adjusted to fit that number of players to maintain balance.

We'll also be including new soldier classes that were often requested. For example, the Special Operations kit is somewhat your typical Commando. He is armed with a short range weapon, has light armour and is able to move quickly. At the same time he comes with a bag of tricks that allows him to blow up enemy equipment and to paint enemy targets with a laser to guide in friendly missiles. The Heavy Weapons kit is almost the complete opposite of the Commando. He is armed with a machine gun with a lot of fire power and range. He moves slower, but has heavier body armour. He also has the ability to hand out ammunition to his fellow player and score points for doing so.

Another great feature we've developed based on gamer feedback is "Battlefield TV". As players of *Battlefield*, we all had some fantastic moments that could only be shared if you showed it to someone ... a "you had to be there" moment. We decided to make that a reality by enabling servers to record matches and share those files with the community. The files are much smaller than a movie file and as AVI's could be played within the *Battlefield 2* engine. Players can take those files, change and save camera angles, as well as play it back at various speeds. This feature also allows you to take great screenshots. Clans should also find this a useful feature as you can record and publish a clan match. Clans could have their entire playing history available on the web for people to view.

Battlefield was infamous for long load times and a very resource-intensive engine. *Battlefield 2* looks great but can players expect a more streamlined and less hungry game?

Yes, we anticipate that *Battlefield 2* will run on slightly lower-specked machines than *BF Vietnam* relative to the best currently available, and it will certainly be no more demanding than various other recent PC titles.





How much research went into the weaponry, uniforms and vehicles? Did the DICE team “trek off” to a local military base for some pointers?

Substantial research went into all the game elements – our team gathered as many of the in-game weapons as possible, and ‘experimented’ with them under expert supervision at a firing range. The team wanted to make sure the game captures not just the weapons’ look and feel but also the firing rate and reaction and effect on the battlefield - as close as possible to reality.

Modern warfare is a politically sensitive topic at the moment. Considering that Battlefield didn’t replicate WW2 German insignia, were any changes made to Battlefield 2 to make it more politically correct?

As with previous BF titles, the focus is on fun war-based game play, rather than completely accurate representation of any particular army or location. The Battlefield franchise has never tried to take sides in any conflict, for one very simple reason - our focus has always been large multi-player games. So if it isn’t fun to play all sides then the game isn’t fun. Battlefield creates the sandbox and the toys. You get to bring your friends and your imagination. We will not portray terror in any way. All sides in this game are portrayed as professional armies.

The community response for “mods” for Battlefield was immense. Did you expect such support from players?

With Battlefield 1942, I think the strength of consumer response surprised us all. It really gave gamers the opportunity to expand on our title and make it their own and the “mod” community created many fantastic and fun enhancements.

What’s being done in Battlefield 2 to support community “mods” even more?

With Battlefield 2, we have focussed more on supporting the “mod” community from the outset (we’ve specifically hired “mod” community experts to do just that). We’ll be providing “mod” tools to the community before the game launches and supporting the community through our Website and other efforts post-launch. It’s really one of the pillars of our effort to develop and support BF2.

Will Battlefield 2 make more use of the persistent player statistics?

Yes, absolutely! The game will have built-in tracking of a wide range of statistics and rankings, for all the players worldwide who play on ranked servers. This allows you to build up a history with your player, unlock new weapons and earn various rewards.

Tell us a bit more about the medals and awards players can garner.

The player can earn points either based on kills if they are a soldier, or heals if they are a medic, etcetera. – we wanted to make sure that the player gets the same satisfaction and progression whichever role they choose to play and a good squad really needs a well-balanced range of players. As their points increase the players will unlock subsequent ranks. For particular achievements they’ll receive appropriate medals or commendations. All of these will be maintained with that player’s profile.

One of the most exciting rewards is the ability to play as “Battlefield Commander”, an all-new role with a bird’s eye view of the whole battle. Each side will have just one commander, the highest-ranked player who applied for the role – that individual will be able to call in artillery strikes on enemy positions, drop supplies for their squads, perform satellite or UAV sweeps to uncover enemy positions, and issue orders to their squads using an improved command system with integrated VOIP.

There are now three teams: the US, China and Middle-Eastern forces. Why these three specifically?

We felt that these three forces offered the best opportunity for variety and fun in game play involving the key players on the world stage today and allowing us to explore some of the most interesting battlefield situations.

While the Battlefield franchise doesn’t attempt to absolutely accurately represent any particular army, the USA and China forces, of course, are based on the global superpowers we’re all familiar with. The Middle Eastern Coalition (MEC) was formed out of a number of current day Arab states who felt their future was brighter together rather than apart. It would draw parallels with today’s European Union. The MEC is anything but a terrorist state. It’s well armed, having used its oil reserves to purchase the best equipment on the market, including some European weapons. It is also highly trained and motivated.

Did having three sides instead of two pose any additional balancing problems?

The main concern for us was that whichever sides are fighting it out in a particular battle any gamer must have a real chance to impact the battle and secure victory for their side. If any side or soldier kit isn’t fun to play then the game isn’t fun. Naturally this translates



into a huge focus on balance. Balance in weapons, vehicles, abilities and maps. If players feel that there is an imbalance it ruins the experience for them. Rock, paper, scissors is a mantra for us. Battlefield has always been about using your skill. To have a weapon that automatically kills your opponent with no skill involved is not something we wanted to introduce so we have ensured that each weapon has a 'game within the game.' An example would be firing an anti-tank (AT) missile. A player can fire and guide his AT-missile over a distance to hit an enemy tank just by keeping his crosshairs on the bad guy. At the same time though, the player in the tank gets a warning whenever a hostile player aims an AT-missile at him and a more urgent warning when one is fired at him. To add to the mix, the player in the tank can fire one of his few smoke grenades to deceive an incoming AT missile. Now it becomes a bit more cat and mouse and involves a lot more skill.

Can all three teams play in a map simultaneously?

No. We felt that the balance, inherent in the fun game play Battlefield is known for, is best maintained by having two sides in any battle.

With China and the US in the fray, will maps only be located in the Middle East or can we expect other areas?

Actually the Middle East is only half of the battle. Battlefield 2 will also ship with conflicts taking place in Manchuria pitting the US against China. The battles there will take place in settings very far removed from the desert settings of the Middle East. The Chinese Army has some of the most modern weapons in the game.

As far as the Middle East goes – it's a vast place, so we wanted to explore some of the areas that people might not consider when they think of the Middle East. The swamps around Al Basrah, the mountains of Northern Syria as well as the beaches of Oman are just a few examples.

Squads are a new addition – how far can players take this con-

cept in terms of online play and persistent teams?

Gamers will be able to play within squads, either as members or squad leaders. Each player will communicate primarily with their squad during play. As I mentioned earlier, the Battlefield Commander will have an overall view of his side and communicate with each of his squad leaders to best coordinate the forces. This squad-based play provides the gamer with some unique tools to help them play together more effectively. These tools include being able to track their squad mates, use the built in VOIP to talk to their squad mates and to even "spawn in" on the Squad Leaders' locations when they die.

So far the only game to follow Battlefield's example was Star Wars Battlefront. What did you think of it?

We're very proud of the great multiplayer game play that the Battlefield franchise is known for and of course expect that as its popularity increases other developers will be interested in making titles that cater to the same audience. Star Wars Battlefront offers a completely different environment and game play dynamics, so we're happy that gamers who want to explore that direction have this option.

Would you like to see more games like that in the genre?

Of course we'd like everyone to be playing Battlefield but everyone needs some variety - so we're happy to see more competition. It drives all developers to keep delivering the very best quality and innovation that we can.

What do you have planned after Battlefield 2?

Erm ... I could tell you, but I'd have to kill you. But seriously, beyond the console version Modern Combat, we already have some great ideas for a first expansion pack for Battlefield 2 and further on an outstanding all-new concept for the next major PC release in the franchise. I can promise that's something to look forward to in a couple of years, but for now we're confident Battlefield 2 will keep all our fans very happy until then. **N**







THIS IS THE ROAD TO

John Constantine, the prolific anti-hero of *Hellblazer*, made his first appearance back in 1985 as a cameo in a *Swamp Thing* comic. In January 1988 he appeared in his own series, one of the landmark comic creations for DC's mature Vertigo line-up. Since then the comic series has survived over 200 issues, various trade-paperbacks and numerous special editions. A movie (and of course the obligatory game spin-off) was therefore inevitable and soon Warner Bros. Studios announced project Constantine. Following short on Warner Bros' announcement, Bit Studios and SCI revealed that they were hard at work on a game that, for the first time, would allow you to take control of the remorseful warlock trying to fight the forces of evil. Should fans be reeling in terror of a movie-based title or looking forward to it? We sat down with Dylan Beale, Constantine's Game Director, to find out.

Hellblazer has a serious cult following amongst comic readers. How does it feel to work with material that has such a history and following?

It is something that fills us with excitement, honour and nerves all at the same time! Because of the high quality of the writing, characters and artwork, *Hellblazer* is a comic book series that we have read and loved for a long time. So when we heard that it was going to be adapted for the Constantine movie, we did not hesitate in approaching Warner Bros. about obtaining rights to develop the game based on this property. The enthusiasm that we have put into the game development process as a result has really helped us keep the quality bar as high as possible. I hope that we have done enough to please the fans of the series ... which is where the nerves come in.

With *The Punisher Volition* you decided to use the comic book license as opposed to the movie materials. Why did you opt for the movie license instead?

Like you say, the *Hellblazer* series has a serious cult following. The feedback from Warner Bros. regarding the film quality and hype surrounding it should elevate the awareness about John Constantine's universe higher than that of the original comic books. Using the vehicle of the movie helps us to share the vision of Constan-

tine's world to a wider audience than would be if we had gone down the *Hellblazer* route.

License- and movie-based games have always been viewed as sub-standard by enthusiast players. Why would Constantine be any different?

We are very fortunate with this film license in that Warner Bros. have really put a lot of effort and assistance into the project. We got unprecedented access to the digital effects files from the filmmakers, in addition to film footage and general guidance and direction along the way.

Our passion for creating the game has also allowed some of the core aspects of all great games to come through – good control and level design etc., have not been ignored on this project.

How much of an influence will the comic book series have?

Even though there are some visual differences between the movie and the comic book, I'm happy to say that the overall tone and feel of *Hellblazer* has been kept quite intact – especially regarding the lead character whose personality and attitude is the soul of the John Constantine we know and love. That was a really important thing for us to know before we took on the project. There are also some elements in the game where we drew strong inspiration from

HELL





the comic book - for example, the Hunger incantation that causes swarms of insects to devour their victim, is a direct link to the 'Original Sins' plot arc of the Hellblazer series. Touches like this and many others should make the comic fans feel right at home.

Will Constantine follow the movie or go for its own territory, similar to the Chronicles of Riddick game?

The story of the game follows the plot of the movie in many regards. However, we have made a few changes here and there to make the story fit our videogame medium. As Riddick and others have proven, to follow the movie plot word-for-word is not necessarily the best route and we understand this.

Aside from the story aspects, our game extends on the materials in the film in other regards as well. Locations not in the film can be explored by Constantine and there are new weapons and spells in the game too. Probably the coolest additions exclusive to the game are the new demons to defeat. We designed a bunch of new demons just for the game with full feedback and approval from Warner Bros. throughout. The new demons keep the overall visual style of those in the movie but have some new and tough abilities for you to overcome.

What game play styles can players expect - is Constantine more action or more stealth? And does the story-telling mechanism play a big role, as it does in the graphic novels?

Our game is primarily a 3rd person action horror title. It is an easily accessible yet atmospheric game with many jumpy/scary elements and a healthy mix of 3rd person shooting, spell casting, exploration and puzzle solving throughout. The story telling aspect does play an important part of the game and like any good detective story, Constantine will keep you wanting to find out what happens next and learn who is responsible for all the occult goings-on. But we can't tell you anything about that!

The storytelling aspect is something that Warner Bros. have been very much involved and helpful with and we are pretty proud of some of our resulting cut scenes. Constantine will be the first game licensed by Warner Bros. where we have been allowed to replicate an entire scene of the film completely in CG. The results are pretty impressive.

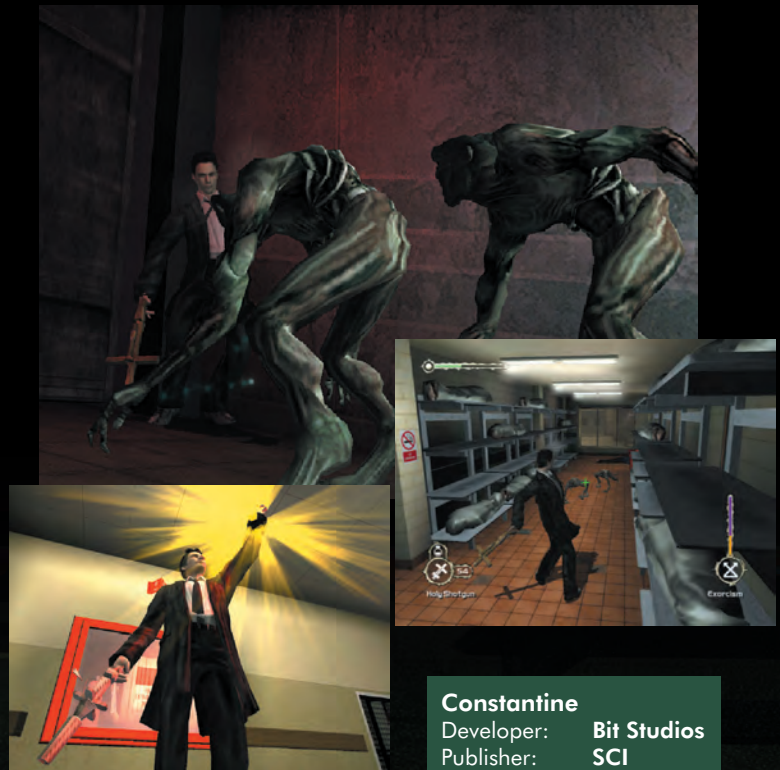
Who will John meet during the game? And what type of opponents can we expect?

John will meet all the main characters in the film, right through from his assistant and man-at-arms Beeman through to the mysterious Balthazar, the angelic Gabriel and beyond. Known characters from Hellblazer such as Papa Midnite also play a valuable part in the game.

The opponents John will face include the crawling Scouts and flying Sepulvites that can be seen in the movie and its trailer. New enemies just for the game include the charging, yet vulnerable Impalers, the 'hell-infantry' Soldier demons and many more which I'm not telling you about!

Which locations will be visited in the game?

You start the game in John Constantine's apartment. Even though this is John's sanctuary you soon find that you must go to Hell and back - literally - to put a stop to the evil doing. Your journey takes you through dark and moody urban locations including a mortuary in the middle of the night (that sometimes goes pitch black...), a police station, a hospital and many more. John must transfer over to Hell on many occasions. This is where the quality of graphics in the game really kicks up a gear and you can start seeing effects galore such as cars and trucks getting thrown around the screen and much more. One of the Hell levels even has you fighting demons on one of the same freeways that take you to the LA Convention Centre where E3 is held. We thought that some of our more dedicated gamers would like that touch. **N**

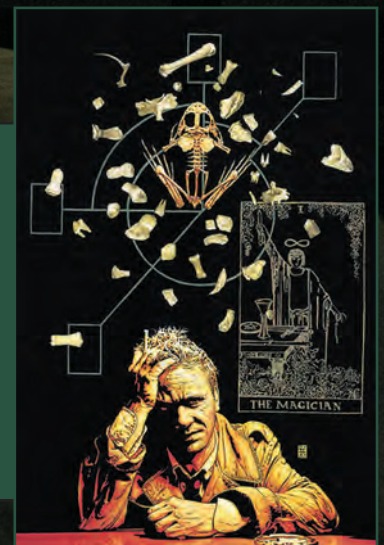


Constantine

Developer: **Bit Studios**
 Publisher: **SCI**
 Platform: **PS2, Xbox**
 Expect it: **Q2 2005**

HELLBLAZER THE COMIC

John Constantine first appeared in Swamp Thing #37 in 1985, but it would take three years before the first issue of Hellblazer appeared in January, 1988. Created by legendary comic writer, Alan Moore, Constantine was actually based on music star Sting and features a hard English accent - something fans worry actor Keanu Reeves might fail to bring across. Constantine initially used his inherited gift for magic to his own selfish means, up to the point where he botched up an exorcism and ended up sending a little girl to hell. Since then he has roamed the world, fleeing his demons and trying to fight evil where he can, though he's grown reluctant to use magic and would rather use his gift of the gab to get out of trouble. This combination of myth and reality has evolved the series into one of the most prolific in the comic book world, featuring interesting and intense characters in the series' ever-enriching world.





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Rugby 2005



PC | PS2
N-GAGE | GCN
GBA | XBOX


Developer: EA Sports · **Publisher:** Electronic Arts · **Supplier:** EA Africa [011] 516 8300 **Genre:** Sports
Release Date: TBA



Is Rugby 2005 a good try? ...sorry...

In terms of sports games there are perhaps a few examples of games that have gotten worse treatment on the digital playing field than rugby, but these usually mean seeking out something as exotic as caber tossing or the myriad of "hunting simulations" the US market thrives on. Still, EA's Rugby series has grown in stature and quality over the years and the 2005 edition is looking really impressive.

The usual trimmings are there. All the Rugby teams as well as all of the major tournaments (including the Super 12 and Tri-Nations) are included. As is standard with EA Sports games, we can expect motion-captured moves and a lot of detail that fans of the sport will expect. EA's innovation with sports control, at least as far as the analogue sticks on console controllers go, becomes evident with the ability to make fake moves to avoid oncoming players (intent on ploughing you into the ground), accurate kicking control and more responsive attacking moves. Other features include dynamic crowd reactions and a training mode for beginners or those who want more details on the rules.

So is Rugby finally ready to enter the same league as EA's other sports titles? Let's hope so. 

Discover the Real Potential of Your System

ASUS Motherboards Eliminate CPU Multiplier Lock

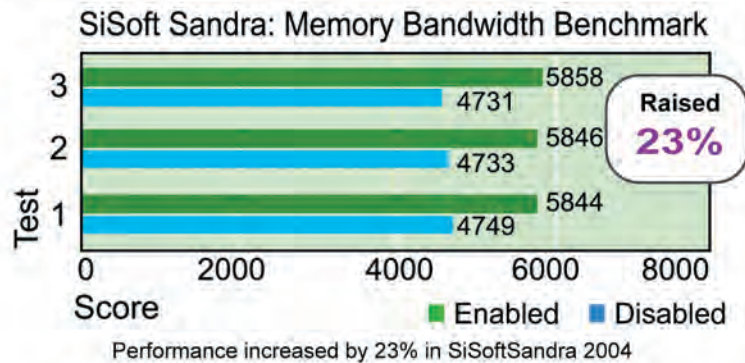
Enjoying better performance without spending extra money to upgrade a computer is a dream of every computer user, and overclocking is the best way to boost system performance without changing current PC setups.

ASUS recently introduced several unique overclocking features that can be easily activated in the BIOS to unleash the true potential of your system. One of the innovations that have received raved reviews from hardware testing media is CPU Lock Free, which unlocked the multiplier limitation in Intel Pentium 4 processors. Today we'll take a closer look at this latest motherboard technology.

Why multiplier-based design?

Clockspeed is the most common unit for measuring CPU performance. The higher the clockspeed, the faster the processor and the quicker a computer can complete each application. To experience the CPU's full power, a motherboard with matching front-side-bus (FSB) is a must. This was possible when the CPU clockspeeds were much lower but has become almost impossible now with clockspeed rising beyond 3GHz.

This is where multiplier-based CPU design comes in. For example, the latest Intel Pentium 4 runs at 3.6GHz. Producing a motherboard with 3.6GHz FSB involves complex, high frequency circuitry that will significantly increase the cost in both design and manufacturing. Average users don't have the budget for these boards anyways.



The function of CPU multiplier is to increase FSB frequency to match CPU clockspeed. This CPU design greatly simplified motherboard circuitry design by allowing motherboard makers to maintain FSB frequency at acceptable levels.

Most CPUs nowadays has what's called a multiplier lock that forbids users to tweak CPU multiplier. Beginners find it very convenient since they have one less thing to worry about when building their PC, but for those who like to push their systems, it's one less option.

CPU Lock Free unlocks FSB overclocking limitation
Any user with some experience on computer hardware probably knows this formula:

$$\text{CPU Clockspeed} = \text{FSB frequency} \times \text{CPU multiplier}$$

Users usually tweak their systems either by increasing FSB frequency or CPU multiplier, which is usually locked for the Pentium 4

CPU. ASUS motherboards now offer CPU Lock Free, which enables CPU multiplier adjustment. Multiplier reduction provides more flexibility for increasing FSB frequency without raising CPU clockspeed.

As the table indicates, CPU Lock Free adjusted CPU multiplier from 18x to 14x, allowing the system to operate with FSB up to 258MHz (maximum bandwidth 8.23GB/sec) and memory bandwidth up to 10.98GB/sec while clockspeed remained at 3.6GHz. Multiplier adjustment is a safe and convenient method to overclock.

ASUS motherboards are the only ones to incorporate CPU Lock Free, an exclusive feature that unlocks the multiplier limitation in Intel processors, delivering superior flexibility to unveil your system's real potential.

Example: Clockspeed fixed at 3.6GHz

(Default setting: 3.6GHz CPU, 200MHz FSB, 18x multiplier, and 533MHz DDR2 memory module)

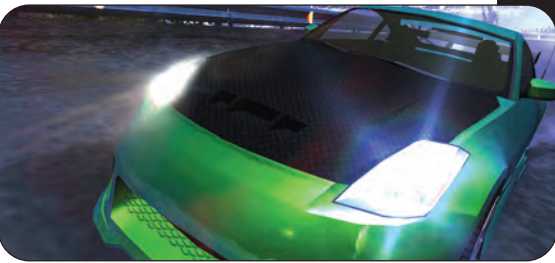
Clockspeed CPU	Lock Free function	Multiplier	FSB Frequency	Increased % of the FSB	Effective Memory Frequency	Memory Bandwidth
3.6GHz	Enabled	14x	258MHz	29%	686MHz	10.98GB/sec
	Disabled	18x	200MHz	0%	533MHz	8.6GB/sec

CPU Lock Free is especially effective in boosting memory performance. In a test using the configuration below, CPU Lock Free achieved a 23% performance improvement.

- Motherboard: ASUS P5AD2 Premium, BIOS Version: 1007
- CPU: Intel LGA775 3.6GHz
- DRAM: Micron DDR2 533, 256MB*2PCS
- O.S: Windows XP Professional version 5.1. 2600+ Service Pack 2

For more information, contact ASUS SA local office at asus_sa@telkomsa.net

reviews



Return of the son of...

Once again, sequels are prominent in this issue. But how long will the trend of relying on previous successes continue?

When perusing the list of games reviewed in this issue of NAG, it becomes evident that the time of the sequel has far from ended. A couple of years ago it was stated, during the state of the industry speech at E3, that sequels would come to dominate the computer game market for some time, at least, while new franchises would become rarer. In addition, games licensed from other media would also become more prominent. This is a result of the fact that making games has become, as stated many times before, big business. Big business is, of course, very competitive, which means that companies producing the products need to take every measure they could to ensure the success of their products and subsequently their investments.

And what better way to ensure your success than by following a formula that has worked in the past? This is why, in essence, we will see a great many twos and threes behind the names of games, in the near future at least.

Where does this leave those developers and publishers who are willing to take the risk of establishing new

titles? It is a fact that we all like to see something new and that the tendency towards sequels is more of a business decision than a result of human nature. For this reason the smaller developers, who are far more willing to take risks in order to achieve success, will always have a place in the market. The maverick developers will have a very firm footing indeed whenever the current trend of creating sequels changes. Of course, there is nothing to stop them from making sequels either...

In the end, it all comes down to making money by giving consumers what they want. And let's be honest - when we as game players hear about the sequel of a favourite game, we tend to get very excited. The only real concern we should have stems from the fact that original, first instalment titles may become rarer as time goes on. There is, of course, no way of predicting this anyway, but let us hope that this will never be the case. In the end, as with so much else in this fickle and highly mutable industry, time will tell and we the consumers will just have to wait and see what happens...

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Editor's Choice

Once in a while, a game comes along that displays certain qualities which our editor likes. Pretty colours and loud noises help...



Platform

Platforms are described using icons rather than just plain old words. For those of you who don't know (shame on you) they are, left to right, top to bottom: Game Boy Advance, GameCube, N-Gage, PC, PS2 and Xbox.



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The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-Earth



PC
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** EA Games · **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
Supplier: EA Africa [011] 516 8300 · **Genre:** Real Time Strategy · **Reviewer:** Alex Jelagin
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 4 1.3GHz · 256 MB RAM · 8 x CD ROM · 32 MB Video Card · 4.0 GB HDD

Electronic Arts, having some time ago acquired Westwood Studios, continues the two companies' tradition of excellent real-time strategy titles with this new franchised release. Developed under license from New Line Cinema, the game is decidedly based on the style and approach taken in the film trilogy and uses many elements from the films such as portraits, voices and video clips.

As usual for games from this stable, the packaging and presentation are very slick indeed. I was initially somewhat intimidated in finding four CDs in the box and the installation consumes over 3 GB of hard drive space and takes quite a while.

The manual is of high quality and well presented and contains enough information for even newcomers to the genre to get started. The game interface must be seen to be believed - it is

simply beautiful! This is probably a good place to mention something rather clever. There is a button granting direct access to the options screen in the multiplayer screen. This is sheer genius. Normally players like to tweak their settings for performance when playing multiplayer and having the settings so readily accessible means that players needn't navigate several levels of menus if they forgot to make necessary changes on their way in.

The Battle for Middle-Earth features an extensive campaign mode, which loosely follows the story of the book (and, therefore, the films). I say loosely, because it would be virtually impossible to keep things identical and maintain integrity from a gaming perspective. The action is, as in the book and movies, split between locales and players jump between controlling the Fellowship (and, later, its fragmented parts) and commanding the armies of

Rohan and Gondor. The timeline is consistent.

This title boasts amazing graphics, but you will need a chunky system to appreciate them in their fullness. Each unit is magnificently detailed and animated and the animations include many actions and mannerisms that might even be considered superfluous. These, however, add believability and polish. Let me warn you, right now, that any screenshots you see, here or elsewhere, will fail to do the game justice. As its splendour is so heavily dependent on movement and animation - the game is graphically very dynamic. The audio experience puts players right back in the Lord of the Rings movie trilogy, with sound samples from the abovementioned making up a fair amount of the background ambience.

The game dynamic is unusual. No free-form base-building in this one. Rather, there are specific locations on



The Factions

The sides of Good and Evil are each represented by two armies. These tend to be similar, but have notable differences. Each, therefore, plays notably differently.

Gondor: This side epitomises fortified strength, boasting magnificent castles and numerous structures. It has fewer heroes than the other Good faction.

Rohan: Rohan is very cavalry-minded and is focused on mobility. Rohan's technology tree is somewhat simpler than Gondor's, but features a host of versatile heroes.


Isengard: This Evil army is, for a fantasy setting, technologically rather advanced with a fair amount of mechanisation and a correspondingly environmentally-unfriendly resource strategy.

Mordor: The heart of Middle Earth's evil, this side features many monsters and supernatural entities.

the various maps that can be built upon, some of these offering multiple build options. Base locations offer a number of "build foundations" that can be built upon, so you have a preset base location with a number of possible building sites - structures are essentially added to these. This means that it is very difficult to fortify key locations, other than base and outpost sites, as these may not offer any building options and buildings cannot be placed just anywhere. The result is often a long game wherein both sides sweep at each other and run around lighting and fighting fires. Except for heroes, units are handled in battalions (most people would refer to these as squads, really, given that they usually consist of around half a dozen troops), which seems to be the growing trend in strategy games today. Unit types have also been defined in a somewhat more "realistic" fashion - cavalry units, for example, mow down most infantry units like blades of grass. The exception to this is in the case of pike men,

who are specialised counters to charging cavalry. Also, many units will fall from a single arrow.

In terms of pace, this game could almost be considered a cross between Command & Conquer and Age of Empires. The army sizes tend to the epic and it's not uncommon to see thousands of units fall in a single game! Furthermore, bases are fairly resilient, so early rush tactics will seldom work; certainly not if opposing players are of a similar calibre. Maps have something akin to Warcraft III's creeps - monster lairs that can be cleared in order to acquire experience and treasure. While on the topic of experience; almost everything in The Battle for Middle-Earth can earn experience, even buildings. Unit veteran status (or "veterancy") is a familiar concept to players, so I shan't explain it here. When buildings gain a new level, they either start to operate faster, or offer new products, or both. So, certain units can only be built by veteran buildings. Multiplayer options are provided, of

course. Network and online play are both supported, and there is a skirmish mode to practice multiplayer maps in the absence of live opponents. The game keeps quite detailed stats of a player's skirmish performance and replays of multiplayer games can be saved. 

An excellent and spectacular game offering great strategic depth in an authentic Lord of the Rings setting

83

The Sage Engine

The graphics engine used to render Middle Earth in this game is a (somewhat enhanced) derivative of the engine used in Command & Conquer Generals. This is most notable in the graphics options screen, which presents the player with the same items as the comparable screen in Generals. The Sage engine proves itself powerfully versatile. An example of this is the complete difference in types of units and buildings that are rendered in the two mentioned games. In Generals it's mostly vehicles with a smattering of infantry, while in The Battle for Middle-Earth all the units are highly animated beings and creatures. We will see more of this excellent power-plant in EA's upcoming Red Alert game.



RollerCoaster Tycoon 3



PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299 · **Developer:** Frontier Developments · **Publisher:** Atari
Supplier: MegaRom [011] 234 2680 · **Genre:** Simulation · **Reviewer:** Michael James
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 1GHz · 256 MB RAM · 8 x CD ROM · 32 MB Video Card · 800 MB HDD


Chris Sawyer's widely enjoyed theme park simulator franchise spawns a third game, and after the lacklustre sequel it falls on this all new shiny 3D version to impress and wow the crowds. The development this time around was handled by Frontier Developments, headed by David Braben, co-creator of the classic 80's game Elite. How does it all turn out; will your janitors keep cleaning up vomit with a smile or will they loosen all the bolts on the really fast rides... come right this way folks.

In case you were wondering, the graphical transition from a fixed isometric point of view to freeform 3D camera is competently handled. It would have been great to see a little more attention paid to the overall quality of the 3D artwork ... but you can't have everything.

The game plays exactly as you'd expect; build a theme park with cool

roller coasters and rides and the people will come. The amount of tweaking you can get up to is mind-boggling with each ride featuring a plethora of options, dials, buttons and selections. The great thing about the way this is implemented means that you can decide if you want to modify absolutely everything, from the name of the ride to the colour of the rails, or you can just leave the defaults on - although the more detail you go into the easier you'll achieve all the available tasks. Completing tasks is important because this carrot and reward systems unlocks new and harder single player missions. If you'd prefer just having fun, the game ships with a sandbox mode that doesn't place any restrictions on the player (unlimited space and money). The game also manages to impress with its level of detail outside of the control interface - rides break down, visitors have thoughts you can read and then act on (such as complaining

about the price of rides) and in general the whole theme park works realistically. Organised chaos, that is.

It's hard to fault this game. Don't get it if you don't enjoy the slow and careful building and running of a theme park - this is light on the action and requires a little thought. The varied campaigns keep the interest piqued, only just, and on some levels you'll find yourself speeding up the time just to increase your available cash so you can build more rides - the financial side of the game reacts slowly to what you're doing in your park, making the game a little pedantic. That said, you should be so busy placing trash cans and deciding how much to charge for access to the toilets that you won't notice. 

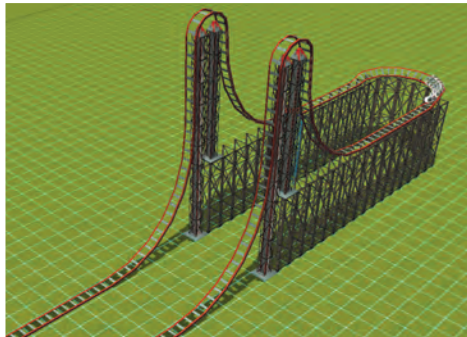
A fine transition to 3D and some decent addition to the franchise make this a worthwhile buy

72



Graphics need a little polish here and there

You can manage yourself into oblivion



Looks like the queue at the bank

Wahoo!

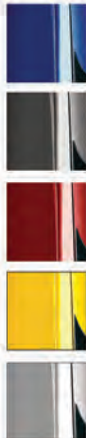


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Transparent fan with blue light.

Alien



Zoo Tycoon 2



Suggested Retail Price: R 243.00 · **Developer:** Blue Fang · **Publisher:** Microsoft
Supplier: Comstek [0860] 600 557 · **Genre:** Management · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 2 733MHz · 256 MB RAM · 4 x CD ROM · 16 MB Video Card · 1 GB HDD

Microsoft's ever popular and wonderfully didactic zoo management title has got a new breath of life in this latest, greatly updated version of the game.

For the most part, fans of the previous game (and its expansions) will not notice anything particularly different in terms of the way the game works. This will, in part, be due to the fact that they will be too busy looking at the flashy new 3D engine that Blue Fang has incorporated to power the game.

The graphic overhaul and inclusion of a good 3D engine has added immeasurably to the title. Instead of four pre-set angles from which the zoo could be viewed, the camera can now be positioned at virtually any angle. Additionally, the park construction has also been granted a greater degree of versatility.

Three game modes - freeform, challenge and scenario - allow the player to take on a wide variety of challenges and situations, each providing different variations for the player to tackle. The freeform game also allows for games that virtually last forever, especially when the wide variety of maps available for play is considered.

As before, the player is faced with two major challenges within the zoo environment; keeping the animals happy, and keeping visitors to the zoo happy. Of course keeping the animals in good shape (and keeping a variety of animals) attracts more visitors, who in turn, provide the money for funding more zoo projects.

While the research capabilities have been removed from the game in this new version, a virtual tour of the zoo has been added - hardly a fair trade, but entertaining none the less.

One major improvement to the game is the ease with which exhibits can now be built. Instead of scrabbling around to get all the right parts for an animal's suitable biome, everything needed by the animal is now grouped together in an easy to understand and simple to use interface.

On the down side, there are far fewer animals for inclusion in the player's zoo. While this does make running the zoo somewhat simpler, it removes a level of variety that was a personal favourite.

Zoo Tycoon 2 is a suitable and effective continuation of the series and still contains excellent levels of educational content. Additionally, the newfound freedom of design granted by the 3D engine makes the game wonderfully entertaining and versatile. This is a great title for management fans as well as for younger players.

A great sequel to the ever popular zoo management game - now in glorious 3D

78



The beaver is a distant cousin to the badger...



3D makes for interesting changes...



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Jak 3



PlayStation 2
Review



Gold
Award

Suggested Retail Price: R 489.00 · **Developer:** Naughty Dog · **Publisher:** SCEE
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Action · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 Player · 200kb Memory · Vibration compatible · Analog compatible

Those expecting Jak 3 to be the antithesis of the series will be severely disappointed. You simply cannot have too much of a good thing when it comes to the creative universe Naughty Dog has managed to put together for us to enjoy; along with the dynamic energy between the strong silent-type Jak and his comedic buddy-turned-marsupial Daxter. Absolutely true to the Jak and Daxter franchise, players are immediately thrown into Jak 3's compelling storyline that picks up right where Jak 2 left off.


Much as Jak 2 was a vast improvement over the first title, this third incarnation is nothing short of that same level of improvement, squared. Every conceivable aspect of the game has been polished and refined, the rough edges filed down while the concepts that made the previous titles fun have been paid special attention to and enhanced.

The core mechanics of the game remain the same as before. Jak 3 is a platformer involving timed jumps, a good dosage of exploration and fast-paced action blended with seamless adventure. As you explore the new Wasteland and the remodelled yet eerily familiar Haven City (a Metal Head attack destroyed the palace and demolished the majority of the city), all the expected weapons and their upgrades will be at your disposal. Every weapon from Jak 2 makes a welcome return, along with the addition of two insanely powerful upgrades for each gun type.

In a welcome twist, certain areas give the player a chance to play as Daxter so as to achieve goals otherwise unattainable to Jak himself, although these areas don't occur as often as would have been preferred. Also making an applauded return, the Titan Suit and Jetboard provide interesting dynamics and alternative ways of dealing with surroundings, alongside the new vehicles that play a rather large role in the game. Each vehicle you unlock features rather complex vehicle physics but they are instantly fun to drive and come equipped with weapons ... naturally.

It may be a cliché concept but the introduction of new Light Eco powers juxtaposed to Jak's original Dark Eco powers certainly work with each new power interesting and different. A par-

ticular ability of note is Jak's capability to slow down time so as to manoeuvre fast-moving platforms or to race the clock.

Everything is held together with the latest technology such as "rag-doll" death animations for each enemy, integrated physics, cloth dynamics as well as a complete and utter lack of any load times whatsoever. However, all of this takes a back seat to the show-stealing in-game cinematic effects. Over an hour of professional voice-acting and plot-moving real-time visuals unfold as players once again take a journey with one of the most interesting and entertaining duos in gaming history. 

A fitting continuation of an
already impressive series

90



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Need for Speed Underground 2



Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Electronic Arts · **Publisher:** EA Games
Supplier: EA Africa (011) 516 8300 · **Genre:** Arcade Racing · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 933MHz · 256 MB RAM · 8 x CD ROM · 32 MB Video Card · 1.4 GB HDD

Time to get back behind the wheel, folks... the high speed, brightly coloured, super charged world of Need for Speed Underground is back, this time offering a host of new options for the player to take to the streets.

The original Need for Speed Underground was something of a revolution for the series and computer based arcade racers in general, so it's no small surprise that the second instalment of this sub-series has met with such a great response from consumers. And while the game is full of new ideas and options, the same style of dynamic and exciting game play exists within the title - the things that appealed to fans of the first game so much.

Need for Speed Underground 2 continues the story from the first game - well, what story there was in the first game - as the player takes control of the "same" driver from the first title who, after a near fatal accident, has relocated to a new city called Bayview. It is here that the player must once again establish himself as the king of illegal street racing by acquiring cars, modifying them visually in terms of appearance and performance and beating all comers in a variety of race conditions. Nothing new here.

But people familiar with the Need for

Speed franchise are well aware of the fact that each subsequent game brings something new to the table, exceeding the expectations created by former titles. Need for Speed Underground 2 is no different. The most obvious difference comes in the overall way that the game is approached by the player. Where the first title was basically a case of the player having had to complete a series of races in order, Underground 2 offers the player far more in scope for making their own decisions. Bayview is presented as a large city for the player to explore. As the game progresses, new areas are unlocked, allowing the player even more places to explore and discover. Within this environment, different races and shops can be found. A comprehensive map helps the player find races (although there are some hidden races that pay better) and automatically memorises shops discovered by the player. In this way, Need for Speed Underground 2 is almost adventure-like... the player can determine which type of race to drive and has to find the places where upgrades are available. The concept adds a sense of realism to the game that was missing from the previous version. Additionally, there are spontaneous races called "out runs" that could be entered whenever a fellow racer is encountered. These races are the ones where the player

may be rewarded with unique parts, so they are well worth taking part in.

All the favourite race modes can be found within the game, as well as a few new ones - SUV races, down-hill drift races (in traffic) and Street X races (which are fast paced races on very tight tracks.) There are also a whole slew of new modifications, particularly in the visual department, for the players to make use of. Once again, however, all performance modifications of the same level are identical in performance, which is a little disappointing.

Another new factor that comes into play is sponsorship - the player can get sponsored by a parts manufacturer, which allows him to take part in the very lucrative Underground Racing League (URL). Magazine covers and DVD covers are available for the player to keep a record of his cars' progress.

Yes, that's right. Plural cars. More than one. Thankfully, this time around, the player can have more than one car. As the game progresses, the player can unlock up to five garage slots, meaning that they can have up to five cars at the end of the game.

The high level of graphics, enjoyable arcade style game play and usually high standard of EA Trax music all make the game very enjoyable. The wide variety of cars (including SUVs) and modifications make for a wide



Sliding downhill, in traffic, in a tappit-mobile... no accounting for intelligence, is there?

amount of variation in terms of car setup and design. This definitely adds a great re-playability value to the title. However, there are a few shortcomings within the game that do bear mentioning. The most obvious problem lies in the fact that the game is very true to the arcade racing principle... in other words, no damaged models. This isn't a huge problem, but realism fans won't like it much.

The next problem seems, at first, to be a marked improvement - the traffic that proved so irritating in the previous title, has been trimmed down and

made easier to manage. The result is, after a period of game play, that the game becomes too easy. This, once again, isn't a problem of gargantuan proportions, but it does rob the player of some enjoyment.

For the most part, this game is far from disappointing, though. It has the same horribly addictive qualities of the previous title, but with much less frustration involved, due to the easier game dynamic. The new race types and overall "adventure" style of the game add a wonderful new slant to the title and fans of the previous game will

undoubtedly enjoy this new instalment.

One sad fact that needs to be mentioned is that the super-sexy selling point of the game, Brooke Bourke, is only ever shown as a drawing... but, then again, the game is about driving, not perverting at chicks. Isn't it? **N**

A great follow on to the previous title, with great new ideas... although maybe a bit too easy...

80



Mortal Kombat: Deception



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 489.00 · **Developer:** Midway · **Publisher:** Midway
Supplier: Ster Kinekor (011) 445 7900 · **Genre:** Fighting · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Minimum Specifications: 1 Player · 300kb Memory · Vibration compatible · Analog compatible

It takes a special kind of magic, a real unique type of spirit and drive for a series to still be popular 12 years after original conception. The year 1993 saw arcades around the world changed forever as Mortal Kombat entered the fracas and managed to carve a place in history using gore, blood and interesting fighting dynamics such as ripping off your opponents head [always good, Ed].

Throughout it's many incarnations, two dimensional and more, across the multitude of consoles and home computer systems, Mortal Kombat has always essentially been about one thing; stereotypical Martial Art-types kicking three degrees of derriere, with as much emphasis on over-the-top violence as possible. Somehow, it's always managed to avoid being too much (although the against-violence-in-games committees would naturally disagree), but recently the series had fallen into the expected rut. Mortal Kombat Dark Alliance just didn't hit the mark with fans or casual fighting game enthusiasts, the magic just wasn't there.

Unexpectedly, Deception leaps right out of its predecessor's mediocrity and flying-kicks straight into the hard-hitting combat fans have come to love, backed up with improved visuals. While the initial translation from two-dimensions into three with the ill-fated Mortal Kombat 4 may have stumbled along the way, Deception diligently irons out the kinks in the system by making combat in a fully-3D arena easy and strategic.

To emphasize freedom of movement inside the arena, the arenas themselves contain hazard zones and other dangerous elements. Get your

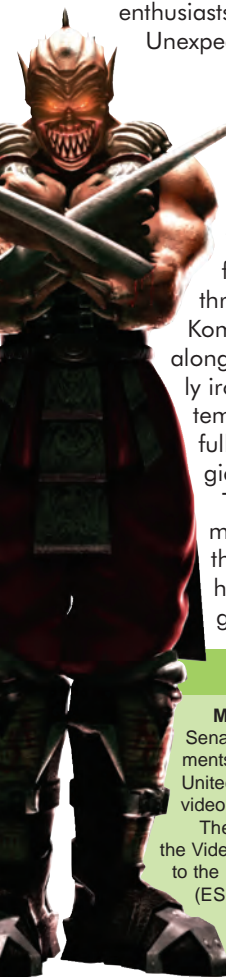
opponent in the right place and a well-timed kick can send him into spinning blades, the jaws of a large snake or even over the edge of a thousand foot cliff only to be impaled on spikes below. Each results in the expected amount (ludicrous amounts) of blood and squishy bits. Along with the movement, the combat system itself has been given a nip, tuck and facelift in the form of a new breaker system (allowing you 3 easy chances out of any combo per round) and indicators under your health bar showing if you are vulnerable to certain types of attacks. Careful observation of the 'status' indicators could win you the fight,

letting you strike at the perfect moment.

Throughout the entire experience, including the improved Krypt (containing a crazy amount of un-lockable content) and the creatively arbitrary Kombat Chess and Puzzle Kombat, Deception shines with the kind of shimmer usually reserved for a labour of love. Even the half-hearted diet-role-playing Konquest mode has a certain undeniable charm to it. This is a Mortal Kombat that the creator of the series, Ed Boon, must be proud of.

It's what every Mortal Kombat fan has been waiting for. Fight!

78



Pretty graphics combined with gravity defying anatomy...

Part of the crew

Mortal Kombat was one of the games Senator Joseph Lieberman centred his arguments on during the 1993 investigation by the United States Congress on extreme violence in video games.

The investigation caused Sega to develop the Video Game Council, which would later evolve to the Entertainment Standards Review Board (ESRB). Since then, even with the ESRB, video games have actually increased in violence (e.g. Grand Theft Auto 3).



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Flat Out



Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 **Developer:** Bugbear Entertainment · **Publisher:** Empire Interactive
Supplier: WWE [011] 462 0150 · **Genre:** Racing · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 4 1.5GHz · 256 MB RAM · 8 x CD ROM · 64 MB Video Card · 2.7 GB HDD

One of the main criticisms that are often levelled at car simulators stems from the fact that damaged models are very seldom accurate. Physics models, too, fall prey to this criticism, due to the fact that the handling of the vehicles within the game is less than perfect.

Aside from the fact that these are, after all, games (let's not get into that whole suspension of disbelief thing again) the fact of the matter is that people who play this sort of game want a realistic feel to them. That's where Flat Out comes into the picture. And then again ... not really.

Flat Out is a demolition derby style simulation that boasts some of the most realistic damage and physics modelling ever. The developers, Bugbear Entertainment, certainly put a lot of work into the title, which is quite surprising considering the game is so

wonderfully simple.

Like most racing titles that feature something of a career mode, the player acquires a car that can be upgraded in rather broad, sweeping ways and raced around various makeshift tracks in an attempt to win races - part of which involves smashing the living day-lights out of the opposition.

The beauty of this title lies in the fact that the cars and tracks can be taken to pieces almost completely. Scenery can be destroyed and the cars can all but be demolished (although they, rather unrealistically, cannot be written-off). Causing havoc on the track earns the player nitrous boost, similar to games like Burnout. This boost is vital in winning races.

Aside from the races several hilarious mini-games are also included, most of which involve propelling the driver of the car through the windscreen and towards some goal or another (high

jump, long jump, darts and ten pin bowling.)

All the mayhem is supported by great graphics and a carefully chosen Indy sound track crammed full of great generally unknown music.

Flat Out is, rather unfortunately, a very frustrating game due to the fact that the cars are, initially at least, incredibly difficult to control. Getting anywhere in the title requires a lot of playing... once the vehicle is upgraded things get a bit simpler, but earning enough cash to upgrade initially is high impossible. To generate extra cash, a smart player may be able to find a number of exploitable situations in the game which, once again, poorly affect the game's overall appeal.

But if you enjoy your racing titles and don't take things too seriously, Flat Out is a great way to while away a few hours.

A fun and frustrating destruction derby racer with great graphics and music

80



Second Opinion [Xbox]

Flat Out is to Destruction Derby what Burnout 3 is to Outrun. With a heavy focus on the physics behind the cars, Flat Out attempts to add an unsurpassed realism to every crunch, crash and collision. It seems, quite simply, that with such heavy preening and posturing towards the physics, little attention was given to the shoddy single-player and forgettable soundtrack. The interesting mini-games (one such mini-game involving your car, its driver and a large dartboard) only offer momentary relief from an otherwise frustrating experience, leaving you in the dust.

Miktar Dracon 67%

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The Urbz



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 · **Developer:** Maxis · **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
Supplier: EA Africa [011] 516 8300 · **Genre:** Adventure · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Requirements: 1 - 2 Players · Analog Compatible



It's time for the most successful spin-off of all time, The Sims, to get a spin-off of its own. That's right, the overall game play has moved along in a new direction, especially for the PS2.

The Urbz is a new take on the addictive people management game style of the Sims, but it does seem to leave a little to be desired. Sims fans will undoubtedly enjoy the new take on the idea of running the lives of virtu-

al people, especially in a more socially focussed context, but the pace and rhythm that the game's hype promises seems to be missing. The Urbz features a great new "cartoony" feel and allows the player to more effectively control the social interactions of up to four urban dwelling sims. It's far shallower than its inspiration, dealing more with style than substance as a social simulation - a shallowness that is completely apt - across a variety of sub-cultures ranging from Goths to house freaks. While it all sounds very exciting, the

game is rather slow and has something of a clumsy control system. While the game tries hard to capture the vibrancy of modern street culture, these two aspects go far to lay these aspirations low. This is the kind of game that will do well due to its obvious cult appeal, but it will hardly become the smash hit that The Sims was and is. [N](#)

This game, inspired by The Sims, has definite cult classic potential, but lacks wide market appeal in its execution

75



Lord of the Rings: The Third Age



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 369.00 · **Developer:** EA Games · **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
Supplier: EA Africa [011] 516 8300 · **Genre:** Strategy · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: 1 Players · Analog Compatible

Yet again - a brilliant Lord of the Rings title comes to the PS2 from EA Games, but this time the focus of the game moves away from tense, sword swinging action in favour of a more strategic style of play with a strong leaning towards intricate character development. The Third Age does not involve characters known in the actual Lord of the Rings universe. Rather, the characters in this game are a sort of "supporting cast," following the more familiar fellowship of the ring across Middle Earth. These unsung heroes are the stars of a game that has taken on a game dynamic similar to the Final Fantasy game style - computer adventure role playing with a dynamic turn based action system employed for combat, which proves far more addictive than it sounds. Great graph-

ics and a high standard of voice acting support a compelling and entertaining "untold" story behind the Lord of the Rings scenes. It is filled with entertaining and informative expansions on the already known Lord of the Rings universe - mostly in the form of live film segments narrated by Iain McKellan, the actor who played Gandalf in the films. In this environment, the player controls a party of adventurers as they follow the fellowship across Middle

Earth. To add to the fun, extra items can be unlocked for the party by playing in "evil mode" - a game mode where the player controls the forces of evil in fights against his own party. Overall, this game is a great strategy adventure title that holds wide appeal. [N](#)

Slightly different from the other LOTR games, this strategy adventure title is entertaining and highly addictive

82



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Sly 2: Band of Thieves



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 469.00 · **Developer:** Sucker Punch · **Publisher:** SCEE
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Platform · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 Player · 300kb Memory · Vibration compatible · Analog compatible

Sucker Punch pulled no punches with their debut title, Sly Cooper, and it showed in every polished angle of the award-winning platform.

With a welcome return, the same can be said of Sly Raccoon's second daring jaunt into his colourfully realised world. This time, his childhood friends play more than just a secondary role in the capers Sly has to undertake.



Once again Sly Cooper runs, jumps and swings around a surreal Saturday-morning cartoon inspired world, but not just in a 'more of the same'

capacity. Each mission now flows more elegantly, often requiring you to play as either the intellectual yet cowardly turtle Bentley or the beefy backup hippo Murray. Each character represents a slightly different play style, with Sly natu-

rally requiring more stealth than the direct approach Murray or the explosive-planting Bentley.

Tighter controls and a much more forgiving health-system (replacing the infuriating limited-lives system from the previous game) allow for an essentially frustration-free experience, the only real challenges often presenting themselves in the form of deceptively intelligent enemy placements or quick-reaction "run away from the shooting" sections.

In almost every aspect including plot, characterisation, game dynamics and overall style, Sly 2: Band of Thieves manages to flawlessly steal the show and then pawn it off for more than its worth. It is a truly rare occasion when a title such as this comes along and manages to achieve what it set out to do. Entertain.



Smart, sexy and above all, more polished than a rare diamond

82

WRC 4



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 489.00 · **Developer:** Evolution Studios · **Publisher:** SCEE
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Racing · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Requirements: 1-4 Players · 428KB Memory · Analog: All buttons · Vibration compatible

The latest instalment in Sony's World Rally Championship franchise serves to reaffirm the series' reputation, both with regards to quality and difficulty. It should, at the outset, be noted that WRC 4 is in fact the only rally game that features a full official license for the 2004 season, and as such, all the real tracks, vehicles and even drivers from last year's competition appear in the game. In keeping with its predecessors, WRC 4 offers a vast variety of modes and events, encompassing, among others, basic quick race and time trial modes, and an expansive championship mode. This not only features traditional races but also super specials, sprints and shakedown events, all spread out over four classes of vehicles, ranging from entry level 1600 vehicles to aptly-named "extreme" rally cars. The play dynamic is also reminiscent of prior titles, though it is vastly different to that found in the Colin McRae series. The question of which

title is better remains largely a matter of personal preference. WRC 4's handling requires much practise and precision and combined with the almost insanely fast times set by computer-controlled opponents makes WRC 4 an incredibly challenging title. It requires a large investment of time to master which may diminish its appeal to casual gamers. Fans of the series and hardcore rally enthusiasts, however, will definitely love it.

Expansive and highly challenging rally title - probably best suited to enthusiasts

76



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Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines



PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Troika · **Publisher:** Activision
Supplier: Megarom [011] 234 2680 · **Genre:** CRPG · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 1.2GHz · 384 MB RAM · 4 x CD ROM · 64 MB Video Card · 3.3 GB HDD

Troika has quite a reputation as a development house and therefore their entry into the dark world of White Wolf publishing's Vampire: The Masquerade has been greatly anticipated. Add to that the fact that the new Half-Life 2 source engine provides the visual power behind the game and anyone can see that the potential behind the title is massive.

Initial impressions of the title are not exactly what would be expected, mainly because the graphic quality of the game is not quite what it should be. While the environments are quite beautiful, the character models are very poorly handled - clipping, "ice skating" and a host of other problems abound.

However, should the player be able to look past what is essentially a purely cosmetic problem (if you will excuse the pun) he will find a game that is complex, entertaining and challenging.

The major improvement over the older version of the game lies in the fact that the player can create their own vampire-like character, rather than being forced to use a pre-generated character. The variety of options that this opens up to the player is quite vast and adds to the replay ability of the game quite extensively.

Another change is that the game can be played from both a first or third person point of view. All melee combat is in third person, while firearm combat is in first person. A comprehensive and simple control system makes the game easy enough to handle, although the story itself leads to some very challenging situations all set in a dark and ominous world quite similar to our own.

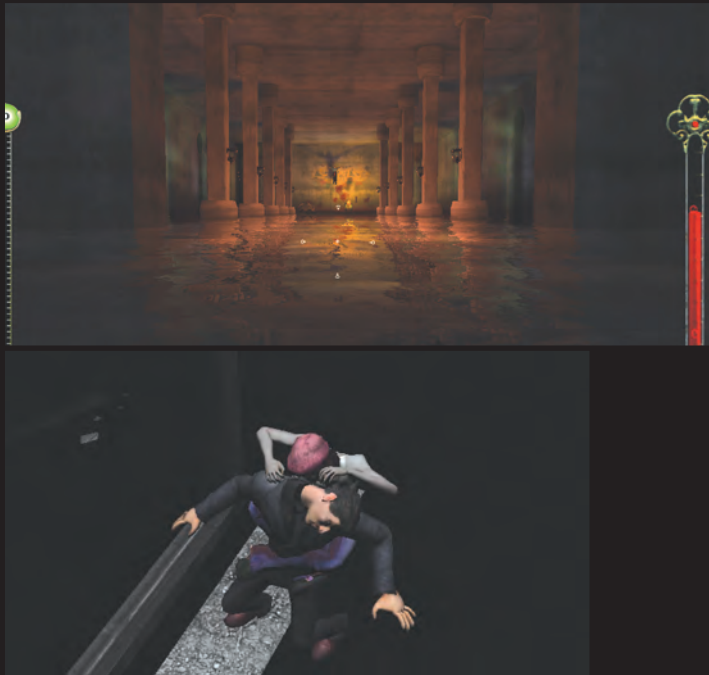
Perhaps the two most impressive features of the game come in the form of the story and the extremely high level of voice acting. The former is complex and well calculated, providing the play-

er with hours of intrigue and entertainment. The latter is of a quality that is rarely seen in games these days and is wonderfully supported by excellent facial animations (yes, the character animations are poor, but their faces are brilliantly handled).

This is one of those games that will prove very popular with those who are able to look past essentially non-critical problems to find the rough diamond beneath. That, however, will not be the case with the majority of gamers who, basically, will be too shallow to look past the graphical problems. **N**

A game that, despite poor graphics, is deep, entertaining, as well as very challenging

79



SEGA Superstars



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 **Developer:** SEGA · **Publisher:** SEGA · **Supplier:** WWE [011] 462 0150

Genre: Puzzle · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon

Requirements: 1 Player · 200 kb Memory · Eye Toy

The EyeToy bandwagon seems to finally be running full-tilt with every second company and their intellectual property trying to get you gyrating like a fool in front of the deceptively versatile little EyeToy camera atop your PlayStation 2. Unsurprisingly, Sega threw every recognisable character/brand they had at Sega Superstars. Some missed; some hit their mark but more so the latter.

Possibly the most interesting aspect of Sega Superstars, was how Sega

attempted to use the EyeToy in slightly more creative ways instead of mimicking the groundwork set by EyeToy Play and its sequel. Instead of waving your hands trying to clean something, your arms often act as an improvised controller. As you spread out your arms like an airplane, tilting your body from side to side manipulating the massive Super Monkey Ball level to buck and tilt so as to steer the ball upon it. The addictive Puyo Pop Fever game involves using your entire body as a funnel for the various coloured Puyo Pops, trying

to make them flow into the correct buckets.

As with most EyeToy games, it's all good fun - requiring you to leave your dignity at the door. Only a noticeable lack of support for multi-playing seriously dents this otherwise smoothly executed title. The slightly cumbersome interface combined with a lack of depth may prove detrimental to its longevity.

All your favourite (or not) Sega characters trying their best on the EyeToy

72



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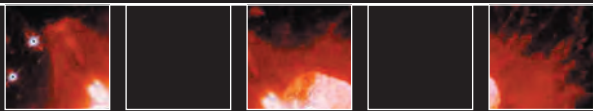
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**Tech Musings:
Get ready for a Deep Impact**



words james francis

Projectiles tearing through space scare me. Someone recently told me that we are only monitoring about 15% of the celestial heavens. It made me think that the probability of earth being struck by a large piece of space junk, without anyone knowing about it in advance, is therefore quite real and frightening.

Well, probably not that great a threat but, just think, we could be asteroid fodder any day. On that note, NASA has launched a probe towards the comet Temple 1. When the craft reaches this large snowball, it will hurl a 373 kg piece of copper at it at a speed of around 37,000 km/h (one hundred times the average speed on a Johannesburg highway), causing a "Deep Impact". Besides finally giving scientists a cool name for their project, the objective of this mission is to reach the comet's nucleus and give scientists a chance to study it. This will be the first time that anyone has ever thrown anything substantial at a comet with the intent to hit it (not counting the odd lunatic with an egg). It's also a major deal for astronomers and other physicists interested in the origin and composition of the universe. Unlike planets and their moons, which endure geological makeovers as they age, and stars, which burn through matter faster than a toddler with a packet of Smarties, comets are pretty much unchanged inside and are thus a great place to find some really good old stuff to play with. What will they find? Either answers to their questions about the universe or, maybe a note saying "Made in Heaven circa 5,000 BC".

The good news is that you'll be able to witness this event on the 4th of July, providing you point a telescope towards the constellation of Virgo, a few degrees off the star Spica. I'll have to bribe some astronomy geek, but at least I'll get to use his telescope. Apparently the comet will light up like a roman candle, so you can't miss it. You might not want to, because the most unpredictable part of this whole endeavour is what will happen when the impact occurs. Maybe one day future generations will have a saying: "The copper just hit the comet!"



ECS Dual Graphics Engine

Motherboard manufacturer ECS has introduced its Dual Graphics Engine technology in its latest range of products. The new boards sport both AGP and PCI Express slots, and both may be used simultaneously. The main purpose here is to allow staggered upgrades, permitting users to upgrade board and processor without having to upgrade graphics right away. The disadvantage of the system is that the AGP slot is not AGP 8x, but rather AGP Express, and shares bandwidth with other PCI devices.

New Radeon X850-based graphics cards

ATI's new series includes XT, XT Platinum and Pro versions. The first two feature imposing coolers that occupy two slots, while the Pro version, with slightly less extensive features, is more space economical. The cards basically feature increases in clock-speeds and expanded engines. All sport GDDR-3 memory, hardware video support and Pixel Shader 2.x support.



Xbox Inferno Pad

This new fashion accessory from Logic3 puts a clear controller with Jade Green backlighting and a 64-colour backlit logo in the hands of Xbox gamers. It also boasts rubber hand grips, and additional shoulder buttons.

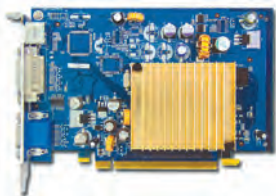


Logitech Precision PC Gaming Headset

This new offering from Logitech offers gamers a set of 40mm neodymium with a behind-the-head open-air design aimed at comfort. The microphone features noise-cancellation, which has become the de facto standard in this kind of application.

Albatron PC6600U

This graphics card uses a nVIDIA GeForce 6600 chipset, wrapping it in performance-boosting features and an advanced cooling mechanism. The Heatpipe Technology is similar to that used in some computer systems as CPU coolers, and works by means of liquid-filled copper pipes that draw heat away from the GPU to be dissipated by heat sinks. The PC6600U has performed well in tests, substantially exceeding the average performance of GeForce 6600 based cards.



Albatron TC6200 Series

This series of graphics cards makes use of the GeForce 6200's TurboCache feature, which allows the GPU to use available system memory as video memory. The PCI Express bus allows for this to happen at high speed, thus not adversely impacting performance. The result of this is that cards can be made with less memory, reducing their cost.

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Atari goes nostalgic

Atari has released the Flashback, which lives up to its name by allowing retro gamers to relive the 7800 gaming system. The console is preloaded with 20 classics that include the likes of Asteroids Centipede and Warlords, but offers no facility for inserting cartridges from the 7800 system.



PlayStation 3 timing details emerging

IBM has announced plans to begin limited production of the Cell processor, which will be at the heart of Sony's upcoming PlayStation 3, in the second half of the year. Sony has indicated that commercial applications of the processor would launch next year and analysts expect the next-generation console to emerge by around the middle of next year. Software development kits will begin shipping before this year's E3, with a second-generation SDK expected in October, which will allow software developers to have products ready by 2006.

Recent patent hints at Xbox 2

A recent Microsoft patent describes a system with multiple processor cores and one GPU which can render complex geometry on the fly. One CPU is the host, and handles the coordination of the tasks involved in running a game, while the rest take care of specific individual tasks. Although no hardware is discussed, the references to gaming within the patent more than suggest that the Xbox 2 is being referred to here.

Zodiac online

The Tapwave Zodiac (a Palm-based handheld) will soon be getting online connectivity via an upcoming Wi-Fi solution that connects as a SD card. Using this device and the accompanying software, users will be able to get online in supporting Wi-Fi networks.

New power supply standard

A new power supply specification has recently been introduced - ATX12V 2.01, to replace its predecessor, ATX 1.3. The new format has a new plug with 24 pins, compared to the old 20-pin arrangement. Interestingly enough, there is some degree of compatibility between the two standards - the smaller old plugs can fit into the larger new ones, and the reverse can be achieved by means of an adaptor. The new standard was introduced to raise reliability levels and so some changes are less visible; such as the higher level of efficiency, which results in less power wasted as heat, meaning both a saving in terms of power usage, and a cooler system.

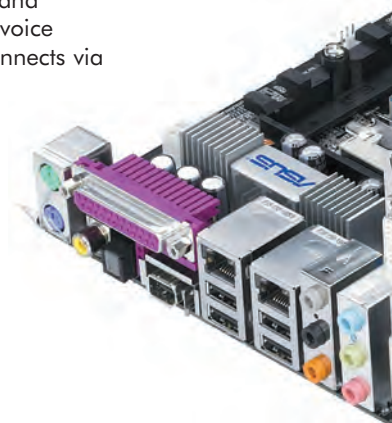


D-Link Gigabit gaming routers

D-Link has introduced routers that prioritise gaming packet transfers over other Internet applications. The DGL-4300 "GamerLounge" router offers four Gigabit Ethernet ports and 802.11g wireless connectivity, and is suitable for PC, PlayStation 2 and Xbox.

Rio Carbon Pearl

Rio's Carbon digital audio player is being re-released in a new Pearl finish. Essentially, this is a fashion item, and is identical to other versions in terms of functionality - slightly smaller than the iPod Mini, holds 5GB of data, boasts a 20-hour battery life and supports MP3, WMA and Audible. It allows voice recording, and connects via USB2.0.



AMD Alchemy chip

AMD has introduced a processor specifically designed for media processing applications. The Au1200 "Alchemy" will primarily be used to power portable video devices. One of its major strengths is its ability to resize virtually any video format into any resolution on the fly, eliminating the need to transcode video files into different formats upon/after downloading them. Supported file formats include MPEG, DivX and WMV9. The integrated Media Acceleration Engine eliminates the need for digital signal processors, thus reducing power consumption and design complexity. The processor also includes a LCD controller (supporting up to 1024x768) for output and a camera interface module for image and video input.



ASUS A8N-SLI Deluxe motherboard

Asus has released an AMD-based motherboard that supports SLI, the A8N-SLI Deluxe. The board has similar features to its Intel-based counterpart, including EZ Plug (power supply points located next to the PCI Express graphics ports), EZ Selector (a specially designed socket for insertion of the SLI selector card) and a layout to promote airflow, given the high heat dissipation needs of systems sporting two PCI Express graphics cards. The board includes technology common to Asus boards, such as dynamic overclocking and network diagnostics. Its other features are what you'd expect from a high-end motherboard at the moment, and can be checked out at www.asus.com.



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Doom 3 Board Game

Supplied by www.boardgames.co.za
price: R450.00 [including shipping]

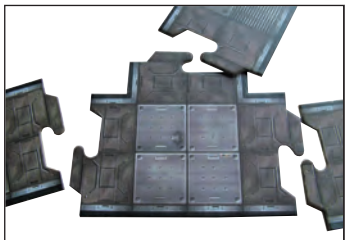
No, we don't always do hardware here... not this month, anyhow. With Doom 3 being such a huge PC title, we thought we'd take a look at a brilliant new board game based on the game. So, without further ado, here it is...



So how does it work? Basically, up to three "good" players take on one "evil" player in a predetermined scenario. Using specialised dice, cards and other bits and pieces, the "good" players need to survive the onslaught of hellish forces. That's the nutshell version.



Specialised dice determine attack results and damage in one easy roll.



Interlocking board pieces of various shapes and sizes allow for a great variety of "board shapes".



A number of scenarios are provided with the game to help challenge the players. Of course, as you get better at the game, you can create your own scenarios.

All the bad guys you might expect are available for blasting on the board!

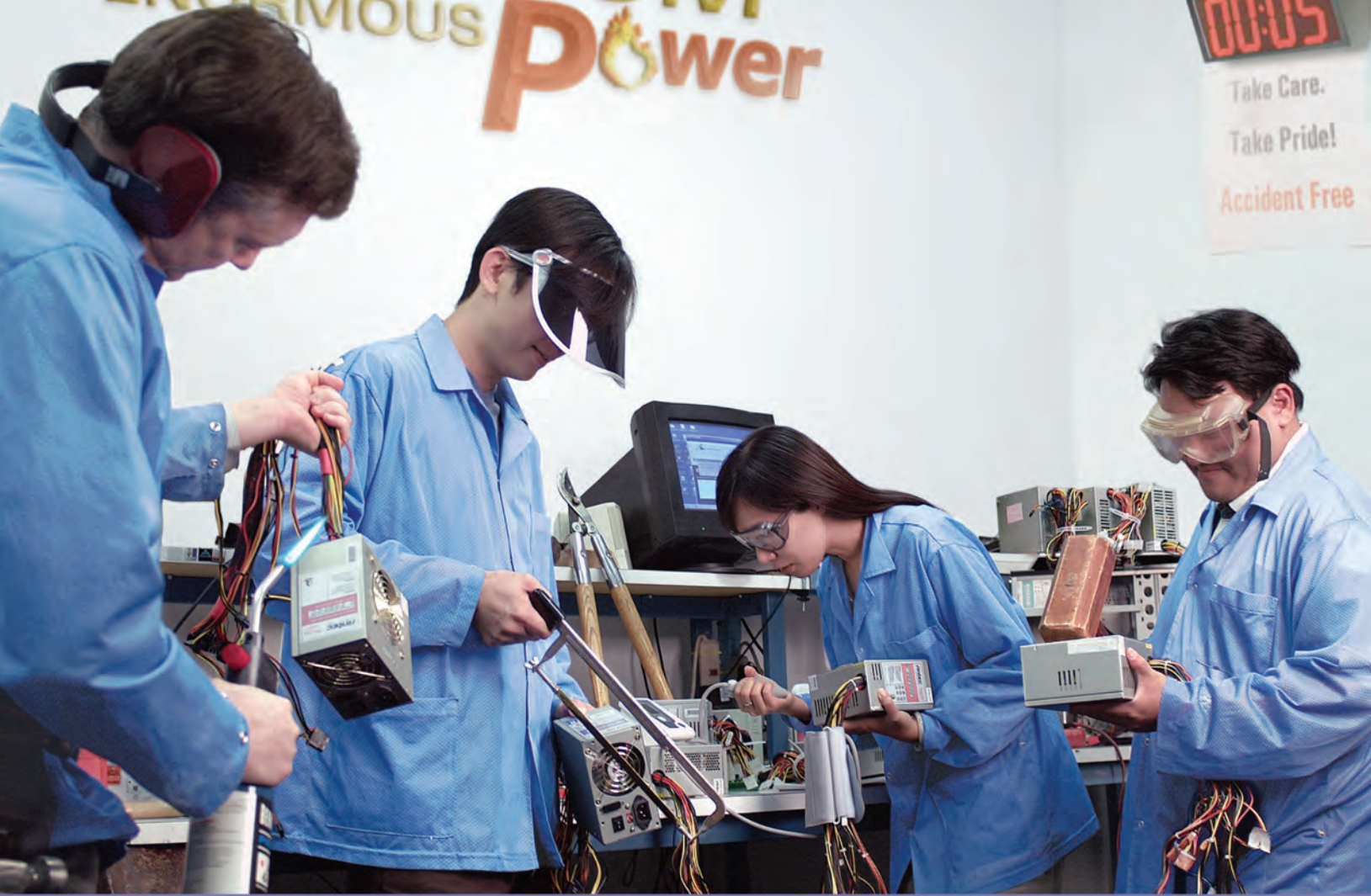
Cards for both sides (good and bad) add randomness to the game in terms of "upgrades" for the marines and events for the forces of evil.



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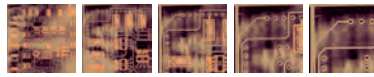


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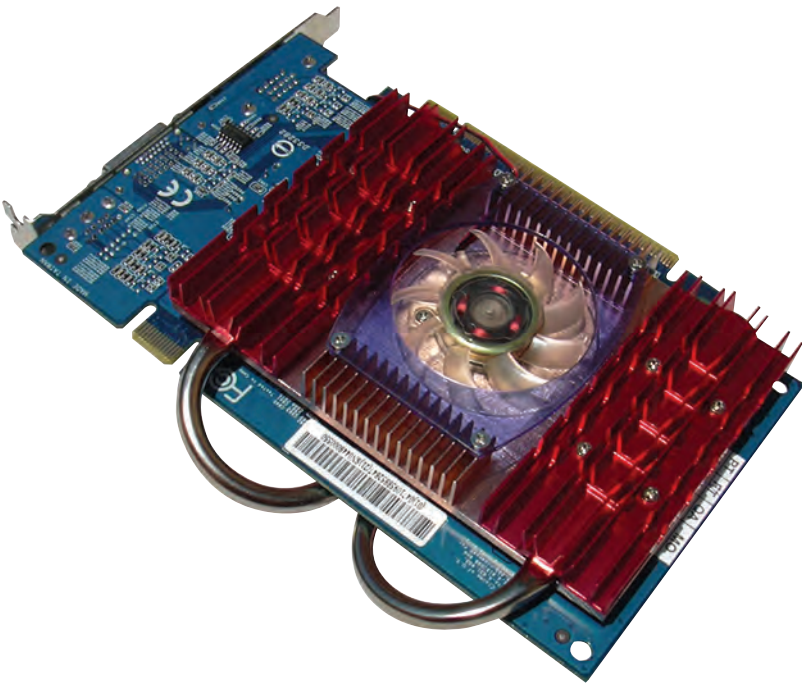
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Albatron Trinity 6600 U



While the manufacturer Albatron is not exactly a household name it has, particularly amongst gamers, carved a decent niche for itself on international shores by providing one of the fastest ranges of NVidia-based graphics hardware available.

The organisation's one weakness, depending on your point of view, lies in constantly striving to deliver the highest performing products available. Up until now, this single-mindedness has hampered Albatron's ability to provide more affordable, mid-range targeted offerings. With the release of the NVidia 6600 series, based on the new NV43 core, the organisation decided to take the fight to this hotly contested market using this chipset.

Incidentally, the chipset used in this product is the first NVidia offering to be built from scratch to support PCI Express SLI operations (although it's only the 6600 GT and upwards which receives this questionable benefit). While the Trinity board being reviewed is called 6600U, suggesting a full-featured Ultra core chipset, it is in fact merely a 6600 tweaked by the graphics card gurus at this German organisation.

Although no official 6600 Ultra currently exists, this implementation would be a great product for NVidia to use as a foundation to build on when planning such a potential future offering. It incor-

porates a massive cooler with the heat sink covering both the front and back of the card and heat pipes running down either side. As a result of this cooling system Albatron has been able to raise the core frequency on this board from the standard 306MHz to 350 MHz. While I'm certain the memory chips must also have been over clocked my hardware identification tools weren't able to discern at

what frequency these chips were running. For a mid-range offering this Trinity GeForce does very well, scoring 6398 points on 3DMark03 at standard resolution with filtering disabled entirely. With initialising and anisotropy turned on the 6600U achieves 2248 points (more than what the old-generation leader, the 9800, could manage and almost 2000 points more than older offerings from Albatron). Turn on the post-processing image quality enhancers and this PCI-e offering still does rather well in consumer

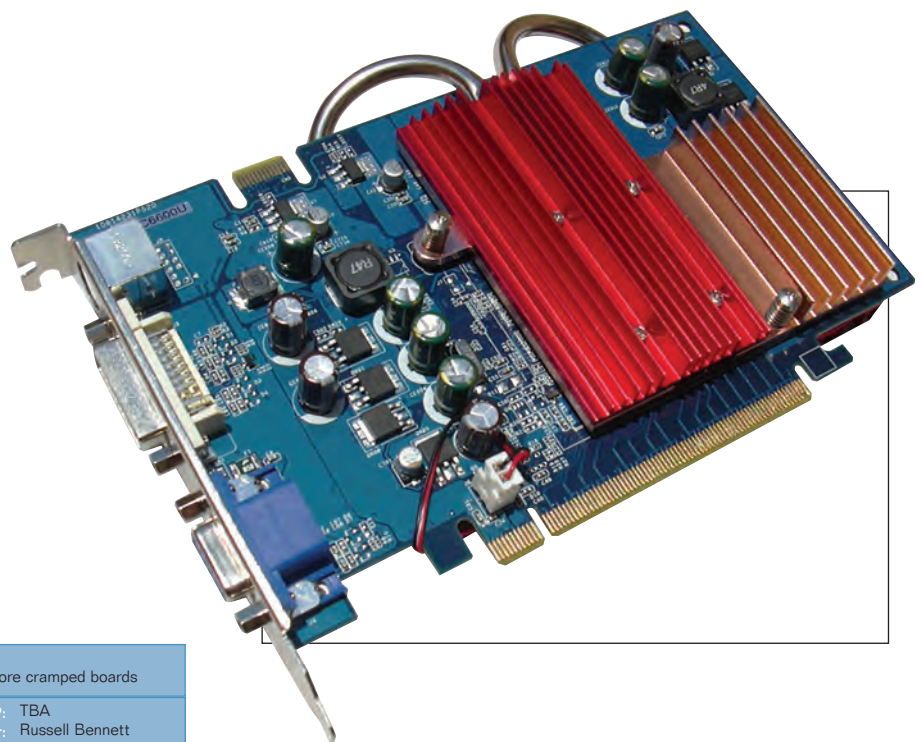
environments.

My biggest gripe with the unit is surprisingly one of its biggest strengths. The extensive and substantial cooler allows the board to run at its default over clocked frequencies with zero stability issues and excellent performance gains. It could, however, be an impediment depending on the layout of your chosen motherboard platform.

The Gigabyte board running my LGA 775 P4 3 GHz, for instance, has had caps placed right alongside the PCI slot and this makes the wide, double-sided Albatron cooler impossible to install on this system.

If you can find space for this mid-range monster in your system, the Albatron is without a doubt the finest 6600-based board I have tested to date. It's very quiet (most of the time) and performs at a more than adequate level for all gaming - modern or older. The NV43 also appears to be superior in performance to the higher-end NV40 cards, but featuring half the rendering pipelines it cannot compete with this incredibly expensive offering.

The Albatron Trinity 6600U has teething problems but, if you are able to get past this you will not be disappointed. The Trinity 6600U is a great piece of kit and even has room for further safe over clocking without destroying stability.



Plus: No heat issues thanks to massive included cooler
 Minus: That same cooler can make it impossible to install on more cramped boards

Supplier: Albatron
 Internet: www.albatron.com.tw

RRP: TBA
 Reviewer: Russell Bennett

Vantec SATA EZ Swap Bays

Removable hard disk bays and the Serial ATA (SATA) interface seem to suit each other extremely well, with the hot-swap capabilities of this latest storage interface immediately lending itself to this type of operation. Strange then that it is only now that the first SATA compatible removable drive trays are hitting the market, in the form of the two Vantec EZ Swap offerings on test here.



The naming of these solutions is somewhat confusing. Purely because the SATA EZ Swap device features a delightful LCD display built into the front panel for providing real-time information on drive temperature and uptime, while the EZ Swap 2, which sounds like it ought to be the more evolved of the pair, does without this little gimmick.

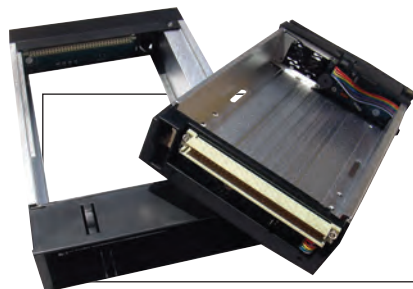
Both bays are constructed of a mixture of plastic and aluminum. The tray being manufactured from the latter is a critical element of removable hard disk bays thanks to the superior heat dissipation qualities of the light metal. Both also feature tiny 40mm cooling fans to further assist drive cooling, without which your data would run a high risk of corruption due to excessive heat.

The EZ Swap is easy to install, requiring that a Molex power connector and SATA data cable be attached to the back of the bay itself. From there a PCB converts these inputs into what looks like an unusually long IDE connector, mirrored on the rear of the tray portion of course. That LCD display looks great once lit up, displaying drive temperature in either Celsius or Fahrenheit at the press of a button. It also shows whether the drive is set up as a master or a slave and how long it has been running. Mostly for bragging rights at LAN parties then ... The EZ Swap 2 does without this display, but in my opinion is actually the better bay. It's a tiny, nitpicking difference, but in the EZ Swap 2 no PCB separates your drive from the connec-

tors inside the bay itself. Instead, there's simply a perfectly proportioned gap in the back of the tray which plugs into the data and power points on the installed drive itself. Simple is often best - in this case merely removing a potential point of failure on the converter PCB. Another minor difference is the fact that the SATA data cable on this model is integrated, so you simply plug the other end onto the board itself and a Molex connector into the back of the bay.

Both drive bays however display excellent build quality, with very little play when sliding the tray in and even the plastic components feel durable and strong.

If you've been looking for a way to turn your SATA storage device into a mobile data repository, these Vantec EZ Swap bays both offer excellent means of doing this, with the added benefit of superior drive cooling and quality construction. And you can even add or remove drives while your machine continues to run thanks to the interface itself.



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Supplier:	Frontosa [011] 466 0038
Internet:	www.frontosa.co.za
RRP:	Vantec SATA EZ Swap - R430 Vantec SATA EZ Swap 2 - R285
Reviewer:	Russell Bennett



Gainward PowerPack Ultra/2600



At last, an NVidia 6800 Ultra has arrived for hands-on testing. And not just any 6800 Ultra either, but a Gainward PowerPack Ultra/2600 for comparison to my results from competitor ATi's X800 series - the two most desirable boards in gaming today.

You need no more than a cursory glance to tell that this card is packed with serious capability. The gigantic cooler necessitates that the card occupy the AGP slot as well as an adjacent PCI slot, while no less than two Molex power connectors are needed to feed the board with power to function. There are no conventional VGA slots on the back panel, just one S-Video and two DVI ports, so you need the included DVI to VGA adapter if you're using a standard monitor. InterVideo WinDVD 5 and video-editing software Muvee AutoProducer 3 completes the pretty minimal bundle.

But of course, it's the card you've paid the substantial amount of money for. This gaming powerhouse competes directly with the rare as hen's teeth X800 XT Platinum Edition, and by all reports surpasses it in many critical benchmarks. I tested the board on the same machine I normally use an X800 Pro in, a 3.06 GHz P4 with 512 MB DDR 333 RAM, using a variety of ForceWare driver versions.

Synthetic benchmarks first - and immediately the Gainward offering establishes its dominance in this competitive arena. 3DMark03 and 05 both ran best with the

latest WHQL-certified driver version 66.93 installed and at 1024 X 768 with no filtering, returned phenomenal figures of 11279 and 4769 respectively. Turning FSAA up to 4X and anisotropic filtering up to 8X drop these numbers accordingly to 8165 and 3939 - both still highly impressive scores. And finally, cracking the

resolution right up to 1600 X 1200, with anti-aliasing still enabled, did the most damage in 3DMark05 with a still respectable end result of 2787.

The above figures, and benchmark results in the remainder of this review, were obtained with the card running at its most unstressed default clock settings of 400 MHz for the GPU core and 1.1 GHz for the 256 MB of Hynix GDDR3 memory modules. Install Gainward's ExpertTool frequency utility and the board will automatically clock up to 450 MHz and 1.2 GHz, giving appreciable performance gains without apparent stability issues. The 3DMark03 result, for instance, jumps up by a full thousand points to 12367.

Interesting in these Futuremark benches was the question of image quality. This was once a pretty controversial topic between supporters of the two major graphics card camps and while the noise may have died down the problem clearly still persists. ATi GPUs serve up more vibrant colours, more depth to textures and very little unattractive dithering - particularly evident in heavily shadowed scenes like the Nature sections of these benchmarking runs.

The newer software includes an option to force full precision operation, and turning this option on helps the 6800 to offer an image with fewer hiccups. This however

lowers the results of this board by almost 400 marks (from 3939 down to 3659) while on the X800 Pro the option yields only a 60 point drop in the final score. For real-world benchmarks I ran a number of current gaming titles - the two most demanding being Doom 3 and Half-Life 2. In Doom this NVidia offering showed a clean pair of heels to its competition, running Ultra quality at a phenomenal average frame-rate of 44.0 fps. Sealing its absolute ownership of this title is the fact that at Ultra detail with 4X FSAA enabled the board still served up 42.6 fps.

Differences in Half-Life 2 are less pronounced. In fact, using the latest ForceWare version, results obtained from this title are meaningless as it entirely fails to render numerous DX9 shaders, while with the 61.73 drivers included on the CD the card delivers an excellent frame-rate (although with a much smaller delta between it and its competitor in this case than any of the other tests conducted).

The Gainward Ultra/2600 will give you the best frame-rate in just about any 3D game you care to play. At the 450/1.2 frequency settings the only board capable of achieving higher performance figures is probably the Gainward CoolFX version of the same card, which can comfortably run at these frequencies and higher thanks to a water cooling system. NVidia still need to improve its image quality issues which, at times, become painfully obvious and work on the ForceWare driver package. Older games simply stop working and newer ones require different driver version numbers to work fully featured - which can be quite annoying.



Plus: The highest framerates you'll see from any current graphics card
Minus: Lagging in image quality | Forceware driver version issues persist

Supplier: Axiz [011] 237 7007
Internet: www.axiz.co.za

RRP: R5399.00
Reviewer: Russell Bennett

Logitech Driving Force Pro

When I was younger and playing titles like Test Drive and the original Need for Speed, controlling these vehicles with their basic to non-existent physics characteristics worked perfectly using the digital control model of a keyboard. But as driving games became more advanced and handling models more realistic, it became clear that a wheel was the only way to go - preferably one with force feedback even though the technology was far from perfected. The Logitech Driving Force Pro is actually marketed as a PS2 wheel, however, being based on the Formula Force offerings well known to PC racers and the fact that it uses a USB interface makes this a dual-purpose device, with PC operation merely requiring a download of the Logitech controller driver, after which the wheel worked without glitches.

Let's begin with construction of the unit itself. The Logitech 2-clamp securing mechanism looks and feels sturdy and durable and proved similarly supportive during hard gaming. To evaluate the claimed "most realistic force feedback available" of the Driving Force Pro I put the wheel through a number of driving titles - two simulation-oriented games, namely the superb Live For Speed and hyper-realistic Richard Burns Rally, two arcade racers in the form of Need For Speed Underground 2 and FlatOut, as well as Gran Turismo 3 on the PS2.

First the simulators... Live for Speed on the Logitech offering seems to be missing critical degrees of feel required to extract the best lap times from the grip available on the vehicle of your choice. And yet our other simulator, Richard Burns Rally, shows the Logitech out on top thanks to superior feedback information. Despite having a powerful feedback motor, the Driving Force actually delivers this energy in a more organic manner, sel-



dom snapping from one extreme to the other but rather gently writhing as the simulated forces play along the virtual chassis. The arcade titles showed a similar lack of consistency - FlatOut on the Logitech felt like only the basic force feedback elements were being implemented. NFSU2 is undoubtedly more fun on the Logitech, with not only the ideal levels of feedback, but also the semi-automatic stick-shift suiting this title to a tee and really adding to the gaming experience.

Gran Turismo, for which the Driving Force Pro was specifically designed, complete with GT logo emblazoned on the steering boss, is hugely more enjoyable with a wheel attached and shows off this offering's capabilities - although NFSU2 actually feels even more ideally matched to this hardware. Sadly those 900 degrees of rotation is only effective on titles which support it and at the moment that only includes one yet to be released title - Gran Turismo 4.

The Logitech Driving Force Pro clearly represents the huge strides made by this company in the field of force feedback, as it delivers a package which is not only nice to touch but well up to scratch on its feedback effects as well. It's also an excellent dual-platform offering bringing increased levels of realism to both the PC and PS2 systems. And once titles taking advantage of the higher degree of rotation available become available, the appeal of the Driving Force Pro is likely to climb a few rungs higher still.

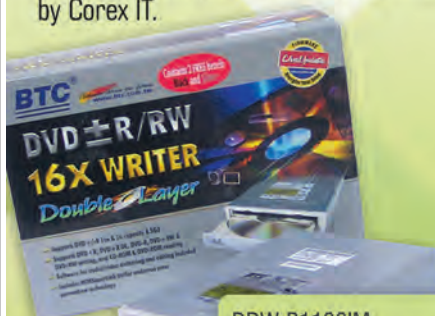
Plus: Great feel | Brilliant force feedback engine
 Minus: 900 degrees of rotation very limited in application at the moment

Supplier: Digital Channel Solutions [011] 466 5099
 Internet: www.logitech.com

RRP: R1299.00
 Reviewer: Russell Bennett

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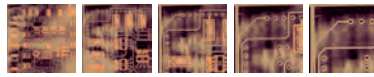
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Gigabyte K8NXP-9

It wasn't too long ago that I told someone that PCI Express needed support from motherboard manufacturers of AMD boards before it would really start to make significant inroads into the market. On test here, we have the first such offering using the latest and greatest NForce 4 Ultra chipset from NVidia to offer not only PCI-e, but also a number of other enhancements to system elements which may match the Intel 9xx series blow for blow. The Gigabyte K8NXP-9 is now a high-end offering thanks to this new chipset. But before I get into the rich feature set which nForce 4 delivers, I'll take a moment to have a look at the board itself.

Gigabyte knows how to build parts to please the technically minded and this board is beautifully executed. All those connectors you usually only use once the board is tucked away into the case, complete with all of its add-in boards (ATX, SATA, USB headers), are conveniently located along the edge of the PCB allowing access without having to contort your hands to fit into tiny spaces. The difficulty of being unable to add or remove RAM modules once the graphics card is plugged in is eliminated by moving the PCI-e 16X slot towards the centre of the board with the two smaller PCI-e 2X slots positioned close to the CPU.

Included in the board bundle are two back panels offering an additional four high-speed USB ports as well as two Firewire 800 MB/s ports. Storage needs are more than adequately catered for. Besides the traditional two IDE channels, there are four SATA-2 compatible ports (operated by the chipset itself) and an additional four original SATA ports thanks to the integrated Silicon Image controller. Completing the package is a 6-phase power daughterboard which, once plugged in to its slot will ensure that your system never experiences power-related instability. An 802.11g PCI card together with the dual integrated Gigabit LAN adapters provide total connectivity coverage.

As referred to earlier, this nForce 4 Ultra chipset not only brings support for PCI-e to the AMD platform, but also storage enhancements such as SATA 2 (which doubles the potential throughput of SATA drives to 300 MB/s) and Native Command Queuing (NCQ) which is now

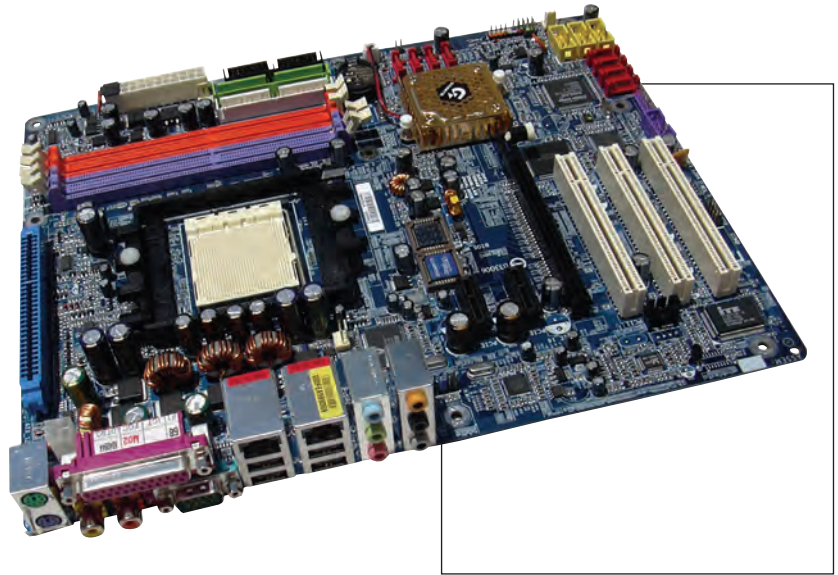
incorporated into most new SATA drives. The HyperTransport link has been increased in frequency to a full 1 GHz both up and down and the audio controller is an 8-channel affair. An innovative new addition to the chipset is dubbed Active Armour which provides hardware-based packet inspection and filtering on network connections. Testing with an Athlon64 3000+ and 512 MB of DDR400 running in dual-channel mode, the memory performance showed only a minor increase over older offerings - which is to be expected as the controller is built onto the CPU itself. Still, at 5300 MB/s it remains an excellent performance and there are unlikely to be any major bottlenecks in this department. In benchmarking the system this trend continues with this latest offering showing little performance gain over previous generation nForce chipsets. Across the board the K8NXP-9 is consistently only a few points faster (but then similar statements are true when comparing a 925 chipset to an older 8xx-based board). It's really the feature set and the introduction of new technologies that are becoming ever more important and these are the reasons behind the nForce 4's release.

No SATA 2 hard disks were available at the time of testing this product but Web-based technical resources are unanimous in praising the burst and sustained

throughput speeds of these drives on nForce 4 Ultra boards (the Ultra, by the way, is the only nForce 4 variant to support SATA 2).

The technological innovations brought to the party by Intel with its 9xx chipset series have now been matched by this Athlon64 Gigabyte. The K8NXP-9 offers an extensive and excellent selection of new features and adds truly impressive stability thanks to the power-sorting daughter board.

On top of that, the board itself is nicely designed and laid out making connecting peripherals a simple task. The nForce 4 Ultra chipset is sure to power a large number of enthusiast-oriented systems as it is the source of those lovely extended features like 1394b (Firewire 800) and the ActiveGuard firewall solution. There's even a system over clocking utility which makes toying with frequency, bus and voltage settings incredibly easy through the Windows point-and-click interface.



Plus: NForce 4 chipset brings AMD platforms to par with 9xx series from Intel
 Minus: No DDR2 support, but it isn't really needed anyway

Supplier: Rectron [011] 203 1000
 Internet: www.rectron.net

RRP: R1699.00
 Reviewer: Russell Bennett

Coolermaster CoolDrive 6

The new COOLERMASTER CoolDrive6, an anodised black aluminum case featuring a silver face plate with white illumination is the perfect suitor for any hard drive. It is cleverly designed, ready to cool, effortlessly fits on a hard-drive and can be installed in a 5 ¼ inch drive bay without any effort. It provides the user with all the necessary drive information via its cleverly designed LCD display, bundled software, or both. The software is easy to install and the CoolDrive6's menu fairly intuitive. The CoolDrive6 offers four thermal sensor wires and three fan connectors which could be connected to any three selected fans in your PC, allowing you to monitor temperatures almost everywhere inside your case. Alarms can be set for each of the thermal sensors and fans. The fans can be controlled via the unit or the software. One of the thermal sensors has to be situated on the hard drive

and this necessity could turn out to be a tiresome experience. A "built-in" thermal diode would have been a better option. The fan connections only offer 3-pin connectors, ruling out any fan relying on a 4-pin power configuration. In terms of its cooling prowess the CoolDrive6 definitely delivers. During benchmarking tests with the external temperature at 28° C, the CoolDrive6 managed to keep the temperature on a Western Digital 120Mb Special Edition Drive constant at around 33, 4° C. Standard mounting produced a rather scorching average of 38, 5° C. It is common knowledge that keeping a drive as cool as possible not only makes it more reliable but also increases its life expectancy. The CoolDrive6 supports IDE and SATA but unfortunately not RAID. It's efficient, easy to use, has excellent cooling abilities, and looks good in a modded case.



Plus: Effective cooling Improves airflow dynamics Aesthetically pleasing	
Minus: No integrated thermal diode Only 3-pin fan connectors available	
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203 1000	RRP: R650.00
Internet: www.coolermaster.com	Reviewer: Victor Moore



3.5" NexStar 2 External Enclosure

Sleek and stylish, the NexStar 2 External 3.5" Hard Drive Enclosure is a great, no-frills way to upgrade any internal 3.5" hard drive into an external storage solution. Installing a new hard drive can be a hassle, especially if you are trying to add storage to a notebook computer. With the NexStar 2, you can upgrade your storage in minutes. The NexStar 2 takes advantage of USB 2.0 and Firewire to help you move your data fast. Because the NexStar 2 is plug & play, you can easily transfer data between Windows XP/2000 systems without worrying about drivers or rebooting. The NexStar 2 External 3.5" Hard Drive Enclosure is the smart way to easily add storage to your computer.



Cable Slewing Kit

It offers 3 separate channels, which can be adjusted to allow the inside of a computer case is usually a mess of cables and wires. Power cables get tangled up and loose wires can be damaged from fans or other jagged edges inside the case. The Vantec Cable Slewing Kit is the ideal way to eliminate these problems. The braided sleeve is expandable up to 150%, making it easy to slip over any plugs or connectors. Made of flexible material, the Vantec Cable Slewing Kit will not break or crack. The Vantec Cable Slewing Kit is also ideal for bundling cables and wires outside your case as well.

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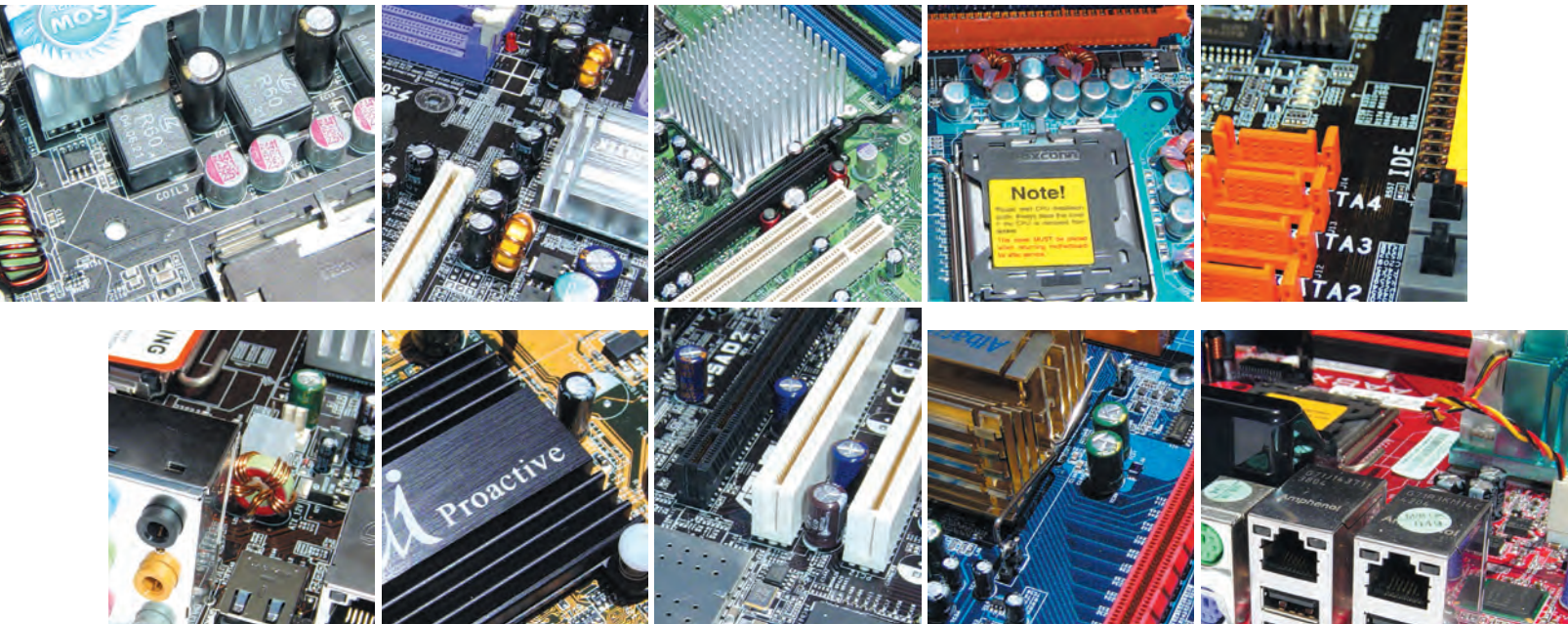


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Motherboards

With the not-so-recent release of the Intel 915 and 925-chipsets the computing world has been turned upside down as virtually everything we know has changed. I am sure by now that most people have read about PCI Express, DDR2-SDRAM, and the new pin-less Intel processor based on the Prescott core. I have attempted to postpone doing a H@rdc0r3 on socket 775 motherboards as I felt they have not matured enough yet. Finally I gave in to the pressure and decided this would be the month to compare the top motherboards. The Christmas season however, did not give me much reason to be jolly as many of the manufacturers did not keep their promises and I did not receive all of the review stock I requested. Initially it would have been only a 925-chipset roundup but I had to include some 915-based motherboards as well, due to the shortage of review stock. I think it worked out for the best as I was very impressed with some of the 915-based motherboards. I eventually bought one myself for a computer I am building, but you will have to read the reviews and guess which one (*win a date with the Ed if you guess correctly*).



Epox Omitted

In sourcing products for this month's issue, I tried very hard to get hold of an Epox motherboard from the local distributor, Bethesda Computers. After a few phone calls and a number of e-mails, I finally got hold of someone who was in the position to authorise review stock. This, however, turned out not to materialise as it was then established that they did not want to submit a product for review even after I had tried to convince them otherwise. This was very unfortunate and made me lose some faith in this brand which I thought was one of the top motherboard manufacturers. I am following up this issue with the Epox head office and hopefully I will be able to bring you some Epox reviews in the coming months.

Benchmarking

The test hardware I used for this month's round-up consisted of an Intel 3.4 GHz socket 775 processor. The memory I used consisted of two sticks of 512 MB Micron DDR2-SDRAM 533MHz and the hard drive was a 80 GB Seagate SATA drive. The graphics card I used in this system was a MSI RX600XT PCI Express graphics card. For this motherboard I formatted the hard drive and installed Windows XP SP2. I also included all the drivers that were on the driver CD sup-

plied with the motherboard. I ran each test twice to ensure consistency and rebooted after the completion of each test. The benchmark applications I utilised included the brand new SiSoft Sandra 2005 which I used to run the CPU Arithmetic, Multi-Media, and Memory Bandwidth benchmarks. I also ran Futuremark's PCMark04 and 3DMark05 build 1.1.0.



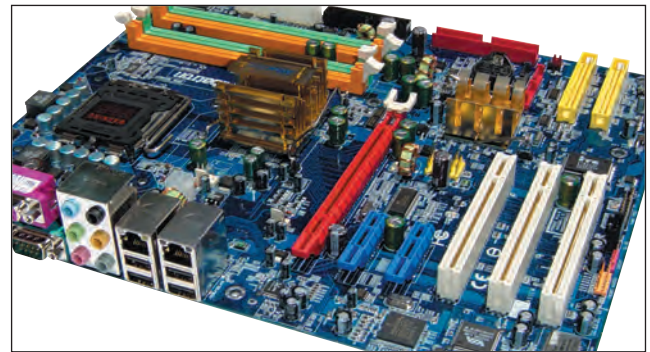
Test PC by Light Edge Technology

2 GHz Intel Pentium 4 | MSI 865PE Neo2 motherboard
 Transcend Radeon 9700 | Philips 107E 17" Monitor
 Transcend 512 MB DDR500 RAM
 Western Digital 80 GB HDD 7200rpm
 LG DVD/CD-RW combination drive

925X Motherboard

Albatron PX925X Pro-R

I have always had a soft spot for Albatron motherboards and I was quite eager to see their top-of-the-range model in action. The sea-green colour of the motherboard and the gold plated heat sinks featured on this motherboard are typical of Albatron motherboards. The two Ethernet controllers consist of a Broadcom Gigabit and VIA 10/100 Base-T chipset. It also features an 8-channel Realtek codec which is pretty much on par with the other audio codec's found on the Intel 925X chipset motherboards. Looking at the storage connectors, the Albatron PX925X Pro-R features 4 SATA ports and is capable of SATA RAID 0, 1, and 0+1 configurations. There are also two IDE ports which also support IDE RAID 0, 1, and 0+1 configurations. There are four USB 2.0 ports situated on the back panel and there are two headers on-board, which allow you to expand the total to 8 USB 2.0 ports. There is unfortunately no PCI-bracket to allow you to expand the USB 2.0 ports included in the package. This caused it to lose some points in my book. On the plus side, I was delighted to see the inclusion of front audio connectors on the motherboard. This allows you to easily make use of the headphone and microphone jacks. I was however disappointed with the bundle, or should I say lack thereof, which comes with the motherboard. The box includes a colour installation chart which is useful but Albatron, for some reason, only included one SATA cable. There is however two IDE cables and one floppy-drive cable included. The software bundle was also disappointing and apart from the system drivers only included PcCillian2004 and Marvell's Virtual Cable Tester - a handy application used to test network cables. Overclocking, as I mentioned, is not a big feature of 915/925X motherboards but the Albatron PX925X Pro-R is capable of adjusting the CPU frequency in 1 MHz increments and you are able to adjust the Vcore, VAGP, and vMemory. The motherboard performed on par with most comparable motherboards. It was slightly outperformed in the SiSoft benchmarks but not by much. Personally, I would have liked to see a slightly better score in 3DMark05 but as is, this should be a great all-round board for the average computer user. I could not obtain an estimated retail price at the time of going to print which made it difficult to determine a value for money score.



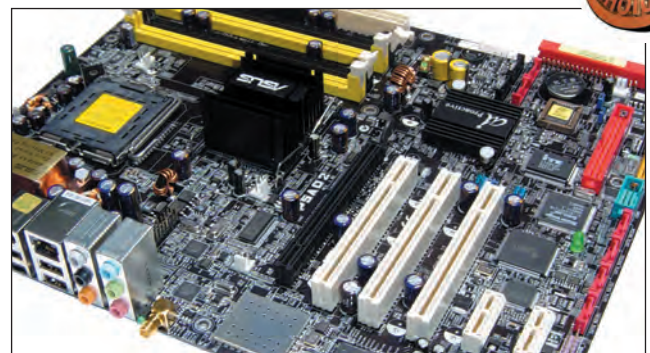
Value for Money: NA	Performance: 78	Features: 80	Overall: NA
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Plus: Front Panel Audio connectors **Minus:** Bundle
Supplier: Wentek International [021] 551-8866 **Internet:** www.wentek.co.za **RRP:** R TBA

925X Motherboard

Asus P5AD2 Premium (Wireless Edition)

Asus has always been one of the top motherboard manufacturers. In enthusiasts' circles its products are well sought after. This time, I have to admit, Asus has outdone itself. The Asus P5AD2 Premium is one of the most feature-rich, performance driven motherboards I have ever seen and if this is the direction in which products are heading I am really looking forward to the 3rd and 4th generation of Socket 775 motherboards. The most noticeable feature of this motherboard is the built-in 802.11g Wireless LAN adapter which could be used as either a wireless LAN adapter or a wireless peer-to-peer access point. Another feature you might have noticed is the whopping eight SATA ports onboard this motherboard. This motherboard also includes four IDE ports. In order for ASUS to include eight SATA ports on this motherboard they had to use two controllers. The first one, an Intel ICH6R, features Intel Matrix Storage Technology with RAID 0, 1 support. The second controller is a Silicon Image 3114R RAID controller which features RAID 0, 1, 10, 5 configurations. Lastly, the ITE IDE RAID controller supports RAID 0, 1, 0+1 configurations and this really impressed me. Looking at the Ethernet controllers I was really impressed to see that both are Gigabit Marvell PCIe 88E8053 controllers. An interesting feature could be observed when looking at the underside of this motherboard. Asus has implemented a heatsink of sorts called the Asus Cool Stack and this is designed to pull the heat away from the components near the CPU. The bundle shipping with this motherboard proves that Asus is committed to giving consumers value for money. There are 10 SATA cables, three IDE cables, one floppy-drive cable as well as some PCI brackets which provide for all the connectivity options you would ever need. One thing that stood out for me was the PCI bracket which featured external connectors for two SATA devices as well as an external power connector. This is great for adding a hard drive without opening your case. Looking at the benchmark results, this motherboard did not perform badly at all. In fact, in most of the benchmarks I ran it produced top results. What gave this particular motherboard the edge over its competitors was the bundle included, and even though it was the second most expensive product in this roundup it still offers the perfect features for the high-end user.



Value for Money: 88	Performance: 90	Features: 95	Overall: 91
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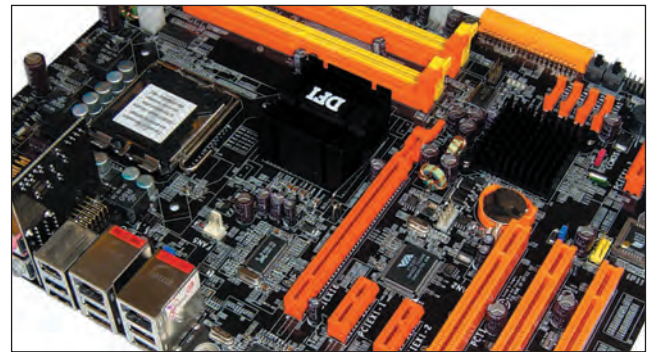
Plus: Everything **Minus:** Nothing
Supplier: Corex [011] 707-5000 / ASUS [011] 783-5450 **Internet:** www.corex.co.za **RRP:** R 2799.00



925X Motherboard

DFI LanParty 925X-T2

DFI has been a relatively unknown brand until it released its LanParty series of motherboards, featuring funky UV plastic sockets and other "modding" goodies. DFI placed a lot of effort in creating a motherboard for the gamer. The LanParty 925X-T2 is its top-of-the-range socket 775 offering and as with its predecessors, this one has a lot to offer. The motherboard looks pretty weird in normal light as all of the plastic sockets are bright yellow and orange. Under UV-light these sockets light up and look simply amazing. The first thing I noticed when I set up this motherboard was the omission of audio ports. Upon inspection of the box's contents I found a daughter board with the audio codec and ports which could be installed if you do not have a PCI sound card. It is a tradition by now that DFI LanParty motherboards feature a great bundle and this becomes evident the moment you unpack all the extras. Firstly you will find some UV-orange cable sleeving in a kit which is pretty much identical to the ones sold by Vantec. This kit includes all the cable ties and tubing you may need as well as two different sized sleeving. Also included is a set of UV-orange round IDE and SATA cables and the PC Transpo - the carrying harness for your computer case. Lastly you will find the ever popular FrontX 5 1/4 -inch panel which fits into one of your front bays. One great feature of this front panel is that you decide which connectors you want to use. Unfortunately, the options are a bit limited and the ones supplied only include one IEEE-1394 jack, one external SATA port, one SPDIF-out, and a set of diagnostic LED's. One of my favourite features of this motherboard is called CMOS Reloaded. This feature allows you to save up to four different CMOS configurations and recall them by simply switching to a previously saved configuration in your BIOS. Not only is this great for switching BIOS configurations when you want to overclock your computer, but if your computer boots with an unstable BIOS configuration you can simply revert back to the last auto-saved configuration. The other feature I really enjoyed, and which was imported from previous models, is the onboard power and reset switch. This allows you to power up your system should there be no power button connected to the onboard headers. The bundle compared to price of this motherboard is incredible and is the perfect choice for gamers on a budget.



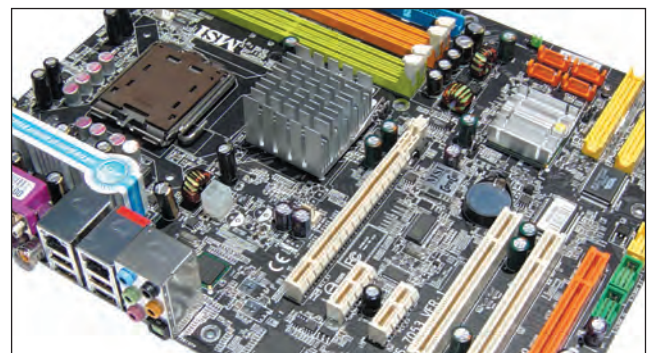
Value for Money: 90 Performance: 88 Features: 90 Overall: 89

Plus: Bundle | Price Minus: FrontX needs more connectors
 Supplier: Axiz [011] 237-7000 Internet: www.axiz.co.za RRP: R 1895.00

925X Motherboard

MSI 925X Neo Platinum

I have personally been using this motherboard for a couple of weeks now and I am very impressed. It does not feature all the extras its competitors offer, but its stability, hardware compatibility and price are rather impressive. Looking at the back panel you will see four USB 2.0 ports with two more USB 2.0 headers situated on the motherboard (a 2-port USB 2.0 bracket is also included). There are also two Ethernet adaptors; one features a Broadcom BCM5751 Gigabit controller and the other an Intel 82562EZ 100 Base-T Ethernet controller. The MSI 925X Neo Platinum also features four SATA connectors that are compatible with Raid 0, 1 and Matrix Raid. The three IDE connectors are also RAID compatible and support RAID 0, 1, and 0+1. I was glad to see that MSI opted to include the original Intel Azalia codec for the sound on this motherboard. This codec features 8-channel audio and supports Universal Audio Jack. UAJ is a great feature which allows users to connect an audio device such as a microphone to any of the audio jacks. The hardware (assisted by the software) then assigns the correct port to the device you just plugged in. I was a little disappointed with the bundle that ships with this motherboard. Usually MSI ships a fairly decent bundle, but in all fairness its Platinum series of motherboards are known not to have many extras. MSI rather focuses on its motherboards to be stable and reliable. Upon unpacking it you will see a set of rounded IDE cables, a PCI bracket which hosts two IEEE-1394 ports, and another PCI bracket which hosts two USB 2.0 ports and four LED's. These are designed to diagnose boot errors. A very nice addition to the somewhat bleak bundle is the MSI CPU Clip. This nifty translucent-blue device was designed to help with the proper installation of the socket 775 CPU. This is very handy and will work on any socket 775 motherboard. Definitely a great little tool for the pc-toolbox! The MSI 925X Neo Platinum shows some potential for over clocking but is not the best over clocker in this roundup. The BIOS provides a feature whereby you can allow the motherboard to automatically over clock your system and over clocking is rated in percentage levels up to 15%. Performance-wise, this motherboard is pretty impressive and its benchmark results are on par with top performers. Its price versus performance ratio is what makes this a superb buy.

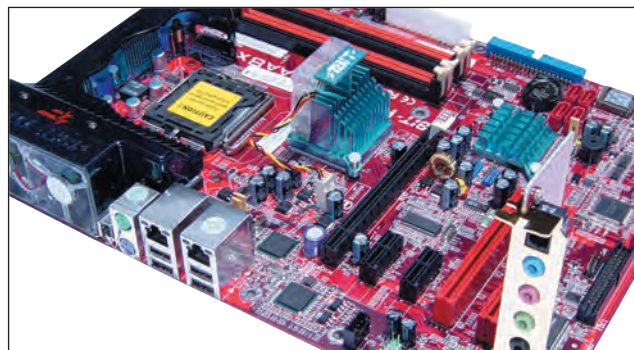


Value for Money: 91 Performance: 89 Features: 89 Overall: 89

Plus: Price Minus: Bundle
 Supplier: Light Edge Technology [021] 510-8270 Internet: www.lightedge.co.za RRP: R 1600.00

925X Motherboard**ABIT Fatal1ty AA8XE**

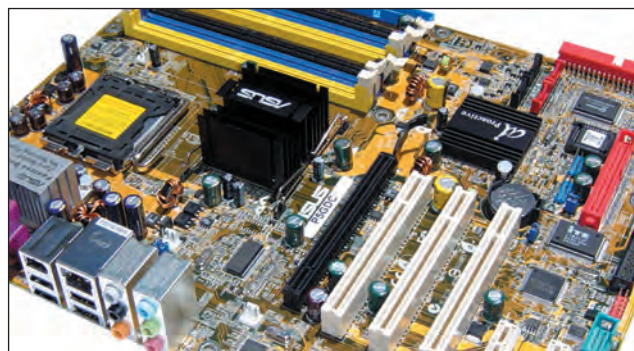
ABIT recently joined forces with one of the world's leading gamers, Jonathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel, to create a line of hardware designed and tweaked with gaming in mind. The results are very impressive and almost everything about this motherboard is commendable. The ABIT Fatal1ty AA8XE is visually a stunning motherboard and one of the most attention-grabbing features is the series of red LED's on the underside of this board. The effect it creates when installed in a windowed or translucent case is sure to turn a few heads. You should also notice the two fans situated on the back plate. This cooling solution is named OTES and cools the voltage regulators situated just below it. ABIT also moved some of the connectors from the back plate to PCI brackets and for this reason you will only find four USB 2.0 ports, one IEEE-1394 port, the mouse and keyboard PS2 ports, one Gigabit Ethernet port, and one 10/100 Base-T Ethernet port. The "sound card" moved away from the back plate and is now a separate module which plugs into its own proprietary slot at the bottom of the motherboard. ABIT claims this will reduce noise created by some onboard audio codec's. The Northbridge also features a fan but this would only be needed when the system is over clocked. A very interesting add-on to this Fatal1ty AA8XE is a product called OTES RAMFlow. This plastic bracket innovatively fits on top of your RAM modules and the two fans built into it then cool your RAM. My first concern about all these fans was the noise level they would produce. I am, however, pleased to report that the uGuru processor, which does the over clocking and control of the system functions, does a great job of keeping the fans running quietly when they are not needed. Over clocking is definitely one of the ABIT Fatal1ty AA8XE's strong points and I was able to achieve some amazing over clocking results. I managed to push my 3.4 GHz processor to about 3.7 GHz ... impressive for a socket 775 CPU! What really impressed me about the ABIT Fatal1ty AA8XE overall, was the fact that it was designed with gaming in mind, so virtually every feature has been tweaked for this task. Abit has developed one of the best platforms for the Intel processor to do just that. Out-of-the-box, this motherboard performed very well and with some tweaking I have no doubt it will outperform most of its competitors.

**Value for Money: 87****Performance: 91****Features: 90****Overall: 89**

Plus: Over clocking **Minus:** Price
Supplier: Esquire [012] 657 1111 **Internet:** www.esquire.co.za **RRP:** R 3400.00

915 Motherboard**Asus P5GDC Deluxe**

Although this is one of Asus' mid-range motherboards in the socket 775 sector it is known that Asus put a lot of effort into creating great motherboards throughout its socket 775 range of products. One of the first things that impressed me was this motherboard's capability to support DDR2 600 memory. The reason why this is so significant is because Intel's specifications only claim to support DDR2 400 and DDR2 533. The Asus P5GDC Deluxe is also capable of supporting both DDR and DDR2 memory which is a great benefit to those users not wanting to upgrade to DDR2 yet, but plan on doing so in the near future. There are six memory slots in total; two of these support DDR2 while the other four are DDR slots. Being an Intel 915P chipset, this motherboard features four SATA ports which support RAID 0, 1 and Intel's Matrix RAID technology. This motherboard also features three IDE ports, two of which are used for RAID setups and are RAID 0, 1, 0+1 compatible. The single Ethernet port is a Marvel Gigabit Ethernet port and features Asus's AI Net2. This feature which is common on all new Asus motherboards, is capable of remotely detecting faults on a network cable up to 100 meters at 1 meter accuracy. The audio on the Asus P5GDC Deluxe is taken care of by the C-Media 8-channel codec. As with its 925X counterpart, Asus has implemented a feature called stack cool which is basically a flat heatsink on the underside of the motherboard just below the CPU. This works surprisingly well and draws a fair amount of heat away from the components close to the CPU. I was a bit disappointed with the bundle as there is not much along the line of extras. On the software side you only will find the driver CD and InterVideo WinDVD Suite. This suite consists of four software titles and include; WinDVD 5 which enables you to watch DVD movies on your computer, DVD Copy2 which enables you to copy home DVD movies (it will not copy protected DVD's), WinDVD Creator 2 which is a great piece of software that allows you to capture video and create a DVD for playback, and lastly DiscMaster which allows you to copy onto CD's and DVD's. The performance of this ASUS motherboard was mostly better than the other Intel 915 motherboards and in some instances it even ran on the same levels as some Intel 925 motherboards.

**Value for Money: 85****Performance: 88****Features: 87****Overall: 86**

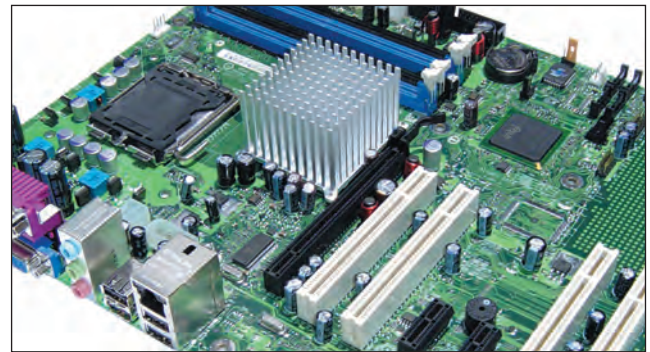
Plus: Performance **Minus:** Bundle
Supplier: Proton Technology [021] 552-5201 / ASUS [011] 783-5450 **Internet:** www.prototech.co.za **RRP:** R 1517.00



915 Motherboard

Intel D915GAV

The D915GAV which is pretty much an entry-level socket 775 board does not feature much in terms of extras as it is aimed at basic desktop and workstation use. The D915GAV features an integrated Intel GMA900 graphics adapter. This graphics adapter is able to dynamically change the memory allocated to it, as needed. It is able to use up to 224 MB of RAM (provided you have enough system memory) but this does not imply that it cannot accommodate high-end graphics cards though - it also features a PCI Express X16 slot. Looking at the memory this motherboard uses it is no surprise to see compatibility with only standard DDR400 memory. If you are considering using slightly faster DDR2 RAM I would suggest you consider one of the other motherboards. I was a bit disappointed in the lack of a second network port but, in all fairness this board's intended market does not really require a second network port. Other connectivity features on this board are also pretty standard. It hosts four SATA ports, one IDE port as well as one floppy-drive connector. The audio is provided by Intel's High Definition Audio. Overall this motherboard seemed quite bare with only the essentials listed on its feature list. The motherboard has very limited over clocking potential and as I have already indicated is a workstation or basic desktop board. The bundled software is also much the same as what I have seen with other Intel motherboards. InterVideo WinDVD and MusicMatch JukeBox are included and I was impressed with the inclusion of Norton Internet Security, Farstone RestoreIT! Lite, and NTI CD-Maker. Performance-wise this Intel motherboard performed on par with the rest of the 915 chipset boards but I really would have liked to see a slightly better performance - especially under the SiSoft Sandra benchmarks. All things considered, this motherboard would probably be better suited in an office environment rather than in a gaming rig.



Value for Money: 89

Performance: 85

Features: 83

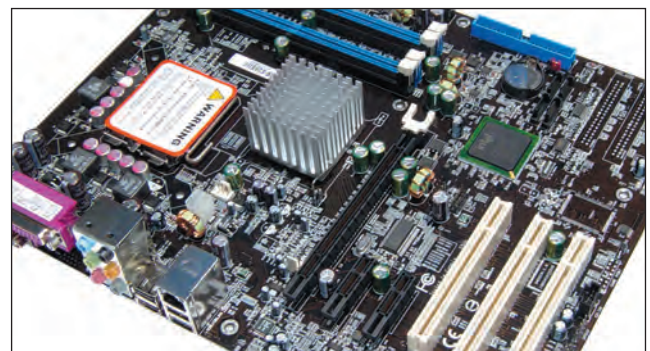
Overall: 85

Plus: Intel reliability Minus: Bundle | Extra motherboard features
 Supplier: Sahara Computers [011] 542-1000 Internet: www.sahara.co.za RRP: R 829.00

915 Motherboard

Chaintech V915P Zenith Value Edition

I am always a bit excited when I review a Chaintech product as this company seems to really add a lot of value to its products - especially to its top of the range products. Feature-wise, the Chaintech V915P is pretty much standard across the board (no pun intended) which is what I expected from a socket 915P motherboard. This motherboard has one Gigabit Ethernet port and four USB 2.0 ports onboard. I would have liked to see at least one PCI bracket with some more USB 2.0 ports but I was glad to see that there are two onboard headers for USB 2.0 ports which will allow you to add a PCI bracket yourself or to connect your case's front USB connectors. The audio on this motherboard features Intel's Azalia, 7.1 channel surround-sound and also sports the clever jack-sensing technology which allows you to plug any audio device into any port and the software will automatically detect it and set it up correctly. The memory supported by this board is normal DDR400 RAM and is capable of running two sticks in Dual-Channel mode. There are four SATA ports, one IDE port as well as one floppy-drive port included on this motherboard. The bundle, as I have already mentioned, is very limited and the box only includes two SATA cables, one IDE and floppy-drive cable, and two software discs. The first CD contains the drivers while the second features the bundled software. The software titles featured on this CD are not the best I have seen but works well enough. ProMagic is the first title and is basically just system recovery software. This software allows you to create store points, similar to Windows' System Restore, and enables you to restore your system back to a working state. The second title is Image It which is basically a software backup application and allows you to backup and restore your data to either a CD or to another hard drive. Lastly there is Norton AntiVirus. Looking at the performance offered by this motherboard there is not much to report except for the fact that it runs on par with its competitors. This is basically what I expected from an entry-level to mid-range motherboard such as this one, as manufacturers do not usually implement any performance enhancing features on its lower range of motherboards. Overall I was impressed with the price versus performance ratio.



Value for Money: 89

Performance: 88

Features: 85

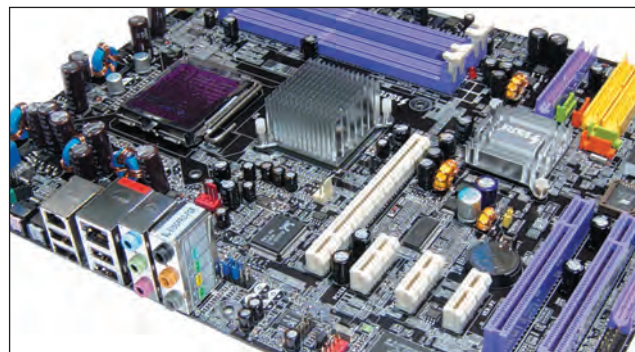
Overall: 87

Plus: Price Minus: Bundle
 Supplier: Sonic Informed [021] 551-8218 Internet: www.sonicinformed.co.za RRP: R 949.00

915 Motherboard

Soltek SL-915GPRO-FGR

Soltek, in my opinion, is one of the most underrated computer brands in South Africa. This company does not produce the best high-end hardware but when it comes to entry-level to mid-range hardware it can compete with the best in the industry. This particular motherboard is a great example of this. Even though this is theoretically an entry-level motherboard I was impressed with the features which Soltek incorporated into it. Unpacking the Soltek SL-915GPRO-FGR for the first time I almost mistook it to be a high-end motherboard. On the back panel you have two optical S/PDIF ports, one for input and one for output. Then there are the four USB 2.0 ports, one IEEE-1394 port, and a Gigabit Ethernet port. This motherboard also features the Intel GMA900 graphics adapter which is able to dynamically adjust its memory requirements. Also included is an 8-channel audio codec. Looking elsewhere on the motherboard I was surprised to see a two digit LCD which displays various error codes. I am also pleased to report that the manual has a comprehensive list of error codes and their meanings. Just above the LCD-display are four SATA ports which, unfortunately, do not support RAID but two of the three IDE ports do. The RAID levels supported are RAID 0, 1, and 0 + 1. The one aspect which I did not appreciate was the positioning of the floppy-drive port which was placed right at the bottom of the motherboard below the PCI slots. Looking at the supported memory this motherboard is only capable of accommodating DDR RAM and considering the fact that the Intel 915G chipsets supports it, I would have liked to see DDR2 memory slots included. Even though the bundle is not as extensive as some of the other products in this roundup I was still impressed. The box includes one PCI bracket which hosts two USB 2.0 ports, one purple rounded IDE cable, a set of flat IDE cables and one floppy-drive cable. The reason for this purple colour is, as you will see from this motherboard's picture, to match the slots on this motherboard. The bundled software is nothing incredible but includes titles such as PCCillan 2004, VirtualDrive 7, RestorIT! 3 Lite, PartitionMagic 6.0 SE, and Drivelmage 4.0. Looking at its performance I was impressed as the Soltek SL-915GPRO-FGR performed slightly better than its competitors and a word of praise must go to the Red Storm 2 over clocking software.



Value for Money: 89

Performance: 89

Features: 90

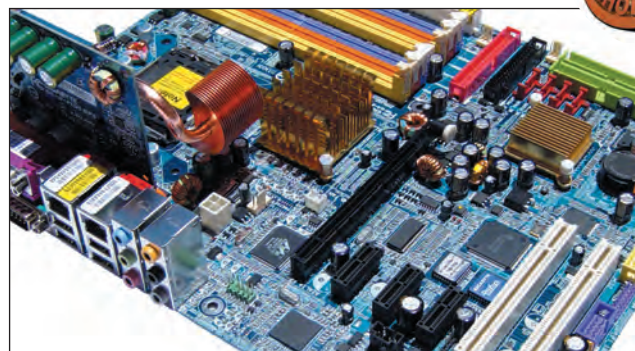
Overall: 89

Plus: Features **Minus:** Floppy-drive port
Supplier: Eurobyte [011] 234 0142 **Internet:** www.eurobyte.co.za **RRP:** R 1499.00

915 Motherboard

Gigabyte GA-8GPNXP DUO

There is no denying that this motherboard is one of the best motherboards that Gigabyte has produced in this class. Even though it is based on the Intel 915P chipset, its feature set and bundle make this a very desirable motherboard. Onboard the Gigabyte GA-8GPNXP DUO there are two Gigabit Ethernet ports, four USB 2.0 ports, two S/PDIF jacks, and an 8-channel audio codec. Elsewhere on the motherboard you will find four SATA ports which are RAID 0, 1 compatible as well as three IDE ports, two of which are RAID 0, 1, 0+1 compatible. You should also notice the six brightly coloured RAM slots on this motherboard; two of these are for DDR2 memory while the other four are for installing DDR RAM. One aspect which has become quite popular with most Gigabyte motherboards is its DPS (Dual Power System) which allows it to supply eight-phase power to the motherboard and its components. This time around Gigabyte enhanced this feature and it is now called U-Plus DPS. Like its predecessors the U-Plus DPS module fits into a proprietary slot near the CPU socket but, unlike its predecessors the U-Plus DPS module uses passive cooling and is designed so that it can draw a cool air supply from the CPU fan. The extras that ship with this motherboard are what really make it worth the money. Out-of-the-box it is passively cooled but if you are planning to over clock this motherboard I would suggest you install the supplied optional Northbridge fan which simply clips onto the heatsink. Also in the box you will find a Gigabyte GN-WPKG 802.11g wireless LAN PCI adapter - this is a great bundle feature. The software bundled with this motherboard is limited and about the most exciting is the inclusion of Norton Internet Security 2004, which is very useful today. The other software which should be familiar if you have used a Gigabyte motherboard before is the EasyTune 5 over clocking software which works in conjunction with the C.I.A.2 feature, which is the over clocking software built into the BIOS. EasyTune 5 is also able to monitor your system fans and temperatures. This motherboard sports some over clocking potential but do not expect to be able to over clock this motherboard a lot. Performance wise this is a great motherboard but its bundle is still the winning factor for me.



Value for Money: 90

Performance: 90

Features: 90

Overall: 90

Plus: Bundle **Minus:** Software bundle
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203-1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.co.za **RRP:** R 2099.00



Benchmarks

Product				PCMark04					3DMark05	
	CPU Arithmetic <small>Dhrystone / Whetstone</small>	Multimedia Benchmark	Memory Bandwidth	CPU	Memory	Graphics	HDD	PCMark	CPU	3DMark Score
MSI 925X Neo	10564 4347/7723	int:26211 Float:38023	Int:4665 Float: 4659	5080	5323	2989	3947	5276	4738	1558
Albatron PX925X Pro-R	10386 4286/7611	int:25864 Float:37504	Int:4685 Float: 4658	4979	5352	2950	3925	5293	4736	1521
ASUS P5AD2 Premium	10456 4294/7661	int:25912 Float:37269	Int:4716 Float: 4709	5026	5305	2966	3907	5294	4786	1564
DFI LANPARTY 925X-T2	10365 4283/7640	Int:25825 Float: 37421	Int:4527 Float: 4527	5026	5222	2934	3903	5201	4731	1518
ABIT Fatal1ty AA8XE	10514 4366/7764	Int:26300 Float: 38208	Int:4676 Float: 4678	5197	5288	2934	3933	5251	4797	1522
Asus P5GDC Deluxe	10519 4298/7666	Int:25912 Float: 36892	Int:4549 Float: 4551	5159	5159	2984	3936	5181	4607	1466
Intel D915GAV	10357 4285/7545	Int:25824 Float: 37395	Int:4393 Float: 4385	4928	5045	2978	3941	5106	4630	1463
Chaintech V915P Zenith Value Edition	10429 4247/7625	Int:25712 Float: 36883	Int:4526 Float: 4525	5137	5163	2982	3936	5173	4624	1450
Soltek SL-915GPRO-FGR	10360 4287/7555	Int:25822 Float: 37393	Int:4390 Float: 4381	4932	5028	2968	3945	5110	4610	1460
Gigabyte GA-8GPNXP DUO	10519 4298/7666	Int:25937 Float: 37993	Int:4550 Float: 4552	5170	5162	2987	3946	5192	4682	1461

Specifications

Product	Chipset	FSB	Memory	Memory Slots	Ethernet Adapters	IDE RAID	SATA RAID	Price	Rating
MSI 925X Neo	Intel 925X	800/1066 MHz	DDRII	4x DDRII	Broadcom Gigabit Intel 10/100	RAID 0,1,0+1	RAID 0,1	R 1,600	89%
Albatron PX925X Pro-R	Intel 925X	800/1066 MHz	DDRII	4x DDRII	Broadcom Gigabit Via 10/100	RAID 0,1,0+1	RAID 0,1	N/A	TBA
ASUS P5AD2 Premium	Intel 925X	533/800 MHz	DDRII	4x DDRII	Marvell Dual Gigabit	RAID 0,1,0+1	RAID 0, 1, 10, 5	R 2,799	91%
DFI LANPARTY 925X-T2	Intel 925X	533/800 MHz	DDRII	4x DDRII	Marvell Dual Gigabit	No	RAID 0,1	R 1,895	89%
ABIT Fatal1ty AA8XE	Intel 925X	800/1066 MHz	DDRII	4x DDRII	Intel Gigabit Intel 10/100	No	RAID 0,1	R 3,400	89%
Asus P5GDC Deluxe	Intel 915P	533/800 MHz	DDR and DDRII	4x DDR 2x DDRII	Marvell Gigabit	RAID 0,1,0+1	RAID 0,1	R 1,517	86%
Intel D915GAV	Intel 915G (Intel GMA900)	533/800 MHz	DDR	4x DDR	Intel 10/100	No	No	R 829	85%
Chaintech V915P Zenith Value Edition	Intel 915P	533/800 MHz	DDR	4x DDR	Marvell Gigabit	No	No	R 949	87%
Soltek SL-915GPRO-FGR	Intel 915G (Intel GMA900)	533/800 MHz	DDR	4x DDR	Realtek Gigabit	RAID 0,1,0+1	No	R 1,499	89%
Gigabyte GA-8GPNXP DUO	Intel 915P	533/800 MHz	DDR and DDRII	4x DDR 2x DDRII	Marvell Gigabit Broadcom Gigabit	RAID 0,1,0+1	RAID 0,1	R 2,099	90%

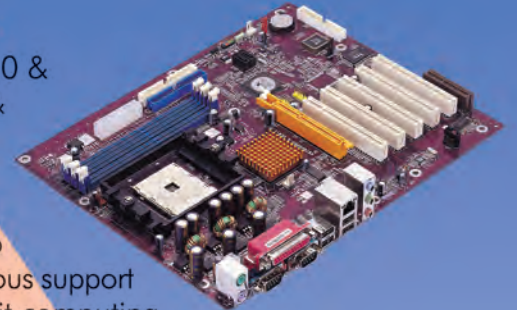


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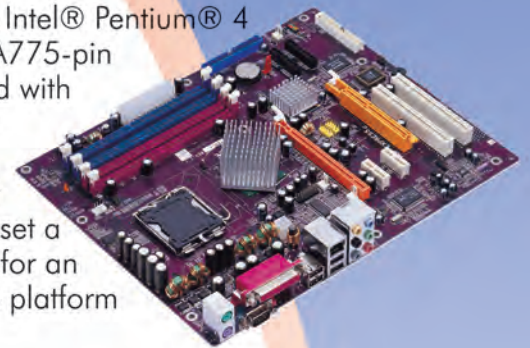
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news

destination: japan II - "how much is this costing you?"

Japan has a reputation as the world's most expensive holiday destination, but that depends on what kind of holiday you're after. During my two-week-long stay, I will be visiting most of the country, including Osaka, Hiroshima, Kyoto, Sapporo and Mt Fuji, costing me approximately R15, 000 (excluding spending money).

Travel

A well-priced plane ticket should set you back no more than R7, 500, including airport tax. During off-peak seasons, the fare should be lower. The main flight is routed through Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, which is a popular shopping destination. As always, it is still good to compare prices with other airlines. AWL Travel is an agency that deals specifically with Japan. Other reliable agencies are STA Travel and Flight Centre. For getting around Japan - Japan Rail offers a for-

foreign traveler's pass that allows the use of almost all public transportation, including subways, national express trains and bus services. It currently costs around R1,500 for 7 days, R2,500 for 14 days, and R3,100 for 21 days (exchange rate dependant), and can be obtained locally from AWL Travel. You must purchase this pass in South Africa as it is not available in Japan. For railway maps, directions to popular destinations and more information, visit the Japan Rail Website. If you are in possession of a South African passport, you will also need a VISA. Applications can be

made at the Japanese Embassy in Pretoria or the Consulate in Cape Town, and usually take three or four business days to process.

Accommodation

Most travel agencies have partnerships with Hotels, but this is expensive. Traditional Japanese guesthouses (ryokan), family-run lodges and backpacker hostels are cheaper alternatives that also allow one a better experience of the Japanese way of life. The Lonely Planet Website offers a good selection, a reservation facility and secure credit card payment facility. In Tokyo, New Koyo Inn and Hibari House are also reputable guesthouses and undoubtedly the cheapest. Always find out what services will be provided at the place you will be staying. Some require that you bring your own bedding, some do not have laundry facilities, and at some you have to pay to use the shower. Certain guesthouses provide breakfast which is a great way to cut down your meal costs. Always book at least two to three months in advance and remember to confirm the week before you leave.



review

Golden Boy is a tongue-in-cheek "ecchi" (lewd anime) mini-series. It features Kintaro Oe, a 25-year old student who drops out of college before graduating, but only after having completed all the courses for his degree. His personal motto is "life is study" and he roams Japan looking to learn all he can about life and, especially, women.

Each episode is a self-contained story apart from the final which links all of the previous tales together. As one would expect from this type of show, Kintaro lands himself in all sorts of trouble with all sorts of people, including the director of an all-

female software company, a female swimming instructor, the daughter of a Yakuza boss, and a spoilt, rich biker-babe. Golden Boy cannot be taken seriously. It is also not a show that will be appreciated by a family audience. The humour is mostly sexual and, while tasteful, it can be fairly extreme. Don't say you weren't warned, but if you can handle it, Golden Boy will tickle you in all sorts of pleasurable places. It comes highly recommended.

golden boy

Format: OVA Age Restriction: 16NL
Availability: www.amazon.com -
\$17.98 excl. shipping (Box Set)



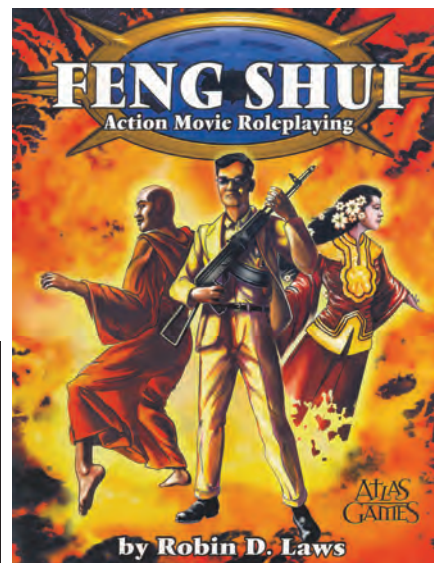
rpg & books.

feng shui

This month, for a change, we avoid the D20 system and look at something completely different. In fact, this particular game not only differs in system from the industry dominating D20, it's also an entirely different approach to most other role playing games out there. Called Feng Shui, this game takes on the world of the Hong Kong action genre with alarming alacrity - it is a joyous homage to a film genre that is at the same time loved, maligned and highly influential. Players take the part of warriors in a secret war waged in this world, while a mysterious alternate realm exists that allows time travel to four different ages - 69AD, 1885AD, the present day and 2059AD. All sorts of mysterious, vile, and evil creatures and organisations are out to take control of both worlds by controlling sites of power. Naturally, the players' heroes are all that stand between them and success. Feng Shui is a heady blend of fantasy, science fiction and all out, over the top action. Rather than discouraging the movie clichés so many players tend to be drawn to, Feng Shui exists almost purely because of them. Every character has a dark secret or hidden agenda and wants to make their kung fu "stronger than yours."

Interestingly, Feng Shui does lend itself to a surprisingly detailed level of role playing, despite the fact that the game is so action driven. It features a simple, effective system and will provide players and Game Masters, who enjoy raucous, unrealistic action with enormous amounts of fun.

Feng Shui
Approx. R275



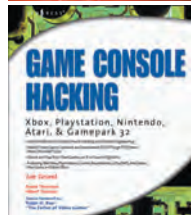
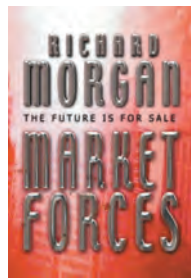
I am a fan of Richard Morgan. Apart from a disappointing ending, his second novel, Broken Angels, was a fascinating read in the way it combined economics, warfare and a hefty dollop of science fiction. Morgan has also gained a following in Hollywood, with Matrix and Die Hard producer, Joel Silver, buying the movie rights for his debut novel Altered Carbon. His latest foray into science fiction is Market Forces. Continuing the golden thread of corporate greed, blood-thirsty combat and political intrigue, Market Forces examines just how far one person is willing to go for the chance to work at one of the top investment firms in the world. Shorn Associates has hired Chris Faulkner to assist its Conflict Investment division, continuing its trend of making a killing, not only from a business perspective but from

a figuratively speaking perspective as well. As with Morgan's previous novels, this one gives a science fiction twist to the business world.

With conflict investment, financial firms closely monitor wars of liberation and revolutions and gauge who the winners are likely to be. The firms then sell those weapons and intelligence in return for a percentage of the gross domestic product of the country. Apart from this, the executives of the investment firms constantly fight a lethal battle to secure bids, promotion and prestige.

With Market Forces, Morgan has excelled himself. He has been improving with every book he has written and this one is no exception. This is a must-read if you like your novels fast-paced and full of intrigue.

Market Forces
By Richard Morgan
Price: R139.95 (excl. delivery)



With a tagline that reads "Have fun while voiding your warranty", Game Console Hacking is a veritable treasure chest of useful hardware hacks for next-generation and classic consoles.

It discusses how to "enhance" systems ranging from the modern Xbox and GameBoy Advance SP consoles, to the battle-hardened Atari 2600 and the Nintendo NES. Divided into three parts; Modern Game Consoles, Handheld Game Platforms, and Retro and Classic Systems, the book should theoretically cover all the top gaming platforms out there.

Unfortunately, neither the GameCube nor the PSOne receives any mention. It seems that neither of these consoles have hacks worth writing about. This is a pity since many gamers would be interested in getting more from these devices, especially the PSOne that still has a loyal following.

Nevertheless, the book still makes for a wonderful read if you are technically orientated. With the focus being squarely on the hardware side of things, readers will have to have at least a rudimentary knowledge of electronics, soldering and circuit boards to gain any use from the book.

For me, the best hack in the book was on how to convert an Atari 2600 console into a PC complete with DVD player and wireless keyboard and mouse.

All of the hacks in the book contain an illustrated step-by-step guide on how to complete the optimisation process and explain exactly what kind of tools are required.

All told, Game Console Hacking is definitely worth a read for those of us who are "modders" at heart.

Game Console Hacking
By Joe Grand
Price: R310.95 (excl. delivery)

books supplied by

music & comics.

In one of its more hare-brained schemes of recent times, MTV has arranged this collaboration between Jay-Z and Linkin Park. This marketing tactic has produced a CD and DVD combination set that might appeal to fans, but is essentially mediocre. Nothing much to write home about.



Collision Course
Jay-Z & Linkin Park

Best | 1991 - 2004
Seal



With a unique vocal style that has lifted him to tremendous heights of popularity, Seal can do little wrong in the eyes of his fans. This collection features all the things he did right through his rather lengthy career, including tracks like Crazy, Kiss from a Rose and Killer. An excellent choice for fans wanting a comprehensive Seal compilation.

Cholly and Flytrap
Image
R 34.50



In a futuristic world similar to "Mad Max", people crawl around the landscape trying to find what they need to survive in a wasteland; bullets being the most sought-after, of course. Two of the toughest survivors are Cholly, a huge mute Chinese, and Flytrap, a speedy little man with a gun. Trying as hard as possible to stay out of trouble, their reputations always seem to precede them. When they arrive in a town where everyone knows that nobody can beat the "Champ," you can bet the boys won't be able to stay out of the manipulations of the gangsters who control Center City.

The Ballad of Sleeping Beauty
Beckett comics
R17.50



The writer of this comic has created a version of the Sleeping Beauty tale set in the Wild West. The story follows the tale of Cole, a cowboy seeking revenge for the murder of his wife by a US Marshall. On his journey he meets Red, a young boy who claims to have seen a small town where a girl has been unjustly punished by being imprisoned in sleep for crimes she did not commit. Suddenly Cole has two new goals; saving the girl and getting the bad guy. But will this make him a hero or a villain?

Samurai
Dark Horse
R19.95

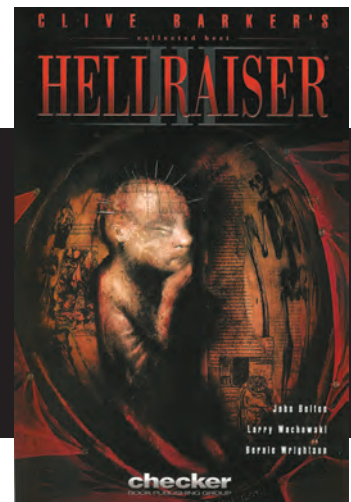


Samurai is set during a war between Japan and China. But, even in a class as rigid in discipline as the samurai, love can prevail. Shiro is a man in love with the beautiful Yoshiko. Nevertheless, he stands with his fellow warriors against the larger Chinese army, expecting to die. A twist of fate drops a building on him, saving his life. Finding that the battle has been lost, Shiro prepares to take his life, as honor demands, but then discovers that the Chinese have taken Yoshiko away with them. Now he must prolong his life to save the one he loves.

graphic novel

This is a collection of short stories featuring some of the finest names (both writers and artists) in modern comics. One story to definitely look out for is written by Larry Wachowski. Remember him? He made that minor film called "The Matrix" that some of you may have seen. Reading this book won't make you jump like a horror film might. What it will do is make you wonder "what if...?" It will also make you a little more nervous about going down that dark ally on the way home. What it will give you in the end though, is a few hours of entertaining reading (it's a rather thick book) and awaken your imagination. Well worth the price.

Hellraiser collected best
Checker publishing
R235.95





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The end of the world as we know it
www.xs4all.nl/~mke/exitmundi.htm

Disregard prophecy, the apocalypse or whatever doomsday ideology as you wish but, we all have to face an ultimate truth - one day the world will end. The big question is how, and funnily enough a lot of the predictions have little to do with the wrath of a god coming down upon the world and its retail chains. This site carefully documents a variety of doomsday scenarios, sometimes even linking them with a date. And they aren't all implausible. Apart from the obvious ones such as global warming, nuclear war or a big chunk of space junk hitting us, there are also theories on mass insanity, world-wide disease, nano-bots gone wild or just the anticlimactic whimpering of our species as all the sperm dries up.



Electric Light Artist www.jamesclar.com

Neon isn't that big a deal - we're used to it since every second building that feels like illuminating its presence to the nightly world uses these tubular constructs to show off itself. The same goes for LEDs, those little lights that have ended up making everything electronics' presence felt in the world. So while we take all of this for granted, artists like James Clar doesn't and his Website is brimming with works of art and constructs using Neon tubes and LED lights. Some are simply interesting sculptures while others move and change to the sound of music. A new dimension to art and definitely an entertaining site to visit.



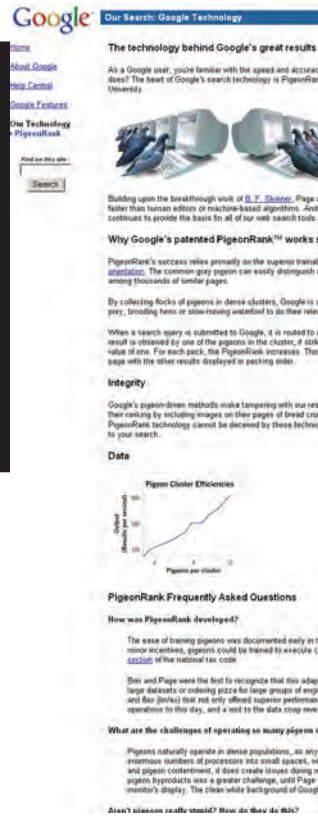
The final word on opinions www.metacritic.com

Rating sites and hubs are a dime-a-dozen. Gamers usually flock to the large Gam rankings.com to get the lowdown on a title's score from a myriad of gaming sites and users, but, there you tend to get the good with the bad as pretty much anyone can get their opinion listed online. Metacritic, on the other hand, takes its business far more seriously and only lists specific publications and acknowledged sites - not unlike NAG's favourite: Rotten Tomatoes.com. But while the latter focuses on movies and game rankings, Metacritic declares itself the authority on music, movies, books and films. Plus, they have a nice, clean design so we couldn't help but to check them out and see what the real critics have to say.



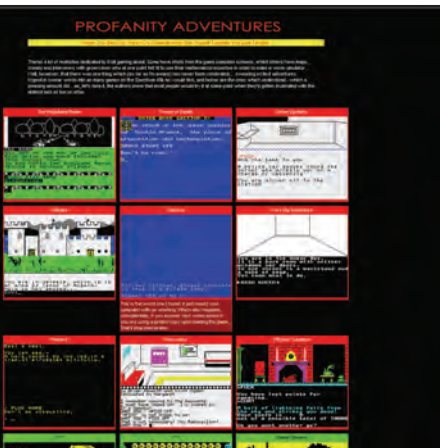
The power of Pigeons www.google.com/technology/pigeon-rank.html

Yes ... another Google-related feature on this page. This time an article on Google's inner working that carefully explains how the company trains and employs thousands of domestic pigeons (Columbia livia) to sort through the sites on the search engine's database and rank them accordingly. Pigeons packed in clusters are very effective at this task, plus they are unsusceptible to bribes like pictures of crumbs...



Bad words, good games www.monkeon.co.uk/swearadventure/

Don't tell your mom that we sent you here, but this site celebrates the time-honoured pastime of typing rude words into a text-based adventure and reveals the outcome. But none of us have gone to such lengths - these guys covered a lot of games and frankly it's amazing how many games reprimand you for typing in naughty words. It's also amazing how many games go along with the joke. And it's really amazing how many games kill your character when you write in a nasty instruction. Finally, it's extremely amazing how old you feel when you actually recognise most of the games...

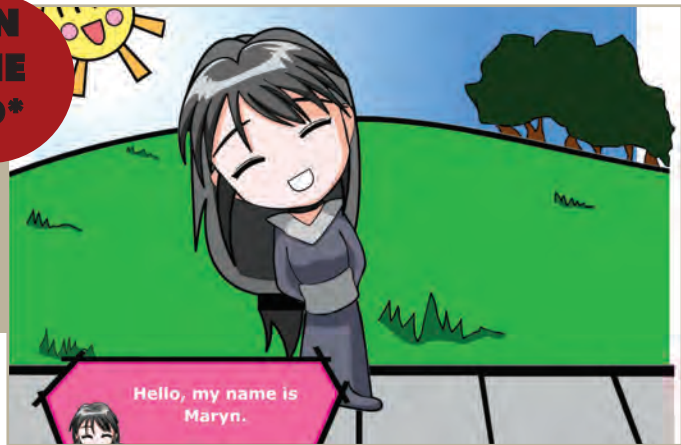


Flashlight

All About Maryn

Maryn is a little girl who lives with her father and her pet rabbit. She also happens to be a demon capable of some serious destruction. While this isn't the best Flash animation you'll see, the nice blend of Anime styling, Japanese dialogue (with subs) and funny story make for a great little movie and we're likely to see more of her in the near future.

ON THE CD*

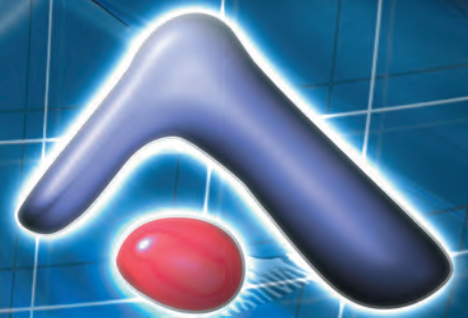


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PRIORITIES...

Let's be honest - none of us could really give a damn about a Tsunami somewhere or kidney stones when there is serious gaming to do...



It absolutely amazes me how shallow we have become. Yes, I include myself most wholeheartedly in that. I am horribly shallow. So are you. Now why would I be making this kind of assertion? Why would I be accusing my beloved readers (yeah, right) of leading meaningless lives in pursuit of everything that is unimportant? Okay, maybe that's a bit harsh, but you get what I am saying. You should, after all, be used to me by now.

Let's analyse what is important to us. You're holding it in your hands - or, at least, a representation of it. The reason you're reading this is because you bought this magazine. The reason you bought this magazine is because you love gaming. And the reason you love gaming, quite possibly, is because it is the be-all and end-all of your existence. That's the way we gamers are. We become so obsessed with this form of entertainment in all its overpriced glory that little else matters to us. It becomes an obsession to the exclusion of virtually anything else... we only eat because we have to; we only sleep because we have to. Games become all-consuming. At least I have an excuse - I get paid for this kind of stuff. Do you?

More than a hundred and fifty thousand people died recently in a freak accident involving a lot of water in the form of a massive wave. Children die every day because of starvation and abuse. Men, women and children around the world suffer countless miseries and atrocities every day - and here we are, getting so consumed by our games that we barely notice. Is this some kind of defense mechanism? Is it a way we protect ourselves from the horrors that surround us - losing ourselves in a virtual world so that we don't have to think about the real one? Is this the way we block out the pain of existence, the way we forget our own particular insignificance? Hell, I don't know. I just find it sort of weird that games become so important to us when there is so much else out there that we should be concerned about.

So why exactly am I going on about this? Why does my soap box look a lot more like a pulpit this month? It has something to do with kidney stones.

See, there I was, lying cringing in a hospital bed, feeling like my kidneys were ready to go through some kind of thermonuclear melt down and the only thing on my mind was getting back to the game I was currently playing. Weird, isn't it? Strange how the important things in the world can be eclipsed by something that (other than for those making money out of it) is of no real importance. And yes, my kidney stones are that important. Sort of makes you think about our priorities...

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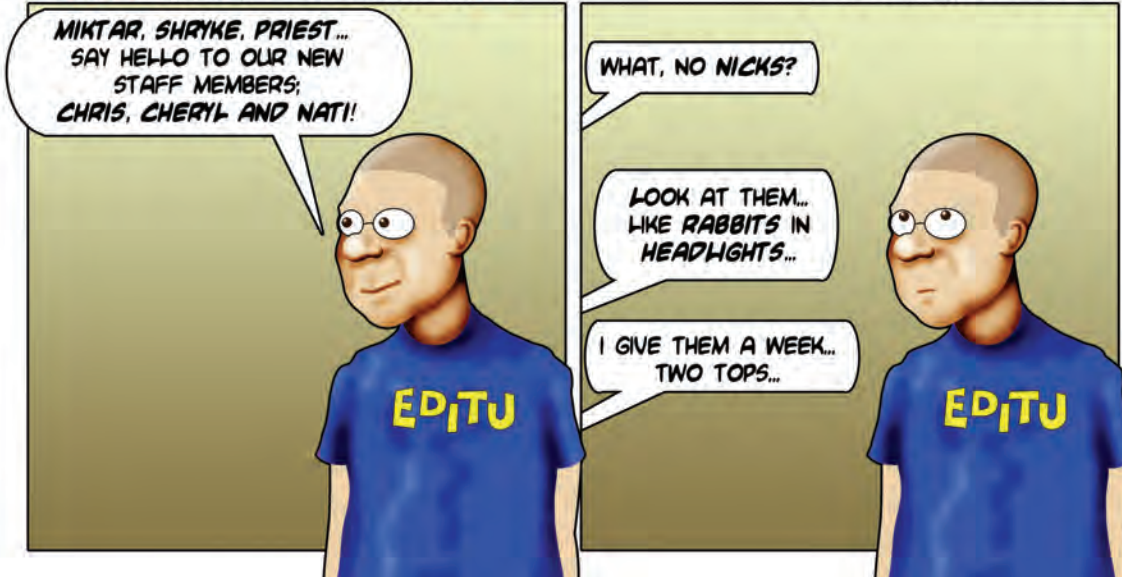
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Someone out there actually reads this line of text. Wow. Now I don't feel so alone anymore.

A NAGGING SUSPICION 2

art & words by Walt Pretorius



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