NAG

PC   PLAYSTATION   XBOX

DEAD SPACE 2

A necromorph love child is born, but who's the daddy?

YES WE CAN!

Death in the USA, Korean style! We sent a guy all the way over to New York to shave the turkey and bring us back the white meat.

HOMEFRONT

LEGO: PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

Captain Jack Sparrow and 10,000 other pieces of plastic bob on the high seas

HARDWARE

Internet Security suite roundup
ASUS NX90 reviewed
Intel Core i7 2600K
Sandy Bridge unveiled

NAG 2011 DVD

Miner Wars
BOOM! TEN DEMOS!

EXTRA!

03

9 771028 053002

The cover DVD got so bored with you and your 'stellar' personality it made a fake DVD and placed it where the original DVD was supposed to be. The real DVD then snuck out while you weren't looking. I think it's best if you just let it go. You could try being more interesting so this doesn't happen again.

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PC DVD-ROM

ASSASSIN'S CREED BROTHERHOOD

18

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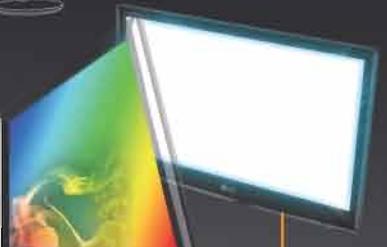
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The future of monitor viewing has arrived. Recently, IPS (In-Plane Switching) has been grabbing a lot of attention and acclaim from today's top players in the electronics community for its market advancing innovations. Now, the already powerful technology of IPS joins the bright and vibrant technology of LED. This historical technological merger promises to provide you with high-quality and precision viewing at the widest angles, while never compromising its superb brightness and spot on detail.

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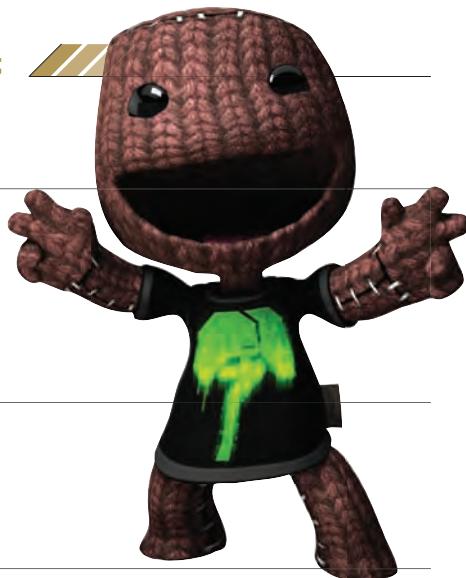
Mega Contrast Ratio
The sharper contrast of brightness and darkness makes it easy to see even the most subtle colour differences. Mega Contrast technology can even show shades of pitch-black, which is considered the most difficult shade to realise.

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On the DVD

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<EXTRAS>

Gamecca Volume 2 Issue 19 January 2011 Gladget Volume 1 Issue 4 January 2011 Cthulhu Saves The World Soundtrack Dungeons Main Theme | [Free Games]: Classic - Star Control 2 (The Ur-Quan Masters) | Dash-Da-Dash DX Edition FRACT | Pixel Force: DJ Hero | Halo | Left 4 Dead | [Modifications]: Command & Conquer 3: The Forgotten (v1.0)

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Sold out! Come back next month.

<91 VIDEOS>

86 Game Trailers | 3 Wiki Cheats videos
2 ScrewAttack Video Game Vault videos

MARCH 2011

The spine...

Coming soon to a NAG near you!

There's a joystick in my polar bear...

BEING A ROCK AND roll gaming magazine is fun. We get all the latest stuff for free and spend most of the day playing games, talking about games and thinking about games. How this magazine gets done each month is a mystery. Even people who have spent a deadline cycle week here (Tarryn) have no idea how it all just happens. I personally think it's out of our control and the universe demands a gaming magazine so it just magically appears out of nothing while we bumble and fuddle our way through the day. But I'm getting off topic here...

Part of the job involves travelling around the world to see new games in development for ourselves and then write about them for you – it's glamorous and exciting and we've all been through some rather wild experiences – apparently, 'her ID definitely said she was 18' will stand up in court... ;)) The result of such trips can even be found in this issue, take a look at the new *Lego: Pirates of the Caribbean* and the exciting *Homefront*, etc.

But this Ed's Note isn't about stroking our egos or using our clever words (and stuff) to pretend we're better than everyone else. No, this is about global warming and how it has an impact on you.

While putting this issue together we had cancelled flights into New York due to massive winter storms, delays on getting advertising material in thanks to a tropical cyclone (the Chinese New Year didn't help either), a rushed out feature from London and I'm sure a baby penguin might have missed a meal somewhere in there too. In unrelated news our former Art Director, Chris, had to flee Egypt because, in his words, "my street looked like a *Call of Duty* level and there was a tank parked at the bottom of my road". It's been a carnival of chaos.

Thankfully you only missed one feature because of this – but it could have been a lot worse. The message here is simply that if we don't all do our little something to help prevent climate change one day we'll having nothing to talk about in NAG. One day we won't be able to fly anywhere to see new games because the developers have been snowed in for the last month, or get any new games because there is no fuel for the airplanes and ships or play any games because the power was switched off three months ago - permanently. You can laugh all you like, ignore the warnings for the next few years, and pretend all the scientists are wrong and stick your head under your duvet but remember one thing – this issue of NAG was actually affected by global warming. It was a small bump in the road that we managed to work around but I felt it and it made me think a little longer and harder than usual. I'm not going to list all the things you can do to save the planet – if you're really that interested in making a difference you can start by looking it up on the Internet. Now get to it, get educated and make us proud. ;)

NAG IS A TEEN...

We're turning 13 years old next month – lucky number 13. It's lucky for gamers, because 13 usually involves cool things like vampires, ghosts and zombies, getting an axe to the face, balls and chest or even the long awaited return of Diablo!

Besides all this focus on the number 13, our birthday issue always means things are changing... The spine is coming back. I know, I know, now you can die happy. I wasn't altogether thrilled with the staples personally but they are more of a commitment than a paperclip I'm sure you'll agree. So it's back to glue and a hard spine – more 'professional' I've been told. This then means the internal poster is gone. We can always do those single-page posters for you guys if you like. I can also tell you that *Duke Nukem Forever* will be in the next issue (provided the weather doesn't interfere) – there are some other big things we're doing but I can't talk about them now or I'll get into trouble with someone. Something else – we're not increasing the price of NAG this year... hooray!

One last thing – rAge 2011 will start 30 September and end 2 October. It funny, this little gaming expo we started back in 2002 has now become such a big thing that a team of people (event logistics, graphic designers, venue people, networking logistics, public relations and so on) are working hard on the show right now as you read this. It was just supposed to be a fun little gaming event that's somehow turned in to an internationally noticed, well supported and 'important' expo on the South African entertainment calendar. Bit of a crazy LOL if you ask me and I still can't manage to get a bunch of classic arcade cabinets in the show.

So that's about it, it's nice to be back up to full power again and see you all next issue.   **NAG**

Michael James
[Editor]

Letter of the Moment

From: Marius
Subject: Where have all the flowers gone?

2011 THE YEAR OF the umm… wait a bit… nope nothing. 2011 is the year of the sequel, prequel, and remake. I recently took an online tour to find the most anticipated games for the coming year. What did I find… an amazing list of games that all have a number suffix to it (sequels)?! Only one in about ten games brings something original. Don't get me wrong, the titles like *Uncharted 3* and *Duke Nukem Forever* and the new *Alice* game is right up my wish list. But what happened to the originality? The days when the first *Tomb Raider* blew us away or when Kratos changed our life forever. Or when we met our childhood heroes for the first time in a game or movie?

That's right even movies lack originality. Just look at the list. Movies like *MacGyver* and a *Footloose* remake? Come on Hollywood. Where are your thinking caps? Stop milking the cash cow. We love to see and experience old Faithfull's but sometimes, enough is enough (Star Wars episode 1, 2, 3 broke the saga forever). Bring us some new ideas, new characters, new locations (I swear that every game out there was a level in a sewer). Has the time truly come where all great ideas have been used up? Then the end truly is here.

Originality is dangerous. It's not Hollywood's fault, it's not the game developer's fault. The sad honest truth is that is your fault. Well, not you personally but gamers like you (unless you're not like most gamers) and in a roundabout way it's also our fault – NAG magazine.

You see, it costs millions of monies to make a computer game. It also costs time – years in most cases. All of this time and money is just about getting the game ready as software. After it has gone gold you now have packaging, marketing, distribution and so on and so forth. NAG comes in because we need marketing money in the form of advertisements to make the magazine work so we can provide a voice for the industry so you can read about these time consuming and expensive games. Your game also has to survive a team of critical full of nonsense game reviewers without too much scaring. So… end of the day it's just safer to stick with things that work which is why we're on Call of Duty 6 already. My advice, if you want to see originality, buy independent games and try new things occasionally or we're never going to escape the rinse and repeat sequels. Ed.
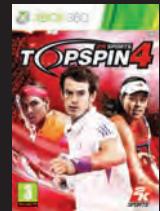
From: Werner
Subject: Classic Sega Game Sequels
Every time I turn my Xbox on and start playing *Sega Mega Drive Collection* I wonder… I wonder why many of these games don't have sequels. If I take a look at *Vectorman* and *Vectorman 2* I just can't understand why there hasn't been another. *Vectorman* would do great as a third-person shooter with a cover system like *Gears of War* and a platform system like *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. But that's not the only game that deserves a sequel. *Comix Zone* is still one of my favourite games: I just can't get enough of that amazing graphics and brilliant gameplay. Now you might be wondering what I have in mind for, say, *Comix Zone*: well, it's simple. Rocksteady Games take *Batman: Arkham Asylum* and change the textures into a cartoony look, put in a few panels, new levels and characters. With Batman's combat system and open world gameplay the game will be an instant hit. Or, if you think that's a bit overboard, they could always make it a simple 2D platform game with HD textures. I hope you guys think these games deserved and still deserve sequels, because I think they do. Thanks for the awesome magazine.

For some perspective – this is another reason why people make sequels. That bitter sweet pill called nostalgia. Ed.

From: Isma-eel
Subject: Baby: You Don't need to Change
It recently struck me that certain games have been ruined by developers who rather than improve on what works, try to change things too much and ruin a previously great experience. One title that jumps to mind is *Resident Evil 5*. Here we have a game that is so called 'Survival Horror ', which would imply that it would be at the very least, a little scary. Previous titles in the franchise always had a dark or foreboding setting, due both to the fact that they were set at night and the environments were generally unfriendly. Then *Resident Evil 5* comes along and out goes the night and harsh environments and in their place are the day and generic shanty towns that can be seen on TV in the news for the wrong reasons on a nightly basis. What

was the reason for this change and how could the fundamentals of this beloved series be completely ignored? Another game where game play has been changed too much for its own good is *Metal Gear Solid 4*, which I found hard to find sections to be stealthy in, ironic when it's supposed to be Tactical ESPIONAGE action. It has now dropped the tactical and espionage aspects as far as I am concerned. All this makes me fearful for certain other beloved franchises: Would *Mass Effect* become a first person shooter? Would *Final Fantasy* be turned into an action platform game? I hope not. Please don't get me wrong, I'm all for innovation but not fundamental changes. My final message is to developer's: By all means, innovate and improve on mechanics and elements that have worked in the past, cut out what hasn't, but PLEASE, do not throw out those core experiences that got us hooked on the games you've made in the first place!

More on why things never change, Ed

From: Some angry dude
Subject: Ed… You fail.
I don't know why you think so much of yourself, because in actual fact you're a drunk with power, sad man. Do you only get about 10 letters each month, or do you just like posting the letters of those you can insult? The most common [snip… Ed], why do you post the letter then if you don't want us to read the whole thing? This issue with Tarryn van der Byl… she is an awful review writer. Most of her review "plus and minus" section is the useless information, e.g. [*Halo*] plus: it's a Halo, minus: it's Halo. [*Batman: Arkham Asylum*] plus: You're Batman, minus: You're Batman. When we read Pros and Cons about a game we seek information that is going to help us, not think she's funny or whatever. One more thing, am I reading the same magazine? Everyone keeps on saying it's a good magazine. Really? In the past two years this magazine started to suck bigger balls with each issue. Okay, there are some good ones, but the majority of the magazines are so short, filled with useless reviews [Tarryn] and the demo disk have 40 videos [the demo disk is the only reason I

buy this magazine, otherwise this magazine would be a complete waste of money].What happened to the 200 video demo disks and the 150 page issues? I think it's time for new management so that this current excuse for a gaming magazine can actually become worth our time again.
PS: You're a perfect example of someone who acts tuff on paper, but in real life you're actually scared sh1tless. You hide behind your words and pages, time to get a life.
PSS: All the other journalists are great, keep up the good work.
PSSS: And if you paste, which you will so that you can portray some of your cool [snip… Ed] skills, I or any other reader, don't give a shit if I have spelling mistakes or if I have spaces after my full stops, this is not relevant, the information that my post carries is what matters.

Wow! Just for the record both instances of '[snip… Ed]' were added by the author of this letter. Ed.

From: Graham
Subject: Gamers' Life Cycle
My letter as follows…
Past
My love for gaming started back with my first computer, the Commodore VIC 20, then C64 and Sega Saturn as a kid and my friend's Atari console. When I started earning my own way years later discovered PC Gaming with TNT2 GPU; back in the early days of *Quake 3* and *Unreal Tournament* and LAN fun. With a buddy doing my upgrade, seen my box fry twice, to break the news to my wife twice in month wasn't easy (she still let me build up another). :-)
Present
Last upgrade about 3 years ago just after my son was born. I'm running an average specification with an 8800GTS 320MB xxx edition, 3GB RAM and a Dual Core AM2 AMD 3800 processor. Currently still almost max most games on [dare I say] Vista… I still don't see what issue people have with it… Will upgrade again when my system stops handling the game requirements, by then probably on DX12 or DX13.
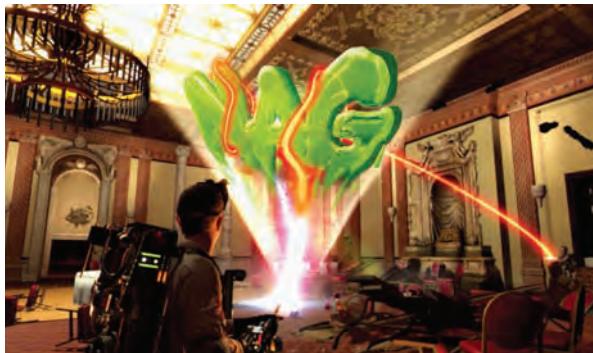
< Inbox >

NAG Fan artwork

This is the best of what we received during the month. If you can insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo you might also end up here for your three lines of fame.

David Edwards: "I hope you enjoy my Ghostbusters inspired NAG picture. I did it all in Photoshop."

This month, NAG is giving away a mystery prize, ooohhhh mysterious...

Being a hardened gamer; tech-life's about upgrading... now with a family; budget games are my focus; my wife cannot understand the mystery behind my gaming passion and never will, life's too busy to commit to finishing a game in a set time so I Play As I Go... the passion remains and the collection grows... eventually working my way through... Next big game title *Crysis 2* will be my next worthy New Release buy... looking forward to your reviews. [*You might want to start saving for that new PC sooner, Ed*]
So, as in years past; I'll rely on NAG for the best demos and game trailers and reviews, to help me make my gaming decisions.
Next Generation
Now slowly got to pass on the torch, [now 3 years old] my son slowly moving into it... will hopefully get him X-Box Kinect soon; thanks for the valued insight on your motion experience, awaiting reviews on games worthwhile for Kinect.
The joy of passing on this experience to my son, seeing his excitement while [trying] to play the *NFS* games and a bit of *Kung-Fu Panda;* seeing him try to interact with the Kinect Sensor at a store with a penalty shoot-out game. Takes me back to when I was a kid... where learning new technology always excites. [I guess this part of me has never grown up.] Henceforth the future of gaming, what will we see in 10 years as we move into the 3D gaming age; to what depth and realism will the developers go?
Years ago on ROBOTECH there was a 3D gaming battle arcade match between two characters... anyone see this... I don't think this is too far away, holographic gaming without 3D glasses... imagine.
For the sheer entertainment value, hand eye coordination, thinking, reflex, adventure, escapism, challenge, technology, imagination, relaxation and sharing this gaming experience and literally for love of the game... I will play games till the day I die.

Thanks for the mail... I also started with the Commodore 64 - those were the days – I remember getting Congo Bongo for it as a cartridge. I promised myself that it wasn't just going to be for gaming so the first thing I ever did with my first computer was type in a little program to make a balloon move across the screen. That was also the first and last time I programmed anything and went straight onto the gaming and never looked back. I was lucky enough to

play Elite on that old Commodore 64, a game that might very well have changed my whole life. I'm also seeing the same now with my son (8), and watching him spend hours building a mine cart rollercoaster in Minecraft makes me proud. Ed.

From: Alec
Subject: An Idea
Hello best magazine in the world! Have you guys ever thought about putting your top 10 games of 2010?

Hello best reader in the world! We did but then we thought who wants to see another list of games someone else thinks are cool. We'd have also probably mess it all up and miss some important games and then there's the arguing about what came out in 2010 and do we include portable and do we split for platform and... well, you get the idea. ;) Ed.

From: Eric
Subject: My Holiday with Friends
First off I want to thank and congratulate you for an awesome wicked cool magazine! I buy it religiously. I am on leave at the moment and loving every second of it. This brings me to the reason I'm writing this letter. Everyone keeps asking me what I'm doing on my holiday. Am I going away, am I going out somewhere, am I going to climb up Table Mountain, am I going to do this, am I going to do that, what about doing this today, or that? My reply to all these questions is simply, "I'm spending my holiday with my friends". The friends I'm referring to are Chis Redfield, Jill Valentine, Sheva, Albert Wesker, John Shepard, Lara Croft, Drake, John Marsten, and a bit of Blizzard too.
I'm sure all us gamers know that we don't spend as much quality time with our games as we would like. Work, the real world and responsibilities always get in the way. So I made a decision. This holiday I'm going catch up on my gaming. I have been playing nonstop. Occasionally I might venture out to seek and obtain some food and maybe a quick drink with some buddies. But I always end up back home engulfed by the comfort of my sofa and on some wild adventure with "my friends". Keep up the good work!

The gaming industry loves and salutes you! Between you, me and everyone else, I've been known to take my console on holiday with me. People just don't understand. Ed.

On the Forums

QUESTION: Do you feel that games have more potential than movies to scare their audience?

Fredder: Definitely, you are way more submersed in the story and action. The first Fear game really created a good physical and psychological scare and atmosphere plenty of times. So much more potential but it needs to be pulled off right!

Sci_Ghost: Most definitely, slap on a pair of decent earphones & games such as dead space or amnesia really have the potential to brown your pants more often.

Toxxyc: Absolutely. Think game vs. movie: Silent Hill, Resident Evil, Far Cry, and Dead Space.

Darranged: Combined with the usual solitary environment of any gaming setup, as well as a longer time immersed into that sort of atmosphere than the regular 90 minutes of a horror film, games have far more potential to frighten people than movies ever will.

Error: Little girl covered in blood with a teddy... Freaks me out either way...

Zoop: Yes, because with games the user is actively taking part, whereas movies have you watching other people who you have no control over.

Jodez: Games are way scarier, coz you're the one in control it's all up to you... so much pressure.

Miz3r: Games have much more of a "Scare factor" as when you are watching movies it's usually with other people and you try act tough knowing you do not want to embarrass yourself if you get scared, and with Games like Dead Space with nobody around you crap like a little sissy girl.

Nferno: Yes, they definitely have the potential. Have they achieved this yet? No, not on par with movies. Yet.
Spindleshanks: No. Movies are far more imaginative. Whereas games tend to be predictable.

Wesley: I've watched my fair share of horror movies, and personally none of them even come close to Dead Space, or the F.E.A.R. trilogy. I'm just so much more immersed in the games that I crap myself whenever I have a go at Elma.

Demikid: Of course, because no gamer is dumb enough to open the closet that obviously has the killer/monster/demon/Justin Bieber.

wisp: I believe so , movies can be very predictable at times mostly cause the music gives it away , games have more of that in your face , scare the krap out of thing going when the unexpected happens (ask Chevron he loved Doom3).

vii: I don't know, ask the copy of dead space I only played an hour of and never touched again...

CaViE: Games have immersion levels that movies never manage. And nothing beats the terror of feeling like you're playing the person in that horror game with little health and not much of an ability to fight back. There's just no comparison to movies, really.

OllieTheDog: Well depends, there are a lot more crappy movies then games.

Cpt.Monde: Absolutely. I've watched plenty of horror movies and none of them come close to having the same scare factor as Dead Space and Resident Evil 2. The thing about scary movies is that they stop being scary after your first viewing and horror games can continue to be scary even after your first play through.
Wah: Yes. While they can easily offer a greater sense of immersion, they also have a much bigger fright factor implemented as well (ala Killing Floor).

spjt07: Yeah it makes a huge difference. Playing games helps you more in getting into the life and feel of the main character. Plus a game is longer so the feeling is longer.

I, Gamer

by Miklós Szecsei

HuRr DUrr – or how I learnt where my towel was

I'VE ALWAYS HAD THIS suspicion in the back of my mind: people are stupid and I think I hate them [*now that you mention it... Ed*]. By people I mean humanity as a whole; there are a handful of clever individuals knocking about, but they're the ones who inevitably get the stupid people to do what they want them to do. Such as buy drool inducing videogames like a Michael Phelps endorsed swimming simulator. Thanks to this recent game announcement, my initial inkling is rapidly becoming a personal conviction.

I'm not sure which abhorrent act of dumb depresses me the most: the one in which some asinine individual, upon reaching the bottom of a now well-dredged barrel labelled "creativity", decided to propose a swimming

> *"NAG has secretly been using readers' subscription money to fund and build a space ship. "*

videogame; or the one in which a supposedly intelligent person patted asinine individual on the back and approved its misconception of digital entertainment. In doing so, supposedly intelligent person relegated itself to the ranks of asinine individual. In an ideal world that person would be made to wear a sign that reads: "I thought I was clever but actually it turns out that I'm just as stupid as the rest of you. So sorry for the inconvenience."

Yep, that's right: 505 Games is making a Michael Phelps videogame called *Michael Phelps – Push the Limit.* Man that sounds so extreme. So extreme that no normal controller would be able to handle it; in order to cope with the extreme extremity of *Push the Limit*, you'll need Kinect. Yes, I also just threw up in my mouth, don't worry. How anyone gave this project the green light is a mystery; the answer to which lies hidden alongside another box last seen disappearing into a warehouse at the end of *Raiders of the Lost Ark.*

In seemingly unrelated news, *NAG* has secretly been using readers' subscription money to fund and build a space ship. We're planning on leaving this hurr durr planet that is full of stupid, to colonise another one where nobody in their right mind would ever make a swimming videogame. We'll be raffling tickets; space is limited; hop onto the *NAG* website to secure your place in a brighter future. Don't forget to bring a towel.

PSP2 confirmed

Sony announced the Next Gen Portable

AFTER MONTHS (OR YEARS, depending on your participation in speculation) of rumours and hushed voices in dark alleys, the PSP2 has finally been confirmed. It's currently called NGP, or Next Gen Portable, and is packed with the most impressive collection of technology we've ever seen in a portable device of any kind.

The ethos behind NGP and the development of games for the platform revolve around five key points: Revolutionary User Interface, Social Connectivity, Location-based Entertainment, Converging Real and Virtual (augmented) Reality. Using a combination of inputs, including the seemingly bizarre rear touch pad, users will have a huge range of ways to interact with their games on the NGP.

In addition, Sony announced the inception of PlayStation Suite, which will give developers the ability to develop "PlayStation-like" games for any mobile device running the Android operating system. NGP will also support PS Suite.

Sony has confirmed that NGP will be available for the holiday season this year; local PlayStation distributors Ster Kinekor has confirmed the same. There's no solid word on price yet, and speculation from members across the industry put the cost to consumers anywhere from $300 up.

Actual size

The games

THE POWER OR VERSATILITY of any gaming platform is irrelevant if the games aren't there to back it up. Sony has proven that they know how to launch new hardware with third-party developers on board with the PlayStation Move, and it looks like they're going for the same approach with the NGP.

Here is a selection of the games that are confirmed for release for NGP. Release dates and every other detail but their names are pending:

- *Killzone*
- *LittleBigPlanet*
- *WipEout*
- *Resistance*
- *Uncharted*
- *Monster Hunter Portable 3*
- *Dynasty Warriors*
- *Call of Duty*

< Bytes >

What happened to the PSP phone?

IT'S CALLED THE XPERIA Play, and while it still hasn't been officially confirmed by Sony, we know it's real because tech website www.engadget.com has been playing with a pre-release version for some time now. The Xperia Play is, as we expected, a cross between the SE Xperia Arc (an upcoming, updated version of the X10) and PSP Go.

According to Engadget, the Xperia Play is loaded with Android 2.3 (Gingerbread) and features a Qualcomm Snapdragon MSM8655 processor, which is capable of clock speeds up to 1.2GHz, coupled with an Andreno 205 GPU – one step up from the GPU found in the X10. The device features a 4" multitouch LCD with a resolution of 854x480, the same as the X10, with a few modifications to improve contrast ratio. Additionally, the Play's screen is powered by a Bravia engine for improved video playback.

Unfortunately, there isn't much in the way of gaming information at this stage. From the images, we can see that the Play has a d-pad, four face buttons, two shoulder buttons and a pair of circular touch pads that can only be touch-based analogue "sticks". In terms of a games library, we know that Play will support PlayStation Suite, which might be enough if the roster of games is great enough. We're not yet sure if Play will have native support for full-blown PSP or NGP games.

THE SPECIFICATIONS

This is the hard dirt you've been hankering for. Bear in mind that with its release almost a year away, some of these specs may change to accommodate an unexpected shift in the market, last-minute cost-cutting, or responses from the public. Here's what Sony has confirmed so far:

CPU: Quad-core ARM Cortex-A9 processor. These chips tend to hover in the 1GHz and 1.5GHz range, but are certified to go all the way to 2GHz. In comparison, the iPad and iPhone 4 use a single Apple-branded Cortex-A8 CPU that runs at 1GHz. The A9 is faster, multi-core ready and draws less power.

GPU: Quad-core PowerVR SGX543MP4+. Capable of delivering up to 133 million polygons per second with fill rates in excess of 4Gpixels/sec, this GPU is rated at approximately as powerful as the GPU found in the original Xbox. Bear in mind, however, that a smaller screen and various technological advancements will allow developers to push the visuals much further than this.

RAM: Unknown at this time.

Display: 5" OLED multi-touch screen with 960x544 resolution.

Media/storage: Unknown proprietary memory card format for games storage. Expect support for SD cards as well. There will be no UMD drive.

Input/controls: Front multi-touch screen; rear multi-touch pad; dual analogue sticks; two shoulder buttons; four face buttons; d-pad; start/select/power/volume buttons; microphone; SIXAXIS motion sensing; three-axis electronic compass; single front and single rear camera.

Connectivity: IEEE 802.11 b/g/n Wi-Fi; Bluetooth 2.1 +EDR; GPS; 3G in selected models.

Dimensions: 83.55x182x18.6mm. This marks the PSP2 as thinner than the first PSP (PSP1000), but slightly wider and taller.

Weight: Unknown.

Goodbye UMD?

YUP; CONTINUING THE TREND started with the PSP Go, NGP will not include a UMD drive. It will, however, use a new type of memory card, reportedly (but this is unconfirmed) called "NVG cards."

As one might expect, the entire NGP range of games will be available online through the PlayStation Network, but Sony has assured the public that you'll be able to purchase games in-store.

PSP backwards-compatibility with downloadable PSP games has been confirmed. There's still no word from Sony regarding the conversion of one's current UMD collection to disc-less format; don't hold your breath for a solution.

The XBIG service: maturing at last?

A FEW YEARS AGO, EXCITEMENT among indie developers was at a peak when it was announced that Microsoft's brand new XNA toolkit and Xbox Community Games platform would allow average folks to develop on consoles for the first time in ... well, ever. The news was glorious: an entirely new market lay open for exploration and profit, devoid of the pesky contracts, large-scale budgets and years of development usually associated with a console release.

Unfortunately, there were several potential drawbacks to this whole idea, and they all immediately manifested. Lack of quality control along with almost non-existent methods of quality content featuring meant that XBCG quickly became a joke of a platform filled with crude, overpriced wannabe titles and a Top Ten list that contained more massage apps and screensavers than actual games. Although the lack of interference on Microsoft's part could on one hand be seen as "admirable"

> "More and more, the renamed Xbox Live Indie Games service is proving itself to be something quite viable…"

(especially at a time when people were complaining about the seemingly draconian approval system of Apple's own gaming platform), it was clear that unless something changed soon, XBCG would be doomed to mediocrity forever.

You'd be forgiven for ignoring the service back then, but if you take a look now, you'll notice that the scene has changed quite drastically in recent times. More and more, the renamed Xbox Live Indie Games service is proving itself to be something quite viable, a stepping stone for genuinely passionate devs who want to try cool new ideas but don't necessarily have the platform or resources to make themselves a full commercial success. Among the sea of passable entrants and generic 3D shooters, gaming journalists -- and the community at large -- are frequently pinpointing games of actual artistic value (see www.indiegames-uprising. com for some great examples), and while one would still have to view the service with a healthy amount of scepticism, the truth is that anybody can hit XBIG now and find a cheap, fun game of suitable length and value.

It's a promising set of developments from what has been until now a quite understandably underestimated platform. If you haven't fired up XBIG in a while: give it another whirl. You may just surprise yourself.

Bumbling wizardry

Success and failure surrounds Magicka's launch

MAGICKA, THE RECENTLY RELEASED cooperative action RPG that sees up to four players using an inventive spell-casting system to slay monsters (when they're not mistakenly murdering each other in bouts of accidental, hilarious spell misfires), seems to have left gamers in two minds: on the one hand, they love the game's satirical charm, but on the other, it's incredibly buggy and broken. It's so problematic that some players have refused to continue playing it until developer Arrowhead Game Studios fixes the game's annoyingly erratic behaviour.

Shortly after the game's digitally distributed launch, publisher Paradox said this about the game's state: "[Single-player] works fine for the most part, multiplayer does not – patch on the way for both! (as soon as [Steam] pushes the button). We'll patch the game as often as possible." Sure enough, the game received a number of patches shortly thereafter, but players were still not pleased. The folks over at tech site Ars Technica experienced a plethora of technical issues with the game, calling *Magicka*'s release "broken" and "negligent." Paradox CEO Fredrik Wesker then spoke with Ars and promised that Arrowhead Studios would squash the game's issues.

"The development team is working around the clock and we will get this fixed. We will make this right," said Wesker. He then went on to explain why this sort of thing happens and provided some good insight into what it means to be a small publisher in today's gaming world. Most players seem to be willing to forgive the game's problems, because its uniquely amusing gameplay makes dealing with all the freezes and glitches worthwhile, but the point of all this is that there's no need to worry: soon you'll be able to enjoy *Magicka* without all the constant crashing. On a lighter note, *Magicka* has already been quite successful, having sold 30 000 copies within its first day of availability.

An example of a typical Wizard.

World of StarCraft is a thing

HAH! WE THOUGHT THAT would get your attention. Now you're forced to read about an indie development that you thought was something official. *World of StarCraft* is, sadly, not official. It's a mod developed by a chap named Ryan Winzen using the *StarCraft II* modding tools. Using a ton of clever tricks, Winzen has laid the foundations for an MMO-style mod set in the *StarCraft* universe, complete with character selection, spell casting and multiplayer raiding with missions that extend across multiple maps.

As one might expect, Blizzard wasn't too chuffed with this obvious trademark infringement, and contacted YouTube to pull down the video demo released by Winzen while they chatted with him to resolve the issue. According to Winzen, the publisher was calm and reasonable in their dealings with the intrepid modder.

"The Deputy General Council from Blizzard contacted me last night to discuss the details of the *World of StarCraft* project. We talked for a while and apparently some people from Blizz were concerned I was developing the game somehow outside of *SC2*," Winzen explained.

"Anyway, I explained the details of the project to him and made it clear this mod was to be developed within *SC2*. After that was clear he obviously wanted the name to be changed."

As a result of the legal wrangling, Winzen has agreed to change the name of his mod; he'll likely go into co-development with modder Mille25 who's been working on a similar project named *StarCraft Universe*. Winzen is hopeful that he'll release a fully-playable demo within a year.

» THUNDER-BOLTS AND LIGHTNING!

Final Fantasy XIII. I know, right? What's up with that? Thankfully, the *Final Fantasy* series has this neat little trick that it pulls out every now and then: spin-offs and sequels. We're not sure if this is to be considered an apology for *FFXIII*, an improvement or just something to take our minds off it; whatever it is, *FFXIII-2* has been confirmed by Square-Enix.

It's a direct sequel to *XIII*, and returns players to the control of Lightning. The game will feature an "evolved" battle system and an all-new story, although the developers are encouraging players who endured through to the end of XIII to keep their save games for a "special surprise." The game will also reportedly be darker than the usual fare.

FFXIII-2 is still a long way off; it's only expected to release in late Q4 2012 or early Q1 2013. We're happy to let them take their time and learn from past experiences.

Let's talk about HD remakes

WITH ALL OF THE new gamers entering the scene in recent years, there's little wonder why retro gaming has taken off as well as it has: people need to catch up. The problem is that people who want to get back to the roots of modern franchises often don't appreciate just how bad some of those old games look today.

According to "insider whispers," *UK Official PlayStation Magazine* claims that the first three *MGS* games, the first being released on PS1 and its sequels on PS2, will receive HD revisions and made available for the PS3. Many argue that 2011 would be the perfect window in which to release such a collection, as *MGS: Rising* is due out only in 2012.

One HD remake that we can confirm right now is Abe's Oddysee, you'll no-doubt be pleased to know. Developers Just Add Water, who are working on other Abe adventures as well, will remaster the entire first game in glorious high-definition.

Oddworld Inhabitants (the studio that create the Abe series) co-founder Lorne Lanning spills the beans.

"*Abe HD* is going into production. It's basically *Abe's Oddysee* being redone in a 3D physics engine as a 2D side-scrolling platformer. So the way Just Add Water wants to approach it, we thought was very smart; they are not trying to reinvent any wheels. It's like, 'Can we make that experience in a new engine, with new tech, in the old way?'"
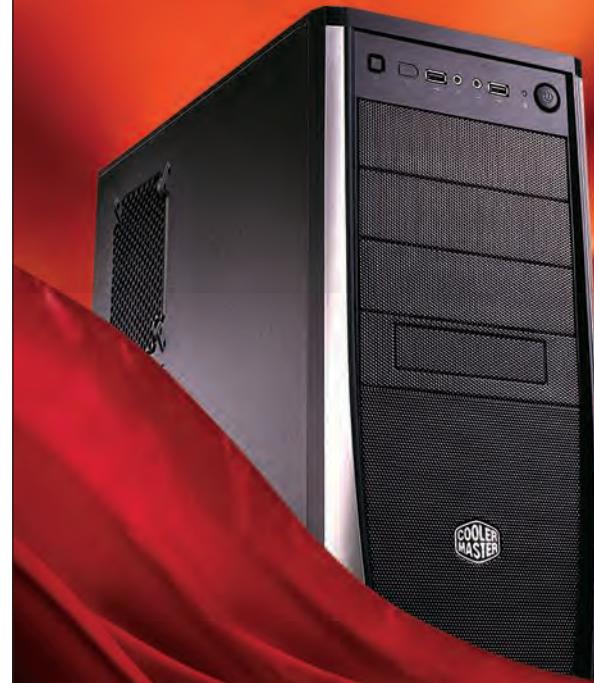
Wipe that smile off your face

LAST MONTH, WE BROUGHT news that famed hacker George "GeoHot" Hotz had succeeded in jailbreaking the PS3, enabling users to install other operating systems and run homebrew applications on the console. Just days after this hack was posted on the Internet, online multiplayer servers for numerous games were flooded with people who'd used the hack to install cheats for their games. Rampant cheating was the least of Sony's worries, however, since tearing down the console's copy protection mechanisms also left the system wide open to piracy. Naturally, Sony didn't appreciate this at all and immediately opted to sue Hotz. Hotz, who was also one of the people responsible for jailbreaking the iPhone, shrugged this off, casually stating that he was being sued for "making Sony mad."

Now, the courts have granted Sony's request for a temporary restraining order against Hotz - which is apparently a fairly common thing in cases like this. Essentially this means that Hotz has to hand all his gear (everything from entire PCs to USB drives and discs) over to the courts, cease his work on this project and take down any links to his work with the PS3. While this stops Hotz from furthering his hacks and buys Sony some time, it's a bit too late, because his work is already all over the Internet. We're sure this isn't the last bit of news you'll read relating to all this GeoHot vs. Sony drama.

Pause for Thought

OVER DINNER, ONE OF my housemates had gotten hot under the collar because I insinuated (jokingly) that the only reason he didn't like the thought of me watching the animated television series The Boondocks, was because he was racist. I discovered that Americans, unlike South Africans, are *particularly* disturbed by the term "racist" and still take it personally on a level I can't quite comprehend.

"Well, your job is to lick someone's ass," he told me angrily, looking for a way to insult me back.

All this came about because he would see my recorded episodes of The Boondocks on the DVR and remark that I'm a "n****r-lover". So I figured I'd call him a racist, it seemed fair game. Apparently it wasn't.

Do I think my job is to lick someone's ass? Certainly not. I've never considered myself the type to even slightly kowtow to the whims of publishers demanding

"I know I'm incredibly thankful for my job, even though I give my editor plenty of beef. When I started working for NAG, it was like a piece of the puzzle to my life slotted into place (like that long 5-square block in Tetris)."

higher review scores. I don't over-inflate the worth of a game, just because I was flown somewhere nice to play it early. In fact, I'm suspicious when a publisher spends a lot of money to try and make a good first impression. It's like, "okay, what's wrong with this game that you're flying people in from Greece, Spain, Finland and South Africa to see it".
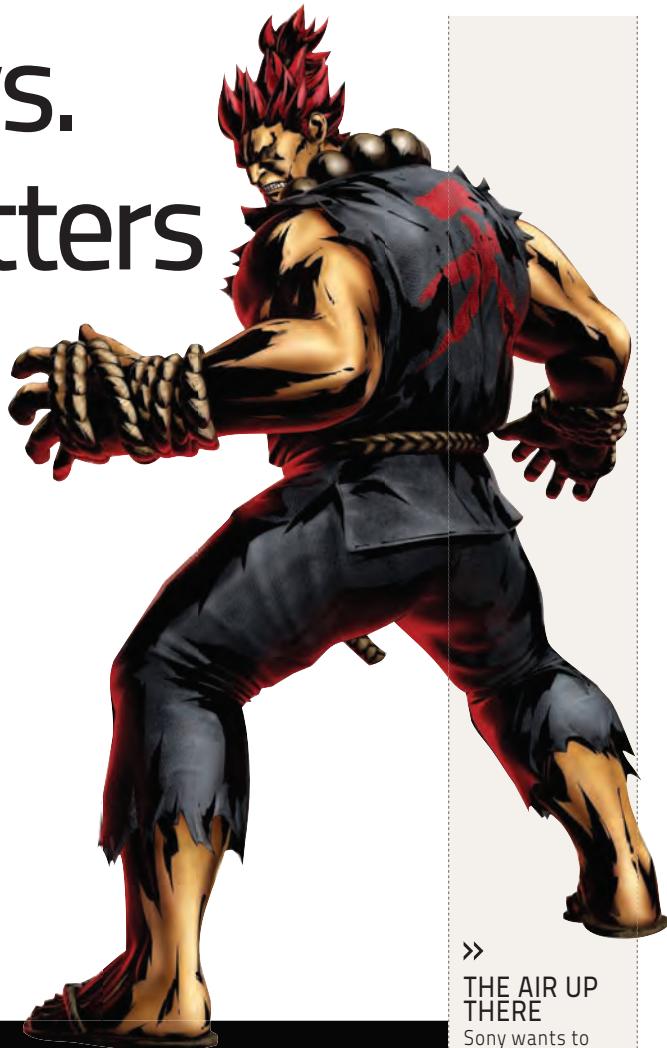
I know I'm incredibly thankful for my job, even though I give my editor plenty of beef. When I started working for NAG, it was like a piece of the puzzle to my life slotted into place (like that long 5-square block in Tetris). Suddenly, a huge chunk of my concerns disappeared, namely the "what the hell do I do with my life" bit.

Some people think I preen in the mirror, monologuing some self-aggrandising flattery about how amazing people must think I am for the wondrous words I put on the pages of NAG. Some days, I wish I *could* be like that. It must be fun. Honestly though, I'm just glad I get to do something for a living that isn't mind-numbingly boring. That's good enough for me.

Marvel vs. Ragequitters

CAPCOM'S MUCH-ANTICIPATED BRAWLER *MARVEL* vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds just got a whole lot more exciting for a very obscure reason. The developers are essentially creating a naughty corner for the game, where all the bad apples will be sent to think about what they've done. They'll gather up all of those horrible griefers that are sure to flood the game's online component, shove them all into a big griefer box and then only ever let those griefers play against other griefers like them.

Allow us to explain. Let's say you're the type of player who insists on ragequitting the moment you see that you're about to get your face pummeled. You scream, you whine and you drop out of the match prematurely. *MvC 3* will keep track of this and if you do it too many times, you'll be flagged as a ragequitter and the game will only pair you up with other ragequitters for your online matches. We can't think of a more fitting punishment and it's a brilliantly elegant way of discouraging people from being tools online. Now if only we could implement this sort of thing in all games...

Live-action Necromorphs

THE *DEAD SPACE* SERIES already has a bunch of supplementary media associated with it, including two super-gory animated films (*Dead Space: Downfall* and *Dead Space: Aftermath*), but what about the live-action side of things? Will we ever see a live-action movie based on *Dead Space*? According to the game's developer, Visceral Games, there's a decent chance that we will eventually be able to enjoy non-interactive strategic dismemberment on the big screen. Ian Milham, art director at Visceral Games, had this to say about a film adaptation of *Dead Space* in a recent interview with BBC News:

"We would love to have a live-action film and we've had a lot of discussion. But one of the reasons *Dead Space* still exists and is popular is because we've made sure to do everything right. So we're doing the same with the film, not just a cheap cash-in but to do something really worthwhile, so we'll see."

We're glad that Visceral is taking this seriously and that they don't simply see this as a way to make some extra cash. We love *Dead Space* far too much to see its reputation smashed to pieces because they gave the movie to some useless Hollywood tool who decides to turn *Dead Space* into a slightly scary coming-of-age story starring Shia LaBeouf.

» THE AIR UP THERE

Sony wants to PlayStation the world. They also want you to take your save games with you anywhere in the world, something which Steam has been pushing on developers for some time now. Perhaps not coincidentally (Steam is coming to PS3 in the near future), PS3 users will soon be able to cloud their save games with the next firmware update (3.60).

This system will allow users to optionally upload their save game files to the PlayStation Network, which will allow them to be downloaded onto another console with that user account anywhere else in the world. We're not entirely sure there's a huge market for this.

Demon's Souls spiritual successor is now called Dark Souls

A FEW MONTHS AGO THE spiritual successor to From Software's *Demon's Souls* was called *Project Dark*. The development team, however, was not happy to convey these notions of spiritual succession through identical motifs, environments and gameplay alone. Adamant to get their point across, they've changed the name to make sure everybody understands that this is not a sequel but still totally like their first, ridiculously brutal and unforgiving *Demon's Souls*.

Dark Souls sounds just as daunting and From Software are being careful to craft a game that is (wait for it) even harder than its predecessor; get ready to weep continuously all over your controller. While *Dark Souls* follows a different story and is set in a different world, the gameplay mechanic will be very similar to *Demon's Souls*. Insofar as structure is concerned, *Dark Souls* will be a lot more open-world than the previous title, which featured a hub and five branching worlds. With an open world comes greater exploration, and with greater exploration comes even more opportunities for your character to die horribly painful deaths!

Further good news is that PlayStation 3 owners won't be the only masochists fumbling their way through numerous deaths and respawns as *Dark Souls* will be coming to the Xbox 360 as well.

There is a future for Enslaved

D ID YOU BUY *ENSLAVED:* *Odyssey to the West* when it was released last year? We hope you did, because we loved the hell out of it. Unfortunately, like so many great games that came before it and passed by consumers completely unnoticed, *Enslaved* didn't sell very well. We're guessing everyone was much too busy salivating over the thought of pumping several million hours into *Call of Duty 17* to even give *Enslaved* a moment of their time. It's sad really. Thankfully, there is a silver lining here. Publisher Namco Bandai won't simply kill off the IP based on poor sales - they're still optimistic about its future.

"It didn't perform as well as we hoped it would, but we're very proud of how it was received by both the media and the gamers who have experienced it," said Lee Kirton, marketing director. "I can't discuss where we are in terms of a sequel, but we're looking at reviews and feedback from the press and because of the gameplay and quality that *Enslaved* delivered, we see it as a great catalogue title going forward."

ANARCHY IS SET TO REIGN

PlatinumGames, the studio behind *MadWorld, Bayonetta* and recently *Vanquish*, together with SEGA has announced their latest project: *Anarchy Reigns*. Not surprisingly, *Anarchy Reigns* takes a common concept – online versus multiplayer in this case – and gives it a bit of a unique spin. Where almost all online multiplayer games involve people shooting bullets and rockets at each other, *Anarchy Reigns* brings it up close and personal with melee and hand-to-hand combat.

It's described as a massively-multiplayer third-person brawler, and SEGA has promised that there will be a number of game modes including "Tag Team battles and Battle Royal." The game is being produced by Atsushi Inaba of *Okami*, *Vanquish* and *MadWorld* credit, and is being directed by Maskia Tamanaka. A newcomer to the director's chair, Tamanaka has lead character design experience with *MadWorld* and *Resident Evil* 4.

Anarchy Reigns will be released in Q4 this year for Xbox 360 and PS3.

The Evolution of...
LEGO games

1997 – LEGO Island

2000 – LEGO Land

2003 – Bionicle: The Game

2005 – LEGO Star Wars

2008 – LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original adventures

2008 – LEGO Batman

2011 – LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean

Splinter Cell Trilogy adds to ever-growing collection of HD re-releases

IT'S BEEN RUMOURED FOR some time already and has now been confirmed: a *Splinter Cell* HD Trilogy will be arriving on the PlayStation 3 towards the end of March 2011. The re-release is called *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell HD Trilogy* (how original), and it will have the first three games from the *Splinter Cell* franchise: *Splinter Cell, Pandora Tomorrow* and *Chaos Theory*. It's worth mentioning that a trilogy like this already exists for the PlayStation 2, but it's the high-def updates and support for 3D TVs that set this re-release apart.

Sony is clearly not going to stop with these HD re-releases any time soon. We've already seen *God of War* and *Sly Cooper* collections, and the highly anticipated re-release of *ICO* and *Shadow of the Colossus* is just around the corner. What's more, the *Prince of Persia Classic Trilogy HD* collection will also get a Blu-ray release on the same day as the *Splinter Cell* trilogy. We gamers have made nostalgia a lucrative business.

A Dark Tower videogame?

FOR THOSE OF YOU who don't already know, Ron Howard is set to direct the upcoming big-screen adaptation of Stephen King's excellent *The Dark Tower* series of novels. Howard (who previously directed films like *A Beautiful Mind* and *The Da Vinci Code*) is splitting King's sci-fi/fantasy/western epic into three theatrical releases, together with a TV series to fill the gaps between the movies. Now it's been revealed that there will also be a videogame tie-in.

Ain't It Cool News claims to have an insider source who states that there are "genuine plans" for the first movie to be released on May 13th, 2013, with "a very ambitious Game component being planned" as well. There is a staggering amount of material that can be drawn from the novels, so we're hoping that whoever ends up developing this planned game uses the rich world detailed in the books to its full potential. Basically, we hope it doesn't suck.

Gaming Charts

Look & Listen

Look & Listen recommends

PS3

SingStar: Afrikaanse Treffers

Mass Effect 2

Test Drive Unlimited 2

MOVE

We Dare

Top Spin 4

Dance On Broadway

XBOX 360

Shift 2 Unleashed

Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds

Test Drive Unlimited 2

KINECT

Paws & Claws: Fantastic Pets

Body and Brain Connection

Crossboard 7

PS2

Lego Star Wars III: The Clone Wars

Ben 10 Ultimate Alien: Cosmic Destruction

The Lord of the Rings: Aragorn's Quest

PC

Crysis 2

Dragon Age II

Knights Contract

PSP

Lego Star Wars III: The Clone Wars

Ben 10 Ultimate Alien: Cosmic Destruction

God of War: Ghost of Sparta

WII

Mario Sports Mix

Hello Kitty Seasons

Zumba Fitness

DS

Tangled

Zhu Zhu Pets: Kung Zhu

Rango

PS3

Gran Turismo 5

FIFA 11

Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit

Call of Duty: Black Ops

God of War Collection

XBOX 360

Call of Duty: Black Ops

Kinect Sports

FIFA 11

Forza Motorsport 3

Alan Wake

PS2

FIFA 11

Gran Turismo 4

Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights

WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2011

MX vs. ATV: Untamed

PC

World of Warcraft: Cataclysm

Call of Duty: Black Ops

The Sims 3: Late Night

The Sims 3

Need for Speed: Undercover

PSP

Gran Turismo

God of War: Ghost of Sparta

God of War: Chains of Olympus

Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters

MX vs. ATV: Untamed

WII

Wii Sports

Mario Kart Wii

New Super Mario Bros. Wii

Super Mario Galaxy 2

Wii Fit + Balance Board

DS

Mario Kart DS

New Super Mario Bros.

The Sims 3

Tinker Bell & The Great Fairy Rescue

Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story

>> SARIEN.NET GETS OFFICIAL GO-AHEAD

Do you know what sarien.net is? No? That's terrible; here's a quick low-down: sarien.net is an online, multiplayer platform where users can play HTML 5-based versions of classic Sierra *Quest* games like *Space Quest* and *Leisure Suit Larry* with other people. Recently, the creators of sarien.net were contacted by Activision to cease and desist operation of the site. Then, that sort-of went away.

After some legal chatting, Activision gave sarient.net approval to continue doing what they do best, provided they only give access to the first game in each series, and pull their iPad-based endeavours from the App Store (based on Activision's tentative plans to extend the Sierra *Quest* games to that platform, one can assume). So there you have it. Visit **www.sarien.net** and play some classic adventure games with other people with absolutely no worries that you're doing something wrong.

One thing at a time please

IN AN INTERVIEW WITH CVG, Crytek CEO Cevat Yerli admitted that a new title in the TimeSplitters series is something they've been considering - but they won't commit to anything until they're done making Crysis 2 the best game it can possibly be. "Yeah, we have been discussing it, but nothing has been confirmed yet, so let's see after Crysis 2," said Yerli. Crytek acquired Free Radical (the developers of the TimeSplitters series) back in 2009 and there's been rumour and speculation ever since that a new TimeSplitters could be on the cards. At the moment, however, Free Radical (now known as Crytek UK) is hard at work ensuring that Crysis 2's multiplayer component will blow our socks off when we get our hands on it.

The Beavatar

I'm in ur jungle, hiding from ur doods

The story so far: Our poor badger has disappeared (somewhere in the über jungle of Pandora). He's easily distracted by bright lights… so you can imagine. We are looking for him and will let you know.

In the meantime the awesomeness of *NAG* has attracted someone else, a pretty blue thing that's still a little shy (this is our awkward way of saying she's hiding in the magazine). So, to win the prize you must now find Ney'turik, she's hiding in the magazine somewhere… Get going. Send your sitings to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line 'March Beavatar'.

February Winner

Gary White ,
pg 32

WIN!

One person who finds the Beavatar will win a Thrustmaster Firestorm Dual Analog 3 Controller valued at R229.99 sponsored by Bowline & Thrustmaster.

GARGANTUAN list of competition winners!

November Dremel competition: Anton Griessel from Wonderboom South
November Case Mod Competition:
1st prize – Marinus Kelfkens from Garsfontein East
2nd prize - Werner Eksteen from Elarduspark

December Dremel competition: Quinton Keynel from Klerksdorp

NAG Online 24 Days of Giving:
Guitar hero 5 super bundle: Terry Norton of Cape Town

AVG Subs winners:
NG Loggerenberg from Bloemfontein;
Greg Haralambous from Fish Hoek;
Johann Nel from Bethlehem;
Zak Bornman from Sunward Park;
Braham du Plooy from Langenhoven Park;
Johan Scheepers from Edleen;
Caro Reinecke from Centurion;
Ruan Erasmus from Secunda;
Dr. Bernd Sonnenberg from Norwood;
Brenda Posthumus from Jeffrey's Bay;
Gareth Woods from Durban;
Gordon Staines from Oaklands;
Rowan van Weile from Vincent;
Jan Wessels from Sasolburg;
Trevor Misplon from Cape Town;
Matthew Pike from Westlake;
Michael Hay from Kempton Gate;
Chris Human from Tokai;
Nigel Benetton from Clareinch;
Nathan Tyler from Kensington;
Luke Neville from Potchefstroom;
Bernard Keyter from Kuilsriver;
Theunis van Niekerk from Totiusdal;
PJ Pretorius from Paarl;
X Lui from Wonderboom South;
P Nagel from Fauna Park;
Slade Smith from Scottsville;
Kyle Myburgh from The Willows;
Andrew Ross from Cape Gate;
Lisa Walker from Framesby;
M Martinho from Northmead;
Dion Keats from Kuils River;
Bruce Peters from Plumstead;
Caelon Voogt from Bromhof;
Kirsty Marais from Strubensvalley;
Keagan Allan from Westville;
Christopher Boshoff from Durbanville;
Francois Coertze from Wonderboom;
Dewald du Randt from Secunda;
Michael Isaacs from Milnerton;
Christian Swanepoel from The Reeds;
Thomas Coull from Cape Town;
Hentie Pietersen from Centurion;
Hendrik Fourie from Brookhorstspuit;
Elias Judin from Parkview;
Justin van der Westhuizen from Witbank;
Tristan Barrington from Weltevreden Park;
Liam & Ben Kufal from Diep River;
Bryce Gething from Panorama;
George Sotoropoulos from Solheim;
Dylan Boshoff from Hilton;
Troy Stonall from Benoni;
Terry Coetzer from Northmead;
Tinus Venter from Faerie Glen;
A Van Milligen from Sanlamhof;
Graeme Morgan from Strand;
Dr. Willem Labuschagne from Canada;
Eduard de Kock from Durbanville;
Annelize Fokker from Wierda Park;
Kyle Findlay from Cape Town;
Chris Lange from The Willows;
Frikkie Lourens from Newcastle ;
Neil McLean from Bramley;
Cabous Geldenhuys from Groenkloof;
Sumner Cassidy from Silverlakes;
Cameron Hamilton from Amanzimtoti;
Matthew Mc Williams from Constantia;
Roxanne Cloete from Durban;
Nashen Naidoo from Milnerton;
Devin Hazell from Camps Bay;
Timothy Grove from Ifafi;
Mark Haines from Pinegowrie;
Jeandre Janse Van Rensburg from Bloemfontein.

»

EA JUST HAEMOR-RHAGED $322 MILLION IN THREE MONTHS

EA suffered a significant drop in earnings over last year's Christmas period as they've just reported a net loss of $322 million for October 2010 through to 31 December 2010. Despite the fact that the second largest publisher is reporting "record breaking" game sales on iOS devices (iPhones, iPads and iPod Touch players) and big increases in digitally distributed titles, it wasn't enough to ensure a profitable fiscal third quarter. The net loss is four times the size as the one reported for 2009 and EA is attributing it to lacklustre sales figures of boxed games (ie: disc-based releases), which have a much higher production cost.

Hey angry fanboy, Treyarch needs you to shut up

TREYARCH RECENTLY PUT OUT a damn successful *Call of Duty* game called *Black Ops*; you may have heard of it. If you haven't then you've clearly picked up the wrong magazine and are sitting patiently in a dentist's waiting room; good luck, we hope it's nothing too painful.

Treyarch's community head, Josh Olin, believes that "angry entitled fans" are damaging the gaming industry by stifling creativity. How so? Well, the more fans of IPs (such as *Call of Duty*) whine and moan about changes to the game, the less inclined development teams are to take risks in creating new experiences. Instead, they opt for the safer, tried and tested formula to keep people happy, or so Olin believes.

"It's a creative industry - the most creative form of entertainment in existence. Too many developers who try new things are getting burned by "pundits" and angry entitled fans who look to be contrarian, sometimes simply for the sake of being contrarian. The only thing this attitude aims to achieve is stunt that creativity and innovation even further, which is something that no rational gamer looking to be entertained would want to do."

He might have a point, or he might be putting the blame on review scores and angry fans when it should be placed on publishers who, quite rightly, want a return on investments.

< Bytes >

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Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of *WWE All Stars* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line 'March Caption'.

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR: Now I rip out your spine and use your anus as an ashtray!

LAST MONTH'S WINNER:
I missed the beaver, so I blew up the stoopid beavatar!!!

-Michael louw

ZOMGOMGOMGOMG! Duke's got a release date

BET YOU THOUGHT THIS day would never come; the recently revived *Duke Nukem Forever* will be hitting retail stores on the 6th of May 2011. That's right, thanks to the lovely people at Gearbox and 2k Games, we will once again get to Mighty Boot Pig Cops in the face and throw dollar bills at strippers, which is something everyone has been waiting for since 1997. A demo is still planned for release prior to May, but there's no concrete date for that yet. Previously, only those who pre-ordered the *Borderlands GOTY Edition* were going to get access to the *Duke Nukem Forever* demo, but 2K has since come to their senses and said that the demo will be available for everyone "soon". Wow, even in a *Duke Nukem Forever* article about an actual release date, that frustratingly vague adverb manages to sneak in somewhere.

bt GAMES™ Release List

Dates subject to change without notice

MARCH: WEEK 1

Gods Eater Burst	PSP
Warhammer 40, 000: Dawn of War II: Retribution	PC
Disciples III: Resurrection of Mortis	PC
The First Templar	PC, Xbox 360
Warriors: Legends of Troy	Xbox 360, PS3

MARCH: WEEK 2

de Blob 2	Xbox 360, PS3, Wii, DS
Pokemon Black Version	DS
Pokemon White Version	DS
Elements of War	PC
Homefront	PC, Xbox 360, PS3
Dragon Age II	PC, Xbox 360, PS3

MARCH: WEEK 3

Fit in Six	PS3, Wii
Zhu Zhu Pets 2: Featuring The Wild Bunch	DS
Zhu Zhu Pets	DS
Zhu Zhu Pets: Kung Zhu Bundle	DS
Top Spin 4	Xbox 360, PS3, Wii
Shift 2 Unleashed	PC, Xbox 360, PS3
Crysis 2	PC, Xbox 360, PS3
The Sims Medieval	PC
MotoGP 10/11	Xbox 360, PS3
Monster Jam: Path of Destruction	Xbox 360, PS3, Wii, DS

MARCH: WEEK 4

Darkspore	PC
Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood	PC
Lego Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	PC, Xbox 360, PS3, Wii, DS, PSP
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters	Xbox 360, PS3, Wii
MotorStorm: Apocalypse	PS3
PlayStation Move Heroes	PS3

NAG GAMING LEAGUE

[NGL]

BLACK OPS ONLINE LEAGUE

[NGL]
NAG Gaming League
40
₵ 34501

270 GAMES. 68 CLANS. 16 days. That's what it took for us to complete the first Seeding Tourney for the NGL Black Ops Online League. Oh, and let's not forget 26 servers, a handful of dedicated admins, and a spattering of relationship issues as girlfriends and wives lost their other halves to gaming for two crazy weeks.

So let's explain how this league is going to work. All the clans that participated in the Seeding Tourney have now been placed into three divisions, based on the overall results as at 31 January (you can check out the clans and their rankings per division elsewhere on this spread). League play then started on 8 February, with the 2nd Division games being played on Tuesday evenings, 1st Division on Wednesday evenings, and Premier Division on Thursday evenings. Premier and 1st Division have 20 clans and 2nd Division has 28, so they will play each clan in their division once during Season 1. Season 1 will end on 17 June. The top 2 and bottom 2 clans in each division will be relegated or promoted. Season 2 will kick off on 28 June and run through to the weekend prior to rAge, 25 September, and will run in the same way that Season 1 was.

The top 8 clans in the Premier Division and the top 8 clans in 1st Division will go through to rAge to compete in the NGL Tournament, where the winning clan and a runner-up clan of each division will be crowned on Sunday, and prizes awarded to both winners and runners-up. We're still working on securing and finalising prizes and sponsorships, so will update you on this in an upcoming issue.

So, dates to remember …
Season 1: 8 February – 17 June [19 weeks]
Season 2: 28 June – 25 September [13 weeks]
rAge NGL Tournament: 30 September – 2 October
We do also have some other things planned for this year, but will share them with you when we're ready. In the mean time keep an eye on www.nagleague. co.za for up to date news or e-mail us at **info@nagleague.co.za** if you're keen to get involved in any way.

Lastly, a big shout out to all the gamers who have travelled this new path with us so far. Granted, there have been some teething issues which we've managed to overcome, and at times we asked a lot of you as we muddled through this process. But the Steam Black Ops community in SA is an incredible bunch of gamers, and we hope you will have loads of fun over the next few months as your clans fight their way to victory. **NAG**
Lauren Das Neves
[Guardi3n]

< FEATURE: [NGL] Black Ops Online League >

NAG GAMING
LEAGUE

NGL
2011

CLAN RANKINGS AFTER THE SEEDING MATCHES

PREMIER DIVISION
1. vegA
2. aE
3. DSW.CsB
4. impi
5. N
6. K†K
7. DSW.Es
8. 32 Battalion
9. pW
10. BASF
11. DAC
12. FU
13. Pew
14. ASF - Eagles
15. UbS AK
16. iG1 Rolling Thunder
17. A10
18. 32 Battlion
19. ATF
20. mo0

1st DIVISION
1. pX
2. CraK
3. ASF Hawks
4. UbS RW
5. UpS
6. ESWAT
7. FFL Younglings
8. Xs2
9. VAMP - L
10. UGR
11. DSW.BoB
12. SS Resurrection
13. LOC
14. KK
15. FFL
16. Xs1
17. w2F
18. DAC2
19. dTs
20. Ti

2nd DIVISION
1. DzG2
2. Sox
3. RIG
4. PSY
5. NI
6. SS Redemption
7. w2F-R
8. sPa
9. 2old
10. J2G
11. iG2 Ghost
12. DzG
13. iFk
14. CyG
15. IF
16. BUD
17. StK
18. BASF2
19. Vamp Equi
20. flash

* 8 newly registered clans have been added to this division for the League.

A WORD FROM THE TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR

15 days of working 9 hours a day and 5 hours of Black Ops afterwards, and there is a kind of emptiness I can't explain. I'm sure my girlfriend will want to hear that it's because I missed her lots during this time (yes babe that is the emptiness I feel). The Seeding Tournament of the 1st NGL Black Ops Online League has just proven to me how hungry and eager our gaming community is in South Africa. The responses I've seen on the boards and conversations I've had with people have shown me how interested and excited gamers are about this. Yes we can argue about the competitive side of Black Ops for ages and ages but I think this goes beyond that. Sure the Premier Division is there for the all-out competitive guys and the dark horses to show their metal, but what sets this NGL comp out for me is the amount of what I like to call Weekend Warriors who are playing. Guys and girls (women too) that just want to enjoy a bit of gaming with friends and maybe kill a couple of girlyboys. This has shown me that our community has not lost sight of what gaming is all about, and that is to have fun. Even my 'kaas en wyn' team made it to the 1st Division. I've seen some amazing matches, some close encounters and epic comebacks, some epic 'nades and a couple of sick sniper shots. It's been an awesome two weeks and that was just to see who is in what division. So here I sit a week away from League play kicking off, getting countless e-mails of more and more teams wanting to join the league, and this emptiness is being filled with the excitement of the League starting (no babe it's actually being filled by you).

   Enjoy the NGL Black Ops Online League, and keep your eyes wide open on the site and forum because there are exciting things coming, and we will go way out of our way to give South African gamers what they want and what they have never had.

Frikkie Jansen van Rensburg
[fr1dg3]

"NAG have done an awesome job arranging this and putting in the effort. Also thanks to all the guys from the various teams acting as admins. The effort and work are greatly appreciated. Even if some of us moan a lot :D"
iGLevi

"Hey I just want to say a big thanks to NAG and the admins that have been setting this up. The fantastic thing of this little community is that if we ask for something to perhaps be done on site or something it is done, nice to be listened to for a change :) So far it all seems to be going on track, a little bumpy but its new so can expect a few hiccups now and again, but all in all I'm enjoying this league so far."
Shadow

"Thank you NAG; for a very smoothly run seeding round. It seems that the divisions are competitively matched with generally the right teams in the right places. I'm sure a few clans would beg to differ."
MandrethiN

"Yeah big ups for NAG and all the admins contributing to make this league a fun one. :D I would also like to thank the teams playing as well for everyone's positive attitude as that will help this community build itself up :) GL to everyone in the league and remember HF :D"
C-MAN

LEGO PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

THE VIDEO GAME

HANDS ON

DEVELOPER > Traveller's Tales   **PUBLISHER** > Disney Interactive Studios   **RELEASE DATE** > May 2011   **WEB** > www.ttgames.com   **GENRE** > Action Adventure   **PLATFORMS** > Xbox 360 | PC | PS3 | Wii | DS | PSP

I'm Cap'n Jack Sparrow

As I write this, I know it's sunny in South Africa. I know someone… somewhere… is having a braai, standing around in shorts and a t-shirt, enjoying the summer sunshine. That's not me though, because I was shoved in a crate, tossed on a plane and flown off to a quaint little village/town/thing in Manchester in the UK, where it is currently freezing, the sun is nowhere to be seen and shorts and t-shirts are worn by only the craziest of the crazies. It's here that you'll find the headquarters of Traveller's Tales: developer of those fantastic, delightfully fun *Lego [Insert Franchise Here]* videogames. This is where I was sent to find out more about the inner workings of Traveller's Tales and to uncover some info on their new title, *Lego Pirates of the Caribbean: The Video Game*.

After meeting the folks at Traveller's Tales, a few things became very clear, very quickly. These people love what they do. Not only are they passionate about Lego (there's even a bunch of Lego stashed in their office) and the unique style that it brings to their games, but they're also huge fans of the franchises that they recreate using their own special Lego touch. This is their first time working with Disney, whose *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies are prime candidates for some Lego retrofitting. After a brief presentation, we were given the opportunity to play through a couple of levels (specifically Port Royal and Tortuga - both of which are pulled from *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*) from the game.

Set to coincide with the release of the fourth film this May, the game will span all four films, which you're free to play through in any order you wish. Iconic scenes from the movies have been lovingly recreated here, such as that tussle between Will Turner and Jack Sparrow at the blacksmith's workshop when the two characters first meet in *Curse of the Black Pearl*. All the characters behave just as you'd expect them to - we loved the fact that Jack Sparrow's trademark swagger and rum-fuelled insanity have been faithfully captured here. As it has always been with the *Lego* series of games, drop-in/drop-out co-op is where this game is at its most fun as players work together to bash Lego enemies, solve puzzles and unlock rewards. Co-op is once again restricted to local play and no online co-op will be offered. We're told that the final game will boast over 70 characters from the films - which is a ridiculous number considering that the developers insist that each of these characters will have a unique special ability that none of the other characters can replicate. Some characters can repair broken objects, others can double jump and some can smash through specifically marked objects.

New to the series is underwater gameplay. At one point in the demo levels, Jack and Will grab a couple barrels, slip them over themselves, then proceed to mosey around on the ocean floor in order to solve a simple cooperative puzzle. We're told that certain characters won't be forced to resort to the use of barrels for some underwater action. Captain Barbossa and his undead pirate crew, for example, can stay underwater indefinitely, able to manipulate objects underwater seeing as they're not restricted by large, unwieldy barrels. All these different character traits are important, because unlocking all the game's secrets requires more than just a single play through of the levels in Story mode - you'll need to go back in Free Play mode (which will apparently have some new features) with more characters (and therefore, more special abilities) in order to solve every puzzle, access every hidden area and collect every collectable. Collecting studs and finding all the secrets scattered across the levels is still as infuriatingly addictive as it's always been, so the obsessive compulsive among you will be happy to know that there will be a ton of

< FEATURE: Lego Pirates of the Caribbean: The Video Game >

HUMPH

There's no dialogue in the *Lego* games. During cut scenes, characters convey emotions via simple grunts, sighs and silly noises. So we were surprised to learn that there is actually a script for each title. A script filled with grunts, sighs and silly noises, but a script nonetheless. It's astounding that a team of voice actors works hard at getting this special brand of wordless dialogue just right for each game, but we're definitely grateful for it - it adds an extra layer of comedy on top of an already funny experience.

AVAST YE SCURVY DOGS

While the *Lego* games have always featured vehicular gameplay, this new title has an entirely new avenue to explore - that of ship-to-ship combat on the high seas. We're told that we'll be able to fire cannons, unlock new ships (like the Black Pearl) and more, all in the name of offering as much gameplay variety as possible. Unfortunately, we didn't get to see this in action, but we did get to see a few smaller-scale vehicle segments in the levels we played, such as one in which you row a small rowboat between buoys for a reward. Or something. We didn't particularly care, because simple science dictates that pirate ships bristling with cannons are infinitely more exciting than rowboats.

stuff to hunt down in this game.

There's a variety of intricate details packed into this new game. Combat, for example, involves more than wildly swinging a cutlass until Lego enemies explode in a shower of plastic bricks - characters parry and dodge and perform a deadly (but cute) dance before landing comical death blows. The visuals are bright and cheery and everything looks and sounds and feels exactly as you'd expect it to. The *Pirates of the Caribbean* soundtrack alone should be enough to get fans riled up. Also worth noting are the new sticky platforms: a new feature the developers have added in an attempt to lower the global suicide rate by making the game's platforming elements less frustrating. The *Lego* series of games has gradually evolved over the years since its birth in the form of the first *Lego Star Wars* back in 2005 and with every iteration Traveller's Tales refines the experience a bit more, using the wealth of experience they've amassed over the years to put out the best title they possibly can. At its core though, the series is all about light-hearted fun and *Lego Pirates of the Caribbean* looks set to continue that trend. It's safe to say that this is undoubtedly more of the same Lego-infused action adventuring that fans love, but with 100% more Jack Sparrow and undead pirates.

The Interview . . . Yar

We drunkenly waved a blunt rapier around the Traveller's Tales studio until our demands were met and we were allowed to speak to someone in charge of the proceedings. Turns out that was unnecessary, because Phillip Ring (all-round nice guy and producer of *Lego Pirates of the Caribbean: The Video Game*) had already penned us into his diary for an interview. This is how it went:

NAG: Can you tell us a bit about what Lego means to you?

Phillip Ring: Well, I was a Lego fan when I was a kid, but interestingly, my older brother got all the Lego sets when he was young. So by the time those sets were passed on to me, I had a pile of Lego bricks in a tin with no instructions. So mine was all "can I build it with my own imagination"-style Lego, and personally my imagination isn't great so I had a lot of cars that looked very square.

NAG: We think that happened to middle children all over the world.

PR: Yeah. [Laughs] So my Lego was just piles of bricks, which was great. My brother had a ton of the space Lego stuff, like blue spaceships with grey baseplates and things like that. So I had a lot of fun with that, and then getting the job to work on *Lego* titles was great for me. I joined the company around the time that we were doing *The Complete Saga*, so I'd seen the *Lego Star Wars* games and I'd actually played them. And just instantly, working here, even if you're not a Lego fan you become a Lego fan, because you work so closely with Lego and see all the pieces that they create, you always find something that's going to interest you. It's great seeing all the different sets that are around nowadays.
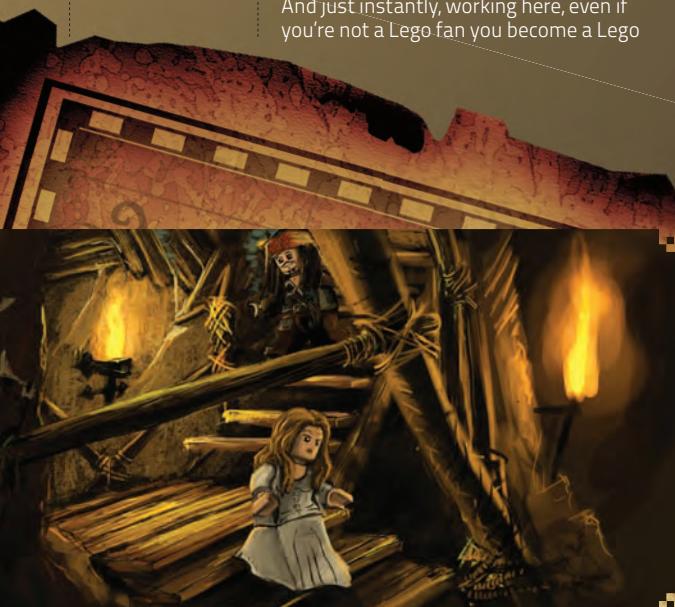
NAG: We hope we don't offend you with this question, but Traveller's Tales: over the years you guys have become known as "The Lego Guys." Do you ever feel compelled to do anything else?

PR: As the company progressed, we started off trying other stuff, and then we moved onto the *Lego* titles. What we've actually found is that we love making these games. We have a lot of fun creating these games for people and we get loads of good feedback from people saying that they want to see new *Lego* games. We get loads of requests for new *Lego* titles - we get lists of like 20 or 30 different titles saying, "Make all these for me please." We always keep looking into other things, but at the moment, we get to make these games that people are enjoying and so we're really happy to carry on doing that.

NAG: Why do you think the *Lego* franchise is so successful?

PR: I think it's because it appeals to such a wide audience, a wide age range. I mean, I grew up with Lego and other people did as well. So as the younger generations and people who have kids introduce them to Lego, the games kind of have the same impact, that people can play these games and they can play them with the younger kids and the kids will enjoy it because of the fun gameplay and the quirky humour that we

< FEATURE: Lego Pirates of the Caribbean: The Video Game >

have. The adults like it because they know it's Lego and they know what Lego brings to the game, what Lego stands for effectively, but then we also get to do the humour and comedy that they will appreciate as well - especially working the franchises that we do. People of all ages like things like *Star Wars* and *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Batman* - we get to parody those worlds. It's like a nostalgic thing from their childhood, but it's also a game that's new, that's fun and has some new gameplay mechanics.

NAG: So this is your first time working with Disney. What's Disney been like compared to previous publishers you've worked with?
PR: Disney's been great to work with. They really have. They give us access to top-secret film content, so we can put it in the game. They've been really helpful, showing us what they've been doing with the film, we got to read early versions of the script and watch it come along. Disney has a relationship with Lego as well, so we're all kind of working together towards the same goal, so that's been really helpful - we can speak openly with Lego, we can speak openly with Disney and just make sure that everyone's happy to work with the game and is happy with where it's going.

NAG: Is there any one franchise that you wish you could apply the Lego treatment to? Kind of like a dream Lego job that you want to work on.
PR: There's a few of them, really. As a personal choice, I'd like to see a *Lego* game that I know we'd never make, because it probably would never fit. I'm a big fan of things like the *Alien/s* films.

NAG: That would be great: Lego chest bursters.
PR: [Laughs] Yeah, but if you actually sat down and said, "Okay, let's design this game," it would be so tricky. It just wouldn't work. In terms of other franchises, I've considered things like *Back to the Future* and *The Godfather*. There are a lot of films out there, but I think the biggest obstacle is the audience factor - if we took like a really niche, really cold film and turned it into a *Lego* title,

it might not have the same appeal as our other titles.

NAG: *Lego The Godfather* - another game we'd love to see. Is there any one particular feature that you've added to this new title that you and the team are particularly proud of?
PR: Personally, I quite like the vertical structure that we can add to the levels by adding things like the Lego climbing walls and the sticky platforms, because we get to do some really cool things in some of the levels that we haven't had a chance to show you today, we've got some really cool elements and some really cool action-oriented scenes. You can sort of see where we're going with that, with the mechanics.

NAG: The ship segments that you very briefly touched on during the presentation: are those the evolution of the vehicular segments from the previous games?
PR: Yeah, a little bit. We were looking at what we've done in the past and we wondered how we would adapt that to the *Pirates* world and we obviously decided to add sailing pirate ships. So we're looking at making it so that these bonus levels are a lot of fun, a fun way to actually sail a pirate ship around and shoot the cannons, be able to do very pirate-y things on the sea. So they're kind of like a bonus thing that we wanted to add because we wanted to develop the vehicle gameplay that we've had in the past.

NAG: One final question: is there any question that you wish we'd asked, but we didn't? A question that you really want to answer, but no journo has asked you yet?
PR: Well, this is a first look, so I'm sworn to secrecy by the two Disney bouncers at my sides. [Laughs] So there are loads of cool things that I want to tell you about, that you're really going to enjoy in the game, but I'm sworn to secrecy. I think there's going to be a lot of things that people are going to enjoy.

NAG: Thanks very much.
PR: No problem. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

Comeback Queen
Unlike a washed-up analogue star, the iterative nature of videogames gives reboots, remakes and re-imaginings a far better track record for a protagonist's true comeback, even after a string of failures. "Forget everything you know about *Tomb Raider*," says Darrell Gallagher, Head of Studio for Crystal Dynamics. "We are exploring things that have never been done before in this game. This is an origins story that creates Lara Croft and takes her on a character defining journey like no other." No more hunting for keys or strange artefacts to open doors for no good reason, or bizarrely acrobatic gunplay against endangered species. In this new deal for *Tomb Raider*, Lara is now the endangered one and will have to scavenge for resources to combine into tools with which to survive.

< FEATURE: Tomb Raider >

DEVELOPER > Crystal Dynamics   **PUBLISHER** > Square Enix   **RELEASE DATE** > TBA   **WEB** > www.tombraider.com

Tomb Raider

Not your brother's Lara

SHE WAKES INTO DARKNESS, becoming aware of her surroundings. She's upside-down, suspended and restrained above a rocky cave floor. Next to her is a fellow crewmember, he's dead and may have been tortured. She hears distant screams. Her fear drives her to struggle and escape, landing on a sharp rock that pierces her side. Caked in mud, bleeding and without weapons or tools, Lara must survive a mysterious island filled with traps and hostile natives.

A few days ago, fresh from university and eager to make a name for herself the 21-year-old Lara Croft had set sale aboard the salvage ship *Endurance*. Alongside Captain Conrad Roth, an ex-Royal Marine commando known for breaking the law when it suits him, they were travelling to the coast of Japan to find lost relics. The expedition encountered a storm and the *Endurance* split in two, sinking beneath the waves.

Human, vulnerable but driven and intelligent, this is the new Lara Croft in a completely revamped and rebooted franchise. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

"Human, vulnerable but driven and intelligent, this is the new Lara Croft in a completely revamped and rebooted franchise."

(NEW) LARA CROFT

She bleeds, bruises, cries and shows genuine pain on her face, but she perseveres. Familiar, yet fresh, is the new Lara. Like the game around her, Lara has been rebuilt from the ground up, starting from a motivation and a silhouette.

"For me, every character design starts with who that person is and what motivates them," explains Brian Horton, senior art director at Crystal Dynamics. "What we chose to do very early on with Lara was not start with the surface qualities but instead really work on who she was as a character."

The team designed Lara working up from silhouettes, adding physical features with attention given to her iconic ponytail and the spatial relationship between the eyes, nose and mouth.

"After crafting the biography, our goal was to make her as believable and relatable as possible", Horton continues. "We wanted to make a girl that felt familiar, but still has a special quality about her. Something about the way her eyes look and the expression on her face that makes you want to care for her. That was our number one goal. We wanted to have empathy for Lara, and at the same time show the inner strength that made it clear she was going to become a hero."

Part of the reboot of the entire franchise involves cutting away all ancillary products, which includes the old promotional practices and media ventures. Translation: no more live-action models for Lara. Also, a completely new wardrobe was in order.

"She is on this expedition and has practical clothing - cargo pants and layered tank tops and boots - because she is in and among a group that share the same values. The end result was a look that is both contemporary and timeless. We didn't want the look to be too trendy or too hip, but she still needed to feel youthful and relevant."

All fine and well but what about her sex appeal then, asks the randy male in the back.

"As far as sex appeal, we're always looking to make a character that people want to play, and part of that is a level of attractiveness and being drawn to Lara. But we don't want to play up sexuality for sexuality's sake. Context and motivation are paramount in this project. I think what's going to be compelling, and what our version of sexy is, is the toughness through adverse conditions, with a beauty and vulnerability showing through. That is sexy in its own way."

When Crystal Dynamics showed the new Lara off behind closed doors, they did eye-tracking studies to see where people looked at the old model, and the new. Compared to the old design, rather than fixating on Lara's guns (both sets) or curves, most participants gazed into her brown eyes instead.

"Her inexperience with violence shows, and the game makes sure to put proper emphasis on the first time she's forced to kill"

TOMB RAIDER GAMEPLAY 2.0

It's all about "Action Survival" and perhaps, having learned some lessons from *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, the new *Tomb Raider* fuses adventure with action in the same way that Batman did. Playing heavily in the "Metroid-Castlevania" genre, as Lara crafts more gear she gains access to new areas. You'll set up basecamps in specific areas, which act as save points and a place to craft using the raw materials you find through exploration. You can fast-travel between basecamps, but will miss out on the salvage you might find exploring.

Player-driven exploration, discovery and dynamic terrain traversal are the new key elements to this *Tomb Raider*. "I think that the major difference between this game and the old is the concept of smoke and mirrors," says Darrell Gallagher, studio head at Crystal Dynamics. "There was an illusion of freedom because of streaming and loading that would pop you out in a different location, but this is absolutely real. You can literally go any direction that you see and carve your own way to the finish line instead of being guided."

There will still be scripted moments, described as "survival escapes", but with a genuine level of interactivity so they don't feel like glorified cut scenes. As the story progresses and you uncover more of the island's secrets, Lara will grow as a character along with her abilities.

"It was important in the game to not only deliver the character arc of Lara Croft emotionally, but to deliver it in gameplay as well so the player gets to grow into a hardened survivor," says experience director Noah Hughes.

Areas initially inaccessible become unlocked because Lara learns how to reach them, not because of artificial gating. Much about the new mechanics in *Tomb Raider* is tightly guarded, but Crystal Dynamics admits this is no simulator.

"We aren't treating survival as simply not dying," Hughes says. "This isn't about walking around an island and picking berries," explains lead designer Daniel Neuburger. "But it is giving a reward for exploration that can feed back into the action pacing of the game. We want these systems to have flexibility for different player types. The action gamer can pay less attention but still get something out of this, and people who like to explore will be rewarded with something more fulfilling." Such as new items, clues to the island's inhabitants, as well as resources.

Gunplay Revisited

"We've been putting a huge amount of effort into the combat, a much larger emphasis than we've put into any of our previous titles," says studio head Darrell Gallagher. Bringing the franchise up to speed, *Tomb Raider* drops all the gunplay conventions from previous entries in the franchise and follows more along the lines of *Uncharted*, removing lock-on and requiring the player to precision-aim. "The free aim system will help make *Tomb Raider* competitive amongst our peers in the genre, while maintaining a unique flavour." Lara, being fresh out of university, has never killed anyone. Her inexperience with violence shows, and the game makes sure to put proper emphasis on the first time she's forced to kill. "It's pretty traumatic to do it for that first time, irrespective of the reasons you were forced to," says Karl Stewart, global brand director at Crystal Dynamics. "That is a defining moment for the character." While the team isn't ready to reveal everything about the weapons, they hint at the line between tools, weapons and gear being blurred. Lara will have to be resourceful.

< FEATURE: Tomb Raider >

»

Too Long, Didn't Read
"Iconic characters, whether they are heroic or not, are obvious products of their time," says Timothy Longo Jr., franchise director at Crystal Dynamics. "Specifically with franchises, they need to evolve with the time. When they don't, you can tell. They will fail. Crystal was bold in saying 'We have to do something big, something different.'" The new *Tomb Raider* is a full reboot, and goes in a new direction both in gameplay and story. There is no more lock-on gunplay. Concept art shows Lara with only a bow, pistol and shotgun. Confirmed is the climbing axe, useful for melee combat as well as traversing terrain. Survival elements involve scavenging the island for food and resources. "This is a survival story. This is an origin story," Longo says. "Our goal is to take a very human and relatable character, and break her down before we rebuild her - to put her through survival challenges and have her come out a changed person, someone the player will relate to."

"The reason Tomb Raider as a series went downhill was because each successive development team had a kind of ignorance as to the original game's importance. "

LARA CROFT (CIRCA 1990)

Shallow history tends to remember *Tomb Raider* for its use of a hard-edged female heroine during a time of male-dominated characters. There is always mention of the derision it gained for using a "sexist stereotype to appeal to teenage boys".

The real problem *Tomb Raider* faces, as a franchise, is that its original significance and context has long been lost. Having suffered for so long in mediocrity, it's not clearly remembered how revolutionary Tomb Raider was at its inception in 1996. It was a proof of concept, showing that a certain flavour of meaty, sink-your-teeth-into action-adventure title *could* be made in 3D. It was played not for its graphics, CG cut scenes or story (though those helped), but because it was the first sign of a successor to 2D games like *Prince of Persia, Flashback, Another World* and the mighty *Metroid*.

Before *Tomb Raider*, early attempts at such games in three dimensions were awkward, floundering, bugged messes that weren't fun to play. The reason *Tomb Raider* as a series went downhill was because each successive development team had a kind of ignorance as to the original game's importance. Each focused overly on the adventures of "dashing, sexy Lara - international woman of mystery". They failed to continue researching how to advance the 3D action-adventure and became surpassed by other developers. Games which took over where *Tomb Raider* left off, like *Prince of Persia: Sands of Time* and *Uncharted*, every series but *Tomb Raider*, better served the legacy the first game created.

It was the first game to bring the puzzle-traversal-platform into 3D with a solid world that felt real and could be explored in a natural way. Its impact was no less than the impact of the original *Prince of Persia*. Except these days people don't over-analyse the Prince, speaking about what kind of leading male role-model each game's interpretation of him is, or his crotch size. (Well, he did have a bit of an anger issue in *Warrior Within*, but that's neither here nor there.) They talk about what each new game brings to the traversal platform adventure genre. *Tomb Raider* has been mediocre for so long, that people have begun to subconsciously talk about everything *except* how it is as a video game.
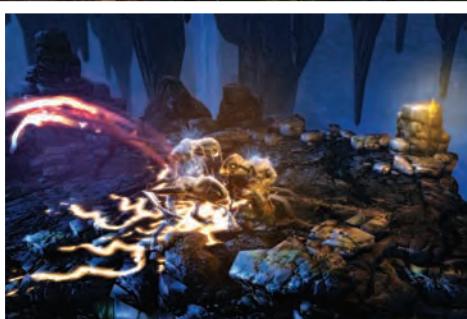
Who did what now?

The first *Dungeon Siege* with its jaunty ear-worm theme music and its direct sequel (plus expansion) were developed by Chris Taylor and his studio Gas Powered Games. The follow-ups however, were not. *Dungeon Siege: Legends of Aranna* was developed by Mad Doc Software and *Dungeon Siege: Throne of Agony* (PSP) was developed by SuperVillain Studios. Square Enix acquired complete ownership of the Dungeon Siege franchise in 2010, and handed the development of *Dungeon Siege III* over to Obsidian Entertainment. "Square actually purchased the IP from Gas Powered, and it's a Square brand now," said Obsidian CEO Feargus Urquhart.

Dungeon Siege III

Third time's the charm-spell, hyuck.

GENRE > Action role-playing

PC   **360**   **PS3**   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

IF A SEQUEL IS developed by a different developer entirely, published by a different publisher and takes little inspiration from the previous entries in the series aside from a dab of back-story, is it still a sequel?

Looking (and by some accounts, playing) like *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* cross-bred with an offline MMO-diet, its lack of ties to previous *Dungeon Siege* games may not be a bad thing. There is more focus on pure action in *Dungeon Siege III*. After picking a class (only the offensive-centric Guardian has been revealed so far), players swing giant two-handed swords or the classic sword-and-shield combination, you can switch between them real-time – depending on the situation. As you mass-murder your way through monsters, a power bar fills up, used to trigger screen-clearing slams and sword-dashes. Loot and experience rain from the sky, automatically picked up to keep the action flowing.

The world is laid out with quest-hub locations where you talk to NPCs using a *Mass Effect*-style conversation wheel to get quests. Most quests seen so far are basic go-here-kill-this types. The hack 'n slash paradigms are in full effect from the branching ability trees right down to the drop-in/drop-out cooperative play (which is available from the start). The main plot will follow whoever is host, with the second player taking over the unnamed fill-in character slot. The other slots are taken up by story-related A.I. controlled characters. You can't switch between your protagonist and other team-members in the single-player.

It's all a little on the nose really. The plot is your generic fantasy fair: evil sorceress, corrupt chancellors and greedy merchants. Your character's childhood home is burned to the ground at the start, and the world cries out for

>> Chris Taylor, who is only peripherally involved in *Dungeon Siege III*, likes toga parties – truth.

a saviour. Good thing *we're* around to be that saviour. At least it takes place inside the Kingdom of Ehb from the first *Dungeon Siege*, which looks quite good in Obsidian's proprietary Onyx engine.

Obsidian has a decent track record (*Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic, Fallout: New Vegas, Neverwinter Nights 2*) but not without its blemishes (*Alpha Protocol*). Even though Obsidian and Square Enix are known for stories with depth, it remains to be seen how this new *Dungeon Siege* will pan out. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

Preview

DEVELOPER > Naughty Dog   **PUBLISHER** > Sony Computer Entertainment   **RELEASE DATE** > November 2011   **WEB** > www.unchartedthegame.com

Why desert?

Developer Naughty Dog is known for taking its entire staff on extended vacations (like a Caribbean cruise) after finishing a game. This may contribute to why they are one of the most lauded developers in the industry. After returning from their post-*Uncharted 2* vacation, the team wanted something technically challenging, more-so than the jungles and snow of the first two games. Desert, with its complex sand properties - displacement, flowing, pouring - seemed a natural fit technically and thematically.

Chasing Sir Francis Drake

Drawing inspiration from the real-world archaeologist and explorer T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia), Nate searches for the legendary lost city, the Iram of the Pillars, in the vast Rub'al Khali desert while following another lead left by his supposed ancestor Sir Francis Drake. The Iram of Pillars is, according to Islamic beliefs, akin to that of the Christian mythology surrounding the sinful Sodom and Gomorrah: its king defied the warnings of God who thus smote the city, driving it into the sands.

Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception

Going boldly going where Ms Croft did not...

GENRE > Action Adventure

PC   360   **PS3**   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

FROM THE JUNGLES OF *Uncharted* to the snow in *Uncharted 2* and now the vast desert in *Uncharted 3*, Drake hops temperate zones like a dancing and singing Bollywood hero [*don't knock it until you've tried it, Ed*]. So what's new in his upcoming adventure to the sandy middle-of-nowhere – where there's bound to be tons of stuff to shoot and punch?

The screenshots speak for the improved visuals, but what they don't show is Drake's new barroom brawling skills.

"One of the things we always felt was missing in the action/adventure genre is a brawl", says *Uncharted 3* director Justin Richmond. "You can engage multiple targets, which you couldn't do last game. They're trying to ring you - push you back in the middle. On top of that, Drake will use environmental things around him. So if there's a bottle on a bar he'll pick it up and smash it against their head or he'll smash them into the bar. We're more heavily using the counter button so the counter can actually do multiple things at the same time. Sometimes he'll duck and you'll be able to do a quick punch. It's all contextual based on what's happening in the game. It's still relatively simple, but it feels a bit deeper."

Aside from action-archaeology, *Drake's Deception* will expand on the history between Drake and Victor, bringing depth to their bromance. "This is Nate's lifelong friend and partner and mentor, and pretty much the closest thing to a father figure he's got," says creative director Amy Hennig. "And we realise that Sully is absolutely a fan favourite and people want to know more about their backstory and their history and how this unlikely duo came together. So for us their relationship is one of the main thread lines in our story, and the bonds of this partnership is explored and tested in this story."

Even though the game is only a year away, Naughty Dog is keeping much under wraps. What we do know is enemies can now form squads, ammunition is automatically picked up, stereoscopic 3D will be supported and multiplayer/co-op features will be greatly improved and expanded. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

The subtitle has multiple meanings and interpretations: either Drake could be deceiving, or be deceived. It's so deep!

Plot Twist Pretzel

Mortal Kombat is the 9th game in the series; its story begins after the events of *Mortal Kombat: Armageddon* but then jumps right back in time to when the first three games happened. You see, just as Raiden is about to be murdered by Shao Kahn (spoiler alert), he sends a telepathic message back in time to an earlier version of himself. Thus enlightened, the new *Kombat* follows Raiden as he changes events in the hopes of avoiding his future demise. It's unclear how this will alter the original trilogy's plot. What we do know is the story mode features elaborate in-engine cut scenes for its on-going narrative. The tournament ladder mode is still an option, complete with animated ending for your selected character.

Mortal Kombat

"Test your might!" done right!

GENRE > Fighting

PC   **360   PS3**   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

"**W**HILE WE WERE MAKING it [*Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe*], we knew we were going to go back to an M-rated game. We were going to go back to the 2D fighting plane and revisit the older story. That whole plan was already in place", says Ed Boon, creative director on *Mortal Kombat*.

And not a moment too soon... The first *Mortal Kombat*, released in 1992, was a keystone title in the gaming industry. What it lacked in its unsophisticated fighting system, it made up for with guts, literal and figurative. After the third game in the series, things went downhill, supported only by the most fervent (and desperate) fans.

The new *Kombat* takes things back to basics and focuses on what matters. Modes include Tag-Team, Challenge Tower and King of the Hill with up to 8 players and a full rating system. There's a proper training arena for practising character and stage fatalities as much as you want, downloadable content for future character additions and a *Deadly Alliance* style 'Krypt' system with currency for unlocking features.

Returning veterans are the cast from the first three games, including Cyrax,

Goro, Jade, Sektor, Reptile, Jax and Kung Lao. While it's known that Kratos will be the PS3 exclusive character, brought to the Netherworld by some godly hijinks, it's unknown what the 360 exclusive character will be, if any. Wouldn't a Marcus Fenix be cool? He's got a chainsaw, after all.

BACK TO BASICS
Following in the footsteps of *Street Fighter IV*, the new *Kombat* has full 3D visuals but characters fight on a 2D plane. While it takes cues from the original trilogy's combat system, the entire fight system has been overhauled
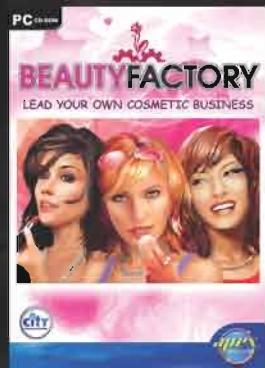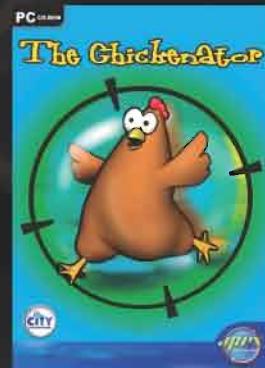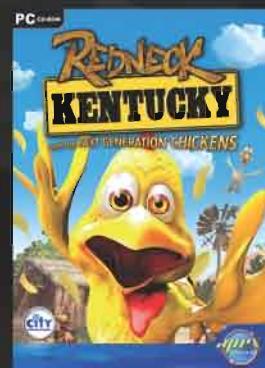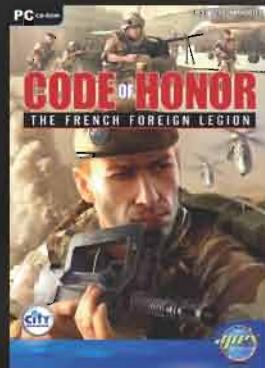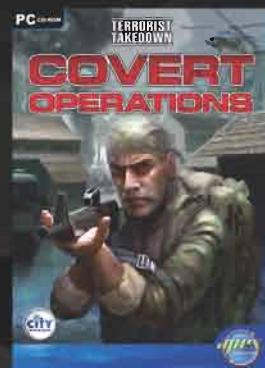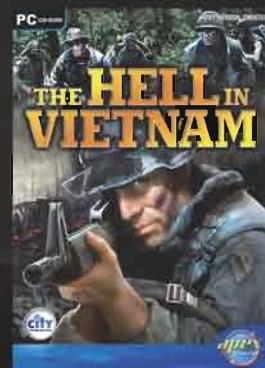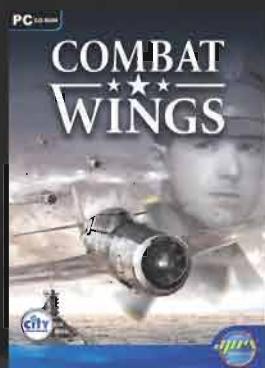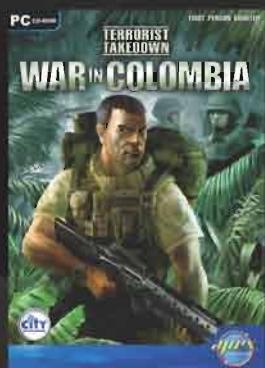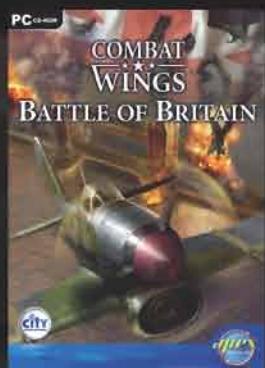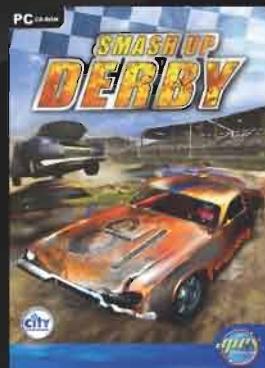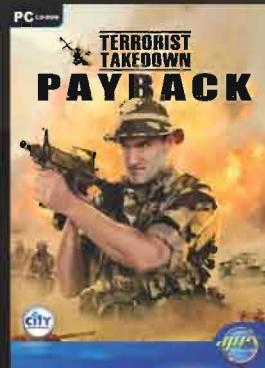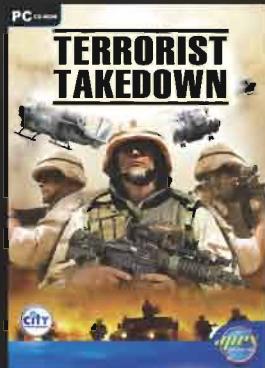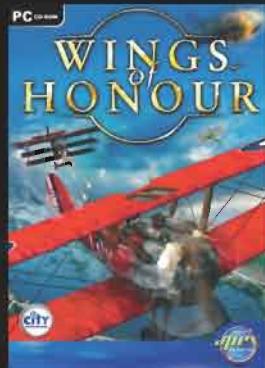
>>
Ed Boon designed the original *Mortal Kombat* fighting system to be easy; because he was frustrated he couldn't throw a fireball in *Street Fighter II.*

and modernised. The "dial-a-combos" are gone, with emphasis more on creative links and strategic special meter usage. "You're making your own combinations. We're not programming them in as much," says series creator Ed Boon. The special meter can be used for a breaker move (like in *Deception*), or to power up standard special moves into super-powered versions. Save up enough Special and you can unleash an X-Ray move that shows in-body bone-breaking and organ-busting by peeling back the skin layer. Tasty! **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

Let the gaming begin...

PC CD-ROM WINGS of HONOUR

PC CD-ROM TERRORIST TAKEDOWN

PC CD-ROM TERRORIST TAKEDOWN PAYBACK

PC CD-ROM WORLD WAR II PACIFIC HEROES

PC CD-ROM SMASH UP DERBY

PC CD-ROM BATTLESTRIKE THE ROAD TO BERLIN

PC CD-ROM COMBAT WINGS BATTLE OF BRITAIN

PC CD-ROM JET STORM MODERN DOGFIGHTS

PC CD-ROM PROJECT FREEDOM

PC CD-ROM BATTLESTRIKE THE SIEGE

PC CD-ROM TERRORIST TAKEDOWN WAR IN COLOMBIA

PC CD-ROM COMBAT WINGS

PC CD-ROM THE HELL IN VIETNAM

PC CD-ROM TERRORIST TAKEDOWN COVERT OPERATIONS

PC CD-ROM WINGS of HONOUR Battles of the Red Baron

PC CD-ROM CODE OF HONOR THE FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION

PC CD-ROM TANK COMBAT

PC CD-ROM REDNECK KENTUCKY

PC CD-ROM The Chickenator

PC CD-ROM BEAUTY FACTORY LEAD YOUR OWN COSMETIC BUSINESS

CITY interactive

apex interactive

de Blob 2

Painting by numbers

HANDS ON

GENRE > Platform

PC **360** **PS3** **WII** PS2 PSP **DS**

I DIDN'T PLAY THE FIRST *de Blob*. When it was released, I thought it had a silly name and I was way too cool to play games on the Wii anyway, so, along with a lot of other people, I ignored it. Understandably, over a million people weren't as cool as me and bought the game, promoting it to sleeper hit status and giving THQ a few bucks to throw at Blue Tongue Entertainment for the development of a sequel. If you enjoy bright colours, cute visuals and puzzle platformers, you've probably already killed yourself with pure excitement.
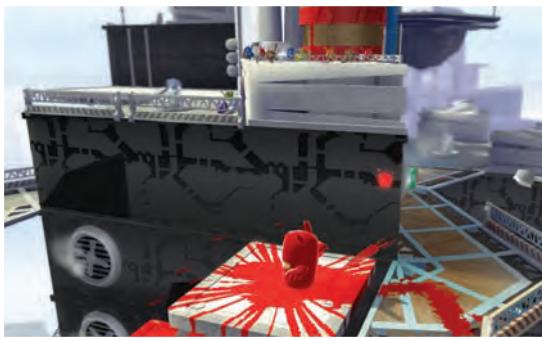
When you're an amorphous blob of bouncing, paint-soaking, err... *stuff*, then the word "story" isn't really a big deal, but here's the low-down for the fans out there: *de Blob 2* takes places a few years after the first game, and marks the return of the original villain, Comrade Black, in the guise of a priest who calls himself Papa Blanc. Blanc, together with the evil INKT Corporation rigs the Prisma City general elections, and subsequently drains the city of colour and turns its once-jolly residents into grey, mindless drones. It's up to Blob and the Colour Underground to right the wrongs and fix things by once-again filling the world with colour.

Blob will have to solve the city's woes by performing a number of missions – some lengthy and essential, others shorter and secondary – given to him by members of the Colour Underground. In the chapter that we had a chance to play, Blob was tasked to put the fun

back into the local soda production factories, one per each colour of the rainbow. Each facility is a tower rising high above a free to explore world filled with allies and enemies alike, and each tower had a trick to it that you'd better learn fast if you'd like to cease falling to your doom every time you misstep. Despite its appearance, *de Blob* isn't a typical kid's game. What we played was pretty tough and was cause for a number of sulky faces throughout the preview venue. Each tower was divided into two distinct sections: getting to the top with enough paint to climb inside; and the factory itself once you're in. The first section plays out like a classic 3D platform game, with moving platforms, obstacles, enemies and other dangers along the way. Once inside, the view shifts to 2D and requires very specific colour combinations to unlock parts of the factory and ultimately drain it of the nasty slush to be replaced with a bright, happy colour.

The first three towers were simple enough because they required Blob to reach the top of the tower with 50 units of each primary colour, but the remaining four changed things as they required secondary colours. This is where the puzzle elements of the game work their way into the traversal challenges; it's not a simple matter of hoping across a few floating blocks and bashing an enemy or two on your way to your goal, because various colour-changing influences will lie along the way that either need to be avoided like the Black Plague or actively sought. A typical example of these difficulties would be to soak up some blue at the beginning of an area where the goal

< de Blob 2 >

> "Despite its appearance, *de Blob* isn't a typical kid's game. What we played was pretty tough and was cause for a number of sulky faces throughout the preview venue."

is a purple button; along the way you'll need to soak up some red – and only red – to successfully activate the button to open up a new area for exploration.

In addition to the environmental challenges, there are also a number of nasty members of the INKT Corporation out to stop Blob and his buddies from spreading the love. Some of these enemies are simple, ink-coloured blobs that need to be bashed or stomped (at the cost of some paint) to be put out of the picture, but others are more challenging and require that Blob be a certain colour to vanquish them, or can only be charged and not stomped. Others will attack Blob with ink, causing him to lose his ability to soak up paint until he's been rinsed off with water. Finally, the entire game is on a timer. As you accomplish goals you'll gain more time, but running out will reset your progress to the beginning of the area.

Puzzle platform games might not be for everyone, as they're potentially stupidly irritating, but *de Blob 2*'s bright, bubbly visuals and interesting puzzle mechanics will go a long way in pulling in the less-than-hardcore puzzle crowd (and raising a few new ones from the youth market). I doubt it'll lead to as many nights crying oneself to sleep as, say, *Braid*, but there's plenty of challenge here

for those who like it. This is definitely one to look out for if you plan on having a lot of spare time on your hands and feel the need to unleash your inner hippy.

EPIC BLOBBY?

Stay your inevitable comparisons; *de Blob 2* is quite different from *Epic Mickey* despite their perceived similarities [*I was wondering, Ed*]. The painting mechanic in *de Blob 2* is simply about bringing colour to a grey and lifeless world, but not just any colour. To conquer each puzzle, Blob must soak up paint from different sources – pools, rivers, and canisters – and carry that paint to his goal, such as a colour-coded button, entrance, or even enemy. On his way, Blob will use up some of his stored paint by attacking enemies, smearing the landscape with colour or freeing Graydians from their dull servitude. If you reach your destination with either insufficient paint, or are the wrong colour, then you'll have to return to the paint source and top up. As you might guess, this leaves room for tons of complexity, as Blob is prone to change colour (or even reset to grey if he's rinsed out with water) as he moves through the environment. Dexterity and precision of movement are important if you don't like frustration. **NAG**
Geoff Burrows

>> A second player can jump in at any time to take on the role of Blob's sidekick, Pinky. She can shoot at enemies and help out Blob when the going gets tough.

The Reviewers

In honour of Dead Space 2 and in no more than 20-30 words tell the readers what terrifies you...

ALEX
The thought of being marooned on a desert island – without an Internet connection! That and clowns, of course...

MICHAEL
It's the bizarre notion that some people actually read this magazine from cover to cover and expose all of our mistakes, inadequacies and general stupidity. Just look at the pictures and move along please.

MIKTAR
Silent, non-local, Euclidean-defying entities that pursue me, incomprehensible in their motives, unfathomable in their intent. Or: babies. Take your pick.

TARRYN
Lizards, snakes, deep water, spiders, unusually large rooms or halls, certain types of lamps, the howling void of space, whatever is underneath my bed, and someone putting milk or sugar into my coffee.

MIKLÓS
I would say Creepers from Minecraft, but I haven't played it long enough to find any. Although Dane tells me they make him scream like a girl.

GEOFF
Spiders! Big, hairy, brain devouring, soul-destroying eight-legged demons from the Netherworld.

DANE
[*Apparently replying to email, Ed*]

WALT
Honestly? My hardware failing... how can I be scared by horror games if my consoles don't work?

SAVAGE
Snakes...

NEO
Nothing supernatural terrifies me. Jail time terrifies me, yeah Jail is no good so I won't go to jail – it's terrifying.

Anatomy of a Review
A quick guide to the NAG reviews section

Vital Info: Who made it, who's putting it on shelves and where to find more information

Box Outs: More good stuff. Just in a box.

The Review: These are words that make up our opinion on the game. You didn't really need us to tell you that, did you?

Genre and Platforms: What kind of game is it and what will it run on? All available platforms are bolded. The one we reviewed it on is red.

Game Name: It'd be a bit confusing if we left this bit out. There's also a summary line for added spice!

Screenshots and Captions: A picture's worth a thousand words. The captions are mostly just fart jokes...

Enslaved: Odyssey to the West
Press "A" to everything

The Score Box

Age Rating: Lets see some ID, son

Multiplayer Icons: How many players per copy, players per server, and players in co-op, respectively

DRM: Applies to PC games only: Internet connection required, disc required, or no DRM beyond a serial key

Online Services: Is the game distributed/available over an online service, or does it gain additional features such as multiplayer by connecting to said service? Required services are bolded.

Plus/Minus: What we liked and didn't like, in convenient bullet-point format

Bottom Line: Here's where we boil down the entire review to one sentence. Because reading is hard...

Award: See below for details

Score: Further simplifying the bottom line to a number out of 100

THE SCORE

Online services
Games for Windows LIVE

›Plus
+ Enthralling setting
+ Improved combat system
+ Riveting story

›Minus
- Doesn't change much

›Bottom Line
Our second trip to Rapture is every bit as captivating as the first.

88

ED'S CHOICE
Editor's Choice Award
If a game bears this award, then it rocks. It does everything right – pure and simple. We don't hand these out every issue.

MUST PLAY
Must Play Award
Essential playing for fans of the genre. These awards aren't as rare as the Editor's Choice award, but if you see one, take note.

PONIES
Pony Award
This isn't an award anyone can be proud of. If a game gets this award, then it's rubbish and you should avoid it like moss on a sandwich. We keep it only for the worst garbage.

MASS EFFECT 2 [PS3]

It's taken some time, but the once Xbox 360 exclusive *Mass Effect* franchise has finally arrived on the PlayStation 3 platform. At least, the second one has... the first game will likely never make the jump. But that's okay, because *Mass Effect 2* does a good job in catching the player up on the story, and is so awesome that it really doesn't matter all that much anyway.

Although a year after the Xbox 360 release, the PS3 game is still excellent. And, as an added bonus, the DLC that Xbox 360 players had to wait for is included with this title, adding six hours of play to an already long game.
If you haven't played this game before, it's in the must-play category. Even if you have, the added content makes playing it all over again a good idea. Even a year later, it is still relevant and highly enjoyable.

Bottom line: The once Xbox 360 exclusive masterpiece finally arrives for PS3.

MAGICKA

Magicka is a top-down hack-'n'-slash action game. We won't throw in the word RPG at the end because there are no role-playing mechanics aside from choosing to speak to NPCs and swapping out your character's sword and staff. What *Magicka* is, however, is more important. It's an entertaining, rather challenging romp through Swedish folklore with a unique selling point: the player character casts spells that are constructed on-the-fly by the player. There are no preset spells to cast (although recipes can be found). Each spell is put together from eight elements and placed into a spell "rack" with five element slots. The spell can then be cast on yourself, an enemy, your sword or your immediate surrounding area, with different results depending on where it's cast. The result is a huge number of possible spells; it's up to the player to figure out which combinations suit each situation the character finds himself in.
Unfortunately, the game suffers from numerous trivial bugs in single player mode and plenty of game-breaking bugs in multiplayer, but the developers are working around the clock to fix these issues.

Bottom line: Fun and interesting. The bugs are overlookable for R70-odd you'll pay for this game.

Web Scores

How do we measure up? We scour the Net to find out what the rest of the world thinks.
**NAG** // Metacritic average // Game Rankings average

DEAD SPACE 2

360
92
90
90

JEKYLL & HYDE

PC
68
37
NA

LITTLEBIGPLANET 2

PS3
90
91
93

EMPIRES OF STEEL

PC
30
NA
NA

ARMA II: OPERATION ARROWHEAD

PC
79
73
75

ARMADA 2526

PC
55
64
67

For Morbid!

Dead Space 2

It really is the Aliens to Dead Space's Alien

GENRE > Survival horror

| PC | 360 | PS3 | WII | PS2 | PSP | DS |

MAN, IT LOOKS LIKE somebody threw up in here. Well, assuming anyone could shovel a seven hundred kilo family bucket of free range Man McNuggets before breaching critical mass and repainting the bulkheads in a high-gloss Peristalsis Puce, anyway. Gross. This totally wasn't in the Concordance Extraction Corporation's recruitment brochure.

Isaac Clarke, Engineer First Class and CEC Employee of the Month (September 2414, *in absentia*), has been working off the clock for a while now, though. About three years or so, actually. Not that he remembers any of it, mind you, but the complimentary straitjacket is nice.

I'll stop right there lest I inadvertently blow the game's plot or something, but suffice it to say the game starts off in a wide-eyed, scrambling panic, and maintains this relentless pace pretty much throughout. Where the ponderous and sombre *Dead Space* was Ridley Scott's *Alien*, this helter-skelter space-riot is James Cameron's *Aliens* – it's an express elevator to hell, going down, and I'd recommend equipping an RC-DS Remote Control Disc Ripper for close encounters, or you'll be reloading the same ****ing checkpoint for over an hour (true life drama).

The sequel is set in and around The Sprawl, a grimy, industrial metropolis bolted onto a chunk of Titan, one of Saturn's moons. While some of the locations are, as expected, somewhat more domestic than the USG Ishimura's engineering decks, the game's mostly a series of gore-clotted corridors, cargo bays, and service tunnels crammed with gigantic pneumatic pulverising machines with no obvious purpose besides being in between you and your objective marker. Shipping on two disks on Xbox, and constituting an enormous 13 GB installation, however, the game swaps its predecessor's copy-

pasted environment palette for an entirely unprecedented and frankly astounding range of stage assets that ultimately resolves itself into the definitive sci-fi property of this generation. Simply, *Dead Space 2* looks *incredible*.

Joining the original cast of mortiferous muggers are quite a few newcomers – perhaps most significantly, the Stalker. Significant because this particular Necromorph demonstrates some of the most sophisticated AI I've ever seen. Apparently modelled on *Jurassic Park's* iconic velociraptors (and quite possibly using the same foley pack), these guys will avoid engaging you in any sort of honest frontal assault, peering instead around and scuttling between corners and props, before flanking you from two positions you weren't even aware were there in the first place. And just as you reorient your killing stuff, they'll retreat. Absolutely, bum-clenchingly terrifying.

Elsewhere, Isaac's toolbox is also expanded to include an electrified javelin gun, a scoped rifle, and a deployable mine-launcher. On harder difficulties, where ammo is in desperately short supply, you'll find the game's revamped Kinesis module all the difference between death and skewering something to the wall with its own recently severed arm.

Also, you get to co-opt dead babies as *ad hoc* frag grenades. Did I mention you get to co-opt dead babies as *ad hoc* frag grenades? Because you get to co-op dead babies as *ad hoc* frag grenades. *Dead Space 2* completes me.

Since I've now officially run out of words I'll be paid to write, I'll leave Michael "The Fourways Ripper" James to tell you everything else, but in quick conclusion, *Dead Space 2* is not only better than I'd expected, but better than I could've imagined. It's superb.

Tarryn van der Byl

< Dead Space 2 >

24 JAN

Tarryn: Are we doing an epic Dead Space review?
Michael: F**k yeah.
Tarryn: \:D/
Michael: It will be our slimy xenomorph lovechild - like last time - you did abort it right? RIGHT?!?!
Tarryn: No, I kept it in my closet.
Michael: God save us all... I'm not paying for its education - you hear - you'll never get me to pay the bills.
Tarryn: LOL.
Michael: See how we've kind of started it already...
Tarryn: Have you got it yet? Friday is, like, an eternity away. :(
Michael: I know. I've begged for a SE.
Tarryn: I can't wait, seriously. And it's been getting really good reviews so far, looks like this one might be even better than the first game.
Michael: I've been trying not to look. Don't want to cloud my objectivity.
Tarryn: Yeah, but I have a lot of news feed subscriptions, and the review scores keep turning up in them. :P I'm not actually reading any reviews, though. I don't want to spoil anything. I didn't even download the demo.
Michael: Good girl! Isaac will be proud
Tarryn: :3
Michael: Don't forget to 'appear' intelligent in all Google chats from this point forward. Don't want the readers figuring out I'm an uneducated hillbilly and you're have no life outside of your Xbox!
Tarryn: God, no.
Michael: :P We have a frail image to maintain – one slip of the truth and it's gone like mist in the morning sun.

25 JAN

Michael: Umm, we have some' business' to attend to before we can have fun with guns and stuff. When we originally posted that little Google review some said we didn't bother 'explaining' what the game was about (yeah, I know - I don't get it either). So... in the interests of appearing fair, unbiased and actually listening to what people want we should do a little hey what's that... So it's an FPS sequel to *Dead Space* as in first person shitter. You play Isaac Clarke who has to do stuff in space, killing alien necromorphs as he goes. Tarryn can explain what a necromorph is otherwise she won't forgive me. He had a wife and she was a ghost or something in his head and she kind of didn't die in the end... Go.

Tarryn: A necromorph is a dead body infected with some kind of alien parasite. Basically, it's a zombie but with, like, serrated bits of chitin or something where their arms should be. From an evolutionary perspective, it's really quite perplexing - how do you feed without accidentally chopping your own head off? I don't even want to think about reproduction.
Michael: They could never hug either... No wonder they so angry.
Tarryn: Maybe they're just desperate for cuddles.
Michael: You might need to fill in the story bits a little - I never pay attention – especially when I just shat my jean pant.
Tarryn: Have you heard about the 'hard core' difficulty mode?
Michael: Sounds like your kind of thing. I'm more a medium kind of guy.
Tarryn: Yeah, but no. It's super-maxed enemies, (even more desperately) limited supplies, and NO checkpoints. If you die, you go back to your last hard save. But you're allowed to save only three times in the entire game.
Michael: Mother<beep> - you like Little Britain I see. That's sounds epic. I'll never survive
Tarryn: It's f**cking insane and the WORST PART is there's an achievement for doing it. So I'm going to have to try.
Michael: Well for you at least... I can die happy knowing my Gamerscore wasn't all it can be. At least if you finish it on hard you'll know where the best places are to save.
Tarryn: Yeah, that's my plan. I'll run through the game two or three times, so I know the choke points.
Michael: LOL. You mean the shit points
Tarryn: Still, I reckon that's going to be a tough achievement.
Michael: You going for the collector's? I'm using my limited charm to arrange one.
Tarryn: I was very, very tempted, but nobody seems to know if the plasma cutter is available locally.
Michael: Hmm...
Tarryn: I'm hearing mixed reports.
Michael: I may even blow someone at EA. ;)
Tarryn: Hahahahahahaha... You can put that in the review.
Michael: Hmm... I might. But all in or nothing right. Show some sack. Hoorah!
Tarryn: Look, it's a plasma cutter. It's serious f**king business. All the reviews are coming out in

Cross your heart and hope to die, stick a needle in your eye!

I was going to write my own 500 words but our clearly-out-of-control Google blog chat thing has eaten up all the space. It's been through three different people to edit down and a page or two increase. I'm just going to say that *Dead Space 2* is an incredible experience. It goes beyond just being a game and straight to something much more. The art direction and sound parallels any Hollywood movie you'll see – even better than a few B-Grade efforts actually. The whole station environment is unique and interesting and you'll never see the same thing twice – guaranteed. Just imagine if all games made an effort and were like this. Special mention must go to the Stalkers, a new necromorph type that hunts you down... and kills you more often than not. I can't imagine playing this on the higher difficulty settings. The Multiplayer is okay, it's fun and different especially when playing as the bugs. This game has never being about multiplayer so we'll leave it there. It's one of the best games I've ever played and will stay with me for a long time. We already had a few chats about what *Dead Space 3* will be all about. Tarryn is for a prison colony to mimic the 'Alien' theme and I'll just be happy with more of the same.

Michael James

Bottom Line: Simply the best game I've played in years.

96

force; it's just 9s everywhere

Michael: Be nice if someone gave us an early copy. Win some, lose some. It's not a collector's edition that plasma cutter one. Called something else.

Tarryn: You should've offered blowjobs earlier.

Michael: Hahaha. I usually don't. But circumstance is everything...

27 JAN

Michael: Do not use your Xbox 360 tonight...

[Here I mailed Tarryn a picture of the collector's edition with the plasma cutter, Ed]

Tarryn: Why?

Michael: ... She checks her mail...

Tarryn: @_@

Michael: 77% complete installing to Xbox 360. 79%. Of disc 1!

Tarryn: Oh god. I hate you so much.

Michael: Now the right thing to do would be to not show you that image and tell you that stuff. Geoff dared me...

Tarryn: I tried to persuade BT Games to sell me a copy earlier, and they wouldn't. :<

Michael: They never break embargo...

Tarryn: <unladylike swearing>

Michael: Respect them!

Tarryn: I also tried Musica and Look & Listen.

Michael: 2 discs!

Tarryn: Apparently rules matter or some shit. Yeah, I know. Loads of necromorphs :P Let me know how it is later. I can take the pain.

Michael: Of course. Look - you'll still finish it before me - even if I play right through the night.

Tarryn: yes, but I WANT IT NOW.

Michael: I'll play it with video feed, you can then go like A trigger, A, B, trigger, LB, etc.

Tarryn: Are you signed into live? I'm going to keep checking your status.

Michael: Game Installation complete...

[A little later, Ed]

Tarryn: SO HOW IS IT?

Michael: If I could get to play it... Got some stuff I have to finish first...

Tarryn: Lame!

Michael: One day my life will be less about everyone else and more about me. But that day is not today. ;)

Tarryn: I'd say everybody else can f**k off, and go play Dead Space instead. Clearly your priorities are messed up.

Michael: Yeah but no but... True - they are. But I am doing stuff for money and I need that for everything.

Tarryn: look, I'm just saying that the Sprawl is overrun with necromorphs, and only you can save the day.

Michael: LOL. I would sell my body for money but I'm not pretty enough... So work I must - I'll be up to my tits in necromorphs in about 45 minutes.

Tarryn: \:D/

Michael: This game is creepy man. Isaac Clarke weighs 195 – FYI. I'm in a strait-jacket and there a necromorphs - DO YOU KNOW HOW TERRIFYING THAT IS?

Michael: The level of environmental detail here is astounding - it feels so alive and real. Stomping reveals 'gifts' like health and etc.

Tarryn: Is it awesome?

Michael: It's better than the first one - like everything is just more polished and they take a few nods to the old one. When you get your first armour suit you feel like a super hero then they f**k you with a boss fight. I've been lulled into a sense of safety only to have it ripped away. I don't trust any 'dead' bodies anymore and everything looks like a monster. WOW!
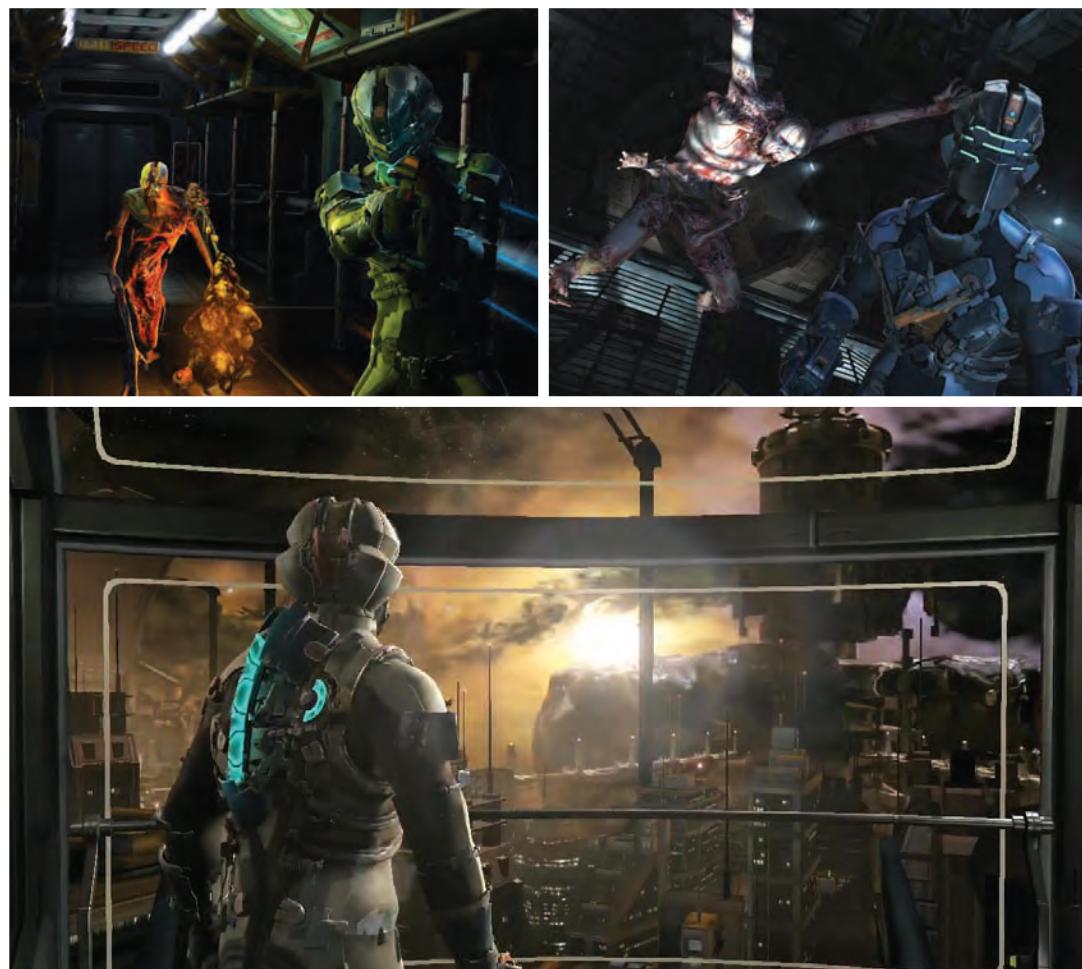
Tarryn: :D I can't wait.

28 JAN

Tarryn: So.

Michael: Indeed!

Tarryn: How many times did you die during the

opening sequence?

Michael: 3

Tarryn: I died twice. :P

Michael: Love every one of them. I can believe how they manage to convey that feeling of distress and helplessness so well by just putting you in a strait-jacket - so clever.

Tarryn: So evil.

Michael: You playing what mode?

Tarryn: Casual. I just want to enjoy the story for my first play through.

Michael: I'm the second one down.

Tarryn: The new Game+ mode lets you bring over unlocks and stuff, so I'll keep the harder difficulties for second and third plays.

Michael: I'm not mentally ready for difficult and scary. I stopped at chapter 2.

Tarryn: I'm going to play all day and all night.

Michael: Of course you are. I like the way they throw a little bit of everything at you in the first chapter - it's subtle and a reminder of the terror to come. I also hate using lifts - always expecting shit + fan.

Tarryn: :D

Michael: You keep going. I'm taking it slow looking for the Peng as I go... Try picking up a rubber duck and stomping it. ;)

Tarryn: OMG. It's... it's amazing.

Michael: Yes... and, well... this is not news. ;)

Tarryn: But it's even better than I'd expected... than I'd hoped.

Michael: I'm in love with this game! It's nice when something really surprises you like that - you always fear that the hype will kill it – every once in a while magic happens.

Tarryn: It's just superb.

Michael: I'm taking it real slow. Exploring as I go - those small necromorphs are painful... But the ripper slices through them - got the lawnmower man achievement.

Tarryn: I haven't even bought the ripper. I'm mostly using the plasma cutter.

Michael: There are lots of different types of the same weapons but with different specialities... I'm going to stick with the cutter and upgrade it with the power nodes.

Tarryn: That's what i did. I maxed it out just now. It's pretty devastating.

Michael: I don't like using them to open doors - seems like a waste

Tarryn: you often get schematics behind those doors, though and enough cash to replace the node.

Michael: Hmm... I'll remember that.

Tarryn: I need to start using kinesis more, actually.

Michael: Saves bullets and will look cool in the replays. I'm going to give multiplayer a spin tonight too... Later - going to supper with friends.

[Why we pay her the big bucks – note the time below. She finished it in one day! Ed.]

23:45 Tarryn: I WIN \:D/

29 JAN

Michael: I see... A little later today four burly men will arrive at your house - they are your friends. They will take you to a place where some doctors will help you. They are also your friends. You'll be away for a while but your Xbox will be allowed to visit during allocated days and hours across the week. This is for your own good see.
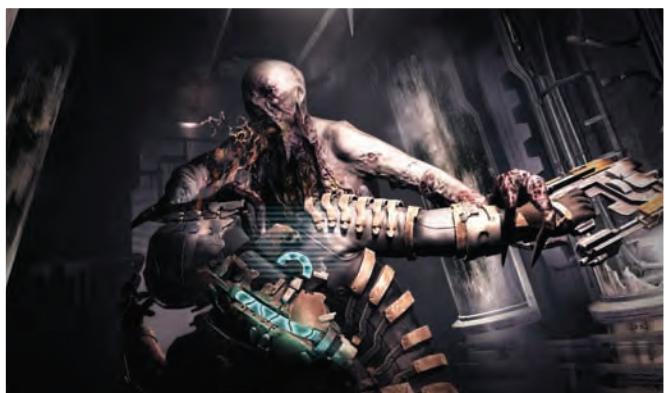
30 JAN

Tarryn: Why aren't you playing Dead Space?! I'm already almost finished my second play through.

Michael: I am now - these flash backs are disturbing.

Tarryn: Yeah, the flashbacks are really creepy as hell - something about the light coming out of Nicole's face freaks me the f**k out.

Michael: True - me too - why is that – you playing

< Dead Space 2 >

on impossible now? I've been lulled a few times - then bam - something comes at me. Those fast charging ones in the church were a fun fight. It is truly a lovely thing to see when you turn off the gravity and everything lifts off. So surreal. They also haven't spared any money on getting the audio experience done right. This whole place is really fun to explore - like I've not seen the same thing twice. I'm missing something here with the story bits - why are people chasing him around.... talking about a gunship outside and so on. Who and why – I obviously wasn't paying attention somewhere.

Tarryn: The station's security wants to take him out – it'll become relevant later.

Michael: I see... Is it supposed to be a mystery now? We should avoid spoilers in the review.

Tarryn: I'm playing on zealot difficulty now, which is roughly the equivalent of DS1's impossible. It's not too bad because the new game+ mode lets you bring over all your stuff from another completed play through.
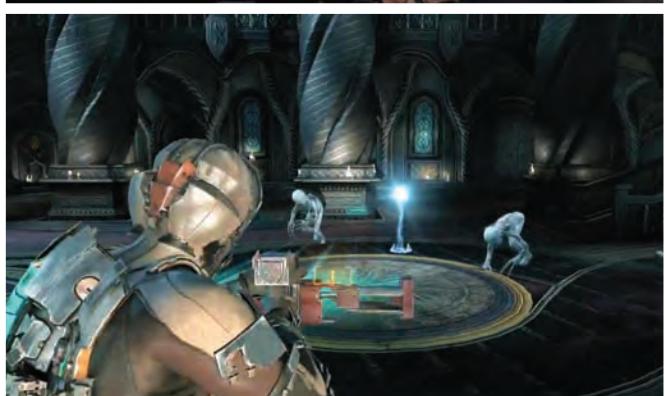
Michael: Finally - a store... Ammo shouldn't be an issue as you can rip off pieces of the necromorphs to shoot at them? Or am I giving you too much credit. ;)

Tarryn: The environment design is, quite simply, breath-taking. There was a part in chapter 10 where I just stood and stared at a vista for ages. I've never seen anything on the scale in a game before. It's incredible.

Michael: Why can't other game developers put this kind of effort into their games... I mean really.

Tarryn: Well, putting the game on two discs means having so many more assets in the game. There's simply no feeling of cut 'n' pasted environment design and the lighting is just... it's epic.

Michael: So true. It's my first 2 disc Xbox 360 game... I often pose him in certain lighting

conditions - looks lovely.

Tarryn: Some of the locations are just amazing to look at. It's obvious that every single place in the game was carefully designed to look absolutely fantastic. I can't wait for you to reach chapter 10. You're going to shit yourself.

Michael: Yeah - like now, entering a small walkway but there's like smoke and a panel has been removed with wires coming out of it. I haven't seen that configuration. Getting there slowly – I'm the savouring kind.

Tarryn: That's what I did on my first play through. I explored, I took in everything, all the little details. It was amazing. Now I'm just surviving.

Michael: Why do they always kill the lights! Gulp... LOL. Like - the lights went now. Nothing happened and then they came back on. Bastards.

Tarryn: The lights thing is a good gag - it's kind of what they were trying to do in *Doom 3*, but they really nail it here.

Michael: You find the Peng treasure.

Tarryn: Yup. It's very well hidden. If you're being very thorough, you'll find it.

Michael: Not that much... I do look where I think it would be a good place to hide it. We'll see...

Tarryn: :D I'm sure the game is going to grab a lot of awards. It's hard to fault it much at all.

Michael: I'm upgrading stuff with the nodes and ignoring the new types of guns - they don't look like they offer much more. I'm really looking hard to find something negative to say so I don't look like a fanboy.

Tarryn: I did my first play through mostly with the plasma cutter, but the detonator is magnificent too.

Michael: I got the refurbished plasma cutter - going for capacity and damage. I see at the end you can set things on fire with its special node - \o/.

Tarryn: \:D/. I've also noticed that some weapons work better against certain necromorphs. Like the Lurkers - those things with the three tentacles that fire missiles - best thing against them is the line gun. The new types of necromorphs really add to the game too. I LOVED / hated the stalkers, those guys in the church that creep around corners.

Michael: What about those small creep things - the tiny ones - I had a pack coming at me earlier and they were moving all the dead bodies towards me - it was like some weird bloody orgy of death coming at me. I was firing wildly in all directions and stomping like a mad man. Those church ones - man oh man... Creepy.

Tarryn: Have you encountered the pack yet? It's the necromorph-kids.

Michael: I have - in the station... they give lots of stuff so I'll take them anytime.

Tarryn: :D. Wait till they rush you. Not so nice then.

Michael: I have that saw blade out and spinning for the little shits - chews them up nice and quick. I do giggle a little when I do that.

Tarryn: Also, every single kill should drop something. If it doesn't, stomp on the corpse. Sometimes you can kill without getting the final coup de grace that drops stuff. The ripper is awesome.
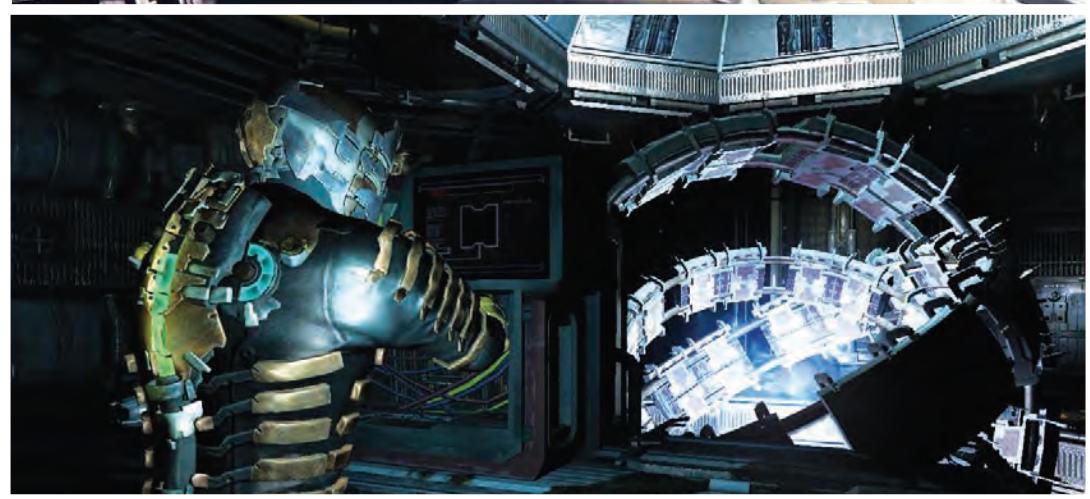
Michael: I hate it when I break a window to the outside and all the cool stuff I saw dropped goes out into space. :(This crawling through access tunnels is also a little unnerving.

Tarryn: I don't have that many vacuum implosion kills, actually. I need to work on that for the achievement – like you, I'm reluctant to lose loot. :P.

Michael: I'm less accurate clearly.

Tarryn: Use stasis more, gives you time to line up the perfect shots.

Michael: I don't actually - not a lot. Only when they come at me quick and many – don't know why I don't - only two shots maybe - like it's easy to use and I hate missing.

Tarryn: Also, it's an odd thing to say about a game, but the number of different deaths is quite extraordinary - in one instance, this necromorph that was, like, a head with tentacles, tore off my own head, shoved its tentacles down the meaty chunks of my neck, attached itself, reanimated me, as my corpse started shambling off as the screen faded to black. It was epic.

Michael: Nice. You know what would be cool... like when you've finished the super hard mode you can go back into the game with all the lights on. I know I'm missing so much in the dark... I can't kill this bitch of a thing in the church - hold me and drags me a long... then rips me apart.

Tarryn: A stalker?

Michael: It's huge.

Tarryn: Where its weak spot?

Michael: How the beep.

Tarryn: What does it look like?

Michael: I'll fix the grammar and spelling for the mag. ;) Ugly, slimy, had a giant claw with yellow on it...

Tarryn: Hmm... Could be the tormentor – just shoot for the orange bits.

Michael: Yeah - got that - just now. Orange bit blasted.

Tarryn: BTW - here's a tip for you. Those big fat bastards – don't shoot them in the guts. Take out their legs instead. They go down quite fast. But if you shoot them in the guts, it's an instant kill, but they also spawn those tiny... things.

Michael: I always aim for the balls

Tarryn: Me too. ^____^

Michael: LOL. Those little ones drop loot like nothing else... These boots are made for stomping.

Tarryn: \:D/

31 JAN

Michael: This automatic security BITCH is getting on my tits. Got the Peng! It's like Xmas in here.

2 FEB

Michael: So, we should do like a 500 words review of DS2 each, then back it up with the Google stuff?

Tarryn: That's cool.

Michael: You finish it on impossible yet?

Tarryn: no, I'm f**king stuck in this one bit. I'll probably get back to it tonight.

Michael: How many chapters BTW...

Tarryn: 15

Michael: Stuck where...

Tarryn: Somewhere in chapter 11 or 12 – an elevator of death.

Michael: Those hunters (Stalkers) are amazing - I've never been hunted quite like that before...

Tarryn: the AI is great, huh? What's really interesting about them - and I'm not sure I've ever seen this in a game before - is that they engage, and then retreat again.

Michael: Yeah. Totally random too – because I had to replay a section a few times and my approach was somewhat similar each time and the reaction of them was different - weird. I was really terrified and I've noted that as a part to save before if I ever play impossible.

Tarryn: It really is the *Aliens* to *Dead Space*'s *Alien*.

Michael: Nice quote. F**k you for thinking of it 1st. :)

Tarryn: \:D/.

Michael: Do you think we have enough to fill in the 'blog' part of the review - this stuff here - it's probably like 10 000 words by now. [*It was 7211 words unedited actually, Ed.*]

Tarryn: So trim it down, and reword it to make us look way smarter.

Michael: That's a given. I'll send to you for a quick look. I mean really. We're just too awesome to be consumed in our natural state.

Tarryn: For the readers' safety.

Michael: For the people - we should get like medals and stuff, keys to the cities and the codes to the nukes even.

Tarryn: Obviously, our time will come, Michael. I'm just waiting on a shipment of domesticated raptors. We'd be crap without an awesome ride.

Michael: LOL - so right. Just remember to buy the anti-itch stretchy pants - those raptor saddles can work up a sweat. Don't want to unload a nuke then be scratching your butt.

Tarryn: Hahahahaha. But it's the only way to be sure. @____@

Michael: Hahahahaha. Don't remind me.

Tarryn: FOR MORBID! We need to caption one of the *Dead Space* pictures with that.

Michael: RIP etc. I wish I could take screens easier - I've posed him in some amazing places - like those rising rings of fire. He also died the one time (Isaac) got chopped in half and his body fell and his visor looked right at the screen - like a blue god ray. I held my breath waiting for the light to flicker out – Goosebumps.

Tarryn: Have you encountered any bugs?

Michael: Nothing. I'm battling to find fault - but we must, think of the people – to avoid being called a total fanboy.

Tarryn: On my second play through, I've noticed that - occasionally - the ammo counter display disappears from my weapon. I have to swap out and back to it for it to reappear. One time, I fell through the floor of the elevator somehow, like a geometry glitch.

Michael: What was down there?

Tarryn: Death.

Michael: LOL. I've pulled those semi-conductors out from the strangest places sometimes - like secrets... I'm still looking for problems - it even loads quickly. I mean what is wrong with it.

**Tarryn**: Yeah, the ruby semiconductors especially - they're put in really odd places.
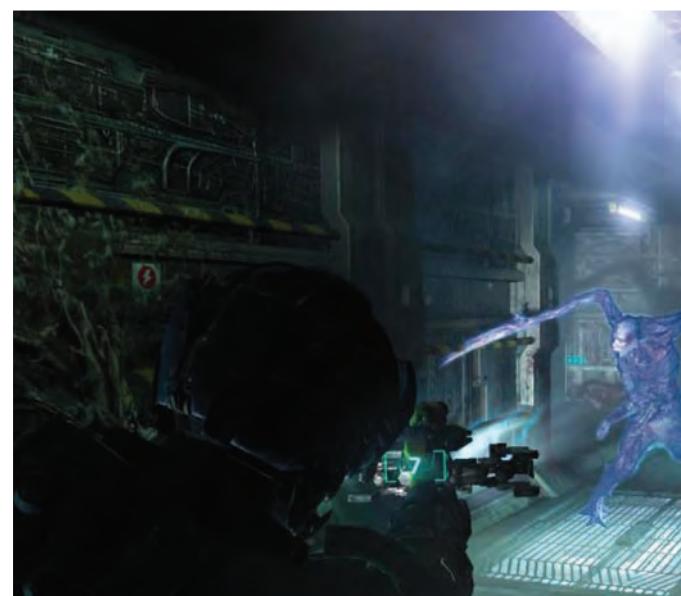
**Michael**: So rewarding when you look in a place you'd hide something and you find something.
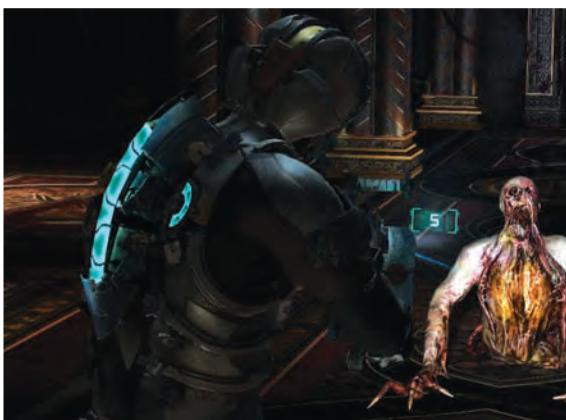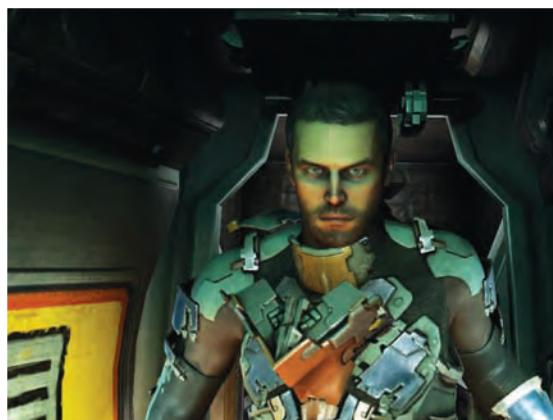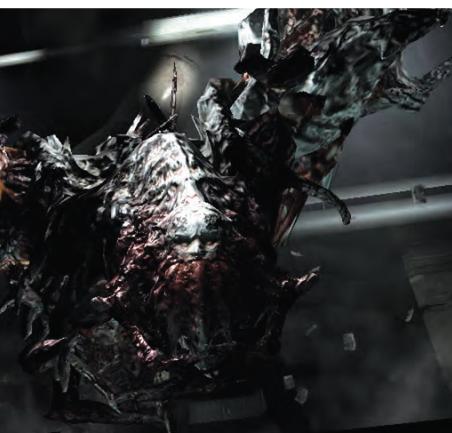
5 FEB

Michael: Convergence! I keep sticking it in his head. LOL. Weirdest mini-game EVER.

Tarryn: I had no trouble with it, but it grossed me out big time.

Michael: Got it after 2 tries... Now I'm being chased around by that re-generating f**ker. This end

< Dead Space 2 >

game is a lot harder.

Tarryn: I'm actually in the same place. That regenerator on zealot difficulty is :<

Michael: It's a little annoying for the normal difficulty - like nice pace until now and like 20 deaths. :(

Tarryn: :(

Michael: :(((

Tarryn: YOU CAN DO IT. Checked out the multiplayer last night - it's quite good, actually. Very much like *Left 4 Dead*'s versus mode.

Michael: I tried it last night too - lots of fun - I prefer the necromorphs of course. Yeah - this is now turning into BS... :(

Tarryn: I loved playing as the Lurker - if you get onto the walls and ceiling, I've found players don't tend to pay you much attention. got so many kills. :P

Michael: Are there cheats... No health. No ammo and millions of bugs. :(

Tarryn: Use stasis and run.

Michael: None left...

Tarryn: you're f**ked.

Michael: LOL. This is nonsense however...

Michael: This is seriously not impressive... Why all the crazy difficulty at the end. Not good form. Like I had to run ALL the way back to a shop and sell stuff - now stuck again. How long does this BS go on for? ;(Sad panda.

Michael: Finally!

Tarryn: \:D/

6 FEB

Michael: Any tips on finishing this game - stuck on that rock by the marker with these demon creatures attacking me - endless. Not having fun anymore with this game. :(

Tarryn: <SPOILERS STRATEGICALLY DISMEMBERED>

Michael: No - I got that... I'm just trying to glam up the chats... for the magazine.

Tarryn: Right, LOL.

Michael: I resorted to using the glitch.

Tarryn: There's a glitch?

Michael: Yeah. Http://boards.ign.com/dead_ space/b23951/199718474/p1/?3. Now I will win... Oh yes. I will.

Tarryn: Apparently the javelin gun is the best weapon to use there.

Michael: I know - I'm ashamed. BBL.

Tarryn: OH GOD THAT FINAL BIT IS IMPOSSIBLE.

Michael: I success - it really was just a matter of firepower... I forgive them. Nice ending...

Tarryn: What weapon did you use?

Michael: Force, line and assault... Boom, boom, boom...

Tarryn: Those f**king kids just tear me to bits.

Michael: LOL. Use the force gun to blast and kill... Will need to be upgraded however.

Tarryn: yeah, my current load out is NOT working.

Michael: Credit music is nice...

Tarryn: Oh, there's a little something at the end of the credits. Don't miss it.

Michael: Oh... I was wondering. Goes on a bit.

Tarryn: It does. :P

Michael: LOT of people involved in this.

Tarryn: Must play and Editor's choice, right?

Michael: Also nice that it didn't require a patch... That's rare. Sure, of course. Can 'credits too long' be a negative?

Tarryn: Not in this case.

Michael: LOL.

Tarryn: F**k, I can't think of any minuses.

Michael: I will say they did try and cram at the end - not necessary... You ran into a bug or two - I did not. Multiplayer needs a little work.

Tarryn: So: Minus: One bug.

Michael: But it's not a MP game in my book. Don't you think they over did it a little at the end... I mean if I didn't resort to that little trick I don't see how I would have finished it. Remember this is also on normal difficulty - I don't see how a normal person will finish this game. Everything okay right up to chapter 15...

Tarryn: Did you run out of cash, then? That was never really an issue for me. I buy loads of ammo all the time.

Michael: I bought an expensive suit I didn't need - and got screwed for the rest of the game on money.

Tarryn: LOL. **NAG**

THE SCORE

1 | 2 - 8 | N/A

ED'S CHOICE
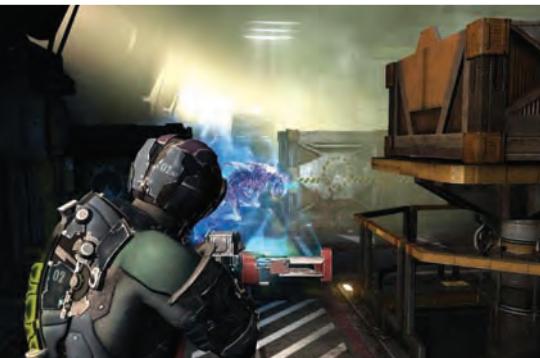
Look & Listen
For the Fans

>**Plus**
+ Just about everything

>**Minus**
- Inconsistent difficulty
- No quick-turn
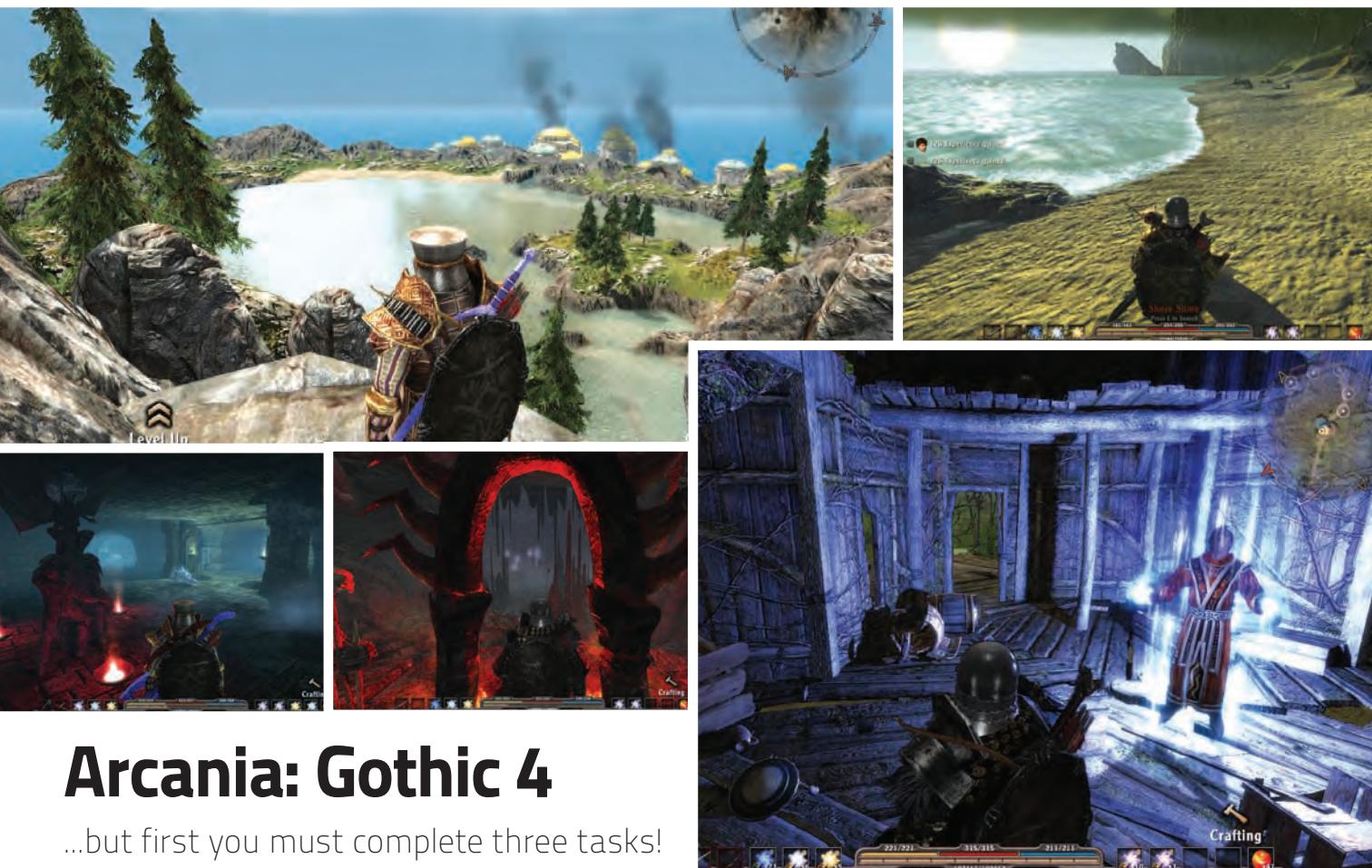
>**Bottom Line**
My mommy always said there were no monsters - no real ones - but there are. And they're aweso-AARRRRGHHHHHhhhhhh...

92

WARNING!!
MILITARY CHECKPOINT

Arcania: Gothic 4

...but first you must complete three tasks!

GENRE > Action RPG

PC   360   **PS3**   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

APPARENTLY THERE'S A LOT riding on this title. *Arcania* is the fourth instalment in a series that, frankly, bored me to tears, but with a new developer, Spellbound Entertainment, at work. Spellbound have never been considered great developers, but they were the team behind *Robin Hood: Legend of Sherwood* – a game built on the *Commandos* engine and gameplay mechanics that replaced Nazi stuff with swords and mead, making it instantly better. This meant two things: 1) I was actually interested in *Arcania: Gothic 4*, and 2) I'd have a chance to prove to the diehard *Gothic* fans that there is a better way to handle the series. Sadly, I was wrong. *Arcania* can't even be compared to the previous *Gothic* games because it's a dumbed-down action-RPG with stupid voice acting and repetitive gameplay. So, now that you're ready to read this review with one of those "Hah! I knew it" grins on your face, let's continue...

You play as a chap I can only assume is named Hero, because he never introduces himself and that's what the mini-map says. Hero is a peasant boy with flopsy hair, a goatee and designer stubble who lives in a village. To cut a clichéd, predictable introductory tutorial short, your village is attacked; your fellow villagers are slain and your path of vengeance is laid in front of you. You'll need to travel to the isle of Feshyr to seek out the bloodthirsty king who ordered your village put to the torch, but your journey is filled with lots of NPCs who want you to do favours for them before they'll help. The quest system is predictable and repetitive, and is filled with "fetch me twelve golden banana

That last scone is mine!

skins from the Gutspewer Orc village"–type quests that are separated by meaningless dialogue presented by robotic characters with awful accents (Irish ≠ pirate). When you're not trying to convince the local villages to let you through to the next chapter, you'll fight monsters that have similarly predictable and repetitive AI using a combination of melee, ranged and magic attacks. These attacks are performed by clicking on enemies until they die, with the added challenge of rapidly pressing the quickslot key that corresponds to the seven hundred and forty-two apples, potions and venison stews you have stashed in your pants.

Arcania might sound bloody awful, and compared to good action RPGs like *Diablo II*, the earlier *Fable* games and *Titan Quest*, it is, but it's not the combat or characters that make it so bad. It feels soulless, like you're simply going through the motions of completing the game. It makes me think that the developers simply went through the motions of *making* the game, without pausing to think "what makes action RPGs *fun*?" If *Arcania* has a saving grace, it's that it looks splendid. The world is richly-detailed and the visuals are exquisite, albeit prone to glitches (especially with the animations). The

Aww, that red #@$% ate the last scone.

game is also pretty lengthy, although it feels drawn-out most of the time, but if you're looking for a game that'll take you a few dozen hours to finish, and don't mind doing the same thing over and over again, then this could be the game for you.   **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

THE SCORE

16 — www.pegi.info

1   N/A   N/A

>Online services
SecureROM

>Plus
+ Looks incredible
+ Decent humour
+ Strong gameplay

>Minus
– Repetitive
– Predictable
– Soulless

Look & Listen
For the Fans

>Bottom Line
There are worse things you could do with your money, but you might want to try them first.

63

TOTAL WAR
SHOGUN 2
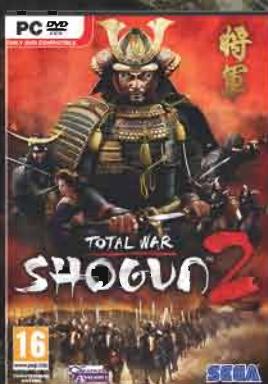
MASTER THE ART OF WAR

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Conquer 16th century Japan by leading your armies into breathtaking real-time battles.

PC DVD

RELEASED MARCH 2011

NuMetro
interactive
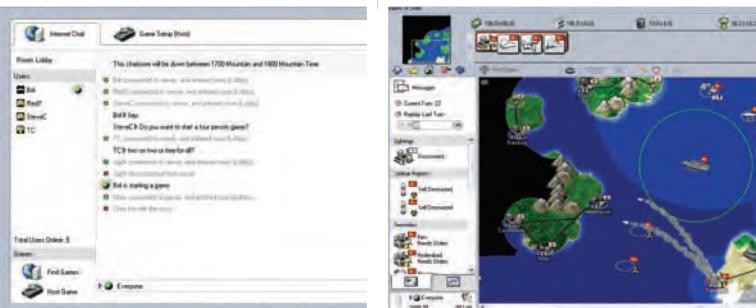
16
www.pegi.info

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www.totalwar.com

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Empires of Steel

Sounds impressive, but isn't

GENRE > Turn-based strategy					
PC	360	PS3	WII	PS2	PSP	DS

TURN-BASED GAMES REALLY DO come down to a matter of taste. They allow for greater amounts of tweaking and micromanagement, but they also tend to be far slower and more pedantic than the average gamer would want. On the upside, once again, this allows for a level of detail that real time strategy games can't normally pull off.
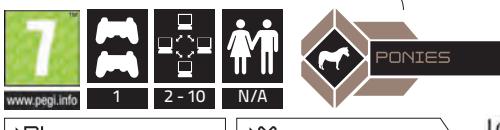
And that's the real problem with *Empires of Steel*: the detail. The game is a turn-based strategy title set around World War 2 (although the tech-tree of the game is hardly up to the specification in terms of that) and allows players to take control of a number of factions in order to gain control of the planet. There is no real benefit to choosing one nation over another, except maybe for patriotism. They pretty much have the same abilities and the same tech-tree.

The game then bogs down into slow turns that allow the player to move units, issue attack orders and perform research. That's all fine and well – Civilization does the same thing – but the menus are unclear, the various research and unit options are vague and the overall feel of the game is beyond anachronistic. We played games like this a decade ago. The biggest clue stems from the fact that the graphics are nowhere near the expected standard of today's games. They're not just poor... they're very old fashioned. *Empires of Steel* isn't redeemed by the strategy element, either. It's extremely simplistic, in truth, with the player rushing to capture cities and resources. Cities are all pre-existing, so even the strategic decision of where to place new settlements is taken out of the player's hands.

Empires of Steel feels like a weekend project put together by students, but we have seen games like that achieve far more than this title. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

THE SCORE

7				PONIES
www.pegi.info	1	2 - 10	N/A	

>**Plus**
+ It installs
+ It uninstalls

>**Minus**
- Anachronistic
- Pedantic
- Vague

Look & Listen
For the Fans

>**Bottom Line**
There are many other strategy games out there.

30

ArmA II: Operation Arrowhead

More real than real

GENRE > First Person Shooter					
PC	360	PS3	WII	PS2	PSP	DS

REALISM IS SOMETHING THAT many gamers insist on. But the truth is that many games claiming to be realistic still drop many of the more 'petty' aspects of realistic action in favour of a thrilling gaming experience. Let's face it: realism isn't exactly the most exciting thing at times, and adding an abundance of it to a game can raise frustration levels and decrease pace in a game.

ArmA II: Operation Arrowhead is a standalone expansion to *ArmA II* that doesn't think that way. While there are some unrealistic aspects to the game, this is a title that gets as realistic as it is feasible for a video game to be. Many gamers may actually find the game to be a little too realistic, in fact. Playing *Operation Arrowhead* provides the gamer with the most complete and realistic war simulation they're going to find.
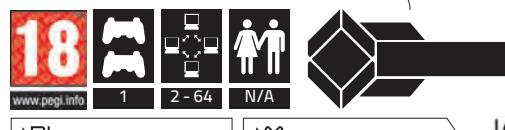
The game is exceptionally detailed in many aspects (including its awesome graphics) and the player will be able to make use of an incredibly rich variety of vehicles and weapons - this being the unrealistic part of the game, because most soldiers specialise. This means that the player will need to spend quite some time learning the complex controls that govern the game. And there are a lot of them. Every situation has a different set of controls, and each set is very detailed.

It's not a perfect game. The artificial intelligence can be rather dense from time to time, and the deep realism can make the game slow-paced and pedantic. But that's the real world for you. If it sounds appealing, and you're looking for something other than a run-and-gun game which allows you to get shot a zillion times before dying, the *ArmA* franchise is a good option – and *Operation Arrowhead* is the latest, most complete (and complex) of the lot. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

THE SCORE

18				
www.pegi.info	1	2 - 64	N/A	

>**Plus**
+ Very detailed
+ Lots of in-game toys
+ Super-realistic

>**Minus**
- Pedantic
- Complicated controls
- Some issues

Look & Listen
For the Fans
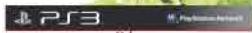
>**Bottom Line**
You can't get much more realistic than this – including slow and pedantic game play. For enthusiasts, this may just be heaven.

79

LittleBigPlanet 2

All the imagination you can handle

GENRE > Platform

PC   360   **PS3**   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

THE RELEASE OF *LITTLEBIGPLANET* may have been hampered by controversial delays relating to its sound track, and it may have seen a slow start in sales thanks to a very competitive market at the end of 2008, but the game has managed to establish itself as a solid contender over time. The biggest contributor to the game's success is the theme behind the game: creativity and imagination. By building a strong following in the form of a community uploading custom built levels, available for all users to download and play, the game tapped into a very lucrative concept… user generated content.

So it's little surprise that the sequel to *LittleBigPlanet* takes a very similar route, improving on what the original offered.

In terms of the game itself, *LittleBigPlanet 2* really is more of the same. The player gets to guide their Sackboy character through a variety of challenging levels, although some of these levels show more variety this time around. The levels still have reasons for the player to revisit them, thanks to collectable items for use in decorating and building levels. And the levels still have multiplayer sections that add to the game's fun factor.

There's a bit of a story to the game, this time around, which adds a little to the experience, but really isn't necessary. If you liked the first game, you will like this one, story or not. Additionally, new mini-games, that borrow ideas from many favourites, are also present, to add a bit of variety into the mix.

The real gem in this release, though, is the level creator. Once again, Media Molecule have decided to stimulate the creativity of the end-user, allowing themselves to rely on the luxury of a strong online community for added success.

The level editor is vastly improved over the previous game. Tools that had minor issues the first time round have been refined, making them easier to use. Most tools have additional settings as well, and a number of additional tools have made the potential for more than just "normal" levels possible. Level builders have a greater variety of options this time around, which is great – the creativity of end-users can be expressed even more effectively now.

On top of that, the limits on levels (in terms of size and object counts) have been increased, allowing users to create even bigger, more complex environments for Sackboy to explore. And levels can be linked, so that an industrious builder can create a longer, more involved experience.

To the critics that have accused the game of being more of the same: sure, it is, but *LittleBigPlanet 2* shows the kind of improvements that are required in the extension of this kind of franchise. And, quite frankly, the series isn't going to go from a platform romp to a FPS, no matter how many sequels are created. 'More of the same' could be said about *Call of Duty*, too, but no-one really did.

If the first game appealed, then this one is a must. Even if you didn't play the first, but like the idea of awesome creativity, *LittleBigPlanet 2* is a great bet. **NAG**
Walt Pretorius

THE SCORE

7
www.pegi.info

1 - 4   2 - 4   2 - 4

MUST PLAY

>Plus
+ Improved tools
+ Awesome creative opportunity

>Minus
− Similar to previous title
− Relies on community
− A little short

Look & Listen
For the Fans

>Bottom Line
It's a fantastic game that allows for a huge amount of creativity, but it might not be for everyone.

90
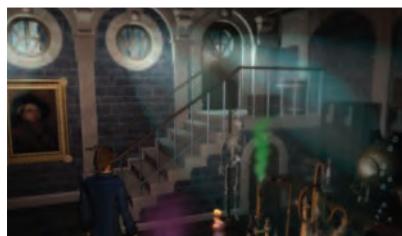
This is a boss battle. I'm not even kidding.

Oh awesome! I love sliding tile puzzles!

Jekyll & Hyde
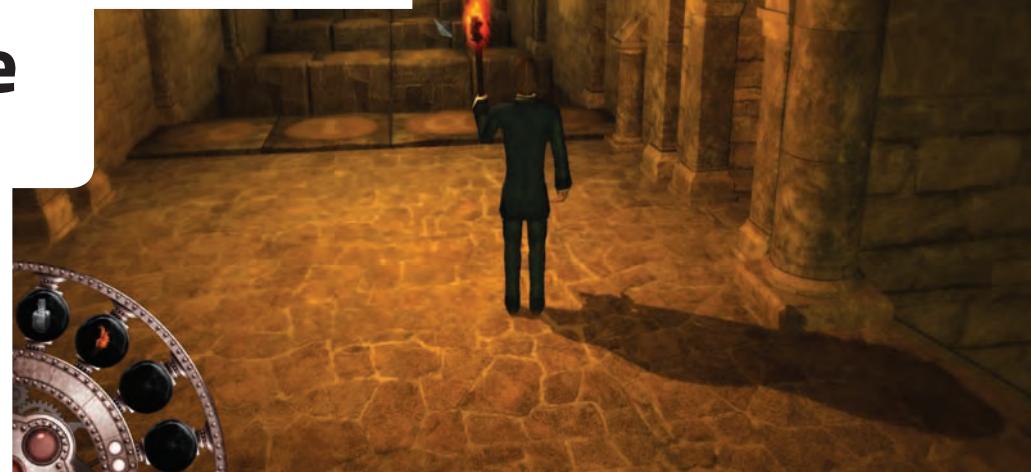
Monster in my pocket

GENRE > Adventure

PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

THIS GAME WOULD NEVER have been reviewed had it not been mercifully lifted from The Pile of Obscurity on our beloved editor's desk by yours truly *[I was getting there, Ed]. Jekyll & Hyde*, along with about nine billion other "modern classic" adventure games, will slip through the cracks of video entertainment for most gamers out there. On the whole, it's a shame, as it's a genre in dire need of support from gamers who grew up with the *Monkey Island* and *Quest for Glory* theme tunes stuck in their heads. Sadly, *Jekyll & Hyde* suffers from the same pitfall that plagues 90% of the games in this genre: poor production quality, but it's not without a few saving graces.

As one would expect, you'll play the role of Dr Jekyll, a medical practitioner stuck with an incurable epidemic on his hands and a lass who's about to be tied off to some sort of wealthy toff. Henry Jekyll needs to cure the disease, win the hand of his beloved from her snooty father and deal with a recently-developed pending psychological breakdown courtesy of a new resident in his head: one Mr Hyde. He will accomplish this by venturing through the vast temples, mines and labyrinths supposedly hidden beneath London, and he'll do that through the use of the traditional adventure gaming mainstays of exploration, item discovery and combination, puzzle-solving and platforming. Wait… pardon? "Platforming?" in an adventure game you ask? Quite right, old chap. Jekyll & Hyde mixes up the classic genre with a mild dose of action elements: leaping across chasms, quick-slot power-ups and some poorly implemented QuickTime events.

These action elements don't overpower the balance of the game, and if they were better implemented wouldn't be that much of a catastrophe. At certain points in the game, Jekyll can switch to Hyde by taking a swig of his accidentally concocted potion (which can be upgraded throughout the game to provide additional abilities to the monster). This increases movement speed, jumping distance, strength and life force, but the clumsy oaf cannot access Jekyll's inventory. The result is a combination of puzzle-solving and exploration challenges that do a hell of a good job keeping the game interesting, but the cruddy animations and inept control system don't do any of these innovations justice.

All of the above might sound ridiculous, and if the dated visuals and terrible animations haven't caused you to die by self-inflicted railroad spike injuries yet, then they might just push you over the edge, but there's an unmistakable charm that this game possesses that makes its wild combination of love and hate factors come together somewhat harmoniously. Playing *Jekyll & Hyde* is a bit of a strange experience, but at its heart the relatively small, possibly brain-damaged team at Pixelcage isn't afraid to deliver an adventure game that's actually interesting, rather than simply sticking to a boring formula that, frankly, does nothing to take this desperate genre any further. If they manage to secure a bigger budget, I eagerly anticipate their next title. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

THE SCORE

7 www.pegi.info | 1 | N/A | N/A

> Online services
Disc based DRM

> Plus
+ Decent puzzles
+ Good soundtrack
+ At least it tries

> Minus
- Shoddy visuals
- Weak action elements

Look & Listen
For the Fans

> Bottom Line
Solid classic adventure let down by poorly-implemented innovations and awful visuals.

68

Armada 2526

It could be worse

GENRE > Management
PC   360   PS3   WII   PS2   PSP   DS

I GET A LITTLE GIDDY every time I see a really small development team put together a game that makes it onto store shelves. It's both a reminder of my failings to ever do and a beacon of hope that maybe, one day I'll pull it off. Sadly, most of the time games like this do actually make it onto store shelves they get trounced by the AAA titles because these "semi-indie" games don't have the production values to make them appealing to most people. *Armada 2526* is that type of game. It's a 4X space management title that plays like it was programmed by a single person, because it was. One coder, four artists and a sound engineer made this game, and it shows.
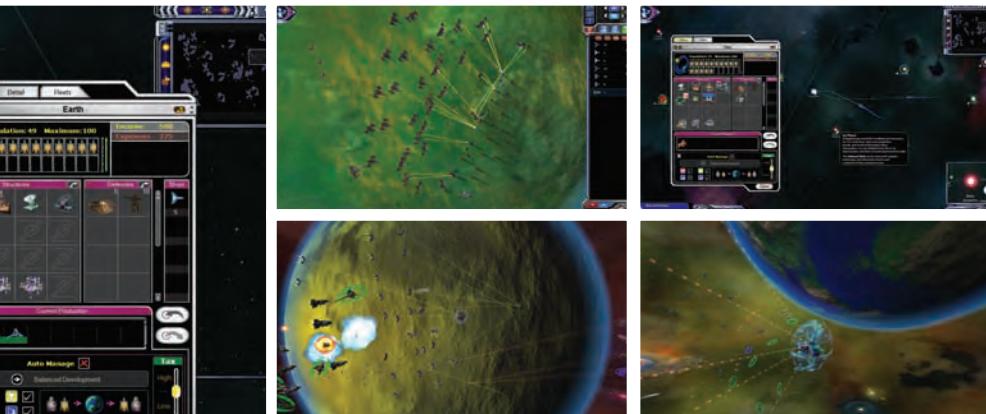
Armada 2526 isn't very good. Its flat, lifeless body will make you feel like you're playing a productivity application with an objective of galactic domination. However, functionally, it's pretty solid. Like most games in this genre, it's up to you to carve out a story of your conquests; *Armada* certainly isn't going to do it for you. It's incredibly slow to play, challenging to stay on top of and yet at the same time a little too easy, but it checks all the boxes for what one would expect from a game like this. The game is broken down into two components: the turn-based galactic management map with all of the starships, solar systems, wormholes and other stuff that science geeks get a kick out of; and the real-time battles that occur any time two opposing forces occupy the same space, usually during planetary invasion. On top of that, there's a large selection of units to choose from, seven branches of scientific research to pursue and a good selection of system variables to ensure that, more often than not, each system you colonise represents a unique challenge.

Should you play *Armada 2526*? Probably not, but if you're nuts for the 4X genre or desperately feel the need to chill out with a game, then it might just be worth your hard-earned buckazoids. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

THE SCORE

12
www.pegi.info

1   N/A   N/A

>Plus
+ Functionally sound
+ Plenty of re-playability

>Minus
- Poor visuals
- Clumsy interface
- Boring

Look & Listen
For the Fans

>Bottom Line
Most people will hate it, but for the few who love this sort of thing, you'll find comfort here.

55

HOMEFRONT

DEVELOPER > Kaos Studios [Console] | Digital Extremes [PC]   **PUBLISHER** > THQ   **RELEASE DATE** > March 2011   **WEB** > www.homefront-game.com
GENRE > First-person shooter   **PLATFORMS** > Xbox 360 | PC | PS3

IN A MARKET WHERE 90% of first-person shooters involve trekking off to a dusty country to shoot guys in equally dusty robes [*this will probably offend someone somewhere, Ed*], it's a refreshing change to see the terrifying setting of *Homefront*. In the year 2026, California has been EMP-bombed, invaded and occupied by the Greater Korean Republic – North and South Korea united under the rule of the late Kim Jong-il's son. This forms part of a long-running campaign to conquer the United States, and follows the country's economic downfall in a post peak oil world. It's that scary and somewhat feasible future that nobody wants to face, and with the penmanship of John Milius (writer of *Red Dawn* and co-writer of *Apocalypse Now*) on the books, you can expect some hardcore subject matter.

THQ recently invited a huge group of journalists to attend a preview event in New York to meet the developers, play the first chapter of the singe-player campaign and then spend a few hours eating free food and shooting each other in two of the game's multiplayer modes. Here's what you can expect of *Homefront* based on that event.

The single-player campaign is story-driven and linear with an interesting technique employed to keep the action coming when it needs to: player-focused "magnetic" scripting that brings the action to you no matter how safe you think you may be. The game begins with you, an as-yet unnamed guy, being arrested by Korean troops. You're smacked around a few times, shackled and thrown onto an appropriated school bus used to cart around prisoners. As you journey to your destination, you get to see for the first time the horror of foreign invasion. Americans are rounded up violently, herded into lines and shot for even the slightest transgressions, or less. Public places have been converted

into makeshift prisons; a high-tech machine gun turret passes its laser sensor over you; a young couple is gunned down in front of their child. It seems crass to be surprised at the brutality of what our character sees on this bus ride; we've witnessed this kind of scene a hundred times in first-person shooters, but this feels more real, more close-to-home than ever. The "bad guys" are winning this time.

Shortly into your ride, your bus is crashed into. America rebels reach in and help you to freedom. They hand you a gun and tell you to follow them. Kill anyone who gets in your way. As you follow them through the ruins of suburban California, you see abandoned children's toys, a terrified mother, and a bombed-out lounge. You soon encounter your first group of Korean soldiers. They're taken by surprise and go down quickly, and you scramble to pick up their dropped weapons. This concept is a key aspect to create that sense of desperation you'd imagine any freedom fighters would have; ammunition is tight. As you progress through the suburbs, moving in and out of churned-up lawns through bashed-in white picket fences, you encounter more Korean forces, claiming their weapons as you kill them. While you're clearly on the losing side of this battle, your character and the rest of the rebels are tough. There are also a few supplies left behind by the USA Armed Forces, such as satchel charges and a remote-guided rocket-launching tank called a Goliath; you'll use these types of weapons to deal with the armoured resistance you'll encounter.

We didn't get a chance to play much more than that and we hope that the rest of the game is as action-packed as the first chapter. We also hope that the focus on story means that we'll meet interesting characters with fascinating personalities, but let's not get too far ahead of ourselves.

> **"Public places have been converted into makeshift prisons; a high-tech machine gun turret passes its laser sensor over you; a young couple is gunned down in front of their child."**

< COVER FEATURE: Homefront >

⭐ MULTIPLAYER

IN TRYING TO THINK of a way to describe *Homefront*'s multiplayer, I can't help but use the term "*Battlefield* meets *Call of Duty*," but in truth it feels like either, not both. It's also not entirely fair to make blatant comparisons like that because *Homefront* has a few cool things going for it that you don't see every day. Here's the low-down:

When you load up the multiplayer mode, you're greeted with the now-familiar sight of customisable classes. You know this stuff by now: pick your primary weapon, attachments, perks (which are all listed elsewhere on these pages), grenades and whatnot, but there's something here that you won't recognise: Battle Points slots. This is *Homefront*'s answer to the notion of kill streak rewards. Whenever you perform a meaningful action in-game, you'll be rewarded with Battle Points. The

< COVER FEATURE: Homefront >

more meaningful or impressive, the more points you'll receive. Killing a guy is easy enough, and you'll gain a few points for your troubles, but kill him with a headshot, or a melee attack, and you'll earn twice as many. Is that a revenge kill? Have some more points. If you're more of an objective-oriented player (and good for you), then you'll earn a huge stack of points every time you capture an objective. Save your teammate from certain death by excavating his attacker's heart with a 250mm round and you'll be given a little something extra to say "thanks".

Once you've earned enough Battle Points, you'll be able to instantly redeem them on the field. Your rewards are dependent on what you've unlocked and what you've assigned to the d-pad (only two slots are available initially; the other two unlock as you gain experience levels). A solid, versatile infantry build might include an RPG, flak jacket, personal UAV and a cluster bombing run, allowing you to tackle any situation as it arises. Campers

might enjoy ammo resupplies and thermal goggles, or you can go drone-crazy and load up all of your slots with the buggers. The beauty behind this system is cost: the more powerful the reward, the more BP it costs. Those who spend at every opportunity will be more powerful on a low level, but could suddenly be overtaken in prowess by that one guy who's been saving up his points like Scrooge McDuck, only to unleash a hell storm on the entire battlefield and swing the game in the last minute. Then, on top of all of that, you have vehicles.

Tanks and full-size helicopters (i.e. not drones) cost a *lot* of Battle Points, but the payoff is often worth saving up and taking a few knocks on your way. To claim a vehicle, you simply choose to spend the required amount of BP and the next time you spawn, you'll be the pilot of the vehicle. Other players can then choose to either spawn in your vehicle or can jump in if you take enough pity on them to pull over and let them in.

>>
Homefront was in development for three full years. According to THQ bigwig Danny Bilson, that's how long it takes to make a good game properly. Ouch.

"In trying to think of a way to describe *Homefront*'s multiplayer, I can't help but use the term "*Battlefield* meets *Call of Duty*,"..."

< SIR YES SIR! >

Each game mode has an optional modifier called Battle Commander. This mode provides a computer-controlled non-combatant commander who hands out secondary objectives to players on their team, based on the progress of the opposing team and its players. Each player has a wanted rating, on a scale of one to five stars, derived from their performance and kill streaks. As players earn stars, the commander on the opposing team will give its players missions to eliminate that dangerous player. The more stars that player has, the more players on the opposing team will be given a mission to kill him. To raise the challenge of staying alive even further, that player's last known position will be approximated periodically and relayed to the hunters. There are a handful of mission types, including eliminate solder, eliminate drone, defend position and take position. These secondary objectives add variety and spice to an ordinary death match and make you feel like a total badass when you have the entire enemy team desperately chasing you around a map. It's even better when you're that guy, in a helicopter.

< DRONES? >

Yes, drones. These little fellows are permitted in infantry-only maps and will either be the bane of your existence or your new *raison de vivre*. Drones are entirely player-controlled and can only be summoned through the use of Battle Points. They are lightly-armoured but their manoeuvrability and pure psychological terror that they inflict on others is worth every point.
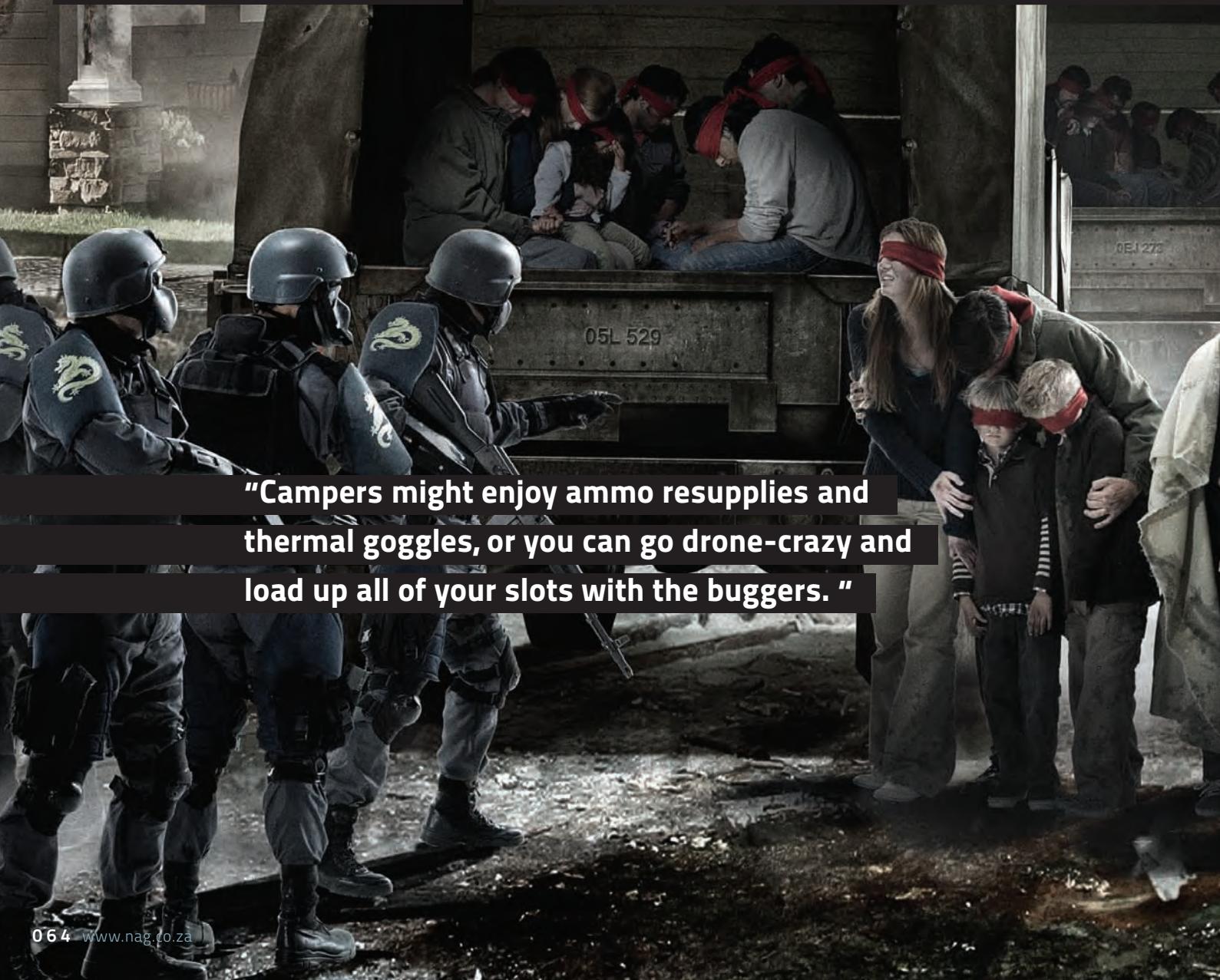
There are four types of drones:

Buzzard AQ-11: Like a tiny, whirring robot of death, the Buzzard spews out low-damage rockets in a straight line. What it lacks in punch, it makes up for with speed and its ability to turn the entire enemy team against its controller.

Parrot RQ-10: Four propellers allow for this unarmed scout drone to zip around the battlefield. The controlling player uses it to mark enemy positions to earn a small BP bonus for each kill. If you suck at shooting stuff, you can always just pilot one of these.

Wolverine MQ50: This ground-based machine gun on wheels can be dispatched with a single knife-attack, but that won't help you when it's gunning you down from across the map.

Rhino MQ60: Are tanks a problem for you? That's fine, because the Rhino is a problem for tanks. Firing free-fire or lock-on armour-piercing shells with gay abandon, this is the drone you want on your side when the other team just spent 2,000 BP on an M1A3 Abrams.

"Campers might enjoy ammo resupplies and thermal goggles, or you can go drone-crazy and load up all of your slots with the buggers. "

< COVER FEATURE: Homefront >

< DON'T CALL THEM PERKS >
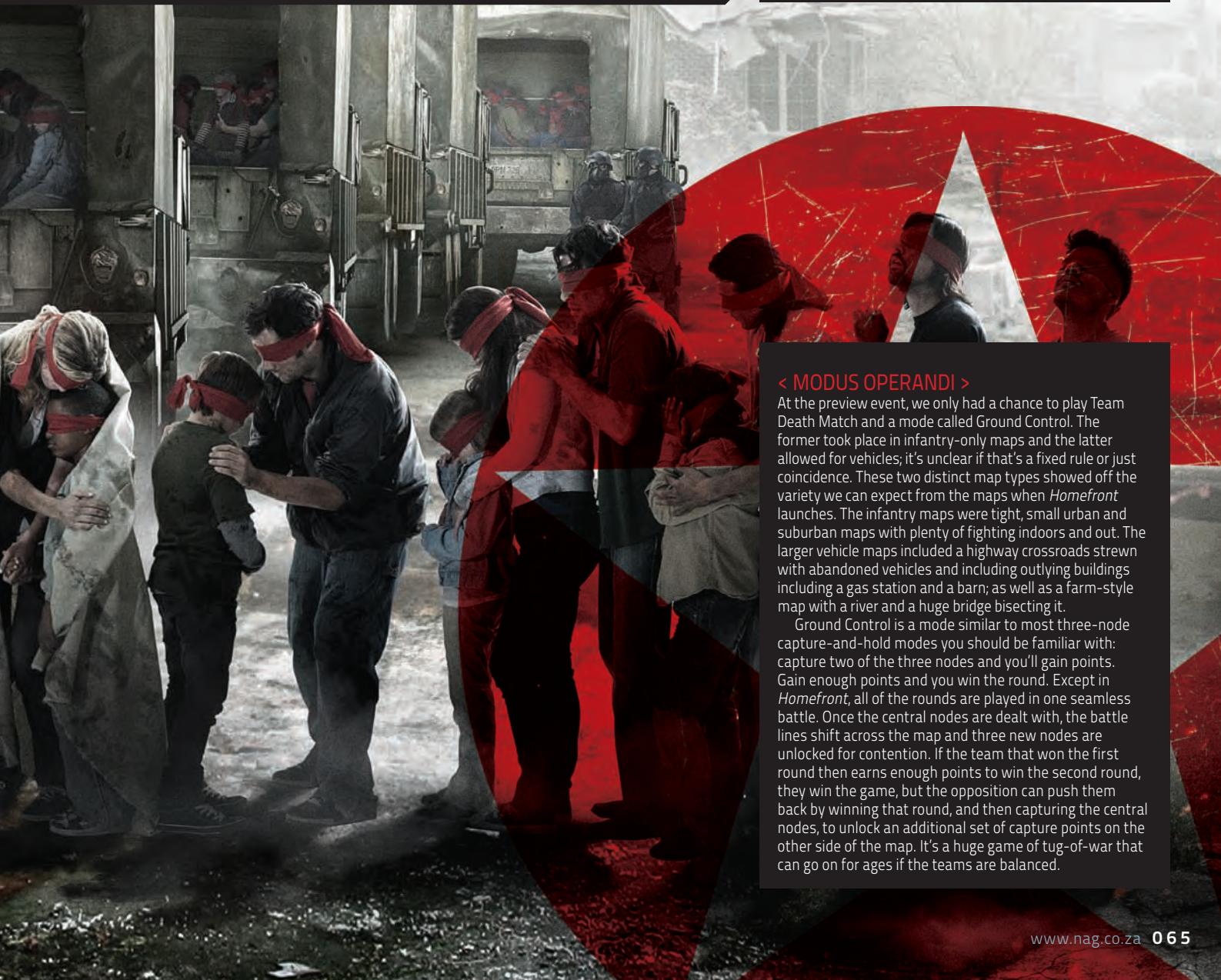
Just like any good first-person shooter, *Homefront* has a number of customisable classes for both infantry and vehicles. All of the expected weapons make an appearance, including the ACR, M16, M4, SCAR-L, SCAR-H, Remington 870 and M110 sniper rifle, and most can be fitted with attachments including an ACOG scope, red dot scope, silencer, under-slung grenade launcher and all that good stuff.

Here is a list of the infantry abilities that can be chosen once unlocked:

Tier 1: Tactical Reload (reload faster); Quickdraw (aim faster after sprinting); Drone be Gone (increases drone speed); My Buddy (increases drone battery capacity); Now that's a knife (increases melee attack range and speed).

Tier 2: Straight from the Hip (improves accuracy when firing from the hip); Thick Skin (increases drone health); Penny Pincher (reduces BP cost of equipment); Ghost (invisible to UAV); Steady Aim (improves accuracy when aiming down sights); Blastwave (increases explosion radius); Utility Belt (carry extra special grenades); Grave Robber (allows ammunition to be collected from bodies);

Tier 3: Grizzled (increases XP earning rate); Fist Full (carry extra explosive grenades); Boomer (increases explosion damage); Crater-to-Order (your drones explode on death); Quick Healer (regenerate health faster).

< MODUS OPERANDI >

At the preview event, we only had a chance to play Team Death Match and a mode called Ground Control. The former took place in infantry-only maps and the latter allowed for vehicles; it's unclear if that's a fixed rule or just coincidence. These two distinct map types showed off the variety we can expect from the maps when *Homefront* launches. The infantry maps were tight, small urban and suburban maps with plenty of fighting indoors and out. The larger vehicle maps included a highway crossroads strewn with abandoned vehicles and including outlying buildings including a gas station and a barn; as well as a farm-style map with a river and a huge bridge bisecting it.

Ground Control is a mode similar to most three-node capture-and-hold modes you should be familiar with: capture two of the three nodes and you'll gain points. Gain enough points and you win the round. Except in *Homefront*, all of the rounds are played in one seamless battle. Once the central nodes are dealt with, the battle lines shift across the map and three new nodes are unlocked for contention. If the team that won the first round then earns enough points to win the second round, they win the game, but the opposition can push them back by winning that round, and then capturing the central nodes, to unlock an additional set of capture points on the other side of the map. It's a huge game of tug-of-war that can go on for ages if the teams are balanced.

INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD CARRILLO

NAG: Please tell us who you are and what you do at Kaos Studios.
Richard Carrillo: I'm Richard Carrillo, a senior game designer on *Homefront* multiplayer. I'm in charge of user interfaces and all online systems.

NAG: What was the main inspiration behind the development of *Homefront*?
RC: The story drove a lot. In single player you have the David and Goliath story – the resistance against the Korean occupation – and in multiplayer you have that large-scale warfare of the military and what they're actually doing at the time. They're not completely gone, even though it looks that way in some parts of the single player. They're around – they're fighting in skirmishes around the country.

NAG: Do you feel that story is something that's missing in first-person shooters?
RC: Definitely. And that's where you can shine in the FPS genre right now – that part is missing in a lot of first-person shooters. It's more about multiplayer than it is about single player. But we've definitely got a good balance of both. That story just really tried to drive home the human casualties of war. To create a real war feel, and that's what a lot of games don't really have.

NAG: Do you think, going forward in the genre in general, that story needs to be the focus?
RC: The way forward for first-person shooters is to do your own thing, I think. It's not that "this or that should be the next focus," it's more like "what are you inspired by and
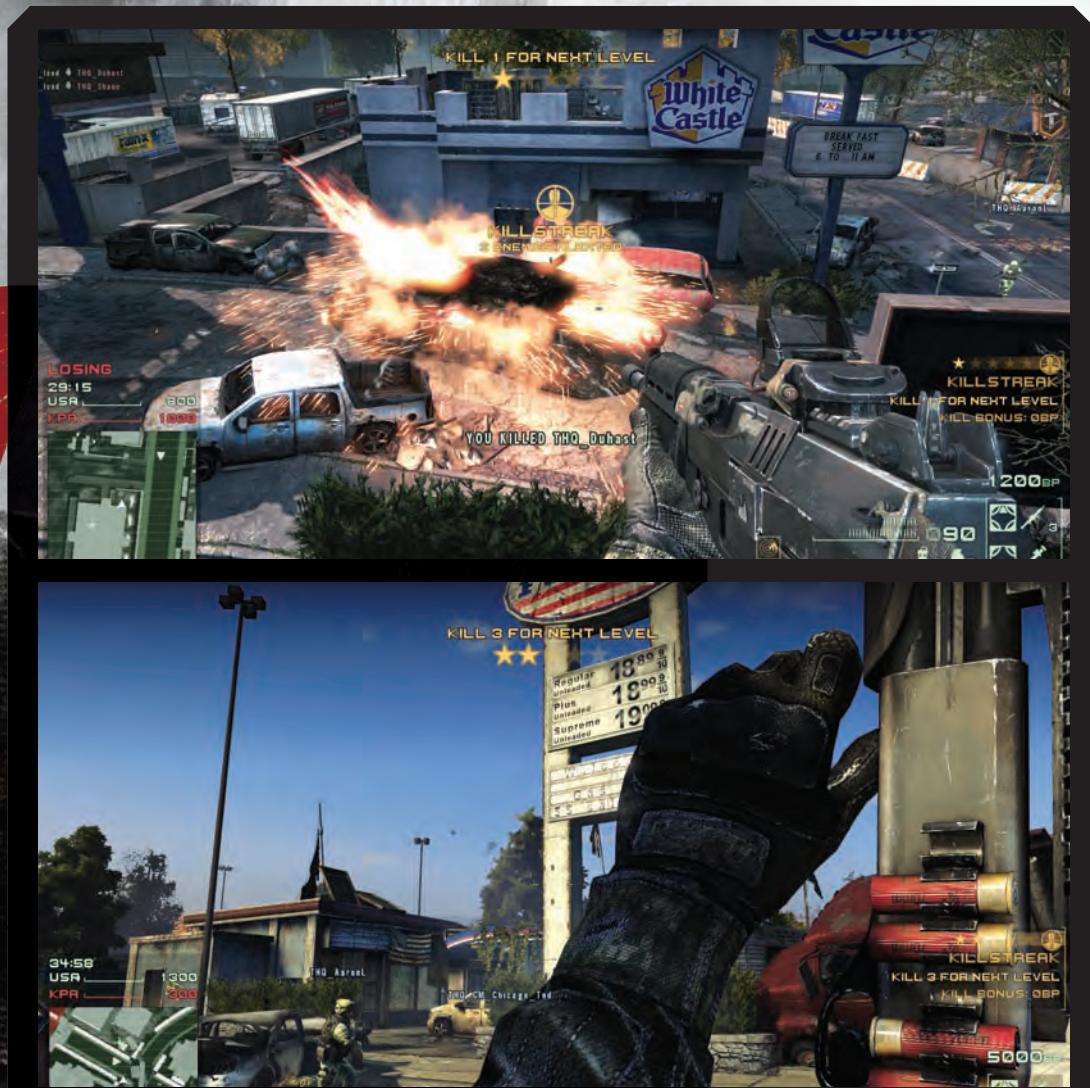
what do you want to bring to the table?" This is what we wanted to bring to the table. I think other games are doing well at what they do well, and to change it too much, to give them new direction, I don't think that's really going to work for all games, but that story and that premise in our game really drives what we do.

NAG: In multiplayer, you've got support for 32 players, clan support and dedicated servers. Do you feel that *Homefront* is going to compete with the big guys like *Medal of Honour* and *Call of Duty*?
RC: Definitely. We're really excited to compete with them and we definitely think we have a great game to compete with. What sets us apart is large-scale, fast-paced warfare. A lot of those games either have fast-pasted warfare with infantry or you have large-scale, slower-paced warfare with vehicles where it takes a long time to get to the conflict. In our game, we want to always make sure that there were epic scenes and epic vehicle warfare, but the infantry part was also a huge part of it and to be in the combat in less than ten seconds. And that's kind of a big thing that other games don't do. We're bringing both of those together. We're looking at the best games in the industry right now and merging them into one. That's kind of what we've done.

NAG: Speaking of vehicles, we've seen a lot of vehicular and drone combat here today. What have you done to try and balance it so that the vehicles and drones are not overpowered?
RC: That's probably the hardest part – making sure that

< COVER FEATURE: Homefront >

balance exists; making sure that those people want to play as infantry get a great experience just playing at infantry. That balance comes through in the Battle Points system. If you want to save up all your points to purchase a vehicle, you have to earn it. They're not just scattered around the map. So, in the time it took you to save those points, someone else could earn that same amount of points and get a carpet bomb airstrike and take out that vehicle right as you spawn. Obviously we're not trying to frustrate people right as they spawn a vehicle – you will get enough time to play and have fun in it – but there are all of those counters, and we make sure that both sides have a lot of fun and really have to watch out for the other side.

NAG: For the PC version, you outsourced the porting to Digital Extremes. With your roots in PC development, what has that process been like?
RC: It's been a great experience. The old GM of Kaos Studios is running PC development. He's hands-on with those guys and doing a great job over there. It's almost like sister studios in a way. It isn't so much outsourcing to someone you're not really talking to. They're doing great things with the game and we're really excited about what they're doing – bringing that PC-only aspect to it, making sure that's completely covered. We're trying to make sure that we concentrate on the console side. Obviously it's a completely different user-base. Console guys don't want to wait. They want to get into the action as fast as possible, where the PC guys are much more laid-back and they can wait. They can have their respawn timers be longer, or even go without playing almost a whole round a lot of the time. It's just a completely different experience and it needs different tuning.

NAG: Will the PC players have customisability in terms of hosting their own servers?
RC: You will be able to host your own dedicated servers on PC. I think that will open up a lot of doorways. People will be able to control their own servers and things like that. You'll probably see a lot of interesting stuff. It's all up to the community at that point. Just give them it and it's like "well, it's yours now" [laughs]. So I'm sure a lot of interesting things will happen. On the console side, it's a lot more closed, but still dedicated servers for them with 32 players per server.

NAG: What is your personal favourite feature in *Homefront*?
RC: I'm a multiplayer guy; my personal favourite feature is that epic feel of our multiplayer experience. There are points where you'll spawn and there are airstrikes going on next to you; there's a tank rolling up on you and there's a helicopter in the sky. And the coolest part is you feel like you can handle it still. It's really epic and you're like "holy sh1t, what am I going to do?" but you've got an airstrike, man; you've got this and you can handle it; you've got rockets. And then you look over and you've got teammates, and they're all trying to battle it also. It's just a really interesting vibe. My favourite thing to do right now is to use a Hellfire Airstrike to try take out a helicopter. It's probably one of the hardest things to do. You almost have to wait for them to slow down or stop and then shoot and hope, and guide the missile, and it's just a blast with a huge payoff if you actually hit him. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

"We're trying to make sure that we concentrate on the console side. Obviously it's a completely different user-base. Console guys don't want to wait."

Antec adds new cases

ANTEC RECENTLY ANNOUNCED THE new mid-tower Sonata IV and the Six Hundred V2 gaming chassis. The Sonata IV has been re-designed from the ground up to accommodate future component upgrades. It has a USB 3.0 front panel port, includes an 80 PLUS certified 620W power supply, and features eight drive bays (three external 5.25", four internal 3.5", and one internal 2.5"). The Sonata IV supports Mini-ITX, microATX and Standard ATX motherboards.

Their new gaming case, the Six Hundred V2 comes packed with some cool new features. A front-loaded 2.5" hot swap hard drive caddy (SSD compatible); a CPU cutout for installation of after-market coolers; a cable management compartment for tidier routing; and a windowed top panel for unique "moonroof" visibility. Storage won't be a problem either since it has 11 drive bays (six internal 3.5" HDD, three external 5.25" HDD, one internal bottom-mounted 2.5" SSD and the built-in hot swap 2.5" SATA HDD caddy).

Antec KÜHLER H2O 620

ANTEC HAS DEVELOPED AN easy-to-install liquid CPU cooling solution that is said to outperform stock CPU coolers up to 20 percent under full load. The KÜHLER H2O 620 features Asetek's low-profile pump for liquid circulation, easy-bend tubes for maximum flexibility in radiator positioning, utilises liquid temperature controlled fans, and uses the latest generation copper cold plate for optimal conduction.

"Combining high performance and quiet computing has never been easier than with the KÜHLER H2O 620 cooler's liquid temperature fan control," said Steve Branton, director of marketing at Asetek. "Simply plug the fan into the pump and the cooler provides great performance when you need it and stays whisper quiet when you don't."

430 Scuderia Limited Edition

THIS WIRELESS GAMEPAD IS Ferrari slick. So slick that the grip has been inspired by a Ferrari "musetto" (nose) – more specifically that of the 430 Scuderia. Being a Limited Edition, each one is exclusive and has been numbered. It is compatible with PC and PS3
R750 | www.bowline.co.za

ROG Vulcan

ASUS WILL SOON BE releasing a new stereo gaming headset - the ROG Vulcan ANC (active noise cancellation). The headset features active noise cancellation of up to 30 dB, and a noise-cancelling microphone.

< Tech News >

Know Your Technology

DMA: Direct Memory Access is a feature of all modern CPUs that allows some hardware subsystems to access main memory (both reads and writes) without relying on the CPU. This independence allows disk controllers, graphics cards and other controllers to minimize the CPU overhead as these devices regularly perform such operations within the system. Computers without DMA channels often waste CPU cycles by using programmed inputs and outputs for communication which can cause 100% load on the CPUs.

IRQ: Interrupt Request. This is the act of interrupting the bus lines that signal an interrupt as caused by installing or removing a device from the machine. In modern computers users rarely have to worry about setting individual IRQs for hardware. It is all taken care of by the APIC (Advanced Programmable Interrupt Controller) which assigns IRQs automatically to any and virtually all devices that need them.

VXD: Virtual xxx Driver. This is the old device driver model used in 386 enhanced mode as is Windows 9x and older operating systems. This driver model allows access to the memory of the kernel (terrible idea as that makes the entire system vulnerable to attacks and severe memory leaks) and all running process. This provides raw access to the hardware as well.

WDDM: Windows Display Driver Model is the graphic driver model underlying Windows Vista/7. It replaced the general WDM driver used in the older NT kernel operating systems. It allows the compositing windows manager to run on top of Direct3D (which is what allows Aero effects) as well. WDDM's main advantages are that it supports virtualized video memory, scheduling, sharing of Direct3D surfaces and significantly better fault tolerance than before (hence you can recover from a halted driver without crashing the entire operating system).

"The complete exhaustion of IPv4 addresses means that organisations need to adopt the next generation of IP addressing, IPv6. If they fail to do so, the future growth of the Internet may be in jeopardy."

AfriNIC, The reserve of available Internet addresses was used up around the world on 1 February. The currently used Internet Protocol version 4 (IPv4) manages about four billion addresses and has reached its limit. But an alternative protocol, IPv6, will allow the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers to register and service billions of new addresses.

By the Numbers # 1GB

Steam has just released an opt-in beta version of its client that will allow you to take screenshots while in-game without needing an additional application to do so. Valve has allocated 1GB of uploading space so you can share your screenies on Facebook, Twitter and your Steam Community Profile.

Hardware Scoring System

1	Not worth reviewing so it's unlikely to ever appear in the magazine.
2	Hardware turns on/installs but doesn't do much else.
3	This is reserved for all products that function exactly as advertised but not well at all.
4	Hardware that is worth considering if your budget is extremely tight.
5	Middle of the road product. Performs and works exactly as advertised.
6	Slightly above average product with additional functionality over the standard model.
7	Good product that falls only a little short of being a must have item.
8	Reserved for products you will definitely want to go out and buy if you're in the market.
9	Excellent product, near perfect.
10	The stuff of dreams, the best in the market, bar none.

Hardware Awards

This award can be given for a product that is fast, useful, great value, innovative, first of its kind, etc. It is typically only awarded to a product that scores 7 or higher.

The Dream Machine award isn't always given to the fastest version of any product, but the most versatile, powerful, etc. Only products scoring 9 or 10 get this badge.


The Mosh Pit

Digital Planet sent us a box of cool little gadgets this month. No prizes for guessing which one our Editor likes the best. You can buy all this stuff online at **www.digitalplanet.co.za**

THE ULTIMATE GEEK PEN
Aside from being a ballpoint pen, this Geek Pen can also function as four other devices. It has a laser pointer that can be used for presentations (or simply to watch your cat chase it around the floor); a UV light if you need to do an impromptu check on money; a flashlight for like lighting up stuff; and a stylus tip that can be used on PDA and game devices.
R229

CABLE MONKEY
This is what it says on the packaging … "Don't monkey around with messy cords and cables. Let the Cable Monkey tidy things up for you." You literally just wrap the monkey's arms around your cables.
R129

CLOCKY
Having trouble getting up in the morning? This alarm clock will make sure you never oversleep again. Here's how it works. When the alarm goes off it jumps off your table and wheels itself off whilst beeping. The only way to get it to stop is to actually get out of bed and turn it off. You're awake now aren't you?
R899

HUMPING DOG
This is a USB drive that is pretty much what it's called – a humping dog. And yes, it was disturbing to watch a plastic dog humping our PC.
R199
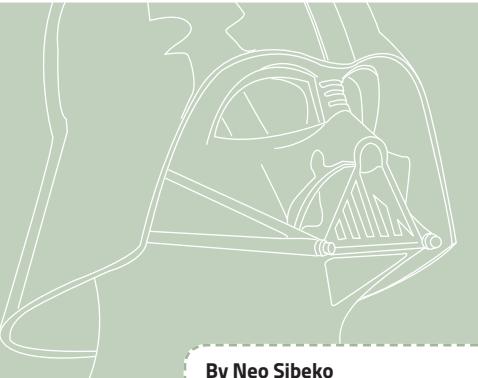
POCKET LAMP
It's a cute little pocket lamp that slides out and lights up.
R129

Hardwired

By Neo Sibeko

The Business of XPU

LEND ME YOUR EYES a little; this month I'd like to talk a bit about what I always had a passion for - the business of processing units. I say the business of, if not solely concerned with or even partially concerned with the monetary elements of it, but rather with the science of the business of semi-conductors in the context of processing units

What many people don't know about the business of manufacturing, designing and selling CPUs or GPUs is that what plays out before our eyes is not what is current at Intel, ATI, AMD, NVIDIA, IBM or Texas Instruments, ARM or any other major company that is concerned with the semi-conductor business. What is true in particular to the first four (AMD swallowed ATI indeed, but for the purposes of this, we refer to ATI as a separate entity) is that their successes, or lack thereof, takes place many months if not years before the actual products hit retail.

We like to amuse, or at least appease, our juvenile selves entertaining the idea of products being released for the sole purpose of upsetting the competition, or having one up on them for the sake of gloating, or having a fictitious "crown" of being the best or as usual the fastest.

This is entertaining and does allow us to think we have some real insight into what happens at these firms, but the truth is by the time we catch wind of anything, hundreds and thousands of man hours have passed which have already determined the future of the company, past the imminent release of their next product.

A simple example is Intel's ill-fated Pentium 4. The design directive for that was finalised many months before the products sampled, in fact it is reasonable to assume that given the information and the predictions made by the knowledgeable and the powers that be at Intel, (around 1997) the Pentium 4 was going to be a success which Intel would base its entire product line up and future on. This obviously never materialised and the Pentium 4 was tragic from its inception to its abortion.

Concurrently, AMD's success and rise to the fore at the same time was based on investments made many months before the AthlonXP and subsequently Athlon64 (K8) architecture saw the light of day. The decisions made by the engineers and scientists at each respective company were made without any knowledge of what the competition was planning and to a large degree that was never important at all. What was and remains so for these competitors is an architecture that allows them to have as many SKUs and products as possible, for as long as possible, investing as little as possible over the longest period possible and ultimately with the greatest returns. (Did you get that?) Looking at it like that, you soon realise that beating the competition is only second to besting your own products and making the massive strides both

financially and in market pervasiveness which are not always directly related.

This ideology is true in the GPU market as well. Any design that is decided upon and has vast amounts of resources poured into it has to have longevity. It has to last past a single product cycle and must last long enough to recuperate its R&D and marketing costs, in addition to making sure the company turns a profit. The notion that any design can be thrown out when it's not superior to the competitions is nothing short of ludicrous.

NVIDIA had to ride out the storm with the NV3X GPU. It was an expensive investment at the time, which for

> "Being first isn't important, neither is being the fastest. What's important is not what's out right now, but what may come in the future, because there's nothing you can do about the products you offer now except make them cheaper if the competition is clearly superior."

all intents and purposes was better than their previous products in all spheres, alas the competition made better design decisions and they reaped the benefits accordingly. The refresh to the NV30 in the NV35 and NV36 was a valiant and somewhat successful attempt at salvaging what could be from the ill-fated design and recouping as much as possible for the firms' next project. This is the business of CPUs and GPUs. Being first isn't important, neither is being the fastest. What's important is not what's out right now, but what may come in the future, because there's nothing you can do about the products you offer now except make them cheaper if the competition is clearly superior. The future though is most dangerous because if you bet incorrectly, it's already costing you money now, but in reality you're making a loss at the same time, it's just that you don't know it yet.

Get it wrong twice in a row and that's the end of the company; if you want to know that's exactly what happened to 3Dfx, Cyrix, WinChip and others. **NAG**

Life, Hardware and Ch@ps

By Derrick Cramer

Evolution vs. Revolution

THE PROBLEM WITH FOCUSSING on something too long is that you tend to lose perspective, and often it takes some form of outside "interference" to make you step back and realise things aren't really as bad or as stagnant as they appear to be. Over the last while I've been thinking to myself how boring the hardware industry has been of late, nothing has really revolutionised the way our computers run, until something obscure was pointed out to me.

I'm sure at least one of you has thought, well what about Sandy Bridge? The new processors and chipset are out, and they offer amazing performance at a good price, and they also use far less power, so it's a win win situation! Well, not really. Since the dawn of the PC era CPU's and the chipsets they run have been getting smaller, faster, more power efficient, less hot (well maybe not the old NVIDIA chipset's for the Intel platform but we'll give that a skip), it's the same old thing over and over again. The same goes for the GTX580/6970, just newer cards doing the same thing graphics cards have always been doing. Sure they support the latest DirectX and have features like Cuda, but nothing that's going to change your life any time soon. USB3 is exactly the same, a faster revision of a technology that's been around since the Mesozoic era, the same can be said about the new Sata 6GBs.

So think back, when did the last big thing hit the hardware market? SSD's are a close contender, their benefit is measurable in day-to-day usage, but they're still expensive and far from commonplace. So before SSD's? How about Hexa/Quad Core CPUs? Did they suddenly change everything? Not really, they had a slight performance bump in limited applications for the first few years, but even today games don't make full use of them. How about Larrabee, Intel's foray into the discrete graphics card market? It had the ability to impress, but it was cancelled, so much for that. NCQ perhaps? How many people know what NCQ means? It couldn't have been that good then. How about SLI/Crossfire? Well not only has that been around in some form or another for longer than NAG's younger readers, it's just expanding on previous technology, much the same way slapping

more cores into a CPU was.

The point here is we need replacements for our current technology, not advancements. We need something new, something fresh, something that changes everything, or at least changes one thing in a big way. One such thing is here, and it's called UEFI.
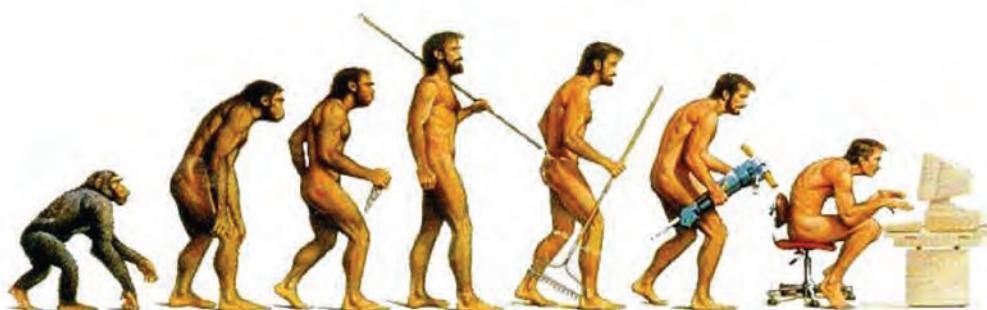
The United Extensible Firmware Interface aims to replace the BIOS, a 30-year-old system that became obsolete years ago. So now instead of your PC taking 30 – 40 seconds to boot as the BIOS tries to wake up, put in its false teeth, yell at the kids to get off its lawn and finally do its job, your PC will now boot in a matter of

> *"We need something new, something fresh, something that changes everything, or at least changes one thing in a big way."*

seconds. Yeah, that's right, more exciting than all of the above mentioned technology advancements is shaving off 75%+ of the time it takes for your PC to boot.

Not impressed? If we had an advancement like this in the laptop battery department, your desktop would be running perfectly well off a battery the size of a midget's fist. Or something like that. So I say we need SOAT (Some Other Awesome Technology) to replace PCIe, not PCIe 3.0. We need CROS (Cool Replacement of Outdated Sata) replacing Sata, not Sata 7.5GB. Being serious for a second, this is why we need Lightpeak by Intel, or Fusion from AMD, or clusters of ARM processors as competition to server class CPU's.

All of these technologies are on the horizon; all have the ability to be the next big thing. Will they go the way of USB3 and SLI? Evolution rather than a revolution? I sure hope not, because according to this jaded tech enthusiast the industry needs something new and exciting. **NAG**

ThinkGeek Electronic Guitar Shirt

DO YOU PLAY *GUITAR* Hero or *Rock Band*? Do you rock the Heavens when you play *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band*? Have you ever tried to play a real guitar and been knocked into a seven-week depression because you realised that playing a real guitar is difficult? If you answered "yes" to those questions, then the Electronic Guitar Shirt from ThinkGeek is exactly what you need to make yourself feel better about life. If you answered "no" to any of those questions, then you should get the Electronic Guitar Shirt from ThinkGeek anyway because it's *a guitar on a T-shirt.*

WHAT IT DOES
Aside from making you the coolest person at any party, this T-shirt and accompanying amplifier recreate genuine distortion guitar sounds. Hold your finger down on the neck and pass the magnetic plectrum over the pickup area and a sound will play. Each location on the neck will play a chord, and A through to G# is included to ensure all of those simple, iconic rock anthems are accessible to anyone willing to learn a strumming pattern.

The accompanying amplifier, which is designed to clip onto your (obviously studded leather) belt features a power switch, 3.5mm headphone jack, tone adjustment and volume adjustment that goes all the way up to 11. It's surprisingly loud, to be honest. You'd get seriously kicked out of anywhere if you walked around jamming this thing on full volume.

OTHER SHIRTS LIKE THIS
Right, so you bought this shirt and thought to yourself "Gosh, self, I wish I had other instrument shirt-wielding friends with whom I could rock out." Good call. Lucky for you and your friends, ThinkGeek has your backs. They also produce an electronic drum kit T-shirt and a music synthesiser shirt (that's "keyboard" to us common folk). If you're the unfortunate owner of children, then they too can be put to task with the kids-size guitar shirt and drum kit shirt. Rock out family style! **NAG**
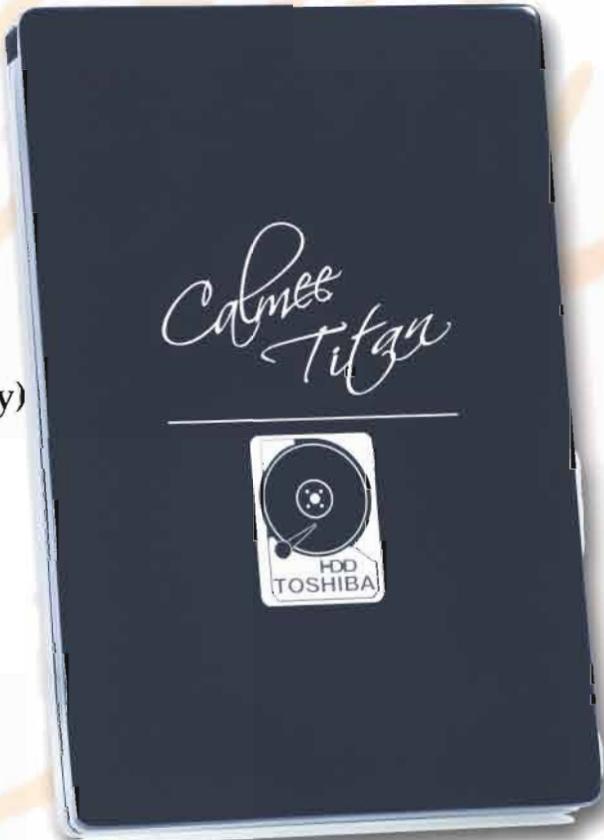
The Dream Machine

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder

THIS MONTH WE ARE replacing our Graphics with something cheaper but better. Now before you go asking why, since the Dream Machine is supposed to be the best stuff you can possibly get for your PC, let us explain why.

Neo says that the Dream Machine should have the fastest single GPU on the market. So even though the ASUS Ares Limited Edition costs well over 10k, the ASUS GTX580 DirectCU II, which he benchmarked for this issue, is the best. As you'll read in his review, put the GTX580 into the fancy case that the Ares comes in and you'll have unmistakable winner. Add to that the fact that the GTX580 can be run in SLI as well, and you'll start to see why it belongs on this page. The guru has spoken. And we never argue with the guru.

The Damage...

COMPONENT	PRICE*
CASE	R3,585
PROCESSOR	R9,199
MOTHERBOARD	R6,199
MEMORY	R2,980
GRAPHICS NEW!	R6,499
STORAGE DRIVE	R1,699
OS DRIVE	R1,699
SOUND	R2,699
POWER	R3,760
DISPLAY	R2,454
KEYBOARD	R1,599
MOUSE	R899
TOTAL	R43,271

At print time

NOTEBOOK
Alienware M17x
R29,999 | www.dell.co.za

System Specs:
CPU: Intel Core i7 720QM (2.8GHz)
RAM: 8GB DDR3 1066
Graphics: 2 x ATI Mobility RADEON HD4870 CFX
Display: 17-inch LCD (1920x1200)
HDD: 320GB SATA2
OS: Windows 7 Ulitimate 64-bit

PROCESSOR
Intel Core i7 980X
www.intel.com

MOTHERBOARD
GIGABYTE GA-X58A-UD9
www.gigabyte.com

MEMORY
Corsair Dominator GT 2000C8
www.corsair.com

GRAPHICS NEW!
ASUS GTX580 DirectCU II
za.asus.com

STORAGE DRIVE
Seagate Barracuda XT 2TB
www.seagate.com

OS DRIVE
OCZ Agility 2 60GB SSD
www.ocz.com

POWER
Thermaltake Toughpower 1.5KW
www.thermaltake.com

CASE
Ikonik Ra X10 LIQUID
www.ikonik.com

DISPLAY
Samsung P2770HD
www.samsung.co.za

KEYBOARD
Logitech G19
www.logitech.com

MOUSE
Roccat Kone[+]
www.roccat.org

SOUND
ASUS Xonar Xense
za.asus.com

MILITARY CLASS II
HIGH STABILITY COMPONENTS

SFC
30% Higher Power

Hi-c CAP
Tantalum Core

Solid CAP
10 years lifetime

TOP QUALITY & STABILITY

Hi-c CAP
(Highly-conductive polymerized Capacitor)

High reliability & Longer lifetime
- 8X longer lifetime than traditional Solid CAP
- Higher Thermal Stability
- No mechanical issue
- Ultra Low ESR

Solid CAP 20,000hrs
Hi-c CAP 160,000hrs
8X Lifespan

SFC
(Super Ferrite Choke)

30% Higher Current Capacity
- 10% Power Efficiency Improvement
- Better Overclocking Power Stability

Maximum current

Traditional Choke 100
SFC 130
30% Higher current

Solid CAP
(Solid Capacitor)

10+ years ultra long lifetime
- No explosion
- low ESR
- Lower temperature

GAMING 12 years
OFFICE 40 years
10+ years lifetime under full load

P67A-GD65
- Support Intel Core i7/i5/i3 series LGA 1155 processor
- Military Class II Components
- OC Genie II Technology
- Click BIOS X2
- USB 3.0 & SATA 6Gb/s Support

www.msi.com

Fighting the good fight

2011 Internet Security Suite Round-up

With a new year well on its way, a fairly well-trodden path looms before all of us who are PC users. Yep, your 1-year protection money is going to run out sooner or later, and you might have to think about what to choose to replace it with. After all, you can't be a conscientious Internet-using global citizen without at least trying to make sure it isn't your box that the potentially Web destroying worm will be launched remotely from.

Of course there's a lot more to it than that sort of flippant terror. Identity theft, scamming, all that stuff, they all do happen. So I don't think dwelling on them any longer at all is really worth the time. Let's, instead, meet the 2011 NAG Internet Security finalists and see if we can find which one is the best...

< FEATURE: Fighting the good fight >

Norton Internet Security 2011

Price: R520: | http://za.norton.com

MAY AS WELL KICK off with surely the biggest gun in this arena. Norton has been around for so long and made so many great, useful, powerful software tools the name is practically PC legend. And like a similarly long-lived gaming developer, they seem to have fallen into quite a comfortable niche, churning out updated releases of software like NIS which will be bought and used and standardised upon all over.

It's basically a Next, Next, Next, install this, although when it's done it does force setting up a Norton account online, purportedly for "quicker access to support". Fair enough, you wouldn't need a full IS suite if you weren't Internet connected so that's fine. The NIS shell is very slick indeed, not overly bubbly but well laid out with comprehensive information ensuring that you're kept well aware of your protection status.

It also has some nice extra features, like a built-in performance monitor which will show in real-time the CPU and RAM usage of the app suite – in our case this bounced between 10 and 20% CPU and as little as 7.3MB RAM at idle, which of course grows quite quickly when a scan is activated. There's also a network mapping utility, as well as pre-defined alerts you can set based on the performance monitor which will bring excessive CPU, RAM, and HDD activity to your attention. For some reason, the parental control functions are not installed by default, and you have to go and add this module manually.

As for protection, as you might expect it's probably the most comprehensive here. With a whole lot of cool marketing terms for things thrown in to make you feel extra secure, things like Smart Scanning, and SONAR protection, all of which works to ensure you're safe from a massive variety of threats, from viruses to spam, to when actively participating on your chosen social network. I particularly liked, although it isn't unique in this batch, how it filters your Google searches in real-time and guides you away from potentially harmful pages before you've even gone near them.

Scanning is relatively quick, the optional Quick Scan feature taking less than a minute to go through the 17,000 items on my test install. And finally, uninstalling is just as smooth an operation as everything else to do with Norton.
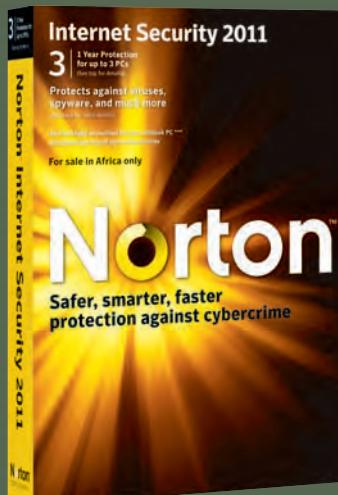
It's also worth noting that we received a 3-license pack of Norton, so you can protect multiple machines on your home network with the same security suite, which is helpful.

Overall a very good, very comprehensive, and well designed security suite. They've been doing it long enough now that frankly, we would expect no less.

Pros: Experience
Cons: Conventional wisdom

Score: 90%

AVG Internet Security 2011

Price: R250 | www.avgsa.co.za

I MUST ADMIT, I'VE HAD a weird personal grudge against the commercial element of AVGs business ever since they launched it, but that's probably just selfishness. After all, they do still distribute AVG Free if you're happy with somewhat limited protection, and as a company they ought to be able to make profits off their endeavours, so let's see what they actually offer in this full IS suite.

The CD autorun didn't work at all, calling up an HTML page which never loaded, so I had to go and install the components manually which wasn't a great start. Once it's in, you also won't be blown away by the interface, it hasn't moved on much from the Free version although it does include a lot more functionality now.

We're starting to notice already that the raw security features of these suites are very similar, the difference coming down to their usage and included extras. AVG includes the company's only other real product, the excellent TuneUp Utilities, and it's actually well worth the investment. This package includes a Registry Scanner, System Tweaker, even a mini-DRM solution (basically glorified backup).
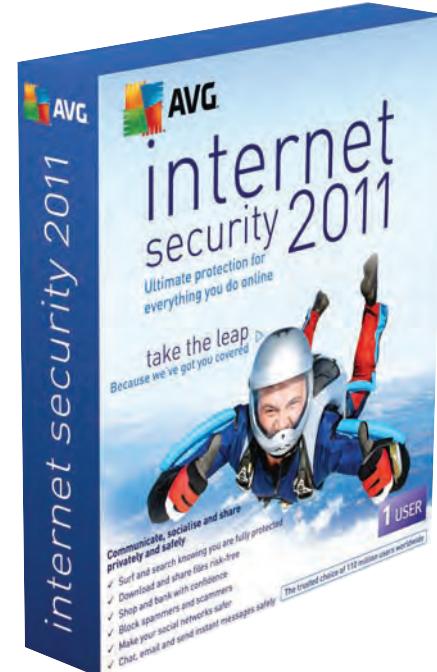
The security features like the app design and layout are very similar to AVG Free, but there is a lot the free version doesn't provide, like Firewall and AntiSpam. It even has a Game Mode now, which simultaneously ensures that AVG doesn't hog resources and opens up standard ports on the intrusion prevention side of the suite to allow online play.

So, it isn't quite as polished as NIS, but then AVG haven't been around for nearly as long of course. And it runs at a fairly hefty 25 – 30MB RAM usage. Yet there's this loyalty to the brand, because of the Free version which is still available… And I also really like the TuneUp app as an easy, fuss-free way of performing that all-too-necessary Windows preventative maintenance.

Pros: TuneUp Utilities
Cons: 25 – 30MB resources used

Score: 91%

Kaspersky PURE

Price: R479 | www.kaspersky.co.za

SINCE THE LOCAL KASPERSKY distributor didn't have any trial CDs to give us, we were given a trial key instead and were able to download the 120MB installer ourselves. Of course, that meant no slick installation autoruns, just an executable zipped installation file to run. Very quick, very straightforward.

Although the first thing I actually saw reminded me strongly of a McAfee dialogue popup, once you get into the PURE app framework itself, you'll be impressed. It's laid out in that more modern style, more visual, more friendly overall let alone user-friendly, and neat and simple to use.

There's quite a lot to use in PURE as well. Kaspersky has gone for a very high-level, holistic approach to personal computer security this time. In addition to a fairly standard list of raw security features as well as parental control functions, there's also a complete backup utility just in case, and some extra tidbits. Like a remote-admin LAN tool, a Browser Tuneup, Data encryption and even a virtual keyboard so that no-one can log your keystrokes even. It's very comprehensive.

Then the most impressive thing of all. Kaspersky PURE when just idling and protecting your machine from viruses and other online menaces, uses just less than 6MB of RAM. That's impressively lightweight for one of these comprehensive suites, or for any software these days of 28MB Microsoft Search Indexers. Yet it installs to just over 93MB, so Kaspersky is only keeping active the modules that are necessary for real-time protection.

Although the added extras aren't quite as useful in boosting your machines performance as the AVG PC TuneUp package, there are more of them with more varied uses which is always nice. And honestly, for online security, Kaspersky have a good name and boast very much the same kind of protection as the other leading packages here.

But then, the uninstall fails completely, which is never a great sign in an IS suite and suggests unnecessary complexity in an already very complex system.

Pros: Great all-rounder
Cons: Not the best detection rates according to industry standard reports

Score: 89%

Panda Internet Security 2011

Price: R406 | www.pandasecurity.com

NEXT UP, THE BIG and fluffy, and unfortunately quite endangered, Panda AV in 2011 guise. Never the most major player in the game, Panda have to be commended for their resilience – the company has been going now battling around the fringes for two decades.

And it isn't that there's much wrong with their product either. In fact, this latest dress-up provides us with an impressive look at how much Panda has developed their solution in that time. It is very fully-featured, and claims to offer cloud-based anti-malware "intelligence" which is nice and up to date.

But they haven't really gone the extra mile with this release. Perhaps they should be commended for sticking to the core strengths of an IS suite, and providing security of the most comprehensive kind by doing so. There is also a backup tool, an online backup solution, and even a remote PC access tool, but it doesn't exactly go out of its way to impress, overall.

So much of ICT security has to do with perception, and image shapes perception. Norton for instance is a name everyone knows and trusts, AVG built up its rep beautifully with the Free software, even Kaspersky is constantly communicating with our market about threats and thereby keeping its name in the front of mind when it comes to security. But Panda... well just sort of fades into the background, becomes something of a shadow. Perhaps there's better communication with other markets it serves, but ours very seldom hears anything about the company.
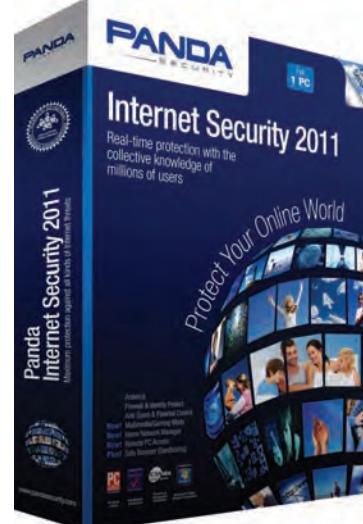
So while the software is definitely capable stuff, it isn't amazing, and your perception of the software isn't that reassuring. It is the lightest weight on system resources, just 1.4MB for the active shield component, yet it's the largest install at 209MB. While that lightweight resident module should improve performance, these are the days when 4GB of fast DDR3 RAM is the absolute norm, making these sorts of historical advantages and challenges largely go away. Which leaves you with, well, not very much to recommend in the Panda stable.

Oh, there is also a Gaming/Multimedia mode in there. So at least they're thinking about us, even if we hardly ever get to think about them. There is also, of course, a bit of a rep about significant false positives with this software which you might want to consider if you know you're a bit of a high-risk case.

Pros: Very lightweight
Cons: Nothing wow

Score: 83%

< FEATURE: Fighting the good fight >

eScan Internet Security 2011

Price: R399 | www.escan.co.za

NOT TO BE CONFUSED with the more corporate-targeted ESET, eScan is consumer-oriented home-user protection from developers MicroWorld Technologies. This company appears to take their business very seriously, and brags (with stats to back the boasts up) that it has the best protection vs. false positive ratio. Although in terms of its actual detection rate, it ranks side by side with all of the others here in the high 90% bracket.

It is the only one which allows you to scan directly from the CD install interface, which is useful if you already have an infection when you go to install it. Being an IS Suite now, it also includes Parental control features, as well as encryption for your sensitive data, linked into any biometric devices you might have installed which is nice. There's also an automated backup system in place, and another Virtual Keyboard for avoiding the keyloggers.

At 240MB it's a fairly large install. Again, HDDs these days are counted in Terrabytes, not Gigs, or even Megs, so it's pretty irrelevant. All five of our contenders didn't really slow the system down at all either, again due to the large amounts of RAM installed and the raw power of our multicore CPUs, so performance is no longer really a consideration. At idle, e Scan uses less than a MB of system RAM though, which is good, efficient coding.

But it is a very nice user interface, with its Apple-like floating dock at the bottom, and simplified information windows allowing you to get a full snapshot of your security status in seconds. The company has also now included a Gaming Mode in this release, which blocks alerts and popups from interrupting your enjoyment, but that's about it. Nothing more, really, to write home about.

Pros: Pretty Apple-like user interface
Cons: No bonus "Extras"

Score: 84%

ESET Smart Security 4

Price: R472 | www.eset.co.za

ALTHOUGH THE SMART SECURITY suite is now up to version 4 (4.2 in fact), ESET remains a company more focussed on corporate AV solutions than the consumer market, and we say fair enough for an IT security specialist to work this way. Nevertheless, the company packages a neat little collection of powerful security utilities for the home user in this IS suite, and it could be worth considering.

Smart Security includes no guff. The interface isn't particularly pretty; this security suite includes only security-related modules and nothing extra, and the advanced options include a lot of very convoluted tabs.

Still, don't be scared off, it's not hard to use. And it is probably the most impenetrable barrier you can get for your home PC. Smart Security covers AV, e-mail protection and AntiSpam, and a personal firewall. It's the only one on our list that doesn't specifically include social networking, or anything like a gaming or multimedia mode. In fact, it's pretty serious stuff this one.
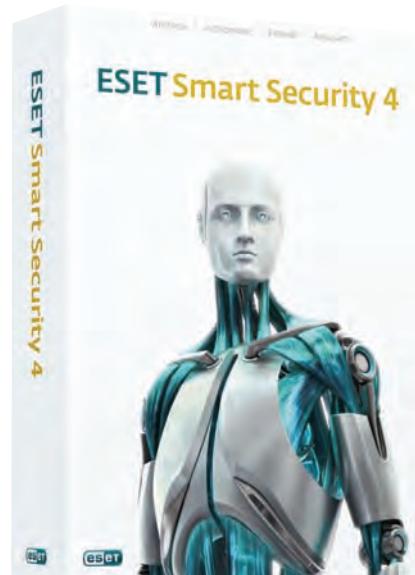
One of the features I particularly appreciated was that the Smart Security control panel also checks your Windows installation for key security updates, and includes the near-instant option to turn off all network traffic straight away if a threat gets really hectic. I like that built-in one-inch firewall idea, it implies that ESET know that sometimes no matter how clever your IS, it's just not going to be able to protect your machine.
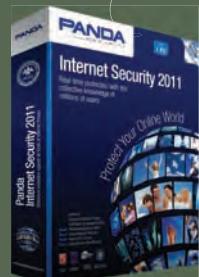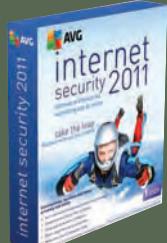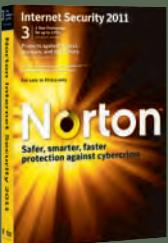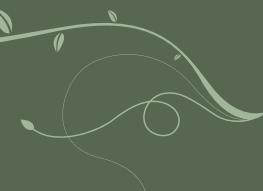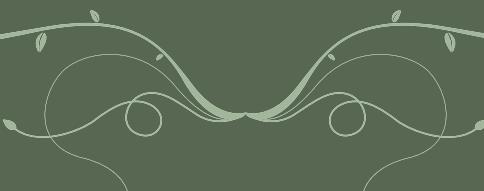
But otherwise, it's pretty bland. Effective yes, there's no doubt, but there's nothing sexy to entice you with at all. All the other suites tested here feature a more user-navigable main application and some value-adds as well, ESET has merely packaged its corporate suite in a slightly different box.

Still, if I were installing IS on my gaming machine, my highest priority would be security functionality. And in this light, ESET would be top of my list. The fact that it is the most lightweight on system resources here also helps, and makes ESET viable even for older, more limited systems.

Pros: Lots of serious security options
Cons: No slick sheen

Score: 88%

Conclusion

If I were a high-risk Internet user, or just a digital hypochondriac, it would come down to PURE or Norton. Which is not to say the others are poor choices; the AVG package in particular is well worth the purchase even if Free is still available to all; e Scan has come a long way since I last looked at it; Panda does what it does really well, even if it does scan a bit "wide" for my liking; and ESET is probably one of the most capable of them all, even though it lacks any sort of user-oriented flair whatsoever.

But the Norton package is proper peace-of-mind stuff, while the versatility of PURE sets it apart, and the AVG TuneUp addon alone is brilliant. So these three get the nod for us, with the caveat that ESET will impact less on performance and is likely the more effective guardian.

All that having been said, of course, AntiVirus and Internet Security are worries which shouldn't really bother us too much. Most gamers are going to be capable of keeping their systems relatively safe without these packages – only corporate environments where IT Security is regulated and must pass against established standards is such a stringent suite really necessary.

On the flip side, apart from a usually pretty reasonable purchase price, there isn't much "pain" from running security suites anymore. Modern systems, even ones being pushed to their limit playing the latest games, have such massive resources that they shrug the burdens of this type of real-time protection off with relative ease, so we're not saddled with the choice between a responsive PC and an AV package – we can have both. So from that perspective, and especially if your gaming rig is also a work machine with loads of valuable (to you, or whoever) data on it, it's probably best being safe than sorry.

At the end of the day, any one of these will provide you with just about as comprehensive a home-PC security solution as you need. In fact, they're all a lot more than you strictly "need". The differentiators these days, are the perceptions – the outright trustworthiness of the brand, and the extras which the suites might boast. It can even be said that it's largely for these psychological reasons that Norton came out as the pick of our 2011 bunch. **NAG**

Russell Bennett

PURE fragility…
needs PURE safety

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KASPERSKY lab

Intel Core i7 2600K:

Core: 32nm Sandy Bridge (x4)   **Frequency:** 3400MHz   **Cache:** 8Mb L2   **Platform:** LGA1155 (P/H67)

BY THE TIME YOU read this Intel's 2nd generation Core i7 architecture will already have hit retail. These CPUs range from the highest performing 2600K to the lowest end Core i3 2100. As a direct replacement for the P55 platform and a future look at where the Intel processors are headed, the 2600K tells all, as it's the most complete Sandy Bridge variant there is right now.

If it wasn't clear to everyone already, it should be now; the day of single core, or rather single thread CPUs, is truly gone because unlike before, the slowest of the 1155 CPUs has a minimum of 4 threads, not counting the only Pentium designated part. The best thing about these CPUs is they feature Intel's much updated Graphics processor (GT6) which supports DirectX10 and, from what we have seen, puts in some decent performance that is sometimes better than what AMD and NVIDIA offer on their lowest end parts. This can only mean good things for the industry, as it really bolsters the lowest common denominator graphically and every other GPU above benefits directly.
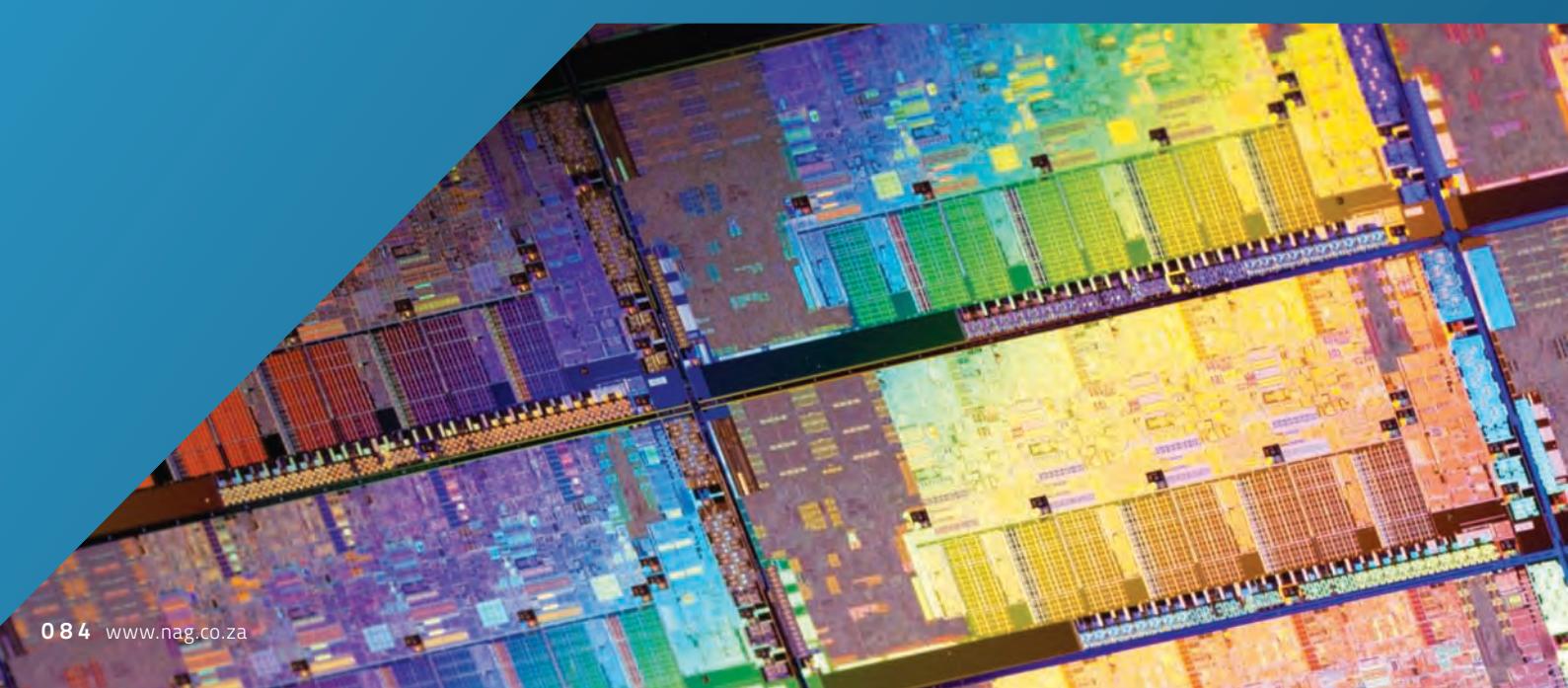
As great as that may be, we are only really concerned with how fast these CPUs are. With the new Quick Sync extension, media encoding with supporting applications is the quickest it's ever been. To put that in context and to further elaborate on what we mean, a single 2600K CPU can encode a video faster than any GPU on the market can (yes including the GTX580) and with significantly better quality. This is fantastic news for everyone, because as much as we loved GPU accelerated video encoding, getting it to work let alone getting it to produce decent quality videos proved rather complex for the most part if not costly (at least from the NVIDIA solution via the 3rd party application "Badaboom"). The implications of this are substantial because we can finally stop having to listen to AMD and in particular NVIDIA tell us just how much better their GPUs are for such processes. The annoying bit though (as there are a few with Sandy Bridge you'll find) is that you can only use this extension if and only if you are using the integrated graphics processor.

So for anybody with a discreet GPU it's all really meaningless unless Intel finds a way to lift this seemingly artificial limitation. (Indeed it does feel imposed for purposes other than technical reasons.)

Sandy Bridge CPUs present some interesting changes at a silicon level as well. SNB (Sandy Bridge) is a 32nm fabricated die (we are talking specifically the 2600K and other 8 thread parts here) that houses about 995 million gates with a die size smaller than any other 4 core CPU on the market today at just 216mm (squared). This is some impressive density and much better than that of the 1.17Bn gate Gulftown die (of the 980X and 990X CPUs). A sizeable amount of this however is reserved for the IGP which makes up more than 100 million gates. So in general Intel has squeezed more performance per square mm into the Sandy Bridge CPUs than what it may seem at face value.

In just raw MHz performance or IPC, there's really nothing that can match the 2600K and its brethren. It just is that much faster than the Intel Core i7 980X which has remained the premium part in Intel's line-up. This in itself presents a problem of sorts because 980X CPUs, indeed said to be for gamers and so-called power users, only have an advantage in heavily threaded applications. That is virtually no game at all, and even for the overclockers the 2600K presents better value than the 980X because it only

< FEATURE: Intel Core i7 2600K >

Sandy Bridge Unveiled

looses out in about 2 competitive benchmarks at most. At the retail price of the 2600K it's hard to understand why any user would buy the 980X.

As for the limitations we mentioned earlier, there are a few that are downright annoying besides the Quick Sync situation. With a single PLL controller keeping tabs on just about every clock except the internal CPU clock, overclocking as we knew it on the Intel platform has been killed. There's no real technical reason why this should be, but the truth is probably closer to Intel wanting to keep the X58 and the 6 core/12 thread 9XX CPUs as the highest performance parts commanding the highest prices.

So what we end up with is a highly overclockable CPU that has some potential but is artificially limited not only in raw clock speed but in memory as well. Your fancy 2400MHz DDR3 set has just been rendered useless for the most part, because it is near impossible to reach that speed since the maximum supported speed is 2133MHz which is "1:21.3"and as you can see this will present some problems. Even with a 110MHz Bclk (which no CPU will reach with anything that can be considered stable) you'll still be limited to 2343MHz on the memory at most.

Now to add even more confusion to it all, the current revisions of these CPUs or at the least the IMCs used do not seem to pair well with ELPIDA BBSE chip based RAM. That is you can forget about the super tight timings like we had on the P55 and X58 platform. We are now limited to the PSC like chips (CL8-11-8 for example) that have very high tRCD values, but because of the Bclk limitations we don't even get the frequency benefit. Indeed the IMC in SNB processors is considerably better than anything we've had before, and in a way negates the advantage (which was always debatable) the triple-channel controller on the X58 platform had, but this is just one nasty side to the Sandy Bridge CPUs.
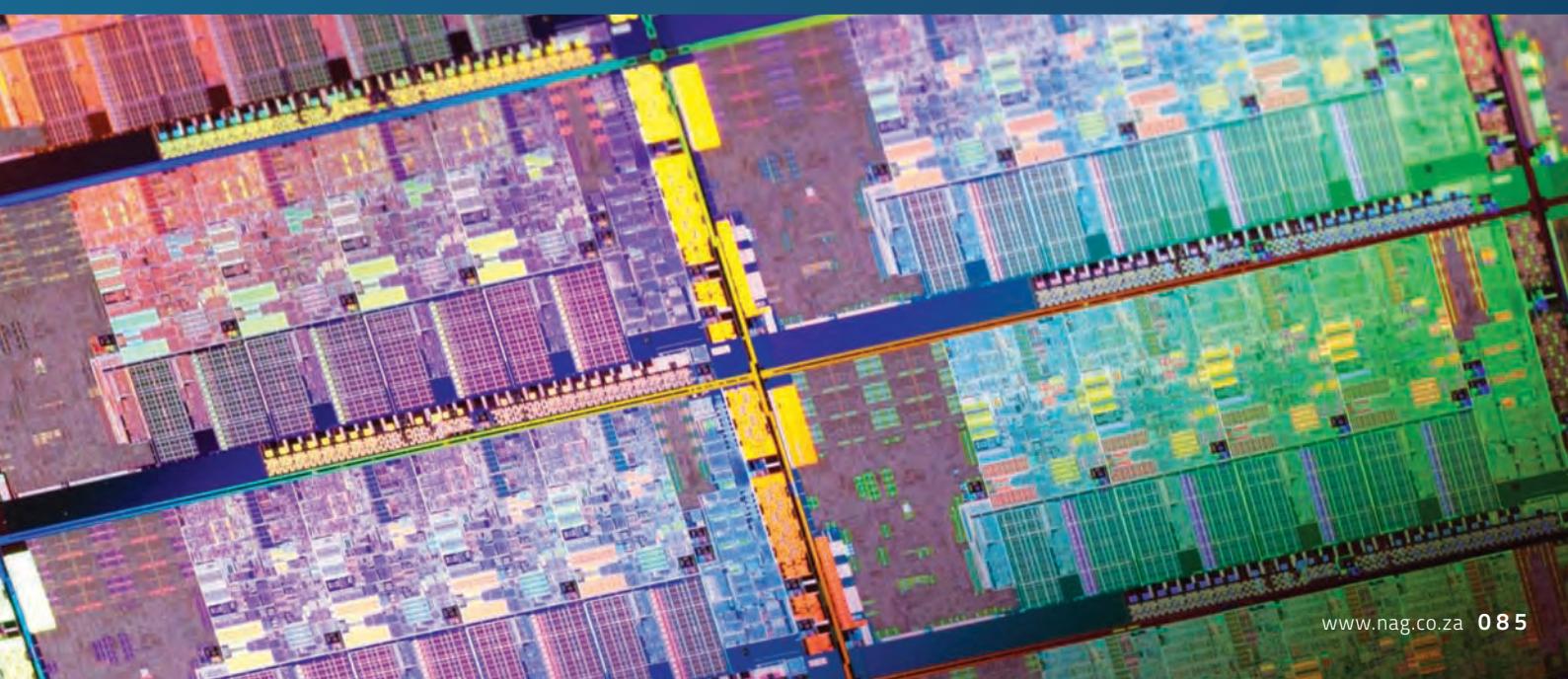
Despite all the downers, there are some really great things that have come with the new CPUs other than performance. One of the major ones is support for EFI, which should bring greater functionality than the normal BIOS, including a graphical interface and one that can be controlled with a mouse. With that we can also get native support for many more devices like 3TB drives (you can actually boot from volumes this size without any additional 3rd party software or utilities).

The CPUs as well are much cooler than what we've had before and even the reference cooler that Intel packs with the retail units is the smallest we have seen in many generations. With these improved temperatures, power draw is also cut down on with the 2600K having an impressive 95Watt TDP compared to the 130Watts of the 975XE and 980X. This also means we will (at least for now) stop seeing dual 12V ATX connectors on high-end motherboards that we needed to give power to the 980X, which, under the right circumstances (read, extreme overclocking), draw more than 250Watts and massive amounts of current (hence the need for OCP workarounds).

The 2600K CPU in particular is, in a way, more than we could have hoped for but also less in many regards. With each revision it will get better, but for now we'd recommend it to anyone who wants to build a powerful machine at a reasonable price but doesn't mind some of the limitations imposed by going with this platform. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

DIY: Hands-on with Dremel
Case Modding 101

CASE MODDING IS SOMETHING that can be done on so many different levels. A simple side window can be classified as a mod. A full-scale project that involves customising every aspect of the case can also be classified as a mod. One thing that all mods have in common, however, is that they all require lots of thinking, lots of planning, and they all need some kind of materials of equipment. I get mails all the time from people asking me about this aspect of modding - the planning, where to get perspex or aluminium, where to get tools, where to find certain plastics. That's what this article is for.

WHERE TO GET STUFF
Two of the materials I work with the most are perspex and aluminium. Generally, these two materials are the ones any modder would use the most.

PERSPEX:
Perspex, as well as just about any kind of plastic, can be purchased from a place called Maizey. They sell perspex in various thicknesses ranging from 1.5mm, all the way up to "too thick for a case modder". They also sell perspex in just about any colour you could ask for, in transparent and non-transparent variations. They sell their materials in different forms too, so you could buy sheets, tubes, whatever you like. One word of advice, from my own personal experience - buy your perspex a few millimeters bigger than what you need, as the machine used to cut it leaves little chips in the edges, so you'll need to sand and polish those out. What I love about Maizey is that you can call them with dimensions and they'll cut your perspex to size.
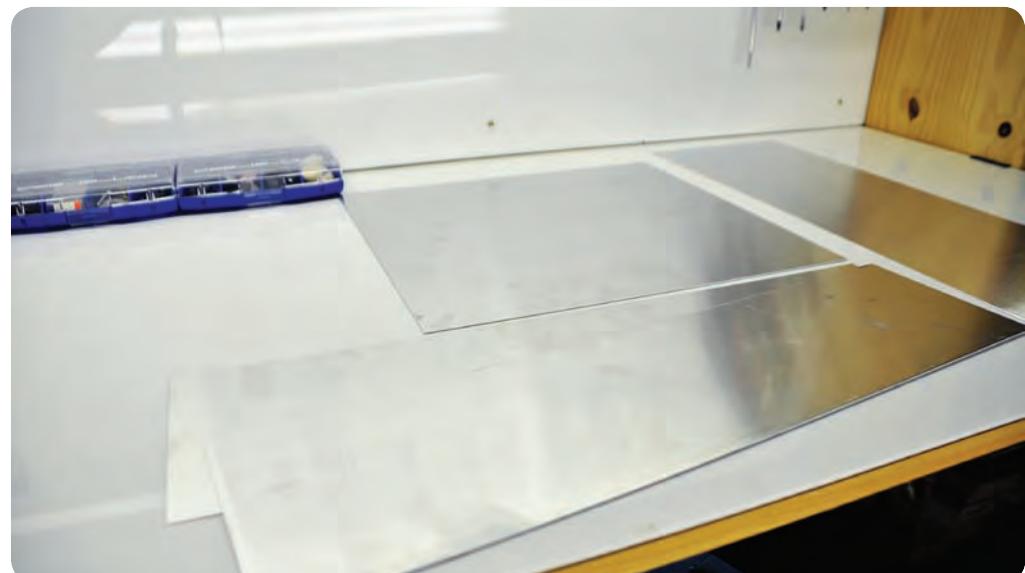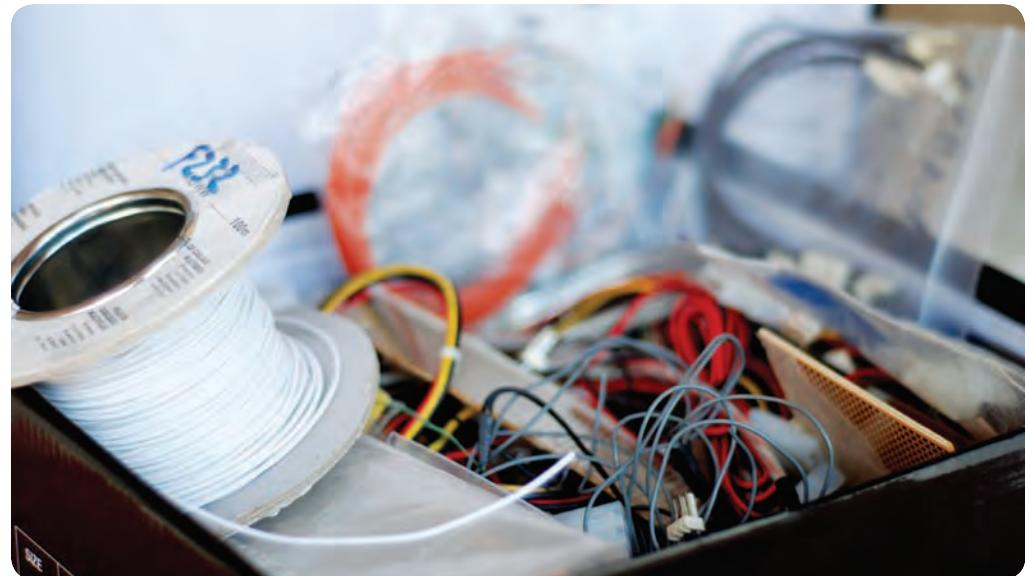
Maizey has stores all over the country, so you could find it no matter where you are. They also do free delivery, so if you're tight on time, just ask them to deliver and buy the driver a burger for his efforts. Maizey's website URL is **www.maizey.co.za.**

METALS:
I do quite a lot of work with aluminium, and my source of this amazing metal is a place called NFM - Non-Ferous Metals. They, too, have distribution centers all over the country. They sell all kinds of metals, aluminium obviously being the one we want. They sell it in sheets, or they can cut it to size for you. Like Maizey, NFM sells their materials in many different thicknesses, sizes and forms, from plain sheets, to tubes, to solid blocks, even heatsinks!

Keep in mind that when you get aluminium from them, it'll already be a little bit scratched, and once you're done working with it, it'll be even more scratched. So when you're done working on it, you'll need to give it some work to bring it back to a good clean look. NFM's website URL is www.nfm.co.za.

ELECTRONICS:
Loads of what we do as case modders is related to the cables and wiring in our machines. Nobody likes ugly, messy cables, so we work as hard as we can to make sure that our cabling looks awesome. 99% of the time, this involves putting our cables through cutting, soldering, lengthening, shortening, or some kind of modification, and in order to do that, we need some goodies from the electronics stores. The store I've used for years is Electronics123. They have a store in Waverly (PTA), and I believe they have another one somewhere in Pretoria East. These guys sell just about anything you could need. I get all my wiring, all my heatshrink, all my connectors, everything from them. Their website URL is **www.electronics123.co.za**

TOOLS:
Tools. Case modders can't function without tools. I've always been a big fan of Dremel tools, and I use Dremel tools every day of my life. Builders Warehouse has a great selection of Dremel tools, including most of the accessories you'll need. They also sell all the screwdrivers and things you'll need. They have branches all over the place.

That pretty much covers most of the materials you'll need. If you need any more help, mail me at **ett@nag.co.za**.

Ettienne Venter
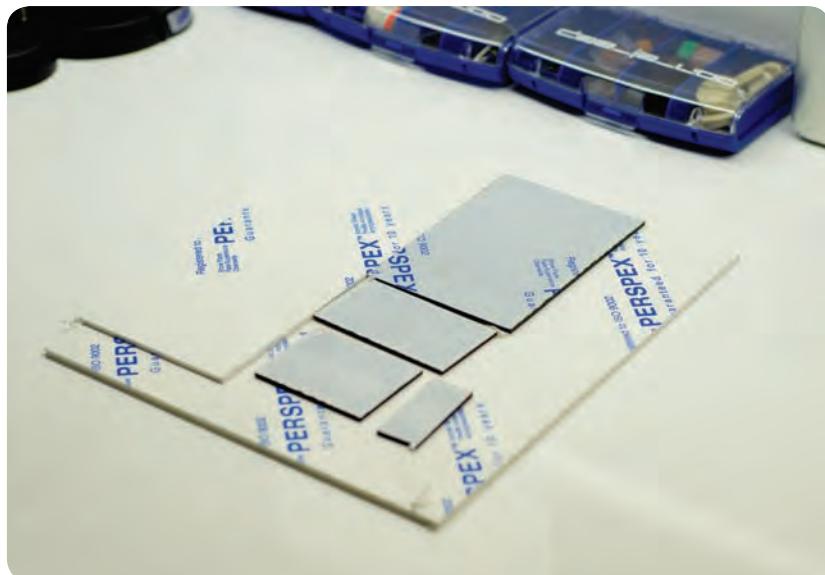
A Snippet from Dremel

Things change and rotary tools are no exception. In South Africa alone, Dremel offers 7 different rotary tool types to cover as many different user needs as possible. To make sure you buy the right rotary tool, check beforehand what projects you have planned and what role the tool will have to play. In this and the next issues, we'll have a look at the different performance ranges.

For basic stuff (mainly low-torque applications) and only occasional use, a tool with 2-speed settings and around 120W will easily do. Your high-speed setting (around 25-28,000 revolutions per minute) and low-speed (12-15,000 RPM) cover almost all basic applications in most materials. A basic model should not cost you more than R500.

If you need to be mobile, you could look into the cordless version of a basic model. RPMs and torque of a cordless model will be slightly lower than what a corded version might offer. Batteries normally contain inexpensive NiCd cells (the same cells can be found with more than 80% of all cordless DIY tools in SA) to keep the price down. Your cordless tool should come with at least a 7.2V battery, otherwise it won't produce sufficient power and will stall quite often. Here you're looking at about R500-600.

RRP > R6,499   **SUPPLIER** > ASUS   **WEB** > za.asus.com
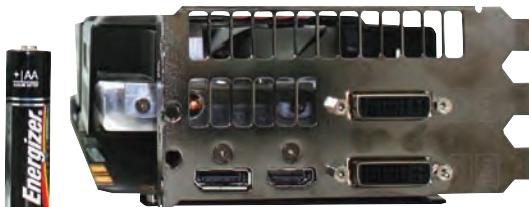
Size comparisons

Palit GTX570

ASUS GTX580

Benchmarks

Heaven 2.1 Xtreme Preset

> 1512.203
> 1476.602

3DMark 11 Extreme

> 2,186
> 2,141

3DMark Vantage Performance

> 25,338
> 24,908

Just Cause 2 1920x1080

> 77.01
> 75.21

Crysis: Warhead 1920x1080

> 53.21
> 52.42

■ **Baseline:** NVIDIA GeForce GTX580

ASUS GTX580 Direct CUII

DREAM MACHINE

WE WOULD LIKE TO say few things about this GTX580 graphics card from Asus before anything else. The first being that the Direct CU ll name is without mincing our words "absurd", we can't believe that they did not call this the TOP or Matrix edition but instead chose what is essentially meaningless and un-cool everywhere on the planet save for Asus HQ.

Secondly, this card is big, ASUS says it's a 2.5 slot card, but really it'll take up three slots so be careful if you're considering SLI, it's a huge card and as impressive as it may seem, its proportions make it look silly .

Third, Asus advertises that they have overclocked the card to 782MHz, but what they don't say is that it's a miserable 10MHz on the core and a downright feeble 4MHz on the memory. Our words may be harsh but they are true, a 10MHz overclock meant something in the days of the SST1, NV5 and such graphics controllers where internal clock speeds were in the sub 100MHz range. In this day and age, such shenanigans have no place and they are not fooling anyone.

Now that we have gotten that out of the way, let's dissect what is probably the best GTX580 graphics card money can buy. If you believed this graphics card would be a lacklustre showing from ASUS you couldn't be further from the truth as this is likely their most impressive graphics card to date.

When we speak of custom PCB's we usually speak about more power phases, and a custom cooler. However, ASUS has literarily re-designed everything and the only part they took from NVIDIA is the actual GPU. The rest is all customised and despite

the massive size of the cooler, it is one incredible looking card. At least as far as the electronics are concerned.

Gone is the Fujitsu 3V 1000uF capacitor and in its place is the NEC TOKIN Proadlizer quintuple chip (similar to what GIGABYTE has been using on their SO series of high end graphics cards) and it seems to be doing its job pretty well.

GTX580 cards traditionally clock very well, but this card from ASUS is head and shoulders above the others. Not only will it out clock any other GTX580 right now on air, it will possibly extend this lead under some exotic cooling as well. In our testing, we managed a solid 940MHz without much hassle, and after the testing was done for this review, 1GHz was surpassed. Needless to say, at such speeds it was unmatched and pretty much destroyed every other graphics card we have tested to date including most of the Asus ARES benchmark results.

This level of engineering and as a result the overclocking headroom makes this the most exciting card to hit our test bench in a while. There was seemingly no limit to this graphics card could do and true to what Asus claims it was indeed about 20°C cooler than a reference GTX580 under load.

At idle speeds we managed to get the temperature down to the high 20s which believe it or not was just a few degrees warmer than the ambient temperature. This here is a monster overclocker that just needs the right CPU to have it shatter all sorts of single card records.

It almost seems a waste to call this card a

gaming card as it will be wasted in a gaming computer. This rendition of the GTX580 is deserving of the limited edition case that the Asus Ares came in or at the very least a better name and better packaging as it is the best graphics card to come out of Asus in a long time.

If you have the funds and want absolutely the best, this is what you should buy; you won't find a better GTX580 than this one.   **NAG**

Neo sibeko

Specifications

Core: 782MHz GF114 (40nm)
Processors: 512
Render Outputs: 48
Memory: 1280MB GDDR5 4GHz (192.3GB/sec)
API: DirectX11/OpenGL 4.x /OpenCL 1.X/ PhysX/CUDA

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Very good temperatures
+ Performance
+ Massive overclocking

›Minus
- Size
- Price

›Bottom Line
Not the fastest GTX580 out the box, but certainly the best one yet.

10 out of ten

Gadgets & Electronics GALORE!

Seagate Freeagent Goflex TV

HD Media Player solution

R949
Was R1199

HP ProLiant Server

R3699
Was R3999

Seagate Freeagent Goflex
Ultra Portable Drive 1TB

R1019
Was R1349

Samsung
Galaxy Android Business Tablet

R7519
Was R9119

ASUS NX90

ED'S CHOICE

IT'S VERY RARE THAT we take a look at a notebook that isn't made for gaming. In fact one could say we never do, but once in a while there's a product that deserves a spin even though it might be considered irrelevant to our target gaming audience.

The NX90 is a notebook that would hopefully appeal to those who purchase their music in FLAC format, those who insist on ASUS Xonar sound cards, the ones who invest into high-end audio headsets and those who long for the return of Hi-Fi audio.

Yes, this is a notebook for the discerning amongst us, those who aspire to greater experiences rather than experiments in computing. It's the notebook that isn't apologetic for what it is. It's, in a way, the best home theatre experience you'll find in anything that can qualify as a notebook.

What makes this special is not the hardware and in all fairness, the hardware is nothing spectacular or anything we haven't seen before. The 72 CUDA core GT335M GPU is not for gaming; the copious amounts of RAM will be useful for those who work with large video files or photography, but for the most part it will remain underutilised. After all, this is not a notebook that should leave the house, its place of rest, nor should it be used for hardware thrashing work.

While most notebooks are put together around space constraints and all sorts of things considered before the aesthetic, this one seems to be designed with the aesthetics in mind. This is true at least, for the highlight of the notebook is the Bang & Olufsen ICEPower speakers.

The audio reproduced from these units

is really something to consider and take in. There's no other notebook we can think of right now that can possibly match the audio experience from the NX90. The drivers deliver a bass that may not make you rumble (nor should it try, it's a notebook!) but remains clean even at the loudest setting. Even better though and what makes this notebook wonderful is the wide sound stage, the detailed mid-range, and how delicately the high frequencies are rendered. The experience is really something that one can easily get attached to, and soon after you'll find yourself unable to listen to any other notebook.

Compressed audio doesn't benefit much from great audio equipment, but if you have some concerts on Blu-Ray or uncompressed music you'll really appreciate how amazing it is that such sound can be produced on a notebook.

Visually the NX90 has the display to match its aural experience with a proper 16:9 18.4" LED backlit LED display. This display is crisp, and sharp. Watching Blu-ray movies or other high bit-rate HD content is highly enjoyable. With the video processing provided by the GT335M it really does make for a wonderful experience, and a quick sit down to watch your favourite movie sequence or concert usually results in you watching the entire show.

ASUS has put together an exquisite package in the NX90. It's a notebook like no other and doesn't really have any competition that we're aware of. Purposefully designed it's a single function machine that is hard to fault for being particularly weak in any one of the

disciplines it caters for.

The only criticism we can really level at it is the choice of audio controller, which is not the AV200 as used on many of the acclaimed Xonar line of sound cards. Instead ASUS has gone with a Realtek controller which isn't bad at all, but given the entire notebook it does seem out of place.

Having said that, the notebook isn't cheap, but for those who can afford it and most of all appreciate what it's meant to do, you won't be disappointed, as this is an outstanding machine. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Specifications

CPU: Intel core i7 740QM
Display: 18.4" LED (1,920x1,080)
Memory: 12GB DDR3 1333
Hard Drive: 2x 640GB
Optical Drive: Blu-Ray/DVD

THE SCORE

>Plus
+ Good specs
+ Incredible sound
+ Striking design

>Minus
- Pricey

>Bottom Line
The ultimate media entertainment notebook.

08
out of ten

GIGABYTE™

LET THERE BE GAME!

Aivia™

K8100 GAMING KEYBOARD

- Enhanced Ergonomic Gaming Keyboard Design
- Touch and Slide Volume Control
- 20 Anti-Ghosting Keys
- GHOST™ Macro Engine

Enhanced Ergonomic Gaming Keyboard Design
Special weight on commonly used gaming keys; 3 different levels of force on keyboard Easier and smoother keystroke

70 grams Elastic Force

60 grams Elastic Force

50 grams Elastic Force

GAMING MOUSE

M6980 Macro Gaming Mouse
- 2000 DPI laser gaming sensor
- GHOST macro engine with 8KB on board memory
- Gaming-grad tracking capability up to 7080 FPS
- On-the-fly DPI switching
- 7 customizable buttons, 3 profiles

M6900 Precision Gaming Mouse
- 3200 DPI optical gaming sensor
- Gaming-grade 30G acceleration
- On-the-fly DPI switching
- 5 customizable buttons

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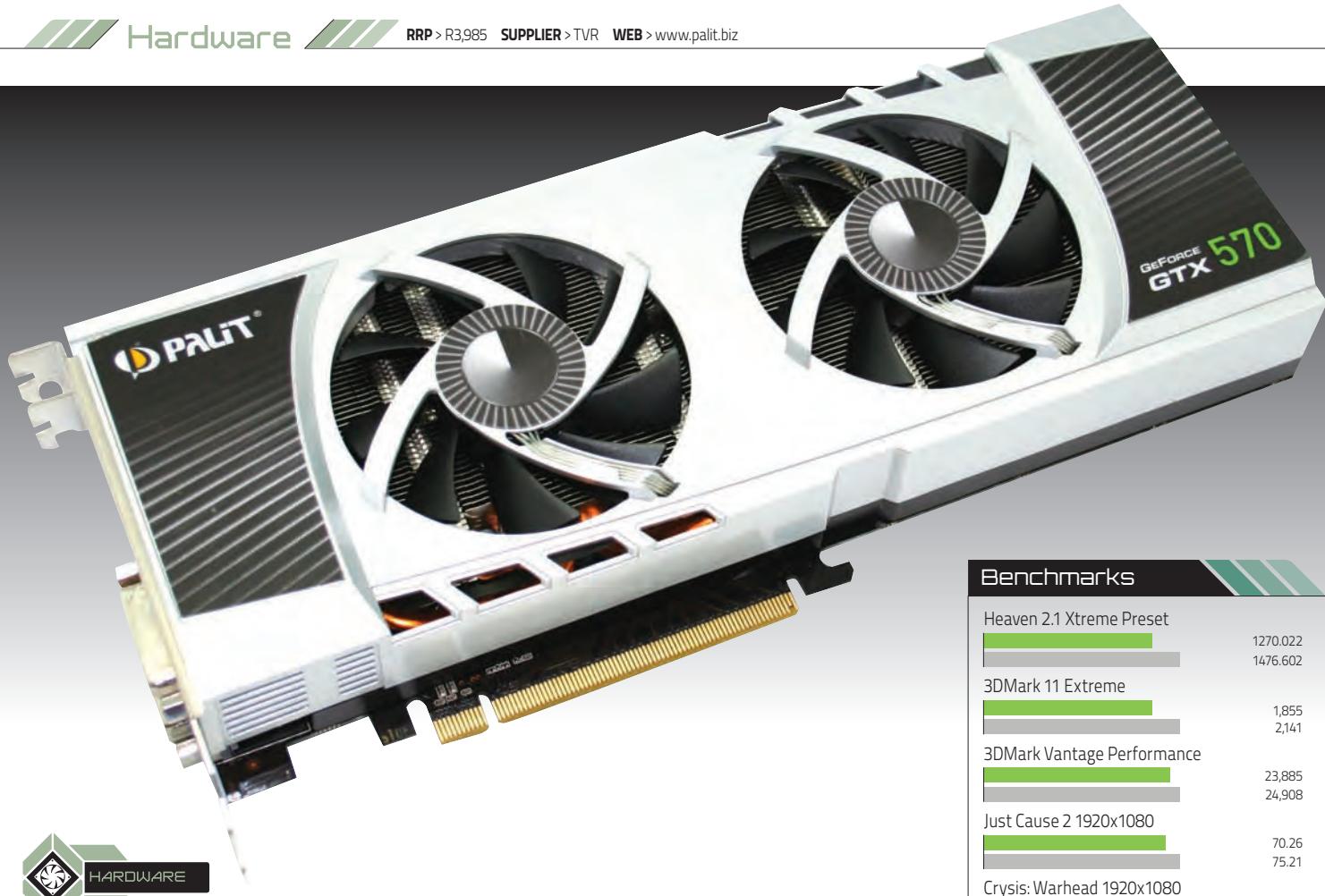
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Fax: (011) 203 1940	Fax: (021) 555 7187	Fax: (031) 571 8865	Fax: (041) 398 7135	Fax: (051) 430 1144

GeForce GTX 570

Benchmarks

Heaven 2.1 Xtreme Preset
1270.022
1476.602

3DMark 11 Extreme
1,855
2,141

3DMark Vantage Performance
23,885
24,908

Just Cause 2 1920x1080
70.26
75.21

Crysis: Warhead 1920x1080
48.33
52.42

Baseline: NVIDIA GeForce GTX580

Palit GTX570 Sonic Platinum

NVIDIA'S FIRST GENERATION DIRECTX11 cards had a rocky start. Not only were the cards deemed too hot, expensive and power-hungry, they left a bitter taste in consumers' mouths along with much lighter pockets. In retrospect and something that we have always maintained here, the reason for all that was down to the size of the GPUs and the process maturity, things that arguably NVIDIA couldn't do anything about.

Naturally these were not factors in the competition's parts because they were significantly smaller in terms of density. However the decision to make such a large GPU was entirely NVIDIA's doing and knowing the potential issues this would cause, the company in a way sabotaged their own products.

The second generation DirectX parts we have here though (technically the GF104 core powering the GTX460 could be counted as second generation) have proven to be winners in all regards and as such have caused a price war between the two GPU giants. In a way this is acknowledgment from the competition that they have built some really competitive products, and the true test between the two will come down to pricing and not necessarily performance.

The GTX570, or GF114 core if you prefer, is in a way a second chance for the GTX480. It is technically the same GPU but lacks some GP-GPU features that were in the original GF100. These have been stripped and have resulted in roughly 200 million gates being saved. Paired with the matured 40nm process from TSMC, we have ended up with a GPU that is lighter on power consumption, runs cooler, clocks significantly better, is

cheaper to manufacture and suffers no loss in gaming performance from all these. Total power draw from the GTX570, or rather maximum board power, is stated at 219W which is just 3 watts more than the older GTX470, but with that the new GTX570 has a lower thermal threshold for the GPU at 97°C compared to 105°C for the GTX470.

With that said there are some new power management features that may be invasive to the overclocker but will not hinder any gamer at all. These power management features limit the total power draw by ways of adaptive clocking, ASPM power management and adaptive power states. They are much like AMD's TDP threshold monitors but these are passive and they are either on or off.

Taking advantage of this new GPU Palit has built a very solid graphics processor, with a custom cooler that does a better job than the reference one, more than that it has allowed Palit to clock this card to 800MHz out the box and increase the memory frequency by 200MHZ (SDR is 50MHz), which makes for a very potent graphics card that nips at the heels of the GTX580. The performance numbers speak for themselves. We have changed benchmarks from this issue to not only increase load on the GPUs but to enable you to see how these graphics cards will cope with future games. The Palit GTX570 Sonic Platinum bulldozed through these benchmarks to provide incredible scores that are nothing short of impressive. The ideal gaming resolution and settings for this card are 1920x1080 with 4xAA. However Crysis is still a taxing game and enabling 4xAA may drop you down to the mid to high

20s in frame rates which is not ideal. Still, with some further overclocking you just may be able to game at those settings and keep a smooth 30~34fps.

We would be clutching at straws if we were to say there's anything lacking in the Palit GTX570, as there really isn't. It's just a great graphics card that performs well in all games, overclocks even better, runs cool and looks a little better than the reference model. If Palit carries on in this tradition they may be the manufacturer to beat very soon. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Specifications

Core: 800MHz GF114 (40nm)
Processors: 480
Render Outputs: 40
Memory: 1280MB GDDR5 4GHz (160GB/sec)
API: DirectX11/OpenGL 4.x /OpenCL 1.X/ PhysX/CUDA

THE SCORE

>Plus
+ Cool
+ Performance
+ Overclocking headroom

>Minus
- None

>Bottom Line
The best showing of the GTX570 core to date, and possibly the best graphics card to come out of Palit.

09 out of ten

GIGABYTE M6980

THE WORLD OF GAMING mice is dominated by a few manufacturers, but there's always room for a little competition, especially in the mid-range market where one's gaming might not be serious enough to warrant spending close to R1,000 on a mouse.

It might be fair to consider the GIGABYTE M6980 as a stripped-down response to those high-end mice, but that's not to say it doesn't have some of the features a hardcore gamer would want. The included Ghost Macro Engine software allows you to create custom macros or application shortcuts and assign them to any of the mouse's buttons, but the sensitivity settings feel a little lacking, only allowing for X and Y speed, report rate and scrolling speed to be customised.

Ergonomics are always a concern for those who expect to play games for hours on end, and while the M6980 looks the business and isn't uncomfortable as such, those with large hands might find the hourglass shape to be a little too narrow at the waist [*When did this become a fashion magazine?, Ed*]. That combined with the lack of a pinky grip surface and the inefficient thumb grip make for a less-than-perfect claw grip experience. In addition, the mouse feels a bit too light overall, and unbalanced. Without an adjustable weight system

this is an issue that won't go away.

Despite its ergonomics issues, the M6980 performs rather well in-game. At only 2,000 DPI, you won't see the level of accuracy delivered by a high-end mouse, but it's perfectly acceptable and will at least perform better than your average desktop mouse. It's also quite capable outside of gaming, and doesn't suffer from any twitchiness or acceleration issues, meaning that it could quite happily be used by a casual or even non-gamer who spends more time in front of spreadsheets than capture points.   **NAG**
Geoff Burrows

Specifications

Resolution: 2,000 DPI
Polling rate: 1,000 Hz
Profile storage: 8KB
Customisation: 7 buttons + LED colour

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Customisable
+ Price

›Minus
- Poor ergonomics
- Unbalanced

›Bottom Line
A decent first gaming mouse, but not enough to stand up to the high end.

06 out of ten

Toshiba Calmee Titan 500GB

IF YOU'RE ON THE lookout for a no-frills 2.5" portable hard drive, then the Toshiba Calmee Titan might be just what you're looking for. When I say "no-frills", I'm not kidding. Plugging in the drive reveals a refreshingly clean view. There's no backup software, PDF manual or any of the usual fluff. While I'm sure 90% of users aren't interested in these kinds of freebies, one can't help but wonder why the decision was made to deliver an empty drive. The rest of the bundle consists of a too-short USB Y-cable and a gaudy draw-string pouch that might be better suited to holding your Dolce&Gabanna sunglasses.

Performance is what really counts, and while one can't expect too much from a drive as ordinary as this, the numbers returned were satisfactory. We ran three file copy tests on the drive. The first involved a single large file to test maximum sustainable transfer rates, which produced a result of 22.8MB/sec writing speed and 31MB/sec reading speed. To test its ability to cope with smaller files, we copied 1GB of MP3s, totally 262 files, which resulted in an average write speed of 16.5MB/s and an average read speed of 25.6MB/s. The files took 62 and 39 seconds to write and read, respectively. Finally, we performed a test of mixed file sizes and types. 7.32GB of game files took 7 minutes to copy to the drive, averaging 17.4MB/s and peaking at 18.2MB/s. Copying the same files off of the drive took a little more than four minutes, climbing up to 30MB/s and maintaining an average speed of 29MB/s.

This drive performs as well as one would expect, has a large storage capacity and is small enough to take with you anywhere you'd go.   **NAG**
Geoff Burrows

Specifications

Capacity: 500GB
Interface: USB 2.0
Dimensions: 75x113x11mm

THE SCORE

›Plus
+ Looks good
+ Performs decently

›Minus
- No included software
- Ugly carry pouch

›Bottom Line
Does what it says on the box and manages to look pretty good while doing so.
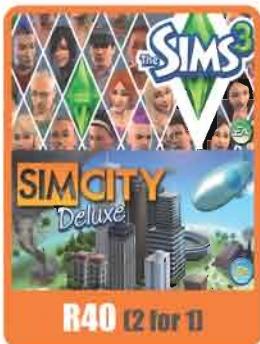
06 out of ten

TOP RATED GAMES
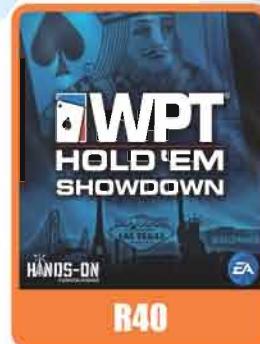
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Samsung Apps

ASUS EAH6970

LAST MONTH WE REVIEWED the ASUS EAH6950, and we found it pleasant, offering good performance at a reasonable price (with the price cuts it's even better value). What made this card even better was that virtually all of them could be turned into the RADEON 6970 which is great for the 6950, but actually presents problems for the 6970.

While the modified 6950's may not clock as high as the 6970s it's a moot point considering just how high the Cayman GPUs are clocked out the factory. Not unusual for AMD graphics parts but what is unique this time around is that the headroom is very limited. In fact despite the powerful performance these cards provide, there's virtually no headroom to be had, and as a result they have been largely ignored by enthusiast and competitive overclockers.

Gamers on the other hand are actually in for a treat; in fact one could say that the 6970 is the best bang for buck graphics processor of this generation. This is because the performance is in between that of the GTX570 and the GTX580 (sometimes better) but the price is much lower. As it is now, the average 6970 costs about R1,000 less than a GTX580. This value is hard to ignore and we can't, in our right minds, consider the 6970 as anything but a great successor to the RADEON 5870.

Much like the 6950, this card features a dual BIOS mechanism that allows you to easily switch between the factory BIOS and another one which a vendor or end-user may customise. The modifying of the BIOS is not encouraged by AMD in any way and

it will still void your warranty, however from AMD and its partner's point of view it drastically reduces the RMA rates.

This may not seem important but it's the difference between millions of dollars in revenue at the end of a product cycle. For every graphics card that's sent back to the vendor the profit on that graphics card has been lost. So in AMD's quest to save money, they have inevitably gifted the enthusiasts and gamers alike with a neat feature.

As a result of the CaymanXT core's size and AMD navigating new territories in transistor density and count, the new 6970 is much hotter than the outgoing 5870. In fact despite the very low power draw at idle, under load the graphics card easily reaches the 90s which is where the older GTX480 used to peak at. The only difference here is that the idle temperatures are much lower and the GPU itself is quieter unless you set the fan speed past 60%.

The EAH6970 is a reference card and looks identical to all other 6970's on the market, and ASUS has once again overclocked the card by a meaningless 10MHz. On AMD graphics processors, overclocks have less of an impact than they do on the competition's hardware and if you thought 10MHz on a GeForce was useless, on this card the performance gain can't be measured and the scores fall within the tolerable margin of error.

The RADEON 6970, having come after the GTX580, was the card that was supposed to usurp the crown and bring it back to the red team. Sadly this hasn't happened and the competition's high-end GPU remains at

the top for now. By the time you read this the announcement of the dual GPU based RADEON 6990 should have been made and in fact it's likely it will be available for retail. If it's scaling is anything like what we have seen from the RADEON 6970 when in Crossfire mode, AMD will once again claim the fastest for the second time in a row.

Until then however, if you're looking for a graphics card to replace your RADEON 5870 or even 4890, you may want to look at the RADOEN 6970; it's significantly better than its predecessors and the new Catalyst drivers are just a joy to use. **NAG**
Neo Sibeko

Specifications

Core: 890MHz CaymanXT (40nm)
Processors: 1536
Render Outputs: 32
Memory: 1280MB GDDR5 5.5GHz (176GB/sec)
**API:** DirectX11/OpenGL 4.x /OpenCL 1.X

THE SCORE

>Plus
+ Good performance
+ Dual BIOS

>Minus
- HD3D

>Bottom Line
The RADEON 6970 is a sizeable leap in performance from the 5870, sadly it's just missed out on the Fastest GPU on the planet by a hair.

07 out of ten

AMD Phenom II X4 840

WE'VE HEARD A LOT about AMD's upcoming Bulldozer architecture. Finally K10 will come and rescue us from the current crop of AMD offerings which have improved vastly over the years but just can't match the competition.

AMD as a result of having poorer performance against Intel offerings have had no choice but to play the price game and win in the budget segments. This is all good and well, but at some point being cheaper is meaningless, because at no point did anyone expect any CPU from AMD right now to be expensive. So price isn't enough to entice anyone, but the lack of performance will be hard to ignore. Unlike other Phenom II CPU's of late, despite the name, this one isn't based on any Phenom II core, but on a much weaker Propus core that powers Athlon 2 CPUs. We can't really understand why AMD went this way, but the immediate result of this is that the Phenom II X4 840 has no L3 cache at all, is a rather poor overclocker like other Propus based CPUs, and for the most part, isn't really worth the bother.

We have no idea why AMD was compelled to release this CPU, but it really lands itself nowhere and is about as useful as the Tri-core CPUs that the company tried to convince us of some time ago. Frankly there just isn't any reason why any gamer should buy this above a Phenom II X2 Black edition, or spend a little more and buy a fully fledged Phenom II X4 9XX CPU. They will offer you much better bang for your buck, overclock significantly

better and last you longer. If indeed you're on a tight budget then the last thing you'd want to do is spend on a CPU that will need to be upgraded before the end of the year, and this is exactly what the 840 will bring.

Either buy a proper Phenom II, Athlon 2 or wait for Bulldozer in a few months, as it would be best if you pretended the 840 never happened. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

Specifications

Core: Propus
Frequency: 3200MHz
Socket: AM3
Cores: 4

THE SCORE

>Plus
+ Cheapest quad core on the market

>Minus
- Performance
- Poor overclocking
- Pointless

>Bottom Line
A cheap Phenom II X4 CPU that may have been impressive two years ago but isn't worth the bother now.

05
out of ten

GG

By Tarryn van der Byl

No girls allowed

NOW, **I'VE KINDA MADE** a big thing about not making a big thing about being a so-called, so-what, so-stfu "girl gamer" at one time and/or another[1]. Synopsis: it's irrelevant, it's pointlessly divisive, and it does nothing much more than perpetuate this dreary pageant of gender sensationalism that "girl gamers" are supposedly trying so hard to dismantle. Irony, thy name is xXgamergirlXx.

BUT!

One of our NAG forum regulars recently posted a link to a site that did sort of remind me that, *actually*, sometimes the big thing about "girl gamers" has nothing to do with the girls, and instead, everything to do with "boy gamers". Without further ado, to-do, and ne'er-do-well, then, I present... www.fatuglyorslutty.com

As a gamer and the otherwise cosmically incidental owner of boobs, I'm well aware that the (apparently!) formidable aggregate of these two[2] attributes can solicit outside scrutiny of a somewhat, err, extravagant persuasion. Or more simply, perhaps, some guys can be total assholes.

The assumption, basically, is that female gamers are unattractive or – somewhat paradoxically - promiscuous (not an exhaustive list). The obvious response then, *obviously*, is to make sure that female gamers know that they know.

The site features user-submitted screenshots of this interesting ontological process in action, including such philosophically enduring epistles as Ang3l of d3ath's, "only reason girls play video games is cuz they r the fat ugly rejects that no guy wants to ****.

Or CruddierBag0672's, "am sorry 4 asking this but would you send me some pics of your bare feet and would you like to see a big ****".

Or maybe lambert58rcks elegantly succinct invitation to, "Suck my ****."

Some of you might think, of course, that this sort of brash, chest-beating, cro-magnon miss-oh-jin-ee is unusual or something, but it's really not. As a female gaming *writer* – and someone who not only plays games, but has an opinion (!!!111) about them - I've fielded some rather tersely-worded[3] commentary from total strangers about my appearance, my menstrual cycle, my inferior gender and criminally abandoned kitchen, my hygiene habits, my sexuality, my relationship status, and my chances of getting myself gang-raped if I were chucked naked into a men's prison (zero; I'm allegedly too repulsive). I also got death threats from one bloke when I wouldn't accept his Facebook friend invite.

And then, guys wonder why more women aren't into this video game stuff. **NAG**
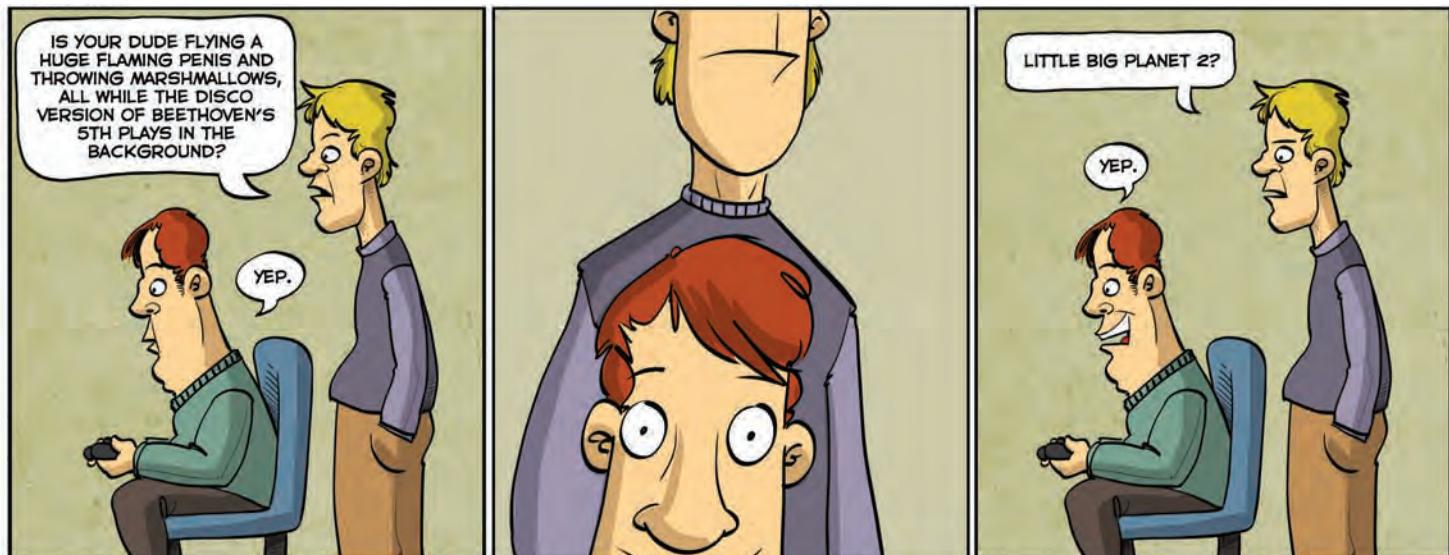
[1] Last October, I think. I remember, because I bought a totally *stunning* pair of shoes the same week. <3 Wait, no. A... a tank, I mean. I bought a tank.

[2] Three, technically.

[3] Misspelled, mostly.

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