

NAG



APRIL 2011 SOUTH AFRICA R42.00



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04

DUKE NUKEM FOREVER



HAIL TO THE KING!

NAG



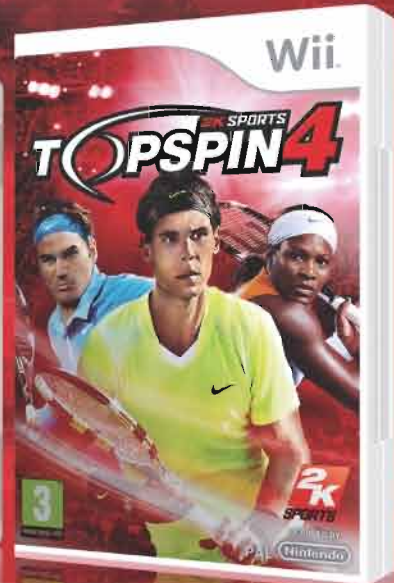
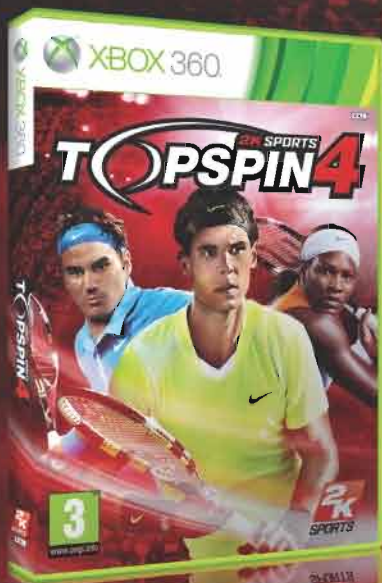
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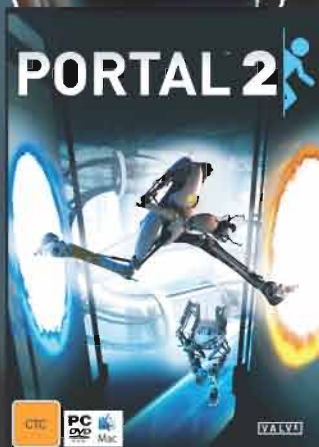


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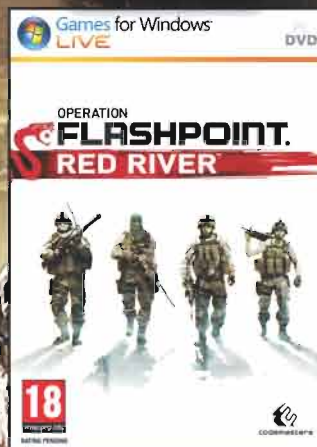
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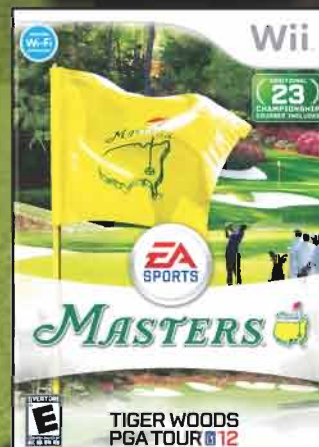
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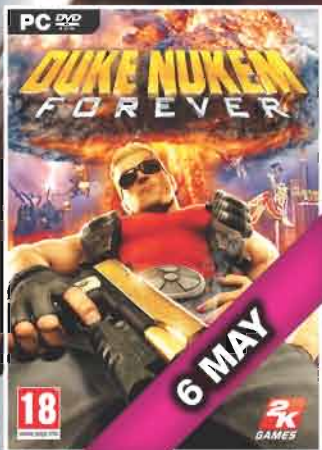
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WHERE TECHNOLOGY & HUMANITY MEET

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Don't Pirate NAG!

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PRE-ORDER AND SAVE



Uncharted 3 Drake's Deception

Uncharted 3 will see protagonist Nathan Drake and mentor Victor Sullivan travelling around the world to such places as the Rub' al Khali desert, in search of the legendary lost city, the Iram of the

Pillars. The plot will draw from the archaeology days of T. E. Lawrence.

New features in Uncharted 3 will include "enhanced backward climbing", automatic ammunition pickup, and the ability to fight multiple enemies at once. Enemy AI is improved, providing the ability for enemies to form squads. Multiplayer and co-op features will also be greatly expanded. It will also support stereoscopic 3D.

Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception
PS3 R599.99 + R75 Gift Card

Available November 2011



Battlefield 3

Battlefield 3 will feature the maximalist combined arms battles that made the series popular across single-player, co-operative and multiplayer modes. It will reintroduce several elements absent from the Bad Company games,

including fighter jets, the prone position and 64-player battles on PC, while the consoles will support 24 players. A new animation system will allow players to "drag fallen comrades into safety and mount weapons on almost any part of the terrain." The destructible environments of DICE's Frostbite engine will also be in use.

Battlefield 3
PC R349.99 + R50 Gift Card
PS3 R499.99 + R75 Gift Card
XBox360 R499.99 + R75 Gift Card

Available November 2011



Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 2011

It's 1982 in Uganda where Samson, an unknown character (the player), and your guide, Mbeki, are hunting a creature called the "kaftar" (which the locals think is a demon that can only be destroyed by fire, whereas your troops think it's a Hyena that's slaughtering thousands of people.) You see cave drawings that look like hyenas and hear hyena-like laughter. Samson turns off the lights and turns them back on, but the unknown hunter gets attacked by the Kaftar. Mbeki shoots it, but the bullet takes no effect. It is not known whether the unknown character dies or not.....

Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 2011
PS3 R499.99 + R75 Gift Card
XBox360 R499.99 + R75 Gift Card
Wii R399.99 + R50 Gift Card

Available 6 May



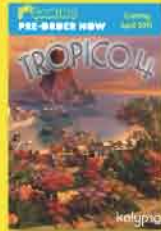
L.A. Noire
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Coming 20 May



F.E.A.R.
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+ R75 Gift Card
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Coming April



Duke Nukem
Forever
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XBox360 R599.99
+ R75 Gift Card
Coming 6 May



Tropico 4
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Dungeon
Siege III
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Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 2011
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+ R50 Gift Card
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Coming May



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Dirt 3
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Infamous 2
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Coming June



Red Faction
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The Witcher 2
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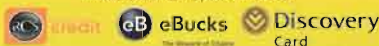
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I shall call him Squishy

Like never giving in to the demands of terrorists as policy, you should never pay the ransom when it comes to emotional blackmail. The simplicity of this rule is important because if you pay once you'll be paying forever, and then you die unhappy and baby seals can get hurt, even. This is a good rule... which I follow when it suits me.

This overly elaborate introduction sets the scene and backdrops the need to sometimes hear what the terrorists have to say. Actually listen to their demands and while you ultimately must give a thumbs-up on firing resolution to the SWAT and kill the stinking lot of them, you must also identify with the thinking that went into the whole endeavour.

Not too long ago Miktar said this to me, "you know when you stopped being a gamer though? When you started signing your name as Michael James under your Ed's Note. I miss RedTide. That dude was cool. :P"

Do you know what's really funny – I typed in RedTide now and Word underlined it in red. This means I haven't written RedTide in ages. Shame on me. Miktar for me is my gaming Jiminy Cricket – my gaming conscience. He keeps a careful eye on the purity of NAG as a gaming magazine and when we stray too far up the corporate bum he pulls me aside and offers some insight and makes me feel bad. I usually laugh him off or make some excuse that I know he'll let me get away with. Reasons why he has this role vary but are not important. Just believe that I know what I'm doing and what's good for everyone. I'm in touch with the right forces.

What this means for you is a better NAG. This is our redesign issue – it's not too radical based on previous changes but just feels right. Things that have changed that people think are important are the columns, we added a few more words to them, and I'd like to welcome Pippa to the magazine as a permanent columnist. For those of you living under rocks and stuff, she's the dynamic and vivacious presenter from The Verge on Vuzu (DSTV). I'd also like to welcome back the spine and the glue – it's taken a year of fighting and you wouldn't believe what else to make this happen and we got it back cheaper than ever before. I'm sticky on my principals. We've also added some cool features this month that will become regular – the great thing about these features is that they just happen now in the office without anyone having to make them happen which means they're being done with love. The review pages have also changed into what I think is a more logical layout, and the hardware has received a much needed makeover. It's incredible how stale things get in 12 months and I clearly remember people in the

office saying that last year's refresh was good for 2 years at least. It's so funny, LOL, etc.

This page is usually all about me posing and strutting and that's not a bad thing but I have to also give some space to the people that actually get NAG done each month. To the staff (past and present) thanks and well done – we couldn't do it without you... but remember – you can be replaced at any time. ;)

With a lot of South African pride we also say well done to development team QCF Design for bagging the Excellence in Design award at IGF 2011 (www.igf.com). Rodain is the designer and you can read his column in NAG each month. Read Miktar's column for the details on the event.

MARKETING GROWS A PAIR

Oh, I must mention... There's a trend developing that I'm putting a stop to right here and now. People complaining about the prizes they win in NAG. To those morons that have b1tched in the past – this is how it works. We get given prizes by different game / computer companies and sometimes we'll even give away stuff we were given as media (we do keep all the good stuff however). We then put this in NAG for someone to win. I don't care if you have a PS3 and you win the PC version of a game. This is what was put up as a prize. If you don't want it then don't enter the competition. In future if anyone complains about the platform preference of a prize you'll be added to our 'I'm a giant tool' list and never ever win anything again. Come now. See.

COVER STORY

Yes, it's another guy on the cover with a gun. At least we don't have a burning flag this month. I'm starting to think that there might be some merit to this whole promoting violence and video games. I'll bet if you changed the name of NAG to 'Guns and Ammo' nobody would even notice. Of course we put Duke on the cover. This man is an icon to all things cool and cheesy in games. Every single shooter that gets released these days has a little Duke DNA in them. That's right, he's your daddy and he's already banded you!

Enjoy it.

RedTide
[Editor]

An advertisement for Gigabyte featuring a blue background. On the left, it says "NAG REVIEW RIGS SUPPLIED BY: GIGABYTE" and "Quality is Everything". In the center, there's a graphic of a hard drive with "333 ONBOARD ACCELERATION" written on it. To the right, the slogan "Simply Fast" is written in a stylized font. Below the slogan, there are three icons: "USB 3.0 10X Super Speed", "SATA 3.0 4X Speed via RAID 0", and "USB Power 3X".

The Intel Core i7 logo, featuring the Intel logo and the text "CORE i7 inside" on a dark background with a colorful, abstract pattern.

Letter of the Month March 2011

Sorry, there is no letter of the month winner this month because we need space for more disclaimers. I'm going to give this month's games to the lucky winner next month (unless another bored soul gets offended this month): So, let us not get like America. It's a fun place with singing and dancing Idols people worship on TV and Hollywood and bacon you can squeeze out of a tube. You can also sue people there if you're dumb enough to walk into a glass door you didn't see...

Anyway, I got a call the other day from a concerned citizen (a guy called Peter I think, I think because when I get calls like this I glaze out almost immediately, so I'm sorry if your name is something else). For dramatic effect he asked me a question I couldn't say 'yes' to. The question was, 'do you think it is okay to tell a school child to kill himself?' This is an obvious no (under normal circumstances), but the problem was I actually did in a letter to someone in a recent NAG. So I guess it is okay to do it if you're me

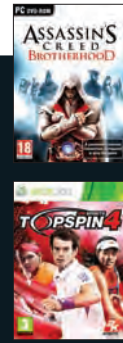
and making a point while trying to be funny in context to previous letters at the same time. Bearing in mind that it should be very obvious to everyone that I don't actually mean I really want you to kill yourself... right, please tell me everyone else gets this*. However, I also have to wonder if it was that easy to convince someone to kill themselves, they should rather do it now instead of in a crowded market place with a suicide vest in a dusty far away land one day (this is probably also going to generate a complaint). So yes... all of this to point out that sarcasm, drama and seriousness are hard to distinguish between if you're an idiot (now this doesn't mean I'm calling you an idiot Peter - I'm just speaking in general). Please do look for examples of this in this issue's letters section. More to consider... We do also come in a plastic bag each month with a FPB age restriction so you can protect yourself with information. Even though we do, we still don't say words like f**k and sh1t (see, the '1' there and the '**')

makes it all okay - clever hey) in print because it's rude and we really worry about the important stuff like not being racist, sexist or inconsiderate to disadvantaged people. When it comes to young, healthy, normal people, especially a bunch of n00b gamers (yes, we call each other n00bs in the office too) all bets are off. It's a gamer culture thing. Most importantly, we love our readers and they know it. I'm not sure where you fit in, however. So instead of wasting my time, a phone call and your time... why not do something for your community and emigrate^{1&2}. Also, in future, please use www.hellopeter.co.za for all your constipated issues. When we end up on that site it increases our readership, so help a brother out will you.

* Also, this would mean one reader less to pay for my expensive lifestyle.

¹ I read this on the back of a playing card - true story.

² You also made me waste all this space - shame on you.



The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by Megabrom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most inspired bit of wisdom or cleverness.

IMPORTANT STUFF! PAY ATTENTION!

Land Mail: P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158
Cyber mail: letters@nag.co.za

Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win...

From: Marius

Subject: Irritable bowel hype syndrome
It's yet another end of month where the cramping and crapping of my bowels and wallet starts to disgrace and disappoint me. Hype is like that extra beer or the extra spicy Indian curry. You know you should stay away, but just a bit more won't harm will it? Not today but tomorrow you will regret every decision you made yesterday.

Every single time the majority of us gamers get these irritable bowel hype syndrome (IBHS) and yet we keep on treading in the dangerous waters of empty promises. Ask any gamer out there how many times he pre-order a game or sneaked into a movie premier that promised to be the next best thing? And then ask how many of them actually were pleased with what they saw/received?

Hype is the aids of entertainment. It is slowly killing every expectation we get. But yet next month we will start having unprotected joyous expectations just to have our dream crushed yet again by the industry. Just look at some huge hype games that sucked: Haze, Hellgate, Diakatana, Final Fantasy 13 and... the list is endless... How will we ever fight this addiction? Or are we caught forever in this hype machine of destruction. Yes hype truly is worse than crack.

And yet there are little known gems that sneak into our lives with no hype at all and change our lives forever (Plants vs. Zombies anybody?)

Every word you said about hype is all true. Trust me, I'm an expert. It's exactly like AIDS, in a way - an unpleasant social condition that you can live with if you follow the right treatment but will eventually kill you. Notice to prudes: I'm not making jokes about AIDS. Interestingly in most cases, like AIDS, it is a choice you make. So... don't buy into the hype, don't read about a big game

you're dying to play, ignore all Internet posts, news feeds and forums and when it comes out you can play it raw dog. Why don't you give that a try for the next game you're dying to play and see how it feels. Fight the addiction. ;) Ed.

From: Stephen

Subject: Ed's note - March 2011
Oh, so now you worry about global warming, because it affected an issue of NAG. Stop being so holier-than-thou and realise the bigger picture. Who is actually dealing with the "core" problem here? The planet Earth is a finite entity, which can't sustain the current human population, let alone a constantly growing one. Call me what you want, I'm just a realist.

Hey, I can get interested in something how and damn well when I choose. I've been doing my environmental bit for ages and I thought it was a good idea to share with our readers why they should do something and how it might affect them. However, I do agree with your thinking. There are too many people on this planet. What we need is another good dose of the black plague or perhaps an almighty flood. Notice to prudes: I'm not suggesting the renewed spreading of black plague is a good thing. It must just happen quickly, take its toll and move on. The last thing we need is millions of suffering people using up more space and resources. Also, seeing that you know it all - what are you doing? Ed.

From: Nicholas

Subject: Monthly demo goodness
First off I'd like to say thanks for the great magazine; your reviews and tech support frequently help me decide what to spend my money on. What I'm interested in, however, is the demos. How do you choose what to put on the disk? Do you have to go out of your way to get permission to distribute demos, or do game developers offer them to you?



Shorts [extracts from LOL n00b from NAG reader letters]

"No straight man would wear tights like that." - James
"This is my first letter to you so just stop me if i get too rusty."
- Devin

"Believe it or not, the poster is what got me hooked onto the magazine."
- Rushil

"My friend who claim to know the Palace in which NAG was made in accompanied me on this faithful quest."
- Michael

It seems that the majority of the demos are lesser known games (unless I'm just behind most of the time), and games that are made by small time developers. Obviously there are exceptions, such as the massive Mass Effect 2 demo, but these are few and far between. I'm not complaining; the lesser known demos are a great way of finding the gems out there in the gaming world. But when it comes to demos by big shot companies such as EA, does being a South African magazine mean you sometimes miss out on the demos that over-seas magazines get? An example is the Dragon Age 2 demo (yes I'm a BioWare fan). It came out on the 22nd of February, but I read about a German magazine that got permission to release it a few days early so they could have it with their magazine, and now that the demo is officially released many overseas magazines are giving it out. My question is, why not us? 2GB is too much for me to download in one month, and the game will be out by the time I could get it, defeating the purpose.

Nice question. It's really simple. We put all available demos on the NAG DVD as soon as they are released. There has been a bit of a dry spell recently (over December and well into the New Year) but that appears to be over now (check out this months DVD). We don't have any control over what is released and when, but we do get it to you as quickly as possible. Occasionally overseas magazines do get scoops on demos but they usually have to sell their souls to make it happen and often it's only for their territory i.e. only in the German language. Regardless, Dragon Age 2 is on this month's DVD so enjoy it. We are always looking for suggestions for the DVD on our forums, so get posting. Ed.

From: Hilton

Subject: Dead Space 2 "review"
Fred: Hey Tim did you check out this

NAG Fan artwork

This is the cream of the crop that we received at NAG this issue. If you 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. Remember, don't just stick the logo on a picture – use the logo in a picture or you win squat.



Gunther Jager, "I drew this in one night and I'm 15."

Heinrich Kuhn, "This energy drink* was rendered in Blender and the label was done in Photoshop."

month's NAG yet!?

Tim: Tot4lly dud3, it was awesome.

Fred: What did you think about the Dead Space 2 review?

Tim: I thought it was awesome and hysterical. Chat logs. LOL

Fred: But doesn't it bother you that instead of a proper review we just got given some sort of bash.org style IRC log?

Tim: No, WTF LOL, bash.org is hilarious. Like the review.

Fred: Yeah, bash.org is funny, but it's not informative at all. I'm not buying NAG magazine for a laugh, I'm buying it for some purchasing advice.

Tim: ... WTF...

Fred: No really, this is a huge game release, and they don't give me a proper review. The job of a journalist is to take information and process it, resulting in a nice neat article with a start, an end and a finish.

Tim: If I wanted to read books, I'd go to amazon... lawl.

Tim: They're trying something different, stop being such a n00b.

Fred: That's not the point, at the end of the day I paid Tarryn to play a game and then talk about it on Google Talk. She could've used those chat logs as some sort of reference and then just cleaned it up – it's crap.

Tim: Dude, LOL, you're phreaking out over nothing. It's 1 game review...

Fred: No, it's not just one game review. They did the same BS when they reviewed the original. The original went on to be one of the biggest games of the year. One of the best games of the year and they gave us a BS chat log.

Tim: Srsly, they did it for the original also? WTF...

Fred: Yeah, only this time it's worse. The original had little hype and was still unknown. They've been hyping us up on the sequel for months and this is what we end up with WTF? I waited an extra month after seeing it in stores, because nag take their time to review the thing

properly and I didn't want to go with some review posted 30 seconds after release on the Internet and instead they give me that.

Tim: LOL, sounds like an epic fail. But it's not all bad. Did you read Tarryn's back page, she said she's on hotornot.com... BBL

Someone did not click on 'likes', Ed.

From: Troy

Subject: Dead Space 2 Review
Just read the Dead Space 2 review, just want to say great job (got me drooling), the whole Google Chat between you and Tarryn was awesome to read, and I actually want to see the un-edited version of the chat. Actually rather not, I think seeing the un-edited pure awesomeness will be too much for me, may have to get psychiatric help as brain won't be able to comprehend how such awesomeness is possible.

I played the 1st Dead Space a few months back and I initially hated it. Controls and viewing angle was just not easy to get used to, so I stopped playing it. Finally a few months ago I gave it another go. I soon got over the whole sluggish controls and viewing angle thing I disliked and began getting into it. WOW! Game was epic. And I am not a horror fan so for me to enjoy it, it has to be top notch. From your review I just read, the 2nd will be even better. Can't wait to slice and dice more necromorphs. Anyway, thanks for the great reviews, keep it up.

Someone did click on 'likes', Ed.

From: Tyron

Subject: Game testing
I have just bought Call of Duty: Black Ops (Xbox) and I am seriously disappointed with the layout of the game. I have played all of the earlier versions and thought this would be a good step up but it seems I wasted my hard earned pocket money. I read up everything I could about this game and it is not living up to its reviews. I am interested in game testing and previews and want to know how to get involved.

Yes I to had difficulty with the layout of the game, I found that the structure lack a certain delighted angle and was also much cleaner than was promised and I certainly expected. ;) Also, we don't have any open slots at the moment and when we need new writers we'll put an advert in the magazine. Ed.

From: Wes

Subject: Agonising Message from Gareth
As I send you this message I wish I was dead.
For Gareth's novel put me to bed. The duration was so long it scrambled my head.
It took so long his words were abundant. His Retarded Email got so redundant.

[Snip, Ed]

Yes, lovely. Just so you know, I used a program on the Internet designed to generate meaningful spam messages and the first thing it kicked out was better than this effort. You win at n00b. Ed.

On the Forums

Question: What major innovation in gaming have you waited for / are you waiting for?

Chevron: A holodeck so I can play Leisure Suit Larry.

echo: Virtual reality glasses. Like in that crappy Jason X movie.

Die Jason: The end of gaming piracy. I think that would trump just about anything else.

Sir PaniCore: A game where for once the Russians are not the Bad-Guys... I swear Americans can really hold a Grudge for that Whole "Cold-War" thing.

apie: An end to postponements of release dates and general tardiness. {Yes Valve, I'm looking at you. Where is my #\$\$%& Episode 3}

Miz3r: DIABLO 3 LAN Multiplayer! Wait that will never happen, thanks Blizzard for ruining my life

Jerkydarkstar: A game that's not broken and doesn't need any patching.

spjt07: A game that is as close to perfect as possible, a game that is met by the hype given and delivers what is promised. Innovating? No, just done right.

Toxyc: A realistic steering wheel set. Read again: REALISTIC. R-E-A-L-I-S-T-I-C. At an affordable price.

vii: A proper lightsaber based Star Wars game. Until then I won't buy any form of motion control.

Nferno: I was waiting for something like Gamegun, but now that it's available I can't afford one. And so is the circle of life, Simba.

MarryO+LewyG: Games that let you make use of your own tunes, like Vib ribbon or Audiosurf. We need more of these for console.

{G}Zulu: A game that really does have everything. I mean EVERYTHING!

Fredder: A single platform which can handle all games... and associated peripherals. No more PC vs. Console/Console vs. Console crap, just one big happy family.

Changsta 187: Mind control.

nukehead: Virtual Reality, like in those old 90's movies but minus any actual harm to the 'real' you. That would be swell.

OllieTheDog: A portal gun. :D

Rah_Skill: 3D graphics.

Darranged: A game that happens to take more than 6 hours to clock, and doesn't rely on appealing to gamer OCD with cheap achievements in order to get a 100% completion rate.

@@GJC@@: A computer with full virtual reality like in the movie Stormbreaker. Kind of like Matrix except without dying if you die in the Matrix (game).

Sci_Ghost: A virtual system that enables the user to be fully immersed within the game universe without a hint of distraction. Full body sense interaction.

CaViE: Pure escapism. Like Rapture, except, all over the place and wherever you look. No possible way of being reminded that it's not real.

VirtualForce: Quake 1 on a Star Trek holodeck....

Person24: Non-Crappy internet for South Africa.

Tankiouse: A game that doesn't fade to black when there is a sex scene LOL that game would be awesome if it were virtual reality ready. ;D

cc4Spawn: Minecraft! Brought one of the biggest Lego problems to an end, the nightmare of running out of blocks... ;)

Chainsaw: Truly open-ended storylines.

M2K: Bollywood to start making games. ;)

jhl: A totally immersive FPS game where you have to do absolutely everything (with the ability to fast forward through the boring parts of course :D), traveling, talking, decisions, planning, even peeing :P Not because it would be fun but because it would be a refreshing change in games, like Bulletstorm.

NightWalker567: A huge map that has amazing graphics and offers complete escapism

absolado: PlayStation 4 and NGP

hideinlight: DOTA2

Toxyc: You guys have no idea what the word "innovate/innovation" means do you?

gameaddictwn: Motion sensing cameras (Kinect and Eye Toy) That's actually accurate

Acinixys: I'm waiting for the day when I can play an online FPS and not be insulted. (Yeah, right)

The weasel stole my cupcake? We understand, come for a chat. Almost everyone is welcome: <http://www.nag.co.za/forums/>

Sex! That got your attention



By now you must have heard that some ludicrous code-monkeys at Ubisoft have created a racy game for the Nintendo Wii. No, not the racy that involves Mario and a go-kart (although for some that might actually be the right racy – yuck), the *other* kind. The one that involves groping parts of a human body that don't belong to you. The one that involves risqué acts performed by two people (or more if you're lucky). The one that often results in a new person after nine months. Yes! *That* racy.

It's called *We Dare* (oh so very clever – because it's on the Wii you see...) and what Ubisoft has essentially done is taken the squeaky clean, family-friendly ethos that's buzzed around the Nintendo Wii like a persistent gnat, glued gnat-sized tits onto it, dressed it up in a lacy thong and given it a glowing purple strap-on. A console that's seen more cutesy releases than Walt Disney is about to get a sex party game, which obviously gives

“Ubisoft is clearly dragging swingers groups into the 21st century.”

the oft repeated lament of “where are the games for the hard-core crowd, Nintendo?” a whole new meaning.

Judging by the game's debut trailer, the premise is simple. First, you need to be wildly attractive, with a six-pack you could grate cheese off if you're a guy or legs that go up to your eyeballs if you're a woman. You then invite a couple around to your expensive looking loft apartment and, after a candle-light dinner mixed with alcohol and polite conversation, you propose a spot of Wii gaming in the hopes that it'll lead to casual sex with all parties involved. Of course, what Ubisoft needs to do is put a disclaimer on the box that reads: “Casual sex is a possible by-product of using this software and is in no way guaranteed by Ubisoft. Ubisoft and all of its subsidiaries will not be held responsible for eighteen years of child-support payments and does not condone frivolous sex with multiple partners, even though that's totally what we're implying in our advertising campaign for this insane game we've just made. *Assassin's Creed* and *Raving Rabbids* branded condoms sold separately”.

Without that disclosure all Ubisoft is doing is setting up hordes of socially inept gamers for utter heartbreak mixed with soul crushing rejection. Something, granted, most are probably used to by this stage, but *We Dare* offers a glimmer of hope – hope that says: “if you play this game with people you fancy, you'll get to see them naked. If not then at least you'll get to jam a Wii remote down the back of a woman's skirt to make butt smacking a new way of controlling on-screen characters.”

Ubisoft is clearly dragging swingers groups into the 21st century. No more chucking your car keys into a bowl because that method of generating random hook-ups is now outdated. Instead Ubisoft feels that “40 fun and flirtatious games” are a much cooler way of ensuring casual sex. And the best part is that the games don't even have to look mildly entertaining, because any hint of sex in the real world is enough to sugar-coat the most vacuous of in-game experiences.

The part that intrigues the most is that the title has been given a 12+ age restriction. It's the video gaming equivalent of setting Pedo Bear free in a day-care facility armed with a stash of Rohypnol and twenty litres of spiked Oros.

Miklós Szecsei

Long live Harmonix

This year has brought tough times to the rhythm genre. Shortly after Activision announced the discontinuation of the *Guitar Hero* franchise, *Rock Band* publisher Viacom decided to dump the development studio, Harmonix, which is now owned by Harmonix-SBE Holdings, essentially making the studio independent.

According to studio head Alex Rigopulos, the news didn't come as much of a surprise. Despite the commercial success of the Kinect-based *Dance Central*, Viacom obviously didn't have much faith in the studio's future, but thankfully, they're alone in that regard. Harmonix will not only continue to develop content for *Rock Band 3* for at least the rest of this year, but they also have the prudence to look beyond the music genre.

“I see Harmonix potentially evolving past exclusively focusing on music games,” he said in a recent interview with *Destructoid*. “That's been – for our entire history – our reason for being basically. We've been focused on interactive music since the company started; we've been focused on music games for over ten years now.”

With the studio's strong focus on peripheral- and now motion controller-based gaming, we can almost certainly expect something based on that technology.

“We're incredibly creatively motivated by motion gaming,” he



says. “Of course, dance games are a special intersection of music games with motion gaming. Harmonix has developed a competency and quite a passion and interest, generally speaking, in the area of motion gaming. So I think one of the things that you may see coming out of Harmonix in the future is more activity in the area of motion games.”

There's also talk of the studio reinventing the *Rock Band* series, so don't throw away your plastic guitars just yet.

Bats gets a release date

The sequel to the critically acclaimed *Batman: Arkham Asylum* is the gaming calendar highlight for many this year. *Arkham City* sees the Dark Knight take on all manner of foes in the now expanded loony bin (five times the size of *Arkham Asylum*). The latest character addition to the game is Calendar Man, who players will be able to visit in his cell during the game. The neat trick, however, is that Calendar Man will divulge information and anecdotes about heists and crimes he pulled off on whichever holiday is closest in time to when you are playing. In other words, the game will monitor the date setting on your console and depending on which holiday is closest, it will trigger different conversations with Calendar Man. Neat!

Speaking of Calendar Man and dates, you can expect to swoop around *Arkham City* with an overhauled gliding mechanic on the 21st of October.



Scrolls are the new cubes

Minecraft creators Mojang have announced their second title, and it has absolutely nothing to do with obsessively moving blocks from one place to another. *Scrolls* will be a digital collectable card game (like *Magic: The Gathering*) with board game elements (like chess). Opposing players will attempt to destroy each other by drawing cards from a custom-built, shuffled deck, and placing them on the board. Cards can be used to attack or defend and will include both spells and creatures.

Scrolls will be primarily multiplayer-focused, but the final release will include a single-player campaign to give players a chance to learn the ropes and build up a decent-enough deck.

No clue on a release date, but the game's head developer Jakob Porser (not Markus "Notch" Persson, the chap who created *Minecraft*) has confirmed that there will be a closed, free alpha as well as a public beta. The alpha is set to begin sometime this year, having bought the original alpha release of *Minecraft* may earn you a golden ticket into this exclusive club.



Imagine that!

Local game development studio I-Imagine Interactive is still kicking, you should be pleased to know. Their latest title is once-again for iPhone/iPad, and is called *Space Freight*. In this game, players will need to help a cargo-bearing mothership travel through the depths of space by fending off attacking aliens and keeping its energy reserves topped up. There are three different types of aliens and five cargo ships to choose from.

Space Freight is currently ranked among the top 100 selling US iPad arcade and puzzle games, and is closing in on the top 100 iPhone arcade games. If you want to support these local developers, head over to the App Store and pay just \$0.99 for this title.

Sonic spins into next episode

// *Sonic 4* may or may not have tickled you in all the right places, but either way SEGA has confirmed that the series is moving forward with the development of episode 2. Despite a few disgruntled gamers' opinions, episode 1 did actually perform fairly well in terms of sales, which means a bigger budget for this next title.

The studio has been fairly quiet with regards to the details, but they have confirmed that they're taking on board a lot of feedback from both the public and SEGA Europe/Asia. Expect new zones as well. There's no word yet on a release date, but with that hyperactive blue hedgehog turning 20 this June, you can expect *something* to be announced around that time, if not an actual release.

It's burger time, kids

// Do you remember *BurgerTime*? You probably don't, because you're a young whippersnapper with no respect, so we'll tell you: *BurgerTime* is a static platform game from 1982, similar to the original *Donkey Kong*, in which players had to run around on platforms knocking down the ingredients for a hamburger. Complete all of the burgers on the level and you win. Yay! This is all pertinent because the ESRB has filed a rating for a new HD *BurgerTime*.

The game will be released on digital platforms like WiiWare and PSN. We're not sure when the game will hit the virtual shelves, but it'll likely be fairly soon.



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Neutral Good



I like talking about stuff most people don't give a rat's arse about. Really. That's not going to change for this column, so either read on or smile and nod and move along your merry way to "the good stuff".

In this case my mind perambulates on character creation in videogames – specifically of the RPG genre. Why should we care about this you ask? Well, after spending untold, antisocial hours playing games the likes of *Oblivion* or *Dragon Age*, I was intrigued to discover that a friend of mine approached her character creation in a very different way to yours truly. And it comes down to 3 points: Character Class, Race, and Alignment.

Class. I'm a fighter, usually a rogue. Almost always. It rarely matters which RPG game I'm playing - I like being able to open my own locks, and use weapons in both hands. I don't call it self-sufficient, I call it irritable: "Get out of the way, I'll do it". Even if I do start out as

" I throw fireballs. I don't care if I incinerate half the innocent bystanders in the vicinity "

a magic user of some sort, inevitably I will pick up a sword and bash the baddies over the head.

If for some unknown reason I decide to practice some restraint (WTF?) and become a spellcaster, I throw fireballs. I don't care if I incinerate half the innocent bystanders in the vicinity: the bigger the explosion and the quicker I can get back to the storyline, the better.

I guess the point I'm making is that I'm not like that in real life. I don't like confrontation, and I try to avoid throwing fireballs at people whenever possible. My friend on the other hand, is more quarrelsome. She'll admit it too, and yet she will play as either an archer (people actually do that?) or out of preference a mage that casts personality spells to manipulate people into giving her what she wants.

Race. The other interesting creation morsel is the race and gender of my character. Often male and dark-skinned (black, blue, green - meh), with crazy hair and eyes, I try to create characters that are the least like me I can manage. Well perhaps not the crazy hair...

Lastly, Alignment. This is the one area that I cannot change no matter how hard I try. I create an Evil character, I end up Neutral Good. I play a Lawful Good character, I end up Neutral Good. I play Chaotic, you guessed it - Neutral Good. Perhaps I'm just a pragmatic person by nature - I'm loathed to alienate NPC's because you never know what bonuses you'll wheedle out of them... (cue Evil Neutral Good laughter).

The question that I want answered is this: Why do we create characters so implicitly different to our own personalities? Do I have a wish to live vicariously through my character? After meditating on this I've decided it's because I'm weird and I can't really be bothered with battles.

Yes. I know.

Now before you pick up that stone, hear me out. It's not that I don't like a challenge, in fact I love them, but if I want to play a game where I'm fighting to survive, it probably won't be an RPG.

I haven't of course completed an in-depth analytical study of this, much as you might think I have the time. It's merely something I muse upon when the other voices in my head give me enough time to think.

Pippa Tshabalala

Epic admissions

Delta Squad secretly wants your PlayStation, Cliffy B goes all candid on us.



There's a particularly scary, mutated breed of PS3 fanboy out there. You've probably met one of these "gamers" before. They live in the shadows, unwashed and unloved, feeding on the husks of long-dead insects, feverishly jumping at any opportunity to snipe anyone who doesn't believe that PlayStation is the one true console out there. Every platform has its own take on this nasty, unfortunate group of individuals, but for the sake of this news piece, we're just dealing with the PS3's ultra fanboys.

These are the clowns who tear into Xbox exclusives like *Gears of War* and *Halo*, calling them nothing but excuses for games. Every other gamer out there knows that these poor souls are merely trapped in eternal anguish at the thought of these excellent games never appearing on their sacred console. They don't know of any other way to deal with this pain than to criticise those who are able to experience the fun these titles provide. Epic Games is here to tell this band of misfits that it's okay, Epic doesn't hate you – they just think you're misunderstood. They'd love to provide you with some *Gears* action. Microsoft's golden money vaults make that difficult, however.

"Do we wish we could take all those *Killzone* and *Resistance* fans on PS3, and get them to say 'Gears is awesome'?"

Yeah, sure I'd love to ship the *Gears* trilogy on PlayStation," admitted Epic president Mike Capps. "That would be fun. I want to be there; I want to be everywhere." Then he explains why that's not the case. "Time and time again, when it came down to figure out what we do next with *Gears*, we sat down with Microsoft and they've given us really good, compelling reasons to work with them again." So, basically: glorious moneys.

In other Epic-related news, Cliff Bleszinski has openly stated that *Gears of War 3* cannot afford to share the problems that plague the multiplayer portion of *GoW 2*. The series is notorious for matchmaking, hosting and lag issues, and Cliffy B won't have that for the upcoming third title.

"If we release *Gears 3* and it has the same launch as *Gears 2* online then the franchise is dead," said Bleszinski. "So you can't afford to make that mistake twice, right? And to be fair over the course of the six title updates, we got *Gears 2* in a very good position. And we need to take it to great. And that's what this will help do."

GoW's multiplayer is fantastic fun, so we're glad to hear that all the issues it's been plagued with in the past will hopefully be rectified, taking the multiplayer to a whole new level of awesome.

EA/Intel: PC could be biggest

At Intel's GDC presentation, Intel's Matt Ployar (who is also the new president of the PC Gaming Alliance) spoke about the growth in PC game sales. He predicts that by 2012 the PC will be a bigger market than "all the consoles combined." He attributes this to massive growth in Asia, as well as shrinking sales in North America, where people can no longer afford to pay \$60 for a console title.

Then there's Frank Gibeau,

president of the EA Games label, who told Gamasutra that PC downloads are "awesome." He then went on to explain that statement: "The margins are much better and we don't have any rules in terms of first party approvals. From our perspective, it's an extremely healthy platform. It's totally conceivable it will become our biggest platform."

So there you go. PC gaming isn't dead. It's silently taking over the world.

Durex: Steam Transmitted Diseases Edition

Valve reveals Steam Guard



Valve has revealed another update to the features list of its wildly popular digital distribution service, Steam. It's called Steam Guard and it's perfect for anyone who's paranoid about having their account hijacked. What this shiny new feature does is give you the option to temporarily link your account to a single PC. "Attempts to modify or change account settings by any other PC won't be possible without the user's approval," says Valve.

It's all well and good until you get down to the details, because there's a bit of fine print here. In order to be fully protected, you're going to need one of Intel's new-fangled Sandy Bridge CPUs and a motherboard that supports it. This new hardware is soon going to be updated with what is, essentially, hardware-based DRM called Intel Identity Protection Technology (IPT).

"IPT generates a new numerical password every 30 seconds, integrating into the processor functionality that previously required a separate card or key fob," is how this technology has been explained. So your Steam account basically becomes linked to your hardware so you can limit access to it. What's not clear yet is how (or even if) Steam Guard can be used on PCs that aren't equipped with Intel's new processors.

Make no mistake: in this age of phishing and keylogging, protecting your digital data is important. "Account phishing and hijacking are our #1 support issues. With Intel's IPT and Steam Guard, we've taken a big step towards giving customers the account security they need as they purchase more and more digital goods," said Valve's Gabe Newell. However, while Steam Guard is a fantastic idea and protecting your Steam-bought goods is undoubtedly important, we don't think that Steam Guard is worth buying a new CPU and motherboard for if that's what's required. You'll know more about this when we do.

Panasonic bails on MMO handheld

// Do you remember when, a few months back, we told you about Panasonic's upcoming handheld MMO gaming console, the Jundle? Yeah, that's been scrapped. The company didn't know what level of hell they were getting into and decided to cut their losses before even a prototype made it out the door.

"Panasonic decided to suspend further development due to changes in the market and in our own strategic direction," the company said in a statement.

NAG's translation: "We ran out of ways to sh1t ourselves. The MMO market terrifies us and a handheld dedicated to the genre was as good an idea as a surf board made of toffee."

Serious trilogy

// We're seriously excited about this. *Seriously*. Croteam has officially announced *Serious Sam 3* with a handful of screenshots and a splash of details. It'll be called *Serious Sam 3: BFE*, but we have no clue what BFE stands for (Big F\$%#ing E-something is the best we can do). The game will once-again be set in Egypt and will give players access to new weapons, melee attacks, 16-player co-op and competitive deathmatch and Best Hunt modes.

Expect *Serious Sam 3* to come crashing through store shelves in Q4 this year. We can hear the terrifying screams of those headless bomb guys already.



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I hate you, clones. Hate

[repeated 5 times ;), Ed].



Game developers have it pretty raw sometimes. They get screwed over by publishers. They get screwed over by consumers with entitlement issues. Most upsettingly, they even get screwed over by other developers from time to time.

Like many other industries, the world of game development is rife with creatively bankrupt copycats who will do anything for a quick buck. These sort of people release what you may know as "game clones", or "soulless sh1t piles that copy another game's mechanics to the letter and slap on different artwork in order to seem unique". Such clones pop up frequently across all platforms, targeting consumers who don't know any better and funnelling their money to lazy, re-skinning a55holes instead of people who actually produce the industry's new ideas and fun experiences.

Mainstream game publishers dedicate a fair amount

"Mainstream game publishers dedicate a fair amount of their time and resources to bringing the hammer down on cloners"

of their time and resources to bringing the hammer down on cloners, but it's a difficult situation to police properly. Worse still, when cloners decide to target indie devs – game creators who enjoy scant legal protection and typically cannot fund aggressive lawsuits – there's little that can stop them. This wreaks havoc on studios that already have to tread water in unforgiving markets such as the iPhone, since their visibility (and popularity) may well be eclipsed by an impostor who happens to hit the market at the right time and spread the word about "their" fun game.

This gets worse on occasions when the cloner successfully manages to bring their game to a platform that the original developer hasn't even reached yet. Take, for example, Halfbot's *The Blocks Cometh*, a highly successful Flash game that was due for release on the iPhone before the devs discovered that it already was on the iPhone. It appeared under another developer's name, with the same title, gameplay and even artwork. Some scumbag had lifted the code and assets and put it up for sale without the original creator's permission, and had already made it into the App Store's Top 100 list. This clone was fortunately shut down by Apple after being reported, but the damage was already done – after all, average consumers don't usually have a reason to buy the same game twice.

It's difficult to convey the full complexity and depravity of this situation in a single column: I could discuss Wolfire's *Lugaru* being compiled and resold by another developer at a lower price than the original game, or Capcom's shameless rip-off of *Splatoon Man* with a title called *MaXsplosion*, or even drop a mention about my own *Desktop Dungeons* being cloned, re-skinned and sold on the iPhone under a different title before QCF Design could establish a foothold there.

But if you're the sort of person who just doesn't care about an indie developer's plight (okay, I can accept this), bear in mind that this situation can affect consumers as well. Anybody who has bought a buggy, half-arsed clone from the App Store only to see it pulled down a few days later with no hope of patching – while more savvy consumers have instead opted for the officially supported, legitimate version of the game – can tell you that the experience isn't too much fun.

This is all just food for thought, of course: it is by no means an attempt to make any legal argument about the nature of game cloning and other nonsense. But it is an ethical argument – and perhaps quite an important one.

Rodain Joubert

Make games; make money; make us proud

If you fancy yourself a game developer and know your way around XNA or associated programming languages, then it's time to get your ass in gear. Microsoft's annual Dream.Build.Play challenge has returned with big prizes: \$75,000 in total, as well as the fame that goes with winning (and the huge XBL sales you can expect from that fame). Registration closes on May the 17th, with submissions running from that day up until the 14th of June. Get cracking, and be sure to let us know if you become an instant professional game developer.



An example of a typical indie game developer.

Epic Games: thanks for the free publicity, Fox News

Just prior to the release of *Bulletstorm*, Fox News ran a report entitled "Is *Bulletstorm* the worst game in the world?" They then got in TV psychologist Dr. Carole Lieberman to give her opinion. She claimed that games like *Bulletstorm* were responsible for the rise of rape cases in the USA. Face: palm.

Naturally, most gamers with their heads screwed on just took the opportunity to laugh at Fox News and utterly destroy the star rating for Lieberman's book on Amazon.com (no really, they did – hell hath no fury as a gamer scorned).

Now Epic Games' president Mike Capps has voiced his opinion on the whole matter. From a business stand point he's smiling, saying: "For a game that's over-the-top, they probably helped sell more units than they convinced people to pick at us".

He was also thoroughly pleased by the way the gaming industry's media outlets condemned the irresponsible reporting on behalf of Fox News. He said that for him it was most "wonderful to see a media that's defending free speech". It also helps that most gamers are rather intelligent and able to spot utter rubbish a mile away.

Still, it wasn't all good news from



the Epic Games boss-man: "As for what it does for the industry as a whole I think it's terrible... There are people who really respect Fox News' opinions and look at that and are [convinced that video games are bad]."

Miniature Cold War

Toy Soldiers, that enjoyable tower defence game (which was released on XBLA last year) starring miniature soldiers and set during World War I, has just been sequelized. *Toy Soldiers: Cold War* travels forward through time to the 1980s and sees miniature US and USSR forces squaring off for dominance of miniature battlefields. Cooperative play, new units, new attacks and new drivable

vehicles are being added. That's a whole lot of new right there.

In addition, improved multiplayer, new minigames and refined enemy AI will all be implemented. *Toy Soldiers* sold over 500 000 copies and it's now been announced that the original game will be arriving on PC later this year. That's great news, but we're not yet sure if the sequel will also be hitting the PC.

Help wanted: apply within

While Microsoft's Kinect is being picked up by every man, woman and child throughout the known universe, the company is already setting its sights on the future. Recent job ads (which stemmed from the company's Mountain View research facility) suggest that they're stocking up on staff for the development of what might be the Xbox 360's successor. Mountain View hopes to add a design verification engineer, hardware architect and numerous other positions to its list of employees. Those hired should expect to be tasked with "defining and delivering next generation console architectures from conception through implementation."

Before you get too excited about this news, bear in mind that it'll still take years before any concrete details begin pouring out for a new console. That's assuming this actually relates to the 360's successor at all. It might pertain to something entirely different.

First-person cinema

// That 2005 *Doom* movie with Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson was okay for a bit of mindless fun, but it didn't exactly do the beloved FPS series much justice. It seems there might be hope for redemption however, because anonymous sources have supposedly informed What's Playing of a new *Doom* film adaptation, which is currently in the beginning stages of development over at Universal. No details yet, other than that the film will be viewable in 3D. Oh sweet, sweet gaming gods: please let this turn out to be the opposite of crap.



The Wheel of Time turns, and ages come and pass

The *Wheel of Time* series is massive. It currently spans thirteen novels (some over 1,000 pages), one rather poor first-person shooter, a handful of comic books and an upcoming film. Now, the comic's publishers Red Eagle Entertainment has partnered with Electronic Arts, Obsidian Interactive and Team Jordan to produce a series of videogames based on the *WoT* licence.

There's a long roll-out plan for these games, with the first wave spanning two and a half years. During 2011, Red Eagle will release images and what they call multimedia "samplers" to give fans a taste of things to come. That will be followed by a few flash games on the company's website, and shortly after, a full-blown RPG with Obsidian working internally with the studio. After that, there's talk of an MMO with a longer development cycle, but there's no word yet on a time-frame for release.

After James Oliver Rigney Jr. (aka Robert Jordan – the original writer of *WoT*) died in 2007, nobody has really been sure where to go with the series. The publishers want more books, and that's happening courtesy of Brandon Sanderson, and now Red Eagle aims to continue the series beyond the pages. It's a neat idea, but there's a lot at stake here; staying true to the fans will guarantee their interest, but with over four million words written in the series, it's going to be difficult to keep the momentum going without alienating potential newcomers.



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Independent Game Festival Story



We are in the Moscone Convention Center¹ in uptown San Francisco, where the 13th Annual Independent Games Festival and 25th Annual Game Developers Conference are in full swing – think E3 or rAge, but with a focus on indie developers and industry-veteran panel discussions on the merits of player investment or artificial intelligence in games.

I'm sitting with the guys from local indie game studio QCF Design (creators of *Desktop Dungeons*), drinking heavily from the complimentary bottle of red wine I found at our assigned table. The award ceremony is about to begin. That morning, geek-pope Will Wheaton had tweeted that he liked *Desktop Dungeons*. For the guys, that was mana from heaven, and a bit of validation.

I can see Tim Shafer at one table (who's being harried to get up and go backstage to prepare for his hosting of the

“ They look like a Creed cover band ”

GDC Awards in an hour), Peter Molyneux at another table (who is there to accept his Lifetime Achievement in Game Development award) and Notch (creator of *Minecraft*) looking I'm-a-millionaire-now smug surrounded by his documentary crew.

The female voiceover (who unfortunately does not sound like GladOS) announces, “This year's nominees for the IGF Excellence in Design award are: *Desktop Dungeons*, *Faraway*, *Minecraft*, *Nidhogg* and *Super Crate Box*.” Host of the IGF Awards, Anthony Carboni², opens up the envelope in his hands. “And the winner is... *Desktop Dungeons*!”

Around me, the guys explode into cheers of shocked amazement.

“They look like a Creed cover band”, someone tweets as Danny, Marc and Rodain walk spot lit up to the stage. They accept their trophy (shiny!) and give a few words. *Desktop Dungeons* is the first South African game to be nominated for an IGF award³ and simultaneously the first to win one.

It's ironic, because of the history involved*. I met Danny and Marc back in 1996 at a cyber-cafe (which I've mentioned before). We became good friends. NAG wasn't even around yet. The only game development website at the time, SA Game Dev, focused more on the engineering side of things - thinking that game engine *uber alles* - and thus was pretty useless for everything except back-patting over which programming language one uses. They're *still* like that, says my opinion, and still useless for fostering actual game development in South Africa. Danny's parents, like most parents, put little stock in this “video game” thing and it took his company's first big contract nearly 10 years later to convince them otherwise.

Fast-forward 15 years, and Danny's company is in the US accepting a prestigious award for their game, competing against the likes of *Minecraft*. It was Danny's involvement in the Game.Dev section of the NAG forums that helped incubate the start of Rodain's game development career.

I find it all pretty amazing. Grats guys, you deserve it.

* Don't get me wrong, I'm not really into the Cult of Personality thing. I don't think that what a developer ate on Thursday matters much with regards to what he programmed on Friday. Sure, it can be interesting to learn more about a developer/songwriter/moviemaker, because it gives a little more context to their works: but personally, I think a person's work (should) speak(s) for itself.

Miktak Dracon

¹ 37.784147,-122.401299

² Host, writer and producer. Creator of indie game show Bytejacker. Has a ten-footvertical leap and is impervious to bullets... and heartbreak.

³ To my knowledge.

To infinity, and beyond!

We loved playing *Tribes* way back when it was possible to play online with 32 players on a dialup connection. Then *Tribes 2* came along, and we loved it even more despite the need to upgrade to a blazing fast ISDN line in order to keep those headshots coming. Then *Tribes: Vengeance* happened, and we sort of said “well that's that then.” Thankfully, there are people out there who share our love of this series, and after way too long, a “true” sequel to *Tribes 2* is on its way, according to the developers

Tribes: Ascend is in development by *Global Agenda* devs Hi-Rez studios, and is due for release towards the end of 2011 for PC and Xbox 360, with other platforms under consideration. The game is built on Unreal Engine 3 and the developers aim to pack every loved feature into the game without losing the big picture (making massive landscapes, jetpacks and death from above actually fun)

“The community has been waiting for a multiplayer shooter that is the modern successor to *Tribes 2*. *Tribes: Ascend* is that game,” said Hi-Rez COO Todd Harris.



Chair Entertainment promises a Shadow Complex 2

The original *Shadow Complex* exploded onto Xbox Live Arcade back in 2009. It got stellar reviews from critics and wowed gamers alike. Now Donald Mustard, the creative director for developer Chair Entertainment, has said that *Shadow Complex 2* is coming.

“I'll put it this way. More *Shadow Complex* isn't a question of ‘if’; it's a question of ‘when’. *Shadow Complex* is our baby and we love it dearly and, y'know, we're working on some cool stuff. That's all I can say.”

Mustard also had some words of excitement regarding their iOS title *Infinity Blade*. Thanks to the iPad 2's beefed up processing power, the developer has been able to update *Infinity Blade* to take advantage of the

new hardware: “We've really cranked up the textures. We've added super, super hi-res bump maps and specular maps to all the characters. And we were even able to turn on full-screen anti-aliasing. It runs butter-smooth at 30 frames per second.” According to Mustard the iPad 2 is “a game-changer”.

So what about *Shadow Complex* making its way onto iOS devices? That is decidedly unlikely and it's entirely thanks to the control scheme: “*Shadow Complex* is designed for a controller. I'm not a fan of trying to shoehorn console controls onto touch screens. They don't feel right. You just lose so much precision.”

So no mobile *Shadow Complex* on the cards, but a sequel is definitely on its way.



It's alive!

Dead Island is back from the brink



Do you remember 2007? We don't either – we attribute the loss of an entire year's worth of memories to rampant alcoholism. We do remember the 2007 announcement of a zombie-filled game called *Dead Island*, however, because not even a supreme lack of sobriety can stop us from religiously tracking anything even remotely related to zombies. We assumed the game had disappeared into oblivion when we heard almost nothing about it after its announcement. That, and the game didn't actually have a publisher tied to it. We were wrong to doubt developer Techland (Chrome, Call of Juarez), because it turns out they've been quietly hammering away at the game over the last few years. They've got publisher Deep Silver backing the project now, and everything's good to go.

Let's get down to details. *Dead Island* dumps you on a tropical island paradise: the island of Banoi in Papua New Guinea. Banoi was once a burgeoning tourist attraction. It's not anymore, because zombies. You're cast as one of the few remaining uninfected survivors on the island. Your task is to fight for your life and uncover the mystery behind this undead outbreak. The developers promise a heavy focus on story aspects, even though this is an open-world, sandbox-style zombie kill-a-thon. Melee combat is your buddy here, because firearms are scarce on the island, as is ammunition. Instead you can pick up almost anything littered throughout the game world and use it to whack zombies until they get the message to stop chomping at your meaty bits.

Light RPG elements will supposedly worm their way into the game, with stat progression and a skill tree all being hinted at. Four-player drop-in/drop-out co-op will feature. When you put all these features together, it looks like *Dead Island* aims to be a combination of *Left 4 Dead* and *Dead Rising*; and that sounds amazing.



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Support Lines

Got a legal boxed game and need some technical help? Before you call please do the following. Update your system software, drivers and have a look online for a game patch. Just these simple tasks eliminate 93% of all problems – it's a made up statistic but probably close enough.

Publishers: Activision / Blizzard 2K Games / Rockstar / Ubisoft Codemasters / NC-Soft / Namco-Bandai
E-mail: support@xtremems.co.za
Number: 0861 987 363

Publisher: Microsoft Xbox
Number: 0800 991 550

Publisher: Electronic Arts
e-mail: zasupport@ea.com
Number: 0860 EAHELP/324357

Microsoft's avatar puts on its happy face

Microsoft is already swimming in a Kinect-fuelled sea of cash – but their motion-controlled megahit isn't showing any signs of slowing just yet. Captain Xbox (aka Aaron Greenberg) recently tweeted that Microsoft has sold 10 million Kinects, along with 10 million Kinect games. This tweet came little over a month after Microsoft revealed that Kinect had sold 8 million units.

Apparently that super-quick sales pace isn't just mind blowing; it's record breaking. Guinness World

Records has named Microsoft's wunderkind the "Fastest-Selling Consumer Electronic Device" of all time. In its first 60 days (starting November 4th of last year) on store shelves, the device sold an average of 133 333 units per day. That. Is. Insane. What's even more surprising is that Kinect units were flying out of stores faster than both the iPhone and the iPad during their equivalent 60-day period. Looks like Microsoft made the right choice (at least financially) in going the controller-free route.



Shiver me timbers: Piracy abound in Risen 2

We don't mean the type of piracy perpetuated by acne-riddled hackers. We mean piracy of the old-school, peg-legs-'n-parrots variety. Piranha Bytes and Deep Silver have revealed the ambitious-sounding sequel to *Risen*, entitled *Risen 2: Dark Waters*. You may recall that Piranha Bytes is the former developer of the *Gothic* series. They lost the *Gothic* license when they broke away from JoWood, former publisher of Piranha Bytes' titles. *Risen* was interesting and engaging, but it's also deeply flawed in many ways, so we're excited to see what this sequel delivers.

Piranha is pulling out all the stops on this one, intrepidly claiming that the sequel "will be set in the most

immersive RPG game world so far." They've promised expanded choices and abilities, together with "multiple approaches to every challenge allowing players to shape the game world based on their own decisions." With *Risen 2*, Piranha Bytes "aims to combine the most loved classic RPG gameplay mechanics of the original *Risen* with a fresh theme and setting on a huge variety of themed island locales." None of that really matters of course, because pirates and guns and (possibly) boat travel equals win.

Piranha Bytes have always aimed extremely high with their RPGs. It sounds like they're not going to change that now, and we're curious to see how this one turns out.



Videogame retailers: Your friendly neighbourhood crack dealers

It seems you can't keep a good douchnozzle down. Therapist Steve Pope (aka Admiral Zero Evidence) is at it again. Speaking with BBC Radio 5, Pope has once again stated that "two hours on a gaming station is equivalent to taking a line of cocaine." You may have heard that ridiculous statement before: Pope first dropped his sensationalistic garbage on the unquestioning mainstream media in May of last year. In addition to the usual cries of games cause violence, games are addictive and games prevent learning, Pope added a new catchphrase to his unending string of malarkey, boldly claiming that games are "the silent killer of our generation."

The reason why these claims have so many people outraged is because Pope has never submitted even a single shred of evidence to back his ludicrously hyperbolic statements. Until he produces said evidence (which Pope claims to have, but has never revealed, despite numerous requests from actual, genuine journalists who don't blindly accept everything that's said to them) to prove his claims, everything that comes out of Pope's mouth can be seen as purely anecdotal. We think this guy needs to sit down and play some games, because clearly he needs to chill the hell out. Well, that, or he could do some cocaine – they're obviously the same thing.

Telltale has its hands full... ... (of licenses)

We'd been hearing rumours of a videogame adaptation of TV series *The Walking Dead* (which is based on the comic book of the same name) since long before the show first aired, but the last developer we expected to be working on recreating Robert Kirkman's particular brand of zombie apocalypse was Telltale Games. Telltale isn't known for making gritty zombie games after all. Regardless, it turns out that the developer of *Tales of Monkey Island* and *Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People* is indeed capable of many shocking surprises, and the folks at Telltale are very excited to be working on *The Walking Dead*. They've promised something more than just your typical zombie shooter. This'll be a game focused on the human element of a group of survivors struggling to survive in a world gone all gross and undead.

Speaking with All Things Digital, Telltale's Steve Allison said they'd like to see "one million digital downloads" for the game. Allison believes that "*The Walking Dead* could become a \$20 million to 30 million franchise if all goes well." Bold claims, but that's not all Telltale is up to. They're also working on digitally recreating another brilliant comic book series: *Fables*. Then there's *King's Quest*, a franchise which Telltale is rebooting. Yes, you read that right – *King's Quest* is returning!



ABOVE / The Walking Dead tv show.
BELOW / The Fables comic book series.



Look & Listen



Pre-orders / www.lookandlisten.co.za

PC

Tropico 4	28th April
Might & Magic: Heroes VI	27th May
The Witcher 2	17th May

Xbox 360

F.E.A.R. 3	April
DiRT 3	24th May
Dungeon Siege III	27th May

PS3

Duke Nukem	6th May
L.A. Noire	20th May
Battlefield 3	November

Wii

Dance Party With Mel B	May
Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 2011	6th May
UFC Trainer	June

3DS

Thor: God of Thunder	29th April
Spongebob Squigglepants	May
LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean: The Video Game	20th April

DS

Kung Fu Panda: The Kaboom of Doom	May
ZhuZhu Puppies Bundle	10th June
Transformers: Dark of the Moon	24th June

Kinect

Dance Party With Mel B	May
Super Me	17th June
Child of Eden	17th June

Move

Nat Geo 2	April
Dance Party With Mel B	May
Ape Escape	June

Relic <3 August

THQ's Danny Bilson has casually revealed that Relic Entertainment's (developers of *Homeworld*, *Company of Heroes* and the *Dawn of War* series) next RTS will be unveiled in August. That's all we know so far. Could it be the start of an entirely new franchise? Perhaps it's another expansion for *Dawn of War II*? Maybe it's a new *Company of Heroes*, a full retail release to make up for the recent cancellation of *Company of Heroes Online*. We're really hoping it's a new *Homeworld*, because it's been far too long since that incredible series graced our PCs.

3DS now available

If you're reading this within a reasonable time after this magazine hits the shelves, then the Nintendo 3DS has just been released. If you've somehow managed to read this before the magazine hits the shelves, then know this: the 3DS will launch in South Africa on the 25th of March.

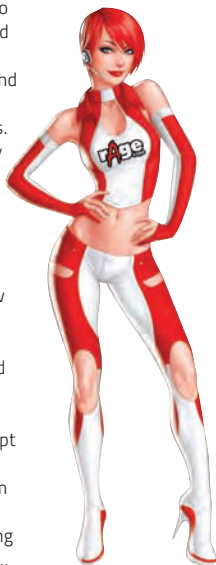
The console will be available in blue or black at a cost of R2,799. Premium games will go for R499, and will include *Super Street Fighter IV 3D Edition*, *Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D*, *The Sims 3*, *Nintendogs + Cats* and plenty more. Expect a wide range of games to trickle onto shelves throughout the year.



What's that noise?!

Thanks to the redesign we were rushed for time to come up with a new story for the badger. So, instead, we'll just tell you the truth. We're sick of him; we stole him from a stupid flash video like years ago and kept modifying him with more and more ridiculous ideas and stories. We've effectively washed away everything that was good and wholesome with our plagiarised garbage and now it's time to move on. Whoa! That felt good. Instead we're going to whore out a marketing concept and make you find Scarlett from rAge. See if you can find her hiding in the magazine...

Clue: It's in NAG magazine somewhere. Send your sighting to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line 'April Scarlett' and don't get it wrong or deleted it will be.



March Winner



Danielle Nel, Page 29

Win!

One person who finds Scarlett will win a PS3 Move 6-in-1 Starter Kit valued at R 549.99, sponsored by Dream Gear and Bowline.



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 *Homefront* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line 'April Caption'.



NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR / This gives new meaning to the word skull#\$\$%



LAST MONTHS WINNER / The final of Strictly Come Dancing goes horribly wrong.
- David Edwards

Strength of the bear

Prey 2 is a thing that exists. You should know about this already; the sequel is all-but confirmed at the end of the first game's credits, and word has been floating around for some time regarding this highly-anticipated continuation. Now, however, Bethesda Softworks has confirmed a few solid details.

The game is due for release in 2012 for Xbox 360, PC and PS3 and is built using the id Tech engine. The press release confirms that *Prey 2* will use

"cutting-edge" id Tech technology, but Bethesda has confirmed that this does not mean it's id Tech 5.

"We are thrilled to be working with Bethesda on *Prey 2*," said Chris Rhinehart, project lead. "*Prey 2* will provide gamers the opportunity to explore a new facet of the *Prey* universe, one that offers fast-paced action in an open, alien world. We're excited to show gamers the title we have been working on and hope they will be as excited by this title as we are."



Sleepy-time

// Beds! They exist in *Minecraft* right now, for you to pass those long, lonely nights without the need to play with the hordes of zombies and creepers running around your brand-new tree farm. Notch and the gang have been keeping busy with updates to *Minecraft* including new block types and a new red stone switch (a delay/repeater).

There's also quite a bit on the horizon for *Minecraft*, and it looks like an achievement system is going to put some purpose into the game for those who enjoy this kind of thing.

"I've had the idea to make achievements kind of like the in-game questing," Markus "Notch" Persson stated.

"So you'd be able to see the first achievement in a tree of achievements, and you have to unlock the top ones first before you can unlock the ones further down. So the first one might be to chop down a tree, or kill a chicken, and then these branch into more things you can do. Hopefully it would encourage people to try new areas."

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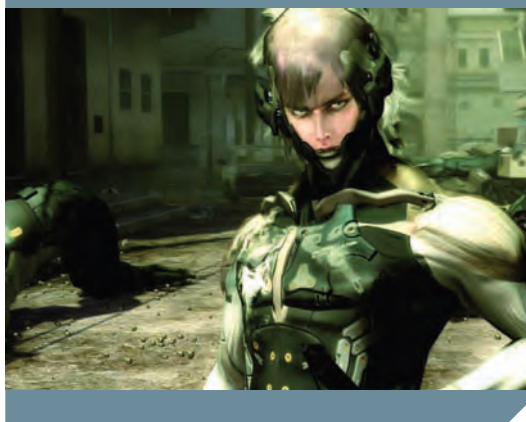
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Get your movies out of my games

In an interview with Edge, THQ's Danny Bilson has taken a stab at the reliance on cutscenes to convey the story in our games. He described cutscenes as "the failure state that is the last resort of game storytelling. It's really not what the art form is about. As soon as you put a controller in someone's hand they want to interact."

Bilson says he's never played a game with a narrative that actually engaged him. "That's a place we have not cracked yet, as an industry. We should be able to tell great stories, fresh original stories, in this industry, just like in books, movies or anything else."

"There are fantastic story moments in games, there are stories that I think are better than others," said Mr Bilson. "Games aren't about story first - the story is there to make you care about the mechanics, to make it more emotional. But if I separate the story from the experience it doesn't blow my mind."



Your Gamerscore is but a drop in the ocean

Microsoft has released the worldwide figures for Xbox 360 Achievements and Gamerscores. The numbers are, to say the least, massive. Introduced back in 2005, the Achievement system on the Xbox 360 was soon mimicked by competitors; even Steam has its own Achievements.

Whether you like them or not they've definitely helped define this current generation of gaming. Ever wondered how your Gamerscore compares to the rest of the world? Well, according to Microsoft, the average Gamerscore is 11 286 - not too shabby.

What about the collective Gamerscore of the world? As of March 2011 it was: 176 802 201 383. That, according to Xbox Live central, is a figure that is comprised of over 6.4 billion Achievements that have been unlocked since the Xbox 360 launched six years ago. Note, however, that the figures are probably higher than that because these are the numbers pulled from Xbox Live accounts; consoles that aren't connected to the online service are obviously not accounted for.

Release List

bt
GAMES™

Dates subject to change without notice

April: Week 1

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12	Xbox 360 / PS3 / Wii
Combat of Giants: Dinosaurs 3D	3DS
Raving Rabbids: Travel in Time	3DS
Forza Motorsport 3: Ultimate Edition	Xbox 360
Shift 2: Unleashed	PC / Xbox 360 / PS3
Darkspore	PC
WWE All Stars	Xbox 360 / PS3 PS2 / PSP

April: Week 2

Tomb Raider Trilogiy	PS3
The First Templar	PC / Xbox 360
Dynasty Warriors 7	Xbox 360 / PS3
Patrician IV: Rise of a Dynasty	PC
Rio	Xbox 360 / PS3 / Wii / DS

April: Week 3

Operation Flashpoint: Red River	PC / Xbox 360 / PS3
Portal 2	PC / Xbox 360 / PS3
Duke Nukem: Critical Mass	DS
Gray Matter	PC / Xbox 360
Paws & Claws: Fantastic Pets	Xbox 360
Michael Jackson: The Experience	Xbox 360 / PS3
Chronicles of Mystery: Scorpio Ritual	PC
SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs	PS3

April: Week 4

Mortal Kombat	Xbox 360 / PS3
Virtua Tennis 4	Xbox 360 / PS3 / Wii
Thor: God of Thunder	Xbox 360 / PS3 / Wii / DS / PSP

April: Unconfirmed

John Daly's ProStroke Golf	Xbox 360
Europa Universalis III: Chronicles	PC

Player banned from Dragon Age II



// Yes, you read that correctly; EA recently banned a player from the single-player only game *Dragon Age II*. The publishing giant is claiming it was an accident, but the accident has highlighted an issue with EA Accounts.

The ban was instigated after the player referred to EA as the "devil" on the BioWare forums. The post was flagged and the player's account was suspended for 72 hours. The "ban" from the game came in when the player was unable to activate *Dragon Age II* because the EA account needed for activation was suspended. Needless to say there was an outcry and EA lifted the ban.

In related EA news, the publisher has just announced that the upcoming *Darkspore* is going to require a permanent internet connection in order to play it. You know that DRM tactic - Ubisoft tried to do the same thing with their PC game releases and it failed miserably (it has since been scrapped for the PC release of *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*). Clearly EA has not heard of the saying: "those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

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- > Transcend 6GB DDR3 Gaming Memory
- > GIGABYTE AMD Radeon HD6870 OC 1GB Graphics Card
- > 32GB SSD Drive
- > Western Digital 1TB Caviar Hard Drive
- > LITEON 24x SATA DVD Writer
- > GIGABYTE Aivia K8100 Gaming Keyboard
- > GIGABYTE M8000X Gaming Mouse
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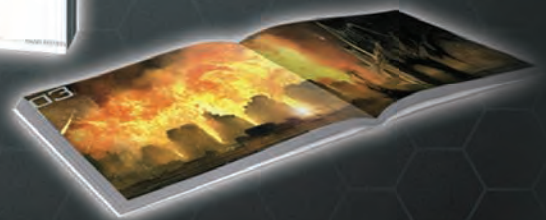
Winners will be notified by SMS. | Judges decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.

ALCATRAZ FIGURINE



PRODUCED BY FIRST4FIGURES, THIS FIGURINE OF ALCATRAZ ON A NEW YORK TAXI FEATURES UNIQUE LIGHTING EFFECTS AS SEEN ON THE NANOSUIT 2.

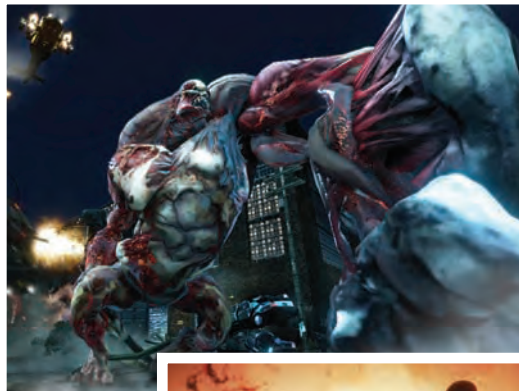
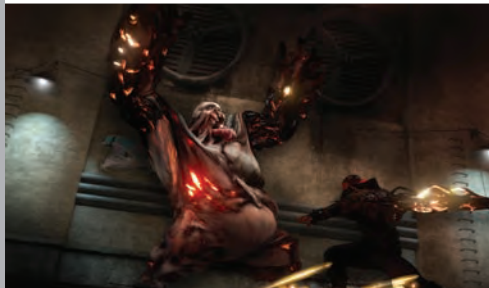
STUDIO ART BOOK



DESIGNED AND PRODUCED BY THE CRYTEK STUDIO TEAM, FEATURING OVER 150 PAGES OF ART AND COMMENTARY DOCUMENTING THE GAME'S PRODUCTION.



Lets hope he doesn't need to scratch his crotch anytime soon.



HELICOPTER TAKE-DOWN

In perhaps a nod to the Penny Arcade comic that offered Mercer doing a karate-kick against a helicopter as one of *Prototype's* primary selling points, the *Prototype 2* teaser has a scene that involves Heller latching on to a helicopter using both tentacle arms and slingshot-kicking the thing into next week.



Prototype 2

Stronger, angrier, more tentacles...

[details]

Release Date:
2012
Platforms:
PS3 / 360 / PC
Genre:
Open-world, Action
Developer:
Radical Entertainment
Website:
www.prototypegame.com
Publisher:
Activision

[trivia]

// There is a six-issue comic published by DC Comics that reveals more about the viral outbreak of the first game.

// After a dare by Zero Punctuation spinster Ben "Yahtzee" Croshaw, the developers of *Prototype* produced an image of Mercer wearing a pink dress riding a unicorn.

Activision continues to be secretive about their follow-up to the 2009 hit-or-miss *Prototype*. Personally, the game was an indulgent joy from start to finish, but I skipped a lot of what I considered frivolous side-missions. *Prototype 2* could learn a lot from its first game, and from the leaps in the genre that the *Assassin's Creed* series have taken [was that a joke? Ed].

Prototype 2 returns players to an infected New York, but not as Alex Mercer. Instead, you'll play as Sgt. James Heller, a returning wartime army operative who's pretty pissed that Alex killed his loved ones and wrecked his city. Filled with (generic) rage and a death wish, Heller stomps into the Red Zone and via nefarious plot by some shadowy agents, gets infected with the same virus as Alex. *Derp*.

Beyond that, not much is known about the story. Plot twists are to be expected (though hopefully done smarter than in the first game; we live in a post-*Assassin's Creed* world after all), and we've seen Heller's powers looking similar to Mercer's if not quite the same. Some shots show him using a giant Gatling gun against a helicopter (we hope for a better lock-on system); another has Heller throwing a tank using his tentacles. If anything, Heller's transformation seems to step it up a notch from Mercer's, his claw form is bigger and more monstrous and his tentacles can slam things together from a distance. One video shows Heller literally pulling apart a dozen enemies at once using some kind of area-filling tentacle-rape-cloud.

"One video shows Heller literally pulling apart a dozen enemies at once using some kind of area-filling tentacle-rape-cloud."

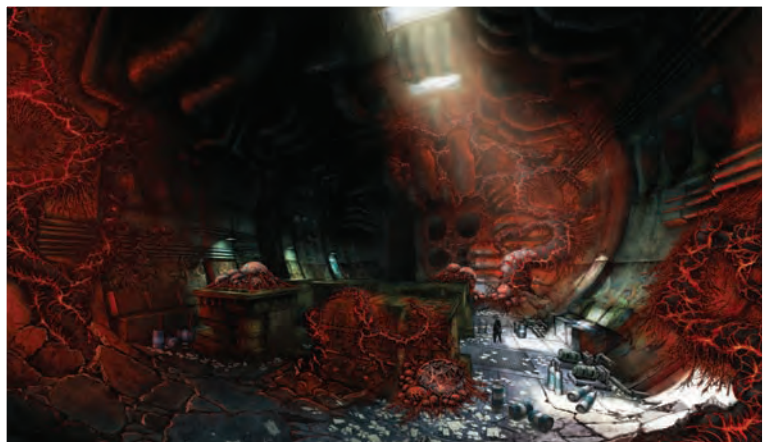
NAG Magazine

It's unclear if the clumsy stealth element from the first game will return; if it does we hope Radical learned a thing or two. Less monotony in the missions (protect target, destroy tower, chase a vehicle, yawn) and more playing up to the strengths of the game would help too. Early videos show much bigger bad guys than Mercer had to face, so one would expect Heller's been powered up to

match. Hopefully the obvious climatic battle against Mercer will be like two tentacle-bearing titans clashing. That'd be *hot*.

And of course, co-op wouldn't hurt. Radical claimed they were experimenting with it for the first game but it was cut due to time. With the game due sometime in 2012, there seems time now, guys.

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Wait a minute... did I remember to put on clean underwear this morning?



“The core of Silent Hill comes down to storytelling...”

NAG Magazine

Silent Hill: Downpour

Torrential terror!

[details]

Release Date:
Q4 2011
 Platforms:
PS3 / 360
 Genre:
Survival horror
 Developer:
Vatra Games
 Website:
www.konami.com/games/silenthill/silenthill8
 Publisher:
Konami Digital Entertainment

[trivia]

// The first *Silent Hill* game featured numerous references to Sonic Youth, a rock act active since the 80s.

Silent Hill, you are our favourite beleaguered franchise. We know you're having a bit of an identity crises lately and you've ran into the arms of half a dozen developers in as many years. But we're still here for you. And it's okay; you're even looking better these days; honest.

Now it's Vatra games, and the weather report is: rainy. *Silent Hill: Downpour* is another start for the *Silent Hill* franchise. Murphy Pendleton becomes an accidentally escaped prisoner when his convict's bus overturns outside the titular Silent Hill; not that any local policewoman would believe that, right? This is just the first of Murphy's problems, and we haven't even gotten to the part where water is cascading up walls and filling the ceiling.

The cursed town is always ready for mind games with a new guest, but the producers of *Downpour* express the need to mix up expectations. Pendleton doesn't have an obvious or necessary connection to the many factions, cults, and famous personages who have helped build Silent Hill's vile reputation. (Though, it is said, there may be Easter eggs for those knowing what to look for.) Developers have been trying to recreate the magic of *Silent Hill 2* for years; *Shattered Memories* came remarkably close in some ways. *Downpour* attempts to add a first-person perspective into this mix. Don't assume too much; anyone who played *SH4: The Room* will remember how utterly unsettling and paranoid a forced first person perspective can be in the universe of *Silent Hill*.

A first person perspective does however naturally remove the awkwardness and vulnerability of timidly shuffling around America's creepiest town; but balancing that is the fact that Murphy can only carry one weapon at a time, and weapons can break. More intriguingly, for just about the first time, *Silent Hill* has side missions. Much more of the town is open to exploration this time, including sections often seen on maps but never physically present in the game world. To give the feeling that one is exploring the unearthly place and trying to understand it and its inhabitants, a number of mysteries can be picked up and dealt with in a non-linear order. Not all are required to experience Murphy's personal endgame.

It's the kind of thing we like to hear, because it's genuinely new for *Silent Hill* but doesn't violate the spirit of what the whole thing is about. And, one has to admit, that using water as the primary theme is the perfect way to ensure there's lots and lots of mist about.

The core of *Silent Hill* comes down to storytelling however. That is why *SH2* remains legend, and weaker entries scorned by the faithful. Writing spooky stories for a naturally spooky locale seems a snap, but *Silent Hill* is at its best when it's about the ways human beings can be messed about and not merely scared by jump-out monsters. Here's hoping that Vatra has been a more perceptive student of the lore than some. **NAG**

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WAITER! there's a dead girl in my soup!



"The "darkling" henchmen / creatures of the first game have been replaced by a singular 'darkling' that appears at pre-determined points to interact with game mechanics and story."

NAG Magazine

The Darkness 2

Surprise sequel to surprise cult classic

[details]

Release Date:
2011
Platforms:
PC / 360 / PS3
Genre:
First-person shooter
Developer:
Digital Extremes
Website:
www.embrace-the-darkness.com
Publisher:
2K Games

[trivia]

// In the original game, if you chose to sit down and watch TV with your girlfriend Jenny for some quality time together, you could waste a couple of real-world hours watching *To Kill a Mockingbird* - the entire movie - on the in-game television. *The Man with the Golden Arm* was another film that's watchable in its entirety, as is a full episode of *Flash Gordon*. There was more stuff (like cartoon shorts of *Popeye and Gabby*) in there, all made possible because these properties are in the public domain.

It is perhaps truth that at this point, books could be written on how to get your first-person shooter to stand out from the crowd. Gaming's most popular genre is its most crowded and in these times, "good enough" isn't any longer. 2K takes a bid that the tactic to get *The Darkness 2* noticed is to take dual-wielding and make it a double order, to go.

For those just tuning in, you are still Jackie Estacado. You possess the power to control the substance of shadow itself - so long as there is shadow to sustain you - and naturally, this means that someone, somewhere, wants to kill you. Thanks to your powers, two ethereal arms of darkness are available to grasp and slice anything in your way; your mortal hands can busy themselves with those curiously popular devices: guns. Set two years after part 1, your man has moved up in the world: Jackie is now head of the Franchetti crime family. It's never good to be plagued by demonic visions, but the explosion of a mob war is a good cover to start beating people up in search of answers.

The original *Darkness* was a bit of a cult hit with its semi-open world structure and detailed use of light and dark environments to affect the planning of one's assaults. The sequel attempts to address criticisms of uneven pacing by confining Jackie's supernatural mob warfare to a linear path with much more tightly scripted narration. Darkness and shadows still play their part, but a more rough and tumble attitude is captured in the shoot-punch-slice-and-shoot-again quad-fisted gameplay.

The "darkling" henchmen / creatures of the first game have been replaced by a singular 'darkling' that appears at pre-determined points to interact



with game mechanics and story. It's a little difficult to say what fans of the original will think given that the creative yet unpolished elements have been streamlined so severely. Still, the presentation is prettier than the norm these days, with character animation and real-time cut scenes that lose a lot of the stiff puppetry appearance symptomatic of tired, workmanlike quality we expect to see in the average title. All the technological improvements one expects to find in a title this far into our generation are apparent.

2K specifically will not comment about multiplayer at this time. *The Darkness* multiplayer was generally a

cute distraction, but original developer Starbreeze Studios themselves even told players not to treat it as much more than a joke. We might assume that multiplayer of some sort is a given, as it was deemed necessary even in *BioShock 2* - but one never knows.

It's a little unexpected maybe to see an underdog tier title get a serious attempt at a sequel, but *The Darkness* was not without its vocal fans. In that sense, the foundation for a bigger, better, well-received sequel is in place. A second chance is a lot more than many equally deserving games get in a viciously competitive marketplace.

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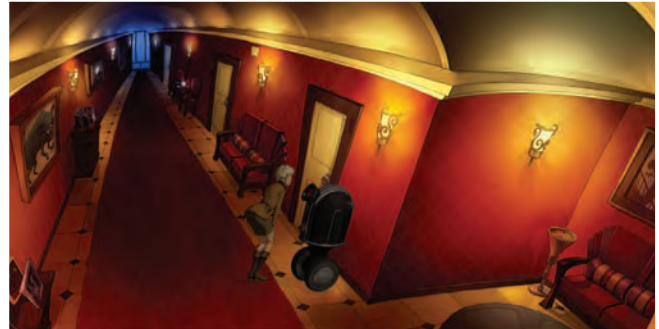
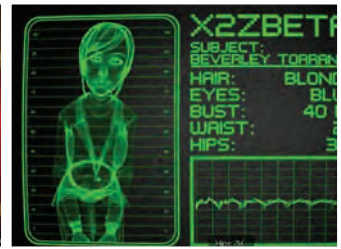
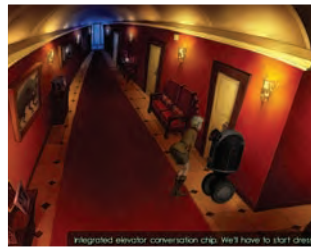
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The Next Big Thing

This is what crazy feels like.



[details]

Release Date:
April 2011
 Platforms:
PC
 Genre:
Adventure
 Developer:
Pendolo Studios
 Website:
**www.thenextbig-
 game.com**
 Publisher:
**Focus Home
 Interactive**

[trivia]

// "Twenty, twelve, one, four!" Liz cannot count. She also dialogues with herself (as two identities), makes up ridiculous metaphors ("Life is a like a crocodile") and seems to have a thing about vegetable soup.

// *TNBT* is possibly the best-looking adventure game yet. Beautiful hand-drawn, full-HD backgrounds are complemented with the illustration-styled real-time 3D characters.

When Pendolo Studios released *Runaway: A Road Adventure* in 2001, I played it. I didn't enjoy it. I wasn't sure what made it so uninteresting, so I passed it along to a couple of friends (yes, yes) and got their opinions. They too didn't enjoy it. How the series managed to garner two sequels, I'll never know (I didn't play the other titles past a demo of *Runaway 2*), but here we are at Pendolo's new release: *The Next Big Thing*. Thankfully, I'm not in charge of giving this Spanish studio money, otherwise the world would be without this title that I'm not ashamed to admit, based on what I've played so far, is bloody brilliant.

Like in the *Runaway* series, *The Next Big Thing* revolves around the exploits of a chauvinist man (Dan) and a ditz woman (Liz). The difference here is that Liz is completely bonkers – certifiably insane – and her nuttiness feels endearing instead of irritating. Maybe I'm just a better, more tolerant person now (which I obviously am), but it feels like the writing and character development this time round are more solid and believable.

It's the 1940s. Monster films are taking off in a big way, but in this alternate reality, they're using real monsters. The game begins with Liz Allaire and Dan Murray reporting on the Annual Horror Film Awards ceremony. Dan, as a sports writer, doesn't give two hoots about the event and decides to spend most of the evening relaxing in his sports car while Liz, an avid gossip reporter, goes off to do the real work. Soon enough, Liz stumbles upon some nefarious goings-on and goes to investigate. Before long, she disappears and it's up to Dan to find her. Players will

"Players will get a chance to alternate between each character, completing different chapters that make use of their notable people skills and varying approaches to situations."

NAG Magazine



get a chance to alternate between each character, completing different chapters that make use of their notable people skills (especially Liz's ability to make people move slowly away from her while reaching for the telephone) and varying approaches to situations (Dan's will often involve a baseball bat).

The humour in *TNBT* has obviously been a focus during development; every spoken line drips with delicious puns and classic references, and Liz's speeches are especially chortle-worthy. The puzzles follow the common point-and-click adventure game guidelines (finding, combining and giving items)

but often have a delightfully adult twist with a good dollop of wit. As an example, there's a robot that Liz needs to convince to open the locked door to a secretary's office. Liz fits the visual description of the secretary by having blonde hair and blue eyes, but her feminine figure is a little lacking. The solution is to, of course, get the robot drunk. The resulting beer goggles ensure it sees Liz's assets as fuller than they are, and he proceeds to open the door.

Is it silly? Sure. Is it ridiculous? Yep. Is it still funny? You bet. Classic adventure fans are going to love this.

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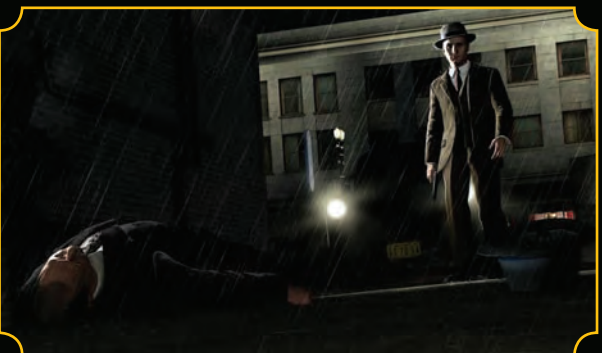
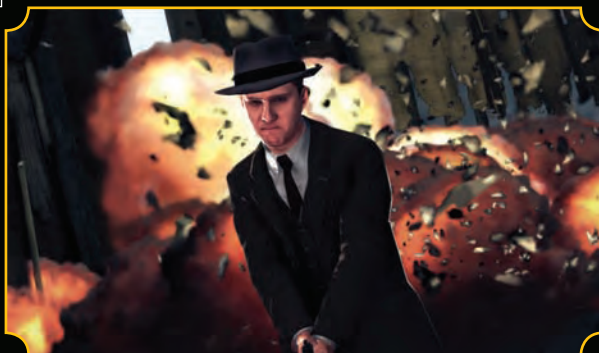
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CONTROL FREAK

To prove just how committed THQ is to this whole "arcade fighter" approach to wrestling games, they've partnered with Mad Catz to develop two branded fighting controllers. The WWE BrawlPad is a six button flat controller with floating eight-way d-pad, and the WWE BrawlStick is an eight-button joystick controller modelled on a tweaked version of their *Street Fighter* arcade stick. This isn't the high-end Tournament Edition loaded up with Sanwa parts, however, but Mad Catz rep Alex Verrey assured us that the controller is modifiable if you really want the high-end stuff.

WWE All Stars

Hulk (Hogan) smash!



[details]

Release Date:
April 2011
 Platforms:
360 / PS2
PS3 / Wii / PSP
 Genre:
Sports
 Developer:
THQ San Diego
 Website:
www.wweallstars.com
 Publisher:
THQ



Pro wrestling as a sport (LOL) might not appeal to everyone, but for sheer entertainment value, there are few people who can honestly say they don't enjoy watching oversized drama queens hit each other in interesting ways for 10-30 minutes. The theatrical performance; the athletic prowess; the crowds; the ridiculous personalities – all of these add up to a thoroughly entertaining spectacle that fits very well into a videogame format. Just like the show on which it's based, *WWE All Stars* is a bit silly but highly technical. This is not *WWE Smackdown vs. RAW*, which is a hardcore simulation-style title, *All Stars*' cartoonish visuals and embellished action and physics make for a game that fits snugly into the "arcade sports" genre, and does its best not to take itself too seriously.

At the heart of *All Stars* lies the combat system, which has been designed along the age-old concept of "easy to learn, difficult to master." Taking cues from other arcade fighters, *All Stars*' control system is made up of two types of direct attacks (quick or heavy), two grab attacks (short or strong) and buttons for counters and reversals. If you've just picked up the controller for your first time, you'll be able to fight a skilled opponent without getting your face punched in too much. Taking the time to master the many combinations, juggles, sneaky tricks and counters in the game will elevate your ability and playing style to the next level.

"At the heart of *All Stars* lies the combat system, which has been designed along the age-old concept of "easy to learn, difficult to master."

NAG Magazine

During each round of combat, the goals are limited and simple: pin your opponent for those very long three seconds or break his face into a thousand pieces, and don't get kicked out of the match for being too much of a bastard. To accomplish that first goal, you'll need to peel away four layers of your opponent's health meter; the further along you are, the more difficultly your opponent will have shaking off your attempts to lovingly hold him down. In addition to a health

meter, each player also has an energy meter and finishing meter. The former is built up by performing varied and interesting moves, and depleted by running and using special abilities. The latter is used to perform one of your wrestler's unique finishing moves, which must first be charged up and then unleashed on your opponent. If you manage to land that finishing move while the other guy is staggering around like a 3AM drunk, you'll win the round through a spectacular animation



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WHO'S WHO?

The roster of talent from throughout WWE's history (including WWF) is broken down into four classes. Each class has access to its own set of moves (also taken from throughout WWE's history), but many of the available wrestlers borrow moves from other classes, meaning no two fighters are alike.

Grappler: The type of wrestler who likes to take the fight to the floor, grapplers are loaded up with submission moves and pins and aren't able to take too much of a direct beating. Keep them at a distance and never

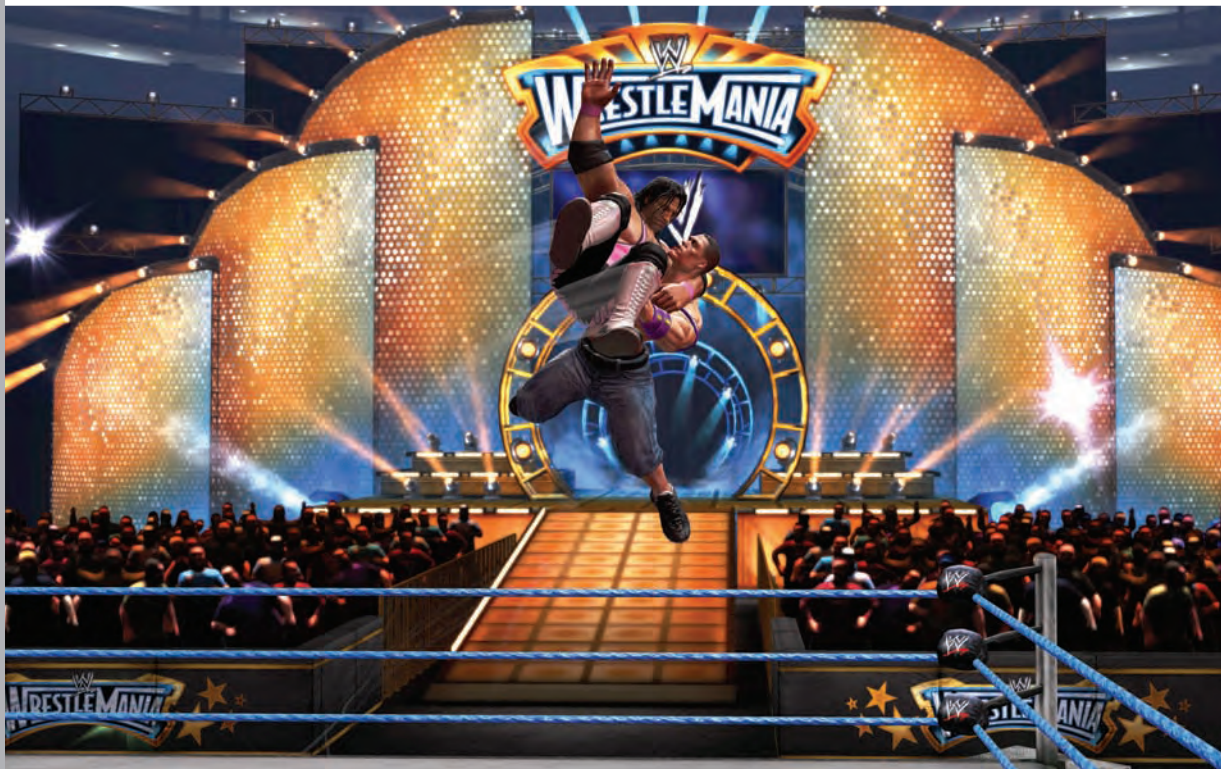
turn your back on a grappler. Bret Hart fits into this class.

Brawler: "Am wrestler, will punch, and also kick... and maybe bite" is the brawler's credo. Seamus, John Cena and The Rock are all brawlers, and specialise in dishing out damage as much as they can take it while remaining light on their feet.

Acrobat: Flip-flopping all over the place like an epileptic fish on a sushi mat, the acrobat will be everywhere you don't expect him to be, including on your own person. Rey Mysterio is an example of a

typical acrobat; he likes to leap and dive from the ropes and turnbuckles, and only stops moving to help you count those precious three seconds from the wrong side of a double leg cradle.

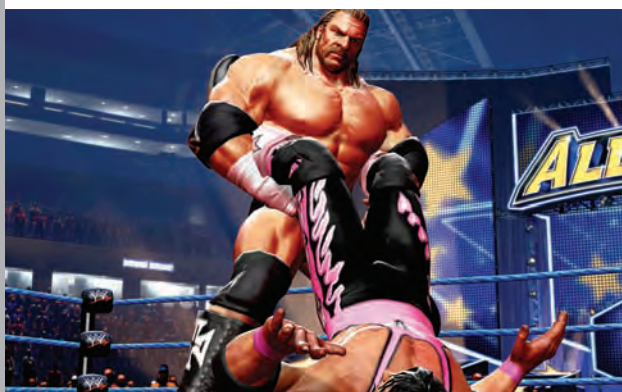
Big Men: This for the really big lads like Big Show and Andre the Giant. Their long reach, immense weight and extreme strength are only matched by their ability to soak up blows to the gut. Sure, they might take five minutes to cross the stage, but by the time they get to their opponent, expect those massive fists (and occasionally entire wrestlers) to fly.



[trivia]

// Jump outside the ring and grab one of those handy folding chairs. You can use it as a weapon a few times before the almost non-existent ref throws you a DQ, but it'll be worth the satisfaction.

// Each move your fighter performs can be modified based on the direction you hold while pressing the button. This includes not just direct attacks and grabs, but counters and reversals as well.



that looks a lot more brutal than anything you can expect to see on TV.

Of course, while you're attempting to charge up your own meters while beating down your opponent's, there is a ton of action happening. Almost every move has an opportunity for reversal using quick time popups and blocking. Depending on your chosen wrestler's skillset, you'll be able to perform a huge variety of moves, from simple punches and kicks to grapples to heroic leaps off the turnbuckle. During our time with the game, we didn't see two rounds that felt even marginally similar, and

there are very few sure-win moves that can't be countered, blocked or avoided altogether.

Despite not really caring all that much about wrestling, I couldn't help but be impressed with what I got to see at the THQ preview event. *All Stars* looks *fun*; it looks over-the-top and ridiculous, but also technical enough to be taken seriously by the hardcore fighting crowd, much like EA's *Fight Night* and THQ's *UFC Undisputed*. Then, if you actually are a fan of WWE, you should go nuts for this title.

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Top 8

covert ways to display your gaming habits

We gamers are a passionate lot. In fact, some might say we're bordering on fanatical in our own geeky, al-Qaeda sort of way. Despite this, and despite the fact that, let's face it, gaming is becoming mainstream, some of us are desperately clinging to the last shreds of social acceptance that we have left. In other words, while we love games, something in the back of our minds is preventing us from shouting it from the rooftops. It's something to do with

that unshakable stigma, better judgement, a desire for acceptance and possibly the need to come right with members of the opposite sex. Blame your biology and society in general because it's way easier than plucking up the courage to stand on that roof and exclaim, "World, I am a gamer. Screw you if you think that's weird."

Until you find it in yourself to do that, however, here's a list of covert ways to display your gaming passion without risking social ridicule.



1 Clothing

Sports fanatics get to do it so why can't we? The trick is to find that oh-so-sensitive balance between obscurity and instantly recognisable gaming connection. It's tough, but try avoid the obvious ones like those trashy t-shirts you get for free when you pre-order games from online retailers. You know: the ones that look like they've been silk-screened by your aunt.



2 Personalised number plates

What better way to reaffirm your gaming obsession than by affixing a license plate that says "D1CKT1TS" to your car? Avoid the obvious like "ND4SPD", unless you've chromed the hell out of your rims and have run neon lighting under your chassis; in which case please don't refer to yourself as a "gamer", we're trying to maintain a semblance of dignity here.



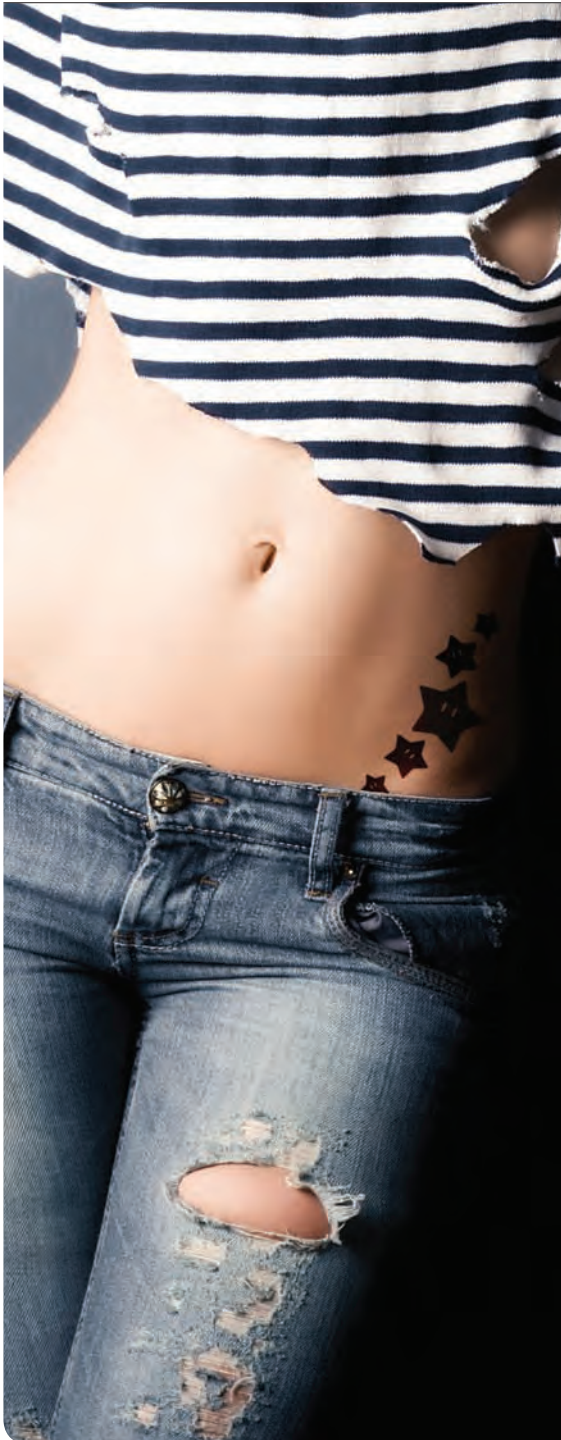
3 Facebook

Status updates that say "I'm at my son's seventh birthday party and his little friends just totally ling rushed the cake table" says it all – you're into games, and you're slightly petrified by hordes of sugar-hyped seven-year-olds amassing in your house.



4 Naming your kids after game characters

The great thing here is that you can pretty much pick any game character's name; you're not the one getting punched in the school playground because your name is Cloud. The safer option, and the one less likely to cost thousands in psychologist bills for your child, is to name your pets after characters. The more extreme the better, like naming four miniature daschunds Marcus, Dom, Cole and Baird. You could then refer to the whole group as Delta Squad, which would be six kinds of awesome.



5 Gaming tattoos

Ink is cool. Inking Link and the Triforce symbol onto your body is not. Subtlety is everything when it comes to a gaming tattoo.

6 Cell Phone ringtones

A ringtone with the opening guitar riff from Guns 'n Roses' "Sweet Child of Mine" is meant to say: "I take my music pretty seriously, but I'm also into drinking and hitting on my daughter's school friends". Go ahead and use a videogame flavoured ringtone to promote your implied public image. Theme tunes from the Final Fantasy or Zelda games are not ideal, mainly because most non-gamers won't have a clue what they're from. Instead, go for instantly recognisable pieces, like the Mario Bros. theme. If you want to go covert geek that can be mistaken for rocker, think some of the awesome guitar pieces from Brütal Legend. An SMS tone of Eddie Riggs screaming "Decapitation!" is also totally permissible.



7 Gaming references in everyday situations

It's inevitable that at some point in your day you'll have to interact with other, real people. Take the opportunity to display your passion by dropping game references into casual conversations. When somebody asks you if you play a musical instrument, instead of saying you wish you did, tell it like it is and say, "Yeah I play guitar. I can clear 'Surfing with the Alien' on Expert level with a five star rating." Chances are that you'll get dumbfounded expressions in response, but you know you're awesome – I mean five stars in "Surfing with the Alien" on Expert? That's godlike.



8 Game soundtracks

There's a load of great music to be found in games, so stuff your iPod or cram your car's CD shuttle full of the stuff. Of course, we're going for subtlety here; you want people to be browsing through your iPod albums and asking who Jack Wall and Sam Hulick are. Timing is everything; you do not want your iPod to be accidentally used at a house party in case the theme tune to Oblivion suddenly comes on; nothing kills the buzz and empties a dance floor quite like full orchestral fantasy RPG music.



Things that

didn't take forever

It's been fourteen long, painful years that we've waited for *Duke Nukem Forever* to be released. Fourteen years is not only a ridiculously long time to develop a videogame, but it's a long time to do anything. To put things in perspective, we've gathered together information on how long it took to complete other massive undertakings.

2 Years

The total development time for *Duke Nukem 3D*, from inception to release.

3 Years

The length of time it took Kaos Studios to develop *Homefront*.

3 Years

The total voyage time for the first ever global circumnavigation ending in 1525.

4 Years

The amount of time it took average game development budgets to rise from \$5 million to \$20 million in 2010.

6 Years

The length of time it took to design and build the nuclear bomb from the first nuclear fission experiment.

6 Years

The length of time it took to build Disney World from its announcement in 1965.

DUKE NUKEM - BAD BOY



> Departing from Sanlúcar de Barrameda in 1519, Ferdinand Magellan led five ships to discover the world and ended up sailing around the entire globe. The vessels suffered huge losses, and Magellan died along with most of the crew, but eventually, almost exactly three years later, the last remaining ship, *Victoria*, returned to its departure point.



> After the lessons learned from the construction of Disneyland, Walt and his "Imagineers" decided that Disney World needed a huge amount of space for construction. Over a period of months leading up to the commencement

announcement in 1965, Disney secretly acquired 27,443 acres of land through phony corporations. Within months of the announcement, the land value around the site increased from \$180 to as much as 80,000 per acre.



7 years

The amount of time it took Facebook to grow from inception to its current state with over 600 million active users.

8 years

The length of time from JFK's declaration to put a man on the moon to Neil Armstrong's first step on its surface.

8 Years

The length of time it took Sony to develop the original PlayStation, from its original attempt to develop a CD add-on for Nintendo to the console's Japanese release in 1994.

10 years

The entire career of the Beatles.

10 years

The combined total duration of both World Wars.

11 years

The total development time for Prey.

11 years

The length of time it took the world population to increase by 1 billion people from 1999-2010.

11 years

The length of time it took to build the Statue of Liberty, disassemble it, ship it from France to the USA and then reassemble it, in 1886.

14 years

The total development time for Duke Nukem Forever.



> The original Sony PlayStation was designed to be a CD add-on unit for Nintendo's hugely popular Super Nintendo, tentatively called "SNES-CD". After carefully reading the contract that Sony and Nintendo had signed, Nintendo bigwig Hiroshi Yamauchi realised that the deal would give Sony almost

exclusive control over software, and soon after, Nintendo pulled out of the deal and partnered with Philips. After much legal wrangling, the two companies decided to go their separate ways and Sony moved on to develop the PlayStation based on the compact disc technology they had developed.



> Prey suffered a similarly bumpy road. Development began in 1995, and while the fundamentals – portals and gravity shifts – stuck throughout the development cycle, its story and setting was changed a number of times.



QUICK HITS

Beyond Good & Evil HD

Beyond Good & Evil is one of gaming's anomalies. It was loved by critics the world over when it was released, but commercially it was massive fail. Dodgy release dates, poor marketing, whatever: feel free to take your pick as to why that was. The point is that the game deserved to have huge success, but didn't. Now it's got a second chance to put its brilliance on display.

At its core, *BG&E* is an action adventure that casts you as a photojournalist named Jade in an attempt to discover the truth behind a thrilling conspiracy – but it's so much more than that. Like *Little Big Adventure* before it, it's a game bursting with unbridled creativity and imagination, with a great story and characters that you can actually grow emotionally attached to. Playing it today, it doesn't feel as monumental, but that's because so many of the games we've played since borrowed elements of its design. With *BG&E HD*, we're handed the same phenomenal game, but with improved character models, textures and audio. All you need to know is this: if you've never played this game before, there's never been a better time to do so. If you have played it, do it again, because *BG&E* is worth it.

// It's every bit as engaging as it was back in 2003, now with extra pretty.

The Hell in Vietnam

War is hell, man, that's why this game is called *The Hell in Vietnam*, because, the war in Vietnam was hell, and this game represents that war through gameplay that will, like, make you realise, man, how much that war was like hell, man. But this game better represents hell's version of a crappy, cookie-cutter first-person shooter from the mid nineties. It does so because that's exactly what it is. When it wasn't plodding through the most stagnant, uninteresting and blatantly scripted levels ever to exist in a first-person shooter, it was crashing to the desktop with the error "Terrorist Takedown War in Colombia has stopped working". That, in case you didn't notice, is not the name of this game. That's the name of another generic shooter released by the same publisher. This is a clone of that game.

If there's a silver lining here, it's that *The Hell in Vietnam* only costs R50. Even at that price it's not suitable for throwing at your screaming eight year-old to keep him busy while you play *StarCraft*, because *THIV* is so brutally realistic (this is sarcasm) in its portrayal of war that it uses the word "gook" like it's going out of fashion. Hint: it already did.

// Sure it's a budget game, but that's no excuse.

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

Bulletstorm



92
83
84

Fight Night Champion



86
86
87

Killzone 3



88
85
87

Knights Contract



50
50
56

Marvel vs. Capcom 3



90
85
87

Test Drive Unlimited 2



65
68
68

Tt **Thermaltake**
COOL ALL YOUR LIFE

Level 10 **GT**
INSPIRE THE VISIONARY

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WITHOUT
BOUNDARIES

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SUPPORT



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KINGS

Supports
240W

Toughpower™ **Grand**

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EFFICIENCY
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PLUS
GOLD

7
Thermaltake
YEAR
WARRANTY



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Test Drive Unlimited 2

2 Unlimited

There's something incredibly cool about cruising along a highway in Ibiza with the top down in your Ferrari and the radio blasting your favourite tunes [*there's a 'your girlfriend's' missing there somewhere, Ed*]. That's the idea behind the *Test Drive Unlimited* series, and, when they did it for the first time in *TDU*, it was cool. This time, it feels a bit stale. And the radio stations suck.

I've never been a fan of the fluff that comes with some racing games: the story of a newcomer rising through the ranks, or *Need for Speed's* street racing gangster codswallop. The most important thing a racing game needs to do is provide a solid, entertaining driving experience; everything else is gravy. *Test Drive Unlimited 2* is that gravy. The driving system is decent, and sits neatly between arcade-like and simulation, but it isn't actually all that fun. Although the events are varied (with three classes of vehicles), the act of driving in those events feels unfulfilling. The rest of the game is filled with wishy-washy story fluff, preposterously irritating voice acting and a ton of ways to change the look of your avatar. The actual

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3
Genre:
Racing
Age restriction:
12
DRM:
None / Disc-based / Internet connection required
Multiplayer:
Online versus: 8 players
Developer:
Eden Games
Website:
www.testdriveunlimited.com
Publisher:
Atari
Distributor:
Megarom



mechanical upgrades you can do to your vehicles are limited to the dumbed-down approach where upgrades are available as four set levels for your acceleration, speed and braking. That's it. For a game that claims to be car porn, you'd expect a hell of a lot more petrol-head tinkering or, at the very least, a wider range of vehicles. Thankfully, the cars that did make it into the 100-strong roster look pretty good, and feature plenty of detail both inside and out.

TDU2 takes place on two islands: Ibiza and O'ahu (the location of the first game). Both feature thousands of kilometres of road to travel on and this brings with it two issues: first, you're restricted to fast-travelling only on roads that you've already unlocked by driving on them once; and second, you're left with a bloody huge space in which you can drive. Without filling that space with interesting content, you're left with a needlessly large game environment that manages to successfully convey the

sense of freedom, but feels empty and boring. This is where the game's saving grace comes in: multiplayer. If you're online during play, other players from around the world will appear in your game world. You can challenge them on-the-fly, join in multiplayer races, compete in persistent time trials that offer a large pot for the fastest time at the end of a predefined time, hang out in public areas (although the character models are ugly and poorly-animated) and partake in a Facebook-like logging system. The social aspects of *TDU1* felt a bit short but here, they work well. However, if you don't have the kind of Internet connection required to make this system behave, you're missing out on a huge chunk of the game.

TDU2 has a lot to do for those who put in the effort, or love playing online. If you don't do either, then you'll easily become bored with what is otherwise a merely decent racing title.

NAG
GeometriX

/ PLUS / Good multiplayer content / Looks decent / Variety of events
/ MINUS / Boring single player / Little customisation / Horrible audio

A DISAPPOINTING SINGLE PLAYER EXPERIENCE BURIED IN A MOUNTAIN OF BOLLOCKS. DECENT MULTIPLAYER THOUGH.

65



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MINDJACK

I seem to have lost the ability to pause...

If I were to describe *MINDJACK* in five words, this is how I'd do it: don't play this damn game. I'm extremely irritated that I've had to play it. Not because it's the worst game ever created in the history of the world – that's not it at all. The reason is because there's obvious potential here that's being weighed down by the frustrating, poorly designed game that's been loosely wrapped around it.

MINDJACK is set in the year 2031. There's some clichéd background story in there somewhere involving the rise of evil mega corporations who proceed to engage themselves in obligatory conspiracies. As special-agent guy Jim (I think that's his name), you and your female sidekick Rebecca must join forces to take on one of those evil corporations (called NERKAS) to save the world or something. If it seems like that plot synopsis is a bit cold, that's because *MINDJACK*'s narrative is laughable at best. It's a shoddily presented, throwaway attempt at a sci-fi plot. To make matters worse, every line of dialogue in the game is delivered by voice actors with about as much collective voice-acting talent as an

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PS3
Genre:
Third-Person Shooter
Age restriction:
16+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Online:
co-op
6 players
Online versus:
6 players
Developer:
Feelplus Inc.
Website:
www.mindjackgame.com
Publisher:
Square Enix
Distributor:
Nu Metro Interactive



/1/ Apparently this is the appropriate physical reaction when someone is breaking into your mind.

/2/ Cyborg chimps with NVGs - humanity is doomed.

/3/ This is a boss. You don't even get to kill it - it just dies of boredom or something when you kill all the other enemies.



unconscious possum. These talentless voice monkeys were then handed the most offensively bad sci-fi script written in the last two years, making the whole narrative experience emotionless, tacky and completely uninspiring.

Then there's the game itself which, aside from some good (but poorly implemented) ideas, offers nothing more than competent cover-shooter gameplay with the occasional fun-killing aggravations thrown in for good measure. *MINDJACK* tries to differentiate itself from the pack by allowing you to leave your body and float around in ghost-like fashion as a Wanderer. From there, you can implant yourself in the mind of an enemy to take control of them until they're killed, at which point you're ejected back into Wanderer form so you can proceed to jack the minds of other enemies or return to your own body. Humans, machines and more can all be mindjacked in this fashion, but as great as that sounds, finicky controls quickly break this entire concept. Those fiddly controls extend beyond just Wanderer form, with an

annoyingly obtuse melee system being the most frustrating of these control problems. Aside from mindjacking, you can also turn incapacitated enemies into mindslaves, who will proceed to fight by your side for as long as they're breathing. Included with all this is an always-on multiplayer mode which allows other players to "hack" into your game (or you can hack into theirs), allowing them to either take control of your enemies or aid you in your battles. This always-on multiplayer has a painful side effect, however: the game cannot be paused, even when you're playing alone.

Despite all its fresh, interesting ideas, *MINDJACK* feels out dated. It's really just badly designed. The AI is broken, the story is weak, the controls are infuriating and even the menus are ugly. Maybe those promising concepts will be implemented in a future game that is actually good, but for now, if you're interested in possessing the minds of enemies in your games, go play *Messiah* instead. *Messiah* is great. *MINDJACK* is not. **NAG**

Barkskin

/ PLUS / Nice ideas
/ MINUS / Rubbish presentation / Lousy controls / Annoying gameplay / OMG pause button please
THE IDEAS BEHIND IT ARE COOL, BUT MINDJACK IS NOT. IT'S AN EXERCISE IN CONSTANT FRUSTRATION.

45

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NINTENDO 3DS™

Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds

An amazing dog saves the universe. Woof.

If there ever was a resurgence of any genre over the last decade or so, it would certainly be fighting games. During the turn of the century 3D fighters were on the rise and the days of traditional 2D fighters seemed numbered. However, with the waning appeal of staple fighters like *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter*, something was needed to take their place. In fact, the entire genre needed a change and this is where *Street Fighter IV* entered.

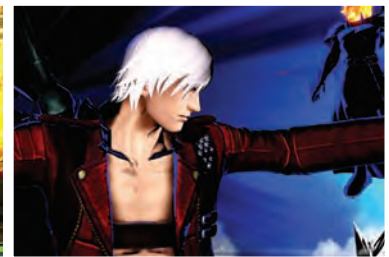
Now in 2011, it's without a doubt that 2D fighters (or 2.5D as some say) are back and better than ever, breathing new life into several series' of games that were thought well past their prime. One of these was the 'vs.' series from Capcom.

Since *X-Men vs. Street Fighter*, the cross-over titles have been an outlet for the most over the top duels in Marvel's and Capcom's world. From ridiculous move sets, power ups and combos (*Killer-Instinct* had nothing on what you could pull off even in these games), to the most interesting teams you can think of to put together. The series offered a pleasant departure from the traditional one on one well-paced combat game of the time. Not only were these games



[details]

Platforms:
360 / PS3 / Arcade
Genre:
Fighting
Age restriction:
12
DRM:
Disc-based
Multiplayer:
Local: 2 players
Online Versus: 2 players
Developer:
Capcom
Website:
marvelscapcom3.com/us/
Publisher:
Capcom
Distributor:
Nu Metro Interactive



(despite their perceived difficulty) actually easier to get into, but button bashing got you somewhere at least against equally inexperienced players or against the AI.

More than 14 years later we have what can be considered the biggest departure from these traditional game mechanics yet. You're still faced with defeating a team of several heroes where there are no rounds (a time limit is still present though). However, how these heroes interact has been re-tuned and in some ways made more relevant in this game than in Capcom's previous efforts.

For instance, picking the right type of support, depending on your team could mean the difference between easily defeating difficult heroes and struggling endlessly. This does add some complexity to the game but utilising your squad mates during battle can be as simple as randomly calling whoever is available to use at the time to start a combo all the way through chaining together advanced combos that can deliver more than 100 hits on a single or multiple opponents.

The uniqueness of this game is in just how simple it can be to play, in particular if you select "simple mode" for combat. One thing is certain though and that is combos and in particular the air types are paramount to any victory. Single hits are not devastating in anyway and because of this lack of damage one must learn how to master basic juggling moves.

Unlike the latest iteration of *Tekken* for example, getting out of costly juggling offenses is relatively easy provided you are watching keenly for the breaks between chained multi-hit moves. There's a vast amount of depth in this game and despite "simple mode" being quick and easy to jump right into, the true beauty is in the "normal" mode.

What has always been annoying with the series and fully present here again in the most spectacularly irritating way is the boss battle with Galactus. In typical 'vs.' series fashion, his body is only visible from the torso upwards and being larger than the planet its amazing just how much damage a well delivered





Somebody this big and mean should not be wearing pink and a helmet that looks like a trophy.



/1/ Galactus much like previous bosses is not only intimidating but mostly annoying.

/2/ Two of the most memorable *vs.* series characters make a showing in *MvC3* in the form of DLC.

/3/ If you're on the receiving end of this combo chances are you've already lost that player.



roundhouse to his head does. Still, don't expect to fight an opponent that will test all the skill you've needed to get that far, no you'll instead be tested on just how quickly you can put together a series of offensive moves before you are flicked away with his index finger or other such humiliating moves. If you've fought Apocalypse, Thanos or any of the boss characters in the previous games you'll know exactly what I'm on about.

In terms of character selection, many are missing from the previous game, but it does make for a tighter and more diverse selection of players. Still, we would have thought characters like M. Bison would have made a showing as the most recognisable antagonist in the Capcom universe. This also goes for Cyclops and Sabretooth, amongst others. Still there's more than enough diversity to find the characters that fit your playing style perfectly and with enough practice in both free training and mission modes

you'll become rather proficient provided you're dedicated and patient with the game. While the moves are simpler to pull off and chain together than before, they are by no means easy. Given just how much faster this game is split second timing is vital.

Visually it's as expected – the best in the series. Indeed it's based on the same engine as *Street Fighter IV*, but has been adapted and fits perfectly, lending itself to more artistic representations of the heroes and the lively game world which they occupy. There are heavy comic book influences and it all blends perfectly to create one of the most visually enticing fighters ever produced. Even when the screen is flashing in dazzling pallets courtesy of impossible combos it never fails to impress. Overall, this is the most unique game in the series, but by far the best one. This is a must have for any true fan of fighting games.

NAG

ShockG

/ PLUS / Loads of fun / Massive replay value / Looks fantastic
/ MINUS / Juggernaut / M. Bison and others missing / Can be very difficult

UNLIKE ANY OTHER VS GAME IN THE SERIES, BUT DEFINITELY THE BEST ONE.

90

Bulletstorm

Drunken space pirates: they're the bane of balls everywhere

Hi there. How are you? I'd like to welcome you to Stygia. This formerly desirable resort planet is smeared with a healthy splatter of shimmering beaches, luxurious hotels and eye-popping tourist attractions. Presently it's a festering sh*t-hole littered with several thousand different things that want to kill you, every one of which will giddily teabag you to a pulp once it's had its gruesome way with you. Loveable man-eating plants, delightful planet-wide gamma radiation storms, idyllic underground rivers of radioactive waste, cute 'n cuddly giant dinosaur things that (as it turns out) are very protective of their offspring and a bunch of extremely friendly warring factions are just some of the alluring features that make up Stygia's current attractions. As space pirate/space alcoholic Grayson Hunt, you're trapped right in the middle of this swirling vortex of things that want to eat/shoot/castrate you. What's the best solution to this painful predicament filled with potential death and/or loss of balls? Come up with 131 inventive, hilarious ways to eat/shoot/castrate



[details]

Platforms: PC / 360 / PS3
Genre: First-Person Shooter
Age restriction: 18+
DRM:
Internet connection required [Games for Windows LIVE]
Multiplayer: Online: co-op [4 players]
Developer: People Can Fly / Epic Games
Website: www.bulletstorm.com
Distributor: Electronic Arts

every living thing on Stygia before it does the same to you.

Bulletstorm is not a mindless FPS. Don't let any d*uche-nozzle out there tell you otherwise. For all its brash, drunken slurring, *Bulletstorm* shows a remarkable amount of panache, intelligence and gameplay ingenuity. I'm not just talking about the Skillshot system (which you've probably seen and heard about by now) either – this is a game that knows that it can devote the majority of its time to polishing every nook and cranny of the gameplay while still leaving room for a brilliantly gripping story and characters who – at first glance – may be the stereotypical, armour-clad 'roid monkeys we're used to seeing in games, but at least this particular band of 'roid monkeys is highly likeable. The story, written by comic book writer/artist Rick Remender (he of *Fear Agent* fame), is unflinchingly outrageous in the best possible way. It's great to see that even though this game would've done just fine with a throwaway, placeholder plot, that's not what's been employed here. Instead, you've got a story that's



/1/ Punt an enemy into these cacti to earn yourself the 'Pricked' Skillshot.

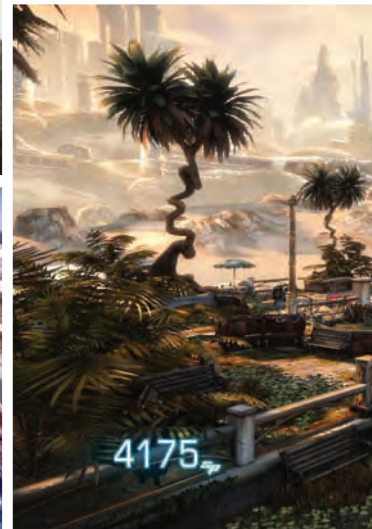
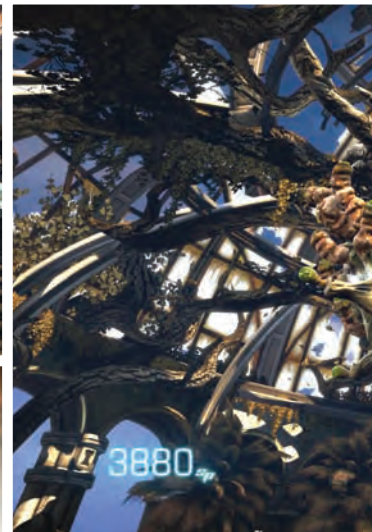
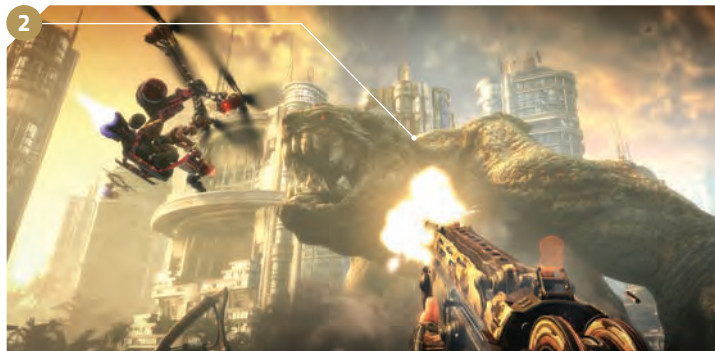
/2/ The Hekaton. Don't get it angry. You wouldn't like it when it's angry.

/3/ This is Anarchy - *Bulletstorm*'s cooperative multiplayer mode - in action. Blood Symphony FTW.

/4/ This is what happens when powerful Charge Shots are thrown around willy nilly.

/5/ Those yellow globe things are Nom Parasites - boot them onto an enemy's noggin for great success.

/6/ Unless you're a massive dino-monster thing, try not to piss off the guy with the quad-barrelled shotgun.



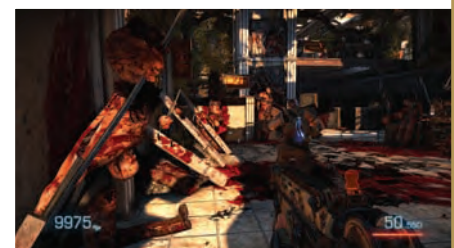


actually worth a damn, one that's filled to the brim with off-the-wall dialogue (read: approximately ten hours worth of sexual innuendo, d*ck jokes and double entendre) and imaginative scenarios. Remender's got a good sense of when to get down to serious, meaningful story business and when to lighten the mood with things like playful, homoerotic idle chat between Grayson and his cyborg sidekick Ishi during long elevator rides. It helps that this is one of the most genuinely funny games I've ever played, although anyone who's got their serious pants on will likely hate Remender's spectacular penchant for coming up with some of the most ingeniously foul dialogue (which is expertly delivered by fantastic voice actors) I've ever had the pleasure to hear. It is pulp fiction at its finest, at its most ridiculous, and I love it for that.

Then there's the gameplay itself, which is every bit as satisfying as the much-lauded Skillshot system promised it would be. In case you don't know, *Bulletstorm* makes a big deal out of what the marketing campaigns describe as "killing with skill" - which essentially means not just pointing at things and clicking until your virtual bullets make them go boom. To aid with this, you've got an extensive arsenal of weapons (each of which has a satisfying and devastating secondary fire mode called a Charge Shot), your mighty boot (great for kicking dudes and environmental stuff), an Energy Leash (which can be used to fling enemies all over the place) and the ability to slide (useful for getting around quickly and for tripping up enemies). Use all these abilities, weapons and a plethora of environmental hazards (like giant cacti and walls of sharp, pointy

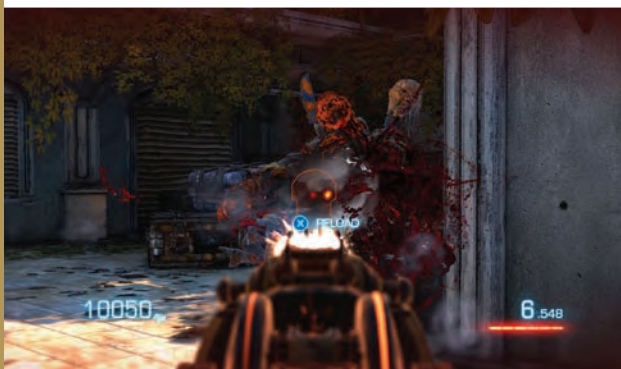
stuff - into which enemies can be punted) in creative ways and you'll pull off Skillshots. These Skillshots (there are 131 of them in total) are important because they earn you Skillpoints, which are the currency used to upgrade weapons, buy ammo and more. This all gels together to create fluid, catastrophic combat system which sees you more worried about killing enemies in the most beautifully imaginative of ways than you are about surviving.

Simply killing an enemy in *Bulletstorm* feels like a wasted opportunity. Dying is actually a blessing in this game, because it means you get to have another go at squeezing as many points as possible out of whatever insane set piece just got you killed. Dying doesn't come often though, because Grayson is a total bullet sponge. Even on the hardest difficulty, you can soak up damage while carefully



studying the environment for potential Skillshots. This does mean that the game's challenge comes more from successfully achieving Skillshots than it does from the enemies themselves: but hey, I'm okay with that. The entire Skillshot thing is undeniably a rigid, mechanical system and not nearly as dynamic and organic as I thought it would be, but in the most chaotic of action scenes it comes together so gracefully that it's barely noticeable. Picking on single enemies becomes a common occurrence as you circle him to find a way to milk him for all the Skillpoints he's worth. It's really an excellent system, one that no other FPS out there can claim to match right now.

If you were expecting some Skillshot-riddled competitive multiplayer, you're out of luck here. I'll bet the developers tried to do it, but during testing things didn't go so well. The Energy Leashes alone would mean that you'd spend more time flying helplessly through the air in competitive matches than you would actually shooting things. Instead of that, we get one cooperative multiplayer mode called Anarchy and a score-attack mode dubbed Echoes. Echoes plucks all the most action-packed sequences out of the single player and lets you replay them to get the highest score possible, complete with star ratings for each level and online leader boards. Anarchy pits you and three friends against



increasingly difficult waves of enemies. There are unique Team Skillshots that can be performed here which will get you and your team a ton of points. This is important, because there's a target score that you and your mates have to meet at the end of each round. If you don't hit that target, you restart that round, but you've got a limited number of retries before the match ends. Team challenges pop up from time to time which require a specific Team Skillshot to be performed for big rewards. Anarchy is actually a ton of fun and is dedicated to being truly cooperative. Teams that don't work well together won't get very far.

Every inch of *Bulletstorm* has very obviously been painstakingly crafted with much love. From the animations for reloading weapons to the humorous public service announcements that echo throughout Stygia – all of it is impressively done. This includes the visuals and audio, with an appropriate soundtrack keeping your speakers working hard to match the action onscreen. Visually *Bulletstorm* proudly shows how much juice is left in the evergreen Unreal Engine 3, with some

of the most gorgeous vistas I've ever laid eyes on in a game nonchalantly showing up around every corner here. I challenge you to not stop and stare at the phenomenal level of detail in between your Skillshot bonanzas. The game's not technologically perfect: it was prone to crashing on my machine and every once in a while a visual glitch would pop up and ugly up the place. This didn't happen often, however, and when it did it didn't really bother me much. The game itself makes up for the silly glitches.

When the credits started rolling, I was bummed out because there's nothing else quite like it out there that I could play while waiting for the inevitable sequel (the ending blatantly confirms that a sequel is a thing that will happen). It's ludicrous, it's brash and it's unrelenting in its quest to make everything it presents to the player as fun and as over the top as possible. I love the crap out of it. Also – I managed to finish the game without becoming a massive rapist, so FOX News can suck my d*ckt*ts. **NAG**

Barkskin

/ PLUS / Creative Skillshot system / Compelling narrative / Huge d*ckt*ts / OMG mecha-dino thing
 / MINUS / Occasional bugs / Visual glitches
BULLETSTORM HAPPILY D*CKPUNCHES EVERY OTHER FPS OUT THERE. GRAB A STRAPON AND DIVE IN FOR MAXIMUM ENJOYMENT.

92

Stacking

So I put myself, like, *inside* you?

In *Stacking*, you play as Charlie Blackmore, the smallest of all Russian stacking dolls in a beautifully-detailed miniature world populated by these little wooden people. Charlie's family has been kidnapped by an evil Baron obsessed with industry that puts children to work and pollutes without a care in the world. It's up to Charlie to save his family and stop the Baron, and in order to do that, he'll have to jump inside and take control of the other dolls in the world and put their abilities to use in creative ways.

Each doll type, and each unique doll, has an ability that it can perform. This includes simple tasks like shaking hands, dancing and sneezing, as well as stranger abilities like running around on a sugar high, serving soup and pouring oil slick onto the floor. Each doll type is also a particular size, and Charlie can only stack into them if they're one size bigger than the doll he currently occupies (or himself). This leads to a potentially great puzzle dynamic of stacking with particular dolls, passing through size-restricted areas, and 'unstacking' strategically, but sadly, the game only really starts to put these puzzles into effect right at the end of the four



[details]

Platforms: 360 / PS3
Genre: Puzzle
Age restriction: 7+
DRM: None
Multiplayer: None
Developer: Double Fine Productions
Website: www.doublefine.com
Publisher: THQ
Distributor: Xbox LIVE Arcade / PlayStation Network



hours of core game time.

There's another strange design decision: you only need to complete about 50% of the puzzles to finish the game. The rest are optional, and often each challenge can be completed in a number of ways. There are also tons of extra tasks and challenges

to discover in the game world. While we appreciate Double Fine's desire to stay away from needlessly fluffing up game time, it feels wasteful to neglect half of the game, which will likely only be played by obsessive achievement hunters.

NAG
GeometriX

PLUS / Fantastic visuals / Clever puzzles / Great humour
MINUS / Sells itself short

A GREAT PUZZLE GAME THAT IS SURE TO PLEASE YOU, BUT DOESN'T FULLY IMPLEMENT ALL OF ITS IDEAS.

80

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Killzone 3

In the Zone

The Helghast leader may be dead, but the war between the ISA and the Helghast forces is far from over. With the political structure of the insidious warmongers in disarray, one would think that the ISA could strike a quick blow to end the overly-long conflict, but the leaders of the planet Helghan (such as they are) are not willing to take things lying down...

That's pretty much where *Killzone 3* sets up its premise. The game starts moments after the last one ended, and dumps the player into a savage battle from start to finish. The action is intense, the enemies are numerous, and everything about the game just feels bigger and better than *Killzone 2*.

Killzone 3 is exactly the kind of action packed first-person shooter that fans of the franchise have come to expect. It has a laughably simple plot, but the game does not need to be complex in terms of story. The characters are similarly shallow and lack development through the story... but that's okay, too, because the *Killzone* series has always

[details]

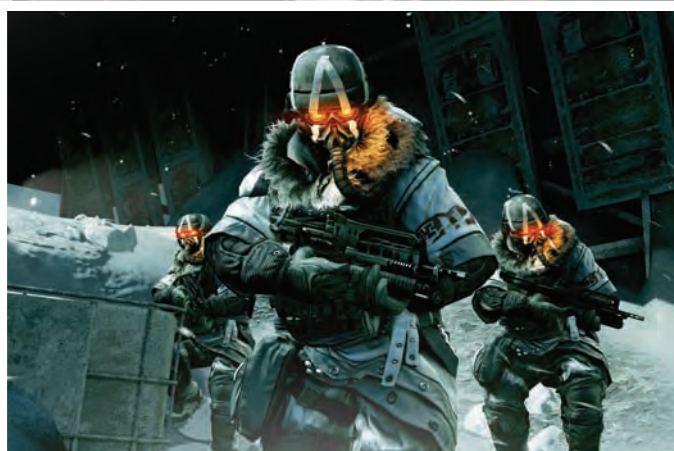
Platforms: PS3
Genre: First-person Shooter
Age restriction: 18+
DRM: Disc-based
Multiplayer: Local: co-op [2 players] / Online: co-op [None] / Online versus: [24 players]
Developer: Guerrilla Games
Website: www.killzone.com
Publisher: SCEE
Distributor: Ster Kinekor Entertainment

treated plot and character as secondary to game dynamics.

The improvements in the game are quite numerous, and all add up to the fact that *Killzone 3* just feels better to play. There is still a bit of weight to the weapons (one of the bigger complaints about the previous game) but the delay this causes to control is almost unnoticeable. The pace of the game varies nicely, and when it gets fast and frantic, it does so to the utmost level.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. A little more detail is necessary.

The player reprises the role of Sev, from the second game in the series, and is joined by a handful of recognisable characters along the way. Even though the war against the Helghast seems to be going well (what with the death of their leader) the ISA troops beat a hasty retreat at the beginning of the game. However, Sev and a few of his buddies are left behind, and have to eke out a living on a planet that is becoming (thanks to the Helghast nuking their own city as a last ditch defence effort)





/1/ It's not difficult to understand what's happening here. Clearly there's a big thing coming towards a man with a gun, and bowels have been cleared. Obviously.

/2/ The situation becomes murky here. Why is this man shooting at the distant landscape? Why is that manshooter to his left so angry? What's the point of this text you're reading?



increasingly hostile. However, months after getting stranded, the remaining ISA troops uncover a plot that threatens the very foundations of humanity, and decide that action must be taken.

This launches the player on a rather exciting ride that features excellent variations in pace (from stealthy missions through to all out massive battles), setting (from weird jungles reclaiming the world through to space stations) and method (numerous stages allow the player varying degrees of control over vehicles, in addition to the traditional on-foot style of play.)

The levels are massive and beautifully represented. Even though the game is linear in nature, it never really feels that way. The only complaint is that Sev sort of gets pulled through the levels. He is never really a leader, but rather more like a grunt following orders for the whole game.

There are weapons a-plenty, although the progression to bigger and better guns that many games follow is not here – the player will likely stick to their assault rifle for the whole game, resorting to other weapons only when needed. It adds a nice, realistic approach to the weapons.

The enemy the player faces is even more challenging than before. A fantastic AI will have Helghast troops doing their best to take the player out, using various tactics to do so. The AI governing friendlies is also not too shabby. For example, when Sev goes down, one of his team mates will revive him. It's not always possible, but the AI will do it's

best to get the player back on his feet. This can, admittedly, lead to a few cheap deaths... if the player is in a nasty spot when he goes down, the AI may, or may not, clear out enemies before reviving. If the enemies aren't cleared, the player will likely go down again seconds after he gets to his feet – and going down too often makes reviving impossible.

But this isn't the kind of game where mindless run-and-gun tactics work out well. The player needs to apply a decent balance of all out bravado and skin-saving caution to get through *Killzone 3* properly.

As much fun as the single player campaign is, the three multiplayer modes are what will give this game an amazing longevity. They are well constructed and tons of fun, and have a few new ideas implemented that make them better than many others – like the ability to spend experience gained wherever the player wants, rather than on class specific upgrades.

Oh, and the player can take advantage of full 3D support, as well as Move control. While the Move implementation is well handled, it doesn't trump the "classic" control system. Despite not using 'standardised' control layouts (which can lead to a bit of frustration) using the normal PS3 controller to play this game works beautifully.

Killzone 3 is one of the better first-person shooters available on PS3, without a doubt. It's smooth, massive and full of fun and tense moments – exactly what fans would want it to be. **NAG**

Ramjet

/ PLUS / Great graphics / Massive levels / Excellent multiplayer
/ MINUS / Simple plot / Shallow characters / Slightly odd control scheme

KILLZONE 3 IS ONE OF THE BETTER PS3 FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS, AND OFFERS AN EXCELLENT EXPERIENCE ALL-ROUND.

88

Fight Night: Champion

Back in the Ring

Sports games are not really known for their story modes. They have career modes, sure, but the blanks that exist between competitions are up to the player to fill in. That's where *Fight Night: Champion* takes a different approach...

See, in this game, the player can undertake the usual quick fight and Legacy career modes, but they can also experience the world of boxing through the eyes of Andre Bishop. The introduction of a story mode makes for an interesting change to the franchise (and sports games in general) and adds a degree of background, as well as a glimpse into the world of professional boxing.

The story mode will work for some, and not for others. That's to be expected. It removes many of the elements of Legacy mode – like training and booking fights – but adds cinematic story sequences and a different level of engagement for the player. At the very least, it's a good idea, and the story is interesting enough to keep players intrigued, while the fights themselves add new challenges to the game.

The game, as a whole, is a very solid

[details]

Platforms:
PS3 / 360
Genre:
Sports
Age restriction:
16+
DRM:
Disc-based
Multiplayer:
Local:
Versus [2 players]
Online:
Co-op
Online versus:
[2 players]
Developer:
EA Sports
Website:
www.fightnight.easports.com
Distributor:
EA South Africa



/1/ Two dudes about to punch each other.

/2/ Some dude just punched the other dude in the face.

/3/ So you know that dude that punched that other dude I was telling you about? Well he just got punched n the face!

/4/ Guess what happened to him? He backchatted his wife, and then got punched in the face!

entrant into the Fight Night franchise. But this time around, there have been a few changes, which are rather apparent in Legacy mode particularly.

The biggest change – and one that fans might have the most to say about – is to the control scheme. The excellent scheme used in previous games has been simplified. So, for example, to deliver a shuddering uppercut, the player no longer has to move the controller's right analogue stick down and around... rather, this punch just requires a downward flick. This may seem to dumb the game down a bit and, to a degree, it does. But a cleverly structured stamina system also comes into play, and it will have flailers on their backs before the end of the first round.

Another change comes in the way the player's fighter progresses in Legacy mode. Previously, players

would select training exercises based on the attributes that they want to develop. Now, training session (and fights too, for that matter) grant the player experience points, which can be used to increase a wide variety of skills. Each type of punch, for example, has a skill attached to it.

At various points on the skill tracks, bonus 'items' are unlocked. As far as punches go, things like haymakers have been replaced by flash stuns, flash knockdowns and flash knockouts, which have a chance of occurring if the right kind of punch is thrown.

Although it feels more serious and is a bit more accessible, *Fight Night: Champion* is very similar to the previous title in the franchise. Good multiplayer (particularly online) and the story mode are definitely plus points, though.

**NAG
Ramjet**

/ PLUS / Story mode / Simpler controls / Stamina system / Skill system
/ MINUS / Not many engine changes

A SOLID NEW ADDITION TO THE FRANCHISE, WITH SOME GOOD NEW IDEAS – ALTHOUGH LONG-TIME FANS WILL NOTICE BIG CHANGES.

86

Microsoft

100%
GENUINE

This is Kamal; he's passionate about sport. He writes a blog for the local cricket team and works really hard at making it the most interesting blog in town. He plans on becoming the official blogger for the Proteas one day.

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Windows 7

Knights Contract

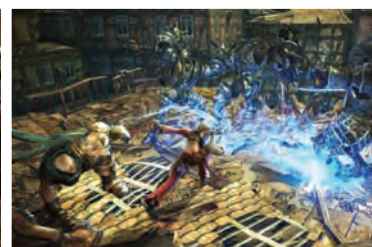
May contain traces of irritating.

I'm amazed that this game made it out the front door of Hexa Drive. It's not that *Knights Contract* is an abysmal, broken game; it *does* function, just not terribly well. It's a beat-'em-up with that supposed allure given to any obscure Japanese-developed title – the kind that *someone, somewhere* will find compelling and challenging and will play to death because he's run out of ways to speed-run his collection of rare Nintendo games from the '80s. If you're not that person, then all *Knights Contract* will be to you is a series of bland combat situations strung together by too-many cut scenes, irritating quick time events and the unnecessary inclusion of a second, AI-controlled character.

In *Knights Contract*, you'll play Heinrich, a former executioner to the state in the 17th Century who finds himself at the bottom end of a conspiracy of evil. Heinrich is immortal; he became so because after he was ordered to lop off the heads of a handful of witches, one witch in particular, Gretchen, cursed him to wander the land forever. Then, one day, the witches returned to life, hell-bent on seeking their revenge on

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PS3
Genre:
Beat-'em-up
Age restriction:
18+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
None
Developer:
Hexa Drive
Website:
www.namcoban-daigames.com
Publisher:
Namco Bandai
Distributor:
Megarom



the humans. Gretchen isn't interested in revenge, believing that humans are inherently good, so she finds Heinrich, binds him to serve her in exchange for his release from the curse, and the two of them set off to stop the nasty witches from destroying the world.

As Heinrich, it's your job to keep Gretchen the masochist alive. You can't die, and will instead be knocked down or even dismembered by your enemies while they get to work on making a Gretchen sandwich. While you're down, you have to mash the tits off the A button before The Big H deigns to get up and help his charge. Now, I don't hate quick time events; used sparingly and appropriately, I actually enjoy them, but this is ridiculous.

The combat itself is repetitive and bounces psychotically between dead-boring and brutally challenging, the latter instances usually leave you with sore thumbs and/or a dead Gretchen.

Either way, it's not terrible, just a little boring at times. Heinrich does most of the heavy-lifting with occasional support from Gretchen, and the player can pre-select up to four spells to have Gretchen cast at the press of a button. Where the combat really gets painful is during boss battles. Each is repeated in almost exactly the same order: bash away at a few life bars; watch the boss run/fly out of reach; attempt to heal Gretchen while being on fire; dodge incoming attacks; finish off boss health bars; perform stupidly fast quick time events; fail those events; repeat from start until boss is dead or console has been flung through nearest window.

The game also has horrible level design that's either completely linear or so convoluted that you'll get lost. Oh, and *Knights Contract* is also really, really ugly – textures, models, animations – the works.

NAG
GeometriX

/ PLUS / Combat isn't awful / Decent story
/ MINUS / Ugly / Boss battles suck / Repetitive gameplay / Poor level design

YOU'LL HAVE AN INFINITELY BETTER TIME PLAYING *DMC*, OR *BAYONETTA*, OR *GOD OF WAR*, OR *5-FINGER FILLET*.

50

Rango

Out West

With a new animated movie the likelihood of a video game release supporting it is... well, highly likely. *Rango*, with its big name voice cast (including Johnny Depp) will be hitting cinemas mid-April, and the inevitable video game will be on the wish list of kids who enjoy the film.

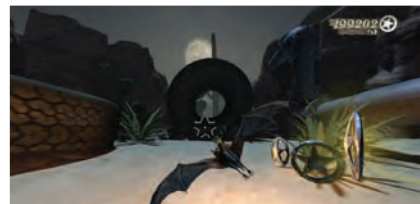
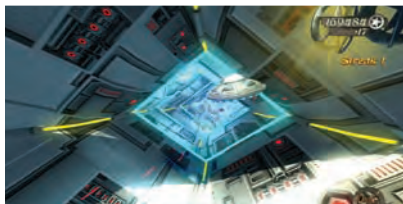
In the game, the player takes on the role of the eponymous chameleon-sheriff as he relates tales of his exploits to fellow townsfolk (which are a bunch of small animals) in the local saloon.

The game is quirky and full of humour that might go over the head of the average kid, but the game itself is extremely easy, making it great for exactly that audience.

The game doesn't do much that could be called original but, in terms of a platform-style action-adventure,

[details]

Platforms: 360 / PS3 / Wii / DS
Genre: Action Adventure
Age restriction: 7+
DRM: Disc-based
Multiplayer: None
Developer: Behaviour
Interactive Website: www.rangomovie.com
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Distributor: EA South Africa



Rango is well put together. The player will use Rango to traverse several zany levels, fighting enemies and upgrading skills and equipment along the way. Some levels will even be "vehicle" based (if Roadrunners can be called vehicles) and the whole experience is varied and – for a game based on a

movie – rather enjoyable.

The developers didn't take any chances with trying anything new here. That, combined with the fact that you can get through the game in around five hours, makes it fun but ultimately forgettable. **NAG**

Ramjet

/ PLUS / Good humour / Easy for kids
/ MINUS / Very short / Boring setting / Nothing original

NOT BAD FOR A MOVIE-BASED GAME, RANGO IS VERY EASY AND VERY SHORT.

70

MORTAL KOMBAT

**RAIDEN HAS BEEN DEFEATED!
HIS ONLY HOPE.... UNDO THE EMPEROR'S
VICTORY IN THE ONLY PLACE HE IS VULNERABLE...
THE PAST!**

Driven by an all new graphics engine, the fan favourite *Fatality* is back and presented in more gory detail than ever before. In addition, *Mortal Kombat* introduces a number of new game-play features including tag team and the deepest story mode of any fighting game.

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DOU



NUKEM

FOR EVER

Forever is right here, right now.

Release Date: May 6, 2011 / Platforms: PC / PS3 / 360 / Genre: First-person shooter / Developer: Gearbox Software / Publisher: 2K Games

Dated visuals, aged gameplay, tired controls and infantile humour? Hell, I'd still hit it*.

Where *Quake* may have defined the technological focus of the late 1990s going forward from its launch in 1996, it was *Duke Nukem 3D* that defined the *memetics*, giving birth to the entire concept of "dudebro" long before it would be applied wholesale to the manly-man modern-war first-person shooter parade. Everyone who played games, played Duke 3D. No exceptions.

People who've been waiting 14 years for the sequel are going to play it, regardless of what some jackass in a magazine writes, or what people say about it online. If you weren't alive yet when *Duke 3D* hit the scene like a nuke, *Duke Nukem Forever* is a good-enough aftershock but nowhere near as impactful as the original. The moment has passed, but Duke's time is not yet over.

DUKE NUKEM'S TITTY CITY

Where better to let the press play the first eight levels of *Duke Nukem Forever*, than in a temporarily re-branded strip club in Las Vegas? Cleared of all hooters and filled with Xbox stations, we're given 90 minutes. It was ample time to play through the first chunk of the game, which opens in a bathroom, Duke staring at his controllable stream of urine. You become involved in "Operation Cockblock" (after scribbling on a whiteboard), then fighting a giant monster in a football stadium (perfect remake of the Stadium from Duke 3D).

It all feels good and looks good, the monster is downed and it's eye kicked past the goalposts. The camera



* You ended that sentence with a preposition, you bastard.

moves back and it was all a game within a game, Duke was playing a product based on his life while also being pleased by "the Holsum Twins". Many silly (yet enjoyable) one-liners, interactive world bits (like a pinball table) and shooting later, we've learned much about Duke. He's a lightweight (drink one beer and you do more damage but the world becomes super-blurry), and when he chews steroids he becomes so enraged he can only use his super-effective fists.

There was a turret shooter section, a "shrunk down and driving toy RC car through the hallways" section, and plenty of shoot-that-alien and use-action-button-on-toilet bits. There were even a few platform puzzlers, a throwback to level design not seen in the FPS genre since the rise of the wartime shooter. The demo's abrupt end after a boss fight which climaxes in Duke using the giant monster's nut sack as a punching bag, made more than a few journalists complain at there not being more to play. We noticed more than one journalist scribbling frantically at the start of their session, but halfway through completely forgetting to write anything. They were too busy being Duke.

CAME AND GOT SOME

The run-and-gun is fun and reassuringly classic; the boss-battles feel weighty, tricky even if you're not careful. The gunplay, while nothing exceptional, is solid enough that you aren't pulled out of the experience by it. Basically, it's

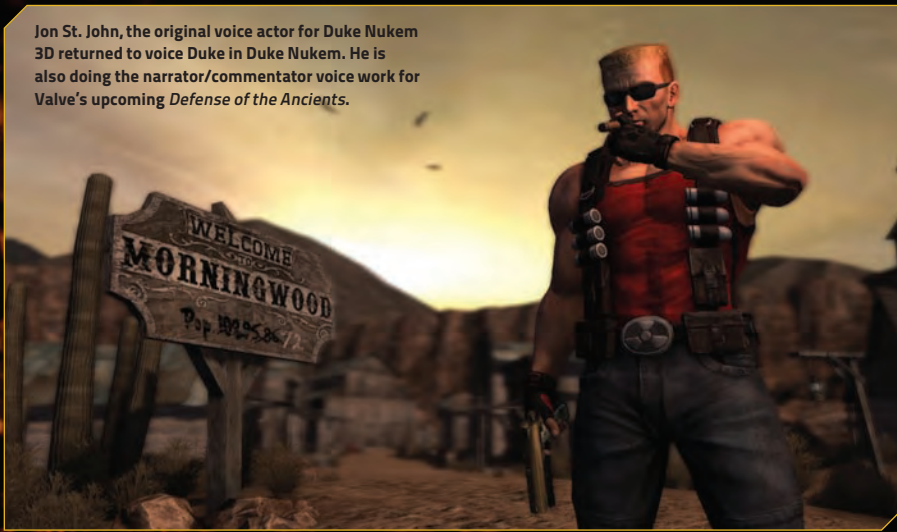


DUKE'S EGO

Maximum available health is determined by Duke's ego. No health packs here, it automatically regenerates when out of combat. But, if you want more available health, you gotta do "Duke stuff" - pump iron, play with the toilet handles, look in mirrors, shoot some hoops. The more you interact with the environment, the larger Duke's ego bar grows. Take a lot of damage, and his ego chips off, leaving the bar permanently shortened until you do more Duke stuff.

There is a good balance between doing Duke stuff before and after battle situations, and the pressure from battles diminishing your health reserves. It acts as a loose difficulty modifier: the more you stop to appreciate the environment and interactivity, the easier a time you'll have in upcoming battles but push hard and fast, and the fights get more challenging. It's cheesy, but it works well and fits perfectly with the motif.

Jon St. John, the original voice actor for Duke Nukem 3D returned to voice Duke in Duke Nukem. He is also doing the narrator/commentator voice work for Valve's upcoming *Defense of the Ancients*.



DUKE'S PLOT

Career alien-butt-kicker, Duke is the saviour of the human race (thrice). He's also the richest, best-est and most famous person on the planet. He runs his own strip clubs and casinos, has his own television and movie media empire and constantly appears on talk shows. They even make games about his previous exploits against extraterrestrials.

Then, aliens park a spaceship off the tip of his "Lady Killer" skyscraper casino. The same aliens whose butt he kicked the last time. The president of the United States rings Duke up and says dude, don't do anything, "we're in peace talks with the aliens". The general of the U.S. military agrees that Duke should sit this one out. When the aliens start kidnapping all the hot babes from the planet, Duke doesn't even say "I told you so", he's that much of a man. He just goes right for the beer, steroids and shotgun. It's not high prose, but it's a damn catchy tune and the only justification you need to punch giant aliens in the nuts.

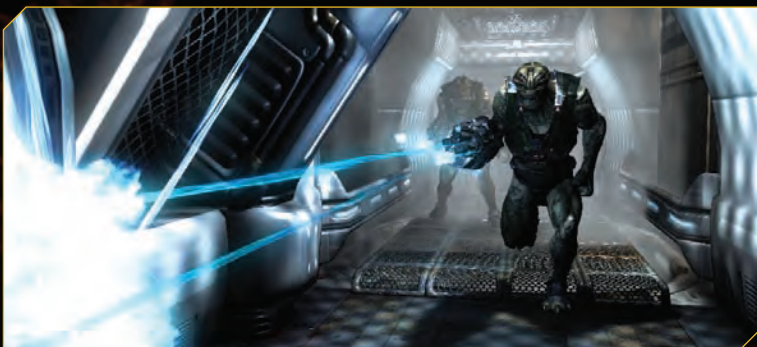


"That's what Duke is, he has the balls to do what other people wish they could do, and he can kick ass and save the world while doing it."



all good, it just isn't anything great. Except for Duke, he's totally great every time, even with (or perhaps because of) his one-dimensional nature. And that's the point, really. Duke is a hero, one who (unlike modern game heroes) doesn't have issues, problems, or a deep inner sadness that may be related to parents, a long-lost sister or seething rage at some deity's injustice. Duke's only problem is that aliens are stealing his chicks.

That said, it all feels a little flat and slightly dated. The characters are too shiny and marionette, the level design while visually appealing is too crisp and angular. People looking for something to complain about will find more than enough forum bitching fodder, but that doesn't take away from the fact that the more time you spend in Duke's world the more you can't help but give into the madness. It's all about Duke, and if you can release your inner man-child to chuckle at the humour clearly aimed at 15 year olds, you're taken back to exactly the place you were when playing *Duke Nukem 3D*, without having to go through puberty again.



Gearbox has done a commendable job finishing what 3D Realms started, it's almost impossible to see where one developer's involvement ends and the other's begins. It's important to remember this: *Duke Nukem Forever* is not a game that took 14 years to make. It is not an evolution or revolution of the genre. It is exactly what it is: a dumb, immature pleasure as guilty an indulgence as laughing at someone who just fell after acting like a jackass. It's something that's been lacking in the gaming zeitgeist: a game unapologetic about what it is and represents. **NAG**



INTERVIEW: Melissa Miller

We sat down with an attractive lady in one of the backrooms of the strip club and tried not to look embarrassed about the obvious decor around us.

// Hi!

Hi! I'm senior producer Melissa Miller!

// Didn't you work on *BioShock 2*?

Yes! When I was on *BioShock 2*, I was working for the developer 2K Marin, and now I've moved back into publishing which is why I'm working with Gearbox!

// Does it feel like an odd thing, to now be working on Duke?

Coming from *BioShock*? You couldn't find a more different IP, you really couldn't!

// Did you have fun?

Yeah, yeah! I see the most ridiculous things now and they're all work related! Pretty amazing. For instance, you've played the demo, and so, there'll be discussions surrounding the, "hey oh, did you see the twins, they got new animations after the oral sex scene! Oh yeah, you should totally check it out!" (Laughs) It's all work related! And hey, I'm at a strip club in the middle of the day doing interviews, so yeah, you're not going to get that through *BioShock*.

// So, Dukematch? Can you confirm anything?

We have multiplayer! I can confirm that, at least. (Laughs) Did you play through the demo?

// Yeah.

Did you find the poo? Did you throw the poo around?

// No, but I did see the loading tip about how "we wanted to make throwing poo around take away Ego". Loved the tips, my favourite was "if you get stuck you can always cheat and look it up online".

(laughs) There are lots I love. How was it phrased... "If you're losing health, try dodging or something..."

// The quip in game when you find the Master Chief power armour was great too...

Yeah, it's pretty cool. That stuff I love, because they only do that gentle ribbing towards the really cool games that they really liked and stuff. How much of the interactivity did you find?

// Well, everything that I found, I fiddled with. It was great to see the return of the pool table, right off the bat.

Oh God, the pool table! I've beaten that thing once or twice, and I will sit there for like an hour!

// It was great that the pinball game was also actually playable, where in *Duke 3D* it was just a texture.

Yeah, the stuff that's so funny to me - I feel that it adds that extra "thing"; you can almost like do your own little roleplaying. I was testing this demo and checking everything, and I was shutting off all the lights, like, "Duke's going to be environmentally conscious today!" and literally every room when I left, I was like, click, shutting them off.

// People who've never played a *Duke* game are going to wonder, what's the fuss? What would you tell them?

I think that, for one, it's the character. Basically, there's so much in the cultural landscape now where everyone is just kind of over-watching what they say, and you have to be careful, because the sound bite can be taken out of context and turned into this big tabloid story, and like, you know, you see a lot of that happening in any type of political dialogue, and the tabloids and the gossip culture we have now... so there's something just really compelling about somebody who just *doesn't care*, and just says it, and you



"I find the pissing hysterical! The first time I started playing the full game, I peed everywhere."

know there's just so many people out there who're like "I was just thinking that" but they didn't have the balls to say it. That's what Duke is, he has the balls to do what other people wish they could do, and he can kick ass and save the world while doing it.

// The return of true machismo...

Yeah, yeah! And so there's that, and everything that you need to know about the game you can see in the first three seconds. What other game starts with you standing there, taking a piss? I find the pissing hysterical! The first time I started playing the full game, I peed everywhere. Every time I found a toilet I was like, pee! Pee!

// As a female, don't you find all the rampant objectification in the game insulting?

I think that, one, if you're going to be in this job you have to have an objective sense, you have to be objective about certain things. You have to have equal opportunity humour. Just because I find something funny, doesn't mean you will and vice versa. So, what I need to look at, is not my personal feelings about any given situation, but is this in line with the brand, the



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* Brightness comparison based upon monitors with same brightness in 2D.

*3D glasses are required and are included with purchase.



CHILL South Africa



DUKE 3D

Released in 1996, *Duke Nukem 3D* was a huge hit. Up to that point the Duke series were 2D side-scrolling platformers. Selling over 3 million copies (which back then is equivalent to *Modern Warfare 2* figures comparatively), the game's juvenile humour and interactive environments were original and fresh. Powered by the Build Engine (written by a 16 year old Ken Silverman), the game sported some very fancy visuals and technology for its time. *Quake* was still 5 months away from launch.



DUKE'S BALLS OF STEEL EDITION

True Duke believers, having waited 14 years, will no doubt splurge on the ultimate Collector's Edition of DNF. Clocking in at an expected \$100, you don't get more ludicrous than this "Balls of Steel Edition" kit: a giant Duke Nukem bust, 100-page hardcover history and art book, postcards, radioactive emblem sticker (not actually radioactive), collectible comic book, foldable papercraft, poker chips, mini-card deck, radioactive emblem dice and of course, the game. All of it certified with a numbered limited-edition certificate of authenticity. Classy.



WTF IS DUDEBRO?

While the exactitude of what is considered dudebro (or brodude) isn't clearly defined and may vary depending on geographical location, in gaming the term is used to generally (and broadly) refer to a specific culture of male-centric male-celebrating males who have narrow thematic tastes when it comes to what games they play (war/muscles/power armour or muscled power armour during war).

[Oppenheimer's First Quantum Theory of Brodocity states that over a long enough timeline all dudes will invariably meet, become bros and shoot/stab until beer. Otherwise known as "the dawn of Xbox Live".]

In the early days of gaming, dudebro was more about how awesome the characters in a game were (the manly bros of *Contra*, or the brodocity of *Dukebro*). Over time, brodudes co-opted dudebroishness and applied it to themselves, imagining themselves to be totally brodocious just because they could headshot an unsuspecting n00b, then watch the "big game" on TV while chugging beer.

In short, the modern dudebro is a total douchebag. Duke would not approve.

[Oppenheimer's Second Quantum Theory of Brodocity states that all dudes, irrespective of their physical coordinates, are also bros.]



character. Is this what Duke would do? And evaluate things that way. Two, I totally find this funny. I'm not offended by it. I think there's this weird expectation that having women in games is going to have this tangible result, like more rainbows or something. And our consoles will become bedazzled. It's not like that. You bring yourself, your experiences. I'm not overly feminine, I'm pretty tomboy, and I bring that meaning to Duke.

// Excuse me? One minute left? Ah, thank you. So, anything you'd like to add?

There have been so many announcements, and what I love about today, is it is just one more step towards showing, this is real, it *will* come out, it'll be on the shelves. It's really cool to see so many people playing it and see their reactions. It's always this big test. You go in, and from our side it's "I hope they'll like that, I hope they'll like this" and at the same time, I just know how fun the game is, and I'm excited people are about to start experiencing it themselves.

// Thank you!
Find the poo! Throw it around!

NAG

Miktar

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Processor Rating

05F43521AW151NAG

The Settlers II: Gold Edition

Developer: Blue Byte Software / Publisher: Ubisoft / Price: \$9.99 on gog.com (Gold Edition includes the Mission CD expansion)

Ah, *The Settlers*. It's great to see this lovable series consistently surviving amidst a constantly evolving gaming industry. Now in its seventh iteration (*The Settlers 7: Paths to a Kingdom* was released in March last year), this series has gradually morphed and developed to accommodate today's gamer by taking the plunge into 3D a few years back and making alterations to its complex economic system. Many of the people who've become *Settlers* fans in recent years won't ever explore the series' roots, but to those of you who feel the need, there's no better place to do that than with the series'

second title. Don't worry about the first game, because the second is basically identical to it, aside from a Roman theme and improved visuals.

The premise behind *The Settlers* is fairly simple: build a settlement, get its economy up and running, establish supply routes and expand your borders, all while protecting your settlers from the threat of opponents eager to steal all of your settlement's candy. Whereas *Civilization* focuses on the broader scale of things, *Settlers* takes you down to a more personal level. Much of the game's excellence comes from its shrewd (but intuitive) economic system. Every building and

ORIGINS

Blue Byte Software (now known as Ubisoft Blue Byte) is currently based in Düsseldorf, Germany, and was founded in October 1988 by Thomas Hertzler and Lothar Schmitt. Blue Byte's first game was a tennis simulator called *Great Courts*, but their first real success was found in 1991 with *Battle Isle* – a turn-based strategy title. They released *The Settlers* in 1993 and have developed every *Settlers* title since. Other than *The Settlers*, they've recently also helped develop the *Anno* series, having co-developed the brilliant *Anno 1404*.



10TH ANNIVERSARY

If those old-school visuals are putting you off a bit, you'll be happy to know that there's an updated, 3D version of *The Settlers II* floating around in the wild called *The Settlers II: 10th Anniversary Edition*. The second game was so popular that in 2006 the developers opted to release an enhanced version, adding/changing a bunch of features and utilising a 3D engine.



settler in the game has a purpose. Your woodcutters can chop down trees for wood, but without sawmills your carpenters won't be able to turn that wood into lumber used for construction. Without a forester, your woodcutters will soon be without trees. Your farms can produce grain, but if there's no mill, you won't be able to provide your bakery with the flour needed to bake bread to supply your miners with food. Then there's the matter of transporting your goods, which is done by building a network of roads for your settlers. If your road layout sucks, so will your goods production. It's surprisingly easy

for your economy to come crashing down due to something as seemingly menial as poor building placement. When there's an enemy settlement on the map, things can get tricky as you balance your economic progression with your military might.

There's a ton of depth in this game, too much to fit onto this page. It's definitely not for everyone with its slow pace and complex management aspects. If you enjoy the more recent *Settlers* titles and you're interested in delving into the series' past, however, then have a go at *The Settlers II*. It's only \$9.99 and it's considered by many to be the best game in the series. **NAG**

Disney

TRON

L E G A C Y



"TRON: Legacy" is a 3D high-tech adventure set in a digital world that's unlike anything ever captured on the big screen. Sam Flynn (Garrett Hedlund), a rebellious 27-year-old, is haunted by the mysterious disappearance of his father Kevin Flynn (Oscar® and Golden Globe®-winner Jeff Bridges), a man once known as the world's leading video-game developer. When Sam investigates a strange signal sent from the old Flynn's Arcade—a signal that could only come from his father—he finds himself pulled into a digital world where Kevin has been trapped for 20 years. With the help of the fearless warrior Quorra (Olivia Wilde), father and son embark on a life-or-death journey across a visually-stunning cyber universe—a universe created by Kevin himself that has become far more advanced with never-before-imagined vehicles, weapons, landscapes and a ruthless villain who will stop at nothing to prevent their escape. Presented in Disney Digital 3D™ and scored by Grammy Award®-winning electronic music duo Daft Punk

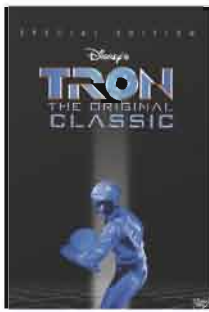
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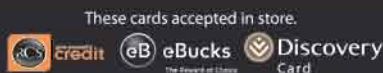
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Light Peak launches as Thunderbolt



Intel's Thunderbolt technology (formerly codenamed "Light Peak") is finally coming to market through a technical collaboration with Apple, and will be available first on Apple's new line of MacBook Pro laptop computers. Thunderbolt is a high-speed connection technology in a single cable, running at 10Gbps, allowing you to transfer a full-length HD movie in less than 30 seconds, and backup and restore data in less than half the time.

"With Thunderbolt technology, Intel has delivered innovative technology to help professionals and consumers

work faster and more easily with their growing collection of media content, from music to HD movies. We've taken the vision of simple, fast transfer of content between PCs and devices, and made it a reality," said Mooly Eden, general manager, PC Client Group, Intel.

Thunderbolt technology is compatible with existing DisplayPort displays and adapters. Intel is working with the industry on a range of Thunderbolt technology-enabled products including computers, displays, storage devices, audio/video devices, cameras, docking stations and more.



iSound ice Compact Speakers

These funky little cube-shaped LED lit speakers are compatible with iPod, iPhone, and all other audio devices that use 3.5mm audio jack.

R449 / www.bowline.co.za

DID YOU KNOW?

Samsung is in the process of developing **prescription 3D glasses** that will make the 3D viewing experience available to those with impaired eye-sight.

LOLWAAT?! //

"National Sleep Foundation says millions get less sleep because of technology"

They say: According to a US study, playing video games late at night is one of the main factors of sleeplessness.

We say: Red Bull FTW! HTFU people.



Thermaltake Toughpower 1350W

If you have a multi-GPU setup then you need one of these. It claims to deliver 1350W continuous power 24/7 @ 50% with up to 91% efficiency under real world load conditions.

R3,699 / www.corex.co.za

/ tech Q&A /

Send your hardware questions to lauren@nag.co.za.

HARDRIVE

From: Ilyaz Mohamed

"I would like your opinion on purchasing a hard drive. I want to get either a 1TB Western Digital Caviar blue or green. The blue has a 32MB cache and operates at 7200RPM, while the green has a 64MB cache but operates at 5400RPM. Any advice would be appreciated."

Neo: Buy the Blue, rotation speed will mean more to you than cache.

NEW STUFF

From: Janharm Labuschagne

"I want to upgrade my PC, (particularly my CPU and motherboard) but I wasn't sure if I should wait for the new stuff (new Intel CPUs, new Gigabyte/Asus motherboards etc...) that apparently comes out early next year? And also any suggestions on what I should get if I want something mid-range that can still pack a punch?"

Neo: There's never a right time to upgrade - buy P67 now and it'll last you a long time, right now is as good as any other time. As for what will pack a punch refer to our Buyers Guide article in the December issue of the magazine (page 82). It has a breakdown in

price of what you should be looking for and at what prices from both AMD and Intel.

3D GAMES

From: Eswee Engelbrecht

"So in spite of the bad reviews and let downs I've read and heard of 'Avatar the game' I went and got it for PC two days ago. Something that was so good in a movie had to somehow at least have a few good moments in the game. Now I'm not a picky gamer, I play games because they are games, so on my second play through I'm still in it because of the multi-endings. Anyway that's not the point. I want to play it in 3D, the option is there and I got the glasses from the movie lol. It's not working though. How do I set this up?"

Mosh Pit



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Thrustmaster 3 in 1 Dual Trigger Rumble Force

Compatible with your PS2, PS3 and PC, this vibrating gamepad features rubber grips, dual triggers, and mapping and presets.

R499 / www.bowline.co.za



Genius EasyPen M406

If you like to draw or sketch you may want to get yourself this 4" x 6" multimedia tablet. It uses a cordless battery-free pen.

R629 / www.axiz.co.za

Thanks, I hope it's not too expensive."

Neo: You'll need a 3D Display and the appropriate glasses to be able to play in 3D. Or you can opt for the anaglyph glasses and use software 3D but that is a terrible experience at best and you'll still need to make or buy Anaglyph (red and yellow/cyan) glasses.

GTX 560 OR HD6950?

From: Alden Geldenhuys

"Sup Neo! Decided it's time to donate the old PC to the parents as a media centre, so I went basically bought a whole new PC. I have not bought the GPU as yet, as I'm still deciding. I'd really appreciate your input. It's between a NVIDIA GTX560 and a HD6950? They seem to be priced

quite closely together as far as I can tell. From the benchmarks I found they seem quite similar, although I really like that extra GB all the HD6950s seem to have. I'll be gaming at 1920x1080, so which one would you recommend?"
Thanx man :)

Neo: The 1 extra GB of the 6950 (2GB) won't make much difference, however you can get even better value from the 1GB version. It's generally faster than the GTX560.

WHAT THE REAL DREAM MACHINE LOOKS LIKE. YEAH.

From: Kobus

"Had a really boring meeting just now and this is what happened to keep from nodding off.

The Real Dream Machine (some existential analyses potential in that name, but...whatever)
Screen: Korean BH0MS. (Big Huge with Zero MilliSecond response time.) Also has rip off covers, like on an F1 Racer helmet. Sometimes you have to play, even though you have the world's worst cold. Sneeze, rip of the plastic cover, repeat. Tissue holder option added.

Keyboard: One can only go with the SASC1000. (Super Automatic SpellCorrecty 1000). Has pre-programmed macro that adds beautiful flowery words in all mails to NAG. It's on a shiny pink button, which looks like a cats...uhmm...

Mouse: TwinFunction 1 Million Dpi Nuance Special. Function 1 - Like, mouse type stuff. Function 2 - Automatically understands what

New ROG gaming products

ASUS revealed some new gaming gear from the Republic of Gamers at CeBIT. Included in their line-up was the ROG Rampage III Black Edition motherboard, ROG Matrix GTX580, and ROG G Series notebooks. The new ROG G53 notebook features a deadzone-free 3D display that can be viewed without the need for special 3D glasses. By combining 3D lenticular lens technology with the AUO 'naked eye' eye-tracking system, the G53 screen renders full 3D images that can be viewed from any angle for a more comfortable viewing experience. Both 2D and 3D modes can operate on the screen at the same time too, so on-screen text remains clear at all times.



ROCCAT launches Talk technology



Unveiled at CeBIT in Germany, the ROCCAT Isku - Illuminated Gaming Keyboard sports two brand new technologies: ROCCAT Talk and EasyShift[+]. The ROCCAT Talk protocol allows mouse and keyboard to talk to each other by utilising EasyShift[+] functions on the mouse or pressing the keyboard's EasyShift[+] key. Basically the Isku keyboard features 3 EasyShift[+] Zones (M1-M5, 20 EasyZone keys, T1-T3), and in the press release it states that "EasyShift[+] and the three thumbster keys offer a total of 36 macro functions all perfectly positioned in and around the WASD zone, making them very easy to reach. By default, the Caps Lock key

which is of no interest to any gamer is configured as the EasyShift[+] key, but macro keys M1-M5 and thumbster keys T1-T3 can also be used. The 36 easy-to-reach macro keys offer a total of up to 180 directly executable functions which can be saved in 5 profiles."

Although it sounds quite complex, in a nutshell you'll be able to easily execute critical functions such as EasyAim by pressing a key on the keyboard. The devices apparently communicate lag-free so you should see instant in-game responses. The new ROCCAT Talk protocol is already included in the ROCCAT Kone[+] and will be fully functional with the ROCCAT Isku when it launches in Q2 2011.

Know Your Technology

/ CPU CACHE /

This is the memory usually inside the CPU (on die these days) that is used to store frequently used instructions and data. This is data that is also available in the main system memory but much quicker to access on the cache, as it's significantly faster and closer. These days cache is broken up into Instruction and Data Cache at various levels. Typically from Level 1 to Level 3 (for Data Cache only) in x86 derived CPUs.

/ CACHE MISS /

A failed attempt to read or write data in the local cache which results in main memory access. Instruction cache miss read stalls all things down the pipeline within the current execution pipeline. This is usually the most costly cache miss there is. Data cache misses are also costly but less so because instructions not dependant on the data cache being read can continue to execute. In theory the larger the cache the less likely you are to encounter a cache miss, but this has diminishing returns past a specific point for a particular architecture.

/ BRANCH PREDICTOR /

Digital circuitry within most if not all modern day CPUs that try and guess which branch will execute before it can be known for sure. This is done to improve the flow in the instruction pipeline hence improving performance significantly. Branch predictors these days are highly advanced with hit rates well above 95% with some in desktop CPUs claiming better figures than 99%. Miss-predictions and cache misses can prove to be catastrophic for CPU performance hence branch predictors can get very detailed and technical over and above other CPU systems.

/ CACHE COHERENCE /

The consistency of data stored in local caches of a shared resources typically main memory. This is of the utmost importance because problems may arise when data inconsistency is introduced. If one core or thread rather alters what is in the global/shared Data or instruction cache without other threads being aware made aware, this will invalidate all processes that rely on that data. Cache coherence is intended to maintain and manage such inconsistencies between cache and memory. This is of particular importance in multi core or multi-CPU systems.

/ tech Q&A /

you want fixed when you bang it on the desk in frustration, and then fixes whatever it is. Even when the phone rings when you are on TeamTalk, halfway through a three hour WoW instance. Just stops the phone ringing. Bam! Phone stops ringing and Supreme Commander stops jerking.
Case: DairyMaid Icebox Extreme Logicmate Etherconnect. With actual dry ice receptacles. Fans are like, so dot matrix. Logicmate feature prohibits any piece of hardware going in that is actually end of life, but the pimply dude at the shop insisted is not. Etherconnect facility lets you

know by way of Psi waves that you are about to buy redundant k@k, even when you're still in the shop. Can be adapted to do the same for games via the "Artwork vs. content debulshittifyer" add-on. Automatically detects and burns anything that resembles P55 architecture.

Power Supply: OneUpMagicGenerator. It's actually an external power generator, running on Diesel that you can crank up, seeing as anything else you buy will be 40 watts underpowered for the new GPU you just bought. Power cables from the supply to the MoBo will be 400 metres long, as opposed to 40 microns, which seems to be the standard these days.

Motherboard: JAsus PWhatever Ultra Bypass. The JAsus MoBo knows what the marketing

department's roll out strategy is and bypasses it, by unconstraining everything. Marketing Strategy being "let's make it so our clients can only ever buy outdated boards, seeing as we're holding back the bus speeds and things we are actually capable of producing right now."

Processor: Autobalance Intel CoreNoOption. Thoroughly tired of always buying the middle child of the range, I opt for this, as there is just one CPU and it stays current for at least two years. To assist developers who seem to be baffled by all those core things on it, it comes out with a PowerBalance bracelet, which figures it all out for you by magic.

GPU: NoXNoBSCcompact GTi1 6v DOHC TDi Mark IV. Apart from being (according to Marketing) the

Quote

"Well we have just released a new version of NVIDIA BIOS Editor (NiBiTor) software. NiBiTor allows graphics card enthusiasts, or the hardcore overclockers to have full control over some advanced features and functionality found on firmware of supporting cards. And doing so users gain some extra performance, enable certain hidden features, tweaking memory latencies, provide extensive information, adapt bootup settings, changing fan speed options and/or get extra stability on their NVIDIA based graphics accelerators."

NiBiTor is a lightweight NVIDIA GeForce/Quadro BIOS file manipulation utility that lets to fine-tune your GeForce or Quadro graphics card at the BIOS-level. Version 6.01 is now available for download.

By the Numb3rs

v1.1.0

3DMark Vantage has just received a new update. V1.1.0* brings with it some changes: Trial Edition is no more and the Basic Edition is now free. So you can put your GPUs through all four of the main tests, view your scores online, and compare them with others on the ORB. Why they didn't just do this in the first place is beyond us. *On the May NAG DVD.

Snippets

LG recently launched their **22" and 23" LED-backlit IPS monitors** in South Africa. Ideal for playing games, watching movies, and editing video and graphics, they are now available for R1,999 for the IPS236V and R1,899 for the IPS226V.

Corsair announced a **USB 3.0 Upgrade Kit for their Obsidian Series 800D and 700D**

full-tower PC cases. The kit consists of a replacement front I/O panel that includes a USB 3.0 port and a wiring harness that connects to an available USB 3.0 port on the customer's motherboard or add-in card.

Gigabyte announced a new wireless gaming mouse at CeBIT in Germany last month. The **Aivia M8600 is ambidextrous** and can be used for 100 hours on full battery.

Mad Catz and Microsoft

will be releasing a range of licensed, co-branded audio headphones under **Mad Catz's Tritton brand and Microsoft's Xbox 360 brand**. This is the first time that wireless, licensed and co-branded headphones will be available for Xbox 360.

MSI products announcements at CES included the new **G Series notebooks**: GT780, GT680, GE620 and GR620. All models will have the second generation Intel Core i7 quad

core processor, and the GT780 and GT680 will be sporting NVIDIA GeForce GTX 500 Series and 400 Series graphics cards.

LG has launched the world's largest FULL LED 3D TV. The **72-inch LZ9700** also enables video streaming from YouTube and photos via Google's free web photo service, Picasa. Guess how much it costs – R249,999.99. No, we're not kidding.

Intel has made some changes

to its high-end LGA1366 Core i7 processor lineup. The **Core i7-990X Extreme Edition** displaces the existing i7-980X Extreme Edition, which will gradually be phased out.

SteelSeries Siberia v2 headsets will soon be available for PS3. The **SteelSeries LiveMix** features, which are located on the cord along with an in-line AudioMixer, will give you options to control independent voice and game volumes.

Thermaltake debuts mid-tower gaming chassis

Another product to make its debut at CeBIT was the Thermaltake Chaser MK-1 XB (extra big) ATX mid tower chassis. It is extra wide allowing for enough space to install particularly big and powerful CPU coolers of up to 18 cm height. Other features include a water-cooling ready design, a hot-swap docking station for 2.5" SSDs or 3.5" HDDs, and an advanced cable management system through the use of grooves which have been strategically placed on the back of the case.

HD 6990 for hardcore gaming



Coming soon from ASUS is the HD 6990 Graphics Card. It features 4GB of GDDR5 memory, ASUS Voltage Tweak overvolting, and supports AMD Eyefinity (on up to five screens) and HD3D. Twin HD

6970 cores work in tandem on a single board to ensure maximized 2-way CrossFireX performance by default. The card can be paired with another HD 6990 for easy 4-way CrossFireX.

"Most Powerful Card in the World for as Long as This ad Runs in this Magazine" it actually has some nifty features: NoX – A layer of nanobots on the card, the box and all associated documentation prevents the word Extreme or the letter X from appearing anywhere on it; NoBS – This same layer of nanobots erases any pointless stats that mean nothing to me, just tell that it will make me happy when Crysis 2 comes out; It does not look like and weigh the same as a BMW engine bay or a Tron lightcycle. It's hidden, so who cares how sleek it looks. It's not going to fly somewhere.

HDD: SilentHill Lightspeed. This is your normal very high speed HDD, but differs from others in that it doesn't make any noise before it dies. This

forces me to backup frequently, as I know there will be no warning. Self discipline makes up for many faults in one's upbringing.

Memory: 16 GB Dragon Memory. Called Dragon because it's be dragin' Windows 7 32-bit into the 21st Century, bloodywell forcing it to use more than 4GB.

Sound: Killerbot SoundSaber. Couple of nice features on this one ... This soundcard automatically detects when you put the headphones on and adjusts the levels if it was somehow set to max by someone or something. It detects inane banter on TeamTalk apps and shuts it out. It determines the age of people on TeamTalk, through a feature called Age Detect and lowers the volume for anyone younger than

15. An add-on, called Yodel Buster, allows it to equal out voice frequency spikes from dudes experiencing heavy puberty. It can tell useful info from opinions, killing the latter immediately. This is especially handy when used in conjunction with Age Detect. It will kill any singing or weird noises on TeamTalk. This feature has proven to completely mute anyone from Centurion on any game. An additional feature allows it to react to any of the above instances by sending a jolt of electricity to the talking party. The voltage is just enough to pop a pimple on that person's face. (Which seems to be the common denominator, according to a leaked development report).

Cost: Not sure, but worth every cent." **NAG**

Cyborg R.A.T. 9



[info]

RRP:
R1,112.81
Website:
www.rebeltech.co.za

[technical]

DPI range:
25-5600dpi (in 25dpi steps)
Acceleration:
50G
Polling Rate:
Dynamic up to 1000Hz
Tracking Speed:
Up to 6m/sec

- // Always On
- // Up to 9 hours continuous gaming,
- // Up to 4 days normal use
- // PTFE "Slick" Feet

[summary]

Pros:
// Highly customisable
// Looks great
Cons:
// A bit bulky
// Won't fit every hand
Alternatives:
Logitech G9x



Roccat Kone [+]



Finding that perfect mouse can be a challenge. Some are too small, too big, too wide or have the wrong kind of grip for you. Mad Catz feels your pain, and with this wireless version of their range-topping gaming mouse, will give you that MacGyver feeling every time you boot up your PC.

LOOK MA, NO WIRES!

/1/ The R.A.T. 7 was wired; this is wireless. The **receiver unit** (with its own blissfully tangle-resistant cord) doubles as a charging station, and with **two eight-hour battery units** included in the box, you can be sure you'll never be left paralysed when the enemy comes knocking.

WHAT ELSE HAVE YOU GOT?

Using what Saitek calls Cyborg Dynamic Ergonomics, both the **/2/ palm and pinky rests** are replaceable, with three options for the pinky (smooth, textured and winged) and two for the palm (no winged option, but there is a spare smooth grip).

/3/ The **palm rest** can be extended

by up to 20mm to ensure even the biggest of hands is comfortable. It can even be removed altogether if you're confident about your claw-style grip.

/4/ The **thumb rest** can be adjusted in two ways: outwards and up/down.

BUTTONS, BUTTONS, MY BUTTONS!

In addition to the regular buttons, there is a **/5/ resolution selection switch** (predefine four different dpi settings), **/6/ mode selection switch** (predefine three different sets of settings and/or button macros) and the **/7/ precision aiming toggle**. With the precision aiming button held down, the mouse's response slows to a predefined

percentage of its total speed, making it perfect for planting that pin-point headshot from across the map. There's no need to switch to an entirely different dpi setting any longer.

WEIGHT OF THE WORLD

/8/ The RAT 9 is big, it's also fairly heavy without any of the **seven additional 6g weights** loaded in, but the feel of the mouse is that it's solid and well constructed. The **aluminium frame** isn't afraid to show itself, much like many of the other internal components, but the industrial look doesn't lead to the mouse feeling messy. It also looks a hell of a lot like it belongs in *The Transformers*, and for that it gains bonus brownie points. **NAG**

That's enough now Mr. Console



I had been talking recently with several people about the joys of console gaming and how this generation's ecosystems had revolutionized gaming as we know it. I will not go into the details of that conversation, but what is important is that we came to discuss the future of all gaming platforms and, despite all the great things we envisioned, and speculated upon (read, hoped for) we eventually arrived at the discussion of console graphics.

A few short years ago this would have been a glossed over topic, but now in 2011 it dominates the entire conversation and in the end it's very apparent at just how archaic these systems that were once next generation have become. We are not talking a few generations behind the equivalent PC hardware where all these consoles borrow heavily from. No, this is as many as 8 generations or revisions behind what is now available on the PC, and by this time next year it will likely be 10 generations.

"I may be completely off the mark here, but it should be apparent to anybody by now that their games on either console are never going to look any better."

Logic would suggest that if one hasn't heard of any rumours or contracts being signed with any would-be hardware contributors, that we are unlikely to see a new Xbox or PlayStation until 2015 or so. By then, your average smart phone will have better internals than both these consoles. This is understandable from the manufacturer's point of view. The longer these tragically underpowered systems stay in production, the more money they make, and from just a financial perspective these will cost virtually nothing to manufacture, which in turn increases bottom lines. This is easy enough to understand and a sound business decision given that they're in the business of making money above all else.

I may be completely off the mark here, but it should be apparent to anybody by now that their games on either console are never going to look any better. That's it as far as visual fidelity and pixel richness is concerned. The better the development tools the more apparent the lack of power becomes on a platform. By 2015 the average gaming computer (I am talking average here not a budget box that costs less than any console) will likely house an 8 to 12 thread host CPU and a graphics processor about 4x as powerful as today's GTX590/6990 graphics cards. That is, between the host CPU and the GPU you'll have about 16TFlops of computing power at the least.

To put that in perspective, the RSX in the PS3 can achieve a maximum of 400 GFlops (0.4TFlops Single-precision) and slightly more on the Xenos GPU in the 360 when looking at the graphics synthesizer alone. In comparison a single HD6970 GPU will provide you with up to 2.7TFlops of computing power (single-precision) with significantly better accessibility to that power courtesy of the tools available which are superior than what both consoles have at their disposal. Easily put that is almost 7 times the power. However let's not compare a high-end part to any console as those will just continue to increase the gap at an alarming rate. Let's take for instance the cheapest and slowest GPU in NVIDIA's 400 series which is the GT430, a half height card of diminutive size and power draw (65 Watt's which is about that of the Xbox GPU). Even this little next-to-useless card (in a gaming context that is) delivers not only a higher fill-rate than either console. If nothing above makes sense and you're wondering what I'm on about, ask yourself, "Why are we playing sub-standard definition games on our consoles in 2011?"

Neo Sibeko



Display

Samsung P2770HD

R5,198 / www.samsung.co.za



OS drive

OCZ Agility 2 60GB SSD

R1,699 / www.ocz.com



Processor

Intel Core i7 980X

R8,999 / www.intel.com



Motherboard

GIGABYTE GA-X58A-UD9

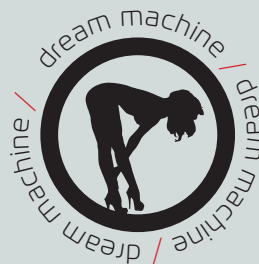
R6,499 / www.gigabyte.com



Memory

Corsair Dominator GT 2000C8

R2,299 / www.corsair.com



Dream Machine

The lust-have Rig that dreams are made of

With a funky new layout for the Dream Machine we decided to add a couple more items to make your ultimate gaming rig just that little but more über awesome. The three new additions this month are a mousemat, 2.1 speakers and 5.1 surround sound speakers. We've also updated the case since our previous winner, the Ikonik Ra X10 Liquid, is no longer available worldwide. Enjoy the extra drool space.

TOTAL: ±R52,534

Storage drive

Seagate Barracuda XT 2TB

R1,699 / www.seagate.com



Power

Thermaltake Toughpower 1.5KW

R3,760 / www.thermaltake.com



Keyboard

Logitech G19

R1,599 / www.logitech.com



Mouse

Roccat Kone[+]

R599 / www.roccat.org





It just takes one weak link to cripple a Sandy Bridge

How many of you have built sand castles on the beach? I know I have, and still do. I may be in my early 20's now, but there is a certain childish appeal to sitting on the beach for hours with nothing but a plastic bucket and spade, slowly crafting away at your masterpiece. Mine were never very detailed or technically accurate mind you, but that didn't matter much because one thing was certain. The tide would come in, small waves of water would lap at my sand castle, and eventually they'd find a small weakness in the castles defences. In my case it was usually my lack of a moat, and very thin castle walls, and no gate. In Intel's case, it was a few low spec transistors...

Intel's new Sandy Bridge 6 series motherboards are

"The problem in a nutshell is all P67 motherboards designed to work with the new Sandy Bridge CPU's from Intel suffer from a degrading Sata ports problem. Only the older Sata 3GB/s ports are affected by this, but in most cases this includes most of the ports on your board."

suffering much the same fate as my sandy castles, swept away due to one small imperfection that could have been easily avoided.

The problem in a nutshell (at the time of writing) is all P67 motherboards designed to work with the new Sandy Bridge CPU's from Intel suffer from a degrading Sata ports problem. Only the older Sata 3GB/s ports are affected by this, but in most cases this includes most of the ports on your board. This is due to some genius at Intel (well probably a team of them) using transistors that aren't capable of sustained operation at the voltages required, and the results are ports that will experience performance degradation over a period of time, followed by potential damage to any hardware attached to them. So in a nutshell, every Sandy Bridge board sold in the first half of Q1 2011 has a major problem that affects most of their users.

What this means for you is the following. Your nice new Sandy Bridge board is perfect, except for the Sata 3GB/s ports. These ports will degrade after a while and might take your hardware with them. Don't use them, and if you are, stop it.

Intel, how could this possibly have happened? Sandy Bridge promised the world and more, and actually delivered on it. Power consumption was down, performance was up, overclockability was way up, this was the chipset/CPU combo I (and many others) had been waiting for! Now I'll have to hold off upgrading until the new boards are in stock, because let's face it, I'm not spending money on what I know is a faulty product. I'm disappointed at your lack of effective quality assurance testing, allowing 8 million+ motherboards with the fault to be shipped before finding a solution really is sub-standard and not at all what I expected from "Chipzilla". What I'm trying to say is, hurry up and fix the motherboards, I want to upgrade from LGA1366 to Sandy Bridge!

At the same time I must applaud AMD for their tongue in cheek jab at Intel on Valentine's Day. If you haven't seen it yet, Google "I heard Sandy. B broke your heart...". Well played AMD, I had a good chuckle and I'm sure much of the enthusiast world did too.

Derrick Cramer



Graphics
ASUS GTX580 DirectCU II
R5,999 / za.asus.com

Case

Coolermaster HAF X 942
R1,899 / www.sonicinformed.co.za

NEW



Sound

ASUS Xonar Xense
R2,799 / za.asus.com



Speakers 2.1

Logitech Z623
R1,799 / www.logitech.com

NEW



Speakers 5.1

Logitech Z-5500 Digital
R4,999 / www.logitech.com

NEW



NEW

Mousemat

Roccat Alumic
R399 / www.roccat.org

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
(1,920x1,200)

HDD: 320GB SATA2

OS: Windows 7 Ultimate 64-bit



Big on Sound

You can sing the praises of headphones and their immersion factor all you want, but when the time comes to bring the house down with some window-rattling audio, your plastic headgear won't mean zip. Also - we dare you to try use those headphones to ensure romantic ambience when you're trying to enjoy some alone time with a girl/guy/Facebook profile picture/whatever. You're going to need speakers. We're here to help you choose the right ones.

Speakers used on gaming PC's and, to some degree, on consoles, are probably one of the most overlooked aspects of a gaming setup these days. Too many users buy only the best hardware but skimp on the speaker system. Very few people use a discreet audio card of late and, as one can imagine, even fewer people buy a good set of speakers to use even with those sound cards.

There may be many reasons for this, but we'd like to think it's because our auditory sensitivity has been dulled down gradually since the mass acceptance of MP3s and other portable compressed formats. Not only are these compressed formats what we by and large listen to on a daily basis, but even our games have audio tracks and samples stored in similarly compressed file types. In other words, as the recording quality decreases (or rather the playback), our hearing is adjusted accordingly to the point where some are unable to tell between average bit-rate portable formats against uncompressed CD quality audio.

With that said though, there just isn't much that one can do about this situation, and it looks to stay the same or get worse going forward. The only way to make sure you enjoy any auditory experience as intended or as close to that is to invest in a high-quality speaker system that will outlast all your other PC

upgrades. This is essentially the reason for this roundup. You may only see 10 units here, but we tested more than that and documented our findings as briefly as we could to shoot right to the essence of each set.

Some sets are purely for the budget conscious who just can't afford to pay that much for a speaker system. Those users we would strongly recommend look to a set of headphones instead. Indeed headphones can be very tiring and just downright uncomfortable after a while, but do keep in mind that listening to sub-standard audio, especially at elevated levels, can cause strain as well. So only consider the budget sets if you really can't afford to spend money on the more expensive systems. One could be forgiven for thinking that the difference in audio quality is between the best budget set and the worst high-end speaker system, but that isn't so as it is very easy to tell the sets apart, even from the first listen. So pick your speakers carefully, as you'd rather buy once and have the set earn its keep over years rather than having to outgrow your speaker system every four months, which will inevitably happen with the budget units.

2.1 AND 5.1

We split the speakers up into two categories - 2.1 channel and 5.1 channel. We then tasked Neo with the testing of the 2.1 sets and Geoff with the 5.1

systems. They each had a short word to say before blasting their neighbours with some acoustic entertainment.

Neo: Testing of these speakers was a very subjective exercise and given the time constraints I was working with, chances are some of the units presented here are little better than I may have perceived them, but this should hold for all sets, so the difference in quality would most likely remain even after weeks of testing of each set. It may even be that the pricier sets would sound even better with the worst ones making it apparent how inappropriate they are for gaming or casual music listening.

Geoff: I'm hardly what could be considered an audiophile. I enjoy listening to decent quality MP3s and playing games with loud explosions, however, so a decent sound system is important enough to be an issue. If you're a typical gamer, chances are that it's important to you too, but you might be disinclined to break the bank with a purchase. You probably also only use onboard sound, and these days, with motherboard technology where it is, that's perfectly reasonable for 90% of gamers. The 5.1 surround sound systems I tested represent a basic overview of what is available, but I've included the competition-destroying Logitech Z-5500 because it's still better than anything in its class despite its age.

Hercules XPS 2.0 10 Gloss

RRP: R359.99 / Website: www.bowline.co.za

This was the first budget set I tested and it was a little surprising at just how loud it was. The set quickly reminds you that it's a budget system and for that you're rewarded with tinny bass which is a thud at the best of times. Play the set for long enough at high volumes and it starts to distort everything. However, having said that, at low volumes they do produce acceptable sound for the most part. Gaming performance is as I expected from such a speaker system as it never suffers from the same issues as when listening to audio. This is probably a good thing because if you're looking for speakers to use for regular music listening you should probably look at getting a set of headphones instead. With MIC and Headphone jacks in the front and a basic volume knob, they really are basic speakers and at 2.5 watts R.M.S you shouldn't expect earth shattering sound from them.

Power: 2.5watts R.M.S
Frequency: N/A
Inputs: Stereo min-jack



/ Bottom line /

Decent gaming performance, but tinny bass and distortion at high volumes make these less than ideal for music.

Genius SP-M200 2.0ch

RRP: R139 / Website: www.axiz.co.za

This set was tested after a cool off period listening to my reference audio setup. While this set is still a budget speaker system, it does sound notably better than the Hercules XPS 2.0. The drivers are a little bigger and they do deliver a better sound in everything. I was surprised at just how loud these were for their size. There's a Tone setting in addition to the regular volume one, which is pretty useless given that it always seems to make the sound worse when changed from anything other than the reference position. Gaming performance is a little less stringent than audio and movies, and once again much like the Hercules set, these are passable not excelling in anything one way or another. In the budget range, these are probably the best you can buy right now.

Power: 6watts R.M.S
Frequency: 200 Hz – 18 KHz
Inputs: Stereo min-jack



/ Bottom line /

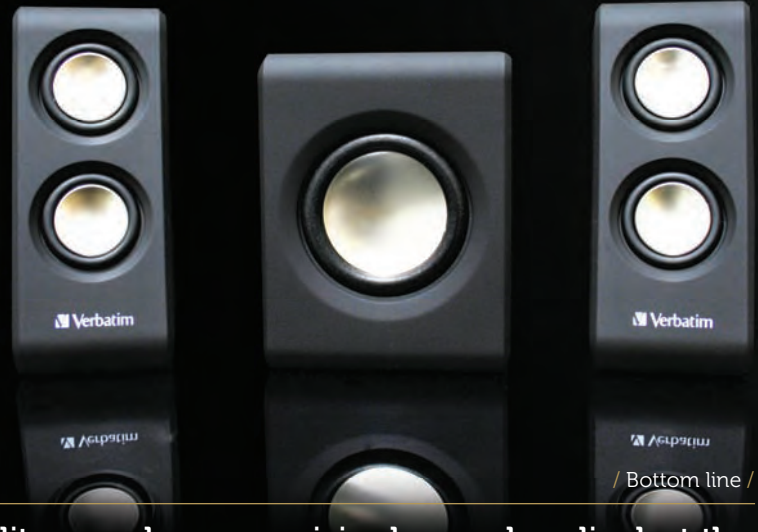
They're not bad, but they're far from great. If you're not expecting miracles, these work just fine.

Verbatim 2.1 Multimedia Portable Speaker System

RRP: R399 / Website: www.incredible.co.za

This is the smallest speaker set in our roundup around. It's a three piece speaker system with the most ludicrously small sub-woofer. They are labelled as being portable, but there's really nothing portable about a 3-piece set with so much wiring. So these are best left at home where they belong plugged into an iPod. The box claims a powerful bass from the "sub" however given the dimensions of the sub it is near impossible to deliver that bass, and the satellites actually outshine the sub delivering rather pleasant audio at reasonable volume levels. The sub however distorted at virtually all volume levels regardless of the source input. What is good about this set is that it shines in the looks department, being better-looking than the other budget sets we tested, but sadly it was the poorest performing one, coming across as gimmicky more than anything else.

Power: 2watts R.M.S
Frequency: 120Hz - 20 KHz
Inputs: Stereo min-jack



/ Bottom line /

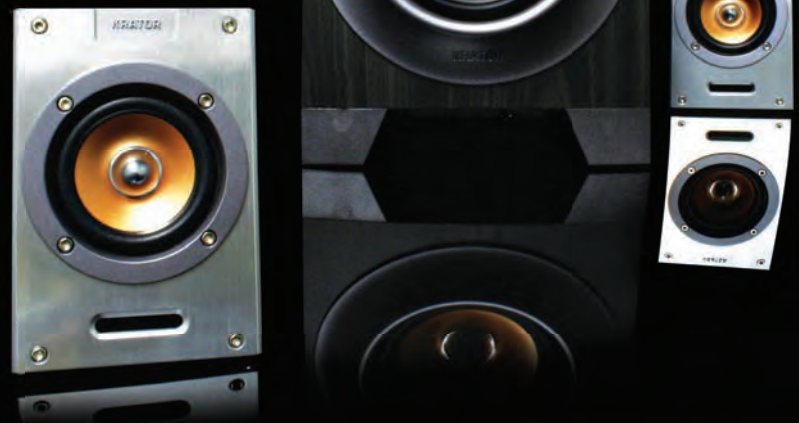
The satellites produce surprisingly good audio, but the subwoofer sucks. It helps that the aesthetics are cool.

Krator Neso 02 N2-21030

RRP: R650 / Website: www.rebeltech.co.za

This set was the first high-end set I tested and despite the unconvincing packaging I had high hopes for it. To that end it did not disappoint, delivering solid distortion-free bass with well-matched satellites that handled all the audio streams with the finesse one would expect from a significantly more expensive unit. The low tones do tend to sound a little hollow at first but it's something one can grow accustomed to. The biggest issue with this set, however, is that if you play from a sub-standard source the system sounds equally bad, and there's no generic setup you can use that allows you to play games, listen to music and watch movies without having to adjust the bass level, or even more than that the levels on your sound card. This can be quite annoying because the optimum setup for each use is so small with this set you're constantly fidgeting. That aside this is a respectable system that is certainly worth the purchase if you're looking for good, clean and solid sound reproduction across a variety of uses. You'll have to spend a lot of time finding the right setup, but once you do, it's worth the effort.

Power: 30watts R.M.S
Frequency: 40 Hz - 20 KHz
Inputs: Stereo min-jack/
Two-RCA



/ Bottom line /

This set offers up solid all-round performance with good audio output. It does require some tweaking for optimum results, however.

ASUS recommends Windows 7.

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Kworld D14+ Dark Pyramid

RRP: R299 / Website: www.corex.co.za

I can't be sure what the intention was behind the design of this set of speakers because, despite what the box claims, pyramids are not the best geometric shapes for propagating sound. This is a 4-piece system that uses a central control console, which allows you to plug in a set of headphones as well controlling the volume for the entire system. Given that we are talking about 2.1 speaker systems here, it really is unnecessary, as all these could have been added to either the left or right speaker. The first thing one will notice about this unit is that the sub woofer has a small 4" downward facing driver which isn't good at all. It distorts and rattles at virtually all useful volume levels and with the satellites providing some of the tinniest mid-range in all the sets, the entire experience isn't pleasurable. With a very narrow frequency response starting at 80Hz through to 18 KHz you'll lose some very low tone bass in games or when you're watching movies or listening to music.

Power: 14watts R.M.S
Frequency: 80Hz – 18 KHz
Inputs: Stereo min-jack



/ Bottom line /

Simply put, this speaker set isn't great. It's really cheap though, which might make it worth a look.

Genius SW-G2.1 1250

RRP: R479 / Website: www.axiz.co.za

The Genius set is one of the better looking units in the round up and would look great around any gaming setup. More than that however it does sound okay given some of the other products it's competing with. The basic specifications do suggest it is better than the Krator Neso 02 set, but this isn't true because the S/N ratio is not as good and the frequency response is nowhere near what the Neso 02 unit can cope with. Regardless, this is the only 4-piece system I tested. There really isn't a need for the main control unit as it offers nothing that couldn't have been placed inside one of the satellites. Gaming is where this set actually sounds best; the bass here in games is usually not as subtle or as sensitive as it would be when listening to some dynamic music, so the solid thump of punches and gun fire is reproduced very well on such a set. The one major concern with this unit however is the piercing mid-range that is rather harsh on the ears devoid of any warmth, but having said that, if you can overlook that there's some fun to be had with this set.

Power: 38watts R.M.S
Frequency: 58Hz – 20 KHz
Inputs: Stereo min-jack



/ Bottom line /

There's decent gaming performance to be found here, but some minor niggles hurt this set's general audio performance.

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Aivia™

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- 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



GAMING MOUSE



M6980 Macro Gaming Mouse

- 2000 DPI laser gaming sensor
- GHOST macro engine with 8KB on board memory
- Gaming-grade 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

www.gigabyte.com

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Fax: (021) 555 7187

Durban:
Tel: (031) 398 8839
Fax: (031) 571 8865

Port Elizabeth:
Tel: (041) 398 7082
Fax: (041) 398 7135

Bloemfontein:
Tel: (051) 430 1144
Fax: (051) 430 1144

Divoom xForce 5

RRP: R920 / Website: www.esquire.co.za

From the sheer weight and dimensions of these speakers, I was already expecting something above average, and indeed the xForce 5 set is anything but average. It may not look special in any way but the sound it delivers can be considered well above average, if not great. There's so much to say about this speaker system it would be impossible to get through it all, however the highlight has to be the dual ported 8" long throw subwoofer. This not only serves as the main console for the satellites, but really moves the set into a new class in audio fidelity. Sure enough, it's not the most taught sub-woofer you'll find and it isn't as quick to respond as you'd expect in a very high-end Hi-Fi speaker system, but its close enough that most users won't be able to tell the difference. The window rattling bass is excellent for gaming, while versatile enough to handle most types of music. While I wasn't moved by the two satellites, they are adequate, and best of all, you can swap them out for better ones as they are standard spring clip terminal wires. So should you need better speakers you have that option (provided you can match the speaker rating). Overall this is the 2nd best set I tested.

Power: 50watts R.M.S
Frequency: 20Hz-20 KHz
Inputs: Dual Aux (RCAx4)



/ Bottom line /

Excellent bass and good all-round audio make these Divooms a very attractive option. They're not the best 2.1s here though.

Logitech Z623

RRP: R1,799 / Website: www.logitech.com

No roundup would be complete without the premier speaker brand in computer/gaming audio. Logitech's Z623 speakers are as you'd expect THX certified which may not mean much to some but actually carries a lot of weight. The THX certification process is rather stringent and passing it means the set has done well enough to receive the endorsement. As such the sound reproduction is unequalled in this roundup. Not only did the speaker system deliver accordingly, it superseded my expectations. The bass may not be as earth moving as that of the Divoom xForce 5 set, but it's much more precise, and oddly enough not as invasive. The entire system is well balanced, the only thing missing being an optical input. Short of that however there's really nothing to fault this system on. Be it for gaming or for music you'll set this system up once and have incredible sound with little need to tweak the setup at any time. Without question this is the best option if you're looking for a 2.1 system and if your pockets can stretch that far you'd do well to pick up a set of these.

Power: 30watts R.M.S
Frequency: 40 Hz - 20 KHz
Inputs: Stereo min-jack/
Two-RCA

WINNER 2.1



/ Bottom line /

Logitech asserts its dominance on this roundup with the best 2.1 speakers here. Great in almost every way.

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Creative Inspire T6200

RRP: R899.99 / Website: www.bowline.co.za

Creative has been in the speaker game for a long time, and this mid-range system shows their experience. The entire set has a high-quality feel to it, although the lack of colour-coded RCA jacks for the speaker connections feels like an unnecessary oversight. Gaming performance is what you'd expect from speakers for this price. The rear channels are audible but lose definition with quieter sounds (something that can be addressed on a software level), but the front and centre speakers have plenty of volume. The subwoofer delivers plenty of bass, as do the satellites, but the latter tends to struggle with high-frequency sounds, introducing a very slight rattling noise. When it comes to music, the T6200s perform well, with the high-frequency issue being less noticeable depending on what sort of music you listen to. Bass remains clean and crisp throughout the volume ranges, but the satellites start to exhibit distortion past 50% volume. Thankfully, you'll seldom need to go any higher than that; 50% is very loud. The T6200 are good performers with a price to match.

Power: Front/rear satellites: 4x 7.5 watts RMS;
Centre satellite speaker: 18 watts RMS;
Subwoofer: 22 watts RMS
Frequency: 35Hz-20kHz
Inputs: 3.5mm



/ Bottom line /

Good performance with a price to match.

Logitech Z506

RRP: R999 / Website: www.logitech.com

Everything the T6200 manages to do, the Z506 does slightly better. Presumably replacing the good old X530s, the Z506 follows Logitech's typically high-build quality and finishes but adds a slight industrial look to set them apart from the norm. Most notable of this set is the mini ported subwoofer in each satellite which helps this entire set deliver very impressive bass. Playing games with this speaker set is a joy. Not only do the rear channels deliver plenty of volume without any software configuration, but the bass-heavy audio means big sounds in all games. Unfortunately, as a side-effect of all of this bass, speech in games (and most other sources) tends to sound a little muddled. Music performance is, expectedly, excellent. The Z506 is incredibly loud and the bass means that dance tracks are delivered with plenty of power. It does tend to struggle a tiny bit with the mid-level tones found in rock music, however, again due to the high levels of bass.

Power: Front/rear satellites: 4x 8 watts RMS;
Centre satellite speaker: 16 watts RMS;
Subwoofer: 27 watts RMS
Frequency: 45 Hz-20 kHz
Inputs: 3.5mm, RCA



/ Bottom line /

Tons of bass and volume plus excellent build quality and looks.

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Divoom xForce 1H 5.1

RRP: R429 / Website: www.esquire.co.za

Given the impressive performance from Divoom's 2.1 offer, I expected good things to come from this budget-focused surround sound set. Sadly, I was disappointed. Setting up these speakers proved to be difficult, from the tangle-loving (and poorly colour-coded) cables to the inconsistent performance from the rear channels. This set includes a remote control which is the only way to adjust volume for channel pairs or the whole set. It also allows you to set treble, mid and bass, which is a great feature on a budget set, but without a display on the unit you're left to blindly muddle through the settings without ever really finding a suitable configuration. In-game, the 1H 5.1 performs poorly. The rear channels are almost lifeless despite adjustments on the remote control, and in general the audio is tinny and prone to rattling. The 1H 5.1's music performance is similarly weak, although the subwoofer is capable of delivering decent levels of bass, all of the speakers exhibit distortion fairly from about a third of the way up the volume scale.

Power:
Front/rear satellites: 4x
12 watts RMS; Centre
satellite speaker: 12
watts RMS; Subwoofer:
40 watts RMS
Frequency:
45 Hz–20 kHz Inputs:
3.5mm, RCA



/ Bottom line /

Poor performance all-round. Rather spend a little more on a higher-end set.

Logitech Z5500 Digital

RRP: R4,999 / Website: www.logitech.com

First released in 2004, the Z5500s are considerably more expensive than the other three 5.1 sets in this roundup but it's important to include a benchmark. The immense amplifier/subwoofer needs two feet of space from nearby sensitive electronics due to its massive magnet, and the rest of the setup is equally impressive in both looks and, obviously, performance. The unit's control panel gives you access to all of the customisation you'll need and also includes a host of hidden features like massive volume boosts and diagnostic mode. Games sound fantastic with the Z5500. The loud bass and clear high-frequency sounds slightly overshadow the mid-tones, but otherwise, every boom, scream and explosion comes through with clarity at every level of volume. Music performance is equally impressive, especially with tracks that make use of the subwoofer's ample bass. At the massively high volumes this set is capable of, the somewhat drowned-out mid-tones are barely an issue. In addition, the quality of the high-frequency sounds makes for excellent playback of vocal or classical music. **NAG**

Power:
Front/rear satellites: 4x 62
watts RMS; Centre satellite
speaker: 69 watts RMS;
Subwoofer: 188
watts RMS
Frequency response:
33 Hz–20 kHz Inputs:
3.5mm, RCA, optical

WINNER 5.1

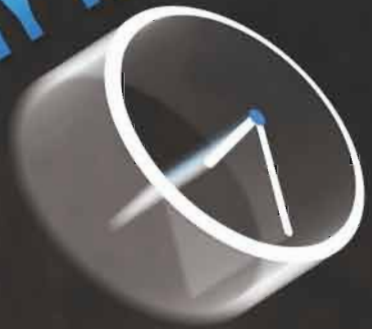


/ Bottom line /

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Coolermaster HAF-X (RC-942-KKN1)

Supplier: **Sonic Informed** / Website: www.sonicinformed.co.za / RRP: **R1,895**



[specs]

Dimensions:
(W / H / D)
230 x 599 x 550 mm

Weight:
Net Weight:14.35 kg;
Gross Weight:16.08 kg

M/B Type:
M-ATX / ATX /
E-ATX / GIGABYTE
XL-ATX

5.25" Drive Bay:
6 (2 converted SATA
HDD drive bay
available)

3.5" Drive Bay:
5 Hidden (2 in 1 2.5"
and 1.8" SSD drive
support)

2.5"/3.5" - SATA HDD
Drive Bay:
2 (converted from
5.25" drive bays)

Expansion Slots:
9

Cooling System:
Front:230 x 30 mm
red LED fan on/
off x 1; Top:200 x
30mm fans x 2 (one
optional); Side:200
x 30mm fan x 1;
Rear:140 x 25mm
fan x 1; VGA Fan
Duct:120 x 25 mm
or 120 x 38 mm fan
x 1(optional); VGA
Holder:80 x 15 mm
fan x 1(optional)

Maximum
Compatibility:
VGA Card length
:342.0mm;
CPU cooler
height:190.0mm

The CoolerMaster HAF-X (High Air Flow) is the case that has the tech community abuzz, and some have proclaimed it their dream case. What's all the fuss over? Is this the best case available on the market? Read on and see for yourself.

The HAF-X is a full tower chassis designed to fit some extreme hardware inside, from the biggest motherboards to the longest graphics cards, as well as a wide array of hard drive and SSD's. It's big, it's very big. But does it live up to its namesake? Is the airflow anything to write home about?

Well the cooling system comprises of one 230mm LED fan at the front, two 200mm fans at the top, one 200mm side panel fan, and one 140mm rear exhaust fan. What I don't understand is why CoolerMaster didn't use 230mm fans for the top and side panel, as they did on the ATCS840. Aside from this peculiarity, the fan configuration is optimal for any graphics cards installed, but seems to fall short where CPU temperature is concerned. Testing the HAF-X's airflow next to a standard ATCS840 and a standard Antec 1200 netted the following results:

CPU	
HAF-X:	34c idle, 70c load
ATCS840:	33c idle, 67c load
Antec 1200:	34c idle, 68c load

GPU	
HAF-X:	38c idle, 68c load
ATCS840:	38c idle, 69c load
Antec 1200:	40c idle, 74c load

The test system used was an i7 930 at 4.2GHZ, Noctua D14 CPU cooler, ASUS Rampage 2 Extreme, Team Xtrem 2000CL9, and a Gainward GTX 570 Phantom at 800mhz core, 2000mhz memory. OCCT was the program used to stress the CPU to 100% load, while 3DMark Vantage was used to stress out the graphics card. The reason for the HAF-X's great GPU cooling ability is also the reason it suffers slightly on the CPU front, namely the graphics card air duct.

Moving on from airflow, the HAF-X also has numerous future-proofing features, ranging from USB3.0 headers on the front panel, to 9 expansion slots, allowing easy installation of SLI/CrossfireX setups that require 3 graphics cards. Perhaps the most welcome future-proofing feature is the ability to double up 2.5" SSD's in the standard hard drive holders, making third-party brackets unnecessary. The HAF-X also sports a power supply cable partition for neatness. This seems a slight waste as far as I'm concerned as the HAF-X already has very good cable management, though this is nitpicking, other than adding a few minutes onto case installation time, the partition works well. Removable case wheels also make an appearance on the HAF-X, although these are more of a nuisance than anything else. While their construction is relatively sturdy, it felt as if the wheels would buckle if the case was picked up and put down enough, something regular lanners should take note of. The last feature

worth mentioning is according to CoolerMasters website, "Advanced GPU holder for to (sic) reinforce heavy GPU cards". This feature has been available on Lian Li cases for some time, and has always just been another thing to get in the way. The HAF-X's version is no different and is something you'd install purely because it came with the case.

Last but not least, the looks of the case. The HAF-X is either a case you love or you hate. Some have called it a "masterpiece of case art" (an actual quote); others like myself think it looks like a butchered tyre. While looks are quite subjective, what I do mind is the prevalence of plastic in the HAF-X. Surely a high-end full tower case with an imposing price tag should have more refined looking materials? Either way, the plastic looks fairly sturdy and should survive the trips to LANs and back.

Is the HAF-X the best case I've ever reviewed? Well no, not really. But it is one of the better ones. It has a long list of features, enough space to fit any modern hardware, very good cooling ability while remaining relatively quiet, industrial-style looks and a price tag that is on par with its rivals. A great case that deserves a spot on any gamer's consideration list.

NAG
Derrick Cramer

/ PLUS / Feature-rich full tower / Great airflow / Future-proof
/ MINUS / Looks not to everyone's taste / Too much plastic

THE HAF-X IS A GREAT FULL TOWER CASE FOR THE PEOPLE, ITS DESIGN AND FEATURES MAKE IT ONE OF OUR TOP PICKS.

9
OUT OF 10

AOC e2243Fw LED Monitor

Supplier: **AOC South Africa** / Website: www.aocmonitorap.com/southafrica/ / RRP: TBA

LED monitors are all the rage these days. Understandably so, given just how much richer the colours they produce are and obviously the unmatched contrast ratios that traditional CCFL monitors can't produce. As these monitors become pervasive however there'll soon be a time where all consumer level LCD's are LED models.

However, it is worth noting that not all LED technology is the same; some LED monitors use LEDs on the edges for the backlight (white LED Backlights), while others employ these across the entire panel consisting of red, blue and green LED's. This AOC model uses the former like most consumer grade units. However don't let this put you off the monitor, as it actually looks very good. This is especially true when you take the time to play with the Color and Picture Boost modes which help clarify the text on the screen, but more than that help render a richer, more precise and comfortable viewing experience.

This monitor produces vivid colours with very good black levels

as well with no sign of backlight bleed at all. After a few hours of using this monitor one will really appreciate just how comfortable this monitor is on the eyes and just how simple it is to configure courtesy of the touch sensitive buttons at the base of the screen.

This would be the perfect Dream Machine monitor if it was say at least 24" (this model measures 21.5") and featured an HDMI (HDCP) input, which is sadly missing from this unit. Also of concern is the inability to adjust the height of this monitor. Other than these issues however we really found nothing to fault this monitor on.

It's light, weighing in at an incredible 2.55kg, making it the lightest monitor we've ever tested. Not only that, measuring 18.5mm in thickness it's the thinnest monitor we've tested, beating out the Samsung XL2370 in this department making it perfect for LAN parties and the like.

If you want a stylish, high quality LED backlight monitor and are not bothered too much about size, this is the monitor for you.

NAG
Neo Sibeko



With the VESA Mount feature you can mount your monitor directly onto a wall.



[specs]

Size:
21.5"
Native Resolution:
1920x1080
Refresh rate:
60Hz (5ms)
Inputs:
DVI, D-Sub
Backlight
technology: White
LED

/ PLUS / 18.5mm thickness / 2.55kg weight / Very good display
/ MINUS / No HDMI / No HDCP

VERY GOOD LIGHT WEIGHT AND THIN MONITOR WITH A VERY GOOD CONTRAST RATIO AND COLOUR REPRODUCTION.

8

OUT OF 10

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Roccat Alumic mousepad

Supplier: **Sonic Informed** / Website: www.sonicinformed.co.za / RRP: R399

In recent years, every peripheral company and their sister has released a plethora of roll-up mouse pads of all shapes and sizes. From control to speed pads, there really is no lack of choice when it comes to this oft overlooked gaming accessory. Why then has no one released a decent metal mousepad? It seems Roccat had the same idea, and so the Alumic was born.

I'll be honest, I've never seen a mousepad with this many usable features, and they all do what they claim to, and do it well. Let's start with the obvious first, the hard metal construction. With an Anodized Aluminium core and measuring 3mm thick, the mousepad offers perfect support when gaming on any surface, playing with the Alumic on my lap or the couch was a breeze and not once did it feel like bucking under the pressure of my hand. The Alumic also offers two gaming surfaces, giving you the best of both controls at high mouse sensitivities, and speed at the lower ones. Speaking of low sensitivity, the Alumic is quite

large measuring at 331x272mm, meaning you'll have more than enough space to stretch out if that's your style.

The obvious aside, the Alumic has a few more features that bear mention. The non-slip rubber mousepad feet found at the four corners have excellent grip and ensure the pad doesn't move even in the most intense gaming session; their grip on all surfaces from glass to veneer is impressive to say the least. Their other purpose is to raise the mousepad slightly, meaning the underside of the pad never rests on your table, reducing the chance of damaging it. The bundled gel wrist rest is a separate unit to the mousepad, and can be stuck in place to your table surface.

The Alumic then is a fantastic mousepad, it has all the features any gamer can ask for and performs exceptionally. It may be a tad more pricy than the competition, but the build quality, features and two usable sides makes it well worth the asking price. It is by far the best mousepad I have ever used.

NAG
Derrick Cramer



[specs]

Features:
Double-Sided Mousepad, Anodized Aluminum Core

Dimensions:
331x 272 x 3mm

/ PLUS / Size / Double-sided / non-slip
/ MINUS / Bulky to transport

FEATURING TWO DIFFERENT SURFACE MATERIALS ON EITHER SIDE, THE ALUMIC IMPRESSES ON ALMOST EVERY FRONT.

10
OUT OF 10

Roccat Kulo headset

Supplier: **Sonic Informed** / Website: www.sonicinformed.co.za / RRP: R549

If you saw the Roccat Kulo headset displayed in a store window, you might say they looked "modern", lightweight, something gamers would take to LANs due to their portability and gamer focussed features.

On paper the Kulo sounds good. Sporting "Incredible comfort", "Premium Stereo sound" and "Auto Mic mute", it has all the features one would expect from headphones in this segment of the market. It's unfortunate that some of the paper specs could not be further from the actual performance during testing. The "Incredible comfort" is ruined after 5 minutes thanks to a pleather ring around each headphone cushion. I would assume it's there to aid in noise cancellation, but what it really does is make your ears start to sweat in record breaking time, after which things become quite uncomfortable. "Premium Stereo sound" translates into muddy bass and over-emphasised treble; what this means in real life is, explosions sound like air blowing through a wet paper bag, and gunfire is exhausting to your ears. Voice chat is clean and clear though, the only redeeming feature of an otherwise bland, lifeless audio experience.



There are some pro's to the headset though. The "Auto mic mute" works really well in that when you move the mic up it automatically mutes and bringing it back down turns it back on. The headset only weighs 178g so it should be quite portable for gamers on the go. The metal-reinforced headband is also a welcome feature and does make the Kulo quite robust while still maintaining flexibility.

If I had to choose between using the Roccat Kulo and having no sound while gaming, I'd choose the Kulo, but only if there were no other headsets, earphones or cheap desk speakers available to me. The level of discomfort experienced while wearing these headphones really is that much of an issue.

NAG
Derrick Cramer



[specs]

Frequency range:
70-20,000Hz
Sensitivity:
-47 dB ± 3 dB
Signal-to-noise ratio:
50dB
Impedance:
2,2 KΩ
Directivity:
Bi-directional
Weight:
178g (excl. cable)
Connection:
2 x 3.5mm
Cable length:
2.5m

/ PLUS / Volume slider / Auto mic mute
/ MINUS / Very uncomfortable

EXCEPTIONAL NOISE-CANCELLING AND AUTO MIC MUTING FEATURES, LET DOWN BY BEING UNCOMFORTABLE ON YOUR EARS.

4
OUT OF 10

Cyborg V.7

Supplier: Rebel Tech / Website: www.rebeltech.co.za / RRP: R695

Saitek has long been renowned for its quality flight sticks and other gaming peripherals, but since Mad Catz acquired the company in 2007, they've taken a massive leap forward in building more general-purpose devices like keyboards and mice through their Cyborg and Eclipse ranges. This is their top-of-the-range gaming keyboard, above the Cyborg V.1 and V.5, and boasts impressive build quality that pits it against the current market leaders.

The first thing you'll notice

about the Cyborg V.7 is the silver-coloured WASD, space bar and cursor keys, which are not only protected from matrix-related errors caused by multiple key presses (such as the keyboard not accepting any more inputs), but include a metallic coating that supposedly ensures that they will last longer. The result is keys that feel a little strange to play with at first, and you'll always notice them during typing, but one should get used to them quickly. The rest of the keys are of a high quality,

with a light, soft touch and a slight texture to ensure decent grip during frantic hotkey sessions.

The twelve Cyborg keys allow users to program a macro to each, with multiple profiles available. Unfortunately, the macro editing software, while functionally sufficient, isn't the best-looking or most easily operated in the business. There also doesn't seem to be a way to auto-launch profiles based on which application is running, nor is there a way to assign the Cyborg keys to launch

individual applications. The rest of the keyboard includes touch-sensitive media playback controls and LED backlighting controls for the entire keyboard or specific areas. These cannot be controlled in the profile editor.

As the first real attempt we've seen from Mad Catz, the V.7 is worth anyone's attention but doesn't quite beat back the competition due to inferior software. It's a pity, because the keyboard itself is a pleasure to use.

NAG
Geoff Burrows

[specs]

Interface:
USB 2.0
Outputs:
3.5mm headset and microphone; 1x USB 2.0 host
Additional keys:
12 programmable Cyborg keys; media playback control; LED backlighting control



/ PLUS / Tough gaming keys / Looks good / Feels great
/ MINUS / Poor software

AN EXCELLENT GAMING KEYBOARD THAT IS LET DOWN A BIT BY ITS LOW-QUALITY SOFTWARE.

7
OUT OF 10

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Toshiba Qosmio X500

Supplier: Hi-Fi Corporation / Website: www.toshiba.co.za / RRP: R21,999



The multimedia bar is cool, but it's nudged the keyboard so far to the right that it takes some getting used to.

Toshiba first launched their Qosmio range with the X300 a few short years ago. That X300 was a great desktop-replacement notebook: great performance, a nice balance between power and portability, and a competitive price (relative to other desktop replacements at the time) made the X300 an alluring option for those in the market for such a machine. Now we've got the X500, the X300's bigger, meaner replacement. We put the X500 through its paces and this is what we found.

First off, the X500 is a massive notebook. It weighs approximately 5 kilograms, so if you need to do your gaming on the move, this probably isn't the best choice. This weight is to be expected when you've got a massive 18.4-inch screen and a bunch of meaty hardware hiding beneath the hood, but it does mean that this particular desktop replacement is best left on your desktop at all times. Speaking of screens, the X500's display outputs vibrant colours and produces crisp, clear images – but it could do with some extra brightness. Nevertheless, at its native resolution of 1920x1080, the screen produces an excellent image. Then there's the design of the X500 which, aside from some minor annoyances, offers slight improvements over the X300. In terms of the actual look of the machine, the brash flaming motifs and bright red styling are gone. In their place is a simpler, more subtle black/red colour palette with the Qosmio logo emblazoned on the top of the notebook. Personal opinion is king here, but we quite like the new look.

The multimedia bar is now to the left of the keyboard (the X300's multimedia

"The X500 has a good list of features, decent hardware and is comfortable to use."

Dane Remendes, NAG Magazine

bar is above it), but this has forced the keyboard far to the right, which takes some getting used to. This layout also means that annoyingly tapping the media keys with your left hand while using the keyboard is a common occurrence. The backlit keyboard is nothing special, but it's comfortable to use. The trackpad, however, is a bit too small. Horizontally it's fine, but vertically it's not quite long enough. We eventually became acclimatised to it, but it's irritating at first.

Performance is where the Qosmio starts to stumble and fall on its face when you take that R22,000 price tag into account. For a quick real-world gaming test, we started up Resident Evil 5 running at 1920x1080 with 4xAA in DirectX 10 mode (with all other settings maxed out). The average FPS we recorded was 36. That's not worth R22,000. Unplug the power cable (if you do, you'll get around 1.5 hours worth of battery life under load) and the FPS drops to 10. Unigine Heaven in DirectX 10 mode with no AA and 16xAF spat out a score of 421. Bards won't be writing songs about that. 3DMark

Vantage at 1280x1024 gave the X500 5552 3DMarks. These low scores are most likely due to the NVIDIA GTS 360M that's hidden within struggling to keep up with the system's native res. You'd be able to play most of today's games at medium/high settings, but at that price we expect a lot more than just average performance. At least the harman/kardon audio is good and the Blu-ray burner is much appreciated. HDMI output means that your X500 could double as a Blu-ray player, but that still doesn't make it worth it.

The X500 has a good list of features, decent hardware and is comfortable to use. It's definitely not worth R21,999 though, because there are better, more powerful desktop replacements out there that are much cheaper.

NAG
Dane Remendes

[specs]

CPU:
Intel Core i7 Q720
(1.6GHz)
GPU:
1GB NVIDIA GeForce
GTS 360M
RAM:
8GB DDR3 1066MHz
Storage: 1TB (2 x
500GB 7200RPM
hard drives)
OS:
64-bit Windows 7
Home Premium
Display:
18.4-inch
widescreen
(1920x1080)
Audio:
harman/kardon
stereo speakers
Extras:
Blu-ray rewritable
drive / 1GB Ethernet
1.3-megapixel
webcam / Wi-Fi
802.11b/g/n / 12-
cell Li-ion battery

/ PLUS / Blu-ray rewritable drive / Good design / Decent features
/ MINUS / Quite heavy / Performance doesn't justify price / Expensive

IF THE PRICE WERE MUCH LOWER, THIS WOULD BE A DECENT OPTION FOR GAMING/ENTERTAINMENT.

6
OUT OF 10

ASUS Eee Note

Supplier: **ASUS** / Website: www.asus.com / RRP: \$233 (local price TBA)

The ASUS Eee Note is a strange device. Its part tablet, part eBook reader, and like the typical Jack-of-all-trades, is master of nothing. Using an LCD without a backlight, the Eee Note seems at first glance like an eBook reader with touch functionality, but the Linux-based operating system is capable of a fair bit more.

As an eBook reader, the Eee Note is capable, but a little too heavy. Page turns are quick, and both synchronisation of files and browsing them on the device is nippy. Perhaps the most interesting feature of the Note is its ability to double as a tablet device using Wacom drivers. With only 256 levels of pressure-sensitivity (half that of the entry-level Wacom Bamboo) and a relatively small resolution, it's not suitable for professional use, but amateur users might enjoy this feature occasionally.

As has become commonplace, the Eee Note includes support for images and music playback. There's also a microphone and, surprisingly, a rear-mounted camera. Both are of low quality, but the ability to take photos and then write notes on them is something that has great potential in the future. For now, the display's monochrome limitation and low resolution is the greatest impact on this feature's usefulness.

There are a couple of other interesting features, such as the included web browser that uses the device's Wi-Fi adaptor to connect to the Internet. Aside from being incredibly sluggish, obviously monochromatic and low resolution, the web browser works, but don't expect to spend long hours trawling the 'Net for LOLcats. Text-based sites like news hubs are surprisingly readable, however.

Is the ASUS Eee Note the poor man's iPad? Not quite. At \$233 it's sufficient for those who want an eBook reader with a bit of extra functionality, but don't expect it to fill the role of a second PC or replace a full-featured tablet or smart phone.

NAG

Geoff Burrows



[specs]

Display:
8" 2540dpi
CPU:
624MHz Marvell ARM11
Storage:
4GB internal. Expandable up to 16GB
Supported formats:
PDF, ePub, MP3, JPEG, BMP, GIF, PNG
Weight:
520g (excluding leather cover)

Antec 25
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KÜHLER H₂O 620

Next Generation High Performance CPU Cooling System



Intelligent noise / speed-control fan for quiet, efficient cooling



Non-corrugated easy-bend tubes for maximum flexibility in radiator positioning



Low profile pump ensures exceptional liquid circulation while preserving internal airflow



Latest generation copper cold plate for optimal conduction

/ PLUS / Additional features / Decent display
/ MINUS / Too heavy / Additional features aren't great

A DECENT ATTEMPT TO CREATE A "BETTER" EBOOK READER, BUT NOT ENOUGH TO CRACK INTO THE TABLET MARKET.

6

OUT OF 10



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GIGABYTE GeForce GTX560 Ti Super Overclock

Supplier: Ractron / Website: www.gigabyte.com / RRP: R3,699



To those who are unfamiliar with NVIDIA's history, or are just not old enough to remember, this isn't the first time that NVIDIA has designated the "Ti" brand to a GPU. In actuality the first graphics card to carry the "Ti" at the end (pronounced "Ty") was the GeForce 3 in its second outing as the Ti 200 and Ti 500. For some reason or another NVIDIA decided to re-introduce it again with the GTX560. Odd though considering that at the time this was reserved for the two highest performing parts from NVIDIA.

Whatever the reason, we suspect the Ti branding may be around for a while, or at the least in the next generation parts as well.

Given just how much excitement this card generated prior to its launch and Gigabyte's enthusiasm for their Super Overclock products, it was only a matter of time until we came across a graphics card with arguably the longest name in a while. After all, the line has become synonymous with high performance binned GPUs and while this has yet to eclipse ASUS' s own overclocked special edition cards (ROG parts) the products are getting there fast.

With graphics cards it's always a hit and miss affair and, depending on the particular GPU, it just may not be worth going through the extra effort to make a special edition version of it. An example of

this would be the HD6970 graphics card. On its own a powerful GPU that without question offers the best value for money in high-end graphics card right now. However, the Cypress GPU just doesn't have the legs to overclock well without some serious cooling, and even then the scaling is less than optimal.

Fortunately though, this isn't a Cypress core, it's NVIDIA's new GF114 core and unlike Cypress it does have some headroom. Essentially GF114 is a fully enabled GF104 core that powered the very popular GeForce GTX460. What this means is that instead of having only 336 CUDA cores functioning, this GPU provides the full complement of 384 cores.

Interestingly though, much like the move from the GF100 to the GF110 core (GTX580), if not more so is that this core is not only clocked faster (NVIDIA reference clocks are a mighty 822MHz making it the highest clocked NVIDIA GPU to date) but the memory controller has also been improved tremendously. All this has combined to make a very potent graphics card that was supposed to be unmatched at the sub \$250 segment.

Unfortunately for NVIDIA, AMD released the HD6950 1GB cards at the same price point a mere week after the GTX560 Ti was available, and given that the Cypress core in the 6950 was supposed

to compete with the GTX570, the GTX560 Ti had a favourable reception but seemingly less than optimal sales. After all, you can get true high-end performance at the same price instead of a boosted mid-range card. As it stands for those with no brand preference there's really no compelling reason where performance is concerned to buy the GTX 560 Ti over the 1GB Radeon HD6950.

With that said, what GIGABYTE has produced here isn't a regular GTX560 Ti. In fact it's maybe unintentionally become a GTX570 killer (at least the reference model). That's simply because GIGABYTE through their so-called GPU-Gauntlet sorting (they are basically binned) has produced a card that comes out the box clocked at an eye-watering 1GHz. That's right, no water cooling here, no 8-pin PCI-E power, it's the exact same PCB as what was on the GTX460 SOC but this time features the newer and better GF114 core.

The overclock isn't limited to the core as the memory is courtesy of Samsung 0.4ns rated GDDR5 DRAM which translates into a 5GHz reference clock. Previously no GF104 core had an IMC strong enough to drive such a frequency, but that has all changed now. Be it through NVIDIA's tweaking, GIGABYTE's sorting process or both, the memory is clocked at a smooth 4,580MHz for a healthy 146GB/sec

[specs]

Core:
1GHz GF114 (40nm)
Processors:
384
Render Outputs:
32
Memory:
1024MB GDDR5
4.53GHz (146.5GB/sec)
API:
DirectX11/OpenGL
4.x /OpenCL 1.X/
PhysX/CUDA

"...what GIGABYTE has produced here isn't a regular GTX560 Ti. In fact it's maybe unintentionally become a GTX570 killer..."

Neo Sibeko, NAG Magazine



Benchmarks	
Heaven 21 Xtreme Preset	/ 1187.682 /
3DMark 11 Extreme	/ 1476.602 /
3DMark Vantage Performance	/ 1,695 / / 2,141 /
Just Cause 2 1,920 x 1,080	/ 22,382 / / 24,908 /
Crysis: Warhead 1,920 x 1,080	/ 64.66 / / 75.21 /
	/ 45.21 / / 52.42 /

Baseline: NVIDIA GeForce GTX580

memory bandwidth figure compared to the standard 4004MHz memory clock of the reference unit (which provides just over 128GB/sec). This benefits performance especially when using resolutions above 1680x1050 or applying AA. The GPU overclock in addition to the Memory frequency come together to make for the fastest GTX560 Ti on the market today (at least at the time of writing) so much so that it beat out the reference GTX570 in all the benchmarks.

In our attempt to gain even more performance, we discovered that the core would not budge past 1025MHz regardless of voltage (the scaling to more voltage isn't linear so obviously another issue is at play here and it's not heat) but to make up for that the memory clocked all the way to its rated 5GHz comfortably and artefact free. There really isn't a need to overclock this graphics card and as we found, the best way to further boost performance is by adding another one for SLI functionality. So despite how disappointing 25MHz

may seem, very few cards will get to 950MHz from other manufacturers let alone 1GHz.

The only thing we lament about the GTX560, and this has everything to do with NVIDIA and not GIGABYTE or any other NVIDIA partner, is that there's still no support for 3-way SLI on their mid-range cards. Disappointing considering that the competition offers this in sub-\$200 parts as well. While 3-way SLI can't be called economical in any way, it would help make the parts just that much more attractive to the power users who want ultimate graphics performance but won't quite stretch out their budgets to a full SLI GTX580-based system. Not only would a 3-way GTX560 setup prove faster, it would be cheaper and subsequently more accessible.

That aside, in the GIGABYTE GTX560 Ti Super Overclock, we have a graphics adapter that certainly doesn't have the coolest name around but one that remains incredible and the best GTX560 Ti money can buy. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

/ PLUS / Good temperatures / Good performance / Massive Overclock
/ MINUS / Price

THE FASTEST GTX560 TI AVAILABLE AND HIGHEST FACTORY-CLOCKED NVIDIA GRAPHICS CARD EVER.

10
OUT OF 10

From single components to fully customised overclocked gaming computers, Landmark has it all



OVERVIEW

Weight: 1,8 kg, Height: 23,4 cm
Width: 56,6 cm, Depth: 4,7 cm

steelseries
MERC
STEALTH



Illumination in
Red Blue Purple

steelseries
SIBERIA V2
FULL-SIZE HEADSET



OVERVIEW

Weight: 680 g, Height: 27 cm
Width: 24 cm, Depth: 12 cm

Colors Available



steelseries
XAI
LASER MOUSE



OVERVIEW

Weight: 380 g, Height: 24 cm
Width: 20,5 cm, Depth: 5 cm

Case Modding 101

Part 2

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- / Your side panel
- / Masking tape and a pen
- / A cutting tool (Dremel/Jigsaw)
- / A straight, hard piece of metal (like angle iron)
- / A file
- / Sandpaper (220 and 1000 grit)
- / Some two-way tape
- / A sheet of perspex
- / Patience

A SNIPPET FROM DREMEL

GLUE GUNS

Glue guns are a handy device for all sorts of DIY work. Unlike liquid glues, hot glue will set quickly and create a strong hold. Usually you can choose between low-temperature or high-temperature glue guns. Low-temp guns heat up to about 100° Celsius and are suited for jobs where your work piece can get damaged if the glue is too hot. High temp guns go up to almost 200° Celsius and produce stronger bonds. Dremel offers both hi, low and dual temp glue guns so you can choose the optimal tool for your applications. Always wait until the heating element has fully heated up. More sophisticated glue guns like the Dremel models have anti drip tips. Before you start your job, let the glue from your previous job that still sits in the nozzle drop through. The most common lengths for DIY glue sticks are 7-12mm, and sticks have different open times and set times. Open time is the working time to make a bond while the surface still retains sufficient tack. Set time is the time to form a bond of acceptable strength. Open and set time depend on the composition of the glue, glue temperature, substrate and other factors.

Remember when case modding first appeared on the PC enthusiast scene? Remember how bad the mods were back then? I look back at those times now, and I feel nothing but sadness for those poor computers. All of the ridiculous and tacky fans that had a million colours, all those lights that would flash at frequencies that could induce epileptic fits, everything we did back then was so primitive, wasn't it?

Things have evolved so much from the beginning. Case modding has become so advanced, so complicated, and so, so fun. Cases are looking better than ever before, but also taking exponentially longer to complete.

One of the fundamental things from that era, that will always be something a case modder needs to be able to do, is a simple case window. I could teach you how to do all kinds of crazy things to your case, but what good is it if you can't actually see them? So today we're going back to the absolute basics. Many cases, even high-end cases, come without windows in the side panels, and we need to know how to create perfect windows for times like that.

/ STEP 1 /

First thing you need to do: Grab your side panel. Remove any fans and things it may have attached. I don't have a single case that I use with a standard side panel anymore, so I grabbed a panel from a machine I used many years ago. Excuse all the scratches. **(See image 1)**

/ STEP 2 /

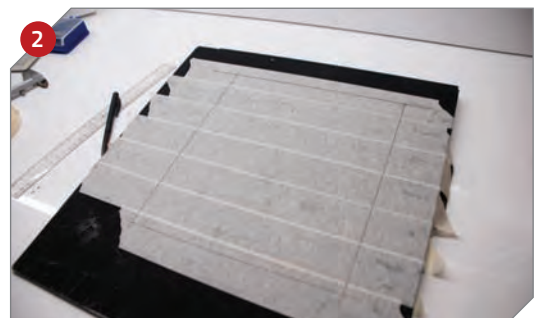
This step involves masking tape. Masking tape is something case modders need rolls and rolls of. We use it to protect the stuff we're working on, as well as do markings and lines on it that we're going to cut along or drill around. So, tape up your side panel, and then draw up the hole you want to cut in the panel. Remember the golden rule: Measure twice, cut once. Check and recheck your lines and measurements, you only have ONE of these panels, so it needs to be right the first time. **(See image 2)**

/ STEP 3 /

Grab the cutting tool of your choice and go nuts. I generally use a Dremel tool or a jigsaw for something like this. I used a Dremel 4000, which is an absolute beast. Don't cut on the line itself, cut about 2mm on the inside of the line, so that you have an edge to work off to create a perfectly straight edge. **(See image 3)** There's just no way you can cut a perfectly straight line with a Dremel or Jigsaw. Chuck away the inside part of the panel. **(See image 4)**

/ STEP 4 /

Here's the really tedious part - getting those lines absolutely perfect. There's nothing worse than a line that's not perfectly straight. What you want to do is clamp a really hard piece of metal like a thick piece of Angle Iron to the panel, with the iron's edge on the very line you drew on the masking tape. Clamp that iron on there really tight. **(See image 5)** Start filing, and don't stop until you're sure the line is straight. It should look something like this. **(See image 6).**

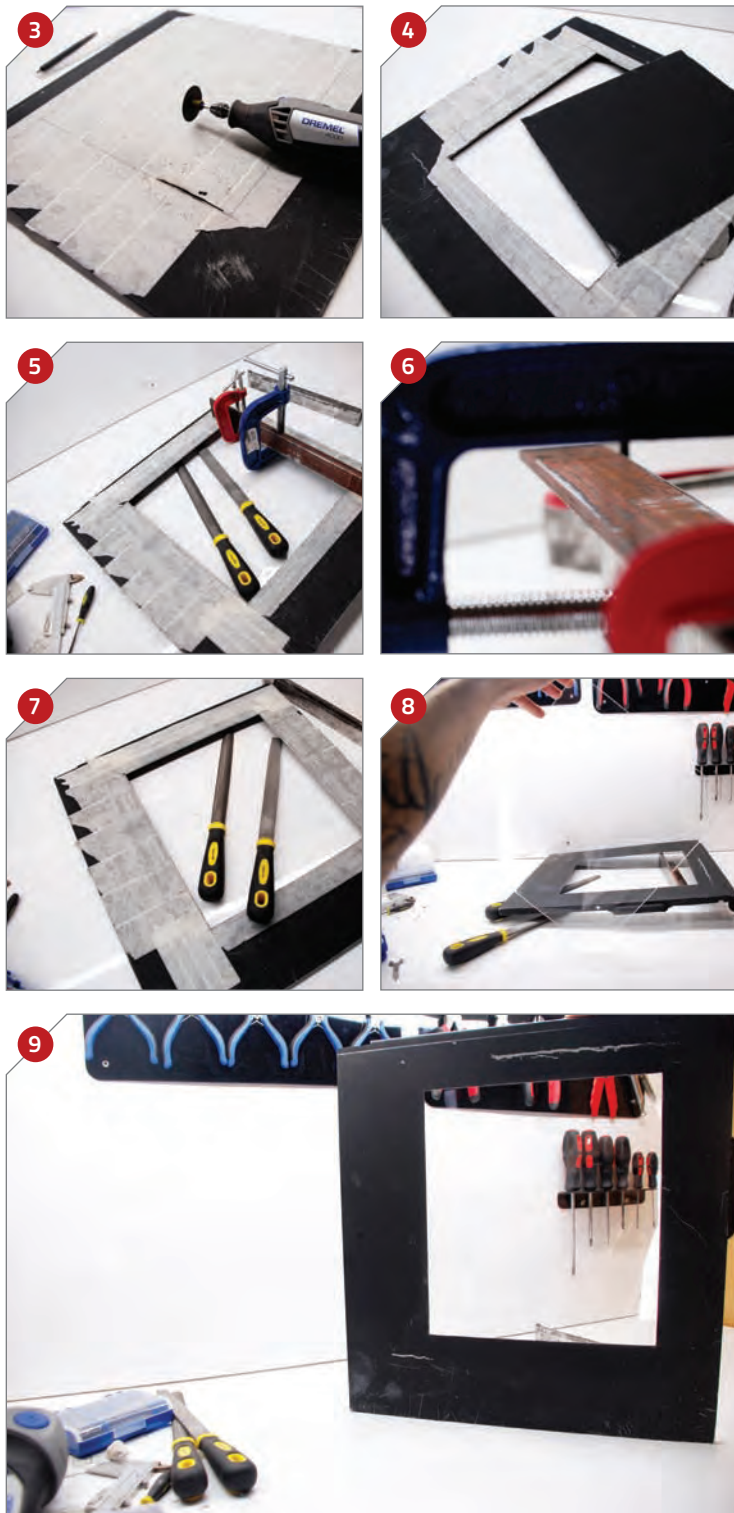


/ STEP 5 /

Once all your lines are perfectly straight, you just want to neaten them up a little, since the file leaves a really rough finish. Grab that 220 sandpaper and smooth out those cuts. Once you've done that, repeat the process with the 1000 grit. If you feel those cuts now, you'll feel an absolutely smooth surface. SUCCESS! **(See image 7)**

/ STEP 6 /

You're almost there now. Grab the perspex you got for the window, and cut it to size if you need. **(See image 8)** Stick some two-way tape along the edges and then just stick it to the inside of the side panel. **(See image 9)** Now, many people do this part differently. Some people want plexi held in place with screws, glue, etc. Some people like the edges of the panel to be covered by u-channel, and so on. I like a really clean looking



panel, so I leave the edges clean and the plexi held in place at the back. So this step is up to you.

/ CONCLUSION /

The panel I used for this guide is an ugly panel, so here's a shot of a panel that I did that looks good, and what it looks like on a machine.

The result is so simple, so clean, but it's one of the biggest aspects of case modding. Now, you're not limited to a square window like I did here. You could do a circle, triangle, heck, you could do a window in the shape of the number 42. It's all up to you. You could add some fans into the panel if you want for added cooling in your case. That's all up to you.

If you're struggling, drop me an email at ett@nag.co.za. Have fun, and let me know how it went! **NAG**
Ettienne Venter

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- Ergonomic T-handle grip: for good balance and comfortable handling

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NO UR FACE



When I was asked to submit a photograph of myself for the latest annual NAG extreme makeover, I immediately tried to book a taxi off-world. I mean, not only do I suffer the monthly indignity of publishing this pseudo-intellectual drivel under my actual real name and everything, I was now expected to put my actual real face on it too. OH NOES, THERE GOES MY FRAGILE ANONYMITY. It's kind of a big deal¹.

So anyway, here's me. I look sort of gormless because whenever I pose for a photo, I'm caught somewhere in between smiling, sobbing, and trying desperately to contrive instant powers of invisibility.

Now that you know my name and what I look like, you might as well also know that I own a pair of vinyl hi-tops trimmed in purple and neon yellow, I'm left-handed, I occasionally smoke cigarillos, I have an identical twin sister, I'm a chronic insomniac, I taught myself to speak Swedish when I was 12, I seem to notice the number "314" at least once each day, I prefer Irish whiskey to scotch, I failed grade 9 maths and subsequently dropped the subject because I had – and have – absolutely no idea how algebra or geometry work, I'm pathologically shy, I swear excessively, I secretly listen to Erasure when nobody's looking, I shaved my head when I was 16 or so in an (unsuccessful) attempt to get myself suspended from school, I barely tolerate temperatures over 25°C, I have four tattoos, I used to play guitar in an almost-popular band, I'm mortally terrified of lizards, I have an extravagantly useless degree in Classical Latin, I'm a fully-qualified high school senior English teacher, and this one time, I was involved in a car accident with a speedboat².

You probably now know approximately 13000⁵ percent more about me than you know about most – if not all – of the people you play games with online. And that's just starting with my name.

It's rather extraordinary, isn't it? Sure, it's not just online gaming – it applies somewhat to the internet in general – but the fastidiously-maintained culture of anonymity is maybe more remarkable in this context, because of the otherwise unusually high degree of social interaction

"I have four tattoos, I used to play guitar in an almost-popular band, I'm mortally terrified of lizards, I have an extravagantly useless degree in Classical Latin, I'm a fully-qualified high school senior English teacher, and this one time, I was involved in a car accident with a speedboat."

involved. I play regularly on Xbox LIVE with the same crowd, for example, and I realised earlier that I know almost nothing about any of them.

Obviously, that same anonymity readily lends itself to certain modes of exceedingly selfish and vile behaviour – which are really quite beyond the scope of this discussion – but, perhaps more significantly, is it also precluding meaningful relationships with others? Are we slowly, inexorably, divorcing ourselves from reality, and instead indulging artificial alt-personas at the expense of our true selves? Does the concluding inclusion of a third, thought-provoking question invest this paragraph with some sense of obfuscating academic profundity?

I was recently persuaded – with subterfuge, guile, and false promises of choc-mint ice-cream – to sign up with Twitter. If you'd like to become better acquainted with just how terminally ordinary another gamer's real life is, follow me¹⁷! @anxtrms. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

¹ Emotionally, that is. I didn't get a raise.

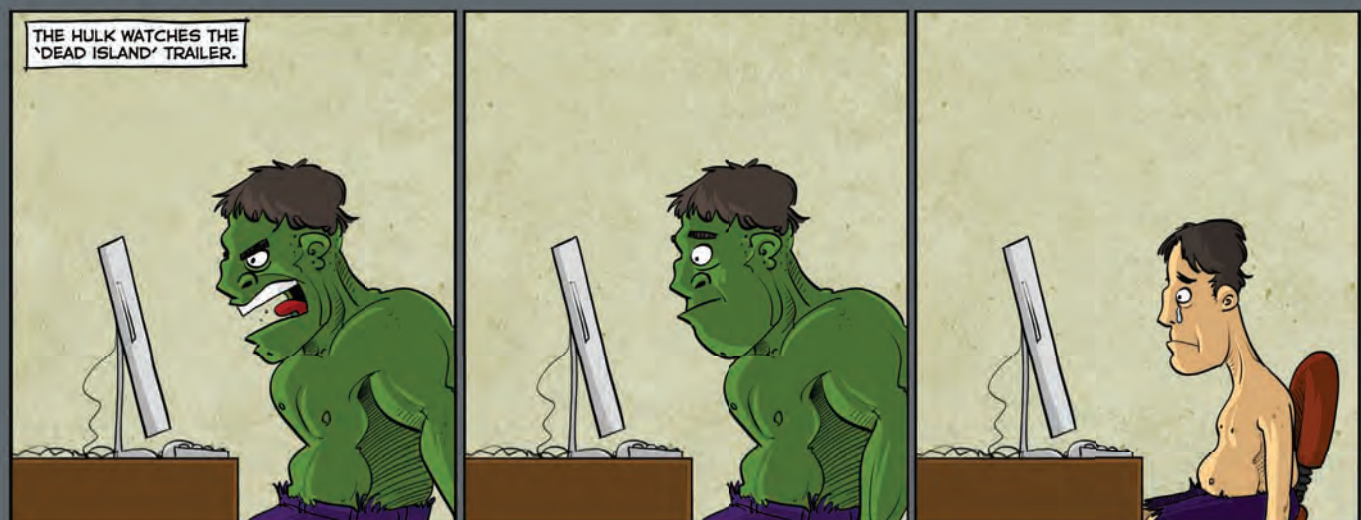
² The speedboat's fault too.

⁵ I guess it's not just algebra and geometry. It's numbers.

¹⁷ Just, please, guys, seriously. Stop trying to add me on Facebook. I'd like some privacy left over.

Extra Life

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