

NAG

Reviews

- Portal 2
- Mortal Kombat
- Motorstorm: Apocalypse
- WWE All Stars

Batman: Arkham City

Sometimes it's only madness that makes us what we are

Previews

- Deus Ex: Human Revolution
- Gears of War 3
- Dungeon Siege III
- Alice: Madness Returns



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WOODLAND

ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS

L.A. NOIRE

20 MAY

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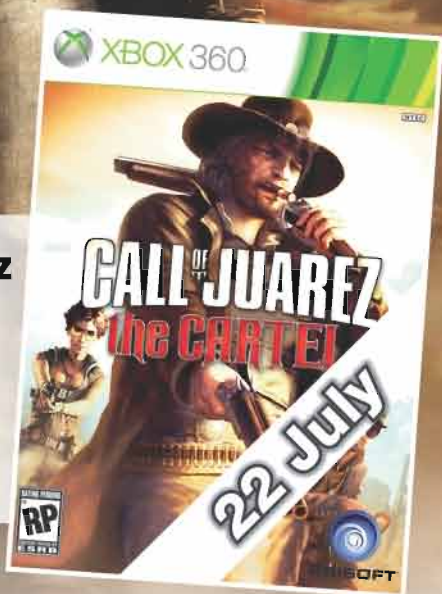
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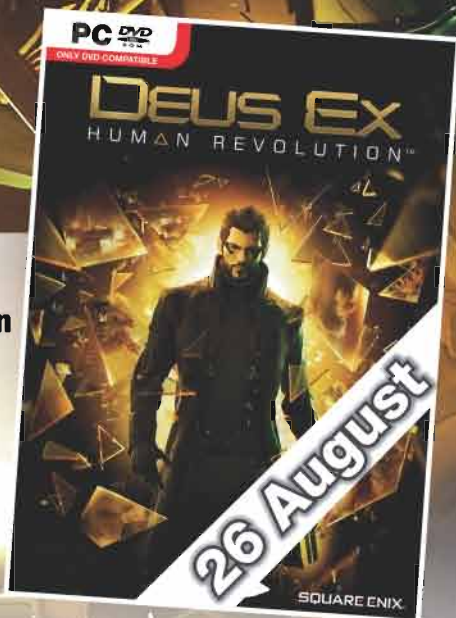
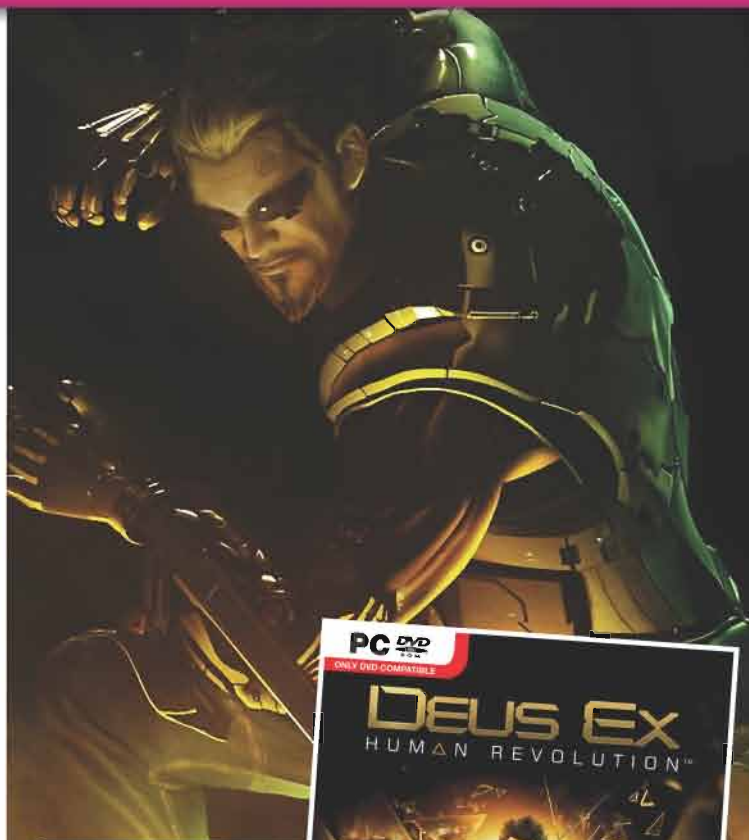
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Regulars

- 10 Ed's Note
- 12 Inbox
- 14 Bytes
- 96 DIY – Modding 101: power supply test box



Opinion

- 15 I, Gamer
- 17 The Game Stalker
- 19 The Indie Investigator
- 21 Miktar's Meanderings
- 83 Hardwired
- 98 Game Over

Features

- 42 **Top 8 zombies in video games**
We reminisce about our favourite undead murder monkeys (and WTF spiders) from gaming's past.
- 66 **Batman: Arkham City**
With great power comes GREAT SCOTT IS THAT BATMAN?!
- 72 **Black Ops Online League Update**
Hi! Can we have just a moment of your time? We'd like to have a word with you concerning our *Call of Duty: Black Ops* online league...
- 90 **VGA Buyers Guide**
It's tough deciding where to deposit your hard-earned cash when it comes to buying a new graphics card. We feel your pain, so we've brought you some facts for your consideration.

Previews

- 28 Deus Ex: Human Revolution
- 32 Gears of War 3
- 34 Alice: Madness Returns
- 36 Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning
- 38 Shadows of the Damned
- 40 Dungeon Siege III



Reviews

- 46 Reviews: Introduction
- 47 Short Reviews:
Sanctum / Yar's Revenge
- 48 Portal 2
- 50 Mortal Kombat
- 52 Shift 2: Unleashed
- 54 Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II: Retribution
- 56 MotorStorm: Apocalypse
- 58 LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars
- 60 Nail'd
- 62 SOCOM: Special Forces
- 63 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters
- 64 WWE All Stars
- 65 MotoGP 10/11



Hardware

- 74 Tech News
- 80 Lazy Gamer's Guide:
GIGABYTE ECO600
- 82 Dream Machine
- 84 ASUS NC1 | Kingston
HyperX LoVo 1800C9
- 86 WD Caviar Black 1TB
FAEX / WD
VelociRaptor 600GB
GIGABYTE GTX 580
Super Overclock



On the DVD

Demos
Anomaly: Warzone Earth / Black Mirror 3 / Mechanic Infantry / Minecraft / The Next Big Thing / The Tiny Bang Story / Theatre of War 3: Korea / Two Worlds 2: Castle Defense / Wildlife Park 3

Extras
Gamecca V2 I22 April 2011.pdf / Portal 2 Lab Rat.pdf / 7-Zip
[Free Games]: Streets Of Rage Remake / UFO - Alien Invasion
[Free Music]: Bulletstorm Soundtrack / Mount & Blade With Fire and Sword Soundtrack / Sonic - The Sound of Speed
[Minecraft]: New texture / HD Texture Fix / Portal - Unity

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90 Game Trailers / 3 ScrewAttack Video Game Vault videos
2 Retrospectives

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The Daily noob

Sunday, May 29, 2011

Gaming saved my life!

You know those idiot journalists in the mainstream media who never get anything right when it comes to reporting on videogames? Keep them in mind for reference. Let's be honest with each other, and realistic here – there's just no beating that kind of stupidity out of people, so instead, I've decided to join them with my own little sensational headline.

Perhaps this one will get picked up by SABC News and spread around thick and generously like butter on hot toast. The difference is... my headline is true, sort of.

To really understand this whole Ed's Note, go play the *Minecraft* demo on the DVD. If you haven't or don't care that's still cool. I'll explain here anyway. *Minecraft* is a really addictive little game that almost everyone on Earth is playing. You start on a randomly generated world with trees, mountains and oceans. You must chop wood, mine, build and create a house and other things using blocks of wood, sand, stone and metal. You only have your wits and a 3x3 block crafting table to get it all done. There's also some farming but not in a painful way. It's compelling. Trust me.

So, I've built a large and impressive house in the game and the other day I extended my palace to include a granny flat of sorts for my son to live in (he was living in a very creative 'cave' on my property). The game is great for creativity and I've even taught him to plant more trees than he chops down. So I get home the other day to find out he accidentally set fire to his side of the house and burnt down the whole thing. Once the fire started he raced to make a fire break between our two houses so my side was saved. He probably thought I'd kill him if he destroyed my place, so while his house went up in smoke he was chopping at the wooden bridge connecting our two homes. I'm so proud. He also learnt a very important lesson that day about playing with fire inside a house, and although this didn't happen in real life, there's a better chance now it never will. So that is how gaming saved my life, sort of. Keep this story handy to wave in the face of anyone that tells you gaming is a waste of time or a bad thing.

PORTAL 2

Easily the best game I've ever played - it even gets a whole heading on my page here. Dane gave it 97 in this issue – but you can read that score as 100% as far as I'm concerned. It's simply the best experience you'll have in gaming land, and you'll not pick up a bullet-firing device once.

COVER STORY

Look! We have two different covers this issue. A hero's edition and a villain's edition. I recommend getting both so I can afford to keep sending my kids to private school. Thanks, LOL. Also, huge thanks to Rob at Warner overseas for making this happen. It was a real circus with credit card problems, airline shuttle timing, hotels not appreciating Miktar's midnight howling thing, artwork wrangling, permissions, NDA scrutiny and so on. Rob championed his way through it all and got Miktar all safe and sound into the studio in California for some hands-on time with Batman. Awesome sauce everyone and thank you so much. These covers are epic.

Enjoy it people.

RedTide
[Editor]



My *Minecraft* house... I'm using the *Borderlands* texture pack in case anyone is wondering. I'm standing at Atrium Station – part of Burrows-James Railways linking up all of our houses on the private NAG *Minecraft* server.



This is Dane 'performing' in *Portal 2*.

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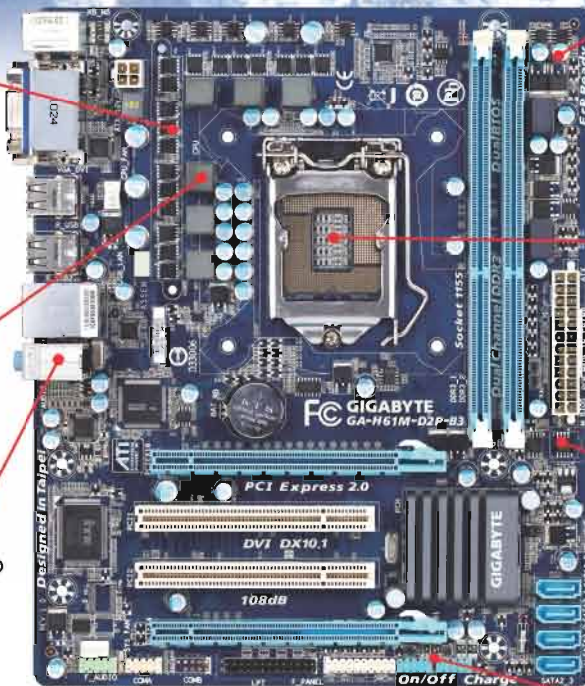
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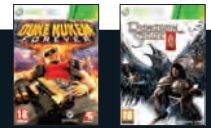
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Letter of the month June 2011



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

IMPORTANT STUFF! PAY ATTENTION!

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

From: Jacky
Subject: Duke Nukem Forever = Sexism? No way!

In the May issue of NAG, I came across an article titled, "Ban that sick filth" which was about some people that wanted to ban Duke Nukem Forever because of sexism? On another note I came across the article titled, "Fail to the king, baby" which also said it's sexist, but it's Duke Nukem, and I agree, what else can we expect? As a female gamer, I myself was a great fan of Duke Nukem 3D back in the day. Duke Nukem is awesome and "Capture the Babe" is so fitting! I asked a few of my female friends, explaining how

"Capture the Babe" works, and they agree with me that we don't find it as sexist but fitting, and dare I type it, even funny.

Now for my question: Do these petitioners really belittle gamers so much as to assume we are too stupid to tell real life from gaming? And if their children do things they see in games wouldn't any of you say that it is because of a lack of teaching between right and wrong? Anyway, Duke Nukem is awesome, can't wait for the game. As for the people at NAG, keep up the great work!

Unbelievably, yes they do and you are 100% correct about

parental responsibility. These media headlines always pop up when some new controversial game is released (GTA, Call of Duty, etc.) If it isn't an outcry about killing people in airports, then it's shock and horror about slapping a hostage on the bum. The joke is, Duke is so old in terms of controversial ideas it's funny that the 'big' newspapers and TV channels are only getting hold of it now. This is why I don't bother with the mainstream media. If they're getting it this wrong with something simple and easy like the gaming industry, imagine what they're doing with the rest of the 'real' news. Ed.

From: Sebastian
Subject: Project Cafe

Hey guys, love the magazine. Anyways have you heard about Project Cafe, Nintendo's next hardcore console? According to my sources (the Internet) it will be more powerful and have better graphics than the PS3 or Xbox – but not significantly? The cool – or maybe the bad part of the thing is that each controller has been confirmed to feature a six inch, 720p touch screen plus analogue face sticks and trigger buttons. The controller will be able to stream whole games. Maybe you can find out more about it for the next issue but if you already know some information like what games it will have or when it will be released or the cost. I would appreciate it if you sent it to me.

Miktar has been all excited about this whole Nintendo thing (Wii 2 / HD or Nintendo Stream / Feel) ever since the Internet (rumour mill) got hold of a few images / notes / things indicating that Nintendo would be announcing something new at E3. They definitely need to respond now that the whole Wii fad is running on empty. We're sending two of NAG's finest to E3 in June so keep an eye out for our exclusive monster supplement in August with everything you need to know about gaming for the next 6 months. Ed.

From: Kyle
Subject: Adapt to Survive

I just got my May 2011 issue of NAG. I know you get a lot of requests from readers as to what you should do with NAG, and I know there is a reason for the way things are done, but never the less I would like to make a suggestion. Times are changing and as such I feel NAG should change too. Many gamers in SA (well more than there used to be) now have access to internet, and online gaming in this country is growing. I just read the review of *Crysis 2*, and the tiny insert on the multiplayer, the same happened with *Black Ops* and *Medal of Honour*, *Homefront* has a small portion dedicated to the multiplayer, but a lot of that which was said I knew before reading the review (thanks to GameTrailers.com and ironically the NAG

DVD). What I'm asking for here is more in-depth reviews on the multiplayer aspect of games like *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield* which are multiplayer focused games (or games which have a worthwhile multiplayer component). Things like level design, weapon balance, and pace of the game and over all polish (major bugs, etc.). Please take this into consideration, I would really appreciate this. Oh, and I know this is lame, but please print the platform the game is being reviewed on in red instead of black. I know the platform written first is the one the game is being reviewed on, but this tiny little change will make life for lazy people like me a lot easier.

Thanks for the suggestions... This kind of mail will generate a bit of debate in the office and perhaps make people think differently about what they're doing when writing reviews in the future. That all said, not everyone has access to the Internet so the single-player experience is always going to be very important. Also, many games only have a multiplayer component because they think they have to and it's therefore kind of half-baked. Unfortunately, 'multiplayer' is kind of expected / demanded these days to artificially add to the value of the game... I feel unless you can do it properly don't bother – rather put that time and energy into making the single-player experience better and leave multiplayer gaming alone. Ed.

From: Nicholas
Subject: Duke?

On the April NAG there is a portrait shot of duke on the inside cover page. Forgive me for saying this, but, is the man wearing face paint?

I'd be careful. You keep talking like that and Duke will use your nut-sack for a wallet. Ed.

From: Keaton
Subject: Pure awesome and escapism for only R42.00

So try not to get too angry, but the last time I bought NAG was April 2010 *gasp*. Shocking I know, but you're not to blame... that would be ridiculous. My issue is that over the past year and

Shorts [extracts of LOL n00b from NAG reader letters]

"Right now, however, I find myself alone with the desire to drop you guys a line."
– Mia

"Nobody is standing with a gun against their heads forcing them to buy NAG... or are you?"
– Gustav

"For the first time in my life I was emotionally touched by a simple short video."
– Tando

"Apparently, the configuration wasn't popularised until the release of Quake (developed by id Software, 1996). The fast paced competitive gameplay created a need for an easier control scheme. WASD opened up a range of keys in close proximity for more advanced functionality."
– Robert

"Please delete this next part if you disagree."
– Dylan

a bit, I have been so extremely busy with studies, etc. that I consequently lost track of my priorities - NAG fell by the wayside. I actually felt that it was a necessary evil to let go of NAG due to the hours I would spend ravaging its pages and crawling through the DVD. I am a third year law student you see, so the hellish grinding of case studies and the incessant workload crippled my social life and well, basically pwnt NAG - soz! Then suddenly, during my Easter vacation of 2011, I decided to purchase a copy as a remembrance of times past. Then WHAM! Nostalgia hit as I tore open the plastic sheath and smelt the awesomeness that is NAG as it filled my lungs and took over my brain with explosions of happiness and excitement - not a euphemism! I spent the entire day glossing over the pages of the April 2011 issue of NAG; reading previews/reviews; laughing at the letters and columns; drooling at the amazing artwork and pictures of future games to come. Then it got me thinking, "OMGWTF!?! I've missed out on 1 whole year of NAG!" I really thought back and came to the conclusion that NAG actually wasn't time wasted, it was time enjoyed! I realised whilst reading, that the happiness and sense of escapism from the pressures and stress of reality that NAG gave me was actually recreational time well spent. Obviously, I quickly got my priorities straight, rectified my schedule and limited meaningless drunken social activities to make room for NAG. It's good to know that almost a year later, the layout may have changed but the people at NAG have not! You guys have done a great job since your very first issue and you really are the perfect gaming/technology mechanism that SA needs. Proud to say I have been buying NAG since April 2006 and still have every issue (apart from the 2010 gap)! Also proud to say I'm now a fully recovered n00b since April 2011 and will be buying NAG now until Xbox 540/720/900 comes out - if I'm still kicking by then! Otherwise spirit world NAG FTW! :)

Every now and then a staff member's mom writes us a cool fake letter. Thanks! Also Keaton, if you want to catch up let our subscription

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.



Hubert Knoblauch, "Please find attached, the NAG FRAG Grenade. The model was created in 3D studio Max and rendered with Mental Ray. A little post production was done in Photoshop CS5."

department know. We can send you all those missed NAGs... for a reasonable fee. ;) Ed

From: What's the story
Subject: Mario

One of my friends recently got married. Growing up together we were avid gamers and used to play games and LAN almost every weekend. Obviously times change and people get older, we are 28 now, but I still have the same passion for my gaming as when I first did when I received my SNES with my super Mario cartridge. Now he's married and he's not "allowed" to play games, apparently the wife and her family told him "it's time to grow up" and to leave the nonsense alone.

Hmm, when he told me that, my obvious first reaction was, WTF? As I know that's the most uneducated thing anybody could say. I know her father likes fishing, spending hours at a time, holding a beer in his hand and waiting for something to nibble on his line (no offence to any fishermen out there) but nobody says hey you look like a retard standing with a rod in your hand with a dumb look on your face waiting for a fish to bite. It does come off as offensive to me, because everybody has their respective hobbies and things that make them happy. What right has anybody got to bash the things we love to do? Here's a thought go educate yourselves, do the things you like to do and let people spend their money and time on what they like to do.

She sounds like a real catch – I give it 14 months. Regardless, let this serve as a warning to all those gamers out there. If the person in your life doesn't respect your hobby then find someone who does. Collecting stamps, fishing, gaming or gardening are all valid hobbies. Also, don't let anyone ever tell you what you can and cannot do with your free time. Ed.

From: Graeme

Subject: Neo's letter - April pg. 77

Neo, in response to your letter re: superiority of PC graphics, I too used to think PC gaming was superior. Sure

the graphics are better, but a game is more than just graphics. If you had to choose between playing *Guitar Hero* on a PC or a console which would you choose? Console no doubt - having your friends huddled over a PC at a party just doesn't have the same effect. Sitting on my couch and playing games on my 50" Plasma and surround sound compared to my chair and a 19" monitor with small speakers. Guess which one I prefer. Then there's the Blu-ray in the console and the fact that forking out R10 000 every 2 years to upgrade my PC and you can see why console gaming is taking over. Not to mention the DRM in PC gaming which requires Internet access and Steam which requires you to first install the updates before you can play – all presuming that you actually have fast internet access in order to do such thing. RIP PC gaming. Long live the console!

I warned Neo that his column would generate this kind of letter and I'm sure a million replies and another endless and pointless debate would arise. But nobody ever listens to me. Ed.

From: Isma-eel
Subject: CINEMAEOGAME – Endless Possibilities

I was just thinking about the whole rocky relationship that games have with movies and vice versa. We all know, either a game based on a movie will suck or a movie based on a game will do the same (Hey that rhymes). But what if these two mediums arrived on the market as one, and found that sweet balance between a cinematic experience where you're taken on a thrilling journey, and a videogame, where the destination of the journey and the way the story concludes is in your hands. I am very optimistic about this happening in the future because, I believe these two mediums were made for each other. The broader audiences that such a title would appeal to could be a huge benefit for all gamers as directors and developers would collaborate very closely and constantly rather than a director giving a studio his vision and just leaving it at that. I do think that for such a venture to work, a new IP would have to be created as it should not come with any baggage or past expectations, this would be tricky because studios would normally tend to turn to tried and tested games or franchises in other words. So putting out such a title is inherently risky because of this gamble but I feel that it is a gamble that this industry needs in an age of context sensitive, multiplayer focused and short campaign titles. Because for me, this is where true progression as an art form lies. Heavy rain did almost reach that level but somehow the gaming part of this CINEMAEOGAME (yes I made a new word) was a bit lost for the cinematic part. One title that holds possibilities for me is *L.A. Noire*, as it seems to be striving for that balance. Lastly I know this may be off topic but according to the peeps at NAG, what is the most popular answer to the following question: Do zombies walk or run?

They shuffle. Ed.

On the forums

Are you having bad hair days over the double XP weekend? We can help. Almost everyone is welcome: <http://www.nag.co.za/forums/>

Question: What elements have to feature in a game based on a comic book/superhero/non-gaming franchise?

nukehead: A good or unique game play experience is paramount. That is it should not be some shameless cash in on the already well-established franchise but should either add to the franchise or have something different to offer. As an example Arkham Asylum was brilliant as it brought a unique combat system and brought what was very essential to being the Batman to an interactive format.

vii: Arsenic, Lots and lots of arsenic.

hideinlight: They have to retain their powers throughout the game. Playing a game with a superhero without super powers is boring.

Jerkydarkstar: Realism, the character must look the same and have the same strengths and weaknesses, just like the superhero.

Jodez: The story should be top notch, comic book universes have a lot of potential and they should use it

echo: Probably the atmosphere. Example: Batman has this dark, moody atmosphere which carried over brilliantly into Arkham Asylum.

Mikit0707: I always like it when they use the same actors/voice actors from the films or TV series to do the voice-overs for the game.

Cleric: Comic trivia in the loading screens.

Chevron: Story. Polish.

Toxyc: The story is paramount to success. Realism (as far as it's possible with flying bullet-proof men in tights) is also important, making you feel like you are actually playing the character and not just advancing along the storyline like a blind man following his dog.

Darranged: The character has to come first. Everything in the game should be designed around the character, from his moves to his appearance, because if you don't feel as if you actually are the hero, then the game has failed to take advantage of its intellectual property.

Cyberninja: It really depends on the character. The elements used in the game should be in line with the character's demeanour and personality. Personally, I feel that the characters, story, world and atmosphere in the game, should be a faithful representation of their comic-book counterparts. Batman Arkham Asylum is a perfect example of a game that excelled in all these areas. And in doing so, has pretty much set the standard of what a great superhero game should be.

Zoop: Any comic based game should just duplicate Batman: Arkham Asylum. Win all around.

MarryO+LewyG: Do the complete opposite of Superman 64 and you got yourself a great game. Like the Goddam Arkham Asylum. (G)Zulu: Do what Arkham Asylum did and you win!
wisp: ooh almost forgot and a well-endowed damsel in distress :D

5h@un13: Keeping the effect of the comic book is paramount in any comic to game franchise. That is the hardest part of a project like that, moving it from still pictures to fully rendered 3D graphics, and the story HAS to be good.
absolado: Originality. Like what Nolan did for Batman

Changsta 187: Less loading screens.

Sci_Ghost: Well I would prefer if the game featured an accurate storyline & gameplay that lasted more than a pathetic total of 4 hours.

gordanfreeman50: bass slapping, like Scott Pilgrim! bass IS AWESOME :D

Smug prick



There's this rapidly expanding side of gaming that I've been missing out on, and it's been driving me nuts. Apple's obscenely expensive iOS products have become legitimate gaming devices. While iPhones and iPads don't primarily serve as gaming platforms, they do a pretty good job at it and they seem to attract a calibre of game rarely found on consoles or PCs. In that regard I felt it necessary to harvest and sell the organs from people who wouldn't readily be missed – not straight away at least. The result is that I amassed enough cash to splurge on an iPad 2 the day they became locally available. In doing so I have joined the throngs of Apple zombies all shambling around heeding Overlord Steve's bidding. I don't regret it, although I get this sneaky feeling that with each iOS product sold, Jobs's maniacal cackle grows more sinister.

Before taking ownership of my "magical new device" I vowed not to let that Apple haughtiness rub off on

"Honestly, I would be lying if I told you that playing games on the iPad was not my primary reason for wanting one."

me. You know what I mean; that attitude that seems to pervade the daily functioning of ninety percent of Apple and Mac users, especially the graphic design hipsters. That crowd seems to be the worst when it comes to this sort of thing. They're the type who insists that any wording they have tattooed to themselves be done so in the Helvetica font.

It was the last attitude I wanted creeping into my demeanour, and then somebody asked me how I was finding my shiny new iPad. Just like that some switch marked "Smug Prick" flipped inside the deepest recesses of my subconscious. I began peppering my conversation with the most nauseating statements like "intuitive interface" and "fostering a sense of community". God, it was hideously overbearing; I swear I blacked out during the entire ordeal.

Honestly, I would be lying if I told you that playing games on the iPad was not my primary reason for wanting one. The persistent deluge of iOS games that has remained frustratingly out of reach became too much to ignore. So it was with unbridled glee that I dived (head-first) into gaming on the iPad.

About three seconds into my iTunes shopping spree I encountered my first hurdle: that persistent deluge I spoke of earlier has produced a sea of utter rubbish that one is forced to wade through before finding anything decent. Fortunately I happened upon *Superbrothers: Swords & Sorcery EP*, which is one game I've been keeping half an eye on. It's odd, but it is exceedingly beautiful in its retro, pixel presentation. Perhaps it was just coincidence, but it seems *Superbrothers: Swords & Sorcery EP* has been made by the aforementioned Mac design hipsters – its name should have been a warning sign now that I think about it. That Apple superiority complex shines through every pixel, control interface and piece of dialogue. Granted some of it made me chuckle ("we were like groan not a fetch quest amirite") but it is wildly pretentious and persistent in its desire for you to Tweet every sentence of dialogue as you swipe and poke your way through the title. Yes, we get it: you're hip and out there but making me Tweet your pseudo-intellectual drivel to people who will read it out of context just makes me sound like one of you, you colossal hipster douchebags.

And what's the big deal with *Angry Birds* anyway – amirite?

Miklós Szecsei

The sky's the limit

Skyrim *might* get mods on console



One of the most compelling reasons to own the PC version of *Oblivion* is the extensive library of mods that ambitious users have created for it. The amount of tweaks that can be applied to the game is astounding: from nudie mods (LOL) to item packs, user-created quests to total conversion mods which alter the game's fundamental mechanics, there's a wealth of options available for anyone who's not happy playing *Oblivion* in its vanilla state. Console players, however, have no choice in the matter and are thus forced to languish in a pit of mod-less, vanilla despair. Okay, so that's a touch overdramatic, but you get our point.

With *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, however, there's a chance that console users may finally get to experience the same level of customisability as the PC crowd. Todd Howard, *Skyrim*'s executive producer, says that he's considered the possibility of bringing mods to the console versions of the much-anticipated title.

"It works on all the consoles," said Howard in an interview with *EDGE*.

"As far as the 360 and PS3, right now there's not an avenue for us to make that available, but we'd very much like to find a way. We have talked to Microsoft and Sony, and so there's a chance it might happen one day, [but] I don't see it happening for release."

Apparently it would totally work, because the tools used for modding are the same tools used to make the game, but without an avenue for distribution, it could take a while before anything becomes concrete. "We'd like to see it happen, because it works, it's how we made the game," added Howard. "I think it's something really cool about what we do, but 90 percent of our audience is on the consoles, so 90 percent of our audience can't even see this thing. So if we can solve that we'd like to."

We can't imagine that all of the mods would work on a console, however. Both *Oblivion* and its predecessor *Morrowind* boasted some mods that put massive strain on system resources – a practice that won't go down well on consoles, unless each mod goes through an official approval process first.

You can run...

There's a new *Need for Speed* game on its way, entitled *The Run*. The game was initially only known thanks to a slip-up by UK online retailer ShopTo.net, but has now been confirmed by EA. They were even kind enough to provide a trailer, which features what looks to be a story-driven experience in which the player (named Jack) must cross America, from the West Coast to the East, in the attempt to escape from some sort of bad entity: cops

and a woman driver were shown; it's anyone's guess as to how they all fit into the scheme of things.

The game's trailer highlighted three cities – San Francisco, Denver and New York – that the player will visit, as well as what we expect to be many miles of open road that we hope won't be boring. Black Box is rumoured to be running the show, which suits us just fine, so add this to the arcade racer side of the *NFS* board. The release date is set to be November the 15th.

APB is almost done reloading



As you may already be aware, the doomed-from-the-start MMOFPS *APB* is in the process of being rebooted following its dismal performance in the market as a game that people had to pay money for. As these words are typed, GamerFirst's free-to-play version of the title is setting itself up to enter open beta, so if everything goes well you'll be able to jump in by the time you read this. Visit www.gamersfirst.com/apb for all the details.

We tend to greet reboots like this with a degree of scepticism, as who's to say that the fundamental idea on which *APB Reloaded* is based isn't what caused the game to fail in the first place? However you want to think about it, *APB* always *seemed* like a good idea, so let's hope that *Reloaded* will garner the success that the new developers feel it deserves. What is clear is that the developers are putting in tons of effort to reduce cheating and deal with all the little nuances that creep up in online games; perhaps efforts like these and others will be just what the game needs.

And... action!



Video game-to-film crossovers have been doing the rounds almost since the birth of the gaming industry, but up until now these types of things have required the work of a film studio to put together. As you're probably aware, many important facets of the game in question tend to get lost in translation, with very few films ever really doing their games justice.

It seems like last year's *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* sparked an idea in Ubisoft, the publisher that green-lit the film, as the company has decided that they're tired of the film industry messing around with game licences, and will now directly produce films themselves.

The company is named Ubisoft Motion Pictures, and will have its headquarters in Ubi's home town of Paris, France. The studio is led by Jean-Julien Baronnet, formally of EuropaCorp – a production house that's been making French films for the last decade.

Ubisoft hasn't revealed any other details yet, but we'll let your imagination run wild with the possibilities. *Assassin's Creed*, *Raving Rabbids*, *Splinter Cell*, *Beyond Good & Evil* or even *Driver* could all be fantastic licences on which to base a film or two.

Blizzard's feeling charitable

// Blizzard Entertainment has donated \$800,000 to the Make-A-Wish Foundation – and it was all made possible by you. Well, maybe not by you specifically, but by gamers. Well, maybe not gamers specifically, but *World of Warcraft* addicts. The generous donation was based on 50% of the total sales of *World of Warcraft's* Moonkin Hatchling in-game pet during November/December 2010. On top of that, Blizzard also invited two Make-A-Wish kids to their studio on "World Wish Day" (April 29th), where they got to meet the developers and tour their gold-plated workplace. It's not the first time Blizzard has donated to the charity. Last year, a promotion involving the Pandaren Monk pet raised 1.1 million dollars for the foundation.

// *Rock Band 4* is on the cards, but don't expect a release this year as a "disc release", says Harmonix VP of strategy Chris Rigopoulos. The company will continue with the series but for this year at least, they're going to concentrate on DLC for *Rock Band 3*, but didn't confirm that the DLC will be limited to new tracks only.



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Kiiiiiiiiill Frenzy!



VIDEOGAME VIOLENCE. Capitalised. Yup, that's because it's one of the most contentious issues in videogame production in contemporary society. And without intending to harp on about old issues, recent developments mean that it's something that I've begun to wonder if I should reconsider my stance.

As a child my gaming content was never really restricted by my mother - I played pretty much whatever I wanted. There was a certain guilty fascination that went hand in hand with breaking the parental lock on *Leisure Suit Larry* and gaining greater access to the "adult" content than technically was allowed, but I don't think I've ever met anyone in my later years that didn't do that as a kid.

So, would I want my child exposed to extreme violence in a videogame? Do I think he could distinguish it from reality, or is there an inherent problem with our desensitisation to commonly accepted violence in videogames?

"We were all perfectly capable of distinguishing fantasy from reality as children (well, most of us anyway)... "

The thing is, I don't really think it's a problem. We were all perfectly capable of distinguishing fantasy from reality as children (well, most of us anyway) and to be honest, if you aren't capable of that, it's unlikely to be because of the videogames you're playing.

When we ran around and played cops and robbers, did our parents ever stop to think, "Maybe my child will become a criminal because they're always playing the thief?" I doubt it.

Now let's just get this out there right off the bat: No, I wouldn't expose my children unnecessarily to things that are likely to scar them for the rest of their lives, and I do firmly believe that reasonable ratings are in place for a purpose.

But therein lies the rub - reasonable ratings. And who are we to determine what is reasonable for one child, may not be considered reasonable for another? Yes, I was able to distinguish between fantasy and reality (with the exception of my imaginary friends), but there are those of us out there who have a slightly less reliable grip on reality.

Would I allow my child to play *Grand Theft Auto*? Perhaps not, but it does entirely depend on the child. Maybe we were allowed to when we were young because our parents simply didn't know the kind of content we were being exposed to, or perhaps it's because they weren't as uptight as many of us are today.

We're so busy worrying about the watchdogs looking over our shoulders and judging us for being "bad" members of society, that we suffer unreasonable guilt and in turn clamp down on what we perceive to be the enemy.

In the 1950s it was the comic book code, then it was rock and roll, now it's videogames - as a society it appears we always need something else to blame other than ourselves for the fact that our children are perhaps not perfectly adjusted members of society.

Where do we draw the line? Do you take writer Matthew Orona's stance on *Bitmob* where he allows his 4 year-old to play supervised *GTA*, or do you clamp down on your child's game playing because of what OTHER people think he should or shouldn't be allowed to play?

Yes, there should be game ratings - of course - but do we adhere strictly to them, or are they guidelines as opposed to rules?

Pippa Tshabalala

Hacked!

Sony on the receiving end of one of the biggest security breaches ever



Sony has had a rough few weeks. What began as a mysterious outage of their online service, PlayStation Network, has turned into a massive case of personal data theft, law suits and alleged conspiracies against the company.

On April 20th, PSN went down, leaving users confused and irritated. Then, shortly after, Sony went on record to state that there had been a breach in security the day before and PSN had been shut down while they worked on the issue. An outside digital security firm was consulted to provide a full investigation of the breach and to assist in their attempt to get back online as soon as possible.

Hacking/trolling group Anonymous has claimed that they're not responsible. Sony's best friend GeoHot is laughing at the company, but hasn't made any claims of involvement. Cyber vigilantes are cheering all over the Internet.

At the time of writing (noon on May the 9th), PSN is still down. The US Department of Justice and Homeland Security Agency is getting on board. So what actually happened?

After a few days of downtime, Sony responded to irritable gamers with bad news: PSN personal data to the tune of 77 million user accounts had been stolen by the hackers, including full names, addresses, birthdates, PSN login details and security question answers. In addition, it was later revealed that over 24 million Sony Online Entertainment accounts were "leaked" during a similar attack that took place a few days before. If you're reading this and had no idea of the problem, go and change your PSN password right now. If that's a password that you commonly use, change every other instance of it. In addition, be aware of any scam emails (or even telephone calls) supposedly concerning Sony. The company *will not* call or email you to request any account details.

Then, there's the issue of credit card details. According to the FAQ released by Sony, "If you have provided your credit

card data through PlayStation Network or Qriocity, it is possible that your credit card number (excluding security code) and expiration date may also have been obtained." In response, VISA is advising customers to keep an eye on their bank statements and to get their cards changed if they suspect anything odd.

As one would expect, Sony is now facing a class-action law suit in California.

If none of this bothers you (maybe your bank account isn't worth hacking), then you'll be pleased to know that there's a light at the end of this dark tunnel. PSN should hopefully be back online in a limited capacity (with full services restored within a month) and relatively safe by the time you read this, and there should be free digital content to the value of \$15-\$20 awaiting you when you log on for the first time. You'll be required to change your password and download a new firmware update. Oh, and you'll have free access to PlayStation Plus for a month, for what it's worth.

A typical example of Sony's digital security team.



"One of the things that Ray Muzyka and the team up in Edmonton have done is essentially step-by-step adjust the gameplay mechanics [of *Mass Effect 3*] and some of the features that you'll see at E3 to **put this in a genre equivalent to shooter-meets-RPG**, and essentially address a much larger market opportunity than *Mass Effect 1* and *Mass Effect 2* began to approach."

John Riccitiello, EA CEO

Up, up and away!



We're ashamed to admit that we only recently stumbled upon this incredibly intriguing game, but recently-released trailers and the title's impending open beta program have piqued our interest.

Firefall is a free-to-play online FPS in the spirit of *Tribes*. The game world is a persistent online environment in which players will battle for control and natural resources using a variety of weapons, customisable classes (called Battleframes), vehicles and of course... jet packs. Woo!

The game will use a mix of classic FPS action elements like player skill-based combat and team-based play, together with MMORPG activities including party formation, defending settlements from attack by the enemy (The Chosen: a race of sentient robots), hunting mobs (either Chosen or a race of giant insect-like creatures), gathering loot, completing missions, using activated abilities and calling each other noobs.

The game is being developed by the independent Red 5 Studios and will see its full release this year, across the globe, for PC only. From what we've seen so far, it looks like it's going to be action-packed but with plenty of strategy, which will come together with the social aspects of online gaming. *Firefall* won't cost you a cent to download and play, but will be supported by microtransactions which haven't yet been detailed.

If you'd like to sign up for the beta or catch a glimpse of the game in action, head over to www.firefallgame.com.

Blast from the past

This isn't the kind of thing we usually cover, but we were so blown away by the sheer insanity of this project that we couldn't help but share it with you. One lone man is remaking *Crash Bandicoot* in CryENGINE, and it looks good.

Yann Gilbert, aka Lennox, is a 22 year-old Frenchman who has never made a game before this, but since he'd been digging through CryENGINE for three years prior to the start of what he calls *Crash Bandicoot Returns*, he figured "why not?"

Watching the video that he released on popular videogame modding site ModDB, it's clear that a lot of effort has gone into this project, but working a cartoonish third-person platformer into an engine designed for a realistic-looking first-person shooter has been a challenge for him.

"I like technical challenges, so it's a real pleasure to develop with this engine," said Lennox in an interview with Giantbomb.

He's not sure how far he will get with the project (he's only demoed a few key stages at present), nor has he even attempted to gain the rights to do what he's doing from Activision. Even if he doesn't get any further than the already-impressive stage he's reached, it's clear that this is one young developer with a future in the industry.

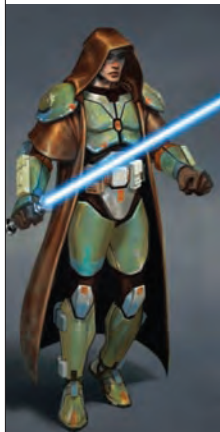


First DLC for Portal 2 believes in freedom

// Have you played *Portal 2* yet? Well, why the hell not? Go, play it now. We can wait... Right, done? Good. Now you can fully understand our happiness towards news that the first downloadable content for the game has been announced, for the price of nada. It'll be available for all platforms and promises to bring "new test chambers for players, leaderboards, challenge mode for single and multiplayer modes, and more."

By the sound of things, Valve is looking to challenge you far more than the main game does with this DLC. Higher difficulty means greater satisfaction, so we're totally cool with that. Expect this DLC to arrive some time soon.

EA has big plans for *The Old Republic*, their upcoming *Star Wars*-themed MMORPG, and they're not yet ready to confirm a solid release date. According to EA CEO John Riccitiello, **the company is preparing the game's launch**, but that fans can only expect this to happen sometime during the publisher's fiscal year which ends on March 31, 2012



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Leap before you look



I have a new number one rule in game development: stop thinking ahead. If you're finding it difficult to just sit down and actually *make* something, chances are that you're over-analysing whatever it is you're about to do. Stop that. Right now. It's crippling you.

Unless you're one of those few readers who are already professional game developers, you shouldn't be thinking about how your current project can become the next big thing. Or whether the interface will work well on an iPhone. Or how you're going to leave room to replace those prototype graphics with custom tilesets and a map editor later on. While all of these ideas are important issues in the long run, at the beginning of a project's life they represent only one thing: constraints. Constraints typically make game design more difficult, and the last thing you want to do with your new-born game is strangle it with its own umbilical cord.

Yeah, it sucks a little bit if your game becomes a runaway

"Yeah, it sucks a little bit if your game becomes a runaway hit and you find out that the code base is sorely under-equipped to deal with all of the polish elements now expected of you."

hit and you find out that the code base is sorely under-equipped to deal with all of the polish elements now expected of you. It happened when I created *Desktop Dungeons*, and shoe-horning a bunch of features into the freeware after I'd already coded myself into a corner was one of the most frustrating (albeit necessary) game development situations I'd ever encountered.

This led to a bunch of mistakes, though. Not wanting to repeat the above experience, I made sure that all subsequent prototypes were coded defensively, with my object hierarchy structured to allow for as much generalisation and flexibility as possible and my game's controls and ruleset able to grow, switch around or become more streamlined at the drop of a hat.

This new approach had two major effects. One: my development time on new prototypes doubled. This made the quick turnover of new ideas about half as feasible. Not cool when the entire point of prototyping is to promote high speed and low effort. Two: I ended up smothering quite a few nice ideas by fretting over secondary concepts (user interface, game modes, unlock hierarchy, re-playability, platform-agnosticism, the list goes on) instead of beelining for a simple, fun experience. In one or two lamentable cases, I actually made an initial prototype that was quite enjoyable, and then ruined it with unnecessary complexity. That kinda sucked.

Unless you're operating in some sort of demented, high-pressure environment where every idea that you try absolutely **MUST** be financially viable (and to be fair, it's a reality faced by many formal game studios), you shouldn't assume that every project you start is going to take off in a big way. Indie game development produces a lot of forgettable ideas, but any hobbyist developer who avoids the pitfalls of over-investment will come out better for it.

To put the whole thing in FPS terms: making an indie career isn't about grabbing a sweet-ass sniper rifle and lining up the perfect shot. Instead, you're going for the stationary turret and peppering bullets all over the battlefield. Preferably while laughing maniacally.

The aim may be poor, but with such a steady stream of bullets you're eventually going to gib something. It'll be messy, yes, but the results are typically worth it.

Rodain Joubert



Split/Second developers out on the street

Black Rock Studios, the creator of last year's action racer *Split/Second*, is suffering major cutbacks with Disney's reported inability to make full use of the studio.

Speaking to an anonymous insider, Eurogamer.net revealed that as many as one hundred jobs are on the chopping block. This isn't your typical downsizing following a project, however, as this large portion of the team has been sitting idle for months since the release of *Split/Second*. Many concepts and ideas have been pitched to the studio's owner/publisher, Disney Interactive, but no matter what was produced, Disney wasn't interested.

"After *SS* wrapped, we started work on *SS2* pre-prod which was cancelled last December due to DIS's new management and their changing priorities (the push towards freemium etc.) - *SS2* didn't really fit in with that (despite some efforts to shoehorn it in)," the insider claims.

"We had a concept week (everyone in the studio working on small teams) to try to come up with new ideas, but nothing really stuck. We had a freemium week sometime later with similar goals too," he continued. "The inactive portion of the studio has been expecting redundancies for months, so this doesn't come as a surprise to anyone."

Wii will rock for a while longer

With rumours running rampant of Nintendo's next big home console (which we'll fill you in on as soon as we have some solid details; for now all that's been confirmed is the existence of the device), The Big N has come out of hiding to explain some of the finer details of the Wii's shortcomings and its future.

According to Nintendo, the Wii has only seen half of its total lifetime sales. With 86 million notches already on their belt, that would mean that Nintendo plans for the device to outsell the PS2, which currently holds the record for home console sales at a whopping 150 million units worldwide.

To help usher along this next wave of sales, Nintendo has announced a price drop of the Wii bundle to \$150 in the US and £130 in England. We don't want to promise that you will see the same reduction down here in our distant end of Africa, but it could happen. Nintendo also confirmed a range of budget titles (called Nintendo Selects) to suit those who only now jump on board the Wii train which will retail in the lands of magical affordable gaming for a mere \$20 a piece.



It's not all peaches and cream for Nintendo, however; Ninty's CEO Satoru Iwata confessed that the Wii delivered poor online services that couldn't compete with the likes of Sony's or Microsoft's offerings.

"In the field of networks in particular, however, I admit that we cannot do business in pace with the changes in the world and the requests from consumers only within our company and with development companies we have long been in touch with," he said.

Iwata then went on to imply that the successor to the Wii, currently codenamed Project Café, will begin its life with solid, competitive online services.

Say hello to China's very first gaming console – the iSec



Here's a fun fact some of you might not know: gaming consoles are banned in China. It is illegal to sell any gaming consoles manufactured by Sony, Microsoft or Nintendo. That being said, Nintendo has been allowed to develop a China-only console but it is not nearly as popular as the Wii. The reasons behind the country-wide ban are numerous: the health of kids; loss of productivity; products manufactured by foreign companies; the list can go on. People in China can, however, still get foreign consoles and there are numerous knock-offs available, but the legitimate consoles are illegal to sell and own.

Now, thanks to a Chinese company called Eedoo Technology, the country's first officially approved gaming console will launch in the last half of 2011. The name iSec stands for "Sports Entertainment Centre". There is an emphasis on fitness and sports games, which means its primary input is a Kinect-like, motion sensing camera.

Both local and international companies will develop games for the system. Should games prove to be rubbish, then the console doubles as a home entertainment system and karaoke machine. If things go well for Lenovo-backed Eedoo Technology then the iSec might get an international release – don't hold your breath for a South African release (we're sure you'll cope) although judging by how in love our government is with China at the moment, anything is possible.

// According to a few Ubisoft employees' LinkedIn profiles, they've been working on *Far Cry 3*. While the offending programmer and animator profiles have since been edited, they included words like "undisclosed First Person Shooter" and "exotic gameplay." Two stuntmen blatantly list the game on their profiles.

// "We have *Quake*; we have *Wolfenstein*. If people want that, we have the IPs to deliver it. And we have a different approach now; we're forging a new path. I think we can freshen those things up... we don't have anything in the works right now."

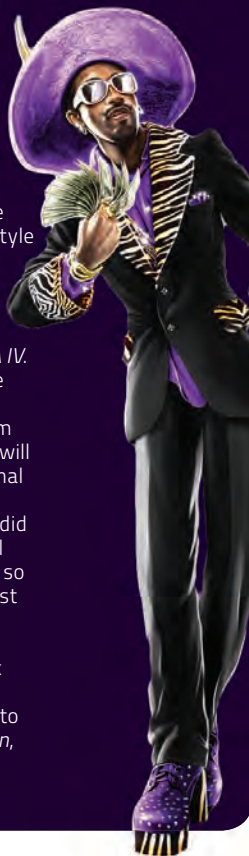
Jason Kim, id Software senior producer

Saints Row Initiation Station gives a head-start in character creation

THQ's ultra-uber tongue-in-cheek take on the already tongue-in-cheek *Grand Theft Auto* style of crime games is getting a third instalment towards the end of the year. That's exciting stuff, especially to the multitude of people who had far more fun spraying poo over pedestrians in *Saints Row 2* than they did answering phone calls in *GTA IV*.

Possibly as a result of gamers' insatiable desire for instant gratification, THQ has announced that they will be releasing a character creation program prior to the release of *Saints Row: The Third*. This will allow us to generate all types of outlandish, criminal bastards to use as our main characters in the full game when it comes out. It's kind of like what EA did prior to the release of *Spore* and *The Sims 3*. You'll be able to share everything you've created online, so for you lazy instant gratification types, you can just download other people's hard work.

The *Saints Row Initiation Station* will be totally free and available on the PC, PlayStation Network and Xbox LIVE Marketplace sometime in the near future. If you want early access then all you need to do is pre-order a copy of *Red Faction: Armageddon*, although whether this early-access promo will be available in South Africa is not certain.



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Pimps and Hos



Are'n't Pimps and Hos just business people providing a service? What's so wrong with that? The manipulative relationship Pimps have with their employees is what. They also ruthlessly exploit their subject-matter without consideration for responsibility, ethics or taste. That's what gives Pimps and their Hos such a poor social image.*

Same could be said for the Publisher and its indentured Developers. Gaming has an unsavory image in Pop Culture for the same reason Pimps and Hos do. Publishers and their relationships with their Developers seems to have, for the time being, fallen into the same pattern of ruthless exploitation: tapping into a needy, still relatively underground market. The average person can smell the seediness that surrounds the entire operation. The gamer too, but he tends not to care since he's only in it for the fun and doesn't care who gets hurt in the process except if it's him. Right?

When the new *Duke* game looked to be the Real Deal, the gaming Dons (gamers) were titillated, as if the bar down

"Nobody wants saggy Developer tits."

the street got a hot new girl. Meanwhile the general public is thinking "oh look, there's another trashy videogame, another thing for unsavory young males to indulge themselves in wasting their time with". Basically, the same reaction to finding out someone is a regular Ho customer.

The Pimp ruthlessly exploits a base need, and gets no respect because the exploitative nature keeps it on the fringes of society and never allows it to achieve a degree of sophistication. Publishers who try and exploit their customers and Developers in the most base manner are still in the realm of the seedy backdoor-of-the-bar Pimp, and their wares are often as tasteless and ugly, if gratifying and direct, as a Pimp who knows his customers.

How is it when one of the godfathers of the business, *Mortal Kombat*, returns to town to show how to exploit sex and violence, that it seems almost classy? Compared to the generic gangsta simulator industry by daddy-mac Zynga, anyway. Could it be that something like *Mortal Kombat* is from a more genteel age, an artifact from when brothels were more of a gentleman's club than a flophouse?

The analogy is humorously water-tight. Indie Developers are like independent Hos, taking their Stuff online to service niche fetishes without fear of wandering into some Pimp's turf. Pimps/Publishers act as agents and advertisers for their Ho/Developers, perpetuating the belief that doing this Business is far too dangerous alone, and a Ho is gonna find itself without money, bereft of protection, out on the street cold or perhaps... *pirated*.

How many Developers find themselves destitute anyway, after their Pimp thought them over-the-hill or not profitable enough? Or simply overworked them to the point where development sagged? Nobody wants saggy Developer tits.

It's a cheap shot to draw comparisons between the abusive Pimp/Ho relationship and what goes on in the complex contract-driven inner-workings of the Publisher/Developer synergistic bondage, sure. Do Developers see themselves as digital prostitutes having mind-sex with teenage boys for cash? Do Publishers see themselves as digital "procurers", brokers of the exploitative mind-sex their Developers put out? The structure of a Publishing business with all its middle-men certainly bears more than an uncanny resemblance to the hierarchy of the Pimp business.

Miktar Dracon

* That, and prostitution is illegal in most parts of the world. Most parts, not all.

Yay, a new Burnout! Now with lobster monsters?

Burnout *Crash!* has an exclamation mark in its name, which means typing it out is a pain in the ass seeing as our word processor insists on auto-correcting the proceeding letter. Anyway, the game apparently has Lobster Monsters in it so we know we're not the only ones wondering what the hell is going on.

It turns out the next game in the *Burnout* series will likely be a downloadable arcade game of sorts heading for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. According to an ESRB ratings report, the game will feature "cartoony vehicles" that

players need to drive into busy intersections from a top-down perspective. The higher the carnage created, the higher the points you'll score. So far, aside from the "cartoony" look of the cars and the top-down perspective, it's standard *Burnout* crash mode stuff. Enter "oversized airplanes, tornadoes, lobster monsters and UFOs" which you'll have to dodge while guiding your vehicle to the crash site. We think it's safe to say that this is an attempt to expand the franchise into the downloadable, casual game market and should not be seen as a full-on, new *Burnout* title.



You've got Paradox in my Syndicate

Well now: this is mighty intriguing. Speaking with Kotaku's Stephen Totilo, Paradox Interactive's wonderfully eccentric CEO Fredrik Wester casually dropped a conversational nuke while discussing the future of the peculiar publisher. If the name *Syndicate* means anything to you, you're going to want to read this excerpt from the article that was born of that discussion:

"And down the line? Well, this is how Wester's mind works: He loved the ruthless isometric tactical classic *Syndicate* back in the day. He also works in Sweden and is therefore privy to the fact that a neighboring studio is making a new *Syndicate* for EA and that the game is "more of a like a *GTA* wannabe than

it's like the original game." Therefore, he wants Paradox to make its own riff on *Syndicate*. They don't have a game design in mind yet, but that's the dream."

It seems that all the well-deserved success that Paradox is having lately (multiplayer magician simulator *Magicka* has been a runaway success, having sold 500 000 copies) hasn't gone to the publisher's head, because they're going to continue bringing us obscure, niche titles that push the boundaries of "weird, but awesome." Paradox plans to reveal a new title, currently known as *Project Postman*, at E3. Most importantly, the company's CEO is willing to happily namedrop *Syndicate* when discussing their future games. And that's awesome.



Steam coming to a handheld near you?

Valve's online distribution platform is, without a doubt, one of the most successful initiatives in the gaming industry. The service launched alongside *Half-Life 2* way back in 2004; gamers did not welcome it with open arms at all. Fast-forward to today and the vast majority of those who initially loathed it are now some of the most steadfast ambassadors.



Steam Works has made the jump from PC to Mac and more recently to the PlayStation 3. Is that it insofar as expansion is concerned? Not likely if Valve's Marketing VP Doug Lombardi has anything to do with it: "we do feel we're late on mobile across many of Valve's services. It is something we're starting to look at now. People are starting to ask us for it. The more requests we receive, the more we feel the need to act on them."

A Steam App on your iOS device? On your Windows 7 phone? On your NGP? Now we're talking. Hey Valve, if you "feel the need to act on" requests by gamers, then act on this: we at NAG would like Steam on the NGP and considering its twin analogue stick awesomeness, we'd like to be able to play the entire Valve FPS collection on it as well. Oh, and both *Portal* games. Kthnxbye.

Itsa me, Ezio!

Ubisoft has announced the next title in the excellent *Assassin's Creed* series. Subtitled *Revelations*, the game will bring with it the conclusion of Ezio Auditore da Firenze's story when it hits this November. Here's what we know so far:

The third title sees Ezio enjoying a bit of acrobatic tomfoolery in Constantinople "at the heart of the Ottoman Empire, where a growing army of Templars threatens to destabilise the region." Ubisoft Montreal is once again heading up development "with the support and expertise of Ubisoft studios Ancecy, Massive Entertainment, Quebec, Singapore and Bucharest." With that many studios toiling away on the game, we're expecting something *epic*. It's been stated that the fourth title to bear the *Assassin's Creed* moniker will boast "revolutionary gameplay" and improved multiplayer. Also – a climbing hook, presumably used for climbing things. Expect to see the game on all the usual formats – Xbox 360, PS3 and PC. The PC version will probably arrive much later than the others, if the past repeats itself.

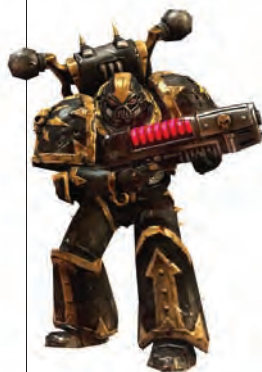
That's pretty much all the info that exists right now, but we're sure E3 will reveal more. *AC*'s famously enigmatic storyline has become a vast, complex beast, spanning three separate characters and timelines. Apparently *Revelations* will answer all those questions that have been burning a hole in your brain ever since the end of the original *AC*.



Tabletop victory: THQ retains Warhammer 40,000 rights

// THQ have excitedly announced that they've managed to hold onto the rights to Games Workshop's *Warhammer 40,000* franchise for a few more years. Basically, this means that we're likely to see a bunch more THQ-published games set in the 40K universe long after the upcoming Ork-infested shooter *Space Marine* and LFG-infused MMO *Dark Millennium* have been unleashed on the world. THQ's Brian Farrell had this to say regarding these happenings:

"The complex, futuristic war-torn universe created by Games Workshop equipped THQ's award-winning development teams with the material to create one of the most loved PC franchises – *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War*. Our envisioning of the *Warhammer 40,000* universe will continue to grow with top quality games across all platforms, including the upcoming launches of *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine* and *Warhammer 40,000: Dark Millennium Online*."



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EA South Africa	[011] 516-8300
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Phoenix Software	[011] 803-5437
Prima Interactive	[011] 799-7800
Rectron	[011] 203-1000
Samsung	0860 726 7864
Sonic Informed	[011] 314-5800
Ster Kinekor Entertainment	[011] 445-7700
TVR	[011] 807-1390

If your company isn't listed here, phone NAG on [011] 704-2679.



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

Publishers: Microsoft Xbox
Number: 0800 991 550

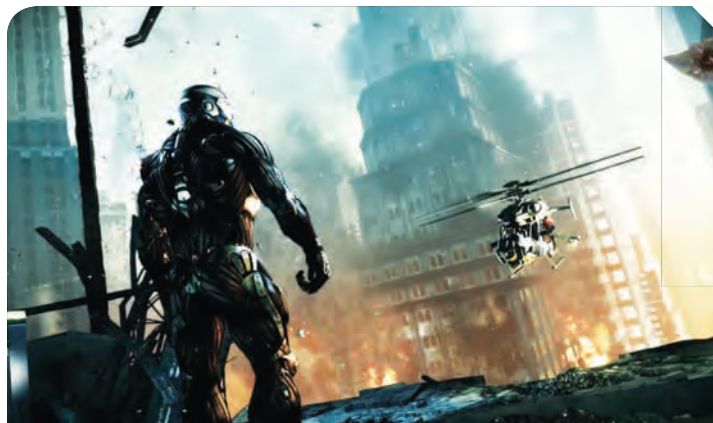
Publisher: Electronic Arts
e-mail: zasupport@ea.com
Telephone: 0860 EAHELP/324357

Rage <3 modders



To all you modders out there who've sat back and thought "Jeepers, I'd really love me some modding tools for *Rage* when it's finally available," you're in luck. id Software's Tim Willits told *PC Gamer* that when *Rage* ships this September, it'll do so with full modding tools, so you can go bananas building your own levels and modding the game until it's barely recognisable.

"All you need to do is pull down the console, type 'id studio', then press enter. Then, bam, there's all the tools we use," said Willits. While building your own content from scratch using these tools could prove to be quite a daunting task, modifying existing game content to suit your needs should be a lot easier. "Building levels from scratch is more difficult," says Mr Willits, "because we have a layer system in some of the levels. I can foresee somebody modding up Wellspring (a town in-game) and adding different characters, giving them different voice-over."



So you think you can make something better than *Crysis*, eh?

id Software aren't the only ones providing enterprising modders with a reason to cry tears of unbridled joy. When August rolls around, it'll bring with it a gift for anyone wanting to create their own digital playgrounds using Crytek's CryENGINE – whether that involves simply creating levels for *Crysis 2*, or embarking on the more challenging adventure of developing entirely new, non-commercial projects, free of the burden of licensing fees. We'll see not only a *Crysis 2* editor, but a CryENGINE SDK as well.

"In August 2011 we will be launching a free CryENGINE SDK. If you want to use it for fun, like all our previous MOD SDKs it will be completely free of charge, to anyone who wants to play with it! You just register, download the SDK with a personalized license key and you're good to go! If you want to use it to make a game to launch commercially, we'd like to help you with that. If you want to take your product down a traditional commercial route, we will offer an innovative low cost licensing model if you want to release your game digitally," said Crytek CEO Cevat Yerli. Feel free to head on down to www.crymod.com for more info.

God of War IV in 2012?

// Kratos may have tied up all those bloody loose ends at the end of *God of War III* and completed his vengeance-fuelled quest, but chances are that Sony's not going to let a franchise as enormously popular as *God of War* pass quietly into the annals of history. Not when there's money to be made. According to *PSM3* and one of their "anonymous sources," that's definitely the case since they reckon a fourth *God of War* title will see the light of day in 2012. Thanks, anonymous source!



// Telltale Games, creators of such fabulous titles as the new *Sam & Max* and *Tales of Monkey Island* series, have revealed that they're pushing back the release date of their upcoming *Jurassic Park* title. The good news is that the game is also in development for PS3 and Xbox 360, and the delay on PC means that all three platform releases will be simultaneous. The console versions will ship with the entire series on disc.

Hardcore gesturing: Kinect getting a "core" shooter



Microsoft Game Studios Vancouver is reportedly working on a new "core AAA shooter experience using Kinect." This is great news for anyone who feels that Kinect still lacks titles that appeal to gamers who want more than just mini-game compilations and arm-flapping simulators. According to senior artist Shawn Woods, MGS Vancouver (also known as Zipline Studios) was supposedly originally focussed on creating "social microtransaction games," but the studio's gaze has now shifted to this new, unnamed game.

The studio's website says that it's "dedicated to making games for 'core' gamers" and aims "to push the limits of proven and unexplored game development and show the world what's possible on Microsoft's game consoles." Job listings on the site delve deeper into the studio's intentions and their dedication to "bringing high quality, highly experimental gameplay to Xbox 360 and Kinect." The listings describe the current project as an "original IP that uses Kinect in new and unique ways."

It all sounds very promising, but time will tell if the studio (which hasn't been around very long) can deliver on those promises.



Attention to all zombie enthusiasts: Dead Block exists

Developer Digital Reality has announced a new downloadable game for PC, XBLA and PSN starring your favourite undead brain munchers. *Dead Block* stars three unlikely companions who must work together to deploy a number of imaginative defensive traps against the encroaching zombie horde. There's Jack Foster, a construction worker with a natural appreciation for hammers and all things hammer-like. Foxy Jones is a traffic warden with fabulous hair. Finally there's Mike Bacon, a boy scout with a penchant for gorging on foodstuffs all day, every day.

The game's official site (www.deadblock.com) says the Unreal Engine 3-powered title will feature "innovative defensive gameplay." The characters blockade themselves in various places scattered across town, erecting deadly (and often comical, if the trailer is anything to go by) traps and resorting to their weapons when the going gets tough. The game can be played alone or cooperatively with friends. It's due later this year.

Look & Listen



Pre-orders / www.lookandlisten.co.za

PC

Alice: Madness Returns	June 10th
F.E.A.R. 3	July
Driver: San Francisco	September 2nd

Xbox 360

Call of Juarez: The Cartel	July 22nd
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	August 24th
Battlefield 3	November

PS3

Bodycount	July
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: HD Trilogy	July 8th
Madden NFL 12	September

Wii

Transformers: Dark of the Moon	June 24th
Captain America: Super Soldier	July
The Smurfs	July 22nd

BDS

Cubic Ninja	June 24th
Zoo Mania	September 2nd
Puzzle and Mind Gym	September 2nd

DS

Squinkies	June
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	July
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2: The Videogame	July 8th

Kinect

Dance Party with Mel B	June
PowerUp Heroes	June 17th
Super Me	June 17th

Move

Dance Party with Mel B	June
National Geographic Challenge!	June 24th
Child of Eden	September 16th

Reboots all round: *Tomb Raider: Big-Screen Edition* snags some writers

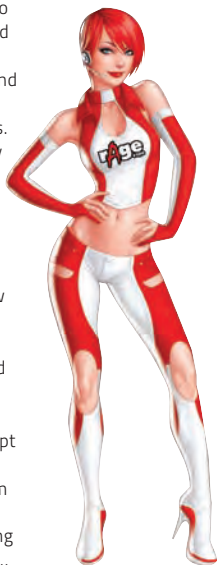
A while back it was revealed that a reboot of the *Tomb Raider* film franchise is set to arrive in 2013. That's pretty much all we've known up until now, with no word yet as to whether or not Angelina Jolie would reprise her role as the iconic adventurer. Now it's been revealed that Mark Fergus and Hawk Ostby, the pair of writers behind films like *Iron Man* and the impending *Cowboys & Aliens*, will be penning the script for Lara Croft's return to the silver screen.



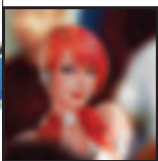
What's that noise?!

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 'June Scarlett' and don't get it wrong or deleted it will be.



May Winner



Rodney Conchar, Page 60

Win!

A 6-in-1 Starter Kit for Xbox 360 valued at R499.99. Sponsored by Bowline and DreamGear.



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 *LittleBigPlanet2* plus a plush Sack Boy toy from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line 'June Caption'.



NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR / "You said what about her boob armour?"



LAST MONTHS WINNER / "I told you not to drink the soda with the fizzpop!"

- E.M. Kwooit

"We know we have a big competitor. But head-to-head with *Call of Duty* in Q3, we have the superior game engine, a superior development studio, and **a flat-out superior game.** Our goal is to significantly gain share in the huge FPS category and to put the other team on defence."

John Riccitiello, EA CEO, on *Battlefield 3*

Some details escape regarding rumoured Warhawk sequel

It seems nobody is able to verify the validity of these details (brought to us by *SystemLink*) regarding the long-rumoured sequel to 2007's PS3 exclusive, *Warhawk*. Apparently an anonymous Sony employee revealed that the sequel, which may or may not be called *Starhawk*, is a third-person shooter that allows players to assume control of tanks, jeeps, APCs and now spaceships that do what they do best – shoot things in space. These details reveal that some maps are focussed on exploits that take place on a planet's surface, while others take place in space. You won't be able to make the transition from planet to space in the same map. In terms of the technology behind the game, Sony guy says a new engine will provide "stunning visuals," while still retaining the slightly cartoonish visual style boasted by *Warhawk*.

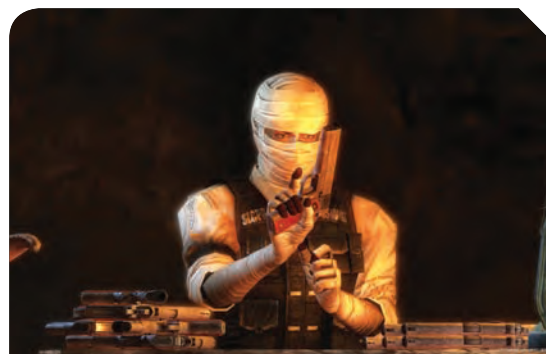
Thousands of fans were expecting *Mass Effect 3* to release this year, but EA recently confirmed that the game will only launch in 2012, before the end of March. The company needs time to tweak the game to make it the "biggest, boldest and best game in the series."

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Alice: Madness Returns delves deep into the dark and violent side of the imagination, creating a nightmarish Wonderland where Alice must face the demons that haunt her visions. Visit the grim reality of Victorian London and then travel to the beautiful yet ghastly Wonderland to uncover the root of Alice's madness and discover the truth behind a deadly secret, kept hidden for years.



Lucky number 3

Elder Scrolls V is well on its way into production, but that doesn't mean Bethesda's ready to give up on their post-apocalyptic frolic *Fallout: New Vegas*. The company recently announced three upcoming downloadable content packs that, for a change, will land simultaneously on PC, Xbox 360 and PS3, for \$10/800MSP/R70 each.

Honest Hearts should be available by the time you read this, and follows the story of a character left stranded after their caravan is ambushed. While attempting to get back home, the player will get stuck in the middle of a war between a New Canaanite missionary and the Burned Man.

Old World Blues, which is set for release in June, focuses on a character's journey through pre-war research centres, and eventually their unwilling participation in a science experiment.

Lastly, *Lonesome Road*, due in July, will take a deeper look at the original game's storyline and will tie up a few loose ends.

More crazy Kinect peripherals



Sweet mother of all that is good and holy – sometimes we swear that there must be a bunch of inbred, half-brained, faeces-chucking monkeys developing things for the gaming industry. When Kinect first launched, we had a news byte about an entirely superfluous blow-up dinghy that you're meant to use while playing *Kinect Adventures!*. Seriously. The mind-boggling amount of stupid that went into developing a brazen cash-in peripheral like that is being tapped once more, this time by CTA Digital; they are the company that brought out a blow-up go-kart for use with *Mario Kart*. I think I just lost brain cells typing out that last sentence.

So what could possibly be more stupid than blow-up dinghies and go-karts? Transparent steering wheels for Kinect racing games; we kid you not. Clearly CTA Digital didn't get the whole premise of "you are the controller" with Kinect. Anyone who purchases a translucent steering wheel should be required by law to undergo sterilisation procedures.

Release List



Dates subject to change without notice

June: Week 1

Kung Fu Panda 2	360 / PS3 / Wii / DS
Red Faction: Armageddon	PC / 360 / PS3

June: Week 2

Dance Party with Mel B	360 / PS3 / Wii
Infamous 2	PS3
Duke Nukem Forever	PC / 360 / PS3
Zhu Zhu Pets + Puppies Bundle	DS
James Noir's Hollywood Crimes	3DS

June: Week 3

Dungeon Siege III	PC / 360 / PS3
Child of Eden	360
PowerUp Heroes	360
Alice: Madness Returns	PC / 360 / PS3

June: Week 4

Petz Fantasy	3DS
Cubic Ninja	3DS
Transformers: Dark of the Moon	360 / PS3 / Wii / 3DS / DS
Shadows of the Damned	360 / PS3
Ape Escape	PS3
No More Heroes: Heroes' Paradise	PS3

Winners

February Rectron Liteon competition:

Doryn Dippenaar from Pinegowrie
Ferdie Swanepoel from Boksburg
Duan Jordaan from Centurion
Nathan Bannister from Greenacres

February Dremel competition:

Herbert Fraser from Middleberg

April Crysis competition:

Eduaan Welthagen from Willow Glen Pretoria

Game announcement: The Second Guest

// Some of the developers who worked on *The Whispered World* (a traditional point-and-click adventure game which boasted truly beautiful hand-drawn 2D artwork, but stumbled a bit in the gameplay department) have announced their next project: an episodic adventure series called *The Second Guest*. It's a joint venture between Twice Effect and Head Up Games – a pair of independent devs from Germany. *The Second Guest* will once again be a point-and-click adventure, one which will supposedly be augmented with a comedic edge. Set in London in the year 1923, it's apparently inspired by the art of Tim Burton and will be spread across five episodes. The first two episodes are due for release later this year.

// Following a mysterious domain name registration, **THQ has confirmed the sequel** to last-year's dark and mysterious *Metro 2033*, entitled *Metro 2033: Last Light*. According to sources, the publisher had green-lit the sequel before the first title was complete, which we hope means that the sequel is so packed full of terrifying subway goodness that it'll make us cry ourselves to sleep at night.

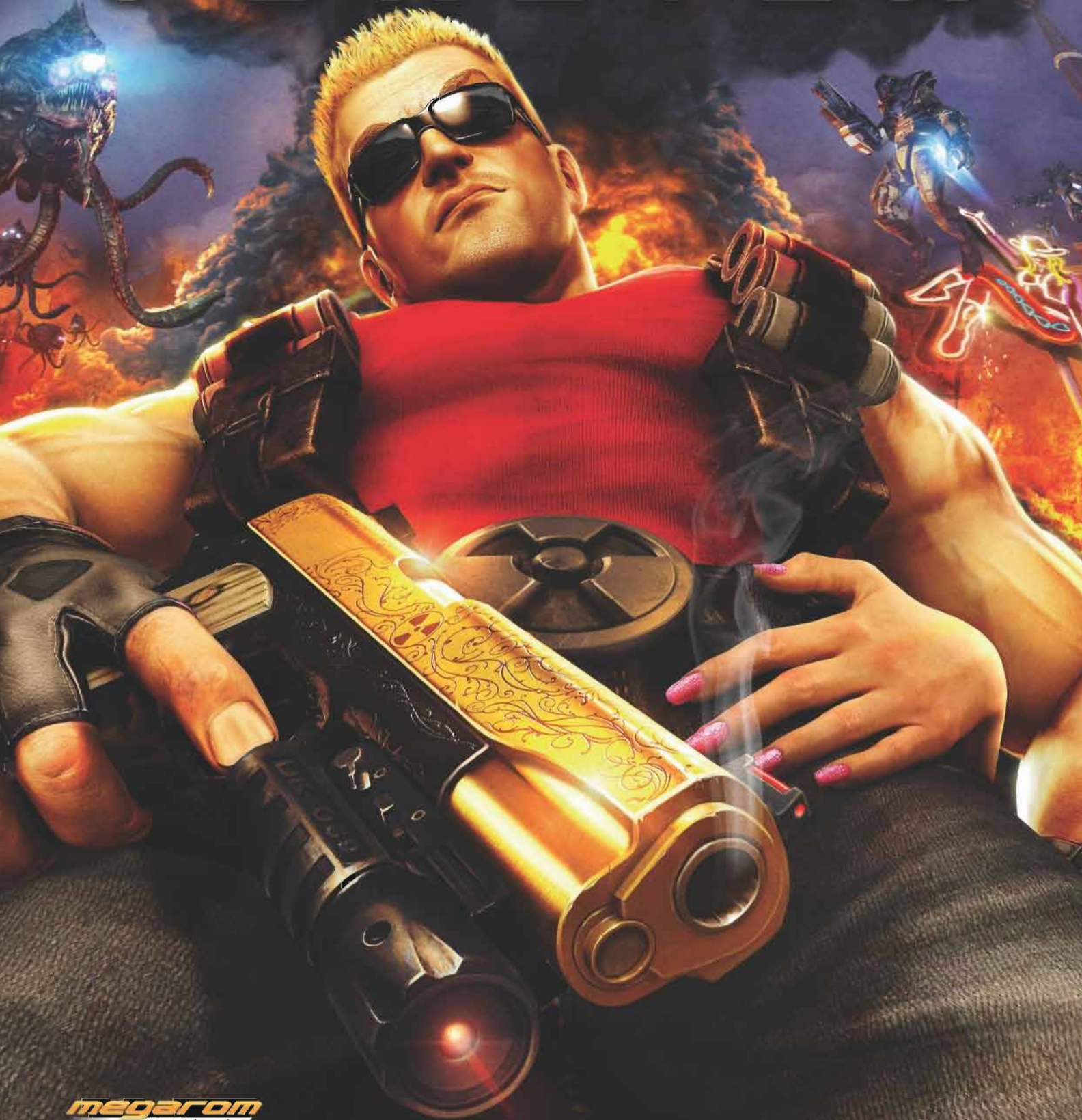
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Deus Ex: Human Revolution

Future imperfect



[details]

Release Date:
August 2011
Platforms:
PC / 360 / PS3
Genre:
First-person role-playing game
Developer:
Eidos Montreal
Website:
www.deusex.com/
Publisher:
Square Enix

[trivia]

// At one point, I found a room filled with lockers. It was like Christmas came early as I opened each and every one of them, greedily filling my inventory with delicious beer and boxes of stun darts stolen from factory workers' lockers. It's their fault, really: what the hell kind of factory worker needs stun darts? [Don't forget the concussion grenades, Ed]

I don't really know how to get this preview rolling. Any words I could put on these pages about the importance of the original *Deus Ex* and its impact on every immersive sim that followed could bring me perilously close to underselling it. It's a game that changed the way we thought about first-person titles at the time, proving that giving the player the power of omnipresent choice could have a more profound effect on the experience than handing them a seventeen-barrelled rocket launcher right before the final boss. Give them a world to explore, give them more than just a series of cleverly designed mazes, and they will love you for it. Give them a template on which to build and define a character as they see fit and you immediately encourage them to become immersed in a world into which they're investing infinitely more than just a steady stream of bullets. Envelop them in a thrilling conspiracy, have the characters in your gritty cyberpunk world lie to them constantly, then let them decide what's right, what's wrong and who's worth trusting. Leave a candy bar lying on a park bench and let the player decide if they'd really like to have a taste of the delicious, energy-boosting nutrients within. Let them decide how they want to play this game and you'll be remembered for it. Warren Spector and his cohorts have definitely been remembered for it. Before *Deus Ex* arrived, others had attempted to successfully build a game around similar ideals, with mixed success. None of them got it quite as right as *Deus Ex* did, which is why the memory of it lingers so strongly.

That's also why there's so much

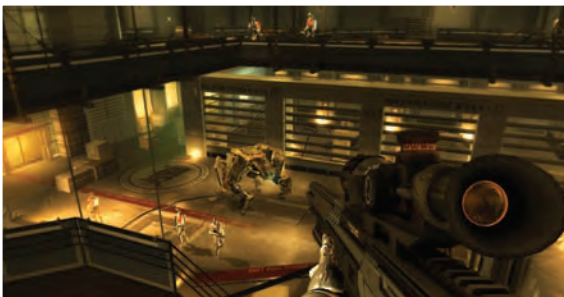


The orange highlighting of important objects in the game isn't as obnoxious as you'd think. The game world is filled with so much tertiary detail that it's actually quite helpful.

anticipation for this, the third title to bear the coveted *Deus Ex* name. With Warren Spector hanging out with Mickey and Co., can the new developers at Eidos Montreal successfully slap new, good memories into the minds of fans, or will they fail and be ridiculed on dingy Internet forums for years to come, as so often happens when a new developer tries their hand at pleasing the rabid fans of a beloved franchise? We were kindly handed an ominous disc containing a generous portion of the game's opening hours. We've spent a good deal of time with it, inspecting every polished nook and choice-filled cranny, and we're here to tell you that this game won't just be good: it'll be

awesome. It's pretty much got no hope of rivalling the first game in the eyes of fans, because nostalgic, starry-eyed memories are a powerful beast to conquer, but it's sure to create an all-new legion of followers, judging by the excellent experience we've had with it so far.

Phew - I guess that's how you successfully get a preview of a new *Deus Ex* rolling. Playing the preview code for *Human Revolution* revealed a game that feels lofty and significant, like it understands and appreciates its lineage, but still feels the need to carve its own path and doesn't give a crap what the neighbours are doing. That's an impressive feat considering



it's not even the complete game. It's not without the problems that early builds are typically rife with, but it's already polished and refined enough to get us eager for the final release. In case you've not been reading up on the game's basic plot, here's the (hopefully spoiler-free) situation: you play Adam Jensen (voiced by Elias Toufexis, self-professed fan of the *Deus Ex* series), a private security bloke in the employ of Sarif Industries. It's the year 2027, 25 years before *Deus Ex*. Biomechanical augmentations that push human beings far beyond their biological limits are all the rage right now, naturally dividing humanity into pro-aug and anti-aug (i.e. those who are all for augmentation and those who are against it) camps, with extremists on both sides. Sarif Industries specialises in human augmentation and one of their leading scientists has just made a discovery that will drastically change the future of transhuman development. Everything changes when an anti-aug organisation mounts an attack on SI and leaves Adam tragically disfigured, forced to undergo augmentation to survive.

That's how it begins. From there on out, you're bombarded with choices. Every mission you embark on in the game can be completed as you choose, letting you talk, sneak, hack and shoot your way into or out of sticky situations. You're not restricted to any

one of those either. Adam is versatile enough to adapt to any situation. There are entire sections within missions that you can stealthily move through without ever firing a shot. The game actually encourages this by rewarding you with extra experience points that'll eventually allow you to upgrade your augmentations. The difference between this and the first game is that you're not punished for failing to stick to your chosen role. As a stealthy character loaded with stealth upgrades, you're still good in a brawl. Likewise, a character loaded with combat augmentations can successfully put his stealth hat on without looking a fool thanks to the new radar and a cover system that complements the deliberate movements required for stealth brilliantly. I love the variety packed into each mission as methods for completion are constantly presented to you. Do you hack your way past that pesky turret, or do you search for a vent that might lead to an alternate route around it? Do you risk leaving that body there on the off chance that somebody might spot it, or do you drag it into a broom closet just to be sure? If you don't use a concussion grenade, will you still be able to take on the eight bad guys in the next room? It's exactly how a *Deus Ex* sequel should be. Each step reveals another choice and each choice further engulfs you in this vibrant virtual

"Each step reveals another choice and each choice further engulfs you in this vibrant virtual world."



Each combat scenario presents its own unique challenges. Luckily, Adam is such a badass that there's always an exciting solution.



[trivia]

// It's not clear yet how far the consequential ripples of your decisions will reach, but there were some tough insta-consequences in the preview code. Failing to save a hostage in one mission draws a deeply, almost disturbingly human response from one of the game's minor characters that had me feeling like a total asshole for the entire in-game chopper ride back home.



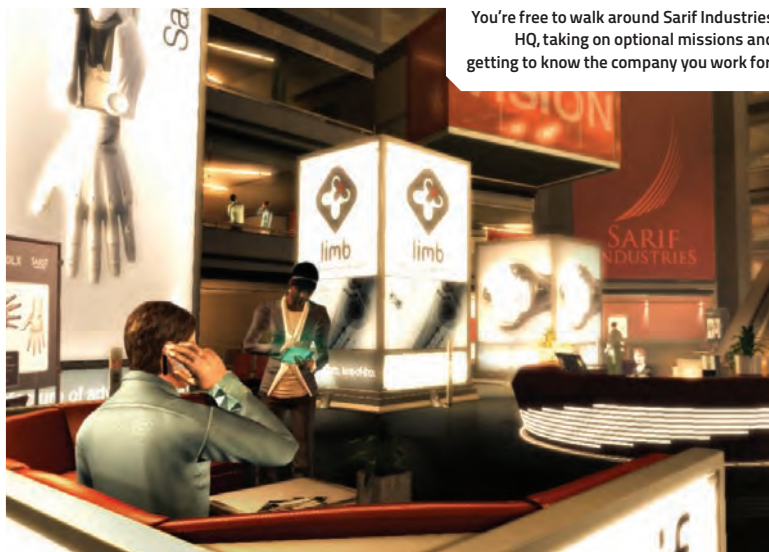
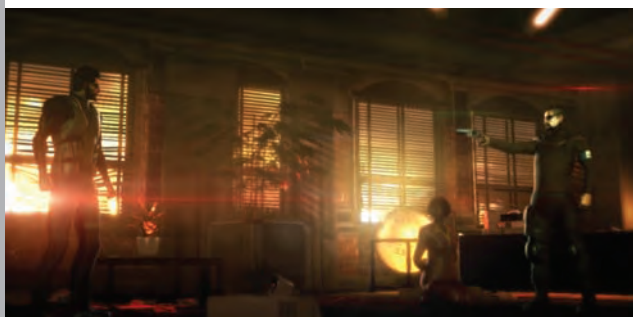
world. When your choices inevitably lead to an inescapable scuffle, the action is tight. The guns feel great, each item feels useful and every augmentation you've unlocked or upgraded is hugely appreciated somewhere down the line. Add in a plethora of weapon upgrades/add-ons and the intuitive action becomes even more alluring.

Those augmentations come in a variety of flavours. A nice touch is the explanation behind them: following the accident, Adam has every augmentation in existence fused to his battered body, but not all of them have been activated. His body needs time to gradually accept each augmentation and its incrementally useful upgrades, and that's where the experience points come in. Accrue enough of them and you'll unlock a Praxis Point, which you then exchange for upgrades. Social augmentations alter the way you approach conversations with NPCs. Your cyborg arms can be strengthened to the point where vending machines become projectile weapons. The instantly



Hacking security systems brings its own set of XP rewards. The game is constantly rewarding you for the choices you make regarding your playstyle.

"...it understands and appreciates its lineage..."



You're free to walk around Sarif Industries HQ, taking on optional missions and getting to know the company you work for.

useful unlocks like cloaking and speed boosts are there, as are the more exotic, approach-altering augmentations like one which lets you fall great distances without taking damage or another which gives more advanced options when hacking terminals.

Then there's the story and the world you're thrust into. It's never going to be clear who to trust, who to believe in this world that seems altogether more sombre than that of the original. The game's transhumanism theme is inherently interesting and engaging, but I won't spoil any of the specifics. It's made more plausible by the fact that every unimportant passerby is happy to express their opinion on the subject when you engage them. Conversations with key characters are pleasantly stimulating mini-battles that see you trying to judge their personality type and manipulate them accordingly. The architecture and intricate design of the world itself is stunning, packed with incidental details and people to meet. We've only seen Detroit, just one of the five cities that will be in the main game,

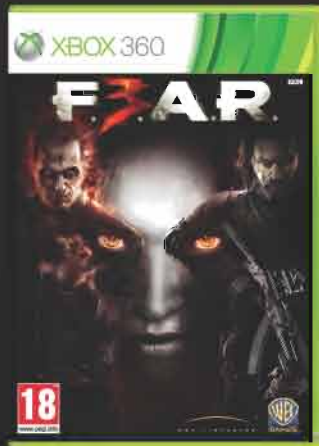
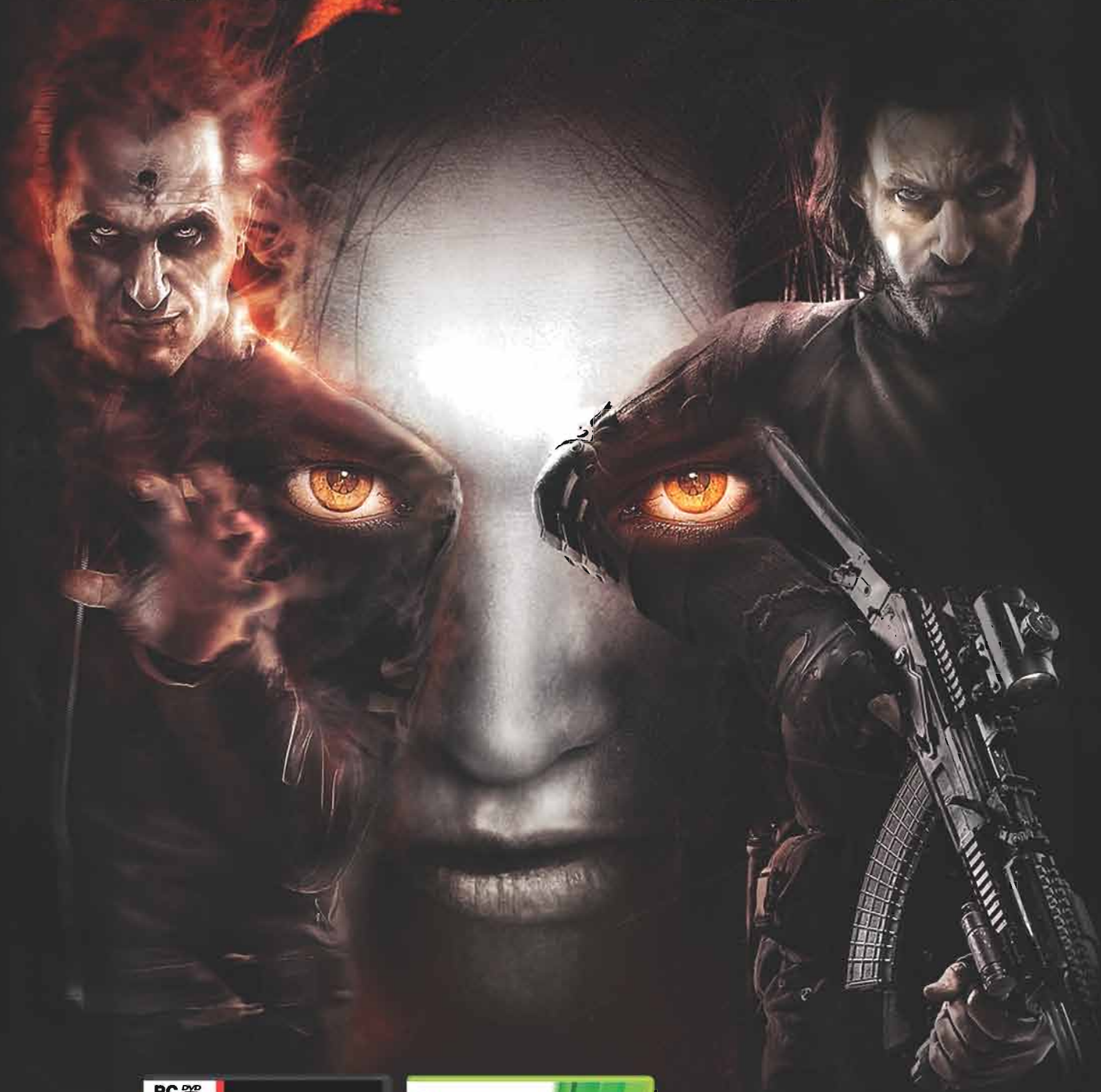
and it's enormous, offering a playscape peppered with side missions and optional endeavours. If each city is as engrossing and vast as Detroit, expect to pour more time into this game than is socially acceptable.

The preview code brought so many satisfying surprises and such a staggering amount of content that trying to concisely compress the thoughts I've had on it is difficult. I've prattled on for more than 1 300 words now, and I still haven't come close to saying everything I want to say. I've run out of space, so all I really want to leave you with is this: *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* is going to be great, possibly one of the best releases of the year if the rest of the game is this solid. It managed to make me care about its world and the virtual people who inhabit it – and this wasn't even the full game. There's still room for trepidation here, because there's a chance that the rest of the game might suck massive testes, but my bright-eyed anticipation won't let me believe that.

NAG

Barkskin

F.E.A.R.



NuMetro
interactive

18
www.pegi.info

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XBOX 360

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PS3

PLAYSTATION NETWORK

WB GAMES



Steve's rendition of *Black Swan* was coming along nicely, but the pirouette was a sticking point in his progress.

Gears of War 3 Beta

I love the smell of chainsaws in the morning



[details]

Release Date:
September 2011
Platforms:
360
Genre:
Third person shooter
Developer:
Epic Games
Website:
www.gearsowar.com
Publisher:
Microsoft Game Studios

[trivia]

// *Gears of War 3* is the first game in the series to feature she-people as playable characters. In a daring and doubtless controversial break with long-standing industry tradition, none of them are wearing sculpted boob armour. Where do they put them? *Nobody knows.*

You know how sometimes, playing a new game, you'll have a moment. Like, a *Moment*. I mean, one of those MOMENTS when you realise you're absolutely, dizzyingly, cataclysmically in love with the game you're playing? I had one of those.

I guess I'd been playing the *Gears of War 3* beta for a couple of hours already. It was a Team Deathmatch on Trenches, and we'd been beaten down to a last man standing playoff. The final sorry bastard on our team was shut up in an alcove, the entire Locust team closing in on him while the rest of us watched helplessly through his camera. A pop-shot around a corner somewhere, and he was down, crawling desperately in the dust, when a Theron Guard wandered in and casually tagged his bum with an incendiary grenade. As the flames spat out of his arsehole and down the back of his trousers, and the screen faded out to a decidedly ignominious black, I knew then that I'd lost my foolish heart all over again.

I clocked quite a bit of time playing both *Gears of War* games, and I have the Veteran Gear Xbox Achievement to prove it. Going back in, a couple of things were immediately – if perhaps subtly - different. I could queue up a weapon swap while on the trot, for starters. As starters go, it was a rather good one. And – oh! – what's this? The smoke grenade is packing a concussion blast again. It's like the smoke grenade is actually useful again. It's like I died and went to wherever it is that *Gears of War* plays like it's supposed to.

There's now a sort of x-ray vision



"It's like I died and went to wherever it is that *Gears of War* plays like it's supposed to."

Tac-Com overlay assigned to the left bumper, somewhat reminiscent of *Left 4 Dead's*, which turns up allies, map-based weapon spawns, and other important intel on your HUD. It's also used to 'spot' enemy positions for your team mates, much like *Battlefield: Bad Company 2*. If that results in a subsequent kill, moreover, it'll bag you one of a huge heap of new accolades (and bonus XP!) awarded for doing just about everything, as previously seen in *Call of Duty*. Simply, *Gears of War 3* has taken a lot of excellent ideas from other multiplayer games, and stuffed them in. It's bigger, better, more badass... and comfortingly familiar.

The multiplayer beta bundles four new maps and three game modes – Team Deathmatch (with a limited respawn ticket system), King of the Hill (which is pretty much unchanged from the last version), and Capture the Leader (a mega mix of *Gears of War 2's* Submission and Guardian modes). Two of those maps – Trenches and Thrashball – are particularly significant

for featuring an intermittent and effectively blinding sandstorm and an enormous, dangling death-trap respectively.

The game feels somewhat faster than the last time around, although this is likely reinforced by the strategically cramped map design, and damage packets have been substantially increased (or damage thresholds have been decreased, *whatever*), presumably to discourage the otherwise inevitable, seemingly impervious shottie and melee rushing that so pervaded the first two games.

For a game that's ostensibly still in beta, *Gears of War 3* is kind of astonishing – for all intents and purposes, it's been like playing a free AAA multiplayer game for a few weeks. It's hard to imagine that Epic Games will pack it up and take it away for several months now, when it already feels so ready for launch. It's hard to imagine that Epic Games could be so cruel. **NAG**

Azimuth



PAINTING THE TOWN RED

While experts agree that a fully-automatic assault rifle with a chainsaw bolted to it is pretty much hogging the entire "TOTALLY F*CKING AWESOME" end of the firepower spectrum, *Gears of War 3* adds a few bold new shades of red to the series' gore palette with this fine new ordnance:

Incendiary Grenade – It's like a regular grenade, but instead of exploding in a death-cloud of nails, teeth, old bits of chewing gum, and whatever else they put in regular grenades, it makes fire. Lots of fire. The first choice in tactical area denial, and also the first choice in fast food, battlefield-style, for the hungry grunt on the go.

Retro Lancer – It's an AK-47 with an 8-inch shiv strapped to the front of it. Kicks like a Brumak in heat, with the bullet spread to show it, but it's devastating in the closer mid-range. Also, characters yell out when they charge with it, which makes it totally intimidating... and strangely sexy.

One-Shot – Basically, it's a Spartan Laser or Instagib Rifle. If you don't know what those are then, basically, it's a charged beam weapon that instantly transforms everything in its targeting reticule to a delicate pink mist that probably smells a bit like hotdogs. Basically, it's not just a clever name.

Sawed-Off Shotgun – It's professional conflict resolution with a unique twist. Well, chunks.

Digger Launcher – In the eighteen months or so since everything that happened in *Gears of War 2*, the Locust R&D department has spent a lot of time watching YouTube videos of the COG offensive, and invented an itty-bitty baby Locust thingy dragging a high-powered, anti-personnel frag mine. And it goes under the ground, and under obstacles, and it screams on the way over. Hey, remember when cover used to be so nice? Man, those were the days.



"Yeah, right there. Can you feel it? Is that normal, doc?"



You were going to do WHAT with that salt?



KNOW THY STUFF

Alice released on the id Tech 3 engine (*Quake 3*) and was developed by Rogue Entertainment. Now *Madness Returns* is built on the Unreal Engine 3 and is developed by Shanghai-based Spicy Horse Studios. What's going on? Who are these people and why do they think they can mess with *Alice*? I'll punch them in the nose!

Before you put up your dukes, know that Spicy Horse is American McGee's very-own studio that he founded in Shanghai to get to the inner workings of the mysterious Asian games industry. The result of this was AMG's *Grimm*, which bombed commercially (American blames GameTap) but is a totally decent series of puzzle games. Now, after all this time, EA and Spicy have teamed up; the developers have the necessary experience behind them; EA is delighted to work with McGee again and we're, of course, happy to see the return of our favourite psychopathic female.



Alice: Madness Returns

Don't mess with the chick with the knife



[details]

Release Date:
June 2011
Platforms:
Xbox 360 / PS3 / PC
Genre:
Action platform game
Developer:
Spicy Horse
Website:
www.ea.com/alice
Publisher:
Electronic Arts

[trivia]

// There are a few sequences throughout the game that play out differently to the rest: there's a side-scrolling sequence, a sequence where Alice removes her head and rolls it around like *Marble Madness*, those "run away from the thing chasing you but you can't see where you're going" bits, as well as a sequence where you stomp around as giant Alice, squishing the pathetic creatures beneath your feet.

It's been eleven years since the first *Alice* took away everything we knew and loved about the childhood fairy tale and replaced it with new, spooky content fit for our slightly more grown-up minds. It was a bold move but it paid off; people loved the game's twisted world that was filled with interesting action and platform elements. Not only is eleven years a long time in life, but it's practically a century in gaming industry terms; technology and the audience have changed considerably since then. Eleven years is also the length of time that Alice had spent locked up in Rutledge Asylum, after which she was released into the care of her psychologist (her parents being dead and all). It's here that we rejoin our demented friend. Her sanity has taken a turn for the worse and when she inevitably returns to find comfort and answers within Wonderland, she finds it's a much worse place thanks to the even-more twisted mind she bears.

When we attended EA's recent London showcase event, we had a chance to play two levels from the game. We're not sure when exactly each level takes place in the chronology, but that's not important in this context. What is important are the gameplay elements, which you may or may not be pleased to hear are very similar to those found in the first game. Lead designer American McGee's reason for this is simple: they wanted to build a sequel that was identifiable as a continuation, even all this time later, but also wanted to give new players a chance to get their dirty thumbs on a solid action



“We saw her with her iconic Vorpal blade that she used to lash out quickly, inflicting fairly low amounts of damage, also a mace-like hobby horse that deals a large amount of damage (and is necessary to stun certain enemies) but takes longer to swing.”



The MUST-HAVE Lady Gaga outfit of the season.



platform game that they may not have experienced before. Whatever the logic, it's certain that *Madness Returns* is thoroughly *Alice*, but that's not to say the mechanics haven't been updated to meet modern expectations.

Combat forms a large part of the game, and we were genuinely surprised by how deep it felt, even from our exposure to only a few enemy types. Alice has quite a few weapons at her disposal. We saw her with her iconic Vorpal blade that she used to lash out quickly, inflicting fairly low amounts of damage, as well as a mace-like hobby horse that deals a large amount of damage (and is necessary to stun certain enemies) but takes longer to swing. She was equipped with three ranged weapons during our test: a machine gun-like pepper grinder, a teapot cannon that launches explosive balls of slime, and a clockwork bomb. These weapons can (and should) be switched between during combat, which Alice combines with her abilities to deflect attacks and dodge quickly, and the need to defeat opponents that block her attacks, flank her and don't expose their weak spots without a nudge from the right weapon or stratagem. When you're not fighting regular units like imps armed with giant forks (or are they miniature imps?) and card guards with missing hearts, you'll face off against bosses of all sizes that require a dollop of cunning and a good sense of timing.

According to the man himself, there are five tenets to deliver a compelling

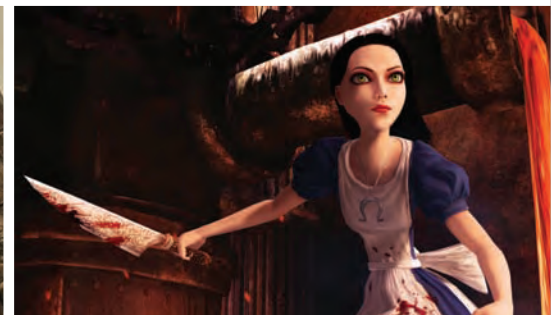
game of this sort: exploration, platforming, combat, puzzle solving and storytelling. It's *Spicy Horse's* goal to ensure that all of those elements are part of *Madness Returns*, and while we can't yet comment on the delivery of the storytelling elements, we can say that exploration and platforming are certainly present. *Madness Returns* has all the mainstays you'd expect from such a game: there are platforms that move in any direction; steam vents and bouncing pads launch you up into the air; Alice can double-jump and float; and certain platforms must be activated by pulling levers and the like. There's also a neat *Tiny Alice Mode* (we made up that name) that not only shrinks our heroine, but grants her the ability to see hidden platforms in her environment. You'll often use those platforms to find hidden areas that could contain the teeth you need to collect to upgrade your arsenal, or memories that will reveal more about Alice's twisted history and how *Wonderland* got to be like it is.

We're told there's a lot more to *Madness Returns* than what we've seen so far, and knowing *Spicy's* history of developing tons of content for *Grimm*, as well as McGee's penchant for hidden depths in games, we're ready to believe it's true. If the combat and exploration are anything to go by, *Madness Returns* will be, at the very least, a rock-solid action platform romp set in a fascinating, dark, and downright creepy world. That's a damn good start.

**NAG
GeometriX**

[trivia]

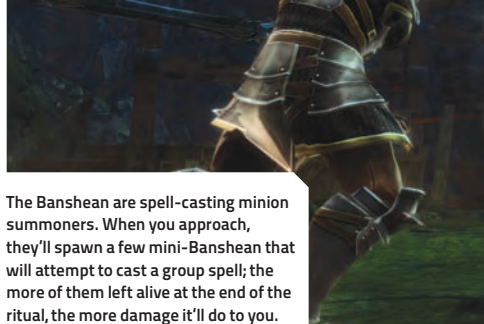
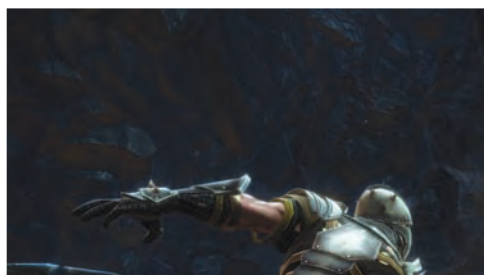
// We hope that this is still valid when this issue reaches your hands, but it's been 99% officially confirmed (by McGee, at least) that the first *Alice* will be available for download when *Madness Returns* releases. There will also be additional downloadable content like new outfits for Alice, so you can play dress-up between slaughtering mutant tar babies and eating cake that someone's left lying around.



The game's dynamic camera will ensure that you always have a good view of your enemies. It'll swing around, zoom out and pan throughout the battle.



If you're interested in reading more about *Reckoning*, be sure to click onto www.nag.co.za/2011/04/interview-with-reckonings-ken-rolston for a detailed look inside the nutty mind of the game's creative lead.



The Banshees are spell-casting minion summoners. When you approach, they'll spawn a few mini-Banshees that will attempt to cast a group spell; the more of them left alive at the end of the ritual, the more damage it'll do to you.

Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning

Don't call me an action game!

[details]

Release Date: Q1 2012
 Platforms: 360 / PS3 / PC
 Genre: Role-playing game
 Developer: 38 Studios / Big Huge Games
 Website: www.reckoningthegame.com
 Publisher: Electronic Arts

[trivia]

// Enemies can be destroyed with finishing moves if the player has quick reflexes. Doing so will reward you with a delightfully-violent display in which the character will impale, smash, incinerate and generally kill their pleading foe.



When we get invited to big publisher events like the EA London Showcase, there are always two types of games on show: those we're there to see (in this case, *Battlefield 3* and *Portal 2*), and those that the publisher chooses to show us because they think it's important. Now, as you may know, a publisher's opinion of a game's importance isn't always spot on, but every now and then they show us a game that we haven't ever seen before, and we're remarkably impressed. *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning* is such a game, but not just because the early code we've seen looks good (although it certainly does), but because of our brief time chatting with the game's lead designer, Ken Rolston. Ken was one of the lead chaps on *Elder Scrolls Morrowind* and *Oblivion*, who, after *Oblivion*, left Bethesda to join Big Huge Games. The studio assembled a crew including epic fantasy writer R.A. Salvatore, comic writer and creature creator Todd McFarlane, and former baseball bigwig Curt Schilling. Yeah, we're not too sure about Curt either, but apparently he knows a thing or two about game development, and also happens to be the founder of 38 Studios. So here you have a badass team of creators, a ton of really cool ideas about RPGs, and EA's financial backing.

The world of *Reckoning*, which includes a ten thousand year history created by R.A. Salvatore, is your typical fantasy world filled with magic (lots of magic), monsters, heroes and

people who need a saviour from some or another sort of nefarious beast or villain. During the demonstration, we were shown a few scenes from the game, including the opening act which depicts our dead hero, as yet unnamed and classless, being wheeled through a giant crypt by a couple of imps. One quick yet detailed character creation process later, the character is dumped down a chute where he/she lands upon a pile of bodies. Since playing a game as a completely lifeless character would be fairly boring, the character awakens from the dead, and has to find their way out of the underground ruins in which he finds himself. He meets a gnome who explains that the character is the first-ever surviving resurrectee (this would totally be a word if people got up from their graves more often). Armed with a randomly generated, low-level weapon, your character sets off to find an epic adventure of intrigue, conspiracy and fantasy hijinks.

Reckoning sounds pretty standard up until this point, but here's where it gets interesting. It uses a freeform class system that allows players to place skill points into any unlocked skill in any of the three skill trees: might, finesse or sorcery. Sure, that could simply represent "warrior, rogue or mage," but Rolston is adamant that the game is designed to let you play whichever blend of archetypes you'd like. In his words, "your hybrid character won't suck." In a world so deeply infused with magic, even

the most traditional of warriors will benefit from ground-shattering earthquake magic; and what rogue hasn't thought "gosh, I could do with a healing spell right about now?" As you progress through the game, you'll carve out your class, defining your own "wrapper" for how you want your character to be seen. There's more to it than just unlocking complementary skills, however; certain character traits like movement will be affected by your choice of skills. The developers demonstrated an example of this where the character's dodge ability would change based on their

dominant skill tree: rolling for rogues, dodging for warriors and teleporting for mages. Then, a mage/rogue hybrid was shown that used teleport to get behind his enemy where he employed his backstab ability to deal instant lethal damage.

Reckoning could be described as an action RPG, but Ken Rolston would probably call you an idiot for doing so. Instead, he prefers to call it just "an RPG" but the game isn't shy about the level of action and the intensity of combat - a symptom of the studio's almost obsessive desire for fluid animations and controls. It



[trivia]

// There will be plenty of other activities to keep you busy when you're not adventuring. Blacksmithing and alchemy were highlighted during the demonstration - the latter requires you to spend your time picking dainty flowers and herbs in between your skull-crashing antics.



"The game isn't shy about the level of action and the intensity of combat - a symptom of the studio's almost obsessive desire for fluid animations and controls."



uses a combat system that's similar to *Fable's*, but the combat is much more intense and reliant on timing and combos. Each face button is mapped to a weapon or spell, and the context of the use of that weapon or spell will determine exactly what your character does. Equipping a mage with a pair of flaming chakrams will give him access to long-range "nuking" spells if he keeps his distance from his enemies, but getting in closer allows him to fling the bladed weapons around. Enter melee range and he'll happily carve up his enemies. Then, there's the timing of each attack which also affects how it behaves. Short quick taps of the corresponding button will allow you to perform quick, low-damage jabs, but holding in the button will perform a strong, slow attack. Mix up the timing of your button presses

and your character will perform other combat actions like juggling enemies into the air. If all of this sounds very definitely like an action RPG, don't fret. Rolston explains that the game will feature meaningful dialogue, tons of side-quests, factions, complex loot systems and all of the other things you can expect from a "proper" RPG, it just won't be bogged down with sluggish combat and soulless animations.

In addition to *Reckoning*, Studio 38 is working on a *Kingdoms*-based MMORPG codenamed Project Copernicus. They have a lot on their plate right now but from our impressions of this super early gameplay, it looks like *Reckoning* could be a strong contender in the tough-to-crack RPG genre. It certainly has the right names behind it. **NAG GeometriX**

Garcia has clearly missed the point of jousting.



Shadows of the Damned

Hell hath no fury like a pissed-off Spaniard



[details]

Release Date:
June 2011
Platforms:
360 / PS3
Genre:
Action horror
Developer:
**Grasshopper
Manufacture**
Website:
ea.com/shadows-of-the-damned
Publisher:
Electronic Arts

[trivia]

// At one point in that game, Garcia is walking through what looks like a medieval fruit market when, suddenly, Paula appears. He chases her down and then finds her head lying on a table. Horrified, he soon discovers that it's a demon's idea of a playful joke. This is the typical kind of weird stuff you can expect in *Shadows*.

Fans of obscure Japanese games will know the name Goichi Suda, or Suda51 as he's better known. He's the guy who likens game development to emptying one's bowels and formed game development studio Grasshopper Manufacture, which to date hasn't created a single grasshopper or grasshopper-focused video game. We're holding thumbs that he does one day, but for now we'll just have to make do with his next bizarre title, *Shadows of the Damned*. *Shadows* is a bit more than "just" a Suda51 title, however, as it includes two other big names in Japanese design: legendary *Resident Evil* creator Shinji Mikami and *Silent Hill* composer Akira Yamaoka. *Shadows* was originally conceived by Suda and Mikami when they became friends in 2005, under the name of *Kurayami* (Darkness), but the two struggled to find a publisher until when, in 2008, EA stepped in and handed them the license to develop the game on Unreal Engine 3. As a big fan of Grasshopper's previous title *No More Heroes* – a Wii-bound beat-'em-up – Yamaoka jumped in with Suda and there you have it: three of the hottest names in Japanese game development working on a single title.

The game centres on Garcia Hotspur: demon hunter, boozier, badass and boyfriend to a lady named Paula. For reasons currently unknown, Paula is kidnapped by a demon named Fleming, who takes her into the bowels of hell. Garcia obviously doesn't take kindly to this and decides to go into hell to retrieve his damsel. There's also a flaming skull that Garcia carries around called Johnson, who sports a British accent, a foul mouth and the ability to turn into



a pistol, shotgun or machine gun that fires teeth and bones. Together, Garcia and Johnson will travel through various incredibly strange locations throughout hell in search of Paula.

Shadows is described as a game that combines Suda51's punk rock design with Shinji Mikami's psychological action thriller approach. While that could be true if one stretched out the term "psychological action thriller" until it just read "action", *Shadows of the Damned* certainly has plenty of flavour from both designers. As the game's early name implies... darkness is a key ingredient in *Shadows*. On his journey through this Eastern European-inspired version of hell, Garcia will encounter a number of demon types that have a little twist you may recognise from *Alan Wake*: they're "coated" in darkness, and Garcia must use the flaming power of Johnson to peel away that darkness and expose the gooey bits beneath [that sounds a little X-rated, Ed]. Sure, it's not unique, but *Shadows* does take the concept a





"Hell has various zones, some light and some dark. While in the dark zones, Garcia will take constant damage that will eventually kill him, so it's up to you to find the source of darkness and snuff it out."

little further than *Alan Wake*, and adds a dangerous dose of WTF on top of it.

Hell has various zones, some light and some dark. While in the dark zones, Garcia will take constant damage that will eventually kill him, so it's up to you to find the source of darkness and snuff it out. During our time with the game, we encountered two such zones. The first was easy to deal with: a demonic goat head statue on the wall spewed out foul darkness that not only spawned enemies but diminished the space in which we could move without losing hit points. To put an end to the problem, we simply had to shoot the goat head with a blast of light from Johnson in his weapon form. With that done, the darkness receded and each demon could be picked off by first firing a light blast or hitting them with a melee attack from Johnson, and then either stunning them with a second light blast that allowed us to perform an execution move or simply hammering at them with our weapon of choice.

The second darkness zone required a bit of puzzle-solving to deal with. The source of darkness was a stone hand that we had to attack directly with the flaming skull (with a bit of button-mashing), but it was out of reach. To get to it, a gate would first have to be opened by blasting the goat head above it, which created temporary reprieve from the darkness, and then we could navigate around the

outskirts of the area to get to the stone hands. All of that had to be accomplished while holding off darkness-enshrouded demons. We're told that like in this zone, it won't always be obvious as to how exactly you'll conquer each area, and there's a sense of desperation that sets in when Garcia's health drops low and you haven't yet figured out where to go.

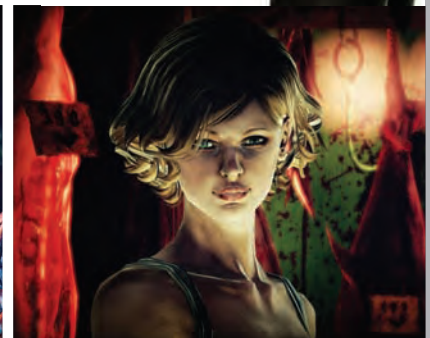
Since this is a Shinji Mikami game, expect a wandering merchant that will appear to help you upgrade your weapons and statistics. One of the collectables in the game are gems that are usually dropped by stronger demons and bosses (the typical Japanese fare: weak spots, pattern recognition, timed attacks and the like); these can be turned in to improve your health, reload speed, ammo capacity and other such stats.

Shadows of the Damned looks and feels just like you'd expect: dark, weird action with some neat stuff on the side. The visuals are intense and disturbing, the game's story is simple yet the subject matter in the game is bizarre. Punk rock is a great way to describe Suda's style and it's clear that he's been given free rein to do whatever feels right. Fans of either developer (or ideally *both*) should look forward to this one. **NAG**

GeometriX

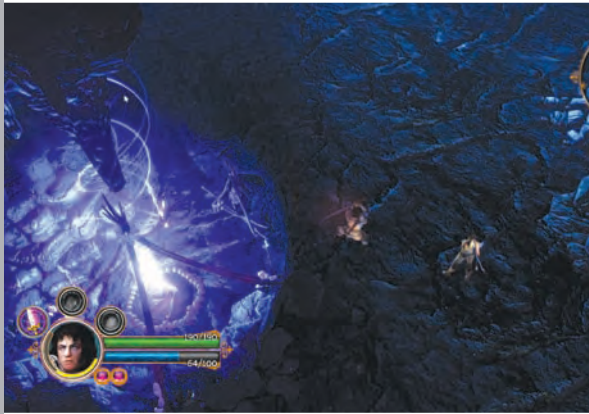
[trivia]

// While Shinji Mikami is lauded as a highly successful designer and producer, with titles like *Resident Evil*, *Devil May Cry* and *Ace Attorney* under his belt, Suda51 is known more as creator of weird but loveable titles that often don't do terribly well in the market. To date, *No More Heroes* is his most successful title (many would argue, his *only* successful title), despite his involvement in thirteen titles prior to that.



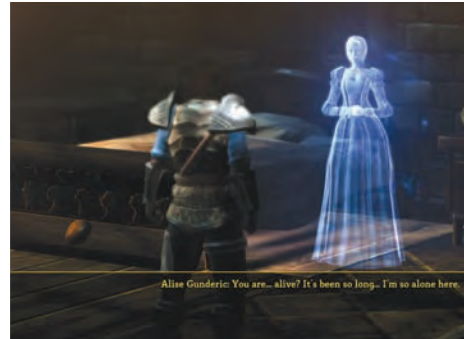
What do you mean the cupcakes are finished?!





[trivia]

// The game uses a random loot system that will provide a wide range of weapons with varied properties like poison, flame damage, and slow effects. *Dungeon Siege's* famous donkey sadly won't make a return. It's been replaced by a quick-vend system that allows you to exchange items for cash when you're out in the field.



Dungeon Siege III

New! Now with more action!

"The idea here is to force players to keep attacking, and the result is an intense and dangerous combat mechanic that never lets up."



[details]

Release Date:
June 2011
Platforms:
360 / PS3 / PC
Genre:
Action role-playing game
Developer:
Obsidian Entertainment
Website:
www.dungeonsiege.com
Publisher:
Square-Enix

[trivia]

// Each character can be customised with abilities and proficiencies as they gain levels. There are nine abilities in total, but those can be modified by spending proficiency points to change the way they behave, such as providing improved damage, stun duration, or extra effects.

The Kingdom of Ehb lies in ruins. Driven mad with power and a lust for carnage, Jeyne Kassyster has taken control of the land following the death of its ruler. The 10th Legion, a centuries-old fighting force, falls into ruin and Kassyster orders her troops to find and kill every last surviving member and their offspring. It's a tough world, and it's the world you will fight for in *Dungeon Siege III*.

Players will be able to choose to play as one of four possible characters. Each character has two distinct combat stances, a backstory and reason to fight to rebuild the 10th Legion. Lucas Montbarron is your typical warrior, who can change between a sword and shield combination and a double-handed sword; Anjali is an Archon who swaps between her fire form and its elemental magic, and her human form in which she uses spears and staves; Katarina uses two types of firearms: a combination of short-range side-arms like pistols and shotguns, and a long-range rifle; lastly, Reinhart Manx is a spell-caster who swaps between ranged AoE [area of effect for the rest of us, Ed] attacks and a magic-powered gauntlet that he uses at melee range.

As a remnant of the 10th Legion, it'll be up to you to convince the nation that your cause is a just one, which you'll accomplish by bashing the main bad guys in their collective faces, and performing side-quests that usually involve bashing less-important bad guys in their faces. Hey, it's an action-RPG, and while the game doesn't skimp on the basic role-playing elements, those elements always come back to the key ingredient:



combat: Throughout the course of the game, you'll encounter the other three playable characters that come and go as AI-controlled partners. Dialogue sessions will see you given a choice of discussion topics and occasionally, you'll be challenged to take sides in a matter; agreeing with a character might see them gain combat bonuses.

The combat follows the hack-'n'-slash mainstay of "click; click; click; oh look, it's dead", but with each character possessing two combat stances and a defensive one for healing and buffs (each stance has three activated abilities), you can be sure that there's a degree of tactics involved. Instead of the iconic mana bar for activated abilities, characters have a Focus metre (which is still, wisely, blue) that will build up to a maximum of 100 points whenever

the character damages an enemy. The idea here is to force players to keep attacking, and the result is an intense and dangerous combat mechanic that never lets up. There aren't even health or Focus potions available; if you want to heal, either use a slow regeneration spell or pick up health orbs from your fallen enemies. Thankfully, should you fall, your AI-controlled (or player-controlled, in the case of co-op play) companion can get you back up and fighting without you having to resort to a reload.

With a new development studio working on the franchise, it's clear that *Dungeon Siege III* is going in a different direction to its predecessors. How far and how positive that difference will be remains to be seen, but our review will tell all when the time comes.

NAG GeometriX

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Top 8 zombies in video games



Yeah, that's right; it's another zombie feature in *NAG*. Wanna make something of it? I thought so... keep walking, punk.

But seriously folks (only sort-of), we do love the zombie thing around these parts, and there's no better way to celebrate these fine necrotic vermin than with this: *NAG*'s top 8 zombies in video games!

8 *Call of Duty: Crawler*

COD: WaW introduced us to the Crawler, the most seemingly-harmless of the game's undead legions. We've spent many hours luring around one of these little creatures while it looks up at us with those puppy dog eyes, but every now and then they cause all manner of foul language to erupt from within the confines of Castle NAG because one of them has snuck up on us from within a pile of bodies.



7 *Dead Rising 2: Katey Greene*

Children are scary enough when they're crawling around your home theatre system's overloaded multi-plug, so the idea of a zombie child should strike terror into the heart of even the most seasoned *Supernanny* watcher. It's made even worse when the zombie child in question is the daughter of the lead character of *Dead Rising 2*. Give her all the Zombrex you need to avoid this fate.



6 *Left 4 Dead 2*: Charger

You know what, we can handle the Hunter's ADD and we can deal with being covered in Boomer bile, but one thing we cannot abide is being knocked about thirty miles from the nearest ally during an already intense battle with a group of Infected. Where the Tank just outright smashes your face, this chap really messes with your strategies and has been the cause of more rage-quits than any other Special Infected.



5 *Resident Evil*: MA-39 Cerberus

Who thinks up this kind of stuff? I mean, come on. Dogs are, like, man's best friend or something, but when you throw a pack of mindless undead Dobermans at the player, there'd better be a clean change of undies ready to go.



4 *Plants vs. Zombies*: Dancing zombie

When the dancing zombie (aka Michael Jackson zombie) is first seen in *Plants vs. Zombies*, a gentle chuckle, perhaps even a bit of a titter, is the accepted reaction. Now that the King of Pop is actually dead, having him in the game would just be weird, so the Jackson estate forced the developers to remove the King of Pop's undead representative from the game, which instantly puts this down in the history books.



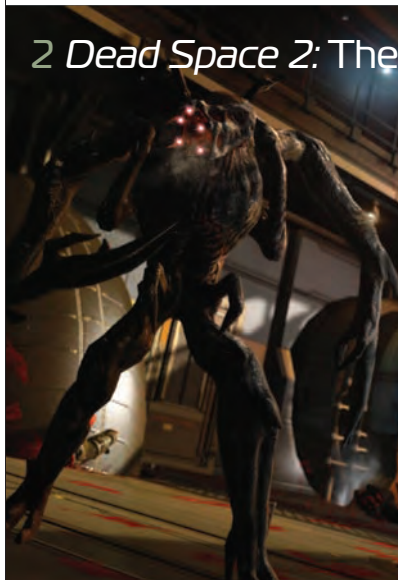
3 *House of the Dead*: Giant F%&#ing Spider Thing

We couldn't find a name for it¹, but the Giant F%&#ing Spider Thing is easily the scariest zombie in the entire *House of the Dead* series because it's a spider. That's about it, really. We dare anyone to not be afraid of a giant zombie spider. Good luck with that can of Doom, buddy. Good luck.



¹Actually, we could. It's called a Hermit but that's lame because the implication is that it's just a crab.

2 *Dead Space 2*: The Ubermorph



After a lot of debate, we (meaning Geoff, since he had to write this piece sometime this year) decided that *Dead Space*'s Necromorphs classify as zombies¹. But, to quell the rampant pseudo-science that'll likely flood our inboxes, we chose the Ubermorph as most zombie-like because the damn thing simply won't die by anything but the most unconventional means. That's more than a zombie; that's, like, hax or something.

¹ All we could get out of Tarryn was, "I suppose so" when asked if the *Dead Space* Necromorphs qualify as zombies.

1 *Monkey Island 2*: LeChuck

What's better than a pirate? No... Not a ninja. You're not playing along and you need to leave the room. The correct answer is a zombie pirate! Easily the coolest character to grace

a 320x200 resolution screen, the Zombie Pirate LeChuck proved that no matter how hard you try, you can't keep a good evil villain down. Just ask Guybrush Threepwood.





"...IT'S LOOKING AWESOME"
PLAYGAMER

"DUNGEON SIEGE III
LOOKS SET TO
GIVE US OUR ACTION-RPG
FANTASY FIX IN 2011"
360 MAGAZINE

"CLASSIC RPG ACTION
WITH ALL THE SWORDS
AND SORCERY
YOUR LITTLE HEART
COULD DESIRE"
PLAY

DUNGEON SIEGE III

SQUARE ENIX.

XBOX 360

XBOX
LIVE



PS3



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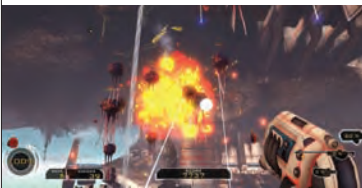
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QUICK HITS

Sanctum

Fans of tower defense know what to expect when they dive into a new TD title: construct a twisting maze of deadly towers through which waves of enemies will filter and ensure that they don't reach whatever it is that you're tasked with protecting. *Sanctum* boasts a unique take on the genre, in that you do all of this in first-person.

In addition to the upgradable towers, your character is equipped with an arsenal of weapons – which can also be upgraded. You build and tweak your maze in first person with a bit of *Minecraft*-style block/tower placement, then you watch as waves of inventively designed critters (each enemy type provides a unique challenge) attempt to reach your Core on the other side of the maze. *Sanctum* boasts a level of polish that few indie games ever attain. It's also satisfyingly strategic, since your choice to upgrade either weapons or towers decides which gameplay style you're going to rely on the most.



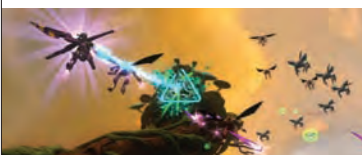
// *Sanctum* blends addictive TD gameplay with an enjoyable first-person twist.

Yar's Revenge

The original *Yar's Revenge* released in 1981 for the Atari 2600 and proved to be the single biggest-selling non-licensed game on the platform. This re-imagining probably won't break a single sales record as it attempts to transform the 2D static shooter into something recognisable as a modern game.

You'll play as a Yar, but a blonde, anime-looking human female version with four arms, that flies through each level along a scripted path (designating this an "on-rails" shooter). You'll use one analogue stick to move the Yar, and the other to move your targeting reticule. Press different buttons to shoot different projectiles. Dodge to win. Repeat until you've completed the unimaginative story.

It's a decently-playable little romp through a rather pretty series of levels, but feels soulless and poorly put together. You might enjoy it if you really like applying plasters to bruised trigger fingers or desperately want to wear a hat that says "I love retro gaming but don't have a clue what that means." The best thing about this game is the good, but not irritating level of challenge it delivers.



// You might like it, but you probably won't.

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

Portal 2



97
95
95

Shift 2: Unleashed



85
84
83

Mortal Kombat



90
85
87

MotorStorm: Apocalypse



82
77
77

WWE All Stars



73
75
77

SOCOM: Special Forces



70
67
70

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Portal 2

Potato power for

Oh Valve. You never cease to amaze. You stumbled upon unforeseen (even by you) victory with *Portal*, creating a legion of rabid fans overnight, each one fanatically devoted to a franchise built from what started out as little more than a novel idea. Cynical fools doubted that you'd succeed in making *Portal's* meme-sparking lightning strike twice. Granted, it's understandable that it seemed an impossible task to them, given that part of *Portal's* immense charm lay in the briefness of its revelatory ride through the Enrichment Centre of Black Mesa's competitor, Aperture Science. The entire experience could be blasted through in a couple of hours: a quick spurt of puzzling genius peppered with the robotic ramblings of a malevolent, yet lovable, rogue AI made the ride infinitely sweeter and more memorable. Would lengthening the experience and extending its portfolio of puzzle elements beyond just the eponymous portals cheapen our untarnished memories of the original game's brilliance? In short: no, of course not, you massive, cynical dolt. This is Valve. They're in the business of creating

the win!



[details]

Platforms:

PC / 360 / PS3

Genre:

First-person puzzle

Age restriction:

12+

DRM:

Internet connection

required [Steam]

Multiplayer:

Local: 2 players

Online: 2 players

Developer:

Valve Corporation

Website:

www.

thinkwithportals.

com

Publisher:

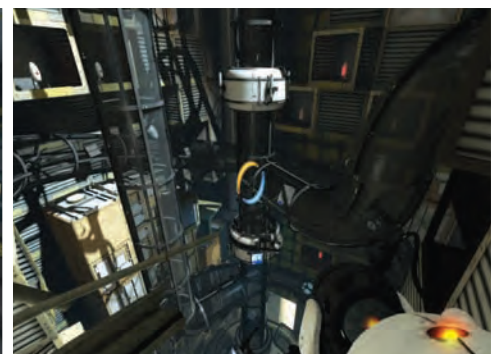
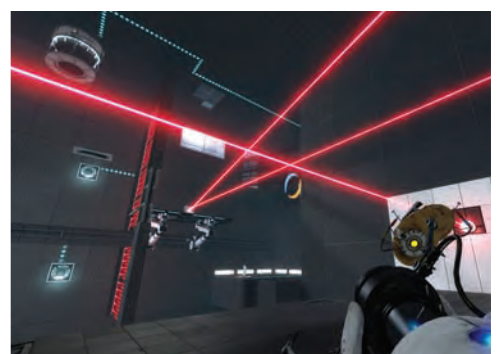
Valve Corporation

Distributor:

Electronic Arts

games that define and redefine gaming – and they've just landed yet another unforgettable success that'll go down in history as one of the best pieces of interactive entertainment ever created.

Portal 2 begins with protagonist Chell rousing from what could be a centuries-long slumber within one of the countless stasis chambers in the Aperture Science facility. The years have obviously not been kind to the place. It's in disrepair, completely dilapidated without GLaDOS around to maintain an environment fit for vigorous, deadly testing in the name of science. Nature is now the facility's simultaneous caretaker and destroyer, bringing a touch of green to *Portal's* formerly pristine test chamber walls. Right from the get go, the charm is laid on thick and heavy as you meet new characters and reacquaint yourself with the eerily familiar environs that surround you. Wheatley, a personality sphere (or core - whatever) granted the gift of independence following your banishment of GLaDOS, introduces himself early on. Together you awkwardly progress through the facility, searching for a quick exit. Naturally, things manage to



become a bit more complicated when you accidentally reboot GLaDOS, and the robotic she-devil immediately, vengefully sets you to the task of furthering science once again.

From those seemingly humble beginnings, a grand adventure is born: one which exceeds the original title in more than just length. *Portal 2* smashes all the impossibly high expectations set by its predecessor by being more creative, more adventurous and more challenging. It does all this while still maintaining, even improving on the idea that a puzzle game doesn't just need to be an insanely addictive, but ultimately meaningless experience. It can be more than that. It can boast a narrative and characters that are both engrossing and memorable beyond the scope of simply being a tutorial mechanic. It can feature writing and design that stand tall amongst its AAA peers, smoothly surpassing them in many areas. *Portal 2* proves that a puzzle game can have boundless character and class, without sacrificing any of the wonderfully challenging gameplay around which it is built. Valve has

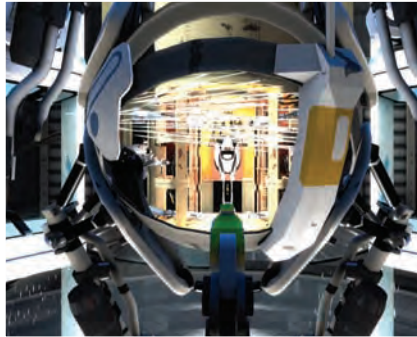


/1/ There's still plenty of life left in ye olde Source engine.

/2/ This is one of those newfangled gels. You use it to coat surfaces to do... stuff. That's all I'll say really, because I don't want to risk ruining the joys of discovery.

/3/ Believe me when I say that trusting RedTide with your virtual life is no simple task. You're permanently on the brink of death when RedTide's involved.

/4/ If you find yourself awkwardly trapped in an Excursion Funnel with RedTide, don't scream. That just excites him.



successfully recaptured the first game's charm, largely thanks to magnificent writing, expertly delivered voice acting and a massive dollop of humour that is instantly recognisable, yet still excitingly fresh and witty. Old friends remain delightfully, casually monstrous, while new friends are instantly made iconic in their own right. Seriously - Ellen McLain, J.K. Simmons and Stephen Merchant all deserve medals for making these characters so darn unforgettable. Even the guy who voices Aperture's automated announcer deserves a pat on the back.

Puzzles, while they all invariably depend on the portal gun in some way, are made more challenging and varied by gradually introducing new gameplay elements like environment-altering gels, light bridges, lasers that can be redirected at will and Excursion Funnels - which are a bit like tractor beams that slowly propel you away from or towards their source. These new elements create an experience that is always challenging, but never daunting. Perfectly planned pacing ensures that you're gradually eased into the nuances of this expanded gameplay, rather than simply dropping you in with zero explanation like a toddler that's been strapped to an anchor and tossed into the deep end of an abnormally deep pool. The same goes for the story, which unravels itself at a comfortable rate while never descending into Dullsville. It's abundantly clear that ridiculous attention was paid to the design of the puzzles, as each one feels deliberate in its presentation, right down to the visual and auditory cues that help guide you to the solution.

As if all that wasn't enough, we've also been gifted with a hefty chunk of cooperative play that elegantly ties into the single player and casts you and a buddy as a pair of cute-as-hell robots named Atlas and P-body. You're handed

two portal guns and GLaDOS then pits you against a generous portion of puzzles designed specifically for co-op. Doubling the number of portals that can be created immediately changes the dynamic. You'd think having two brains to mull over each obstacle makes things simpler, but it totally, gloriously doesn't. Suddenly you're factoring in another set of portals, along with the fact that you both have to reach the exit to proceed. Annoyingly, you can't just leave your mate behind, flipping him/her the bird as you triumphantly stroll through the exit while they curse you from a platform hundreds of feet below - because that'd be awesome. As it turns out, *Portal* is wonderfully conducive to cooperative play. RedTide and I spent a few nights fumbling our way through it like a pair of hapless man-children, enthusiastically arguing (in between bouts of riotous laughter) about more than just the puzzle at hand, having impromptu bouts of rock, paper, scissors to decide who got to do the fun (read: lunatic) part of each puzzle. And it was an absolute blast. The polish seen in the single player carries through to the co-op, with excellent animation for Atlas and P-body, outstanding (and pleasingly devious) puzzle design and massive potential for LOL-worthy grieving.

Quite simply, *Portal 2* is an astonishing piece of work. It succeeds beautifully, both as a puzzler and a story-/character-driven experience. It feels like a commentary on the relationship between gamers and developers, because everything about this game - from the preceding Potato ARG to their refusal to lazily release a shameless cash-in on *Portal*'s runaway success - makes it clear that Valve appreciates us as much as (if not more than) we appreciate them. Just go play the damn game. You'll feel the love.

NAG
Barkskin

/ PLUS / Phenomenal writing and voice acting / Fantastic puzzle design / Feverishly good co-op
/ MINUS / Minus?

GOOD. REALLY GOOD. REALLY, REALLY GOOD. REALLY, REALLY, REALLY, REALLY...

97

Mortal Kombat

The ninth *Mortal Kombat* competition

If change was what defined fighting games in their history, one change that nobody could have ever foreseen was the resurgence of the 2D fighters, or rather 2.5D as they're called today. Not only does this format allow the players to concentrate on split-second timing and millimetre precision, it somewhat simplifies the mechanics without removing anything from the actual game. In fact, some would even argue that it allows for more depth within the battle because of the limited number of moves being confined to two planes brings.

This is basically what *Mortal Kombat* is. Much like the previous *Mortal Kombat* vs. *DC Universe* game, this game is based on the same Unreal Engine 3 and brings some of our favourite *Mortal Kombat* characters into the new fighting style. Unlike in the previous titles though, there are some changes that have been made which instantly make this amongst the easiest to control but the most satisfying *Mortal Kombat* game to date.

Despite this game taking place within the original *MK*, *MK II* and *MK III* timeline, it doesn't make use of the High and Low Punches or Kicks of the time. Instead it opts for four buttons that are mapped to specific limbs, much like in the *Tekken* games. At first it's curious how this would be beneficial given that this isn't



[details]

Platforms:
PS3 / 360
Genre:
Fighting
Age restriction:
18+
DRM:
Disc-based
Multiplayer:
Local: 2 players
Online: 4 players
Developer:
NetherRealm Studios
Website:
www.themortalkombat.com
Publisher:
Warner Bros. Interactive
Distributor:
Nu Metro Interactive

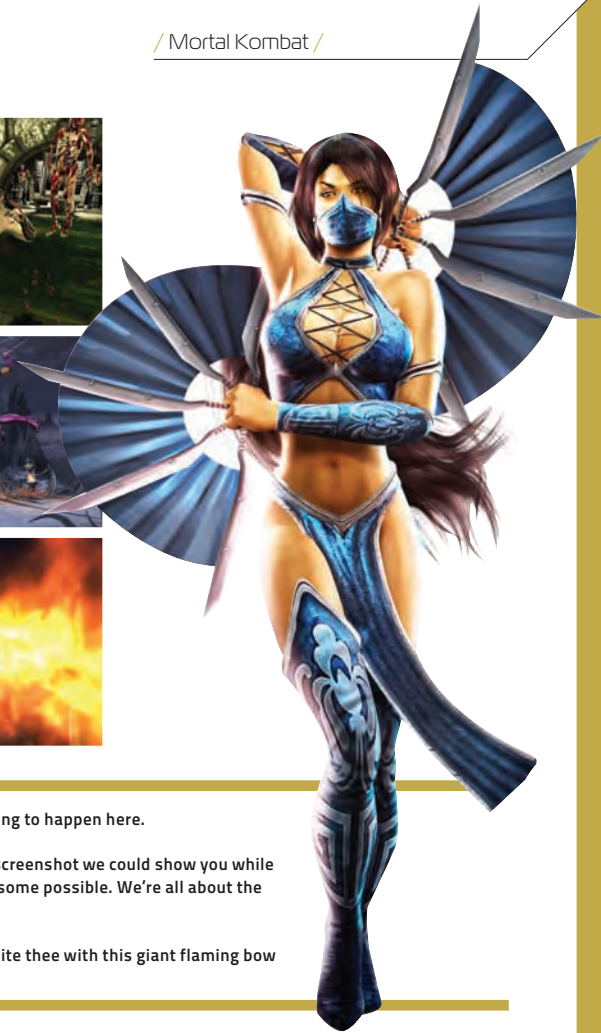
a 3D fighting game and because of how the characters are positioned, two limbs will always be slower or have a longer distance to travel than the two closest limbs to the opponent. This isn't the case however and advanced players may see this as a missed opportunity given that you can change stance, but as it is these stances are merely cosmetic.

Having said that, this minute oversight isn't an issue as *Mortal Kombat* plays smoother than any of its predecessors and best of all is more fun than ever before. Combos, as with virtually all fighting games, are important but these are not an absolute must have for a great experience. Characters that rely on power and grapples can be very effective with those easy-to-execute two button combos. In fact, even the most complex combos are easy to master with just a few practice rounds.

This is unlike *MVC3* for instance, where they are pivotal, rendering the game unplayable to anyone who cannot execute chained attacks. In *Mortal Kombat* it's hard to juggle an opponent (unless the character has a teleport move which can be quite annoying in the hands of an expert) and thus makes for a more balanced game even between beginners and the advanced.

In keeping the game "fair" and simplifying it, *Mortal Kombat* has a





/1/ Oh you just know what's going to happen here.

/2/ This is the least gruesome screenshot we could show you while still showing you the most gruesome possible. We're all about the kids around here.

/3/ "By Zeus' testicle, I shall smite thee with this giant flaming bow of obvious hax!"

Super Meter that can be used in three different ways: Either by increasing the damage special moves inflict such as projectiles and the like (single bar), or it can be used to break combos (when two bars are full). When the power bar has been filled completely (it fills up easier and quicker when you're on the receiving end of a barrage of successful attacks), you can pull both trigger buttons to execute a devastating X-Ray move which can turn a losing battle in your favour. This isn't a new feature as it was present in *Street Fighter 4* and prior to that has been in several *King of Fighters* titles, in a slightly different way. Much like in *SF4*, it makes for an interesting experience to say the least. For the proficient player, it won't suddenly make them susceptible to repeated defeats by an amateur, but it will give hope to the beginner therefore keeping said player interested for longer.

There's plenty one could say about the mechanics of this game, but one of highlights probably as important as what has been mentioned above is the single player campaign which is extensive and told in a way that shames all fighting games to come before. The *Mortal Kombat* story has always been far-fetched and spectacularly weak mostly. Not much has changed but for the first time this same story is told in a coherent and progressive way that makes for a complete work of fiction rather than random end movies/ sequences that depend solely on with whom you chose to defeat the final

boss. This game tells the *Mortal Kombat* story through many battles that will have you play as different characters throughout. It's an innovative way to stitch together the occurrences of the *Mortal Kombat* timeline in one consistent way that everybody can follow. This is how all stories in fighting games should be told, because it actually creates a single player experience instead of the arcade ladder (which is also available with individual prologues for each of the characters) trying to come off as a genuine narrative.

Overall this is the most complete *Mortal Kombat* ever made and it's highly addictive. There are plenty of mini games that one can take part in and even more features to unlock (hundreds of unlocks actually). The only downside is the excessive violence, blood and gore it has. This isn't actually in the game where it's somewhat "appreciated" but in the "Krypt" where one unlocks these various items and boons. Torture devices that decapitate people, others being drawn and quartered and exploding stomachs filled with green gas and pools of blood do not add to the game, but merely make unlocking items annoying and distasteful. As such they serve to subtract from the game rather than add to it. Other than that, *Mortal Kombat* is plenty of fun and a game which every fighting game enthusiast should own.

NAG ShockG

/ PLUS / Balanced combat / Good story mode
/ MINUS / Needlessly violent / Cheap bosses

THE BEST MORTAL KOMBAT GAME EVER; VASTLY SUPERIOR TO ALL PREVIOUS EFFORTS.

90

SHIFT 2: Unleashed

Need for Speed grows into a full on simulator

The original *Shift* has to be one of my favourite racing games of all time, so writing the review for the successive title was always going to be a difficult task. With so much expectation for the sequel and appreciation for what the original game offered, *SHIFT 2: Unleashed* has managed to be a worthy successor – despite its faults.

What this game offers is a seemingly more refined experience with tighter car control through improved physics and gameplay mechanics. However, it doesn't always feel like progressive changes have been made. Instead it presents itself as more of a refined alternative to the original game. As such it can be brilliant at times and at other times frustrating. Where this is prevalent is in how much more realistic the cars behave, while at the same time retaining the weightless sensation that plagued the first game. This time however, because of the improvements made in the handling, the twitchy rear and the feeling of driving a car that's "lacking" weight is even more invasive. From a purely driving point of view, it sometimes isn't as engaging as the first game despite being closer to a real simulator.



[details]

Platforms:

PS3 / 360 / PC

Genre:

Racing Simulator

Age restriction:

3+

DRM:

Disc-based /

Internet connection

required [EADM]

Multiplayer:

Local: None

Online: 12 players

Developer:

Slightly Mad Studios

Website:

www.needforspeed.com/

shift2unleashed

Publisher:

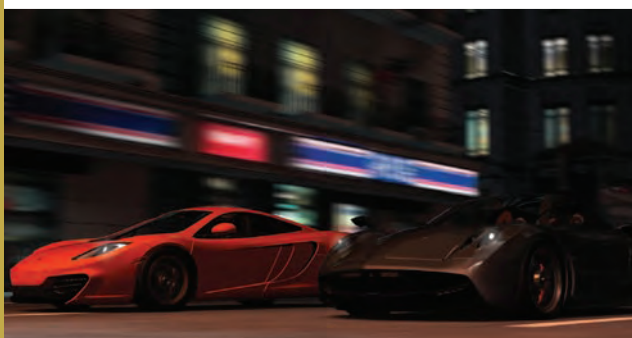
Electronic Arts

Distributor:

Electronic Arts



1/1 Night-time racing makes its debut here. Couple it with the excellent damage model and you've got the potential for simulated catastrophe. Smash one of your headlights during a night race and suddenly the game becomes more of a survival horror than a racing simulation.



What the game does very well however, other titles could stand to benefit from lifting. This is true of the helmet cam which does take time to get used to (for obvious reasons looking at the apex of the corner in a virtual car isn't the most natural sensation when the car is moving straight ahead), but once you do, it can help nail those perfect corners which add to your overall XP and just may put some distance between you and the competitors. In addition to that, *Unleashed* offers some of the best damage modelling available to date. In fact, as far as mainstream racing simulators go, there isn't another that offers this level of detail and makes

the in-game crashes the most realistic experiences in any racing game.

Having played this on the PC, it is unfortunate that (unlike the previous game), *SHIFT 2* is virtually unplayable in stereoscopic 3D. This might keep some players glued to the original as the 3D there further enhanced the experience, adding another level of realism to an arcade racer posing as a simulator.

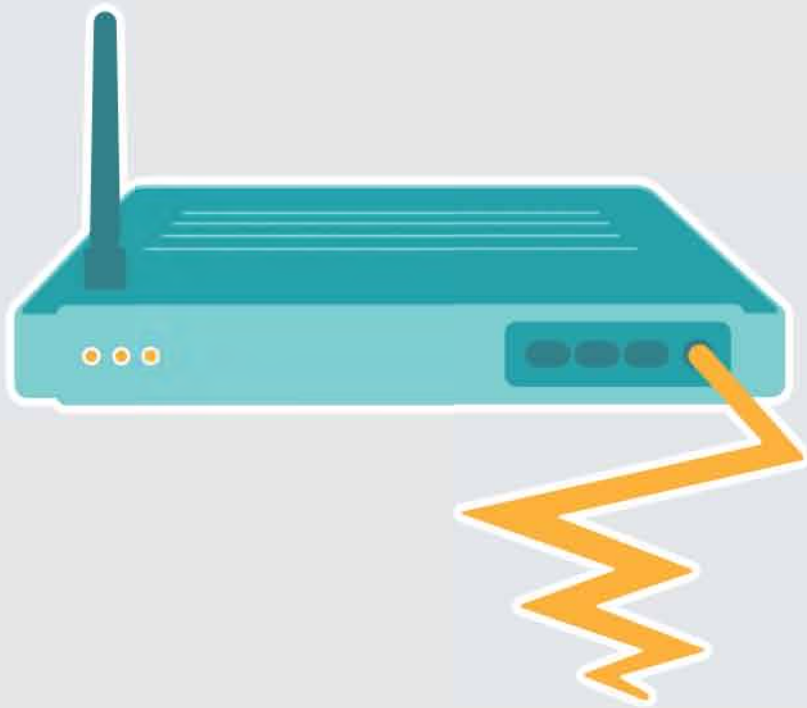
Other than that, this game offers more races, tracks and cars and by virtue of that alone, had it been the same game with just these additions, it would be a worthwhile purchase. As it is, it's a step in the right direction even though it's not as refined as it could have been.

NAG ShockG

/ PLUS / Great car line-up / Superb driving physics
/ MINUS / Less than stellar AI / Uneven presentation

SHIFT 2 GOES FURTHER IN THE DIRECTION OF BEING A RACING SIMULATOR, WITH MIXED RESULTS

85



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Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II: Retribution

Here be monsters

More stuff! Bigger stuff! Better stuff! Even madder action! Those flashy exclamations seem to compose the key ideology for the second *Dawn of War II* expansion. Forget cool, calm and collected: *Retribution* takes the already frenetic, fast-paced gameplay of *DoW II* and dials it up to eleven. There's a separate campaign for each race (there are six of them in the game's feature list now, thanks to the newly introduced Imperial Guard), each boasting their own heroes and slightly unique take on a shared storyline. Multiplayer is kitted out with new units and strategies for the five existing races, just in case they were feeling left out now that the Imperial Guard have arrived. There's a new hero for the excellently fun Last Stand mode, which also gets a new map to call its own. There's a ton of new content here, but does throwing a whole bunch of shiny new things at fans automatically make this better than *Chaos Rising*, the previous expansion? The short answer is: not really.

Most of *Retribution's* faults lie in its single-player campaign/s. In it,

[details]

Platforms:
PC
Genre:
Real-time strategy
Age restriction:
16+
DRM:
Internet connection required [Steam]
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: 8 players
Developer:
Relic Entertainment
Website:
www.dawnofwar2.com
Publisher:
THQ
Distributor:
Ster Kinekor Games



1/1 Retribution allows you to replace some of your heroes with Honour Guard squads at the pre-mission deployment screen. These powerful Honour Guards increase the population cap for the current mission and come with special benefits. This allows you to choose the way you want to play Retribution - as a more traditional, unit-spamming RTS, a hero-centric action RPG, or a mix of both.

you return to Sub-Sector Aurelia, this time with the ability to choose your race rather than being forced to view everything from the perspective of the Blood Ravens. What they don't tell you is that there's a side effect to all this, in that you're going to be playing through the same campaign six times. The endings for the individual factions are different, but to see them all you're going to have to play through exactly the same missions (albeit with minute variations in mission objectives) six times. The perspective, agenda, heroes and wargear for each race vary, but everything else is just a steadfast mould into which every campaign has been poured and left to dry. The cinematic sequences are still narrated from the Blood Raven perspective, even when you're plodding about as a servant of Chaos. I didn't really expect much variation between each campaign, but it would've been nice to be surprised by unexpected variety - especially following on from *Chaos Rising's* enthralling storyline. Thankfully, the gameplay itself

is engaging enough to help you peer beyond this annoyance and discover the wonderful assortment of devastatingly powerful wargear and abilities sported by the characters here. The RPG-style progression system is still in place, with every mission requiring a different approach in terms of ideal loadout. It's a more linear experience than the previous titles, but it's enjoyable nonetheless.

Engaging in online battles will greet you with more of the same frantically fun, tactical action that sets *DoW II* apart from the rest of the RTS pack. The Imperial Guard are a great addition to the game and Relic has done a great job capturing their unsuitable approach to warfare where a million casualties is perfectly acceptable, provided you come out the victor. Despite the lack of variation in each race's campaign, every addition in *Retribution* benefits *DoW II* as a whole. It's an excellent expansion pack that comes packed with new content. **NAG**

Barkskin

/ PLUS / Multi-race campaign / Imperial Guard are well presented / Excellent multiplayer
/ MINUS / Copy/paste campaigns / Not much has changed

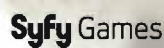
IT'S THE SAME BRILLIANT *DAWN OF WAR II* EXPERIENCE, NOW WITH MORE STUFF.

85

RED FACTION

ARMAGEDDON

THERE IS LIFE ON MARS



MotorStorm: Apocalypse

Welcome to the mosh pit

If *Gran Turismo* is mommy and daddy PlayStation's favourite child, who always does her homework and helps set the table for dinner, then the *MotorStorm* series is their long-haired, dope-smoking teenager about whom everyone says "he had so much potential" while shaking their heads. Young *MotorStorm* is also the child who has the most fun, but you wouldn't know that if you didn't hang out with him. Before I lose the metaphor here, I'll tell you that *MotorStorm* has always had loads of potential, but hasn't received the attention it deserves despite being a stupidly fun series of racing games that has consistently scored high.

Apocalypse continues *MotorStorm*'s tradition of hardcore arcade racing but takes everything up a notch: combat is fiercer than before; the boost system demands constant strategic use; and the tracks are the most insane and varied I've ever encountered in a racing game. *Split/Second* tried to create an action racing experience by giving players control over the destructible environments; *Apocalypse* takes a similar approach but forces players to spend all of their available attention

[details]

Platforms:
PS3
Genre:
Arcade racing
Age restriction:
16
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 4 players
Online: 16 players
Developer:
Evolution Studios
Website:
www.motorstorm.com
Publisher:
Sony Computer Entertainment
Distributor:
Ster Kinekor Games

and reflexes to survive each lap while scripting takes care of the mayhem... and boy, what mayhem. The tracks literally explode around you as you careen down sagging highways or scamper your way through dark and twisty subway tunnels. Vehicles detonate from over-boosting or charge into you at full speed, ramming you and any unlucky pedestrians off bridges, rooftops or seaside cliffs. While all of this is happening, a befitting soundtrack blasts in the background, consisting of drum 'n' bass, some raunchy break-beat and surprisingly fine orchestral scores.

The tracks are breath-taking to behold, yet highly detailed, which has its good and bad points. On one hand, very few races on the same tracks ever play out the same way. While the scripted events are static and predictable once you've learnt their placement, the sheer number of ways you can manoeuvre through each track means you'll often encounter the same incident, as they're called in the game, from different points of view, which could either hinder or benefit you depending on your position relative to the event. Then, on the other hand, you have the issue of



being completely overwhelmed almost constantly. It's a jarring experience to get your thumbs on the controller for the first time, as the speed at which you're forced to drive to remain competitive requires split-second (LOL) reaction times to avoid the hundreds of potholes, broken bits and pieces and other cruelly-positioned obstacles that litter each track. One has to commend the design team and give them the respect they deserve for putting in the amount of effort that's gone into the design of each track (even before the incidents tear them up), but I can't help but feel sometimes that it's a little bit much, and luck enters the equation just a tad more often than what a sane person would consider reasonable.

Thankfully, the game's fairly gentle learning curve does its best to keep you feeling in control of the situation, which it does by presenting the Festival story mode in three progressively-challenging chapters. Each chapter follows the escapades of a member of *MotorStorm* – a group of adrenaline junkies who get their kicks by racing through a fictional city that is simultaneously being ravaged by war and natural disasters. Each chapter comprises ten or-so races spread across nine settings during the few days of the Festival, and between each race you're treated to a motion comic that attempts to create some sense of tension, romance, rivalry and



1

/1/ While you're trying to go about your business of racing through a city that's falling apart around you, two factions – the rebellious Crazies and the private military company Dusklight – are at war. We're not sure why, exactly, but their machine gun, Molotov cocktail, rocket launcher and occasional helicopter attacks are best avoided if you plan on not exploding.

/2/ When the pack gets as tight as this, a quick nudge to either side will get those louts out of your way. Each nudge uses a bit of boost though, so don't overdo it if you'd rather have the speed.

/3/ Each vehicle class has its strengths and weaknesses: Superbikes are fast but get trampled by heavy vehicles like big rigs and monsters trucks. Muscle cars have great top speed to make up for their poor acceleration, but handle terribly on tight-winding tracks. Rally cars and superminis are good all-rounders, but will still get stomped by the bigger vehicles if they're in the way.



5

Psycho Billy



2

14

Big Bl



3



POS 9 / 13

POS 5 / 16
LAP 2 / 3

even conspiracy within the game. The result is, unsurprisingly, a rather weak and pretty-much pointless storyline, but the goofy comics' visual style (which I personally loathe, but your taste might differ) does its bit to assure you that nothing in the game should be taken seriously, except your boost level.

Boost is the lifeblood of your vehicle, and the correct use of this tool will be the deciding factor in where you finish each race. Simply, the player holds X to go faster, but holding it in for too long will overload some sort of mechanical doohickey that turns your vehicle from a nimble death machine to a flaming ball of fail. To keep said doohickey from exploding your pants all over the track, you'll have to keep it cool. Laying off the boost is one way to do it, but driving through water puddles/rain/sprinklers/water barrels will also give you a quick shot of quenching relief (while slowing you down a bit as well). Likewise, while you're airborne (and you'll often be airborne), releasing the accelerator and boost keys will allow your doohickey's heat sinks to soak up the breeze so you can safely mash the

nitro as soon as you land.

In addition to the single player campaign (which only features three race modes), there's also a heaven-sent four-player split-screen mode for you and three friends to become enemies, a hardcore race mode that allows you to replay single-player races with tougher enemies, a customisable free-race mode, and online multiplayer. The MP is impressive in that it features unlockable perks, vehicles, drivers and avatars, which add more than enough spice to this already fiery title.

There's so much brutal and silly fun in *Apocalypse* that it's sometimes easy to overlook its flaws. It's shallow in that there aren't 73 ways to alter your fuel injection or adjust your tire pressure, but that's not what arcade racing is about. Its biggest flaw, and this might put people off, is the chaos that the track design, AI opponents and incidents inject into every moment of gameplay. When that chaos comes together to create a challenging and exciting race, it's brilliant, but there are times when it'll just be irritating. **NAG**

GeometriX

/ PLUS / Looks good / Great level design / Excellent audio / Vehicle variety
/ MINUS / A bit too chaotic / Too few race modes

DECENTLY CHALLENGING, OCCASIONALLY IRRITATING BUT ALWAYS RIDICULOUSLY ENTERTAINING ARCADE RACING FUN.

82

LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars

[Insert *Star Wars* theme song here]

This is the eighth title in the *LEGO [Insert Blockbuster Franchise Name Here]* series of games. That's not even counting stuff like *LEGO Rock Band* and *LEGO Battles*. That also doesn't include the looming release of *LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean: The Video Game*. How the developers at Traveller's Tales manage to invariably pump these games out year after year without getting sick of them is beyond me. Thankfully, all that past experience does mean that with each successive *LEGO* title, TT manages to slowly refine their proven formula and as a result, *LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars* is arguably the best game in the series yet.

The third title in the *LEGO Star Wars* series is based on *The Clone Wars* animated series. It's set between *Episode II* and *III*, with adult Anakin and young Obi-Wan undergoing LEGOfication (don't look at me like that – the word's real enough) and fighting for the Republic

[details]

Platforms: 360 / PC / PS3 / Wii / DS / 3DS / PSP
Genre: Action platformer
Age restriction: 7+
DRM: Disc-based
Multiplayer: Local: 2 players
Online: None
Developer: Traveller's Tales
Website: www.lucasarts.com/games/legostarwarsiii/
Publisher: Traveller's Tales / LucasArts
Distributor: Megarom



1/ A cool new feature in the game is a set of missions with heavily simplified RTS elements. The map is divided into capturable nodes, each of which can spawn troops or vehicles. You don't have much control over units you spawn, but they'll provide some extra firepower while you run around doing your thing.



against the threat of the Separatists. They're not the only iconic characters that show up here either – there are dozens of them to be unlocked, along with a veritable bucket-load of other unlockable stuff.

Fans of the series know the drill – Story Mode sees you running around as various level-specific characters in *Star Wars*-themed locales. You're given a straightforward set of objectives and you're free to switch between the provided characters at any point to take advantage of their unique special abilities. Jedi can use the Force to reconstruct LEGO objects, Clone Troopers are equipped with superior firepower, and small characters like Yoda can crawl into confined spaces to reach new areas. The catch lies in the fact that levels are littered with collectables and secret areas, not all of which you'll be able to find in Story Mode. Instead, you'll have to go back in Free Play mode (which lets you freely switch to any character you've previously unlocked in Story Mode) and revisit the levels armed with all the abilities required to access every secret

area. This is important, because there's a ton of stuff to unlock here, from new characters to new vehicles and more. It's a game for completionists and OCD sufferers, and it also means that it'll keep you busy for a good deal of time if this is your cup of tea.

The game manages to be doubtlessly fun (if a little repetitive) and the trademark cut scenes (in which speech is replaced by all manner of grunts, sighs and other non-verbal, but undeniably cute interactions between characters) are always funny. Unfortunately, it seems like Telltale refuses to fix the little annoyances that have plagued the series from the start – things like shoddy vehicle controls and the supremely annoying inability to quickly change targets when trying to manipulate stuff with the Force. The fixed camera is still infuriating to no end and makes judging jumps an exercise in frustration. Still, it's enjoyable and comes packed with a ton of content to mess around with. Fans will definitely dig it. **NAG**

Barkskin

/ PLUS / Vast amount of content / Fun and funny / It's... It's adorable
/ MINUS / Idiomatic camera / Lame Force targeting / Iffy vehicle controls

IT'S NOTHING WE HAVEN'T SEEN OR DONE BEFORE IN PREVIOUS LEGO TITLES, BUT IT'S DEFINITELY FUN.

76



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Nail'd

Newton who?

The problem with racing games these days is that very few people really enjoy the arcade experience anymore. Now it's all "realism" this and "physics" that, and the market has almost turned its back on the idea of arcade racers. You might find them on handheld devices and mobile phones, but the bigger systems... well, they're becoming rare.

This is an issue that *Nail'd* faces because, quite honestly, it doesn't have a realistic code-bone in its virtual body. This is a game in which the developers, Techland (the same crew behind the *Call of Juarez* series) decided that Newton could take a flying leap – they were going to do things their own way.

The end result is a rather mixed bag of awe-inspiring in-game action and utter frustration. See, even an arcade racer needs some kind of universal rule to live by, but *Nail'd* only really seems to pay attention to gravity – and just a little bit, at that.

This off-road racer will allow the player to sit astride a two or four-wheeler, and blast their way at truly hectic speeds around tracks that

[details]

Platforms: 360 / PC / PS3
Genre: Racing
Age restriction: 12+
DRM: Disc-based
Multiplayer: Local: None
Online: 12 players
Developer: Techland
Website: www.naildgame.com
Publisher: Deep Silver
Distributor: Apex Interactive



/1/ If he survives this, I'm totally throwing away my matric science textbook.



would make mountain goats shuffle their hooves and claim that they need to get home because they left the gas on. The tracks are crazy, with near vertical sections coupled with fast turns and extremely big jumps. This incredibly... err, rugged terrain is made even more extreme by the fact that the player generally has two speeds in the game; stop and "oh my God, the G-forces have pushed my eyeballs through the back of my skull".

The combination of super speed, insanely designed tracks and jumps so big that air-traffic would be diverted in the real world all sounds like a recipe for a super experience, but somehow *Nail'd* falls a little flat. The execution just doesn't seem right, and the overall experience, while fun in short bursts, gets a little tedious when played for

longer periods. The graphics aren't bad, the soundtrack features some good – if old – metal and the controls are fairly responsive.

But still, *Nail'd* fails to achieve a status above mediocre. Perhaps the fact that you can steer your vehicle in the air and almost never wipe out when landing is a problem. Or maybe it's the imprecise track design, which will cause problems in some places. Maybe it's the fact that you'll come to a dead stop if you hit the wrong, minute piece of geometry. Or maybe, it's all of this combined... perhaps arcade racers aren't all that anymore because physics and realism – even a little – help a game make sense. *Nail'd* is mindless fun in short bursts, but don't expect a deep, engaging experience. **NAG**

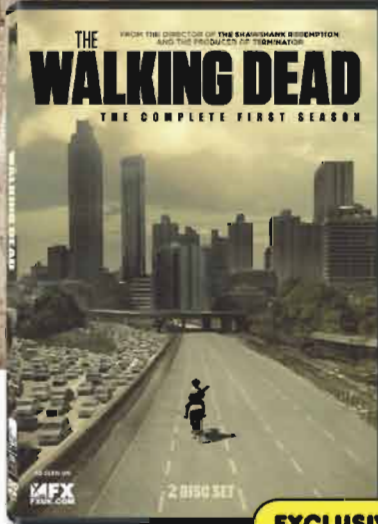
Ramjet

/ PLUS / Extremely fast / Extremely vertical / Extremely crazy
/ MINUS / Too much "extremely" / A little realism never hurt

IT CAN BE FUN IN SHORT BURSTS, BUT TECHNICAL PROBLEMS AND LACK OF DEPTH LAY IT LOW.

60

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

SOCOM: Special Forces

Is *Special Forces* a return to *SOCOM*'s glory days? Let's find out...

The *SOCOM* series of tactical shooters has somewhat of a chequered past; its first entry, over a decade ago, helped pioneer online multiplayer shooters on the PS2, while its most recent iteration was an online-only shooter beset by technical flaws that stymied its potential. Development of the newest *SOCOM* release, subtitled *Special Forces*, has been handled by the series' original studio Zipper Interactive and the result, though imperfect, marks a return to the roots that garnered the franchise its substantial cult following.

Special Forces is set in an unnamed South-East Asian locale, and tells the fairly generic story of a five man special operations squad charged with the task of preventing a revolutionary militarist bent on seizing control of the entire nation. Of the five characters, two are

[details]

Platforms:

PS3

Genre:

Action Shooter

Age restriction:

16+

DRM:

Disc-based

Multiplayer:

Local: None

Online: 32 players

Developer:

Zipper Interactive

Website:

www.socom.com

Publisher:

SCEE

Distributor:

Ster Kinekor

Entertainment

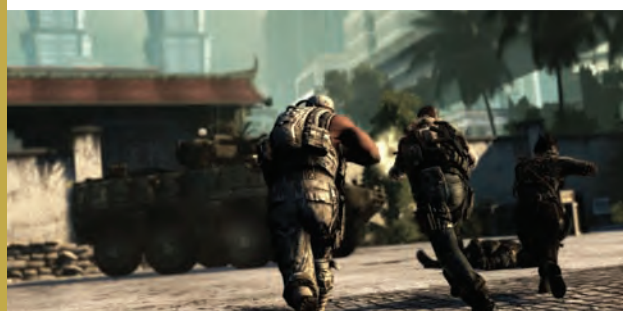
directly playable, and both are suitably stereotypical – there's the gruff but well-meaning American commander Cullen Gray, as well as the enigmatic Korean femme-fatale who's tough enough to "roll with the boys", codenamed "Forty Five". The other three characters serve only to run around the battlefield firing their weapons, and are all but devoid of personality, adding nothing to the game's bland storyline.

Special Forces offers a single-player campaign mode spanning fourteen missions, which serves not only to introduce players to the game's mechanics, but is also good for a fair 6-8 hours of entertainment. The missions themselves comprise typical tactical squad-based combat in which you'll control Gray, as well as a handful of stealth-based missions starring Forty



/1/ Ted was worried that the giant smoke cloud saw him. "I should be safe behind this wall," he thought.

/2/ Frank vowed to defend his cell phone store against aggressive competition, but they're getting carried away this time.



Five. The squad based missions are competent and enjoyable, if hampered by the occasional display of lacklustre AI (which applies to both your teammates, and your enemies), and they offer a fairly challenging experience, particularly on the harder difficulty settings. The stealth missions provide a welcome change of pace, though you'll often have to resort to trial-and-error tactics in order to accomplish them.

Multiplayer options include both cooperative and competitive modes, supporting up to 5 and 32 players respectively. Unfortunately, the cooperative mode features only stand-alone missions, and doesn't allow you to play through the game's main campaign mode with teammates. The competitive modes include typical deathmatch and capture-the-flag modes, as well as two novel modes: Bomb Squad casts one player on each team as a bomb technician, outfitted with a padded

suit and special equipment, while the Last Defence mode tasks teams with completing certain primary objectives, before switching to an all-out tug of war between the winning and losing teams. Although the game's launch coincided inopportunistically with the massive PSN outage in April, its multiplayer component is sure to be one of the game's main draws following the restoration of service.

Though it suffers from a short single-player campaign, *SOCOM: Special Forces* is certainly a capable and competent tactical shooter, bolstered by its strong multiplayer potential. It also offers full PlayStation Move support, as well as stereoscopic 3D gaming, neither of which radically alters the game experience, but which are welcome touches nonetheless. It's a solid title, albeit one that does little to distinguish itself from other entries in this crowded genre. **NAG**

Madman

/ PLUS / Enjoyable, if short, campaign / Vast multiplayer potential

/ MINUS / Uninspired storyline / Imperfect AI

AN ENGAGING, IF SHORT, SINGLE-PLAYER EXPERIENCE, AND SOLID MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS, THOUGH IT STOPS SHORT OF DOING ANYTHING REVOLUTIONARY.

70

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters

Who's your caddy?

[details]

Platforms: 360 / PS3 / Wii
Genre: Sports
Age restriction: 3+
DRM: Disc-based
Multiplayer: Local: 4 players
Online: 4 players
Developer: EA Sports
Website: www.easports.com/golf
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Distributor: Electronic Arts
South Africa

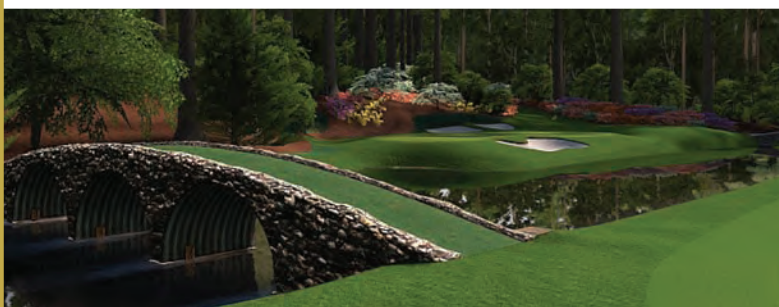
It's that time of year again that EA Sports see fit to bring another Tiger Woods PGA Tour game to the market. But while the last few releases haven't shown too many significant changes, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters* brings two big things to the franchise.

The first is the Masters Golf tournament, which really just is a matter of inclusion. It's not a technical change, but fans of the sport will appreciate the ability to take part in a virtual version of this prestigious tournament.

The second is far bigger – the player now has a caddy. What this means is that the player can assume an extremely lazy route and just follow his suggestions. Sure, the player still has to swing correctly, but it does feel a bit more like a guided tour than a game. That said, the caddy does occasionally sort of throw his hands up and say "I don't know", leaving the player to determine what the best shot would be. He also improves as the game progresses, based on the player's performance on individual courses – to such a point where the player can achieve awesome shots.

The career mode has been tweaked a bit, putting the player on a fast-track to becoming a pro. It's maybe a little too quick, but the XP system is still in place for proper player progression. **NAG**

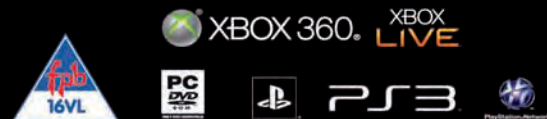
Ramjet



PLUS / Caddy system / The Masters / Good graphics
MINUS / A bit too easy / Fast-tracked career

A NICE ADDITION TO THE FRANCHISE, ALTHOUGH THE CADDY CAN MAKE THINGS A BIT TOO EASY.

78



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EA/MP/05001

WWE All Stars

Proving that anything worth doing is worth over-doing.

For over ten years, the simulation style *SmackDown! Vs. RAW* series has been the WWE's videogame bread-and-butter, with each successive instalment seeking to offer greater depth and realism than the last, no doubt much to the delight of professional wrestling aficionados worldwide. Of course, this means that wrestling games are no longer the widely accessible, "pick up and play" games that they used to be (for those who remember the SEGA Mega Drive, *WWF RAW & Royal Rumble* might spring to mind). THQ's latest WWE offering marks a return to the genre's distant roots of over-the-top cartoon style action, with a roster that consists of both current talent as well as a fair helping of wrestling icons from days gone by, ostensibly in an attempt to make *WWE All Stars* accessible to casual gamers and wrestling fans of all ages.

The game itself offers basic one-on-one bouts, tornado tag matches and a variety of specialty match types including cage matches, extreme rules fights, triple threats and elimination bouts, as well as two "story modes". Path of Champions offers three

[details]

Platforms: PS3 / 360 / Wii / PS2 / PSP
Genre: Fighting
Age restriction: 16+
DRM:
Disc-based
Multiplayer: Local: 2 players Online: 4 players
Developer: THQ
Website: www.wweallstars.com
Publisher: THQ
Distributor: Ster Kinekor Entertainment



/1/ "...and then the ghost came out from beneath the bed and was all, like, 'Boogidy-boo!'"

/2/ "For the last time, I'm not a ghost and I totally didn't even say that."



storylines, each of which sees you battling a string of 9 different opponents before finally facing off against the Undertaker, Randy Orton, or the tag-team of Triple H & Shawn Michaels. The fights are interspersed with cut scenes of your ultimate opponent taunting you in preparation for your eventual confrontation. The more exciting story mode is "Fantasy Warfare", a set of inter-generational matchups for fictitious titles (for example, Andre the Giant is pitted against Big Show to determine the "Greatest Big Man"). Each of the relatively standard matches is preceded by a lengthy cut scene featuring footage from promos and actual WWE fights that serves to perfectly set the scene.

The roster itself is hefty, boasting 30 characters, including legends like Ultimate Warrior, Hulk Hogan and Bret Hart, and newer talent like John Cena, Rey Mysterio and Kofi Kingston. A further 12 characters are to be added by way of paid DLC, allowing players to add the likes of the Road Warriors, the Big Bossman and Ted DiBiase to the game's line-up.

The characters themselves are

grossly exaggerated caricatures of their real life counterparts that perfectly complement the over-the-top action. Wrestlers leap impossibly high in the air, perform multiple spins, and knock their opponents about with ridiculously powerful strikes. The embellished action is further emphasised by multiple camera angles and liberal slow-motion segments that puts *WWE All Stars* firmly in the realm of the unreal. The controls have also been simplified, and it's easy enough to throw strikes or perform grapple attacks, though more complicated manoeuvres like entering or exiting the ring remain too cumbersome, especially given the lack of a tutorial.

Rounding out the package are competent multiplayer options, and a Create-a-Wrestler mode, albeit one that pales drastically in comparison to those found in the *SmackDown! Vs. RAW* series. All in all, *WWE All Stars* puts a more accessible spin on wrestling games, while also offering a fair degree of nostalgic value. It's not the perfect arcade wrestling title by a long shot, but it's a fun outing nonetheless.

NAG Madman

/ PLUS / Sleek presentation / Expansive roster
/ MINUS / Lengthy load times / No tutorial

WWE ALL STARS IS A SATISFYINGLY EXAGGERATED TAKE ON WRESTLING, HAMPERED ONLY BY ITS SLIGHTLY TOO-STEEP LEARNING CURVE.

73

MotoGP 10/11

It's all in the braking

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PS3
Genre:
Racing
Age restriction:
3+
DRM:
Disc-based
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: 20 players
Developer:
Monumental Games
Website:
www.motogp.com
Publisher:
Capcom
Distributor:
Nu Metro Interactive

The previous iteration of the *MotoGP* franchise (being *09/10*) made some interesting steps towards being a good motorcycle racing simulation, but still fell short in a number of places. But developers Monumental Games took a good look at what was wrong with the previous game, made lots of notes, and went about improving things for *MotoGP 10/11*. What we have here is a game that is far superior to its predecessor and while SBK may still have the handling edge, *MotoGP 10/11* delivers an experience that is laps ahead of the older title in the franchise.

With that will come some grumbling, though, because the heightened technicality of the title may take some players by surprise. The bikes carry more weight, braking needs to be more carefully considered, and throwing the bike around like an arcade-style toy is no longer an option. Thankfully the game has a wide variety of assists, and finding the right balance between too easy and blood-vessel-bursting difficult is a matter of tweaking and experimentation.

While the career mode could have been a bit deeper, it is still entertaining, and the 18 tracks on offer deliver a good degree of challenge within the game. It's a vast improvement and, although far from the perfect bike simulator, it's a lot closer to that lofty goal. **NAG**

Ramjet



/ PLUS / More realistic / Improved handling / A good challenge
/ MINUS / Steep learning curve / Graphics a little bland

A VAST IMPROVEMENT OVER THE PREVIOUS TITLE, *MOTOGP 10/11* DELIVERS A BETTER EXPERIENCE TO BIKE RACING SIMULATION FANS.

79

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OVERVIEW

384-bit, 797MHz Clock,
1536MB 384-bit GDDR5
Memory 4008MHz,
512 Cuda Cores, 2 x DVI-I
Connector, 1 x mini HDMI, PCIe 2.0.

EVGA GeForce GTX 560 Ti 1024MB



OVERVIEW

256-bit, 850MHz
Clock, 1024MB
256-bit GDDR5 Memory
4104MHz, 384 Cuda Cores, 2 x DVI-I Connector, 1 x Mini HDMI, PCIe 2.0

EVGA GeForce GTX 550 Ti 1024MB



OVERVIEW

192-bit, 951MHz Clock,
1024MB 192-bit GDDR5
Memory 4356MHz,
192 Cuda Cores, 2 x DVI-I Connector, 1 x Mini HDMI, PCIe 2.0

EVGA



Building a better Bat-mensch

Please be quiet. Batman is perched on the edge of a tall building. If we are not quiet, Batman will have to hurt us.

The dark industrial streets below send echoes of shouts and screams to his bat-ears. He surveys the central part of Gotham City recently converted into the world's largest open-air insane asylum. This new *Arkham City* holds the world's most depraved, violent and sociopathic criminals. Somewhere in the middle of all this chaos is the bat-clue he needs to shut the whole thing down.

The code I'm playing is clearly a very early build.

Holding the A button to run off the edge and glide throws up some framerate stutters. Ames Kirshen (Executive Producer at Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment) assures me the actual game is much further along and far more

polished. Of course, no pressure. After all, it is only the sequel to the game that single-handedly changed expectations about video game adaptations of comic books in the eyes of many.

Navigating the sprawl is easy; gliding and grappling around is fun. The bat-signal is used very effectively as a giant "finger of god" marking my objective. The goal is to make it to a nearby courthouse. Two-Face has captured Catwoman and is holding her there for a mock trial. While gliding, you can hold the right trigger to send Batman into a dive. Release the dive, pull back on the stick, and you swoop up to gain altitude. Using this dive-and-swoop you can travel most of the map without having to use the auto-targeting grappling-hook.

On the way to the courthouse, I stop a random violent crime in progress. There are many types of events that spawn

randomly throughout the city, since there are innocents trapped within the walls of Arkham City, prey to the criminals. Mid-glide, pressing the X button sends Batman feet-first into the auto-targeted enemy. The fluid "FreeFlow" combat from the first game is back and even better. Batman has double the combat moves, and a new beat-down mechanic. Pressing B lets you cape-swoop to stun a nearby enemy. Once stunned, mashing X rapidly unleashes a surprising flurry of face-punches. Some enemy types, like Joker's armoured thugs, can only be defeated this way. Regular enemies are easily dispatched since Batman is awesome. Like the first game, the X button attacks, the A button lets you vault over an enemy and the Y button is a counter-attack. Double-tap A to dodge serious stuff. Without touching the movement stick, I easily incapacitate



[details]

Release Date:
Q3 2011
Platforms:
360 / PS3 / PC
Genre:
**Third-person action
adventure**
Developer:
Rocksteady Studios
Publisher:
**Warner Bros.
Interactive
Entertainment**



nine enemies. Brawls will get much larger in scope than the first game had at its peak, I'm told. The cinematic camera swoops and excellent thumping impact noises make combat ridiculously engrossing.

Reaching the courthouse, I'm left with a choice: fight my way through the front door, or find a stealthy way in. Both choices are equally valid and come with their own repercussions. I tried both during my hands-on time. The front door is a heavy fight but the door is locked. This won't always be the case, but in this instance one choice was a red herring. Going in through a door on the roof, I find Two-Face addressing a crowd of thugs. Catwoman is tied up and hanging over a vat of dramatic-flavour acid. I bust through the glass window I was snooping close to by double-tapping the A button to initiate the contextual action.

The huge brawl that ensues nearly kills me. Two-Face taking pot-shots at me with his handgun from behind protection didn't help matters. On my next play-through I took out a sniper in the corner first with a stealth-kill, which made life much easier. A little pre-fight tactical consideration (still) goes a long way.

Two-Face escapes and Catwoman nearly has her head blown off by the Joker sniping from somewhere. By using Detective Mode (tap left bumper) the room is bathed in a neon blue grid of bat-computer analysing, and I scan the bullet lodged in the floor and the entry point in the window. This gives me an orange line showing me the tower from where the Joker was sniping. The tower is on the other side of this quadrant of the city, a good five minutes away. I can grapple/glide my way there, but I opt to hitch a ride on a Tyger helicopter instead. Tyger

is the fake police force Hugo Strange has in his employ to maintain Arkham City. Strange is responsible for Arkham City, having been put in charge of the project by the new mayor of Gotham, Quincy Sharp. Obviously neither Sharp nor Strange have Gotham's best interests at heart.

On my way to the tower I spot the neon sign for the Monarch Theatre. Kirshen reminds me that this was where Bruce Wayne's parents were killed, so I stop to take a look. Behind the theatre I discover a fresh chalk outline for his parents and a recorded message by Strange. Being a sociopathic super psychiatrist (comic books, you never fail to amaze), Strange leaves a taunting litany for Batman. Kirshen says even more so than the first game, *Arkham City* is full of deep references for fans.

Reaching the tower, I glide in and

brawl it out with the guards at the front door. A nearby Tyger helicopter notices the fight and focuses its floodlight on the chaos. The hyper-kinetic combat is framed nicely within the white beam, highlighting the smooth animation and detailed models quite effectively. Some gangbangers run, others try to hide and a few attempt to take you down. Kirshen mentions there is a lot more to the A.I. of enemies in *Arkham City* compared to the first game. They're more intelligent, will call for help and effectively use what's around them. Inside the tower I'm greeted by Harley Quinn. She struts up all cocky so I bat-fist her face. She points to the hostages in the back and makes her escape. I'm trapped in the sights of several heavily armed thugs.

One of the new gadgets Batman has are ninja-escape smoke pellets. A quick tap of a button and I drop some thick smoke. Tapping right-bumper I grapple

to a gargoyle statue in the rafters. The grunts below lose sight of me and start patrolling while some stay by their hostages. Using Detective Mode you can see clear neon x-ray skeletons of enemies. Bright orange for hostile, blue for passive. You can see what weapons they're holding and scan their heart rate. Dropping in behind two guards in the back and pressing Y initiates the new double-takedown. Batman grabs both pinheads and slams their heads into the ground at the same time. One guard tries to keep his back to a wooden wall. No matter, Batman can takedown right through it using the power of punching. Using his deft grappling, glide-takedowns, and new sliding move, I make short work of the room. The small air-vents you can scurry into are back, and you can take down from within them. Batman has double the animations for all his standard moves compared to the



"What's a little Pythagorean Screw between friends, eh Bats?"



Get over here!



[trivia]

// Batman was originally designed in 1939 to be half-man, half-baseball-bat, but creator Bob Kane's wife changed his mind.

// A recent *Batman* plot penned by Grant Morrison was so complex that only 3 people understood it.



“Batman has double the animations for all his standard moves compared to the first game”

RIDDLE ME THIS

While I explore this small corner of the game, a little Riddler statue peeks out from a bear-trap looking enclosure on this one roof. Using Detective Mode and some logic, I figure out how to open the trap and get the statue. There are plenty such statues to collect, each one a small puzzle on their own. Some require dexterity such as sliding at the statue after hitting a time-delay switch; others involve tracking down the button somewhere obscure. After collecting a few statues, the Riddler messages me with a location to visit. Once there, I find the first of many Riddler Rooms.

These encapsulated zones act as true puzzle sequences, each more difficult than the last as the Riddler keeps trying to outsmart the world's smartest detective. Kirshen is coy as to the purpose of these or what their ultimate reward may be. The puzzles themselves are enjoyable, the first involving a series of electrified floors and switches.

Another layer to the Riddler's involvement in Arkham City are his informants. In a group of random thugs there may be an informant, highlighted in green if you check Detective Mode. You have to try and keep him alive, fighting around and over him, taking everyone down while he tries to get in a few punches of his own. You can interrogate the informant and find out more about what the Riddler is up to, provided he's the last man standing.

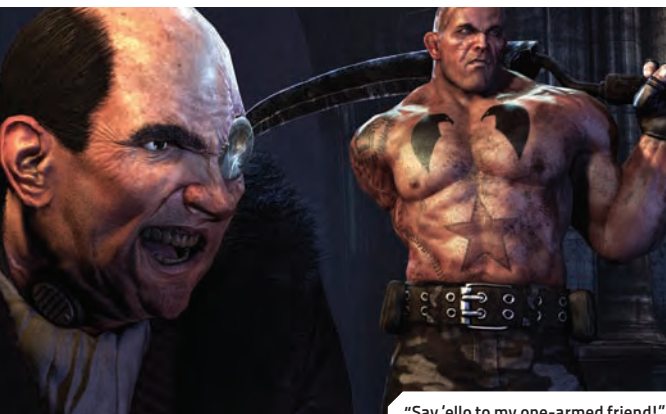


If you're in the Joker's territory, everything is thematically appropriate - all the artwork on the buildings, graffiti, signage, etc - to give you a real sense of the Joker being in control there.

"It's to really help the player feel like they're making a physical transition into another emotional space" says Dax Ginn, Marketing Game Manager at Rocksteady Games.



"...while the entire experience was quite cinematic, very little was overly scripted except for the non-interactive cut scenes."



"Say 'ello to my one-armed friend!"

first game. It really shows, especially in the intricate contextual takedowns.

Reaching the top of the tower I discover the sniper rifle was remotely controlled. The Joker left me a pleasant video message, macabre and funny. Then he triggers a countdown, the entire tower is rigged with explosives. Thankfully I remember the dive-through-the-nearest-window move and escape. Gliding away from the tower, it explodes satisfyingly behind me and the press demo ends.

It's worth noting that while the entire experience was quite cinematic, very little was overly scripted except for the non-interactive cut scenes. You can explore anywhere within Arkham City with certain sections obviously locked out due to plot. While Kirshen insists this is not *Grand Theft Auto*, it still feels a little *Assassin's Creed*. Unfortunately with the limits of the press demo I couldn't get a good bead on how expansive the city is, though I'm told it's five times bigger than Arkham Island.

I'll be frank with you: as a fan of the first game I have high hopes for the sequel. Honestly, I would have been happy with just more of the same. *Arkham Asylum* was a tightly-designed

experience rooted in the *Metroid/Castlevania* ethic of exploration. What it did, it did very, very well. So while *Arkham City* is a sequel, it's also a vast expansion of the premise. You'll still level up and improve your abilities, weapons and Bat Utility Belt, but we weren't shown any of that. Mythological Bat-Scribe Paul Dini returns to pen the brand new story for *Arkham City* that contains Catwoman, Hugo Strange, Victor Zsasz, Calendar Man, The Joker, The Riddler, Harley Quinn and other as of yet unrevealed iconic characters. When the press demo ended, there was a brief flash of a spray-paint graphic that looked very much like the calling-card of The Penguin. Mark Hamill and Kevin Conroy reprise their roles as Joker and Batman.

As a sprawling super-prison, filled with industrial districts, iconic locations and Gotham landmarks - all a stage set to explore Batman's tortured psychology - it's not a question of whether *Arkham City* will be good, but if it can be as good as *Arkham Asylum*. The change of scenery and more open design is nice, but you can only do the prison-break story so many times. **NAG**

Miktar

THE RING IS IN YOUR CONTROL



GREEN LANTERN

RISE OF THE MANHUNTERS



NuMetro
interactive

12
www.pegi.info

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NINTENDO DS NINTENDO 3DS Wii XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE PS3





BLACK OPS

ONLINE LEAGUE UPDATE

We're kicking off this update with the announcement that Incredible Connection has come on board as one of the headline sponsors for the *Black Ops* League. Huge thanks must go to them for supporting the local gaming community! We have some exciting things planned for rAge and will keep you posted. Now, onto news of the league itself.

There's been some interest from sponsors for a couple of the top Premier Division clans, as well as a recent partnership between Ventus Gaming and *Black Ops* Clan Drunkeds [DRK]. DRK has now joined Ventus and renamed themselves to Ventus eSports [vegA].

As I write this we will be in Week 14 (of 19) of Season 1, but by the time you read it we will only have around 3 weeks of fixtures left to complete. It's been an interesting couple of weeks in the league with a couple of clans disbanding, quite a few players switching clans, and some clans changing their names. Aside from that however the league is still very strong with a total number of 52 active clans participating each week. We have had a number of new clans wanting to join the league so we will be opening up registrations on June 1st for new teams to enter. The tempo of the online league will start to ramp up a bit now as we start nearing the end of Season 1, and a lot of clans will be looking to

get into the top three spots of their division in order to be promoted to a higher division.

So here's a short version of what's happening and when ...

1 June 2011 - Registrations for clans wishing to join the 2nd Division in Season 2 open.

17 June 2011 - Season 1 ends. The top 5 and bottom 4 clans in each division will be promoted or relegated accordingly in order to fill the divisions up (this is due to a number of clans disbanding midway through the season).

28 June 2011 - Season 2 begins and will run through to 8 September.

30 September-2 October 2011 - rAge Black Ops League Finals. The top 8 clans in Premier Division and the top 8 clans in 1st Division will battle it out in Quarter Finals, Semi Finals and Finals to be held in the NAG LAN @ rAge.

And here's an update (as at 9 May 2011) of the clan rankings ...

PREMIER DIVISION

Ventus eSports [vegA] - 32 points
 Konsentrasie.Knights [KtK] - 30 points
 Neworder [N] - 30 points
 illusionGaming 1 Rolling Thunder [iG] - 25 points

nArotiK Gaming [nArk] - 25 points
 PewPew [Pew] - 24 points
 Forsaken Union [FU] - 22 points
 Advanced Special Forces - eagles [ASF] - 17 points
 immortal men pursuing insanity [impi] - 16 points
 32 Battalion Red [32B] - 14 points
 Amplified Experience [aE] - 13 points
 SOF >MvP< [SOF] - 6 points
 Deadly Alliance Clan [=DAC=] - 6 points
 A10 [A10] - 4 points
 32 Battlion Black [32B] - 4 points

1ST DIVISION

Dark Trojan Squad [dTts] - 39 points
 Friends For Life [Younglings] [FFL] - 39 points
 Will to Fight [w2F] - 32 points
 Band of Brothers [BoB] - 30 points
 Konsentrasie Kampers [KK] - 30 points
 Ubersoldaten RW [Ubs] - 28 points
 Infinity 2 [iN] - 26 points
 Vamperic defiance [LORD] [VAMP-L] - 25 points
 Legends @ War [LaW] - 24 points
 SS (Resurrection) [SS (Resurrection)] - 23 points
 Electronic Special Weapons & Tactics [ESWAT] - 18 points
 Crude Rude And Kinky [CrAK] - 12 points
 Annihilate The Weak [ATW] - 9 points
 Deadly Alliance Clan 2 [=DAC=] - 9 points
 Friends for life [FFL] - 8 points
 Advanced Special Forces - hawks [=ASF=] - 6 points

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS TOURNAMENT

16 teams; 80 players; 1 weekend. That's how the very first NGL League of Legends Tournament went down. We had four groups of four teams with the top two qualifying for the quarter finals.

We also had an international team who participated and I can tell you from personal experience playing in the tourney, we have loads to learn regarding the competitive side of LoL. My own team's first match was against Aerosol Esports [Ae] (the international team from Belgium) which we naturally lost but gained a lot of pointers from them. On Friday night we started with the group stages which finished by Saturday evening, and we then started with our quarter finals. After all was said and done the two Semi finals were decided.

KK vs. A10 (A10 won 2-1) and Poodles vs. Ae (Ae won 2-0)
So the time came around and we had

our first NGL LoL Tournament Final. The foreign forces vs. the local pretenders. Who was going to win?

A10 vs Ae (Ae won 2-0)

It was decided that the prizes would go to the 2nd placed team (A10) as they were a South African team.

We hope that this is the start of something new and exciting for the South African team Community, and with the game being free there is no reason why all of you reading this shouldn't give this game a try and come and join us.

[fr1dg3]

Thanks to EA, Top CD and Phoenix Software for sponsoring five hampers for the winners - (Crysis 2 PC, Dragon Age II PC, Sims Medieval PC, R100 gift vouchers from Top CD; Magix Rescue your Vinyl and Tapes; Magix video editing software; Magix Rescue your Videotapes)

"I MUST SAY I'M A DECENT FACEROLLER WHEN I PLAY LOL. IF YOU ARE WONDERING WHAT A FACEROLL IS, HERE IS MY MONTHLY DEFINITION OF ONLINE GAMING LINGO. FACEROLL IS THE TERM THAT IS GIVEN TO A CHAMPION WHICH IS SO EASY TO PLAY YOU CAN TAKE YOUR HAND OFF THE KEYBOARD, SLAP YOUR FACE ON IT AND ROLL YOUR FACE AROUND AND YOU GET KILLS."

[FR1DG3]

DeadZone Gaming [[DzG] - 2 points

2ND DIVISION

Pew2 [Pew2] - 52 points

Somewhat Other Xtreme [Sox] - 44 points

impi-X [impi-X] - 43 points

SS (Redemption) [SS (Redemption)] - 38 points

a52 [a52] - 36 points

Real Intense Gaming [_={RIG}=_] - 33 points

illusion Gaming 2 Ghost [iG] - 32 points

Will to Fight- R [w2F-R] - 28 points

Strength in Brotherhood [SiB] - 22 points

Crude Rude And Kinky #2 [CraK] - 21 points

Just 2 Good [J2G] - 19 points

BlowUpDolls SHAKE [BUD] - 17 points

Dead Zone Gaming [[DzG]] - 12 points

Vamperic defiance [EQUI] [[EQUI]] - 12 points

SOF >Edge< [SOF] - 11 points

fIAsh gaming B [[fIAsh]] - 9 points

Spire Gaming [SpG] - 9 points

BlowUpDolls BAKE [BUD] - 8 points

fIAsh Gaming [[fIAsh]] - 7 points

Shoot to Kill [StK] - 5 points

If you'd like to give us some feedback on the Online League, or make any suggestions on future events or games, please go to our forums (www.nagleague.co.za) and post your comments there or send me an e-mail at lauren@nag.co.za. **NAG**

[Guardi3n]

NGL BLACK OPS EASTER KNOCKOUT TOURNAMENT

Our very first Knockout Tournament was held over the Easter Weekend, and most of the big boys pitched and some of the, what I would like to call "Kaas and Wyn" teams also played. Our initial aim was to have 32 teams competing but it would seem that there are a lot of hardcore gamers out there who have personal lives over Easter, so we managed to get 20 teams. Who knew?

We decided to put all the clans into groups and start the knockout stages from the top 8 clans who qualified from the group stages. We tried out some maps we haven't played in the Online League like Summit and Cracked, where we got some very valuable information and feedback from the teams who played. The semi finals came down to four of the biggest teams in the NGL: vegA, impi, nArk and KK. All four teams have been battling it out since the MW2 SA League and they all know each other very well, so it's a fascinating and sometimes tense rivalry that is growing every day. The final went down on Sunday evening at 20:00 with KK and vegA playing each other. It was very close and round for round equal. The game went down to the overtime sudden death round and KK pulled it through. The final score was 13-12 to KK, with what was described as a very tense but awesome clan match.

I must confess that our initial ideas we employed in this tourney did not turn out as we had expected them to, and we had a long discussion after the final to iron out some of the issues we experienced over the course of the weekend. Based on feedback from the community we will ensure that the next Black Ops Tournament will have a revised tiebreaker for the knockout games.

[fr1dg3]

Thanks to Megarom for sponsoring five Black Ops hampers (Black Ops Beanie; Black Ops Earbuds; Black Ops Call of Duty Backpack; Black Ops iPad cover; Black Ops iPhone Case/Blackberry Case) and to Foxcomp for five SteelSeries Siberia V2 Limited Edition Blue headsets for the winners.



AND THE WINNERS ARE ...

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS TOURNAMENT

CLAN - A10

**PLAYERS - CILLIN / ROIDZ / HARDKNOCKS
DIABLO0831 / FIREBLADE105**

BLACK OPS EASTER TOURNAMENT

CLAN - KK

PLAYERS - VOLKL0L / DOMINOZ / SHIROSAKI / SPEEDY / STAIN

**NAG GAMING
LEAGUE**



DID YOU KNOW?

Renowned computer-generated music innovator Max Mathews died at the age of 84 in April. Mathews pioneered the field of digital audio research in 1957 by writing the program that enabled an IBM 704 mainframe computer to play a 17-second composition.

Razer Goliathus gets a facelift

The Razer Goliathus mouse mat has been redesigned and reinforced. It has an anti-fraying stitched frame, meaning that the edges

will now last longer. Other features include a rubber base, and a specially textured weave that is said to register the smallest of movements.



XMini v1.1 Capsule Speaker

With a playtime of up to 6 hours when fully charged, the X-mini Capsule Speaker is an ideal accessory to portable multimedia players such as MP3/MP4 players, mobile phones, laptops, and portable game consoles.

www.edutain.co.za / R195



Music Angel Digital Speaker Mobile Tube

This mini audio box is the perfect companion if you have an MP3/MP4 player, mobile phone, notebook or handheld console. It can be powered in a variety of ways – battery, computer USB, or adaptor DC-5.5V. It also has Line-in and Micro SD.

www.digitalplanet.co.za / R399



/ tech Q&A /

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

I CAN'T HEAR A THING

From: Donovan Fourie

"Hello guru Neo. I have a problem with a computer I recently got. The thing plays no sound. No sound on my video or audio files, when I play mp3's with my media player's it works fine (no errors etc.), but there is no sound, not on games either. My friend says I need to download audio codecs. I don't have a soundcard. I am using Windows XP with service pack 3. I don't think it's my speakers cuz they

work fine on my other pc. I also tried earphones but they don't work either."

Neo: You need audio drivers for the particular motherboard you have. The motherboard manufacturer's website should have all the drivers needed for your particular motherboard including the audio drivers.

2.1 SPEAKER SET HELP

From: Michael Brooke

"I'm planning to upgrade from my current speaker set very soon. Spurred on by the excellent and informative reviews of speakers in the April edition of NAG, I decided to start investigating (on the internet) the various 2.1

speaker sets available that are around the R500 mark.

Based on this budget and your reviews, I decided that the Genius SW-G2.1 1250 speakers would be the best option. The internet, however, failed me, and I can't seem to find any decent, definitive reviews of other, similar 2.1 speaker sets to compare to this Genius set in order to make an informed choice.

My question is, is this the best possible 2.1 speaker set available for around R500, or are there any better sets that you may know of that didn't make it into the magazine? They're going to be used for gaming on my Xbox (which is connected to a PC monitor) and for music from my iPod.



Astrum Combe Freedom
 This wireless multimedia keyboard and optical mouse has a 10m wireless transmission distance, ultra-thin keycap design, 1600dpi mouse and is also waterproof.
www.astrumltd.com / R399



Huntkey X7 1200W PSU
 The X7 has four key technologies that will appeal to gamers and overclocking enthusiasts: Phase-shifted Full-bridge, Interleaved PFC, Synchronous Rectification and DC to DC Module. What you get is higher efficiency, more stability, smooth operations and superior performance.
www.tvr.co.za / R2,699



Team 2.5" Portable Hard Drive
 The TP 1023 640GB, with its exclusive sports car theme, is equipped with a shock absorbent rubber suspension mechanism to ensure that your data remains intact.
www.teamgroup.com.tw / R899

Any suggestions would be greatly appreciated and helpful!"

Neo: *The really good sets start from above R1,000 and that's obviously not your budget. The Genius set is amongst the best you'll get at that price range, if not they are going to sound very similar to other brands that are competing in that segment.*

GAMING LAPTOPS AND DESKTOPS
From: Jonathan Strauss

"I hope you can help!!! I'm in need of desperate advice. I want to get a gaming pc, preferably a laptop, because you can take it anywhere. I've been doing research for almost 5 months and

the best I've seen so far is the Asus ROG series. I can't decide between the Asus G73JW and the Asus G73SW. Should I get a 3D enabled laptop, is it worth it? There's also the G53 series that has 3D without glasses and the same GPU. Asus will also be releasing the G74. What must I do? Is Asus the best way to go? Alienware is a bit over the top for me, it looks like Vegas in a box. I love the stealth fighter designs. I just finished reading the new NAG and there's so many awesome desktops. I don't know what to do. I have about R28,000 to spend and I want to make sure if I spend this kind of money, that the pc will at least be semi future proof. I have an Xbox and a PS3, so I'm getting the laptop mostly for the new strategy games, games that look and play the

best on pc, internet browsing and downloading and, do not laugh, Sims. Is there anything you can recommend? Do I need a high-end laptop for my above mentioned requirements? I love the back lit keyboard, cooling system, design and the fact that the SW and the G74 has the Sandy bridge technology. I also love Sony, but the Asus seem to be the best priced for what you get. I'm new to PC gaming, so I know the basics. What do I do? Please help!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Congrats on the NAG!!!!!!!!!!!!!! It's definitely the best!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Neo: *Notebook performance is usually not up to par with PC because of the GPUs they use in them. You're actually better off spending half of*

HTC has plenty of upcoming devices for the local market

Leading the pack is the HTC Sensation, a high-end mobile phone that is equipped with a 1.2GHz dual-core processor, 1GB RAM, a 4.3" QHD display protected by Gorilla Glass, and runs the Android 2.3 operating system.

HTC's popular Desire has received plenty of attention, with three new derivatives set to arrive soon: the Desire HD, Desire Z and Desire S, which feature HD video recording, a slide-out keyboard and all-round improvements, respectively.

Two new phones, the ChaCha and Salsa (both pictured here), are focused on social networking, and in particular, Facebook integration. By pressing

the dedicated Facebook button on each device, users can instantly share content contextually, for example, if you're browsing photos or using the camera, pressing the button will upload the images. Both phones include built-in Facebook chat support.

The most surprising device on the list of upcoming devices is the HTC Flyer, which is a mini-tablet (7" display) with a 1.5GHz single-core CPU, 1GB RAM and stylus support. The device will function just like any HTC phone, and includes the HTC Sense operating system overlay, but will not allow GSM voice calls, despite being equipped with a SIM card slot for HSDPA internet.



Apple iPad 2 arrives

The second-generation iPad 2 is now available in SA. It features an entirely new design that is 33 percent thinner and up to 15 percent lighter than the original iPad, while maintaining the same 9.7" LED-backlit LCD screen. In terms of hardware power the iPad 2 is sporting

Apple's new dual-core A5 processor. It also has two cameras - a front-facing VGA camera for FaceTime and Photo Booth, and a rear-facing camera that captures 720p HD video. Pricing ranges from R4,399 for the 16GB Wi-Fi version to R7,599 for the 64GB Wi-Fi + 3G model.

Know Your Technology

MOBILE HARDWARE

/ ARM CORTEX CPU /

This is a 32-bit RISC (Reduced Instruction Set) CPU that powers the vast majority of smart phones in the world today in some way or another. This CPU is licensable and companies such as Texas instruments, Qualcomm, NVIDIA, DEC and others use this CPU customise it and add it to their SOC and embedded solutions for mobile or low power devices. The most popular of these CPUs are based on the Cortex-A8, A9 and the A15.

/ POWERVR SGX5 SERIES /

Popular GPU used in mobile devices ranging from smart phones to tablets and netbooks. This GPU is developed by PowerVR which used to make desktop GPUs in the mid to late '90s. The SGX line supports OpenGL 2.0 and DirectX 10.1 at hardware level (although rarely is it ever used in that capacity and only the 545 supports DX10.1). These GPUs are in the most popular devices today such as the iPhone 4, iPad, Galaxy S, Nokia N900 and many other SOC solutions.

/ NVIDIA TEGRA 2 /

SOC series developed by NVIDIA for use in mobile devices including but not limited to portable video players, tablets and more recently smartphones. Originally based on the ARM11 core in the APX2500, it has matured and is now based on the ARM Cortex-A9 which is paired with a GeForce ULP GPU that features discreet vertex and fragment processors. The entire system is a single channel DDR2 platform and depending on configuration can support capture of up to 12MP stills or 1080p H.264 Video. Some devices that use this SOC are the Samsung Galaxy Tab II, LG Optimus 2X and the ASUS Eee Pad Transformer.

/ SAMSUNG EXYNOS /

Samsung's own SOC that will be used in upcoming devices as well as some variants of the Galaxy X phones. This SOC discards PowerVR in the graphics department in favour of ARM's own Mali-400MP. Not much is known about this GPU currently but speculation places its performance on par if not better than PowerVR's SG545 GPUs with support for both 3D and 2D acceleration, and OpenGL EX2.0 support.

// tech Q&A //

that on a good desktop PC and the other half on a notebook with a mobile 400 series graphics card from NVIDIA or mobility Radeon from AMD. That way you can play your games on the go. The desktop you could use to play the more demanding games with better quality/settings. Truth be told there isn't such a thing as a future proof notebook, as a R20K notebook is usually the equivalent of a R7K desktop in power and, with no upgrade path for it, so-called gaming notebooks can't ever be considered investments in my opinion.

FAULTY RAM HELP From Waseem Tayob

"Hi there guys, firstly I'd like to complement you guys on the excellent publication, and a big thumbs up to your team of designers. I have a small annoying issue...I recently purchased a set of OCZ blade ram 2x2gigs ddr2 1066, second-hand from a famous website (carbonite) with a lot of regret, I got my hands on the ram and went about installing it on my pc, but my pc refused to boot....switched the ram and still not booting, tried each stick individually, and to my amazement my pc only booted with the 2nd stick...faulty 1st stick....I tried explaining to the seller at what had happened and he insisted

that it was perfect when he had sold it to me, a lot of arguing with no help, and then I realized that OCZ carries a lifetime warranty on ram... my problem is trying to find out who is the official supplier of OCZ in South Africa, and how do I go about swapping them out. The seller had told me that he purchased it from some local website, but as you can imagine he isn't on talking terms with me. I just would like to warn others out there about buying second hand pc components. TEST FIRST!!! If only I had :-(... please advise."

Neo: The official distributors in SA are Foxcomp and Syntech SA (<http://www.ocztechnology.com>).



INCREDIBLE DEPTH FOR THE ULTIMATE GAMING EXPERIENCE.

Experience real-life depth with the new Samsung 3D LED monitor.

Real 120Hz • Brighter* 3D images • 2D to 3D image conversion • www.samsung.com

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

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



enil South Africa

Quote

"Intel's scientists and engineers have once again reinvented the transistor, this time utilizing the third dimension. Amazing, world-shaping devices will be created from this capability as we advance Moore's Law into new realms."

Paul Otellini, Intel President and CEO.

Intel recently announced a significant breakthrough in the evolution of the transistor. For the first time since the invention of silicon transistors over 50 years ago, transistors using a three-dimensional structure will be put into high-volume manufacturing. Intel will introduce a revolutionary 3-D transistor design called Tri-Gate, first disclosed by Intel in 2002, into high-volume manufacturing at the 22-nanometer (nm) node in an Intel chip codenamed "Ivy Bridge".

By the numb3rs

5.6%

According to the Steam hardware survey results for April 2011, the number of PCs that can run DirectX 11 games are still in the low range. Just 5.6% of all PC game rigs can run DirectX 11 games with their hardware. PC video card usage is 59.11% NVIDIA / 32.98% ATI; while PC processor usage is 72.37% Intel / 27.63% AMD.

Snippets

MSI and SteelSeries have created a keyboard for the GX780 gaming notebook. Features include larger Ctrl and Alt keys, repositioning of the Windows function key, and a Gaming Mode hotkey that will light up your W,

A, S, D, and Ctrl keys.

Samsung has announced plans to sell its hard disk drive (HDD) business, leaving just three players in the consumer HDD market: Western Digital, Seagate, and Toshiba.

Cooler Master has added a

mid-tower chassis to its line-up. The CM Storm Enforcer is aimed at enthusiasts and budget conscious gamers, and includes features such as a modular interior, cable management and liquid cooling-ready.

Telkom has begun increasing the speed of 512Kbps ADSL

subscribers to 1Mbps. Uplink speeds are also being upgraded - from the usual 256Kbps to 512Kbps.

OCZ has unveiled the Agility 3 and Solid 3 SATA III SSD product lines. The new series will deliver nearly double the performance of the

previous generation and offer a more cost-effective alternative to current SATA 6Gbps SSDs on the market.

The retail pricing for the Roccat Kone [+] in the Dream Machine was noted incorrectly in previous issues. The correct price should be R899.

Alienware extends its laptop family

Three Alienware laptops have been announced by Dell – the M18x, M14x and a new M11x.

"If you're a gamer, you're going to love our new family of laptops, which deliver on the features gamers care most about – uncompromised graphics performance, latency-free wireless HD streaming to HDTVs, and lifelike 3D gaming," said Arthur Lewis, general manager of Alienware. "We are committed to delivering the best gaming systems for enthusiasts everywhere and we take great pride in helping them 'pwn', no matter where they are in the world."

The flagship M18x will be a true desktop replacement, according to Alienware. It will have Wireless HD and 3D options, HDMI-in, SuperSpeed USB

3.0 ports, an 18.4-inch FHD WLED 1080p display, dual-graphics technology, and the industry's only Intel Core i7 Extreme CPU option factory overclocked to 4GHz.

The M14x is ideal for gamers who want a balance between performance and mobility, and features full-voltage second-generation quad- and dual-core Intel Core CPUs, discrete graphics and an optical disk drive. Improvements to the popular M11x include second-generation Intel Core processors with Intel Turbo Boost Technology 2.0, updated graphics featuring the NVIDIA GeForce GT 540M, and like the larger M14x, optional Intel WiMAX technology. The latest M11x also features a soft touch finish with a new Nebula Red option.

Lian Li special edition PC-U6 Cowry



Shaped like a seashell (hence the name Cowry) this funky looking special edition chassis from Lian Li is an all-aluminum case weighing in at 4.5kg. It will support Micro-ATX and Mini-ITX motherboards, graphics cards up to 310mm long, with 3 x 3.5" and 2 x 2.5" HDD mounts.

tech Q&A

[com/where-to-buy/distributors/africa.html](http://www.nag.co.za/com/where-to-buy/distributors/africa.html)
You can also apply for an RMA service on the site as well, but you'll have to pay for shipping to OCZ.

Hope that helps.

GRAPHICS CARD UPDATE

From: Llywellyn Del Piccolo

"In your May 2011 mag, regarding whether David Malan should upgrade to the GTX570 or HD6970, you said that the GTX580 is about R80 bucks more??? I almost wanted to pull my hair out

thinking that I missed something like that...

I bought a Gigabyte GTX570 Windforce from TAKE2 for R3663.00 (special) two weeks ago. Now when I did a search the cheapest GTX580 that I could find is R5100.00, with a massive R1400 difference. Please enlighten us where you guys get prices.

Now to get to my question, is it normal for a sata 2 HDD to just "die" after 6 years of use? As I was busy working about a week ago my pc just crashed and nothing. The PC picks up that there is a HDD connected but it displays 0 GB. When I try and initialize it through windows disk management it tells me there is an I/O error. I've tried connecting it to other sata ports, swapped sata cables, plugged it into another pc, but the

problem always stays the same. Is there any way that the data on the disk can be recovered etc?"

Neo: At the time there was indeed a GTX580 for a little bit more than an HD6970 of a different brand. The cheapest 580 you can get right now is about R4,800. For example, the GIGABYTE GTX5700C costs more than a Palit GTX580. You should try www.jump.co.za you'll be surprised at what you can find.

In answer to your second question it's not normal, but drives do die at some point or another. You may be able to recover the data on your drive but you may need data recovery services for that, which can be very expensive. **NAG**

The **ZyXEL** digital home



1 P-870HW
Internet Access
Supports SPI, Timewalk/WiP,
WPA/WPA2



2 NRG-460N
Gigabit Wireless N Router
Supports WPS/WPA/WPA2



3 NSA-220 Prime
Central Digital Media Library
Secured by FTPS/HTTPS



4 PLA-401
Ethernet Powerline Adapter
Secured by 128-bit AES Encryption



5 PLA-450
Powerline Access Point
Secured by 128-bit AES Encryption



6 PLA-491
Powerline Ethernet Multiplug Center
Secured by 128-bit AES Encryption



7 DMA-1500P
Digital Media Adapter



8 STB-1003
IP Set-top-box



9 NWD-271N
Wireless N USB adapter
Supports WPS/WPA/WPA2



COREX

Johannesburg

Tel: +27 10 223 2220
Fax: +27 10 223 2140

Cape Town

Tel: +27 21 555 7108
Fax: +27 86 653 5027

Durban

Tel: +27 31 582 0286
Fax: +27 31 582 0280

GIGABYTE ECO600

[info]

RRP:
TBA
Website:
www.rectron.net

[technical]

Interface:
USB
Tracking system:
Laser
Polling rate:
125 reports per second
Resolution:
800/1200/1600DPI
Weight:
106g excluding batteries
Controls:
Four regular buttons; mouse wheel (non-tilting); DPI switch.

[summary]

Pros:
// Comfortable
// Claimed battery life

Cons:
// Entry-level performance

Alternatives:
GIGABYTE GM-M7600



Logitech M305



GIGABYTE's ECO series of motherboards have been doing the rounds for some time now, offering users supposedly reduced power usage to help save the environment and other things you wouldn't usually associate with component production. Now, the company has brought the concept to this mouse, the ECO600.



"The biggest attraction with this mouse will be the claimed battery life."

LOOK AND FEEL

If you're familiar with GIGABYTE's range of mice, you should know what to expect by now. The ECO600's overall quality is of a decent level, but won't win any awards in the hardcore gaming segment. Still, with its shell styled on the M6980/900 (which we reviewed in the March issue of NAG), it wouldn't look out of place at a LAN party.

The device's rubberised thumb and pinky grips are comfortable enough and offer a good level of control, and the two easy-to-reach, customisable thumb buttons allow you to map game

commands with ease. Additionally, with the batteries installed, the mouse has a good heft to it without being too heavy, although its weight isn't centred.

INNER WORKINGS

While it might look like the M6980, the ECO600 takes after one of GIGABYTE's other wireless mice, the GM-M7600. Both devices share similar specifications, and make use of the absolutely tiny, and aptly-named, Nano Receiver. Connecting to your PC is as simple as inserting the included batteries, plugging in the receiver and turning on the device.

The biggest attraction with this mouse will be the claimed battery life. According to GIGABYTE, the device can run for up to 12 months on a pair of batteries. While we didn't have a year to spare for testing purposes, we get the feeling that this claim is limited to regular use, not the obsessive levels of gaming some of us gamers are guilty of. Still, all of this means that it's a great mouse for bringing with you on trips or to LANs; if the total battery life is even half of what GIGABYTE claims it to be, that's better than many other wireless mice. **NAG**

Memories never fade...



PF705

7" Digital Photo Frame

Transcend's PF705 Digital Photo Frame is simple and stylish, featuring a bright, sharp 16:9 widescreen. Aside from offering slideshow, thumbnail, rotate, and zoom-in viewing options, the PF705 works with most mainstream memory cards and USB Flash Drives, making it a simple and versatile way to keep those precious moments alive.

The PF705's smart and user-friendly Flash user interface makes your photo-viewing experience fun and easy. Equipped with advanced NaturaTone intelligent skin color processing technology, the PF705 guarantees your photos look their very best!



Classic Design
Crisp LCD screen



For more information visit www.rectron.co.za or call 0860 582 835 / For Support call our National Technical Support Line: 0861 788 789

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Tel: (011) 203 1000
Fax: (011) 203 1940

Cape Town:
Tel: (021) 555 7136
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

Display

Samsung P2770HD
www.samsung.co.za



Power

Thermaltake
Toughpower 1.5KW
www.thermaltake.com



Processor

Intel Core i7 980X
www.intel.com



Storage drive

Seagate Barracuda XT 2TB
www.seagate.com



Motherboard

GIGABYTE GA-X58A-UD9
www.gigabyte.com



OS drive

OCZ Agility 2 60GB SSD
www.ocz.com



Memory

Corsair Dominator GT
2000C8
www.corsair.com



Dream Machine

Processor	R8,999
Motherboard	R6,499
Graphics	R5,999
PSU	R3,760
Memory	R2,099
OS Drive	R2,099
Storage drive	R1,699
CPU Cooler	R579
Case	R1,899
Display	R3,999
Keyboard	R1,499
Mouse	R899
Mousemat	R319
Sound	R2,799
Speakers 5.1	R4,499

TOTAL: R47,646

Keyboard

Logitech G19
www.logitech.com



Mouse

Roccat Kone[+]
www.roccat.org





Technology doesn't replace needs

Recently PC sales have slowed according to several stats organizations. However, much like many of these statistics in this industry, they mean nothing when the very same people who have supposedly suffered because of this slowdown are posting record revenues. I guess it all depends on what Kool-Aid is being sold on the day and how many people are willing to drink it.

Part of this PC sales slowing is attributed to the uptake in tablets and smart phones. Alleged experts state that tablets will soon take over the PC market and there may come a time when everyone uses a tablet almost exclusively. Needless to say I don't agree with this, and it's a rather nonsensical argument as you'll see.

Tablets, much like smart phones, are devices that allow people to consume more content primarily. With more people consuming software (whatever it may

"Even besides the power argument, in such a situation your portable tablet isn't a tablet anymore but a sub-standard PC. Now it serves even less of a purpose than say a netbook, which as it turns out was always a useless device."

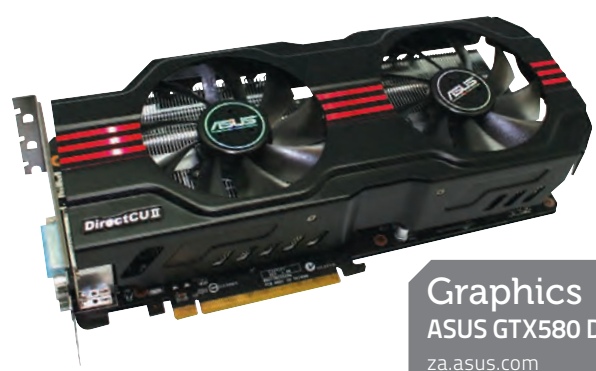
be) you need more people producing it. Now simple deduction, no actually just common sense, would make it very apparent to most functional minds that you cannot at this point create content on either of these devices. Indeed you can hook up a keyboard, mouse and a large LCD to your tablet and in a way use it as you would a PC. However once you do that you're in essence using a PC, only a less powerful one than you could be using. Even besides the power argument, in such a situation your portable tablet isn't a tablet anymore but a sub-standard PC. Now it serves even less of a purpose than, say, a netbook, which as it turns out was always a useless device.

This isn't isolated to tablets only, but other products as well. Smart phones become more powerful by the day. Samsung's Galaxy II S features a dual-core CPU, not that there's anything useful you can do with that power when it's stuck on a phone, but the fact that you can have a 1.2GHz dual-core CPU on a phone does not instantly make all similarly specified PCs useless. On the contrary, to design for any platform you need an even more powerful platform to work on. To expose the limits or harness the power of any console, you need to develop on the PC.

The suggestion that people will just take their tablets anywhere and plug them into docking stations is ridiculous. A PC serves a specific purpose and it is a PC because of the needs it fulfills. To suggest anything else would be working backwards, solving a problem that isn't there and re-creating one that was solved decades ago. A PC remains so because it is a computing device; smart phones, tablets and consoles use the computing part only as in how much they allow you to consume.

Nothing needs to replace anything else, and you can easily have a very good smart phone, a tablet, a notebook and a desktop PC. Notice that none of these devices is called an "all in one electronic Swiss Army device of everything you need". So the next turkey to say that X is replacing Y, should think carefully and ask themselves what was it exactly these devices were built for.

NAG
Neo Sibeko



Graphics
ASUS GTX580 DirectCU II
za.asus.com

Speakers 5.1
Logitech Z-5500 Digital
www.logitech.com



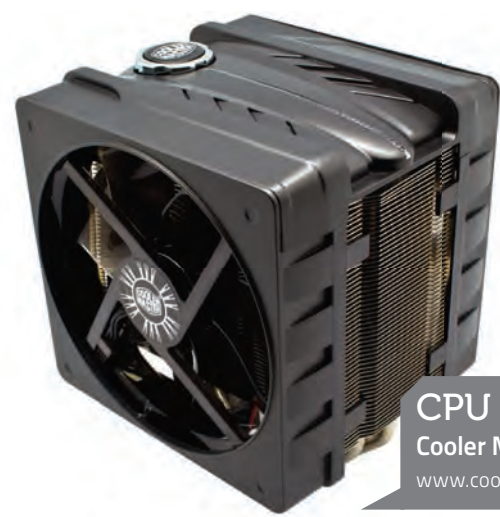
Mousemat
Roccat Alomic
www.roccat.org



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



Case
Coolermaster HAF X 942
www.sonicinformed.co.za



CPU Cooler
Cooler Master V6GT
www.coolermaster.com

ASUS NC1

Supplier: **ASUS** / Website: za.asus.com / RRP: TBA

Some may not know this but even more so, are amongst the most difficult pieces of audio equipment to design. This is especially true when shooting for sound that rivals speakers and companies such as Sennheiser, Koss, Klipsch, and Audio Technica amongst many others, as they spend sizeable amounts in R&D in an effort to reproduce the best sound possible given the confines of a typical headset.

It is even more difficult to make good noise-cancelling headphones that introduce more electronics into the equation in an attempt to isolate interference from the outside and mute it without boosting the signal from the source. Most noise cancelling headphones work by having ear cups that fit snug over the ears. They then employ a sampling microphone or two which creates an inverse signal to the "noise" to cause destructive interference. This is active noise-cancelling, which is what the ASUS NC1 set does instead of soundproofing via the ear cups.

The set claims reduced noise levels of up to 87%. It's hard to

measure this exactly with the limited tools we have, but suffice to say the NC1 noise cancelling actually works well. It sometimes loses sync with the outside noise, but just turning off the noise-cancelling and turning it on again fixes everything. In that regard it's hard to fault this set as it actually mutes unwanted sound almost entirely without harassing your ears with excessive volume, which some sets do in their attempt to subdue the interference.

Where it doesn't all come together is in the build quality. While it doesn't feel cheap, the in-line volume, mute and on/off controller is big, pulls on the headphones a little, and just isn't built well at all. The weight is understandable as that's where the battery is housed, but even with that excuse, the entire piece is probably the single biggest downside to these headphones, made worse by the wires which come off both sides of the ear cups using an unnecessarily long cable. If you're willing to overlook all of that however you'll find a fairly good set of cans here that will be more than acceptable for most people. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



[specs]

Weight: **130g**
 Frequency Response: **16 - 22000 Hz**
 Impedance: **32 Ohm**
 Input Sensitivity: **102dB**

- / PLUS / Noise-cancelling actually works / Comfortable
- / MINUS / Less than optimal wiring / Annoying control unit

GREAT VALUE FOR MONEY NOISE-CANCELLING SET, THAT ONE SHOULD CONSIDER.

7
OUT OF 10

Kingston HyperX LoVo 1800C9

Supplier: **Kingston** / Website: www.kingston.com / RRP: R1,099

As we continue to lament the termination of high-quality low-latency RAM in the power user circles, the new batch of DRAM chips have had a less than stellar time finding favour with enthusiasts. While this situation is unlikely to change anytime soon, we do have some interesting products that the new chips have allowed.

A great example is the LoVo (Low Voltage) series from Kingston, which operate at a healthy 1.35V, well below the JEDEC spec of 1.5V and the regular 1.65V of almost all performance sets since the introduction of the X58 platform. One would assume that RAM operating at such a low voltage would be limited to very low speeds in the region of 1066MHz or 1333MHz at best (after all, these are the only officially supported JEDEC speeds), but this particular set is rated at a respectable 1800MHz. In unofficial terms, that's PC14400. All this is achieved at the already mentioned 1.35V, but the timings as well are worth giving a nod to. Rated at a true CL9-9-9-27 we would have forgiven Kingston had they had more relaxed timings, but instead find ourselves surprisingly impressed.

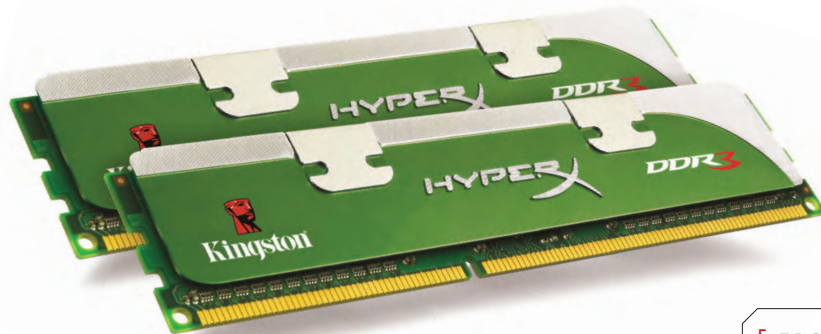
Granted that this set is not

meant for overclocking and doesn't feature any sort of high-end cooling mechanism, we were surprised to learn just how far this RAM was willing to go at 1.6V. We managed to reach the practical limit of 2,200MHz on the P67 platform at 9-10-9-27 timings. This obviously gave the best performance, but

we do feel that given the amount of voltage needed to reach this speed, the voltage increase doesn't justify the performance gain for most people. In a competitive environment the situation is obviously different and even more can be had from this set, but that is entirely dependent on your CPU and

its IMC. For the asking price, this RAM doesn't actually cost much as it pairs decent timings, high speeds and some impressive overclocking headroom to give you a great package. If you want some good RAM at an affordable price, consider this kit. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



Benchmarks	
AIDA64 Copy	/ 25061MB/s /
AIDA64 Latency	/ 39.3ns /
MaxxMem Score	/ 1689.7 /

[specs]

Size: **4GB (2x2GB)**
 Memory Type: **DDR3**
 Frequency: **1600MHz CL9**

- / PLUS / 1.35V operating voltage / Overclocks well
- / MINUS / Nothing

GREAT VALUE FOR MONEY SET WITH SOME GOOD PERFORMANCE.

8
OUT OF 10



REPUBLIC OF GAMERS

ASUS recommends Windows 7.

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WD Caviar Black 1TB FAEX

Supplier: Landmark Computers / Website: www.landmarkpc.co.za / RRP: R875

Western Digital's Caviar Black line has always been synonymous with performance. For those who couldn't quite justify the 10K RPM drive prices, this was the second best thing and even now in the middle of 2011, it's hard to not like these drives.

The trouble with most drives on the market is that any two drives that are supposedly the same make can perform very differently. Most people will never know this because benchmarking disk drives isn't something that is done as much these days, where SSDs have proved that there's no coming back for magnetic storage where performance is concerned. To this end, one may assume that all disk drives are the same but they are not, especially when looking at a drive such as this one. This is the newest Black series drive (along with the 2TB) from WD and, unlike the previous models, feature a SATA 6Gbps controller and a healthy 64MB of cache.

Making use of two 500GB platters and some nifty drive logic, the Caviar Black represents the best that 7200rpm magnetic drives can offer. The numbers speak for themselves and while they are lower than those of the reference SSD we use for testing, you should pay particular attention to the video editing and Vista start-up scores in PCMark Vantage. They are so close to those of the SSD that it makes one wonder if paying more than 3x the price for the SSD is worth it for one eighth of the space. More than that however, the performance of this drive nullifies the need for the VelociRaptor drives which aren't much faster but carry SSD prices. When short stroked this drive actually performed better than the 600GB drive bringing read access times down to 7.32ms with sequential write and reads speeds above that of the Raptor. Should you be looking for a high-performance drive; look no further than the Caviar Black.

NAG

Neo Sibeko



Benchmarks	
Average Read	/ 103.1 / / 120 /
Average Write	/ 102.6 / / 118.1 /
4K Read	/ 0.709MB/s / / 1.0MB/s /
4K Write	/ 1.522MB/s / / 1.836MB/s /
Video Editing	/ 47.063MB/s / / 67980MB/s /

Baseline: VelociRaptor 600GB

/ PLUS / Near VelociRaptor performance / 64MB cache and SATA 6Gbps
/ MINUS / A little loud

FANTASTIC PERFORMANCE FROM A MAGNETIC DRIVE AT AN INCREDIBLE PRICE.



[specs]

Size:
1TB (64MB Cache)
Platter Density:
500GB (x2)
Form Factor:
3.5"
Interface:
SATA 6Gbps

9
OUT OF 10

WD VelociRaptor 600GB

Supplier: Drive Control Corporation / Website: www.westerndigital.com / RRP: R2,333

For a number of years Raptor drives from Western Digital were the ones to have. With an unprecedented 10K rpm spindle speed and access times that matched, enthusiast and power-users alike looked to these drives for the ultimate in performance. In fact, this was the closest we could get to the enterprise 15K rpm drives which cost a fortune and were usually available only in SCSI guise.

Many years later, and with SSDs taking over where performance is concerned, the value of Raptor drives is questionable at best, and while they still do offer significantly more capacity than what SSDs do for the same price, they are expensive. More so right now with this 600GB model which costs as much as our reference Kingston 128GB SSD.

The VelociRaptor drive, in theory, should offer the best of both worlds and, in a perfect world where these drives performed as expected, these would still be worth the investment. Sadly this isn't the case because, as you will see in the results, the Western Digital

Caviar Black FAEX 1TB drive offers 400GB more at less than a 3rd of the price and about 85% of the performance. It's hard to campaign for the VelociRaptor because it may be peerless when compared to other magnetic drives (barring 15K rpm drives), but its advantage just isn't that substantial anymore or relevant. At half the price it could be attractive but as it is, you're paying a whole lot more for marginally better performance.

Those that require ultimate performance but will not sacrifice on capacity may find a use for these in RAID configurations, but even then, the more you add, the less cost effective they become. At the end of it all, we like the VelociRaptors for what they represented, especially in their new 2.5" form factor. However, regular disks such as the Black have closed the gap significantly and SSDs have taken the crown for ultimate performance, which leaves the VelociRaptor in a race nobody else is in.

NAG

Neo Sibeko



Benchmarks	
Average Read	/ 120 / / 120 /
Average Write	/ 118.1 / / 118.1 /
4K Read	/ 0.54MB/s / / 1.0MB/s /
4K Write	/ 1.836MB/s / / 1.836MB/s /
Video Editing	/ 26.222MB/s / / 67980MB/s /

Baseline: VelociRaptor 600GB

/ PLUS / 10,000 RPM / Small 2.5" size / 600GB / Relatively quiet
/ MINUS / Expensive / Of little relevance today

THE FASTEST MAGNETIC DRIVE ON THE MARKET IS ALSO PROBABLY THE MOST MEANINGLESS.

[specs]

Size:
600GB (64MB Cache)
Platter Density:
320GB (x2)
Form Factor:
2.5" (3.5" housing)
Interface:
SATA6G

6
OUT OF 10

Balls of Steel competition

* Balls of Steel not included



Exclusive for NAG readers

Help Duke decide what he should do in the proposed situations. Go here to enter the competition:

www.btgames.co.za/bt/duk34eva.asp

Grand prize:

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- 1 x Vintage Duke figurine
- 1 x Duke Forever figurine

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Running time:

Expires 31 May 2011



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NAG

**BT
GAMES™**

GIGABYTE GTX 580 Super Overclock

Supplier: Rectron / Website: www.gigabyte.com / RRP: xxxxx



“Unlike a regular GTX 580, this one is made with the intention of offering the best overclocking potential...”

Benchmarks	
Heaven 2 Xtreme preset	/ 1475 /
3DMark 11 Extreme	/ 1476.602 /
3DMark Vantage Performance	/ 2,187 /
Just Cause 2 1,920 x1,080	/ 2,141 /
Crysis: Warhead 1,920 x1,080	/ 26,678 /
	/ 24,908 /
	/ 144.6 /
	/ 75.21 /
	/ 51.21 /
	/ 52.42 /

Baseline: NVIDIA GeForce GTX580

NVIDIA's GTX 580, despite the disappointment that was the 590, remains the best single-GPU graphics card on the market. Not only is it peerless in game performance, but in the competitive overclocking scene it's unmatched by anything out there. This is especially important when it comes to this particular card.

Late to the party, GIGABYTE finally released the Super Overclock variant of the GTX 580 and, as usual, the company re-designed the GPU PCB and fitted it with some impressive parts which we will detail a little later on. Unlike a regular GTX 580, this one is made with the intention of offering the best overclocking potential, much like its direct competitor the ASUS GTX 580 DirectCU II. The only difference is that this card commands a price premium over the competition's card if only because of the factory overclock. However anyone who would buy this card for the factory overclock would be doing themselves a disservice because you can achieve these clocks with the standard GTX 580 from GIGABYTE.

Despite what the company may claim, this product is actually better suited to those who would compete on HWBOT, because the GPUs are pre-binned (sorted) for the highest-clocking cores which are obviously the ones that hold the most promise. As such, the question of pre-overclocked settings doesn't really mean anything because the overclock here, while respectable, makes previously playable games run at even higher frame

rates. Moving from 67fps to 76fps is academic at best, especially with most monitors capped at 60Hz.

That's enough about the philosophy behind the card. When it comes down to it, it's actually a very well made product. As mentioned earlier, GIGABYTE has designed a completely new PCB opting for better and more VRMs. A standout VRC area powered by several (5 to be exact) NEC/TOKIN Proadlizer decoupling film capacitors. These are used in parallel, to further decrease ESL, increase capacitance and obviously aid in noise absorption at high-switching frequencies (10MHz+). This card makes use of an impressive 12-phase power system (10+2) so you'll not lack for power when going for those super-high speeds when using some exotic cooling.

Control of the power is through the ONSEMI ADP4100 multi-phase buck converter that allows controlling of up to 6 phases. It's not clear how this converter is able to control the 12 on this graphics card, but logic dictates that some of the phases are paired which would make it fit nicely into the 6-phase operation limit. Upon close inspection though, we found three Texas Instruments ACT08 Quad 2-input and gate chips, and each would handle 4 phases feeding back to the ADP4100, hence only 3 phase control is needed, well under the maximum 6. Moving on from there, the card uses a MICROCHIP PIC16F1937 EEPROM for the BIOS which features a normal and extreme mode for those using sub-zero cooling who may have problems with

the system refusing to boot because of thermal safety protection.

Memory is oddly enough courtesy of Hynix GDDR5 SDRAM (H5GQ1H24AFR) rated at 1.25GHz [SD/CK Rate]. GIGABYTE has clocked this memory at 1.025 GHz so there should be some room for overclocking there, but out the box you get around 196GB/sec of bandwidth. (We've come a long way from the 64GB/sec of the 8800GTX on the same 384-bit bus). This memory is passively cooled with some thermal pads that make contact with the heat sink plate and hold down for the cooler. Core clocks are set to 855MHz (global) vs the reference 772MHz. We aren't sure why Samsung memory wasn't chosen because it consistently clocks better than the Hynix memory and proof of this is how, on other GTX 580 cards, reaching 1,250MHz is a fairly easy process, while it's not always possible on the 50 cards.

Still, this is a great card with some huge potential, already claiming the 3DMark11 Performance record soon after release. If you're in the market for a high-performance competition class 580, you should consider the GIGABYTE GTX 580 SO if you can find it for a reasonable price. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



[specs]

Core:
855MHz GF110 (40nm)
Processors:
512
Render Outputs:
64
Memory:
1586MB GDDR5 4.1GHz (196.8GB/sec)
API:
DirectX11/OpenGL 4.x /OpenCL 1.X/PhysX/ CUDA

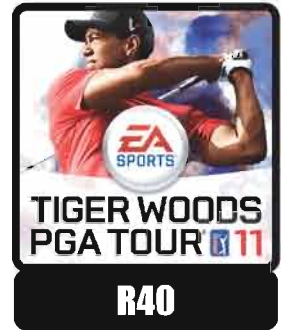
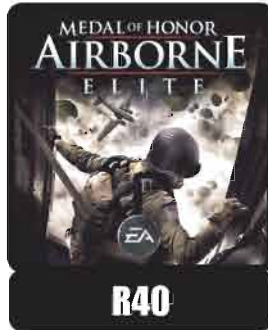
/ PLUS / Fastest GTX 580 on the market / Runs cool
/ MINUS / Priced out of relevance / Hynix GDDR5

THE FASTEST SINGLE GPU GRAPHICS CARD ON THE MARKET
TODAY COURTESY OF THE FACTORY OVERCLOCK.

8
OUT OF 10

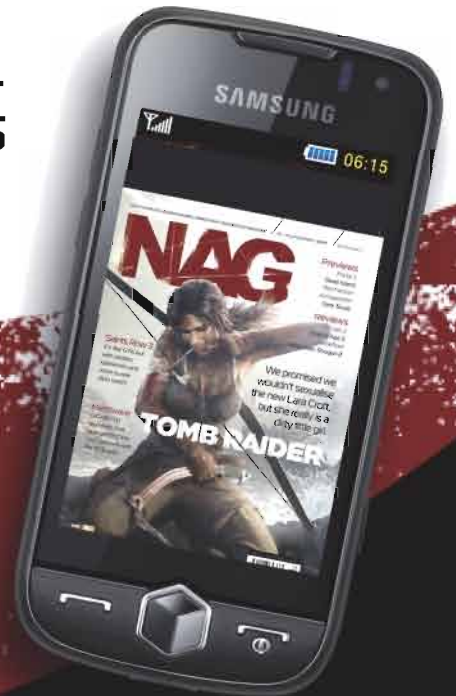
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VGA

Buyers Guide

Often (and we mean every day) we get letters asking which graphics cards one should consider at different price points. While this is a seemingly-straightforward question, systems are rarely ever identical, and the right upgrade for one person may be a waste of money for another. To this end we've re-compiled the results of a number of graphics cards we've reviewed and had generally positive impressions about within the last 8 to 12 months. The price points for each of these graphics cards has been included for your convenience, so it should be easy to pick the right graphics card for your needs and, more importantly, one that fits your pocket. Striking the right balance between the host system and your chosen VGA card is of paramount importance, because

spending too much on a graphics card in the hopes of getting the best performance is not a matter of just buying the best graphics card on the market; you also need to consider the resolutions that you play at and what settings you prefer. The idea that buying a high-end graphics card future-proofs one is a fallacy because, even up until now, we don't have a real idea of how DirectX11 games will perform on the graphics cards we have today. Short of *Metro 2033*, there isn't any real DirectX11-complementing game out there. So buying a graphics card should take into account the games we have right now instead of trying to be future-proof, as there's just no way one can actually do that. So to help you with this often complicated decision, we've compiled four charts and broken them up into two synthetic tests and two game tests. The games were chosen because they

represent fairly heavy loads on modern day graphics cards, and if any adapter is able to play these games at acceptable frame rates (minimum 30fps), then chances are they'll handle any game coming out this year and maybe well into 2012. Some concessions may have to be made with future games that we can't foresee right now, but for the most part these results should represent the upper echelon of game engines and the loads they will place on your graphics cards. All games here are tested at the highest graphics settings possible at full HD resolutions because this is actually how games should be enjoyed on the PC in this day and age. If you use a lower screen resolution you'll obviously get even better performance, but assuming that this is how the vast majority of people play their games, you should be able to make an informed decision on which card is right for you.

AMD Radeon HD6990 4GB

Core:
Processors:
Render Outputs:
Memory:
Api:

830MHz Antilles (40nm)
3072
64
4096MB GDDR5 5GHz (320GB/sec)
DirectX11/OpenGL 4.x /OpenCL 1.x



AMD Radeon HD6970 2GB

Core:
Processors:
Render Outputs:
Memory:
Api:

880MHz Cayman XT (40nm)
1536
32
2048MB GDDR5 5.5GHz (176GB/sec)
DirectX11/OpenGL 4.x /OpenCL 1.x



AMD Radeon HD6950 2GB

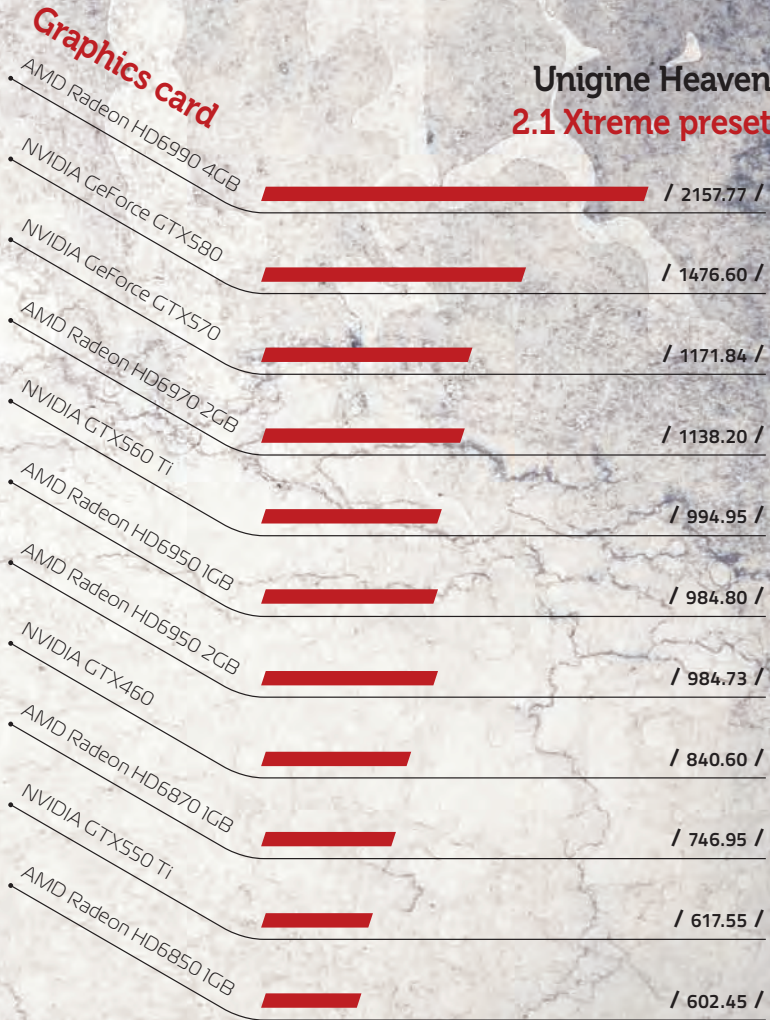
Core:
Processors:
Render Outputs:
Memory:
Api:

800MHz Cayman (40nm)
1408
32
2048MB GDDR5 5GHz (160GB/sec)
DirectX11/OpenGL 4.x /OpenCL 1.x



“A benchmark is the act of running a computer program, a set of programs, or other operations, in order to assess the relative performance of an object, normally by running a number of standard tests and trials against it.”

From Wikipedia.




AMD Radeon HD6950 1GB

800MHz Cayman (40nm)
1408
32
1024MB GDDR5 5GHz (160GB/sec)
DirectX11/OpenGL 4.x /OpenCL 1.x

Core:
Processors:
Render Outputs:
Memory:
Api:



AMD Radeon HD6870 1GB

900MHz Barts XT (40nm)
1120
23
1024MB GDDR5 4.2GHz (134.4GB/sec)
DirectX11/OpenGL 4.x /OpenCL 1.x

Core:
Processors:
Render Outputs:
Memory:
Api:



AMD Radeon HD6850 1GB

775MHz Barts Pro (40nm)
960
32
1024MB GDDR5 4GHz (128GB/sec)
DirectX11/OpenGL 4.x /OpenCL 1.x

Core:
Processors:
Render Outputs:
Memory:
Api:

Benchmarks

Unigine Heaven 2.1 Extreme Preset

This benchmark obviously tests Tessellation Performance more than anything else. As such an excessive number of polygons are generated almost to the point of making this benchmark look particularly unrealistic, but it's a great test because of this and tells us just how efficient the tessellation engines are in each graphics card. Scoring well here is a great way to tell how future games may run on your system.

3DMark11 Extreme Preset

The latest from Futuremark is for the most part a completely GPU orientated test. It mixes in advanced lighting techniques only available in DirectX 11, tessellation and some compute calculations (physics tests which use the Havok Engine) to produce the most stressful synthetic test we have to date. Unlike its predecessor, 3D Mark Vantage, this iteration actually looks good and as such the low numbers are understandable.

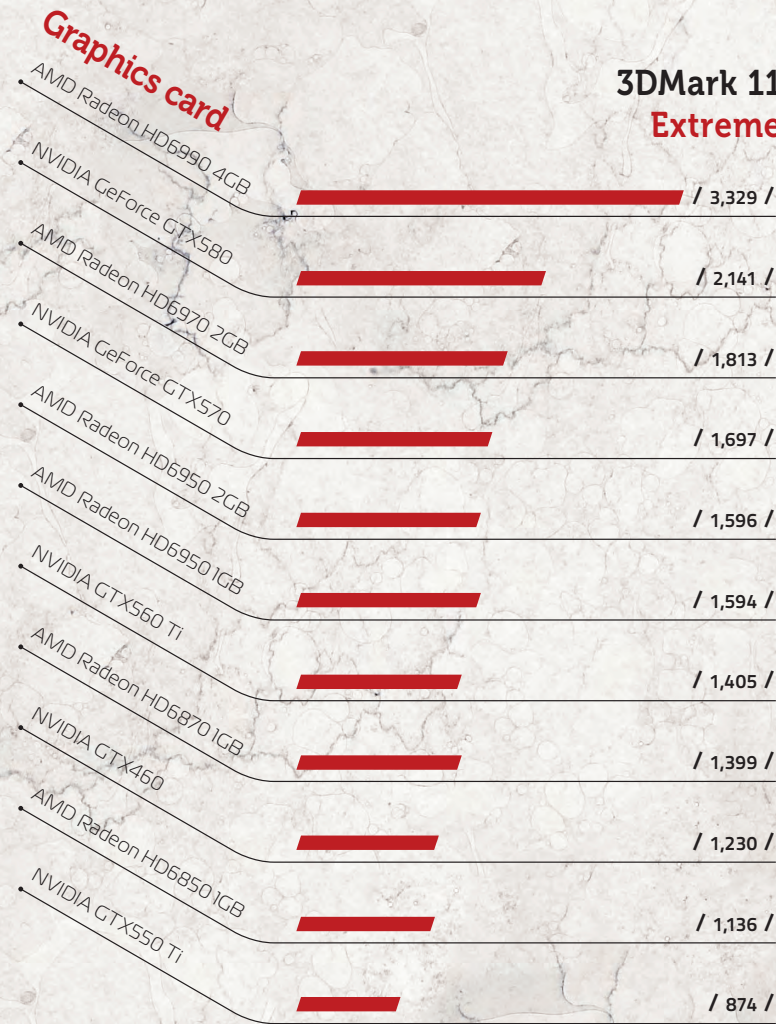
Just Cause 2 (1,920 x 1,080 DX10)

This was one of the best looking games of 2010 and in some parts, still remains unmatched. The massive world and draw distances make this a perfect game for testing the streaming capabilities of graphics cards. There's no tessellation used in this game, but if you have an NVIDIA graphics processor you can use some computing capabilities to render the best looking water in any game currently. These results are without any of those features enabled for compatibility's sake with AMD graphics adapters.

Crysis: WarHead (1,920 x 1,080 64-Bit Enthusiast)

Crysis 2 may be out but *Crysis: Warhead* still represents a greater load on the graphics card than its successor which still lacks DirectX 10 and 11 support (at least this was the case at the time of writing). This game is notoriously hard on systems and is, for all intents and purposes, the worst case scenario in modern games. Any graphics card that can handle this title well is more than equipped to deal with *Crysis 2* and many other games that push the graphics envelope.

3DMark 11 Extreme



NVIDIA GeForce GTX580



Core:
Processors:
Render Outputs:
Memory:
Api:

772MHz GF110 (40nm)
512
64
1586MB GDDR5 4GHz (192.4GB/sec)
DirectX11/OpenGL 4.x /OpenCL 1.X/PhysX/CUDA

NVIDIA GeForce GTX570



Core:
Processors:
Render Outputs:
Memory:
Api:

732MHz GF110 (40nm)
480
60
1586MB GDDR5 3.8GHz (152GB/sec)
DirectX11/OpenGL 4.x /OpenCL 1.X/PhysX/CUDA

NVIDIA GeForce GTX560 Ti



Core:
Processors:
Render Outputs:
Memory:
Api:

822MHz GF114 (40nm)
384
32
1024MB GDDR5 4GHz (128GB/sec)
DirectX11/OpenGL 4.x /OpenCL 1.X/PhysX/CUDA

Graphics Card Entries and Price Points

AMD Radeon HD6990 (4GB)
 AMD Radeon HD6970 2GB
 AMD Radeon HD6950 2GB
 AMD Radeon HD6950 1GB
 AMD Radeon HD6870 1GB
 AMD Radeon HD6850 1GB
 NVIDIA GeForce GTX580 1.5GB
 NVIDIA GeForce GTX570 1.2GB
 NVIDIA GeForce GTX560 Ti 1GB
 NVIDIA GeForce GTX460 1GB
 NVIDIA GeForce GTX550 Ti 1GB

Price points

Market segmentation is done in USD, but obviously we don't have such segmentation locally, and most graphics cards aren't useful in any capacity under a certain price. As such we have broken up the graphics parts into the traditional four segments which are low-end, mid-range, high-end and ultra high-end graphics cards. There are some that fall outside of this description, but that's only the HD6990 which is generally reserved for those who play higher than full-HD resolutions.

HD resolutions

R1,400 – R1,700

- NVIDIA GTX550 Ti

R1,800 – R2,900

- AMD Radeon HD6850/HD6870
- NVIDIA GeForce GTX460 1GB/ GTX560 Ti

R3,000 – R4,000

- AMD Radeon HD6950 1GB
- NVIDIA GTX570

R3,500 – R5,200

- NVIDIA GeForce GTX570/ GTX580
- AMD Radeon HD 6950/6970

As you can see, the market segmentation is corrupted in the last two tiers because of the unusual pricing schemes we have locally. Regardless, these are the prices you're looking at and we would implore anyone looking for an upgrade to save up enough money to make it into any of these pricing brackets. Indeed you can look at the previous generations and even into the 2nd hand market, but that has the potential of further confusing your upgrade choices, and if you're buying in the mid-range and higher bracket, you'll be spending far too much money on old parts. Whatever you decide, make sure you shop around and you just may manage to make a high-end part fit into your budget by avoiding some notoriously expensive brands locally.

Graphics card

Just Cause 2

1,920 x 1,080 Max Detail 4xAA



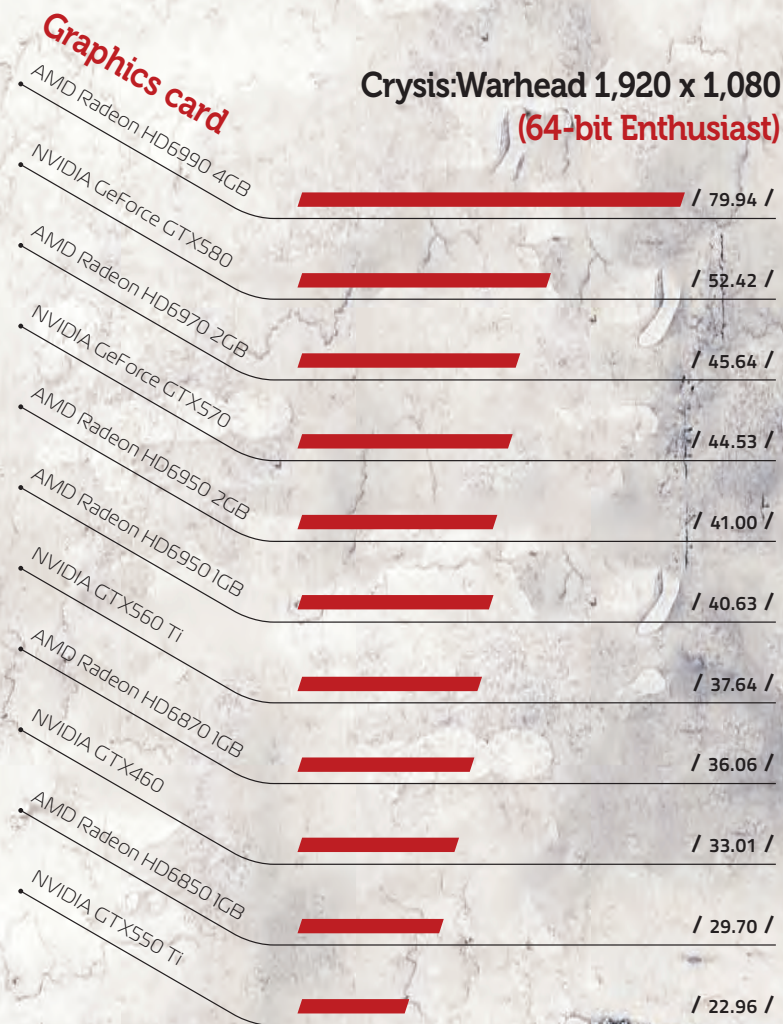
NVIDIA GeForce GTX550 Ti
 900MHz GF116 (40nm)
 192
 24
 1024MB GDDR5 4.1GHz (98.4GB/sec)
 DirectX11/OpenCL 4.x /OpenCL 1.X/PhysX/CUDA



NVIDIA GeForce GTX460
 675MHz GF104 (40nm)
 336
 32
 1024MB GDDR5 3.6GHz (115.2GB/sec)
 DirectX11/OpenCL 4.x /OpenCL 1.X/PhysX/CUDA



“All games here are tested at the highest graphics settings possible at full HD resolutions because this is actually how games should be enjoyed on the PC in this day and age.”



CONCLUSION

The GTX560 Ti is one graphics card we really like; unfortunately it falls outside any of the price points we selected and despite the fantastic performance, it is overshadowed by the HD6950 1GB which represents the best value for money out of all the graphics cards we looked at here. If you're fortunate enough to have bought the 2GB version these easily convert to 6970 graphics cards, however if you're going with the 1GB version, there's still some great performance to be had for a great price. For ultimate performance we have

to give the nod to the GTX580. In this regard, from a budget perspective, buy the cheapest brand as they are all basically the same apart from the ASUS Direct CU II version which is peerless right now. At the low end, it's hard to beat the GeForce GTX460 1GB. It's better than the 6850, but can be had for similar prices and sometimes less. It may not be part of the new 500 series lineup but it still packs a punch and is a faster graphics card than the disappointing GTX550 Ti.

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Modding 101

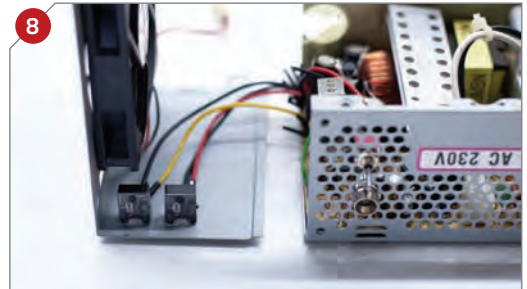
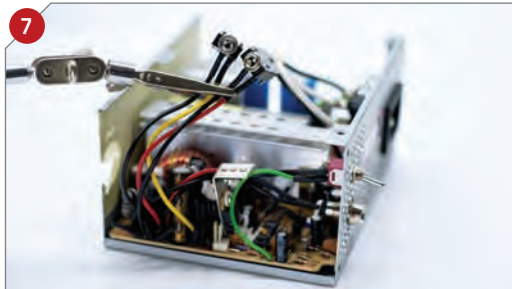
Power supply test box

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- / A spare PSU
- / Soldering iron
- / A couple of 3.5mm female and male jacks
- / Optional: A regular 3.5V LED, 75ohm resistor, and a switch
- / A sandwich (to eat)

TIPS FROM THE DREMEL EXPERT

Blow the dust off your Dremel if you have any need for high-speed tools. The combination of your high-speed Dremel tool and suitable accessories allows you to do any detailed and intricate work without applying much pressure. Pressure can potentially damage your tool, your work piece or your accessory. You can't go full-speed in to all materials and with all accessories though as several variables have to be taken into consideration: density of the work material; the type of accessory you work with; the depth of cut being applied. How do you find out about the ideal speed that you need to apply? At the back of each Dremel accessory packaging you can find the maximum speed in rpm (rounds per minute) which you can apply. In the user manual of your tool or at www.dremel.com you find a detailed table that shows the ideal speed of each accessory that should be used in various materials. With the right speed applied, the lifetime of your accessory increases and you get much better work results.



I can't even begin to tell you how often I need to test a small component that I want to have inside a case. 12V and 5V are the two voltages that are most commonly used inside a computer, and they're really easy to leech if you know where to go looking. But you don't want to have to plug in a dodgy LED array you just made into your own PC, because if you did something wrong, you don't want to damage your rig. Furthermore, you don't want to have to open your case and ruin your wiring job just for 12V, right? So this is a guide on how you can get around that.

/ STEP 1 /

So, first things first: You need an old PSU (image 1). You'll need to open up the PSU and pull out its guts. Be careful, PSUs hold their charge for quite some time after they've been used, so try not to touch the bottom of the board, it'll give you a nasty surprise! Also remember that once you open the PSU, you void its warranty. We don't care much for warranties anyway, so that's fine.

/ STEP 2 /

You basically need to chop off every single wire inside that PSU. There are a couple that you need to hang on to, though, which I'll describe now. There's a thin green wire (image 2). That's the wire that starts the PSU. So keep that one. Furthermore, you need to keep one yellow wire (12V), one red wire (5V), and three black wires (the black wires are all the same, they're ground). If you want an LED inside the PSU,

keep another pair of red and black wires. The rest you can cut right off, down to about 10mm from the board (image 3).

/ STEP 3 /

This step is important. You need to cover all the wires you just cut with heatshink. We do this so that we can insulate the wires and stop them from causing short circuits and frying the PSU (image 4). You'll notice now that I'm using a different PSU, just ignore that change.

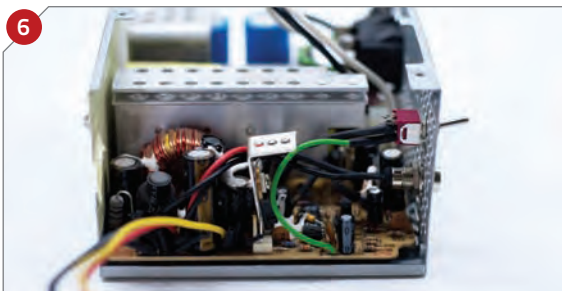
/ STEP 4 /

This step isn't actually entirely necessary, but I did it to add a little bit of a nicer finish to the mod. Here's where all of the jacks and connectors come in (image 5). Usually, in a PC, when you press the power button, the motherboard joins the little green wire and one of the ground wires. This is what turns on the PSU. Now, because we don't have a motherboard, we need to emulate that action. All you need to do here is solder one of the ground wires and the little green wire to a switch. This will allow you to turn the PSU on and off as you wish, without the need to yank out the power cable. If you don't want to do this, you can just solder the green wire to a black wire and leave them permanently joined, but this means that you'll have to yank out the power cable every time you want to turn off the PSU.

Another thing I did in this step was connect an LED to the PSU, so that when the PSU powers up, an LED will glow as

THE SWISS ARMY KNIFE OF POWER TOOLS

*SMS TO
WIN



well, so as to indicate the PSU's power status. In this step, all you need to do is connect the 75ohm resistor to a red wire inside the PSU (5V), and then solder that wire onto the + leg of the LED (the longer leg). Connect a ground wire to the other leg of the LED, and you're done. Once you've done all of this, grab a drill and make some holes in the PSU's housing for the switch and LED. Mine looked like this when I was done. (image 6)

/ STEP 5 /

Now you need to wire some 3.5mm female jacks to the four remaining wires. You don't need to use 3.5mm female jacks, though, you can use whatever suits you better. I used these because I have loads of them lying around. You might even choose to use one connector that has four points (image 7).

What's important here is that you have the ground wires connected to whichever pin on the jack will touch the case of the PSU. If you connect the 5/12V wires to those points, you'll have some trouble. Use a multimeter to find those points.

/ STEP 6 /

All you really need to do now is drill some holes in the PSU enclosure to make space for the new connectors, and fit them (image 8). Once that's done, close it all up and give it a test run (image 9). That's all there is to it! Now you just need to wire some 3.5mm male jacks with molex connectors or anything like that, and you'll be done. Remember to test with a multimeter!

If you struggle or need some help, be sure to drop me an e-mail - ett@nag.co.za. **NAG**

Ettienne Venter



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How I learned to stop worrying and love the console (and why you should too)



I have a secret. It's kind of embarrassing. I... I kinda used to be a member of the PC Master Race. I mean, I didn't go to the rallies or hand out brochures on the street or spend any significant length of time maintaining a discreetly low profile in some flyblown South American dump or anything like that, but this one (and that other, and maybe another) time, I might have made some rather disparaging comments about consoles and the people who owned them. Oh what can I say, I was young and naive, and the party propaganda – CONSOLES ARE TOTALLY LAME AND CONSOLE GAMERS ARE TOTALLY LAME BECAUSE LOL – was compelling. It all seemed so obvious back then, really. Mommy and Daddy wouldn't buy me a console, so of course I thoroughly despised them on principle, and a lot of similarly deprived well-protected children agreed with me, so that was nice.

Besides, PC gaming is obviously the most important sort of gaming, because gaming wouldn't even exist ever if it weren't for PC gaming, which means PC gaming is the most important*. But is it? Apart from one or two academic enquiries into human and computer interaction and a bunch of nerd-developed, machine-coded *Dungeons & Dragons* clones back in the 70s, actual demonstrable reality shows that gaming moved out of the otherwise terminal obscurity** of university mainframe laboratories and into the home *on console*. Or haven't you heard of the Magnavox Odyssey (launched in 1972)? Or the Fairchild Channel F (1976)? I could go on, so I guess I should – the Atari 2600 (1977), the Bally Astrocade (1977), and the Intellivision (1979)***.

* Obviously. / ** It's a pun too! / *** Okay, I haven't heard of some of those either.

Oh what can I say, I was young and naive, and the party propaganda – CONSOLES ARE TOTALLY LAME AND CONSOLE GAMERS ARE TOTALLY LAME BECAUSE LOL – was compelling.

In fact, before anything like real home computing was even a real thing (basically, the Commodore 64, in 1982; and that's pushing it), people all over the planet were already playing games on console.

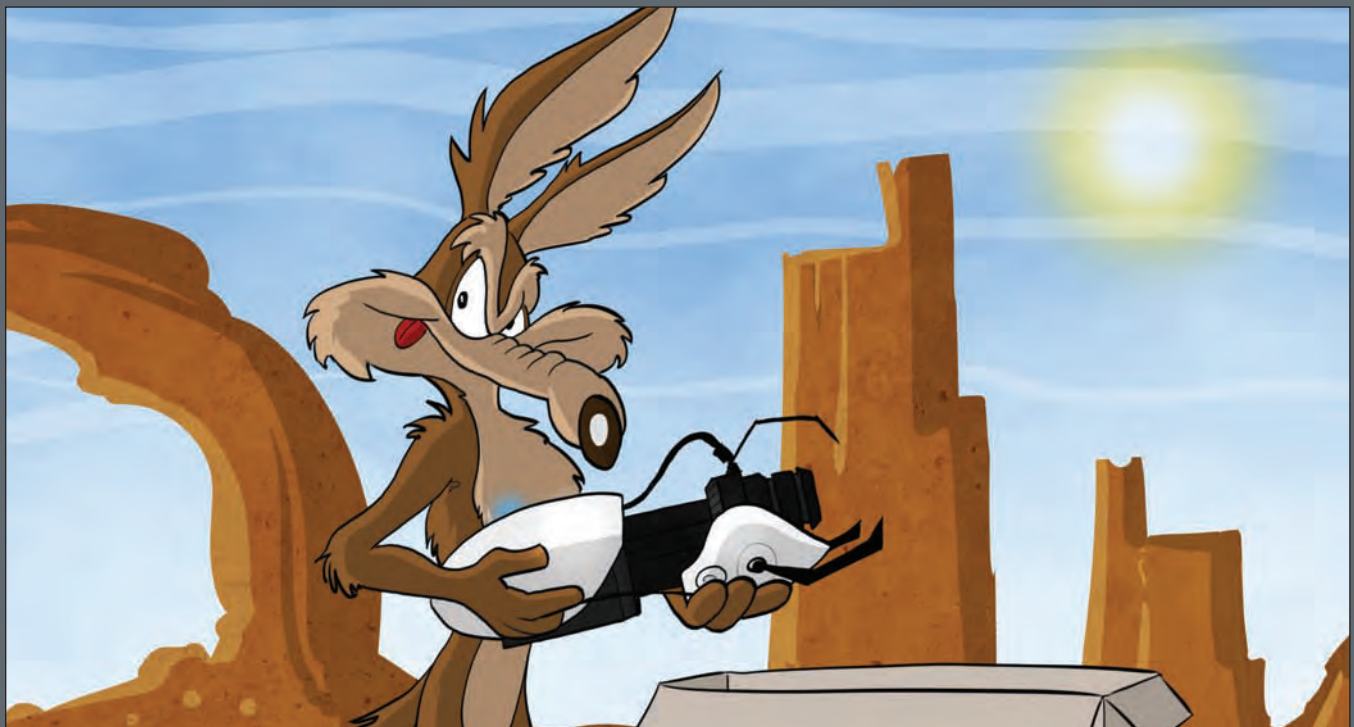
That's not to say that PC gaming *isn't* important, mind you, but rather that it's not the be-all, end-all, and everything else in between either – and the sooner those people who do think so realise it, the better for everybody. You're missing out on some of the best games this (and previous) generations have to offer, and why? BECAUSE LOL, etc. Also, split-screen gaming is awesome.

Gaming platforms are like snowflakes – they're all pretty, and they're all unique, and they're all just f***ing snowflakes, making a big, slippery mess on the pavement and waiting to kill some careless passer-by. Okay, so maybe they're not exactly like snowflakes, but you know what I mean. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

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