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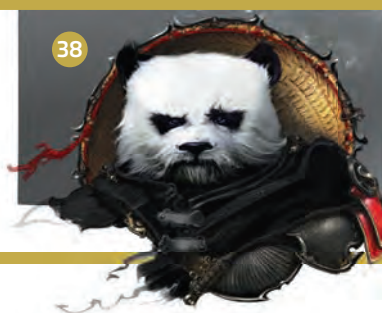
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The game was only five hours...

Dane and I (Dane more really) are massive fans of id Software. This love affair began a long time ago (*DOOM*) and over the years flourished and grew stronger into what it is now – a weird kind of no pants worship ritual (again, definitely more Dane). It should come as no surprise then that we paid extra special attention to their latest game *Rage*.

Some of this attention resulted in us checking those paid-for early reviews. "The campaign is only five hours long" was one of the comments that had alarm bells ringing and guys in white lab coats running. We've been waiting years for the new id Software IP (intellectual property) and all we get is five hours and no DM. Boo and hiss. All of this before we played the game a few days later. Long story short here... Lauren logged over 14 hours (34% of the achievements) in *Rage*, me around 13 (I'm not done yet) and Dane over 20 hours.

So where exactly did this clown get five hours from. After some discussion it was assumed/guessed/suggested that in order for someone to finish the game in five hours they must have rushed through it at breakneck speed, you know, like those *Quake* speed runs. This means no side quests, no racing bits, no exploration or looking for hidden stuff, nothing – just click, click, bang, bang and thank you very much for installing me. I'll bet he didn't even read the mission logs but rather raced from dotted line to dotted line to get it done. How soulless. If you actually play the experience that the game presents it's at least 10-15 hours' worth of good solid fun and entertainment. So where does this 'game journalist' come from exactly is the thing I was wondering about and this, is what I think. A long time ago (not really) Sony invented the PlayStation. It made gaming popular. The medium grew and grew and now almost everyone plays games – yes, even your mom. Many modern gamers have only been playing games since the middle to late nineties. Gamers that go further back are people like me and most of the guys that write for *NAG*. Guys like us take our time with games because we love them and appreciate what they've become over the last 30 years odd. This new crowd (the five hour crowd that have probably only been gaming since the original Xbox) don't understand the significance of the experience of games, the history and even the 'folklore', and it seems they don't really know how to play games either. If you're going to see how fast you can get through a game then rather don't play games. Get another hobby like racing go-karts or bikes. Speed is important there not here. End of the day you get out what you put in, so if you put in five hours, you're only going to get out five hours.

Merry festive season holiday wishes best happy regards to you

At the back of the magazine this month we wish our readers a merry one... But it doesn't feel right. We're not wishing our entire demographic. Over the last few years I've noticed more and more girls reading *NAG* and writing in to *NAG*. It's easy to pick these letters out from the crowd because they usually make sense, are written in decent English and end with smiley faces, kind words and sometimes hugs and kisses. In light of this and so that we don't appear too one-sided; the picture of the guy on this page is for you lady gamers. Enjoy him and remember that we're an equal opportunity publication. Also, we couldn't find a good zombie Santa.

Drive safe, be sensible and watch out for fins in Durban.

OxoXx

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[Editor]





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Letter of the Month December 2011

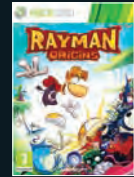
From: Altay
Subject: Books, gaming and details

Recently a great realisation hit me about gaming. I read lots of books. Sci-Fi, fantasy, thriller, I read pretty much every genre. My friends have sometimes looked at the sheer size of some of the books I read (the series I am currently on consists of over ten books, each at least 900 pages) and exclaim "HOW CAN YOU READ THAT MONSTER?" I would simply laugh and say the story's good. The thing that makes a good writer is the creative streak. Think of Lord of the Rings. Tolkien has got to think of rings, bearded midgets, pointy eared people, wraiths with black cloaks, legendary swords and a massive other number of things. Someone who can do this and show his imagination in a way that the reader can feel it and seem as if they were in the action, right there as if it was though their own eyes is an extremely talented person. So I also am what most would call a gamer and you could probably guess that most of my favourite games would be RPG's, ones with a massive free roam environment or a game with an extremely immersive combat system. And so I was playing Red Dead

Redemption on my PS3 one day and as my pitch black stallion galloped across a snowy forest, a large brown grizzly bear jumps and kills my horse. Marston falls off but quickly gets up as I rapidly try to escape a death. The bear starts to charge towards me and I select the shotgun out of my inventory and activate Dead Eye. The world is brightened in a glorious yellow haze and the bear almost freezes in mid charge. I mark the bears head and press R2 and then suddenly the bear goes straight back into full charge but it lurches forward as a shotgun shell pierces through its fur then it was peaceful in the game world for then. I had a similar experience in Dragon Age where my whole party died and Varric was left with a golem to kill on nightmare difficulty. And later one in Wolfenstein and then Red Faction: Guerrilla, the list goes on and on. With these experiences I realised that games were like books in a way. Every feature on a characters face, every grain of sand on a hard sun baked red earth, every blade of grass, is all someone's imagination. Someone's creativity comes to life. Every small detail in the virtual

world is a product of someone's mind, like a book's story. With this I started to really appreciate how brilliantly rendered everything is in a game. I also realised how few people saw this but all in all I can say that this realisation made my gaming experience in any game ten times more enjoyable. Thank you for reading this letter and please keep up the brilliant magazine.

Correct. Even the most rubbish game, the original Transformers: The Game movie game for example, still took a heap of artists and illustrators and writers and directors to put together. A great number of people all working on different things with nothing to go on except their imagination (and some help from the Transformers universe of course). Gamers are wired into this type of 'ether'; we all love science fiction, fantasy and the unreal and surreal and are therefore naturally attracted to the gaming industry. Essentially we're all the same. So next time you play a rubbish game try and look past all the bad stuff and remember how much work went into it, all done by people like you and me. Ed.



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.

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From: Morne
Subject: Skyrim obsession

The highly anticipated release of Skyrim has been hell on my life, I have been counting down every second of it and reading every snippet of information about it online, I cannot remember when last a game has had me so excited for its launch, as I am writing this, Skyrim is 8 days from release, I feel the days slowing down. As gamers have a unique culture I'm sure many of you reading this watch more or less some of the same stuff on TV or where ever, I have gathered (from my friends and other acquaintances) that most gamers are fans of South Park and Family Guy. There is an episode in South Park where Cartman is almost in the same boat as me and I'm sure a whole bunch of other frothing at the mouth Skyrim groupies. To set the scene, a pudgy Eric has got his faced glued to a store window staring at coming soon posters of the new Wii gaming console which is set to release in 3 weeks. He is losing sleep, not concentrating at school and literally lying awake in the middle of the night staring at the bed side clock. He eventually can't take it anymore and decides that he has to take drastic measures to solve his problem before he goes insane. He then attempts to cryogenically freeze himself so that he can be defrosted on the day of the Wii release. So in theory he will fall asleep and 3 weeks would slip by in an instant. Obviously his little plan doesn't work out and he wakes up hundreds of years later. Anyway I'm at the verge of writing a note saying "Baby I will be locking myself in the freezer for 8 days, I left R600 in our recreational narcotics fund for you to go and purchase a copy of Skyrim on the morning of 11.11.11, when the time comes simply unlock the freezer and leave me in the sun a bit. While I'm defrosting insert the game into my PS3 and let the install run, thanx babe love

you." Hopefully all this hype is not a prelude to a big disappointment, which I'm certain it will not, I think the boys at Bethesda have done their homework and spent enough time to truly deliver an amazing ground breaking polished game. So book some sick leave next week or try and fake(or not) an injury for some time off of school and be prepared for months of alienated friends unloved girlfriends/boyfriends/pets/parents and start warming up your sword arm.

I feel you brother. This game is looking epic; we're 2 days away as I type this. I saw it at E3 and I'm still trying to get my jaw closed. Perhaps a word of caution for you is best at this point. Seeing that you're, how shall we word this... more than a little obsessed with this game, perhaps your girlfriend won't take you out the freezer after all. Just think about it, if you're frozen or thawed she's not getting much out of you either way once that game is installed. If I were her I'd leave you in there until the next chapter in the Elder Scrolls franchise comes along. Then you can play it on your PS4 and she'll be too old to care anymore. View the South Park episode as a warning more than anything else. ;) Ed.

From: Craig
Subject: Halo Cake Topper

Please find attached a picture of my wedding cake with me (Craig) and my wife (Cindi) with Halo Figurines (Master Chief & Cortana) as cake toppers. We got married on the 3rd September 2011. I thought you could maybe print a small picture in the next NAG to show how lucky I was in have Halo Cake Toppers for the wedding cake. These figurines were specially imported from the USA. I got it through a shop in Cape Town called Figure Finatix [www.figurefanatix.com]. He said he found someone who had these 2 figurines but didn't want to let them go, and when he

Shorts [extracts of LOL n00b from NAG reader letters]

"At first I didn't like the uncalled for language and extreme violence, but then I started to get used to it."
– Arno

"Just tell Pippa not to pull her face like that in her picture, she looks like a Troll."
– Unknown

"Secondly, I was really hard at thought on how developers use trailers to really 'beautify' their game - even if the game isn't great at all."
– Ismail

told them he wanted them for us to use as a cake topper, the guy in the states then sent it to him to give to us. How many wives would let a gamer put Halo Figurines or any other Figurines on a wedding cake...



Nice one. First up congratulations on your union, I hope you two live happily ever after (or at least until the next Halo comes out at least). ;) I'm sure somewhere deep inside Tarryn is wondering how she missed you

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.



Vedianna, "This is an original 3D design made with Carrara 6 Pro and an old Vista computer (it nearly burnt out from the rendering)! I hope you think this is worthy of being in NAG magazine."

while hunting for another suitable victim mate. Make sure you always treat your lovely wife well; any girl that let you get away with that stunt is a definite keeper. Ed.

From: Kent

Subject: Reply to Andreas' "Right on the money"

I think that Andreas' idea has a lot of potential as a gaming franchise (because of the length of the Bible, as well as the many books, the game would have to be published in parts, as the Harry Potter series was). However, I do not believe it would be a success. For hundreds of years religion has been a very fragile subject, with wars and arguments ensuing as a result of disagreements and opinions. While I am not religious myself, I estimate that if developers were to accept the challenge of creating a Bible-themed videogame, many people would be offended either by a depiction of some characters, a developer's opinion of an event or the possibility of controlling an evil character. Thus, I consider the idea, while innovative and different, as impractical - gaming would probably be criticised as a whole, both by the media and people with strong religious beliefs.

Good heavens, can you imagine the endless debates, finger pointing, research groups, concerned citizens, offended school principals, mobs, armies, liberal movements, roaming choir groups, fake priests and converted nuns such a game would create, destroy and haul out of the woodwork. I shudder to think. Actually, if this game was ever made we'd dedicate a permanent spot in the news section each month in NAG to cover all the backwards and forwards shenanigans. Just imagine what Fox News would do with this. It would actually be fun and sad all at the same time. Ed.

From: Carl

Subject: The conspiracy

The other day I Goggled for NAG. I was surprised at what I found. I came across the Numerical Algorithms Group (aka NAG). I went in and discovered a range of odd and bizarre stuff like NAG for financial modelling, from multicore to super computers and flexible environments, speed development. As I saw this I began to think about NAG.

Are they part of something the world never expected? Is there more to just a gaming magazine and super computers? Were there really people on moon or was it shot in an underground facility?

Are all the magazines for entertainment purpose or do they secretly brainwash our brains with propaganda. Does NAG keep us to date with the latest technology and gaming? Could NAG be a total lie and be part of the biggest conspiracy known to mankind? The media, music, Internet even our parents are a part of THE CONSPIRACY! The U.N. is a cover up for the real people controlling our lives and security. The highest bidder decides when the next recession strikes and when the next Call of Duty is released. While this all could be true I'll just be reading my monthly NAG and wait for The Dark Knight to save the day.

I can tell you that there is no 'outer space'. It's just some black cloth with holes poked in it and a few bright lights behind that. There was no moon landing because the moon is painted onto that cloth. All true. Notice how I'm starting to sound a little like you now. The bottom line, no matter what you think you've discovered it never matters because when they take you away nobody will believe you anyway. That's the beauty of any elaborate corporate cover up. Of course we are part of something bigger. How the hell do you think I get away with half the stuff I do... play games all day and do hardly any work at all? Ed.

From: Marius

Subject: Santa's little helpers

It's that time of the year again. The time where tinsel litters the world. Where soap on a rope outsells everything else as people need their R20 filler gift. This is the time of year where most large developers wait for to release their highly anticipated titles. The hype usually starts prior to E3. Promises are made and ideas are launched. And then the times come for hearts to be broken. What I do not understand is why wait for this time to release. Sure most lucky people get a Xmas bonus. Sure most lucky people do receive some of the premier titles in their Xmas stockings. However at pricing of R500+ per game few people can afford more than 1 of these games at a time. Now you have the battles between Skyrim and Dark souls, Battlefield and Modern Warfare. Not to mention the other triple-A titles out there this December. Do developers actually pocket more cash by entering their titles into the market at this specific time? [Nope, Ed]. Early in the year as well as between July and October gamers suffer a drought of major titles. I believe the gaming industry should look a little closer at supply and demand. When there is so many choices few will be bought, however when you are starved for a new title, even a lacklustre game will suffice (thank you Duke). This is simple marketing strategy: Supply and demand.

What you're hoping for is already in effect. If you look ahead a little, the beginning of 2012 (March onwards) is looking rather crispy for new releases (XCOM, BioShock Infinite, StarCraft II: Heart of the Swarm and so on). Of course these will probably all get bumped but the intentions were good. The clustering of titles around the holiday season ended up hurting many developers in the past because people only really have money for 1-3 games and (this year) they're going to be Skyrim, MW3 and

On the Forums

The sweat of distant brows is over, come hither to yonder. Almost everyone is welcome: <http://www.nag.co.za/forums/>

Question: What is the proverbial "pot of gold" in the gaming industry and who is the leprechaun?

Nferno: Half-Life 2: Episode 3. Gabe is the Leprechaun, or should I rather say, Troll under the bridge.

-Bouncer-: Diablo 3, Blizzard...that is all.

Cranky: CS: GO would be a pot of gold for the Valve expects and the leprechauns drawn to it will be gamers who played CS in the last 20 years... So expect Millions.

Toxyc: The next COD and the leprechaun is whoever is publishing it this time.

Gamaray: The pot of gold is what we imagined DNF would be like and the dead leprechaun is 3D Realms.

Changsta 187: The Assassin's Creed series, Ubisoft Montreal – that or another Splinter Cell title.

Cyberinja: Angry Birds, Rovio. They've got the Midas touch.

Slither: I would say BioWare is the current leprechaun, anything they produce instantly turns into a pot of gold, but if you look closely... you'll see Ubisoft Montreal peeking over the rainbow...

Jodez: Square Enix, Final Fantasy 7 remake... Reeks of leprechaunism.

absolado: Batman Arkham City, Rocksteady is the Leprechaun.

echo: A subscription based MMO on the consoles and PC. That is between Blizzard and BioWare.

drunken_boy: No hardcore gamer will want to admit it – but The Sims would definitely be the "Pot of Gold", with Will Wright being the "Leprechaun" rolling in his pile of money.

CaViE: I want to say Warcraft, specifically the next proper sequel to Warcraft III, with Blizzard the obvious Leprechaun.

The_Furry_Cat: Batman: Arkham City (drools). Rocksteady is the most awesome leprechaun.

Shaderow: Sony and Microsoft abolishing exclusives (E.g. God of war 360), the first person with common sense.

spjt07: To me, the proverbial pot of gold is games that appeal to the masses, games such as Call of Duty, Sims, WOW etc. and its leprechauns are the ones who keep buying these games without giving them any second thought because, "Oh it must be good because millions of others really like it."

ShawniF: Call of Duty. Bobby Ko(tick) is the evil leprechaun.

Demikid: Awesome credit songs and the leprechaun is Jonathon Coulton.

hideinlight: This year it was sequels with the number 3 in them. Next year it's going to be sequels with the number 4 in them.

Battlefield 3. So these developers end up moving their games to the quieter times you speak of. It's a very slow boat to turn and the big sales around this time of year make it hard to look the other way. The same thing happens with movie releases. If you keep an eye on releases you'll see that no other big movie will be released during the same weekend as Mission Impossible 4: Ghost Protocol or The Hobbit: Part 1 or Avatar 2. Some goliaths just need to be stepped around. Ed.

Why we can't have nice things



I really hoped to write a more light-hearted column, especially because this is the Christmas edition and I should be spreading cheer and goodwill like Banelings spread acidic pus. Irritatingly, in the last week I've seen two different examples of gamers behaving badly and for the first time I've felt somewhat embarrassed to be associated with the gamer collective.

I completely get that gaming goes hand-in-hand with a sizable amount of passion; it's one of the things that I love most about the people who play games. I love the fact that local retailers host midnight launches for fans of popular franchises; and I love the fact that a diverse collection of people (young and old, male and female, black, white, pink, sunburnt, you name it) can point towards games as a commonality. So kumbayah, let's all hold hands and look smug. Now excuse me from the high-five circle for just a moment.

It all started when a local gaming show ran a

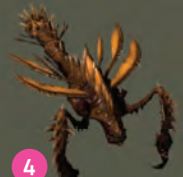
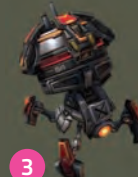
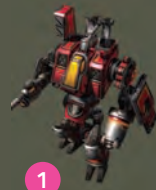
"I completely get that gaming goes hand-in-hand with a sizable amount of passion; it's one of the things that I love most about the people who play games"

somewhat unflattering four minute segment on the rAge LAN. This egregious error on behalf of the show's producers made local gamers out to be, well, basement dwelling dorks that needed to get a social life. I know that's not the case; you know that's not the case, and the show knows that's not the case. So why the massive outcry from our local gaming community? Well, probably because that stereotypical image of a gamer was, locally, beginning to fade into the woodworks. I'd argue that this setback to our perceived public image was only imagined, because the only audience likely to watch the show is the very audience that it ridiculed in the first place. Irony! Regardless, this didn't stop a group of gamers from spewing forth torrents of venomous verbal abuse aimed at the segment's female presenter. That hate-speech rapidly devolved into destructive criticism lined with sexism and misogyny. It all culminated in the creation of a Facebook group that proceeded to escalate the disdain by posting libellous verbal attacks and threats against the presenter. It was pathetic; it was an embarrassment. It was a vocal minority with enough stupidity to make me cringe and regret being lumped in the same "gamer" category as them.

A few days later, *Batman: Arkham City* had its somewhat tumultuous launch in South Africa. Collector's Editions missed flights and some people were left to wait a whole weekend before getting their game. Again, I get it: fans of a game that have been waiting two years for a sequel are allowed to be disappointed about having to wait a few more days. However, it wasn't long until forums and Twitter feeds began filling with gamer entitlement outbursts peppered with liberal doses of four-letter expletives and threats of arson. Sure you might be able to chalk it up to disappointed gamers venting online, but for me it just highlighted something that has been growing in the back of my mind: this vocal minority is creating a different perception of gamers. It won't be long until we're all wishing to be referred to as basement dwelling dorks that need to get a social life. It won't be long until there's another embarrassing segment on local TV that paints all of us as sexist, childish morons with severe entitlement issues. So if you know a friend who falls into this new definition of a gamer, tell him or her to find another hobby.

Miklós Szecsei

Big list o' changes for



We're moderately nuts about *StarCraft II* here at Castle NAG, so when Blizzard confirmed all of the new multiplayer units and major changes for inclusion with *Heart of the Swarm*, we decided that their details would need to take priority in this news section. Do keep in mind that these units are confirmed but their powers, resource cost, abilities and just about everything is subject to change based on beta feedback and how Steve Blizzard feels when he wakes up in the morning of the game's release.

TERRAN

/1/ Warhound: This replaces the Thor but is smaller, armed with an anti-air attack with splash damage as well as an anti-mechanical ground attack with a range of 7.

/2/ Battle Mode Hellion: Change from squidgy and fast to hardy and slow once this research is complete. The Battle Mode Hellion's flame attack will also change to have a shorter range with a cone of damage, similar to the Firebat's.

/3/ Shredder: No, not that evil kitchen utensil from the *Ninja Turtles*, this mechanical unit deploys a radiation

field around it that does 20 damage per second to ground or air units in its vicinity. To stop this from making the Terran bio ball even more deadly, the radiation field shuts down when friendly non-Shredder units are nearby.

Other changes: Thors can no longer be built *en masse* and will become a ground-based capital unit similar to the former Protoss Mothership. It'll be more powerful and larger, but you'll be limited to one at a time. Battlecruisers will have access to a cooldown-based speed boost upgrade. Ghost Personal Cloaking has been changed to an activated ability instead of a channelled one, meaning it requires less micro-management for quick cloaked attacks but more for prolonged outings.

ZERG

/4/ Viper: New flying spell-caster and detector. The Viper can detach their detector "eye stalk" and plant it on any friendly unit, permanently transferring their detection ability. They also have the ability to pull any mobile unit, friendly or enemy, towards it quickly, as well as an ability called Blinding Cloud that reduces a target unit's vision to melee range and prevents them from

A mixed bag of news from Sony

Hey, PlayStation fans! Here's some ammunition for you to use in the incessant fanboy war between you and your Xbox counterparts: the PS3 is catching up to the Xbox 360's lifetime sales figures. The second quarter of Sony's 2011 fiscal year saw 3.7 million worldwide PS3 sales (up 200,000 units from the same period last year), bringing its life-to-date total to 55.5 million units. Last month, Microsoft reported that the 360 has shipped 57.6 million units worldwide to date. Bear in mind that they're only competing for second place – Nintendo reports that, as of October, the Wii has moved 89.36 million units. Also, remember that all these big, scary numbers don't necessarily point to units actually sold to consumers. They just refer to retail shipments.

Now for the news that might put a damper on your fanboy dreams – although it relates to Sony as a whole, not just its PlayStation division. Despite growing game sales, Sony is



predicting another year of losses in revenue. The company's television and cellphone divisions have been stagnating relative to the competition, while earthquakes, hackers, riots and flooding have made it tough for Sony to actually get their products in the hands of consumers. If Sony's projection is to be believed, this will be their fourth unprofitable year in a row.

Thankfully, things are still looking up on the gaming front, with interest in PlayStation Vita gradually gaining momentum and those PS3 sales figures you see above hopefully bringing some smiles to Sony's face.

Heart of the Swarm



using energy-based abilities.

/5/ Swarm Host: Zerg's long-awaited ground-based siege unit. The Swarm Host can only attack indirectly; by burrowing itself in the ground, limited-lifespan "Locusts" will spawn frequently that can be used to break an entrenched enemy position without the need to sacrifice units.

Other changes: Overseers have been removed entirely, which could be disastrous for a Zerg player caught off-guard by cloaked attackers. Banelings can gain the ability to move while burrowed. Ultralisks gain a burrowed charge attack which is similar to the Zealot's ability but unhindered by units blocking their path. Hydralisks can gain an off-Creep movement speed upgrade.

PROTOSS

/6/ Replicant: This unit will be expensive – an estimated 200 minerals, 200 gas – but can permanently transform into any visible non-massive unit. When it does so, it gains all potential tech upgrades for that unit (excluding weapons/armour/shields, from what we can tell), such as Personal Cloaking, Siege Tech or Blink.

/7/ Tempest: The new air-superiority unit for Protoss, the Tempest fires an AOE anti-air attack that will chew through Mutalisks, but also has a ground attack so it's not left defenceless on its own.

/8/ Oracle: Spell-casting harassment unit. Perfect for players with the APM to spare (that's "Actions Per Minute" for the noobs out there), the Oracle's abilities let it temporarily shut down a Mineral Field so that workers can't mine from it; phase out a building from existence (and the tech tree, which is important for Zerg players); and Preordained, which gives the controlling Protoss player line-of-sight from a target building as well as the ability to see what research/production is underway in the targeted building.

Other changes: The Mothership and Carrier have been removed entirely. The Nexus gains two abilities: Arc Shield allows it to temporarily provide any friendly building with boosted armour, shields and a Photon Cannon attack that damages light units only; and Mass Recall, which behaves in the same way as the Mothership ability but temporarily stuns teleported units.

Gearbox tugs at our heartstrings



You may want to grab some tissues for this one, because it's simultaneously sad and inspiring. *Destructoid* shares news that one of their readers, a chap who goes by the name Carlo, popped them a message regarding a touching tale granted life by the fine folks over at *Borderlands* developer Gearbox Software. A short while ago, Carlo's friend Michael John Mamaril passed away due to cancer. He was 22 years old.

Both Carlo and Michael were huge fans of *Borderlands*, leading Carlo to honour his late friend's memory by sending Gearbox an email detailing

the situation and making a simple request: that Gearbox come up with a short eulogy for his friend, to be given by the game's adorable robotic mascot, Claptrap. Not only did Gearbox deliver on Carlo's request, but they went above and beyond by revealing that they intend to put Michael in *Borderlands 2* as an NPC.

It's a touching, heartfelt story, one that shows just how dedicated the fine folks at Gearbox are to the people who play their games. We salute you Gearbox, and we offer our sincere condolences to Michael's friends and family.



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Multiplayer phobia



I don't do multiplayer. Really. It's not to say that I never play online, I'm just not really a sociable gamer, y'know? I prefer a LAN with people I know, or playing single-player campaigns where nobody gives two hoots about the leaderboard or how many kills they got, blah, blah, blah...

So imagine my joy when I discovered John Walker's article over at *Rock Paper Shotgun* entitled "Look, Singleplayer People Are Just Better".

Satirical the article may be, but is that really an accurate statement? Well, I'm sure many would say no. And so I got to wondering... did other people feel like this? Was it just me?

So I ran it through Google, because you know, that's what I do. And joy of all joys – I am not alone!

In fact, some of the top reasons many listed for disliking online multiplayer included being verbally abused and cheaters, although personally it's the former that gets to me the most.

"I play games for the appeal of the story, the experience and to get lost in the world."

The trolls who usually comment on these kinds of things and who missed the point argue that Walker should "stay in [his] cave" and that he has "crappy friends. Or no friends". Maybe he should and maybe he does, but that doesn't change the fact that for many people playing online is a stressful and unappealing experience.

That's not to say that I dislike playing co-op, but co-op is not the same as online multiplayer. I also don't have any problem playing against people that I *actually* know, but perhaps that's my real issue.

Along with my lack of overtly competitive nature I also have a certain phobia associated with online multiplayer – I have a problem with huge crowds, and this for me is the gaming equivalent. Just with more expletives.

Like many other Singleplayers (yes, capitalised), I play games for the appeal of the story, the experience and to get lost in the world. I DON'T play to be shouted at by some teenager who thinks he (or she for that matter) is better than me because he camps in a corner and keeps killing me over and over and over... you get the idea.

And for those people who are about to argue that online multiplayer is a social experience – hear me out. Perhaps for some, but too many people play online in order to exercise their competitive urges and boast that their gamer score is X.

I'm happy for you, I really am! I'm glad that you have a GS of 500,000. I'm glad you have a record of 1,000 headshots in a row as well. Wonderful. I still don't feel the need to compete against you to get the same score.

We all hear stories of people who meet in *WoW* and then end up getting married and having lots of little warrior gnomes (can you tell I don't play this game?) Good for them, really, and I'm completely sincere when I say there's no sarcasm there at all – strangely I even know a couple of those people – but that doesn't change the fact that I still don't want to join your guild and go adventuring.

"No!" U showt. "Gamez r nuthin wthowt onlyn mltiplayr! U dnt no wat ur talkin bout!" Nd u tel ur freinz, "Itz becuz shez a gal..."

To which my response is, "Laugh out loud at the person who thinks that online multiplayer is the only way to play a game."

Oh sorry, wait, lingo... "Lolz at teh n00b!"

Pippa Tshabalala

Modern Warfare 3 leaked, hijacked, you name it



So how's everyone enjoying the third instalment in the *Modern Warfare* franchise? It's been out for a couple of weeks already and by now we're sure the body count must be way over a billion online players. That's sick, but also totally awesome.

It may interest you to know that prior to the release of Activision's money printing title a truck, reportedly carrying about 6,000 copies of the game, was hijacked in France. According to French papers, a vehicle rammed the cargo truck and then subdued the driver and passenger using tear gas. They then robbed the truck of its *Modern Warfare 3* cargo. The estimated value of the stolen goods is over R4 million.

Across the pond in the USA, retailer K-Mart accidentally broke street date

and allowed copies of *Modern Warfare 3* to be sold to the public nearly a full week before the actual day of release. This, coupled with the hijacking in France, resulted in uncertainty amongst gamers about whether their accounts would be banned for playing the game online before its release date. Activision was forced to issue a statement saying that players' accounts would not face sanctions, but that it would be totally awesome if everyone waited until the actual release date so that gamers could all play together. Yeah, that probably didn't happen.

In related news, one of the copies from K-Mart wound up on eBay and sold for a whopping \$1,725 or just less than R14,000! Let's hope Bobby Kotick doesn't realise that there are people willing to pay this much for *Call of Duty* games.

LEGO Universe MMO about to go belly-up



And with it, the nostalgic dreams of gamers in their late twenties and thirties. Developed by NetDevil and later purchased in its entirety by the LEGO Company, the *LEGO Universe* MMO launched in 2010 after a fairly tumultuous development process. The LEGO Company has announced that they will be hitting the power switch to the MMO and shutting shop at the end of January 2012.

With the closure of the MMO comes the loss of 115 jobs as LEGO shuts their Play Well Studios and marketing team. According to the game's VP Jesper Vilstrup, "Unfortunately, we have not been able to build a satisfactory revenue model in our target group, and therefore, have decided to close the game."

Executive VP of the LEGO Company Mads Nipper (who happens to have the most badass name we've heard in a while) said that the closure of *LEGO Universe* will in no way affect LEGO's development of other games such as *LEGO Indiana Jones* and the more recent *LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean*. Deals and development projects with Warner Bros. and TT Games will continue, which is probably a prudent financial decision considering more than 60 million LEGO games have been sold in five years. So while we might be waving goodbye to online little yellow plastic people, we probably have a lot more LEGO games to look forward to in the future. We're still holding thumbs for a *LEGO Gears of War*.



Mass Effect 3 beta ends up on XBL by mistake

BioWare's final instalment in the Commander Shepard *Mass Effect* trilogy is releasing in March 2012. The veteran RPG developer had always intended on launching a beta program, but it was only meant to become available next year. Unfortunately for them, thanks to some "human error" on Microsoft's side, the *Mass Effect 3* beta became available to all beta testers of the new Xbox Dashboard. Oops!

Microsoft was quick to react but the beta had already been downloaded by a ton of people. This resulted in gamers, and by extension the entire Internet, getting an early peak into what BioWare has install for us come March 2012. A single player portion of the game's Prologue was available – this was the same section of gameplay that was shown off at Gamescom 2011. In it Commander Shepard and Anderson attempt to evacuate Earth while fighting off hordes of Husks and Reaper attacks.

Interestingly, the beta also showed off some of the game's settings. These settings included the ability to turn on or off your involvement in the decision making during dialogue sequences. Further settings allowed you to make the game more like a third-person shooter and less like an RPG. The converse setting was also possible. BioWare issued a statement shortly after the leak and highlighted the fact that these settings were still in the very early stages of development and no decisions had yet been made as to how they would function in the final release.

Naturally, portions of the multiplayer were there, but it amounted to little more than a character unlock and creation screen.

BioWare said, in the same statement as mentioned above, that the content of the leaked beta was very early stuff and as such asked those playing it to not judge what they experience too harshly. What's more, shortly after this beta leak, *Mass Effect 3* producer Jesse Houston announced via the BioWare forums that the game's story files had also been leaked.

Hard sci-fi

If you recently completed cyberpunk FPS *Hard Reset* and felt a little short-changed by the game's length, there's a good chance that you haven't double-clicked that icon since then. Well, get clicking, because the game's been the recipient of a big ol' patch that adds a shiny new survival mode. Yep, now *Hard Reset* is just like every other FPS, in that you can sit in an enclosed area, murdering endless waves of enemies while getting bigger and better weapons to allow you to continue murdering endless waves of enemies. Survival mode will feature new enemies, new maps and leaderboards, so your *Hard Reset* can mingle with other *Hard Resets* online and determine which is the best of them all.

Rumour: Next Xbox is codenamed "Loop"

// According to website MS Nerd, which has in the past had a number of rumours proven dead right, the next generation Xbox 360 console is currently codenamed "Loop". The rumour doesn't stop there however, as the same website believes that the third Xbox console will run off a modified version of Windows 9. What's more, the device is being custom designed by Microsoft and two other hardware partners.

The Xbox "Loop" will supposedly use a single main processor with "multiple dedicated assistive cores" responsible for functions like physics, networking, sound, AI, graphics, sensors and encryption. The entire unit will supposedly be smaller than the current Xbox 360 S. Finally, it's been suggested that the Xbox "Loop" will be cheaper than the Xbox 360 so as to increase the uptake of Kinect sensors by the public. Whether or not the price of the Loop will be lower than the current price of an Xbox 360 or its initial launch price was not mentioned.

// Sony's PS Vita finally has a confirmed release date – the 22nd of February. That's a simultaneous release date for the US, Canada, Latin America and Europe, so we hope that we'll see the handheld arrive on our shores on or shortly after that date. Local online retailer Kalahari.com estimates that the 3G version will retail for R3,299.95 while Takealot.com figures that the Wi-Fi version will sell for R2,799.



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Comfort zones



When you're a game developer, it often pays to experiment. At its most basic level, this entails fiddling about with how you make an already familiar game. You've almost certainly done that at some point - for your first few game projects, at least. I still remember personal gems like *Pac-Man* with guns, *Match-3* with guns and *Robin Hood* platformer with guns (I was ten, I was a boy, and my game making tool made bullet firing really, really easy).

Of course, training up just about any skill eventually requires increasing your efforts to get the same workout value. As you gain more experience with game development, you'll need to push those boundaries a little further to avoid stagnating in your own game creation "comfort zone".

If we're honest with ourselves, we can usually identify those comfort zones quite well: I'm fond of grid-based puzzle games, deterministic gameplay and Insert-Classic-

"No matter what you like doing, it's a good exercise to drop that and try something different"

Idea-Here-With-Bullets. Others may be happy making top-down shooters, mech games or point-and-click adventures.

And some may be most comfortable with MMOs, for some reason.

No matter what you like doing, it's a good exercise to drop that and try something different. I've made action platformers, hack-and-slash RPGs and racing games as odd prototypes here and there. I even made a horrible, boring JRPG-esque grindfest once. It was about kittens fighting bugs or something, and I never showed anyone for fear of people figuring out just how soulless I could actually be.

But soulless or not, it was a valuable experience: maybe the experimental games themselves weren't the most amazing offerings, but they allowed me to return to my comfort zone with a slightly broader range of experiences and ideas. In some ways, even vile abominations of nature like my kitty cat RPG would contribute towards every project I worked on from then on. I think I used its map generator logic for the first alpha of *Desktop Dungeons* a few years later. So hey, that's something.

Even if you know you're far better at some forms of game development than others, it pays to increase your scope and place your particular pet projects into a broader perspective. It's much like meeting people: if you're constantly immersing yourself in a "comfort zone" of similar interests and personalities, you may well never know how to improve your behaviour or understanding of others. Challenging ourselves and forcing ourselves to think of new and creative approaches to different - maybe difficult - people can often shed new light on relationships with existing friends: you and Jimmy may enjoy putting Marmite on your sandwiches now, but it would take a friendship with Mary to understand that peanut butter is a good option, too.

This doesn't necessarily mean that peanut butter will become a firm favourite, or that you'll suddenly decide to fuse peanut butter and Marmite into some unholy super mixture (yuck), but at some point in the future when you realise that a situation calls for peanut butter, you'll have the breadth of experience to know this and not miss out.

This advice carries over to game development too: understanding and experiencing the whole field can make your specialised efforts more worthwhile in the long run. All it takes is a little experimentation now and again.

Rodain Joubert

Sweden's Pirate Party booted from Gamex

Ok, this one takes a little explaining, but it's totally worth it just for the WTF value. In Sweden there's an actual political party called Piratpartiet, or The Pirate Party. No really, they even won two seats in the Swedish parliament. Their goal, according to their website, is to "fundamentally reform copyright law, get rid of the patent system, and ensure that citizens' rights to privacy are respected."

Sweden, on top of having a Pirate Party (seriously?) has a gaming expo akin to our rAge, except theirs is called Gamex. The Pirate Party was initially going to have a stand at the Gamex expo this year. They'd paid for their stand, bought advertising and booked hotel rooms. Then just days before Gamex kicked off, the organisers phoned up the Pirate Party and said thanks but no thanks, you're no longer welcome.

Apparently the Pirates were pretty taken aback by Gamex's sudden change of heart because according to the party's leader, Anna Troberg, the organisers of Gamex had badgered them to be a part of the expo. It's likely that some of the industry's top publishers told the expo organisers to get rid of them - we can't blame them. The idea of hosting a gaming expo, and then granting entry to a group that willfully promotes activities that damage what the expo is celebrating, is just mindboggling.



A typical example of a Swedish Pirate Party member

Origin to support third-party publishers



Despite the mixed public opinion on the digital distribution and social management platform, EA's Origin will soon support third-party publishers. THQ, Warner Bros. Interactive and Capcom will be the first companies to jump on board, with *Saints Row: The Third* as the guinea pig.

"Since launch, we've had overwhelming support from both publishers and developers across the gaming industry, recognising Origin as an opportunity to deliver more of their great content straight to consumers across the globe," said EA's Origin VP

David DeMartini.

THQ senior VP of publishing Terri Schiek stated that the company "is excited to work with Origin and to offer players another new, innovative way to experience the over-the-top fun of *Saints Row: The Third*," and that it looked forward to "building our relationship with the Origin team, and to continue to deliver great content for the platform."

"When we met with the EA team and discussed their long-term vision for Origin, we were excited to lend our weight to their efforts," added Capcom's Christian Svensson.

GTA V is a thing that exists



Rockstar Games has announced *GTA V* with a short teaser trailer and an official statement. From the statement and imagery in the trailer, we know that *GTA V* will return to the fictional location of San Andreas, including the areas of Los Santos, Los Venturas and San Fierro, which are based on the real-world locations of Los Angeles, Las Vegas and San Francisco, respectively. In addition, Rockstar claims that this will be their biggest game world to date.

The publisher describes *GTA V* as "the largest and most ambitious game Rockstar has yet created," and "a bold new direction in open-world freedom, storytelling, mission-based gameplay and online multiplayer."

The trailer has a lot to show, with locations all throughout the region including the I5 freeway that runs between San Fran and LA, areas based on locations that we speculate to be Venice Beach, Beverly Hills, Malibu and Hollywood, and the massive countryside between the three main cities, possibly even including Yosemite National Park. Stay tuned for more details as they emerge.

Skeptical or perceptive people might think that this announcement, right on the heel of *Saint's Row: The Third's* release, is an attempt to shove THQ out of the limelight, but the publisher's CEO, Brian Farrell, isn't bothered.

"I went online like everyone else to see the *GTA* trailer," said Farrell. "It's a high-quality trailer and I think it's going to be another fantastic game in the series."

"That said, it shows the completely different positioning of the two games. *GTA* is still serious and character-driven – a very different experience. *Saints Row* – if you saw our video today, it shows you all the crazy stuff in the game. It's a totally different positioning."

DLC never changes

// *Fallout: New Vegas* might've missed the mark for a few people, with a general lack of content and, well, *stuff*, so this is the perfect opportunity to pick up the title if you haven't yet played it or felt underwhelmed by the amount of content in the original release. *Fallout New Vegas Ultimate Edition* is set for release in February 2012 (presumably to give you the chance to finish *Skyrim* and its inevitable DLC) and will include the full game plus all add-on content packs: *Dead Money*, *Honest Hearts*, *Old World Blues*, *Courier's Stash* and *Gun Runners' Arsenal*. Additionally, new areas will be available for exploration – *Sierra Madre Casino*, *Zion National Park*, *Big MT research crater* and *The Divide* – and the character level cap will be increased to 50.

// There hasn't yet been an official announcement from the developer or publisher, but news has emerged that *Dead Island* will receive a sequel entitled *Dead World*, following a trademark application made but the Polish developer.

Rule, Britannia!

When *Ultima* creator Richard Garriott left NCSOFT in 2008 to go play astronaut, the company wasn't too happy with him at the time. For reasons way too complicated to get into here, Garriott's millions of dollars worth of stock in NCSOFT was forfeited against his will, and since then, Garriott and NCSOFT have been in court trying to figure out this whole thing. Now, the US Court of Appeals has finally closed this case once and for all, ordering NCSOFT to pay a hefty \$32 million to Garriott to

cover his lost stock, interest and legal fees.

In an interesting twist, Garriott is now selling his wacky, weird and wonderful mansion affectionately called Britannia Manor. This building is home to more than just a strange video game developer, but includes an observatory, secret passageways and plenty of over-the-top Halloween antics every year. Garriott is selling the manor to fund the construction of Britannia Manor II, which we're convinced is code for "I want to live in space forever."



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2011



Right now, it's *Dark Souls* is demanding my time like an incontinent pet that was to murder me. I don't need to reiterate how refreshing it is to play an actual *game* again. Yes, yes, all those interactive cut scenes masquerading as games are fun. Some people think *FarmVille* is fun. It seems "fun" has no cover charge; it lets in just about any scruffy old interactive doodle.

My first *Dark Souls* run-through took just under 90 hours, and countless deaths. My first character was actually 6 hours in when I accidentally killed an NPC merchant I needed. No reloads here, your actions are permanent unless you start over from scratch. So I started over. I'm now on my third character, halfway through the game in under 8 hours. Experience is an incredible time-saver. And where better to get all the experience you could ever want, than games? The Land of Infinite Fun, across the Sea of Trial-And-Error.

What a year, eh? Did you survive the rapture twice, like I did? I'm glad, because I don't think there's any gaming in heaven. Gambling is a sin, after all.

At the time of writing there's still two months to go until 2011 officially kicks the bucket. With luck, nothing of nuclear-proportions will happen in gaming until January. There just aren't enough hours in the day for this hobby anymore. Everyone gets that one *game* that starts dominating all their time for a while. For some it's an MMO (and up until I retired from it in August, for me that would have been *World of Warcraft*). For others it's an online shooter or MOBA or such, bless the CodFish and the Fortress Twofers and the Battlefielders and the League of Lollilegenders. You know who you are.

This year was a good year for experiences. The sequels shined, like *Mass Effect 2*, *Dead Space 2*, *Marvel vs. Capcom 3*, *Pokémon Black and White*, *Portal 2*, *Arkham City*, *Battlefield 3*, *StarCraft II*, etc. The on-going indie bohemian revolution gave us *Minecraft*, *Terraria*, *Limbo*, *Bastion*, *Voxatron*, and much more. Quite a few series saw from-the-dead revivals, like *Mortal Kombat* and *Sonic Generations*. Others finally got their spiritual successors in *From Dust*, *Dark Souls*, *Child of Eden*.

Duke Nukem Forever finally came out, ending decades of terrible jokes by being its own punch line.

It was the year of Freemium, with almost every MMO other than *WoW* (for now) moving over to the free-to-play pay-to-progress model that Korea popularised in the early 2000s. The "games as a challenge, not as an entertainment product" trope has started regaining popularity after falling into obscurity in the late 1990s when everyone became obsessed with shinier graphics. It was a year of technology, with developers pushing their new engine techs powering their new shooting-brown-people-in-a-brown-land games. It was the year of everyone saying that iOS is taking over gaming, with every store starting to stock iOS devices. It was once again the year everyone said Nintendo was doomed. Again.

Anniversaries!

Time to make you feel old (or young and stupid). This year quite a few landmark games celebrated their decade-or-more anniversaries, so take the time to remember them fondly. They deserve it.

30th anniversary: *Ultima*, *Castle Wolfenstein*, *Frogger*, *Ms. Pac-man*.

25th anniversary: *The Legend of Zelda*, *Metroid* and *Castlevania*.

20th anniversary: *Street Fighter II*, *Sonic the Hedgehog* and *Civilization*.

15th anniversary: *Resident Evil*, *Pokémon*, *Tomb Raider*, *Diablo*, *Crash Bandicoot*.

10th anniversary: *Grand Theft Auto*, *Halo*, *Devil May Cry*.
Miktar Dracon

Who cares about morality, anyway?



Say what you want about the fact that the upcoming *Syndicate* reboot is an FPS – the game looks like an absolute blast. Given that a lot of the people reading this have probably never even played the original, it may come as a surprise that *Syndicate* isn't about being the typical good guy. You're actually just meant to be a total d*ck without ever thinking twice about collateral damage: and Miles Kilo, the reboot's playable character, will be no different.

"You're certainly not playing a good guy," said producer Ben O'Donnell in an interview with *Videogamer*. "You follow him in the narrative, and that narrative will obviously unfold in different ways.

When you first start you're playing as this agent working for EuroCorp, and you do their wet work for them. You have this really high-end chip in your head, and you can do things to people that they really wouldn't want to do – like commit suicide or change allegiance. You're by no means a good guy, you're there to do the dirty work."

You may think that at some point in the narrative, agent Kilo will experience a moral crisis and decide to rethink his approach. Don't expect that, however, because O'Donnell assures us that this is not a game about good and evil, and as such there'll be no moral quandaries to deal with.

Space Marine does THQ proud

THQ has revealed its financial figures for the second quarter of their 2012 fiscal year (July through September), stating that their sales figures "exceeded expectations." Net sales brought in 146 million dollars, which is a pretty hefty improvement over the 77.1 million dollars they brought in during the same period last year. Still, the company's losses nearly doubled year-over-year as well, but let's just ignore that and focus on the happy side of this news.

The excellent *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine* stood tall atop a pile

of Orks as THQ's best-selling title, having sold 1.2 million units across all platforms during that second quarter. Just under half of those were sold in North America. Apparently THQ's older titles also sold particularly well, with specific mention being made to *Saints Row 2*. We're guessing all that outrageous *Saints Row: The Third* marketing has a lot to do with that.

"We are encouraged that our second quarter performance exceeded our expectations, particularly in a quarter with a light release schedule," is the official word that came from THQ CEO Brian Farrell.

Ninja Theory's DmC splinters universes



When Ninja Theory changed the appearance and backstory of protagonist Dante for their upcoming *DmC: Devil May Cry* title, fans were annoyed and confused. That's putting it lightly. Outraged would be a better way to put it, because entitlement LOL. Ninja Theory has now assured Japanese gaming magazine *Dengeki PlayStation* that their version of Dante battles demons in his own separate universe to that of the original Dante.

What this really means is that it's safe for fans to calm the hell down, because nobody is screwing with your *Devil May Cry* canon. The game's looking pretty sweet despite all the negativity, and hopefully this news will help in satiating concerned gamers.

More than just a silver lining

// Fans of adventure games would do well to pay attention here. Remember that unofficial episodic series of *King's Quest*-inspired fangames, *The Silver Lining*? We'll forgive you if you don't, because they aren't actually, you know, any good. Still, at least they're trying, and at the time of writing this developer Phoenix Online is currently gearing up to release episode four of the five-part *Silver Lining* series. While that's completely free, they're also looking for monetary assistance with another project: one that's being made in collaboration with *Gabriel Knight* designer Jane Jensen.

They're calling it *Cognition: An Erica Reed Thriller*, and they've put up a Kickstarter page (<http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/postudios/cognition-an-erica-reed-thriller>) asking for donations to help get the project rolling.

"I've worked on a lot of engines over my lifetime and spent a lot of time putting graphics in to them and [the *Modern Warfare 3* engine] is a Porsche. **And what I mean by that is that it's stream-lined,** everything in it is perfectly freaking clean. You can tell it's been worked on for years. It's easy to upgrade."

-Glen Schofield,
GM of Sledgehammer Games

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Support Lines

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

Publishers: Activision / Blizzard 2K Games / Rockstar / Ubisoft Codemasters / NC-Soft / Namco-Bandai

E-mail: support@xtremems.co.za
Number: 0861 987 363

Publishers: Microsoft Xbox
Number: 0800 991 550

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

EA believes in the power of loyalty



There are these two games, see. Their purpose, setting and genre are similar enough that the gaming world has seen fit to spend the last few months pointlessly arguing over which will be better, which will sell more, and which game's players are awarded the honour of being superior human beings. It's been a sh*tstorm of loyalist malarkey and marketing madness, easily this year's biggest bout of industry rivalry. If you've not figured it out yet, those games are *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* and *Battlefield 3*.

With both games now out the gate, the feud isn't quite at an end yet. EA's executive vice president Patrick Soderlund believes that, even with *Call of Duty's* massive following, *Battlefield 3's* multiplayer component will make players "feel loyal" to the game and keep them coming back for more Frostbite

2-infused mayhem.

"We all respect what *Call of Duty* brings and what they're going to come with," Soderlund told *IGN* at the time of writing this. But Soderlund is adamant that EA has an "industry-leading multiplayer game that will make people want to stay with [them], frankly." He sees it as a service which will allow players to "continually get updates and new content and hopefully improvements to the product as we go." Such content updates include the upcoming "Back to Karkand" DLC, due this December and promising an even greater level of destruction than what we've seen in the base game.

We think that the two games offer enough of a different experience on the multiplayer front that there's no reason gamers couldn't enjoy both titles. Seriously – can't we all just get along?

Trials and tribulations

We love the *Trials* series of aggravation simulators here at NAG. It seems fitting then that we'd have a double whammy of news relating to the series. First up is the announcement that indie developer RedLynx (the Finnish developers responsible for *Trials*) is not so indie anymore, having been acquired by publishing giant Ubisoft. RedLynx CEO Rero Virtala explained that they were attracted to Ubisoft's focus on "creativity and quality."

We're guessing it might have also had something to do with fat stacks of cash. Virtala also pointed to Ubisoft's "long-term strategy on both the traditional and digital distribution video game markets" as a reason for joining the publisher.

Secondly, there's news that, despite this acquisition, *Trials Evolution* (the upcoming game in the insanely popular series) will still be published by Microsoft and released on XBLA when it's ready. "We will still be working directly with Microsoft to bring *Trials Evolution* to Xbox LIVE Arcade once it's ready," said Jason Bates, RedLynx director of marketing and PR, to *Joystiq*.

"What we've been holding to is the 'when it's done' approach," said Bates. "We are going to take the time to polish and test the game to the best of our ability before we release it, to ensure it matches the quality people have come to expect from a *Trials* game." We're guessing that means we won't be seeing the game this year then.

Sony patents biometric controllers and handhelds

// Now here's an interesting bit of info that's surfaced, especially in terms of how it's intended to be used.

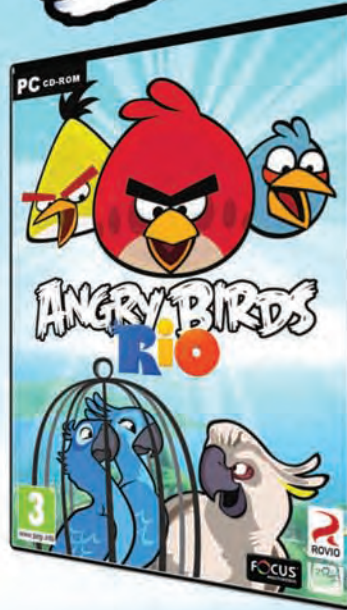
Siliconera found a patent with Sony's logo attached to it for biometric controllers and portable gaming systems with biometric sensors built in. They're designed to measure heart rate, electro-muscular data (i.e. muscle contractions) and skin conductivity (i.e. moisture).

It's not the first time we've seen something like this. Remember the fuss that was kicked up when Nintendo announced the Vitality Sensor for the Wii? That device might never see the light of day after countless delays and the same goes for Ubisoft's *Innergy*. Where Sony's patent differs is in its application: while Nintendo's and Ubisoft's devices would have used the data collected to provide relaxing, mellow experiences for users, Sony would use it to create more hardcore applications. Imagine having your accuracy with an in-game weapon increase or decrease depending on your real-life stress levels, or an in-game character who grows nervous along with you, and you'll understand what Sony is getting at.

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Don't eat it if it's yellow: SNOW announced



Fans of racing down snow-capped slopes at high speeds while strapped to skis and/or snowboards seemingly have it rough. Sure, they get their occasional virtual fix every once in a while thanks to games like *SSX* or the stuff that that Shaun White guy plasters his name on, but it's never particularly realistic, and skiing is hardly ever featured. So, a bunch of enterprising skiing/snowboarding enthusiasts have taken it upon themselves to rectify this problem.

They've announced *SNOW* (in all caps – just in case you missed it), a snowboarding/skiing sim that's made "for riders, by riders." It's designed to appeal to those who want more authenticity in their snowy exploits by taking a physics-based simulation approach to things. It's also being built in CryEngine 3, so we're automatically assuming it's going to look incredible.

Here's a choice quote from the game's official website: "Using a completely new and improved control scheme that pays attention to the actual experience of skiing and snowboarding, *SNOW* enhances the link between player and character, creating a superior gaming experience." As an added extra, the game's world will apparently be completely open for exploration.

Filling the treasure room



Dungeon Defenders, the endearingly colourful and brilliantly chaotic indie tower defense game of cooperative joy, is already doing quite well for itself. Developer Trendy Entertainment has giddily revealed that the game had already sold 250 000 units at the time of writing these words.

The majority of those sales are on PC, with 200 000 units sold on the platform – accounting for 80% of the total sales. Trendy plans to continue supporting the game with community events on 360 and PS3, which will include special game modes and the chance to win unique loot for the game, in addition to all the DLC that's planned. If you've not yet had a chance to play it, do so – it's great fun when played with friends. It'll set you back \$14.99 on PC and PSN, or 1200 Microsoft Points on XBLA.

CHART TOPPERS / www.lookandlisten.co.za

PC

Call of Duty: Black Ops	Available now
FIFA 12	Available now
Move Starter Pack	Available now

Xbox 360

Rugby World Cup 2011	Available now
Gears of War 3	Available now
Assassin's Creed II: Game of the Year Edition	Available now

PS3

The Sims 3: Late Night	Available now
World of Warcraft: Cataclysm	Available now
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2	Available now

Wii

Pilotwings Resort	Available now
Nintendogs + Cats: French Bulldog & New Friends	Available now
The Sims 3	Available now

3DS

Super Mario Galaxy 2	Available now
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	Available now
Just Dance 2	Available now

DS

New Super Mario Bros.	Available now
Super Mario 64 DS	Available now
Mario Kart DS	Available now

Kinect

Sports Champions	Available now
Racquet Sports	Available now
Heavy Rain: Move Edition	Available now

Move

Kinectimals: Now With Bears!	Available now
You Shape: Fitness Evolved	Available now
UFC Personal Trainer	Available now

Ridge Racer Unbounded gets a release date

// Hey you. Yeah, you. You like cars, right? What about racing? And crashing, what are your thoughts on that? How about crashing cars while racing then? If you answered yes to any of those, then you're in luck, because Namco Bandai have tacked a release date onto their upcoming crashing 'n' racing simulator, *Ridge Racer Unbounded*.

You'll be able to grab the game on March 6th next year for PC, Xbox 360 and PS3. So, if creating entire cities and then racing through them with friends sounds like your cup of melted rubber, be sure to save that date.

The adventure game of the first-person shooter

// Do you remember *XIII*? If you don't, or missed out because this entertaining but poorly-performing title didn't grab your attention, then this news probably won't affect you all too much. If you're on the other side of the fence, then listen up: *XIII* is getting a "re-imagining" which should be available by time you've finished reading these words, or even sooner if you're a slow reader.

The title is called *XIII Lost Identity*, and will be available on PC, Mac and iOS. Unlike the original *XIII*, *Lost Identity* seems to take the form of an adventure or *shudder* hidden object game, but follows the same story of a man who awakens on a beach with no clue as to his identity other than a "XIII" tattoo on the back of his neck.



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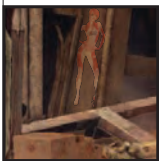
What's that noise?!

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



November Winner



Michelle Roux, Page 62

Win!

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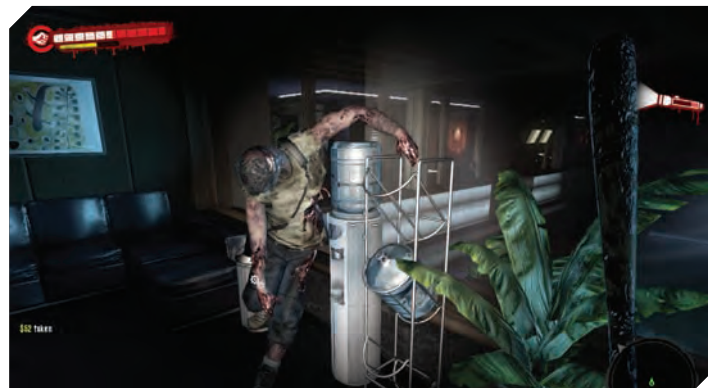


Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of *W12* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line 'December Caption'.



NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR / "Is there any dog poop on my boot?"



LAST MONTHS WINNER / I think that brain I ate was off..

- Laurence Merry



"I think that there's an underlying, a fundamental assumption right now, that the less you charge, the more money you make. Which isn't true. And it doesn't necessarily make for a better game. **I mean, everybody likes free...** I think that definitely, players have seen a lot of really great quality free-to-play experiences, but I'm not sure it's the best model for us right now."

-Mike Morhaime, co-founder of Blizzard Entertainment

// We'll probably never catch sight of this locally, but world-renowned console modder **Ben Heck** has decided to get into the pinball business. Heck is a creative mastermind and electronics expert famed for creating incredible full conversions of consoles, including his popular laptop conversions of an Xbox 360 and PS3. For his first pinball project, Heck is teaming up with pinball creation expert John Popadiuk and the two are preparing themselves to launch their first game, *Ben Heck's Zombie Adventureland*, early next year, with pre-orders starting in January.

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With a K: Fatshark announce Krater

Fatshark, the awesomely named Swedish development studio behind titles like *Bionic Commando Rearmed 2*, *Lead and Gold: Gangs of the Wild West* and *Hamilton's Great Adventure*, have announced a new project that they're working on. It's called *Krater*, an action RPG in which "the base pillars are crafting, exploration and consequence." Speaking of consequence: "Consequence brings not only the ability for the characters to level up and improve themselves, but also permanent injuries and death."

It's set in post-apocalypse Sweden, which has been torn apart by war and biological weapons and stuff. When a weapon rips a giant chunk out of the Earth's face, the crater left behind reveals fresh drinking water, an oasis in this barren land (and providing the game with its name). There'll be both single player and multiplayer options, and they promise that "the innovative control setup allows you to effectively command a party of three characters simultaneously." It's due out in 2012 on PC via Steam.



// The annual Spike TV Video Game Awards are a great place for publishers to flaunt their upcoming titles and tease the public with snippets of information, and is sometimes used to announce entirely new projects, as will be the case with these titles. The much-anticipated new *Alan Wake* game is set to be previewed at the show, as well as an as-yet unknown new BioWare game. Of course, there'll be a lot more info on many other games, including some juicy new snippets from *Metal Gear Solid: Rising*.

// Nintendo has been feeling the effects of the 3DS's failure to pull in as much cash as the company was hoping for. Despite the increase in sales following the price drop a few months ago, the company is set to post an annual loss of ¥100 billion, or \$1.32 billion – almost double their projected loss of "only" ¥55 million. Following the report, Nintendo's share price fell by 7.5%. Those budding market players out there who believe that the Wii U is the shot in the arm that Nintendo needs to bounce back might want to look at speaking to a Japanese financial advisor some time soon.

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FINAL FANTASY XIII-2

03 • 02 • 2012





Top 9

worst gifts to give a gamer for Christmas*

Good lord will you look at the date! It's Christmas already? We swear it was just the other day that we were all sitting around seeing who could stuff the most chocolate marshmallow eggs into their mouth at once (it was Michael; no surprises there). Now it's already that time when gamers across the planet wait eagerly to see whether anybody really loves them; whether anyone has paid attention and realised that Christmas isn't Christmas unless there's a game with your name on it under the tree. Not forgetting that cloying atmosphere of barely-concealed hostility around the lunch table, obviously. Auntie Whatsherface still hasn't forgiven Uncle Whatshisname for that thing he said about Third Cousin Soandso that time, what a disgrace, and to think he's just sitting there heaping all the turkey legs onto his plate like nothing happened.

Oh. Anyway.

To celebrate that impending, soul-crushing realisation that nobody actually loves you because there totally isn't a game under the tree, or behind the door, or in the garage, or ANYWHERE, NOT EVEN THE CUBBYHOLE, OH THE HUMANITY, we at NAG have collaborated to bring you a list of the worst presents a gamer could possibly receive on the special day, besides plague or whatever it is that makes the Borg the Borg or a Justin Bieber CD.

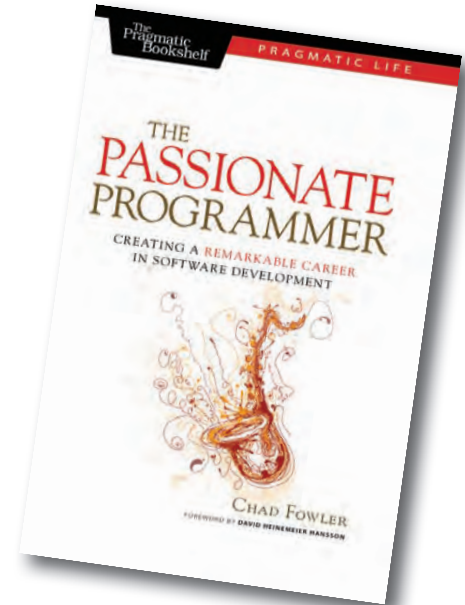
9 Clothing

We don't need it, honestly. Rather spend that money on games instead. You don't need to look good when you're sitting in front of a TV or PC screen. In fact, many would argue that gaming *au naturale* is the only way to play. There's nothing quite like dominating in a rousing game of *Horde 2.0* while completely butt naked [I can confirm this. – Tarryn]. Possibly reconsider if you own Kinect; or at least disconnect it [I was okay with this sentence in principal until you used rousing and butt naked in it, Ed]



8 Books on programming

We get it, estranged crazy uncle, you don't know much about us but you vaguely recall a cousin mentioned that we're into computers and games. We also totally get that your scotch-added mind automatically presumed that because we're into computers then we *must* be into programming. Surprise! Not all gamers realise that there's more to Java than the liquid stuff that comes out of a percolator.



7 A PS2

Look, we really appreciate that you've finally worked out the difference between one of those cheap, plastic mail order kids' laptops and a game console, but the PS2 is so last-generation. Besides, *Shadow of the Colossus* is available on PS3 now, so there's just no reason to even own a PS2 anymore.



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715 ATX tower specs

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6 That game your grandmother bought for you

And she totally bought it by asking the store clerk for "that game that has a man in it, who has a gun, and there was a girl, and they were on an island". That or the game your grandmother picked up because they didn't have that game that has a man in it, who has a gun, and there was a girl, and they were on an island.



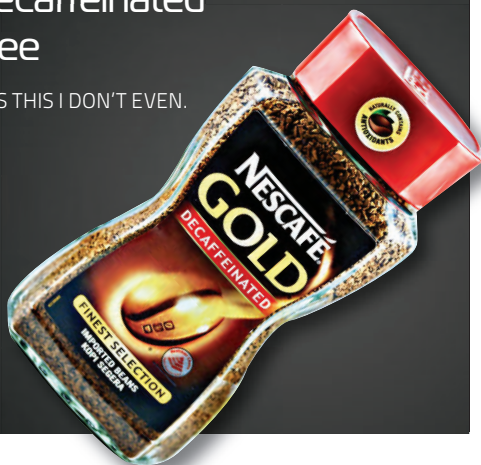
5 Any DVD or Blu-ray

Isn't this obvious? They look exactly like games when they're all wrapped up in that garishly festive paper. That smiling Father Christmas and cheerful Rudolph and those elves that festoon the paper belie a mendacious masquerade of disappointment, catastrophic depersonalisation, and a rapidly crumbling psyche within their deceptive folds and creases and sticky tape. This never used to be a problem. Just over ten years ago games came packaged in deliciously oversized cardboard boxes, not the crummy DVD cases we have today.



4 Decaffeinated coffee

WHAT IS THIS I DON'T EVEN.



3 Anything outdoorsy / sporty / move-off-the-couchy

Just look at this skin. Look at it! It glows in the dark. We don't even remember what the daystar looks like anymore, precious.



2 Deodorant

Seriously? You bought us deodorant? What the hell ever happened to subtlety? So we're inclined to sit for hours on end, feverishly controlling on-screen characters, remaining rooted to a single chair, forsaking regular bathroom visits and stuffing our faces with easy to scoff junk food. So we might, occasionally, sometimes, maybe forget to brush our teeth in the morning because we just have to get back to *Skyrim*. Or we might, occasionally, sometimes, maybe forget to shower because we need to start *Arkham City* on – alright you should totally buy us deodorant.



1 A robot velociraptor

Okay, admittedly we only put this one in as a joke. Everybody wants a robot velociraptor; it's like the galactic overlord of presents. Oh, just think of all the things we could do with a robot velociraptor – this stuff could make a 90-minute romantic comedy, with an entire career of planet-wide tyranny left over.



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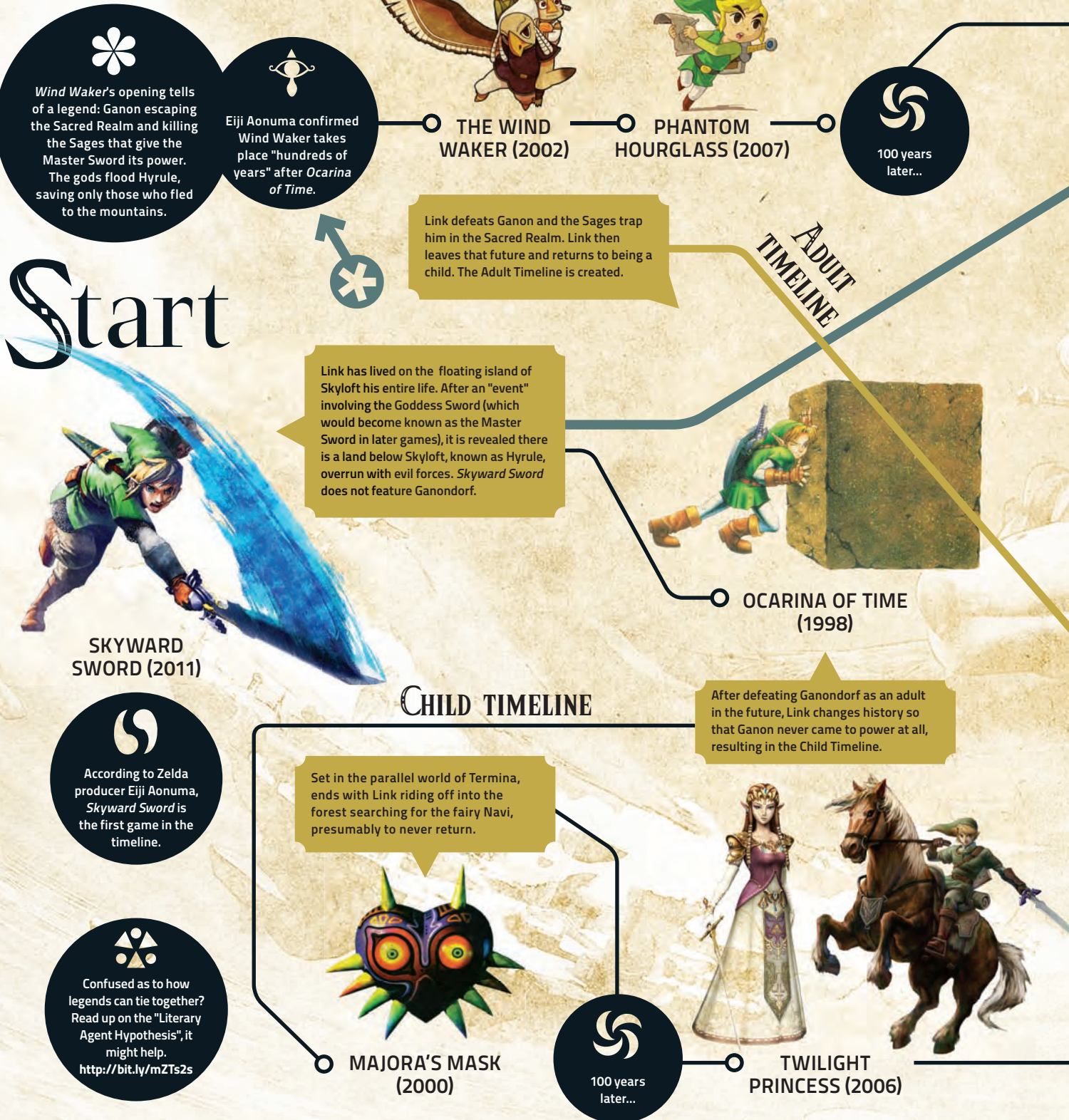
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THE LEGEND(S) OF ZELDA

LEGEND



Many assume the *Zelda* franchise is one tale retold in different ways. In some respects it is: a cyclic legend with character leitmotif, good vs. evil, repeating throughout the history of Hyrule. However, the *Zelda* storyline is actually a (mostly) linear fiction spanning nearly a thousand years. And two confirmed timelines. And a lot of fan speculation as to how it all fits together.



THE MANY LINKS



FOUR SWORDS TIMELINE



SPIRIT TRACKS (2009)

Link's friend Alfonzo is the descendant of Gonzo from *Phantom Hourglass* and Princess Zelda knows she's the granddaughter of Tetra from *The Wind Waker*.



THE MINISH CAP (2004)

Confirmed to be the first in the *Four Swords* trilogy, the ending explains the origin of Link's iconic cap which leads some to place it before all others in the timeline.



FOUR SWORDS (2002)

The opening cutscenes of *Four Swords* and *Four Swords Adventures* clearly defines the plotline of the three game mini-series.



FOUR SWORDS ADVENTURES (2004)



ORACLE OF AGES (2001)



ORACLE OF SEASONS (2001)

Link leaves Holodrum and Labryna (after a *Linked Game*), on a boat similar to the one seen at the beginning of *Link's Awakening*, which has the backstory that Link had been training in "foreign lands", which could easily include Holodrum and Labryna.

After Link defeats Ganon, there's no mention of what he does next.



LINK'S AWAKENING (1993)

In an interview, Shigeru Miyamoto confirmed that *Link's Awakening* takes place sometime before the original *Legend of Zelda*.

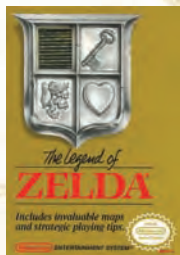


A LINK TO THE PAST (1991)

The ending scroll states that the Master Sword is never used again, implying that any game in which Link draws the Master Sword must happen before *Link to the Past*.

The Sages sealing Ganon in the Sacred Realm at the end of *Ocarina of Time* was confirmed as the Imprisoning War, an event referenced during the opening of *Link to the Past*. After being sealed, Ganon gains the full Triforce and transforms the Sacred Realm into the Dark World.

Ganon / Ganondorf
The human form of the main series antagonist is called Ganondorf, while the later monster incarnations are called Ganon. The more you know...



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA (1986)



ZELDA II (1987)

Don't agree with our timeline? Use this TARDIS and fix it yourself.



BlizzCon

2011

For two days in October, the four-hall Anaheim Convention Center in Los Angeles became the epicentre of all things Blizzard. Tens of thousands arrived by plane, bus and car, some bringing their entire families along for the festivities. It was not uncommon to see mothers, fathers, and even grandparents in attendance, and as actual participants, not just to chaperone the kids.

Blizzard and its games have become a transcendental culture – one that has been growing steadily since the early 1980s. It is a culture that encompasses all walks of life, all ages, and exists in almost every country around the world.

Those that couldn't be there in the real bought Virtual Tickets which granted them access to Internet livestreams of every event, all the panel discussions, and walkthroughs of the various game demos. The various *StarCraft II* and *World of Warcraft* tournaments were streamed for free.

Events were varied and constantly on-going. While the tournaments

raged on dedicated stages, with entrants from as far as China, Korea and Taiwan, various panels invited attendants to pose questions to Blizzard developers and artists. The panels ranged from discussions about sound engineering in *Diablo III*, an in-depth examination of the class talent systems in the upcoming *World of Warcraft* patches, live run-throughs of new raid areas, debate over lore, detailed looks at all the gear and items of *Diablo III*... the list goes on.

If you were stuck in the lines waiting to try the new *WoW* expansion, *Diablo III*'s team-deathmatch (which could be a two hour wait if you weren't press), or *StarCraft II: Heart of the Swarm*'s multiplayer, or *Blizzard DOTA*, there was always a nearby stage or television screen to watch. The lines for the merchandise booth were even longer; Blizzard fans are rabid for the *merch*. The event ended with a rocking Foo Fighters concert, and much screaming of "For the Horde!" from the various hotels situated around the convention centre. Screams that lasted until morning.

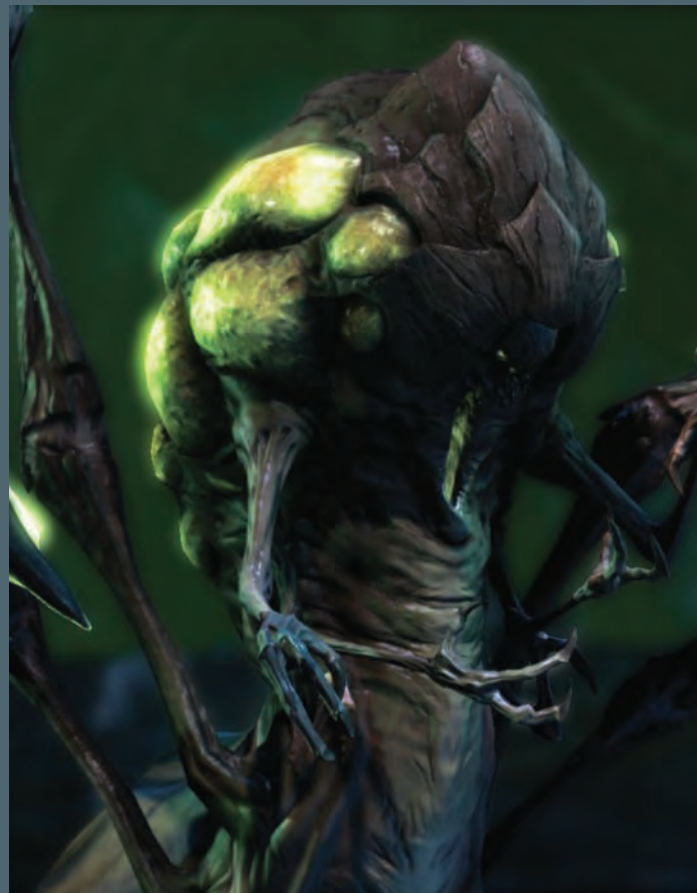
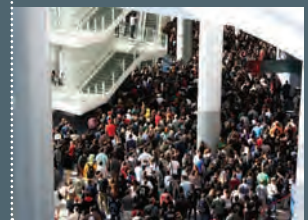
THREE EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS!

We have three huge interviews for you from BlizzCon that were just too big to fit into the magazine, so you can find their full transcripts on our handy-dandy website!

Senior world designer on *Diablo III*, Leonard Boyarski.
<http://bit.ly/s5r7uA>

Lead 3D artist on *StarCraft II*, Allen Dilling
<http://bit.ly/uehWm2>

Production director for *World of Warcraft*, J. Allen Brack.
<http://bit.ly/tpATZ5>



World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria

Even though its announcement at BlizzCon wasn't that much of a surprise since Blizzard registered the domain "Mists of Pandaria" at the start of August, it did not lessen the impact felt in the crowd. While you may not care about *WoW* (unless of course you do), there are plenty who have made it their second home, their social life (don't judge, you Facebook junkies) and their fun-zone. This new expansion is nothing short of an entirely new oriental-themed area with new panda-based rides being built on to their favourite amusement park.

The Pandarens are the new dual-faction race, looking every bit the style and attitude expected from a race that had been hinted at since the days of *Warcraft III*. For the more unrefined, just think *Kung Fu Panda*. Pandaren can be Hunters, Mages, Priests, Rogues, Shamans, Warriors and the new Monk class. The Monk, a damage dealer, tank and healer, with no auto-attack. You have to manually chain attack skills, building up your chi for various finishers. The level-cap is increased to 90, with new spells and abilities for all classes, wrapped up in a new, simpler

talent system which allows for on-the-fly respects. The new starter zone for Pandaren rests on the back of a giant sea-faring turtle, with exotic locations such as the Kun-Lai Summit and Jade Forest. Not much is known about the new continent of Pandaria, which all players will be able to explore.

New PvE challenge scenarios are being added to the base game, allowing for easier group-play events that don't rely on the DPS/healer/tank dynamic as much. All dungeons are getting a new Dungeon Challenge Mode which earns you prestige rewards. Bizarrely, the non-combat pets are getting their own Pet Battle system. References to *Pokémon* are not unfounded: you'll catch them in the wild, level them up, and find Battle Masters to challenge in various locations around Azeroth. You'll be able to trade with other players, or sell your high-level pets on the Auction House. There is no release date for this *pandamonium* yet.

You can read our hands-on impressions with the Pandaren starting area on NAG Online:

<http://bit.ly/uNLM7i>



StarCraft II: Heart of the Swarm

It's about time. The first expansion to *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty*, *Heart of the Swarm* picks up where *SCII* left off. The story focuses on Kerrigan (formerly known as the Queen of Blades), and you'll be able to use her as a hero on the field. She grows in strength, gaining new abilities, as the story progresses. You'll also evolve your swarm organically, making choices about which mutations should occur in which units, by talking to a very freaky-looking Zerg unit in-between missions.

Blizzard is promising about 20 new campaign missions for the Zerg army, new multiplayer maps and units, an improved Battle.net with emphasis on custom-game search, improved map authoring tools and of course, plenty of pre-rendered and in-game cinematic sequences.

To ensure Koreans stay frisky for another few years, *Heart of the Swarm* is mixing things up in the multiplayer by adding new units and abilities to all sides. The Zerg get a new ground-based siege unit called

the Swarm Host that can spawn melee units while burrowed, a flying Viper that can turn any friendly unit into a detector, and a host of skill changes to existing units, like a Burrow Assault for the Ultralisk.

One new Protoss unit, the Replicant, can turn itself into any non-massive unit within the player's line of sight. It's an expensive unit, but gives the Protoss access to Banshees and Siege Tanks. The Nexus gets an energy-based Arc Shield, adding temporary shield and armour to any structure, and a cannon for fending off early drops.

Tricky Terrans get some transforming action. The Hellion can transform into a walking battle mech, moving slower but with more health and higher damage output. Battlecruisers get a short cool-down-based speed-boost, helping them with late-game positioning.

You will need *Wings of Liberty* to play *Heart of the Swarm*, according to Blizzard. No release date has been announced.

Diablo III

We're sure you know all the details by now, but we'll reiterate them for those joining us late. *Diablo III*, a sequel long overdue, lets you choose from five ass-kicking classes (all have male and female versions): Barbarian, Witch Doctor, Wizard, Monk or Demon Hunter. You will click, click and click some more, casting powerful spells and skills, finding sweet loot and exploring the world of Sanctuary. Twenty years ago a few powerful heroes fought off the armies of the Burning Hells (that was us in *Diablo II*), saving Sanctuary from evil. Evil doesn't stay beat very long, so now it's up to the New Batch and their mentor, Deckard "Stay Awhile" Cain.

The engine is all new, 3D but constrained to the traditional angled top-down view. The areas are randomly generated, bolstered by random scripted events to keep things dynamic. The new quest system is very *World of Warcraft*, skills are incredibly powerful but you can only have a set of five

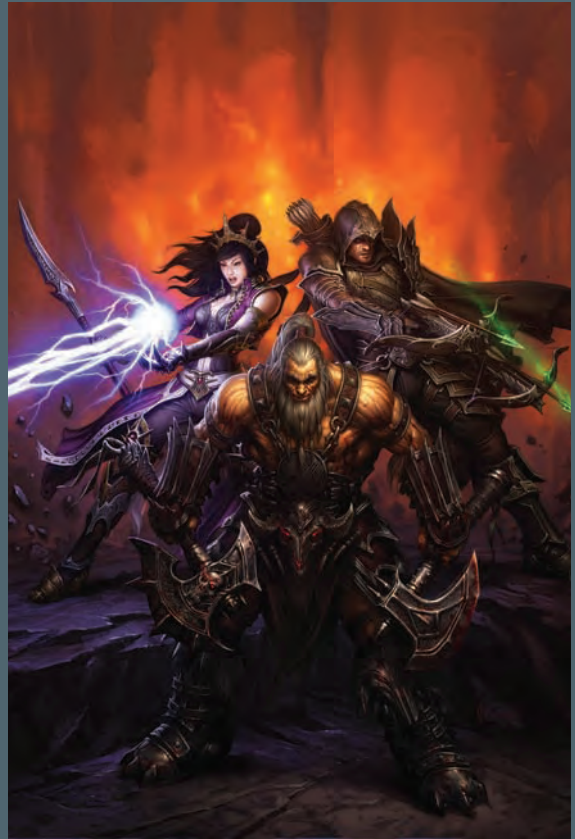
active at a time. You can change which five are set when you're not being murdered by one of the new monsters. Runestone items augment and change how abilities look and function, so yes, you can socket your skills too. According to Blizzard, the new Inferno difficulty is the "real" difficulty, with Normal, Nightmare and Hell leading up to it being just training wheels. Real men play Hardcore Mode anyway, where death is permanent.

There's plenty more, like online cooperative and competitive modes and a controversial auction house where you can sell and buy items for real money or in-game gold. We tried out the Team Deathmatch at BlizzCon, which was five on five with pre-set skills. It was surprisingly fun, the various skills working well against other players.

Release date is still "when it's done", sometime in 2012. Maybe.

You can read our hands-on impressions with the Demon Hunter on NAG Online:

<http://bit.ly/uNiwDL>



Blizzard DOTA

You know the score, you proficient knowledgeable gamer you. DOTA is a team-based competitive game where you control a powerful hero and help your automated stream of minions take out the enemy base, where they're busy trying to do the same to you in-between blaming each other for being *n00bs* as the reason why they're losing. Your hero levels up, unlocking skills, and gains gold for buying augmenting items and upgrades.

At BlizzCon, the demo version had 12 heroes from various Blizzard games, including Thrall, Kerrigan, the *Diablo III* Witch Doctor and a Siege Tank. When *Blizzard DOTA* launches, you'll start with a small group of heroes, unlocking more as you play. Once you've unlocked them all, you'll start earning cosmetic "prestige" items for them.

What sets *Blizzard DOTA* apart from traditional *Defense of the Ancients*, *League of Legends*, *Heroes of Newerth* and etc.? Traditionally the DOTA/MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) has a very demanding learning curve, brutal to new

players still trying to figure things out. Blizzard wants to apply their "easy-to-learn, difficult-to-master" philosophy to the genre.

There is much more clarity in what items to buy from the in-game store, Blizzard has eliminated much redundancy there. You focus generally on one of three types of items, to boost health, damage or mana. The store is a single panel, no sub-panels.

Towers are also handled very differently. The towers in the lanes your minions fight along are powerful, able to kill heroes quickly, but in *Blizzard DOTA* they have a limited amount of energy that recharges over time. This allows for a concerted push against a tower that's out of ammo, encouraging team-based aggression. The "jungle" contains power nodes protected by neutral creeps, taking a node will strengthen your minions.

You guessed it: no release date yet. They're planning on offering *Blizzard DOTA* for free, perhaps by including it as part of the *StarCraft II: Starter Edition*.



Swag Bag

As part of the \$175 (R1,431) ticket price, attendees to BlizzCon got an exclusive Swag Bag with some goodies inside:

- A scratch-card with a special code for redeeming a *World of Warcraft* pet (the Murkablo, a Murloc disguised as Diablo) and a special *StarCraft II* portrait (a Pandaren in a marine suit).
- A pre-built demo-deck for the *World of Warcraft* trading-card game that explains the fundamentals of the game via "scripted" events on the cards.
- An amazing museum-quality maquette of Mini Tyrael, *Diablo III*'s Archangel of Justice. It's a limited-edition figure, designed by the Blizzard cinematics

team in conjunction with Sideshow Collectibles.

- A *Diablo III* themed Authenticator for account security. If you've not seen an Authenticator, it's a small device that you register with your Battle.net account. When you log in to a Battle.net game, it asks for a code, which you get by pressing a button on the Authenticator.
- A MEGA Bloks (think *LEGO*) sample of a small poseable Thrall figurine, complete with little hammer and shaman beads, as an example of what they're thinking of doing with their upcoming *World of Warcraft* themed block sets. **NAG**

Miktar



BLIZZCON CONTESTS

BlizzCon wouldn't be complete without the various contests for best costume, best dance (themed after the *World of Warcraft* races), fan art, song and fan-made videos. The costumes were amazing this year, with the winner being particularly inspired. We've included links to YouTube for dance, song and video winners. Be sure to check them out.

COSTUME CONTEST

First place: 1
Avery Faith,
"StarCraft II Adjutant"

Second place:
Christopher White,
"Paladin with Ashbringer"

Third place:
Justin Floyd,
"Deathwing"

DANCE CONTEST

Winner: Robert McNeill, "The dwarf male dance"
<http://bit.ly/tRs0xC>

FAN ART CONTEST

First place: 2
Chaoyuan Xu,
"Diablo III"

Second place: 3
Sang Han,
"Shades of Azeroth"

Third place: 4
Toby Lewin,
"Tyrael Versus Hell"

SONG CONTEST

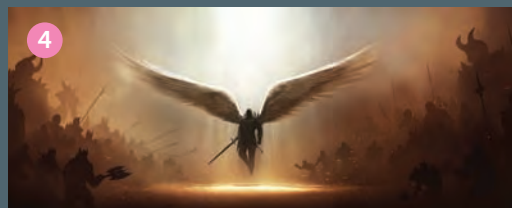
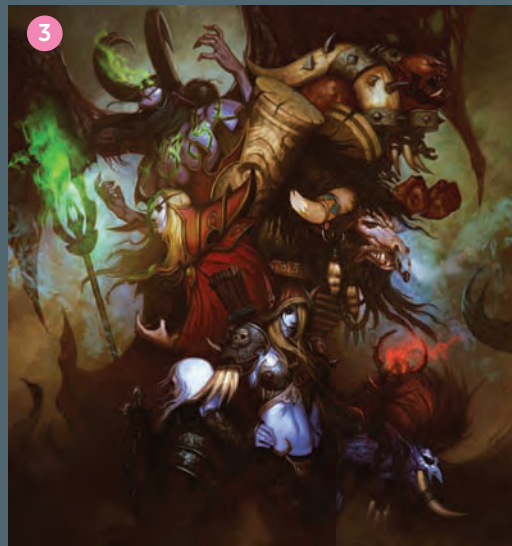
Winner:
Ken Ashcorp, "PvP"
<http://bit.ly/uiUlsZ>

STARCRRAFT II FAN VIDEO

Winner: Jose Jacas,
"Valencia Invasion"
<http://bit.ly/sOvdno>

WORLD OF WARCRAFT FAN VIDEO

Winner:
Melvenor, "Warcraft II Unofficial Trailer"
<http://bit.ly/vuTcWZ>



A character in a white and red hooded robe, likely an Assassin, holding a dagger. The character is wearing a white hooded robe with a red lining and a silver breastplate. The background is white with a faint hexagonal pattern.

INTERVIEW

An hour in UbiWorkshop



Recently I got to visit the UbiWorkshop in Montreal where I met three important people running the department: **Julien Cuny** ¹ (Transmedia Development Director), **Christophe Grandjean** ² (UbiWorkshop Product Manager) and **Louis-Pierre Pharand** ³ (Transmedia Producer).

UbiWorkshop is a separate branch of Ubisoft that handles all intellectual property transmedia development. In other words, they're responsible for the *Assassin's Creed* comics, short films, animations and merchandise. Ever wondered where things like the *Assassin's Creed: Embers* short film comes from? UbiWorkshop, that's where.

I arrived wanting to talk all things *Assassin's Creed*, from animated movies to the amazing *Assassin's Creed Encyclopaedia*. Luckily the team at UbiWorkshop were more than willing to oblige.

NAG: How was the world premier of *Assassin's Creed: Embers*? What was the general feedback?

LP: It went really well! Each time we develop a narrative product within UbiWorkshop it needs to be a standalone project. Even if anyone doesn't know the universe, they need to have a great experience. *Embers* is ten years after *Revelations*; it's a part of Ezio's life that you cannot have in the game. Ezio has children, and as soon as an Assassin has children, there's a DNA transfer so technically Desmond doesn't have access to those memories. So that part of Ezio's life cannot be told in the game, it's impossible. That's why we pitched to the *Assassin's Creed* team that you have three games about a great Assassin but you cannot have the epilogue of his life. So we wanted to tell that part of Ezio's story, which we believe is crucial to have some sort of closure with the character.

NAG: So then you pretty much had the last say with Ezio's story. What was that like?

LP: We always go to the *Assassin's Creed* team with ideas. So for us it was to come up with a solution

that fits within the universe. So we had, in some sort of way, great power but it was not done only on our side; we worked with them to make sure everything fits. Actually the script writer for *Embers* is the script writer for *Revelations*. For someone who doesn't know the universe, they'll watch it and they'll see something – the fan will see something else and understand the subtleties that are there. We're planting seeds with all the cross-references and narrative projects that we're doing, so maybe those seeds will grow into something else entirely.

JC: By the way the encyclopaedia is completely up to date with *Embers*, and we are introducing a new Assassin in *Embers*, and you can actually find the page about that Assassin in the encyclopaedia.

NAG: Ezio has to be one of the most loved characters in the *Assassin's Creed* brand. Are people at Ubisoft sad to see him go?

LP: When you're working on something and "it" happens (I'll just call it "it"), you know, the director, myself and the writer... we always got chills. It's going to affect people, but you know what? I see it as a privilege for us to have that opportunity because we are displaying that we are mature, and that the quality of the narrative and universe created is special. Most companies would never have allowed this to happen. Most would have said "let's do a fourth, a fifth, a sixth with Ezio!" Name me one franchise in the gaming industry that lets its hero go away and accepts it as part of the story. It's not as if our games aren't selling and so we need to change the hero; it made sense narratively to close Ezio's chapter. So long as it's done in a noble way that the character deserves.

JC: It will have an emotional effect on people. But if you remember, in *Assassin's Creed II* at the beginning, you actually see the birth of Ezio. You play him as a baby. I guess this is the first time where you actually play as a character from his birth all the way to his last epilogue. With each game averaging twenty hours, you've spent

sixty hours with this character. So for us, it's not neutral for us to... say goodbye.

NAG: At what point in the *Assassin's Creed* franchise's history did it become apparent that an entire encyclopaedia was needed to collect the series' canon?

JC: In *Assassin's Creed II* there was a glyph with a picture of a Russian Tsar with a staff, and at that point in *Assassin's Creed II* the player would be making connections with the staff that Ezio had. The funny thing is that the whole story for the comic *Assassin's Creed: The Fall* started from that glyph. The creators of the comic book came back and said that they were interested in setting the comic during the Russian Revolution. They looked online for the history of these real characters and they started to have good ideas. But the point is we started making connections from all sorts of moments in games and comics and more. So we decided that we really needed a book or a bible where we could start to understand how things worked together, because if we didn't do that then we were going to make mistakes. And if we do a mistake, the fans will find it in five minutes!

NAG: How long did the whole production period take for the *Assassin's Creed Encyclopaedia*?

JC: Three months! But when we started we actually had no idea how to develop an encyclopaedia. Nobody had ever worked on one and suddenly we realised we had hundreds of questions. But we took the decision to stay fully in narrative, which means there are no mentions of any games, novels, whatever – it's fully within universe. The whole thing comes in a static bag like you'd put your computer cards in, so it looks like the whole thing has been made by Abstergo.

NAG: Is there an aspect of the encyclopaedia that the team at UbiWorkshop is particularly proud of?

LP: Personally the fact that it's fully in narrative and there's no 3D imagery at all; it's all concept art created by artists. **NAG**

Miklós Szecsei



“Despite Ezio’s old age, he still has all of his skills and equipment”



Assassin’s Creed: Revelations

You can SO teach an old dog new tricks



[details]

Release Date:
15 November 2011
Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3
Genre:
Third-person action
Developer:
Ubisoft Montreal
Website:
www.assassinscreed.ubi.com
Publisher:
Ubisoft

[trivia]

// Den Defence is an addition to Revelations. In this tower defence sequence it's up to Ezio to deploy assassin troops on rooftops overlooking a Templar raid. You spend Morale points to deploy troops, but rooftops need to have leaders deployed before you can add offensive troops.

Ezio is old and, sadly, this is our last adventure with the assassin from Firenze. This third outing commences right where *Brotherhood* left off [spoilers ahead]: present day protagonist Desmond Miles is in a coma and trapped inside the Animus. The enigmatic Subject 16 suffered the same fate but managed to find refuge in the “guts of the Animus”, which manifests itself as an island. With a little prompting from Subject 16, Desmond uses a Sync Nexus in order to see all the memories his two ancestors have. In doing so, the Animus will be able to defragment Desmond’s psyche from that of Ezio’s and Altair’s, and return him to consciousness.

Ezio’s memories start in Masyaf. He has followed the trail of Altair back to the ancient home of the Assassins to find a hidden armoury that holds an artefact powerful enough to end the Assassin-Templar war. Unfortunately the Templars are already there and Ezio is forced to travel to Istanbul in search of the lost Masyaf armoury keys. With the help of the local assassins and their leader Yusuf Tazim, Ezio begins the hunt for Altair’s keys while ensuring he upsets the local Byzantine and Templar presence in the city.

Despite Ezio’s old age, he still has all of his skills and equipment. The good news is that they’re all available right from the start so any further unlocks will be for new abilities and equipment. The most notable additions to Ezio’s abilities are the hook blade and bomb crafting.

The hook blade replaces Ezio’s



second hidden blade with a razor edged, extendable hook that allows him to use the city’s zip-lines. Because the hook blade can extend, Ezio is able to reach higher hand-holds when free-climbing as well as jump wider gaps. What’s more, hanging lanterns can now be used to slingshot Ezio even further, meaning you can traverse ridiculously long gaps. This makes getting around the expansive Istanbul extremely fast and fluid. The *Assassin’s Creed* franchise has always prided itself on fluid movement, but they’ve significantly improved on their system.

Bombs have seen an overhaul. You’ll be looting bodies, chests and bomb stashes throughout the game, all of which will provide a variety of the three ingredient types required to construct bombs: casings, gunpowder and

effects. You can use any combinations to develop custom bombs, but you need at least one ingredient from each of those three categories. Casings explode on impact, proximity or after a few bounces. Gunpowder dictates the size of the explosion. Effects are varied, but there are some wonderful ones such as Lamb’s Blood, which soaks victims with blood. Thinking that they’ve been wounded by the blast they’ll begin to panic, and panicking enemies are much easier to silence.

After spending six hours with *Revelations* I can say that it is, without a doubt, looking fantastic. Ubisoft has added enough new content to ensure that this game does not feel like DLC, but rather a fully-fledged AAA title.

NAG
Mikit0707



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



CNEF South Africa

Release Date:
2013
Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3
Genre:
First-person shooter
Developer:
Ubisoft Montreal
Website:
www.rainbow6.ubi.com
Publisher:
Ubisoft



THE ENEMY COMES FROM WITHIN

A news report flashes images of New York on the flatscreen TV that sits directly in our field of view. The presenter continually makes mention of a terrorist organisation known as the "True Patriots". Picking up the tablet sitting on top of the side table, we scroll through a list of articles that all discuss the "True Patriots". Across the room, sunlight slides through the window, illuminating a Christmas tree that stands on the polished wooden floorboards. It's at that moment that our first-person view focuses on a woman walking towards us; she's holding a cupcake with a single lit candle. It's our birthday. She smiles coyly and whispers that the baby is asleep. We're prompted to press a button to kiss our wife. Ubisoft wants to make us connect with this woman and the man that we control; they

want us to care about what we as players are intruding upon. It all seems a little contrived on the surface, but something that's playing a part in the scene is having the desired effect. Perhaps it's the intimate moment coupled with the tender music that's doing it? It's definitely a contrast to the anarchy that's being described on the TV in the background. Before it can be pinpointed however, the doorbell rings and our wife instinctively moves towards the front door. Without warning, a group of men bursts into the living room and our wife is hit to the floor. Our view lurches towards her assailants, enraged voices filling the scene – somewhere in the house, the baby starts to scream. It's not long until we're knocked out and the scene dissolves.

Wires and explosives are the first things that creep hazily into our view; they're strapped to our chest. In front of us, our wife is crumpled on the floor, bound and gagged, blood pouring from her face, her eyes wild with terror. The assailants' leader tells us that in order for our wife and child to live, we're to accompany the men to Times Square where we will have to detonate the suicide vest they've padlocked to us. With script-perfect timing the baby's cries grow louder while our wife tries desperately to scream her protest through her bloodstained gag. This is how we're introduced to Ubisoft's revamped *Rainbow Six* franchise.

A HUMANISED STORY

From the onset, the game's Creative Director David Sears admitted that prior *Rainbow Six* games had been lacking in memorable characters and plotlines. While the series' gameplay proved undeniably popular, Sears believes that very few people would be able to recount the events of previous instalments. It is for this reason that Ubisoft have ensured they have a talented group of writers on board; their intent is to make *Rainbow 6: Patriots* a tactical shooter set against the backdrop of an impressive story. The goal is to have a story populated with believable characters that we as players can connect with. According to Sears, the team working on *Patriots* has aimed to "achieve true human performances for the first time ever in *Rainbow Six*... everyone in the game is important; no one just exists to be cannon fodder; no one exists just to be shot."

Ubisoft Montreal is deliberately moving away from the traditional depictions of terrorists. Gone are the Islamist extremists and terrorist organisations based on religion. In their place are the True Patriots – an American-born terrorist organisation. "Terrorism is not about taking hostages and hijacking aeroplanes anymore," according to Sears, "terrorism is not necessarily about planting bombs. Terrorism, the new terrorism, is all about sending a message of 'we just don't like you.'"

Drawing on the contemporary American political scene, which has exhibited growing anti-government protests and dissatisfaction with the powers of corporations and banks, the True Patriots are made up of everyday American civilians. They're a militant terrorist organisation led by the charismatic Jonah Tredway, who is a man well aware that his actions and leadership are merely laying the foundations for the eventual toppling of the US government. He is the most dangerous of terrorists; one who comes from within the very country he is fighting against and one who is willing to die a martyr. To bolster his violent terrorist actions, Tredway has proof of government cover-ups, which he plans to disseminate at a critical moment to achieve

"Creative Director David Sears admitted that prior *Rainbow Six* games had been lacking in memorable characters and plotlines."

// One of the buzz words that kept coming up for *Rainbow 6: Patriots* was Systemic AI. This means that none of the actions that NPC characters undertake will be scripted; they'll react to your actions as you'd expect.



maximum political fallout for those in office. The ranks of the True Patriots are swelled by paramilitary groups and war veterans from Afghanistan who feel forgotten and disenfranchised by the country they fought for. They are made up of fathers, mothers and angry Americans who no longer feel represented by the very people they put in power. The True Patriots harbour resentment and distrust towards the American government, and they aim to ensure that it falls through violence and acts of domestic terrorism.

WELCOME TO THE TEAM

The single-player campaign features three acts spread across multiple points of view. While this is a *Rainbow Six* game, and as such the majority will be played from the perspective of a Rainbow 6 recruit, you'll also get to experience portions of the plot from the perspective of civilians, paramedics and even the terrorists. This obviously gives Ubisoft freedom with which to engage the story and gameplay mechanics. When playing as a civilian, you might be caught in the crossfire between Rainbow 6 and the True Patriots. What if a terrorist gets shot in front of you? Do you pick up his gun to defend yourself? In doing so, will this mark you as another terrorist, thereby painting a target on your head for Rainbow 6 to shoot at? After all, the True Patriots are civilians themselves so how would Rainbow tell the difference?

Looking back to the aforementioned scene, you'd take control of that specific, explosive carrying civilian and guide him along the Brooklyn Bridge towards Times Square. You'll have to keep a finger on the controller's right trigger to ensure he doesn't release the remote detonator. Naturally, the van that the True Patriots are using to transport your civilian character in is attacked while on the bridge, so you'll have to follow what's left of the terrorist group as you move from cover to cover, dodging NYPD gunfire and sniper fire from Rainbow 6 Echo Team. At that point, the perspective will switch to your Rainbow 6 recruit's and the mission will continue from his perspective. This all happens seamlessly during gameplay and triggers at certain scripted moments.

While playing as a Rainbow 6 operative, you'll take on the role of Mark Barlow, the new leader of Echo Team. You'll have two squad mates underneath you, but Ubisoft didn't divulge any further information about them. What they did say is that your two squad mates will be fully fleshed characters with personality.

One of the more senior Rainbow 6 operatives is a former Navy SEAL called James Wolfe. He is the direct opposition to the True Patriots' leader, Jonah Tredway. Wolfe is willing to do anything to stop Tredway, including taking numerous ethical shortcuts. While playing as Mark, it'll be up to you as the player to make moral decisions and navigate a pathway of dubious ethical choices. Do you keep ethically vigilant and in doing so conflict with Wolfe's "at any cost" mentality, or do you accept that to save hundreds you might need to allow collateral damage? Killing hostages or civilians no longer results in mission failure, so you're given a little more freedom to approach situations from all angles. For the first time in a *Rainbow Six* game, saving everybody is not an option. For example, once you take control of Barlow on the Brooklyn Bridge, your objective is to stop the advancement of the True Patriots group and the civilian strapped with explosives. Mark and the rest of Echo Team sit perched on top of one of the arches of the bridge, providing sniper fire



“With script-perfect timing the baby’s cries grow louder while our wife tries desperately to scream her protest through her bloodstained gag. This is how we’re introduced to Ubisoft’s revamped Rainbow Six franchise.”





for the rest of Rainbow 6 on the street below. Shooting the advancing civilian is an option, but then he'll drop the remote and detonate on the bridge killing hundreds of innocent people still trapped in their cars or fleeing the scene. Your second problem is that NYPD units are busy firing on the True Patriots as well as the civilian hostage. One option is to incapacitate the police through non-lethal takedowns, but shooting cops isn't exactly taking the moral high ground, is it? These sorts of options will be frequent throughout the single-player campaign.

Perhaps the most extreme instance of this occurred at the end of the Brooklyn Bridge live demonstration. After finally reaching the civilian with the suicide vest, a countdown timer began ticking away on the explosives. As Mark you'll have seconds to decide what to do. Wolfe is screaming at you to throw the terrified civilian over the side of the bridge; other Rainbow 6 members are uncertain they'll be able to remove the vest. In this early build of the game there was no option other than to tip the civilian over the edge, but the Lead Game Designer for single-player confirmed that they are working on an option B.

THESE ARE YOUR TOYS

Squad-based tactics, breaching and rappelling have always been central to *Rainbow Six* games. That hasn't changed, but the mechanics have been improved. For many, the mere mention of "squad-based tactical shooter" is enough to send them running, but Ubisoft has kept that in mind and developed a system they're calling "One Button Tactics".

The OBT system is based on contextual commands. Placing your aiming reticule over an object and pressing the tactics button will send your squad to perform an appropriate action based on the situation you're in. If you're in stealth or in combat, their actions will change to fit the context. In this way you'll be able to tell them which target to fire on, which door to breach or where to take cover, all with a single button press. On the bottom of the screen you'll be notified what type of order your squad has understood. Additionally, they'll provide you with audible feedback like "moving to car for cover".

For the ardent *Rainbow Six* fans the option to control absolutely every movement of your squad is still in *Patriots*. Holding down the tactics button brings up a radial menu of squad commands. This is where *Rainbow Six* veterans will begin to feel at home. With the extended orders menu you'll be free to string together entire sequences of instructions so that you can literally choreograph sections of missions. The list of orders has been dramatically increased since previous games, so you'll have numerous options when approaching situations.

A further enhancement to the series is something Ubisoft Montreal has affectionately dubbed "Rappel 2.5". Inspired by what South Korean Special Forces units are doing in the real world, in *Rainbow 6: Patriots* your rappelling will border on acrobatics. Looking back to the Brooklyn Bridge demonstration one last time, once Echo Team is given the order to come back down to street level, it gave us a chance to see the new rappelling in action. The team literally jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge supporting arch and ran down the vertical surface face first. This allowed them to fire on True Patriot forces directly below them.

When it comes to breaching rooms in the *Rainbow Six* games, the snake cam was a standard go-to item. This has been removed from *Patriots* and the Rainbow 6 team has been





upgraded to Augmented Reality Vision. This is a kind of infrared mode that allows you to see through walls and identify concealed weapons on targets. It also comes equipped with heart-rate monitors so you can detect hostages by looking for elevated heartbeats. This vision mode will be power-driven meaning that you cannot run around with it permanently switched on.

MULTIPLAYER

For a long time, the *Rainbow Six: Vegas* series was the leader in online multiplayer. Ubisoft Montreal is aware that they ceded the crown to competitors, but they're adamant to get it back with *Rainbow 6: Patriots*.

There's a tremendous focus on co-operative team dynamics and communication in the multiplayer modes. You're encouraged from the start to develop a team amongst your online friends and live out the *Rainbow Six* fantasy. One of the key ways Ubisoft is doing this is in the addition of the Sand Table and squad HQ. Your HQ is your home in the online world of *Rainbow Six*. Here you're free to form parties, upgrade and modify the appearance of your persistent character, or develop plans for your next match.

Planning is done via the Sand Table: a surface with a projected holographic image of the particular multiplayer map you wish to plan for. With your online squad mates gathered around the table, you're free to navigate any multiplayer level. The navigation handles just like an ordinary game, except there are no enemies and the level will resemble the AR Vision mode. While in this mode you can switch camera angles and place a number of markers and custom notes anywhere you see fit. For example: if you know that a particular stairwell is a good choke point for enemies, you could place an "Enemy" marker and annotate it with a custom message for your squad. You can also place numerous waypoints and string them together. Tags for "Objective", "Snipe", "Protect" and "Target" are a few that Ubisoft showed off during their presentation.

Naturally you can save plans for each map. Then, prior to jumping into a multiplayer match, you can pick the particular game plan you and your squad wish to use. Once the match starts, each squad member will have the various tags, markers and waypoints superimposed over the level. As a team leader, you'll also have an easy means of communicating your orders to everyone else in the squad because everyone will have a frame of reference for orders. Teamwork is rewarded in multiplayer games. You can spot and "tag" enemies for your team mates, which will result in that enemy becoming outlined in red and visible through walls. Each team member can see team mates via a small, on-screen radar that even shows their field of vision cones. You'll know when your friends are under fire because their icon will change to orange. The more you work together as a team, the faster a squad metre fills. Once the squad metre is full, the team leader can activate a power-up (such as increased rate of fire or higher damage) that benefits the entire team.

Tom Clancy's Rainbow 6: Patriots is still very early in production, but what was shown is looking promising. The greatest change is undoubtedly the new focus on characters and storyline. If Ubisoft can maintain its vision for the remaining development time, then we're in for something special. A first-person shooter with the depth and tactics of the *Rainbow Six* franchise, coupled with an engaging and refreshing story, should be a winning combination in anyone's book.

NAG
Mikit0707

"He is the most dangerous of terrorists; one who comes from within the very country he is fighting against and one who is willing to die a martyr."



// It might interest you to know that the engine powering *Rainbow 6: Patriots* is Ubisoft's own Anvil engine. Yep, the same one that powers the *Assassin's Creed* games, making this the first time the engine will be used for an FPS.



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intel inside™

CORE™ I7

Visibly
Smart

★★★★★
Processor Rating

The reviewers

Question: If money was no object what is your ultimate gaming gift to yourself for the holiday season?

RedTide



I'd buy a gaming magazine so I can get free stuff before everyone else. Oh, hang on I already have. LOL.

Miktar



An entirely new gaming PC and a move to the West Coast.

Azimuth



The Quest for Glory, Space Quest, and King's Quest series remade in HD.

Mikit0707



I'd buy Relic, and whoever owns the rights to the *Dune* RTS franchise. Then I'd whip the Relic team all day long until they create another *Dune* RTS game. Mwuhaha!

GeometriX



The 2012 Jeep Wrangler Call of Duty: MW3 Edition. <http://www.jeep.com/en/calloffduty/>

Barkskin



I'd pay for id to create a real, non-bullsh*t competitive multiplayer mode for *Rage*. When one of the original founders of your company coins the word "deathmatch", you include it in all your games. Seriously.

Ramjet



It would involve time travel... all the *Assassin's Creed* Collector's Editions.

SAVAGE



Blow up dolls of Lara Croft and Nathan Drake so I can make them make out.

ShockG



An eight-lane ten-pin bowling alley in my house, next to the arcade, oh and one of those air hockey tables.

Anatomy of a review

A quick guide to the NAG reviews section

/1/ Totally interesting stuff: Developer, publisher, platform, random junk and more. The number of players listed under multiplayer is the maximum number you can have in a game at one time. Local means "couch", not LAN.

/2/ Obligatory words (i.e. a review): This is the stuff you probably won't read before ogling the shiny pictures, glancing at the score and then flipping the page. We don't blame you – word-reading is hard.

/3/ Screenshots: These are the pretty pictures you'll probably stare at before peeking at the score, ignoring the wonderful review and then flipping the page. You should probably ask your mom to make your sandwiches too. Just to be on the safe side. You might cut yourself.

/4/ Captions: Funny. Informative. Touching. The captions are usually none of these things. Except maybe touching, when we put some innuendo in there.

Look@Items from@Items

Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds

An amazing dog saves the universe. Wof!

1 **Details:** Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds is a crossover fighting game developed by Capcom. It is the third game in the Marvel vs. Capcom series, following Marvel vs. Capcom 2: New Age of Heroes and Marvel vs. Capcom: Infinite. The game features a roster of characters from both the Marvel and Capcom universes, including Iron Man, Wolverine, Ryu, and Chun-Li. It is set in a post-apocalyptic world where the two universes have merged.

2 **Gameplay:** The game features a unique "assist" system where characters from one universe can help out characters from the other. This adds a layer of strategy and teamwork to the fighting. The game also features a "charge" system where characters can build up special moves that are more powerful than their standard attacks.

3 **Characters:** The game features a large roster of characters, including Iron Man, Wolverine, Ryu, Chun-Li, and many others. Each character has their own unique moveset and playstyle, making the game highly replayable.

4 **Story:** The game features a story that is a mix of humor and action. It follows the adventures of Iron Man and Wolverine as they team up with the Capcom fighters to save the world from a powerful villain.

5 **Score:** The game has received high praise from critics and fans alike. It is considered one of the best crossover fighting games ever made. The game has a score of 90 on the NAG scale.

6 **Score:** 90

7 **Review:** Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds is a fantastic crossover fighting game. It features a great roster of characters, a unique assist system, and a fun story. It is a must-play for anyone who loves fighting games.

/5/ Game name: The most reading you'll do will likely happen in this bit right here.

/6/ Award: Comes in three delicious flavours. See below for maximum info.

/7/ Those things with extra info: These things have extra info.

THE AWARDS

Editor's Choice: If a game gets this award, you know it's more than just good. It means it pulled the editor away from *Call of Duty* for long enough to actually play another game – and we can't think of anything more remarkable than that.

Must Play: It means exactly what it says: you must play this game. Beg your parents for cash, dole out sexual favours, etc. – fight past the pain and do whatever it takes to get your sweaty paw on it. You'll thank us for it later.

Pony: You know how everyone wants a pony? Yeah, that's not the case here and we're not just being mean. We're trying to protect you from the horror of being punched in the nether regions by thoroughly rubbish games.



THE SCORE BOX

/1/ Plus: These are the great things that make us happy.

/2/ Minus: These are the rubbish things that make us sad.

/3/ Bottom line: The waffle stops here. Hundreds of words distilled into a tiny bit of text that can either damn a game to the depths or shower it with praise.

/4/ The Score: It's a number out of 100. It lets you make an informed decision as to whether or not you should spend money on this game. This isn't rocket science, people.

1 / PLUS / Very detailed / Enthralling setting / Amazing graphics
2 / MINUS / Not enough detail / Boring setting / Rubbish graphics

3

4

69

BOTTOM LINE GOES HERE, KEEP IT UNDER 15 WORDS, 15 WOULD BE IDEAL. THANKS.

QUICK HITS

Deus Ex: The Missing Link

Have you played *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* to completion? Did you love it like a cyborg loves a can of WD-40? Do you long to play more *Deus Ex*, with more augmentations, weapons, enemy types and *stuff*? If that's the case then you're out of luck, because *The Missing Link* is essentially just *Human Revolution* again, only smaller, and unlike, say, replaying the game, this will cost you additional money.

This standalone DLC pack includes about four hours of additional gameplay that takes place between Jensen stowing away in a cargo container and waking up in Singapore. None of this context matters, however, because Jensen loses his augmentations and items and is forced to unlock them all again, find the same weapons, speak to people and figure out what's going on. Aside from a few interesting characters and a rather boring location made up mostly of corridors, there's not much new content here. While *The Missing Link* is filled with all the good stuff that you'd expect from *Deus Ex*, it feels like little more than a glorified demo of the game than additional content worth your R120.

// Zero gameplay changes and innovation make this only suited for those desperate for additional missions.

Dungeon Defenders

Having been delayed so often that we were beginning to wonder if it would ever actually release at all, *Dungeon Defenders* is finally available for your enjoyment. And enjoy it you will, provided you like the idea of a cooperative tower defence/action RPG that's strikingly colourful and delightfully cheerful in its excellent presentation.

You've got a choice of four hero classes, each with different specialties, abilities and towers that can be used. Erect your towers at strategic points around a variety of well-designed levels, then unleash waves of enemies to see how your planning holds up against their onslaught, while you personally direct your hero to help your towers with foes. It's cooperative for up to four players, and this is highly recommended, because it's a tough title to tackle solo. Assigning areas to each person, deciding on your distinct roles and having a good laugh with buddies is clearly what this game was designed for. As you play, your hero gains XP and levels up, allowing you to improve abilities. The equippable items you collect can also be improved, and you'll unlock new defenses as you go. It's packed with features and game modes, making it well worth the price.

// Best played with friends, this is charming, lighthearted fun.

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

Batman: Arkham City



95
94
94

Forza Motorsport 4



90
91
91

Dark Souls



90
89
89

FIFA 12



90
91
91

Rage



89
79
77

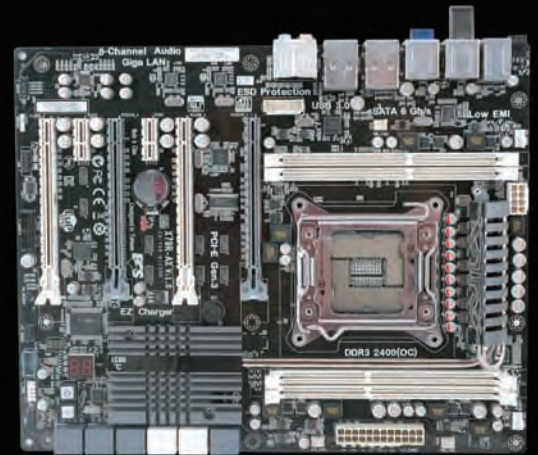
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3



88
89
89



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Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3

It's no picnic on this battlefield

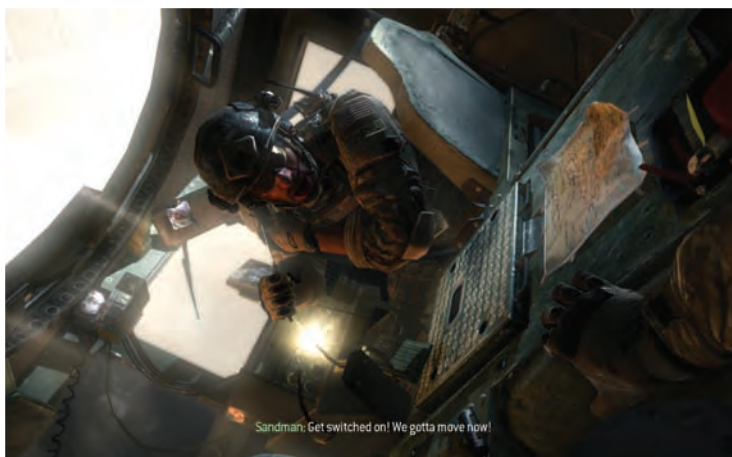
Wake up! Get out! Grab this ammo; now move, soldier! Shoot those Russians! The skyscraper is coming down; look out! Keep going; get behind cover! Don't shoot those friendlies! Watch out for that helicopter! Run inside the building! Take this grenade launcher! Switch weapons! Switch scopes! Stab him in the chest! Go go go!

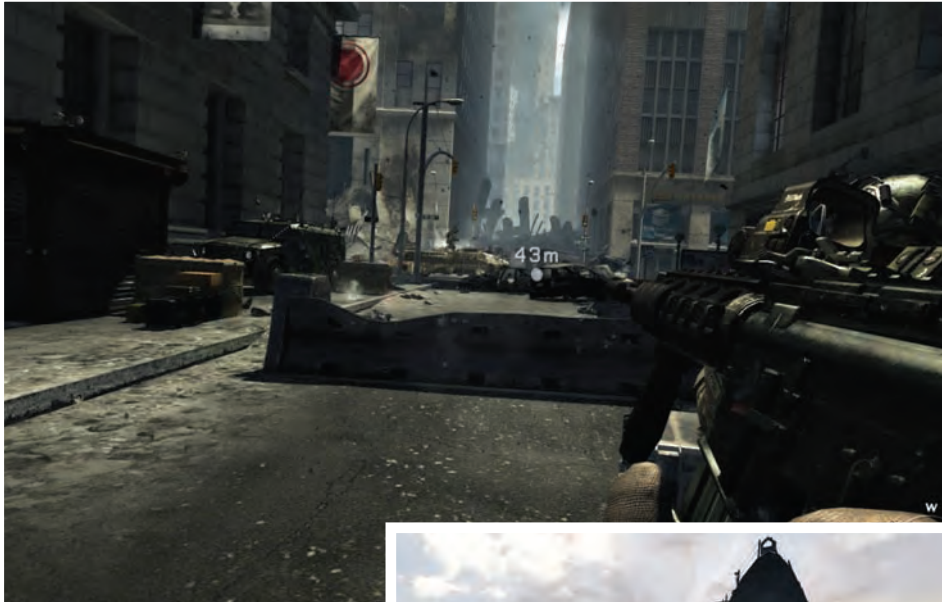
Ah, yes; *Call of Duty*. You know you're playing a game in the series because every mission feels like it could stand on its own as a blockbuster action film directed by Michael Bay and starring Mark Wahlberg and Jason Statham. It's the series' greatest strength: you know what you're going to get, and nothing has changed with this next iteration of the *Call of Duty* franchise. Everything is by the book: there are the helicopter minigun sequences; the AC-130 bombardment sequences, a few missions where you have to sneak past groups of apparently blind and deaf militants; a boat driving bit; and loads more. There's just enough innovation to keep you interested in what's going to happen next, but everything is driven by



[details]

Platforms: **360 / PC / PS3 / Wii**
 Genre: **First-person shooter**
 Age restriction: **18+**
 DRM: **Internet connection required [Steam]**
 Multiplayer: **Local: 2 players**
Online: 18 players
 Developers: **Infinity Ward**
Sledgehammer Games
Raven Software
Treyarch (Wii)
 Website: **www.callofduty.com**
 Publisher: **Activision**
 Distributor: **Megarom**





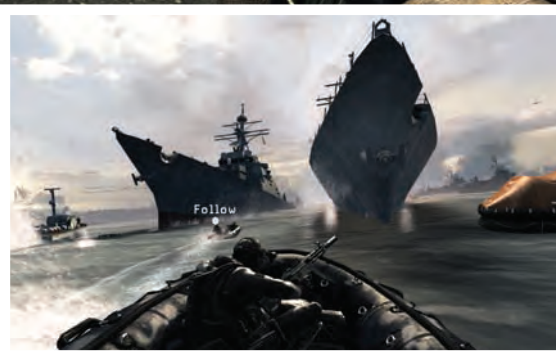
MULTIPLAYER SAVAGE'S OPINION

What can I say, I hate this game. I hate it for keeping me up 'til 3am, running around backlots and high-rises, shooting and knifing my way through 16 well thought-out, extremely fun maps. I hate it for putting me behind deadline when I should be doing the finishing touches on the magazine you hold in your hands (if there are any mistakes in this issue, you know why; just saying). I hate it for giving me so many options for weapons, perks, unlocks and ways to maim, kill and obliterate the opposing team. I hate that it steals my sleep and social life. Most of all, I hate how addicted I am to this iteration of *Modern Warfare* multiplayer. Curse you Infinity Ward, curse you!

immovable scripting that you might feel restricted if you try to step outside of the bounds of what's been designed for you to experience; this is especially noticeable in the stealth sequences which are made laughably easy by simply following orders – you can't really go wrong.

The antagonist from *MW2*, Vladimir Makarov, is back and continues his goal to spark World War 3 by manipulating key global powers and being a terrorist. Like previous *Modern Warfare* games, you'll play as a number of different soldiers, including a member of Delta Squad, the British SAS, and a newcomer to Task Force 141, as well as a few smaller roles. It will take six hours to complete the single player campaign, but one can't help but feel that it could have benefitted from a slight reduction in game time, as a number of sequence types are repeated.

Once you're done with the campaign, Spec Ops mode returns to offer you and (just one) friend 16 missions to complete. These include time trials and objective-based



operations, with most borrowing from or inspired by missions from the main campaign, with new objectives or played from a different perspective. Then there's Spec Ops Survival, *MW3*'s answer to Zombies. While it's a great horde defence game, and the persistent player level-based weapon and equipment unlocks is a nice feature over Zombies, the lack of support for four players tends to force the game to be a serious, goal-driven affair rather than the insane, hilarious and chaotic party atmosphere created in Zombies. It also lacks the history, the personality and the charm of its undead cousin, not to mention the tons of Easter eggs.

Finally, there's the multiplayer mode, which you'll see from looking around these pages is something that we're quite fond of. Similar to the single-player campaign, the multiplayer component features only a few new features; instead the developers decided to focus on improving existing gameplay mechanics and tweaking everything a little bit here and there. Most

MULTIPLAYER BARKSKIN'S OPINION

I'll be honest: I wasn't particularly excited about this year's *Call of Duty* release. A combination of many factors led to this totally uncharacteristic lack of enthusiasm for it: series (and genre) fatigue, wariness at the thought of what Infinity Ward might have become after that insane mass exodus and general cynicism thanks to the fun-killing demeanour of a sizable chunk of its player base made it difficult to care about it, really.

Having now played it, I feel a bit silly. Not because any of the above doesn't hold true, but because I'd forgotten why I loved *Call of Duty* in the first place – it's the *Quake III* of modern military shooters. It's immediate and intense, chaotic yet refined, infuriating as all hell but almost as exciting as getting a stripper for Christmas. And *Modern Warfare 3* is just that, all over again. Its multiplayer is a smoother (both in terms of performance and gameplay) ride than that of *Block Ops*, the map design is outstanding and the game's most noticeable changes, the Pointstrikes and Strike Packages, are a subtle yet sublime alteration to the long-running formula. An exercise in refinement rather than innovation (which is what everybody expected anyway); *Modern Warfare 3* successfully delivers exactly what *COD* fans want. It's fantastic.



// Players who like a good challenge should definitely play the campaign on hardened or veteran difficulty. Regular is pretty easy, and recruit is just silly.

MULTIPLAYER

REDTIDE'S OPINION

First up I must state for the record (left hand on my copy of *Skyrim*) that I don't usually touch the single-player parts of these *Call of Duty* games until much later the following year. Don't mock and laugh please, I get enough of this at the office already. This self-imposed stay isn't because I don't enjoy them or hate all the drama of what is modern cutting-edge game development (disclaimer: not cutting-edge in terms of innovation but rather raw technology and bling). The *Call of Duty* games are the equivalent of the *Transformer* movies – all flash without depth. So, I play the multiplayer component first because I enjoy killing people online. I'm sure the additional 'hits' that come from unlocking weapons and perks and ranks and then doing it all over again for prestige only deepens this addiction. These games are the modern equivalent of *Quake III* – fast and simple killing fun, the only things missing are space levels and jump pads.

This new one is very easy to like. It feels chunky; there's more plod and weight to everything; *Black Ops* always felt a little light on its feet and *MW3* has corrected this. The guns will look and feel all the same from previous games to most players, except of course people that buy magazines like *Guns & Ammo*. They feel good and sound amazing. Of course things like the new menu music and voice-over recordings and perks are all very new and exciting – Killstreaks are rewarded with some really exciting toys now. Something new is the levelling-up of both your rank and your weapon's 'rank', so the more you use a gun the more toys you can get for it. It's a bit like having your birthday on Xmas day and during some games you'll hear the levelling-up sound bite more than twice. This will make you a happy smiley face (see addiction bit above).

The one thing that sets this franchise apart from many other games is the maps; single concepts define them, like Village or Hardhat, making them easy to remember. You'll have favourites and then the ones you hate because you can never kill anything. They're very dirty and cluttered; garbage, bushes, smashed concrete and burning cars are everywhere – a camper's paradise in some places. They're also very tight with multiple ways to get around – expertly designed for speed and flow. You're often flanked and many encounters happen as a surprise in close proximity. The maps are easy to learn and oddly familiar. Village is like Favela; there's a Crash one, and so on. It seems the map makers have dipped into the last three games for inspiration, making things familiar but new and different. The overall effect is light and tight unlike the sprawl of *Battlefield 3* or the larger 'outside' areas in *MW2*. So all good then...? Yes, except *MW3* just doesn't push the franchise along hard enough like *MW2* did. *MW2* was a real punch in the gut, the maps and the guns, just the whole thing felt new and exciting – fresh and tasty. With *MW3*, Activision and the developers are playing it safe; understandable considering the very public administrative troubles of the developers – Infinity Ward. But this isn't even a negative in the scheme of things... I can guarantee you'll have a good time with this one. It's like putting on an old pair of army boots that have now been upgraded with a button that laces them up for you automatically. You know, like in *Back to the Future*.



importantly, they addressed the issue of Killstreak rewards, which are now called Pointstreak rewards. Now, players will gain points for combating air support and capturing objectives, making support roles much more viable. There are two new main game modes: Kill Confirmed is a great alternative to Team Deathmatch in that it actually requires teamwork, forcing players to collect the dog tags dropped by their fallen enemies in order to score points and preventing the enemies from doing the same; and Team Defence, which requires players to capture and hold a single flag for as long as possible, gaining points as they do so. Private games have

also been reworked to provide a few new modes which are highly customisable. This means that it won't be long before a standard is established by the pro gaming leagues to determine permitted classes, weapons, perks and Strike Packages (if any).

The *Call of Duty* series has come a long way, but there will be those who yearn for something new and different. If you're in the latter camp, then *MW3* won't do much more for you than it's done in the past, but fans of the series should enjoy this release's single-player campaign, but it's with the multiplayer component that this game truly shines.

NAG
GeometriX

/ PLUS / Exciting and action-packed campaign / Fantastic multiplayer
/ MINUS / Much of the same / Scripting is too heavy at times / Specs Ops is no Zombies

IT'S EVERYTHING YOU'D EXPECT FROM THE SEQUEL TO MODERN WARFARE 2.



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Battlefield 3

Da-dun-da da-dun-dun!

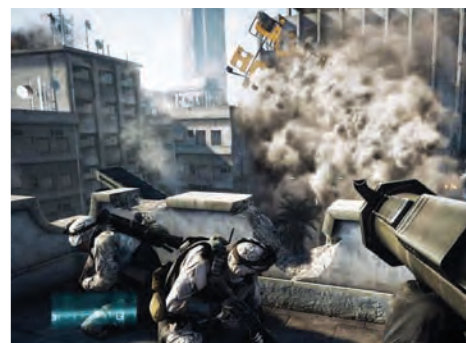
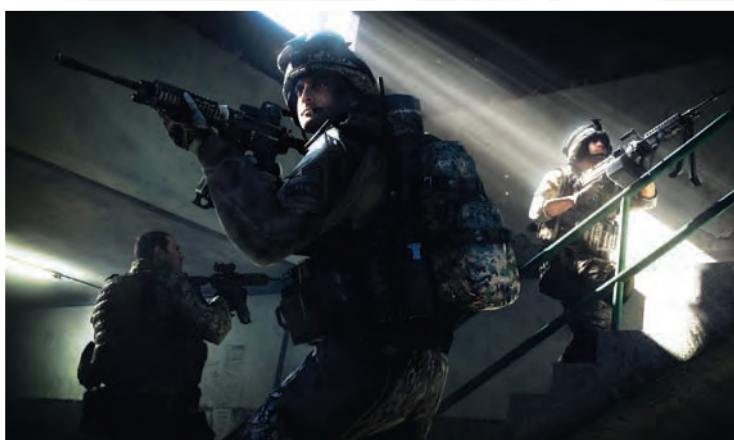
So! The Big Two are out in the wild. Both are first-person shooters, but, in multiplayer at least, that's where the similarities end. And, as you'll discover shortly, the multiplayer is really the only part of *Battlefield 3* that you should be concerned with. There's no other game out there that offers a multiplayer spectacle quite like this. This mad, beautiful thing that provides a different experience in each and every game you play. It's liquid euphoria, injected directly into your brain for every second you spend running, gunning, tanking and jetting your way through every intense moment, and its name is *Battlefield 3*.

First, we've got to get the boring bits out in the open, and they've all got to do with the game's single-player campaign. Maybe it's just because I've been spoiled by so many excellent non-military, non-tactical, non-realistic, all-mad FPSes this year and thus become jaded to this whole "terrorism and WMDs and this is the real world LOL" thing, but I'm fairly certain I'm not the only one who feels that *BF3*'s single-player portion does not need to exist. It's not bad by any means – it just is what it is. It's the same "I wanna be *COD*!" rubbish that everyone seems



[details]

Platforms: 360 / PC / PS3
Genre: First-person shooter
Age restriction: 16+
DRM: Internet connection required
[Origin / Battlelog]
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: 64 players
Developer: EA Digital Illusions CE
Website: www.battlefield.com/battlefield3
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Distributor: Electronic Arts South Africa



/1/ You're often joined by AI-controlled squadmates in the campaign. It's a pity that the enemy and friendly AI is mostly idiotic (especially noticeable after witnessing the incredible AI in *Rage*).

/2/ There are jets in the campaign, but you never get to fly them yourself.

so keen to paint their faces with these days, and it's just getting really old.

I won't even give a plot outline, because you already know what to expect: it involves terrorists and WMDs and real-world humdrum. I do, however, quite like the way that it's told, as memories recounted in a prolonged interrogation sequence. *Frostbite 2* obviously makes everything look and feel phenomenal, with eye-popping set pieces and deliciously powerful battlefield imagery everywhere you look. I do think the game would've benefitted from *Bad Company's* more playful single-player approach to military shooters, with its ultra-cool *Kelly's Heroes* approach to narrative, because at least that was engaging and somehow more meaningful than this. There are attempts at hooking you emotionally, but they come across as forced. I also don't get the need for all these scripted quick-time events. All that being said, understand that it's

really not as terrible as I make it seem. It's certainly gritty and well presented. But it's nothing special.

Now, the multiplayer – that's all kinds of special, and part of the reason why the single player seems so bland by comparison, sticking out like ringworm on otherwise perfect skin. It's more *Battlefield 2* than *Bad Company 2*, bringing back jets and upping the player limit (on PC) to 64, providing huge playgrounds eager to be obliterated as a result of all the fun you're having. I'm not exaggerating when I say that each and every game I've played since its release has shown me something different, allowed me to do something I'd not done before, left me with new tales to regale friends with. The maps are sprawling, elaborate things that take on a life of their own from the moment you hear that first tank shot ring out, as if that tank were the starter pistol being fired at the start of the most violent 100-metre dash you've



MULTIPLAYER

REDTIDE'S OPINION

EVERY GAME TELLS A STORY

For me, *Battlefield 3* was initially all about ticking check boxes. Can I put C4 on a jeep and drive it into a tank, leaping out at the last second to detonate? Yes. Can I jump into a jet and buzz across the map, bailing out over enemy occupied territory and capture the point? Yes. Can I just sit in a bush the whole game sniping anyone that walks past? Yes. Are there choppers and tanks and 64 players all online at the same time on impossibly huge maps? Yes. Are there a million different ways to kill enemy soldiers? Yes (well, 999,999 – give or take).

But first a little personal history (bear with me; it'll help detail my overall opinion based on playing style for you). My background with this series started with *Battlefield 1942*, moved to the sublime *Battlefield 2* (I played this one to death – no really) then onto the different and fun, but buggy and average *Battlefield 2142*. *Bad Company* was next, which I loved playing on the Xbox, but then hated everything about *Bad Company 2*.

Throughout all these games I've played the lone wolf role. I prefer sneaking around the map, capturing points behind enemy lines and disrupting the enemy however and wherever I can. Stuff like planting C4 on enemy jets and waiting until their wheels have barely lifted off the runway before setting off the explosion, or parking a Huey on a hilltop overlooking the enemy base and then sitting on the machine gun. I'm not really a team player, so my opinion on the multiplayer is based around this perspective.

Battlefield 3 is essentially *Battlefield 2* with fresh pants, and all the new ideas that feature in modern military shooters. It ticks all these boxes too and does so flawlessly. There's little point in listing all the different classes and weapons and so on. Just know that there are a lot of them and everything you do generates experience points. This experience then ranks you and your weapons up giving you things like new weapons, camouflage and new abilities for yourself, your weapons and

even the vehicles you drive or pilot.

There are a lot of awards, ribbons and accolades awarded in any given game. Just like those concerts put on by 8-year-olds, everyone wins an award – even the kid the teachers have put on the prison watch list.

Getting into these games is easy as the launcher interface is essentially a website. Although it must be said that Geoff in our office still can't get the game working on his home PC and Lauren had to switch browsers to get it working – didn't like Firefox it seems.

Unlike the *Call of Duty* games (in general), the multiplayer in *Battlefield 3* is spread out if you're playing Conquest or push and pull around a central objective if you're playing Rush. The maps are huge but also feature trimmed down versions for a smaller number of players. What is missing from *Battlefield 3* are the quirky physics that allowed C4-strapped, rocket-powered jeep jumps and launching snipers into the air by placing C4 next to them. You can still get in and out of aircraft mid-flight

but you can't ride on the wings of a jet. There is no commander mode so forget artillery bombardments, but then also no bossy types trying to order people around. Enemy bases are now off limits so spawn raping (unless you're in the sky) is not possible anymore. Overall it's a massive improvement on *Battlefield 2* – it has been six years since then so this goes without saying. There isn't anything wrong with the game; it innovates in all the right ways, ticks all the boxes and provides those looking for this kind of fight everything they could possibly hope for.

As for the inevitable better or worse than MW3 discussion – don't bother. This argument is pointless because the games are so completely different from each other that they only really have the genre in common. *MW3* is great for jumping in quick and killing the bad guys in a fast-paced environment, while *Battlefield 3* offers more scope to do as you please. Both are brilliant games and each night it's difficult deciding which one to play.





3/ A little C4 turns an ordinary Jeep into a high-speed tank killer.

4/ Enemy AC-130 above! No, wait... wrong game.



ever done, officially letting you know that the chaos has begun.

It's provided life by an engine that can only be described as astonishing, breathing life into an already lively game. With everything looking this good, and with sound so shockingly authentic that I'd not be surprised if my neighbours called the cops for fear of my safety, there's no other game that creates a wartime scenario quite like *BF3* can. It's loud and frenetic, with weapons that pack monstrous punch and vehicles that allow everyone to find their niche. There's simply no better simulation of a true, large-scale warzone than what's on offer here. The 64-player engagements are an entirely unique affair on their own, unpredictable beasts that relentlessly unleash incredible moments as jets constantly dogfight overhead, choppers coordinate strafing runs and lines of tanks barrel down hillsides looking for things to murder. It's primarily teamwork oriented and best played with a squad and voice chat, but there's still plenty of room for lone wolf-style shenanigans.

For all the awe and excitement, the finicky systems surrounding all this do remove some of its sheen. Origin (i.e.

Steam with EA's logo on it) breaks in odd ways sometimes (on numerous occasions I've magically inherited the usernames of people in my friends list, for example), and Battllog is incredibly broken for many of the people I've spoken to. Launching the game from a browser seems like such an obtuse alternative to a good old menu, but it does work (mostly), and I like all the stat-tracking stuff and weird social networking doohickies – because it's obvious that the only thing Facebook is missing is an extensive arsenal of deadly weaponry.

So, now you know. Possibly the best way for me to describe what makes *Battlefield 3* so special is to recommend that you just go buy it and see for yourself. This weird contention that's developed between it and *Call of Duty* will seem completely ludicrous to anyone with even a smidgeon of intelligence – they're explicitly different games, each the epitome of their chosen approach. You should be playing both if you want maximum happiness. As far as *BF3* goes: the single player is merely a decent distraction, while the multiplayer will undoubtedly leave you breathless. **NAG**

Barkskin

PLUS / Outstanding multiplayer / Jaw-dropping visuals and audio
MINUS / Single player falls flat / Battllog and Origin can be annoying
IGNORE THE SINGLE PLAYER, AND YOU'LL FIND A MULTIPLAYER GAME THAT'S PEERLESS IN ITS EXECUTION.



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Rage

Knee-Deep in the Dead

It took a while for the realisation that I was playing an id game to really set in. I'd emerged from my Ark dazed, confused and weaponless, when suddenly John Goodman appeared to save me from premature, mutant-induced doom. Even as I rode shotgun in Mr Goodman's (I should clarify – Goodman voices a character named Dan Hagar in *Rage*) awesome dune buggy, utterly mesmerised by the frenzied wobbling of the DOOM marine bobblehead mounted on the dashboard, my brain still refused to acknowledge that I'd just taken my first steps in the world of id Software's first original IP in well over a decade. I mean, id is credited with creating an entire gaming genre, setting the initial standard for what first-person shooters needed to be in order to claim the title of *DOOM* clone. I should've been celebrating, damn it. But I wasn't. I sat fixated on that bobblehead, not making the connection. The realisation came later; but when it did, it crash-landed on me like a frozen heap of plummeting Pinky Demon crap that'd been ejected from a plane mid-



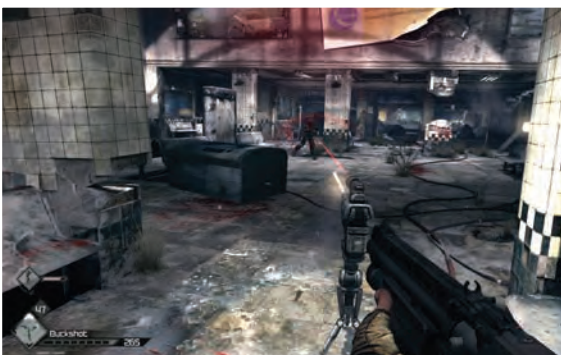
[details]

Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3
Genre:
First-person shooter
Age restriction:
18+
DRM:
Internet connection required [Steam]
Multiplayer:
Local: 2 players
Online: 4 players
Developer:
id Software
Website:
www.rage.com
Publisher:
Bethesda Softworks
Distributor:
Ster Kinekor Entertainment



flight. I'd whipped out my lowly pistol, aimed it at an enemy hurtling towards me, and eagerly pulled the trigger. The sound that rang out carried the game's intentions. That's when I knew I was playing an id game. And I immediately knew I was going to adore every moment of it.

On its surface, *Rage* might seem like a title that breaks new ground for id. In a way it is, yet somehow it's not. This is still old-school FPS action, but with a few contemporary twists thrown in. There's the open-world wasteland in which the game is set, complete with NPCs and mini games and side quests and exploratory opportunities and collectable doohickies. An inventory system manages all the ammo, weapons and assorted junk you find on your travels. A crafting system allows you to create unique items, weapons and ammo. You're given your very own vehicle early on, which can be upgraded (and outfitted with weapons) and used to enter various races in the towns you'll visit. Shopkeepers, quest givers and tertiary characters roam the streets of these towns, which you'll end up visiting



1/1 *Rage* ships with two multiplayer modes: Road Rage and Wasteland Legends. Road Rage pits up to four players against one another in vehicular combat, with the ability to customise vehicles using unlocked parts. It's definitely fun, but requires very little actual skill - immediately making it feel out of place in an id game. After all, these are the folks who gave us *Quake III*.

Wasteland Legends is much more engaging. It's a two-player cooperative mode, offering a collection of purpose-built missions and the chance to experience more of the excellent first-person scuffling. Even though the two modes are appreciated, it definitely feels odd to not have some form of competitive FPS action in a game with such awesome FPS mechanics, especially when it's got the id logo on it.

frequently to replenish supplies, take on more jobs and gather arbitrary info from townspeople. You'd be forgiven for reading all that and expecting a weird FPS/RPG/racing hybrid. Actually play the game, and you'll find that *Rage* is really just an incredibly solid shooter, with random bits of secondary, optional fluff draped all over it.

As a straight-up FPS, *Rage* excels. The weapons are brutally satisfying, the enemies are alarmingly intelligent and the levels in which jobs (i.e. quests/missions) take place are expertly designed (Jackal Canyon is a personal favourite). You end up with a massive choice of weaponry by the time you reach the end of the game, even though there are technically only eight weapons (not including your fists). That's because most of them have multiple ammo types that you can switch to on the fly, and while a lot of them merely increase damage output, the rest actually change the effect and purpose of the weapon entirely. Then there are the offensive gadgets (which can be crafted or bought), like wingsticks (which are now right up there with my favourite

FPS weapons of all time) and sentry bots that can be used against foes, not to mention a number of different consumables that imbue you with different bonuses. It allows for a lot of variety and choice in combat, and while you'll get by just fine in most scuffles using only your base weaponry on the lower difficulty levels, you'll need to use all the gadgets, weapons and ammo types at your disposal if you plan to tackle the higher settings.

There's so much to love about the action here. Your arsenal is monstrously gratifying, and the enemies themselves are endlessly entertaining in skirmishes. They're divided into a number of different factions, each with their own combat style, weaponry and challenge level. All of them have at least one thing in common though: they're governed by some of the best AI I've ever encountered. Enemies provide cover fire as their mates make a hasty retreat. Aim at one of them and they'll react to it by dodging or ducking behind cover, rather than simply waiting to be shot by you. Ranged enemies keep

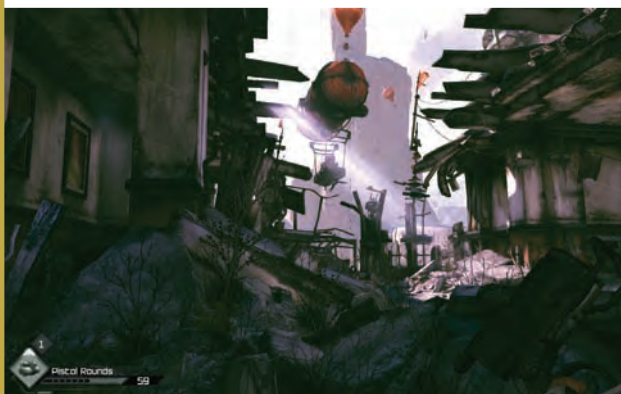
SECOND OPINION

So this is it: the legendary id Software's next big thing that you've been waiting for since *DOOM 3* may or may not have failed to wow you in 2004. A lot has changed at the id ranch since then: acquisition by Bethesda owners Zenimax Media and a move to natively release games on multiple platforms as the two biggest boat rockers. Owing to those, and many other smaller, changes, there's a lot that's different about *Rage* than the studio's previous titles. But, if you're a fan of the old-school with which id is so very firmly associated, thankfully much has stayed the same.

Rage manages to mix the old with the new: a classic corridor shooter is wrapped up with RPG elements, free-roaming bits and even a whole driving game. All of those elements would be nothing special on their own, but that id magic brings together every aspect of *Rage* that is only just different enough to the games that made id what they are to keep modern attention-deficit gamers hooked and bridge the gap between generations. It's not perfect by any means, and I was often left feeling that the extra bits could do with a few extra bits of their own, but at its heart, *Rage* is a solid shooter with some fluff on it that can be ignored or embraced as much or as little as you'd like. It's every bit an id classic as their genuine classics, and smacks of a mature development team that only narrowly misses the mark on a few occasions.

GeometriX

SCORE: 88



their distance, while melee opponents hastily close the gap, cleverly ducking, diving and weaving, often using various bits of the environment to change their movement patterns (launching themselves off a nearby desk, for example) and keep you guessing. It's naturally intense and challenging, and the wonderfully detailed animations make it look elegant as well. I especially appreciate the way enemies react to being shot, as if there's real weight to them rather than just being cardboard cut-outs that simply ragdoll their way to the ground when hit.

Everything else in the game is just gravy. I personally enjoyed the open-world antics between missions, wasting many hours just messing around in between jobs. However, their secondary nature does make them feel very lightweight compared to the outstanding first-person shooting. As an example, the vehicular portion of the game is extremely well polished,

but the racing, while it does offer a fun distraction, is far too easy and has no real impact. As with all id games, the story is simply there as an engine that drives the action, resulting in a narrative that is entirely forgettable, as are the characters within it. There was definite potential to make everything surrounding the FPS side of things far more meaningful, but honestly, if it meant that the action would've suffered for it, then I'd rather have it the way it is now.

I'd whine about the technical issues that the game launched with, but frankly, I'm out of space and they didn't bug me in the slightest anyway. Instead, know this: *Rage* will live and die by your expectations. If you're expecting anything more than fantastic first-person shooting with some supplementary, but superfluous flair, you'll be disappointed. It is what it is, and what it is is a damn fine shooter that's worthy of id's revered name.

**NAG
Barkskin**

/ **PLUS** / Varied, brutal gunplay / Brilliant animations / Excellent enemy AI
/ **MINUS** / Hollow narrative / Technical blunders

RAGE IS ONE OF THIS YEAR'S FINEST GAMES, AND ONE OF THE SLICKEST SHOOTERS EVER CREATED.

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Batman: Arkham City

Oonly youuuUUUUuu can make this woooOOOooorld seem riight

20 OCTOBER

Dear Batdiary,
Big day tomorrow!!! :D Me and some of my friends are holding a rally to protest Mayor Sharp's totally lame totalitarian police state here in Gotham City. Honestly, we've just about had enough of this. How am I supposed to maintain a successful secret identity as a crime-busting vigilante superhero if I can't even get myself a skinny latte and one of those yummy caramel wafer things on the go without a full-on interrogation for political dissidence? These spandex tights don't exactly go on quickly, you know, and besides, I have to work off those carbs quickly or they'll go straight to my thighs.

Oooh, I'd better get to the Batbed – I can hear Albert coming down the passage, and he'll be so mad if he finds me on the Batcomputer after bedtime, lol. xD Bye!!!

- Brucie

21 OCTOBER

Dear Batdiary,
I'm off to the rally, wish me luck!!! :D More later!

[Later]Sh*t. More later.

[Later]Okay, well. Okay. Um, I don't know where to start, lol. Okay, so basically, it turns out that nasty Mister Hugo



[details]

Platforms:

360 / PC / PS3

Genre:

Action adventure

Age restriction:

16+

DRM:

None

Multiplayer:

Local: None

Online: None

Developer:

Rocksteady Studios

Website:

www.

batmanarkhamcity.

com

Publisher:

Warner Bros.

Distributor:

Nu Metro Interactive



Strange hasn't forgotten I'm actually really Batman (Batnote to self: maybe reconsider that whole not-killing-people thing, it's really not working out in the long-term), and arranged with Mayor Sharp to have me arrested by his Tyger Security goons and sent to the Arkham City prison district on some flimsy pretext, and now they're apparently planning to launch some kind of something called Protocol 10 and I'm quite sure it's not going to be hugs and free pizza. D:

Oh, and Two-Face has Catwoman over at the old courthouse, and is going to execute her. Brb.

[Later]No time to explain, but OMG, WORST DAY EVER. Gotta go save the world again, bbiab.

- Brucie

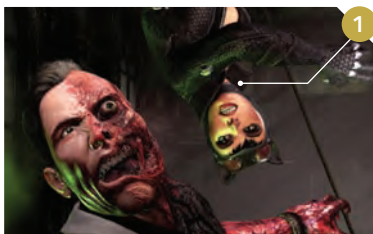
Then the Clown Prince of Crime; blood transfusions; Batarangs; Harley Quinn's accent; thugs; lurking; a clue!; assassins; payphones; gargoyles; SURPRISE BOSS; the old steel mill; sociopaths and serial killers; narcissistic delusions; DNA; SURPRISE BOSS (again); dying and reloading; ooh, another Riddler trophy; swoooooop; inverted takedowns; SURPRISE BOSS (again); megasharks; oh, it's suddenly all gone a bit BioShock; SURPRISE BOSS (again); SURPRISE BOSS

(again); M. Night Shyamalan's What A Twist but actually it is kind of clever; and seriously, who brings a machine gun to a Batfight, anyway (not necessarily in that order); before everything goes did-that-, that-, and-that-really-just-happen; roll credits; and that Platters song will never be the same again.

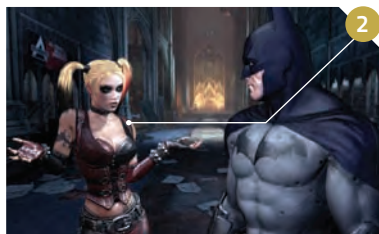
My one and only youuuUUUUuu...

And that's pretty much *Batman: Arkham City*, although I really did miss the Scarecrow this time. Which brings me conveniently around to the most instantly obvious question – is it better than *Arkham Asylum*? Mostly yes.

I say "mostly" because the game's main storyline definitely trips and falls a little short of its predecessor's, although it's hard to define quite why and how that is. The premise – Batman is [redacted] and must [redacted] before [redacted] or [redacted], and it's not going to be as easy as it sounds, maniacal laughter goes here – looks good enough as a series of major plot points on a design brief, but in virtual reality, it never quite manages to fill the big spaces in between with anything meaningful and instead comes off somewhat perfunctory, even contrived and otherwise incoherent at times. More than once, I found myself dropping in from an eave somewhere, wondering,



1



2

/1/ HELLO KITTY! New copies of the game ship out with codes for some extra, downloadable Catwoman missions that change the start and end of the game a bit, so that's nice.

/2/ Look, B-Man. I told ya. I don't date no men who wear their skivvies on the outside. Them's just this girl's rules, ya know. And the baws would be real unhappy about it, anyhow, what with ya being arch-enemies an' all. So stop followin' me around and SCRAM.



"Wait, what's the point of this again?", and not in a deep, existential crisis sort of way. Which is really rather a shame, as the game's conclusion is absolutely stunning, and that's in the very real, very punched-in-the-guts sense of the word.

The move from the walled confines of Arkham Asylum out onto the snow-swept streets, alleyways, and rooftops of Arkham City presents another problem – where the madhouse housed a finite number of inmates, it seems Mayor Sharp's megaprison has no such logistical restrictions. This means that pretty much everywhere you go, you're going to have to fight a bunch of goons to get there. Every time. Sure, it means you always have a ready, steady supply of XP, but it's also kind of a drag when you're jacked into Detective Mode and you're trying to locate the next blood spatter in a crime scene.

And that's another thing – for a game starring the World's Greatest Detective, there's just not very much detective work to do. How much this actually matters is going to vary from one player

to the next, but I think there's perhaps a bit too much emphasis on bashing heads together, and not always enough on being, you know, *Batman*.

These are, however, quite insignificant gripes in the grander scheme of things, and really, that's a grand scheme in a whole new, top level category of grand schemes. Honestly, just ignore what I said before, because I'm only trying to pretend I'm professional and objective.

Simply enough, *Batman: Arkham City* is a brilliant game. The setting and presentation are flawless, the voice acting is superb, the combat system is probably still the best example of how this stuff is done properly, and if you don't ask too many questions, the missions are immensely enjoyable. There's also so much to do – the campaign will clock up a substantial 10 hours or so on its own, before all the challenges, 400 Riddler puzzles, and side missions, and then doing it all over again on New Game Plus. Being Batman has never been this cool. **NAG**

Azimuth

/ PLUS / You're Batman / (See left)
/ MINUS / A bit repetitive in parts

GOOD, BETTER, BATS.

95

Dark Souls

Be gone from here, pernicious caitiff!

The *Dark Souls* advertising campaign revolves around a bunch of scenes showing the player failing, again and again. The "You Are Going To Die" tagline and motif may seem like straightforward hype highlighting how badass the game is; that it's terrifying, a great challenge, and that the game is daring you to be more badass than it is. The trope is not uncommon in videogame ads, but upon reflection, *Dark Souls* is taking a more subtle angle.

They're trying to gently reacclimatise the audience to the notion that they can't automatically win this game. That the game expects them to fail, in order to rise to the challenge and learn how to play the game better, to live a little longer next time. This is a profoundly different design ethic than almost any other mainstream triple-A games. In every other game, it is expected that just by buying the game the player

[details]

Platforms:

360 / PS3

Genre:

Action role-playing
Game

Age restriction:

16+

DRM:

None

Multiplayer:

Local: None

Online: 4 players

Developer:

From Software

Website:

www.preparetodie.com

Publisher:

Namco Bandai

Games

Distributor:

Megarom

deserves to see the ending, as if they bought a movie ticket. Other games have learned how to remove the game part from the equation, if the game part inconveniences the player.

That means those games are accessible to anyone, in that they do serve a purpose, but it does strangely undercut the fact that games are contests. A game is something you are supposed to solve, to be challenged by. Otherwise it's not a game.

Dark Souls is very bracing, in that it completely dispenses with the conventions of mainstream gaming of the last five to ten years. Succeeding in *Dark Souls* actually means something. It means you didn't just pay R600 to be entertained for a set number of hours, that the price was an entry fee to a contest to be challenged, with no guarantee of success. Of course, by taking that angle, there is much riding on how fair the challenge is. *Dark Souls*



/1/ So many souls. So much darkness.



is tough, very tough, but fair. The combat system is rugged yet refined with plenty of tactical choices. The role-playing elements are surprisingly deep and meaningful; the NPCs you kill or don't kill matter. Many secrets stay hidden until a second play-through. The open world invites exploration, but punishes brazen wandering severely.

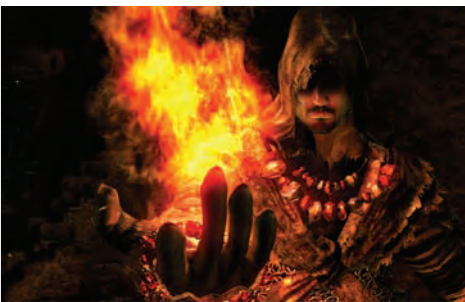
This is a game for the gamers out there, a quality challenge with plenty of content.

THE COVENANTS

There are nine Covenants in *Dark Souls*, each tailored for a specific play style. They function a little like a guild, accenting one's actions or rewarding you for your service. Some Covenants benefit those who love to hunt down and kill players; others reward you for killing the unjust that do just that. One lets you get impregnated in the forehead with an egg. All Covenants have a betrayal penalty if you leave them or go against their tenants, some harsher than others.

Way of White: For players who prefer co-op and helping each other, this Covenant reduces the amount of





invaders who enter your game while making it easier to match up with others of the same Covenant.

Princess' Guard: Through this Covenant you gain access to two special Miracles for healing yourself and allies, and you find soul signs of other players from this Covenant more easily.

Blade of the Darkmoon: Using a special item given to you when joining, this Covenant lets you easily invade players who have sinned by betraying their Covenants.

Warrior of Sunlight: Aimed primarily at co-op play, members of this Covenant gain Sunlight Medals for helping others defeat bosses. They appear as golden phantoms and soul signs, instead of white, and can find each other more easily.

Forest Hunter: By equipping a special ring gained from joining, you're always on call to defend the Darkroot Woods from players who enter it and aren't part of the Covenant.

Chaos Servant: Pyromancers should seek out this Covenant as it gives you three powerful bits of magic. Betraying this

Covenant gets your face impregnated with an egg, which will later hatch into a giant egg replacing your head, giving you a Maggot Attack kick.

Gravelord Servant: Gravelords can make the game harder for others by using an Eye of Death item, which leaves a special soul sign in three players' worlds, upping their difficulty. If they find it, they can invade the Gravelord for revenge.

Path of the Dragon: Dragon-fanatics have their very own Covenant, useful for gaining items to level Dragon-type weapons. You even get two special items for turning yourself into a fire-breathing anthropomorphic dragon.

Dark Wraith: If you want to constantly invade other people, this Covenant is for you. It grants an invasion item with infinite uses, and a special weapon for stealing Humanity from players by attacking them with it.

PASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

While the game does have more active forms of multiplayer, such as summon signs that let you invite up to three other players into your world, or player vs. player invasions that can happen for a variety of reasons, it's the passive elements that give *Dark Souls* its unique flavour.

Intangible transient ghosts fade in and out, showing other players' actions around you. Sit by a Bonfire long enough and you might catch a glimpse of another player doing the same. Wave and they might wave back. Blood splats mark where other players died, letting you view their final moments. Helpful (or harmful) messages dot the landscape, their red fire letters often a welcome sight after a long time spent in the dark. "Bonfire Ahead" may well be the most religious moment a *Dark Souls* player can have.

NAG

Miktar

/ **PLUS** / Challenging and deep gameplay / Dark and brooding fantasy world

/ **MINUS** / Frame rate issues in certain areas / Ambiguous multiplayer makes buddying-up difficult

**THE CLOSEST THING TO A SPIRITUAL SEQUEL TO CASTLEVANIA:
SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT WE'RE GOING TO GET.**

90

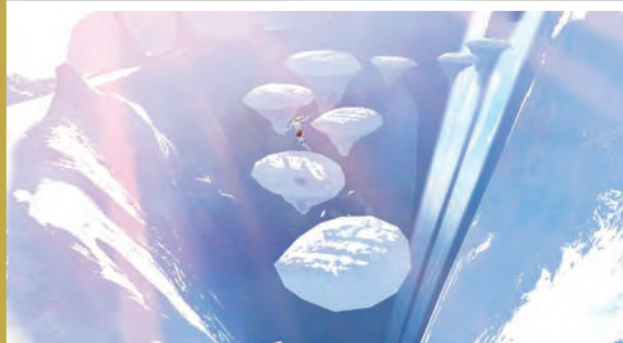
El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron

It's the Bible, but in a video game. Except not quite...

Deftly blurring the line between video games and art, *El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron* is an epic adventure/platform hybrid that manages to be simultaneously both immeasurably quirky and unbelievably fluid. In a fashion that is unmistakably Japanese, *El Shaddai* puts an interesting spin on an ages-old Biblical tale, and it does so with no small amount of panache. The game's lead character is Enoch, who, according to the tale, was so righteous that he entered Heaven without first suffering a mortal death. The game follows his story as he returns to earth, charged by the ruling authority with the task of capturing a band of fallen angels who have set about procreating with humans (and that sort of thing simply cannot be tolerated). Enoch's quest is a last ditch attempt to spare the earth from a second flood, one that would not only wipe out the evil angels and their abhorrent half-

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PS3
Genre:
Action
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
UTV Ignition Entertainment
Website:
elshaddaigame.com
Publisher:
Ignition Entertainment
Distributor:
Ster Kinekor Entertainment



mortal offspring, but extinguish all human life at the same time.

The game's storyline does tend to become somewhat convoluted, especially given the fast pace at which it moves forward, but the artfully-presented narrative is so well complemented by the game's surreal setting that it almost seems appropriate that the plot should be somewhat disjointed. The game itself splices hack-and-slash combat with platform segments, some of which are presented in 2D, and the two are merged seamlessly against the backdrop of the game's beautiful and varied landscapes. There's also a range of eclectic characters that Enoch will meet along his journey, ranging from the wonderfully diverse fallen angels themselves to the various archangels that serve as Enoch's advisers and guardians on his quest. Not to mention the narrator Lucifer, whose wit is as sharp as his dress sense, and who helps you save your progress by phoning heaven directly from his smartphone.

The combat itself seems initially simplistic, relying on only one button to attack. This belies its complexity however, as attacks change subject to timing and momentum, with dodging and counterattacking also playing an integral role in the combat system. Enoch has three different weapons at his disposal, with the twist being that he doesn't actually have an inventory – if you want to switch between weapons, you'll have to do so by stealing them from wounded foes. The three weapons have a rock-paper-scissors type of relationship with each other. The Arch is a fast-striking bladed melee weapon; the Gale delivers ranged projectiles, whilst the Veil is a slow but immensely powerful pair of gauntlets that double as shields. The interplay between combat styles forces to choose the correct weapon for any particular foe that you're facing, and the same holds true for the game's epic bosses, some of whose vulnerabilities will switch during the course of a battle. Further complicating

/1/ Holy sh*t, is that Batman?

matters is that with repeated use your weapons become “tainted”, dealing less and less damage with every swing until you purify them again – of course, this leaves you vulnerable to enemy attacks, so you’ll have to plan your moves carefully. It’s a shame that the game’s harder difficulty settings are only available after completing an initial play-through, since that’s where the game’s true complexity shines. On the easier settings, button-mashing will suffice against most foes but as you ramp up the difficulty, you’ll need to fight carefully and strategically in order to maintain the rhythm required to despatch your enemies.

The platform segments serve primarily as a showcase for the game’s stunning art direction, set against a variety of beautiful backdrops. In fact, it seems that the actual platform jumping is somewhat of an afterthought, since Enoch’s jumps feel strangely weightless, and this makes it quite difficult to predict exactly where he’ll land. This problem is compounded by the game’s unforgiving collision detection that sees you plummet to your demise unless you manage to hit your landings perfectly. These difficulties are especially pronounced in the 3D platforming segments,



where the camera occasionally works against you, making these sections of the game unnecessarily frustrating, even once you get a good feel for the jumping mechanics. Fortunately, the game is generous with checkpoints and opportunities to save, meaning that the awkward platform segments are merely an annoyance rather than a game-breaking flaw.

For the senses, *El Shaddai* is an absolute delight, offering a variety of beautifully detailed environments, each with its own distinctive style ranging from the wildly futuristic to the sublimely ethereal, and the game slides remarkably seamlessly from one environment to the next without ever feeling disjointed. Powerful and evocative imagery is interspersed with subtle nuances that keep the game interesting long after the

combat system’s shine has worn off. A suitably epic soundtrack complements the scenery, and manages to be just as diverse in its influences as the visuals are.

El Shaddai may be too off-beat for some tastes and it’s certainly not devoid of flaws, but it’s nonetheless a joy to play. The surreal but epic storyline is complemented by a range of gorgeous and diverse visuals, and a sweeping score. The simple and accessible combat system, though prone to becoming tedious on the easier difficulty settings, offers surprising depth for those who put in the requisite effort to master it. *El Shaddai* is strangely compelling, inarguably beautiful, and imaginative without ever becoming obnoxious. It’s an immersive and unique experience that deserves not to be overlooked.

**NAG
Madman**

/ PLUS / Superb visuals / Deeper-than-it-seems combat / Wonderful soundtrack
/ MINUS / Tedious on easier difficulty levels / Occasionally frustrating platform segments

IMPERFECT, BUT INCREDIBLY ARTFUL AND UNDENIABLY UNIQUE.

83

Forza Motorsport 4

The definitive driving simulator

Forza Motorsport 3 was arguably the best racing simulator on the Xbox 360 when it was released. Unlike previous instalments, *Forza 3* separated itself from the multitude of competitors by making a real attempt at the elusive title of the definitive racing simulator for consoles, arguably a title formerly held by the *Gran Turismo* franchise on PlayStation. *Forza 4* just may have captured that title this time around.

Forza 4 improves on just about every aspect of the previous game, more than merely refining what was there. From the incredible graphics to the navigation menus, the whole experience is a little more polished. It may not be to everybody's taste, but where everyone will agree is that the car and track detailing is exceptional. However, as great as it is graphically, it's secondary to the compelling career mode that the game offers.

There is no AI difficulty setting for instance, but the game dynamically adjusts this based on how you perform during the comprehensive career mode. In some ways, this makes the game a lot less challenging but it keeps it



[details]

Platforms:
360
Genre:
Racing
Age restriction:
3+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 2 players
Online: 16 players
Developer:
Turn 10 Studios
Website:
www.forzamotorsport.net
Publisher:
Microsoft Game Studios
Distributor:
Microsoft

fun throughout the entire experience. Mastery of the track and cars is the challenge and once you have managed that, the game pretty much becomes about wading through the events to get to the next driver level and gain access to new tracks.

As humdrum as it may seem sometimes, the game's mechanics and the various challenges presented through the events (such as cone slaloms, knocking down pins and driver challenges) keep the racing varied without ever becoming too much about these auxiliary events. It is in these small details where *Forza 4* outclasses its predecessor once again. In the previous title, boredom set in fairly quickly with downright tedious races, but *Turn 10* has kept this to a minimum and, while there are some races which one can do without (in particular the very long races that exist solely for extending the career mode), for the most part it is an enjoyable experience throughout.

Forza 4, as with all racing simulators of this type and in particular its predecessors, rewards you with credits. Credits are never in short supply, however,



and even if you perform dismally in most of the races, there are cash incentives that will make sure you always have more than you actually need. As a result, performing upgrades becomes a matter of just extracting the most power from the car and entering in what can only be termed an “inappropriate” class. An example of this is how a Vauxhall Corsa VXR when fully upgraded is capable of challenging more purpose-built cars such as the Ferrari F430. Understandably, the power-to-mass ratio is the fundamental principle behind how cars are classified, but obviously in real life there are masses of differences between these two cars, which cannot be articulated in such a simple manner. For the sake of not complicating car classifications though, it is understandable why Turn 10 chose to go this way.

The biggest complement to *Forza 4*'s detailed and sometimes lifelike renditions of the cars is the driving model – or physics engine, if you will. Unlike in other simulators, the damage model is vastly superior, offering damage that's related to the velocity at which the collision occurred with an opponent or another obstacle. The



cars do not merely suffer uniform deformation or scuff marks. The angle, location and velocity of the contact play a significant role not only in the damage suffered visually but also in the handling dynamics of the car. Oddly enough this is arguably the most compelling deterrent to reckless driving in general as any kind of contact is costly and, depending on the difficulty setting may spell the end of your race.

The cars do tend to have an understeer and locking of the brakes is much easier than it should be even with full ABS assistance enabled. Having said that, this is actually preferable to other simulators where oversteer tends to be the most overwhelming driving characteristic of most cars, regardless of the drive train. Brake locking can be very annoying though, especially on tracks that lead from high-speed straights to complex turns. The cars have a tendency to nose dive excessively. Understandable in cars that have the engine mounted up front, but it happens more so than it should, even on cars that are four-wheel drive with the engine located in front of the rear axle. Managing this behaviour is simple enough, if only because it's predictable and also encourages you to be more vigilant with your brake points and racing line. Braking mid-corner too hard or with the wheels turned will most

likely end with you in the gravel.

Racing with a minimal set of assists is far more rewarding than before. It's not just in the credit or experience bonuses it grants, but also in how it allows you to appreciate the differences in cars and how they handle. As you grow more proficient at driving exotic machines, it becomes easier to extract a fulfilling experience with the cars. Every upgrade you make has a tangible performance boost or hindrance. This single facet of the game makes it a more enjoyable experience than any other mass-market racing simulator to date. Turn 10 has done some great things with *Forza 4* and the franchise has taken its greatest leap yet, while at the same time managing to make itself the most competent general racing simulator on any console.

In closing, *Forza 4* is much more than just a simple refinement of its predecessors. It makes racing simulators more enjoyable to the average gamer, even though the title's greatest asset comes from its more meaningful and increasingly more accurate driving model: a balancing act that Turn 10 has pulled off better than one could have expected. Whether you are new to the series or a fan, *Forza 4* is a definite must have for any racing enthusiast who has an Xbox 360.

NAG

ShockG

/1/ *Forza 4* has an even bigger roster of cars than its predecessor, boasting iconic exotics such as the Mercedes Benz SLS AMG. Too bad hyper cars such as the Lamborghini Aventador and the updated 2011 Nissan GTR are absent. Nothing some DLC can't fix though.

/ PLUS / Looks fantastic / More realistic driving simulation
/ MINUS / Missing some performance icons / Lacks polish in some areas

THE BEST CASUAL DRIVING SIMULATOR ON ANY CONSOLE TO DATE.

90

FIFA 12

Really real

It seems that with all things football, fans are rabid in their support... and pretty vocal, too. This extends to the world of football video games, too, in which the adherents of the two major franchises snipe at each other (and their preferred game) almost constantly. And this support doesn't necessarily arise from anything other than the 'it's my team' attitude that these fans have.

But, when there is a toe-to-toe contest between the *FIFA* and *PES* franchises, it is not possible – from a purely objective standpoint – to give the crown to anything but *FIFA* at the moment. And yes, I can be objective because, quite honestly, I am a fan of neither franchise.

The problem with the franchise is that, even though there are improvements made every year, these are built upon a very solid basis, and may not always be apparent. Take *FIFA 12* for example. Improving on *FIFA 11* is pretty difficult, but the game has managed to do it in ways that are subtle yet impactful.

The tactical defending system, for example, takes the game to a whole new level of realism. It's not just about

[details]

Platforms: 360 / 3DS / PC / PS2
PS3 / PSP / Wii
Genre: Sports
Age restriction: 3+
DRM: Disc-based
Multiplayer: Local: 7 players
Online: 22 players
Developer: EA Sports
Website: easportsfootball.com
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Distributor: Electronic Arts South Africa



/1/ The player is granted great dribbling control.

/2/ The new collision model works brilliantly.



throwing defenders at the guy with the ball anymore. It is about careful timing and on-field tactics that make the game a lot more difficult to come to grips with. Those that don't like this new system can resort to the older one if they wish, but getting the tactical defence system right is extremely rewarding... particularly if you are a football aficionado.

Another change that is far more subtle, but arguably packs more of a punch, is the precision dribbling system. It is an idea that, if used correctly, will not turn the player's team-members into supermen, but will add that little bit of extra edge when it is needed – in turn adding a lot of realism.

And then there's the much hyped player impact system. This gives the team members realistic physics in

terms of mass and velocity, and physical collisions between them in game has much more realism attached. Sadly, the ref AI sometimes battles with the added complexity and the player may be the victim of some very questionable calls.

FIFA 12 is a game for football enthusiasts, thanks to its heightened realism and deep tactical approach. It leaves any vestiges of arcade-sentiments clearly behind as it heads for the goal of being the ultimate football simulator. It still has a way to go, of course, and the added systems may be extremely frustrating to casual and new players, simply because the game has become a lot more challenging. But it is also extremely rewarding, and makes for some very exciting football, whether against the AI or friends. **NAG**

Ramjet

/ PLUS / Excellent new systems / Great look and feel
/ MINUS / Some odd ref calls / A lot more challenging

FIFA FANS WILL BE IN HEAVEN WITH THIS NEW RELEASE, BUT NEWCOMERS AND CASUAL PLAYERS MAY FIND IT FRUSTRATING.

90

A Game of Thrones - Genesis

Incest not included

With the TV series *Game of Thrones* doing what it was expected to do (gain a massive audience), it was only a matter of time before the videogame cash-in came along to do what it was expected to do (gain a massive bank balance for the publishers). Oddly enough, this game seems to be more geared towards fans of the book series, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, than the TV show. The campaign's chapters span the history of the intriguing world of Westeros, which is great for those looking to explore the times when dragons ruled the skies, when the Red Keep was formed, or when the first Baratheons battled the first Starks.

In a somewhat strange move, *A Game of Thrones - Genesis* is a real-time strategy game. Sure, the developers could've gone with the hacking, slashing and literal backstabbing elements of the books/ show that are so entertaining, but they decided to attempt to honour the subtle human elements – the conniving, wangling, secret agreements and more metaphorical backstabbing – that everyone who has read *A Song of Ice and Fire* knows is actually what makes the series so interesting. As a result of this decision, the RTS elements in this game more resemble those of *R.U.S.E.*, or to a lesser extent *Civilization*, than more traditional titles like *StarCraft* or *Command & Conquer*. It's here where the game gets a little iffy.

All of the conspiracy stuff is handled fairly well – there are layers upon layers of secrets, alliances, secret alliances and counters to the above, which players must battle through or counter-counter (we're not kidding) to defeat their enemies in the game's campaign, skirmish or multiplayer modes. Keeping an eye on everything is challenging and entertaining, but when it comes to combat (which happens if you stab people in the face more times than they consider reasonable), the game slips down to a level of simplicity that would be better suited to an RTS released 15 years ago, and it doesn't even have the level of settlement management that *Civ* boasts to make up for it. Combined with too-simple visuals and a stodgy interface, we can't help but think that another 6-12 months of development polish and tweaking would have given *A Game of Thrones* the prestige it needs to match the quality of the books and TV show.

NAG
GeometriX

[details]

Platforms: PC
Genre: Real-time strategy
Age restriction: 12+
DRM: Internet connection required [Steam]
Multiplayer: Local: None
Online: None
Developer: Cyanide
Website: www.agot-genesis.com
Publisher: Focus Home Interactive
Distributor: Apex Interactive



/ PLUS / Plenty of lore / Espionage and conspiracy stuff is decent
/ MINUS / Dated visuals / Poor controls / Overly-simplistic RTS elements

TRIES SOMETHING DIFFERENT BUT FALLS FLAT.

58

Antec 25

A Quarter Century of Quality and Innovation

LanBoy Air

Most Modular, Most Customizable
Open-Air Chassis



High Current Pro
1200W | 1000W | 850W | 750W



Dark Fleet Series
DF-85 | DF-35 | DF-30 | DF-10



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ANTEC.COM

Pro Evolution Soccer 2012

Getting better...

It's extremely difficult not to compare *FIFA* to *PES* in a written review, but I am going to try it anyway. The war of words between the two franchises always rears its ugly head at this time of year, but we're going to try and avoid it. Rather, each to its own merits...

Every year, we are promised bigger and better things from the *Pro Evolution Soccer* franchise. But the game has, in the past few years, struggled to regain the former glory that once made it the definitive soccer simulation. Fans won't admit that, of course, because it seems that being a soccer fan of any kind means completely dogged persistence in support. This means turning a blind eye to failings, both past and present.

The latest iteration of *PES*, *PES 2012* arrived amid the expected hype and promises, but the game doesn't manage to return to the glory that fans are undoubtedly rooting for. Not that it's

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PC / PS2
PS3 / PSP / Wii
Genre:
Sports
Age restriction:
3+
DRM:
Disc-based
Multiplayer:
Local: 4 players
Online: 8 players
Developer:
Winning Eleven
Website:
www.konami.com
Publisher:
Konami
Distributor:
Ster Kinekor
Entertainment



/1/ The animations and models look great, if generic.

/2/ The tweaked AI adds challenge.

bad, mind you – it just suffers from a number of odd little quirks that prevent it from reaching its full potential.

The game dynamic focuses on fast, flowing, attacking football, rather than getting bogged down in defensive play, which is a good thing. But this adds an arcade feel to the title, taking it away from the claimed realism just a bit and moving it towards an anime version of soccer. Not that the game is unrealistic... it just doesn't feel completely realistic.

A few new AI tweaks make for a more intelligent, more strategic team, but the responsiveness of computer controlled players can also result in lots of mistakes and strategic misinterpretations. The end result is a lot of throw-ins and frustration.

A new Off the Ball team control system is also something of a double-edged sword. Using the right analogue stick, the player can designate players for passes and the like – and can even

shift control to those players – but the inherent strategy in this method is flawed, simply due to the fact that it gets a little too much during the often heated play.

And then, of course, there is the licensing issue that still plagues the franchise. The animations are great, but the character models are generic, and the names of teams and players have been altered to avoid any legal conflicts. This can be changed, of course, but that requires quite a lot of work on the part of the player.

Pro Evolution Soccer 2012 is a good game, and it shows definite improvements over the previous version, but improvements are not what the franchise needs; rather, it needs a good session back at the drawing board. Still, the soccer can be enjoyable, if the player is willing to get over a few of the game's quirks.

NAG
Ramjet

/ PLUS / Fast paced / Great animations
/ MINUS / Generic models / Quirky

FANS WILL LOVE IT, BUT IT STILL HAS A FEW LITTLE NIGGLES.

80

Orcs Must Die!

And die they will...

Tower defence games are a dime a dozen, but the genre has seen a lot of fun innovation recently. If you want a cooperative first-person shooter plus tower defence, there's the excellent *Sanctum*. If you want *Torchlight*-like loot-driven RPG plus tower defence (cooperative too), look no further than *Dungeon Defenders*. If you want a third-person action-combat tower defence with a snarky meathead hero whose sole purpose in life is to kill orcs, then *Orcs Must Die!*

The mechanics remain the same: enemies come in from one or more doors and travel a path (that you can manipulate) to your portal, then jump through. If enough baddies jump through, you lose. You can dive into the hordes of orcs manually, hacking and slashing or casting fireballs, but you'll want to place traps too. You select a handful of traps before starting the level, so restarts as you decide on better traps to use are common. The traps are wonderfully *Dungeon Keeper* inspired: some fling orcs into lava, others shoot spikes out of the wall. There is a satisfying crusher you can attach to ceilings, and all traps are designed to let you combo kill orcs from one into another.

Multiplayer would have been nice, but the game suffer for the lack thereof. The better a rank you get at levels, the more you can upgrade each trap and weapon. The game isn't anything special, but it's confident at what it does. **NAG**

Miktar

[details]

Platforms: 360 / PC
Genre: Tower defence
Age restriction: 12+
DRM: None
Multiplayer: Local: None Online: None
Developer: Robot Entertainment
Website: www.robotentertainment.com/games/orcmustdie
Publisher: Microsoft Studios
Distributor: Xbox LIVE / Steam



/ PLUS / Humorous / Long campaign / Plenty of upgrades
/ MINUS / One-liners repeat too often / Difficulty ramps up fast

A QUIRKY AND MODERATELY FRESH TAKE ON THE GENRE.

70

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Spider-Man: Edge of Time

Cobwebs

Spider-Man is cool. He really is one of the better superheroes in Marvel's stable. And when Beenox developed *Shattered Dimensions*, we got to see how cool he was in four different realities. And that was cool too. Each character presented the player with their own attitude, visual style and game dynamic. Even more cool.

Well, Beenox have produced another Spider-Man game, in the form of *Edge of Time*. This time, though, it seems that the watchword 'cool' has been supplanted by 'lame'.

The game features two Spidey incarnations: the Amazing Spider-Man and Spider-Man 2099. A scientist travels from the future to create his billion-dollar, nasty corporation in the time of Peter Parker (so he can make more money and have more power, presumably). This results in the untimely death of Peter Parker, and creates a

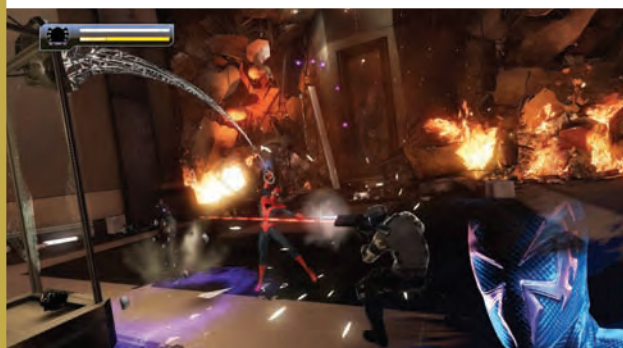
[details]

Platforms:
360 / 3DS / DS
PC / PS3 / Wii
Genre:
Third-person action
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
Disc-based
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
Beenox
Website:
www.herohq.com/
spidermanedgeof-
time/
Publisher:
Activision
Distributor:
Megarom



/1/ Hordes of generic enemies await.

/2/ Even good visual effects cannot save this one.



splintered reality that 2099 decides to put right – by guiding Parker through a rift in time.

It sounds like it has a lot of potential, but somewhere between the drawing board and the final product, it changed to become a short game that artificially increases its play-time by throwing droves of samey bad guys at the player. This is made worse by the fact that the combat is less than satisfying, with fewer special moves and choices than before turning it into something of a mindless button-masher.

The levels are pretty repetitive, too, with very few exceptions breaking the player out of that cycle. The design of the levels is unimaginative, and the player will be tasked with fighting bad guys, collecting keys, breaking stuff and a whole bunch of other mundane tasks that make one wonder as to whether the level designers just suddenly got slack.

Of course there is the fun to be had with Spidey's web-slinging and wall-

climbing, right? Nope. They messed that up too. Navigating a level can be extremely annoying, because the game will, often as not, either latch onto the wrong bit of architecture, or will do the wrong thing – web-swinging when you want to do one of those nifty web-jumps, for example.

Beenox have managed to take the reputation they started building with *Shattered Dimensions* and pretty much trash it with *Edge of Time*. The game feels rushed and poorly thought out, and its action sequences soon devolve into boring repetition that will have most gamers not even sitting through the extremely short seven-hour story. It's a pity, really, because the character is so cool, and is potentially a lot of fun to use as a game hero.

But the situation is what it is. Those who enjoyed *Shattered Dimensions* will be sorely disappointed by *Edge of Time*, which is inferior to its predecessor in every way.

NAG
Ramjet

/ PLUS / Cool idea / Some nice animations
/ MINUS / Repetitive / Short / Poor idea implementation

THIS TITLE JUST DOESN'T LIVE UP TO ITS PREDECESSOR, OR THE RICH FRANCHISE ON WHICH IT'S BASED. BAD BEENOX!

40



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Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One

...and one for aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaallllllllllll

You've probably been caught playing *Ratchet & Clank* before, and had to explain to your parents/girlfriend/older brother and his pack of jock friends that, no, it's not a kid's game and, yes, it is actually pretty involved, despite the 7+ PEGI rating on the box. With its over-the-top weaponry and visual effects mixed with fast-paced gameplay and puzzle elements, the series has managed to charm young and not-so-young gamers for the past nine years. Since wrapping up the *R&C Future* trilogy, however, franchise leads Insomniac Games seem to have finally given in to the notion of simplifying the gameplay and making it more accessible for the whole family.

The events of the game take place after *A Crack in Time*, and see Ratchet and Clank retired, Captain Qwark as the president and the previous game's lesser antagonist, Dr. Nefarious, out to destroy all three of them. Being the

[details]

Platforms: PS3
Genre: Action platform
Age restriction: 7+
DRM: None
Multiplayer: Local: 4 players
Online: 4 players
Developer: Insomniac Games
Website: www.ratchetandclank.com
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Distributor: Ster Kinekor Entertainment



1/1 Teaming up to fire on the same enemy (usually a boss) results in an increased rate-of-fire.



useless evil genius that he is, Nefarious' murderous plan soon goes awry and he's forced to work with the trio to keep himself alive.

You might guess from the name that *All 4 One* focuses on co-op gameplay, with Ratchet, Clank, Qwark and Nefarious as playable characters. It's designed for it from the ground-up, with character selection screens, drop-in/drop-out, and instant access to any previously reached level available to lend the game more of an arcade feeling than previous titles. To compensate for the expected mayhem that would take place with four players on the screen at once, many of the gameplay mechanics have been removed or simplified, including player movement, aiming and combat. Instead, the bulk of the exploration and combat focuses on the act of up

to four players working together to overcome simple enemies and basic puzzles, using a few moves like ground slams and grappling hook shots, and a variety of weapons. The level design is straightforward but not painfully linear, offering occasional offshoots to explore and hidden bonuses to collect. At least the levels themselves look fantastic; Insomniac hasn't lost their touch there. The illustrative style and vibrant palette work well together, but the visuals have been balanced to ensure maximum visibility on-screen, even with four players in the game together.

All 4 One won't be for everyone, but it should make for an entertaining couch co-op experience (we didn't say "drinking game"), and will definitely appeal to a younger crowd. **NAG**

GeometriX

/ PLUS / Great humour and visuals / Co-op gameplay is well implemented
/ MINUS / Oversimplified gameplay and puzzles / Little focus on story-telling

THIS ISN'T THE R&C YOU KNOW, BUT IT SHOULD ENTERTAIN THOSE WHO DON'T NEED MUCH CEREBRAL STIMULATION FROM THEIR GAMES.

70



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WRC 2: FIA World Rally Championship 2011

Can the WRC series' latest instalment manage a podium finish?

Italian developers Milestone released their first *WRC* title last year and although the game had its share of flaws, it was a respectable first entry in the fledgling series. For those unfamiliar with the previous game, it offered a rally experience that prioritised realism above all else, and the focus hasn't changed at all with the release of the sequel.

You'd be hard pushed to find many differences between this year's release and its predecessor; the game offers the same play modes and vehicle handling feels incredibly familiar. This is not necessarily a bad thing, since *WRC*'s physics and damage models set it apart from the competition. *WRC 2* handles its racing with the same finesse, offering a challenging and rewarding experience racing on any of its 78 Special Stages, bolstered by its fully-licensed roster of teams, drivers and vehicles. Once again the various stages

[details]

Platforms: 360 / 3DS / PC / PS3
Genre: Racing
Age restriction: 3+
DRM: None
Multiplayer: Local: 4 players
Online: 16 players
Developer: Milestone
Website: www.wrcthegame.com
Publisher: Black Bean Games
Distributor: Ster Kinekor Entertainment



1

/1/ Typically the drift dynamic on tar is subtly different to sand. Then you need to look at the granular consistency of the sand. Add water to this mix and chaos erupts.



offer transitions between different terrain types, such as sand, gravel and snow, each one placing unique stresses on the handling of the vehicles. There are also some preset tuning options available at the start of each race, for those who lack the technical know-how to fully explore the in-depth customisation options that the game offers. New for this year is the addition of a handful of Super Special Stages, and a few infamous Group B cars that are sure to delight rally enthusiasts. In addition, the developers have added a "rewind" feature, not dissimilar to that introduced in *GRID* a few years back. It's a welcome addition, given that even a minor slip-up can prove disastrous, but it can also be disabled for those looking for a "purer" challenge.

Unfortunately, the game's interface remains unpolished and clunky, one of the noticeable shortcomings of last year's iteration. The visuals too

offer only minor improvements over the game's predecessor, with muddy textures and blander-than-expected environments being the order of the day. The bulk of the game is still found in the career mode, dubbed "Road to WRC", and progression is still slow and tedious, particularly in the earlier stages of the game. There's also been no change made to the multiplayer modes as compared with last year – the game still forces you to play "hot-seat" style offline, and online races still take place against ghost vehicles. Failing to address the flaws of its predecessor is *WRC 2*'s greatest shortcoming; it remains a solid rally title, and one especially well-suited towards enthusiasts, but it's sadly not so much a true sequel as it is a roster update. Enthusiasts might find some value in this title, but it's unlikely to win over any new fans for the franchise.

NAG
Madman

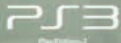
/ PLUS / Realistic rally experience / Official license / Great customisation depth
/ MINUS / Dated visuals / Uninspired interface / No real improvement on last year's release
A REALISTIC AND CHALLENGING RALLY EXPERIENCE, BUT MORE AN UPDATE THAN IT IS A SEQUEL.

60

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X-Men Destiny

Destined for the bargain bin

I'm fairly certain that the *X-Men* franchise has seen more video game adaptations than any other comic-based brand. Some of these games have been decent, or even quite entertaining, like *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* and *X-Men Legends*. The rest tend to mingle somewhere between barely acceptable and "at least it's over quickly," and it's in that miasma [Nice, I told you reading will grow your vocabulary, Ed] of disappointment that you'll find the latest young buck in the *X-Men* stables: *X-Men Destiny*.

In an attempt to inject new life into the franchise, *Destiny* puts you in the role of one of three new mutants, each with their own back-story and reason to be a part of this unoriginal story filled with choice and consequences that barely warrant the name. Things start off some time in the future; X-Men founder Charles Xavier is dead, and peace talks between mutants and humans has reached a point where the mayor of San Francisco is set to pass

[details]

Platforms: 360 / DS / PS3 / Wii
Genre: Action
Age restriction: 16+
DRM: None
Multiplayer: Local: None
Online: None
Developer: Silicon Knights
Website: www.herohq.com/xmendestiny
Publisher: Activision
Distributor: Megarom



/1/ Choosing your allegiance means about as much in this game as choosing between peanut butter and Marmite: they both taste good on bread, but at the end of the day, you're still going to have a pretty boring sandwich.

/2/ Between the aging visuals, poor frame rates and dull combat, you'll be hard-pressed to accept that *Destiny* was released this year. Unfortunately for *Destiny*, it was. Its rushed development cycle might have a thing or two to do with that.



a law that will further bridge the social and cultural gaps between the two factions. Suddenly, the congregation is attacked by the Purifiers – a militant group of anti-mutant protestors. Your character, chosen in the middle of the opening cut scene, flees the attack and starts making their way through the city that's been all-but destroyed due to frequent earthquakes.

One of *Destiny's* few pony tricks is that, as a new mutant, you get the chance to choose your character's allegiance (to the Cyclops-lead X-Men or the Brotherhood, still lead by Magneto) and mutant powers as you progress through the game. The latter is a cool idea – taking cues from existing powers or using them as-is, and combining them with other powers to form your own unique combination, but unfortunately many of the powers behave in the same way, with only visual changes to indicate that your character is based on Toad, Juggernaut, Emma Frost or whoever.

The bulk of *Destiny's* gameplay is made up of button-mashing brawling until you've killed X enemies in the area, which unlocks the next area so that you

can go there and do the same thing, with occasional outdated platforming elements thrown in. The enemy types are varied enough to prevent this formula driving you to suicide, but the combat is, for the most part, pretty repetitive and only becomes exciting for a brief period after you've unlocked a new power. These powers come in two flavours: X-Genes that are found scattered throughout the levels or rewarded for completing challenges, or core powers that are chosen at particular points in the game. Both types can be improved by expending acquired experience points but it's only the core powers that give the impression of much improvement as a result.

If you can put up with the lacklustre combat and unexciting gameplay, you might be able to salvage some enjoyment from the vast range of comic book heroes and villains who you can pretend to be, but one does have to ask "if it's so much fun unlocking X-Men/Brotherhood powers and trying to be like them, why didn't the developers just let you choose to actually play as them?" **NAG**

GeometriX

/ PLUS / Extensive roster / Starts off well enough / Attempts to bring something new
/ MINUS / Repetitive gameplay / Poor visuals / Pointless moral choices / Unpolished
ONLY FOR THE MOST hardcore X-MEN FANS, ON A RAINY DAY, WHEN THERE'S NOTHING ELSE TO DO.

60

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Steel Diver

Even the box art is 3D!

Steel Diver has a strange history. Originally designed for the DS and shown at E3 2004, it had a remarkably bumpy road for such a small, simple title. Finally, after what we imagine to be a lot of polite but firm arguments in a boardroom somewhere in Japan, the title was released alongside the 3DS. The game combines elements from physics-based platformers with bullet hell-like shooters and plenty of *Ecco the Dolphin*, if Ecco were a steel-clad submarine armed with torpedoes and tasked to save the world from a "rogue nation" in the year 19XX. Yes, that's the old "19XX" timestamp again, which older readers may remember from the days of *Megaman* if their Alzheimer's hasn't set in yet.

In the game's main campaign mode, players will guide one of three submarines through a number of levels packed with mines, dangerous terrain, enemy subs and boats, and even an occasional sea monster. The point is to get to the end of each level and possibly defeat an end boss as quickly as possible, and then play through each level again with different submarines in the attempt to beat your own score. This is an arcade game, pure and simple, so those looking for story elements

[details]

Platforms:
3DS
Genre:
Platform game
Age restriction:
7+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 2 players
Online: None
Developer:
Nintendo EAD / Vitei
Website:
steeldiver.nintendo.com
Publisher:
Nintendo
Distributor:
Core Group



or innovative gameplay might want to look elsewhere, although the submarine controls might be interesting enough to hook you initially.

When you're done with the campaign, there's a mini-game mode called Periscope Strike which involves you firing torpedoes at enemy ships and subs from a first-person perspective, as well as

a rather well thought-out turn-based strategy game called Steel Commander. Playing out like some sort of mix of Battleship, Minesweeper and Rock, Paper, Scissors, with as much guesswork as you'd expect from that mix, it's a decent distraction but not deep enough to hold one's attention for too long.

NAG
GeometriX

/ **PLUS** / Looks good / Fun for a bit
/ **MINUS** / Too short / Slow pace / Controls are irksome

SHOULD AMUSE YOU FOR A FEW HOURS IF THE SLOW PACE AND QUIRKY CONTROLS DON'T PUT YOU OFF.

60

The Sims 3 Pets (3DS)

Sit, Ubu, sit...

Pet-focused games like *Nintendogs* and *Pokémon* work phenomenally well on a handheld platform.

They always have, and it made sense when *The Sims* made the move to the 3DS because, really, the only difference between caring for humans in *The Sims* and *Pokémon* is that you don't (usually) pit Sims against each other in battle. With *The Sims 3 Pets* on 3DS, you now have access to human, feline and canine dolls to dress up, socialise, send to work and watch as their blurred forms bonk each other.

The transition to this relatively powerful but still limited platform isn't perfect, and while it bears a "3" in the title, this *Sims* game is closer to the first PC release than the third, although it does make use of a few features from later titles. Limitations in Sim pathing, wall construction and item placement bring back memories of frustration with the first game, and the interface, for all that it tries to make use of the 3DS's controls, could do with some tweaking to make it simpler and quicker. Other than that, it's impressive that this really is *The Sims*, in all its glory, on a handheld. You can create your own Sims complete with outfits and lifetime goals, build

[details]

Platforms:
3DS / 360 / DS
PC / PS3 / Wii
Genre:
Simulation
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: None
Developer:
EA Play / The Sims Studio
Website:
www.thesims3.com/pets
Publisher:
Electronic Arts
Distributor:
EA South Africa



their houses from scratch and even visit community lots.

While you won't find a huge number of household items, there are certainly enough to keep you busy and allow your Sims to perform the bulk of the most important actions like gaining skills, having fun, staying clean and relaxing. Then there are the pets, the stars of this show. While they add a few

more interactions for your Sims, for the most part they're treated as human Sims with their own interactions and item use. They also can't get a job, which becomes an issue quite quickly if you decide to be brave (or simply bored and trapped on a ten-hour flight with a broken IFE system) and create an all-pet household.

NAG

GeometriX

/ **PLUS** / It's *The Sims*, in your hands! / Great visuals
/ **MINUS** / Interface needs work / Limited content / More like *The Sims 1*

IF YOU'VE BEEN HOLDING BACK FOR HANDHELD RELEASE OF THE SIMS, THIS IS AS GOOD AS IT GETS FOR THIS GENERATION.

72

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It's that time of year again, when we gamers look expectantly under the Christmas Tree, hoping to find presents in the shape of computer and gaming stuff. Yes we know you want the GTX590, but Ouma and Tannie Marie are on tight budgets this year, so we've put together a more affordable gift list for you to distribute to your well-meaning family members.

Instead of compiling a shopping list of obvious things to buy for an **Über Gamer**, we've gone for a stylin' caboodle of doohickeys and thingamajigs.

We've even gone one step further in making sure you get some cool presents this holiday season ... all these gadgets can be ordered online. So take your pocket money and go buy *Internet for Dummies*. Then spend an afternoon schooling your useless cousins in shopping online. You can thank us later.

the

The Shopping List for Über Gamers



Wear it



What would a gamer's cupboard be without... clothing? Everyone we know secretly wishes they had a pair of Duke Nukem jockeys. Branded gaming attire FTW.



Arkham Asylum Inmate T-shirt

www.darkcarnival.co.za | R240



Gears of War 3 Bandana

www.darkcarnival.co.za | R55



Gears of War 3 Beanie

www.darkcarnival.co.za | R120

slüig

Gears of War 3 Drawstring Backpack

www.darkcarnival.co.za | R160



Orb PSP Case

www.darkcarnival.co.za | R129



Bag it



What would a gamer's trip be without... gear? Keeping our kit safe on our holiday excursion is way more important than going to the beach and getting a tan. Besides, our 3DS isn't waterproof or sand-resistant.

Roccat Into Street-Proof Messenger Bag

www.sonicinformed.co.za | R699

Orb Portable Console Travel Organiser

www.darkcarnival.co.za | R229



the slüg

Cyborg v5
Rumblepad for Xbox 360

www.cometcomputing.co.za | R458



Nintendo Solus
Wii Wheel

www.nintendo.co.za | R189



Control it

What would a gamer's mantelpiece be without... peripherals? Essential tools for looking über pro when the girlfriend comes to visit for the first time.

Wii Nunchuck
Black

www.nintendo.co.za | R349



Logic3 TopDrive
RF Steering Wheel

www.kalahari.com | R1,099.95



Saitek Aviator
Flight Stick
PS3/Xbox

www.cometcomputing.co.za | R729



Wowee One Powermonkey

www.MobileGadgets.co.za | R549



Plantronics P90 Gamecom for PS3

www.gamersgear.co.za | R399



Hear it



What would a gamer's melody be without... sound? Silence is not a word that we are familiar with. Learn to love it.

Krator Neso 04 Speakers N4-20U03

www.frontosa.co.za | R199



Krator Neso 04 Speakers N4-20U05

www.frontosa.co.za | R229



Star Wars Stormtrooper DJ Stereo Headphones

www.darkcarnival.co.za | R550



Cuddle it



What would a gamer's room be without... snuggling? C'mon, we know you wanna nuzzle something when *Resident Evil* gets too scary. Oh, and we found the perfect bean bag to take with to LANs, so no excuses for sleeping hunched over your keyboard anymore.

SUMO Omni Bean Bag Chair

www.sumolounge.com | \$149



Angry Birds Plushies

www.awx.co.za | R375

*Banana not included

Move it



What would a gamer's lounge be without... movement peripherals? Small rooms and limited space should never hamper our gaming escapades, which is why these accessories are must-have items on our list. The Nyko ZOOM reduces the space needed to play Kinect by 40%; and the Orb Universal Support is a tripod mount for Kinect and Move that sits behind your TV screen. The TrackIR device with its head tracking technology will make your gaming experience even more immersive.

Nyko ZOOM for Kinect

www.catsdigital.co.za | R599



NaturalPoint TrackIR 5

www.landmarkpc.co.za | R2,085



Orb Universal Camera Support for Kinect and Move

www.megarom.co.za | R399

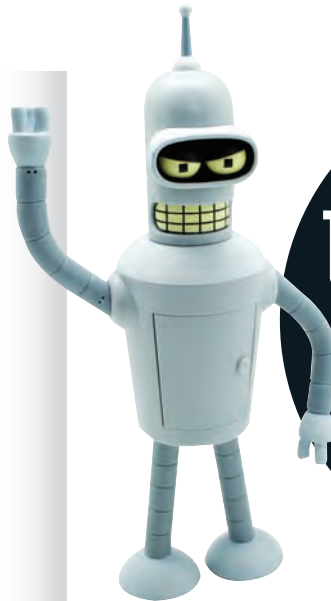
Star Wars Darth Vader USB 4-port Hub

www.darkcarnival.co.za | R750



Futurama Talking Bender Action Figure

www.darkcarnival.co.za | R240



Display it



What would a gamer's desk be without... figurines? Oh, and an Über awesome USB hub that breathes full on Darth Vader when you plug it in! E.P.I.C.

BioShock 2 Big Daddy (Rosie)

www.darkcarnival.co.za | R240



Star Wars Lightsaber Chopsticks

www.darkcarnival.co.za | R220



Spiderman Computer Sitter Bobble-head

www.darkcarnival.co.za | R160



Gears of War 3 Dog Tags

www.darkcarnival.co.za | R80



Nintendo 3DS Stylus (2x pack)

www.nintendo.co.za | R399



Orb Analog Thumb Grips for PS3 and Xbox

www.megarom.co.za | R49



World of Warcraft: Twilight of the Dragon Starter Decks

www.magicsa.co.za | R134.95



ORB DS Clear Game Card Case

www.megarom.co.za | R59



Sandisk Nintendo Wii 4GB SDHC Card

www.sandisk.co.za | R120



Fill it



What would a gamer's Xmas stocking be without... stocking fillers? Yes, we know no-one in your family will think eating Smarties with Star Wars Chopsticks is legendary, but nerds the world over will so get you. Oh, and make sure you have your name on your stocking so Santa doesn't mistakenly give you Barbie's Fashion Handbag Accessory Kit, that was meant for your baby sister Leonora.

the slug



the slüg



God of War Blade of Chaos Replica

www.darkcarnival.co.za | R1,750

Kill it



What would a gamer's arsenal be without... weapons? When we slay we do it in style. Nothing is safe when we're in all-out slaughter mode. Or even when we're filming a mock lightsabre battle against Obi-Wan to upload to YouTube.

THE XMAS SONG! (sung to the tune of Santa Clause is coming to town)

He knows when you are sleeping
He knows when you're on the can
He'll hunt you down and blast your ass from here to Pakistan!
You better not move you better not move
You're better off dead, I'm telling you dude
Santa Clause is gunning you down!
Robot Santa, Futurama



Star Wars Kit Fisto Force FX Adult Collectible Lightsabre

www.darkcarnival.co.za | R2,100



Experience Life in Brilliant HD with the new APU from AMD

What is the new APU?



The APU (Accelerated Processing Unit) is the fusion of AMD's multi-core CPU and Graphics on a single power-effective chip.

This means you get to play and work fast, long and in Brilliant HD.

Use this VISION guide to find the perfect APU for you.

Add any APU to the MSI A75MA-P35 FM1 Socket motherboard

Whatever you love to do, there's a VISION for you.



	A6 VISION Brilliant HD Entertainment	A8 VISION Brilliant HD Performance
INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA		
Accelerated Internet Browsing	✓	✓
Social Networking	✓	✓
Online Gaming	✓	✓
Email and Instant Messaging	✓	✓
PRODUCTIVITY AND APPLICATIONS		
Basic Office Applications	✓	✓
Word Processing	✓	✓
Mega Multi-tasking	✓	✓
Long Battery Life	✓	✓
Quad Core Performance	✓	✓
PHOTOS, VIDEOS AND ENTERTAINMENT		
Edit HD Photos	✓	✓
Advanced photo editing	✓	✓
Watch HD Movies	✓	✓
Create and edit HD movies	✓	✓
Render and Transfer HD Videos	✓	✓
HD Entertainment Hub	✓	✓
GAMING		
Direct X11 Support	✓	✓
Dual Graphics Capability	✓	✓
Casual Gaming	✓	✓
Ultra Realistic 3D Gaming	✓	✓



- OC Genie II: Auto OC to boost performance in 1 sec
- ClickBIOS Concept: Easy-to-use UEFI BIOS interface
- i-Charger: fast charge iPad/iPhone/smartphone
- Support USB 3.0 & SATA 6Gb/s

Available from these fine stores:

Chaos Computers - Western Cape
Tel: +27 21 914 7877

PC Zone - Kwa-Zulu Natal
Tel: +27 31 702 2101

InterComputers - Gauteng (Selected stores only)
Tel: +27 12 643 0737



Brilliant HD



Know your technology

/ MPEG-4 /

This standard defines a method of compression for audio and video digital data. MPEG-4 incorporates many of the features found in MPEG-1 and MPEG-2 but adds other features such as support for 3D rendering, VRML objects and many other features including externally specified DRM. MPEG-4 is a standard that is continually being improved and evolving. The most popular profile used in codecs such as DivX, Xvid and 3ivx is MPEG-4 part 2 that differs from the other profiles but still falls under the MPEG-4 banner. Most modern codecs that fall outside of this like X.264 and Quicktime 7 use MPEG-4 profile 10.

/ MP3 /

MP3 despite common misconception does not stand for MPEG-3. MP3 can fall under both the MPEG-1 and MPEG-2 Audio Layer III profile (hence the MP3). This patented lossy compression format has become the *de facto* standard for playback on many digital music devices. Despite only gaining massive popularity in the late 90s, the standard is old dating back to 1992. The compression ratio is generally 11:1 at 128kbit/s and much like other compressed audio formats, its encoding uses perceptual coding that discards and reduces precision of components that are less audible to human hearing.

/ AVI /

Audio Video Interleave is what AVI officially stands for and as the acronym suggests, it is a format used for storing audio and video in an interleaved file format. Introduced by Microsoft in 1992 as part of the VFW, most modern day AVI files actually use the newer AVI 2.0 format formalized in 1996. AVI breaks files into chunks and a FourCC tag identifies these chunks. An AVI file may carry data in these chunks in virtually any compression scheme, not limited to M-JPEG, Indeo, Cinepak and MPEG-4 video with all its profiles. As such, the AVI file largely serves as a container and says nothing about the compression mechanism used within these chunks inside the AVI file. Hence, the AVI extension is not a meaningful reference to data contained within the file.

/ MKV /

Matroska Multimedia Container is an open standard free container format that can hold any number of video, audio, picture and subtitle tracks in a single file. Its intention is to serve as a universal format for storing multimedia content. Matroska is similar in concept to AVI, MP4 (the native MPEG-4 container) and ASF, but remains open entirely in its specification. This container is commonly found in high bit-rate, high compression content files and is supported by several hardware manufacturers on their devices like Panasonic, ASUS, Western Digital, Samsung and others. Although entirely open, CoreCodec owns the copyrights and trademarks for the Matroska specification, but they are open to everybody.



Genius Wireless Stereo Headset HS-905 BT

It's a Bluetooth device combined with headphones and an integrated mic. Plug them into your headphones or speakers and you can stream music for up to 6.5 hours wirelessly (using any 3.5mm headphones or the supplied ones).

www.axiz.co.za / R299

Nintendo 3DS Charging Cradle + AC Adapter

Connect the AC adapter and use this as an easy portal to recharge the battery on your 3DS. The AC adapter is also compatible with the DSi and DSi XL.

www.nintendo.co.za / R299

Quote ///

"Razer Synapse 2.0 gives gamers a convenient, single cloud-based platform to access, maintain, and store settings for all of their Razer devices. On-board memory, with its limited storage for user profiles, becomes obsolete when Razer Synapse 2.0 offers essentially unlimited space for all of your hardware settings."

Robert "RazerGuy" Krakoff, President, Razer USA.

With the new Razer Synapse 2.0 software all of your Razer peripheral settings for any next generation Razer gaming device will be automatically stored in a cloud server which is accessible from any computer. Razer Synapse 2.0 also automatically downloads drivers, game add-ons, and firmware updates as they become available, ensuring your Razer devices are always updated. The software is currently in beta testing so will be available soon.

Mosh Pit



Geil Enhance Corsa DDR3 Hardcore Gaming Memory

Funk up the inside of your PC with 4GB (2GB x 2 dual channel kit) of bright orange 1600 MHz RAM.

www.elementek.co.za / R650



Razer Onza

Add a dash of style and a touch of class to your Xbox gaming. If you like to obsessively tweak your peripherals, the two extra fully programmable buttons will be right up your alley.

www.apexinteractive.co.za / R549.95



Coolermaster Universal Laptop Charger 120W

The charger has two USB ports (1A and 2A) to charge devices such as phones, media players and tablets. It also comes with 10 different interchangeable tips for charging a wide range of laptops: Acer, ASUS, HP, Compaq, BenQ, IBM, Lenovo, Toshiba, Fujitsu, Gateway, NEC, MSI, Sony, Dell and Samsung.

www.sonicinformed.co.za / R649

Snippets

Thermaltake have debuted the Transporter Carry Bag, a chassis carry bag suitable for all full tower cases including the Level 10 GT. It holds up to 100kg, has space for your keyboard, mouse and headset, and is rain, dust and snow resistant.

If you have an Intel SSD then you'll want to grab the Solid-State Drive Toolbox 3.0 system software. It monitors your Intel SSD for performance

degradation, tells you how many rewrite cycles are left, and provides a suite of diagnostics. Get it from <http://downloadcenter.intel.com>

CM Storm have introduced a line of fully mechanical keyboards. The QuickFire Rapid Mechanical Gaming Keyboard uses Cherry MX switches to minimise lag from the keyboard.

Samsung have launched a free, cross platform IM service called ChatOn. You

can get it from the Samsung App store or the Android marketplace.

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 meets Logitech in the Logitech Gaming Keyboard G105 and the Logitech Laser Mouse G9X. Both peripherals carry the official MW3 logo and come with the standard gaming features.

Intel will be including water cooling as an enthusiast solution for their upcoming Core i7-3000 series Sandy

Bridge-E processors, which are due for release on November 14.

Local IT distribution company Corex, sponsored all the prizes for Season 2 of the NGL Black Ops Online League. The winning clan in each division received 5 Thermaltake Azurues Gaming Mice; 5 Thermaltake Tt eSports DASHER Gaming Mouse pads; 5 Thermaltake Tt eSports Challenger Gaming Keyboards, and 5 Thermaltake Tt eSports

Shock Spin Gaming Headset.

GIGABYTE's new gaming keyboard, the Force K3, will be available soon. Features include an enlarged elastic rubber dome, one-piece rubber membrane design, enhanced frame structure, water-resistant functionality, and shock-resistant design.

NVIDIA's second generation of 3D Vision products is now available. New features include NVIDIA 3D LightBoost as well as a sleek new design.

Xbox 360 Wireless Speed Wheel

[info]

RRP:
R499

Website:
www.xbox.com

[technical]

/ Connectivity:
Microsoft proprietary wireless

[summary]

/ Pros:
No setup necessary;
Very sensitive;
Solid build quality;
Intuitive;
Doesn't take up space in your living room

/ Cons:
No bumper buttons;
Gets tiring to use after a while;
No recharge cord

/ Alternatives:
Microsoft Kinect;
An actual steering wheel



Since Microsoft has no official wheel for their Xbox 360 console, the closest thing to such a controller is the Wireless Speed Wheel. This controller aims to bridge the gap between the enthusiast hardcore crowd and the casual gamer who is unlikely to invest in any kind

of wheel for racing games. It's unlikely to appeal to the seasoned racing simulator fan, but there is some fun to be had with it for the casual racer, and especially with arcade racing games. We tested the Speed Wheel with *Forza Motorsport 4* and lying on the couch while racing definitely has its appeal.



/1/ All buttons found on the regular controller are present, save for the two bumper buttons.

/2/ The Speed Wheel makes use of two AA batteries inserted into the base of the unit.

/3/ Face buttons on the right of the wheel are a little small (about half the size) but are still functional and easy enough to reach during game play. The start and back buttons however can prove a little challenging as there's no

way to reach them without taking at least one hand off the unit.

/4/ Triggers have good travel, are placed well for convenience and do not hinder the steering at any point.

/5/ As light as this steering wheel is, your arms will quickly tire if you're holding the wheel like one would a traditional steering wheel, and you're unlikely to do anything close to 10 laps in any simulator using the speed wheel.

It is, however, great for drags and point to point races. The built-in sensors do allow a certain amount of versatility, meaning you won't need to hold the wheel out vertically in front of you to get it to respond.

/6/ Rumble feedback is a little weak, but the tracking accuracy and sensitivity is very good.

/7/ Two light rings are on either end of the controller and flash accordingly when you are accelerating or braking.


GIGABYTE™

Leader in Motherboard Innovation




All New 3-Way Digital Power

GIGABYTE X79 Ultra Durable™ Motherboards LGA 2011



Patent Pending
3D POWER
3-Way Digital Engine
Digital CPU Power | Digital Memory Power x2



Patent Pending
3D BIOS
Dual UEFI BIOS™

*3D BIOS and the 3D Power utility are available for download from the official GIGABYTE website.

Bluetooth™ 4.0
+ WI-FI Card Included

Supports
Intel® CORE i7

Intel
CHIPSET
X79



X79-UD7



G1.ASSASSIN 2



**PCIe Gen. 3 is dependent on CPU and expansion card compatibility. Overclocking may cause system instability. Above features may vary by model. Models may vary by region.



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

Cape Town:
Tel: (021) 555 8200
Fax: (021) 555 7136

Durban:
Tel: (031) 582 0200
Fax: (031) 582 0280

Port Elizabeth:
Tel: (041) 398 7082
Fax: (041) 398 7140

Bloemfontein:
Tel: (051) 430 0000
Fax: (051) 430 1144

Dream Machine

If you are confused by the change that you see in the NAG Dream Machine, do not be alarmed. We have decided to spec not one but two machines that should cater to both AMD and Intel fans alike. Naturally, the AMD machine is cheaper, but at this price point, it still offers incredible performance and remains a machine for those with an uncompromising affinity to AMD and deep pockets as well. The Intel machine features similar components but differs only in the choice of memory, motherboard

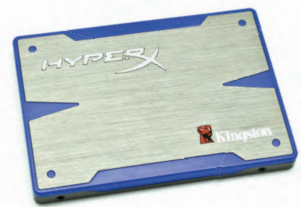
and CPU obviously. Going forward, these newly specced Dream Machine rigs will more closely reflect the rigs we would build for ourselves in accordance to the hardware we get to test and play with. As always, this is not the ultimate machine, but it is our "Dream Machine" and our criteria for including a component here is not only performance, but quality, functionality, value and aesthetics. Our objective is not to build the fastest machine money can buy, but the most balanced system possible with few to no shortcomings.



PSU
ANTEC HCP 1200
R2,399 / www.intel.com



Graphics
MSI GTX 580 Lightning
R5,499 / www.msi.com



OS Drive
Kingston 240GB HyperX SSD
R5,699 / www.kingston.com



Storage drive
Seagate Barracuda 3TB
R1,999 / www.seagate.com



Chassis
CoolerMaster HAF-X 942
R1,799 / www.sonicinformed.co.za



Display
ASUS VG278H 3D Monitor
R8,999 / www.asus.co.za



Keyboard
Logitech G19
R1,899 / www.logitech.com



Mouse
Roccat Kone +
R899 / www.sonicinformed.co.za



Mouse Mat
Roccat AluMice
R319 / www.sonicinformed.co.za



Sound
Asus Xonar Essence STX
R1,399 / za.asus.com

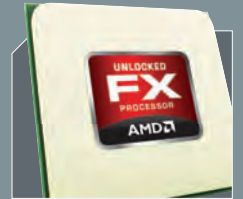


Speakers
Logitech Z-5500 Digital
R3,699 / www.logitech.com



Headphones
CMStorm SIRUS
R1,199 / www.sonicinformed.co.za

Fail Xtreme



With the disappointment that is AMD's FX CPU, one may wonder how such a project goes from looking promising on paper to staggeringly underwhelming in practice. Truth is, you'd be surprised just how often this happens and how it could happen to anyone in this industry. In fact in some instances, it only needs to happen once and the company ends.

If you rewind to the early to late '90s, we had so many IHVs it was ridiculous in comparison to today. One dubious design decision can end it all and it is probably the number one reason most of these IHVs don't exist. If you look at 3Dfx, this was a company founded by ex-SGI engineers and at the time, you could not really get a more talented team from anywhere. 3Dfx founded consumer grade 3D graphics accelerators. However, by the time the company shut down in 2000, too many misguided decisions ultimately destroyed what was actually a very IP-rich entity. Terrible business decisions like

"Surprising then, that AMD with the FX has done exactly the same thing as Intel did back in 2000/2001, it's almost as if nobody remembers how that entire episode played out."

the acquisition of STB further compounded the problem and interestingly enough, it seems that when tech companies make less than optimal technical investments, the business decisions follow with equally disastrous repercussions.

NVIDIA's resolution to be overambitious with the FX GPUs led to the company not only losing market share but also smearing their name amongst enthusiasts and gamers alike with questionable practises like outrightly cheating benchmarks. "optimizing" synthetic tests was more than likely a business decision and not one done by engineers. After all, if you go with a particular design direction, investing an incredible amount of resources only to find out it's not as great in practice simply means that you've just got to make the most of the situation until next generation. Bean counters and those with only monetary interests are more than likely to have pressured their underlings into such practices and it didn't end well. FX will forever remain a blemish in NVIDIA's history. Fortunately for NVIDIA, the company wasn't overwhelmed by the competition at the time simply because all competition short of ATI had died in the 3D card wars a few years prior.

Intel made similar disastrous design choices with the Pentium 4. From inception up until the end of the architecture's life, the damage done by the initial launch products was irreversible. In fact, the entire Pentium brand was ruined. As it is today, the "Pentium" brand looks to have been permanently retired. Chasing clock speeds at the cost of efficiency cost astronomical resources and the failure of the underlying design was evident. As painful as it may have been, (AMD gained market share during this time at Intel's expense) Intel had to ride it out while they went back to the drawing board to make something that would eventually lead to the incredible CPU technology we have today.

Surprising then, that AMD with the FX has done exactly the same thing as Intel did back in 2000/2001, it's almost as if nobody remembers how that entire episode played out. Much like how the Pentium 4 was slower than the outgoing Pentium 3 in many applications, the new AMD FX CPUs are slower than the outgoing Phenom IIs in many tests. By AMD's own disclosure, they were actively chasing high clock speeds, sacrificing single thread performance for multi-thread efficiency. The result having similarly disastrous consequences as it did for Intel almost 10 years ago.

It seems no IHV is exempt from making questionable investments.

Neo Sibeko

Intel

Intel Core i7 3960 Extreme Edition
R10,000 / www.intel.com

ASUS X79 Sabretooth
R4,000 / www.intel.com

8GB Quad Channel DDR3 2133MHz Memory
R2,000 / www.intel.com



Intel Dream Machine Price:

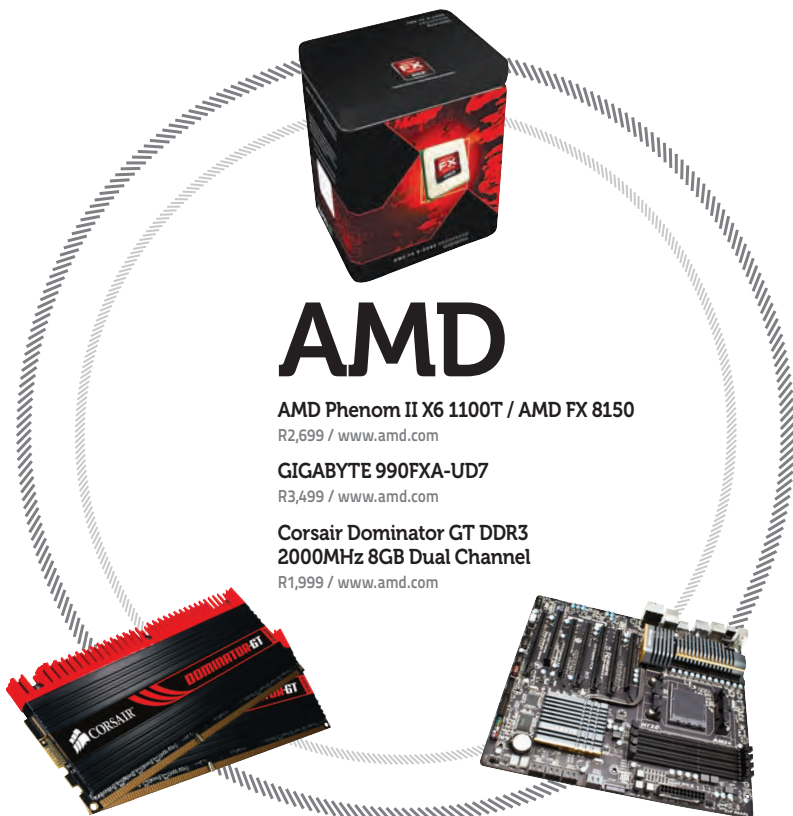
R48,808

AMD

AMD Phenom II X6 1100T / AMD FX 8150
R2,699 / www.amd.com

GIGABYTE 990FXA-UD7
R3,499 / www.amd.com

**Corsair Dominator GT DDR3
2000MHz 8GB Dual Channel**
R1,999 / www.amd.com

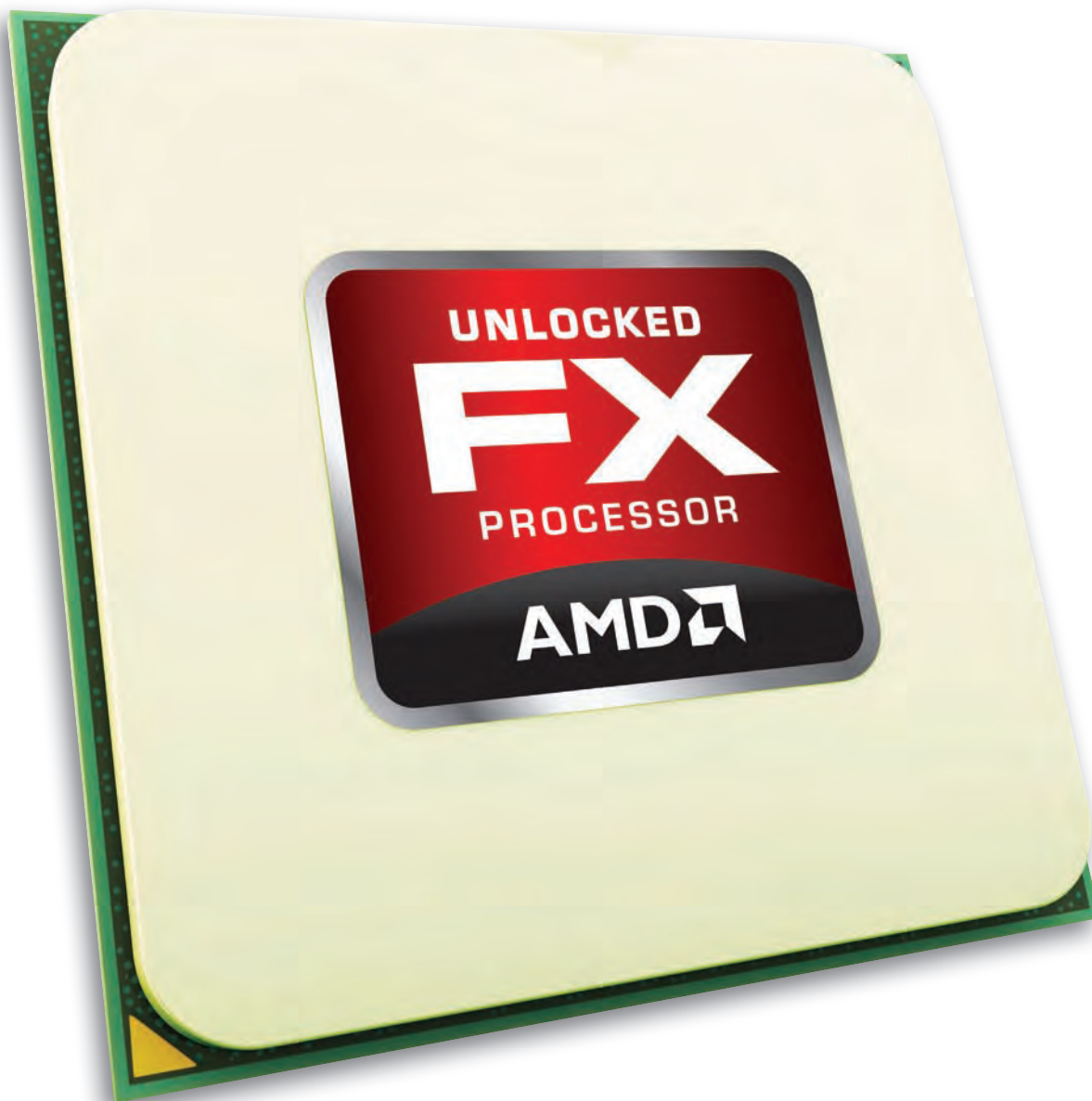


AMD Dream Machine Price:

R41,005

AMD FX-8150

Supplier: AMD / Website: www.amd.com / RRP: R3,099



The last five to six years have been very rough for AMD. Not only did Intel run away with the performance crown, but even on the graphics front, their acquisition of ATI has not allowed the outfit to surpass NVIDIA in overall market share and certainly not revenue.

However, despite all these difficulties, AMD has had some design wins and some fairly robust and powerful solutions, this being especially true of the APUs. These are really great products and lead in a way that makes it hard for Intel to compete with them. After all, there isn't any integrated solution from Intel that will give you the performance of any of the high end APUs from AMD. Whichever way you cut it, AMD's APUs are great all around products and, paired with

such aggressive pricing, there simply isn't a better choice for the consumer looking at such price points and functionality.

With that said, one would then expect the main bread and butter of the company to produce even better results. After all, AMD is known to us as a CPU company above all else. Sure enough both Intel and AMD seem to make most of their money in every other space before the DIY market, but in all these markets the products are shared; they may have different SKUs and configurations, but the architecture is shared across.

After many delays and setbacks, AMD has finally released the Bulldozer based CPUs. Technically elegant and quite interesting, but in practice things are very different and are anything but interesting. In truth,

[specs]

Core:
**32nm Bulldozer
(8 cores)**
Frequency:
3600MHz
Cache:
16MB total (8MB L3)
Platform:
AM3+

unlike other reviews you may have read, here we are only swayed by the numbers and it is because of these numbers we are largely confused about what the intention was behind the desktop parts.

We do understand that this way of designing CPUs will make it very easy for AMD to sell in the server and HPC market. Here, the number of threads is significantly more important than single thread efficiency by far. The design paradigm that AMD has with Bulldozer will allow them to leverage this for years on end, delivering both performance and scalability.

For end-users, the AMD FX CPUs are not what we were expecting and certainly not what we wanted. We don't understand how it's possible for AMD to gloat about having the world's only true (or rather "native") octa-core

Benchmarks	
3DMark Vantage CPU	/ 18,564 / / 23,940 /
CineBench 11.5	/ 5.89 / / 6.92 /
Wprime 1.55 1024M	/ 277.462 / / 221.347 /
Wprime 1.55 32M	/ 9.36s / / 7.379 /

Baseline: Intel Core i7 2600K

CPU, but forget to mention that their previous 6-core part is faster. That's right, in many tests you'll find that the Phenom II x6 1100T is actually faster than AMD's FX 8150. Despite the FX having two additional cores, a significant amount of additional cache, a better memory controller, better memory bandwidth and a smaller node, it still manages to be slower than the Phenom II.

How this was achieved is a little more technical than we will go into, and frankly it doesn't matter because the explanation will not help one live with the performance of this CPU. If we must be brutally honest, this is probably the most disappointing product from AMD since the original Phenom, which much like this CPU was clouded in darkness before release. Engineering samples were few and anybody who speculated on performance was chastised by either an AMD rep or somebody affiliated with AMD. Much like the original Phenom, the FX 8150 is underwhelming to say the least.

If you've not seen the numbers already, here is a sad example of how inefficient this CPU is in our context: in Cinebench 11.5, the FX-8150 at 4.6GHz delivers a lower score than a Phenom II X6 1100T at 4GHz. That's right, with two additional cores and a 600MHz advantage you end up with a lower score. If you're the owner of a Phenom II X6 1100T, you'll be hard

"...it is a genuine 8 thread CPU; it does have some interesting new instructions and is a drop-in upgrade for existing AM3/AM3+ systems."



pressed to upgrade to the FX series CPUs.

In Super 1M, the FX-8150 is about 4 seconds slower clock-for-clock than the Phenom II x6 1100T, which is pretty much what we see throughout all our testing. AMD states that they sacrificed single thread performance for multi-thread efficiency, however in all our tests other than two, the Phenom II X6 1100T was coming out ahead or equal to the newer CPU. Most certainly for video encoding nothing is close to what the FX-8150 can deliver, however while we do some video encoding once in a while, we do everything else more than that and that's where the FX-8150 falls short.

In its defence, it is a genuine 8 thread CPU; it does have some interesting new instructions and is a drop in upgrade for existing AM3/AM3+ systems. In addition, these CPUs overlock very well so that should sit well with enthusiasts and overclockers all over the world. The flip side to that though is that at 5GHz, the AMD FX-8150 will deliver the same performance in 3D Mark Vantage as an Intel Core i7 2600K at 3.6GHz. It is this lack of single

thread performance that lends itself to the abysmal multi-threaded performance in normal everyday applications. There are situations where the FX-8150 matches Intel's 2600K and sometimes betters it, but it's in obscure benchmarks and tests that virtually nobody reading this would care about.

We aren't entirely convinced that all is well at AMD because the company has essentially reproduced the disappointment of the original Phenom. There may not be a TLB bug here but the entire exercise has left us bitterly disappointed. After so many years of false starts, promises and delays, what we have here is a CPU that just isn't relevant against what the competition offers. Next to the Intel Core i7 2600K, this CPU does not make for a wise investment at all. Pitted against the X79, the situation is even worse. As it stands if you own a Phenom II system (DDR3), there's absolutely no incentive to upgrade and we'd wait until AMD's Piledriver cores show up next year before we even considered upgrading.

NAG
Neo Sibeko

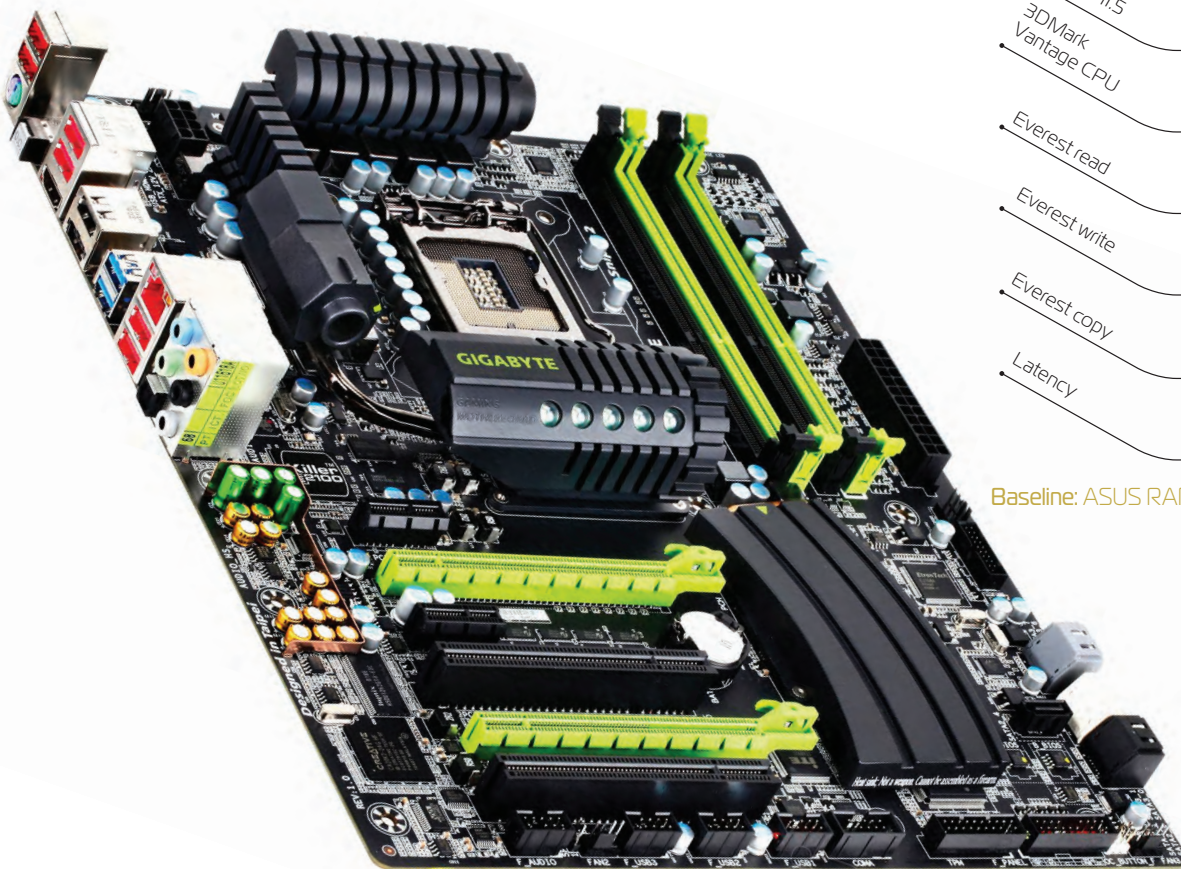
/ PLUS / Bulldozer finally released / Great at video encoding
/ MINUS / Performance at everything else / Slower than Phenom II X6 mostly

THIS CPU IS NOTHING LIKE WHAT THE FX NAME USED TO REPRESENT. THIS CPU IS ONLY FOR DIEHARD FANS.

5
OUT OF 10

GIGABYTE G1.Sniper2

Supplier: GIGABYTE / Website: www.gigabyte.com / ERP: R4,499



Benchmarks	
Super PI 8M	/ 1min57.012 / / 2min 5.175 /
CineBench 11.5	/ 7.09 / / 9.34 /
3DMark Vantage CPU	/ 24,981 / / 33,737 /
Everest read	/ 19,062 / / 17,111 /
Everest write	/ 18,401 / / 16,627 /
Everest copy	/ 21,188 / / 16,441 /
Latency	/ 44.6ns / / 49.1 /

Baseline: ASUS RAMPAGE III GENE

GIGABYTE seems determined to carry on with the G1 line of products and as it stands there are more than four motherboards in the series based on just two chipsets. One would have thought an AMD line of gaming boards would follow as well, but given the status of AMD's platforms we are not surprised that there isn't. What we do have though is the G1.Sniper2 which is the latest in the gaming series and, oddly enough, our favourite as well. Yes, much like the others it has a few issues we wish GIGABYTE would address, but for the most part it's a simple and straightforward board that has great performance, overclocks just as well as the UD7 products, and has a few nifty features that make it a better fit for gamers.

Before we get into the details, it's important to highlight what we didn't like about the motherboard. At the top of that list is the absence of a POST LED; we understand that this is primarily a gaming board, but like any other aftermarket motherboard it's a DIY part, so the ability to see what is going on during POST comes in very handy. The 8GB set of RAM we used for testing had some intermittent issues and booting the system took several cycles sometimes. We narrowed this down to the memory, but it took forever to diagnose that, whereas if there was a POST LED we could have diagnosed the problem within seconds.

Another issue with the board is the

lack of power and reset buttons. Instead there's an OC button on the back panel. Hardly what we would call useful as it's not useable if you have manually overlocked the board. Other than these issues, the Sniper2 is a solid board. Sure enough it does not grant you the abilities to use the built-in GMA3000 graphics processor on Sandy Bridge CPUs, but the IGP is enabled and you can still take advantage of the media encoding power of the CPUs because of Intel Quick Sync Video. A great design decision on GIGABYTE's part, because on other Z68 boards such as the EVGA Z68 FTW, you simply don't have the ability to use these extended CPU features at all, despite Quick Sync being one of the cornerstones of the Z68 chipset.

On to what we think is the most important feature on the board – the audio processor. This is once again custom circuitry built around the Creative Labs C20K2 audio processor. There are high quality caps used for filtering the signal and some shielding as well to further protect the audio from interference and noise. Overall, as you can imagine, it's a significantly better solution than anybody else offers right

now with onboard audio and certainly better than relying on the Realtek ALC889A controller. There's some distortion at very particular frequencies but that's isolated to certain songs we tested with, and overall there isn't much of a difference between an add-in X-Fi card and the solution GIGABYTE has implemented on this board.

Of lesser importance is the Bigfoot Killer NIC that is supposedly tuned for gaming, optimizing and shaping network traffic. There are all kinds of tests done comparing this and a "normal" NIC, but we aren't convinced by these results at all. There just isn't any compelling reason to pay more for a supposed benefit or solution to something that was never a problem to begin with. Having said that, we do appreciate the efforts GIGABYTE has made into designing this board and tailoring it for gamers.

Add all the features that the Z68 platform brings with it and you end up with a fairly impressive board that may not be perfect but gives you everything you will ever need or can get from the LGA 1155 platform.

NAG

Neo Sibeko



[specs]

Chipset:
Intel Z68
Memory:
4x240-pin DDR3
CPU support:
Intel Core i5/i7 LGA 1155
Slots:
2x-PCI-E 16x, 2x PCI

/ **PLUS** / Sound Blaster X-Fi processor / Bigfoot Networks NIC
/ **MINUS** / 2-way graphics only

FANTASTIC GAMING BOARD FOR THE LGA 1155 PLATFORM. SOLID PERFORMANCE AND GREAT FEATURES MAKE THIS A GREAT BUY IF YOU CAN FIND IT FOR THE RIGHT PRICE.

8
OUT OF 10

OUTSMART

budget pressures with HP's next generation EVA.

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with the new HP P6000 EVA family.*

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ASUS Xonar Essence One

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



This is the best USB DAC that money can buy.



ASUS, out of all the motherboard companies, is easily the most versatile of the lot. Their audio cards alone attest to this. Unpopular as this sentiment may be, ASUS actually makes the best mass-market sound cards for the desktop. Sure enough, there are competitors in the form of AUZENTECH, Creative and some others, but very few, if any, can claim to produce the level of sound quality that we have witnessed over the last few years with the Xonar Essence products.

They may not be for everybody, but there is no denying that they epitomise acoustic brilliance when it comes to desktop computers, and in particular for the enthusiast market. With every Essence product, we are further impressed and this isn't about to change with their latest entry. The Essence One is not actually a sound card at all, but rather a DAC/Headphone amplifier if you will. This means you can plug it into your PC's USB port and have it take over as your primary audio controller; however, to say that's all it does is to not only undersell the product but miss its brilliance entirely.

Before we get into the details of what makes it such a great product, one has to concede that such a product is unlikely to appeal to the vast majority of gamers. It's an audiophile product that so happens to come from ASUS. This is particularly easy to see given the kind



[specs]

Inputs:
Toslink, Coaxial, USB
 Outputs:
**XLR, RCA, 6.3mm
 RCA**
 THD:
<0.000316 (-110dB)
 SNR:
120dB
 Frequency response:
10Hz -48KHz

of connections that this DAC makes use of. Balanced XLR, unbalanced (RCA) outputs, support for headphones with impedance as high as 600 ohms and all relevant digital audio inputs. You'll not find any stereo mini-jack output or inputs here. All inputs must be digital in nature (it is a DAC after all) and as such the Essence One is geared only for the most discerning audio purist. Most of what makes this DAC brilliant will be lost to virtually all gamers as hardly anyone in this demographic is going to be impressed by the 11 changeable op-amps, the built-in power supply, the 120dB SNR, the multitudes of supported sampling rates or the ridiculously impressive THD value. All of this will be lost and wasted on anyone who even considers onboard audio controllers from the likes of ADH or Realtek adequate for their needs.

If, however, you would spoil yourself for once and listen to the immaculate audio signal produced from the Essence One you'll be hard pressed to return to using your on-board audio solution. Having said that, most people's compressed audio tracks are not

adequate for truly appreciating what this device is capable of and what it brings to the table. The immediate temptation with the Essence One is to plug it directly to a Blu-ray or SACD player and connect a set of Beyer T1s if you can afford such toys, or for the mortals, Sony's MDR-XB500s. However even with a "lesser" but endowed gaming headset (CM Storm SIRUS for example) there's hours of brilliance to be extracted from this unit. Best of all, as your appreciation grows and you upgrade your headphones, the Essence One will grow with you.

There are very few things that one can purchase adorned with the ASUS logo that will not need upgrading at some point. This DAC, however, is unlikely to ever need replacement for any reason, as it is unimaginable that there exists a more refined auditory experience than what the Xonar Essence One will produce over a set of headphones. In pursuit of auditory excellence and perfection, ASUS has delivered by far the purest product from the Xonar family and by extension, easily the best USB DAC money can buy. The ASUS Xonar Essence One is in a word, impeccable. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

/ PLUS / Flawless audio production / Build quality
 / MINUS / Niche product / Heavy

THE BEST USB DAC ON THE MARKET RIGHT NOW AND PROBABLY FOR MANY YEARS TO COME.

10
 OUT OF 10

devolo dLAN 500 AVmini Starter Kit

Supplier: Galasol LTD / Website: www.galasol.co.za / RRP: R1,499

500Mbps is a lofty goal for any consumer networking product that relies on something other than a simple Cat 5e cable. Powerline Ethernet has been around for a while, and has always struggled to keep up with other networking protocols in terms of speed and reliability, even falling short of Wi-Fi's finicky but ultimately better performance. Enough time has passed to encourage us to try this technology again and, despite failing to come close to its theoretical maximum throughput, the devolo dLAN 500 AVmini is miles ahead of anything else we've used in the past.

Powerline Ethernet works by connecting two remote points in the same building (and on the same breaker board) through the existing power lines; the adaptors then provide an Ethernet port so you can connect your PC, console, Blu-ray player etc. without the need to run network cables all over the place. Installation of the dLAN 500 could not be any easier; it literally takes longer to unpack the box's contents than it does to set up. Simply plug in each adaptor where they need to go, wait a second for the display to confirm an established connection, plug in the included Ethernet cable at each point and connect your devices.

To test the throughput of the dLAN 500, we copied a large file across the network from one PC to another, under a variety of circumstances. Our first test provided disappointing results, managing a maximum sustained speed of just 6.5MB/s (52Mbit/s), but the included insert clarified the issue: the more overloaded your multiplugs, and the more plugs in the chain, the slower the speed. Eventually, after fiddling with the setups on either end (including using different 2-prong adaptors), we managed to get that speed up to 113Mbit/s, which is enough to stream an HD movie to your console, transfer large files in a reasonable amount of time, and even play games across the network. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

[specs]

Included components:
2x PLC powerline adaptors; 2x grounded Ethernet cables
 Theoretical maximum throughput:
500Mbit/s
 Certification:
HomePlug AV IEEE 1901
 Encryption:
AES 128-bit
 Warranty:
3 years



/ PLUS / Incredibly easy to set up / Good throughput / Easily expandable
/ MINUS / Far from 500Mbit/s / Pricey

A GREAT PRODUCT THAT WILL SUIT THOSE LOOKING FOR A QUICK AND EASY NETWORKING SOLUTION.

8
OUT OF 10

LICENSED FOR
XBOX 360

XBOX 360

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PS3

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QNAP TS-219P II Turbo NAS

Supplier: Pinnacle / Website: www.qnap.com / RRP: R2,819

QNAP is a prominent player in the world of network-attached storage (NAS) devices, and rightly so: their products are always well made, feature-rich and easy to use. The TS-219P II is no different, offering a diverse solution for anyone looking to do more with their home network.

In terms of the hardware itself, the TS-219P II comes packing a 2GHz Marvell 6282 processor, coupled with 512MB of DDR3 RAM. The sturdily built device is designed to stand vertically on four rubber feet that prevent slippage, and you'll find two hot-swappable drive trays that are easily removed. The trays can be outfitted with both 3.5- and 2.5-inch (solid state or magnetic) drives. Our only problem with the trays is that they don't feature a tool-less design, instead requiring a bit of screwdriver action to ensure your drives stay in place. It would have been nice if they boasted the same tool-free tray design that most PC cases employ these days.

In addition to a number of status LEDs, the power button and a one-touch backup button, there's also one USB port on the front of the unit. At the back you'll find two more

USB ports, along with the Gigabit LAN port and two eSATA ports. All the USB ports are USB 2.0 ports and can be used with removable storage, memory card readers and compatible Wi-Fi adapters. While USB 3.0 support would've made the package more appealing, USB 2.0 works perfectly fine.

Setting up the device is a hassle-free affair, with the installer guiding you through each step of the setup process and allowing you to configure the device to match your requirements as you go. Once installed, the browser-based interface is clean and really easy to navigate, allowing you to put the TS-219P II to use in a variety of ways. It can be used to serve media to multiple devices (with iTunes Server support provided – and it can also stream media to your Xbox or PS3), to download torrents straight to the installed drives, or it can be used as an FTP server. You can also use the MyCloudNAS service to access your stored data from anywhere, even via your Android or iOS device. The built-in web server lets you host websites, complete with SSL authentication. The device offers more than there's space to list here, and all you really



[specs]

CPU:
Marvell 6282 2GHz
RAM:
512MB DDR3 RAM
HDD:
2 x 3.5-inch SATA II
2 x 2.5-inch SATA II
SSD/HDD
(not included)
Flash memory:
16MB
LAN port:
1 x Gigabit RJ-45
Ethernet port
USB:
3 x USB 2.0 ports
eSATA:
2 x eSATA ports

need to know is that it's packed with useful features, and setting them up is quick and painless.

In terms of performance, the hardware allows for impressive

read and write speeds. Overall, it's a great product for anyone looking for a network-attached storage solution.

NAG
Dane Remendes

/ PLUS / Solid build / Good read/write speeds / Excellent software
/ MINUS / No tool-less design / No USB 3.0

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A NAS SOLUTION, THIS IS DEFINITELY WORTH CONSIDERING.

8
OUT OF 10

Yama W1 Full Tower Value USB 3.0 Chassis

Supplier: CompuSeed / Website: www.compuSeed.co.za / RRP: R1,599

Chassis manufacturers like Cooler Master, Thermaltake and Antec ruled the market for ages, and in recent years that's opened up to accommodate other manufacturers like NZXT who have been scooped up by a market desperate for new products, so it's good to have a new contender in this space.

It's clear that Yama's design philosophy follows that of the big-name manufacturers mentioned previously, as the interior design of the case is simple but practical, built using high-quality steel construction and a neat paint-job to tie it all together. This case could be considered small, but with room for five hard drives (with mountings for both 3.5" and 2.5" drives) and five optical drives, and fan mountings in every possible location, it makes good use of the space. Our only gripe in this regard is the case's width, which will make for a tight squeeze when using any larger-than-ordinary CPU coolers; for reference, our former Dream Machine cooler, the massive Noctua NH-D14, simply wouldn't fit in this case. On the plus side, this restricted width is in part due to the ample cable management space on the underside of the motherboard mounting plate.

There are a few design oddities,



namely the large space between the two top-mounted 120mm fans that would prohibit the proper mounting of a dual radiator; the exterior HDD slot, although welcome, won't actually allow a hard drive to be connected and requires the use of (mercifully included) SATA data and power cables; finally, the use of two 80mm fans on the side is just begging for noise over performance,

and with 120mm fans so common in this role, we had half forgotten that 80mm fans were even still manufactured.

NAG
Geoff Burrows

[specs]

Gross weight:
15.8Kg
Dimensions:
516x210x450mm
Included fans:
2x80mm side,
1x 120mm rear,
2x 120mm top,
1x 120mm front
Additional fan
mountings:
2x 140mm bottom,
2x 140mm
replacement top
Front panel:
Audio, 2x USB 2.0, 2x
USB 3.0 (via cables),
4x fan toggles (on/
off), e-SATA, SATA,
multi card reader

/ PLUS / Solid steel construction / Plenty of fans and mountings
/ MINUS / Some design oddities / A few plastic components

EVERYTHING YOU NEED FROM A MID-RANGE CASE.

7
OUT OF 10

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CM Storm SIRUS 5.1 Gaming Headset

Supplier: Sonic Informed / Website: www.sonicinformed.com / RRP: R1,299



/1/ The Tactical Mixing Console control allows you to adjust your volume using the knob, mute your microphone and speakers, and also mix four basic sound channels. The LED lights up in different colours so you can see what you're adjusting. The Tactical Mixing Console requires two dedicated USB ports to

function and connects to your headset using a 10-pin connector.

/2/ The SIRUS comes with a 5.1 surround sound TRS cable, allowing you to connect your headset directly to your 5.1 surround sound card. Alternatively, you can connect directly via USB.

/3/ There is a very long braided cord, ensuring that your headset has ample room to connect to your PC without it pulling tight at any point. The heavy-duty plated connector at the end of this cord can plug into your Tactical Mixing Console or into a TSR cluster, both of which include a second run of cable.

"One could literally listen to this headset for hours on end without any kind of fatigue usually induced by bass heavy and typically harsh audio on gaming headsets."

A few issues back we did a roundup of gaming headsets and while some were good, most were nauseating and for lack of a better word, rubbish. The quality left much to be desired and almost all the sets were more gimmicky than they were functional. The 5.1 surround effect was hardly convincing and, as far as we are concerned, just not worth the bother. If you want 5.1 surround sound, stick to a real speaker setup and keep your headphones for pure stereo listening.

The CM Storm SIRUS headset was not available at the time of that roundup which is most unfortunate because, up against SIRUS headphones, every other gaming set would be worthless. A bold statement indeed, but the SIRUS set is in a completely different class compared to all of the gaming sets we tested. The purity of the sound is incredible and despite having very low expectations, the sound completely blew us away. One never expects such a warm and well-balanced gaming headset. The



[specs]

Frequency response:
10 - 20,000 Hz
Impedance:
32 Ohm
Input sensitivity:
105dB
THD:
< 1%

stereo imaging is fantastic, with a very lively low frequency. The mid-range is just right, never overbearing while the highs are slightly subdued but not to the point where they sound dull and take away from the source material. In a way, the drivers on this headset remain understated while featuring very accurate and super-fast movement, which keeps the audio engaging at all times.

One could literally listen to this headset for hours on end without any kind of fatigue usually induced by bass heavy and typically harsh audio on gaming headsets. This set also features the most comfortable ear cups we have ever used. They isolate outside noise very well while allowing your ears to breath. Depending on

your own personal preference you have a choice of foam or pleather ear pads. The actual headset itself is a bit weighty, but does feel comfortable nonetheless, even after hours of continuous use.

Back to the sound quality, which never ceased to amaze with spectacular dynamics across all kinds of music and movies. Games in a way undersell what this headset is capable of producing. Suffice to say, this set is, in our humble opinion, peerless amongst all the gaming sets on the market. On audio quality alone, the CM Storm SIRUS deserves a perfect score. Considering that this is Cooler Master's first foray into the audio market it's an exceptional debut product.

NAG
Neo Sibeko

/ PLUS / Very comfortable / Acoustics / Build quality
/ MINUS / Lots of USB ports required

BEST GAMING HEADSET MONEY CAN BUY CURRENTLY. UNMATCHED ACOUSTICS AT THIS PRICE.

10
OUT OF 10

TOP RATED GAMES

VISIT NAG ON YOUR PHONE AND DOWNLOAD ANY OF THE PREMIUM GAMES FEATURED ON THIS PAGE. WHILE YOU'RE THERE, CHECK OUT THE HOTTEST NEW PREVIEWS, HANDS-ON REVIEWS, THE LATEST FEATURES AND A WHOLE LOT MORE PURE AWESOMENESS.

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Samsung GALAXY S II

Supplier: Samsung / Website: www.samsung.co.za / RRP: R6,999

In our technology landscape, some truths – hard as they may be – must be expressed occasionally. In this case, it is that Apple is peerless in its marketing campaigns. More than that, its brand value is without equal. There is something cool about owning an iPhone, regardless of how many other people have it. Other products are cool because of the entry they allow you into a supposed exclusive club, but in the case of the aforementioned product, being part of the Apple iPhone family has an almost esoteric appeal. Odd then to start a Samsung GALAXY S II review talking about its chief competitor and bitter rival.

Well, this is simply because there really isn't a way Samsung can ever be as cool as Apple, or at least, having a Samsung GALAXY S II just doesn't garner you the same approving nods as having an iPhone 4 does. These factors in a way are what make the GALAXY S II that much more remarkable. Based purely on its capabilities, the GALAXY S II has not only managed to beat out every other smartphone in all relevant comparisons, but it has, by virtue of being the "geek's revenge" against "Job's mob", cemented itself as not only the most advanced smartphone on the market but as smartphone of the year. Given that the GALAXY S II sells itself based purely on scientifically



[specs]

CPU:
Dual ARM Cortex A9
1.2GHz, Mali 400MP
GPU (Exynos chipset)
Memory:
1GB
Storage:
16GB storage
expandable via
microSD
OS:
Android Gingerbread
2.3 (TouchWiz 4.0 UI)
Screen:
480x800 Super
AMOLED+ capacitive
Camera:
8MP, autofocus, LED
flash, Geo-tagging,
image stabilization
Connectivity:
Wi-Fi a/b/g/n,
DLNA, Wi-Fi Direct,
Hotspot, Bluetooth
3.0+HS



"...it's astonishing that it has become the fastest selling smartphone of all time, unseating Apple's iPhone from the throne"

quantifiable features such as being the thinnest smartphone, it's astonishing that it has become the fastest selling smartphone of all time, unseating Apple's iPhone from the throne.

These are not just claims, but facts that have caused a very public and bitter attack by Apple on Samsung. Understandable because, in terms of features and possibly usability, the GALAXY S II is in every way better than the flagship phone from the competition, and even more than that it's better by a margin in those disciplines. From the Super AMOLED+ screen (brightest screen on the market) with an eye-watering 480x800 resolution, to the ultra light weight 116g and 8.5mm profile. It's not only thinner than the iPhone 4S introduced 7 months later, but it's lighter, has a longer battery life, supports more Wi-Fi standards, DLNA, Wi-Fi Direct and higher HSDPA speeds. These are but some of the advantages it has over its direct competitor, and so compelling

are the features that in a way it does not need to be cool. However, we must mention that Apple's iPhone 4/S display, while smaller at 3.5", has an even higher resolution and as such, a much better pixel density, which is just breathtaking to say the least.

So vast are the features and capabilities of the GALAXY S II, it's difficult to summarize the user experience in a single page review. You could own this phone for months on end only to have another GALAXY S II user show you something that blows you away. It could be the very powerful voice recognition engine, which allows you to not only input text via dictation in any appropriate field but make searches as well, to the ability to issue commands to your phone via voice. The interface is so understated and simple that it almost undersells the phone's capabilities.

Of particular interest to us in our testing was that the GALAXY S II allows one to use not only the Android

market but also the Samsung store to download all kinds of applications. That includes programs that allow you to rip subtitle files from MKV files and have the built-in player read them as SRT files. Through copying all kinds of video and audio files to the device, the GALAXY S II played them all without ever needing them to be converted; this includes massive full 1080p videos. Simply put, there isn't a better Android phone on the market; the GALAXY S II is the most advanced you can buy and you'll not find a more capable smartphone on the market right now. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

/ PLUS / Superb display / Very powerful / Very light
/ MINUS / Auto-sync drains battery

EASILY THE MOST POWERFUL AND FEATURE RICH PHONE ON THE MARKET. THIS IS THE SMARTPHONE TO BEAT.

9
OUT OF 10

ESET Smart Security 5

Supplier: ESET Southern Africa / Website: www.eset.co.za / RRP: R538

Cybercrime! It's a thing that exists in the dangerous, untamed wilds of the Internet. Pesky basement warriors lurk in dark imaginary alleyways, eager to jump you from their hiding spot in a digital bush somewhere and steal all your virtual belongings before thumping you over the head and leaving you for dead. Or so I've been told.

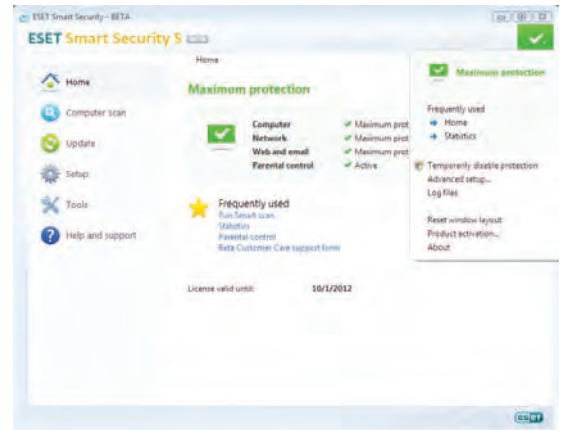
So, you'll need some form of protection, and this is where ESET Smart Security 5 comes in. When you're a gamer who primarily engages in their virtual shenanigans via a personal computerbox, you're likely looking for a security suite that's unobtrusive, but effective, and preferably one that results in a negligible impact on your rig's performance so that all of your expensive hardware can focus on making your games run as smoothly as possible. ESET's offering has always been known for this – after all, the company first launched its security software at a time when the market was flooded with bulky, system-destroying security suites like Symantec's Norton Internet Security, so ESET's suite was mighty tempting for anyone who wanted their system secured with almost no impact to performance.

Smart Security 5 continues that tradition, offering one of the leanest and



most user friendly security suites out there. The interface is minimalist and easy to navigate, with a range of security options and barely noticeable impact on system resources – even while performing tasks like scans. This makes it ideal for gamers, but unfortunately people who require the highest level of security will do well to look elsewhere, because Smart Security 5 has lagged behind its competition in terms of the protection and features it offers.

Still, if you're looking for a basic,



but efficient security suite to protect your precious data from losers with nothing better to do than defile your digital doohickies, Smart Security 5 will do a great job of keeping you safe on all fronts. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

[specs]

System requirements:
OS: Windows 2000/XP/Vista/7 (32-bit/64-bit)

/ PLUS / Minimal performance hit / Good all-round protection
/ MINUS / Not the best parental control system available

IT'S NOT THE BEST INTERNET SECURITY SUITE OUT THERE, BUT IT'S A DECENT CHOICE.

7
OUT OF 10

Wishing you a cracking holiday season, from NAG.

NOTE: The Editor's girlfriend was not harmed during the making of this advert.

This, after a word from our sponsors



I can't believe it's already December*. I can't believe much of anything just now, in fact. It's been four and a half and a bit days since I quit smoking (again), and – presumably as a consequence of some momentary indiscretion against the universe, or maybe that KFC Twister I ate the other day – I've come down with some kind of repulsive bug. Honestly, I'm not even sure which of the three, sometimes four monitors / magic elf windows in front of me is the real one.

This time last year**, as I've done at the end of every year*** since whenever I started doing it, I made a bunch of predictions about big happenings scheduled on some secret ethereal calendar for the coming year. Oh, they said I was mad, a blasphemer, and a great deceiver, the auguries falling from my lips nothing more than the perfidious phantasms of 21st century pharmacology and too much chewy toffee. That's all true, of course, but I was right.

Most Kinect and Move games suck, nobody bought a 3D TV, Duke Nukem bombed, Diablo III was delayed to 2012, and PC gaming continues to die / not die on a daily basis. Okay, the world hasn't ended (yet; it's still only October, remember?), but my hair colour was discontinued and that's close enough.

Having thus established my incontrovertible authority on all things past, present and future then, here's what is surely coming up next.

DELAYS

All the things.

BUTTHURT AND BOYCOTTS

It's not exactly, specifically, unequivocally what PC gamers wanted, and they don't like the colours, so they're starting this online petition to demand that EVERYTHING IS REDONE (etc.) and threatening to pirate the game instead. Which most of them probably do anyway.

THE NEXT GENERATION OF CONSOLES IS

"Most Kinect and Move games suck, nobody bought a 3D TV, Duke Nukem bombed, Diablo III was delayed to 2012, and PC gaming continues to die / not die on a daily basis."

ANNOUNCED, AND CONSOLE GAMERS ALREADY KNOW WHICH ONE IS GOING TO BE THE BEST

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Which is just pseudo-philosophical subterfuge for sneering contempt.

DISAPPOINTMENT

;-; We all really expected them to do something exciting and innovative with Generic Face Shooter 9.

A CLASSIC FRANCHISE GETS REBOOTED, AND EVERYBODY HATES WHAT THEY'RE DOING WITH IT

Because it's not in 16-colour EGA, it's not using a text parser, it's not kind of shit, and it's just not the same. Also, it's so mainstream and consolificat-... consolidis-... lame now.

FUN-HATING

Gaming is serious business.

IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING, THE NEXT CALL OF DUTY SELLS ZILLIONS

But nobody actually wants to publically admit it's because it's a great game. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

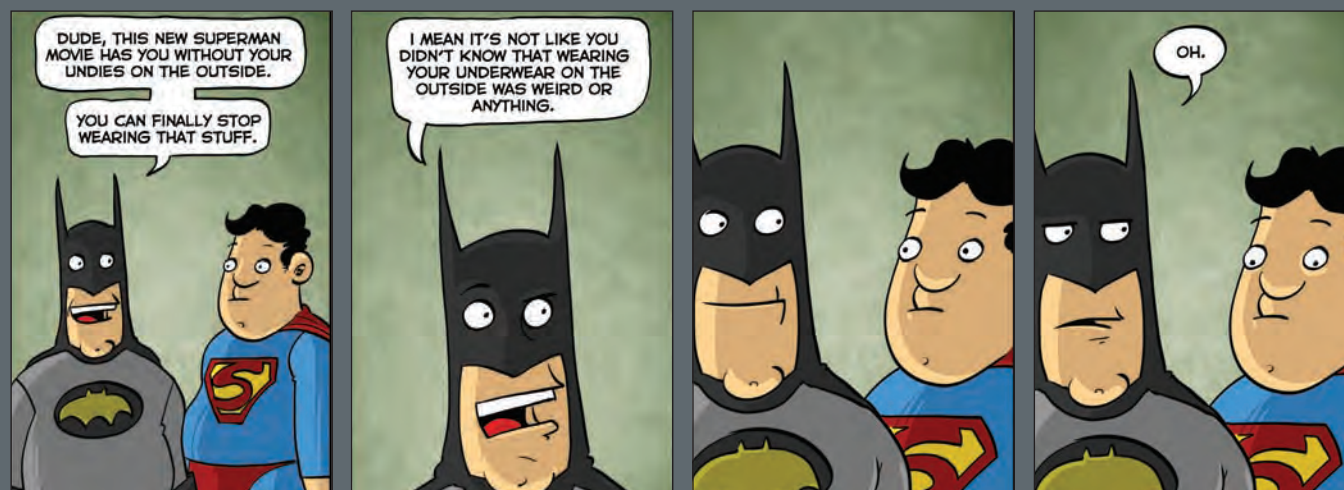
*It's not, actually. It's October. Don't ask, this is top tier, Grand High Ultra Wizard-Journalist stuff.

**Also October.

*** You know this bit.

Extra Life

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R40



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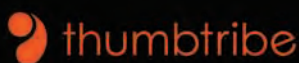


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