

NAG

FAKRCRY3

Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Africa anymore...

INDIE GAMES

An 8 page investigation into what's good, what's coming and what it all means.

PREVIEWS

- Torchlight II
- The last of us
- I am alive
- Kinect Star wars
- Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City
- + MORE

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CONNECTION

WHERE TECHNOLOGY & HUMANITY MEET

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NAG

Editor
Michael "RedTide" James
ed@nag.co.za

Assistant Editor
Geoff "GeometriX" Burrows

Staff Writer
Dane "Barkskin" Remendes

Contributing Editor
Lauren "Guardi3n" Das Neves

Technical Writer
Neo "ShockG" Sibeko

International Correspondent
Miktar "Miktar" Dracon

Contributors
Rodain "Nandrew" Joubert
Walt "Ramjet" Pretorius
Miklós "Mikit0707" Szecsei
Pippa "UnexpectedGirl" Tshabalala
Tarryn "Azimuth" Van Der Byl
Adam "Madman" Liebman

Art Director
Chris "SAVAGE" Savides

Photography
Chris "SAVAGE" Savides
Dreamstime.com
Fotolia.com

Sales Executive
Cheryl "Cleona" Harris / cheryl@nag.co.za
+27 72 322 9875
Len Nery / len@nag.co.za

Marketing and Promotions Manager
Jacqui "Jax" Jacobs
jacqui@nag.co.za
+27 82 778 8439

Office Assistant
Paul Ndebele

Contact Details
P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158, South Africa
Tel +27 11 704 2679
Fax +27 11 704 4120

Subscription Department
subs@nag.co.za

Internet
www.nag.co.za
www.zinio.com/nag

Printing
Impress Web Printers
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Distribution
On the Dot
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this magazine when you're finished with it.



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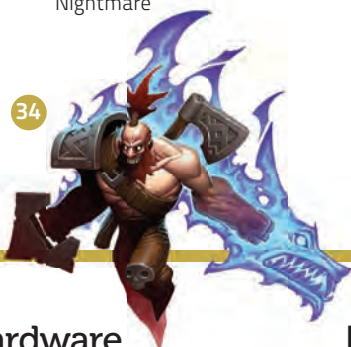
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Letter of the Month March 2011

From: Amith

Subject: The Hidden Gamer

Hey you awesome people of awesome, first up great job on the magazine keep it up you guys do a great one-of-a-kind job. Well it was the festive season and I received a knife from my sister that looked like a ninja star, my other sister knew more about what I liked, so she got me Skyrim for PS3, now this was no surprise seeing as I begged her to get it for me. I inserted the disc and the PS3 gobbled it up as usual. I got in the game very quickly. Now the unusual thing was the awkward presence of my mother from the start of the game (we have only one main HDTV that everyone uses). As I battled dragons, levelled up, took arrows to the knee (sorry couldn't resist), and adventured, I glanced every few times at my

mother to see if she was still paying attention, and the weird thing was, she was... She even enquired at one point about why I was killing women (female bandits). So now, one day my mom told my dad to take me to SPAR and get a few things for her, naturally I was playing Skyrim and was about to fight a dragon, so I saved and paused. When I returned I saw my mother on the couch, controller in hand taking on the dragon. I was astonished. Like, seriously man, I was at a loss for words. She never kill the dragon though, she died (thank God I saved.) After she gave the controller to me she proceeded to do what mothers do best. Later than night I was thinking, a 42 year old woman, who has probably never touched a PS3 controller before attempted to slay a dragon just by observing what I did. This definitely

proves that everyone has a Gamer inside of them. I just never expected it from my own mother! What a year this will be to remember!

This is excellent because it's different from all the usual cry-baby stories I hear about how bad everyone has it out there. Boohoo, my mommy won't let me play GTA; Sniff, my daddy says I can't play games during school nights; poor me, I can't afford ADSL, and so on. I hope that your letter gives those poor sad gamers with rubbish parents a little hope in their darkest hours. Well done. Have a few free games because you already seem to have it all... Rich sisters who buy you knives and games, your own PS3, an HDTV, a gaming mom and cool dad that drives you around! 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.

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

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

From: Clinton

Subject: Perfection

Far too often I see the "Inbox" section of your incredible magazine (you guys do an amazing job, but that goes without saying) littered with letters of disgruntled gamers complaining about shattered expectations they had about games. Many gamers seem to be stuck in a sad cycle of hype and disappointment. It seems that no game is released without being absolutely hated by at least a minority for doing something a slightly wrong. Today's gamers simply can't play a great game and be happy with it, nothing's good enough, it seems. For example; Bethesda created a mindboggling world in The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, a world so captivating that people have given up their lives to live in the dragon-filled mountains of Skyrim. I myself have given more than seventy hours of my life to that game, and countless others have given much more. Skyrim does have a few (often hilarious) bugs, and the problems on the PS3 are adding yet more kindling to the console war, but there is no denying that it is a breath-taking game. Yet people are still complaining – still making snowy mountains out of ant hills. Near the end of last year we were assaulted by a slew of games too good to be Triple A (Uncharted 3, Batman: Arkham City and the fraternal FPS twins). But still the forums are alive with anger, resent, and sad faced emoticons. Today it seems that if a game isn't perfect (Miktar pointed this out perfectly in his column last month) it crashes, or is burnt at the stake by the very people who were looking forward to the game. What we should all do is take a step back to see how lucky we are. We have games and technology which no one could have imagined just a few years ago, yet, there's never going to be a "perfect" game or an "ideal" console, as both are relative to every individual. So don't listen to the hype, or the hate, if a game catches your eye, play it and enjoy. Just remember, there is no such thing as perfection. P.S. If you think the awesome people at NAG gave up on the badger, think again! If you look very, very closely, you'll see that it is the icon for www.nag.co.za! The stuff they said being sick of the badger? Lies! Go see for yourself.

That icon only appears if you use Firefox and Chrome for some reason – odd. As for your letter, first up thank you for the kind words...

Second, you're right. Gamers are a bunch of whiny slags end of the day. Just play a game of MW3 and try camping a bit and see what I mean. I'm not sure what makes them like this, or us like this. I can't distance myself because I'm just as guilty. :) Do we have high expectations because of all the BS hype we get fed every day, do the screenshots seem more exciting in our heads than the game plays when we get it or are the improvements between versions just not enough anymore. I don't know, you tell me. Ed.

From: Travis

Subject: Lydia Must Die

Hi guys at NAG great work keep it up. Now my story began when I was playing Skyrim and I had just become a Thane and I met Lydia. By the time I got from Dragonsreach to the Whiterun Stable she had foiled my multiple attempts at pickpocketing, lock picking, sneaking as well as committing blasphemous acts like passing through doors so at the Whiterun Stables she foiled one pickpocket too many and I smote her my holy fire and stole everything she owns. To this day she sits on her knees with head looking in to the sky with no clothes on and stands as a reminder to any who would do wrong by me. In the January Issue of NAG someone wrote an article about his love for Lydia, make sure he reads this. If you agree with me you can join my face book group "Lydia must die". On another game I used her as Giant bait and before I died as I was blasted up into the air by the Giants massive upper body strength I saw her on her way down and when I heard the sickening crunch of her hitting the ground I felt that my death was worth it. Sorry about the picture quality my camera sucks.



Shorts [extracts of LOL n00b from NAG reader letters]

"Another highlight that springs to mind is when I was walking over a bridge (you know, to get to the other side) when the whole thing erupted in hellfire courtesy of some dragon breath, cooking me to a nice medium rare while the only good my armour did was keep the juices in."
– Charles

"You will notice that this letter doesn't actually have anything to do with rangers of any sort, I just wanted it to sound cooler."
– Ricardo

"I was afraid it was going to be like Dead Rising 2, and I was ready to Alt-F4 as soon as it felt even vaguely like that debacle which should never have seen the light of day."
– Melcolm

"Where people of the 1940s had actual war for this, we have Battlefield."
– Frans

Poor Lydia... This is the type of behaviour that gives us gamers a bad name. But then ordinary people (non-gamers) just don't understand how annoying AI can be. AI that blocks the doorway while urging you to leave through the same door. We understand, but not everyone will. Ed.

**From: Tips on reviewing
Subject: Jandre**

You guys are doing a pretty awesome job on NAG. Now, to business! Me and a friend of mine have started a blog on gaming, where we wish to review games. As we have recently figured out, it's really hard work reviewing a game, I have a nice way of rating the games: first I look at a bunch of things like the graphics, story, gameplay. Things like that we rate on a scale of 1-10 and then the summary on a scale of 1-100. Anyway do you have any Tips?

My tip is to get out of the game reviewing business before you hurt yourselves. Ed.

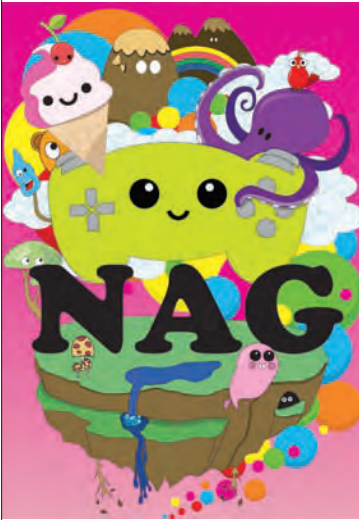
From: Greg

Subject: Gaming as seen by the general public

I thought we moved past the point where taking gaming seriously was seen a joke. It's odd, we live in an age where the writer of 28 Days Later is contributing to the level design of Enslaved (as well as writing the game's script), the director of the academy award winning drama Crash is writing the story of Modern Warfare 3, and where famous comedians like Ricky Gervais are performing stand-up in GTA IV. Hollywood's clearly accepted gaming as a serious entertainment medium, so why is it that the mere notion of gaming being taken seriously is still laughed at by the non-gaming public? It's not that I demand everyone to immediately fall in love with the medium, but it sure as hell deserves more respect than it currently gets. Tell a room full of people that they should watch American Beauty because of the smart way it tackles themes such as infidelity and criticises modern family living, and they'll nod their heads in agreement of you (at least the kind of people who like drama films will) but tell those same people they should play or at least watch someone else play a game like Catherine because it deals with similar subject matter (and it some places,

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.



Nicholas Franco, "I created this design off the top of my head, and thought it was exciting and fun, hoping that it would reflect the NAG magazine. I created it using Adobe Illustrator."

does it better than American Beauty) and they'll laugh at you, declaring it and gaming as a whole to be nothing more than childish entertainment. I feel embarrassed whenever someone asks me what I'd like to do after university, and that's because I want to get into videogame journalism (for lack of a better term) and whenever I try to explain it, most people simply roll their eyes, they just think I'm being childish. (One guy even laughed and then asked me what I really want to do, seriously), so what I want to know is this, will it ever be possible for the medium to garner some respect among the general public? I shouldn't have to hide my goals (and if all goes well, my career) from everyone who asks. Gaming is an entertainment medium that should be taken as seriously as any other (and it's certainly the most profitable entertainment medium), and I think it's high time people realised that.

Don't ever hide your goals and stop hanging out with idiots. The old stereotypes linked with gaming are all but dead and buried and anyone perpetuating these 'myths' is clearly uninformed and relying on stuff they've heard in movies and other old 'popular culture' to add their voice to the conversation. It sounds like you're living in a small town run by the local old age home. Get out, get out now! Ed.

From: Robert

Subject: For the Ride Guys, for the Ride.

In response to Brandon's letter in the January 2012 edition. Brandon poses a question which I'm sure that more than a few gamers, at some point during a gaming session, have asked, "Am I wasting my time? Imagine the credit card bills I could've settled with the money I used to buy this game!" I know I have indeed asked myself this question - on numerous occasions.

In fact it was only recently, that, whilst

thoroughly ensconced in a great online battle, the clock would strike 4 A.M. On those occasions feeling a little disgusted in my irresponsibility, I would turn off my console and drag myself reluctantly to bed. Until - one early morning - while on my walk of shame to the bedroom, preparing my response to certain spousal wrath - I stopped - about turned, grabbed a drink and barricaded myself on the couch - controller firmly in hand - my console booting - welcoming my return to the land of fantasy. Subconsciously I had convinced myself - set to rest all doubts I had regarding the value of my hobby - my passion - gaming. The point is that gaming for the gamer is not an entrepreneurial scheme to make or even save money - not even something that we do to be constructive in the real world - we do it for the same reason that sport fishermen spend thousands on fishing rods, the same reason that an in-law spends millions on racing weekend cars - we game for the thrill and excitement of visiting exotic and impossible locales, the contentment of reaching a certain rank in a competitive online game - and most of all for the ride - and what a hell of a ride it is!

All true what you say there Robert. Besides, even if I did think gaming was a massive waste of time (and I don't), I'm certainly not going to admit that in this magazine. My expensive lifestyle relies on keeping as many of you as hopelessly addicted to gaming as possible. If I thought I could get away with lacing the pages of NAG with dangerous and addictive drugs I would do it in a heartbeat. I welcome pointless achievements that take hours and hours of perfect playing to get, high five. Modern Warfare 3 has 15 levels of prestige, bring it on. The more wrapped up in gaming everyone is the better for me at the end of the day. Ed.

From: Gareth

Subject: Homage to gaming

Recently in the film industry we have seen that a silent movie has made in homage to the silent movies in the past. A homage is a "show or demonstration of respect or dedication to someone or something, sometimes by simple declaration but often by some more oblique reference, artistic or poetic" - Wikipedia [where would we be without this fountain of knowledge, Ed]. Now this film has the same characteristics as a 1920's silent movie. It is in black and white, there is no talking (obviously), and the acting and storyline are both in similar style and humour. Now why haven't we seen this in the gaming industry? I mean we see all these "HD remakes" but it isn't the same. We need there to be homage to games like Duke 3D and Doom 2, and I'm talking about the same/similar graphics and same gameplay. Obviously we don't want something that is EXACTLY the same but the concept is what counts. We also see side scrolling games being made in this "HD fashion". I want to play games that look and feel like Mario or Donkey Kong. I hope you understand what I'm trying to say here as it is quite difficult to explain.

They do say if you can't explain something in ten seconds or less then you don't understand it yourself (just so you know, it took me about a minute and a half to read your letter). Let me see if I get this... You want to play older games in black & white and without sound. I have a solution for you. Find a black and white TV, plug your Xbox into that and then turn the volume down. It's a pleasure. Ed.

On the Forums

Make sure you like us... it's everything really, everything. Most gamers are very welcome: <http://www.nag.co.za/forums/>

Question: If you could combine gameplay elements from any two games, what would they be?

GeometriX: LA Noire's crime-solving gameplay with Battlefield 3's setting: solving military crimes in the middle of a modern-day conflict, while having to deal with enemy attacks, insurgents and civilians.

RedTide: my one would be Minecraft (random world generation) meets Elite (space trading and galactic awesomeness)...

Zoop: Minecraft's random world generation with first person free running and combat from Mirror's Edge.

Aesir: Gameplay elements from Half-life 1 combined with the gameplay elements from Half-life 2. They have babies and form Half-life 3 (Or E3 either way).

-Bouncer-: The story elements from Dragon Age combined with the gameplay from Mass Effect and you get a new IP. No, I'm not referring to Dragon Age 2.

Griff3n: Assassins Creed ability to climb up any building and hookblade, incorporated into Skyrim. :D

Nferno: Grand Theft Auto 4's free-roaming world coupled along with an FPS perspective and Crysis graphics/physics.

echo: Bioshock's RPG and gunplay elements combined with Trespassers' world and puzzles. And call it Dinoshock.

Goraan: Portals and a multiplayer FPS. Essentially Modern Warfare with a Portal gun.

Jerkydarkstar: SSX and Skyrim. Snowboarding down Skyrim's mountains while tossing fireballs and dragon shouting at competitors. FUS RO DAH!!!

Toxyc: 1. Take one medium sized mixing bowl. 2. Cut the graphical capabilities of a large BF3 or Skyrim (according to taste) into the bowl. 3. Add the essence of one medium God of War. 4. Mix thoroughly to the soundtracks of Assassin's Creed. 5. Scoop onto 12cm flat discs, and serve in a small plastic case.

malmaris: Spore creature creator with Mortal kombat fighting mechanics.

ZoRPA: Dead Island in the Just Cause 2 world should make for creative ways of getting your zombie-slaying-freak-on.

Cranky: Doom 3 meets BF3. :D

Acinixys: BF3 meets Skyrim. Open world military questing with a 100 hour+ campaign.

Yuri: Goraan stole my thunder... But here goes. Unreal Tournament 2004 meets Portal. Can you imagine the potential of a shock rifle - portal combination?

The_Furry_Cat: Well, for me, Crysis + Mass Effect!!!

Dave: Deus Ex meets Freelancer. Cyberpunk planet exploration and awesome Space travel.

pArkEr: An open world with the gameplay of Uncharted. Oh wait...

nukehead: Oooh, I very much like the idea of Minecraft/Mirrors Edge. I'll add the survival aspect of Minecraft too but it might be getting too complicated.

The Wolf: A game with the art-style of something like Borderlands mixed with the awesomeness of Gears of War, and the intellectual story of a game like BioShock or the upcoming BioShock Infinite.

Rise and shine, Mr. Freeman



On 04 February 2012, at precisely 21:00, I fired up *Half-Life 2*. Actually that's a lie; I accidentally fired up *Half-Life Source* because the icons were so close together in my Steam Library; that and I just saw Freeman's face so reflexively double-clicked it without reading what game I was actually launching.

On 04 February 2012, at precisely 21:03, I fired up *Half-Life 2*. I was participating in a planned, mass playing of Valve's FPS masterpiece as part of a bid to get the developer to talk about the long dormant franchise. In all likelihood it was probably a futile effort, but I like to think that Gabe sat there watching the *Half-Life 2* player numbers increasing while he leaned back in his oversized armchair, fingers interlocked and pressed between his nose and top lip as he intently studied the graphs and percentages on the Steam super server (which kind of resembles a *StarCraft* Adjutant, only it talks to him like EDI from

"I was participating in a planned, mass playing of Valve's FPS masterpiece as part of a bid to get the developer to talk about the long dormant franchise."

The Normandy). I also like to think that at the moment when the concurrent player numbers peaked at 13,216 he sent word to the G-Man to ready a press release regarding *Episode 3*. Because the G-Man works at Valve as Gabe's personal assistant – obviously.

It was quite a neat feeling clackety-clacking back into City 17 and realising that there were *thousands* of other people all over the world purposefully doing exactly the same thing. And I was really surprised by just how well that HEV Mark V fitted me; it was as if seven years hadn't even happened. I was exceedingly chuffed by how little *Half-Life 2* has aged. Seven years is pretty much a lifetime by video game standards, but I still found myself instantly sucked back into the *Half-Life* universe with all of its Combine, Vortigaunts and scary black headcrabs that squeak endearingly before poisoning you – I'd forgotten how much I hated those things, and the bent, lumbering buffoons that carry dozens of them on their backs like some grotesque, human bus system.

Needless to say, what had started off as a "quick hour" to show my support for what I feel was a well-meaning exercise, turned into a five hour session of *Half-Life 2*. I hadn't played the game in years, but the moment I pulled that trigger on the pistol it was November 2004 all over again. I was totally transfixed despite having played the game multiple times. And then I got the Overwatch Standard Issue Pulse Rifle with its booming thud of a sound effect and I squeed a little – that gun makes me all tingly, which is weird.

This organised play session of *Half-Life 2* definitely rekindled my love for the game, but that's a double-edged sword because it has also highlighted just how much I've missed the franchise. As much as I love Valve to bits, I think I love their franchise more and I wonder how many other fans of the series feel the same.

Valve has had an excellent run of titles since *Episode 2*, but they should probably wake up and give *Half-Life* fans a reason to believe again. Not that I wish to imply they have been sleeping on the job. No other developer is more deserving of a rest. But now they risk their fans turning on them in favour of (ironically) what they've created. So wake up Valve. Wake up and smell the impatience.

Miklós Szecsei

Zynga steals IP, says that's acceptable

Competition is fierce in the social and casual gaming market. Mammoth publishers like Zynga and PopCap move through these spaces with great force, buying up small or independent studios and defending their own properties with armies of lawyers and mounds of paperwork. It can be a daunting place for small to operate in, but they do, and often quite successfully. But a slew of recent copyright infringement suits, while nothing new, is showing just how challenging it can be to develop games for this lucrative market.

Recently, Zynga published an iOS game entitled *Dream Heights*. At first glance, one might think that *Dream Heights* is a simplified version of *SimTower*, but it draws most of its influence from a source much closer – indie studio NimbleBit's *Tiny Tower*. Actually, the word "influence" is entirely unfair; "blatant rip-off" would be much more apt. NimbleBit picked up on this cheeky move and released an infographic comparing a number of features side-by-side; the result is frightening.

Quick to defend its actions, Zynga's CEO issued an internal memo that's since been shared with the Internet. In it, he boldly claims that the company's IP scalping is simply how the industry works.

"Google didn't create the first search engine. Apple didn't create the first mp3 player or tablet. And Facebook didn't create the first social network. But these companies have evolved products and categories in revolutionary ways. They are all internet treasures because they all have specific and broad missions to change the world."

"We don't need to be first to market.



We need to be the best in market. There are genres that we're going to enter because we know our players are interested in them and because we want and need to be where players are. We evolve genres by making games free, social, accessible and highest quality."

While he makes a number of valid points, we have to say that what he's referring to is something entirely different to the practise of stealing 90% of a game's design elements. The worst part about this story? Months ago, Zynga tried to acquire NimbleBit to gain ownership of *Tiny Towers*, which was named by Apple as iPhone Game of the Year for 2011. When the indie developer told them to get lost, Zynga obviously decided to help themselves regardless.



EA talks Old Republic and Origin numbers

Publisher Electronic Arts spent \$200 million financing MMORPG *Star Wars: The Old Republic*.

EA recently released its earnings for the third financial quarter (October to December 2011) which provided insight into the numbers of *The Old Republic*.

Two million copies of the game have been sold since its launch in December 2011, and at present there are 1.7 million active accounts. While that certainly is a big number, it's worth asking where 300,000 players have gone to. It's still very early days for the MMORPG but judging by the pricing of the game's subscription model and the amount of copies sold so far, EA might be able to cover its financial investment quite comfortably. That being said, the 1.7 million active accounts is based off

the financial reports of the third quarter (i.e. up to the end of December 2011) so there's no telling how many of those active accounts have turned into active subscribers once the initial one month trial period expired for gamers.

Insofar as Origin is concerned, EA's digital distribution platform now boasts 9.3 million users, which is just less than a quarter of the total users currently registered on Steam. Still, those 9.3 million accounts know how to spend money on digital sales as EA has revealed that Origin generated \$100 million for them throughout 2011. While many of those Origin accounts were opened voluntarily, a large percentage of them are the result of titles like *The Old Republic* and *Battlefield 3* requiring an Origin account.

Kinect might be built into laptops



With Microsoft having attached Kinect to Xbox 360 consoles and more recently PCs, rumours are circulating that the company has begun negotiations with laptop manufacturers to develop laptop computers with Kinect sensors built in. Website The Daily was the first to reveal this possibility and claimed to have seen a prototype developed by hardware manufacturer ASUS.

Apparently this ASUS laptop was running Windows 8 and featured complete Kinect integration and navigation. Instead of a webcam, the laptop had a collection of small sensors at the top of screen, and what looked like a set of LEDs at the bottom of the screen.

With Microsoft beginning to push Kinect as a platform for innovative applications, it would make sense for them to ensure the motion-sensing peripheral could be found in as many places as possible. Perhaps it won't be long until Microsoft reveals a Kinect App store of sorts, similar to Apple's iOS App Store.

At time of writing, Microsoft has yet to respond to the claims made by The Daily.

Mixed standards for EA's Online Pass



While most of the big-name publishers are committed to the concept of an online pass that limits multiplayer functionality to second-hand purchasers unless they cough up a bit of cash, EA seems to be having difficulty getting it right of late. The recently launched *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning* (which we'll have reviewed for you in the next issue), at the time of writing, includes such a pass. Considering that *Amalur* is an entirely single-player game, this is an odd (and rather cheeky) move on EA's part, as the pass includes a whopping seven "extra" quests that even retail purchasers will have to jump through a hoop to access.

Then there's the upcoming *Syndicate* reboot – a shooter that lends as much importance to co-op play as it does single-player. Any reasonably pessimistic person would assume that this EA-published title would also fall prey to the lure of the online pass, but it isn't to be.

"We want as little resistance or barriers to entry as possible," said EA Partner's executive producer Jeff Gamon. "The co-op is equal billing in this. We wanted everyone who owns a copy of the game to have access to the entire product."

And it's not important for a single-player RPG to include all content for all players?

Next batch of 3DS titles announced

// Nintendo's big boss – Satoru Iwata – is happy that the 3DS has been picking up speed. The hardware price drop and subsequent release of *Super Mario 3D Land* and *Mario Kart 7* helped to boost sales of the 3DS to a level greater than that of the DS and Wii, and now Nintendo is finally comfortable enough to start marching out the next batch of exclusive titles.

Most likely the biggest upcoming game will be an as-yet untitled 2D *Mario* title, but there's also talk of a new *Paper Mario*; it's unclear if they're separate games or the same. Add to that *Mario Tennis*, *Luigi's Mansion 2*, *Rune Factory 4*, *Heroes of Ruin*, and *Guild 01* from Suda51 and Level-5, and it looks like Nintendo's upcoming titles are focusing on their target market to hold off any competition from the PS Vita.

// EA's digital distribution service Origin might still have a few hiccups, but that hasn't stopped EA from **pulling in more developers and publishers to sell their games**. The latest batch includes CD Projekt (*The Witcher*), the Russian-based 1C Company, inXile Entertainment (*Hunted: The Demon's Forge*), Paradox Interactive and *Dark Reign* developers N3V. In addition, Trion World's RIFT has joined the service with exclusive bonus content.



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Retirement Fund



Do you cheat? No, I'm not meditating on the morality of the gaming population in their relationships, but rather on the notion of whether or not cheating in a video game can be considered acceptable or completely immoral.

Let us take a quick trip back in time. Remember the days of *Cybernet*? When you used to watch the entire show mostly in anticipation of those elusive cheat codes they gave out at the end?

Did you ever buy a hint book for any of the Sierra quest games, where you had to use that little red viewfinder to see the answers to the questions?

No? Oh. Well, never mind then. You can probably stop reading now. For those of you who know what I'm talking about, you may continue.

Now of course the process is much simpler. Open web browser. Type www.google.com. Type in (game) walkthrough or (game) cheats. And voila! Said cheats appear.

"I can admire someone though who will never use a cheat or a walkthrough even when they're stuck on a level."

This of course means that it is much easier and more tempting to cheat than before. And so the question remains, "Do you cheat?" And if so, "Why?"

I do on occasion. I won't deny that. Not in multiplayer obviously – that's more like cheating in high stakes poker and expecting not to get the crap kicked out of you. In a single player campaign however, certainly I'll use a walkthrough or cheat code every now and then.

I don't find it lessens my enjoyment of the game at all, although certainly it does make it less of a challenge. Sometimes when I can't be bothered to worry about dying in a certain level, I'll just go into god mode.

Does this make me a bad gamer? Should I be smacking myself on the nose with a newspaper? I'm not personally into self-flagellation. I can admire someone though who will never use a cheat or a walkthrough even when they're stuck on a level. My husband for example, never cheats. Ever. Isn't he so bloody wonderful?

Perhaps it's all about the type of person you are. Are you patient or do you seek instant gratification? Do you live in the moment or plan for the future? Do you single-mindedly focus on your goal or are you distracted by the shiny things along the way?

Hmmm, this is beginning to sound more like a bad retirement fund advert. It's a useful analogy however.

Although gaming on the surface provides us with these shiny moments of instant gratification, they do also engage us in longer term planning and strategy.

Aside from the obvious examples of RTS strategic gameplay, RPGs encourage us to plan the spending of our XP in order to level up specific skills, giving us long-term goals for the kind of character we want to be when we reach level 40.

By circumventing the long term planning, are we losing our enjoyment of seeing those skills progress or are we playing the stock market and retiring early?

Perhaps it could be likened to missing out on the enjoyment of seeing your child grow up. Do I have the memory of their first weapon? Their first spell? The first time they successfully pickpocketed someone without being detected? Or did I miss out on all this and miraculously see my child at their level cap?

Considering I'm normally a shiny things, distracted person, it makes me sad to think that I might no longer ponder the gravity of the XP spent to nurture my character to fruition. Perhaps it's time to turn off the god mode.

Pippa Tshabalala



THQ is having a bad time

Publisher reports lowest share price since 1995, cuts games, jobs and more

Mega publisher THQ has reported net losses of \$56 million for their fiscal Q3 2011, ending December 2011. That's \$41 million more than their reported losses in the same quarter of 2010. The company is in trouble and has been forced to make drastic adjustments to their business.

The reasons for these losses are numerous, but the company is pinning most of the blame (at least for recent performance) on the U Draw peripheral's poor reception on the PS3 and Xbox 360 platforms. The rest of its youth and casual line-up has performed equally poorly in the last six months, and, as a result, THQ has taken the huge step of cutting the entire segment from its business model going forward. Instead, the publisher is going to put all of its effort into supporting its current and future core offerings, as *Saints Row: The Third* and *WWE '12* both performed reasonably well (3.6 million and 2 million sales to date, respectively).

"*Saints Row: The Third* and *WWE '12* demonstrate the strengths of THQ's core gaming capabilities," said CEO Brian Farrell. "These titles performed at or better than the expectations we shared during our last investor conference call, driven by favourable critical reviews, community engagement and outstanding marketing efforts."

Sadly, this decision isn't nearly enough to drag THQ out of the mud. In December last year, their share price slipped to a miserable \$0.90

and has been steadily declining since then. At the time of writing, it stands at just \$0.61 – far below the NASDAQ's official minimum share price for listing. As a result, the American stock exchange issued THQ with a notice that, should they fail to pull their share price about the \$1 threshold, the publisher would be delisted. For reference, THQ's share price peaked at \$34.19 in February 2007, held it around there for a few months and then steadily declined to its current value.

In an effort to immediately reduce costs, THQ has cut 240 jobs in "selling, general and administrative" roles. Farrell as well as all board members have taken a 50% salary cut, putting the company's CEO's annual pay at \$359,250 for the next year. While the job cuts will decrease costs in the long-run, THQ estimates that they'll have to pay out over \$10 million in settlements and termination costs, as well as fees for abandoning "fixed assets".

In related news, the company has issued a statement that they're looking for a partner to help bring their upcoming *Warhammer 40K MMO – Dark Millennium Online* – to market. The game is still slated for a 2014 release.

While all of this is rather bad for the industry, if you're only interested in core games then rest assured that THQ will be putting in every effort to insure that their upcoming line-up is as solid as possible – they certainly can't afford any more flops.

Fourth Mass Effect novel loaded with errors



The problem with creating a universe as detailed and expansive as the one in *Mass Effect*, is that the creators and writers eventually become slaves to maintaining a canon so vast that inaccuracies begin to creep in every now and then. With ever increasing libraries of transmedia, many franchise creators have to keep on their toes in case a plotline crops up that fails to fit in properly. Fans of franchises are always ready to pounce on inaccuracies and are more than willing to voice their disdain loud enough for the whole internet to hear.

This has happened to the *Mass Effect* franchise thanks to some considerable errors in the fourth novel *Mass Effect: Deception*, which has been written by William C. Dietz.

Mass Effect fans outraged by the lore and timeline errors collaborated to create a public Google Docs file where any further errors could be catalogued. Some fans even went as far as burning their copies of the book. Needless to say, BioWare issued a response a few days later in which they apologised for the errors. They also thanked the fans for their "passion and dedication" and promised that all of the errors would be corrected in future editions of the book.

This sort of thing must be incredibly tough for those in charge of transmedia; the bigger the universe gets the greater the chances of inaccuracies. Ubisoft's UbiWorkshop transmedia department was so worried about exactly this that they decided to create the *Assassin's Creed Encyclopaedia*. They even got fans of the series to be contributing writers for the project.

Also, BioWare has now become the first developer to release a patch for a book.

BioWare drops hints to keep your Mass Effect 3 saves

This magazine you're holding in your clammy paws is the March issue of *NAG*. While it is invariably the coolest thing to happen in March, something else that is just as cool is happening as well: *Mass Effect 3* is coming out!

This is ostensibly Commander Shepard's final outing in the *Mass Effect* universe; BioWare has always maintained that Shepard would be confined to a trilogy of games. That being said, Mike Gamble, one of the producers at BioWare, was recently asked whether players should keep their *Mass Effect 3* saved game files. His reply: "Obviously I can't say anything, but it wouldn't be a bad idea."

Intriguing, but let's be honest: BioWare would be stupid not to make any further *Mass Effect* games. Our money is on the decisions you make during *Mass Effect 3* being carried over to a future trilogy of *Mass Effect* games; a series in which you play as a new character.

The Half-Life fans continue to be restless

// In the February edition of *NAG* you might have read about "Operation Crowbar" in the news bytes section. "Operation Crowbar" was a fan-initiated program that called for gamers to order real crowbars off the internet and have them delivered to Valve's offices. If you thought that the clamouring for more *Half-Life 2: Episode 3* news would have stopped after "Project Crowbar", you were wrong.

A Steam group has recently appeared that calls itself "A Call for Communication (*Half-Life*)". In a matter of weeks they managed to accumulate nearly 50,000 members. Their aim is simple: they just want to get Valve to provide better communication regarding the future of the *Half-Life* franchise.

In order to make a statement and gain Valve's attention, the group arranged a mass *Half-Life 2* play session for 04 February 2012. At precisely 21:00 our local time, as many people as possible fired up and began to play *Half-Life 2* in an attempt to catapult the title up the Most Concurrent Players chart on Steam. Prior to the start of the play session, *Half-Life 2* was ranked 30th on that chart; shortly after the session it was ranked 11th.

In a statement posted via the Steam Community pages, the group admins said: "Our primary goal was to unite *Half-Life* fans in a unique and interesting way, and that was accomplished. Whether or not Valve will respond has yet to be determined; however, seven years after the release of *Half-Life 2*, over 13,000 fans have returned to play it again, together. That means something."



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Telling a story



It's rhetorical question time! How much attention do you pay to a game's narrative? Do you think about the story, or the fascinating (and often dangerous) world your character is thrust into? Chances are that you do, but it all depends on what your definition of "game narrative" happens to be.

Games are not conventional storytelling vehicles because they require audience participation in a way that most other media can only flirt with. But the stories that we're consciously aware of – the more deliberate, in-your-face tales told by games like *Mass Effect* or *Dragon Age* – aren't usually the ones that impact us most as players. It's the seemingly mundane situations which matter far more, like running out of ammo during a gunfight, ducking behind a wall on a sliver of health and discovering one stray clip lying on the floor next to your feet. Or maybe you starved to death once because you invoked a spell of levitation and it didn't wear off

"Games are not conventional storytelling vehicles because they require audience participation in a way that most other media can only flirt with."

in time for you to grab any of the food on the dungeon floor. There's also the classic embarrassment of being murdered by a wandering mountain goat while looting the corpse of that titan you just slew.

All of these situations count as stories, and you've probably related some variation of each to your willing (or unwilling) audience over and over again. It's not unreasonable to assume that these stories can be regaled far more often than dry dialogue scenes or your experiences of a five-minute cinematic – they may not be THE story, but each one is certainly YOUR story.

From a developer's perspective – particularly for indies, who often don't have the time and resources to generate conventional story content for their games – the amount of discussion that a game session inspires depends on how often their rulesets can be used to create remarkable scenarios.

For players of rhythm games, these can be "payoff situations", such as unlocking a new level or going through a difficult sequence perfectly. More sandbox-oriented games such as *Skyrim* rely on the random pieces falling into place to create interesting events ("I was fighting some bandits and then a bear arrived and the bear and the bandits started fighting and then OMG DRAGONS!"). Even a session of *Pac Man* or *Pong* can have a story to tell, if you know what to focus on and talk about.

In fact, the more that you hand-feed the player his or her story elements, the more likely you are to fail at conveying a compelling story because *you're not using the game's own strengths*. Your work cannot compete with a novel – at least not in terms of what a novel is good at. On the other hand, even the most nuanced Choose Your Own Adventure book cannot rival the sheer joy of an emergent game scenario, and the less scripted it appears, the better.

If you're a developer and a narrative enthusiast, consider that perhaps a good game story is fine to have, but backing it up with a solid design can actually lend implicit storytelling value that rivals even the most well-written game world. They say this in writing circles, and it appeals even more to game designers: *show, don't tell*. If you have faith in a gamer's imagination, you'll be able to do great things with it.

Rodain Joubert

XBLA Fans provides a detailed analysis of the state of XBLA



The fine folks at *XBLA Fans* have provided an extremely in-depth analysis of sales, Metacritic scores and trends on Microsoft's Xbox LIVE Arcade over the past few years. According to them, the average price of XBLA games is rising; it's doing so very slowly, but it's definitely happening. There are more 1,200 Microsoft Point (\$15) games being released on the service relative to previous years, but there's still a steady stream of 800 point (\$10) games coming out as well. There are still more 800 point games on the service than there are 1,200 point titles. This means the average price of XBLA games remains at 800 points for now, but it's steadily rising towards the 1,200 point mark. Bear in mind that the higher price is still assigned to the higher-quality games on XBLA. The overall quality of games released during the XBLA Summer of Arcade, however, is dropping. This is according to the average price and the Metacritic average. When the first Summer of Arcade promotion was launched in 2008,

the games therein scored a Metacritic average of 84.8 percent, with an average price of 960 points. The past year's SoA saw that Metacritic score drop to 78.8 percent, while the average price inflated to 1,120 points. Still, this is all based on mathematical calculation, and you should remember that a) review scores are subjective, and b) as XBLA games become more complex, it's only fitting that the price would increase in kind. The final bit of interesting information relates to XBLA games going on sale. *XBLA Fans* has found that 73% of the games released on the service have gone on sale within their first year. The catch is that these sales generally only run for very brief periods: in many cases, only a day or so. If you have a little patience and keep up-to-date with all the latest XBLA happenings, you could bag yourself great XBLA titles for much cheaper. There's more to this analysis than we have space for here, so head on over to <http://www.xblafans.com/xbla-fans-xbla-in-review-2011-38006.html> if you feel like finding out more.



Bungie says goodbye

Despite no longer being the development team behind all things *Halo*, Bungie has had a back seat dealing with internal support for the series since they were given the boot in 2010. The day has finally come for Bungie to complete the handover to 343 Industries, which oversees the franchise as a whole on Microsoft's behalf.

The following was posted on Bungie's blog:

"On March 31st, 2012 that transition process will be complete, all live *Halo* data will be managed by 343 Industries, and Bungie will no

longer be able to update game stats and player service records, to host new user generated content, or to operate the Bungie Pro service."

"All currently supported, Bungie-developed *Halo* titles will be impacted by this change. Any replacement functionality, and all future *Halo* support, will be provided by Microsoft and 343 Industries via Halo Waypoint."

"Thanks for making the *Halo*-era version of Bungie.net more successful than we could have possibly imagined. You complete us. See you starseide."

Darksiders II gets a release date and prequel novel



The follow up to 2010's Metroid-Vania action game *Darksiders* is expected in June this year. This was revealed at a recent investors meeting held by THQ. In *Darksiders II* you'll take on the role of Death, one of the other Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. It's up to Death to clear War's name thanks to the events of *Darksiders*. The game will, however, play out parallel to the plot of the first *Darksiders* game.

Fans of gaming transmedia will be pleased to learn that a *Darksiders* prequel novel is planned for release a month earlier than *Darksiders II*. The novel is entitled *Darksiders: The Abomination Vault* and the story takes place millennia before the events of the original *Darksiders* game. In the book, it's up to Death and War to stop a group from resurrecting an ancient weapon that threatens to plunge the entire universe into open conflict.

On top of the prequel novel, THQ has announced that a *Darksiders* "IP bible" is also in the works. It'll be along the same lines as the *Book of Cain* for the *Diablo* series and UbiWorkshop's *Assassin's Creed Encyclopaedia*. No release date has been provided for the IP bible as yet.

Metro: Last Light gets delayed

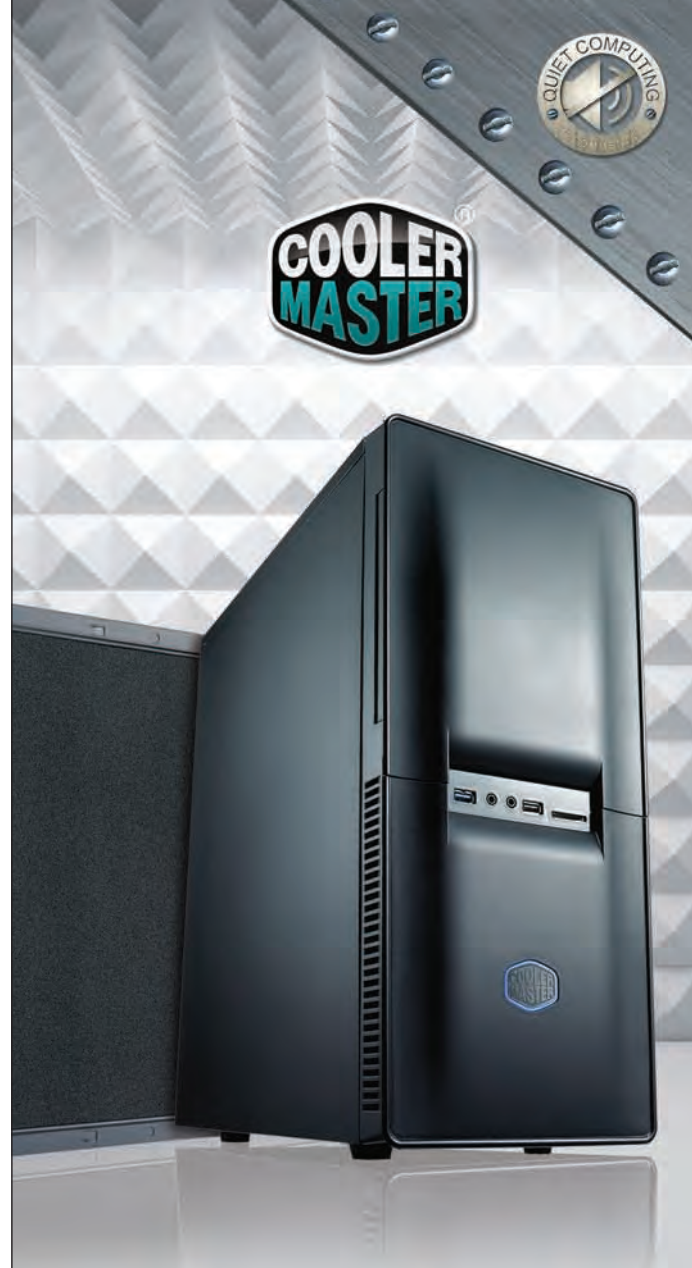
For fans of grim, post apocalypse shooter *Metro 2033*, you'll have to wait until 2013 before you get to rush around the depressing Russian underground system once again. At a recent investors meeting, publisher THQ revealed that the initial 2012 launch for *Metro: Last Light* has been pushed back into the last financial quarter, which equates to sometime between January and March of 2013.

Apparently developer 4A Games requires more time in order to polish the title. The good news, however, is that THQ has pledged to spend double the amount in advertising *Metro: Last Light* than it did with *Metro 2033*. This is probably a good thing, because *Metro 2033* is one of those titles that never got the attention it deserved.

Indie Game: The Series

// You've probably heard of *Indie Game: The Movie*. If not, do a quick search on YouTube for the trailer; it's worth it. This film is a documentary that follows the stories of the developers that created *Fez*, *Super Meat Boy* and *Braid*, and was recently screened at the Sundance Festival 2012 where it received a positive reception. So good, in fact, that producer Scott Rudin (*The Truman Show*, *Team America*, *Sleepy Hollow*, *Shaft*, and dozens of other films and series) has teamed up with HBO to acquire the rights to produce a fictional comedy series based on the film. While it won't be follow the film's documentary roots, we hope that the series helps to open the minds of the public to this wonderful little niche in the gaming industry.

// According to a recent job posting by Visceral Games, the company is on the hunt for a lead multiplayer designer to work on a "thrilling new online action shooter". The posting also refers to a "bold new franchise", which means there's not much chance of this being a *Dead Space* shooter – sorry folks. Either way, we trust Visceral to make what are at least interesting games, so here's hoping that they've got something up their sleeves to inject new energy into the overcrowded multiplayer FPS market.



SILENCIO 450



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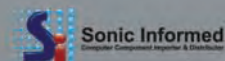
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Maek games, iz good for u.



Making games is easy. Making games is hard. Both these things are 100% true, all the time. Making games is fun. While I was working on my first proper game, I really enjoyed the creative process.

I'd made plenty of prototypes before, using tools like Game Maker, but they were never complete games, just random ideas I wanted to try out and see if they were fun. Often, they were not fun, but the process of creation is an enjoyable one nonetheless, even when the end result isn't anything meaningful. And you still gain plenty of experience just by *doing*.

I am not a programmer, by any stretch of the imagination. I have no formal training on the matter of game design, other than having played lots of games and thinking they're the only meaningful thing in this universe. I tried the programming thing, back when Pascal was the thing to do, and then later when Delphi

"I have no formal training on the matter of game design, other than having played lots of games and thinking they're the only meaningful thing in this universe."

was the thing to do. Never really got into it. mov ax, 13h, int 10h.

When I discovered StencylWorks, I thought it'd be fun to try and make a complete thing for a change, but limit myself to working on it a few hours every day, for two weeks. The end result is a small and challenging low-fi platformer called *Muu: Just Another Day*, which you can find on Newgrounds (<http://www.newgrounds.com/portal/view/589079>). I used a one-color style because I'd just finished reading the excellent *Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline, which made me nostalgic for the "feel" of old Intellivision games. Limiting myself to one colour also meant I didn't sit and futz with the graphics overly much, I could draw something quickly and "get it done", which was my motto for working on *Muu*.

Most of the time working on the game was spent learning the ins and outs of StencylWorks, which is actually pretty powerful and rather straightforward. It has a few issues, which I'm told Version 2.0 will fix. Even though I made the game just for fun and as an experiment, having a lot of fun while doing it and a few frustrations at not being smart enough to figure out how to do certain things, the hardest part was releasing it.

As a reviewer, I know full well the Court of Public Opinion isn't a kind place. It is often very hostile towards new things that don't follow established patterns. After putting it on Newgrounds, I was surprised at how stressed I was. I'm not new to waiting for an opinion on something, as I've done a few art commissions in the past, but this was different. Even though I could finish the 8-minute long game easily enough without resorting to Easy Mode, I was worried that it might be too frustrating for some people.

But in the end, the reviews on Newgrounds were quite positive. I was shocked at how many people were into the "trial by fire" kind of platformer. Though with the success of *Super Meat Boy*, I shouldn't have been that surprised.

Overall I'm quite happy with how the game turned out. I learned a lot from it that I would apply to my next project, and which pitfalls to avoid. Like a quirky physics-based jump mechanic. Wasn't such a good idea in the end.

Miktar Dracon



Microsoft has a few tricks up its sleeves

If you've noticed a decline in Xbox exclusives lately, you're not the only one. While Sony's people have been hard at work securing new IP and expanding on their existing franchises, it feels as though Microsoft has stagnated somewhat when it comes to improving on their current stock of *Halo*, *Gears of War*, *Fable*, *Crackdown* and *Alan Wake*. Microsoft Studio's corporate vice president Phil Spencer explains the situation.

"Creating core IP, as many first- and third-parties have seen over the years, isn't an easy thing."

"I went through the process of creating *Gears* with Epic and I know the sweat, time, and effort that went

into it," Spencer added. "I also worked on things like *Alan Wake*, *Too Human*, *Crackdown*, and stuff that didn't hit the same level of success, but had an equal amount of sweat equity and heart go into getting created."

"So it will continue to be something that we focus on with new partners like Crytek and new people that aren't announced yet. We do think that it's fundamental that core gamers look at 360 as the place they want to play games."

Obviously, the company has its Kinect-based games to fall back on if it's purely exclusivity that you're after, but we hope that the future brings with it more titles that actually, you know, matter.

Deadlight is an XBLA physics platformer... with zombies

What do you get when you take talent from Blizzard, Sony Computer Entertainment and Weta Digital? An indie developer called Tequila Works with a serious talent pool behind it. You also get their new game, *Deadlight*.

Coming exclusively to Xbox Live Arcade, this "horror puzzle platformer" stars a man called Randall Wayne, who is a survivor of a plague that has turned humanity into a pack of killer automatons known as "shadows". The game is not about saving the world or finding a cure to turn little Timmy back into a fun-loving boy, it's about Wayne doing whatever it takes in order to survive.

Set in the American Pacific Northwest, the game takes place during the late 1980s and draws inspiration from films like *Rambo: First Blood* and *Day of the Dead*. The gameplay itself is more akin to *Portal* than *Left 4 Dead* so don't think this is another zombie shooter only played from a platforming perspective.

According to creative director Raul



Rubio, players will have to rely on intelligence and traps in order to survive. While you'll get access to some firearms, they are literally a last resort as the odds of you surviving while using them are pretty slim. For Rubio and the rest of the team at Tequila Works, the emphasis in the game is on making every day, mundane activities like crossing the road an utter challenge in survival.

The handful of screenshots released so far certainly look amazing; the game is already packed with atmosphere and looks ripe for exploration. No concrete release date has been set just yet, but publisher Microsoft Studios is looking at sometime between June and August this year.

Next core Resi title confirmed



As if having two *Resident Evil* games in the market right now isn't enough, Capcom has confirmed that *Resident Evil 6* is in development and will be released for Xbox 360 and PS3 this year in November, with a PC version to follow afterwards.

The game has reportedly been in development for two years, which would make sense as *RE 5: Gold Edition* was released around that time. Capcom claims that a core team of 150 Japanese developers (mostly the same team from *RE 4* and *5*) as well as 450 additional developers worldwide are behind the title.

The recently released trailer shows the game taking place in the town of Tall Oaks, in which 90% of the population is infected, as well as what appears to be a fictional Chinese city. Chris Redfield and

Leon Kennedy will both be playable for the first time in a *Resident Evil* game. The trailer shows a few action game elements like sliding to cover, shooting while on the ground and melee combat. It also looks as though there will be civilians to worry about (or really, just to avoid shooting). Oh, and you'll be able to move and aim at the same time. While the trailer is action-packed, Capcom claims that the game's developers are attempting to blend the action of *Resi 5* with the horror elements of *RE 4*.

Each character in the game will reportedly have a full-time partner, which means that you can expect the co-op gameplay from *RE 5* to make a return. Rumours suggest that there will also be a 6-player online mode, but we suggest you wait for official word on that before getting too excited.

Nintendo to take online gaming seriously



Nintendo has been hinting at an improved online service for a while – a service that could compete with the offerings from Microsoft and Sony. Well, they've finally given that service a title: Nintendo Network. The thankfully completely normally-named service will cover add-on content sales, digital distribution of software, personal accounts and community-based gameplay like what we've already seen in *Mario Kart 7*. Both the 3DS and upcoming Wii U will be able to make use of Nintendo Network; no word yet on

backwards-compatibility with the original Wii.

This step marks the long-overdue entry by Nintendo in the online gaming space dominated by its competition, further solidifying the notion that the Wii U won't be afraid to target the core market as well as the more comfortable casual gaming space. Users will be able to manage all of their digital properties from a single, unified account, and we expect it to replace the Nintendo eShop and WiiWare services once it's up and running; perhaps the Nintendo Club as well.

WE CARE WHAT YOU THINK*



it's true. we do care but we can't read minds. instead we have a survey in the issue you're reading now. we're not going to keep on telling you that completing the survey will help us make NAG better for you. most scientists agree that positive encouragement usually never works. usually. instead we have some awesome prizes for 5 lucky people and everyone else gets free cake.^ also subscribe.

^the cake is a lie



*NO REALLY

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Ster Kinekor Entertainment	[011] 445-7700
TVR	[011] 807-1390

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



Support Lines

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

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

Publishers: Microsoft Xbox
Number: 0800 991 550

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

E(A)lite: Activision's chief rival loves COD's subscription service



Electronic Arts have championed the idea of turning games into long-running services for a while now, and it seems that one of the main reasons for that is *Call of Duty Elite*. EA CEO John Riccitiello praised his company's archenemy Activision, saying that we should expect many services similar to *Elite* soon. Quotes incoming!

"When we look at what we do and what our competitors do, there are a number of examples of [what] I would call the best work of our industry in terms of making this work," said Riccitiello. "Frankly, I gave a compliment to one of our competitors. It's got a subscription on the back end of an FPS title. I think that's a best-in-class performance."

"And we study all of these, and by way of example, when we put [*FIFA*] Ultimate Team out

there, we had a competing idea with *Madden*, none of which I'm sure – none of whom I believe on the call would even know the name of it because it quickly faded and it was replaced with Ultimate Team because we're learning from best practice."

"So the reason this is such a fast-growing revenue stream for us is we're identifying and implementing best practice across the range of our products, and you'll see lots more to come including an announcement near term that Peter just alluded to."

Frankly, it's a bit mad that gaming has had so much superfluous garbage (*CoD Elite*, pre-order bonuses, DLC, online passes and more) tacked onto it, muddying the reason we're all here in the first place: the games.

Sony feeling confident about Vita in Japan

Despite the PlayStation Vita having what many sane people would dub a bit of a lacklustre launch in Japan, Sony seems to think that everything's still peaches and cream. Since December 17th, the Vita has sold 535,423 Vitas in Sony's country of origin. Take into consideration the fact that 321 407 of those units were moved during the powerful handheld's first week on sale, and it's no surprise that people have been predicting doom. Everyone needs to calm down, according to Sony:

"Now the company has not publicly announced the units of shipping and sales, at

the appropriate time, we would do so. But as far as the sell-through, three weeks have passed and sell-through is 500,000," said Masaru Kato, chief financial officer. "So as a start, I think we had a very – a good start."

On moving forward, Kato had this to say: "...including software and hardware, we are carrying out sales promotions and we do it to boost the sales, and we do not think we have any problems."

It sure sounds like denial, but we've no doubt that, in the long run, PS Vita will pick itself up, dust itself off and get over its rocky beginnings.



DIABLO

Diablo 3: Coming mid 2012

Two decades have passed since the demonic lords Diablo, Mephisto, and Baal were defeated in Diablo II. The Worldstone, which once shielded the inhabitants of the world of Sanctuary from the forces of both Heaven and Hell, has been destroyed, and evil once again stirs in Tristram. It now depends on a new generation of heroes (from five character classes including the Barbarian, Witch Doctor, Demon Hunter, Wizard and Monk), who will acquire powerful items, spells, and abilities as they explore new and familiar areas of Sanctuary, to battle hordes of demons to safeguard the world from the horrors that have arisen.

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Taking a hard swerve in a unique direction Ridge Racer Unbounded adds a punishing dose of destruction to the familiar arcade gameplay. Get ready for one of the most action-packed and destructive racing games ever seen. Players will careen through the competition using their four-wheeled street-racing thoroughbreds as high-octane wrecking machines with a new mantra – Drive, Destroy, Dominate.

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MASS EFFECT 3

Coming 9 March 2012

Earth is burning. Striking from beyond known space, a race of terrifying machines have begun their destruction of the human race. As Commander Shepard, an Alliance Marine, your only hope for saving mankind is to rally the civilizations of the galaxy and launch one final mission to take back the Earth.

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INVERSION

Coming April 2012

Turning third-person shooting on its head, Inversion sees players utilizing the power of gravity to fight foes in a constantly changing environment. Combining hard-hitting and adrenaline-pumping action, players can manipulate zero gravity environments and weaponry as they dive between cover with their fellow squadmates.

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ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS MAX PAYNE 3

Coming 18 May 2012

Utilizing cutting edge technology for a seamless, cinematic action experience, incorporating the latest advances in Natural Motion physics and a brand new iteration of Rockstar's Advanced Game Engine. Max Payne 3 offers highly-refined gameplay, with an extensive range of realistic weaponry, an intelligent cover system and sophisticated Bullet-Time mechanics; and promises to deliver a dark, gritty action experience that is sure to satisfy newcomers and fans alike.

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Sony makes PlayStation bossman the new CEO

Kaz Hirai, the man responsible for making Sony's PlayStation division so successful, has been named the Chief Executive Officer for Sony Corporation worldwide. Hirai takes over from Sir Howard Stringer, the British Sony exec who ran as CEO since 2005. Stringer has come under criticism for failing to guide Sony's resurgence in the electronics market. It is hoped that Hirai will be able to work his same PlayStation magic on Sony's entire electronics portfolio when he takes over as CEO in April of this year.

Hirai picks up the reigns at the end of Sony's current financial year. He's got a big task ahead of him as the Japanese hardware manufacturer has hemorrhaged money yet again. For four consecutive years, Sony has posted an overall financial loss and this year is no different with the company revealing an expected total loss of \$2.9 billion or just less than R24 billion.

The year-on-year losses are being chalked up to a failure to innovate in the electronics market. Industry analysts have accused Sony of following other manufacturers' leads and failing to develop new technologies to boost their market share. On top of this, last year's earthquakes in Japan and floods in Thailand significantly hindered Sony's manufacturing programs.

It looks like Kaz Hirai has a serious challenge ahead of him.

EA looks to be reviving Populous



A French website has been sniffing around and has managed to come across what looks like an EA Partners website called "EAP Marketing FY13 Home Page", which details games for the 2013 fiscal year. Some of EA's expected titles are there like *The Secret World*, but more interesting was the mention of *Populous* and another unannounced title *Outernauts*.

Outernauts is listed as an EA Partners and Insomniac venture; Insomniac is the development team behind the PlayStation 3 *Resistance* trilogy. We already know that Insomniac is working on something new, and this *Outernauts* game might just be it.

What's going to get most gamers over the age of thirty really excited however, is the mention of *Populous*, the God Game that initially made Peter Molyneux famous along with his Bullfrog Productions development company. Bullfrog was purchased by Electronic Arts 1995 and in doing so the publisher acquired the rights to the *Populous* intellectual property.

Fans of the *Populous* series have been clamouring for a new game for well over a decade, but this is the first time any EA documentation has made mention of the long absent series. Whether or not this will be a completely new *Populous* title is unknown at present, but it could also be an iOS or (God forbid) Facebook tie-in of the series.

Look & Listen



Pre-orders / www.lookandlisten.co.za

PC

Spec Ops: The Line	April
Diablo III	May
Max Payne 3	June 1st

Xbox 360

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 13	March 30th
Prototype 2	April
Borderlands 2	May

PS3

Armored Core V	March 23rd
Inversion	April
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier	May 25th

Wii

PokéPark 2: Wonders Beyond	March 23rd
Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2012	June
The Amazing Spider-Man	June 29th

3DS

Luigi's Mansion 2	TBA
Mario Tennis	TBA
Professor Layton and the Mask of Miracle	TBA

LBP takes to the track?

Ask Nintendo or Sony how they would make money from an aging franchise without doing anything substantially innovative and they'll tell you "just add karts". *Mario Kart* has proven to be so successful over the years that Sony has decided that it's time for another of their brands to get some attention. And what's the most likely candidate to receive the kart treatment? *LittleBigPlanet*, it seems.

LittleBigPlanet Karting has been claimed as a thing that exists by the twitter account of PSN Stores – a website dedicated to all things PSN – with a photograph of the supposed retail packaging. It's not official confirmation, however, but it follows soon after another tweet from Canadian retailer Future Shop that claims to have insider information that confirms the game's existence. According to Future Shop, the game will be bundled with a plastic accessory that resembles the *Mario Kart Wii* accessory. This leaves us a little confused, however, as there's no confirmation or even suggestion as to whether this plastic wheel will fit the PlayStation Move controller or a regular SIXAXIS, as either can be used for simple gyroscopic motion controls.

Regardless of how true this rumour is (it does look fairly likely), we're not sure just how necessary the presence of another user-generated-racing title is considering that *ModNation Racers* isn't all that old.

// **Minecraft LEGO is good to go!** A few months ago, the concept of *Minecraft* LEGO was put forward to CUUSOO – a community-driven site that allows the public to conceptualise and vote for potential new LEGO themes. Unsurprisingly, the idea of *Minecraft* LEGO did exceptionally well – reaching the required 10,000 votes within hours – and now the LEGO elders have returned to give the news that this new theme is in development deep within the halls of LEGO HQ. As soon as we have more details, expect them.

// Despite the massive upcoming titles from Blizzard, the publisher recently confirmed that **there will be no BlizzCon this year**. Instead, they're moving all of their important tournaments into the 2012 Battle.net World Championship, to be held somewhere in Asia (we'll guess Korea). This is only the second time that Blizzard has skipped the convention since its inception in 2005.

// Insomniac Games has confirmed that **they're done with the Resistance franchise**. The studio will dedicate itself entirely to its next game, *Overstrike*, which is due for release on PS3 and, new to the developer, Xbox 360 this year. The series will continue to live on as SCE owns the rights, with *Resistance: Burning Skies* due to be released this year for the PS Vita.

XBOX 360.

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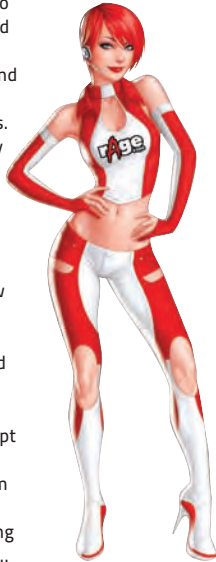
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What's that noise?!

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



February winner



Cameron Futter, Page 38

Win!

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iSound: The New Sound

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 *Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line 'March Caption'.



NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR / "I swear, this is the last time I switch dog food brands."



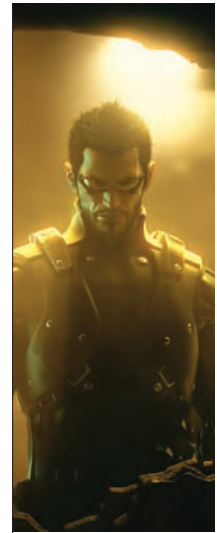
LAST MONTHS WINNER / "The fight for the remote reaches a new level."

- David Edwards

Kid Icarus director thinks movies beat games at telling stories

Masahiro Sakurai, director of upcoming *Kid Icarus: Uprising*, had some choice words to say regarding his promising-looking 3DS return of the classic series. Apparently the game will have "a ton of talking," but he "didn't add all that voice in order to tell a story." Why would he do that? Because he thinks "movies and such are much better at telling stories in an effective and enjoyable way than games are."

Hefty statement that, especially considering the push for game stories to become more mature and meaningful to cater to an ever-aging audience that expects more from game narratives these days. *Uprising* is evidently taking a more old-school approach to video game storytelling: "While there is a story, we don't advance it by forcing players to sit and watch some tedious briefing scene or anything."



Square Enix gives gaming two thumbs up

// Square Enix has been crying tears of joy lately, boasting a rise in revenue and delicious profits for its previous fiscal year. Their digital entertainment department (THIS MEANS GAMES!) grew 6.2 percent from April 2011 to December 2011 compared to the previous year. It equates to totals of \$704.7 million in net sales. This also means that games now comprise 56% of Square's total revenue, as opposed to 52% in the same period in 2010. Operating profits rose 11.5 percent, jumping up to \$169.4 million, with its net income sat comfortably at \$65 million (an increase of 175.2 percent). To what factors do Square Enix believe they owe these monetary leaps? In addition to Square's online/social titles, they've given specific props to the quietly brilliant *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*. High five for augmentation!

BioShock Infinite to have a "1999 Mode" difficulty setting



Creative Director for *BioShock Infinite* and general all-round game developer mastermind Ken Levine, has admitted that he's an old school gamer at heart. As such, he's used to having pixelated enemies kick him the nuts for not being good enough. Clearly, the man laments the passing of nineties difficulty levels; the kind of difficulty levels that made *everyone* a core gamer. Nowadays, games have a mass appeal and as such, the core gamers are not the only market to be tapped.

Levine realises this, so while *BioShock Infinite* will indeed keep today's standard for difficulty levels, it'll go one step further to satiate the old school gamers amongst its audience by including a "1999 Mode" difficulty level.

1999 Mode will do more than simply increase enemy health or increase their damage per second; Levine and the team at Irrational Games are implementing all sorts of gameplay features that will demand you plan ahead and make careful decisions.

"We want to give our oldest and most committed fans an option to go back to our roots," Levine said via the developer's official blog. "In 1999 Mode, gamers face more of the permanent consequences of their gameplay decisions. In *BioShock Infinite*, gamers will have to sweat out the results of their actions. In addition, 1999 Mode will demand that players pick specializations, and focus on them."

Sounds like things are going to get tough, especially with the necessity to specialise in a weapon before it's of any use to you. Apparently, "any weapon will be useless to you unless you have that specialization". Fortunately Irrational isn't removing game saves altogether, but how the developer plans to implement game save options has yet to be revealed. According to Levine, "there are game saves, and you're gonna f***ing need them".

Release List



Dates subject to change without notice

March: Week 1

Ridge Racer Unbounded	PC
Jurassic Park: The Game	PC
Jagged Alliance: Back in Action	PC
Dynasty Warriors Next	Vita
Ninja Gaiden Sigma Plus	Vita
SSX	360 / PS3
Catherine	360 / PS3
The Last Story	Wii

March: Week 2

Mass Effect 3	PC / 360 / PS3
The Sims 3: Showtime	PC
Unit 13	Vita
Street Fighter X Tekken	360 / PS3

March: Week 3

Carnival Games: Wild West 3D	3DS
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7	Vita
FIFA Street	360 / PS3
Assassin's Creed: Revelations (Ottoman Edition)	360 / PS3

March: Week 4

Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D	3DS
Silent Hill: Book of Memories	Vita
Twisted Metal	PS3
Yakuza: Of the End	PS3
Blades of Time	360 / PS3
Birds of Steel	360 / PS3
Silent Hill: Downpour	360 / PS3
Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City	360 / PS3
Silent Hill HD Collection	360 / PS3
NeverDead	360 / PS3
Armored Core V	360 / PS3
Kinect Rush: A Disney-Pixar Adventure	360
Rayman Origins	PC / Wii
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 13	360 / PS3
Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm Generations	360 / PS3
Best of Just Dance	Wii
Mario Party 9	Wii
Ninja Gaiden 3	360 / PS3

Two Challenge Towers and touchscreen Fatalities for PSV Mortal Kombat

// By now, some of you might be proud owners of a shiny new PlayStation Vita. While the launch line-up of games is already pretty stellar, there's a ton of titles to look forward to. One such PSV game that will likely acquire the "Must Have" moniker is the upcoming PSV version of last year's *Mortal Kombat*.

Before you label this release a port, you should know that developer NetherRealm Studios has put a lot of effort into ensuring the game is anything but. While the multiplayer aspects have been reduced to one-on-one matches only, the rest of the *Mortal Kombat* experience is there, from all the stages, characters and Fatalities, to the entire story mode and Challenge Tower.

Touchscreen Fatalities will add some variety to your bloodlust, with some of the game's harder input strings being made a lot easier thanks to the PSV's touchscreen. The Challenge Tower was arguably one of the greatest aspects of 2011's *Mortal Kombat* reboot, and the excellent news is that there are two in the PSV version. The original Challenge Tower with its 300 challenges will be present in the game, but there will also be a PSV exclusive second tower with 150 new challenges that make use of the handheld's unique input controls.

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Top 8 villains in video games

Villains! We need them in video games because, in their absence, our would-be heroes would never have the chance to hang out with princesses or escape their menial jobs; there'd be an excess of games about doing household chores and not enough about saving the world.

8 Shang Tsung Mortal Kombat series

This chap is so shrouded in mystery that not even the creators of the series can agree on his past. Nonetheless, we know that he's evil because the gods of Outworld don't go around cursing just anyone. We say this without a shred of proof or authority, but we heard from a guy that knows Scorpion's uncle that he once saw Shang Tsung drinking milk inside a grocery store and then putting it back on the shelf, which is, like, totally gross.



7 Baal Diablo II: Lord of Destruction

Sure, we could've been predictable and claimed Diablo himself to be the most bad of all asses in the series that bears his name, but we dug a little deeper into the psychology of gamers and discovered (well, decided) that Baal is in fact the one you need to keep an eye on. Lord of Destruction, corrupter of Tal Rasha and big enough to bully all of his demonic siblings, Baal is the stuff of nightmares.



6 Bowser Mario series

Our mandatory old-school platformer representative, Bowser is the classic villain in that he exists purely to give the hero something to do. We pity him sometimes, but then he does that thing where he jumps and blasts us with a fireball while we're trying to dodge those other things that are flying all over the place, and we get back to the business of hating him.



MASS EFFECT 3



TAKE EARTH BACK
9 MARCH 2012

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PS3



XBOX 360

XBOX LIVE

BIOWARE



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EA GAMES 3001

5 Glados Portal series

That's right, Glados is a villain. Try as you might to sympathise with this deranged (and admittedly driven) sentient AI, it's impossible to ignore just how many times she tries to kill absolutely everything that gets in the way of her weird little tests. Science isn't that important anyway.



4 Albert Wesker Resident Evil series

Video game fact: Cool sunglasses mean you're either a super good guy or a super bad guy; it just comes down to what percentage of time you spend wearing them indoors. Albert Wesker almost always wears sunglasses and, since he spends most of his time indoors while working on his world-ending viruses, conspiring to destroy humanity and corrupting life forms to do his bidding, he obviously falls under the category of super bad guy.



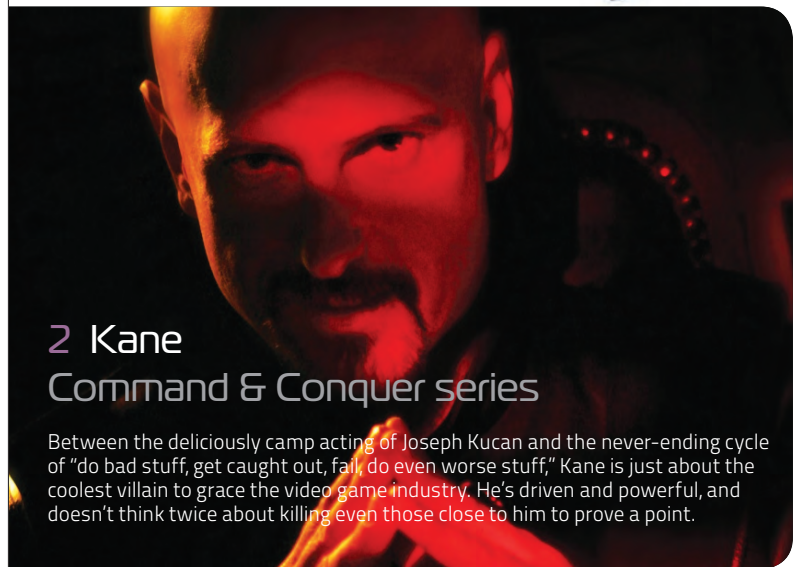
3 LeChuck Monkey Island series

Everybody's favourite zombie pirate, LeChuck proves that you can't keep a good bad guy down for more than a few weeks. And, boy, has GuyBrush Threepwood tried. He also, incidentally, met the love of his life, became known as a hero throughout the islands, made loads of new friends and had many adventures, all thanks to this undead menace. It's funny how these things work out sometimes.



2 Kane Command & Conquer series

Between the deliciously camp acting of Joseph Kucan and the never-ending cycle of "do bad stuff, get caught out, fail, do even worse stuff," Kane is just about the coolest villain to grace the video game industry. He's driven and powerful, and doesn't think twice about killing even those close to him to prove a point.



1 Adrian Ripburger Full Throttle

Most video game villains have wild and lofty goals and often possess incredible powers and abilities. They're easily recognisable as evil and they stand apart from regular people, but Adrian Ripburger is a great villain because he's so terrifyingly human. He is uncompromising in what he wants, but his goals are nothing more than financial success and he will stop at nothing to achieve that. He's the villain that all of us wish we never become.



THE MACHINE AGE HAS BEGUN...



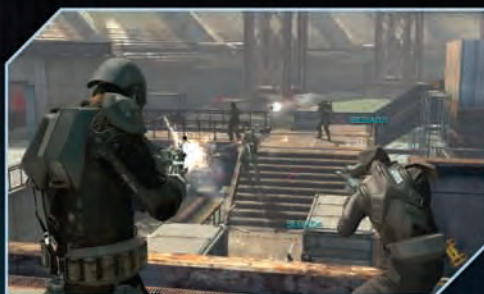
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Available at selected stores:



StencylWorks

Game development studio in a box

Making games is a lot of fun, but it is also a difficult, laborious task – especially if you have no programming ability whatsoever. As gaming becomes more and more ubiquitous, creation tools such as StencylWorks (www.stencyl.com) appear to make the creation process easier. Using StencylWorks, you can easily (for a given value of “easy”) make games for PC or iOS. It’s still not as easy as writing a book, but thanks to tools like StencylWorks and Game Maker, it’s already a thousand times easier than it was 10 years ago.

1 WHAT IS IT?

StencylWorks is a game creation kit. By working within its framework and workflow, you can focus on what’s important to you: making the game. If you’re the type to get your hands dirty with programming, you can still access all the low-level code for handling things personally. But if you have no programming skills at all, you can still assemble something by basically building a game out of component blocks.

2 WHY USE IT?

If you’re asking, “why should I use something like this instead of learning ActionScript from scratch and building my own gaming engines?” that’s a valid question. If you want to do each step of the process by hand, go ahead. Another way of looking at it is when you want to type up a document you don’t program your own Word or Google Docs. For rapidly testing out ideas to see if they’re fun, or if you don’t feel like re-inventing the wheel, StencylWorks provides a good alternative. If you write your own thing from scratch, you’ll always have more power and control than if you use a creation tool like this, but sometimes being able to draw a picture without making your own pencil is just as powerful.

3 BUILDING BLOCKS?

Things like enemies, player actions, bullets, level transitions, things that “do” something, are driven by Behaviours. You can make your own Behaviours by snapping together “code” blocks, or you can use StencylForge. Built right into the program, StencylForge is an online repository of user-submitted Behaviours, Tiles (for building levels), Sprites (for things like player characters and enemies) and even complete “kits” for things like platforming games or role-playing games. Kits are basically a collection of Behaviours, themed around a genre like action games or side-scrolling shooter. If you’re working on a game and need something to handle

enemy movement, you can usually find something to use on StencylForge. You import it into your game, assign it to an enemy you’ve made, tweak the settings and off you go. Not all Behaviours are well-made, so you will have to either look around to see which one works best, or examine one and see how it works so you can make your own.

4 HOW’S THE PROGRAMMING WORK?

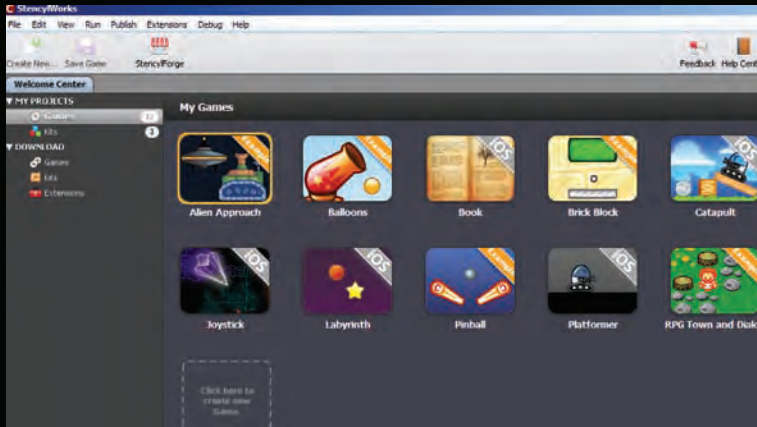
One of the best ways to learn how things work is to take something apart. By opening Behaviours you get off StencylForge or taking apart the provided sample games, you can learn a lot about how to construct basic programming to handle the simpler tasks. StencylForge manages a lot of the difficult stuff automatically, like physics and sound. You set the Material Properties of objects, like their weight, mass and bounciness, and the game engine handles the rest (make sure to set the gravity on a Scene). The basic hierarchy of things goes like this: you have a Scene (like a level), which contains Actors (enemies, the player, etc.) which move around on the Tiles (the building-blocks of the level, like grass, ladders, etc.). Scenes and Actors can have Behaviours, which drive their actions and determine what happens when, for example, a bullet meets an enemy’s face.

5 WHAT DOES IT COST?

StencylForge is free, with no limits other than a splash-screen that displays when the game loads for the first time. You can pay \$50 to remove that watermark if you want a branding-free game (once you’re ready to publish). There is also \$150-a-year subscription for access to the “Pro” version of StencylWorks, which gives you earlier access to software updates, and the ability to publish your game directly to the Apple App Store if you made something for iOS.



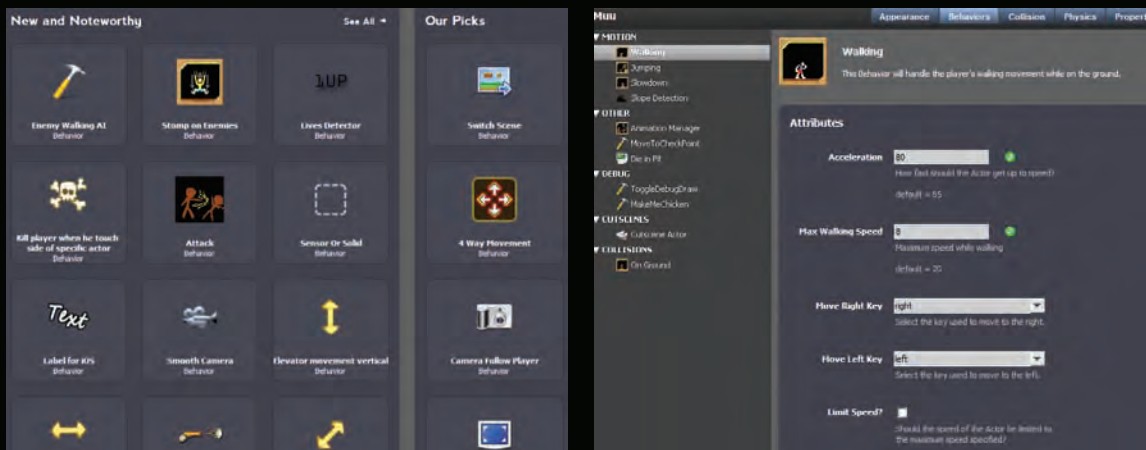
You can find
the latest version
of StencylWorks
on the
NAG DVD!



1 The first thing you see after installing StencylWorks is a bunch of example games, and a menu asking if you'd like to run through a quick tutorial to learn how StencylWorks works.

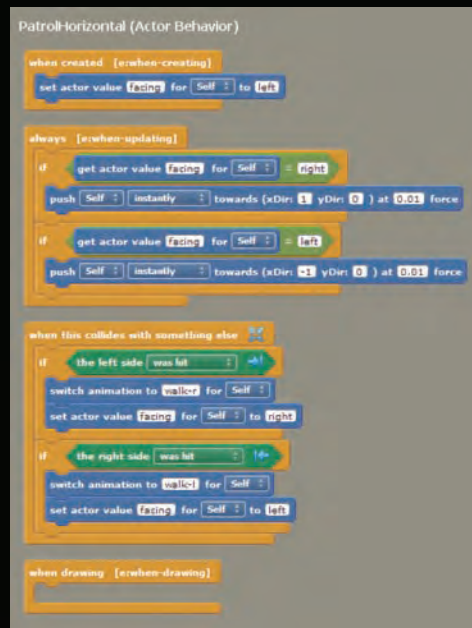


2 One of the example games provided with StencylWorks is a quick Angry Birds style game, to show you just how easy it is to make something like it.

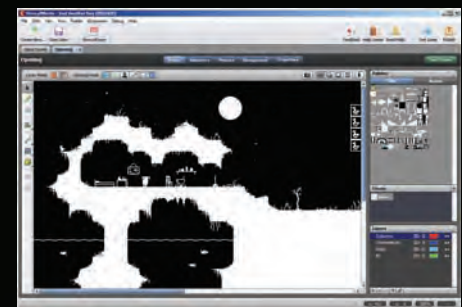


3 Some of the community-made Behaviour Blocks you can import into your game and use, many of which you can adjust without looking at their code.

4 When programming in StencylWorks, you're dragging and dropping code blocks into various slots, depending on what you need to do. Some things are straightforward, like "push this thing in that direction", others will require a little finesse.



5 An example of a level (the minimalist graphics were an art design choice by the game creator) being laid out inside StencylForge. Since everything is done visually, "what you see is what you get".





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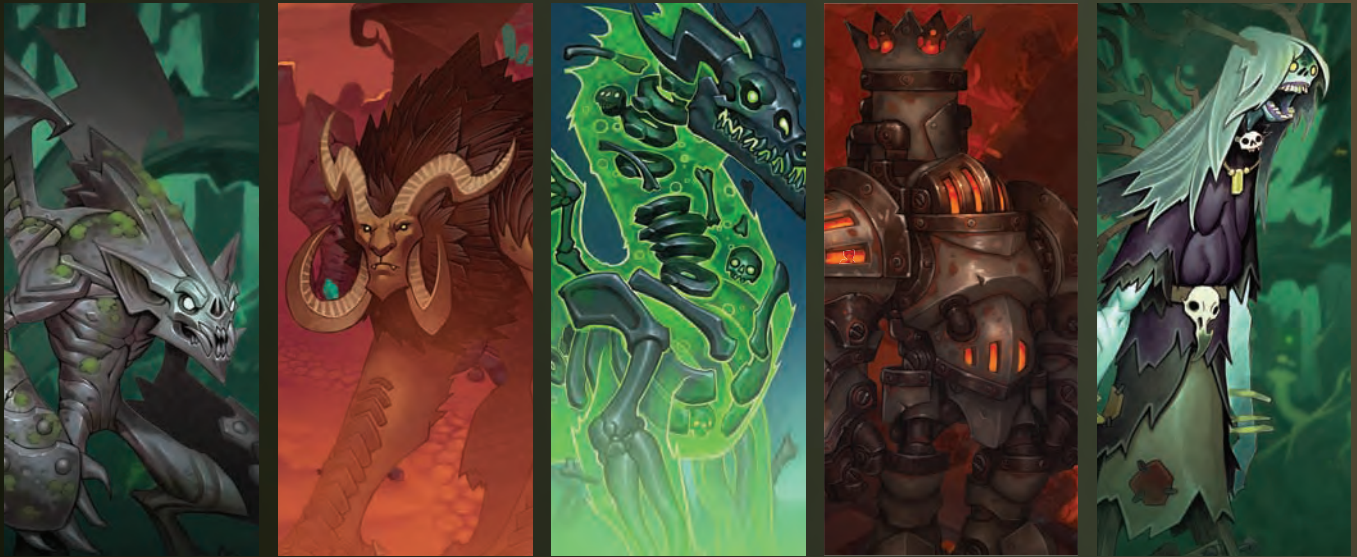
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TORCHLIGHT II

Moving on up

[details]

Release Date:
TBA 2012
Platforms:
PC
Genre:
Action role-playing
game
Developer:
Runic Games
Website:
www.torchlight2game.com
Publisher:
Perfect World

[trivia]

// Runic originally planned to expand on the *Torchlight* universe with an MMORPG following the original's release. Instead, the team began work on *Torchlight II*, not only because *Torchlight* with co-op theoretically equals automatic win, but so that the team at Runic could gain "more experience with making a multiplayer *Torchlight*" as well.

Torchlight's lovable desire to bring the original *Diablo*'s ideals into modern-day gaming made it an indie hit. All you had to do was load it up once and you'd suddenly have your face hacked and slashed by delightful nostalgia. Confined to a single town (which may as well have been called Tristram) that housed all your crafting and mercantile needs, and boasting a lone dungeon (not counting the endless randomised dungeon that you gained access to upon completing the narrative, or the secondary dungeons visited using scrolls) with multiple levels that got increasingly tougher (but at the same time more rewarding) as you delved ever deeper immediately rekindled memories of Blizzard's beloved original action RPG. It's not surprising really: members of the Seattle-based team at Runic Games have extensive experience crafting action RPGs, including *Diablo* and *Diablo II*. It was more than just familiarly furious clicking through loot-dropping mobs and boss critters – new innovations (and twists on old ones) peppered the game's design. The blend of proven ARPG mechanics, coupled with its relatively low price of admission and high-quality dungeon crawling made *Torchlight* an instant favourite. And *Torchlight II* hopes to do it all over again, but bigger and better.

The storyline goes something like this: years have passed since the original adventurers (i.e. you) vanquished The Great Evil™. Now, someone's stolen the essence of that terrible bastard's powers and is using it to shave kittens, scratch chalkboards and poison all of the world's shampoo. This Greater Evil™ must be stopped, and it's up to you (and possibly

whatever friends you may or may not have) to stop it. To this end, there are four all-new character classes on offer, each featuring an extensive list of unique skills and abilities useful in conquering evil and cleansing tainted hair products. Stories in hack-'n'-slashers have always been little more than tertiary details serving as a backdrop for your frantic clicking and skill point distribution, so we don't expect miracles from the narrative. Still, we're certainly expecting it to take us to new, exciting environs in which to frantically click and distribute skill points, and it has been promised that the plot will be much more substantial this time around.

Significantly, this sequel brings the addition of an extensive overworld – which should serve to alleviate complaints of repetition levelled at the original. We're moving beyond the boundaries of the titular town of *Torchlight*, promising vast outdoor expanses and multiple towns scattered throughout the world, complete with weather and a day/night cycle. Randomisation of your out-of-dungeon exploits will hopefully keep things fresh. Moreover, randomised dungeons across the world bring XP and rare loot rewards, supposedly boasting more branching paths than the original game's dungeons as well. Randomisation really is a keyword here: even the important locations around the world are randomly located. Random events can result in a quick reward should you choose to engage in them. Out in the wilderness, you may find a caravan beset by bandits. Kill all the bandits before they off the non-player characters, and they'll reward you for your troubles. The world of *Torchlight II* will be truly huge, offering up

LEVELLING UP

> The randomised outdoor areas in the game are divided into two types: “passes” and “overworld” areas. Each act of the game features multiple variations of each type. Passes are more confined, themed areas that connect different zones – like brutally rewarding highways running between different areas. Within each of the multiple varieties of pass that the game can spew up on each play through, certain smaller elements will also be randomised, altering the experience each time. Overworlds are larger and more open, allowing for a ton of exploration. They’re completely randomised, just like the

game’s dungeons, allowing for practically infinite variation. Runic’s Patrick Blank explains the sheer size of the overworlds best:

“*Torchlight I*’s largest levels were towards the end of the game in ‘The Black Palace.’ The largest floor was about 6-7 chunks in size, and very linear. A typical overworld area in *Torchlight II* can contain up to around 23 chunks in size.”

Meanwhile, dungeons are very similar to those of the first game, but will reportedly be much more detailed and lively. They’ve been set up to offer more room for exploration, rather than a largely linear dungeon crawl. **5**

[trivia]

// Modding is once again handled by TorchEd, which will boast more options and greater functionality this time around.

// *Torchlight II* features cinematics produced by the folks at Klei Entertainment – they who developed *Eets* and *Shank*. Prepare for animated awesomeness.

// Fishing will return in *Torchlight II* as an optional endeavour. Fish you catch can be fed to pets to provide unique bonuses – and in some cases, can lead to a permanent physical transformation of your pet.


plenty of potential for exploration and, crucially, all the randomisation will foster replayability. The game's divided into four acts (only one of these is not set outside), and it's been said that the first act alone has more boss encounters than the original *Torchlight* in its entirety.

Drop-in, drop-out cooperative play is another much-touted feature of the sequel. It'll be playable via LAN or online. It's not yet officially confirmed exactly how many people will be able to join forces in the quest for shiny new chest armour, but it'll be at least four. That number might increase to eight, so you'd best get to work convincing your friends to set aside cash for the game right now if you think it's dangerous to go alone. After all, multiple skill trees are better than one. Bear in mind that the number of players could also possibly be tweaked by the community post-release using TorchEd, the game's modding suite. Difficulty and experience scaling work dynamically. When players are in close proximity of one another, experience is shared accordingly and monsters become tougher. Split up

HERE BOY!

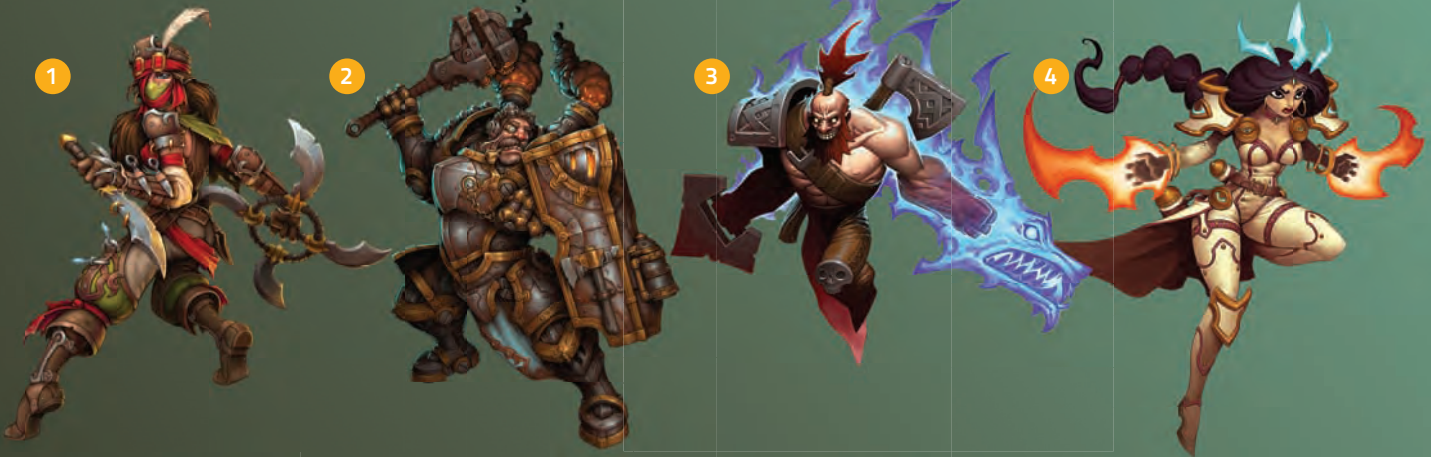
> Those wonderful pets return in *Torchlight II*. To those not familiar with how pets functioned in *Torchlight*, here's the skinny: The game allowed you to choose between a cat and a dog at the game's offset, and your loyal companion would join you at the start of your journey and be with you until its climax. Not a feature unique to *Torchlight*, sure, having shared it with the pets of 2005's *Fate* – another hack-'n'-slasher developed by

some of the devs currently working on *Torchlight II*. At any time in the dungeon, you could send them back up to town to sell any items you'd placed in their inventory, returning with a meaty pile of gold for your ever-growing collection. The deeper down you were, the longer your pet's journey would take and the more time you'd spend without them by your side. It's a cleanly intelligent and naturally charming way to handle that outdated action

RPG habit of constant back and forth between town and wherever it is you're currently at work maiming things to offload all the underpowered junk you've been stashing in your backpack. Not only that, but pets are pretty handy in a fight: they level up alongside you, can cast spells (!) and their behavioural AI can be altered to suit your needs. They'll also give you face a lick that is somehow uplifting when you're feeling down. Good times. 



CLASSY



> *Torchlight II* boasts four new character classes. Gone are the Vanquisher, Alchemist and Destroyer, replaced by the Engineer, Outlander, Embermage and Berserker. The original characters are apparently in the sequel as NPCs. In addition to the new classes, *Torchlight II* adds light character customisation to its ARPG equation, allowing you to choose your character's gender for each class, as well as changing their hairstyles and faces. Class descriptions incoming:

1 THE OUTLANDER

Somewhat similar to the Vanquisher, the rogue-like Outlander specialises

in ranged combat. Fast and nimble, the Outlander uses superior agility to herd opponents into tight groups before striking them all with a single throw of his/her deadly glaive. This survivalist has some magical ability and is skilled in the use of all manner of ranged weapons.

2 THE ENGINEER

Originally called the Railman, the Engineer is a heavy melee fighter, seen equipped with steampunk armour and a potent-looking hammer. Able to absorb massive amounts of damage, the Engineer has skills that improve his tanking

prowess and can also act as a support character by buffing nearby allies. As this character dishes out damage with powerful melee attacks, he/she builds up charges that can be spent to increase damage and provide other bonuses.

3 THE BERSERKER

Animalistic and brutal, the Berserker is *Torchlight II*'s fast, savage melee fighter. Granted special powers through their worship of "totem beasts", Berserkers make fantastic hand-to-hand fighters. In a pinch, "their fearsome totems unleash gouts of fiery dragon breath or packs

of spectral wolves to turn the tide of battle." Sounds delightful.

4 THE EMBERMAGE

The spellcaster of the group is the Embermage and, as the name suggests, has been imbued with magical abilities through their study of the magical mineral Ember (which fans of the first game will recognise). However, unlike Alchemists, they do not draw their power directly from Ember. Fire, ice and electricity are all in the Embermage's magical arsenal, as is short-range teleportation – which can be used on themselves or their enemies. 5



and go your separate ways, and the XP/difficulty will scale for individual players until you once again join forces with others. It means that players can run off and do their own thing, tackling quests alone or as a group, with the game constantly keeping track of all this. Your offline characters can be used in multiplayer games. If you want to join a high-level player's game as a low-level character, it's possible – but experience gains will be capped to stop you from suddenly gaining ten levels off the shared experience of a tough, high-level boss fight. Loot stealing won't be an issue here either, because dropped loot is different for each player. The loot that drops for you isn't the same as the loot that drops for another player, hopefully reducing the loot-induced real-world murder count down to zero.

There's a lot to look forward to in *Torchlight II*. Less immediately evident changes include a new, improved user interface that's designed to be intuitive and newcomer friendly. There's also a

retirement system: once your character reaches a certain level, they can be retired to bestow special bonuses to new characters. In many ways, it's very similar to its predecessor – but it's much, much more ambitious. The attractive art style and playful design that made the original so alluring returns, as do seemingly all of the mechanics and polished ARPG features that made the original so infuriatingly addictive and brilliantly compelling. With the promise of a larger world, a better-developed storyline and the inclusion of multiplayer effectively silencing the majority of the universal complaints directed at its forebear, *Torchlight II* would seem to have all the makings of a sure-fire downloadable hit. Here's to hoping it lives up to its potential and isn't dwarfed by a certain other beloved ARPG that's releasing this year. At only \$20, this should be an automatic purchase for anyone who's ever wondered if buying a pair of Levi's jeans would give a bonus to dexterity. **NAG** **Barkskin**

RESIDENT EVIL: OPERATION RACCOON CITY

T-virus Fortress



[details]

Release Date:
Q1 2012
Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3
Genre:
Third-person shooter/
survival horror
Developer:
Slant Six Games/
Capcom
Website:
www.residentevil.
com/reorc/
Publisher:
Capcom

Over the years, *Resident Evil* has slowly taken the spotlight off its survival-horror elements and shone it in the direction of straight-up action and giraffe fellatio. *Operation Raccoon City* wants to add yet another element for that spotlight to share its gaze with: multiplayer.

Raccoon City is besieged by the original outbreak of the T-virus, with pharmaceutical company Umbrella fighting to destroy any evidence of their role in all this by any means necessary. Set around the same time as *Resident Evil 2* and *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis*, *ORC* features all the team-based multiplayer bells and whistles: persistent stats/unlocks, an array of different characters to choose from and multiple game modes. Gain enough experience and you'll be able to purchase weapons, level up abilities and basically make yourself more lethal. Each character (there are six of them for each faction in the game, with two playable factions) comes packing their own unique skill set, proficiencies and abilities. Unlocks are persistent across modes: whether you're playing the cooperative campaign mode (which can be played offline, whereupon you're joined by three AI teammates) or one of the handful of

competitive modes, your level, unlocks and experience will accompany you. Weaponry available includes staples like assault rifles, SMGs, stun grenades and shotguns, with more exotic stuff like grenade launchers also showing face.

Taking a cue from other *RE* titles like *Outbreak File #2* and *Revelations*, players can aim and shoot while moving rather than being rooted on the spot whenever a bit of gunplay needs to happen. You can also run while reloading, and a cover mechanic has been added, just to further solidify *ORC's* tendency towards action. The increased mobility and cover are uncharacteristically crucial, because zombies and things that go bump in the night aren't the only things you've got standing between you and survival: in the competitive modes, other humans will be eager to fill you with bullets, and even throughout the campaign, angry men with guns will take a vicious disliking to you. You'll find many nods to previous games in the series, from typewriter collectables to instant-use herbs that replenish your non-regenerating health when you find them. And while these throwbacks are all well and good, don't expect a classic *RE* offering here. Instead, expect a





MEET THE TEAMS

In the game's main story, players take on the role of one of six Umbrella Security Service operatives, and are joined by either three AI squad members, or player-controlled allies. Naturally, this is a game that'll be best played with good ol' humans, preferably friends. There's a definite *Left 4 Dead* vibe here, but Valve's zombie apocalypse works brilliantly for very specific reasons that seem absent from *ORC*. It remains to be seen if Capcom can find similar success with *ORC*.

Meanwhile, competitive multiplayer pits two teams (divided between USS and US Spec Ops) of four players against each other in game modes detailed elsewhere. Here are your playable characters on the USS side, with similarly functioning counterparts obviously existing for the Spec Ops team:

1 LUPO

Real name: Karena Lesproux

Leader of USS squad Delta, aka the "Wolfpack," Lupo hails from France and is affectionately known as Wolf Mother. Lupo's role is assault, and has numerous abilities that enhance this; such as one which grants her unlimited ammo and improves accuracy for a limited time.

2 SPECTRE

Real name: Vladimir Bodrovski

The team's recon expert, Spectre can use thermal vision to pinpoint enemies for his squad.

3 BELTWAY

Real name: Hector Hivers

Discharged from the Army Corps of Engineers, although not much is known about the circumstances surrounding his discharge other than the fact that he emerged with a prosthetic leg. Beltway's speciality is demolitions, able to bring the boom by laying down mines and blowing chunks out of walls.

4 BERTHA

Real name: Michaela Schneider

The squad's medic, Bertha hails from Germany and is able to heal downed squad members from a distance.

5 VECTOR

Real name: Unknown

Stealthy bastard Vector has the ability to use a cloaking device to become invisible. Vector can also assume the shape and form of other players and even zombies.

6 FOUR-EYES

Real name: Christine Yamata

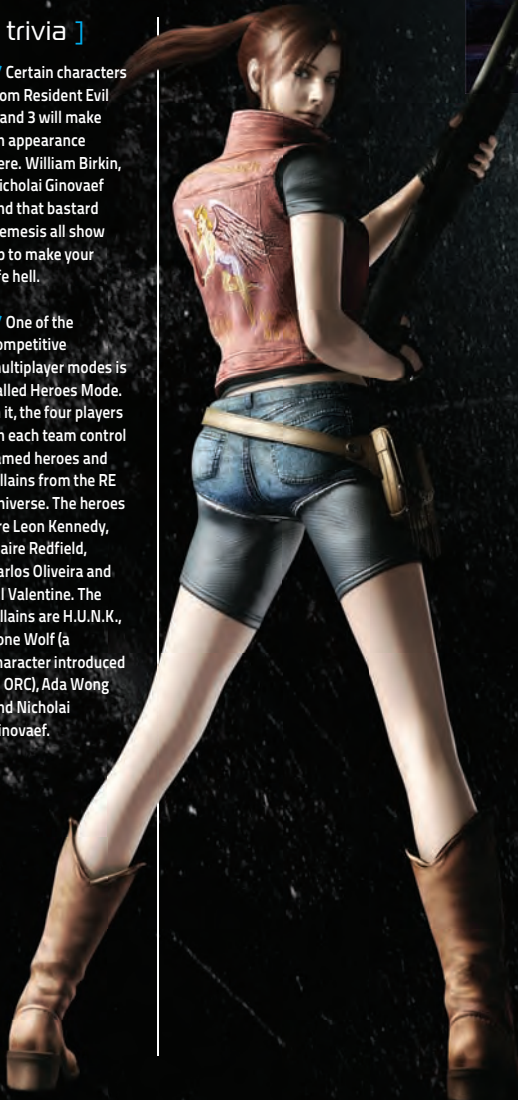
Four-Eyes' expertise in virology allows her to execute a number of abilities that turn the odds in the team's favour, like firing a dart that lets her take control of enemies, or throwing a T-virus grenade that attracts infected.



[trivia]

// Certain characters from Resident Evil 2 and 3 will make an appearance here. William Birkin, Nicholai Ginovaef and that bastard Nemesis all show up to make your life hell.

// One of the competitive multiplayer modes is called Heroes Mode. In it, the four players on each team control famed heroes and villains from the RE universe. The heroes are Leon Kennedy, Claire Redfield, Carlos Oliveira and Jill Valentine. The villains are H.U.N.K., Lone Wolf (a character introduced in ORC), Ada Wong and Nicholai Ginovaef.



“Taking a cue from other RE titles like *Outbreak File #2* and *Revelations*, players can aim and shoot while moving rather than being rooted on the spot whenever a bit of gunplay needs to happen.”

weird mash-up of *Left 4 Dead* meets *Team Fortress 2*.

There are two playable factions vying for dominance in the objective-based competitive modes: the Umbrella Security Service (USS – who are fighting to conceal Umbrella’s involvement) and the US Spec Ops (whose aim is to expose Umbrella). A third, non-playable faction comes by way of the Bio-Organic Weapons (BOWs) that populate levels and pose a threat to both teams. Lickers, Hunters and other recognisable foes all stand to make achieving victory a constant struggle, with the player reportedly able to control these monstrosities in certain situations. A number of cool mechanics are in place, both in the competitive modes and the campaign. Shoot a human enemy enough without killing them, and they begin to bleed, attracting nearby zombies to the wounded foe. Beware, however, since the same can be done to you. You, or one of your buddies, can become infected via prolonged

exposure to certain enemy attacks. Fail to expeditiously locate some antiviral spray, and you’ll become a zombie yourself. In the campaign mode, downed teammates respawn at set areas.

There are many interesting ideas running rampant within *ORC*’s design. The multiplayer focus is no surprise, given that Slant Six Games, co-developers of the game, previously created *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Confrontation*, which also focussed on online play. It also wasn’t at all well-received by critics and gamers alike. Mid-story decisions, like whether or not killing prolific RE character Leon S. Kennedy is a good idea, are sure to rouse fans, but seeing as how *ORC* is non-canonical, these decisions won’t have any real impact. There’s a lot that could go wrong here, resulting in a game best forgotten. But if they manage to pull it off, this could be one of the most interesting games in this beloved series. **NAG**

Barkskin

RESIDENT EVIL™

Operation Raccoon City

ALL ROADS LEAD TO HELL



OUT
23.03.2012



facebook.com/residentevil



youtube.com/residentevil



PS3
PlayStation 3



XBOX 360

XBOX LIVE



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I AM ALIVE

Back from the dead and intimidating...

When *I Am Alive* debuted at E3 in 2008, it was with a single short moody trailer showing a duck-faced man running through derelict buildings before using his only bottle of water to kill three dubious-looking post-apocalyptic gangsters.

After two years of development and very little shown, that version of *I Am Alive* was abandoned. While the true concerns that led to Paris-based *Cold Fear* creator Darkworks leaving the project due to a "mutual decision" remain unknown, Ubisoft claims it was digital distribution that ultimately saved the project. At the start of 2010, Ubisoft CEO Yves Guillemot announced that the game was being rebooted and developed from scratch by their internal Shanghai studio, which was responsible for, among others, *Tom Clancy's EndWar* and *Rayman Raving Rabbids*, and currently developing *Far Cry 3*.

The main theme of survival remains, as does the plot of an "everyman" trying to find his wife and daughter who were lost during the "Event". It takes Mr. Everyman a year to find Haventon, his hometown, now in shambles. Buildings are crumbled, ash covers the streets and society has been reduced to base survival instincts. If you have something of scarcity (and thus value) like water, bullets or cigarettes, someone else will kill to get it.

INTIMIDATION

At the heart of *I Am Alive* is a third-person intimidation simulator. You can shoot people, but bullets are a precious commodity. Instead, you're expected to bluff your way out of perilous situations, or at the very least resolve them quickly and decisively. Perhaps that's why Ubisoft felt digital distribution is the only avenue for the game: it flies right in the face of the populist heavy action shooter conventions. "Thought-provoking choices" is a buzz phrase reserved for the back of the box for *haute couture* games. Nobody expects there to *actually*

be choices that make you think about the consequences. Right?

Ubisoft is taking a big chance trying to deliver on its intimidation mechanic. A single bullet is all it takes to kill a man, and in a realistic situation even an empty gun is a threat. By trying to change encounters from the straightforward shooting everything that moves into a deadly game of chicken, *I Am Alive* will have to make its people believable. If enemies don't react in a convincing way to your bluff, the illusion will fall apart and the intimidation mechanic will become a simple puzzle to solve by rote trial and error, instead of one that has to be navigated empathically.

The videos released so far show great attention to detail, though it's difficult to say what was heavily scripted and what evolved naturally out of a dynamic system. Drawing your gun on a loner trying to strong-arm you into handing over your precious bottle of water has him raising his hands defensively and moving away. Having backed up too close to a precipice, the would-be assaulter looks back nervously, and our Mr. Everyman dispatches him with a quick kick to the chest. Another presented encounter has three thugs start to flank Mr. Everyman, presenting an interesting situation on who to shoot. One encounter is avoided entirely with

a quick slit of a thug's throat via a "surprise kill" stealth move, causing his buddies to back away cautiously.

SURVIVAL

To make a believable, considered post-apocalyptic world, the team opted to forgo the usual trappings. There are no zombies, no mutants, and no supernatural elements of any kind. The "Event" that threw the world sideways was a natural disaster, but one that ended civilization entirely. You'll have to climb ruined skyscrapers, explore broken residential buildings for supplies, but most importantly: survive. The higher you climb up buildings, the more breathable the air, but the higher the risk. Structures are unstable, and a small militia tends to keep the best areas to themselves.

Taking inspiration from *Shadow of the Colossus*, the game uses a stamina gauge. Every physical effort has a stamina cost, like running and climbing. If you run out while navigating up a dangerous scaffold, you'll fall and die. Mastering your navigation controls and stamina management is an integral part of the game.

If *I Am Alive* can pull off even half of what it's trying to achieve, even that would be enough to breathe some life into a genre that's become insufferably stale and cliché over the last decade.

NAG
Miktar

[details]

Release Date:

Q1 2012

Platforms:

360 / PS3

Genre:

Third-person, survival

Developer:

Ubisoft Shanghai

Website:

www.iamalivegame.com

com

Publisher:

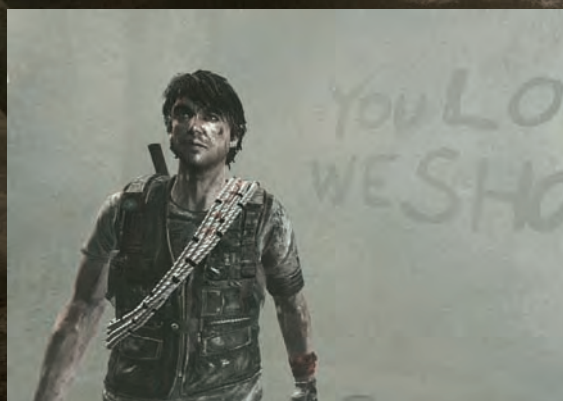
Ubisoft

[trivia]

// You'll be able to barter with goods you've found while scavenging, or just give them to those that need it.

// There may be stuff hidden at the top of skyscrapers, and getting fresh air will be good for you.

"Instead, you're expected to bluff your way out of perilous situations, or at the very least resolve them quickly and decisively."





PC VERSION?

Officially, there will be no PC version of *I Am Alive*. Odd, considering how profitable digital distribution platforms like Steam have been for Ubisoft. Since the game is exclusively a digitally distributed product, the choice not to release a Steam version at the least, seemed odd. In talking to www.incgamers.com, creative director Stanislas Mettra was a bit snarky on the matter, saying things like "It's hard because there's so much piracy and

so few people are paying for PC games that we have to precisely weigh it up against the cost of making it."

After a small storm in a teacup about the matter, Mettra sent an email to the site to clarify his thoughts, explaining that he would "really love to see a PC build of the game" and didn't mean to imply there wouldn't be one at all, just that they are "still working to see the feasibility of it" and that the choice is ultimately not in his hands.



THE LAST OF US

Heading off the charted path...

[details]

Release Date:

Q1 2013

Platforms:

PS3

Genre:

Third-person survival

Developer:

Naughty Dog

Website:

www.lastofus.com

Publisher:

Sony Computer

Entertainment

[trivia]

// Exploration will be a key feature of *The Last Of Us*; it won't be as linear as *Uncharted*.

// The game's visuals draw inspiration from *No Country for Old Men*, *The Walking Dead* and WWII novel *City of Thieves*.

In 2008, the BBC aired an episode of *Planet Earth* that showed the interesting lifecycle of a microscopic spore found in the Amazon Rainforest. The spores land on an ant, infecting its body and taking over its mind. As the ant succumbs to the infection, a spore growth erupts violently from its head.

After the release of *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*, Naughty Dog game director Bruce Straley and creative director Neil Druckmann were looking for new game ideas when they saw the episode. They asked, "what would happen if it jumped to humans and infected their lungs?"

The answer, of course, is *The End of the World*.

BEAUTIFUL TRAGEDY

By the time Naughty Dog had finished *Uncharted 2*, the studio had grown large enough to support two main projects. Half the studio focused on *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*, while the other half used the technology being developed for *Uncharted 3* to explore Straley and Druckmann's idea.

The end result is *The Last Of Us*, a game with an uncharacteristically generous development budget which managed to come out of nowhere. The game takes place across multiple locations in America, long after the original event in which the mind-controlling spores jumped to human hosts. In an obvious nod to *I Am Legend* and *Enslaved*, instead of the bleak greys of contemporary post-apocalyptic cities, derelict metropolises have already been reclaimed by nature and overflow with green.

JOEL AND ELLIE

Players control Joel (voiced by Troy Baker), a lean 40-year-old bearded man who's clearly seen and done some things he's not proud of. He's accompanied by Ellie (voice by Ashley Johnson), a 14 year old girl of no relation but seemingly wise beyond her years. Even so, the two share a father-daughter bond, influenced in part by the sequence between Nathan Drake and Tenzin in *Uncharted 2*. Joel is a survivor, while Ellie has no memory of the world pre-apocalypse.

Joel and Ellie attempt to survive in a world overrun with infected, but Naughty Dog insists the monsters are not the focus. "If the game was really about the monsters, the infected, the creatures, the zombies – whatever people want to call them – we wouldn't have shown them," says Druckmann. "We're trying to say something about human beings and how they exist. Not necessarily just in this setting, but in every setting."

The initial trailer hints at cover-based shooting and ammunition scarcity, though little else is known about the gameplay. While it shares the core engine with *Uncharted 3*, improvements have been made to the facial animation to facilitate its emphasis on non-verbal communication. There are non-infected to contend with, but their motivations are unknown.

Oscar-winner Gustavo Santaolalla (*The Insider*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *Babel*) will provide the score, his first foray into video games. **NAG**

Miktar

THE MIND-CONTROL FUNGUS

Nature is out to kill us. Nowhere is that more evident than the Amazon Rainforest, where an airborne spore belonging to the parasitic fungi of the genus *Cordyceps*, will literally mind-control its victim so as to reproduce. This is the spore that inspired *The Last Of Us*.

Spores land on various ants and insects in the forest, where they germinate and enter the insect via the tracheae (the tubes through which insects breathe). They start to grow fine fungal filaments called mycelia which expand inside the insect's body cavity, absorbing soft tissue but leaving vital organs intact.

When the fungus is ready to

"sporulate", the mycelia grow into the insect's brain. The fungus releases chemicals which alter the host's perception of pheromones, causing the insect to climb plants and trees as high as it can. Once it reaches the top, it clamps itself to a leaf or stem. The fungus then eats the insect's brain, sprouts from the dead host's head and bursts, releasing clusters of organic capsules into the air. The capsules explode as they float down, spreading more airborne spores over the insects below, repeating the cycle.

This entire process takes between four to ten days. Sleep well.

TROY BAKER

Baker describes himself as a "card-carrying, badge-wearing nerd". The Texas native first began working in video games by playing Sgt. Matt Baker in the *Brothers In Arms* franchise. Since then, Troy has been Slimer in *Ghostbusters*, shouted "Steel Guard!" as Snow Villiers in *Final Fantasy XIII*, voiced Jetfire in *Transformers: War for Cybertron* and Two Face in *Batman: Arkham City*. We

personally love him for his role as Vincent in the under-appreciated *Catherine*.

His animated voiceovers include Van Kleiss in *Generator Rex* and Yamato in *Naruto Shippuden*. An avid gamer, cartoon fanatic and comic book fan, Troy says "It's quite rare to have a job that affords you opportunities to participate in creating something that you'll geek out over later."

ASHLEY JOHNSON

At age two, Ashley Johnson was already a clothing model and appearing in local and national commercials. By age five, she was wowing judges at a Universal Studio beauty pageant with her rendition of "Broadway Baby". She starred in the ABC sitcom *Growing Pains* as Chrissy Seaver, and then made her feature debut

in 1991 opposite Jean-Claude Van Damme in *Lionheart*.

Since, she's worked regularly in specials and TV-movies, such as *Phenom*, *Jumanji*, as the voice of Gwen in *Ben 10: Alien Force*, and more recently in Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse* and as Mary Beth in the feature-film *The Help*.

KINECT STAR WARS

Dance Dance Darth Vader

[details]

Release Date:
Early 2012
 Platforms:
360
 Genre:
Action Adventure
 Developer:
LucasArts /
Terminal Reality
 Website:
www.lucasarts.com
 Publisher:
Microsoft Studios

[trivia]

// For the launch of the game a limited edition *Kinect Star Wars* console bundle will be available. The bundle includes the first ever white Kinect sensor and the console itself is designed to look like R2-D2 and the controller like C3PO. Oh, they'll also throw in the game.

No other intellectual property provides the unskilled journalist with so many free puns and corny references quite like *Star Wars* does. They flow around you and through you, effortlessly from keyboard to screen. You just do it; you don't even have to try. That galaxy far, far away has certainly had a bumpy ride with recent turkeys like *Force Unleashed II* and dream come true wonders like *The Old Republic*. Due to the rich and diverse nature of the *Star Wars* license it's a mixed bag in the game department and opinion has always been divided on favourite *Star Wars* games. One thing that perseveres is that with each new console and technology there are inevitably a batch of *Star Wars* games following closely behind. *Kinect Star Wars* has always carried the promise of the perfect game. Do that Jedi hand swish you've been practicing for years in your bedroom and the Lightsaber follows onscreen, move whole spaceships around using your secretly practiced shaky Force-posed hand (you know the one – where you try and get the TV remote to come to you from across the lounge). Truthfully, this game is as close to being a Jedi as you're going to get right now. Hands on preview code arrived at the NAG office; it was divided up into three different modes.

JEDI ADVENTURE

This mode included another menu for Jedi Training. The training involved moving a ship, jumping, grabbing droids, slicing up droids and kicking droids. Yoda kept offering words of encouragement throughout. It was over all too quickly but got the job done.

The Jedi Adventure itself starts off on Bespin (the cloud city from *Empire Strikes Back*); with you flying towards the city with your AI buddy next to you. Before long you're required to jump into the air to get off the transport and



land on the platform – into some heavy crossfire. You're a Jedi of course, so no problem. Instantly forgetting all the training from three minutes ago you stand there staring at a droid wondering what to do next. Thankfully there is a Kinect prompter bottom left showing you what action needs to be performed to advance. This part of the game is a little 'on rails' and your companion ends up doing all the heavy lifting while you distract enemies and flail about with your Lightsaber and some Force Push powers. There is a lot of potential here as the action in-lounge translates well onto the screen – not perfectly but good enough for most. It's all very exciting and fun and hopefully the final game will allow players a little more freedom.

POD RACING

Two players on-screen, different races (locations) and pods, ranking and some difficulty settings. This is all available immediately for pod racing. The racing begins in the Mos Espa Arena, from *The*

Phantom Menace. Leaning to the left and right deals with the corners and you can pull up different arms for tighter turns. 'Jumping forward' changes the view to just behind the energy binders and pulling your arms back pops the flaps and slows you down. The racing part of the game plays its part well enough but man almighty your arms do get tired quickly – it's a little bit like torture really. That aside, there is fun to be had here and racing next to a friend in the multiplayer mode results in a lot of bumping and jostling. Track variation will be critical as this mode might be a bit limited if you're playing solo. Also, your arms will die so clap the gym now boet.

RANCOR RAMPAGE

Here are eight words for you: You're a Rancor and eating people is encouraged. Enough said, buy the game and live happily ever after. This mode was a little unexpected and will remind older gamers of *Rampage*, except this version is a million times better. There will be

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"Here are eight words for you: You're a Rancor and eating people is encouraged."

different modes and locations in the final game but for now we'll deal with Mos Eisley for the 'time limit' mode. Destroy, kill, bash and eat your way through the objectives before the timer reaches zero is the idea. To move you stomp around in your lounge, to turn you turn, to bash you raise your arms in the air and bring them down hard. Once you've picked up a hapless civilian you can throw them into the sky or just eat them. Yes, throwing involves throwing and for eating you just bring your hand to your mouth. Interestingly it's very hard to avoid biting and chewing when doing this – it's like a reflex action. This mode was the highlight because it's just so silly and ridiculous it has attained genius level status. This mode also received the biggest laughs from the

crowd watching and is enough really to sell the whole concept. Besides modes and locations there are other types of Rancor promised which is good news because this mode could get a bit repetitive by itself.

Kinect Star Wars offers a faint glimpse into the future of gaming. A future (let's say 2080) where you walk into your game world (think *Star Trek*) and become a real Jedi. Yoda will be there, and Darth Vader and if you're lucky you won't notice the slight fuzziness around the edges of the graphics or the cut & paste look of the clone army while you admire your Lightsaber and test your force powers. It'll feel all too real while you're lost in the moment.

NAG

RedTide

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- Limited edition comic by Dark Horse Comics, complete with unique cover artwork.
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- Exclusive 4x6 lithographic print featuring a one-of-a-kind piece of artwork.
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"We really wanted to make *American Nightmare* a standalone experience so that people who have never played *Alan Wake* can pick it up and have fun."

- Sam Lake, Writer

ALAN WAKE'S AMERICAN NIGHTMARE

Have some side-story spin-off...

Even with a protracted development period of five years, *Alan Wake* (2010) managed a cult following. It remains the best Stephen King simulator there is. Drawing inspiration from the likes of *The Shining* and *Twin Peaks*, it's a genuinely creepy psychological thriller.

Bestselling author Alan Wake, suffering from a two-year writer's block, takes a hiatus to the small town of Bright Falls, Washington. Darkness finds him, takes his wife and turns his past novels into reality. The blend of reality-meets-fiction proved provocative, wrapped up in a narrative and plot structure usually found in television cliffhangers, "previously on *Alan Wake*" recaps, and so on.

Remedy has assured fans a sequel is in the works.

JUST WAKING ALONG

American Nightmare is not that sequel. While it is set in Arizona, two years after the events of *Alan Wake* (and its two DLC post-game stories *The Signal* and *The Writer*), it's more of a downloadable side-story. "We really wanted to make *American Nightmare* a standalone experience so that people who have never played *Alan Wake* can pick it up and have fun," says Sam Lake, series creator and writer.

Finding himself outside his prison Bird Leg Cabin (the cabin is broken and overturned), Wake explores his surroundings. He suddenly walks into a dusty golden-hued desert, bathed in an orange-and-blue palette. It's the perfect counterpoint to the original game's moody blacks-and-blues. A nearby gas station provides a starting point. There, a crackly radio squawks the rumours surrounding Wake. "Did he lock himself in a cabin and kill his wife?" the presenter asks. Wake realizes he's inside one of his Night Springs episodes, a live-action



Twilight Zone inspired show he wrote earlier in his life. Because of Wake's situation in which fiction becomes reality, the rumours of him being a murderer create Mr. Scratch, a doppelganger intent on finding Wake's wife and killing her.

Cue lots of Taken (the primary enemy of the first game) and a sub-machine gun. "Story is not the main focus here", says head of franchise development Oskari Häkkinen. "If [the original] was two-thirds story and one-third action,

then I guess *American Nightmare* is two-thirds action and one-third story."

Because of the new action-centric nature, controls have been refocused. The desert around the gas station is open, non-linear. Wake must collect items to properly act out scenes from his show, and find new weapons to deal with the Taken. The campaign is around five hours long, expected to price at \$15 (R120).

NAG

Miktar

[details]

Release Date:

Q1 2012

Platforms:

360

Genre:

Third-person shooter, psychological thriller

Developer:

Remedy Entertainment

Website:

www.alanwake.com/

american-nightmare/

Publisher:

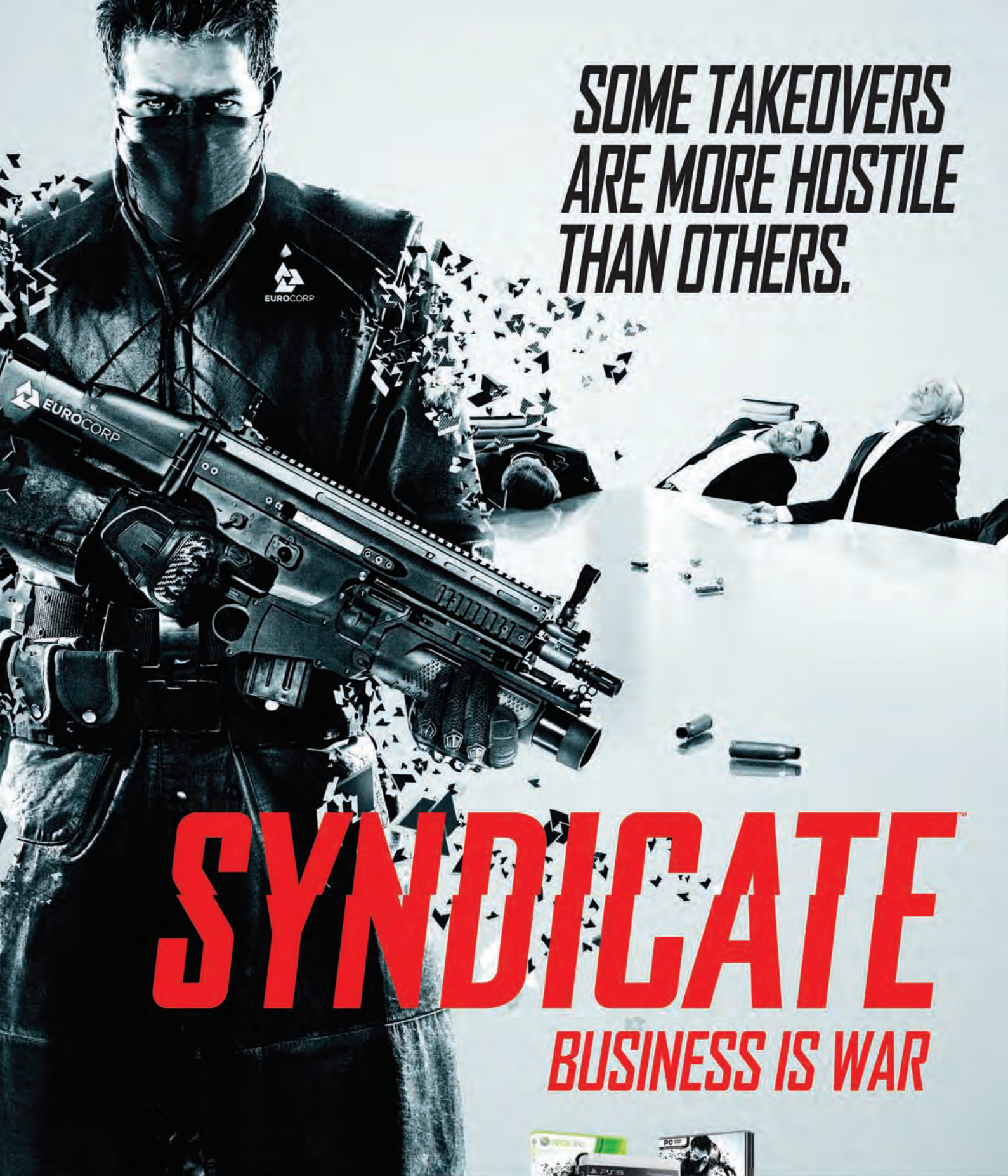
Microsoft Studios

[trivia]

// Light still plays a key part in defeating the Taken; your flashlight indispensable.

// A new enemy, the Splitter, divides each time it's killed. One easily becomes a mob.

**SOME TAKEOVERS
ARE MORE HOSTILE
THAN OTHERS.**



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EA/12/001

HAVE I EVER TOLD YOU THE DEFINITION OF INSANITY?

Release Date:

2012

Platforms:

360 / PC / PS3

Genre:

First-person shooter

Developer:

Ubisoft Montreal / Massive / Reflections /

Shanghai

Website:

far-cry.ubi.com/far-cry-3

Publisher:

Ubisoft

The type of presentations that we attend during press visits to game development studios are designed to give us an impression of the game in question. We're meant to walk out feeling good about the game, positive of its future, and full of hope. Walking out of the *Far Cry 3* presentation left me feeling... odd. While chatting with fellow journalists after the 35-minute gameplay presentation, I came to the conclusion that *Far Cry* is the weird kid in class. You know the type (maybe you are the type) – the one that sits in the back row talking to himself and writing bad poetry on the desk. He doesn't hang out with the cool kids or the geeky kids or the sporty kids. He keeps to himself and looks inward, not to his peers, for self-improvement and one day he grows up

THE STORY SO FAR

The *Far Cry* series has had an interesting ride. The first game in the series, created by *Crysis* developers Crytek Studios was only published by Ubisoft. It took place on a tropical island and checked all of the boxes you'd expect from a first-person shooter: great visuals (ground-breaking, for its time), an interesting environment in which to kill things, and the right weapons with which to do just that. But it had a quirky nature – too quirky for some – with limp science-fiction elements that the game could have done without, and when Ubisoft took over the series in its entirety from the game's sequel, they decided to make some big changes to the gameplay,

setting, and just about everything else.

It began with a new setting – the African savannah – and a new engine dubbed Dunia (Swahili for soil). The game was built from scratch by an entirely new team based at Ubisoft Montreal. It traded in mutants for African militia and expanded on the previous game's sandbox elements. It had its problems, but much like the previous title, managed to earn a solid following between those who respected *Far Cry 2*'s technological prowess, perfectly captured atmosphere and environments, and modest attempts at open-ended gameplay.

to be a world-renowned artist. *Far Cry 3* doesn't fill me with blind hope or simple happy feelings; it fills me with intrigue, curiosity, and just a touch of trepidation. It's something quite different to what most people would expect, but, really, after two prequels that are so different from each other, what could one expect?

According to the developers, what you should expect is a "cast of insane characters" that inhabits this game's south-Asian island setting that's not entirely unlike that of the first game in the series. And, much like the protagonist in *Far Cry*, *Far Cry 3*'s lead Jason Brody finds himself trapped on the island. Brody is no Jack Carver, however, neither is he a hardened mercenary type from *Far Cry 2* – he's billed as an ordinary fellow whose holiday-making saw him, his girlfriend and

TECHNOLOGICALLY ADVANCED

It takes a lot of work to build a game of this scope. 3D modellers, physics programmers, audio engineers, lighting experts, cinematic directors – you name the title, they'll be included in the credits of a modern video game. In an effort to reduce development time and simultaneously attempt to lend greater realism to the portrayal of the in-game characters, Ubisoft have been putting a lot of effort into developing their motion capture (or "mocap") facilities, to the extent where as much as 90% of animations from their games currently in production in Montreal make use of this technology. We had an opportunity to visit their dedicated mocap studio during the filming of a surprisingly touching scene from the game.

Ubisoft's studio sits inside the Loco Shop, Montreal, a converted former locomotive and tank manufactory that now houses fancy design and television studios. Their setup is impressive, even to those unfamiliar with animation technology, with a large 15x8x3m capture volume surrounded by 60 high-end infrared cameras (priced around \$20,000 each) capable of capturing at up to 240 frames per second. 20 dedicated technical and film crew take their positions in and around the volume while two actors decked head-to-toe in a capture suit prepare their lines. Even the head movements are tracked with a bulky (but light-weight, we're told) camera helmet that allows the animators to perfectly capture the first-person perspective. Purpose-built software helps to clean up the captured animations and get them into the artists' software as quickly as possible. This is cutting-edge production and is responsible for the more than 10,000 animations that will find their way into *Far Cry 3*. In fact, the only animations that won't be motion captured are those of animals (they did actually try this, with poor results) and machinery.



his friends (we're not sure how many friends, exactly) stranded and completely out of their depth. Brody isn't on a mission of vengeance or anything quite so heroic; in the words of the game's producer Dan Hay, all Brody wants to do is "find his friends and get the f*** off the island," which seems like a completely reasonable goal for anyone in that situation.

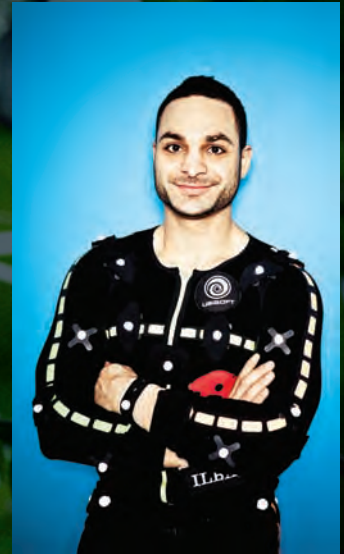
Finding those friends will be no easy task, however. The island has been home to the disruptive forces of a psychotic pirate named Vaas and his army of equally crazed thugs. Hay talks about two types of inhabitants on the island – those who are there for personal gain, and those who are there to escape ordinary life, including a doctor who likes to experiment with local hallucinogenic drugs and paint his house



THE MAN BEHIND THE MAN

Most of you should remember the first *Far Cry 3* trailer that was released at last year's E3. It featured Vaas, the game's villain, delivering a speech on the definition of insanity. It was hardly a ground-breaking speech in terms of the words (although it does give a good indication as to the theme of this game), but its delivery was superb. While visiting Ubisoft's mocap studio, we had a chance to sit down and chat to Michael Mando, the chap who lends his voice, likeliness and body movements to the character. As an actor used to the stage, Mando was understandably nervous and a bit unsure of himself with the direct confrontation of a room full of nagging journalists, but he took the time to answer a few questions and tell us that the character of Vaas was actually created specifically for him. Mando's first audition was for another character but, when he returned a second time for a follow-up, the speech they gave him to read ("the definition of insanity") was so compelling that the writers sat down to put together Vaas almost immediately. The trailer actually uses the sound originally captured during the audition, and Mando told us

that he was initially embarrassed that Ubisoft decided to use it. Only after seeing the positive reception that the trailer received did he embrace the willy-nilly nature of the production and really stepped into the role.



"...all Brody wants to do is 'find his friends and get the f* off the island,' which seems like a completely reasonable goal for anyone in that situation."**

once a week "to stay grounded". These and other characters form a part of the above-mentioned insane cast in *Far Cry 3* that will continuously bombard the player with bizarre dialogue, challenging tasks and a look into just how deep the rabbit hole goes. Don't glance over the Wonderland reference there – from the gameplay we had a chance to see it's clear that the developers aim to pull people out of the comfort zone they'd expect a shooter to offer. Drug trips with obscure visuals, an unlikely musical score (described as "not a bombastic Hollywood score" by level design director Mark Thompson) and deeply deranged characters rub shoulders with tough, modern shooter elements like jarring physicality, convincing run-and-gun action and a free-form cover system. This isn't your adolescent

brother's first-person shooter.

Despite all of the weird stuff going on, *Far Cry 3* is still a shooter, and the developers are adamant that this is their main focus. It's here that the game's presence in the series feels comfortable and even familiar, as missions can be approached in a similar manner to that of previous titles – any way you'd like. Hay calls it their "360 approach", which encourages players to play how they want rather than follow a prescribed sequence of actions. During the gameplay presentation, we had a chance to see one of the earlier missions in action: *The Medusa's Mast*. *The Medusa* is a beached old wreck of a ship that Vaas' men are dismantling for scrap and parts. On top of the ship's mast lies a radio transmitter that an unknown man (to us, at least) has told us to disable.



ONE BIG SANDBOX

Ubisoft has confirmed that the game's story will be entirely linear, and, frankly, we support the decision. That doesn't mean that the sandbox elements from *FC2* will disappear. In fact, they've been improved upon, with the *Skyrim*-esque idea of providing tons of side quests and activities for the player when they feel like taking some time off from the main story to mess around. Characters and events throughout the island will constantly pull at you for attention, and will reward you for giving it.

Once again, we don't have a solid list of activities to share with you, but lead designer Jamie Keen tells us that the activities will encompass "pretty much anything you can think of being able to do on a tropical island." That includes vehicle races, shooting competitions and treasure hunts. Don't hold your breath for swimming with dolphins. As you progress through the story, more of the island will be opened up to the player until eventually the sandbox space will explode (not literally), allowing you to explore every inch of this tropical paradise. Expect tons of hidden goodies and ample Achievement/Trophy hunting opportunities.



"Brody takes a zip line to the position and tucks himself in. Blasting away ground forces and popping red explosive barrels looks as familiar as it always has been in an FPS."

This goal can be accomplished a number of ways, some more conventional than others, such as simply taking a hang-glider to the mast, but then getting back down will be a little tricky.

The most obvious way to gain access to the mast is to fight your way in. We witnessed the mission played out in the most likely way: beginning with a stealthy approach – melee take-downs, suppressed weapon fire and observing enemy patrols – to size up the situation and get your bearings, and then switching to all-out shooter action when the enemy numbers started to thicken. At this point, Brody was forced to slide to and duck behind cover to avoid taking too much damage. While the game includes a regenerating health system, we've been told that Brody will have to "take care of himself" if he takes a big hit. Whether this means applying field first aid, injecting a syringe of magical healing juice or visiting the doctor every time Brody is injured, we're not yet sure. After fighting his way through the ship and making his way to the mast, Brody

deactivated the radio transmitter. Now he needs a way back down to safety. More enemies are swarming in but thankfully there's a mounted machine gun nest nearby. Brody takes a zip line to the position and tucks himself in. Blasting away ground forces and popping red explosive barrels looks as familiar as it always has been in an FPS. After wiping the floor with Vaas' men, Brody makes his way down to a nearby jeep, jumps in, and drives off into the sunset... or, rather, to the doctor's house for a quick patch-up. A job well done.

The combination of the expected and the unexpected is what will make *Far Cry 3*, at the very least, an interesting title when it launches, and certainly one to keep an eye on. We look forward to seeing how the stranger elements are implemented and how the general population of action gamers will respond. Ubisoft has set a big challenge for themselves and we can't wait to see if they live up to their own expectations.

**NAG
GeometriX**

I HEARD YOU LIKE TO ROLE-PLAY?

RPG-inspired mechanics are all the rage with today's first-person shooters, and *Far Cry 3* refuses to be left out of this trend, although its use is perhaps a little more "classic RPG" than what we see from the likes of *Call of Duty* or *Battlefield's* multiplayer components. Whenever Brody completes a quest or activity, kills an enemy or does anything of significance, he'll be rewarded with experience points, and once he's accrued enough XP, he'll gain a skill point. These skill points can be spent on improving Brody's capabilities, and we wish we could tell you much more than that. Unfortunately, the system is still very-much under construction at Ubisoft, so the details aren't yet finalised. What we know is that you'll unlock new active abilities (such as knife throwing) as well as passive bonuses (like weapon accuracy). Other than that, your guess is as good as ours.

INTERVIEW

WITH PRODUCER DAN HAY

NAG: You're sticking with the Dunia engine for *Far Cry 3*; how much of it has been overhauled and how much has stayed the same?

Dan: We definitely stretched it. We're doing some things with this, especially with the exotic missions, where you have two elements: the open world and incredibly long draw distances. You want to make sure that you can have sniper gameplay – that idea that if you can see it, you can kill it. And at the same time we want you to have exotic moments. There's a level of fidelity here that requires you to ask "how are you paying for the open world, and the exotic moments, and for the characters?" We have to leverage everything that we've got to try technically and try to make that happen.

NAG: How do you co-ordinate the efforts of four studios working on this title?

Dan: I can't go into specifics at this stage, but I can tell you that the thing that's gratifying is that we've got the resources that we need to work on this game, like if we need someone who can help us craft the character, someone who's an expert in character faults, or who's an expert in coaching actors. We basically just said "yes", if someone wants to do something unique and involved. We'd say "Okay what is it?" And then they describe it and we'd say "Okaaaay, cool. We've got someone who may have expertise in something else, but we'll give you some resources and we'll try to figure it out together."

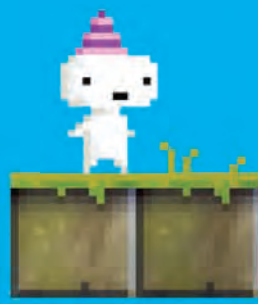
NAG: The impression that I got from the demo earlier is that *Far Cry 3* is trying to stand out from the crowd. What would you say if I told you that it feels like the weird kid in class that's always doing something strange to stand out from its peers?

Dan: In high school, those kids that were always a little different from everyone else – those are the creatives. Those are the ones who are running companies right now. They're the ones who are kicking all of our butts. That's a perfect analogy for us. We don't want to be normal. We picked "insanity" for a reason. We do want to stand out. We're not ashamed of it; we're proud of it. We want you to have a trip; we want you to have an exotic experience.

NAG: When you sat down and decided to start drawing up the plans for *Far Cry 3*, what are the biggest things you learnt from the development and the reception of *Far Cry 2*?

Dan: When you look at *Far Cry 2*, it's a good game, and I put a lot of hours into that game, and it had a big open world and a lot of great tech. We started from that. And then you go online and you get feedback from folks and we saw some trends. Okay, malaria, not something that people are into – they don't want to be sick, so what else can we do? What other kind of interesting experiences can we have? And we go a whole different direction. We've got drugs and different things that happen to you – hallucinations and things of that nature – that are very different. And we had to do fast travel. And we have the large, open world. We wanted to give the feeling of being able to use the environment, so a lot of stuff is being built to support that.

"Despite all of the weird stuff going on, *Far Cry 3* is still a shooter, and the developers are adamant that this is their main focus."



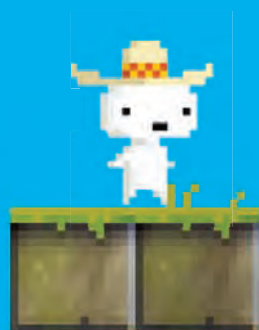
From bedroom to BOARDROOM

Everything you need to know about indie games

As the video game industry continues to grow, studios are formed and closed more frequently now than ever before. Publishers have an insatiable need to release big name, AAA titles that pull in millions of sales, but the nature of the industry means that very often, big studios aren't given the chance to experiment with new game mechanics for fear of them failing (and costing a lot of people their jobs). In comes the indie games industry, which is a little difficult to define but we'll give you this to work with: an indie game studio is a typically small, self-funded group of game developers (or a single developer) who make video games. They don't have publishers telling them how or why

they should do things, and they invest countless hours of work and their own money into each project. There are indie games built by a single person within as little as 24 hours, and there are those built by dozens of people over a period of many years. Some are available for free, some cost as much as \$25, and there are even a few that allow the buyer to set their own price.

To help you figure out what's going on in this increasingly dense market, we've put together a list of upcoming games, some tips for getting hold of them, and a sort-of "state of the industry" from our experts in this field. We also asked around to see what indie games people would make if money wasn't too much of an issue. We got back some... interesting results.





Indies in 2012: welcome to the masses

In the coming year, indie games will pull off the seemingly impossible task of becoming both more popular AND less noticeable. This statement is deliciously paradoxical on the surface, but makes more sense when explained. Honest.

It's like declaring something along the lines of "OMG a girl on the Internet!" within a modern, enlightened and mature gaming forum (and for the sake of this analogy, we'll assume that such places exist). Regardless of gender attitudes a decade or two ago, this outburst is no longer noteworthy or even cute – the distinction (and the need to draw attention to it) represents a pretty crappy attitude in general.

The gaming public's understanding of indie games is becoming similarly more

mature. While it's important for those in the know to keep tabs on the nature of industry releases (for example, Zynga's *Dream Heights* being a heavy-handed clone of NimbleBit's *Tiny Tower* – shame Zynga, shaaaaame!), people who only occasionally dip their heads into gaming don't need distinctions. We're seeing a rise in the number of gamers who don't seem to know what "indie games" even are, yet regularly end up playing them anyway.

Now that indies are rubbing shoulders against triple-A titles on an increasing number of platforms (mobile, Steam, consoles – just about any digital distribution channel, really), they're competing for the same eyes, the same market and the same mindshare. In mainstream promotion and discussion, the term "indie" is falling steadily

out of use as these games come to be held in similar regard to their built-by-army, fuelled-by-publisher brethren.

More and more, indie titles are standing up to exactly the same scrutiny as everyone else... and weathering the judgement like champs. Yes, this can make some things harder for indie developers – the full glare of the gaming public can be tiresome for just about anyone – but the coming year seems to be brimming with the possibility of realising a broader, more important goal for all of us: the unadulterated acceptance of more creative, versatile and experimental games into the public consciousness.

The training wheels are off, yes. But now is the time for indies to maximise their rewards.

Rodain Joubert

[Local Indie game developer]

Rodain is a designer/programmer at QCF design, winner of the Excellence in Design award at the 13th Annual Independent Games Festival for their indie hit Desktop Dungeons.



Indie games to look forward to in 2012

1. THE MINECRAFT POCKET EDITION SURVIVAL UPDATE

Somehow, in between playing almost everything on Xbox and playing nothing on PC, Tarryn managed to not play *Minecraft*, over and over, until it turned up on iOS and she couldn't avoid it anymore because she'd already played *Bookworm* to death and needed something new to play on the toilet. The launch version was rather underwhelming, though – you basically dig holes and drop a bunch of stuff in them, and that's a pretty good start, but that's also all there is to it. In a way, though, it's actually quite a bit like going to the toilet, so that's kind of meta. She was going to add something here about the Survival mode update adding monsters, but it's getting a bit crowded in this allegory.

2. THE WITNESS

This is the 'sequel' to *Braid*. The word sequel isn't really correct as it has nothing to do with Jonathan Blow's original time-based puzzle adventure jigsaw. *The Witness* is a first person experience set on an island. Initial impressions

of the game paint a picture of messages within mazes and unique and interesting ways to experience videogame entertainment. We know from playing the brilliant *Braid* that no matter what *The Witness* looks like or sounds like now, nothing will prepare players for the final product. Trust in Jonathan Blow and you can be assured of another experience that wakes up your mind while showing you a new side to gaming. The only sad thing is that there are no plans for *The Witness* on Xbox or PlayStation – apparently the consoles are not able to perform what is required for the game.

3. SPELUNKY (360)

Tarryn has a bit of a thing for brutal, uncompromising misadventure that invariably ends in sobbing catastrophe and spiders, and that's how her last relationship ended but enough about that. She played *Spelunky* now and then when it originally launched on PC, but gave up when all that crushing dismay didn't come with achievements – honestly, even real life makes up for it with TV Bars.

4. FEZ

If you haven't heard of this game by now, then you need to start paying more attention to the indie scene – not that we're trying to sound elitist here or anything. Coming to Xbox LIVE Arcade, *Fez* is a puzzle-platforming adventure game that utilises shifting 3D perspectives as a principle means of creating pathways for your 2D character to use to reach his goal. The game is slathered in retro appeal, from the 8-bit sound effects to the seemingly 2D, pixelated landscape that magically transforms into stunning 3D models as you rotate the camera view. In fact, so central to the game's mechanic is this shifting, three-dimensional perspective, that they gave up posting screenshots on their official webpage and began posting single-scene video clips instead, which they christened "Long Screenshots".

Fez is one of those indie titles that's won awards before it's even been released (*Minecraft* was another): it won the Grand Jury Prize at last year's Indiecade as well as the prize for Story and World Design.

14750

Q If you had one year, a fully-paid staff of 10 developers and all the hardware and software you'd need, what game would you make?

Ultimate Quest III. The first two games, which I created with a friend back in whenever it was, were really just proofs of concept – which is that, given enough time to waste, I'll change my mind about the graphics at least four times a day. This time around, I'd also add cats and banjos into the game, because I'm all about cats and banjos now.

Tarryn

The game has been in development for years now, but finally has a tentative release schedule of Q1 2012, which is sometime now!

5. BOTANICULA

Czechoslovakian indie team Amanita Design looks set to continue their winning formula of charming art style and unique settings in the point-and-click exploration game *Botanicula*. You play as five separate little creatures that inhabit a tree which is being poisoned and killed by strange black entities. It's up to you to save the last seed from the tree and outwit the creepy invaders.

Those who've played Amanita's earlier point-and-click offerings, like *Machinarium* and the two *Samorost* games, will be able to spot the indie team's trademarked organic art direction a mile away. Amanita's been steadily improving from game to game, so it'll be interesting to see what they do with this their third full-on title. Simply put: we hold *Machinarium* up there with the likes of *Monkey Island* and *Full Throttle* when it

comes to quality point-and-click games, so when Amanita announces a new game, we give them our unwavering attention.

6. CUBE WORLD

Who would have thought that *Minecraft's* blocky aesthetic would have practically created a sub-genre of game? *Cube World* is being developed by a single guy who calls himself Wollay. The game has been in development since June 2011 but already looks well underway to being something rather special. A self-described mash up of *Diablo*, *Zelda* and *Minecraft*, *Cube World* is a vector-based role playing game with procedurally generated environments and very cute character models.

Gameplay is your typical hack-'n'-slash affair against all manner of fantasy beasties ready to spurt forth mounds of loot as they crumble into dusty piles of tiny cubes – it all looks quite amazing in the gameplay videos released so far.

Sticking to the *Minecraft* side of things, you'll be able to customise your character,



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Q If you had one year, a fully-paid staff of 10 developers and all the hardware and software you'd need, what game would you make?

An indie game in which you're tasked with making boring, five day cricket test matches more entertaining. It'd be a cross between a management simulator and tower defence game. The object would be to obliterate the team members of whichever side has the least spectators in the stadium. You'd be able to research and place various traps prior to the beginning of the match, and then kick back and await the carnage. Things like randomly placed claymore mines, explosive cricket balls, explosive wickets and the occasional camouflaged spike pit would be some of the obstacles and traps you could place on the field. You'd need to continually upgrade your

stadium and customise it in order to keep attracting crowds. Merchandising, food and ticket sales would all add to your income, which in turn would be used to research and unlock deadlier items. As you progress, so the cricket players would become wise to the traps, forcing you to constantly alter your tactics. Your success on each level would be measured by the amount of crowd excitement. There'd of course have to be over-enthusiastic commentating throughout matches (ala Monday Night Combat) as well as buckets of blood, gib and scantily clad cheerleaders. I can smell the money already.

Miklós

Q If you had one year, a fully-paid staff of 10 developers and all the hardware and software you'd need, what game would you make?

I'm happy to share one of my actual ideas because, unlike some people called Michael James, I have more than one and I don't mind telling the world. Also, publishing my idea in NAG automatically copyrights the idea. It's not like it'll do well or anything anyway.

So, *Post Reality* is a survival RPG in which the player begins on a prison-type planet comprised almost entirely of landfill sites. The game will include all of the regular survival activities: building or finding shelter, gathering food, constructing weapons and armour, and ultimately attempting to escape, but with NPC interaction and typical RPG mechanics thrown on top. Players will need to deal with rival gangs and their territories, expand their safe areas with automated defences and NPC allies, and can finish the game in one of three ways: bring peace to the planet and turn it into a giant, productive recycling plant, destroy the planet because it's filled with anger and violence, or just bugger off and forget they ever stepped foot on its surface. It'll have a main story line added to the sandbox survival elements, side quest lines (randomly generated and fixed), and lots of cool science-fiction stuff.

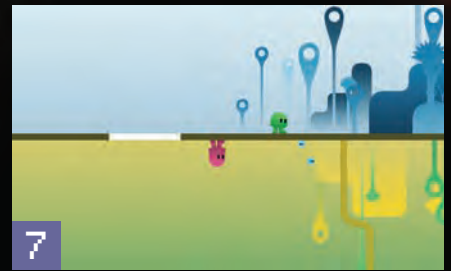
Geoff

Top indie games from 2011

(In no particular order, as decided by us)

Bastion (360/PC) – Supergiant Games
Dungeons of Dredmor (PC) – Gaslamp Games
Frozen Synapse (PC) – Mode 7 Games
Terraria (PC) – Re-logic
The Binding of Isaac (PC) – Edmund McMillen & Florian Himsl
Minecraft (Mobile/PC) – Mojang
Sanctum (PC) – Coffee Stain Studios
Gemini Rue (PC) – Joshua Nernberger

Life: 93/100



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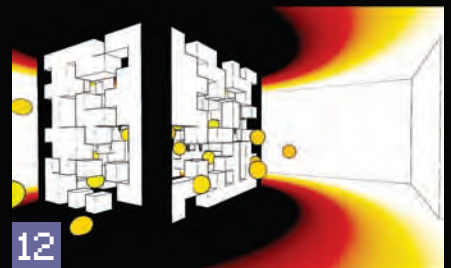
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12

build your own house (utilising blueprint cards) and even keep pets that will follow you and help you in combat. Multiplayer has been confirmed as well so you can look forward to endless exploration and looting with a buddy online. *Cube World* currently has a release window of "when it's done", and will be available on PC and possibly Mac.

7. IBB AND OBB

Sparpweed consists of programming duo Richard Boeser and Roland IJzermans from Netherlands. Together with publisher Codeglue they're making a co-operative platformer called *ibb and obb* (the lack of capitals is not a typo).

Each player takes on the role of one of the colourful duo as you traverse various levels that have been divided horizontally across the middle. On the bottom half of the screen, gravity works in the opposite direction. As you both move from left to right (and sometimes up and down) you'll find portals or "Warps" in the terrain that allow you to hop to the segment below and vice-versa. It's a tad tricky to explain, but the existence of two separate plains with opposite gravitational effects pretty much makes perfectly timed teamwork essential. The result is a balletic performance of co-operation. The crisp, colourful visuals coupled with truly beautiful music makes this an indie title to keep an eye on. It's due out in the next few months on the PlayStation Network, but it will be making a PC appearance a few months after its PlayStation 3 debut.

8. TRIALS EVOLUTION

This is the sequel to the compelling and frustrating *Trials HD* for XBLA. If you aren't an off-road bike or motocross fan it doesn't matter because the original game grabbed you by the nuts and pulled hard. Fans will know what this is all about and many of them probably have a broken controller hidden in a box somewhere because of *Trials HD*. Not much has been said about this next game other than it'll be out sometime in 2012, will have online and local multiplayer, outdoor environments, a track editor and plenty of customisation options. We really can't wait, especially for some new challenge modes and fresh opportunities to rub the "skills" in everyone's face. Evil laugh goes in there somewhere.

9. LEGEND OF GRIMROCK

There's nothing better than seeing an old flame stand up, dust themselves off and throw on some fancy new clothes. *Legend of Grimrock* may be oldschool at heart, but it struts confidently with plenty of modern conventions to update the design, and some fancy graphics to seal the deal.

It's being developed by Almost Human Ltd., a four-person indie studio formed by previous industry veterans who worked on *Max Payne 2*, *Alan Wake* and *Shattered Horizon*. The game takes inspiration from first-person turn-based dungeon exploration games such as *Dungeon Master* and *Eye of the Beholder*, but plays real-time like granddaddy *Dungeons of Daggorath*. Levels are hand-crafted, and there's an

Oldschool Mode that removes the auto mapping function.

Players will take on all manner of beast inside the stone-walled labyrinth, casting spells using an innovative rune-based system where you construct magical effects on the fly by selecting complimentary runes. There will be traps; there will be riddles; there will be fabulous treasure to find. And that's all we really want.

10. MONACO

Taking inspiration from movies like *Ocean's 11*, *Monaco* is a heist game with emphasis on the simple yet complex interplay between a realistic line-of-sight system and the various abilities of the team. You can play either by yourself, with up to four people on the same screen, or online.

When playing cooperatively, each player has to take advantage of their unique character class' traits. Among the (currently often-changing) roster is the Hacker, Lookout, Locksmith, Muscle and Pickpocket. The Hacker can shut down security systems, the Muscle can C4 open a wall or dispatch guards, while the Pickpocket has a monkey that gathers money.

The goal of each level is to gather money, reach the "prize", then make it back out alive. Levels range from fancy dress parties to clubs to prisons, each one a unique challenge. Viewed from a top-down perspective, only what your character can see is visible, though visual cues expand your senses, like little footprints in the blackness indicating where you're hearing

someone walk. A fancy party presents a host of problems, like a constantly-changing group of innocents that may stumble into your misdeeds and alert security.

11. DESKTOP DUNGEONS

Locally developed by a four-person team and winner of the 13th Annual IGF Award for Excellence in Design, *Desktop Dungeons* is a difficult game to summarize easily. Billed as a "coffee-break game", you fight your way through randomly-generated dungeons after choosing one of many character class and race combinations.

Dungeons are a single screen, initially covered in darkness. As you explore, tiles you reveal replenish health and mana, diminishing a valuable limited resource (unexplored areas). Monsters fight using a variety of skills, some hit first, some poison, some remove your mana until you level up. As you kill monsters, you gain experience and get

stronger. The goal is to get strong enough to eventually kill the dungeon boss.

Even though your character starts at level 1 each time you enter a dungeon, as you complete more and more dungeons you unlock new races, classes, powerful items to take into dungeons with you, and new functional buildings for your kingdom. The kingdom represents the meta-game, the permanence in-between dungeon dives. You can still download and play the smaller, free alpha version of *Desktop Dungeons* from the website.

12. ANTICHAMBER

Antichamber is a first-person journey through a stark yet vibrant minimalist Escher-inspired world. What may seem like a straightforward location may not follow the rules of geometry and space we're used to, breaking the Euclidean conventions for the sake of innovative perception-based puzzles.

Some puzzles involve destroying things, some involve creating or moving things.

While it nods towards the like of *Portal*, *Antichamber* stealthily incorporates *Metroidvania* elements, requiring backtracking through complex spaces once you've achieved a certain goal. There is a gun, but you don't shoot things with it.

Antichamber used to be called *Hazard: The Journey of Life*, before its creator Alexander Bruce disowned that version and name. You can bring up a handy map room and select a destination to explore if you've already been there once, the map room teleporting its exit to where you want to go. One example of a simple puzzle is the Leap of Faith, a floorless room you need to cross. Stepping over the void makes a floor materialize right under you. It's something you'll have to see for yourself, which is why we're being vague. **NAG**

GeometriX

Q If you had one year, a fully-paid staff of 10 developers and all the hardware and software you'd need, what game would you make?

Truthfully, I'd sit down and develop a proper homage to the intricate design sensibilities of *Mega Man 2*. It's no surprise that neither an indie nor big-budget studio has attempted to make a true *Mega Man* style game, because the amount of proper design work you need to put into the enemy patterns and level design, taking into account the various weapons and abilities you get, is phenomenal. Very few games have copied the style successfully, like *Ducktails* (NES). *Whomp 'Em* (NES), while not utterly terrible, is a great example of "doing it wrong".

The 2D visuals and simplified verbs (jump and shoot) betray just how deep the game actually is. Every screen is its own puzzle, the solution to which changes depending on which bosses you have already defeated. Even within the *Mega Man* series itself, new producers have often managed to misread the formula and get it wrong, such as *Mega Man 6*.

I'm not sure a year is even enough time, half of that would have to be just pre-production and planning, leaving little time for actual production.

Miktar

Q If you had one year, a fully-paid staff of 10 developers and all the hardware and software you'd need, what game would you make?

FU. This idea is a sort of group collective one that came out of the NAG office one lazy day after some nightmarish deadline. Geoff and I pioneered most of it but I'm pulling rank and claiming it as my own...

You didn't think I was going to give you my personal best one did you – the one idea I've been harbouring for decades that will never see the light of day right because I'm writing about games instead of making them? That idea is the holy grail of video games so no chance there puppies... no ways.

Anyway, back to *FU*. We dip back into the design document for this mighty experiment every now and then with a "wouldn't it be cool if..." or "how about when you..." and so on. It's so much fun making a game this way because it doesn't cost any money (it's cheap) and there's no publisher waiting to show off the beta at E3 in 20XX (no pressure). *FU* is an attitude and that attitude is misery, pain and aggravation. *FU* is the hardest game you'll ever play with no rewards or satisfaction or even a score. You get weaker weapons as you progress but the enemies get tougher. Your character loses abilities and the game gets more demanding. The levels are complex mazes that make no sense at all and are washed out in garish clashing colours that'll make your eyes hurt and onlookers squint. There's only one save slot for the whole game and even getting to that will be an impossibly frustrating and difficult mini-game peppered with cheap deaths. As the game's developers we'll mock the players, shun the press and be terrible role models with our cocaine sniffing and prostitute abusing ways. Basically it'll be a big fat *FU* to gaming everywhere and people will love it because they hate it.

Michael

PS VITA™

The upcoming release of the PlayStation Vita means more than just putting a powerful gaming device in your hands; it means giving you access to the world of online gaming, communication and social networking wherever you go. This is only possible with the 3G model of the

Vita, which allows you to connect to a cellular network for uninterrupted connectivity without the need to hunt for a Wi-Fi hotspot or be bound to your wireless router. Of course, you can still access these features with the 3G model, as it also includes Wi-Fi support.



Only with 3G will you be part of a social network of connected gamers wherever you go.

CONSTANTLY CONNECTED TO YOUR PLAYSTATION LIFE

Connect to your gaming life:

The LiveArea Information Zone allows you to see what people around you are playing, and share with them what you've been up to.

Update and Share in real time:

Gaming is a connected experience, even if you're playing a single-player game. Share your latest Trophies with your friends and let them know who's best.

Never lose touch with your friends

Stay in touch: Use text or voice chat to tell your friends all about your gaming exploits.

Keep up to date: The LiveArea Communication Zone and Friends App shares your friends' latest gaming updates.

Social Essentials: Stay connected to some

of the largest social networks in the world with LiveTweet for PlayStation®Vita, Flickr and Facebook.

REAL-TIME GAMING

Play online: Multiplayer gaming is the heart of many sports and action games, allowing you to connect to and play with (or against) your online friends or in online tournaments, or just enjoy a leisurely game of *Everybody's Golf* when it suits you.

Download new game experiences, anywhere: Grab downloadable content like new levels, weapons and quests for your current library of games from anywhere that has 3G coverage.

Location-based gaming experience discovery: The "near" app allows you to share and discover new game experiences

based on your current location.

Be first to challenge your friends: Play against your friends' ghost times in *WipEout 2048* or compete in offline leaderboards if there's nobody else online.

THE INTERNET. ANYWHERE. ANYTIME

Great web browsing: Browsing websites on the large 5" OLED screen has never been this comfortable.

Facebook: With this purpose-designed Facebook app, you can stay connected to your friends at any time.

Check in everywhere: With Foursquare on PS Vita you can check in wherever you go to let your friends know that there's more to gaming than being stuck on the couch.

These games look incredible, where do I find them?

Usually online. The small budget nature of indie games means that the developers don't have the necessary capital to pay for games to be distributed in boxed retail form. Disc production, booklet printing, box packaging – these all add to the costs of getting titles into gamers' hands, and so the vast majority of indie games can only be found on the Internet.

Most indie games are developed for the PC as there are fewer licensing fees and hoops to jump through. Steam (www.steampowered.com) has been a great supporter of indie games for a number of years and has a vast library of titles. While Valve does take its own cut from the sales of each game or item of DLC, the sheer size of this distribution platform means that each game has millions of potential buyers and will usually be a great source of revenue for the developer. Direct2Drive/Gamefly

(www.gamefly.com) and Desura (www.desura.com) are other online distributors that offer indie games. Obviously, most developers will also directly distribute their games through their own sites.

A recent trend in indie game distribution makes use of the concept of a "humble bundle". These allow the buyer to set their own price for set collections of games. Often, spending above the average price will provide the buyer with additional games as a form of thanks. The originator of this idea is the Humble Indie Bundle (www.humblebundle.com), with the latest bundle (#4) making over 430,000 sales for a total of \$2.3 million. Other organisations have popped up recently with similar offerings, including Indie Gala (www.indiegala.com) and Indie Royale (www.indieroyale.com). Keep an eye on all of those sites for their next bundles.

Console owners have no need to feel left out of

the equation, as both Xbox LIVE Arcade and PlayStation Network have their share of indie titles. Xbox LIVE Indie Games (XBLIG) is a section of the XBL Marketplace dedicated to such titles and is considered to be a great place for developers to make a name for themselves. Developers have mixed feelings when it comes to this distribution channel, however, as the accessible programming tools (C#, VB.NET or XNA) are often countered with challenging barriers from Microsoft for entry into XBLIG. Sony's PlayStation Store isn't as well established as receptive as XBLIG, but features most of the big-name indie titles from the other platforms as well as a few exclusive ones that are published by SCEA (and thus a little wobbly when it comes to fitting within the description of "indie"), the most notable of which are *Flower*, *Fat Princess* and *PixelJunk Shooter*.

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NAG / Metacritic average / Game Rankings average

The King of Fighters XIII



75
79
82

Resident Evil: Revelations



83
82
83

NeverDead



60
51
48

The Darkness II



85
79
80

Unstoppable Gorg

Veteran tower defence players (of any sort) will love this odd little title from Futuremark Games – a division of the company that develops the benchmarking software 3D Mark and PC Mark. Don't expect a lavish set of visuals though, *Unstoppable Gorg* knows what it is and knows what it needs to deliver – solid, challenging gameplay – and it does so in heaps. That's not to say that it doesn't embellish on the fluff, as the '40s-era wacky science-fiction theme is as over-the-top as you'd expect.

At first glance, *Unstoppable Gorg* is a simple tower defence: the player must build variations of the common money tower, arrow tower, cannon tower, sniper tower and selection of supporting buildings, but its playing field is something quite unique. Instead of defending on a static field through which enemies fly, players must defend a space station by deploying defences that can be rotated around the station's orbit. As a result, levels are much more than simply deploying towers when you have the cash; players will need to frequently rotate their numerous orbits (each with predefined build points) to adjust to the shifting enemy flight paths. The system works very well, but newcomers to the TD genre will feel much pain and suffering.

// A complex, challenging tower defence that requires a puzzle-solving mentality and quick reflexes.

QUICK HITS

Captain Morgane and the Golden Turtle

Whenever a new point and click adventure game is released, it's easy to get excited if you've been playing PC games for longer than a decade. But memories of this classic genre can do more than generate hype; they put any new game at an automatic disadvantage. As much as developers try, modern point and click adventures are seldom as good as the golden oldies, and that's very-much the case here.

Captain Morgane follows the simple tale of a girl who wants to be a pirate and then grows up to become one. It has all of the features you'd expect if you've ever played the king of pirate adventure games – the *Monkey Island* series – and never really innovates. Many actions in the game are those that you've done years before, like recruiting a crew for your pirate ship, and the delivery of various puzzles, story elements and characters is functional, if a little contrived. The character animations are dated and the dialogue is grating and laborious, but this simple and otherwise pleasant game isn't all that bad if you're just looking for a retro throwback.

// Nothing special, but it should scratch that itch.

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The Darkness II

Hold back the day

The *Darkness* was one of those sorely overlooked gems that deserved to be played by more than just three people. It was something special: a truly compelling origin tale based on the comic book series of the same name, with an uncommonly poignant love story giving it heart and a ton of personality driving its purpose. Now, we've got a sequel helmed by a new developer. Action is the flavour and gruesome is the aftertaste – but does it amount to anything more than that?

You'd not think so, at first glance. The new graphical style, with its cel-shaded visuals giving everything a fetching comic book-style veneer, might immediately lead you to believe that Digital Extremes has taken the sequel in a new direction – and they have, with its heavy action focus and strict linearity replacing the more plodding, often stealthy and thoughtful play style required by the first and its semi-open world. Even with these changes, the sequel's most endearing characteristic – its story – somehow manages to be as powerful a lure as the first game's was, despite all the blood and gore and dismemberment that takes centre stage.

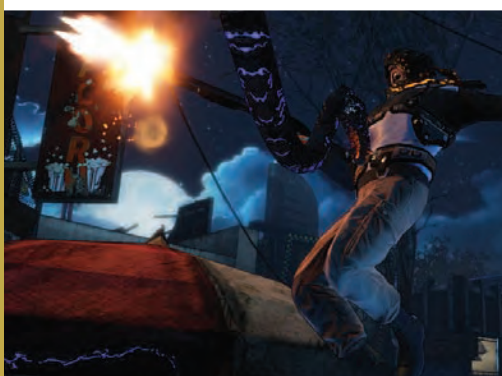
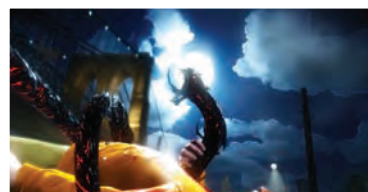
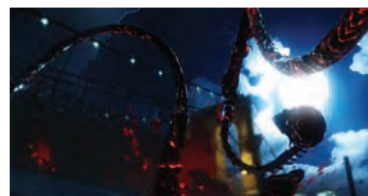
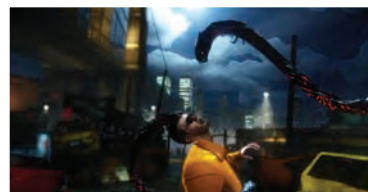


[details]

Platforms:
360 / PC / PS3
Genre:
First-person shooter
Age restriction:
18+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: None
Online: 4
Developer:
Digital Extremes
Website:
www.embracethedarkness.com
Publisher:
2K Games
Distributor:
Megarom

Not that the blood and gore and dismemberment are no good, mind you. The action in *The Darkness II* is thoroughly satisfying, its quad-wielding mechanic turning every firefight into a fluid string of brutality that manages to feel powerful and rewarding throughout the game's 8-10 hour campaign. As you glide through levels, tearing off car doors for use as makeshift riot shields, slashing enemies into the air before slamming them down with a squidgy thud, literally tearing enemies limb from limb, all while continuously laying down a steady stream of fire from your dual-wielded firearms, you'll feel like the monstrous superhuman that you're meant to; a vessel of death and carnage leaving no survivors in its wake. The left tentacle is used for grabbing objects and stunned enemies. Grab a metal pole and it can be thrown as a crude spear, impaling unfortunate foes. Snatch up an enemy and you're given an execution option for each face button on your controller, each type providing a different reward when chosen. The right tentacle whips and slashes, quickly slicing through anyone in your way. Devour the hearts of fallen enemies to

// Jackie's voice actor may have changed, but the voice of *The Darkness* is still provided by Mike Patton, best known as the lead singer of Faith No More. All the game's voice acting is solid, and Patton is as creepily convincing as ever.



regain health on the move. Your human arsenal of SMGs, shotguns, assault rifles and pistols is beefy and potent, and the game's action shines brightest when all of your abilities are used in tandem to perform a deadly dance through clusters of enemies.

There's purpose to all of the variety in the slaughtering as well. Killing enemies gives Dark Essence – essentially experience points with *Darkness* flavour. Spend them at set locations to unlock new abilities and improve on existing ones, intensifying your power to match the gradually increasing deadliness of opponents that the game sends your way. There's even a *Bulletstorm*-style variable points system in place, wherein more stylish kills reward more Dark Essence, although it's significantly simplified here. Still, it encourages more creative use of your unique skill set.

Wrapped around the action is the game's narrative. It starts off slowly, but gradually snowballs to become one of



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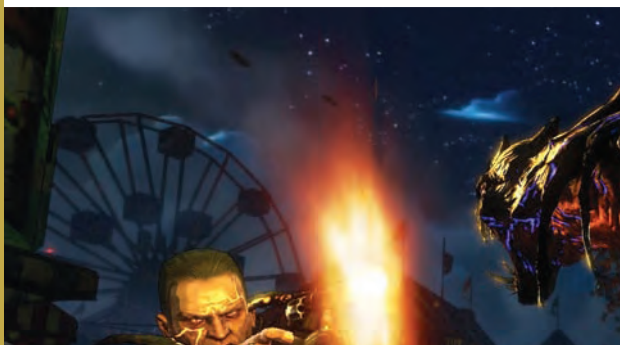
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/1/ Enemies gradually graduate to more complex methods of annoying you. They'll toss light grenades, develop their own version of Darkness powers and shine light directly into your eyeholes. How rude.

/2/ There's only one Darkling this time around and, although he's been given more personality than the four in the first game, doesn't ever really feel like an integral part of *The Darkness II*.



the most stirring game narratives (even though it shares many of its narrative mechanics with those of the first game) we're likely to see this year. In the years since the original game, our anti-hero Jackie Estacado has become the don of his crime family. Jackie's managed to keep the titular Darkness suppressed, but an attempt on his life unleashes his inner demon. Still tormented by the death of his beloved Jenny, her demise is Jackie's real motivation for all this gratuitous slicing, slashing and shooting. It's a love story more than anything, unlikely as that may seem, and *The Darkness II* spins its yarn with remarkable intelligence. Flashes between alternate realities will actually make you question what part of all of this is real, and what effect The Darkness is having on our boy Estacado. It's well worth playing this game for its narrative alone as far as I'm concerned, despite what may seem on the surface to be little more than a mafia-themed murder-fest with added supernatural elements.

The narrative might serve to immerse you in all the in-game happenings, but there are some niggles that shatter the illusion. The game occasionally feels as though it lacks some polish, with sporadic bugs worming their way into the proceedings. Enemies get trapped in geometry, objects will occasionally hang midair and the like. The combat,

despite all its fluid ferocity, doesn't really have much depth when you get down to it. The only time real thought needs to be put into it is when strategically destroying light sources, which requires some forward planning lest you have your superhuman traits unwittingly stolen from you by pesky light. Other than that, there's really not much to it, and you'll likely just find a winning combat pattern and stick with it to defeat any and all foes.

Once you're done with the single player, there's the cooperative Vendettas mode for four players that offers up its own unique missions and a separate storyline that runs parallel to Jackie's. Four different characters are on offer, each with unique abilities, allowing you to extend the game's lifetime by a few hours – only this time, you'll have the help of friends. It's a worthwhile outing and is very well crafted.

Well crafted is probably the best way to describe *The Darkness II* in its entirety. What it does, it does well. I think I still prefer the way its predecessor took care of business, but it's nevertheless a good start to the year for first-person shooters. It's powered by potent action, solid design and a strangely heartfelt story about love and loss that might actually make you feel something.

NAG
Barkskin

/ PLUS / Excellent action / Surprisingly touching narrative / Good multiplayer
/ MINUS / Occasional bugs / Not much combat depth

THE DARKNESS II IS AN ENGAGING ACTION ROMP WITH AN UNEXPECTEDLY SOFT, GOOEY CENTRE.

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NeverDead

Where's your head at?

Dismemberment. Not particularly appealing in the real world, but commonplace in gaming. Generally, however, it's your enemies being dismembered by you, and not the other way around. *NeverDead* hopes to fix that, turning your in-game body into a personified health bar. Sure, on paper it might sound like an interesting mechanic to shove into an action title. But in practice, it ends up becoming more frustrating than exciting.

NeverDead casts you as demon hunter Bryce Boltzmann, cursed with immortality by a demonic douchebag some 500 years ago. Bryce (together with his handler, Arcadia Maximille) spends his days reluctantly fending off demonic incursions in the name of booze money. I get the impression that, along the way, we're supposed to start feeling sympathy towards Bryce and the circumstances surrounding his immortal existence. Unfortunately, somewhere on the road to release, the team behind *NeverDead's* narrative confused "likeable, misunderstood antihero" with "unrepentantly chauvinistic asshat" and destroyed any chance we had of ever feeling any positive feelings about Bryce. The terrible characterisation doesn't stop with him either: all of the characters you'll encounter herein

[details]

Platforms:

360 / PS3

Genre:

Action

Age restriction:

18+

DRM:

None

Multiplayer:

Local: None

Online: None

Developer:

Rebellion

Developments

Website:

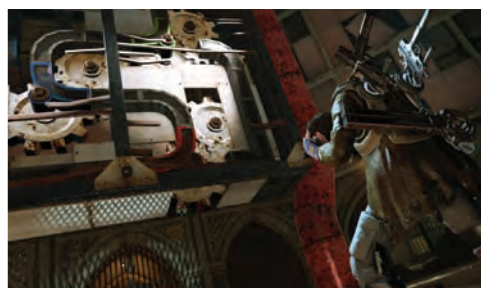
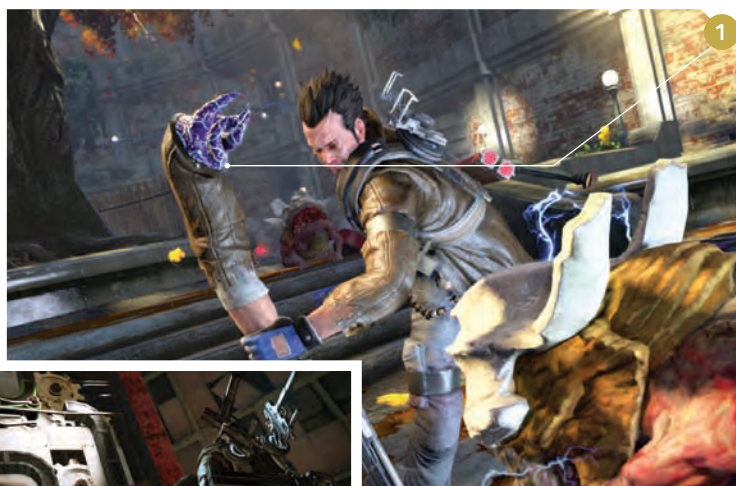
www.konami.com/officialsites/neverdead

Publisher:

Konami

Distributor:

Ster Kinekor



/1/ It's possible to tear off Bryce's head and toss it to reach otherwise inaccessible areas. Your arms can be similarly torn off for various reasons.

are either annoying, or blatantly stereotyped, or just completely, irrevocably unlikeable in myriad ways. It makes the game's entire story feel even more pointless than it already is.

The actual game, while not necessarily broken, doesn't exactly do anything beyond providing momentary chuckles the first few times you encounter the dismemberment mechanic. This is how it works: being an immortal, Bryce can't actually die. Instead, as enemies attack, explosions explode and bits of debris fly into his contact lenses, Bryce will occasionally have one of his limbs torn off. Sometimes it's an arm, leaving your dual-wielding capabilities a bit lopsided. Perhaps one (or both) of your legs will suddenly be somewhere other than where they're supposed to be, leaving you hopping (or crawling) your way around wherever it is that you are. Maybe your head will decide that your neck is no longer the place to be, and you'll have to roll around as a disembodied head – which is useful for

fitting into tight spaces. You'll spend a ton of time mid-battle collecting limbs, or waiting for your regen-meter to fill so you can quickly regenerate any bits you've lost. It can make for some frantic fights and is amusing initially, but eventually, as the combat becomes more repetitive and the fiddly controls become ever more infuriating, you'll grow to feel nothing but disdain each time one or more of your appendages disappears into a crowd of enemies.

There's a modicum of fun to be had with *NeverDead* at times. The melee and ranged combat are somewhat satisfying, and a couple of the boss battles could almost be called inventive. The game's shortfalls, however, tend to murder any joy you might feel very quickly. It's the type of game that feels like it could've been a cult classic, if it had been developed by a different team, or if they'd had more time to work on it. As it stands though, *NeverDead* can't really be called anything but a game that's barely above average. **NAG**

Barkskin

/ PLUS / Looks okay / Can be fun at times

/ MINUS / Frustrating controls / Horrible characters / Repetitive combat / Repetitive everything else

NEVERDEAD'S CONCEPT IS INTERESTING. IT'S A PITY THE GAME BUILT AROUND IT IS SO FORGETTABLE.

60

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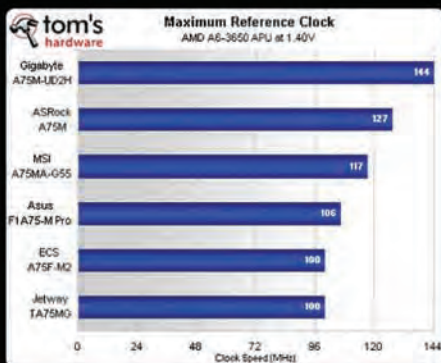
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The King of Fighters XIII Deluxe Edition

The return of K'

Regardless of the attachments fans may have to the series, there's no denying that the *The King of Fighters* franchise has had better days. Soon after *KOF 2002* it all seemed to fall apart. The series tried 3D then quickly went back to its 2D roots in the last decade or so without much success. The problem with the franchise was simply that it became irrelevant, attempting to compete with modern fighters using mechanics and gameplay from the turn of the century.

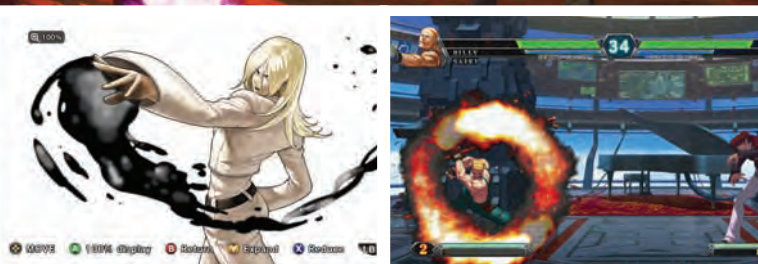
Nowhere else was this more evident than in *The King of Fighters XII*, which was appalling to say the least. So as you can imagine, expectations were low for this game; after all, it was essentially the same team that produced a lemon a few years ago. Fortunately, the 13th iteration seems to have somewhat redeemed the series. In a way this is the game we were expecting from *The King of Fighters XII* and a little more.

The character roster has been beefed up thanks to the return of player favourites like Mai and K' to name a few. The music is better, the animations vastly improved, the artwork sharpened and, best of all, there are many more

/1/ Flames version of Iori Yagami. Only available as DLC, but well worth the purchase.

[details]

Platforms:
360 / PS3
Genre:
Fighting
Age restriction:
12+
DRM:
None
Multiplayer:
Local: 2 players
Online: 2 players
Developer:
SNK Playmore
Website:
www.atlus.com/
kofxiii/
Publisher:
Rising Star Games
Distributor:
SilverScreen



stage locations. In addition, we have more game modes, artwork to unlock and for some characters – additional moves (that said, some have sadly lost moves). It's a massive improvement over the last offering and this one is actually quite enjoyable provided you're willing to overlook a few shortcomings.

One of the peculiarities of this game is the omission of Iori as he was in *KOF'98*, *2001* and other outings of the game. Instead we have this character using an alternate and less accessible move set. If you, like me, had grown proficient with the "power of flames" version of this character, in this game he is rendered useless. As such, despite the option of mixed teams some combinations may

not work as well as before.

With regards to the narrative, the game has improved and in fact it's probably the best presentation of *The King of Fighters* canon to date. That doesn't say much, however. The absence of properly animated movie sequences with spoken dialogue is annoying, especially if you're new to the series and have no idea what's going on. Overall, if you're a fan of the series or want to try a 2D fighter like no other on the market, *The King of Fighters XIII* might just do the trick. If you do pick up a copy, make sure you get the Deluxe Edition as it contains a bonus CD, poster and a full colour game manual/moves list.

NAG ShockG

/ PLUS / Great artwork / Smooth animations
/ MINUS / Missing *KOF'98*Iori / Lazy story telling

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Resident Evil: Revelations

Abandon hope, all ye who enter here...

When Capcom released *Resident Evil: The Mercenaries* for the 3DS, it proved two things: first, it was possible to make a great looking *Resi* title for the 3DS's comparatively meek hardware (Capcom has a history of squeezing out fantastic visuals from Nintendo's machines) using the publisher's MT Framework Mobile engine. Second, it proved that a *Resi* title could actually play well on the system. It was a proof of concept, and the cart for *The Mercenaries* featured a demo for *Revelations* that barely lasted five minutes but managed to expertly pack the horror and exploration elements of the series into this handheld format.

Revelations takes place in the year 2005, between the events of *RE 4* and *RE 5*. Interestingly enough, its gameplay fits in somewhere between those two as well. Players take on the roles of *Resi* favourites including Chris Redfield and Jill Valentine as they uncover and attempt to stop the terrorist group Veltra's plot to unleash the deadly T-Abyss Virus on the world. It's pretty standard *Resident Evil* fare, and feels a little "ho-hum" at times, but with the series' story and characters all-but set



[details]

Platforms:

3DS

Genre:

Action / survival-horror

Age restriction:

16+

DRM:

None

Multiplayer:

Local: 2 players

Online: 2 players

Developer:

Capcom / Tose

Website:

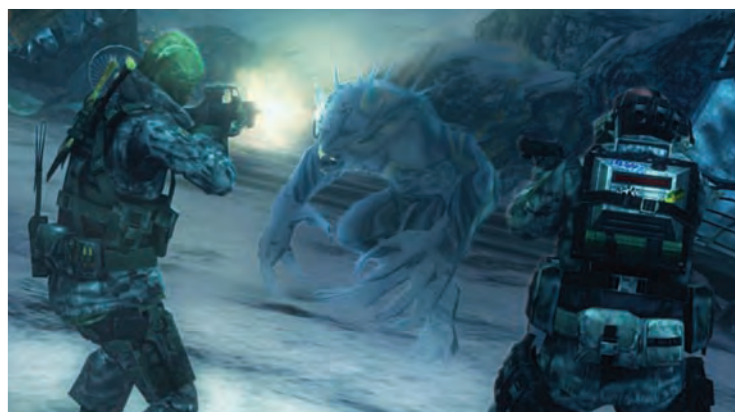
www.residentevil.com/revelations

Publisher:

Capcom

Distributor:

Core Gaming



/1/ When you've finished the main campaign you'll gain access to Raid Mode. This horde survival mode allows up to two players to battle together against waves of infected to gain levels and unlock weapons and custom parts. It's a surprisingly beefy multiplayer component that greatly expands on the core game's 6-8 hours of play time.



in stone, there isn't much room to fit in anything too interesting. Unfortunately, the most wild and different elements in the game are also its weakest – characterisation. There are numerous weak and ineffectual attempts at romance or sexual tension from and between the new characters who seem to have been dropped in purely to check the box that says "ensure each character has a partner." *Revelations* also features the most irritating characters in the series – Grinder and Jackass. As they're also dropped-in characters, we'll hopefully never have to see them again.

While the game has its issues, these are far outweighed by the positive elements. Exploring the various parts of the game (most of which takes place on a large ship at sea) feels like it always has in an *RE* title: intimidating but doable. Ammo and other pickups are positioned carefully to lull you into a false sense of security and, whenever you reach that temporary bubble of

blissful ignorance, the difficulty spikes to sometimes infuriating levels to take you down a notch and remind you that there is no such thing as safety. While the variety of enemy types isn't quite as large as that of, say, *Resident Evil 5*, the zombie encounters themselves mix well with a variety of environment types and under different circumstances in the game to ensure the combat experience always feels fresh and suspicious.

Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of *Revelations* is the game's control scheme. Never have I been this impressed with the 3DS's gyro-driven aiming as I was here. While you can buy and use the optional Circle Pad Pro attachment, rather spend a few minutes adjusting to the gyro controls and you'll have the benefit of moving while aiming as well as a laser sight that's as responsive to twitch movements as an FPS. You might want to play on an office chair though. **NAG**

GeometriX

/ PLUS / Looks great / Well-implemented controls / Feels like a proper *Resident Evil* title
/ MINUS / Uninspired storyline / Weak characterisation

MORE THAN AN ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR ITS PLATFORM, *REVELATIONS* IS A SOLID ADDITION TO THE SERIES AS A WHOLE.

83

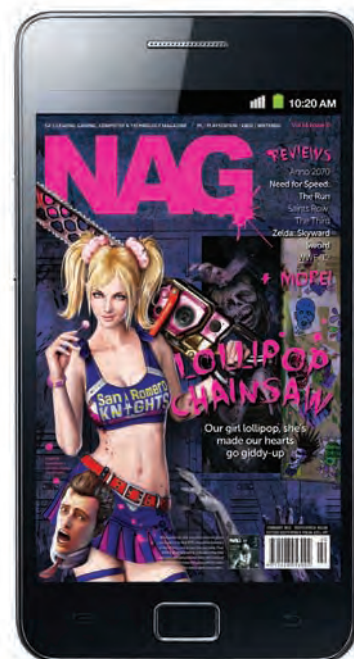
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Know your technology

/ WHUXGA /

The highest defined standard for pixel distribution and density. It means Wide Hex Ultra Extended Graphics Array. It is defined by a colour depth of 32bpp and a resolution of 7680x4320. This display format requires sixteen times the pixel count of the common 1080p HD resolution. A full frame at this resolution requires 36 megapixels (or 132MB of DRAM on your graphics card).

/ PAL /

An analogue television colour encoding system which means Phase Alternating Line. It's used as a broadcasting standard and came about as a better way of transmitting a colour signal than what NTSC could offer, which was susceptible to colour tone shifting, among other things. These days PAL as well as NTSC are used rather imprecisely to refer to the number of lines a signal has and its frame rate. However these are actually defined as EIA 525/60 (what we call NTSC) or CCIR 625/50 (what we refer to as PAL).

/ DVB /

Digital Video Broadcasting is an open standard for digital TV. The standards within the DVB framework define physical and data link layers independently. DVB also defines encryption and metadata for accessing scrambled content and preventing unconstrained sharing on the internet. A large part of the encoding schemes used in DVB are based on the MPEG-2 standard.

/ IPTV /

Internet Protocol is a system through which television services are delivered over an access agnostic, packet switched network that employs the IP protocol to transport the audio, video and control signals across a packet switched network. In contrast to video over the public Internet, with IPTV deployments, network security and performance are tightly managed in an attempt to deliver a constant and reliable experience.

By the Numb3rs

999

A browser-based FPS game called *Man vs. Machine* broke the official world record on Monday 30 January 2012 by hosting the largest online gaming session ever. The Guinness World Records confirmed that 999 players participated in the two-hour game.

Local clan bags huge sponsorship, teaches noobs how to pwn

Gigabyte South Africa, distributed by Rectron South Africa, recently announced the sponsorship of Clan =ASF= team Aquila to assist them in their pursuit of complete and total domination of all competition in *Battlefield 3*. Their sponsorship value totals R150,000 worth of computer hardware to ensure the clan

has the beefiest gaming machines around.

Not content to simply compete online, Clan =ASF= has formed GIB (Gamers in Beta) in conjunction with Mweb Gamezone. This program teaches upcoming gamers (more commonly known as noobs) how to play the games, join clans and play competitively online. Clan

=ASF= is also in the process of opening up a training academy for gamers on all platforms (PC, Xbox 360, and PS3) and learners will be encouraged to come into the centre at no charge to be able to receive hands-on training. You can visit the Clan =ASF= website at www.clanasf.co.za for additional details.



Jabra Street

A Bluetooth stereo headset with a difference. It works with any Bluetooth enabled phone, and can either be worn with the lanyard around your neck or as a clip-on.

R699 | www.mobilegadgets.co.za



Tt eSPORTS Saphira

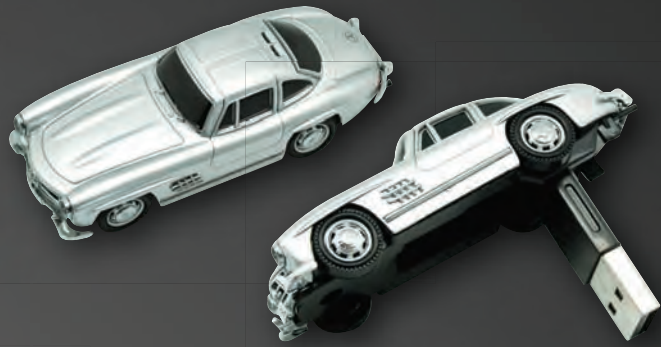
Endorsed by professional StarCraft II player, Aleksey "White-ra" Hrupnyk, the Saphira is a 3500 DPI customised gaming mouse suited to FPS game types. If you like your mouse to be big, then give this one a try.

R595 | www.corex.co.za

Click Car Mouse and Car Stick

It's a car-shaped computer mouse and USB stick! Licensed by the car manufacturers, these are miniature replicas of the real cars. We were sent the Range Rover Evoque and the Mercedes-Benz 300 SL to play with, but a total of nine models are available locally.

R350-R500 | www.clickcarproducts.co.za



Beyerdynamic MMX 300

This digital headset can be used for gaming, as well as with hi-fi systems and mobile devices. It has a mic, separate USB converter for adjusting the volume, and also a funky protective carry case for when you're transporting it around.

R4,999 | www.beyerdynamic.com



DID YOU KNOW?

A mechanical keyboard has switches beneath each key that **recreates the experience of typing on a typewriter.** It is said to improve typing accuracy, prolong the life of the keys and also make the keyboard much sturdier.

Dream Machine



This month we see three changes to our Dream Machine. We have the reference ASUS HD 7970 graphics card, the first DirectX11.1 graphics card on the market. Great performance isn't cheap but there's nothing faster or cooler on the market at present. It is likely to be replaced next month with a special edition 7970 offering

(like the Direct CU II 7970) but until then it remains our graphics card of choice. Our choice chassis has changed to the Cooler Master Cosmos II, which is not only the biggest case right now, but also amongst the most stylish as well. Our SSD also gets replaced by the Plextor M3 256GB, which is the fastest SSD we have tested to date.



PSU
ANTEC HCP 1200
R2,399 / www.evetech.co.za



Graphics
ASUS Radeon HD 7970
R6,999 / za.asus.com



OS drive
Plextor M3 256GB SSD
R2,999 / www.plextor-digital.com



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



Chassis
Cooler Master COSMOS II
R3,755 / www.coolermaster.com



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



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



Mouse
Roccat Kone [+]
R899 / www.sonicinformed.com



Mouse mat
Roccat Alumic
R319 / www.roccat.org



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.com



Hardware show

Nobody will say it and sometimes we're discouraged from even thinking it, for we must all keep the ruse going lest we suffer the consequences. PC gaming is great; overclocking is better than it's ever been, actually, yet we need fewer vendors than before. How this situation comes about is pretty easy. Every memory vendor has started making SSDs, every one of them has a 2,400MHz CL11 kit, which is supposed to be impressive, but in truth actually isn't. The speed may be great but the question is: is there a vendor out there who can't produce the exact same set? No, from A-DATA to Patriot, you're looking at the same ICs dressed in different clothes. To diversify they try and make SSDs but the situation is even worse there.

Most vendors turn to SandForce, not only because the company (now owned by LSI) makes great controllers but the truth is, if you use any modern day SandForce controller, you negate the need for any cache. That means vendors

"The odd thing here is that all the devices and products again are very similar, with some being so identical it's obvious they're manufactured in the same place or at least by the same company"

actually save money. You can package the cheapest NAND memory money can buy with said controller and voila, you have a drive that looks impressive on paper but doesn't cost much to manufacture. Sadly though, this isn't a secret to anyone and everyone knows SandForce will tune the exact same controller to different IOPS performance depending on how much you pay.

In the end, the memory is the same and so are the SSD's. The only ones worth buying, ultimately if all things are equal, would be the better known AAA brands because at least you'll get some decent support and warranty. You may even receive better NAND memory in your SSD. As it looks right now, there's zero innovation from memory vendors and going forward there looks to be even less. In such an economy this model can't be supported and some are likely to fold sooner rather than later, in particular the smaller companies.

The same thing is happening with vendors of gaming peripherals, PSUs and cases. In fact just about everyone has a gaming keyboard, a mouse and a headset. The odd thing here is that all the devices and products again are very similar, with some being so identical it's obvious they're manufactured in the same place or at least by the same company (Foxconn amongst others). One has to wonder why there's no innovation when it comes to such things, because you can literally design anything and charge accordingly. So similar are the products that they even inherit identical shortcomings. One has to wonder how anyone in the respective design departments is inspired to mimic a failure. This is very peculiar to me especially since the marketing material for such things mostly use words like "unique" and "patented" more times than Intel, AMD and NVIDIA combined.

I could go on forever and include many other vendors but I think it's obvious what I'm talking about. As readers you may have had a sneaking suspicion of this, and if you did you're not wrong. The vast majority of components involved in modern day desktop gaming computers are the same. If you ever thought motherboards and graphics cards were hardly distinguishable, try and find a gaming keyboard with no macro keys on the left hand side or a mouse with fewer buttons than you have digits.

Neo Sibeko

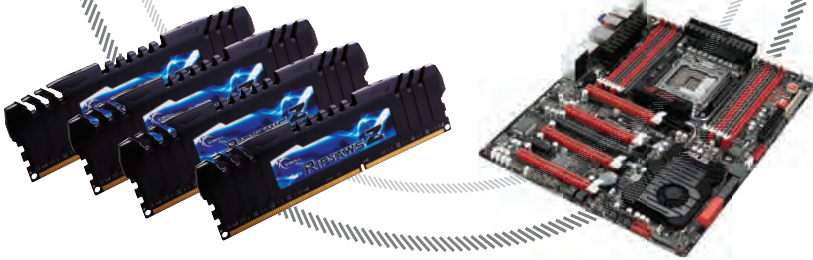


Intel

Intel Core i7 3960X
R11,999 / www.intel.com

ASUS Rampage IV Extreme
R4,999 / za.asus.com

8GB Quad Channel DDR3 2400 MHz memory
R3,999 / www.gskill.com



Intel Dream Machine price:

R58,561



AMD

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

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

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



AMD Dream Machine price:

R45,061

[specs]

RRP:
R765 (M90)
R1630 (K90)
Website:
www.frontosa.co.za

[technical]

Corsair Vengeance M90:
Sensor:
Adjustable 5,700 DPI Avago Technologies ADNS-9500
LasterStream Gaming Sensor
Polling rate:
1000Hz/500Hz/250Hz/125Hz
Acceleration:
Up to 30g
Tracking rate:
Up to 165 inches per second
Buttons:
15 programmable

Corsair Vengeance K90:
Key switches:
Cherry MX Red mechanical
Windows Lock key:
Yes
USB pass through:
Yes
Macro recording:
Yes

[technical]

/ Pros:
Sturdy build quality / Good software / So. Many. Buttons.

/ Cons:
Keystrokes on K90 are insanely noisy / Quite pricey

/ Alternatives:
CM Storm QuickFire Rapid keyboard / Cyborg R.A.T. 7 mouse

Corsair Vengeance M90 gaming mouse and K90 gaming keyboard

It's reaching a stage now where we'd not be surprised to see gaming-focussed mice and keyboards on the shelves of our local grocery store, somewhere between the dairy section and the frozen foods. In a time when the Cool Kids can't be labelled as such without their own take on backlit, macro key-covered keyboards and thousand-buttoned mice, it's difficult to decide which devices to fawn over. And we've now got another pair of

(admittedly somewhat unique) choices to make the final decision even more difficult.

Corsair's Vengeance K90 (the keyboard) and M90 (the mouse) are marketed squarely at RTS and MMO gamers. As such, they're both covered in a ludicrous number of macro-enabled buttons/keys – a trend we thought had fizzled out ages ago. Both feature all the bells and whistles you'd expect, and both want your money.



/1/ BUILT TO KILL

Whoever designed these babies appears to have a slight metal fetish, each managing to squeeze in a startling amount of aluminium to make them stand out from the crowd by adding in the capacity to turn your gaming peripherals into potential murder weapons; perhaps not so much with the M90 and its full-metal, weighted scroll wheel, but the K90 would definitely not be seen as completely out of place if it were a weapon pickup in your average first-person action romp. In a more practical sense, the aluminium makes both products feel incredibly sturdy and able to take a surprising amount of

punishment. If you're prone to furious bouts of physical ragequitting, these might just be the peripherals for you.

/2/ MACRO MADNESS

The K90 features 18 macro keys, with three different memory banks. This makes for a total of 54 possible macros (which can be recorded on the fly) available to you at any given time. It seems a bit like overkill, and brings back memories of the original Logitech G15 – which you'll remember cut the number of G-keys down considerably when the design was revised shortly after the original release.

Meanwhile, the M90 features a ridiculous 15 fully programmable buttons, most of which are located by your thumb and 9 of which are suitable for macros. Remember that with both devices, up to 50 unique profiles can be created for different games, making the macro potential practically limitless. These macros are also highly customisable, letting you add time delays and the like to carry out complex command strings with the press of a single button.

/3 & 4/ THE SPECIFICS

The K90 has a few cool features worth



mentioning. Firstly, laser-etched mechanical keys – depending on how you feel about these old-school, noisy buggers, you're going to love or hate the feel of this keyboard. The key rollover has also been increased from the standard six-key rollover on USB to a 20-key rollover, so together with anti-ghosting it's highly unlikely that any of your keystrokes will be swallowed in the midst of frantic multi-key presses. USB pass through and dedicated media keys have their checkboxes ticked, and the obligatory ability to disable the Windows key is also present.

The M90's laser sensor is capable

of sensitivities up to 5,700 DPI, with on-the-fly adjustment available via the touch of a button. Polling rate, acceleration adjustment and all the usual tweaks can be accessed via the Vengeance software shared by both devices. You can even adjust the lift detection settings to alter the way the mouse behaves when lifted.

THE PROOF IS IN THE FRAGGING

When all's said and done, as with most PC gaming peripherals it'll come down to personal preference whether or not you choose to hand over the

dough for Corsair's offering. There's nothing here that's truly compelling enough to drive you away from your current gaming mouse/keyboard setup, unless you feel that your life could do with a bit more aluminium. Nevertheless, Corsair has provided a pair of very worthy contenders: comfortable, rugged and packing all the goodness you'd expect. We'd not recommend the K90 to anybody who spends a lot of time typing around other people, however: we haven't heard keystrokes this loud in ages, which might lead someone to kill you with the thing. **NAG**

Cooler Master COSMOS II

Supplier: **Sonic Informed** / Website: www.coolermaster.com / RRP: **R3,699**



Some time ago, one could have said that there were only two things Cooler Master was good at: aftermarket heat sinks and cases. Even in those respective fields one wouldn't have hailed any product Cooler Master produced as a premium component. Well, that was a long time ago and one could say over the last five years if not a little more, Cooler Master has positioned itself as the company to beat when it comes to such things.

Not only do they make very good cases, their repertoire includes some of the best devices the gaming and enthusiast community has ever seen. From headphones, keyboards and PSUs, Cooler Master seems to deliver the goods at every turn, especially with their flagship products.

With the Cosmos series of cases, Cooler Master has been improving with every version, building on their previous efforts while integrating new features from their others lines. Nowhere else is this as obvious as it is with the COSMOS II. It essentially takes everything that made the original Cosmos cases great while adding everything special about the HAF-X, our current Dream Machine case. The culminations of these two cases seem to have produced the COSMOS II. Though this union though has produced a better case than we could have hoped for.

The biggest selling point about this

case will be the build quality. It is really something that we would have only expected out of Lian-Li and in fact it's better than any Lian-Li case in that department. The brushed aluminium is perfectly moulded and everything fits together snugly. All the components have a purpose and even the wiring is fully labelled, eliminating all guess work and tracing of cables to their origin. It's this attention to detail that is the easiest facet to appreciate about the COSMOS II. It may be a pricey case but it actually looks and feels expensive. There are no sharp corners, no parts that break off revealing edges that can sever your fingers. It's a truly well thought-out case and one will struggle to find fault with it.

While we appreciate the six USB ports at the front, only two of them are USB 3.0, four would have been the ideal number because many boards today ship with two headers, especially the high-end boards which are likely the ones that will find a home in such a case. Other than that there's really nothing else we found to be a flaw with the COSMOS II. A place to put external drives and such would have come in handy, but that may have interfered with the aesthetics which is a big factor with the COSMOS II.

This is probably the case with the most complex moulding process as the curves are just about everywhere. Inside it's still straight lines, but the

entire exterior is flowing lines and curved aluminium, making for one of the most attractive cases we've seen. It won't be to everyone's liking but one thing that will be hard to argue is the fine finishing and attention to detail.

It is however a large case, in fact it's the largest case we've ever reviewed and weighs a hefty 22kg when empty. Add your hardware into the case and you're looking at a very heavy system that is anything but LAN friendly. However, we can't mark the COSMOS II down for that too much. It's made for the power user who will only populate the case with the most expensive kit money can buy. With native 4-Way SLI and CrossFire support and XL-ATX compatibility, this case can also be used as a server chassis.

Overall the COSMOS II has many more features than we are able to cover here, as stated in the beginning it's a culmination of two of the best cases to ever come from Cooler Master. If you've owned either the HAF-X 942 or the original Cosmos, this case is the most obvious upgrade choice for you.

NAG
Neo Sibeko



[specs]

Gross weight: **22kg**
 Dimensions: **344x704x664mm**
 Supported motherboard type: **Micro-ATX / ATX / E-ATX / XL-ATX / SSI CEB / SSI EEB**
 Front panel: **e-SATA, audio, 2x USB 3.0, 4x USB 2.0**

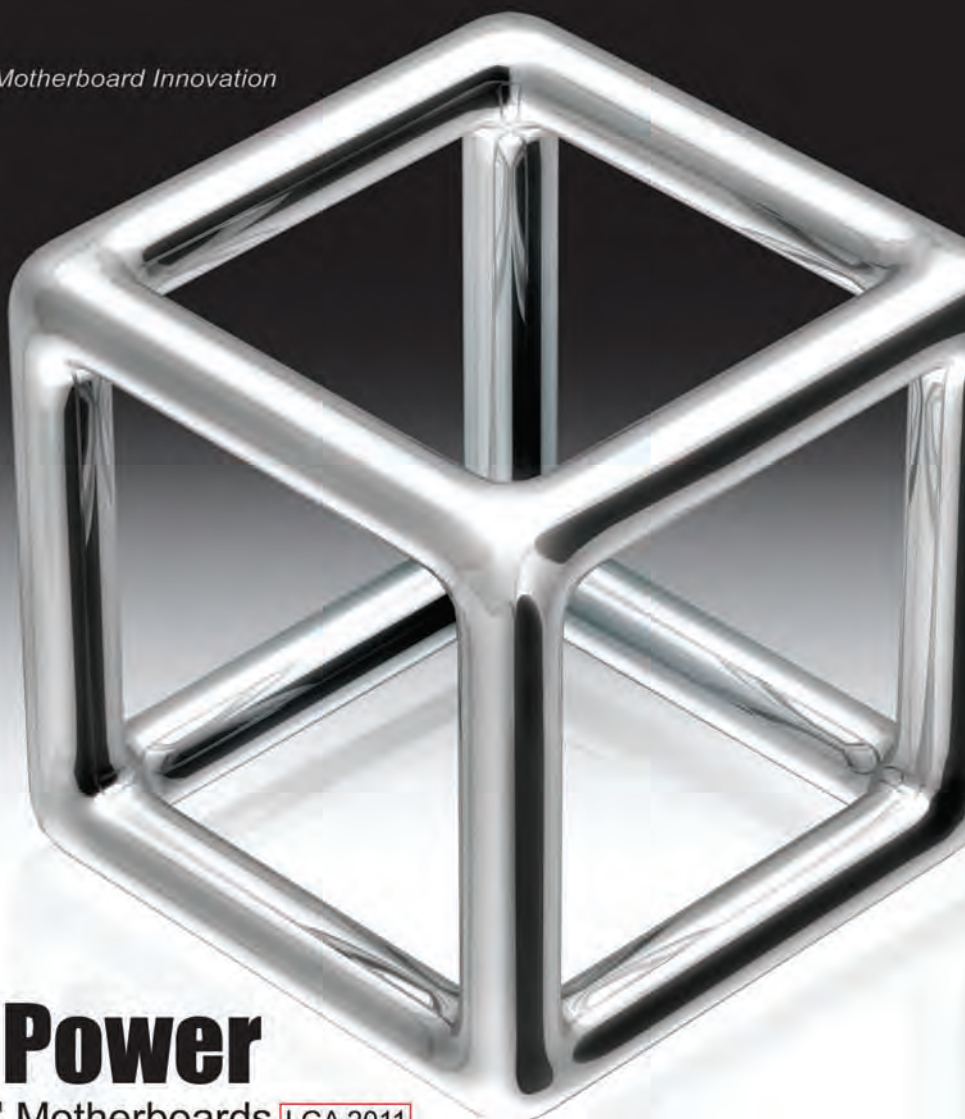
/ PLUS / Build quality / Features
/ MINUS / Heavy / Not cheap

ARGUABLY THE BEST CASE MONEY CAN BUY RIGHT NOW.

9
OUT OF 10


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
inside



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

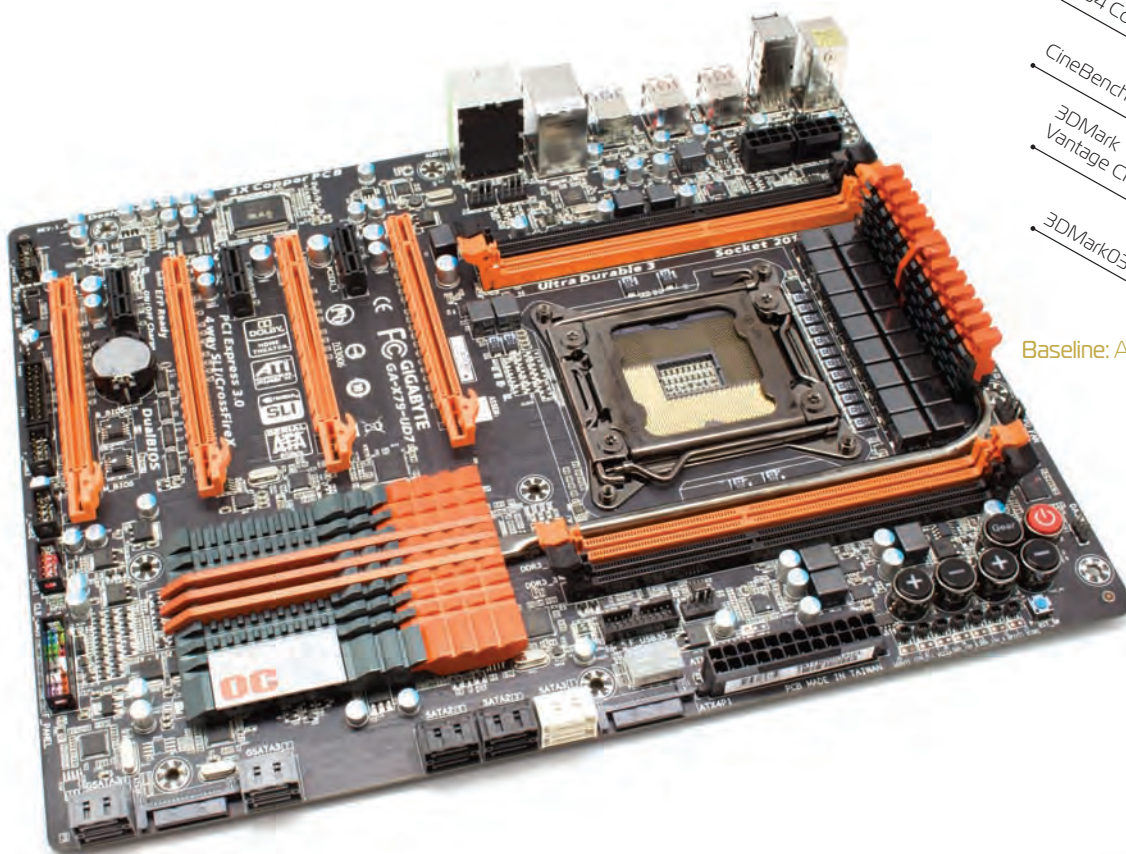
Durban:
Tel: (031) 582 0200
Fax: (031) 582 0280

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

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

GIGABYTE X79-UD7

Supplier: Rectron / Website: www.gigabyte.com / RRP: R4,399



Benchmarks	
AIDA64 Copy	/ 19,966MB/s / / 20,396MB/s /
CineBench 11.5	/ 13.42 / / 9.34 /
3DMark Vantage CPU	/ 46,853 / / 33,737 /
3DMark03	/ 127,361 / / 156,407 /

Baseline: ASUS RAMPAGE III GENE

GIGABYTE planned on turning the overclocking community on its head with the X58-OC last year. Sadly this board was late to market and cost a little more than it should have because of that. However, the board was great and was definitely a contender for the greatest X58 board ever made. It had literally everything one could want from an overclocking motherboard save for PCIe switches. Short of that, it was near perfect and we loved that board for sure.

The X79-UD7 is essentially a follow up on that board, featuring everything that was on the X58-OC with some differences that are appropriate for the X79 platform. For instance, this time the board is not limited to 3-way SLI but supports four graphics cards in tandem both in SLI and Crossfire mode. Unlike on the UD3, this is suitable for the extreme overclockers as well as it provides additional SATA power connectors for feeding additional current to the PCIe slots. So for those looking to compete at the very high-end, this is what GIGABYTE has to offer and it is a damn fine board even though it may not have started out life that way.

GIGABYTE's 3D BIOS has matured into something that resembles the brilliant Award BIOS they used to have on the previous platforms, which wasn't the case with the F2 BIOS we received with this board. It was initially very slow and

buggy, but with the changes that the BIOS engineers have worked on have resulted in a board that's become a pleasure to use, even though it's not as obvious as we'd like in some areas. This is in particular when it comes to controlling load line calibration for the CPU.

After the F4 BIOS, more relaxed settings were employed, but this means that you will need a much higher LLC setting than before, however this has not affected overclocking in anyway. It just means that we have cooler running components by default, which should not be an issue for most users looking to this board because this one is best used on a benchmarking rig instead of inside a computer case.

Boards like these are about extracting the very best performance from the platform and as such the X79-UD7 delivered very impressive performance which more than matches the numbers of our Dream Machine motherboard. So this proves that despite the differences in feature set, ultimately the performance is the same and for our purposes, the clock for clock performance was identical. What we wish GIGABYTE would have implemented is Bclk, PCIe and DRAM skews in the BIOS because these can really help Bclk overclocking, which can help some CPUs reach higher frequencies which they may not with just the multiplier alone.



[specs]

Chipset:
Intel X79
Memory:
4x 240-Pin DDR3
CPU Support:
Intel Core i7 SB-E
(LGA2011)
Slots:
4x PCI Express 3.0
16x, 1x PCI, 2xPCI
Express 1X

Another missed opportunity as mentioned earlier is the PCIe slot switching feature which would allow you to enable or disable slots individually. Particularly useful for those who want to overclock using 4-way graphics and need the system up and running as best as possible before they proceed to cool the graphics cards and apply the overlocks.

Short of that we are impressed with the X79-UD7. It may not be as revolutionary as the X58-OC was, but we should remember that even more of the X79 chipset is in the CPU so that leaves very little for vendors to do to distinguish their boards from each other. Even with that said, GIGABYTE has arguably produced the best X79 board you can buy at this price point, only falling short of the Rampage IV Extreme which retails for significantly more. As a successor to a legendary board, the X79-UD7 has delivered in every respect, and with further BIOS improvements could possibly be the best board GIGABYTE has produced to date.

NAG
Neo Sibeko

/ PLUS / 4-Way SLI support / OC buttons / Performance
/ MINUS / 3D BIOS needs to go

A GREAT SUCCESSOR TO THE ORIGINAL X58-OC MOTHERBOARD. WORTH
SOME SERIOUS CONSIDERATION IF YOU'RE A SERIOUS OVERCLOCKER.

8
OUT OF 10

LOGO

COMPETITION

g

looking to the future

Imaginet:

more than you can imagine

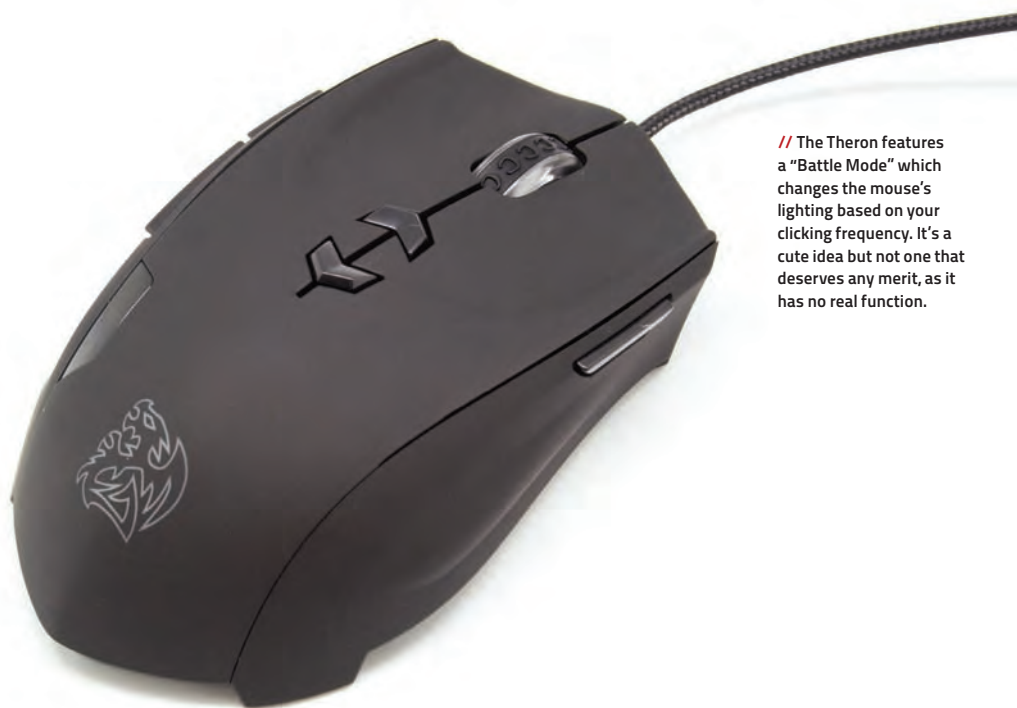
imaginet
Est 1997

info@imaginet.co.za
<http://www.imaginet.co.za>

086 111 1101

Tt eSPORTS Theron

Supplier: Corex / Website: www.corex.co.za / RRP: R795



// The Theron features a "Battle Mode" which changes the mouse's lighting based on your clicking frequency. It's a cute idea but not one that deserves any merit, as it has no real function.



[specs]

Resolution:
100–5,600 DPI
(adjustable on-the-fly)
Connector:
1.8m braided cable and gold-plated USB interface
Polling rate:
Up to 1,000 Hz
Weight adjustment:
5x 4.5g removable weights
Customisation:
7-colour LED schemes

"The Tt Theron is the company's latest move to bring pro gaming names into the households of regular people, and, while it doesn't feature any design or technical innovations worth raving about, is right up there..."

Thermaltake has teamed up with a variety of e-sports professionals through their Tt eSPORTS range. Just how much input these world-renowned stars have in the design of each component is uncertain, but these chaps put their names on these products and, in return, Thermaltake delivers well-designed, sturdy devices that anyone – professional, would-be professional or regular gamer – will enjoy using.

The Tt Theron is the company's latest move to bring pro gaming names into the households of regular people, and, while it doesn't feature any design or technical innovations worth raving about, is right up there with Logitech, Razer and Roccat's high-end offerings. This mouse has been endorsed by Taiwanese *StarCraft II* pro gamer Zhan "SoftBall" Zhenyu, who plays for the Tt Apollos in the Taiwan eSports League (TeSL) where he currently sits as the top-rated Terran player in the country. And, if someone were to tell us he plays with a Theron, we'd believe them.

This mouse's build quality is fantastic. The industrial-grade rubber's durability is difficult to test in a short period of time, but it feels sturdy and provides an excellent grip. Those who prefer to use a palm grip will be comfortable with the Theron's large

surface area and buttons, but gamers who use a lighter claw grip might find that the mouse's weighty lower end makes it a little difficult to manoeuvre. Five removable weights do their part to reduce this problem, but without them inside, the overall weight comes to something that I personally would consider too light. If this is a concern for you, we suggest that you give one a try before committing to a purchase.

That small worry aside, there's little else to complain about with the Tt Theron. The company's no-frills approach to software means that it's easy to set up, although we did find that for some odd reason, the resolution was set to 4,000 DPI instead of the maximum capable 5,600. Not a problem, but worth mentioning. The software also allows one to set the LED colours, adjust the polling rate (a function we usually find to be pointless), and assign the single macro key its function from a list of built-in commands or a custom macro programmer. Finally, up to five profiles can be stored on the mouse itself, each with its own collection of macros.

Thermaltake has produced an excellent gaming mouse in the Theron. It's easy to become accustomed to, feels solid and doesn't lose itself in a mountain of unnecessary frills.

NAG
Geoff Burrows



// **PLUS** / Smooth operation / Comfortable / Feels durable
// **MINUS** / Not ideal for claw grip

A SOLID MOUSE THAT SHOULD SUIT MOST GAMERS WHO LIKE TO USE HIGH-END PERIPHERALS.

9
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.

R40



R40



R40



R40



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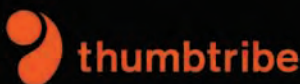
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DESTINATION FOR
HARDCORE GAMING
ENTHUSIASTS.



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Samsung Apps

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ASRock X79 Extreme9

Supplier: **Comptum** / Website: www.asrock.com / RRP: **R3,999**



Benchmarks	
AIDA64 Copy	/ 19,234MB/s / / 20,396MB/s /
CineBench 11.5	/ 13.4 / / 9.34 /
3DMark Vantage CPU	/ 46,900 / / 33,737 /
3DMark03	/ 124,667 / / 0 /

Baseline: ASUS RAMPAGE III GENE

ASRock isn't a company synonymous with overclocking products. It's more of a competitor with BIOSTAR and ECS to most people. ASRock has decided to up its game and focus on the hardest group of people to please in the hopes of carving out a place for itself at the top.

Getting to the top is a long and arduous process which may seem very easy and simple at face value but it's anything but that. In truth, the positions held by ASUS and GIGABYTE took many hundreds if not thousands of man hours and countless marketing and research dollars. As such we were not expecting much from the Extreme9 because ASRock just hasn't been focusing on the ultra-high end as long as the other two.

Having said that, do not assume this isn't a capable motherboard, as it is. In fact, it surprised us with how smooth its UEFI BIOS implementation was. It's possibly the easiest BIOS to navigate as it's very well laid out from an aesthetic and grouping point of view. Even to those not familiar with the ASRock BIOS configurations of previous models, you'll soon be at home with this board and in this environment.

Before we go further into the BIOS, we have to pay particular attention to the actual board layout. It's a standard ATX motherboard, but features a full eight DIMM slots and a total of five PCI Express slots but it will only do 3-way SLI and

CrossFire. The reason simply being that the PCIe spacing is too narrow to allow four dual slot graphics cards to be used on the system. This won't be an issue for most people though save for the fact that the last graphics card in such a situation will block the power, reset and POST LED. A design oversight we've seen on other boards from other vendors.

The PCIe slot placement for the Game Blaster module is also in a peculiar place because it is in between the second and third full size PCIe slot which means you may have some limited airflow on the primary graphics card depending on the cooler.

As for the performance of the system, it was less than optimal because we could not stabilize the memory past 1,866MHz, which means that compared to other X79 boards we've tested, it consistently delivers lower performance. This isn't a BIOS issue as well, while 2,133MHz can be booted, it's not stable and this will only be fixed in the Fatal1ty X79 board which we've heard amazing things about.

Still, if you're not concerned with 3D Mark scores and the like, and just want an easy to work with board with brilliant sound and great features, you could do a lot worse than the ASRock X79 Extreme9.

It's the little extra feature that ASRock gives you that make this board worthwhile even though we wish it came in at a slightly better price. The front

[specs]

Chipset:
Intel X79
Memory:
8x 240-Pin DDR3
CPU support:
Intel Core i7 SB-E (LGA2011)
Slots:
5xPCI Express 16X,
1xPCI Express 1X

panel USB 3.0 adapter makes life much easier for those who don't have cases with USB 3.0 ports at the front and for those who do have, you will receive an additional two which is always a good thing.

The system comes with an on-board gigabit LAN controller with an additional Broadcom adapter on the Game Blaster. With some intelligent software and logic, the LAN connectivity offers traffic optimization and prioritizing in addition to teaming support, several features that gamers should appreciate, especially at LAN parties.

Overall we are satisfied with ASRock's attempt at making a high-end motherboard for both gamers and overclockers. It isn't quite there on the overclocking front, but where gaming features are concerned it can stand with the best of them, and if you have the budget and want something different from the usual, you should look at the Extreme9. If you want a little more though, hold out for the Fatal1ty board. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

/ PLUS / Looks great / ASRock Game Blaster / Easy BIOS navigation
/ MINUS / Lower memory clocks / PCIe 1X placement

THE EXTREME9 IS A GREAT ATTEMPT BY ASROCK TO TARGET BOTH THE HIGH-END GAMER AND THE OVERCLOCKER.

7
OUT OF 10

ASUS HS-W1 Wireless USB Headset

Supplier: ASUS / Website: za.asus.com / RRP: R599



Wireless headsets have earned a bad reputation over the years from discerning listeners simply because the audio quality is notably compromised, yet prices for such sets remain high. This is especially true for headsets with microphones that are supposedly targeted at gamers. These usually fall short in several aspects not limited to the audio quality, but the build quality and reliance on Bluetooth technology can sometimes cause configuration headaches.

With the ASUS-HS-W1 most of these issues seem to have been sorted. The audio quality is not going to blow you away, nor should you be expecting it to. It is, however, better than average. The microphone in particular is very clear, and as a result the entire experience is rather pleasurable. What you sacrifice in fidelity, this set makes up for in convenience and comfort. The ear cups on the HS-W1 are particularly noteworthy and despite looking like they will allow significant amounts of sound leakage, they keep audio very personal and unobtrusive. Outside noises are kept to a minimum making the entire listening experience better than one would initially expect.

This set is supposed to be multi-purpose, catering to all kinds of uses, however it's best for conversations across the multitudes of chatting programs available today. As mentioned earlier the microphone is noteworthy as it's very sensitive but doesn't pick up much outside noise, something we wish was true for all microphone/headphone sets. The range is specific for a maximum range of 15 meters, however we found that anything more than five or six meters isn't practical. Also while Wi-Fi doesn't rely on line-of-sight, obstructions between the PC and you will result in audio gaps and a generally poor experience. So care should be taken not to move too far from the PC when using this set.

Overall, the HS-W1 is likely a little more than you'd expect and overall will result in a pleasing experience at the least. One to consider if you're in the market.

NAG
Neo Sibeko

[specs]

Frequency response:
20Hz-20 KHz
Wireless technology:
Wi-Fi 2.4G
Listening time:
8 Hours
Charging time:
~3 Hours
Dimensions:
180x175x65mm
Weight:
170g



NAG

... we come in
all flavours.

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Steam: NAG Online
Zinio: www.zinio.com/NAG



/ PLUS / Very comfortable / Sounds decent
/ MINUS / Range is limited by obstructions

AS FAR AS WIRELESS USB HEADSETS ARE CONCERNED, THE ASUS HS-W1 IS BETTER THAN MOST.

7
OUT OF 10

ASUS Radeon HD7970

Supplier: ASUS / Website: za.asus.com / RRP: R6,999



Benchmarks

Lost Planet 2 1,080p DX11	/ 64.5 / / 55.2 /
Crysis 2: 1,080p DX11	/ 62.4 / / 44.763 /
Crysis: Warhead 1,080p DX10	/ 61.4 / / 52.76 /
3DMark11 Extreme	/ 2,444 / / 2,105 /
3DMark Vantage	/ 35,854 / / 26,053 /
Unigine Heaven Xtreme	/ 1,728.75 / / 1,409.539 /

Baseline: NVIDIA GeForce GTX580

"Throughout our time with this graphics card we had a blissful experience, even with early drivers. We had no performance issues or anomalies"

AMD's 6000 series of graphics cards were, to put it mildly, less than exciting. It's safe to say this now because we are past that generation. It's not that they were failing to deliver tangible performance gains over the 5000 series, but it was more that the competition's offerings eclipsed AMD's 6950 and the 6970. Sure enough, the original 6950 GPUs could unlock to full 6970s, but even this was short lived as AMD put a stop to that soon after the cards were released.

The 6000 series' tessellation performance, while improved over the 5000 series, was not up to the levels of what NVIDIA offered. Not unexpected, because AMD was still working with an older design fundamentally, and had not invested in the logic required to truly turn the Cayman GPU into a computing and tessellation behemoth.

Fortunately with the 7000 cards, AMD has re-designed their GPU from the ground up. In a way it is a nod to NVIDIA for having designed massive compute-heavy GPUs as a way to target different markets with the same GPU. To this end the Tahiti GPU has incredible logic density, packing over four billion gates into a core that is physically smaller than the outgoing Cayman GPU. This is courtesy of the 28nm node from TSMC. This manufacturing process has not

only allowed AMD to package so many transistors in such a small space, but has enabled AMD to produce a very cool running GPU that has incredible overclocking headroom.

To illustrate this, on the reference card from ASUS we were able to reach 1.25GHz from the standard 950MHz and 7GHz on the memory. There hasn't been a graphic card to date that has had such overclocking headroom, let alone reaching such frequencies which were previously reserved for exotic cooling like dry ice and liquid nitrogen. Best of all this isn't the limit of how far this GPU will overclock. With better after-market cooling, from products such as the Direct CU II version of this card we do expect clock speeds as high as 1.3GHz. If that isn't impressive enough, for those who are looking for a world record breaking GPU, the 7970 has been shown to reach 1.8GHz already using liquid nitrogen courtesy of Andre Yang.

Gaming performance is where the magic will be for most users. At default speeds it may not look impressive, giving a 20% performance improvement over the GTX 580, but keep in mind that this card needs very high resolutions or AA to show off the new architecture. With 4xAA the advantage over the GTX 580 grows enormously and at 2560x1600 it trades blows with the



[specs]

Core:
925MHz Tahiti (40nm)
Processors:
2048
Render outputs:
32
Memory:
3072MB GDDR5
5.5GHz (264GB/sec)
API:
DirectX 11.1 /
OpenGL 4.x / OpenCL 1.x

HD6990, often matching the GTX590.

Not only is this graphics card very powerful, it is the world's first GPU to offer DirectX 11.1 support. There may not be many changes in the API refresh but it is a more streamlined API and officially supports partially resident textures at a hardware and API level.

The ASUS card we have here is a reference card, but that doesn't mean ASUS has not worked its magic with the software and BIOS. This card has much higher overclocking limits as well as supporting both memory and GPU voltage adjustments. Just those differences make this the HD7970 to have at the moment.

Throughout our time with this graphics card we had a blissful experience, even with early drivers. We had no performance issues or anomalies. The HD7970 is a great showing by AMD and we can only look forward to further driver revisions which will bring performance gains and features. This is definitely our choice GPU for the moment and deserves a spot in our Dream Machine.

NAG
Neo Sibeko

/ PLUS / Overclocks very well / Runs cool / Very low power draw
/ MINUS / Price

THE FASTEST SINGLE GPU GRAPHICS CARD MONEY CAN BUY.

8
OUT OF 10

Thermaltake Commander MS-I Snow Edition

Supplier: Corex / Website: www.corex.co.za / RRP: R795

Thermaltake makes big, fancy, usually high-end cases, and the general consensus is that you get what you pay for. It makes sense, then, for the manufacturer to develop budget cases that take their high-end builds, slim them down and trim off the fancy pieces to suit people who have skinnier wallets than others. What doesn't make sense is when one such case costs more than that which houses our Dream Machine.

The Commander MS-I comes in two variants: black, and this white version called the Snow Edition, but both are functionally identical. Designed for budget gamers, these cases manage to include almost everything you'd expect from a high-end case in small amounts, and at an overall lower level of build quality. The single USB 3.0 port; minimal but sufficient cable management that includes no rubber trimming; unsightly but functional breakaway water-cooling pipe conduits; a single included fan; simple tool-less bays: these all indicate good intentions to include as much functionality in this case with as strict a budget as possible. The result is laudable, and one can even forgive the cramped interior (which could endanger any particularly toasty components if you fail to install additional fans inside this case) and exaggerated facade because this case is designed to appeal to a very specific market and does so admirably.

For a mid-range chassis, the Thermaltake Commander makes every effort to combine affordability with functionality, and those looking to pick up a case in this price bracket will have a lot to consider when comparing it to its vast competition in this segmnt. While its local pricing is slightly higher than we'd expect, buyers get a stamp of approval from a well-known manufacturer, and for many people that's as important as the case itself. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows



/ PLUS / Good functionality for a budget case
/ MINUS / Slightly over-priced / Only a single fan included / Limited front USB ports.
A WELL-DESIGNED BUDGET CASE THAT JUST MANAGES TO STAND UP TO ITS MID-RANGE COMPETITORS.

[specs]

Weight: **4.5kg**
 Dimensions: **426 x 202 x 484 mm**
 Included fans: **1x 120mm rear exhaust**
 Additional fan mountings: **2x 120mm top exhaust, 1x 120mm bottom intake, 1x 120mm front intake, 1x 120mm side intake**
 Front panel: **Audio, 1x USB 2.0, 1x USB 3.0**

7
OUT OF 10



QoolTech™ IV Heat Pipe Design 10" x 10" x 10" Cooling Down Thermochromic Tech.	Long-lasting 3X Extra Gold 15µ Gold Contact
4-way GPU 4Way GPU with CFX & SLI 150% Boosted 4 way Design	DDR3 2500(OC) 156% Boosted DDR3 1600 Up To DDR3 2500

- Support Intel LGA 2011 Sandy Bridge-E Family Processors
- PCIe Generation 3/ USB3.0/ SATA 3.0/ eSATA3.0
- Wi-Fi/ Bluetooth on board



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SAPPHIRE HD7950 Overclock Edition

Supplier: Sapphire / Website: www.sapphiretech.com / RRP: R5,040



"We kid you not; with just a 75MHz boost in clock speeds you can bag yourself 7970-like performance"

Benchmarks	
Lost Planet 2 1,080p DX11	/ 62.3 /
Crysis 2 1,080p DX11	/ 55.2 /
Crysis: Warhead 1,080p DX10	/ 53.68 /
3DMark11 Extreme	/ 44.763 /
3DMark Vantage	/ 60.16 /
Unigine Heaven Xtreme	/ 52.76 /
	/ 2,531 /
	/ 2,105 /
	/ 34,286 /
	/ 26,053 /
	/ 1,731,085 /
	/ 1,409,539 /

Baseline: NVIDIA GeForce GTX580

AMD can't seem to put a foot wrong with their APUs and graphics cards of late. In stark contrast to their CPUs, their graphics cards and AMD Vision products are true game changers. The 7970 is a fantastic graphics card but its younger brother, unlike lesser versions of high-end cards before, is as compelling. Sure it has some parts of the GPU turned off, but that has some advantages.

For instance, what you end up with is a GPU that runs cooler, requires less power, and is on average only 14.7% slower and overclocks just as well, but retails for less. Even if you're not a fan you have to admit that such a combination is hard to beat. This is especially true when considering that even now NVIDIA has nothing to compete with it. The 7950 may cost the same as a high-end GTX580, but it's faster and is better in every respect.

So what then makes the SAPHIRE version different? Well sadly not much. Just the GPU cooler, but then again that's all that's needed to make it special. The GPU cooler uses a five heat-pipe design that feeds an array of fins from a copper base. The heat sink may seem overkill for some, especially considering how cool the 7950 GPU is already, but it's not all for nothing on the Overclock Edition.

The card comes in at 900MHz, a full 100 MHz higher than the reference clock: not much of an overclock from the default speed and still 25MHz lower than what the 7970 offers. However that's not where the fun is to be had because without using any voltage modification tools, you can still push the slider up to 1,000MHz and the temperatures will stay low while the performance will eclipse that of the 7970. We kid you not; with just a 75MHz boost in clock speeds you can bag yourself 7970-like performance. This is especially easy to do because of the very low running temperatures of the SAPHIRE card. At this clock speed we found that temperatures never exceeded 75°C with the default fan profile. If you're willing to increase this just slightly you'll find that these temps can drop to the late 60s which is virtually unheard of with graphics cards of this class and at such clock speeds.

Game performance is as you'd expect, even with such early drivers the performance is smooth and there were no hiccups at all in any of the tests we ran. SAPHIRE has produced a really great product with their 7950 Overclock Edition. As great as this card is though, it's not all rosy because the memory

overclocking is a little less than what we recorded on a reference 7950. We had grown used to reaching 1.62GHz on the memory but the most we could get away with on this sample was 1.53GHz which is still good, but a little less than what we expected.

Ultimately, we find that the 7950 has more than enough memory bandwidth already and for the RAM speed to become a factor in gaming you'd need a resolution higher than 2560x1600 which very few people have access to. Overall we are thoroughly impressed with the 7950 and what SAPHIRE has managed with just a custom cooler. Depending on availability and pricing, you just may want to consider this model over an HD7970, especially if you want stellar performance but aren't willing to stretch your budget to the exorbitant prices that the 7970 is commanding right now. With some overclocking you'll not know the difference between the two. If you're set on a 7950, this is the one to go for without a doubt. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



[specs]

Core:
900MHz Tahiti (40nm)
Processors:
1728
Render outputs:
32
Memory:
3072MB GDDR5 5GHz (240GB/sec)
API:
DirectX 11.1 / OpenGL 4.x / OpenCL 1.1

/ PLUS / Fantastic performance / Runs very cool
/ MINUS / Pricey for now

THE COOLEST-RUNNING AND FASTEST RADEON 7950 ON THE MARKET.

9
OUT OF 10

PATRIOT Division4 PC3-12800 16GB RAM

Supplier: PATRIOT / Website: www.patriotmemory.com / RRP: R1,799

The enthusiasts and power users may not like to admit it, but the days of high-speed memory having any measurable impact on system responsiveness or general user experience are gone. The difference between 1600MHz memory in a system and 2,400MHz for the vast majority of tasks is negligible at best. Today's platforms with caches many times larger than what we had available at the advent of DDR memory are just not as sensitive as we may like to believe they are to memory performance.

What has changed though is that DRAM pricing has plummeted incredibly and it's at a point where vendors are seeing serious erosions to their bottom lines. For us though, it means kits such as these can be had for next to nothing. The asking price for this kit is more than reasonable when you consider that it's 1,600MHz with a good 8-9-8-28-1T latency and best of all, its 16GB. You can set the X.M.P profile on your X79 platform and everything will be configured for you. It's truly a few mouse clicks in every UEFI BIOS there is out there and you're ready to go.

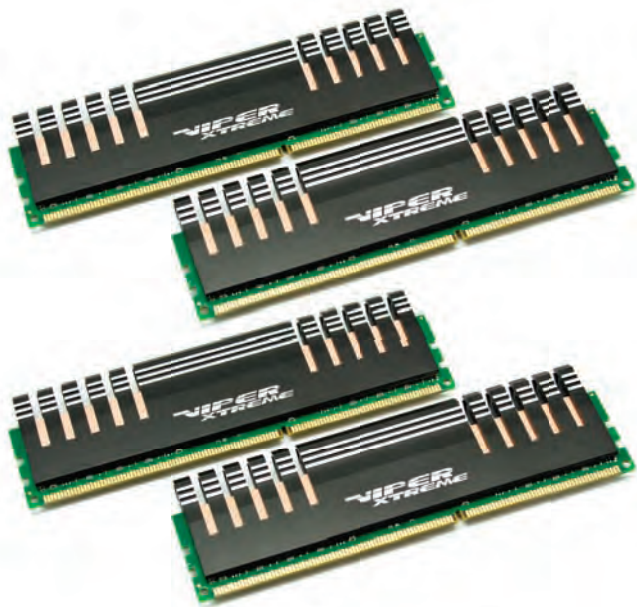
For the enthusiasts looking for a budget set to overclock with, this may not be the set for you. It's very difficult to overclock and by that we mean the headroom is very limited and requires tenacious tuning of not only secondary but tertiary timings to get anyway near a meaningful overclock. With that said, such tuning will require you to make some sacrifices that will impact your benchmark scores negatively until you reach a sufficiently high enough clock speed to offset the settings you had to relax to get there. Should you manage this though, there is some performance to be had, but ultimately it's just not worth the effort as there are easier ways to achieve the same speeds using other sets from Patriot.

This set is strictly for the gamers and mid- to high-end users looking for a cost effective low latency 16GB Kit. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

[specs]

Density:
16GB (4GBx4)
Voltage:
1.65V
Timings:
8-9-8-28
XMP:
Yes, 1.3



/ PLUS / Low latency / Pricing
/ MINUS / Very difficult to overclock / Local availability

WELL PRICED GAMING MEMORY THAT MAY NOT OVERCLOCK WELL BUT RETAILS AT A MORE THAN FAIR PRICE.

7
OUT OF 10



GX
GAMING



DeathTaker



IMPERATOR



MAURUS



SV-62.1 3000



SP-1250G



CAVIMANUS



GX GAMING
CONTROL

GX GAMING
SPEED

Pro Game STYLE

www.gx-gaming.com



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Tel: +886-2-2995-6645

Fax: +886-2-2995-4751

E-mail: sim@geniusnet.com.tw

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Plextor M3 256GB SSD

Supplier: **Rectron** / Website: www.plextor-digital.com / RRP: TBA



Benchmarks	
Average read	/ 475.1 / / 471.4 /
Average write	/ 360.6 / / 234.7 /
IO Meter IOPS	/ 27,060.1 / / 17,166.33 /
4K Read (QD32)	/ 268.8 / / 183.1 /
4K Write	/ 266.6 / / 238.4 /
PC Mark Vantage HDD	/ 67,832 / / 51,291 /

Baseline: OCZ Vertex 3 240GB

“There’s really nothing to not like about this drive. The Plextor M3 drive could possibly be the best kept secret in consumer level SSDs right now.”

Any serious gaming machine these days needs to have an SSD. The prices may still be unfavourable to many, but even the cheapest SSDs on the market are much faster than high-end drives like the WD Raptors. SSDs in this day and age give the biggest performance improvement of any component inside the PC. The vast majority of overclockers have also moved to SSD’s, not only for performance but simply because they are much more convenient than traditional magnetic drives.

Cloning SSD drives is very quick and for some reason they place a lower load on the system during bootup than magnetic drives. Even 128GB makes for a very fast system where you can effectively get rid of your swap file, or at least move it to your magnetic drive and set it to a fixed size.

What we have here with the M3 is an SSD that doesn’t come in the typical quantities of 240GB, but is a full 256GB drive, like the earlier offerings. Don’t be fooled into thinking this is a slow, low-end drive. Even though it is keenly priced, it is anything but a budget drive in performance. In fact it’s faster than any other drive we’ve tested before, separating itself from the SF-2XXX powered drives and cementing itself as the Dream Machine SSD.

Instead of the typical SF-2281 controller, the Plextor M3 uses a Marvel

88SS9171 logic core with 512MB of Hynix DDR2 memory for caching and the incredible Toshiba NAND memory (used on another drive we like, the Patriot Wildfire). This configuration plus some firmware optimizations deliver unprecedented performance that simply blows away everything we have ever tested.

Oddly enough the pricing would suggest that this drive is more of a competitor to the original Kingston V100+ drives, but these drives couldn’t be further apart in every aspect. SandForce based drives are usually strong when it comes to compressible data, but this drive was quicker in all disciplines even though it may not look impressive in the sequential read numbers. Anything above 450MB/sec we consider fast and unlikely to ever make a difference in any usage scenario that one could come across, so the 475MB/sec is very good, especially with our read patterns that are larger than the cache on the drive.

The really important numbers are the 4K reads and writes, the total real world IOPS performance and to a lesser extent the PC Mark Vantage numbers. SSDs are inherently hard to benchmark because no single benchmark represents a meaningful scenario that illustrates the massive difference in user experience when moving from a standard magnetic drive to an SSD.



[specs]

Controller:
Marvel 88SS9171
NAND type:
MLC
Form factor:
2.5"
Interface:
SATA 6Gbps

However, one has to appreciate the IO Meter results from this drive. Not only have we never broken 20K IOPS ever before, but the M3 drive was approaching 30K IOPS. It is worth noting that this is significantly higher than the results we measured from the OCZ Vertex 3 Max IOPS drive which costs more, but is a whole 33% slower. Our sequential write performance as well was incredible at 360MB/s, beating out our previous write performance champion, the Patriot Pyro SE. Maximum IO response time as well was phenomenal at just 8.99 seconds, which is at the least 400% faster than the closest drive.

There’s really nothing to not like about this drive. The Plextor M3 drive could possibly be the best kept secret in consumer level SSDs right now. While accolades pour in for the better known vendors out there, Plextor has produced a much faster drive at a better price. Whether you’re in the market for an SSD or not, this is a drive that’s definitely the one to buy, as you’ll not find anything else out there that’s faster.

NAG
Neo Sibeko

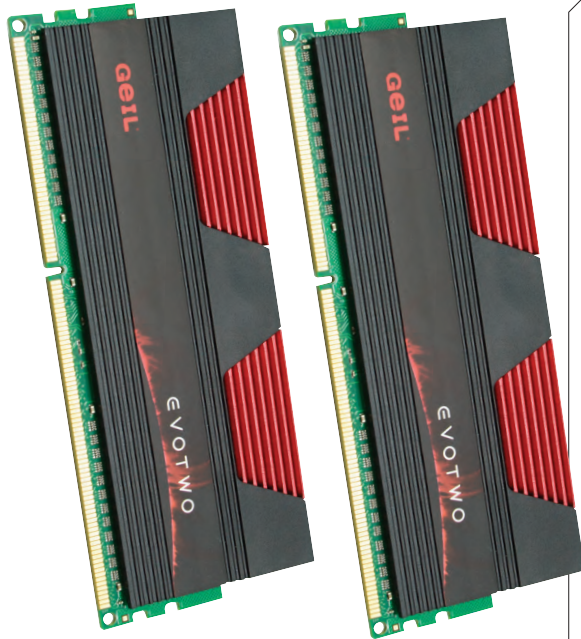
/ PLUS / Fastest SSD you can buy
/ MINUS / Nothing

INCREDIBLE SPEED AT MORE THAN A FAIR PRICE. MUST BUY.

9
OUT OF 10

GeIL EVO TWO 2400MHz 8GB Quad Channel

Supplier: Elementek Distribution / Website: www.geil.com.tw / RRP: R2,149



[specs]

Density:
8GB (2GBx4)
Voltage:
1.65V
Timings:
11-11-11-30
XMP:
Yes, 1.3

GeIL did very well several years ago at the pinnacle of DDR memory with their TSOP ICs. Sadly, those days are long gone and with them many vendors and IC suppliers. More than that, memory latency has skyrocketed along with memory frequencies. So we have finally had to let go of low latencies and embrace pure speed at what initially seems uncomfortably high latencies.

Fortunately, modern platforms, including what AMD offers with the FX CPUs, are more responsive to speed than latencies so there's no need to search high and low for CL7 memory as it doesn't do much for new chipsets.

At a standard 2400MHz 11-11-11-30-2T the first thing we did was tune the settings down to a 1T/N command rate instead of the reference 2T. We found that this boosted performance in a measurable way and in no way caused instability. Sadly though if you set the default XMP settings according to this RAM's SPD you'll more than likely end up with an unbootable system. For some reason, the XMP settings specify secondary timings that are unsuitable for this set and as a result we had a difficult time setting up this RAM at the desired speed until we figured out the issue. Once this was sorted, it was smooth sailing all the way to 2,500MHz. In fact we were able to tighten the timings down to 10-11-9-28 which you'd think would make

a huge difference in performance. However, there wasn't any reliable performance advantage to operating the RAM at these settings, so we settled back to 11-11-11-30 and just concentrated on the memory speed.

Our final speed was just shy of 2,540MHz, which was very impressive, but we suspect most people will choose the 2,500MHz setting as it's a round number which actually requires a little less VCCSA and VDIMM voltage. From then on the only thing that will truly increase performance is a better CPU overclock which will vary according to the sample you have. With that said, this set makes more sense than some other more expensive sets simply because it is very affordable, and you can use this kit to see how good the IMC on your SB-E CPU is before pouring money into the highest quality hand binned sets from GeIL or another vendor.

This set may not be the best that GeIL has in the range, but it is close enough to the more expensive sets that it is easily our best budget high speed set for the X79 platform. It's a pity about the XMP settings as they might result in returns and endless problems for the less experienced users. If you're willing to spend a few minutes setting up this RAM, there's some great performance to be had from this set.

NAG

Neo Sibeko

/ PLUS / 2,400MHz / Overclocks well
/ MINUS / Default XMP profile doesn't work

AFFORDABLE 2400MHZ SET.

8
OUT OF 10

CORSAIR®

VENGEANCE



Vengeance 1100
BEHIND-THE-HEAD GAMING HEADSET

Vengeance 1500
USB GAMING HEADSET

Vengeance 1300
ANALOG GAMING HEADSET

Vengeance Gaming Headsets

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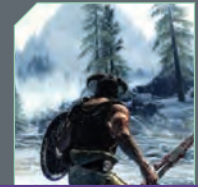
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All the world's a stage

Who makes those smart waistcoats for the wretches in *Gears of War*? I mean, there must be a factory somewhere in the Locust Hollow, perhaps managed by a loud, somewhat effeminate drone with an indeterminate European accent, peroxide blonde hair extensions, and zebra-printed hot pants, where those sorts of things are designed and manufactured.

Bleary firelight glimmered off the cavern walls, the gloom battered by the clack-clack of harnessed tickers treading sewing machines across the workshop's sooty floor.

"Oh, my, gods," squealed a voice from an office nearby. "The sniper boys is going to love this gorgeous little goggleses. Look at them André, they is totally stunning!"

A grenade explodes somewhere.

... Maybe I'm overthinking this a bit, but maybe not. A sense of wonder is important too.

Consider a game like, for example, *Skyrim*. One of the cool things about *Skyrim* is that you can look around yourself out in the wilderness, pick some random crag in the dim distance, and spontaneously decide you're going to go there, and kill everything on the way over.

And so it came to pass that the intrepid hero went forth, and slayed many mammoths and butterflies and fish and stuff with a great and terrible wrath.

Until finally, he stood upon that stony promontory, and thought to himself, "Well, this is kind of nice and everything, but there's not much to do here. I guess I'll go do something else then."

Suddenly dragons or whatever, and then he sold all the junk he'd picked up to the blacksmith in Whiterun, and asked himself – not for the first time – if this is it, if this really is all there is to it.

The thing is, open world games have only the gauziest illusion of wonder, and that's quickly yanked aside when you get where you're going and realise it's nothing special, actually, just more geometry, so slip 'n' slide down the mountainside and keep on moving.

It's not that I don't like open world games, mind you, but I've never quite understood how and why "linear" has

"The thing is, open world games have only the gauziest illusion of wonder, and that's quickly yanked aside when you get where you're going and realise it's nothing special, actually, just more geometry, so slip 'n' slide down the mountainside and keep on moving."

become such a dirty word, either.

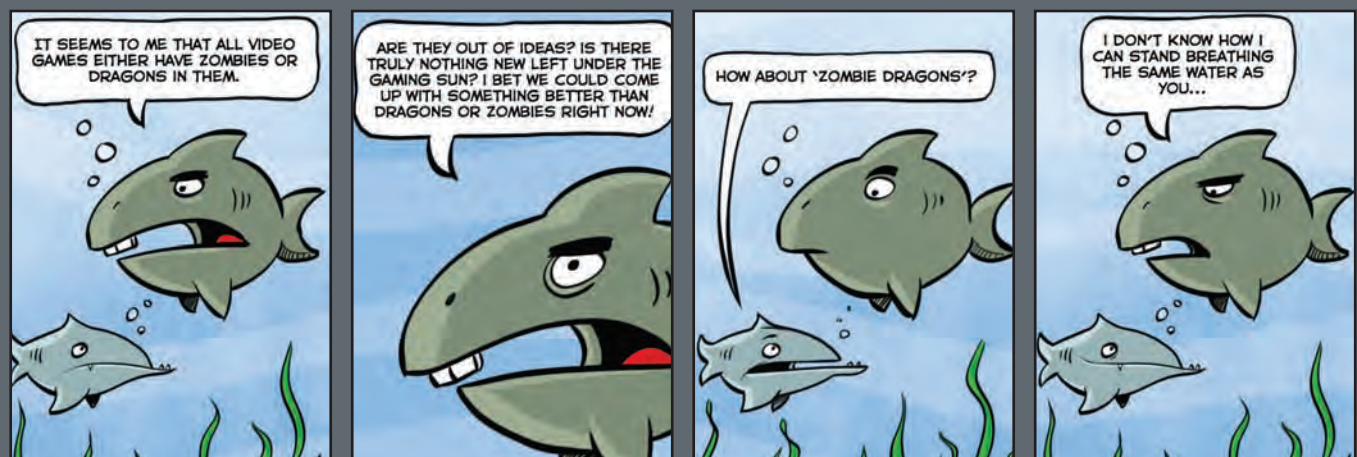
A game like *Gears of War 3* is basically a long corridor with bits of rocks and gore and drama glued to the sides here and there to make it look not so much like a long corridor. But it's those same bits of rocks and gore and drama that maintain an arguably more convincing and clever deception of open worldness than a real open world ever could, and that's because you have to use your imagination to look past it.

NAG

Tarryn van der Byl

Extra Life

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STREET FIGHTER X TEKKEN

STREET FIGHTER X TEKKEN



09.03.12



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NAG Reader Survey 2012

Important! Read this!

Being dynamic modern gamers you all understand that things in this industry and the related hardware industry change quickly. In fact, if you were stranded on a tropical island for a year (or longer), you'd need weeks of counselling and professional help just to integrate smoothly back into this little hobby of ours.

We've often said that NAG is an accident that happens each month. Tarryn spent a week here during deadline and she still doesn't quite know how we did it. The secret is in the sauce really. We have a little take-out place down the road here that serves... hang on, never mind all that.

Important bit: What we want is for you to

complete the survey and send it in to us. It gives us an idea of what you want, and because so many of you take the time and effort to **post/fax/e-mail** it back to us, it's a pretty solid idea of EXACTLY what you want. We then take all the results and over the course of a few issues magically change the current magazine into a more perfect version of it. It's important to remember that NAG and rAge have a major influence on the gaming industry in South Africa, so the more accurate we are the better for everyone and at the end of the day for you. You also get to win stuff.

Yes, we know it's a mission... filling it all in with a pen, folding it up with your fingers, buying envelopes and stamps, putting it all together and

then visiting the post office (we've heard there's some licking involved too?!). We do it like this because we know that if you went to all this trouble then you're serious about what you want in the magazine. Clicking little boxes on an Internet page is meaningless – for everyone involved. As a little side bonus, you can now spend some quality time with your grandparents as you learn all about stamps, ink, writing and paper.

To prove that we're still hip with the times, we're giving you the option to send us your survey via email. Complete the survey in pen and scan it as a PDF. Then send us an email at survey@nag.co.za with the file attached. Alternatively, you can fax your completed survey to 086 232 5096.

PRIZE BUNDLES *Prizes subject to change

1st Prize [valued at R16,000]

Gigabyte Z68XP-UD3 Motherboard, Gigabyte GTX 560, AOC e2352PHz 3D monitor Yama 715 USB3.00 case, Megarom games for a year (March-December 2012), Alienware Enhanced keyboard, Alienware TactX headset, Alienware TactX mouse, NAG LAN @ rAge ticket.



5 Runner-Up prizes [valued at R3,800 each]

R1,000 Takealot voucher, Nintendo hamper, Evetech hamper, Compuseed bag Animeworx figurine, NAG LAN @ rAge ticket.



Disclaimers: The games for a year from Megarom will be delivered one at a time as close to their release date as possible. These games are the bigger releases and not everything the company releases in a year. NAG will manage the prize. The winners will be published in the June 2012 issue of NAG magazine. No late entries will be considered. Prizes are not transferable to cash. Our decision is final. Prize winners will be randomly drawn.

Here's a list of our sponsors who made these prizes possible:



ABOUT YOU

Gender

- Male
- Female

Age

- Under 12
- 12-18
- 19-29
- 30-39
- 40+

How many hours a week do you spend playing games?

- Less than 4
- 5-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-29
- 30+

Which of these platforms do you have at home? [Check all answers that apply]

- Desktop PC
- Xbox 360
- PS3
- PSP
- Wii
- DS / 3DS
- Notebook
- Tablet

Do you play games on a phone/tablet?

- Yes
- No

What type of gaming PC do you have?

- None
- Basic
- Mid-range
- High-end
- Extreme

How tech savvy do you consider yourself to be?

- Basic knowledge
- Intermediate
- Advanced user

How much have you spent on hardware in the last year?

- Less than R1,000
- R1,000–R5,000
- R5,000–R10,000
- R10,000–R15,000
- R15,000–R20,000
- R20,000+

Have you ever upgraded your PC to make it compatible with a game?

- Yes
- No

How do you make decisions when buying games?

[Check all answers that apply]

- Magazine reviews
- Magazine advertising
- Internet research
- Demos
- Advice from in-store sales people
- Recommendations from friends
- Packaging (description and screenshots on the box)

How many games do you buy a year?

- None
- 1–5
- 6–10
- 11–15
- 15+

Where do you buy games? [Check all answers that apply]

- Retail store
- Online retailer
- Digital distribution

Have you purchased a second-hand game in the last 12 months?

- Yes
- No

When a new game is released, how soon do you buy it? [Check all answers that apply]

- Pre-order
- The day it launches
- Within the first week
- Within the first fortnight
- Within the first month
- Within the first three months
- Wait until I have the money

What Internet connection do you have at home?

- None
- Dial-up
- ADSL 512Kbps
- ADSL 1Mbps
- ADSL up to 10Mbps
- 3G / HSDPA
- Wireless

What type of games do you enjoy? [Check all answers that apply]

- Massively multiplayer online
- Sports
- Music and rhythm
- Adventure
- Racing
- Real-time strategy
- Role-playing game
- First-person shooter

- Simulation
- Independent
- Arcade / platformer
- Puzzle
- Management
- Board games / Pen and paper
- Collectible card games

How often do you purchase downloadable content (DLC)?

- Never
- Infrequently
- All the time

Where do you play multiplayer games? [Check all answers that apply]

- I don't
- Online
- Couch co-op
- LAN

NAG MAGAZINE

What influences your decision to buy a gaming magazine?

- Cover feature
- DVD
- Hardware content
- Exclusive content
- Competitions
- Price
- Review or preview of a specific game

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE?

Content

Letters

- More
- Less
- Same

Game reviews

- More
- Less
- Same

Game previews

- More
- Less
- Same

Features

- More
- Less
- Same

Hardware

- More
- Less
- Same

Competitions

- More
- Less
- Same

Subscription offers

- More
- Less
- Same

Hardware features

- More
- Less
- Same

Hardware roundups

- More
- Less
- Same

Advertising
 More Less Same

Supplements
 More Less Same

Style

Screenshots
 More Less Same

Bigger screenshots
 More Less Same

Article text
 More Less Same

Longer articles
 More Less Same

Shorter articles
 More Less Same

DVD

Demos
 More Less Same

Applications / utilities
 More Less Same

Patches
 More Less Same

Add-on files and modifications
 More Less Same

Driver updates
 More Less Same

Screenshots / artwork / wallpapers
 More Less Same

Game trailers
 More Less Same

Free games
 More Less Same

Would you pay an additional R10 for a double cover DVD?

Yes
 No

What additional content would you like to see in the magazine?
[Check all answers that apply]

- Mobile gaming
- Comics and figurines
- Strategy guides / walkthroughs / etc.
- Gamer lifestyle content (sports / fashion / health / etc.)
- Board and card games
- Game development and modification
- Local gaming coverage

How many people read your copy of NAG?

- Just me
- 1-2 people
- 3-4 people
- 4-6 people
- More than 6 people

How many people use your NAG DVD?

- Just me
- 1-2 people
- 3-4 people
- 4-6 people
- More than 6 people

Why don't you subscribe to NAG?

- I do subscribe
- Worried about the postal system
- Too expensive
- I prefer to buy it in-store
- Other (please specify): _____

Have you ever been to rAge?

Yes
 No

Do you visit the NAG website regularly?

Yes
 No

What other type of magazines do you buy on a regular basis?

- Men's lifestyle
- Women's lifestyle
- Motoring
- Sports
- Science and technology

COMMENTS YOU'D LIKE TO ADD:

NAG READER SURVEY 2012: COMPETITION DETAILS

Just because you took the time to randomly tick through the survey options and sent it in to us, you qualify to win some awesome prizes.
Deadline to send in the survey is: Must be posted before/on 31 March 2012.

Please remember: you don't have to take advantage of our subscription offer at the back of this survey to be eligible to win one of the five prizes. We're not that shallow.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SECTION:

Can we send you the occasional e-mail with stuff you'd probably like?
 Yes No

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