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Contents

Regulars

Opinion

Previews

Reviews

Hardware

Features

It's my nightmare and I'll scream if I want to!

They say when you start talking about your dreams in print it's time to look at other career choices and perhaps get a nice hobby that involves plenty of sunshine and fresh air. Lucky for me then talking about my dreams is not what this is about.

Actually, I do need to talk a little about them for context, but this isn't about them – you'll see.

So the other night I had what most people might call a nightmare: Tarryn was in it (not the scary part), and we were going under the ground to explore some evil house or a school that was infected by some oozy, slimy meaty entity (*Dead Space* – not sure). Tarryn disappeared down a hole in the floor (into the entity) and I took another route fighting shapeless things in the dark. Before things got too intense and weird I woke up. Anyway, in this dream and ones like it my view of the action switches to third person and not first person. So I kind of watch what's happening to me while I'm doing it. I only have first person dreams when they are fun, pleasurable or exciting and interesting. The "bad" stuff like slaying acid vomiting aliens and/or nuking the Dome at Northgate (don't ask) I do in the third person – to keep me detached, I think a psychiatrist would guess. So laying there in the dark a thought dropped out of the collective and I mused, "I wonder if you dream like that because you're a gamer." People who don't play games have no perspective other than the first person. They don't do anything that involves controlling anything from a third person perspective. On the other hand, we gamers switch from first to third and from 2D to 3D and top-down to isometric all the time since we started gaming. The first time I grasped just how clever and complex games could be was playing an isometric puzzle game called *Head Over Heels* on the Commodore 64. You had to split up a pair of characters to solve the puzzles. This was a long time ago when a concept like this was on the bleeding edge but it was a new way of looking at games, a different perspective as it were. Since then I've played from so many different viewpoints (even inside rocks thanks to *Tomb Raider*) I've lost count, and I think this has changed the way I view my dreams.

I'd like to hear from you lot about your gaming related dream perspectives, not so much dreams about games, because we've all probably had plenty of those, but *how* you think playing games affects how you dream. I did a little snap poll around the office but the results were inconclusive so let's find out what everyone else thinks. That's it I hope, unless I've just typed 500 odd words of evidence in the case to have me committed?

I'D LIKE TO THANK...

I don't know if I'm going to get all of this in before the orchestra starts playing but I'll give it a go. For our cartoony *Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two* feature thanks must go to Gail from Prima Interactive and Warren Spector from Junction Point. Then, for *Darksiders II: Death Strikes*, thanks go to Howard from Ster Kinekor and Marvin Donald (game director) for taking the time to speak to us about his game. For the epic *Assassin's Creed III*, we say hey to Rene' from Megarom, Dan Gardener and Hayley Johnstone from Ubisoft London and of course Matt Turner (lead script writer for *ACIII*) for taking the time to talk to us. Almost done... Last, but not least, Sarah from Claudia's Travel who had to make a million flight alterations across four different countries so that we could get to London. Finally, thanks to Rob Guillory for kindly letting us to use his artwork in *NAG* and also for taking the time to answer a few questions. All you people rock!

OUT OF SPACE

We never had space for the T-shirts in the GELF on page 32 thanks to our art director's "artistic vision" or some other nonsense. This is the one that got away...
- RedTide
Editor

megarom interactive

LETTERS@NAG.CO.ZA

INBOX

LETTER OF THE MONTH MAY 2012

LETTER OF THE MONTH

The "Letter of the Month" prize is sponsored by the good folks at Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most inspired bit of wisdom of cleverness.
Note: You can't change the games or the platform they come on.

HARD TECHNICAL STUFF

Land mail: P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158
Better mail: letters@nag.co.za
Important: Include your details when mailing us or you'll never get your prize if you win…

From: Siemeon
Subject: Our equality is being broken

Recently Battlefield 3, perhaps one of the greatest multiplayer offerings of our generation, introduced an option to unlock all weapons/mods/upgrades by way of buying them. This spells the start of what could be perhaps the biggest sh1tstorm in gaming's history. Video games have always been the greatest equaliser on the face of the earth. They've put us no matter the race, sex, creed, belief or whatever you care to name on equal ground with no advantage over each other. This took quite the battering with the Call of Duty approach of having your rank determine your weapons. But with these shortcut kits in Battlefield 3, all equality has been obliterated by the age old evil of money. Now the gamers who have dedicated themselves to the game and poured hundreds of hours into it are being obliterated by someone who just had to pour a few extra bucks into it. This entire unlocking system within the gaming industry is getting worse and worse. For example: Gears of War's weapon skins are extremely limited to those without Microsoft points, that in itself isn't that bad, but putting a price on stuff that influences gameplay is much worse . Even though a lot of people claim that Battlefield and Call of Duty are both perfectly balanced in terms of weapon strength; everyone knows that comparing the rifle you unlock at level 50 with your starting rifle is similar to comparing a peashooter to a cannon. The level ground is gone and once again the rich gain better footing, in our final and once beautiful frontier. And the sad part is that we can't do much to stop it.

Boy, this whole paying for weapon unlocks in Battlefield 3 is a hot topic this month; I received about 19 letters on this topic alone (50/50 for and against). I'll simplify how I see it and then you can agree or disagree as you see fit at the usual address. I fully support the idea of paying for things instead of spending endless hours unlocking them. I have money but I don't have time. I also have the money because I spend my time making it; time I might have otherwise spent in the game unlocking things. With this new "service" I can go to work, make supper, feed the cats, watch some TV, and then play a few hours of Battlefield 3 without feeling like I'm behind the pack and getting nowhere fast. I also like the way this has worked out because those that do spend their whole day and night in front of the game sometimes have superiority complexes based purely on how much time they've sunk into a game and nothing else. So yeah, bring it on and level that playing field with cash. Time does equal money after all and this just proves it. ;) Ed.

From: Sebastian
Subject: Awards

Hey amazing magazine makers, thank you for bringing joy to my life every month. I am happy that finally gamers, for the most part, are not stereotyped as much as before and that we and the games are getting more respect. It is my opinion that video games are in many ways better than movies and they sometimes have amazing music as well that should be considered for higher awards than the VGA's or E3's game of the show. I mean there are the Oscars and the Grammy's, but there is no award for video games that people respect and admire, and that many can only hope to get. You know that every actor out there wants an Oscar and that even if the film does not sell that is the proudest moment in their career, but do you think that game developers would rather have more sales or one of the awards? I want the biggest honour for a game developer to be an award like an Oscar because some of them truly deserve that, which would get them remembered for their accomplishments even after their deaths.

I think the Video Game Awards and others like the Independent Games Festival are very prestigious affairs in the gaming industry. The other thing with games is that it takes a huge team of people to make them, so who should get the award? The guy that figured out better hit detection or the guy who drew all the amazing backgrounds or the manager who drinks coffee and makes it happen? It's not a play with a single actor but rather an extravaganza with hundreds of roles. Still, the VGAs are special and on TV and everything and gamers watch them. Who cares about Joe public and what he/she/it thinks anyway. Ed.

From: Ezra
Subject: Hi from India

Thank you for producing such an awesome magazine. I've been hooked on it for ages. :) I recently returned from my holiday in India and have to say that the March Issue of NAG helped save my sanity on the way there.

What with having a 12 hour flight to Dubai with an 8 hour overlay following that in the airport on the way to Chennai. So the NAG pretty much lived in my backpack for the rest of the trip and went with me to many interesting and exotic locales. I thought the image of Far Cry 3 was quite fitting, especially when we were in Goa. Most of the coastline consists of beaches and tropical peninsulas, not so many bloodied knives though. In Mahabalipuram got to chill in the shade of a freaking huge boulder called Krishna's Butter Ball which has thus far refused to roll over even though it is precariously perched on a solid rock embankment. Hi from the past in the shade of the Butter Ball with my girlfriend and my NAG. ;)
Like. Ed

From: Peter
Subject: Game of last Year?
It's got me puzzled how critics could have bestowed the honour of game of the year upon Skyrim in 2011 and I feel assured that none of them even completed the game. Comments on the internet lead me to believe that Skyrim is plagued by endless glitches, just as Elder Scrolls IV was and still is. I attempted to complete the latter game on 3 occasions since release in 2006 and downloaded an available Xbox patch recently, that meant starting the game from scratch. Nothing has changed; the recommendation of deleting saved games or holding 'A' to clear the cache is as good as farting against the wind. Soon to celebrate my 65th birthday I hate to leave quests unfinished, my time has become most precious and I have wasted 100's of hours in a quest such as the above, which could lead me in finally becoming a King in something. What could be good news to all the millions of gamers that have played Elder Scrolls IV is that Bethesda Game Studios seem now finally to have gathered that their past has come to haunt them and a recent mail received informs me that their game developers are currently working on more fixes for the game. Hoping that they get their act together this time, one wonders what took them so long, in perfecting a release since 2006.

As beautiful the game may be I will not fork out my pension on purchasing Skyrim until assured that the game can be completed, good things must come to an end, let's hope that Bethesda gets it right before my end.

I think Skyrim gives the player an open-ended adventure and world they can get completely lost in (which is why it probably won). I agree that it's

ON THE FORUMS

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Q: Which game character do you care the least about, to the point that if they died tomorrow, you wouldn't be bothered?

"Alex Vance, because well, 'Look at me, I'm with the Freeman!' If Freeman were to ever say something, I hope it is, 'Move b!tch, get out the way' even if it is in sign language."
ZoRPA

"Pac-man. I have killed him so many damn times..."
nukehead

"Kane from the Command & Conquer series. No one cares if he dies any more."
mordread

"James (ME3), he was essentially a marine meat bag with about as much depth as an empty cup."
OllieTheDog

"I have an inexplicable hatred of Miranda Lawson from Mass Effect 2 & 3. It's even worse because I usually take her along because of her squad damage boost ability."
KimmyKae

far from perfect but then amongst all the imperfect games, it's probably the best of the batch for what it represents – and they continue to tweak and fix it. While you wait for that next patch why not give the Mass Effect *universe a try (bear with the first one however); now there's an amazing game/story/ experience like no other – especially if you enjoy science fiction. I'd also like to point out that if you played a game for hundreds of hours then they are not wasted – if you enjoyed most of them. Someone smarter than me said, "Life is a journey"... or something like that. Ed.*

From: Anna
Subject: My Short Story
I've been reading NAG for quite a while and decided to send in a letter on my experience with gaming in general. Games have always been a part of my life, since as far back as I can remember.

When I was five I would accompany my mom to work every day, just because there was a PS1 waiting for me there. I would sit there for hours playing Brian Lara, FIFA 95 and my most cherished game Tekken 4. One might think it sad that the only use I ever had for sports gel as a child, was to put on the blisters that formed on my thumbs from the button mashing I did on that game, but I couldn't care less.

Then a few years later I discovered the PS2, but sadly I couldn't afford it. Instead I would run to the shops every Friday and hire out a ratty looking PS2 and the game of all games, Kingdom Hearts. This will forever be my most cherished game. I have a copy somewhere in my cupboard and every now and then still play it. Sadly Square Enix lost the plot shortly after making the game and hasn't made a good game since; I didn't even manage to finish Kingdom Hearts 2. I still play every

Final Fantasy game, hoping that the miracle that was Square will return but I think it is a broken dream.

Today there isn't a game I won't play on my Xbox 360, well maybe not Uncharted but you get what I mean. I play everything I can get my hands on, from FPSs to RPGs. Right now my favourite game is the Witcher 2. I've only played about 5 hours (I had to borrow it from a friend) but fell in love with it in the first 5 minutes.

I have a dream of one day becoming a game developer, and maybe someday help create a game like Kingdom Hearts that will bring a smile to someone's face like it did mine. Until then I'll keep reading NAG and hopefully learn a thing or two from the greats.

Part of what gets me out of bed in the morning (besides the fact that I play games for a living) is making NAG *into a magazine that will inspire a reader out there like I was inspired when I was growing up reading all those UK gaming magazines (there was no local magazine). So I get what you're saying 100%. Ed.*

From: Dawie
Subject: Some things will never change
The other day I was completely overjoyed when I saw the latest DBZ game on the store shelf and bought it without second thought. Then I thought about when I was five-years old and saw the first DBZ commercial on television and got excited over the new show. When I watched it that afternoon I got addicted to the entire franchise. Now, 10 years later, nothing has changed and then I wondered. Do other people also have things from their past that they'll never outgrow and games that have enriched them by giving them the opportunity to take control or actually be their favourite characters or heroes? If there are other people like this, I just want to let them know that they are not alone. Thanks for a great magazine, you really give meaning to the term "outstanding literature" and really ease the decision of purchase.

I still think about heroes like He-man, the Gummy Bears, Maya the Bee and probably the knight from Ghost n' Goblins *from time to time. But, I've outgrown them because when I watch or play them now they just don't seem as magical, insane or interesting.* Star Wars *and* Star Trek *and so on is an easy one – I'll never outgrow wanting to travel to far away stars and explore the universe. Ed.*

From: Dariusz
Subject: Book by its cover: too true!
Thank you for an awesome magazine! Without a doubt the best SA has to offer!
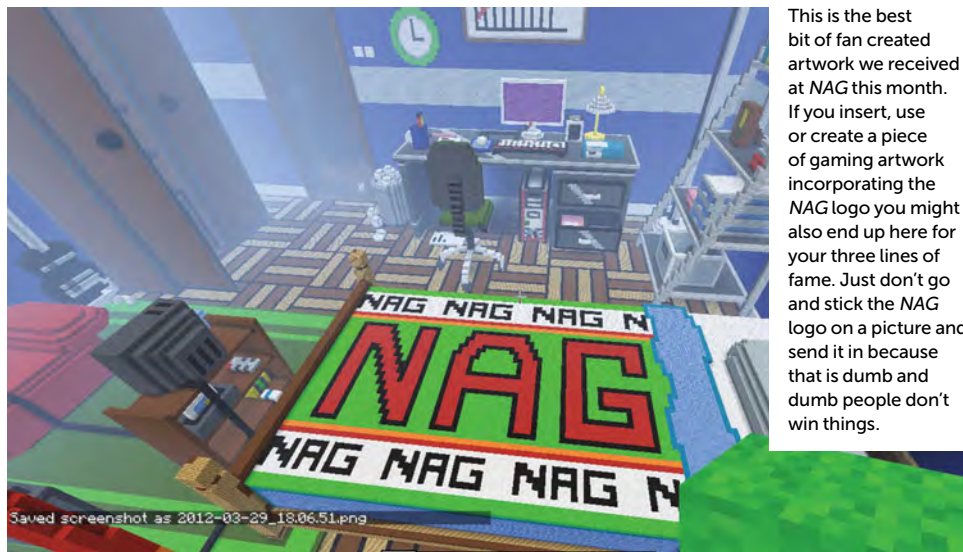
This is the best bit of fan created artwork we received at *NAG* this month. If you insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the *NAG* logo you might also end up here for your three lines of fame. Just don't go and stick the *NAG* logo on a picture and send it in because that is dumb and dumb people don't win things.

Justin Davis & Brent Lunderstedt, "Any kid's dream is to sleep under NAG bed sheets. Been working on this for a while, and incorporated the NAG logo – thought it would be cool." *Update: after they were notified of the win they came clean, admitting they downloaded the map and modified it. Still okay by us.*

I buy NAG religiously (in fact gaming is probably my religion). I value all your articles and your input on games is vital to my gaming purchases. In fact I am just sitting here reading the February issue (long story of falling behind in my NAG reading while trying to get through the wheel of time) and now I'm days from the April issue and find myself in a mad dash to catch up on all things gaming. Alas I digress, the reason for my letter is I just finished Miklós article "Book by its Cover". It was so true, I am a personal trainer, and I look like a typical jock. Yet I am the biggest nerd in creation. I play Dungeons and Dragons, watch anime and work for the sole purpose of buying a game or two every month! The only reason I survived my teen years is because I was bigger than almost everyone. It's sad how people judge by appearance. So thank you to Miklós for having the balls to admit his own mistake. It's a rare thing indeed and something more people should do. Thanks for the awesome magazine gentlemen and ladies! Don't go changing!

Miklós was gushing over this fan mail he received. He wanted to do a speech and everything but then the music started playing and he was escorted off stage sobbing. Ed.

From: Brendan
Subject: Where did the new ones go?
Bright ideas. It seems to me that that is what is lacking in the world of gaming. Every month there are releases of series reboots or sequels to successful games and granted these games are fantastic. But the problem for me lies where the developers of this world are trying new ideas, failing, and giving up.

THE SHORTS

Extracts of n00b from NAG letters

"Anyway, I read that article Miktar wrote about preconceptions (a few times to understand it), and now I finally know why it is that a certain friend of mine always, always hates every game I play."
— Sebastian

"He never was built to be an adventurer; it was something of a miracle that he made it so long especially after that arrow in the... leg."
— David

"Also, viewership will grow by 100 % week on week because the show will have the greatest, most energetic, handsome and downright coolest host ever... Michael James."
— Isma-eel

For example, take LA Noire, fantastic game, fantastic visual, interesting gameplay and a great story, barring the end. So why did Rockstar just <spoiler> and hint at what is a very possible demise for the series? Is it because game developers are scared to invest in uncertainty, or is it rather due to the fact that it's the public's fault that we are getting nothing new.

To be honest, the public have a way of sticking with what they're used to, and that's fine, but it does mean that we never get anything new. What I'm asking for is that new ideas and concepts come through, because I'm tired of playing through battlefields and call of duties. Even though they are good games, I want something new. Obviously there are examples where my demands are being met, but there are few. I feel that if the gaming industry is to continue evolving, the only way is to create new concepts and franchises. Otherwise it's going to end up with COD 47 [coming in 2047, Ed]. To be honest, I'm pretty happy with this year's releases, but in the future, it would be great to see a title without a digit on the end.

If you're not an indie studio you need the endless COD *and* Battlefield *clones and sequels to pay for the games that do something different and innovate. The rubbish movie franchise to game atrocities must also happen to open the gaps for new ideas to spark within those companies. It's a cycle with many mouths to feed and high risk ventures are rare, so support the sequels because (with some companies) they end up paving the way for the innovation. Or you can just pledge money to a project you like here. www.kickstarter.com. Ed.*

I, Gamer

Way to go Internet, that's real mature

Apparently Electronic Arts is the *Worst Company In America*. There's this website that you might have come across called The Consumerist – Shoppers Bite Back. For six years now The Consumerist (which prides itself on "slamming bad corporations") has held an annual, vitriol-sh*t-storm in which readers are encouraged to vote for the company that most deserves a "Golden Poo" trophy. In the past, the contest held some merit as it allowed the website's substantial reader-base to air its displeasure at some of the worst companies around. Some of those companies include BP, which won in 2011 because their negligence resulted in one of the worst oil spills the world has ever seen. Remember that? That's a good example of a well-deserved Golden Poo award and title of Worst Company in America, despite BP being British.

According to the guidelines of The Consumerist's tournament, companies are nominated by the website's readership. This year's competition saw 32 nominations; EA was included for the first time and beat the Bank of America in the final by winning almost two-thirds of the votes.

Granted, a total of 250,000 votes doesn't exactly represent a population figure of over 311,000,000 so perhaps the title of Worst Company In America is a tad flamboyant? What it does represent, I think, is a sizable portion of butt-hurt. I don't think it's a coincidence that EA's "victory" came at the same time as the height of gamer indignation caused by the ending of *Mass Effect 3*.

To me, it seems gamers managed to hijack another online tool to voice their disgust with EA. In doing so, however, they've equated the publisher to oil companies and banks that have literally been responsible for the death of employees and nearly crashing the world economy respectively. EA, on the other hand, is selling a non-essential luxury product, but because they've angered some entitled customers who *voluntarily purchased* what was on offer, they've been placed alongside some of the shadiest corporations in existence.

The Consumerist doesn't exactly exonerate itself by posting sweeping statements in an attempt to validate the findings of its contest. According to the website: "EA and its ilk deliberately hold back game content with the sole intent of charging a fee for it at a later date. It's one thing to support a game with new content that is worth the price. It's another to put out an inferior — and occasionally broken — product with the mindset of 'ah, we'll fix it later and make some money for doing so.'"

So are we to understand that all EA games get inferior DLC and that all EA games are invariably broken until we *pay* for patches? That's pretty much what The Consumerist implies, without any examples to back up their claim.

Perhaps this is how consumer displeasure is voiced these days: by utilising online tools to make a statement, when the only statement that should be made should be done so with wallets. But people won't do that, will they? People still want to play EA's games, despite all the online chest-thumping.

Perhaps they're right: Electronic Arts is just *the worst*. I hate them for taking risks in publishing *Dead Space* and *Mirror's Edge*; I hate them for charging me R100 less per game in South Africa; I hate them for allowing their developers to utilise time and resources to release free DLC that addresses the displeasure of fans. Man, EA you are just the worst.
- Miklós Szecsei

Publishers never change...
...but the industry does

If you're reading this and happen to fall within the average age of our readers, there's a good chance that you haven't played *Wasteland* – the hard-as-nails, open-world post-apocalyptic RPG from Brian Fargo and a number of important people at Interplay. The 1988 game was an accomplishment for its time in terms of both technology and storytelling, as it was one of the first ever games to introduce long-lasting consequences in a persistent world based on player choice. It's also considered to be the forefather of the *Fallout* series, and the two share a number of gameplay similarities as well as members of the development teams.

Now, Brian Fargo is preparing to lead his current studio, inXile Entertainment, in the development of an official sequel to *Wasteland*. Despite having recovered the rights from EA some ten years ago, Fargo has been unable to find a publisher interested in supporting the title, and as a result this project will be entirely funded through Kickstarter funding (which you may recall from the April issue of *NAG* is what Tim Schafer very successfully used to fund his next project), which means

Dark days narrowly avoided for Vigil Games

When THQ decided that it was time to issue cutbacks throughout the company, Vigil Games' *Warhammer 40,000: Dark Millennium Online* found itself on the knife edge between continued support and total closure. The publisher sought out a partner to help bring the game to market, but a poor response to that request means that now, *DMO* has had a seriously large slice of gameplay removed: it'll no longer be an MMO.

This move is crushing for those who long to ride shotgun with a squad of fellow Space Marines, but in light of the publisher's recent troubles, and considering how far into development the game is, it's probably best that they release something and attempt to make back some of the cash spent on development. This move isn't a total saviour, however; 79 full-time employees at Vigil and 39 at Relic Entertainment (which provides some assets for the game) have been let go following the announcement.

The trimmed-down version of the game, which now drops the "Online" part of its title, will still feature a multiplayer component, and THQ president Brian Farrell says that it'll include "robust digital content and engaging community features" to go as far as possible to appeal to online gamers without necessarily attempting to compete in the already crowded MMO market.

that it's going to be a game funded by the fans and made for the fans, without any publishers involved. It's going to be hardcore and gritty. It's being developed for primary release on PC; this is not a console-friendly, pick-up-and-play action-RPG; it'll be isometric, turn-based, old school in every conceivable way.

At the time of writing, the game has received over $2.1 in funding, which means that inXile can afford to bring in Obsidian Entertainment and, as importantly, studio COO Chris Avellone, who's been kicking around the industry since his work on *Fallout 2* alongside Fargo. We're extremely interested to see how Obsidian will get along without interference from publishers, as it's often been cited in the past as the cause of Obsidian's games' less-than-stellar performance.

What's next for Starbreeze?

S o, now that the *Syndicate* FPS reboot (which we quite enjoyed, despite its blatant indifference towards our cherished memories) is out in the wild, and people are (hopefully) playing it, what's next for developer Starbreeze Studios, whose past work also includes the excellent *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay* (and its sequel), as well as the original *The Darkness*?

Well, it seems free-to-play is the frequently travelled path of choice for the Swedish studio. Their next shooter, called *Cold Mercury,* will be built on the increasingly popular business model, and that's all we know for now really. Fret not, dear reader, because this does not mean Starbreeze is exiting the AAA market.

"Starbreeze will not leave the AAA segment," says Starbreeze CEO Mikael Nermark. "We are discussing with several leading game publisher on publisher financed games, but we will broaden our product portfolio of games in the new business models and segments that have arisen in the games industry. I am convinced that Starbreeze will be successful with the new games."

BOMBS AWAY!

Andy Davidson, the creator of the original *Worms*, has returned to Team 17 just in time to announce that the company is preparing to release a brand new *Worms* game this year. It's been 14 years since Davidson has been in the business, but his return to the industry will be great news for both newcomers to the series and fans of yore. *Worms Revolution* will feature an all-new 2.5D game engine that keeps the classic 2D gameplay with high-detail, gorgeous polygonal backgrounds and playing fields. It's every bit old-fashioned *Worms* as you could hope for, and will launch in Q3 this year through digital distribution only on PC, PSN and XBLA.

The Game Stalker

We are...

Casual gamers.
They are spurned and cursed by the gaming world as the downfall of the hardcore gaming industry.
Developers on the other hand seem to be making games more and more accessible to the "casual" gamer. Why you ask? Well I'm sure the answer is probably money... The plethora of dancing games on the market certainly seems to indicate this.

But I personally don't understand the need for people to marginalise casual gamers as the lepers of the gaming world. No I wouldn't identify myself as a casual gamer (someone on the *NAG* forums said that these are the people who play once, maybe twice a week) but what actually constitutes a hardcore gamer?

People who play games professionally? Maybe. They certainly are very good, but they're often training so hard that they really only play one game.

How about the people who play every game imaginable? Well, yes, I guess they could be considered hardcore, but if they only play on a specific platform does this count? Must you be PC, PS3, and Xbox? Do gamers who play every game on the Wii qualify as hardcore gamers?

"Of course not" I hear you mutter... the Wii isn't a "real" gamer console. Well, ok I can't say that I own a Wii, whereas I own all the others, but why does this make it less hardcore?

Is it the silly motion controls? PS3 and Xbox have those now as well. On the other hand, although the Wii might not have the greatest titles, it has *Dead Space* along with *Call of Duty* and a number of games considered hardcore titles.

"It's not the games, it's the processing power," you argue. Well, the upcoming Wii U is reported to have twice the graphical and processing power of the Xbox, so will that then qualify as a hardcore console, or will the stigma of the current generation Wii hamper its acceptance?

I don't identify myself with any "camp". I'm a gamer. I play some "hardcore" games; I play some "casual" games. Sometimes I have to play (and finish) some truly awful games as a part of my job.

And that said there are very few games now being made without a casual gamer mode.

Mass Effect 3 for example, has three storyline options that vary between allowing full control over dialogue and allowing you simply to get on with the shooting. *The Witcher 2* was an interesting case as well, in that the developers even stated that the game was made for hardcore RPG gamers.

I also recently saw an argument for "core" gamers vs. "casual" gamers on a forum, one referring to someone who plays games as an "infrequent distraction" as opposed to a "consistent hobby".

Good argument. But what about those people who play Farmville every day for six or seven hours a day? Are they hardcore social gamers? Surely this constitutes a "consistent hobby"?

I'm also firmly convinced that those people who don't identify themselves as gamers simply haven't found the right game yet. Whether that's playing solitaire on your phone in bed, or an all night *MW3* multiplayer session, everyone plays something.

And surely if there are enough of us playing, we shouldn't feel the need to be marginalised.

We are Gamers.
We are Legion.
We will take over the world.
Expect us.
- Pippa Tshabalala

Rumour: Next Xbox has Blu-ray, needs Internet

Cast your minds back to last month's edition of *NAG* and you might recall us running a news article that mentioned website MCV proclaiming there'd be no optical drive in the next Xbox. Also, if your mind is capable of remembering things you read in *NAG* that long ago, then we're suitably impressed; 90% of the time we can't even remember what we had for breakfast.

New rumours have surfaced regarding the next Xbox console, but this time they're courtesy of website VG24/7. According to this latest batch, the next Xbox (which is apparently still codenamed "Durango") will have a Blu-ray drive, which is completely the opposite of what was rumoured last month. Yeah, we're battling to keep up with all of this as well. It's worth mentioning, however, that in the interim there's been talk of Microsoft releasing a stripped-down version of the Xbox 360 that will only serve as a media hub and portal to Xbox Live Arcade games. It's probable that this is the unit that MCV was originally reporting on last month.

According to VG24/7, the next Xbox will also require an "always-on Internet connection as an anti-piracy measure". This would double as an anti-used game measure as well. This rumour, coupled with similar rumours about the PlayStation 4 or "Orbis" having the same requirements, leads us to think that both Microsoft and Sony are taking their loss of revenue due to second-hand game sales very seriously.

VG24/7 didn't stop there with their report; they're claiming they have information suggesting the next Xbox will feature "four or six" CPU cores. Apparently, one core will be used for the Xbox operating system and another will be reserved for Kinect 2, which will supposedly come standard. Furthermore, the next Xbox reportedly sports a GPU based on AMD's 7000 series of GPUs.

Finally, VG24/7 claims Microsoft's next console will be available during the 2013 holiday period, which is also the rumoured release date for the next PlayStation console.

Power outage: could the Wii U be less powerful than its current-gen competitors?

It seems there's a new rumour about Nintendo's upcoming Wii U every other week. It's difficult to separate the potential truth from the absolute excrement, but if the latest turns out to hold some truth, it could prove quite shocking.

Supposedly, the long-believed idea is that the Wii U will at least be on par with the Xbox 360's and PS3's technical specs, if not better, but this rumour insists that that's not the case. Instead, it'll be less technologically powerful than either. An anonymous source allegedly said this to *GI.biz:* "No, it's not up to the same level as the PS3 or the 360. The graphics are just not as powerful."

"Yeah, that's true. It doesn't produce graphics as well as the PS3 or the 360," another "anonymous developer" agreed. "There aren't as many shaders, it's not as capable. Sure, some things are better, mostly as a result of it being a more modern design. But overall the Wii U just can't quite keep up."

Oh dear. Still, even if all this hearsay turns out to be true, Nintendo has proved with the Wii that you don't need to have the most horsepower to win the race. They're once again betting on the power of their unique controller to sell the system, despite whatever hardware it's packing under the hood. Nevertheless, we've been hoping for a more powerful piece of tech on which to play our favourite Nintendo franchises, so we're hoping that this rumour turns out to be nothing more than just that: a rumour.

Brace yourselves Glorious PC Master Race, Dark Souls is coming

In early January this year, the Internet decided that it wanted the really, really, ridiculously difficult console RPG *Dark Souls* to come to PC. Ordinarily, what the Internet wants, the Internet gets – see Double Fine Adventure's Kickstarter and *Mass Effect 3*'s extended ending for further proof of this fact. An online petition was formed that rapidly exceeded 60,000 "signatures", which caught Namco Bandai's attention because money.

The ever-vigilant underbelly of the Internet, NeoGAF, has since spotted that a German gaming magazine called "PC Action" featured a preview of the PC version of *Dark Souls*, which has been given the subtitle "*Prepare to Die Edition*" – a subtitle that we at NAG completely attest to because PC gamers, you will die. Again and again and again.

Dark Souls: Prepare to Die Edition will feature new bosses, but other than that will be identical to the console versions. The mere mention of new bosses is probably enough to convince the more ardent (read: masochistic) fans of the console game to pick up a second copy on PC. According to the German preview, the game will be out in August this year.

Kingdoms of Amalur gets floaty DLC

We quite enjoyed *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning*. It's a good thing (or a bad thing, depending on how you feel about game addiction) then that this already huge action RPG is set to get a second DLC expansion following the first pirate-themed offering. This one's called *Teeth of Naros*, and invites us to "explore the city of Idylla, which magically floats in the sky above the Teeth of Naros."

Idylla is a floating Kollossae (a "devout race of giants") city, and the Teeth of Naros is "a forgotten land" named after an ancient troll god. "That's all well and good, but what about my quests and loot and stuff?" we hear you ask. Well, gentle reader, Idylla offers more than 20 (so 21, we're guessing) new side quests, five enormous new dungeons, new enemies, new Twists of Fate, nine new armour sets, six new shields and 18 weapons unique to *Teeth of Naros*. The DLC should be available by the time you read this, on PC and PS3 for $9.99, or 800 Microsoft Points on Xbox LIVE.

The Indie Investigator

Design layers

The biggest problem with the Internet right now is that there's just so darn much of it. Right? Right. And when you're trying to peddle something awesome to the masses (like, say, your latest game project) it can be a rather colossal pain to get people playing long enough to appreciate it properly.

There's a little psychological factoid about the 43-second attention span. In short, that's about as much time as the average person is willing to dedicate towards a new and uncertain activity before they start switching off – unless, of course, there happens to be a suitably rewarding bit of feedback and/or sufficiently large explosion involved.

How brain wizards discover this sort of specific stuff with all their neuroscalpels and lab coats and whatnot is uncertain, but common experience does dictate that if you can't sell your game's core to a prospective player within the first five minutes or so, you're going to lose them forever. This is a modern era of communication, networking and yo-ho-ho levels of digital piracy – why spend more time on something that *may* become fun when so many cool offerings are already scintillating on the horizon?

This does present a problem to people who enjoy designing "time investment" games such as RPGs. In fact, it tends to be a rather hot topic of discussion in RPG communities specifically – the genre's lack of representation in competitions, the difficulty of meaningful tester feedback and so on. It's not like smaller devs have the clout and hype of this year's hot blockbusters – titles that people readily exercise more patience with, particularly if they pay several hundred rand for it (ignore this if the aforementioned yo-ho-ho applies, I suppose).

So, give up and die now, right? Well, no. The important thing to bear in mind is that no matter how deep or expansive your game eventually becomes, it's a skill and an art to make enough of its awesomeness transparent from the word go. Does your game contain sprawling empires, deep lore and a fascinating overarching story? Great: pick the best bits of that to drop into the first five minutes. Is your game set up mechanically so that there are many fascinating tricks, edge cases and complex interactions in its ruleset that will amaze veteran players? Congratulations on your advanced design, but is the simpler stuff fun enough to get people playing to that level?

No matter how far you think ahead with your project, it should always be appreciable on as many levels as possible to ensure long-term rewards and success. A game which players can only "warm up to" after a great deal of slogging is bound to fail, no matter how fantastic it may be in the long run. Somewhat less fatally – but still not quite the best case – is a game which gives everything it has in the first two minutes, then quickly crumbles as the long-term system reveals itself to be one-dimensional and unrewarding (unless you're sneaky and callous enough to hook players with a Skinnerian psyche trick, of course).

When you design your stuff anywhere beyond the initial prototyping level, always think about it in layers of complexity. Divide your attention between those layers as well as possible. It's a simple but effective rule that produces great *and* accessible games.
- **Rodain Joubert**

Pre-order The Secret World, get cool stuff

Funcom has revealed the pre-order incentives for its upcoming modern-day myths 'n' legends MMO *The Secret World*. First up, anybody who pre-orders the game will automatically get access to all of the game's beta weekends, starting from the 11th of May. Funcom seems adamant that these beta weekends will run most weekends (with successive one adding new content for players to experience), pretty much right through to the game's launch date on June 19th.

In addition, those willing to hand over the dough before launch day will get a head start of up to four days on the action, an in-game item that boosts XP gain, an in-game T-shirt (which are infinitely cooler than real-life T-shirts, obviously) featuring a unique monster design, a combat-capable pet (either the Ferocious Wolf, Egyptian Cat or Loyal Hound) and the chance to reserve their character's name early. *The Secret World* has been looking more and more intriguing since its initial announcement so long ago, and we can't wait to see how its alluring features turn out. For more info, head over here: **http://www.thesecretworld.com/news/pre_order_now_access_exclusive_beta_weekends**
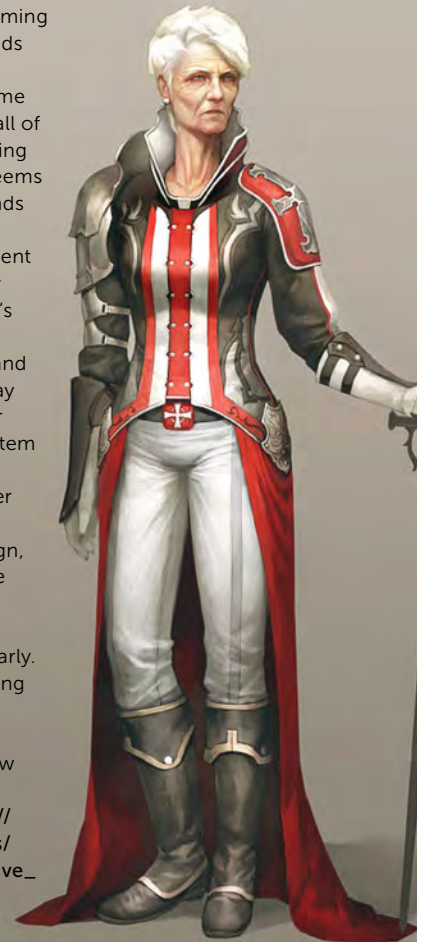
Jumping the gun

Here's an interesting bit of trivia for anyone who's anxiously awaiting the arrival of Gearbox Software's upcoming *Aliens*-themed FPS, *Aliens: Colonial Marines*. It seems that, when SEGA's announcement of the game rolled around way back in 2006, Gearbox hadn't even begun development of the game.

"Everyone was just so excited that the deal got done," said Gearbox's head honcho Randy Pitchford while speaking to *Joystiq* about the upcoming survival horror-style FPS. "20th Century Fox, Gearbox and SEGA all had to agree to do this and

0x10ᶜ

Notch has a new game! It's called 0x10ᶜ

And we have absolutely no idea how to say it, unless that's since been revealed by Mojang after we've gone to print – in which case we're one of the cool kids who totally knows how to say the name.

The guy who brought you *Minecraft* is about to bring you a space game set in the year 281 474 976 712 644 AD. The game's background is based on an alternate history in which the space race never ended. This resulted in rich folk and corporations getting involved in space travel, which eventually led to the creation of a "deep sleep cell" that malfunctioned (due to driver incompatibilities – obviously), putting space travellers asleep for a very long time. Those super-sleepy people begin to wake up billions of years later only to find the universe riddled with black holes and on the brink of extinction.

The game will feature things like looting abandoned ships, landing on planets, engineering your space ship, programming "fully working computer system[s]", mining, trading and duct tape. We're kind of excited about the duct tape part, but Mojang fans online seem more interested in the "fully functioning emulated 16 bit CPU that can be used to control your entire ship".

The game is still very early on in development, but Notch and the rest of the team at Mojang are approaching the game in the same way they did *Minecraft*. This means we can expect public alpha and beta versions throughout the development cycle; the feedback from which will be used to streamline the final game.

The cost of the game has yet to be decided, but Notch points out that there is a significant multiplayer "multiverse" planned which would likely incur a monthly fee. If you want to simply play the game as a single player then there will be a once-off purchase fee and no monthly subscription.

SUDA51 CONFIRMES HIS NEXT TITLE

As if *Lollipop Chainsaw* wasn't enough, lead designer Goichi Suda is already busying himself with his next project – *Killer is Dead*. The equally oddly-named game will apparently see players take on the role of an executioner whose job is to hunt down and kill "S-level criminals" – whatever those are. While this isn't a direct sequel to Grasshopper Manufacture's PS2 and GameCube title *Killer7*, we understand that it'll have a few similarities and could even be thought of as a spiritual successor. Insofar as the actual gameplay goes, we've got very little information other than "it'll involve swords". The game will be published by *Lollipop* publisher Kadokawa Games, which is good news as it means there's a stable relationship between the two companies that might well be the bearer of a number of interesting new titles in the future.

Killer is Dead is scheduled for release next year for PS3 and Xbox 360.

with Aliens: Colonial Marines

commit themselves to it. The fact that that deal even existed – everyone on the business side was so excited that the deal happened that they just wanted to tell the world. So before we even started on the game they announced the deal."

Naturally, in the time since then, gamers have gotten incredibly antsy about the title, assuming an impending cancellation announcement back when the title had gone quiet for a long spell. "I think there have been a couple of things that have kind of created that feeling. One thing is that it was announced before we were even started. Another thing is that there was an [*Aliens*] RPG game in development by Obsidian which was canceled. And I think when that happened we hadn't even really shown this game or talked about it yet, so that created some confusion of, 'Wait, what was canceled?'"

It's always good to see developers being so candid about the development of their games, give us a bit of insight into the details that would've otherwise gone unnoticed. Then again, it's Gearbox. They're always quite open with their fans about such things.

Miktar's Meanderings

The space dinosaur agenda
(or: If you want to make enemies, try changing something.)

After 250,000 votes, the Consumerist poll for "Worst Company in America" came to a close. The winner: Electronic Arts. Make no mistake, it was a dumb poll. That EA could "win" against the likes of British Petroleum, and companies that crashed economies and covered up rape, shows the bizarre priorities of the voters.

"We're sure that British Petroleum, AIG, Philip Morris, and Halliburton are all relieved they weren't nominated this year." said John Reseburg, senior director of corporate communications at EA. "We're going to continue making award-winning games and services played by more than 300 million people worldwide."

Stay the course, then. Sure, EA loves to try and bamboozle consumers at every corner just to put a few more million dollars on their bottom line: that's what corporations do. If you don't like it, stop giving them money, stop paying for the day-one DLC. It's very likely EA only won the Golden Poo because of "passionate" *Mass Effect 3* fans wanting an outlet for their frustration, no matter how misplaced. "Gamers gamed the game," said one onlooker.

Almost exactly the same time the Consumerist unveiled its winner, as if by providence, an article headline appeared on Gamesindustry.biz: *EA defends itself against thousands of anti-gay letters.* The short of it: EA claims to be "inundated" with "several thousand" letters and emails protesting their inclusion of same-sex or LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) content in its video games.

"Every one of EA's games includes ESRB content descriptors so it's hard to believe anyone is surprised by the content." said Jeff Brown, vice president of corporate communications. "This isn't about protecting children, it's about political harassment."

Most of the letters threaten boycotts against EA's games if the publisher refuses to remove same-sex content. Some letters claimed that EA was "pressured" by *Gay Agenda* groups to include homosexual content, to "force gay themes upon children."

It reminds me of something I read recently which made me chuckle: "Homophobia: The fear that another man will treat you like you treat women". Take that as you will.

These kinds of protests represent a fringe element, a knee-jerk reaction common when society undergoes a progressive change. When culture attempts to shift from established orthodoxy or conventionalism, opinions galvanize and people start to feel threatened, or afraid. You can easily find examples of how fear of the unknown, the new, and the misunderstood, have left dark marks on humanity's past.

With regards to EA and this hullabaloo over gay themes in *Mass Effect* and *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, they sure do paint themselves as champions of social liberalism. And yet, they also hired outspoken and rather active homophobe Orson Scott Card to write the comic series for *Dragon Age*. Corporations are made up of people, and people don't always agree. Often, to the detriment of people as a whole.

Less than 100 years ago, women did not have the right to vote in the United States (and in quite a few other countries). It took until 1979 before the United Nations explicitly adopted a stance against all forms of discrimination against women. That's only 33 years ago. Think about it.

Humanity can do better than blind patriarchy and heteronormativity. The greatest enabler of bigotry and intolerance is ignorance. As a gay man, I've experienced first-hand the results of people's ignorance quite keenly, and often still do.
- Miktar Dracon

Orcs Must Die! (again)

Delightful (and delightfully named) orc-murdering simulator *Orcs Must Die!* is set to get a feature packed sequel in the future. It brings cooperative play to the third-person, tower-defense style gibbing of greenskins, adding a second, unique playable character: the Sorceress.

"In 2011, we implored players to kill the orcs," says Patrick Hudson, CEO of developer Robot Entertainment. "As many as possible. Yet, only 3.4 billion orcs have been slaughtered to date. The only way we will get to a respectable orc death toll is by adding another killing machine and cooperative play. Bring a friend and destroy the orcs!"

The Sorceress is reportedly a much more crafty and nuanced character than the original War Mage, whose straightforward orc-smashing tactics largely involved clicking until green things went pop. She's able to use stuff like mind control, while fans of the War Mage will be treated to more of his brutally satisfying abilities. In addition, new enemies, a new campaign (playable solo for people who hate people, with the lone player able to choose either character), new defenses, and a revamped upgrade system packed with new stuff await when *Orcs Must Die! 2* arrives exclusively on PC later this year.

Get ready to rock

Megarom and Ubisoft South Africa have finally confirmed the local release date for *Rocksmith* – October 2012. While we'll still be a month behind the European release, it's good news for all of us who are excited about this game that it'll eventually arrive on our shores. In the meantime, we've become the lucky recipients of an early import review copy of the game, so you know that by time we release our official review (in the October issue), we'll have had plenty of time to gauge just how useful *Rocksmith* is as a guitar tutor. If you can't wait for our review or just want to soak up as much info as possible on this new generation of guitar-based rhythm games, be sure to follow Geoff as he blogs about his experiences on NAG Online. At the time of writing, the first part is online and can be found at **bit.ly/HS2BCk.**
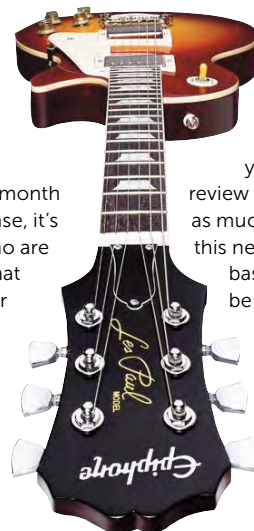
Apex Interactive	011 796 5040
ASUS SA	011 783 5450
BT Games	0861 4 GAMES
Compuseed	011 781 8880/2/3
Comstar	011 314 5812
Core Gaming	087 940 3000
Corex	011 655 8800
EA South Africa	011 516 8300
Evetech Solutions	012 326 6547
ESET	0860 313 872
Frontosa	011 466-0038
Incredible Connection	0860 011 700
Intel Corporation	011 806 4530
Look & Listen	011 467 3717
Megarom	011 361 4800
Microsoft	0860 225 567
Musica	0860 687 422
Nu Metro Interactive	011 340 9300
Phoenix Software	011 803 5437
Prima Interactive	011 799 7800
Rectron	011 203 1000
Samsung	0860 726 7864
Silverscreen Trading	011 794 9749
Sonic Informed	011 3145800
Ster Kinekor Entertainment	011 445 7700
Top CD	0861 086 732

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

gog.com

Good Old Games still good, but slightly less old

We love digital distribution service Good Old Games, because they're essentially peddlers of delightful nostalgia, providing us a single portal through which to access our favourite titles from yesteryear without having to jump through countless painful hoops to get at them now that they're no longer readily available in the wild. Now, with Good Old Games slowly adding more recently released titles to their ever-expanding library, it no longer seems pertinent to keep the "Old" in their name. Good Old Games is gone, and in its stead we're left with GOG.com – still the same site we know and love, but with an influx of newer titles to go along with gaming's greatest past hits.

They've got themselves a new frontpage to go along with their new image, and GOG.com has vowed to begin adding three new games each week instead of two. Also, there's an improved downloader. Obviously, this change in focus does mean that they're now in direct competition with other digital distribution services, like Valve's monolithic Steam. The kicker with GOG.com, is that they will still offer all their titles, even the newer ones, completely DRM free and devoid of region-specific pricing. Being completely without the burden of DRM is a beautiful prospect, but it does mean that many of the more mainstream titles from the big, DRM-obsessed publishers will be out of the revamped service's reach, at least initially. The titles that will be made available on the service, however, will surely appeal to anyone who hates the idea of the built-in DRM of such services as Steam and Origin.

Out of the shadows

Pen and paper role-playing gamers rejoice: a new *Shadowrun* is on its way, and, no no *no*... it won't be a first-person shooter. The game's creator Jordan Weisman (who's also been behind games like *MechWarrior, Battle Tech, Crimson Skies* and even *HeroClix*) has reclaimed the rights to his franchise and pulled in a ton of money through Kickstarter to develop a 2D, tactical, turn-based CRPG set in the futuristic city of Seattle.

For the uninitiated, *Shadowrun* takes place in a cyperpunk future that mashes together dark and gritty science-fiction with high fantasy. Elven biker gangs, minigun-wielding orcs, mage knight hackers and dwarven-run mega-corporations exist together in *Shadowrun* to create a rich and varied world to explore.

Shadowrun Returns, as it's tentatively named, will feature all of the great gameplay from the tabletop role-playing game and the SNES and Mega Drive releases based on the franchise, but will focus more on the classic RPG stuff like storytelling and rich character development. Players will also be able to design their own stories and campaigns with the editor that will ship with the game when it releases for PC, Mac and even tablets at a date to be determined. Expect a hardcore, single player-focused game that will do fans of the series proud.

BIG MONEY CLOUDS SMALL MINDS

Zynga, growing megapublisher of social and mobile games, is in the habit of buying up its competition. It's been happing for years now, so it should come as no surprise to learn that indie mobile developer OMGPOP was just scooped up by the company. The studio, which was founded six years ago, has churned out a decent number of average-performing online and mobile games, but recently found success with *Draw Something*, a *Pictionary*-inspired game for mobile. Quick on the draw, Zynga approached OMGPOP just days after the game went viral (it received over 35 million downloads in just six weeks) and before anyone could bat an eyelid, had purchased the company in its entirety for a staggering $210 million.

That's big money, and with all that gold glittering in CEO Dan Porter's eyes and clouding his judgement, he made a rather rude Tweet about a former employee who apparently wasn't on board with the buyout. Porter claimed that the man was the only one who stood against the move, and that "selfish people make bad games". He then went on to say "what's so interesting about success is the number of failures who try to ride on your back. Shay Pierce is just one of many..." Ouch, meanie. He's since apologised.

Rumour: PlayStation 4 is apparently called "Orbis"

Website Kotaku has managed to get their hands on a host of details pertaining to Sony's PlayStation 3 successor. According to the report, the PlayStation 4 will actually be called the "Orbis" – it's believed that this is the not the codename but the final name. It's also meant to tie together with the PlayStation Vita, as putting the two names together gives you "Orbis Vita[e]" which is Latin for "the circle of life".

Supposed names and brand connections aside, the Orbis is rumoured to be capable of rendering games at a resolution of 4096x2160, which is odd considering TVs aren't exactly capable of producing that as yet. The rumoured hardware that's powering the Orbis includes an AMD X64 CPU and AMD Southern Islands GPU.

Now for some bad news: according to Kotaku's report, the Orbis will require an Internet connection in order to play games. It's not clear whether a permanent connection is required or whether brief connectivity is necessary in order to activate games (similar to what's necessary with most PC games). It's obvious what the reason is for all of this: combating used-games sales.

Apparently, purchasing a second-hand Orbis game or borrowing one from a friend will only give you access to demo content for that particular game. This is because the game would have already been tied to the original user's PSN account. In order to access the whole game, an additional online purchase would need to be made.

If that's not bad enough, there are also rumours that suggest the Orbis will not feature backwards compatibility for PlayStation 3 games. As we mentioned on NAG Online, this particular rumour could be quite likely seeing as how Sony has proven that they can re-release PlayStation 2 games as "High-Definition" remakes and people will buy them.

Apparently, the Orbis will be out during the holiday season in 2013.

Angry Birds invade everything, ever

The addictive, unstoppable juggernaut starring those lovable, pissed-off avians continues its worldwide domination of everything you've ever known. It's now getting a weekly cartoon series of its own this year, with 52 episodes planned that'll be coming to "all possible platforms" – as revealed by Rovio's head of animation, Nick Dorra. Dorra noted that the cartoon series will provide fans with a new way to enjoy the *Angry Birds* phenomenon, while also attracting newcomers to the franchise. We're surprised there are any newcomers left, given its popularity.

WAIT FOR THE DROP

Square Enix have announced the European and US release dates of the next title in the long-running and surprisingly successful Disney collab series of RPGs. *Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance* will be the seventh game in the series and is to be released exclusively on 3DS. The game is scheduled to receive a Euro release in August 2012, so expect to see the game available locally during that month.

Dream Drop Distance draws is name from the concept of "Drops" which will cause the active player character to switch between Sora and Riku when the Drop Gauge depletes. Players can replenish the gauge by attacking enemies, or choose to actively switch characters at save points. The game will be one of the few new titles to make use of the Circle Pad Pro attachment for camera control, and will make use of AR functionality that allows players to play with any Dream Eaters that they catch.

Return to the Sword Coast

This is truly the month for retro remakes. Overhaul Games, together with parent company Beamdog, announced that they've begun development of an HD remake of *Baldur's Gate* and its expansion pack, and will begin development of a remake of the sequel and its expansion packs in the near future.

This is the third title from the developers, after the HD remake and Wii port of *MDK2*, and will be entitled *Baldur's Gate: Enhanced Edition*. *BGEE* will keep the story, characters and general gameplay largely unchanged (along with the antiquated AD&D 2nd Edition ruleset, complete with "THAC0") from the original, but the developers will base the game mechanics off of *BG2*'s updated and tweaked systems. Entirely new art, additional voice recordings and improved multiplayer support will all make it into *BGEE*, as well as a few new features and characters that Overhaul hasn't yet detailed.

BGEE will be released sometime this year for PC, Mac and iPad, and then the developers will get stuck into the production of *BGEE2* (or *BG2EE*, we can't quite decide what to speculatively call it yet). After that, well, we don't want to get anyone's hopes up, but Overhaul's Trent Oster has publically confirmed that he wants to develop *Baldur's Gate 3*.

Hop on that bandwagon

Before the awful *Magna Cum Laude* and *Box Office Bust, Leisure Suit Larry* was a series of point-and-click adventure games that were actually fun. They were rude, crude, slap-stick affairs that touched many gamers' hearts, and now creator Al Lowe wants to bring them back through the popular crowd funding mechanism Kickstarter. While this would ordinarily excite us, there's something a little strange going on with this project.

For starters, Al Lowe already announced last year in September that he was remaking the *Leisure Suit Larry* series, and even released a screenshot showing the new look. They should have started development months ago, or at least they should've been wrapping up pre-production by this stage, so why go out and ask for a staggering $500,000 (Double Fine Productions only asked for $400K) from loyal fans if the deal was already sealed? No doubt due to the success of other Kickstarter projects. However, instead of new, bold, challenging projects from the likes of Brian Fargo and Tim Schafer, Al Lowe is content to simply remake his old classics for a modern audience. We'd much rather see the long-ago cancelled *LSL 8: Lust in Space*.

At the time of writing, the project is almost half funded and will close on the 2nd of May, which means that you should have a couple of days to get in your pledge if this is something you'd like to support: kck.st/Haj4Fy.

Look & Listen

Pre-orders www.lookandlisten.co.za

PC

Diablo III	May
Prototype 2	July
Spec Ops: The Line	July 12th

Xbox 360

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier	May 25th
Assassin's Creed III	October
Tomb Raider	November 13th

PS3

Max Payne 3	May 18th
Darksiders II	June 29th
Borderlands 2	September 21st

Wii

Men in Black 3	May 18th
Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2012	June
The Amazing Spider-Man	June 29th

3DS

Funky Barn 3D	June 8th
Monster 4X4	June 8th
Puzzler Crosswords 3D	June 8th

Harley-flavoured DLC for Arkham City?

Harley Quinn already featured prominently in *Batman: Arkham City*, but perhaps you still can't help feeling that Harley didn't get enough time on-screen. We're going to assume that's because you're a filthy pervert, obviously. Jokes aside, you'll be happy to hear that, if a bunch of PlayStation 3 Trophies allegedly discovered by PS3Trophies.org are anything to go by, Harley could be getting her very own batch of *Arkham City* DLC.

The ten Trophies link to content that is given no other description than "Harley Quinn DLC," with no details on pricing or release date, although they do allude to Robin starring as a playable character in it. The same Trophy seems to point to an event called "Harley Quinn's Revenge," so we'd not be surprised if that ends up being the DLC's final title. We'll happily take more *Arkham City* any way we can get it.

GHOST RECON COMMANDER COMING TO FACEBOOK AND MOBILE

Sure, we generally don't deal with content that involves Facebook and mobile devices – but this particular bit of news caught our eye for one reason: the involvement of John Romero, which makes it huge news, because *DOOM*. John Romero's social games studio, Loot Drop, has signed a deal with Ubisoft to create a tie-in Facebook game for upcoming *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*, which is set to launch on May 22nd (so it could already be out by the time you read this), as well as free-to-play *Ghost Recon Online*, which releases later this year.

The Facebook game will allow players to unlock items in both of the games it's set to be tied to, and makes the bold promise that its release means that there'll finally be a "gamer's game on Facebook." *Ghost Recon Commander* will allow you to customise your own Ghosts, deploying them in a number of missions to earn upgrades and new gear. A nice touch is the promise of asynchronous cooperative play, although we don't know much about that at the time of writing. The initial release will reportedly be limited to Facebook – but it'll eventually come to mobile platforms as well, which this game seems well suited for. Also... John Romero!

iPAD 2

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[1] 1GB = 1 billion bytes: actual formatted capacity less. Availability and prices subject to change at the discretion of the supplier. Not all items are available in all stores - please call your local store to enquire on availability. iPad availability is subject to supply constraint. iPad Smart Covers are sold separately.

What's that noise?!

There's a whole backstory for Scarlett involving prototype game development, evil henchmen, unlikely heroes and many of everyone's favourite video game characters. It's an epic yarn that we started working on one day at the Wimpy up the road. It was going to be a comic strip leading up to rAge – an elaborate marketing plan of sorts that would be fun and exciting and actually worth reading. What happened to it you all scream? Not sure really... we had a few drawings and a page of text written but then rAge actually happened and that stole all our time away. She's still of some use today as we hide her in each issue. Perhaps one day we'll get back to that comic but for now see if you can find her hiding somewhere in this month's *NAG*.

Send your sighting to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line "May Scarlett" and don't get it wrong or deleted it will be.

April winner
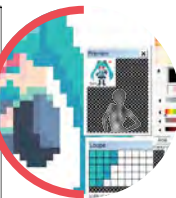
Darren Smart, page 33

THIS MONTH'S BOUNTY

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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 *Dragon's Dogma* for PS3 from Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line "**May caption**".

NAG's lame attempt at humour
Private Jenkins lights a fart on tequila Tuesday.

Last month's winner
"Whoever blinks first has to drink out the toilet" Tristan Kleynhans

On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness. Again.

For a long time there, things seemed quite grim for the *Penny Arcade Adventures*. We're sure we can all agree that the first two games in *Penny Arcade*'s episodic series of RPG adventures weren't about to forever change gaming's face, but their humour and self-awareness were nevertheless well received. Still, according to *PA*'s Tycho and Gabe, as well as former developers Hothead Games, it seemed unlikely that the series would ever receive continuing instalments. We say "former," because that's all changed now.

Zeboyd Games, creators of much-loved JRPG spoof *Cthulhu Saves the World*, have picked up development of episodes three and four of *Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness* (that title still haunts us), bringing their pixel stylings and proven ability when it comes to pastiching RPGs to *PA*'s adventure. Importantly, they also create highly playable RPGs, rather than being all-spoof with shoddy gameplay. Developed with input from the chaps at *PA*, episode 3 is due later this year on Steam, the Xbox Indie Channel, iTunes App Store and Google Play, with episode 4 set to land in 2013 on the same platforms. They'll once again chronicle the adventures of Tycho Ephemerous Brahe and Jonathan Gabriel as they battle "unspeakable evils" in the land of New Arcadia.

"I would argue that used games are cannibalizing the industry. If developers and publishers don't see revenue from that, it's not a matter of hey 'we're trying to increase the price of games to consumers, and we want more,' we're just trying to survive as an industry. If used games continue the way that they are, there's not going to be an industry."
-Dennis Dyack, CEO of Silicon Knights

Release list

May week 1

Magic: The Gathering: Avacyn Restored	N/A (trading card game)
Risen 2	360 / PC / PS3
Sniper Elite V2	360 / PS3

May week 2

Starhawk	PS3
The Ratchet & Clank Trilogy	PS3
Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception: Game of the Year Edition	PS3
Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2012	360 / PS3 / Wii
Mortal Kombat	PS Vita
Dungeon Lords 2012	PC
Spellforce Universe	PC
Spellforce 2: Faith in Destiny	PC

May week 3

Diablo III	PC
Max Payne 3	360 / PS3
Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City	PC

May week 4

Men in Black 3	360 / PS3 / Wii
Dirt Showdown	360 / PS3
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier	360 / PS3
Mario Tennis Open	3DS
Sorcery	PS3
Resistance: Burning Skies	PS Vita
Silent Hill: Book of Memories	PS Vita
Street Fighter X Tekken	PC
Dragon's Dogma	360 / PS3
Binary Domain	PC

The top 8 ADGs
(attention-demanding games) of 2012

Have you taken a look at the gaming calendar for 2012? It's a thing of beauty, already packed with titles that deserve no less than every drop of drool and giddy giggle your face can muster. Some are merely mildly interesting. Others show loads of promise but still encourage caution. A few are intriguing enough for you to raise your brow at, but aren't quite worthy of a proper commitment until you've seen more. Then there are those that inspire instant devotion. Whether they're part of a beloved franchise, or captivating new ventures from the minds of proven developers, these games make you lose sleep to thoughts of what future pleasures they'll likely bring. They demand immediate, impulsive pre-orders without a moment's hesitation, and warrant empty wallets at the hands of needlessly awesome collector's editions. Here are our top eight picks (in no particular order) of games such as those, as well as a few extras that deserve a special mention.

8 DISHONORED

Dishonored is what you get when you lock Harvey Smith (co-designer of the original *Deus Ex*) and Raphaël Colantonio (founder of Arkane Studios – developers of *Dishonored* and creators of *Arx Fatalis* and *Dark Messiah of Might & Magic*) in a room and demand that they fashion a game together. It's all whale oil and rat possession and stuff, and it looks incredibly inviting. Supernatural abilities, cool gadgets, an emphasis on stealth and a generous portion of player choice have us eagerly anticipating the arrival of this immersive simulation.

7 XCOM: ENEMY UNKNOWN

The real *X-Com* remake has us thanking the gaming gods for its unexpected existence. We were hesitant at first, but after seeing it in action and talking in-depth with some of the developers, we've no doubt that this is undoubtedly *X-Com* with a modern-day makeover. Action-packed turn-based combat, base building, research trees and other beloved series staples await us. We couldn't be more excited.

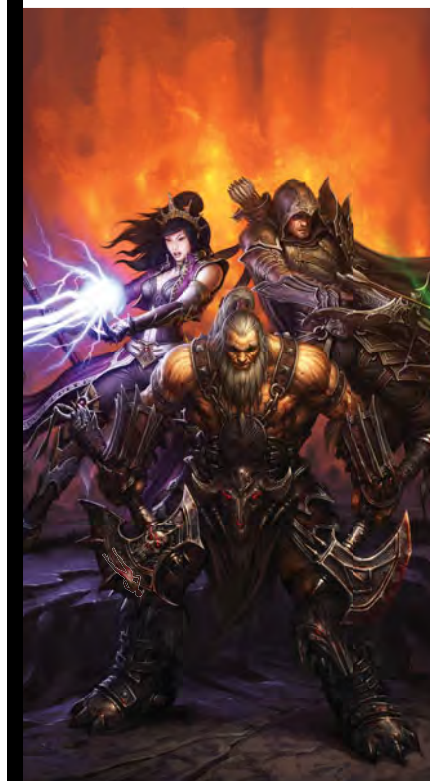## 6 DIABLO III

Honestly, do we really need to explain this one? It's Blizzard. It's *Diablo*. We practically bought this the day it was announced. Still, we're uncharacteristically cautious about it, mostly because of the always-on Internet requirement and single-player lag issues (which shouldn't even be a thing that exists). We're giving our concerns the middle finger and playing it anyway.

5 QUANTUM CONUNDRUM

This cute, playful first-person puzzler is especially enticing for one crucial reason: it's designed by Kim Swift, lead designer of the original *Portal*, who left Valve halfway through development of *Portal 2*. Explore your eccentric uncle's laboratory, switching between four dimensions at will to solve hopefully ingenious puzzles. We're expecting a healthy dose of humour as well.

4 GUILD WARS 2

Easily the biggest MMORPG event of this year, *Guild Wars 2* aims to pile on a thousand reasons to engage in subscription-free online adventuring. It's hauling a sack of deliciously inventive features on its back, too. Choose from five races and eight professions, and set out to make your mark on this persistent game world filled with dynamic events.

3 STARCRAFT II: HEART OF THE SWARM

We're still playing *StarCraft II*'s competitive multiplayer component. We sometimes feel that it inexplicably hates us, and yet we keep coming back for more. This expansion touts a new single-player campaign centred on Sarah Louise Kerrigan, as well as the ever-important addition of new units and tactics to multiplayer. We're more eager for this than a pack of Ultralisks about to wreak havoc on a group of unwitting Marines.

2 BORDERLANDS 2

Somehow, Gearbox has shoved even more guns into it. We do not understand how such things are possible, but it makes us massively happy that the universe is allowing it. We're back on Pandora, with four new characters and a whole heap of new skills to aid in the killing of nastiness.

1 BIOSHOCK INFINITE

Based on what we've seen, taking *BioShock* to the skies was the best thing Ken Levine and his team of game development wizards could've ever done for this franchise. It looks every bit a true gaming spectacle, effortlessly weaving a deep, meaningful experience in the midst of high-flying, variety-riddled action. We plan to spend hours just racing up and down the floating city of Columbia's Skylines.

Special mentions: Far Cry 3 / Max Payne 3 / Worms: Revolution / Halo 4 / Assassin's Creed III / Prey 2
Tomb Raider / Torchlight II / Counter-Strike: Global Offensive / Dota 2 / The Secret World
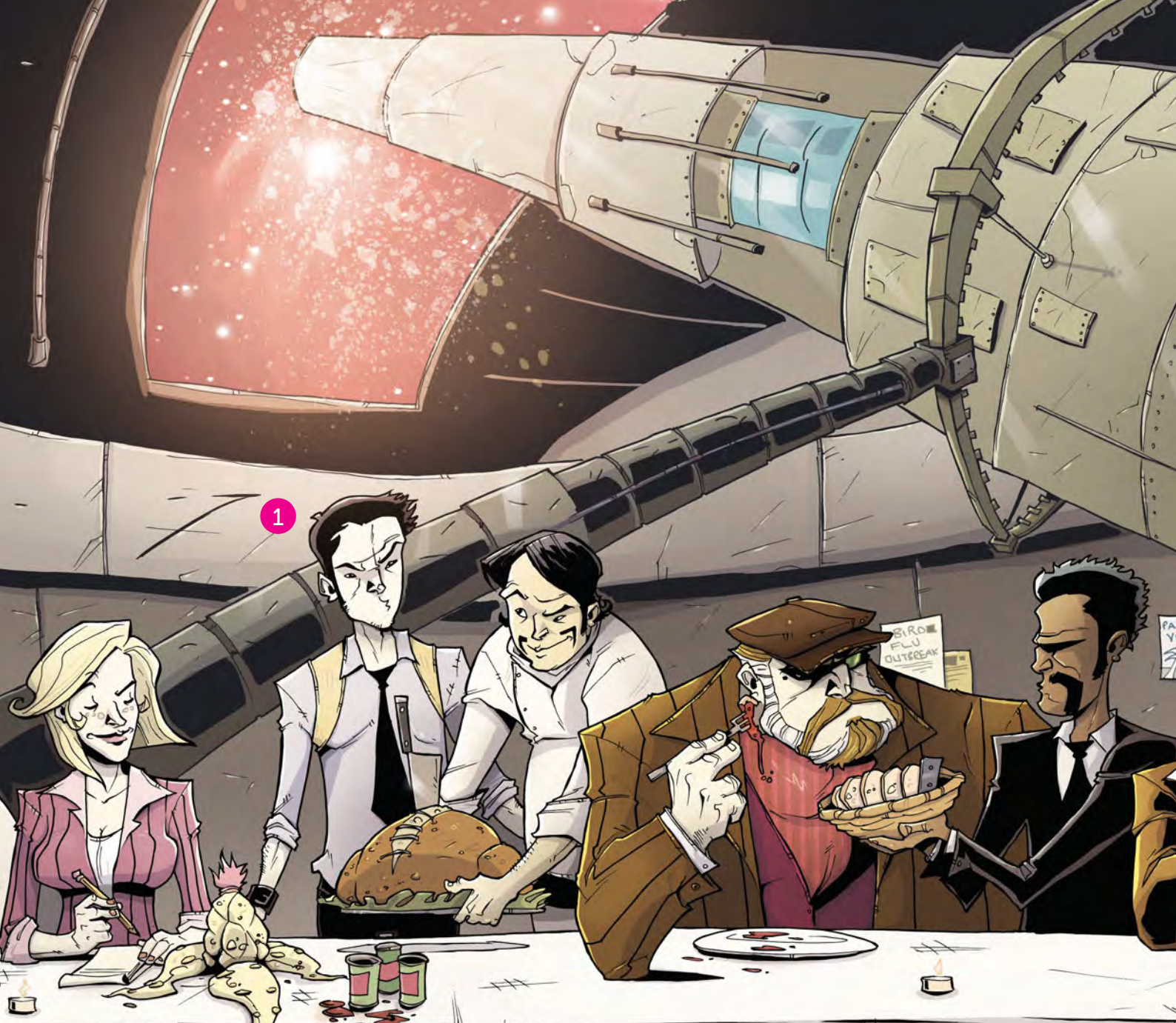
CHEW artwork courtesy Rob Guillory.

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Comics

① CHEW Vol 1

Writer: John Layman
Artist: Rob Guillory
Publisher: Image Comics
Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Price: R131 per volume

CHEW is the Eisner award-winning brainchild of John Layman (writer) and Rob Guillory (artist). It centres on FDA agent Tony Chu, who has been blessed (or cursed) with the ability to see the history of anything he eats, and yes, that includes people. Tony is required to solve a number of cases using his "cibopathic" abilities which leads him down some very dark and action filled adventures, and more often than not, into some gag-inducing situations. CHEW is one of the most original and captivating comics to come along in a long time. Take a bite, you won't regret it. Volumes one through four are available now.

② Who is Jake Ellis?

Writer: Nathan Edmondson
Artists: Tonči Zonjuć
Publisher: Image Comics
Supplier: AWX
Price: R195

International thief Jon Moore has an edge over everyone who's out to catch him: a man named Jake Ellis has taken residence inside his head and acts as an omniscient guide. Ellis tells Moore when to run, when to stop, who's coming around the corner and how to break a man's wrists. But both men want to find out who Jake Ellis is and how the two came to be united. The artwork is thick and low-detail, but the use of vivid colours and surprisingly efficient portrayal of facial emotions means you won't be left feeling confused. A great read for anyone looking for something different.

INTERVIEW
Rob Guillory,
artist, CHEW

NAG: Thanks for taking the time to talk to us Rob. Firstly, congrats on the multiple awards you've won, especially the Eisner. Did you ever think that when you and John were working on the early issues of CHEW that it would get this much recognition?
Rob Guillory: Definitely not. We both sort of figured that we'd gain some sort of cult following of weirdos. It just turned out that the group of weirdos was lot bigger than we expected...

NAG: Your style adds such a unique flavour to the visual look of CHEW, was it something you worked on just for CHEW or have you noticed it develop through previous projects?
RG: This is just my natural drawing style. When I draw, this is just how it comes out, like a handwriting. It's something I've developed over the last 10 or 15 years, and CHEW was the culmination of all that hard work. Funny enough, my art style was actually a bit of a hindrance to finding comic work in my early career. I draw a bit differently than most popular comic book styles, so editors were really doubtful that readers would buy a book that looks like CHEW. Thankfully, they were wrong.

NAG: We're sure our readers would agree that your art style and the CHEW universe would make for a fun video game, is that something you're looking to for the future, or are things strictly focused on the comic for now? How about other media?
RG: I'd love to see CHEW as a video game or even a board game. We'll see what comes up in the future. For now, our main focus is on the comic, though there is a CHEW TV show in development at Showtime.

NAG: Are you a gamer or does drawing all that beautiful CHEW art take up most of your time?
RG: I rarely ever play these days, though I used to be a pretty big gamer. Between CHEW and family, it's pretty tough to find the time to break out the Xbox.

NAG: Favourite game?
RG: On the rare occasion that I get to waste some time, I play either Red Dead Redemption or Street Fighter X Tekken (which I just bought a few days ago).

NAG: Ever had any crazy fans or stalkers?
RG: I did have a crazy conspiracy nut guy that used to bug me at cons, but for the most part, our fans are pretty awesome and surprisingly normal.

NAG: What can we expect in the future for CHEW? Any secrets you can reveal?
RG: Well, we're just starting out sixth story arc, "Space Cakes", which stars a totally different protagonist, Toni Chu, since our usual lead, her twin brother Tony, will be out of action for a few issues. This will be leading to the halfway point of the entire series' 60-issue run, which will bring about some major changes for the book as a whole. That's about as much as I want to give away, for fear of ruining the fun.

NAG: And finally, the fate of the world depends on you: You need to choose between chewing on Enrique Iglesias' former mole for an entire day, or eat your pinkie finger. What do you do?!
RG: I'd go with the mole. I hear it tastes like super-models.

*Sorry, we spent too much time reading our sister's Cosmo and got a little carried away.
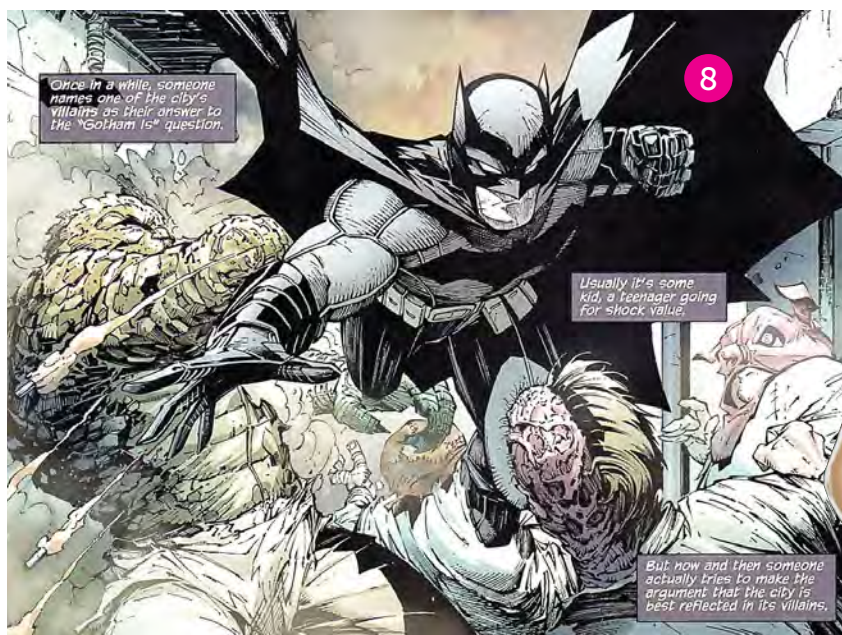
Comics

3 Avengers vs. X-Men

Writer: Brian Michael Bendis
Artists: John Romita, Jr. / Scott Hanna
Publisher: Marvel Comics
Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Price: R499 (full series)

Phoenix is back in what seems to be yet another Marvel universe, one in which the Avengers (who are either magical or simply human) and the X-Men (mutants, duh), clash in an epic series of battles that spans this special series. Its highly commercial art style might not appeal to everyone, but the series makes for an interesting "what if" read that combines just about every cool character from both series in a post-Decimation world.

4 Rotten: Volume 2: Revival of the Fittest

Writer: Mark Rahner / Robert Horton
Artist: Dan Dougherty
Publisher: Moonstone Books
Supplier: AWX
Price: R220

Given that this is volume 2, we were dropped in the middle of *Rotten*'s ongoing storyline. It follows two US government agents: William Wade, a reluctant Civil War veteran and former Pinkerton agent, and his academically driven partner J.J. Flynn, each doing their part to uncover the mystery surrounding recent outbreaks of the reanimated dead. What this means is zombies, and lots of them (with the kicker being that there are numerous species of them). It's a decent read, with clean artwork offset by moments of gruesome brutality.

5 Justice League (The New 52)

Writer: Geoff Johns
Artist: Jim Lee
Publisher: DC Comics
Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Price: R45 per issue

As part of DC's "new 52," the Justice League has been refreshed with rebooted origins, but familiar Super Friends (LOL) tomfoolery. Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Flash, Green Lantern (Hal Jordan edition) Aquaman and Cyborg are the League's initial members, but more superheroes have been gradually introduced to this reboot over time. Geoff John's writing is as solid as ever, and various guest artists bring the Justice League to life with their own unique styles. Importantly, this is still the Justice League, and the storylines are as entertaining as always.

6 Hunter's Fortune

Writer: Andrew Cosby / Caleb Monroe
Artists: Matt Cossin / Mike Cossin / Chris Peter
Publisher: Boom! Studios
Supplier: AWX
Price: R170

When smarmy hipsters and half a billion dollars meet, you get *Hunter's Fortune*. It's not a terrible story, but the characters are so vapid and unlikeable that you'll be forced to turn to the dialogue and artwork for saviour. While said dialogue is witty enough to keep your attention and the artwork's manga inspiration isn't completely overbearing (it comes close), it's the long diatribes and rushed story that will prevent readers from longing for more once you've taken the time to get through this.

7 Supercrooks

Writer: Mark Millar
Artist: Leinil Yu
Publisher: Icon Comics
Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Price: R35 per issue

Mark Millar's up to his usual antics of taking traditional comic book stereotypes and flipping them on their head. In Supercrooks, a gang of American super criminals has been going through the usual routine: coming up with daring heists, and getting pinched by one of the many superheroes keeping America semi-safe. Trying something different, they opt to change things up a bit – by taking their criminal shenanigans outside of the US. This is undoubtedly going to become a hit comic book series, brilliantly written with a generous splash of humour, backed by cool, stylish art.

8 Batman (The New 52)

Writer: Scott Snyder
Artists: Greg Capullo / Jonathan Glapion
Publisher: DC Comics
Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Price: R49 per issue

The New 52 is a massive undertaking that reboots 52 of DC's top franchises. Not all stories will start from the beginning, but new story arcs and characters will make an appearance to give readers the chance to pick up from "a" beginning, at least. This is especially true with *Batman*, which brings on a new opposition – the Court of Owls – but keeps Bruce Wayne as Bats and includes all three Robins. Gritty but accessible artwork, deep writing and almost every recognisable character await new and old readers alike.

9 Thief of Thieves #1

Writer: Robert Kirkman / Nick Spencer
Artists: Shawn Martinbrough / Felix Serrano
Publisher: Image Comics
Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Price: R39

The Walking Dead is trudging along nicely, and creator Robert Kirkman was on the hunt for a new project that was more grounded in reality. *Thief of Thieves* is brand new and follows super-thief Redmond. Heavily-inked but clean artwork, reminiscent of *GTA*'s style of art, mixes with colloquial, everyday kind of chatting that's light-hearted and believable. It's an effective combination that makes for easy reading, and we're definitely excited to see what comes of this series.

10 Dead Space: Salvage

Writer: Antony Johnston
Artist: Christopher Shy
Publisher: IDW Publishing
Supplier: AWX
Price: R225

We love *Dead Space*. A lot. *Salvage* is part of EA's multimedia focus for some of their franchises, acting as a bridge between the original *Dead Space* (the video game) and the animated movie *Dead Space: Aftermath*. As such, it's more for serious fans of the series, fleshing out Visceral Games' horrifying universe. Written by one of the game's writers, its rapid pacing is disjointed and somehow unnerving, and the gritty blend of viciously painted realism in the art is further unsettling.

Figurines

①

HE'S LOOKING AT MY **BUTT**, ISN'T HE?

① **StarCraft II series 2 action figures**

Types: Sarah Kerrigan / Tychus Findlay
Supplier: AWX
Price: R380

These two figures almost didn't make it into this feature but luckily we managed to get them just in time. Both are excellent examples of the right way to do licensed figures: they feel solid; they look authentic and their points of articulation give you just enough pose adjustment options without sacrificing the overall look and feel of the pieces. A must-buy for any *StarCraft II* fan.

Movies

Tron: Legacy

Director: Joseph Kosinski
Starring: Garrett Hedlund / Olivia Wilde / Jeff Bridges
Supplier: Look & Listen
Price: R100 (DVD) / R250 (Blu-ray)

Our return to the world of *Tron* follows Kevin Flynn's son Sam as he unintentionally enters the Grid (the digital world his father created) twenty years after Kevin's disappearance. It's all programs and ISOs and Light Cycles in this visually stunning film, and even though it's not a particularly good movie, it's still well worth watching – both for the nostalgia it provides and the incredible world it shows off.

Resident Evil: Afterlife

Director: Paul W. S. Anderson
Starring: Milla Jovovich / Ali Larter / Kim Coates
Supplier: Look & Listen
Price: R41 (DVD) / R154 (Blu-ray)

Somehow, this series of movies based on the video game franchise of the same name is still going strong. Milla Jovovich is still in it, there are still zombies and it's still very "meh". But they're all decent popcorn movies, strangely entertaining and packed with action – and more importantly, they (loosely) tie-in to our favourite form of entertainment. *Afterlife* is no different – aside from the fact that, if you've got a 3D TV, you'll be able to watch "meh" in 3D.

Scott Pilgrim vs. the World

Director: Edgar Wright
Starring: Michael Cera / Mary Elizabeth Winstead / Kieran Culkin
Supplier: Look & Listen
Price: R56 (DVD) / R162 (Blu-ray)

It's the best video game movie you've probably never seen, based on the *Scott Pilgrim* comic book series. This romantic comedy is loud, weird and packed to bursting with references to our entertainment medium of choice. A lot of people don't appreciate this film, and that's understandable: its pacing is incredibly strange and its humour, action and premise are undoubtedly ludicrous. But to gamers, this movie should be the Holy Grail.

Captain America: The First Avenger

Director: Joe Johnston
Starring: Chris Evans / Hugo Weaving / Hayley Atwell
Supplier: Look & Listen
Price: R78 (DVD) / R115 (Blu-ray)

Marvel continues their domination in the world of fun, action-filled superhero movies with the final superhero needed for their march towards *The Avengers*, which opens in cinemas soon. Steve Rogers, a sickly, skinny dude from Brooklyn, becomes the First Avenger after being rejected for military duty during World War II and thus opts to be treated with the super-soldier serum that leads to the creation of Captain America. Nazis, explosions and an awesome shield are all in there, and that's pretty cool.

2 Jak 3: Dark Jak statue

Supplier: AWX
Price: R385

Show your love for this loveable character with this slightly less loveable version. Dark Jak is every bit as morose as you could imagine in this resin-cast, painted statuette. Great pose, decent paintwork and a good heft will guard your gaming cabinet against the forces of light.

3 Alien Facehugger & Alien Chestburster

Supplier: AWX
Price: R485 (Facehugger) / R390 (Chestburster)

These plush toys have apparently been out of circulation for eight years, but are now making a serious comeback largely thanks to Ridley Scott's new movie *Prometheus* (that may or may not be about aliens at all). Inexplicable alien xenobiology aside, the Facehugger has stiff legs and can be posed just like in the movies. The Chestburster does nothing but lay around looking creepy — all essential kit to go along with your black plague microbe plush.

4 Catherine: Catherine 1/7 figure

Supplier: AWX
Price: R970

What better way to celebrate the recently released game of the same name than with this "demure" Catherine figure? Well, you could buy the game and play it, we suppose, but rather wait until next month to read our review before you jump in. The pose might not do much for you, but between the detailed eyes, silky vinyl finish and bouncy hair, you're bound to find something special here.

> NO YOU MORON, NOT A BANANA. I SAID, "ANY MARINE WEARING A BANDANA."

Series

Spartacus: Blood and Sand / Spartacus: Gods of the Arena

Creator: Steven S. DeKnight
Starring: Andy Whitfield / John Hannah / Lucy Lawless
Supplier: Look & Listen
Price: R581

It's like Ridley Scott's Gladiator, but several thousand times more violent and filled with copious nudity. And swearing. Lots and lots of swearing. Seriously, this one is not for Sunday night viewing with the kids. It follows Spartacus, forced to become a gladiator in the city of Capua in order to reunite with his true love, who was enslaved following Spartacus' capture. It's surprisingly good for a show so heavily focused on brutality and heavy handed shock tactics.

Game of Thrones

Creator: David Benioff / D.B. Weiss
Starring: Sean Bean / Peter Dinklage / Emilia Clarke
Supplier: Look & Listen
Price: R261

Based on George R .R. Martin's excellent series of fantasy novels, *A Song of Ice and Fire, Game of Thrones* brings the engaging novels to those of us who couldn't be bothered with words and the reading of them. It's a hugely compelling tale of political subterfuge and incestuous backstabbing, with brilliant acting and high production values making this a show that both fans of the novels and people who've never even heard of them before should watch.

The Walking Dead

Creator: Frank Darabont / Robert Kirkman
Starring: Andrew Lincoln / Jon Bernthal / Sarah Wayne Callies
Supplier: Look & Listen
Price: R157

Yet another entry based on a comic book series, this one is an adaptation of the zombie-filled, post-apocalyptic world envisioned by Robert Kirkman. Its focus is less on the zombies and more on the survivors struggling to eke out a meagre existence in the aftermath of Z-Day. Its character-driven nature might make its pace a bit too tentative for some, but we can't get enough of it.

Chuck

Creators: Josh Schwartz / Chris Fedak
Starring: Zachary Levi / Yvonne Strahovski / Adam Baldwin
Supplier: Look & Listen
Price: R261

It's the familiar tale of an unlikely hero, with a nerdy twist. Chuck works as a computer technician at a consumer electronics store. It's a dead-end job, but Chuck's lack of ambition makes him mostly okay with that. When he has the "Intersect" (basically the entire CIA and NSA database) embedded in his brain, however, he becomes an accidental superspy, having to hide this fact from friends and family while aiding his new CIA and NSA handlers. Comedy and frequent video game references are interspersed with great action sequences.

Double the Disney

Release Date
2012
Platforms
360 / PC / PS3 / Wii
Genre
Action-adventure / platform
Developer
Junction Point Studios
Website
www.junctionpoint.com
Publisher
Disney Interactive Studios

When Junction Point Studios was established in 2005 by game design luminary Warren Spector, people signed on thinking they'd be making the next *Deus Ex, Ultima Underworld* or *System Shock.* Instead, they got to make a Mickey Mouse game.

HANDS ON

Epic Mickey didn't end up as "dark" as people had hoped. While the initial concept art leaked to the Internet showed an edgy dystopian view of Disney locations and characters, the end result was more in line with what's amiably considered a "kids game". Even so, *Epic Mickey* became the best-selling single-platform game for Disney, with the majority (54%) of surveyed players between the ages of 15 to 54.

We were invited to Austin, Texas by Disney to attend an early first-look reveal of the sequel.

"As a lifelong Disney fan, working with Mickey Mouse in the original *Epic Mickey* was a truly humbling experience," said Warren Spector, creative director and vice president of Junction Point. "Millions of fans fell in love with Mickey as a video game hero and I know they'll experience similar emotions when they get to interact with and actually play as Oswald the Lucky Rabbit in *Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two.*"

The sequel brings Mickey Mouse back to Wasteland, the alternate world constructed out of 80 years of "lost" Disney cartoon characters and forgotten theme park attractions. Much like the first game, *Epic Mickey 2* is a homage and tribute to eight decades of Disney creations, wrapping it up in an action-platform experience where each location is filled with references to familiar and not-so-familiar characters.

BLOT BROTHERS

This time, Mickey will need his "brother" Oswald the Lucky Rabbit's help, the pair teaming up to tackle puzzles, enemies and an unknown foe together. Oswald was the predecessor to Mickey Mouse, co-created by Walt Disney but lost in 1928 due to a contract dispute. Disney regained control of Oswald in 2006.

EPIC MICKEY 2: POWER OF ILLUSION

Announced at the same time we were attending the *Epic Mickey 2* event, was a surprise nobody saw coming. DreamRift, the studio behind *Monster Tail* (DS) is producing a follow-up to the 1990 Sega Genesis cult classic *Castle of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse*, seen here in the screens labelled 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

STYLISH MICKEY

Epic Mickey 2: Power of Illusion for the Nintendo 3DS will use the stylus for "painting" objects into existence, such as a cannon that shoots enemies. Mess up how you draw it, and it may pose a danger to Mickey as well. Every character Mickey saves takes up residence in a fortress that Mickey uses as a home base, Scrooge McDuck makes an appearance, and the witch from Snow White reprises her role as the main villain.
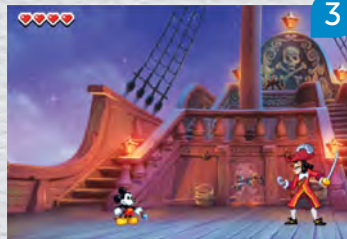
Mickey uses the magical paint brush he found in the first game, which lets him shoot either "paint" or "thinner" at the environment and characters around him. Paint will restore erased segments of the level or make enemies less hostile, while thinner will remove chunks from the environment and damage enemies.

Oswald takes a different approach, wielding a powerful and charmingly cartoonish one-big-red-button remote control, allowing him to command electricity. He can stun enemies around him for a short while, power up devices or influence one of the new enemy types, the Blotworx: a chimera of cartoon and animatronic parts.

Spector hopes that now Oswald has been reintroduced to the world through the first game's storyline, the sequel will win the rabbit more fans. "We couldn't ask people to care about this guy they've never heard of or no one has ever seen since 1928 in a Disney film," said Spector. "It was unrealistic to expect people to care in the first game, but now we know they care. We hear about it from players all the time. They really, really got into Oswald, which is hugely gratifying."

BUILDING A BETTER MOUSE

The first game's audience was limited due to it being a Nintendo Wii exclusive. The sequel will be multi-platform for Wii, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and even the PC. While the 360 version won't have Kinect support, the PS3 version will have full PlayStation Move support.

"All of the assets in the next-gen versions are unique; the shaders, all the visuals effects are unique. We didn't use the same assets for any two versions." says Spector. "I challenged the team on the first game to make a game that had even our competitors saying, holy cow; I didn't know you could do that on the Wii. It's actually awfully hard to make a next-gen game look better than the Wii game. The Junction Point team is just so gosh darn talented. I mean, I don't know how they did it."

Spector admits that the camera controls from the first game weren't as great as they could have been – something they hope to fix with the sequel. "We've had a team working on the camera from literally the day we finished the first game," he says. "They'll be working on it until the day we ship the second game. There have been over 1,000 specific changes made to the camera. Our goal is that you will not have to touch the manual camera

controls even once to play through the main story path of this game."

Epic Mickey had no voice acting; something Spector says was inspired by certain Nintendo games. "I made a choice." he admits. "In retrospect, I wish I made a different one." As such, all dialogue in Epic Mickey 2 will be fully voiced. Disney Character Voice will be providing official voice actors for all the main Disney cast, with the esteemed Frank Welker providing the voice for Oswald. Welker is known for his voice work as the various characters in Scooby-Doo, Inspector Gadget, Garfield, The Looney Tunes Show, Tiny Toon Adventures and more. Since Oswald was a silent film character, this will be the first time he's had a speaking role.

COOPERATIVE CARTOONING
Epic Mickey 2 is all about "the power of two", bringing with it two-player cooperative play. It's split-screen only so no online play. Players can help each other; for example, Oswald can use his ears like a helicopter propeller, gliding down slowly while carrying Mickey in a way that reminds us a little too much of Sonic and Tails.

"It's drop-in, drop-out co-op, you can sit down at any time with a friend who is playing as Mickey, and you can take control of Oswald." says Spector. "If you're playing as a single player, Oswald will be there every second of the game. He's not just a multiplayer character; he's a helper, whether you're playing alone or with a friend or family member."

We spent some time with an early three-level build of the game. The art direction was colourful and captivating, the camera controls indeed very much improved, and overall the game looks exactly how one would expect a sequel to look: more confident in everything it does.

IT'S A MUSICAL?
During the introduction video, the Mad Scientist villain from the first game returns to Mean Street to claim he's reformed, but will need help from Oswald to fend off a new threat to the Wasteland. The Mad Scientist conveys his plight via an overwrought musical number complete with Disney-styled song sung in the key of deep Russian accent.

"I'm such a geek about musicals; I love the co-op and next-gen stuff," says Spector. "But for me, when a character breaks into song, which they do on a regular basis in this game, it's magic."

Composer James Dooley (Pushing Daisies) returns to provide the music for Epic Mickey 2, with noted lyricists Mike Himelstein providing the words for the songs. Just like in the first game, players will hear music and instrumentation change based on their personal choices, ultimately letting them "conduct" their own unique soundtrack.

"In the first Epic Mickey title, fans embraced Mickey as a true video game hero and welcomed Oswald back into the Disney family with open arms," said John Pleasants, co-president, Disney Interactive Media Group. "Now, as the vision for the Epic Mickey franchise advances, fans and gamers across all platforms will experience completely new ways to embrace the immeasurable vault of Disney characters and attractions." **NAG**

-Miktar

> "Since Oswald was a silent film character, this will be the first time he's had a speaking role."

Death has a pet crow called Dust who follows him throughout the game. Dust plays an important role in providing subtle hints as you progress; he might perch on top of a door, indicating that your objective lies within.

DEATH

Take a look at the info box for this preview; notice anything? How about that we've categorised *Darksiders II* as an "action role playing game"? With the original *Darksiders* from January 2010, you would have been hard-pressed convincing somebody that the game had RPG elements. In *Darksiders II* it's almost the opposite: there is no denying that the series has taken on board additional gameplay mechanics that comfortably ensconce the title somewhere between a full-on action brawler and a role-playing game.

It's not every day that a studio develops a new character who immediately appeals to gamers; it's even more infrequent for that studio to decide to side-line said character in favour of somebody new. When the first *Darksiders* arrived, many people took to protagonist War. He was gritty but had steadfast honour and a belief in justice that was neatly complemented by a "take-no-crap" kind of attitude. In short: he's one of the more memorable characters of this generation. With that in mind, *Darksiders II* comes across as a little ballsy; a fairly new IP dismissing its lead character after only one game seems like hardly enough time to build a relationship between player and character. Be that as it may, War is out and Death is in, and after spending a good few hours in the boots of the Pale Rider, I'm pleased to say that he's shaping up to be just as memorable, if not more.

Previously on Darksiders

First, some background to the *Darksiders* universe. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are the remnants of a race of the most powerful beings that ever existed: the Nephilim. A result of the unholy coupling of Angels and Demons, and spawned by the Demon Queen Lilith, the Nephilim were judged to be a threat to the Universe by the Charred Council, who ordered their destruction. The Four Horsemen were spared in exchange for aiding in the genocide of their own race. This "genocide pact", as Vigil refers to it, haunts Death the most out of the Four Horsemen. In fact, Death carries a talisman bonded to his chest that contains the souls of his slaughtered race.

The events of *Darksiders II* run parallel to those of the first game, so while War is trying to clear his name, as Death you're trying to prove that War is the victim in a greater conspiracy. So begins a quest that will lead Death into the realms that exist between Heaven and Hell.

Meet your Makers

During the hands-on event for *Darksiders II*, I got to spend two hours playing an Xbox 360 build of the game. The section demoed was about six hours into the story and took place in the final dungeon of The Makers' Realm. The Makers are the oldest race of beings in the *Darksiders* universe and are responsible for creating everything, from weapons to entire worlds. Ulthane, who helped War in *Darksiders I*, was one of The Makers. During this particular portion of *Darksiders II*, Death is aided by another Maker called Karn, who is able to pick up and throw Death across wider gaps and assist him during combat. The particular area of The Makers' Realm that I was in was called The Foundry: a massive workshop full of giant chains, machinery and lava pits.

The objective here was to locate three Heart Stones so as to awaken a huge stone golem called The Guardian. The preamble to this point in the game was not relayed to us, so exactly what the Makers needed this Guardian for was uncertain. Suffice it to say, a dark corrupting entity had infected portions of The Foundry and had possessed the beings inside, turning them into Corrupted Construct Warriors who made up the bulk of the enemy forces I sliced my way through.

And Hell followed with him

Returning fans of the series will be struck by how much faster Death is when compared to War. Whereas War was all about heavy attacks, hulking armour and brute force, Death is extremely light on his feet, utilising superior agility and incredible speed to his advantage in combat. The differences in the two characters' approaches to everything from terrain traversal, combos and execution moves, couldn't be more pronounced.

Death has a whole suite of new moves available to him that make getting around the world a much quicker and more stylish affair. New abilities include things like wall-running which, when combined with other new abilities like mantling, means traversing levels can sometimes become a puzzle in its own right. Death can climb pillars, scale narrow gaps by performing wall bounces between the two surfaces, and sprint across narrow beams. He's basically the free-running, parkour expert of the Four Horsemen. Does all of this new-found speed and agility handle well? To be honest, it takes some getting used to, but once you

HANDS ON

Release date
29 June 2012
Platforms
PC / PS3 / 360 / Wii U
Genre
Action role playing game
Developer
Vigil Games
Website
www.darksiders.com
Publisher
THQ

have the hang of it, Death's speed and grace is fantastic to watch and makes ordinary area traversal that much more entertaining.

The basics of combat remain largely unchanged in *Darksiders II*, with Death having a primary and secondary weapon mapped to the X and Y face buttons respectively. Death's primary weapons are his dual scythes, but throughout the game you'll pick up new scythes with differing damage stats and special abilities. The secondary weapon slot is split into two further categories: heavy secondary weapons and light secondary weapons, but you can only have one secondary weapon mapped at a time. The former includes weapons like axes, polearms, hammers and maces, whereas the latter includes weapons like tonfas, claws, bucklers and gauntlets. By the time I'd finished my two hour hands-on, I'd accumulated piles of different scythes and secondary weapons, so you'll be able to customise your load-out to your heart's content.

Combat is incredibly fast in *Darksiders II*, and at times I found it a little difficult to keep track of what was happening onscreen. That being said, this was an early build I was playing and the game's director, Marvin Donald, told me that the team is still polishing for final release.

Death has more than thirty different unlockable skills across two separate skill trees – you will not be able to unlock all of them so choose wisely. Unlocking skills follows typical RPG mechanics: kill enemies for XP; collect enough XP to level up and then spend your skill point in either the Harbinger Skill Tree or the Necromancer Skill Tree. Harbinger Skills are warrior focused, whereas Necromancer skills are spell-caster focused. You're free to focus on one skill set or develop a hybrid of both. Some of the Harbinger skills include moves like Teleport Slash, which teleports Death across the battlefield to deliver a scythe attack against an enemy. Branching skills from that particular skill will add modifiers to that attack, so you might put your next skill point into Death Blossom, which causes enemies slain by a Teleport Slash to explode, injuring nearby foes.

Necromancer skills allow you to summon ghouls, crows and more to attack your enemies. Again, the skill tree is branching which means you could choose to spend points to modify your summoned ghoul with Fiery Souls, which adds fire damage to your ghoul's attacks.

On top of the unlockable skills, Death has his own version of War's Chaos Form known as Reaper Form. This ability only becomes available once you've invested a total of six skill points across the two skill trees, and for every six points you spend, the Reaper form gains a level of power.

Death and all his friends

Throughout the hands-on, I came across numerous supporting characters, familiar pieces of equipment and useful NPCs. One handy friend was a large, ride-on construct known as a Maker Custodian. This giant automaton allowed Death to perch on his back, which gave me direct control of the brute in combat and traversal. It also meant rolling through lava pits became an option as the Custodians are impervious to heat.

A Horseman without his horse is rather sad, but luckily there was a boss fight at the end of the section where I was finally given access to Despair – Death's horse. This particular boss fight immediately reminded me of *Shadow of the Colossus* as it took place in a massive open area against a towering enemy. The fact that I had to
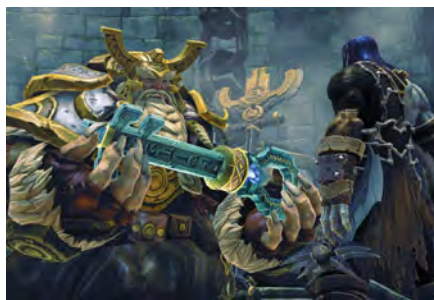
continually make use of Despair to stay out of the way of the enemy's incoming attacks, just meant that the likeness to Team ICO's classic was all the more apparent – definitely not a bad thing.

Additional familiar faces include the demon merchant Vulgrim (who now accepts pages from the Book of the Dead as a currency), Strife's pistol and the Void Walker – the Horsemen's answer to an Aperture Science Portal Gun.

Come for the action, stay for the RPG

The extent to just how much more of an RPG this series has become only really became apparent once I brought up the in-game menu. I was greeted with the typical RPG systems: skill trees, character levels and stats, inventory screens,

equipment lists – if it belonged in a contemporary RPG, it was there.

A menu system, however, hardly makes a game an RPG – gameplay mechanics are all important and *Darksiders II* brings the RPG elements in droves. Damage numbers spout from enemies' bodies as you attack them; side quests will distract you from your main goal; NPCs will trade with you; you'll be bashing open barrels and crates while hoping to hear the tinkle of gold coins accompanying your rampant vandalism. Most importantly: there is a ton of loot to find, trade and collect.

The game features randomly generated items that fall into the categories of weapons, armour (further split into Shoulder, Armour, Gloves and Boots), talismans and potions. As is to be

expected, there is a tiered system when it comes to the power of each item. Common items are frequent and not very powerful, but you might luck in and pick up a set item, rare item or a Possessed Weapon. I never found a Possessed Weapon during my hands-on, but we were told that these ultimate weapons level-up just like Death does, and that you'll be able to "feed" other pieces of equipment to them in order to grant them varying abilities.

Then there's the promise of an open-world to explore. While The Foundry was definitely a linear environment, the culminating boss fight that rounded off the hands-on area was set on a wide open plain flanked by trees and high mountains. The hint of an open-world was definitely there, but remains to be seen. Still, director Marvin Donald told me that the size of the playable area is at least three times larger than that of *Darksiders I*, so there will, undoubtedly, be quite a bit to explore. **NAG**
- Mikit0707

If you want to read more about *Darksiders II*, be sure to check out our interview with game director Marvin Donald over on NAG Online: **bit.ly/IKz2Ul**

NEW GAME, NEW ASSASSIN, NEW WORLD.

Join the Revolution

The *Assassin's Creed* franchise has slowly developed a preoccupation with historically accurate representations of the past. Considering we're about to head into the fifth big-budget game, it's no surprise that we're about to get an *Assassin's Creed* steeped in American history. This is, perhaps, somewhat disconcerting for the average South African whose knowledge of Redcoats and Bunker Hills might be a little rusty – I know mine is.

The important thing to remember is that *Assassin's Creed III* is still about the on-going war between the Assassins and Templars. What's more, the team behind the game believes that the basic themes of the *Assassin's Creed* series run parallel to those of the American Revolution: power or oppression; control or freedom. "The American Revolution is one of the periods of history where we have the most documentation," says Tommy Francois (IP development director) during the game's debut presentation in London. "We're actually capable of knowing where Washington was and a lot of the key characters from that era. So it was because we pride ourselves in being authentic, [that] we had to make sure that any of the targets that you're going to assassinate are in the right year and the right location."

In previous *Assassin's Creed* titles, less detailed historical documentation allowed for a certain level of creative license. Now that a mere 230 years separate us from Ubisoft's chosen period, *Assassin's Creed III* is headed down a more authentic path.

This will be Ubisoft's biggest game to date; there are more than eight different studios across the world that are involved with the project. Additionally, five full-time researchers have sifted

Release date
31 October 2012
Platforms
360 / PC
PS3 / Wii U
Genre
Action
Developer
Ubisoft Montreal
Website
www.
assassinscreed.
ubi.com
Publisher
Ubisoft

through thousands of pages of historical documents. During the presentation, Francois admits that "one of our secret goals in *Assassin's* is that we hope that players, once they go through an *Assassin's* experience, will not only have the urge to go and check out the stuff on Wiki, but maybe even go visit the cities."

They call him Connor (thankfully)

When the world was first introduced to the star of *Assassin's Creed III*, his name caused more of a stir than anything else. Not surprising; Ratohnhaké:ton is definitely out of the ordinary. Interestingly, throughout the presentations and interviews we attended, our new assassin was never referred to by his traditional Mohawk name. Instead, the half British half American Indian is just known as Connor.

Just like Ezio, it's a traumatic event that kick-starts Connor's eventual involvement in the Assassin-Templar war. Instead of the murder of his father and brothers, Connor witnesses his village being destroyed. In his pursuit to ensure his people's place in the new society that is burgeoning around them, Connor eventually becomes embroiled with the events of the American Revolution.

Ubisoft has gone to great lengths to represent Connor's Mohawk heritage as accurately as possible. While he's a fictional character, the period of history that he inhabits most certainly is not. Therefore, he needed to fit the historical framework within which *Assassin's Creed III* is presented. In a target gameplay video that Ubisoft originally created in December 2010, Connor could be seen scalping his assassinated targets. This action was later scrapped from the game because

ABOVE
Previous *Assassin's Creed* titles featured a free-climbing style based on parkour. The climbing in *Assassin's Creed III* is now based on professional rock-climbing techniques.

"The tomahawk made a sickening sound as it penetrated the last soldier's skull; combat in *Assassin's Creed III* is a much more brutal affair."

historically the Mohawk people never scalped their enemies. This might seem inconsequential, but it's a testament to just how serious Ubisoft is about accurate representation.

AnvilNext and the Animus 3.0

Driving *Assassin's Creed III* is Ubisoft's new AnvilNext engine. In terms of visual quality it's noticeably more powerful, but the level of fidelity insofar as animation is concerned puts previous Assassin's Creed games to shame. With the ability to produce twice the amount of "bones" in character faces, the AnvilNext engine is capable of portraying subtle facial expressions that aid in emotional delivery of dialogue during cut-scenes.

AnvilNext can happily render up to 2000 NPCs at once, which makes for some spectacular missions set during battles between British and Colonial forces. Additionally, the increased NPC amounts mean that the cities of Boston and New York bustle with life. That life is more intelligent as well, with NPCs able to interact with each other and engage with Connor thanks to the "completely revamped crowd AI".

A central element to the *Assassin's Creed* games is the Animus: the device that allows Desmond Miles to access ancestral memories that lie locked away in his DNA. The way the Animus is

Have you heard the phrase "do not fire until you see the whites of their eyes"? That expression was coined at the Battle of Bunker Hill on 17 June 1775. Throughout the game you'll hear similar historic quotes and speeches thanks to the detailed records of the American Revolution.

visually presented from game to game is perhaps one of the unsung pleasures of the series. For all intents and purposes, when you take control of Connor, you as the player become Desmond Miles. Visually, the new Animus for *Assassin's Creed III* does a good job of enhancing this illusion and that's largely thanks to its new, integrated 3D feel; think in-game augmented reality. It'll also make use of some of AnvilNext's more impressive visual tricks, such as shattering the entire scene whenever Connor moves out-of-bounds.

Supporting cast

It's already been revealed that figures like George Washington, Ben Franklin and Charles Lee will be making an appearance, but we were also told that about 80% of the game's characters will be historical people. For Ubisoft however, the characters that populate the game are just half of Connor's supporting cast; the environments make up the other half.

Boston, New York and the Frontier are all being treated like characters in *Assassin's Creed III*. During the presentation we were shown a gameplay sequence with Connor arriving in Boston. People filled the streets, all of them performing tasks like selling newspapers, loading wagons or selling wares. Children ran amongst

the crowds and a dog trotted next to its owner, panting in the heat. A woman stumbled, dropping a basket of apples which rolled around in the dirt. Suddenly a passer-by snatched up an apple and disappeared down the road while the woman shouted for assistance. At this moment in the presentation we were told that this was an example of "emerging gameplay": you could choose to pursue the thief, or walk by, minding your own business.

The Frontier is being treated with equal care so as to prevent it becoming a dull, lifeless space. During the presentation, Francois mentioned that 30% of the game's missions will take place in this massive area. Ubisoft wants you to be able to explore every tree, river and cliff side, and while the Frontier gameplay sequence shown was confined to a fairly small area, scrambling up a rock face to higher ground revealed a vista stretching into the distance. Indeed, the very name "frontier" denotes an area ripe for exploration – an area removed from man's involvement. Perhaps the sense of being alone is what makes the Frontier such a contrast to the bustling cities usually found in *Assassin's Creed* titles?

A FLUIDITY OF MOVEMENT

Ubisoft has rebuilt every animation for *Assassin's Creed III*. The fluid, free-running mechanics that have become

Layouts of Colonial cities during the mid-18th century posed a problem for Ubisoft designers: the streets between buildings were wider than usual, making it unlikely for an assassin to be able to jump from building-to-building. The solution: trees lining the streets.

a staple of the franchise have seen big advancements thanks to AnvilNext. The biggest cause for this overhaul is the environments. Connor's climbing movements from tree-to-tree or from tree-to-rock have to be seamless – it's much harder than animating an assassin jumping from building to building, because the geometry of what Connor is climbing can change from one organic surface to the next.

Free-running has seen adjustments as well, with Connor now able to slide under obstacles and leap onto moving surfaces like wagons. In the Boston gameplay sequence, Connor is chased by a group of British soldiers. Eventually he is able to leap through an open, second-story window of a house (startling a woman inside who shrieks in panic) and escape out the back window by jumping into a tree, climbing to higher branches and then leaping from tree-top to the neighbouring building's roof.

Watching Connor move through the trees of the Frontier (as he stalks a British regiment below him) is equally mesmerising. Light sprinkles of snow fell from the boughs as his weight buckled the thinner branches. He paused, perching in that iconic assassin pose as the group of seven soldiers marched underneath him. Suddenly Connor had impaled one of them with the new Rope Dart weapon (an ancient

LEFT
Ubisoft has purposefully put a lot of tiny details into Connor's appearance. Note the blade of his tomahawk: it's meant to resemble the Assassins symbol.

"Owing to the period of history, guns have become more prevalent. As such, a cover system has been introduced to *Assassin's Creed III*..."

Chinese weapon featuring a sharp point attached to a length of rope); he stepped backwards off the tree branch and the weight of his fall lifted the lifeless body of the soldier attached to the other end of the rope. Two more soldiers were cut down before they knew what was happening. Connor grabbed a fourth soldier and used him as a human shield as the remaining three took aim with their muskets. All three fired at once and as the smoke cleared, Connor dropped the lifeless soldier whose body had stopped the bullets. The remaining three had no time to reload before Connor was on top of them, dispatching them with the new dual-weapon combat system. The tomahawk made a sickening sound as it penetrated the last soldier's skull; combat in *Assassin's Creed III* is a much more brutal affair.

Owing to the period of history, guns have become more prevalent. As such, a cover system has been introduced to *Assassin's Creed III,* but don't worry: there were no chest-high walls or crates to be seen during the gameplay demonstrations. Cover does, however, mean new ways to dispatch enemies with cover-to-target assassination moves.

The final snippet of gameplay that we were treated to showed Connor at the Battle of Bunker Hill. As hundreds of soldiers fired volleys from muskets, Connor moved from cover to cover so as to flank the enemy's position. His

Assassin's Creed III will feature a changing weather system that impacts gameplay. A thick blanket of snow will inhibits Connor's movements, while rain makes gunfire impossible.

target: the general commanding the British force. Climbing the cliff-side to the left of the enemy's entrenchment, Connor reached the top and immediately moved into a stealth mode as he crept through bushes – thick flora now acts as contextual cover and Connor will automatically crouch and move slowly. Spying his target, Connor rushed from his hiding place, killing a British soldier in his path with one fluid motion before mantling off the body to maintain his momentum, pushing him into a second soldier who fell just as quickly. Finally, Connor leapt off a small outcrop to embed his tomahawk in the general's body. This fluid, momentum-driven kill string is another new combat and animation feature to *Assassin's Creed III*.

I would be lying if I told you that I didn't feel slightly disappointed when Ubisoft revealed that *Assassin's Creed III* would be set during the American Revolution. When those blurry first images of our new assassin hit the Internet with the Betsy Ross flag flying behind him, I was not convinced. Ubisoft, however, is thoroughly convinced, and the developer's excitement was genuine throughout the game's press debut event. Ubisoft hasn't got a shadow of a doubt that this is the *Assassin's Creed III* that everyone wants, and after witnessing the game in action, I'm now inclined to agree with them.

- Mikit0707

Interview

Matt Turner, **lead script writer**, *Assassin's Creed III*

NAG: Tell us more about the new cuts-cene development procedures that *AC III* **uses.**

MT: We're doing full performance capture, which basically means you have the motion capture, the facial capture and the voice capture all happening at the same time. So the goal with that is to try and get as high-fidelity out of the actors' performances as possible. We're getting to that level where we're starting to be able to have that subtlety and nuance that actors can give; so we can actually go out and find some even better actors and be confident that the performance they're going to give will come through in the capture. The beautiful part of that is that the breath [of the actor] is in line with the movements they're making. So it's allowing us to hit a new level that *Assassin's Creed* hasn't been anywhere near before, and we're really excited about it.

NAG: We noticed during the gameplay videos that the movement from gameplay to cut-scene is very fluid — there's no break at all.

MT: Yeah, that's something we're pushing on. It's somewhat of a challenge in games to be able to bridge that gap even more; to get away from that disconnecting cut-scene. For *Assassin's Creed III* our whole goal was to take the entire franchise to the next level, and that includes things like that: that cut-scene transition being as seamless as possible to keep the player immersed. I'm happy you noticed that because it's something we've definitely been working on.

NAG: Could you give us a little more background on Connor; it was mentioned he's half Mohawk Indian.

MT: He's half Mohawk and half British. It was important for us to have a character who was outside of the conflict. We didn't want to have him taking sides in terms of British or Colonial; he had to have his own motivations that were clear of the whole Colonial fight. That was the inspiration for going that direction. We started researching different Native American tribes and the Mohawk one was the one that fit best with us. So we've been working really closely

with two Mohawk consultants from the tribe currently, and they've been making sure that all of the ways that we present him [Connor], from what he wears and how he talks and all that stuff, is as authentic as possible. We're really trying hard to move away from that prevalent and common stereotype that you'll see for Native Americans. A lot of media and films and previous games present kind of like a mishmash of 500 different tribes, whereas the truth of the matter is that each tribe is very unique and they have these really, incredibly rich and interesting cultures and creation stories. It's really interesting stuff and we're trying to be as true to the Mohawks as we possibly can.

NAG: The whole game will take place over 30 years from 1753-1783, but it was also mentioned that Connor only becomes an assassin in 1770.

MT: Yeah, you'll get to play him and experience Connor throughout his life. It's a big window of time set before and after and during the American Revolution, so we'll see Connor evolve through all of that.

NAG: Tell us about Connor's appearance; you've got elements of Native American and almost British military coming through in his outfit.

MT: First of all we have a very traditional assassin look with the hood and the white — it's very important to have that visual fidelity of who you are as an assassin. With his garb, there are definitely elements of Native American but more of it is just Colonial in general because he needs to look at home with the rest of the people he's with in the colonies. So we tried to have a fusion of all of that. Interestingly enough, when you see him among people in the cities he actually looks more at home, I think, than any of the other assassins have before. Even in the woods, because of the white in winter especially, it looks like he's supposed to be there.

NAG: Let's talk about the Frontier. The animals are going to be the crowds in place of the people you'd find in the colonies. Tell us about

the interactions. It looked like there was a scripted scene with a bear at one point.

MT: Yeah that was one encounter with a bear, but we have many different animals that are going to be the crowds, and they're going to react to snow and they'll have their whole living, breathing world. It should feel to the player that the animals are living in the Frontier in spite of you, so they're doing stuff if you're not even there. We really wanted to make it feel like it's a living, breathing forest. That was a big thing for us when making this Frontier map, which is one-and-a-half times the size of Rome from *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. But when we started building it, it was about building it for a 3D playable space from the ground-up, to have all kinds of stuff involved for the player to go and explore and find, and part of that was the animals themselves and they really contribute to that.

NAG: How will the changing weather system work? Will weather change dynamically so that in the middle of a sequence it might start raining or snowing?

MT: No, it's not dynamic in that it won't start randomly in the middle of a mission. It'll be winter at certain points and that sort of thing.

NAG: We've got a forum attached to our magazine's website and one of the concerns that kept getting posted was that, thanks to the American Revolution setting, the franchise is going to head in a "rah-rah America!" direction. Was that ever an issue during development? Did that ever even come up?

MT: We were definitely aware that that might be a concern when we made that decision, but it's important to realise that historically America doesn't even exist until 1773, which is when our game ends. So actually the time during when our game stands, it's just colonial England really. I think the core fantasy of what Connor is involved in and what he's doing, you know, basically he's a pioneer and you're fighting for freedom, but not necessarily just Colonial freedom. Connor is a very just character; he's setting out to make sure that the injustices that happened to him won't happen to other people. So he's not operating out of pure revenge; he wants to set things straight in a sense. He experiences a pretty traumatic event when he's younger and that kind of triggers him to go and stop certain things.

So yeah, I get that initial reaction of "oh it's all rah-rah America", but the fantasy of where you are and what's happening in that time and how volatile and interesting it is and the people that are there, it's really, really cool. Once you start diving into the history and learning about these people, I think players are going to be really into it because it's a really interesting and dynamic time. **NAG**

Two heads; one boot.
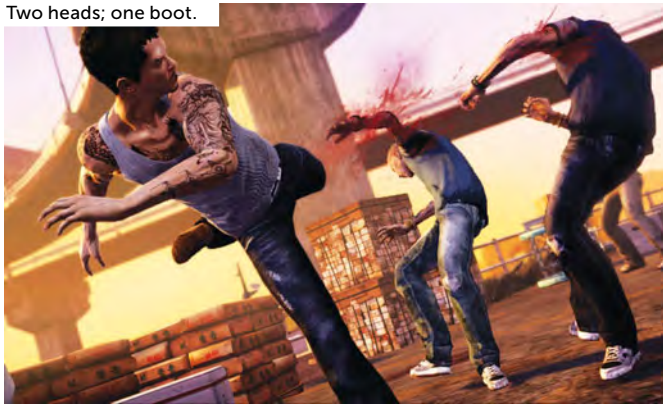
Sleeping Dogs
True Crime might pay after all...

If *Sleeping Dogs* looks familiar, that's because it's *True Crime: Hong Kong*. We took a brief look at the series reboot back in 2010 (August issue), before it was delayed until 2011 then unceremoniously cancelled.

Activision felt the game "wasn't good enough" to compete against other open-world games, even though initial impressions were overwhelmingly positive. Square Enix on the other hand, felt it was something worthwhile and bought the publishing rights for the "virtually complete" project, but not the *True Crime* name.

So now United Front's open-world kung-fu combat driving shooter lives again as *Sleeping Dogs*, channelling the spirit of *Stranglehold* in a *Grand Theft Auto* style game.

While the name may have changed, almost nothing about the game has been altered. The story is still that of Hong Kong police officer Wei Shen, gone undercover to take down the Triad organization *Sun On Yee*. While the basic building blocks follow the genre formula of driving, shooting and on-foot combat, individually they appear more mechanically competent than the genre is used to.

United Front Games consists of former members of EA Black Box, Rockstar Vancouver, Radical Entertainment and Volition Inc.

"Wei can parkour over and through market stalls cluttering neon-lit back alleys, scramble up and over walls, and pull off many of the moves that give Hong Kong kung-fu action cinema its unique flavour."

The first True Crime (Streets of LA) was released in 2003, one of the first open world games launched after Grand Theft Auto III.

Gunplay uses tried-and-true cover-based mechanics: you can blind-fire from behind walls, slide over or around cover to advance quickly, and quick-kill enemies who pass by unsuspectingly.

The driving segments are inspired by *Need for Speed*, since several of the developers worked on previous *Need for Speed* titles. In a tip of the hat to *Pursuit Force*, if you're riding on a motorcycle you can jump on to another moving vehicle. Vehicles themselves can act as projectile weapons if you decide to bail, using player-triggered slow-motion to shoot the car or bike petrol tank on your way out.

The hand-to-hand combat system, central to the game and heavily influenced by *Batman: Arkham Asylum*'s "Freeflow" combat, incorporates smooth cinematic counters, combination attacks and environmental takedowns. Wei can parkour over and through market stalls cluttering neon-lit back alleys, scramble up and over walls, and pull

off many of the moves that give Hong Kong kung-fu action cinema its unique flavour.

There are three different "experience" systems that influence what kind of equipment you can buy and which missions you gain access to. "Triad XP" is gained by killing rather than arresting, letting you unlock dangerous underground guns and violent combat moves frowned upon by society. "Face XP" is respect, a factor in which prominent Hong Kong figures will consider you important enough to chat with. "Police XP" gained from the straight-and-narrow, granting you access to police equipment and above-board abilities.

As you gain Face XP you'll be able to undertake storyline missions that move the plot forward, but only when you want to. As you explore, there will be side-missions such as street races for earning extra cash to spend at the various in-game stores. **NAG**
- Miktar

Dead or Alive 5

This time it's all about the "inner beauty"...

The product of a singular vision, those unfamiliar with the *Dead or Alive* series are (rightfully) of the opinion that it exists mainly as a vehicle for mammary physics. The more sensible onlookers know it for what it is: a fighting game series with unique charms and ideas.

Dead or Alive 5 will be the first entry created without the input of series creator Tomonobu Itagaki. It's been almost seven years since *Dead or Alive 4* which launched in 2005 as an Xbox 360 launch title. This is also the first time the series appears on PlayStation 3.

"Our female characters have been such a huge symbol of the series, what we want to do is redefine that." says Team Ninja lead Yosuke Hayashi. "We want to make a woman who really moves a man's heart."

And those beautiful women will punch and kick each other until something explodes. There *are* dudes too, like a ninja (of the Gaiden variety), a Bruce Lee clone, and a spandex-wearing African-American DJ. The cast has been redesigned from the ground up with more realistic proportions in mind. Gone is the "doll" aesthetic that has given the series its stiff mannequin look. Characters will now sweat, show their exhaustion visually, and their clothing will get scuffed during brawls.

"What we want to call this is our concept of 'fighting entertainment.'" says Hayashi. "We don't really want to use this 'fighting game' term anymore, because through this 'fighting entertainment' what we really want to do is blend the fight and really kind of make it interactive with the stage and what is really going on."

The "entertainment" part comes via the new Power Blows: a single-button charged

"What we want to do is make a woman who really moves a man's heart."

- *Yosuke Hayashi, Team Ninja*

attack that, when successful, triggers an over-the-shoulder camera and slow-motion. During this, you can pivot your view and aim at the background, which lights up as you select a target. When you tap an attack button again, you send your opponent flying where you were looking. Walls break and glass shatters, but now you can also trigger dramatic changes to the battlefield such as causing the entire half-built skyscraper you're fighting on to collapse to the street below.

Interactive stages have always been a series staple, but *DoA5* takes it to new heights, turning it into a strategic choice. The bombastic action is viewed through a new cinematic camera which zooms, pans and tries to make everything look as dynamic as possible. A standard "classic" side-view camera can be selected.

Much is being kept under wraps such as the cast list, how destructible environments are, fighting system changes, and so on. It's been confirmed that Akira Yuki from *Virtua Fighter* will appear as a playable guest character. **NAG**
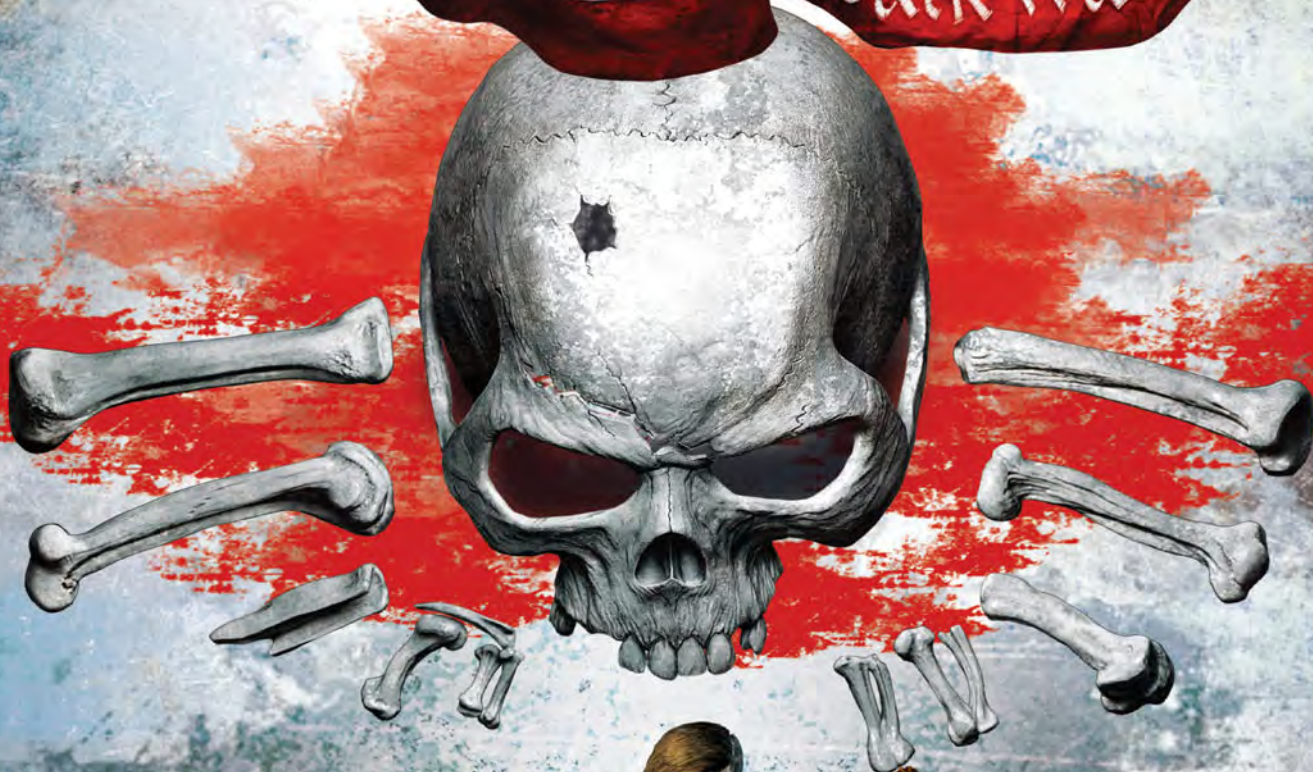- Miktar
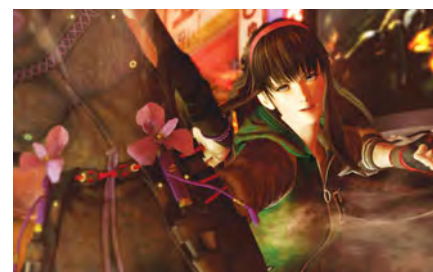
Dead or Alive was created by Tomonobu Itagaki in 1996, inspired by the *Fatal Fury* and *Mortal Kombat* series.

Tecmo was founded in 1967 and sold office cleaning equipment. In 1969 it started selling amusement equipment (arcade machines).

Over 16 million players are registered with Nadeo, thanks to their *TrackMania* series.

ShootMania Storm

D.I.Y. F.P.S.

FPS. Go-to genre for franchise reboots, glamorised representations of war and occasionally, because it's the right choice for the game in question. The "first-person shooter" genre has come a long way since the 1990s. No longer a rudimentary murder simulator (die Nazi scum!), now you even get first-person shooters without any kind of shooting whatsoever.

ShootMania Storm has plenty of shooting – a mania of shooting. But more importantly, it aims to bridge a specific chasm that's developed over the last decade. While first-person shooters have managed to keep their graphical fidelity lead on the PC platform, they've fallen woefully behind in terms of features and functions when compared to their console-bound counterparts. They lack customisability that doesn't require a degree in programming, level-editing that doesn't require a bachelor's in architectural design.

Taking much from their build-whatever-you-want *TrackMania* racing franchise, Nadeo is bringing their unique brand of level creation to a multiplayer first-person shooter. You can snap together a new arena with unique composition and layout quickly and easily, using the game's "Planets" currency, much like the "Coppers" from *TrackMania.* It's clear the fundamental design of *ShootMania* is heavily influenced by grand-daddy *Quake III Arena.* Arenas are abstract, neon-edged and groomed for e-sports.

Part of the e-sports consideration carries over to the weapons. There's only one, an energy-bolt "rocket launcher" that fires four plasma bursts before requiring some downtime for reloading. It's a bold choice; Nadeo wants to avoid the "which gun is the best" mentality. There are no explosions or blood, which Nadeo says hinders e-sports. To help spectator readability and comprehension, players carry their health on their backs in the form of a shield, adorned by a user-selectable sigil that empties as they get hurt. The player character models look like hip fluorescent-rimmed 1990s cyber-warriors.

To bring a tactical mix to the single-weapon game design, maps can have "Rail Blocks". While standing on a Rail Block, you're given a one-hit-kill highly accurate railgun, but move off the block and you lose the weapon. You can design your own types of blocks using the built-in ManiaScript, while jump pads, lifts and other such constructs come bundled so you don't have to make them from scratch. ManiaScript is powerful. You can even make walls you can draw on for interactive displays; teams can scribble battle plans on them, or you can make turret control displays.

ShootMania will be released in three parts, the first being the jungle-themed *Storm*, followed by the snow-themed *ShootMania Cryo*, and an unnamed third sometime after. Arena shooters haven't seen serious play since *Quake III* and *Unreal Tournament 2004. ShootMania*'s intuitive editor and refined gameplay might do the trick. **NAG**
- Miktar

> There are no explosions or blood, which Nadeo says hinders e-sports.
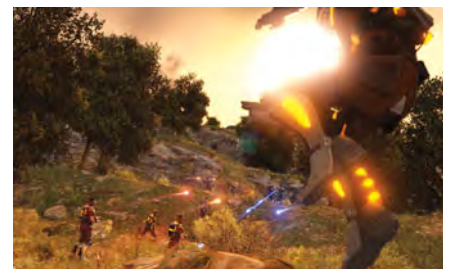
Founded in 2000, Nadeo is a French video game developer. Their first game was sailing simulator *Virtual Skipper 2,* which has five sequels.

REVIEWS**INTRO**

We asked for a crew of cunning assassins, but instead we just got ass. Meet your reviewers.

What is your most treasured gaming lifestyle item (comic, figurine, plush, etc.?)

RedTide
A limited edition cast Millennium Falcon I bought in Los Angeles one year. I also have a black plague plush that I keep in the hope that humanity will suffer a good and thorough culling again soon. ;)

Miktar
I wouldn't say I have any "treasured" items, since it's all just stuff, but I do like the *Mega Man* art book I have, and my various Bowser toys/plush/posters.

Azimuth
My extensive collection of *Gears of War* figurines. They've kept me happily single for years.

Mikit0707
Tough one – I've got lots. Probably my signed *Assassin's Creed* Encyclopaedia or my figurines of Wander on Agro and the bird colossus from *Shadow of the Colossus*.

GeometriX
I have a coffee mug with my face on it. Underneath it says "this is an ugly mug." Apparently this counts because Michael is desperate for replies and that's all I can think of.

Barkskin
My 6:1 scale doll house. It has a video games room on the second floor so it does count for this question. My parents gave it to me when I was much younger, before they figured out I was a boy.

MINI**REVIEWS**

Kinda like regular reviews, only bite-sized and with less of those pesky words.

ARMY CORPS OF HELL

It's kind of like a demonic version of *Pikmin*, where plants and cuteness have been replaced by goblins and violence. *Army Corps of Hell* casts you as the fallen "King of Hell" on a quest to reclaim your throne. To do so, you lead your newfound goblin army against a variety of demonic foes.

Your army follows you wherever you go, holding formation until you give the command to attack. Three different types of goblin will happily do your bidding: basic soldiers are the grunts, throwing themselves at tougher enemies from short range; spearmen charge from long range; and magi cast various elemental spells to damage foes. Hold down the right shoulder button, and a steady stream of goblins will rush forth to attack whatever enemy you're targeting. Killing enemies rewards you with rare loot, which is collected by your minions and then used as components in the crafting of new armour and weapons for your goblin army. It's simple, uncomplicated fun, but its mechanics lack variety.

70

LUMINES: ELECTRONIC SYMPHONY

Tetris-style musical puzzler *Lumines* took westerners by storm when first introduced to our PSPs back in 2005. Since then, it's seen a number of iterations and re-releases on numerous platforms. With the launch of the PlayStation Vita, it's only fitting that *Lumines* brings its sound- and light-based antics to the new handheld in the form of *Electronic Symphony.*

For newcomers, it works like such: you're presented with a number of stages, each with a unique song, background and colour scheme. Two-toned cubes spawn at the top of the screen and the blocks must be rotated and moved as they descend to make groups of same-coloured blocks match when they meet at the bottom. Do so, and the matched blocks are removed and added to your score multiplier. With a number of solo game modes (as well as a two-player duel mode), you've got a number of ways to play this brilliantly addictive puzzle game, and it features a range of network connectivity features like online leader boards to show how your scores rank against those of your friends.

80

SILENT HILL HD COLLECTION

Silent Hill 2 has not aged well. This HD skinning of the 2001 title serves only to show us just how poorly it controlled and how bad it looked, and then makes it look even worse somehow. Yes, the creepy feelings and scares in this game are still present, not much can take that away, but this port stinks of laziness: stuttering audio, an awful conversion of that iconic fog effect and frequent streaming lag will plague the game from beginning to end. The most effort put into it has been the re-recording of all voice-overs, but the new voice talent misses the mark and feels like an attempt to turn *SH2* into a Hollywood slasher.

SH3, on the other hand, has done quite well. Much more attention has been paid to the game's textures and lighting, and having a stronger technical base from which to work has definitely helped the process.

And... that's about it. This "collection" comprises just two games. There's no sign of *Silent Hill 1* or *4*.

60

Ramjet
My *Assassin's Creed* T-shirts... I hardly ever wear them, in an effort to keep them pristine.

SAVAGE
My 28 inch limited to 1,000 units *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* premium format figure from Sideshow, complete with real clothing and Sankara stones.

ShockG
The tip of my left little finger (lost in the cooling fan incident of 2003). I keep it in liquid nitrogen so that one day science can reattach it.

WEBSCORES

How do we measure up? We scour the 'Net to find out what the rest of the world thinks.

ARMORED CORE V
NAG: 75
Metacritic: 66
Gamerankings: 66

BLADES OF TIME
NAG: 58
Metacritic: 56
Gamerankings: 59

JOURNEY
NAG: 86
Metacritic: 92
Gamerankings: 91

KID ICARUS: UPRISING
NAG: 91
Metacritic: 83
Gamerankings: 84

SSX
NAG: 85
Metacritic: 82
Gamerankings: 82

THE SIMS 3: MASTER SUITE STUFF
NAG: 70
Metacritic: N/A
Gamerankings: N/A

STREET FIGHTER X TEKKEN
NAG: 75
Metacritic: 84
Gamerankings: 82

TEKKEN 3D: PRIME EDITION
NAG: 68
Metacritic: 64
Gamerankings: 65

THE JAK AND DAXTER TRILOGY
NAG: 80
Metacritic: 81
Gamerankings: 81

TWISTED METAL
NAG: 82
Metacritic: 76
Gamerankings: 77

YAKUZA: DEAD SOULS
NAG: 48
Metacritic: 64
Gamerankings: 65

REVIEW
SCORES
GUIDELINE

Here at *NAG*, our reviewers are gamers first, and, while we strive to be as objective as possible with our reviews, each reviewer has their own preferences, opinion and style that will come through in their reviews. It's not an exact science – anyone telling you otherwise is fibbing. We love playing games and, sometimes, certain genres and series will stand out for an individual reviewer; it's not uncommon for those preferences to reflect in their review score. Having said that, we've put together this little guide to help you understand how we rate our games – more or less.

1-39 This game is broken, both technically and in terms of gameplay. Even if you get it to run, playing it is a painful experience that you wouldn't wish upon your worst enemy.

40-49 It barely functions, but there's little real game here. Maybe if you got it for free you'd spend a few hours with it, but it's not something you'd recommend to friends.

50-59 Acceptable, but nothing special. It's generic in every conceivable way, but it's solid enough and might be worth spending some time hunting for achievements.

60-69 Now we're getting somewhere. This game is good; it has something interesting about it, and fans of the genre or series should enjoy it, but something significant holds it back from greatness and might prevent newcomers from latching on.

70-79 This game is solid. Anyone who enjoys this type of genre will have a great time and could finish it without too much aggravation. It shows care and polish, but falls short in a number of areas.

80-89 Excellence has been achieved; a game that you'd happily play through multiple times and recommend to friends. It adds interesting, if imperfect, advancements to the genre or series, or ticks all the expected boxes with flair and polish. It's technically superior to many other games but perhaps misses an opportunity or two, or doesn't innovate enough.

90-100 As close to perfection as possible. This game is highly innovative; it has incredible visuals; it plays like a dream and you can't get enough of it. You have to look for faults just to avoid giving it a perfect score. You'll go back and play this in ten years and shed a tear of joy when you do.

Prototype 2

Little bit louder now

Fourteen in-game months after the end of the original *Prototype*, we return to New York City (now known as New York Zero, or NYZ) as Sergeant James Heller. Alex Mercer has switched from protagonist to antagonist, with Heller taking on the role of our new playable character. Heller blames Mercer for the death of his wife and young daughter. With vengeance as his motivator, Heller recklessly hunts down his newfound nemesis, but rapidly discovers that Mercer isn't exactly going to take his vengeful attempts lying down. Mercer instead infects Heller with his strain of the Blacklight virus (the virus that's the cause of this entire mess), imbuing Heller with the same supernatural attributes and abilities that our former protagonist so comfortably revels in. And that's how *Prototype 2* begins, as Heller tries to make sense of a senseless situation and fights to suppress the virus that's tearing New York apart.

Possibly the most annoying thing about *Prototype 2* is its story. It's perfectly functional, but with a narrative based in such powerful loss, I guess I expected a bit more from it. There's not much to care about here, and what could've been a worthwhile, possibly even vaguely poignant story eventually devolves into nothing more than a vicious display of ham-fisted machismo. The few attempts that the game makes at actually leveraging its subject matter with tender moments come across as forced after seeing such blatant disregard for it at every preceding turn. Progression through the storyline is spread across three zones, each atmospherically different to reflect the level of Blacklight infection within. The Yellow Zone – the game's starting area – is littered with refugee camps, and a black ops military force known as Blackwatch (who specialise in dealing with viral outbreaks and biological weaponry) works with Gentek Corporation (creators of the virus) to experiment on the surviving populace, who are battling to endure within this zone and overcome occasional outbreaks of infected. The Green Zone is where life supposedly carries on as per usual for the civilians within – but Blackwatch oppression sees to

it that this isn't actually the case. Finally, there's the Red Zone: the most dangerous of the three, completely overwhelmed by the virus and filled with all manner of nasty beasties and men with big guns. It's also Mercer's personal playground. The open world that you're presented with plays its part adequately, although I've definitely seen much more effective and convincing displays of open-world design in other games. It's certainly a livelier world than what we saw in the original *Prototype*, but that's not saying much.

Various contacts throughout the zones provide you with missions that either further the story or reward you with all manner of useful and devastating powers. Weapon mutations turn Heller's arms into an array of deadly melee weapons, each with unique specialties and effects. You start off without much destructive potential, but by using Heller's ability to consume enemies (which allows you to assume their identity as well, which is useful for escaping alerts and for infiltrating restricted areas in very basic stealth segments) and absorb their DNA, you'll unlock upgrades for everything from your rocket launcher proficiency to all-new weapon mutations. You'll also gradually evolve Heller's base statistics (i.e. level up) as you gain Evolution Points for completing missions, consuming enemies and more. Once you've evolved to a new level, you can allocate points into increasing your max health, or improving your regeneration rate, or raising your maximum sprint speed and jump height. Then there are Mutations: numerous sets of ability augmenting upgrades that are unlocked by completing side missions, or by searching for various collectables. They're divided into different categories – the Locomotion Mutations develop your travel powers (jumping, gliding and dashing through the air), for example. By the time you reach the game's final missions, your once pitiful powers will have become outrageously potent, and seeing your powers gradually improve with each new upgrade selection is one of the most satisfying facets of the game.
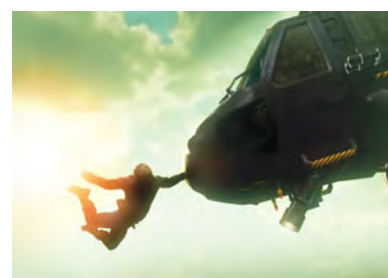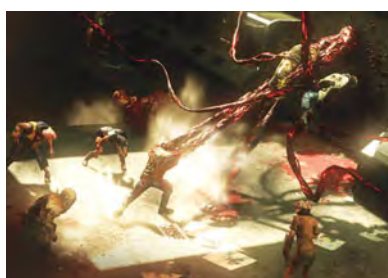
What's more satisfying, however, is the unrelenting action and constant mayhem that you're able to engage in at any given moment. It'll be instantly familiar fare for anyone who's played the original *Prototype*, as Heller shares many of Mercer's abilities from the first game – with the exception of a couple of skills exclusive to Heller. Aside from the technical improvements that have been made with the sequel, if you were to put *Prototype 2* and its predecessor side by side, it'd be tough to tell them apart. As such, if you didn't enjoy the original, you're not going to enjoy this. Enemies progressively get tougher as the game rolls onwards, to match your constantly evolving tools of destruction – but you're always more than sufficiently equipped to deal with any obstacles. You're able to pick up weapons dropped by downed Blackwatch soldiers if you fancy a bit of ranged combat. Eventually you'll be able to commandeer vehicles and helicopters (midair hijacking FTW) that are useful in taking out tougher foes. Or you can simply destroy the vehicles in a single, brutal blow.

There's a lot of fun to be had with *Prototype 2*. While the game's not really difficult, the action is always intense and immensely enjoyable. There's really not much to it, but what it lacks in depth, it makes up for in unrelenting chaos. It's fierce, it's gory and it's fluid. Unfortunately, the lack of any real substance does lead to repetition, and loads of it. The optional side missions often feel cut and paste, reusing the same objectives and mission types over and over in fresh locations. Enemies too, are limited in their variety, with only a handful of different foes to take on throughout the game. Eventually slicing through the same enemy types countless times inevitably leads to feelings of monotony. It's a pity, because with action this solid, I'd have loved to see more enemies to dispatch in harshly imaginative ways. **NAG**
- Barkskin

82 It's difficult for me to see the flaws in *Prototype 2*. I know they're there, but I'm so blinded by all the wanton destruction, idle amusement and carefree fun that my brain refuses to acknowledge them and take them seriously. If you're able to do the same, then you'll enjoy it. If you're looking for something more substantial, however, I'd recommend looking elsewhere.

PLUS
Helicopter hijacking / Tank bashing / Ass kicking

MINUS
The story is mostly meaningless / Gets repetitive in a number of ways

Armored Core V
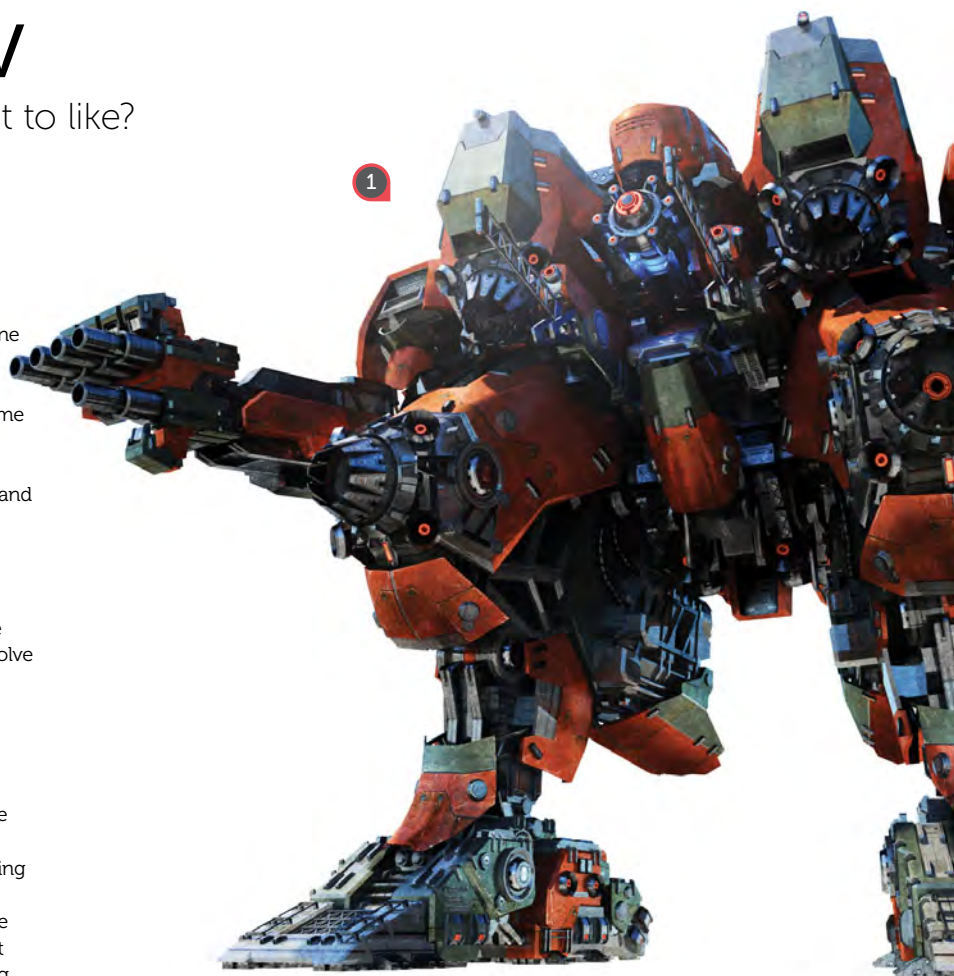## Giant robot combat – what's not to like?

The *Armored Core* series has long been the stalwart of the mech combat genre, and fans will no doubt be pleased to see its return. For the uninitiated, a "mech" is a giant walking combat vehicle, outfitted with an arsenal of devastating weaponry that it uses to decimate opposing forces and level entire city blocks. Set in a post-apocalyptic world, *Armored Core V* allows players to pilot one of these steel behemoths of destruction through a lengthy campaign. You fight on behalf of a generic rebel resistance movement whose goal is the toppling of an oppressive regime imaginatively named the "Corporation". Storyline has never been the strongest selling point of the *Armored Core* series, and the latest iteration is no exception: the plot is contrived and lacklustre, and takes a backseat to the action.

The story mode comprises ten principal missions, all of which are fairly lengthy and challenging, but which are generous enough with their checkpoints so as never to become frustrating. In between the story missions, you'll be able to tackle "order missions", optional jobs that usually involve a quick skirmish and which offer a lucrative payout for their successful completion. The missions themselves generally see you taking on a variety of enemies, including aircraft and ground artillery, as well as opposing mechs (known as ACs), which provide the bulk of the game's challenge. Your enemies are fast and ruthless, and they'll make full use of the environments in which you duel them, hopping between buildings or darting down alleyways to evade you, or targeting you from behind cover with their sniping lasers.

In order to successfully overcome the challenges that lie before you, you'll need to tweak your mech, swapping out its various parts and customising its weapon loadout using the funds that you've accumulated from completing side missions. This is where *Armored Core V*'s biggest strengths, and also its principal weaknesses lie. Kitting out your mech is done in the assembly room, which is where you'll be faced with a dazzling array of statistics, specifications and options for customisation. You can customise virtually every aspect of your mech, choosing its weapons, armour and even switching out its various body parts. Some of the changes are easy to understand – for example, a base with treaded tracks is going to be slower than a pair of bipedal legs, but it will also allow your mech to carry a heavier load. Some of the other options, like the generators, cores and fire control systems are harder to appreciate at first, but the value of investing in such upgrades gradually becomes apparent as one spends more time with the game.

The lack of a comprehensive tutorial means that the customisation options can become a very significant stumbling block for players new to the *Armored Core* series, particularly since choosing the wrong mix of parts will make the already challenging missions almost impossible to complete. Those willing to invest sufficient time to make sense of the various assembly options will find that the game offers an incredible depth of customisation, and the multitude of different options ensures that virtually no two mechs will be alike.

This is particularly significant given the game's strong online focus. After joining or creating a team, you'll be greeted with a world map which outlines missions that are available to you. You'll be able to tackle the game's story and order missions with a team-mate, which alleviates the challenge but also halves your payout for completing their objectives. You'll also be able to tackle the game's Conquest mode, where you'll

1 Pictured: a giant robot.

DETAILS

Platforms
360 / PS3
Genre
Action
Age restriction
12
Multiplayer
  Local
  None
  Online
  10 players
Developer
From Software
Website
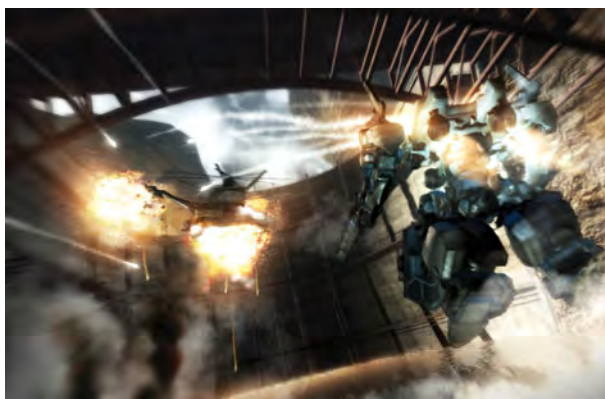www.armoredcore-v.com
Publisher
Namco Bandai
Distributor
Megarom

"Armored Core V undoubtedly represents a step forward for the series. **It lives up to the legacy of its predecessors by offering an overwhelming degree of depth** and customisation..."

pursue world domination by invading enemy-controlled zones with a squad of four team-mates. You'll earn team points as you progress, which will allow you to invade additional zones and further your team's dominance. In between bouts of frenetic online combat, you'll be able to trade parts with your companions as you plan your next move on the global map.

Visually, *Armored Core V* is a mixed bag. The mechs themselves are superbly detailed, and you'll appreciate every close-up of either your own or an opposing AC – they truly are a sight to behold. The environments, on the other hand, are disappointing in their lack of imagination. Thanks to a drab colour palette, the cities you'll traverse feel washed out, and each locale looks and feels exactly like the last. Uninspired voice acting is mitigated by the fittingly dramatic sound track and a range of guttural and convincing sound effects, but the game's presentation remains one of its weaker points.

Armored Core V undoubtedly represents a step forward for the series. It lives up to the legacy of its predecessors by offering an overwhelming degree of depth and customisation, and although this makes for a steep learning curve, it also allows players to truly feel like they have some ownership over their mechs. The expansive campaign risks becoming tedious and taxing in its single-player guise, and this might represent a significant barrier of entry for newcomers to the series. However, *Armored Core V* truly shines in its multiplayer modes, which breathe new life into the campaign missions as well as providing fast-paced and strategic combat opportunities in the massive Conquest mode. Despite the game's unpolished presentation and lacklustre storyline, *Armored Core V* manages to provide a deep and enjoyable experience, which fans of the franchise will certainly enjoy. **NAG**

- Madman

75 *Armored Core V* is certainly the best entry in its series, and perhaps its genre. Incredibly deep customisation options and an expansive campaign are complemented by challenging and strategic combat. Fans of the franchise won't be disappointed, though newcomers might be deterred by the game's complexity.

PLUS
Engaging combat / Superb depth / Compelling online offering

MINUS
Steep learning curve / Lacklustre plot

Street Fighter X Tekken

The greatest fighting game mash up in theory

Street Fighter IV, unlike any other game after the original Street Fighter II, revolutionised 2D fighters, proving that not only did they have life in them still, but could still be improved upon tremendously making them as appealing as the 3D fighters if not more so. As Tekken grew more complicated with each successive title (but oddly enough less interesting), Street Fighter IV offered the perfect balance for seasoned players and newbies alike. A solid game which has since seen many titles built around its success. Each of them featuring a variation of the game mechanics but ultimately being an unmistakable Street Fighter IV derived game.

It was inevitable then, that a "vs." game would come to be, pitting the two premier fighting games on current generation machines against each other. Tekken at the forefront of 3D fighting games and Street Fighter as presented in SFIV. Much like Capcom vs. SNK on previous generation consoles, the idea of pitting your favourite fighting game characters against each other is more appealing in theory than it is in practice. The previous games from both Capcom and SNK were not bad and in fact were quite enjoyable, but they were not better than the individual games they were comprised of. That is, The King of Fighters and Street Fighter respectively were better than the mash-up.

Having said that, those two franchises made more sense together than Street Fighter X Tekken, if only because all the characters in these games moved in a 2D space and their move sets were relatively left intact with no significant changes in how you would play them in each game save for a few combos and time-based attacks. This however is not the case with SFXT, especially with the Tekken characters which

are essentially skinned Street Fighter characters. Moving them into a 2D space has not worked well in gameplay, even though they remain visually appealing.

Many of the moves Tekken characters have are based on positioning which is lost when fighting in one less dimension. While the move rosters for recent Tekken games are far too long and for the most part redundant, in this game they've been reduced to a mere fraction which creates the opposite problem. There's simply no reason to play the Tekken characters at all as they just don't offer anything you haven't seen before in one or more Street Fighter games. Despite all this, the game is fun if you don't take it seriously. Spend some time in the training mode and master some combos and it's a little more rewarding.

Ultimately, Tekken X Street Fighter is likely to be a better game, if only because Street Fighter characters and gameplay mechanics do translate well into 3D as we've seen before in the Street Fighter EX series. The 3rd dimension may allow the Tekken characters to retain their individuality as much as possible while expanding on what the Street Fighter stars have at their disposal. **NAG**

- ShockG

1 Every team pair of characters (like Juri and Bison or Guile and Abel) has a unique ending cutscene, most of them charmingly silly, usually related to the personality of the fighters that find the Pandora.

DETAILS

Platforms
360 / PC / PS3
PS Vita
Genre
Fighting
Age restriction
12
Multiplayer
  Local
  2 players
  Online
  2 players
Developer
Capcom
Website
www.
streetfighter.com
Publisher
Capcom
Distributor
Ster Kinekor
Entertainment

75

In a world without *Marvel vs. Capcom* and *Mortal Kombat vs. DC*, this would have been a great title, but as it is, it won't satisfy cross over title fans or purists of any franchise. *Street Fighter X Tekken* feels unpolished; even though it is sometimes fun.

PLUS
Jin vs. Ryu / Looks fantastic

MINUS
Gem System / Wasted opportunity

Kid Icarus: Uprising

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Sorry to keep you waiting!

Sequel to the 1986 cult classic *Kid Icarus*, there is very little similarity between the two in terms of how they play. Where the original was a side-scrolling platformer, *Uprising* is a strange blend of genres and ideas.

Most chapters start with a flying Sky Battle section reminiscent of the *Panzer Dragoon* series. It's on rails, but you need to move lead protagonist Pit out of the way of incoming fire, while simultaneously aiming your shots at enemies. It's during these sections that *Kid Icarus* is at its graphical best. The environments you zip through, under and over are wonderfully realised: beautifully textured, detailed and locked at a smooth frame rate even with 3D on.

The meat of a chapter is the Land Battle, where the game becomes a kind of third-person shooter. You aim your view and cursor using the stylus in ways not unlike that of mouse-aiming on the PC, and depending on how you nudge or hold the analogue stick the type of attack you do changes. These in turn vary depending on what kind of weapon you're using. Finding a weapon that suits your play style is important. There is a rich crafting system for making your own weapons by combining existing weapons, transferring their properties such as auto-dodging or poison attacks to the new one.

Near constant dialogue occurs between characters while you play – sometimes serious, sometimes funny, and often very self-referential. *Uprising* luxuriates in being video game, making constant references to the previous *Kid Icarus*, other games, and breaking the "fourth wall" by talking about itself. The voice acting is high quality, but the cheesy nature of the dialogue won't work for everyone. If you can get into the spirit of it, it's very much like a good cartoon series. The witty tit for tat between Pit and villain Hades, is a particular delight.

Difficulty is set before each chapter via an "intensity" slider, higher settings yield better loot but at the cost of a larger "bet" of hearts (currency). Die, and the bet is lost and the intensity is lowered. Each chapter tries to exceed the previous in an ever-upward spiral of I-can't-believe-that-just-happened. Quite lengthy at around 10 hours, *Uprising* feels like a trilogy, streamlined and deep, packed into a single title. **NAG**

- Miktar

MULTIPLAYER

Uprising has a fully-featured multiplayer setup for both online and offline play, including bot support. The two game types are free-for-all and "Light vs. Dark", a team-deathmatch mode where each time you kill someone on the opposing team their team health meter is reduced. When empty, the last player to die becomes their team's angel, a powerful character. The match ends when your team's angel is defeated. Because players bring their own weapons and powers to the match, Light vs. Dark is balanced by having stronger weapons empty out your team's meter faster when you die.

DETAILS

Platforms
3DS
Genre
Third-person shooter
Age restriction
12
Multiplayer
  Local
  6 players
  Online
  6 players
Developer
Project Sora
Website
kidicarus.nintendo.com/uprising/
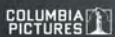**Publisher**
Nintendo
Distributor
Core Gaming Systems

91 This might as well be the first *true* Nintendo 3DS title. The sheer amount of content and polish is incredible; everything is measured and considered, highlighting the talents of its designer Masahiro Sakurai (*Super Smash Bros. Brawl*). It's a game not to be missed.

PLUS
Amazing visuals and orchestral score / Customisable difficulty / Overflowing with content / Very replayable

MINUS
Controls can be tricky for some

Journey

MUST PLAY

I've been through the desert with a friend with no name...

On my first journey I met many others. Running across the sun-streaked desert, I'd come across a fellow traveller and we'd wander together for a while. We could only chirp at each other, make little or big single-note noises. The very basics of communication, but enough, and capable of transcending language/culture. After a time they'd leave me behind, or I'd lose them somewhere, having gotten caught up in exploring. I reached the summit, the ever-present goal since the start of the journey, alone.

I will never have a journey like my second one. No two will ever be alike, of course, but my second journey will always be special. I met a traveller at the very start of the journey, and we travelled together all the way to the summit. They always waited for me, and I always waited for them. When I got lost or wandered off to explore, they sat and meditated. When they didn't respond to my chirps, I would meditate next to them until they returned. When we completed our wordless pilgrimage together, I could see their PlayStation Network name for the first time, appearing after the credits. I sent them a friend request, and amusingly, received one from them at the same time.

We know nothing about each other, other than the two hours we experienced together. And yet, I already know more about them than I do my neighbours, and some of my friends.

Reviewing video games is easy. Especially when they're *just* video games. Most videos games are made to entertain, or challenge. They're products. You can do quantitative analysis on products. They either do what the manufacturer intended, or not. A reviewer only has to grade accordingly. But what happens when a video game is more than just a game? It's still a product: to be sold, bought and consumed/experienced. But

1 The more symbols you find, hidden throughout the game, the longer your "scarf" becomes, which increases how far you can jump/fly.

2 By holding down the "chirp" button for a while, you charge up a powerful yell, which will recharge a fellow traveler's scarf.

what if that product's purpose lacks a satisfactory definition?

Journey contains no dialogue, no explicit narrative except some tapestries that mime out the context for which you find yourself in: a red-clothed figure in the middle of a vast desert surrounded by ruins. The "plot" takes a few cues from the cyclical nature of Stephen King's *The Dark Tower*, but with a definite "less is more" attitude. Like a concept album, the game expects you to sit down and play a complete session. The value of your experience comes from full investment, hence the "shortness" of a single play through.

Judged solely as a game, *Journey* is a short platform game through a sequence of beautifully rendered environments, with ambient anonymous cooperative multiplayer. Looked at more holistically, *Journey* can be a revealing look at how we yearn to form connections.   **NAG**

- Miktar

DETAILS

Platforms
PS3
Genre
Adventure
Age restriction
7
Multiplayer
  Local
  None
  Online
  2 players
Developer
Thatgamecompany
Website
thatgamecompany.
com/games/
journey/
Publisher
Sony Computer
Entertainment
Distributor
PlayStation
Network

86 It's either an okay platform game with pretty graphics and nice music, or it's a unique and unforgettable event that will redefine what you've come to expect from video games. It depends entirely on you, and what you bring to the experience.

PLUS
Hauntingly beautiful soundtrack / Amazing landscapes and vistas / Singularly unique experience / Highly replayable

MINUS
Limited to a single platform / Requires an internet connection for best experience.

Twisted Metal

No one expects to die on Christmas

David Jaffe and his crew at Eat Sleep Play have been trying for some time to get *Twisted Metal* on the PS3. I guess the third time really is the charm: two scrapped games later and we're finally here with this "reboot" of the franchise, because apparently nobody can be bothered to come up with sequel titles any more.

Playing like some sort of demonic combination of demolition derby and *Carmageddon* in (mostly) arena-style maps, *Twisted Metal* is all about vehicular combat. Players choose their vehicles, each rated for armour, speed and special weapon power, and drive around cities, purpose-built arenas and other locations with the intent to kill each other. Weapons and other pickups are scattered around each map, so knowing where to find them and, more importantly, actually picking them up (rockets in the behind tend to mess with your trajectory) are important skills to master.

Another skill worth mastering is figuring out the controls. Simply put, they're a mess. In addition to regular driving controls and four weapon buttons, vehicles can jump, turbo reverse, super turbo boost (on top of the regular turbo boost), and brake/turn (a single move with a dedicated button); it's a bit much. The result of this excessive level of control almost makes up for it – vehicles are highly manoeuvrable and mastering the controls does make you a powerful foe – but it feels like the controls could've been designed to be simpler without sacrificing too much control. And the presence of two alternative control schemes leads us to believe that the developers weren't quite happy with how things turned out either.
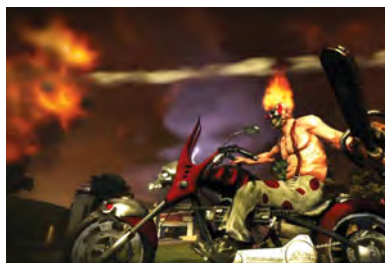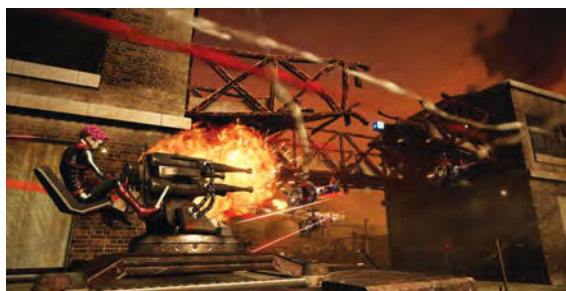
1 Your vehicle's appearance will change based on your currently selected weapon, such as the chain gun in this screenshot.

Control issues aside, *Twisted Metal* is a polished product with stylish visuals, detailed environments and a great heavy metal soundtrack to keep your blood pumping. There's a single player campaign that spans three chapters and does a good job of providing some background into the game's characters, but should generally be treated as a primer for the game's multiplayer modes. Split-screen, LAN and online support (quick match or a server list) make for a rounded package, but we'd appreciate a few more maps – the eight on offer provide a good bit of variety (and each tends to have something special and unique), but it won't be long before you're eager for more – in particular, those designed from the ground up as race tracks. While they're at it, some more attention could be paid to the races themselves; most of the game modes involve killing your opponents (a purpose around which the entire game is designed), leaving the races feeling sloppy and too chaotic. They're also bloody difficult. **NAG**

- GeometriX

DETAILS

Platforms
PS3
Genre
Vehicle combat
Age restriction
18
Multiplayer
  Local
  4 players
  Online
  16 players
Developer
Eat Sleep Play
Website
www.twistedmetal.com
Publisher
Sony Computer Entertainment
Distributor
Ster Kinekor Entertainment

82 Unapologetic mayhem and destruction with a surprising hint of tactical thinking. *Twisted Metal* is perfect for the couch with some friends or for those who like to sink an unhealthy amount of time into online play.

PLUS
Detailed vehicles and environments / Combat is fun, chaotic and tactical / Solid multiplayer offering

MINUS
Over-complicated controls / Race mode feels incomplete
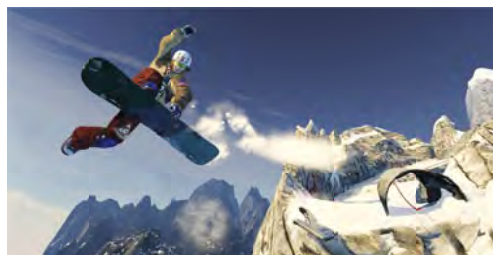
SSX

MUST PLAY

Winter is coming

Strapping yourself to a wooden board and zipping down a snow-covered mountain might not be everyone's cup of tea in real life, but it sure does make for a fun video game. *SSX* takes a break from the serious stuff – the sports simulations, even the skateboarding games that force you to learn ridiculous button combos and split-second timing – to give you a pure arcade experience that's as entertaining as it is challenging.

As is the case with many extreme sports games these days, *SSX* has a "story", but it's mercifully not bound in adolescence or anything too silly. You are *SSX* – an extreme sports crew that aims to conquer the world's seven deadly descents, and you want to do so faster and with more flair than your rival team lead by some guy called Griff. That's it, and frankly, that's more than enough motivation. You don't even have to pay attention to, or even compete in, the game's career mode, as the free play section is open from the beginning.

There are three event types in *SSX*: Race It, Trick It, and Survive It. The first two are simple – either get to the bottom of the run first or rack up the highest score while doing so. The last event type is easily the most challenging of the lot and requires that you take care when working your way down a mountain without careening off the side or into a ravine. This is made especially difficult with the game's twitchy physics engine that makes for an exhilarating descent 90% of the time, but a frustrating experience for the remaining 10% (if you knew how many times I wrote the F word in my review notes, you'd have me committed).

Each of the seven descents adds its own flavour and unique challenges, providing you with huge variety

between locations in addition to the variety within each descent – there's no such thing as a "right" or even "clear" path a lot of the time. Some locations require that your chosen character pads up with armour that helps you get back on your feet quickly after a tumble; others require that you bring a pair of ice picks to let you carve on the rock-hard surfaces; others have massive gaps that you'll have to glide over with your wing suits. With all this other stuff going on, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the actual snowboarding isn't up to snuff, but you'd be wrong.

The biggest let-down with *SSX* is its lack of traditional multiplayer. Instead of the regular offering, *SSX* only lets you compete in asynchronous events in which you post your best times or highest scores and race against ghost players. There are a few more bits added on like discovering where your friends have hidden "geotags" and trying to find them for a large points reward, but otherwise, this mode feels too sterile and plays like a last-minute addition. It's not terrible, but it's not ideal either. **NAG**

- GeometriX

1 Get enough air and you might have a chance to grab onto the helicopter that shadows you down each run.

DETAILS

Platforms
360 / PS3
Genre
Sports
Age restriction
3
Multiplayer
  Local
  None
  Online
  None
Developer
EA Canada
Website
www.ea.com/ssx
Publisher
EA Sports
Distributor
Electronic Arts
South Africa

85 It's the farthest thing you can get from a snowboarding simulation. If that sounds good to you, then you'll have a great time with this wild and exciting arcade experience.

PLUS
Arcade-like action / Plenty to do / Descents feel adventurous and varied

MINUS
Poor multiplayer component / Frustrating difficulty spikes

Yakuza: Dead Souls

PONY

Problem child

A typical example of how not to do a zombie game.

"Yakuza: Dead Souls **manages to take this well-loved idea** and turn it into a painful, laborious exercise"

It would have been great to be a fly on the wall during the initial meetings that decided the next chapter in the long-running *Yakuza* franchise. The question must have been asked: "how do we advance this deep, story driven, character-rich RPG crime-drama series in the most sensible way?" The best answer... stick zombies in it. Puff, puff, pass...

Yes, the new Yakuza game leaves behind the more serious, "real-world" feel and makes for the zombie-apocalypse hills. The once-vibrant fictional city of Kamurocho has been overrun by shambling dead, intent on killing anything with a pulse and the bad sense not to emigrate. While the decision to move the franchise in this direction is, in a word, odd, one can forgive a bit of weirdness. This is largely due to the prospect of massive amounts of zombie-carnage, which always makes for great gaming.

But *Yakuza: Dead Souls* manages to take this well-loved idea and turn it into a painful, laborious exercise that only the most ardent fans of the franchise will pummel and curse their way through. The satisfying brawling that made the first four games (particularly the fourth) so enjoyable has been stripped away, replaced by a third person shooting mechanic that is extremely broken. The role-playing elements, like exploring Kamurocho, are there initially, but as the game progresses through its four chapters and the zombie-infection spreads, even this disappears, replaced by endless zombie killing.

That would not have been so bad, had SEGA managed to build a decent shooting system into the game. But what you have here – upgradable weapons aside – is a clunky attempt to spice up the franchise, with disastrous results.

The player has three options when shooting; randomly spraying bullets in the direction they are facing (good for killing walls), a more precise, strafe based shooting mode (good for killing walls accurately) and a zoomed in, over-the-shoulder view (good for slow moving walls). The game's auto-aiming is painfully rubbish, leaving the first two modes barely effective, and the third mode's aiming is so painfully slow that it is almost impossible to dispose with the hordes of fast moving zombies.

Add to this that the camera has a mean streak a mile wide, and you have a game that becomes, at times, almost unplayable. The player will get themselves stuck in horrid situations, with enemies pummelling them endlessly while the camera displays a rather nice view of a corner. And the controls are twitchy enough to make readjusting them difficult. **NAG**

- Ramjet

48

This is a good example of an interesting idea done badly. SEGA surely had high hopes for this one (prizes and accolades) but it turned into a problem child. The story is good, but that just isn't enough here.

PLUS
Good voice acting / Interesting ideas

MINUS
Broken mechanic / Repetitive / That damned camera!

The Sims 3: Master Suite Stuff

The boudoir collection

You can almost set your watch by *Sims 3* releases, particularly when it comes to stuff packs. These packs, unlike full expansions, aren't game changers – rather, they add more items for you to use in building up your Sims' homes.

The Sims 3: Master Suite Stuff pack is no different, although its focus on all things bedroom does set it a little apart from the rest. It's just a sexier version of a Stuff pack, really, playing into the fact that a great number of *Sims* players seem drawn to the bedroom antics of their little computer people.

The *Master Suite Stuff* pack adds furniture for the bedroom and bathroom (well, plumbing, I suppose in the latter case) as well as new night-time outfits. These are generally a little racier than other stuff pack inclusions in the past, although *The Sims 3* is still securely PG13.

If you are a fan of the franchise – read as rabid consumer of all things *Sims*, because that's what the fans actually are – then getting this stuff pack really is a no-brainer. Having more stuff for Sims is always appealing.

But if you would rather spend your hard-earned cash on a game changer, then this isn't what you are looking for. Pretty much the usual Stuff pack case...

- Ramjet

DETAILS

Platforms
PC
Genre
Simulation
Age restriction
13
Multiplayer
  Local
  None
  Online
  None
Developer
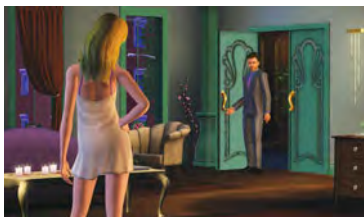Sims Studio
Website
za.thesims3.com
Publisher
Electronic Arts
Distributor
Electronic Arts
South Africa

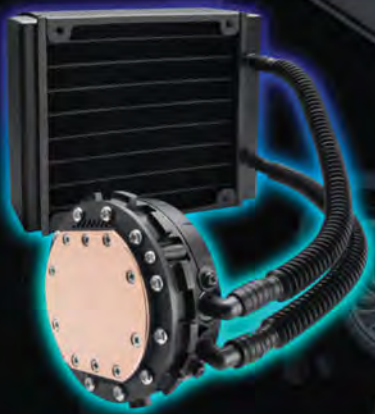**"That better not be you making those bubbles!"**

70 It's a themed Stuff pack, like so many before it. Enough said.

PLUS
More stuff

MINUS
No game changes

Blades of Time

As if time travel wasn't already confusing enough...

Blades of Time tells the tale of a young and scantily-clad fortune-seeker by the name of Ayumi, though it does so in a manner so convoluted as to border on being unintelligible. Although the details of the plot are difficult to discern, it soon becomes apparent that Ayumi has to traverse a multitude of different landscapes, all of which harbour legions of enemies that would rather see our heroine dead. Given such overwhelming odds, it's quite fortunate that Ayumi has the magical ability to manipulate time, and it is this facet that provides the foundation for the game's entire play dynamic.

At its most basic, *Blades of Time* is a fairly rudimentary hack-'n'-slash action title. There are only two attack buttons, and aside from performing the odd finishing move on an already weakened opponent, you're limited to just running around and performing basic combos. Early on you'll also gain access to a rifle, which allows you to eliminate foes from afar, but slow and unresponsive shooting controls quickly put a damper on the prospect of exciting gunplay. The game's saving grace comes in the form of Ayumi's time manipulation: at the press of a button, you're able to rewind time itself, and the events of the preceding moments play out before your eyes in reverse. After you're done rewinding, you'll regain control of the protagonist, but a "shadow" version of Ayumi will carry out whatever actions you originally performed. This allows you to level the odds against multiple enemies, or to team up with "yourself" to simultaneously strike at larger foes.
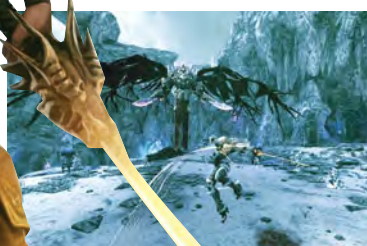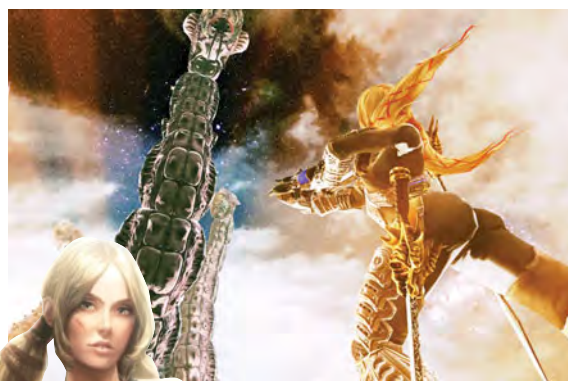
The unique time reversal mechanic makes for some interesting boss fights, which will require you to target multiple weak points simultaneously, or to use one of your clones to distract a titanic foe, allowing you to sneak up on your enemy from behind and land a killing blow. The concept also allows for some intriguing puzzles that require some clever thinking to complete.

It's a shame that this innovative and exciting mechanic is hampered by pervasively unresponsive controls which, in combination with Ayumi's limited health reserves, make for an overall frustrating experience. The tangled mess that constitutes the game's plot doesn't help matters, and neither do the stuttering visuals. Even the game's multiplayer mode fails to impress, as it strips players of the time reversal ability that is the single-player game's saving grace. Ultimately, *Blades of Time* is a missed opportunity above all else. Its defining mechanic is undeniably novel and refreshing, and makes for a multitude of "oh snap!" gaming moments, but the game's shortcomings simply cannot be overlooked. It's a shame, but *Blades of Time* is a frustrating mess rather than the unmitigated success that it could've been. **NAG**

- Madman

DETAILS

Platforms
360 / PS3
Genre
Action
Age restriction
16
Multiplayer
  Local
  None
  Online
  2 players
Developer
Gaijin Entertainment
Website
www.bladesoftime.com
Publisher
Konami Digital Entertainment
Distributor
Ster Kinekor Entertainment

58

Blades of Time introduces a unique and engaging concept to a tired genre, but is unfortunately stifled by its shoddy plot, poor controls and visual flaws.

PLUS
Unique time manipulation mechanic / Intriguing puzzles

MINUS
Convoluted storyline / Unresponsive controls / Frustrating

Tekken 3D: Prime Edition

Prince of Iron Fist Tournament

Handheld consoles have turned out to be a surprisingly successful platform for fighting games. It seems that every major franchise is having a go (bar *SoulCalibur*, but we're sure that won't be long) and doing so with their own approach to the conversion.

Tekken 3D: Prime feels like a port of *Tekken 6* (complete with all 41 characters – most impressive) with lower-spec fighting models, a trimmed-down combo list and absolutely no story mode, just a random survival mode and a random quick battle mode. The result is a little disappointing from a *Tekken* fan's perspective, as it does nothing to further the franchise, but the combat mechanisms and controls feel just as good on this wee platform as they do elsewhere. *Tekken* is at home on the 3DS with its 3D environments, but the 3D effect isn't so glaring (even at full whack) that it distracts from the most important bits – the combat. With that said, it doesn't do much to actually enhance the visuals, so it's probably best left off.

Instead of a story mode to explain who the hell anyone is, we get the full-length *Tekken: Blood Vengeance* film. It's... well, it's fine, and not much more: the 3D effect is barely noticeable and the film does its job to fill in the story blanks. Unfortunately, the game's replay value is crippled by the lack of single player modes, and the multiplayer component uses an awkward matchmaking system that will no doubt chase away a lot of players. We found it generally difficult to find a game online. **NAG**

- GeometriX

We call this fighting style "The zombie".

DETAILS

Platforms
3DS
Genre
Fighting
Age restriction
16
Multiplayer
  Local
  2 players
  Online
  2 players
Developer
Arika / Namco Bandai Games
Website
www.tekken.com
Publisher
Namco Bandai Games
Distributor
Megarom

68

While it feels every bit like a proper *Tekken* game when you're in combat, *Tekken 3D: Prime Edition* falls short of its console-based cousins and its handheld competitors with its lacking single player experience and ultimately low replay value.

PLUS
Looks good / Controls feel solid / Extensive character roster

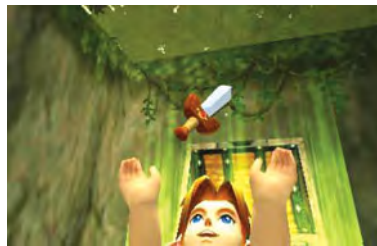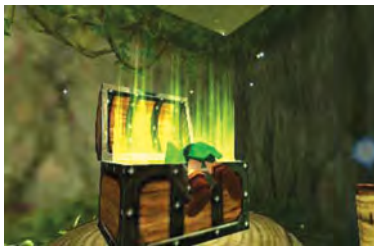**MINUS**
Weak single player offering / Lack of replay value

The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D

Alright, confession time: I had never played a *Legend of Zelda* game and because of this I had no childhood! This being my first *LoZ* game and because I have heard the amount of praise for the series (this game in particular) I had my hopes set high and I am happy to say they were met.

First off, let's go into what a good HD remake should have, and that is better graphics than the original. *OoT 3D* not only has better graphics than the original but completely remakes them to look just as good and even better than games of this generation. An example of this is Link's hair, in the N64 version it looked like "two scones"; in the 3DS version it looks like actual hair. This also goes for all the environments, town and dungeons all look fantastic without a graphical hiccup.

As for the game play it has been adjusted to suit the 3DS quite well. Moving the inventory system to the touch screen makes switching items a lot easier and more efficient (to my knowledge, the inventory was the only complaint from the original). Also the gameplay has not changed much from the original. Link can still lock on to enemies and to beat them you need to time your sword attacks and shield blocks correctly (How I know this: the Internet).

Ocarina of Time isn't praised mainly for its combat

DETAILS

Platforms
3DS

Genre
Adventure

Age restriction
12

Multiplayer
  Local
  None
  Online
  None

Developer
Nintendo EAD

Website
www.zelda.com/ocarina3d

Publisher
Nintendo

Distributor
Core Gaming Systems

system but rather for the real meat of the game: the dungeons! After completing my first dungeon I finally realised why this series is praised the way it is. Not only is each dungeon well designed, but the amount of satisfaction you get after you complete a puzzle is something I have never before felt in any other game. Even with the 3D on it only helps show off the grand scale of some of the dungeons. Not only are the levels well designed, but they have great musical compositions with memorable tracks that will please fans (since they didn't change them) and amazing boss fights.

Even when the player has beaten the game and finished all the side quests, he/she still has stuff to do such as the Master Quest, which mirrors the entire world, giving players a reason to play again if they love a challenge and a boss challenge mode so you can verse all your favourite bosses again
- Jack Van der Merwe

READER SCORE

96 This is by far one of the best HD remakes I have ever seen. This title is a perfect start for people new to the series and also has enough new content to keep the old fans happy.

PLUS
Amazing remade graphics / Great Levels / Memorable tracks

MINUS
Can feel dated at times

READER PROFILE

My Name is Jack Van der Merwe. I am studying at Crawford College La Lucia. I have achieved my black belt in karate at age 14 (that's right, be jealous) and my SA colours at 15 (Be even more jealous LOL).

The Jak and Daxter Trilogy

Naughty Dog's classic series, face-lifted

Considering the abundance of high-definition remakes of classic PS2 titles to hit the shelves in recent months, it's no surprise that Naughty Dog's acclaimed *Jak and Daxter* series has received a current-generation makeover in the form of *The Jak and Daxter Trilogy*. For newcomers to the series, it revolves around the titular duo – brash, goateed youngster Jak, and his diminutive furry sidekick Daxter. The first game in the collection, *The Precursor Legacy*, is a typical but well-crafted platformer which opens with Jak and Daxter setting off on a quest to transform Daxter back into human form following the mishap that turned him into the otter-weasel hybrid that so many PS2 owners came to love. *Jak II* marks a significant change in direction for the series – it has a stronger emphasis on action sequences, a far steeper difficulty curve, and a correspondingly darker plot. *Jak 3*, the final game in the collection, throws a liberal sprinkling of vehicular combat into the mix, whilst also offering a large, non-linear game world. Despite some now-dated visuals (even when up-scaled to HD) the series remains gripping, charming, and very well polished. There's no shortage of nostalgic value for those who played the originals, and for those who didn't, it's an opportunity to experience some of the games that helped to shape the platform genre as we know it today. **NAG**
- Madman

DETAILS

Platforms
PS3
Genre
Action
Age restriction
12
Multiplayer
 Local
 None
 Online
 None
Developer
Naughty Dog
Website
www.naughtydog.com/games/jak_and_daxter/
Publisher
SCEE
Distributor
Ster Kinekor Entertainment

80

A three-in-one compilation of some of the PS2's finest platform titles, with remastered visuals. *The Jak and Daxter Trilogy* offers many hours of entertainment, as well as a fascinating cross section of the platform genre's evolution.

PLUS
Great value / Nostalgic merit / Compelling plot / New trophies

MINUS
Old-school controls / *Precursor Legacy* appears very dated

TECH**NEWS**

KNOW**YOUR**TECHNOLOGY

SFU
Special Funtion Unit in the context of modern GPUs applies to the parts of the GPU that deal with mathematical functions that fall outside of the regular arithmetic operations. These include (but are not limited to) functions such as square root, division, reciprocal, fused-multiply-addition, denormal handling and infinity. These are of high importance in the GPGPU ecosystem and to some degree in commercial programs used on desktop systems. Since SFUs take up a relatively large amount of transistor space for the number of times the features are used, they are typically much less numerous than regular stream processors in GPUs.

TMU
Texture memory units fetch and perform texture operations on pixels such as rotating and resizing. Texturing can be measured in the number of textured pixels a second which is usually equal to or higher than the raw pixel fill-rate. In general, the higher the number of texture units, the better the texturing throughput.

CACHE
In essence any type of SRAM or DRAM can be called cache. Cache mainly refers to the function of a particular segment or part of a memory pool. In modern GPUs and CPUs, however, cache is divided into three or fewer levels with each subsequently higher level operating slower in frequency or having higher latency, compensating for that in increased size. In general L1 (level one) caches are the fastest with sub-5ns latencies. L1 caches are rarely larger than 512Kb.

Memory bandwidth
Much like any other bandwidth on a computer sub-system, this is calculated by multiplying the frequency by the number of bits in the memory sub-system or channel. So a 256-bit, 1GHz memory bus would yield a memory bandwidth figure of 32B/s. Memory bandwidth however is a theoretical figure, that does not take into account latencies and wait states, but is merely a measurement of the maximum amount of data that can be transmitted between two points. In practice there are no devices that reach the theoretical memory bandwidth figures.

#

10,000

BY THE NUMBERS

Razer recently posted a question on its official Facebook page asking if fans wanted another mouse built for left-handed gamers. Min-Liang Tan, Co-Founder, CEO and Creative Director of Razer, said "if there are 10,000 Likes in a month from now on this post, we WILL make a LH Razer Naga." Within a week the number had been reached (at the time of writing his post is sitting on 11,559 likes), and Razer released a press release confirming that development would begin on a left-handed version of the Naga MMO gaming mouse.

DID YOU KNOW?

1366x768 pixels overtook 1024x768 as the most popular screen resolution worldwide, for computers, according to the latest statistics by StatCounter (**http://statcounter.com**), an independent web analytics company that provides free website traffic analysis. Since StatCounter began its tracking of screen resolution in March 2009, as a free service to developers and other users, 1024x768 has been the dominant screen size globally on the web (excluding mobile).

"What we're seeing is that people are turning on the Xbox to play games and then keeping it on afterwards to get other types of entertainment."
Yusuf Mehdi, Xbox marketing and strategy chief

In an interview with the LA Times Mehdi said that households now spend an average of 84 hours a month on the Xbox LIVE online service playing games, watching videos and listening to music. That's up 30% from a year ago. Just over half that time is spent on videos and music. By comparison, the average household spends about 150 hours a month watching television.

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DREAMMACHINE

May's Dream Machine comes with better performance courtesy of the NVIDIA GTX 680 graphics card and lower prices for both AMD and Intel machines. As wonderful as the GTX 680 is, it is not without its issues, especially for those who want even more performance from overclocking. So do not be alarmed when it inevitably gets replaced by an extreme edition featuring double the power phases and a 1.1GHz + reference clock. We may even see it as soon as the June issue of *NAG*.

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

ASUS GeFORCE GTX 680 NEW
R5,500 / za.asus.com

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

Seagate Barracuda 3TB
R1,399 / www.seagate.com

Cooler Master COSMOS II
R3,399 / www.coolermaster.com

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

Logitech G19
R1,599 / www.logitech.com

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

Roccat Alumic
R319 / www.roccat.org

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

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

CMStorm SIRUS
R1,199/ www.sonicinformed.com
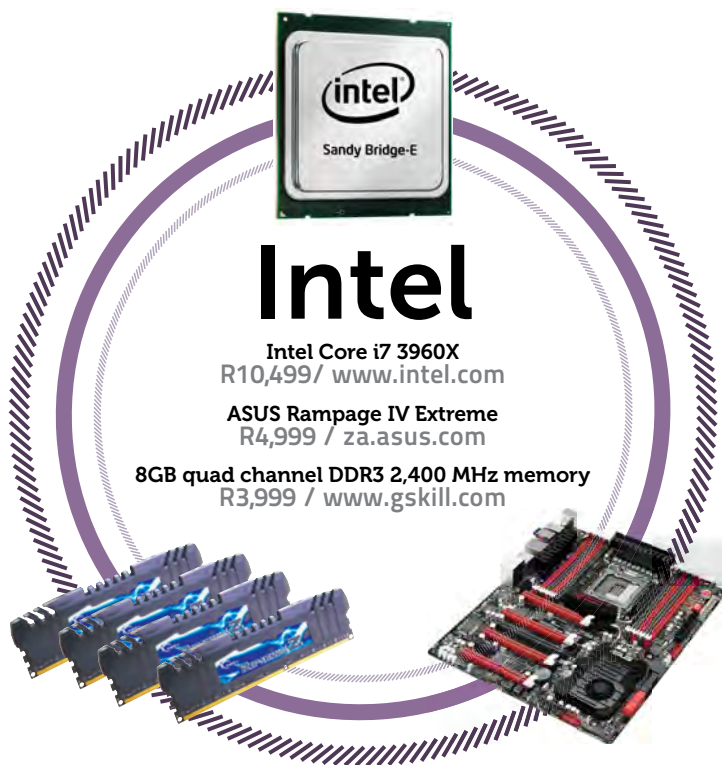
Intel

Intel Core i7 3960X
R10,499/ www.intel.com

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

8GB quad channel DDR3 2,400 MHz memory
R3,999 / www.gskill.com

Intel Dream Machine price:

R53,306

AMD

AMD Phenom II X6 1100T / AMD FX 8150
R2,299 / www.amd.com

GIGABYTE 990FXA-UD7
R2,999 / www.gigabyte.com

**Corsair Dominator GT DDR3
2000 MHz 8GB dual channel**
R1,999 / www.corsair.com

AMD Dream Machine price:

R41,106

Hardwired

Keyboard engineers

I tend to avoid online debates on forums and the like. Not because I don't enjoy a good informative debate, but simply because they are rarely informative. Add to which, to have a debate implies in some way that the parties involved have some kind of evidence from which they make their claims and base their arguments on. As consumers we rarely, if ever, have all the information, but from what we do know and the tools we have at our disposal (including the wonderful thing called the Internet), we should be able to debate sensibly.

Like most things however, what we ought to do and what actually happens are very different. So of late I have found myself dragged into boxing matches where we are not debating technology, but rather dealing with misconceptions that individuals have for whatever reason on a great number of subjects. Since I only have 500 or so words to say what it is I want to bring across, I'll only tackle

> "Just because a new CPU or GPU is made using a smaller pitch, doesn't mean it will automatically be cooler or dissipate less heat or overclock better. It just doesn't work that way."

one issue, and that is the one of process nodes.

Lithography is a complicated process. The fundamentals are simple enough, and indeed are in the word itself, which means etching. However, since we are talking about silicon, copper and other materials that we use in our ICs (Internal Components), it's become a little more involved. In fact, it's at a point where any meaningful node we use today has to be verified not only in theory by physicists and other equally keen minds, but has to go through rigorous testing and implementation phases by equally adept engineers. The idea that we, behind our keyboards, can extrapolate the bulk of the qualitative features of a node by merely pushing sliders up on our graphics cards and CPUs is outrageous at best. We can make summations about the products we have in front us, but when we delve further into the technology behind it, we would do well to use caution and not make assertions based on our vast "personal experience" with sliders and blinking cursors.

Here's a fundamental law of physics that applies to all our ICs, regardless of what they are used for: as the node or pitch decreases, the more sensitive that IC will be to voltage, heat and current. There are many other facets to this but you can be sure about the above for all nodes. Just because a new CPU or GPU is made using a smaller pitch, doesn't mean it will automatically be cooler or dissipate less heat or overclock better. It just doesn't work that way. The complexity of a CPU or GPU and, above all, market pressures, dictate more the product that ends up in front of you than any science behind it that we may have access to. So for those who were looking for their Ivy Bridge CPUs to reach Sandy Bridge speeds on air cooling purely because these are manufactured on a smaller node are in for a wonderful surprise. Rather than assume these new parts will clock better and argue from that position, it's better to ask how the new process would, if at all, improve clock speeds in comparison to current CPUs on the 32nm process.

- Neo Sibeko

Cyborg F.L.Y. 9 Wireless Flight Stick

Website www.cometcomputing.co.za   **RRP** R1,199

Most gamers who take a powerful liking to virtual flight will happily recommend a joystick to anyone looking to dabble in a bit of airborne shenanigans. There's no denying its usefulness as a control mechanism in such simulators. It might also have something to do with authenticity, given that actual planes tend to be navigated through the skies with the aid of joysticks. We don't know; we're gamers, not pilots. What we do know is gaming peripherals, and Cyborg's F.L.Y. 9 is a good one.

Boasting a robotic-looking, angular design that's nicely consistent with Cyborg's other offerings across the gaming spectrum (like the weird, but wonderful and much-loved Cyborg R.A.T. series of gaming mice), the F.L.Y. 9 is designed for wireless use with Xbox 360 - and as such, can be synced with your Xbox as quickly and easily as any 360 controller. Once that's done, it'll work with any game that supports it (which includes the likes of *Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.* and *Ace Combat 6*).

While its unique aesthetics certainly ensure that it looks the part of sturdy, rugged peripheral, we can't help but think that the F.L.Y. 9 feels a bit cheap, particularly the base of the device. We're also worried about the number of supported titles: from what we can tell, there aren't many of them. Still, it does its job well, and it'll certainly give Xbox gamers more precise control over whatever flight games they fancy that support this stick.
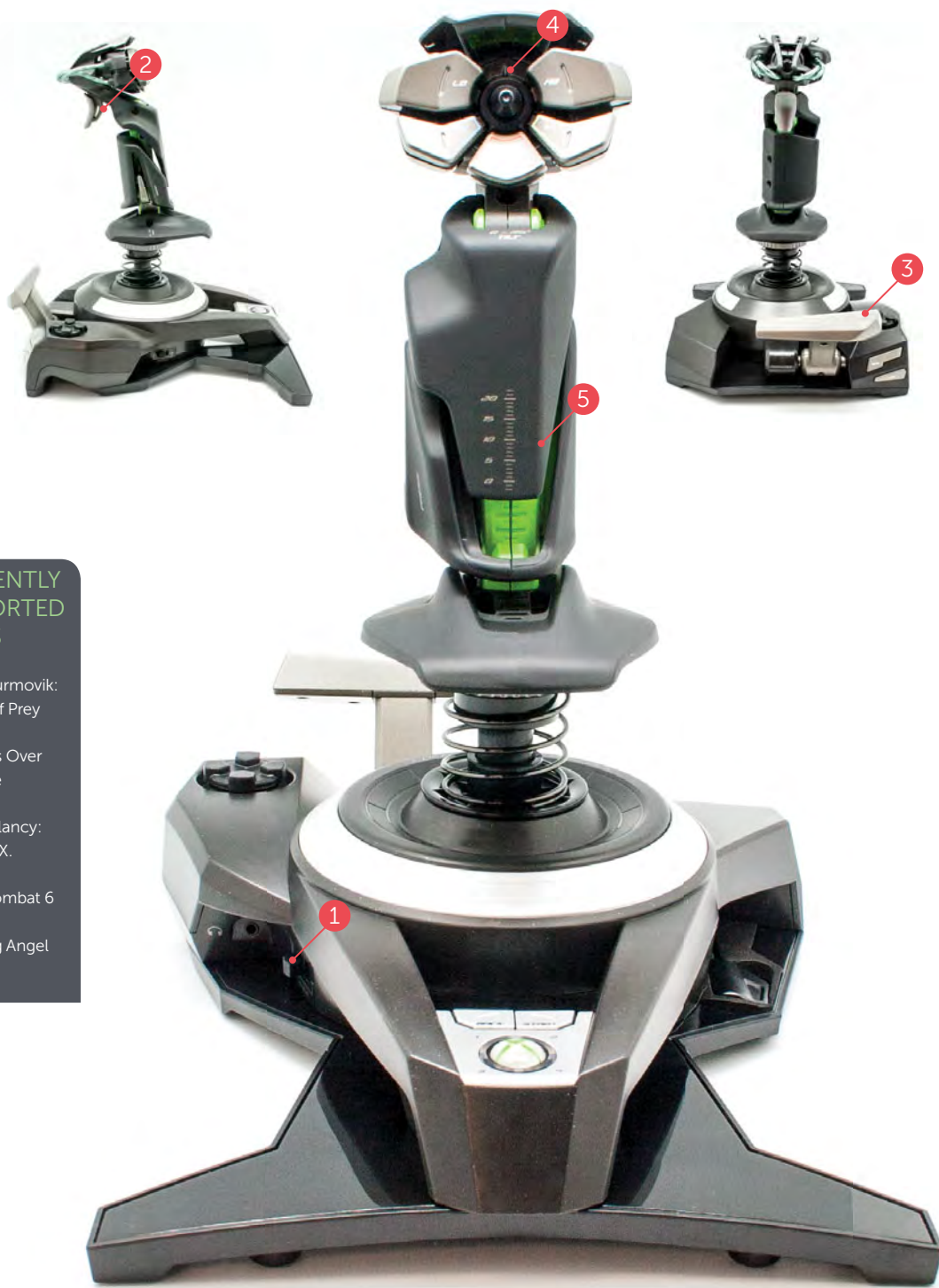
CURRENTLY SUPPORTED TITLES

- IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey
- Heroes Over Europe
- Tom Clancy: H.A.W.X.
- Ace Combat 6
- Blazing Angel 1&2

PROS
- Easily customisable
- Looks mean
- It works

CONS
- Feels plasticky
- Not a huge list of supported titles

ALTERNATIVES
- Saitek Aviator
- Genius MetalStrike 3D

1 Two modes
Tucked away on the left side of the base, you'll find the mode toggle. This allows you to switch between two different control layouts to match the differing control set of various games.

2 Send one up the tailpipe
This here is the trigger. Ideally, when it's pressed, bursts of death-bringers exit from your craft's weaponry, hopefully causing the enemies you're targeting to go boom

spectacularly. Also makes a neat clicking sound when pressed.

3 Full throttle
When you push this forward, your plane flies faster. Pull it back, and it slows down.

4 The gang's all here
You'll spot all the regular 360 controller functions on here. There's the Xbox Guide button, a d-pad, start and back buttons, bumpers, triggers and the

four face buttons – they're all scattered across the F.L.Y. 9's imposing form. There's a mini-stick in the middle of the bit at the top of the stick, which functions as an analogue stick or d-pad, depending on the mode selected. The handle also twists for precise rudder control.

5 Tinkering 'n' tuning
Hidden in the right-hand side of the base is the adjustment tool, always ready for use but out of

the way when it's not needed. This can be used to adjust three of the device's features to better fit the size and shape of your hand. The head (the bit at the top) angle, the handle length, and the handle's rake angle (tilts the handle towards or further away from you) are customisable whenever needed. We like the adjustability, and the stick ships with an attachable lap mount as well, if you plan on using it that way. **NAG**

GENERATION Z

INTEL Z77 MOTHERBOARD ROUND-UP

Intel's Z77 chipset is here. It brings with it as usual new technologies, CPUs and features. While it maintains backwards compatibility with our beloved Sandy Bridge 2nd generation Core CPUs, it is ideally tuned for 3rd generation Ivy Bridge CPUs. Amongst the long list of changes that Intel has implemented in the chipset, most important to us is the native support for USB 3.0 and the PCIe 3.0 standard. While the Z77 chipset still houses as many PCIe lanes as Z68 and P67 respectively, the 3.0 standard doubles theoretical bandwidth so 3 and even 4-way graphics solutions are possible without any trade-offs in performance.

Where USB 3.0 is concerned we can finally be rid of 3rd party controllers that need drivers to function, or at last we can have fewer 3rd party controllers. The benefit of native USB 3.0 support as well means that we may start seeing many more devices on the market and adoption is sure to increase rapidly from here on in.

Sadly however, all these features are only available when using the newer 3rd generation Ivy Bridge based Core CPUs. For those using the current 32nm crop of CPUs, not much will change regarding these two features as they are controlled CPU side.

The good news however is that Z77 boards are licensed to use a technology that Intel showed off at IDF last year from LUCID, dubbed MVP. This technology in its simplest form allows the built-in HD3000 graphics in Sandy Bridge CPUs

to help your discreet graphics card with workloads. What this does is boost frame rates without altering image quality. From our own testing, depending on the game, we have seen gains vary from 30% to a staggering 300%. Games like *Street Fighter IV* on the PC and others based on the engine see frame rates well above 500. Not an entirely useful frame rate, but for those on very tight budgets who can't afford graphics cards costing above R1,000 this technology just may make your games playable at much higher settings than before.

It's currently not perfect, and there are some rendering anomalies, but the drivers we used were early, and we are confident with each successive driver update from both Intel and LUCID, things

will get better. If anything this technology should scare GPU manufacturers as multi-GPU rendering technologies such as SLI and CrossFire may effectively be rendered dead. However we will have to wait and see how it all pans out. Right now though we gathered five Z77 motherboards from three vendors and pit them against each other to find out which one was best. We initially had six boards and four vendors but due to some BIOS issues we had to leave out one motherboard.

In any case, this is a rating not based on price as pricing was not available at the time of writing, neither were any of these boards locally for retail, but it is purely from a feature and performance point of view. What follows were our findings.

ASUS Maximus V Gene

Website za.asus.com   **RRP** R2,999

Don't write off this board because of its microATX size, it is one incredible piece of electronics for sure. It's lifted virtually everything possible from the peerless Rampage IV Extreme on the X79 platform and implemented it for the Z77 chipset. It supports two full PCIe 3.0 slots with switchable modes, an LN2 mode for extreme overclocking, POST LED, clear CMOS, power and reset buttons and a "Go Button" for those overly aggressive tuning sessions that make it impossible to POST. However the most impressive aspect of this board is in presenting by far the most polished BIOS ever.

It's virtually identical to the one on the Rampage IV Extreme, but it's improved further with more options than we can go into here in such a short space. It's unequivocally without competition. The team at ASUS, with Peter "Shamino" Tan on the team have once again outclassed and out-engineered every other vendor out there by far. The Maximus V Gene is easily the best of the lot and the board by which all others are to be measured. If you're a serious overclocker above everything else, look no further than this board as you'll be hard pressed to find an equal here.

10
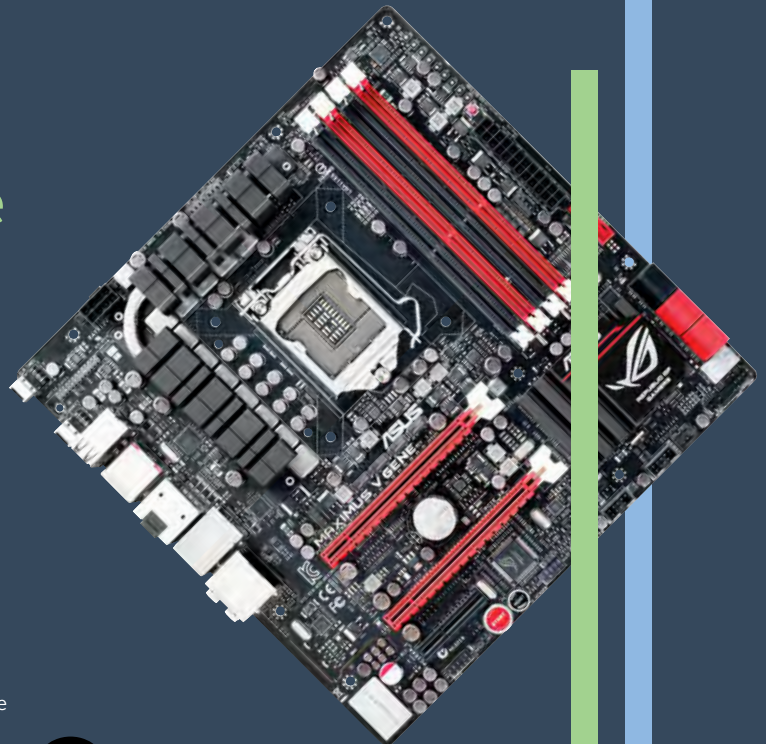
ASUS P8Z77-VDeluxe

Website za.asus.com   **RRP** R3,999

This motherboard is most likely what you will be looking for when building a new gaming or high-end Z77 based motherboard. In typical ASUS fashion it's kitted in various shades of blue, making it somewhat similar to the previous Z68 and P67 boards. As a deluxe board however it does come with a few extras such as three full size PCIe slots, but only one is 16x electrically while the others are limited to 8x. Keep in mind that this will still allow 3-way graphics configurations, as the primary slot will have its link speed dropped to 8x as well in such a configuration.

ASUS has outfitted the board with no less than 10 USB slots at the rear, six of which are USB

3.0. Should you require more, the board offers a header for an additional two ports. SATA connectivity is taken care of by the native PCH on the Intel chipset and a 3rd party controller for a maximum of eight drives.

The board is pretty much standard affair where ASUS is concerned; it has a surprisingly detailed BIOS with an impressive array of overclocking options which make this a very attractive platform. Add Wi-Fi connectivity to the package and you have a fairly impressive motherboard. For those looking for a relatively high-end board but whose budget won't stretch to the ROG range of products you need look no further than this motherboard.

8
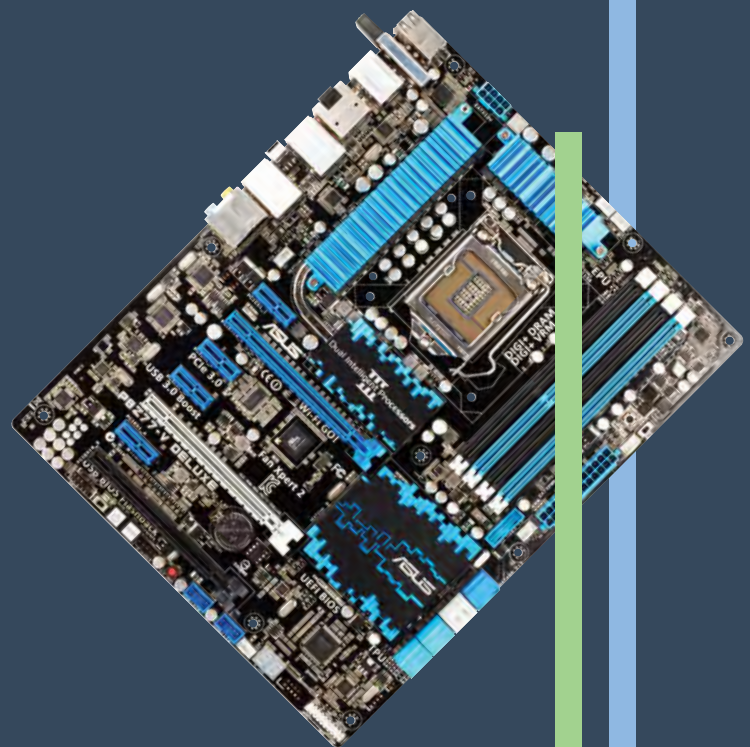
GIGABYTE G1.Sniper M3

Website www.rectron.co.za   **RRP** R1,869

This motherboard started out as very uninspiring. It has no power or reset, POST LED, or clear CMOS button. It only has four SATA headers and visually it's rather bland. With the beta D11 BIOS it was even worse, as it had missing memory clocking options, and all kinds of problems that were very much unlike what GIGABYTE have produced in the past. It seemed that the troubled X79 BIOS issues had carried over to the Z77 platform. However, during testing we received an updated BIOS and it fixed almost every issue we had with the board.

In fact with this small update, this became the fastest motherboard in the entire roundup, offering blistering performance and the only board to offer sub 1 minute 25 second score in SuperPi 8M with no tuning. Despite not having a POST LED, it never failed to POST even with ridiculous settings. It moved from being at the bottom of the pile, to right up there with the best of the lot. With the best audio solution of all motherboards here by far and having more display outputs than any other board, it redeemed itself and instantly turned into one of our favourite motherboards. While the BIOS update doesn't add all the functionality that is missing like the on-board buttons, this motherboard is one very efficient performer and definitely worth consideration.
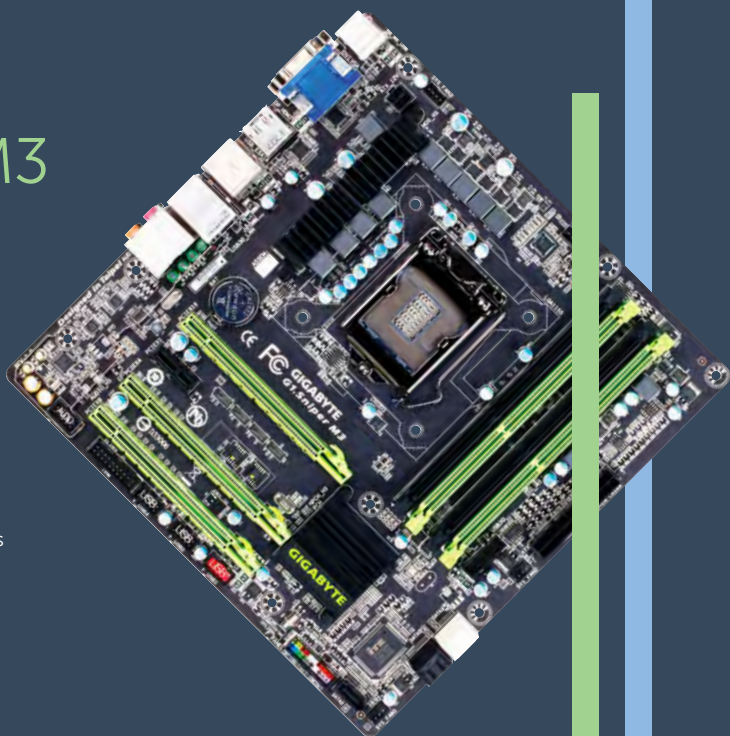
8

GIGABYTE Z77X-UD5H

Website www.rectron.co.za   **RRP** R2,459

The UD5H is supposed to be GIGABYTE's most high-end motherboard, at least until the UD7 version shows up if it ever does. With that said, one expects several features such as a POST LED, power, reset buttons, dual UEFI BIOS, dual LAN and a superior audio solution. As far as the above is concerned the UD5H delivers, it even goes the extra mile to provide an mSATA slot for hybrid SSD/HDD performance. However one thing we lament about this board is the PCIe configuration, as only one slot is 16x electrically while the remaining two are 8x and 4x respectively. We aren't sure why GIGABYTE decided on this configuration on a high-end board, but it does mean that 3-way SLI or CrossFire is out of the question. A missed opportunity as far as we are concerned as this is the only motherboard here that does not have two full 16x slots save for the Sniper M3. The rear USB 3.0 ports are few as well sporting only four ports which is odd considering at one point that GIGABYTE motherboards had more USB ports than others on the market.

Other than those few issues this board is pretty much standard stuff. It isn't too different from the ASUS P88Z77-V Deluxe and they should retail at about the same price point. While this is certainly not indicative of what GIGABYTE can do at their best, it is a fairly competent board and one that should provide plenty of performance at a fairly reasonable price.

7

MSI Z77A-GD65

Website www.corex.co.za   **RRP** R2,599

We won't mince our words: MSI's UEFI BIOS on the P67 platform left a lot to be desired. Not only was it overly complicated, it was visually unattractive, cumbersome and anything but intuitive. So we had very low expectations for the Z77A-GD65. However we were pleasantly surprised because not only did MSI overhaul their UEFI interface, it is the slickest interface of the lot only second to what ASUS provides on the Maximus V Gene. It's well laid out, options are appropriately named and it makes for one very easy motherboard to overclock.

Physically the board is very well featured especially for the GD65, which is not the high-end SKU. It has voltage measuring points, 3-way SLI/CrossFire support with three 16x electrical slots, OC Genie button, power, reset and POST LED. Given that this isn't the Big Bang board or the GD80, it's probably the most feature packed board here. USB 3.0 ports at the rear are a little thin with only two ports, but given everything else that MSI provides we are more than willing to overlook this.

The only issue we had with the board was the weak load-line calibration for the CPU. Level 0 is supposed to offer the most stable voltage but even then, the VDroop is quite noticeable and is the only disappointment in an otherwise bullet-proof motherboard. We aren't sure if a BIOS update can fix this, but other than this issue, this board is masterful. A really great offering from MSI and one we wouldn't hesitate to recommend.
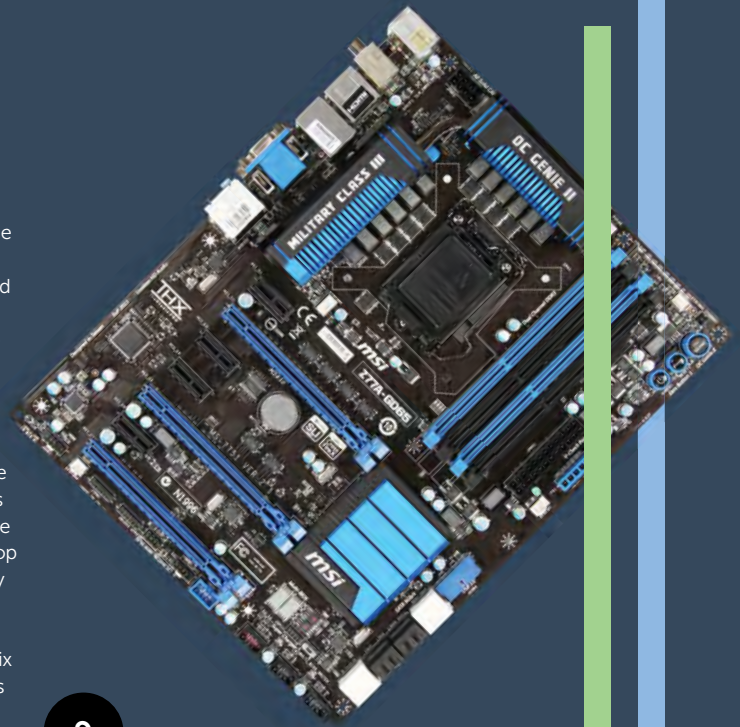
9

Benchmarks

	3DMark03	3DMark05	3DMark06	3DMark Vantage	3DMark 11	Cinebench 11.5	SuperPi 8M	AIDA 64 latency
Maximus V Gene	131,996	44,569	35,042	34,146	8,213	9.87	1:25.207	37.2
GIGABYTE G1.Sniper M3	131,669	44,676	34,899	34,268	8,225	9.84	1:24.677	36.6
ASUS P8Z77-V Deluxe	130,996	44,622	34,724	34,191	8,188	9.85	1:25.187	37
Z77X-UD5H	131,626	44,452	34,635	34,136	8,189	9.81	1:25.449	40.4
MSI Z77A-GD65	131,825	44,368	34,698	34,096	8,215	9.83	1:25.209	37.3

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: ASUS GEFORCE GTX 680

Benchmark	Score
Hard Reset DX9 1,080p 4xAA	99.6 / **99.6**
Just Cause 2 DX10 1,080p	155.72 / **155.72**
3DMark11 Extreme	3,343 / **3,343**
3DMark Vantage	39,722 / **39,722**
Unigine Heaven Xtreme	1,871.607 / **1,871.607**

PLUS
- NVIDIA surround out the box
- Fast
- Quiet

MINUS
- Built in overclocking is annoying
- Limited overclocking headroom

BOTTOM LINE
A great graphics card; easily the fastest GPU on the market.

ASUS GeFORCE GTX 680

Supplier ASUS   **Website** za.asus.com   **ERP** R5,500

DREAM MACHINE

It's finally here. NVIDIA's successor to FERMI has arrived and it is nothing like we suspected it would be. In fact it turns out NVIDIA's snide remarks regarding AMD's TAHITI GPU were somewhat justified. Regardless of whether you're a fan or not, what NVIDIA has managed with Kepler is impressive. Named after the 17th century mathematician and astrologer, NVIDIA's latest architecture is interesting in a way that no other GPU from NVIDIA has been in a while. It's essentially FERMI revisited. It's a dense GPU housing in excess of 3.5 billion gates, but because of the 28nm HKMG process from TSMC, it measures in at 294 square millimetres, significantly smaller than the outgoing GF110 core that powers the GTX580, even though it houses half a billion transistors more. We had expected a massive 500 square mm core, but NVIDIA seems to be saving that for the true successor to the GTX 580, but more on that later.

Kepler is seemingly an enlarged GF114 (the core that powered the GTX 560). In fact, it shares many similarities with the GF114 part such as 32 ROPs and 256-bit wide GDDR5 memory bus. The claimed TDP figures are close as well, with the GTX 680 consuming 195W according to NVIDIA, a mere 25W more than the GTX 560 Ti. Compute cores as compared to the GF114 core have increased significantly totalling 1,536 processors, four times what the GTX 560 Ti had at its disposal. With that however, the hot clock or shader domain clock has been dropped in favour of a universal clock for the entire GPU. As such, shader performance hasn't gone up by 400% but is closer to 300%.

The memory controller has been improved as well in comparison to the GF114 (or GF110 core for that matter) because the GTX 680 ships with a 6GHz memory clock, which allows it to match the 192GB/s memory bandwidth of the GTX 580. Unimpressive when compared against AMD's 264GB/s memory bandwidth on the HD 7970, but still an achievement for such a narrow bus especially for NVIDIA.

As we alluded to earlier, everything about the GTX 680 screams mid-range part. After-all, the GPU has far more in common with the GF114 core than it does the GF110. Add to which the internal naming of the GPU as GK104, suggests it's a successor to the GF114, much like that GPU succeeded the GF104 core as used in the GTX 460. With all things equal, the GTX 680 is apparently better than what NVIDIA had expected, or rather AMD's HD 7970 was not as fast as they had anticipated, which has allowed NVIDIA to charge high-end prices for what is arguably a mid-range product.

All that, however, is unimportant, since what we all want to know is if it deserves to occupy the highest SKU previously reserved for NVIDIA's best efforts only. Fortunately it does. Unlike the 9800 GTX which was sometimes slower than the 8800 GTX, the GTX 680 is always faster than the GTX 580 it replaces. In fact it is properly fast, and can claim the title of the world's fastest gaming GPU to date. On average it's about five to fifteen percent faster than the HD 7970, but retails for less. It runs cooler than the GTX 580; it's quieter; it draws less power and is in every conceivable way better than its predecessor and the competition's offering.

There's a lot more that one could say about the GTX 680, but we'll leave that for the DirectCU II version. Until then, welcome the newest and fastest gaming GPU money can buy.
- Neo Sibeko

9

Acer Aspire S3

Supplier Acer Africa   **Website** www.acer.co.za   **RRP** R9,999

Netbooks were once a must-have gadget for users searching for supreme portability. Now, with mega-popular tablets viciously intent on world domination in the portable market, netbooks have unfortunately fallen out of favour with the inhabitants of this planet. Enter the ultrabook: essentially an extremely high-end netbook, packed with power that cannot be matched by the tablets on offer today, and offering the familiar functionality and form of a traditional notebook.

The Acer Aspire S3 is one such offering. An ultra-thin, ultra-light, ultra-portable powerhouse, the S3 is brilliantly designed. It's fast, too; its SSD allowing for cold boots in just under 30 seconds and resumes from sleep mode in just over a second, making it a great choice for anyone who doesn't want to have to wait an age for it to start up in a hurry. Curious to see if it could handle it, we ran the *Resident Evil 5* benchmark and got an average frame rate of 30.8. Granted, this was with all settings tuned down to the bare minimum, but it's nonetheless impressive and means that gamers can still rely on it to offer the chance to play a few of the less demanding games out there while on the move. It definitely has no troubles handling general applications, playing HD video or any other such tasks either.

The three-cell battery offers a decent amount of use when there's no nearby power socket. Under constant heavy load, you'll get around an hour and a half of use, while idling and light use will get you around five hours before the battery fizzles. Using the S3's chiclet keyboard and touchpad is comfortable, and the display doesn't suffer from any issues that we experienced. All in all, the S3 is an impressive option if you're looking for a portable offering that's more traditional than a tablet.

- Dane Remendes

9

PLUS
• Powerful
• Light and portable
• Battery life

MINUS
• Nothing really

BOTTOM LINE
Excellent little ultrabook that'll easily satisfy your need for power and portability.

AOC e1649Fwu

Supplier Platinum Micro   **Website** us.aoc.com   **RRP** R899

Designed for notebook users who desire dual-monitor setups without sacrificing too much in the portability department, the AOC e1649Fwu is a good choice for anyone in the market for such things. To this end, it's powered via USB, and setup is perfectly simple: connect it to your desired notebook, wait for the drivers to install on first use, accept the license agreement that pops up, and you're good to go, able to customise display settings as you would any other monitor connected to your notebook.

It's really light – as you'd expect – and can be used in either landscape or portrait orientation, with an adjustable stand making provision for either, which can be tucked away while in transit. The display itself is vibrant enough, producing decent image quality. Its viewing angle is quite limited, however, making for a less than pleasant experience for anyone not viewing it head on. There's also slightly noticeable visual lag, but for a display that offers such high levels of convenient portability, it can be forgiven for that.

It's obviously a niche product – but it fills its role quite well. I suppose it's got a number of practical applications besides the obvious: for business presentations on the move (although the dodgy viewing angle might impede this), for example, or maybe for use as a digital photo frame that lives with your notebook. I wouldn't recommend it as a must-have accessory to anyone not looking for its specific functionality, however, but for those who are, I'd say go for it.

- Dane Remendes

8

PLUS
• Simple setup
• Adequate display
• Practical design

MINUS
• Some visual lag
• Limited viewing angle

BOTTOM LINE
It's great if you're looking for something like it, but it's not a must-have for everyone.

GIGABYTE RADEON R7870C-2GD

HARDWARE

Supplier Rectron **Website** www.gigabyte.com **ERP** TBA

AMD did a fantastic job with their first GCN GPU, the Tahiti core that powers the Radeon HD79XX range of GPUs, and is easily the most impressive piece of silicon to come from AMD in years. However that GPU represents the best of AMD and as such, is quite expensive to manufacture, making it unsuitable for the mid-range parts.

This is where AMD's Pitcairn GPU comes in. It's not a handicapped Tahiti core, but a GPU built from the ground up around AMD's GCN architecture for this price point. Interestingly enough, the high GPU clock that this card ships with may have allowed the 7870 to cannibalize the market that would otherwise be occupied by the HD 7950. Unlike NVIDIA, AMD allows most of their GPUs to make use of 4-way CrossFire and Eyefinity, which means the only advantage the HD 7950 can have over HD 7870 to warrant the price difference is performance.

A challenge the Pitcairn GPU is up for, especially pre-overclocked models like the GIGABYTE model we tested. Not only does it come in at a healthy 100MHz overclock, through our own tuning we were able to further raise the clock speed to 1,175MHz with no voltage adjustments. The results that you see here represent the kind of performance you should expect in a similarly configured system. To that end, this card performed admirably, delivering performance that was within spitting distance of the HD 7950, which costs significantly more. With our own

overclock, this GPU was outpacing the HD 7950 in every benchmark regardless of the resolution.

Odd considering that the bandwidth advantage for the HD 7950 is in the region of 90GB/s. Clearly the bottleneck is somewhere else other than the memory bandwidth. We suspect that the equal number of render outputs could be the limiting factor while the additional 32 texture units are not able to make up for this on the Tahiti Pro. Then again, the clock speed of this particular HD 7870 card is much higher than that of a standard HD 7950, so a direct comparison between the two in efficiency will have to wait for a later date. As it stands however, it's hard to recommend the HD 7950 over the HD 7870, this one in particular.

Overclocking with new GPUs seems to be limited by the 28nm process and, much like the HD 7970, our sample reached a clock speed of 1,270MHz before it started producing artifacts. For those who want to push even further, you'll be disappointed by the 1.4GHz and 1.3V vGPU limit, as the card is capable of at least 50 to 100MHz more before OCP kicks in to crash the party. Our particular sample, much like all other HD 7000 cards we have tested, did not have a cold temperature limit as such and continued to operate well until -140°C, great news for the enthusiasts and competitive overclockers.

For normal everyday use, we can't help but be thoroughly impressed with what AMD and, subsequently, GIGABYTE has delivered with the HD 7870. It's a little more than we expected it would be

and, given just how close it is to the HD 79750, it's an easy card to recommend. We would have preferred GIGABYTE to increase the memory overclock a little to a standard 5GHz, but there'd be no benefit at all as we increased it to 5.8GHz and didn't measure any change in the benchmark results.

If you're looking to upgrade from an HD 6950 or 6870, you can't go wrong with the GIGABYTE R787OC-2GD. **NAG**
- Neo Sibeko

SPECS

Core
1.1GHz Pitcairn (28nm)
Processors
1280
Render outputs
32
Memory
3,072MB GDDR5 4.8GHz (153GB/sec)
API
DirectX 11.1
OpenGL 4.x
OpenCL 1.X

PLUS
• 1.1GHz GPU clock
• Great performance
• Runs cool
• Quiet

MINUS
• None

BOTTOM LINE
Fantastic mid-range card that offers HD 7950 like performance at a fraction of the price.

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: **ASUS GEFORCE GTX 680**

Benchmark	GTX 680	R787OC
Hard Reset DX9 1,080p 4xAA	81.6	99.6
Just Cause 2 DX10 1,080p	126.62	155.72
Crysis 2 1,080p DX11	59.118	N/A
3DMark11 Extreme	2,208	3,343
3DMark Vantage	31,277	39,722
Unigine Heaven Xtreme	1,583.689	1,871.607

9

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: ASUS Rampage IV Extreme

Benchmark		
3DMark Vantage CPU	46,833	**46,760**
Cinebench 11.5	13.43	**13.43**
AIDA 64 copy	20,063MB/s	**20,396MB/s**
3DMark03	126,998	**127,025**

Asrock X79 Fatal1ty Professional

HARDWARE

Supplier Compitum   **Website** www.compitum.co.za   **ERP** R3,100

The X79 chipset has made for one of the hardest platforms to design high-end motherboards around. Simultaneously it has turned out to be one of the hardest systems to justify investing in. In simple terms, there isn't a single situation in gaming, and even when using modern video and audio encoders, where the X79 3800 series CPUs are faster than the 3700 counterparts. The appeal of this platform is purely for power users, number crunchers and enthusiasts looking to compete in a select few benchmarks. So, for that reason and that reason alone, Asrock wants the choice board in any serious overclockers' inventory to include the Fatal1ty Professional. It's cheaper than the Extreme9 and sacrifices the superior audio amongst other things, but in turn you get a true enthusiasts motherboard. Tailor-made for the overclocker who is uncompromising and wants to squeeze out the last bit of performance from their CPU.

Unlike the Extreme9, memory speeds above 2,133MHz work in quad-channel mode, load-line calibration is more accurate, and the BIOS is packed with settings only relevant to this crowd. The load level control in particular made a strong impression, where if you set Level 1 and key in 1.45V for the Vcore value, you can be sure

"Make no mistake about it, if you're a gamer looking for the most features out of a motherboard, this isn't the board for you."

that it will remain so even under heavy loads, such as the notorious 3DMark Vantage CPU Test 2 and Prime95. It's in these small things where the Fatali1ty board outshines its brethren. It's as if this is Asrock's second attempt at X79 and, unlike some other vendors who have given up on the X79 platform, Asrock has it down to near perfection. It may not be a match for the Rampage IV Extreme, but at a significantly lower price, it shouldn't have to be.

At this level the differences between boards is not necessarily how far they will allow you to overclock, but the ease with which these overclocks are achieved. One of the strong points of the reference board (Rampage IV Extreme) is that it has several profiles for memory and CPU overclocking under extreme cooling. The Fatal1ty board has these profiles as well. Not for memory sadly, but for CPU overclocks all the way to 5.2GHz. Loading any one of these profiles makes it very easy to bin CPUs instead of wasting ten to 20 litres of nitrogen trying to find

the CPU's limits. With these profiles you can pretty much be sure of what the CPU will and won't do within five minutes at most.

With X79 CPUs in particular, the IMC performance is very indicative of the CPU silicon quality, so even if you're not using exotic cooling, the fact that memory overclocking is relatively good on the Fatal1ty board will allow you to make fairly accurate assertions about the kinds of frequencies you can expect from the CPU. Make no mistake about it, if you're a gamer looking for the most features out of a motherboard, this isn't the board for you. Indeed it has the Fatal1ty name on it, but the truth is it is more deserving of having a prolific overclocker's name on it rather than a gamer whose popularity is ever diminishing into irrelevance. There really isn't much to not like about the X79 Fatal1ty Professional. It's a fantastic board and one well worth owning if you're serious about performance.

– Neo Sibeko

SPECS
Chipset
Intel X79
Memory
4x DDR3 2600+
CPU support
Intel LGA 2011
Slots
4xPCIe 3.0 16x,
2xPCI, 1xPCie 1x,
4-way SLI,
4-way CrossFireX

PLUS
• Easy overclocking
• Great BIOS

MINUS
• Availability

BOTTOM LINE
One of the best X79 motherboards money can buy.

NAG

8

Sony Ericsson Xperia arc S

Supplier Sony Mobile Communications
Website www.sonymobile.com   **RRP** R6,000

Since Sony bought out Ericsson's remaining shares in the previously joint venture, this will be the last of the SE branded phones you'll see before the "just plain Sony" brand of mobile devices heads our way.

Sporting a speedy single-core processor and the aging but competent Adreno 205 GPU that drives the phone's vibrant display, the arc S skips along at a decent pace throughout the interface, Web browsing and multimedia usage. It's not perfect, however, shedding a few frames during HD video playback and lagging here and there while browsing visually intensive websites. As reflected in this phone's modest AnTuTu benchmark score of 3584, it falls behind current leading Android mobile phones like the Galaxy S2, HTC Evo 3D and LG Optimus 2X. It is, however, the fastest SE-branded Xperia, so anyone familiar with the series will be happy with its performance.

The rest of the arc S's feature-set is on par with its performance – good, but not spectacular. The stills camera captures high-quality images but they tend towards over-saturation, and the phone's video recorder, while managing to capture 720p video without much lag, suffers from a slow auto-focusing lens that can take up to five seconds to figure out what you're trying to film.

The arc S is SE's sign-off phone, and delivers solid performance that should please anyone who's on the hunt for a mid-range device that fits into a slim, lightweight package. **NAG**
- Geoff Burrows

7

SPECS
CPU
ARMv7 single-core @ 1.4GHz
GPU
Qualcomm Andreno 205
RAM
512MB
Built-in storage
1GB
Storage expansion
microSD supported, 8GB included.
Connectivity
Wi-Fi 802.11a/b/g/n; Bluetooth 2.1; 3G HSDPA
Display
4.2" LED-backlit LCD @ 480x854 with capacitive multi-touch
Operating system
Android 2.3.4
Battery: 1,500mAh
Dimensions
125x63x8.7mm
Weight
117g

PLUS
• Good interface performance
• Comfortable to hold

MINUS
• Slightly laggy multimedia playback
• Pricey

BOTTOM LINE
A competent smartphone with great mid-range performance.

GG

Absolutely fabulous

So, you might have heard that EA was the recent recipient of The Consumerist's (un)glamorous Worst Company in America Golden Poo award. While the *Mass Effect 3* haters and that one guy who just never got over the Bullfrog acquisition baa-baa-baa about how EA totally had it coming because of online passes or *The Sims* or Bobby Kotick[1] or whatever, baa-baa-baaaaaaaa, the more sensible of us out there are probably wondering how the hell EA beat out Wal-Mart, an evil megacorporation so evil, there's a whole Wikipedia article about how evil they are[2].

Well, you might also have heard that EA has been the recent recipient of thousands of letters from a bunch of ultra-conservative organisations over the planned addition of gay and lesbian characters to *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, demanding that EA renounce its wicked homosexual agenda. Hmmmmmm.

"The overwhelming number of players on *Star Wars* games is children who do not need to be forced as a captured audience to participate in homosexual content," reads a letter sent to EA HQ, apparently written in such a morally panicky moral panic that petty, inconsequential things like basic fact-checking and personal autonomy were resigned to instant irrelevance.

"We ask that you please adhere to your long term policy of omitting and steering clear of this type of advocacy representation in your games. Please do not include LGBT content in *Star Wars* video games that will impact so many children."

This "long term policy" obviously didn't include the *Dragon Age* or *Mass Effect* series, for some reason that may or may not be that the writer hasn't heard about those games. I'm just spitballing here.

The note also exhorted the reader, ominously I'm sure, to "remember Sodom". Apparently the people over at the Florida Family Council are big fans of vintage German thrash metal. Or something.

Inevitably, the writer is also threatening to boycott the game if EA goes ahead with its homosexual holocaust. The potential

"Well, you might also have heard that EA has been the recent recipient of thousands of letters from a bunch of ultra-conservative organisations over the planned addition of gay and lesbian characters to *Star Wars: The Old Republic,* demanding that EA renounce its wicked homosexual agenda"

loss of the state's biggest fundamentalist Christian pre-teen *Star Wars* and premium MMOG fan market must be a very worrisome burden indeed for the company.

NAAAAAAAHT.

I mean, honestly, I think my favourite bit is where these stupid bigots think their opinions matter to anybody except themselves. Well, them and probably some of their kids who are too terrified to tell mom and dad they're gay. These people have got this whole "for the children" thing on backwards. That *and* reality.

Me, I think I'd back a letter-writing campaign to dump the Florida Family Council in the Sarlacc Pit [*why not get that funded on www.kickstarter.com. ;) Ed*]. **NAG**

- Tarryn van der Byl

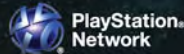[1] It's easier to spell than "John Riccitiello".

[2] Seriously, people actually voted for EA over a company whose founder famously said that, "I pay low wages. I can take advantage of that. We're going to be successful, but the basis is a very low-wage, low-benefit model of employment", who were found in "extensive violation" of child labour laws, and who opened a superstore next to the 2,500-year old Teotihuacan Pyramid of the Moon? That's it, I'm leaving the planet.

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