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FEATURES

The gamer's health issue

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Guild Wars 2

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GIGABYTE GV-N680OC



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 LAST ACQUIRED REPORT: 23:45:00
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 # ASSET: UNIDENTIFIED
 # POSITION: 41° 12' N
 # NONE

MISSILE GUIDANCE SYSTEM

missile guidance system
 //Status: Online
 ETA: 3.4 Seconds
 //:

18TM
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PS3
PlayStation 3



XBOX 360

BETTER WITH KINECT SENSOR

XBOX LIVE

PC DVD ROM



UBISOFT

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<p>Available 29 June*</p>	<p>Available 29 June*</p>		
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		<p>Available 29 June*</p>	
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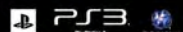
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E3 2012 is happening this month and we're going. We've got on our excited pants because of it. Here are eight reasons why you should also consider breaking out the excitement.

32 PLAYSTATION VITA-STATISTIX

Now that we've had some time with the Vita's powerful, um... power, we've discovered a few choice features that perhaps you're not aware of. We'd like to share them with you.

34 THE HEALTH ISSUE

Ditch that pizza slice and break out the broccoli: it's time to get fit and fabulous! LOL. Seriously, being fit and healthy will actually make you a better gamer, apparently even a better human. Let us guide you through the process.

58 CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS II

You know what's better than *Call of Duty*? *Call of Duty* reinvented. We take our first look at Treyarch's *Black Ops II* and walk away impressed with what the future holds.



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Too many pies

About two odd years ago I stopped smoking. I read that book, *Allen Carr's Easyway to Stop Smoking*. I had tried and failed many times before that and had just resigned myself to whatever smoking related death was coming for me down the line – smokers are funny like that. Then about a year ago I decided that if I could stop smoking I could also stop eating rubbish and get healthier. So I started running and only eating rubbish occasionally. I did drop some weight but I still own about 20 kilograms of pure fat that I don't need which is disappearing slowly. All this stuff is supposed to motivate you to take NAG's first (and probably the last) "health issue" seriously. So... get your fat butt off the couch, out of that stereotyped basement and bedroom and take a walk. The message here is to cut the cheese (out of your burgers) and do a squat (and maybe a push up or three). We know it's going to be a bit of a stretch which is why we divided it up into difficulty levels depending on your energy, effort and willingness. There won't be any achievements except you'll feel better, look better and live longer. Get crackling. Oops. Sorry.

THIS IS NOT ABOUT GAMING...*

The Monte Casino Nu Metro cinema is a joke. It's gotten so bad there I now drive all the way to Sandton to watch any new movie that hits the circuit. The crazy part... I live less than two kilometres away from Monte Casino.

The staff complement seem to think that if a movie starts at 09h00 in the morning they only need to get to work at 08h50. There's no fresh popcorn that early, no staff at the tills and "collections only" signs on the automatic machines for ticketing. The slush puppy machine has just been switched on and there is general chaos behind the counter. Don't bother asking for the manager because he doesn't care. So at 09h00 (the time the show starts) I'm still waiting to be sold a ticket. I can't get popcorn that's worth eating and there no ice in the slush machine. So far, so bad... Eventually, once inside, other issues crop up. Here's a condensed list of problems I've experienced as the movie starts: no sound, wrong aspect ratio, curtains still cover up the sides of the screen, lights not dimmed out and a blurry image. Of course it takes them 5-10 minutes into the movie to fix these problems after someone has to go outside and tell them. Labelled as one of this country's biggest (best) cinemas it's an embarrassment. So, goodbye Nu Metro at Monte and hello Ster Kinekor at Sandton – they know what movies are all about and how to

* Don't worry, most of the rest of the magazine is all about gaming.



treat their guests. Okay I'm done. Sorry for the rant – just had to get that off my chest. I wish I could say I'm doing this for you but I'm not. Anyway, thanks for listening; I feel much better now. If anyone else wants to comment on this send me mail: letters@nag.co.za.

POSTER LOVE

Clear a spot in mom's basement and give up joyous praise and love to the people at Megarom for the *Diablo III* poster. We've been begging everyone to spend a little on posters and finally they said yes to a poster for easily the biggest game this decade. Thanks Megarom, you've made thousands and thousands of gamers very happy.

ALSO...

Call of Duty: Black Ops II is now a thing. Miktar went to Treyarch Studios in Santa Monica to get the skinny on their latest efforts. The last Guild Wars 2 beta event went off without too many hitches and you can read about that too. If this whole issue seems a little rushed or patchy here and there then blame *Diablo III*. We all made the mistake of just having a quick look, just one level, just wanted to see the first movie, just this and just that ended up consuming hours. It'll be in the next issue – arrived just too late for this one.

See you in New Tristram

- RedTide
Editor

WINNERS

Frontosa
Gaming PC
Ruan Odendaal
(Centurion)

NAG Box of Crap
Daniel Schreiber
(Somerset West)

Star Wars hamper
Ruan Swanepoel
(PE)

Kalahari voucher
Michael Isaacs
Pieter De villiers
Luan Chen
Rory Bennett
Tertius Du Toit



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INBOX

LETTER OF THE MONTH JUNE 2012

From: Eric

Subject: Gamers are becoming soft in our old age

With the Resident Evil 6 around the corner I had a nostalgic moment and decided to download the original trilogy for my PS3. I installed them and settled in for some good old school gaming and roughly five minutes into the first game I died, killed by the first zombie I found which I tried to take on with a knife. I decided that it must have been a fluke so I started again, this time getting slightly further but dying again. It soon dawned on me that I may actually be hopeless but then it occurred on me – games have just become too easy. The early Resident Evils were true survival horror games, with an emphasis on survival. You have to make each bullet count, you have a limited inventory that forces you to make difficult decisions, do I carry this puzzle item and risk dying or do I carry extra health and risk having to find my way back to an item box? I felt myself becoming tense because I knew that my imminent death could be hiding just around the corner and an hour of my hard work would just go down the drain. Then I thought back to all the other old games, the original Fallout games, Final Fantasy VII, VII and IX, Silent Hill, Metal Gear Solid, Abe's Odyssey and Super Mario Bros, Contra, Mega Man and I realised that they were all incredibly difficult, if you died you went back to your last save regardless of if that was five minutes ago or five hours ago or worse, right back to the beginning of the game. New games may be beautiful, complex, massive, wonderful things that are more

in intense and require more skill and are far removed from yesteryear's finest but they are not difficult, not when there are check points every thirty meters and auto-saves every three minutes. Modern Warfare and Battlefield 3 may be frustrating but when you die you only lose ten seconds of game time and that makes me sad in a way because I sort of miss the adrenaline pumping because I know my next move may be my last, I miss the payoff for beating a boss on the verge of death knowing that one wrong move could cost you the last four hours. I love gaming and I'm happy with the direction that gaming is going in general but sometimes I just miss the old days when games were tough but gamers were tougher.

Tough?! Let me tell you about tough my friend. Tough was Green Berets and Strangeloop on the Commodore 64, tough was Rygar at the corner café, tough was Lemmings on the Amiga. Yes, the list can go on but enough drama where it's not needed. I agree with you and fortunately so do many developers. I was told at the XCOM preview they are including an ironman mode in that game for the "hardcore" player. Diablo III has hardcore characters and one crazy tough difficulty mode. These days it's more about choice, easy to start for the delicate soft gamers and then harder modes for those that want it. That all said and done – you are right, there was a period a while back when everything seemed to be going soft and now soft is the default setting. Ed.

From: Ismail

Subject: The vault

Firstly, I'd like to thank you guys at NAG for producing such an awesome magazine which oozes with mouth-watering content. Secondly, my predicament, it's 2012 already, there's a solid line-up of games (Assassins Creed 3, GTA V, BioShock Infinite etc.) bound to hit store shelves soon. Only problem is games are expensive and my funds are limited. The solution to this

problem came sooner than I expected in the form of a tiny white watch-box which I dubbed "The Vault". I neatly cut a small hole on the top of the watch-box, stuck motivational sayings on it, and secured it with rubber bands and ka-ching! Problem solved. The logic behind this is relatively simple. Whenever I find myself with leftover coins after going to shops or an extra R10/R20/R100 in my hands, I pop it in the box instead of wasting it on "petty

*Disclaimer: Most of the letters sent to this fine publication are printed more or less verbatim (that means "we don't edit or fix them" for you slow kids at the back), so ignore any spelling or grammatical errors. It's not us... it's you.



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 or cleverness. Note: You can't change the games or the platform they come on.

HARD TECHNICAL STUFF

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Important: Include your details when mailing us or you'll never get your prize if you win...



things". To be honest, the results so far are mind-boggling. I just started this ingenious practice 2 months ago and already find myself with a really generous R994, 50 to be precise. That's almost two games out of just handling money "wisely"!

Smart! I'm using this as a lesson for everyone out there complaining about too many games and not enough money. Also remember, if you use this same line of thinking for your retirement you'll end up happy instead of living in a cardboard box under the highway. Very cool, enjoy the gaming – you've earned it. Ed.

From: Gerhard

Subject: A matter of perspective

I just read through your Editor's Note about how gaming has influenced the way you dream and it got me thinking about all the different gaming dreams

ON THE FORUMS

it's the Internet – get with it or get off it...
Visit our forums: www.nag.co.za/forums

Q: Is crowd-funding (Kickstarter, IndieGoGo, etc.) the future of indie games, or even the industry as a whole?

"It just needs one failed project that started with a Kickstarter campaign and users will turn on the idea."

CaViE

"Jip, I think it is. With constant bickering about publishers and their draconian DRM systems people will get fed up and start doing it their way. This is it."

echo

"Depends on whether the first few games made with this succeed or not. If so then yes, we are going to take this industry into our own greasy paws."

Shaderow

"No. Evil will always win. It won't last."

Spindleshanks

"It's a good idea, but there are some titles that should never be revived by Kickstarter that could waste gamer-investor's money, like LSL. Nothing will replace it or be better than it. Let it rest in peace."

Wesley

I've had in my own life over the past few years. A recent one comes to mind, and I think I may have discovered some interesting things about my own psyche.

I dreamt that I was that scruffy-looking brother from "Tru Calling" (bear with me). I knew this because I was watching the whole thing from a 3rd person perspective. A bunch of goons were after me, they caught me and locked me inside an abandoned TV repair shop, promising that they would come back and kill me in the morning. I scavenged parts from a broken TV and "crafted" myself an improvised Taser that shoots sharpened AV cables. The next morning the goons came back and broke down the door, but I was ready for them.

The moment I took aim with my AV Taser, my view switched to 1st person (I didn't get any crosshairs, though). I only had six shots, so I couldn't afford to miss. I managed to stun my enemies long enough to get outside and hijack a bike (I wish I could tell you it was a badass Harley, but it was just a regular old bicycle). The moment I jumped on, my view switched back to a 3rd person perspective.

What I find most interesting about this dream is the fact that gaming elements somehow crept into a "real life" situation, where I wasn't part of an actual game.

It's also worth mentioning that I hardly ever dream as "myself". Probably for the same reasons I enjoy gaming so much. It's the ultimate form of escapism. In games and dreams alike, you can be anyone and do anything. The only limitation is what the mind can conceive of.

You wrote that your dream perspective changes depending on how stressful your dreams are. Happy dreams take place in 1st person, while nightmares manifest in the 3rd person to "detach" yourself from the horrors cooked up by your subconscious – a simple, yet effective defence mechanism.

I believe my dreams switch perspective, not because of stress, but because of my inborn sense of practicality. When I need to aim at something, my viewpoint switches to 1st person to increase my focus and accuracy. When I was trying to escape my pursuers, I gained a 3rd person perspective to increase my field of vision.

Perhaps gaming has allowed my primal mind to learn new ways with which to maximise my odds of "surviving" the dream? Or maybe it has absorbed so much information from the different perspectives of gaming that it simply accepts shifting viewpoints as a normal part of life when not constrained by the chains of reality?

It's impossible to say for sure without

vivisectioning my brain, but you know what?

I like my gaming dreams. Sure, they may be weirder than the average dream, and they might worry my non-gamer family members (which is pretty much all of them), but I wouldn't trade them for all the flying, flower skipping, bubble floating, rainbow spewing happy dreams in the world because I am a Gamer, and gaming is what I do.


Even in my sleep.

I received plenty of mail on this topic and it seems everyone shares similar experiences. But... they have more to do with how they experience the dreams instead of the content of the dreams. I also did some asking around but haven't been able to get a clear line of thinking on this concept from anyone smart. I feel this is something a team of bored/gamer medical students should tackle with a laboratory, white coats and sleepy gamers (not hard to find now that Diablo III is reality). Ed.

From: Simoné

Subject: None given

I think the Box of Crap is a much more exciting prize than the gaming rig for the reasons that, with the rig you can play games and do all the nice stuff we like to do, but the Box of Crap, the holy grail of the NAG office, contains parts touched and used by those that bring us the great news and competitions on a monthly basis. Imagine, touching something that one of our dear dedicated writers have touched, used, smelled and perhaps even licked for that matter. I am sure as hell more exited for something with that kind of sentimental value than something that will be outdated in the next six months anyway and I am likely to replace in the next year. As such, I, as an avid reader, will give my vote to the Box of Crap... more likely the Box of Memories, or the Box of Valuables.

Some of those items have been touched in ways that shouldn't be spoken of 

again, mostly by Geoff and Dane. In their defence they had just started and EVERYTHING was exciting back then for them. The winner has been announced in the Ed's note this issue. I just hope he sends us some interesting pictures. Ed.

From: Carl
Subject: Game development - RTS games

I'm curious about what is going through game developer's minds right now as I am a hobbyist/game developer myself. I really wish they would release decent real time strategies e.g. StarCraft and Warcraft. I'm not only a RTS player for the story but, want a good gameplay. I would do anything to join a RTS game development business because I think it would be fun. I love coming up with units and tech-trees for RTS games and think that if people just took a chance they would see that RTS can be just as fun as any other game, if made properly. Could you help me find out how to get into this field?

Also, you guys should release tutorial videos on the DVD. That would help people in South Africa develop the gaming world.

LOL. I like your enthusiasm but no amount of tutorial videos will ever teach you how to make StarCraft. Okay maybe an infinite amount of videos and... The best is to start small and build up from there. We're also not a talent agency so I can't help you (or anyone) get into the industry. Besides, we don't let just anyone into the secret club. Ed.

From: Jesse
Subject: Reader Reviews

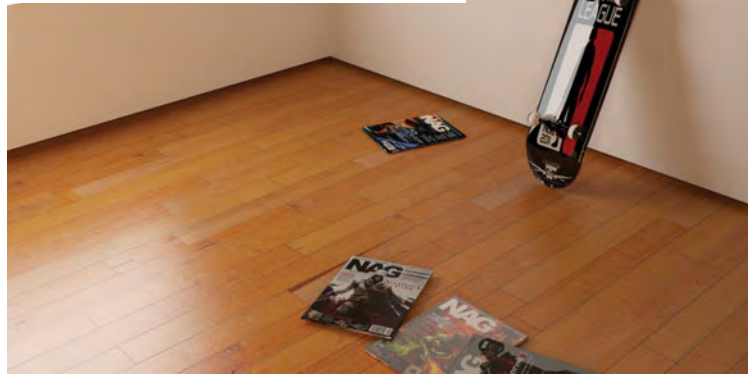
Hey guys and girls of le NAG, The other day I was just reading the latest issue, (with Assassin's Creed 3 on the cover), and I noticed the reader review section... I instantly thought, AWESOME! But then I saw that it was only for 3DS games. I sat there with an angry look on my face. Why should 3DS owners have the pleasure of reviewing games for NAG? [Going to stop you right there, Ed]

That section was created by the people at Nintendo so we're going to be doing their games for the next four issues. After that we'll probably open the taps up and see what happens. Hang in there and in the meantime learn from the mistakes of others. :) Ed.

From: Daniel
Subject: -Clicked on Like

I just finished Beacon, the side scrolling game that came on the NAG disk this month, and I enjoyed it more than Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3. After doing some research into it, I discovered that the game was in fact created in 48

Mihanano Shirilele, "I created this rendered image with blender which took me two days to do."



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.

Mark Sanders, "Recently downloaded Google sketch up and decided on drawing this post-apocalyptic scene."



hours. Hours. Now, it is probable that not everyone agrees that Beacon is in fact more enjoyable (I almost said better, heaven forbid) than afore-mentioned Generic Shooter 3: now with more shooting. In fact, most people will most likely disagree. However, I found it amazing how much I could enjoy such a humble game that simply drew me in, and promptly ended, which made me sad. In other very important opinions of mine, the Gaming Lifestyle section is great, (I always enjoyed the movie review section) it is just what NAG needed. The new layout is looking great, and the writing is as great as ever.

One of the things we do in NAG is to try and expand horizons. Getting gamers to try different things because we know they'll like it. I used to be rather single-minded with gaming but a while ago I decided to try everything at least once and I haven't looked back. The other benefit is you quickly figure out what you really do and don't like and it's often a big surprise. Ed.

From: Arshad
Subject: How NAG makes high school rock

Every month I take my NAG with me to school to read during my free periods. However I don't just read in my free periods, I read it every single period (free period or not). I stuff the NAG

THE SHORTS

Extracts of n00b from NAG letters

"A psychiatrist might deduce that I have a deep-seated subconscious yearning to become a muscle-bound meat-tank wielding a rocket launcher and/or a mini-gun named "Sasha", but that's not what this letter is about."
- Gerhard

"With sport, you get old and, sometimes, fat. With gaming, you get old, and most of the time fat."
- TheEcho911

"It actually makes me think that some of you are stalking me."
- Justin

between my books to hide it from my teacher. While the teacher gives a very boring lesson, I look for Scarlett (the rAge mascot) or try to think of a cool caption. I copy the game videos from the DVD to my memory card to watch on phone during class. Most of the time my teacher sees the earphones in my ears and throws me a look of disgust, while my classmates try to warn me, although I can't hear them because the earphones are shoved too deep down my ears and my eyes are stuck to the screen. Even though this gets me into lots of trouble, I am still VERY grateful for the BEST gaming magazine in the world; NAG. Thank you NAG for making high school ROCK!

While I do really appreciate all the support and dedication I have to caution you that slacking off at school isn't the answer. If you don't work hard and pay attention only you will suffer in the end. Here's a little secret not many people know: your parents and teachers are actually right about everything. The other reason why you should take school seriously is dead simple... If you don't, you'll become a bum without a future or (more importantly) any gaming capable hardware. If you can't play games because you can't find a job then there's no chance you're going to keep on buying NAG. So, get your act together – do it for us. Ed.

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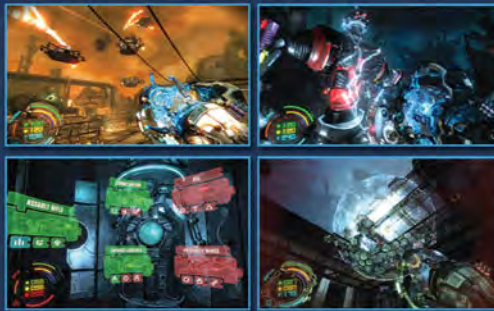


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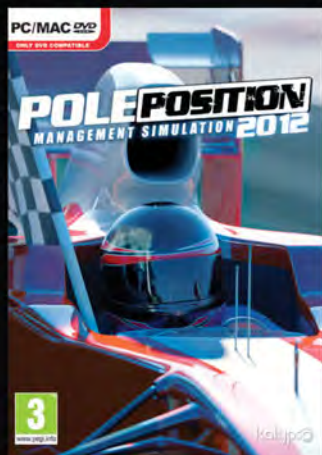
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I, Gamer

Mumorpuger? Muh-lesspuger, please

In last month's issue of *NAG*, the "On the Forums" question asked which game characters nobody would miss if they disappeared entirely. I figured, why stop at just characters? Let's wipe out an entire genre instead. Which would be my pick? A while ago I would have unapologetically chosen Japanese RPG games; I can say that with hollow conviction having never actually played one in its entirety, but that's beside the point because yawn. Just watching them in action (a phrase that doubles as a contradiction in terms in this context) is enough to convince me that there's more fun to be had in filing tax returns.

But, as I said, that was a while ago and that would have been based rather precariously on very little time spent playing JRPGs; not very fair to say the least. Now, with a level of *solid* conviction this time, I can say that I wouldn't care if MMORPGs disappeared into the dribbling maw of the Internet, never to be seen again. To me this bloated, musty genre is the most overrated form of gaming. I'm not advocating that nobody should play them because I loathe them; I'm merely sticking to the (somewhat altered) premise of the original question.

Obviously, *World of Warcraft* was my springboard into MMORPGs. I dabbled in it for a few days, trying different characters and participating in early level raids, but for me the game's downfall was its continually shifting tone. Is it a game about warring races forever locked in ageless conflict, or is it something that's supposed to be tongue-in-cheek? I couldn't work it out, but the nail in the coffin was fetch quest number 347 in which I, the mighty Orc warrior, was tasked with collecting apples for an apple pie. I stopped playing shortly after that. I clearly don't get it, but 10 million monthly subscribers do so I'm willing to accept that I'm in the minority and move along.

My next attempt was *The Old Republic*. I'm a *Star Wars* fan so you'd think that I would have been able to get into this – sadly not. At last year's Gamescom I got to play *The Old Republic* months before its release. People stood in a queue that lasted for hours; I got to skip the queue thanks to my media pass. Less than five minutes into the hands-on I wanted to stop playing because it encapsulated three things I hate most about MMORPGs: cookie-cutter gameplay; zero atmosphere; and combat mechanics that make me want to gouge trenches into my face. The only reason I didn't stop was because there were literally hundreds of people watching me, and I would have looked like a total douche jumping the queue only to say, "this sucks!" after a few minutes.

More recently I allowed myself to feel some interest towards the newly announced *Elder Scrolls Online*. I've spent more time playing *Oblivion* and *Skyrim* than any other games, so an MMORPG built off the franchise was surely my ticket to mumorpuger addiction? Not sure. When those first images appeared online, and the information began to trickle in with phrases like "World of Warcraft-style mechanics" and "skill hotbars" and "the Hero Engine", all initial interest I had imploded in on itself.

Guild Wars 2? I can see my three pet hates already smiling back at me in the gameplay footage I've watched. That's a "no" then, I guess.

- Miklós Szecsei

Open wide



Multiplayer mods for the *Elder Scrolls* series have been doing the rounds for a decade, and now ZeniMax is having their own go at the idea. They're just aiming a little... bigger.

Relatively hot on the heels of *Skyrim*'s success comes the official announcement of *The Elder Scrolls Online* – a massively multiplayer RPG set in the vast world of Tamriel. The game has been in development for almost five years by a super-secret team of over 250 people under the banner of ZeniMax Online Studios. It will take place 1,000 years before the events of *Skyrim*, with the Daedric Prince Molag Bal as the game's main antagonist.

While the game will share a setting with the *Elder Scrolls* world, *TESO* will feature vastly different play mechanics to help it fit in to what's expected of an MMO. Gone is the freeform class system; it'll be replaced with defined classes and good old experience points to give you something to grind. The game will also make use of a

conventional skills bar to manage magic and abilities, but will keep the concept of stamina which will drive much of the action. Radiant AI – the complex system that manages NPCs and makes them behave in a more natural way – is also gone. At least mounts will stick around – which is expected considering that almost every other MMO has the feature – but there's no word on the flying variety – or dragons, for that matter.

Players will be able to create a character from any of the established Tamriel races, who have begrudgingly formed alliances based on geographic proximity: the Nords, Dunmer and Argonians have formed the Ebonheart Pact; the Aldmeri Dominion is made up of the Altmer, Bosmer and Khajiit; and the Daggerfall Covenant is formed of the Bretons, Redguard and Orcs.

Not all cities and areas of Tamriel will be complete by time the game launches in 2013, but the bulk of the continent will be available to explore. Obviously, more content will be added as the game matures.

"Story can only ruin a game for those people who care about story. For instance, Gears of War. It contains atrocious, offensive violations of story basics. Yet it doesn't seem to ruin it for many, many people. It's literally the worst writing in games, but seems to have no ill effects."

-Chuck Beaver,
story producer for *Dead Space*

From Russia with love

Company of Heroes is lauded as one of the greatest real-time strategy games of our time, and with a metascore of 93 (and a user score of 90), it's difficult to argue with that. The game was released six years ago and had two expansions, and now THQ has revealed that a true sequel is on its way.

Due for release in 2013, *Company of Heroes 2* returns to World War 2 but will give us a perspective from the Soviet front; players will control Russian forces as they repel Hitler's attempt to invade the country. Snow will play a crucial role in the game (as it did every time someone tried to take over Russia), which will bog down any units that try to cross it. The game will feature a revamped cover system as well as all-new characters, unit types and vehicles. Relic's Greg Wilson calls *CoH 2* a "true successor, introducing a new front, new protagonists and new technology while retaining the unique mix of strategic gameplay and competitive multiplayer that made the original *Company of Heroes* such a success."

Shaken but not perturbed

007 LEGENDS

Apparently the meagre scores for just about every *James Bond* game launched under the publisher aren't enough to bother Activision – the company has announced another game based on the affairs of Britain's number one super spy to tie in with the release of this year's *Skyfall*. *007 Legends* is the name of the game and it's being put together by Eurocom, the team behind *GoldenEye 007*'s original Wii release as well as the more recent HD port *Reloaded*. Rather than shadow any particular story in the massive franchise, *Legends* will be a tribute to the series (fit for its 50th anniversary) that incorporates the stories from six *Bond* films, retelling them in such a way that a single, over-arching story drives the narrative. Which films exactly is anyone's guess at this stage, but we do know that the game will culminate alongside the events of *Skyfall*.

Expect a release date of October 16 on both 360 and PS3. There's no word yet on a Wii U version but we'd be surprised if such a release doesn't happen given Eurocom's history.

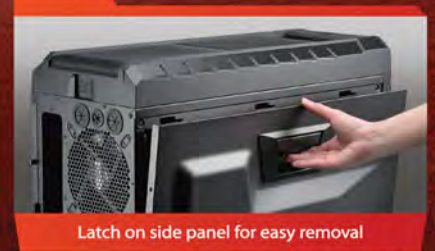
MISS OUT ON DOUBLE FINE'S KICKSTARTER? DON'T PANIC!

Perhaps you were in a coma, or on the moon, or otherwise preoccupied with mundane activities like school or university? No matter the excuse, you missed out on pledging money to Tim Schafer and Double Fine's Kickstarter campaign for their new adventure game. Now you can't sleep at night; you keep hearing the accusatory voices of Guybrush and Murray telling you that you're no longer the adventure game fan you once were. Whenever you hear a Harley Davidson approaching, you panic, thinking that Ben and Ben and the rest of the Polecats are about to appear to punch you in the face for neglecting to fund a new adventure game.

Luckily, Double Fine is seemingly not content with the \$3.3 million already pledged, and as such they've set up a PayPal account for you to continue backing their project. If you head over to www.doublefine.com/dfa you'll be able to throw more money at Tim Schafer. Naturally, any backing done this way will get you access to all sorts of goodies similar to those on offer through the initial Kickstarter. You'll get a Steam code for a PC/Mac copy of the game, access to the backer forums, access to the Steam beta, and access to the documentary that's being produced.



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The Game Stalker



Stop! Bullet Time

Ah, May 2012. The month of mammoth mounds of things beginning with 'M'. Or rather one particular thing beginning with M. A thing beginning with M that I have been waiting in anticipation for since, I don't know... forever. I'm sure you've guessed already, it's *Max Payne 3* [I was going with the mash potato festival in Perth, Ed].

Of course *Max Payne 3* will be out already by the time this goes to print, but this doesn't mean that right now, in this moment, I'm not counting down the days until I can closet myself away from the world, even if just for a few hours a day.

The worst part is that I remember playing *Max Payne 1* and *Max Payne 2* and being sorely disappointed with the second game. It wasn't bad, not by a long shot, but it was just... lacklustre.

The introduction of Mona Sax as a playable character had such potential, and yet when you actually played the game it all kind of seemed a bit... meh. Repetitive, with an underdeveloped but nonetheless interesting storyline. Playing as Mona, whilst initially a novelty, didn't have any real advantage in the long run.

Of course, Remedy Entertainment has not been involved in *Max Payne 3*, having sold the rights back in 2002 to Take-Two Interactive who own Rockstar Games. History lesson aside, I'm both apprehensive and intrigued to see what Rockstar Vancouver will do with *Max Payne 3*.

Sure, we've all seen the trailers but will this departure from the film noir inspired games of early 2000 be as gritty and dark as the previous iterations? They've certainly departed from the desaturated colour palette of Remedy's *Max Payne*, introducing by contrast a warm, oversaturated look that exudes less revenge and more desperation.

And desperation is of course exactly what *Max Payne 3* is about. Set in Sao Paulo, Max is in a downward spiral of destruction. Which considering the events of the previous two games isn't really surprising. No-one stops to consider what happens to video game characters after they kill all the baddies. Do they start anew? Do they retain their sense of self? What happens to them when they lose their purpose in life by avenging their loved ones?

Whilst these are all rather philosophical questions that perhaps could be the subject of some academic paper on the personification and identification of video game characters as real people, I ask the question more because Rockstar dares to take us there.

They play out Max's story to some kind of longer term conclusion other than revenge. Logically of course, Max would never have been able to slip comfortably back into his own life after the events of the first two games. He's killed too many people, and lost too much of his purpose to pretend that everything could go back to how it was.

It's with great interest and trepidation then that I approach *Max Payne 3*. Will his latest, somewhat involuntary mission (or so it seems from the trailers), give Max a renewed sense of purpose and will to live? Or will it merely delay the inevitable sense of loss and pain that he hides by throwing himself into his work?

By the time you read this I will have found out. I will have explored the tumultuous depths of Max's mind. Will he be found wanting? Or will he rise to the occasion and find renewed purpose?

- Pippa Tshabalala

No! No BioShock Infinite for you in 2012!



Attention citizens! We interrupt this broadcast with an urgent message. A dreadful message. A saddening message. Hugely anticipated *BioShock* of the skies, *BioShock Infinite*, will not be arriving this year as previously reported. We're sure you gathered as much from the headline. Hurts even more when you hear it twice, doesn't it?

Irrational Games' Ken Levine showed up on scene to break this disheartening news to every excited gamer *in the universe*. Even though the game was initially set to launch in the weary light of this year's dusk, apparently the time between then and now just isn't enough to get the game in airship-shape, and make the "specific tweaks and improvements" needed by a game as huge as *Infinite*. That's awesome, Mr Levine, but do tell us more.

"I won't kid you: *BioShock Infinite* is a very big game, and we're doing things that no one has ever done in a first-person shooter. We had a similar experience with the original *BioShock*, which was delayed

several months as our original ship date drew near. Why? Because the Big Daddies weren't the Big Daddies you've since come to know and love. Because Andrew Ryan's golf club didn't have exactly the right swing. Because Rapture needed one more coat of grimy Art Deco. The same principle now applies to *BioShock Infinite*."

Ah, who're we kidding: we can't resist Ken's winning smile and those well-chosen words, and so we can't stay angry at him forever. The game's new release date? February 26th 2013. Now, wipe away your tears, disgruntled gamer. It's not the first time a much-anticipated title has slipped beyond its initially intended release, and it won't be the last. *Infinite* will apparently not be shown at E3 or Gamescom this year, as Levine explains that preparing for huge events such as those takes away from time that could be spent actually developing the game. And we wouldn't want that. We want this amazing-looking game to get here as soon as possible, don't we?

"To us the core of what is wrong with the mobile platform is the lack of respect for players, it really seems like a large number of these companies out there view their audience as dumb cattle who they round up, milk and then send them on their way feeling empty or at times violated."

-Ed McMillen, creator of *Super Meat Boy*

The Road to South Korea

Do you have what it takes to beat the best in the world at *Tekken 6* or *StarCraft II*? MSSA (Mind Sports South Africa) will be sending a team overseas to represent South Africa at the annual IeSF (International e-Sports Federation) World Championships, which will be held in Cheonan City, South Korea from 4-8 October this year. This will be the fourth year that an official South African team will be competing at the IeSF, and our national team will be joining top gamers from around 40 other countries to compete for top honours. In addition, players selected for the national team will also earn their Protea Colours.

To qualify for the national team trials, which happen in August, players will need to participate in one of the regional championships hosted by the MSSA. The Gauteng and Free State championships have already been held, so if you're looking to qualify you can only do so at the Mpumalanga, Western Cape, or KwaZulu-Natal events. Where *StarCraft II* is concerned you can also enter the online championships in order to qualify. So far four gamers have already qualified for the *StarCraft II* nationals and eight have qualified for *Tekken 6*. Among these is Robert 'PandaTank' Botha, who is currently ranked #166 worldwide in *StarCraft II*, and is the first South African to have ranked in the top ten IeSF e-sports rankings, and who represented SA at last year's Championships.

Gamers wanting to compete in any of the MSSA's Championships will need to be registered with the MSSA, and this can be done via their website www.mssa-cgdoc.org/tournament_manager.

Seriously professional



As e-sports continues to set the hearts of groupies aflutter and fill the pockets of pro gamers, Blizzard knows that it has responsibilities to its community to help spread the *SC2* e-sports scene into the world. Because of this, a number of nifty features will make its way into *StarCraft II*, including the highly-demanded Global Play, which will allow players from separate regions (US, Europe, Australia, etc.) to play against each other without the need to purchase a new account tied to that region. Incidentally, Global Play is also a feature that will be available to *Diablo III* players from the start.

Two other features important to the pro and amateur scenes alike are the ability to resume dropped multiplayer games using a replay file, and full support for clans/groups. A final new feature is support for "multiplayer replay viewing", but Blizzard hasn't given any solid info on that just yet.

These features will be available to all *SC2* players around the launch of *Heart of the Swarm*, but won't necessarily require a purchase of the expansion pack.

GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER DLC ANNOUNCED; ACT SURPRISED

By the time you read this, it might be likely that you've been playing *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* for a few days considering its local release date is 25 May. There's been a lot of moaning about publishers releasing day-one DLC for their games, so in order to sidestep any gamer backlash, Ubisoft has announced that they will begin the obligatory DLC deluge about two weeks after the game's release.

The first load of *Future Soldier* DLC is called "Arctic Strike", and it'll be hitting the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 on 03 June, which might have come and gone considering this is the June issue you're holding in your grubby mitts. The DLC will send players "from the streets of Moscow to the far reaches of the Arctic" and brings along with it new multiplayer maps, a new multiplayer mode, a new game mode called Guerrilla Mode, and six new weapons.

The DLC will cost \$10 (probably about R80) on the PlayStation 3 and 800 MS Points over Xbox LIVE. There's been no mention of DLC for the PC version of *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*.



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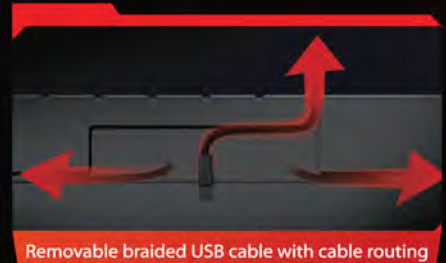
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The Indie Investigator



Inspiration

There's nothing worse than being stuck in a creative rut. Getting a little thingy of popcorn stuck between your teeth after a trip to the cinema comes close, but even major oral discomfort is nothing in the face of looking inward and finding that your wellspring of inspiration has run dry.

Chances are that at some point in your game development history you've felt inundated with concepts that feel wholly infeasible or horrifically tepid, with nary an inspiring or realistic thought among them (if you've never encountered this, please contact me and dispense some o' that miracle wisdom). In the face of such a creative drought, it's best to take a deep breath and focus on a couple of these plans:

Throw yourself into a game. It may seem cheesy to say that you had a cool game idea after, uh, *playing a cool game*, but this is a basis for many great development projects. The classic formula of "X game but with Y improvements" still boasts an astounding amount of wiggle room ... though only if you put some meaningful effort into understanding why X is so great (and not-so-great) in the first place. Taking inspiration from your favourite FPS won't work if your enthusiasm doesn't extend past the thought of "yay, guns!"

Throw yourself into something else. A lot of the greatest genre departures, creative works and ground breaking titles in games come from evocative and engaging "outside" experiences. You know, like how *Minecraft* is awesome digital LEGO and *Left 4 Dead* is basically zombie cinema in game form. Getting involved in "other stuff" is how some of the very first game creators got their ideas: early RPGs drew greatly from fantasy literature, and the first text adventure was inspired by a creator's love for spelunking. There's a big world filled with amazing experiences, so find some for yourself and package them as a game!

Try something new. Make a game that you wouldn't usually consider devving. We all have our favourite genres and approaches, and sometimes this allows us to focus too narrowly and exhaust our creative space more often than necessary. Learning to step out of your comfort zone and develop more experimental games may not produce the next killer title on its own, but you'll walk away from the project with new perspectives and ideas that can be taken back to your regular stuff.

Try something old. Some ideas age surprisingly well. Remember that prototype you made a couple of years back which you thought would be awesome at first, but didn't really work out? You can look back and understand *why* it didn't work, right? Can you start something that exists in a similar creative space while nipping these newly-understood problems in the bud? Sometimes it's not just a matter of spamming random prototypes until one of them works: it can also be a matter of poking at a single broad idea in several forms over time, shaping the final, successful game through the failures that precede it.

Whether the above suggestions work or fail: understand and remember that a lack of "good ideas" is something that everybody has to deal with from time to time, level of expertise be damned. Stay calm and don't lose hope!

- Rodain Joubert

Clash of the subscription titans: The Old Republic vs World of Warcraft



Oh dear. It seems that even BioWare's first foray into the MMORPG scene, *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, can't stave off dwindling subscriber numbers. And it's got *Star Wars* in it! This news came to light during publisher EA's annual fiscal earnings call. Among the numbers that were touted were revenues of \$4.1 billion, earnings of \$76 million, and the announcement that EA will be splurging \$80 million "in development of games for Gen4 console systems" – which is the next generation of gaming consoles.

But let's get back to that headline. Eventually, talk turned to BioWare's flagship MMO. In March, EA proudly proclaimed that *TOR* played home to around 1.7 million active subscribers. That's a hefty number. At the time of writing (May 2012), however, that number has dropped to 1.3 million active subs. That's a decline of 400,000 subscribers in just a couple of months. This despite last month's claims from EA that subscription numbers weren't declining, but that server populations only appeared lighter because of there being less "concurrent users" online at any given time.

In order to quell the concerns that

this raised, EA Labels President Frank Gibeau argued that the numbers are in line with EA's "original assumptions" about the game's projected performance. "Some of those casual customers have gone through a billing cycle and have decided not to subscribe to the game," was Gibeau's reasoning behind the decline. Nevertheless, EA plans to increase subscriber numbers by releasing future updates for the game, aiming to improve PvP, guilds and endgame timesinks, as well as releasing expansion packs as they go – the first two of which will be out later this year.

A few days later, Blizzard was on the scene to proudly declare that their baby, *World of Warcraft*, has been holding steady in subs numbers over the last few months. Probably because most of the players who left to play *TOR* to see what it offers inevitably decided that *WoW* is still their preferred way of demolishing time, as so often happens with any new MMO. During a financial call, Blizzard's Mike Morhaime happily announced through grinning teeth that *World of Warcraft* is still holding strong at 10.2 million subscribers. What a ridiculous number of people that is. Seriously.

So, how's the PlayStation Vita doing then?

During Sony's annual fiscal call, CEO Kaz Hirai gave eager listeners an update on the number of fancy, powerful new handhelds the company has thus far sold: 1.8 million. Hirai muses that this is a "good start" but went on to say this: "We have to reinforce the software area in order to improve the business, that is the basic line."

The last we heard about the Vita's sales figures was back in February, when the punchy portable was reported to have landed in the hands of 1.2 million consumers. "This is a very important product indeed for us, and therefore we still have a very high motivation to develop this further. There is no change," added Hirai.



A not-so-grim dawn for Grim Dawn

“What’s happened to *Grim Dawn*?” we hear you ask. Or maybe you didn’t, but here’s some info regardless: the game was chugging along at a bit of a slow pace, since most of the development team (comprised largely of former *Titan Quest* devs) could only afford to work on the game in their spare time. Enter Kickstarter, the go-to crowd-funding source for indie developers who can’t raise the necessary capital to start (or, these days, even complete) their games.

Crate Entertainment recently posted a brief but successful Kickstarter campaign asking for a mere \$280,000, which they acquired without breaking a sweat. At the time of writing, the team managed to pull in over \$370K, so we expect the total to reach approximately the \$400K mark. With the cash, Crate will be able to hire full-time staff to add much-needed polish to the visuals of the game, finish up the coding and world creation, slap on some AAA audio and get started on beta testing. While the release date is still pegged at “I dunno”, we expect the game to roll out the door before the end of the year. Exciting times!

Tomb Raider reboot delayed to 2013



Sticking with the theme of “awesome games for 2012 being delayed until next year”, it’s been announced that the very promising *Tomb Raider* reboot has been pushed back to 2013. The news came via the game’s official forums and was delivered by Crystal Dynamics’ studio head Darrell Gallagher.

In his post, Gallagher apologised to fans but said that the delay was necessary in order “to make sure we fully deliver the very highest quality game”. On top of this, he pointed out that the team behind the reboot is working on content that has never been done in a *Tomb Raider* game before.

It also doesn’t hurt having the game release during a less crowded period. The end of this year sees releases like *Assassin’s Creed III*, *Halo 4* and *Black Ops 2* – to name but a handful of seriously strong IPs. Probably a good move on Crystal Dynamics’ behalf.

WOLFENSTEIN 3D TURNS 20, GOES FREE TO PLAY IN YOUR BROWSER

In case you missed it, the 9th of May 2012 saw *Wolfenstein 3D*, the grandpappy of first-person shooters, turn 20 years old. There was cake. It had bullets in it. Also, bits of mechanised Hitler. It wasn’t the best of all of history’s cakes, sure, but it served its purpose.

To compensate for the crummy reception of their bullet-riddled baked goods, developer id Software went ahead and ported *Wolfenstein 3D* to web browsers, making it free to play for everyone. There was also some business about it going free to download for a single day on iOS, but we’re not bothered with that.

We’d like to wish the old boy a very public, very belated happy birthday right here, so that when it turns 30 it can pick up this magazine and have a laugh at memories of how promising life looked at the start of its twenties.

To play the game for free in your browser right now, go here: wolfenstein.bethsoft.com



COMPUTEX Taipei JUNE 5-9 2012 1F, I0417a

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Miktar's Meanderings



Occupational hazard

Writer's block is like Alzheimer's disease: what you want to say, how you want to say it, it's still there, locked up inside your brain. You just can't get to it. Like, you know the name of the song that's playing, or who that actor on the screen is, but for the life of you, you can't remember it right now. It's on the tip of your tongue... Sod it, it'll come back to you later.

Many people confuse indecision with writer's block. Not knowing *what* you want to write is not the same as not knowing *how* to write it at all. Indecision can be crippling for someone tasked with writing something topical on a regular basis. It does happen when writing about anything video game related: after all, you can only say "This publisher/game/fan base is awful/fantastic" so many times. There are only so many ways to describe a first-person shooter that's redefining the genre in ways that don't really redefine anything except which colour of person you're shooting at now: brown, black or green.

And who *actually* gives a crap about which video card manufacturer is making what video card next? They're all too expensive anyway, and will be outdated by the time you buy it. Like cell phones. Could you imagine writing about cell phones for your entire life? You'd go insane. You'd want to walk up to random people in the street, shake them by the shoulders and scream: YOU WILL BE DEAD SOON, DO YOU *REALLY* HAVE TO HAVE THE NEWEST MODEL CELLPHONE?

I often write about shaking people by the shoulders and screaming at them. Have you noticed that?

True writer's block isn't about not having anything topical to say. It's about sitting there, having temporarily forgotten how concepts work, which bits connect to which ends to form these things, like... similes, and metaphors. There's all that juice about proverbs and adverbs and allomorphs, but the proverbial square peg refuses to be jammed into the round hole and you just don't know why.

During less civilised times, before the advent of electronic mail and dental care, the writer would rely on their muse for guidance, for assistance in dealing with writer's block Daemons. The muse was the guiding light during dark times and a lack of creativity. She (or he if you swing that way) would appear in a puff of mental magic, inspire you into ideation and get you really wound up and good to go. *Especially* when you're on the crapper and nowhere near a writing implement. We killed the muse with science. It's a Greek tragedy, really. Un-amusing, when you think about it.

Some writers still worship the muse, or tell their girlfriends that "yu r my muse lol," but that's just romantic tripe between teenagers and people over 15 who think poetry is still a valid form of creative expression.

So what can you do, when your livelihood is under threat by the dreaded ten-ton roughly square-shaped mental brain fart that's cutting off circulation to your inspiration gland? Prolific authors and established creative types often say (or write) that you should write about your writer's block. But that's just the writer's block talking. It's trying to stay alive, meme-like, by transmitting itself to the brains of others, via the writer it has infected. So don't listen to those people, they're diseased. If you ever get writer's block, don't panic. Just <word limit reached> [Dammit, Ed]

- Miktar Dracon

Here piggy piggy piggy



Ubisoft's long-promised, partially-undead, perpetually in-stasis sequel to the cult hit *Beyond Good & Evil* is apparently still in production. That's good news, by the way. The expected bad news is that it's unlikely that we'll see it anytime soon, as it's now reportedly in development for next-gen consoles only (that's *actual* next-gen, not the current generation as represented by marketing people).

The original game's lead designer Michel Ancel, who's back in the saddle for the sequel, told journalists that the studio is "in an active creation stage and at this moment we are only focusing on the game

and making it the best game that we can." He then states that the title is too ambitious and resource-heavy to squeeze into the current generation of consoles. Their plan is to focus on creating the game without fitting into any hardware limitations, and then when the new gear pulls up, they'll figure out the technical stuff.

It sounds like their tech team is either blissfully ignorant or already getting familiar with the next generation Xbox/PlayStation hardware. Either way, expect a release some time before our sun burns itself out. That's about as specific as we dare guess.

What's up with the DICE-managed Battlefield 3 servers?

Perhaps you're finding it harder to find multiplayer games on official, DICE-run *Battlefield 3* servers? Perhaps you're also playing EA's first-person shooter on a console? Either way, console or PC, DICE-run servers are in decline and it's largely thanks to the "Rent A Server" feature included in *Battlefield 3*. Recently there's been a growing concern online that DICE is simply shutting down their own servers in favour of making money off player-rented servers instead. While EA has acknowledged that players might be experiencing difficulties in connecting to DICE-run servers, they've reassured players that there is no intention to relinquish all *Battlefield 3* servers to public rental.

Speaking to website Shacknews, an EA representative

said: "DICE is not shutting down servers. If DICE-managed servers appear unavailable, it is because they have been rented and customized by players." In other words: every time somebody rents a server, a DICE-run server is taken out of action. With the growing popularity of player-rented servers comes a growing number of people finding it harder to connect to a dwindling supply of DICE-run servers.

The good news is that EA is aware of all of this and have said that "DICE will continue to add servers and will reserve a percentage of servers for players who prefer to connect through DICE-hosted servers". In the meantime they encourage people to use the server filter options and "favourite" options for finding player-rented servers that appeal to your specific play style.



Another epic SpaceVenture



A couple of months ago, Scott Murphy and Mark Crowe (aka The Two Guys from Andromeda – the original creators of *Space Quest*) dug themselves out of obscurity and announced to the world “we’re back, but wait”. Waiting over, the duo has now announced their inevitable Kickstarter campaign and their plans to take back the comedy science-fiction point and click adventure game market.

Perhaps the most important part of their return to the industry is that they are developing a new game. Presumably unable to buy back the licence for *Space Quest* from Activision (or maybe they just didn’t care to try), they’ve decided to develop all-new content based on the ideas they’ve had swimming around in their heads for the last 20 years.

The duo promises game dialogue that will apparently make your nostrils blow Tang, fun and unique humour, hilarious death sequences, game music to die for and voice talent from some of the best in the business (including the voices of GlADOS, Pinky and the Brain, the SQ4 narrator and many more).

If this sounds like your cup of Monolith Burger all-natural decaf, then head over to tgakick.com and give them some money!

Rumour: Traveller’s Tales bringing LEGO to Middle-earth

If this rumour turns out to be true, then the next in Traveller’s Tales long-running series of franchise-themed, LEGO-centric video games will travel to the world of J.R.R. Tolkien’s fantasy epic, *The Lord of the Rings*.

MCV brings word of the title, reporting that packaging materials used in the new *Lord of the Rings*-themed LEGO line confirm the existence of an upcoming *LEGO Lord of the Rings*. In addition, UK retailer Shop To posted a product listing for the game. The listing was promptly removed, but the powers of the Internet ensured that it was not forgotten. The product page revealed placeholder box art and a release date set for October 2012.

When asked what was up, Warner Bros. Interactive representatives informed the media that they “do not comment on speculation or rumours.” It seems as though Traveller’s Tales will never run out of franchises to draw from for their hugely popular *LEGO* video games.

PRESSURE-SENSITIVE CONTROLLERS IN MICROSOFT’S FUTURE?

If a recent patent filing is to be believed, then they very well might be. Recently granted to Microsoft, the patent details a controller that utilises a unique method of biometric identification to figure out who’s using it – by registering and identifying that person’s unique hand-pressure signature.

The controller would include internal memory and a processing unit. When picked up, the device detects the pressure exerted by the user’s hands and compares it to the recognised profiles stored within a database. Once it finds a match, your console will know who’s holding the controller and can display your unique information appropriately.

We imagine that this type of technology could be useful for a great many gadgets, but we’re fine with it just logging us into our Xbox profiles, forever eliminating the need to press pesky buttons to do so.

Alan Wake on PC has proved to be a great experience – so good, in fact, that developers Remedy Entertainment and publishers Microsoft have found common ground with *American Nightmare* much sooner than it took them the first time. *American Nightmare* for PC should be available by time you read this. It’ll include both the story and arcade modes.



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Musica	0860 687 422
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Rectron	011 203 1000
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Ster Kinekor	011 445 7700

Indie indeed

As indie games become more dominant in the market, big publishers have been looking at ways of tapping into this potentially huge source of revenue by scooping up a few key titles and giving them the big budget treatment. It's a strange middle-point between true indie development (i.e.: entirely independent of a publisher) and the regular stuff, but EA has decided that it definitely falls under the term "indie".

Testament to this, the multi-billion-dollar publisher recently released their "indie pack" – a collection of games developed under the EA Partners brand – something akin to Fox's Searchlight Pictures label that gives small development teams the funding and sometimes marketing they need to get their games out the door. As you'd expect, people were offended by this idea, but some of the developers claim that, while they're not strictly speaking "indie", there's not much besides an exchange of money that binds them to the publisher.

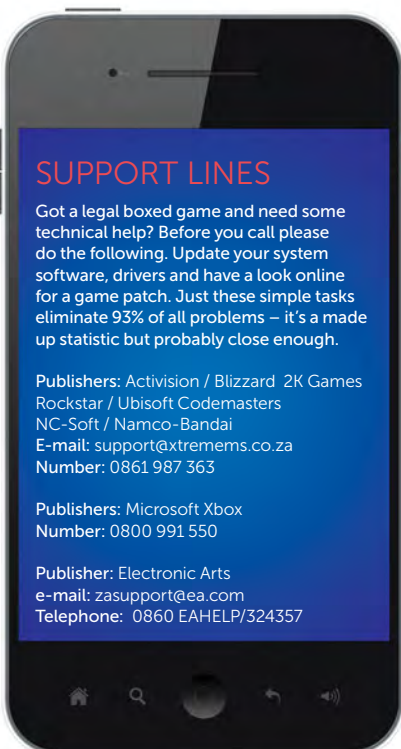
"...it really is a partnership. I never saw anything that could even be



vaguely considered creative pressure," said Nels Anderson, a technical designer at Klei Entertainment who's behind both *Deathspank* and *Shank*. He then explains that to release a game on XBLA or PSN, "you must have a publisher. So either your publisher is Microsoft/Sony or it's a third party."

While not a big deal on its own, this move from EA and the subsequent feedback from both sides continue to give rise to the importance of understanding where the games industry is and where it's headed. Indie games are gaining popularity, and platform owners need to break down the barriers of entry into the ever-widening market that is console gaming.

Nintendo has confirmed that the sequel to *New Super Mario Bros.* will be headed to the 3DS in August. The game uses a more conventional 2D side-scrolling point of view but will include some elements of 2.5D depth. It looks to be running on the same engine as *Super Mario 3D Land* but will obviously stick to its classic gameplay roots. Added bonus: the Super Leaf will allow Mario (or Luigi!) to fly, rather than float, just like its first appearance in *Super Mario Bros. 3*.



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@xtrememem.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

Valve and Blizzard kiss and make up, resolve DOTA trademark dispute

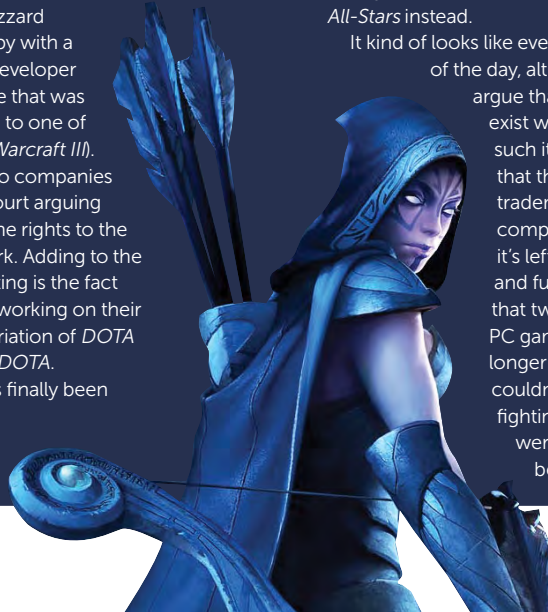
DOTA is kind of a big deal when it comes to online competitive games. Originally starting life as a custom map for Blizzard's *Warcraft III*, the multiplayer mod/map proved so popular it took on an identity of its own. One of the guys behind the idea, "IceFrog", went on to work for Valve, where work on *DOTA 2* commenced.

Naturally, Blizzard wasn't too happy with a rival software developer creating a game that was intrinsically tied to one of their own IPs (*Warcraft III*). As such, the two companies have been in court arguing over who has the rights to the *DOTA* trademark. Adding to the legal head-butting is the fact that Blizzard is working on their own, official variation of *DOTA* called *Blizzard DOTA*.

The case has finally been settled, with Blizzard and Valve

reaching a "mutual agreement". From now on, the trademark "DOTA" will remain in the public domain, meaning that players will be able to make *DOTA* related stuff so long as it is not for profit. Valve gets the "DOTA" commercial trademark, which means *DOTA 2* will release as *DOTA 2*. As for Blizzard, they have agreed to change the name of *Blizzard DOTA* to *Blizzard All-Stars* instead.

It kind of looks like everyone wins at the end of the day, although some would argue that *DOTA* wouldn't exist without Blizzard, and as such it seems a little unfair that they handed over the trademark to a rival software company. Be that as it may, it's left us feeling all warm and fuzzy inside knowing that two of our most loved PC game developers no longer hate each other. We couldn't bear to see them fighting and at one point we were almost certain they'd be getting a divorce.



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So that's how it's done



Super publisher, developer, distribution platform and all-round loved-by-everyone company

Valve Corporation recently released to the public their new employee handbook and, oh boy, it's quite a read. It explains in great detail the organisational structure of the company, how things get done, and what everyone is expected to do. It's not quite revolutionary, but it's close.

Valve uses a flat corporate hierarchy, which means there are no bosses (not even the company's figurehead Gabe Newell, who only calls himself "managing director" to make it easier for the rest of the world). Everyone at Valve is hired based on their expertise and is expected simply to do their jobs. But here's the catch: those jobs are determined by themselves and their peers. Employees design, run and publish their own projects within the company and "recruit" others for their projects, and everyone is expected to work together to get things done. If a project fails, then everyone learns from their mistakes and moves on to the next thing.

There's a lot more to it than that, but you get the gist – it's about freedom of creativity based on respect, expectation and hard work. Everything that Valve produced suddenly makes a whole lot of sense.

A challenger approaches



Comic book readers and figurine lovers should listen up, as there's a new online retailer in the field of battle, eager to cater to your needs. They're called Steampunk Comics, and this is how they describe themselves:

"Our dedicated online shop features new and forthcoming graphic novels and collectibles. Organized character links makes for easy navigation around the site, with free delivery to your door on orders over R350. It's just one of many ways we're making shopping online easy, secure, and fun!"

To learn more and to get your hands on awesomely nerdy awesomeness, head on over to www.steampunkcomics.co.za.

Look & Listen

Pre-orders www.lookandlisten.co.za



PC

Borderlands 2	September 21st
Hitman: Absolution	October 12th
Medal of Honor: Warfighter	October 26th

Xbox 360

Aliens: Colonial Marines	August 31st
F1 2012	September 19th
Resident Evil 6	October 2nd

PS3

Darksiders II	August 29th
Far Cry 3	September 7th
Assassin's Creed III	October 31st

Wii

Madagascar 3: The Video Game	June 15th
LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	June 29th
The Amazing Spider-Man	June 29th

3DS

Funky Barn 3D	June 8th
Monster 4X4 3DS	June 8th
Puzzle Crosswords	June 8th

Surprise: Minecraft smashes XBLA sales records

Well, we certainly didn't see this one coming. Except we did. From many miles away. Using our hand-crafted binoculars made from the diamonds we discovered in the caverns beneath our *Minecraft* castle. Within an hour of having gone on sale on Xbox LIVE Arcade, *Minecraft* on Xbox 360 had already become profitable, as revealed by a tweet from *Minecraft* creator Markus "Notch" Persson – who has now run out of room for piles of cash in his original money room and has had to construct a second.

This was all calculated based on the number of players who immediately flooded the game's leaderboards following release. Judging by the leaderboards, *Minecraft* sold more than 400,000 copies within 24 hours of going on sale, breaking digital sales records on the 360 by selling more than any other title in its first day on XBLA, said Microsoft.

If you've been patiently waiting for indie PC megahit mining/crafting/surviving simulator *Minecraft* to hit the console world, you can grab it off XBLA right now for 1,600 Microsoft Points.

UBISOFT/MARVEL PARTNERING FOR AVENGERS VIDEO GAME

With the recently released *Avengers* movie tearing through box office records and wowing audiences, it was fair to assume that a video game starring the titular *Avengers* would inevitably rear its licensed head. We're just surprised it didn't release to coincide with the movie.

It's called *Marvel Avengers: Battle for Earth*, and it's being developed exclusively for Xbox 360 (using Kinect) and Wii U. It's in the works over at Ubisoft Quebec and will allow players to use motion controls to stave off an invasion by the Skrull. "The idea that we're making a motion-control version of 'The Avengers' is a unique proposition if you compare that to superhero games of the past," said Tony Key, Ubisoft marketing VP.

"This is the perfect type of game for that because these characters are very action oriented. They're always fighting and throwing things."

The game's narrative deviates from that of the movie, drawing from the *Secret Invasion* comic book storyline, in which the Skrull infiltrate Earth by posing as superheroes. It'll boast interactive environments "inspired by iconic Marvel comic artwork," as well as 20 characters from the Marvel universe.

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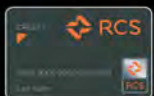
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MUSICA
A WORLD AWAITS

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

May winner



Heinrich Swanepoel, page 30

THIS MONTH'S BOUNTY

dreamGEAR – PS Vita 7 in 1 Starter kit valued at R299.95. Sponsored by *dreamGEAR* and Top CD.



dreamGEAR



Caption of the month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a mystery hamper from NAG (not pictured). Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line "June caption".



NAG's lame attempt at humour
Don't drink and game!



Last month's winner
I like my privates well done. Miguel De Oliveira

SOMETHING NEW FOR NEOCORE

Neocore Games, the team behind grand strategy / real-time tactics / role-playing game *King Arthur: The Role-playing Wargame* and its sequel, have announced a new game in development under their banner. It's an action RPG that goes by the title of *The Incredible Adventures of Van Helsing*, and it'll likely feature all of the vampire slaying that goes hand-in-hand with the Van Helsing name.

The game is "loosely based on Bram Stoker's classic novel *Dracula*" and is "set in a gothic-noir universe resembling a fantastical 19th century Europe filled with monsters, magic, and weird technology." In it, Van Helsing's son finds himself enlisted by his former supernatural foes "to defeat a new scourge terrorizing the ravaged Eastern European city." Other words contained within the announcement reveal that the game will be "filled with fierce and demonic battles, memorable characters, and a refreshingly unique story that brings the legendary vampire slayer to modern audiences." It's due for release in the fourth quarter of this year, on PC and XBLA.

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Microsoft taps into the budget market

Microsoft in the US has introduced a strange but somewhat familiar method of selling the Xbox 360. Their latest offering is of a 4GB Xbox 360 and Kinect bundle for a mere \$99 (R800). Yes, there's a catch – a huge one: purchasers must sign up for a 24-month XBL Gold subscription at full price – \$15 a month – with heavy penalties for early cancellations. When added together, that's \$459 for the lot – almost twice what you'd expect to pay for the hardware alone, but when you take into account the Gold sub, which would ordinarily cost \$120 over two years, you come out close to the original price.

Is it a good deal? No, not really. Microsoft is obviously trying to make up for the downward slope of sales in the US over the last three months, and might be concerned that a certain upcoming piece of hardware from Nintendo could steal those potential customers teetering on the



edge between "casual" and "core" that it's so keen to pull in.

Before you ask: no, there's no indication of this same offer reaching our shores, but don't be completely shocked if it, or something similar, does happen.

*"Tim Sweeney [Epic Games] doesn't look at Steam and say 'F***, we shouldn't support that because that will hurt long term sales of the Unreal Engine.' He's like, 'that's pretty cool, that's pretty useful.' So hopefully EA get their head to the same place."*

-Gabe Newell, MD of Valve

Release list

Dates subject to change without notice

June week 1

Max Payne 3	PC
Magic: The Gathering: Planechase	Collectible Card Game
Rayman Origins	3DS
The Sims 3 Katy Perry's Sweet Treats	PC
Inversion	360 / PC / PS3
Jurassic Park: The Game	PC
Pole Position 2012	PC

June week 2

Madagascar 3: The Video Game	3DS / 360 / DS PS3 / Wii
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier	PC
Warlock: Master of the Arcane	PC
Crash Time 4	360 / PC / PS3
Ratchet & Clank HD Collection	PS3
Pokémon Conquest	DS
The Secret World	PC

June week 3

Legends of Pegasus	PC
Enclave: Shadows of Twilight	PC
Gravity Rush	PS Vita
Lollipop Chainsaw	360 / PS3
Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception: Game of the Year Edition	PS3
Uncharted Trilogy	PS3
Steel Battalion: Heavy Armor	360

June week 4

Ice Age: Continental Drift	3DS / 360 / DS / PS3 / Wii
LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	3DS / 360 / DS / PC PS3 / PS Vita / Wii
The Amazing Spider-Man	360 / DS / PS3 / Wii
Silent Hill: Book of Memories	PS Vita
Spec Ops: The Line	360 / PC / PS3
London 2012: The Official Video Game of the Olympic Games	360

PRE-ORDER ON PC NOW!

FOR GENERATIONS, war and chaos raged across the land of Tyria. Five great races competed and warred against each other, struggling to tip the balance of power in their favour.... Then the dragons woke.

GUILLEMARS 2
PRE-ORDER

12

The top 8 reasons why E3 should matter to you

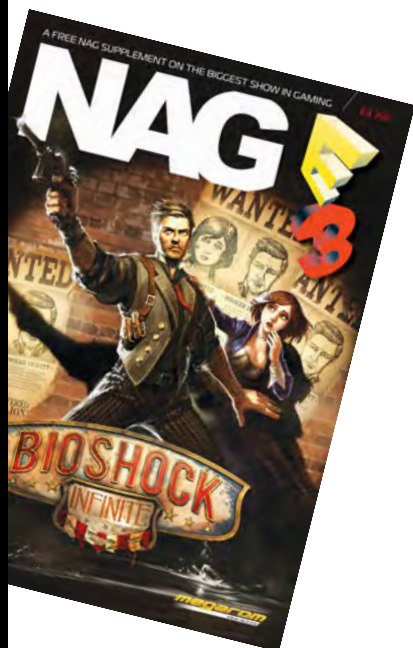
E3 (the Electronic Entertainment Expo) was first hosted back in 1995. It doubled as a platform for publishers and developers to peddle their wares to journalists eager to gobble them up, and as a celebration of everything that gaming has to offer. Before E3, games industry folk had to show off their works at other, all-encompassing trade shows like the Consumer Electronics Show. E3 changed all that. As the years drew on, it continued to grow and evolve, and today it is considered by many to be the most prestigious and important of all the gaming expos that have since been added to the yearly event calendar. E3 2012 is happening this month, and we're once again setting off on a grand gaming expedition through the hallowed halls of the Los Angeles Convention Centre. This excites us, and we'd like to give you seven reasons (in no particular order) why it should excite you as well. These could apply to any of gaming's foremost expos – but we'd like to honour the original.

8

THE SUPPLEMENT

No, we're not talking about the vitamins you'll have to swallow after sucking in that germ ridden airplane air for 26 hours.

We're talking about the NAG E3 supplement (gaming bible in some circles). Our supplement highlights all the games you need to know about for the coming year. We've only been wrong about a game once – back in 1999. Expect it in the August 2012 issue.



7

THE FLOOD

As E3 approaches, you can almost feel all of gaming holding its collective breath. News is scant as developers, publishers and console manufacturers tend to keep their secrets close to their chests, only to set them free in a torrential flood of E3-exclusive information (and the excitement generated from it) that transforms the gaming world into a veritable wonderland of upcoming adventures filled with possibility.

6

THE GAMES

This one's a given. The full spectrum is there: from big-budget, AAA titles that show off their importance with all the subtlety of a nuclear explosion, to the smaller, lesser-known titles that sit quietly in the corner waiting to pleasantly surprise anyone who happens to wander by. Not only do we get to gain mountains of fresh knowledge and insight on games we've been following, writing about and squealing over for what feels like an age, but we're often offered the chance to get our overly enthusiastic hands on them too. And that newfound knowledge and hands-on experience is then transferred directly to you.

5 THE SHOWCASE

Gaming is evolving, expanding and adapting at a frightening pace: this much is obvious. This is never more evident than at trade shows like E3. It's a celebration, an exposition of everything that we love about this industry. Much like our very own rAge, E3 offers three days of like-minded people coming together and revelling in the wonder and awe that gaming is capable of providing. Unlike rAge, access to E3 is exclusive to press, developers, publishers and other important-looking industry insiders – but its effect is felt by all gamers, everywhere.



COMPUTERS | GAMING | TECHNOLOGY

4 THE PLACE

This one's obvious: we get to go to Los Angeles, explore the strange lands we find ourselves surrounded by and stuff our faces



with the best, most exotic junk foods that LA has to offer. We'll worry about the real-world health bar repercussions later.

3 THE PEOPLE

No, we're not talking about other smelly journalists like us. We're talking about meeting the fine folks responsible for offering us the best that interactive entertainment has to offer. We get to rub shoulders with our favourite developers, perhaps share a few words with them and find out what makes them tick. We get to hear about our games from the mouths of the people making them, rather than some PR monkey. That's pretty amazing.



2 THE SPECTACLE

E3 is invariably an unwavering barrage of sights and sounds and awesomeness that turn it into a sensory extravaganza. The effort that is put into the booths and exhibits that publishers and developers put on show to entice interest is often mind-blowing. From enormous statues depicting beloved characters, to full-size replicas of in-game vehicles and locales, it's truly an unforgettable experience.



1 THE POSSIBILITIES

E3 is exciting not just because of what does happen behind its doors, but because of what *could* happen. Buzz gradually crescendos for months before the actual expo kicks off and rumours swarm the Internet. Will Microsoft/Sony/Nintendo reveal a new console? Is Relic going to show off its next title? Will we finally get some hands-on time with *Excite Game X*? Sure, it can lead to disappointment, and it normally does: but sometimes, a rumour that you've been hoping would come true, does, and you spend the next half-hour shedding tears of unbridled joy. E3 turns every one of us gamers into an excitable schoolchild. And for that, we adore it.





We see you're holding your shiny new PlayStation Vita. It's great for games, but you know that already. Because you're totally *wired*. You're hip, down with the tech. You even got the 32GB memory card, because you look to the *future*. So sit back and feel smug, Mr. Gadget Pants, you won't need to read this little feature. What's it about? Oh, just a few neat things about the PS

Vita, like how it can take screenshots, post those screenshots to Twitter, or play most of the back catalogue of excellent PSP titles. But you know all that, so you get to flip to the next page. There's probably something great on the next page. Everyone else, here's a few things you may not have known about Sony's new handheld...

1 TAKING SCREENSHOTS

If you press the PS button and Start at the same time, the Vita will take a screenshot of whatever you're doing. For some reason this won't work with *WipEout 2048*, probably because the game has a much better built-in camera mode. It doesn't work if you're playing a PSP game either, unfortunately. While the system is saving the screenshot, you won't be able to control the game you're playing, so expect to die if you're taking a snap from a nice fire fight in *Unit 13* or *Uncharted: Drake's Gold*.

2 QUICK MUTE

Hold down the "volume +" and "volume -" buttons at the same time for a second, and the Vita will

mute its sound. If you press either button again, it will return the sound to the volume it was before.

3 QUICK MENU

Hold down the PS button a few seconds, and a quick menu appears with options for adjusting the screen brightness, switching to a new music track if you started playing music at any time, and disabling the microphone if you're using the Party app to chat with friends.

4 LIVEAREA

When launched, every game and application has its own unique LiveArea. Some games use this screen to show how many trophies you've gotten so far or direct links to important websites. *Hot Shots Golf: World*

Invitational has a useful button for quickly accessing the Daily International Tournament, bypassing the logo screens and menu. Some applications like Group Messaging use the LiveArea for quickly accessing functions, showing a little button for writing a message. It's up to developers to use the LiveArea intelligently, so it may take some time before we see its true potential. The LiveTweet application, for example, does not have a quick button for writing a tweet, which is silly.

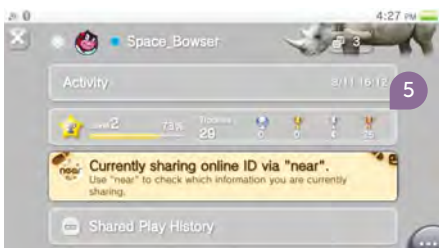
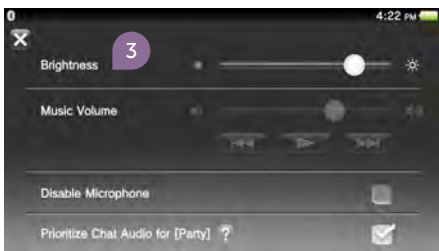
5 ACTIVITIES

If you're looking at a LiveArea, you can flick the LiveArea upwards to reveal the Activities area. Most games have an Activities area, showing your

most recent actions like high-scores, trophies gained or other notable events. If you have friends on your friends list who also play the game, it will show their accomplishments as well, so you can keep track of what they're playing or how far along they are. It's like a mini-Facebook, in that you can also "thumbs up" their status, or drop a comment on it that they'll see via a little notification icon the next time they visit their LiveArea for that game. You can see someone's entire Activity list by going to their name in the Friends application.

6 SOCIAL APPLICATIONS

Sony provides a handful of free applications you can download



PlayStation Vita-statistix

from the PlayStation Network Store, covering most of your online social needs without having to use the capable built-in web browser. LiveTweet is a slick Twitter app that even lets you post photos or screenshots stored on the Vita. Flickr lets you upload those photos of your cat directly to the popular photo-sharing site, while the foursquare app lets you check-in to locations either via 3G or Wi-Fi. Of course there's a peppy Facebook app as well, but what doesn't have Facebook these days?

7 PLAYSTATION NETWORK STORE

Every Vita launch title (and presumably every game released for the Vita moving forward) is available on the PlayStation

Store for digital download. In a surprise move, the digital versions are also slightly cheaper than their retail box counterparts. More importantly, the huge back catalogue of excellent PlayStation Portable games are also on the PSN store, even titles that were niche or hard to find. This is something Nintendo could really learn a thing or two from. Each week, some PSP games are discounted, the existing library is already slightly cheaper than if you were to try and find the games new at a store. You can also download demos, buy or rent movies / television shows, and check out screenshots for upcoming Vita titles. The PSN Store is a real plus for the Vita, making it a powerful PlayStation-centric experience.

8 CONTENT MANAGER

Buying lots of stuff off the PSN Store and taking photos/videos with the Vita's camera, is going to fill up your memory card quickly. And what happens if your Vita is lost or broken? In a surprising amount of forethought from Sony, the Vita comes with a Content Manager application that makes moving files or backing up your Vita to a PC or PS3 stupid easy. When you plug your Vita into your PS3 via the supplied USB cable, everything is already set to go. You just select what you want to do on the Vita's screen, and it happens. On PC, it will first ask to download a Content Manager program, which it does automatically if you agree. Once that's installed, backing up your Vita or moving music, movies and

photos to and from the device, is a breeze. Once backed up, if you ever need to replace your Vita, a simple restore will have everything back to the way it was.

9 THEMES

You can customise your Vita's lock screen and its various panels, either by selecting a new colour for the backdrop or by assigning an image or photo to it. If you transfer a cool picture from your PC to the Vita, you can resize and crop the image on the Vita itself so it fits the screen perfectly. If you're more technical-minded, the Vita also supports the PNG file format and its ability for transparency, which can lead to a lot of amazing-looking themes. The best place to find themes right now: www.vitathemes.com. **NAG**

THE HEAL

A gamer's guide to health and fitness. No really.



We'll be the first ones to admit that this is, quite possibly, the most unlikely feature one would expect to find in a gaming magazine. Okay, maybe a study of ancient Greek architecture would be more obscure, but you get the idea: this is something new for us. But it shouldn't be. We should've done this an age ago because staying healthy is very important for a number of reasons. 1) The longer you live, the longer you'll keep buying games (and *NAG*) and supporting this fantastic industry. 2) When the inevitable zombie/ alien invasion comes, we know that gamers are the most mentally well-equipped people on the planet to deal with the threat, but a number of us tend to skimp on the physical preparedness side. Finally, and most

HEALTH ISSUE

importantly 3) Staying healthy will make you a better gamer ¹. Your reflexes will be sharper, your focus deeper, your mood better, and your cognitive abilities can increase by as much as 10% ². Sound like a good idea to get healthy? Let's get started.

This is not a definitive guide to fitness and health. This is a practical guide assembled by us from first- and second-hand experiences and research. As such, it's not tailored for everyone, so don't despair if you can't keep up with the program (or if it seems too easy). Just do what you can, and don't give up. If you have any medical conditions or think you might be susceptible to them, speak to your doctor first, but there are very few medical conditions that make all forms of exercise impossible.

A WORD FROM THE PROS

"As a professional gamer, you need to take care of many things apart from gaming. Having your mind clear makes a huge impact in game, that's why every morning I spend time on being healthy (gym, sports and such).

Another important point while being a professional gamer is having a healthy diet. Diets too full of fats are definitely horrible to keep up a proper lifestyle, which helps a lot. Before important games I always try to don't eat too much, because it makes you react slower during the digestion phase.

I normally practice a lot of cardio, since it's what I like the most: mostly spinning and football. I find myself healthy when I feel energetic; so that's why I spend around four days a week on cardio, and one day on free weights to keep up the volume."

- Carlos "SK.ocelote" Rodriguez Santiago, star *League of Legends* player for SK Gaming



Your three-stage workout program

STAGE 1



THE NOOB (WEEK 1 & 2)

You're over- or under-weight. You can't climb a flight of stairs without gasping for breath. You're out of shape and you want to touch the bare minimum amount of exercise. No, really, you *do*. Don't overdo it. Take a full day's rest between exercise sessions to give your body time to heal and adjust to your new regime.

For your workouts at home, prepare yourself and your environment for exercise. Change into loose-fitting, comfortable clothes; grab a glass of water; close your door; put on some music with a bit of oomph and set yourself for the task ahead. Remember to do these exercises slowly. Feel your muscles contracting and expanding. Don't rush through them or you won't gain the full benefit.

DAY 1: GO FOR A STROLL

Hit up Google Maps and find a 2km route from your house, around the block and back again. Just go for a walk; take in the sights of your neighbourhood. Have a pleasant stroll. Pepper spray for the dogs, carry some small coins for the beggars and wear bright clothing so they can find you in the veld after you've been knocked over by a taxi.

DAY 2: REST

Also important is not to think you can now stuff your face because you've "exercised" the day before. Burning kilojoules is not a license to eat more, and tonight, just for once, leave all the pizza crusts in the box.

DAY 3: PUSH-UPS AND SIT-UPS

In this early part of your program, you're aiming to get your body used to the idea of exercise, not to shed weight and get ripped by the evening, so take it slow. Do up to 10 push-ups, then up to 10 sit-ups. Take a break for a minute or two and repeat both sets. Then do it a third time. If you can't manage 10 push-ups, do the cheater's version by placing your knees on the ground with your feet in the air to create a see-saw motion; just make sure that you keep your body straight – don't use your stomach or back to aid in the movement. The same can be said for the sit-ups. If you can't cope with the full range of motion, go half-way. Even if you can only manage five of each exercise, or three, that's fine; the point is to do *something*.

DAY 4: REST

Remember to drink plenty water.

DAY 5: GO FOR A STROLL AGAIN

DAY 6: REST

DAY 7: PUSH-UPS AND SIT-UPS AGAIN

DAY 8: REST

DAY 9: A STROLL, WITH A TWIST

You're going to jog. Not the whole way – don't panic! Start your route as usual by walking for the first five minutes or until you feel your leg muscles loosen up a bit. Then jog slowly, almost to the point where you could walk faster. Try and jog for a minute or two, but don't push yourself too hard. Walk another five minutes, taking in deep, controlled breaths. Then jog for another minute or two. Repeat this until you get back home.

DAY 10: REST

DAY 11: PUSH-UPS AND SIT-UPS AGAIN

DAY 12: REST

DAY 13: REPEAT DAY 9'S ROUTE

DAY 14: REST

STAGE 2



THE KILL-STREAK (WEEKS 3-6)

If you've made it this far, then the hardest part is already behind you. Exercise is as much about developing the right frame of mind as it is about improving your physical health. The past two weeks have given you a taste of exercise and you should be feeling a bit better for it. Now we're going to turn up the heat a notch.

DAY 1: ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Extend your route to 3kms and continue to practise the "walk for five minutes, run for three minutes" routine.

DAY 2: THE SIX-SHOOTER

This workout features six exercises that will target different parts of your body. It also includes some leg workouts so expect to feel the burn the next day. Complete three entire sets of:

- 20-30 star jumps
- 10-15 push-ups
- 10-15 sit-ups
- 10-15 squats
- 10-15 dips
- 10-15 calf-raises

[TIP] Alternate push-ups: Push-ups are good workouts for your arm and chest muscles, but try a few varieties to target different parts of your muscle groups. Elevated push-ups (with your feet raised up off the ground) are great for targeting your shoulder muscles, and at stage 3, when you buy a Swiss ball, place your upper legs on the ball to give your core muscles some attention.

DAY 3: REST

DAY 4: MORE JOGGING

DAY 5: THE SIX-SHOOTER AGAIN

DAY 6: MORE JOGGING

DAY 7: REST

That's for the first week. For the three weeks following, continue to do this same program but step up the intensity each week. You could either do additional sets of the full program on days two and five, or add in additional reps of each exercise – or both, if you feel up to it. Your walking/running should also be increased; see if you can get to the point where you can run for a full ten minutes at a time. If you do really well, you can increase your total distance.

STAGE 3



THE VETERAN (WEEKS 7-12)

By this stage, you're fitter than the average person. Doesn't that feel good? This stage adds additional exercises that will require you to purchase two pieces of home gym equipment: the chin-up (or pull-up) bar and the Swiss ball (also called a therapy/medicine/gym ball). The chin-up bar can be temporarily attached to a door-frame and gives you the ability to leverage your entire body's weight to target your shoulders, laterals, biceps and even a few core muscles. The Swiss ball might look like something from a '80s workout video, but it's an indispensable piece of exercise equipment if you want to target your core muscles to help improve posture and give you abs that would make even Geralt of Rivia jealous.

Because of the additional exercises, we're going to segment your workout into upper- and lower-body workouts that are done on alternating days. Exercises that target your core muscles fall under lower body. This will give your muscles a chance to rest. These workouts have also been divided into a morning and evening segment – one for cardio (running) and one for everything else. If you have plenty of time on your hands, you can do these workouts back-to-back, but start out slowly and don't kill yourself just yet.

[TIP] A Swiss ball can be used for more than conventional exercises. Simply by sitting on it while gaming or watching TV, you exercise your core muscles that make thousands of compensatory movements to keep you balanced. Exercise can't get much easier than that.

DAY 1:

Morning run

Lower body: Squats, calf raises, crunches, side crunches (each side), bridges (three sets of 15 each)

DAY 2:

Morning run

Upper body: Push-ups, dips, pull-ups, chin-ups (three sets of 15 each)

DAY 3: REST

With an optional morning run

DAY 4:

Morning run

Lower body: Squats, calf raises, crunches, side crunches (each side), bridges (three sets of 15 each)

DAY 5:

Morning run

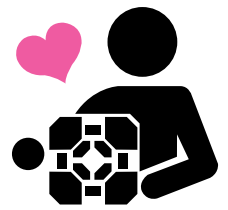
Upper body: Push-ups, dips, pull-ups, chin-ups (three sets of 15 each)

DAY 6:

Go for a long run. Extend your route to 5km (or more if you're already up to 5kms). Dedicate this day to improving your running.

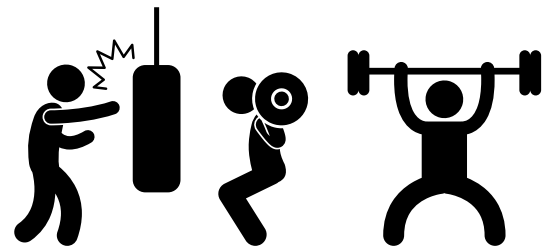
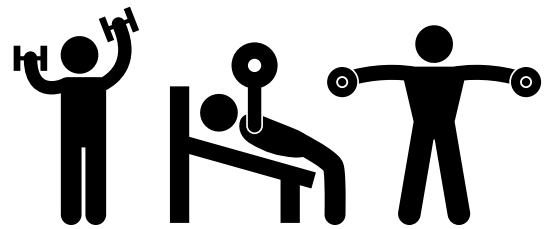
DAY 7: REST

BONUS STAGE



TO INFINITY AND BEYOND

You feel fitter and stronger. You've gained muscle and/or lost a bit of fat. You feel healthier and happier than ever before. So, where to from here? Ideally, you should continue this program until your bones are too old and frail to hold you up, but don't get bored with it. Mix your exercises, speak to other people and try out their weird and wacky programs for a while. Buy more home equipment like a pair of dumbbells (which will allow you to perform some great shoulder and bicep exercises, among many others), a bench, a yoga mat, a boxing bag, a collection of vintage sweat bands, or anything you want, really. Form an exercise group with your friends or head to your local gym and open your eyes to the endless possibilities. Whatever you do, don't stop exercising. Good luck!



[TIP] Warm up before and cool down after every session of exercise.

Warm-ups and cool-downs for cardio are simple: just walk, at least five minutes before and at least ten minutes after each session. For your strength training exercises, a few star jumps and maybe even a quick jog will be enough to get your blood pumping. Cool-downs are much more important: you should stretch those muscle groups you've exercised. We couldn't fit in an entire stretching program here as well, but you can visit the following website for a pretty good guide: <http://bit.ly/1Th572>

CARDIO

GET ON THE ROAD

Does the idea of running terrify you? It sounds like a lot of hard work, and it is, but it's also extremely rewarding and incredibly useful. Running is also very simple, and that's why we've chosen it as the cardio accompaniment to the strength training in this feature. If you absolutely hate the idea of running or find it altogether pointless, then by all means do something instead: cycling, swimming and rowing are all viable replacements, and, of course, playing a sport is incredibly good for you.

Let's back up a minute, though, to discuss the concept of "cardio". Your cardiovascular system is the part of your body responsible for the intake and distribution of oxygen throughout your body, by means of the lungs, heart and blood vessels. The point of cardiovascular exercise is to increase your "VO2 max" – the maximum amount of oxygen your body can transport and use. That, in a nutshell, is the reason why you wheeze and gasp when you've physically exerted yourself too much.³

During the cardio portions of this program, you're going to exercise your heart (a muscle), to literally make it stronger. A stronger heart is larger and can pump more oxygen-rich blood through your body with greater ease, feeding your other muscles with oxygen so that they can keep working at optimal level. A balance between cardiovascular fitness and general muscular fitness is the key to physical health.

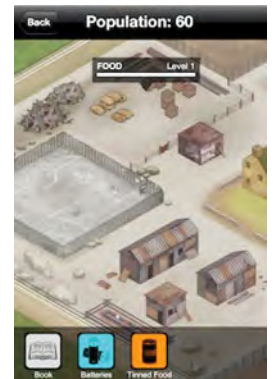
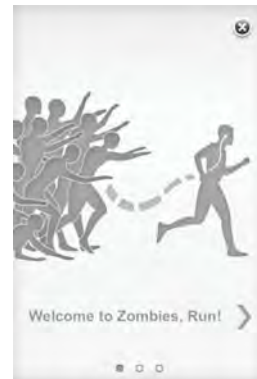
[TIP] FAVOUR DISTANCE AND TIME SPENT RUNNING OVER SPEED. THE GOAL IS TO IMPROVE YOUR OVERALL FITNESS, NOT CAUSE AN INJURY, SO TAKE IT AS SLOW AS POSSIBLE (ESPECIALLY IN THE BEGINNING) WHILE ON THE ROAD. SPEED WILL COME WITH TIME; AS YOUR LEG MUSCLES BECOME STRONGER YOU'LL FIND THAT YOU NATURALLY INCREASE THE SPEED AT WHICH YOU RUN.



ZOMBIES, RUN!

Don't want to get up, get out, and get moving? Well, you don't have much of a choice about it because there's a zombie holocaust and if you don't get up, get out, and get moving, you won't be doing anything again ever. Nothing says "motivate yourself" quite like "or die".

Six to Start's *ZOMBIES, RUN!* is a fitness game with an undead apocalypse survival twist. Using your iPhone or Android phone's GPS tracking, the game keeps tabs on where you are, where the zombies are, and how much space is in between you. If the brain-eaters get up close and personal, you'll hear them moaning and groaning in your headset down the back of your neck and if you don't speed up, you lose stuff. Valuable stuff that the human resistance needs, like underpants and tins of beans. You don't want to be the guy coming home to Abel Township without sticky plasters, do you?



IF THE SHOE FITS

Your ten year-old Docs might've seen you through more rock concerts than Steven Tyler has wrinkles, but they're no good for wearing during training. Get yourself some proper trainers. If you can afford to, spend R500 or more on a pair of branded shoes and your feet will thank you for it. Regardless of the quality of shoes that you wear, expect a few blisters during your first weeks on the road. Running takes its toll on your feet, calves and knees, but spending a bit of cash now on a pair of decent shoes could save you thousands on medical bills in the future. Don't say we didn't warn you.



NUTRITION

Exercise is only half the battle to become fit and healthy. Your body needs the right nutrients to keep going during training, while you're sleeping (and your body is repairing itself) and during the day. Because of this, the food and liquids that you consume are incredibly important. Heck, even if you ditch everything else in this feature and just start to eat a proper, balanced diet, you'll be healthier.

Nutrition is a complex subject, far beyond the scope of this feature, so we've decided to include just a few short tips that will help you.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- 1 <http://bit.ly/lqlcHS>
- 2 <http://abcn.ws/lnqRgn>
- 3 <http://bit.ly/JPGYpW>
- 4 <http://bit.ly/K45mFl>
- 5 <http://bit.ly/JA6mhV>
- 6 <http://hvr.me/IDXyst>
- 7 <http://bit.ly/IER0rE>
- 8 <http://bit.ly/IEBsw>
- 9 <http://bit.ly/lodmNi>
- 10 <http://hvr.me/JFuCh1>

[TIP] MAKE SURE THAT YOU EAT SOMETHING BEFORE YOU WORK OUT, BUT LEAVE AT LEAST 1-2 HOURS BETWEEN EATING AND EXERCISING, OR EVEN MORE TIME IF YOU'VE HAD A HEAVY MEAL. A MORNING WORKOUT CAN COMPLICATE MATTERS, SO JUST HAVE A LIGHT SNACK OR PIECE OF FRUIT BEFORE YOU GET STARTED. ⁴

[TIP] PROPER NUTRITION ISN'T LIMITED TO FOOD. A NUMBER OF DRINKS CONTAIN HIGH LEVELS OF SODIUM, BAD CARBS AND PRESERVATIVES THAT YOU SHOULD AVOID. FIZZY SOFT DRINKS SHOULD BE ELIMINATED FROM YOUR DIET OR CUT DOWN AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. TEA AND COFFEE IS FINE IN MODERATION, BUT GO EASY ON THE SUGAR. FRUIT JUICE, WHILE POTENTIALLY HIGH IN SUGAR, IS GENERALLY GOOD FOR YOU, BUT MAKE SURE THAT YOU FIND A VARIETY THAT CONTAINS NO ADDED SUGAR AND AS FEW PRESERVATIVES AS POSSIBLE. DRINK LOADS OF WATER.

EAT THIS

- You're going to hate this part, but here it is: eat your veggies! And fruit too! Vegetables and fruits provide your body with the vitamins, minerals, acids and fibres it needs to keep ticking.
- Foods that are high in protein are essential to rebuild muscle. These foods also tend to include the essential minerals and oils that contribute towards mind, joint and bone health. Lean red meat, skinless chicken, fish, low-fat and unsweetened dairy products and soy are almost all good for you. Just make sure that you order that fish or chicken grilled, not fried. ⁵
- Carbohydrates are what give your body energy. If you take in too many carbs without burning through them, they turn to fat, which is why so many diets recommend that you reduce your carb intake. In moderation, however, "good" carbs are essential for any active person – whole grain breads, brown rice, oats, potatoes (avoid the fried variety), lentils and, of course, fruits and vegetables are all good for you ⁶. They usually contain high amounts of fibre, too, which promotes a healthy digestive and metabolic system.

NOT THIS

- Foods that contain high or even moderate amounts of saturated and trans fats should be avoided altogether if possible. Over 5% saturated fat is considered to be a bit much, so keep an eye on the labels of foods. This is especially important with red meat, which is high in necessary iron and zinc but potentially fatty and high in cholesterol ⁷; stick to lean variants where possible. Avoid all forms of trans fats, which will raise your level of bad cholesterol while lowering the good stuff. ⁸
- Food that has high calorie counts. We won't get too far into the science, but an average, active male should consume 2,500 calories (technically "kilo calories", but nobody uses that name) a day, and an average, active female should consume 2,000 calories ⁹. Some foods show their calorie count in kilojoules (Kj); to convert Kj to C, divide by 4 (10Kj = approximately 2.5C).
- Foods with high levels of sodium (salt). Usually chips, tinned goods and fast food contain high levels of sodium to improve flavour and aid preservation. However, our bodies don't like too much of this substance, which has been proven to increase the risk of high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease and heart failure ¹⁰. It'll also kick your ass when you're trying to exercise; best to avoid the stuff as much as you can.
- Food with "bad" carbs. Bad carbs are a challenge for your body to process and tend to turn to fat before they can be put to use. White bread and pasta, donuts, cakes and processed breakfast cereals should be avoided. ⁶

EXERCISES

1 STAR JUMPS

Skills improved: Jumping to grab hold of a ledge above you.

Stand up with your legs together and your hands at your sides. Jump straight up. While doing so, spread your legs and raise your hands (keeping your arms straight) to clap above your head. Time the jump so you land with your legs spread as you clap your hands. Reverse the motion to complete the repetition.

2 PUSH-UPS

Skills improved: Pushing off a zombie that's trying to claw your face.

Lie face-down, flat on the floor. Place your hands to the side of your shoulders. While keeping your body rigid, use your arms to raise you up until just before your arms are fully extended. Lower yourself back down until your chest is about a hand-height off the floor.

3 SIT-UPS

Skills improved: Pulling away from a zombie that's grabbed your hair while you're on the ground.

Lie flat on your back and raise your knees. Place your hands behind your head or crossed over your chest. While tightening your stomach muscles, raise your upper body until your chest touches your knees. Lower yourself back down but do not fully come to rest on the floor.

4 SQUATS

Skills improved: Kicking off a zombie that's grabbing at your ankles.

Stand with your feet in line with your hips. Raise your

arms out in front to be level with your shoulders. Keeping your feet in place and your back straight, slowly bend your legs until your hips are in line with your knees. Move your butt backwards to maintain balance. Slowly raise yourself back up in an opposite motion.

5 DIPS

Skills improved: Shoving away zombies that are chasing you.

Sit on the edge of a raised platform (like your bed). Place your hands on the edges of the bed with your palms down and fingers facing forwards. Slowly lower yourself down without allowing your butt to touch the floor, then raise yourself back up to complete the repetition.

6 CALF RAISES

Skills improved: Landing from a high drop.

Stand on a small raised platform like a step or a large, thick book you don't like. While supporting yourself with a hand on the wall, edge backwards until only the balls of your feet are on the platform/book. Lower yourself down to below the starting position, and then raise your body with your feet until fully extended. Go back to the lowered position to complete the motion.

7 PULL-UPS

Skills improved: Pulling yourself up onto a ledge above you.

Stand on the floor in

front of your pull-up bar. Jump up to (if you're short) or grab hold of the bar with your hands at the outer-most position (further apart than your shoulders), palms facing away from you. If you're tall, bring up your legs to keep them off the floor. Keeping your back straight and in one smooth motion, use your arms to raise your body and continue until your chin is above the bar. Complete the motion by gently lowering yourself to the point just before your arms are straight.

8 CHIN-UPS

Skills improved: Holding yourself from an overhead pipe while the zombie horde grabs for you from below.

Position yourself on the bar in the same way as the pull-ups, but with your hands on the inner grips with your palms facing towards you. Raise yourself up and continue the same motion as the pull-ups.

9 CRUNCHES

Skills improved: Having washboard abs to help you keep your laundry clean during the zombie apocalypse.

Lie back on the Swiss ball with the small of your back positioned near the centre of the ball and your feet flat on the floor in line with your shoulders. Place your hands in the same position as a sit-up. Raise your upper body to an upright position while rolling on the ball. Hold that pose for a second or two and then lower yourself back down. Get a feel for the motion by

doing it very slowly at first. Don't be surprised if you fall a couple of times.

10 SIDE CRUNCHES

Skills improved: Twisting while grappling with a zombie on the ground.

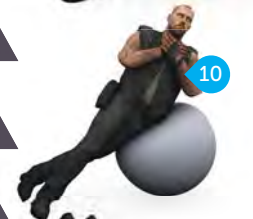
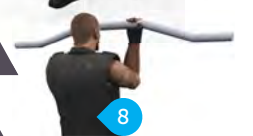
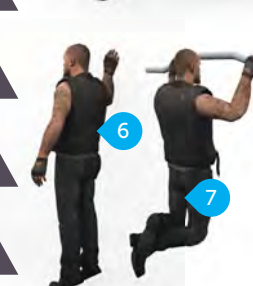
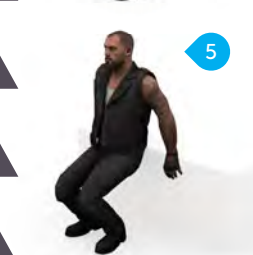
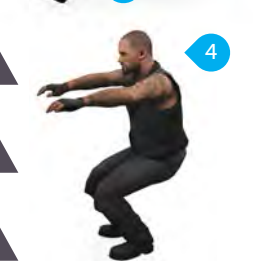
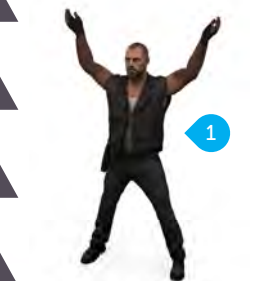
This is a tricky one. Position yourself on the ball on the side of your hip. Steady yourself by placing your feet in the corner against the wall, if necessary. Place your hands behind your head and tilt your upper body upwards, hold that pose, then lower yourself back down until your body is snug against the ball. Repeat this motion. Make sure that you keep your entire body – legs and back included – in line.

11 BRIDGES

Skills improved: Sitting up straight while owing your friends thanks to improved blood circulation to your brain.

This is perfect for exercising your lower back muscles. Lie flat on your back with your feet on the Swiss ball. Fan out your arms on the floor for stability (but don't use them for lifting). Tighten your stomach muscles and lift your butt until your body is flat from shoulders to feet. Hold for a couple of seconds, then slowly lower yourself back to the floor.

There's an alternate version of the bridge that has you start with your upper back resting on the ball and your butt on the floor with your knees up. Keeping your feet in place, lift your butt until your body (from knees to shoulders) is parallel with the floor.



GAME ON

So, you've just finished reading this gigantic health feature and you want in, but you're still not convinced that any of this exercise stuff is easy, or even doable. Fret not, dear unmotivated reader; we've got you covered with this fine selection of motion-controlled fitness games that require no more thinking than what's needed to insert the right disc into your console.

ZUMBA FITNESS RUSH [360]

Also available under the name *Zumba Fitness 2* for Wii, this game uses the power of pure groove to shape you into the perfect specimen.

YOUR SHAPE FITNESS EVOLVED 2012 [360 / WII]

Perform exercises designed by two magazines that really know what they're talking about: *Men's Health* and *Women's Health*.

WII FIT [WII]

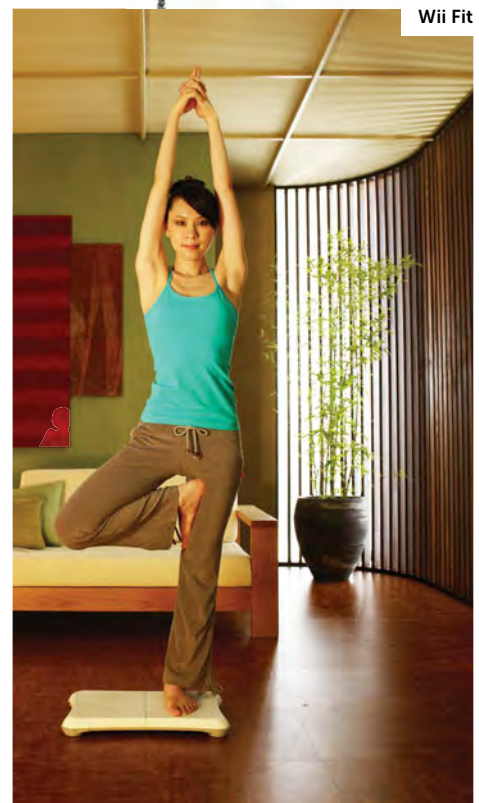
Stop pretending that you use your Wii Balance Board and actually use it. *Wii Fit* (and now *Wii Fit Plus*) is the granddaddy of today's fitness games, so treat it with respect and don't forget to phone it on its birthday.

UFC PERSONAL TRAINER [360 / PS3 / WII]

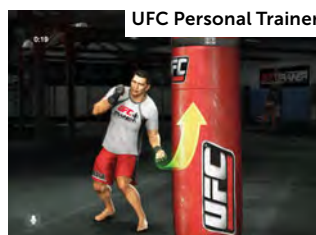
It won't teach you to murder people in a net-enclosed octagon, but *UFC Personal Trainer* will help you improve your strength training and keep you motivated with videos of angry, sweaty men who punch other men in the face for a living.



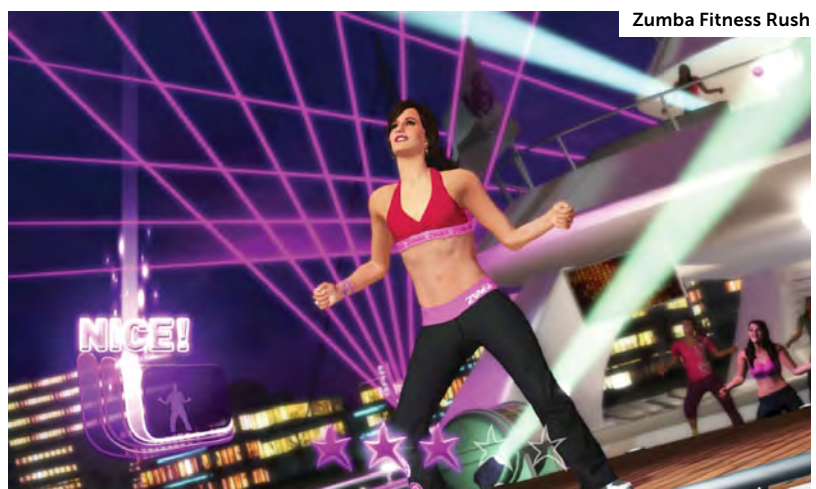
Your Shape Fitness Evolved 2012



Wii Fit



UFC Personal Trainer



Zumba Fitness Rush

POKÉMON HEARTGOLD AND SOULSILVER [DS]

Put your obsession with collectable fictional creatures to use with the included pedometer (that's a thing that tracks your steps). Simply strap on this sweet looking Pokéball every time you go for a walk and watch the Pokémon you've stuffed inside gain levels faster than you can say Ash Ketchum.

FIT IN SIX [PS3 / WII]

If exercising seems too complicated, this game will break down the process into six workout groups that give you targeted, serious-business training. For those who lack focus but realise that it's kind of important.

EA SPORTS ACTIVE 2.0 [360/PS3/WII]

Punch that air! Now kick the invisible dog in front of you! Now bend! Now stretch! Come on you can do it! Well, if you can't, then this is what you need for some of that much-needed motivation. Let those smiling, shiny people show you how it's done.

DANCEDANCEREVOLUTION [360/PS3/WII]

It's been around for 14 years, but the *DDR* series just never seems to get old. Dancing burns calories faster than you'd expect, and will have you whip up a sweat before you even realise you're actually exercising. **NAG**



Pokémon HeartGold and SoulSilver



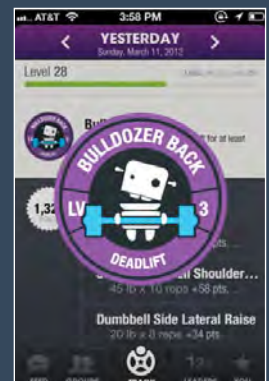
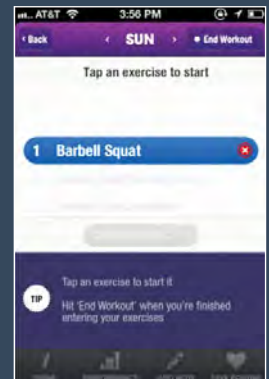
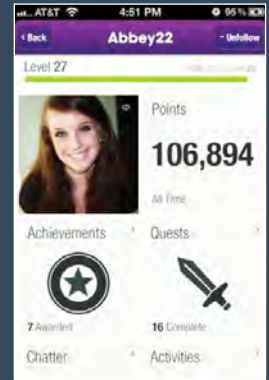
DanceDanceRevolution



Fit in Six



EA Sports Active 2.0



SOCIAL FIT

Getting in shape is cool and stuff, but it's so lame that you can't, like, earn experience points and level-up for all your efforts. Am I right? No, actually, I'm not, because now you can.

Yes, rejoice, all of you out there who think that exercise only leads to fitness, increased longevity, mental and physical health; Fitocracy changes all of that. It's a social-networking website (with companion iPhone app and a great mobile site for other platforms) that lets you track all of your workouts and rewards you with experience points for your accomplishments. As you progress, you'll unlock quests like "do 50 crunches" or "try the bench-press for the first time"; completing those quests gives you even more XP. Fitocracy is a fantastic tool that not only encourages you to push yourself and learn new workouts, but it connects you with like-minded people and gives you a tracking system for your exercises so you can chart your progression. www.fitocracy.com

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Look & Listen
For the Fans

Guild Wars 2

Rise of the dragons

It's been 250 years since the events of *Guild Wars*, or, more pertinently, seven years for us in the real world. While we had three great expansions to tie us over, those of us who fell in love with the world of Tyria have been left stranded, waiting for the sequel that was first hinted at so many years ago. Finally, everything is coming together;

the end is in sight for this five-year development term, leaving just ancillary content, tweaks and balance issues for the team to take care of. To mark this occasion, ArenaNet recently held their first Beta Weekend Event – 48 hours for pre-purchasers (or well-connected journalists) to run free through the new world of Tyria, report bugs, give feedback and write previews like this.

Guild Wars 2 is quite different to its predecessor, not just in terms of the world itself, which has undergone a number of significant changes, but in terms of the gameplay mechanics. Gone are the dual professions; they've been replaced with

eight distinct professions across three armour types. The damage-dealing warrior and defensive guardian are soldiers who wear heavy armour; engineers with their supporting turrets and abilities, together with the pet-friendly ranger and back-stabbing thief, don medium armour and fall under the adventurer class; and scholars, who wear

only light, cloth armour, are made up of the powerful elementalists, hell-raising necromancer and the mesmer, who likes to toy with the minds of her enemies.

To go with the new roster of playable classes is an entirely new skills system that can

certainly be called unconventional. Each character's skill bar is made up of 10 skills assembled from a number of sources. Your equipped weapons determine your first five skills (they'll be different depending on your profession, so a mesmer's greatsword abilities are quite different to a warrior's); your sixth skill slot is dedicated to healing abilities (all professions can take care of

"A number of quest types exist here, and almost all of them favour a group effort. Many of these are 'dynamic events', which can chain together to have anywhere from miniscule to major impacts on the game world."

DETAILS

Release date

TBA 2012

Platforms

PC

Genre

Massively-multiplayer online role-playing game

Developer

ArenaNet

Website

www.guildwars2.com

Publisher

NCSOFT

TIMES HAVE CHANGED

A lot has happened to Tyria in the last 250 years. The charr have finally pushed their rival humans out of Ascalon and taken the time to rebuild much of the damage caused during The Searing. A diminutive but highly intelligent race known as the asura, who had been living underground for some time, has come to the surface and joined the dominant species of Tyria. Another new race, the plant-like sylvari, has just arrived on the scene, having been born of the mighty Pale Tree just a few years prior. The towering norn, stoic as ever, have been forced to flee their

hometown to take up residence in the southern Shiverpeaks.

But another species has joined the battle for dominance of the lands – the Elder Dragons. For two centuries, these huge creatures have been waking up from their dormancy and causing all sorts of trouble for the races of Tyria, and have forced rivalries between the races to end. Human and charr have set aside their differences (for the most part; there's still some fighting in certain regions) as the nations of Tyria rally together to defeat their common foe.



themselves now); slots 7-9 are for utility skills – profession- or race-dependant abilities that generally have longer cooldowns and greater impact; the final slot is reserved for high-level elite skills, which can also come from either your profession or race.

The system will take some getting used to, as it favours the dynamic shifting of skills that encourage a player to be adaptable, rather than dedicated to a single role. Although there are classes that favour damage-dealing, tanking and support, everyone is capable of giving a helping hand where needed.

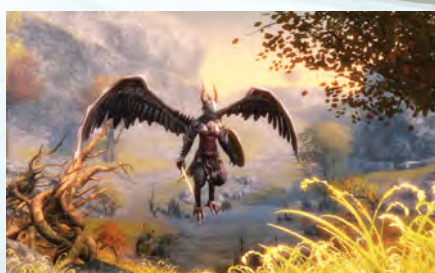
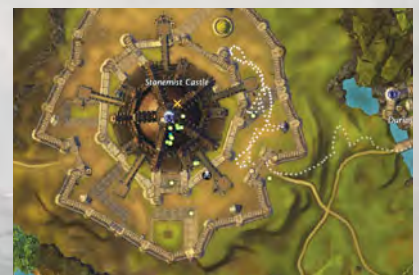
The first *Guild Wars* was almost entirely

“The first *Guild Wars* was almost entirely instanced – a system that aided storytelling but tended to rob the game of many of the social aspects of MMOs.”

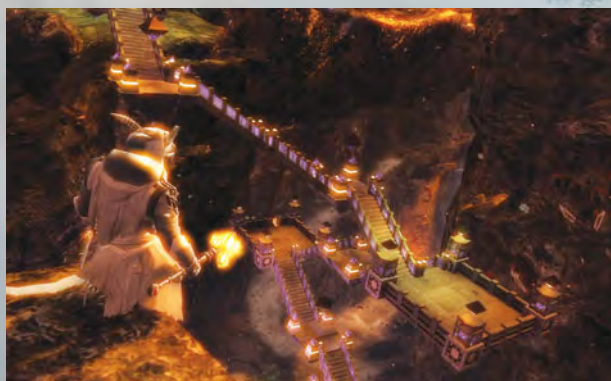
instanced – a system that aided storytelling but tended to rob the game of many of the social aspects of MMOs. *GW2* doesn't do away with the concept entirely, but rather makes a nifty compromise between the two. While you're

out and about, you're in the open world. A number of quest types exist here, and almost all of them favour a group effort. Many of these are “dynamic events”, which can chain together to have anywhere from

miniscule to major impacts on the game world. Bandits might form blockages on main roads, making travelling difficult; or minotaurs could take over a castle within usually safe territory. Players will have to band together to retake



While GW2 retains its pricing model of "buy once, play forever", it'll also include optional real-world money transactions to unlock certain (mostly aesthetic) items as well as trade straight for in-game currency. The most interesting thing is that the purchased currency (in the form of gems) is subject to fluctuating exchange rates for trading with in-game currency, so those willing to speculate could find themselves turning a tidy profit (in-game only, gems can't be traded back for real money).



GUARDI3N'S BETA WEEKEND

This weekend I fell in love. Really hard. In two days. We danced through enchanted woods. We walked hand-in-hand into dark caves and emerged having discovered magical items. We stood on a bridge and bravely fought off wave after wave of enemy centaurs. Many times I died and was lovingly brought back to life.

And on Monday morning just before 9am we ambled through the now almost deserted city streets and pondered our captivating adventure. Unspoken questions of when we would meet up again just lay there in the silence. I shall miss you Boo.

I spent a good two days and then some, shooting and sword-slicing my way to level 14, during the first *Guild Wars 2* Beta Weekend Event. I had intended to try a couple of the professions, but I quickly got sucked into my chick's storyline and character progression. My default class for most games I play is warrior – I like to straight-up fight. So it's no surprise then that I created a human warrior on my first journey into the *Guild Wars 2* universe. Fiddling with her skills and masteries became something of a "side quest" for me, and I eventually settled on double pistols for my primary loadout and a Thor-like hammer for my alternate.

My compulsive nature drove me to visit every point of interest, and journey through every portal. And it was then that I realised that hundreds upon hundreds of hours of my life would be spent travelling through and experiencing this fantastical world. I simply cannot wait for the final release of this game.



MIKTAR'S BETA WEEKEND

Most of my all-too-short beta weekend was spent with the four-eared charr engineer, although I did check out each of the eight classes to see how they felt. Though I preferred the engineer, dropping turrets and running away my usual modus operandi, all of the classes were fun to play and each felt powerful. *Guild Wars 2* manages to give a strong sensation of agency when you're in combat and moving around, the active dodge mechanic keeping your attention invested: a well-timed dodge can save you from instant-death.

The engineer is themed around kits and turrets, with the five class trait lines boosting skills that involve explosives, firearms, inventions, alchemy and tools. Some of the turrets you can place include rocket turrets, flame turrets and net turrets. The engineer can swap between kits on the fly (with a slight cooldown), each kit gives you a new set of offensive or defensive skills to use. For example, the grenade kit gives you a host of grenade types to throw (poison, bleeding, flash-bomb), while the med kit lets you act as a mobile triage station.

Built for adventure and responding to a wide variety of situations, the engineer will satisfy players who like to be the Swiss Army Knife of the party.



GEOMETRIX'S BETA WEEKEND

I tend to play support roles in MMOs, but I also like versatility, so I decided to roll an engineer during the beta weekend. My choice of race was norn, and I went on to create the biggest, rowdiest, blondest norn engineer I could.

The norn tutorial area is a small zone that teaches you the basics of combat and the interface while preparing you for "The Great Hunt" – from then on it's on to the region known as Shiverpeak Mountains. The norn's biggest foes in this area are minotaurs, hobgoblin-like dredges, rabid wolves and ice worms (some huge) that like to pop out of the ground at inappropriate moments (usually in the middle of a quest).

I have to be honest: the engineer's skills didn't really tickle my fancy. By the time I reached level 16, I felt a little restless and started to doubt my choice of the engineer – it's clearly the most under-developed class of the lot. As it turns out, many other beta participants tend to agree with me, so there's a good chance that the engineer's system of replacing active weapons through the utility skills will be improved upon. I'm eager to see how far the class will have come during the next beta weekend.



Dyes are also back but have been adjusted. Now, once you've unlocked a dye colour (through a gem purchase, trading or looting), it's permanently and infinitely available for you to dye your clothes and armour whenever you wish.



control over these areas or lose access to important locations, NPCs and shopkeepers. While all of these (and other types) of quests are happening in the open world, players have access to an entirely instanced personal story – one tailored to them based on answers given during character creation, their race and their profession. This gives players access to a strong, fitting single-player experience (although you can bring along your friends, giving them access to quests they'd otherwise not experience) that you're free to ignore or embrace entirely throughout the game. **NAG**

- GeometriX

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The hypothetical megastructure of a Dyson sphere was popularized by physicist and mathematician Freeman Dyson in 1960.

Halo 4

Wake up John

BEGINNING THE RECLAIMER SAGA

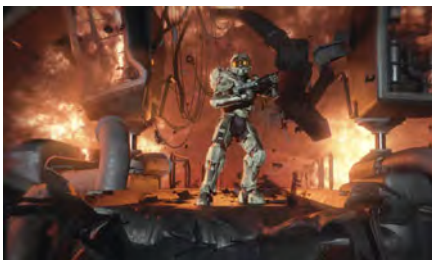
When *Halo 3* ended with Spartan 117 locked in cryostasis, adrift in a wrecked craft, falling towards a mysterious alien object of mammoth dimensions, it was pretty obvious Master Chief would return. With the Covenant war at an end, the only question was: to what purpose? The prospect of *Halo 4* represented a true enigma.

The plot of *Halo 4* is still shrouded in secrecy. The new custodians of all things *Halo*, 343 Industries, have said they would like players to discover most of it themselves. They call the story the "beginning of the Reclaimer Saga". The year is 2557; nearly five years after the credit roll of *Halo 3*.

It sees Master Chief – and players – thrust into a changed world, inside the game and out of it.

The original E3 teaser set the stage; the shattered stern of the *Forward*

Unto Dawn comes under weapons fire by an unknown force, and A.I. Cortana must wake Master Chief in a desperate attempt to do something. But it is known that *Halo 4*'s campaign – which still supports four player co-op – will take place primarily or entirely on a world inside a world. A variation of



"343 has emphasized that the Covenant are not the primary antagonists - a new enemy enters the story, more focused and intelligent than the Covenant."

Dyson sphere, where a metal sky surrounds a smaller world. It has a name: Requiem. 343 has emphasized that the Covenant are not the primary antagonists – a new enemy enters the story, more focused and intelligent than the Covenant.

Past that only a precious few glimpses of campaign images and concept art insinuate what players will find. Supported by a refined version of the same engine that powered *Halo: Reach*, *Halo 4* seems to transition away from the clean but moderately sterile atmosphere of Bungie's *Halo*. The terrain is more organic.

Light and shadow are harsher; the future catches up to *Halo* and brings lens flares with it. There are more cues to suggest you are wearing a helmet and seven foot tall power armour. And, 343 has prepared for taking Bungie's reins.

Veteran talent brought on board for *Halo 4*'s campaign includes designers who have worked on the lauded *Metroid Prime* series for Retro Studios.

But discussing the campaign and story of *Halo 4* isn't possible without involving the other half of the game. For the first time, *Halo* multiplayer has a story.

INFINITE HORIZONS

Humanity hasn't been idle during the years of Master Chief's deep sleep. They've constructed the largest spacecraft in human history: *UNSC Infinity* is three kilometres in length and carries an entire army of brand new Spartan IV troops. Its mission: top secret. But *Infinity* is out there, and it will cross paths with Master Chief and Requiem.

Infinity hosts *Halo 4*'s competitive multiplayer suite. Spartan IVs fight it out on the "Combat Deck", a holographic environment that can



DETAILS

Release date

November 6, 2012

Platforms

360

Genre

First-person shooter

Developer

343 Industries

Website

<http://halo.xbox.com/en-us/Games/overview/halo4>

Publisher

Microsoft Game Studios



FORWARD UNTO DAWN

Premiering in October on YouTube and on *Halo Waypoint*, *Forward Unto Dawn* is a live-action series that highlights the start of the Human/Covenant war, where Master Chief inspired a young cadet who would eventually become a leader aboard the *UNSC Infinity*.



To prepare for *Halo 4* you should read the *Halo: Primordium*, *Halo: Cryptum* and *Halo: Grasslands* novels.



LIMITED EDITION

At a frisky R899.00, the limited edition of *Halo 4* will include access to three future map packs containing three maps each, early access to six Specializations (like Perks) giving you access to customization options others will have to wait for as they'll be released over time, and the *UNSC Infinity* Briefing Packet (a bunch of ancillary material like a map of the *Infinity*). You'll also get a unique in-game Spartan-IV armour skin, skin for the assault rifle, and a unique emblem. And of course, swag for your Xbox LIVE Avatar: Spartan-IV armour and a prop (unannounced). Lastly, an extended 90-minute cut and bonus features of the *Forward Unto Dawn* live-action digital series.

simulate any planet and environment. In addition to their – rather violent – war games, Spartan IVs engage in “Spartan Ops”. Specific co-op missions for up to four players, separate from campaign co-op.

The pitch is that Spartan Ops will gradually unfurl the *Infinity's* mission and peel back the secret. And the biggest twist is that Spartan Ops are not fully available for eager and sleepless players to plough through on day one. Instead, Ops missions will be released on a regular schedule. *It's not paid DLC*. The full story of *Infinity* as told through Ops is included in the price of admission. The content will be available free of charge as episodes go live.

What about the bread and butter *Halo* multiplayer game?

“Our design goal is to dramatically reinvent the multiplayer experience – both the core element and surrounding modes,” says Josh Holmes, creative director.

The biggest, and obvious, cut is Firefight: it's gone. Spartan Ops accounts for the dedicated co-op content. Elites are out of the game as well. Combat Deck battles are Spartan-on-Spartan only. Past that, armour abilities do return, but the Sprint ability is now a standard feature of Spartan IV armour. You won't have to choose between Sprint and another capability. In addition to returning abilities such as Hologram, the new Forerunner Vision allows players to see through walls to scan for opposing Spartans. This ability isn't fool proof, and its visual effect and level of clarity are still being adjusted.

There's more; weapons now have no set spawn points in a map and are dropped from pods. Yet it's not entirely random; there will be indications of when and where a drop will occur. Again, it's something that's still the subject of experimentation. Experience Points are gone in favour of Spartan Points; used to unlock returning aesthetic armour components and Spartan Ops missions.

Beyond this the full parameters of multiplayer are still being locked into place. There are always new modes, medals, and game types. The lauded Forge map editor will return, but 343 Industries has not revealed if it uses the Forge world concept or returns to editing the settings of default maps.

THE CIRCLE IS NOW A SPHERE

Halo 4 represents an event still uncommon even in the uncertain video game industry – the passing of a dynasty from the exclusive control of one developer to another. As it was in the beginning, *Halo* has a sense of the unknown. *Halo 4* has a number of tall orders to fill, not the least of which is impressing an audience that by this point, has just about literally seen it all. **NAG**

- Miktar

Umm. You're not wearing protection?





DETAILS

Release date
Q2 2012
Platforms
360 / PC / PS3
Genre
Third-person shooter
Developer
Ubisoft Paris / Ubisoft
Red Storm
Website
www.ghostrecon.com
Publisher
Ubisoft

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier



HANDS ON



A new direction. Again.

Ghost Recon, as is normally the case with most of the games bearing Tom Clancy's seal of approval, has always done an excellent job of representing the more cerebral side of shooters, emphasising careful use of squad-based tactics, planning and pinpoint execution if players hope to be rewarded with a victory screen. It saw something of a reboot with *Advanced Warfighter* and its sequel, but both still upheld the series' base tenets. *Future Soldier* aims to do that again, aiming to show us the future of warfare while offering up fun times with lots of guns.

It follows four Ghosts (Ghost Lead, 30k, Pepper and Kozak, with you playing as Kozak) on a path to track down the source of a dirty bomb that

killed another team of Ghosts while off on a mission somewhere. As such, the narrative is all weapons shipments this and arms deals that, with you saddling up with the four-man team of elite operatives across the globe as they rescue allies being held prisoner, track down elusive targets and more while shooting a great many bad guys. The preview build we

"It seems a solid bet that Ghost Recon: Future Soldier will be one of this year's finest games..."

Xbox 360 players who happen to have Kinect will be able to manipulate the Gunsmith customisation feature using hand gestures and voice commands.

played transported us to places like Russia, Zambia and Nigeria, with a variety of objectives (which organically evolve as missions progress) to complete in each. Before each of these missions, you've got the customary briefing screens and tactical information, stylishly presented to you so you know what you're doing and why. It's also where you can learn about any new gear you've got at your disposal and modify your equipment, customising your weapons using the new Gunsmith feature.

After this, you're into the meat of the game. Even though it retains its tactical, tentative nature, the gameplay in *Future Soldier* seems

more focused on action and dishing out volatile situations than previous outings. The *Call of Duty* influence is obvious: from the way the shaky-cam cut-scenes are

presented, to the more linear, scripted nature of the missions. It feels like less of a tactical sandbox and more of a scripted event – and we'll have to wait and see if it works for this traditionally thoughtful series. All manner of delightful toys and powerful gadgets flesh out your arsenal, and I don't just mean EMP grenades and laser sights. The most significant addition is your optical camouflage. This addition almost puts stealth on autopilot, making you practically perpetually invisible if you learn to use it well. It activates automatically whenever you crouch, and will remain active for as long as you stay down, move slowly and don't attack anyone. Stand up, move too quickly, or open fire with a non-suppressed weapon and you phase back into existence, alerting enemies to your presence. It doesn't make you completely undetectable, mind you: get too close to an enemy in camo mode, and



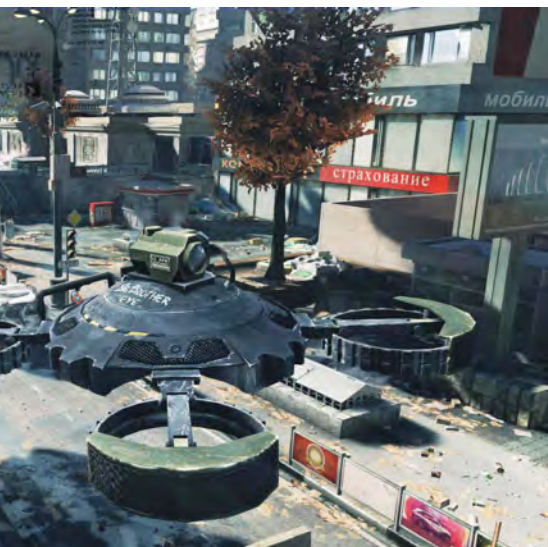
THE DEADLIEST BLACKSMITH

One of the most heavily touted features of *Future Soldier* is its Gunsmith weapon customisation feature. Now that I've gotten to play around with it, I'm impressed. It's possibly the most detailed and intricate weapon customisation tool we've seen in a game yet. Select a weapon you'd like to take with you on your next mission, and Gunsmith switches to an

exploded view of the weapon, letting you customise everything from the weapon's stock and barrel, to its trigger and sights.

Every little modification affects one of the weapon's statistics: one stock might decrease control (thereby increasing recoil) while increasing manoeuvrability, for example. While this pre-mission customisation

isn't crucial for the single player (the game suggests an optimum mission load out before you head out), it's nice to have so much choice before you even set foot within the game world. The number of weapons on offer is also impressive – there are more than 50 of them in the game, including assault rifles, shotguns and pistols.



THE FUTURE WITH FRIENDS

Future Soldier's multiplayer is probably what has most people interested here, given how popular *Advanced Warfighter* was in the multiplayer space. Unfortunately, I didn't get a chance to try it out: but here are a few details. Multiplayer will offer a variety of

game modes on the cooperative and competitive fronts. There's a cooperative campaign, as well as the new Horde-style, wave-based Guerrilla mode. The competitive multiplayer adopts the series' focus on tactical play, and rewards teamwork greatly. The competitive game

modes all feature some sort of objective for competing teams to skirmish over, and death comes quickly given that players are just as squishy here as they are in the solo campaign. Gunsmith customisation will be available for the multiplayer.

an alert pops up to let you know that you're in danger of being discovered.

Magnetic vision lets you see enemies through obstructions. A portable recon drone can be dispatched, controlled by you to survey scenarios, discover enemy positions and plan accordingly. Certain missions unleash the Warhound – a sort of walking tank packing mobile artillery and missiles (that can be guided by you) using your input. It can also be used as a rugged piece of mobile cover, and is an incredibly useful bit of deadly future-tech for those missions where it's just the four of you against overwhelming odds. Speaking of cover, the snap-to cover system here is impressively solid – thankfully too, because death comes quickly in this game if you stay out in the open. While you're in cover, point at a nearby piece of cover and a prompt pops up letting you know that holding a button will have you quickly dash over to it without breaking camo. You can be suppressed behind cover though: heavy enemy fire on your position will cause your vision to become restricted and returning fire becomes almost impossible. The animations

across the game are excellent, with Ubisoft's mo-cap infatuation paying off greatly in making all the animations expertly slick. Leading your squad is now limited to basic commands. You can tell them to focus fire on enemies you've got targeted. There's also Sync Shot, which lets you highlight four enemies (this can be done from the relative safety of your recon drone as well), following which your AI squad will move into position, ready to fire when you line up your sights with the fourth enemy. Pull the trigger when the ready signal is given, and all four members drop their targets quickly and efficiently. And that's when you pray your planning was optimal and that nobody discovers the bodies and raises the alarm.

It seems a solid bet that *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* will be one of this year's finest games. The multiplayer looks unique enough to set it apart, and the single player, while it's not yet clear just how different it will be from previous series entries, seems to pack enough of a punch to make it a worthwhile tactical shooter experience. We shall have to see. **NAG**
- Barkskin

In space, everyone can see you lighting a fart.



5th Cell was behind the excellent *Scribblenauts* series, and the underappreciated *Lock's Quest*.

DETAILS

Release date
2012
Platforms
360
Genre
Third-person shooter
Developer
5th Cell
Website
www.whatisahybrid.com
Publisher
Microsoft Studios

Hybrid

There's nothing else like it



HANDS ON

The year is 2032. The Large Hadron Supercollider in Australia implodes. Dark matter starts appearing around the globe. An alternate reality merges with our own, bringing with it a humanoid alien race called the Variants. Earth gets stuck in a time loop, which leads to a never-ending war between the Variants and us, the Paladins.

The plot is silly window dressing for the main game mechanics: three-on-three multiplayer battles where your win/loss influences the outcome of a global territory war that resets once one side has won. While the global war mechanics weren't entirely finished during our hands-on time with the recent *Hybrid* beta, we did get a good look at what this downloadable, multiplayer-only third-person cover-based shooter has to offer, aside from a lot of hyphens in this sentence.

CHOOSE YOUR DESTINY

When you start, you pick a side. You're locked to that faction, so there's no abandoning ship when your faction falls behind. To queue for a multiplayer match, you select an unclaimed territory, your win/loss contributing to its assault or defence. Once captured, territory can't be retaken by the other side. Territory gives your faction a boost to skills and abilities, though this area of the game has yet to be elaborated on. Once the "war" has ended, it all resets and presumably there's some kind of scoreboard.

Three-on-three may seem small, but it's to ensure no matchmaking problems. Smaller

maps mean faster paced gameplay, and the game will release with ten maps. While there's only six soldiers in a map, each match can have up to 18 AI controlled drones on the field. Drones are killstreak rewards. First kill gets you a

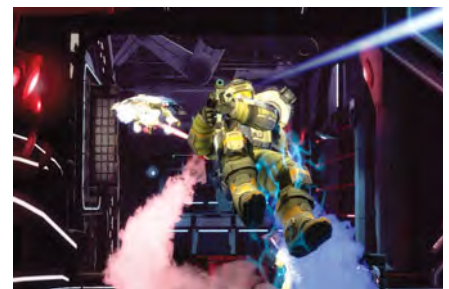
"One such ability is the Hacking Grenade, which turns drones against their masters."

Stalker, which follows you around and shoots what you shoot. Three kills nets the Warbringer, a mobile death platform. The Preyon is at five, flying out to one-shot a nearby opponent. As you win matches, you gain experience, which unlocks weapons and abilities. One such ability is the Hacking Grenade, which turns drones against their masters.

WHY HYBRID MATTERS

The cover-based shooting is standard: you can blind-fire and pop out to take shots, like *Gears of War*. The movement system however is unique. Player movement is handled by the game. You point at the chest-high cover you want to go to, hit the A button, and you jetpack there automatically, flying along an arc. You can adjust your position around the arc slightly, and use short boosts to increase your speed or dodge incoming fire. It emphasises tactics, where flanking is paramount. Hitting Y makes you jump over cover, or land on the opposite side of cover you're flying towards. You can change which cover you're going to on the fly; hitting B makes you retreat immediately to the last cover you were behind, provided you had just made an active move. Keep an eye on this game, it might surprise you. **NAG**

- Miktar



Hybrid uses the Source engine licensed from Valve, and runs at a solid 60 frames per second.

Your favourite magazine

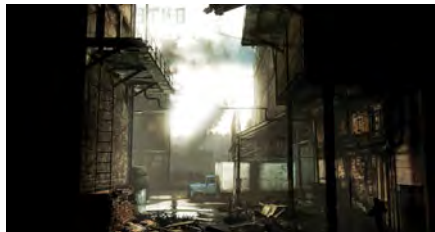
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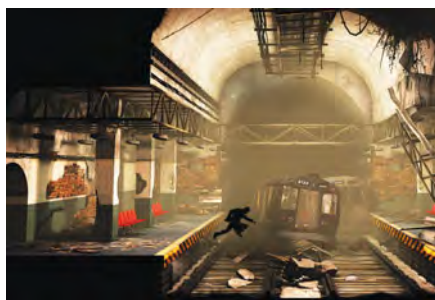
Deadlight

Zombies ate my third dimension

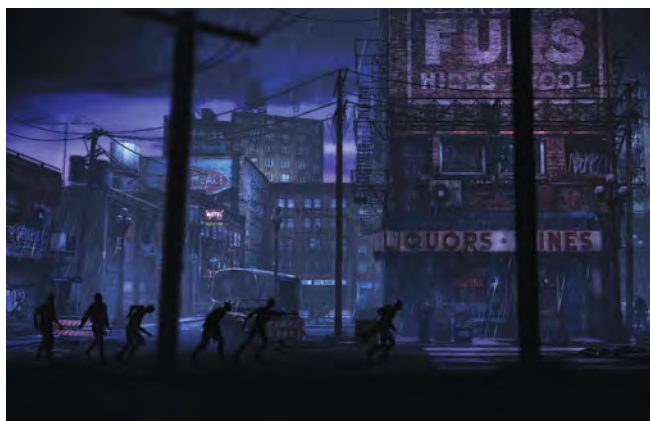
Randall Wayne is paranoid. And not just because of the zombies. He killed a member of his group whom he thought was infected. Some believe him; others don't, so they left him behind. Now he has to catch up with them, while surviving a zombie apocalypse. There's no "saving the world" here, just Randall, his stamina gauge, and *Prince of Persia* inspired platform action. Surviving takes precedence, so much so that no reason is even given for the zombie infection. It's just there, deal with it.

Set in an alternate 1986 Seattle, the zombies are slow and simple, but lethal. If more than one grabs you, you're dead. If you fall more than one storey when you miss a jump, you're dead. Randall is a forest ranger, so he's got some wits about him and limited athletic ability. But he can't run forever, thanks to the stamina gauge. He can't hold on to the edge of a rooftop forever either. If a single zombie grabs you, you'll need to struggle to get away. Most things found in the houses you walk through can be used as a weapon, but primarily they'll be used as tools to solve physics based puzzles or dexterity tests.

As the scenes unfold, Randall provides his



Tequila Works was founded by industry veterans from Blizzard, Sony Computer Entertainment and MercurySteam.



"Surviving takes precedence, so much so that no reason is even given for the zombie infection. It's just there, deal with it."

own narration via voice-over, which is unreliable. You don't know if he's telling the truth, or if he's demented. The zombie threat is constant; they can amble in from both the foreground and the background. Randall can whistle to draw their attention, perhaps to lead them into an electrified puddle of water or some other trap. According to the developer, the puzzles and encounters won't be so much trial and error, but rather a test of wits. As you progress through the narrative, you'll find pages from Randall's diary scattered throughout the game, which will help you piece together the truth behind his actions. Exploration will lead you to and from areas, with a certain amount of backtracking. Randall also gains new abilities over the course of the game.

The zombie thing is getting long in the tooth. Some would say it's already overstayed its welcome. But the dense faded atmosphere *Deadlight* is going for is pretty fresh, especially when coupled with gameplay inspirations being drawn from games like *Another World* and *Flashback*.

And when all else fails, there are mini-games to be found in the form of old handheld consoles, secreted away in hidden stashes around the map. **NAG**

- Miktar

DETAILS

Release date

Q3 2012

Platforms

360

Genre

Platform survival horror

Developer

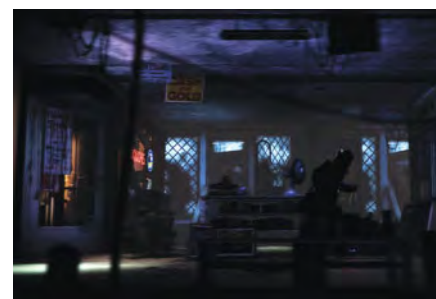
Tequila Works

Website

www.deadlightgame.com

Publisher

Microsoft Studios



According to the tenets of Vodou, a dead person can be revived by a bokor, or sorcerer.

NOT ALL HEROES ARE SUPER
CHRONICLE

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For the Fans

Developer
Treyarch
Publisher
Activision
Platforms
360 / PC / PS3
Release date
November 13, 2012
Genre
First-person shooter

Black to the Future

Nobody was expecting this...

The lobby to Treyarch, an American game developer founded in 1996 and located in California, has all the usual things you find in the reception area of most western game developers: cabinets full of industry awards (there's even one for their now-forgotten gem

Die by the Sword), an attentive receptionist wondering who all these unshaven people are that just walked in, posters of past and current projects arranged thoughtfully across all walls, and a large flat-screen television.

Usually the flat-screen shows trailers of whatever the developer is proud of at the moment, but not here at Treyarch. Instead, a real-time

scroll of *Black Ops* multiplayer statistics ambles past: 35 billion headshots and counting, nine trillion shots fired and counting, 300 billion minutes played, and counting... Three-hundred billion minutes equals 570,397 years... that's nearly half a million years of person-hours spent playing war inside a video game. We're a fascinating species.

We're ushered past the company kitchen – which is strangely health-oriented with less snacks and soft drinks compared to other developers and stocked with more reasonable foods like salads and sandwiches – and into the boardroom, which looks a little like the futuristic Combat Information Centre from *Battlestar Galactica*. Half of the room is a functional meeting room, with serious mood lighting, Perspex wall panels adorned with concept art and war-themed photography, framing a giant glass-topped conference table. The other half of the room is a small theatre setup: plush, comfortable leather seats facing an almost impossibly large plasma television.

Mark Lamia, studio head of Treyarch, and game director Dave Anthony, join us in the boardroom. They're a jovial looking pair, prone to finishing each other's sentences. But right now, they've got their serious business faces on. We all know why we're here: to look at yet another *Call of Duty* that'll be just like every other *Call of Duty*, but it's clear Mark and Dave have something on their minds, and know something we don't.

ZOMBIES?

There will be zombies! Again, Treyarch could not confirm nor deny anything except that zombies will be back, with new modes, more zombies and much more content. The entire zombie mode is being done in the multiplayer engine, which gives Treyarch a lot more flexibility compared to the first *Black Ops*, where the zombie mode was more of a tacked-on joke feature. "This time, the zombie mode will be its own game entirely, with its own campaign," says Mark. It will support up to 8-player co-op, which is up four players from *World at War* and *Black Ops*.

THE WAR ON EXPECTATIONS

"We want to rewrite the rules of storytelling in *Call of Duty*," says Mark. Dave nods in earnest agreement. It's a pretty bold move, considering the series has become comfortable with staying true to a specific formula: a linear plot with delightfully bombastic set-pieces, backed up by an enjoyable multiplayer with plenty of content. Fans of the franchise on either side of the Treyarch / Infinity Ward fence, for all their kvetching at each other over [REDACTED] trivial differences in how the [REDACTED] two developers approach the franchise, end up being content with whatever they get each year anyway. Some might say there's no reason (yet) for Treyarch to try and rock the boat, the millions of dollars will flow in regardless.

But rock the boat they will. While they could bank on the fan base eagerly devouring more of the same, Treyarch seems eager to bring fresh ideas to the table and surprise both the complacent fans and jaded critics.

You'd expect the sequel to *Black Ops*, which took place during the late 1960s early 1970s, to logically follow into the 1980s. Instead, the primary story takes place in 2025, thirteen years from now. [REDACTED] There will be playable flashbacks to the '80s, but most of the game follows David Mason, callsign "Section", son of *Black Ops*' lead protagonist Alex Mason, as he handles a second "Cold War" brought about not by oil, but another resource entirely.

Right now, in the real world, China controls 95% of rare earth element production. Which is quite a big deal, since nearly all technology, both consumer and military, uses rare earth elements in their manufacture. It's such a concern for world leaders, that in March this year, the United States, European Union and Japan filed a charge with the World Trade



Organization against China's recent export restrictions on rare earth elements. If China decides to play hardball, there's a good chance things will escalate.

That's what P.W. Singer thinks, anyway. He's an American political scientist, international relations scholar and a prominent specialist on 21st century warfare. He advises world leaders on matters of 21st century defence, and his book *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century* was used as an inspiration for the narrative in *Black Ops II*. Other military advisors were brought in to facilitate an authentic experience, such as United States Marine Core Col. Oliver North and Lt. Col. Hank Keirsej of the US Army.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

You'll get to play as Alex Mason during the flashback sections, set in the 1980s proxy wars in Central America between the United States and Soviets, but according to Treyarch these sections will be used primarily to set up the game's main villain: Raul Menendez. In 2025, it's Menendez who pits China against the United States by hacking the military drones of both sides, sending them to assault major cities across the globe. The 1980s missions will chronicle what set Menendez off on his current-day grudge, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Treyarch hopes players will come to know Menendez as the most compelling villain in video game history. They've got a good shot at it: the story for *Black Ops II* is written from the ground [REDACTED] up by *The Dark Knight* and *Batman Begins* co-writer David Goyer, known for penning his version of The Joker played by Heath Ledger. Goyer joined the first *Black Ops* only part way through its production, mostly



MULTIPLAYER

Even though Treyarch would have loved to tell us more about what we can expect from *Black Ops II* in terms of multiplayer, they weren't ready to talk about it yet. They did confirm that they were pulling back on features like create-a-class, Killstreaks / Point Streaks and others. They want to re-examine and challenge all the established features, to figure out "what cows are sacred", jokes Mark.

The multiplayer will take place entirely in 2025; there will be no maps or guns from the 1980s era. Treyarch says they're taking the e-sports community

very seriously, and are focusing on making the game more fun to watch in spectator mode, as well as providing all the tools event organizers might need.

We're walked through two unpopulated multiplayer maps so online director Dan Bunting can show off the changes they've made to the graphics and lighting engines. The first map we're shown is a dusty village in Yemen, where he points out various rocks. The first rock is a rock, the usual low-detail background element we've trained ourselves to ignore. "This is how we used to do things," he says. He walks

around the corner and looks at another rock. This rock is more detailed, there's more self-shadowing, more texture work, and a lot more... rock. "This is how we're doing things now. The difference is quite clear!" Dan laughs.

The rock serves to highlight the jump in detail Treyarch is applying to all their level design, yet will still maintain the solid 60 frames per second true fans expect from the series. "We're aiming for PC quality graphics," Dan says. "But at a much better frame rate." We ask why all games don't run at 60 frames per second,

especially on consoles. All of the Treyarch staff present look at each other, and Dan leans forward with a solemn expression, "because it's hard."

The second multiplayer map we're shown is "Aftermath", set in a ruined downtown LA themed after the single-player level we were shown earlier. "If you look at this corner here, we call this our Beautiful Corner," says Dan. "We do this will all the maps - we start on one corner, make it as beautiful as we can, and then we say 'Okay, let's make the entire map look this good!' and that's what we try to do."

"We want to rewrite the rules of storytelling in *Call of Duty*."



to help smooth rough edges on the narrative. But this time, he's got the helm right from the start.

By this point, Mark and Dave put down their respective hands after three hours of strong gesticulation and excited ramblings about how deep they went into figuring out the plot for *Black Ops II*. It's all fascinating stuff, especially the various videos we were shown regarding the Stuxnet virus, self-guided bullets, the military drone crash in Iran, robot jellyfish fuelled by seawater, and the Boston Dynamics robot "Big Dog". The reason for showing us all these seemingly related things is to highlight just how far technology has actually come within the last ten years, and then paint a picture of how far it might go over the next ten years.

They switch on an Xbox 360 in the corner, the mammoth plasma screen becoming a vision-filling portal into the level they wish to show us.

Menendez has hacked into the unmanned drones of the US military, and set them to destroy downtown Los Angeles. We're in a transport vehicle, escorting the female president of the United States to safety. There is quick, sharp dialogue between David, the president and the rest of his squad. Through the windows, Los Angeles is being strafed by the drones, missiles flying, buildings collapsing. All the real-time cut scenes feature full-performance capture of the voice actors - so not just their faces and lips, but their entire bodies. Like full actors, they had to walk around, sit on chairs and exist in the same kind of space their digital counterparts would be in, inside the game. It gives *Black Ops II* that very *Uncharted III* feeling, in terms of the digital actors anyway.

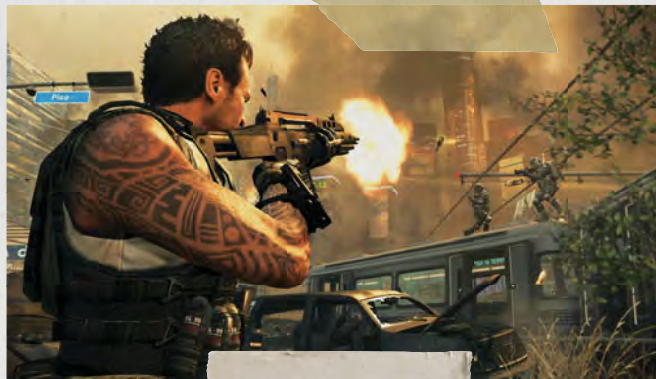
The convoy is attacked, the vehicle flips, and Mason is dragged from the wreckage. The president is okay, but must be escorted on foot to the safe house. A VTOL (Vertical Take-Off and Landing) jet acts as overwatch, defending the group from drones, as we barrel down the near-collapsed highway.

Approaching a rise,

we're presented a choice: provide sniping cover, or rappel down to clear out invading forces below. Sniping is chosen, and we're given a high-powered rifle with what is by now considered standard military tech – an x-ray scope. Looking through the scope reveals the ghost-white silhouettes of enemies behind concrete walls, the technology a portable version of the airport security scanners now found in modern airports.

The area cleared, we're given control of a swarm of Gunner Quad Drones, little aerial drones armed with machine guns, that we can send ahead to flush enemies out of cover. If you've ever seen the Parrot A.R. Drones you can buy right now as toys, they're like that, but more angular and full of bullets. If you don't direct the drones, they swarm around you providing an offensive net of protection.

Along the way, the situation forces David to take over for the VTOL pilot after she lands nearby. Initially we thought the dogfighting through the city sky was on rails, until Mark and Dave point out that it's entirely free-flying. Using quick turns and boosters, the enemy drones are dispatched and we land. A rogue missile hits a nearby skyscraper, sending it toppling down



“The 1980s missions will chronicle what set Menendez off on his current-day grudge, and Treyarch hopes players will come to know Menendez as the most compelling villain in video game history.”





right on top of us, and the president.

They switch off the Xbox 360.

"Black Ops II will have a branching storyline. Key characters will live, or die, based on your choices," says Mark. We're told that when you finish the game, it will highlight for you how things could have gone differently, and won't be ambiguous about it. Since this is *Call of Duty*, you'll know when there is a fork in the road. The main component that causes the story to flow down one path instead of another, is the new real-time strategy mission mode called Strike Force.

REAL-TIME STRATEGY STRIKE FORCE

Strike Force is not a separate mode. At key junctures during the single-player

campaign, you are presented with a choice.

Several hotspots around the globe require military intervention, and you have to decide which one to focus on. You'll drop in with a black ops team to secure an objective, for example. But when you select a mission, others get locked out. You won't be able to play all the Strike Force missions in a single playthrough of the campaign, and the outcome of a Strike Force mission changes the story. You'll be able to go back and retry a mission if you fail, or you can let it fail and see how that impacts things moving forward.

How a Strike Force mission plays is the biggest departure from convention the *Call of Duty* franchise has ever seen. You start from a zoomed-out Overwatch Mode command view of the mission area (which is slightly larger than the largest multiplayer map). From this viewpoint, you can control the squads of deployed troops, giving movement commands or calling reinforcements of different war assets, such as unmanned aerial vehicles, jet fighters and robots, if



you have enough resource points. The Strike Force mission we were shown took place in Singapore in a ship docking area cluttered with large shipping containers. There are several electron lasers that need to be destroyed to clear the way for a gunship assault on the area.

At any time, you can dive into the head of a soldier (or military drone).

The effect is not unlike the Big Eye mission from *Black Ops*, but this time it's entirely under your control. On the ground things play out like *Call of Duty* should: weighty gunfire, explosions, plenty of shouting from your squad mates. If you get shot and killed, your view pops back out to Overwatch. We're shown what it's like to take control of the CLAW: a quadruped tank the size of a small car armed to the teeth. When you exit a soldier, they smoothly drop into cover and go about trying to achieve the orders you set them. Strike Force missions are a sandbox: no two deployments will go the same, depending entirely on how you decide to approach the objectives.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Can *Black Ops II* change the mind of gamers who have already decided that *Call of Duty* is a lost cause? Will the gambit Treyarch is taking with the series pay off and bring fresh enthusiasm to a franchise often criticised for being just a yearly repaint of last year's game?

Even if it can't bring lapsed fans back into the fold, even if it won't convince those who turn their noses up at what they see as a franchise designed to appeal only to what they believe are a population of less sophisticated gamers... there's no denying that what Treyarch is attempting with *Black Ops II* is indeed unexpected.

NAG

- Miktar



REVIEWS INTRO

Sometimes all you need is a few good men – these are not those men. The NAG review team at your service.

What is your guilty pleasure* when it comes to gaming?



RedTide

Playing *Call of Duty* almost every day... It's just so quick and easy to jump into, kill a few guys and then get on with whatever else I'm doing. Everything else just takes too long. I miss *Unreal Tournament*.



Miktar

Gaming in itself, is my guilty gaming pleasure. I could/should be working on other things, improving skills or spending more time with real-life issues. But life is crappy, and I'd much rather be gaming.



Azimuth

I HAVE NO REGRETS. Although there was that time I played that game just for the achievements. This might have happened more than once.



Mikit0707

Not really gaming, but buying stuff for my Xbox 360 avatar. Spending money on items that don't exist and that MIGHT be noticed by a handful of people online? Stupid!



GeometriX

I kill civilians in games whenever I think I can get away with it. Chickens too – lots of chickens. Also my squad-mates, but I usually get in trouble for that.



Barkskin

Certain games (like *Dead Space* and *Limbo*) immerse you in situations where there are a thousand different, increasingly horrifying ways to die. Sometimes, I try to discover them all. I'm sorry, every video game character ever.

*A guilty pleasure is something one enjoys and considers pleasurable despite feeling guilt for enjoying it. – www.wikipedia.com

MINIREVIEWS

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

LEGEND OF GRIMROCK

Legend of Grimrock is an indie dungeon crawling RPG available for \$14.99 from places like Steam, www.gog.com or the official site (www.grimrock.net). If you remember games like *Dungeon Master* (1987) or *Wizardry* (1981) then you'll feel right at home here. For those gamers new to the genre expect to be tossed into a dungeon at the top of a mountain and if you make it to the bottom you win. The story is simple; you're a prisoner and if you make it out alive you'll be set free (and get to keep any treasure you might find). Movement is one square at a time and it's all in real-time so the action flows smoothly. As you explore you'll encounter monsters, traps and puzzles and of course be required to make your own map in the hardcore mode with pen and paper. The game lets you create your own characters, has an interesting spell casting dynamic, useful potions you can brew and plenty of hidden secrets. For the money it's immensely satisfying and keeps offering up new things to see and fight and do right until the end. Highly recommended and an excellent example of how old styled games can be done right. There's even a level editor on the way soon.

92

PORTAL 2: PERPETUAL TESTING INITIATIVE

Yes we know; *Portal 2* scored an impressive 97% in the June 2011 issue of NAG magazine. This isn't about that experience but rather all about *Portal 2*'s Perpetual Testing Initiative (PeTI). If you own the game you might have missed the update for it that added a level editor to the menu screen list. Now you can create your own test chambers and share them with the world... We'll let that sink in a bit...

The best news is that the editor itself is easy and simple to use; think room full of monkeys and typewriters. You start with a white box which includes mandatory entry and exit points and a glass-panelled observation room (light source). The box itself is made up of white panels that can be pushed and pulled in any direction (entire walls or just single squares) and the individual squares can be switched to portable or not. Once you're happy with the basic shape, items from a side menu can be added to your chamber (turrets, companion cubes, basically everything from the game). From there you just add, modify, shape and connect everything until you've created a test chamber you can immediately



“test” in the game engine (after a bit of rendering). The design of the editor is smart in how simple it is to use thereby allowing your mind to get on with puzzle building parts instead of grappling with the how. Then, when you're done, use Steam Workshop to share your maps and/or play maps created by other players online (over 30,000 already and counting) – pure bloody genius.

Just add another 2% to the original *Portal 2* score.

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.

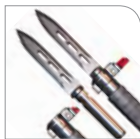
80-89 Excellence has been achieved; a game that you'd happily play through multiple times and recommend to friends. It adds interesting, if imperfect, advancements to the genre or series, or ticks all the expected boxes with flair and polish. It's technically superior to many other games but perhaps 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.



Ramjet

Walt doesn't really value his job at NAG all that much and didn't reply to the editor.



SAVAGE

Knifing people in CoD – except I don't feel guilty, I love it.



ShockG

Using liquid nitrogen to solidify organic material, I'm a bit bored with flowers and oranges – might move onto spiders and hamsters soon.

WEBScores

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

CATHERINE

NAG: **81**
Metacritic: **82**
Gamerankings: **83**

FEZ

NAG: **95**
Metacritic: **89**
Gamerankings: **89**

ASPHALT INJECTION

NAG: **50**
Metacritic: **49**
Gamerankings: **N/A**

RIDGE RACER

NAG: **50**
Metacritic: **44**
Gamerankings: **46**

DiRT: SHOWDOWN

NAG: **70**
Metacritic: **N/A**
Gamerankings: **N/A**

AWESOMENAUTS

NAG: **84**
Metacritic: **77**
Gamerankings: **79**

BLOODFORGE

NAG: **40**
Metacritic: **43**
Gamerankings: **43**

MARIO PARTY 9

NAG: **75**
Metacritic: **75**
Gamerankings: **75**

RESIDENT EVIL: OPERATION RACCOON CITY

NAG: **55**
Metacritic: **52**
Gamerankings: **48**

RIDGE RACER UNBOUNDED

NAG: **58**
Metacritic: **71**
Gamerankings: **70**

SILENT HILL: DOWNPOUR

NAG: **80**
Metacritic: **64**
Gamerankings: **67**

TRIALS EVOLUTION

NAG: **96**
Metacritic: **91**
Gamerankings: **92**

Mario Party 9

Feeling lucky, punk?

The latest in the long string of *Mario Party* games offers the player a rather mixed affair but it's really a case of agony and ecstasy. The ecstasy comes from some welcome changes to the game that makes it more strategic than before. The agony comes from the game's heavy reliance on randomness, which can scupper even the best-laid plans.

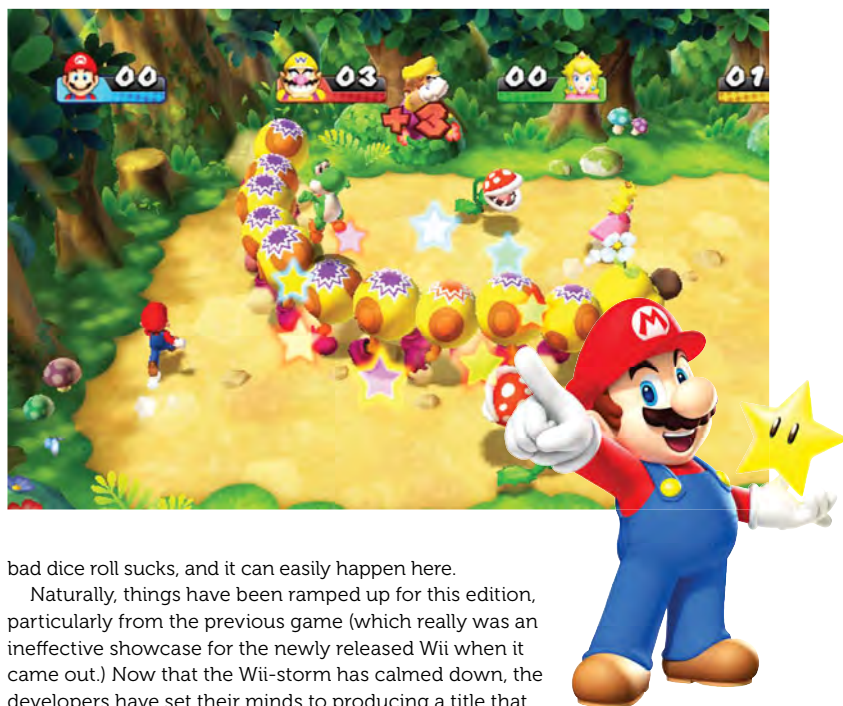
As veteran players would correctly assume, *Mario Party 9* presents the player with a kind of virtual board game. While moving along the track, players will land on squares that activate mini-games, which are the real meat and bones of this title. Playing these games earns the player stars, and the one with the most stars at the end is the winner. It's simple in principle, and great fun to boot.

Strategy has become a part of the game, as moving along the track can now be affected by specialised dice that the player can earn. These dice can help the player move along the track in more strategic ways, effectively screwing the opposition, with a little luck.

But there's the main issue – luck. While the strategy part of the game is great, a lucky (or unlucky) dice roll can truly make or break a player's performance. Doing really well at the mini-games simply isn't enough... you need to be lucky with the game's virtual dice, too. And seeing as how it appears that the AI cheats a little, it gets even more frustrating when you're not playing with other human beings.

Here, though, there is an improvement. AI players can be deactivated, turning the experience into a crisper, quicker one. Instead of sitting through boring AI player turns, the players can (if there are more than one, obviously) concentrate the game on themselves, and the mini-games adjust accordingly, in some rather clever ways.

The best fun, of course, is to be had when four players take on the game, in the party-spirit that it was intended. There are tons of laughs and groans to be had, but that ever-present random nature and reliance on luck can result in far more frustration than it should. Losing a game because of a



bad dice roll sucks, and it can easily happen here.

Naturally, things have been ramped up for this edition, particularly from the previous game (which really was an ineffective showcase for the newly released Wii when it came out.) Now that the Wii-storm has calmed down, the developers have set their minds to producing a title that plays fairly well, rather than showing off. The graphics are a lot better, and various mini-games (which range from fairly clever through to button-mashing affairs) reflect different Nintendo properties, too.

In all, this game is fun, as long as you don't take it seriously. It has charming moments, and will provide lots of entertainment for groups of players. As a single player experience, the reliance on AI players ruins that entertainment, though. This one is best when played with friends... particularly if they are more casual gamers. **NAG**
- Ramjet

75

This one is fun if you're part of a group, and allows for more strategic play, but the whole random luck thing can ruin the experience.

PLUS

Fun for groups / Somewhat more strategic than before

MINUS

Too much randomness / AI cheats a bit

DETAILS

Platforms

Wii

Genre

Party

Age restriction

3

Multiplayer

Local

4 players

Online

None

Developer

Nintendo

Website

marioparty9.
nintendo.com

Publisher

Nintendo

Distributor

Core Group



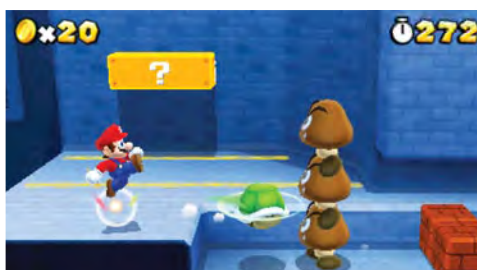
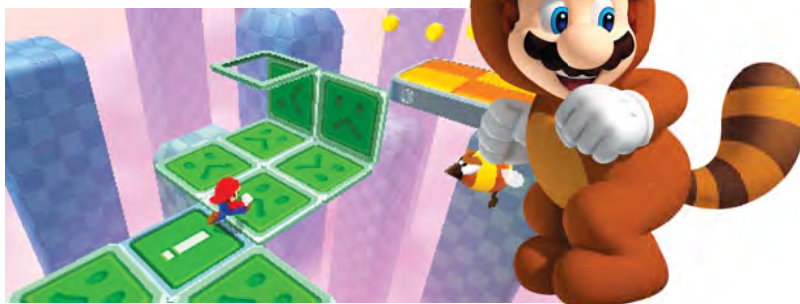
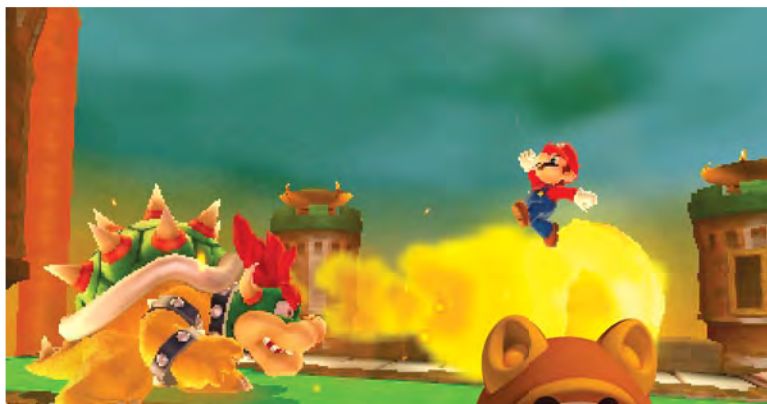
Super Mario 3D Land

Whenever Nintendo or its fans have a hard time, they can always count on good ol' Mario to help them up, despite what many analysts said. *Super Mario 3D Land* shows off what the 3DS can do when the developers put enough effort into their product.

If you have played previous *Super Mario Land* titles you will notice that every level is short, and this new one remains true to the format, which makes sense because it's meant to be played in a bus, waiting room or bathroom. You have to platform through very creative levels, jump on enemies, and after that, if you are like me, you would go for the hidden coins which is addictive and lengthens your play-through, and finally you would jump on the flag at the end of the stage, all while you listen to the great soundtrack. The best part is that it feels like the true console experience in your hands.

This game, like all its predecessors, is greatly accessible, but do not be fooled, getting all the hidden coins can lead to frustrating moments. To make the hunt for coins harder for you, they sometimes make it a necessity for you to be wearing certain suits that cannot be gained in the level you are playing, which adds a layer (even if thin) of complexity that I appreciate.

New (or revisited) additions like the Tanooki costume,



DETAILS

Platforms
3DS

Genre
Platformer

Age restriction
3

Multiplayer
Local
None
Online
None

Developer
Nintendo EAD
Tokyo

Website
www.nintendo.co.za

Publisher
Nintendo

Distributor
Core Gaming Systems



SEND US YOUR REVIEW

If you'd like to take part in our Nintendo Reader Reviews competition, write a review of 300-350 words on any 3DS game you want, excluding the games we've already seen (*Super Mario 3D Land* and *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D*). Include a summary of your review (up to 40 words), a few short pros and cons, and a score out of 100. Write a few lines about yourself too. Check it twice and then send it through to nintendoreaderreviews@nag.co.za as a Word document (.doc or .docx) or RTF. You need to do this by 12:00 on Friday the 15th of June.

The best review will

appear in the next issue of *NAG* and the winner will receive from Nintendo South Africa three Nintendo 3DS games of their choice (limited to first-party titles), a Circle Pad Pro and *Mario Kart 7* wheel accessories. Three runners-up will also be chosen, and each will receive a 3DS game of their choice (limited to first-party titles). Please note that this competition is open to South African residents only. This competition does not constitute a job offer or entitle the winner to any benefits or rights of employment with *NAG*. Prizes cannot be exchanged for cash.

and the boomerang fit seamlessly into the game, but the most noticeable addition to the game is the 3D. Unlike many other games where the 3D is just there as a silly gimmick, the developers found a way to turn this into a useful gimmick; by placing the camera in the right spot, platforming through certain parts of many levels becomes nearly impossible without the aid of the 3D.

In terms of graphics this game is perfect for the 3DS because of its art style, where everything is round, chubby and cute, even the enemies (it broke my heart to slam my butt on their faces... but the coins were worth it) is not too demanding. **NAG**

- Sebastian Campos

READER SCORE

95

The red plumber again proves Nintendo's console's full potential... in 3D!

PLUS

3D is useful / Great soundtrack / "Console Mario" feel / Lots of content

MINUS

Going back to get hidden coins can get tedious

FEZ

MUST PLAY



You spin me right round, baby

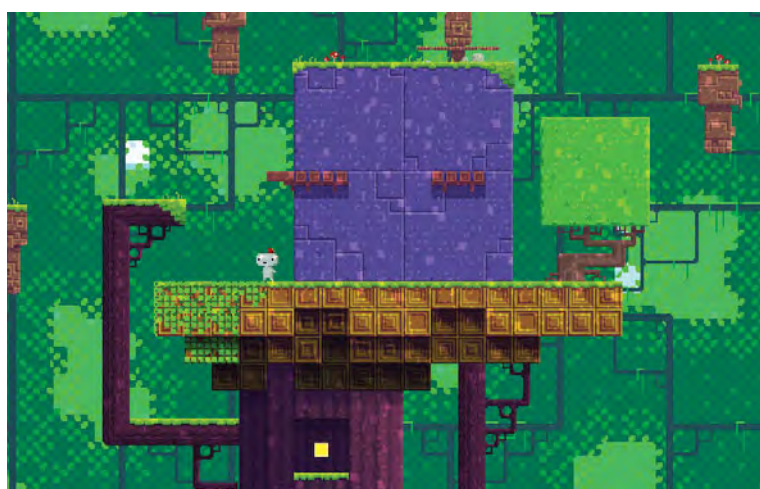
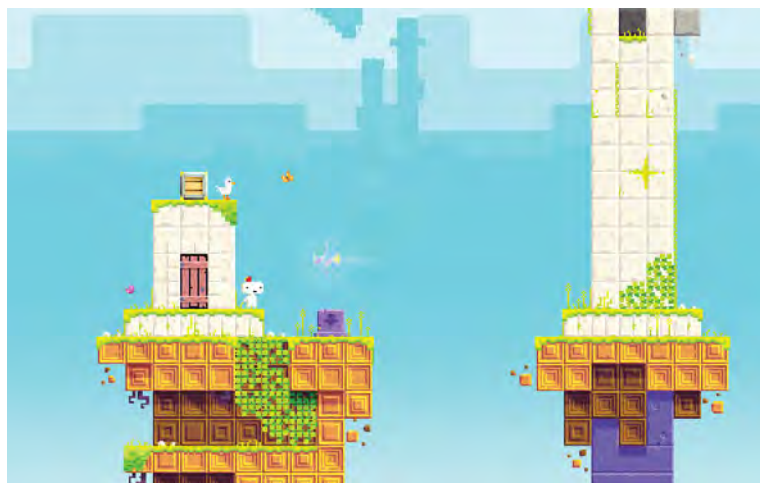
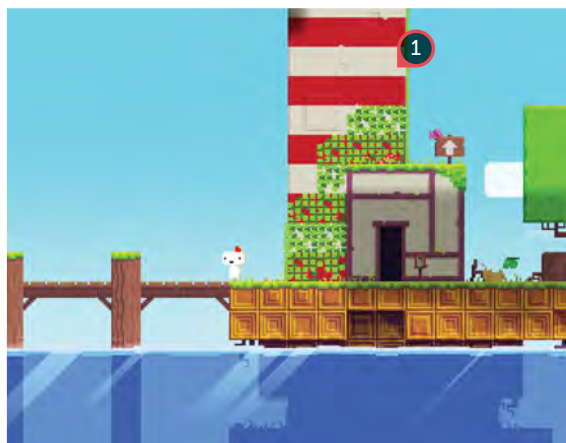
Once upon a time, in a simple, two-dimensional village in a simple two-dimensional world, there lived a simple, two-dimensional guy named Gomez. One day, a magic three-dimensional cube turned up and exploded all over the place and reality experienced a glitch and rebooted, and Gomez got a magic three-dimensional hat – and suddenly, he could turn corners.

It's actually much more impressive than it sounds.

FEZ is a game about changing your perspective on things. Like, literally. Although the world is always presented on-screen in two dimensions, you can rotate it 90 degrees to the left or right to see what's over on the other side. As the world reasserts its two dimensions, you will find that, for example – and in ostensible contravention of every law of physics, ever, but not actually if you think about it, just not too hard – the spaces between things might have changed. What was previously an enormous chasm is instantly reorganised into a hop, and that's just getting started. In one level, three short ladders situated at different heights can be turned into a single, long ladder by rotating the world around. What I said before about perspective? That.

The big idea is to get about from one place to the next, and pick up the bits of cube that have fallen everywhere so you can put it back together and win and everything.

1 From this side, it looks like a gigantic mouldy candy cane. But if you turn the screen around, you'll discover it's actually a lighthouse. No, not really, it's still a gigantic mouldy candy cane, it's just cleverly disguised as a lighthouse.



But that's the basic stuff. I've almost finished FEZ on New Game Plus mode, and I still have absolutely no clue what's up with the observatory. Or the black monolith. Or the sodding owls. It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma, but perhaps there is a key – and I'm quite sure it has something to do with an expeditious, tawny *Vulpes vulpes*, an indolent *Canis lupus familiaris*, and some sort of upward motion vector. Expect to scratch your brainbox a lot.

My only complaint about the game is easily undone with a few secret button presses (NUDGE NUDGE), but in the interests of objectivity – and because those secret button presses don't work the first time around – the game world navigation is clumsy and unnecessarily tedious. Warp gates connect main hub areas, but there simply aren't enough of these and moving around can be a serious slog. Otherwise, FEZ is pretty much perfect. **NAG**

- Azimuth

95

Fez is one of those games that's going to instantly polarise players between those who love the game, and those who hate the game even though they haven't played it, because creator Phil Fish dared to say that Japanese games suck. Even though it's true. And those people are going to miss the best XBLA game since *Braid*.

PLUS

Totally different / Totally adorable / Totally hard

MINUS

Over-complicated world navigation

DETAILS

Platforms

360

Genre

Puzzle

platformer

Age restriction

3

Multiplayer

Local

None

Online

None

Developer

Polytron

Website

www.polytron
corporation.com

Publisher

Microsoft Studios

Trapdoor

Polytron

Distributor

XBLA



1st prize:

1x Inno3D GTX570 graphics card and a copy of Diablo III

Runner up:

2x runners up each receive a copy of Diablo III

WIN



To enter SMS the keyword **Diablo** to **32541**

- SMSes charged at R1.00
- Competition closes 30 June 2012
- Winners will be notified by SMS
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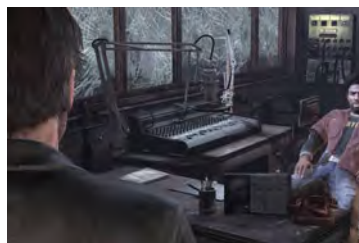
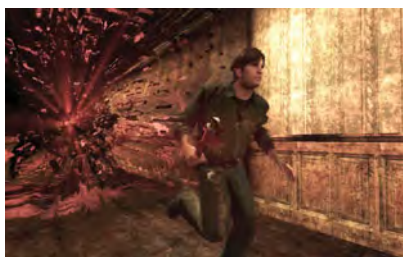
Silent Hill: Downpour

Don't forget your broly

Silent Hill has long been a bastion of the survival horror genre, fending off its mortal enemy *Resident Evil* in the race to give players nightmares and making them second-guess their own sanity almost as often as the game's characters. The series is "unsettling" scary, not just "blam!" scary. *Downpour* makes a few changes to this formula, introduces a new playable character and takes place in entirely new locations in and around the town. Its horror can best be described as more Western than that of its predecessors: more jumps and starts; more sudden crashes and monsters leaping out of closets. It's less psychological in nature, but, frankly, it's almost as good for it if you keep your mind open.

You play Murphy Pendleton, a prisoner being transferred to another prison when his bus gets wiped out as it passes the foggy town of Silent Hill. Murphy is stranded and confused. He's also trapped. He'll need to work his way through the broken, segmented town (and a few interesting outlying locations) in his attempt to escape. But this is Silent Hill; its fog hides dozens of monsters eager to tear Murphy to shreds and he's ill-equipped to deal with the physical and psychological threats that surround him. Weapons aren't scarce, but they're fragile. Murphy will find and use wrenches, rakes, lamps, lead pipes and even loose rocks to defend himself. He might even find a few firearms but ammo is hard to come by – best used as a last resort. The combat is limited to a standard melee attack and blocking, or throwing your currently equipped weapon. Murphy can only hold one item at a time which seems illogical but it

1 *Downpour* isn't strictly-speaking free-roaming, but you can explore large chunks of the town at a time, and even return to previously-explored areas. It's a good mix of linear gameplay and the free-form stuff that might leave you feeling a little confused at first, but sets a good pace for the game once you get used to it.



adds to the tension of the game – much like the severely limiting locations and their all-too convenient (or rather, inconvenient) and apparently unscalable debris and fences. When that fire axe that's been your anchor of safety for the last four encounters breaks in the middle of a fight with a monster that crawls on ceilings for fun, it's time to engage your flight mechanic and make a strategic exit in the direction of "anywhere but here" – possibly into the embracing arms of another creature.

Mood and atmosphere ooze throughout the game and drip into the gameplay itself. Light and darkness is critical: specular highlights and dynamic shadows create depth in almost total darkness while your eyes scan the areas illuminated with flashlights or ambient lights to find first-aid kits or anything you can use as a weapon. It's a solid mix of technology and gameplay design. Even the puzzle elements and exploration sequences, usually isolated from threat of death, are nerve-wracking experiences. Actually, it's *because* of those sequences that you'll be on edge. Too much tension would be manageable – it'd be certain – *Downpour* makes sure to keep you guessing about your safety and what's around the next corner. **NAG**

- GeometriX

80

A return to the series but not quite a return to form, *Downpour* might be technically flawed but it offers great gameplay and plenty of frights.

PLUS

Dripping with atmosphere / Challenging combat and puzzles / Still scary as hell

MINUS

Combat feels dated / Low-res textures / Poor frame-rates

DETAILS

Platforms

360 / PS3

Genre

Survival horror

Age restriction

18

Multiplayer

Local

None

Online

None

Developer

Vatra Games

Website

www.konami.com/silenthill

Publisher

Konami

Distributor

Ster Kinekor

Entertainment

Trials Evolution



MUST PLAY

The empire strikes back

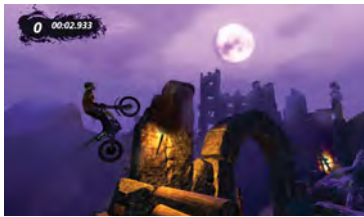
Take a dirt bike, mix in a few ramps, jumps and even a giant spinning saw blade or two, add some physics and an Xbox controller and you've got the essence of the *Trials Evolution* experience. The first game, *Trials HD*, introduced players to a motocross "simulator" that tested both their riding skill and patience. It was an unforgettable experience – especially for a downloadable Xbox LIVE Arcade game. That was two odd years ago.

The sequel, *Trials Evolution*, is exceptional in every way imaginable. The old game took place in a warehouse setting; this new one has wide open forests, a dock yard and even a battle-scarred beach, complete with explosions and airplanes zooming overhead. Some levels feature giant spiked balls that swing across the track, in others, rock falls add to the drama. Another new addition is multiplayer, up to four players on a single screen and of course online against people you don't know. It goes without saying that another big hook is trying to beat the times and scores of your friends, represented by a score table which is always in your face and ready to mock your efforts. This aspect alone can eat up hours and days as you try shave milliseconds off your



1 First time for the series is multiplayer, and up to four on the same screen. The game uses rubber band catching up so you've got a shot right until the end. Bailing out to take the win is often abused.

2 The track editor is bordering on ridiculous when it comes to options. Timed events, giant worms, foosball tables, underwater tracks, *Angry Birds* rip-offs, weather, giant rolling rocks, explosions, roller coasters, portals, and on and on and on.



best time for those all-important bragging rights.

As you play and earn medals you will unlock more tracks, bikes, skill games, money and kit. The cash is used to modify your rider and bike from a selection of helmets, mud guards and boots. Another dramatic improvement on the original is the track editor, which now comes in two flavours: "lite editor" and "pro editor". This is the same editor that the developers used to make all the tracks in the game and if you go to www.youtube.com you'll find 32 tutorial videos by the developers on how to make the most of the editor. The power of the editor is astonishing and some gamers have created first-person shooters and foosball tables that you can play on. There's even a version of *Angry Birds* (exploding barrels in this case), oh and a version of *Portal* too. The sharing and managing of these tracks is quick, simple and easy and there are already thousands of them awaiting download.

Technically, the control and feel of the bike and rider remain the same from the first game, which is a good thing as they were as close to perfect as you can get. It's not just all about ingeniously designed tracks and back flips and wheelies – the game also ships with ten new skill games ranging from guiding a metal ball around a maze to seeing how far you can go on a single tank of gas. Again, the editor includes all the tools you might need to make your own skill games.

It should be clear by now that this is a game you must own if you own an Xbox. There aren't any negatives worth talking about other than the game's ability to make you question your sanity as you keep trying over and over and over again to beat a time or a score. Besides the final game you download the editor and community tracks and skill games extend the life of the experience beyond the scope of anything else out there. It's an evolution alright and it's hard to imagine how they're going to improve on this. **NAG - RedTide**

96

Easily the best game available on XBLA and one of the best sequels ever. Just don't play it with a heart condition, if you're pregnant or suffer from anger issues.

PLUS

Better in every way / Community support / Level editor

MINUS

Might make you throw a controller / Might make you blow a vein

DETAILS

Platforms

XBLA

Genre

Side-scrolling motorsport

Age restriction

12

Multiplayer

Local

4 players

Online

4 players

Developer

RedLynx /

Ubisoft

Website

www.redlynx.com

Publisher

Microsoft Studios

Distributor

XBLA

Catherine

For whom the bell tolls

Catherine is weird. I went into it expecting some sort of Japanese dating game but quickly realised that it's even weird for a Japanese dating game, although much deeper. It tells the story of Vincent and his dealings with his wife Katherine and his on-the-side hook-up Catherine, who he (you) has to juggle to fit into his life while balancing his nightly near-death experiences. The game is sliced into two types of gameplay: during the day, Vincent hangs out at a bar with friends, or sees one or both of his better halves; at night, he goes into a nightmare world that plays out through a brilliant but often frustrating puzzle game that involves climbing up mountains of blocks and pushing them around. It sounds simple, but it's far from it.

The socialising sections are the weakest part of *Catherine*. While this game has a highly compelling, massively deep story to tell, the way it does so leaves a lot to be desired. Many expected gaming conventions (including some essential player choice options) have been skipped over for the sake of enveloping the player in the role of Vincent. Most of the time, *Catherine* excels at this, but immersion-breaking qualities like irritating sound effects ("will someone please shut up that damn bell!?!"), a clunky interface and some mind-numbing dialogue serve only to soil the experience rather than enhance it. **NAG**

- GeometriX



DETAILS

Platforms
360 / PS3

Genre
Puzzle adventure

Age restriction
18

Multiplayer
Local
2 players
Online
None

Developer
Atlas Persona Team

Website
www.catherinethegame.com

Publisher
Deep Silver

Distributor
Megarom



81

Engaging and thought-provoking, *Catherine* has a brilliant story to tell and doesn't care what conventions it has to turf out the window to do so. Add to that a complex and highly challenging puzzle game and you've got a package that will reward you heavily if it doesn't chase you away.

PLUS

Fantastic story and storytelling / Stylish visuals / Challenging and complex puzzle game

MINUS

Missing out on a few essential gaming elements / Some painful dialogue / Irritating sound effects

ECS
ELITEGROUP



ECS Golden Board My Game My Rules



Z77H2-A2X

- Intel® 3rd Gen Core™ i7/ i5 / i3 / Pentium® / Celeron® Processors
- 4 Dual-channel DDR3 2800+(OC)
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Gold 4ever



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Golden Cooling



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Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City

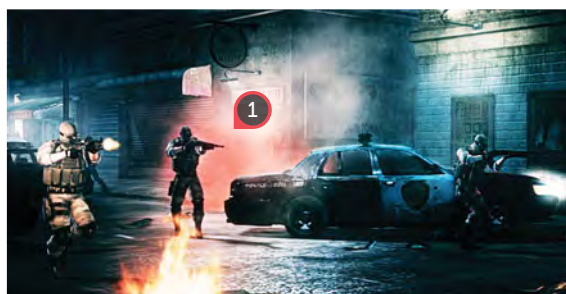
Shoot first

Sometimes, a series benefits from stepping outside of its home genre. *Halo* managed a pretty good RTS, and *Final Fantasy Tactics* turned out to be a huge success among tactical RPG fans. But this process doesn't always go as well as expected, as is the case with *Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City*. Even if we embrace its run-and-gun nature as a means of telling an action-packed story, and overlook its awful AI, and sink into the repetitive gameplay for the sake of game progression, nothing will cover up the blemish that *Operation Raccoon City* is on the *Resident Evil* franchise because it's so far removed from what *Resident Evil* is, that it's more of an insult than a worthwhile experiment. But it's not an awful game – on its own, at least.

Forget everything you know and love about the *Resident Evil* series. Once you've done that, let's ride our pickup truck square into the jaw of this squad-based shooter and kill some zerbies! While it makes an attempt at pushing a few weak tactical elements onto the player, *ORC* is simply an action game. It's even a decent one at that, with some great animations, a modest variety of weaponry, a cover system that works most of the time, and the bare minimum in enemy types. On the flip side, *ORC* is plagued with dreadful AI that will enrage you at



1 You'll also face a number of human enemies in *Operation Raccoon City*. These guys need to be eliminated along with the zombie forces to complete your "clean up" job as Umbrella's secret security forces.



times. If you're lucky enough to find players online (or sharp enough to convince three friends to also buy the game), then obviously the AI issue is reduced to your opponents, who are just as prone to run directly into trip mines, jets of flame, walls, doors and enemies as your own squad mates.

If you can't manage to scratch off the *Resident Evil* label from your copy of the game, then you're in trouble. Sure, *ORC* has green herbs and Leon Kennedy, but aside from "you can shoot zombies" there are no gameplay similarities present. It feels like *Lost Planet* in the *Resident Evil* universe (with everything that analogy implies). There's no puzzle-solving, exploration or ever a feeling of fear or uncertainty. About the only other thing *Operation Raccoon City* has in common with its cousins is the sometimes blisteringly painful scarcity of ammunition. But then that sort-of stops being an issue at some point in the campaign where a developer obviously discovered the ammo crate object and decided to start popping them in the levels. **NAG**

- GeometriX

55

An unspectacular action game that has a giant target painted on its back thanks to its setting and name. In another universe, with more attention given to generating a polished, exciting product, *Operation Raccoon City* could've been good. Now it's merely okay.

PLUS

Can look good at times / Great animations
Basic combat is solid

MINUS

Poor fit in the *RE* universe / Terrible AI / Inconsistent design
Repetitive combat

DETAILS

Platforms

360 / PC / PS3

Genre

Third-person shooter

Age restriction
18

Multiplayer

Local

None

Online

8 players

Developer

Slant Six Games

Capcom

Website

www.residentevil.com/
reorc

Publisher

Capcom

Distributor

Ster Kinekor
Entertainment

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Benchmarks for reference only. Results may differ according to system configuration.

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



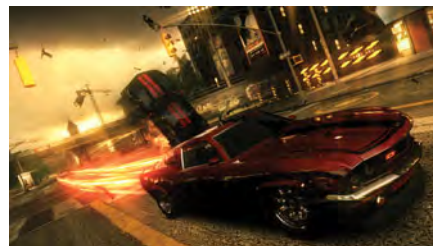
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Ridge Racer Unbounded

Better than a head-on collision



Unbounded features a soundtrack that can only be described as "booming". Lots of loud, bass-heavy techno and dub-step tunes are sure to make you feel good about spending a bit of money on your sound system, if that's your kind of thing.



Some games are painstakingly designed from end to end to give players a great experience. Others are designed to allow the players to create those experiences, and that's perfectly fine if those creation tools are well designed and result in content that's actually fun to play. *Trackmania* did this very well, which is probably why the creators of *Ridge Racer Unbounded* figured that'd be the perfect series to mimic. As it turns out, you need more than a good track editor to make a user-generated content-driven racing game exciting.

To start, you need soul, and *Unbounded* has none. I don't mean that in the airy-fairy sense, I mean it in the sense that you need a game that has guts – that makes you *feel* like you're driving a 500 horsepower death trap through the city streets. Instead, *Unbounded* gives you a poor impression of speed, twitchy physics, lacklustre nitro boost and boring, repetitive tracks carelessly bundled into a career mode that lacks enthusiasm. There's approximately zero reason to play through the offline campaign unless you lack a broadband connection or the meagre requisite creativity to generate your own tracks. Thankfully, there are two features to offset this otherwise dreary offering: Similar to just about every arcade racer released in the last two years, there's an element of destructibility to the tracks that will reward you with bonus points and a shortcut if you time your power (boost) gauge correctly to smash through specific walls and buildings in a shower of flames.

Once you've given up on the campaign, it's time to head to the track editor. While you don't have access to many parts at first, by competing in any event (even those you've created), you'll unlock new road sections that

are pieced together in a jigsaw fashion on a large grid. Building your own track is both simplistic and fun, and is easily the best part of *Unbounded*. The unfortunate by-product of the track editor is that, after a couple of hours of play, every race starts to feel very familiar. Instead of being a process of discovery, every new track you race on (built by you, the developers, or others online) becomes a process of handling individual track pieces and knowing exactly how to take "this corner" or "that slalom again". Minor reprieve is given when a track has been built using the freeform editor that includes ramps, loops and much of the crazy stuff from *Trackmania*, but so very often these tracks are poorly built and a pain to play. **NAG** - **GeometriX**

58

Unbounded will almost definitely suffer from that which plagues so many games designed around the expectation of a strong online community: without giving players a reason to pick up the game in the first place, you can count on having only a small, undedicated community that will in turn make the game as a whole less appealing.

PLUS

Great track editor / Smashing things can be fun
It looks pretty good

MINUS

Boring SP campaign / Uninspired racing / Weak online experience / Repetitive tracks

DETAILS

Platforms

360 / PC / PS3

Genre

Arcade racing

Age restriction

7

Multiplayer

Local

None

Online

8 players

Developer

Bugbear

Entertainment

Website

www.ridgeracer.com

Publisher

Namco Bandai

Games

Distributor

Megarom

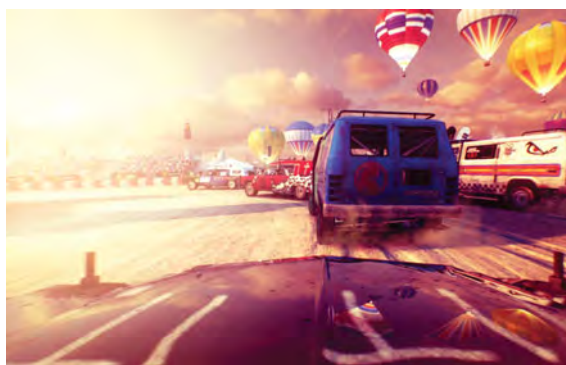
DiRT: Showdown

Two steps back

It seems like it was just the other day that *DiRT 3* arrived in our offices, so it feels a bit cheeky that we've already got more *DiRT* to engage in. To be fair, it's actually been a whole year since the previous game, so we'll forgive it – especially considering that *Showdown* is a series spin-off, one that makes it clear from the offset that it doesn't want to be like its brethren.

Showdown retains a familiar *DiRT* aesthetic. The track designs, the menu interface and pretty much all of the visual design are immediately recognisable. That's where the similarities end, however. There's an overwhelming focus on arcade racing shenanigans here. The series' traditional driving model (which, in previous entries, rested comfortably somewhere between simulation and arcade) has been altered to be more accessible to casual racers. The presentation is more garish and the events available reflect a definite shift in direction for this spin-off. If you took all of the "Gymkhana, bro" events from *DiRT 3* and made an entirely new game out of them, adding little bits along the way, you'd have *DiRT: Showdown*: which is bad news for anyone who happens to think that the Gymkhana events were the weakest part of the series' third entry.

Progression through the game is very straightforward. The game's solo campaign – the "showdown tour" – features a number of events split across four increasingly tough tiers. Cash is earned by performing well in the various events, which can then be spent on new vehicles and rudimentary upgrades to each unlocked vehicle's basic statistics (like power and handling). As far as events go, rally races are out. Instead, you've got stuff like standard circuit races, "Hoonigan" (*groan*) events – which involve such things as head-to-head trick runs that require you to complete a series of vehicular magicks like donuts and drifts before your opponent does the same – elimination races and various demolition derby-style



1 The new "Crashback" rewind feature lets you immediately bring up a stylish instant replay whenever you use your brutal rolling wrecking ball to bring vehicular pain to other drivers. Which is to say that you can watch yourself maniacally crash into people again and again. And again.



skirmishes where you're tasked with objectives like wrecking as many opponents as possible within a time limit.

And that's it really. *Showdown* lacks the depth and variety that its distant siblings offer, and while it manages to be entertaining at first, it eventually becomes tedious simply moving through the linear event list with very little to engage or reward you for doing so. Certain events inevitably become monotonous, and the stripped-down driving model means that there's very little challenge to be had and very little skill required, even though it's solid as far as arcade driving models go. And as for the in-game announcer who constantly provides input for all of your exploits: I'd like for this digital human to awaken one morning and find a horrible rash in a very uncomfortable spot.

I imagine that *DiRT: Showdown* could provide a few laughs in multiplayer. I wouldn't know – I couldn't actually give it a go because I played the game prior to its official release, meaning that there was nobody else to compete against online. Given the nature of the events on offer, it'd definitely provide at least ten minutes of party game-type fun for anyone on the hunt for such things. **NAG**

- Barkskin

70

Showdown will have people who like to watch cars crash spectacularly (given that crashing cars into other cars spectacularly is a major theme here) happy for at least a day. It is, by no means, a bad arcade racer. It's good, even – but it doesn't live up to this series' high standards. And, perhaps most disappointingly, it's completely heartless.

PLUS

It's fun for a while / looks good / solid arcade driving model

MINUS

Very little depth / certain events rapidly become annoying death to the announcer

DETAILS

Platforms

360 / PC / PS3

Genre

Racing

Age restriction

7

Multiplayer

Local

2 players

Online

8 players

Developer

Codemasters

Southam

Website

www.codemasters.com/uk/dirtshowdown

Publisher

Codemasters

Distributor

Megarom

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 13

The new swing

It was inevitable, just as it is inevitable with any of EA Sports' franchises... there is a new *Tiger Woods PGA Tour* game. *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 13* takes the player back to fabulous golf courses around the world, but this time around some of the changes we saw in the previous game have been refined, and a few other changes make the game one of the better *Tigers* we've seen to date.

The most obvious change is also the one that will potentially give the player the most trouble, at least until they are used to it. It comes in the form of a new swing mechanic. Initially, using it will be more difficult – instead of the swing indicator being at the bottom right of the screen, it now is displayed around the player's golfer. The club follows the track it displays, and the player will have to practice getting things just right. Thankfully the camera can be rotated, to display the track more clearly. At easier difficulties, the track doesn't offer too much of a challenge, but when the game is tougher, it can be tricky. The same applies for putting – which can be extremely bitchy. The easy way out (the three click system) is completely gone. But that was pretty much cheating anyway, so we don't mind...

Another welcome change is the caddy. He's still around, but the player can disable the function. Even with it activated, it is far less intrusive than the previous release, which is a blessing. The player can choose to listen to the caddy, or go it alone – even if the caddy is activated.

Less peachy is the fact that this game thrives online. While it can be played offline, a constant connection to EA's servers while playing means better rewards. That's all fine and well if you have a decent connection, but players who cannot get online will not enjoy the full experience. Both the standard game and the Masters



Collector's Edition require this connection.

That said, playing online can be great fun. Players can even join, or create, virtual country clubs, which adds lots of benefits. Players can also earn more experience and in-game currency online, which can be used to buy rounds on exclusive courses, or packs of limited use pins (kind of like Magic: The Gathering booster card packs) which add buffs to the player's performance. These can, naturally, be bought with real money, too.

The character creator returns, and is rather extensive – although basing your golfer on photographs of yourself may well have very mixed results [we warned you about looking directly at the camera, Ed].

On the whole, this game offers a smoother, richer experience, and one that is closer to the real thing, thanks to improved controls and a stripped down GUI. Players will find a ton of courses and a very long career mode to round things off. The game also features a special mode in which they can experience highlights of Tiger Woods' golfing career, from tot to troublemaker.

If golf is your bag, then this game is a definite must-play, as it moves the franchise forward nicely with some clever game evolution. **NAG**

- Ramjet

80

A great step for the franchise, with improved ideas and a new swing mechanic that just feels better.

PLUS

New swing mechanic / less intrusive caddy

MINUS

Can be tough to get used to / online requirement

DETAILS

Platforms

360 / PS3

Genre

Sports

Age restriction

3+

Multiplayer

Local

4 players

Online

4 players

Developer

EA Tiburan

Website

easports.com/
golf

Publisher

EA Sports

Distributor

Electronic Arts
South Africa

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Asphalt: Injection

Underpowered

Gameloft make great mobile games, no questions asked. Even their tablet games are good. But the PS Vita is neither a phone, nor a tablet; it is a very powerful game console, even if it is small. So the leap to the Vita, for Gameloft, is not an obvious one. And it shows in games like *Asphalt: Injection*.

Based on the popular mobile racing games, *Injection* allows the player to use 45 licensed cars on a number of tracks around the world. It's great, in principle, but the actual execution of the title shows far too many gaps and cracks. For the most part, the cars feel the same. There is no real discernible difference between different models, let alone different makes.

And then there are the tracks. They start to feel rather repetitive after a while and, even though they are resplendent with shortcuts and boosts, the elastic AI manages to make every race a nail-biter to the finish line.

The controls, too, leave a lot to be desired. Sure, Gameloft tried to make use of the Vita's unique system combinations, but they fall flatter than the "normal" controls.

Lastly, the looks – not awesome, as one would hope. If you have played the likes of *Uncharted* on the Vita, they are actually a big let-down. We expect more from racing games than this delivers. **NAG**

- Ramjet



50

Although it shows promise, Gameloft's first racing game for the PS Vita leaves the player a little cold in the end.

PLUS

Lots of cars

MINUS

Poor graphics / Not enough variation

Ridge Racer

Stripped down

Namco Bandai has been around for some time, as has the *Ridge Racer* franchise. But this title may just be the publisher showing their true colours... one could only hope that what they did here is not a sign of things to come.

See, *Ridge Racer* for the PS Vita is an obvious choice; racing games and handheld consoles go hand-in-hand. But the connectivity of the Vita brings a whole new idea into the mix, and one that this game blatantly takes advantage of: DLC.

When you first play the game, you will be treated to three tracks and five cars. That's it. In addition, there is one offline game mode. All the rest you either have to be connected for, or have to fork over cash to download.

Sure, the game sells at a slightly reduced price, but it still doesn't sit well. Add to that the fact that it doesn't really play as well as one would expect, and you start getting a very bitter taste in your mouth.

Ridge Racer for the Vita suffers from numerous problems, some of which are probably due to the fact that it was a launch title. But the worst issues are ones that speak of issues that may arise in the industry in the future. No-one likes exploitation. **NAG**

- Ramjet



50

This obvious DLC exploitation leaves a sour taste in the mouth, even at a reduced price. And it could play a lot better, too.

PLUS

Some nice graphics

MINUS

DLC exploitation! / Doesn't play as well as it should

DETAILS

Platforms

PS Vita

Genre

Racing

Age restriction

7

Multiplayer

Local

8 players

Online

8 players

Developer

Gameloft

Website

www.gameloft.com

Publisher

Ubisoft

Distributor

Megarom

DETAILS

Platforms

PS Vita

Genre

Racing

Age restriction

3

Multiplayer

Local

8 players

Online

8 players

Developer

Namco Bandai

Website

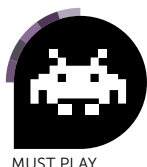
www.namcobandagames.eu

Publisher

Namco Bandai

Distributor

Megarom



Awesomenauts

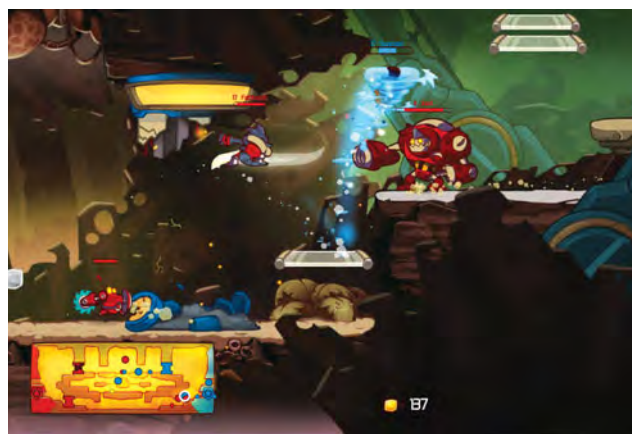
If *League of Legends* was an '80s cartoon...

If you've ever played *League of Legends* or *Defense of the Ancients* or *Monday Night Combat*, this game is like that, but as a 2D side-scrolling platform shooter like *Contra*. If you've never played any of the aforementioned games, read on.

Awesomenauts is a three-on-three multiplayer online battle arena, or MOBA. You pick from one of six funky retro-cartoon styled characters, each with their own set of abilities and style of play. The two teams face off against each other, with the goal of taking out the opponent's base. Each base automatically sends out a steady stream of robots, which you use as cover when assaulting the turrets that defend the base. Taking on a turret alone is suicide. As you dive in and out of combat, assaulting and defending, you'll gain Solar with which to upgrade your character's abilities. Some characters, like the stealthy French chameleon Leon, are better at picking off weak retreating opponents. Others, like the space cowboy Sheriff Lonestar, are great at pushing back incoming robots.

If a player disconnects during a match, a very capable A.I. bot will replace them until they get back. If you join a game late, you'll get a Solar boost to help keep you competitive. Of all the games in this genre, *Awesomenauts* is the most approachable, easiest to understand, and a lot of fun. It even supports local split screen for up to three players, vs. A.I. or online opponents. **NAG**

- Miktar



84

With its funky theme and unique twist on the genre, *Awesomenauts* brings the MOBA genre to consoles in a big way and makes it accessible to anyone.

PLUS

Big and colourful visuals / Drop-in drop-out play / Well-designed characters / Amazing theme song

MINUS

Wonky network code / Only six characters for now



Bloodforge

So bad it's bad

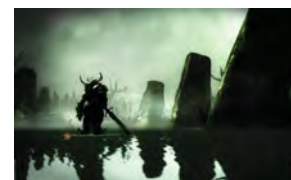
While Bloodgrudge's duo-chromatic visual design is striking, and its Conan-inspired characters are intriguing, the first thing that strikes you is the camera. It's horrible. Jumping between coordinate points in a jerky manner, swaying to and fro as if lost at sea... it would labour a more bearable game.

Alas, bearable this is not. A tale of meat and revenge, lost love and a shouting berzerker named Krat... Umm... Crom, Bloodforge is an action brawler that seems like something created by a person who only had *God of War* described to them, in Russian, without having ever seen the game itself.

Character movement is sluggish. Strikes are stilted. Animation is rudimentary. There's plenty of blood, but little else. It is at least mercifully brief. After Crom has stomped through the scant few chapters, replayability is offered in the form of challenging friends' kill scores in individual levels.

Tragically, it is a concept based on a flawed premise: that a person who actually enjoys Bloodballs is someone who would have any friends. It smells of inexperience with Gamecraft (www.gamecraft.org) itself, yet still responsible enough to try and include all the expected features. The boxes are checked. Nobody should play this. **NAG**

- Miktar



40

If this game were a movie, it would be one of those knock-off movies with the almost sound-alike title aimed at conning your grandma into buying it for you thinking it's the real deal.

PLUS

There's blood / There's screaming / It ends

MINUS

It exists / That damn camera / There's screaming

DETAILS

Platforms

360

Genre

Action hack-and-slash

Age restriction

18

Multiplayer

Local

None

Online

None

Developer

Climax Group

Website

bloodforge
thegame.com

Publisher

Microsoft Studios

Distributor

XBLA

Full disclosure:

My opinion of *Bloodforge* is biased by the fact that I couldn't play it without becoming motion sick.

TECH NEWS

KNOW YOUR TECHNOLOGY

Tri gate

Three-dimensional transistor fabrication as employed by Intel in all post Sandy Bridge CPUs. Tri-gates use a single gate stacked on top of two vertical gates for three times the surface area for electrons to travel. This design drastically reduces leakage while allowing significantly more current to pass through, and as a result the transistor can switch faster between the two states. Tri-gates are a form of FinFETs which describe most non-planar (3D) double-gate transistors.

CPU throttling

Dynamic frequency scaling is what is commonly known as CPU throttling. This essentially adjusts (usually lowers frequency) CPU speed, to either conserve power, reduce heat or both. This is based upon an algorithm and is not a linear function, where capacitance is multiplied by the voltage (squared) multiplied by the transistor switching frequency. While this helps tremendously in the situations stipulated above, it is not able to deal with static power draw which isn't variable and is due to the specific chip leakage.

SOI

Silicon on insulator: this is a process where a layered silicon insulator substrate is used instead of conventional silicon substrates. It reduces freeloading device capacitance, as such improving performance. In other words, SOI helps where leakage is concerned as well. It differs from traditional processes in that a silicon junction is placed above an electrical insulator, so mechanically this electrical insulation sits between two silicon layers.

High-K

A modern day lithographic technology used to increase feature density on an IC. The name is derived from being able to add double the expected number of features on a particular node without having to move to a smaller one; this is done by using dual-tone photo resisting technologies which allow different parts of the die to respond to different processes during manufacturing, thereby allowing double the features. Not only is it cost effective, but essentially allows a process node to be used longer than it would otherwise be viable. Double-patterning is what allowed the half-pitch 32nm node as used on Sandy Bridge CPUs for example.

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The design has been inspired by a gaming mouse and the bag has multiple (and by that we mean loooooots) compartments both inside and out, small and large. It's one of the most functional, funky and highest quality gaming backpacks we've seen in a while. They come in black, grey or blue and sport a stylish combination nylon and faux leather finish.

www.computersonly.co.za | R599

"As the world continues to advance, so too must semiconductor technology, and that is never more evident than today with the pending release of tri gate transistors and 22 nm process technology. Few individuals and industries will be untouched as powerful microprocessors, Internet-connections, and user experience breakthroughs are applied across the worlds of business, healthcare, education and the society at large."

Sean Maloney, executive vice president of Intel Corporation and chairman of Intel China.



10.8 TWh

BY THE NUMBERS

According to researchers at Carnegie Mellon University, 68 percent of all game console energy consumed in 2010 in the USA happened while in idle mode. In numbers this amounts to 10.8 TWh of energy and roughly \$1.24 billion in electricity costs.

DREAMMACHINE

A single change in this month's Dream Machine, courtesy of the GIGABYTE GTX 680 OC graphic card. Factory overclocked, with a custom cooler. Pretty much what we had expected but also a fantastic gaming graphics card, nothing revolutionary there. As much as we like Ivy Bridge there'll be no changing from the X79 platform as without Lucid MVP, there really isn't a difference in gaming performance. Next month should see some new entries where the graphics card, memory and SSD are concerned.



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



GIGABYTE GV-N6800C
R7,429 / za.asus.com



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



Seagate Barracuda 3TB
R1,799 / www.seagate.com



Cooler Master COSMOS II
R3,399 / www.cooler-master.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



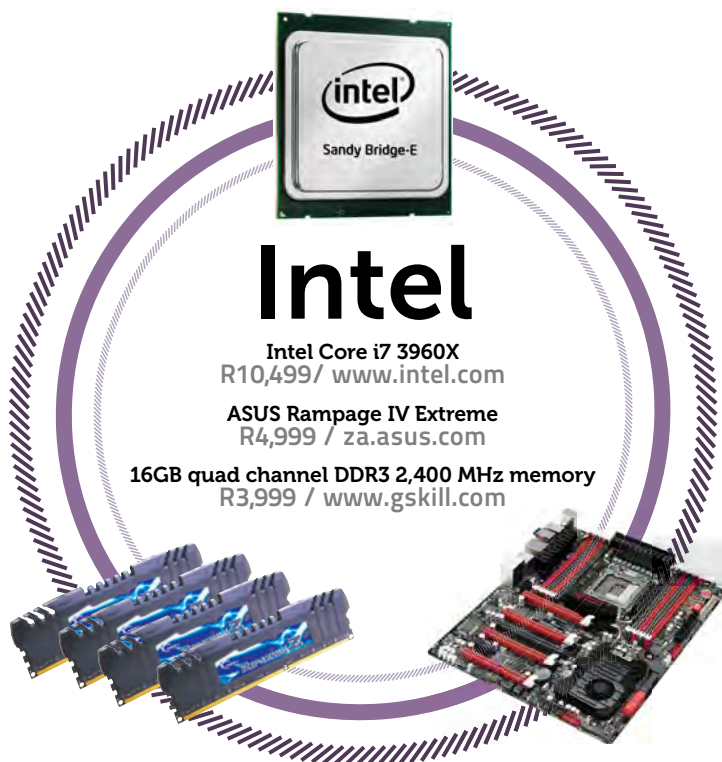
Asus Xonar Essence STX
R1,399 / za.asus.com



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

16GB quad channel DDR3 2,400 MHz memory
R3,999 / www.gskill.com

Intel Dream Machine price:

R54,636



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:

R42,436



Hardwired

Money money money – part 1

With the vast amount of platforms and entertainment mediums we have today, it seems like content providers have their hands out more than ever. In fact, what I call outright greed is evident everywhere you look. Be it games, music or movies. Every corporate structure is out to get more from you than what they are essentially entitled to.

They'll cite piracy and all kinds of things, but that's not what I'm discussing here. What is aggravating is the over commercialisation of it all. It's as if the liberties that the Internet grants us, or rather all forms of digital media, the controls only exist to wean us of our hard earned cash. The saddest part is that the justice system the world over is ill-equipped to deal with these problems, and court injunctions are handed out indiscriminately, usually at the expense of the end user.

I'm not saying there's a great conspiracy out there to short-change Joe average, what I'm saying is there's no need for a conspiracy; the patterns across all forms of entertainment are repeatable and very obvious to see. If all of this seems to you like I'm whining about high prices and having to pay for services and people's hard work, I'll highlight to you why this isn't so and even if it is, the point I'm making cannot be invalidated or dispatched by simply confining it to my dissatisfaction with the way we (as your average consumer) are treated by not only the entertainment industry as a whole, but the judicial system that allows this to take place.

Turn your eyes to the tech industry which I'm more than familiar with. For years on end patent lawsuits, copyright infringement and the like have been the order of the day. In fact Microsoft, along with Intel and many others, spent considerable amounts of time in courts in litigation for numerous reasons. From defending genuine patents on their technology to preventing would-be competitors from posing real and plausible threats to their bottom lines. What has always been very clear is that the legal system is ill-equipped to deal with many of these cases. With increasingly complicated technologies and support structures, many of the laws we have, have not been adjusted to deal with the arising conflicts adequately. When a 74 year-old judge, clueless in many aspects of computing, is tasked with overlooking a case pertaining to low level code or algorithms, you're likely to get anything but a fair ruling.

Fair enough, part of that has to do with the thousands if not tens of thousands of invalid patents granted every year at various patent offices all over the world, however this speaks precisely of a system that is ill-equipped with the changing technological landscape. How this relates to our entertainment mediums, or rather content, is simple. All technological breakthroughs, regardless of their scope, eventually have an impact on how we interact, consume, and in general relate with our entertainment.

Publishing companies and their insistence that people buy physical mediums like CDs and DVDs as opposed to digital distribution is evidence of this. Those that claim to embrace digital distribution mainly do it only if there's some form of DRM involved. Today in South Africa it's not possible for you to use iTunes without circumventing the restrictions in one way or another, courtesy of our distribution companies. That way they can continue to charge exorbitant prices and dictate to us what we can and cannot have.

Hold on, I've exceeded my allocated space, let's continue this next month!

- Neo Sibeko



Intel Core i7 3770K

Supplier Intel Website www.intel.com RRP R3,599

If you've looked at the score before reading this review then you should know that we have nothing but praise for Intel's latest generation Core CPUs. In particular, the Core i7 3770K, which is the high-end part that we reviewed.

With Ivy Bridge, Intel has continued in its tick-tock strategy and if you're not sure what Ivy Bridge is, it's the tick. That is, fundamentally it's not too different from Sandy Bridge. There are no new instruction sets and for the most part the technologies are identical. Some changes have taken place but many will be of little interest to power users, gamers and enthusiasts. The more significant change that isn't directly related to raw CPU performance is the on-die GPU. Intel has ushered in HD Graphics 4000, which is actually clocked lower at 1.15GHz but offers more execution units (16), so overall it's faster. It also supports DirectX 11 which bodes well for those gaming on a budget. We do however have to wonder who of us would waste such a wonderful CPU using the integrated graphics processor. Sure enough it is more capable than ever before, but it's still not a match for what AMD can produce in their APUs. For that we may have to wait for Intel's Haswell architecture (which is the tock if you didn't know).

What is fundamentally different about Ivy Bridge CPUs as opposed to the Sandy Bridge ones is the process technology. For years on end Intel has been working on tri-gates and in fact it was 2002 where Intel was showing off working samples of 3D gates. Ten years later the technology is ready for mass production at a 22nm node. It is also worth noting that the node is not an inherent part of tri-gates, those just happened to be married at this particular time by Intel. Other semiconductor firms will likely not move to tri-gate technology on their sub 30nm processes.

Essentially, tri-gates are regular transistors with a third dimension or a third gate stacked on top of the source and drain. This means each transistor has lower leakage levels (when the source leaks into the drain through the gate, even though it's supposed to be off) by up to 37%, Intel claims, and more than that each transistor can tolerate much higher drive currents and switch much quicker. The physics of this are detailed and outside the scope of this write-up, so we'll leave it at that. Suffice to say, it's very impressive and once again speaks of the keen minds at Intel's R&D centres.

What all this means to us is that we should think in theory get cooler running CPUs. Odd then, that on average Ivy Bridge CPUs run hotter than Sandy

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: INTEL CORE I7 3930K

3DMark 11 physics	9,471 11,154
Wprime 1024	221.86 160.885
Cinebench 11.5	7.91 9.38
AIDA 64 CPU Queen	46,240 55,214
AIDA 64 FPU VP8	3,899 3,774

SPECS

Core
22nm Ivy Bridge
Frequency
3200MHz
Cache
9.34MB Total
(8MB L3)
TDP
95W
Platform
LGA 1155 (Z77)

PLUS

- 22nm node
- Demonic overclocking powers
- Very good IPC

MINUS

- Lower overlocks on air cooling than Sandy Bridge

BOTTOM LINE

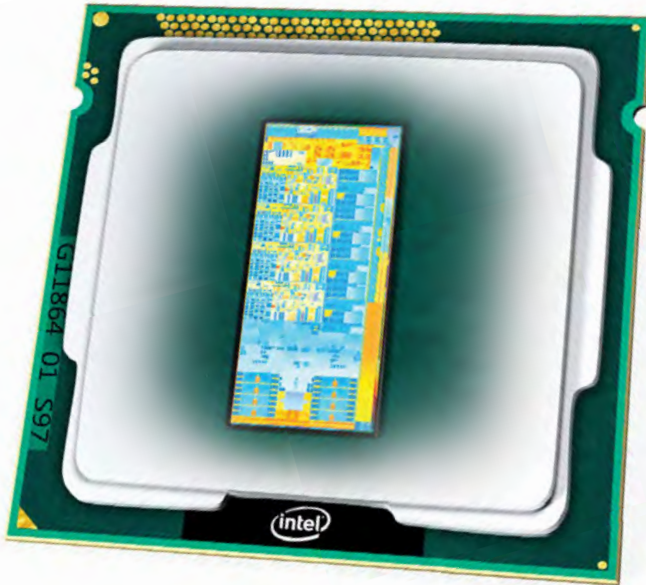
The 3770K is the most efficient CPU from Intel ever. A breakthrough in engineering.

Bridge. This is only true when running overclocked settings as at default speeds they are roughly the same. Still, the advantage of using a smaller node at the same frequency should, at roughly the same gate count, be a lower running temperature. However this is not the case and this has led some to speculate all kinds of things. A common but incorrect assumption is that the thermal interface material between the IHS and the die has been compromised and Intel is not using flux solder to bridge this gap but the more common thermal paste.

A plausible supposition but one that doesn't hold any merit, as Intel has been using the very same TIM for several generations. The real answer hypothetically lays in the inability, or rather the non-linear relationship, between heat generation and its dissipation from within the CPU die itself. This could be the reason why Ivy Bridge CPUs are very sensitive to temperatures.

Whatever the reason, what we do know is that these CPUs overclock incredibly well under the right circumstances, and by that we mean when cooled with exotic cooling. Liquid nitrogen has been shown to allow Ivy Bridge CPUs to reach staggering clock speeds above 6.5GHz, something that Sandy-Bridge CPUs

where do you want to game today?



“Whatever the reason, what we do know is that **these CPUs overclock incredibly well under the right circumstances**, and by that we mean when cooled with exotic cooling. ”

could never manage. Not only is this impressive, but Intel seems to have taken a queue from AMD's playbook and manufactured CPUs that do not have what is colloquially referred to as a cold bug. That means you can cool these CPUs to temperatures below -196°C and they will continue to operate and in fact allow even higher clock speeds. A useless boon for 99.9% of the buying public but for the small group of enthusiasts and overclockers, it's what dreams are made off.

Not only do Ivy Bridge CPUs overclock incredibly well, they allow memory speeds that were not only thought improbable, but certainly unattainable without using liquid nitrogen. This has turned out to not be the case and with our very early sample, memory speeds in excess of 2,700MHz were attainable with some tuning. Needless to say this

speaks very well of the improvements that Intel has made to the memory controller inside the CPUs. If you thought that was impressive, you'll be happy to know that internal cache and memory latencies are lower in Ivy Bridge CPUs and, paired with a 7% improvement in IPC, you're looking at a truly impressive technology from the world's number one semiconductor firm.

If AMD was two generations behind in performance before, comparing AMD's Bulldozer to Ivy Bridge pegs them squarely at three generations behind. It's astounding that the outfit continues to innovate while increasing their lead against the competition. Had it not been for the limited number of threads on the 3770K, it would easily be our Dream Machine CPU, as there really isn't anything we can find to fault it with. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

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DREAM MACHINE

GIGABYTE GV-N680OC

Supplier Rectron Website www.gigabyte.com ERP R7,429

It seems that just about every vendor in the business has a GTX 680 product, or at least a press release conveying their intention of producing a GTX 680. Not surprising though as the GTX 680 is a cheap graphics card. The price point it holds is solely because it's the fastest single GPU on the market today.

We suspect this may be the reason why every manufacturer is jumping on board. It's not only to beef up their product range, but their bottom lines as well. Given just how simplistic the PCB is and the bill of parts on NVIDIA's end, the vendor's or on both, margins are unusually high for what is essentially a halo product. So then it's no surprise that every self-respecting outfit in the business would be eager to get their product out as quickly as possible.

Good news for everyone then, but it does mean that differentiating your product from the rest is particularly difficult. After all, it's unlikely a vendor would want to chip away at their margins by opting for an unnecessarily complex design when the only people to benefit from it are a very small minority, mainly the overclockers. Even then, the enhancements would not yield much benefit because the limitations when it comes to the GTX 680 are inside the silicon as well as on the PCB. While something can be done about the PCB, not much can be done about the GPU itself.

This brings us to the GIGABYTE GTX 680 OC card we tested here. It's essentially the reference model, save for that it features a 5-phase PWM instead of the regular 4-phase. That should, in theory, help overclocking a little, but using air cooling and at the speeds that this card operates at, there's truly no benefit to the additional electronic circuitry. However, it is worth noting that on a reference PCB, there's space for an additional phase anyway which NVIDIA has not populated, so adding in the right VRMs is unlikely to increase the manufacturing cost in any meaningful way. What it does allow though is for GIGABYTE to charge a slight price premium on their card, which they have.

To that end, the clock speeds on this card are higher as well, with a base clock of 1,071MHz instead of 1,006MHz. This is a small overclock indeed, but one that makes somewhat of a difference, so for those who do not dabble in overclocking, this slight boost will be appreciated. One lamentable aspect of this card though is the maximum power draw limit. It is set at 111% at most which is far less than the 132% the reference card allows. In contrast to the ASUS Direct CU II version that allows more than 150%, it's disappointing. However we do suspect the Super Overclock edition will remedy this. In the meantime this is GIGABYTE's best

SPECS

Core
1,071MHz Kepler (28nm)
Processors
1,536
Render outputs
32
Memory
2048MB GDDR5
6GHz (192GB/sec)
API
DirectX 11.1 /
OpenGL 4.x /
OpenCL 1.X

PLUS

- Runs cool
- Factory overclock
- Performs very well

MINUS

- Reference PCB
- Low TDP limit
- Pricey

BOTTOM LINE

Fastest and coolest GTX 680 we have tested to date. If you can find it at the right price, buy it.

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: ASUS GEFORCE GTX680

Hard Reset DX9 1,080p 4xAA	98.8 99.6
Just Cause 2 DX10 1,080p	154.45 155.72
3DMark11 Extreme	3303 3,343
3DMark Vantage	37,351 39,722
Unigine Heaven Xtreme	1940.515 1871.607

offering and it is the fastest graphics card we have tested to date.

As usual with the WindForce coolers, operational noise is very low and cooling efficiency admirable, especially when compared to the reference card. Since the GTX 680 is a cool operating GPU anyway, the cooling system doesn't make as dramatic a difference in temperatures as it would on a GTX 580. Having said that, we still believe that when the BIOS tools are out in public, there'll be some more to be gained from this card, as right now the TDP limit spoils the overclocking a little.

Still, if you were impressed with the ASUS GTX 680 we reviewed last month, this one is better in every way and you should give it some serious consideration.

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- Neo Sibeko

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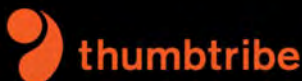
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G.SKILL TridentX F3-2400C10D

Supplier G.SKILL **Website** www.gskill.com **RRP** R1,299

G.SKILL is fast becoming the vendor to beat when it comes to enthusiast and gaming grade memory. In this market where DRAM manufacturers are failing to set themselves apart from the competition, G.SKILL is not only marketing virally through overclockers and just about every memory speed record broken, they are also producing some of the best memory we have seen to date.

While many of their kits are very expensive, in G.SKILL's defence, these kits are hand binned and, as such, the manufacturing cost of each kit is significantly higher than what other vendors have to put up with. For that, they get to charge more, but for us we get memory speeds much higher than we could have ever expected.

For instance, almost every memory speed above 3GHz has been achieved using a G.SKILL kit. Granted, these feats are achieved using kits that are rated at a much higher speed than what we have here, but that doesn't mean their budget kits are not capable of equally impressive tasks. For instance, this kit is amongst the cheapest Z77 performance sets not only from G.SKILL but in the market as a whole. So you'd not expect them to do much better than their rated speed,

especially given the high latencies.

Contrary to our expectations, we were able to reach almost 2,800MHz with this memory, as we topped out at 2,786MHz, which is nothing short of impressive when dealing with budget RAM. No other set we have tested to date is remotely close to this kit when it comes to raw MHz or performance for that matter. Indeed, we had to loosen the timings to 11-13-13-30, however what we lost in latency we made up for in frequency, and above 2,700MHz the memory results are staggering, especially in contrast to the default memory speed and timings which are nothing to write home about.

We can't be sure what ICs are used in this kit as the heatspreaders use what seems to be thermal epoxy, so any attempt to find out which DRAM is used would most likely damage the memory. We can only speculate that these are Samsung chips, as they scale relatively well with voltage adjustments, which is exactly how this kit behaved. Even more impressive is the fact that our maximum speed isn't necessarily the limit of this kit. The issue we encountered when attempting 2,800MHz related to our chosen CPU sample and not to the memory itself. Upon booting the system

SPECS

Density
8GB (4GBx2)
Voltage
1.65V
Timings
10-12-12-30
XMP
Yes 1.3

PLUS

- Looks great
- Affordable
- Overclocking headroom

MINUS

- Default timings

BOTTOM LINE

Impressive 2,400MHz RAM built for the Z77 platform that offers incredible overclocking headroom.

at 2,800MHz we were faced with BIOS post code "23", which is the post code for CPU IMC errors and not "55" which would be the limits of the memory.

We are more than confident that with the right CPU, 2,800MHz and beyond is possible. So there's some serious overclocking headroom in this kit provided you have the right sample.

One thing that we did notice is how this kit is tuned for ASUS motherboards and won't necessarily perform to the same levels when paired with a GIGABYTE motherboard. This is purely because G.SKILL has a better R&D relationship with ASUS than it does with any other vendor, so your mileage will likely be higher with an ASUS motherboard than any other. Still, with some patience and tuning, you may be able to reach the same speeds, as with every motherboard we tried we were able to reach 2,600MHz, which is well above the rated speed of the kit.

We liked the previous RipJaws Z kit that is currently in our Dream Machine and, if it were not for the platform that this set is specifically made for, it would replace RipJaws Z, as it actually is a better kit in all respects.

- Neo Sibeko

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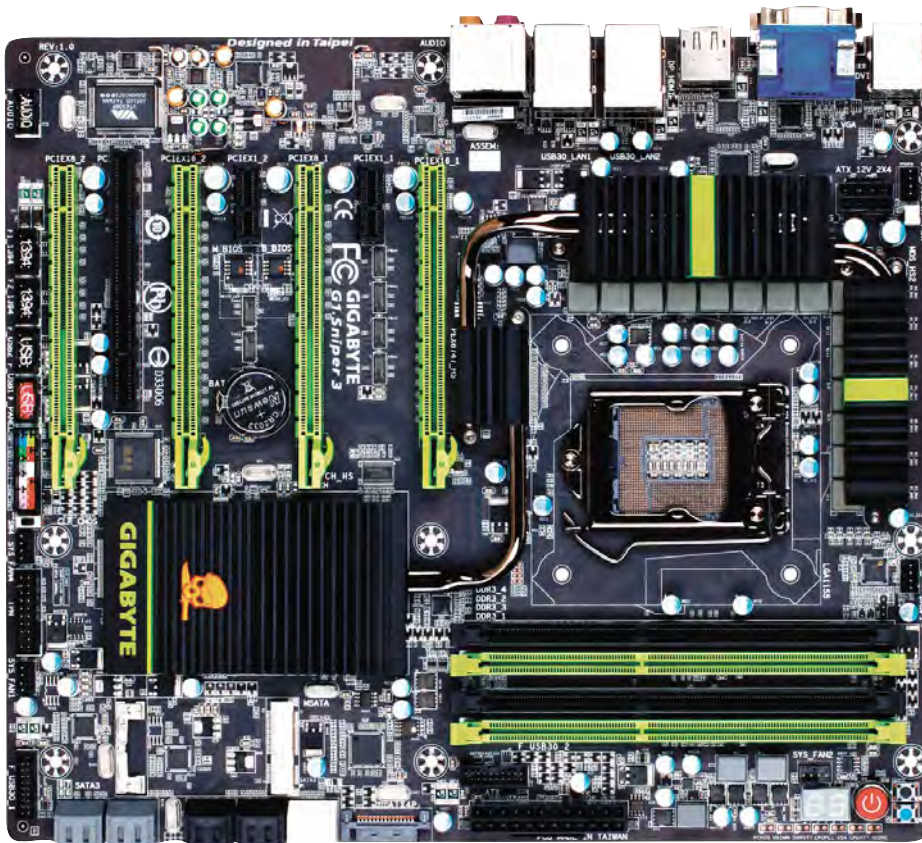
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BENCHMARKS

BASELINE **ASUS Rampage IV Extreme**

3DMark Vantage CPU	33,047 46,760
Cinebench 11.5	9.36 13.43
AIDA 64 copy	28,509MB/s 20,396MB/s
3DMark03	112,305 127,025

GIGABYTE G1. Sniper 3

Supplier Rectron Website www.gigabyte.com ERP R4,999

A perfect score for a non-ASUS motherboard and one that isn't the best overclocking board on the market, you ask? Well there are several reasons for that which makes this a valid score for the Sniper 3. See, the G1.Sniper 3 is easily the best gaming motherboard to come from GIGABYTE or any vendor. What was somewhat of a gimmicky line of motherboards from the company has finally produced a noteworthy and exceptional product.

Not only does the board look good, gone are the childish heat sinks that resemble guns and all kinds of infantile aesthetics. Instead GIGABYTE has gone with a slick and stylish layout of the heat sinks which are a perfect contrast in black to the green accents on the PCIe and DIMM slots. It may be simplistic when compared with previous G1 boards, but it's easily the most desirable of the lot.

This is particularly true when it comes to the features on this board, which makes it the most prolific motherboard on the Z77 landscape to date. This is by way of the slickest UEFI BIOS GIGABYTE has ever come up with, which is even better than their best Award BIOS on previous platforms. With all the trouble GIGABYTE may have had transitioning to the UEFI, this time it is perfected. It is fast, looks

good and has every feature you could need. It's essentially GIGABYTE at its best.

LAN comes by way of the new Killer E2200 dedicated gaming NIC, which provides several benefits over and above the previous E2100 controller. This includes network traffic prioritization, lower latencies and the like. The software is a little cumbersome, but easy enough to navigate and has a surprisingly rich mixture of features and options to tune. If that's not enough for you, you'll receive an additional Intel gigabit Ethernet controller should you need dual LAN connectivity.

Audio, one of the gaming series' biggest selling points, is once again peerless courtesy of the Creative Labs Sound Core3D audio chip. Together with some of the best audio circuitry on a motherboard (Nichicon audio caps for example) the Sniper 3 delivers incredible audio that rivals those of high-end gaming sound cards. It simply has to be heard to be appreciated and we promise you, once you listen to sound using this motherboard, you'll be hard pressed to find any other board on the market from any vendor that comes close. Add a built-in front audio headphone amplifier and additional amps for surround gaming and you have a peerless audio solution for motherboards.

SPECS

Chipset Intel Z77
Memory 4x240-pin DDR3
CPU support Intel Core i7 SNB IB (LGA1155)
Slots 4x PCIe 3.0 16x, 2x PCIe 1x

PLUS

- Audio quality
- Connectivity
- 4-way graphics
- Aesthetics

MINUS

- Nothing

BOTTOM LINE

The G1.Sniper 3 is the epitome of Z77 gaming motherboards.

GIGABYTE has also included a Bluetooth 4.0 and Wi-Fi expansion card giving you all possible forms of connectivity we have today. Add mSATA on board for use with Intel Smart Response technology or as a standalone drive, you have a board that doesn't lack in any department at all.

For those who would use multi-GPU configurations, the PLX PCIe 3.0 switching chip allows the use of up to four graphics cards in either SLI or Crossfire, with sufficiently enough bandwidth to match that of the X79 platform when using PCIe 2.0 graphics cards. To remedy some of the complaints from previous G1 boards, GIGABYTE has also added clear CMOS, reset and power buttons, not forgetting a POST LED as well.

If it's not apparent yet, we are genuinely impressed by this motherboard in a way no other GIGABYTE board has impressed us since the X58-OC. There aren't many complaints we can level at the G1.Sniper3. If you're a gamer or power user set on building the best Z77 platform money can buy, you need look no further than the G1.Sniper 3. It's as near perfect a gaming motherboard as you are likely to find.

- Neo Sibeko

Genius Cavimanus gaming headset

Supplier TVR **Website** www.tvr.co.za **RRP** R699



The Cavimanus boasts all the basic features you expect to see from a gaming headset. Virtual 7.1 surround sound, dedicated volume controls and a foldaway microphone. There's also a vibration function that adds extra effect to the bass produced.

Ergonomically the set is fairly pleasant. The large ear cups fit over the ear nicely and are padded enough to not be an irritation – but they don't swivel, which might make them uncomfortable for some. They do an alright job of cancelling out any outside noise, provided you've got them at a high enough level of volume – unfortunately, they're not at all good for preventing noise from escaping, so using them around others might get you shot. The volume control dial is located on the left cup, as is the button for the vibration function. The vibration itself works as expected, amplifying the audio to give the lower frequencies physical feedback, but using it for extended periods of time inevitably results in discomfort.

Turn the vibration off, however, and flaws in the set's audio reproduction glare through. The low- and mid-ranges become muddled thanks to the set's tendency towards the high end. Listening to audio is made quite painful, as noticeable distortion (particularly in music with vocals) makes audio garbled and crackly. This distortion is actually made worse by turning on the vibration.

This would be a set of headphones worth considering if it were priced to cater to a tight budget. At R699, it's difficult to justify the Cavimanus' existence: in the same price range, you can get quality headphones from the "bigger" brands out there, like SteelSeries or Logitech.

NAG

5

- Dane Remendes

SPECS

Frequency response
20Hz – 20kHz
Speaker diameter
40mm
Sensitivity
95dB
Impedance
32 ohm
Cable length
250cm



PLUS

- Mostly comfortable / Sturdy build

MINUS

- Vibration effect becomes uncomfortable / Lacks low- and mid-range clarity

BOTTOM LINE

The Cavimanus would be a decent budget headset, if it were actually priced as such.

Cyborg Gaming Lights for PC

Supplier Comet Computing
Website www.cometcomputing.co.za
RRP R1,099

It seems we've run out of things to attach to our gaming PCs, because we've now got... surround lighting. Designed to amplify the ambience of your gaming area of choice, these Cyborg Gaming Lights dynamically react to onscreen happenings to further immerse you in your gaming. But they're far from essential.

Setting them up is fairly painless. Plug in the power, attach the provided USB cables and find a way to run them neatly to your PC (each light requires a USB port) and install the bundled software and you're good to go. Most Direct 3D-capable games are supported by the software, which analyses the onscreen action and adjusts the colour and intensity of the lights to bathe your play area in appropriate hues. They work with music and movies too, and can be used as notification lights for various Windows functions.

For games where immersion is key, like survival horrors, these lights will add a fair amount of ambience. However, to get the full effect that these lights offer to provide, you'll have to do all of your gaming in almost total darkness – which I know most people don't do.

To be perfectly honest, I don't really know how to feel about Cyborg's amBX-infused gaming lights. They're such a tertiary addition to any gaming PC's repertoire of gadgets and flashy things that it's difficult to really recommend them. Add in the insane asking price (which only gets you two of them – you can buy four of these packs for a total of eight lights at just under R4,400), and they make even less sense as a gaming peripheral. Their function is so niche and their price is so high that, unless you've got mountains of cash to splurge on utter randomness, I'd say don't bother.

NAG

4



SPECS

LED life
20,000+ hours
USB cable length
3m
Power usage
2W per light
Illumination
Strength
100 Lumens

PLUS

- They work
- Ooooh... shiny

MINUS

- What's the point?
- Ridiculously priced

BOTTOM LINE

Only you can decide if their function is appealing enough to warrant a purchase.



BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: ASUS Rampage IV Extreme

3DMark Vantage CPU	32,757 46,760
Cinebench 11.5	9.41 13.43
AIDA 64 copy	28,270MB/s 20,396MB/s
3DMark03	113,247 127,025

“As a result of having one of the world’s top overclockers working at ASRock, the **Extreme6** is tuned for performance and stability at settings at which other boards may fall apart.”



HARDWARE

ASRock Z77 Extreme6

Supplier ASRock Website www.compitum.co.za ERP R2,100

ASRock was always a questionable brand in the eyes of the power user. At first it wasn't quite clear what their market was going to be. OEM/ODM, entry-level or mid-range products, but it turns out that ASRock is catering to most market segments, much like the bigger vendors.

If you want to win the high-end though, you have to impress the power users and the enthusiasts. To that end, ASRock did the right thing and hired a few talented people who have slowly but surely turned the vendor into a player worth watching out for. This is very evident in their Fatal1ty range of products.

More so though in the unassuming Extreme6 motherboard we tested. This isn't the high-end SKU that has all the bells and whistles, far from it. It's actually just a little better than the Extreme4, but what sets it apart from the Extreme4 is that this one is a monster overclocker. It's not heavy on features and it can be considered quite barren, but for the asking price (at least the USD price) it does nothing short of impress.

As a result of having one of the

world's top overclockers working at ASRock, the Extreme6 is tuned for performance and stability at settings at which other boards may fall apart. This is particularly true when comparing it to the Z68 family. The advancement ASRock has made is staggering and, even though the company doesn't get the respect in enthusiast circles they deserve, it's only a matter of time until it is considered amongst the best.

As stated earlier, this is a fairly basic Z77 motherboard, with a lot of visual appeal as the gold accents and black components have grown on us. It's neatly laid out and there's nothing fancy on the board. Just the basics like your POST LED and everything that goes with that. It lacks the PLX PEX 8747 chip, so if you run SLI or CrossFire you'll have reduced traffic at eight lanes per card. Since we are talking about PCIe 3.0 connectivity though, an eight lane link is the equivalent of PCIe 2.0 16x so there's nothing lost in terms of performance. Add to which there's no latency overhead which is present on all motherboards which use the solution to support a greater number of graphics cards.

SPECS

Chipset
Intel Z77
Memory
4x240-pin DDR3
CPU support
Intel Core i7 SNB/
iB (LGA1155)
Slots
2x PCIe 3.0 16x, 2x
PCI, 2x PCIe 1x

PLUS

- Supreme overclocking
- Fantastic BIOS

MINUS

- A little short on features

BOTTOM LINE

One of the simplest but fastest Z77 motherboards on the market.

The only downside we found was the absence of a backup BIOS chip, should this one go wrong you end up with a dead motherboard. We must again make mention that the included package is rather thin on features. Short of that there's really nothing to complain about and this board is very solid.

The performance of the motherboard when using Ivy Bridge CPUs is worth highlighting. Sure enough this will make very little difference to the vast majority of people, but to the enthusiast and dedicated overclocker, there's no snivelling at memory speeds north side of 3GHz. Especially if the achieved memory speed is using DDR3 2,666MHz memory with nothing but air cooling. That kind of overclocking headroom is usually reserved for the ASUS and GIGABYTE boards, but the Extreme6 has proved it's equally capable of reaching such stratospheric speeds and breaking records. This one may not appeal to all the gamers, but if you're an overclocker or performance inclined, give this one some serious consideration as it really is an amazing motherboard.

- Neo Sibeko

NAG

9

Cooler Master TPC 812

Supplier Sonic Informed

Website www.coolermaster.com **RRP** R799

Don't double take; you've seen a cooler like this before. Actually you've seen plenty of them from every vendor out there. It's the tried and tested design that, while effective, is very boring. It's what we've had in the market since 2007 or so and not much has changed.

Cooler Master has managed to use vapour chamber technology on this unit though to separate it from the others. As vapour chambers allow much better heat dissipation, they in theory should work better than heat pipes. As true as that may be, on the TPC 812 we are hard pressed to notice the difference. It's not that the cooler is bad or incapable in any way, in fact it's actually good. It's just that we are not convinced that this level of performance isn't attainable with just heat pipes.

After all, it's not able to keep the same temperatures as the Noctua NH-D14 which still remains the best air cooler on the market. In comparison to that the TPC 812 is about five to six degrees warmer under load. Not much, really, and certainly not enough to make a difference in overclocking headroom, particularly when using an Ivy Bridge or SNB-E CPU. Cooler Master allows you, and in some ways encourages you, to use two fans in a push-pull combination, but for our own experience on just about every cooler, it makes no difference in performance. The noise levels do rise though, so we'd rather use a single fan.

As stated earlier, there's not much to say about this fan aesthetically, it's pretty much your standard design and far from the good looking V6GT that the company released a while ago. The TPC 812 is a significantly better cooler though, and for that we'll gladly suffer the dull looks.

In a crowded market, we admire the fact that Cooler Master has gone forth and tried to introduce something different with vapour chambers on CPU coolers. Be it you're using SNB-E, IB or any other platform for that matter where cooling performance is paramount, the TPC 812 will not disappoint you. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

8



SPECS

Size
138x103x163 (mm)
Weight
978g
Compatibility
2011 / 1366 / 775
1156 / 1155 / AM2
AM3 / AM3+ / FM1

PLUS

- Quiet
- Can accommodate two fans

MINUS

- Very generic design

BOTTOM LINE

A competent cooler from Cooler Master that performs admirably.



Intel 520 240GB SSD



Supplier Intel

Website www.intel.com **ERP** R4,799

Intel has finally decided to embrace the SandForce controllers which are dominating most performance drives today. Unlike the previous 510 drive, which relied on a Marvell controller along with 34nm MLC NAND and some cache, the new drive sports an SF-2281 controller, 25nm NAND with no cache. As many have read, the smaller node NAND memory tends to last a shorter time, or if you will, has far fewer write cycles than 34 and higher nm NAND.

Thanks to some ingenuity from Intel, you don't have to concern yourself about a reduced lifespan, as the 520 drive has a 1.2 million-hour MTBF rating along with a five year warranty. You'll not find any other SSD on the market that has that kind of MTBF and warranty. So reliability should not be an issue for anyone.

The power consumption has gone up however in both idle and active states, so if this drive does end up in an ultrabook or notebook, there may be reduced battery time. However, since we're talking mW, it shouldn't be too noticeable to most users.

The gains in performance in comparison to the old drive are staggering. Not only do you get built-in drive encryption, which alone would make the upgrade worthwhile, you also get significantly better performance. At least, in our internal testing we found this to be true. In every test the 520 drive obliterated the 510 we had previously reviewed. So compelling is the performance that had it not been for the Plextor M3 Pro drive in our current Dream Machine, this would be the drive to beat, as it easily matched the Patriot Pyro SE 240GB.

This drive isn't cheap. It's actually very expensive, but quality and performance isn't cheap. If you can stomach the price, you're unlikely to find many drives better than this one on the market. This is a worthy successor to a drive that we always liked. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

9



PLUS

- Very fast
- Reliability

MINUS

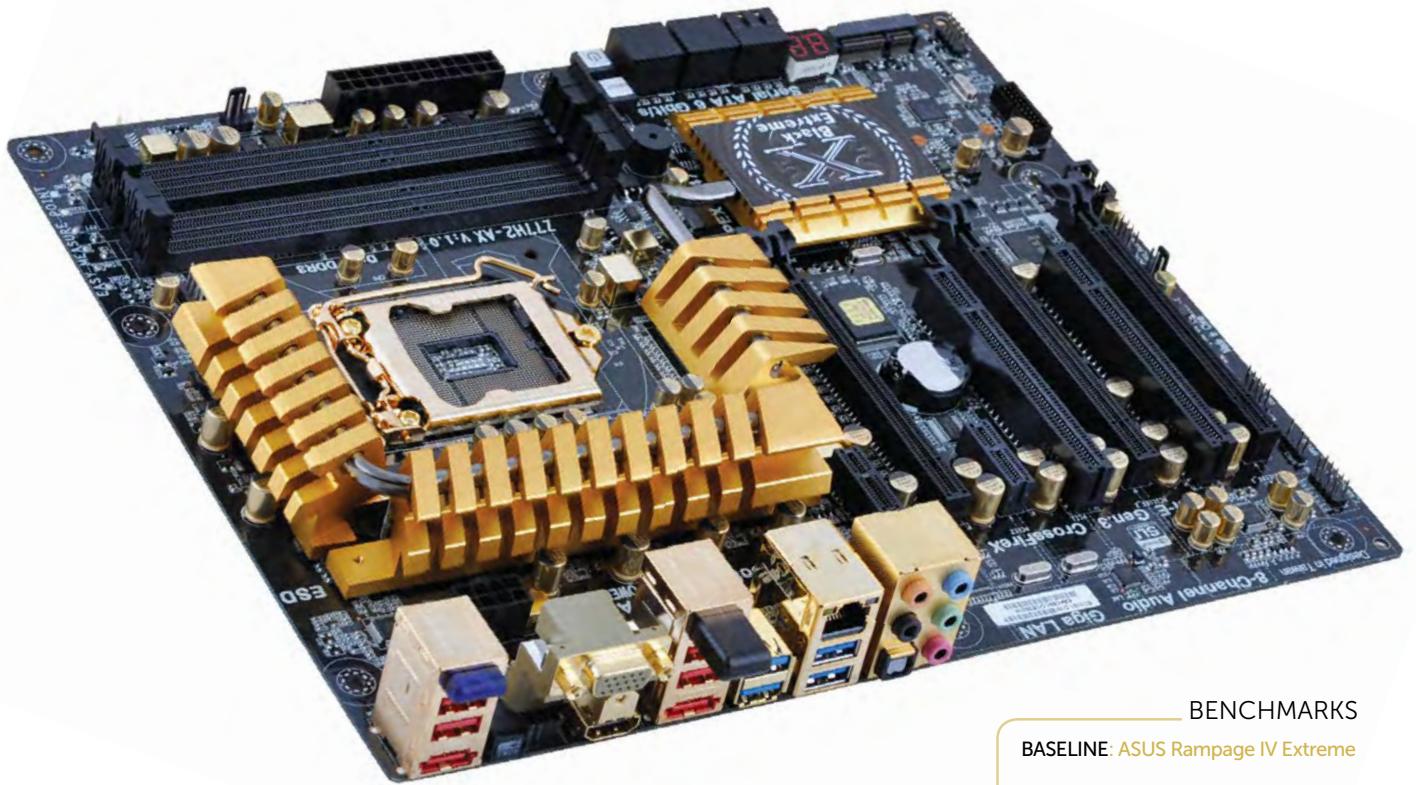
- Price

BOTTOM LINE

The best consumer level SSD from Intel and one well worth buying.

SPECS

Controller
SF-2281
NAND type
25nm MLC
Form factor
2.5"
Interface
SATA 6Gbps



ECS Z77H2-AX



Supplier ECS **Website** www.ecs.com.tw **ERP** R4,800

Right then, some mystical force has inspired ECS to make a gold motherboard. It's comical in a way, but at the same time it grows on you. After all, say what you will about ECS, but nobody else has ever had a gold motherboard. What better time as well to introduce such a component than with the Z77 chipset?

Well, not quite, you see; Z77 unlike X79, P67 or Z68, is a chipset that is rather complex. Complex in that its implementations across the vendors, or at least their products, vary dramatically. So this newfound freedom allows vendors to either botch it up completely or get it very right. ECS with this motherboard finds itself somewhere in the middle.

Mechanically it has everything you'll ever need on a high-end Z77 motherboard. It has a PLX multiplexing chip for full speed high bandwidth PCIe 3.0 devices where electronically all the slots are 16X. It supports LUCID's MVP technology, has built-in Bluetooth and Wi-Fi connectivity, USB 3.0 support (courtesy of native support on Z77 and 3rd generation Core CPUs) and just about anything you can think of to add to a motherboard.

All this is actually well laid out and

ECS has placed the POST LED, clear CMOS, power and reset buttons in a more convenient location as compared to their previous attempts. So it looks good physically and we will give the nod to ECS for producing a noteworthy motherboard in this regard. Sadly as always it's not as smooth in the BIOS. This is where a vendor can make or break a product.

Fortunately ECS didn't do too much damage here; in fact it's arguably their best effort in a while. Our qualms with ECS are in the layout, functionality and options grouping. USB configuration is separate from SATA configuration, which is also in a separate menu from on-board sound and LAN control. You have to wonder if the company isn't aware of how BIOS options have worked for years on end now. Every other vendor seems to follow some logical layout for this but ECS has chosen to go the other route.

The absence of temperature reading is perplexing as well. So you'll have no idea if your heat sink is mounted correctly or not and you'll have to use Windows software to get your temperatures. Again, odd considering this is one of the most basic options in any BIOS. It's what we have always

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: ASUS Rampage IV Extreme

3DMark Vantage CPU	33,124 46,760
Cinebench 11.5	9.41 13.43
AIDA 64 copy	27,994MB/s 20,396MB/s
3DMark03	113,517 127,025

SPECS

Chipset
Intel Z77
Memory
4x240-pin DDR3
CPU support
Intel Core i7 SNB/
iB (LGA1155)
Slots
3x PCIe 3.0 16x, 2x
PCI, 2x PCIe 1x

PLUS

- Good performance
- It's gold
- Lots of features

MINUS

- Probably sold out already
- Odd BIOS options

BOTTOM LINE

The best ECS motherboard to date despite some quirks.

experienced with ECS products: one step forward only to take two steps back. As a premium Black series board, we would not expect such oversight.

With that said, this board is rather efficient; it's very easy to overclock and once you get to grips with the oddly laid-out BIOS, it isn't bad at all. In fact it's ECS's best showing to date. For some reason, unlike all other motherboards out there that have the PLX multiplexing chip, this board manages to hold on to its performance in synthetic benchmarks at least. It matches the boards without the bridge chips in many benchmarks and this is great for those who want to eke out every bit of performance from their machines. If you fancy the gold and want something different, but capable, consider the ECS Z77H2-AX, as it has some charm to it. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

Tritton Primer Xbox 360 Stereo Headset

Supplier Comet Computing
Website www.cometcomputing.co.za
RRP R1,099



The last time I strapped a pair of Tritton headphones to my head I was pleasantly surprised, but the Primer's wireless functionality had me a little sceptical. Wireless headsets can be bulky and uncomfortable or slack in the volume department, but thankfully, the Primer does neither.

If you want volume, it's delivered here in bucket loads. Crank this set up to just 50% and that'll be ample, making the prospect of full volume terrifying. It's surprisingly capable of delivering plenty of clear, thumping bass and sharp high-frequency tones, but becomes a little muddy around the mid-section. Two other slight technical hitches exist: a tiny popping noise is present when playing the Xbox menu sound effects; and a slight electric hum (no doubt caused by the base unit's USB power source) that's only noticeable at low volumes or total silence – it doesn't scale with volume, however, so it shouldn't trouble you.

The Primer is technically sufficient, but its ergonomics are truly impressive. Its small "on-ear" cups might look like they'd cause some ear pain, but they're actually very comfortable, even during extended use, and don't press too hard on the side of your head; and the entire device is so lightweight you'll soon forget it's even there. Incorporated into the design are two volume sliders (one for voice and the other for in-game audio), and a microphone mute button – everything you could reasonably expect to find.

- Geoff Burrows

SPECS

Wireless frequency 5.8GHz
 Wireless range 10m (claimed) 7m (tested)
 Input Xbox 360 RCA (adaptor included)
 Frequency response 25Hz – 25kHz
 Speaker diameter 40m

PLUS

- Great bass performance
- Plenty of volume on offer
- Very comfortable

MINUS

- Slight hum at low levels
- Occasional popping
- Imperfect mid-tones

BOTTOM LINE

A solid offering from Tritton.



SW-G2.1 3000
70-Watt for Gaming



Lychas HS-G550



SP-1250G
4-Watt for Gaming



SW-G2.1 1200
30-Watt for Gaming



Cavimanus HS-G700V



SW-G2.1 1250
38-Watt for Gaming

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GG



Zen and the art of Minecrafting

What makes a game a game? It's a question I've given a lot of thought to recently, and not because I've also spent a lot of time digging holes in Minecraft for no obvious reason. Okay, it is because I've spent a lot of time digging holes in Minecraft for no obvious reason. Or any reason whatsoever, if I'm completely honest about it. Hey, I don't need a reason to dig holes in a video game any more than I need a reason to play video games in the first place.

Because surely a game can be a game simply for its own sake – or indeed, a game can't be anything else without breaching the laws of physics and precipitating a self-accreting black hole and bringing about the total annihilation of the universe (or something). I mean, pretty much any regular game objective you could think of is entirely artificial, subject only to itself, and confined to the game anyway – it's not like swapping some code variable to a new state is going to change reality in any meaningful way except perhaps to empty a bag of chips, and even then only indirectly.

When you break it down to its fundamental constituent parts, the gameplay in every game ever is, basically, clicking on things and/or pressing buttons. For the purposes of competitive gaming, this might also include clicking on things and/or pressing buttons faster than other people for points. Everything else is just context and textures.

It's why I struggle with the discrete concepts of "casual" and "hardcore" gaming – or, maybe more specifically, with the distinctions between them – because at this level, and it's the one that counts, there aren't any. I read somewhere once that everything¹ is made of the bits of some supermassive star that exploded, and so we're all just the same cosmic stuff in subtly different rearrangements. Games are more or less exactly the same, but with user input functions instead of space dust².

So what makes a game a game?³ You know, it doesn't



"Because surely a game can be a game simply for its own sake – or indeed, a game can't be anything else without breaching the laws of physics and precipitating a self-accreting black hole and bringing about the total annihilation of the universe (or something)."

even matter. I'm having fun, and now if you'll excuse me, I have some more holes to dig.

[What follows are the remaining words you as the reader would have gotten if Tarryn didn't get distracted by Diablo III and/or Minecraft this month. Here is some Latin placeholder text. Enjoy. ADJ]

*Bit digendunt fugias nate plitatem doluptius, omnihil enihiciis estoribus molorestio bea dolo to quodi doluptae nobitationet vel inisimin nobit eriae et omnihil id quia nonsequ atessitibus audis imi, sed que por maion essequa tempore comnis a cum ipsa nobis vitibus, il eosto eate veliam aut quia disque eatio es volorumque il mint, quam vernam endit, senime que cullorr orepli quasit di dolor si ulpa aut essime quamus dem sit ducit labo. Abo. **NAG***
- Tarryn van der Byl

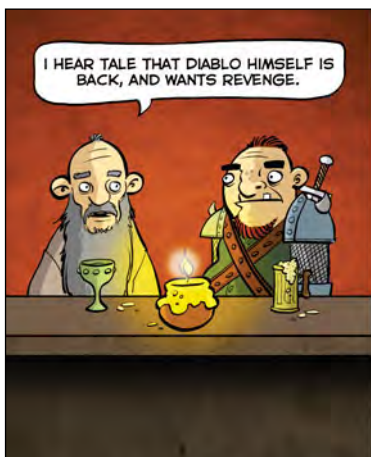
¹Everything with an atomic number higher than helium, anyway, according to Wikipedia. Presumably including toffee. I just ate a toffee, which makes me a cannibal. Even an autosarcophagist, which also sounds like a totally badass Norwegian black metal band and probably is.

²Although the computer it's coded on is also made of space dust, so games are ultimately space dust products too. I should apply for the trademark before somebody else thinks of it.

³Besides Space Dust™.

Extra Life

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Wireless N Media Router*



NBG5715

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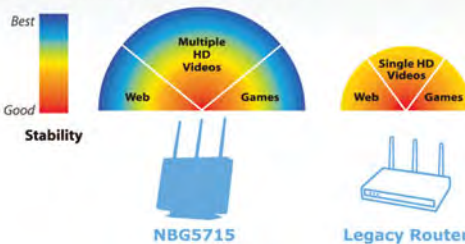
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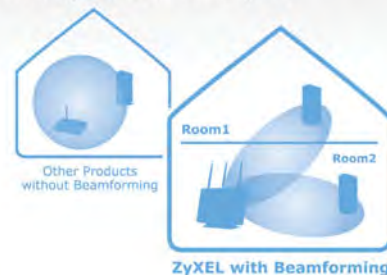
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