

# NAG

PC / PLAYSTATION 3 / XBOX 360 / NINTENDO

**REVIEWS**  
Diablo III  
**Max Payne 3**  
Tom Clancy's  
Ghost Recon:  
Future Soldier  
**Dragon's Dogma**

## METRO LAST LIGHT

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when you leave  
the room

**FEATURES**  
**Into the Pixel**  
The winners for  
2012 from E3

**Competitive  
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A quick look

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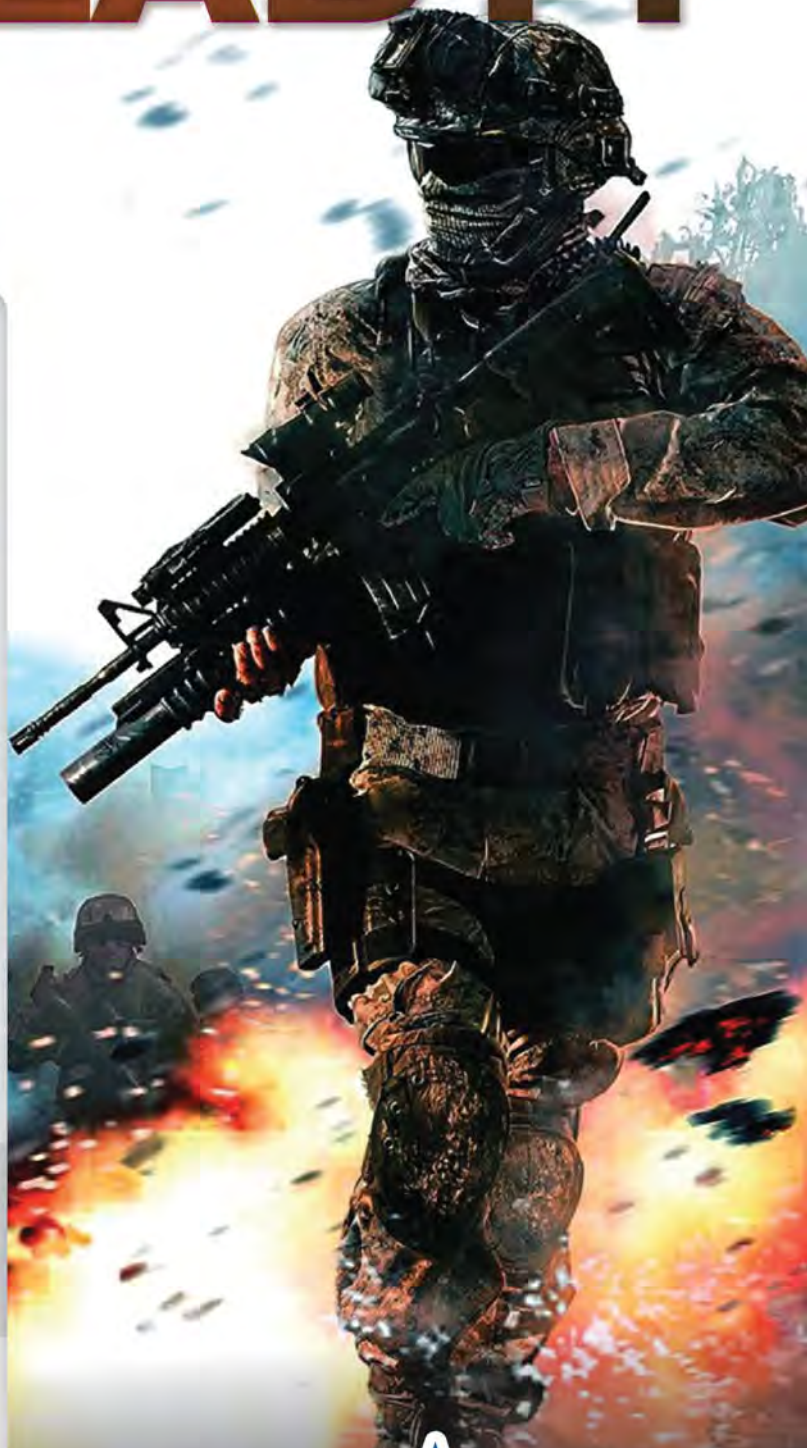
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www.zinio.com/nag  
www.facebook.com/NAGMagazine  
www.twitter.com/nagcoza



## Printing

Impress Web Printers  
031 263 2755

## Distribution

On the Dot  
Stuart Dickerson / 011 401 5932



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## 30 OPENING THE DOOR TO ESPORTS

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People play *League of Legends* in South Africa. It's kind of a thing. Check out this update on what's happening in the NGL's *LoL* league.

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This year's Into the Pixel winners produced a stunning collection of video game art, and we'd love for you to see it.

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Return to the inhospitable and deadly Moscow subway as Artyom, encountering all manner of horrors and hardships in your search for answers.



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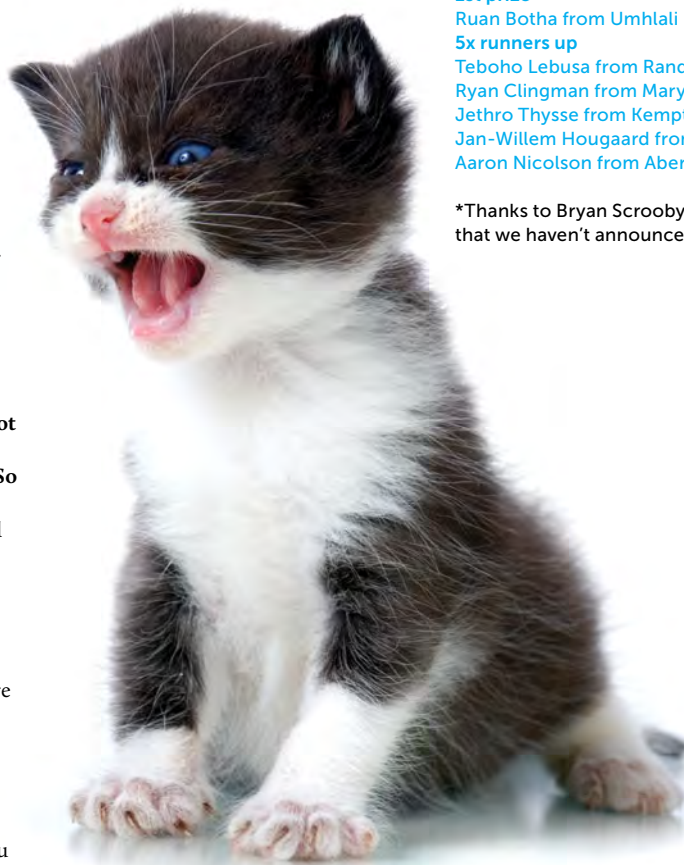
# A little bit of everything

It's an angry day in the office today. Jacqui is banging the doors of the prize cabinet; Cheryl is speaking through clenched teeth at the support people hosting our email; Lauren is ranting about the NAG LAN sponsorship because some of our clients are a bit slow with the paperwork and logos. Dane is probably irritated (he's at home so we can't see) taking screenshots for *Max Payne 3* because he never does it while playing the game; Chris is annoyed at all the technical problems owning a new phone brings [*No I just couldn't get Plants vs Zombies to load, but it's all good now; you can all relax! AD*] (and of course having to do pages over because of advertising changes and waiting for Dane to take screenshots); Geoff says he's fine; and I'm slightly annoyed because all of this is impacting on my deadline which is today. I've also not written this part of the magazine yet because I was at a theatre show last night and I've been off my game lately due to a nasty winter cold – even the cashier at my local Woolworths told me I'm picking up weight because I'm not running because I'm sick. E3 also hasn't helped because that happened right in the middle of our deadline cycle. So yeah, if I wasn't such a responsible adult I'd run away and never come back. All that aside we will get through it and when we do, all the problems getting there will make the achievement that much sweeter.

I don't really have anything to say this month. It happens occasionally – like once a year or so – and when it does, I do that thing all the other boring editors of magazines do – talk about what's in the magazine. So here goes. Sorry, but please understand. It's the best I can do under these trying conditions. Actually some of it needs a little introduction anyway and I need to pretend to be a proper magazine every now and then.

**Diablo III:** This is the big *Diablo III* review issue and as you will see I've asked everyone to tell me what they thought of the game. You will notice that Cheryl also wrote a bit but didn't score it – this is because she's not a game reviewer (didn't pass the final exam) but still plays *Diablo III*. This all just goes to show how universally liked the franchise is and you can safely ignore all the whiners and cry-babies – it's an amazing game – amazing but not perfect.

**Into the Pixel:** Here at NAG we've got some mileage under our belts in terms of gaming experience and when you wade this deep into gaming culture you start looking at/ for the bigger picture, the deeper meaning of it all, if you will. The first, and convenient, stop along many roads/ journeys of inner discovery and "seeking of meaning," is art. Is gaming art? Is art gaming? Is gaming life? Anyway, each year the best of the best in terms of gaming artwork is chosen at E3 – enjoy it, we gave it plenty space to show it all off. The bonus here is you get five pages of magazine and only have to write 200 odd words – LOL.



## SURVEY WINNERS\*:

### 1st prize

Ruan Botha from Umhlali

### 5x runners up

Teboho Lebusa from Randlespark;

Ryan Clingman from Maryvale;

Jethro Thyse from Kempton Park;

Jan-Willem Hougaard from Bellville;

Aaron Nicolson from Aberdeen.

\*Thanks to Bryan Scrooby for spotting that we haven't announced it.

**Metro:** Last Light: the first game (*Metro 2033*) was critically acclaimed but didn't do well because THQ didn't spend enough money marketing it. They have promised to change their ways for this game so expect big things – one of the reasons we gave it lots of love in this issue. There was also a mix-up between me and Ster Kinekor on the *Darksiders II* issue/cover... They thought it was going to be the cover feature but I had no idea this was the plan, people went overseas, emails were exchanged and eyebrows were raised. End of the day everything worked out perfectly and thankfully everyone is now happy. Phew.

As for the rest, we've got some big reviews, some cool hardware (including a whole car) and news on competitive gaming. It's a great issue but I'm glad it's finished. One more day and someone could have gotten hurt. **NAG**

- RedTide  
Editor





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# INBOX

## LETTER OF THE MONTH JULY 2012

From: Andreas

Subject: LOLBOOBS!

I know it may seem crude to state at first... but I haven't encountered any sex orientated\* games of late or ones with all fantasies man can conjure, like Singles did a while back. Most games are provocative to no end, rubbing right against the limits, but never focussing on them, or giving us those extra few screen-tilting centimetres. Don't give me all the nobility, we all love boobs and the like. The world has accommodated every other kind of genre to fulfil man's desire - we wield wands (well, at least some of us... choose to...), fight dragons, command a space-faring vessel across the galaxy, shoot insurgents from Russia and Africa, kick the winning goal, kill zombies, and drive cars the likes of which we'd never afford an exhaust system of, in real life... why not this one? There will always be a market for such a thing, and deep down, every guy wants some virtual action, some real visual vistas... especially those gamers that probably paged passed your 'fitness' section frantically, all the while hissing like a threatened cat! Stupid ESRB... seriously, have a vote in your magazine; get the actual ratio of boob-to-no-boob numbers going. Apologies to all the ladies I'm potentially undermining/threatening (the livelihood of)/insulting with this, but boys will be boys, and someone needs to come out and say it.

\*Okay, maybe not orientated, but free-to-see (?)

Truth be said, mate of mine at BT told (dared) me I couldn't send a 'controversial' mail to NAG that'd actually get published - Here's my attempt.

*Clearly your mate from BT is wrong – but I'm not publishing this to prove him wrong (but it is a bonus for you). I'm impressed that your mail is so well put together – often these kinds of pleas are written by people who I imagine hang off scaffolding during the day and beat their chests during the night. It really depends on what level of sex you want in your games. There's plenty of nudity and even some sheet action (across the Kinsey scale) in current games, so I'm not sure what you're looking for. If you trawl the Internet you can find some explicit games but they're generally rubbish. Big reputable studios experiment on the fringes of what is acceptable and occasionally stick a toe into the unknown. I personally don't see the need for "sex and boobs" in games unless they fit in with whatever else is going on. Mass Effect is an excellent example of this. TLDR: Sex is fine in games if it belongs there otherwise the line between gaming and pornography gets blurry. Ed.*

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

#### HARD TECHNICAL STUFF

Land mail: P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158

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

*a standing ovation (you would have settled for a back slap). But no. all you got was dead silence and confused faces. Finally (thankfully) someone coughs (too loud), giving you the chance to sit down again and wonder how you got it all so very wrong. Ed.*

From: Dominique



Subject: Sample

I am not sure how you are going to take what I have done. It may cause you to have a hernia, but please, hear me out first. I have sent you (what I think) the best gift a gamer could get for his/her birthday. Some people may say I have

From: Matthew

Subject: :-... --- :-...

I was reading my June issue of NAG magazine at my grandfather's house while he was doing a crossword on the opposite side of the table. Next thing I know he asks me "What does L.O.L. mean?" So I told him "Laughing Out Loud. Why?" So he said "Secret Message LOL" I didn't know what he was talking about then I realised he had translated the Morse code on the spine of my magazine. He's 92 and served as a code breaker in WWII.

*That's the best thing I've heard in years. Very cool! Please tell your grandfather*

*that his skills are still working for him all these years later because we're going to send you a cool prize for that one. Still laughing, excellent. Ed.*

From: Tayab

Subject: Doesn't relate to anything necessary...

Please use your old magazine layout; this new one is kind of lame. Before I could easily spot game ratings and stuff and now it's like "what?!" Well I'm sure I'm not the only one concerned. *You stood up, got everyone's attention and said what you had to say in a loud clear voice. You were expecting loud cheers and clapping, perhaps even*

## ON THE FORUMS

Unplanned alien baby in your womb – come share with us.  
Visit our forums: [www.nag.co.za/forums](http://www.nag.co.za/forums)

**Q:** To those of you who've been playing games for most of your life: why do you still play games? Is it just because they're there, or are you still getting something out of them (enjoyment, something to do, I hate my real life, etc.) that's keeping you hooked? Discuss.

**"I pretty much play these days because I can, and it's mainly because I've always wanted to own a nice PC and a rack full of games. I enjoy games, but when (and yes, they do) I find them becoming cumbersome my DVD/Blu-Ray collection mysteriously grows..."**

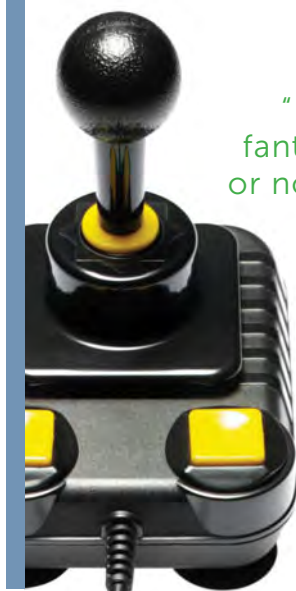
Toxxyc

**"I game mainly to explore these amazing fantasy realms made flesh. That and believe it or not, socialising. I play online to keep contact with friends from Durban to Venice."**

Shaderow

**"Games have been a part of my life since I was a toddler, whenever I came home I would go to my room and play so eventually it became a full part of my life making me who I am today."**

Demikid



mutilated your wonderful magazines, but I did it out of love.

I was in a bit of a dilemma: it's my boyfriend's 21st birthday soon, and I had no clue what to get him. I just had to get him something memorable and special to make his day even more special. So I started thinking about all his likes and interests. Well, they mainly consisted of games and Star Wars. I have got him countless Star Wars gifts before, so that idea was out. Then it hit me... why not make a collage out of all his old NAG magazines lying around his room? It's better than them sitting on the floor collecting dust. So with a little help from his brother, I stole them and so began my quest to gain the "best girlfriend" status. Once I was done, I couldn't just leave it at that. It needed to have a message too. So I tracked down the titles of 21 different games that he likes and constructed a message that read: "Happy 21st Birthday Matthew". I could not believe the final result...it was amazing. When I got it laminated, the guy behind the counter was speechless. If strangers could appreciate the awesomeness that you have helped create, I am sure that his reaction would be unforgettable too.

*Then I replied like this: Here's the deal. It's an awesome idea and you're a definite "keeper" as they say. However, if he freaks a little about you cutting up his collection – because this might happen – I will see if we can replace any of his favourites – just in case – some guys collect the magazine. I think I'll definitely put this in the July issue – I can add a message from you at the bottom so reply to this and tell me what it is. You've got around 20 words. ;)*

*Then she said: Happy birthday to the most amazing, game obsessed boyfriend in the world. Matt, I hope this makes your day. My work is now done. Ed.*

**From: Jason**  
**Subject: The health issue**

At my school we have to do a month long trek from our school to the De Hoop Nature reserve. We only had 3 forms of transport: Bicycle, raft (Breede River) and of course foot. It was during November and I had my Birthday during this "Hardcore" School outing. It did disappoint me that I would miss my birthday but it was near the end. This was 2010 you see and my Dad promised me to buy Fallout: New Vegas and Call of Duty Black Ops. My friends and I talked about it the whole time. I deserved a physical break. To put things short, when I came home I never slept

properly for the first month. My parents always said go to the gym or go run outside. I always used to say that I did a month of nonstop exercise and I don't need to exercise. I have used this excuse since then until I got the new issue of NAG. I have been delaying exercise for so long and now a gaming magazine has an article saying "go do exercise". I can't thank you guys enough. You have helped me get out and be active. You guys have achieved something that my parents, sport coach and friends could not and greatly appreciate it! Long live NAG!

*To be honest we did talk about that feature a lot, talked about how it would be received, talked about what you guys and girls would think. You know how I know something is a must publish article – when we're not sure that we should publish it. Since I started doing NAG I've had a rule – if I'm worried about how something will look, sound or feel then I just do it*

*anyway and screw the consequences. Anything else would just be pandering to fears and what people might think and we gamers don't roll like that. Ed.*

**From: Jean**  
**Subject: Curios!**  
I'm Jean <deleted>, this is probably a random email but I am extremely curious on how does one get the opportunity to write reviews on gaming? Do I need specific qualifications or do I just have to be able to explain games very well? I would really appreciate your feedback.

*From the online Merriam-Webster dictionary:  
plural cu•ri•os  
Definition of CURIO  
: something (as a decorative object) considered novel, rare, or bizarre  
: curiosity; also : an unusual or bizarre person  
How apt, especially the last bit. ;) Ed.*

From: Jason

Subject: Lifesaver

I had recently bought a new Xbox game which gave me a bit of trouble. I was so keen to play it when I got home. There was however one problem... When I loaded it into the Xbox the automatic update messed up, and so the game became unreadable. I was extremely bleak and all I could think was "noooooo, all my hard earned cash has gone down the drain". Now this is where it gets awesome. When I got my May issue of the NAG magazine, I slipped the DVD which comes with the mag into my computer, and I noticed that there was an Xbox update on the disk. I thought to myself, "Is this a second chance? Will this make my Xbox work properly again and read this game. If it does the guys at NAG are going to become my best friends." I put the update on my flash, put it in the Xbox and uploaded it. There was suspense as I watched the update load. The Xbox then restarted and I saw that the update had completed as there was a new interface. It was now the moment of truth. I put the game in, and what do know? My Xbox read it first time with no problems! I was ecstatic, in fact so ecstatic that I jumped up and down and did a little jig. So all I can say is thank you guys for the awesome magazine and being a total lifesaver for my Xbox. I can now play the game without any hassles. Your hard work is much appreciated.

*Excellent, good to know we can help. But your game disc should have the latest update on it anyway. That's how I thought it worked. Ed.*

From: Sebastian

Subject: Surly Gamers

I find it amazing how much damage a gamer wants to cause to a game, even if they like it overall.

The best example is Mass Effect 3 of course, it has many positive reviews from people that play games for a living (like you lovely people), but I found that it has a user score of 5/10 on www.metacritic.com All because they didn't like the ending? Even though they are adding free DLC? Not only this, but EA 'won' the worst company of the year award, beating horrible companies, so obviously, most the voters were the people who probably spend the most time on the internet: gamers. It has happened recently too with Diablo III, probably because of its technical issues, but that does not justify the horribly low 4.1. Us, as gamers, have become very aggressive with the use of the internet and I dislike it, whether it is because they think that it doesn't matter because nobody knows them or they're trolls, it's still unacceptable to rate games like Mass Effect 3 with zero because of a bad ending since there are people out there that pay attention to



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.

Johan van der Merwe, "Thanks for a great mag! Been an avid reader for a long time! I thought I'd commemorate the reveal of Assassin's Creed III with a tomahawk, but not just any tomahawk... a NAG tomahawk! It's made 100% in Blender."

that, and may not buy a good product as a result.

*This is why the Internet will always be a dumb place, because it is full of dumb people. I was going to do a whole Ed's Note on that Diablo III score topic fiasco but it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. The future: the Internet gets so full of dumb people that all the smart people abandon it for green pastures. What is left is a dumb place filled with dumb people (a few smart ones are left for monitoring purposes) saying dumb things. Some say this has already happened up to three times already. This is why you can trust NAG, we no dumb. Ed.*

From: Henry

Subject: Don't listen when they say gaming is uneducational\*

Time and time again I've been told by various groups of people (parents, teachers etc.) that I'm wasting my time with games and that it's destroying my mind... What they don't know is that between all that violence, strategy, hours of dialog etc. is actually vast amounts of useful knowledge! For example I scored 90% for my History exam thanks to Napoleon Total War and Call of Duty (all WW2 CODs). I had gained so much extra information from these games that not only did I have to study less but I managed to easily ace it! Then a conversation came up in biology about augmentation and how technology is going to increase the potential of man... Deus Ex right there! There have been other cases such as in conversations I been able to put in my 2cent remark thanks to gaming knowledge. This is all still excluding the fact that most games also teach you how to react and think quicker. There is still more that gaming can teach us but

## THE SHORTS

Extracts of n00b from NAG letters

*"They are disorganised, usually only have half of their confectionery in stock, and we as customers are served by total zombies who seem asleep most of the time. And one cannot complain because there is, as you say, no manager in sight."*  
- Emil

*"Once inside I realise that not only were the seat a bit uncomfortable (in all fairness it could be that I am too tall perhaps) but the screen was significantly smaller than what I am used to, this puzzled me because everyone always speaks about Canal Walk's cinema being so great. Yeah I'm never going through that again. Ster Kinekor is my happy place"*  
- Cheslyn

I would just like to thank it for giving me everything that is has had so far and proving all those people wrong!

Thanks NAG for such an amazing magazine! Keep it up

*\* If you ignore this word most of what he says makes sense. Ed.*

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@Ling83  
5 shops later and I finally have my baby brother's @nagcoza magazine. #phew

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Things that go down often: Submarines. My girlfriend. Australians. Moles. Lindsey Lohan's attractiveness and the @nagcoza Forums.



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# Look & Listen

## For the Fans



## I, Gamer

### Zen gaming 101

A few weeks back, I was called out by Miktar for being a whiny gamer over Twitter. Although his suffixed smiley with its tongue sticking out implied he was joking, many a true thing is said in jest. His response to my comment poked a niggling finger into my side and reminded me about something that I've been grappling with for the last few months: how to minimise a growing tendency to be a whiny, negative gamer. Initially I thought it would be a simple mindset adjustment, but it's remarkable how quickly one regresses.

I think I first became aware that I was slipping down this super-slick slippery slope somewhere between the utter dejection that was the *Diablo III* beta, and playing *Fez*. I know it's a weird combination but sit tight. For the weekend that *Diablo III* opened its brimstone-encrusted beta gates to the masses, I only managed to play a few hours thanks to the colossal strain on the game's servers. It was a beta, for Pete's sake, but I still let it get to me and I immediately took to Google Talk on the Monday morning to moan to whoever would listen. The one who listened was NAG's very own GeometriX who offered the kind of sage-like advice ordinarily reserved for characters like Gandalf and Obi-Wan: "*Diablo III* will be what it will be". Despite the fact that this was a text conversation, his tone was undeniable: zenned-out, pure acceptance. I resolved to shift my mindset then and there, and stop unintentionally wasting so much energy on the uncontrollable, negative aspects of gaming.

A few days later I had one of those rare gaming moments of inordinate bliss while playing Polytron's *Fez*. I capped off my NAG Online review of the game by saying that "*Fez* is the kind of title that'll cheer you up and remind you why it is we play games in the first place". (Did I just quote myself? Is that even necessary?) The point is that I'd gone from one side of the game-induced emotional spectrum to the complete opposite in a few short days, and *Fez* only served to reiterate that focusing on the good stuff would yield some truly great gaming vibes. Somebody pass the bong.

And then a few days later *Diablo III* came out properly, and I found myself right back at square one thanks to the balls-up that was the game's launch. And what made my sarcastic disbelief even more unnecessary is that I wasn't even playing the game - I'm still not. It also didn't help that Jim Sterling was probably 100% right in saying that, in this instance, gamers have the right to feel entitled and pissed off. But whatever, the online requirements for *Diablo III* is the topic of another column; one which I'll hopefully no longer feel the need to write.

Basically, I'm trying hard to find my "there is no spoon" moment - that moment when the world around me dissolves into cascading letters and numbers and I reach some level of transcendence with the gaming industry. I'm not saying we don't have a right to moan when it's warranted (I agree with Jim Sterling regarding *Diablo III*) however, I do believe there's also a tendency to allow the negatives to consume us to such an extent that they overshadow the experience of gaming. And last time I checked, it was all about having fun.

- Miklós Szecsei

## Forza Horizon gets release date, expands Kinect integration

Back in March, the announcement of *Forza Motorsport* spin-off *Forza Horizon* caused a bit of concern. With an all-new developer at the helm and an implied shift in focus from simulated hardcore racing to more playful arcade sensibilities, that's to be expected. Now, we have a release date for the spin-off:

October 23rd is when we'll all get to see whether *Horizon* developer Playground Games (founded in 2009 and partly comprised of former *DiRT* developers, as well as a few devs from way back in the days of Psygnosis) has the chops to carry Turn 10 Studios' (main *Forza* developers) heavy torch and keep fans satisfied.

## Ubisoft unveils Watch Dogs, E3 crowds do a double-take



French publisher Ubisoft is about to add another new IP to their already healthy stable of AAA titles. *Watch Dogs* is an open-world action adventure game that looks like a mash-up of *Grand Theft Auto* and *Deus Ex*. Set in the not too distant future, in a corrupt city where interconnectivity is king, you play a vigilante hacker by the name of Pearce.

The game's tagline is "everything is connected; connection is power" and as such you'll be taking control of and using numerous pieces of technology found throughout the city. Be it traffic lights, cell phones, security cameras or PCs, if it's made up of microchips and data, Pearce will hack it. During the game's E3 debut presentation, Pearce could be seen hacking cell phones to dupe NPCs into performing certain actions; and hacking traffic lights to cause a massive accident in order to pin a particular target.

Also seen during the demo was the ability to call up personal information on any person in your vicinity; this action, Ubisoft confirmed, would

lead to numerous side quests and opportunities. For example, you might see that a certain person is suspected of plagiarism. You could then locate that person's home, hack their personal computer, find proof of plagiarism, and then use the information to blackmail them. This sort of morally ambiguous tone will pervade the title, and despite Ubisoft keeping quiet about the finer character details, they have confirmed that Pearce will be a "gray area" sort of guy.

The game was demoed on PC and the attention to detail in the environments and characters was unbelievable. *Watch Dogs* is officially coming to PC, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, but Ubisoft mentioned that they wanted to get the game onto as many platforms as possible. This title, along with *Star Wars 1313*, raised a lot of questions regarding next-gen consoles. With both games looking unbelievable, and both being demoed at E3 on PCs, it's left many people speculating that *Watch Dogs* and *Star Wars 1313* will be seeing releases on next-gen hardware.



Playground Games has also revealed that *Horizon's* Kinect integration promises to be a bit more useful than the dynamic head tracking of *Forza 4* – which was really just to show off the possibilities of Kinect-empowered racing titles. The spin-off utilises Kinect to allow players to use voice commands to operate the in-game GPS as they race their way through the game's open-world version of Colorado.

"We received two recurring feedback points while we were looking at this game," said Playground Games' design director Ralph Fulton in an

interview with *Joystiq*. "The first one is really simple, people said 'This world so big, I found it really easy to get lost.' The second is kind of related to that, people said 'Sometimes I forget where I'm going, or what I want to do next.'"

To mitigate such issues, Playground Games integrated the voice commands to simplify GPS navigation. To reach the game's titular Horizon Festival, for example, you'd say "GPS, Festival, Autoshow." You'll also be able to ask more general questions, such as "where's my next race?" or "where's my nearest event?" The game will then guide you appropriately. Nifty!

## Dota 2 for the price of free



Valve has confirmed that its upcoming "sequel" to massively popular *Warcraft III* map/mod, *DotA*, will be free to download and play, supported by microtransactions as people pay real-world cash to unlock extra in-game rewards. The news comes courtesy of the *Dota 2* blog, where Valve has revealed what this all means for people anxiously awaiting the game.

Contrary to fears that always arise whenever F2P enters the conversation, Valve has assured gamers us that "*Dota 2* will not be a pay-to-win game," and that "all the items in the store are cosmetic, and don't affect gameplay." In addition,

"all of the heroes will be available free of charge. We believe restricting player access to heroes could be destructive to game design, so it's something we plan to avoid."

Here's something else that you might not know about *Dota 2*: it's already part of the Steam Workshop, meaning that it's entirely possible for budding item creators to submit items they've designed as they have with *Team Fortress 2*. "If you're a *Dota 2* fan with some artistic skills, here's your chance to get in on the ground floor of what's sure to be a vibrant community for years to come, and be able to contribute directly to the game you're already playing non-stop," say Valve.



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## The Game Stalker



The Titans have spoken

We all wait in anticipation of times like these. When the powers that be will grace us with their presence and deign to show us what we can expect to see in the gaming world in the coming year.

Or two... or three...

Or, maybe they'll change their minds and cancel whatever it was they showed us.

Never mind, we'll still sit in awe of these wondrous beings that make such wondrous things for us mere mortals to gaze at wondrously.

Until they make something that doesn't live up to expectations. Then of course we'll throw off our shackles, wind up the trolls, and spew forth hate mail unto the gods for daring to present us with this load of rubbish, which we all loved when we saw the trailers, but now we hate it ok?

Anyway moving on, what came out of E3 this year that we can sit and twiddle our thumbs waiting for? Amid the glut of sequels, teaser trailers and booth babes, what is on the list of dreams?

It differs for everyone I'm sure, but personally there are a couple of games vying for my attention.

The one that came out of nowhere and blew everyone away, partly because I think we relate on a subconscious level, has to be *Watch Dogs*. I'm not saying it was necessarily the best of show, but it certainly was the trailer that made people sit up and pay attention! This concept of information warfare is not something particularly new, but in an era where information is becoming the new currency and the privacy issues surrounding websites like Facebook and Twitter are ever present, it's something that resonates with me as a particularly fantastic concept around which to structure a game.

So which other games made us sit up and take notice? Well whilst *Halo 4* certainly blew people away and garnered a massive amount of praise, this isn't something that excites me. The only thing that vaguely interests me in yet another *Halo* game is the change in developer, but even then I'd rather give other games my full attention. *Halo*. Again. Yay.

There are a couple of games that have kept my interest and excitement from the first days of teaser trailers, and those are *Assassin's Creed III* and *The Last of Us*. Now, although I run the risk of being shot down, I have to say upfront that I'm not a massive fan of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise. Sure it's ok, but I really felt that so much of it was more of the same. *Assassins Creed 3* however brings together so many new elements that it is the first game since uh... the first game... that really gets my attention and the showing at E3 this year has maintained that.

*The Last of Us* has gathered a sense of mystery around it since the beginning, and I'll be honest, although we keep getting hints as to what the story is, we're not really any closer to knowing: are they zombies, are they aliens, are they mutants? What's the deal here? And with a guy that looks like an older Nathan Drake (it is Naughty Dog after all), can you really blame us for thinking this is going to be a blockbuster?

There are other games that deserve a mention here, *Dishonored*, *Beyond: Two Souls*, and *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, which I really just don't have space to discuss, but let's throw them in now so I have an excuse to talk about them next time!

- Pippa Tshabalala

## A little less Ironside in Splinter Cell: Blacklist



E3 2012 came, went and brought with it many an announcement, each one garnering a different reaction. One of the more controversial ones was Ubisoft's announcement of *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*, due in 2013 on PC, 360 and PS3. The first gameplay demonstration had journos and fans concerned that Ubisoft had lost the stealth-driven plot, with a healthy spattering of daylight, a high enemy headcount and guns-out action contained within the demo – inherently unusual for a *Splinter Cell* title, which led many to assume that *Splinter Cell* might be doing the *Call of Duty* dance that we're always worried every beloved series out there will eventually do. In development at Ubisoft's shiny new Toronto-based studio, *Blacklist* stars a much younger Sam Fisher. And, in perhaps the announcement's most outrage-inducing move, Ubisoft Toronto has employed a younger actor to play Fisher in this new game.

News that series stalwart Michael Ironside would not provide Sam his gravely, perpetually scornful voice immediately sparked animosity in die-hard fans. Writing to the fans directly from E3, Ubisoft Toronto Community Developer Zack Cooper immediately dove into the maelstrom to quell the upset. Insistent that he's a long-time fan of the series as well, Mr Cooper assured everyone that "there is PLENTY of stealth" in the game. "It comes

across as an action game. I know... and it can be just that... but you can also be the sneaky bad ass Sam Fisher who a lot of you know and love."

As for the change in voice actor, Cooper states that the reason new guy Eric Johnson is to be the new voice of Sam is because Ubisoft wants the actor who provides Sam's motion-captured animations to be the same actor who provides the voice work. "Settling for just a voice-over wasn't deemed acceptable for us, when we've got the capabilities to do full performance capture (and I'm a guy who worked in radio for 11 years – I appreciate the power of voice)," wrote Cooper. It seems a strange move to replace such an iconic part of the *Splinter Cell* universe – but for what it's worth, Michael Ironside has officially given Sam's new voice his gruff blessing.

In *Blacklist*'s story, "a group of rogue nations have had enough of the United States' military presence in their countries. In an effort to force the withdrawal of the U.S. forces, they mastermind 'The Blacklist', a countdown of escalating terrorist attacks on U.S. assets." Spies versus mercenaries multiplayer will return, and the game will offer both new and classic weapons/gadgets, as well as the new "Killing-in-Motion" fighting style, which "allows players to strike with lethal precision by marking and executing multiple enemies in one fluid motion."





## First details for Skyrim DLC reveal the Dawnguard

The first official helping of downloadable content for Bethesda's time-sink *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* has been detailed. It was announced a while ago that *Dawnguard* would be the title, but little else was mentioned. Luckily, E3 pulled a Van Helsing and spiked *Dawnguard* in the chest, spilling its viscous details all over the floor where eager journalists lapped them up.

The focus of the *Dawnguard* DLC will be vampires; more appropriately, it'll be the fight between a vampire family and a group of vampire slayers called, you guessed it, the Dawnguard. You'll get to choose who you'll join, but if you side with the undead blood-suckers, they'll turn you into a vampire lord complete with wings and hideous bat-like features.

The DLC will bring along a new vampire lord skill tree for you to unlock, but don't stress if you've already hit your level cap because in order to unlock vampire lord perks, all you need to do is feed on people. You'll be able to learn amazing new skills like being able to float across the terrain, lob red energy balls at hapless victims, and dissolve into a swarm of bats that'll let you instantly teleport across the battlefield. On top of a whole new quest line, transforming vampire lords and a new faction, the DLC will bring crossbows and new dragon shouts to learn.

During E3, Bethesda's Todd Howard tentatively said that *Dawnguard* will be arriving on Xbox 360 on 26 June, which means it *might* be available by the time you read this. As for PC and PlayStation 3 gamers – you'll have to wait a little longer as *Dawnguard* is a timed exclusive for Xbox 360.

## Crytek to make permanent move to F2P

**W**arface, Crytek's upcoming free-to-play multiplayer FPS, has had a more profound effect on the company's future than you'd think. Crytek CEO Cevat Yerli has stated that, once the developer's current, non-F2P projects (*Homefront 2*, *Crysis 3* and *Ryse*) are out in the wild, they'll switch over to exclusively creating free-to-play titles.

"Right now we are in the transitional phase of our company, transitioning from packaged goods games into an entirely free-to-play experience," said Yerli to *Videogamer*. "What this entails is that our future, all the new games that we're working on, as well new projects, new platforms and technologies, are designed around free-to-play and online, with the highest quality development."

Yerli believes that this is the future business model for gaming. "I think this is a new breed of games that has to happen to change the landscape, and be the most user-friendly business model." It's an obviously risky manoeuvre, but we're hoping that it pays off for Crytek, since they happen to be one of our favourite developers.

## EA'S ORIGIN: NO "75 PER CENT OFF GOING-OUT-OF-BUSINESS SALES" HERE!

Ask any gamer with a Steam account, and they'll probably tell you that they have a ton of games in their library that they haven't even played yet. This is a direct result of those awesome Steam sales that we all have a hard time passing up. You know the ones; where you can buy amazing, AAA titles for about R30.

Steam's biggest competitor is EA's Origin, which now boasts 11 million active user accounts; if you're counting, Steam has over 40 million. Origin, according to bossman David DeMartini, will not be following Steam's lead when it comes to massive discounts.

Speaking to website Gamesindustry International, DeMartini said, in no uncertain terms, that Origin "won't be doing that. Obviously they think it's the right thing to do after a certain amount of time. I just think it cheapens your intellectual property."

DeMartini continued, justifying his opinion of Steam's sales by saying: "the gamemakers work incredibly hard to make this intellectual property, and we're not trying to be Target. We're trying to be Nordstrom. When I say that, I mean good value – we're trying to give you a fair price point, and occasionally there will be things that are on sale you could look for a discount, just don't look for 75 percent off going-out-of-business sales."

So in other words, think of Steam as Mr. Price and Origin as Stuttafords... or something to that effect.



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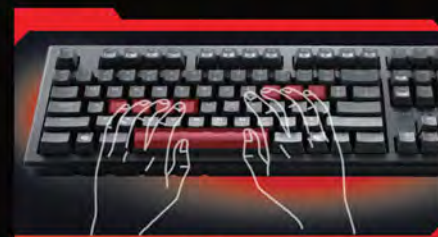
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## The Indie Investigator



Read up

Greetings, dear reader.

Yes, I'm talking to you.

If you're masochistic enough to have followed my ramblings consistently over the years, congratulations. You've probably learned a heckofalot about game development by now. Or probably not much at all. But almost certainly *something*.

My humble side columns are just the tip of the iceberg (assuming that such an iceberg is constructed out of poorly-written opinion pieces instead of, say, ice). There are loads and loads of wordscribblers out there on the Internet, both professional and amateur, who regularly offer far more detailed insights into the game development process than I can.

Some of these guys are game critics (duh). But the ones I'm really interested in discussing are the game creators.

If you want some of the most unbelievably interesting and educational stuff about game design out there, it's just a matter of (a) figuring out who made the awesome game you played recently and (b) checking for a devlog or essay collection on their site or somewhere relevant.

A lot of developers like jabbering about their latest work, sharing opinions on recent design trends and engaging with a broader audience when they have a new idea. The most prolific ones write a lot because they *think* a lot. And a great way to improve your own craft is to pay attention when they talk, because you can be sure that they pay attention too.

I have never met a top tier game designer who wasn't at least reasonably well read. Successful developers regularly investigate other people's ideas, exchange viewpoints and have a good general understanding of what issues affect the industry right now. Devs quote other devs. You'll see them commenting on news sites and each other's blogs. Anyone who has anything profound to say on Twitter usually has a host of genuinely fascinating retweets to go along with it. *Et cetera, et cetera!*

A good game developer can look at another person's game, understand what makes it work and draw inspiration from it. A *great* game developer will peek behind the curtain and learn even more. I'm a personal fan of the more long-form essays that can be found out there (diary-style devlogs are nice too, especially if you're more inclined to learn about technical implementations), but just about anything you do to find out more about the person's voice behind a project can be of value in your own work.

So there are things. They exist on the Internet. And they need to be read. By you. Here are two quick pointers to get you started:

**One:** check up on a little dev log called [www.lostgarden.com](http://www.lostgarden.com) and read basically anything there. See the dev's games and see all the stuff written about them. Learn a boatload.

**Two:** learn the word "postmortem", attach it to the name of any game you really like and try your luck with Google. The more indie, the better (mainly because the challenges faced by larger studios don't always relate to, say, a one-man hobbyist outfit). Always pay particularly careful attention to the "what went wrong" sections.

Don't trundle along trying to reinvent the wheel all by yourself. That's just slow. Read as much as you can, as *often* as you can, and you'll increase your awesomeness that much more quickly.

- Rodain Joubert

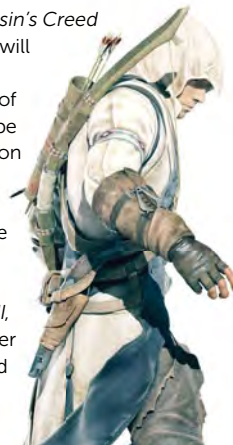
## Assassin's Creed III: Liberation heading to the PlayStation Vita

When Sony's PlayStation Vita was revealed, Ubisoft mentioned that they would be making an *Assassin's Creed* game for the handheld. Instead of simply porting the upcoming *Assassin's Creed III* to Sony's little powerhouse, Ubisoft has made a whole new game starring a brand new assassin.

Set in New Orleans during the American Revolution, you'll play as Aveline, the series' first female lead assassin. Naturally, Desmond Miles is out, but Connor will make an appearance meaning that the

plotlines of *Assassin's Creed III* and *Liberation* will overlap at points.

The whole city of New Orleans will be open for exploration and there won't be any loading screens. The game will be out on the same day as *Assassin's Creed III*, which is 31 October 2012, in case you'd forgotten.



## In Dead Space, your co-op partner can totally hear you scream

**D**ead Space 3! *DEAD SPACE 3!* It's a thing that is now official, and in case you'd not noticed, it has created great NAG excitement. It's most touted new feature is drop-in, drop-out cooperative play. Also, snow. Lots and lots of snow.

Our man Isaac Clarke has crash-landed on a dangerous new planet called Tau Volantis. Quickly discovering that this planet could actually be the key to ending the Necromorph infestation

for good, Isaac gets to work hunting for answers. In addition to the bitter cold of Tau Volantis, Isaac will also battle all-new Necromorphs, terrifyingly large boss critters and even a few overzealous humans. But he won't be alone.

Isaac's joined by Earthgov Sergeant John Carver, who is *Dead Space 3*'s new cooperative character. Players who join forces will experience additional story details, and the person playing John will enjoy unique

## Zombies for everyone

With Nintendo firm on the idea that their upcoming Wii U console is as much for the core crowd as it is for casual gamers, having those core games available at the time of launch is going to be essential if anyone else is to buy into the idea. You might remember a title destined for the system called *Killer Freaks from Outer Space*; well, that's been mostly ditched and redressed as a zombie-themed game which now bears the title *ZombiU*.

The game will feature first-person zombie-massacring action that plays out in a way not entirely unlike that of *Left 4 Dead*, with a fixed story mode and objectives mixed with randomly-placed zombie



encounters. Players will use the Wii U Gamepad to manage inventory, scan their environments for hidden items and shake off any zombies that get too close. There's a lot more to the game, including an extensive asymmetric multiplayer mode, so check back with us next month for all the details.



"[Metro 2033] released to critical acclaim and disappointing sales. The reality is, back then, THQ didn't market the game and we're very aware of that. We're absolutely committed to marketing [Metro: Last Light] appropriately."

- Rich Williams,  
SVP of Global Marketing, THQ



gameplay mechanics. Said Steve Papoutsis, VP and General Manager of Visceral Games (as well as the game's executive producer):

"Dead Space 3 will deliver action and horror on a scale that far exceeds anything we've done before. The game will range from the depths of space and tight, indoor corridors to a harsh new planet with explorable environments that offer new challenges. For fans that love playing

alone in the dark, they still can have the classic Dead Space experience that makes the franchise so unique. Likewise, players that want to share that immersive and intense experience with a friend now have that option thanks to the addition of co-op. Either way, the action is intense, the adventure is breathtaking, and the thrills are unforgettable."

The game is due out in February next year on PC, 360 and PS3.

## Dead Island: Riptide set to deliver more undead bashing



Dead Island's release last year was really quite successful for Polish developer Techland and publisher Deep Silver, having sold over three million copies in just three months following its launch. It's no surprise then that the publisher/developer pair have excitedly announced a sequel bearing the Dead Island name, in development at Techland for PC and consoles.

Dubbed Dead Island: Riptide, we've currently got no details on the game's story, its new features or anything at all really, but we've been promised more details to come soon. You'll know more when we do.

Zeno Clash, Ace Team's weird, wonderful and surprisingly good first-person brawler/shooter is getting a sequel called Zeno Clash II. It promises more weird, wonderful and surprisingly good first-person brawling/shooting. Say Ace Team: "The world of Zenozoik comes alive like never before, an open world waiting to be explored, rendered with breathtaking splendor. As Ghat, players can fully and freely explore every natural and architectural wonder his world has to offer."



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## Miktar's Meanderings



A day in the life of a minorex...

**"Let's a go! Let's a go! Let's a g-"**

**I slam down on the snooze button of my Authentic Mario(tm) alarm clock. It cost \$195 off eBay. I don't regret buying it. I regret Nintendo changing Mario from a Brooklyn plumber to an Italian stereotype, around the mid-1980s.**

No time for regrets. There is *diem to carpe!* I get up and place my Bowser plush back on his golden-foil pedestal. Sleep well, leather-fetish reptile. You conquer that Mushroom Kingdom. Best part about sleeping on the floor? When you get up, there's no more bed, just a Dinosaur blanket in need of folding and storing. Before breakfast, a quick *Contra* speedrun, on an original NES of course. Six minutes, not bad. Died twice. Can do better.

Breakfast is a banana and a bowl of *Pac-Man* cereal. It was difficult to find boxes of the stuff still fresh; they stopped making them 20 years ago. It's amazing what you can do with vacuum-packing these days. Post-breakfast involves sorting through the mail. Spam, spam, letter of adoration from my fan. More spam. Cheque from Activision paying me for my good impressions on *Black Ops II*. Spam. Cheque from Disney for my kind words on *Epic Mickey 2*. Letter of condemnation from my critic. Cheque from Nintendo for my continued services in the valorous field of "Good Vibes For All Things Ninty". I'm glad I signed up for that, it's been steady pay. Letter from SEGA pleading me to save their failing business. No, SEGA. Not until you release the *Shenmue* series in HD. Spam.

Guess I should get out of my "Hugasaurus Rex" pyjamas. To stay fit, one has to exercise! Hello *Wii Fit Plus*, what horror do you have in store for me today? Ha, I defy your cute exterior, for I know the truth of thine evil.

One 3,000 calorie workout later...

Shower. Check emails. Instant messenger pleas from RedTide for my column. I should start on that. Hmm, let me see. "A day...", there. That's a good start. I feel positive about those words. I'll do the rest later. Let's see what's up at E3 2012. One of my personal assistants should still be on the show floor, bringing me a live video feed. I can control him with a little joystick under the video feed, how cute is that? I think it works via electrodes or something, I didn't ask.

Looks like the major games this year are: *Shoot That Man*, *Shot That Guy*, *Premium Manshoot 4: The Gunnening*, *Neck-stabbing Now*, *Bro Shooter 2012*, *Shooter Bros: Best Frenemy Expansion*, *Bomb Them All: Set Them Up The Bomb (retro shooter)*, *Lara Croft: Look I'm a Real Girl with Real Issues* and a few *Mario* games. Not a total loss, then.

I steer my E3 slave to zoom focus in on a few Xbox and PlayStation fanboys huddled together in the corner, sharing tears, their lords having forsaken them. No new consoles this year. They're going to have to deal with yesterday's pixels, today, and tomorrow. Or get a Kinect or PlayStation Move and dance.

Damn, I crashed my E3 slave into a squall of mammaries around one of the booths. He's a goner. They need to cut down on the booth babes next year, someone might get to second base. Well, that opened up my schedule. Time to bust out the OG (Original Green) Gameboy and be a *professional games journalist* until I pass out. [Unfortunately there's just no way to tell if someone is high online, Ed]

- Miktar

## Wii U news! Get your Wii U news here!



Nintendo just had a very busy E3 and provided a lot of fresh details on their upcoming console, the Wii U. The only thing that was missing was a concrete release date, so we're still going with the tentative "fourth quarter" option.

The Japanese company confirmed that the Wii U will be getting a new type of controller, which effectively brings the various Wii U controller count up to five. Dubbed the Pro Controller, this new beastie looks very similar to current Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 controllers. It's for a good reason: the Wii U will be getting a lot of games that are also heading to Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3; consequently, a similar controller is needed to make developers' lives a little easier.

Sticking with Wii U controller news, Nintendo has revealed that their upcoming console will indeed allow up to two touchscreen controllers (now officially called the Wii U GamePad) to connect at once. This is completely the opposite of what Nintendo stated when the Wii U debuted last year. The caveat is that your frame rate will halve the moment a second controller connects. Considering Nintendo is aiming to have most games running at 60fps, a drop to 30fps isn't exactly the end of the world.

Interestingly, the Wii U GamePad has been confirmed to have a maximum battery life of 3-5 hours. Now, we don't know about you, but that's ordinarily way less than we play games for in one sitting. Nintendo also stated that a completely depleted battery in a Wii U GamePad will take about two-and-a-half hours to charge.

It's not all depressing news however, as there's a ton of awesome titles headed to the console. The following were revealed or at least confirmed at E3: *Pikmin 3*, *Trine 2: Director's Cut*, *Scribblenauts Unlimited*, *Batman: Arkham City: Armored Edition*, *Mass Effect 3*, *New Super Mario Bros. U* and something called *Nintendo Land*, which sounds like a piece of primer software for the new Wii U GamePad. It's still not clear whether *Nintendo Land* will ship with new Wii U consoles, but we'd be surprised if it doesn't.

Nintendo also confirmed that all of your purchased, digital games as well as saved games will be transferable from your Wii to your new Wii U. How this will happen is still unclear, but it's good news indeed. And yes, the Wii U will be sold in black as well – we're sure you can hear Bruce Wayne fist pumping somewhere in the distance.

## Details emerge for Obsidian's South Park RPG



Obsidian is working very closely with *South Park* creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker, and the result is that the upcoming *South Park* RPG is looking more and more like an episode of the TV series we all know and love. The entire game script is being written and voiced by the creators, so the characters are all going to sound the way they should. Both Stone and Parker made an appearance at E3 during Microsoft's press event in order to debut the game's first trailer. If you didn't know that it was a trailer for a game, you'd have thought it was a trailer for a new episode of the TV series – good news indeed.

You'll play as a new kid in the town of South Park, and you'll be able to customise your look and gender. You can also name your character, but all of the kids in South Park will just call you "Douchebag" anyway, which is a clever way of sidestepping that awkward RPG issue of naming characters and then having them referred to as "chosen one" or "dragon born" throughout the game.

All of the kids in the town of South Park are heavily involved in an RPG game that they're all playing outside – we guess you could say that they're all LARPing. Different groups of kids will form different factions or races for you and the boys to fight against: the school bullies are all dressed as elves, and the vampire goth kids are, well, vampire goths.

Combat is turned-based and similar in approach to *Paper Mario* in that timed button presses will allow you to attack and defend. You'll also be able to summon powerful attacks, each of which will bring their own brand of *South Park* humour to the fight. For example: you could summon Mr. Slave who will suck enemies into his bum. Yep, pretty much *South Park*!

The game is due in March next year for PC, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.

### DEAD OR ALIVE 5: DETAILS AND RELEASE DATE

Anyone looking forward to upcoming brawler *Dead or Alive 5* should pay attention. The eagerly anticipated sequel will see the return of tag matches, allowing two teams of two players each to face off against each other – both locally, and online. Developer Team Ninja's Yosuke Hayashi has also revealed that the interactive lobbies seen in *Dead or Alive 4* would not return in the fifth game, reason being so that Team Ninja can create the most stable (and best) online experience they can.

Meanwhile, in terms of combatants, *Virtua Fighter*'s Akira Yuki will be joined as a playable *DoA 5* fighter by fellow VF combatant Sarah Bryant. *DoA 5* also utilises a similar four-point hold system to what was seen in *DoA 4* (high, mid-punch, mid-kick and low) rather than employing *DoA 3*'s three-point (high, mid, low) system. You can expect to get your hands on *DoA 5*'s visual facelift and increased interactivity in September of this year.

### Something different for TopWare Interactive and Reality Pump

Reality Pump, developer of the *Two Worlds* series of role-playing games, has announced its next project: the strangely-titled *Sacrilegium*. It's a survival horror that follows a young woman named Alex on a journey that spans the globe. There'll supposedly be thrilling combat (and motorcycles), with "unparalleled animations" apparently breathing life into every character's movement.

The feature list also includes promises of gorgeous visuals, a satisfyingly scary atmosphere, "ultra-realistic" motion capture and, brilliantly, eye-tracking technology in the form of Reality Pump's 3D-ET (3D Eye-Tracking) – which they describe as "the revolutionary proprietary technology that offers three dimensions, providing a more real and captivating experience than any other implementation available today." Sounds fancy.

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## Opening communication channels: Microsoft unveils SmartGlass

If your tablet and smartphone were at a cocktail party where your Xbox 360 was the socially inept host, then SmartGlass would be the vodka-based lubricant that got everyone talking and making out. Unveiled during their press conference at this year's E3, SmartGlass is an application that has one goal: connecting your iOS, Android and Windows based handhelds to your Xbox 360.

It's a smart move; instead of wasting time releasing new hardware, take advantage of the hardware that most people already have. SmartGlass will have numerous uses across gaming and media streaming. Additionally, because a touchscreen allows for much more accurate input as well as an onscreen keyboard, SmartGlass will see Internet Explorer making the jump to Xbox 360.

The media interconnectivity might be somewhat of an issue for us here in South Africa, as Microsoft focused on media services that aren't available in our country. Netflix, HBO Go and more will support SmartGlass and allow users to take their media with them. You could start watching a movie on your iPad, and then connect it to your TV via SmartGlass to continue watching in your living room. Once your TV has taken over

playback, your Xbox 360 would stream information regarding the film straight to your iPad. For example: if you were watching an episode of *Game of Thrones* on your Xbox 360, SmartGlass would stream a map of Westeros to your tablet device that would highlight where the action on-screen was taking place.

Gaming is perhaps the most interesting part, as your smartphone or tablet will become an extension of whatever it is you're playing. Here we'll have to wait and see how creative game developers can be with SmartGlass, but the example provided saw somebody planning *Madden* football plays on their tablet, before streaming them into the game. Looks like the Wii U's GamePad will have a bit of competition when it launches.

Microsoft's Phil Spencer confirmed that we'll be seeing in-game SmartGlass connectivity some time during our spring time (September – November). Further good news is that Microsoft is treating SmartGlass like they treated Kinect. In other words: they want the community to be able to start doing their own things with the application, just like what happened when people "hacked" Kinect on PC. Get ready to see some interesting projects.

HALO 4'S SPARTAN OPS COULD RUN FOR MORE THAN ONE SEASON



*Halo 4's* episodic cooperative mode, Spartan Ops, might continue for longer than expected. The secondary campaign (designed to complement the game's single-player narrative) aims to offer up weekly "episodes" across a season, much like a TV show. It's a clever idea, and if it proves popular enough, it might run for more than just one season.

Developer 343 Industries' Frank O'Connor refers to the episodes included with *Halo 4* as the "first season" of Spartan Ops and this naturally made everyone wonder if that immediately meant more seasons are planned. "Right now we're saying one season, but we're like a TV show, we have to see if people like our TV show," said O'Connor. Considering *Halo's* immense popularity, we'd wager our mothers that there'll be more than one season.



### 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.

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Rockstar / Ubisoft Codemasters  
NC-Soft / Namco-Bandai  
**E-mail:** support@xtrememems.co.za  
**Number:** 0861 987 363

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**Number:** 0800 991 550

**Publisher:** Electronic Arts  
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## Surprise: lots of people bought Diablo III within seconds of its release



**D** *Diablo III* has proven, once again, that you can't keep a good Blizzard game down. Despite all the pre-release whinging and sulking at online auction houses costing real-world money to acquire digital goods, and always-online, always-authenticating gameplay, and general "down with Blizzard!" style shenanigans, *Diablo III* still managed to become the fastest-selling PC game in the history of everything we know. How'd it do that? This is how:

Launched globally on May 15th of the year 2012, within 24 hours of release *Diablo III* had found its way into the hands of 3.5-million eager gamers (and, judging by the immense popularity of the series, probably a few grandmothers as well). Blizzard was also eager to point out that that number did "not include the more than 1.2 million players who received *Diablo III* as part of signing up for the *World of Warcraft* Annual Pass promotion," which meant that the actual number of players who bombarded the game's servers on day one was 4.7 million. By the end of the first week, a total of 6.3 million people had begun exploring the world of *Diablo III*'s Sanctuary.

Jeepers. That is a great many people playing a video game all at once. No wonder the game suffered so much early infamy with servers overflowing, connections dropping and people having one big collective sob and scream. Thankfully, the game appears to be running smoothly now, and everyone seems happy. All's well that ends well, 'ey?

## Look & Listen

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### PC

Guild Wars 2	September 19th
Borderlands 2	September 21st
Hitman: Absolution	October 12th

### Xbox 360

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

### PS3

FIFA 13	2012
Madden NFL 13	August 3rd
Resident Evil 6	October 2nd

### Wii

Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two	September 1st
WWE 13	October 31st
Skylanders Giants	October 31st

### 3DS

New Super Mario Bros. 2	2012
Pro Evolution Soccer 2013	2012
Ben 10: Omniverse	2012

### BETHESDA'S NOT DONE WITH RAGE

Despite id Software's most recent FPS release, *Rage*, not having made as much of a splash as expected (even though we loved every minute of its post-apocalyptic action), publisher Bethesda is not about to toss the IP into the trash like some misused child's doll that's missing an arm. Bethesda's Pete Hines told *Eurogamer* that they've still got plans for the franchise.

"We're looking at doing some things with *Rage*. But obviously the first thing out of anybody's lips now when we talk about id is not, hey, what else is up with *Rage*? They're asking the question they've been asking for five years, six years, seven years, which is, where's *Doom 4*? What about *Doom 4*? As far as where we are with *Rage*, the future for that is still TBD."

This is all mighty intriguing, especially considering that id is also supposedly working on another new shooter that is yet to be revealed.

## Doom 3 rides again!

**D**espite being divisive upon release, we'll always have a soft spot in our hearts for *Doom 3*. Bethesda's announced that the beloved FPS series' first foray into the third dimension will soon be re-released in the guise of what they're calling the *BFG Edition*. Promising "greatly enhanced graphics," this updated release will also bring seven all-new missions as part of a new single-player expansion pack called *The Lost Mission*.

It'll come packing copies of *Doom 3*, its *Resurrection of Evil* expansion, as well as copies of the original *Doom* and *Doom 2*. Additional features include an added checkpoint save system, 3D support and will be playable via a head-mounted display (!). Due for release on PC, PS3 and 360 in the fourth quarter of this year, the *BFG Edition* also adds an armour-mounted flashlight to *Doom 3*, allowing players to see what they're shooting at – a luxury not all of us had on our first (and perhaps only) play through the game.



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## 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 her hiding somewhere in this month's NAG.

Send your sighting to [ed@nag.co.za](mailto:ed@nag.co.za) with the subject line "July Scarlett" and don't get it wrong or deleted it will be.

## June winner



Bridget Munro, page 41

### THIS MONTH'S BOUNTY

PS3 Shadow 6 Wireless Controller valued at R549.95. Sponsored by dreamGEAR and Top CD.



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## Caption of the month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of *Sniper Elite V2* for PS3 or 360 from Apex Interactive Entertainment. Send your captions to [ed@nag.co.za](mailto:ed@nag.co.za) with the subject line "July caption".



### NAG's lame attempt at humour

Travelling at 250km/h makes even the common housefly deadly.



### Last months winner

I see... Purple people!! - No name provided (thanks genius)

## WHAT'S RETRO STUDIOS DOING? NINTENDO WON'T SAY.

The *Metroid Prime* trilogy is not only one of the finest shooter series on the Wii, but across all of gaming. *Donkey Kong Country Returns* is widely lauded as the perfect old-school throwback to Nintendo's retro offerings. As such, many are interested to know what developer of both of those, Retro Studios, is now working on, especially considering this whole Wii U business. Speaking with *IGN*, Nintendo of America's Superman Reggie Fils-Aime declined to provide any solid info, stating that the developer's next project is very much under wraps and Nintendo likely won't reveal the supposed project's intricate details any time soon.

"If I disclosed what Retro is doing, I would have the president of Retro literally calling me right now saying, 'Reggie, what are you doing?' We love that people are interested. We love surprising people."

"I remember getting the questions before we announced *Donkey Kong Country Returns*," said Fils-Aime. "And I loved unveiling that. So ... Rest assured, the team is hard at work. But I'm not gonna tell you what they're working on."

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## Star Wars 1313 unveiled; proves we DO need bounty hunter scum



While the game was outed before E3 began, Lucasarts officially lifted the lid on their new *Star Wars* game during gaming's biggest annual event. *Star Wars 1313* then proceeded to win a bunch of "Best of" awards from various publications. Yes, it looks that awesome.

In *Star Wars 1313* you play the role of a bounty hunter prowling the expansive, criminal underbelly of level 1313 on the planet Coruscant. For those whose *Star Wars* knowledge is rusty, Coruscant is the seat of the Galactic Empire and is a planet that is covered by one massive city.

*Star Wars 1313* will follow the aesthetics of the original *Star Wars* films, so the game is definitely aiming to capture that classic *Star Wars* feel. You'll have "an arsenal of exotic weaponry" at your disposal, which obviously won't include a lightsaber – you're a bounty hunter, not a Jedi.

Interestingly, the demo on display at E3 was being run on a PC, which explains the incredible graphics. Lucasarts did not make mention of the game coming to PlayStation 3 or Xbox 360, leaving many to speculate that this might be a game for PCs and next-gen consoles.

*"People like to ask me if I want to do a small project with a small team. I do like working with a small team, and I'm working with a number of small teams on a lot of different ideas, but the problem is because of all these different roles that I have to fulfil, it takes me a long time to write the design document."*

**- Game design legend Shigeru Miyamoto on why it'll be a while before we learn anything about his next project.**

## Release list

Dates subject to change without notice

### July week 1

The Secret World	PC
Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir	3DS
Anarchy Reigns	360 / PS3

### July week 2

The Sims 3: Diesel Stuff	PC
Metal Gear Solid HD Collection	PS Vita
New Little King's Story	PS Vita
Inversion	360 / PC / PS3

### July week 3

LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	360 / 3DS / DS / PC / PS3 / Wii
Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance	3DS
Prototype 2	PC
Mensa Academy	3DS / PC / Wii

## Sleeping Dogs didn't begin life as True Crime after all

Upcoming *GTA*-in-Hong-Kong *Sleeping Dogs* might've initially been revealed as an entry in the *True Crime* series (full name *True Crime: Hong Kong*) before being ditched by Activision, picked up by Square Enix, dusted off and given a fresh new name – but the open-world action game wasn't always meant to be part of the *True Crime* franchise anyway.

"One misconception is we were *True Crime* from the get-go," said Dan Sochan, producer at *Sleeping Dogs* developer United Front Games. "We were a new [intellectual property] from the get-go. Our own story, own characters and gameplay features. After working on it for a couple years, Activision decided it wanted to reboot the *True Crime* franchise."

All the changes do not mean that the title's original vision has ever been skewed, however. "In terms of of our initial vision for the game nothing has changed. From new IP 'Black Lotus,' to *True Crime* to *Sleeping Dogs*, that has always remained intact," revealed Sochan.



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# The top 8 coolest things we did in LA

NAG went to LA LA Land last month, and amongst the gaming nirvana that was E3, we also did some pretty cool and random stuff while we were there. So we thought we'd share some of the highlights with you.

## 8

### THE LEGO STORE

Before leaving SA we were given explicit instructions from a nine year-old to bring back some cool LEGO. So we

missioned off in a taxi in rush-hour traffic to Glendale, and an hour later we were in LEGO heaven. Trying to narrow down the purchases to box sizes that would fit in a case was the biggest challenge. The coolest thing we bought there? A LEGO Minifigure Ice Cube Tray that makes ice cubes in the shape of LEGO men.



## 7

### TRANSFORMERS: THE RIDE 3D

We spent a full day at Universal Studios Hollywood – getting wet on rides, screaming

on rides, standing in queues for rides, and eating in between rides (we can highly recommend the Flintstone's Bar-B-Q joint for the most delicious flame-grilled burgers you've ever tasted). One of the highlights had to be the newly-opened Transformers: The Ride 3D. We were so dedicated that we stood in a queue for 85 minutes, but boy was it worth the wait. It's the craziest and most thrilling experience you could imagine, and you feel as though you're literally inside the movie fighting alongside Optimus. Highly recommended, especially for lovers of the movie franchise.

## 6

### NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

When Savage found out that the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County was a mere five minutes away from E3, he bid us *adieu* and headed that way for a good three hours. When he came back he couldn't shut up about the fact that he saw dinosaurs! Real live...er... fossilized dinosaur bones. From the mighty Tyrannosaurus Rex to the majestic and enormous Brachiosaurus (which took up an entire room), to the mammals of the Ice Age, including the Woolly Mammoth; everything you grew up wondering about these gigantic beasts was laid out before you. They really are that awesome in real life and you can't help but feel like you're five years old gazing up at them. Dinosaurs rule!



**5 VENICE BEACH**  
 Going to Venice Beach was an expedition of note. It's filled with all kinds of crazy, JUST like you see in the movies. Even getting there on the longest Metro bus ride in the history of ever was an experience like no other.



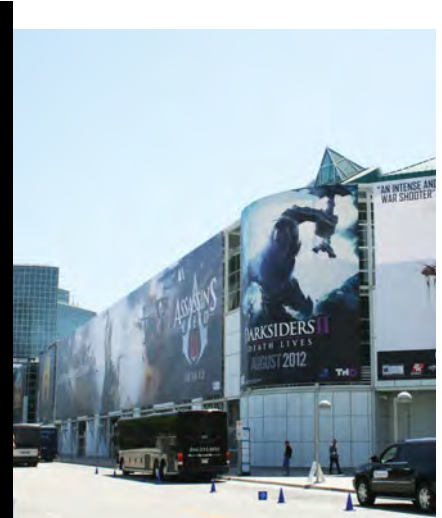
**4 THE WEDGE SALAD**  
 One thing we did a looooot of was eat (in fact, we may very well have eaten our way through LA). So we couldn't resist a visit to the California Pizza Kitchen to try their Wedge Salad. If you watch *Modern Family* you'll recall an episode in season 2 where Phil recommends a wedge salad to Claire and she flips out because she's been telling him to try it for years. We concur with Phil – it's the best piece of iceberg lettuce, sliced into the shape of a wedge, smothered in blue cheese dressing, some tomato, crumbled blue cheese and bacon that you'll EVER eat.



**3 FAMOUS PEOPLE WE MET**  
 Like the magnet for fame that hosts it, E3 attracts a lot of big names in the gaming industry. Not just them, but lifestyle icons from all over the Internet can be seen, met, greeted and even touched if you're faster than their armies of bodyguards. GeometriX geeked out just ever so slightly when he met Harley "The Sauce Boss" Morenstein from the Internet show *Epic Meal Time*, but nothing was more special than arbitrarily running into the one and only Tim Schafer on the way to a meeting, stopping him, naming him as the god among gamers that he is and then shaking his hand. Score!



**2 HOLLYWOOD WALK OF FAME**  
 A visit to Hollywood is incomplete if you don't do the obligatory touristy thing and spend a few hours walking down the Hollywood Walk of Fame, in search of your favourite star. Some of the stars we took snaps of include Steven Spielberg, James Cameron, Tom Selleck, Marilyn Monroe, Christopher Reeve and Bugs Bunny. Savage went on a mission to find Harrison Ford (he is a huge Indiana Jones fanboy) and wanted us to take his picture lying down on the ground. We eventually convinced him that his feet in the shot would do.



**1 E3 EXPO**  
 Our sole reason for being in LA was to attend the biggest gaming expo in the USA. It's a complete assault on your senses – from attending five press conferences before E3 even started, to playing preview code of unreleased games, to rushing around from meeting to meeting over the course of three days. Then there's the yummylicious booth babes (Savage felt compelled to photograph every single one he saw). Look out for our annual E3 supplement in next month's issue – everything we saw and played will be in there.



# Opening the door to eSports

The concept of eSports is relatively new, especially in South Africa. While a lot of gamers like to call themselves "pros", very few actually are. Professional gamers are those who get paid to compete in gaming – it's become their job. These gamers are more than just talented players who pwn noobs on a Friday night – they're dedicated sportspeople who just so happen to be better with a mouse and keyboard (or controller) than a football or tennis racquet. Becoming a professional gamer takes years of dedication and training, but it's entirely within the grasp of anyone who's serious enough.

To give you a better understanding of the inner workings of our humble but rapidly growing local eSports scene, we chatted to Colin Webster, president of Mind Sports South Africa.



# LOCAL MGOS

## NAG: What is Mind Sports South Africa?

**Colin Webster:** Mind Sports South Africa (MSSA) is a non-profit association that is the recognised national federation for board games, eSports, robotics and wargames. The MSSA is run purely by volunteers who are elected by the different member clubs at the Annual General Meeting. The Annual General Meeting is always held directly after end of play at the South African National Championships. As the recognised controlling body, the MSSA is the only authority for its codes in South Africa and is the only body that may legally award provincial and national colours. Thus it is the only body that can legally select teams to represent South Africa in international competition.

## NAG: What is the MSSA inter-school league?

**CW:** The league is designed to legally bring competitive eSports into the school environment, in which schools pit their best players against other schools in order to determine the best school in the country as done for water polo, swimming, etc. The schools will be assigned to clusters. These clusters may vary in size due to geographical location, but will always be as fair as possible. The winners of each cluster will then be invited to a LAN event to determine the Provincial School Champion. The winners of such Provincial School LAN Championships will then be invited in order to determine the National Schools Champion.

## NAG: How does one get their national colours for eSports?

**CW:** In order to get national colours for gaming, the gamer must first and foremost be registered as a member of a member club. Then, the gamer must participate in an accredited MSSA eSports event. However, participation alone is not enough. The gamer (and their team) must then finish in the top three, or the top twenty percent of teams in such event. Thus if there are six teams competing, the teams that finish in first, second and third places will qualify for trials. If there are twenty teams participating, then the top four will qualify, and if there are fifty teams participating, then the top ten will qualify for trials. When the Management Board has agreed to hold trials, all gamers who have so qualified are invited to participate. Then it is at such trials – which is always a LAN – that the team is selected.

**NAG:** MSSA is sending a women's team to IeSF (International eSports Federation) in October. How big is the market for women's eSports, and what is the local gaming scene doing to increase women's participation?

**CW:** Certainly the women's market is not nearly as big as it should be. It is necessary that any sport that wishes to grow must accommodate women at all levels. Thus the MSSA has policies in place for trying to increase the participation levels in this regard. The sending of the women's team is just the most visible aspect of this policy.

## NAG: How are the official games determined?

**CW:** The member clubs of the MSSA are responsible for choosing the games to be played at all MSSA events on an annual basis. The way in which this is done, is that the games choice comes up for review by the sub-committee, and all member clubs are requested to furnish their choices. Of course the Management Board may add additional games if they are required by the international federation.

## NAG: What are the most popular eSports games locally?

**CW:** Popularity of the games in general can only be answered by the publishers and the retailers. That is not what the MSSA looks at. The MSSA concentrates on competitive gaming and providing an outlet for competitive gamers. Thus, there may be a game that is fantastically popular among the gaming community, but because the game may not lend itself to competitive gaming, the MSSA may not cater for it. In terms of our figures, the most popular competitive eSports game in South Africa is, without a doubt, *COD 4*, followed by *DotA*, *Battlefield 3*, *StarCraft II* and *Tekken*.

## NAG: How has console gaming grown in the country in terms of eSports?

**CW:** Console gaming has a number of advantages in terms of eSports. Because of its ease of access, lower cost and standard systems, it has brought gaming to many who do not have the finances for computer gaming, and to many who do not have the know-how in terms of computer gaming. To start console gaming, all the gamer needs to do is "plug and play". Thus console gaming has made huge strides in attracting many new gamers to competitive eSports who otherwise would have felt intimidated by the set up procedure. In the past three years, numbers of console gamers participating at MSSA events have doubled.

## NAG: What's the best way to become a professional gamer in South Africa?

**CW:** In order to become a professional gamer, my advice is to start while you are in school. The gamer must first develop a passion for

An MGO is a Multi-Gaming Organisation – an official collection of teams, organisers and players across multiple games and even platforms. These organisations represent the pinnacle of organised competitive gaming, and, locally, we've got a good handful of them for you to aspire to join when you're ready to step up your game.

### BRAVADO GAMING (BVD)

Game divisions: Counter-Strike, Call of Duty 4: MW, StarCraft II, Battlefield 3, Call of Duty: MW3, Quake Live, Dota 2  
Website: [www.bravadogaming.com](http://www.bravadogaming.com)

### DNA GAMING (DNA)

Game divisions: Call of Duty 4: MW, Battlefield: BC 2, StarCraft II  
Website: [www.dnagaming.co.za](http://www.dnagaming.co.za)

### MINT GAMING (MINT)

Game divisions: Call of Duty: MW, Counter-Strike, FIFA 12, StarCraft II  
Website: [www.mintgaming.co.za](http://www.mintgaming.co.za)

### NAV GAMING (NAV)

Game divisions: Call of Duty: MW3, Counter-Strike, DotA, Quake Live  
Website: [www.navgaming.co.za](http://www.navgaming.co.za)

### SPARTAN COMPANY GAMING (SCG)

Game divisions: StarCraft II, Call of Duty 4: MW, Dota 2, Battlefield 3  
Website: [www.spartancompany.co.za](http://www.spartancompany.co.za)

### VITRIOLIC GAMING (VTL)

Game divisions: Call of Duty 4: MW, Battlefield 3, FIFA 12, StarCraft II, Call of Duty: MW3, Dota 2, Heroes of Newerth, Gran Turismo 5  
Website: [www.vitriolic-gaming.com](http://www.vitriolic-gaming.com)

### XPRTS@TOTAL.CHAOS (XTC)

Game divisions: Call of Duty: MW3, Counter-Strike: Source, DeFRaG, Dota 2, StarCraft II, Quake Live  
Website: [www.xtcgaming.co.za](http://www.xtcgaming.co.za)

# LOCAL LEAGUES

Even if you don't wish to join a competitive team (although it is highly recommended), you're going to want to sign up for any one or all of the currently running online leagues, depending on your game of choice. These leagues will give you a chance to challenge some of the top players in the country, improve your game and, become accustomed to playing in a competitive environment.

## NAG GAMING LEAGUE

Website: [www.nagleague.co.za](http://www.nagleague.co.za)  
Games played: StarCraft II, League of Legends

## MIND SPORTS SOUTH AFRICA

Website: [www.mssa-cgbo.org/](http://www.mssa-cgbo.org/)  
Games played: Battlefield 3, Call of Duty: MW, Counter-Strike 1.6, FIFA 12, Guitar Hero 5, Pro Evolution Soccer, Quake Live, StarCraft II, Street Fighter, Tekken, Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne

## MWEB GAMEZONE

Website: [www.mweb.co.za/games](http://www.mweb.co.za/games)  
Games played: Tekken, Need for Speed: The Run, Battlefield 3, Call of Duty: MW3, Halo

## DO GAMING LEAGUE

Website: [www.dogamingleague.co.za](http://www.dogamingleague.co.za)  
Games played: Battlefield 3, Call of Duty 4: MW, Call of Duty: MW3, Dota 2, FIFA 12, Forza Motorsport 4, Gran Turismo 5, StarCraft II, Gears of War 3

## POLARFLUKE

Website: [www.polarfluke.co.za](http://www.polarfluke.co.za)  
Games played: StarCraft II



# LOCAL LANS

Despite the improvements made to Internet speeds and accessibility, LANs (Local Area Networks) are still an incredibly popular way to socialise and compete with other local gamers. Here is a brief list of some of the larger, more official LANs in South Africa, but there's a good chance that there are small, irregular LANs at your school or even a friend's house. Do some digging, ask around and start socialising.

## GROUND ZERO LAN

Website: [www.ground0lan.co.za](http://www.ground0lan.co.za)  
Location: Johannesburg

## LEGEND'S LAN

Website: [www.facebook.com/](http://www.facebook.com/)

groups/306791510616  
Location: Pietermaritzburg

## ORGANISED CHAOS LAN (OC)

Website: [www.oc.co.za](http://www.oc.co.za)  
Location: Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Bloemfontein

## FRAG LAN

Website: [www.frag.co.za](http://www.frag.co.za)  
Location: Durban

## GAMERNET

Website: [www.gamernet.tv](http://www.gamernet.tv)  
Location: Cape Town

## MPLD

Website: [www.mpld.co.za](http://www.mpld.co.za)  
Location: Centurion

## MAYHEM

Website: [www.mayhem.co.za](http://www.mayhem.co.za)  
Location: Johannesburg

the game and for competing while at the same time learning to be part of a team. It is important for gamers to then train properly for the game. Simply playing does not equate to training. Training involves examining every aspect of the game and pushing it to the nth degree. Remember, that mistakes made in practice are often carried through into competition matches. Thus it is important to practice perfectly... Once a gamer has earned provincial and national colours, the gamer would have been exposed to the international circuit. It is then that the gamer is ready to start thinking about becoming a professional. However, to be a professional, the gamer needs solid sponsorships and needs to be part of a team of like-minded individuals. Often the professional gamer will have to put gaming above all else in order to secure any form of sustainability as a professional gamer. It should be noted that the professional gamer would also have to register with the tax authorities as a professional as any income derived while being a professional would be taxed in his/her hands. Of course, any expenses directly related to conducting himself as a professional gamer would then also be able to be deducted.

**NAG:** How have your experiences been working with local LAN organisers and online league organisers?

**CW:** The MSSA has built up good working relationships with existing LAN organisers.

The MSSA does not see itself to be a provider of LAN networks. Instead the MSSA is more concerned with helping existing LAN organisers to become more sustainable. Thus the MSSA has worked with FRAGLAN, MAYHEM, VODOOLAN, FRAGARENA, etc. to name but a few.

**NAG:** Why the decision to send players to IeSF and not, say, the World Cyber Games (WCG)?

**CW:** For a start, the costs involved are very different, but so are the visions of both the WCG and the IeSF. The WCG is a privately owned company that is essentially in business to make a profit. On the other hand, the IeSF is an association not for profit that is attempting to get eSports recognised as a fully-fledged sport. The IeSF is trying hard to get eSports admitted into the Pan Asian Games and to get eSports accepted by the highest authorities in international sport. As an association, all member federations are responsible for the running of the IeSF and making the decisions that will determine the future of both the IeSF and of eSports in general. Thus the IeSF is more in line with the MSSA's own objectives, and the MSSA has a vested interest in making the IeSF work. However, that is not to say that the MSSA will not send a team to the WCG if it can afford to do so. The MSSA has for a number of years ensured that South Africans have been present at the WCG. **NAG**



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• Extra Gameplay Content



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PS3



**ASSASSIN'S CREED III**

Also on XBOX360 & PC

Released: 12 March 2013



PS3



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**MUSICA**  
A WORLD AWAITS

# NGL League of Legends

## Online Tournament

This is the second year we have run a *League of Legends* tournament and this year we have seen a huge increase in players and teams that want to compete. In January this year we allowed entry for 30 teams, and when registrations closed we had 32 teams entered and ready to

enter the fields of justice.

The 32 teams consist of five players per team competing head to head over two legs from February to August in three divisions (Premier, First and Second) for the title of NGL *League of Legends* Champions 2012.

### WHAT IS LEAGUE OF LEGENDS?

*League of Legends*, in a nut shell, is a free-to-play MOBA with two teams of five players each competing head-to-head for lane and map dominance. The main objective is to destroy your enemy's Nexus by destroying their turrets and inhibitors first before the Nexus is exposed for attack. This is achieved by the players with the use of any five of the available 90+ champions after six were banned during the initial match making phase.

[www.leagueoflegends.com](http://www.leagueoflegends.com)

### 2012 TOURNAMENT

This year's community involvement has been much greater than in 2011, largely due to the amount of teams we have playing this year. At the time of writing I can say that we as the administration of the tournament have never worked with a group of players and teams like we have this year when it comes to understanding and keeping to the rules set forth. A huge thanks and appreciation goes out to the competing players and teams.

During Leg 1 of the tournament there has been a fierce battle for top spot in First and Second Division, as those teams get automatic promotion into Premier and First Division before Leg 2 which started in mid June. It was decided to have a playoff weekend in the two week break period after Leg 1 finished where teams from their respective divisions in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th places play against the bottom placed teams of Premier and First Division. This was done to give the bottom placed teams a chance



to prove their worth to stay in their respective divisions or be relegated to a lower division.

A live stream of a number of games happens every week with huge success thus far of the Seeding round as well as Leg 1 of the tournament. All of these streamed games with commentary have been uploaded on the NAG Magazine YouTube channel ([www.youtube.com/NAGMagSA](http://www.youtube.com/NAGMagSA)) for later viewing and the number of views is growing by the day. The competing teams constantly request to have their games streamed to show off their skills and game play.

Leg 2 kicked off on 15 June and promises to be just as competitive as Leg 1. The top six teams of each division will qualify to play in the

Grand Finals at [r/ge](#) 2012, where the plan is to broadcast every game played over the Internet for those that cannot attend the expo in person.

On a personal note, I would like to thank my fellow administration members especially Marnewick (Switch19) from LoLinSA, without whom this tournament would not have been the success it has been thus far, and Lauren (justBoo/Guardien) from NAG for all the assistance that has been given on the numerous issues that had to be resolved. Lastly a huge thanks to all of the administrations wives, girlfriends and family for their understanding while we play games so that we can build a bigger and better gaming community.

- Frans "Greep3r" Scheepers

## A WORD FROM THE NGL TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR

### STATE OF LOL IN SOUTH AFRICA

I was fortunate enough to play in arguably the best *LoL* match of this year's NGL *LoL* League between Winning Tiger Blood and KK. WTB has been the best team in SA for quite a while now and we at KK are in a rebuilding phase, but when we meet the games tend to be quite intense. Needless to say, game 1 was something special, with KK taking an early 8-0 lead and continuing with game domination up until WTB teamplay came through and they protected their awesome AD Carry Yar so well to bring the match back into their favour, to eventually run out as winners. I can't really explain in words how good that match was you'll have to check it

out yourselves on the NAG YouTube Channel.

Even though the highest rated player in that match only managed an Elo rating of 1,500, the quality of play was amazing and while we are miles behind the likes of Korea, USA and EU, South Africa is getting there. I've seen more and more teams lifting the quality of their play immensely and we recently saw one of the local players hitting 1,900 Elo rating. That in itself is quite a feat. The big MGOs in SA are also noticing that *LoL* is becoming a massive force in SA competitive gaming, and xTc partnering with Pro Noob Gaming is an indication of that. With around 1,400 active players that we know of in SA, the player base is quite massive,

and the goal of LoLinSA and the NGL *LoL* League is to get more and more players involved in the competitive side of it. South Africa has shown before with some quality *COD 4*, *CSS*, *CS 1.6*, *StarCraft II*, etc. players that we are closer and closer to international quality with each passing year. So get your friends together, join the NGL and the LoLinSA community and grow the community.

P.S.: You didn't hear this from me but apparently the League of Legends finals at rge this year are going to be quite epic. Well, if you looked at what we did for the *Black Ops* finals then you can just imagine what's going to happen this year.

- Frikkie "Fr1dg3" van Rensburg



## DIARY OF A LOL PLAYER

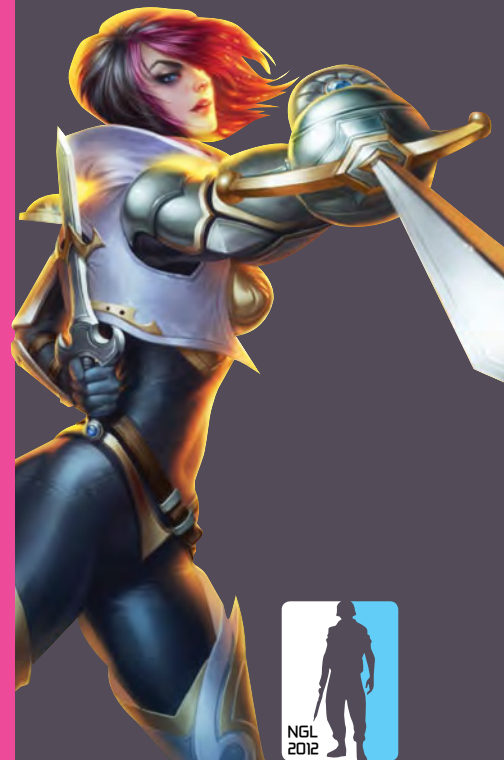
### Wednesday 30 May 2012

Dear diary. I hate this game so much. I log on with all the right intentions. I will not swear, I will not flame and I will not speak to myself so hard that my neighbours hear me. But what does the game do, diary? It takes all my good wholesome All Bran Flakes intentions and just laughs at it. Straight to my face, diary. I'll be running around with Udyr owning the jungle territories like a boss and I'll be all 4-0-2 after eight mins, diary, all up the Summoner's Rift. But then this game of all games shows its true colours. Like a fed abomination made in the lab where an Akali and Evelynn were cloned into an unskilful invisible jumping ninja noob faceroll demon stripper (okay maybe stripper

is stretching it a bit) thing that just one shots all your happiness and awesomeness to turn you into the guy the neighbours are hearing raging. I can't take it anymore diary. I'm on a 10 game losing streak and people always say the wheel will turn and I'll get back to the good days but this must be a mine excavator wheel cause this wheel is taking forever. I'll rather play Act I in *Diablo III* with a naked character four times in a row than having to lead a game of *LoL* 20-4 and still end up losing because some French (in general they do this) person chases a Nidalee past three towers into their base to try and get the kill and ends up failing and the best he has to say to himself is "Lucky". I don't know any more.

### Thursday 31 May 2012

Dear diary. I love this game so much. Today the shining lights that are Slaghoender and Decimator joined me for *LoL* and we went on a ten game winning streak. Making people rage quit and surrender at 15 minutes (I know they can't but we make them okay). I even won two ranked games in a row. That must be some kind of record for me. Today we took the fed unskilful invisible jumping ninja noob faceroll demon stripper and made it a cuddly little teemo just chilling in lane and being all nice. But you know what they say diary. The wheel turns. \*Fr1dg3 running in a bush and losing a lot of health, OMFG Teemo is going AP, FML Teemo shrooms every freaking where.\* I hate this game so much.



## FINAL RESULTS FOR LEG 1

[www.nagleague.co.za](http://www.nagleague.co.za)

### PREMIER DIVISION

Team name	Points
Winning Tigerblood [WinTB]	36
Pro Noob Gaming [ProNG]	27
Renegade Gaming [ReN~]	21
KK Pwnage [KK]	2
A10 Tunderbolt II [A10 T]	9
Wicked Sick Gaming [WSG]	6
illusion Gaming	
Old School [IG OS]	6

### FIRST DIVISION

Team name	Points
Dance Dance	
Revolution [DoDoR]	45
Jesus Used Zileans Ult [JUJU]	45
Zampers [ZamP]	42
Renegade Gaming 2 [ReN2]	30
League of Feeders [LoF]	30
Heretic [HT]	21
A10 Tank Killer [A10 TK]	21
UnityZA [oNe]	21
NeedLessLy Large Rods [NLR]	9
Immortal Forces [IF]	0

### SECOND DIVISION

Team name	Points
illusion Gaming	
Inexorable [IG IX]	51
zampers countdown to extinction [ZCTE]	45
Illusion Gaming Omens [IGO]	33
Thumps UP [TUP]	30
Dark Forces Mobile	
Strike Force [DF MSF]	30
Infinity Gaming [iN]	27
Dying to Kill [DtK]	27
Fearless Gaming [FLG]	9
Dying to Kill too [DtK2]	6
Metal Warriors [MWAR]	0

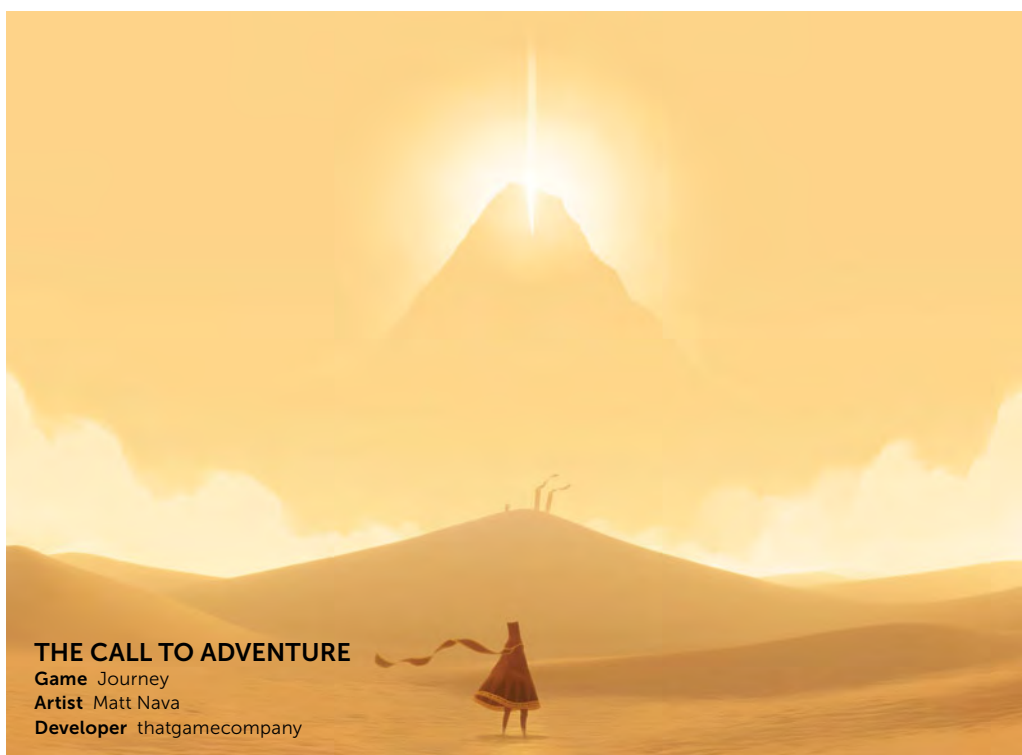


## SNOWLAND

**Game** Akaneiro: Demon Hunters  
**Artists** Ben Kerlake, Sun Guo Liang  
**Developer** Spicy Horse Games

# INTO THE PIXEL 2012

Each year the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) and the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences (AIAS) announce the winners of the Into the Pixel (ITP) collection at E3 in Los Angeles. This year (the ninth for the ITP collection) there were 16 exquisite pieces of art chosen from games like *Diablo III* and *Mass Effect 3*. But enough with the words, this is about the art, right? For more information you can visit: [www.intothepixel.com](http://www.intothepixel.com).



## THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

**Game** Journey  
**Artist** Matt Nava  
**Developer** thatgamecompany



## REGENT

**Game** Dishonored  
**Artist** Sergey Kolesov  
**Developer** Arkane Studios

**GRAVITY DAZE**

Game Gravity Rush

Artists Takeshi Oga

Developer Sony Computer Entertainment  
Worldwide Studios – Japan Studio



**BATTLE CHARGE**

Game Assassin's Creed III

Artist William Wu

Developer Ubisoft Montreal





### ARIA

**Game** Mass Effect 3

**Artist** Ben Huen

**Developer** BioWare

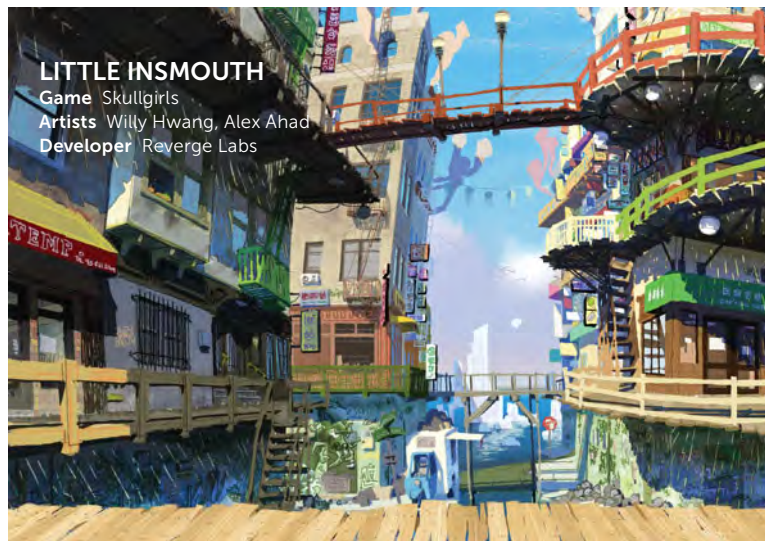


### THE 2048 GRID

**Game** Wipeout 2048

**Artist** Darren Douglas

**Developer** Studio Liverpool



### LITTLE INSMOUTH

**Game** Skullgirls

**Artists** Willy Hwang, Alex Ahad

**Developer** Reverge Labs



### LEAH CLOSE-UP

**Game** Diablo III

**Artists** Nick Carpenter, Graham Cunningham,  
Xin Wang, Chris Thunig, Fausto De Martini,  
Mathias Verhasselt, Till Aschwanden, Fin Teo,  
John Lanz

**Developer** Blizzard Entertainment



## THE JUDGES

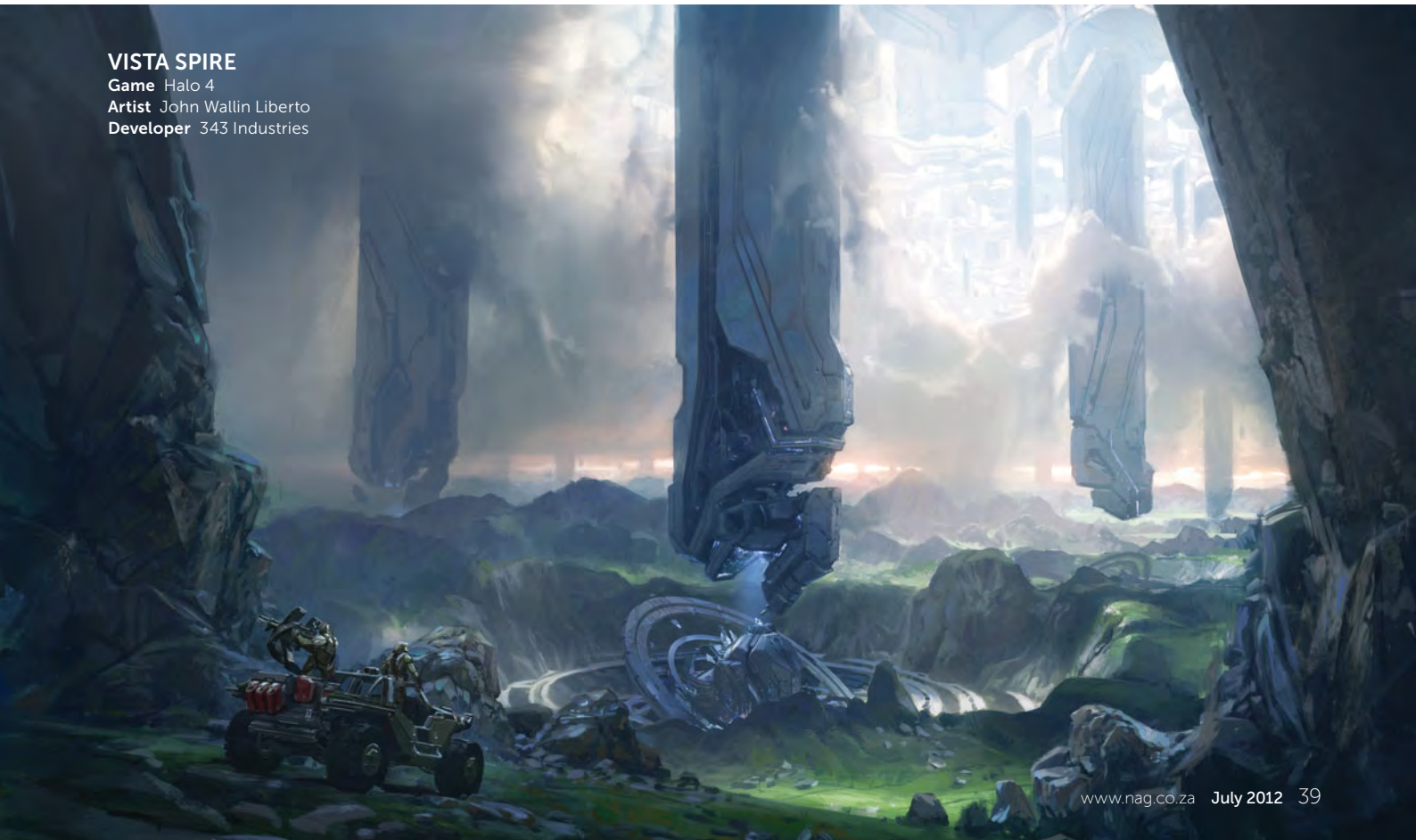
- **Bob Rafei**, Big Red Button Entertainment, founder, CEO and visual director
- **Eddo Stern**, UCLA Games Lab, director
- **Glenn Phillips**, Getty Research Institute, senior project specialist & consulting curator, Department of Architecture and Contemporary Art
- **Ian Milham**, Electronic Arts' Visceral Games, creative director
- **Jon M. Gibson**, iam8bit, founder and partner
- **Matt Hall**, Timbuk2 Studios, senior partner production designer
- **Nora Dolan**, independent curator
- **Ryan Wilkerson**, Microsoft Game Studios, senior art director
- **Seth Spaulding**, Blizzard Entertainment, art manager
- **Shane Caudle**, Epic Games, principal artist



**SHOPKEEPER**  
 Game Dota 2  
 Artist Jim Murray  
 Developer Valve Software

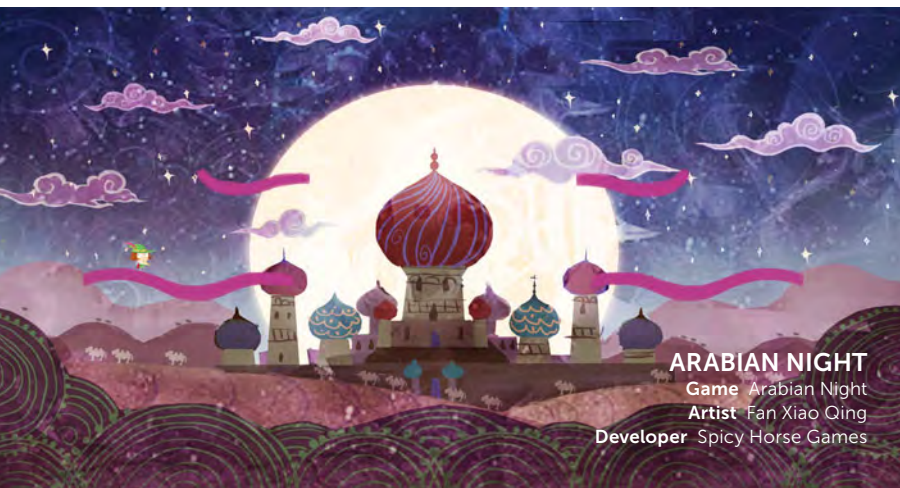
### VISTA SPIRE

Game Halo 4  
 Artist John Wallin Liberto  
 Developer 343 Industries



## PRIORY

Game Guild Wars 2  
Artist Daniel Dociu  
Developer ArenaNet



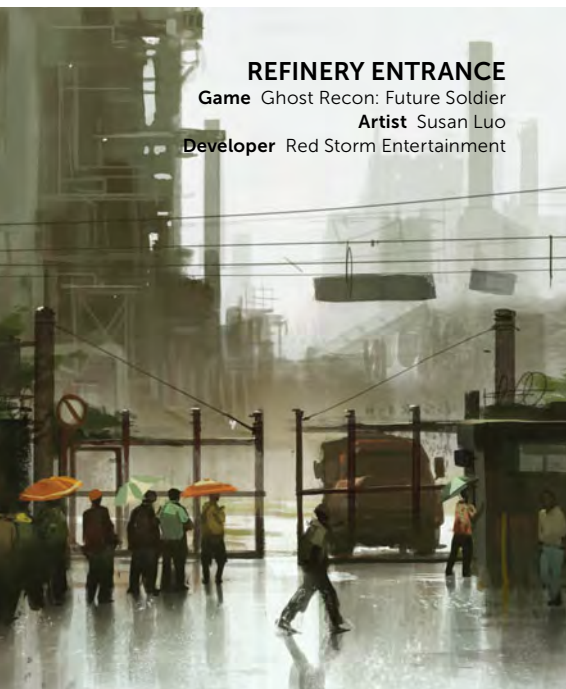
## ARABIAN NIGHT

Game Arabian Night  
Artist Fan Xiao Qing  
Developer Spicy Horse Games



## BROKEN OVERPASS

Game The Last of Us  
Artist Shaddy Safadi  
Developer Naughty Dog



## REFINERY ENTRANCE

Game Ghost Recon: Future Soldier  
Artist Susan Luo  
Developer Red Storm Entertainment



## GUNSMITH

Game Wild East  
Artists Eytan Zana, Cliff Childs, Tyler West  
Developer Double Helix Games, West Studios



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DETAILS

**Release date**  
Q1 2013  
**Platforms**  
PC  
**Genre**  
Vehicle combat/racing  
**Developer**  
Stainless Games  
**Website**  
www.carmageddon.com  
**Publisher**  
Stainless Games

When released in Germany, *Carmageddon* had to replace the pedestrians with zombies (green blood) and robots, to avoid showing red blood.



# Carmageddon: Reincarnation

Cunning Stunt Bonus! Cunning Stunt Bonus! Cunning Stunt Bonus!

Long before *Grand Theft Auto* made running over cops and pedestrians a controversy, there was *Carmageddon*. It had full 3D freeform driving/racing, vehicular combat with physics-based car damage, driving over old ladies and cows gave you points, and contained the most famous spoonerism in gaming history (which is always best when unintentionally screamed out loud).

**“Other games don’t let you glue a penguin to the ground and then fire it through a plate glass window with a giant spring.”**

*Carmageddon* was the poster child for everything that’s wrong in life, but so right in a video game. Power-ups let you glue pedestrians to the ground, make them blind, or let you ride up the sides of buildings like a spider car. Then there’s the pedestrian electro-bastard ray...

Back in 2003 there was a leak about a possible *Carmageddon 4*, but it fell through the cracks when it was put on hold indefinitely in 2005. Last year, Stainless Games bought the rights for the series back from Square Enix Europe, who had inherited it from their takeover of SCI in 2009. In May, Stainless started a Kickstarter fund to fuel development on *Carmageddon: Reincarnation*, which hit its goal of \$400,000 within two weeks.

Of the original eight-man team that worked on *Carmageddon*, five of them are still with the company (which houses around 50 people). *Reincarnation* is a reboot of the franchise, inspired by the classic cars, drivers and power-ups of the original but dragged bodily into modern state-of-the-art: rag-doll pedestrians, physics-based power-ups and an evolved in-house engine. Stainless is promising all the dark humour that made the original so charming, along with the full multiplayer setup, both online and offline LAN play. They claim many of the multiplayer modes will return, but aren’t talking specifics yet, only mentioning that one mode involves playing as a pedestrian.

The popular “Action Replay” playback mode that let you enjoy your glorious car-created apocalypse over and over in slow-motion with cinematic camera effects will also make a return, with the ability to post clips to YouTube, and full integration with



The original *Carmageddon* was to be a *Mad Max* tie-in game, then a *Death Race 2000* license, but both fell through.

Twitter and Facebook. “So you can annoy your parents without leaving the game”, says Stainless. Community ingenuity will be supported and encouraged, with Stainless making provisions to allow players to modify and expand the game with new levels, cars, game types and other assets.

But is there still a place for a game that glorifies the antics of predatory drivers in high-speed death machines trying to drive over anything that moves just to add a few more points to their score tally? To quote Stainless, “Other games don’t let you glue a penguin to the ground and then fire it through a plate glass window with a giant spring. We do. We offer a unique service to humanity. Messy, but unique.” **NAG**

- Miktar

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Fatshark developed the under-appreciated *Bionic Commando Rearmed 2* for Capcom.



# Krater

Ready for some post-apocalyptic fun, Nordic style?

A very big bomb has taken out Stockholm, leaving only a crater behind. Sweden is in ruins, with cities and micro-nations having congealed around the impact crater in the post-apocalyptic aftermath. Free-diggers attempt to plunge the depths of the crater, a giant shaft of indeterminate fathoms, to reach buried bounties of old technology and weapons.

Casual observation would peg *Krater* as a *Diablo* clone in Nordic drag. Ostensibly, not an incorrect assumption, if you replace demons and zombies with mutants and bandits. It plays the same, with mouse clicks and skills, viewed from a top-down three-quarters angle. Level layouts are randomly generated. You beat things up so you can find better (randomly generated) items with which to beat up more things. There is a crafting system. But that's where the similarities end.

Instead of one main hero, you take out a squad of three characters. You can customise characters into one of four main classes, each class with plenty of specialisations. The classes follow the "Holy Trinity" to a degree: Bruisers act as damage absorbing tanks, the Medicus is all about heals, Slayers are your primary damage output, while Regulators act as crowd-control with stuns. Classes can be adjusted using a component upgrade system, such as adding healing to the area of effect stomp attack of the Bruiser. Upgrades are permanent, along with death.

Members of your party will die. *Krater*

**In psychology, Stockholm Syndrome is when hostages express empathy towards their captors, often defending them.**

**"Casual observation would peg *Krater* as a *Diablo* clone in Nordic drag."**

follows the unapologetic hardcore niche of permanence. That's why you recruit

more characters: to fill up the slots left by the deceased. Characters don't die instantly however. When knocked out in battle, a meter starts to fill. When full, that character gets an injury, which can only be cured at a hospital. Not all injuries can be remedied. Accrue enough injuries on a character and they die, taking all the time and upgrades invested in them to the great beyond.

Each enemy encounter has been crafted to be more like a puzzle, and less like the usual hack-and-slash enemy *modus operandi* of "mobile loot piñata". Enemies group up in tactical ways, will defend their Medicus if they have one, and use their skills and abilities intelligently with the explicit goal of killing you.

Fatshark has confirmed that if the LAN and online cooperative mode isn't ready at launch, it will be added for free in a later patch. They're planning on also adding a player vs. player mode, along with two further single-player campaigns as paid downloadable content. The DLC will focus on interactions with the various factions around the crater, such as the laid-back hippy nation of Solside, the geriatric-controlled Gerontocracy and the reclusive monks of the Broderbo.

- Miktar



## DETAILS

### Release date

Q3 2012

### Platforms

PC

### Genre

Action role-playing game

### Developer

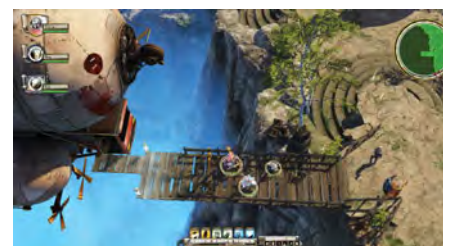
Fatshark

### Website

[www.kratergame.com](http://www.kratergame.com)

### Publisher

Fatshark



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**DETAILS**

**Release date**  
Q1 2013  
**Platforms**  
PS Vita  
**Genre**  
Action-adventure, action role-playing  
**Developer**  
Japan Studio  
Marvelous AQL  
**Website**  
www.jp.playstation.com/scej/title/soulsacrifice/ja/  
**Publisher**  
Sony Computer Entertainment

# Soul Sacrifice

Mega Man/Rockman co-designer returns with something dark and twisted...

**“W**hat I wanted to illustrate in this game was a ‘reality blended into a fantasy world.’” said Keiji Inafune, debuting his company’s first game, at a recent Sony press conference.

“The word ‘fantasy’ normally points to a story that is fictitious,” he continues. “However, with *Soul Sacrifice* I wanted to illustrate a ‘reality’ within a fantasy that wasn’t sugar-coated. It’s not about focusing on the strange, but to flip the commonly held concept of what a fantasy theme should be with the concept of ‘reality.’”

Translation: if you want a sword in the game, you reach into your mouth and pull out your spine.

The spell to do so, ironically called “Excalibur” is indicative of what *Soul Sacrifice* is going for. Conceptually, the game is a third-person *Monster Hunter* variant: you play a customisable sorcerer who enters the pages of a magical book to fight boss monsters, sacrificing parts of your body to perform powerful magic. Why would you use your own blood as a projectile weapon? Part of the plot involves



Keiji Inafune joined Capcom in 1987 as an illustrator; his first project was as a graphics artist on *Street Fighter*. He left Capcom in 2010.

**“Concept is the most important part of a game. If the concept is good, 80% of the game is good. That’s how important concept is.”**  
- Keiji Inafune

your character having been raised by a cruel sorcerer for some nefarious and painful purpose.

“Cruelty is a reality in our world, and we have to make sacrifices and pay costs on a daily basis”

says Inafune. “I wanted to blend this ‘reality’ theme into a fantasy world, one filled with magic, and create a new type of gaming experience that relied on the player making sacrifices in order to obtain great power.”

When you create your sorcerer, you choose from a variety of “sacrifices”, which form the abilities which define your role, e.g.: ranged spellcaster, melee fighter or damage-absorbing tank. One ability set lets you pull up boulders from the ground to form a mobile shield and use trees as weapons. The recondite cost in using abilities: the more you use them, the more your body becomes corrupted and used up.

Multiplayer will support up to four players, both local ad-hoc and online infrastructure. Voice chat will only work during ad-hoc play, which is something Inafune jokes “may be for the best”. The “sacrifice” motif extends to multiplayer: when a player is near death, he can sacrifice his life for the other players, turning himself into a giant fire-elemental “Salamander”, striking the boss with a massive flame. Once the boss is downed,



the remaining players can opt to sacrifice or save it, which changes the type of reward you’ll get. If the players can’t agree on which action to take, there will be a system in place to resolve it.

There are more Vita features to be revealed, and it’s likely we’ll see much more of the game at this year’s E3. *Soul Sacrifice* hasn’t been confirmed for all regions yet, just Japan. [It was recently announced that the game will appear in all territories eventually, Ed].

**NAG**  
- Miktar



Mega Man 2 was made in three months, in the team’s spare time while working on other projects for Capcom.

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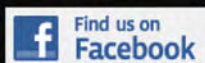
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DETAILS

**Release date**  
Q1 2013  
**Platforms**  
PS3  
**Genre**  
Role-playing game  
**Developer**  
Level-5  
**Website**  
ninokunigame.com  
**Publisher**  
Namco Bandai

# Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch

Can Studio Ghibli work their movie magic in games?

There's only one company that can take the horrific scenario of a child almost drowning, then losing his mother when she dies after rescuing him, and turn it into something magical and innocent.

Thirteen year old Oliver's tears for his departed mother bring his doll – a strange flanged beast with a lantern nose ring – to life. The doll proclaims to be Drippy, a magical male fairy. Drippy gives Oliver a magical book, which lets the pair travel to the world of "Ni no Kuni", a parallel reality containing alternate versions of the people and animals Oliver knows. Drippy intones that there, in the parallel dimension, Oliver might find his deceased parent.

If this story were told by say, Guillermo del Toro, it'd be high-octane nightmare fuel. But thanks to the dream

team of Level-5 (known for their puzzling *Professor Layton* series) and "Pixar of the East" animation house Studio Ghibli, instead it's a soothing if dark jaunt into a universe of transformation and impermanence.

Even after gaining critical acclaim in Japan with its release in 2011, the international release for *Ni no Kuni* has been long forthcoming. The delay was brought about by the difficulties in translating such a nuanced story while retaining the original illocution. "We're staying true to the Japanese version, even with regional accents," explains studio president Akihiro Hino.

"In the original, Drippy has a heavy Osaka accent, but in the international version it's Welsh. We have a localisation director who is very particular with all the minor details." In Japan, the regional Osaka accent

**"If this story were told by say, Guillermo del Toro, it'd be high-octane nightmare fuel."**

**The 1992 film *Porco Rosso* by Ghibli was made specifically to entertain oxygen-deprived middle-aged Japanese business men.**

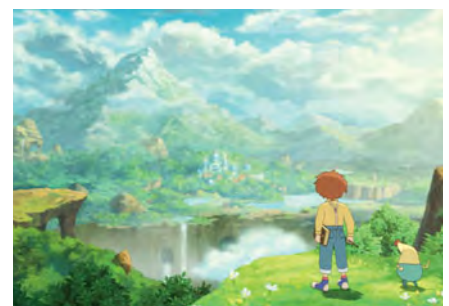
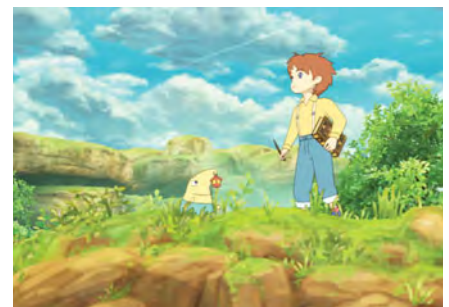


is often used for comedic effect, to give a character an unsophisticated country person inflection.

To maintain the soft matte backdrops Ghibli is known for, while retaining the sharp outlines on their minimalistic character features, Level-5 created a brand new cell-shading engine. The creatures roaming the fields are cute, expressive and friendly, reminiscent of Level-5's exemplary monster animations found in *Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King*. To complete the Ghibli effect, the musical score is being composed by Joe Hisaishi, known for his work on most Ghibli films including *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Ponyo by the Sea* and *My Neighbor Totoro*.

Those familiar with Japanese RPGs will feel at home: it's a straightforward quest, with Oliver encountering new party members as he explores over world locations and monster-infested dungeons. The combat system blends action-RPG and turn-based concepts, where attacks take time and positioning matters, so you need to move around while they charge. Encounters are never forced, as creatures are visible on the over world, and each party member can capture up to three critters to use in battle, Pokémon-style, or attack using their own weapons/magic. **NAG**

- Miktar



The Japanese title for the game is *Second Country: The Queen of the White Sacred Ash*.



# CUTTING EDGE **REVIEWS**

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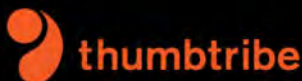
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Level 1

>>> *Metro 2033* was based on the novel of the same name by Russian writer Dmitry Glukhovsky, which is now available in English. The book also has a sequel, entitled *Metro 2034*, but *Last Light* is a unique story. However, Glukhovsky is once again involved with the development and has been an integral part of the story design process right from the beginning.

# NEED A LIGHT?

**I**n the year 2013, the world went to sh!t. Nuclear war all but wiped out the population of Russia; those that survived the missiles and subsequent nuclear fallout did so by taking to the subways of Moscow, where they attempted to eke out an existence in the confined, cramped Metro system. 21 years have passed since then; mankind has made an attempt to rebuild everything that makes it unique: homes, social conventions, commerce, politics, manufacturing, and war – again. Factions driven by differing ideologies have staked out their claims in the Metro while everyone else tries to just get on with life. But a brave few will try to make a positive difference – to bring peace to the Metro, put an end to two decades of hardship and get humanity back on track.

*Last Light* is a direct sequel to 2010's *Metro 2033*, and takes place one year after the events of that game. Players will take on the role of the fearless Artyom once more, who will make his way through the Metro and the scorched, poisonous world above in search of answers to the many questions that will crop up during his adventures. The gameplay in *Last Light* will be similar to that of *2033*: a mix of cinematic action found in most modern FPSes and folklore-inspired

survival horror. Weapons are crude, usually hand-made devices that spit out equally crude ammunition. Only those with the necessary resources have the luxury of pre-war technology and ammo, but most of what's available is used as currency in exchange for first-aid supplies, weapon upgrades and gas mask filters.

The way of life in the Metro and the world above is a bleak and dangerous one. It's loud, cramped and hot down in the depths but empty and cold above. Only now, a year on, two decades of snow has begun to melt; grass pokes through the rugged landscape and rain is spotted for the first time in post-war memory. That rain is toxic, however, much like the air, forcing Artyom and anyone else caught out in the open to don a gas mask for any supply or communication runs that require an outdoor excursion. It might seem like an inconsequential piece of kit, but the gas mask was what gave *Metro 2033* its uniquely claustrophobic atmosphere and did a fantastic job of pulling in the player. Masks fog up in cold weather and take visible damage during combat. Filters must be replaced every few minutes – evidenced by Artyom's increasingly panicked sucking in of air that you'll hear through your speakers. Bloat flies that hover around the dead and curious spiders will land on your visor; you'll

Level 3 - end of the line

#### Website

[www.enterthemetrometro.com](http://www.enterthemetrometro.com)

#### Release date

Q1 2013

#### Platforms

360 / PC / PS3

#### Genre

First-person shooter

#### Developer

4A Games

#### Publisher

THQ

need to swat them and wipe off any leftover bug goo or blood spatters from recent combat encounters.

While human factions battle for dominance beneath the surface, mutated animals run amok both above and below. They're a constant danger to anyone caught outside after dark (or even during the day), being vastly stronger and more aggressive – nearly demonic in power – than any creatures known to man. That's not the only thing you need to worry about, however. *Metro* is known for its supernatural, science-fiction kicks and *Last Light* looks like it's getting ready to crank up the weird-o-meter a few notches. During our demo, Artyom explored a crashed airplane filled with long-deceased corpses which sent him flying into a fit of hallucinations and flashbacks of the crew and passengers' last few minutes. We're not sure of the implications but, if we know 4A Games, we think it's safe to expect plenty more where that came from.

In a lot of ways, *Metro 2033* felt quite a bit like *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay*. Both games share a blend of stealth, action, story-driven scripted events and, oddly enough, a penchant for pushing the technology limits of its generation. Also, like *Butcher Bay*, *Metro 2033* could be played as a blend of run-and-gun and stealth play that would make even the most hardened

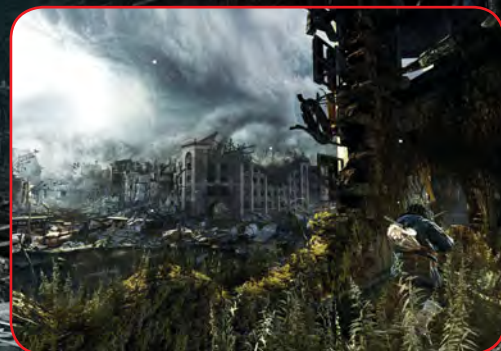


>>> The original *Metro 2033* took just 19 days to port over to Xbox 360, thanks to a highly efficient architecture design and what the developers call "not eight-hour days". They are non-committal on the amount of vodka consumed during that period.

## TECH SAVVY

Many of 4A's original developers came from S.T.A.L.K.E.R. dev studio GSC Game World, which was well known for its technical prowess and PC-focused development. When 4A was assembled, however, chief technical officer Oles Shishkovstov and his team realised the need to build an entirely new engine – one that would not only allow them to deliver improved visuals, but one that could also be used for deployment on consoles.

Their first requirement was to develop an engine that offered full support for multi-threading. While the architecture they finally developed was capable of running *Metro* on both PS3 and 360 (in addition to PC, obviously), the decision was made by publishers THQ to hold back on a PS3 release – a new studio with a scratch-built engine seemed like too much of a risk for them at the time. Thankfully, the initial investment of time and effort has paid off, as the game is just as capable of running at full speed on the PS3 as it is on its native PC system and Xbox 360. On a similar note, 4A's time spent engineering a network capable engine means that the previously missing multiplayer component in the series will finally make its way into *Last Light*.





Level 2

Level 1

### WEAPONS OF WAR

The scarcity of weapons and ammunition in post-blast Moscow means scavenging, stealing and building your own guns is the order of the day. As a result, every weapon in *Metro 2033* and every new addition to the arsenal in *Last Light* follows a distinctly hand-made design philosophy. From concept art to design to implementation, every weapon is carefully crafted to be as realistic as possible, and to visually represent its functionality to the player. You can see bolts slide and hydraulic pistons tense up as you pull the trigger of your pneumatic sniper rifle, and even Artyom's headlamp needs to be manually charged with a hand-worked pump to keep up its brightness. Everything that's been pieced together in the Metro looks and feels like the work of an amateur weapon smith, which gives a real sense of believability to the world.

*Thief* fan giggle with joy. *Last Light* is set to increase the stealth ante even further, with vastly improved AI and even more ways to sneak around the dark to stab people in the neck. Players will need to stay in the shadows, extinguish light sources like fires and electrical or kerosene lights, and keep an eye on their own light-emitting devices to ensure there's only just enough illumination to prevent them from tripping over the feet of the big armoured guy with the Gatling gun. Of course, different lighting conditions will exist throughout the game, with both day and night situations both above and below the surface, so the player will be forced to adapt to new challenges quickly if they are to progress.

*Last Light* is set to be everything that *Metro 2033* was, and then some. The series appears to be growing into one that continues to offer a mature, gritty world and storyline, together with the sort of combat and excitement you'd expect from a shooter today. An increased focus on outdoor exploration means we can expect new monsters and challenges to overcome, but the dark depths of the Metro itself are more dangerous than ever before. For anyone who first noticed this slightly obscure, Ukrainian-developed title, *Last Light* will be the sequel you've been eagerly anticipating. For everyone else, there's no time like the present to dig up a copy of *2033* and find out just what you've missed out on.

# INTERVIEW

## with Huw Beynon,

### head of global communications at THQ

**NAG: How much time has passed since the events of *Metro 2033*?**

**Huw Beynon:** In the fiction it's about a year further on, but we've taken that year to change the environment a little bit. There are the first signs of spring; our outdoor environments in *Metro 2033* were kind of ashen and grey – they had a certain bleak charm about them – but this time around by advancing the time line we've given ourselves a little bit more flexibility with a richer palette of colour and texture to play with. You're going to see sun, vegetation, running water. You can see our weather effects with a day/night cycle have allowed us to deliver a lot more variety into the outdoor world.

**NAG: Is that day/night cycle dynamic or scripted?**

**HB:** It's not real-time in that it'll change according to your time in the level, but we can do some interesting things depending on whether its night or day.

**NAG: So different monsters coming out depending on whether it's night or day?**

**HB:** Absolutely.

**NAG: And how much has changed with Artyom? What's he been up to during the last year?**

**HB:** You obviously play as Artyom again. He ended *Metro 2033* in a very... interesting situation. We take the canon of the book even though we offered the player the opportunity to explore two different endings. Without giving away too much of the story, he ultimately destroyed what he perceived as this threat of the Dark Ones. *Metro: Last Light* puts him in the position where he has to come to terms with his actions from the first game, which is a really interesting starting point for us; we'll explore his story throughout the game.

**NAG: Is everyone still living underground, and how has that lifestyle evolved?**

**HB:** Yeah, the surface is pretty inhospitable. The same factions are still struggling for power – we're going to explore those factions in a little bit more detail this time around. The plot will revolve more around the balance of power between them. So the neo-fascists of Reich, the hard-line

communists of Redline and the more commerce-oriented Hanza are all vying for power.

**NAG: What sort of new weaponry can we expect in *Last Light*?**

**HB:** We've actually expanded our weapon set quite extensively. You saw a new bolt-action sniper rifle in the demo today, but we have plenty more new weapons that we haven't shown yet. We've explored more along the lines of the hand-made weaponry that we introduced in the first game – the idea of these Frankenstein, cobbled-together weapons from spare parts. We're now also giving the player more opportunities to modify these weapons, whether it's with additional mounts, scopes, silencers and other attachments, but still staying very true to that hand-made ethic.

**NAG: The stealth mechanics were a part of the game that many felt needed the most attention; how have you improved on those systems?**

**HB:** We actually had some very sophisticated AI in the first game but I don't think we really had the time to polish it quite as well as we needed. For any AI to be believable, it has to be consistent, and we didn't quite hit that consistency in the first game. The player has to be able to know what's going to happen if they perform a particular action, as that allows them to lay out a strategy and then execute it. We saw a few moments of randomness that broke that immersion. So we've worked really hard to keep that sophistication but hopefully add a ton of polish to it, and we're confident that the final aspect of the game will vastly improve on *2033*.

**NAG: Will it rely on the same concepts of sneaking between pools of light and dark?**

**HB:** Yes, and one of the things that we've changed is how the AI communicates in terms of where your position is and how they try to find you if you've done something to reveal yourselves.

**NAG: Would you say that *Last Light* is tending towards a grittier atmosphere than *2033*, or more towards the concept of a more accessible, mainstream shooter?**

**HB:** It's really important to us that we



don't want to neuter that original *Metro* experience. We think that players want a more cerebral experience – that they want that gritty experience. We're not trying to reach this kind-of mythical mass audience for the game. We just think that there are a lot more people that if they got to sample that *Metro* experience, they'd actually really love it. So we're staying true to our original inspiration; we're not trying to Westernise it or dumb it down. We're determined to explain some of our very complex mechanics a little bit better this time around – introduce them in a slightly more accessible way. But the gameplay, the tone, the bleakness – everything that our fans of the original loved – is absolutely preserved in *Metro: Last Light*.

**NAG: Is the development team still mostly intact from the original team?**

**HB:** Yeah; it's the original team and then larger again. We've got significantly more production resources assigned to us than we did with *Metro 2033*. We're determined to deliver a campaign of comparable length and hopefully superior quality to *2033*. We also have the addition of an entire multiplayer component that we're not ready to talk about just yet. So, yeah, it's a bigger team this time around. **NAG**

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<b>Z77 + Discrete GPU + 3rd Gen. Intel® Core™ processor + Virtu MVP</b>	3DMark Vantage (Extreme)
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# REVIEWS INTRO

I want to be a video game reviewer. I want to play games all day long. Company... Halt! Meet your reviewers.

What was your best boss fight ever in a computer game? Ever!



## RedTide

If the definition of boss fight is a part in the game where you need to overcome a challenge to continue then I choose the doppelganger from the original *Tomb Raider*. Not so much a boss but a heart stopping moment I'll never forget.



## Miktar

It's difficult to pick one from 20 years of amazing boss fights, but the Draco Cantus fight from *The World Ends With You* springs to mind. Pure epic.



## Azimuth

The boss fight that didn't happen. I hate boss fights. Every boss fight should be replaced with free Xbox achievements. All the sense of accomplishment but without the hassle.



## Mikit0707

The scariest boss fight I ever had was with my wife because I didn't close the toothpaste.



## GeometriX

Ad Avis from *Quest for Glory II*. You know any boss fight that begins with a tightrope walk is going to be awesome.



## Barkskin

Although technically not an actual fight, the invisible water... thing... from *Amnesia's* flooded cellar will forever be a memorable encounter. Absolutely f\*cking terrifying.

## MINIREVIEWS

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

### RESISTANCE: BURNING SKIES

Since handhelds tend to be the dumping grounds for popular franchises from their bigger, home-bound siblings, a *Resistance* title on the Vita was inevitable. Well, here it is – are you happy now? No, you aren't, or you won't be, rather, as this is a pretty poor conversion of the popular PS3 series.

*Burning Skies* takes place in the '50s, during the Chimera invasion of the United States. Players take on the role of a fire-fighter turned militia-man named Tom Riley. While *Burning Skies* makes a few decent attempts to bring the concept of a full-scale dual-stick first-person shooter to the Vita, it falls flat at almost every turn: dated visuals and clunky controls serve as a poor technical base on top of which this glorified gallery shooter is dumped. Some of the weapons are kind of cool, and the game even manages to supply a simplistic but sufficiently satisfying multiplayer mode, but only those desperate for a handheld shooter will find much more than a few hours of meagre entertainment here.

45

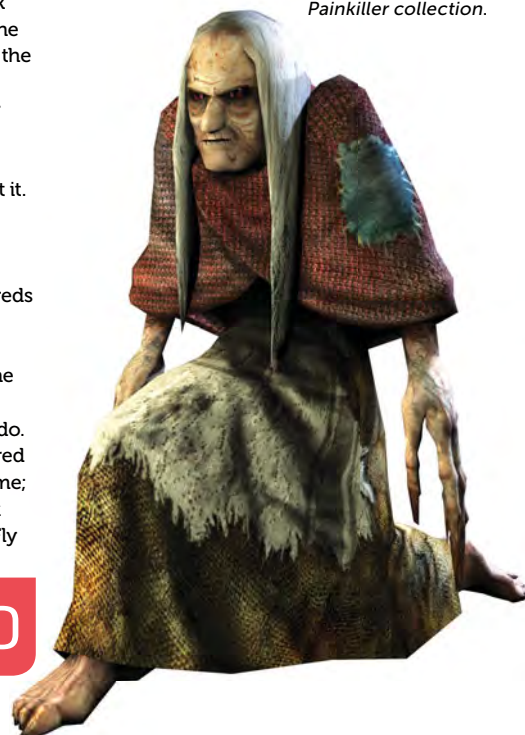
### PAINKILLER COLLECTION

If for some unholy reason you haven't played *Painkiller*, here's your chance to seek forgiveness. *Painkiller Collection* includes the original game plus its expansion, as well as the three standalone expansions that followed. The back of the box claims that there's over 70 hours of game time to be had, which is probably about 50 hours more than a sane person would need, but it's here if you want it.

While the first *Painkiller* was a breath of fresh air for its time, it might not suit every modern-day gamer looking for an FPS fix. *Painkiller* is a horde-style game, with hundreds of enemies that tend to die quickly but require twitchy reflexes and quick thinking to kill, making it an exhilarating arcade game but not much more. Regardless, it perfectly accomplishes everything that it sets out to do. Its standalone sequels, however, haven't fared as well. They feel too much like the first game; they don't innovate nearly enough and lack the quality of design that only People Can Fly (the developers of only the first *Painkiller* and its expansion) can deliver. As a whole, this collection is a mixed bag of sweet nostalgia and, frankly, boredom.

70

One of the many lovely ladies on display in the *Painkiller* collection.







### Ramjet

It was the one with the burly, surly stable hand in Barbie and the 12 Dancing Princesses, I wanted to feed my horse oats and he said no.



### SAVAGE

The Evil Queen Pulsating, Bloated, Festering, Sweaty, Pus-filled, Malformed, Slug-for-a-Butt from *Earthworm Jim*.



### ShockG

*Street Fighter Alpha 2* when you play as Ken and fight Ryu.

## 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.

## WEBScores

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

### DIABLO III

NAG: 85  
Metacritic: 88  
Gamerankings: 87

### DRAGON'S DOGMA

NAG: 89  
Metacritic: 75  
Gamerankings: 76

### FABLE HEROES

NAG: 52  
Metacritic: 55  
Gamerankings: 54

### GEMINI RUE

NAG: 78  
Metacritic: 82  
Gamerankings: 85

### MAX PAYNE 3

NAG: 90  
Metacritic: 91  
Gamerankings: 90

### MUD – FIM MOTOCROSS WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

NAG: 68  
Metacritic: 57  
Gamerankings: 53

### PANDORA'S TOWER

NAG: 60  
Metacritic: 74  
Gamerankings: 70

### RISEN 2: DARK WATERS

NAG: 69  
Metacritic: 69  
Gamerankings: 68

### SNIPER ELITE V2

NAG: 69  
Metacritic: 66  
Gamerankings: 68

### SORCERY

NAG: 72  
Metacritic: 70  
Gamerankings: 69

### STARHAWK

NAG: 84  
Metacritic: 77  
Gamerankings: 79

### TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER

NAG: 75  
Metacritic: 80  
Gamerankings: 79

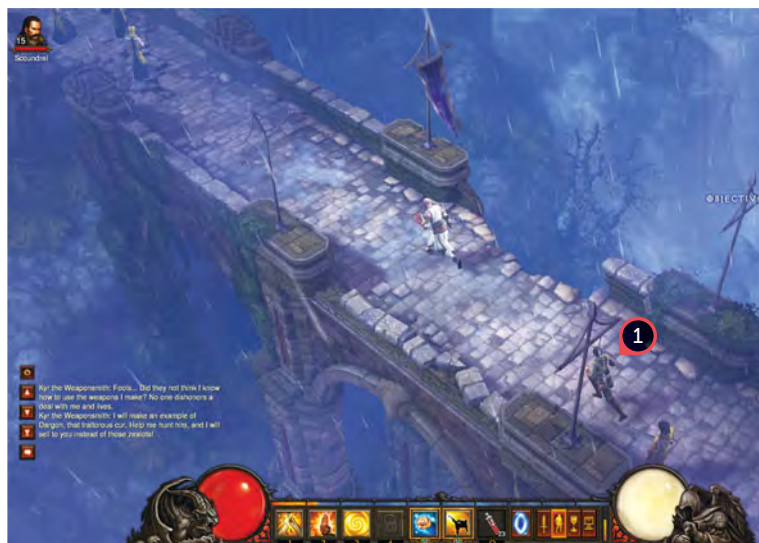
# Diablo III



Stay a while and listen

Here it is: the stupendously anticipated *Diablo III*. It's been eleven years in the making and four years in the waiting since Blizzard first confirmed its existence. It's the biggest PC game release of all time, shattering existing records by selling over 6.3 million copies during launch week. It might be everything you hoped it would be, or it might disappoint you bitterly. There's a whole lot that's good about *Diablo III* – elements that are just plain better, or more interesting – but there's also quite a bit that's less than good. Not necessarily "bad", just... different – worse in some regards than its predecessor. But then again, *Diablo II* was released over a decade ago, so there's a very real possibility that you haven't even played it and wouldn't know a Chipped Skull from a Scroll of Town Portal. Anyway, there's a lot to talk about for all types of potential players of this game, so grab a cup of hot chocolate. Let's see if we can figure out all the nuances together.

*Diablo III* returns to the world of Sanctuary. Ever wrought with invasions of the demonic persuasion, Sanctuary is set squarely in the middle of Heaven and Hell, and acts as a buffer zone between the two planes. The first two *Diablo* titles saw humanity attempt to drive away the demons that barged in, lock away the Lords of Hell – the biggest of the big bads – and restore the world to order. All has been well for some years, but now a giant star has fallen from the sky, ushering in dark prophecies, a following of undead creatures, possessed wildlife and every other manner of foe you can imagine. It's up to



you to be the hero that Sanctuary once-again needs, save the day, fill up your britches with shiny loot and walk triumphant amongst the millions of other players attempting to do the same thing.

As you might have guessed, storyline isn't exactly a big deal in *Diablo III*. Oh, the world has depth, accessed through talkative NPCs, books of lore and lost journals, but the main story that drives the action from Act I to Act IV is pretty much just there to do just that, and not much more. It's not a life-shattering issue, however, as *Diablo* is designed to be a linear affair and every shred of the game is packaged to fit into that description. As your chosen character levels up and moves through chapter after chapter, you'll experience a vibrant, richly detailed world that you might be surprised to learn is randomly generated. Environments offer massive depth and enemies make use of that, crawling down walls and out of graves, swooping in from the skies or exploding into existence from the depths of hell. PC gamers who care about such things have long hailed their platform of choice as the graphical king amongst its console competitors, but *Diablo III* isn't trying to win any awards for boasting the most advanced AA algorithm or most complex tessellation; it's a beauty to look at for reasons greater than texture sizes or polygon counts: it's a work of art in the sense that art is about more than just visual fidelity. Of course, that's always been Blizzard's *modus operandi*: make games that can happily run on a PC that's five years old.

## DETAILS

### Platforms

PC

### Genre

Action role-playing game

### Age restriction

16

### Multiplayer

Local

None

Online

4 players

### Developer

Blizzard

Entertainment

### Website

www.diablo3.com

### Publisher

Blizzard

Entertainment

### Distributor

Megarom



"If you've somehow missed out on the news that *Diablo III* is an online game, here it is in plain English: *Diablo III* is an online game."



**MIKTAR'S OPINION**

It was tempting to write "click" two-hundred times and let that speak for itself, but I doubt RedTide would let me get away with it [damn fine idea actually, Ed]

Put aside the technical issues related to overburdened login servers that often deny entry. Such matters will solve themselves over time. Ignore the debate over the game requiring a constant Internet connection to play even when playing alone. No amount of bitching about it is going to change anything.

*Diablo III* is the sequel to *Diablo II*, and all that implies. Addictive loot-gathering and monster-killing is there. The elderly Deckard Cain drones on about demons this and demons that. Diablo, the Lord of Terror needs to be killed. Repeatedly. It's more fun with friends.

Unlike *StarCraft II* however, Blizzard wasn't afraid to try and evolve the formula. Gone are skill points: no more regretting putting points into a skill you ended up hating. As you level, skills unlock, and you can switch them at any time. To counterbalance infinite instant free "respects" (re-specialisation) is "Nephalem Valor": a buff gained from killing rare/ champion monsters at level 60. It's the only way to get the best items from bosses, but disappears if you change your skills.

The plot is dinky, but *Diablo* was never known for its story. For every bet it plays safe, *Diablo III* introduces something bold and controversial.

If it's still being played 12 years from now, then those choices were the right ones.

**89**





**1** In solo mode, players can take on a follower NPC who can be customised and equipped to a lesser degree than a regular player. These followers contribute in quite a meaningful way in terms of both combat and even lore – they'll often chat to you about their life, future prospects and feelings of current situations.

**2** There's a huge variety of monsters to fight throughout your adventures. Many familiar beasts from the series make a return, but there are plenty of new sorts for you to figure out and defeat.

**3** A crafting system has been added to the game that replaces the Horadric Cube and gambling system of *Diablo II*. Now, an account-bound blacksmith can be taught recipes and given crafting components to build weapons and armour that will be given random magical properties upon creation.

But no amount of artistic beauty can hide a bad game, and this is perhaps where the question of "is *Diablo III* the most amazing game ever" needs to be answered. In short, no, it is not. *Diablo III* is, however, exceptionally fun. The gameplay loop is finely honed to reward exploration, tactics and the already extremely satisfying combat by giving players better equipment, which they use to progress further without dying too much, thus unlocking better equipment, and so on. It's not perfectly executed, however, with a few glaring issues that may be enough to put off people entirely. As mentioned previously, the story is a scrawny narrative vessel, but that's forgivable. What could be considered less forgivable is the incredibly narrow character progression: instead of giving players points to spend on skills and stat points, everything is unlocked automatically. While this has the effect of making level progression exciting all the way up to level 60, and allows players to keep their options open at all times to chop and change builds at will, it relegates player customisation purely to the equipment that they find or buy. Even the skills, as diverse as they are, rely purely on weapon damage as a basis for their own effects, further compounding the focus. As it is, many of the skills are borderline pointless (or at least, made obsolete by other skills) and are ditched soon after being unlocked. Lacking the ability to focus on and improve individual skills towards points distribution means players will naturally tend towards skills that simply are better, instead of those that *feel* better – the latter being a critical component in creating a character that becomes uniquely yours.

Any game with this number of inter-connected players is going to suffer from balancing issues. It's been Blizzard's

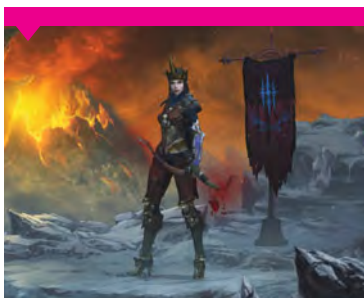


weakness (or strength) for years now: they're unable to deliver a well-balanced game on launch day, but will continue to balance, update and adjust the gameplay mechanics during the game's lifespan to ensure that everyone is happy and playing on a level playing field. The problem with this approach is that, for those who intend to play this game as a purely single-player experience, when Blizzard deploys a balance change that reduces the power of your favourite character's favourite ability because someone else on the Internet felt it was overpowered and unfair, it suddenly becomes an invasive and unwelcome process. It forces one to accept that this is not a single-player game – it's an online game that can be played solo.

As it stands right now, there are major balance issues that affect early and late game specifically. The four difficulty levels are Normal, Nightmare, Hell and Inferno, but Normal is best considered as "easy", as only Nightmare starts to lay down a real challenge for the majority of players. That's not to say that Normal is a cakewalk for everyone – it seems that most classes have a low point in their progression that will require a serious readjustment of their skills and equipment to climb over that hurdle, but once that's done the rest of your first 20-30 hour play-through will be, for the most part, pretty darn easy. Unfortunately, this first play-through on Normal is mandatory, which many players (especially those used to the more punishing *Diablo II*) will find to be a slap in the face. Of course, you can always select Hardcore Mode if you're a sucker for frustration.

On the flip side, Inferno difficulty is proving to be exquisitely challenging for players, and well it should. Unfortunately, it's proving to be particularly challenging for





### GUARDI3N'S OPINION

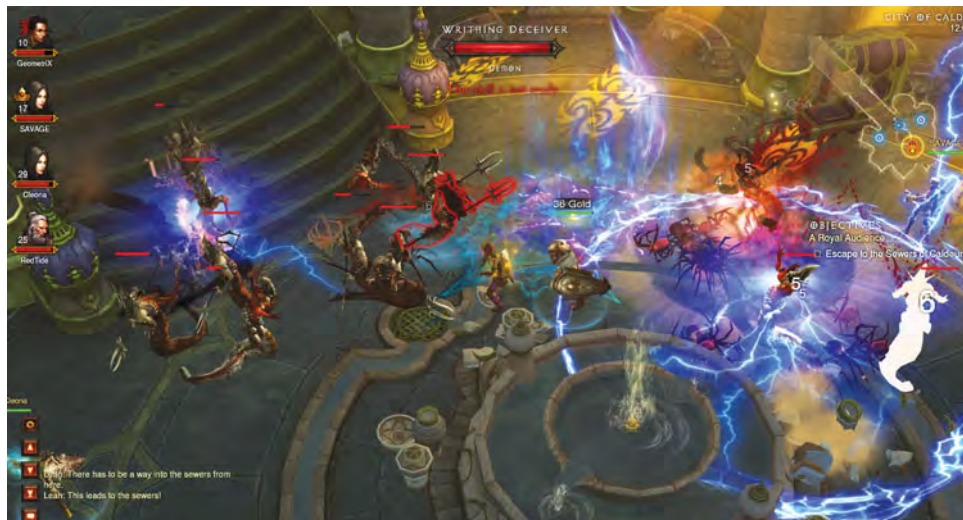
38 hours and 15 minutes with a level 32 Demon Hunter to complete *Diablo III* on Normal. What. A. Ride. The highs for me include finding a Legendary Helm, being able to swap cool stuff with people on my friends list, the sheer diversity of environment from one act to the next, and obsessively exploring every single area on every single map. Oh, and the loot. The glorious magical loot.

The lows were bouts of frustration at not being able to survive very long in two boss fights, which, if I'm being honest, were entirely my own fault at focussing more on magical find percentages than durability or survivability.

There were thousands of mouse clicks, and numerous irreverent chats with my Templar (who I used exclusively for my first play-through) that often had me smiling; not to mention the compulsive organising and re-arranging of my Stash (which I eventually colour-coded into blue and yellow sections and listed according to item class). The game feeds on your compulsive personality in every way it can – and it succeeds.

Is *Diablo III* a perfect game? No, but it is ridiculously addictive and intoxicating in so many ways, and simply demands to be played over and over again.

89

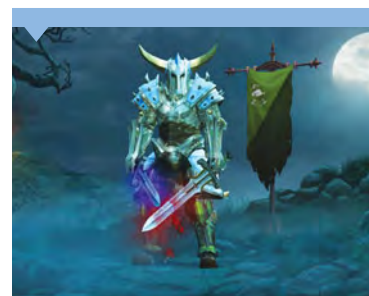


certain classes while others don't struggle nearly as much. It's a delicate balancing act that Blizzard is faced with which will unfortunately leave at least some people feeling sour about whatever changes are ahead.

If you've somehow missed out on the news that *Diablo III* is an online game, here it is in plain English: *Diablo III* is an online game. Not a massively-multiplayer online game, but one that requires that you are permanently connected to the Internet regardless of whether you're playing with friends, in public games or alone. All game elements are constantly validated through Blizzard's servers which will result in lag for every action – combat, inventory usage, skills selection and even chatting to NPCs – if your connection isn't up to snuff. While playing on an ADSL line we've experienced latency of between 210 and 380ms. Anything upwards of 300ms becomes noticeable, but tolerable, and certainly something that one can get used to within a few days. Locally, data usage is also something that needs to be considered, and we've measured usage of approximately 50mb per hour of play.

The more interesting side of this always-online requirement is the social and trading functionality that's been vastly improved from anything we've seen before. Battle.net 2.0 is put to work here: connecting players through a common friends list, allowing quick access to your friends' games (or not: the option is there for you to disable should you feel unsociable), chatting across Blizzard games and even jumping into an open, public game and chat channel. That's all well and good, but there exists a darker side of this online component: the Auction House.

The AH works in much the same way as *World of Warcraft's* version: players can buy, sell, and bid on any items found in the game. This has many knock-on effects that could potentially ruin the game for you or turn it into a truly online experience,



### REDTIDE'S OPINION

*Diablo III* is the banana bread of delivery mechanisms for butter. Here's why: the "butter" is the hack and slash, compare and exchange or sell gameplay loop that games like *Titan Quest*, *Torchlight* and *Diablo* deliver. I'm not going to call it an RPG because there isn't any role-playing as Geoff explained to me in a 30 minute lecture. People like butter; it makes things like Matzos, toast and even corn on the cob palatable. Take the butter out and a snack like a slice of toast loses its appeal. So therefore... out of all the existing delivery mechanisms to get more butter into my mouth, banana bread has to be the best (in my personal opinion). This says a bit about the game too. Some people play it for the grind, others for the cooperative experience and people like me play for the single player experience and the occasional higher level farming whenever I have a spare hour or two. *Diablo III* is by far the most rewarding of these mechanisms I've experienced in years; it satisfies a deep craving. On the technical end, *Diablo III* offers up an incredibly diverse set of environments and creatures to kill and a lot of it is randomly generated. The sound design is amazing and the play dynamic is close to flawless. The only downer is the persistent Internet connection but this is something we're all going to have to accept in our games.

87

## A QUICK GUIDE TO GETTING ALONG ONLINE

With *Diablo* taking the leap into the scary world of online gaming, it's important to familiarise yourself with a few basic terms that will help separate you from the real n00bs online.

**Kiting:** The act of drawing away enemies from their packs to pick them off without getting swamped (or "ganked") by the rest of them.

**Mob:** An enemy, or a group of enemies. Pluralisation isn't an

exact science with this word.

**Build:** A set of skills that ideally work in harmony with one another. Your build can be customised depending on your purpose (solo/co-op play, boss battles, farming, etc.).

**DPS:** Damage per second. This is the ultimate measure of your or your weapon's damage output, calculated by combining average damage with attack speed and any other effects.

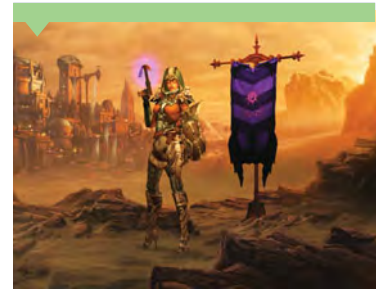
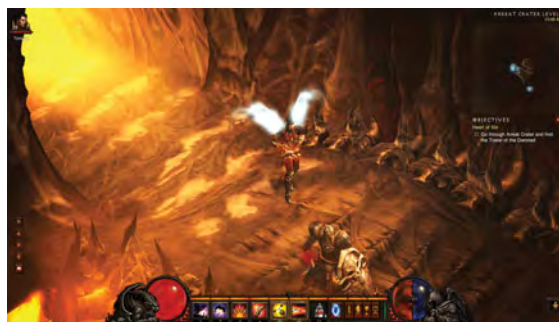
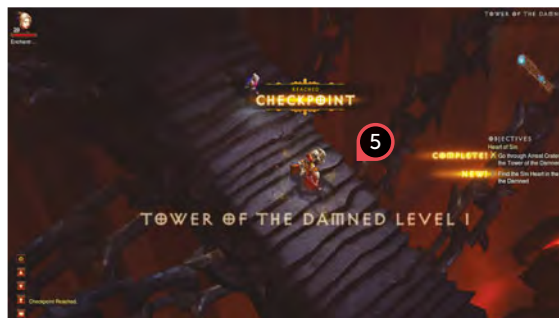
**Farming:** The act of repetitively playing through certain areas of the game to find drops that are common to the area.

**Drops:** Items (generally known as "loot") that are programmed to be found in a particular area or from a boss.

**LFG:** Looking for group. Used in public chat channels to find co-op groups with the intention of farming or defeating a certain boss.

4 Each character class has 20 or so active skills to choose from, but can be customised by one of five skill runes each that become unlocked as you gain levels. These runes change the effects of each skill by extending its duration, increasing damage, reducing resource usage, or other variations.

5 Every area in the game is randomly generated each time you reload your game, but checkpoints throughout quests make dropping in and out of games a little more convenient than it was in the past.



### CHERYL'S OPINION

Hello my name is Cleona and I'm a *Diablo III* addict...

It doesn't matter if you are a casual gamer like myself or a hard core gamer, *Diablo III* is a must play. I will admit one aspect I'm not entirely happy with is the always online side of things. I'm sure I'm just repeating what every other player is saying... Blizzard should not dictate when I may play the game I paid money for! Right, now that I have that out of the way; I have to admit my husband is a *Diablo III* widower, he does however come to visit me online in the world of Sanctuary. I spend a great deal of time there having clocked more than 48 hours in the first five days since the release. I really like the changes they have made to crafting and levelling up your character, I find it is a lot more user friendly. I understand that some people prefer to fine tune their characters to focus on certain skills, by deciding whether they need extra strength or dexterity. I don't really care for that, I prefer to use weapons, armour, etc. to boost those skills. A part of the game that really appeals to me are the achievements – I must admit I'll probably never have a hardcore character so those achievements will never be earned by me, I will however spend many a night trying to earn as many as I am able to.

“...there is so much that's great about *Diablo III* – near-perfect, even – that almost makes it as compelling and addictive as the games before it. ”

depending on the type of player you are. Of course, the AH is completely optional, but just knowing that you can (at the time of writing) buy a Perfect Ruby for the same price of combing together three Chipped Rubies, is enough to leave even the solo players feeling sour. Then there's the real-money Auction House that hasn't yet launched at the time of writing, but a recent spate of account hacking and gigantic security flaws will no-doubt see its launch delayed until Blizzard has locked down absolutely everything.

Reading this review, you might wonder how it's possible for a game with such a great legacy to have so many faults, but it's important to bear in mind that these flaws are only as big as you allow them to be. It's easy to become bogged down in them and to write off *Diablo III* as a terrible shame – a lost opportunity. It's easy to let yourself become wrapped up in negativity and online arguments about where the game went wrong. If you're prone to doing so, you might want to give Blizzard a few months to iron out the kinks, or even wait until the inevitable expansion comes

along. However, there is so much that's great about *Diablo III* – near-perfect, even – that almost makes it as compelling and addictive as the games before it. On its most basic level, *Diablo III* succeeds. **NAG**  
- GeometriX

**85** An imperfect but simplistically entertaining game, *Diablo III* attempts to usher in a new era of action RPGs and will, as a result, either drive you crazy or have you hooked for years to come. Or both, more likely.

**PLUS**  
Satisfying combat / Rich world and visuals / Great audio

**MINUS**  
Weak story / Limited character customisation / Always-online DRM / Balance issues



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# Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier

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If you head into *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* expecting something akin to *Battlefield 3* or *Modern Warfare*, you'll be disappointed. To some this might be obvious, but throughout my time with Ubisoft's latest iteration of the *Tom Clancy* franchise, I couldn't help but feel as if it was the French publisher's answer to those military shooters that dominate the gaming landscape. Perhaps "answer" isn't giving them enough credit however, as *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* does a lot of its own things really well.

You are Staff Sergeant John Kozak and part of a four-man Ghost team. Along with your three fellow phantom friends, Ghost Lead, 30K and Pepper, you'll hop across the globe, from war theatre to war theatre, in an attempt to track down those responsible for detonating a phosphorous bomb that wiped out another Ghost team. Because this is a *Tom Clancy* game, there's loads of military jargon, commanding officers, acronyms and fist-bumping, which is actually entertaining if you don't take it too seriously, and you're able to forgive the occasionally cheesy dialogue. The story starts off with a fairly small scope, but soon enough things escalate to *Modern Warfare* proportions with Russian coups and nuclear launches. It's a little generic, but plot in a military shooter is hardly ever anything more than a vehicle for gameplay and varying environments. While the ending may have been rather abrupt, getting there was nonetheless entertaining.

The game's campaign is broken up into twelve different

missions, with each mission proving to be a rather lengthy affair. At first, mission objectives appear straightforward, but the obligatory curveballs mean that they're never simple. Fortunately you have a ton of fantastic high-tech toys with which to outwit and obliterate your opponents. For me, this is where the game truly shines. I'm kind of a sucker for near-future settings, so issuing orders to a squad of Ghosts equipped with optical camouflage, augmented reality and UAV spy drones never ceased to appeal. On top of this, the near-future setting has allowed Ubisoft's UI designers to include some nice touches. Some of those touches are useful, such as your ammo count and equipment selection hovering near your gun barrel; and others seem to be little more than aesthetic overlays, like the augmented reality that hovers massive text in the sky, not all of which is legible.

Equipment is only half of the goodies you'll play with: there are dozens of guns to unlock and even more attachments and internal mechanisms to add to that list. Gun nuts will love being able to pull apart the various weapons to add gas systems, stocks, rail attachment or alternate triggers. The game boasts "more than 20 million combinations" and honestly that wouldn't surprise me. Don't believe all the marketing hype however, as using Kinect to modify your weapon is a cumbersome affair that you'll try once and never again.

Despite the fact that Kozak (your character) isn't the team leader, you'll literally be calling the shots during missions. Using your augmented reality's targeting system you can mark up to four targets for synchronised take-downs. This can also be done via your UAV, so while the four Ghosts are tucked away behind cover, you can fly around marking enemies to take out. Planning who to kill first is your biggest challenge as certain sections of missions require you to avoid raising alarms, so ideally you want to snipe targets when they're out of sight. This does, however, highlight how dense the AI can be: every so often I'd take out enemies in plain sight of others, with little consequence. What's more, having three AI controlled team members lining up shots on moving targets meant that hit detection would often veer wildly in my favour. Whether this

## DETAILS

### Platforms

360 / PC / PS3

### Genre

Shooter

### Age restriction

18

### Multiplayer

#### Local

2 players

#### Online

12 players

### Developer

Ubisoft Paris  
Ubisoft Red Storm  
Ubisoft Romania

### Website

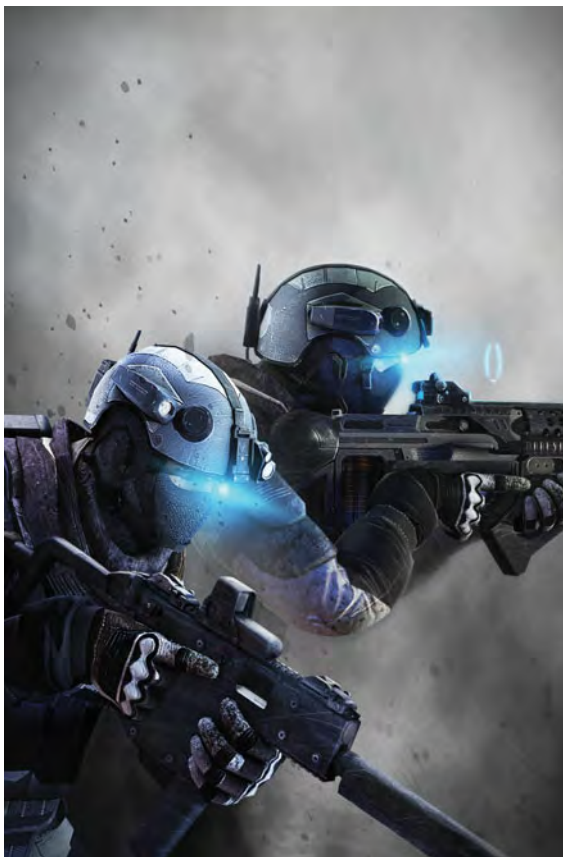
[www.ghostrecon.com](http://www.ghostrecon.com)

### Publisher

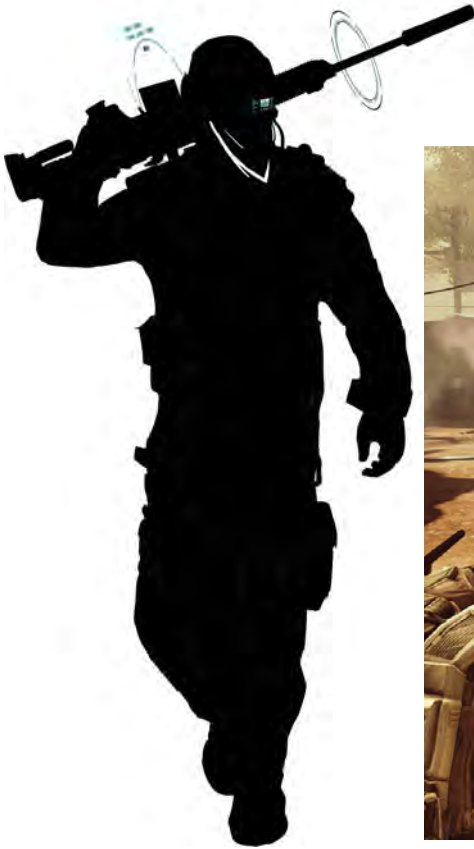
Ubisoft

### Distributor

Megarom







“The game’s campaign is broken up into twelve different missions, with each mission proving to be a rather lengthy affair.”



is an intentional design decision to make synchronised shots more feasible is up for debate. Whatever the case may be, immersion was frequently quashed by team mates being able to snipe enemies through metal shipping containers and, at one point, an entire building.

On a technical note the game is a mixed bag. Character animation during gameplay is very well done, especially as you sprint from cover to cover. What’s more, the camera is possibly one of the best I’ve come across in a third-person game. I never experienced an instant where view was obscured by poor camera placement. The over-the-shoulder viewpoint and cinematic camera angles during cut-scenes do a really good job of keeping you right in the middle of the action. First-person shooting is a franchise staple and that obviously features prominently during the more intense gun battles.

But, as I said, it’s a mixed bag. The Yeti engine has its moments (the Adaptive Camouflage effect is thoroughly convincing) but on the whole the game is rather ugly. There are frequent 2D textures that are so low res you’ll wonder what it is you’re looking at, and occasionally model geometry is laughable. Nowhere is this more obvious than in NPC characters like enemies and civilians; they’re blocky and lacking in detail. Cut-scenes are just as bad if not worse, and the terrible lip syncing doesn’t make things any better. I also experienced some nasty frame-rate dips when the action got too intense.

These technical stumbles are easy to overlook because the game is a lot of fun. It’s important to realise, however, that the squad tactics have taken a backseat in favour of a more cinematic approach. You’ll still be stacking up on doors and performing simultaneous breaches, but your squad mates line themselves up and await your command. A lot of the control has been taken away from you and nowhere is this more



1 This is magnetic vision in action. It lets you see enemies through obstructions at close range, which is useful for a bit of forward planning.



apparent than with the occasional on-rails sections, which seem to be included for the sake of creating dramatic action sequences. It's not a bad thing, because it keeps the game moving along at an agreeable pace. There will still be moments when you'll take things slow and stealthy, but there's now a definite balance between methodical planning and frantic run-and-gun tactics.

Of course, with a four-man team, the campaign screams four-player co-op and indeed you're encouraged to play the game this way right from the start. Even when starting a new single-player game you're dumped into an online lobby that prompts you to invite friends to join your campaign. You can play split-screen co-op but the account that joins you needs to be an Xbox LIVE Gold account (or possibly have a *Future Soldier* U-Play passport code attached to it) which is a stupid move. You can still play with a Guest Account tied to your main account however.

In addition to the campaign is a game mode called Guerrilla Mode. Think of this as *Future Soldier's* very own *Gears of War* Horde mode. You can play this mode on your own, but playing with three other friends is where things really become fun. You need to capture an HQ and defend it for ten waves; after ten waves the HQ position shifts. If you survive a certain amount of waves in a row, you'll begin to unlock power-ups like radar scans and airstrikes.

Competitive multiplayer features four modes: Saboteur, Conflict, Decoy and Siege. There are also three classes to choose and level up: the Soldier, Scout and Engineer. Each of the four game modes is very objective heavy. Objectives vary from hacking terminals to capturing and transporting a bomb



so that you can detonate it in the opposing team's base.

Unfortunately all of the multiplayer modes require considerable teamwork if you hope to win, which is something that is lacking all too often in public multiplayer games. Most of the time, matches will devolve into lone-wolf free-for-alls, with the winning team being decided on kill counts and the few fleeting moments of teamwork. If you have a group of friends and you form your own squad, then you'll probably have a blast with the online competitive modes. As it stands, however, if you head into public games on your own then don't expect much teamwork, but rather a lot of individuals trying (and failing) to get jobs done. **NAG**

- Mikit0707



**75** *Future Soldier* turned out to be a very pleasant surprise. There's a good mix of action-heavy sequences and stealth mechanics. The equipment, weapons and UI successfully combine to give the game a believable, near-future setting that'll scratch a particular itch. Despite its technical shortcomings, the game is an inordinate amount of fun. Also, Ubisoft's Afrikaans enemies make a return. **Bliksem!**

#### PLUS

Excellent sound / Lengthy campaign / Varied environments  
Great for co-op

#### MINUS

Mission variety lacking / Occasionally ugly graphics / Finicky multiplayer modes

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# Max Payne 3

## 101 reasons to never visit São Paulo

It's been almost nine years since Max Payne's fall (see: *Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne*). Unlike most video game heroes, unaffected by the outrageous events and brutal circumstances they traditionally find themselves in, Max hasn't magically picked himself up, dusted himself off and moved on from everything he's seen, done and somehow lived through. He's a broken man, perpetually off-centre in a haze of alcohol, painkillers and regret. There's an odd moment of realisation in the game's opening cut-scene, where all the guilt-ridden pieces click into place. You were with Max throughout his downward spiral, smiling with sheer joy as every slow-motion dive and stylish bullet-cam made you feel like the epitome of the bad-ass action hero. But as Max insists that he's feeling much better now, that he's ready to move on with his life and that all his pain is vanished, even as he stumbles around his unkempt apartment, drowning in drink but floating on medication, your mind grasps at a thought: perhaps Max's past isn't the purely jubilant, sugary, action-packed romp you remember it to be. You were there for the fall, but left before the lonely consequences. In *Max Payne 3*, it's time we dealt with them head on. With bullets, obviously. Lots and lots of bullets.

For all its excellently explosive third-person shooting, *Max Payne 3* is best enjoyed for the yarn it spins around our tragic anti-hero's present-day problems and his attempts to find a way to move past them. The film noir influence seen in its forebears is gone, instead opting for a more



conservative story that actually isn't, because while dream sequences, cheerful weirdness and Norse mythology don't appear, *Max Payne 3* nevertheless deals with powerful emotions and themes generally not often tackled in gaming. Here come some barebones details, devoid of spoilers. Max has moved out of New York and now calls his home São Paulo, Brazil. He's working private security detail for one of São Paulo's wealthiest, most prominent families, which allows for a bit of interesting social commentary as an aside when the narrative highlights the disparity between the city's rich and famous and the poverty-stricken inhabitants of its favelas. Kidnapping, shooting and general misbehaviour happen, and what was supposed to be an easy, abnormally relaxing bodyguard job for our Max turns into something deeper and far more sinister throughout a series of twists, turns and WTF moments.

Narrative delivery and tone might've been altered a bit, but gameplay will be instantly familiar to series fans. The already satisfying gunplay stored within is punctuated with all the series' action-enhancing hallmarks: bullet time, shoot-dodging, bullet-cams, dual wielding and popping painkillers to prop up your health bar all violently return to make you feel at home. Incidentally, you should stop for a moment to consider that we're all the cause of Max's painkiller addiction. We helped get his miserable life where it is. Suck on that guilt, this is what video game characters have to deal with to provide us some fun, etc. New to the game are modern conventions like a cover system, and fleshed-out, unlock-promising multiplayer that's been

### DETAILS

#### Platforms

360 / PC / PS3

#### Genre

Third-person shooter

#### Age restriction

18

#### Multiplayer

##### Local

None

##### Online

16 players

#### Developer

Rockstar Studios

#### Website

[www.rockstargames.com/maxpayne3](http://www.rockstargames.com/maxpayne3)

#### Publisher

Rockstar Games

Take-Two

Interactive

#### Distributor

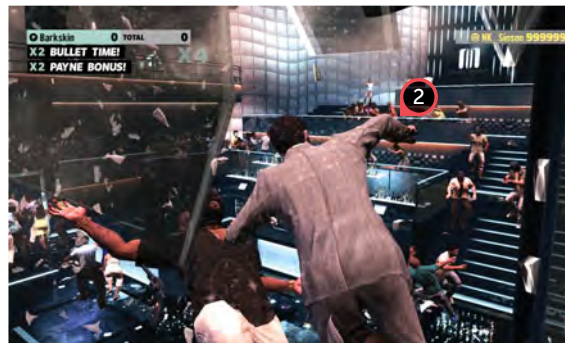
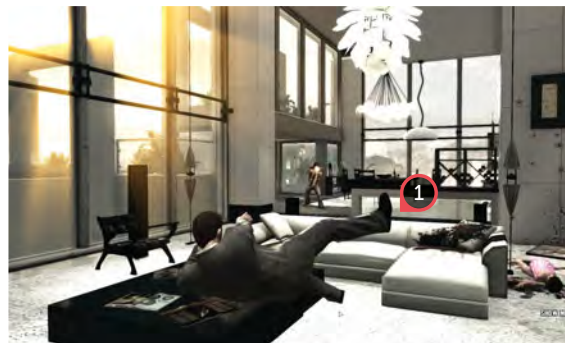
Megarom



### JOIN A GANG, SEE THE WORLD

Let's use this space to talk about *Max Payne 3's* multiplayer for a bit. Simply put, it's really quite good. It's loosely faction-based, in that across various multiplayer modes you'll play as customisable characters from the various gangs you encounter throughout the single player (and even Max's past, with the inclusion of the Punchinello family as one of the multiplayer gangs). Modes on offer include the obligatory deathmatch and team deathmatch (as well as "large" variations of the two, on bigger maps that double the player limit to 16). More exotic stuff comes in the form of the Payne Killer and Gang Wars modes. The former is a variation of Mutant – two of the players in the game become Max Payne and his sidekick Raul Passos, fighting off every other player in the game using prescribed weaponry and a few character-specific bonuses. Kill Max or Raul, and you respawn as them. Earn points. Win. Repeat. Gang Wars is a series of varying, objective-based game modes depicting two gangs struggling for dominance. Capture points, bombsite attacking and defending,

that sort of thing – complete these in a sequence, and the gang that performed best in the series gets a bonus for the final team deathmatch at the end. Playing in matches earns you cash and experience. Cash allows you to buy new weapons, Bursts and other enhancements. Bursts are like killstreak rewards – getting kills, looting bodies and completing objectives earns you adrenaline. Build up enough adrenaline, and you can activate Bursts, things like bullet time and damage upgrades for your weapons. Adrenaline is also used for slow-motion shoot-dodging (only players you're aiming at will join you in bullet time), so it's somewhat of a trade-off. Experience earns you increases in rank, and this provides more stuff for you to spend multiplayer money on. There's more to it than I have space to list here, but know that the multiplayer is a fun, frantic offering for when you're done experiencing the single-player plot. There are currently a few issues with obnoxious cheating a\*\*holes in the game's multiplayer (who are apparently being punished for their unforgivable crimes), but aside from that, it's great.



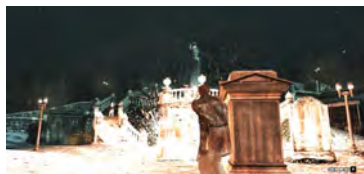
“For all its excellently explosive third-person shooting, *Max Payne 3* is best enjoyed for the yarn it spins around our tragic anti-hero's present-day problems and his attempts to find a way to move past them.”



1 Max now reacts realistically to the environment when shoot-dodging. It obviously makes everything more plausible – but it's also a LOL when you send Max careening headfirst into a wall.



2 There are now interactive cinematic moments like this one, wherein Max will initiate a sequence that still leaves you in control of the aiming and shooting, but movement is automatic.



featured in everything since 2007. For those who've not played the previous games, Bullet Time was Max's initial claim to fame: the ability to slow time to a crawl at the press of a button for perceived increased reaction time and aim. It was a remarkably satisfying effect back in 2001, and it still is today. Shoot-dodging lets you dive in any direction, automatically activating bullet time when you do so and making it tougher for enemies to get hits on you. As you soar horizontally through the air, you're still able to loose a steady stream of bullets. Line up a few headshots along the course of a shoot dodge, and it's possible to take out several enemies before you hit the ground. Also, it looks cool, and looking cool is at least 80% of an action hero's job.

There are a few tertiary upgrades to the trademarks, like how you're able to stay on the ground for as long as you'd like after a shoot dodge, rolling around from the extra cover of a prone position to fire at enemies all around you. Collecting painkillers now provides a "last stand" situation for when an unseen enemy gets a cheap shot in and leaves you close to doom. Provided you've got painkillers stored, this'll activate bullet time and swing the camera around to face whoever shot you. Kill the offending foe before an invisible timer expires, and you'll pop a painkiller and be able to continue the fight. It's a massively helpful feature, especially on the tougher difficulty settings where it doesn't take much punishment before you're coughing and spluttering in a puddle of your own entrails.

Now that the laundry list of inner workings is out of the way, all you need to know is that it's a fairly standard third-person shooter on the surface – but it's an immensely



LEFT: Extreme planking: adding in the "extreme" doesn't make you any less of a D-bag.



"You got blood on my favourite shirt! Now I'm gonna ask you one question... Do you think Vanish will get rid of it?"

satisfying one in motion. It's been expertly polished to nigh perfection, with convincing animations, volatile environmental destruction and pleasing variation in the cosmetic appearance of enemies making every action-packed sequence uniquely extraordinary in its own way. Level design is tight, proving that Rockstar is capable of crafting more than just non-linear open worlds. The levels themselves and the chunks of story revealed within them are exciting and meticulously paced. The flow of the action is impressive, as kills are organically strung together using the mechanics provided. It almost makes the game as much fun to watch as it is to play. Almost.

In a game where pitch-perfect presentation seem to have been such a driving force (and is presumably the reason for its protracted development), minor technical glitches are all the more noticeable. *Max Payne 3* has its fair share of them. At one point, I was forced to restart a level because a scripted event within it refused to fire, no matter how many times I reloaded from a previous checkpoint. Later, I found myself walking upside-down underneath a level's geometry. It's little, immersion-nuking issues like this that poke holes in *Max Payne 3*'s stylish delivery. Still, I'm sure you can tell that I really like this game. Its stylised action is effortlessly engaging and never ceases to be fun – yet its greatest accomplishment lies in the presentation of its oddly believable (and affecting) storyline. **NAG**

- Barkskin

**90** With the genre packed to bursting, every new shooter that's released these days runs the risk of exiting the gate already stale and tired. Rockstar's keen sense of style, story and interactive cinema ensure that that's not the case with *Max Payne 3*. If you're looking for an expertly developed action romp with an unexpectedly poignant tale to tell, play *Max Payne 3*.

**PLUS**

Excellent narrative / Stylish, smooth action / Good multiplayer  
Max Payne is an awesome character

**MINUS**

Occasional technical fail

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# Risen 2: Dark Waters

I refuse to piratespeak here

I've not played the original *Risen*. All I've read about it leads me to believe that it was a flawed gem, a weird and wonderful RPG experience plagued with all manner of technical oddities that proved too frustrating for some; but for those who could stomach it, it proved a rich and interesting role-playing delight. That sounds pleasingly familiar, because I have played *Gothic* and its sequels – and the *Gothic* series (originally created by *Risen's* developer, Piranha Bytes) was met with similar reception (at least, the first two games were) upon release, vehemently defended by its legion of die-hard fans who lusted for the more gritty and challenging, far less mainstream (and technically very broken) RPG experience that series offers. But is *Risen 2: Dark Waters* similarly endearing? Is it weird and wonderful enough to prove enthralling beyond the expected mountain of technical botches? In short: no.

That's not to say that my disdain for *Risen 2* is caused entirely by technological failings, mind you. The game actually ran mostly hitch-free on my PC (bar a few minor bugs here and there), only crashing to desktop once in my many hours (40 or so) with it. The real problem lies in questionable design decisions that permeate throughout the game, and a gnawing feeling that this game is incomplete. But let's start at the beginning. *Risen 2* ditches the high-fantasy trappings of its forebear in favour of something a little more unusual in the world of RPGs: swashbuckling buccaneers and pet monkeys and ships and cannons and grog-swilling scoundrels and other high-seas high jinks that allude to pirate-y happenings. The story follows on from the original, with you assuming the role of *Risen's* Nameless Hero once again. There's all this stuff about battling Titans and sea monsters nomming ships and



pirate captains rubbing each other the wrong way and trade embargos and islands of dead people and other such words that would be much more inspiring were they to flow in any coherent, story-like manner. But they don't. So they aren't. It's abundantly clear from the offset that *Risen 2's* pirate-themed narrative is never going to be its shiniest appendage.

Onwards to the gameplay then, and the role-playing nuts and bolts that glue it all together. This is where *Risen's* sequel is most depressingly disappointing, in that it feels too loosely hewn together to be truly satisfying.

Foregoing any form of class-based system, *Risen 2* instead takes the freeform character progression route, and it works like this: bashing monkeys and warthogs (and you'll do a lot of this – this game's enemy variety is sorely lacking) earns you "Glory." Once you've amassed enough of this formerly abstract substance (which I like to imagine tastes a bit like After Eights when eaten), you're free to spend it on one of five base character proficiencies – blades, firearms, toughness, cunning and voodoo. *Risen 2* does away with bows and the like for ranged combat, offering up assorted muskets, pistols and shotguns to accompany its pirate sensibilities. Traditional magic systems (fireballs, ice spells, etc.) are done away with too, instead offering the chance to learn voodoo – which focuses on controlling and debuffing foes – later in the game. Cunning is the all-encompassing skill behind stealth and persuasion abilities, and blades and toughness are self-explanatory.

Once you've spent a few points on various proficiencies, you visit trainers to learn different abilities for each. A firearms

## DETAILS

<b>Platforms</b>	360 / PC / PS3
<b>Genre</b>	Role-playing game
<b>Age restriction</b>	16
<b>Multiplayer</b>	Local
	None
	Online
	None
<b>Developer</b>	Piranha Bytes
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.risen2.de">www.risen2.de</a>
<b>Publisher</b>	Deep Silver
<b>Distributor</b>	Apex Interactive







Melee combat against human foes is fairly entertaining, and you'll gradually learn skills that make it easier – like ripostes and power attacks. The same does not apply to most non-human critters.



trainer can teach you how to reload your pistol faster, or even how to engineer your own pistols using schematics collected around the world, for example. Trainers demand gold for their services, however, and gold is tough to come by in *Risen 2* – especially when you're not a rogue-type character capable of stealing anything that isn't nailed down. The Nameless Hero is also quite a useless chap when it comes to swordplay and gunfights until you've pumped a few points into the requisite skills and trained some combat abilities – and this, coupled with the scarcity of cash and the game's inability to adequately explain most of its more intricate mechanics, can make *Risen 2*'s opening hours infuriatingly unforgiving as you bump around in the dark trying to figure out how the game expects you to play it. On the flip side, the unusual skill system means that character progression is made more meaningful, each new ability cherished because of its high cost in time and in-game funds. There are some truly interesting abilities as well, like one which allows you to train a pet monkey, allowing you to assume control of it for a bit of nefarious thievery. Combat functions adequately enough, but it's clunky and unforgiving, often resulting in cheap deaths just when you think you've got an encounter under control – especially when facing off against groups of enemies.

Quests are numerous and there are a decent number of people on the islands you'll travel to in the game willing to part with some gold and perhaps a unique treasure in exchange for a favour from you. While there is some variety in the jobs, tedious fetch quests and inane quest lines often appear to ruin your fun and seemingly offer no function other than padding game time. Why the hell do I need to perform a series of five

mundane tasks when I want to leave an island, and why do I have to do this more than once? Like the rest of the game, the quests feel rushed and poorly strung together. Another of *Risen 2*'s issues involves rewarding the player for their efforts, in that this very rarely happens. When I spend an hour slashing through hordes of giant crabs and ghouls and other beasties in a lonely swamp, I expect a chest filled with glorious booty to be waiting for me on the other end as my reward. This is never the case. *Risen 2* instead asks that you expect almost nothing from such taxing endeavours, which is insulting. Especially when simply buying a treasure map from a merchant for 100 gold, casually strolling to the treasure's location (which is in visual distance from the merchant's stall) and digging it up rewards you with 500 gold and a load of valuable trinkets. True story.

*Risen 2* feels as though it was born of a dream had by its chief designer, wherein it was envisioned the perfect pirate RPG, right down to the finest detail; but upon waking, said designer couldn't jot down all of the dream's ideas fast enough to outpace the withering memory of it, leaving holes in its design. It's a shame really, because it's obvious throughout the game that plenty of thought and passion has gone into its making, but constraints of some form kept it from achieving its true potential. **NAG**

- Barkskin

69

**Risen 2 is one of those games that constantly, lamentably reminds you of what it could (and should) be. It's cheery and optimistic, and it's got a ton of heart, but it's also too mechanically scatterbrained to really offer up an RPG outing that's worth enduring. Fans of Piranha Bytes' praiseworthy previous efforts will likely be disappointed.**

**PLUS**

Alluring RPG mechanics

**MINUS**

Brutally unforgiving for newcomers / Unrewarding  
Lacks polish in many areas



# Dragon's Dogma

Advanced Dungeons and Devil May Dogma

A dragon drops down from the sky, rips out your heart and eats it. You come back to life as the Arisen, compelled to get back at that damn dragon. After all, the dragon says (nearly literally) "come at me, bro".

This is all the "plot" you really need. *Dragon's Dogma* is a 1990s arcade game in spirit, with an amazing combat system dropped into the middle of a sandbox world. It's populated by the bestiary of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, and it is perpetually fascinating to play with. But there are a few things it definitely isn't.

You may have been told *Dragon's Dogma* is like *Skyrim*; if you approach *Dragon's Dogma* expecting that, you'll be disappointed. Its world is not as granular, nor does it have the scope of *Skyrim*'s frosty mountains. The savvy person may have told you it's like *Dark Souls*. Close, but you'll still be a bit let down. It's tough, at points, but it is by no means as harsh and unforgiving.

Instead, this is a game that deftly and quietly remaps the boundaries of a genre.

When you create your character, all the usual mannequin tweaks are there for cosmetics, but two have a large impact on gameplay: height, and muscle vs. fat ratio. A tall, fat man can bring down flying creatures just by grabbing on to them. A tiny, skinny kid can run like a cheetah, but can't carry much. This impacts on combat

too: if you give yourself much muscle, your attacks do more damage, but you lose the agility you might need to climb up a dragon's chest so as to stab it in the face.

Another example of unconventionality in *Dragon's Dogma* lies in its fast-travel system: or the initial lack thereof. At first all you can do is teleport back to the hub city. Later, you can place teleport markers yourself, building up your own fast-travel network which carries over into the post-game and each subsequent New Game+ where you restart the game but keep your skills and items.

In a way, there is a little *Dead Rising* in *Dragon's Dogma*. You won't be able to see everything on your first play-through: the game expects you to play it over and over, learning more about the combat and world each time, becoming better equipped to handle certain dangerous areas on the next pass through.

Each character class (see: "Stay Classy") plays its own unique way. Warriors are heavy with slow attacks that do much damage, Magick Archers can lock onto multiple targets and let fly homing arrows, Sorcerers can split the earth and bring down meteors (if given enough casting time). The major spells are impressive in ways rarely seen in fantasy games, while the basics of combat are intricate. This is what you get when the *Devil May Cry* team is in charge of designing the combat: a non-disposable

## DETAILS

### Platforms

360 / PS3

### Genre

Action role-playing game

### Age restriction

18

### Multiplayer

#### Local

None

#### Online

None

### Developer

Capcom

### Website

www.dragonsdogma.com

### Publisher

Capcom

### Distributor

Megarom

## MY LITTLE PAWNY - ASYNCHRONOUS MULTIPLAYER IS MAGIC

You're not alone in *Dragon's Dogma*. Your personal Pawn is an A.I. controlled apprentice that learns from you. Use the "Help" command often, and they'll start to prioritize defending you. If you use "Go" often, they'll start exploring areas ahead of you naturally. They learn how to best kill certain beasts and even solve quests.

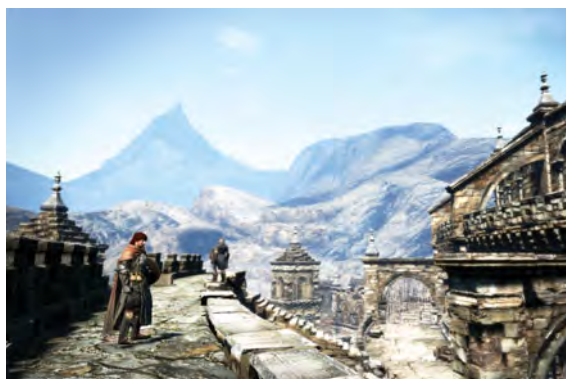
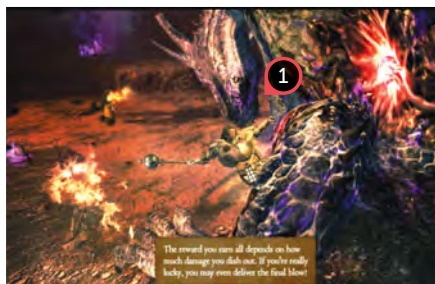
If you're online, your Pawn can be hired by anyone else and will continue to learn and grow. It's asynchronous: sleep at an inn and the copies of your Pawn from other people will return with their knowledge and experience. Your Pawn might return with clues on how to complete a quest you're stuck on, having completed it in someone else's game.

You can hire up to two additional Pawns using special Riftstones which lets you search for specific types of Pawns, or by simply hiring them when you come across them wandering the roads. If you're online, other people's Pawns will appear in your world ambiently.



1 You can climb any of the giant creatures, attacking their weak points directly, and hang on for life as they try to shake you off.

2 The Hydra is a bothersome foe, spitting poison and eating your Pawns. When you manage to cut off a head, burn the hole with fire to stop it regrowing.



### STAY CLASSY

There are nine combat classes, or "vocations", in *Dragon's Dogma*. Each is unique in how it plays. You pick between Fighter, Strider and Mage at the start, these basic vocations striking a balance between offense and defence. All vocations gain rank as you use them, and you can swap freely between them. Once you've ranked up enough in a basic vocation, you can switch it to an advanced version, like Warrior, Ranger or Sorcerer, which gives up defence in favour of a much stronger offense. There are three additional hybrid vocations: Mystic Knight, Assassin and Magick Archer,

which combine elements from two different classes and add their own unique skills and abilities.

Ranking up in a vocation unlocks new attack skills, upgrades which improve your character in some way such as levitation or dodging, and augments. Once unlocked, augments can be used by any class, up to six at a time. Just because you unlocked "increased damage at night" with your Assassin, doesn't mean your Warrior won't find it useful.

Pawns can only use the basic vocations, but can be switched between them freely.

"A tall, fat man can bring down flying creatures just by grabbing on to them."



combat system that's perpetually interesting to play. While the story starts off paper-thin, it gains weight and a surprising amount of meaning near the end. Around the end game, you gain access to a boss fight that is unlike anything in gaming today: the Ur-Dragon. To take it down, the damage from everyone fighting him on the same platform (PS3 / 360) is combined, making it an invisible team effort. If you're offline, he's easier, but the loot isn't as good.

If you're the type that wasn't wooed by *Skyrim's* friilly bits and one-dimensional combat, or thought *Dark Souls* too masochistic, then here is a game that may be more like what you were looking for. **NAG**

- Miktar

89

It's not perfect (and what is these days), but it's the closest thing to something genuinely new and invigorating in the drab fantasy game genre. Best played with an active Internet connection, but not necessary.

#### PLUS

Rock-solid combat system / Epic monster encounters  
Ground-breaking asynchronous multiplayer / Amazingly replayable

#### MINUS

Optional escort missions / No vsync on 360 version / Pawns can be very chatty

# Gemini Rue

One man army

You might recognise *Gemini Rue* – we mentioned it briefly in the March issue of *NAG* as one of the top indie games of 2011. The game has finally taken the leap into local retail shelves which means that those of you who were unable or unwilling to buy online can get their heads stuck into this great retro-inspired point and click adventure game.

That retro inspiration extends beyond the interface: most of *Gemini Rue* is made by a single person – coding, writing, design, animation and the vast majority of the game's sometimes crude pixel art has been put together by a chap named Joshua Nuernberger. On the one hand, it's commendable – massively impressive, even, that a game of this overall level of quality can be made by a single person. On the other hand, the weak dialogue writing goes to show that it's impossible to master every aspect of game development. And the voice acting, which is of the most painful and dull level imaginable for an indie title, doesn't do much to redeem the dialogue.

While it suffers from a few technical hitches, *Gemini Rue* is otherwise a fantastic adventure game that has all the throw-backs to those '90s classics we love, with a few modern twists that are surprisingly well integrated into the gameplay. **NAG**

- GeometriX

## DETAILS

### Platforms

PC

### Genre

Point and click adventure

### Age restriction

16

### Multiplayer

#### Local

None

#### Online

None

### Developer

Wadjet Eye Games

### Website

wadjeteyegames.com/gemini-rue

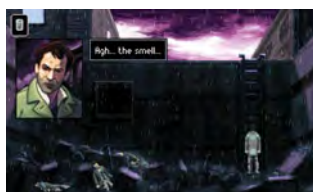
### Publisher

Wadjet Eye Games

### Distributor

Apex Interactive

Barry gets probed.



78

Old school gamers should love it; everyone else might be able to overlook its relatively dated trappings to see the deep, intriguing sci-fi adventure within.

### PLUS

Great puzzles / Rich game world / Well-conceived story

### MINUS

Awful voice acting / Some terrible animations / Weak dialogue

# Fable Heroes

Bash It!

When you have a good, solid IP as part of your stable, the temptation to exploit it is more than a little strong. And that's pretty much what Lionhead did here; *Fable Heroes* is a nod to the popular franchise, yes, but it also comes across as an excuse to try and wring a little more money out of it.

*Fable Heroes* is a simplified visit to Albion, which comes in the form of a 3D beat-em-up game that devolves into fairly aimless button mashing before long. Each level presents the player with the choice of two paths through it. One leads to a tiring, punishing boss fight, and the other leads to a collection of mini-games. But the boss fights are tedious (simply because the bosses just take too long to kill) and the mini-games are rather unoriginal. The choice then becomes one of selecting the lesser of two evils.

The game has an upgrade system, too, which involves spending collected coins on upgrades made available according to the player's position on a game board. It's a fun idea and is surprisingly complex when compared to the rest of the game, but the upgrade themselves seem to have little effect.

Aside from great visuals, *Fable Heroes* doesn't have too much going for it. It is a fun distraction, sure, but it is ultimately very forgettable. **NAG**

- Ramjet

## DETAILS

### Platforms

360

### Genre

Action adventure

### Age restriction

10

### Multiplayer

#### Local

None

#### Online

4 players

### Developer

Lionhead Studios

### Website

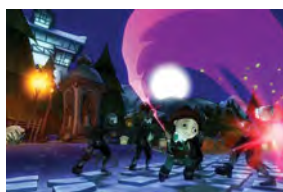
www.lionhead.com/fable-heroes/

### Publisher

Microsoft

### Distributor

XBLA



52

A fun distraction, *Fable Heroes* just doesn't do enough to make you want to play it obsessively... or very much at all, for that matter.

### PLUS

Good distraction / Great visuals

### MINUS

Feels pointless / Very short [*That's what she said, LOL, AD*]

# Pandora's Tower

## Chained

The Wii is slowly coming towards the end of its life cycle; one would expect a bunch of top notch, inventive titles to be hitting the shelves, pushing the limits of the hardware in all new ways. But *Pandora's Tower* doesn't quite live up to that ideal.

It's not a bad game, per se, but it doesn't do all the things you would expect it to do. Some elements of the game dynamic are excellent, while others feel decidedly dated.

Aeron, the hero of the tale, is in love with Elena. But the girl has been cursed to turn into a hideous creature, so the hero undertakes a mission to get twelve chunks of flesh for her to consume, in order to undo the curse. It's a bit gruesome, and if the game had better graphics, it might even border on shocking, but the visuals that support this surprisingly deep and emotionally charged story leave a bit to be desired.

The action itself is also a mixed bag. With two primary weapons, the game does offer some variety. A magical chain that Aeron uses to fight and navigate adds a very visceral feel to the game, which is great. But his other weapon – which the player can grind to improve or replace with other weapons – feels a little off.

It's a fun adventure, but the mixed bag it offers keeps it from achieving any form of greatness. **NAG**

- Ramjet

### DETAILS

#### Platforms

Wii

#### Genre

Action adventure

#### Age restriction

13

#### Multiplayer

##### Local

None

##### Online

None

#### Developer

Ganbarian

#### Website

www.nintendo.

co.uk

#### Publisher

Nintendo

#### Distributor

Core Group



**60** This action adventure is a real mixed bag; it combines great elements with some not so great elements.

#### PLUS

Great story / Some awesome game dynamics

#### MINUS

Dated graphics / Can get repetitive

# Sorcery

## Have wand, will travel

Set in a world inspired by Celtic mythology, *Sorcery* puts the player in the role of Finn, an apprentice spell-slinger who nicks a magic wand and goes on the sort of action-packed, world-saving adventure that one would expect from this kind of title.

What is most impressive with this game is the actual spell casting. Using the Move controller as a magic wand, the player can cast a variety of spells, even combining their effects to create more powerful magic combos. The control scheme is well implemented, too; if the player aims at a specific spot, that's where the spell will go, and curved motions can even shoot enemies that are behind cover.

The well-implemented controls are let down a little by the almost lifeless feel that most of the environments and enemies offer. The game looks great at times, but for the most part it feels a little dull. In addition, it is not very long, either – around six hours at best.

Younger players will undoubtedly love the effective wand casting and potion brewing that *Sorcery* offers, but the fact that this game has been so long in development, coupled with elements that just don't deliver on what is expected from an HD game these days will make it less appealing for adults. With that said, *Sorcery* is a lot of fun to play, and makes for a great distraction. **NAG**

- Ramjet

### DETAILS

#### Platforms

PS3

#### Genre

Action adventure

#### Age restriction

12

#### Multiplayer

##### Local

None

##### Online

None

#### Developer

The Workshop

#### Website

www.sorcery.

com

#### Publisher

SCEE

#### Distributor

Ster Kinekor Entertainment



**72** *Sorcery* can be very enjoyable, as long as you don't demand too much from it. Great control combines with lifeless environments in a rather short game.

#### PLUS

Great controls for spells / Youngsters will love it

#### MINUS

A little lifeless / Somewhat inconsistent

# Sniper Elite V2

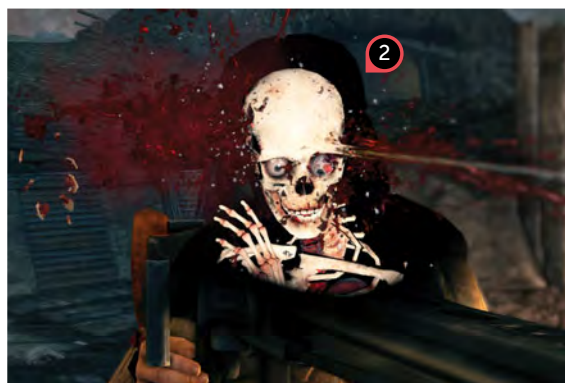
## High impact x-ray surgery

Let's talk about *Sniper Elite V2*. It's not a sniping simulation because at no point do you ever climb into a tree and wait there for days until someone passes underneath without moving or eating. It's not an action shooter because you can't survive a direct close-quarters fight for long. It's also not a stealthy sneak around because the enemy can spot you at almost any distance no matter how low you crawl or how carefully you move. The game does try and set up believable sniping opportunities with loud noises meant to cover your shots and a few lofty vantage points you must carefully work your way up to. But no matter the setting or required task, the action often devolves into a tedious pop-up shooting gallery where you absorb bullet impacts, regenerate health and wait for enemy heads to stick out. The maps are sparse and offer no real "strategic" choice as you chase from one obscure waypoint to the next. Progress is often halted by patrolling guards that offer varied levels of intelligence and/or resistance. In terms of the missions, it would have been far better if players were given an objective and then allowed to choose their own way to achieve the goal, but instead are led by the hand. The game also suffers from thicker than normal artificial intelligence where soldiers will simply forget that a few minutes ago one of their buddies took a bullet to the head. The game engine looks dated with many cut and paste locations and objects and similar looking piles of rubble artificially blocking areas of the map. Playing the game on normal difficulty will get you about ten hours of game time and only because you might choose to do things the careful, slow and stealthy way. If you're aggressive this play time will drop significantly. The game is best played at the highest difficulty because then it'll be closer to the kind of experience you're probably looking for in a sniping

1 Planting explosives is all in a day's work for tough guy army dude man.

2 The skeleton king's army was taking a beating.

3 Heart stopping action.



game – slow, deliberate and careful. There certainly are a pile of problems with *Sniper Elite V2* and it's important to understand what you're getting into, because if you can overlook these issues (most not serious) the game is a lot of fun. For most players the balance between sneaking and shooting will be just right. The satisfaction of making a kill at the perfect moment is a decent reward after the time and effort put in. The story is functional enough to get you through the loading screens and oddball enough to remind you that this is just a game and not an accurate historical simulation (although that might have been better). All critical points aside, the clear winner here has to be the slow motion bullet camera; and of course watching the x-ray view of bones and organs exploding in all their gory glory. Of course if that level of intimacy isn't your cup of sugar then this one is best left alone. What is on offer is good enough to demand a sequel, a sequel that perhaps opens up the world more and punishes you heavily for breaking the rules. It's a fun game with a few flaws that keep it from being great. **NAG**

- RedTide

## 69

*Sniper Elite V2* gets the concept right but messes up the delivery mechanism with a lot of little things that prevent it from being great.

All the negatives aside, it is a lot of fun to play and nothing beats the slow motion x-ray kill camera with matching screams.

### PLUS

X-ray kills / Simple and fun

### MINUS

Linear maps / Short / Can be tedious

## DETAILS

### Platforms

360 / PC / PS3

### Genre

First-person shooter

### Age restriction

16

### Multiplayer

Local

None

Online

12 players

### Developer

Rebellion

Software

### Website

www.

sniperelitev2.

com

### Publisher

505 Games

Mastertronic

Distributors

[PC] Silver

Screen

[Console] Apex

Interactive

# Mario Kart 7

**M**ario Kart, a franchise that has always been a great and welcomed addition to the Nintendo name on both past and present platforms grows more and more with every release while still staying true to its core game play mechanics and style. *Mario Kart 7* is the latest offering on the Nintendo 3DS, and it does not disappoint.

The main idea of *Mario Kart* is to combine tracks and characters from previous games, a track designed from *Super Mario Galaxy*, the characters from previous games, and of course, the infamous power-ups that have been cleverly designed to fit the fast-paced dodging, driving, and drifting. The character roster includes 17 characters – a bit short from its Wii predecessor which had 25, although there are new faces in the portable title. The beloved game modes return too: Balloon Battle, Coin Battle, focusing on multiplayer battles, fighting over quantity of coins until the end.

The tracks are unique, each with their own style, they pop with colour and if you have played *Mario* you will remember a lot of the scenery. Each cup has a four track selection, with no duplicates, ranging from 50cc to 150cc the difficulty rising with the increased speed. Finishing the 150cc cups will result in unlocking a new character. This can be extremely daunting and frustrating on some tracks.

Nintendo have added a few more additions to the franchise,



## DETAILS

**Platforms**  
3DS  
**Genre**  
Racing  
**Age restriction**  
3  
**Multiplayer**  
**Local**  
2 players  
**Online**  
8 players  
**Developer**  
Nintendo EAD /  
Retro Studios  
**Website**  
mariokart7.  
nintendo.com  
**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*, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D* and *Mario Kart 7*). 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](mailto:nintendoreaderreviews@nag.co.za) as a Word document (.doc or .docx) or RTF. You need to do this by 12:00 on Wednesday the 11th of July.

The best review will

appear in the next issue of *NAG* and the entrant will receive from Nintendo South Africa three Nintendo 3DS games of your choice (limited to first-party titles), a Circle Pad Pro and *Mario Kart 7* wheel accessories. Two 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.

like underwater diving, and gliding segments, which are great, if you do it right it could secure your spot ahead of the rest, and they don't take away from the whole karting experience. Collectable coins are added and by collecting 50 you unlock a new car part, which you use to customize your kart, anything from flower umbrellas to cloud encasings, these parts have their own attributes and help contribute to your style of driving.

Multiplayer is obviously essential to this title, bringing along with it StreetPass functionality, local play and download play, if your partner doesn't have the game. Online lets you have your own profile and rating.

**NAG**

- Marco Gio Cocomello

## READER SCORE

**92**

**Mario Kart 7 is a great title, it's a pick up and play game, you take in little by little. Its use of 3D is subtle and works well. It's a bite size Kart racer, with its multiplayer and packed variety of tracks, it will keep you busy for a while**

### PLUS

Added new features / Multiplayer support

### MINUS

Character roster could be bigger / Frustrating at times



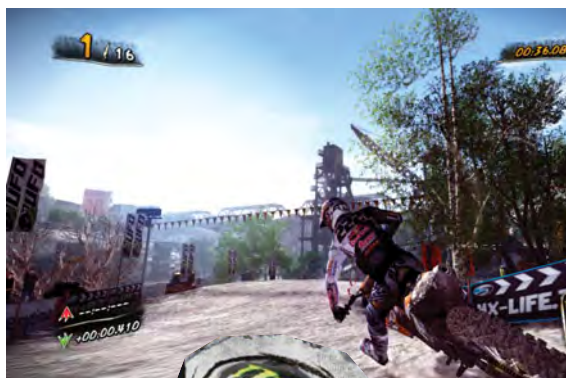
# MUD – FIM Motocross World Championship

Half the wheels, twice the fun?

Known for their *SBK* and *WRC* franchises, Italian racing game specialists Milestone have set their sights on Motocross, a form of off-road motorcycle racing that has hitherto been rather under-represented in video games. *MUD – FIM Motocross World Championship* seeks to bring the nail-biting excitement of the de facto dirt-bike championship to living rooms the world over and the result is admirable, though not without its flaws.

Milestone's previous games have generally prioritised realism over accessibility, making for titles that were technically very competent though often unforgiving in their difficulty. *MUD* breaks with tradition by adopting a more arcade-style approach to motocross racing, allowing players to get off to turbo-starts with correctly timed button-presses, and even offering speed power-ups in the form of mid-race energy drinks. There's also no independent front/back braking to worry about, and the bikes feel almost absurdly stable on the various circuits, leaving players to concentrate on finding the ideal racing line, and landing their jumps correctly.

The game's "official mode" lets players race alongside a line-up of 84 licensed riders in either the MX1 or MX2 class, while the "Motocross of Nations" mode is an expansive campaign, the events of which are spread across different classes. The "World Tour" mode is a more imaginative entity, replete with its own roster of fictional riders, and it features a mix of events including Trick Battles, Checkpoint races and gauntlet-style elimination races. World Tour is probably the most compelling of the different modes, but the Trick Battles



in particular are hampered by cumbersome controls.

Visually, *MUD* starts off at a disadvantage, given that it's inherently difficult to make a muddy off-road bike track look interesting. While it's unlikely to win any awards for its graphics, *MUD* nonetheless manages to look inoffensive, if somewhat drab. *MUD*'s soundtrack might lack the big-name bands that commonly accompany higher profile racing games, but it's a suitably noisy fit for the game's off-road, dirt-slinging action.

*MUD* tackles a genre that hasn't seen much love in recent years, and as such there's no real benchmark to which it can be compared. It's an accessible and solid motocross experience, and while it's not as skill-intensive as Milestone's previous offerings, the game is nonetheless challenging. The shoddy trick battles detract from the overall package, as does the game's generally bland presentation, but *MUD* mitigates this to a degree with the sheer amount of content on offer. It's by no means a ground-breaking racing title, and there's little on offer to draw in players who aren't already motocross junkies, but anyone with a predilection for motocross racing will likely find some enjoyment here. **NAG**

- Madman

68

*MUD* is a solid, though certainly not revolutionary, racing title, that makes the most of its official license to deliver a no-frills motocross racing experience that fans of the sport should enjoy.

#### PLUS

Licensed content / Accessible

#### MINUS

Occasionally cumbersome controls / Drab presentation

#### DETAILS

##### Platforms

360 / PC / PS3

##### Genre

Racing

##### Age restriction

16

##### Multiplayer

Local

None

Online

12 players

##### Developer

Milestone

##### Website

www.mudthegame.com

##### Publisher

Black Bean Games

##### Distributor

SKG



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# Starhawk

*Warhawk's* long awaited spiritual-successor has arrived

It's been five years since the release of the critically acclaimed online-only shooter *Warhawk*, and PS3 owners have awaited its successor with eager anticipation. Set in a distant future, *Starhawk* again employs a deft mixture of typical third-person action and vehicular combat, this time including a single-player campaign as well as an extensive multiplayer component.

Humanity has taken to the stars and begun colonising far-off planets, relying on Rift energy, a powerful new fuel that drives the race's lofty ambitions. This new power source, however, has the unfortunate side effect of horribly mutating those directly exposed into it, turning them into the deranged Outcasts, terrifying mutants who lust after Rift energy and will go to any lengths to protect it. The protagonist of *Starhawk* is Emmett Graves, a man who has been exposed to Rift energy but fortuitously managed to avoid the psychological corruption that usually befalls its victims. His brother Logan, however, was less fortunate, and with his band of Outcasts, he is now one of humanity's most determined adversaries.

The premise of *Starhawk's* storyline is intriguing initially, but sadly falls flat as a result of lacklustre story-telling and half-hearted character development. Of course, in a game as fast-paced and action-oriented as this one, the storyline is at best incidental to the whole affair, but it's nonetheless a shame that the plot wasn't more thoroughly explored in the game's five hour single-player campaign. The campaign itself



should be thought of more as an extended tutorial to prepare players for the rigors of *Starhawk's* multiplayer offering, serving as an introduction to the fundamentals of combat, the various vehicles on offer, and the game's unique "Build 'n Battle" system.

The "Build 'n Battle" system is *Starhawk's* attempt at integrating real-time strategy elements into an action game, and though rudimentary, it's quite effective. The player character is at all times in contact with an orbital drop-ship, which serves not only as an early-warning system for incoming enemies, but can also deploy certain structures directly onto the battlefield at the cost of some accumulated Rift energy. The structures range from simple walls and turrets to advanced structures like the launch-pad, which allows you access to the game's most advanced piece of weaponry, the Hawk. A heavily armoured combat-mech that can transform into a fighter jet, the Hawk is a shining star in the game's expansive arsenal.

Offering an expansive and challenging multiplayer mode which accommodates up to 32 players on a single map, *Starhawk* shines in online play. Both co-operative and competitive multiplayer modes are available, and they're richer for the strategic nuances that the "Build 'n Battle" system provides. An innovative and rewarding multiplayer shooter, *Starhawk* is a fast-paced and enjoyable title, despite its modest single-player offering. **NAG**

- Madman

## 84

*Starhawk* neatly blends traditional third-person action with vehicle-based combat, and throws some novel strategic elements into the mix as well, making for an epic and engaging multiplayer action title.

### PLUS

Relentless action / Innovative construction mechanic / Great variety of combat vehicles / Superb multiplayer offering

### MINUS

Short single-player campaign / Underdeveloped plot

## DETAILS

### Platforms

PS3

### Genre

Action

### Age restriction

16

### Multiplayer

#### Local

2 players

#### Online

32 players

### Developer

LightBox

Interactive

### Website

[www.starhawkthegame.com](http://www.starhawkthegame.com)

[thegame.com](http://thegame.com)

### Publisher

SCEE

### Distributor

SKG

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# TECH NEWS

## KNOW YOUR TECHNOLOGY

### SACD

A somewhat defunct high fidelity audio CD standard that was publicized in 1999. SACD, unlike regular audio CDs, are not encoded in pulse-code modulation (PCM) but use a digital direct stream digital pulse-density modulation (PDM) layer that is compatible with normal CD players. The SACD sampling rate is significantly higher than that of an audio CD at 2.8224MHz, with a 120dB dynamic range and a much wider frequency range that is as low as 20Hz all the way to 50KHz.

### DVD-Audio

DVD-Audio is a digital format for delivering high fidelity audio content on a DVD. It's technically inferior to SACD somewhat at a maximum sampling rate of 192 KHz and a 24-bit depth. However, DVD-A disc can be played on any conventional DVD player and the audio can be configured in many more ways than SACD in terms of speaker configuration, sampling and bit-rates.

### DTS-HD Master Audio

Lossless audio codec created by Digital Theatre System. It is an extension of the core DTS system. It's an optional audio format for Blu-ray media, but has slowly become the most used standard for lossless audio on the format. DTS-HD has the ability to carry any number of discreet channels and is only limited to the storage media. DTS-HD only supports variable bit-rates so direct comparisons are not possible, but as the standard specifies lossless audio, the bit-rate is not important.

### Dolby TrueHD

The successor to AC-3 Dolby Digital, Dolby True HD is a lossless multi-channel audio codec competing with DTS-HD Master Audio. It can carry up to 14 discreet sound channels at various bit-rates but the maximum encoded bit rate may not exceed 18Mbit/s. It supports Sample depths as high as 24-bits/sample and 192 KHz. As used on Blu-ray Discs, TrueHD however may only carry a maximum eight discreet channels at 96 KHz or six channels at 192 KHz.

### MEPHISTO TRAVEL CHESS

It's a (large) pocket-sized chess computer that offers 64 levels of play divided into eight modes, which include stuff most casual players have never heard of. The skill level is rated in the middle of beginner and expert so if you're about to go up against Big Blue this will be beneath you – especially considering you can take back up to 14 moves. For the rest of us it's a decent chess computer that's specifically designed around travelling.  
R265 | [www.cometcomputing.co.za](http://www.cometcomputing.co.za)



### PLANECHASERS

Magic: The Gatherings' casual offering Planechase, is a fun format that introduces planar locations to the game. It's basically an additional deck of (oversized) cards that players incorporate into their designs. This element adds a new dimension to the game that can be most intriguing and entertaining – as long as you realise that it increases the impact of random chance on the game, thus making it less a game of skill.  
R249.95 | [www.magicsa.co.za](http://www.magicsa.co.za)

### DID YOU KNOW?

Apple, IBM and Google are currently the top three brands in the world according to the BrandZ Top 100 Most Valuable Global Brands 2012 report recently released by Millward Brown Optimor. This seventh annual report identifies and ranks the world's most valuable brands by their dollar value; an analysis based on financial data; market intelligence; and consumer measures of brand equity.

**AVR EVENT DECK**

For the more hardcore but lazier player, Wizards introduce the Event Decks (currently in the Avacyn Restored expansion pack.) These are nicely presented and fairly well-tuned, minimum-size pre-constructed decks with sideboards – 60-card mainboard and 15-card sideboard. As with previous pre-con decks, these are available in a variety of themes, implemented in various colour combinations. These decks are currently released under the Avacyn Restored expansion, and this is a card-set that includes both reprints of great old cards and well-designed new ones.  
R299.95 | [www.magic.co.za](http://www.magic.co.za)



**XPERIA S**

The Xperia S is an Android smartphone that's geared to the max for entertainment. It supports 3D games, motion gaming and is PlayStation Certified. Add to that the full Bravia HD hi-res touch screen, a 12MP camera and HD video recording, and the Xperia S is a must-have.  
R5,999 | [www.sonymobile.com](http://www.sonymobile.com)



“We literally use this data center, and this supercomputer, to methodically search the perfect setting for each GPU, CPU, motherboard, operating system, and driver configuration”

*Jen-Hsun Huang, President, NVIDIA*

NVIDIA recently revealed details of a five-year project of theirs called the GeForce Experience. Currently in beta, it's a cloud-based service that will use supercomputers to determine the optimal combination of settings for each game, tailoring it to the user's particular hardware and software environment. To put it simply, once the software is installed on your PC, you basically click a button and your optimal settings as well as the newest drivers will automatically be downloaded to your PC.

#

4/5

**BY THE NUMBERS**

According to NVIDIA, four out of five gamers play games at their default settings, meaning 144 million or so PC gamers are missing out on an optimal (or even good) gaming experience.

# DREAMMACHINE

This month we've changed our Dream Machine PSU to the Cooler Master Silent Pro M2 1.5KW unit. It makes the two PCs cost more, but in turn you'll get a much better PSU. The Plextor M3 Pro also makes its debut at an incredibly high price, but peerless performance. Overall the Intel machine costs about R2,000 more, whereas the AMD machine increases in price by a mere R200 with twice the memory capacity. Whichever you go with, you'll get one of the best machines and gaming experiences money can buy.



**Cooler Master Silent Pro M2 1500Watt PSU**  
R3,300 / [www.sonicinformed.co.za](http://www.sonicinformed.co.za)

NEW



**GIGABYTE GV-N6800C**  
R7,429 / [www.gigabyte.com](http://www.gigabyte.com)



**Plextor M3 Pro 256GB SSD**  
R4,999 / [www.goplextor.com](http://www.goplextor.com)

NEW



**Seagate Barracuda 3TB**  
R1,799 / [www.seagate.com](http://www.seagate.com)



**Cooler Master COSMOS II**  
R3,399 / [www.cooler-master.com](http://www.cooler-master.com)



**ASUS VG278H 3D Monitor**  
R8,999 / [za.asus.com](http://za.asus.com)



**Logitech G19**  
R1,599 / [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)



**Roccat Kone [+]**  
R899 / [www.sonicinformed.com](http://www.sonicinformed.com)



**Roccat Alumic**  
R319 / [www.roccat.org](http://www.roccat.org)



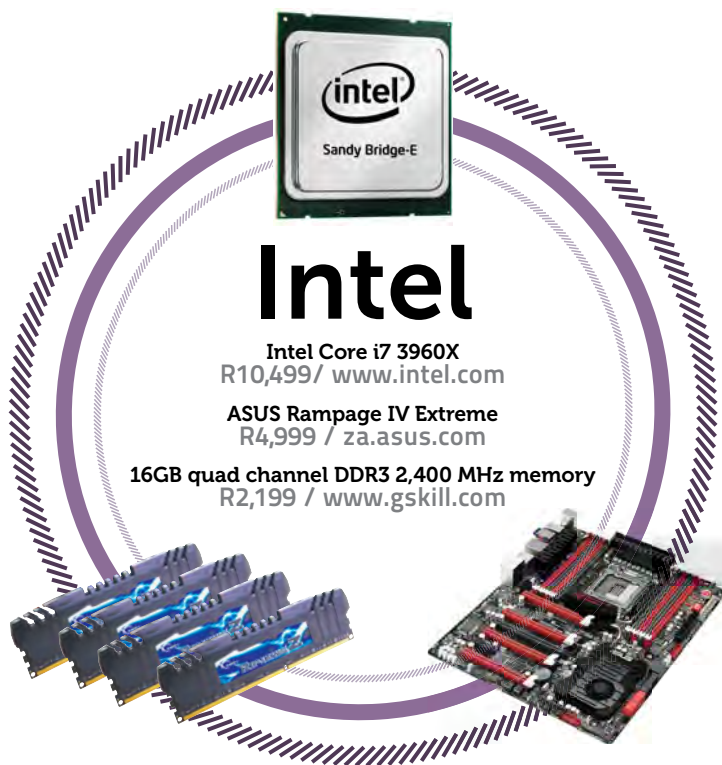
**Asus Xonar Essence STX**  
R1,399 / [za.asus.com](http://za.asus.com)



**Logitech Z-5500 Digital**  
R3,699 / [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)



**CMStorm SIRUS**  
R1,199 / [www.sonicinformed.com](http://www.sonicinformed.com)



# Intel

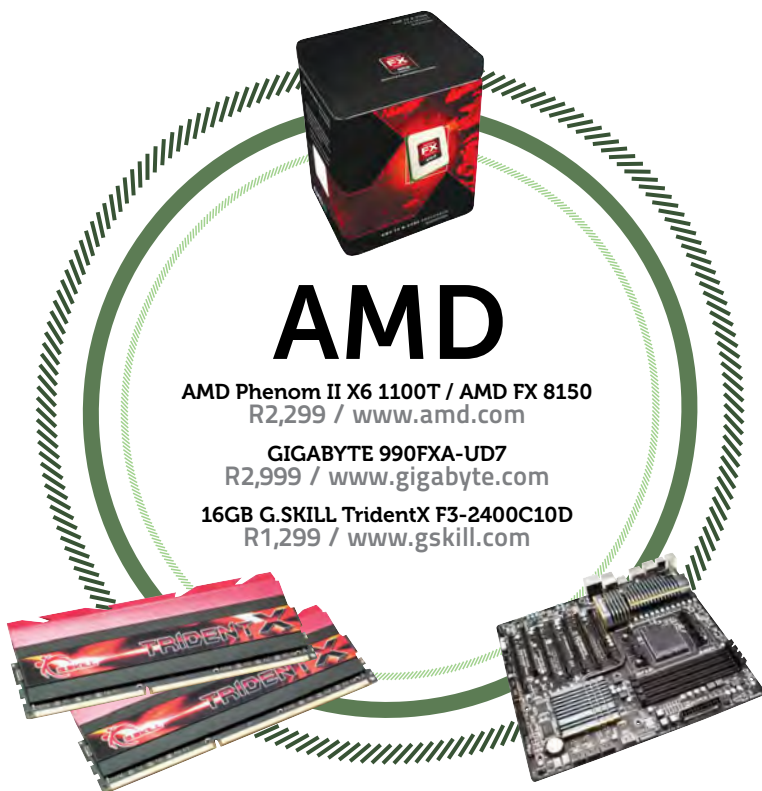
Intel Core i7 3960X  
R10,499 / [www.intel.com](http://www.intel.com)

ASUS Rampage IV Extreme  
R4,999 / [za.asus.com](http://za.asus.com)

16GB quad channel DDR3 2,400 MHz memory  
R2,199 / [www.gskill.com](http://www.gskill.com)

Intel Dream Machine price:

**R56,736**



# AMD

AMD Phenom II X6 1100T / AMD FX 8150  
R2,299 / [www.amd.com](http://www.amd.com)

GIGABYTE 990FXA-UD7  
R2,999 / [www.gigabyte.com](http://www.gigabyte.com)

16GB G.SKILL TridentX F3-2400C10D  
R1,299 / [www.gskill.com](http://www.gskill.com)

AMD Dream Machine price:

**R42,637**

## Hardwired

### SILLY NUMBERS



The entertainment industry, like no other, is by far the worst when it comes to making meaning of numbers. Often these days you'll hear, read or see that a particular movie or game has made x amount of money in a very specific amount of time. These numbers are then used to either advocate for or against some ideology.

Last month I spoke about patent trolls, and this is related to it. You see, when a scientific tool is used to prop up poorly formed philosophical positions, we as the public lap up these numbers because for the most part, we have a poor understanding of numbers and what they mean. We prefer data over information, and these numbers we read about are data which we are incapable of processing into something meaningful.

*"when a scientific tool is used to prop up poorly formed philosophical positions, we as the public lap up these numbers because, for the most part, we have a poor understanding of numbers and what they mean."*

For instance, there are more consoles now than ever before; the Internet is more pervasive than ever before so it stands that online gaming will be at an all time high. There's not a single number in the statement above, yet when written in a press release or written by an "analyst" it comes to us via the following for example. "Super Larry XIX sold 3 million copies in 72 hours in 90 countries, making it the fastest selling game of all time on the PC." So we will sit in awe and in turn that will drive us to purchase said Super Larry XIX game. Great for marketing, but the numbers do not hold any merit as they are vacuous without the context of the above.

Movies make more money than ever before, simply because ticket prices are higher than ever before while the film production costs have not gone up proportionally. Movies that cost \$100 million to make fifteen years ago were considered big budget movies. Today that movie is still considered a big budget movie, the only difference is ticket prices have increased and there are more theatres now in a world with seven billion people as opposed to six billion. There's nothing wrong with promoting a movie based on its box-office success, but sometimes I wonder if we are conscious of what it is we are actually being told. If a movie resonates with 10% of a population of six billion, it will appear more successful at 9% to a population of seven billion.

*Call of Duty* isn't as impressive in sales on the PC as it is on the consoles we are told. So by that observation, PC gaming is dying. *Diablo III* came out and became the fastest selling PC game of all time (an empty statement itself) so the "analysts" said PC gaming was on the rise again. Once again numbers without context mean nothing and you can infer anything from them if you so wish. If you ask Valve if PC gaming is on the decline, they'll likely disagree. PC graphics card shipments are down this quarter according to "analysts", however the suggestion that PC gaming is stagnating is incorrect, because they've not taken into account that there's been no game that required new graphics card purchases. The statements and numbers would make it seem there are fewer PC gamers than before, but it's not true, it's the growth in new PC gamers that has slowed, but there are more of them now than there were last year at this time.

Our relationship with numbers is by and large very poor and as such we are exploitable in ways we cannot imagine. I would urge us all to consider carefully what it is we are told by so-called experts.

- Neo Sibeko

# 2012 Jeep Wrangler Call of Duty: MW3 Special Edition

**Website** [www.chryslersa.co.za](http://www.chryslersa.co.za)

**RRP** R424,990.00 (R10,000 more than the standard Jeep Wrangler Unlimited 3.6L V6 Rubicon on which the MW3 SE is based)

1 We had special edition number 119 of 250.

2 The game's logo is featured prominently here.

3 Looks cool but you won't care if you're changing a flat at night or in the rain.

4 This leather comes from a special breed of cow found only at Activision's head office.

What do you get when real life, gaming and crazy collide? You get a special edition car based on a video game of course – not just any video game, but *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*. According to Activision, *MW3* grossed \$1 billion throughout the world in just 16 days (James Cameron's *Avatar* took 17 days to reach the same figure). This kind of success means you can slap the *Call of Duty* brand on just about anything from lunchboxes to now even cars and someone out there will buy it. This is the second year Jeep has partnered with Activision on this brand. Unfortunately, as it stands right now these limited edition versions are sold out, so if you want one you're going to have to pre-order it next year.

This isn't a car review and although the Jeep Wrangler is an excellent vehicle we can't really tell you why, as the cars we drive usually come with a controller. So instead, we'll just show you some of the cool gaming related features and share with you a few photos we took the other day (all our camera equipment was at E3 at the time so a big thanks to Devon for being our "professional" photographer). From the press release, here's what you get: "The *Call of Duty: MW3 Special Edition* is based on the Jeep Wrangler Rubicon model and features Rubicon wheels finished in semi-gloss black. Available in Black or Bright Silver, the exterior features '*Call of Duty: MW3 Special Edition*' graphics on the front fenders and spare tyre cover. Interior appointments include model-specific black seats with accent stitching and *Call of Duty* logos, unique gauge cluster graphics, dashboard grab handle with logo, accent stitching on arm rest, console lid, and steering wheel, Mopar Slush Mats with logo, and rear cargo mat with logo."





### TECHNICAL

**Engine**  
3.6 liter,  
PENTASTAR DOHC  
V-6  
**Type and  
description**  
Six cylinders, 60°  
bank angle, dual  
overhead cam  
**Power**  
209 kW at  
6,350 rpm  
Max. engine speed  
6,600 rpm  
(electronically  
limited)

**DIMENSIONS  
AND  
CAPACITIES**  
Overall length  
4,751 mm, with  
spare  
Overall width  
1,877 mm, without  
mirrors  
Fuel-tank capacity  
85.17 L  
Gross weight  
2,540kg

**PERFORMANCE**  
Manual / automatic  
acceleration  
0-100 km/h  
8.6 sec / 8.9 sec  
Top speed (km/h)  
180 / 180  
(restricted)



**PROS**

- Subtle MW3 additions
- The car suits the game perfectly

**CONS**

- Too specific on game title. *Call of Duty* games change each year – you buy a car less frequently

**ALTERNATIVES**

- Your regular boring non-gamer car

# Gyroxus full-motion gaming chair

**Website** [www.gyroxus.com](http://www.gyroxus.com) **RRP** R6,500

As the name suggests, the Lazy Gamer's Guide is a guide for gamers who are lazy. What's on the list of a lazy person's favourite things to do? Sitting. And chairs are made for sitting, right? Therefore, a lazy gamer needs a lazy gamer's chair to go along with all that laziness. That obviously makes this the

most perfect Lazy Gamer's Guide we've ever done. Except it doesn't, because the Gyroxus gaming chair isn't exactly for the lazy folk who sit among us. And with that sentence, we effectively dismantle the entire premise behind this introduction. Damn it. Read on to find out why.

## 1 LOTS OF ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

Step one in how not to appeal to lazy people: require a bit of assembly before they can engage in all their sexy sitting shenanigans. The Gyroxus comes in quite a large, heavy box that requires a bit of carrying, which is a no-no, obviously.

Once you've got it open, had a sandwich and are ready to do a bit of work, you take out everything you need, which is all provided in the large, heavy box. You attach the four

non-skid feet to the base. You insert the backrest into the desired slot, and then screw the footrest into the other end. Then you attach the controller spine thingy (a wireless PS3 controller is provided, which is affixed to the top of this spine), plug in the sensor cable (we'll get to why this is needed in a bit), plug the USB transceiver into your PS3 (there's another Gyroxus model for Xbox and PC) and power everything on. And then the fun begins.

## 2 AM I DOING THIS RIGHT?

Step two in how not to appeal to lazy people: require a bit of motion. The Gyroxus' selling point is that it doubles as a motion controller. It pivots on its axis, which means that the chair part swivels around on the base. You use the controller as leverage and move your body in the direction desired, and this is translated (via the aforementioned sensor cable) into on-screen movements. Move the chair to the left, and your virtual character/vehicle/

whatever makes the equivalent motion, for example. It's a novel idea, and an expensive one too.

On the top part of the controller, there's a toggle which lets you switch between regular use of the controller (allowing you to use the analogue stick for movement as per usual) and the Gyroxus' motion control.

## 3 BUT DOES IT BLEND?

Here's the part where we tell you if the Gyroxus works. Well, it does and it doesn't. It certainly

"Ah, yes – it's a chair as well. It's just not a very good one. There's no padding on the Gyroxus at all. It's purely plastic and metal, which is not a very good set of materials for use when being lazy."

#### TECHNICAL

Included in the box:  
Bundled controller, USB transceiver, 2x AA batteries, all the bits you need

Is a chair:  
Yes

Platforms:  
360 / PC / PS3

#### PROS

- Does what it says on the box

#### CONS

- Inaccurate
- Uncomfortable

#### ALTERNATIVES

- Your couch
- Wooden garden furniture
- The floor



does what it says it'll do on the box. The chair moves adequately and it all seems to be of sturdy enough build quality that you won't end up on YouTube in a video entitled "Gyroxus breaks and idiot falls on floor ROFL" that'll naturally get at least a million views. Unfortunately, as with other forms of motion-controlled gaming, it's just not precise enough to warrant a dedicated switch to it from traditional controllers.

It's admittedly fun for a short

time, but it's also admittedly gimmicky all of the time. For games that require very precise movement and targeting, like platformers or shooters, the Gyroxus just isn't accurate or natural enough. While using it for racing games or, say, flight sims, makes for a more agreeable experience with the Gyroxus, it's still too finicky and unreliable to be truly worthwhile. There's a spirit level to measure if the device is centred before enabling the

motion control – but even this doesn't help with the obvious inaccuracies that arise from such an abstract control method.

#### 4 WHAT ABOUT THE PART WHERE IT'S A CHAIR?

Ah, yes – it's a chair as well. It's just not a very good one. There's no padding on the Gyroxus at all. It's purely plastic and metal, which is not a very good set of materials for use when being lazy. Sure, you

could add cushions, adjust the position of the backrest, fiddle with the controller spine and other such things, but none of it's going to change the fact that the design of it just isn't as comfortable as, say, a regular chair. Or even the floor.

What this all means is that, unless you've a fetish for gimmicks or you're a rich human with fleeting, impulsive interests, there's no need to spend the money required for access to your very own Gyroxus. **NAG**



# Cooler Master Silent Pro M2 1500Watt PSU

**Supplier** Sonic Informed **Website** www.sonicinformed.co.za **RRP** R3,200

Cooler Master is one of the most respected names when it comes to PSUs. Not only has the company been in the business for a while, but on more than several occasions, have partnered up with other vendors, producing all kinds of components for them. One area where Cooler Master may be unfairly underrated is in the PSU department. Usually when power users look for the most efficient PSU to power their machines, they rarely think of Cooler Master first, but with the Silent Pro M2, this should change. Not only is this Cooler Master's most powerful PSU to date, it is also the most impressive; it complies with all the relevant standards and the build quality is superb. To further impress upon us how confident Cooler Master is in their PSU, it comes with a five year warranty and an MTBF of 100,000 hours. It's a massive PSU and if you're using a standard gaming chassis you best look somewhere else, as it likely won't fit. That isn't an issue though, because we suspect the primary buyer for a unit such as this would own a full tower E-ATX case



or is an enthusiast who uses no case at all. Either way, if you're willing to spend this much on a PSU, chances are you have the means to use it and so its proportions are not going to be an issue. Where performance and specification is concerned we can't find fault with this unit anywhere. It not only has the highest 12V+ output rating we've ever seen on a PSU, but there are two of them. One 55A and the other at a whopping 70A, combined capable of a staggering 960 watts of continuous

power output. Good then for those overclocking four-way multi-GPU configurations on either the X58 or X79 platforms. More so for the former though, as we've not had CPUs that draw as much power as the 980 and 990XE CPUs.

It was very easy to replace our Dream Machine PSU with this unit as it's better in every way than the Antec HCP 1200Watt. The Cooler Master Silent Pro M2 is unbeatable right now. **NAG** **10**  
- Neo Sibeko

## SPECS

Rating  
1500W  
Certification  
80 plus Silver  
Combined 12V output  
960W (125A)

## PLUS

- Build quality
- Quiet
- Powerful 12V rails

## MINUS

- Nothing

## BOTTOM LINE

The most powerful PSU you can buy right now.

# PowerColor HD 7850

**Supplier** Evetech **Website** www.evetech.co.za **RRP** TBA

AMD did a great job with the Pitcairn GPU as found in the HD 7870, and in some ways they did too good a job, because as we've stated earlier, the HD 7870, especially when overclocked, manages to not only match the more expensive HD 7950 but does exceed it under certain conditions.

As much as we liked the HD 7870, we can't help but be a little underwhelmed with the HD 7850. Not because it doesn't perform well, but because the pricing puts it in the equivalent position of the HD 7950. That is, it costs a little too much for what it offers. With just a price adjustment, the HD 7850 would easily be the best mid-range card in a long time. In fact it would be better than anything NVIDIA has ever had on offer, including the 8800 GT from many years ago.

We sort of understand AMD's situation when it comes to the HD 7850. It shares the same GPU with a higher priced SKU but has functional units fused off. That means, for the same GPU cost, AMD is making less and in turn its partners such as PowerColor make less. Everything about the card is identical to the reference



HD 7870 and, as such, we can imagine the costs involved in producing the HD 7850 are what make it a less attractive purchase in light of the HD 7870.

Still, if you can manage to find the HD 7850 for a reasonable price, you'll not be disappointed. It's faster than the HD 5870, plays virtually every game on the market at 1920x1080 with 4x AA and it also supports up to four screens. It's a great card and with some quick overclocking it managed to match the GTX 570 more times than not, but

with none of the drawbacks. Even with the reference cooler as used by this sample, with some minor overclocking we were able to extract some sizeable gains in performance without heat ever being an issue.

If you're set on a cost effective but high performance graphics card, you could do a lot worse than the PowerColor HD 7850, but we'd recommend you shop around for the best price possible first. **NAG** **8**  
- Neo Sibeko

## SPECS

Core  
860MHz Pitcairn (28nm)  
Processors  
1024  
Render outputs  
32  
Memory  
2048MB GDDR5  
4.8GHz  
(153.6GB/sec)  
API  
DirectX 11.1  
OpenGL 4.x  
OpenCL 1.X

## PLUS

- Low power consumption
- Performs well

## MINUS

- Price

## BOTTOM LINE

At better prices the HD 7850 would be the best bang for buck card of this generation.

## Rebel Tech high-end gaming PC

**Supplier** Rebel Tech

**Website** www.rebeltech.co.za

**RRP** R23,499

This month we're having a look at a prebuilt high-end gaming PC from the good folks at Rebel Tech.

Housed with the poorly constructed, aesthetically neutered (but thankfully highly functional) ThermalTake Level 10 GT Snow Edition is a ton of great hardware, all of which sits on the versatile GIGABYTE Z77X-UD5H Wi-Fi. It's easily one of the top mid-range motherboards, and delivers plenty of overclocking potential and stability for its reasonably affordable price. That's not to say that the entire PC is simply "reasonable" – the inclusion of a 256GB SSD in the form of the maddeningly quick OCZ Vertex 4 is definitely worthy of showing off. And, of course, the real guts of this machine – the GTX 680, i7-3770K and 16GB of Corsair Vengeance RAM – will put green faces on the majority of your friends.

There's a lot going for this machine, both in terms of future prospects and current-day performance. In synthetic benchmarks, the PC scores 3,299 points in 3D Mark 11's Extreme test, and a proud



6,341 points in Futuremark's productivity-centric PC Mark 7. In our two game tests, the machine sailed along without a hitch, nabbing average frame rates of 103 in *Hard Reset* and 80.6 in *Lost Planet 2*. Worth noting is that the 16GB of RAM over a more conventional 8GB has almost no bearing on game performance, but we suspect that it won't be long before games start

to push that envelope. In addition, the inclusion of the seemingly excessive CPU cooler and power supply mean you can safely continue to overclock this PC and even add in an extra video card in future to give you a good handful of years ahead without the need to dramatically alter its specifications. **NAG**

- Geoff Burrows

### PLUS

- Fantastic performance
- Large SSD
- Plenty of future upgrade options

### MINUS

- Poor chassis build-quality
- No Blu-ray writer

### BOTTOM LINE

You'll get what you pay for; this powerful prebuilt PC is everything you need to jump into high-end PC gaming right now, and for the next few years.

### SPECS

**CPU**  
Intel Core i7-3770K (at 4.5GHz)  
**Motherboard**  
GIGABYTE Z77X-UD5H Wi-Fi  
**RAM**  
16GB (2x 8GB) Corsair Vengeance  
1,600MHz DDR3  
**GPU**  
GIGABYTE NVIDIA GTX 680 OC  
**Storage**  
256GB OCZ Vertex 4; 2TB WD Green HDD  
**Optical drive**  
LiteOn BD combo drive  
**PSU**  
Corsair HX 1050  
**Cooling**  
Corsair H100 Extreme  
Performance Liquid CPU Cooler  
**Chassis**  
ThermalTake Level 10 GT Snow Edition

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## Solid Computing mid-range gaming PC

**Supplier** Solid Computing

**Website** www.solidcomputing.co.za

**RRP** R17,999

Newcomers to the market, Solid Computing are out to make a name for themselves as affordable components suppliers and, now, gaming PC assemblers. This review machine is hardly priced among the category of "mainstream affordable", but it's certainly priced well enough to undercut the competition and entice mid-range customers to step up a notch to the "high mid-range" level of hardware.

For the price premium, you'll get a top-of-the-range Core i5 processor that lacks the Hyper-Threading of its big brother but still manages to deliver solid performance. The benchmarks speak for themselves, and it's very interesting to see just how little difference in the gaming benchmarks there is between this machine and the Rebeltech PC that costs a good R5,000 more. This PC scores a highly respectable 3,240 in 3D Mark 11's Extreme test, and delivered average frame rates of 96.7 and 75.3 in *Hard Reset* and *Lost Planet*

2, respectively. Perhaps the biggest gap in performance comes from PC Mark 7, in which this machine scored 5,443. That's obviously up to the lack of Hyper-Threading, slower SSD and half the amount of RAM when compared to our other prebuilt. While these two builds cannot be directly compared in terms of overall performance, if you don't plan on doing any multimedia editing or heavy multi-tasking, this machine will be well worth your money.

The only slight let-down here is the

water cooling unit. While it's absolutely functional, another R400 or so will get you an upgrade to the Corsair H80 which has much improved performance under heavy overclocking (which may be something you'll need to resort to in a few years to have this humble i5 keep up with the times) due to its thicker radiator and extra fan. Additionally, the size of the SSD might also put you off, but it should be able to fit in at least a couple of games in addition to the OS. **NAG**

- Geoff Burrows



### PLUS

- Excellent performance for its price
- Great mid-range chassis

### MINUS

- Very basic water cooling system
- Small SSD

### BOTTOM LINE

A great excuse to squeeze a few extra grand out of your mid-range budget to take it up a notch.

### SPECS

**CPU**  
Intel Core i5-3570K OC to 4.4GHz  
**Motherboard**  
ASUS Maximus V Gene Z77  
**RAM**  
8GB (2x 4GB) Corsair Dominator  
1,600MHz DDR3  
**GPU**  
GIGABYTE NVIDIA GTX 670  
**Storage**  
Corsair Force GT 60GB SSD; Seagate Barracuda 500GB HDD  
**Optical drive**  
LiteOn DVD combo drive  
**PSU**  
Corsair HX 650  
**Cooling**  
Corsair Hydro series H40 Liquid CPU Cooler  
**Chassis**  
Corsair Graphite 600T

9

# KFA GeForce GTX 680

**Supplier** Foxconn **Website** www.kfa2.com **RRP** R5,399

**K**FA's entry into the country isn't an exciting one, as it comes via a reference GTX 680 graphics card. So what you'll get are the typical clock speeds, the 4-phase PWM, and the 170 watt board, with the only difference being the sticker on the graphics card.

Still, nothing prevents you from overclocking the graphics card, and it's about time we got a different card in the country which should hopefully drive prices down, even if it's by a very small margin. Fortunately this is where the KFA card we had for testing was most appealing. Technically it's nothing to write home about, for that we will have to see about the OC editions, but right now the KFA GTX 680 is the cheapest GTX 680 you'll find locally. In fact it's sometimes R2,500 cheaper than other brands with exotic coolers and out the box overclocks.

That makes it even cheaper than some HD 7970s, which should spell trouble for those graphics cards, as you'll get a lot more for your money from the GTX 680 than you will an HD



7970, especially at these prices. So it's the easiest way to get your hands on a high-end card without worrying about importing and such things. As for performance, with the newest driver at the time of writing (301.42) the performance was notably better than it was when the GTX 680 came out, further improving the lead it has over the HD 7970 and the GTX 580.

For the overclocker once again, the GTX 680 may not be your best option, in particular this one, as it's a 4-phase PWM board and the

amount of modifications you'd need to make it competitive would make it uneconomical. So it's best to hold out for what we hope will be the more exotic 680 card from KFA, where you're almost certain to get higher clocks.

Overall, it's good to have KFA in the country and, as stated earlier, this is the cheapest way to the fastest GPU money can buy and you'd do yourself a great favour by taking a look at the KFA GTX 680.

**- Neo Sibeko**

**BENCHMARKS**

**BASILINE: ASUS GEFORCE GTX680**

Hard Reset Dx9 1,080p 4xAA	100.6 <b>99.6</b>
Just Cause 2 DX10 1,080p	156.13 <b>155.72</b>
3DMark11 Extreme	3364 <b>3,343</b>

**PLUS**

- Most affordable GTX 680 locally
- KFA brand

**MINUS**

- Reference board

**BOTTOM LINE**

The most economical way to high-end performance has just arrived via the KFA GTX 680.



# Plextor M3 Pro 256GB SSD

**Supplier** Rectron **Website** www.goplextor.com **ERP** R4,999



**Y**ou're not seeing double, we did review the Plextor M3 drive previously and it is currently in our Dream Machine, but the folks at Plextor have an even faster variant apply named the Pro drive. It's everything the M3 drive was and more. It's not only lighter, its slimmer, at a mere 7mm, which makes it ideal for ultra books and any other place where space is a premium.

The size though isn't what makes this drive impressive or worthy of a perfect score. It's the staggering performance figures it delivers which, as hard as it is to believe, are even more impressive than what the original drive tuned out. So overwhelming was the performance of this drive that we even managed to record scores a little higher than what Plextor claim the drive is capable of. Never have we witnessed an SSD that manages this, as manufacturer claims are always indicative of an ideal situation, but we were not only able to match these performance claims where sequential writes are involved, we exceeded them by a respectable and repeatable margin.



We not only recorded the highest read times we've ever seen, but they were only 67MB/s away from the theoretical limit of the SATA 6Gbps standard at a mighty 533MB/s. Most impressive was the sequential write number, which read 436.9MB/s, which simply ridiculed everything else we've had to date, including the M3 drive. The rest of the numbers were pretty boring afterwards as they were exactly what we expected

as the M3 Pro laid waste to everything else, which soon became tedious. This drive is simply peerless right now. If you're not too concerned about pricing and want outright performance and Plextor superior quality control, you need to buy this drive. There's not much else to say except that M3 Pro is as near perfect an SSD as you're going to find.

**- Neo Sibeko**



**SPECS**

Controller  
Marvell 88SS9174  
NAND type  
24nm Toshiba  
Toggle NAND  
Form Factor  
2.5" 7mm  
Interface  
SATA 6Gbps

**PLUS**

- Incredible performance
- Reliability
- 7mm height

**MINUS**

- None

**BOTTOM LINE**

The M3 Pro simply extends the lead the original M3 drive had, by being better in every conceivable way. This is the SSD to own.

## OCZ Vertex 4 128GB SSD



**Supplier** SyntechSA

**Website** [www.ocztechnology.com](http://www.ocztechnology.com) **RRP** R1,808



OCZ is one of the most recognized names in the SSD market. Not surprising because ever since the company left the DRAM business, their keen focus on the storage market has turned out well and allowed the outfit to produce some of the best SSD families to date. From the first Vertex drive to the latest iteration Vertex 4, OCZ has made improvements to not only performance and reliability, but their pricing as well.

Some time ago, OCZ acquired Indilinx and, while the company still produced SandForce powered drives, it was clear that OCZ, unlike other outfits, were not only in the SSD market to stay but wanted to lead. The Vertex 4 drive is the first drive to come out from OCZ that uses the Everest 2 controller, which they helped develop specifically for the Vertex 4 range of SSDs.

Unlike the SandForce powered alternatives from OCZ, the Vertex 4 has relatively low sequential write speeds at only 200MB/s. However, what's good to see is that, unlike with many other drives, we were able to test this claim and indeed, we recorded 200.1MB/s across the entire 110GB of formatted space. So OCZ's claims are true. The sequential read performance was lower than the claimed 535MB/s, but at 482.5Mb/s we would call this close enough to not be an issue.

Where the drive stood out was in random write performance where it not only outpaced the Intel 520 240GB SSD, but the Kingston HyperX as well. This is actually more important than the raw write speed. With the Vertex 4, OCZ claims better IOPS numbers than on their previous offerings, but we found that the Vertex 3 Max IOPS was still faster. Having said that, that work load isn't typical of desktop usage and should not overshadow the random write performance, which is only matched by the Plextor M3 series of drives.

At this price, we are hard pressed to recommend another drive, and we give the OCZ Vertex 4 our stamp of approval. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

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### SPECS

Controller  
Indilinx Everest 2  
NAND type  
25nm IMFT MLC  
NAND  
Cache  
512MB  
Form  
Factor  
2.5"  
Interface  
SATA 6Gbps

### PLUS

- Reasonable performance
- Price

### MINUS

- Sequential write performance

### BOTTOM LINE

For the asking price the OCZ Vertex 4 is more than reasonable; probably the best bang for buck SSD on the market right now.

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# GIGABYTE GV-N670OC

Supplier Rectron Website [www.gigabyte.com](http://www.gigabyte.com) RRP R5,299

As expected, NVIDIA released the GTX 670 GPU soon after the GTX 680 to an overwhelmingly positive reception. This is partly because the GTX 670 offers stellar performance that often matches that of the competition's HD 7970 GPU, but comes at a more reasonable price, at least it should. What's happened here is that NVIDIA has essentially caught AMD sleeping.

AMD produced a stunning range with the HD 7000 series graphics cards in all respects (especially where compute performance is concerned), but NVIDIA, instead of competing with their traditionally large dies, opted for a simplified architecture. That is, the current Kepler range of GPUs (barring the GK110 which we'll talk about in a later issue) is smaller than envisioned by AMD and enthusiasts alike. NVIDIA has managed to use the die space otherwise reserved for compute capabilities to enhance gaming performance. By the same token NVIDIA has produced GPUs that are very cheap to manufacture but can easily sell at stratospheric prices (for example the GTX 690 which is more than R10,000 on average) maximising profits and keeping the company in the black.

The GTX 670 is the latest entry and it features the same GK104 die but with 1,344 compute cores instead of the full complement of 1,536 as found in the GTX 680. The clock speed has also been lowered

to a 915MHz base clock and 980MHz in turbo mode. With these changes texture fill-rate is diminished as well by way of fewer texturing units which are tied to compute core clusters. With these differences from a logic point of view one would suspect a pronounced difference in performance between the GTX 680 and the GTX 670, but this is not the case. The memory bandwidth is identical for both cards and on the GIGABYTE model in particular, the base clock is boosted to 980MHz with the turbo clock a hair over 1GHz at 1,006MHz. This small overclock ensures that the GTX 670 is never far behind, and in most games it's a difference of five or so frames per second.

Unlike the reference GTX 670 which uses a miniature PCB, the GIGABYTE OC model uses the same PCB as found on their GTX 680 model, which we reviewed last month. That means instead of the 140 watt board power limit which can be boosted to 170 watts, the GIGABYTE OC model uses the 225 watt board which can be boosted to 250. A difference which we are certain helps overclocking a little, as it not only allows the graphics card to draw more power than the reference card, but with the right tools can tolerate higher GPU voltage settings.

In our own testing we found that the base clock could be boosted to an impressive 1,150MHz, with the

## SPECS

**Core**  
980MHz GK104 (28nm)  
**Processors**  
1,344  
**Render outputs**  
32  
**Memory**  
2,048MB GDDR5  
6GHz (192GB/sec)  
**API**  
DirectX 11.1  
OpenGL 4.x  
OpenCL 1.X PhysX

## PLUS

- Impressive overclocking potential
- Performance
- GTX 680 PCB

## MINUS

- Availability

## BOTTOM LINE

NVIDIA, and by extension GIGABYTE, have produced a graphics card that isn't far from the GTX 680 in performance but costs much less.

## BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: ASUS GEFORCE GTX680

Hard Reset DX9 1,080p 4xAA	95.7 <b>99.6</b>
Just Cause 2 DX10 1,080p	150.71 <b>155.72</b>
3DMark11 Extreme	3,226 <b>3,343</b>
3DMark Vantage	37,351 <b>39,722</b>
Unigine Heaven Xtreme	1,922.52 <b>1,871.607</b>

turbo clock reaching 1,254MHz, with not a single adjustment where fan speeds or voltages are concerned. At this speed the graphics card was able to match a reference GTX 680 that we have elsewhere in this issue. Most users will settle for a less aggressive overclock or choose to not adjust the graphics card clocks at all, in which case the GV-N670C is still a mighty impressive card. The only downside here is that with things as they stand, NVIDIA is unlikely to offer aggressive prices on their 600 range as it is the superior offering compared to what AMD has. So add that cost with GIGABYTE's use of the more expensive five-phase PWM PCB and this is going to be a very expensive GTX 670.

If you're willing to overlook that and want only the best though, do consider this card as its sure to not disappoint you.

**- Neo Sibeko**

**NAG**

**8**



## Genius SW-G2.1 1250 speakers

Supplier TVR Website [www.tvr.co.za](http://www.tvr.co.za) RRP R449



Targeted at gamers, elegant subtlety has not been a factor in the design of these speakers, with fierce curves and metallic red colouring certainly making the set stand out from other sets in the same budget price range.

The set includes two satellites, a subwoofer and a control box (which doubles as the set's amp). The addition of the control box is a pleasant surprise, as most budget speaker sets would just include volume controls on one of the satellite speakers. The control box is where you'll be connecting the hardwired speaker cabling, and can accept input from either your PC or your TV to get the audio flowing. It's where you'll find knobs to adjust the volume and bass, and there are also microphone and headphone sockets on the box's front panel if you need them.

For gaming, the sound produced is decent enough: the sub makes for beefy explosions and the level of volume, while not mind-blowing, is definitely higher than that boasted by your average TV. It's clear and powerful enough to do a decent job with videos and movies as well. When it comes to music, however, we're hesitant to recommend these speakers. The high frequencies have a piercing harshness to them, and at anything above half volume the audio begins to warp. The same goes for the bass, which becomes unpleasantly distorted at higher settings. The midrange tends to disappear when you turn the volume down, and these issues lead us to recommend that you look elsewhere if you're planning on listening to music.

For gaming, however, this set will prove more than adequate, and at R449, they're worth considering for anyone on a rigid budget.

**NAG**  
- Dane Remendes

### SPECS

**RMS**  
38 watts  
Subwoofer  
20 watts / 5.25-inch driver / 8 ohm  
Satellites  
(each channel)  
9 watts / 3-inch driver / 4 ohm  
Frequency response  
58 Hz ~ 20KHz  
Signal-to-noise ratio  
90 dB

### PLUS

- Decent audio quality for gaming
- Dedicated control box

### MINUS

- Piercing high frequency
- Sub distorts at high volume
- Not great for music

### BOTTOM LINE

For anyone hunting for a decent set of gaming speakers on a tight budget, these are worth considering.



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**IMPERATOR Pro**  
Gaming Keyboard



**SW-G2.1 3000**  
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# GG



## It just works

The thing is, I wasn't going to get *Diablo III*. It's not that I didn't want to play the game, mind you, but rather that I'm predominantly a console gamer these days, and I'd decided to wait until the console version<sup>1</sup> was launched. Then I changed my mind, because I'm a woman, and changing my mind is a primary class skill. Also, there was this super cool guy I liked, and playing *Diablo III* was a good excuse to get him next to me on the couch and share this super cool *Diablo III* mouse pad I'd won at a launch event<sup>2</sup>. It just made a super cool kind of sense at the time.

Anyway, after playing console games pretty much exclusively for the last two or three years, going back onto a PC was a bit of an adjustment. I had to actually install the game, and it took about half an hour to get that finished up before I could start the game. In theory, I mean. Because then I got an error popup telling me that my PC's integrated Intel graphics chip wouldn't start the game<sup>3</sup>. Information that might have been rather more useful around half an hour previously, but maybe that's cheating or something in hardcore master race PC gamerland where nothing is worth doing unless it's excessively inconvenient and makes people want to impale other people on sharp things.

So I installed it on my laptop instead. That was another half an hour before I could start the game, although this time it worked. I say "worked", but after getting the game started, I had to open up the menu and turn down most of the visual options because "worked" was more like "worked if starting the game counts".

It's funny because, comparing technical specs, my laptop is probably about ten times more powerful (and expensive) than my Xbox, but even with *Diablo III* dialled up to MAXIMUM SEXY, it looks about as good as most console games. What's up with that?

Rumours of PC gaming's demise – imminent or



<sup>1</sup>There will be a console version. I know, because I want one, and somebody once told me that if I want something enough, the universe would somehow contrive to make it happen. Admittedly, I'm still waiting on the volcano villain lair and the superpowers and the bottomless tub of extra spicy guacamole, but when I get them, I'm sure they'll go nicely with my *Diablo III* for Xbox. It's a five-year plan.

<sup>2</sup>I won the guy too. The universe helped.

<sup>3</sup>Even the universe can't do much about an Intel integrated graphics chip, I guess.

otherwise – may or may not be exaggerated, but, perhaps more significantly, it's definitely overdue for some sort of very dramatic reincarnation.

Hilariously, I'd originally intended to write this column about the stop-gap between now and the next console generation, and how PC gaming and its quintuple quantum flux oscillation technology would be back on top in the meantime. Now, I'm not entirely convinced. It doesn't beat putting a disc in the drive and just playing the game. **NAG**

- Tarryn van der Byl

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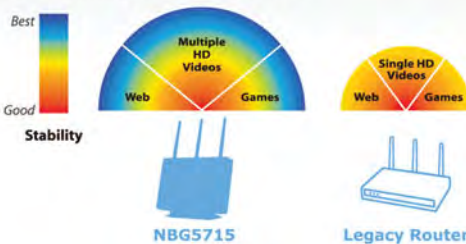
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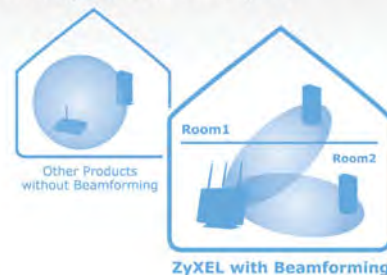
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