NAG

PC / PLAYSTATION / XBOX / NINTENDO

REVIEWS

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Most Wanted
Forza Horizon
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Wii U

Zombi
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MUSICA
A WORLD AWAITS

NAG

Contents

Features

30 60 THINGS TO DO DURING YOUR HOLIDAY
These holidays, you may find yourself with a lot of time to kill because you spent all your cash on prezzies for other people and have none left to buy yourself a stack o' new games. The first thing you're going to want to do is write angry letters to all those horrible people who insist on receiving gift-wrapped goodies from you, thereby robbing you of quality gaming. Secondly, you're going to want to read this list of gaming-related, time-killing activities, because it's how you're going to keep yourself from going insane due to boredom.

40 WII U
Oh hey, a new gaming console! What a pleasant surprise this is! We've taken a good, long look at Nintendo's Wii U, from its games to its delicious game-powering circuitry and its innovative tablet controller, to bring you all the info you need to decide if this is the console for you. Trust us: one look at *ZombiU* and you'll be clamouring for a chance to own it.

Spoilt for choice

Doing this job I get a lot of games. Some I grab from the pile and take home to play when I've got time. Others I force myself to review so I can actually get to play them (don't think of the word force as negative). Here's some insight into why this job isn't all it's cracked up to be all the time. It's like having that problem of not knowing which private jet to take on holiday.

On my desk at home I've got many games still in their wrappers. I keep saying I'm going to play them all but most nights it's just rinse and repeat *Battlefield 3* and inevitably *Black Ops 2* when it releases in a few days. I've got *Halo 4* but can't remember what happened in the last game leading up to this one. I'm too lazy to look online and if I ask Tarryn I'll first get chastised and then a nine page email. So I probably won't play it right now. I've got *Tekken Tag Tournament 2* because I like fighting games but I won't touch it because of all the moves I'm going to have to learn. I've installed the DLC for *Borderlands 2* and actually went to the new location but I'm not in the mood for killing many bad guys so that's on the shelf too. I also managed to get hold of two extra golden keys but I'm too scared to waste them at the level I'm at. I haven't finished *StarCraft II* yet (even though we play multiplayer almost every day in the office) because I'm playing it on a tough setting and each mission is a real fight with many retries. I've got *XCOM* also waiting to play but that's a big time commitment and I'm not in the mood for the heartbreak that ironman mode will bring. I've also got *Sleeping Dogs* but *GTA IV* has put me off those types of games – I really enjoyed playing the small bit I played at a function but can't be arsed to get involved in a long "sandbox" game right now. Then there's *Max Payne 3*. I went to London and played two levels of this at Rockstar's offices. I loved it, but have no idea why I haven't opened the wrapper and played it yet. No idea at all. On Steam I bought *To the Moon* – haven't touched it. *Legend of Grimrock*'s level editor came for free – looks too complicated to get into quickly – haven't used it. I also have *Krater, Amnesia: the Dark Descent* (I'm too scared to play that one to be honest), *Cities XL 2012* (I'm really waiting for *SimCity*), *Trine* and *Trine 2*, and the list goes on. This is just the stuff I haven't even played yet – no, haven't even installed yet. The list of games I've started and left is even longer. I don't really care if I don't play some of them, I just have them and I suppose that's becoming good enough for me.

I've come to the scary revelation that I'm just not ever going to be able to get to everything any more. In the good old days games were quick and simple to play and finish. I used to get through 20+ Commodore 64 games in a single weekend. Not finish them – just load and play them all. I then went back to the ones I liked and finished those. It's just interesting that I'm swamped in the stuff I love but have no time, inclination, whatever to get to everything. Is too much of a good thing becoming bad for me? No idea.

Thanks for listening, I feel better that I've gotten that off my chest. I just hope you weren't expecting too much

"entertainment" on this page this month. Sometimes I have to unload and sometimes you all get to play psychologist. Of course if you have any truths yourselves share here: **letters@nag.co.za**. ;)

ARROW TO THE KNEE

Now here's something entertaining and if I didn't have witnesses nobody would believe me... We went to the *Assassin's Creed III* launch event the other week and had to hunt around a botanical type garden place with ducks for a bow, arrows and a target. We then had to shoot the targets and the best team won swag based on the game. The actual arrow shooting part of the event was a little terrifying as the people in charge weren't running it like a military operation. Anyhow, the picture shows where my second arrow ended up (the first one went sailing over the top)... Geoff and I actually won a prize for that shot – an arrow to the knee.

The January 2013 issue of *NAG* will be on-shelf 20 December. Remember, the next day is the end of the world so please make sure you get you copy.

Happy holidays!

**- RedTide
Editor**

megarom interactive

LETTERS@NAG.CO.ZA
INBOX

LETTER OF THE MONTH
DECEMBER 2012

From: Erik
Subject: Double Win

Okay, so I live in a pretty dead town with nothing to do so NAG and its gaming advice keeps me sane. So one day I'm just trolling in the local, tiny, mall and I remember I haven't purchased this month's issue yet so while I'm going through the magazine aisles I pick up a copy and read the cover page when I hear a polite cough behind me, I turn around to find a hottie who proceeds to ask me if I'm into gaming cause I have the NAG in hand... obviously yes!, A joke here, a giggle there and soon after numbers exchanged which leads to a date, doing what? Lanning Torchlight 2, so thanks to everyone at NAG you guys are even more amazing for helping me get a so called rare "gamer girl" My advice: advertise you buy the NAG guys!

Seeing that you're already living the dream here are some free games to go with your hot new girlfriend. Some guys have all the luck, hey. Ed

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

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

From: Bianca
Subject: Virtual girls are better...

Pride. In the dictionary it is defined as a satisfied sense of attachment toward one's own or another's choices and actions, and that's exactly how I felt when I discovered an old (very old) NAG in my parents' bookshelf. I always knew my parents were gaming people, my dad more so than my mom, so it did not come as a big of surprise when I pulled that poor, dusty, misshapen piece of history from its resting place. I flipped through the pages of this foreign specimen in amazement. Only to repeat the same thought... "Wow, the graphics those days sucked." Sure, yeah these games are considered classics and hits with titles like Final Fantasy X-2 , Tribes: Vengeance, Hitman: Contracts, Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance, the list goes on and those were just the games in that specific issue. These games were the building blocks for the newer generation of gaming, and for them I'm extremely thankful, but compared to the games of let's say 2009 (the year I restarted the tradition of the monthly NAG) they are quite... Crappy. It's true, I haven't been a gamer for very long so one might argue the point that I just don't appreciate and respect these "elders". Fine, it's a valid point but only if it were true. I respect these games purely because in those days they were original, not like nowadays where the same storyline is just marginally modified and the game play slightly altered with a new title slapped on it and called a "new release". No, in those days they prided themselves in out doing each other with the content inside the game and not the vanity of how amazing their graphics were. We get excited about things like Borderlands 2 because, compared to all the other games we have, it's very unique. I suppose the same can be said about NAG, we love you guys because compared to the other dribble we are exposed to, this magazine is unique. After finding the pre-historic NAG I searched for one of its grand-children, I found this September's that had XCOM and a very nice shade of pink on the cover. I compared the two and I must say, with all the honesty my body can conjure up, you guys have improved... a lot. So I have to say a special thank you to the whole team for making me and so many others, better gamers. I grew up with you guys and I am hoping to grow old with your magazine in my hand. Keep making us proud!

Thanks! I put letters like this in the magazine to boost office moral and to brainwash the rest of you into thinking we're the best thing ever. I'm also blatant about what I'm doing all the time which makes me look very honest and if done correctly can be seen as having a good sense of humour too. So, NAG is amazing as voted by a third-party independent reader. We're also very honest and have a great sense of humour. It's all very clever and to think I just barely made it out of high school. Ed.

From: Tyler
Subject: The ultimate game

I was playing an epic game of Forza Horizon when I thought of an awesome idea! [Here we go, Ed] Imagine a game like Sims only you are one person that goes through everyday life and then you choose your career path... that's when things get interesting, imagine if you chose to be in the army "Call of Duty" or racing "Forza" or soccer "FIFA 13" and so forth all of this but you design your own avatar an you get a salary you use to buy a house, food, clothes etc. You grow old, have a family... ok that's kind of crap but you still get to blow up choppers frag noobs and my personal favourite, go GTA in an open world map! My point is, imagine a game that pretty much has all your favourite games in one and still get to buy houses, cars, clothes you know, the stuff that makes you look rich.

Why don't you just play Sims then when you feel like killing people load up COD or if you want to race load up NFS and so on. Also, I'd rather be rich than look rich – just saying. Ed.

From: Kevin
Subject: How gaming is choosing the dark side

I remember getting my first real game. Command & Conquer Generals. It was the game that started it all. So when I first heard of Command & Conquer Generals 2 I was ecstatic. I gave a nice loud "WOOT". A couple months down the road came Gamescom. With that 'chilling' announce trailer. C&C G2 was going F2P. That "WOOT" turned into a "BOO".

Let me take you back to about 10 years ago. If you wanted a game you had to go to the shops and buy it. It had no updates, no DLC, no buying in game stuff. MP wasn't the focus of the game. Back then if you wanted more stuff, you went and bought an expansion. Now you have to buy overly priced DLC. ALL games now have s**t loads of updates – some truly massive. Sometimes you even had to download half of the f**king game, *cough, cough, steam*. MP is great, but it is becoming the focus. And the SP experience is starting to suffer now. What about F2P. I hate F2P with a passion. (I admit I am a hypocrite, and do play them. (I hate it when they take old franchises and make them F2P)). I always feel so ripped off. You can't get anywhere without purchasing stuff (there are some exceptions like World of Tanks). These are all of the reasons that I have become a heavy console gamer. But we all know that Star Wars 1313 is not going to run on PS3. So I did some research. The next gen consoles are the last. Cloud gaming is going to take over. The game is going to be run on a server far-far away, lag, you are going to push a button and the command is sent through the internet and the processing is done far-far away, and the outcome sent back to us, even more lag. Sounds great, you don't need a high end system to play the game. But what about SP? I'm going to lag in SP? I always thought that the whole point of SP was to not lag! I know they say that we all fear change. But now I truly do fear. Gaming isn't clean anymore. It is joining the dark side. Dark Side is a metaphor for money. Our money. Gaming must NOT change!

In many ways I agree with what you're saying. I don't like the way the industry has changed. I think DLC is being abused – especial day one DLC. Free-to-play is a misnomer. The term "pay to win" should never exist in the gaming world. Episodic content is hit and miss. Social anything is a meaningless percentage game that is only successful because of the huge number of people on these networks. Sadly, more people are spending money on this kind of thing than people that aren't so it's here to stay – for now. I don't think cloud gaming is a real threat just yet, but you do need to be connected 24/7 to play Diablo III. Things are changing faster than ever, fads and coming and going and sometimes it appears that the world is mad. Who knows where gaming will end up in all this and what system will gain lasting popularity. On a brighter note, we do have things like Kickstarter and a thriving indie scene that might just bring order back to the universe. Ed.

From: Trophies and trouble
Subject: Xander

Dear NAG,I have a problem, a gaming problem it all started when a friend of mine started saying that he was trying to beat me by trying to get more trophies than me so I tried to keep having more than he had but at last he did get more than me but now I am so used to playing my games just for trophies that I always buy games just to get trophies and so I ask you when do you try to get trophies and when do you know, ok I have a trophy problem please help because I mean games are meant to be played for fun not to show people that you have more trophies that don't even exist.

I have a theory about people who chase after trophies in games. When you were really small at school you got a trophy for just participating. You were young and too dumb to understand that in this life some people are just better than you. As time went along you realised that you had to actually perform well to get noticed and get trophies, ribbons, medals and cup. Nobody wants to tell very young children that the world isn't fair and equal and that they will probably end up living very mediocre lives. Today, gaming is taking you back to those amazing days of your childhood when you got stuff for doing nothing at all, and treating you like a child. So, those people who covet trophies in games now obviously underperformed growing up

ON THE FORUMS

Say what you like, you know nobody really cares www.nag.co.za/forums

Q: What are you doing during your December holiday?

"A combination of clearing my backlog of games and lazing around in the sun to recharge the batteries for 2013."
DXeXodus

"Well there is the Halo 4 tournament me and a few friends are entering, so that's going to devour most of my time with practicing. Also going to jam large unhealthy amounts of AC3 and continue reading through a tremendous backlog."
Shaderow

"Work. Really."
Toxxyc

"The same thing I do every holiday Pinky, try to take over the world"
Demikid

"Moving to Johannesburg to stalk the NAG staff into giving me free games and move in with my brother."
5h@un13

and are desperately seeking praise once again for doing nothing important. Ed.

From: Nicholas
Subject: Choices and Morality in Video Games

I recently purchased Dishonored. After months of anticipation and waiting, I held it in my hands. I shoved it into my PS3, eager to begin my journey. Not only did I experience a great game, but I also learnt about morality and choices in video games: There I was sword in hand enemy directly in front of me. He doesn't know I'm there. I am a ghost, with the power to kill at will and vanish. I step forward, silently, careful not to alert my prey. He is so close I can hear him breathing. I raise my sword and... Wait! Didn't I hear you could finish this game without killing anybody? In the second before I claimed his life, I realized something... This game had given me a choice. A choice to administer life and death as I see fit. This was an alien concept to me. I was so used to the on the rails action of games like Call of Duty, where the sole objective is to pump lead into the faceless enemies of the opposition while they tried to do the same, that I was surprised to feel a pang of guilt. What had this guard ever done to me? Did he have a family, kids, and a wife? Was the only reason he was here is to hopefully earn enough money to put food on his table and pay his bills? Probably not. He was just an AI. But this made me think.

Isn't the reason of games like this to display how we are in reality? To show that us gamers are not mindless gore craving animals but people with a conscious? And Dishonored gave me a chance to see what I, as a person, would do if I were given the choice to be merciful or merciless.

I ended up sticking the sword through his neck, picking up his gun, killing two other people, then engaging in a half-hour tea bag marathon on their cold, lifeless corpses. But that's just me.

LOL... You sick evil bad person you. I think society and all its silly rules suppress our animalistic urges to kill and murder everything around us. Games just let us behave naturally. Ed.

From: Ryan
Subject: "Camping"

Greetings my professors of gaming.

Please assist me with my enquiry as to a definition of "Camping". I have recently started playing COD Black Ops multiplayer and have learnt that I am a NooB. I also regularly have been called a camper however I do this periodically to avoid death every 2 seconds. Please explain what the do's and don'ts are regarding this. I feel like an addict and would like to be converted to a non-camper however I do feel that camping may be necessary at times LOL (I know there will be a

GW Roodt, "I created this in Photoshop and enjoyed every minute of it. I Hope you guys like it."
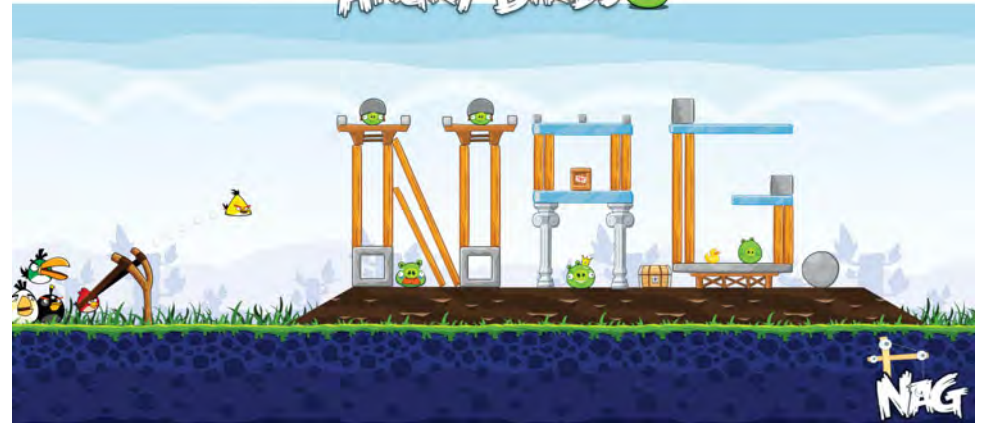
This is the best bit of fan created artwork we received at *NAG* this month. If you insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the *NAG* logo you might also end up here for your three lines of fame. Just don't go and stick the *NAG* logo on a picture and send it in because that is dumb and dumb people don't win things.

lot of hating round about now). So if possible would you please lay the cards out on the table as to what would be acceptable and vice versa?

Here's the simple rule. You do whatever the hell you like when playing games. Nobody has any right to tell you how to play or what to do. All games come with options and tools to turn off the outside world (no voice communication, no text or anything) – use these tools and then do as you please. I would tell you to tell them that I said so but you're not going to be able to hear them crying and moaning anymore, are you? Ed.

From: Joshua
Subject: Top 8 holy sh1t moments

I thought your "top 8 moments" were all very good choices but one was missing. Now this isn't the most amazing but I couldn't get over this for the entire campaign and multiplayer of this game and I might add that my mates and I still LAN this legendary game. Far Cry 2. Now you're thinking what could have made this game so good? Of course you can paraglide and shooting ammo boxes etc. But none of these can match this.

Sprinting then crouching and all of a sudden you go all pro into some other Chuck Norris sliding hip fire mode. Now this is what I can't get over. I don't know if it was the first game to include this sliding concept but it was the most revolutionary in my mind, every 30 second I'm in a game whether it be Crysis 2, Brink (I might add that sliding was the only enjoyable thing to do in Brink and was the reason I pre-ordered it), Mirrors Edge or any other game that has this feature you just have

THE SHORTS

Extracts of n00b from NAG letters

"In 10 years from now, are we going to see the option in games to have an orang-utan as a love interest?"
- Jay

"Oh wait, must I reboot every time the TV hangs?"
- Antonius

"To all the people who make game covers, please try make your game exciting if it is and a lame cover if it is lame!"
- Lakhe

"<Insert babble about the greatness and significance of NAG>"
- Nicholas

"I'm still waiting for the next crossword puzzle; you're going to lose my mum again."
- Dirk

to slide. And I mean sometimes there are 3 enemies and you could easily get 3 headshots, but that's not nearly as fun or satisfying as sprinting guns blazing into a slide and rain bullets onto your enemies. It simply never gets old.

I'm still stuck on "pre-ordered a game just for the sliding." It is fun and all but not something to spend money on really... surely? Ed.

ON FACEBOOK

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Yo!! Assassins Creed 3 is ballistic!! I Read the vol. 15 Issue 2, decided to check out the game for myself, and I'm not regretting one bit. This games graphics are beyond real, and the story line is brilliant, best thing so far I've ever seen from Ubisoft! Love the NAG mag too.
Andrew Ajay Jetson

Tonight old school night, dusting off my Gamecube and playing Eternal Darkness. A awesome horror title.
Andre Deacon

TELL ME NOW!! Is MoH win or fail? I DEMAND AN ANSWER NAG MAGAZINE!!!
Nkanyiso Hermy Mbambo

I, Gamer

You see what they want you to see

Quite a few of the games that I previewed at this year's Gamescom have started to come out and I've noticed this interesting phenomenon. It's prompted me to wonder when a game is able to speak for itself. What I mean is, from a preview point of view: what is it that makes one game able to hold its own without developer input during a hands-on session? When you're given hands-on time with a title before it comes out, you invariably have a member of the development team or PR department holding your hand. Sometimes, like in the case of *NAG*'s recent *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* cover feature, you get the studio head chatting to you about the game they're making. Obviously these people are doing their job and are trying to show the game in its best possible light so that we the writers go off and tell you the readers how great the game is looking. We're shown particular parts of the game in a very controlled setting so as to bring about a positive previewing experience. I'll admit, what I saw of *Warfighter* at Gamescom was really very good and it looked like Danger Close was on to something enjoyable. Too bad the game released as a bug-riddled mess, resulting in poor to mediocre critical consensus.

Now for the complete opposite: while at Gamescom, I utterly loathed my hands-on time with *Dishonored*. We were ushered into a room with about fifteen preview stations all running the game. There was no brief, no developer on-hand and no context for the mission we were allowed to play (it was the mission in which you have to assassinate Lady Boyle). My experience was terrible and I left with a very poor initial opinion of the game. And yet, look how it turned out: *Dishonored* has been universally praised by critics. I've now had the chance to play it from the beginning and at my own pace. Unsurprisingly, I've loved every second of it. I'd figured that my initial hands-on had lacked decent context, and that it had simply been a poor preview setup.

So here we have two completely different preview experiences with opposite outcomes. EA and Danger Close went out of their way to ensure that *Warfighter* put on its best dress and behaved itself in front of the press. There was no schmoozing by any means, but I did have three pieces of chocolate-covered popcorn so not sure if that constitutes a Keighley-Dew-Doritos scenario. Still, my brain goes mushy just imagining how much money EA threw at marketing material for Gamescom. Conversely, Bethesda and Arkane Studios left journalists all alone with *Dishonored* in a secluded booth with very little branding. It's like they knew *Dishonored* was old enough to look after itself without a chaperone.

Did EA and Danger Close realise that they'd have a tough time selling copies of *Warfighter* once reviews started rolling out? Was it part of their marketing plan to rely on positive previews so as to glean the majority of sales through pre-orders? On the other hand, were Bethesda and Arkane Studios convinced (rightly so) that *Dishonored* would be able to hold its own after release, and that therefore going out of their way to ensure a positive preview experience wasn't entirely necessary? I doubt any publisher would risk any form of bad publicity, but the contrast between these two titles was interesting nonetheless.

- Miklós Szecsei

Some details on CD Projekt RED's Cyberpunk

Earlier this year, CD Projekt RED (developers of *The Witcher* and its sequel) revealed their plans to move beyond creating excellent fantasy RPGs set in established universes, expanding their repertoire to include creating (hopefully) excellent sci-fi RPGs set in established universes. They revealed *Cyberpunk*, a role-playing excursion set in the world of the pen-and-paper RPG of the same name.

Now, CDP has revealed that the game's full title is *Cyberpunk 2077*, which flings this video game adaptation forward in time, well ahead of the tabletop version's 2020 setting. Most intriguing is the fact that the game will offer a full sandbox world to explore and influence. This is unlike *The Witcher*, which, while not strictly linear, still led the player through a fixed set of environments with its narrative. It'll all centre on Night City, and locations to visit will range from "the legendary Afterlife joint" and "the nostalgic Forlorn Hope," to "a combat zone completely taken over by gangs." Cyberpunk 2020's original creator Mike Pondsmith is providing loads of input on the project, and it certainly seems like CDP aims to adhere to his original vision as much as possible.

While combat will be governed by the same rules that apply to the pen-and-paper game, CDP explain that certain structural changes are required to make it fit in with the unique requirements of its digital counterpart: "This is why adapting pen & paper rules to video game is not as easy as it can appear at first glance. The flexibility of an in-person RPG has to be replaced with a strict set of rules. Every skill, attribute and game mechanic has to have a clear definition and place in the game," they say on the game's blog.

"For example, the Cyberpunk 2020 'Wardrobe & Style' skill governs the knowledge about the right clothes to wear, when to wear them and how to look cool even in a spacesuit. As you can see, this skill covers quite a big area of lore and can be interpreted differently, depending on the situation and the players. In *Cyberpunk 2077* this skill has to be tied to a specific gameplay mechanic. And all of these mechanics have to be clearly defined so they can work well with other elements of the game and, at the same time, be easy to understand for the player. After all, we don't have a referee or game master to explain or interpret the rules as you go."

There's no word yet on a release window for the game.

EA's Origin is crawling with users (and other interesting EA stuff)

During EA's earnings conference for the mega-publisher's second quarter, they revealed a few interesting stats and figures that shed some light on the status of some of their endeavours. First up is some info on digital distribution platform Origin. Love it or hate it, EA's wannabe Steam killer has thus far convinced 30 million users to register for it to gain access to the games and services it offers. That's a massive 42.9 percent increase in registered users over three months, up from the 21 million revealed back in July. Moreover, 4.4 million people have thrown money at Origin's digital content, which ranges from full games to DLC. The average sale figure is reportedly $64. Peter Moore, EA's Chief Operating Officer, also noted that 13 million users have accessed Origin from a mobile device.

"With the 70 plus developers that are now putting content on the platform," said Moore at the conference, "And with our own content itself — *Medal of Honor* debuted this week, obviously — our ability to continue to drive stronger commercial engagement as well as community engagement has got to be key, and the metrics all point towards that being a very strong part of our business."

It was also revealed that EA's *Battlefield 3 Premium* subscriptions are up, now sitting at 2 million (up from 1.3 million in late July). Monolithic digital football sim *FIFA 13*, meanwhile, managed to sell 7.4 million units (excluding mobile) within just four weeks of hitting store shelves, making it the "biggest sports launch of all time" for EA. *Battlefield 3* (the base game) and last year's *FIFA* offering *FIFA 12* have together sold "nearly 4 million units" since April of this year.

Your move, PETA

Team Meat, the indie studio behind the running-and-grinding-and-mincing-and-screaming-in-rage platformer *Super Meat Boy* has announced that they're working on a new game entitled *Mew-Genics*.

The game will be an extension of the prototype work the team created for a recent game jam (we think it was a recent Ludam Dare 24, which featured the theme "evolution"), but other than that, not much is known. It'll involve cats on some level, and the teaser artwork shows weird things like a man in a cheerleader outfit, a scientist in a laboratory and a cat with another cat growing out of its head. So, um... your guess is as good as ours right now. That's it for now; we'll fill you in on any new details as soon as they exist!

DUST OFF THE COBWEBS

It seems like we've written about this sort of thing at least ten times in the last few months, but here it goes anyway: Lori Ann and Corey Cole, best known as the creators of the *Quest for Glory* series, have announced their return to game development along with a Kickstarter campaign.

Now, usually when we cover these campaigns, they're a sure thing, but this particular one looks like it might not succeed; at the time of writing it's pulled in less than half of its goal amount with just two weeks to go. Nonetheless, we're certain that even if the Kickstarter campaign does fail, the couple will make an effort to get it out the door; they've done most of the design work at this stage, anyway.

Their game, entitled *Hero-U: Rogue to Redemption*, is described as "a turn-based RPG with adventure game puzzles an immersive story." It follows the antics of a rogue, Shawn, as he makes his way through various dungeons, defeating or evading enemies, solving puzzles and doing all the things one expects a character to do in an adventure game. Their goals are quite bold, but if the gameplay balance turns out how they've planned, *Hero-U* could be a great indie title.

The Game Stalker

Tales of a painted lady

I know that most people probably don't want to hear about my tattoos – this is a gaming magazine after all, but hear me out; this isn't a completely random thought.

Just a quick note with regards to my tattoos – love them or hate them (I'm aware that not everyone is keen on tattoos and that's ok), know that I am, for most of you, what is considered to be heavily tattooed, although not by any means completely covered. Anyone who has seen me on TV will know that I have a full sleeve, but I also have a number of other tattoos that you probably just haven't seen, including most of my left leg, and large tattoos down both of my sides as well as a number of small ones.

Now here comes the gaming link – I have no gaming related tattoos [*Phew, don't want any angry readers up in arms about the relevance of an opinion column, heaven forbid, Ed*]. Which seems weird even to me actually considering my love of the gaming industry and the number of years I've actively been involved in it, you'd think that I would have acquired a piece of game related body art at some point. Indeed many people often ask me this question and always seem vaguely surprised when I say no.

Much as there are games that have been hugely influential on my life, there is no game that I love enough to get tattooed on my body for all eternity. Did I love *Super Mario Bros, Pac-man, Gears of War, Red Dead Redemption*, and *Grand Theft Auto*? Yes, of course. Do I want them emblazoned on my body? Uh, no.

These were all games that I played extensively, and were in one manner or another, hugely influential on my life, however I don't feel the need to have them tattooed on me. I have to ask myself why in this case – why is something that is such a big part of my personal identity not a part of my body art, which is equally a part of my identity?

In my opinion it's because many games are transient, popular one day and forgotten about tomorrow when the next big title is announced. Certainly I have favourites but in 10 years, am I going to feel the same about this game as I did when I had it etched into my skin?

From frequent discussions with people who ask about my tattoos, this is the hesitation of many first timers, they change their mind too often. This is not a bad thing – you don't want to be stuck with something you hate five years down the line, but it's personally not an issue I have with any topic other than gaming.

There is really only one game I would currently consider getting inked upon my person – *Full Throttle*. The game that changed gaming for me. The game that made me want to be involved in the gaming industry in any manner possible. But now the question – do I get a contemporary interpretation of this classic, but somewhat pixelated Tim Schafer masterpiece, or do I get something more representative of the era in which it was released? Which character do I get? A combination of the biker gangs? Ben? Maureen? Malcolm Corley? The choices are endless and so once again my temptation to get a videogame tattoo falls by the wayside as I slide into indecision.

Maybe one day I'll take the plunge and have some amazing gaming mural etched on to my body, but until such time I'll have to make sure I save a spot... somewhere.

- Pippa Tshabalala

Grand Theft Auto V gets 2013 release date

When a Polish *GTA V* fan site posted allegedly leaked advertisement posters for Rockstar's upcoming entry in the ludicrously popular *Grand Theft Auto* series, the Internet immediately engaged speculation mode. Beyond all the rabidly excited Internet shouting and tears of joy streaming from the faces of fans at the sudden appearance of anything at all relating to the chronically silent, hugely-anticipated game, the most tantalising bit of info to emerge from it all was a release window: "spring 2013".

Shortly after that, Rockstar Games appeared on the scene to confirm that that release window is legitimate, which for us SA gamers means we can expect to see the game anywhere between March and May of next year on Xbox 360 and PS3. Developer and series creator Rocktsar North has called the game "the largest and most thriving game-world we have ever created set in the sprawling city of Los Santos and for miles beyond – from the tops of the mountains to the depths of the ocean." What's that last bit then? Can we expect some underwater shenanigans?

On the PC front, Rockstar garnered a bit of a hostile reaction at the absence of any news of a PC release, enough to warrant a stern warning from Rockstar, who said this: "Hey guys, glad to see so much enthusiasm about the release announcement. For those asking about the PC platform, we're currently focused on the Xbox 360 and PS3 versions of the game and don't have any details to share about a PC version at this time. Anyone that continues to spam the comments section will have their commenting privileges suspended." Rockstar has a history of releasing their *GTA* titles on PC some time after their console counterparts; but as consolation, PC players should bear in mind that, for their wait, they usually receive the definitive version of each title.

In other *GTA* news, *GTA: San Andreas,* which many consider to be the finest entry in the series to date, might be gearing up for a digital re-release on PS3, if a new ESRB rating is to be believed. Similar listings for *GTA 3* and *Vice City* appeared earlier this year, and the former was subsequently released on PSN as a direct port in September.

Scare tactics
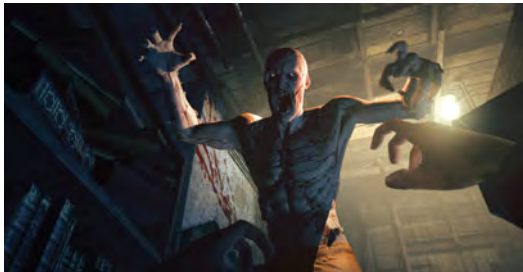
Newly formed indie studio Red Barrels, which was put together by various key developers from Ubisoft's *Splinter Cell, Prince of Persia* and *Assassin's Creed* teams, has announced its first title: the PC-exclusive horror survival game *Outlast.* It takes place in the fictitious location of Mount Massive Asylum which was host to all manner of secret human experimentation over the years. Presumed abandoned, the asylum was owned by the Murkof Corporation, and now investigative reporter Miles Upshur will search its blood-stained corridors to uncover the secrets it holds within.

The trailer that's currently available shows what we can only assume is in-game footage, and sees Miles slowly searching the asylum interior from a first-person perspective, switching to the night vision mode of his video camera as needed. There doesn't appear to be anything in the way of combat, but there's plenty of running away from terrifying, ghoul-like creatures, so we think it's safe to assume the game will follow the first-person horror formula made successful in recent years by games like *Penumbra* and *Amnesia.* The trailer certainly seems to be as pants-wettingly frightening as those two games, so mark us down as highly intrigued at this stage.

Outlast is currently due for release on Steam during Q2 2013, and is powered by the Unreal Engine.

You must be mad

Joe "I don't know how to pronounce that so I'll just say 'Mad'" Madureira has left Vigil Games. The comic book artist and geek super-hero sent video game and comic book fans' hearts aflutter when he announced that he'd bring his (then) unique art style to the gaming industry with the first *Darksiders* title seven years ago. Since then, he's been an integral part of the gameplay and art design departments, but has also seen the studio rocked hard under publisher pressure.

The exact reasons for his departure are unknown, other than that he's decided to "move on to new adventures" which includes a return to comic books. He's set to announce "the next big thing" in the coming months.

DEVIL MAY CRY GETS CREATIVE WITH ITS DIFFICULTY SETTINGS

Despite early controversy thanks to its revamped, parallel universe Dante at the hands of new developer Ninja Theory, *DmC: Devil May Cry* has steadily powered forth and given both long-time series fans and potential newcomers plenty of reason to sit up and take note of its ultra-stylish demon-slaying action. Now there's another reason for hardcore *Devil May Cry* fans to respect Ninja Theory's adaptation. Well, four reasons to be exact.

They're four new difficulty modes, unlocked once you've completed the game's easy, normal and hard (called Human, Devil Hunter and Nephilim in the game) difficulty levels. The first, "Son of Sparda", mixes up enemy placement and makes them tougher, also altering their behaviour. Secondly, there's "Dante Must Die", which is the same as Son of Sparda but "contains the strongest enemies and insane attack waves."

Things get really interesting (or horrible, depending on your view of game difficulty) with the final two modes. "Heaven or Hell" transforms the game by making everything die in just one hit, including Dante. "Hell and Hell" is similar to the above, except that only Dante dies after just one hit. We think we all just simultaneously fear-vomited in our mouths a little.

The Indie Investigator

Your ideas are SAFE!

Fun fact one: some game developers are concerned about protecting their ideas. Fun fact two: some game ideas have been cloned or exploited by companies looking to make money. Fun fact three: this does not mean that you should hide your game in the dirt until a week before its release date.

When we hear horror stories about developers being ripped off by groups with more cash or manpower, it's important to understand how this happens. Fledgling game ideas do not come straight into a perilous existence: there's always a key point at which someone *may* sit up and take notice, and it's always way after the initial concept phase.

Getting people to notice your game is pretty hard work. Those who have tried will know this already. Large-scale marketing requires a lot of build-up presence and groundwork and knocking on doors. Half-completed concept prototypes are the five-cent coins of the Internet. They're around, but nobody really cares.

Predatory developers looking for concepts to clone are more often than not going to wait for an idea to mature and blossom before they even think about stealing it. If you're hypothetically in the market to clone concepts and sell them off, the least risky (and least resource-intensive) way of doing so is waiting for games to generate a minimum level of buzz and a proven potential audience. After all, if dedicated journos who make it their job to hunt down and review new titles haven't found or picked up on your idea yet, why does it seem likely that nefarious forces would do any better?

If we can understand and accept that cloners naturally want to work in a way that's simple and convenient to them (else why not put the time and energy into a unique project?), we figure out that our ideas aren't even a blip on the hunter's radar until well after a minimum threshold of completion *and* popularity. Unless you're already a top-notch developer with a fantastic portfolio of hit games, you're generally not at high risk.

Showing a game very late in the development process (near or at completion) is pretty much the prime theft point and does little to protect your work more than being open much earlier. Even waiting until release time itself (if you really, really want to scuttle your marketing boat that badly) isn't a watertight strategy against anyone determined enough to grab your game, produce a cheap knock-off and begin marketing aggressively within a few months. It's like trying to implement some sort of idea-based version DRM, with about the same laughable measure of success.

The time you spend in secret directly wrecks time spent "out there" making an impression on people and developing the Internet presence necessary for a successful game. Promoting yourself as a dev is a long-term project and the strongest way to improve your reputation is producing games that people can play and experience, not dropping hints and teasers that are more cryptic than the stuff sold by traffic vendors (coat hangers and bin bags, how does that actually work out?).

The concerns are natural, and the dangers are real, but the far greater danger by quite a margin will always be the snuffing of your own creative candle. Be responsible and mindful, sure ... but don't shoot yourself in the foot.
- Rodain Joubert

Wildfire Worlds brings you a toy box with a propagation engine

James Boty used to work for Bullfrog back when Bullfrog still existed and Peter Molyneux wasn't peddling insane ideas. While there, he got a solid grounding in developing games based on population mechanics. He then left the industry to work in advertising. Luckily for us, he's gotten bored of advertising so has decided to make a game (of sorts) called *Wildfire Worlds*.

Wildfire Worlds provides you with an aerial view of a little city. Graphically the game looks charming as hell with its papercraft aesthetic and tilt-shift camera focus. The city has some incredibly technical programming running in the background that governs the way things run and what the population gets on with. You can watch little papercraft people finding the fastest route to work, noticing billboards on their way to work and then being influenced by those billboards to go to particular stores after work. That was one example Boty provided.

The purpose of the game is for you to break the system. You'll be able to drop agents into the city to insight civil unrest and disobedience. Do a thorough job and your city's population will begin violent riots that might even result in the complete destruction of the city. "Because it's cute I think we diffuse the more unpleasant aspects," says Boty, "It's not meant to be too serious, it's sort of the *South Park* take on everything, that's my touchstone on it."

Once you've destroyed everything, the game doesn't end. Instead, nature takes over and animals start to flourish in the area. Eventually people return and a new city pops up. You'll then be able to try your hand at destroying that one as well – maybe this time you'll spread a disease instead?

Basically, *Wildfire Worlds* is a toy box with some very technical propagation mechanics nestled in the background. Your actions will lead to mass consequences, but Boty is hoping to bring in real-life examples of this sort of thing as well: "We want to do football stadiums, modelling hooliganism... The civil rights movement would be a wicked one to do."

For now, there's no release date, but Boty and his small team are hoping to get the game out on PC and iPad. If you head over to **www.wildfireworlds.com** you'll be able to grab a copy of the tech demo.

BYTES

This might not count for anything locally, but maybe those of you with keen importing skills will be interested to know that **a remake of *Dragon Quest VII***

has been announced by Square Enix for release on the Nintendo 3DS. The game is set to launch in February 2012 and will include 3DS-exclusive

features like support for exchanging lithographs via StreetPass. There's no word yet on a US or global release, but it doesn't hurt to dream.

Stronghold just got a lot bigger

Despite the dismal reception and performance of *Stronghold 3*, series creators Firefly Studios are keen to stay in the game of making games, and they have a couple of tricks up their sleeves to do just that.

The first, which we briefly touched on in a previous issue, is their crowd-funding venture through Gambitious. Oddly, there's been very little movement on that front other than the confirmation that the game they're going to seek funding for is *Stronghold Crusader 2*, a sequel to the spin-off of the game that first put them on the map. Funding hasn't officially opened yet, but you should probably stay tuned to www. fireflyworlds.com if you're interested in this sort of thing.

The other half of this studio's campaign is the free HD patch for the first *Stronghold, Stronghold Crusader* and *Stronghold Crusader Extreme* for anyone who already owns any of those games. This patch increases the supported screen resolution, increases texture sizes and adds a few new features like a super zoomed-out view of the battlefield and free DLC addons. Unfortunately, they don't currently work with Steam versions of the games. If you don't own any of these excellent titles, ready-to-go HD versions are available from gog.com.

New Super Mario Bros. U game modes detailed

Nintendo has seen fit to grace us with new info on the upcoming Wii U version of *New Super Mario Bros.* and its game modes, as well as a new feature/character: a little purple thief called Nabbit. When Nabbit appears on the world map, chasing him down and catching him lets you relieve him of all the goodies he's collected, allowing you to return the stolen goods to Toad, who'll give you a P-acorn. The P-acorn then lets you fly endlessly, for one level only.

In addition to Boost Mode (revealed at E3, and is a mode which lets players help each other out – or hinder them, if they so choose – by tapping the touch screen to place blocks, or tapping enemies to stun them), Coin Battle returns from the game's Wii forebear: a battle for up to four players to see who can collect the most coins throughout unique courses. It's compatible with Boost Mode's inter-player helping/hindering. Finally, there's Challenge Mode, and it's all in the name: here, there are tasks set across four categories of Time Attack, Coin Collection, 1-Up Rally and Special, and it too works with Boost Mode.

STARCRAFT II'S MULTIPLAYER GETTING A LEVELLING SYSTEM

Now, before your head prematurely explodes at the sight of that headline because you immediately assume it means that there'll be a sort of *Command & Conquer 4*-style multiplayer progression system when *Heart of the Swarm* finally outs itself that only allows players to access certain units and strategies once they've reached a certain in-game level, pause for a moment. That's not at all what's happening.

With this new system, players earn experience as they play multiplayer matches and custom games. The levelling is split across races (the maximum level for each race is 20), and you earn more experience for each unit you build or destroy. There's also talk of bonus XP for certain actions, like winning your first match of the day or for playing games with people in your friends list. Your progression with each race will then be displayed in your player profile for other *StarCraft II* players to see.

Your rewards for doing all this are purely cosmetic: people familiar with *StarCraft II* will know of the portraits and decals that can be unlocked by earning achievements. This is just a new way to earn those. This new system rewards players of all skill levels and encourages people to fight until the bitter end of each match if they're obsessive about unlocking the many new portraits and decals that Blizzard are creating for *Heart of the Swarm.*

Miktar's Meanderings

Lord of the Flies

A baby can be declared a full legal adult, did you know that? It's unlikely to ever happen, of course. But thanks to how legal systems tend to work, it is actually entirely *possible.*

If a court (with the relevant jurisdiction) declares a child legally emancipated, that child automatically becomes "mature" in the eyes of the law. Granted, emancipation of minors is an edge-case scenario, usually related to highly subjective "best interest" situations.

But what is "mature" anyway? Legally, it varies from country to country. The "age of majority", as it's called, is when the law conceptualises you as an *adult*. You stop being a minor, and the legal control and responsibility of your parents/guardians is terminated. You can now buy stocks, vote, drink alcohol, drive a car, marry without the consent of others, and so on. Congrats, you're an adult! The age by which this magical transformation happens, varies. In Albania, when you hit 14 you're an adult. In South Africa, it's 18. In the United States, some states require you to be 21. Legal "maturity" is thus, sketchy and unreliable, and totally at the whim of your geographical location.

What about sexual maturity? Most multicellular organisms can't sexually reproduce at birth. Historically, biological adulthood has been determined by the start of puberty (menstruation in women, ejaculation in men, and the all-important pubic hair). In the past, such a change would be accompanied by a culturally-relevant coming-of-age ceremony. A ritual, if you want to be blunt. Every religion/culture has their own idea of what's appropriate; some are more interesting than others. Usually, biological adulthood begins around 10 for girls and 12 for boys, varying from person to person.

But since "biological adulthood" can vary from "legal adulthood", we're now stuck with two conflicting ideas of when exactly someone is "mature". To call someone an "adult" is vague, because it could mean either.

If you were to look at it in terms of unspoken social contracts, the idea that a person moves from adolescence into adulthood, is entirely fictional. It's basically a convenient lie we tell ourselves (and each other), so as to keep the cogs of society nicely greased. We tell ourselves that "adults" behave a certain way, and anyone who doesn't act that way is clearly not an adult. And since it's a lie, it's fluid and convenient.

The drunken man at a sports event, throwing obscenities and acting like a giant douche, is clearly not acting like an adult at that moment. He goes home to his wife and child, and the assumed responsibility (if he takes responsibility, of course), declares him a mature adult in the eyes of society. Good for him! In contrast: The 12 year old brother who takes care of his toddler sister (the parents being too busy to care) is in every respect being more mature than the adults around him. And yet, he's not an adult in half of the world's confused clarifications of what it means to be an adult.

Basically, "grown-ups" don't exist. They're a mirage on the horizon of senescence (biological aging, a hereditary failing in most organisms). Society injects a fictional marker into the minds of kids, letting them think that once they go past a certain point; they evolve from one shape into another. Mental maturity isn't that convenient or simple.

So don't tell me what games are "mature" and what games are "for kids". You don't know either.
- Miktar Dracon

Zynga woes continue with studio closure

Social gaming giant Zynga has been having a really rough run of things over the last few months. The company best known for Facebook games like *FarmVille* and *Mafia Wars* has been shedding executive staff members since August, and it looks as if things are only getting worse.

Zynga has shut down its Boston based studio in its entirety. The studio, which was responsible for *Indiana Jones Adventure World*, was purchased by Zynga in 2010 when the team was still known as Conduit Labs. Furthermore, 100 employees at Zynga's Austin studio have been shown the door. The reductions to the Austin studio come as a result of Zynga's budget cuts for the underperforming Facebook game *The Ville,* which is Zynga's unashamed copy of EA's *The Sims Social.* Together with the shuttering of Boston and the reduction in Austin's workforce, Zynga has shed 5% of its total employee base.

According to an internal memo by Zynga CEO Mark Pincus, the cuts were necessary in order to "streamline [Zynga's] operations." The memo also made mention that the UK and Japan based Zynga studios are also ripe for closure. At time of writing, those studios are still intact.

A few days after these staff cuts were made public knowledge, online hacktivist group Anonymous decided to launch a new hacking campaign against Zynga. Anonymous claims to have already hacked Zynga servers and stolen numerous Zynga games. The hacking collective is threatening to distribute the games for free online unless Zynga ceases culling their workforce. Anonymous maintains that they acquired an internal Zynga document outlining future plans to shut down further US based studios in order to outsource development cycles to cheaper countries like India.

As of the beginning of December 2012, Zynga will begin shutting down 13 of its most underperforming games starting with *Treasure Isle* and *Fishville.*

BYTES

Come April 2013, it'll be time to get your zombie slaying on with *Dead Island Riptide,* which will release then. The game will be available on 360, PS3 and PC simultaneously, and sees the return of the first game's four protagonists who have to deal with the failure of their escape attempt from the tropical island. You'll also be able to import your data from the first game, so if you haven't completed it yet, it's time to get cracking.

....

If anyone still cares, John Carmack has promised that **modding support for id Software's** FPS *Rage* **is coming "soon".** Bear in mind that these tools were meant to launch alongside the game over a year ago, but we'll give the team the benefit of the doubt and assume that they've spent all this time fine-tuning the software. You know, instead of messing around with *DOOM 3 BFG Edition.*

A New Hope?

Look, we're not going to mess around here: this news has been so prevalent in all forms of media that you've likely heard about this a thousand times already. But for the three of you who haven't, we'll keep this brief: Disney now owns Lucasfilm Limited, the corporation responsible for everything *Star Wars, Indiana Jones* and all things George Lucas. Included in the package are Industrial Light & Magic, Skywalker Sound and LucasArts. And all this cost Disney $4.05 billion. Wowzer!

Also announced along with this is news that there will be a *Star Wars 7*, aimed squarely at 2015 for its release date. Kathleen Kennedy, Lucasfilm co-chairman, will become president of Lucasfilm and act as executive producer on "new *Star Wars* feature films, with George Lucas serving as creative consultant."

And what's this mean for *Star Wars 1313*, currently in development at LucasArts? That's still on. At least, it is for now, as a rep explained to Polygon that "for the time being all projects are business as usual." The future of all these developments is both frightening and exciting.

Modder remaking Descent in UE3

With everyone having seemingly gone remake-mad this year, one game that's been neglected is *Descent*. That is, until now. An ambitious modder simply known as "Max" is remaking the game in Unreal Engine 3, and aims to faithfully recreate the six-dimensional movement and anti-gravity battles that made the original an instant classic.

The game will be a retelling of the original story with a thriller/horror atmosphere through remakes of the original levels. The original robots will be remodelled and animated, and powered by advanced AI. There'll apparently also be more diverse gameplay, although it'll also stick to the basics that made *Descent* great. The ship model will be a high-detail Pyro-GX model, with a 3D cockpit view. Obviously, all the original weapons will return, potentially with some new ones added.

That's Max's plan at least, and you'd be right for thinking it's a huge undertaking for one human. And that's why he's more than willing to accept help. Float on over to **descent.silverball-magic.com** for more on the project.

MONEY DON'T GROW ON TREES...

...it's made from many many sales of fantastic, truly deserving video games. And that's exactly what's happened with *Borderlands 2* and *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*, two games we have nothing but love for and which appear to have made publisher 2K Games equally happy with their performances at retail. To date, Gearbox's *Borderlands 2* has shipped (not sold) five million copies, revealed Take-Two Interactive during their second quarter earnings report, making it "one of the most successful releases in 2K's history".

Firaxis Games' excellent *X-COM* remake, meanwhile, is "proving to be a critical and commercial success", although no exact figures were revealed to openly display the game's success. Both games have been said to have "strong digital sales".

"Take-Two's second quarter revenue and earnings exceeded our outlook, driven by the breakout success of 2K's *Borderlands 2* and robust demand for our catalog and digitally delivered offerings," beamed Take-Two CEO Strauss Zelnick. "Moreover, with *Grand Theft Auto V* slated for spring 2013, we are poised to generate substantial revenue and earnings growth in fiscal year 2014."

DISTRIBUTORS

Apex Interactive	011 796 5040
ASUS SA	011 783 5450
BT Games	0861 4 GAMES
Compuseed	011 781 8880/2/3
Comstar	011 314 5812
Core Gaming	011 535 9000
Corex	011 655 8800
EA South Africa	011 516 8300
Evetech Solutions	012 326 6547
ESET	0860 313 872
Frontosa	011 466-0038
Incredible Connection	0860 011 700
Intel Corporation	011 806 4530
Look & Listen	011 467 3717
Megarom	011 361 4800
Microsoft	0860 225 567
Nu Metro Interactive	011 340 9300
Phoenix Software	011 803 5437
Prima Interactive	011 799 7800
Rectron	011 203 1000
Samsung	0860 726 7864
Silverscreen Trading	011 794 9749
Sonic Informed	011 3145800
Ster Kinekor Entertainment	011 445 7700

SUPPORT LINES

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

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

Publishers: Microsoft Xbox
Number: 0800 991 550

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

Fusion is imminent

Insomniac lays down the details on its upcoming shooter

If you thought that *Resistance* developers Insomniac couldn't make games for anything but the PS3, you'd be wrong. You'd also be a shallow, unfair person; shame on you! Scolding out of the way, let's get on with some news: Insomniac has begun to provide details on their upcoming, multi-platform third-person shooter, *Fuse,* which is a reworked version of the previously-titled *Overstrike* which we first caught wind of last year.

This science-fiction action shooter tells the story of an elite group of mercenaries called Overstrike 9 that must infiltrate a government installation called Hyperion Base. Home to a number of bizarre scientific experiments, Hyperion is also the target of rogue paramilitary group Raven, and both organisations must race to take possession of a source of powerful energy: an alien substance called Fuse.

You'll play as Overstrike 9, a four-person team comprising of Dalton the leader, Izzy, a hacker and technology expert, former LAPD detective Jacob, and British assassin with daddy issues Naya. Each character can be played in co-op mode or AI-controlled if you're just a party of one. The four characters represent distinct classes;

Dalton is the tank, who possesses a powerful Fuse-based device called the Magshield that can dish out as much damage as it soaks up; Izzy has taken ownership of a device called the Shattergun which can freeze enemies in time and smash them to smithereens; Jacob is the long-ranged damage-dealer, and takes a shining to the Arcshot Fuse crossbow which can also set traps made of explosive molten mercury; Naya, being the sneaky type, can fully cloak herself to sneak up on enemies and perform silent takedowns when she's not using her Warp Rifle to generate miniature black holes.

All four main characters will interact with the game's supposedly narrative-driven campaign in their own unique ways, and will grow as both a personality and a character (in the form of XP-based skill unlocks) throughout.

Fuse is currently due for release on PS3 and Xbox 360 around March 2013, and will be published by Electronic Arts. We just hope that EA has the sense to give this game the space it needs to be a simple once-off game or grow into a series if it's worth it, but we'll have more info for you in the coming months to see how it pans out.

HALO 4 TAKES A STAND AGAINST SEXISM

343 Industries, they in charge of *Halo 4,* have vowed to curb all forms of discrimination in their first foray in expanding Bungie's universe. *Halo*'s online component is one in a list of many games notorious for having some of the scummiest, most foul gamers in existence ruining the fun for the rest of us with their constant, offensive spewing of profanity and discriminatory remarks. Executive producer Kiki Wolfkill (best name ever) and studio head Bonnie Ross say that sexist discrimination of any kind will be met with a lifetime ban, both from the game and Xbox LIVE.

According to Ross, "most people look at a franchise like *Halo,* and automatically assume it's run by a guy," but that's not true in the case of 343, which has a few women running the show. Not that that should make a difference: discrimination of all kinds should've been shut down ages ago in the *Halo* series, no matter who's been driving the boat.

Now for a couple of interesting *Halo* facts. Ahead of the launch of *Halo 4,* Microsoft revealed that the game is easily their most expensive game to develop to date. Also, the *Halo* series had thus far sold 46 million copies and generated $3 billion in revenue. Five billion hours had been logged in the series via Xbox LIVE, and *Halo 3* boasted 120 million pieces of user-generated content. It'll be interesting to see how these figures have changed following *Halo 4*'s release.

The Longest Journey's longest journey

Five long years ago, Funcom announced a new outing in the celebrated adventure series *The Longest Journey*, serving as a sequel to *Dreamfall: The Longest Journey*. Entitled *Dreamfall Chapters*, series creator Ragnar Tørnquist disappointed fans back in 2008 by admitting that the game was on the backburner and not very high at all on Funcom's list of priorities, but he assured that it had not been abandoned. Fast forward four years, and his words prove true as it's revealed that Chapters has finally entered the pre-production stage.

Development is being helmed by new studio Red Thread Games, with Tørnquist leading the way. He'll still maintain an advisory role on *The Secret World*, the MMO for which he served as creative director, while Joel Bylos will step up as *TSW*'s director. Funcom are licensing out the Longest Journey IP to Red Thread with an agreement to share revenue. It's also been revealed that the Norwegian Film Institute has provided Red Thread with $175,000 to assist with pre-production.

"I'm very excited to finally have the opportunity to continue the *The Longest Journey* saga," said Tørnquist. "Ever since we ended *Dreamfall* on a nail-biting cliffhanger, players have been rightfully demanding a sequel, and my deal with Funcom will finally make that possible. I'm extremely grateful to Funcom for this unique and exciting opportunity, and I can't wait to dive back into the universe I helped create more than a decade ago, and continue the story players have been waiting for these past six years."

Look & Listen

PC

SimCity	March
Star Trek	March
South Park: The Stick of Truth	March

Xbox 360

Dead Space 3	February
BioShock Infinite	February 26th
Splinter Cell: Blacklist	March

PS3

DmC: Devil May Cry	January
Tomb Raider	March 5th
The Last of Us	2013

Gouranga!

Controversy and video games go together like Doritos and Mountain Dew, and this has been the case practically since the industry was born. Some controversies are dubbed PR nightmares — they're bad for businesses because they're handled poorly or distastefully — but the old adage "there's no such thing as bad publicity" holds true for a couple of franchises, and *Grand Theft Auto* is no exception.

In fact, *GTA* has just become the poster child for the saying; in a recent interview with UK paper *The Sunday Times*, series creators David Jones and Mike Dailly came clean that the controversy over the original game was orchestrated, by none other than tabloid-loving publicist Max Clifford.

"He designed all the outcry, which pretty much guaranteed MPs would get involved... He'd do anything to keep the profile high," said Dailly.

"He told us how he would play it, who he would target, what those people targeted would say." Jones added, "every word he said came true."

The decision to go with the PR stunt was reportedly made by BMG Interactive, the game's publishers at the time. The plan included planted stories among key newspapers and pressing the buttons of selected politicians who Clifford knew would kick up the biggest fuss.

Developers DMA Design (which later went on to become Rockstar North) went along for the ride purely because it was fun to see how dark the campaign would get. Little did they know that they'd go on to turn the series into one of the most popular video game franchises in the world.

DALLAS BASED COMPANY MOVES TO HAVE MAGIC: THE GATHERING ONLINE SHUT DOWN

Stop us if you've heard this one before: there's a company in the US that's opened up a court case based on some obscure patent infringement. That's right, it's this whole thing again, only this time it's Wizards of the Coast that's getting shafted by US Patent Laws.

Wildcat Intellectual Property Holdings has this online trading card game called *Unit Command*, only it's not actually a complete release and has been floundering around in a beta for who knows how long. *Magic: The Gathering Online*, however, has been running for more than ten years. That hasn't stopped Wildcat from hitting Wizards of the Coast with a patent lawsuit based on an alleged infringement of at least seven aspects of their "Electronic Trading Card" patent.

Unit Command has a copyright dating back to around 2010, so IF they get anywhere against *Magic: The Gathering Online*, then we will have officially lost all faith in the US justice system. If you feel like a laugh, then head on over to **www.unitcommand.com** to see what Wizards of the Coast is up against. Something tells us they'll just tap four mountains and two colourless mana, summon Magma Lawyers of Dragnaroth and obliterate Wildcat. At least that's what we hope they'll do, and obviously only after the Magma Lawyers' summoning sickness has worn off.

FULLY LOADED BOX MEAL
IT'S NOT A MOUTHFUL, IT'S AN ARMFUL

sogood™

Well hello, sexy lady!

Ladies and germs, we'd like to introduce you to Roxy, our official rAge mascot for 2012. It's not that we don't love Scarlett anymore, it's just that rAge turns 10 this year, and we thought it was time for a new babe sporting some cool gear. So we briefed South African illustrator Warren Louw, who also did Scarlett for us back in 2010, and our vision for a rAge/NAG gaming chick was created. We think she's hot and would play her in a video game any day.

Every month we'll hide her somewhere in the magazine – your mission is to go find her.

Send your sighting to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line "December Roxy", and of course your contact details, and you could win a prize.

November winner

Daniel Robertson, page 51

THIS MONTH'S LOOT

PS3 Phenom Wireless Controller valued at R449.95. Sponsored by dreamGEAR and Musica

dreamGEAR

MUSICA
A WORLD AWAITS

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 *Toxic bunny* for PC from Apex Interactive. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line "**December caption**".

TOXIC BUNNY HD
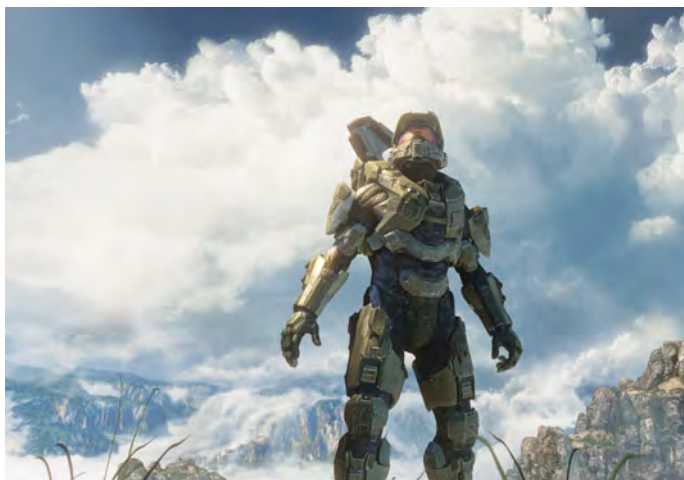
NAG's lame attempt at humour
"I hate it when the cold air outside fogs up my visor!"

Last months winner
"My precious! … ah screw it, it's made of plastic now anyway." -Nikhil

DmC
—Devil May Cry—

December: week 1

Street Cricket Champions 2	PS2 / PSP
LEGO The Lord of the Rings	Wii
Guardians of Middle-earth	PS3
Paper Mario: Sticker Star	3DS

December: Unconfirmed

Battlefield 3: Aftermath (code in a box)	PC

Stop, drop and roll

With all the fuss and money flowing around Kickstarter and its myriad of completely unmonitored campaigns, it was bound to happen sooner or later that one of them would stall. That's the case with an isometric horror game by the name of *Haunts: The Manse Macabre* that was Kickstarted its way into nowhere land shortly after it surpassed its funding goal of $25,000 by over $3k.

Shortly after the goal was met, the team began the process of settling down to some hard work, but then two members of the four-man team announced that they were quitting the studio. Stuck and confused, design lead and fund-raiser Rick Dakan went public with the situation and was, rather surprisingly, greeted with almost complete understanding. He even had a slew of interested programmers who were keen to join the project.

"So far the fan reaction has been amazingly supportive and generous," said Dakan. "The vast majority of messages and comments have been positive. Only three people have asked for their money back so far, with a total of $30 refunded. Since I was fully prepared to be refunding thousands of dollars today, I'm feeling amazingly grateful to everyone who's decided to stick with us."

Well, there you have it. The first funded Kickstarter disaster and it was practically nothing. Sure, the development of *Haunts* will be delayed, but you know when people on the Internet show compassion and understanding, you're dealing a new level of empathy.

60

things to do during your December holiday

(with little or no money)

Whether you've got just a few days or entire months ahead of you, year-end holidays often amount to sitting around in your underwear, eating cold pizza and wishing you had a better way to keep yourself entertained. Well now you do, thanks to this gigantic list of game-related activities for you to while away the time. Thank goodness for NAG!

PS: This is a killer list, filled with tasks both tiny and monumental, but we've got a special challenge for you: if you can provide photographic and/or screenshot evidence of you accomplishing *every single task* in this list (we mean it!), then we'll give you... stuff. We're not sure what stuff exactly, but there's talk of a lifetime subscription to *NAG*, and maybe a Checkers packet full of games and some stale Niknaks. Whatever it is, you can be sure that it'll be unique. If anyone manages to achieve this mammoth undertaking, send your 60 images (zipped or in some way compressed, please) to **ed@nag.co.za.** Good luck and have fun!

Number

18

Number
2

Make stuff!

1. Make a game. We've included a program called Construct 2 on this month's cover disc – give it a go!

2. Dig out your childhood action figures or LEGO and film a stop-frame animation.

3. Make a gaming crossword puzzle and give it to your friends/ family to beat.

4. Make a music video or game trailer using video game clips.

5. Build a wargame table. Bonus points for using bonsai trees, moss and real running water.

6. Make a machinima video using a game editor.

7. Design your own gaming shirt and get it printed through local

websites such as **www. tshirtprinting.co.za.**

8. Make an original amateur movie based on a classic 8-bit game. The less story you have to work with, the better.

9. Start a South African-flavoured, gaming-powered YouTube channel packed with reviews, previews and random gaming content.

Number
20

10. Teach someone who knows nothing about gaming something about gaming.

11. Add gaming events to your 2013 calendar (for example rAge 27-29 September 2013 and the *SimCity* launch on 8 March 2013).

12. Deliberately remove yourself from your genre comfort zones. This can be cost effective because you've missed *all* of the titles in that genre, which means you'll be able to pick up really cheap older games; and it might broaden your tastes.

13. Prepare for rAge 2013: Stand in the blistering sun for two hours; lock yourself out of your own house for 45 minutes; disconnect your internet for an entire day; spend money on overpriced food.

14. Display your love for gaming in a very public place.

15. Get admitted to hospital with a gaming related injury. Or, if your mum is reading this, um... *don't* do that.

G3T T3CHNICAL!

16. Mod your PC: It can be as simple as installing a side-panel fan or LED strip, or as complex as rebuilding your entire machine to fit into a backpack.

17. Do maintenance tasks on your PC: update drivers, uninstall unused programs, defrag your

hard drive and delete old files.

18. Build a replica BFG (or any interesting video game gun) using things found around the house.

19. Design your ultimate gaming cave.

Socialise!

20. Host a *Minecraft* or *Terraria* server for you and your friends.

21. Take part in a LAN or host one yourself.

22. Run a rhythm or dancing game competition in your neighbourhood. If you're going to irritate the neighbours with loud music, at least invite them round to join in the fun.

23. Host a board/card/wargame day. Or better yet, have everyone bring something and make up your own game. Magic the Risk Hammer has loads of potential.

Number
54

Number
36

24. Hone your stealth kills until you're able to sneak into the kitchen from outside your house (which must be busy and full of people at the time), make a sandwich and get out without anyone ever having noticed you were there. Repeat until you feel you've earned a role in a stealth game of your choice. Do so wearing night-vision goggles (in the middle of the day) for extra points.

25. Try a game's multiplayer mode that you've avoided all this time.

26. Play a classic game everyone regards highly but you never tried (like *Little Big Adventure*).

27. Learn more about the history of a game, possibly by reading a book about it (*Masters of Doom*, for example).

28. Return to a game you previously thought was terrible and re-examine it with fresh eyes or "beginner's mind".

29. Dig out old *NAG* cover discs and try demos for games you never tried.

30. Join in a game jam or form your own. Game jams are the perfect opportunity to focus your game-making skills in a short space of time.

31. Get together with a group of friends and record a gaming podcast.

32. Build a real-life version of a game's multiplayer map in your garden and invite around some friends for a water pistol fight. You're never too old.

33. Find a gamer girl/boyfriend or convert your own. Bonus points if you've already got one.

34. Overclock your PC: your graphics card, RAM and CPU probably have a little bit of overclocking headroom without the need to upgrade your cooling system. Just take it easy.

35. Find out which of your games can be modded and download as many mods for that game as you can. *Skyrim*, in particular, just loves to be tinkered with; head over to www.skyrimnexus.com for more info.

Sink those hours!

36. Get hooked on a free-to-play online game or flash games from websites like **www.kongregate.com** or **www.newgrounds.com**.

37. Watch commentary or streams of your favourite games through sites like YouTube and Twitch.tv

38. Calculate how much time you spend running, jumping and diving in a single game session and try to do it in real life. Bring a bottle of water and a sense of humility.

39. Draw some fan art of a character, location or scene from one of your favourite games.

40. Join the NAG Forums; talk to like-minded people; be nice; don't be an ass.

41. Design an original and awesome tinfoil hat and read the *Diablo III* forums.

42. Find some indie games and play them. Many are free, and most

at least have a demo. **Visit www.tigsource.com** (and join their forums) to stay up-to-date.

43. Resolve to finally install and finish one of those idle games in your Steam library that you haven't looked at since you snagged it in the latest ludicrous sale.

44. Create eating challenges for yourself. Buy a few boxes of Smarties and then whenever you collect a coin or token in a game, eat one.

Number

52

45. Find an old arcade machine. Play it until your fingers hurt.

46. Attempt a speed run of one of your favourite games in your library.

47. Host an all-day marathon of video game films.

image courtesy Jessica Nigri and 12 North Photography.

Be creative!

48. Write a script for a TV series or film based on a game.

49. Tune that guitar or dust off your recorder and learn to play the theme tunes for various games.

50. Turn your favourite game into a board game or card game (a good game can always be turned into one or the other).

51. Write some fan fiction and then stick it on **www.fanfiction.net**. Just, er... try to avoid the weird stuff there.

52. Design and make a cosplay outfit.

53. Create a cartoon strip using 8-bit graphics.

54. Print out and assemble a papercraft of your favourite game character; visit www.tamasoft.co.jp for details.

55. Start a website or blog dedicated to gaming.

56. Make a custom map for one of your favourite games.

57. Learn the basics of pixel art and turn a modern character into pixel form, or "demake" a modern game.

58. Bake a *Minecraft* cake, or cook any food from any game. We like to think that health potions are probably pretty tasty.

59. Build your own personal Claptrap that's also a bedside table.

60. Write an excellent letter to the *NAG* editor for Letter of the Month glory. **NAG**
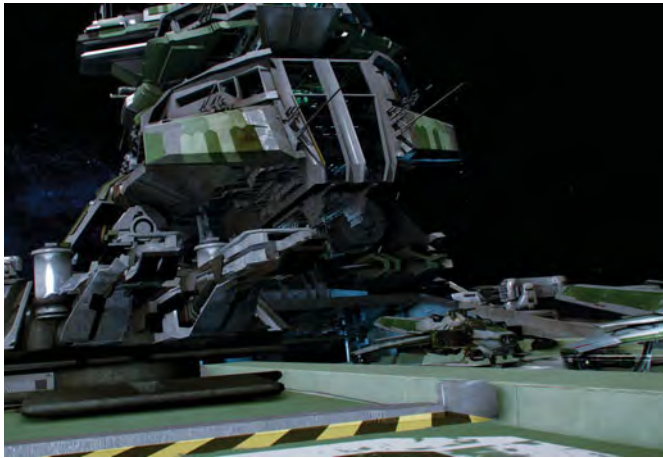
DETAILS

Release date
2014
Platforms
PC
Genre
Space trading and
combat simulator
Developer
Cloud Imperium Games
Corporation
Website
www.
robertsspaceindustries.
com
Publisher
Cloud Imperium
Games Corporation

Star Citizen

The space trading and
combat simulator genre lives!

Fans of games like *Freelancer, Privateer, DarkStar One* and *X3* will be pleased to know they've not been left out in the dark cold void. *Star Citizen* (from legendary designer Chris Roberts) aims to bring back the space trading/combat genre in a big way. The goal is to give the player true freedom within a huge universe, letting you be a merchant, pirate, smuggler, bounty hunter or soldier whatever works for you.

There will be a single-player campaign called Squadron 42, which you can play by yourself offline or online with friends. By fighting on the front lines, protecting settlements from raiders, you'll be approached to join the prestigious 42nd Squadron. Acting much like the French Foreign Legion, the 42nd tackles difficult and sensitive missions that require finesse and skill. Once you complete your tour of duty, you're given citizenship and money with which to start a new life in the Star Citizen universe.

You don't have to do Squadron 42, actually: you can start and just become a pirate, or trade

> **"The goal is to give the player true freedom within a huge universe, letting you be a merchant, pirate, smuggler, bounty hunter or soldier - whatever works for you."**

with space stations. But without citizenship, you'll always be a second-class citizen. Citizenship is earned through civic or military duty, which creates a class system used to generate friction and narrative among the various factions and players. The team hopes to add new content to the universe on a weekly basis, in response to player actions. The universe of *Star Citizen* is designed to be responsive to what players do: if you explore a space anomaly and successfully navigate it (which is not easy), you can sell the recorded navigational data and the system will be named after you.

Star Citizen is not an MMO though: it's an offline, single-player game that can be played online if you want, much like *Freelancer*. You can host your own servers (with modifications too), or you can join the developer-run persistent universe. While you'll spend much of your time in the cockpit, you'll also be able to explore larger ships in first-person, manning turrets or repelling invaders that have boarded your frigate.

Ship combat takes place in a full Newtonian physics system, where a fly-by-wire system

tries to do what you're asking your ship to accomplish. You make the keyboard or joystick motions for where you want to go, and the on-board ship computer takes your inputs, calculates all the vectors and velocities needed, and then uses the variety of engines on a ship to make it happen. It's all dynamic, kind of like controlling an AI ship: if a single engine gets damaged, your movement will be laboured in a realistic way, since the flight physics are calculated every frame.

It's a ridiculously ambitious project, especially since it's entirely player-funded via Kickstarter and the game's own website. The team hopes to launch sometime near the end of 2014. **NAG**
- Miktar

Chris Roberts was the lead designer for the seminal *Wing Commander* **(1990) and** *Freelancer* **(2003).**
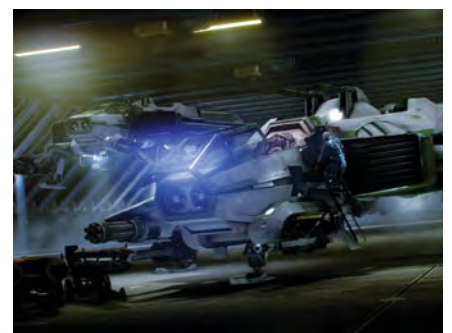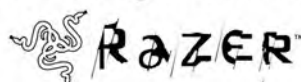
DETAILS

Release date
Q4
Platforms
PC
Genre
Vehicular combat
Developer
Adhesive Games
Website
www.playhawken.com
Publisher
Meteor Entertainment

Hawken

The lovechild of *Mech Warrior, Counter Strike* and *Cyber Troopers: Virtual On*

With *MechWarrior Online* handling the slower, more "simulation type" giant-robot combat, there's certainly room for more mech themed games. *Hawken* is pretty much the antithesis of *MWO*, focusing instead on high-speed, arcade-game like skirmishes. In a sense, *Hawken* plays more like a conventional first-person shooter, except you're in a mech, you have thrusters for speed and side-dashing, and everything is 20% cooler (because mechs are cool).

Free-to-play and online-only, *Hawken* takes place in a dystopian future where a human-colonised planet has been industrialized to the point of disaster. It's become a hunt for resources, survival dependant on the warriors fighting over dwindling supplies. What that means, without the window-dressing frou-frou: you got your team deathmatch, free-for-all, siege (a bit like Assault from *Unreal Tournament 2004* but with both sides assaulting at the

> "Movement is quick and meaty: you can side-dash, boost and make 180 quick-turns, but these manoeuvres deplete your fuel gauge."

same time) and an unnamed fourth mode. The team hopes to have a co-op horde mode, time permitting.

You pick from three mech types: light, heavy and all-round. There's no ammo, but you can overheat if you don't lay off the fire button. Overheat, and all your guns shut down, forcing you to hide and recover. Movement is quick and meaty: you can side-dash, boost and make 180 quick-turns, but these manoeuvres deplete your fuel gauge. Mechs are customisable: you pick weapons, upgrades and the paint job. There is some part-swapping, mostly the upper and lower leg pieces, just for aesthetics. The main body shape is determined by your mech type to maintain good silhouette readability on the field. There are a variety of gun types: rocket launchers, cannons, flamethrowers, sniper rifles, etc. You pick three proficiencies: offensive, defensive and functional. Offensive include things like rocket turrets, Defensive are things like shields and hologram decoys, and Functional includes radar scramblers and the like.

As you play, you gain experience and unlock proficiencies. There are three skill trees, offensive, defensive and movement that act much like the skill trees in *Borderlands*. Each tree has a unique special ability at the

The major influences for the game came from '80s sci-fi like Alien, Blade Runner, Star Wars, Ghost in the Shell and Patlabor .
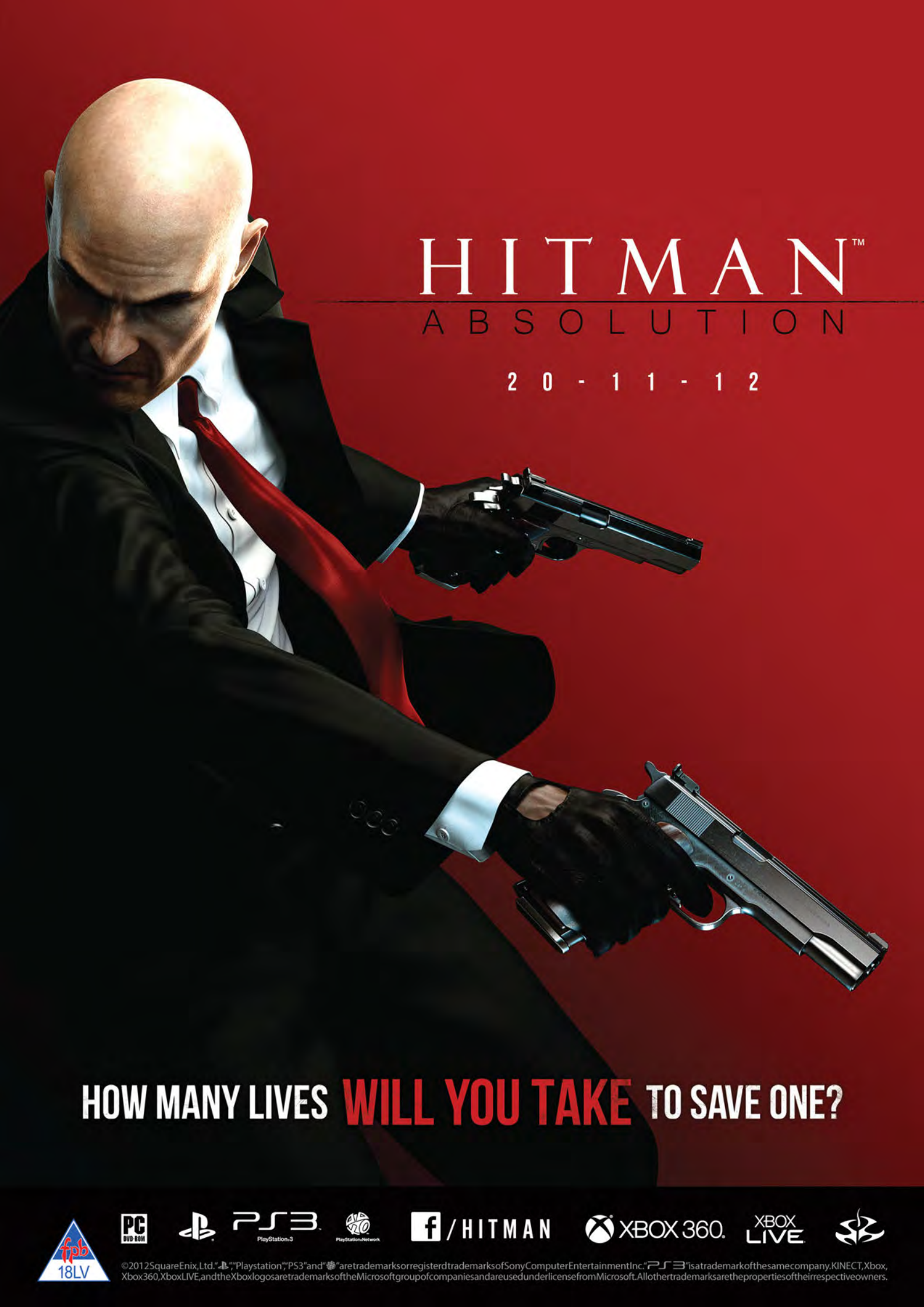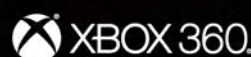
Originally, the game might have been called Bolthead or Steel Vultures, but the team settled on Hawken (in reference to 3D artist James Hawkins).

bottom, but you can't have all three so you'll have to tailor your choices based on how you want to play that mech. Each mech type has its own skill tree, and the skill trees load-outs are saved per mech in your stable. This lets you build your own classes, like a light mech rapid assault, or a heavy sniper, each with different visual customisations and skill tree/proficiency load outs.

There are plans to expand the universe with graphic novels, comics, and web video episodes and there's even a feature film in the works. *Hawken* has a lot going for it, and it's visually very exciting, using a Kow Yokoyama kitbash (taking pieces of commercial model kids and making something custom out of it) design aesthetic for the mechs. **NAG**

– Miktar

Deadpool
LOL! VIDJA GAMES!

Not much has been shown for the *Deadpool* game other than a fun teaser that premiered at Comic-Con 2012 earlier this year in San Diego. In the teaser, the red-spandex Merc with a Mouth is shown shooting people with guns, inflating a bouncy-castle, looking at boobs, punching a guy out a window and decapitating people with swords, all while rattling off a constant litany of crass humour and self-referential in-jokes. So basically, it's Deadpool, no compromise. The teaser ends with Deadpool saying, "Suck it, Wolverine!"

"Suck it, Wolverine!" - Deadpool

Considering High Moon Studios has done reasonable work with the *Transformers* franchise (if you ignore *Dark of the Moon*), it's not surprising that Activision has handed them a Marvel license. After all, it's not like Silicon Knights can be trusted with it anymore, after the horror that was *X-Men: Destiny*. Raven Software used to be Activision's purveyor of all things Marvel, but they seem to be missing-in-action since *Singularity* (2010) bombed, not counting the interface work they did on *Modern Warfare 3*.

Regular *Deadpool* writer Daniel Way will pen the script for the game, and of course, Nolan North will reprise his role as voicing Deadpool. North has voiced Deadpool (and what seems like half the characters in all games) in pretty much every game (and cartoon) for the last

Part of Deadpool's charm is his tendency to "break the fourth wall", which involves speaking directly to the audience.

five years, while also being the voice for Nathan Drake in *Uncharted* and the Penguin in *Batman: Arkham City*. If you've heard the voice acting for Deadpool in *Marvel vs. Capcom 3*, you'll know North has plenty of the swagger required to make Deadpool work as a character.

It's a third-person action game, we're assuming much like *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*. Lots of combos, plenty of things to kill, and some kind of plot to give it impetus. Deadpool will verbally interact with the player, argues with himself, and we're pretty sure most of it will be funny. According to the developers, you'll get rewarded with Deadpool Points after missions, which are used to level up your various weapons. You get more Deadpool Points if you do more combination attacks. Combo moves also fill up a variety of meters that, once full, let you unleash room-clearing abilities. The trailers promise swordplay, gunplay, and lots of chimichangas, as well as duct-tape. Domino, Wolverine and Psylocke are confirmed to appear.

To quote Deadpool in a press release written as if he personally hired High Moon to make a game about his amazing self: "If High Moon can make an amazing game about big transforming robots look cool, then they can surely make me look amazing in a third-person action video game, from all angles." **NAG**
- Miktar

(Almost) everything you need to know about the Wii U

NINTENDO'S
HOME CONSOLE GROWS UP

TECH SPECS

CPU
Triple-core IBM

GPU
AMD Radeon with support for Shader Model 4.0 and DX10.1

Size
45x266x172mm

Weight
1.5 kg

Storage
Internal flash memory (8-32GB depending on model). SD card and external USB HDD support

Media
Wii U and Wii optical discs

Video output
HDMI and legacy Wii video cables. Resolution up to 1080p

Audio Output
Six-channel PCM via HDMI, or analogue via AV multi out

Networking
WiFi (IEEE 802.11b/g/n) connection

USB
Four USB 2.0 ports

Internet browser
NetFront NX v2.1 engine; supports HTML 5, but plugins such as Flash are not supported

Wii compatibility
Nearly all Wii software and accessories can be used with Wii U

Controllers
Supports up to two GamePad controllers; supports any combination of up to four Wii Remotes or Wii U Pro Controllers; Nunchuck, Classic Controller and Wii Balance Board also supported

THE GAMEPAD

It was recently brought to our attention that there are a few people out there who are confused as to what role, exactly, the Wii U's GamePad plays. Some people even think that this is a portable console, but let's get this clear right here: The Wii U is a home console; the GamePad can only be used in conjunction with the Wii U and can't go further than ten metres from it. Games use the GamePad's screen to display extra content, and all games can be played entirely on the GamePad (with your TV off or tuned to another channel) but the Wii U has to remain on.

The GamePad isn't required for every game, and many multiplayer games make use of the new Pro controller which will be familiar to anyone who's ever held an Xbox 360 or PS3 controller.

Built-in display
6.2-inch, 16:9 aspect ratio LCD touch screen.

Features
D-pad, L/R sticks, L/R stick buttons, A/B/X/Y buttons, L/R buttons, ZL/ZR buttons, Power button, HOME button, -/SELECT button, +/START button, and TV CONTROL button. Accelerometer, gyroscope and geomagnetic sensor. Front-facing camera, microphone and stereo speakers. Rumble features, sensor bar, included stylus and support for NFC technology.

Battery
Rechargeable lithium-ion battery

Weight
500g

DESIGN BY COMMITTEE

Despite being roughly the same size as the Wii, the Wii U is much more powerful. Unfortunately, the exact specifications of the internal hardware (core speed, shaders, cache, etc.) are still unconfirmed by Nintendo, but the company has been pretty open about the way in which the internal components work together.

From the initial designs in 2009, Nintendo knew that they were going to keep the Wii U's size and power footprint to a minimum but needed to find a way to cram in more power. The answer is a single substrate that houses both the IBM CPU and AMD GPU. These aren't on the same die, as with AMD's new Trinity APUs, but rather the design places the CPU and GPU next to each other with 32MB of RAM shared between them to speed up transfers. Accomplishing this was by no means an easy feat for Nintendo as it required the coordination of AMD, IBM and the final manufacturers Renasas Electronics.

PIKMIN 3

Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Release date: Q1 2013

Pikmin 3 is one of the Wii U's launch window titles; that means it won't be out alongside the new console, but it will be out by the end of March 2013. The game has made a rather beautiful transition to Nintendo's more powerful console. The forested level areas that were featured in our hands-on at rAge are rendered in almost photo-realism, which makes the bright and vibrant character models really stand out. This, alongside the depth-of-field blur around the edges of the screen, makes *Pikmin 3* somewhat of a visual feast. If you're browned and greyed out from all of the military shooters and depressing sci-fi games, then *Pikmin 3* makes for one lively pick-me-up.

Sadly, our time with *Pikmin 3* did not include playing the game with the new Wii U GamePad. Instead, the trusty old Wii Remote and Nunchuk is what we were given, with the GamePad sitting a little way away from us acting as an off-screen mini-map. We were, however, assured that the GamePad will make for an alternate control method in the final game and not just an extension of your HUD.

Gameplay mechanics have remained largely the same: you still control Captain Olimar (although it's been implied that he won't be the only character you'll play as) and you still get the dutiful pikmin creatures to do your bidding. With a horde of pikmin following you around the level, you'll be able to get them to break through barriers, attack foes, collect odds and ends and generally help you complete each mission before the timer runs out. There are new pikmin that will be making an appearance in *Pikmin 3*; one new type is the rock pikmin. Rock pikmin are extra handy when it comes to beating bad guys to a pulp or destroying obstacles; they're essentially the soldiers of *Pikmin 3*.

Our hands-on also gave us a chance to try out one of the game's boss battles against an armoured centipede. By hurling rock pikmin at the centipede's armour, we were eventually able to break off chunks of the stuff in order to get to the creature hiding underneath. Once the pieces of armour had been removed, it was a matter of sending red and rock pikmin in for the kill. It's easier said than done, however, as the centipede was very large and very fast, crawling up the walls and sneaking up to attack from behind. The boss battle was rather tricky, and that's largely thanks to the single analogue stick making camera movement a bit of a chore. Hopefully that will be completely negated in the final game, when you'll be using the GamePad with its dual analogue sticks anyway.

ZombiU
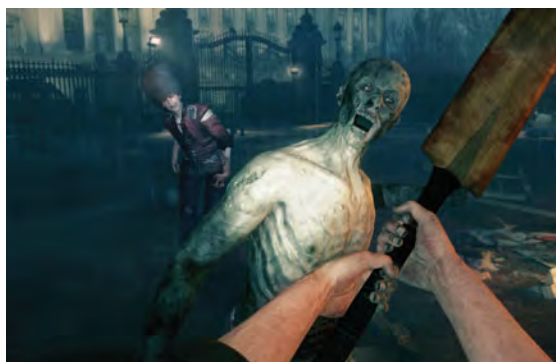
U have to feel sorry for the team developing *ZombiU*. When they initially took their game to E3 to show the world what they'd been making, they weren't ready for the massive amounts of hype *ZombiU* created. What's more, the game is now the title that Nintendo trots out whenever somebody moans about how neglected "hardcore gamers" were during the Wii's lifecycle. *ZombiU* has become synonymous with Nintendo's renewed efforts at wooing the hardcore crowd, and that alone must make for some considerable development pressures.

Ubisoft has approached development with one clear goal: redefining the survival horror genre. They intend to do this by creating a deeper immersion and frequently breaking the fourth wall. They see Nintendo's Wii U GamePad as the only means to do this. As a result, whenever you need to check your inventory, pick a lock or enter a keypad code, it's actually *you* the player who will be doing the action via the GamePad. The majority of contemporary action games rely on contextual buttons to do these actions. For example: in *Assassin's Creed* the same controller button can be used to pick somebody's pocket, open a door or vault over an obstacle – it all just depends on the context of the action. In *ZombiU*, contextual buttons are out and the GamePad is in. By making the player responsible for performing basic gameplay actions, it leaves the player's character vulnerable. What's more, with your attention turned to the GamePad's screen, your survivor over on your TV screen is left momentarily unattended. This is how Ubisoft intends to create that all important survival horror requirement: tension.

You will likely die dozens of times during your attempts to survive the London based zombie apocalypse. Whenever one of your playable characters dies, then they're gone for good. You'll lose any character improvements you may have made with that particular survivor, and you'll lose any items and equipment you may have scavenged. Fortunately you'll be deposited into a new survivor in order to continue whatever mission you were on. You'll also likely encounter the now shambling corpse of your previous survivor; killing it will at least give you back all of your equipment. That being said, depending on how much you'd levelled-up that previous character, dictates how tough the zombie will be.

Our hands-on time with the game was an undeniably disconcerting affair. You are completely dependent on the GamePad and it's no wonder that the development team began referring to the new controller as the player's "survival kit". When you encounter moments when the GamePad is disabled, that's when the panic sets in, and that's when you'll likely have to say goodbye to yet another one of your survivors.

INTERVIEW

WITH ASSOCIATE PRODUCER NICOLAS ROBIN AND LEAD CONTENT DESIGNER MOUNIR RADI

NAG: The Wii U's unique control mechanisms are obviously a driving force for your game. What sort of advantages do you feel you have over your average first-person shooter on any other platform because of this?

NR: The first one is immersion, because you have the game displaying on screens in front of you and below you, so you increase the immersion of the player because they have to watch out on both screens – one far away from them and one nearby. We often use the nearby GamePad screen to shock and scare players with sounds and images from around the in-game character while they're focused on interacting with the GamePad. It's a great way to create a new survival horror experience.

MR: One of our unique features is that we can break the fourth wall with the player; we use the two screens to create freaky moments when the player is focused on the GamePad.

We have a slow-paced game, but the game doesn't stop when you're managing features with the GamePad, so we use that to increase tension for the player.

NAG: Do you guys leverage that disconnect that the player is forced to experience between the GamePad and the main screen often during gameplay, to create fear?

MR: Yes! The first time we met the guys from Nintendo Club, they told us it was such a strange experience to play with this asymmetrical feature in such a way, and that we are the only developers who are using it like this.

NR: Basically, when you want to manage your inventory, you open your backpack: but like in real life, the backpack is not far from you, it's in your hand. So you open it on the Wii U GamePad, while the game continues on the big screen. It forces you to manage your inventory quickly. If you hear something, a zombie or a special zombie or something around you, it'll make you panic.

NAG: And with the survival elements of the game, what sort of stuff can we expect as you progress?

MR: The game is slow paced and is all about scarcity. So if you want to play it like *Call of Duty*, shooting everything and wasting ammo, you will struggle. It's a game about survival. So if you play it smart and make good decisions, check your GamePad constantly to monitor your supplies and use your scanner to check for hidden elements, you will survive longer.

NR: One of the major things we talked about when we created the game was, "What if this zombie outbreak happens to us?" We

wondered what would be the things we'd have access to, because we felt we'd not find a box of 1,000 shotgun shells right on all of our desks. So we tried to make it really realistic in our own way. So you have very limited resources in the world for managing your health or managing your firepower, or conserving your supplies by distracting zombies rather than engaging them...

MR: Yes, with things like flares...

NR: Yes, those attract the zombies and keep them off of you. And we also have other resources like traps that can be used in the game. Your Wii U GamePad is really your survival kit; you need it to progress in the game. Check your inventory, scan your environment, and more stuff like that, to survive.

MR: We also have crafting-style features in the game. You can modify and upgrade weapons to do stuff like lower recoil, increase ammo capacity and increase damage. When your current character dies in the game, you lose all of your equipment.

NAG: But then you obviously spawn again as a new character?

MR: Yes, you spawn as a new character, and your previous character will now be a zombie. You'll need to hunt this zombie down and kill it to get your lost gear back.

NAG: Is there any feature in the game that you're specifically proud of?

MR: The persistence. When you're playing something like *Gears of War*, and you die, you restart from a checkpoint. In our game, if you die, it's a setback, but you continue playing as a new character. Because of this, you'll have a different experience each time you play the game.

NR: I'm proud of our more realistic approach. We wanted *ZombiU* to be a realistic zombie game. As Mounir said, when you die, that character becomes a zombie and you continue the story with a new survivor, and when you travel back to locations you visited with your previous character, zombies that you killed on the map don't reappear in the game. Zombies that you spotted previously but didn't kill will have roamed, so they won't be in the same places the second time. Zombies roam around the world and the game keeps track of their movement. Because of this, the environments of London are always changing.

Wii LOVE

BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY: ARMORED EDITION

Developer: Rocksteady Studios
Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment
Release date: November 2012

You can bet your Superman belt buckle that the Wii U is going to see its share of straight ports of current games, but *Armored Edition* seems to have a few extra tricks up its sleeves to make even those gamers who have already played the game consider buying it again on the Wii U.

Most of the game will remain exactly the same experience, but players will be able to use the GamePad controller to activate new abilities like BAT mode in combat (we're sure it stands for something clever) as well as an adaptation of Bats' detective vision by looking through the controller's screen. Another neat feature is the ability to control remote batarangs using the GamePad's accelerometer to hit switches and bad guys that are otherwise out of reach. Expect to be looking back and forth between the main screen and GamePad screen often.

TEKKEN TAG TOURNAMENT 2: WII U EDITION

Developer: Namco Bandai Games
Publisher: Namco Bandai Games
Release date: November 2012

To say that we're surprised to see a core fighting title like *Tekken* appear on Nintendo's new console would be an understatement, but looking at the details of this game makes us realise that this is the perfect example of what Ninty is trying to achieve with the Wii U.

On the surface, *TTT2* for the Wii U is just an ordinary port of the upcoming fighting game, but a couple of bizarre additions to the game give it a distinctive Nintendo flair. First up, there's an optional gameplay mode called Mushroom Battle Mode in which players can collect mushrooms that randomly spawn on the battlefield to make them super big or super small. Another addition is a suite of Nintendo-themed costumes for you to unlock, such as a Mario, Samus Luigi and Star Fox, as well as a full character painting mode that will use the GamePad's touch screen.

FIFA 13

Developer: EA Canada
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Release date: November 2012

FIFA 13 loses a few features in its transition to Nintendo's new console, but the GamePad's unique capabilities also add a few exclusive features to make up for that. First on the list of things to go is popular online mode FIFA Ultimate Team. Recent gameplay additions like First Touch and the skill system from *FIFA Street* had to be cut, as did the improvements seen in the Player Impact Engine in other versions of this year's *FIFA* release.

On the plus side, Wii U adopters get a range of exclusive features, like a co-op mode in which one player manages the team while four others play. The GamePad lets players plan supporting runs, or set players to attacking or defensive behaviour. Substitutions, formation changes and more can be made on the fly. You can use the GamePad's screen for finer control over penalties and free kicks. Passing and shooting are made more precise, with players able to use the touch screen for pinpoint precision. There's more Wii U goodness than there's space to list here.
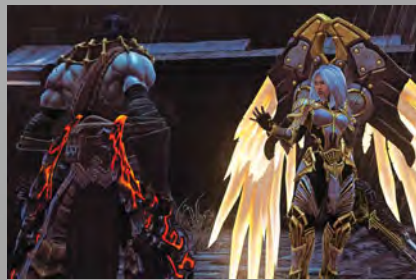
GAMES

CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS II

Developer: Treyarch
Publisher: Activision
Release date: November 2012

The Wii U version of Activision's latest entry in its monolithic FPS series is mostly identical to its PC, 360 and PS3 counterparts, except that it features full support for the Wii U GamePad as an added extra. Developer Treyarch has admitted, however, that the game's fast-paced action is better suited to a classic controller like the more conventional Wii U pro controller. Nevertheless, that hasn't stopped Treyarch from incorporating stuff like weapon displays, ammo counters, maps, objective lists and more on the GamePad's screen.

In addition, *Black Ops II* on Wii U features local competitive play without the need for a split-screen setup. Instead, one player uses the GamePad's screen as their viewpoint, while another uses the television. In online multiplayer, the screen will provide match stats and other details at a glance. All the obligatory DLC packs that the game will undoubtedly receive post-launch will be available on the Wii U as well.

DARKSIDERS II

Developer: Vigil Games
Publisher: THQ
Release date: November 2012

On the Wii U, *Darksiders II* still casts players as Death, embarking on a journey to battle countless deadly enemies, defeat memorable boss enemies, collect epic loot and crawl through sprawling dungeons filled with puzzles and danger, all to prove your brother War's innocence in the premature unleashing of the apocalypse. Basically, it's largely identical to the other versions of the game – to which we awarded a score of 92 in our October issue.

The list of unique Wii U features includes the ability to access and manage Death's inventory of goodies via the GamePad's touch screen, as well as view your quest log, skill tree and a map of the game world. Having such an easily accessible map will be a huge benefit to a game such as this, filled as it is with labyrinthine environments and hidden areas. Optional motion controls let you control Death's dodges during combat. Finally, the Wii U edition gets new armour and weapon sets, as well as various bundled DLC packs.

NINTENDO LAND

Developer: Nintendo EAD
Publisher: Nintendo
Release date: November 2012

As you'd expect from the first in-house game for Wii U, Nintendo Land will be a great showcase of everything the new console has to offer. Strangely enough, however, this game won't ship for free with every Wii U bundle, so it'll be interesting to see just how many people pick up this title.

Nintendo Land is a collection of mini-games based on games from Nintendo's assortment of first-party titles. There's a range of games to play, from the multiplayer-focused *Metroid Blast, Mario Chase* and *Animal Crossing: Sweet Day* to solo offerings like *Donkey Kong's Crash Course* and *Yoshi's Fruit Cart*. We've had some time to play a few of these games and have to say that they're surprisingly fun, although obviously simple – best when combined with a lounge full of party guests. *Luigi's Ghost Mansion* in particular stood out for us as a great party game.

3X RUNNER-UP PRIZES

Wii U
ZOMBI U
18 VL
UBISOFT

+

+
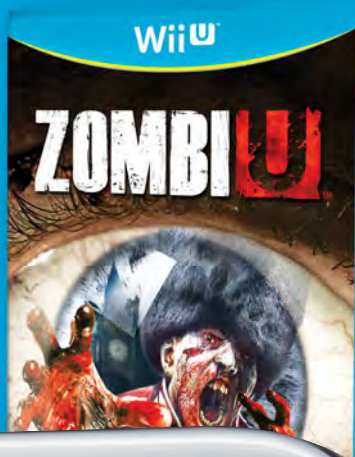
WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

Wii U
ZOMBI U

Wii U™ GamePad

Wii U GamePad Cradle

Wii U GamePad Stand

Wii U Console Stand

Wii U Pro Controller

Sensor Bar

Wii U GamePad AC Adapter

Wii U AC Adapter

HDMI™ Cable

32 GB
Internal Storage
Wii U™ Console

Wii U

REVIEWS**INTRO**

These great talented guys will guide you (and your wallet) through the December holiday madness... Why so nice? It's the holidays – we can't be mean at a time like this.

What is the best part about the December holidays for you?

RedTide
I've got so much stuff I've put down for "December holidays" that I've just realised I won't have enough time to do everything. Damn. I am aiming to write 30 000 words of raw fiction.

Miktar
The few weeks right before the December holiday are the best part: because that's when you're making all these promises to yourself that you'll finish Game X or Game Y. But you never do. Still, it's nice to dream.
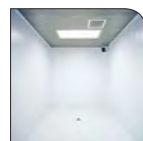
Azimuth
Sleeping in until noon, staying in my pyjamas, and not getting anything constructive done. It's also my favourite thing about the rest of the year.

Mikit0707
What is this "December holidays" you speak of? I'm lucky if I get three days off over Christmas. I do love those chocolate Christmas balls Woolworths sells though. Ha! "Balls."

GeometriX
Waking up at some ungodly hour in the afternoon, crawling into the isolation chamber that is my study, switching off from the rest of the world and doing absolutely whatever the hell I want.

Barkskin
Every year, we inevitably have to pass up on many great games, so we can sink time into other great games. December is when we revisit the ones we missed. But mostly, sleep.

MINI**REVIEWS**

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

BRIDGE PROJECT
Within 20 minutes of playing *Bridge Project*, I had decided that I'm quitting my job at NAG and going on to design bridges for a living. Clearly I'm that good. I mean, my bridges can support tanks. Tanks! But then I decided to view the high scores for some of the bridge-building challenges that I so heroically conquered, and noticed that other people in the world managed to accomplish my exact same result with little more than a few pieces of balsa wood and a stick of chewing gum. Crushed, saddened and firmly ushered back into my dismal cave that is reality, I decided to stay at NAG, which is good for you because now you can read all about *Bridge Project*. Hooray!

Actually, there's not much more to say: build bridges; do so without sending your little test busses crashing to the depths below. It's exactly what you'd expect, and well-enough packaged to keep it entertaining but not spectacular. The addition of a map editor and sharing just seals the deal.
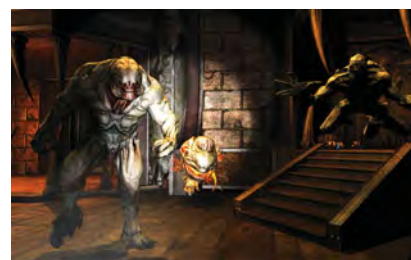
70

DOOM 3 BFG EDITION
Following the slew of HD re-releases that roll up around this time of year to help fill the stockings of grand-children all around the world, *Doom 3 BFG* (which, admittedly, probably won't be purchased for any grand-kids) is here to say "I'm back! Buy me because of purely that reason!"

The back of the box claims that there's a new rendering engine at work here, but, honestly, *Doom 3* looks as mediocre on today's consoles as it did on a mid-range PC when it first launched in 2004. The only difference is that nowadays we know what level of fidelity consoles are capable of, and the PC release of *Doom 3* has been treated to so many excellent HD mods over the years that there is no point in buying this version over the original. With that said, if you're a console gamer and have never played *Doom 3*, now's a good chance to do so.

This version of the game is made less terrifying by the addition of an always-available flashlight, but the game is left otherwise intact. An extra campaign, while dull compared to the original, adds a bit of play time over and above the inclusion of *Resurrection of Evil*, and the added bonus of the first two games rounds off the package well enough to make it worth your money.

70

"I long for the days when gaming used to be antisocial"

- Miklós

Ramjet
It's a bit of a dichotomy... I enjoy the fact that I can play all the games I didn't get to for work, but I also love the fact that I don't have to play games at all.

SAVAGE
Doing absolutely nothing...

ShockG
Catching up on all the games I've been saving for the year. *Mass Effect 3* for the 6th time, with all the DLC... again!

REVIEW**SCORES**GUIDELINE

1-39 This game is broken. 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 you'd play it for a bit if you got it for free, but it's not something you'd recommend to friends.

50-59 Acceptable, but nothing special. It's generic or uninspired, but playable, and might be worth spending some time hunting for achievements.

60-69 Now we're getting somewhere. This game has something interesting about it, and fans of the genre or series should enjoy it, but something significant holds back this game from greatness.

70-79 This game is very good. Anyone who enjoys this type of game 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 An excellent game; one that you'd happily play through multiple times and recommend to friends. It adds interesting, if imperfect, advancements to the genre or series.

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.

home_coded

Exposure for South African indie developers...

Giant Box Games

Website: www.pixelboygame.com

Recently-formed indie duo Giant Box Games might be just a two-man operation, but in the nine months founders David Nickerson and Dominic Obojkovits have worked together on their second game, they've already made quite a splash in the indie scene.

The unlikely pairing of a Canadian game artist with credits on *GTA IV* and some time at start-up studio Atomic Robot and a high school student from Tzaneen who had a completed iPhone game under his belt before he finished matric has given rise to this quirky roguelike shooter. *Pixel Boy* combines simple role-playing mechanics with a customisable upgrade feature that will ultimately see over 15,000 possible gun combinations for the game's hero to blast away spiders, wraiths and all sorts of nasty creatures you'd expect to find in a randomly generated dungeon full of treasure.

At present, *Pixel Boy* is undergoing public scrutiny on Steam Greenlight where it

seems to be faring quite well and providing the team with valuable feedback. You should definitely have a look at it, watch a couple of videos and cast your vote. There's currently no demo available but as soon as there is, we'll do our best to get it on the cover disc.

If you have an established local game development company or project and would like to be featured in NAG, send an email to geoff@nag.co.za.

Halo 4

What happened next?!

It's no coincidence, I'm sure, that *Halo 4*'s opening level bears a rather conspicuous resemblance to *Halo: Combat Evolved*'s opening level, except that it looks approximately twelve million times better. Also not coincidentally, maybe, this serves as a sort of conceptual metaphor for *Halo 4* in its entirety – it's authentically, unmistakably, and totally unequivocally *Halo,* but it's (mostly) a whole lot more impressive than previous games in the series.

After a "*What if we tried this as a real-time strategy game*" prequel, a "*Meanwhile, back on Earth...*" semi-prequel, a "*Hey, remember Reach?*" prequel, a change of management, and a "*Just because we can*" remake of the first game (in that order), *Halo 4* finally gets back down to the important business of what happened next with Master Chief and his AI not-girlfriend-but-sort-of-it's-complicated, Cortana, who were last seen floating towards an unknown planet in the uncharted zone in one half of the UNSC frigate *Forward Unto Dawn.*

As things turn out, that unknown planet is Requiem, an artificial Forerunner shield world, built as a fallout bunker to protect its makers from the Halo Array big bang, which does kind of undermine their erstwhile plans to wipe out *all* sentient life in the universe but I suppose self-interest matters too. Much more pertinently, perhaps, it's also a convenient plot device to introduce the Forerunner Prometheans as the new bad guys.

I won't say anything more about the story, except to add that it's a much more personal and emotionally credible one than any before it, if somewhat overwhelming and occasionally quite incomprehensible to anybody (... like me) who hasn't kept up with the abundance of supplementary

DETAILS

Platforms
360
Genre
First-person shooter
Age restriction
16
Multiplayer
  Local
  4 players
  Online
  16 players
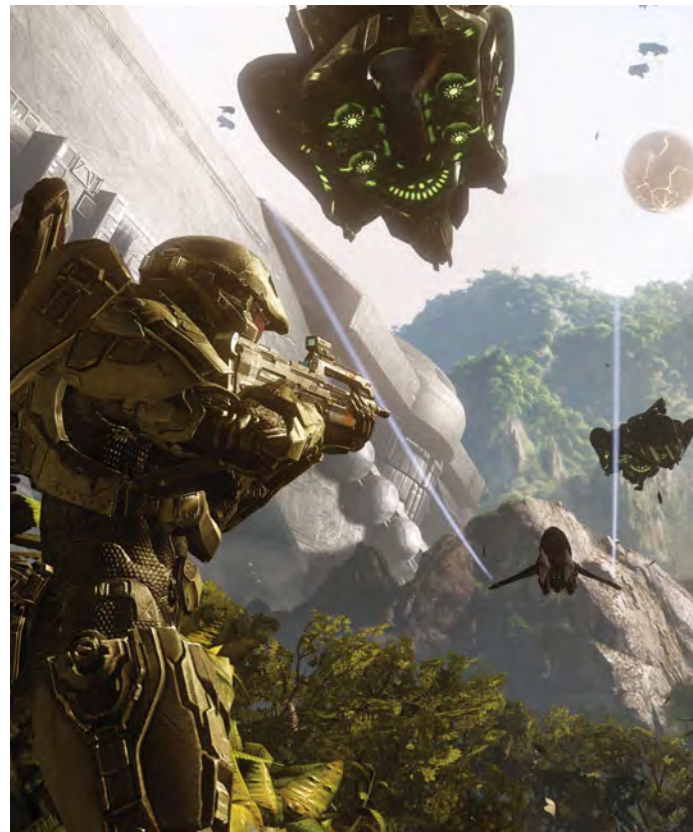**Developer**
343 Industries
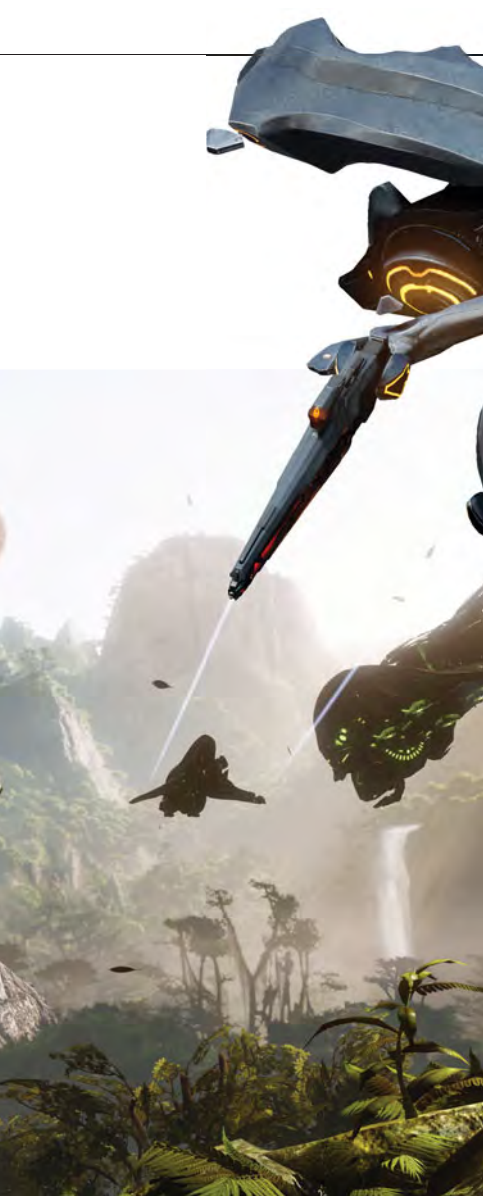**Website**
www. halowaypoint. com/halo4/
Publisher
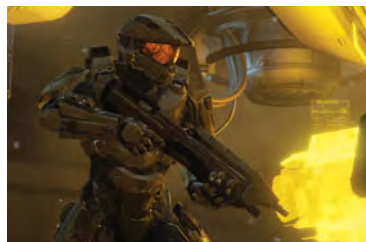Microsoft Game Studios
Distributor
Prima Interactive

Fundamentally, it's everything you'd expect in a *Halo* game, but updated to maintain a **cool and trendy edge in a very competitive market where what's "cool and trendy"** is more or less "the same but... basically the same".

1 It's almost impossible to believe that this is the same engine that powered Halo 3 in 2007, but it is. The development team rebuilt "massive components of the technology", though, enabling the game to run - for the first time in the series - at a full 720p resolution, smooth and sexy as an Grunt's bum.

literature released over the last decade. Hidden terminals throughout the campaign do supply some useful exposition and context, but because they're hidden, you're also quite likely to miss most of them the first time around. Halfway through my second playthrough, I've still found only two of the eight so I've no idea why [REDACTED] with the [REDACTED] in the [REDACTED], and how they got it into the meth lab with a greased pig. I might've made up some of that, but if parts of the story are missing, I'm going to have to make some assumptions for myself.

Onto the multiplayer then, and it's the standard UNSC-issue load out of *Halo* game types, with one major new entry on the list – Dominion, a new objective-based mode that's a bit similar, and a bit different to *Battlefield*'s Conquest mode. Three bases on a map can be captured by either team, and once a base is captured, it generates turret batteries, vehicle stations, and shield barriers restricting enemy access to it. Points are awarded for holding onto captured bases over reinforcement intervals, and if one team manages to secure all three bases, it's a sudden-death countdown to the win. It's the sort of frenetic, rapidly escalating madness that *Halo*'s multiplayer has lacked until now, and it's an absolutely brilliant addition to the game.

Fundamentally, it's everything you'd expect in a *Halo* game, but updated to maintain a cool and trendy edge in a very competitive market where what's "cool and trendy" is more or less "the same but... basically the same". *Halo* players have always known exactly what we want, and that's exactly what we're getting with *Halo 4* – a robust co-op campaign, exhilarating multiplayer, and infinite opportunities to teabag everybody else. Mostly the tea bagging.

NEW PLACES TO GO

Replacing *Halo: ODST* and *Halo: Reach*'s cooperative Firefight mode is the *New! Improved?* Spartan Ops mode, featuring the UNSC *Infinity*'s Majestic Squad through a series of objective-based missions that take place concurrently with the main campaign. At launch, a single chapter comprising five operations was included on disc, with subsequent iterations scheduled for (free!) tactical insertion via Xbox LIVE over the coming weeks.

Spartan Ops supports up to four players, and each mission takes around 10-20 minutes or so to complete depending on the difficulty setting. It's a pretty decent distraction from standard multiplayer, although I'm not convinced it's a compelling swap for Firefight, which provided substantially more variable replay value in the longer term with custom configurations and whatnot. I mean, I could spend an entire afternoon playing Firefight, but I just don't see myself playing Spartan Ops more than two or three times over.
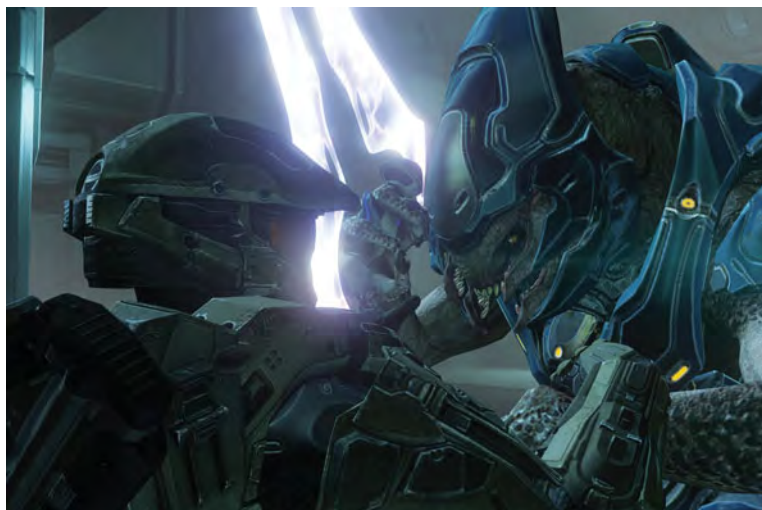
> "Spartan Ops supports up to four players, and **each mission takes around 10-20 minutes or so** to complete depending on the difficulty setting."
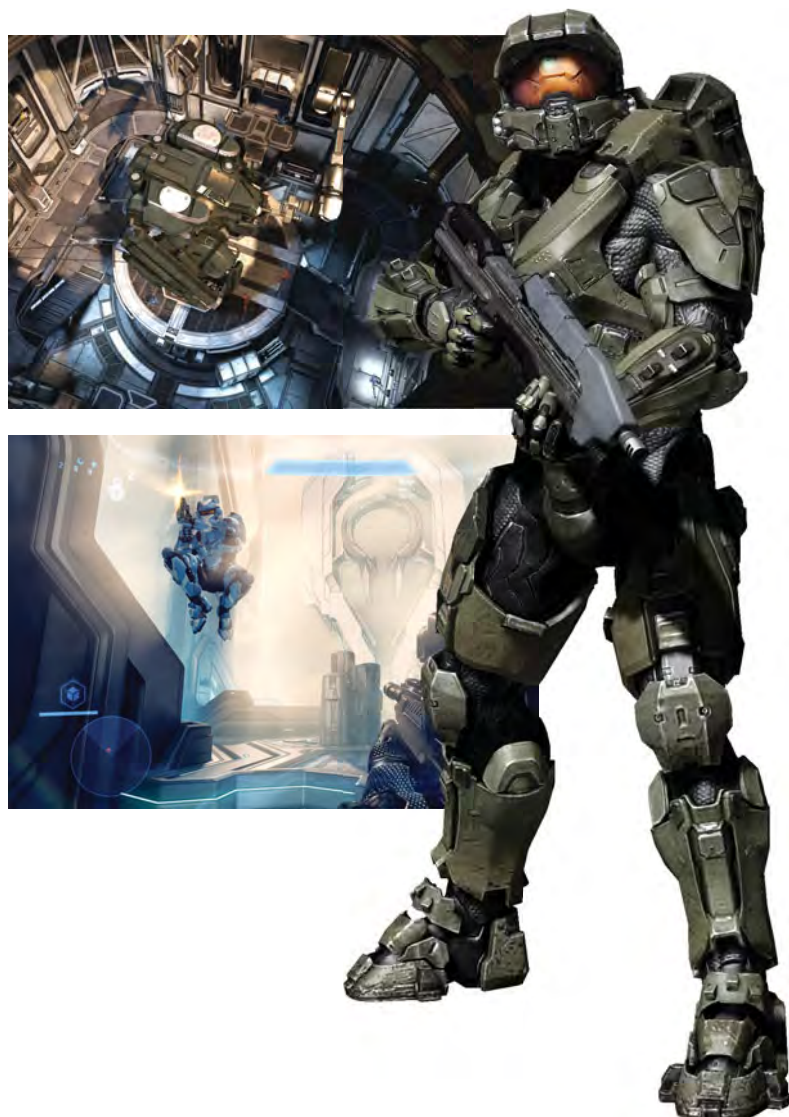
NEW THINGS TO KILL

The Prometheans come in three basic types – Knights, Watchers, and Crawlers – and you'll probably (love to) hate them all equally. The Knights are somewhat equivalent to the Covenant Elites, although they're significantly tougher and better protected, and are able to deploy Watchers (and sometimes even Autosentries) in combat who provide additional shielding and firepower. And just when you're about to deliver the kill-shot, they teleport out of the way.

The quadrupedal Crawlers excel at both close- and long-range, and some are equipped with the one-shot-kill particle accelerator Binary Rifle. Much like the Covenant Grunts, Crawlers can be taken out with a single headshot, but their skittish engagement protocols make this a frequently erratic proposition.

The new Promethean faction is, inevitably, accompanied by a whole new arsenal of weapons to keep things interesting, the Lightrifle carbine (a combination of the UNSC Battle Rifle and DMR) and Boltshot pistol/mini-shotgun being the most prolific. Ammo is very limited, so you're forced to use whatever you can find lying about, especially on harder difficulties. **NAG**
- Azimuth

90

Halo lovers will love it. *Halo* haters will hate it. That's also the third time I've used the same summary for a Halo review.

PLUS
It's *Halo*.

MINUS
It's *Halo*.

BIG THINGS ARE COMING

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SERIES 2 SKYLANDERS

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Assassin's Creed III

MUST PLAY

A tomahawk to the knee...

For the first part of *Assassin's Creed III*, you may well ask yourself "what the hell is going on?" That's because Connor, the much-talked-about hero of this third outing in Ubisoft's popular open world action adventure franchise, is nowhere to be seen. There is a reason for that, though, and it is a good one. Ubisoft have created a more complete tale in this game, and it starts even before the hero is born. It is complex and intricate and, in a time when it seems so many games are putting story in a secondary position, it is well appreciated.

Set in the time of the American Revolution, *Assassin's Creed III* brings the player to the American colonies, and it weaves an intricate tale full of twists and turns, reinventing the history of the time rather deftly. But story isn't the only thing here – the expected level of action is also present.

Each iteration of *Assassin's Creed* – even the extra "add-ons" – has presented the player with new ideas and more to do. This instance is no different. In fact, when you finally get to control Connor and don the famous assassin's garb, you start realising that there is almost too much to do. Collecting feathers and almanac pages, opening chests, liberating cities, invading forts, managing trade and income, producing goods, finding hidden treasures, exploring new areas, hunting dangerous animals, engaging in naval battles... the number of things that are available to the player is almost mind-boggling, and we haven't even touched on the story missions and other quests. In this, *Assassin's Creed III* is very ambitious. Add to that a game world that is really vast (ranging from bustling cities through to frontier regions) and you have a title that will, potentially, keep you going for ages. Oh, and there's multiplayer, too.

It is, on paper, the perfect game for fans of the series. And in many ways it surpasses previous games... but there are certain aspects that show how *Assassin's Creed III* falls victim to its own ambition – nothing ruinous, really, but there are a few bugs and issues that rear their ugly heads

from time to time. They can cause frustration, yes, but the biggest problem is that they bring the player back to the real world in a rather jarring fashion. That's really a pity, because here we have one of the most immersive games in a long time – and certainly the most engaging of the *Assassin's Creed* titles.

The biggest change that veterans of the previous titles will notice – aside from the new setting, new characters and new things to do – is the control scheme. The idea that used to tie the various buttons to sections of the character's body has been chucked out in favour of a system that allows for a more flowing combat style, among other things. While the "counter-and-parry" idea of the previous titles is still strong here, the game allows the player to make better use of blocking and counter-striking, thanks to a smarter control scheme and clever use of Bullet Time. These are split-second sequences in which the player can decide how to counter best once a parry has been initiated. It also means that the game can use enemies that require different combat approaches. That said, the AI opponents aren't quite so dominant this time around, and it is possible for the player to wade through tons of enemies without ever parrying. Ranged weapons have also been improved, although the number of enemies who also have access to firearms has increased to... well, potentially every one. Thank goodness those muskets take time to reload, and that you can make use of human shields. The end result is a faster pace and extremely stylish looks – Connor visually comes across as a sort of Founding Fathers Rambo, which is pretty much exactly what he is.

Speaking of looks, *Assassin's Creed III* is a visual feast. The sheer size of the game precludes graphics that are truly jaw-dropping, but the world and characters that inhabit

1 A better combat flow allows Connor to effortlessly deal with large groups of scummy Englishmen.

2 Firearms play a prominent role this time round... and the bad guys have them too.

3 Naval battles add something new to the title.

DETAILS

Platforms
360 / PC / PS3
Wii U

Genre
Action adventure

Age restriction
18

Multiplayer
  Local
  None
  Online
  8 players

Developer
Ubisoft

Website
www.
assassinscreed.
com

Publisher
Ubisoft

Distributor
Megarom

> "Set in the time of the American Revolution, *Assassin's Creed III* brings the player to the American colonies, and it weaves an intricate tale full of twists and turns, reinventing the history of the time rather deftly."

it are believable and well detailed. This is supported by excellent voice acting and fantastic facial animation in the cut scenes. The character of Haytham is particularly expressive, and often rather funny, thanks to his incurable stiff upper lip attitude.

Let's bounce back to the controls for a moment. Free-running – another staple of the series – has been improved, and the player can now move through trees as well. It takes a bit of getting used to, and the problem of latching onto buildings and other climbable objects while all you are trying to do is run away from some enemies still exists. But the overall experience of running over roof tops and climbing around like a deranged orangutan is improved.

I personally found myself spending a lot more time with my feet firmly planted on the ground. The necessity for climbing and free-running comes in less often here. Sure, you'll need to scale buildings and stuff in missions, but you can walk around with far less harassment now. And even if you are harassed, taking out the enemies is more fun and generally better in *AC III*. After all, there's a war on...

That's the real crux of the matter when it comes to this game: freedom. Connor keeps going on about it, and the idea has moved into the whole game dynamic, too. Here's an *Assassin's Creed* title that offers even more freedom than previous games. While the first title often locked the player into a process, the second started moving away from that. But there were still areas that needed a specific kind of approach. Not so here. The player can – within the paradigm of the game and the world they are presented – pretty much do what they want, how they want it. There are very few times when the player feels forced in a particular direction. Those tend to be during

"The biggest change that veterans of the previous titles will notice – **aside from the new setting, new characters and new things to do** – is the control scheme."

the story missions, which are inevitably going to be a little linear anyway, so all is forgiven. In fact, the freedom is so generous that it is easy to forgive the game its little bugs and inconsistencies.

It all sounds like a great experience and, quite honestly, it is, but there are certain aspects of the game that Ubisoft could have done differently. As an example, the trading system is very slow and pedantic. Instead of being able to do bulk manufacturing and trading, the player needs to do each item one at a time. It breaks the flow of the game, and may even prevent some players from engaging in those all-important, revenue generating activities. In addition, this can also affect the player's equipment. And there is a lot of it. Supplies, upgrades and new weapons can be found at shops in the game, but they can also be crafted as part of the player's economic control system (which is based on the player's homestead base... which is also upgradable). Not delving into this system may hamper progress.

In terms of multiplayer – which has never been the core of the franchise – *Assassin's Creed III* offers the player compelling competitive and co-op options, which greatly extend the longevity of the title.

Calling *Assassin's Creed III* the best game in the franchise may be a bit of a stretch; there are a few inconsistencies and issues that do keep it from attaining that lofty goal. But it is at least as good as *Assassin's Creed II*, and when compared to games in general, it is an excellent title, beyond a doubt. The adroit combination of engaging game dynamics, great presentation and a top notch story makes for an experience that you really should not miss. It is huge, engrossing and will keep you busy for absolute ages, if you play the game the way it was intended. That means not just racing through the story missions, but rather experiencing the full and varied life of Connor – do that and you have a definite winner on your hands. **NAG**

- Ramjet

89 The new *Assassin's Creed* is here, and it brings with it a vast world, lots to do and a simply awesome storyline. Prepare to lose yourself in this one.

PLUS
Huge world / Improved controls / Tons to do

MINUS
Some bugs / Inconsistencies

Assassin's Creed: Liberation

For freedom

The PS Vita has been in need of a "killer game" – a system-seller – for some time now. Low sales on the unit the world over have meant that it hasn't been getting much attention from developers, and Sony needs something that will spur on sales, despite the still-high price point. Ubisoft has attempted to supply just that in the form of *Assassin's Creed: Liberation*, a standalone title that links in to the overall franchise, as well as the latest title in the series. But while *Liberation* is a fun game, it does fall short on being the game that will revitalise the Vita's lagging fortunes.

In this game, the player is introduced to the main character, Aveline, as a child. Her mother, a freed slave, disappears one day while they are out walking in New Orleans. The game then jumps forward a whole bunch of years, showing us a now grown Aveline living with a foster family and already an accomplished assassin. How did she get there? Who trained her? Your guess is as good as mine. This massive gap in the plot stands in stark contrast to the deep, engaging and rather complete tale told in *Assassin's Creed III*, and sets a tone for *Liberation*.

While the story in this game is good, it lacks detail and as a result, leaves the player wanting in those terms. It is difficult to identify with Aveline, because we know so little about her.

Okay, story aside: the controls for the game are a mixed bag. They all work well, and standard assassination and free-roam ideas work really well, but Ubisoft seemed to want to take advantage of all of the Vita's features, resulting in areas of the game that feel gimmicky, if not borderline nonsensical. Had they steered clear of being a bit of a Vita showcase and just concentrated on the controls that really matter, the game would have benefited greatly.

The visuals can also be a mixed bag, with frame rate issues cropping up every now and then. This can be disconcerting, particularly when engaged in combat. The game will also ask the player to make use of specific "personas" (slave, lady and assassin) at certain times, to achieve different goals. It is a great idea, but the title will force players to use these personas at certain times, which removes a bit of freedom from the title.

With all that said it must be noted that *Assassin's Creed: Liberation* is a good game. While it falls victim to its own ambition from time to time, the overall experience is a good one. It may not be a Vita saviour, but fans of the franchise will likely want to get their licks in with *Liberation* none the less. **NAG**

- Ramjet

78

While many hoped that *Liberation* would "save" the Vita, it probably won't. Still, it's good fun if you get past its shortcomings.

PLUS
Free roaming / Lots to do / Interesting setting

MINUS
Some sections feel tacked on / Some performance issues
Plot gaps

Dishonored

EDITOR'S CHOICE

A *Thief* by any other name

He tosses a chunk of dead flesh at the hound sat before him. Quickly it devours the messy treat. "Good boy," says the guard with almost monotone joy, an unnervingly eerie affinity between him and the deadly hounds in his charge. I watch from the nearby shadows as the guard and his companion begin their patrol, moving from cage to cage, pausing momentarily to greet the other trained dogs within. I silently scurry atop a nearby pipeline running along the length of the room, high above the floor, crouched with my head barely lower than the ceiling. I can see into the tops of the cages as the guard chats to his canine chums. They've no idea that I'm here. I make my way to the far end of the room, and peer below. I've a feeling the exit is in the adjacent room, but I'll only be certain once I'm actually, you know, in there. I'll have to wait, patiently, for my chance. The enemy patrol comes to a halt. The guard yawns, arms outstretched, and then moves away, his hound dutifully following. Quickly I spring into action, dropping to the ground without a sound and bolting around a dividing wall towards my goal. But something shiny catches my eye. "I'll just go have a quick look, and be on my way," I reassure myself. And so my plan suddenly changes. I find a gaudy trinket in another room down a short set of stairs that'll fetch a quick 100 or so gold pieces. With a smile, patting myself on the back, I assure myself that it was totally worth it, and hurry back up the stairs to leave with my prize. I round the corner and... find myself face to face with another guard who looks almost as confused and stunned as I'm sure I must. Quickly gathering his shattered senses from the floor, the guard makes an awful racket, and I find myself fending off a flurry of sword swipes, pistol

DETAILS

Platforms
360 / PC / PS3
Genre
First-person action
Age restriction
18
Multiplayer
 Local
 None
 Online
 None
Developer
Arkane Studios
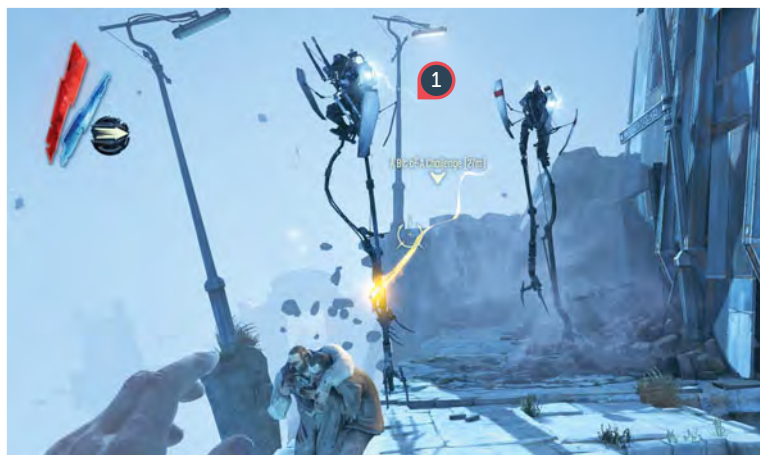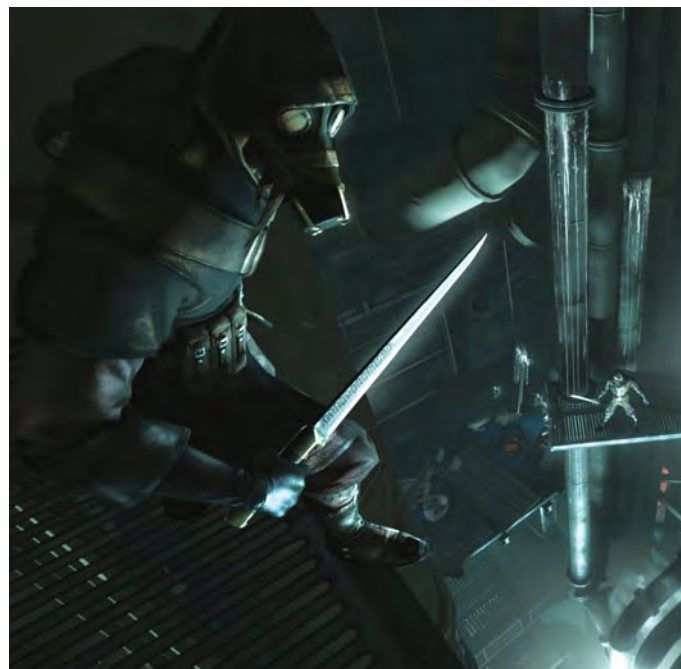**Website**
www. dishonored.com
Publisher
Bethesda Softworks
Distributor
Ster Kinekor

1 These stilt-walking terrors are called Tallboys. Try not to get on their bad side. So basically, don't ever even let them see you.

2 If enemies haven't spotted you, you can sneak up on and pickpocket them, snatching keys or cash and disappearing quietly. Or you can murder them and take it that way. Your call.

EAVESDROPPING ON FAME

Dishonored's all-round quality extends to its voice acting, with all of its characters convincingly portrayed by their actors. And it's no surprise, considering the surprising list of Hollywood talent that's been employed to bring this interesting cast of digital people to life. Voice cast credits include Brad Dourif (*The Lord of the Rings*), Lena Headey (*Game of Thrones*), Chloë Grace Moretz (*Kick-Ass*), Susan Sarandon (most recently *Cloud Atlas*, but has been in a long list of big-name films), John Slattery (*Mad Men*), Carrie Fisher (*Star Wars*) and Michael Madsen (*Kill Bill*).

In *Dishonored*, **technology relies on whale oil: gathered and refined from whales using stuff**, things and video game science to power its technological marvels
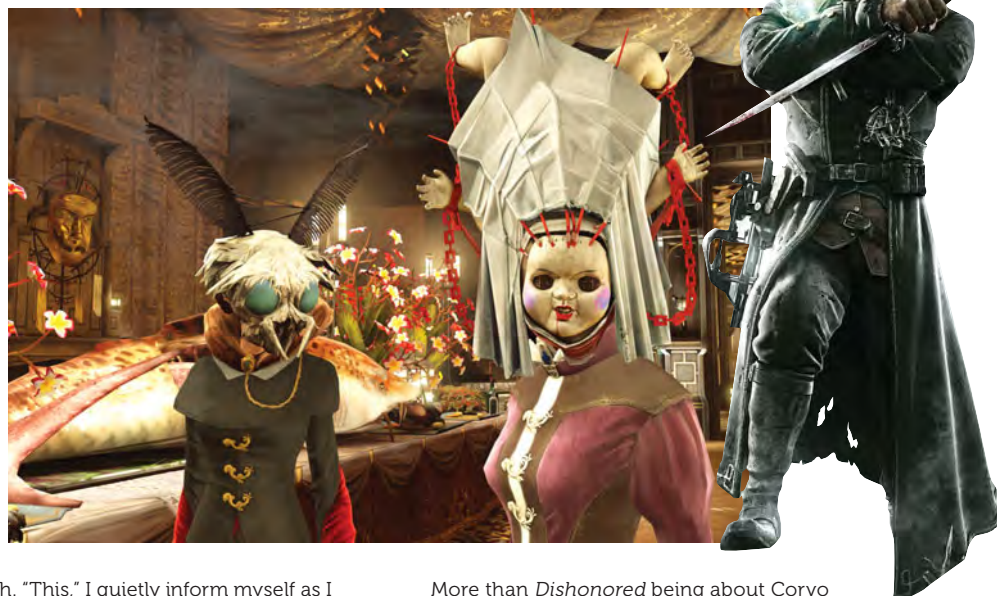
shots and angry teeth. "This," I quietly inform myself as I miserably tap the quick load button, "was not at all worth it."

In *Dishonored,* you are Corvo Attano, bodyguard and Lord Protector to the Empress, ruler of the city of Dunwall. You're returning home after a journey to seek aid from other kingdoms against the threat of a terrible plague that's beset the city. Upon delivering the dreary news that said aid was refused by all, a bunch of bastardly assassins show up to add injury to insult, murdering the Empress before your eyes and disappearing with her daughter. Even as you hold the dying Empress in your arms, you are framed for the attack and promptly thrown in prison. Six months pass, and you quickly learn who was behind the coup: a group of conspirators who promptly assumed control of Dunwall, and sent an already troubled city even deeper into the depths of hopelessness. Soon, you're contacted by an organisation of loyalists eager to restore rightful power to the throne. And so you bust out of prison, and begin a journey to restore order and seek revenge on those who so wronged you.

More than *Dishonored* being about Corvo Attano, it's about *you*. The story is Corvo's, sure: but how you progress through it, and its eventual conclusion, are in your hands. *Dishonored* puts control in your hands, and not just in the good ending / bad ending sense, but in every moment, every aspect of its gameplay. It's a straight-up action game if you'd like, countless foes falling to your sword, crossbow, pistol and the offensive abilities in your supernatural arsenal, which you acquire early in the game. You'll never have to spend a moment hidden in shadows should you see fit. But if that's not your style, you can spend the entire game invisible to all of your targets, consequential or not. You can slice the life out of them without them ever having known you were there. Or you can play through the entire game without ever killing anyone – not even the primary assassination targets that you're sent to dispatch, despicable despots though they prove to be. How you play determines the level of chaos in Dunwall, destabilising the city completely and changing the nature of future missions if you leave a trail of blood behind you.

Those missions are masterfully designed too, sending you to locations varied throughout the city, occasionally requiring a second visit to areas under different circumstances. There's a keen sense of total freedom in each area, despite obvious built-in level limits confining your exploits. Nonetheless, you can go where you choose, and within each area you will discover numerous diversions and side quests, whether they be the requests of characters you'll meet, or self-imposed mini-adventures involving finding stashed loot, or merely spotting an open window high above the streets and resolving to discover a way up there to uncover the goodies that may lie within. Along the way you'll find numerous books, journals and audio recordings that flesh out the world and the narrative, little chunks of history and life to make it more believable and keep you immersed. The look and feel of its grimy, festering world is brilliant too. It's a striking mix of old Victorian

aesthetic (that's instantly reminiscent of 1800s London) and volatile technology. There's a definite steampunk undercurrent, with metallic technological constructs intruding in this old world. In *Dishonored*, technology relies on whale oil: gathered and refined from whales using stuff, things and video game science to power its technological marvels. Dunwall is an incredibly well realised fictional city and its largely thanks to its inhabitants as well. Although most levels are chiefly populated and policed by guards of the city watch and petty thugs who've claimed zones for themselves, they behave as you'd expect. They read books, they patrol areas, they chat and bicker inanely amongst themselves and at night, they warm themselves by fireside.

The actual gameplay lays a bunch of toys out in front of you, and lets you decide how to use them. You've got Corvo's folding blade, his pistol and his crossbow for offensive potential. His crossbow can fire numerous bolt types as well, from sleep darts that incapacitate foes, to incendiary darts that will, as the name suggests, set enemies ablaze. Between missions, an inventor you meet will let you purchase upgrades using cash you've liberated on your travels to purchase various items (like health potions and ammunition) and upgrades for your weapons (such as

"It's a game that revels in letting you **play and experiment within it, always providing you with options** rather than yanking away control..."

those that improve your aim with the crossbow, or let you carry more bolts) and gear. Then there are your supernatural abilities. These are acquired and improved by finding and gathering hidden runes, carved from the bones of whales. Your abilities include stuff like a short-range teleport called Blink (which makes stealthy antics and exploration much easier); another that lets you summon a swarm of plague rats that'll overwhelm your foes and dispose of the bodies; and one that lets you slow time, or stop it altogether for a limited period. They can be upgraded, too. Blink, when upgraded, lets you teleport further, while your ability to possess animals like rats and hounds lets you possess humans as well at its second level. Also available to collect are bone charms, similar to runes. A limited number of these can be equipped to imbue various bonuses – such as one that increases your movement speed when in stealth mode, or another that lets you regenerate a greater amount of health when you find and eat food.

Part of the reason I've got so much love for *Dishonored* is that it's basically *Thief* – and anyone who's played that excellent series of stealthy sandboxes will know exactly what to expect from it. All you need to do is replace rope arrows with Blink. It oozes quality and smart design, driven by a story that is deeply captivating. There's really nothing that comes to mind when I try to recall anything that irritated me about it. People have complained about its length, saying it's too short, but I've spent dozens of hours mucking about in its playground. It's a game that revels in letting you play and experiment within it, always providing you with options rather than yanking away control to show you another cut-scene in which something explodes spectacularly. Scarcely do we get a high-profile game of this nature these days, and we should appreciate it all the more for that. **NAG**

- Barkskin
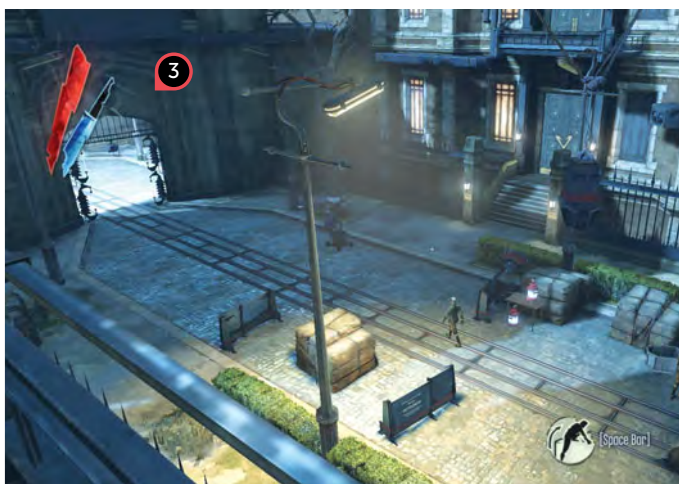
3 Levels boast a huge amount of verticality. Stealthy players are free to spend most of their time traversing the rooftops of Dunwall.

94 *Dishonored* is a rare, old school-revering treat in today's AAA industry. It's a game you're free to play your way, wrapping your experience in as much stealth, action and diversion as you please, set amidst a believable game world that feels not only alive, but lived in. Play it. It's lovely.

PLUS
Compelling story / Rich, diverse gameplay and mechanics
Beautifully realised world

MINUS
Nothing that really matters

LittleBigPlanet Vita
A pocket full of Sack

Let's face it, from word one the PlayStation Vita was pitched around the idea of having a PlayStation 3 in your hand. And while few titles such as *Uncharted: Golden Abyss* have nearly achieved the effect, the definitive argument for Vita's potential has appeared. Save a few quibbles *LittleBigPlanet Vita* puts a contemporary game console into one's hand and pocket with virtually no compromise.

In fact, it may be that *LPB*'s most comfortable home *is* Vita. The full suite required to get the most out of it – camera, microphone, built in touch and motion control – are taken full advantage of. The visual package is maybe the best demonstration of Vita capability to date and shockingly close to its PS3 sibling. Close inspection reveals a handful of shader effects are scaled back, balanced by the inclusion of new effects for new Vita materials. Most surprising is that support for four players has made the transition.

LittleBigPlanet is multifaceted. As a single player and co-op game, *LBPV*'s story campaign is better than that of *LittleBigPlanet 2*, which frequently felt like a series of tutorial stages for creation gimmicks. The Vita game sports bigger, more exciting story stages, and even its typically bizarre Little Big storyline is more clever and interesting than one
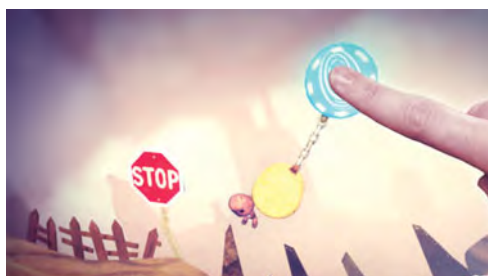
might expect. It's still too short, predicating much of its value on replaying stages to collect every prize and achieve a perfect zero-death run.

As a platform and game creation tool, *LittleBigPlanet Vita* puts a lot of power into portable form. The biggest disappointment, though understandable, is lack of user creation compatibility with *LBP2*. While incredibly close to the console build, the Vita cannot quite match the required complexity to pull it off. Making up for this in a big way is the added potential of multi-touch game mechanics demonstrated in story mode's bonus arcade stages. And these ideas aren't going to waste in the user community's early days. The world editor itself is as powerful as it is on PS3, if not more so with further tool refinements and the option for touch based manipulation. The soothing voice of Stephen Fry is still on hand to walk beginners through every possible step of the process.

There is just very little about *LittleBigPlanet Vita* which undermines its status as PS Vita's premiere *app du jour* so far. It's pretty much the proof of concept piece for why you'd want a PlayStation in your pocket. Its short story mode is something the series still needs to correct. The lack of support for console user levels reveals the Vita is not quite in sync with Sony's marketing. But for the portable realm, it's an impressive piece of kit. **NAG**

- Miktar

92 *LittleBigPlanet Vita* lives up to the promise Sony made with their claims that the Vita is a true portable PlayStation experience. In some respects, *LBP Vita* is a more focused and enjoyable product than its two predecessors, fitting the portable gaming paradigm better than one would expect.

PLUS
95% of *LBP* in your hand, with innovations not found on console / Great soundtrack / Four-player online multiplayer Stephen Fry

MINUS
No console user level support / This one is going to drain your battery

DETAILS
Platforms
PSV
Genre
Puzzle platform
Age restriction
10
Multiplayer
Local
None
Online
4 players
Developer
Double Eleven
Tarsier Studios
XDev
Website
www.littlebigplanet.com
Publisher
Sony Computer Entertainment
Distributor
Ster Kinekor Games

Medal of Honor: Warfighter

Something about beards

I think it all started with that name. The moment EA announced *Medal of Honor: Warfighter*, you could almost hear the collective groan worldwide. *Warfighter*? Really? It's essentially what you'd imagine to be the title of a lampooned big-budget gaming blockbuster, the type of subtitle that'd normally be tacked onto a playful parody of modern military shooters. And yet there it was, stapled onto the end of a familiar franchise with deadly sincerity. It's obvious EA are pushing *Medal of Honor* to become a filler series: the gap-year game that exists in the frightening impending future where we get a new *Battlefield* game every two years. Still, we all knew it was the game beneath the name that would matter here, and so we waited patiently to see if *Warfighter*'s silly moniker would be forgiven by delivering a solid chunk of modern military action. And now that it's out there, has it managed that? Well... No. It hasn't.

I quite liked the single-player portion of 2010's *Medal of Honor* reboot. I think I was one of a handful of people in the world who did. On many levels it was just another modern military outing – but it toyed with some truly impactful moments, and I respected the story and message that Danger Close attempted to convey. Its sequel, however, is a different box of bullets entirely. We once again follow a group of Tier 1 operators on multiple missions set across the globe. Switching control between operatives as the story requires, you'll travel to places like Yemen, Sarajevo and Dubai, hunting down shipments of incredibly powerful explosives meant for use in nefarious terrorist plots. That could be what happens: I don't think I was ever rightly sure about what was actually emerging from the game's story at any given moment. I know I was tracking down a terrorist mastermind calling himself "The

Cleric" as my overarching goal, but the rest was a garbled, confusing mess. *Warfighter* has a story to tell, but it fails to tell it in a coherent way that's easy to follow, or care about.

As you've no doubt spotted from the game's exhaustive marketing, *Warfighter* aims to reveal the unseen nature of a soldier's life, their sacrifices and their commitment to country and cause. And while it's undoubtedly obvious that Danger Close has nothing but austere reverence for these people, the characters they've created to represent them are ultimately hollow puppets surrounded by forced drama that's designed to be affecting, but actually just falls flat. Towards the final third of the game, the narrative begins to sober up a bit, and there are moments that flirt with being genuinely meaningful and moving, but by that point the entire affair already feels too disconnected. If you want a game that actually succeeds in effectively conveying the impact of war on the soldiers that fight them, play *Spec Ops: The Line.*

If you've played a modern military shooter before, you've played *Warfighter* – and chances are, you've seen the tried and tested formula executed with greater success elsewhere. While the mission environments are often excellently detailed and visually remarkable, making potent use of DICE's Frostbite 2 engine, the gunplay they contain is bland and uninspired. This is a game of ducking and shooting, with little to no tactical thought required in between. It's also a game where you cannot be trusted to open doors on your own, and where you're often forced to relinquish control of your character because the game would like to play itself on your behalf. The allies who join you on missions are no smarter than the shockingly stupid enemies you face, who are as likely to rush straight at you with complete abandon as they are to kneel
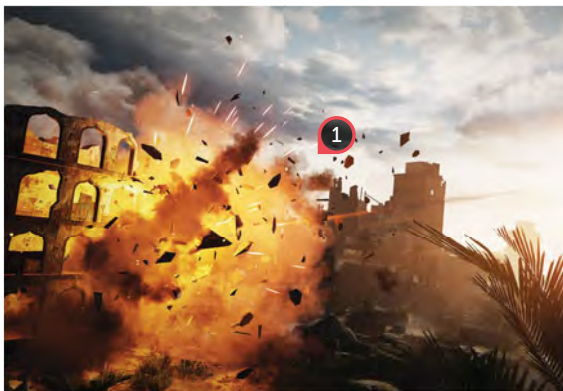
1 At times, it's impossible to shake the feeling that the game was rushed out the door. It's a pity, because its potential to be something more than a standard shooter is obvious.

2 The game's weapons feel solid and weighty, and the gunplay is generally satisfying. Weapons offer a variety of attachments and options for sights.

"Warfighter aims to **reveal the unseen nature of a soldier's life**, their sacrifices and their commitment to country and cause."

out in the open waiting for you to shoot them. Allies will often force you out of cover and get you killed (likely laughing maniacally as they do so), but they'll also provide you unlimited ammo to calm you down when you complain about their thoughtlessness over beers at the mission's end. There are moments where brilliance threatens to shine through in the campaign, eager to display the game that this could have been rather than the game that it is, and you'll find a couple of driving missions that are actually quite fun and even innovative in some ways. But thinking back on my experience with it, there's very little that's actually memorable about *Warfighter*'s solo campaign.

The multiplayer, however, fares better. In it, you're given a choice of Tier 1 operatives from Special Forces divisions around the world. Six classes are offered to you, each with different specialties and class abilities to cater to your play style, or to what's required by current match circumstances. The Assaulter class, for example, has access to an underslung grenade launcher, while the Spec Ops class has faster base movement speed than any other class in the game and is able to spot enemies through walls for a brief moment. The class you choose also decides what support powers you're able to call in once you've gathered enough support points, with different tiers of offensive and defensive streak rewards for each of them. Mortar strikes, Blackhawk transports and smoke screens can all be deployed to swing the odds in games. The

obligatory unlock system is in place, but it works differently here compared to similar titles. As you earn experience points and player ranks, you unlock more Tier 1 operatives from different nations, and the operatives you have available to you determine what guns you're able to use and customise.

The game modes on offer include standards like team deathmatch and point control (called "sector control" here), and customised variants of other modes like capture the flag (called "home run", which limits players to a single life and flags cannot be returned, enforcing strong teamwork and tactical play) and *Battlefield*'s rush mode. Most of the maps are well designed, although there are a couple in there that smack of sloppy planning. The fireteam concept – a small-scale implementation of *Battlefield*'s squads – works well, pairing two strangers or friends together and encouraging them to work in sync. You'll earn bonus XP for resupplying and healing your fireteam buddy, or for simply being near them when they do something awesome, and you're able to spawn on your buddy if they can find a safe spot to lay low. Moreover, if a buddy avenges your death, killing the player who killed you, you're able to instantly respawn. It's an excellent, inventive way to encourage teamwork, and a good fireteam can swing a game. Unfortunately, the multiplayer suffers from a list of bugs (and this goes for the single player as well) that include broken spawns, audio that drops in and out and more that cheapen the experience. *Warfighter*'s multiplayer mode, when it works as intended, is good fun – but to be blunt, it's not good enough to compete against *Call of Duty* or *Battlefield* in the multiplayer arena.   **NAG**
- Barkskin

65 *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* **is a stock-standard military shooter. Its single-player campaign makes a shallow attempt at being meaningful and affecting, and offers very little that could be considered worthwhile. The multiplayer, meanwhile, is a solid offering, but one that won't stand up to the overwhelming competition of** *Call of Duty* **and** *Battlefield 3.*

PLUS
Single-player campaign boasts excellent visuals / Some promising moments / Multiplayer is fun

MINUS
Story is poorly delivered / The standard gameplay is terribly bland / Quite buggy in many areas
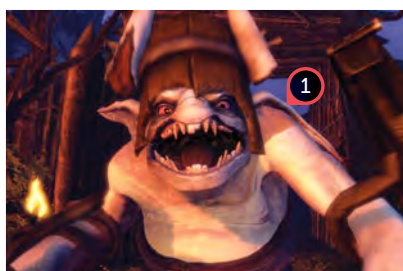
Fable: The Journey

Take a trip...

Let's be honest: a lot of people are looking at the Kinect control system with more than a little scepticism. This is largely due to the fact that games (not exercise programs) that have tried to make use of the system have really been a mixed bag. And not the case of "this game is good, this game is bad", either. Rather, each individual game has managed to deliver good moments and bad ones. That all said and done, there have also been games that have just been plain bad. Kinect controls have never been used in a title that is good in all respects.

Fable: The Journey might have been that game. The idea behind it is great. It's a semi-on-the-rails adventure title that sees the player using their hands to cast various spells at enemies in the *Fable* world. The control ideas are great. The player can cast a variety of spells in specific directions. Hell, some of them can even be guided with after-touch controls. And all this can be done sitting down – so much for getting people up off the couch.

Unfortunately, there is a bit of a slip twixt cup and lip here. The concept is awesome, and most of the time *Fable: The Journey* will deliver the goods. But it is the times that it doesn't that stick out. The Kinect sensor seems to lose its calibration far too often during game play and recalibrating means quitting to the menu. That's annoying, and can drop

the level of the experience down by a good few notches.

So, the main feature of the game – the Kinect controls – can be a little disappointing. But the world and visuals do make up for that a bit, and the player can have quite a bit of fun exploring Albion, accompanied by the *Fable* staple Theresa. But don't expect a full *Fable* experience; this isn't the next big *Fable* game. Rather, *The Journey* is part stop-gap, and part Kinect-exploiter. There is no hectic exploration to do, and levelling up the character is simplified. Additionally, the long game time seen in other *Fable* games is missing here – it is a relatively short game. Still, it's not all bad – when it works, *Fable: The Journey* works well, and stringing together a series of awesome spells to deal with enemies can provide not only great fun, but also a good sense of accomplishment.

The only real hassle here is the Kinect implementation – one would expect better from a studio so closely associated with Microsoft. But it is what it is; if you can get past the more frustrating bits, *Fable: The Journey* is rather enjoyable. It isn't a must play game, but fans of the franchise who own a Kinect will likely find it worth the effort. **NAG**

- Ramjet

1 What's really under your bed at night?

73 It's not a full-length *Fable* game, but it will tide fans over until the next major release... if they can deal with the sometimes frustrating controls, that is.

PLUS
Good fun / Nice graphics

MINUS
Kinect implementation / Short

DETAILS

Platforms
360
Genre
Action adventure
Age restriction
12
Multiplayer
  Local
  None
  Online
  None
Developer
Lionhead Studios
Website
www.xbox.com/fable
Publisher
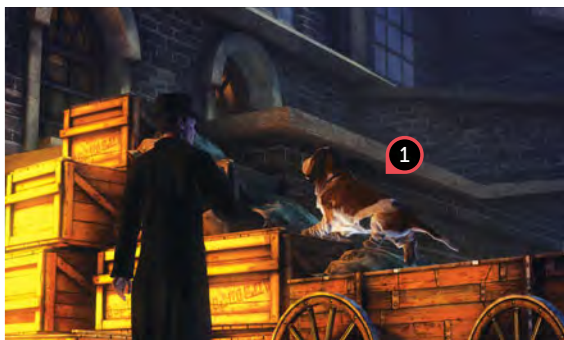Microsoft
Distributor
Prima Interactive

The Testament of Sherlock Holmes

Fetch me my barrel of cocaine, Watson

Before we begin, let your eyes wander to the score at the bottom of this review. I'm going to preface the following series of words by warning anyone reading that *The Testament of Sherlock Holmes* is not a game for someone whose gaming scope lies comfortably between *Call of Duty* and *WWE 13*, and does not ever deviate from games that involve sitting on peoples' chests until they pass out, or shooting people repeatedly many times in the face until they die and/or explode while in the background an aircraft carrier is towed through the air by a space shuttle piloted by flamingos in military garb. Do not look at that score and think that 70 means that anyone and everyone will automatically enjoy this game, or that they'll even find it okay. So first, ask yourself two questions: "Do I like slow-paced, pedantic adventure games?" and "Do I like Sherlock Holmes?" Depending on how positive you are of your answers, consider reading on.

As far as Holmesian exploits go, *Testament* unravels a surprisingly dark plot. Right from the very start of the game (following a highly scripted tutorial-type prologue with a ludicrous conclusion that almost colours the game badly before it even truly begins), you're introduced to the grisly, disturbingly detailed corpse of a torture-murder victim that sets the tone the game carries throughout. You'll perform autopsies, dig around for clues amidst the corpses of a man and his two dogs, and even carry a severed thumb around with you for a bit. The macabre atmosphere permeates into a deeper look at Holmes' character, as he seemingly delves in darker themes, like the notion of killing suspects, while being altogether even more rude, insulting and untrustworthy than usual, completely at odds with the more grounded ideals of his doctor sidekick/pet, John Watson. The visual side of the game does a good job of supporting the story, with characters and environments that are (generally) nicely detailed and suitably grim (you'll visit locations varying from seedy opium dens to a claustrophobic old prison). That's aside from the general stiffness of characters' facial movements and a couple of moments where the animation system can't keep up with what's required on-screen. Voice acting is largely well delivered as well, particularly on the part of Holmes, and the banter between him and Watson will be a treat for fans. It's often (perhaps unintentionally) quite funny, with the way Holmes' nonchalant, deadpan disregard for, well, everything so often clashes with Watson's views in humorous ways.

The general gameplay is as you'd expect, and normally involves a pixel hunt across the game's numerous scenes as you exhaustively scour areas for clues that'll allow you to progress. Then there are some truly devious puzzles that often show face, covering everything from logic to numeracy to chess and more. Some of them are truly devilish, but if you're only here for the story, they can be skipped after struggling with them for a time. Occasionally you'll be expected to deduce the circumstances leading up to whatever situation you've uncovered, using a simple system (that unfortunately never gets as complex as I'd have liked it to) of choosing an aspect of the investigation and finding a common link between all the elements, connecting various scenarios via a flowchart until you've come to an ostensibly logical conclusion. Beyond that, it's a fairly simple game, but one that delivers a storyline well worth unscrambling, especially for fans of the duo of Holmes and Watson. **NAG**

- Barkskin

1 One particularly annoying (and completely insane) section of the game sees you controlling this hound, opening doors, pulling ropes, and following the trail of a runaway suspect.

DETAILS

Platforms
360 / PC / PS3
Genre
Adventure
Age restriction
16
Multiplayer
  Local
    None
  Online
    None
Developer
Frogwares
Website
www.
sherlockholmes-
thegame.com
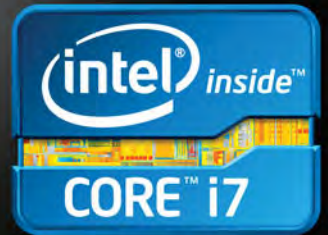**Publisher**
Focus Home
Interactive
Distributor
Apex Interactive

70 *The Testament of Sherlock Holmes* is easily the great detective's finest video game outing. While it's definitely marked by a few unsightly blemishes, likely due to budget and technical constraints, it weaves a tale befitting of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's works. Just bear in mind that it's definitely intended for avid followers of Holmes and Watson, and fans of slow-paced, pointy, clicky adventures.

PLUS
Satisfyingly challenging puzzles and adventuring / Good, Holmes-worthy story

MINUS
At times awful production quality / Sometimes devolves into a frustrating pixel hunt

Need for Speed Most Wanted

Feel the need

MUST PLAY

You're given the freedom of the city and the keys to all the cars. *Need for Speed Most Wanted* is a pure sandbox arcade racer. This is great because you can drive a Lamborghini Gallardo within minutes of starting the game. What's not so great is battling to find the motivation to drive an ordinary car after getting spoilt early on. The game makes up for this a little by only offering around five events per car. After winning a few races and unlocking stuff like nitrous, an improved transmission and better tyres it's on to the next car. The upgrades offer some advantages, the more obvious being a nitrous injection for speed and the less obvious being a hardened chassis and self-inflating tyres to bust through police road blocks.

The 5-0 (cops) patrol the streets and should you flash past them at 250kph they're going to chase you down and bust you. There are heat levels and the more heat you attract the more aggressive the cops get. The police also get involved in the set races and do their utmost to disrupt racing in the city of Fairhaven. You can escape them through speed or cunning and once out of sight it's just a matter of time until the pursuit is called off. The police component of *Most Wanted* feels a little pointless and getting caught just means a reload – there's no penalty and often, like the random traffic in the city, they just get in the way of the fun. The premise of the game is to become the most wanted bad boy racer in the city and you do this by accumulating speed points, once you reach specific targets you can enter challenges to race and beat the current top ten most wanted drivers. Accumulating points is as easy as winning races or crashing through billboards strategically placed in the game world.

In terms of efficiency the whole city of Fairhaven is there

to explore without a single loading screen. There's no menu to navigate and Criterion's Easydrive system allows you to enter or restart races, swap cars and even change your car's tyres on the fly using a few presses on the d-pad. Not only are the technical bits seamless but the racing itself is as close to perfect for an arcade racer as you're ever going to see. The cars feel weighty and depending on what you're driving the experience is very different – Criterion Studios are the masters at this craft. *Most Wanted* is well geared for multiplayer and you can enter events that'll see you competing for the longest jump or powerslide and even who can get to the start of the race quickest. Speed cameras around the city also capture your speed and then compare it to people on your friends list. So if social gaming is your thing then *Most Wanted* has you covered.

It's not all roses and burnt rubber however. The racing is often disrupted by random cars in the way, the involvement of the police means nothing most of the time, and the city is well put together but lacks those holy cow moments and exotic drives. The game is what you make it and giving the player everything right at the start is a risky move. Aside from this *Most Wanted* is a great drive and the best in the series so far. **NAG**

- RedTide

DETAILS

Platforms
360 / PC / PS3
PSP / PSV

Genre
Arcade racing

Age restriction
7

Multiplayer
Local
None
Online
8 players

Developer
Criterion Studios

Website
www.
needforspeed.
com

Publisher
Electronic Arts

Distributor
Electronic Arts
South Africa

87 Vroom. The best *Need for Speed* game since *Hot Pursuit* (also Criterion) and pushes the genre along nicely. What we really want however is another *Burnout* game – just saying.

PLUS
Seamless world / Freedom / Plenty cars

MINUS
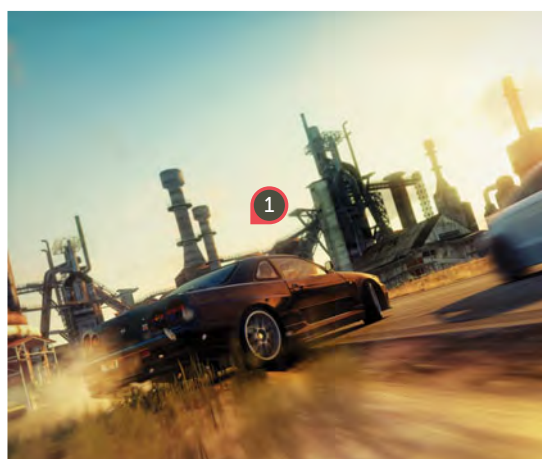Random traffic / Pointless cops

Forza Horizon

Hit the road, Jack

Forza Horizon is a game that knows exactly what it is. You'd think that'd be obvious, but the process of turning a relatively hardcore simulator into an arcade racer could too easily leave the resulting game with dregs of the old without fully embracing the new, but Horizon manages to make the transition with an understanding better than many others that are floundering in this genre.
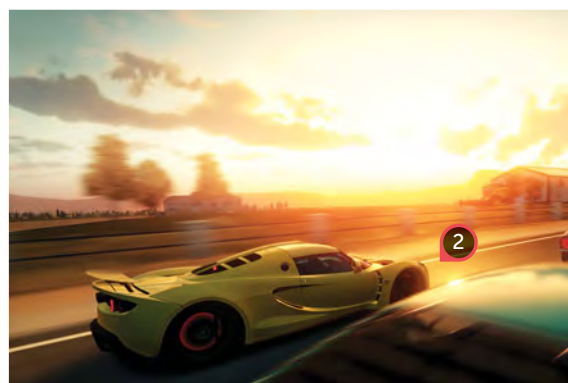
Here's what this game is not: Need for Speed, Burnout, or DiRT. Instead, consider Horizon to be the gentleman of arcade racers, without any gangster crap, cop chases or silly game modes. Horizon honours the simple purity of arcade racing, the beauty of the cars, and the prestige associated with being the best. It fits this approach into its setting: the fictional Horizon festival that takes place on the mountain passes, suburban avenues and desert highways of Colorado. The setting is one of the more believable that you find in these sorts of games: thousands of people gather into an arrangement of music concerts, fairground amusements, tent cities and, of course, the races themselves. You'll take your role in this as the newcomer and will work your way up through the festival by gaining popularity and ranking through your driving skills and pole positions.

The feel of the cars in an arcade racer is of utmost importance, and here Horizon mostly succeeds but falls just short of perfection. The way that cars react as you tinker with the extensive upgrades system is a delight, and shows the depth of the physics system running under the hood. Each race demands a maximum car class and if yours is too powerful then you'll have to dial back certain improvements (either manually or automatically; the same is possible for upgrades themselves, so those who prefer not to dabble don't have to). How you go about choosing those improvements depends on each car – its drive train, power-

to-weight ratio and maximum lateral Gs – which means you're able to tweak your vehicles to suit your driving style precisely. Unfortunately, this relatively advanced physics system (for an arcade racer) has its quirks; you'll sometimes find that cars behave unpredictably when colliding, as many interactions feel canned rather than dynamic. This is especially noticeable in multiplayer, which results in some hilarious situations that could rival the broken horse physics of Red Dead Redemption.

As has become the flavour of the month, Horizon takes place in an open game world. There's nothing particularly special about the way it handles this feature, but there are quite a few activities for you to partake in above the 110+ races the game has to offer. The open format means you don't have to win every single race, but the track design both in and out of events practically never takes advantage of that freedom: you're always stuck to a fenced-in path with no significant shortcuts allowed. In this regard, the developers could've loosened up their grip on mommy Forza's apron strings, but the races are still immensely fun, with your choice of car and its upgrades, and the skill you use to drive it being the most important factors.

NAG

- GeometriX

1 Those who want to take a break from simple racing events can perform PR stunts, found at outposts throughout the game world, that range from speed challenges to photo opportunities.

2 Another throwback to the Forza lineage is the ability to customise your difficulty level. Increase opponent AI, ditch the ABS or traction control or otherwise make the game more challenging and you'll be rewarded with extra cash after each event.

DETAILS

Platforms
360
Genre
Arcade racing
Age restriction
12
Multiplayer
    Local
    None
    Online
    8 players
Developer
Playground Games
Turn 10 Studios
Website
www.
forzamotorsport.net
Publisher
Microsoft Studios
Distributor
Prima Interactive

87 Horizon has made the branch out from simulation to arcade racer with a true understanding of what the latter is all about. It's fun, challenging, and addictive as hell, and has plenty to satisfy petrol-heads and casual race fans alike.

PLUS
Looks fantastic / Extensive upgrades system / Relatively advanced physics simulation / Great setting

MINUS
Car handling has its quirks / Track designs lack freedom Open world underutilised

WRC 3

Mud-slinging

There's a funny thing with racing games: too technical, and they alienate the fun crowd; too arcade, and the petrol-heads look away. Tread the middle ground, and everyone complains. You can please some of the people some of the time, as they say...

WRC 3 makes an attempt, though, to be something that everyone can enjoy and, because of that, it manages to get stuck in that middle ground. It does lean a little more to the arcade side of things, which (considering) is probably a good thing. Arcade style driving players are a lot more forgiving.

The main issue with WRC 3 is that it battles with its own identity. It bangs on about being an official rally title, but it doesn't live up to the promise by getting all technical. Rather, it is about quick reactions and having fun. That's not exactly a bad thing – in fact, I had lots of fun slinging numerous cars around the tracks. But the kind of technicality that one would expect from a game that claims "official" just isn't here. It's not in the tweaking that can be done to the cars, and it isn't in the performance of said cars either.

In fact, the cars all feel rather similar on the tracks, and the various surfaces that you will encounter – mud, gravel, snow and so on – don't feel overly varied either. When you get down to it, the action in this game is all about getting the car around the track effectively – which is the most "rally" aspect of the title.

The game presents the player with numerous locked cars in career mode, and upgrade kits that can be applied to them. The career mode will take the player all over the globe, competing to become a new face in the top rally circles. The idea is quite fun, and that really is what this game is all about. Adding events like gate races and target races proves that.

So the real issue is one of perception. WRC 3 is fun to play, and will appeal to the arcade racing fans. But it really doesn't present itself as such, meaning that a number of hardcore racing fans may be disappointed when it doesn't give them the level of painstaking detail they desire. This is further evidenced by the fact that the player is rewarded for virtually everything they do; fast, clean sections are rewarded, but so are spectacular crashes.

Responsive controls and good graphics are the order of the day here. As casual driving games go, it is a great way to kill a few hours, without too much frustration (once you get used to the slightly less than realistic physics). But if you're after a realistic, nuts-and-bolts racer, you simply won't find it here. **NAG**

- Ramjet

DETAILS

Platforms
360 / PC
PS3 / PSV
Genre
Driving
Age restriction
3
Multiplayer
 Local
 4 players
 Online
 16 players
Developer
Milestone
Website
www.
wrcthegame.
com
Publisher
PQube
Distributor
Apex Interactive

73

It's not a "nuts-and-bolts", technical racing title. But WRC 3 does offer plenty of fun for those who don't take their virtual racing too seriously.

PLUS
Good graphics / Responsive controls / Fun!

MINUS
Not very technical / Sometimes odd physics

SUBSCRIBE NOW!

Persona 4: Arena

Robots, teddy-bears, and sister-complex kingpin of steel.

Do fighting games and Japanese RPGs go together? *Persona 4: Arena* makes a surprising case for it. The benefits of co-development between RPG workshop Atlus and fighting game specialist Arc System Works (they of the *Guilty Gear*) are clear: striking pop-art presentation, lavish soundtrack and professional voice acting. Also: true HD sprite-based combat and an engine so full of systems it could start its own console war.

But *P4:A* reigns in the madness of Arc's other games just a little, and places special emphasis on helping new players learn what the heck is happening on screen. That's expected: while a slick fighter in its own right, the sprawling visual novel-esque story mode is a canonical sequel to *Persona 4*. Positioned to tempt as many RPG players as fighting game gearheads; *P4:A* clearly knows it has to ease you in. It is truly clever in execution, incorporating RPG concepts like status ailments and references to turn-based combat. A petit roster of 13 characters is leveraged against complete uniqueness from one to the next: everyone is their own game.

Do you really need another fighting game? You'll get your money's worth in story here, if nothing else. **NAG**

- Miktar

DETAILS

Platforms
360 / PS3
Genre
Fighting
Age restriction
12
Multiplayer
Local
2 players
Online
2 players
Developer
Arc System Works / Atlus
Website
atlus.com/p4arena
Publisher
Zen United
Distributor
No SA distributor

89 With so many fighting games to choose from lately, why play *Personal 4*? It's the best demonic high-school experience you'll find in a fighting game.

PLUS
Outstanding animation and design / Diverse and catchy soundtrack / Incredible amounts of story / Easy to learn

MINUS
Potentially small fan base / Dedication to one character is a must

Theatrhythm Final Fantasy

Journey through 25 years of memorable music and iconic settings

To celebrate 25 years of the most inappropriately-named series in gaming history, Square Enix contracted a small studio to make a rhythm game based around the iconic music the series is known for. For what it is, and taken on its own merits, *Theatrhythm* is a gem.

You create a party of four characters, picking from the lead characters of *Final Fantasy* through *Final Fantasy XIII* (with more that can be unlocked), and set about playing through three unique stage styles. The Field style is a side-scrolling rhythm game, where notes slide in from the left and you need to tap, hold or slide depending on the icon on the note. Battle Music, a mock battle, involves the same thing, but there are four tracks for notes to slide in on and depending on how well you do, you take out enemies faster or slower, which influences the items you get at the end of the stage. Event Music is more sublime, with the notes appearing on a curvy track that gets revealed as you play.

Your cute button-eyed blank-expression characters level up, improving their stats and learning new skills. These help with tougher songs (their combined HP is the amount of mistakes you can make), and certain skills trigger when Boss enemies appear. It's all very cute (if a touch simple), with plenty of replay value – as long as you like the music. **NAG**

- Miktar

DETAILS

Platforms
3DS
Genre
Rhythm
Age restriction
12
Multiplayer
Local
4 players
Online
None
Developer
Indies zero
Website
theatrhythm.com
Publisher
Square Enix
Distributor
Megarom

75 Do you love the music of *Final Fantasy*? Do you really, really, REALLY love the music of *Final Fantasy*? If yes, buy this game. If no, run for the hills and don't look back.

PLUS
Plenty of songs to enjoy / Easy to pick up and play

MINUS
Limited appeal / Some songs are DLC only

Or Orcs and Men
I'd rather not

Most games in a fantasy setting tell the story of the good guys – the heroes, usually human, who must save the land from invading greenskins or demons. *Of Orcs and Men* flips that premise on its head and follows the tale of an orc and a goblin who attempt to assassinate the human emperor who has invaded the orc homeland and slaughtered or enslaved its people. Rough times, man, but right from the start you're removed from your comfort zones as a player, and that is a fantastic way to start a game. It's a pity that the rest of this game is so bloody awful.

If good intentions were made of gold, developers Cyanide might've had enough money to hire a team capable of turning those intentions into a game that delivers the punch to the gut *Of Orcs and Men* so desperately attempts. Instead, you're stuck with excruciatingly linear exploration of one map after another, during which you engage with neat little pockets of enemies through a painfully unintuitive and downright poorly conceived tactical combat system. You control both characters most of the time, with the inactive chap following closely behind and providing basic combat assistance unless instructed to do otherwise. Both greenskin and enemy AI is so appalling that you'll often find them stuck on an enemy or obstacle, running in place, to attack an unreachable enemy; a habit which is easily taken advantage of.

If it weren't for the dark, witty script and surprisingly well-voiced talent for the lead characters, *Of Orcs and Men* could be considered an absolute failure. To be fair, it's not far off, but those few moments of brilliance serve to frustrate more than redeem, as it's clear how good a game this could've been. **NAG**

- GeometriX

DETAILS

Platforms
360 / PC / PS3
Genre
Role-playing game
Age restriction
16
Multiplayer
   Local
   None
   Online
   None
Developer
Cyanide Studios
Website
www.oforcsandmen.com
Publisher
Focus Home Interactive
Distributor
Apex Interactive

52 *Of Orcs and Men* creates for itself an excellent opportunity to challenge the established norms in fantasy RPGs, but it squanders its moment to shine with poor execution, lack of polish and too many attempts to be special without sufficient technical foundation.

PLUS
Great premise / Moments of brilliance

MINUS
Combat is a shambles / Painfully linear exploration / Terrible AI Stealth sequences too obvious

Everything Else

Bits and bobs that can all be filed under gaming lifestyle

DISCWORLD: ANHK-MORPORK

Supplier: Wizards Warehouse
Website: www. wizardswarehouse.co.za
RRP: R550

It's been said that the River Anhk is so thick with (hopefully) dead bodies that you'd sooner be pulled under than sink into its murky depths. People say that the streets of the city are a foot higher than they were when the cobblestones were first laid because of the accumulation of grime over the years. Legends tell that golems stalk the alleyways in search of human brains purely because it's too hard to crack open a dwarf's helmet. This is the city of Anhk-Morpork – the greatest and most terrible metropolis in all of Discworld, and the setting of this rather odd but immensely entertaining board game.

Anhk-Morpork is simple enough to set up, and plays out in a way best described as a combination of Monopoly, Risk and Magic: the Gathering. At the start of the game, players are assigned a random personality from a pool of seven, each with a different winning condition, and must keep their goals a secret while attempting to uncover (and thwart) the winning conditions of their opponents. Countless near-wins, blatant backstabbing, underhanded gestures of goodwill and sulking are the order of the day as players draw cards that grant them abilities that turn the game on its head almost every turn. Games seem to last 30-90 minutes, so if you're looking for a good laugh with a healthy balance of luck and tactics that doesn't take up an entire day, Anhk-Morpork might be right up your street.

YU-GI-OH!

Supplier: Wizards Warehouse
Website: www. wizardswarehouse.co.za
RRP: R165 (structure decks), R60 (booster packs)

Our general rule is to stay far away from anything that ends in an exclamation mark, but since the last time we broke the guideline and played *Orcs Must Die!*, we were pleasantly surprised, so here goes...

Players take turns to deploy monster cards to the battlefield or perform any number of abilities with the use of spell and trap cards in the bid to reduce their opponent's life points to zero. Despite the game's obvious appeal to a younger audience, it's no less tactical and complex as most other collectable card games, so why not give it a bash and see if it appeals?

SUPERMAN CUFFLINKS

Supplier: Dark Carnival
Website: www.darkcarnival.co.za
RRP: R700

Just like how Clark Kent keeps his true identity a secret, you too spend your time lurking at elegant gala dinners and company functions, a geek within but all business up front. Who are you, even? A man of mystery, no doubt – an enigma – and now you can let loose just that little bit of yourself with these cufflinks that honour the Man of Steel himself.
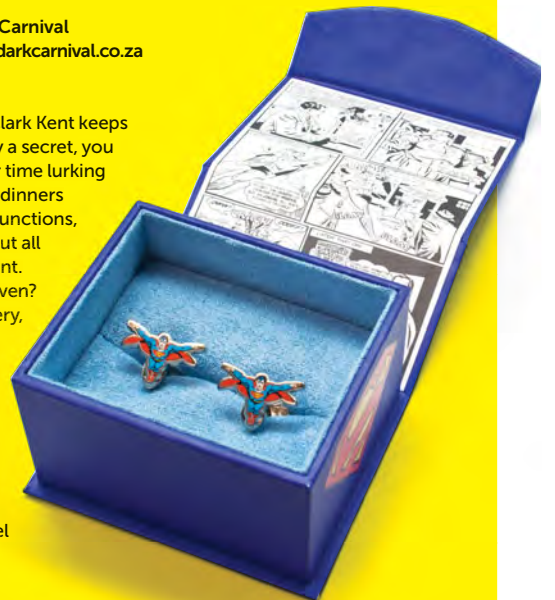
REVELL EASY KIT:
MILLENIUM FALCON

Supplier: Dark Carnival
Website: www.darkcarnival.co.za
RRP: R650

It took a quick 48 minutes to build and requires no glue or tape – just your fingers, some plastic fatiguing and a brain. The instructions are simple (like LEGO) and the parts intelligently labelled. For example, the landing struts required parts 46, 47 and 48 which are all close to each other on the press out plastic moulds. Just not sure the R650 price tag is justified for a snap-together model toy. It's a bit flimsy so those pictures of kids having fun with it are fakes. Things we learnt: Han and Chewy sit in the cockpit with is on the far left...

THE SKY:
THE ART OF FINAL FANTASY

Supplier: AWX
Website: www.awx.co.za
RRP: R1,630

Final Fantasy is credited as a series with some of the most incredible in-game visuals around, but it's the conceptual artwork that has driven those visuals since its inception. Much of that artwork, including character designs and title logo designs, are the work of a single man –

Yoshitaka Amano – and now you can have the entirety of that legacy in the form of this very hefty collection. Totalling three large artwork books and a host of extra goodies (including a personally signed certificate to prove that yours is one of only 1,000 copies), this collection is a must-have for *Final Fantasy* players who enjoy the finer side of video games.

GAMECOM! HEROINE
SERIES: HARLEY QUINN
V.2 & BRANIAC

Supplier: AWX
Website: www.awx.co.za
RRP: R765 each

We're pretty sure there's more to female super villains than boobs, but good luck taking your eyes off them with either of these figures. And Brainiac appears to be a lady for some reason. That reason is probably boobs. Otherwise, these are a couple of fine statues and have a decent level of detail. They're not posable, though, but their fixed stances are dynamic enough that we can't imagine anyone needing much more out of life.

TECH**NEWS**

KNOW**YOUR**TECHNOLOGY

P6 microarchitecture

The sixth generation Intel x86 microarchitecture originally implemented in the Pentium PRO CPU in November 1995, succeeded by Netburst in 2000, it was eventually revived in the Pentium M line of microprocessors, which eventually formed the underpinnings of the Core microarchitecture we still use today.

NetBurst microarchitecture

Referred to as P68 internally. This was supposed to be the successor to the P6 in the x86 family of CPUs. Using Hyper Pipelined technology, the Netburst architecture had an extra ordinarily long 20-stage instruction pipeline (double that of the Pentium III) which increased to 31 stages by the time Prescott was released. This along with the Rapid Execution Engine used, resulted in the Pentium 4 offering lower IPC than the Pentuim III and its eventual retiring in favour of the Core microarchitecture.

K7 microarchitecture

The first seventh generation x86 architecture from AMD, introduced in 1999, and was the first CPU architecture to reach the 1GHz mark. The design of this microarchitecture was helped by Motorola and Dirk Meyer (who would eventually be CEO for a short stint more than a decade later) who had worked at DEC and led the development of this architecture. The K7 made use of DEC's Alpha 21264 EV6 DDR Bus which was superior to what Intel had for the Pentium III.

K8 microarchitecture

The Successor to the K7, K8 was the first CPU to support the x86-64 extension which is still in use today. Very similar to K8, differing in the integration of the AMD64 instruction set and on chip memory controller, which drastically lowered latencies and improved overall performance.

DID YOU KNOW?
A Japanese peripheral maker recently unveiled an optical mouse that has a built-in heater which keeps the mouse warm. The mouse uses a low power heating coil maintaining a temperature of between 35°C and 45°C.

Mosh Pit

NOKIA ASHA 311
A cool touch screen phone sporting all the usual features. Where the appeal lies for gamers is the 40 free EA games valued at around R1,000 that you will have access to forever once you download them from the Nokia Store.
R1,599 | www.nokia.com

TURTLE BEACH EAR FORCE XL1
An ideal entry-level headset for Xbox gaming. Features include 50mm speakers and oversized circumaural ear cups, an in-line amplifier, and a built-in bass boost feature.
R499.95 | www.apex.co.za

"Got an email from Microsoft, wanting to help 'certify' *Minecraft* for Win 8. I told them to stop trying to ruin the PC as an open platform."
Notch, Swedish developer of Minecraft

#4.0
BY THE NUMBERS

Microsoft's new OS, Windows 8, has native support for Bluetooth v4.0. The launch of Bluetooth v4.0 brings with it a wave of new Bluetooth Smart and Smart Ready devices which provide manufacturers and developers the opportunity to create the next generation of devices and software applications that will transform the way consumers interact with their technology.

DREAM MACHINE

We have had two performance related changes in the Dream Machine over the last two months. Corsair has taken over from Plextor with the Neutron GTX SSDs, and the Dominator Platinum memory has displaced the G.SKILL RipJaws as the memory of choice for all platforms. The price difference is significant courtesy of the memory, but then again these are Dream Machines!

Cooler Master Silent Pro M2 1500Watt PSU
R3,300 / www.coolermaster.com

GIGABYTE GV-N680SO-2GD
R7,329 / www.gigabyte.com

Corsair Neutron GTX 240GB
R2,499 / www.corsair.com

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

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

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

GIGABYTE Aivia Osmium Mechanical Gaming Keyboard
R1,299 / www.gigabyte.com

Roccat Kone [+]
R899 / www.roccat.org

Roccat Alumic
R319 / www.roccat.org

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

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

Creative Labs Sound Blaster Recon3D Omega
R2,995/ www.creativelabs.com

Intel

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

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

Corsair Dominator Platinum 2666C10 16GB Kit
R4,999 / www.corsair.com

NEW

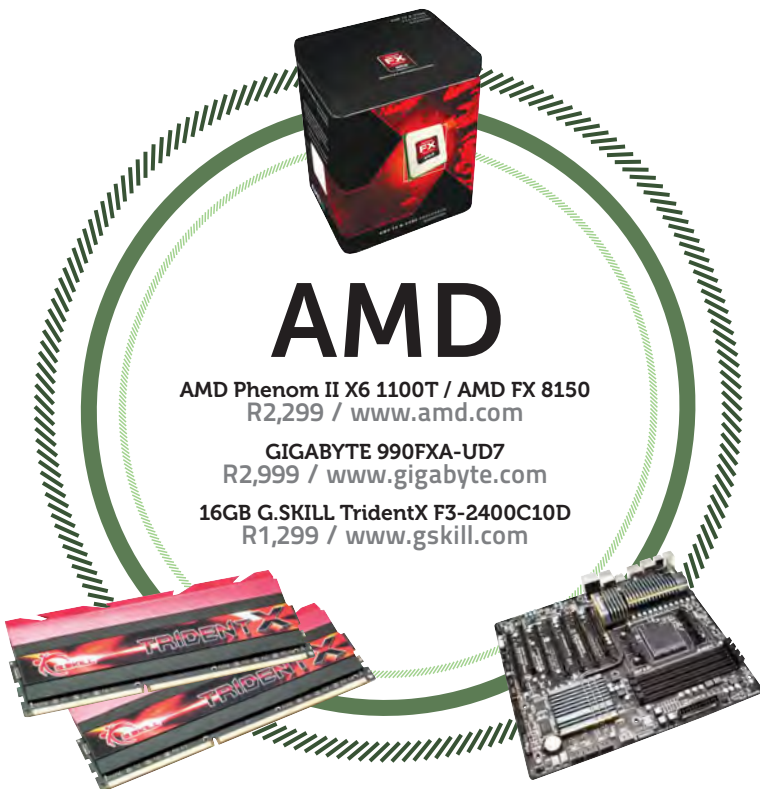## Intel Dream Machine price:

R61,432

AMD

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

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

16GB G.SKILL TridentX F3-2400C10D
R1,299 / www.gskill.com

AMD Dream Machine price:

R41,533

Hardwired

How good situations turn bad

The tech landscape is never boring towards the end of the year. Especially right now in this dismal economy; virtually every IT company around has posted lacklustre to downright appalling results. This is an economic downturn and, despite claims by several people who are supposedly in the know, the truth is all we can do is hope next year is better. It's not the absence of compelling products that has caused this: people (end users) simply don't have any money for basics let alone luxury items, which account for the vast majority of items sold by these IT firms.

It's peculiar then, that in such an economic climate, NVIDIA would choose to for all intents and purposes take such curious positions to their partners and ultimately the end user. You see, the situation that NVIDIA now faces is one that initially had them at an advantage, but at present has them in a corner that is rather hard to get out from.

From a position of power, where they looked certain to capitalize in all relevant ways from their products, to one where they've all but lost relevance to the end user at least.

"The antagonizing nature of NVIDIA along with the anything but fair pricing of their parts all underpinned what is happening now."

Lost relevance to the end user means unhappy partners, as you can imagine. If demand for AMD GPUs grows, it's at the cost of NVIDIA offerings in this economy. Diminishing and saturated markets are being shared, not grown to accommodate both players. As of right now, AMD has released a second set of graphics card drivers in addition to the performance set released with the GHz edition 7970. This new driver set offers performance boosts across the board, bundled game promotions (unreleased games at the time of writing) and discounts for all their products as well and finally price drops. So not only has AMD refined their existing products, they've made them cheaper, better and more appealing as a family. There's simply no reason to buy anything from NVIDIA right now, whether you're a competitive overclocker or gamer.

The stereoscopic experience is still better on NVIDIA's ecosystem, significantly so, but that is a mere fraction of the gaming market. The GHz edition 7970 is officially faster than the GTX 680; it's cheaper as well and you get a game for buying one and possibly massive discounts on other select titles. There are no overclocking limitations on the HD7970 and with the new driver even 3DMark11 performance has improved significantly enough to challenge NVIDIA's dominant position. So as it stands, the list of reasons for buying NVIDIA is much smaller than the list against buying their products.

This is throughout the entire range as well. The products are solid, but in light of alternatives from AMD, the incentives are pitiful to non-existent for NVIDIA. The effects of this closing quarter will only be felt much later, but I'd put to you that it began with a redirection and shifting in attitude by NVIDIA towards the end users. The antagonizing nature of NVIDIA along with the anything but fair pricing of their parts all underpinned what is happening now. With such head-strong leadership and a consistent track record of management decisions that are never reversed, the end of 2013, just may be AMD's best Q4 ever despite their staggering financial losses.
- Neo Sibeko

Evetech SilverStone Fortress high-end gaming PC

HARDWARE

Website www.evetech.co.za   **RRP** R21,999

When Evetech sent us this machine to review, they told us to expect a spectacular chassis, something that would really stand out. So, when it arrived, we looked at the picture on the box – it looked kind of humdrum, slick but not particularly special. Then we took it out of the box and tried to find out how the hell to put it down on the desk… Yes, it's that special, at first in that "special kid at the back of the class" kind of way, but once we opened it up and started poking around inside, we realised that this prebuilt PC from Evetech is housed in one of the finest cases we've ever seen. Oh, and the stuff inside is pretty neat too.

IT'S SO PRETTY!

Boot up this machine and you'll notice one thing above all: those dancing LEDs on the RAM, which led us to dub this PC the Disco Death Star. And, thanks to the massive side panel window, you'll have plenty of viewing space to see those lights in action during gameplay.

SPECIAL NEEDS

Simply put, the SilverStone Fortress has been turned on its side. Not the side that you'd think, but along the other axis. In this orientation, three massive fans suck up air from the underside of the case and blow it directly onto the hard drives, graphics cards and across the motherboard. This setup is perfectly suited to builds with large graphics cards in SLI/CrossFire configuration as the cold air flows along the graphics cards, not right at them where a single card gets most of the attention. And, boy, what cards they are. Evetech has chosen to fit two hefty HD 7950s into this beast that stand upright – dominant and phalanx-like – inside the case.

WHERE DO I STICK THIS THING?

With a machine that's standing on its side, you might wonder where exactly the "back" has gone. To the top, of course, and this has a couple of implications, both good and bad, that you should be aware of. The downside to this arrangement is that every time you wish to plug or unplug one of your devices from the "rear" IO ports, you have to first remove the mesh shroud. Not the biggest inconvenience but certainly worth noting. On the flipside, all of those cables run through a port at the (actual) rear of the machine – neat and tidy – but then that means all of your cables are effectively shortened. If you're already pushing the limits of the length of any of your cables, you'll do well to buy an extension if you pick up this machine.

KEEPING IT COOL

An interesting factor in the make-up of this

POWER OVERWHELMING

machine is that the power supply has returned to its original position at the top of the case, where it acts as a part of the system's hot air extraction, along with the Corsair water-cooling radiator and video cards – there is no other extraction in this case. What impact that will have on the longevity of the components remains to be seen, but then, when you're pumping in this amount of cool air to begin with, we imagine that the effects will be negligible. As it stands, we measured a peak temperature on the CPU of just 63° during our benchmarks. Considering that the majority of the machine's warm air is being vented through the water-cooling unit, we find that impressive.

This is by far the most powerful prebuilt machine we've had in for review, pulling in an impressive 3DMark11 Extreme score of 5,215. Of course, with this level of cooling, you're well equipped to overclock the video cards beyond the factory OC and push up that score even further. Our other synthetic benchmark test, PCMark7, didn't make quite the same fanfare, but a score of 6,117 is highly respectable nonetheless. On the gaming front, we were very impressed: *Hard Reset* ran at an average frame-rate of 143.9 at its highest settings, and the GPU-annihilating *Sniper Elite,* which was also cranked up to full, trundled along at 54.4 frames per second.   **NAG**

PROS
- Phenomenal performance
- Unique yet practical chassis design
- Awesome aesthetics

CONS
- Cabling solution might not appeal to everyone

ALTERNATIVES
- Build it yourself

TECHNICAL

CPU
Intel Core i7-3770K OC to 4.6GHz

Motherboard
MSI Big BANG MPOWER Z77

GPU
2x MSI Twin Frozr Radeon HD 7950 3GB 384bit OC

RAM
4x 4GB Crucial Ballistix Tactical Tracer 1,600MHz LED

Storage
OCZ Agility 3 240GB SSD / Seagate 1TB HDD

PSU:
Corsair Gaming Series GS800 800W

Cooling
Corsair Hydro H80

Chassis:
SilverStone Fortress FT02

Optical drive
LG 14x dual layer Blu-Ray writer

Warranty
24 months

HARDWARE

ASRock Z77 OC Formula

Distributor TVR   **Website** www.asrock.com   **RRP** R2,799

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: ASUS Rampage IV Extreme

3DMark Vantage CPU	32,991
	46,760
Cinebench 11.5	9.40
	13.43
AIDA 64 copy	28,929MB/s
	20,396MB/s
3DMark03	119,536
	127,025

The ASRock Z77 OC Formula is easily, and we do mean easily, the best motherboard to come from ASRock. However, before we delve deeper into what that actually translates into, let's tell you what's wrong with it first.

Why ASRock felt the need to have some of the worst music playing when you're in the BIOS by default is beyond puzzling. No other vendor has thought to have music in the background and that's because it's not only unnecessary but such a "feature", if you can call it that, will always make more people unhappy than it pleases. So we can't say that's a design oversight, but probably a terrible idea that for some reason remained unchallenged throughout the entire process of bringing this board to market.

The above however, is all we have to complain about concerning the OC Formula. An insignificant grievance to some indeed, but it is an issue nonetheless. Everything else about it though, is exceptional.

We've looked at boards from the legendary HiCookie, ones from Shamino (all ASUS ROG boards of late) but now we have the first true board from Nick Shih. It would be wrong to call this his baby, for some reason it just doesn't sound right. Nope, this is the board that was built around his needs and one that he himself spent hundreds of hours tuning to make it one that not only ASRock could be proud of, but he could put his name on.

Dare we say he has achieved both in a manner that no other vendor has. The list of overclocking options is not new and frankly not worth going into, it's the execution and presentation however that is staggering. The BIOS, despite its unfortunate music (which can be disabled mind you) is a marvel to work with. The number of tweaking and overclocking options is exhaustive but never overwhelming; it's the right mix of settings, layout and explanation.

BIOS options are easy though, what isn't is making sure that a motherboard is extraordinarily competent in performance in a measurable and repeatable manner. Well, the OC Formula is, and this is one of the strongest showings we've ever seen from a motherboard. It's not just in a single benchmark, but in every

benchmark and test around, the OC Formula is just faster than every other Z77 board around, including everything in the Maximus V family from ASUS.

How this was achieved will remain a secret but suffice to say, if you're a competitive overclocker you should seriously consider this board or at least have it in your arsenal. Indeed it's late to release such a product at this time with Haswell due in a few months, but all the great boards have traditionally been late to market, so we will not bemoan ASRock for this one.

The ASRock Extreme and Fatal1ty boards are by and large passable, but this one here stands out amongst them, almost as if it doesn't belong to the same family. In light of all this, the asking price for this board is low, as there isn't anything you can do on the ASUS Maximus V Gene that you can't do on the OC Formula and better actually. The Z77 OC-Formula is exceptional and by far the most impressive motherboard we've seen the entire year.

NAG
- Neo Sibeko

PLUS
• Unmatched performance
• Overclocking features
• Tweaking options

MINUS
• Annoying sound in the BIOS

BOTTOM LINE
The OC Formula is best motherboard to ever come out of ASRock and likely the best Z77 board around.

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BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: ASUS Rampage IV Extreme

3DMark Vantage CPU	32,437	**46,760**
Cinebench 11.5	9.42	**13.43**
AIDA 64 copy	28,489MB/s	**20,396MB/s**
3DMark03	112,487	**127,025**

HARDWARE

MSI Z77 MPOWER

Distributor Corex   **Website** www.msi.com   **RRP** R2,499

MSI has one of the best and worst reputations when it comes to overclocking hardware. This is probably because for the longest time, MSI made mediocre boards at best while they continued to make some of the best graphics cards money could buy.

So what that meant is that if you spoke about an MSI graphics card, enthusiasts would listen. Talk about motherboards and the jokes would start pouring in. A fair sentiment to some degree by said individuals because, unlike gamers and regular users, the requirements for an overclocking board are remarkably different.

In some areas a lesser motherboard is needed, but in most cases it's the other way around. As such, overclockers, constantly disappointed by motherboards which held great promise on paper but never materialized into useful boards helped build this unfortunate reputation. As with reputations in this industry though, they tend to outlast the truth of the matter and this is one such case where history has clouded people's judgements and the mere mention of an MSI motherboard could potentially rob them of a good product.

This is unfortunate, especially for the Z77 MPOWER, and no it is not because MSI insists on its capitalization, but because the MPOWER is actually good. In fact it's better than what many overclockers would like to believe or would admit to. Based on its own merits and caveats, this board is more favourable than a number of competing boards especially at this price. When looking to build a motherboard that would have an MSRP of $300, $400 or more, it's a little easier to garner people's positivity as a vendor merely bombards them with features, many of which are useless but prove nonetheless successful in parting people with their money.

The MPOWER then, at a low price, has no base clock, CPU multiplier or any other button on the board for overclocking save for the OC Genie. We believe MSI could have done without this as well, perhaps using the space to place the POST LED which at present is at a lamentable location. It's easily obscured by any respectable graphics card. Short of that complaint, there's little else to fault this board on. If anything, the BIOS on the MPOWER is something other vendors could stand to learn from.

As it is without question the most intuitive, smoothest and downright visually appealing UEFI interface we've ever seen. Its high resolution graphics, simplistic but comprehensive options and true GUI that make this an easy sell for us.

There are simply too many positive aspects about this UEFI interface to mention in this review, but some of them make us wonder why nobody but MSI had thought of this before.

For instance, BIOS profiles are not only customizable, but each profile has a BIOS version, date and time so you're always aware of what it is you are loading and from what BIOS revision. Updating the BIOS doesn't require you to have plugged the USB drive into the computer at BOOT, but you can do this anytime from within the UEFI. Boot order is simply a matter of dragging icons and arranging them in the desired order and saving screenshots within the interface allows you to name them as you please.

There are far too many such touches with the MPOWER to list them all, but suffice to say they make for one of the most compelling motherboards at this price. For overclocking, it lacks nothing and has all that you'd need. For the gamer, you could do a whole lot worse than this and pay more at the same time. From where we stand, this is a solid motherboard and one that hopefully changes overclockers and enthusiast's minds alike, when it comes to MSI motherboards.

- Neo Sibeko

SPECS

Chipset
Intel Z77
Memory
4x 240-pin DDR3
CPU support
Intel Core i7 SNB IB (LGA1155)
Slots
3x PCIe 3.0 x16, 2x PCIe x1

PLUS
• Smoothest BIOS on the market
• Very easy to overclock
• Solid performance

MINUS
• Odd placement of the POST LED
• No overclocking buttons on board
• No mSATA

BOTTOM LINE
MSI's most refined motherboard to date is also one of the most impressive boards we've ever come across.

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CUTTING EDGE REVIEWS

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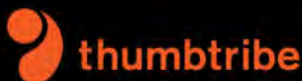
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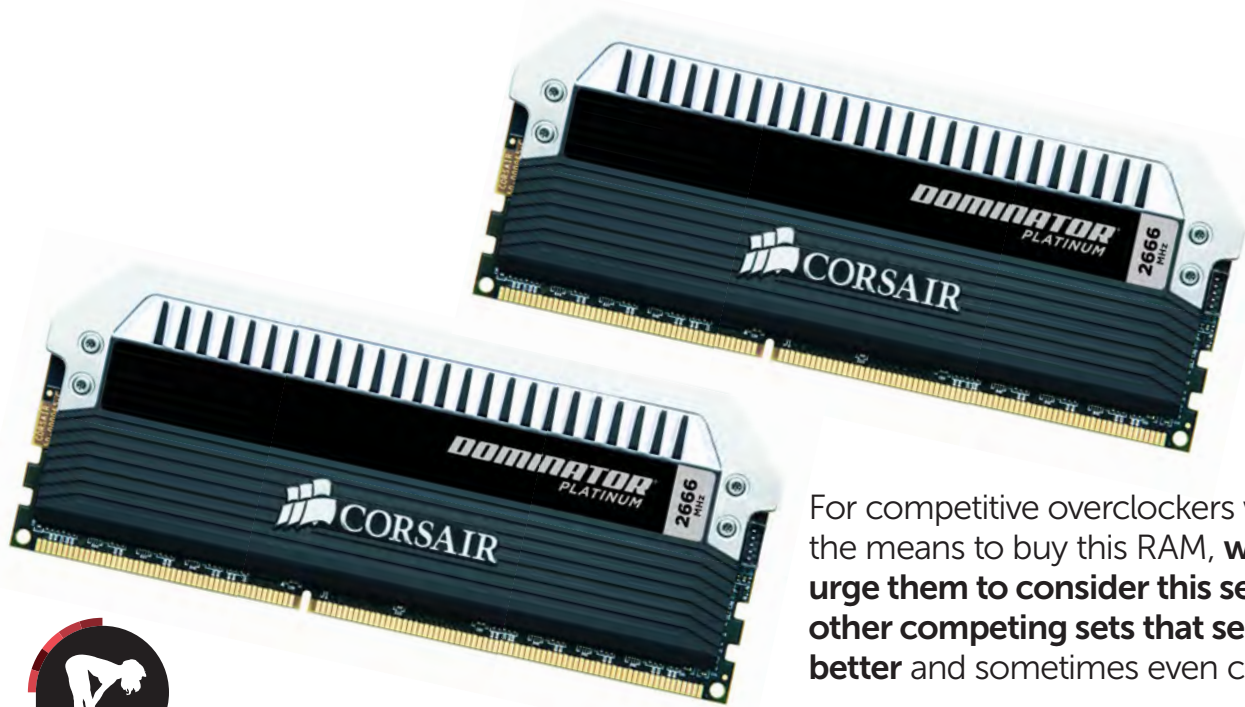
For competitive overclockers who have the means to buy this RAM, **we would urge them to consider this set over the other competing sets that seem to be better** and sometimes even cheaper.

DREAM MACHINE

Corsair Dominator Platinum 2666C10 16GB kit

Supplier Corsair   **Website** www.corsair.com   **RRP** R4,999

DRAM pricing hit an all-time low earlier this year with 16GB of RAM at under $20 for bulk purchases. With such low pricing, one would think that the days of paying more than the cost of the highest end graphics card on the market were over, but this couldn't be further from the truth.

This set for instance is supremely expensive, in fact the most expensive set of memory we've ever reviewed at NAG. More than that, we found out that this isn't the most expensive kit in Corsair's Dominator family. So you should prepare yourself for prices north side of R4,000 for 16GB of this RAM when it's eventually available for retail.

What does all this money buy you? Well, it buys you a highly binned set, possibly the highest binned set in the entire Dominator range. As a result of this special binning process what we essentially have is the rarest kind of performance memory. At present, it's easier to find the 2,800 CL11 and 2,600 CL11 kits as opposed to this particular 2,666 C10 set.

Corsair would never come out and say this directly, but having spent some time speaking with a very knowledgeable insider in the DRAM business from another vendor, they revealed to us just how difficult it was to select ICs that were capable of the settings this set is sold at. Exactly what are the timings of this set you ask? 10-12-12-31-2T at 2,666MHz which certainly doesn't seem special in any way, right? Well, consider that these are Hynix high speed ICs. The days of PSC and BBSE ICs where timings such as CL8-8-8-24 were possible are all but over. The memory used on this set is we would argue even more impressive.

Despite all this, what made us choose this set as our new Dream Machine kit is what it can do on a capable board like the Z77 OC Formula or the Rampage IV Extreme provided you have a sufficiently competent IMC. At a little less than the X.M.P profile settings at 2,666MHz, we were able to run the RAM at 9-11-11-28-1N and 2,600MHz which is nothing short of amazing. If these settings don't look convincing you should try and find any set of memory on sale today or at any other time that had these settings at this speed. This wasn't a special overclocked setting with increased VCIO and VSA voltages, tuned secondary or tertiary settings, but just the primary settings lowered, by a single value while the DRAM voltage was adjusted to 1.7V

We've tried several 2,800MHz kits (in the next issue) and none of them were able to match the settings of the Dominator Platinum kit at any speed. Further confirming what we were told by the aforementioned industry insider. That some 2,800MHz kits are cheaper than this set or at least much easier to find through the retail chain is further testament to this.

The most impressive feat this RAM achieved though was the ease in which we reached 2,800MHz. In addition to the frequency of the memory we achieved this speed with the reference timings of 10-12-2-28-1N which as we mentioned earlier, other 2,800MHz sets can't attain at 2,666MHz. The selection process for the ICs that are used for this RAM is obviously much more stringent than with the other sets, hence the very high price and rarity.

For competitive overclockers who have the means to buy this RAM, we would urge them to consider this set over the other competing sets that seem to be better and sometimes even cheaper. It's a huge investment, but you can be sure that this memory will scale with any CPU IMC around. The Dominator Platinums cost a small fortune, but no other memory we've ever come across performs like this or overclocks this well. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

SPECS
Capacity
16GB (4GBx4)
Frequency
2,666MHz
Voltage
1.65V
Timings
10-12-12-31
XMP
Yes 1.3

PLUS
• Looks great
• Overclocking headroom

MINUS
• Eye wateringly expensive
• Rare

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

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site Creator

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"You'll get triple-monitor support, **via DisplayPort, DVI and HDMI, gigabit LAN**, HD audio and USB 3.0."
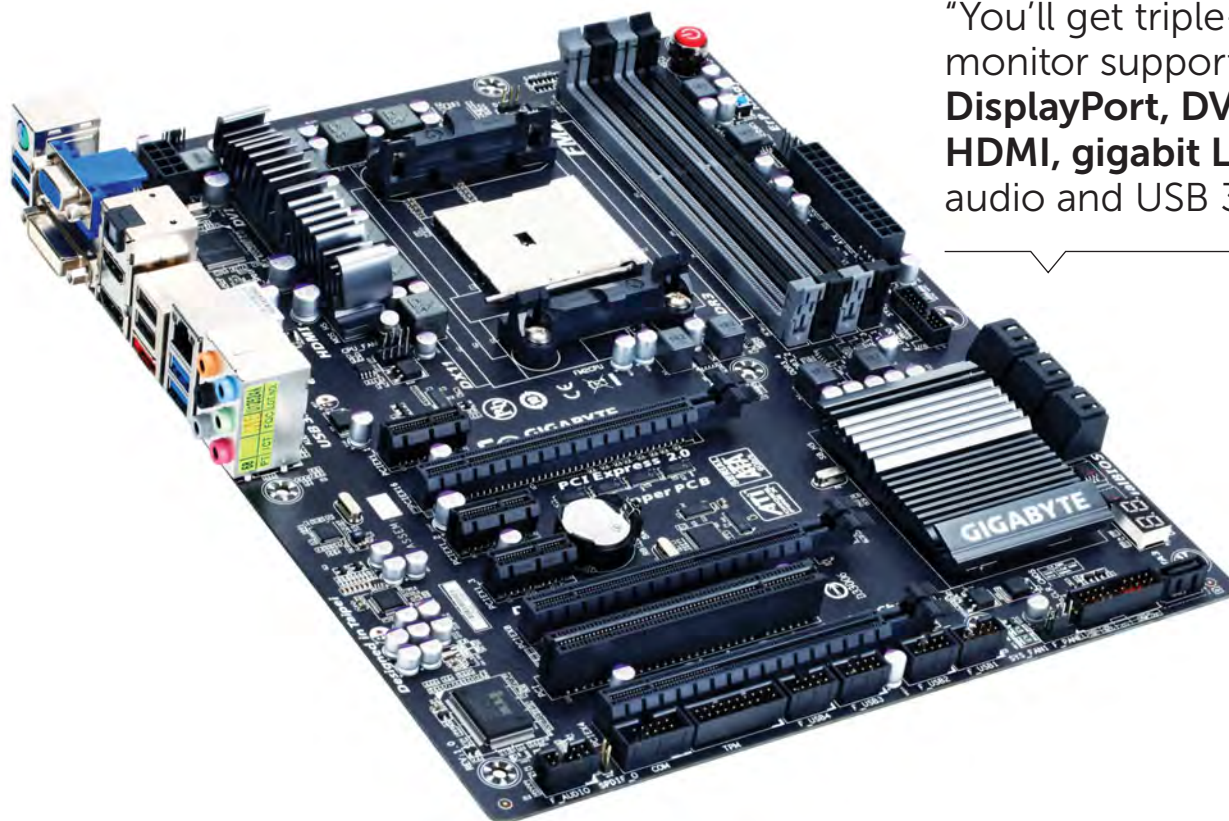
GIGABYTE F2A85X-UP4

Distributor Rectron   **Website** www.gigabyte.com   **RRP** TBA

It's always going to be difficult for any vendor to try and sell a motherboard for any platform at a higher price than the most expensive CPU SKU for that platform. For X58 and X79, motherboards costing $600, while monstrously expensive, made sense because the high-end CPUs of each of those platforms sold for more than this. As such, there was some sensibility in selling a motherboard for such a price. With AMD boards though, this isn't the case. AMD has positioned itself as a value alternative to Intel and even with their latest desktop processors, the highest price for the premium CPU is less than $200. So what that means is that every vendor has to limit their board prices.

With FM2 CPUs, the 5800K is $130, so you can understand why GIGABYTE along with others have an artificial ceiling for their offerings, as very few people would find value in the 5800K APU, then proceed to match it with a $200 mainboard. That doesn't work and in many ways would be to miss the point of the entire platform. As such, it's interesting to see just how much GIGABYTE has managed to cram into a limited pricing platform as this one.

As the best offering for the FM2 socket, GIGABYTE has sought to outfit as many of the technologies the company is known for and that's essentially what

we have here: the best platform the AMD APUs can be on currently.

There's not much to be said for performance hence no benchmarks as there are no repeatable or at least consistent variances between FM2 motherboards to warrant benchmarks. All the vendors provide identical performance and the competition is within the confines of pricing and features. To GIGABYTE's benefit, value add features are the single thing they have always been good at and this holds true for the UP4 as well.

You'll get triple-monitor support, via DisplayPort, DVI and HDMI, gigabit LAN, HD audio and USB 3.0. In addition you'll get CrossFire support for two discreet cards (one on the 16X slot and another electrically limited to 8X), Hybrid CrossFire and the ability to use Lucid's Virtu MVP software as made famous by the Z77 platform. This isn't a given, because there's actually a licencing fee for the feature, so to get it on such a board with such a low price is remarkable.

Another unusual feature is the power, reset buttons along with the POST LED. All of which are on this board. They seem simple enough, but remember once again the price point we are looking at. Every one of these features drives up the price, including the additional USB 3.0 motherboard header and SATA port via

a 3rd party controller. An 8-phase PWM power system completes the board and as stated earlier, what you have then are GIGABYTE's typical features squeezed into a very low selling price.

As for the BIOS, it's sufficient as GIGABYTE's typical 3D BIOS affair. It's not the best, not by a long shot, but steady improvements have been coming across all the motherboards. As it stands it behaves as one would expect, so there's not much to be said there. While on the subject of the BIOS, a feature we may not have mentioned is that the UP4 also has a dual BIOS system, along with the profiles and the like you find on the significantly more expensive Intel boards.

Officially AMD's APUs do not provide support for anything higher than 1,866MHz memory, but on the UP4 we were easily able to run 2,133MHz and we suspect even 2,400MHz may be possible with future BIOS updates. A small boon in the grand scheme of things but once again one that we can appreciate as it makes the board a little more attractive than others that are similarly priced.

As we stated in the beginning, the GIGABYTE F2A85X-UP4 is the best showing of AMD's APUs you're likely to find. Do give it some careful consideration if you're in the market.

— Neo Sibeko

SPECS
Chipset
AMD A85
Memory
4x 240-pin DDR3
CPU support
AMD FM2
Slots
3x PCIe 3.0 x16, 3x PCIe x1, PCI

PLUS
- 2,133MHz memory support
- Lots of value added features
- Decent overclocker

MINUS
- None

BOTTOM LINE
Currently the GIGABYTE F2A85X-UP4 is the best FM2 motherboard around, even if only because of its features and low price.

8

GIGABYTE GV-N65TOC-2GI

HARDWARE

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

Had it not been for AMD's 7850, NVIDIA's GTX 650 Ti would have more than made up for the sad showing that was the original GTX 650. Since this isn't the first 650 Ti we've reviewed here, we'll spare you the details and try to illustrate to you why, when looking at such low to mid-range cards, every advantage matters.

As these parts are very price sensitive, there's absolutely no point in designing an elaborate cooler or PCB to house such a GPU. The 650 Ti is, as far as we are concerned, the best showing of the 650 series and ideally should have been the only SKU here. With that said, GIGABYTE's card is more on the conservative side and rightfully so. The last GTX 650 we looked at was from a competing vendor and it performed admirably, featuring a beefed up cooler and obviously support for MSI's Afterburner program for enhanced overclocking.

Well, the GIGABYTE card is essentially a lesser card in several ways, but at the same time the better of the two, if only because it has a higher clock speed out the box. The difference is negligible and mostly cosmetic (993MHz on the previous card vs. 1032MHz on this sample) and does nothing for gaming, but as mentioned above, every advantage counts at this price point.

By virtue of this small change alone, every benchmark we ran comparing the two cards obviously had this sample ahead, even if it was mostly by a single frame or two at the most. So one then would think the overclocking headroom would be better on this card given its higher retailing speed. Well, it is, but that is purely because the GPU sample just happens to be a better one than the one on the competing card. Things could have been the other way around. Regardless, if the Power edition was impressive, the GIGABYTE OC edition is even better.
NAG
— Neo Sibeko

9

SPECS
Core
1.032GHz
GK106-A300
(28nm)
Processors
768
Render outputs
16
Memory
1,024MB GDDR5
5.4GHz (86.4GB/sec)
API
DirectX 11.1
OpenGL 4.x
OpenCL 1.X
PhysX

PLUS
• Silent
• Overclocking headroom

MINUS
• Uninspired design

BOTTOM LINE
A simple enough GTX 650 Ti graphics card, but one with the highest GPU clock of them all.

GIGABYTE Aivia M8600 V.2

Supplier Rectron   **Website** www.rectron.co.za   **RRP** R1,050

GIGABYTE has tried to edge into the high-end gaming peripheral market for a while now. The Aivia is probably their best effort to date, sporting edgy but not brash ambidextrous styling and all the specifications you'd expect at this level, but despite the inclusion of some impressive stats, it just doesn't perform as well as the reigning champs.

I have never before encountered a wireless mouse with so many options to keep it charged: there's a separate clip-in USB cable to turn it into a wired mouse; two rechargeable batteries so there's always one ready to be swapped in; and a docking station/receiver onto which you can put the mouse when it's not in use. You really will have to go out of your way to run into a depleted battery when using this mouse.

But spend just a few minutes using the Aivia and you'll realise there's something amiss. It handles large travel perfectly, but slower, precise movements are a pain. Despite the maximum resolution of 6,500 DPI there bizarrely isn't enough fidelity at this level, which causes one to spend too much time lining up the perfect headshot.

Hold this mouse for anything longer than those few minutes using a palm grip and you'll soon realise another glaring fault: the harsh angular palm rest that stabs into the middle of your hand during use. This practically forces players to adopt a claw style grip, which thankfully this device accommodates well enough with its plentiful textured side rests, but then there's that problem we often see with ambidextrous mice: the inclusion of two macro buttons on the "other" side, which you'll find yourself pressing accidentally more often than is acceptable. Best to just disable those.

NAG
- Geoff Burrows

7

SPECS
Sensor
up to 6,500 DPI
Polling rate
1,000 reports/second
Programmable buttons
10
Onboard memory
32Kb
Battery capacity
2x 1,500mAh

PLUS
• Ambidextrous
• Great specs
• Plenty of recharging options

MINUS
• Poor handling of precision movements
• Uncomfortable palm rest
• Outside buttons too easily pressed

BOTTOM LINE
A driver update will likely bump up this mouse to a higher level, but it'll always be held back from perfection by poor ergonomics.

Razer Imperator

Supplier Razer   **Website** www.razerzone.com   **RRP** R649

Razer's Imperator is a no-nonsense offering from the celebrated gaming peripheral manufacturer. It's a gaming mouse that aims to be great at what it does, without overselling any fancy, but ultimately superfluous features. As such, it's all about accuracy, sensitivity and tracking ability – and it's perfectly good at all that.

Aesthetically, it's instantly familiar as a Razer product. It's a lengthy right-handed mouse and heavily contoured; it's well suited to gamers with a claw grip, but those who keep their grip flush with the mouse may find the shape of the mouse and its contours make gripping it a bit uncomfortable after a time. It's also quite a light mouse, weighing just 139 grams with no weight system to adjust it, which might not be ideal for those who like a heavier mouse for more deliberate movement.

A nice addition is the inclusion of a tab on the bottom of the mouse that lets you move the position of the two side buttons back and forth along the left side of the mouse, so that you can position it for more natural access. As we've come to expect, sensitivity can be adjusted on the fly via two DPI-switching buttons just below the mouse wheel – but unfortunately, there's no built-in indicator for what setting you're currently running. Install the Imperator's driver suite, and you get an on-screen graphic that pops up when you toggle the DPI setting – but it'd have been nice to get a quick indication from the mouse.

The ludicrously high DPI limit and supposedly superior lift tracking offered by its dual sensor system honestly did not make a noticeable impact on my gaming, but it's nonetheless a good choice for those looking for what it offers.

NAG
- Dane Remendes

8

SPECS
Sensor
6,400 DPI 4G Dual Sensor System
Buttons
Seven, programmable
Acceleration
Up to 200 inches per second / 50g acceleration
Onboard memory
Razer Synapse onboard memory
Weight
139 grams

PLUS
• Customisable side button placement
• Quality build and performance

MINUS
• No built-in DPI indicator

BOTTOM LINE
Razer's Imperator is a good gaming mouse, despite a couple of niggles.

CMStorm Trigger mechanical keyboard

Distributor Sonic Informed   **Website** www.cmstorm.com   **RRP** R1,199

If you are wondering why everyone has a gaming keyboard, mouse, mouse mat and bungee, it's primarily because (a) gaming is as always growing so there's always a new potential customer; and (b) the margins on gaming peripherals, despite the overabundance of competitors, are still relatively high. Obviously this is provided you can sell enough of your chosen peripherals, but in Cooler Master's case we doubt if this would ever be an issue.

What the Trigger, or any other gaming keyboard for that matter, offers you is essentially the same: mechanical switches, lights, lots of weight, profiles, built in memory, multimedia keys and a couple of USB connections to wrap it all up. Gone are the days of excessive macro keys which were used to lure gamers into substandard keyboards which only had an inordinate amount of additional keys going for them.

What we described above could be any keyboard from any number of vendors and despite what the marketing may say, this is essentially what the CMStorm Trigger is. It's a mechanical keyboard with all the trappings of many others just like it on the market. The Trigger does look good though, probably because of the two tone colour scheme and red lights, but for the most part it's a standard pro gamer's keyboard. One of two complaints we have is that we'd have preferred dedicated multimedia keys instead of sharing their function with the F keys. Another that we may level at virtually every vendor is their insatiable need to have every key be mechanical, when there's clearly no need for it. Small issues though in an otherwise sound keyboard.

As with all mechanical keyboards it's going to cost quite a bit more than regular membrane alternative, but for that you do get a better keyboard to game on (for a fair number of people at least). The CMStorm Trigger isn't too different from what you know already, but does have a few novel features. Consider it if you're a fan of the brand or are just looking for an above average gaming keyboard.   **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

7

simfy africa

Supplier simfy africa   **Website** www.simfy.co.za   **RRP** R60 per month

There's no shortage of digital music services these days. If you're of the opinion that the music CD is dead, it's entirely possible to live that belief: music from the most obscure indies to the biggest names in pop is available through services like last.fm, iTunes, Zune, Grooveshark and Spotify, but we're often left out in the rain down here in our little corner of the continent. Now, simfy, a music streaming service founded in Europe, has made itself available locally with an excellent price and sizeable music library.

Once signed up, users gain unlimited access to the service's current library of over 18 million tracks to stream through the desktop or mobile apps at their leisure. The library is what you'd expect for one of this size: practically all music from popular artists and bands are present, and there's a spotty but sometimes surprising assortment of tracks from the more obscure musicians. If your music tastes are somewhere in the middle then you should have no trouble finding enough to listen to.

While the service itself is solid, the apps are a let-down with touches of brilliance mashed into a sloppy user experience (although we have been assured by simfy that updated apps are in development). From a downright clunky interface to the painful method of managing offline (and heavily DRM-protected) tracks, you'll have a hard time getting comfortable with the way simfy expects you to operate. The best part of the app is its radio, which plays music from selected genres, but then those genres are too broad and you'll often find music of varied sorts lumped together. Additionally, there's no information on any artists or bands, not even a link to their official page, which makes the discover mode a limited experience that could be so much better.   **NAG**
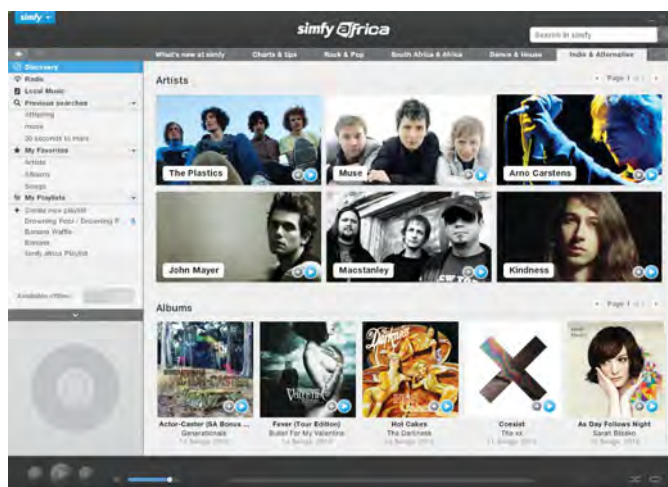
- Geoff Burrows

7

Thonet & Vander Dass

Supplier Musica   **Website** www.musica.co.za   **RRP** R999.95

Having never heard of Thonet & Vander before, I'd no idea what to expect from the Dass speaker set. It's a 2.1 offering, marketed squarely at gamers. In the box you'll find two chunky satellites, a sizable subwoofer and cables for connecting it all to your PC (via a single 3.5mm audio jack) or your TV's audio outputs. That same 3.5mm jack allows you to use them with portable media players and such if you so choose.

The first immediately noticeable and annoying aspect of the set is that the controls are located on the side of the subwoofer – obviously not an ideal spot if, say, your subwoofer rests on the floor, out of reach. It's a really silly design decision, and it's here that you'll find the on/off switch, as well as volume, treble and bass adjustment dials. Sidestep this little irritation and you'll find a speaker set that performs well when gaming and watching movies. Dialogue is clean and clear and explosions rumble ominously from the impressively powerful subwoofer. What they lack in volume, they make up for in clarity when the volume is pushed as high as it'll go. For music, however, the set falters a bit, with a tinny high-end (particularly noticeable when you adjust the bass not far below its highest setting) that often blends together with mid-range tones and muddies up the audio produced, especially with the treble partially dialled down.

Choosing these speakers over other sets will prove a difficult decision, particularly since, for a similar price, you could get a full 5.1 speaker system from Logitech that offers a quality audio experience. Bear in mind that the Dass is by no means a bad set of 2.1 speakers, but if you're looking for music speakers only, then this might not be your best option.   **NAG**

- Dane Remendes

7

MSI GTX 660 Hawk

Supplier Corex

Website www.msi.com   **RRP** TBA

HARDWARE

It's largely established by the enthusiast community that MSI makes the best graphics cards out of all the vendors. This is through some very interesting design decisions that have their origins ways back in 2008 when we first witnessed the Lightning cards that we've now grown to respect immensely. MSI has carried on this tradition of making graphics cards for enthusiasts and gamers without compromise, and with each generation of graphics cards, have produced the best.

Part of this mastery comes from the uncompromising electrical circuitry, the complete abandoning of reference designs for their specialized parts and of course, overclocking headroom as a result of these design decisions. As with all things however, the more you vary from the reference design, the higher the BOP. In this case it's easy to tell that the GTX 660 Hawk is expensive to manufacture. No other GTX 660 or even 660 Ti save for one from MSI themselves features a 10-phase PWM (two for the memory and eight for the GPU). Add a superior PCB, Samsung 6GHz GDDR5 memory, a dual BIOS system and the GPU reactor for additional voltage filtering, and you end up with the highest quality GTX 660 on the market. We do wonder however, given the price region the GTX 660 occupies, if it's worth putting so much effort into it.

After all you can easily find a reference GTX 660 Ti for the same price as this card in the USA, so that pricing structure could very well be echoed here. It's good then that out the box the GTX 660 Hawk comes fairly close to matching the GTX 660 Ti. With further overclocking, it more often than not delivers equal performance. So there's something to be said about all the additional circuitry that you are paying for. As far as GTX 660s are concerned you'll not find a better one anywhere from any vendor.   **NAG**

— Neo Sibeko

9

SPECS
Core
1.085GHz GK106 (28nm)
Processors
960
Render outputs
24
Memory
2,048MB GDDR5 6GHz (144.2GB/sec)
API
DirectX 11.1
OpenGL 4.x
OpenCL 1.X
PhysX

PLUS
• Superior component and build quality

MINUS
• Price may be an issue

BOTTOM LINE
The MSI GTX 660 Hawk is easily the best 660 you can buy; price may be an issue however.

GG

Don't be a dick

You've probably already heard of John Gabriel's Greater Internet F***wad Theory. If it's your first day on the planet, though, it's a simple scientific formula governing just about all idiosyncratic aspects of communication on the internet. Basically:

Normal person + anonymity + audience = greater f***wad

Now everything makes much more sense, doesn't it?

There's just something about anonymity – I'm going to go ahead and hypothesise that it's the total lack of personal accountability and any of its attendant accessories like, you know, *consequences* – that invests some people with the sort of unequivocal capacity for outrageous villainy usually reserved for tin-pot tyrants in low budget art films. In much the same way, I'm quite sure, it's all bad acting, with a special emphasis on "bad".

Just several weeks ago, Violentacrez - the self-styled "creepy uncle" of Reddit[1] – was simply Violentacrez, the self-styled "creepy uncle" of Reddit. An awfully appropriate description too, given his provocative predilections for child porn, racism, violence against women, rape, "creepshots", and other grotesque excesses of pseudonymous sociopathy. One of his most notorious contributions to Reddit was a sub-forum called "picsofdeadkids". You get the idea.

All that came to a very abrupt conclusion, however, when Violentacrez was publically outed by Gawker's Adrian Chen as one Michael Brutsch, 49, of Dallas, Texas. With a real person now attached to his online alias, real reality caught up with him in a major way – the kind where he became an instant social pariah[2], and an instantly unemployed one at that[3] - with nothing but the tragically predictable appeal to "free speech" to make up for it.

The thing about free speech, of course, is that it's not the exclusive property of those people who like to say

"Just because you *can* say whatever you want isn't necessarily a good reason to do so..."

vile stuff without public censure – nor is it any reliable indemnity *against* that public censure. Just because you *can* say whatever you want isn't necessarily a good reason to do so, and remember, nobody is obligated to be nice to bullies, assholes, or other greater f***wads of any kind whatsoever. So don't be one.

~

On that totally edifying note then, have a super holiday and New Year and assuming the world doesn't end on 21 December (spoiler: it won't), I'll be back in 2013. **NAG**
- Tarryn van der Byl

1 The so-called "front page of the Internet", but more closely resembling the turd-clogged scraps of toilet paper stuck to its unwashed bum.

2 Not that he's taking responsibility for any of it, mind you. "I was playing to an audience of college kids," he told CNN in a post-drama interview, before blaming everything on meaningless internet points and the "Violentacrez character" that is conveniently distinguished from Michael Brutsch's own. Lesson learned? Not really.

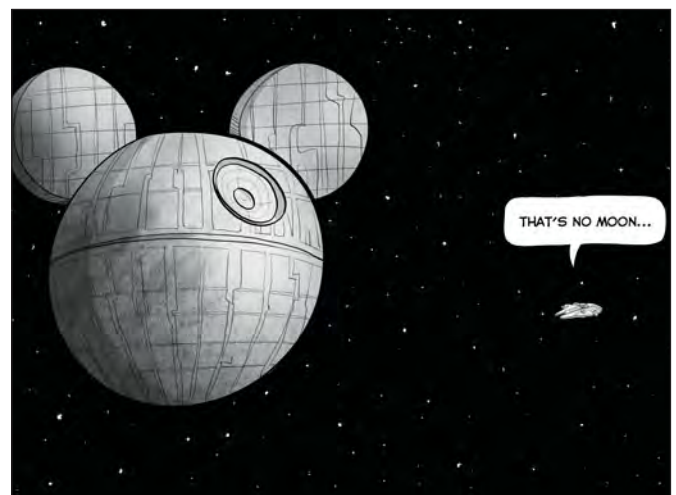**3** He worked for a payday loan company. So pretty much an IRL troll too.

Extra Life
By Scott Johnson – ©2012 All rights reserved – Myextralife.com

#1 Hot dog horror

EVEN HOT DOGS ARE SHOCKED WHEN THEY FIND OUT HOW THEY'RE MADE.

#2 No Moon

THAT'S NO MOON...

Brrrrr

Coca-Cola

www.coke.co.za