

NAG

PC / PLAYSTATION / XBOX / NINTENDO

*The best and
worst of 2012*

We give awards to things –
not in a traditional way...

Reviews

Call of Duty:

Black Ops II

ZombiU

Hitman:

Absolution

+ MORE

A detailed illustration of a character from the video game BioShock Infinite. The character is a man with short brown hair, wearing a dark green herringbone vest over a white shirt and a red tie. He has a large, ornate, golden revolver with a wooden handle slung over his shoulder. He is looking down and to the left with a serious expression. The background is a bright, hazy sky with some orange and red streaks, suggesting a sunset or a battle scene. The overall style is cinematic and detailed.

BioShock Infinite

Look! Up in the sky!

BIG TH ARE



SKYLANDS GIANTS



PS3 Wii



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WHERE TECHNOLOGY & HUMANITY MEET

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ON THE DOT

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this magazine when you're finished with it.

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24 THE BEST AND WORST OF 2012

We like to think we're totally non-conformist, maaaaan. Screw the corporations. Maaaaan, etc. So when we do a "Best of [Year X]" list, we like to do it our way. Here are the best, the worst, the weirdest and, most importantly, the most memorable of all our gaming experiences in 2012. Here's to 2013 being an equally memorable year in gaming!

34 BIOSHOCK INFINITE

How do you take one of the most influential, most evocative experiences of this generation and make it even more so? You take to the skies, of course. Miktar's played a few hours of Irrational's *BioShock Infinite*, and it's left him breathless – but filled with beautiful, descriptive words. Go read them.



CRYSIS 3

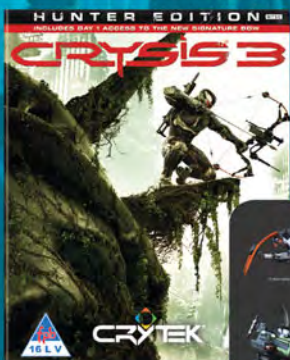
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And so begins 2013 :)

Considering the hectic schedule we run here at NAG I'm in a constant state of awe and amazement and (most important) gratefulness that things don't go pear shaped each month. Every issue of NAG is like a little miracle that happens, not thanks to us, but rather some all-powerful cosmic entity or force we don't yet understand, and only in our quietest moments, will contemplate even existing. Magazines aren't supposed to be run like this, but then I'm so far from being qualified to do this job I should be fired and then immediately arrested for fraud. But run it I do and I'm just thankful to those forces that make it happen each month regardless of me and my "style".

Not only must I thank those forces beyond my control but also the staff that work here. Everyone here has a critical role without which NAG wouldn't happen. So thanks go out to the great team here for an amazing 2012 and of course all those hundreds of people that make rAge happen each year too. Of course I must also thank all you readers for supporting NAG and rAge - remember, without you we are nothing.

I'm writing this text on 6 December so I am assuming the world didn't end and we all make it through to 2013. Next year (2013) is going to be different from the rest because I'm actually going to start working hard again. I've kind of taken 2012 "off" and I've been very lazy. My "recharge the batteries", "slow start to 2012" ended up lasting 12 months and now I'm getting bored with being lazy so it's time to apply myself in all departments. Watch this space.

Anyhow, I think that's more than enough about my twisted mind. Without further ado let's get back to seat of the pants magazine publishing. This issue's cover feature was written in an airplane coming back from a preview event in LA. Of course we (well the writers really) only fly economy class so you can imagine the terror. The cover artwork still hasn't arrived and we go to print tomorrow. Here's hoping it all works out okay. Honesty, I love the way this magazine works - it feels alive and interesting because we are forced to improvise on a daily basis. Not an issue goes by where we aren't making articles shorter or longer or using more or less screens and in some cases rushing reviews so we get it all in. We have a lot of fun putting it together and I hope this comes across to you when you experience it.

That's about it. I hope your year is full of awesome and remember to be nice to your fellow gamers.

THE FACTS

The issue is a little smaller than usual thanks to a stunning lack of game releases and subsequent advertising in January. We should be back to normal for the February issue but definitely for the March issue. You're not missing anything too important except for the review of *F1 Race Stars* - we had



MINECRAFT CRAZINESS

We love *Minecraft* and based on the many letters we get each month, so do many of you guys and girls. In our quest for epic game artwork featuring the NAG logo we sometimes get a gem. This is one of those times. This is what Isak Holtzhausen had to say about this creation, "A lot of people have built tricked out headquarters for NAG in *Minecraft*, but I felt that I had to

do something else. I built the Arkham city issue out of wool. It took me a mere eight hours to build and visualize. This is an achievement for me personally as my previous subject of construction took three days! I hope you enjoy gazing upon my creation, ahem, re-creation of this epic magazine. Keep on keeping on guys. :)"

to give that the cut because it wasn't written yet - my fault. At NAG our rule is what isn't done gets chopped out first. It's harsh but realistic. These game publishers are a bit silly sometimes. We all know people don't have money to throw around like they used to so spending is tight so why flood the market all at the same time. When will they learn?

I hope you're all ready for 2013. Let's hope it's a different year for gaming. **NAG**
- RedTide
Editor



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INBOX

LETTER OF THE MONTH JANUARY 2012

From: Brendan

Subject: Where did the fun go?

Max Payne 3. What a game, right? Brilliant story and a dark, intense action-shooter that took my breath away at every corner. I mean, stopping a [spoiler, Ed] operation, who saw that coming? But, whilst I enjoyed this game, it got me thinking that, are we getting too serious?

Let me explain. Remember back in the days of GTA San Andreas? That game was freaking awesome. You were a kickass black guy strolling around the streets of San Andreas, getting bitches and popping a large amount of cap in various asses. And it was fun. There were cheats that gave you flying cars, jet packs and other mods that really focussed on having a great time whilst playing. But more than just enjoyment, it brought laughter. It brought smiles. And that's what modern video games are lacking, that little bit of humour. Look at the modern GTA titles. Yeah, I'll concede they're brilliant and a bucket load of fun, but they're far too serious. Videogame developers are trying too hard to make it as close to real life as possible, and that just doesn't work for me. Playing video games is a form of escapism that allows you to transport your mind into another world, but I don't want to be surrounded by everyday horrific occurrences that go down in modern games. I want to be dealing with triple headed aliens that fart rainbows.

Now I'm not saying that the games of today that focus on realism are bad, they're not and games like Far Cry 3 look absolutely spiffing, but every now and then I need some fun in my life.

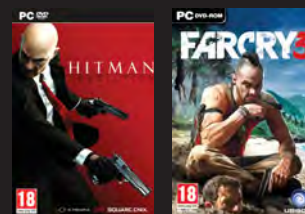
People, we live in South Africa, a country famous for a struggle, and I don't want to get home from another boring

school day where all that was discussed was the depressing state of the South African political system, to be confronted by more harsh realism. Hence, Saints Row: the Third. Yes, the graphics weren't up to par, and yes, there was room to improve. But my goodness, that game was the acid trip I needed. It opened my eyes to an ultimate realization. What was that I hear you scream? Well, we all need a break. We need games like Saints Row, and Bulletstorm to just take our minds away from the harsh reality. Yes, realistic games are the best out there, but sometimes we need a laugh and a smile. We need the game that laughs at itself and lets you have fun.

So in conclusion, yes, deep, engrossing and realistic, serious plot lines are what make the video game utterly amazing and a huge rival to the film industry. But now and then we need that breath of fresh air, that Tarantino-esque ballsiness that gives us a good time.

So what you're saying is you don't like serious subject matter in your happy fun gaming time? You also said you enjoyed playing the odd frivolous game too. So what we have here are some serious games and some light-hearted games available to play. This sounds a lot like movies, television and books – all with their own different ideas, different topics and different genres. So... gaming is like any entertainment medium with a wide variety of choices. Therefore it's up to you to pick and play what appeals to you. War and death do seem to be common themes in gaming – especially the bigger titles. It's just the nature of the beast and that nature dictates a higher demand for murder and killing. Ed.

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



LETTER OF THE MONTH

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

HARD TECHNICAL STUFF

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

game for example that was reviewed on a PS3/XBOX 360/PC and think "wow, this sounds really interesting, especially the open-world part of the game" and when they buy the actual game for their Vita/3DS the level design is basically more linear, and there are things that were in the review that aren't in the game etc. You don't have to do a whole new review, just point out the differences between the console and handheld versions and a different score.

That's a good point – one we've considered in the past. When we are given games we usually only get the PC or console versions. I'll ask the local distributors to send us the handheld versions too and we'll see about adding a bit of text to those applicable reviews. Ed.

From: Marius

Subject: Out with the old and in with the new

It's the time of year again when so many children experience joy all over the world. So now you're left thinking. Who is responsible? Well it's not MJ because his dead. It's not Santa because he doesn't exist. That means it can only be the guys at Treyarch. They have once again provided us with an awesome game.

Black Ops 2 has arrived. But before

From: Patrick

Subject: Portable vs. Console reviews

Hi there. I think you guys should do two reviews of games that are released on both: consoles/PC and handhelds: Vita/3DS etc. because of how vastly different they can be. Take the LEGO games for example, the handheld

versions are usually the "little sister" versions of the console one's (They have less content etc.) and are usually worse because of the way the console versions are treated more importantly, which in turn gives you a completely different game on your handheld. I just think it's unfair because handheld gamers will read a review for a LEGO

I continue I think we should have a moment of silence and pay our respects to its predecessor. Let's thank MW3 for what it has meant to us in the year we have played it. Thanks a lot MW3. LOL! You're the reason why I own noobs every day.

Let's get back to Black Ops 2. I got my care package edition 2 days after launch. One again I found myself going straight to multiplayer. I managed to catch up quickly. Is it me or are guys reaching the prestige's way too soon. Has the difficulty dropped or are we just accustomed to shooting the crap out of each other?

So now I'm back to same old routine. Get home in the morning after work. Play COD for 3 hours. Go to sleep. Wake up and go to work again. The rest of the week will be the same. Weekends will be different. I'll play 6 hours instead of 3. I'll occasionally pop in one of my other games. Normally it lasts only for a few minutes before I find myself going back to COD. What makes these games so addictive?

These games are designed to be addictive with locked content, progression bars, little medals and badges. You should see some of the hoops Chris had to jump through to get his golden knife. Your behaviour is exactly as planned so don't feel too bad – it's not your fault the game is making you do it. I do however suggest trying a different game, maybe create a map or write a story. The world can't just be full of brainwashed consumers – some of us have to create things. So break free. Ed.

From: Phillip
Subject: NAG Competitions

I have had a few questions on my mind regarding your SMS competitions. I have been signing up for them since I can remember, but have never had the opportunity and satisfaction of winning. My questions are as follows:

1. Who are these mythical judges?
2. What is the very objective of these contests?
3. What is the deal of those random phrases I receive after sending an SMS, are they an indication or are they just there?

I would appreciate it if you answered some, if not all, of my questions, as I am losing faith in whether or not to spend a precious R1.00 on a waste of time. Thanks for making such a kickass mag, keep up the good work, and may you prosper in your future endeavours *Spock hand sign*.

1. The "judges": this is computer software that randomly picks a winner from the tens of thousands of entries we get. Exact Mobile is the company we use and their system does the picking. We

ON THE FORUMS

We have a right not to listen to your ranting: www.nag.co.za/forums

Q: What genre do you feel is neglected in gaming these days?

"The rogue-like it seems that this genre is only ever made by indie companies which is a shame since I'm sure with more money to spend then we could get a truly addictive game."

Demikid

"+1 for good adventure games. Think Uncharted. That's some good sh*t right there."

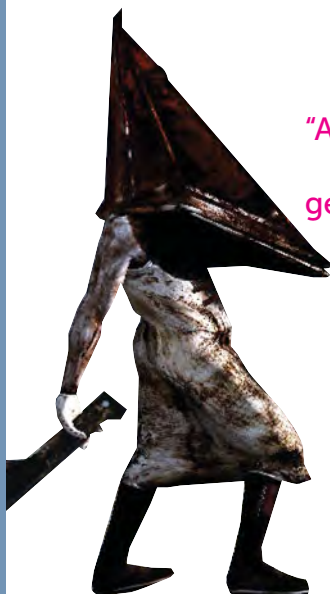
Toxxyc

"Arena shooters (Quake 3, Unreal Tournament etc.) the simplification of once complex genres in order to appeal to a wider audience, essentially the lack of complexity."

cov1e_stalker

"Psychological Horror. Like old school Silent Hill 2 kind of terror."

Goraan



could always use a technique described by Geoff and that is to toss a thousand computers into a tornado; the one that lands closest to a predetermined spot and still works is the one we will use to choose a random number. This way a random computer will pick a random number making it impossible to predict.

2. *The objective is to give cool stuff to our readers. ;) Sometimes companies try and promote their stuff by using competitions – regardless it's a win for you readers.*
3. *The random phrases are just there for fun because we're all about fun. They're not so random – we pick the reply to send to you and it's usually related to the competition because we're smart and we care.*

In my life I've entered many competitions, a few lotteries and so on. When I was 19 I won a VHS video machine on the radio and that's all I've ever won. It's just down to luck. Ed.

From: Sheldon
Subject: age restrictions

Hey all you guys at NAG thanks for the awesome magazine, now I want to talk about age restrictions, but dont worry I'm not going to complain about how I can't play these really awesome games (because I can) but I have noticed a trend. All of the games I see or play have high age restrictions, but if you look back a few years ago age restrictions were never as high as they are today, now I know with all the improved graphics and improved games comes all the violence and gore but there is a huge market for children's games. Now I know that the Wii is a child friendly console for the most part but with the release of the Wii U even Nintendo is moving away from the children's market. Now I have a younger brother and he is still not old enough to play some of the games I can, he sometimes plays on my PS3 but most the games are not

child friendly so he is no longer allowed to play, looking at the games on the market there are very few that are suitable for his age group and I think there is lots of money to be made on the children's market, the only game with a suitable age restriction (that he enjoys) is NFS. All I'm saying is that we cannot expect to have a lot of gamers in the future when they can only start playing when they turn 18, developers need to focus their attention on the next generation of gamers as well as the current generation.

You are generalising a little here. It's the big blockbuster games that everybody wants to play that seem to have high age restrictions and get all the focus and attention. If you consider reality for a few moments you'll discover that there are more games that don't fall into this category of 18+ death murder kill than do. You are correct about the improved graphics. In the past, game graphics were so blocky that parents simply smiled and laughed when you chopped off a barbarian's head (that's if they bothered to even look). These days they have to shield their eyes and look away in horror as a kidney, two meters of intestines and an eyeball shoot off in various directions. So yes... realistic graphics have put gaming on the age restrictions radar but no, it's certainly not all the games. Ed.

From: Riyadh

Subject: Kids hate good stories

So the other day I was watching my little brother play Mass Effect 2 on our PS3. He is 12 so usually the thing I do while he plays games like this is I either supervise him while playing or I only allow him to play a game once I've either finished or have gotten considerably far in the game.

Being a dutiful older brother, I do almost every side mission there is, so what normally takes 8 hours becomes 17. I have to listen to every conversation properly, watch every cut scene and read every damn email Commander Shepard gets (apparently for a technically dead guy/girl, he/she has a large number of Facebook friends who didn't unfriend when he/she died, or the Illusive man also tends to write the contact details of his staff on every bathroom wall in the galaxy). So yes that was quite annoying, I do enjoy the story of these games and like to immerse myself in the character but there is a limit to how many times I am "interested in Prothean technology that will cost a mere 10000 credits" (*Spoiler* it's an enlargement cream).

So there I was, satisfied that after I make up a good story about losing the

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.



LeRoy Gumede, "NAG shatter."

game if you talk to certain people or do certain missions, that little guy will stop whining and enjoy the game. But then when watching him I realised, the little noob skips all dialogues anyway.

From what I've heard from friends I'm not the only person who goes through this kind of issue so I got to thinking, why don't children these days pay attention to the story anymore? The answer came to me after I had clocked Sonic & Knuckles 3 (with both sets of chaos emeralds) when I was having a study break (gaming > matric). If I had not known the story of Sonic before-hand I'd still not know who in hell Knuckles was. Why is this? Because at that time there were no emotional dialogues/cut scenes, it was just "here you are and this is how you got here", full stop no questions asked.

My conclusion is that growing up with these kinds of games where we had to figure the story out on our own, we came to love actual storylines being added to games, so it became amazingly interesting to us, but for those like my little bro who had not had this experience it was just something that prevented him from the next 15 minutes of massacre.

Here's some argument in favour of age restrictions in games. Depth and story are not for the youth. This is why in games designed for younger players the story can be told in five lines – five lines repeated over and over. Ed.

THE SHORTS

Extracts of n00b from NAG letters

"Granny said she loves the magazine like crazy, she said it makes the gamer come out!"
- Cellular

"I get your magazine every month and love it, but I didn't write to you to tell you guys how wonderful you are, you probably get it a lot."
- Skye

"I'm still in school, boring old school, and your magazine is like [an, Ed] oasis. I love the articles that you guy [s, Ed] have, I read through almost all of them. I buy your magazine ever [every... School is important see, Ed] month and have a stack of them sitting on my shelf."
- Keagan

ON TWITTER

Quack like a duck @nagcoza

Riccardo Bortolussi
"Best day ever" jea understatement! Got my prize from nag magazine today "Cod: Black Ops2 special edition" thanks @nagcoza!

Marco
@nagcoza OMG the 60 things to do during December Holiday is like sO hArd.....and you guys really think we can do it??

Jacques Smuts
@nagcoza using a very complicated system, I have just made my first Minecraft map. Table Mountain.

Shivan Ganas
@nagcoza so many games 2 get, only so few family members 2 make Xmas requests :(#GamerProblems



KALAHARI.COM GAMING DAY PLANNER 2013

GET YOUR LEAVE DAYS AND DOCTORS NOTES READY!

JANUARY

15/01/13



From R659⁹⁵
PS3, XBOX 360

08/02/13

DEAD SPACE 3

From R379⁹⁵
PC, PS3, XBOX 360

12/02/13

ALIENS COLONIAL MARINES

From R469⁹⁵
PS3, XBOX 360, PC, Wii U

22/02/13

METAL GEAR RISING

From R659⁹⁵
PS3, XBOX 360

MARCH

05/03/13

TOMB RAIDER

From R379⁹⁵
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I, Gamer

Nothing is true; everything is permitted to be milked

With the end of a year comes the need for reflection. I always find myself casting a misty-eyed look back at the year we've just gamed our way through, trying to decide on the best and worst it had to offer. The best will be tricky because 2012 threw some amazing games in our direction. The worst? For me that's an easy one: *Assassin's Creed III*.

I say this with a considerable amount of regret and disappointment, but Ubisoft's latest entry into their most successful franchise to date is by far the weakest of the lot. The *Assassin's Creed* series has always had this remarkable ability to polarize audience opinion, but this is the first time that an entry into that series has elicited polarized feelings within me. There are moments when the game shines, but (oddly enough) those are the moments when it is doing something the series isn't known for. Take the naval missions for example: they're wonderful, but perhaps they're only so because there isn't really another game on the market that scratches that whole pirates, ships and cutlasses itch?

The *Assassin's Creed* series has always had a place in my pixelated heart, but I think Ubisoft's ridiculous insistence that the series become annualised is beginning to take its toll. *Assassin's Creed II* was perhaps the zenith of the series, with *Brotherhood* proving to be a good entry, but one that came about far too soon. This was the start of the annualisation, and you probably wouldn't have to look hard to find people who thought that *Revelations* was a little dull.

Now we're presented with *Assassin's Creed III*, and throughout my time with this bug-riddled chore of a game, I couldn't help but think of that scene from *Alien: Resurrection*, when Ripley finds the room full of the failed attempts at cloning her. Honestly, for me the *Assassin's Creed* series has become "Clone 7" of Ripley: bloated, stagnant, and barely capable of holding up its own weight. Just as the hideously deformed and failed clone is recognisable as Ripley, so *Assassin's Creed III* is recognisable as an entry into the series, albeit a failed one at that. In the film, the United Systems Military disregarded all outcomes in their relentless pursuit to create a viable Ripley clone; Ubisoft has done the same, and has produced this abominable entry thanks to their obsession with satisfying some corporate pie-graph through annualising the series.

Assassin's Creed III and I don't have a love-hate relationship; it's more like a tolerate-hate relationship. I can't slip that disc into my Xbox 360 without seeing the twisted mass of Ripley, spluttering and gargling as it begs its perfected clone to "kill me". There really is so much wrong with the game: the contrived opening five hours that force you to play as a different character before you get to start the game you *thought* you were buying; the Frontier that, while pretty to look at, is largely devoid of *meaningful* things to do; the bugs; the awful lip-syncing during in-game cut-scenes; the erratic mission designs... Really, the fact that this game received the amount of perfect review scores that it did will forever baffle me.

And then there's Connor himself, who spends most of his time behaving like whiny Anakin Skywalker from *Star Wars Episode II*. The only thing Connor managed to assassinate was my last remaining interest in this series.

- Miklós Szecsei

Molyneux promises the world again

World-renowned fibber and person known to be incapable

of understanding his own limits Peter Molyneux is at it again: he's announced the next game project (or "experiment") from his studio 22Cans. The group's first project, *Curiosity*, is pretty-

much a dismal failure, with massive server failures resulting in people losing their earned gold coins and, shortly after that, any interest they had in the project.

Never the type to shy away from bad publicity, Molyneux rose to the occasion and actually admitted that *shock, gasp* he over-promised and under-delivered on *Curiosity* but now he's super sorry and wants our money again for something else that's totally going to be super awesome.

The next project is entitled *GODUS*, and, in a kind of surprising move, is being run on Kickstarter. Yes, after lying about being done lying, the 'Neux now wants people to pay him money upfront for his next game: a spiritual successor to the game *Populous* that put him on the map way back in 1989. But he's not just

asking for money, Molyneux's idea is that by funding

the project (which is still pretty scant on gameplay details) through Kickstarter, he and 22Cans lay themselves directly in the path of player feedback and accountability. And, as you'd expect, he's

already touting some pretty grand intentions, including the ability to play the game across the release platforms of PC and iOS/Android devices, the latter of which he claims are horrendously under-utilised and highly capable gaming machines. We're inclined to agree with him on that, but whether or not he can actually live up to his own challenge remains to be seen.

This is all very Molyneux-like of the chap, but at the current rate of pledges it doesn't look like *GODUS* will actually make the cut it needs for successful crowd-funding. If that happens, then the studio "would have to go down a more traditional publishing route", which Molyneux states "would be a shame" even though he's "got lots of friends in publishing."



Monster party

Despite receiving relatively high ratings from critics and players alike, Double Fine Productions' heavy metal adventure *Brütal Legend* is largely considered to be a financial flop. Ever since the studio accepted that sad fact, they've shifted their focus to smaller games that can be produced quickly and for less money: games like *Stacking*, *Iron Brigade* (formally known as *Trenched*) and *Costume Quest*.

In an effort to boost the creative process needed for these sorts of projects, Double Fine is set to run a program that will allow the public to vote on 23 prototypes that were created in-house by small teams over the course of two weeks. Five prototypes will be chosen from the batch and the rest will be scrapped.

One such prototype from last year's efforts has spent the last 12 months in development and is



entitled *Brazen: a Monster Hunter*-like co-op RPG styled on old school stop-motion monster films like the original *Clash of the Titans* and *Sinbad*. The development team within Double Fine is led by Brad Muir, who previously ran the *Iron Brigade* team. The gameplay in *Brazen* is designed around the idea of ancient warriors taking on massive beasts and coming home to their villages as victorious heroes. So, if the idea of *Monster Hunter* and *God of War* knocking boots tantalises you, stay tuned for more info as it's made available.

Microsoft aims to take back the living room

By now it seems pretty clear that Microsoft is looking to get their next generation of Xbox out the door and into your sweaty hands by the end of 2013, but, according to a report by tech website The Verge, Redmond plans to release two almost entirely different SKUs.



While we imagine the first device will be the big-hitting 720/Durango, or whatever it'll be called upon release, it's been reported that a smaller set-top box will also be available. This mini Xbox is said to use the same hardware of the next generation, albeit scaled-down, which fits in quite well with other recent reports that the next Xbox will feature a 16-core CPU. Scaling that down to, say, just four cores paired with half the amount of RAM will likely be highly cost-effective (by simply using chips that failed the full binning process), and should still deliver a device powerful enough to deliver video-on-demand, TV recording and even the odd Xbox LIVE Arcade game. Integrated Kinect 2.0 seems a sure bet, too.

As is so often the case with these things, treat this as a rumour for now, but it certainly matches Microsoft's policy to take on every market conceivable. A rival for Apple TV and the upcoming Ouya seems fitting.

Former Halo devs spring a leak

Halo 4 has been doing the rounds for a few months now and the general consensus is that 343 Industries has done a fine job in upholding the legacy left to it by Bungie, but that doesn't mean the studio that created the series is ready to call it a day just yet.

Courtesy of an advertising agency's leaky staff, a couple of detailed documents surrounding Bungie's next project were unleashed on the Internet which tell of a science-fiction FPS by the name of *Destiny*.

From the leaked documents, at least part of *Destiny's* setting is described as the last city on Earth in a future where ruins of mankind's Golden Age litter the solar system. A massive, moonlike alien craft has taken residence above this city and supposedly acts as a guardian against numerous "alien monsters that creep in from the edge of the universe".

The document describes the game as "fun and accessible", with a deep universe and a lean towards social gaming that allows friends to explore the game world together. It's also supposedly designed "for your inner seven year-old", which might mean that the studio is aiming for a more frivolous style of game than *Halo*.

ONE IN THE CHAMBER

Hitman: Absolution has only just been kicked out the front door and already there's talk of the next game in the series. According to *Absolution* director Tore Blystad, the series is being co-developed by Square Enix Montreal, which marks the first time it'll leave its home at IO Interactive.

"It's like with Treyarch and Infinity Ward," Blystad told *Official PlayStation Magazine*. "You have an IP that has been developed. They will feed off each other, as well as [have] some things that stand out."

It's very likely then that we can expect to see a new *Hitman* every year, as Blystad claims that the two studios are now working in parallel to continue the series and SE Montreal's boss Lee Singleton tells how Square plans to increase the frequency of releases in the future.



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The Game Stalker



The schoolyard

I recently acquired a Nintendo Wii U. Just to put this in perspective, I have never owned a Wii – somehow in comparison to games on the Xbox, PS3 and PC, the graphics never quite stood up to the challenge and I wasn't interested in playing yet another reinvented *Mario Bros*.

Once the Kinect and Move were released all thoughts that I had once had of maybe, one day buying one, vanished into thin air.

Then lo and behold, Nintendo made a real effort to revamp their image and released the Wii U. Although the graphics aren't quite what was promised (they're really only on a par with the current Xbox and PS3 as opposed to exceeding them) the innovative GamePad is quite exciting. Coupled with the fact that motion control is still such a big part of the gaming experience, the Nintendo Wii U might not be the console we've been waiting for, but if you can afford the hefty price tag, then at the very least it might tide you over.

After unboxing, setting up, waiting for the download, attempting to set up my profile, unplugging the console as it got stuck on the loading screen, finally setting up my profile, and eventually being able to start playing *Mass Effect 3*, I had a very clear vision of the Wii U as the new kid in the schoolyard.

If the PS3 and the Xbox are the cool kids jockeying for position in the popularity contest that is high school, the Wii U is the new kid who has gained access to that scene but everyone is waiting for him to slip up. He has the looks, the attitude and the gadgets that everyone thinks is kind of cool, but he's new and different and the cool crowd is really just looking for a reason to say "I told you so!"

So far my gaming experience on the Wii U has surpassed my expectations. With the exception of my initial problems in setting up my profile and the fact that I'm still not enamoured of the visual aesthetic of the Miis, the gaming experience has been pretty flawless.

While it's certainly much bigger than a controller, the GamePad is relatively comfortable to use, for the most part the games make good use of the screen, visually they meet current gen standards, and overall I've been pleasantly surprised. And make no mistake – I went in prepared to be disappointed.

It also seems as if I'm not the only one – more than one person that I've spoken to in the gaming industry has actually been interested in purchasing one. Considering the fact that the Wii U is rather expensive in comparison to its competitors, coming in at R4,599.00 for the black Premium pack with only the GamePad and no additional controllers, it somehow surprised me that so many people were willing to fork out the cash for a brand that traditionally has been disappointing.

Whilst certainly time will tell whether or not the Wii U falls into the gimmick market or rises to the challenge, for the moment it's looking pretty positive, and if the current third party titles continue to get better we might see an increase in Nintendo's popularity once again.

Something to remember – you might not think Nintendo is cool right now, but for those of you old enough to remember the SNES – all the cool kids had one... Will the Wii U be the modern day SNES? Or in six months will the cool kids be telling us, "I told you so!"

- Pippa Tshabalala



The (Re)Binding of Isaac

Edmund McMillen of indie megahit *Super Meat Boy* fame recently did a post-mortem on his other indie megahit, *The Binding of Isaac*, which has sold more than a million copies on PC and Mac within its first year on Steam, while 25 percent of the people who bought it also bought its expansion. In the process of detailing this, he revealed that the game is being remade for consoles, and the remake will also be made available on PC. McMillen explained that he was hesitant to make another game for consoles after the difficult time he had getting *Super Meat Boy* onto XBLA, but because the remake is due to be published by Nicalis, McMillen needn't worry about the business side of things in this case.

The remake (subtitled *Rebirth*) of the disturbing roguelike/shoot-'em-up will ditch the Flash graphics that McMillen lamented having to use, replacing them with fresh 16-bit graphics and adding in some "secret stuff" that McMillen says couldn't make it into the Flash version. It'll simultaneously

add local cooperative play in the process. Included in the package will be the *Wrath of the Lamb* expansion, as well as a second expansion similar in size to the first which will bring a new final chapter/ending, two new playable characters and "tons more items, rooms, enemies, bosses and the like." Composer Danny Baranowsky will return to provide some fresh tunes, and the game is expected to be made available on PS3, Vita and PC, although Nicalis is in talks with Nintendo and Microsoft for a potential release on their platforms. McMillen cautions that the remake is still a while away, with development beginning on January 1st and due to be finished by the end of 2013.

"I'm currently in full-time development of *Mew-Genics* with Tommy and we have a few other little tricks in store for you next year, so my goal with *Rebirth* is to simply make sure the remake is top-quality and then detail out the expansion and updates once development is much farther along," says McMillen.

Black Ops II does the Call of Duty dance again

Prepare to be hugely surprised! Except not, because this happens every year. *Call of Duty: Black Ops II* has broken previous *COD* day one sales figures, and publisher Activision is obviously rejoicing, giddily rolling around in their piles of endless money. Previously, *Modern Warfare 3* held the record, selling 6.5 million copies in the US and UK alone within its first day on sale, which amounts to \$400 million. *Black Ops II* has now made \$500 million dollars within 24 hours of going on sale. Think about that sum of money for a moment.

Despite the ridiculous mountain of money that materialised around the game on its launch day, an analyst from brokerage firm Sterne Agee predicts a spot of gloom for *Black Ops II*. Arvind Bhatia has suggested that sales of the game are on a downward trend compared to last year's *COD* launch, predicting that sales will be down 15% for this new title. This after sales of *MW3* were down 5% from the original *Black Ops*. Because *COD* is responsible for 45% of Activision's earnings before taxes and interest, Bhatia calls this "a cause for concern" for the publishing giant.

“When I heard that it was going to go on sale as planned, I thought, that will probably be a big mistake. **We won't make a mistake like FF XIV again.** If we did, it would be like at the level of destroying the company.”

-Naoki Yoshida, director of Final Fantasy XIV

Dishonored makes its parents proud, gets more pocket money



Arkane Studios' excellent first-person stealth-'em-up *Dishonored* has done such an impressive job at retail that publisher Bethesda Softworks has opted to turn it into a franchise. Either that, or the game has sneakily assassinated Bethesda's head decision-maker, replacing them with a *Dishonored*-loving impostor. Either way, Pete Hines has said in an interview with Destructoid that the game sold very many copies (although he wouldn't reveal just how many, which is always incredibly disappointing), actually outdoing Bethesda's expectations for the game.

“I can tell you that *Dishonored* is far exceeding our sales expectations, which is especially cool considering it's new IP facing a host of well-established franchises this quarter,” said Hines. “We clearly have a new franchise.” We're over the moon about the news that the game is doing so well, because it truly deserves it (we gave it a tremendous score of 94 in our December 2012 issue).

We'll obviously be seeing sequels set in the game's brilliantly realised, whale oil-powered universe. Now, in this sort of situation, there's always the question as to whether further forays into the world of *Dishonored* would actually prove worthwhile, or if they'd just sully our memory of the incredible first title. Judging by Hines' confirmation, we'll likely find out in the future.



SONY'S CREDIT RATING DOWN-GRADED TO "JUNK"

Sony has been haemorrhaging money for years now, and the Japanese manufacturer has had to make drastic cuts to its product line as a result. Cuts or no cuts, the company hasn't turned an annual profit in quite some time. The reasons for this are many, but it can largely be attributed to the company's poor TV sales and the fact that a strong yen makes exports all the more expensive.

As a result of this continued poor financial performance, credit ratings agency Fitch has downgraded Sony to a "junk" status. Financial companies such as Fitch routinely classify corporations based on their share prices and turnovers, and if the company performs poorly, its credit rating takes a nosedive. Fitch is the first such credit rating company to downgrade Sony's investment-grade ratings; something the company claims "wasn't an easy decision". Fitch also reckons that it'll take Sony "a long while to crawl back".

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The Indie Investigator



Mechanical failure

Overextending yourself on game content? Sucks to be you. It's a common development caution that gets related time and again, usually because everyone forgets about it at some point or another. Projects with a large scope are just way too complicated and burdensome to develop in a timely and effective manner. In the most severe cases, you'll end up with a half-complete skeleton to show for your efforts, but even less ambitious extensions can suffer from a noticeable lack of polish.

However, there's also something to be said for that sinister opponent of mechanic-oriented developers: the overly-complicated gaming experience. These creations are defined by their high levels of design elegance, elemental interactivity, meaningful challenge construction and utter incomprehensibility.

If you're a fan of beelining for unconventional gameplay, complex tasks and a difficulty curve which relies heavily on players understanding and mastering the interactions between multiple game elements at a time, beware! You may just enjoy making games which are Too Damn Complicated.

There's a certain pride in creating games that give veterans consistently deep and engaging experiences, but a problem emerges when these titles alienate and confuse newcomers. There is absolutely zero chance of any game anywhere being enjoyed ever ever EVER if it only targets a veteran audience. A quick application of super-detective deduction can tell you that at some point, every single player who steps into your game world begins their virtual voyage as a complete newbie.

The notion of the unforgivably difficult game has traction in established genres, or environments where the goals and constraints are quickly visible. Sadistic platformers and physics-based challenge games tend to do well enough because a lot of incoming players are pre-conditioned with the basics. But when you force players to learn a new, extensive rule set AND use it with maximum effectiveness just to tread water and survive in a cruel and unpredictable game world, you're basically asking them to give up long before they've had a chance to find out what makes your game fun or smart in the first place. Originality, depth and that holy grail of emergent gameplay are all meaningless if the player frowns at the screen halfway through level one and moves onto something less tiring.

Rome wasn't built in a day, as the light historical cliché goes, and any game that's worth its salt in the long run will take a player time to fully appreciate. When considering the value that your audience take from the game experience, make sure that your value is evident enough *from the beginning*. If it's great enough after an hour of play, but a wildly confusing swamp trudge until then, the ends most certainly won't justify the means.

It's easy to create something complicated enough to satisfy the creator, but it's remarkably difficult to make the same design simple enough to satisfy the player. A truly intelligent piece of design should resonate with audience and developer alike, and too much complexity can tear any well-meaning project down. Make it interesting. But keep it sane.

- Rodain Joubert

THQ collaborates with Humble Bundle, makes millions



The Humble Bundle has become somewhat of a phenomenon since it began in May 2010. The system (we guess that's what it is: a "system") allows for smaller developers to contribute their games towards a bundle package, with customers choosing how much they're willing to pay for all of the games featured in the bundle. A portion of the payment (as decided by the customer) goes to the developer, another portion to charity and one more to the Humble Bundle company itself.

THQ is in a seriously bad financial position at present, so it was rather interesting to see the once massive publisher teaming up with Humble Bundle to create an offering of their own. The Humble THQ Bundle (as it was called) allowed customers to pay whatever they wanted for Windows Steam keys for *Company of Heroes*, (including *Opposing Fronts* and *Tales of Valor* expansions), *Darksiders*, *Metro 2033*, and *Red Faction: Armageddon*. Anyone

choosing to pay more than the average amount (which fluctuated around the \$5.50 mark) got *Saints Row: The Third* as well.

Within 24 hours, the Humble THQ Bundle managed to generate more than \$2.4 million in sales, and didn't show any sign of slowing down. Just before this edition of *NAG* went to print, we had another look only to see sales already way over the \$3 million mark. This had a knock-on effect with THQ's stock value, which saw a 38% increase as a result of this Humble Bundle. Within five days of the Humble Bundle going on sale, THQ's stock value increased from \$1.07 per share to just over \$1.60.

It's no secret that publisher THQ has had a rough year, so any form of income would undoubtedly be a good thing. At time of writing, THQ is in private talks with a secret financial party, the outcome of which might just save the dying publisher. Just who that financial backer is, is anyone's guess but by the time you read this, we may very well know.

"We've been talking about these similarities to some of the big movie franchise like *Aliens*, where everyone's doing it their own way. **Every time someone gets their hands on a franchise they do something different.** So rather than doing the same thing again you get another take on the character from a fresh perspective."

-Tore Blystad, *Hitman: Absolution's* director, on why development of the next *Hitman* is being handed to *Square Enix Montreal*

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Fans petition for GTA V PC release

Since solid info on Rockstar's next *Grand Theft Auto* excursion started trickling out, one section of its potential player base has been particularly irked: its PC fans. Rockstar has previously stated that the game is "up for consideration" on PC, but will only see release on 360 and PS3 to begin with. PC gamers then quickly took to the Internet to start a petition, which has over 100,000 signatures at the time of this writing. Here's the thing though: Rockstar has a habit of releasing their *GTA* titles on PC a few months behind its console counterparts, but the PC version really ends up being the definitive version. Take *GTA IV* for instance, with the abundance of amazing user-created mods and its excellent video-recording capabilities having made it well worth the wait when it was ported to PC.



TELLTALE GROWS UP

Following the depressingly lacklustre releases from Telltale over the last couple of years, it's good to hear that *The Walking Dead* series was the kick in the pants the studio needed to step up their game. The series has done so well, in fact, that Telltale is now looking to make large expansions to its studio team, claiming that they're "maxed out", according to CEO and co-founder Dan Connors.

The company has reportedly signed a new lease on an office space that can accommodate another 40 members of staff in addition to its already sizable 125. It's highly likely that the studio will continue to work on *The Walking Dead*, going into *Season Two*, and we just hope that they can learn from their successes and failures alike with whatever new IP they get into.

Ownership: Notch's 0x10c's interesting subscription-based model



Markus "Minecraft Guy" Persson (aka Notch) has explained in a recent interview with *PC Gamer* that he's been spending an awful lot of time pondering potential payment methods for his next, space-tastic title *0x10c* (no, we don't even care anymore about how to properly pronounce it either). He's got an idea to use a subscription-based model – and a very interesting one at that.

Notch plans to have a multiplayer mode in the game called "the multiverse" and it'll obviously cost monthly operating cash to have a bunch of persistent, player-owned virtual ships exist on a server somewhere. A potential solution to the cost, reckons Notch, could be to have each ship in the multiverse require a generator of sorts to keep

it running. Paying for a subscription would get you one generator. Notch says that multiple players could then inhabit this ship – but someone would have to pay to keep the ship running, or all players inhabiting the ship could perhaps split the costs. Bear in mind that this model is simply an idea, and is not yet set in stone.

Notch then went on to further discuss construction in the game. There will be "mining," because players will have to search the galaxy for resources to create parts, but it will not be mining in the *Minecraft* sense. Notch says that players will likely design and construct the external features of their ships first (which makes sense) before setting up the internal components for more options and layouts.

Well colour us excited: it's been revealed by the Korean Ratings Board that there's a version of *Resident Evil: Revelations* headed for PS3 and Xbox 360. The little *Resi* on the 3DS wowed us in 2012 with its impressive visuals and return to gameplay mechanics of *RE* games of the past, so we're intrigued to see how well it'll pan out on the big consoles. There's no word yet on launch dates or exactly how the game will make the transition, but it's more than likely that an HD treatment is on the cards.

Miktar's Meanderings



The life of reason

I don't remember what I was doing when my dad told me "those who forget history are doomed to repeat it." I was probably doing something wrong. My dad believed that "doing wrong" was my *raison d'être*.

My grades in school sucked. My dad's threats of sending me to boarding school didn't do much to change that. Looking back, I can pinpoint exactly why my grades suffered in school. It had very little to do with me "not applying myself" as my teachers would say. But that's a story for another time.

I disliked my father. As a person. The feeling was mutual, really. Sure he was my dad, but I had little in common with how he saw the world and what he thought. Had he been a stronger influence on me, I might have ended up a bigot, racist and homophobe. I'm glad I didn't end up any of those things.

I learned of his passing in 2007. He had died from a stroke in 2005. I had not seen him since the late 1990s, when I took my leave from him. I was 16 or 17 when I told my dad I was leaving, I forget the exact year. It was a long time ago.

Apparently, my father had gotten conned out of all his money by some real estate scam, and the stress from that killed him. I found out via my half-sister, who found out via a British journalist. The journalist was interviewing my sister to find out more about my dad's like, fourth wife, who is the estranged mother of a pretty famous British television personality.

Life is weird.

My dad got the quote wrong, too. He was paraphrasing, I know, but the inflection was altered. The correct version is "The one who does not remember history is bound to live through it again." It's attributed to George Santayana (1863 - 1952), who was many things. A philosopher, poet and novelist, he wrote essays on pragmatic topics. Another quote of his is "Only the dead have seen the end of war." Which is often falsely attributed to Plato. I'm looking at you, pithy *Call of Duty* death-screen quotes.

When the topic of "nostalgia" comes up, I tend to remember Mr. Santayana's quote. In a clinical sense, nostalgia is a sentimental longing for the past, usually a time or a place that has a positive emotion attached to it. There was a time in history, when nostalgia was even considered a medical condition.

Nostalgia seems intrinsically tied to sensory stimulus. Smell, touch, and sound are all strong triggers. In the context of gaming, nostalgia has become a bit vilified and muddled, depending on the intent of the person speaking for, or against it. Sure, the "retro fad" may be a *chic* prey on nostalgia, but many a contemporary game suffers in design due to having forgotten the hard-won lessons from gaming's short-but-dense history.

If you go by *Spacewar!* then gaming as electronic entertainment is only 50 years old. The first coin-operated arcade game was 41 years ago, the first home console only a year after. The Nintendo Entertainment System was released in America, 27 years ago. For contrast: the motion picture industry is 102 years old.

Nostalgia, remembering the past, brings context and framing. A.k.a. "perspective". Which is something that slips very quickly, especially in an industry like gaming that's always focused on "the next big thing".

- Miktar Dracon

Ubisoft survey points to co-op for Assassin's Creed III sequel



Website The Gaming Liberty managed to get hold of an alleged online survey that was sent out to a minute few by Ubisoft. The survey asked a number of questions in an attempt to gauge gamer attitude towards the *Assassin's Creed* series in general, the most recent entry into the series (*Assassin's Creed III*), and feelings towards the inevitable sequel to the most recent entry.

One question asked how important it would be for the sequel to include the "possibility for a friend to join the game in order to help me at any time during the solo mode". In other words: drop-in and drop-out co-op.

The moment Ubisoft added multiplayer to the *Assassin's Creed* series (the game mode made its first appearance in 2010's *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*),

fans began clamouring for a co-op mode. We'll be honest, we're surprised co-op wasn't included in *Assassin's Creed III*. With Ubisoft already talking about the sequel to *Assassin's Creed III*, coupled with this alleged online survey popping up, we're now more convinced than ever that a cooperative multiplayer mode will be making its debut soon.

Another interesting snippet of information that came from this supposed survey was that Ubisoft is interested in what people thought about *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*. If this survey was indeed legitimate, it seems as if Ubisoft is sizing up its competition considering both *Uncharted* and *Assassin's Creed* fall into the same genre. Perhaps we'll be seeing a little more Naughty Dog influence in the next *Assassin's Creed* game?

Battlefield devs ready to take another leap of faith

DICE has been hinting in *Battlefield 3* that *Mirror's Edge* is still in their hearts practically since the game was released, with hidden Easter eggs such as runner bags and most recently a pair of Faith's shoes in the game's multiplayer maps. Now, it's been all-but officially confirmed that the studio is currently developing a sequel to 2008's running and jumping simulator. It started with a quote from EA's executive VP Patrick Söderlund, who explained that, of the 300 staff at the studio, there are people at DICE working on projects other than *Battlefield*. "The minute we

start saying 'you're going to make a *Battlefield* game for the rest of your life,' they're going to go someplace else," he said.

Shortly after, former EA F2P boss Ben Cousins told it like it is on Twitter: "It is general knowledge in the Stockholm dev scene that *Mirror's Edge 2* is in production at DICE."



Irrational Games hires cosplayer to be official face of Elizabeth

Hey, remember that incredible *BioShock Infinite* cosplay of Elizabeth that suddenly appeared on the interwebs? We'll make sure our art guru Savage puts in a picture of her along with this article in case you've forgotten or completely missed it. (SAVAGE: see that this happens or else we'll replace you. What, you don't think we're capable of that? Try leaving her out, we dare you.)

It turns out that having an uncanny resemblance to video game characters, and then dressing yourself up like them on top of your already mentioned uncanny resemblance, is likely to get you noticed by that game's developer. That's what's happened with Anna "Ormeli" Moleva and her Elizabeth cosplay. The result is that Irrational Games has hired her to lend her appearance for the game's official box art, pieces of key art and even a TV advert for *BioShock Infinite*. She's now the official face of *BioShock Infinite*'s Elizabeth.

According to Irrational's head-honcho Ken Levine: "We were so amazed by her dedication and her resemblance to Elizabeth that we decided to ask her if she'd like to be involved in helping bring Elizabeth to life."

So you never know: gaming industry fame might be just around the corner as long as you keep working on that cosplay project of yours. All of us at NAG HQ could obviously be human models for Nathan Drake from *Uncharted*, mainly because we all sport roguish charm and rugged good-looks. Except for maybe RedTide; he could be Sully.



Look & Listen

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PC

Dead Space 3	February 8th
StarCraft II: Heart of the Swarm	March 12th
Metro: Last Light	March

Xbox 360

Tomb Raider	February
GRID 2	February 26th
South Park: The Stick of Truth	March

PS3

Aliens: Colonial Marines	February 12th
God of War: Ascension	2013
Grand Theft Auto V	2013

Steam breaks its own record for concurrent users

Valve's monolithic digital distribution platform, Steam, continues to dominate the PC space. It's basically become a requirement for PC gaming, now boasting more than 50,000,000 (we've purposefully typed out all those zeroes, because wow) registered users and over 2,000 games in its extensive library. During their recent Autumn sale, Steam broke its own record by having 6,046,207 signed in at the same time. Back in January, the recorded maximum was five million concurrent users out of more than 40 million registered accounts.

DRAGON AGE III MOVES TO 2014 AND NEXT-GEN PLATFORMS

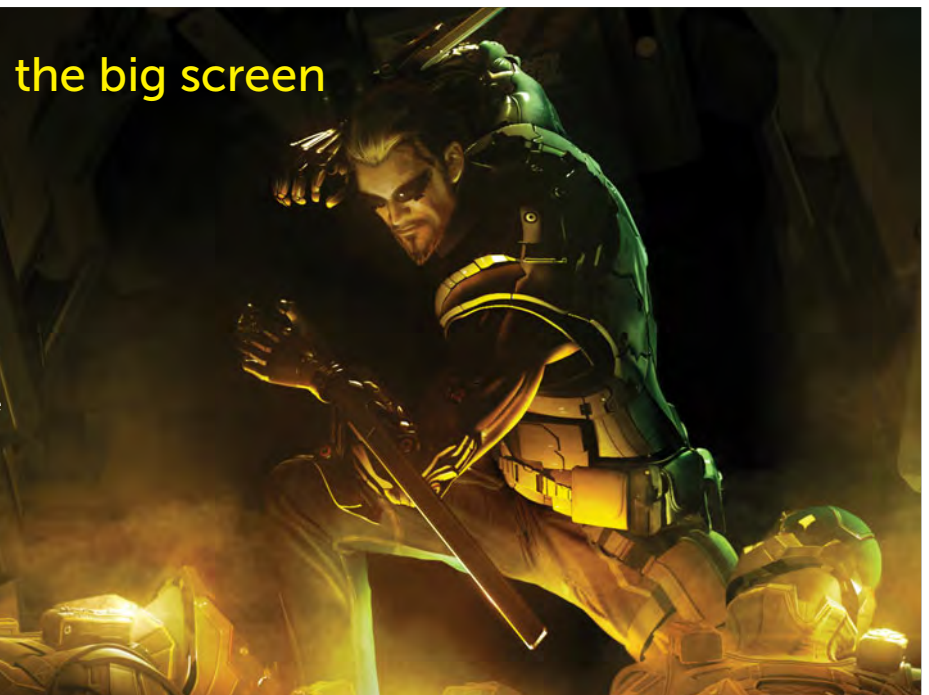
Back in September 2012, executive producer Mark Darrah informed the world that one of BioWare's many teams was busy with *Dragon Age III: Inquisition*. The announcement didn't say much other than that the game was being built on the Frostbite 2 engine (the same beast that runs *Battlefield 3* and other recent EA titles) and that it was scheduled for some time in 2013.

New information has been discovered by Internet sleuths, which indicates that *Dragon Age III* has been pushed to 2014 and that it is now considered a next-gen title. This all came to light thanks to a CV update by an EA Shanghai employee who has worked on level design for *Dragon Age III*. Some are pointing to the delay as EA trying to avoid accusations of rushing another sequel.

Deus Ex evolves to the big screen

This is probably an awful idea, but *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* is getting a film made in its honour. Don't hold your breath for any miracles (like a video game-based film not sucking), but the yet-to-be-titled film will be directed by Scott Derrickson, who was responsible for the chilling horror *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* and the best-left-unsaid-of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Putting pen to paper alongside the director and possibly kissing his career goodbye will be C. Robert Cargill, whose best-known work is the thriller *Sinister*.

For all our nay-saying, the two are chuffed to be working on the project. "By combining amazing action and tension with big, philosophical ideas, *Deus Ex* is smart, ballsy, and will make one hell of a movie," said Derrickson. "Cargill and I can't wait to bring it to the big screen."



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 "January Roxy", and of course your contact details, and you could win a prize.



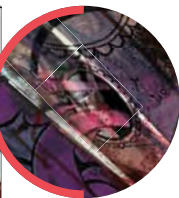
Caption of the month

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 *Angry Birds Star Wars* for PC from Apex Interactive. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line "January caption".

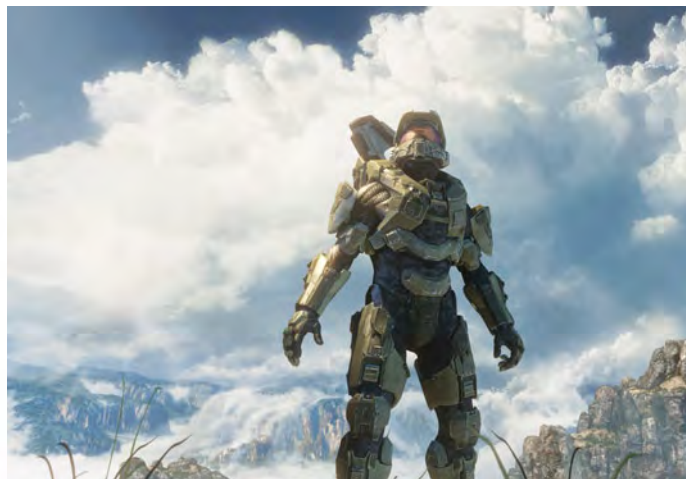


NAG's lame attempt at humour
"The tide is high but I'm holding on..."

December winner



Christopher Liakos, page 30



Last months winner
"The hills are alive with the sound of music" - Jason Pollock

BIOSHOCK INFINITE TO FEATURE A LOT LESS MULTIPLAYER

And by "a lot less," we actually mean "none at all." *BioShock* main man Ken Levine confirmed the lack of multiple-played tomfoolery via Twitter. In one of the regular Twitter Q&A sessions he hosts, Levine simply replied with "nope" when asked if the game would have multiplayer modes. Later, a clarifying Tweet simply revealed that there will be "no multi." *BioShock 2* featured multiplayer modes which were met with varying degrees of approval, but for many (including us) *BioShock* will always be a narrative-driven, single-player experience, so we'd be lying if we said we lament this announcement.

Hyper-violent murder-perfectionist simulator *Hotline Miami* will be getting a sequel. A short while after the original game set the indie scene ablaze late last year, one half of the two-person creative team behind it, Jonatan "Cactus" Söderström, casually tweeted this: "Working while listening to the sweet tunes of a preliminary *Hotline Miami 2* soundtrack that we've put together during the weekend."

THIS MONTH'S BOUNTY

A USB Power Kit valued at R299.95, sponsored by dreamGEAR and Musica.

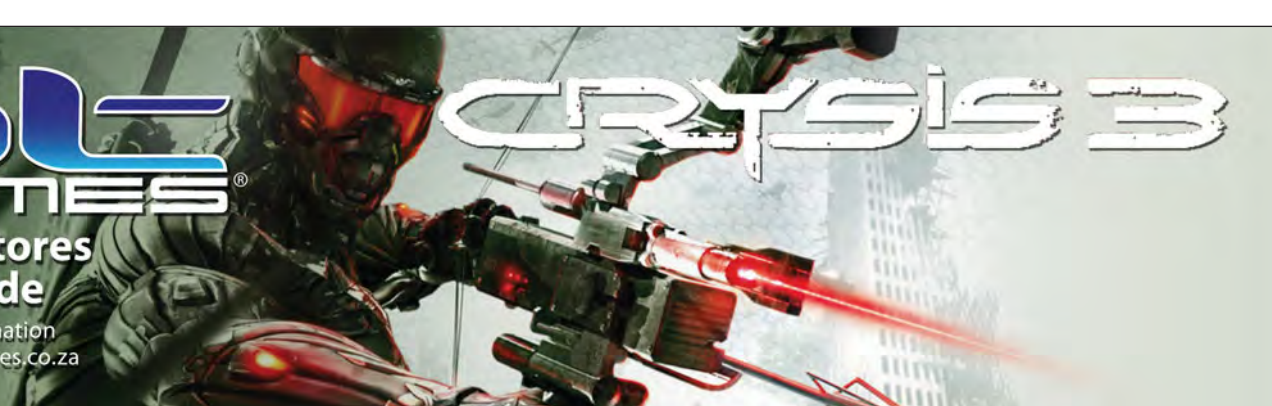


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CRYSLIS 3



Silicon Knights is off to Valhalla



Oh Silicon Knights, what have you done? The studio, which you may recognise as the creators of the futuristic Norse romp *Too Human*, was caught being rather naughty early in 2012 when they attempted to pass off the Unreal Engine 3 as their own. After they made a few tweaks and renamed Epic Game's biggest money-maker to the "Silicon Knights Engine", Epic took the already suffering studio to court and won the suit on all counts. Now it's time to pay the piper.

Not content to demand that SK pay a sum of \$4.7 million to Epic Games, US courts have ordered Silicon to destroy all unsold copies of their games made using the Unreal Engine, including *Too*

Human and *X-Men Destiny*, and any stock still out in the wild is to be recalled and destroyed at the studio's cost. They'll also have to get rid of all their UE3 software and purge any information they might've obtained through the Unreal Network.

The studio, which was down to just five employees last we heard (including founder Denis Dyack, whom we imagine is spellchecking his CV right about now) was all-but dead before this news broke, so there's very little chance of them weathering this last storm and producing another game. There's probably a bad respawning joke in there somewhere but we'll play it cool for once and leave it up to your imagination.

del Toro's Insane in the works again



Famed film director Guillermo del Toro's (*Hellboy*, *Pan's Labyrinth*) pet video game project, *Insane*, was

forced to find a new home elsewhere after embattled publisher THQ's reconfiguration earlier this year. del

Toro is hopeful that, after meeting with an undisclosed developer that apparently loves the project, production of the game will now continue. He says that the game's been worked on for a year and a half already, with potentially another two years of work ahead before the game will be ready for release. We'll have to wait and see with this one.

Release list

Dates subject to change without notice

January week 2

Ninja Gaiden 3	Wii U
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January week 3

DmC: Devil May Cry	360 / PS3
Anarchy Reigns	360 / PS3
Sing Party	Wii U

January week 4

The Sims 3: 70s, 80s & 90s Stuff	PC
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THE BEST AND WORST OF 2012



Best new character in an existing IP

Most Tenacious



WE TELL IT LIKE IT IS AND THROW OUT SOME CHEAP MEDALS

Awards! Get your Game of the Year awards right here! Oh, apologies sir, ma'am: you're looking for the best RPG of the year? Maybe the most awesome graphics ever? Won't find much of that around these parts, we're afraid. We'd rather take this whole notion a little less seriously than what seems to be the norm, and instead present you with a jumble of 26 of the most useless (but most honest) gaming-focused awards of last year. These things are always subjective, anyway.

MOST TENACIOUS

Winner: *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty*

It was released in July 2010, and we still play competitive multiplayer almost on a daily basis at the office. That's impressive. Bring on *Heart of the Swarm!*

Runner-up: *Minecraft*

MOST WELCOME RETURN OF A FRANCHISE

Winner: *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*

In a surprising HIDDEN MOVEMENT, the turn-based multinational alien interception and extermination franchise

returned with gusto, and the first-person remake is nowhere to be seen.

Runner-up: *Toxic Bunny HD*

BEST NEW CHARACTER IN AN EXISTING IP

Winner: *Tina*

This *Borderlands 2* character wins for naming her explosives "Mushy Snugglebites" and "Felicia Sexopants". And for making us crave crumpets the whole way through playing *Borderlands 2*.

Runner-up: Haytham Kenway from *Assassin's Creed III*

BEST SURPRISE

Winner: *Resident Evil: Revelations*

Who'd have thought that this tiny *Resident Evil* would be the best game in the series to be released this year? Not us, that's for damn sure, but *Revelations* managed to live up to its name by being not just a great handheld game but a real step forward for *Resident Evil* as a whole. It's just a pity about those two steps back that came along later in the year.

BIGGEST GAME TO ALREADY BE FORGOTTEN

Winner: *Diablo III*

Can you believe that *Diablo III*, one of the most anticipated titles ever ever ever, was released in 2012? Is anyone still actually playing this? The last we heard about it there were some significant changes made to the way players can hit monsters with big swords until things fall on the floor, but, like, so what?

Runners-up: *The Secret World*, *Max Payne 3*

BEST GAME YOU SHOULD HAVE PLAYED BUT PROBABLY DIDN'T

Winner: *Spec Ops: The Line*

Spec Ops wins for its unnerving ability to make you feel something as you watch the degradation of your main character. Is this a game or a moral commentary on what the genre has devolved into?

Runner-up: *Hotline Miami*



MOST EXCITING VIDEO GAME PROJECT ON KICKSTARTER

Winner: *Star Citizen*

This game is being made by Chris Roberts – that guy that made the *Wing Commander* series, oh and *Wing Commander: Privateer*, to drop a few names. This is a new space faring adventure with ships, trading, exploration and combat. It's like someone took all the cool ideas in this genre and put them all into a single amazing game. Paying money for this is a simple question – do you want to explore the universe in a sexy hot spaceship, or not?

Runner-up: *Double Fine Adventure*, *Project GODUS*

MOST CONFUSING MULTIPLAYER EXPERIENCE IN THE NAG OFFICE

Winner: *Syndicate*

At NAG we have a policy of testing all games properly before committing ink to paper. This of course includes multiplayer gaming. That's the easy part – convincing our local game distributors to cough up four copies of the same game is the hard part. In *Syndicate* (the new one) nobody knew what they were supposed to do at any point in the 4-5 hours we played it. We all died – nobody knew why. At one point we won – nobody knew why. It was kind of fun and again, nobody knew why.

Runner-up: *Trine 2*

MOST EXCITING GAME WE BOUGHT BUT HAVEN'T PLAYED YET

Winner: *Carrier Command: Gaea Mission*

This is RedTide speaking in the first person here. I remember this game on the Commodore Amiga. It was almost like the best thing ever when it came out – it had action, strategy and so many different things to do. I bought this remake without even reading a single review or other opinion. I'm not sure why I haven't played it yet – maybe I'm scared it'll suck and destroy my childhood.

Runner-up: *Hotline Miami*

BEST RE-RELEASE ON A NEW PLATFORM

Winner: *Ghost Trick* (iOS)

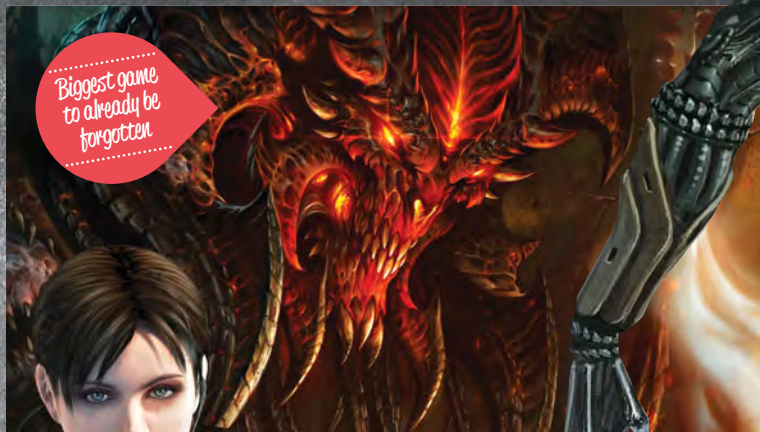
The best quasi point-and-click adventure game we're pretty sure you never played, got a great re-release for the various iOS devices, which you probably can't afford anyway.

Runners-up: *The World Ends With You* (iOS), *Persona 4: The Golden* (Vita)

MOST ANNOYING CHARACTER

Winner: Every military shooter squad-mate best-bro that screams *Black Hawk Down* catchphrases into your ear.

We're looking at you, *Call of Duties*, *Battlefields*, *Medal of Honours* and all your types. We get that camaraderie is cool and you need squadmates for those all-important door-breach moves, but still.



Biggest game to already be forgotten



Most welcome return of a franchise



Best game you should have played but probably didn't

Best surprise

MOST PATHETIC DESCENT INTO SHOVELWARE

Winner: *Fable Heroes*

We get that Mr. Molyneux is no longer invested in the *Fable* brand that he helped create, but the way Microsoft now uses it as a cheap label to slap on some half-arsed party game is just sad.

BEST IN-GAME GADGET

Winner: *The Springrazor*

Dishonored's Springrazor takes this, um... honour, because it's so diabolical in design that it makes us feel just a little guilty whenever we plant one in the path of an unsuspecting enemy.

Runners-up: *The Omniblade* from *Mass Effect 3*; *the Rope Dart* from *Assassin's Creed III*

BIGGEST PROMISE ALREADY BROKEN

Winner: Peter Molyneux

"I swore that when we started 22 Cans that we wouldn't over-promise, and I guess through stupid mistakes we have."

BEST USE OF A LICENSED SOUNDTRACK

Winner: *Lollipop Chainsaw*

Playing as a high school cheerleader who slices up the undead to Toni Basil's "Mickey" is a hack-n-slash memory that will live on in our gaming consciousness forever. That and glitter sparkles.

Runner-up: We guess that *Linkin Park* song from *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* isn't too bad; shame, the game has to have something going for it.

WEIRDEST GAMEPLAY MECHANIC

Winner: *NeverDead*

Losing your limbs mid-battle, or rolling around as a severed head (or bite-sized snack, from the perspective of certain enemies) attempting to gather up your lost body parts was definitely a brief, utterly bizarre novelty in between the rest of the humdrum gameplay.

MOST INEXPLICABLE SUCCESS IN SPITE OF CRITICAL REVIEWS

Winner: *Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City*

All the reviewers in the world hated it; they gave it terrible scores with their almighty reviewing powers and slapped up "Do Not Play" signs. But it sold incredibly well, just like *Resident Evil 6*.

MOST BAT-SH*T CRAZY PROLOGUE

Winner: *The Testament of Sherlock Holmes*

There's a monkey and it steals a necklace from a safe but then someone startles it and it dashes to hide and then swings from a chandelier but drops the necklace and it lands on a fish and kills it and then it cuts a hole in a window with a diamond to escape. What?

HIGHEST BODY COUNT

Winner: *Saint's Row: The Third*

If we didn't award this to *Saint's Row: The Third* we're pretty sure someone would have run up to us with a giant pink dildo bat while dressed as a giant rabbit, and beaten us to death with it.

Runner-up: *Black Ops 2 Zombies* (if you survive long enough)

BEST COOKING SIMULATOR

Winner: *Guild Wars 2*

There are precious few games that will reward you with ample experience points just for figuring out that if you combine a packet of salt with some black peppercorn, you get salt and pepper.

LONGEST CUT-SCENE IN GAMING

Winner: *Asura's Wrath*

The closest thing to an "interactive anime" this side of a *Naruto* game, *Asura's Wrath* contains the angriest fellow in gaming history as he punches everything in the universe when you press a button.



Biggest promise already broken



Most confusing multiplayer experience in the NAG office



Most exciting game we bought but haven't played yet

Most exciting video game project on Kickstarter



Most inexplicable success in spite of critical reviews



WORST MONEY-GRUBBER

Winner: *Gotham City Impostors*
Thank goodness that this game is now free-to-play (on PC, at least), but when it launched for a whopping \$15, and still made it practically impossible to unlock decent weapons and interesting costumes without forking over more dosh, it was a bitter pill to swallow. It's *still* full-price on 360 and PS3.
Runner-up: *Tribes: Ascend*, despite being entirely free, started off so good but has now dived into an awful mess of overpowered, under-tested and unbalanced premium weapons and equipment.

SMALLEST BLIP ON THE RADAR

Winner: *Death Rally*. This game is awesome, but honestly, about two hours into it and you realise that you're done. Great fun, but it's over now.
Runner-up: *Quantum Conundrum*

GAME THAT WE WANT TO TALK ABOUT THE LEAST

Winner: *Resident Evil 6*
Just shut your face.
Runner-up: *Of Orcs and Men*

BEST DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION NETWORK

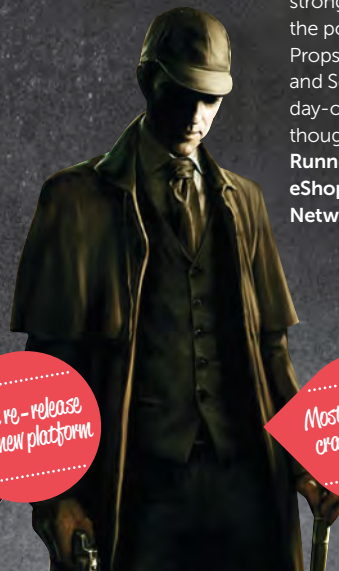
Winner: *Steam*
Like there was even a contest here. Steam has incredible discounts, a strong infrastructure, and the power of Gabe Newell. Props do go to Nintendo and Sony for embracing day-one digital releases though.
Runner-ups: Nintendo eShop, PlayStation Network

WORST GAME OF THE FOREVER

Winner: *Ary*
There are no words to describe just how terrible this French survival-horror game is. Wait, there are! Frustrating, unplayable, horrible, broken. Imagine the worst escort-quest you've ever had. It's that, but worse. **NAG**



Best re-release on a new platform



Most bat-shit crazy prologue

Worst game of the forever





DETAILS

Release date
2013
Platforms
360 / PS3 / PC
Genre
Third-person shooter
Developer
Spark Unlimited
Website
www.lostplanetthegame.com
Publisher
Capcom

Lost Planet 3

Lost Space 5: Gears of Snow

A strange franchise that's never quite managed to find its focus, *Lost Planet 3* continues the trend by being slightly unlike its predecessors. Sitting as a prequel to *Lost Planet: Extreme Condition* and *Lost Planet 2*, it still takes place on the planet E.D.N. III. Series creator Kenji Oguro is still heading up his role as director, but Capcom has outsourced development to Spark Unlimited, whom you may not know unless you played *Legendary*, *Turning Point: Fall of Liberty* or *Call of Duty: Finest Hour*.
Lost Planet 3

focuses heavily on story. The planet E.D.N. III is still experiencing an ice-age (unlike its tropical rainforest drag in the second game).

Series creator Kenji Oguro is still heading up his role as director, but Capcom has outsourced development to Spark Unlimited, whom you may not know unless you played *Legendary*, *Turning Point: Fall of Liberty* or *Call of Duty: Finest Hour*.

The PTX-40A mech from *Lost Planet 2* is a playable character in *Tatsunoko vs. Capcom: Ultimate All-Stars*.



Earth is having resource issues, and so the Neo-Venus Construction Company (NEVEC) has sent a few human colonists to E.D.N. III to harvest minerals to send back to Earth. You'll play as Jim Peyton, a scruffy everyman, who's working this cold contract to help out

his family back home, two million light years away.

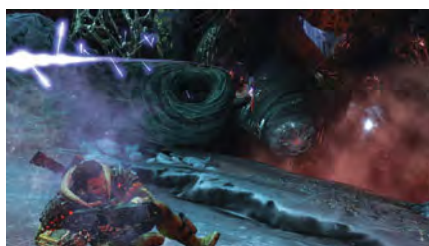
Because NEVEC has yet to go all evil (spoiler alert, it happens in the first game), there are no militarised "VS" bipedal mechs in *Lost Planet 3*. The "Rigs" you control are much larger and slower than the VS mechs from the first and

second game, and don't pack any guns. You've got a powerful drill arm, and a claw arm, with various upgrades making you more potent as you go.

Lost Planet 2 ended up being a very grind-heavy affair, forcing you to go co-op if you wanted to progress. Instead, *Lost Planet 3* has a more traditional campaign structure. You take on core quests to progress the story, or side-quests helping out colonists for some extra cash. You can openly explore areas on foot (unless the weather would kill you) or in your Rig, talk to non-player characters, upgrade equipment, and build Rigs using items gathered throughout the campaign. Thermal energy is no longer tied to your life support, and is instead a form of



Gears of War space-bros Marcus Fenix and Dom Whatshisface were added to *Lost Planet 2* as bonus costumes.



currency. The indigenous insect-like aliens known as the Akrid are the main antagonists, but Jim will uncover dark NEVEC secrets as he gets embroiled in what's looking like a pretty decent yarn. Spark Unlimited has spent a lot of time on their facial animation systems and hired some decent voice actors. The game's trailers thus far, make it look like a pretty good movie.

While on foot, Jim plays every bit like *Gears of War*. The cover system is implemented in exactly the same way; you can blind fire from behind cover and vault over cover while running. The Rig is not only useful for stomping smaller Akrid, but acts as a functional traversal tool. Once you get a certain upgrade for your claw arm, you can shoot it as a grappling hook, letting you hop out of the cockpit and zip line across.

It's surprising to see Capcom still trust western developers with their properties, after the whole fiasco with studio GRIN and the expensive *Bionic Commando* reboot failure. *Lost Planet 3* may represent the last non-internally developed game to come out of Capcom for a while. **NAG**

- Miktar

DETAILS

Release date

2013

Platforms

Wii / Wii U

Genre

Massively multiplayer online role-playing game

Developer

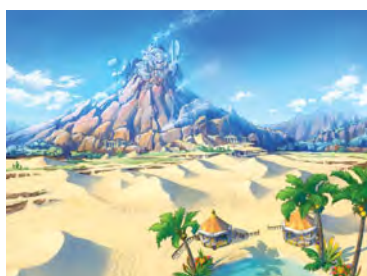
Square Enix / Armor Project

Website

www.dqx.jp

Publisher

Square Enix



Series creator Yuji Horii was inspired by western RPGs such as *Wizardry* and *Ultima*.

Dragon Quest X

The Dragon Warrior goes online

Arguably the world's biggest and most famous role-playing series, *Dragon Quest* gets its first online iteration. But while *Dragon Quest X* does indeed have a large massively-multiplayer component, it's not entirely a pure MMO. Six years in development, the Wii version came out in Japan in August. It sold 400,000 copies in its first week, which does seem low compared to *Dragon Quest IX* for 3DS which sold 2.3 million its first week in 2009. However, there are a lot of factors to consider when comparing the two directly.

Dragon Quest X is the first game you can legally rent in Japan (in almost two decades, due to various Japanese second-hand market regulations). You can rent it for free for eight days, and it comes with a code to play online since the game has a monthly subscription to play online. It's unclear if Square Enix will waive the subscription fee when the game launches in the West, like what Capcom did for *Monster Hunter Tri*.

When you're done with your free trial, you're given the chance to buy it for almost half-price compared to retail (R352 instead of R702, converted from Japanese yen). The rental setup and discount is part of a huge push from Square Enix to try and ease the massive *Dragon Quest* fan base into the

When online, you can either team up with other players directly by meeting them in towns or out in the world, or you can hire their characters temporarily as AI teammates."

***Dragon Quest* has a long history involving women rubbing their breasts [Wait... what?, AD] in another person's face (the Toriyama-coined "puff-puff special attack").**

idea of playing what has been until now a single-player experience, online. It seems to have worked, for where it took *Final Fantasy XI* two years to reach 500,000 subscribers; *Dragon Quest X* managed it in less than two months.

The Wii version of *Dragon Quest X* comes on two discs, and you're required to buy an external USB hard drive if you intend to play. The game installs entirely to the external drive, and you don't even need the discs to play. *Dragon Quest X* is still a traditional RPG in the Japanese sense: battles are turn-based, you select if you want to attack or defend, and everyone goes in turn according to their speed statistic. The art direction retains the Akira Toriyama (*Dragon Ball*, *Chrono Trigger*) style the series is known for, with cute, expressive characters and monsters, all wonderfully animated.

The game starts with you customising a basic human character (and sibling), and the entire hour-long prologue takes place entirely offline. Once you finish the prologue, you're given the option of progressing to the main online part of the game, or you can take on the role of the younger sibling you created and play through a small separate single-player story. But eventually, you'll want to head online to the main game.

While you start as a human in the offline prologue, when you go online you're able to become an Ogre, Elf, Dwarf, Puklipo (like a water dryad) or Weddie (little gnomish thing). After a certain point, you're given the ability to change between the six races at will. There's no real major difference between them, other



than appearance. While playing through the offline campaign, you can hire party members by completing their side-missions. When online, you can either team up with other players directly by meeting them in towns or out in the world, or you can hire their characters temporarily as AI teammates. A cute touch: when you start a fight with a monster out in the open world, an invisible barrier pops up around the player and enemy teams. This prevents other players from taking part, but stray players can still help out by cheering from the side-lines, which gives you a slight boost or restores some health.

The upcoming Wii U version of the game is basically the same as the Wii one, other than running at a higher resolution and having better shadows. Both versions occupy the same online servers. There has been no official date given for a localized western release of either version. **NAG**

- Miktar

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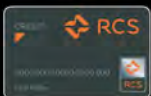
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DETAILS

Release date

Q1 2013

Platforms

3DS / Wii U

Genre

Action role-playing game

Developer

Capcom

Website

www.capcom.co.jp/monsterhunter/4/

Publisher

Capcom

Monster Hunter 4

Biggest Game Hunter

Monster Hunter is a very straightforward franchise. You hunt small-to-large monsters, most looking either like dinosaurs or dragons, and kill them. Then you harvest their bones, teeth and skin so you can make new, better weapons and armour. Using your new gear, you can attempt to hunt even bigger prey.

"Attempt" is the key word here. While the smaller monsters in *Monster Hunter* tend to be simplistic in their patterns, or easy to dispatch, the larger ones are quite dangerous. Success comes through proper preparation (making sure you have enough rations and potions), reconnaissance (checking the environment beforehand and noting the habits of the beast you're tracking) and bravery. When you take down one of the many boss monsters, you've earned it.

The fourth instalment, exclusive to the 3DS, sticks to what works and makes moderate adjustments to elements that have seemed lacklustre in the past. The platforming and

vertical traversal has been refined: walls can be climbed more easily, and in any direction (hand-holds permitting). As such, there is

more platforming in *Monster Hunter 4* than before, and the larger monsters will take advantage of this to chase you up and down mountains.

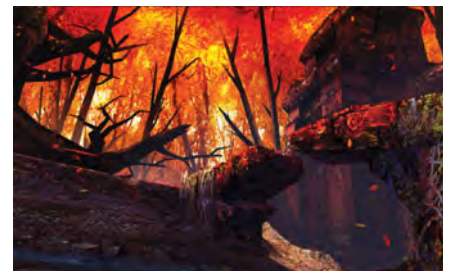
The environments – ranging from jungle to desert – are much larger in spite of being

on a portable system. The underwater fights from *Monster Hunter Tri* have been removed, which is a slight shame, but we doubt they'll really be missed. Story plays a stronger role this time around, your adventure traipsing across multiple zones thanks to your travelling basecamp, a group of caravans. You'll interact with more NPC characters than before, as the series starts to place a stronger emphasis on your interaction with the locals beyond just selling them dragon ribcages.

All the regular weapons make a return, such as the Great Sword, Sword & Shield, Hammer, Lance, Gunlance and so on. Each one has a very unique play style and benefit (which becomes important during cooperative play), and all the weapons have been given modifications to their systems to refine them further. A new addition to your arsenal is a strange hunting weapon that lets you shoot

"The fourth instalment, exclusive to the 3DS, sticks to what works and makes moderate adjustments to elements that have seemed lacklustre in the past."

Resident Evil director Paul W. S. Anderson is considering making a bunch of *Monster Hunter* movies.



out and control an insect. The bug will attach to enemies and drain their energy, buffing you with speed, attack, health or defence bonuses. It's a light weapon, very fast and mobile, likely designed to give newcomers something potent and easy to use. Though no doubt, like all the weapons, it will have much depth to master if you're willing to invest the time.

The fun cat-like Felyne comrades return to assist you in your hunt, replacing the short-lived Shakalaka comrades that were introduced in *Monster Hunter Freedom 2 / Monster Hunter Freedom Unite*. In previous games, the Felyne comrades would help you harvest materials from the world as you explore, fight with you, and tend to your garden while you're away. It's unclear if any changes have been made to the comrade system for *Monster Hunter 4*, but we look forward to seeing the Felyne antics regardless.

There are a lot of smaller changes across the board that should improve an already impressive formula: you can now move the camera freely around the environment, enemies react better to slope terrain, and you can grab on to larger monsters to keep attacking them when they take to the skies (no doubt taken from Capcom's other dragon-rich game, *Dragon's Dogma*).

It's been confirmed that hunters will enjoy both local cooperative play, and online cooperative play, for up to four players. Which is really the best way to play *Monster Hunter*.

NAG

- Miktar



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2K Games paid for my flight, hotel and dinner. They were also very nice to me, and told me they liked my dinosaur T-shirt.

BioShock Infinite

SCIENCE FICTION! DRAMA! STEAMPUNK! ACTION!

What was once known only as "Project Icarus", *BioShock Infinite* hopes to soar in ways fans of the *BioShock* franchise have come to expect... and to exceed their expectations in every way. By combining an exotic and never-before-seen location with a strong narrative centred on a mysterious young girl who has control over remarkable powers, Irrational Games has crafted an experience done no favours just talking about it.



Welcome to the side-show

RELEASE DATE
March 26 (delayed from February 26)

PLATFORMS:
PC / 360 / PS3

We were lucky enough to catch an exclusive opportunity to fly to Los Angeles for some genuine hands-on time with a near-final build of *BioShock Infinite*. And not some carefully pruned press-demonstration either: this was the genuine article, with only a handful of placeholder assets. But before we were given free rein to start a new game for ourselves, lead designer Ken Levine wanted to give us a teaser of things to come – and some bad news.

"When Rod Fergusson (from Epic Games) joined the project as project director, he fell in love with it immediately," says Ken. "But, he told us outright: the game would benefit from three or four more weeks of development. Naturally, I was reluctant. This would be our second delay, and we'd miss our original launch window by a month. But, he was right. And we wanted to put out the best game we could. So that's your bad news, the game's been delayed. But not for long."

Our demonstration opens with a view of Elizabeth, a young girl clad in sterling blue, as she looks excitedly out the window of the elevator we're in. The view beyond the glass is clear sky, a wonderfully manicured vista bracketed by the ridiculously impossible sight of buildings, floating atop what appear to be hot-air balloons. Elizabeth enthusiastically remarks on what she sees, looking back at us with large, expressive eyes.

"When we shipped *BioShock* a few years ago, the goal that we accomplished more than any other goal, was creating an environment that people could really immerse themselves in," remarks Ken, pointing to our view of the sky-city of Columbia beyond the elevator glass. "What other media lets you explore at will? There is no other media that lets you take in a space, and find things. Find things your friends didn't find, that people around you might not find. When I first played *Ultima Underworld* back in the day, it inspired me."

Columbia, unlike Rapture from the first and second *BioShock*, is alive. There are people walking the streets, going about their business, engaging in debates, gossip and enjoying the wonders around them. Airships nose between the floating buildings, sky-rail lines carry cargo containers along their twin tracks, while the buildings themselves float freely about, sometimes connecting to each other to provide a walkway for the inhabitants of Columbia.

"We were happy with the environment we created [in *BioShock*], but the one problem was, everyone was dead – everyone but a few splicers, of course. So with *Infinite*, our goal was to populate the world, to let you arrive at a full, living place, and get involved. Not just be an archaeologist that uncovers things, but watching things change as they happen."

The elevator explodes around us: a nearby barge fired a rocket on our position, so a hasty escape is made to a nearby sky-rail.

Elizabeth follows right behind us, using the same



contraption as us to zip-line along one of the sky-rail tracks. From our vantage point above a nearby platform, the shotgun handily dispatches some enemies below, and a deft execution move takes us from the rail to the ground in one motion, and much to the detriment of the person we landed on. A sky-barge draws alongside the platform, offloading enemies, and Elizabeth scrambles to stay out of trouble. She shouts at us, calling for us to catch something. She tosses us a bright blue vial containing "Salt", which replenishes our Vigor, this game's equivalent of *BioShock's* Plasmids.

"We were hoping people would like Elizabeth. We got back from E3, and we realized we had to finish the game, but we didn't feel confident with what we had done so far. Elizabeth is great, but we wanted her to be your partner all the time. So we started expanding upon her abilities. If you get low on ammo in a clutch moment, she will scrounge around for ammo to throw at you. She'll heal you, or find you money when you really need to buy some health. She can pick locks – she had a lot of time in her tower – she's a little nerdy, so she has a lot of cryptography knowledge. That's why what we're showing you right now, is a moment later in the game with everything is firing on all cylinders."

The combat flows all through the environment. We leap from rail to rooftop to rail, going anywhere in the immediate space thanks to the magnetic properties of the sky-hook grapple. A sudden shout from Elizabeth draws our attention to a giant half-mechanical man, a Handyman, who arrives on the scene like a bomb. The Handyman has no trouble following us anywhere, leaping up and electrifying the sky-rail to make it unusable for a time. Sustained damage from enemies causes our shield to pop, the screen shattering as if glass. By remaining in cover, the shield regenerates, crystalline fractures growing over the view before fading. By using a Vigor power not explained to us, the weakened Handyman is restrained in the air and dispatched with a rocket.

"When I tried this section for the first time, I died seven times to that Handyman," admits Ken. "I'm still in a bit of an argument with the balance guys over it."



"Booker, are you afraid of God?" asks Elizabeth.
"No", replies a man's voice. *"I'm afraid of you."*



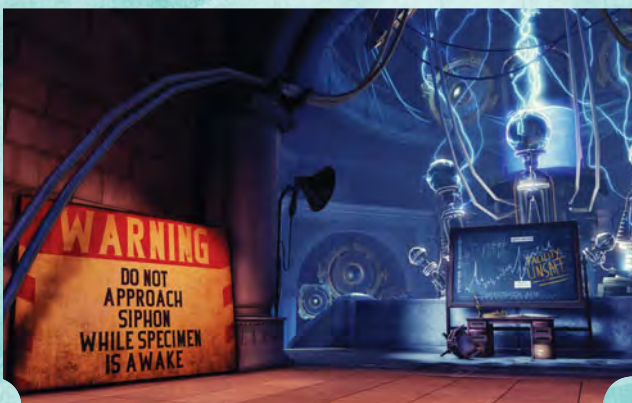
The Main Attraction

BioShock Infinite opens somewhere along the coast of Maine, in the year 1912. We play as Booker, a gruff-sounding man who seems to know his way around guns and likes to talk to himself. We're delivered to an island via rowboat, the only structure visible that of a lighthouse. We're brought there by two strange characters, a couple it seems, who natter between each other about Booker as if he wasn't there. We pause to listen to their conversation, which becomes about the fact that we're not leaving the rowboat. "He's still not leaving," the woman complains dryly. "He will," the man responds, with an odd confidence. We disembark, with the strange sensation that we've not seen the last of those two.

Exploring the lighthouse (only one way to go, and that's up), Booker uncovers a gruesome murder, and a firm note reminding him to "get the girl, and all will be forgiven". Booker seems to know less than we do about why he's here,



While travelling through Columbia, either by grappling from point to point or by using the sky-rails, there are many hidden locations you can enter which may contain lucrative side-quests or puzzles. These will make purchasing expensive Vigors later down the line much easier.



or who this girl he's supposed to find may be. At the top of the lighthouse, some bells are rung in a particular pattern, which elicits a booming response from the sky, as if God himself decided to play a few notes on a saxophone the size of the universe. Booker sits in a newly revealed chair and the lighthouse becomes a surprise rocket, blasting into the atmosphere. It's tense, exciting, and Booker loses the gun he was given by the couple in the rowboat. "Ascending", a pre-recorded voice remarks. "Ascending. Ascending. Ascending..."

"Now entering Heaven. Hallelujah."
We burst through the clouds, and a massive city glows in view, as if by the glory of the Almighty. Welcome to Columbia, a city in the sky, a place of wonder, technology far beyond what should be possible for the era, and an incredible amount of dubious morality.

Building a better tomorrow, yesterday

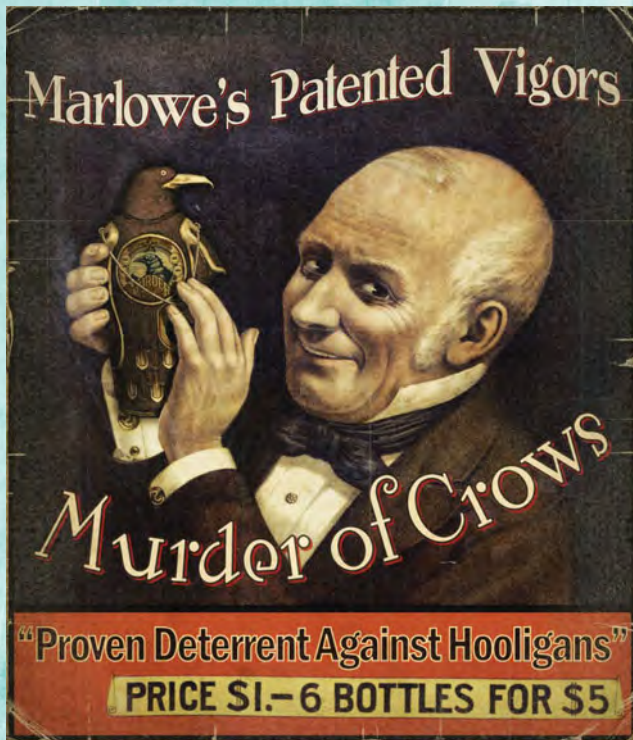
The DNA of *BioShock* is there, in everything. Exploring Columbia uncovers "Voxophone" logs that give additional audio narration from the viewpoint of various characters. You can view "Kinectoscope" movies, little black and white silent propaganda films, at special booths. The entire city exists in glory to "the prophet" Comstock, represented as an aging, bearded man who, aside from building this utopia in the sky, could also apparently see the future.

Things start off slow with a meandering exploration of the city as Booker tries to get his bearings after a particularly disturbing "baptism" upon his arrival. Columbia is an incredibly detailed city. There is activity everywhere, with lots of incidental dialogue to uncover off the beaten track. *BioShock Infinite* is not an open-world game in the traditional sense: it's more like *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, with the narrative leading you to locations which you may revisit later.

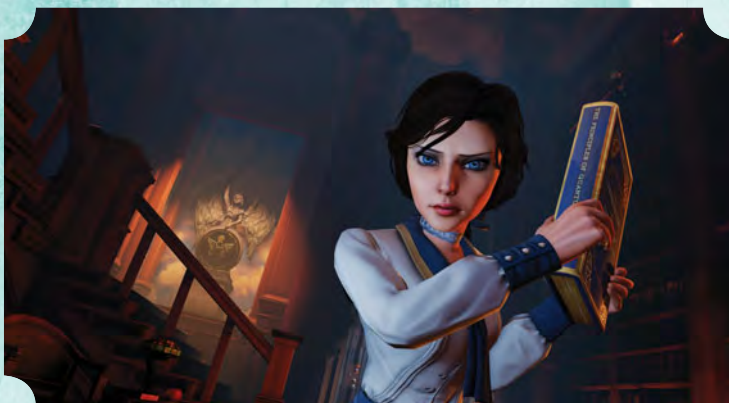
A side-show carnival acts as a transparent introduction to both gunplay and Vigor powers. Various attractions, mini-games with rewards such as money or items, let you test out what some of the Vigors do, such as the Bucking Bronco that lifts enemies into the air by running a shockwave along the ground. We're funnelled towards a raffle, but not before meeting up again with the curious couple from the rowboat. They ask Booker to wager on the outcome of a coin toss, he picks tails. Tails it is and the man complains that "it's always tails". They have a ledger with them, tracking the heads/tails count. For some reason, the heads column is empty. They give the distinct impression that it's not that everyone picks tails, or that it always lands tails, but rather that Booker always picks tails. As if he's been here before. It's all very *Twilight Zone*...

But before we can mull this paradox over too much, we're lured into a sudden morality choice, the situation a very unpleasant one. Booker "wins" the raffle, unknowingly giving him the "honour" of throwing a baseball at a restrained interracial couple upon a stage. Apparently, racism is rife on Columbia, and the punishment for being "impure" is to be stoned to death. We need to decide: throw the baseball at the couple, or at the announcer. A timer forces us to decide quickly, our choice causing Booker to get apprehended by the police, accused of being "the false shepherd".

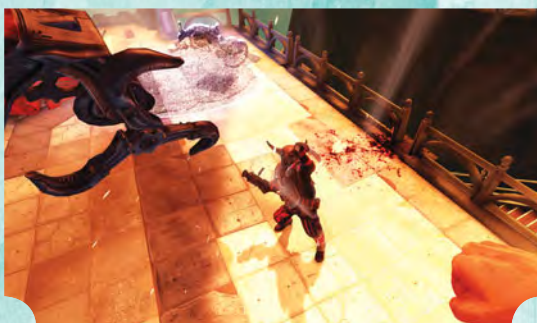
Things get violent, very fast. Booker uses a cop's skyhook claw to mangle the officer's face off, in gruesome detail. The action hits hard: we're running for our life, using a Possession Vigour found earlier to turn the automaton-controlled turrets against their creators. We stumble across an upgrade to Possession, which lets us temporarily make an enemy fight for us. When Possession wears off, the victim



“The tear, or rip, in reality that Elizabeth opens, shows sights and locations elsewhere in both time and space.”



The skyhook execution move slams you down on an opponent and you grind off their face using your grapple tool.



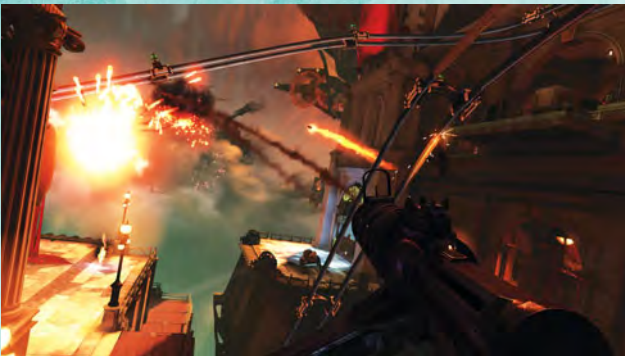
commits suicide. Law enforcement sends in a Fireman: a heavily-armoured bruiser that throws fireballs everywhere. Taking him down, nets us the Devil's Kiss Vigor. It seems all Vigors let you either fire them directly, or charge them up to place as a trap in the environment. You can do combination moves by firing a Vigor through a trap, but we won't spoil the effect.

The strange duo from the rowboat continue to reappear in our path, their dialogue confusing, hiding much meaning though we've yet the context to fully understand their purpose. Occasionally, objects in the environment shudder slightly out of phase, as if they're straining to remain a part of reality. Things only continue to get weirder as the game progresses, and we're hesitant to say much more for fear of spoiling anything.

We find upgrades to our Gear, special items that slot into specific categories, allowing us upgrades such as melee attacks setting enemies on fire. Another Gear we find is "Blood to Salt", which increases our chances of finding Salt when looting corpses. While Gear tokens can't be upgraded, weapons and Vigors all have several tiers of upgrades. For Vigors, these upgrades are potent. For example, the Murder of Crows Vigor, which blasts out a flurry of crows that maim any targets in the area (making them more vulnerable to damage), can be upgraded to gain the effect that when someone dies from a Murder of Crows attack, their body becomes a booby trap that will unleash another Murder of Crows flock should anyone walk over it.



At the start of the game, water is used as a strong religious metaphor and a rite of passage, plus it looks pretty amazing.



The Handyman is Infinite's equivalent to BioShock's Big Daddy, except the Handyman is fast, agile and powerful, able to chase you down with ease.



The girl in the cage

A lot happens before you even meet Elizabeth for the first time. We're introduced to sky-line combat and travel, which has much more nuance to it than early videos let on. It's not as on-rails as one would assume: you choose where to attach, how fast to go (the faster you go the less accurate enemy fire), and you can transition from rail to rail at any time, changing directions instantly or executing a "sky-line strike" on an enemy below.

Reaching Elizabeth, who is held captive in a giant angel tower at the centre of Columbia, and the resulting escape sequence, is a top-notch ride. A certain sequence involving a child setting himself on fire to prevent you from reaching Elizabeth, is sure to be the topic of much discussion down the line.

As for Elizabeth herself, having been kept in isolation her entire life has not made her useless. She spent the time learning a host of valuable skills, such as lock picking, and the ability to open a "tear" in reality. The former comes in handy when presented with a locked door, while the latter is both fascinating and functional. The tear, or rip, in reality that Elizabeth opens, shows sights and locations elsewhere in both time and space. One area of the game presented us a choice of multiple tears that could be opened, though only one could be active at a time, which let us alter the battlefield on the fly, adding or removing walls, phasing in turrets or sky-hook grapple points, and more. Granted, these tears are pre-set, or as Elizabeth frames it, "the tear was always there, I'm just letting us see it."

The interaction between Booker and Elizabeth is the third pillar to the experience in *BioShock Infinite*. The first pillar is Place: Columbia is a marvel, a hodgepodge of anachronisms and then some. The second is Gameplay: *Infinite* brings back all the tactical choices of *BioShock* but makes each Vigor and weapon more powerful and functional, to prevent the "best combination" situation that happened with *BioShock*. Lastly, there is Story: the interplay between Booker, Elizabeth and the larger framework of what they find themselves embroiled in is genuinely fascinating.

We had around four hours to play the game. So much happened in those four hours, and yet there is the distinct impression that things were only just beginning. *Infinite* is a bold move, combining many narrative genres and even attempting the difficult act of giving you an NPC partner that isn't annoying or useless. Visually, what Irrational has managed to accomplish is breath-taking. Where Rapture was dark deco, always framed by the grime of neglect and travesty, Columbia is bright and full of energy. But that doesn't mean it is without a darker underbelly, of course. We were playing the PC version on a rather hefty machine, but we noticed no difference in model quality or texture resolution between the PC, PS3 and 360 versions. Obviously the PC version will have the highest image quality in the long run (anti-alias all the things!), but all three versions seemed to run at an equivalent frame rate, with no screen-tearing on either of the consoles. **NAG**

- Miktar

REVIEWS INTRO

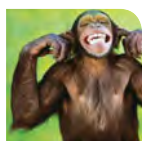
A new year means a fresh start... Pity nobody told the NAG reviewers.

What New Year's resolutions are you actually going to stick to this coming year – remember, we'll check in 2014 and chastise accordingly.



RedTide

Stop passing up on overseas trips because of deadlines – good luck NAG. Have more fun. Get outside more. Stop eating rubbish. Keep running. Write fiction.



Miktar

Refocus on my art. Writing about games is fun and all, but any monkey can do it.



Azimuth

To stop buying so many shoes. Wait, no. I meant to buy more shoes. It's going to be hard, but... I can do it.



Mikit0707

Get stressed less, play more games and try to buy a house by the end of the year. The second resolution is my favourite. :3



GeometriX

I'm going to make my own damn game.



Barkskin

I plan to advance my sole *Diablo III* character beyond his current, pitiful 17th level. With a little luck, I'll hit level 20 before losing interest and playing something else instead. Again.

MINIREVIEWS

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

PAINKILLER: HELL & DAMNATION

The idea of an HD remake of *Painkiller* might seem a little odd to you, and if it does, you're not alone. *Painkiller* still looks decent by today's standards and there's a package of the original game and its expansions floating around that's just as fun to play today as it was in 2004.

So why bother with this remake? The developer's intentions seem noble enough but in their attempt to stay true to the original in this Unreal Engine 3-powered recreation they've practically only managed to duplicate the game with a few extra frills and shaders. This isn't even the kind of game that warrants sexy visuals (and, to be frank, the visuals in this remake aren't all that sexy). The heavy metal soundtrack is still intact, with a few new tunes, and there are a handful of goodies in the collector's edition like a badly produced making of DVD and some cool stickers.

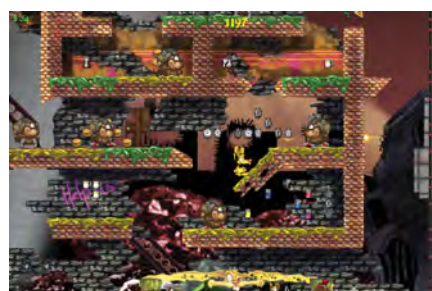
Painkiller HD is fine. It's not bad but it's just unnecessary. If you somehow missed it the first time round and again when the bundle hit, this will be a good place to jump on board, but fans of the series will struggle to find a reason to justify picking up this game.

60



TOXIC BUNNY HD

This is a tough one. Given the fledgling nature of the local game development scene, calling *Toxic Bunny HD* (a locally developed, high-definition revamp of 1996's *Toxic Bunny*) a merely average 2D side-scrolling platformer experience seems unkind. In truth, however, that's exactly what it is. In it, you guide the eponymous, caffeine-loving bunny through environments covered in oddly cheerful goop and grime, killing enemies with a variety of ranged weaponry, collecting items and completing obtuse objectives to progress. To its detriment, there's very little technique or finesse required in its gameplay: the platforming is very basic, and while you



collect new weapons along the way, combat is simplistic and shallow.

The HD side of things is handled decently, and while the art style won't be for everyone, it's visually clean and there are some nice effects like smoke billowing from weapons and sparks flying when bullets collide with objects in the world. While the game definitely isn't terrible, it just isn't very fun – and the majority of modern platformers have advanced to a level that simply outclasses *Toxic Bunny HD* in every way. Even by historical standards, it's just not a good platformer.

50

“Gee_SHIFT this is my DJ name ”

- Geoff



Shryke

My actual resolution is to spend less time gaming. Seriously. I give it, like, a week max...



SAVAGE

Spend more time drawing, and to be nicer to people online playing games, even if they camp like little camping pieces of... *woosa, woosa*



ShockG

This year I'll actually do the things I keep telling myself I will, one of which is making deadlines and generally being on time for appointments.

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...

QCF Design

WWW.DESKTOPDUNGEONS.NET

When *Desktop Dungeons* first emerged, it was little more than a rough idea from local game developer Rodain Joubert, but when a fellow developer Danny Day (who also spends his time running www.MakeGamesSA.com) picked up on the game and invited Rodain and DD into QCF Design alongside Mark Luck, it would set the three of them on a path to realise their dreams of building a full-time, dedicated game development studio.

As it turns out, developing a game to the standards expected by the masses is no easy task, and a little while back QCF found itself forced to shift development of *Desktop Dungeons* from its native Game Maker to Unity in order to ease the process of multi-platform deployment. The move came with its own consequences: eight months of dev time in GM was effectively flushed away, but the gameplay prototyping – arguably the most important aspect of a game like this – experienced during that period was invaluable. Rebuilding the game from scratch has also given the



team ample opportunities to polish gameplay balance and progression as they went along.

So where does that leave *Desktop Dungeons* today? While the team wasn't ready to commit to a release date yet, we know that the game is headed for PC (Mac and Linux, too), iOS and Android devices when it's done. The current alpha and beta programs are still running on QCF's dedicated *Desktop Dungeons* website (the alpha is free and runs in a browser

window) so you can get a feel for the game and soak up all the luscious artwork by local artist Dorianne Dutrieux and exquisite portrait pieces by the mysterious Canadian known only as Lurk.

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.

Call of Duty: Black Ops II

The future feels oddly familiar

In the months leading up to *Black Ops II*'s launch, all the usual mega-hype we've been exposed to alluded to a game that would alter the *Call of Duty* brand in numerous ways, shaking up what's become a hugely predictable annual tick in each year's list of "things that will definitely happen" checkboxes. When you're the new game in a long-running series so often criticised for failing to innovate or take risks as *Call of Duty*, a sure-fire way to gain immediate attention is to showcase all the ways you plan to innovate and take risks. Makes sense, right? But does *Black Ops II* take this obvious marketing ploy and surprise everyone by not actually being an obvious marketing ploy and offering up something that actually innovates and takes risks with the billion-dollar formula? I'd say you already know the answer.

Its single-player campaign is split between two timelines, distinct in weaponry, gadgets and playable characters, but not necessarily in gameplay. In the timeline set near the end of the first Cold War, you control Alex Mason, returning protagonist from the original *Black Ops*. Then you jump ahead to near-future environs as Alex's son David, who happens to follow in his dad's footsteps by joining the military. He seemingly also inherits his father's penchant for becoming embroiled in dangerous, mind-bending conspiracies. This era-hopping narrative has one common denominator: its primary antagonist, international hyper-terrorist Raul Menendez, who rallies a staggering global following behind his cause for economic equality. It's a powerful deception, however, as Menendez is really just an anarchist with a weapon-waving fan club and a remarkable talent as a large-scale puppeteer. *Black Ops II*'s first single-player boo-boo is in failing to take what could have very

DETAILS

Platforms

360 / PC
PS3 / Wii U

Genre

First-Person
Shooter

Age restriction

18

Multiplayer

Local

None

Online

18 players

Developer

Treyarch

Website

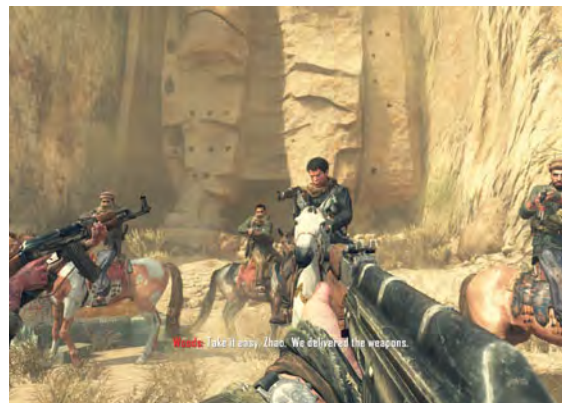
www.callofduty.com/blackops2

Publisher

Activision

Distributor

Megarom



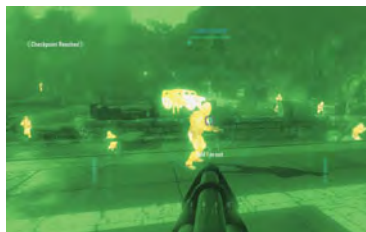
1 During missions, there are extra items hidden in the world that you can access which give you extra abilities and weapons – like mortar shells to use as grenades, or optical camouflage for avoiding foes.

2 A nice new touch is the choice to customise your load-out before single-player missions, even selecting new perks that'll enhance your abilities. It doesn't change the game in any tangible way though.

obviously been a thrilling, engaging narrative and exposing it to us in a way that makes it easy to follow, or care about. Buried somewhere beneath the usual *Call of Duty* spectacle and the increasingly gratuitous sequence of explosions therein lies a genuinely interesting story, but it's difficult to notice when it's too busy messily leaping from mission to mission, struggling to stay coherent and therefore making it a struggle for us to perceive it as anything significant.

This isn't to say that the game isn't fun, or that its solo set-pieces are anything less than extraordinary. Treyarch has proven once again why *Call of Duty* is so revered for being the best in its class, the go-to game for scripted spectacle and volatile Hollywood intensity. It boasts some impressively clever design in its incidental environmental details, particularly those set in the future. A trip to a floating city exclusive to the mega-rich, for example, introduces us to personalised ads that scan biometric data when someone wanders nearby, dynamically tailoring the ads they showcase to whoever strolls past. Posters for sunglasses will have their placeholder model replaced with your likeness, and you'll become the star of any movie poster you venture near. There's definite imagination on display from the team behind the game, and I'd love to see that imagination put to use in a game that's less forceful with its linearity, less inclined to hold the player's hand. And yes, that still happens, with the game often snatching control from you to play out its script – a trait which has become more and more annoying with each successive *COD*, and is especially grating in a year starring such champions of player agency as *Dishonored* and *XCOM*.

Attempts at making it less linear and providing a semblance of choice are courtesy of various mid-mission



factors, like whether or not you manage to discover crucial intel reports, or the actions you take during a fatal standoff. It affects the branching storyline and its eventual conclusion. More substantially in terms of the gameplay variety they provide are the Strike Force missions, which also affect the course of the narrative. These are optional missions that see you taking a predetermined assemblage of troops (it can be any mix of unit types, ranging from SEAL squads to four-legged robot death-dealers bristling with firepower) and battling to complete objectives like defending critical locations and rescuing important allies. You've got a limited time to complete these missions when they appear, and only a limited number of strike teams in your employ. Fail the mission, and you lose a strike team. Soldiers and vehicles in your control can be either directly controlled or commanded via a rudimentary real-time strategy-style interface, letting you select squads and send them where you'd like. Unfortunately, these missions become more irritating than they should be enjoyable. It's mostly due to the incredibly stupid AI that's always so prevalent in the COD series. It's stuff like allies and enemies standing close enough to each other to share a quick, mid-skirmish hug, but not actually shooting each other. With this in mind, because the enemies in Strike Force missions often vastly outnumber you and your squads, they're able to simply steamroll through your lines despite the fact that they're all equally stupid, eventually killing enough of your buddies to make the rest of the mission an infuriating grind. It also means that, while the idea of commanding squads via an RTS-like system is inherently appealing as a distraction from the linear corridor shooting offered by the rest of the game, it's practically impossible to play Strike

THANKS FOR BUYING BLACK OPS II. NOW INVEST A LITTLE MORE TO GET THE *FULL* GAME!

We could debate the evils and merits of DLC, pre-order bonuses and tacked-on purchase incentives for days on end and still not be any closer to discovering an agreeable middle ground on the matter, so that's not what's going to happen here. Instead, I'm just going to point out a horrible problem that's arisen with the Digital Deluxe Edition of *Black Ops II*. This relates specifically to the PC version; we're unsure if pre-order bonuses on the consoles are having a similar effect. Since paying \$59.99 for the standard version of the game on Steam clearly isn't enough, players are asked to fork out an additional \$19.99 (resulting in a ludicrous total of \$79.99) for a Digital Deluxe Edition – which, along with the usual digital doodads like soundtracks and weapon camo, gives players a bonus multiplayer map called Nuketown 2025. To lock out those who don't find it reasonable to pay a further \$19.99 on top of an already expensive purchase for ultimately meaningless tertiary crap, Treyarch has created an exclusive multiplayer playlist for owners of the extra content – a playlist called "Chaos Moshpit" at the time of writing. It rotates through all maps and game modes, including the Nuketown map. The problem is that, with *Black Ops II*, owners of the "standard" game on PC are basically locked into playing Team Deathmatch for their multiplayer kicks, because the only other playlist that locals are seemingly playing is Chaos Moshpit (presumably because it's the only playlist that features the map for which they paid extra cash), rather than regular Moshpit (which also rotates through all maps and modes, minus Nuketown). This greedy oversight has inadvertently divided the South African player base, which is exactly what these sorts of purchase incentives shouldn't do.

There's definite imagination on display from the team behind the game, and I'd love to see that imagination put to use in a game that's less forceful with its linearity, less inclined to hold the player's hand.



Force missions entirely from this perspective, at least on the higher difficulties. It's a pity, because if Treyarch had fully committed to their would-be innovation and taken the game further out of its comfort zone, Strike Force could've been an excellent addition.

Start up the multiplayer portion of the game and you'll find the same fast-paced, frenetic *COD* action you're accustomed to. You'll find a bevy of unlocks, some new and some returning, with which to customise your experience. The new Pick 10 system is the biggest refinement, but isn't the revolution it was made out to be. With it, you still have to gain XP and reach certain ranks to unlock new weapons, perks and equipment – but you've now got more choice over the structure of each of your classes and the combination of gear you take into each match. If you feel you've no need for a secondary weapon, don't select one and instead take a wildcard that lets you take an extra perk from one of the three tiers. Or, if you feel you'd like an attachment on your secondary weapon and can live without one of your perks, remove the perk and open up one of ten slots in which to put your secondary weapon's attachment. Scorestreaks replace killstreaks, which isn't really a massive departure from the game's nature, but it does encourage teamwork and objective completion rather than camping for rewards. The maps are tightly designed and cater to various play styles, and I've not encountered any weapons or equipment that disrupt the balance or anything of the sort. Your choice to engage in the multiplayer will ultimately come down to two factors: whether or not you still find its breed of multiplayer shooting exciting, and how willing you are to put up with those members within the SA community who have been affected by countless generations of inbreeding, leading to tragic inferiority complexes that they're seemingly only able

3 This is what SAVAGE is doing when he should be finishing off the magazine. He loves knifing people, so we just let him do what he wants.



to suppress by being racist, sexist, elitist bags of puke that have been left in the sun for weeks.

The final piece of *Black Ops II*'s recognisable puzzle is the returning zombies mode, which is what's actually seen the most pronounced facelift in the game. You've now got a variety of game modes to play. There's good ol' survival mode for those who want gameplay similar to Treyarch's previous zombie kill-a-thons set across a few maps with varied locations and features. Then there's a new map/mode called Transit, which offers up a sort of rolling zombie defense as you travel from area to area on a semi-upgradeable bus (which you can't directly control), buying perks, acquiring weapons and piecing together items and traps that make your job of culling zombies easier. Traditionally, the zombies mode has been cooperative for up to four players (or it can be played solo), but Treyarch has now added a mode called Grief (or 4z4, as its been lovingly dubbed), playable competitively by two teams of four players, occupying the same map. Shooting a player on the enemy team very briefly slows them down, which could give a horde of chasing zombies time to close in, while hard-earned power-ups can be stolen from them. There are also new power-ups that destabilise the other team when used. Games of zombies are now customisable, letting you change the starting round, or set it so that only headshots damage zombies. While the zombies mode is the most fleshed out and improved of *Black Ops II*'s offerings, all of it has been tinkered with and often enhanced in small ways to give this year's *Call of Duty* its own subtly distinct flavour. **NAG**



85 Look past the near-future scenery and you'll discover that *Black Ops II* is still just *Call of Duty*, replete with all the trappings you'd expect from a *Call of Duty* game. Your gaming taste will decide whether that makes it an automatic purchase, or if you'll avoid it like the plague.

PLUS

Multiplayer is as good as you'd expect / Decent attempts at single-player innovation / Zombies mode is great fun

MINUS

Daft AI makes Strike Force missions a grind / It's still the same game really

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ZombiU

Survival horror has never looked and played this good

Content tourists do not require challenge. They want a temporary distraction that they can sit down and enjoy, with only the minimum involvement required. Leaving aside the (rather important but ignored) discussion over the potential harm an industry focused on content tourists can do to video games as a medium...

ZombiU is not a game for the content tourist.

It's not a conventional first-person shooter either. Your bread-and-butter melee attack and fall back for when you inevitably run out of ammunition is very reminiscent of the overlooked *Condemned: Criminal Origins* (2005). The type of survival-horror *ZombiU* aims to be might seem very familiar to those who played the original *Resident Evil* (1996). While there is a plot that strings everything together with a clearly defined beginning, middle and end, you can approach the game in a non-linear fashion.

There are two single-player modes: Normal, and Survival. When you die in Normal mode, you respawn as a new survivor (with a fresh face and survivor ID that highlights what they were before everything went to shit). In Survival, you get one life: die and it's game over. While dying in Normal may not seem all that threatening, it manages to give the event weight by having you drop everything you were carrying at the time. You can still retrieve your backpack, provided you can reach it again, and kill your previous self that is now shambling about as a zombie. If you died after a very good run, and having attained a high single-life survival score, then the zombie version of you will be more powerful. You'll even come across the zombies of other players who died in that area, their digital deaths transmitted to your game via an online connection. It's very

DETAILS

Platforms

Wii U

Genre

Survival horror

Age restriction

18

Multiplayer

Local

2 players

Online

None

Developer

Ubisoft

Montpellier

Website

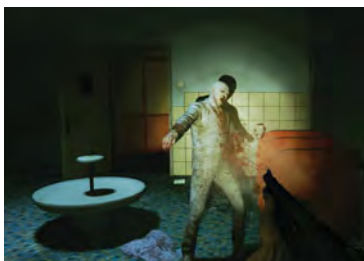
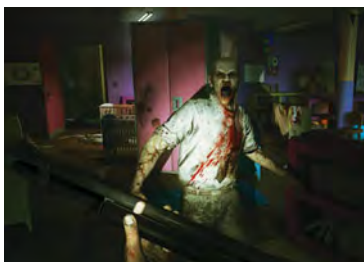
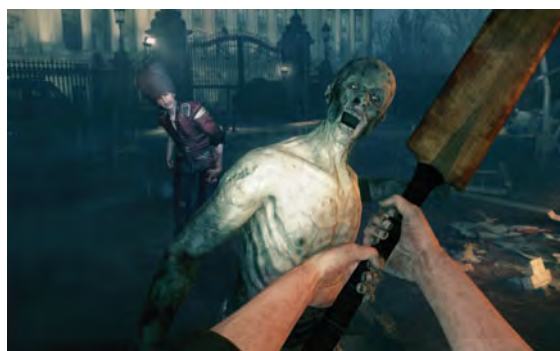
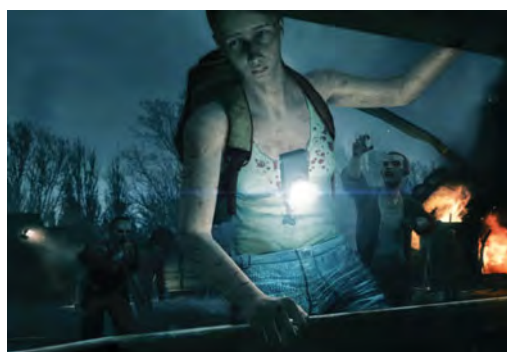
www.zombiub.com

Publisher

Ubisoft

Distributor

Megarom



MULTIPLAYER

Originally, *ZombiU*'s multiplayer was to support five players, one on the GamePad and the others playing split-screen. Likely due to time constraints, the multiplayer was diminished into a two-player affair: one survivor vs. the "King of Zombies".

There are two game modes: Assault and Killing Box. Assault involves the first-person survivor trying to capture flags, while the King of Zombies uses his bird's-eye view on the gamepad to spawn zombies. The King has a regenerating resource, and a limited zombie pool of different types to spawn. Some capture flags, others hunt the player, and the King levels up over time, gaining access to new types of zombies. The survivor gets power-ups after a certain amount of zombie kills, and picks their weapon load out at the start of the map. Killing Box is a simple survival mode, with the King trying to strategically place zombies.

Both modes have a lot going for them, but feel incomplete, especially without online play. The frame rate issues (only in multiplayer) don't help either.

much like *Dark Souls*: if you die while trying to retrieve your backpack, your previous death will be replaced by the new one, and all your items will be lost.

It's a pretty hardcore game. The story does the trick, and there's a lot of backstory you can find via newspaper clippings scattered around the world. The game takes place in London, making for some pretty interesting locations to visit, everything represented in an appropriate Gritty-Vision. Dirty lens flares are all the rage now, thanks to *Battlefield 3*. Sneaking into Buckingham Palace via the sewers is a rather nerve-wracking experience. *ZombiU* is not *Left 4 Dead*. It requires dedication, perseverance, and a kind of "take it all very seriously" attitude if you want to survive till the end (or just the longest, so you can brag about your leader board position).

THE GAMEPAD

Your GamePad is your survival kit. The screen acts as your inventory, notebook, map and radar. A character called "Prepper" talks to you over the pad's speakers, much in the way your handler in *Manhunt* (2003) would talk in your ear over the Xbox headset.

By tapping the flashlight in your quick slot, you can toggle its beam. Another button makes your radar ping, blipping any living creatures into your map of the area. It does not differentiate between zombies, rats or birds, making for some tense moments. When you start looting something, or just need to look around inside your backpack, you need to look at the GamePad. The game does not pause, leaving your unattended digital self vulnerable.

When you first enter a location you have no map for it. Scout out a CCTV junction box and scan it to get an overview of the area. You can scan the environment around you using the GamePad, by holding it up and looking "through" it as if it were a viewport into the game world. This lets you analyse distant objects to check if they contain loot, and the black-light functionality may reveal hints to puzzles. The Pad's functions get expanded and upgraded as the story progresses.

SURVIVAL

As you use a weapon, like the pistol, crossbow or others, you'll gain proficiency with that weapon. Initially, your character isn't very good with weapons (other than being quite handy at bashing in skulls with a cricket bat). Eventually, you gain a steady hand and an increase to your damage. By finding upgrade components, you can boost a weapon's damage even further. But if you die, you lose all the skills you've gained, as well as your nicely upgraded weapon, unless you go get it back from your zombie corpse.

The zombies come in a variety of flavours, your standard shambler, screamers that alert other zombies to your location as they run at you, spitters, and a few others we



“While there is a plot that strings everything together with a clearly defined beginning, middle and end, you *can* approach the game in a non-linear fashion.”



don't want to spoil. Surviving means not taking risks, and taking precautions. By carrying around wood planks you can barricade doors to prevent zombies from breaking through them easily. But that works both ways, and removing those barricades may leave you exposed when you're being chased. **NAG**

- Miktar

89

There is no better zombie survival horror simulator than this. It's tough, unforgiving, and punishes recklessness swiftly. If you play smart and really get involved, there is much satisfaction from surviving.

PLUS

GamePad integration works perfectly / Atmosphere nails it
Ambient online features are great

MINUS

No suspend or quick save / Multiplayer mode is offline only
Rough edges here and there

Hitman: Absolution

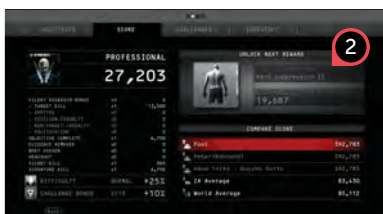
Proof that you should never go to the bathroom alone

After spending a whole heap of hours back in the shoes of *Hitman*'s iconic antihero Agent 47, imaginary garrotte wire still wrapped menacingly around my hand even as I type this, I'm still struggling to decide if I actually like *Absolution*. Objectively, it's a solid game, a satisfying mix of action and stealth that'll cater to various play styles. Personally, however, I'm battling with deciding whether or not I'm actually happy with this new direction that IO Interactive has taken with its long-running, much-loved series of silent assassination simulators. Die-hard fans will undoubtedly be irked by many of the changes it's brought, despite the fact that it still has that familiar *Hitman* feel and some of the evolved elements are actually welcome additions. After all, it has been six years since we last saw this series, and bringing the base gameplay up to modern standards is expected – but the fundamental principles that give *Hitman* its unique edge over the *Splinter Cells* and the *Metal Gear Solids* of the gaming world have been transformed into something that doesn't always gel with its roots.

The core of it is still familiar. *Absolution* is at its absolute best when it sticks to what it knows – giving players a target and offering them a variety of tools, tricks and methods with which to remove them from existence. It's genuinely intelligent a lot of the time in how it presents its murderous conundrums, affording you the opportunity to watch your target (or targets), memorising their activity and movement patterns before exploiting them for your own nefarious purposes. Perhaps your mark makes the mistake of passing by a deep, gaping hole in the floor of a dilapidated building, and a sneaky push while nobody's looking will prove a quick conclusion. Spiking a target's drugs with deadly poison could

1 *Absolution* has one of the best, most effectively employed crowd systems of any game out there. Moving through crowds thick with people helps you avoid detection.

2 There's a scoring system that rewards extra points for completing objectives, performing signature kills and more, complete with global, national and friend leaderboards.



send an immediate message about the dangers of addiction to children everywhere. Exploring the best of the game's levels will reveal a wealth of fatal possibilities, and some of those levels are really quite memorable. It's very clear about the rules of its gameplay from the start: you're once again able to use a range of disguises to navigate areas with a little less resistance, for example – but people who share the identity you're attempting to mimic will quickly become suspicious if you linger near them for too long. Holes in this logic aside (why do all the vendors in Chinatown know one another?), it works at keeping the challenge afloat. You're able to use a new feature called Instinct to blend in and avoid being spotted by similarly garbed NPCs in these cases. Instinct will also highlight important objects in the game world, supposedly acting as a visual representation of 47's killer instincts. You'll be able to see enemies through walls and observe their movement paths, or it'll highlight weapons, useful objects and other details within each level. Its use is limited, however, and on the higher difficulties, Instinct is appropriately stifled to cater to hardcore *Hitman* players.

Problems arise when you realise that levels are prohibitively small compared to the sprawling stealth sandboxes in previous games, which were like massive, lethal Rubik's Cubes that could be twisted, turned and pondered over until you discovered the perfect series of actions to complete the hit and exit the scene. By contrast, here we're presented with an interconnected series of mini-missions that together form the overall level, divided by checkpoints at the start of each. Often these don't even have assassination targets to pursue, instead being elaborate games of hide and seek that task you with moving to an exit in the best way you see fit. You're able to do this as you please, creating distractions and sticking

DETAILS

Platforms

360 / PC / PS3

Genre

Third-person action

Age restriction
18

Multiplayer

Local

None

Online

None

Developer

IO Interactive
Nixxes Software
(PC)

Website

www.hitman.com

Publisher

Square Enix

Distributor

Megarom



to the shadows, never being spotted or spilling blood. Or you can simply slaughter everyone in your path. When this happens, the gunplay is slick and satisfying, the new cover system complementing the weighty action perfectly. These levels are fine and some are even brilliantly clever, experts at building tension (outwitting a throng of police officers hunting for you on a heavily crowded train platform immediately springs to mind), but they're a conspicuous departure from the heart and soul of this franchise. They do, however, blend in story-wise, giving everything a sense of continuity by being purposely mobile and not confining missions to a single, large area. The story, although it's capable of being engaging in short bursts, is completely bonkers and often manages to feel completely worthless.

As I said earlier, despite the changes in dynamic and pace, this still feels like a *Hitman* game. The world is packed with minute details and disturbing pinches of black humour as you go about your grisly work. With its focus on silent observation and careful planning, this series has always been wrapped in an element of voyeurism, and *Absolution* is no different: people chat amongst themselves, arguing the mundane; hotel maids share awkward exchanges with desperate shoe salesmen; and you'll hear people calling their loved ones to tell them that the trains have stopped running and they're going to be late. In a game like this, such details are especially important to sustain immersion. Most of the time, it looks amazing as well, IO's Glacier 2 engine pumping out visuals equally at home covered in strangely beautiful grime and grit, or in more cheery, bright environments. I say most of the time, because it goes a bit overboard with its light bloom on occasion, which may lead to premature blindness if you're not careful.

Contracts is where *Absolution* hits that familiar *Hitman* stride where the campaign doesn't quite manage to. It's an

asynchronous multiplayer suite in which players design the hits and challenge anyone willing to match or better their skills. It's ingenious in the way contracts are designed: you simply choose a level, and then assassinate characters of your choice in any way you see fit. Your actions then decide the parameters of the contract that's created, assigning bonus objectives accordingly. Perform your kills using specific weapons, or wearing no disguises, and players who then download and attempt to complete your dynamic creation can earn bonus cash by adhering to the rules of your hit. Cash rewarded for completing contracts can be used to buy new weapons and such, a feature sadly missing from the single-player portion. Contracts is an excellent addition, and its diabolical player-driven sandbox greatly benefits *Absolution*. **NAG**
- Barksin

85

Hitman's six-year absence has ended with a sharp turn in a noticeably different direction to the series' previous exploits. That might not sit right with all of 47's fans, who expect a totally free-form playground with maximum opportunity for macabre experimentation. Nevertheless, taken on its own merits, Hitman: Absolution remains a good stealth-action game, one that I've had fun with.

PLUS

Impressively intelligent at times / Focused gameplay mechanics / Contracts mode works brilliantly

MINUS

Doesn't always play to the series' strengths / Eccentric story is hit and miss

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PC SPECS

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- Integrated AMD Radeon HD 7660D 384 cores DirectX 11 graphics
- Corsair Vengeance 8GB (2x 4GB) DDR3 1,600MHz high performance RAM
- OCZ Agility 3 120GB read: 525MB/s write: 500MB/s SATA3 solid state drive
- NZXT Phantom Full Tower Special Edition HITMAN gaming case
- Corsair Builder Series CX500 500W 80+ high performance power supply
- 24x dual layer DVD +/- writer
- Supports dual monitor display
- Integrated 8 CH high definition sound card
- Integrated gigabit LAN card - broadband ready
- 24 months warranty



1X SECOND PLACE

- Hitman Professional Edition [PC]
- A short sleeve shirt
- A USB tie pin



4X THIRD PLACE

- Hitman standard Edition [PC]
- A USB tie pin



Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two

...times zero plus fifty

Playing *Epic Mickey 2* is an exercise in patience. Where the first game managed to capture its audience with a sense of charm and belonging in its strange new world, this sequel feels messy, out of place and largely pointless. You'll once-again play as Mickey Mouse, now known as the hero that saved Wasteland, who's been called back to the repository of Disney's long lost and forgotten cartoons after a series of earthquakes have ripped the land asunder and caused all sorts of important bits to break. Yes, as the hero – the mouse who saved the day – you've been called in to fix leaky pipes, repair bridges and apply a lick of paint here and there. All your effort in the first game and now you're little more than a glorified repairman. Or *repairmouse*, rather.

The narrative takes so long to get going and give the players a purpose other than performing quick repair jobs that we imagine anyone who plays this might find themselves wondering just why the hell they're carrying on. It doesn't help, then, that everything else you'll deal with along the way is just as poorly delivered as the story. It's evident that the shift away from the humble Wii to multi-platform hasn't had a good effect on the already shoddy controls. We reviewed *Epic Mickey 2* on the PS3 using the Move controller, which is remarkably similar to our experience with the first game on the Wii except that the controls have somehow been made even worse. Simple practices like jumping and turning are awkward, and you're constantly forced to babysit the game's camera with the sluggish Move targeting reticule. The platforming elements fare better when you use a regular controller, but then you're stuck with a painting/thinning system that's less



1 Most of the 2D side-scrolling sequences feature multiple paths for Mickey and Oswald to take (sometimes separately). This adds some much-needed variety for return trips through these segments.

2 The core painting/thinning mechanisms are largely unchanged from the first game, which means you'll see a lot of returning puzzles and experiences. At least they're dressed up in new clothes, so the solutions are sometimes not as obvious as you'd think.

3 During Mickey and Oswald's adventure, you'll have a number of opportunities to do things the "right" or "wrong" way. Taking the time and effort to figure out a solution that won't piss off Wasteland's eclectic natives will often see you rewarded with easier passage through another area, fewer enemies to face or simply a few bonus tickets or unlocks.



precise and simply not optimised for such control.

With the controls, camera and narrative taking a nosedive and testing the patience of even the saintliest of players (the idea that a child would enjoy this title is laughable), it's difficult to muster the energy to actually care about anything else in the game, but there are a couple of decent bits that, frankly, we wish formed a larger part of the overall experience. Like its predecessor, *Epic Mickey 2* includes many elements of a free-roaming game. You're free to explore most areas, come and go as you please and fish around for side quests and the many hidden bonuses and unlockable items, but the game ultimately follows a linear path which you'd do well to follow if you want to avoid repeating certain levels. The broken world of Wasteland feels more constrained than it did during Mickey's first visit, but as you start to patch together the areas and unlock quicker travel options between them, you'll find that this approach actually lends itself to a feeling that you're getting something done. Sadly, it's hours and hours into the game when this starts to trickle in, by which time any player left with a shred of sanity would be close to giving up. I'd say "stick with it, it gets better" (oddly enough, that's what I said with my review of the first game), but it never really feels like it does. All *Epic Mickey 2* manages to do is scramble to recover and by that point it's too late.

Perhaps the big addition to the formula is that of Oswald. Now the bunny that nobody had heard of before will follow around Mickey wherever he goes, and the duo will use their unique skills to solve puzzles and deal with the returning blot and animatronics enemies – many of which are the same or devilishly familiar with a few subtle differences from their first appearance. Oswald can zap enemies with his remote control or activate certain switches (usually while Mickey holds them open), and also takes a page out of the *Tails Book of Being a Good Sidekick* by providing Mickey with a glide ability courtesy of his spinning ears. When playing solo, Oswald is controlled by the AI, which

DETAILS

Platforms

360 / PC / PS3
Wii / Wii U

Genre

Puzzle adventure

Age restriction

7

Multiplayer

Local

2 players

Online

None

Developer

Blitz Games

Studios

Junction Point

Studios

Website

disney.go.com

Publisher

Disney

Interactive

Studios

Distributor

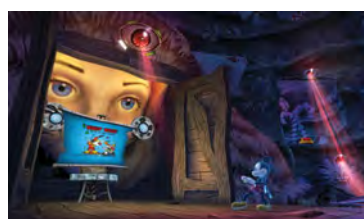
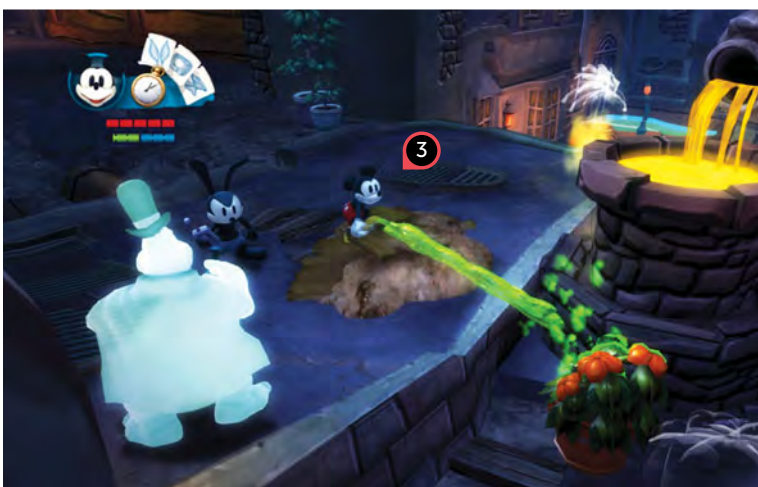
Prima Interactive



All *Epic Mickey 2* manages to do is scramble to recover and by that point it's too late.

means he's often in the wrong place at the wrong time, and getting him to do anything you want at exactly the right time (which is often required amidst time-sensitive puzzles or during combat) is practically impossible. It's really just up to dumb luck, and I often found myself taking the other, less desirable path through certain areas simply because getting Oswald to do the right thing was impossible. If you manage to rope in a real human being to control the rabbit, you'll obviously do a bit better, but with Mickey in charge of the magic paint brush (and thus complete control of the level traversal challenges), Oswald's player will often find him/herself with little to do but run behind, flip switches and stun enemies in combat.

There's so much against *Epic Mickey 2*, but for all its problems there are a few bits and pieces that have turned out rather well. The 2D side-scrolling segments are back and are better than ever with their kooky animations and creative use of classic platforming elements. There's also full voice-acting, which is initially fantastic but becomes a little weird after a while when you realise that there are more voice types than character models. '50s-era classic toons with a Jamaican accent just don't fit. **NAG**
- GeometriX



50 A messy, convoluted experience that will leave you frustrated and bored. It's long time for Disney to put this franchise to bed and get on with something else.

PLUS
2D side-scrolling sequences are fun / Open world elements work well / Lots of hidden stuff to find

MINUS
Painful controls and camera / Oswald feels unnecessary
Jumbled and poorly told story

Nintendo Land

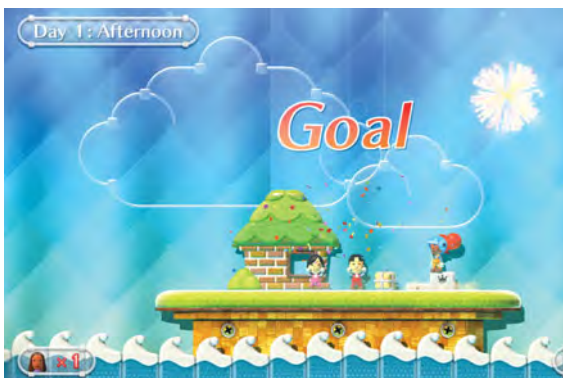
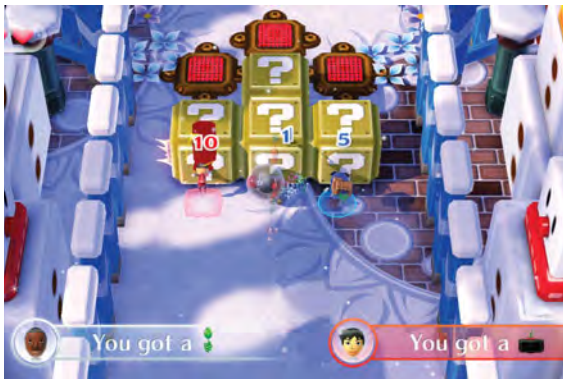
A wonderful place to be a gamer

The gaming industry has been throwing around the term “mini-game collection” so much, it’s forgotten what an anthology is. *Nintendo Land* is not a mini-game collection, it is an anthology. Each game represented within the theme-park wrapping as an “attraction” may be of a shorter or more compact design when compared to a stand-alone product, but they’re not lacking in complexity.

Nintendo Land segments itself into three tiers, each tier representing a specific consideration. The three Competitive games require little to no explanation, making them perfect for a group of five or more players to start enjoying immediately. They also serve as a great introduction to the benefits of the gamepad. In Mario Chase, one player gets a complete overview map of the arena, as they try to escape the tackles of the players viewing the action through a third-person perspective on the television. The other two competitive attractions, themed around *Luigi’s Mansion* and *Animal Crossing*, are also incredibly easy to understand but require coordination and tactics if the non-gamepad players hope to succeed.

The three Cooperative games, themed around *Metroid*, *Pikmin* and *Zelda* are complex, often requiring a bit of explanation to get going (which the game does for you), and represent the meatiest of the attractions. Each starts off basic, then builds up in complexity and mechanics, with harder levels unlocking as you go. Everything in *Nintendo Land* follows this idea: growing in complexity as you progress, so as to not seem overwhelming at first.

The six Solo attractions are individually, solid games,



themed around many Nintendo properties. The Balloon Trip attraction may as well be an actual sequel to *Balloon Fight* (1984), as it builds and expands on the original idea. All the attractions can be played alone, except for the three Competitive ones, though two of those have a single-player time-trial mode.

There is an Attraction Tour feature for setting up a full party session: you indicate how many players you have, and how much time you want to spend, and it will create a “tour” for that length, mixing the games around to keep things fresh. All attractions have local and online friend-list high-score lists, awarding you coins with which to unlock various little knick-knacks around the park’s central plaza. Your plaza will also fill up with Mii characters, your friends and strangers from the Internet, showing you messages and drawings that were made when that player succeeded (or failed) at an event.

Nintendo loves creating “show reel” games that highlight the features of their consoles, and the benefits of those features when implemented with consideration. *Nintendo Land* is a confident title, with a lot of budget behind it, and one hell of a showcase for their new system. **NAG**
- Miktar

85

In a perfect world, *Nintendo Land* would have come preinstalled on every Wii U sold. The competitive games are a blast, while the cooperative games require genuine teamwork and have a lot of depth to them. The entire package is far meatier than you’d expect, with hidden content around every corner.

PLUS

Ample content that continually unlocks / Fun to play alone or with friends / Miiverse integration livens up your Plaza

MINUS

No online play / Multiplayer-only games could have had bots

DETAILS

Platforms

Wii U

Genre

Party game

Age restriction
10

Multiplayer

Local

5 players

Online

None

Developer

Nintendo

Website

nintendoland.

nintendo.com

Publisher

Nintendo

Distributor

Core Group

New Super Mario Bros. U

Newer, and more Super

There is more to appreciate about *NSMBU* than fits on this page. Suffice it to say: the *NSMB* series to this point can be seen as a dress rehearsal for its premiere performance. The E3 reveal of *New Super Mario Bros. U*'s elaborate world map echoed the classic *Super Mario World*. Nostalgia bones were tweaked. But in truth the final product confirms that this is the genuine *Mario World 2*.

Stages are bigger and more numerous. Hidden paths and exits abound, adding a refreshing non-linearity to progress. Difficulty spikes much sooner. Extra lives are capped. Bosses are a touch meaner, sometimes tricky. And world themes are at last refreshed, with appealing spins on familiar *Mario* environs, such as a desert made of... desserts.

As a launch title, *NSMBU* evokes memories of the Nintendo of yore, and that's not a bad thing. Deficits are few. Visuals are improved but won't challenge the upcoming *Rayman Legends*. Online multiplayer sits this one out in favour of preserving 2D *Mario*'s precise platform action and tight interaction with co-op players. And the music, though it sports a nice new theme, remains humble in the *NSMB* series.

In the balance it's the best of 2D *Mario* and guilt-free enjoyment – EAD's next epic 3D *Mario* title is in the wings, and deserves the time it takes to assemble. **NAG**

- Miktar

DETAILS

Platforms
Wii U
Genre
Platform
Age restriction
3
Multiplayer
Local
5 players
Online
None
Developer
Nintendo EAD
Website
newsuper
mariobrosu.
nintendo.com
Publisher
Nintendo
Distributor
Core Group



90 It's hard to go wrong with the all-time classic game console launch title and it plays equally well solo or with friends. Somewhere, a turtle needs stomping.

PLUS

Some of the best platform action around / Challenge and Boost modes add longevity / Miiverse populates game space with player commentary

MINUS

Some reused music tracks / Multiplayer requires Wii remotes, Pro Controller not supported / Safe, though appealing, visual presentation

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007 Legends

Shaken and stirred

The problem with working on a game based on a well-loved franchise is that you have to toe the line. You have to produce a title that will thrill fans, and those fans include hardcore gamers that expect a lot more from a game than a run-of-the-mill Joe who enjoys playing something light on a Sunday afternoon. And when the franchise you're dealing with is one of the longest running big budget properties ever, you have to be even more careful.

The *James Bond* franchise is such a series. At fifty years old, it has been around for longer than the average gamer. But aficionados have seen all the movies, at least, and have seen them all several times. So when Eurocom decided to put together a collection of *Bond* missions – one celebrating each of the actors – they had their work cut out for them. *Goldfinger*, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, *Moonraker*, *Licence to Kill* and *Die Another Day* (Connery, Lazenby, Moore, Dalton and Brosnan, respectively) all received the game treatment in this collection, with Craig's *Skyfall* to be made available as DLC. Not only does the game take on two of the franchise's worst movies (no avoiding *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* in the paradigm of the game, but couldn't they have found a better Moore movie than *Moonraker*?) it does what it does rather poorly. It feels like a *Bond* game made by people who have never watched a *Bond* movie, which is a bit sad.

The five legendary missions are presented in order, with little cohesion between them. As if that doesn't leave enough of a sour taste, the game presents each mission as a linear experience, and is nowhere near challenging enough. A very generous aim assist means that the player



1 A typical example of Pam Bouvier from *Licence to Kill*.



can literally breeze through levels without breaking a sweat, taking cover or even taking damage.

While there are many elements to this title that may well sour the player – particularly a confirmed 007 junkie – it does provide for a fun distraction. But it's not the kind of game that will grip you. You'll want to play this if there is nothing else to play, and the forgettable multiplayer modes don't do much to add longevity either. Even upgradable skills and playable villains don't do a hell of a lot to turn this title around.

Eurocom should have put more time into the looks of the game – the graphics aren't great – and, more importantly, should have used more originality in the way the missions play out, and the way they blend together. Instead, they have released a game that feels unpolished and tacked together, rather than a cohesive experience. It can be fun to play, but even the most casual of *Bond* fan gamers will find it wanting. **NAG**

- Shryke

60

This "celebration" of *Bond* is seen as an insult by some... it's fun, but nothing that a *Bond* fan must (or should) play.

PLUS

Can be fun / Some cool sequences

MINUS

Linear / Far too easy

DETAILS

Platforms

360 / PC
PS3 / Wii U

Genre

First-person
shooter

Age restriction

16

Multiplayer

Local

None

Online

12 players

Developer

Eurocom

Website

www.007legends.com

Publisher

Activision

Distributor

Megarom

Skylanders: Giants

Go big!

When Activision got together with Toys for Bob in 2011 to launch *Skylanders*, they obviously thought it was a good idea to combine a video game with collectable figurines that stored ownership details and character progress, and could be used on any gaming platform. They were right, but one has to wonder if they realised just how well *Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure* would be received by fans. The fans went crazy for it, and sales of the collectable figurines have been phenomenal. While the majority were undoubtedly youngsters whining for their parents to spend money on the large number of characters, there are quite a few adults who got bitten by the bug, too.

It's hardly a surprise, then, that 2012 sees the release of *Skylanders: Giants*, the second set of adventures in the *Skylanders* universe. The game brings with it a host of new toys, too, to further stress those wallets. Included in the toy series are eight Giants, which are literally larger figures to add to the collection. The new toys, defined as series two, all have orange base plates, while the original series one figures have green. The series two figures will not work with the original title, but the series one characters will work (complete with experience and upgrades) with the new game. What's more, the skill cap for characters has been extended from ten to fifteen in *Giants*.

What this equates to, in very real terms, is another enjoyable, family friendly adventure, more characters to collect, and added longevity for existing collections. That's a great mix, and one that will likely not only see fans of the first series crowing, but will attract a whole bunch of new fans. And the collectable nature of the game means that the original characters will likely be



given a new lease on shelf-life, too.

Playing *Skylanders: Giants* is none too taxing. It follows the same simplified platform style as the previous title, with certain areas accessible by specific character types only. This counts for the Giants, too – these slow, lumbering power-houses can access areas and move obstacles that others cannot. Even though the player can get through most of the game without a giant, it's a good idea to have one on hand; if you're the pedantic type. The game can be played without all the side areas and missions explored, of course, but there is a lot more on offer here than just the standard mission.

Skylanders: Giants continues the trend of family-friendly platform fun, and is an excellent option if there are kids about... particularly if the whole family is into gaming. The whole thing can be done in co-op, and the characters can, once again, be used on any platform. It's a winner, and solves gift ideas for many months to come. **NAG**

- Shryke

80

Building on the original, *Skylanders: Giants* brings new characters to collect and a new adventure for the whole family to enjoy.

PLUS
Great for all / Lots to do

MINUS
May destroy your wallet

DETAILS

Platforms
360 / 3DS / PC
PS3 / Wii / Wii U

Genre
Platformer

Age restriction
7

Multiplayer
Local
2 players
Online
None

Developer
Toys for Bob

Website
www.skylanders.com

Publisher
Activision

Distributor
Megarom



Just Dance 4

Just do it...

Just Dance has established itself as a party game of note. The hilarity that it delivers when playing with friends is beyond that which is mentally healthy, and the combination of a few willing folks and a number of inhibition-reducing libations will certainly deliver one of the funniest experiences you can have with a console game.

But that is also, to a degree, *Just Dance 4*'s downfall. This game is all about fun, without a modicum of seriousness. Now you may ask whether a game of this nature needs to be taken seriously, but the fact that you can't really fail a dance routine won't be driving you to improve. That's okay for some, but the achievement oriented dance-gamer won't like it much. Still, the bright graphics, ridiculous routines and often crazy antics that the game has the player getting up to hold plenty appeal.

Just Dance 4 feels a little under-developed, though. It does remind one of an extended song pack, rather than a full new title, that said, the songs are great, with a fair spread for all tastes. It is not as serious as *Dance Central 3*, which is fine for some people. It's more about having fun than getting the dance routines just right, and as such it is a party winner. **NAG**

- Shryke

DETAILS

Platforms

360 / PS3
Wii / Wii U

Genre

Dancing

Age restriction

3

Multiplayer

Local
4 players
Online
None

Developer

Ubisoft

Website

www.
justdancegame.
com

Publisher

Ubisoft

Distributor

Megarom



79

The latest *Just Dance* game continues the crazy party antics that this series is becoming well-known for.

PLUS

Tons of fun / Good track selection

MINUS

Not very serious / Feels like an add-on

Dance Central 3

Mission: dance

While *Just Dance 4* offers players an easy-going opportunity to humiliate themselves; *Dance Central 3* comes from the other end of the scale. This game is not just about dancing... rather, it drives the player towards getting the dance routines right. And it has – believe it or not – a story mode.

This story mode has the laughable premise that the player is a time-travelling dance-oriented secret agent. Yes, you read that right. The player is tasked with moving through four decades (the '70s, '80s, '90s and '00s) in order to learn the dance crazes that marked these eras. Players will do everything from the Hustle to the Macarena. But they will need to do them right.

Dance Central 3 won't let mediocre dancers pass, and so the player will spend a lot of time in choreographic tutorials as they try to master the dance steps the game demands of them. Less serious players may well find this extremely frustrating, particularly because the Kinect tracking in this title is superb. Fudging your way through a dance routine is almost impossible.

The multiplayer aspect does become a little simpler, but this game is a far more serious option, overall. That comes across in looks, too, with more realistic graphics than the Ubisoft offering.

It's a tougher, more challenging game. If that's your thing, it is a great option. **NAG**

- Shryke

DETAILS

Platforms

360

Genre

Dancing

Age restriction

12

Multiplayer

Local
4 players
Online
None

Developer

Harmonix

Website

www.
dancecentral.
com

Publisher

Microsoft

Distributor

Microsoft



81

Dance Central 3 tasks the player with exploring four decades of dance...

PLUS

Great songs from four decades / Good graphics

MINUS

Very demanding / Some tough routines

MUD: FIM Motocross World Championship

Dirty Pocket

The PlayStation Vita has been largely ignored by developers after an initial flurry of activity, so players now need to take what they can get. Thankfully, there are still some developers out there who seem to think that the hand held is a viable platform (which it certainly is). But it also means that Vita owners who need some new gaming action aren't exactly spoiled for choice.

That doesn't mean that all games currently released for the Vita are forgettable – far from it. But there are also titles that are a little middle of the road, like Milestone's *MUD: FIM Motocross World Championship*. With that said, it is better on the Vita than it was on other platforms.

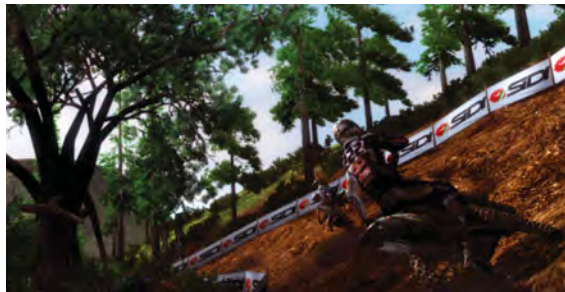
It's a pretty simple game, really, a rather straight-forward off-road motorbike racer with few frills and not too much challenge. It looks good and is fun to play, but it is a little shallow. There are numerous event types for variety, and pre-set characters that can be developed, but not too much more.

Oddly, the game doesn't take advantage of the Vita's capabilities. In its current guise it might as well have been a PSP title, because it uses very simple controls and none of the fancy stuff (except for a little touch screen action). Still, it can be a fun distraction. **NAG**

- Shryke

DETAILS

Platforms
Vita
Genre
Racing
Age restriction
7+
Multiplayer
Local
None
Online
6 players
Developer
Milestone
Website
www.mudthegame.com
Publisher
Black Bean
Distributor
Apex Interactive



69

A simple, no frills off-road racer for the PS Vita, *MUD: FIM Motocross World Championship* can be a fun distraction.

PLUS

Good distraction / Great sound track

MINUS

A bit too easy / No frills

Smart As...

Use Your Brain

If you're looking for an excuse to use your PS Vita every day and you enjoy puzzle titles, *Smart As...* is an excellent solution for you. It really feels more like an app than a game, but the clever brain training model that it uses will have you coming back for more each day.

Play is divided into two major categories: daily challenges and training. While the player can undertake training games each day, the challenges are limited, and 'measure' the player's brain power and performance on a daily basis.

Scoring is divided into four categories, namely Logic, Arithmetic, Language and Observation. One challenge in each category is presented every day, while the player can select categories for practice. The puzzles are simple, yet varied. There aren't a lot in each category, but they are all rather fun. The totals of the four categories are added together to determine the player's overall brain power.

While its presentation is quite simple, it manages to retain stylish. The visuals are supported by John Cleese's voice (which is rather entertaining) and the game manages to use many of the Vita's functions in the various tests, although it mostly uses the front and rear touch screens.

If puzzling and brain exercises are your bag, and you own a neglected Vita, *Smart As...* is an excellent way to kill time. **NAG**
- Shryke

DETAILS

Platforms
Vita
Genre
Puzzle
Age restriction
3+
Multiplayer
Local
None
Online
None
Developer
Climax
Entertainment
Website
www.scee.com
Publisher
SCEE
Distributor
Ster Kinekor



81

Smart As... will allow you to not only train your brain, but will also give you something to do with your Vita every day.

PLUS

Fun puzzles / Something each day

MINUS

Gets repetitive / Plays in short bursts

WWE '13

THQ's latest wrestling game proves that old school is definitely cool

Though there are many who would argue that professional wrestling as a whole has seen better days, there can be no denying that the WWE's sensationalist brand of "sports entertainment" still has legions of devout followers. There can also be no doubt that many of them have eagerly awaited the release of *WWE '13*, the fifteenth entry in THQ's now well-established wrestling game franchise. Last year's entry was the first game to drop the "Smackdown vs. RAW" moniker, and was touted as a "revolutionary" overhaul of the ageing series.

Though this year's release does not bring with it any sweeping changes to the core game dynamic, it does introduce a completely reworked story mode, whilst also "fine-tuning" the game's basic play experience. The campaign mode in *WWE '13* is titled "Attitude Era", and it revisits what many regard as the golden age of the WWE, when the brand's personality flourished with larger-than-life characters and factions including, among others, Stone Cold Steve Austin, The Rock, and Degeneration X. The mode lets players recreate famous matches, and awards special bonuses and unlockable features for fulfilling historical objectives (like chokeslamming Mankind through the cage roof in the legendary Hell in a Cell match at King of the Ring 1998). Tying the mode together is a collection of cut-scenes, match footage, and commentary from Jim Ross & Jerry Lawler. It's an intriguing inclusion and a pleasant improvement over the recent career modes seen in WWE titles, one that will appeal to older players' sense of nostalgia, as well as giving younger players a chance to see what professional wrestling was like at the peak of its popularity.



1 If this guy had to jump into a giant bucket of white paint, he'd still be more tanned than he is here. Our eyes, gah!



The game engine has been tweaked slightly from last year's release, though "Predator Technology 2.0", as the game engine is dubbed, is still plagued by shoddy collision detection and frame-rate issues, particularly in multiplayer matchups. On the whole, aside from the slightly tighter and more responsive controls, *WWE '13* plays very similarly to its predecessor. Although the game is entertaining and engrossing, it's a shame that players still have to tolerate choppy visuals, out-of-place animations and repetitive commentary – one can't help but feel that the developers have had more than enough opportunity to address these problems, and yet they continue to surface with every new instalment in the series. It's not enough to render the game unplayable, but it's these persistent glitches and niggles that stop *WWE '13* from ever feeling like a truly polished experience.

As has become typical for the franchise, *WWE '13* compensates for its technical flaws with a wealth of content. The game's well-crafted "Attitude Era", expansive repertoire of characters & match modes, and its impressive character creation suite all ensure that wrestling aficionados will find plenty to enjoy, despite the game's nagging imperfections. **NAG**

- Madman

70 *WWE '13's* biggest draw is its "Attitude Era" story mode which, along with the game's massive breadth of content, makes for an engrossing and addictive experience, despite the persistent flaws that continue to pervade the series.

PLUS

Superb Attitude Era campaign mode / Great character roster / Deep customisation options

MINUS

Frame-rate issues / Repetitive commentary

DETAILS

Platforms

360 / PS3 / Wii

Genre

Sport

Age restriction

16

Multiplayer

Local

4 players

Online

12 players

Developer

Yuke's

Website

www.thq.com

Publisher

THQ

Distributor

Ster Kinekor

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Z77 + 3rd Gen. Intel® Core™ processor	3DMark Vantage (Performance)
Z68 + 2nd Gen. Intel® Core™ processor	
Discrete GPU Performance	up to 50%
Z77 + Discrete GPU + 3rd Gen. Intel® Core™ processor + Virtu MVP	3DMark Vantage (Extreme)
Z68 + Discrete GPU + 2nd Gen. Intel® Core™ processor	

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

Patent Pending
3D BIOS
Dual UEFI BIOS™

Patent Pending
3D POWER
All Digital Engine



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



NATIONAL SALES CALL CENTRE : 0860 582 835

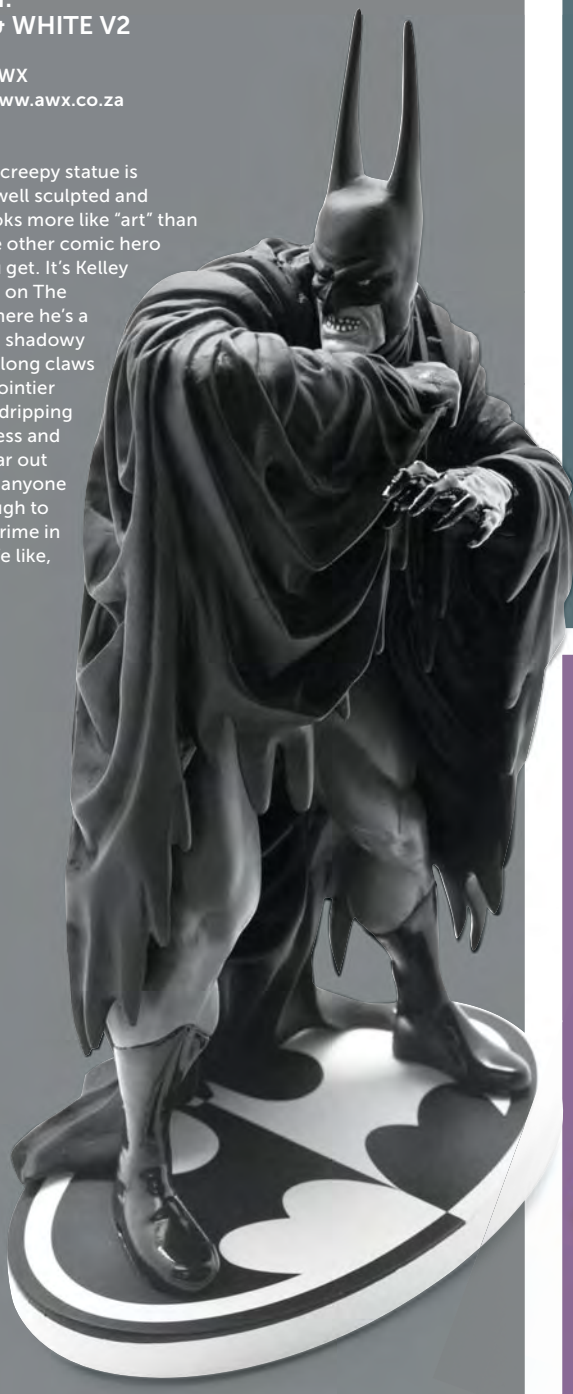
Everything Else

Bits and bobs that can all be filed under gaming lifestyle

BATMAN: BLACK & WHITE V2

Supplier: AWX
Website: www.awx.co.za
RRP: R870

This rather creepy statue is incredibly well sculpted and actually looks more like "art" than most of the other comic hero statues you get. It's Kelley Jones' take on The Batman, where he's a dangerous, shadowy figure with long claws and even pointier ear things, dripping with darkness and ready to tear out the eyes of anyone dumb enough to commit a crime in Gotham. We like, very much.



PORTAL 2 IRON-ON EMBROIDERED PATCH SET

Supplier: AWX
Website: www.awx.co.za
RRP: R115 per pair

If you support the murder of innocent cows and own a lot of leather clothing then this might just be the perfect thing for you: iron-on patches from the *Portal 2* universe. Iron* them on any tough material like school bags, satchels, caps and maybe even your sackcloth underpants. Look the part all *Portal 2* style.

* Irons get hot so ask mommy to do this.

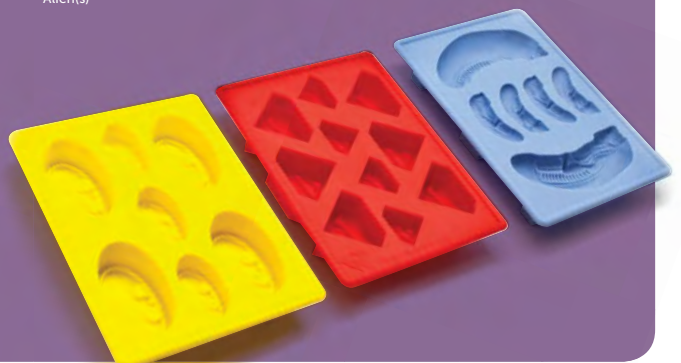


SILICONE ICE TRAY: BATMAN, SUPERMAN AND BIG CHAP*

Supplier: Dark Carnival
Website: www.darkcarnival.co.za
RRP: R140 each

There is this fantasy that some of us guy gamers have that one day we'll invite a girl back to the cave. The cave with arcade machines, a giant LCD hooked up to the Xbox showing reruns of *Star Wars* and neon lights highlighting our figurine collection. In this fantasy she'll fall in love with us as we pass her a drink filled with comic hero logo ice cubes.

*Alien(s)



**HOT WHEELS ELITE:
1:43 1989 BATMOBILE**

Supplier: Dark Carnival
Website: www.darkcarnival.co.za
RRP: R900

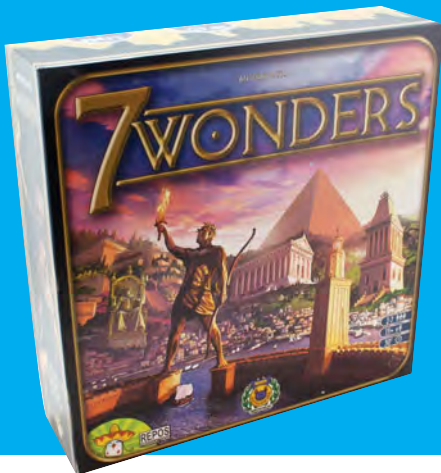
It's a limited edition Hot Wheels 1 of "up to" 10,000 (whatever that means). All the sticky tape, soft tissue and screws protecting the car means you can't have any fun with it, unless you're the daring type. The actual car model itself is lovely with some intricately detailed bits and pieces. We took it out to verify that it: feels good and weighty; freewheels well; doesn't fit on the standard tracks.



7 WONDERS

Supplier: Wizard's Books & Games
Website: www.wizardswarehouse.co.za
RRP: R550

Here's one for the history buffs; 7 Wonders put up to seven players against each other in the bid to create the greatest civilisation before the game ends. It takes a few cues from the *Civilization* series, but otherwise makes a good effort to deliver the classic "build, trade, conquer" combination in a unique way. We especially appreciate the limited time each game runs for (around 30 minutes each), and the fact that the game cards are adjustable depending on the number of players means you'll always get a tailored experience. Impressive.



**EXTREME HEAD KNOCKERS:
AC: BROTHERHOOD: EZIO
AUDITORE LEGENDARY
ASSASSIN**

Supplier: Dark Carnival
Website: www.darkcarnival.co.za
RRP: R300

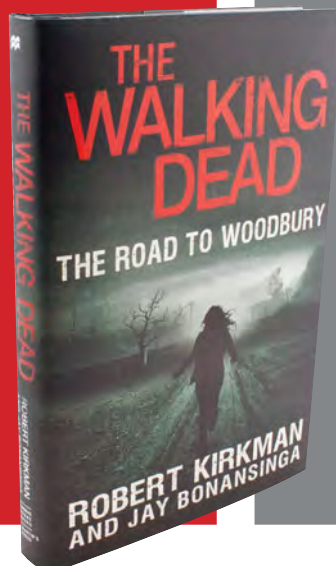
If you pay R300 for a bobblehead this is exactly what you'd expect to find inside the polystyrene enclosure. This version of Ezio is a painted resin bobblehead on a specially sculpted base. Not really suitable for the back of your car but rather behind a glass window in a cabinet. It's the Fabergé egg of bobbleheads, if you will.



**THE WALKING DEAD:
THE ROAD TO WOODBURY**

Supplier: AWX
Website: www.awx.co.za
RRP: R335

If you feel that trade paperbacks ("graphic novels, damnit!") don't give you quite the cred you're looking for during book discussions over a fancy dinner with your fancy friends, then here's a great way to soak up the same zombie slaughtering action from Robert Kirkman. The book is far from a literary masterwork, but it drips with the same sense of foreboding and spring-loaded violence you'd expect from the author, and is well worth it for those looking to dig into the history of the Governor and his creepy town.



TECHNEWS

KNOWYOURTECHNOLOGY

DDR

Double Data Rate SDRAM was the first RAM to use a very strict control of the data and clock signals to allow, in theory, twice the data rate of SDR RAM. This was possible by transferring data on both the rising and falling edges of the clock signal (in 64-bit chunks), resulting in a lower clock frequency but higher throughput. At certain clock speeds DDR SDRAM can achieve twice the bandwidth of SDR RAM. DDR RAM has since been superseded by DDR2 and DDR3. The Highest speed reached by DDR SDRAM was around 633MHz, but the official JEDEC specification only recognized speeds up to 400MHz.

DDR3

Double Data Rate type three memory. The standard actually defines the interface as the DRAM arrays that store the data are similar to what was available with DDR and DDR2. The main advantage of DDR3 is that it is able to transfer data at four times the basic rate. The clock signal is quadrupled over a 64-bit wide interface allowing the memory to attain significantly higher bandwidth than both DDR and DDR2 were capable of. Unlike with DDR2, DDR3 allows per chip capacities of up to 8GB. DDR3 operates at a lower voltage as well at 1.5V and has a maximum JEDEC certified speed of 2,133MHz/s for a theoretical limit of 17GB/s.

GDDR5

Based on the DDR3 SDRAM standard, Graphics Double Data Rate type five memory is similar to DDR3, but it has an additional 8-bit prefetch buffer. GDDR5 allows narrower bit-width configurations than DDR3, where each chip can be connected to a 16 or more commonly a 32-bit bus. With two write clocks each assigned to two bytes (16-bits), its write clock allows it to attain higher frequencies than DDR3. With GDDR5, the command signal is half the speed of the write clock, so a 1GHz command clock results in a 2GHz write clock, hence the very high speeds of GDDR5 at up to 7GHz.

DDR4

The Successor to DDR3, type four DDR memory has a higher range of clock frequencies and data rates officially from 2,133MHz to 4,266MHz. The operating voltage has been lowered as well to between 1.05 and 1.2V compared to the 1.2 to 1.65V as commonly found with DDR3 SDRAM. DDR4, unlike all other versions before, disallows multiple DIMMS per channel in favour of a point to point topology with each module connecting directly to the memory hub or memory controller. Physically DDR3 and DDR4 are the similar, but DDR4 packs 284 pins, and the PCB is taller as well to make signal routing easier.

STEELSERIES SPECTRUM AUDIOMIXER

If you have a PC headset with 3.5mm jacks and want to use it with your Xbox 360, the AudioMixer makes that possible. Just plug it into your Xbox controller and you're set. R399 | www.megarom.co.za



BELKIN PLAY N750 DUAL-BAND WIRELESS USB ADAPTER

Looking for a Wi-Fi connector for your laptop or notebook? The Belkin Play will get you online with minimal fuss, and it supports HD video streaming. R699 | www.belkin.com



DID YOU KNOW?

The world's oldest working digital computer, the Wolverhampton Instrument for Teaching Computing from Harwell, or WITCH, has been rebooted in its home in The National Museum of Computing in Buckinghamshire, England. "In 1951 the Harwell Dekatron was one of perhaps a dozen computers in the world, and since then, it has led a charmed life surviving intact while its contemporaries were recycled or destroyed," trustee of the museum Kevin Murrell said in a statement. Restoration of the 3-ton computer began three years ago to get the device in working order. In its prime, it ran on telephone exchange relays, gas-filled tubes, and paper tape used for input and output on the machine.

GENIUS GX MORDAX

If you're a multi-platform gamer then this gaming headset is a great buy. It has a built-in amplifier, detachable mic, and can be used on your PC, Mac, PS3 and Xbox 360.
R549 | www.tvr.co.za

**LOGITECH G600 MMO GAMING MOUSE**

With a maximum DPI setting of 8,200 (!), this MMO-primed gaming mouse has 20 programmable buttons (!), 12 of which are thumb buttons (!). The G600 is useful for quick access to all of your character's most-used skills, and can store multiple profiles for use with different games.
R1,999 | www.logitech.com



Mosh Pit

SAMSUNG SERIES 9 NP900X3A

This super slim notebook is just 16mm thick and weighs only 1.3kg, but packs in a Core i5 CPU and 256GB SSD. Perfect for business trips and holidays or just lounging on the couch at home.
R15,999 | www.samsung.co.za



"We got tremendously positive feedback from our initial Razer Game Booster testers and we're happy to welcome everyone to experience the award-winning software to optimize their systems and enhance gameplay"
"RazerGuy" Krakoff, president of Razer USA.

The Open Beta release of Razer Game Booster, software that streamlines PC gaming performance, is now available for free, and can be found on our cover DVD this month.

11.1

BY THE NUMBERS

Microsoft has confirmed that DirectX 11.1 will be exclusive to its Windows 8 operating system and will not be made available for Windows 7. DirectX 11.1 adds a number of new features, which can be found here <http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/windows/desktop/hh404562%28v-vs.85%29.aspx>

DREAMMACHINE

There are four changes in the Dream Machine this month! The MSI N680GTX Lightning replaces the GV-N680SO-2GD as the graphics card of choice, and the brand new OCZ Vector SSD outclasses the CORSAIR Neutron GTX. On AMD's side, we finally have a replacement for the aged Phenom II X6 1100T with the FX 8350 CPU, and we're happy to note that AMD finally seems to be making strides in the right direction. To complement that we replace the GIGABYTE 990FXA-UD7 which has ceased production, with the newer ASUS Crosshair V Formula-Z. Substantial changes for the AMD rig both in price and performance.



Cooler Master Silent Pro M2 1500Watt PSU
R3,300 / www.cooler-master.com



MSI N680GTX Lightning
R6,999 / www.msi.com

NEW



OCZ Vector 256GB SSD
R3,000 / www.ocz.com

NEW



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



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



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



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



Hardwired

This is how we do it!

In a struggling global economy, one would think that publishers and vendors alike would be finding more innovative ways to sell their various wares and services. Instead, what I've witnessed in 2012 is anything but that. Publishers in the West are, in more ways than what it may seem at first, very analogous to hardware vendors in the East. Sadly their similarities are to varying degrees the results of the same lamentable shortsightedness and in some cases downright stupidity.

Take for example, the recent rise of gaming service clients that every publisher has for their games. All of them are Steam inspired naturally, however all of them are vastly inferior even though they look better (then again the bar is set very low as Steam is essentially a greyish brown window). Origin from EA as I recently found out, delivers its content in a language deemed appropriate for the IP address on the local machine. That is, you could be English speaking as I am, but because of your present location, find yourself presented with an interface that's completely in traditional Chinese. There is no way to change this, and should I find myself in Mexico for example, it

"A new IP address has endowed one with the ability to speak in tongues. The stupidity of this is nothing but awe inspiring, given that years after Steam has been around, Origin has managed to be worse in every conceivable way."

would be in Spanish. EA has figured that an IP address change for an English account represents newfound proficiency in a new language. A new IP address has endowed one with the ability to speak in tongues. The stupidity of this is nothing but awe inspiring, given that years after Steam has been around, Origin has managed to be worse in every conceivable way. Not because EA lacks technical capacity, but simply because the individuals tasked with the "Origin project" at no point realized the staggering absurdity of using an IP address to determine the language in which content is delivered.

Ubisoft, inspired differently but to the same measure by the same fruit juice as EA, have figured that within their Uplay client it should be impossible to register a game using only your activation code. Somehow when studying Steam it seems the "add a game" option was deemed superfluous and trivial. So, if you do not have the original distribution medium, it will be impossible for you to add a game to your profile and download it from their servers if you've not done so previously. You may only activate a game from within the game, but you cannot start the game because you don't have the game. So you can see then, what we have here is another vivid portrayal of inspired genius.

As for the hardware vendors, well I've mentioned this before on several occasions, but their insistence at not bundling games with hardware is puzzling to say the least. That an organization would ask its customers to buy a \$499 graphics card almost every year, then not realize that a relationship with developers and publishers of PC games is necessary, shows an active effort at being as myopic as possible. Thus far the best answer I have been given as to why this is not happening has been literarily "we don't have any contacts with the publishers." It seems a juvenile thing to claim but it is true.

Here's to 2013, off to a fantastic start then.

- Neo Sibeko



Intel

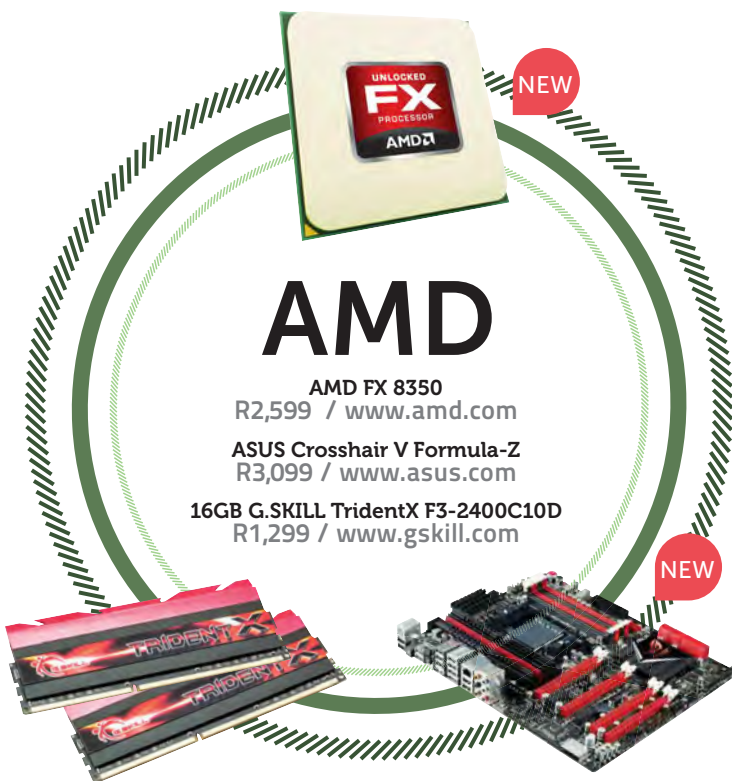
Intel Core i7 3960X
R10,499 / www.intel.com

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

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

Intel Dream Machine price:

R58,603



AMD

AMD FX 8350
R2,599 / www.amd.com

ASUS Crosshair V Formula-Z
R3,099 / www.asus.com

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

AMD Dream Machine price:

R45,103

STAR WARS: The Old Republic peripherals by Razer

Website www.playgroundshop.co.za **RRP** R7,090 for all of it

Every good gamer knows that an important part of a healthy, balanced diet is a generous portion of everything *Star Wars*. Better yet if your *Star Wars* consumption somehow relates to gaming at the same time. Enter Razer's set of PC peripherals, designed to worm their way into the affections of anyone obsessed with BioWare's lightsaber-loving, galaxy far far away-

spanning (now kinda, sorta free to play) MMORPG *Star Wars: The Old Republic*. Or anyone obsessed with *Star Wars* really. Or anyone obsessed with owning all of the world's most awesome things, ever. If you hate money, and the idea of your children going without food for a while doesn't offend you, then read on for more info on this delightfully nerdy extravagance.

TECHNICAL

Keyboard

- Anti-ghosting for up to ten keys
- Ten dynamic adaptive tactile keys
- Multi-touch LCD track-panel / 1000Hz Ultrapolling, 1ms response time

Mouse

- 17 programmable buttons
- 5,600 DPI Razer Precision 3.5G Laser Sensor
- 1,000Hz Ultrapolling, 1ms response time

Headset

- Dolby 7.1 virtual surround sound
- 50mm driver units

Mousepad

- It's a really spiffy mousepad.



IT'S AS IF MILLIONS OF VOICES SUDDENLY CRIED OUT IN TERROR, AND WERE SUDDENLY SILENCED

These quality audio-bringers are outfitted with Dolby 7.1 capabilities. It ticks all the boxes you'd expect: adjustable headband and microphone boom, along with comfy foam-covered ear cups, one of which is fitted with volume/mic controls. Adjustable LED lighting is a nice bonus, and as with the other stuff in this set you've got your faction's emblem proudly emblazoned on it with gold backlighting. You'll need to fork over R1,550 for the chance to stare at these with pride every day.



MAY THE SWITCHBLADE BE WITH YOU

It's the most expensive item in the set at R3,200: the Razer Switchblade UI-adorned keyboard. The basics on its list of features include anti-ghosting for up to ten key presses, pleasant chiclet keys (with slick gold backlighting) and customisable bands of LED lighting running along the edges of the board. What makes this keyboard unique (and likely what gives it its ludicrous price tag, beyond the *Star Wars* license of course) is the full-colour, multi-touch LCD panel on its right-hand side, replete with ten keys that can be customised with dynamically switchable icons, which can be assigned to various in-game powers and abilities (as well as macros) for quick, customisable access. The multi-touch panel below those keys is used in various ways in supported games and apps. It can be used to do everything from browsing the web and watching YouTube videos, to controlling media and displaying the logo of your chosen faction in *The Old Republic*.



I'VE MADE A LOT OF SPECIAL MODIFICATIONS MYSELF

It's covered in "non-slip, anti-reflective, abrasion-resistant hard coating on surfaces", says the packaging of this fancy-looking mousepad. Science says these are probably good qualities to have in a mousepad, so we're excited. Its metal frame is metal, and its non-slip rubber base is non-slip and rubber. Also, it's dual-sided, with faction logos emblazoned on each side. Really, it's just a mousepad. And at R590, it's likely the most expensive mousepad you'll ever own.

CONTROL, CONTROL, YOU MUST LEARN CONTROL!

More traditional as far as the recent upstart of MMO-focused mice goes is this set's mouse, designed for right-handed *Old Republic* players. It's wireless, but can go the wired route when it runs out of juice and needs to be charged without taking a break from your gaming. The wireless receiver doubles as a charging dock as well. Boasting a maximum DPI setting of 5,600 and 17 programmable buttons (12 of these are located by your left thumb), it's also got a panel on the bottom right of it that'll display your chosen faction's emblem. LEDs adorning the mouse can have their colours customised, as with the keyboard. It'll set you back R1,750.



PROS

- Authentic look and feel
- Quality design and build
- *Star Wars*!

CONS

- Hideously expensive

ALTERNATIVES

- Any non-*Star Wars* peripheral set
- Investing in your own personal Death Star



BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: INTEL CORE I7 3930K

3DMark 11 physics	7,885
	11,154
Wprime 1024	261,254
	160,885
Cinebench 11.5	6.95
	9.38
AIDA 64 CPU Queen	35,672
	55,214
AIDA 64 FPU VP8	4,662
	3,774

SPECS

Core
32nm Vishera
Frequency
4,000MHz
Cache
16.7MB Total
(8MB L3)
TDP
125W
Platform
AM3+
(Socket 942)

AMD FX 8350



Supplier AMD Website www.amd.com RRP R2,599

After the massive disappointment that was Bulldozer, we had all but written off AMD. The company had done so much better with Phenom II after that original Phenom debacle of 2008, we were sure that lessons learned from that would ensure AMD never again released such a woeful product. Sadly, this is exactly what happened as you may recall, and in an unprecedented fashion, managed to release a CPU that was by and large slower than their outgoing products from 2009.

So we find ourselves once again reintroduced to the FX moniker. However, this time we have to say, given where AMD is coming from, they have somewhat managed to save

the day. The Piledriver update isn't a dramatic change to what Bulldozer was offered over the previous generation, and in fact the die area is exactly the same. What has taken place are some minor changes to the process and the internals that in total result in a cooler running CPU, lower TDP and a higher clock speed.

AMD, like in 1999 with the first 1GHz CPU, has set the bar again as the first CPU to retail at 4GHz as its default speed. The TDP has remained at 125W though, which is evidence of a much improved manufacturing process.

Turbo frequencies have not changed between the old FX 8150 and the new CPU is still at 4.2GHz, but the new CPU spends more time

at the Turbo frequencies than before. Not that it matters though, because base performance is what concerns us and it is here where the claimed 15% performance improvements actually manifest themselves.

Clock versus clock, the Vishera core is only seven to eight percentiles faster, but because the CPU operates at 400MHz higher than its predecessor, paired a better IMC and higher memory clock speeds. The entire platform does indeed gain a measurable boost in performance.

Take for example the memory we used for our testing. We were, for the first time, able to review the CPU as we do all others from Intel of late, at 2,400MHz. Not only does the 2,400MHz multiplier work,

PLUS

- Great memory overclocking
- Improved overall performance
- Lower power consumption

MINUS

- Still about two generations short of where the competition is

BOTTOM LINE

Finally AMD has delivered a true successor to the Phenom II CPUs. FX 8350 is a step in the right direction.



“AMD, like in 1999 with the first 1GHz CPU, has set the bar again as the first CPU to retail at 4GHz as its default speed.”

but through the various memory frequency records, the new CPUs have shown some incredible memory frequency scaling. We have no doubt that if mainboard vendors thought to include it, we could have a 13 multiplier made available to us which would allow 2,600MHz with no overclocking to the HTT frequency.

More than the improved IMC frequencies, the efficiency of the controller has been tweaked to allow slightly lower latencies, but higher throughput as we saw while doing our testing, as AIDA 64 copy results finally matched those of Intel's older X58 platform at around the 20GB/s mark. It's still some way off what Intel's Ivy Bridge products are capable of but a definite improvement.

Overclocking is another area where AMD has further refined the FX CPUs. The highest CPU frequency right now ever achieved is 8.67GHz, which is nothing short of phenomenal. It is worth keeping in mind though that this frequency is one made possible only by the ridiculously deep execution pipeline of the CPU. It does show however that AMD is able to scale clock speeds even on the aged 32nm SOI process.

On to more feasible overclocking results, we were able to run the CPU comfortably at 4.6 GHz at just under 1.4V or rather a little over the default VID (Voltage ID) for our particular CPU. While on the subject of IVD, please note that the default VID for each CPU is different. Both Intel and AMD stipulate a range for their CPUs and not a fixed voltage, so your particular sample may have a higher or lower default VID. Suffice to say, the lower the default VID the better

the sample is.

Gaming performance, which is what I suspect most of us care about, has also improved. As it stands, the FX 8350 is about as fast as the older Intel Core i7 930 CPU and in some cases a little faster. AMD claims that it's positioned this CPU against the 3570K but that is only in price. In some scenarios they are matched for sure, but for the most part, AMD is still about two generations behind in performance when compared directly against Intel. As the Intel Core i7 930 isn't on sale anymore, there was no way AMD could use that as a comparison against their CPU.

Compared to the outgoing FX 8150 and the Phenom II, the new Vishera CPU is faster in all respects, and we can finally say that AMD has taken a real step forward. So those of you still using a Phenom II CPUs and those unfortunate enough to have bought the FX 8150 should definitely go out and buy the FX 8350. The price may seem a little high, but that is purely because of the sad state of our currency, but rest assured that the FX 8350 offers fantastic value for money, somewhat in line with the APU family.

Overall, FX 8350 left us feeling so much better than we did with the FX 8150. We couldn't figure out why the FX8150 was ever released, but this new CPU makes sense and as a drop in price for those using AM3 systems, this is one very good upgrade that we would definitely recommend.

AMD is getting its act together and we can only look forward to what Steamroller will bring with it next year, until then, the FX 8350 is our choice AMD CPU. **NAG**

– Neo Sibeko

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Ultrabook™



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HARDWARE

GIGABYTE Z77X-UD4H

Supplier Rectron Website www.gigabyte.com RRP TBA

At the end of Intel's Z77 chipset and platform, what has become very apparent is that it's divided the opinion between gamers and overclockers. An otherwise meaningless distinction has been made because of several changes Intel made to its CPUs and subsequently the chipset and motherboards.

With Sandy Bridge, memory overclocking had been forgotten and memory kits faster than 2,133MHz were largely useless, as that was the highest multiplier available. Furthermore, the base clock didn't go much past 5% of the reference 100MHz clock. Add to which, the very low leakage second generation Core CPUs allowed everyone to overclock their systems to extreme levels, sometimes without the aid of exotic cooling.

With Ivy Bridge, the chipset and CPU allowed much higher memory speeds and higher performance. Negating that somewhat, Intel also decided to not use flux solder between the heat spreader and the die. That meant, despite the smaller manufacturing process, the overclocking headroom had decreased when using an air cooler. 5GHz clock speeds had gone from common and unimpressive to rare and noteworthy. On the flip side, Ivy Bridge CPUs were capable, and still remain so today, of 7GHz and higher

clock validations. Something no Sandy Bridge CPU could ever attain. Thus this small change has left the gamers and power users a little less impressed with the Z77 platform, with some opting to remain with the previous generation CPUs and motherboards.

So motherboards such as this one, while more than capable of powering a gaming machine, are best appreciated in an overclocking context as all the changes made to the UD4H over the UD3H are purely overclocking related, and for the most part, there'll be no difference between this motherboard and the previous one. On the other hand, if high clock speeds and competitive overclocking is what you are after, then this is certainly a better motherboard, for several reasons in fact.

The most important one being the vastly improved memory overclocking that this board offers. To highlight this, we were easily able to run our memory at 2,800MHz which isn't as easy as one would imagine. In fact there are some motherboards on the market that simply won't reach that speed regardless of what CPU and memory one uses. That we were able to reach this speed with a 2,666MHz set of memory speaks volumes for

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: ASUS Rampage IV Extreme

3DMark Vantage CPU	33,141 46,760
Cinebench 11.5	9.42 13.43
AIDA 64 copy	28,606MB/s 20,396MB/s
3DMark03	118,547 127,025

SPECS

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

PLUS

- Very good memory overclocking
- Overclocking features
- Price

MINUS

- Only two-way SLI/CrossFire

BOTTOM LINE

A great follow-up on the UD3H; the UD4H is everything the previous board was and more.

the board, as this was not possible on the UD3H before.

A seemingly small difference, but one that will make itself felt when you're competing for a top spot. Even if you're not looking to be competitive, the fact that you can now run 2,666MHz all day and every day with no tweaking or additional voltage makes this the ideal board for those who want to build the fastest possible Z77 computer, but have a limited budget within which to do so.

One could opt for the Z77X-UP7, which is easily the most feature-packed motherboard from GIGABYTE in their Z77 line up, but believe it or not the UD4H overclocks memory slightly better. This is why this motherboard instantly gained favour from us. It provides the same efficiency as the UD3H if not better, but also features the best overclocking headroom with memory out of them all. The only thing we lament is the absence of 3-way CrossFire or SLI support. This lack of support would have gone even further into making this board better than it already is. Overall, it's very similar to the UD3H, but because of the vastly improved memory overclocking, the UD4H is the board to purchase over the UD3H. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

mydlink cloud services

Cloud Cameras

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Get set up with the push of a button

Cloud Cameras work seamlessly with Cloud Routers to connect themselves to your home network in seconds.



Mobile apps make it easy

View live video on your Smartphone with the free mydlink Lite app or keep tabs on multiple cameras at once with the mydlink+ app. 



Cloud Routers

Enjoy wall-to-wall coverage

Cloud Routers have built-in high powered amplifiers so you can share fast and reliable Wi-Fi with all your devices, everywhere in your home.



Manage your home network from anywhere

View web browsing history, see what devices are connected to your network, be notified of free router updates - and more - all from your Smartphone or tablet.

Enjoy media throughout your home

Plug a USB drive of any size into the back of your Cloud Router and enjoy your videos, music, photos - even full length movies - from anywhere in your home.



Shareport Portable Cloud Routers

**DIR-506L
Pocket Cloud Router**

Share any Internet connection wirelessly. Multiple modes make it perfect for any situation. Share and stream files with any connected device. Rechargeable battery provides full portability. Charges using any USB port.



**DIR-505
All-in-One Mobile Companion**

Share any Internet connection wirelessly. Multiple modes make it perfect for any situation. Share and stream files with any connected mobile devices. Access your USB drive over the Internet. Can also be used as a USB device charger.

Cloud Storage

Never leave your media behind



Back up your media to your own Personal Cloud with a Share-center storage enclosure and never worry about losing a file again.

Plus, use the free app to enjoy instant access to all your home videos, photos, music and movies from anywhere, anytime.



D-Link[®]
Building Networks for People



SPECS

Dimensions
151.1x80.5x9.4mm
Weight
183g
Display
5.5" 720x1280
Gorilla Glass
CPU
Quad core 1.6GHz
Cortex-A9
Operating system
Android 4.1 Jelly
Bean
Storage
32GB built-in;
microSD supported
Battery
3,100mAh
Camera
8MP (rear) with
1080p@30fps
video; 1.9MP (front)



Samsung Galaxy Note II N7100

Supplier Samsung South Africa **Website** www.samsung.co.za **RRP** R7,999

Do you remember when mobile phones trended towards getting smaller? We laughed about how big they used to be, scoffing at those who couldn't afford to upgrade to a model with an integrated aerial or predictive text. Then touch screens happened, and mobile video, and on-screen keyboards; now *bigger* is better; top-of-the-range phones are the largest on the market but, as tablets start to take over the jobs we previously reserved for smartphones, there's a tiny gap that's opened up between the entry-level 7" tabs and range-topping 4-5" phones. When Samsung decided to fill that gap with the first Galaxy Note, they quickly realised that they were on to something, and now we're at the second iteration of this (initially) seemingly odd slice of the mobile phone market: what Samsung shamelessly calls the note segment.

With a screen size at 5.5 inches, the Galaxy Note II is 30% larger overall than even the palm-stretching Galaxy

S III, but only a little more than 1mm thicker. It's going to attract strange looks and probing questions – you can bet on it – but this isn't a phone that's simply big: it's packed with powerful hardware and features that actually use that space. The Note II isn't as big as a bachelor flat because of lazy design, but rather because of *smart* design.

To start, you've got the stylus, or "S-Pen", that does a whole lot more than just let you write on-screen (which, compared to Jelly Bean's incredible swipe keyboard, isn't worth your time). Hold down the S-Pen button on the stylus and double-tap to open up the S Note app from anywhere in your phone to jot down quick messages (even during a phone call); squiggle any predefined gesture to open up the specified app; or use the full S Pen app to draw with an impressive set of brushes.

The S Pen is cool (if a bit finicky), but it'll only be useful to a select group of people. The real beauty of the Note

PLUS

- True multi-tasking
- Smooth performance all-round
- Packed with features
- Surprisingly light and comfortable

MINUS

- S Pen still needs some work

BOTTOM LINE

Huge but not bulky, the Galaxy Note II is top of the class on the Android platform.

II is how it uses its large screen. From any app you can slide in supported apps like Chrome, Gallery, Maps, Talk, and a few third-party apps like Twitter and Facebook to sit alongside your current app – on-screen, at the same time. You know windows? *That*. This isn't cheap task switching, this is true multi-tasking. You can take things even further by placing a resizable video window anywhere on the screen so you can do three things at once. And with the most powerful CPU we've yet seen on an Android device, you can bet that everything runs smoothly while you're doing all this.

We'll make this simple for you: if you think you can live with the task of explaining to people why your phone is so damn big, then you'll love the Note II. It's filled with awesome features and nifty tricks, and runs games and apps smoother than any other Android device. Make your decision and stick to it; you'll love this phone.

NAG
- Geoff Burrows

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MSI N680GTX Lightning



Supplier **Corex** Website www.msi.com RRP **R6,999**

When we reviewed the GIGABYTE GV-N680SO-2GD a few issues back, we were sure that it was going to be the best GTX680 ever made. In fact, we were pretty confident that on clock speeds alone it would remain supreme, as NVIDIA's policy on overclocking and clock speeds would ensure that many vendors would not dare attempt a higher clock speed than what NVIDIA had recommended or rather approved.

This is still the case, and the MSI N680GTX Lightning is, for all intents and purposes, a smidgen slower than the GIGABYTE Super Overclock card. So how is it then that it receives a perfect score and displaces that card as our Dream Machine graphics card? Well it's pretty simple really. It's all to do with the electronic circuitry, and subsequently the overclocking headroom that the Lightning offers above any and all GTX 680 graphics cards on the market. It's the typical MSI Lightning affair, featuring only the best "military grade" components. That in itself doesn't mean much other than to say you'll find a 12-phase PWM on the card, additional power circuitry via the GPU reactor module for voltage filtering, an extreme overclocking switch (LN2) mode, extra MOSFETS at the rear of the card for heat distribution and voltage measuring points to name a few. It's

kitted out to be an extreme overclocker's dream graphics card right out the box. Using MSI's own Afterburner software one is able to adjust all kinds of settings and monitor all the relevant voltages as well, allowing you to get the best out of the graphics with no additional mods or third party software.

Well, at least that's the theory. See the problem is, as with any graphics card over the last few years, software voltage control is possible via a CHIL 8318 controller. However voltage limit at least for vGPU is set to NVIDIA's limit, which is 1.175V at most. Circumventing that will require some tweaking and research via Google but suffice to say it's very possible. At the very least 1.215V is possible to unlock on this card with but a simple BIOS modification.

Once again this may all seem too advanced for the regular user, but then again we are confident that should you want just a regular GTX 680, there are plenty others which offer similar out of the box performance that you could purchase as it would be a shame we think to leave this card running at its default clock speeds when it is such a wonderful overclocker.

Even if you're not into competitive overclocking and purely employ such tools as Afterburner to further increase game performance, you'll be happy

SPECS

Core
GK104 (28nm)
Processors
1,536
Render outputs:
32
Memory
2,048MB GDDR5
6.0GHz
(192.4GB/sec)
API
DirectX 11.1
OpenGL 4.x
OpenCL 1.x
PhysX

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: **ASUS GEFORCE GTX680**

Hard Reset DX9 1,080p 4xAA	113 99.6
Just Cause 2 DX10 1,080p	171.55 155.72
3DMark11 Extreme	3,747 3,343
3DMark Vantage	37,912 39,722
Unigine Heaven Xtreme	2,106,579 1,871,607

PLUS

- Excellent for extreme overclocking
- Fantastic gaming performance
- Impressive electronic circuitry

MINUS

- Availability may be a problem
- Costly

BOTTOM LINE

The best GTX 680 we've tested thus far. May not be the fastest out the box, but certainly very easy to make it such.

to hear that courtesy of EVGA oddly enough, there's a little feature in their Precision tool called K-Boost. This little tick box feature allows one to negate NVIDIA's annoying power modes and turbo features, locking the card to a specific clock speed.

This is actually what tipped the scales in the GTX 680 Lightning's favour. Unlike with any other GTX 680 we've tested, we were able to run the card at an impressive 1,260MHz for gaming for hours on end, and push the Samsung GDDR5 memory to 7.5GHz (rated at 6GHz). The additional performance to put it into perspective boosted game performance quite substantially over and above the already impressive 1,110MHz default GPU clock. We did need to switch to the LN2 BIOS for this, however, because only that one allowed the card to draw as much power as it needed to feed this much higher GPU clock.

With such a high graphics card clock and the new (at the time) 310.54 drivers, we saw 3DMark11 scores above the 12,000 point mark, making it the fastest score we've ever recorded with a GTX680 without exotic cooling.

As such, the MSI N680GTX rightfully deserves our Dream Machine award as it really is the best GTX 680 we've ever tested. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

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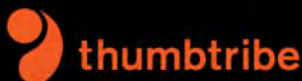
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OCZ Vector 256GB SSD

Supplier Syntech SA Website www.ocz.com ERP R3,000

Just as we thought SSDs were becoming boring, vendors started to differentiate themselves once again, each one vying for the top spot as vendors of the fastest SSD. Plextor did it with their Marvell controller-based M3 and M5 drives, Corsair with the LAMD controller on the Neutron drive series, and now OCZ has done it with their in-house Indilinx Barefoot 3 controller-based Vector.

OCZ's purchase of Indilinx some time ago has been paying off, first with the Vertex 4 drives which used the second generation Indilinx FW, and now with the Vector SSD. This is the newest family of drives from the outfit and, despite their recent financial woes, OCZ may have struck gold with this series of drives and controllers should they sell them to other vendors.

More than just sheer speed, the new controller is built for high reliability, sustainable performance, and endurance. It may sound like marketing talk but OCZ have backed up their claims with a five year warranty on the drives, something that you rarely find with SandForce drives.

Talking about SandForce drives, these had been unmatched for the longest time in raw sequential read and write performance, but with the recent drives that time has officially

passed. Recent drives such as this one not only make similar claims about performance, but they actually reach those claimed speeds. For instance, the Vector drive managed a staggering 524MB/s in both read and write sequential performance. Such numbers are creeping up on the SATA 6Gbps limit which, in theory, is limited to 600MB/s (but less in practice). Better yet, the Vector drive is as equally comfortable with compressed and uncompressed data unlike SandForce driven SSDs so performance is consistent with all kinds of data throughout the drive.

What makes the Barefoot 3 controller tick is the ARM Cortex core, paired with OCZ's own Argon in-house logic which acts as a co-processor. With 8-channel NAND Array support, the controller allows drives ranging from 128GB to 512GB to offer near identical performance. This is unlike with other drive CPUs which scale the performance with the number of NAND chips on the drive. Increasing performance with higher capacity drives while the smaller drives suffer performance penalties. To illustrate this, the claimed performance figures for all Vector drives are identical save for the 4KB random read IOPS figure on the 128GB drive which is 90,000 IOPS

SPECS
 Controller INDILINX
 Barefoot 3
 NAND type 25nm IMFT NAND
 Form factor 2.5", 7mm
 Interface SATA 6Gbps

PLUS

- Incredible performance
- Intelligent controller
- 5 year warranty

MINUS

- May be a little pricey at first

BOTTOM LINE
 The OCZ Vector drive is the latest and fastest SSD drive on the market pushing at the limits of the SATA 6Gbps standard.

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: NEUTRON GTX

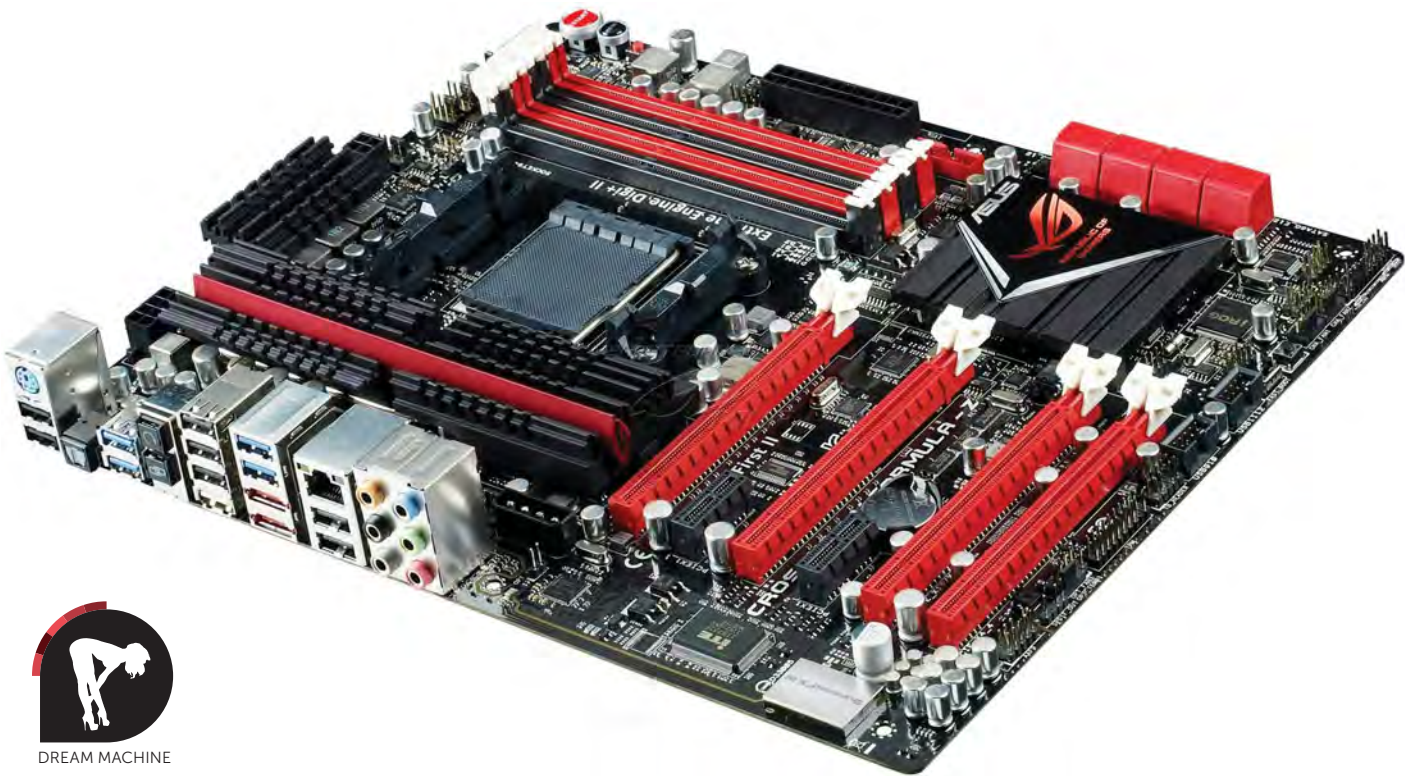
Average read	524MB/s 473.6MB/s
Average write	524MB/s 496MB/s
4K read (QD16)	394.3MB/s 294.3MB/s
4K write	367.9MB/s 316.2MB/s

instead of 100,000. Everything else however is identical, and this speaks volumes for the controller and the new 25nm IMFT NAND flash.

As SSDs become the primary means of storage for people, reliability and consistency has become key to many vendors and it's no different for OCZ. The company claims that their drive has the minimal amount of write amplification over time. A bold claim but one that is easily backed up with IOMeter tests, as this was the only drive to actually increase in IOPS performance as the test suite continued to run. Impressive indeed but it is also worth remembering that on the Vertex 4 drive, performance didn't decrease either for the same test, so it seems to be a general Barefoot controller feature that has been improved upon with the Vector SSD.

Right now this drive is blisteringly fast, beating every single drive we've had in the past and securing itself as our new Dream Machine SSD, easily reaching new levels of performance we had not thought possible for this generation of drives. The OCZ Vector drive is the one to get. It may be a little pricey, but the performance, warranty and reliability make it worth it.

NAG
 – Neo Sibeko



ASUS Crosshair V Formula-Z

Manufacturer ASUS **Website** www.asus.com **ERP** R3,099

Do not be deterred by the extravagant price; the ASUS Crosshair V Formula-Z represents the most refined 990FX motherboard we've ever seen. That doesn't mean it has every single feature possible, but how it combines the features it does have make this the most compelling 990FX motherboard you can buy.

Before we go into what makes this motherboard great, something that most users don't know is that motherboard pricing is very much tied to the chipset and CPU price. That is, for the most part a motherboard's pricing is determined in a large part by the highest SKU of CPU available for that platform. So given that the most expensive CPU for the platform is \$229 USD or so, you can appreciate why ASUS had to come in at this price as well and cram the board with every feature possible without ending up with a board that was underutilized by the CPU. Consider also the current state of the rand and all of a sudden the price starts to make sense.

For just over R3,000 ASUS is offering the most impressive AMD motherboard ever. 3-way SLI, SupremeFX III audio, Thunderbolt connectivity, ROG Connect, Intel gigabit ethernet controller, 12 USB ports, Direct Key, voltage measuring points and a host of other features. It's literally the most impressive showing of the 990FX chipset we've ever seen and certainly the most efficient especially when paired with the FX 8350 CPU.

Overclocking on this motherboard

proved to be a breeze. Most limitations one is likely to come across are probably going to be as a result of the CPU sample you have rather than the board, as the motherboard does in fact hold the frequency world record. Where memory is concerned it's a little more complicated, but suffice to say you shouldn't have any problems running high performance low latency 2,400MHz kits on this motherboard.

As with the Maximus and Rampage family, ASUS has included overclocking profiles with the Crosshair V to help facilitate the process so you can get up to speed much faster and with more reliability than you would have if you had to hand-tune and test each setting yourself. Moreover, you can be assured that these settings work well because they are tuned by none other than Peter "Shamino" Tan himself.

It may be a Republic of Gamers motherboard but, as we have known for years now, the ROG boards are geared towards overclocking first, then "gaming" after. A naming or marketing scheme which we feel could do with some re-evaluation, especially when dealing with such a motherboard. By now, everyone is well aware that ASUS is pretty much undisputed when it comes to audio fidelity and high-end sound cards on the PC. This expertise never ceases to impress and yet somehow it never translates into their SupremeFX audio solutions on the ROG parts. This isn't isolated to the Crosshair

SPECS

Chipset
AMD 990FX + SB950
Memory
4x 240-pin DDR3
CPU support
AMD AM3/AM3+ CPUs
Slots
4x PCIe 3.0 x16, 3x PCIe x1

PLUS

- Great overclocking features
- Great efficiency
- Looks awesome
- 3-way SLI/ CrossFireX

MINUS

- Could have been more

BOTTOM LINE

Easily the best 990FX motherboard on the market right now.

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: ASUS Rampage IV Extreme

3DMark Vantage CPU	25,349
	46,760
Cinebench 11.5	7.95
	13.43
AIDA 64 copy	20,796MB/s
	20,396MB/s
3DMark03	98,811
	127,025

V Formula but we see this somewhat underwhelming (by comparison to their discreet solutions) audio circuitry and subsequently sound quality on all their ROG motherboards. If we were to level any criticism at this board it would be that it does not feature anything close to what even the basic AV100-powered Xonar audio cards provide, which is a shame because the Crosshair V Formula-Z is a near perfect board.

The Crosshair V Formula-Z is expensive, but it's also a fantastic piece of kit. It ticks all the right boxes to earn its place as the new AMD Dream Machine motherboard. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

Cooler Master Seidon 120M

Distributor Sonic Informed **Website** www.cooler-master.com **RRP** R799

Next to gaming keyboards, all-in-one liquid cooling solutions are the latest bandwagon for vendors. Every manufacturer has one and even worse they are near identical in performance and looks, only differing slightly in how the water block is mounted. Short of that, we would be hard pressed to tell the difference between them when lined up against each other.

Cooler Master, a veteran when it comes to cooling, has also entered the rat race with their Seidon line of LCSs. The 120M being the base model that has a single 120M fan and a 150x118mm radiator. Performance wise it's what you'd expect from the Antec Kuhler 620, the Corsair H70, or the TT Water PRO 2.0 we reviewed last year. That is to say, they are all pretty efficient coolers, definitely beating the mid-range air coolers in performance.



The Seidon is a little easier to install than the rest or at least it's much simpler. It has the standard back plate and mounting bolts, but it all comes together so easily you're unlikely to need to turn to the manual. More than that it remains the easiest to install even when the motherboard has been mounted in the case (provided the case

has a motherboard tray opening around the CPU socket). That alone makes this a little easier to recommend over the others. Everything else though is as you'd expect from a Cooler Master product, but more so from these 120M single radiator coolers.

The one annoying part about this cooler is the pump buzz

or noise it made at start up; it quickly became a nonissue after the system was up and running, but it can be pretty loud every time the system powers on. Short of that, it's really a faultless CPU cooler that is certainly better than the vast majority of air coolers on the market.

NAG
- Neo Sibeko

SPECS

Size
150x118x27
(mm radiator)
Compatibility
2011/1366/775
1156/1155/AM2
AM3/FM1/FM2

PLUS

- Easy to setup
- Better than average cooling capacity

MINUS

- Annoying pump noise on start up

BOTTOM LINE

Cooler Master's Seidon 120M is probably the simplest AIO water cooler to install.

8

Turtle Beach Ear Force X42

Supplier Apex Interactive **Website** www.turtlebeach.com **RRP** R2,299.95

Sometimes when we review headphones there are one or two that stand out as something special. It could be thunderous bass or crystal clear high frequencies, perfect surround sound or extreme comfort. Despite the price of this set, however, it doesn't feel quite like it excels in any of those fields.

Sure, the X42 is comfortable: its soft headband and over-ear cups are never irritating to wear, but the feel of this set on your head never quite "disappears" like those that have perfect ergonomics. They are damn light, at least, which counts for something.

As this is a wireless set we're usually prepared to be a little forgiving when it comes to maximum volume, and it's a good thing too because even with this set pumped to full blast, it's a little less "blast" and more like "bla". *Ba dum tsh*

Lack of volume aside, this is a good set. It might not bounce



like a 20 year-old's Citi Golf on Saturday night but the audio quality all-round is very good, if just shy of excellent, but you'll get clear tunes across all applications. Speaking of which, even though the X42's box labels

it as "engineered for Xbox 360", the headphones (not the mic) can be used on any platform with optical output or 3.5mm via separate cables. The only downside is that the receiver unit needs to be re-synched

each time you change platforms. Whether this multi-purpose feature is enough to outweigh the cost will differ from user to user, but it's definitely a plus point.

NAG
- Geoff Burrows

SPECS

Speakers
50mm
Frequency response
20Hz – 20kHz
Microphone frequency response
50Hz – 15kHz
Wireless range
Up to 10m
Inputs
Optical Toslink
3.5mm analogue

PLUS

- Multi-platform support
- Comfortable
- Quality audio
- Lightweight

MINUS

- Pricy
- Low max volume

BOTTOM LINE

Quality audio and comfortable enough to be labelled as such, but a steep price point could put off a lot of users.

8

Kaspersky Internet Security 2013

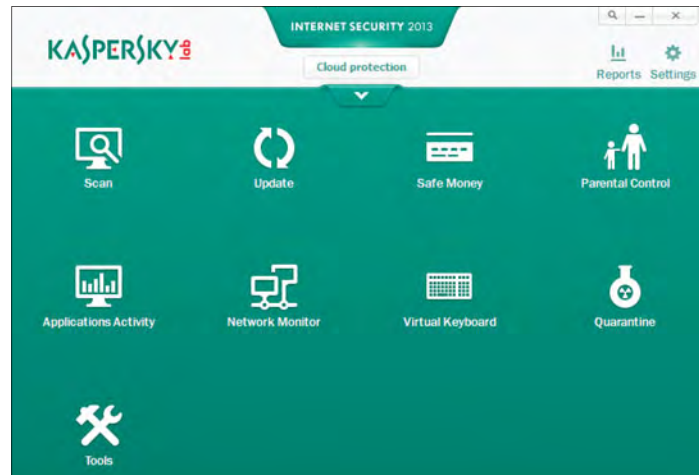


Supplier Kaspersky Lab **Website** www.kaspersky.co.za **RRP** R416.95 (1 user) | R535.95 (3 user)

It's been a while since I've actually paid any attention to an anti-virus program. For the most part, people stick with what they know or what their techie friends tell them to use, and just assume that they're safe. As long as an AV program gets the basics right, it's the other stuff that impacts users on a day-to-day basis.

So let's talk about that other stuff: for starters, the Kaspersky IS 2013 disc comes loaded with boot partition and software to perform a virus recovery before you even enter your OS. Additionally, you can make your own with updated definitions at any point.

The main application includes a few extras that should be welcomed by anyone. A system called Safe Money plugs into your online banking to lock it down better than any browser, and there's some highly customisable parental control suitable for the paranoid breeders out there.



We were also pretty chuffed to find what's essentially a more advanced version of task manager for running applications and network usage to give you an excellent break-down of just what's going on inside your PC – perfect for hunting down any rogue malware. But our favourite

feature has to be the vulnerability scan which detects security flaws in system's other software – usually the sort that can be patched by developers – with detailed explanations of which version are affected and how you can solve the problem.

The closest thing to a gripe we

have with Kaspersky IS 2013 is how much it slows down the PC while it's running a scan, even on a pretty beefy machine. But, considering how seldom you'll actually have to run a scan once your PC is locked down, it's hardly a deal-breaker. **NAG**

- Geoff Burrows

9

PLUS

- Loaded with useful features
- Simple user interface

MINUS

- Major system slowdowns during scans

BOTTOM LINE

Kaspersky has packed so many genuinely useful features into this suite that you'll be hard-pressed to find the need for any other security software.

SteelSeries Siberia V2 Frost Blue Edition

Supplier Megarom **Website** www.megarom.co.za **RRP** R1,299

With so many gaming headsets on offer from so many different brands these days, choosing the perfect one to match your budget can prove a dizzying task. SteelSeries has a range of Siberia headsets, simply called V2, and this one is a USB-powered variant (the sound card is built-in) within that family which also features customisable blue lighting on the ear cups.

Its eye-catching white colouring and blue illumination make this one of those times when appreciating the aesthetic will come down to your own personal taste. It's an unusual design, much less bulky than the headsets we have reviewed of late, with two metal bands confining another springy, foam-lined band which will adhere to the shape and size of your head without needing further adjustment. The design is actually very comfortable,



even for long gaming sessions, and the retractable microphone (which can be tucked away within the left ear cup when not in use) is a nice feature.

Audio production on this set is, to put it bluntly, mostly average. While it boasts excellent clarity, even at its

highest volume (which is not nearly as loud as we expected, especially from a wired headset), nothing about it stands out. The high frequencies are handled well, but the bass is very timid, and the mid-range audio tends to get a bit muddled at times. For gaming and movies, they'll be perfectly fine –

but if you enjoy listening to music on your headphones as well, you'll find a superior experience elsewhere. The Siberia V2 will do a decent job of providing audio; at this price, however, you might find better alternatives elsewhere. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes

7

SPECS

Frequency response
18Hz – 28kHz
Driver units
50mm
Impedance
32 ohms
Microphone sensitivity
-38db

PLUS

- Very comfortable
- Decent audio production

MINUS

- Bit pricey for what it offers

BOTTOM LINE

They're comfortable and offer a decent audio experience, but are a little pricey for what you get.

GG



COMING UP NEXT

It's sort of an established thing that every December or January I write a list of predictions for the upcoming year, assuming two or three times really counts as "established".

And so it has come to pass, once more (ye, verily, troth), that I must burn the ritual incense, imbibe a sanctified caffeinated elixir, and consort with the murky phantasms of time past, present, and future via secret conduits beyond the comprehension of mortal men. Okay, it's a Magic 8 Ball. Well, it *would* be a Magic 8 Ball, but I've just moved into a new place and it's still packed in a box somewhere under my *Lord of the Rings* figurine collection and approximately 50 metres of network cabling. Moved by urgent necessity then, I've stirred cat litter, peanut butter, and leftover beer in an ashtray and consulted the esoteric scatter and lay of clumpy pellets in pursuit of prognostication and prophecy. Here is what I have learned.

SONY AND MICROSOFT WILL ANNOUNCE THEIR NEXT-GEN CONSOLES AT E3

Just getting the most obvious one out of the way first, and not just because I'm quite sure I had this one last year too. Also, console fanboys will instantly know with zealous conviction which one is (much, much) better than the other, and tell everybody else about it on YouTube and Reddit.

THE OUYA CONSOLE WILL BOMB

Speaking of next-gen consoles, the Ouya isn't. Instead, it's an Android-based console powered by mobile hardware technology, but not actually mobile, and "built to be hacked" for a platform probably better known for its extravagant rates of piracy than its quality content. This is what people with relevant business degrees would deem a risky investment proposition, and what people like you and me should deem a completely pointless waste of time and money. *Bonus prediction!* It won't ship on time either.

"Consoletards and self-interested corporate scheming win again, but there's an online petition to add mods anyway so somebody can make naked skins for all the game characters."

MAJOR DISAPPOINTMENT AND/OR OUTRAGED BOYCOTTS FOR THIS, THAT, AND THE OTHER REASON

Crysis 3 for PC will not be exactly, unequivocally, and very, very specifically what PC gamers wanted, including a disgraceful lack of support for triple-buffered flux capacitation in the ambient occlusion zone, and you can even see jaggies on the corner of a rock in a screenshot zoomed to 5,000 percent. Consoletards and self-interested corporate scheming win again, but there's an online petition to add mods anyway so somebody can make naked skins for all the game characters.

NEW THINGS BETTER THAN THE OLD THINGS EXCEPT WHEN THEY'RE NOT

The trouble with innovation is that we only want it until we get it. Then we invariably realise that we preferred it the way it was before they decided to add whatever it was we thought we wanted, or at least until they revert back to the way it was then and we realise we preferred it the way it was after that. Repeat. Controversy, etc. Basically, everything. **NAG**
- Tarryn van der Byl

1 It totally counts. Besides, coming up with a clever new idea for my column every month is harder than you'd think. "Established" trends are more or less the journalistic equivalent of cheating maintaining consistency and credibility. Okay, it's cheating, but all gamers cheat. See? Consistency and credibility, people.

Extra Life

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