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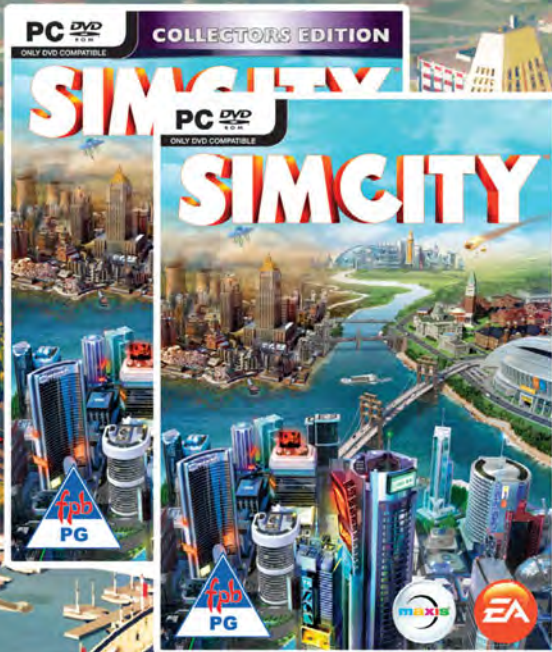
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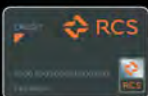
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Features

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All the excitement surrounding the launch of Nintendo's Wii U meant that a few stragglers managed to stray from our launch herd, unnoticed and unreviewed. We round 'em up and tag 'em.

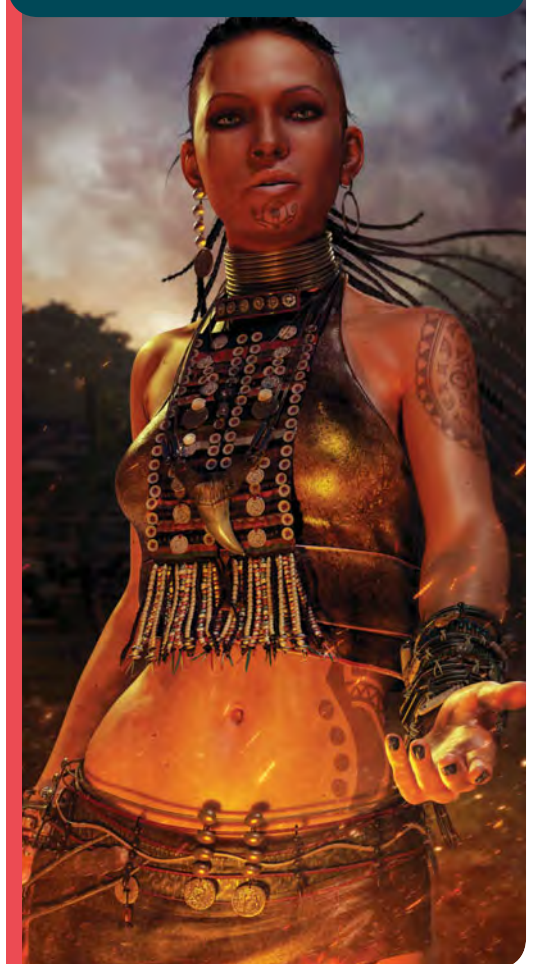
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A STARTLING LOOK INTO THE YEAR 2013!

With 2012 done and dusted, it's time to gaze ahead, deep into 2013's crystal ball for a mysterious mix of speculation, excitement and unbridled anticipation. It's a year that promises to bring Battlecruiser-loads of invigorated gaming flavour. We're ready for it.

43 CRYISIS 3

Prophet's the suit but the suit is also Alcatraz and where New York was the jungle is and... *Crysis 3* brings questions, answers and all the sandbox action your heart desires, with all the visceral punch and visual tenacity that Crytek can muster. Step into the Liberty Dome with us, and we'll tell you more.



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EMP REBIRTH

Let me start this with a bolt of lightning one fine Sunday evening towards the end of December. Picture it: Gauteng 2012. It had been hot and stuffy the whole day; my car's temperature gauge reported 28° at eight in the morning. So nasty in fact it put serious strain on the air conditioners the whole day. As with all hot summer afternoons on the Highveld, the day wrapped up with a thunder storm, some relief from the heat and a fresh start for the next day. But no, not this time; this storm brought a grand total of 18 drops of rain and a vicious crack of lightning that blew the Internet plus a TV, the Xbox and the HDMI port of the DSTV decoder. It wasn't even a direct hit. So there I was stranded without an Internet connection and no way of fixing it – this lasted a week because in December people who fix things are never around. I felt disconnected from the world and had no idea what I was going to do with my last few days of the holiday. Without games to play what was I going to do? After a few hours exhausting my idea cache of outlandish schemes to get Internet from somewhere I choose instead to try something different. Something I only did at night – read a book. In the day! Other things I did included a bit of recreational writing, installing pipes to protect a cable outside, sorted out my cupboard and so on. The end of 2012 into 2013 had a lesson for me and that lesson was balance. I had been spending too much time playing games and not doing everything else. That bolt of lightning lit up a whole new world for me – a world I had forgotten existed and a world I actually enjoyed being a part of. I've restored the balance as it were and now the last part of my "lesson" is to pass it on. Go ahead and pick a day on any weekend where you don't touch your phone, tablet, PC or TV. Give it all up and get stuck into all those things you keep putting off because you can't leave your technology alone for longer than a few minutes. Go on, I dare you.

WHAT I DID AT THE END OF THE WORLD

As many of you know the world was supposed to end on the 21st of December last year. Well it didn't – this is evident even to the people sitting at the back of the class. But back to me – the thing I thought about on that day and then after it (besides being disappointed no zombie apocalypse happened) was regret. The thing here is this...

If the world did end in December, who would you have spent it with? Someone you actually like? Did you have anything you really wanted to do that you hadn't done



because of some silly social convention or because you were too scared to try something different? Would you have been happy to let go and watch it all burn, satisfied that you were all good? With no regrets? How do you feel about the people in your life now, your job, goals you've given yourself or goals you have achieved? Just think about it. The end of the world came and went and here you are still doing the same things you hate or putting up with people you don't like. Or are you really happy with everything as it is? I only had this passing thought on that day and it helped me to identify with so many of the sheep out there – the normal masses of Joe public. I usually have trouble identifying with this kind of thing because of the great job I've got and a life where everything just goes my way...

Just kidding folks, this whole thing is just to get you off your lazy butt and out there, motivated to do something you love and make this year count.

In case you're wondering I spent my last day on Earth riding water slides in an amusement park. I remember looking out at the ocean from the highest slide platform and thinking I'm okay if it all ended now.

It's February for you but it's a New Year for us... **NAG**
- RedTide
Editor



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INBOX

LETTER OF THE MONTH FEBRUARY 2013

From: Matthew
Subject: Has Multiplayer Ruined Games?

I started playing games when I was 6 years old, the first game I ever played was Duke Nukem 3D, The LAST Duke Nukem game ever made! From then on I was hooked on games, playing stuff like 'Tarzan' and 'Global Operations' on my father's OLD Pentium 4 computer was the highlight of my youth. I played, enjoyed and finished many a Single player games. Then along came Call of Duty 4 Modern Warfare, as usual I played and enjoyed the single player experience and then decided to try out Multiplayer, this being my first time. I got very competitive at the game playing in a few DGL clans. I've now moved onto Battlefield 3, and play competitively for my clan.

But I have now noticed that I am unable to play or enjoy any single player games, I find that they do not hold my interest long enough, nor do they pose any challenge to me, even with the difficulty cranked right up. Games like Crysis, Skyrim even Borderlands 2 are unable to keep me interested for longer than a few missions, whereby I will then exit the game and continue to play some Battlefield or CoD4.

And this is where my letter leads me, has Multiplayer ruined the gaming industry? Or is the games industry just becoming a boring, unoriginal, cesspool of the same thing over and over again?

I can honestly think of no other reasons why I would be so disinterested in any single player games anymore. It's not that they're not innovative or good, it's just that I don't find them challenging

nor do I find the stories in today's games interesting or thought provoking. The only single player game I really enjoy and finished recently was Fallout 3, my all-time favourite game.

The competitive side of Multiplayer has in a few ways ruined gaming for me, if the game doesn't pose a serious challenge or its story isn't of GREAT interest to me I'm unable to play it longer than 30 minutes. Hopefully the next couple of upcoming releases will hold my interest but until then it's multiplayer for me I guess. How do you guys feel about this? Do you find that Multiplayer is ruining the games industry, or helping it grow?

The fact that they're tacking on multiplayer in the new Tomb Raider game should tell you that game developers believe multiplayer is where it's at. The reason is simple: if you can get millions of people all playing your game against each other then you're sure to make boatloads of money. The problem is many developers go about adding multiplayer in the wrong way: they don't make it part of the game thereby dooming it to failure. Has it ruined single player? Yes, to some extent, but then gaming is what you take out of it. If you get your fix from killing other humans then single player experiences will always seem lacking. If you are easily absorbed into the game world and character and plot devices and can forgive flaws like easy to kill enemies then you'll enjoy games designed for that. It's all up to you at the end of the day. Ed.

From: Xander
Subject: special edition of games
Dear NAG happy New Year, may this be one of the biggest and best years of NAG. So anyway last night I wanted to pre order the collector's edition of God of War: Ascension but then my uncle said, 'Are you really sure you want to blow 1000 bucks on a game' and in the end I bought a other game but it made me think is it really worth blowing more than 1000 bucks on a special edition of a game which comes

with an art book, a figurine and some soundtrack and DLC and finally the game because in the end you only do it for the game.

Collector's editions are for serious fans and there certainly are enough of them out there to ensure that most special editions sell out months before the game hits the shelves. My opinion – it's only worth it if the developers go the extra mile with the content in the box

*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.

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(artwork books, figurines and so on). I don't think early unlocks and a fancy hat for your character in the game are worth anything. This goes a step further with Kickstarter projects where you can pay thousands of dollars to back a game and you get perks like meeting the developers or even writing bits of the story. Worth it or not – who's to say? It's your money. Ed.

From: Junior
Subject: Fun in games
I'm new to BO2, I'm used to MW3 where I'm a prestige 9 but anyway the other day me and my older brother was playing BO2 and he got a lot of kills and after the match got the normal hate mail, hate mail, and the super hate mail one of witch a young oak for UK was swearing like crazy I reported him and got like 5 messages from him again calling me names and stuff I mean is it necessary to use bad language on a game where I fairly beat him? Anyway, LOVE you guys at NAG and LOVE the way you put out the magazine I'm like your BIGGEST fan.

This problem is an Internet people problem. The sad reality is this is what most people are like if you peel away the layers of social conditioning and give them an environment where there are no consequences to their actions.

The best thing to do is ignore morons like that. The other thing to consider is this – it's war, you're killing each other so all bets are off. Ed.

From: Phillip
Subject: Violence Issue

I just finished reading your BioShock preview, and just after watching the new trailer, and I couldn't help but notice that it gets ridiculously violent at some points, and I have a very important question, is there a way to play the game mostly in a non-violent way, without dying every 5 seconds? I'm asking you this oh great editor of NAG, because me and my dad both have fallen in love with this game, but due to his responsibilities, I might not be able to get it, which puts down the both of us. If there is a way please tell me, and also if I would be able to censor the gore like in most recent games, also like in the old days, I'm kind of glad they put that option in again, because I can now play more games. Enjoy the rest of your day and thanks for your time.

No idea on this one. Your best course of action is to get the game and then let your dad see if you can turn down the blood and guts. All previous BioShock games have received an 18 age restriction. Ed.

From: Leonardo
Subject: Changes in the system.
Okay recently I have started reading NAG religiously a while back I used to only get a copy once every 3 months which sucks. I find reading it an absolute joy and there was a specific aspect that I really liked about it. When I started reading NAG a while back, there was at least one funny caption in a picture in every article. For example, next to a Mortal Combat's picture of Kratos (with his bow) it said "By Zeus's testicle I shall smite thee with this bow of obvious hax". I have had some of my best moments enjoying these captions. A while ago, NAG did a remodelling of the magazine, and all the funny captions were put into little boxes with numbers labelling were the jokes were. Which I guess is still okay but in more recent editions, there are almost no funny captions next to pictures at all except for the obvious exception of the caption of the month. It's not that I'm going to stop picking up my copy of NAG every month. I just feel like a little bit of what had made the magazine unique has disappeared. Thanks for the great magazine.

Don't worry we'll get our funny back when we tweak the design of the magazine for April. Letters like this help us be more better. It was Savage's fault [You wish! AD]. Ed.

From: ELK
Subject: Back to the past
I have noticed a trend in the last

ON THE FORUMS

We will pretend to care about you and your opinion www.nag.co.za/forums

Q: What are you looking forward to in 2013?

"The Google glasses. If it's anything like the demo video then you should be able to play augmented reality first person shooters. Now is that FRICKEN AWESOME or what?"

charly

"Games, games and more games. With such a killer line up of titles coming this year, I forced myself to put away a large chunk of my bonus, so I'm prepared financially at least. I'm also looking forward about the announcement of the next generation of consoles, but also that they are planning to launch them only in Q4 2014. ;)"

Gammaray

**"Isn't it obvious?
The next end of the world."**

5h@un13

"Finishing my backlog of games released in 2012."

CyniKill

"Hoping to see more and more weird and experimental games made by indie developers get more attention, love and funding."

Shaderow

few years of games starting to look worse and worse. Thanks to the indie movement and the hardware limitations of cell phone game development we have ended up with games that look like they came from 20 years ago. I thought games were supposed to be continually improving over time but we have reached a point where developers believe even cell phone graphics are considered acceptable on PCs and consoles. Just have a look at the Xbox Live Marketplace to see what I mean. It is not only graphics but gameplay too. Even side-scrolling games are starting to pop up again when they belong in the last century. When did the industry decide that less is more and why didn't I receive the memo? This trend of degradation makes we worry about the future of gaming.

I've attached 2 screens (See right) from games released in 1993 – 20



years ago – just so you can see what they really looked like. There is more than enough room in the world for the indie scene and the mainstream scene. If you don't like the retro look and feel and the old school revival then don't play those kinds of games and stick to the same old COD but with better graphics each year. The indie scene is critical because it alone is what is saving gaming because it's original, daring, innovative and different. Ed.

From: Michael
Subject: L@N Team

I live in small town with very little potential for gaming so I was hoping you guys could perhaps help us so we can start a Gaming Team and go to events were we can actually challenge and push the team. But the only problem is we don't know how to start or were to look for what events or tournaments I really hope you guys can help us out with this one.

The best thing I can tell you to do is pack up as soon as you can and leave that small town. Once you get to civilisation (tall buildings, piles of traffic and angry people) you can start your clan and take it from there. Pick a game and play it a lot online. If you're good enough someone might ask you to join their clan or challenge your clan. There are professional organisations that host competitions but I don't think you're ready for that right now. This isn't something we can really help you with in the way you need help. Ed.

From: Alan
Subject: Multiple
Covers every month

I come from a household where we are all gaming fanatics and enjoy your mag a lot. So much so that we get our own copy each month to ensure we not fighting over the contents of the DVD or not wanting to read a magazine ruined by water because that's your brothers favourite past time (reading NAG in the bath). So that's our reasoning for buying more than one copy, the only problem is, back in the old days we use to play a game called 'Whose Nag is it anyway'. At least now with your new cover system, we can happily sort out our beloved grail and go on our gaming way.

I like your household – I wish every gaming family thought like that. We only do multiple covers when the artwork and game distributors all work together. It's expensive so it won't be happening every month. We love doing it so we're always pushing. Ed.

From: Zach
Subject: Graphics > Art
I'd like to talk about an oft-discussed subject in videogame culture, graphics.

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.



Derik Stavast, "I created this Scene using Softimage 2013 and Photoshop hope you guys and girls at the NAG office enjoy this image as much as I enjoyed creating it!"

Whether you think it is overrated or all-important, the fact is that the first thing we notice about any game is how it looks, its outward appearance; the graphics, in other words. Now, as a gamer myself (and I don't know if anyone else is like this) I go through life in a constant state of awe at the beauty around me. Simple things like the way a car's headlights light up a long strip of grass in an open field, and bigger things like a secluded inlet by the ocean surrounded by high cliffs with dense forest above, just about everything in the "real" world looks fascinating to me because I spend so much time looking at a bunch of pixels on a screen, and no matter how many of them there are or how many fancy tricks the developer manages to do with them, they can't come close to replicating anything you're able to see by simply walking out of your house and looking around for a bit. So while my eyesight may not be as good as it was in my youth (or whatever... I'm still a teenager), I'll always be thankful to games for helping me to appreciate having use of my eyes at all. I seem to have forgotten the point I set out to make here, but whatever. Alright, now for the bootlicking: in my honest opinion, NAG is not only the best gaming magazine in South Africa but the best of any magazine in South Africa. Props to you guys for always improving and always telling like it is, and also for sticking to the dead tree format. Cheers.

I think the point you're labouring to reach is that real life has better graphics. Ed.

THE SHORTS

Extracts of n00b from NAG letters

"So morale of the story is don't lose your imagination just because you got a TV."
- Tristan

"And just to give another reference when the fax machine was invented he thought it would be a major flop and would never work."
- Arno

"Who do I send letters to and when you do do you say this is my letter or something."
- Tyron

ON FACEBOOK

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I'd like to take my hat off for the all guns in Borderlands 2. Pretty damn kickass. You gotta love them !!!!. I also hate that moment when you realise, much later, you accidentally sold one of your favourite guns and can't get it back. That sucks heavy erg.
Joseph 'Joey' Van Wyk

Today a miracle happened. My dad came up to me and asked if he could borrow my NAG! Few minutes later I found him on his bed reading it. My method: put one of your older issues next the toilet. =D
Carl Meyer

You guys are awesome you're like my SUPER HEROES
Jan-Hendrik Redelinghuys

Oh my soul! Far cry 3 just left me in awe! I'm speechless... That was amazing! The ending was so deep! I felt for the characters. Wow. Brilliant 10/10! Last time I felt this way about a game was COD 4: MW.
Marcantonio Rodrigues Jardim

FOLLOW UP TO THE BEST SELLING SNIPER GAME OF ALL TIME

15.03.2013



SNIPER 2

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I, Gamer

The Apple Effect

You were paying attention during the public relations suicide that was the launch of *The War Z*, weren't you? The online zombie survival MMO appeared on Steam on 17 December 2012, but disappeared a few days later after numerous complaints about false advertising and missing game mechanics. Developer Hammerpoint Interactive placed the blame on customers that had "imagined" game mechanics and features, despite those mechanics and features being advertised on the game's Steam page. The game's executive producer Sergey Titov headed the denial response when faced with criticisms, but was forced to issue a 1,800 word apology letter to quell growing vitriol. That letter clearly worked because people began hacking and crashing the MMO's servers a few days later. Awkward doesn't even begin to describe it.

At time of writing, the game is still not available on Steam; *The War Z* is also sitting with a staggering 18/100 rating on Metacritic. I'm pretty sure it's safe to say that this is an unmitigated disaster of a game, and if you've been following the scandal then you'll likely agree.

While Hammerpoint's glaringly charlatanic behaviour was reason enough to stand and gape at the unfolding melodrama, there's a cautionary tale underneath *The War Z*'s plight, the beginnings of which were seen some years ago when Apple's App Store started spewing an over-abundance of 99c games.

Industry analysts have been warning about the effects of App Store games on the gaming industry at large. The thought is that smaller, inexpensive mobile games will eventually lead to the death of AAA gaming titles. Will that happen? I'm not sure, but you can see the Apple Effect in some aspects of the gaming industry already. For example: *The War Z*.

The App Store is chockfull of clones of more successful games. Invariably those clones are made because the game that they're ripping off isn't available on iOS. There have been *Mario Bros.* clones, *Zelda* clones and even a clone of locally developed indie gem *Desktop Dungeons* (fortunately that clone, which was called *League of Epic Heroes*, was removed). *The War Z* is a clone of the popular *ARMA 2* mod *DayZ*. That mod is poised to get a standalone release, so what Hammerpoint did was beat that to market with their shameless *DayZ* copy.

But the Apple Effect doesn't end there. *The War Z* costs considerably less than your average AAA title, but includes another all-too-prevalent feature of most App Store games: in-app purchases or microtransactions. While microtransactions can be fairly innocuous, *The War Z*'s are despicable. Paying in order to bypass the ludicrous four hour respawn time is criminally unfair. While there is collectable in-game currency that can be used to pay for an instant respawn, that currency is rare enough to warrant Hammerpoint selling bundles of in-game currency for real money. Those who frequent the gaming side of Apple's App Store will be all too familiar with this sort of approach.

The War Z is a PC game aimed at the hardcore gaming masses. Hammerpoint's biggest mistake was treating it like a 99c App Store game: lower price, plagiarised content and suspect microtransactions. It's a clone designed to cash-in on an established mod that wasn't making money. The fact that Valve had to pull the game from Steam solidifies the parallels between *The War Z* and iOS clones, which very often end up being removed from the App Store as well.

- Miklós Szecsei

Competition winners

OCTOBER EVETECH COMPETITION:

Dewald Steyn
Anne Van Der Merwe
Jason Branford
Reuel Schonken
Teresa Redelinghuys

Belinda Duvenage
Duane McCormack
Tyron Thome
Laurence Merry

DECEMBER WIUU COMPETITION:

Charles van der Westhuizen
Nicholas Mitchell
Rob Jermy
3rd runner-up still TBC

NOVEMBER UBISOFT COMPETITION:

Tristan Barrington

Valve rolls out the plan

Steam in the living room has hardware, biometrics in the future



Valve's heavily-rumoured and highly-anticipated Steam Box has finally had a little clarity thrown its way at this year's Consumer Electronics Show.

It starts with a small, relatively unknown electronics manufacturer by the name of Xi3, which, after failing to pull in sufficient funds to take their grapefruit-sized modular gaming-capable PC to the next level through Kickstarter, has been funded by Valve and signed up as a hardware partner (perhaps the leading one) for Valve's move into the living room. Xi3's flagship product, the quad-core AMD APU-powered X7A dubbed "Piston", was shown off at CES and boasted some impressive specs that certainly put it in the field of "gaming capable".

But this little device isn't *the* Steam Box, Valve's CEO Gabe Newell explained. It's a proof-of-concept – quite a convincing one at that, and, along with Steam's recently-released Big Picture interface (a revamped Steam UI that's designed for use on a TV with a wireless controller), shows that the company is set to make 2013 the year we stop talking about PC versus console as though it's a thing that matters to most people.

Valve's Steam Box, when it eventually launches, could be built by

Xi3 but it'll be developed and sold by Valve, and we hope that in doing so the company will subsidise the cost of what we imagine will be a derivative of the X7A, which currently clocks in at a steep \$1,000. Increased manufacturing volumes are likely to bring down the price, too.

Valve isn't ready to stop at a branded, Linux-powered micro-PC. Newell spoke of plans to include biometric interfaces that read minute muscular movements in the eyes, wrists and fingers during gameplay, effectively increasing the "bandwidth" of user input and making for a gaming experience that is both richer than that offered by a conventional controller and natural to anyone who's spent any time with one.

On a final note, Newell stated more immediate plans for the Steam distribution platform outside of the scope of Steam Box. He aims to allow users to create their own Steam shops that include, for example, their favourite games, indie collections or publisher-specific catalogues. There's no evidence yet that suggests the Steam API will be opened up to publishers, but we suspect that will be the case, possibly bringing an end to the idea that forcing multiple digital service accounts on people is a good idea.

War for the Overworld wars for your Dungeon Keeper affections



If people continue to insist on belching out the words "we're a spiritual successor to *Dungeon Keeper*" and then invariably fail at even coming close to the glory of Bullfrog's dungeon-dwelling despot simulator, we're inevitably bound to have a boy-who-cried-wolf situation on our hands. That's why *War for the Overworld* had better stop toying with our emotions and deliver on the exciting promise it's made. And that promise is fairly simple: to give us the *Dungeon Keeper* successor our villainous hearts have so long desired.

Developer Subterranean Games is insistent that *DK* isn't its only inspiration either, admitting that you'll spot inspiration-driven elements from *StarCraft*, *Overlord* and *Evil Genius* as well. It's got everything you'd expect: rooms to build, minions to lure into your domain, spells to cast, traps to set and adventurers to capture, toy with, torture and/or swiftly smite. In addition to its evil campaign of delicious evilness, there'll be multiplayer and a sandbox mode. Its Kickstarter campaign – which raised £211,371, well beyond its £150,000 goal – even drew the attention of game industry legend and *DK* creator Peter Molyneux, who gave the game his blessing.

As an added bonus, the Kickstarter campaign proved so successful that Richard Ridings, the voice of the original *DK* narrator, is now on board as *WFTO*'s narrator. At risk of having our dreams dashed yet again, we'll hazard saying that *WFTO* excites us greatly. It's due out in August if everything goes to plan.

Kickstarting Kickstarter: games earn \$83 million via Kickstarter

Immensely popular crowd-funding website Kickstarter played home to a tidal wave of potential video game projects in 2012 – from nostalgia-driven remakes to hugely inventive new experiences and everything in between. It even prompted Kickstarter to declare 2012 as "The Year of the Game." It all started with Double Fine's initial crowd-funding victory, and then snowballed to the point that many of Kickstarter's most successful projects were video games.

They've now revealed that \$83 million was raised for games with successful campaigns, making games the most valuable of any Kickstarter category. This came from a total of 2,796 video game projects, 911 of which were successfully backed by a massive collective of 561,574 backers. Those are phenomenal numbers; all that's left to do now is evaluate how successful those backed projects end up being, as many of them are still in production.

OCULUS RIFT SUPPORT FOR PORTAL 2, MIRROR'S EDGE, MORE

Courtesy of a third-party toolset by the name of Vireio Perception, a bunch of older games will somehow (using magic, basically) be made compatible with much-anticipated virtual reality headset Oculus Rift. Created by Meant To Be Seen developer / community member "Cybereality", Vireio will be a free, open-source project, and its inner workings are explained as such:

"Perception is basically a new stereo 3D driver with 3DOF head-tracking. Although only a handful of titles are supported at the moment, the experience you get with the driver is something that is not possible with current 3rd party options. In particular, it will pre-warp the image to match the Oculus Rift optics, handle custom aspect-ratios (needed for the Rift's strange 8:10 screen), and utilize full 3DOF head-tracking."

The nine titles that will support the Oculus Rift via Vireio Perception are: *Unreal Tournament 3*, *AaAaA!!!*, *Dear Esther*, *DiRT 2*, *Left 4 Dead*, *Skyrim*, *Portal 2*, *Half-Life 2* and *Mirror's Edge*.



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The Game Stalker



Tomorrow and tomorrow
and tomorrow

We all think of the festive season as one where we relax, spend way too much time eating food that's really not good for us, and try and block out the fact that we have to, one of these days, go back to work. Or I do anyway.

We were quite lucky in that there was a veritable smorgasbord of choice in the gaming world this holiday, some of which I'm still playing because I simply couldn't get through them all. And so while other people were away on holiday, getting suntanned and sightseeing, I was working my way through *Far Cry 3*, *Assassins Creed 3* and goodness knows how many other games. It means I'm still as pale as I was before I went on holiday, but I like to think that I've levelled up regardless.

In my varsity days (remember those, when you used to get insanely long holidays?) I spent large portions of this period ensconced in front of my computer playing games into the early hours of the morning. Of course I didn't need to get up until lunchtime so this was a perfectly acceptable pastime. Sadly the latest I've played in recent years is *iam* (just last night actually), and maybe it's my age, but damn I'm tired this morning. It doesn't help that I actually have to get up, go to work and spend the day being creative.

Anyway, the point was that the reason we so often spend this time (or at least fantasise about it if you've got kids) playing games into the early hours of the morning is because time passes differently in the faerie realm where we can spend but an hour and when we return to the real world fifty years have passed. We all know how that is right?

I remember once starting a game, I vaguely recall it being *Morrowind*, and playing for so long that not only were my eyes grainy and burning from staring unblinkingly at the screen, but I eventually heard the birds and went to bed just before the sun came up. On some level I crave those days, and if I didn't have to worry about getting up with a toddler at 6am, then I wonder if I would still have the stamina to play until sunrise? For those of you who are working and/or have children, how often do you still do this? If you do I can only say that you either have amazing stamina, or you must function like a zombie throughout your working day.

To be honest I quite like my sleep, and even if I had to go to bed at 4am, I would probably be awake at 7am anyway, because my internal clock likes heaping cruel and unusual punishment on me. Perhaps I need to try this as an experiment and balance out the pleasure of the faerie realm with the horrors that lack of sleep can visit upon us not limited to, up to and including falling asleep in mid-sentence (which I have actually done). I might not have closed my eyes but my brain has fallen asleep mid-sentence and that amounts to the same thing.

Right! Challenge accepted! When next we speak I will have attempted a university days gaming evening and subsequent sleep until noonathon.

Maybe.

For those of you at varsity who are probably still on holiday... To adapt a quote from Shakespeare, "A plague on all your houses!"

- Pippa Tshabalala

Planescape: Torment spiritual successor in "very early stages"



If we mutter the word *Planescape* and you immediately faint from nostalgic anxiety before we can even get to the *Torment* bit, then chances are you're as much of a fan of that particular ye olde schoole RPG as we are and you should pay us all of your attention, right now. InXile Entertainment founder (and former head of *Planescape: Torment* publisher Interplay) Brian Fargo has said (in an interview with *Rock, Paper, Shotgun*) that a spiritual successor is in the works. But things are going to be different.

First up, the *Planescape* setting: it's being switched out for Monte Cook's *Numenera* role-playing system, which was successfully funded on Kickstarter and blends together sci-fi and fantasy elements to create a system that emphasises "story and ideas over mechanics." Cook's might be a familiar name for some, since he actually helped design and write the *Planescape* pen-and-paper campaign setting (along with numerous other games for Wizards of the Coast as well) back in the day. "The more we explored the *Numenera* setting, the clearer it

became that it's a natural fit for a *Torment* game," Fargo revealed.

He alludes to this new game being more of a successor in terms of its ideas rather than being strictly faithful to *Torment*. "Rather than overt links, we are trying to recapture the feeling that players experienced through *PST* – both while playing it and after having completed a playthrough. We will remain true to the essence of *PST*, but we'll also be looking for ways to improve the areas in which *PST* could have been even better."

You may want to put on your patience pants for this one though, as it's quite a long way away, with the game still "very early" in the pre-production phase. "We have a basic story outline, design sketches of the major characters, and thematic concepts defined," says Fargo. Bear in mind that *Wasteland 2* is obviously still in production, however, and InXile can't put too many resources into *Torment* just yet. "There will be some other surprise talent that I'll announce later on but I thought it important to stress the heritage of the great team we have." Naturally, Kickstarter is being considered for funding.

Surprise! Skylanders has made a ton of money



If you live on Earth, chances are you've heard of *Skylanders*. It's that game where you buy those expensive toys and accessory packs and they get scanned into your video game on that pedestal thing so they can be used as in-game characters and then children scream at their parents in shops because they don't have that toy but their friend has that toy and they want that toy too. It's not surprising that such a business

model is wildly effective, and it's now been revealed by Activision that it's effective to the tune of \$500 million worth of retail sales. That's in the US alone. Let that sink in. \$195 million of that comes from *Skylanders: Giants* and its retail accessories, which were only released in October of last year and brought an estimated \$500 worth of new collectable figures. Wow.

"We're just crazy people. We don't do this for money or fame. We want to take risks because we enjoy trying to push the envelope. **Does it make sense from a company point of view? Not really, to be honest. Being the CEO of the company, I can tell you that it's totally absurd.** But we enjoy it so much. We're a team of passionate people. This is 'what we should have done,' but we've done something else."

– *Quantic Dreams* head honcho David Cage on why using a new engine for *Beyond: Two Souls* is crazy, but totally worth it.

Father hires virtual mercenaries to "kill" son



When it comes to curbing video game addiction, Mr Feng of China has to be applauded for having one of the most inventive, ludicrous solutions ever. His 23-year old son Xiao Feng started playing video games in high school, getting good enough grades that his parents left him to his gaming unhindered. But when he struggled to find and hold down a job after he left school, his father blamed video games – despite his son's insistence that it was purely because he couldn't find any work that he liked.

Unhappy with the situation, Mr Feng hired digital "assassins" – other players of Xiao Feng's favourite online RPGs – to hunt down and repeatedly kill Xiao Feng's online avatars in the hopes that his countless deaths at the hands of these higher-level players would cause him to get bored of gaming and find a steady job. Rather than stopping him from playing, Xiao Feng merely reacted to his constant respawns by saying this: "I can play or I can not play, it doesn't bother me. I'm not looking for *any* job—I want to take some time to find one that suits me."

Despite the fact that that's not much of a result at all, Mr Feng is reported to be "relieved" by his son's response. Regardless of the limp conclusion to this story, perhaps this is a clear indication that "online hitman" might be a profession worth looking into in the future.

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The Indie Investigator



Tips from a judge

A couple of months ago, I was invited to judge the first round of submissions for the annual Independent Games Festival (I've written about this competition before, it's great). I had a month to present my opinion on about half a thousand independently developed games.

Given that I was accompanied by countless other judges and only really needed to review as many titles as I could manage, the task was somewhat possible. But when confronted with the pressure of investigating a game a day (in my beloved spare time, no less) I began to understand some things more clearly.

If you ever want to submit your game for a competition like this, or rope in a mention from your favourite indie-based publication, consider the following points I found relevant in this judging/reviewing experience:

1 First impressions mattered a lot. No matter how much I wanted to love a game, or engage its potential depth, I was out of there if the first half-hour or so wasn't a satisfying experience (assuming the game lasted that long). This was actually a generous margin of consideration: feeling compelled to play a game for a while longer than usual to give it a fair chance. Probably because I was neurotic and roasting alive in my own guilt.

2 Multiplayer games were hateful to test properly and there was no shortage of them. Kittens died of sadness every time I had to organise a (semi) willing play partner to try click with the game in the same way that I did. Maybe if this was a full-time thing I'd have been more comfortable planning ahead to get in a decent sit-down with another player. But it felt that in a fast-paced judging environment, multiplayer games have to really punch you in the face and be as accessible as possible (preferably even allowing several players to use one device).

3 When talking about their games, some developers skipped out on valuable info, context or whatever. Definitely a no-no. If something went wrong and I didn't know that pressing shift-A could deal with it, my opinion of the game could (and would) plummet. Make sure your readme file is in your distro somewhere.

4 A slightly less understood problem is developer verbosity. Sometimes, devs would overcompensate and provide a staggering wall of text regarding the game's purpose, backstory and marketing. I'd usually read the first paragraph or skip through most of it to find something that looked like a control scheme. Or maybe a TLDR summary. If you ever send off your game for someone to look at, don't bore them before they even try it. They'll hate you forever and you'll die in penniless anonymity, swearing your eternal love to a pigeon or something.*

5 Finally, if there was one type of game that turned me off its merits, it would be the one that exists to relentlessly squeeze money from people. The ones that sacrifice good design for Skinner box-like impulse generation and more micro transactions than you can shake your debit card at. If I have to explain this further, you are officially evil.

These are just a couple of helpful pointers from a brief sojourn on the other side of the fence. Take them or leave them.

- Rodain Joubert

* This has happened before. See Nikola Tesla

Double trouble



As the first game to kick off what we're quite happy to call "the crowd-funding revolution", *Double Fine Adventure* has a lot riding on it. People have big expectations and that pressure has filtered through to the studio – they know what level of quality people expect, and the team is doing everything possible to meet those expectations.

It's for that very reason Double Fine Productions has made a difficult call – to push out the release date of *DFA* to Q3 2013 – probably September. Originally set for release in October 2012 (based on the original Kickstarter goal of \$400K), the game's scope has since undergone a massive increase beyond anything the studio could have expected or

accounted for. Literally accounted for; even with the \$3.3 million they initially earned through pledges, there's practically no chance of that money stretching far enough to cover all development costs. In fact, at this point in time Double Fine will be forced to hire at least another five team members, double their production output from here on and somehow pull in another \$1 million from a third-party investor.

At this stage, studio head Tim Schafer has assured backers and eager fans that they will not go to a publisher; they'll get this game out whatever it takes and ensure that it's 100% independent from beginning to end. They know how important it is to keep the game free of influence from companies just looking to make a buck, and we applaud their efforts.

Death Inc. is death made cheerful

Ambient Studios – a development team comprised of former Lionhead (*Black & White*), Media Molecule (*LittleBigPlanet*) and Criterion (*Burnout*) developers – has announced an utterly adorable but diabolically malevolent strategy game called *Death Inc.* (www.ambientstudios.co.uk/deathinc.php). Here's the pitch: "Guide Grim T. Livingstone, freelance reaper, through 1660s England spreading fear, pestilence and most importantly, the bubonic plague."

So you're basically a cartoonish reaper harvesting souls to fund your fledgling soul-reaping business. It's described as a "freehand strategy game with no micromanagement or complex menus," with some intriguing ideas like "painting" orders for your subjects to follow using simple mouse movements. Then, use the souls you harvest to buy new abilities (like plague rats), kit out your flashy office and expand your influence. Also, OMG cute! It's got a Kickstarter campaign due to launch on February 4th, so if this all sounds mighty interesting, get backing.



Here are your IGF finalists for 2013!

Every year, the Independent Games Festival (now in its fifteenth year of existence) honours the best of the best indie developers with its IGF Awards. Winners in each category are awarded a sizeable mound of cash to complement the supreme prestige of walking away a winner. The IGF is due to take place from the 25th to the 29th of March, and these are the categories and their respective nominees:

Technical excellence:

- Intrusion 2
- LiquidSketch
- Little Inferno
- Perspective
- StarForge



Excellence in visual art:

- Guacamelee!
- Incredipede
- Kentucky Route Zero
- Lovers in a Dangerous Spacetime
- Year Walk

Excellence in design:

- FTL: Faster than Light
- Samurai Gunn
- Starseed Pilgrim
- Super Hexagon
- Super Space



Excellence in audio:

- 140
- Bad Hotel
- Hotline Miami
- Kentucky Route Zero
- PixelJunk 4am

Excellence in narrative:

- Cart Life
- dys4ia
- Gone Home
- Kentucky Route Zero
- Thirty Flights of Loving

Nuovo:

(This category is designed to honour abstract, inventive, borderline crazy game development)

- 7 Grand Steps
- Bientot l'Ete
- Cart Life
- dys4ia
- Little Inferno
- MirrorMoon
- Spaceteam
- VESPER.5



Seumas McNally grand prize:

- Cart Life
- FTL: Faster than Light
- Hotline Miami
- Kentucky Route Zero
- Little Inferno

Unfortunately, due to space constraints we're unable to list the numerous honourable mentions that the IGF has posted in each category.

MINECRAFT MADE LOADS OF CASH IN 2012

Having been released on PC, Android and iOS back in 2011 and Xbox in May of 2012, indie monolith *Minecraft* continued to print bundles of money for Notch and the Mojang team throughout 2012. The game was purchased 15 million times across all of its platforms. *Pocket Edition* for iOS and Android accounts for the majority with just under 5.9 million sales, while on Xbox LIVE Arcade the game was bought just over five million times. Meanwhile, its birth platform, the PC, invited just under 4.2 million purchasers.

The Australian government has finally admitted that adults play video games, and have issued the country's first-ever R18+ game rating. The game is *Ninja Gaiden 3*, and it's hellia violent. But that's not the point; now Australians will no longer have to import those games effectively banned due to a lack of rating. We expect a number of titles to follow suit, and there may even be games that are re-classified with the new rating.

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Miktar's Meanderings



Hey Stampede, how 'bout a poem?

The '90s seem to be a recurring topic for me lately. Bear with me. Back in 1997, Activision developed and published a wonderful little vehicular combat game called *Interstate '76*. It was built on the (at the time) advanced *MechWarrior 2* engine, allowing for large, if rather barren, landscapes. The setting: an alternate history United States during 1976, experiencing an extended oil crisis.

The actual 1973 oil crisis, which involved an Arab-nation instigated oil embargo and a surprise attack on Israel by Egypt and Syria (which caused the United States to step in and assist Israel), ended in 1974 when U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger negotiated a settlement between Israel and Syria. But in *Interstate '76*, that negotiation never happened, resulting in a global depression, disrupted oil supplies, and ever-increasing pressure on various world leaders trying to stockpile their dwindling reserves and defend their oil pumps.

In the game, you play as Groove Champion, whose sister is murdered while investigating a growing private army composed of vehicle-centric villains. Groove, his partner Taurus, and mechanic Skeeter, set out for revenge and to uncover the truth. Much like *MechWarrior 2*, you had to balance weapon and armour loadouts on your car as you tear around the south-western US, chasing a colourful made-for-TV plot involving villains secretly backed by OPEC (the very real Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries), and a hydrogen bomb. Missions took place on huge maps, involving (not unsurprisingly) a lot of driving. It may sound odd now, in the current climate of instant-gratification gaming, but much of what made *Interstate '76* charming was just how long it could take to get to where you needed to be.

Much of the actual vehicle combat happened at specific locations, towns or some such that you first had to drive to. The long drive to these locations acted as wonderful *portamenti*, not unlike the *caesura* train-ride opening of the first *HalfLife*. Cruising along the highway, keeping a watchful eye due to the ever-present threat of bandit ambush, one could get quite lonely. And that's where Taurus, nicknamed "Stampede", comes in.

Soulful mentor and initial driving and combat tutorial, Taurus hangs out in the truck Skeeter drives behind you, due to an incident which wrecked Taurus' car. By pressing Q at any time while driving around, would have Grove chime over the CB radio, "Hey Stampede, how 'bout a poem?"

Taurus had many poems in the game, voice actor Greg Eagle bringing wonderful life and energy to their recital. Each one was penned by Zachary Norman, writer and lead designer on *Interstate '76*, and to quote Jeff Wofford: "It's the closest thing gaming's got to a religion."

You know how a smell can trigger long-forgotten memories, snapping them to your consciousness, altering the very landscape of your mind in an instant? Words can do that too.

- Miktar Dracon

I'm a storm torrent across a slate-gray sea
I rush in billowed reflections a fast, fast dark sky over an
Edinburgh's meadow's wet
I bolt white high through snowfall cold
I am lightning in the night
I sprint like fire across a match head
And leap across lakes of dream-stuff
Over ancient walls
Past armies fast as fast is
Faster than quicksilver can fall into the sun
I, bounding, prance unstoppable to you
My all
My everything dream
- Taurus (*Interstate '76*)

Do I hear \$60 million?

In a recent press release, THQ president Jason Rubin finally put an end to rumour-mongering regarding the publisher's closure. THQ has filed for a Chapter 11 bankruptcy, which means it's getting a fresh start thanks to the commitment from investment company Clearlake Capital Group.

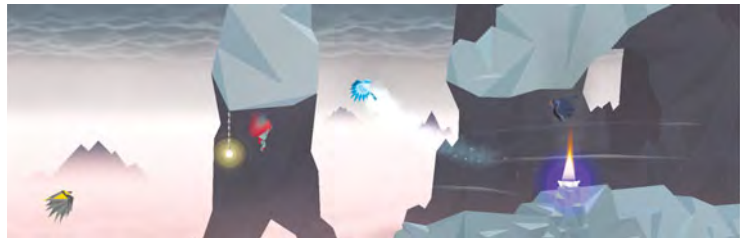
By the end of January, Clearlake is committed to pay \$60 million for the whole of THQ should the individual bids for assets total less than that amount, effectively bailing out the company from its debts. Its internal studios will be provided with all the cash they need to finish their current projects (including *Metro: Last Light*, *Company of Heroes 2* and *South Park: The Stick of Truth*); continued development of future projects (including *Homeland 2* and *Saint's Row 4*)

will be secured; and relationships with partners such as Crytek, Turtle Rock, Obsidian and 4A Games will be maintained.

With this move, THQ has been given a new lease on life, but it'll obviously take the company into financial territories that leave it very much at the whim of its knightly investor. Of course, it's highly doubtful that Clearlake will interfere with much in the way of the publishing of games.

What could have a more profound effect on the games in development is if the sale of THQ is split at the auction which is set to take place at the end of January (we'll fill you in on the details once they're made available). Parties which have expressed interest in picking up a piece of THQ include Ubisoft and EA.

Nintendo gains indie confidence



Speaking with *GamesIndustry.biz*, two indie developers have expressed optimism towards Nintendo's willingness to support the sale of downloadable indie games on the Wii U's eShop. Given that both developers have experience dealing with the original Wii's flawed WiiWare service, this is a huge vote of confidence. On the topic of WiiWare, Gaijin Games' Mike Roush and Alex Neuse said: "We don't know for sure, but it felt like it wasn't taken seriously by Nintendo, the desire for gamers to

buy stuff digitally."

Roush also noted that, "What's more friendly right out of the starting gate is the Wii U is developed for people to have an eShop to spend their money in and buy games easily," while Neuse compared the service to Steam in some ways. Martin Pichlmair of Broken Rules, who previously released *And Yet It Moves* on WiiWare and has since released *Chasing Aurora* on Wii U's eShop, said that "literally everything was easier this time around" when compared to WiiWare.

Back to the good old days



Studio Ghibli and Level-5's *Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch* is just weeks around the corner at the time of writing, and studio head Akihiro Hino is putting out the word that this is a JRPG for a global audience.

"Japanese RPGs tend to cater to players who are not skilled at action games and prefer to have command systems that allow them time to strategize, as well as those who enjoy stories that are similar to reading novels," he explained. "So for fans of Western RPGs, such as JRPGs might seem somewhat antiquated."

He stated that meeting a common audience is going to require a few key features from action games, the most notable of which will be the ability for players to actively move their characters during combat.

The game will also feature a rapidly changing party, a move that goes against the "overly-individualistic titles that make up the bulk of the market in recent years". It's a move that we're sure won't sit well with every gamer, but fans of classic JRPGs should feel right at home here.

DEAD GAME WALKING

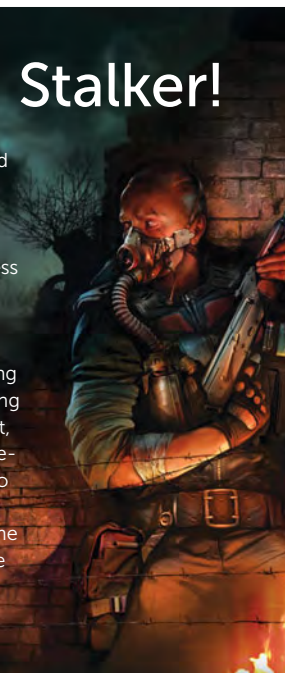
The *Walking Dead* franchise has been a resounding success, spawning a successful TV series and bringing back Telltale Games from the brink with their horror adventure game series. It seems that this success has put dollar signs in the eyes of Activision, as the company decided to get out a quick addition to the franchise with developers Terminal Reality.

The game, entitled *The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct*, is a first-person action title that sees you take on the roles of Daryl and Merle Dixon as they move through the game world defeating the undead hordes and trying to stay alive. The gameplay footage we've seen so far is very rough – it looks like alpha footage – and with the game set for release in March (on all current-gen platforms), we're concerned that this is close to a finished product.

Get out of here, Stalker!

Despite a recent slew of rumours, the beloved but ill-fated *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* franchise is still without a saviour. It was initially suggested that *Call of Pripjat* publisher BitComposer Games scooped up the brand in its entirety, but a later press release by GSC Game World's Sergey Grigorovich refuted the claim, stating that the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* licence is still wholly owned by the studio.

So where does this leave those gamers hankering for more Russian wasteland action? With GSC sitting on the licence and doing practically nothing with it, your best bet is to keep an eye on *Survarium*, a free-to-play MMORPG from Vostok Games – the studio comprising of former GSC employees after the company was all-but shut down last year. The game will include many core gameplay features from the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* series, including a focus on survival techniques and interacting with other survivors holed up in ramshackle settlements.



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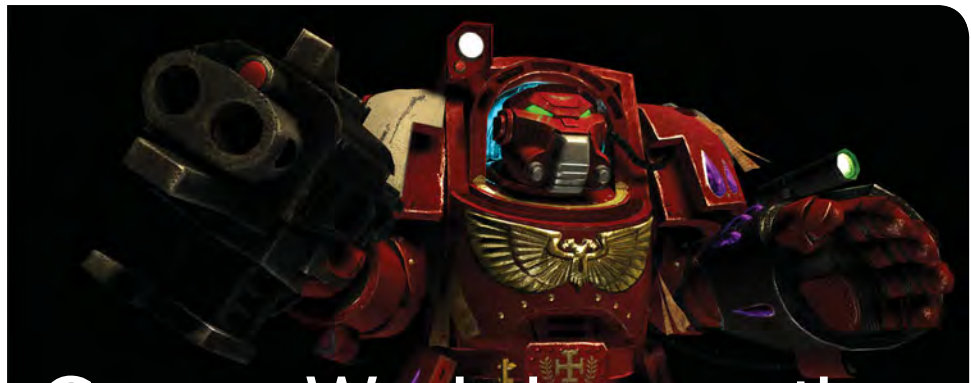


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Games Workshop rustles up a few new partners

Can you believe that it's already been six years since the last Warhammer Fantasy Battles strategy game graced our gaming screens in the form of *Mark of Chaos*? While the game did well enough, its performance is nothing compared to the 40K-based *Dawn of War*. Ready to change all that, Warhammer owners Games Workshop have partnered with SEGA and Creative Assembly – the studio behind the *Total War* series – to bring an all-new strategy title “to launch from beyond 2013”. The announcement was light on details but we know that the studio's 25 years in the business has endowed them with the capacity to deliver solid, complex strategy games, so we're really excited about this news.

But that's not all for Games Workshop. The

company has also secured a partnership with a German-based indie studio by the name of Full Control for its sadly neglected Space Hulk series. And we're not talking about weird mobile ports of the already weird first-person strategy title that floated around some years ago; this is a 3D, turn-based, digital adaptation of the original board game for PC, Mac and iOS. Players will take on the role of a Blood Angel Terminator squad that's been deployed to a decrepit Space Hulk battleship filled with alien Genestealers. If you're feeling a little bit of geekaphobia, just picture *Dead Space* as a board game, with teams of Isaac Clarkes in heavy armour. The game will include a level editor as well as competitive and co-operative multiplayer support, and is set for release this year.



SUPPORT LINES

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

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

Publishers: Microsoft Xbox
Number: 0800 991 550

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

The great War Z debacle

“Okay, you guys get behind me, I'll try lure them out with butt. Zombies love a meaty butt.”



If there's one thing that *The War Z* has proved to the world, it's that jumping onto a bandwagon with the hopes of making piles of money is in no way guaranteed to be easy. But we're getting ahead of ourselves...

If you've been living under a rock for the last six months, you might not have heard about *The War Z* – an indie survival FPS very strongly “inspired” by the hugely successful *Arma 2* mod (and upcoming standalone game) *DayZ*. The demise of this game began before it was even launched; hype

surrounding what was promised to be a massive improvement on the *DayZ* formula spun the heads of developer Hammerpoint Interactive's marketing people and they ran with it. More promises like private hosted servers, a 100-400km2 map and a customisable skills system were made, marketing material was stolen from *The Walking Dead*, and eventually the game was released to what can only be called mad panic.

The Internet blew up; the game was slagged for its poor presentation, game-breaking bugs and lack of promised features. Its user Metacritic score slumped to 15/100, and Hammerpoint's CEO Sergey Titov did nothing but fuel the fire by telling people that they misread the game's description. Then EULAs were changed to forbid refunds, and there's a thing where an official forum moderator told a user to “f*ck off” for complaining about the game.

Since then, Valve removed the game from Steam, and at the time of writing it's still not available for purchase. Titov has issued a lengthy apology for the way the matter was handled, but we're inclined to think that it's too little, far too late.

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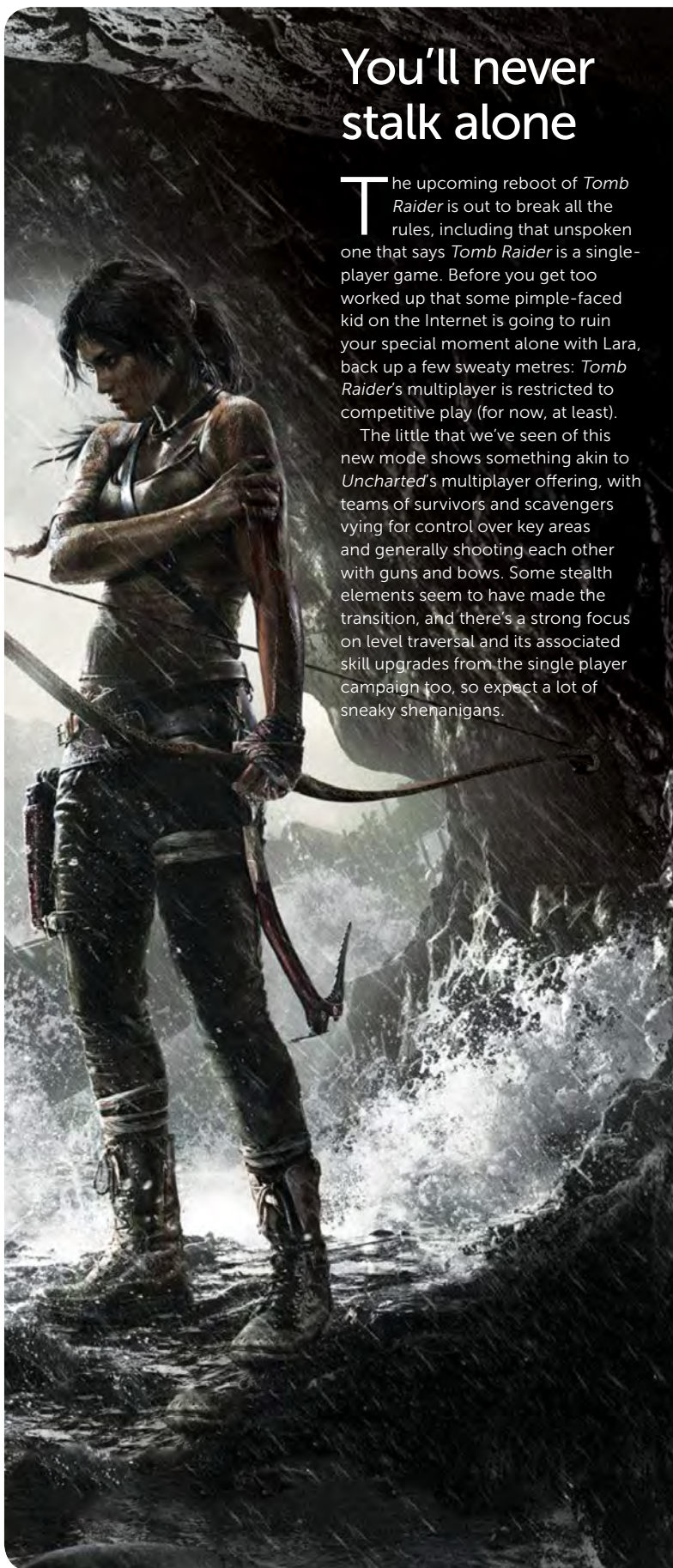


Internet connection required to activate Bonus in-game content.

Available on:

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You'll never stalk alone

The upcoming reboot of *Tomb Raider* is out to break all the rules, including that unspoken one that says *Tomb Raider* is a single-player game. Before you get too worked up that some pimple-faced kid on the Internet is going to ruin your special moment alone with Lara, back up a few sweaty metres: *Tomb Raider*'s multiplayer is restricted to competitive play (for now, at least).

The little that we've seen of this new mode shows something akin to *Uncharted*'s multiplayer offering, with teams of survivors and scavengers vying for control over key areas and generally shooting each other with guns and bows. Some stealth elements seem to have made the transition, and there's a strong focus on level traversal and its associated skill upgrades from the single player campaign too, so expect a lot of sneaky shenanigans.

Look & Listen

Pre-orders www.lookandlisten.co.za



PC

StarCraft II: Heart of the Swarm	March 12th
Star Trek	March
Metro: Last Light	March

Xbox 360

Army of Two: The Devil's Cartel	March
GRID 2	May
South Park: The Stick of Truth	2013

PS3

Splinter Cell: Blacklist	May
God of War: Ascension	2013
Grand Theft Auto V	2013

BioShock Infinite's infinite love for the PC



Chris Kline, Irrational Games' technical director, has made an announcement regarding the PC-specific features of much-anticipated *BioShock Infinite*. Those features include stuff like custom key mapping and no artificial mouse smoothing for mouse and keyboard setups, while full controller support also allows you to customise various controller-based options.

They've implemented "horizontal plus" widescreen support, so that "the wider you go, the more you'll see of Columbia's gorgeous vistas." Multi-monitor support is included via AMD Eyefinity, NVIDIA Surround and Matrox TripleHead2Go. A host of six different graphics presets and numerous customisable options let you tweak the visual splendour to suit the capabilities of your hardware, and the game boasts full DX11 support. The graphics will scale down enough to support machines with integrated graphics solutions, so if you've got a decent notebook, you'll be able to game on the go. *Infinite* will require Steam, and it'll feature Steam Cloud and Big Picture support.

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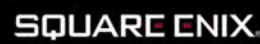
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Well hello, sexy lady!

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.

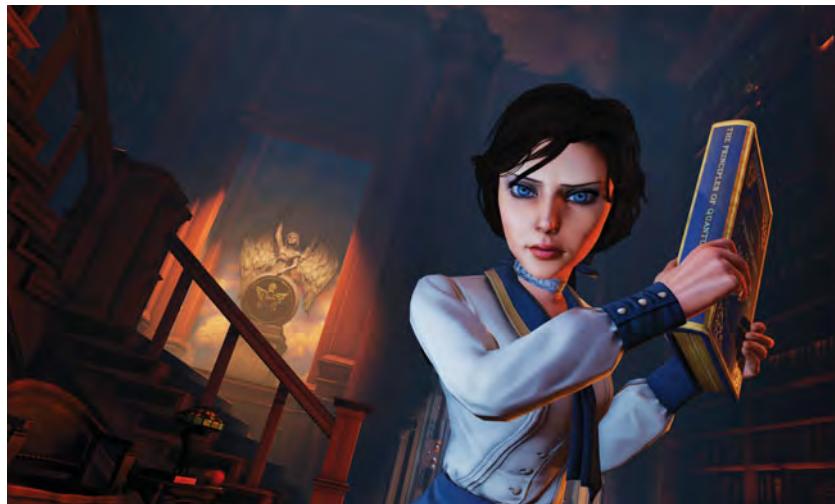
Every month we'll hide her somewhere in the magazine – your mission is to go find her.

Send your sighting to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line "Xxx 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 *Cities XL Platinum* for PC from Apex Interactive. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line "February caption".



NAG's lame attempt at humour
"Liz doesn't like spiders. Not one little bit."

January winner



Armand Pienaar, page 65

THIS MONTH'S BOUNTY

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Last months winner

I used to Run 'n' Gun like you, then i took a landslide to the knee... - Arthur Maree



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TOMB RAIDER

A SURVIVOR IS BORN
ETA: MARCH 5TH



LEGO ambles into Marvel territory



If you asked us to name two constant, universal features that the world will never be rid of, we'd have to name gravity, and the ever-popular *LEGO* video game series. If you want proof, we present to you the announcement that yet another beloved universe is due to feel the effects of being LEGO-fied by Traveller's Tales. This time it's Marvel, with an entry called *LEGO Marvel Super Heroes* that is described as the "first instalment" in what will likely become a recurring setting for more *LEGO* games in the future. Its narrative is an original storyline in which Nick Fury enlists the aid of Wolverine, Iron

Man, Thor, Hulk, Spider-Man and "other heroes spanning the Marvel universe" to save everything ever from the double-threat of Loki and Galactus. There'll be over 100 characters to unlock, including the likes of Deadpool, Black Widow and Captain America. TT Games Publishing's Tom Stone also wants you to know this: "Players will brave the ultimate mission to save the world as they explore famous landmarks in LEGO New York and take the adventure beyond Earth to iconic locations in the Marvel Universe." Expect to see the game in the third quarter of 2013 (July-September) on Xbox 360, PS3, PC, Wii U, DS, 3DS and Vita.

And my shield!

This year's CES was host to a couple of surprises (Valve's little reveal among them), but here's one that came from far out of left field: NVIDIA is jumping into the handheld gaming market. Their device is called Shield, and it combines a full-size game controller with a 5" multi-touch screen in a clamshell design. Running a stock version of Android Jelly Bean and powered by NVIDIA's new Tegra 4 mobile chipset, this little device aims to not only take on the existing handheld market, but standardise mobile gaming across the board.

But Shield is more than just an Android gaming device; it'll also allow you to stream games directly from your PC (provided it's equipped with a GTX 650 or higher) through local Wi-Fi, effectively turning your computer into a mini cloud gaming server. There's no word yet on how extensible this system is; i.e.: whether games could be run through the Internet, but we hope that it'll be possible.

Shield should launch in Q2 this year; there's no word yet on local availability or cost, but we're told that it'll be priced competitively.

Release list

Dates subject to change without notice

February: week 1

Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch	PS3
Power Rangers Super Samurai Kinect	360

February: week 2

Dead Space 3	360 / PC / PS3
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February: week 3

Aliens: Colonial Marines	360 / PC / PS3 / Wii U
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February: week 4

Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance	360 / PS3
Crysis 3	360 / PC / PS3

February: Unconfirmed

Guardians of Middle-earth	360 / PC
Scribblenauts Unlimited	Wii U

One two three green light!

Valve recently announced a host of games that have been accepted through its Greenlight vetting process.

Included in the list is a free-to-play browser-based social ARPG from American McGee's Shanghai studio Spicy Horse. Entitled *Akaneiro: Demon Hunters*, the game takes elements from the fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood* and places them in a Feudal Japan setting filled with nightmares and demons for you to slay. It's weird, spooky and edgy – everything you'd expect from its creators. It's also currently in open beta, so head over to www.spicyhorse.com and sign up if you're interested.

The rest of the list is a mix: we've got Al Lowe's re-remake of *Leisure Suit Larry*, the *Dungeon Keeper* and *Overlord* inspired *War for the Overworld*, the side-scrolling satirical RPG DLC *Quest*, the gorgeous looking hex-based strategy game *Eador: Masters of the Broken World*, the horror survival *Asylum*, and a handful of others. Altogether it looks set to be a great spread of indie games that we can't wait to get our hands on.



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Wii U

Round-up

Tekken Tag Tournament 2

Developer: Namco
Publisher: Namco Bandai
Distributor: Megarom

Tekken Tag Tournament 2 was one of the better fighters of 2012, and has made a fairly good transition to the Wii U platform thanks to increased hardware capabilities in the new box. But there was a missed opportunity here for Namco because the game really just plays like Tekken anywhere else; the potential of the Game Pad was not fully explored. It does make the game easier to play in single player, with commands for special moves displayed on the touch screen. That isn't necessarily a good thing, as far as Tekken fans are concerned, but it may help newcomers get into the swing of things. Not every game will be able to use the Game Pad to its fullest, but one cannot help but think that Namco had no idea what to do with it here. Perhaps future Wii U fighters will use it more inventively. **70**

It's a good fighting game, but the lack of Game Pad implementation makes it feel like just another Tekken platform variant.



FIFA 13

Developer: EA Sports
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Distributor: EA South Africa

While the Wii U offers every opportunity for the FIFA franchise to rise to new heights in terms of a Nintendo console, the advancements made from previous versions on the Wii just don't seem to be enough, particularly if you consider the fact that the Wii U is a far more powerful machine. Rather, EA have presented us with a game that might be called FIFA 13, but is (in essence) still FIFA 12 in execution. That doesn't mean that it is a bad game – far from it – but if you have experienced FIFA 13 on other platforms you may well find this effort disappointing. The Game Pad does offer some nice functionality, though, particularly in terms of team management. You can also play the game solely on the Game Pad, which has its moments, but doesn't truly compare to playing on a TV screen. While FIFA 13 for the Wii U is not awful, it does feel like EA could have done more here. **70**

It may say FIFA 13 on the cover, but in reality this is FIFA 12 revamped for the Wii U.



Assassin's Creed 3

Developer: Ubisoft
Publisher: Ubisoft
Distributor: Megarom

A new assassin, a new setting... and a new console to play it on. The Wii U is really the first Nintendo console that viably supports a game like Assassin's Creed 3, although some frame rate issues do plague the title. However, that may just be the developers getting used to the new hardware. Other than that, it looks and feels like AC3 on any other platform, save for the fact that the developers made good use of the Wii U game pad. The player will be able to access all kinds of menu related functions from here, including the map and inventory and weapon management. It's not revolutionary, but it does keep the player from diving into menus all the time. Other than that, it's the same game, although the very large controller, in the form of the Game Pad, does take a little getting used to. And it does show off the Wii U's potential... **80**

A good display of the Wii U's potential, Assassin's Creed 3 makes good use of the game pad as an added tool.

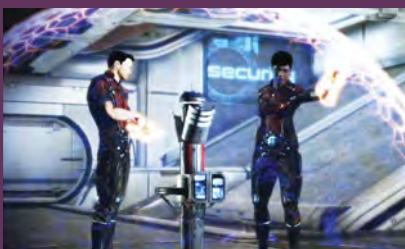


Mass Effect 3: Special Edition

Developer: BioWare
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Distributor: EA South Africa

The biggest problem that a game like *Mass Effect 3* has when ported to the Wii U is that its story is already two thirds through... and the previous titles are not available for Wii U players. To combat this, the developers built an interactive comic into the experience to elaborate on plot lines and to allow the player to make those all-important choices that will impact this third chapter. On the up-side, *Mass Effect 3* is great on the Wii U, and the Game Pad allows the player greater control. It displays a map, complete with enemy positions, and also gives the player fast access to team abilities and strategic commands. And, as a bonus, the player can play the game on the Game Pad rather than hogging the TV. BioWare did a great job in bringing this awesome title to a new platform. It may be an older game, but it is well worth experiencing on the new console. **88**

An excellent recreation of *Mass Effect 3* for the Wii U, with great added functionality via the Game Pad.



Just Dance 4

Developer: Ubisoft
Publisher: Ubisoft
Distributor: Megarom

The biggest flaw in the *Just Dance* franchise – at least as far as the Wii was concerned – returns in this first Wii U outing of the popular dance series. You don't have to dance. You merely need to move your right hand; as long as the Wii remote appears to be doing the right thing, the game thinks you're doing great.

The biggest Wii U related addition to this game is Puppet Master Mode, which allows the Game Pad user to select new routines for the dancers. While it may seem like fun, the overall flaw in the system means that there is little potential for true sadism here.

Overall, *Just Dance 4* is an assault on the senses – it feels disjointed and a little too over-the-top, and still doesn't challenge the player effectively. Of course, if you're a bit drunk and are willing to buy into the game's suggestion that you follow the dance moves, that's fine. But the truth is that it works better on systems that have more advanced motion tracking. **55**

It seems like a great idea, but the overall motion tracking system of the Wii U makes it a flawed attempt at a dancing game.



Sports Connection

Developer: Ubisoft
Publisher: Ubisoft
Distributor: Megarom

Sports Connection on the Wii U is one of the first mixed sports titles available for the platform, but where other sports compilations have a fairly smooth feel and solid themes, this one simply does not. It feels disjointed and tacked together. With six sports on offer, one would also expect that each discipline enjoyed a certain amount of detail injected into it. That simply is not the case. This game feels like it has been rushed out, to a degree. Each sport delivers only the bare essentials. On the upside, that keeps things simple for casual gamers and, at a glance that is exactly the target market that *Sports Connection* is aimed at. But the less-than-stellar implementation of Wii U control systems and the almost afterthought feel of the entire game will have even the most casual of gamers grow bored before long. Overall, it feels like there was just not enough effort here. **50**

A lacklustre, over-simplified attempt at a sports collection, with too few sports and not enough attention to detail. NAG



9c

7 THRILLING PAGES!

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THE FUTURE

A startling look into the year 2013!

2012? That's so, like, last year. We're all about embracing the future, moving forward, looking outwards and other phrases you see in motivational posters. 2013 will be the year of more stuff that's awesome in gaming and everything that gamers love, so let's take a look at what's in store for you, us and everyone in between.



FILM

In eye-popping Technicolor! Sort of!



A GOOD DAY TO DIE HARD

Release date: February
Director: John Moore
Starring: Bruce Willis

If John McClane is solving problems and killing bad guys then you know it's the festive season. He's in Russia this time dealing with his son who is in trouble... or is he. That'll be one eggnog and knuckle sandwich to go. Boom!

OBLIVION

Release date: April
Director: Joseph Kosinski
Starring: Tom Cruise, Morgan Freeman
There are two abandoned Earth sci-fi movies on the radar this year. We're betting on this one based on nothing more than the trailer and of course Morgan Freeman (he was Nelson Mandela after all). The other movie is the Will Smith one called *After Earth*.

MAN OF STEEL

Release date: June
Director: Zack Snyder
Starring: Henry Cavill, Russell Crowe
It's the second retelling of Superman since 1978. Important things you should note: *Superman's* underpants are now on the inside and he's still saving people in busses. A lot is riding on this one because if it sucks it could be kryptonite for the franchise.

WORLD WAR Z

Release date: June
Director: Marc Forster
Starring: Brad Pitt
A tidal wave of zombies is what you should take away from this short description. In our most desperate moment with tsunamis of undead meat crashing around humanity, the one man that can save us is... Brad Pitt?! It's a little risky but in zombies we must trust.

HICK-ASS 2

Release date: Q2/Q3
Director: Jeff Wadlow
Starring: Aaron Johnson
All the same actors return except of course for Nicolas Cage (he got cooked in the last movie LOL). Expect more irreverent fun and kick ass action. Of course going with a different director is the only risky move for this sequel but we have faith in the concept.

STAR TREK INTO DARKNESS

Release date: May
Director: J.J. Abrams
Starring: Chris Pine, Zachary Quinto, Zoe Saldana
There is an enemy within in this second outing under J.J. Abrams. There might even be a tipping of the hat to the original series here (*The Enemy Within*). Regardless, everyone is back for the sequel and we're betting this will be *the* movie of 2013 – can't even wait.

IRON MAN 3

Release date: April
Director: Shane Black
Starring: Robert Downey Jr., Guy Pearce, Gwyneth Paltrow
The Mandarin is the bad guy to beat in this third *Iron Man* movie. The bottom line: we don't care what anyone says; this is going to be amazing and of course (more importantly) marks the start of the long journey to *Avengers 2* in 2015.

ELYSIUM

Release date: Q3
Director: Neill Blomkamp
Starring: Matt Damon, Jodie Foster, Sharlto Copley
It's another man on a mission sci-fi romp from one of our very own. The last time we saw Neill Blomkamp work was with the brilliant *District 9*. A bigger budget with bigger stars puts this one high on the watch list. Sharlto Copley plays the bad guy.

PACIFIC RIM

Release date: July
Director: Guillermo del Toro
Starring: Idris Elba, Charlie Hunnam
Giant aliens under the sea against giant piloted robots sounds like the stuff from Saturday morning cartoons. Be grateful that there are writers, directors and more importantly studios out there willing to blow hundreds of millions of dollars making stuff like this for us.

RIDDICK

Release date: Q3/Q4
Director: David Twohy
Starring: Vin Diesel
Poor Riddick is betrayed and left for dead in this next outing for Captain Awesome. While fighting predatory aliens on a distant world he becomes even more lethal than ever before. Is that even possible, we all wonder. Expect another cool video game to follow.

THOR: THE DARK WORLD

Release date: November
Director: Alan Taylor
Starring: Chris Hemsworth, Natalie Portman
Dark elves (that aren't from Middle-Earth) led by Malekith threaten to destroy / blow up / darken the whole universe. Thor must stop them and still find time for the gorgeous Natalie Portman. Takes place after the events in *The Avengers* and is step two on the road to *Avengers 2*.

ANCHORMAN: THE LEGEND CONTINUES

Release date: December
Director: Adam McKay
Starring: Will Ferrell, Steve Carell
Ron Burgundy and crew return for more laughs in this long awaited sequel. Will they still be able to find the magic that made the original so good? Who knows, but the crazy ride is probably worth the risk.

THE HUNGER GAMES: CATCHING FIRE

Release date: Q4
Director: Francis Lawrence
Starring: Jennifer Lawrence
Split into two movies (to make more money of course) the second book in *The Hunger Games* series features the lovely Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen again. Prepare for more of the same but this time under a different director. This should be epic like the first movie.

THE HOBBIT: THE DESOLATION OF SMAUG

Release date: December
Director: Peter Jackson
Starring: Martin Freeman, Ian McKellen
That pesky dragon will need to start packing his bags because the dwarves are coming home. Second in the *Hobbit* trilogy, this is a must-see and December is so far away we could almost cry.

GAMES

ELECTRONIC INTERACTIVE PICTURE-MACHINES! FROM THE FUTURE!

Is this
technology
from outer
space?



GRAND THEFT AUTO V

Publisher: Rockstar Games

Release date: Q2

Having become practically synonymous with gaming, there's almost no need to explain why you should be excited about the fifth numbered entry in the immensely popular GTA series. Three interconnected playable protagonists (you'll shift between them during story missions and free-roam), a sandbox world that's supposedly larger than the combined worlds of *Red Dead Redemption*, *GTA: San Andreas* and *GTA IV* combined, and gameplay that "evolves nearly every mechanic" from previous entries are all words that promise to make this the best GTA yet, with all the Rockstar polish we've come to expect.

BIOSHOCK INFINITE

Publisher: 2K Games

Release date: March

Ditching the watery depths of Rapture in favour of Columbia's open skies, we've not been able to take our minds off of *BioShock Infinite* from the moment of its first reveal. While our excitement has been muted a bit thanks to annoying delays and apparent development woes, we still can't help but feel an overwhelming wave of excitement at the prospect of finally being able to play *Infinite*. It's all the ideals and varied gameplay of *BioShock*, reinvigorated and reborn within an all-new, massively compelling storyline that aims to actually make you care about its key characters. That's automatic win.

AMNESIA: A MACHINE FOR PIGS

Publisher: Frictional Games

Release date: TBA

As a pseudo-sequel to one of the most successfully frightening survival horrors ever made, *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*, the prospect of *A Machine for Pigs* is equal parts terrifying and thrilling. In the hands of new developer thechineseroom (they behind the creation of much-loved indie hit *Dear Esther*), it's got real potential to be as surreal as it is scream-worthy. Set across a number of different, interwoven storylines with protagonist Oswald Mandus at its core,

the game's horrific tendencies will be more partial to larger areas and outdoor environs. We've already begun stocking up on pants.

DEAD SPACE 3

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Release date: February

Oh *Dead Space*. We do love you so. Despite worries that this third game (and its drop-in, drop-out co-op) might finally destroy the series' fear factor, replacing it instead with a penchant for all-out action and terror-muffling buddy action, we can't help but put all our hopes in Visceral Games pulling it off without entirely uprooting *Dead Space's* base elements. Isaac Clarke returns two months after escaping the Sprawl, and he's joined by Sergeant John Carver as they explore the frozen planet Tau Volantis and battle Necromorph foes covered in angry teeth and sharp bits. Good times.

WASTELAND 2

Publisher: InXile Entertainment

Release date: October

With 2012 having birthed so many nostalgia-infused Kickstarter projects, our retro-senses were forced to work overtime. One of the first, and therefore one that stands out high above the many, is *Wasteland 2*. A reimagining of *Fallout's* forebear *Wasteland*, it's a turn-based, party-driven, tactically focused RPG played from an isometric perspective and set in a desolate wasteland resulting from nuclear apocalypse. That sentence makes us incredibly happy. With Obsidian Entertainment assisting in its development and Brian Fargo (one of the original game's designers) at its helm, we're holding thumbs that this sequel is worthy of its beloved legacy.

TOMB RAIDER

Publisher: Square Enix

Release date: March

Lara's origin story is one of the most intriguing we've seen in gaming to date, simply because she's been in this industry for long enough for any gamer to have put together their own version of how she came to be the adventurer that she is. No matter, because Crystal Dynamics' story is sure to be

darker, crueller and more down-to-earth than anything we could imagine. Expect to have your expectations shattered.

COMPANY OF HEROES 2

Publisher: THQ

Release date: Q1/Q2

It's the same deep strategic experience we know from the first game, with snow. At least, that's how we see it, because that's exactly what we want.

This time players will be tasked with taking care of the Russian front, with its bone-chilling weather and depressingly challenging battlegrounds; you'll be fighting Nazis on one side and Mother Nature on the other. There's also said to be an increased focus on tanks as dominant battle pieces; when one of those iron-clad death machines rolls in to your supposedly perfectly defended position, be prepared to pack up shop and retreat to safety.

DOUBLE FINE ADVENTURE

Publisher: Double Fine Productions

Release date: Q2

Not only is Double Fine Productions' return to point-and-click adventure gaming significant for everyone who loves the genre, but it's significant because of what it represents: the dawn of a new era of crowd-funded AAA games. Things haven't gone as smooth as everyone had (perhaps ignorantly) hoped they would, with the Kickstarter cash raised last year all-but run dry, but we've been assured the game will be out this year by hook or by crook.

STARCRRAFT II: HEART OF THE SWARM

Publisher: Blizzard Entertainment

Release date: March

While our passion for *StarCraft II* has finally started to wane, there's no doubt that we're excited for the return of Kerrigan and the continuation of what turned out to be a massively impressive single player campaign.

Of course, multiplayer is where the longevity lies and we cannot wait to see *SCII*'s new units in action on the battlefield. Also, it'll be funny to watch RedTide try to play Zerg, which he's promised to do when the expansion arrives.

SIMCITY

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Release date: March

We've had a chance to play this game briefly and, yes, it feels as fun as it looks. Between the funky new visuals and the insanely advanced simulation engine that runs everything inside the new *SimCity*, there's so much to be explored, planned and perfected that we're already starting to make excuses to skip social events during the game's launch window. If there's no NAG for a couple of months after March, someone might want to drop by the office to check we haven't died in real life while our simulated metropolises thrive.



STARRING!
ALL THESE PEOPLE
ON THE LEFT!

Aliens disguised as cops!
They're here for probing!

HARDWARE

IT'S ALIVE!

2013 will inevitably usher in a few changes in the hardware world, but that is entirely dependent on whether or not the next generation consoles show up or are moved to 2014. Despite what we may want to believe, the consoles either help propel innovation at silicon level for computers or stunt growth. Over the last three years progress has been extremely slow because the lowest common denominator has been hardware that is eight years old this year. Regardless of what advances were made with GPUs there are no engines that can tackle both the ancient consoles and the cutting-edge graphics cards today in a platform appropriate manner.

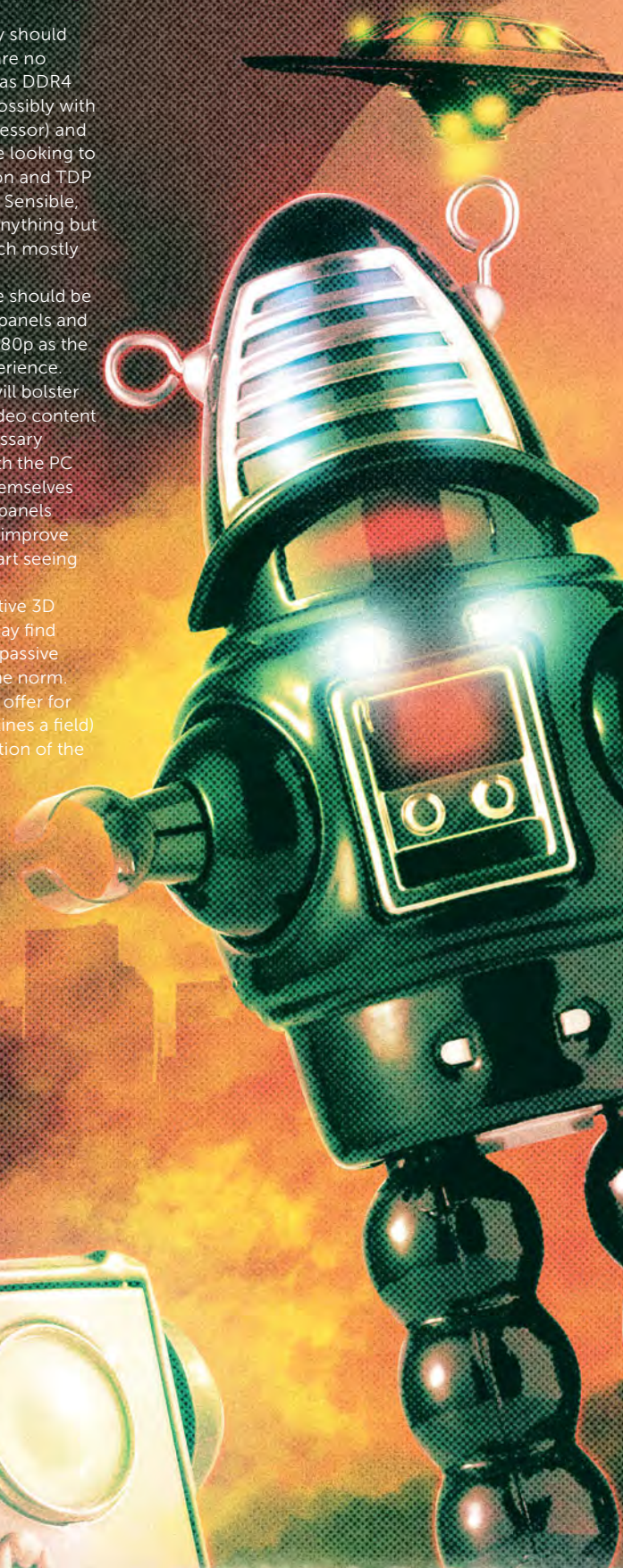
The AMD Radeon 8000 series and NVIDIA's GeForce 700 series may not be too different from what we had last year but they will benefit immensely from titles powered by engines that are not catering to pre GPU compute and tessellation capable GPUs found in the consoles of today.

Storage and all memory in general in 2013 will take the next step forward as we expect SandForce and many other SSD controller vendors to release a new generation of controllers which should see many high-end and possibly mid-range SSDs hit the SATA 6Gbps limit, at least where sequential performance is concerned. SSD prices will

continue to plummet but memory should hold steady if not pick up. There are no major platform changes this year as DDR4 will only make its debut in 2014 possibly with INTEL's Broadwell (Haswell's successor) and AMD's Steamroller. All of these are looking to further reduce power consumption and TDP and not necessarily performance. Sensible, because on the desktop there is anything but the lack of computing power which mostly goes to waste.

As far as display panels go, there should be a lot more multi-touch capacitive panels and finally we may move away from 1080p as the definition of a premium visual experience. The move to 1440 lines or pixels will bolster all related markets even though video content will stay 1080p or 720p. It's a necessary change for vendors concerned with the PC market if they are to distinguish themselves from any other platform. LED, IPS panels may become the standard as they improve with every product and we may start seeing response times as low as 2ms.

On the 3D front, it looks as if active 3D displays as promoted by NVIDIA may find themselves obsolete especially as passive 2560x1440 3D displays become the norm. They are significantly cheaper and offer for the first time true HD quality (720 lines a field) stereoscopic experiences at a fraction of the price of an active system.



ALL ABOUT THE SOFTWARE

Obviously the new consoles from Sony and Microsoft are being built with a new generation of game engines and software technology in mind. We might get to see a practical application of *Unreal Engine 4*. It is the software, more than the hardware that will be what creates an obvious visual distinction between games on the current systems, compared to the next.

DIGITAL CONTENT BECOMES KING?

Consoles have become greatly focused on digital content and online services. The evolution of Xbox LIVE and PlayStation Network is going to go a long way towards characterizing what Sony and Microsoft's next platforms will turn into. Both companies have already begun overhauling their digital stores, placing greater emphasis on media like TV shows and movies. Neither seems to have plans for a "killer app" to set them apart, instead vying for parity with services like Netflix, Hulu, a music store and digital back-catalogue of games. Microsoft does seem surprisingly willing to experiment with unusual initiatives, like SmartGlass, and there is potential for it to be expanded upon for the next Xbox console. But right now it's still mad science.

PORTABLE GAMING

The mobile space continues to mature, exerting pressure on the handheld market. Still, the Nintendo 3DS progresses along a curve not dissimilar to its predecessor. The PlayStation Vita still lacks traction, unable to catch the interest of the mainstream gaming public. Sony still hasn't revealed any extensive plans for reviving the Vita's flagging performance. The future of handhelds in 2013 doesn't look all that exciting, no major happenings (yet) other than continued attempts by Android tablets to be seen as legitimate gaming consoles.

CONSOLES

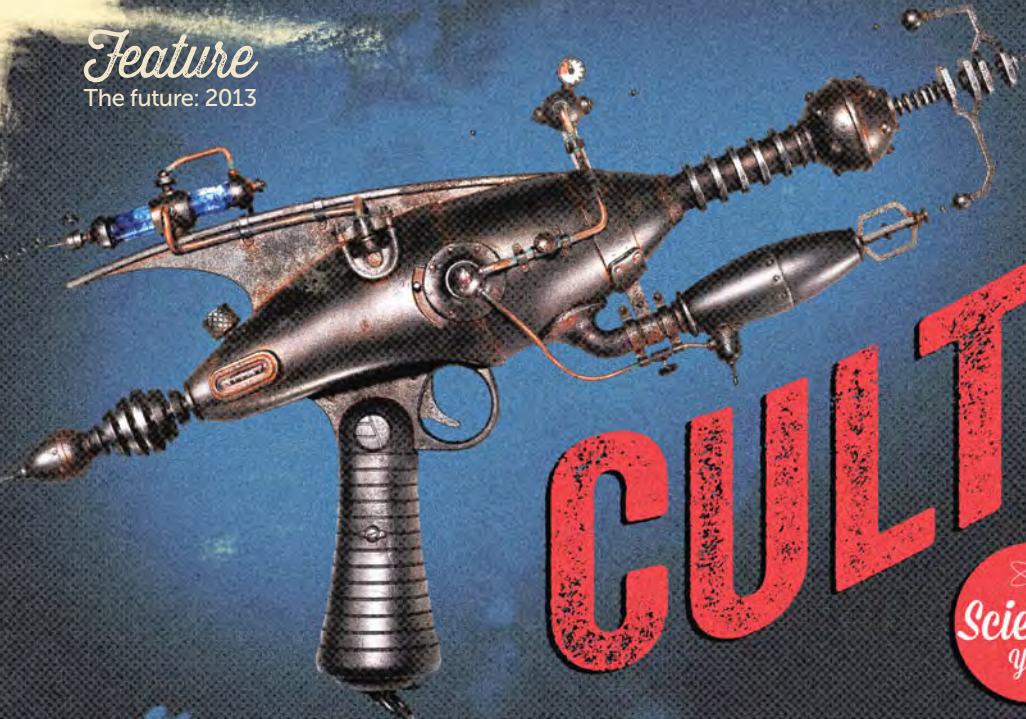
march to war: again

Microsoft is first to begin building hype for 2013. As the only real (final?) big Xbox 360 event is the next *Gears of War* instalment, expectations are that Microsoft will focus on their Xbox 360 successor (codename: Durango) at this year's E3. Likely, the next Xbox operating system will springboard off the current dashboard and software suite, aiming at being a full multi-media living room hub, leveraging that as its biggest selling point for the mainstream.

Hardware-wise, it will be interesting to see how ambitious Microsoft will be. By this point, console hardware is limited by size, power consumption, and representing good value at an affordable retail price. Sony learned with the PS3's original launch price: no matter how good your hardware, there exists a

price ceiling most people are not willing to go past. Microsoft must be keeping this in mind. It seems like Durango is closer than Sony's PlayStation successor (codename: Orbis), likely due to Sony remaining secretive. They've insinuated basically nothing about Orbis, and seem genuinely committed to their "10 year plan".

The Wii U remains a wildcard. Unfocused compared to the Wii, it's hard to predict where it will find traction, in part due to how little software has been revealed. It does cater more to the enthusiast gamer, but still won't compete head-to-head with Sony and Microsoft, instead focusing on presenting different flavours of game experiences, rather than a linear evolution of what's already found on the HD twins.



CULTURE

DISCOVERIES
FROM THE DEPTHS
OF NERDOLOGY!



ATTACK OF THE LIZARD-MEN
FROM THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH!



ON THE CARDS

2013 looks to be a mixed bag for tabletop gaming culture. Of course, we've got the highly anticipated D&D Next (5th Edition, basically) to look forward to. Next is set to return to 3.5 Edition in a lot of ways, but with more customisability out of the box for new players, and a faster pace of combat for those who felt that 4th Edition was a little too bogged-down.

There's no doubt that this year will see a slew of tabletop strategy games, and from the impressive performance of *Dust Tactics/Warfare*, we're expecting more people to pick up this accessible, exciting game.

We're also expecting more card-based RPGs to keep coming, as the success of games like *Munchkin* proves that many people are keen to play complex games but might not want to sit and study a rulebook for days in advance. There's also the massively impressive *Bones* Kickstarter, which we're sure will have a knock-on effect for independent wargame producers, so expect more variety in this field over the coming years.

Lastly, *Magic the Gathering* is set to stay where it is this year, and we've already seen most of the 2013 Core sets which have made it even easier to put together a tournament-ready deck. If anything, this will bring in more players.

Insofar as the gaming industry is concerned for 2013, we'll likely see less enthusiasm about Kickstarter. Towards the end of 2012 the excitement surrounding various gaming projects was beginning to wear off – largely because it seemed there was a new game on the crowdsourcing website every second day. But that's the gaming masses for you: oversupply something in a short amount of time and it's likely people will stop noticing. Case in point: the rhythm game genre. That's not to say that developers will stop using Kickstarter to fund games; Molyneux will continue to hawk his bizarre ideas and threaten us with more of his emotional meltdowns should goals not be met. The point is: developers will likely find a less willing and more sceptical crowd of backers. This might lead some to crowdsource funds via their own websites, but just ask newly reformed Black Isle Studios how that's working out for them.

Sales figures for *Diablo III* proved that gamers are willing to accept always-on DRM despite there being a massive song and dance about it prior to release. Maxis and EA are the next to follow suit with *SimCity*. Their excuse is that the simulation computing is so intense it needs to be done on Maxis' super computers "in the cloud". *SimCity* will sell well and this could give publishers reason to find an excuse to make "cloud computing DRM" a staple in their PC releases. We're not excited about this one either.

THQ did some interesting things with website *Humble Bundle*, so we might see other publishers following this example for a quick cash injection. As for THQ: the company as we know it is pretty much gone already so our guess is that their stable of IPs will find a new home with a rival publisher. **NAG**

FIN!

(THE END)

METRO LAST LIGHT



RANGER MODE

Experience complete immersion. No HUD. Less Bullets. Brutal Combat. Hardcore. The way it was meant to be played.

MODIFIED RUSSIAN RIFLE



A compact but deadly Russian assault rifle, perfect for claustrophobic combat.

EXTRA MILITARY GRADE BULLETS



Coveted for their ability to kill, these bullets are also the currency of the Metro. Will you use them in battle or purchase precious resources? The choice is yours.

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FEATURE



CRYSIS 3

THE PROPHECY IS COMPLETE

Release date

February 2013

Platforms

360 / PC / PS3

Genre

First-person shooter

Developer

Crytek Frankfurt / Crytek UK

Website

www.crysis.com

Publisher

Electronic Arts



HANDS ON



40° 53.89'
73° 54.26'

20 years is a long time. In two decades, nature stakes its claim where mankind previously took over, grudges develop into revenge, and corporate greed is compounded a thousand times over. In the 20 years since the events of *Crysis 2*, the world as it once was is no more. Massive Nanodomes have been erected around the major cities of the world by CryNet Enforcement & Local Logistics – commonly known as CELL – to lock in the remaining alien Ceph menace and protect the world’s people from danger. Or, so they say. Those with a few brain cells to rub together know the real reason behind the domes: to allow CELL to go about their new business unhindered. A powerful and practically infinite source of energy has been found within the cities that once stood as icons for their nations: New York, London, Rio de Janeiro and others now lie in ruin within the domes, under which city-wide rainforests have grown through the cracks and taken back the land. CELL



“New York, London, Rio de Janeiro and others now lie in ruin within the domes, under which city-wide rainforests have grown through the cracks and taken back the land.”

- 01> PS ENERGY SUPPORT SYSTEM
- 02> AUTOMATIC RELOAD SYSTEM
- 03> STUN/ELECTRO ARROW
- 04> STANDARD SPEAR ARROW
- 05> EXPLOSIVE



MAXIMUM MULTIPLAYER

Crysis 3 will feature eight multiplayer modes and 12 maps at launch time. PC players will be able to play online through dedicated servers (no word on LAN play yet) that support up to 16 players at once. Console players get P2P matchmaking and support for up to 12 players in a game.

Currently, only two multiplayer modes have been confirmed – Crash Site and Hunter – but there’s a very real chance that team deathmatch, free-for-all, capture the flag and the other usual suspects will also make an appearance.

Crash Site should be familiar to anyone who spent some time with *Crysis 2*’s multiplayer. In this mode, teams of Nanosuit-wearing soldiers vie for control over randomly selected alien pod crash sites, holding them for as long as possible and scoring points while they do so until the pod explodes and a new one is dropped elsewhere on the map. There are a few additions this time: each crash site includes two shields that can be picked up and used for defence or hurled at enemies for a one-shot kill, and giant mechanical walkers called Pingers can be found in some maps. These powerful machines can decimate the battlefield, but can be destroyed with enough firepower or hijacked if an enemy can get into position to jump on top of it.

The concept of Hunter Mode should also be familiar, but it’s a new addition to the *Crysis* series. In it, a team of up to 14 CELL operatives must survive for two minutes against just two Hunters equipped with advanced Nanosuits. The Hunters are permanently cloaked but equipped only with a compound bow; the CELL soldiers have access to a number of predefined loadouts and powerful weaponry, but limited ammunition. Ammo can only be restocked at certain points in the maps, and dying means you are switched over to the Hunter team. As the very brief but tense two minutes pass, the team of Hunters will grow larger and more deadly, making it progressively more difficult for the remaining CELL agents to stay alive.



LEFT: Pingers are highly capable war machines but can be destroyed by concentrated firepower or hijacked by wily opponents.



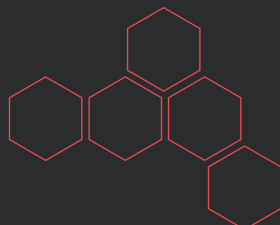
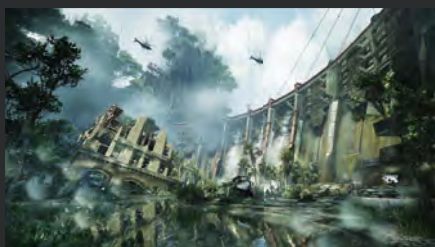
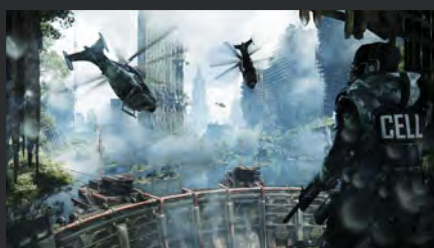
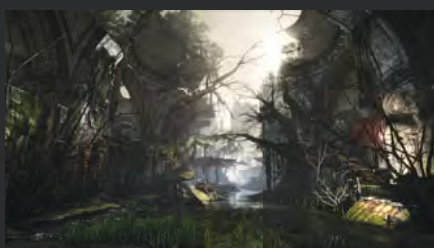
WHAT THE HUH NOW?

Have you got your tinfoil hat, dialled the crazy metre to 10 and booked your stay in the loony bin? Great, let's figure out what happened that would allow the previously very dead Prophet to take the lead in *Crysis 3*. Spoilers abound.

In the beginning of *Crysis 2*, we're treated to a flashback of Prophet killing himself through a memory implanted in the suit that Alcatraz (*Crysis 2*'s protagonist) took possession of. His dying words "They used to call me Prophet, remember me," are stronger now than what they initially seemed: Alcatraz could do nothing *but* remember Prophet, and the suit that once belonged to the legendary soldier slowly started to merge with his cognitive functions, becoming one with Alcatraz and having a profound effect on his self-identity. So much so, that at the end of the game, after waking up in and climbing out of a crater in the middle of Central Park, when Alcatraz is asked his name by Karl Ernst Rasch he responds "they call me Prophet."

While Crytek have been coy on the matter and have simply gone ahead to market their game as the return of Prophet, how he returns exactly is quite eerie. We haven't seen his face, but for all intents and purposes, Alcatraz *is* Prophet, or the other way round, or something. The suit has fully merged with Alcatraz, complete with Ceph DNA, to create a hybrid being that's quite possibly the toughest thing alive. The big question here is: did Prophet know that this would happen when he gave his suit to Alcatraz?

And you thought *Crysis* was just about the action.



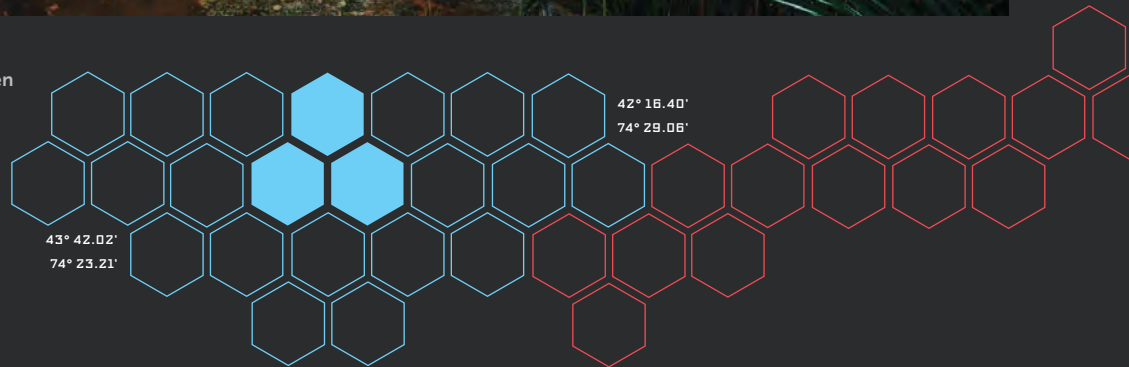
monopolised the world energy market with their cheap alternative fuel source, but once they owned that market, they began to raise prices, and soon people were buried in debt to the corporation that once promised them an abundance of free energy. Forced into what could only be called slavery to pay off their debts, the people of the world need a saviour. Or, at the very least, someone to stick their nose into CELL's business, and maybe bury a few bodies while they're at it.

Eager to rise to the challenge (really, he's just sick of being pushed around) is our returning hero Laurence "Prophet" Barnes. Yes, that's right, the guy who put a bullet through his own skull in the beginning of *Crysis 2* is back – poke your head to the right of this page for our take on how that's possible. After spending 20 years in a CELL... cell, Prophet is rescued by a rebel group inside the remains of New York City, or the Liberty Dome as it's now known. Among those rebels is Psycho, now stripped of his Nanosuit and bearing





In addition to his standard loadouts, Prophet can pick up weapons from fallen CELL operatives when the need arises.

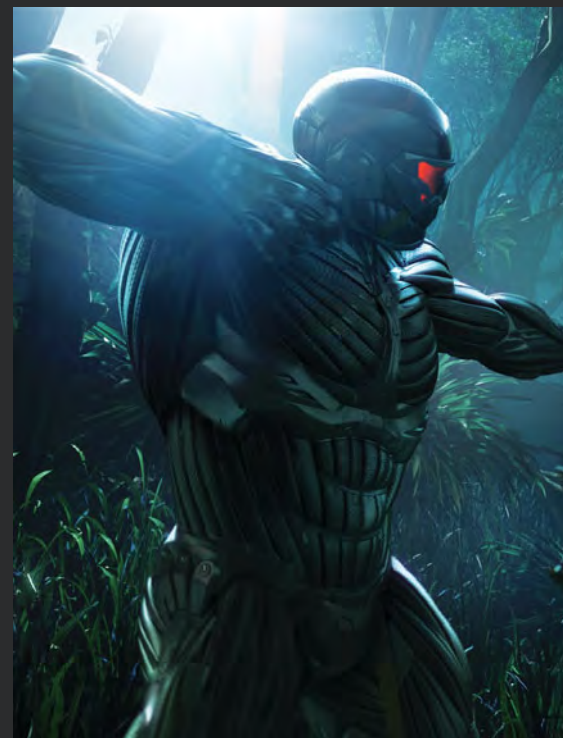


"Fields" is one of the Seven Wonders of *Crysis 3*, and gives players access to wide, open areas mixed with large indoor environments.



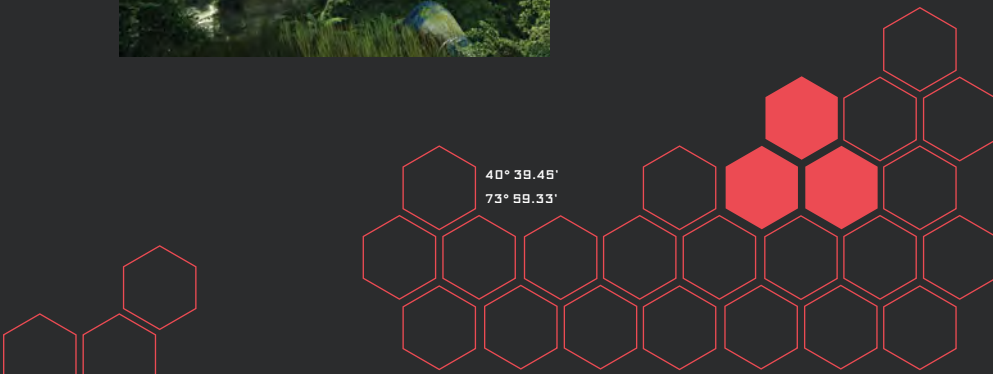
a major grudge for the guys who "skinned" him, and we're told to expect a few more familiar faces to pop up during the game, as Crytek wants to deliver a story more focused on characters and personal development than pure sci-fi. You can also expect the mechanical alien Ceph to make a return, as there are still pockets of these wily creatures stuck within Liberty.

As well as Ceph, you'll of course encounter plenty of CELL operatives, and we're told that they've been given the special treatment by the AI team. Prophet has taken on the role of hunter: he's there to take down CELL and everything they represent, but that doesn't mean the enemies in his sights won't do what they can to eliminate him first. This aggressive form of AI means that Prophet will have to do everything in his power to stay alive, which includes making use of his highly advanced Nanosuit 2.0. The suit has come a long way from its original design, incorporating a number of Ceph technologies and adapting to meet the challenges from *Crysis 2*, making Prophet more capable than ever. Crytek has spent a lot of time paying attention to the desires





The bow is Prophet's stealthiest weapon, and it's also one of his strongest. A single arrow is enough to take down standard CELL operatives, and explosive or shock tips can be used in the correct environment to kill multiple or hidden opponents.



“The suit has come a long way from its original design, incorporating a number of Ceph technologies and adapting to meet the challenges from *Crysis 2*, making Prophet more capable than ever.”



and habits of their players, and, as a result, have made the suit powers easier to use, with longer stealth times and “free” special moves like power jumps and kicking heavy items to help Prophet combat the more powerful enemies he’ll face. All too often we see sequels that simply throw down new abilities for the characters without properly explaining why they weren’t around before, but we know that the Nanosuit is an organic symbiont, not just a piece of equipment. It too has grown over the years.

As well as the improvements made to established powers, the suit has also developed a few new tricks. Thanks to its ability to interface directly with Ceph technology, Prophet can now pick up and use a number of alien weapons which are extremely powerful and can turn the tide of battle. They’re limited use weapons, though – once they’ve run out of ammo Prophet will have to return to his regular arsenal. Well, regular is hardly the right word: Prophet’s weapon selection hasn’t been massively updated, but rather tweaked and improved upon from previous games, but one new addition does stand out: the composite bow. This highly advanced form

ONE FOR THE TECH-HEADS

PC technology enthusiasts around the world collectively groaned when it was announced that *Crysis 3* wouldn’t be the home of a new CryEngine, but really, the thinking behind this decision is quite a smart one.

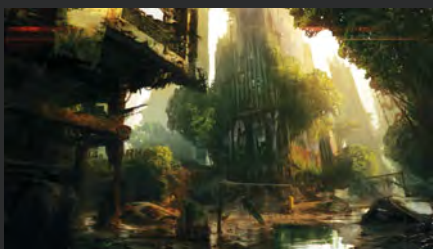
With the development of *Crysis 2* there were a lot of technical challenges in that we had to take that engine, break it down and make it work on consoles,” said *Crysis 3* producer Mike Read. “In doing that, it caused not only a lot of technical barriers but also a lot of design barriers in what you can and cannot do. It was a big thing for us to get that working on consoles.

“Moving into the development of *Crysis 3* we had pretty much unlocked the potential of what we were able to do not only on PCs but consoles as well. And, because we didn’t have all these technical restraints, we’ve had the time [...] to bring everything across the board from sound to cinematics to gameplay and of course pushing the graphics up quite a few notches.”

And seeing is believing. A recent tech demo showed off some of the incredible visuals this engine is capable of. New features have, of course, been added to the engine, including real-time volumetric cloud and fog shadows (“god rays”), highly precise displacement mapping for incredible levels of detail, a new generation global illumination engine and dynamic water volume caustics, just to name a few. There’s no doubt that this game will crush your PC, with the recommended system specs calling for a quad-core CPU, 4GB RAM and at least a GTX 560 or HD 5870. And that’s just to run it at a decent clip: high-end requirements double that amount of RAM and suggest a GTX 680 or HD 7970 paired with a Core i7 or FX4150 and higher.

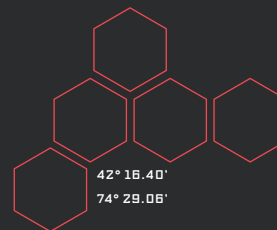


Without his suit, Psycho is on a mission of anger and revenge against CELL and everything they stand for.

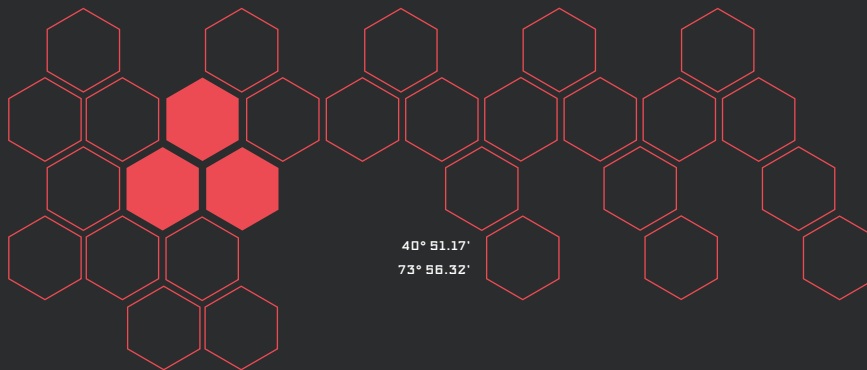


of the classic hunter's weapon slots in perfectly with the "return to nature" theme that's echoed throughout the Liberty Dome, rather than lumping the player with ten new weapons that don't logically fit in the world. The bow occupies a dedicated weapon slot and allows Prophet to attack while cloaked, and like the other weapons it has a number of different ammo types including explosive and electro-shock arrow heads. Prophet also has an all-new tool at his disposal: remote hacking. Initially, this skill will be limited to doors and auto-turrets, but can later be expanded to "epic proportions", according to Crytek. How epic that is remains to be seen, but we've spotted a couple of walking mechs in the game which seem like a good place to start.

Hacking isn't the only skill that Prophet will improve as he progresses through the game. You'll have access to around 20 perks that are unlocked at select points and can be formed into a loadout of four perks at a time. This takes the tactical elements of the *Crysis* mantra of "assess, adapt,

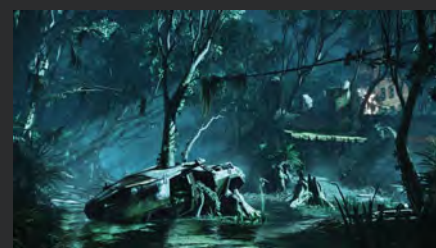


"This takes the tactical elements of the *Crysis* mantra of 'assess, adapt, attack' to a new level, as players can now switch between customised loadouts on the fly."



attack" to a new level, as players can now switch between customised loadouts on the fly. Need more power to tank through a particular area? It's no longer a matter of simply switching the Maximum Armour; a little more thought is required. Of course, you're free to play the game however you wish: stealthy, tactical, aggressive or a combination of all three, but Crytek has explained that certain parts of the game are more guided than others, with "strongly encouraged" play styles.

How you play depends largely on what environment you're in, and with 20 years of nature's retaking efforts behind it, Liberty is a wholly different place to what New York City was. Crytek have implemented what they call The Seven Wonders of Liberty: distinct biomes within the confined area that give players access to a wide variety of environments that mimic both the wide, horizontal spaces of *Crysis 1* and the tight, vertically-aligned battlegrounds of *Crysis 2*. It's the best of both worlds, with some surprisingly open areas that will give the player plenty of room to engage from any angle or distance, offset by everything from dark tunnels to creaking catwalks and collapsing skyscrapers.



INTERVIEW with Mike Read

We sat down and spoke to *Crysis 3*'s producer Mike Read about the decision to return to New York and bring back Prophet, and what the future holds for the series with Crytek going free-to-play.

NAG: Was the intention right from the start to return to New York? Obviously the scenery has changed quite a bit but it's still the same location.

Mike Read: It is, but there have been some big story elements tied into that. At the end of *Crysis 2* we looked at a number of options for where we could possibly go from our creative director, and Cevat [Yerli – founder of Crytek] really wanted to go back to New York. We had a lot of story angles that were tied to that from *Crysis 2* – how the Ceph was defeated and how CELL moved in. We've also reintroduced Psycho and Prophet – Psycho minus his Nanosuit, which is a whole new thing.

NAG: Prophet "returning" is a little strange...

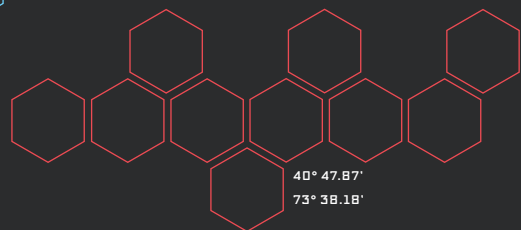
Mike: Yeah, a lot of questions arose around why Prophet is back – didn't he die in *Crysis 2*? There are a lot of hints strewn throughout *Crysis 2* that a lot of people didn't pick up on, and some of them will become a little more evident in *Crysis 3*.

NAG: And where does Psycho fit into this?

Mike: The story so far with Psycho coming into play is that *Crysis 3* begins with the rescue of Prophet from incarceration where he's been for many years with CELL Corporation. Prior to that, CELL has been capturing Nanosuits and one of them happens to be Psycho's. They removed his Nanosuit in what they refer to as a Skinning Lab. It's a very painful and mentally scarring process where they removed the suit, so he's really pissed off. He's not too happy and wants to get back at these guys for doing this. So he's operating with a rebel group within the dome itself.



"... will the next *Crysis* game be an FPS game? Will it be something else? We've done great things with the franchise in building the *Crysis* universe that we can go in so many different directions."



NAG: What can you tell me about Crytek's move to free-to-play?

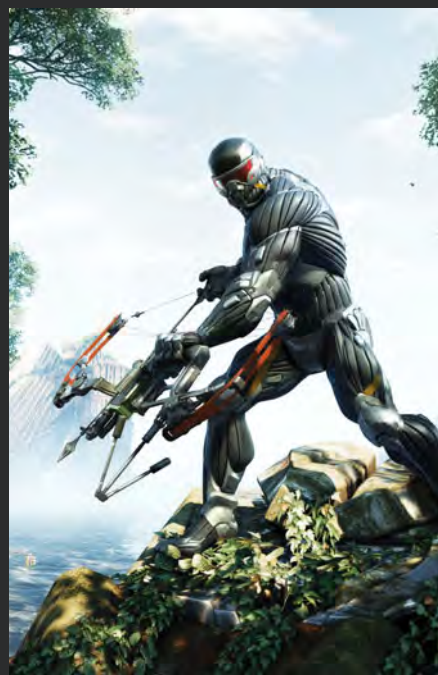
Mike: Cevat has spoken about free-to-play and we've been experimenting in that market with *Warface*, which was released in Russia and China and is coming out in the West probably early 2013. We've been experimenting with that and I think it's all about coming in and focusing on that. It's going to be interesting to see how consoles react to that, whether they can continue with packaged products, whether they transition to digital distribution and even the unknown world of streaming technologies.

NAG: So where will *Crysis* find itself in this new era of development?

Mike: It's hard to say... will the next *Crysis* game be an FPS game? Will it be something else? We've done great things with the franchise in building the *Crysis* universe that we can go in so many different directions. We're talking about some of the things we can do, and when we're in a good spot we'll definitely start talking about it more. I'm pretty excited about the future and where we can take it. I think the guys are really anxious to finish off this end of the series and go "what kind of cool stuff can we do as an offshoot, to do something different and unique?" and let them run wild.

NAG

- GeometriX





DETAILS

Release date
March 2013
Platforms
360 / PS3
Genre
Action
Developer
Insomniac Games
Website
www.
insomniacgames.
com/games/fuse
Publisher
Electronic Arts

Fuse

All for one



There's a common misconception that certain developers are tied to platforms or publishers. Sure, there are those "in-house" studios that have sold all but their souls to platform holders, but despite the company's history of developing games purely for PlayStation consoles, Insomniac is actually entirely independent of Sony. And so they decided to exercise that independence when EA Partners approached them with the option to build a new IP that would belong solely to Insomniac, and at the same time stick their nose into Microsoft's territory for the studio's first multi-platform release.

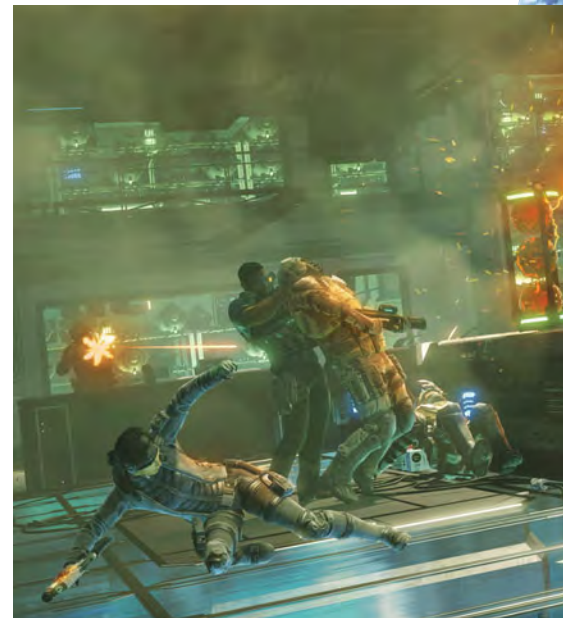
The story and gameplay in *Fuse* centres on an alien substance of the same name. Things begin when our team of four perfectly balanced heroes, who collectively make up the mercenary group Overstrike 9, are dispatched to infiltrate a government institution called Hyperion, where for 70 years scientists

"Each member of the team has taken to a Xenotech weapon that best suits their skills and personality, and has substantial impact on how each character is played."

have experimented with a highly volatile captured alien substance they've dubbed Fuse. When combined with Earthly materials, Fuse creates new, super-powerful applications that

are always deadly. Overstrike 9 are the sort that are called in when the men in black want no liability, and have been ordered to destroy the source of Fuse and prevent the rogue paramilitary group Raven from getting their (no doubt evil) hands on it. Except, this is a group of mercenaries – trigger-happy, gun-crazy mercenaries – and when the team finds a cache of Fuse-powered Xenotech weapons in Hyperion, they can't help but help themselves. Waste not, want not – right?

And so the fundamentals for *Fuse* are established: each member of the team has taken to a Xenotech weapon that best suits their skills and personality, and has substantial impact on how each character is played. Squad leader Dalton Brooks is a muscle-bound but level-headed sort of chap, and he takes to the Magshield which soaks up incoming damage and repels it back with great force. Hacker and information broker Izzy Sinclair finds herself charmed by the Scattergun – a shotgun-like weapon that can freeze enemies in place



Chain together sufficient damage-dealing attacks and all four characters will enter Fusion Mode which increases damage and attack speed significantly with Xenotech weaponry.

UPPER ECHELON

Up until recently, only the main single player mode was confirmed, but now Insomniac has let the cat out the bag with information on *Fuse's* Echelon Mode.

In Echelon, players return to the free-form co-op squad in *Fuse's* take on a horde mode. Except instead of defending, players are tasked with assaulting a position, eliminating waves of enemies, moving along a canister and defeating powerful bosses, all while attempting to outdo their teammates in this "co-petitive" mode. When enemies are slain, bags of cash are dropped, and it's the player who makes it to the bag first that gets to keep it. Risk vs. reward is a constant challenge, with lone wolf players potentially winning each round but also possibly causing the death of their entire team.



A LONG ROAD

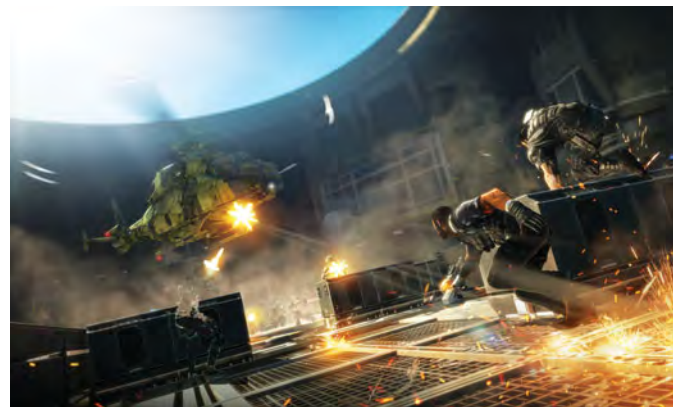
It might seem that *Fuse* has appeared out of nowhere, but the title has already been in development for a few years at Insomniac, albeit originally under the name *Overstrike*. During development, the team found that their game, which was originally inspired by *Mission Impossible*, was turning out to be a little too much like "Mission Impossible: The Game", and so decided to re-evaluate the design and see what could be developed to give it a unique spin.

"We looked at this alien substance that was really just part of the story," *Fuse's* creative director Brian Allgeier told us, "but the more we started thinking about this substance that can mix with natural materials to create devastating results, we got really excited about how this could work for our weapons. The focus of the game became more and more about *Fuse*, and we thought we've got to just call the game 'Fuse'."



While much of *Fuse's* story and gameplay lies in the realm of science-fiction, there are plenty of ordinary weapons for your team to use.

Shotguns, assault rifles, miniguns and SMGs are available, and many of them are customisable through the Fuse Points skill upgrade system.



with its combination of *Fuse* and melanite. Jacob Kimble, former LAPD detective with a mean streak when it comes to dealing with lawbreakers, is fond of hanging back and dealing damage, so the Arcshot crossbow, which melts enemies with its combination of *Fuse* and liquid mercury, is perfect for him. Finally, assassin Naya Deveraux picks up the Warp Rifle, which unleashes miniature black holes right about where her targets' head ought to be, giving her fantastic splash damage against clustered opponents.

Fuse borrows a few tricks from the RPG genre: players can customise each character as they gain Fuse Points during the main campaign and horde-like Echelon Mode, unlocking new activated abilities or passive bonuses to character survivability and weapon use (both ordinary and *Fuse*-powered). These lend the game a familiarity for anyone who's played an RPG, as each character follows a recognisable archetype. There's even a healer of the group: Izzy can gain access to deployable Med Beacons which accelerate healing for anyone standing nearby. And fans of stealthy characters will find comfort in

control of Naya, who can unlock a cloaking ability that lets her sneak up on and instantly take down unaware opponents. But, beyond a few bits of role-playing, *Fuse* is an action game; there are no dice rolls or dialogue trees, and players are expected to keep up with the pace of the game when in combat. Only when things die down (usually after you've made them die), is it time to unlock skills and take a breather before your next engagement.

With four unique playable characters, *Fuse* is perfectly suited for co-op play, and that's exactly where the design is focused. Up to four players can control the squad at a time, with AI bots taking control where there are insufficient human players. But those players aren't stuck to a single character; with a feature called Leap, they can swap between available characters to gain access to the squad's full arsenal. This means that the purely single-player experience is an open one, and, even if you can only muster a single human sidekick, the two of you can change freely between all four characters, making use of their unique skills as necessary. **NAG**
- GeometriX



REVIEWS INTRO

Walk backwards into any crowd. The first nine people you bump into will do a better job than this lot. Meet your reviewers.

What are you most excited about in 2013 – anything really.



RedTide

Star Trek: Into Darkness. End of story.



Miktar

Y'know, I can't really think of anything. Sure, there are some good games, movies, music and other things on the horizon, but nothing really stands out.



Azimuth

It's 2013?! THIS TIME MACHINE I ORDERED ON EBAY DOESN'T WORK.



Mikit0707

I'm excited for the reveal of the next PlayStation and Xbox. I need new hardware in my life. It's got to be this year, right? RIGHT?



GeometriX

This year's rAge. I have some special plans *rubs hands*



Barkskin

All the Kickstarter games we backed last year.

MINIREVIEWS

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

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2013

Do we really need a new instalment of a game franchise every year? And that goes double for games that have just enjoyed very good releases.

In truth, there are very few franchises that move ahead in leaps and bounds when on a yearly release schedule. Most of these games move forward in more subtle stages. That said, the latest version of *Football Manager* is well worth the effort, even if you did buy the previous release.

The SEGA series certainly has sewn up the sports management genre for some time now, but this latest edition takes things quite a few steps further. While the changes aren't necessarily immediately apparent, there is an overall feel that things are just more real in *Football Manager 2013*. And yet the developers managed to reintroduce lightness to the game that keeps it engaging and fun – it's not all spreadsheets and meetings. Well, not entirely.

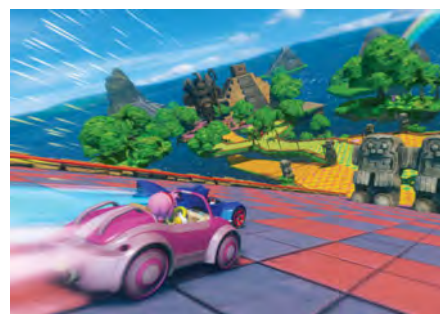
85

SONIC & SEGA ALL-STARS RACING TRANSFORMED

Let's be honest; kart games are all starting to look the same. In truth, they pretty much always have. In an attempt to freshen the genre, *Sonic and SEGA All-Stars Racing Transformed* tries to add a new aspect to the concept by introducing transforming vehicles. Because of this, the action takes place not only on road tracks, but also on water and in the air. And it does so in every track in the game.

Aside from the transforming vehicles, though, the game does little more than present the player with a kart racing game, much like any other. There are power-ups, a cast of zany characters and off-the-wall tracks to race on. Graphically pretty and possessed of tons of fun and challenge, this one is good for fans of the genre. But the genre itself is far too full and over-exploited, making it difficult to stand out among the ever growing crowd.

72



“What was I supposed to be doing? Just going around, picking up guys? Was there an objective?”

- RedTide



Shryke

New console announcements... Just so we know what the next Xbox will be called and can move away from this “720” thing...



SAVAGE

All the great movies coming out this year.



ShockG

High resolution LCD panels coming into the mass market. Most vendors have shown 2560x1440 panels and higher resolutions. Which will make their way to desktop LCDs at affordable prices.

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...

Luma Arcade

WWW.LUMAARCADE.COM

You might recognise Luma Arcade as the group that released a Mini Cooper racing title in 2007 by the name of *Mini #37*. The studio has come a long way since then by working with a range of tools and publishers for a variety of platforms, and all of that experience and expertise eventually lead them to the release of *Bladeslinger* in December last year. Billed as a horror action game, *Bladeslinger* combines fluid gameplay with the most stunning visuals you'll find on a mobile game made anywhere in the world. And how this incredible game has been put together is even more interesting.

Forced to heavily downsize in early 2012, the team at Luma made a number of tough decisions to ensure the sustainability of the company, including making the switch to working remotely. Four days out of the week, Luma's remaining seven programmers and artists work from home,



collaborating online using Skype, Google Documents and a code-sharing service called Git. Then on Mondays, the team meets up at the studio's head office in Bryanston where they play the latest builds and discuss the next week's tasks.

Luma is clearly a studio that has a passion for delivering high-quality games and a sense of place in the massively competitive mobile development market. So what does the future hold? As well as



working on porting across *Bladeslinger* to Android, they're currently busy with an HD remake of *The Harvest* for Windows 8, iOS and Android. After that, the next episode of *Bladeslinger* seems likely, and from there on out it's anyone's guess.

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.

Far Cry 3



So many activities!

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Far Cry 3 is a game that wants you to have fun. Do you remember that concept? It seems to have fallen away from this genre, lost somewhere between hyper-realistic future weapon design, anti-terrorist organisations and saving the world because the idea of patriotism suggests that's what everyone wants to do. Far Cry 3's scope is localised, its gameplay goals less lofty and more selfish: give the player a toybox filled with fun little goodies to be tipped onto the floor and played with for 20 hours.

This toy box's content is scattered across the game's fictional Rook Islands – two of which are dedicated to the main campaign. From the mood-setting intro you're identified as Jason Brody – yuppie adventurer – who finds his extreme sports holiday with a few friends and family members brought to an abrupt end when they were captured by Vaas –pirate psychopath. As it turns out, Brody and his mates have chosen a less than ideal tropical paradise on which to goof around; Vaas and his men have enslaved the islands, locked them down and established camps throughout to keep the locals in check, and killed any who stood in their way. Not to spoil the story too much: Brody soon escapes custody but finds that his friends are still trapped, leaving it up to him to rescue them. He's forced to develop throughout the game, get over his city boy complexes and learn the skills needed to be a real thorn in the side of Vaas and the operation that's being run on the islands.

How that growth is handled sets the tone for all design decisions made during the development of Far Cry 3. It's clear that Ubisoft had in mind a powerful story, believable personal maturation and rich character interactions, but didn't want the player to spend too much time dicking around with the technicalities needed to portray these facets. The result is

DETAILS

Platforms

360 / PC / PS3

Genre

First-person shooter

Age restriction

18

Multiplayer

Local

None

Online

18 players

Developer

Ubisoft

Website

far-cry.ubi.com

Publisher

Ubisoft

Distributor

Megarom



1 There's a brutal physicality to the game that has the first-person camera swooping, snapping and jarring with impacts and motion as Brody moves both in and out of combat. It's a powerful way to root the player into the game world, and has even been known to be the cause of simulation sickness for a few people.

2 You'll find a number of vehicles just hanging around, waiting for you to hop in and go for a joy ride; just be sure to capture a nearby radio tower if you want map coverage of the area.

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

With such a rich single player experience, you'd expect FC3's multiplayer offering to be a slapped-together, last-minute sort of thing, but it turns out that it's actually pretty entertaining in itself. Two modes are on offer (representing two of the other Rook Islands): competitive and co-operative.

The competitive modes are the usual affair: a variety of familiar game modes with a few innovations, persistent unlockable weapons and customisable loadouts. It's a solid, if unimaginative

offering, but it's perfectly acceptable. We do look forward to trying out the torrent of user-made maps that will hit the scene thanks to the return of the excellent map editor.

Co-operative mode is a little more than what one would expect. The six chapters (each about 30 minutes in length) tell their own story, one of four unlikely compatriots who find themselves on the island with revenge and greed in mind. The missions are unique and fun, with an arcade-like design reminiscent of *Left 4 Dead*.



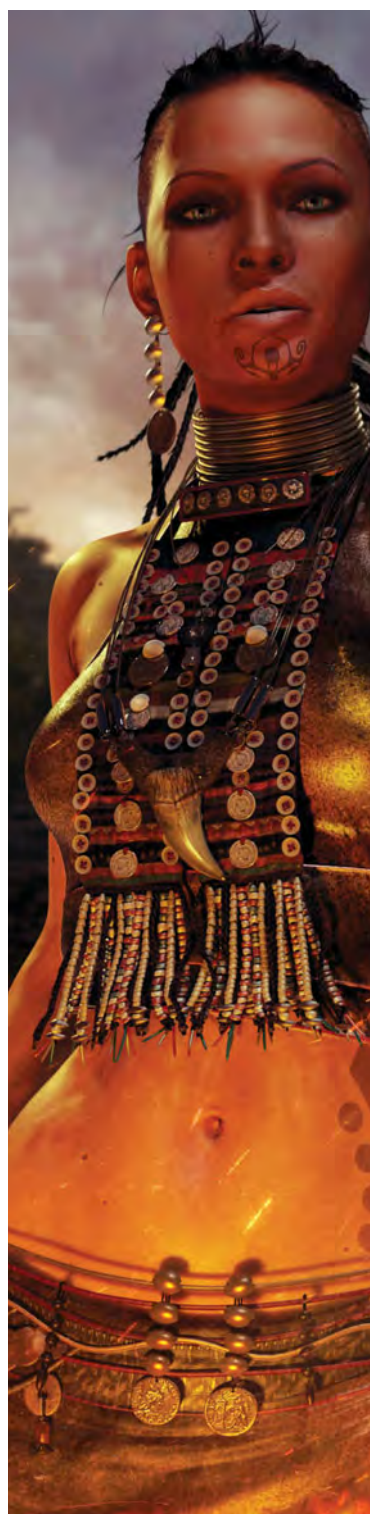
Far Cry 3 is a game that **wants you to have fun**. Do you remember that concept?

a brilliant compromise of established RPG mechanics and arcade-like FPS action that echoes throughout the entire game. Suspension of disbelief is required, but with a world as wonderful as this to explore you'll find yourself slipping in without much hesitation at all.

The north and south islands on which Brody's epic takes place are a vast, freely explorable tropical wonderland, filled with activities for you to partake in between missions. While there's an air of urgency surrounding Brody's rescue missions, finding his friends is no simple task. Brody will have to establish himself on the island, meet the right people and curry favour where necessary. This means getting to know *Far Cry 3's* "cast of insane characters" which the developers are so fond of saying. True to their word, the higher echelon of denizens on the Rook Islands are indeed bonkers – some of them in the "can I get a straight jacket here?" kind of way, and others are more subtle. This unstable mixture of genuinely believable supporting characters gives *Far Cry 3* a flavour which you'll be hard-pressed to find elsewhere. And all of them are expertly acted and animated, with the exception of a couple of lesser NPCs with only a handful of annoying and repetitive lines that they couldn't seem to get right.

The tasks with which you can occupy your time between missions are plentiful and almost all exciting. I won't list them all, because discovering them is as much of a joy as completing them (and that discovery plays a large part in what makes *FC3* so fulfilling), but in addition to hunting for ancient artefacts in forgotten tombs and skinning animals to expand your inventory, other activities include racing through the dense jungles, diving for lost relics, ambushing passing patrols and taking a leisurely flight in a hang-glider. The beauty of these tasks lies in their purpose: everything has one, whether it's for a simple cash prize, a new fast-travel location or to unlock exotic custom weapons for you to purchase, you'll never feel like you're doing these tasks to keep yourself entertained – there's





3 The familiar RPG mainstay of potions makes its way into *Far Cry 3*, in the form of syringes. Once he's learned the recipe, Brody can craft all manner of injections by harvesting local flora to give him temporary increased damage, boosted armour or heightened sense of predatorial instinct during animal hunts.

4 The series' famous fire propagation has returned, although it seems to have been toned down a touch to avoid those sorts of wildfires that consume entire cities. Still, it's a handy tool to flush out enemies from cover or coerce them into a neat little bundle within your RPG's iron sights.

SECOND OPINION

Psychedelic, trippy, bold and adventurous is what you'll take away from the *Far Cry 3* experience. It's bold and adventurous because it's trying something – a skew away from what we've been playing for the last X years. It's trippy because the whole environment, people, tattoo rituals and the odd hallucination all work towards making you feel out of place in what should be a familiar world. *Far Cry 3* is subtle in how it does things differently, for example, you collect cash (mostly from dead bodies) and at one point you're told that you cannot carry more money because your wallet is full – huh? To solve this you'll have to hunt the right animal from an impressive variety of wildlife on the island to craft a larger one. Of course if you're squeamish give it a miss as you'll need to skin animals to craft things – including tigers, dogs and sharks and it's pretty graphic. *Far Cry 3* is a linear shooter hidden in a sandbox game – you can go anywhere on the Rook islands but must always return to the objectives to move the story along. It's a worthwhile journey to take because the characters, story and how the world works is a fascinating thing to experience. This is a game you should play and it even includes the most fun level editor ever.

– RedTide

93

always a reward that you genuinely want. One such task which you'll find yourself practically forced to do to get anywhere on the islands without constant threat of being attacked is the liberation of enemy outposts. Unlike in *Far Cry 2*, when you've taken over an outpost it's yours for good; enemies will no longer spawn in or patrol the area (aside from a few attacks your NPC allies will encounter). While there is the guns-blazing approach available for those who think they have the necessary skills and armament, each outpost is almost puzzle-like in its design; players who have a keen eye and enough patience will find that stealth can almost always prevail, thanks to the (mostly) balanced AI. Don't be surprised if memories of *Jagged Alliance* or *Commandos* creep in during an assault, and remember to keep a couple of Molotov cocktails handy for when things go south.

But... there's always a but. For all the joy *Far Cry 3*'s sandbox experience brings, it falls a little flat when it comes to the main story missions. Not always: some of them are downright hallucinogenic in their design and execution – delightfully so – but for every mission that makes you sit back and laugh out loud, there's one that makes you scratch your head and double check that you didn't just launch *Call of Duty* by accident. Most of these missions, for all they're dressed up to be wacky and "out there" experiences, are painfully linear and starkly contrast the freedom you're given outside of the narrative. That's not to say that a linear experience can't tell a story (really, it's the best way to do so), but it's hard to shake the feeling that some of the missions were built hastily, or by another team, with little concern for how the fitted in from a gameplay point of view. **NAG**

- GeometriX

90 *Far Cry 3* is not a perfect game, nor is it madly innovative in any one area, but it is a definite step forward for first-person shooters. With its complex, adult themes and solid combat experience, there's simply no point going backwards after this. Every aspect of the genre has been improved upon, even if only slightly, but where it's happened you'll notice a distinct lack in any shallower titles that come from this point on.

PLUS

Large world filled with cool things / Interesting characters
Solid feeling movement and combat / Extensive character progression

MINUS

Linear story missions / Sometimes dodgy voice acting / Gets a little repetitive towards the end

Apacer

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DDR3-1866	PC3-15000	8GB/16GB Kit (8GB x 2)	512Mb x 8	1.5V	11-11-11-30
DDR3-1600	PC3-12800	4GB/8GB Kit (4GB x 2)	256Mb x 8	1.5V	9-9-9-27
DDR3-1600	PC3-12800	8GB/16GB Kit (8GB x 2)	512Mb x 8	1.5V	10-10-10-28

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LEGO Lord of the Rings

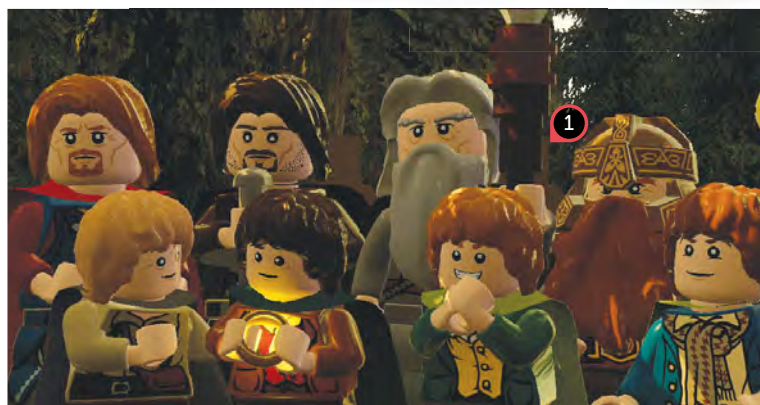
Rinse, repeat...

There is a disturbing tendency in the video game industry (*I feel it too, Ed*); we see it year after year as copy-and-paste shooters and annually-released sports titles hit the shelves in tidal waves of exploitation. Find a formula that works, and then flog it to absolute death with game upon game following the exact same principles. Traveller's Tales' LEGO games have hit that point. In fact, they may well have gone beyond it a little while ago.

In the early days, the formulas and ideas were fresh. When they started flagging, titles like *LEGO Harry Potter* and *LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean* managed to breathe a few fresh ideas into the mix. Even the second *LEGO Batman* game tried to expand on ideas with free-roaming and actual speech. But it truly feels like the LEGO games are past their prime, and that they need more than tweaks to progress.

LEGO Lord of the Rings is a fun game to play, don't get me wrong. It takes the player on a whirlwind tour through the three films (note, films) with pretty much every location of the movies presented as a playable area. There are even a few tongue-in-cheek references that hint at the fact that the developers thought some of the stuff left out of the films (when compared to the books) should have been left in.

The visuals are truly beautiful, too, with excellent lighting



1 They lie in wait, in the dark, on stairs and carpets... LEGO bricks waiting to murder your feet.

and special effects mingling with vast, beautifully recreated areas. Even the character animations have been given a bit of a spruce-up. But the pretty visuals and big playground just doesn't seem to be enough.

The biggest problem here is that the game really is more of the same. While fans of the LEGO idea will not balk at that too much, the setting for the game starts coming across as window dressing. We're doing the same tasks over and over again, just this time in Middle Earth. This lack of originality is underpinned by the fact that the fully voiced characters are basically using dialogue directly out of the movies, which diminishes the game's expected humour and charm.

It feels extremely disjointed at times, too, with characters that don't seem to fit in the beautiful landscapes. The LEGO element of the game – the crux of the game, really – feels alien.

With past successes being what they are, Traveller's Tales have obviously found that formula... and it appears that they're going to milk it for all it is worth. And fans of both the *LEGO* games and the *Lord of the Rings* movies will likely find a lot to enjoy in this particular title. But the formula is getting old – don't expect anything ground-breaking here. **NAG**
- Shryke

75

Fans of either franchise will enjoy it but while it is fun to play, there really isn't anything new here.

PLUS

Great visuals / Familiar dynamics

MINUS

Formula getting old / Feels disjointed at times

DETAILS

Platforms

360 / 3DS / DS
PC / PS3 / PSV

Genre

Adventure

Age restriction

3

Multiplayer

Local

2 players

Online

None

Developer

TT Games

Website

thelordoftherings.lego.com

Publisher

Warner Bros.

Distributor

Ster Kinekor

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



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F1 Race Stars

Formula one karting in last place

F1 racing is all about prestige, speed and millions of lovely money – you can also add expensive yachts, royalty and girls in bikinis to the list. Karting games are silly, fun and cute and use high-grade adorable charm to hide the fact that they're not really proper racing games at all and shouldn't be taken seriously. So how exactly have the developers over at Codemasters (who seem to be milking their F1 licence a little here) blended these disparate concepts into one gaming experience? The answer is cute (but very well done) caricatures of the drivers in the current F1 teams and tracks from the existing F1 global circuit. Each track blends important landmarks and features from the country it comes from. For example, in Abu Dhabi, you'll race past, through and over construction sites, skyscrapers as well as a stint through the desert. The graphical styling is plastic meets candy with bright colours and exaggerated features – much like the drivers. Two F1 concepts have been added in the form of pit stops and KERS. The three levels of KERS can be filled up by pumping the right trigger button while driving over special sections of track. After the KERS section ends your car will zoom ahead based on the amount of KERS you, err, pumped. Pit stops are self-explanatory and required visiting when your car shows signs of wear and tear (smoke, sparks and poor performance). The meat and



1 If drivers' heads stuck out like this in real F1, any crash would be a fatal event every time.



potatoes of karting games are the power-ups and *F1 Race Stars* has little more than a basic selection. Some interfere with other players while others give you an advantage. The power-ups include delay bubbles and coloured confetti that blocks your vision – lame and tame for the most part. The only F1 idea used is the safety car – activating this will slow down the race pace to allow drivers at the back to catch up.

It all sounds great on paper but the lack of variety is a disappointing problem that drags the experience down. The different teams all look the part but offer no real differences other than what power-up can be used. The tracks are pretty to look at and some feature interesting racing dynamics but are ultimately overly long with only two places you can pit. This is annoying if you take damage right after a pit and must putter around the track – falling behind. The cars have no drifting ability so trips around corners are hard work instead of fun and there's an overall lack of speed to the game – somewhat at odds with the licence it's based on. There isn't much else to do other than race and repeat and all the career stuff feels tacky. The biggest issue is balancing. You can be running in first place the whole race and then suddenly you're in fifth thanks to an unlucky incident. This is expected in kart games but in *F1 Race Stars* it just feels like it's all about luck and skill is shown the blue flag. **NAG**

- RedTide

58

An odd choice for an F1 licence and instead of doing something really smart, the developer decided that boring and safe was the way to go. Only get this if you're a karting or F1 nut.

PLUS

Cute representation of the F1 teams / Decent F1 additions to the genre

MINUS

Luck rules over skill / Dull for the long run / Boring power-ups

DETAILS

Platforms

360 / PC / PS3

Genre

Racing

Age restriction

3

Multiplayer

Local

4 players

Online

12 players

Developer

Codemasters

Website

www.f1racestars.com

Publisher

Codemasters

Distributor

Megarom

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Family Guy: Back to the Multiverse



Screw this; I'm out

Let me begin this review with full disclosure: I'm pretty much over *Family Guy*. It was a fantastic show for its first few years, filled with offbeat and coy humour wrapped up in slapstick. Then it waned and became boring and stupid. This brings us to the present, with a game based on the series as it currently stands – and this is every bit a game that represents the series on which it's based because it too is boring and stupid.

Just as the gags on *Family Guy* are recyclable and disjointed, so is the progression in *Back to the Multiverse*. To say that this game is lacking in narrative would be an insult to the word – levels are presented to the player in a seemingly random fashion with no attempt to string them together in a coherent manner. This would be okay if the gameplay was at least as good as that of the *Simpsons* game (hardly a shining beacon, but a fair comparison), but it isn't. Instead, it requires players to shoot near-endless waves of enemies common to whichever stupid parallel universe you find yourself in, all of whom are mostly the same as those you killed in the previous level but with a different character model. There are a few side-quests for you to do and lots of little things to pick up along the way that unlock new weapons or items, but all that does is give you more reason to hate yourself for spending extra time with this game. **NAG**

- GeometriX



30 *Back to the Multiverse* checks all the boxes that permit it to be legally classified as a video game but makes no effort to do anything of interest. Fans of the series, people who have ever played another game before or anyone who has anything remotely more interesting to do will find no entertainment value here.

PLUS

Original voice actors / It sometimes looks okay

MINUS

Dull and repetitive gameplay / Pointless story / Poor use of already weak source material

DETAILS

Platforms

360 / PS3

Genre

Third-person shooter

Age restriction
16

Multiplayer

Local

4 players

Online

None

Developer

Heavy Iron Studios

Website

www.activision.com

Publisher

Activision

Distributor

Megarom



The Sims 3: Seasons

Hot and cold

And the *Sims 3* phenomenon just keeps rolling on. With the release of *Sims 3: Supernatural*, many fans were left with a somewhat sour taste in their mouths. But the newest expansion, *Seasons*, makes up for it in many ways.

Unlike numerous previous expansions, this one doesn't add a new concept to the game in the form of a new section. Instead, this pack brings a rather important change to what already exists. And, as the name implies, that change is a seasonal cycle. But it brings with it more than prettily modified visuals...

Small elements like seasonal holidays and added activities actually make *Seasons* an expansion that helps with maintaining relationships within the game. Families and friends have many more socialisation opportunities, which helps make that whole affair a little simpler.

There is also an added dimension of management due to the effects that extreme weather can have on Sims. Spontaneous combustion on a hot day is very possible, so players need to watch their Sims a little more closely at times.

And, a bit of a cherry on top, the expansion allows the player to quickly and effectively set various options, like the length of seasons. Overall, a great expansion... and it brings alien Sims into the mix as well. But don't expect new careers or items... there simply aren't any here. **NAG**

- Shryke



80

A solid new expansion for *The Sims 3*, *Seasons* adds a whole bunch of weather and associated effects and activities.

PLUS

Lots of new activities / Customisable

MINUS

No new careers / Not many new items

DETAILS

Platforms

PC

Genre

Life simulator

Age restriction

12

Multiplayer

Local

None

Online

None

Developer

Sims Studio

Website

www.thesims.com

Publisher

Electronic Arts

Distributor

EA South Africa

Code of Princess

Strong independent woman looking for thief, necromancer, cat and warrior-nun.

There is a good-natured honesty to *Code of Princess*. The story is an exact brand of goofy light-hearted silliness, no more involved than any '80s cartoon. The characters are affectionate parodies of themselves, right down to the lead character (the good-natured "Princess Solange Blanchefleur de Lux") apologizing to enemies while beating the crap out of them. Along the way she meets new friends (who become playable in their own version of the main campaign), and team up to stop Some Great Evil from doing what Great Evil tends to do.

Code of Princess is a spiritual successor to *Guardian Heroes* (1996), the critically acclaimed cult-classic by Treasure. The original director, character designer and lead programmer for *Guardian Heroes*, all worked on *Code of Princess*. As such, the gameplay is nearly identical: a side-scrolling beat-em up like *Double Dragon* or *Streets of Rage*, but you're constrained to one of three "rails". You can hop between the background, middle, and foreground rails easily, and must learn to manage enemies along them. Combat is nuanced, with special moves, an RPG-like levelling system, and various systems to master if you want to deal massive damage.

The story isn't very long, and lacks the multiple branching paths from *Guardian Heroes*, but there are bonus missions. Online play allows for both versus and co-op, which is always a welcome touch. **NAG**

- Miktar

DETAILS

Platforms

3DS

Genre

Action role-playing game / hack and slash

Age restriction

12

Multiplayer

Local

4 players

Online

4 players

Developer

Agatsuma Entertainment

Website

www.atlus.com/codeofprincess

Publisher

Atlus

Distributor

Nintendo eShop



71

As a spiritual successor to *Guardian Heroes* (one of the best Saturn games of all time), *Code of Princess* has a lot to live up to. It manages for the most part, aping the style, humour and combat of *Guardian Heroes* with some aplomb. The style of game still remains a very acquired taste, though.

PLUS

Lots of characters / Comedic storyline / Online play

MINUS

Some slowdown during large fights / Very short campaign



DVR-FHD600



DVR-FHD590



DVR-HD550



DVR-530

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Hotline Miami



EDITOR'S CHOICE

A cocktail of orgiastic violence and '80s hot-pink tension-ratcheting style

Blood splashes everywhere, bits of brain go flying, and those that aren't instantly killed by your weapon can be strangled to death. *Hotline Miami* is this generation's *Postal*, but without the tongue-in-cheek preface, and even more indefensible in terms of its content. But that's the point, really. Oddly reminiscent of *Dreamweb* (1994), if only for its top-down perspective and dark violence, *Hotline Miami* is a moment-to-moment heart-pounding pixel-perfect murder simulator.

A strange phone call with instructions in code sends you to a location: a house, a club, an apartment building. You choose which mask to wear (each one with special attributes), and try to kill everyone inside. Every shot is deadly, for both you and the mobster-types you decimate. Death is instant, often so fast only the "PRESS R TO RESTART" giving you a clue that you're dead. Controls are simple: left click to attack (punch, shoot and stab), contextual to what weapon you have in your hands. Right click to pick up what's on the floor or to throw what you're carrying.

The more creative you are in your spree, the higher the grade and score at the end of a mission. Score unlocks new masks and new weapons that may drop from enemies (kind of like *Super Crate Box*). But why are you killing, and who is on the other end of the phone call? **NAG**

- Miktar



90 This is exactly the kind of game you never want your parents to see. The driving '80s electro-pop grunge soundtrack combined with LSD-tinted, neon-lasered, glitch-static infested, screen-wobbling retro visuals, only serves to further accent the game's nasty grindhouse ultra-violence. It's glorious, rough, and terrifyingly creative with its brutality.

PLUS

Heart-pounding super-intensity / Bitchin' soundtrack / Lots of secrets to uncover

MINUS

Might give you a heart-attack / Or a brain aneurysm / Probably carpal tunnel syndrome

Paper Mario: Sticker Star

Paper Mario goes portable with some new ideas

For only the second time in the *Paper Mario* series, Bowser gets to be the main villain.

He stomps in and steals a magical sticker of untold power, causing all sorts of trouble across the Mushroom Kingdom. In a universe where everything is made of paper and cardboard, it makes sense that stickers would be top-tier, right? When Mario wakes up after getting his clock cleaned by a super-charged Bowser, Princess Peach is missing, assumed kidnapped. And so, once again, *here we go!*

Traditionally, not counting *Super Paper Mario*, the series is more of a conventional RPG. *Sticker Star* tries something new, dropping the standard "levelling up" and "putting points into stats" thing and replacing it with one big system: stickers. Intelligent Systems, known for their excellent *Fire Emblem* series, were clearly thinking about how to solve a big problem with the previous games: that lazy grinding could break the difficulty curve. Now, your attack choices during battle are entirely determined by the stickers you bring with you, their size a factor since inventory space is limited. It's reminiscent of the Junction System in *FFVIII*, where every spell you cast costs you stats. Experience points and magic points are basically replaced by coins, used to buy more, or stronger stickers.

It's a fun adventure, as we've come to expect from the series, and conveniently portable. **NAG**

- Miktar

DETAILS

Platforms

3DS

Genre

Role-playing game

Age restriction

3

Multiplayer

Local

None

Online

None

Developer

Intelligent

Systems

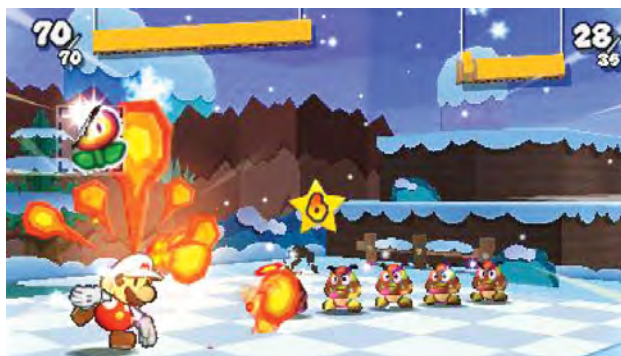
Website

papermario.
nintendo.com

Publisher

Nintendo

Distributor

Core Gaming
Systems

78 *Sticker Star* tries a lot of new things with how the series approaches combat, exploration and puzzles. As a result, it feels more like a side-story or spin-off, much like how *Super Paper Mario* was. The experience is excellent, but not what fans of the series may have come to expect.

PLUS

Lots of wry humour / Lovely papercraft art style / Fresh jazz-like soundtrack

MINUS

Kind of easy / It's no *Paper Mario: Thousand-Year Door* / No partners, sadly

CUTTING EDGE **REVIEWS** M.NAG.CO.ZA

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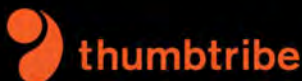
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Everything Else

Bits and bobs that can all be filed under gaming lifestyle

D-DAY DICE

Supplier: Wizard's
 Website: www.wizardwarehouse.co.za
 RRP: R495

It's not every day that a tabletop wargame focuses on co-operative play, and it's certainly not common for a dice-based wargame to actually make sense after one read-through of the rule book, but D-Day manages to do both of those and it's for that reason we're pretty happy with it.

D-Day can be played solo or with three other friends, and the rulebook contains a number of options for expanding or changing the game rules. Eight playable scenarios are included in this core box – more than enough to keep you going for a few solid play sessions, and you could even run two two-player games at the same time out of one box.



FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST BROTHERHOOD: THE COMPLETE SERIES

Supplier: AWX
 Website: www.awx.co.za
 RRP: R995

If you're on the hunt for a ton of anime, this should be your first stop. *Brotherhood* is similar to the original series, and in fact has a number of identical scenes, but more closely follows the original manga on which *Fullmetal Alchemist* is based. As such, it's a "definitive" version of the show, and might seem a little too familiar for anyone who's already invested time in *FMA*, but there are those people who actually prefer *FMA*'s more succinct telling of the story.

However you fit in, the 64 episodes contained within this box are sure to keep you busy for some time while you figure out which you prefer.



STAR TREK CATAN

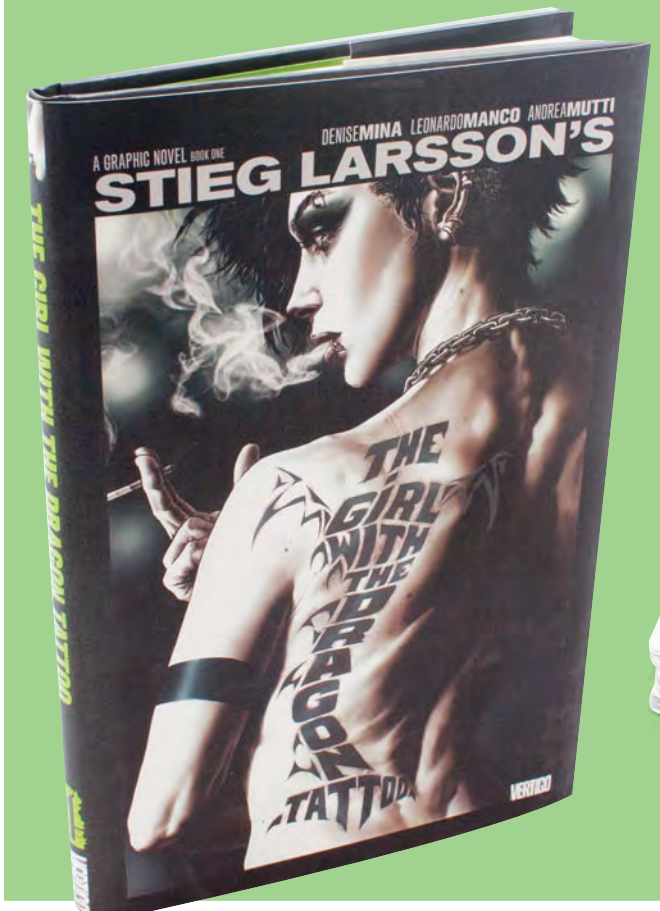
Supplier: Wizard's
 Website: www.wizardwarehouse.co.za
 RRP: R595

Catan has long been the go-to game for those obsessed with advanced strategic board games, and what better way to bring in new hordes of addicted players than by slapping Star Trek branding on everything? *Star Trek Catan* is about what you'd expect: the same game with redone imagery and a space-y twist.

THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO VOL. 01 (HC)

Supplier: AWX
 Website: www.awx.co.za
 RRP: R245

With the popularity this series of books has generated over the last couple of years, it was only a matter of time before it made its way into graphic novels. Thankfully, this hard cover book, which represents the first half of the first book (the format will continue in this fashion until the series is complete), is an expert representation of the original. Sombre, edgy, beautifully illustrated and coloured; this is one of those graphic novels you'll read over and over again, soaking up pieces of artwork or dialogue that you didn't notice before. Get it.



AEROPLANES: AVIATION ASCENDANT

Supplier: Wizard's
 Website: www.wizardwarehouse.co.za
 RRP: R550

In a culture where invading goblins and space marines battling aliens is considered normal we have an unlikely setting for a board game – the dawn of commercial aviation (1919-1939). In the box is a game board, press out cardboard tiles, cards and dice. The fact that the player tokens are just blocks of coloured wood instead of little model airplanes is a missed opportunity.

The game is fun and easy to understand but randomness can hurt it by giving lucky players a too big advantage in the beginning. If this topic is something you're passionate about, or if you have a keen interest in aviation, then give it a look.



ZOMBIE FLUXX

Supplier: Wizard's
 Website: www.wizardwarehouse.co.za
 RRP: R195

Fluxx is fairly old, and this zombified edition is hardly a spring chicken, but when it looked like this issue of NAG was going to print without any mention of the brain-munching undead, we knew what we had to do.

If you're new to Fluxx, it doesn't matter: the game rules are generated as you play. This card game can be as simple or as complicated as you and your fellow players want, which makes it a great way to size up new friends, and maybe make a few new enemies while you're at it.



TRIGUN: BADLANDS RUMBLE

Supplier: AWX
 Website: www.awx.co.za
 RRP: R230

First released a full twelve years after the *Trigun* anime first ran, *Badlands Rumble* is a full-length (or more, rather; at 288 minutes there's plenty to watch) feature film about everyone's favourite blonde, spiky-haired space cowboy in a red coat.

Madhouse, the animation studio behind the anime, is behind this film so expect the same level of quality, and you'll be treated to 5.1 DTS audio in both English and Japanese, with subtitles for those who aren't keen on dubs.



TECH NEWS

KNOW YOUR TECHNOLOGY

AUDIO SIGNAL SENSITIVITY

A measure of how effectively an earpiece converts an incoming signal into an audible sound. So in essence it's how loud any set of headphones will be for a given electrical drive level. It is measured in decibels (sound pressure) level per milliwatt or dB/mW. Headphones are typically between 80 and 125dB/mW

IMPEDANCE

Headphones come in low or high impedance forms. Most high-end or professional headphones are about 100-600ohms and typically need a headphone amplifier to drive them. Regular headphones are between 16 and 32 ohms and are ideally suited for being used for portable players such as CD and MP3 players. High impedance headphones are typically high voltage, low current units, while the inverse is true for the low impedance units.

HEADPHONE TRANSDUCERS

There are mainly two types of transducers used today with headphones. The cheaper electret drivers and the more expensive moving-coil drivers or more commonly referred to as a dynamic driver. The moving coil driver works by setting up a static magnetic field with ferrite or neodymium. The diaphragm is attached to a coil which is placed within the static magnetic field. The diaphragm is actuated by the voice coil as varying current of an audio signal passes through the coil, reacting against the static magnetic field in turn. This then results in what you hear as audio through the headset

NOISE-CANCELLING HEADPHONES

These are headphones that reduce unwanted ambient sounds (noise) by means of active noise control. This involves one or more microphones placed near the ear and electric circuitry which uses the microphone signal to generate an anti-noise signal, (inverse wave form of the incoming signal). This causes destructive interference, cancelling out the ambient noise as heard within the headphones.

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DID YOU KNOW?

The ROCCAT Power-Grid app will soon be available for free download in the App Store. In a nutshell, it turns your smartphone into a fully customisable remote control for your PC. You basically set up different grids to control, for example custom settings for Windows, Skype, Media Player or games. The app provides pre-set grids for several games, e.g. *StarCraft II*, *Skyrim* and *League of Legends*, but it also lets you set up your own grids that fit your individual needs.
<http://power-grid.roccat.org/>

WESTERN DIGITAL MY NET N900 CENTRAL

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www.westerndigital.co.za | R4,199

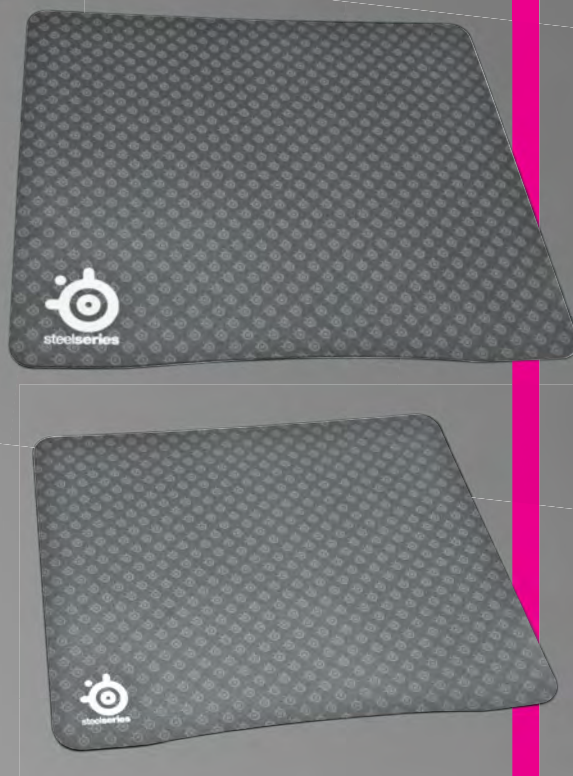


Mosh Pit

STEELSERIES PRO GAMING 4HD & 9HD MOUSEPADS

Made from a specially engineered hard plastic compound, these mousepads have been researched and developed in parallel with the SteelSeries Xia Laser mouse, and are available in two sizes depending on your preference.

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“Project SHIELD was created by NVIDIA engineers who love to game and imagined a new way to play. We were inspired by a vision that the rise of mobile and cloud technologies will free us from our boxes, letting us game anywhere, on any screen. We imagined a device that would do for games what the iPod and Kindle have done for music and books, letting us play in a cool new way. We hope other gamers love SHIELD as much as we do.”

Jen-Hsun Huang, co-founder and chief executive officer at NVIDIA

#2

BY THE NUMBERS

Production for all Sony PlayStation 2 gaming consoles worldwide has officially ended. In its 12-year lifespan, the PS2 sold 150 million units, making it the most successful home game machine of all time.

DREAMMACHINE

It's been a big month for our Dream Machine with four new pieces of hardware. The most prominent change is actually rather minute, with our Intel build seeing the Core i7 3970X take the throne over its (only slightly inferior) predecessor. And to cool that monstrous CPU we've put on the Corsair H100i water-cooling system, another only slightly improved iteration in its field. But the largest jump comes in the form of the Razer Ouroboros mouse and Ironclad mouse mat. This combination has proved to be the best gaming mouse experience we've ever had, and the Roccat Kone was getting a bit long in the tooth anyway.



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



Corsair Hydro Series H100i
R1,499 / www.corsair.com



Razer Ouroboros mouse
R1,399 / www.corex.co.za
Razer Ironclad mouse mat
R599 / www.corex.co.za



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

A new hope

As usual, the beginning of a new year ushers with it new hopes for refinements, improvements and such things in the tech world. Be it CES, Cebit, Computex or any other major tradeshow, they all hold promise but inevitably end up underwhelming.

Perhaps it's not the hardware and new gadgets as such that are underwhelming but the lack of innovation when it comes to new usage scenarios. In a world that is clamoring for convergence primarily for economic reasons, there seems to be a lot of divergence in services and platforms. I've previously spoken about this but it's become even more apparent in the last year or two.

We simply have too many compute capable platforms, with services that do not extend across enough of them to make a cohesive and seamless user experience possible. Windows 8, for example, is Microsoft recognizing this fragmentation and attempting to cross whatever divides there may be in their various services and ecosystems. A noble attempt indeed but one with flawed execution for the most part. I don't have the space to go into it here, but within Microsoft's individual services there are massive disconnects and there is no coherency between several services they provide. Collating all of these under a common interface will not fix the underlying problem but merely exacerbate an already painful user experience.

The attempt at making a single interface for all their platforms while noble, does not translate well in practice. Obviously this is subjective as I'm very partial to the older Windows 7 or rather "legacy" interface. However, I do feel that the attempt at simplifying the user experience has, for people like me, caused frustration without delivering anything in return. The low price of the operating system isn't appealing as that has never been the issue. An operating system is something that should essentially be transparent to the user experience, but I have found Windows 8 to be anything but transparent to me.

I use Microsoft's latest operating system as an example because it has impressed the fragmentation I speak of in the most articulate manner thus far. The attempt at making a seamless interface between their mobile products right up to their console and desktop platforms isn't shaping up as well as one may have hoped. On paper it sounds great, but as soon as you realize the various limitations of each platform and how we interact with said platforms, it all falls apart at the seams.

Take for instance a title on Games for Windows LIVE; it should, if available on the Xbox 360, be in my library of games that I can play on either the console or the PC. The convergence or the immergence of a common interface within the Microsoft family needs to be underpinned by the elimination of redundancy. There's absolutely no reason for me to have to pay for two copies of an identical game if they are both under the Microsoft Game Studios banner. As the most powerful platform there is, your PC should be able to play the games on your Xbox and on your Windows Phone should you so choose to. I do understand PC exclusives may prove difficult, but one-way compatibility is significantly better than no compatibility at all.

If the account, achievements and store are accessible from any Microsoft platform, why then are the titles not available as well in the same manner? Simply having a common interface serves no purpose because you're essentially diluting specialized interfaces to one that isn't particularly suited to any platform and hoping that this façade will somehow pass as a true integrated and seamless experience to the end user. Maybe a rethink of what is important and what seems to be important is needed.

- Neo Sibeko



NEW

Intel

Intel Core i7 3960X
R11,799 / 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:

R62,182

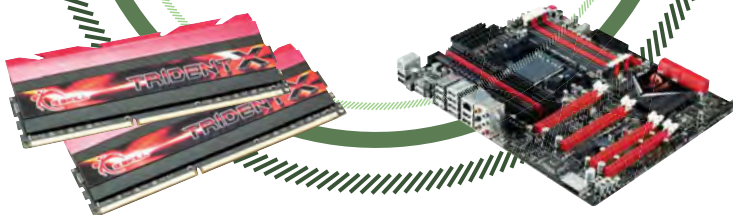


AMD

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:

R47,382



Cooler Master HAF XB

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

Vendors have previously attempted to make cases which function as test beds and LAN party cases. We've seen the Antec Skeleton before, a novel idea but one executed poorly. Since then, there have been very few, if any, cases that have attempted to tackle this usage scenario.

That is, until the HAF XB. This case is an attempt by Cooler Master to satisfy both needs as best as possible. Let's not forget though that most things that attempt to serve multiple functions end up serving neither very well, and with the HAF XB we find ourselves in a somewhat similar situation.

Before we get into that however, let's look at what does work with the XB. For one, it has the typical Cooler Master superior build quality. It's hard to imagine how Cooler Master can make such a quality case at such a price. It's the materials that are most impressive and the ease with which one can assemble and disassemble it without the manual. No sharp edges, high quality finishes and no gimmicky plastic parts. It's straightforward, but still manages to look great. Something that not many cube cases can pull off at all.

The unit features two docking bays in the front for both 3.5" and 2.5" inch drives, two USB 3.0 ports, the

normal power and rest buttons and 5.25" space for your optical drives or fan controllers. It's a small case but it has plenty of room for most LAN computers and test beds. The handles on the side are also a welcome addition, as moving the HAF XB would otherwise prove problematic, especially with all the components installed. Fortunately Cooler Master has thought about this and, despite its dimensions, the case is really easy to move around.

The panels come off with relative ease, and as a bonus the motherboard tray can be removed as well. This speaks more to the people who would use the HAF XB as a test bench, as that's really where this case sets itself apart from other offerings. It is also in this regard that we find that there is a missed opportunity here by Cooler Master. Most people who would have a test bench would likely be power users or enthusiasts. That is, these are the people who would use boards such as the ASUS Rampage IV Extreme, Maximus V Extreme, GIGABYTE Z77X-UP7 and such high-end boards. The problem is all of these are E-ATX in size. That means they cannot be used with the HAF XB. This is a massive oversight for sure because these boards are not going to get smaller

SPECS

Gross weight
8.2kg
Dimensions
442x330x423mm
Supported motherboard type
Micro-ATX/ATX/
Mini-ITX
Front panel
2x USB 3.0

PLUS

- Build quality
- Innovative
- Cooling capacity

MINUS

- No E-ATX support
- Could do with more USB ports

BOTTOM LINE

Innovative and well-designed case for LAN gamers and casual DIY enthusiasts.

going forward. Both vendors are likely to keep their dimensions with future iterations and future chipsets, so the appeal of this case as a test bed is instantly and significantly diminished. This automatically makes it an unviable option for those users who would use PSUs such as the Cooler Master M2 PRO 1500W for instance, as those are the same people who would likely buy such motherboards.

This was the only thing that prevented this case from scoring higher, as it's essentially a well-executed idea and thoroughly thought-out in every other aspect. Here's hoping that a future revision will be slightly deeper and allow such boards to be used, because if that were the case we can imagine enthusiast and LAN party-goers alike would flock to it as it would allow them to show off their expensive and high-end gear in one of the best looking cube cases money can buy.

If you're not bothered by any of these high-end boards and are looking for a pure LAN case, this may still be the one for you. Despite its one major shortcoming, the Cooler Master HAF XB is easily the best LAN / test bed chassis one can buy today. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

SteelSeries 6Gv2 gaming keyboard

Supplier Megarom Website www.steelseries.com RRP R999

As far as gaming keyboards go, the SteelSeries 6Gv2 is very minimalist. It's not got any backlighting or additional macro keys, and even its media controls are built into the first six F-keys, activated by using a dedicated SteelSeries modifier key that replaces the once-dreaded Windows key. Mechanical keyboards are generally a lot lighter on superfluous features than, say, Logitech's ever-impressive G19, and the 6Gv2 is possibly the lightest of the lot. Yet it remains an excellent contender for your cash.

It's a hefty keyboard (despite it taking up very little desk real estate), heavier than most but incredibly robust as the trade-off. It's powered by a single USB cable – but there's also a PS/2 adapter included, which should theoretically give you the best possible experience with the keyboard when used, because science. The Cherry MX Black key switches are the toughest of



the Cherry key switches (they'll apparently be good for up to 50 million keystrokes – you're welcome to put this to the test), and the typing experience they provide is excellent once you become accustomed to them. The travel distance of the keys is shortened as well, meaning that it registers key presses faster because you don't have to press them all the way down. There's also the obligatory anti-ghosting guarantee.

Beyond that, it's a pretty standard mechanical keyboard, albeit a very good one. Some might expect more from a gaming keyboard, and at its price of R999 I actually wish it had just a touch of added functionality or superfluous value-adds – but I also appreciate its minimalistic approach. All in all, it's a solid offering, quality in both build and functionality. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes

8

SPECS

Key switches
Cherry MX Black
mechanical
Anti-ghosting
Up to six keys via
USB
Inputs
USB or PS/2
Windows key
No

PLUS

- Sturdily built
- Awesome for gaming or typing

MINUS

- Mechanical keyboard = loud

BOTTOM LINE

If you're hunting for a mechanical keyboard, SteelSeries' 6Gv2 is worth considering.

Turtle Beach Ear Force PX5

Supplier Apex Website www.apexint.co.za RRP R2,699.95

In the crowded headset market, possibly the easiest way to instantly make someone take notice of your expensive audio powerhouse is to have it answer phone calls. And that's exactly what the Ear Force PX5 does. Another way to have people take instant notice of your headset is to make its audio quality worth every cent of its insanely high asking price – which, unfortunately, is where it falls a bit short.

Despite it being incredibly light for a wireless headset, the PX5 is of sturdy build, shipping with a transmitter/control box that doubles as a stand for when the set isn't in use. It's designed for use with PS3, but you're also free to use it with your PC or Xbox 360. The PX5 is comfortable to use and boasts thoughtful design in various respects (like the aforementioned steaming of calls – or music – to the headset via Bluetooth, which is an excellently inventive feature), but its audio performance is where



things unhinge.

While the clarity of the audio is outstanding, it lacks clout, producing a very flat experience that is largely unremarkable. Certain sounds like weapon effects occasionally sound muted, but toying with the range of different programmable, customisable presets – which let you do everything from amplifying in-game footsteps to boosting the treble and bass, depending on your preference

– lets you improve the result. Though not terrible by any means, the overall effect is acceptable, but is outclassed by similarly priced headsets like Creative Labs' Sound Blaster Recon3D Omega. It's a pity, because it boasts a range of unique features and the set's not bad at all – they simply can't justify the high asking price when the competition is so impressive. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes

8

SPECS

Frequency response
20Hz – 20kHz
Microphone frequency response
50Hz – 15 KHz
Driver units
50mm neodymium magnet
Wireless range
10 metres

PLUS

- Fantastic clarity
- Impressive range of functions
- Comfortable design

MINUS

- Too expensive
- Flat audio experience

BOTTOM LINE

The PX5 is a good cross-platform headset, but its all-round audio quality doesn't justify its daunting price tag.





SPECS
 Sensor
 8,200dpi dual 4G system
 Programmable buttons
 11
 Polling rate
 1,000Hz
 Maximum acceleration
 50 Gs
 Approximate battery life
 12 hours (gaming)



Razer Ouroboros mouse & Razer Ironclad mouse mat

Supplier Corex **Website** www.corex.co.za **RRP** R1,499 (mouse) R599 (mat)

For all the high-end gaming mice we've seen over the years, there are very few of them that actually make us sit up and take notice. For all intents and purposes, mouse technology progression has been gradual, barely noticeable even, but the Razer Ouroboros manages to buck that trend. And, when paired with the Ironclad mouse mat, that improvement is made even more noticeable.

The Ouroboros is not only feature-rich but manages to out-perform any other mouse we've used in the past. Motion in-game is impossibly smooth; you can feel the high-resolution dual sensors working away underneath this mouse to register every microscopic movement you make. Comfort is also excellent, with a height- and length-adjustable palm rest and side rests that can be changed depending on how you like to place your fingers. This level of comfort is made even

more impressive by the fact that the Ouroboros is an ambidextrous mouse, as it doesn't suffer from the typically edgy contours associated with this design. Our favourite feature – a nod to a design issue that's plagued ambidextrous mice since we can remember – is the ability to separately disable each pair of side triggers by flipping a lock switch on the underside of the mouse. Not that you'd be likely to accidentally press the side triggers; they're positioned as close to perfectly as possible.

Everything about this device speaks of quality and an understanding of what gamers want from a high-end mouse, and we're happy to see the return of Razer's wireless charging approach that lets you use the device in a wired mode (while charging the battery), or plop down the mouse onto the base station to let it charge when not in use. It does strike us as a bit odd, then, that Razer would insist that their Synapse software (which

PLUS

- Excellent performance
- Unparalleled ambidextrous comfort
- Customisable design

MINUS

- Synapse requires online activation
- Ironclad isn't perfectly flat

BOTTOM LINE

Without a doubt, this is the best mouse on the market right now, and the Ironclad mat just takes that improvement one step further.

is required to access anything more than the most basic functions of this mouse) require online activation and the registration of a user account. Gamers have enough online accounts already, Razer, stop giving us more to worry about.

Perhaps the most startling realisation we made during this review is how much of a difference the Ironclad mouse mat actually makes. It's not huge by any stretch of the imagination, but it's there – you'll notice the difference between a cheap vinyl mat, a flexible gaming mat and this rigid aluminium one. With a sandblasted surface it's super smooth, although we did notice a very slight dragging of the mouse near the edges of the mat, leading us to believe that it's not perfectly flat. And be sure that the pads on your mouse are kept clean: any muck will cause a horrible scratching sound on the mat. **NAG**

- Geoff Burrows

Antec KÜHLER H2O 920

Distributor Frontosa **Website** www.antec.com **RRP** R959

Antec's foray into these self-contained cooling solutions was a great one. The company started with the 620 then quickly followed up with the 920. This CPU cooler is actually old, but it was upgraded along its lifetime to fit socket 2011 platforms. Even after all this time, we find that it's still one of the best, if not the best, single radiator coolers money can buy.

We weren't sure how the performance would be when tested on a power hungry and hot Core i7 3970X CPU, but it handled it well, offering performance that was hot on the heels of the Corsair H100i. Granted it was louder, and at maximum performance the two are easy to set apart. It's at normal operating conditions where we felt and saw the 920 prove its design superiority to many other single radiator coolers.

Assembly is a little dated and it could do with some improvement, similar to what Corsair uses in the new range of coolers, but it's



still workable. The barrels at the bottom of the back plates are an issue, we feel, because they are metal while the plate is plastic. So should you over-tighten even just a little you may ruin the back plate permanently, making it unusable. This is easily the most annoying design flaw that we found on the Thermaltake Water PRO 2.0 as well.

Other than that, and the needlessly elaborate mounting mechanism, there was nothing

to fault the system on, and the performance was exceptional. We will have to compare this cooler to the H80i from Corsair to be sure which one is better, but right now, the 920, old as it may be, has been the best performing cooler we have tested to date. If you're not going to be constantly changing CPUs or motherboards, this is one of the best water cooling solutions you can buy. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

SPECS

Size
151x120x49 (mm radiator)
Compatibility
2011 / 1366 / 775
1156 / 1155 / AM2
AM3+

PLUS

- Software control
- Good performance
- Flexible tubing

MINUS

- Can be noisy
- Plastic backplate
- Needlessly complicated mounting

BOTTOM LINE

The Antec KÜHLER H2O 920 may not be new but it's still possibly the best single radiator AIO LCS you can buy.

8

PALIT GeForce GTX 680 Jetstream

Distributor TVR **Website** www.palit.biz **RRP** R6,839

Here's yet another GTX 680 for the high-end market. It's a modified reference card with a 6-phase PWM and one of the most impressive coolers we've seen on any graphics card to date. Physically it's very similar to the reference card, but the difference here is the cooler, which not only yields lower temperatures but is one fine looking card.

This isn't meant to be a card competing with the likes of the MSI N680GTX Lightning or the GIGABYTE GTX 680 Super Overclock. It's meant for more middle of the road OC editions which attempt to walk a fine line between complete custom designs and an accessible price.

This may not seem like it with a price tag above R6,200 but that is purely to do with our exchange rate as that price brings it far too close to the MSI N680GTX Lightning price. If you consider just how superior that product



is in all aspects to the Jetstream card, then you may want to skip this card, but if you can get it at say R5,499 or something along those lines then this is certainly worth the spend.

The 1,084MHz base clock is neither here nor there so that can't be an incentive to buy it as every single 680 on the market will make this clock speed. However, if you pair the very good cooling solution with the

resultant aesthetics, fairly quiet operation and above average performance, this card starts making some sense. You're not going to threaten anyone with overclocking word records, but it will play games better than most out there. As stated earlier, if you can find this for a more reasonable price, there's no reason why you shouldn't purchase it.

- Neo Sibeko

SPECS

Core
GK104 (28nm)
Processors
1,536
Render outputs
32
Memory
2,048MB GDDR5
6.2GHz
(198.4GB/sec)
API
DirectX 11.1
OpenGL 4.x
OpenCL 1.x
PhysX

PLUS

- Looks good
- Good cooling solution
- Above average performance

MINUS

- Nothing special electronically
- Price is too high for what you get
- Overclock is relatively minor

BOTTOM LINE

Another GTX 680 has been thrown into the market. It doesn't do enough to stand out, but it does more than enough to impress in games and benchmarks.

7

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: INTEL CORE I7 3930K

3DMark 11 physics	12,194 11,154
Wprime 1024	147.748 160.885
Cinebench 11.5	10.25 9.38
AIDA 64 CPU Queen	60,367 55,214
AIDA 64 FPU VP8	5,900 3,774



SPECS

Core
32nm Sandy Bridge-E
Frequency
3,500MHz
Cache
16.9MB total (15MB L3)
TDP
150W
Platform
LGA 2011 (X79)



DREAM MACHINE

Intel Core i7 3970X

Supplier Intel Website www.intel.com ERP R11,799

Intel's Haswell (the successor to Ivy Bridge) may be upon us, but SNB-E remains the platform of choice for power users. When we say power users, we mean those individuals who use heavily multi-threaded applications more often than not. This does not apply to gamers who want the greatest and best configuration. This is an important distinction because this CPU is aimed squarely at the former.

Since we've reviewed just about every single X79 desktop CPU on the market, there's no need to delve into the details here. Moreover, this CPU is identical to the 3960X. The only differences are the higher TDP and clock speeds. The Core i7 3970X takes the honours of the highest clocked (in Turbo state) Intel CPU to date at 4GHz.

Under normal circumstances this wouldn't mean anything, especially because we are dealing with an unlocked multiplier CPU. However, this small speed bump in nominal and turbo clock modes have largely negated the need to overclock the CPU at all. How ironic then, that the only unlocked SKU for this platform is the one that retails for the most amount of money and has the highest clock speed at the same time.

The 3970X may seem unnecessary at first but we must take the time to appreciate just what this SKU means for Intel. Besides what we suspect to be the offloading unsold 3960s, Intel is in a position to rebadge and sell those CPUs as the 3970X. This is easy enough to tell, given the higher TDP, which is roughly in line with the clock speed bump of 200MHz.

When we tested the 3970X it seemed to handle memory a little better than all the 3960X CPUs we had tested previously. Good news as 2,400MHz and even 2,600MHz was guaranteed; but then it dawned on us. The later 3960X CPUs were already capable of these speeds. So we may still believe that the 3970X is a better clocking CPU for memory, sadly we also suspect that this just may be identical silicon found in the latest 3960X.

Moreover, that the 3960X is unlocked and will reach this speed with no voltage adjustments at all further makes this CPU unappealing. It is in light of this that it scored only a 7. It's still a powerful CPU and one that any real power user would appreciate. As it replaces the current 3960X in the NAG Dream Machine, it results in a faster system. If you're one who has

PLUS

- Slightly better memory overclocking
- 4GHz Boost clock
- Multi-threaded application performance

MINUS

- Expensive
- Power draw
- No significant overclocking advancements over previous iterations.

BOTTOM LINE

The 3970X improves on an already fast CPU. This one is purely for the enthusiast and well heeled.

built a system around the 3960X, then there is very little incentive to upgrade to this CPU. In fact we would be hard pressed to recommend anyone who uses a 3930K CPU to upgrade to this one. Simply because the performance difference, easy to measure for sure, is negated by the fact that both the 3960X and the 3930K CPUs have unlocked multipliers which easily reach this performance level with zero financial investment.

Should you be building a new system though, and you had the 3960X in mind and were somehow opposed to the 3930K then you should forgo that CPU and spend your money on the 3970X. It's a very fast CPU and for number crunching remains peerless in applications that can take advantage of so many cores.

For overclockers I'm afraid this CPU has not proved to be any better than select 3930K alternatives which deliver performance just as impressive in both 3DMark Vantage and 3DMark 11. If it were up to us we'd recommend you wait for Ivy Bridge-E, as this architecture is dated and will be even more so in comparison to Haswell a couple of months from now.

NAG
- Neo Sibeko

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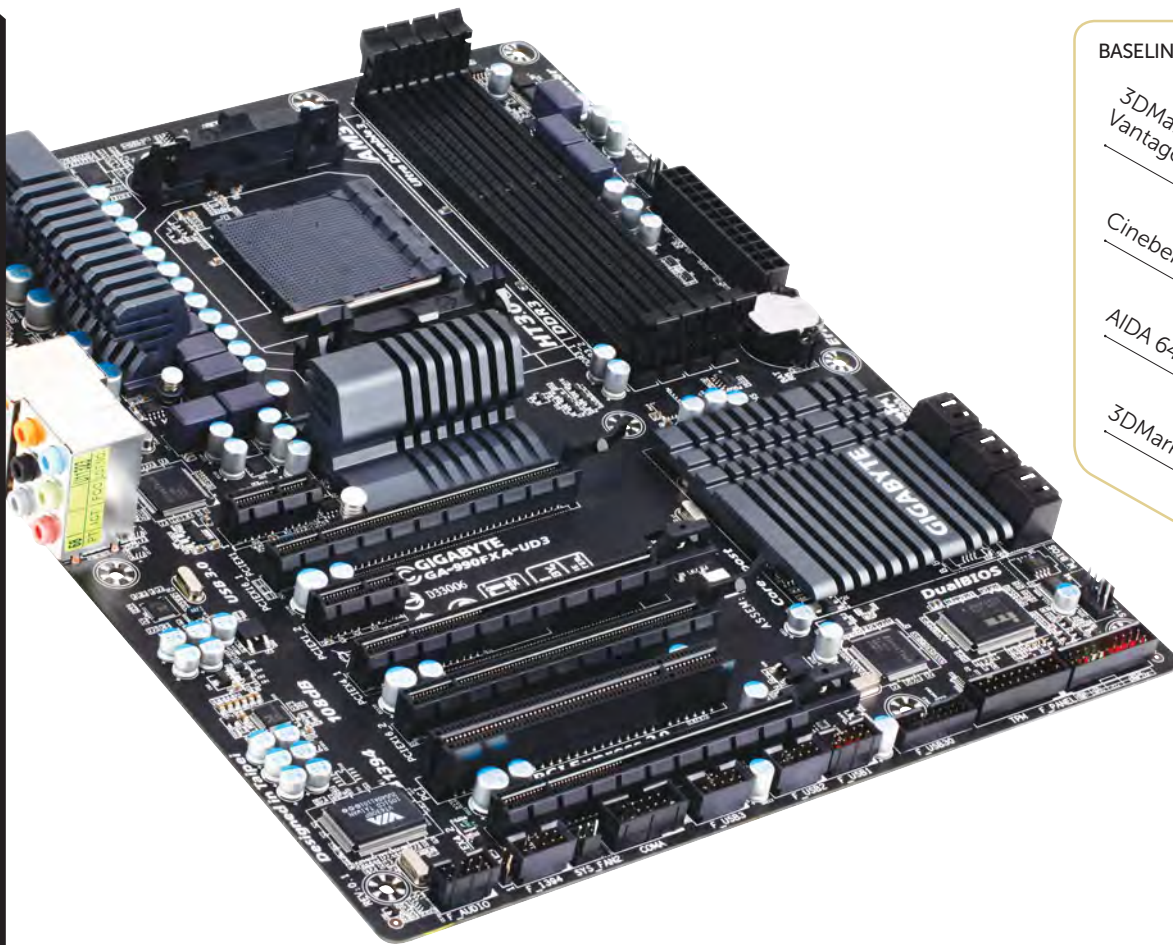
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BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: ASUS Rampage IV Extreme

3DMark Vantage CPU	24,989 46,760
Cinebench 11.5	7.90 13.43
AIDA 64 copy	19,396MB/s 20,396MB/s
3DMark03	98,811 127,025

SPECS

Chipset
AMD 990FX + SB950
Memory
4x240-pin DDR3
CPU support
AMD AM3/AM3+ CPUs
Slots
4x PCIe 3.0 16X,
2x PCIe 1X, 1x PCI

GIGABYTE 990FXA-UD3 Rev 3.0

Distributor Rectron Website www.gigabyte.com ERP TBA

GIGABYTE, for internal reasons unknown to us, was the last vendor to switch their motherboards over to the UEFI interface. Whatever the reason for that may have been, it's come back to hurt them somewhat. Not in a way that makes their motherboards inferior, not at all, as the UD3 is a great board. What we mean is that when every other vendor had embraced UEFI and improved with every product, GIGABYTE had yet to start. So they are playing catch-up, and it shows on many of their products, especially the 990FXA UD3 Rev 3.0.

Once again, this late entry isn't a bad one, and for all intents and purposes you will break overclocking records with this board and will be more than able to build a solid gaming rig with it. The issue we have is that it's not only late to the market but it's not as refined as their other boards. It's certainly no 990FXA-UD7 which for the longest time was our Dream Machine AMD motherboard. That board remains a firm favourite next to the Crosshair Formula-Z (our current Dream Machine board). Sadly the 990FX-UD7 has been discontinued and as such, the UD3 Rev 3.0 is left holding the mantle for

GIGABYTE until they can come to market with a new high-end board.

The UEFI interface is the typical 3D BIOS affair. So if you've used other recent GIGABYTE boards, you'll feel right at home with it. We won't go into the details, but it's near identical to what GIGABYTE offers on the Z77X-UD4H for example. The differences will be down to the platform differences, but by and large they are identical. With that, the UD3 has some teething issues which we first witnessed on GIGABYTE's early UEFI boards like the X79A-UP7. There are sticky BIOS options and some inconsistencies between settings that POST and ones that don't. We know these are what one could call BIOS issues because the hardware is solid, more so than on the 990FXA-UD7 actually as GIGABYTE has switched to a fully digital and better PWM and a host of other changes.

Once you figure out the little nuances though, you can pretty much overclock this board as you would any other one. It'll just take you a little longer, and if you don't have the patience to learn the order in which settings much be applied, you'll end up frustrated with it. So before purchasing be sure that you are patient

PLUS

- UEFI BIOS
- Performance efficiency
- DDR3 2,400MHz support

MINUS

- Nothing special
- Some issues with UEFI BIOS
- No POST LED

BOTTOM LINE

GIGABYTE has finally released a UEFI AMD board. Pity it's not a UD5 or UP7, but still a decent board.

enough to learn what works and what doesn't with this board. We can confirm that 2,400MHz memory is easy enough to set and that virtually all kits made for the Z77 platform will operate at 2,400MHz easily provided you are using a Zambezi based CPU.

Physically, this board is bare and indeed we do understand that it's a low-end board, but a POST LED is something we would have appreciated. There are no on-board buttons, which one can get around with a screw driver, but a POST LED is essential, particularly on this board seeing as how it can be very tricky to overclock or diagnose should you not be able to POST consistently.

At the time of writing we had the earliest FA BIOS, but by the time you read this there should be at least one or two revisions which may simplify the overclocking process, or at least help deliver an easier board to work with.

Overall, this isn't a bad product, but it's not great either and certainly no 990FX-UD7. For the asking price though (unknown to us at the time but around \$150 USD) it's a decent board with a fair amount of features.

NAG

7

- Neo Sibeko


SPECS

Size: 275x122x27
(mm radiator)
Compatibility:
2011 / 1366 / 775
1156 / 1155 / 1150
AM2 / AM3+ / FM2

“The original H100 did not feel cheap, but the H100i takes it to another level with a smoother and more reflective base.”

Corsair Hydro Series H100i

Distributor Frontosa **Website** www.corsair.com **RRP** R1,499



DREAM MACHINE

There are fewer things that are as plentiful in the market as AIO liquid cooling systems. It's typical of the industry that all vendors in a particular market will hop on what is popular, producing near identical products with little or no ingenuity at all.

This isn't the case with the Corsair H100i, and even if it was, it would be the best AIO cooler on the market. Not surprising because the previous H100 was the standard by which other coolers were measured. A few years later we have the follow up to this cooler and all we can say is that Corsair has done a wonderful job with it.

Consider that there's not much one can do with a cooler. Improvements in performance are marginal and quite frankly one should not be expecting anything revolutionary for a while. CPU coolers are amongst the hardest things to improve upon in a practical way. At the mercy of ambient temperatures, there's only so much that blowing room temperature air through fins can achieve.

As true as the above is, that has not stopped Corsair from trying anyway. The biggest and most obvious change to the H100 is the thicker, flexible rubberized tubes. Not only do these allow better installation than the

previous tubing, but the increased flow rate helps cooling capacity as well. The differences we saw with the H100i when compared to its predecessor were marginal, but they were there none the less. The H100i holds load better than the H100 but sadly will not allow higher overlocks. Then again, no water cooler will do that regardless of which model or from which vendor it's from. That Corsair managed to make any improvements at all is impressive, as we certainly were not expecting them.

Beyond the improved tubing the entire build quality has been beefed up tremendously. The original H100 did not feel cheap, but the H100i takes it to another level with a smoother and more reflective base. A fully software controllable system which allows you to regulate fan speed, and last but not least, the slickest mounting mechanism we've ever come across.

The H100 was simple and straight forward to install, but this time Corsair has not only simplified that, but improved it with a magnetic bracket system that further simplifies installing and uninstalling the unit. The H100 mounting mechanism was the best we had seen; the H100i takes

PLUS

- Very easy to install
- Great performance
- Software control
- Build quality

MINUS

- One too many cables

BOTTOM LINE

Corsair has improved on an already impressive H100 cooler. The H100i is the best one yet.

over and simply outshines everything else that's on the market. This is particularly great for those who use testing beds and the like who will change platforms several times in a day. Working with the H100i is a breeze and we'd have called it perfect had it not been for the cabling.

As a result of the newfound intelligence with allows the cooler to be software controlled, we now have additional wiring to the block and pump which results in more cable clutter. It would have been better if this cable shared a lead with one of the fan cables in some way but alas Corsair has chosen to give it its own header lead. This is the only downside to the H100i, as its superior to any other AIO cooler out there in all feasible ways.

The price may be much higher, and possibly a little too much, but you are getting without question the best CPU cooler money can buy today, and that may be worth spending your hard earned cash on. The Corsair H100i easily takes over from the H100 as our Dream Machine cooler for both systems. You'll not find a better AIO anywhere for any price. This one is a winner in our eyes for sure.

NAG

- Neo Sibeko

Genius Gila gaming mouse

Supplier TVR Website : www.tvr.co.za RRP R749

We wouldn't blame you if spotting the Genius logo on this mouse when you see it on store shelves immediately leads you to believe that it's an average, budget offering. Firstly, take one look at the price and it'll prove otherwise. Put it to the test and you'll find a gaming mouse that's anything but budget, or cheaply made.

Remove it from its packaging and you'll find a fairly heavy mouse, even without the bundled weights in use. This may take it out of the running for those who prefer a lighter mouse. It's also quite oddly shaped, with sharp contours at every turn, including spots where your fingers will rest. You'll likely get used to it after a time, but it might border on being uncomfortable for some gamers. It can be used as an ambidextrous mouse, although there won't be thumb buttons for the lefties in that case. Twelve fully programmable buttons are augmented by 72



recordable macros, with three sets of variable backlighting that can be tweaked independently to show off any colour you choose.

In use, it's perfectly functional. It boasts a ludicrous DPI ceiling of 8,200 and its software is easy enough to get the mouse working as you'd prefer. A nice FPS-centric feature is "sniper mode" – a single button that can be held to instantly, temporarily lower the DPI for more

precise movement in appropriate situations. It's as if Genius' design philosophy for the Gila was to throw as much stuff and features at it as possible – but it has made the price a bit higher compared to other gaming mouse brands that have more favour with gamers than Genius. If you can get over that, the Gila is a decent gaming mouse.

NAG
- Dane Remendes

8

SPECS

Resolution
200 - 8200 DPI
Buttons
Twelve, programmable
Weights
6 x 4.5 grams
Macros
Up to 72

PLUS

- Nice range of features
- Works well

MINUS

- Expensive
- Shape might prove uncomfortable for some

BOTTOM LINE

Genius has delivered a quality gaming mouse with the Gila, although some might find its design uncomfortable.

SteelSeries Spectrum X7B

Supplier Megarom Website www.steelseries.com RRP R1,299

SteelSeries' high-end 7H series is taking a walk over to Xbox territory with this 7XB. Functionally identical but with the addition of wireless support, the 7XB is an excellent set and knows a couple of neat little tricks to set it apart from the competition.

This is an entirely personal matter, but I hate the way that headset microphones stick out at unflattering angles when not in use, and the 7XB has solved that solution neatly with its retractable mic that tucks away neatly into the left cup when not in use. Another interesting feature is the ability to break down the headset into three pieces for easy transportation when you're going to a LAN. It's a little bit of a clumsy solution compared to foldaway designs, but it makes for a swell party trick.

Gimmicks aside, the 7XB relies on solid performance to make its mark. Three EQ presets are available for you to customise your listening experience, but the most



balanced setting is really the way to go, and gives defined, punchy bass, clear speech and powerful sounds all across the range in gaming and music listening. As this is a wireless set, the maximum volume is a little soft but you shouldn't find the need for anything louder thanks to the extremely efficient sound isolation ear cups. This is the best you can expect without active noise cancelling.

After all that, there's just one,

rather slight downside to this set: the lack of digital inputs. The wireless transmitter only accepts 3.5mm analogue input from your PC or Xbox (or PS3, unofficially) through an RCA splitter that's included in the box. This means that, whether you use HDMI or not, you'll have to use the original component or composite output on the back of the 360 for audio output.

NAG
- Geoff Burrows

9



HARDWARE

SPECS

Frequency response
18Hz - 28MHz
Impedance
32 ohm
Inputs
3.5mm analogue (RCA splitter included)

PLUS

- Excellent performance
- Very comfortable
- Sound isolating ear cups

MINUS

- Analogue input only

BOTTOM LINE

Clear, powerful audio combined with comfort, you can't ask for much more from a wireless stereo headset.



Intel DX79SR

Supplier Intel **Website** www.intel.com **RRP** R3,799

As the world's leading semiconductor firm, one would imagine that Intel, above all others, makes the best motherboards for their CPUs. After all, there is no other technology company that can claim to have pioneered and steered modern day hardware in the way Intel has. When it comes to semiconductor manufacturing, there are few who would argue that Intel is the bar and is a few generations ahead of everyone else.

As the company that invented the x86 instruction set, you would be forgiven for thinking that Intel is in a position that no other firm can be when it comes to motherboards. They would essentially be making the perfect motherboard that would showcase the best of what their CPUs are capable of.

Well, that is probably true in the perfect or ideal world. Sadly this is not the case in the world we live in. It would seem that Intel makes it a point to make the least inspiring motherboards possible for their CPUs, so much so that we suspect it is intentional. Intel may be avoiding competing with their partners in the channel. There may be some merit to this claim actually, as it's just not in Intel's best interest to oust their

partners who are heavily, and in some cases, *entirely* invested in Intel platforms as motherboard vendors.

It is in light of this, that we have to question the purpose of Intel branded boards such as the DX79SR. Do not make the mistake of thinking this is the worst X79 motherboard money can buy, as that isn't true. That honour is one that all vendors share save for ASUS and MSI. All other boards for the X79 platform were essentially broken and remain so. Worthy of mention is the Sapphire Pure Black X79N, as that motherboard defied reason to say the least.

When taking the above into consideration, it makes the DX79SR an acceptable board because it at least works as advertised. The CPU overclocking works as promised in that you can select a multiplier and have it work as set. Unfortunately, other than that there's little else to complement the board on. It has the regular power, reset and CMOS clear buttons, but they are far from being in the ideal position much like the BIOS POST code LED. This LED finds itself right below the last full length PCI-Express slot where it will be obscured from view even with a single slot graphics card. A shame indeed given that this board is supposed to

SPECS

Chipset
Intel X79
Memory
8x 240-pin DDR3
CPU support
Intel Core i7 SB-E (LGA2011)
Slots
3x PCI-Express 3.0 16X, 2xPCI-Express 1X, 1xPCI

PLUS

- Stability
- Easy setup

MINUS

- Aesthetics
- BIOS layout and options
- Basic

BOTTOM LINE

The DX79SR is a very basic motherboard with average performance and a very high price.

support three-way SLI and CrossFireX configurations.

The existence of jumpers in this day and age is also questionable, as just about everything one needs to set can be achieved within the BIOS. That a jumper is used for BIOS configuration is puzzling when a switch would have sufficed. A switch would have also been better as there's no chance of losing it.

When it comes to aesthetics, there's really not much to say. There's nothing that suggests this board was designed for anything other than for hiding in a windowless case. It's about as dull as they come. Typical of previous Intel boards, but disappointing, as we would have expected some design effort with their premium platform motherboard.

To make matters worse for this board, the incredible ASUS Rampage IV Formula retails for a little less and the equally impressive but micro-ATX version, the Rampage IV Gene is about R1,000 less. Both these motherboards are vastly superior to what Intel is offering here with the DX79SR. As such this motherboard leaves us with very little to like about it. It works as advertised for sure but is as generic as they come. **NAG**

5

- Neo Sibeko

GG



Beware: imposters

I've wanted to write something about the so-called, so-really "fake geek girl" thing for some time now, and it being February – the month that the sort of guy who complains bitterly about "fake geek girls" is probably most likely to drop it temporarily and complain bitterly instead about being terminally single and/or FRIENDZONED AGAIN ;____; and/or otherwise completely invisible to the same women he was complaining bitterly about before – it now seems appropriate to do so. It was that or a step-by-step Valentine's Day gaming date plan, and I don't want to spoil the surprise for my boyfriend¹.

Basically, a "fake geek girl" is a person of feminine genital configuration who pretends to like geeky stuff (so pretty much any woman who likes geeky stuff, according to those people who think this is a real thing) – usually gaming, but also comics, pen and paper RPGs, Star Wars, the Internet, and anything else previously claimed for the exclusive use of the boys in your high school media club – for any number of alleged reasons that read more like a wish list than anything else but mostly for, you know, *the attention*. Because that totally makes sense, except that it doesn't. Women fake liking things so that men will think they like those things so... that... what, exactly? NOW KISS.

It's a funny² thing that I'm sure most of my lady readers³ will recognise instantly – if a man says he's into gaming, it's no big deal. If a woman says she's into gaming, she's immediately at risk of being subject to an inquisition of Torquemadean proportions, and if she's unable to perfectly duplicate the interrogator's knowledge base of mid-'90s BBS-based *Pokémon* fanfic on demand, she's faking it and must be branded and hanged out at the village crossroads for the crows to peck at as a dire warning to anybody else who'd dare to like something

"This is a massive pull quote to fill up space because somebody can't meet their word count."

they're not allowed to like without certified male approval of their authenticity. Which, when you think about it, is somewhat ironic in context.

Quite apart from everything else that's so obviously and abundantly stupid about the "fake geek girl" meme is the necessary premise that geekdom can be definitively owned, and membership dispensed according to the owner's discretion and/or entry examination to avoid subversive cooties (or whatever). Nobody gets to decide who can like anything, and why they like it – the whole point of liking things is liking things. It's no more or less insidious than that. **NAG**

- Tarryn van der Byl

¹ "Surprise! It's a beer and some *Skyrim* DLC. Now let me finish *Dishonored*, please."

² Not actually that funny, though. English is funny like that.

³ And most of my gentlemen readers too, I've no doubt, although some of them for entirely the wrong reasons. You know who you are.

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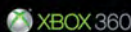
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