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# NAG

Vol. 16  
Issue  
ONE

PC / PLAYSTATION / XBOX / NINTENDO

9 REVIEWS  
INCLUDING

Tomb Raider  
SimCity  
Crisis 3  
Aliens Colonial  
Marines  
Metal Gear Rising:  
Revengeance

ASSASSIN'S CREED IV:

# BLACK FLAG

Arrr! Ubisoft be bringin' ya more  
swashbucklin' than ye can possibly  
hope to swash 'n buckle.

PS4



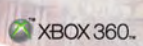
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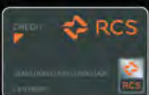


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## Features

### 30 PLAYSTATION 4

The best place to play and share and laugh and cry and die.

How's about that PlayStation 4, 'ey? Isn't it fancy, with all its DualShock 4s and AMD processors and all of the GBs of RAM? We packaged up our resident RedTide and shipped it off to the New Yorks, where it surveyed the scene and was amazed by all the bright, shiny lights of Sony's presentation. Wow!

### 50 ASSASSIN'S CREED IV: BLACK FLAG

It's another *Assassin's Creed*! This time there's far less America, and a Caribbean's worth of pirate-speak. We were in place, mouths and brains agape to drink up all the delicious info that Ubisoft poured out at the reveal. And now we're here to spread that info in the direction of you.

### 90 BUILDING THE BEST MID-RANGE GAMING MACHINE

We've had the super-powered, hyper-expensive Dream Machine living on these pages for years now. It's great to dream, sure – but what about the average human, who's highly eager for a new gaming machine but constrained to a mid-range budget? That's where this useful feature comes in handy.





FROM THE CREATORS OF MORTAL KOMBAT

# INJUSTICE

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# Superficially now I can make it anywhere...

I was cornered and accosted in New York's Central Park the other week. Three mean looking polar bears waited until I was alone and then had their icy way with me – boy that place was cold – especially coming from summer and sunshine. It wasn't the -6° temperature that was the issue but the howling wind slicing through the buildings that did it. In case you've just double checked the cover to make sure this is NAG and not *Getaway* magazine I'll explain now. PlayStation sent NAG to New York for their PS4 reveal. It was a glamorous affair that included Gordon Ramsay dining and two hotel clerks fighting over who should put the chocolate on my pillow each night?! There is a feature in this magazine starting on one of the pages inside that tells the whole story – read it. Besides all the official stuff I also interviewed Jim Ryan, president and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe along with a few UK and Russian journalists. Most of the questions asked were about launch windows and pricing which he didn't answer only to say that somewhere in the world the PS4 would be released before Christmas 2013 and would cost money. Safe to assume it won't be here. The important thing you need to know about the PS4 is that it's a developer's console designed by creative people for tomorrow's gamer. It's now very simple and straightforward to make games for it (something many independent developers have agreed on and applauded Sony for). It will also mean a rebirth of sorts for all things PC game development-related, and in countries like South Africa and Russia who have a very PC-centric history this means growth for consoles (according to Sony).

I asked him specifically about planning for bandwidth limitations

in countries like South Africa and the response was very encouraging. He has been here and has experienced our special mixture of bandwidth related issues and said, "We're not going to mandate that the device be connected before you can use it", which says it all really. Sony is doing things differently with their new console and it is going to change the way everyone does gaming forever. Now we wait for Microsoft – they've got one hell of an act to follow.

## INTO DARKNESS

I made a solemn promise to the banana gods of Musa that I wouldn't try any clever pirate speak anywhere on this page because I'm pretty sure you're tired of it already. What I am here to tell you about is the phosphorescent ink we've used on the cover – that's "glow in the dark" for you non-scientific sit-at-the-back types. Let this cover of NAG absorb photons then stick it in a dark place and have a look. I told Miktar about it and you know what the first thing is he said, "I hope you told people not to lick it." I know right, I was just as confused. Apparently ink like this used to be toxic but now it is better as long as you don't ingest a lot of it. So kids and people who need supervision, here's your warning: don't eat twenty magazine covers (don't get me wrong, you can buy twenty copies – just don't eat them). The glow in the dark NAG cover is brought to you by Ubisoft and Megarom.

## ELIZABETH

Here's a little secret. I'm busy playing an early review code of *BioShock Infinite* right now (about twelve days before the official launch). So I innocently told a colleague that I've been dying to play it ever since I saw Elizabeth being carried away by that big nasty birdy because I'm a sucker for a damsel in distress and I



wanted to rescue her. I was then told (to my horror I might add) that according to many people (on the Internet \*rolls eyes\*) that this is now a bad thing because woman are not objects to be saved. Really, how silly. That's not at all what I meant when I said it. I still love the idea of riding in on a grey donkey and saving the day while I flash a toothy grin. If this is bad I'm afraid of what we're going to become one day. What do you think about there still being a place for gentlemen in the world doing good deeds – or is this no longer cool? [letters@nag.co.za](mailto:letters@nag.co.za) is where you should send your feedback.

I was told my last Ed's Note wasn't all that interesting. Well, sorry (this is that sarcastic sorry with the long "o" sound); I can't make the magic happen every month. It did make me try harder, so I guess it's a good thing.  
- RedTide  
Editor



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# INBOX

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**\*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 April 2013

From: Gareth

Subject: Gaming - Preparing us

I would like to share a recent experience with you. My fiancé and I were travelling down a highway one evening; we'd already experienced a major storm while on the road, gotten lost, and stuck in traffic for a solid hour. Despite this, we found ourselves marvelling at the scene before us. We were headed directly towards a massive, forbidding cloudbank. It was dark as pitch, the sun has almost completely moved below the horizon behind us and we were caught in this netherworld between light and dark. The road was empty but for one or two other motorists and on the large strip of dark green grass separating the two highways a lone man trudged home.

My fiancé and I looked at each other, and the mood in the car changed. She turned down the radio and I instinctually shifted my grip on the steering wheel, relaxed my arms and adopted a slightly lower seating posture. I noticed that my future wife had also edged forward on her seat, she was scanning the area. I had begun compiling mental

checklists. We had a first aid kit in the car, plenty of canned and dry goods in the pantry at home, but what we sorely needed was a means to defend ourselves.

At that moment my mind rolled a reality check. With a low chuckle of amusement, and some relief, I came back to the real world. I glanced surreptitiously over at my fiancé and found her doing the same. The low chuckle became a shared laugh - one of those laughs that are too loud, to cover the awkwardness of the moment. As far-fetched as it sounds, for a few moments both of us had been transported to an alternate reality where we were amongst a few lonely survivors of some apocalyptic zombie event. Many people are worried about the effects of video games on social behaviour. I can tell you now, when the zombie apocalypse happens, those same people will be forced to turn to us gamers for help. Gaming has been training us for years to prioritise targets, determine and fulfil mission objectives and develop good high speed driving habits. People who play games know where to go scavenge for medical supplies or a well hidden

flame thrower. The military will be ineffective against a zombie force because they haven't got the knowledge of zombie physiology we possess. How many world leaders know how to spend skill points effectively?

Bide your time my fellow gamers, when the zombie end of the world comes, you and I will be amongst those of whom they say: "Never have so many owed so much, to so few."

*LOL... Love it. Someone jokingly said to me the other day that I need to get over zombies. "Never", was my reply because... we need to be prepared. If that day (zombie apocalypse) were to come I'd have mixed feelings. Good because it'll be a welcome change of pace (for this hopelessly useless human race) and bad because no more Star Trek Into Darkness movies for a while. The bottom line is I won't be hiding in my house whimpering and wondering what to do; I'll be planning, and scouting and collecting for battle and then the eventual long haul for survival. Have a free game comrade, Ed.*


From: Ivan

Subject: Fair inquisition

NAG, by most standards, manage to, thankfully, roll off a viable and genuinely unbiased (ignoring the Dead Space reviews) literature contrast to the digital in gaming relaxation. The quality and time (or lack thereof) that we get and you have, to get the monolith walking at the end of the month never ceases to amaze me. But my parenthesis impregnated introduction aside. A rather novel

question irks me. The opinion articles pinned upon the framework of NAG does their title marvellous credit. The crux of my question is then: if they would be eligible for the consideration of Letter of the Moment/Month. Would they realistically win it every month? No personal attack on the style and direction of the work. Just blind curiosity.

*Hey! What did you say about my sister? Ed.*



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

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

From: Muhammad

Subject: Jobs at NAG

How would a person get hired by a gaming company or developer? Would they have to get the highest score in a competition or would they just have to have an advanced understanding of technology? With the people that work at NAG does everyone write an article or review in the magazine and get paid based on the response on that article? Does every person working at NAG get games to test out then they have to rate it on a certain scale and based on that scale the reviews are made? How early do you have to wake up to go to work? I hope this letter hasn't been a pain but I just wanted to find out more about the best magazine I have ever read.

*You get hired by a developer by applying for their advertised jobs. You also need specialised knowledge and some experience in the required position. High scores have nothing to do with it - unless you live in a fantasy world. People get paid to work here. We hire them initially based on talent. Paying people based on the response to their work is an interesting concept the world isn't ready for yet - but I'll keep it in mind. Reviewers get the software to review and they rate it based on experience and their knowledge of games and our review template. I wake up whenever I like, but usually 06h05. I go for a run, shower, dress and go to work. It's not really work for me. I love it. No pain. Ed*

From: Callan  
Subject: Sequels

It all started with me playing Uncharted 2 at my friend's house for many hours, I enjoyed it from start to finish and I even bought my own PS3 and obviously buy the next Uncharted – which I enjoyed. Once I put down the game I started thinking of how the game has and hasn't changed. For example any one of us who have played it would have made Drake done that wall kick action about a thousand times, when the console says, "No, you can't climb this". This action that Drake performs is locked into the game and the action will never be changed no matter how many more Uncharted games are made.

Such actions of the game are made only once, never to be changed as long as the series shall live and no matter how many games are still to come. In the future when Call of Duty 13 or so comes onto the shelf do you think that a lot of the game will have changed? Yes, a new and exciting story line plus better multiplayer but that is it! It will always be a first person shooter, controls will always be the same, characters will mostly be the same, graphic style will always be the same (might be a few graphic engine upgrades) but half the game stays the same, never to change.

Companies don't have to work as hard and put in as much time in the design of sequels as they do for the first in the series. Therefore it would make sense that sequels would be cheaper than a new game. A new game is an unexpected rush of pure entertainment. Think of it like this, the first time one does drugs it's such a rush of unexpected pure joy and that's what gets them hooked but one never gets that same experience again no matter how hard they try, it's called chasing the dragon.

A person will never get the same first experience of fun and unknowing of how the game is going to play out, from playing a newer version of the game they originally played and enjoyed. I think because of all this, that a new game should not be the same price as a sequel but more expensive. As the producer makes more sequels of a certain game, the price of it should decrease, unless they completely change the game so that it is a new experience to all gamers.

*It's not that simple. Game engines are updated along with all the graphics and animations, there are new assets, textures, models and so on. Each new game represents a ton of work which isn't mitigated by having a few known animations and a control system already in place. If you're looking for cheaper sequels, the closest you're going to get is DLC. Ed.*

# ON THE FORUMS

Next Gen, get all your next gen here: [www.nag.co.za/forums](http://www.nag.co.za/forums)

**Q:** Now that the PS4 has been officially confirmed and mostly detailed, what features do you expect Microsoft to announce for their next-gen Xbox?

"Coffee holder. A console needs a coffee holder. And that would be some real ingenuity on Microsoft's part."

5h@un13

"A new super Kinect that can read your thoughts so you don't even have to move to play games."

Jodez

"Social. Lots of social. Apparently it's a thing."

Squirly

"The ability to detect rage quitters before they happen?"

H3R3T1C

"Microsoft will take the fight to the opposition. Literally. The slot loading optical drive will be able to eject discs at a velocity high enough to penetrate a drywall. Doubles as an effective anti-theft feature."

CrashHelmut

From: Phillip

Subject: Gaming Escapism

Last night I was restless after someone asked me a gaming related question, why do we play games? That question has lingered in my mind until now, when I had a solution. The world we live in is tough and modernised; there are very few places where someone can go for a walk to just forget their troubles and all of cramped up spaces. So they turn to gaming for that escapism, though most people don't even consider fantasy games, they turn to other open world sandbox games. We all need and crave that escapism, and for me I turn to fantasy games, the worlds are just incredible and perfect as a vacation destination, even though I moved to a farm recently I still turn on my 360 and start-up Skyrim, because cornfields are just not the same as snowy mountains and dragons...

*So you moved to a farm with plenty wide open spaces and nature. Then you sit in the lounge playing Skyrim on your 360 to get away from it all. Have you tried just going for a walk on the farm, maybe? Ed.*

From: Syril

Subject: Call of Disrespect response to Ed

I just started reading the November 2012 magazine and found on the very first letter a response from the editor that is a bit disappointing and contradicting. I completely agreed with everything you said in your response, but then at the end you go and contradict yourself by saying, "The only thing you shouldn't do is cheat or camp because that's lame." Please don't misunderstand me I'm not saying people should cheat and I also hate it as I can't stand people that cheat.

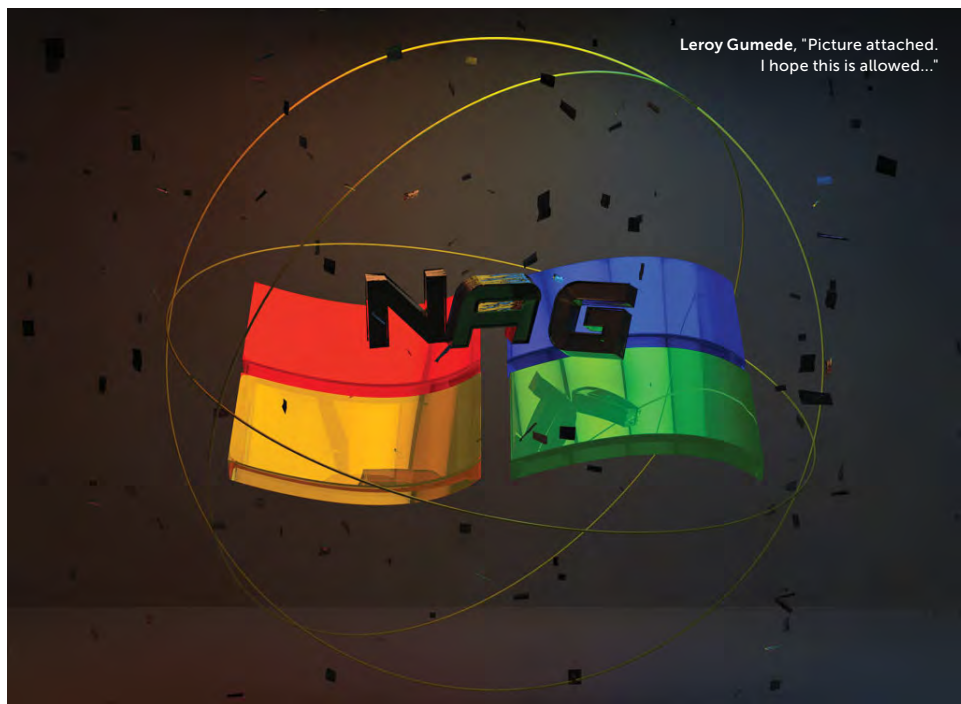
What I am saying though is when you make a statement like "Here's an official message from NAG magazine: Use whatever weapon, tactic, method, mode, style and/or technique you please when playing games", then you can't go and say that a player is not allowed to camp and categorize it with cheating when that is a completely valid game style, tactic, method or technique. I'm not someone that camps, but I do play with a sniper rifle most of the times though. I find that most people that do camp are mostly new players and a lot more mislabelled due to the fact that they happened to have stopped to take advantage of a good position to take out other players and I really don't see what the issue is with campers as they are very easy to take out most of the time.

*I can say whatever I like (just like you). Campers are actually worse than cheaters and I'll tell you why. Cheaters eventually get what's coming to them – a banned account – so they do have an element of risk in doing what they do. They're still human trash however. Campers don't get punished for their low-life slimy tactics of hiding in corners waiting for someone to walk in front of them. So camping is worse than cheating – that's the deal. You don't have to like it and you're more than welcome to disagree with me and then even state as much in a letter and then get it published in NAG. This doesn't change anything. Campers are spineless turds that need to be flushed, or buried if you live in a remote area. Ed.*

From: Jan

Subject: Religion in Gaming

Hi everyone at NAG! I hope you are having an awesome day! I got to thinking in my math class about the religious aspects of gaming, may it be hidden or blatant. Blizzard with their Diablo series for instance, what is their motivation for making a game where you fight demons? Or like Heroes of Newerth, where the evil side of the map is marked with a pentagram. (Footnote: We played it at a church LAN and our pastor played it with us, ha!) BioShock Infinite with its prophet and lamb story (where Elizabeth is the lamb and the guy who runs Columbia is the so called prophet according to the game) and I also saw something about a devil's kiss vigor lithograph that you get with a collector's edition. Are we doing wrong by God to play these games? Is God looking down on us, thinking badly of us? Ed, I don't know whether or not you are a Christian and I know that if one gets too involved in what is wrong or right, you will take too long with the magazine, but why did the



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

gaming companies start using it as a theme for their games? I would also, if I may, want to ask what the NAG team's religions are. I've also heard that if you keep these things at a distance, you can keep your faith and what you wear / play / do / think separate. But don't the things you hear / see poison or enrich your soul? I guess my question really is, can we keep our faith and games separate by telling ourselves that we know what we stand for and believe? Stay awesome!

*Of course you can separate your entertainment and your real life beliefs. As a matter of fact there are very few games that feature the player as a demon or evil entity. In games you're almost always fighting evil and slaying demons. An activity any old school religious order would approve of – Rocky the demon slayer always gets all the ale and girls and treasure. In the past with gaming it's always been killing demons, aliens or enemy soldiers. If you think about it, who else is there to fight besides these old staples? It's good to ask questions like this but I'm smart enough to know not to get into religious discussions with people in this forum and the reason is simple. Everyone is just way too sensitive with their beliefs – which is why there's always been so much fighting and killing in the name of religion in the past and I'm not in the mood to start a war. If you want guidance in this ask a professional – your pastor. Ed*

## THE SHORTS

### Extracts of n00b from NAG letters

*"Ok awkward just read Pippa's article which seems vaguely similar."*  
-Joshua

*"Gaming has become like speed dating."*  
-Lazani

*"The NAG magazine awoke in me, some long dormant craving to be mentally alive in the gaming world."*  
-Sakhile

## ON FACEBOOK

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

**Nicolas De Vries**  
NAG What letter of the alphabet is ur favourite colour????

**Kc Hellfire**  
YES!!! Got my new NAG magazine!!!!=D and it is awesome!!! But I wouldn't expect anything else=P great stuff on the DVD as well, big props to Cap Canada for completing the 60 things =O that was awesome going through his achievements LOL, keep it up!!!

**Jonathan NiteFenix Bester**  
Don't fall for it, it's a trap! That's a Deception in disguise!

**MyNsrannon ItasteLikevryone**  
Awesome NAG! Reminds me of how my mother used to do all my home work for me.

**Dustin Myburgh**  
This is the issue I have been waiting for sadly I will be getting it a month late because I live in the middle of nowhere!

# HOPE IS DROWNING



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G, Gamer



## SimS\*\*\*\*y!

During the launch week for *SimCity*, I seemed to do nothing else on NAG Online but write about the chaos that Maxis had created. *SimCity* came out in the USA on Tuesday 05 March and the sudden, simultaneous logging in of seven trillion people caused the US servers to implode. Funny that. Maxis vowed to have the game stabilised before it began rolling out in other territories but they failed to do that. When *SimCity* eventually released in South Africa, there were a couple of glitch-free hours during which the NAG Forums lit up with joyous acclamations of just how wonderful the game was. Then the whole of Europe finished work and tried to log in to the game as well.

A few days after the game launched, and once that initial "oh God, what have we done" reaction had worn off, Maxis was forced to start shutting down features of *SimCity* in an attempt to stabilise their servers. One of the most basic mechanics in nearly every Maxis simulator game (the ability to fast-forward game time to speed up progress) was removed because it was causing synchronisation issues between servers and users' PCs. Leaderboards (a cornerstone to any online "socially driven" game) were also removed, as were achievements.

Surely there's something wrong here? Game mechanics removed in order to stabilise a game that should have been stable to begin with considering it was brought to market, and with a higher than average price to boot? It's unforgivable, but bizarrely, Maxis has been on the receiving end of a tidal wave of support and praise. Did I miss something? This must be the only industry on the planet that can get away with charging premium prices for a defective product, and then the developers get defended by the people they've just shafted. Sure, not everyone was sending Maxis boxes of chocolates and Thank You cards – website Polygon changed their glowing review score of *SimCity* from 9.5 out of 10 to 4 out of 10 in response to the feature cuts and server problems. That is what Maxis deserves; they don't deserve the "incredible commitment from our fans" as their senior VP put it. It's almost as if the industry has been conditioning us over the last five years to accept whatever crap they throw at us. Now, when always-online single player games launch, I'm writing articles telling people to expect delays as the game's servers strain under demand. This is not alright, and Cave Johnson would be telling us to get mad and make combustible lemons. Why is it that gamers will shriek and perform about something subjective like the ending of *Mass Effect 3*, but when they get screwed over and can't even play the game they've paid for, they turn into fawning "fans" eager to buoy up the developer?

I haven't once mentioned EA in all of this. That's because despite the fact that Maxis deserves to be keelhauled, they have at least had the decency to take responsibility for the debacle. When an obsequious fan consoled the developer and blamed EA for the issues, Maxis responded with, "Hey, this is on Maxis. EA does not force design upon us. We own it..."

That tiny little Tweet might just be enough for Maxis to win back some of my respect. That and I'm desperately trying to find a reason to support this game, because I really want to play it. See? Conditioned.

- Miklós Szecsei -



## I am the shadow

**T**hief 4 is now officially a thing that's going to happen. Of course, we all already knew that, but now that it's no longer going to be called "Thi4f" we're more interested. The torrent of new information surrounding this upcoming nex-gen game might also have something to do with it.

Okay, "torrent" might be a little strong, but the gentle pitter-patter of information is enough to get us wet. Players will return to the role of the master thief Garrett, but we're unclear as to how everything fits together with the original trilogy's canon. We see Garrett with a strange-looking right eye (which is a feature that comes in during the first game), but this is a reboot of the series, so how much will carry over remains to be seen.

Despite this oddity, developers Eidos Montreal (the team behind *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* and the new *Tomb Raider's* multiplayer

component) are aware that the *Thief* series is a "precious gemstone" (their own words) that they've been handed, and their goal is "to deliver the fantasy of being Garrett, the master thief" which will form the basis for the core gameplay experience. What won't feature is all the weird supernatural stuff from the original games. These will be toned down heavily, so we expect plenty of Steampunk elements to take their place in providing variety to the otherwise Victorian setting. Garrett's new bow certainly looks very technical.

As one might expect, Eidos Montreal is keen to make this reboot their launch pad into an all-new *Thief* series. We'd say let's just focus on one thing at a time, folks. There's a lot riding on this title but, given the care they took with *Deus Ex: HR* – and the lessons we hope they learnt – we're cautiously optimistic about *Thief*.



## Metro: Last Light out in May

**N**ow that the dust has started to settle following the detonation of THQ, the in-development games that were affected by it are starting to show their faces again. Take *Company of Heroes 2* and its new release date, which we detail elsewhere on these pages. Now, we've also got confirmation on when we can expect to experience *Metro: Last Light's* haunting atmosphere and overpowering bleakness – which, you may recall, is now being

published by Deep Silver.

May 17th is the day we're due to see the game on store shelves. Developer 4A Games aims to use the extra development time wisely. "The extra time will go towards a final layer of polish, in order to provide fans of mature and atmospheric first-person shooters with the best possible single-player experience we can offer. We are working on details for pre-orders, and hope to have these available soon."



## Then what?



Gamers might be obsessed with zombies these days, but before this fad came about, post-apocalyptic was all the rage. It's also where a lot of indie love is focused these days, perhaps as a sign that gamers aren't quite done with this classic setting. Such is the case with the currently in-development RPG *After Reset*, from a small, as-yet unnamed indie group.

The game's website ([www.afterreset.com](http://www.afterreset.com)) promises a classic post-apocalyptic RPG with a rich story and dangerous environments that will remind you of *Fallout 1/2*. There's also a lot of talk of *STALKER*-like science-fiction elements, with anomalies, mutants and even "guests" from outer-space all being mentioned. The goal of multiplayer support through free dedicated servers and massive persistent world has also been set, and on top of all of that, the team aims to ship a powerful campaign editor with the game. That's quite a feature list for a product that currently only has eight people on its team, but with no release date in sight yet, we're sure this one will still be a while off.

## The past comes back to haunt us



Hey, remember *The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest*? No? What are you, younger than 20? Okay, that's entirely possible – likely, even – but don't fret, we'll forgive you if you head to the iOS App Store or GOG.com right now and download it. Then play it, then come right back here so you can be super excited about this news: Trilobyte, the original developers of the game and its sequel *The 11<sup>th</sup> Hour* came back from the dead in 2010 to aid in the relaunch of the first two games in the series, and now they've announced that work has begun on a third title.

For the older people around, this is exciting news: these two games arrived at the pinnacle of adventure gaming in the '90s with their creepy mix of storytelling and puzzle solving. This third, as yet untitled game (we're not accepting *The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest: 3* as a title – come on now) will see players return to the mysterious mansion that has been repopulated with new games, puzzles, artefacts and the undead. Some of the original team is back on the new project, which gives us hope that this game won't be afraid to throw some real challenges at its players.

## Assassin's Creed: Rising Phoenix rises out of nowhere, burns up the Internet

In case you haven't realised, we have a pretty massive *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* feature in this very edition you're holding in your calloused, bony gamer hands. Fun fact: we've been to Ubisoft and we've seen that their internal online security is really just a standard kitchen sieve that they run their router cable through; they told us (in thick French accents) that the sieve protects them from any leaks. Fun fact number two: it doesn't, because Ubisoft projects leak more often than a fat kid's mouth at a cake buffet. Case in point number one: *Black Flag* concept art and logos leaked online the day before we were officially shown the game. Case in point number two: in the same week that *Black Flag* was revealed, something else called *Assassin's Creed: Rising Phoenix* also leaked.

Very little is known about this, and at time of writing, Ubisoft hasn't even responded to the leak. All we have is a piece of watermarked artwork that looks like it would be used for standard promotional stuff. The artwork has "Ubisoft Digital Arts: Internal Use Only; Do not duplicate or distribute" stamped on it. As you can see, stamping that on secret assets clearly works.

There's no guarantee *Rising Phoenix* is even a game. Ubisoft puts out a vast amount of cross-media content for its various gaming IPs, so *Rising Phoenix* could be a novel, a comic book, a web series... you get the idea. Then again, it could be 2014's *Assassin's Creed* – we'll just have to wait and see.

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The Game Stalder



Yeah? Well I'm famous on teh Interwebz!

I recently began watching a lot of random things on YouTube. This might seem like I'm simply arriving late to the party, which is not the case. I've spent my fair share of time watching stuff online, some of it even for work.

I'm nevertheless still baffled by channels with people just talking about... stuff, especially ones that have hundreds of thousands of subscribers and which are monetised to earn tens of thousands of rands every month. Just from talking about... stuff.

Don't get me wrong, I commend these people for taking the initiative, especially since they can't control who watches their channel and who doesn't, and viewers obviously find it entertaining enough to subscribe, but I just don't get it.

There are no demonstrations of things, no discussions around games except perhaps in passing, just a guy or girl with their webcam, talking to you about... stuff.

I think my problem is in my thinking. I see YouTube as having a purpose and I want to watch videos that show me things like gameplay videos, game trailers, software tutorials, tech demos and TED talks. Oh, and of course funny cats, lemon eating kids, and guys getting pranked and hit in the nuts.

I'm not particularly interested in watching people talk about their day, or rant about random things in their life. "25 Facts About Me"... Uh, ok. That's nice.

I'm obviously in the minority. In an effort to understand this world that I am obviously not a part of, I spent a significant portion of time, like a whole thirty minutes out of my day, watching videos of famous (yes, I mean that in every sense of the word) YouTubers.

I did zone out a little listening to the drone of my chosen YouTuber's voice, even though he was mildly amusing but no, no, I still don't get it. In fact the one guy even admits that he doesn't get it either.

I'm repeatedly asked why I don't start my own YouTube channel, and I haven't bothered up until now because it honestly requires maintenance. In order to maintain interest you need to post regularly, and while I'm not immune to random ramblings, I'm unlikely to bother to record them and post them up on the Internet; I have way too much other stuff to do.

If I did start my own channel it would be filled with game related stuff, because that's what I love. Okay and probably tattoos. Anyway, I suppose I really should be adjusting my perspective. In much the same way as many gamers feel when they talk about games and other people's eyes glaze over, my eyes glaze over when said random YouTuber starts telling me about "Why Girls Are Confusing".

Okay, maybe we all could learn from that one.

That said, the appeal of these videos, certainly the more successful ones anyway, appears to be more in their human connection with their audience. These people touch us by opening up to us so fully. They don't care if they look a bit silly – they're allowing us a glimpse into their lives and their story. It's personal, it's real. And in this digital existence where things become ever more removed, it's refreshing to find people who are happy to be themselves and share that with the world.

It's a great thought, but I think I'll stick to gaming stuff. I still don't care about the fact that you're moving house – unless it has one of those awesome *Battlefield 3* simulators.

- Pippa Tshabalala -

# Prepare for Torment

Planescape creators successfully fund money-printing company



InXile Entertainment – the team behind the upcoming crowd-funded *Wasteland 2* – is taking the lead on the Kickstarter revolution with this, now their second title to be successfully funded by fans with wallets as big as their hearts.

It starts with Numenera – a recently funded tabletop role-playing system designed by Monte Cook, the original designer of the Planescape supplemental system for Dungeons & Dragons, as well as many others. When Numenera reached its funding goal a few months back, it did so with the promise that inXile would pick up the licence to develop a CRPG based on its world and game mechanics. We all knew that game would be related to *Planescape: Torment* – one of Interplay's most iconic and powerful RPGs – but now the details of this spiritual successor have been revealed and they're as juicy as we could have imagined.

*Torment: Tides of Numenera* will see players take on the role of a human(ish) shell once used to house the soul of a great and powerful ruler known as the Changing God of the Ninth World, who trades lives for immortality. Usually these hollow

beings, called Castoffs, are left to die once the Changing God casts them aside, but you – the Last Castoff – did not. You'll spend the game trying to learn who you are and why (or how) you survived. You'll hunt down the Changing God and demand answers from him. You'll meet new companions and lie to them, or love them, or let them die. If you ever played *Planescape: Torment* then you'll know the level of depth you can expect from this game.

It's also a game that you can help fund if you act now: the project has already far surpassed its required \$900,000 goal by reaching \$2.5M at the time of writing, but funding officially only ends on the 5th of April, so there's still time to stake your claim in a dirt-cheap copy when it finally arrives at the expected time of December 2014. For those wondering just how the hell the relatively small team at inXile can produce *Torment* alongside *Wasteland 2* – they've optimised their workflow to be as productive as possible: writers and concept artists who are done with *Wasteland* production have already moved over to *Torment*, with pre-production expected to take months.

## Crysis 3 very nearly made it onto the Wii U...



...but couldn't quite make the final leap to Nintendo's GamePad-touting console. It's not a huge surprise that developer Crytek was trying: Crytek spokespeople spent a good deal of time last year hinting at the possibility of the game appearing on the console. Alas, it was not meant to be, and Crytek CEO Cevat Yerli eventually confirmed that, despite Nintendo and EA talking it through, a deal could not be made and the Wii U would be left *Crysis*-less.

Now, Yerli has revealed that while Nintendo and EA were working things out, Crytek weren't sitting around twiddling their thumbs. They got a fully working version of *Crysis 3* practically ready to launch on Wii U before the plug was eventually pulled. "We did have *Crysis 3* running on the Wii U," said Yerli, speaking with Venture Beat. "We were very close to launching it. But there was a lack of business support between Nintendo and EA on that. Since we as a company couldn't launch on the Wii U ourselves – we don't have a publishing license – *Crysis 3* on Wii U had to die."

## More Kratos after God of War: Ascension?



Speaking with CVG, *God of War: Ascension's* lead designer Mark Simon revealed that he's not yet sure what SCE Santa Monica's next move is following the release of Kratos' latest Greek god-bashing adventure. For now, they'll be supporting the game's multiplayer and delivering new DLC offerings, but beyond that, their next project is not yet confirmed. Simon is impressed by the specs of the PlayStation 4, however, and would love to see a return of Kratos on the new hardware. "I think there's still life in Kratos," he said. "He's a fun character to design games around and I love playing him." Given the franchise's immense popularity, don't be surprised if getting Kratos onto the PS4 is exactly what SCE Santa Monica does next.

## Ron Gilbert leaves Double Fine

Veteran game developer Ron Gilbert has parted company with development house Double Fine. Gilbert joined Tim Schafer's company back in September 2010, and did so in order to utilise Double Fine's resources in developing *The Cave*. Now that the game is out, it's time for him to move on.

Writing on his personal blog, Gilbert stated that he will remain in the industry as there are still "so many games left to be designed". Exactly what he's working on next and where that will take him has yet to be revealed. Honestly, we'd love it if he just walked into Walt Disney's head offices with a shotgun and demanded the rights to the *Monkey Island* games be returned to him. Then, once he's out of prison for armed robbery, he can make a new series of Guybrush Threepwood adventures. What, it's totally feasible; it's not like Disney is using the IPs anyway.

According to Respawn Entertainment's co-founder Vince Zampella, his business partner Jason West has left the studio he and Zampella formed in 2010 after a very nasty court case with Activision. This news came recently, but apparently West ducked out of the studio last year already to take care of "family issues", according to Vince Zampella. There's no word on how this will affect Respawn's long-awaited project under the EA label, although it's suspected that this year's E3 will be home to the unveiling.



# Games & Gadgets

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The Indie Investigator



## The tutorial formula

**M**aking a good tutorial for your game can be just as intense as the rest of the development process, if not more so. Even at the rough prototype level it's absolutely vital that players understand what's going on, where they need to direct themselves, and **how to do it**.

Still, it can be tricky to figure out what is 'right' to do for a tutorial, especially when polished, on-the-market game tutorials are so complex and subtle in their design that sometimes it feels like they have a featherweight touch on the game while still telling you everything you need to know. While it's certainly great to get your in-game lessons to this sort of quality, it's also good to leave that sort of refinement for the latter cycles of a project.

So, let's say you've just built a new prototype and want to show it to other human beings to get a better feel for where it's going. In the early days, it should be safe enough to provide your players with these general pointers:

**First game draft:** You really want the bare bones here, but you also want your players to experiment. Give a helpful list of the raw instructions inside a readme file. Better still: replicate these instructions in-game (a simple splash screen or "press to start" menu works well). If you're worried that the prototype's experience is too complicated to explain in a simple list of instructions, it may just mean that you need to tone down the actual prototype!

**Second game draft:** Most game formats allow the developer to create full-blown "tutorial levels" to ease early game progress and reinforce instructions through behaviour. It doesn't need to be too complicated: if you want people to know that "X" means attack, flash the message in a small room full of enemies who can't defend themselves. If you need to teach players how to push and pull blocks, put them in a situation where they need to perform the action to pass. And although subtlety is often more artful, go with the safe bet first: be explicit with your lessons.

**Third game draft:** There's a survival instinct that works fantastically both in the zombie apocalypse and game design: always double-tap. Once your game has made some progress, received a few positive points of feedback and a general level of enthusiasm and involvement, expand your accessibility by reinforcing each tutorial lesson at least once somewhere later in the game session. It'll help player retention and lessen their panic when they realise they haven't learned all of your lessons quite by heart. This step depends on context, but there are always opportunities for learning; even in brutal PvP deathmatches, things like loading screen hints and "tips of the day" go a long way in educating players over multiple sessions.

Although the above approach is easy to improve upon once you've gained enough confidence, it's a safe and respectable base to work from when you're starting out – particularly if you're in the habit of making throwaway, one-week projects which don't really demand investment or subtlety.

When in doubt, follow the general rule of thumb: never make your game expand at a faster rate than the tools you use to explain it.

- Rodain Joubert -



## SimCity's plot sizes may get an upgrade in the future

**W**e like the new *SimCity*. Beyond the issues it faced at launch, and its many strange quirks that we've gradually spotted during our time with it, we're generally quite happy with Maxis' revamped city-building sim. There's one gameplay facet of it, however, that's given us and many other long-time fans of the series massive cranial trauma: the disappointingly limiting size of the plots in which you're expected to create your bustling metropolis. We get that Maxis are trying to nurture a social side of city building, in which players must share commodities with neighbouring cities within the same region; but really, just let those of us who don't play well with others create one giant city rather than 16 small ones that aren't completely capable of individually sustaining themselves.

While chatting with IncGamers,

*SimCity*'s creative director Ocean Quigley explained that the limitation is in place to ensure that the game would be capable of running on a wide range of PCs with varied hardware specs:

"We need to keep in mind that *SimCity* is a mainstream game, it's not a game that is only going to run on high-end gaming PCs, it has to run in your dad's PC as well. That is just a performance decision. Given that was the performance constraint we decided to work under, we built a larger region environment and a bunch of the multiplayer to work with 2km cities."

Thankfully, it seems there may actually be some reprieve from this annoyance in the future, as Quigley then went on to deliver this shining beacon of hope: "We'll eventually get around to expanding the city size, but I can't make any promises as to when."

## Now this is football



**O**nline fantasy leagues and football management titles have taught us one thing: people enjoy running football teams almost as much as they enjoy playing them. We get the impression that this has lead Games Workshop and Cyanide Studio to rethink their approach to *Blood Bowl* following the three equally unsuccessful releases of their Warhammer-themed American football game based on the franchise. In response, the studio is now

preparing to release a free-to-play management title called *Blood Bowl: Star Coach*, which will be available for PC, Mac and tablets (we're not sure which tablets, exactly) around June this year. Players will be able to choose their race from Orc, Human, Dwarf, Skaven, Wood Elf and Chaos, customise their teams and prepare gameplay strategies, and then send them off to battle without having any direct control over the game.

## Valve's first Steam Box could be out by June



Valve's Gabe Newell recently revealed in an interview with the BBC that prototypes of their PC/console hybrid, the Steam Box, could be out in the gaming wilds within the next three to four months.

"We're working with partners, trying to nail down exactly how fast we can make it. We're also working hard on the input side to try to take a step forward in terms of the kinds of games you can play," said Newell. "We'll be giving out some prototypes to customers to get their reactions, I'd guess in the next three or four months."

Along with the Steam Box itself, Valve has a few prototype controllers that they're ready to let loose on the mysterious "customers" mentioned in the quote above. We've long been aware that Valve has been fiddling with control mechanisms centred on biometric feedback, and by the sounds of things the hardware will take advantage of it.

"What we've found is you can directly measure player state and it turns out to be very useful," he said. "You need to be able to directly measure how aroused the player is, what their heart rate is, things like that, in order to continue to offer them a new experience each time they play."

### Sony could get Minecraft, Nintendo... not so much

If you've ever wondered why *Minecraft* has stayed away from Sony's consoles then wonder no more: "Microsoft has an exclusivity deal for consoles," said Mojang's Jens Bergensten. He stated that this deal is on a timer, however, and when that expires the studio will certainly look at porting *Minecraft* to the PS3 (or even PS4). Yet, despite how very suitable we think the block-bashing simulator would be on the Wii U, Mojang says it's "very unlikely" that they'll port to the platform.

Currently, the studio is working to bring their iOS and Android *Pocket Edition* versions as close as possible to the PC version, with support for online, server-based multiplayer functioning, but working with such a wide spectrum of phones and tablets is proving extremely challenging, especially when it comes to infinite worlds and advanced Redstone circuitry.

## Beyond: Two Souls gets a release date. Also, Willem Dafoe.



Quantum Dream's upcoming PS3 exclusive *Beyond: Two Souls* finally has a release date: October 8th. In addition, it's been revealed that joining Ellen Page (who plays main character Jodie in the game) in *Beyond's* motion-captured acting bonanza is Willem "THERE WAS A FIRE FIGHT" Dafoe. This despite the fact that Quantum CEO David Cage insisted Dafoe isn't in it when rumours

began circulating last year.

Dafoe plays scientist Nathan Dawkins, who's studying Jodie's supernatural abilities for the government. At the time of writing, it's not clear what Dawkins' true motives are – i.e. whether he's helping Jodie or trying to recapture her – but you can rest assured that you'll be able to find out for yourself this October.

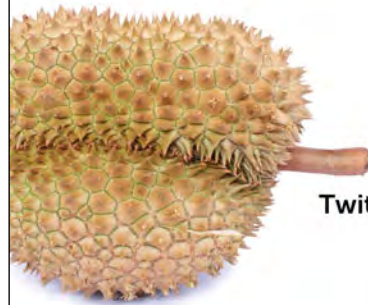
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Miktar's Meanderings



Feline senility / PAX East / tablets

Our cat has Alzheimer's. The oldest one of the two that rules this roost. She's nearly 15 in cat years, so it's not too surprising. Though it is news to me that cats can go senile. Apparently the signs of senior dementia in cats include loss of litter box training, which mercifully, she did not lose. Other signs include increased/changed vocalizations, confusion at their surroundings, lack of grooming, and increased agitation at night... [This is normal in marriages too, Ed]

She's fine, though. Healthy as can be, no joint problems. Just extra clingy, especially at night. She becomes very vocal if I'm not around, and will yowl all night if I don't let her into the room so she can sleep on me. She's not my cat (not that a cat is anyone's cat), she belongs to the people I live with. But, as I have discovered, cats love me. They adore me to bits, and will always gravitate towards me if I'm around. And, since the universe loves irony, I'm allergic to cats.

In non-pet related news, I'll be attending PAX East soon. You'll be able to read about it in the May issue, and on [www.nag.co.za](http://www.nag.co.za) as it happens (March 22-24). PAX (Penny Arcade Expo) has, in some opinions, become the new E3. It's been running since 2004, started by the minds behind the Penny Arcade comic strip which has been running since 1998. It's a pretty big to-do, with keynote speeches from industry professionals, exhibitor booths from all the major game developers, LAN party, and so on. Imagine rAge, but a hundred times bigger. Over the years, E3 has become kind of stuffy, since it's primarily a trade show, with publishers herding press into little rooms to give the same "our game is amazing" demonstration over and over. In contrast, PAX has grown to celebrate the culture of gaming more than its profit margins. I guess the simpler way to put it, is while E3 is for investors, PAX is for gamers.

Part of my trip to PAX will be an experiment: a little while back I bought a Nexus 7, and I've found Google's entry-level tablet to be remarkably powerful for its price tag (\$199). I'm almost never without it, though it's worth noting I don't have a smartphone. I'm sure if I had one of those ultra-powerful Galaxy S thingies, things might be different. But I do like the larger screen a 7-inch tablet has, over a phone. The reason being, I use my Nexus 7 to read manga (thank you, *Mango*), draw (thank you *SketchBook Pro*) and "research" (thank you *RetroArch*).

What I want to try next, is see how useful it can be for content production. Specifically, for updating the NAG website while at PAX. I've borrowed a nice-looking portable Bluetooth keyboard, and I already had a USB OTG (On-The-Go) cable for plugging USB devices like memory sticks and gamepads into the tablet. The plan is to use a USB SD Card reader to get photos off the camera and upload them to the site. The Nexus 7 is a pretty powerful tablet; the Tegra 3 quad-core processor continually surprises me, especially after checking out the Epic Citadel benchmarking tool, which uses *Unreal Engine 3*.

So either the tablet will become a functional replacement for dragging a netbook/laptop everywhere when I go to events, or this experiment will reveal some flaws with the idea that I hadn't considered. Curious how it'll play out.

- Miktar Dracon -



Star Wars: First Assault detailed – a game we'll probably never get

In the November 2012 issue of NAG magazine we wrote an article on the appearance of *Star Wars: First Assault*. The unannounced Xbox LIVE Arcade game cropped up thanks to its "box art" being discovered online. Back then it was speculated that the game was a team-based online shooter that might have been made up of recycled assets from the cancelled *Star Wars: Battlefront III*.

It's now come to light that *First Assault* was indeed a 16 player online shooter. We say "was" because the game's release is looking very uncertain thanks to the recent Disney acquisition of LucasFilm, LucasArts, LucasEverything.

A source who was working on *First Assault* has spilled the beans on the project to website Kotaku. Apparently, *First Assault* was meant to be a predecessor to a renewed take on *Battlefront III*. The thinking was, once *First Assault* had been released and had proven that there was still a market for a *Star Wars* online shooter, LucasArts would use the work on *First Assault* as a springboard to the eventual release of

*Star Wars: Battlefront III*. This would be a completely new *Battlefront III* and it would not use any of the code and assets from the long-cancelled *Battlefront III* of 2010.

*First Assault* has no vehicles or Jedi characters in it – it is simply an 8v8 online shooter pitting teams of rebels against imperial forces. It was meant to mimic *Call of Duty's* style of multiplayer, but was never meant to take the place of *Battlefront III*, which has by now become one of the most mourned cancelled games of this generation. LucasArts, according to the source, deliberately aimed to market *First Assault* as a spin-off and not a *Battlefront* title so as to keep gamer expectations low.

Sadly, the same source doesn't put much hope in the game actually seeing the light of day. It is, much like *Battlefield III*, almost finished, but the team still working on the game has no guarantee that their project will actually launch, and that's thanks to Disney and their shuffling of LucasArts projects. Even the amazing looking *Star Wars 1313's* fate is presently uncertain.

“Tungsten vandalized the fourth wall by graffitiing a dollar sign onto it. And the other three walls, by definition, could only watch.”

Francisco Souki, game designer at Schell Games, on *Dead Space 3's* microtransactions

## Sounding off: Pulse reveals its world with sound



Originally a student project (and an IGF finalist), *Pulse* is the creation of Team Pixel Pi, who've decided to go ahead and turn their prototype into a fully-fledged game. Its hook is that the main character (a young girl named Eva) is blind, and in order to "see" the game world, you rely on sound and echolocation. It bounces off of various objects, gradually revealing the world and any hazards within.

One of the ways you'll uncover the sights of *Pulse* is by throwing adorable little critters called Mokos around the world, their squeals lifting the veil off of chunks of environment. They're not the only creatures in the world, however, and far meaner things exist in the unseen void that are eager to make a meal out of you. Other sound sources like turning gears give you more permanent vision, while you can bash stuff like gongs to get a quick look at your surroundings.

At time of writing, Team Pixel Pi is currently seeking funding for *Pulse* on Kickstarter, with the funding window for their \$75,000 push closing on April 11th. If the game's concept intrigues you as much as it does us, and you're reading this before April 11th, be sure to head over to Kickstarter to back the project.

## Hey there little lady



True to their word, Nintendo has not abandoned the Wii following the launch of its successor. The company recently revealed the Wii Mini, which should be available locally by time you read this at an RRP of R1,499. This little device strips away some of the less used features of the Wii – Wi-Fi, online capabilities, GameCube backwards compatibility and component video output – in exchange for the lower price and smaller size. The standard bundle includes a Wii Plus remote and Nunchuck attachment, although there'll be no games in the box.

This package isn't really suitable for gamers looking to move forward with the Wii (it's doubtful we'll see any new major titles for the platform), but rather only those who are keen to pick up this previous-gen console to play through some of its more well-known games. Nintendo is definitely pitching this as a "platinum" console, and will add a few new titles to its Nintendo Select range to coincide with the Mini's release.

## Major money-maker

We reported last month that *Far Cry 3* was so successful that Ubisoft plans to make it one of their "major pillars" moving forward, and this news seems to indicate that they're doing exactly that: a rating for *Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon* has been discovered on the Brazilian ratings board website. The game is set for release on Xbox 360, PS3 and PC, and possible artwork was uncovered suggesting that this could be a standalone title. *FC3's* lead writer has been quoted in the past as working on something "surprising", so we're not ruling out any possibilities of *Blood Dragon* being entirely different gameplay-wise from *Far Cry 3*.



When THQ kicked the bucket last month we were all left a little worried about the fate of *Company of Heroes 2*, but SEGA has finally confirmed a release date of June 2013. The title will be exactly as it was before the change in publisher, and Relic is excited to work with SEGA thanks to its long-standing history with PC titles. A closed beta will be available soon (possibly by time you read this) to assist in multiplayer balance.



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~ 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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**PUBLISHER** Electronic Arts  
**E-MAIL** zasupport@ea.com  
**TELEPHONE** 0860 EAHLP/324357

## Age of Empires II marches into the HD era



We don't normally make a big splash about games being remastered in HD, but *Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings* holds a special place in many of our hearts – which means that when news reached our brains that this iconic RTS (originally release back in 1999) is due to get a good bit of high-def polish, we immediately sat up and took notice.

Due to hit Steam on April 9<sup>th</sup> (this means it might actually be out by time you read this, in which case you should already be reaching for your credit card before even finishing

this sentence), *Age of Empires II HD* bundles the original game and its expansion, *The Conquerors*, into one package. Aside from the necessary graphical cleansing to make it more pleasing to the modern eye and its insistence on mega resolutions, it'll also boast online multiplayer (making use of new-fangled Steam technologies), multi-monitor support and full Steam Workshop functionality for sharing user-made content. It carries a fairly hefty price tag of \$19.99 – but our great memories of *AoE II* make that price tag seem perfectly reasonable.

Square Enix has registered a new domain under the name *Deus Ex: The Fall*. We know that this isn't the title of the upcoming film (which is called *Deus Ex: Human Defiance*), so there's a good chance that this is either an expansion to *Human Revolution* or, more likely, a full-blown sequel (and hopefully not anything boring like a comic or book tie-in). The timing is about right for an announcement of a sequel, so let's all hold thumbs for that.



The *Tomb Raider* films of the past were decent action romps, and were aligned well enough with the games on which they were based, but with a new, grittier and more believable Lara Croft, **GK Films** wants to reintroduce the young adventurer to the big screen based on her newfound origin story. The studio is working closely with *Tomb Raider* creators Crystal Dynamics, and CD's head Darrell Gallagher calms that he's excited about this partnership and wants to see a film version that isn't a continuation of the old films.

## The Conduit finds a new home



If ever there was a studio with the reputation for developing forgettable games, it's High Voltage Software. It might sound like we're being rude, but when a company's greatest triumph is the utterly docile FPS *The Conduit* for Wii, then you know the accusation is fair.

It's worth noting, then, that HVS has decided to branch out and put to further use the energy they invested into building *The Conduit*

and its even poorer-performing sequel: the studio has announced that they've partened with NVIDIA to bring *The Conduit* to Tegra-powered mobile devices. The game has had a visual overall (a rather sad reference to the level of fidelity on the original Wii version) and will be optimised for not just the mobile hardware, but touch interfaces as well. If we were the betting sort, we'd say that you could expect the sequel to follow soon enough.



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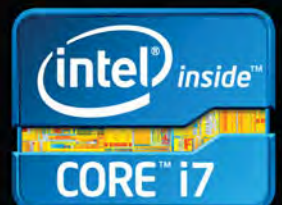
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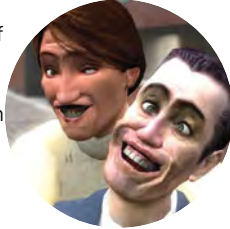
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## The many millions of Garry's Mod

You know what's the easiest way to not make millions of rands? Spend all your days doing nothing but lamenting the fact that you didn't come up with the idea for *Garry's Mod* – the face-deforming, contraption-loving mod of *Half-Life 2*'s Source engine that has enjoyed remarkable success in the seven years since its launch. Just how much success, you ask? Oh, around 22 million dollar's worth of it. And they said you can't get rich modding games.



That figure comes courtesy of creator Garry Newman, who let loose a few interesting tidbits during a community Q&A. "Over 7 years *GMod* has made about 22 million dollars. We get less than half of that though," said Newman, who likely has to send a huge chunk of the money made by *GMod* to Valve for the use of their engine and characters. "Then the tax man gets a bunch of that. Then when we take money out of the company the tax man gets a bunch of that too." Still, we'll bet there's a sizeable wad of cash left for Garry and his team by the end of it all. So what do they plan to do next? Beyond continuing development on *GMod*, adding new features and getting a Linux version out the door, Newman revealed that he and his team are "starting work on a new PC game" – a game which Newman has "wanted to start work on for ages."

PC	
GRID 2	May 1st
Resident Evil: Revelations	May 4th
Splinter Cell: Blacklist	May

360	
Lost Planet 3	June
Grand Theft Auto V	September 17th
Fuse	TBA

PS3	
Injustice: Gods Among Us	April 19th
Remember Me	May
The Last of Us	June

"I would rather see a game where you play to feel happier, and to make other people like you, and then make the people you care about happy."

-Jenova Chen, creator of *Journey*

### To The Moon, and back again

*To The Moon* – otherwise known as "that indie game that induced more tear-stained faces than any other in 2011" – has a spiritual successor / prequel on the way. Developer Freebird Games is calling it *A Bird Story*, and chronologically it's set before *To The Moon*. Its story focuses on the boyhood tale of a patient of Dr Watts and Dr Rosalene in Episode 2 of *To The Moon*. Centred on the boy and a bird with a broken wing, creator Kan Gao says that, despite it being a strongly narrative-driven experience, there'll be little to no dialogue. If it's anything like its precursor, expect an emotional piledriver of a game.



## Lara Croft's Guardian Light has been snuffed

Before Lara's latest rebooted adventure, the buxom pilferer of antiquated rooms had a very different outing. *Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light* was a downloadable game played from an isometric perspective. It had platforming, puzzles, danger, adventure! Why we're telling you all of this escapes us, because you probably played it anyway. It was great! Too bad we're never

getting another one.

Noah Hughes, the creative director for the current reboot of *Tomb Raider*, has revealed that developer Crystal Dynamics has no intention of reviving the now single-dose spin-off.

"No, *Guardian* was a great opportunity to explore things that we may not have done in the pillar franchise titles, but in that case it was co-op. There are no plans to do anything in

that series but it was a great opportunity to do something a little bit outside of the core."

*Guardian of Light* was released in 2010; it was the result of a then attempt to reboot the waning IP after the somewhat lukewarm reception of 2008's *Tomb Raider: Underworld*. The bite-sized offering introduced co-op to the series with much success. That success, however, was thanks

to the drastic shift in gameplay style.

"With *Guardian of Light*, the tone and the story supported side-by-side play in the campaign. This time around," Hughes explained of the current *Tomb Raider* reboot, "it's less appropriate and we tried to do more of a complementary experience, hoping it would have a lot of replay ability and people can just jump in and have fun."



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# Foxy Roxy

Some call her the ultimate gamer grill. Then we smack them and tell them that Roxy isn't food (this is what eating too much of mom's meatloaf will do to you), she's the official rAge/NAG mascot. She was lovingly created in 2012 by South African illustrator Warren Louw for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of rAge. Seeing that we (much like the gaming industry) like to squeeze the blood out of every IP we create, we've got her working it hard in NAG each month. Her job is to hide somewhere in the magazine for you to find. Go, do it now!

Send your sighting to [ed@nag.co.za](mailto:ed@nag.co.za) with the subject line "April Roxy", and of course your contact details, and you could win a prize.

## MARCH WINNER



Daleen Janse van Vuuren, Cover

## THIS MONTH'S LOOT

PS3 Shadow 6 Wireless Control valued at R449<sup>95</sup>. Sponsored by dreamGEAR and Musica.



# CAPTION OF THE MONTH

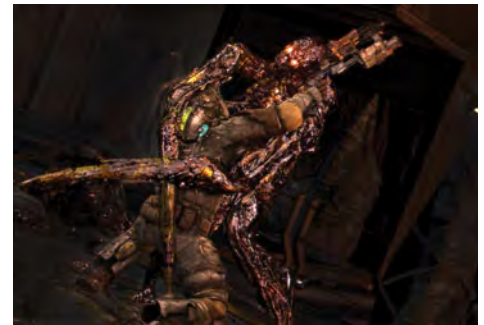


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NAG's lame attempt at humour "Don't worry, bro, these things happen to everyone."



Last months winner "Little did Isaac know he still had his beer goggles on." - Devin Muller

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# INJUSTICE

GODS AMONG US

EXPECTED APRIL 19<sup>TH</sup>

# Lord British returns bearing games

Richard "Lord British" Garriott has announced that he's working on a new fantasy RPG called *Shroud of the Avatar: Forsaken Virtues* – and naturally, at the time of this writing he's seeking funding for the project on Kickstarter. Garriott, who originally created the *Ultima* series of beloved role-playing games, makes the bold claim of wanting to return the genre to its roots and "reinvent the classic fantasy role-playing experience." That is, he promises a greater focus on the role-playing aspects, and far less emphasis on grinding levels.

There's promise of a deeply interactive world where anything that looks usable, will be. The fiction surrounding your character and the world will be complex and meaningful, and the game reportedly uses a classless character system. Player choice is paramount: "Players

may choose to follow the life of the adventurer or, if they prefer, focus on exploration and discovery. Players may even choose the life of a homesteader; either nestled within the safety of the settled lands, or on the dangerous but potentially lucrative frontier. The world is full of opportunities and challenges!" Other features include player housing, a crafting system and "meaningful PvP that also minimises grieving" should you choose to take your game online rather than play it solo. Should you choose to take your game online, you'll be introduced to a persistent multiplayer world. Search for the project on Kickstarter if you're interested in backing it. They're looking for \$1 million, and it definitely looks like Garriott and co. will reach their funding goal by closing date of April 7th.

## Team Meat uninterested in console development

Team Meat, developers of hyper-challenging 2D platformer *Super Meat Boy* and upcoming cat-lady simulator *Mew-Genics*, had a lot to say to Eurogamer about why they no longer find console development appealing. "When you look at the stress that comes with Steam and iOS and the Google Play store, you look at those and you look at which hoops you'd have to jump through to get on any one of the consoles, it's like, 'Is this worth the time? Is this worth the headache?'" said Team Meat's Tommy Refenes.

Refenes reckons that the relatively low cost and ease of entry when it comes to developing for PC and getting your game published on Steam has already begun to limit the importance



of consoles in indie game development. Consoles are "not the only outlet anymore, and those seem to be the more difficult outlets than just contacting Steam and just putting your game on there and supporting it easily." He went on to say, "It's sad. I like the consoles. And I prefer playing something in my living room. But I'm also not in that range of consumer that actually sort of dictates trends at this point."

## RELEASE LIST **BL GAMES™**

Dates subject to change without notice

### April week 1

Painkiller: Hell & Damnation 360 / PS3

### April week 3

Injustice: Gods Among Us 360 / PS3 / Wii U

Dr Kawashima's Devilish Brain Training 3DS

Fire Emblem Awakening 3DS

### April week 4

Dragon's Dogma: Dark Arisen 360 / PS3

### April week 5

Dead Island: Riptide 360 / PC / PS3

### April unconfirmed

F1 Race Stars Wii U

Star Trek 360 / PC / PS3

The Croods: Prehistoric Party! 3DS / DS / Wii

Total War: Rome II PC

## Ubisoft's body is ready for a Wii U price cut

Nintendo's Wii U console has been out for a good few months now, but already the Japanese manufacturer has had to revise its projected sales forecast of 5.5 million by the end of March 2013, to 4 million. As a result of this, there's been a call for a console price cut from interested parties, and Ubisoft is one of the first publishers to go on record saying that this is something that would make them very happy.

Ubisoft's executive director for EMEA territories Alain Corre, when asked whether a price cut is something Ubisoft would welcome, responded with: "Always. We always want the hardware to be at a low price because we want as many fans as possible to afford to buy our games, so that's for sure. We think that Wii U will find its public at some point. Some were expecting sales to be quicker but we are optimistic."

Since he put it like that, it seems rather obvious doesn't it?



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**MIKTAR'S OPINION**

Special processor for background processing, like downloads. Good. Users having to lose all their PSN purchases. Bad. Being able to share the last few minutes of gameplay to YouTube. Good. Suspend mode (something handhelds have had for ages). Very good. Gaikai for streaming PS3 back catalogue (eventually). Ugh. *Diablo III* for PS3/PS4 will have offline play. LOL. Between the lines, Sony admitted Cell was a mistake. About time. Plenty of fast RAM to satisfy Epic and Crytek's demands. Fine. Early prototype "Deep Down", sequel to *Dragon's Dogma*, shown. Day-one purchase. Didn't bother showing the console, or its price. Derp. Fully supports erotic man-on-car interaction. Wait, what?

# POC

# ΔOX□ PlayStation 4

The best place to play and share and laugh and cry and die

20 February 2013  
New York

It has been eight years since the announcement of the PlayStation 3. Many things have changed and fads come and gone. A few are still sticking around like social networking and the invasion of smart devices into our lives – most people have two portable devices. It's hard to imagine that a few years ago you'd need a wheelbarrow to carry all the devices, toys and functionality you can now find on a single smartphone. This is the future people and in it we must adapt to survive.

With the Facebook social games rush diluting, and the future of smartphones and on-the-go gaming growing, it

appears to be the right time to launch a new PlayStation. You can expect something similar from Microsoft in their inevitable announcement later this year, but we're not here to talk about them.

It's not the kind of launch anyone was expecting. Shockingly the box wasn't shown and this caused weird reactions all over the place. The hardware specification was announced along with the company's vision; the controller was shown and a whole pile of exciting games announced and shown. Amazing content and information was shared over the course of a two hour presentation and all people could

talk about was not seeing the shape and colour scheme of the plastic box holding it all together. Sometimes you have to wonder what's going on with the human race. If you want to see what it looks like wait for E3 or around the same time Xbox does their launch so everyone can share the media attention.

The event took place in New York on a freezing cold Wednesday afternoon, and NAG was invited to attend, and then of course kind of expected to share the experience with all of you. There is a lot of information, so we'll keep it trim and condensed over the next eight pages, making the best use of your time.

# PS4

## NEO'S OPINION

This is why the PS4 is important, grand and will be a mighty fine gaming console. It has more than four times the mathematical processing power, seven times the memory bandwidth, six times the pixel-fill-rate, nine times the transistor density and sixteen times the amount of memory at the low end. In total the PS4 is at least eight times as powerful as the PS3. Best of all, extracting every ounce of this power is possible and much easier than it was with the PS3. From a technological point of view alone, this is a worthwhile and much needed leap in performance for the PlayStation. Buy!



## GOING DEEPER INTO THE PS4

Internally the PS4 houses AMD hardware – an eight-core processor from their upcoming “Jaguar” family paired with something similar to the mobile Radeon HD 7970M, to create the world’s most powerful APU ever made. The “Jaguar” cores themselves are similar to Intel’s Atom processors, but the built-in instruction sets, clock speed, Level 3 cache and the fast HyperTransport bus puts it in a class roughly two to three times higher when comparing per-core performance. Manufactured using the 28nm process, they’re going to use significantly less power as well. This is AMD’s first design win in a long time, and they’re putting the same technology into the next-gen Xbox.

According to what AMD has been allowed to reveal so far, “Jaguar” cores don’t share any hardware between them, meaning that each core may have its own floating-point processor as well as 512KB of L2 cache. The PS3’s Cell chip also had eight cores, but back then the world wasn’t ready for parallel workloads. Like the Xbox 360, the APU will also share memory between the GPU and the CPU – all eight gigabytes of it in pure DDR5 trim.

The graphics chip is the most interesting part of the package – Sony is targeting a fluid 60 frames per second in 3D with the PS4 and probably at the full HD resolution as well. It may not be an exact copy of the HD 7970M because AMD can cut out some of the unnecessary fluff, so for now we’ll have to call it the HD 7970M-LE until we know what the actual codename is. Performance-wise, in an un-optimised environment, the entire package will probably be very similar to MSI’s GX60, which features a quad-core A10-series APU and a HD 7970M.

What’s Sony going to do with this hardware? They’ll make a big push into offering 4K media, improving on the Blu-ray HD standard. There’s going to be an emphasis on DirectCompute, as the GPU can now accelerate processes that are parallel in nature, like physics calculations, better video decoding, Tessellation, AMD’s TressFX and global illumination, freeing up the CPU to do other work. The biggest bonus, though, is the x86 architecture. Not only are developers already familiar with it, it’s also going to make porting games and coding for the beast much, much easier.

Oh, and one last thing. You’ll be able to buy this APU separately. It’ll have only four cores and probably half the graphics power and it won’t have DDR5 RAM on-board, but it’ll still be the most powerful APU on the market.

– Wesley Fick



# The war against reality

The festivities were kicked off by Andrew House (president and group CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment) who shared PlayStation's vision with a simple message: no matter how the world has changed and evolved, the gamer is leading the charge in the war against reality, and to win this war you don't need to fight, you only have to play.

Of course playing these days means anything from *Angry Birds* on your smartphone to sitting in your living room to crouching behind your desktop PC. The idea is that the living room is no longer the centre of the PlayStation ecosystem, the gamer is. There was also a push for the PlayStation Vita in House's introduction, and he hinted at another announcement around this handheld later in the year. Sony's aim is to expand PlayStation mobile everywhere. As if pre-empting the question about what it looks like, House ended by saying PlayStation is not a box but rather a leading authority on play.

Andrew House then introduced Mark Cerny to talk about the actual console and what it can do. Cerny has been working on the PS4 for approximately five years. During that time he's been asking developers what they wanted in a next generation console and applying this thinking along with the way the world has been evolving to create a perfect unified device that has an answer for everything you throw at it.

We learnt that one of the goals for PS4 is to help the developer create games, and of course exotic technology is a barrier to this (the previous Cell technology employed in the PS3). Essentially the PS4 is now based on PC technology which frees up developers by having one less whole system to develop for. If you have a team of guys making a game and you have to launch that game on five or six different systems, each system costs you a whole team. If PlayStation eliminates one of these systems, then costs come down for developers, which will have a positive effect on the games in the long run.

Besides making a console that addresses the needs of an ever changing world and the developers that make the games, most of the emphasis was placed on the player experience. To achieve this player centric objective PlayStation have focused on five key principals that drive the player experience:

**Simple:** Simplicity is the overall guiding principal for the PS4 for both the end user



**1 SHARE BUTTON**

Hit this button and you can scan through the last few minutes of gameplay, pick a portion, tag it and return to your game. The tagged video will then upload as you continue to play.

**3 HEADPHONE JACK**

Plug your headphone in here.

and the developer. The user interface is also guided by this principal and the team wanted powerful functionality for the user just a button press away.

**Immediate:** Immediacy is an expectation. The PS4 eliminates the traditional waiting time for a console to boot up and a saved game to load. Suspension and resuming is supported and the console will enter a low power state with the play session preserved in RAM. There is a custom chip (for background processing) that manages uploads and downloads, so even with the main power off you can update games in

the background. Most impressively this will allow digital titles to be played while they're being downloaded. The idea here is that players can start playing newly purchased content immediately while the rest of it is being downloaded in the background.

**Social:** There is dedicated hardware to support social interactions too – social hardware if you will. The hardware allows for always on video compression and decompression supporting fluid uploading of recorded gameplay at the press of a button. This will make the uploading of videos as easy as sharing screenshots



**2 TOUCH PAD**

This is a sensitive touch pad for alternative ways to control your games.

**4 JOYSTICKS AND TRIGGER BUTTONS**

The feel of these has been enhanced for a tighter sense of control. They've enhanced the rumble capabilities and reduced latency.

# Dual Shock 4

The amount of time and effort that goes into creating a controller for a console selling in the tens of millions is staggering. You have to think about everything from ergonomics and comfort for those gamers who spend a few hours at a time playing a game, all the way to battery life and the trade-offs that come with that.

**5 LIGHT BAR**

Coloured bars are a simpler way to identify players. The light bars have been designed in tandem with a second peripheral, a stereo camera that can sense the depth of the environment in front of it and track the 3D position of the controller via the light bar.

with your friends. This same hardware enhances the "visibility of gameplay", players can view live streaming of their friend's gameplay and even jump in and take over (with permission) to help them through a tricky spot. The PS4 will also use your social networks to connect with your real friends using their real names and profile pictures. Of course aliases and anonymity are still in place for those special non-social interactions.

**Integrated:** Gaming will continue beyond the living room and onto all the other devices you own. Some examples include

using your smartphone to browse gameplay footage of an upcoming opponent. You can set up or accept challenges. The idea here – being able to keep in touch with your game regardless of your location.

**Personalised:** The user interface is completely redesigned and now your PlayStation can get to know you. The system will learn your likes and dislikes and display content relevant to your particular tastes no matter what they might be. As the system learns your likes and dislikes you'll discover content preloaded on your system with the aim of reducing download time

to zero. They're aiming for a lofty goal of knowing enough about you to predict your next game purchase and have it preloaded and ready to go as soon as you click the buy button – scary.

2013 was always going to be an exciting year for gamers. Sony has taken the first shot with their PS4 announcement. They've shared their future philosophy with us and seem to be doing all the right things. They're not making another box for the living room but rather showing us how we'll be playing games in the future.

– **Michael James**



# Developers, games and software technology

No console launch is worth doing without a few killer apps. At the New York event an impressive line-up of what to expect was presented by some of the most influential people in the industry. The whole song and dance left you with the impression that everyone is taking Sony's new console very seriously. The planned support for the console is impressive and looks set to keep delivering innovative gaming experiences well past the launch window.



## MARK CERNY

Mark Cerny was introduced as the lead system architect on the PS4. He's 49 and has been in the gaming industry since it started – more or less. He received a lifetime achievement award from the International Game Developers Association in 2004 and was also the 13th inductee into the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences hall of fame. He was described as a modern-day Da Vinci by Joseph Olin (then president of the AIAS). He is noted for being fluent in Japanese and has worked as a game designer, programmer, producer and technologist. He is well known for promoting the Cerny Method as a game development philosophy emphasising measured risk-taking over production schedules. He is known for working on *Marble Madness* and *Sonic the Hedgehog 2* as well as contributing significantly to *Crash Bandicoot* and *Spyro the Dragon*. He is a veteran game developer emphasising Sony's newfound dedication to developers and making the game creation process as easy as possible. Besides architecting the PS4, Mark has also been working on *Knack*, a new IP featuring a robot lead character that must repel a goblin attack using his unique abilities.

## Forever online

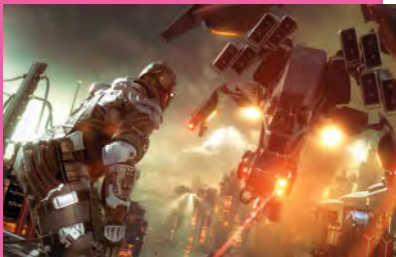
David Perry, CEO of Gaikai, a company Sony recently purchased, was also on stage presenting the fastest, most powerful network for gaming in the world. They even have a Guinness World Record on their resumé. The concepts behind the new PlayStation network hang off the five objectives of simple, immediate, social, integrated and personalised. For example you can browse the PlayStation store and if you see something you like you can hop in and start playing the full game – not a cut down version. They've given power to the developers who can now insert special command buttons so friends can drop health potions when you're in trouble as well as new spectating tools for developers to use. Finally, Remote play makes the Vita the ultimate companion device for the PS4. Right in the middle of your game you can use remote play to transfer whatever you're playing to your Vita with the goal of making every PS4 title playable on the Vita. Gaikai effectively turns the PS4 into a server and Vita a client – this technology is already built in to the hardware. Additionally gamers will have TV shows, movies and music available on the go and ultimately all PlayStation 1, 2 and 3 games available on all devices. Everything everywhere is the vision. How this pans out in South Africa remains to be seen but with Telkom rolling out 20Mb lines for testing, the future isn't too far away for us in South Africa.



## Killzone: Shadow Fall

**Developer:** Guerrilla Games  
**Publisher:** SCEE  
**Website:** [www.killzone.com](http://www.killzone.com)

*Killzone: Shadow Fall* was introduced by Herman Hulst (MD of Guerrilla Games) and is set 30 years after the last one and sees... hang on – who cares? It's just more alien killing fun in what can be described as *Halo* for the PlayStation. The video featured lens flare, reflective buildings and even cascading waterfalls all showing off what games like this do best – deliver visual candy. Then we saw transparency, particles and of course smoke as well as fabric flapping in the wind, exhaust ports and guns, so many guns and bullets. Sarcasm aside it really does look scrumptious, the kind of yummy that makes you want to play it right after watching a few minutes of video. It looks epic and seems to be covering all the bases outside of the technical stuff like slow motion head shots, dangling from a helicopter while firing at the bad guys inside all while flying across amazing looking cityscapes. Expect no depth. We cannot wait for this.



## Drive Club

**Developer:** Evolution Studios  
**Publisher:** SCEE  
**Website:** [www.evos.net](http://www.evos.net)

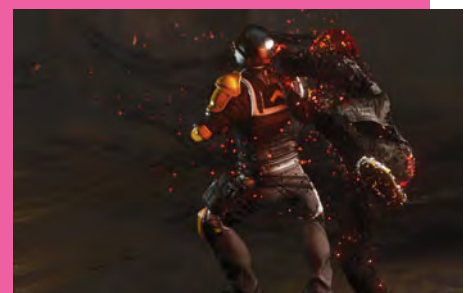
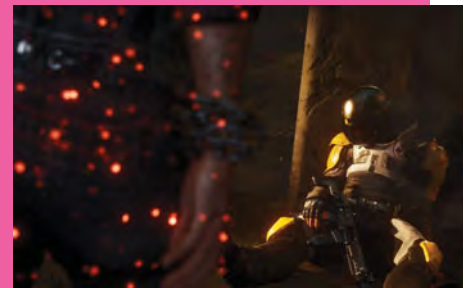
Matt Southern (game director) pitched a fresh take on the racing genre and apparently something that they've wanted to do for years – real time anywhere club racing. The idea in *Drive Club* is that players can, using a mobile application on their smartphone or tablet, set challenges and events and see how people do in them. The scope ranges from a few mates after work to weekend long tournaments featuring thousands of players. The level of detail is described as borderline insane with attention paid to crazy stuff like individual woven threads in the seats and how the bulbs reflect inside the headlights. It looks to be an attempt to shoehorn racing into the social space and depending on how they implement these features it might be worthwhile.



## Infamous: Second Son

**Developer:** Sucker Punch Productions  
**Publisher:** SCEE  
**Website:** [www.suckerpunch.com](http://www.suckerpunch.com)

Your security comes at a price... your freedom. Nate Fox (game director) ran through a short but grim reality check presentation that set the tone and scene for *Infamous: Second Son*. The game is set seven years after *Infamous 2* and players now control Delsin Rowe in the real world location of Seattle instead of the fictional setting of Empire City. In the previous game, protagonist Cole McGrath was all about electricity but now Rowe seems to be all about smoke and fire balls, embers and fiery chains. You can expect plenty close quarters combat and taking the bad guys down with style in an alternate look at the future. "Your safety is our top priority. The D.U.P. is in control."





## The Witness

**Developer:** Jonathan Blow  
**Publisher:** Indie  
**Website:** the-witness.net

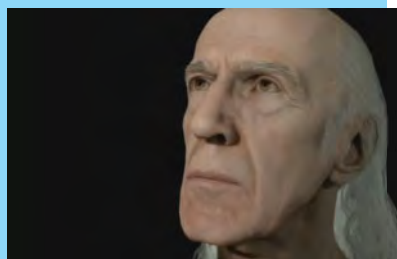
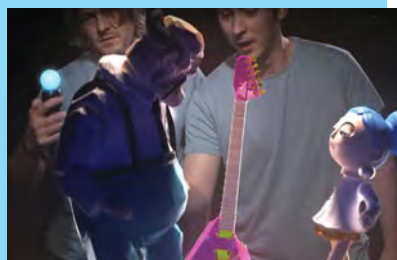
To understand why this game is going to be something special and different and unforgettable you need to do two things. Thing one is buy and play *Braid* and thing two is watch interviews with Jonathan Blow to understand how he views game development. *The Witness* is a game about what happens in your head when you play it. It's essentially an open world first-person puzzle game that takes place on a "mysterious abandoned island". It not the kind of open world you're used to because it's designed to give a compact experience that makes the best use of your time. So instead of spreading out to the horizons in an attempt to impress you with sheer scale and low content, *The Witness* crams everything into a very small area. Puzzle count last time we checked was at 499 and all on that small island – representing plenty opportunity to allow your mind to transition from confusion to understanding. We dig a bit deeper into this title elsewhere in this issue.



## Record your dreams

**Developer:** Media Molecule  
**Publisher:** SCEE  
**Website:** www.mediamolecule.com

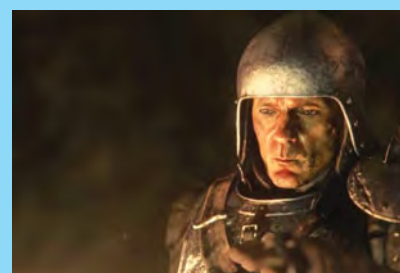
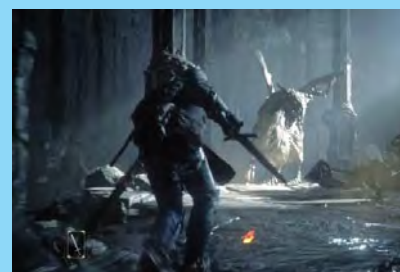
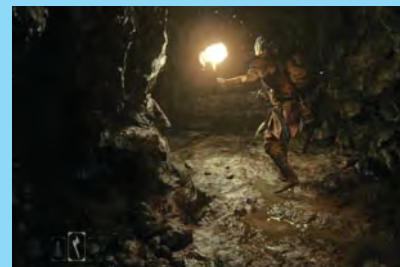
Media Molecule's Alex Evans (co-founder and technical director) didn't have any game to show but instead explored a uniquely creative concept promoting the use of the Move Controller. The pre-recorded video showed users building, modifying and shaping 3D sculptures in real time. Think virtual playdough that can be cut, bent, squeezed and shaped to your heart's content. A second demo showed players manipulating puppets who played instruments in a band using only Move Controllers. His message was being able to record your dreams and based on the presentation, PlayStation games are going to come pretty close.



## Deep Down (working title)

**Developer:** Capcom  
**Publisher:** Capcom  
**Website:** www.capcom.com

Capcom's involvement at the New York event featured Yoshinori Ono (video game producer) running through the history of PlayStation and Capcom before announcing Capcom's work on *Panta Rhei* (code name for their new engine). The presentation ended with a video that represented the gameplay of *Deep Down* – RPG dungeon crawler with a fire breathing dragon is all we really know at this stage and this is based on a short technology video. So, instead of making a flashy new next generation sequel of an existing IP like *Resident Evil*, Capcom have cleverly chosen new IP to test the PS4 waters, thus avoiding all that pressure/criticism/moaning/trolling on the Internet when it comes to everyone's beloved franchises. It's a slick move by Capcom.





# WatchDogs

**Developer:** Ubisoft  
**Publisher:** Ubisoft  
**Website:** watchdogs.ubi.com

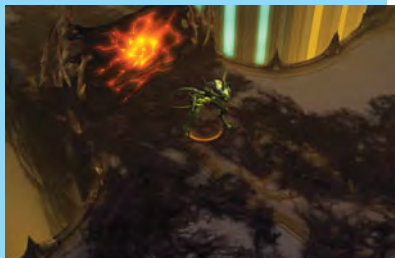
For *Watch Dogs*, Yves Guillemot (chairman and CEO of Ubisoft) did an introduction and Jonathan Morin (creative director) gave the presentation. The game is essentially a high fidelity technology centric *GTA* utilising a new engine. It's called Disrupt and of course ties in nicely with the PS4 hardware announcement. Not much has changed since this title was shown at E3 last year, so for those of you living under rocks and so on here's a recap. You play a character called Aidan Pierce, who can basically hack any kind of electronic system – think cellphones, street lights and security doors. In the game you'll be tasked with anything from eliminating targets to evading the police. Besides the real-time on-the-go game world hacking you'll be expected to nip around the city in a stealth manner or employ your parkour skills and guns where and when required. Good to see Ubisoft is trying new things.



# Diablo III

**Developer:** Blizzard  
**Publisher:** Activision  
**Website:** www.blizzard.com

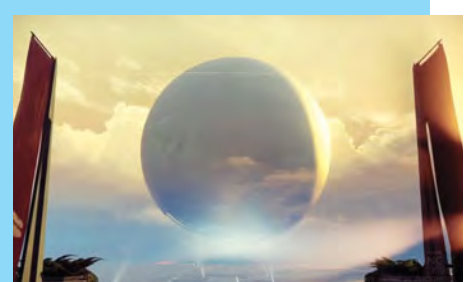
Chris Metzen (senior vice president, story and franchise development) took to the stage to make a single announcement. *Diablo III* will be available on the PS3 and then on the PS4. Of course for PC gamers familiar with the franchise one burning question was answered... Yes, the console version will have an offline mode. Okay, move along you PC crowd – back to the *Diablo III* forums. The console version will feature a new dynamic camera; four-player split screen for couch potatoes as well as online options for couch potatoes with no friends willing to visit them. All the current software patches will be included at launch effectively bringing innovations like Paragon levels and Monster Power to console gamers on day one.



# Destiny

**Developer:** Bungie  
**Publisher:** Activision  
**Website:** www.destinythegame.com

Of course no announcement about a new console would be complete without something from the mighty Activision. Eric Hirshberg (CEO of Activision) introduced Jason Jones (co-founder Bungie) to speak a little about *Destiny*. Seeing that we have a large feature on *Destiny* in this issue – read elsewhere in this issue to find out everything we know. **NAG**



RELEASE DATE / TBA  
 PLATFORM / 360 / PS3 / PS4  
 GENRE / First-person shooter  
 DEVELOPER / Bungie  
 WEBSITE / www.destinythegame.com  
 PUBLISHER / Activision

# Destiny

## Bungie: beyond Halo, beyond single-player

“We need to earn a big audience,” says Bungie narrative director Joseph Staten. “What [we] did before doesn’t matter.”

This is a valid observation, but not entirely true. It is because of what Bungie did before – namely, the *Halo* series – that so much weight is being placed on *Destiny*. The studio’s first project for Activision comes with high expectations, because Bungie has earned a reputation for quality in visuals, frame rate, online infrastructure, and solid gameplay.

*Destiny* is an entirely new universe, always-connected, in which players create a character and set about earning unique customizable weapons, gear

and vehicles as they play through the story. There will be both cooperative and competitive modes. In addition, Bungie is trying to marry several ideas that have gained traction in other genres and

**“We built this game from the ground up to be social and cooperative.” – Studio co-founder, Jason Jones.**

games: the ambient multiplayer of *Dark Souls* or *Journey*, the loot finding of *Borderlands* or *Diablo*, and the emergent, dynamic experiences of an MMO.

“It’s our next great shooter...” says studio co-founder and *Halo* project lead Jason Jones. “By the end, I hope you’ll agree it’s a little crazy.”

There will be no servers, no subscription fee. An evolved form of the backbone behind *Halo*’s matchmaking system will slide players in and out of



### MUSIC

Veteran Bungie music director and composer Marty O’Donnell (known for the chanting-monks *Halo* theme), will provide the score for *Destiny*. According to Bungie, over 50 minutes of music, played by a 106-piece orchestra, has already been completed. There will also be music written by Mike Salvatori, and the esteemed Paul McCartney (from The Beatles). O’Donnell says that he’s been given freedom to make the tracks “as long as they need to be”. Most pieces, he remarks, are between five and seven minutes – a step up from the usual one to three minute tracks of previous Bungie games.



## STORY

"The stories tell of a Golden Age long ago, when our civilisation spanned the system. It was a bright and hopeful time. But it didn't last. Something hit us. Knocked us down and tried to stamp us out. No one knows exactly what, but we do know this: very few of us survived. And those who did, owe their lives to the Traveller."

The most iconic visual from the sparse details released so far, the Traveller is a giant white sphere floating just off the Earth's surface. It hovers over the last safe city,

a haven for the best that's left of humanity. *Destiny* is set several hundred years in the future, a time when humanity spread out and colonized most of the solar system until a near-extinction known as "the Collapse" brought us to the brink of extinction. It was thanks to the Traveller, which appeared several centuries before the Collapse, that humans reached the stars. Legends say the Traveller sacrificed itself to save humanity, and now remains hanging where it made its last stand. Humans have regained

confidence and taken to exploring the stars again, only to face mysterious alien factions that have taken over the former human colonies and civilisations.

That's where you, as a Guardian, come in. Bungie likens *Destiny's* plot to a series of novels, each with self-contained stories that will play out over the 10-year lifecycle of the franchise. Bungie narrative director Joseph Staten noted, "One lesson that's critical is that the most important stories we tell aren't going to be told by us. They're

going to be told by players – their personal legends built from shared adventures."

Bungie is coy with the details, but claims that they've built a game system that allows for unpredictable results. Every time a player logs in, something will be different, or changed. So, as the hyperbole goes, players will team up to assault locations, or "go on raids" that take place on far-away planets, while the systemic nature of the universe provides unexpected encounters or events.



## CLASSES &amp; ALIENS

It's not yet known how many player classes there will be in *Destiny*. The only ones revealed so far are the Titan, Hunter, Warlock and Vanguard. The Titan is your bruiser, able to wield big guns and heavy armour. The Hunter is stealthy, preferring sniper rifles. The Warlock wields powerful magic, which is really just technology bestowed by the Traveller. The Vanguard has been mentioned in name only. All Guardians will have access to some forms of tech-magic, which will presumably be upgraded via a skill tree.

You'll be facing off against aliens like the insect-like Fallen, Spider Pirates, time-travelling robots known only as the Vex, "space zombies", and the rhino-like Cabal.

your game, turning your single-player experience into a social one. Even if you just want to play the story alone. Activision claims you'll need an Internet connection to play *Destiny*, a design decision that may not be so popular after the issues *Diablo III* and *SimCity* have raised with regards to such ideas.

"We built this game from the ground up to be social and cooperative," Jones reinforced. In the announcement video, a Bungie developer is shown walking around checking his smartphone, a *Destiny* app telling him that friends want to try completing missions on Venus tonight, so he checks his character and gear before logging into the game.

When *Destiny* was unveiled earlier this year, the reaction seemed optimistic but muted. It could be that a lack of successful MMOFPS titles gives gamers little to go on when confronted by the lofty goals Bungie enthused about in their announcement video. The cynic might say that perhaps the market is just a little tired of first-person shooters. Regardless of the reason, it's clear that *Destiny* represents a bold and risky move for Bungie, as they are contractually obligated to make four *Destiny* games for Activision.



## HUBS & LOCATIONS

Early sneak-peaks reveal the Tower: a reinforced monolith that acts as your base of operations. It's also a shared public space, where you'll come across other players adjusting gear, grouping up or just looking around. You'll be able to easily spot which players have high-level gear, and perhaps recruit them in helping you tackle a tough mission. If you're exploring an area out in the wild, on another planet, the matchmaking system will put players closer to your skill and level into the game with you if it detects you need help, or just to give you someone to play with. The exact nature of this "ambient" matchmaking is unclear. It's not known if PS3

and PS4 players will be able to play together.

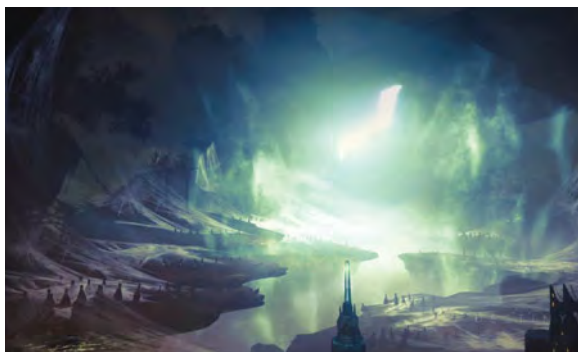
Bungie implies there will be space combat in *Destiny* and that you'll be able to buy and outfit your own spaceship, but little else has been said on the topic. It's also not clear if you'll get to fly to other planets yourself or if interstellar travel happens via a menu. You'll be able to visit every planet in our solar system, including Mars, the Moon, Saturn, etc. According to Bungie art director Christopher Barrett, *Destiny* is a "mythic science fiction" with locations like derelict fleets trapped in the rings of Saturn, the swamps of Old Chicago, giant obsidian pyramid ships, mile-long tomb ships and more.



In *Halo 3: ODST* (2009, originally *Halo 3: Recon*), there is a poster on a wall that reads "Destiny Awaits", showing a picture of Earth with a mysterious orb floating nearby.



The original codename for *Destiny* during its development was Project Tiger.



"Everything you do in *Destiny* earns rewards," says Jones. "There will be a lot of great things to earn, find and make." By providing unique weapons and variety in the armour pieces you can find, their goal is to keep players coming back "day after day, week after week, month after month, [and] year after year."

The main concept to underline here is that *Destiny* will try to foster a lot of player persistence, and thus, player investment. The more a player invests in their character, finding new loot, and building up skills and connections to other people, the more likely they'll purchase the next *Destiny* title/ expansion. Bungie has flirted with persistent player profiles before with *Halo*, but this brings it dangerously close to the same core concepts that make people committed to their favourite MMORPGs. All of this will, no doubt, earn them that big audience they need. **NAG**  
- Miktar



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RELEASE DATE / 2013  
 PLATFORM / iOS / PC / PS4  
 GENRE / Puzzle  
 DEVELOPER / Jonathan Blow  
 WEBSITE / the-witness.net/news  
 PUBLISHER / Jonathan Blow

# The Witness

From the creator of *Braid* comes an a-maze-ing island...

It may look like a new-age *Myst*, all island-like, full of puzzles and audio-logs that tell a story, but there's more at work in *Braid* creator's upcoming game *The Witness* than meets the eye.

"Back before *Braid* was released, I never made a trailer video for it,

because I couldn't come up with a way to show in video form what the game was about," muses Jonathan Blow on his development blog for *The Witness*. On the surface, your primary form of interaction in *The Witness*, aside from walking around the island's many different areas exploring, is solving mazes. Almost every puzzle seen thus far involves a maze in some way. Either a maze in which you need to take a line from point A to point B or a maze in which you need to capture certain points by encircling them while still solving the maze. As it stands,

**"Clearly Blow has a lofty, high-concept point in mind, much like he did with *Braid*."**

there are over 500 such puzzles on the island. But these mazes are not the point, according to Blow. He continues to liken it to his difficulty in making a trailer for *Braid*.

"You can show some rewinding happening, or other funky time stuff, sure, but what

is cool about *Braid* is not the mechanics of those things or how they look on the screen. What is cool about *Braid* is what happens in the player's mind during the puzzle-solving process. The time stuff is the method by which that is implemented, but the rules of time manipulation do not contain the magic. Watching a video, it's nearly impossible to see the magic. You have to play the game to see the magic." says Blow. "The *Witness* is like that too."

Even though the development process for *The Witness* has been surprisingly



## THE ISLAND OVER THE YEARS...

It's amazing what a difference a year can make, as is evident by these screenshots showing the evolution (and tightening up) of the island as time progressed.



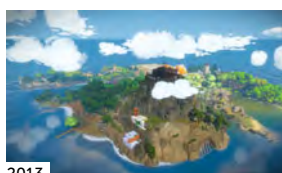
2010



2011



2012



2013



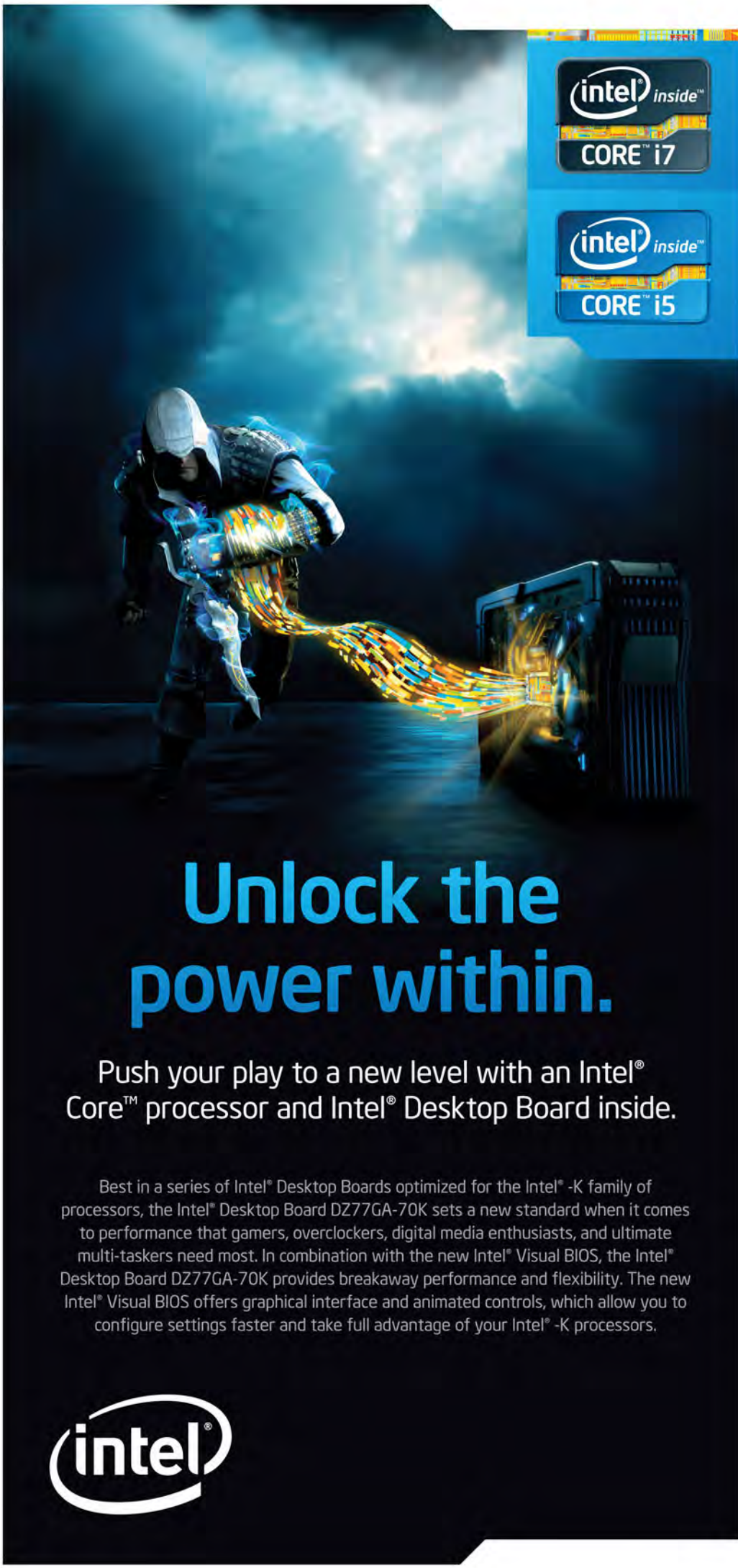
Back before he was a big-time indie developer, Blow blogged his thoughts, like how consciousness might originate outside of the world and is the source of "quantum collapse".



open, with much discussion over the technical aspects to rendering the island's lush foliage and getting the lighting looking *just right*, the actual puzzles themselves and how they connect to the larger picture remains a mystery. Clearly Blow has a lofty, high-concept point in mind, much like he did with *Braid*.

"The point is the magic that happens in the player's mind when he understands the subtle things that the mazes are saying — because the mazes aren't just puzzles, they are lines of communication that aggregate, become more complex and eventually say surprising things." says Blow. "This can't be seen in a video; you have to play it to have the experience. The magic is in the player's head, not on the screen." **NAG**

- Miktar



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RELEASE DATE / TBA  
 PLATFORM / PC  
 GENRE / Third-person shooter  
 DEVELOPER / Digital Extremes  
 WEBSITE / www.warframe.com  
 PUBLISHER / Digital Extremes

# Warframe

Free-to-play cooperative third-person space ninja

You are Tenno, warrior of blade and gun, revived from cryostasis to fight the Grineer army. As an ancient space ninja, you possess the unique skills needed in this New War. Your guide, the Lotus, will assist you in navigating the solar system so you can dish out righteous death. And farm for sweet loot.

It's surprising to see a free-to-play game focus on a cooperative experience. Thus far, most F2P titles have been competitive, like *Smite*, *League of Legends*, *MechWarrior Online*, *Hawken*, and so on. At the core, *Warframe* has a simple loop: you take on missions of increasing difficulty, either alone or with friends/strangers, which usually involve running

through a semi-randomly generated spaceship, killing things and finding loot. As you level up, you unlock new skills and modification slots for your guns, sword and "warframe". Your warframe determines

**"It's surprising to see a free-to-play game focus on a cooperative experience."**

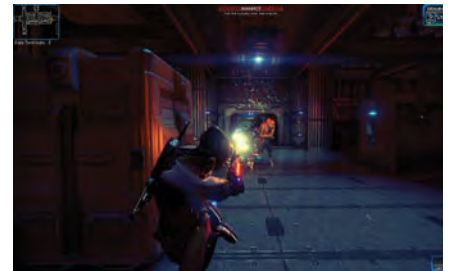
your skills and abilities, and you can buy (real money or in-game currency) or craft new ones.

It's still early (closed beta), but two things save *Warframe* from mediocrity. The visuals are exotic, full of chromatic aberration, depth-of-field, and (if you have NVIDIA) obscene amounts of PhysX particles. The movement scheme allows for some creativity. You can jump, slide, wall-run and chain together moves for flourish, if not much else. **NAG**

- Miktar

## CHROMATIC WHAT NOW WHO?

Chromatic aberration is a type of visual distortion, usually the result of a lens not properly focusing all the colours passing through. It's recognizable as a "fringe" or "halo" of colour on the light/dark edges of objects. In the quest for ever-increasing "realism", developers continually add effects which usually represent poor cinematography or capture equipment. Lens flares, the *Battlefield 3* popularized "dirty lens", and now chromatic aberration. Expect to start seeing it in all games eventually.



## DUDE, THAT'S DARK SECTOR!

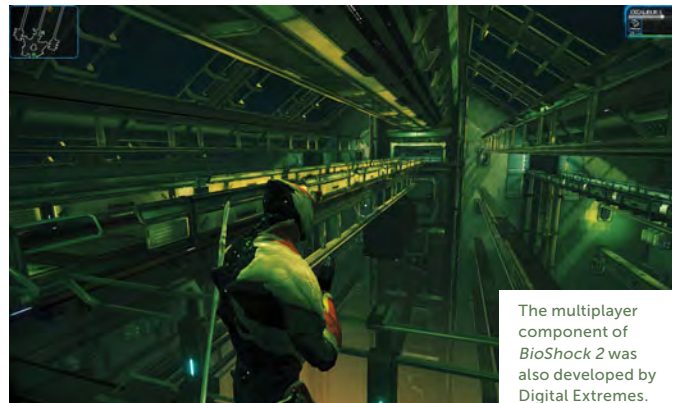
If you're looking at the screenshots and can't shake the feeling you've seen this before, you may be remembering the original *Dark Sector* concept shown at E3 2005 ([youtu.be/u3jw2-xKqjA](http://youtu.be/u3jw2-xKqjA)). Before they changed it into something less interesting (more modern, less sci-fi), due to publisher pressure.

Steve Sinclair in an interview with [www.giantbomb.com](http://www.giantbomb.com) claims these are more-or-less direct quotes from executives: "Can you set in present day? Can you give the guy an eye patch? Can you make his codpiece larger?" One publisher even suggested, while they like the idea, could the entire thing be set during the Civil War instead, without all that sci-fi stuff. Ironic.

Members that worked on that original video are still with the company, and are involved in *Warframe*. For Digital Extremes, it's become a way to "heal a psychic wound", according to Sinclair.



Digital Extremes was founded in 1993, and co-developed the *Unreal* franchise with Epic Games.



The multiplayer component of *BioShock 2* was also developed by Digital Extremes.



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RELEASE DATE / April 2013  
 PLATFORM / 3DS  
 GENRE / Action adventure  
 DEVELOPER / Mercury Steam  
 WEBSITE / [www.konami-castlevania.com/mof/](http://www.konami-castlevania.com/mof/)  
 PUBLISHER / Konami

# Castlevania: Lords of Shadow - Mirror of Fate

The sad story of a father's son, the son's son, and Dracula

As a direct sequel to the recent franchise reboot, *Mirror of Fate* picks up where *Lords of Shadow* left off. It's 25 years later, and Trevor Belmont (son of Gabriel from *Lords of Shadow*) is on his way to avenge the death of his mother at the hands of his father. Gabriel has become Dracula, taken up residence in a mysterious castle, and declared war on the Brotherhood to which Trevor belongs.

Standard *Castlevania* stuff, then. You won't just play as Trevor though, as the game's multiple acts have you bouncing between Trevor's own son Simon Belmont, the mysterious Alucard, and briefly, Gabriel

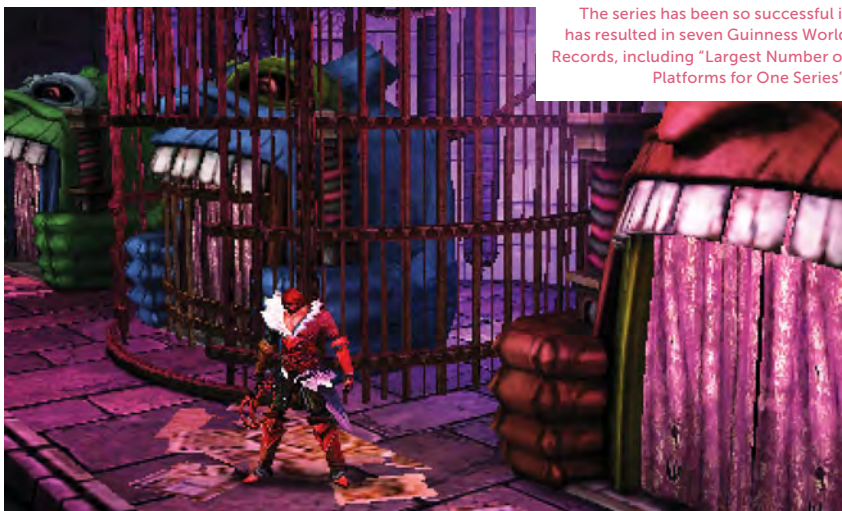
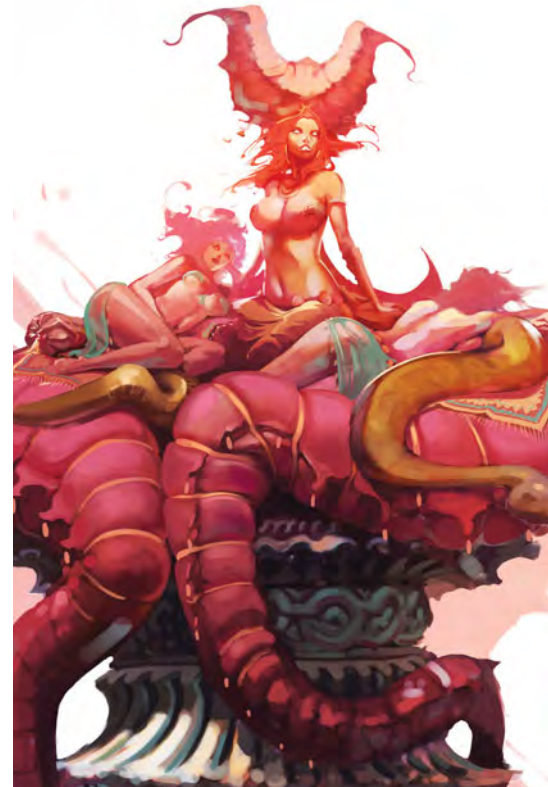
himself. Taking a more *Symphony of the Night* approach, though not as vast or as complex, *Mirror of Fate* apes the *Metroid* side-scrolling *Castlevania* style. There

**"Mirror of Fate may not have the intricate design and thoughtful stage structure of *Symphony of the Night*, but Mercury Steam has managed to shove very detailed visuals into the 3DS without the combat system suffering for it."**

is emphasis on exploration and backtracking, finding items you need to progress, and tricky boss encounters.

Initial impressions are favourable, provided you're not the type to look down at anything

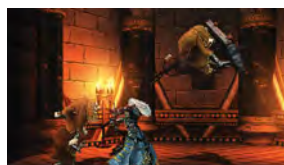
that isn't classic "Igavania", a.k.a., *Symphony of the Night*. *Mirror of Fate* may not have the intricate design and thoughtful stage structure of *Symphony*, but Mercury Steam has managed to shove very detailed visuals into the 3DS without the combat system



The series has been so successful it has resulted in seven Guinness World Records, including "Largest Number of Platforms for One Series".



The *Castlevania* series started in 1986, and has had 40 titles in the franchise so far.



suffering for it. Trevor feels a bit drift, and the combat takes a lot of inspiration from how *Lords of Shadow* does things, but the overall experience is not displeasing.

Like in *Lords of Shadow*, your attacks are split between two buttons for Direct and Area attacks. Direct deals major damage but is very focused in front of you, while Area attacks cover the screen but don't do much against larger enemies. When an enemy glows gold, they're staggered and can be instantly killed by grabbing them. Many combo attacks are very easy to execute, and usually involve holding down an attack button after, say, a jump. If you block an enemy attack at just the right moment, you can perform a deadly Counter move, an important skill to master. As you defeat enemies and find scrolls that tell the backstory, you gain experience points which are used to unlock new attack moves and improve your health. There are also consumable secondary weapons to find which make short work of enemies but are a scarce resource.

Being on the 3DS, one nice feature is the ability to drag and drop markers on the bottom map screen, leaving yourself notes for things like "come back here once you have X ability". Sadly, *Mirror of Fate's* length and structure may not be long enough or complex enough to really merit the feature, but newcomers to this style of game might find it useful. **NAG**

- Miktar



RELEASE DATE / Q3 2013  
 PLATFORM / 360 / PS3  
 GENRE / Action RPG  
 DEVELOPER / Square Enix 1st Production Department  
 WEBSITE / [www.lightningreturns.com](http://www.lightningreturns.com)  
 PUBLISHER / Square Enix

## Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII

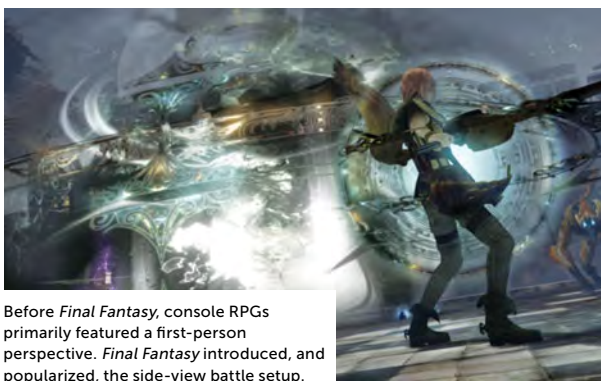
*Fabula Nova Crystallis* continues...

The story arc begun in *Final Fantasy XIII* and continued in *XIII-2* will finally be concluded in *Lightning Returns*. It's interesting how each of the three *XIII* games have brought their own unique twists. *FFXIII* introduced a new and fresh take on the traditional Active Time Battle system first featured in *Final Fantasy IV*. *XIII-2* used an almost identical combat system, but introduced a multiple-timeline exploration system not unlike *Chrono Trigger*, where you could visit certain locations at different points in time, often hundreds of years apart.

With *Lightning Returns*, another shift is made: there is only one playable character (Lightning), and the world is a smaller, more granular place. According to Square, the concept is "world driven", with time always passing in the city of Luxerion, allowing events to happen even if you're not around to see it. The battle system has also changed to account for the new single-character setup. It's still an ATB system, but instead of queuing up commands, they're mapped to specific buttons. Battles still happen on a separate battle field from the game world, but you'll have direct control over Lightning's movement and the timing of her attacks.

The story involves there only being 13 days until the end of the world. Lightning will have to use her newfound control over time to prevent the end, perhaps not unlike the setup in *Zelda: Majora's Mask*. **NAG**

- Miktar



Before *Final Fantasy*, console RPGs primarily featured a first-person perspective. *Final Fantasy* introduced, and popularized, the side-view battle setup.



*Final Fantasy VII* was originally to be a Nintendo 64 exclusive, but Square wanted the PlayStation's CD format so they could have more pre-rendered cut scenes.



RELEASE DATE / TBA  
 PLATFORM / 3DS  
 GENRE / Role-playing game  
 DEVELOPER / Silicon Studio / Square Enix  
 WEBSITE / [www.square-enix.co.jp/bdff/](http://www.square-enix.co.jp/bdff/) (Japanese)  
 PUBLISHER / Square Enix

## Bravely Default: Flying Fairy

The spirit of *Final Fantasy IX* lives on...

What a name, huh? Then again, this is Square, who brought us such game names as *Infinite Undiscovery*, *Dissidia: Final Fantasy Universal Tuning*, and *Dirge of Cerberus*. In this case, most of the heavy lifting done for this upcoming role-playing game was done by Silicon Studio, best known for their cubist 8-bit *Zelda*-like *3D Dot Game Heroes*.

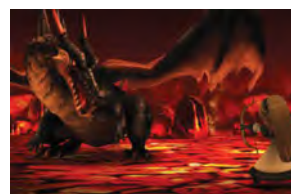
What makes *Bravely Default* interesting, name aside, is how it channels a specific era of Japanese RPG. Fans of older *Final Fantasy* games (namely *VI* through *IX*) will instantly recognize the style. The team was not subtle in their nod to *Final Fantasy's* "golden years". You control four heroes on a quest to purify the world's Elemental Crystals, pursued by a group called the Eternian Air Force Jobmasters. Your heroes are well-written characters, with full voice acting. There is a Job system akin to *Final Fantasy V*: you can change a character's class at any time, and skills they learn in one will carry over to another.

A unique twist in the combat is the inclusion of Brave points. You use up Brave points to take extra turns performing actions, and gain Brave points by defending. If you run out of BP, you're inactive and vulnerable as enemies receive extra turns. There's a village-building sub-game, StreetPass functions for turning friends into a Magic Summon attack, and plenty of dungeons. **NAG**

- Miktar



According to scenario writer Naotaka Hayashi, the title means "have courage and renounce the promises and responsibilities that are expected of you."



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**Release Date** 31 October 2013  
**Platforms** 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / Wii U  
**Genre** Action adventure  
**Developer** Ubisoft Montreal  
**Website** www.assassinscreed.ubi.com  
**Publisher** Ubisoft

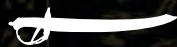


# HOIST A BLACK FLAG

IS THIS THE SERIES EVOLUTION WE WERE EXPECTING LAST TIME?

**D**amn you, Ubisoft. After what was for me the crushing disappointment of *Assassin's Creed III*, I was just about ready to give up on your annualized franchise. Now you've gone and taken the one redeeming mechanic of Connor's misadventure (the naval combat) and structured an entire open world game around it. And it has pirates in it; I love pirates, Ubisoft.

At the end of February, we were invited to London for the official unveiling of *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*. The presentation opened with actor Ralph Ineson (from TV series *The Office*) providing attendees with a very poetic recap of the previous five *Assassin's Creed* titles. "Oh the things that we've seen, together, the places we've gone," he recounted wistfully. Lately, the franchise has been getting an increasing amount of flack, but this one thing is undeniable: *Assassin's Creed* has taken gamers to some truly memorable locations and historical eras since the series debuted in 2007. Now, in 2013, Ubisoft will add a new era to the franchise: the so-called Golden Age of Piracy.



## A BRIEF HISTORY LESSON

It is the year 1715; the West Indies (what will later become the Caribbean) and its trade routes are being ravaged by pirates. The sudden surge in piracy was by

and large the result of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. This treaty was signed between the warring colonial powers of Spain, Great Britain, France, Portugal and the Dutch. As a result of the sudden cease in hostilities, many sailors and mercenary captains found themselves without work. These newly unemployed and highly trained sailors turned to piracy to make a living.

This is a period of history that has become heavily romanticised by popular fiction like the *Pirates of the Caribbean* films and games like *Monkey Island*. However, because this is an *Assassin's Creed* title, and because Ubisoft's flagship series has a preoccupation with accurate historical representations, *Black Flag* won't contain things like ghost ships, skeleton crewmembers and zombie pirates. They're skirting around the clichéd, fantasy ideas that are associated with pirates and are instead treating this era with the same historical reverence that they have shown in previous games.

This early 18th century period is considered the twilight years of the Golden Age of Piracy. During this period's final decade, a particular group of pirates banded together to form the Republic of Pirates at Nassau. It was a democracy built on a pervading sense of equality among men and women, as well as equality among the various ethnic groups of the region. From a sociological point of view, the Republic of Pirates was way ahead of its time. For a decade, this group of pirates ran the West Indies' colonial powers ragged, while amassing a fortune in looted cargo and commandeered vessels. Despite the previously mentioned Treaty of

Utrecht, tension among the colonial powers remained high, and in the midst of this melting pot of potential conflict, Ubisoft intends to continue their ageless war between the Assassins and the Templars. Of course, all of the significant historical events of the time (of which there are quite a few that will be making an appearance in *Black Flag*) will be attributed to this secret conflict. Some of those events will include the wrecking of the Spanish Armada, the pirate escape from their base of operations at Nassau, and the assault on 42 Portuguese ships by one pirate who, incredibly, won.



### THE KENWAYS' TIME TO SHINE

Recent entry in the series *Assassin's Creed III*, won't be remembered for its protagonist Connor. The half British half Native American assassin was a sulky, immature lead who was utterly overshadowed by the game's playable antagonist Haytham Kenway. The good news is that *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* is an entirely new story arc, which obviously makes sense seeing as how present day character Desmond Miles's story has concluded. That means we're thankfully not getting a string of subtitled *Assassin's Creed III* games starring Connor.

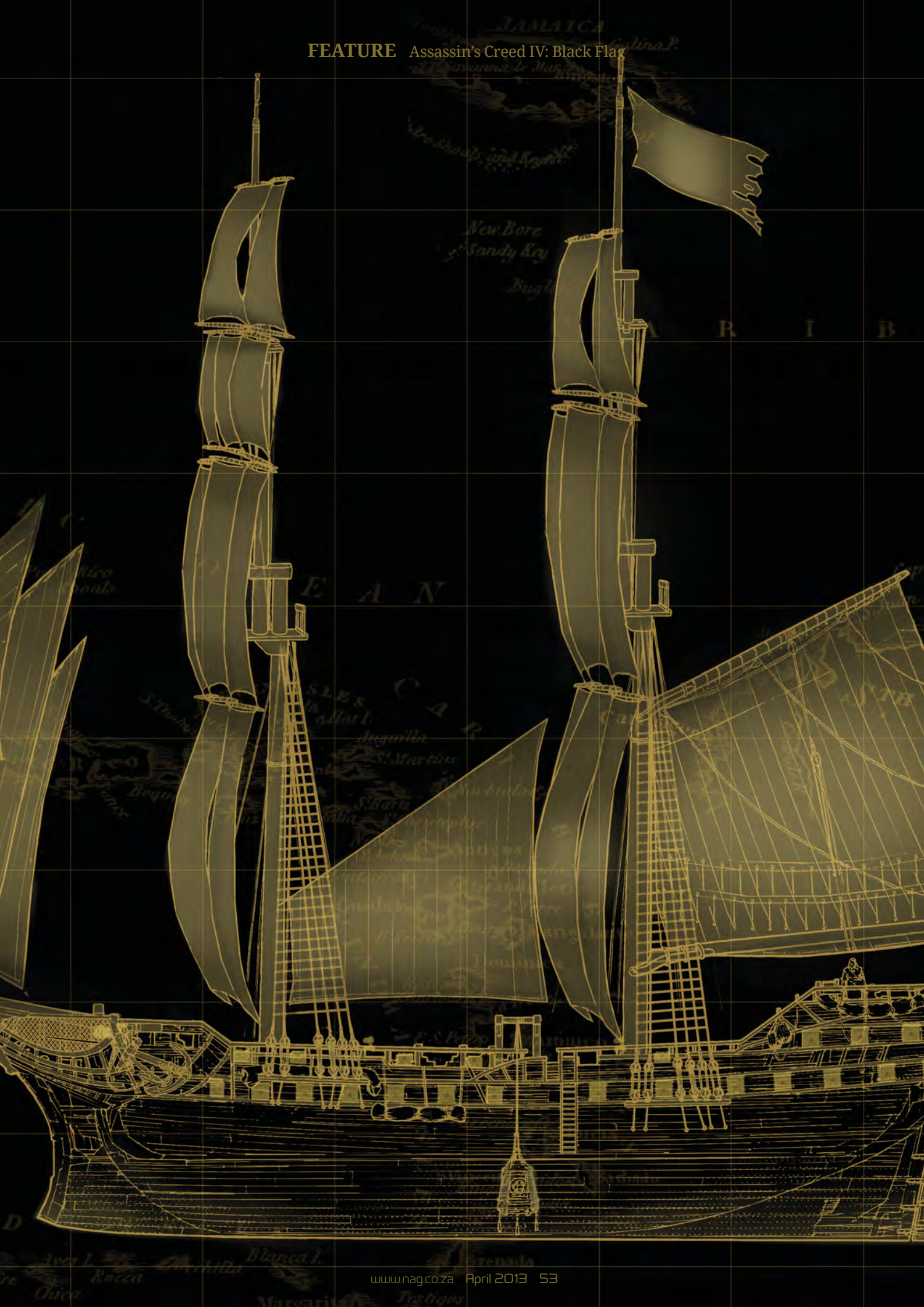
In *Black Flag* you'll be playing as Edward Kenway, who eventually fathers *Assassin's Creed III*'s Haytham Kenway; whether or not this happens during the events of *Black Flag* was not discussed by Ubisoft at the reveal. Edward is an estranged British privateer

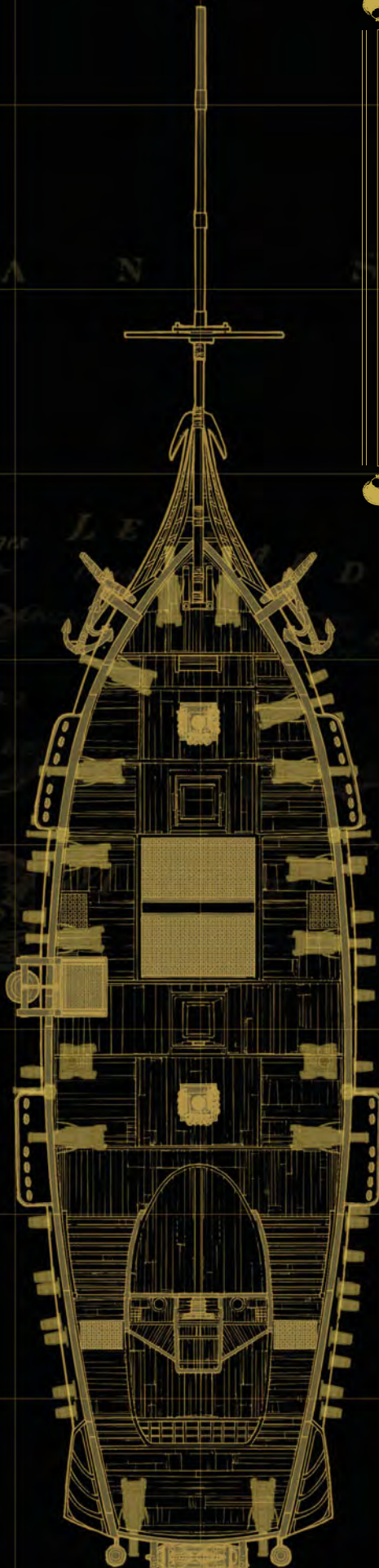
who once sailed for the Royal Navy, but who has turned to piracy in search of fame, fortune and glory. Much like his future son, Edward Kenway will be an antihero of sorts, but that will obviously change as he becomes embroiled in the Assassin-Templar war and begins to fight for freedom alongside the Assassin Brotherhood. Still, Edward is described as brash, reckless, selfish and driven by his desire for infamy. He is confident, handsome and charismatic, and when he's not sailing the seas in search of plunder and wealth, he's languishing in pirate taverns drinking rum and cavorting with ladies of purchasable affections. He's a strong character, but he needs to be in order to keep his crew in check and be able to stand alongside history's most notorious pirates; people like Benjamin Hornigold (the "Gentleman Pirate"), Edward Teach (you know him as "Blackbeard"), Anne Bonny (one of history's only two recorded female pirates), Calico Jack and Charles Vane are all confirmed to be making an appearance in the game. The historical cast is practically a who's who of history's most infamous pirates – could it be any other way for an *Assassin's Creed* game set during this time?

Ubisoft was tight lipped regarding the plot, so it's going to be interesting to see how they weave this period of history into their overarching premise of the Assassin-Templar conflict. The gist of it is that the Templars have discovered something in the West Indies that will give them the upper hand in this secretive war. The Assassins set out to stop this and somehow Edward Kenway finds himself in the midst of the whole thing. Eventually he joins the Assassins and begins eradicating the archipelago of its Templar presence, all while collecting a nice pile of plundered loot as he



“HE PLUNGED A KNIFE REPEATEDLY INTO THE SHARK’S SIDE, TURNING THE WATER AROUND HIM INTO A RED, BILLOWY SPECTACLE.”





**THE JACKDAW**

**Length** 60 metres

**Height** 48.5 metres


**Width** 11.9 metres

**Sails** 26

**Diving bell** Maximum depth 30 metres

**Number of cannons**  
Minimum: 6  
Maximum: 56

**Number of swivel guns**  
Minimum: 0  
Maximum: 4



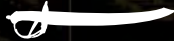

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sails his way across the oceans; it's obviously an "ends justifies the means" sort of situation. Throughout his quest against the Templars, Edward will experience a substantial change in character as he moves from selfish pirate to selfless assassin fighting for a greater good. This particular development has excited Ubisoft, and Edward is being hailed as the series' first truly conflicted character.



### HOPE YOU PACKED YOUR MAP

So just how open is Ubisoft planning on making this game world? From the sounds of things, it'll be by far the most open world in an *Assassin's Creed* to date. An entire network of islands from around central Cuba to the Bahamas in the north, Jamaica in the south, the coast of Mexico in the west and the coast of Haiti in the east will be open for exploration. But instead of just making a collection of islands that will look pretty as you sail past, there will be 50 unique areas for you to explore. "This gigantic archipelago is the first true naval open world game," boasted creative director Jean Guesdon who went on to describe the game world as "the most varied world that we've ever created." It's clearly one of the game's biggest bullet points, as Guesdon reiterated: "the *AC* franchise has created big worlds, but this one is probably the most varied." So while the subtext of that makes it sound like *Assassin's Creed IV* won't necessarily have the largest game world in the franchise, it will definitely have the game world with the biggest variety in locations.

This variety will give us access to places like

small fishing villages and hidden smugglers' coves, both of which will be integral stop-offs for you to repair your ship between naval encounters, as well as places to recruit new crew members. There will be larger islands with explorable jungles dense in foliage and wild animals to hunt. Some of these jungle islands might hold Mayan ruins for you to explore with lost treasures to plunder. You might come across the typical coconut islands that seem to only exist on postcards from the Caribbean; those small desert islands could also end up being useful locations to recruit new crew members considering how often pirates got stranded on them. Underwater exploration will be making its *Assassin's Creed* debut: the oceans of the West Indies will hold numerous sunken wrecks with treasure chests for you to find. During some of the gameplay footage we were shown, Edward was forced to defend himself against a shark attack; something he seemed rather capable of doing as he plunged a knife repeatedly into the shark's side, turning the water around him into a red, billowy spectacle. Finally, these locations will include forts similar to those encountered in specific *Assassin's Creed III* missions. This time, attacking forts will feel less scripted and confined: you'll begin attacking from your ship, bombarding the structure with cannon fire. Once enough damage is done you can leave the ship and continue attacking on foot, utilising Assassin skills to wipe out the fort's remaining occupants. Ubisoft stated that throughout this gameplay sequence there would be no pause to load the next section; it all moves seamlessly from ship to land and back to ship.

These won't be 50 separate maps that you'll be teleporting to after sitting through a loading screen;

OPEN HERE



these are 50 locations that you'll need to discover by sailing around the archipelago. That being said, Guesdon cautioned that we will see the odd loading screen from time-to-time, but we're guessing this will likely be the case when dropping anchor in one of the game's three major cities.

Historically accurate cities are a hallmark of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise, and *Black Flag* will see the cities of Havana, Kingston and Nassau recreated for players to explore. Each of the cities will represent a different power in the West Indies: Havana is under Spanish control, Kingston is under British rule and Nassau is the seat of the Pirate Republic. All three cities will be your typical *Assassin's Creed* locations: expansive, detailed and teeming with missions, characters and assassination targets.

Interestingly, Ubisoft aims to have no artificial locks on the explorable locations that make up the game world. This is contrary to previous *Assassin's Creed* games, which kept certain locations blocked off until you reached particular points in the story. Still, there will be hindrances to your rampant exploration, but they're hindrances that make logical sense in the game world. For example: you might want to explore a particular cove that happens to be defended by a massive galleon. In the early stages of the game, your ship won't be strong enough to take on the larger galleons that bristle with 100 cannons and massive crews. You'll need to upgrade Edward's ship before you can hope to take on these larger foes. In order to upgrade your ship, you need to do what pirates do best: attack the trade routes, amass a fortune and then spend it on making yourself even more formidable.

The pirate Blackbeard understood that reputation was often more important than actions. To maintain an air of ferocity, he used to tie lit fuses under his hat and in his hair before attacking other ships so that his smoking head made him look like a demon pirate.

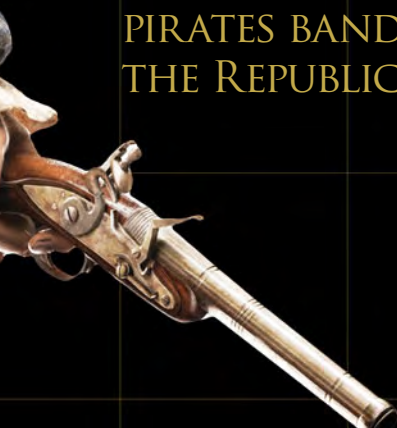




"Can I at least get a hot towel?"



"THIS EARLY 18TH CENTURY PERIOD IS CONSIDERED THE TWILIGHT YEARS OF THE GOLDEN AGE OF PIRACY. DURING THIS PERIOD'S FINAL DECADE, A PARTICULAR GROUP OF PIRATES BANDED TOGETHER TO FORM THE REPUBLIC OF PIRATES AT NASSAU."



#### GETTING YOUR SEA LEGS

Edward's ship is called *The Jackdaw* and Ubisoft put a lot of emphasis on the importance of the vessel throughout the presentation. During the game's development, *The Jackdaw* was treated like a second playable character. Ubisoft said that it will be fully upgradeable and customisable, but we don't imagine you'll be able to paint it hot pink and fly rainbow coloured flags from the main mast. Still, you'll be adding swivel guns, new cannons, rams and varying ammunition types to your vessel. You'll also need to ensure you have enough crew members, because you will lose men during combat, ship boarding and storms. It sounds like there will be quite a bit of management involved, but Guesdon put it in simple terms: "if *The Jackdaw* doesn't progress, Edward doesn't either."

Obviously, one of *Black Flag's* core mechanics will be naval combat. Originally making an appearance in *Assassin's Creed III*, the ship navigation and warfare will be infinitely more integrated in *Assassin's Creed IV*. Roughly 40% of the game will be made up of ship-based missions; the remaining 60% will be traditional, land-based *Assassin's Creed* missions, assassinations, social stealth mechanics and free-running.

With such an emphasis on the seafaring portion of the game, Ubisoft went back to their engine and rewrote the ocean physics to make the ship handling feel more realistic and immersive. Ship to ship combat has also seen some tweaking as cannons now fire on a trajectory based system rather than the timing system that was used in *Assassin's Creed III*.



*Black Flag* is heading to next-gen consoles and Ubisoft has said that those versions will feature advanced physics and graphics as well as integrated social elements to create a "single connected player" experience.



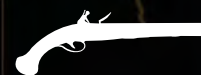
Central to the naval portion of the game is something that Ubisoft has dubbed The Horizon System. At any point while you are on board *The Jackdaw*, Edward can take out a spyglass to scan the horizon. This will always result in at least two systemic pirate activities to attempt based on your main story progress and ship improvements. These pirate activities could be things like whaling, rescuing stranded pirates or attacking trade route vessels. When it comes to attacking vessels and boarding enemy ships, sequences will be far more procedural than the scripted encounters in *Assassin's Creed III*. You'll be able to board ships from any direction using a number of techniques. As Edward will become a trained Assassin, you could adopt a stealthy approach while the rest of the crew use grappling hooks, ropes and close combat. While the chaos ensues on the decks, Edward could jump overboard, swim around the back of the enemy ship, slip aboard unnoticed and assassinate the captain. Alternatively you could throw Edward into the thick of things alongside his men. His standard weapon loadout includes dual cutlasses and multi-pistols that will allow you to string together massive kill combos. Of course, Assassin staples like the dual hidden blades will also be available. The more outlandish weapons include a blowpipe (with various dart effects) and the return of *Assassin's Creed III*'s Rope Dart.



### WE NEED A HERO

Desmond Miles is out but Ubisoft teased his present-day replacement, and it's an intriguing notion. During the presentation, it was noted that our real world date has essentially aligned with the *Assassin's Creed* universe's date. *Assassin's Creed III* ended in 2012, so as far as Ubisoft is concerned, our real world timeline is running concurrently with their fictional universe's. As a result, the present day protagonist for *Assassin's Creed IV*

is you. You are a researcher in a branch of Abstergo known as Abstergo Entertainment, which provides historical information for video games and movies. You've been assigned to research Edward Kenway. Ubisoft was extremely coy about this portion of the game, and aside from this basic synopsis, the only thing we saw was a single piece of concept art for the interior of Abstergo Entertainment. How this will work is still, at time of writing, wide open for speculation, but we're holding thumbs for a character creation that then stays with you over the next couple of *Assassin's Creed* titles, similar to what BioWare did with *Mass Effect*.



### ONCE BURNT...

It would be wonderful to throw caution to the wind and become enveloped by excitement for *Black Flag*, but the disappointment of *Assassin's Creed III* still lingers for many people. There are a number of real concerns that Ubisoft has to address so that *Assassin's Creed IV* doesn't disappoint. Most importantly the free-running mechanic needs to be fixed, as Connor was by far the trickiest Assassin to control. The return of a dedicated jump button would go a long way to fixing this. The user interface also needs to be redesigned as *Assassin's Creed III* had you spending more time navigating convoluted menus than you did navigating the game world.

At the *Assassin's Creed III* reveal last year, we were bombarded by stunning target render videos for numerous gameplay sequences. By the time the game launched, much of what made the reveal presentation so incredible had been completely removed from the game. This time around Ubisoft was careful and they only showed actual gameplay footage. The result was a game reveal that felt more subdued, but also more believable, and at this point I really want to believe in this series again. **NAG**

- Miklós Szecsei

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# Reviews Intro

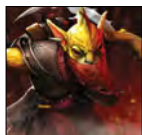
We had an infinite amount of monkeys to choose from and someone ended up with these ones.... Meet your reviewers.

So we hate the idea of micro-transactions, DLC, DRM and online play. Right. If you were big game company chiefs what other (less annoying) methods would you employ to achieve the same results.



## RedTide

Put a lot more care and attention in boxed products like they used to when that's all you could buy. I'd abolish DLC – either put it in the game or save it for the sequel. I'd focus on a few good indie teams and learn how to make good games cheaply. I'd only have micro-transactions for stuff like hats and capes.



## Miktar

DLC is fine when done right. Online-only is fine where it's truly needed. Wouldn't have DRM in my products, only optional value-adding services that are the real revenue stream. Like how *Dota 2* does it.



## Azimuth

Your firstborn child in exchange for the game disc. People would be way more reluctant to share their games if they'd had to give up their own flesh and blood for them.



## Mikit0707

Think game boxes from the '90s: colour manuals, the odd figurine, physical soundtracks, and art books. Basically the stuff that's now "Collector's Edition content" should be standard. That or code wheels, obviously.



## GeometriX

I'd start by treating my customers like humans, then I'd sell them products that they actually want in exchange for a single lump sum of currency. After said transaction I would continue to support my loyal customer base through honest communication and product updates.



## Barkskin

I'd breed an army of gaming babies indoctrinated from birth with the sole life-purpose of buying only my company's games and every bit of DLC, Season Pass and micro-transaction released for them. MONEY!

## Mini reviews

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

## Impire

When Peter Molyneux wasn't mad and the world was still full of new things in gaming and gaming was all about fun, *Dungeon Keeper* came along and let us be bad and slap chickens to death. Of course it was going to be legendary. It's this nostalgic slush that all future emulations/clones/copies/ of this great idea are going to have to contend with forever.

*Impire* isn't bad. It's a hodgepodge of great ideas (both old and new) and the execution of these ideas flips and flops from okay to excellent. The problem overall is you have to sell it hard to get people interested in it and by then you've oversold it and by then it's bound to lead to disappointment. As an example, one good idea the game offers is the raiding of locations above ground – mainly for resources, but sometimes for missions. Great idea but you can only send a squad of minions to the location and then must wait to see if it was successful or not – you have no control over the outcome. To add to its woes, the game is unsure if it's an RPG or a strategy game or a management game and the result is a little bit of everything



but no commitment to any particular genre. The combat is too easy and requires no thinking – smart players will simply use the easy to learn game systems to win everything. The biggest problem however is that players are expected to micromanage everything, from feeding troops to attacking ladders and even repairing damaged rooms. Nothing happens automatically so you're

always backwards and forwards repeating mundane tasks in-between all the good stuff. It's a decent effort if you can look past the flaws and clunky interface and cheesy story and lame voice acting and directionless gameplay. Let's hope they learn from this one and make a second game that improves on this one. **NAG**



“Michael, I know this is a weird thing to ask...”

- Dane



### Ramjet

Walt was at some event in Cape Town that took up so much of his time he couldn't even think.



### SAVAGE

Put more real stuff in collector's editions. So in a game like *Farm Simulator 2014* give away a combine harvester with each game.



### ShockG

Two versions for each game. One that has no transactions to worry about, so say \$10 to \$20 more with everything made available forever. Another at a cheaper price where they may constantly annoy you for 99c purchases and such.

## 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

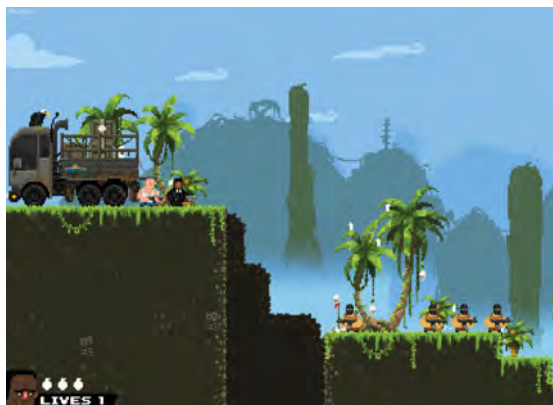
Exposure for South African indie developers...

## Free Lives

WWW.FREELIVES.NET

Ultra-manky action heroes? Check. Ridiculous amounts of explosions? Check. Retro-inspired gameplay and visuals? Check. What do you get when you put all these together? *Bro Force* – a side-scrolling action platformer from the Cape Town-based game development studio Free Lives.

Lead by studio head Evan Greenwood, *Bro Force* has been in production (“in earnest”) for eight months now. The team is made up of four dedicated, full-time developers and one part-time programmer who's helping with the multiplayer code, and for a game that's had less than a year's serious dev time, it looks brilliant and plays very well. You can grab the current playable alpha code from the Free Lives website if you'd like to try it yourself. They're also currently running a Steam Greenlight campaign to get the finished product on the platform, so be sure to support it!



While *Bro Force* is perhaps the biggest project to come from Free Lives so far, they recently made waves in the indie scene by nabbing first place in the Ouya CREATE game jam for their dual-stick shooter *Strange Happenings on Murder Island*. Not only did the studio win a healthy wad of cash to help fund the completion of *Bro Force* (which we're told will only really arrive when the money does run out – the team has big plans for this game), but they also bagged

an Ouya development unit to begin work on the home-bound Android console. This is an exciting time for Free Lives as they prove they've got what it takes to stand against the rest of the world and deliver content that people want. **NAG**

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](mailto:geoff@nag.co.za).

**PLATFORMS**

360 / PC / PS3

**REVIEWED ON**

360

**GENRE**

Action adventure

**AGE RESTRICTION**

18

**MULTIPLAYER**

**Local**

None

**Online**

8 players

**DEVELOPER**

Crystal Dynamics

**WEBSITE**

www.tombraider.com

**PUBLISHER**

Square Enix

**DISTRIBUTOR**

Megarom

*Reviewed*

# Tomb Raider

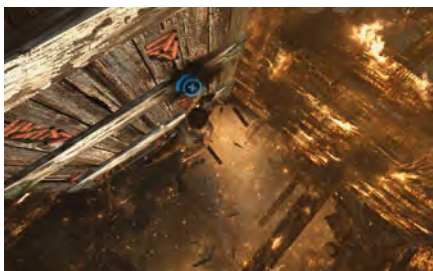
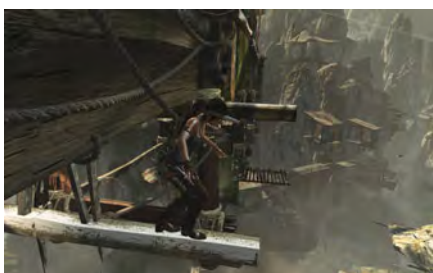
## Born in blood

I think it's safe to say that Lara Croft is one of the most widely recognised video game characters of all time. She's right up there with Mario, Sonic and Link (when he's not being called Zelda), and unlike the Altairs and Nathan Drakes of today, she has *history* – a culture formed in her wake that transcends fanboyism and the wet dreams of teenage boys. She's broken out of the video game niche that gave her life and become adopted by the masses, and now Crystal Dynamics has taken it upon itself to start over with a new Lara that makes the grade for today's ego-stroking gameplay and mass expectations alike. Watch where you step; the ice around here is real thin.

It's a lofty goal – to reboot the *Tomb Raider* franchise – but from the onset it seems that Crystal has a firm grasp of what's expected of them. And they deliver at first: this is a gritty origin story that isn't afraid to punch you square in the nose with its brutality and violence. But that boot-to-the-ass "this is the real Lara" attitude only goes so far to cover the blemishes that lie beneath:

*Tomb Raider's* gameplay is deceptively plain once you've spent a few hours wiping away its layers of makeup.

What depth that is present is thoroughly enjoyable. Lara's abrupt arrival to the mysterious island in the heart of the Dragon Triangle and the events that follow set the sombre tone for *Tomb Raider*, while the expert use of lighting and shadows, remarkable animations and sufficiently convincing voice acting all join forces to create a captive game. And if you're happy to splash in the shallow end, well, you could quite certainly do so for the entirety of its 12+ hours of game time – it's a game that's certainly very easy to play – one that wants you to experience everything it has to offer. As Lara explores the island her character grows in a manner you'd expect of a real person, and her base *Tomb Raider* instincts ensure she's always finding things on which to jump about and enemies to shoot – it's really not a bad experience overall. But those looking for more depth and challenge are likely to feel a mite disappointed.



*“Combat is handled through a now bog-bloody-standard snap-to-cover system that is surprisingly well implemented. It's less snappy than the norm and makes for a fluid, dynamic combat experience.”*

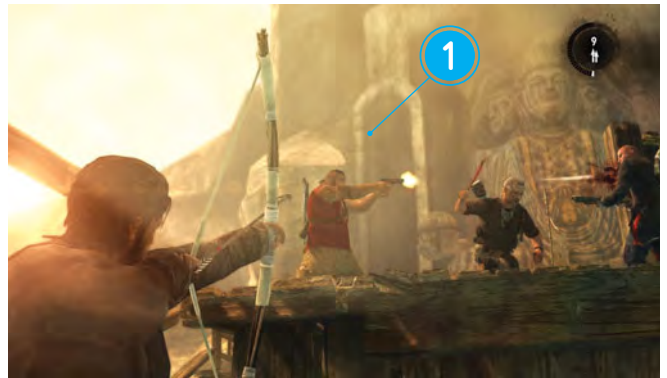


This would be a perfect time to break out in a *Les Misérables*-inspired song about being smeared in mud.



1 The game ships with a fairly decent multiplayer mode in which players choose to play as the survivors or Solarii (the island's psychopathic inhabitants). There are a few different game modes on offer and, as a whole, it's a decent addition to the game.

"Oh don't mind me, I'm just resting my hand."



Let's get the obligatory "but is it *Tomb Raider*?" question out of the way at this point: eh, kind of. While there is a mysterious, supernatural tone to the whole product, the gameplay itself feels too contrived and restricted to really bestow that feeling of accomplishment for the player when they complete a task. With the exception of just two instances, the puzzles are very simple – although clever enough – and far too short and infrequent to demand all that much of your head-space during your time with the game. What you will spend a lot of time doing is shooting people: Lara might start off as a timid person but by the end of things she's had enough blood on her hands to rival the Terminator's best day out.



Combat is handled through a now bog-bloody-standard snap-to cover system that is surprisingly well implemented. It's less snappy than the norm and makes for a fluid, dynamic combat experience. Pumping rounds into the island's variety of people who want you dead is satisfying, but many of the combat encounters are staged in enclosed arena-like spaces in which you need to kill a number of enemies before you're allowed to continue. There's no jumping about or being clever: just

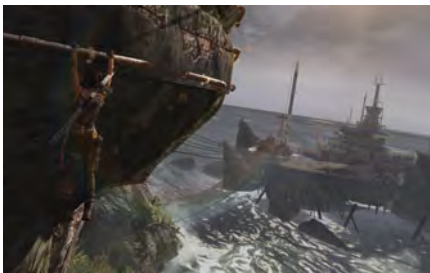
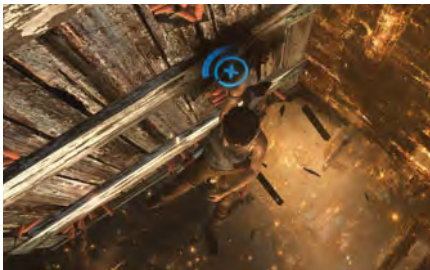
pop up at the right time to murder enough people and loot their bodies if you start to run low on ammo (which you're unlikely to do). Occasionally one of them will toss a stick of dynamite your way or come running at you, during which you can scramble to safety, dodge incoming attack and perform counter-attacks if you have the necessary skills unlocked. Combat feels solid, but to find this sort of battle system here feels too much like an appeal for public acceptance instead of a meaningful extension of the gameplay.

There are also a few stealth sequences present in *Tomb Raider* during which you can opt to keep your head down instead of tackling the enemies head-on. Very often it's a good idea, and Lara's bow makes for a brilliant silent killer once you've got the hang of it (hint: aim for the head) and upgraded it a few times. But, as is so often the case with games that make only a meagre attempt to incorporate stealth mechanics, the enemy AI is unpredictable, and opponents will vary from near-psychic in their detection abilities to practically brain-dead. Unfortunately many of these moments are scripted, and if you don't play *Tomb Raider* how you're meant to play it, you'll find yourself facing the pointy





2 There isn't a tremendous amount of actual "tomb raiding" in this game, but aside from a couple in the main story there are a few optional (and tiny) tombs for you to explore. All that you'll get for completing each is a boost to your XP and mixed feeling of nostalgia and longing, though.



3 At any campfire, Lara has access to some customisation stuff like upgrading her skills and gear, and fast travelling about the island to reach places previously locked out due to your insufficient equipment.

end of more bullets than you can handle.

Then there's the level traversal. Everything is handled well enough: the controls make sense and even the abundance of QTEs don't feel out of place, but there's a major issue here that only becomes apparent after a few hours in. Early parts of the game see Lara going through Hell on Earth: she's pummelled, thrown, beaten and narrowly escaped death numerous times. She's tasked with overcoming environmental challenges that she rises to with a lifelike mix of resentment and fervour. You're left thinking "God, how did she survive that?" and a feeling of triumph for overcoming these odds alongside Lara. Then the mask starts to slip, and you realise just how strongly *Tomb Raider* has been holding your hand. The level traversal is barely challenging – it's almost always obvious which direction you're meant to jump and often the camera will practically force you to stare at your next position. During cut scenes and guided action sequences there's always a convenient escape route revealed or thrown right in front of your face – all you need to do is jump at the right time or press the corresponding quick-time event button. There is no challenge, no decision-making process or feeling of doubt. The perilous music blares and arrows whizz by overhead but it all feels a little contrived once you realise that you'll be completely safe if you just do as you're told. There is practically no danger of failing – I can count on one hand the number of times Lara fell to her death by my mistakes – and if you do fail, the punishment is minor. *Tomb Raider* has historically forced players to think, to learn how to time their actions and make the right decisions based on trial and error or

forethought – usually a combination of the lot. This reboot only ever does that during combat, delivering traversal gameplay that is neutered and afraid to push its players.

Despite all that, *Tomb Raider* is still a good game. It's solidly built and produced to the highest level. It's polished, passionate and violent. It has a great story to tell, but it so badly wants you to sit through that story that it's too scared to put you off for even a moment. But, like a very watchable action movie, *Tomb Raider* is very playable, and you'll find yourself enjoying the more shallow moments despite yourself because they're so damn compelling. This is a game that will lull you into thinking that it's perfect, and we won't hold it against you if you fall for its charming repartee and cheap cologne. **NAG**  
- GeometriX

80

***Tomb Raider* wants to be played. It wants to dazzle you with its visuals and shock you with its intensity. It might be far**

**from perfect, but it's captivating enough to make you sit back and forget about all that gameplay challenge stuff anyway.**

**PLUS**

Great story / Excellent visuals / Solid combat / A few good puzzles

**MINUS**

Level traversal isn't challenging / Inconsistent AI / Combat feels out of place



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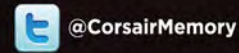
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# Reviewed SimCity

The next generation of city building

When writing a review, it is crucial to keep things focussed on what is important... and that is the product, not the problems surrounding it. So, while *SimCity* experienced some very serious server issues just after it first went live, it is critical to note that the bulk of the issues were sorted out before the end of the first weekend it was live. EA ran out several new servers during that time, resulting in a much more stable experience within 48 hours or so. Not ideal, sure, but at least something was done about it, and relatively quickly at that. It is something that a lot of the early reviews showed a knee-jerk response to, but something that was going to be fixed eventually. And to their credit, while the problem should not have been there in the first place, the people running the servers worked things out quite quickly. This is a problem that we will likely always see with games that have a persistent Internet connection requirement as part of their DRM. It's nasty, but it isn't something that shouldn't be expected. And that is the last I'll mention about the *SimCity* server issues in this review.

In the greater scheme of things, they aren't actually relevant to the most important aspect of this article – the game itself.

As mentioned before, *SimCity* requires a persistent Internet connection. While this is partly for obvious DRM reasons, it also allows this legendary management franchise to move in a completely new direction: multiplayer. It's never really existed in the core *SimCity* universe before, and so it brings a very new approach to the game. In fact, those that have played the previous titles will find a number of differences that change the game quite significantly. So much so, to be honest, that certain aspects of *SimCity* are almost unrecognisable as the next iteration of the world's most famous management simulation.

In days of yore, when *SimCity* hadn't even smelled a whiff of multiplayer, players could create sprawling urban areas that were complex and challenging. They had to lay every inch of sewage pipe and make sure that power lines fed all areas with enough electricity. They had to make sure that traffic didn't become a problem, that



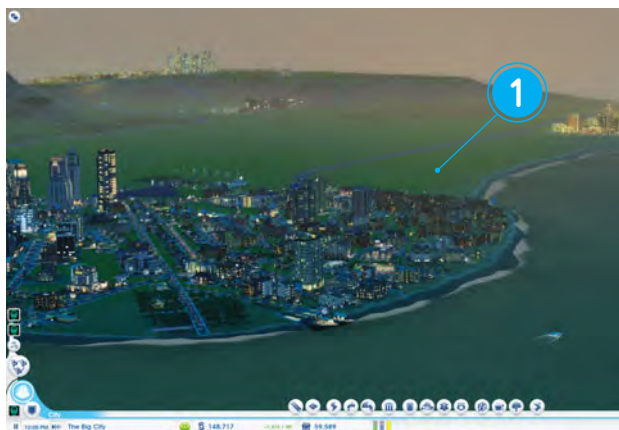
## SECOND OPINION

Over the last week I've had a rollercoaster relationship with *SimCity*. Leading up to its release I longed for it, moping that my time with the tantalising beta was over, its taste lingering on the fringes of my memory. Then it arrived: it was time to lose myself in a new Maxis world. But disaster struck – and not in the good "alien invasion ripping through my metropolis" way.

Maxis' online service for this game has been fundamentally broken since launch. At the time of writing, features have been disabled to help the ever-increasing server count handle the load. There are massive issues and they're unforgivable, but that's not to say we can't put them to the side and get on with enjoying this game because, gosh, it's actually a whole lot of fun.

The tiny city syndrome is an issue, but multi-city play goes a long way to alleviate this. I just wish it wasn't something that needed alleviating – this should never have been forced on the player in the first place. On the other hand, playing with others is a fantastic experience, and Maxis has done well to create a truly social game for those who want it. *SimCity* might be a technical screw-up but it's just as capable as its forerunners of sucking away hours of your life without you realising what's happened. At the very least, this is a good starting point for things to come.

- GeometriX



- 1 Working together is the only way for a region to succeed.
- 2 City? It's more like a suburb, really...
- 3 Choosing the right specialisation is important for the whole region.
- 4 Our Great Works International Airport construction got underway a day before we went to print. It's a massive project that will bring in more tourists and allow us to ship industrial freight, but we can't wait to see a jumbo jet flying overhead!

pollution stayed in check, and that the all-important budget was always finely balanced. The *SimCity* titles of old were complicated affairs that saw cities fail as often as not, because the player was a little too lax in one area or another.

Sadly, the same cannot be said for this new incarnation. It is, in a word, simpler, at least in terms of building and managing a moderately successful city. In the older games, if something went wrong, the impact was often massive. Now, problems are a little less impactful, and money is a little easier to come by. That said, if you run out of cash in this version of *SimCity*, there are very few options. The game will not bail you out at all, and unless you can turn things around by tweaking taxes or extending a loan, you're pretty much screwed as mayor. But it is almost difficult to get there. With just a few hours of play, and a moderated pace, you'll be flying from success to success.

Sure, you'll face problems in the game, but they're little niggles, not socio-economic disasters. It takes a lot to wreck a city in this game. In certain respects, that's pretty cool,



*“- like in the real world, successful cities will need to rely on their neighbours.”*



but even if you're not playing in sandbox mode (which unlocks all building and allows a few cheats) it's pretty difficult to mess things up. It's not a massive problem, but the level of challenge simply isn't the same as veterans might expect.

It comes from a different direction this time around. First off, the cities are a lot smaller. In fact, the game would probably be better off being named SimSuburb. The smaller size is a challenge in itself, because the player needs to be more careful with zoning. In addition, the player will need to make choices in terms of what their city will "specialise" in; industry, tourism, and so forth.

Each city forms part of a larger region. These regions can have up to sixteen cities in them. And here's where the challenge comes in – like in the real world, successful cities will need to rely on their neighbours. Water, refuse removal, power, education and more can be accessed from neighbouring cities, should the need arise. Cities with differing specialities will complement each other within a region.

These regional cities, in multiplayer, are

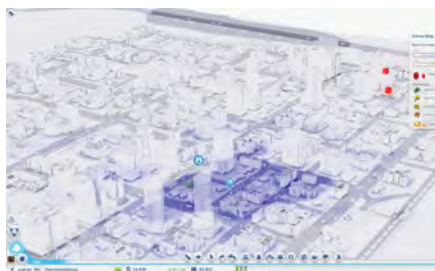


## THIRD OPINION

I'm a complete newbie to this genre of game as well as to the *SimCity* franchise. In fact, if I'm being totally honest here, I bought *SimCity* on a whim. At the time of writing this I'm six days in, have clocked up 56 hours of gameplay, built three cities in one region, amassed a total of 1,011,171 Simoleans (that's Sim moolah to all you uninitiated folk), and have a growing population of 276,116. In short, I'm hooked.

*SimCity* is enchanting and charming in so many unexpected ways. It's like a twisted rose vine that weaves and entangles you until you're so caught up in its beauty and allure, but make a wrong move and you'll find yourself bleeding from its unforgiving thorns. It's not a perfect game, but its flaws are not enough to dampen your curiosity and "what if I did this" train of thought you'll inevitably have while lying in bed at night. Driving on my way to work this morning a fire truck shot past me with its siren blaring, and the first thing that popped into my mind was to wonder how many traffic lights he was going to get stuck at, and whether he would make it to his destination before the building burnt down.

- Guardian



controlled by different players. A brave single player can try control all the cities themselves, which makes for an interesting challenge. Each city only progresses while a player is actively looking after it, though, so a single player can bounce between cities and set up a balance much more easily than a group of possibly self-serving multiplayer gamers would.

Cities in a region can also work together to complete one of four Great Works, each of which has a specific benefit to the region. Once again, you're relying on your neighbours' willingness to cooperate in multiplayer. Find the right group of people, and it will go just fine. But when everyone has their own ideas about which Great Work would benefit their own city, things can get a little complicated and messy.

With decent graphics, easy-to-understand controls and a simpler management model than before, the new *SimCity* has a wide appeal. But it's not the same game as before. Sure, times have changed, but the changes that were wrought in this franchise aren't necessarily all for the best. It's not a bad game – don't get me wrong – but it isn't the same. There is less depth here, and the reliance on others is something that veteran mayors may battle to get used to.

With that said, *SimCity* will reward those who give it a chance. Getting the balance right in single player or working with a team of like-minded mayors in multiplayer to

build up a successful region, can be a very rewarding exercise. And, like the previous titles, *SimCity* has a wonderfully addictive quality that will keep you coming back for more, waiting patiently for the cash to roll in for just one more city upgrade.

In short, if given a chance, the new aspects of the game present the player with a modernised, more relevant version of the classic, which adds more modern game dynamics to an evolved version of this long-running franchise. Newcomers will take to it immediately, while those who experienced the older titles will get the hang of it soon enough, if they suspend their expectations and adjust their thinking a bit. **NAG**

- Shryke

**79** It's a decent management game, but it certainly is not as deep or challenging as the older *SimCity* games were.

**PLUS** Multiplayer collaboration can be great / Cities are easier to run than before / Great graphics

**MINUS** Cities are tiny / Not as challenging as before / Persistent Internet connection



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**PLATFORMS**  
360 / PC / PS3  
**REVIEWED ON**  
PC  
**GENRE**

First-person shooter  
**AGE RESTRICTION**  
18

**MULTIPLAYER**  
**Local**  
None  
**Online**  
16 players

**DEVELOPER**  
Crytek Frankfurt / Crytek UK

**WEBSITE**  
www.crysis.com

**PUBLISHER**  
Electronic Arts  
**DISTRIBUTOR**  
EA South Africa

## Reviewed Crysis 3

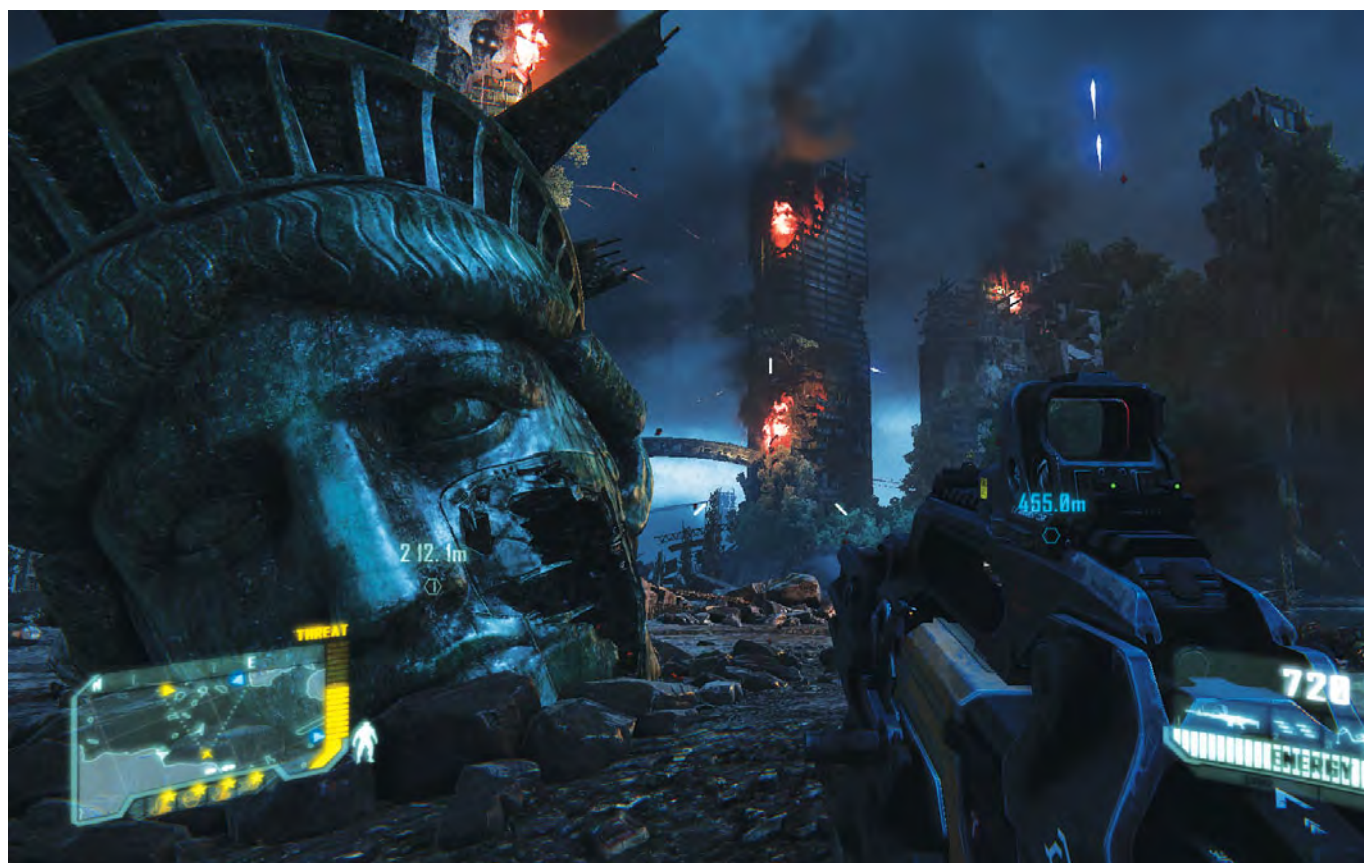
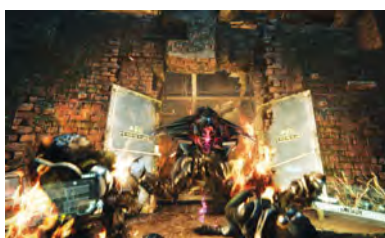
Put on your suit and rocket launcher

It's 2047. It's been over two decades since Alcatraz and his Prophet-infused Nanosuit practically left a New York-sized crater on all future maps of Earth. The Ceph threat lies mostly dormant, left to peacefully snooze for a spell while the CELL Corporation harvests a mysterious, infinite energy source from within the Liberty Dome – a massive shell encasing the ruins of New York City, along with the jungle that's become a lot less concrete within. This sustainable energy pool aids CELL in bringing the world's economy to its knees, their energy monopoly effectively affording them global control of everyone and everything. *Crysis 3* thrusts you into a hip pair of Nano-boots once more, this time as Prophet, and tasks you with infiltrating the Liberty Dome and putting a damper on CELL's whole world domination thing. But a far more insidious, unseen threat looms on the horizon, and you're the only one who can see it coming – and, as you'd expect, you're also the only one who can stop it.

That's the setup for our third *Crysis* outing. I want to get this out of the way early: I like *Crysis 3*. I really do. It proudly flaunts all the hallmarks I've come to associate with this series, and that makes me happy. I just don't think I like it as much as I did *Crysis 2*. It's partly because I personally feel that *Crysis 3*'s narrative, while confidently fiery and packed with an array of impressive moments, isn't as engaging as that of *Crysis*

2. Could be my memory of it is rosier than the reality, but I remember the second *Crysis* game's story being unexpectedly intelligent and thoughtful. Perhaps that's a result of the involvement of lauded sci-fi scribe Richard Morgan on the previous game. *Crysis 3*, meanwhile, has a narrative that, while undoubtedly exciting, isn't quite so memorable. I feel something similar can be said of its gameplay, too: while it's very good and definitely feels every bit like a *Crysis* game should, it doesn't live up to the standards of its precursor.

Right, with that all dealt with, you should know that despite those awkward comparisons with its older sibling, I had a blast with the game. Its sandbox action is every bit as satisfying as ever, letting you choose how best to approach any given combat situation – and providing you all the tools you'll need to adapt when something inevitably goes wrong. The Nanosuit hasn't changed much, with the Armour and Stealth modes kept intact (along with the default Power mode) for use as you see fit. As you'd expect, there are suit upgrades that you can unlock as well, this time paid for by hunting down hidden collectibles rather than harvesting magical upgrade dust from murdered Ceph foes. The system allows you to upgrade important Nanosuit-type stuff, like increasing the duration of your cloaking ability, or increasing the speed at which you



regenerate the energy needed to power your suit's abilities, or decreasing the amount of energy it takes to Power Jump. You're only able to have four of these upgrades enabled at any given time, forcing you to cherry-pick the appropriate set of augments to suit your immediate conflict requirements.

The range of weaponry available to you is vast, and while the majority of it is essentially standard human military hardware, you're now also able to use Ceph weapons. Their design is appropriately alien, and they pack a distinct punch next to the human arsenal. All the weapons in the game pack a mighty punch really, and all feel solid and satisfyingly powerful – which makes the gameplay enormously gratifying and nicely weighted. The new environments, which promised to blend the wide horizontal spaces of the original game's tropical island battlegrounds with the increased verticality of *Crysis 2*'s urban warzone, are intricately designed and wonderfully diverse in terms of look and feel – but again, I feel like the second game's murderous playgrounds boasted better design in terms of offering more diverse gameplay opportunities to use the environment as your own personal toy. If I had to pick one aspect of its gameplay that stuck out as being perpetually annoying, it'd be the artificial intelligence, which often ruins your attempts at being stealthy by being irritatingly psychic. Eagle-eyed enemies are seemingly able to spot you in shadows



2

2 This is the new Predator Bow you've heard so much about. It lets you fill enemies with arrows without ever breaking cloak, or losing Nanosuit energy. It's convenient, but it's really just a hyper-cool sniper rifle.



1

1 Weapons can once again be customised on the fly with various attachments, different sights and other random stuff, depending on your needs.



from across large expanses the moment you un-cloak, and more than once enemies somehow managed to spot me when I exited Stealth mode behind pieces of ample cover. It makes playing the game using stealth often needlessly finicky, which I don't recall being a problem before.

On to the technology then, which many gamers see as the primary reason to buy any title bearing Crytek's logo. Simply put, it looks incredible. Its visuals are remarkable no matter what platform you choose to play it on, but on PC in particular (where you'll need a DirectX 11-capable machine to get it working), it's filled with visually arresting moments that'll leave you gaping in awe – provided you've got the rig necessary to run it without experiencing a nuclear meltdown. This is CryEngine 3 at its very best, and what an amazing piece of tech it is. The audio too, is fittingly meaty. There is some shaky voice acting at times, however – particularly on the part of the ambient soldier dialogue you'll hear when you're out hunting CELL troops, although that's as much due to sloppy writing as it is overly pantomimed acting.

Complementing the single-player campaign is an excellent multiplayer suite. It probably won't rival the popularity of *Call of Duty* or *Battlefield 3*, but *Crysis 3*'s multiplayer is frantically fast-paced and holds the potential for many hours of good times. Obviously, you've got the usual array of persistent stats and unlocks, which is all great – but it's the hugely attractive mechanics and game modes that make it special. Hunter (a variation of Mutant, where certain players get

permanently cloaked Nanosuits and Predator Bows, and must hunt down CELL players until they're all dead) is particularly striking for its mix of sneaky, tense fun. Assault – which is kind of like playing *Counter-Strike*, except the attacking team gets Nanosuits and weaker weapons, while the defenders get no suits, but more powerful weaponry – is also worth noting. Granted, the nature of the multiplayer, with its Nanosuit shenanigans giving it an entirely different texture and pace to anything else out there, won't appeal to everyone – but those who appreciate its unique nuances will be very happy with it.

- Barkskin

87

The final act of *Crysis'* play perhaps isn't as focussed as the second game in the series, but it is nevertheless a well-designed, fun shooter offering many creative ways to tackle its entertaining combat scenarios. It also looks spectacular every step of the way, which is a bonus. It's got fantastic multiplayer too. Fans of the series will love it.

PLUS

Action sandbox is as fun as ever / Eye-melting visuals / Multiplayer is solid, exciting

MINUS

Gameplay and narrative fall a bit flat compared to *Crysis 2*

**PLATFORMS**

360 / PC / PS3

**REVIEWED ON**

PS3

**GENRE**

Third-person action

**AGE RESTRICTION**

18

**MULTIPLAYER**

Local

None

Online

None

**DEVELOPER**

Platinum Games and Kojima Productions

**WEBSITE**

www.metalgearsolid.com

**PUBLISHER**

Konami

**DISTRIBUTOR**

Ster Kinekor



Reviewed

# Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance

Chop! Chop!

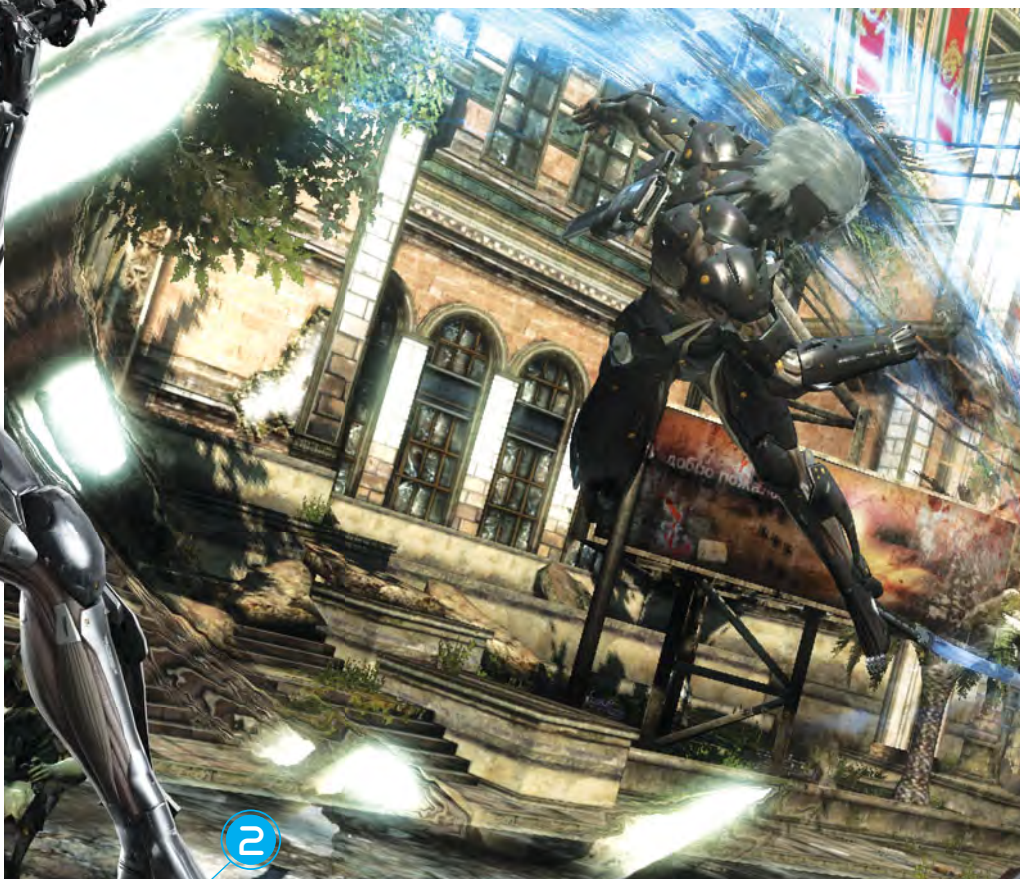
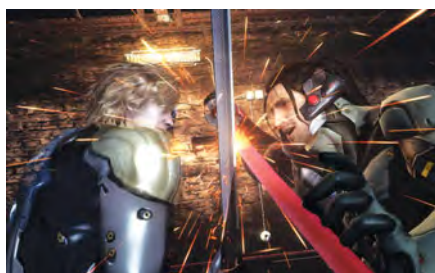
I have to admit, I have never been the biggest fan of the *Metal Gear* franchise. Sure, they are enjoyable, but I never stooped to the level of extreme fanboy worship that some adherents of this franchise have gone for. Perhaps it stems from the fact that I am not a big fan of the anime-inspired flavour of many Japanese games. Maybe it's because I don't rank stealth games at the top of my love-list. Whatever the case may be, while I enjoyed previous *Metal Gear* games, I didn't drop everything to play them.

With the release of the spin off *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance*, my attitude towards all things *Metal Gear* may change just a little, though. See, with this title, Kojima has turned away from the stealthy, sneaky stuff, favouring an all-out hack-and-slash approach instead.

*Revengeance* tells the tale of a cyborg operative called Raiden who, after his failure to defend the prime minister of an African country making a recovery after a brutal civil war, takes on a multinational terrorist organisation pretty much all on his own. And that's fine, in the tradition of this kind of fiction. Instead of sneaking in and sniping bad guys in the head from shadowy corners,

Raiden kicks down the door with his high heeled boots and turns his enemies into chopped liver. The combat is smooth and stylish, favouring timing over complication (although lowering the difficulty level too much eliminates that timing, making this little more than a button masher). Combos flow as the animations depict a wide variety of moves (despite being based on a quick and heavy blow system). Raiden combines sword and unarmed techniques, adding a rather beautiful motion to what is already a visually pretty game.

The real combat fun comes in in Blade Mode. This mode, when available, allows the player to slow down time and really go to work on their enemies. The two buttons can still be used, for horizontal or vertical strikes, but the sweetest way is using the right analogue stick to direct Raiden's sword. It's slice-and-dice, quite literally. The game will chop off bits of enemies wherever the sword passes. You can get big bloody chunks or, with a bit of finesse, can turn the bad guy into mush kibble, with tiny bits flying off in every direction. The Sword Mode also allows the player to block a variety of incoming attacks, like missiles and such.



1 Good graphics help the shredded enemies look even better.

2 High heels – seriously?





This puts quite a strain on the PS3... it requires quite a lot of processing power to keep track of those enemy fragments. Combined with the very good graphics, your console may well take some strain. Mine actually died. To be honest, it was an old PS3, but still, it was working pretty hard before it popped [That'll teach you to ensure that your console has adequate ventilation while playing, and that you should take regular breaks, Ed].

And that's the kind of intensity that Kojima is after with this game – fast-paced, over-the-top action. And while the player is controlling Raiden that's pretty much what is delivered. But there are a few places where the game stumbles. The first, and most obvious, is in the cut scenes. These break the action dramatically, despite the eye-candy that they provide. The story is solid enough but really becomes spurious if all you are after is that intense action. The cut scenes can all be skipped and, quite honestly, most people (who are not die-hard fans) likely will.

Between the cut scenes is where all the action is, and *Revengeance* does a good job at keeping what could easily become tedious fresh and exciting. New enemies



*“Revengeance tells the tale of a cyborg operative called Raiden who, after his failure to defend the prime minister of an African country making a recovery after a brutal civil war, takes on a multinational terrorist organisation pretty much all on his own.”*



are introduced with a steady regularity, and upgrades to weapons and skills mean that the player will always have something new to try out. In fact, there is a lot to do within the game, so there is a solid possibility for a replay or two, just to make sure you get the most out of the experience. And, of course, there are massive boss battles to deal with on several occasions, which keep things exciting. Often short QTEs will be required during these battles as well, which also adds to the game's variety.

Even the movement is fast paced. Raiden is capable of Ninja Running, which means the player simply holds down a button and steers, a-la *Prototype*. Raiden will automatically get past obstacles and the like. This mode also opens up two kinds of fleeting attacks, in the form of a sword swipe or a slide.

And yet, when changing to secondary weapons (which are, admittedly, useful in their own right, although not as capable as the sword) the game loses that pace to a degree. It simply isn't smooth enough, and doesn't allow for a kind of flowing combat combined with weapon changes. That would have been really awesome.

Also, the camera manages to get in the way of things, because while the game is fast paced, it sometimes is a bit slow-witted. This

is particularly true for the bigger boss battles, and it makes some of the trickier parts of the game a bit of a chore to get through.

MG fans will certainly like the new approach, though, despite its minor flaws, and those that enjoy melee based third person action games will find the pace and combat a treat. It's nothing revolutionary, and it does have a few issues, but for the most part *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance* delivers a good experience – even after playing it through multiple times. **NAG**

- Shryke

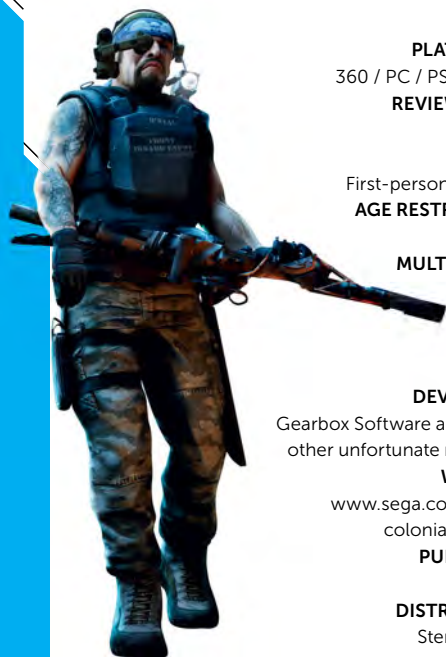
**84** Fans of the *Metal Gear* franchise will like the change of pace, and fans of melee-based action games will love the combat.

**PLUS**

Great graphics / Excellent control scheme / Tons to do

**MINUS**

Some pacing issues / Dodgy camera / Pointless plot



**PLATFORMS**  
360 / PC / PS3 / Wii U  
**REVIEWED ON**  
PC  
**GENRE**

First-person shooter  
**AGE RESTRICTION**  
18

**MULTIPLAYER**  
**Local**  
2  
**Online**  
12

**DEVELOPER**  
Gearbox Software and some other unfortunate muppets

**WEBSITE**  
www.sega.com/aliens  
colonialmarines

**PUBLISHER**  
SEGA

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Ster Kinekor

## Reviewed

# Aliens: Colonial Marines

Nuke the site. For morbid.

You'd think there's no way this could've possibly gone wrong. I mean, the *Aliens* franchise practically begs to be turned into a video game, and goes so far as to do all the heavy lifting for any skilled development studio willing to tackle it. The setting, the weapons, the enemies – all of it and more are already right there, ripe for a bit of interactive digitising. I imagine it'd also be an incredibly fun game to nurture and develop, with such wonderfully iconic source material to draw from, and such powerful horror mechanics pleading to be employed. I mean, the motion tracker alone is basically a built-in mechanism for pants-filling terror. With that in mind, it's almost unbelievable that a proven developer like Gearbox Software has managed to release a game as thoroughly disappointing as *Aliens: Colonial Marines*. It's the video game equivalent of waking up on your birthday and discovering that at some point in the night you had an acid nosebleed that ate away half of your face. It's made me mighty sad.

Set seventeen weeks after Ripley introduced that Xeno queen to the finer details of spaceship airlock usage at the end of James Cameron's *Aliens*, the game begins by sending you – as Corporal Christopher

T. Winter – on a search-and-rescue mission onboard the *USS Sulaco*, which has inexplicably returned to orbit around LV-426 and begun relaying a distress signal. To cut a short story even shorter, there's stuff that happens, and Weyland-Yutani are a bunch of dicks, and your own ship gets destroyed, and there are obviously Xenos, and people speak to you over your radio, and I wish I could tell you more but, in truth, you actually won't give a damn. You'll give no damns because this story is so poorly portrayed and feebly strung together that by the time I reached the end of it, it didn't matter why I was doing what I was doing, or who I was doing it with, or why there was so much tension in the voices crackling through my radio. This is supposed to be a "true sequel" to *Aliens*, and yet it's little more than a narrative facepalm.

Beyond that lies the actual gameplay. Now, this is where reports have been greatly exaggerated, because *Colonial Marines* is not the absolute worst thing ever made by a game developer as many would have you believe. At worst, it's just magnificently tedious. There's very little in it that's actually exciting, which is almost unbelievable, because the Xenomorphs could've, and should've, made excitement an automatic

## SECOND OPINION

### GAME OVER, MAN. GAME OVER.

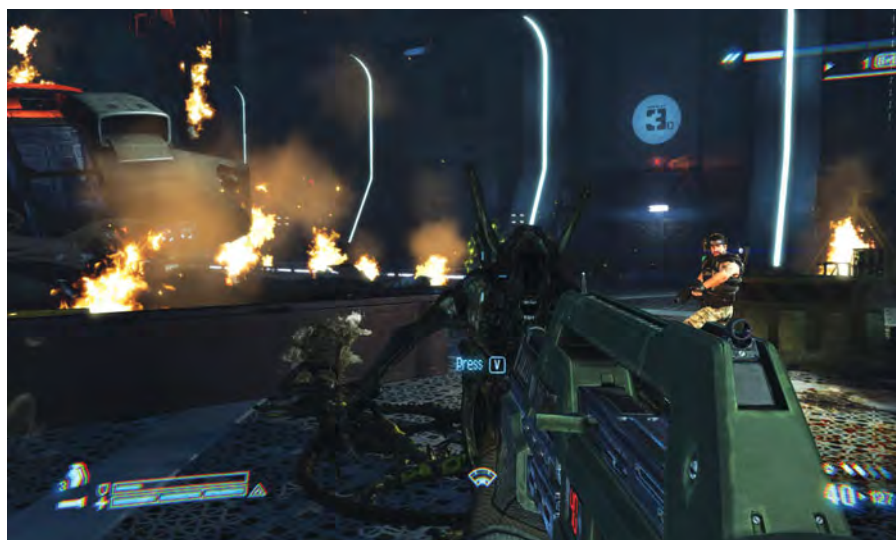
Almost five years ago to the day, I wrote a preview of *Aliens: Colonial Marines* for the magazine. The only thing in that 2008 preview that made it into the game launched last month was no HUD in the hardest difficulty. It's sort of funny, actually, that the only thing that made it into the game is something that isn't, you know, there. YOU SECURE THOSE TEARS, HUDSON!

I'll leave Barkskin to nuke the single-player game from orbit then, while I write something about the multiplayer, which quite in spite of everything else, has managed to be somewhat, sort of, almost not completely terrible.

Featuring asymmetrical gameplay very much like *Left 4 Dead's* Versus mode (in fact, it's pretty much identical in terms of classes), *Aliens: Colonial Marines'* multiplayer has squads of USCM grunts going up against Xenomorphs in a number of ultra-accelerated simulations of natural selection. Playing as the grunts is a bughunt (zing!) but playing as the much more tactically-oriented Xenomorphs is ridiculously good fun. Some maps include a "hive" area that lets you transform from a regular Xenomorph into a gigantic Crusher (it's a *L4D* Tank, basically) and reduce the entire enemy team to Weyland-Yutani brand hotdog stuffing. Hey, maybe Colonial Marine hotdogs is the company's bold new business scheme – "Building Better Novelty Meat Snacks" – and that's why the *Sulaco* went back to LV-426. It's as good an explanation for the game's plot as any given in the game, i.e. none whatsoever.

I'm not sure I'd recommend the game on the multiplayer alone – at least not at full price – but it does mostly make up for the tremendous disappointment of the single-player game. Mostly.

– Azimuth

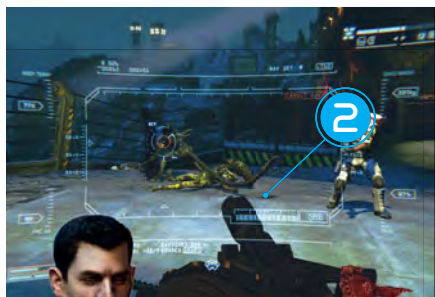
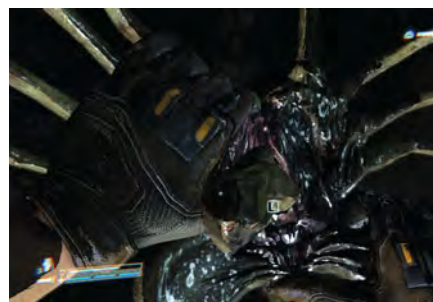
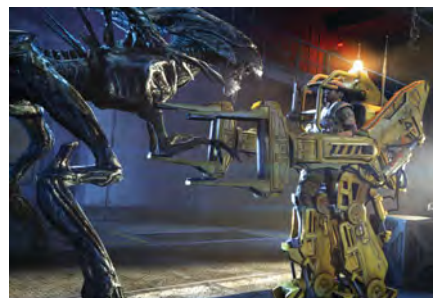
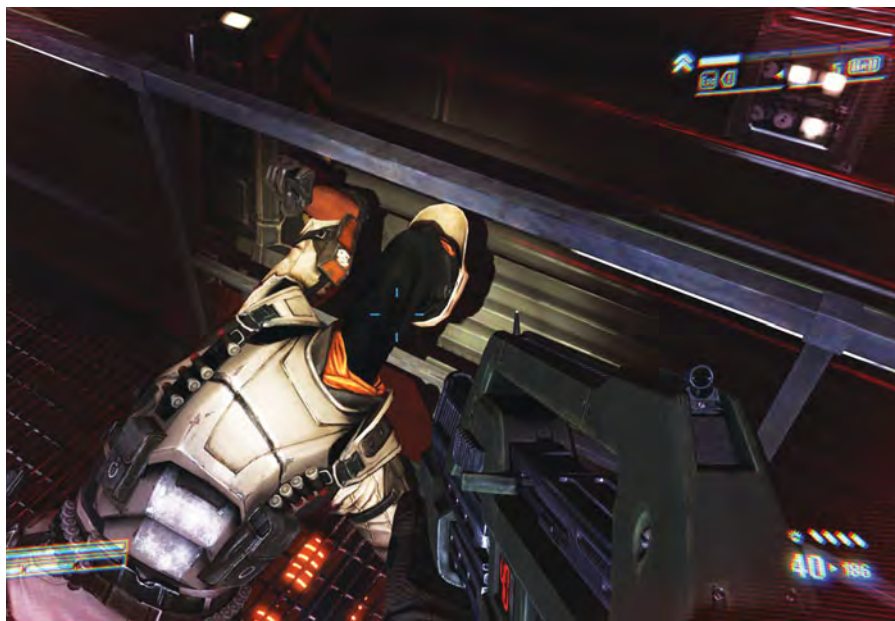


1 Certain weapons can be customised along the way, with the game dishing out the obligatory assortment of attachments and sights and other crap as rewards for playing it. These unlocks are persistent across all of the game's modes.





*“You’ll give no damns because this story is so poorly portrayed and feebly strung together that by the time I reached the end of it, it didn’t matter why I was doing what I was doing, or who I was doing it with...”*



**2** The iconic *Aliens* arsenal has been recreated in the game. Pity all the familiar weaponry doesn't actually help make *Colonial Marines* fun.



by-product. It's mostly because the artificial intelligence governing them is borderline broken. Xenos are prone to running at you in straight lines, rather than stalking you on walls and ceilings in the shadows. You'll find them completely confused by level geometry in certain cases, floating in mid-air above desks and the like, or trapped in a perpetual run animation loop. In essence, the Xenos have been reduced to angry house cats. There are a few different types, but they're really all completely dull. I'll concede that there were moments where I definitely felt tension building nicely, and moments where the level design and mechanics therein threatened to be imaginative (there's a bit where you're attempting to outsmart blind Xenos that hunt purely using sound that springs to mind), but all those moments do is remind you of the game that *Colonial Marines* promised to be, the game it should've been.

Bearing the above in mind makes the appearance of Weyland-Yutani's private military force a sore point for me, because you spend about half the game shooting at human enemies. This would be fine, because it's basically a given these days that any AAA game is obliged to feature a spot of *Call of Duty*, but when you then consider the bits where you're actually battling the titular Xenos and realise that none of their appearances are even remotely memorable, it makes me wish that whoever actually developed this game had decided to cut all the human enemies in favour of setting up more Xeno encounters (or improving the

ones that do exist) that are actually effective at making this feel like an *Aliens* game. I'm told the multiplayer is quite good, but I can't even mention it as a saving grace because I can't seem to find any multiplayer matches on PC. Instead, you'll find Azimuth's thoughts on the multiplayer elsewhere on these pages.

I realise that reading what I've written here might make it seem like I hate *Colonial Marines*, but that's not it. Really, I'm just disappointed. It almost completely fails at capturing the essence and recreating the atmosphere of its source. As a first-person shooter, it's average. As an *Aliens* game, it's heartless. **NAG**

- Barkskin

**65** Contrary to what you might've heard elsewhere, *Aliens: Colonial Marines* isn't the Worst Game Ever (and they'd do well to print that as a quote on the retail box). It's simply vastly disappointing, and that's actually worse than if it had purely been a bad game. *Aliens* deserves better.

**PLUS**

Multiplayer is apparently quite good

**MINUS**

Confused, doddering storyline / Boring, ineffective gameplay / All of the disappointment, ever



**PLATFORMS**  
3DS  
**REVIEWED ON**  
3DS  
**GENRE**  
Strategy RPG  
**AGE RESTRICTION**  
12  
**MULTIPLAYER**  
**Local**  
None  
**Online**  
None  
**DEVELOPER**  
Intelligent Systems  
**WEBSITE**  
www.fireemblemawakening.com  
**PUBLISHER**  
Nintendo  
**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Core Group

Reviewed

# Fire Emblem: Awakening

The strategy RPG for you and me

When starting a game of *Fire Emblem: Awakening*, you're presented with a choice: Classic, or Casual. This setting is separate from the difficulty settings (Normal, Hard, Lunatic and Lunatic Plus). Difficulty determines not only the level of strategy that will be used against you, but what kind of special abilities enemy units might have. At the Lunatic Plus level, every enemy unit presents a serious puzzle to solve.

The choice between Classic and Casual, however, is really important. Granted, if all you want to do is see the story and not have to worry about being challenged, then Casual is the way to go. If your units fall in

battle, they'll simply retreat, keeping any experience/items they may have gained. The only exception here is the lead character, Chrom, and your own custom-made avatar. If either of them fall, it is mission over and you'll have to load from a save game. In Casual, you can save anywhere, even mid-battle. Because there is no real penalty in Casual mode, your tactics can be sloppy, and you can use the Auto-Battle feature to get through most fights. Basically, you'd be pressing buttons to make the story go, your brain need not be present.

Classic mode (and the traditional *Fire Emblem* experience), is what series veterans will pick regardless. But if you've never played a *Fire Emblem* before, it's a tough choice to make. In Classic, if a unit falls in battle it's gone for good (until you start a new game). That unit's death represents not only a piece removed from your army, but entire sections of story that suddenly vanish. That unit won't be around to form connects to the rest of your team, known as Support Level, which are in themselves side-stories and unlock functional elements in battle. To quote the game's tagline, "The choices you make here last forever." You *could* restart missions each time you lose a unit until you make it through with everyone intact. But the length of some missions, and the random-generator that awards loot, complicates things. There may come a point where the sacrifice of a life is worth the gain. You might even need to send someone off to die as a decoy, so the rest can survive.

It sounds stressful, and in a way it is. The Classic system of permanent death puts a lot of pressure on the player, but there is a kind of magic to knowing your version of the game is unique due to your choices. It's very reminiscent of the *Risk Legacy* board game, which adds permanent changes to the game's rules each time you play. Choices only have real meaning, if there are consequences. **NAG**

- Miktar

**90** For newcomers and veterans of the genre alike, *Awakening* is the best you can get right now on portable systems. The rich, deep battle system and highly customizable units, combined with ample plot and side-stories, leaves little to be desired.

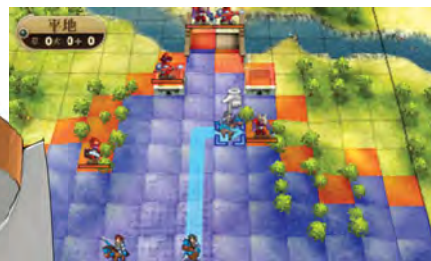
**PLUS**

Incredible amount of content / Wonderful music / Reasonably-priced DLC content

**MINUS**

The God of Random can be unkind / Can get overwhelming fast / No versus multiplayer

During a unit clash animation, you can pause, slow-mo, fast-forward, or change the camera to get a better look at the detailed animations.





## Reviewed

# Zen Pinball 2

Knock your balls together

### PLATFORMS

PS3 / PSV

### REVIEWED ON

PS3

### GENRE

Arcade

### AGE RESTRICTION

12

### MULTIPLAYER

Local

4 players

Online

4 players

### DEVELOPER

Zen Studios

### WEBSITE

www.zenpinball.com

### PUBLISHER

Sony Computer Entertainment

### DISTRIBUTOR

PSN

This update to the lauded PlayStation edition of Zen Studios' digital pinball simulation is a hard package to argue with. While *Zen Pinball* didn't limit itself to modelling strictly real pinball action, *ZP2* still features overhauled physics and tweaked returning tables, moving its play action closer to what a pinball purist would approve of. More to the point, *Zen Pinball 2* is a free upgrade for *ZP1* owners: re-download improved versions of every table, with a genuinely useful set of social competitive features enhancing the package. The upgrade brings *Zen Pinball* into general feature parity with its Xbox cousin, *Pinball FX2*.

*ZP2* launches with new tables and table sets based around *Plants vs. Zombies* and *Marvel's Avengers Chronicles*. Previous *Marvel Pinball* and *Marvel Vengeance & Virtue* tables now live inside the *ZP2* framework as well. Of special note, Sony's recently-named Cross Buy is supported: all tables purchased count for the PS3 version of *ZP2* and its virtually identical PS Vita edition. It's tough to find fault with *Zen Pinball 2*'s package. While it doesn't cater to a preference for real life tables, there's a lot of tightly presented, affordable fun to be found here. Cross Buy and the exemplary quality of the Vita build (sporting a rock solid 60 fps) push it up a few well-deserved notches. **NAG**

- Miktar



90

While *Pinball Arcade* focuses on virtual recreations of physical tables, *Zen Pinball 2* instead attempts to bring the pinball genre more in line with contemporary digital entertainment. The tables look great, play great, and have forward-thinking features that benefit the genre greatly.

### PLUS

Cross Buy is great value (buy once, own on both Sony systems) / Newer tables are a spectacle / Can import *Zen Pinball* tables at no cost / All tables have a free trial mode

### MINUS

Fantasy elements won't appeal to purists / The base package is free, but you buy table and table packs individually



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**PLATFORMS**  
Vita / Wii / 360 / PS3 / PC

**REVIEWED ON**  
PC

**GENRE**  
Action-adventure

**AGE RESTRICTION**  
12

**MULTIPLAYER**  
Local  
None  
Online  
None

**DEVELOPER**  
Vblank Entertainment

**WEBSITE**  
www.retrocityrampage.com

**PUBLISHER**  
Vblank Entertainment

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Online (multiple)

Reviewed

# Retro City Rampage

The ultimate love letter to a more civilised time in gaming

Don't let the diminutive little pixel graphics fool you: *Retro City Rampage* is the complete package. A mash-up of *Grand Theft Auto II* and practically every console game made before 1992. You roam the city hijacking cars, taking on missions, playing mini-games found in arcades, and avoiding the cops.

Most of the game plays out in a top-down perspective, the little people and cars quite charming in their own blocky way. You can actually change the "style" of the graphics slightly in the options, futzing with different colour palettes and visual effects that mimic older systems like DOS, the Virtual Boy and the Atari ST. Some missions take on a side view for some basic platforming, and a few *GTA*-style mini-games are triggered when hijacking the right type of car, like a taxi.

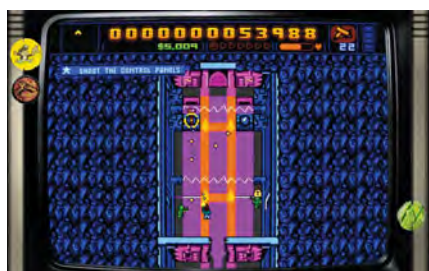
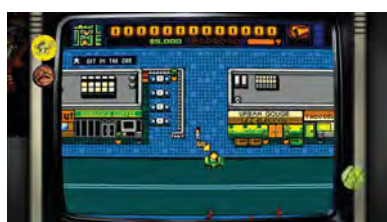
There's a lot in *Retro City Rampage* one

wouldn't expect: like a half-decent cover system (that the cynic would say works better than the one in *GTA IV*). Gameplay is made easier due to a slightly-tetchy auto-lock-on, while the vehicle physics (if you could call them that) are mercifully rock-solid. The story missions that progress your quest to get Back to the Past mix up gameplay a fair amount. Some are standard open-world fare, like killing a target or tailing a car, while others mimic older NES games like *Paperboy* or *Contra*. Side-missions usually involve some kind of rampage spree using one of the many weapons found in the game, there's no lack of variety there.

Obviously, as a homage crafted by one individual (who later enlisted some art and music help), *Retro City Rampage* is a tongue-in-cheek kind of experience suited only for particular tastes. *Retro City Rampage* was originally only a side-project of Brian Provinciano, who was trying to remake *Grand Theft Auto III* for the literal Nintendo Entertainment System, back in 2002. By 2007, due to all the additional content he had added (like characters from games he liked as a kid), he decided to turn "Grand Theftendo" into its own game.

The Vita version is not lacking in any way compared to the PlayStation 3 or Xbox 360 versions – they're all basically identical. The Vita does have the benefit of being portable, and having "Cross-Save", which lets you upload your save to the cloud and resume play on the PS3, and vice-versa. *Retro City Rampage* launched with Cross Buy, so if you bought it for PS3 or Vita, you got the other version for free. The developer is constantly updating and improving the game (just recently, some missions that sorely needed checkpoints were given exactly that). The game is indulgent, but for how cheap it is, there's nothing wrong with that. **NAG**

- Miktar



75

You get games made for an audience, and then you get games made for the people making them. *Retro City Rampage* is the latter: an

experience not particularly suited for general consumption, but a labour of love nonetheless and easy to appreciate if you speak the language.

**PLUS**

Plenty of content / Mini-games / Food for the nostalgia soul

**MINUS**

Some missions are stupidly hard

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

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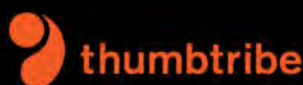
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Guess what you'll find here?

*Well, almost everything.*

# EVERYTHING ELSE

Bits and bobs that can all be filed under gaming lifestyle



## BARBARIAN HULK

Are you sitting down? If like us, you have no idea who this hulked out version of Tarzan is, it's Barbarian Hulk. Apparently Doctor Doom performed a procedure to separate the Hulk and Banner. Hulk went on to live in peace among the subterranean mole men while Banner tried to recreate the process that transformed him into the Hulk in the first place. Now it's Banner's tiger, shark and men hulks against Barbarian Hulk. Phew. This is the figurine based on that story. It also says it comes with a highly detailed base on the box but there's no base in the box. Lies! You get what you see, in other words – a big chunky green Hulk at just over 25cm with 16 articulation points.

Supplier: Cosmic Comics  
Website: [www.cosmiccomics.co.za](http://www.cosmiccomics.co.za)  
RRP: R349



## THE NEW 52: JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA

The great thing about DC's New 52 range is that you don't need to know a damn thing about comics to get into them. Of course, most of you should know who the current JLA members are, but in this version they've gone rogue (or something) and now the US government needs to assemble a new team from the dregs and leftovers to attempt to stop them. It's all quite mysterious but gorgeously drawn and quite packed with stuff for a first issue. It also features Vibe – one of the most hilariously ill-conceived and controversial superheroes from the '80s, so you know you're in for a fun ride. *Ay, caramba!*

Supplier: Cosmic Comics  
Website: [www.cosmiccomics.co.za](http://www.cosmiccomics.co.za)  
RRP: R45



## MAGIC THE GATHERING: GATECRASH EVENT DECKS

Gatecrash is the second expansion in the Return to Ravnica block, and at 249 cards strong (with no basic lands to fluff up that number) it's one of the beefiest expansions we've seen in a while.

These two Event Decks are the highest point of entry for Gatecrash (hence the price premium), but with them you could practically walk into a tournament and not end up a crying lump of sadness in the corner. Rally and Rout is a creature-focused deck that hits the ground running at low mana costs. Thrive and Thrash is a mix of accelerated mana, control, draw, flash creatures and big creatures loaded with abilities.



Supplier: Wizards of the Coast  
 Website: [locator.wizards.com](http://locator.wizards.com)  
 RRP: TBA



## GYRO STEALTH ATTACK HELICOPTER

Wait for it... This is a remote controlled military helicopter that shoots actual missiles in mid-air. There's very little point in continuing with the rest of this text – just give them your money so you can start attacking work colleagues (we found girls run the furthest quicker when this bad boy is in the air). It flies reasonably well and is gyroscopically

stabilised with a trim setting to fine-tune aiming hovering. It comes with paper targets, a tri-band transmitter (up to three choppers in the same office at the same time) and charges using the controller or a supplied USB cable.

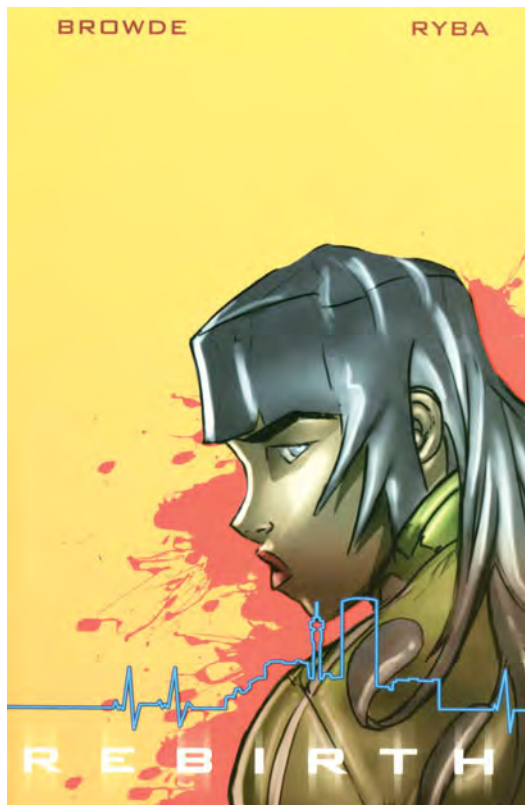
Supplier: Mantality  
 Website: [www.mantality.co.za](http://www.mantality.co.za)  
 RRP: R850

## REBIRTH

*Rebirth* is a 100% locally produced trade paperback from the talents of Daniel Browde and Josh Ryba. It tells the story of a South Africa in which vampires once ruled the country, but have now been quarantined and abandoned by their leaders in Amsterdam following the contraction of IDV – a clear spin on HIV. It's political enough to be poignant without being bogged down by heavy subject matter, and the writing

is solid. What does let down this otherwise great read is the inconsistent artwork. With the whole book taking five years to make, Ryba's art style shows clear advancements made throughout the pages, and the occurrence of blurry, low-resolution art is just frequent enough to be a nuisance.

Supplier: Cosmic Comics  
 Website: [www.cosmiccomics.co.za](http://www.cosmiccomics.co.za)  
 RRP: R235



## CLASSIC COLLECTION: TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: MICHELANGELO

Dude! This range is inspired by the original 1988 animated series which means it's authentic to the max. Each radioactive turtle stands at just over 15cm and can play Twister like a boss with 34 points of articulation. Cowabunga! There is an epic sewer base included and signature weapons for each

turtle, but no pizza or rat poo – bummer – this is probably why they all look so angry trapped in their blister-pack prisons.

Supplier: Cosmic Comics  
 Website: [www.comsmiccomics.co.za](http://www.comsmiccomics.co.za)  
 RRP: R299

# TECHNEWS

## KNOW YOUR TECHNOLOGY

### HSA:

Heterogeneous System Architecture is an architecture that allows accelerators of all kinds to behave as first class CPU components in a system. That is, graphics processors and the host CPU are able to share workloads. HSA is ISA agnostic and allows the developer to focus on function rather than having to specify where this function is to be performed. Most HSA systems use a unified address space for both CPU and GPU which allows pagable memory for both GPU and CPU resources. The latest generation consoles (PS4 etc.) use HSAs at their core.

### NUMA:

Non-Uniform Memory Access is a computer memory design used in multiprocessing systems. Essentially the memory access time in a NUMA system is dependent on the memory location relative to the processor. Under NUMA, a CPU can access its local memory faster than non-local memory (on another CPU node for example). In non-NUMA architecture, control logic for memory access is not done by the local CPU and often handled elsewhere even though the required data may be on the active CPU memory that is demanding it.

### SYMMETRIC MULTIPROCESSING (SMP):

A multiprocessor computer hardware architecture where two or more identical processors are connected to a single

shared main memory pool and controlled by a single OS instance. Most common multiprocessor systems today use SMP architecture. In the case of multicore processors, the SMP architecture applies to the cores, treating them as separate processors. SMP systems allow homogeneous processors to run independently, each processor executing different programs and working on different data with capability of sharing common resources (memory, I/O device, interrupt system and so on) connected via a system bus or crossbar.

### SIMULTANEOUS MULTITHREADING (SMT):

With simultaneous multithreading, instructions from more than one thread can be executing in any given pipeline stage at a time. This is done without great changes to the basic processor architecture: the main additions needed are the ability to fetch instructions from multiple threads in a cycle, and a larger register file to hold data from multiple threads. The number of concurrent threads can be decided by the chip designers, but practical restrictions on chip complexity have limited the number to two for most SMT implementations. GPUs are particularly good at SMT for the kind of mathematical workloads that they are often tasked for.

Havok have announced the launch of a major new version of their Havok Physics technology. It has been designed from the ground up and features significant technical innovations in performance, memory utilization, usability and simulation quality, and represents a major leap forward in physics simulation for games.

"This release of Havok Physics marks the third major iteration of our physics technology since the company was founded 15 years ago. Although Havok Physics is widely recognized as the industry's leading physics solution, our R&D team is constantly striving to innovate and push the technology further," said Andrew Bond,

vice president of technology for Havok. "The result is a new engine core built around fully continuous simulation that

enables maximum physical fidelity with unprecedented performance speeds. Beta versions of the technology have been in the hands of a number of leading developers for some time and we have seen dramatic performance gains with simulations running twice as fast or more, and using up to 10 times less memory. Additionally the new core's performance

is extremely predictable, eliminating performance spikes. We are genuinely excited to see how game designers will harness the additional power that we are offering with this release."

**DID YOU KNOW?**

### SteelSeries QcK Heavy

The QcK Heavy mouse mat lives up to its name by being a thick, heavy monstrosity. At 6mm high, 450mm wide and 400mm long, it boasts more than enough room for even the most energetic mouse aerobics. Quality tested by professional gamers, the underside boasts a non-slip rubber finish while the top surface's cloth covering ensures smooth glide.  
[www.megarom.co.za](http://www.megarom.co.za) | R299



### Thrustmaster 250C

Aside from its chunky looks, features of this PC gaming headset include a detachable mic, an analog connector for plugging directly into your PC's sound card, and a multi-functional controller attached to the cord.  
[www.act3.co.za](http://www.act3.co.za) | R1,549



# 0.6.8

### BY THE NUMBERS

The latest update to GPU-Z, version 0.6.8 has been released. GPU-Z is a free information, monitoring and diagnostic utility. Once the software is installed on your PC, you can use it to get detailed information about your graphics hardware such as clock speeds, temperatures, voltages and video memory usage.

# Mosh Pit

## JBL Powerup

Mobile docking speakers are nothing new, but this nifty device combines the wireless charging of Nokia's high-end Lumias with Near-Field Communication (NFC) to do everything without cables. Just plop down your phone and the music will flow while keeping your phone charged. [www.nokia.co.za](http://www.nokia.co.za) | R3,999



## Logitech G710+

Logitech's first mechanical keyboard requires two USB ports to power and feels much lighter and more plasticky than most of the mechanical keyboards we've used. The G710+ has a subtle LED backlight, and the rolling volume control is a unique inclusion. [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com) | R1,999



## ADATA DashDrive Air AE400

This multi-function wireless reader can stream and read data from USB storage media and SD memory cards. It can also function as a power bank that charges other mobile devices. [www.adata-group.com](http://www.adata-group.com) | TBA



## Astrum Elete Mini Bluetooth Keyboard

If you're looking for a lightweight Bluetooth keyboard to use with your smartphone or tablet, then the Elete Mini, with its 10 metre working range, would be a good option. It's only 21cm wide and 8cm high so is very easy to travel around with. [www.astrum.co.za](http://www.astrum.co.za) | R399



"With the launch of *Tomb Raider* and TressFX Hair, AMD and Crystal Dynamics have radically pushed the boundaries of realism in the PC gaming experience"

*Matt Skynner, corporate vice president and general manager, AMD Graphics.*

This collaboration between AMD and Crystal Dynamics saw the world's first in-game implementation of a real-time, per-strand hair physics system.



# DREAMMACHINE

This month sees two changes in our Dream Machine. We introduce the new Corsair Obsidian 900D as a replacement to the Cosmos II chassis, and from EVGA the NVIDIA GTX TITAN graphics card. The pricing is ridiculous and frankly not worth it, but it is the best in the world and no other GPU can touch its performance. If you need more power than this, add one or two more. For 4K gaming at the highest possible settings in 3D Vision Surround, these two machines will do.



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



**GRAPHICS**  
**EVGA GTX TITAN**  
R13,999 / [www.evga.com](http://www.evga.com)

New!



**OS DRIVE**  
**OCZ Vector 256GB SSD**  
R3,000 / [www.ocz.com](http://www.ocz.com)



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



**CHASSIS**  
**Corsair Obsidian 900D**  
R4,299 / [www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)

New!



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



**KEYBOARD**  
**GIGABYTE Aivia Osmium Mechanical Gaming Keyboard**  
R1,299 / [www.rectron.co.za](http://www.rectron.co.za)



**COOLER**  
**Corsair Hydro Series H100i**  
R1,499 / [www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)



**MOUSE**  
**Razer Ouroboros mouse**  
R1,399 / [www.corex.co.za](http://www.corex.co.za)  
**Razer Ironclad mouse mat**  
R599 / [www.corex.co.za](http://www.corex.co.za)



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



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



**HEADPHONES**  
**Creative Labs Sound Blaster Recon3D Omega**  
R2,995 / [www.corex.co.za](http://www.corex.co.za)



## HARDWIRED

AMD's APU has cured piracy!

**We can either hide behind technological advances or we can embrace them and create even better experiences. This is something all forward thinking people in the hardware and software industry have always known. Sadly, the powers that be, or the people who control the coffers rather, have always believed that limiting access is the way to make money. Only distribute services and software in a very limiting way where they can control it for what they believed is maximum profit with minimal risk.**

This is no conspiracy theory, but just a blatant misunderstanding or short-sightedness of certain influential companies within both industries. Case in point is the 180 degree turn the next generation consoles have taken in respect to their hardware makeup. These are essentially PCs, and in fact they mostly use parts that can be bought at most computer stores. Sure enough this hardware is integrated to some degree, but instruction set for instruction set, these are DirectX 11 / OpenGL 4.0 GPUs and x86 CPUs, with regular hard drives, memory and optical drives. There's nothing magical or custom in them. There are no Power PC processors or magical Cell processors which never deliver on their promise. Nope, these are tried and tested PC parts.

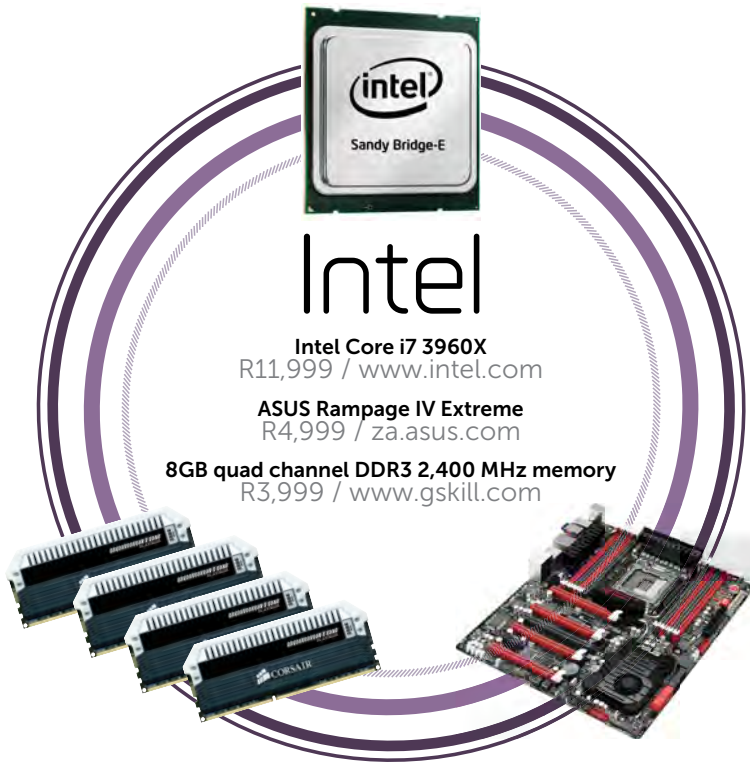
Just when the PC was proclaimed an unviable platform for the future of games by some developers, it received more "ports" than before. Within the coming years even more titles and some that were console exclusives will be making their way to the PC. Gone are the "piracy is rampant on the PC" excuses. Suddenly investment into the PC platform is worth it. In truth not much has changed nor have the people who were proponents of this sentiment become smarter. The only thing that's changed is that the cost of "porting" these console games to the PC is even lower than before, if not non-existent to some degree. You're dealing with identical hardware and the only difference on the PC is that you'll have more processing power. So the thinking in reality is that, even if only 100,000 copies are sold and two million pirated, the cost of shipping those copies on the PC is negligible.

What about patching of said games on the PC? Well even that argument is gone, because whatever performance optimizations are needed via patches and updates on the consoles will likely be needed and worthwhile on the PC. As stated earlier, the hardware is the same, with an identical instruction and feature set. It is no wonder then one reads statements from the people at the top of publishing houses such as Ubisoft talking about not neglecting their PC customers anymore.

I suspect this has nothing to do with a change of heart but merely validating the above. These previously neglected customers are potential revenue streams. A game that may have sold one million on either console will now sell more because it's available on the PC even if it's ten copies more; it's ten copies that cost nothing to make available on the PC.

Parity across all the platforms via technological breakthroughs (such as the APU) has helped all gaming, on the console and PC. This is a good thing and I for one look forward to playing all these new console "ports".

- Neo Sibeko



# Intel

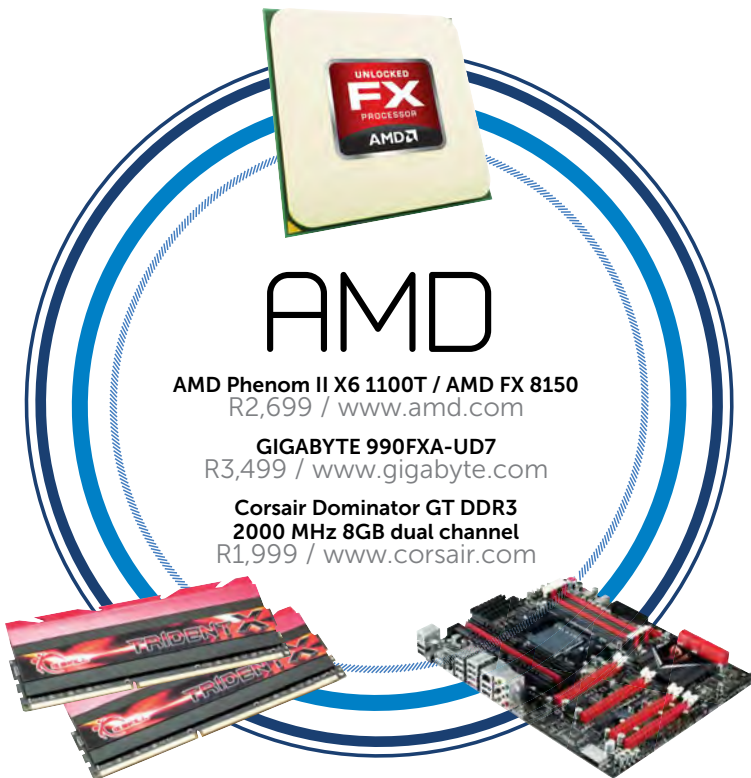
Intel Core i7 3960X  
R11,999 / [www.intel.com](http://www.intel.com)

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

8GB quad channel DDR3 2,400 MHz memory  
R3,999 / [www.gskill.com](http://www.gskill.com)

Intel Dream Machine:

## R69,282



# AMD

AMD Phenom II X6 1100T / AMD FX 8150  
R2,699 / [www.amd.com](http://www.amd.com)

GIGABYTE 990FXA-UD7  
R3,499 / [www.gigabyte.com](http://www.gigabyte.com)

Corsair Dominator GT DDR3  
2000 MHz 8GB dual channel  
R1,999 / [www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)

AMD Dream Machine:

## R56,482

# 3DMARK



www.futuremark.com

Basic Edition: Free Advanced Edition: \$24.95

Futuremark, a company that has dealt solely with the business of making benchmarks has, released their newest test suite. In its 9<sup>th</sup> iteration, this version is simply called "3DMark". This latest benchmark is said to be cross platform compliant (Android, iOS), with client benchmarks promised for mobile phones and tablets in the near future. The benchmark encompasses tests for DirectX 9 class graphics hardware right up to the latest DirectX 11.1 compute capable GPUs.

What makes this benchmark different from the previous iterations is that it has separate tests for three different DirectX generations.

The tests are relatively short and by far this is the most artistically inspired benchmark from Futuremark. With the lamentable 3DMark Vantage visuals of Jane Nash (Graphics Test One), Futuremark has come a long way and made up for that lamentable effort. What this new 3DMark offers are visuals that rival and possibly surpass any game that's retailing today.

### FIRE STRIKE

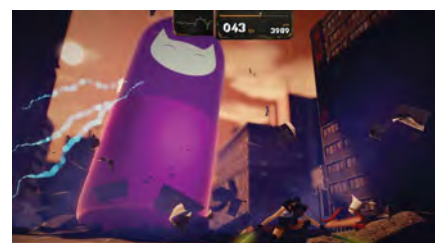
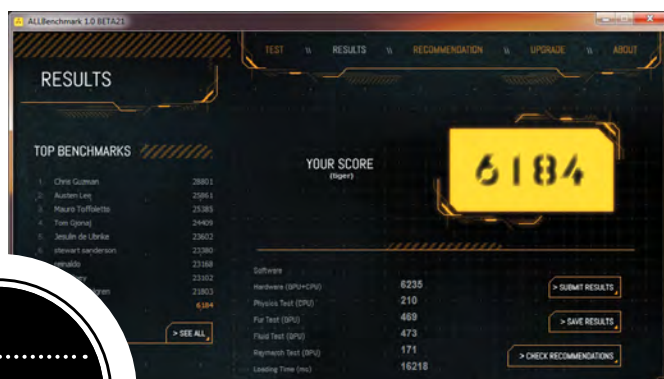
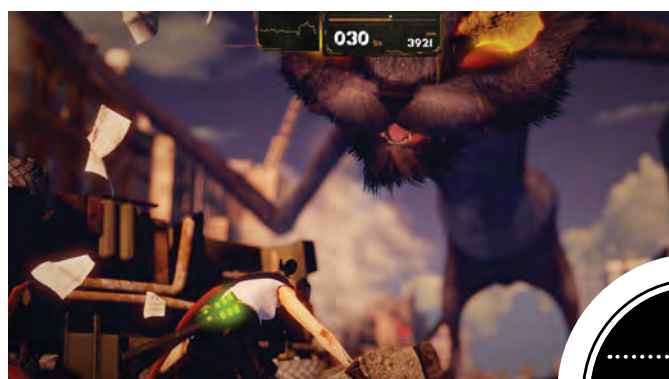
The DirectX 11 test *Fire Strike* that we are mainly concerned with and comparing here, is a visual feast of compute shaders, pixel shaders, tessellation and very high

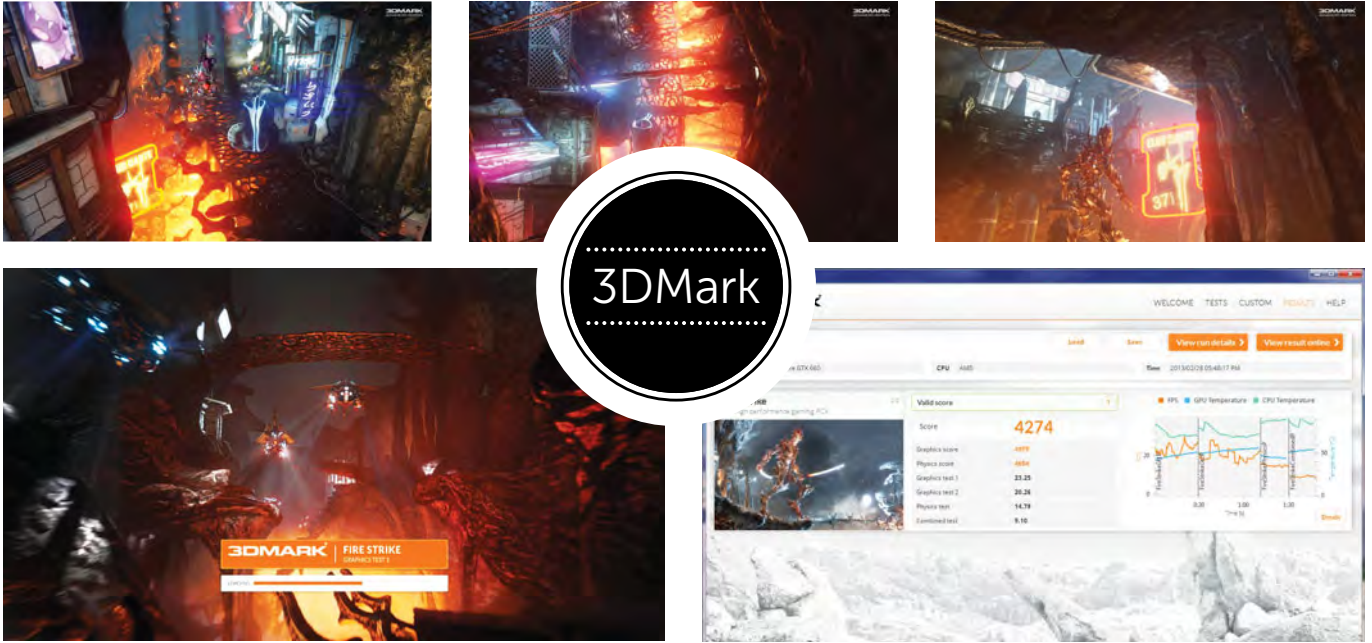
polygon count models. The test is short, but thorough, putting the graphics card and the system overall under immense but realistic load. The output result is a number which is easy to compare with other users who have similarly configured systems and hardware.

### THE SCORES

3DMark will not give you an overall score until the entire benchmark suite is completed. You can however be mindful of the frame rate at certain parts of the benchmark where it's really low. For example during the combat sequence, frame rates can be as low as the single digits depending on the system.

# Futuremark 3DMark VS Catzilla ALLBenchmark





This month we've changed some of the benchmarks we've been using up until now to measure system performance. We have finally let go of DirectX 9 benchmarks and are moving on to DirectX 11 exclusives, as most titles coming out from here on in will have a DirectX 10+ only rendering path. We've selected the two most relevant benchmarks that best represent the current state of gaming with regards to system load.

# ALLBENCHMARK



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

**Free Edition:** Free **Basic Edition:** \$3.99 **Advanced Edition:** \$14.99

**A**LLBenchmark is new to the test suite world. The benchmark is still in its beta form (beta 21 at the time of writing) so scores and performance numbers may change by the time the final is ready. This benchmark tests mainly DirectX 10 and DirectX 11 class hardware, but you can't select which API to use. It's essentially the same sequence of events rendered to different quality levels. Visually this isn't as heavy on the system as 3DMark. The look is a little less serious and more comical/anime style. That in no way implies that there aren't any serious DirectX 11 effects being used, it's merely a different art style to that used in 3DMark. This benchmark

is refreshing and different enough to gain popularity with overclockers and power users alike, but is not as useful as the one Futuremark provides however, as it merely places you on a database with other systems which may have very different hardware from yours.

## TIGER

From the basic KITTY (576p) test all the way to the CATZILLA test for 1440p monitors, we here at NAG test with the TIGER settings which render the benchmark sequence at 1080p. This benchmark delivers a score at the end of a run which allows you to compare directly from within the application, your system

performance against others in a ranking system. This benchmark will also give you feedback on both the hardware and software setup of your rig.

## THE SCORES

ALLBenchmark gives you a score as the benchmark is running. This score increases throughout the test and is a measure of how long it has taken to render X amount of frames throughout the entire benchmark run. It's quicker to get an idea of how well the system will score after all the tests are complete. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

## The Lazy Gamer's Guide

# MSI GT60 ONE

Website [www.corex.co.za](http://www.corex.co.za) RRP R27,999

MSI's range of gaming notebooks continues to evolve. Their past efforts at delivering portable gaming power have generally left us extremely impressed, doling out levels of performance that made them unquestionably worthy of being dubbed true desktop replacements – and despite often overpowering their competition in many ways, they were priced fiercely low compared to other brands.

Now, with the GT60 ONE, we can't help but wonder if the price tag of R27,999

immediately hurts the appeal of such a machine. Given that for around the same amount of cash you could buy a fairly beefy notebook that could handle portable gaming at modest settings *and* a decent desktop PC along with it, the GT60 may seem a tad too extravagant. Then again, perhaps you're the kind of person who can afford such a luxury and will be willing to pay any price for outstanding performance, coupled with portable convenience and a rich feature list – and that's exactly what the GT60 offers.



### TECHNICAL

**CPU:**  
Intel Core i7-3630QM  
(2.4GHz)  
**GPU**  
NVIDIA GeForce  
GTX 680M  
(4GB GDDR5)  
**RAM**  
16GB DDR3 (4x 4GB)  
**Display**  
15.6" Full HD anti-  
glare LED backlit  
display  
**HDD**  
750GB 7,200 RPM  
HDD / 256GB SSD  
**OS**  
Windows 8

Under the hood are powerful components like a Core i7-3630QM and an NVIDIA GTX680M. Our test unit boasts 16GB of RAM, but that's expandable up to 32GB. There's also the combination of HDD and SSD (the SSD is 2x 128GB mSATA SSDs set up in RAID, a feature that MSI calls SuperRAID) to offer a combination of ample storage and super-fast data access. It all equates to fantastic overall performance. There's also the much-appreciated inclusion of a Blu-ray reader/writer.

MSI has seen fit to make use of Killer E2200 networking tech to provide maximum LAN and Wi-Fi performance, automatically prioritising gaming and chat traffic above all other network usage. It's designed to ensure the best possible latency in multiplayer gaming.





## SUMMARY

### PROS

- Impressive performance
- Loads of cool, useful features

### CONS

- Incredibly expensive

### ALTERNATIVES

- Alienware M15x
- ASUS G55

The keyboard was designed by SteelSeries, who supposedly tweaked the layout to portable perfection, even managing to squeeze in a full numpad. The typing experience on the GT60's Chiclet-style keys is excellent, and there's adjustable backlighting that boasts a variety of customisable options.

The built-in audio is powered by two speakers and a subwoofer, and as with MSI's previous gaming notebooks, the audio production here is surprisingly effective. Also, there are gold audio jacks, which we're told by marketing people are very important.

The 15.6-inch anti-glare display doesn't offer up the same amount of visible real-estate as the GT60's bigger, meaner sibling the GT70 and its 17.3-inch screen, but it's nevertheless a vibrant, crisp display. We do feel it could do with a slightly higher level of brightness, however.

The touchpad is unusually small, but this shouldn't matter, given that you'll likely use a gaming mouse instead. Below it is where you'll find the usual indicator lights – like whether or not Bluetooth is turned on.

Running along the top of the keyboard is a row of touch-sensitive keys. Here you'll discover quick access to features like boosting the GT60's fan speed if you feel it's running too hot, or you can toggle "turbo" mode to give the laptop a slight performance boost when needed.

# BUILDING THE BEST MID-RANGE GAMING MACHINE

We've had the NAG Dream Machine for what seems to be like eons. This, in our opinion and based, on the products we've tested, represents the ultimate gaming machine – the gaming rig we would build and one that virtually anyone can build if you have enough money.

As great as that is, it's not possible for many people to build either machine, or even one for half the budget. The truth is that the vast majority of people are unlikely to spend more than R10,000 on a system. A fair amount, but sadly a budget that puts most of the components featured in the Dream Machine out of reach. As such we have compiled a list of the components needed to build a very competent system that should cope with today's games at the highest graphical quality and tomorrow's titles.

Before we get into the individual components, please keep in mind that PC gaming going forward is going to be expensive. The reasons for this are as follows:

**[1] The new consoles which are mostly comprised of PC components are pushing the minimum spec for games. That is, the lowest common denominator is going to be significantly upgraded to where R6,000 and R8,000 computers may not be enough.**

**[2] The PC DIY market is changing in a way that focuses on higher margin components and products: the high-end. This makes it unattractive for vendors and retailers to offer low performance parts. Entry level gaming machines are best replaced by consoles.**

**[3] For a gaming computer to justify its cost, which can be anywhere from two and a half to three times the cost of the upcoming consoles, it needs to offer a superior experience. This is in visuals and acoustics. Input isn't an issue though as that will always come down to preference.**

For reasons stated above, this guide may be concerned about price, but it's primary goal is to help you build a machine that is worthwhile and one that will not need upgrading for two years or more. For that reason and that reason alone, we decided on not half the budget of the current Dream Machine, but go in at a third of the price. Do remember that this list is but a guide. Shopping around could save you some money and even more so if you can salvage anything of use from the system you have at present.

## CHASSIS

### NZXT PHANTOM

PRICE: R1,499

Even after all this time, the NZXT Phantom remains the most beautiful case we have ever seen. Be it in white, black or red, it is well crafted and slick. With a built-in fan controller it's even more appealing. This one is built for aesthetics but does an amazing job of cooling and noise isolation as well. It will never fit XL-ATX motherboards, but few cases ever do at this price range. You could easily substitute this case with the Corsair Obsidian 550D, but we've no direct experience with that chassis and thus it's hard to recommend it, but it does look solid.

The chassis is an important decision, especially when it comes to taking your PC to LANs and the like. If you're going to be moving it a lot perhaps consider something a little more practical like the Cooler Master HAF XB. Not as pleasing to the eye, but certainly easier to carry around. For our money though the NZXT Phantom is the winner.

## CPU

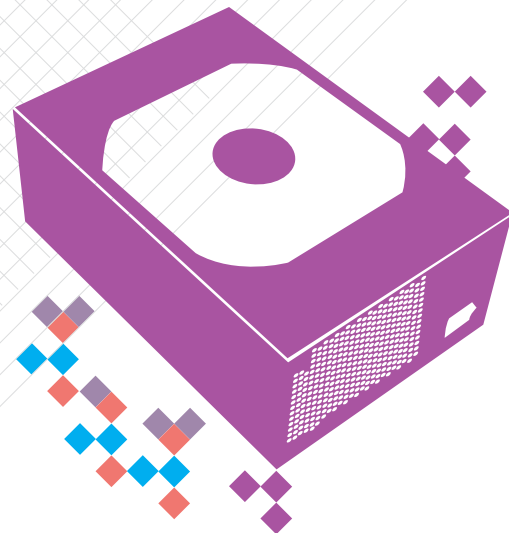
**INTEL CORE I7 3570K**  
PRICE: R2,600

The Intel Core i7 3570K will do the trick here, quite nicely. It's a powerful CPU that may seem short on threads, but in reality is every bit as good for gaming as the more expensive 3770K. With a standard clock speed of 3.4GHz and an unlocked CPU multiplier, it is the best in the range if you balance the performance against what you pay. It's much faster in games than anything from AMD and costs about the same as the FX 8350.

## PSU

**ANTEC HIGH CURRENT  
GAMER HCG-620M**  
PRICE: R999

It's hard to buy a substandard PSU these days. All the vendors you should be buying from are adhering to at least the Bronze standard in PSU compliancy. That alone ensures you'll not get too much ripple, noise and output current fluctuations. Virtually all name brand PSU's come with all the protective mechanisms internally to not only protect your hardware from questionable wall socket power but in some cases lightning strikes as well. Should you have a brown-out or power spike, you'd rather your PSU is damaged instead of your entire machine. In light of that we decided on the Antec High Current Gamer 620W PSU. 620 watts seems little in this day of 1.5kW units but we can assure you that this system will never draw more than 550 watts at its maximum even with a 5GHz overclock on the CPU. Your power needs are more than taken care of by the HCG-620M.



## MOTHERBOARD

**GIGABYTE G1.SNIPER2 M3**  
PRICE: R2,399

This was a tough one to pick and the decision of going with a microATX board may not sit well with everybody, but we have our reasons. The choice came down to three motherboards, the ASUS MAXIMUS V Gene, the GIGABYTE Sniper2 M3 and the Z77X-UD3H WB. Out of those three boards there's no doubt the MAXIMUS board is the best for tuning, overclocking and performance in an overclocking context. However, this isn't an overclocking machine but a gaming one. The Sniper M3 has a dedicated Creative Labs sound processor and other dedicated audio components which make it amongst the best on-board audio experiences money can buy. The Z77X-UD3H WB featured here because it has tons of overclocking features, is cheaper than both the other boards but also comes with a Wi-Fi and Bluetooth 4.0 card.

It is staggering that there isn't a board that can combine all these features in this form factor. In the end we settled on the Sniper 2 M3 motherboard, as that one would make sure we didn't need to have a discreet sound card, saving us from having to purchase one at R1,200 or more.

**"The Intel Core i7 3570K will do the trick here, quite nicely. It's a powerful CPU that may seem short on threads, but in reality is every bit as good for gaming as the more expensive 3770K."**

## GRAPHICS CARD

**SAPPHIRE RADEON HD7950 VAPOR-X**  
PRICE: R3,900

This is where the heart of your gaming PC is. The choice here is very difficult because whatever you commit to has to have the muscle to handle today's and tomorrow's games at a high quality setting. That is, you should be able to play *Crysis 3* at the highest detail level at 1920x1080 without AA. That is easier said than done because this is not only one of the best looking games around; it's the hardest on the graphics sub-system. Factory overclocked cards here prove their price premium sometimes because they provide the much needed 10% gain in performance which would be the difference between butter smooth and just comfortable.

Since this is a mid-range gaming machine, what we looked for is a graphics card between R2,900 and a maximum of R3,900. Steep pricing but this is where you'll want to make no compromises. For that reason we had to forgo the NVIDIA GTX 660 Ti and instead chose the Sapphire branded HD 7950. There were three reasons for this. Number one was because AMD offers AAA game titles with their HD 7000 series graphics cards. Secondly, the latest Catalyst drivers offer phenomenal performance gains for the HD 7950, adding a good 30 to 40% boost in performance from when it was released. Thirdly, AMD released a speed BIOS for the HD 7950 which is free and easily available for anyone to use which further boosts performance. With all these things going for the HD 7950, there was simply no way we could justify the GTX 660 Ti for the same price. Sapphire sells their variant with the efficient Vapor-X cooler which not only makes for a quiet graphics card, but a cool one at that. It will be hard to find a better graphics card for less locally.

## PRIMARY STORAGE

**OCZ VERTEX3 120GB SSD**  
PRICE: R1,199

An SSD is going to be paramount to your gaming and overall speed for your machine. You need not install all your games on the SSD but most certainly your operating system, swap file and any other productivity software you may have. What we have found is that having a magnetic drive as your storage for games while using your SSD to house the operating system is the most economical way to go about it. Games over the last five years or so do not stream constantly from the hard drive. So once game assets are loaded, they reside either in graphics card memory, system memory and at worst on your mass storage drive in your swap file which is on an SSD. You'll not get any disc thrashing and if you play any of the older titles that were not designed for systems with plenty of memory resources, the entire game will likely sit in your system memory anyway.

So there's really no need to have a 512GB SSD for all your games as that will not make your games play any faster or smoother. Load times will decrease, but only by a few seconds per level at most.

## SECONDARY STORAGE

**SEAGATE BARRACUDA 7200.12 1TB HDD**  
PRICE: R799

This was a no-brainer, as there really isn't much else to pick from other than this drive and the equivalent WD offering. It will be up to you which one you pick, but suffice to say these drives are fairly reliable and should be more than enough space for most of your games and media. The price is great and performance is not an issue at all.

**"An SSD is going to be paramount to your gaming and overall speed for your machine. You need not install all your games on the SSD but most certainly your operating system..."**

## CPU COOLER

**CORSAIR H100i**  
PRICE: R1,399

We turn to Corsair for this one. The Noctua NH-D14 is a viable alternative at about R500 less in price. We opted for the slightly better performing cooler and one with software control. The H100i lends itself well to any installation orientation which isn't the case with the NH-D14 as it may prevent some high profile DIMMs from being installed on the board (like the memory we chose). Should you for some reason decide that you want to engage in some overclocking, the H100i will give you more legroom than most other coolers. Cooling wise you'll not get better than this at this price.

## OPTICAL DRIVE

**SAMSUNG 22X SUPER MULTI DVD WRITER**  
PRICE: R199

Once again you could pick just about any drive here from Samsung to Lite-On. Most games can be bought online and even if you don't have the bandwidth for it, the installation of games is a onetime affair so you'll not be using this too often. The machine could do just as well without it depending on your Internet connection, but at R200 it's negligible in cost and worth having.

## MEMORY

**KINGSTON HYPERX BEAST DDR3 2400MHZ**  
PRICE: R899

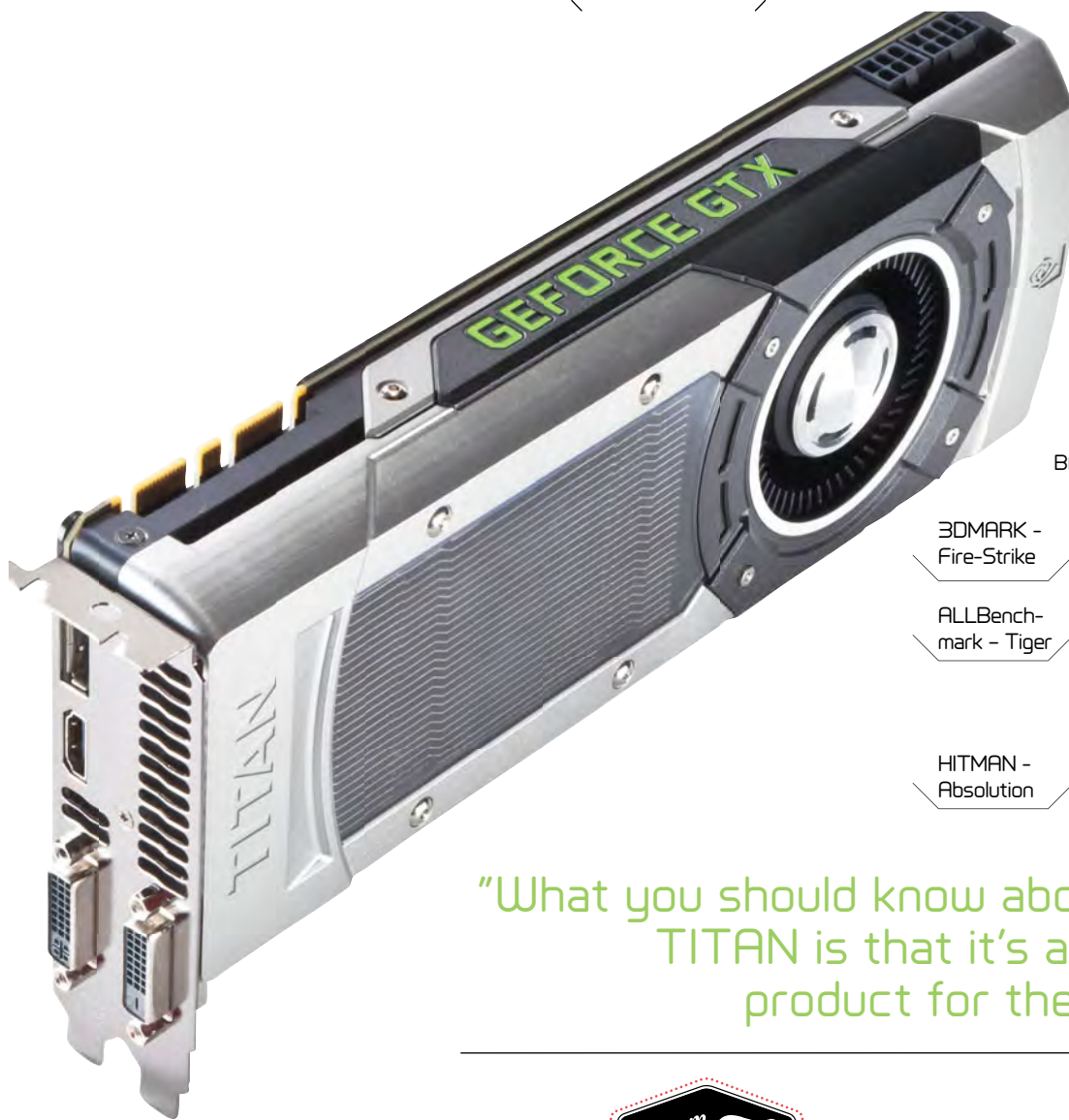
This is the only item which we have previously not tested ourselves here at NAG. We chose it over the G.Skill and Corsair sets because of price. At around R900 you're not going to get better memory with tighter timings or higher frequencies. Add to which, Kingston memory is easily available from virtually all online stores so availability will never be an issue. The set may be CL11, but for gaming, the latency makes absolutely no difference.

# IN CLOSING

You could possibly save some more money on this rig and bring it to about R12,000 changing such things as the CPU Cooler (NOCTUA NH-D14), the graphics card (Reference HD7870), a smaller SSD Drive (60GB) and a cheaper case amongst other things. All these would bring the cost down by about R4,000 and with that you could buy an LCD, a gaming keyboard, mouse and headphones. We would suggest you do this if you are new to PC gaming as this system above has none of these necessary peripherals.

**For those who already have a keyboard, mouse, speakers/headphones and a monitor, consider sticking with a system close to the one we have compiled here. Whatever titles that come out on the next generation consoles will look better on this PC than their native platform. You will not only have the power to run them, but may turn up features**

**such as tessellation factors, AA and plenty of post processing effects, not to mention potentially quicker load times. As stated at the beginning of this guide, PC gaming will most likely move to the high-end (if you exclude things such as the rumoured Steam Box) and cheaper systems costing R10,000 or less will not offer a better experience than a PS4 or Xbox for the next year or so. Give it some serious consideration and perhaps you may find a console is what will suit your gaming needs better than an underpowered PC for the same task. At R15,893 it's less than half the price of the AMD Dream Machine and will possibly offer a better experience and at worst the same one. Compared to the Intel Dream Machine, there should not be any discernible difference, but if there is it will not be R35,000 worth. NAG**



### BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: EVGA GTX TITAN

3DMARK - Fire-Strike	9,116 <b>9,116</b>
ALLBenchmark - Tiger	24,675 <b>24,675</b>
HITMAN - Absolution	(DX11 ultra detail) 4xAA: 68.97 fps <b>(DX11 ultra detail) 4xAA: 68.97 fps</b>

"What you should know about the GTX TITAN is that it's a 'limited' run product for the most part."



## EVGA GTX TITAN

Supplier EVGA Website [www.evga.com](http://www.evga.com) RRP R13, 999

GPU wars have never been as intense as they have in the last two to three years. With every passing generation, the need to claim "the fastest GPU on the planet" has consumed both AMD and NVIDIA. In general, competition lowers prices for most things, but in this case it actually increased prices for the very high-end components.

Before we go into the GTX TITAN, let us remind you that NVIDIA's flagship 600 series graphics card, the GTX 680 uses a mid-range GK104 core. This was simply because AMD's Radeon HD 7970 failed to deliver the performance numbers NVIDIA had expected, and their planned GTX 560 replacement (what would be the GK104 based GTX 660) ended up being the GTX 680. In turn this allowed NVIDIA to sell a mid-range GPU for very high prices, while the GK110 meant to be the GTX 580 successor, never saw the light of day. The GK104 was a 3.5 billion gates, manufactured on a 28nm process, on a 300mm wafer at TSMC. GK104 cost less to manufacture despite housing some 500 million more logic transistors than

the GTX 580 (GF110). The price per GPU manufactured was reduced at the most basic level. Those savings then extended to the PCB, the memory used, the cooler required etc.

With all those savings, NVIDIA didn't lower prices to match AMD, the firm kept them the same as the previous generation and sometimes charged more. This in turn resulted in very high margins for NVIDIA and their partners, while doing very little for the end user. A situation made clear by NVIDIA's posting of record earnings, on the back of their GK1XX (Kepler) generation of GPUs.

While all this was carrying on, the GK110 was on the back burner, or at least its general consumer variant was. The GK110 as with the GF110 (GTX 580 and 570) was to share a core with the professional Tesla and Quadro cards for compute and design purposes. NVIDIA released GK110 in the HPC market under the Tesla K20 name and it was then we got to our first glimpse of the GTX TITAN as we have here.

Basically what the GTX TITAN is is a detuned K20 GPU, retaining plenty if not

all of the professional compute capability including the 6GB frame buffer. Not so important in a gaming context, but certainly appreciated by the HPC market. NVIDIA fused off one SMX cluster (TITAN has 2,688 cores as opposed to the full complement of 2,880 cores available on the K20) and sold it for a discounted price. This discounted price is \$2,000 to \$2,500 USD cheaper, but because we are dealing with super computer hardware in essence, the discounted price still puts the TITAN at \$1,000 USD MSRP. The most expensive single GPU graphics card ever released.

What you should know about the GTX TITAN is that it's a "limited" run product for the most part. There are no exact figures of how many will be produced, but do not expect to see lots of these lining up shop shelves or any custom cards for that matter. Word on the wire is that NVIDIA will not be selling the GK110 GPUs to their partners, thus cards such as the EVGA Classified, GIGABYTE SuperOverclock, MSI Lightning and ASUS DirectCU variants will never see the light of day. They are all standards parts

and they will all be branded NVIDIA. Not an ideal situation for sure, but understandable because this isn't a member of the GeForce 700 family.

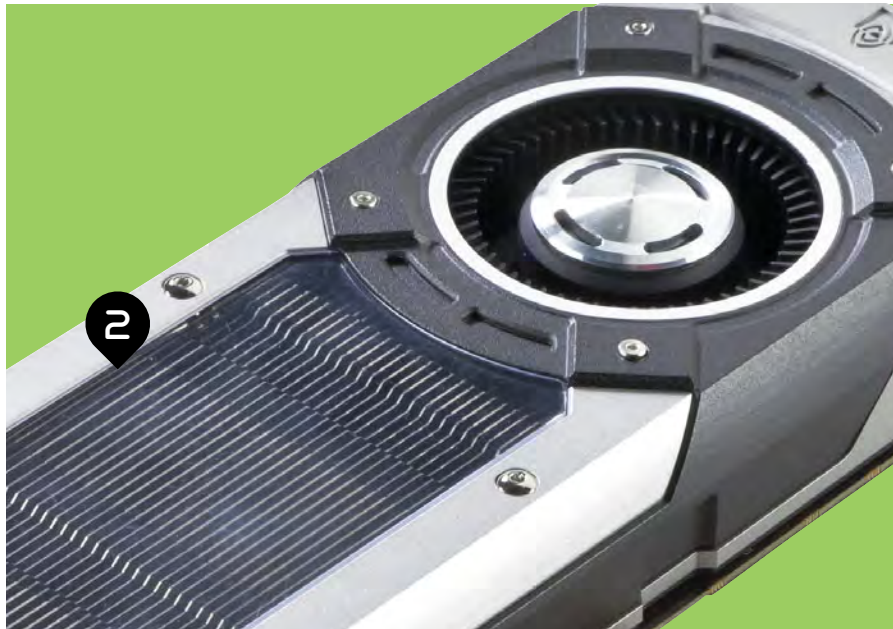
The GeForce GTX 7XX will come out later in its own series and family and that will have custom cards and the like with a more realistic price. It is likely the same GK110 core with a few tweaks and most of the compute parts removed (which should result in a smaller core, gate wise) and some other changes like a smaller frame buffer.

Speculation aside, should you decide to buy the GTX TITAN, this is what you should know: This graphics card is powerful, more so than anything you have likely ever used. For those using AMD setups, you'll need to do some serious overclocking on the part of your CPU to not bottleneck the card. Simply put, anything less than 5GHz is going to be a complete waste of graphics processing power.

For the gamers who are fortunate

enough to own screens capable of 1440p resolutions, then this card is a must have for butter smooth gaming sessions. It will provide the maximum possible graphics fidelity in any and all games. You can throw any game on the market at the TITAN, crank up the settings and AA and still achieve frame rates over 40fps. In some instances the GTX TITAN is faster than the GTX690 which uses two GTX 680 GPUs.

What helps achieve this level of performance is the migration back to the 384-bit bus with GDDR5 at a scorching 6GHz. This allows for a total of 288Gb/s of bandwidth. With some minor overclocking, going above the 320Gb/s mark is easy but perhaps unnecessary. As potent as the TITAN is, it scales well with clock speeds. From the reference 836MHz to 1.1GHz the performance numbers increase by up to 15% which is much better scaling than you'd get with any other GPU. The HD 7970 comes



1 The GTX TITAN uses a 6+8pin PCIe power configuration. Its power draw is only a little higher than that of the GTX 680 and should come in under load at about 285 watts.

2 As per usual with NVIDIA, the cooling is passable and hardly doing the card any favours. With some beefier cooling, higher overlocks would be possible

close, but next to the TITAN it is anything but putting up a fight.

Noise wise, this card is not any louder than the GTX 680. Not surprising because it has a similar PCB to the 680 including a 6-phase PWM for the core and two phases for memory. A pity that there won't be any 3<sup>rd</sup>-party cards, because we are confident that with some extra electric wizardry such as a superior PWM and cooling, cards like the Classified would not only run cooler, but offer incredible overclocking out the box in the region of 1GHz.

There's literally too much to test with the GTX TITAN for us to illustrate to you just how dominant it is when gaming at the higher resolutions. This is best related by tests such as the new 3DMark Fire-Strike which in its extreme setting has the GTX TITAN deliver up to 50% higher results.

The TITAN is absurdly expensive. NVIDIA could have easily sold this one for \$650 or even \$700USD, but having the fastest GPU on the planet allows you to dictate pricing and that's what they have done. Despite our reservations about such pricing, we have no doubt all of these will be sold before the 700 series shows up. Whatever you may feel about the GTX TITAN, it is par none the fastest and grandest GPU ever built. **NAG - Neo Sibeko**

7 **Insanely expensive graphics card for the very deep pocket. It also happens to be the fastest GPU ever built.**

**PLUS**  
Very fast / 6GB of memory for ultra-high resolutions / Relatively low power consumption

**MINUS**  
Unreasonably overpriced / Limited supplies and quantities



### SPECS

**MATERIAL**  
Steel with cast aluminium  
**COLOUR**  
Flat black  
**SUPPORTED MOTHERBOARD TYPE**  
MicroATX/ATX/EATX/  
XL-ATX/HTPX  
**FRONT PANEL**  
2x USB 3.0, 4x USB 2.0



# Corsair Obsidian 900D

Supplier Rectron Website [www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com) RRP R4,299

Given unlimited real estate to build your dream machine, what would you build? No doubt you could fill it with any number of things, including four graphics cards and plenty of hard drives. That's all fine and dandy, but what would you put in the largest tower chassis on the market if you could actually buy it? Well that question isn't as absurd or dreamy as it may seem. It's actually very relevant when dealing with "Godzilla" or the Obsidian 900D, as Corsair calls it.

The question of space and how you utilize it is actually on the shipping box of the 900D. The box is huge, but nothing can prepare you for the sheer size of this case. It just dwarfs anything around it, including the Cosmos 2. Achieving that takes some doing as that's an already large case, however next to the 900D it looks "normal".

It's important that we relay to you just how large this case is because it is not likely to fit under many desks and, if placed on top of a desk, it will be very obstructive. This one is not meant to be hidden or propped up; it's meant to sit right next to you as your equal. Problematic maybe, because the 900D isn't designed with the kind of lines and curves you find on the Cosmos 2. In fact next to that one, it may look a little pedestrian, a little too much Toyota Corolla and not enough Lexus if you will.

Do not be turned off by this, because with its simple aesthetics it's a measure of class that few other cases can muster. It could just be its proportions that give it such a sophisticated appearance or the finish; whatever it is, it works well. The retail price

"In a way, this is the Rolls-Royce Ghost of the chassis world. It's not beautiful, but it has an overbearing presence in its flat black finish."

shouldn't surprise you then at an MSRP of R4,299. In a way, this is the Rolls-Royce Ghost of the chassis world. It's not beautiful, but it has an overbearing presence in its flat black finish. There isn't anything round to speak of, yet it has no sharp edges. It's massive in size, yet surprisingly light given its proportions.

Why then would a case of this size, with no wheels, one which is not beautiful in any capacity replace the brilliant Cooler Master Cosmos 2? Simply put, it's because it allows so much customization, fits everything and anything PC related and is so well thought out in many ways it's near perfect. Its function outweighs any subjective qualms about its aesthetic merits. Those are debatable, but what is not is the ability to fit four radiators in this case. We're talking double or even triple radiators. One PSU not enough, then how about you add another one? Need an XL-ATX motherboard for a dual socket machine; this is the case for you. Need four graphics cards, ten discreet card expansion slots, thirteen tool-less hard drive bays? Buy this case, as there is no alternative we're aware of that can support all of the above installations almost simultaneously. What it may not have in looks it makes up for in function. Even with the

case fully kitted out, it's a marvel to work in as there is still room for a person with big hands to work inside. Side and base panels simply come off at the push of a button and capable management is but a breeze. We could go on about this case and the individual functions it has, but there isn't enough room in this review for that and quite frankly a features list is something you can read on the website. Simply stated, this one is the best power user chassis money can buy.

- Neo Sibeko



**Corsair has done the impossible and displaced the Cosmos 2 as the NAG Dream Machine chassis of choice.**

### PLUS

It's massive / Very high quality materials / Meticulous attention to detail

### MINUS

Could possibly be too big / Somewhat dull looking / High price



~~OBLIVION~~

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## Razer Invicta

**Supplier** Razer  
**Website** [www.razerzone.com](http://www.razerzone.com)  
**RRP** R599

**D**oes the concept “two heads are better than one” apply to mouse mats? I’d never have thought so, but apparently someone at Razer thought this was a cracking idea.

Sitting rather too snugly within what I can only call an aluminium serving tray is the reversible Invicta mouse mat: on one side it’s smooth; on the other, it’s rough. The concept that’s sold to gamers is that you can flip over the mat depending on your demands: the rough side supposedly offers better control and the smooth side allows for quicker movements. Frankly, the smooth side is the way to go in all applications; it’s really quite a remarkable surface and makes for highly responsive, unobstructed gaming. The rough side is just... less responsive and more obstructive. That’s not a feature. And this whole design makes for a rather glaring flaw: the mat never quite fits perfectly into the serving tray, which causes warping along its surface that won’t quite bugged up your game, but is noticeable enough to be a slight irritation. **NAG**

- Geoff Burrows

**WEIGHT**  
700g  
**SIZE**  
255x355x4.5mm  
**BASEPLATE**  
Aluminium  
**SURFACE OPTIONS**  
Speed or Control

SPECS

Mouse not included.



The Invicta might sell you with its stylish looks, but it’s otherwise a gimmicky and unnecessary addition to the Razer line-up.

**PLUS**

Smooth surface is fantastic / It looks the business

**MINUS**

Mat doesn’t fit properly into tray / Rough surface is superfluous

## Skullcandy Navigator



**Supplier** Skullcandy  
**Website** [www.skullcandy.com](http://www.skullcandy.com)  
**RRP** R1,299

**A**s desirable and fashionable as Skullcandy headphones are, we’re going to be completely honest with you here: listening to your iPod with a giant set of cans makes you look silly. There, we said it, and we’re not taking it back. But, before you run crying to your bedroom, Skullcandy has a new set for you to proudly display on top of your cranium; they’re slick, modest in size and perfectly suited for mobile use.

Actually, these phones are *designed* for mobile use, and even include a microphone that has built-in media playback and volume control on iOS devices, so this set can easily replace your standard iPhone/iPod headphones. Matched to impressive performance (for drivers this size), this set is super comfortable (largely thanks to its light weight) and the headband is slightly padded to provide comfort without extra bulk. The inclusion of a detachable 3.5mm cable and some compact folding means travel with this set should be a breeze. **NAG**

- Geoff Burrows

**IMPEDANCE**  
34 ohms  
**SOUND**  
**PRESSURE LEVEL**  
104 dB (1mW/500Hz)  
**THD**  
less than 0.1% (1mW/500Hz)  
**WEIGHT (without cable)**  
200g

SPECS



It might be more expensive than a set of in-ear buds, but the Navigator is perfect for those who want to step up a level without going

into gigantic headphone territory.

**PLUS**

Light and comfortable / Good performance / Travel-friendly

**MINUS**

Playback controls only work on iOS devices

## Turtle Beach Ear Force P11



**Supplier** Apex  
**Website** [www.apexint.co.za](http://www.apexint.co.za)  
**RRP** R899.95

**D**esigned for use with PlayStation 3 (but it’ll happily work with a PC as well), Turtle Beach’s P11 headset offers impressive audio production, but suffers a bit in the quality of its construction. My only real gripe with it is that it feels a bit flimsy and cheaply made – which is not something you want out of a R900 headset. As a trade-off, it’s exceptionally light and thus remarkably comfortable.

Getting it working with your PS3 is fairly simple, with options to use it in conjunction with HDMI or composite video as necessary. An in-line amplifier features controls to independently adjust the volume of game sound and in-game chat, which we imagine will be useful in a number of situations. The P11 boasts plenty of volume, and more importantly, even when you push it to its limit, the quality and clarity of its audio output is exceptional. Whether you intend to use it purely for gaming, or for watching movies and listening to music as well, we’ve no doubt you’ll be more than happy with the P11. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**  
20Hz – 20kHz  
**MICROPHONE**  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**  
50Hz – 15kHz  
**DRIVER UNITS**  
50mm drivers  
**CABLE LENGTH**  
3.7 metres

SPECS



The P11 is a great headset. The audio production is impressive enough to offset its dubious build quality.

**PLUS**

Loads of volume / Excellent audio clarity and quality / Light and comfortable

**MINUS**

Flimsy

# Antec High Current Pro 1000 Platinum



**Supplier** Corex  
**Website** [www.antec.com](http://www.antec.com)  
**RRP** R2,499

Power supplies are one of those products that almost everyone with a mid- to high-end PC should be concerned about. Long ago when hardware was dirt cheap, one could run the risk of buying a budget 500 watt power supply. These days however, the cost of not being thorough about your choice in PSUs could lead to hardware damage well above R20,000.

As such we have certification systems like the 80 PLUS program, which has made it easier for consumers to rate their power supply efficiency without having to get too technical about a PSU. This initiative has inspired many vendors to produce not only better PSUs but compete at the highest level all vying for the highest efficiency possible. Antec is one such company that has had an immaculate reputation in the industry and with the HCP Platinum, strengthened this reputation.

What we have here is a PSU that is rated lower than the HCP 1200 that was our former Dream Machine PSU, but is for the most part better. Do not be fooled by the power rating alone as that means nothing, but look to the specifications, component quality and industry leading seven year warranty.

There was no possible way we could stress this PSU enough in our testing because, despite having it power a 3-way SLI system with three GTX 680 graphics cards, it still produced the goods. We were able to overclock just as well as we could with the current Dream Machine PSU. Using a multi-meter for the 12V readings didn't reveal much droop under load, so we're inclined to believe the claims made about impeccable load handling.

This may not be a cheap PSU and R2,500 may seem like a lot to pay for only 1000W, but you're not going to find a better 1KW PSU anywhere, so the price is more than fair. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko



Probably the best PSU Antec has ever produced, even edging out the old favourite HCP 1200.

## PLUS

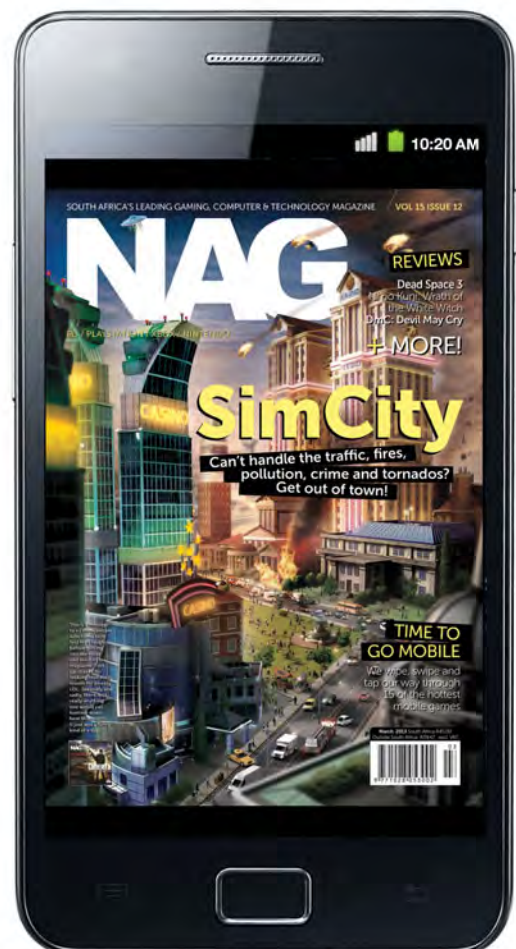
Platinum certification / Continuous 1KW of power OC-Link

## MINUS

Not much better than HCP 1200

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## ASRock FM2A85X-ITX

**Supplier** Comptium  
**Website** www.asrock.com  
**RRP** R1,100

When AMD released the FM2 platform, vendors rushed to make micro and full ATX boards with this chipset. Many of these featured some nice extras such as Wi-Fi, Bluetooth dongles and some even supporting CrossFire and SLI configurations. All good and well for an entry level gaming machine, but ultimately missing out on the real value of the APU.

As discussed before, buying and building a system around the APU is about achieving the optimal balance between cost and performance. Despite the fact that this board has a full length PCI Express slot, its real value lies in its size. Should you build a system around it for the BitFenix Prodigy; you'll have built a very competent gaming machine for cheap. With seven SATA ports and USB 3.0, you'll not worry about storage. With DDR 2,133MHz support, performance isn't an issue.

For basic gaming and HD media the combination of this board and any APU would be perfect. With just a CPU and this board you essentially have a full PC minus the system RAM which is dirt cheap.

Should you want a little more performance though and choose to go with the highest SKU Trinity CPU, then you'll appreciate the full length PCI Express slot. With a GTX 660 or Radeon 7790, games such as *Crysis 3* become playable at high detail settings. The benchmarks may lead you to think this is not possible, but keep in mind that synthetic tests are supposed to represent the worst case scenario rather than what is possible at best.

It's a pity that ASRock did not feel the need to add a Wi-Fi and Bluetooth adapter to this motherboard, but at this price it's forgivable. Overall, one of the best if not the best mini-ITX FM2 boards you can buy. **NAG**  
**- Neo Sibeko**

**CHIPSET**  
 AMD FM2  
**MEMORY**  
 2x 240-pin DDR3  
**CPU SUPPORT**  
 AMD FM2 CPU  
 (Trinity)  
**SLOTS**  
 1x PCI Express 2.0  
 16X

SPECS



**8** The FM2A85X makes for a great platform for building a gaming capable HTPC.

**PLUS**  
 Full length PCI Express 16X slot / Good BIOS options / Seven SATA ports

**MINUS**  
 No Wi-Fi support / DisplayPort would be better than VGA

## SteelSeries Sensei

**Supplier** Megarom  
**Website** www.steelseries.com  
**RRP** R899



First on the list of things you'll notice when you remove the Sensei from its packaging is the supreme shininess of its reflective metallic surface. I imagine the garishness of it will immediately be off-putting for some people, despite the rest of its design being fairly ordinary. Thankfully, beneath its divisive, shiny aesthetic is a brilliant gaming mouse with some very useful features.

Its ambidextrous design is adorned with eight buttons, including two pairs of thumb buttons (to cater to both left- and right-handed gamers) and a single button for switching between two DPI (or CPI – Counts Per Inch – as SteelSeries insists) settings, which are adjustable from within the Sensei's driver suite. While the design of the mouse is mostly comfortable, I did find that it's easy to accidentally bump the thumb buttons on either side. Thankfully, the buttons are programmable and it's thus possible to deactivate any offending buttons as required.

Dig deeper into its software and you'll find a number of useful methods for customising various things. You're able to select the illumination colour of the SteelSeries logo and two other zones for example, or upload a custom image to exhibit on a small LCD display on the mouse's underside. You're also able to modify useful features like ExactAccel and ExactAim. ExactAccel allows you to configure the mouse to automatically increase the sensitivity when you move the mouse faster, while ExactAim decreases sensitivity when you move it slower.

Perhaps the most intriguing of this mouse's features lies in its dedicated focus to professional gaming, which has led SteelSeries to include pre-built profiles created by renowned pro gamers (like *StarCraft II* players IdrA and iNcontroL, and *Counter-Strike* players cArn and markeloff), in case you want to mirror their styles of play. **NAG**  
**- Dane Remendes**

**SENSOR**  
 Up to 5,700 DPI  
 (can be doubled if needed, up to 11,400)  
**BUTTONS**  
 Eight (seven programmable)  
**ACCELERATION**  
 Kenny G  
**WEIGHT**  
 102 grams

SPECS



**9** SteelSeries' Sensei is a solid gaming mouse with exciting features designed to make you feel all professional and stuff.

**PLUS**  
 Comfortable ambidextrous design / Highly customisable Pre-loaded professional profiles

**MINUS**  
 Placement of thumb buttons can be a bit awkward

## Acer Aspire S7

**Supplier** Acer  
**Website** www.acer.co.za  
**RRP** R24,999



**T**he Acer Aspire S7 helped Megan Fox speak to dolphins. True story, if Acer's marketing is to be believed. Meanwhile, back in The Real World, we've put the Aspire S7's top-end features to the test and found it to be an incredible Ultrabook offering – if you can stomach the price.

It's a skinny machine, every bit as light and portable as it should be. Opening its lid can prove cumbersome, because it sinks into the bottom half of the Ultrabook slightly and makes getting the necessary leverage on it a bit of a chore; it's a minor annoyance, but one which Acer should've caught. The keyboard is very nice, with soft Chiclet style keys – but the layout of some of them is odd, like the lonely delete key that's been dumped by the arrow keys, presumably due to lack of space. The touchpad, while functional, can be a bit too finicky, particularly when it comes to accidental touchpad gestures being registered.

If you'd prefer to shy away from keys and touchpads in favour of touchscreen controls, the 13.3-inch LED touchscreen display is on offer. It's a vivid screen, made with Gorilla Glass 2 to improve touch sensitivity but keep it scratch-free at the same time. It means you've got access to all the fancy touch-controlled features of Windows 8, and touch navigation definitely makes Microsoft's latest OS less of a chore to negotiate – but it certainly doesn't make it any less clunky or obtuse.

One of the most surprising aspects of its super-slim package is the punchy audio. It really delivers impressive sound, which means using it for music or movies is better than most portable offerings. Performance is also outstanding as far as ultrabooks go, and with a bit of graphics-options tweaking it'll happily run something like *StarCraft II* admirably. **NAG**  
**- Dane Remendes**

**SPECS**

**CPU**  
Intel Core i7-3517U @ 1.9GHz

**GPU**  
Intel HD Graphics 4000

**RAM**  
4GB DDR3

**STORAGE**  
256GB SSD



**This is an excellent Ultrabook with some brilliant features, if you're willing to part ways with all that cash.**

**PLUS**  
Excellent performance / Super light and slim / Fantastic audio

**MINUS**  
Some irksome design quirks / Windows 8 / That price

## Nokia Lumia 820

**Supplier** Nokia  
**Website** www.nokia.co.za  
**RRP** R6,399

**W**hen Microsoft announced that the shift to Windows Phone 8 would, first, leave WP7 users in the dust with no option to upgrade and, second, be so super amazing that it'd make the slap in the face for early adopters worth it, we all thought it sounded a little shady. But, unperturbed by this move and ready to reinvigorate itself with a new mobile operating system, Nokia jumped in bed with Microsoft and soon popped out a few kids. The Lumia 820 is the slightly nerfed version of its super high-end big brother, the Lumia 920, but doesn't trail too far behind in terms of performance or, for that matter, price.

The first thing you'll notice when picking up the Lumia 820 is its bulk. At 9.9mm thick it's not necessarily the thickest phone on the market, but its rounded corners, rubberised texture and hefty

weight all add up to create the illusion of much greater bulk. However, this design works together with the large screen size to generate an overall comfortable experience, although it tends to feel a little heavy during extended use.

As this is Windows Phone 8, you should know by now to expect a smooth if sometimes overly simple interface, and the dual-core CPU running inside keeps the operating system running at an excellent pace. Moving between applications is very quick thanks to the smart multitasking of WP8, but the same big issue that plagued WP7 still remains: the selection of games and apps (especially games) is downright poor, and with Microsoft recently dumping support for XNA we can't imagine it'll improve much in the future. **NAG**  
**- Geoff Burrows**

**SPECS**

**OPERATING SYSTEM**  
Windows Phone 8

**DISPLAY**  
4.3" AMOLED  
480x800 resolution

**CHIPSET**  
Qualcomm MSM8960 Snapdragon

**STORAGE**  
8GB internal; up to 64GB microSD

**CAMERA**  
8MP Carl Zeiss optics; 1080p video @ 30fps



**Nokia has come a long way since its Symbian days and continues to deliver impressive, if stylistically misguided, hardware, but Windows Phone 8 is still too young to make it worth jumping over from Android or iOS.**

**PLUS**  
Smooth OS experience / Good camera / Great multitasking

**MINUS**  
Feels bulky / Poor selection of apps and games / Somewhat stifling interface



# Access denied

**N**ineteen Eighty-Four is one of my top ten books ever, and not just because it makes me seem clever and sophisticated when I tell people that. George Orwell's fictional construction of a dystopian, totalitarian future might not quite have made it to reality by the deadline stipulated in the book's title, but the preponderant themes of constant surveillance, propaganda and thought control, and oppressive limitations of personal agency are things most of us can relate to in one way or another. You know, like the recent launch of EA's new *SimCity* game.

Okay, so maybe an always-online DRM requirement isn't strictly the same thing as vanishing dissenting civilians for questioning the status quo, but a proper tyranny is built on many ostensibly inconsequential inconveniences and then next thing you know, that always-online DRM requirement comes with ten years of unpaid labour in the publisher's maximum security beta testing facility<sup>1</sup>.

The thing is, it's not just that always-online DRM is a listed "feature" on the box. It's the whole point of having to play a game exclusively on the publisher's terms, or not at all. And even then,

inadequate server support meant that people with the necessary broadband Internet connections who bought the game during launch week couldn't play it. I was shut out of a game I should have been able to play not because I didn't have Internet connectivity, but because EA didn't have a sufficient infrastructure in place to accommodate players. *The same players who were required to have an always-online connection in order to play the game in the first place.* Why was EA not required to have the servers to maintain that?

The introduction of social and multiplayer components to the series isn't a bad thing; the introduction of these at the expense of an offline, single-player option for those people who aren't interested in that stuff is a bad thing. It's that simple.

Totally predictably, the game was pirated, distributed on torrent networks, and cracked to enable offline play within days of launch, so it's not like EA has accomplished anything significant in the war against people who weren't going to pay for it anyway. Once again, DRM makes everything difficult for legitimate buyers only, just like every other time before this<sup>2</sup>. It would be funny if it wasn't so inconceivably

**1** Okay, so technically that's a slippery slope argument, but sometimes, slippery slopes happen. I know, I've seen it on YouTube.

**2** And did they really expect anything different? "Oh oh oh, I know," said Hypothetical EA Boardroom Exec I Just Made Up. "We'll restrict legitimate buyers even more. This time it's going to work."

stupid, infuriating, and pointless.

In what version of fair business practice can a service that makes unreasonable demands of consumers that can't actually be supported by the service supplier or even justified at all be a thing that exists in 2013? We're supposed to know better than this by now, if only because most of us read *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in grade ten English class. No "greater good" is served here, unless you count the gaming industry's steady progression towards a future where buyer restriction is a product marketing feature, and publishers aren't held liable for it in any meaningful way. And no, I don't think that counts. **NAG**  
- Tarryn van der Byl

"In what version of fair business practice can a service that makes unreasonable demands of consumers that can't actually be supported by the service supplier or even justified at all be a thing that exists in 2013?"

# Extra Life

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