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NAGG

Vol. 16
Issue
THREE

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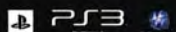
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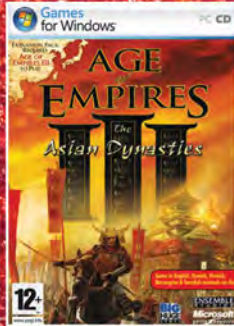
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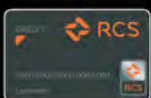


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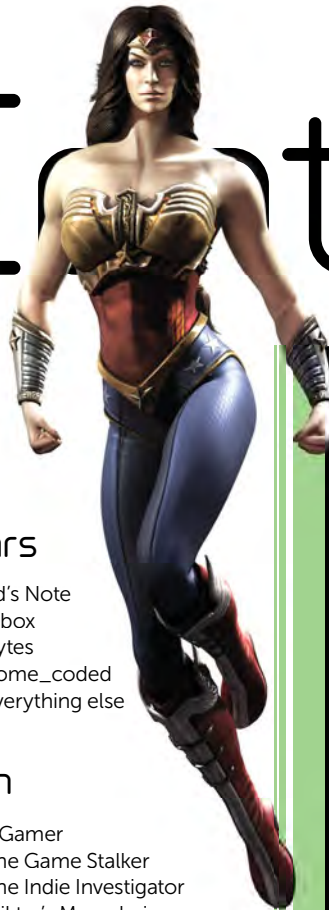
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Come on, you had to know this was bound to happen. 2013's *Call of Duty* wants you to pay close attention to its new engine, new storyline, new player-triggered events and new dog companion, all so that when the game releases you're ready for a bit of expectedly familiar, good ol' COD.

44 THE BUREAU: XCOM DECLASSIFIED

It's baaaaack! 2K Marin's *XCOM* has flipped itself on its head, adopting a different approach in turning *XCOM* into a more hands-on, action-oriented alien-bashing experience with enough tactical depth to satisfy anyone looking for a bit more intelligence in their shooters. Turn to page 44 for more.

72 INTEL IDF 2013 BEIJING

All about 4th generation core technology Intel's annual IDF is all about unveiling the future of the computing giant – and by extension, the future of the computing world in general. We were there for the 2013 edition, ready and waiting to scoop up all the delicious info we could find.

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This digital age

In the office we have a *StarCraft* team comprising of myself, Savage, Dane and Geoff (we're currently in Platinum League at the top spot in our division – number one baby). Geoff is kind of our leader because he follows the game very closely and knows what units counter all the others. Dane is right up there in terms of skill but the higher up generals won't promote him into leadership because he's "a bit of a wild card and loose cannon". Savage swings from amazing to "sorry guys I've got no units" on an hour-to-hour basis and I'm always trailing behind but getting better each game. I don't seem to have (or don't want to learn) the right skillset to get better. Shooters are more my thing. Anyway, the other month in the office we played a game of 1 against each other – something we haven't ever really done before and we haven't done it since.

You see, it just didn't feel right, attacking the guys I fight alongside every day. Of course when it comes to other people (strangers), there's no problem at all and smashing them into atoms brings a smile and a laugh. This got me wondering about the future where nobody actually interacts with anyone else anymore and everything is through avatars and short messages and digital environments. In the past, humans used to fear unknown things – countries with different cultures and languages, like Russia and Germany – and from their perspective the feared unknown was the UK and the USA. Back then we thought nothing of dropping atomic bombs on each other. These days we have *Gangnam Style* out of South Korea and they have Western fail videos to laugh at. Even though we still have our crackpots, the world is getting along a bit better now. However, as this age of young adults matures with all these technological toys and social sites at their

disposal, they're not developing any real social skills and some say they are going backwards. Are we headed to a time and place where we will simply push the nuke button (or whatever it is then) because the people on the other side mean nothing to us anymore... again? Or is this the ramblings of a madman at the end of a long deadline cycle?

ONLY YOU

We all know how the regular world gets gaming wrong. Examples include movies with "hackers" breaking into government institutions in seconds, gamers "gaming" by furiously mashing all the buttons on the controller and even "scientists" uploading viruses to alien spaceships. It's all rather amusing and us real gamers just sit back, shake our heads and cough up condescending grunts. The thing is, it always seems to happen somewhere else, in America, Poland and Russia – almost like this kind of thing doesn't happen in South Africa. But wait, it does. Jacqui in our office buys *YOU* magazine each week (for the crosswords apparently) and she spotted a feature on *Minecraft*! Imagine our surprise. She brought it in and instead of a cool article about how amazing this game is we get the following headline, "Sucked in by Cyberspace". It's all about how addictive *Minecraft* is and how your children are in danger. There are many factual errors in the article such as the one 11-year old stealing dad's credit card to buy "more advanced versions of *Minecraft*" at a cost of R800. There is only one version of *Minecraft* and it costs well under R300. Perhaps you should check what little Johnny is really using the money for. I'm always amazed at how everyone is always trying to find things to blame for their screwed up children. The bottom line here – if your child is spending eight

hours behind a computer every day and is failing school it's your fault as the parent. Not the computer, not the TV and not anything else. In fairness the article does try to balance out the negativity out with some advice and opinions but the whole thing is there to shock and scare. This is also a call for you guys and girls to send me examples you've found in the wild that relate to this topic: letters@nag.co.za is the place to go.

Lastly thanks to Erica and Richie at 2K and Devon at Megarom, and of course all the good people at Infinity Ward and Activision for being so helpful, gracious and accommodating.

The year is halfway done... Stop wasting time and just do it. **NAG**
- RedTide
Editor



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Letter of the Month June 2013

From: Nicolaas
Subject: Gaming Jock
 I have put my May issue of NAG down for a moment to express my frustration of criticism towards being a, what I am calling "Gaming Jock" I found sending this letter worth my time because I read that you do in fact read every letter and do reply to each one. For as long as I can remember I have always loved gaming, from the time I had dial up and playing Black Hawk Down online to today where it seems as if gaming trailers look better than the movies do! On the other hand I have also loved sports and the outdoors. Watching my team play on Saturdays with my mates and having a few cold ones while at it. This is where

my problem occurs! People seem to be categorized into either a gamer or a jock, why can't we be both? I mean just because I enjoy fantasy adventure like The Elder Scrolls series and reading books like The Hobbit and LOTR does not mean I don't enjoy rugby on a Saturday afternoon and my daily gym session. Why can't I buy Men's Health and NAG every month, because I should choose whether I am a jock or a gamer, yes in some way I am sitting on the fence but who is to say there is fence at all, I would say someone like me that enjoys the best of both worlds means I know who I am and I am not afraid to show it. To any others that might read this and feel the same as I do, express yourself and enjoy what you love because



life is short and there is no time for judgment. But hey none the less I will continue to read my NAG magazine while running on the treadmill if I wish to do so. Keep up the great work team NAG – your proud gaming jock supporter.

Nice one. I'd actually go as far as saying that I know more people (gamers) that are exactly like you than those stereotypical clichés that avoid sunlight and real life. I often find that the extremes are the rarity and the average is... well, the average. It should be pretty clear to most intelligent people that straying too far into the extremes isn't the way to go. Enjoy your prize for being so well balanced. Ed.

From: Gareth
Subject: Discrimination
 There is a problem nowadays in gaming, discrimination. Especially against, you guessed it, n00bs.
 What's wrong with them, I mean, we were all n00bs once. Then after years and years of practice, we turned pro. What is the definition on a pro gamer? I'm pretty sure yelling at someone, "I PWNED YO ASS, NOOB!!!!" is not a real pro gamer as well as the most common saying, "I [insert word here] your mama".
 If you ask me, saying words like that is quite rude, and if the gamer's mother heard him talking like that, then he needs to get a time out. So why do we hate on n00bs? My guess is the power that comes with killing someone on a FPS game. It's that rush of competitive feeling that you only get when killing someone who is worse than you. So let's try and welcome n00bs into the wonderful world of gaming. That is all.

It's true. It happens. People get called names when they play online. I remember playing Quake online a long time ago (QuakeWorld) – this was when online was still a new idea. Back then the worst you ever got called was a LPB or a HPB (low/high ping bastard). This name calling and mother insulting business just didn't exist at the time – it was a great community of civilised gamers. I'm not sure where it all went so wrong really. More people online means the proverbial gene pool must now include all types of trailer trash and other morons. Of course once you get called something it's hard to just ignore it and turn the other ear. So you say something back. Or perhaps you're just in a bad mood that day. I would say let's all try and be nice to each other online but I know that will never happen. So instead I'll just say good luck and try to be civil. Ed.

MEGAROM

LETTER OF THE MONTH

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

HARD TECHNICAL STUFF

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

From: Frits
Subject: Random Rambling and a Rudimentary Rationale
 Why are we gamers? At what point did we decide that playing a video game is more fun than kicking around an impractically shaped ball, emptying our guts in a gutter after a night of binge-drinking or overhauling an engine without using the instruction manual? Why are we contempt to spend an inordinate amount of time cooped up in a dark bedroom that started to smell funny eight hours ago, when we could be outside soaking up the sun? 'You should spend more time with real people!' my mother used to say. 'I am' was my stupefied response. 'This is an MMORPG. That's Frank right there lobbing the head off a goblin, and there's Joe from down the street kneading a troll's testicles with his enchanted hammer.' And when we do partake in normal social practices, like grilling meat or hiking up some mountain trail, we still discuss our latest gaming feats. We brag about achievements that are in essence more superficial than some blond bimbos breast implants. Our achievements and 'trophies' are embedded in our hard drives or some server in Switzerland. We have nothing to show for our hours of gruelling gaming to the ordinary person. We won't be able to make him/her understand that we saved the world many times, changed the course of history, forged intergalactic alliances and hold the world record for the most 360 degree head-shots in a single game of Call Of Duty. They wouldn't even know what Call of Duty is. But do we care? No!

Because they don't matter. They're not playing the latest games which makes them outsiders, 'the ones of whom we do not speak'. For us gamers are a fraternity steeped in mystery, our practices are frowned upon by the general public. But have we got news for them. We're taking over. Every day, someone trades in a spanner for a mouse and keyboard, or makes some lame excuse to get out of a pub-crawl in order to spend some time playing Grand Theft Auto. And that's good news for us gamers, because that means we won't have to answer the question, 'Why are we gamers?' The answer will then be quite apparent, 'What else would we be?'

Well said – I'm sure everyone here can relate. I was saying to Miktar the other day that I was tired of deadlines and felt I should take a break and do something else for a bit. His response was that I'm not good at anything else except games so I should just make the most of it. He is a wise one sometimes. But it rings true with your point. I have no idea what else I would do. I've been preparing for this role since I was able insert a coin into an arcade machine. I have no idea what else I would be because this is exactly what I wanted to be. Ed

From: Morne

Subject: Is it really what the consumer wants?

I remember a time, long ago when gaming was still in its developing stages. A simple cartridge jammed into a console provided us with hours of fun – a nostalgic memory of fun, laughter and joy. It was good times to say the least. My brother and I used to play Ice Climber, and Contra on the TV game console we had, it provided us with hours of fun. We had this box full of games, and if I remember right there were like 2 out of the 30 that were not playable by two people. My one friend used to sleep over at almost every weekend and we would stay up the whole night playing Crash Bandicoot, Crash Team Racing, and one of my favourites, Crash Bash. Gaming has evolved so much since then, but why am I not experiencing that same or better feeling now, that I had experienced then? Everything is better now, graphics, physics, gameplay etc... I don't understand why there aren't any more 'old fashioned' couch co-op games being made, and why am I even calling it 'old fashioned'. Why is gaming moving towards the internet? Online multiplayer is becoming a necessity when developing games. Having an Internet connection is becoming a necessity when playing games. Paying for digital content is becoming a more frequent occurrence. When you log into steam or Xbox Live, or whichever sight you use, you see all this content being

ON THE FORUMS

The NAG forums; what the rest of the Internet is for: www.nag.co.za/forums

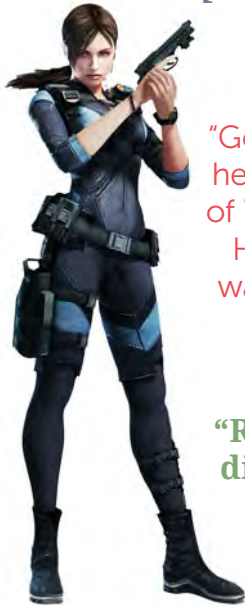
Q: Which gaming franchise do you consider to have gone stale and boring, and what would you want to reinvigorate that franchise?

"The FIFA franchise. So far we've been able to play as a team, a player, a goalkeeper a manager... The time has come for "Be a Referee Mode."

Jodez

"[AAA title] by [Publisher] has become stale. [Publisher] could make [AAA title] 'fresher' by not having annual releases..."

nukehead



"God of War. Take the core concept and gameplay here and go to other mythologies. Imagine a God of War game in Norse or even Chinese mythology. Hell, make a cyberpunk God of War even. I just want to see them move on from the Greek stuff."

Shaderow

"Resident Evil. It's gone too far in the action direction. I think they need to get back to a proper survival horror theme again."

.exe

thrown at you. DLC pack for this, special on that... Why? Is that even what we as consumers want? Is that the direction we want new gaming to head towards? Do they even keep in mind our salary, or do research on what we want? After all we are the ones paying for the games in the end.

Back when you played those old games you were a different person and because those games were so primitive you had to fill in the gap using your imagination. So when games try and compete today they will always come up short when stacked against a young impressionable mind and its active imagination – if you get what I'm saying... This reliance on DLC and special hats and boots for sale is a product of a once good idea being copied and mutated into the horrible thing it is today. The real problem is all those people spending money on this rubbish – they feed the fire with

all their lovely money, and this just makes it worse. Game developers are mostly just big corporate companies now that only care about making their shareholders happy. How you can fight back is by supporting the indie scene and not buying skins and stuff you don't really need. Ed.

From: Benjamin

Subject: Being the Hero

In your last Ed's Note you talked about how you felt there seemed to be no place for heroes in this day and age. I agree that a world without a few people brave enough to do good for the sake of good would be a very dark world indeed. The hero: it's a trope massively applied to games and other media. It's cool to be the hero. Everybody wants to be the hero. What could be cooler than riding in just when it seems everything has hit the lowest low, and saving the day? Picture it: the damsel's in distress, the dragon/moustache-twirling villain laughs as he ties the noose/warms

up the death ray, and then, at the last second, just when hope seems lost, the hero, our dashing do-gooder with a heart of steel, busts down the door. He vanquishes the villain, saves the damsel and everything's peachy for a little bit longer. Sure, we've moved past the idea of the helpless lady waiting for her strong prince, but whatever happened to that idea of a gentleman we had? There's nothing wrong with standing strong to protect the weak. I also got that funny feeling when the big mean bird flew off with the lady of the tower. The need to give chase, to save her, to be the hero. There are plenty of people who might need a hero to save them right now. Maybe he or she will not come riding in on a golden horse, but we still need someone. We need heroes.

I was surprised by how many people replied to that Ed's Note in the May issue – including a few ladies (who don't mind the idea of being rescued by the way). The consensus: most share my point of view. Phew, I was worried there for a few seconds, worried that I might need to leave this place and never return. Ed.

From: Anton
Subject: A song bird

A wise man once said if you want to keep your friends never speak about religion or politics. Obviously BioShock didn't get the memo, now I know what you're thinking, here it comes... You couldn't be more wrong. The newest instalment of the BioShock doesn't pull any punches and I'm sure has drummed up quite a bit of controversy. I'm glad for this, it's not often that a game makes you sit back and think, much less a FPS. Each BioShock I play makes me re-evaluate and question, a good habit we could all use. Coming from a religious background I really enjoyed BioShock Infinite. Not only did I have fun sending crows to do naughty things to the faces of bad guys who were unlucky enough to run across me or busting a cap on the rollercoaster style skylines. But I like to think I'm a better person for it, more mature for having thought about what they were saying and seeing if it applied to my own life. In short play BioShock its good for you.

I agree 100%. It's a game that everyone should play. It challenges your thinking and ideas and will make you question things you had taken for granted in the world of gaming. Like I said, BioShock Infinite is a strong example of how this industry is maturing. Ed.

From: Jared
Subject: Déjà vu

Based on the bits and pieces that I've seen through the reviews on your VDV, I've gathered that the plot/story line of

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.



Tyrone "Folset" Swart, "A wallpaper I made using Photoshop CS3. Might decide to post it on the forums for people to use if they like it."

Tomb Raider and Far Cry 3 are almost exactly the same. In Far Cry 3: tourist Jason Brody and a group of his friends decided to go skydiving and they all land on a pirate invested island and are taken prisoner by a pirate lord named Vaas. It's then up to him to save all of his friends and get of the island. In Tomb Raider: Lara travels on the ship "Endurance" and when the ship is struck by a vicious storm she and many others are stranded on an isolated tropical island in the Dragon's Triangle. She now has to try and survive the animal inhabitants, find the other survivors, and harden herself against killing people in order to fight a group of mercenaries who want to kill her and her companions. So it is kind of like a replay of Far Cry 3. Don't you think so?

More or less – perhaps nobody has told you about the seven basic plot types. They are, the quest; voyage and return; comedy; tragedy; rebirth; overcoming the monster and rags to riches. Most stories from Pride and Prejudice to Lord of the Rings all fit neatly into these categories. Look it up online for more clarity. Writers have been recycling stuff for years which is why when something really new does come along people go crazy for it and then it's immediately copied. Besides, there's a huge difference between Far Cry and Tomb Raider – Lara is a girl and Jason is a boy silly. ;) Ed.

THE SHORTS

Extracts of n00b from NAG letters

*"Imagine my fury!!! Sadly there is nothing I can do about that now. So sad."
- No idea*

*"I would like to praise your application on the NAG DVD. It made the DVD more fun to navigate."
- Louis*

*"Look, I am aware that our great industry was forged in the basements of many a feverish nerd who, between bouts of furious, weepy masturbation, managed to dream up the games which formed the foundation upon which all the rest would follow."
- GDS*

ON FACEBOOK

www.facebook.com/NAGMagazine

Dale Kotze

I love Far Cry 3 :D thanks for your advice :) keep up giving us gamers an amazing magazine and keep up "working" Savage hope to see you soon on CoD.

Alexander van Hemert

Been reliving some games from a few years back. Remembered how epic the first Borderlands is.

Aaron Craig Lewis

You folks are getting quite a bit of referencing throughout the internets for your Batman article. NeoGaf, the Batman Arkham Origins FB page and a few others. Pretty awesome stuff, hopefully more people will get into the mag now! :)

Nicolas Burger

I've always wanted to enter ur win a prize thing but my dad ses wen u enter it it sends u lounds of spam mail :(i would like to win something in my life and my friend is in New Zealand but i wana skype but dam South Africa's bandwidth its so expensive :(

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G, Gamer



Punching my ticket for the Nintendo YayTrain

Well now, this is awkward. In the September 2011 edition of NAG magazine my column attempted to figure out why it was that Nintendo's hardware and games had little appeal for me. I chalked it up to my lack of what most contemporary Nintendo releases rely on in a target market: nostalgia. I've never actually owned an item of Nintendo hardware, and any contact I had with NES and SNES titles while growing up, happened at friends' houses on their Golden China rip-offs.

In a strange twist of fate, I find myself nearly two years later with my own Wii U console hooked up to my TV. I know, sometimes I don't even recognise the person in the mirror. Be that as it may, I've invested in Nintendo's home console future, and I've got to admit that I'm a little worried. It's rather typical, isn't it? The first time I actually get on board the Nintendo YayTrain, carriages begin uncoupling and passengers start screaming and throwing themselves from the windows; some of them might also be on fire – the passengers jumping from the train that is, not the carriages. Anyway, overly dramatic analogy aside, yes... I'm concerned.

The next generation of consoles from Sony and Microsoft are at present dominating the gaming horizon, and the only time we hear about Nintendo and the Wii U is when another company has abandoned the development ship; or when another "launch window" title has suffered an additional delay; or when that update to speed up the pathetically slow Wii U menus has finally been released, even though it shouldn't have been needed in the first place. I can't blame companies like Ubisoft for choosing to turn once exclusive Wii U titles into multi-platform affairs (*Rayman: Legends*); I can't blame developers like Avalanche Studios for saying their Wii U dev kits are and will continue to gather dust because it's just not worth developing for the platform. Companies are afraid because there are less than 3.5 million Wii U consoles in houses across the globe. The Wii U is not selling and the reason is simple: there's nothing to play.

I've had a Wii U for nearly six months now, and I own two games: *New Super Mario Bros U* (an obligatory purchase because owning Nintendo hardware without a *Mario* game is like owning a smart phone without *Angry Birds*) and *ZombiU*, which came bundled with the console. By now I was expecting to be up to my tits in Nintendo games. I'm not; I'm barely up to my ankles. Even the Wii U Virtual Console has practically nothing on it; is there a reason Nintendo's entire back catalogue of NES and SNES games aren't already available? They should be, because that would at least fill this gaping void of Wii U titles we're currently lost in.

I realise that my wanting Nintendo to succeed with the Wii U is an entirely selfish notion. Would it be different if I didn't own a Wii U? If I wasn't invested, would I give a damn if Nintendo crashed and burned with the Wii U? I like to think that I would, but I have my doubts; and I don't like those doubts because they make me appear callous. If it sounds like I'm trying to convince myself about something, it's probably because I am. Here's hoping *Bayonetta 2* warrants owning one of these things.

- Miklós Szecsei -

Thief reboot reportedly suffering from major development woes



When the smoke finally cleared from around the long, long-awaited upcoming *Thief* reboot and we actually got a handful of solid details on which to munch while we awaited the next scheduled info-feeding, there was much rejoicing here at NAG. We've now established an inter-office holiday to commemorate the date and everything. Sure, there was some concern about the change in tone and texture for the series, and there were some disturbing reports of the reveal gameplay demo looking a bit too heavily scripted – but it's a new *Thief*, and that's all that mattered at the time.

Now, however, website Polygon is reporting rumours that the game's five-year development has been fraught with immense troubles, and the situation is looking a mite shaky for Garrett's fourth outing. Apparently, when Square Enix first gave the project the go-ahead for full-steam development at Square Enix Montreal, the team working on the game expanded rapidly, attracting talent from all over the world – but many came from other Montreal-based studios. A few senior team members had previously worked at Ubisoft Montreal and they proceeded to

favour the hiring of local developers. Polygon's sources say that this favouritism divided the office, causing an unusually high turnover rate for lead and senior development roles. Some team members would depart less than two years after signing on, and each new designer would bring their own unique vision for the game, often requiring extensive reworking of existing content and mechanics.

The inter-office politics have essentially left Square Enix with a half-finished game, and with the publisher now pushing promotional deadlines the team has been forced to create elaborately scripted "gameplay" demos that employ various programming tricks to even run at all – like turning off NPC AI, because the game's heavily modified version of Unreal Engine 3 has trouble functioning when too many characters are on-screen. Apparently the game has changed so much over the course of development that the content originally pitched to Square Enix to encourage them to fund it doesn't even load in the engine anymore either. With the game due sometime next year, we hope that the team manages to get it together and not destroy our fond memories of this fantastic series.

Competition winners

Congratulations to the winners of our April Razer competition! Here's a list of the lucky peoples:

Pierre Van der Merwe of Worcester

Peter Skinner of Randpark Ridge

Eythan Davies of Germiston

Dierderick Nagel of Weltevreden Park



Geralt's a lone wolf once again



You may remember that a few months ago *The Witcher* developer CD Projekt RED alluded to the fact that they were strongly considering the possibility of including a multiplayer component in protagonist Geralt's upcoming adventure, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*. Given that the celebrated RPG series has always chiefly been a rich, deeply immersive single-player experience, the Internet quickly erupted at the idea of CD Projekt RED pouring precious time and resources into developing what may have amounted to nothing more than a throwaway multiplayer experience, when that time could instead be spent further nurturing the excellent solo side of things.

Shortly thereafter, the developer made it clear that the inclusion of multiplayer was definitely not set in stone. And now it's been revealed that the multiplayer excursion has been abandoned entirely. "There's no place for multiplayer in so strongly a story-driven game as *The Witcher 3*," CD Projekt's Michal Platkow-Gilewski told Eurogamer. "We want to focus on the single-player experience, delivering more than 100 hours of truly immersive gameplay."

While we're sure a properly crafted multiplayer component for *The Witcher* could be mighty enticing, we're glad that CD Projekt is focusing on improving on what they do best. Because, as Platkow-Gilewski says, "Geralt can be only one..."

Flying Wild Hog rebooting Shadow Warrior



Back in 1997, developer 3D Realms made a terrific tongue-in-cheek shooter called *Shadow*

Warrior. It was built on the Build engine (the same engine powering games like *Duke Nukem 3D* and *Blood*) and starred a samurai bodyguard called Lo Wang. The game was loaded with awful puns, nineties action movie references and slapstick humour.

Developer Flying Wild Hog, the team behind futuristic shooter *Hard Reset*, has announced that they're collaborating with publisher Devolver Digital to reboot *Shadow Warrior*. Their version will be "a total reimagining" of the nineties cult hit, but so far very little has been revealed aside from a single screenshot of a bloodied corpse. It's still early days, but the reveal has so far painted a picture of a much darker, grittier interpretation of *Shadow Warrior*. We just hope that at least some of the humour makes the transition intact.

American McGee travels back to Oz

Spicy Horse – the studio founded by American McGee, creator of *American McGee's Alice* and its sequel, *Alice: Madness Returns* – has announced that the team is currently working on a game based on *The Wizard of Oz*. It is not, however, *American McGee's Oz*, the game that Atari cancelled back in 2004. This new *Oz* game is still in its infancy, with Spicy Horse not yet having even decided on a genre yet, but the studio has a few ideas with which they're keen to play around. Apparently it'll be based on all 14 titles in the *Oz* series, so we should expect to see all sorts of never before seen stuff.

With Spicy Horse currently in talks with EA to bag themselves the *Alice* licence, the team currently has two Kickstarter campaigns on the backburner – one for a third game in the *Alice* series called *Alice: Otherlands* and the other for this *Oz* game – and it'll depend on the outcome of the EA negotiations which campaign actually ends up going live.

Avalanche Studios had Wii U dev kits "that just collected dust"

Swedish dev team Avalanche Studios, the blokes that brought us over-the-top action games like *Just Cause*, aren't exactly enamoured with Nintendo's latest piece of hardware. Speaking to a Norwegian news website, the team revealed that they had intentions to develop games for the Wii U, but that those dev kits sat around collecting dust. As a result, Avalanche has no plans to bring any content to Nintendo's home console.

The bottom line for Avalanche is that the install base for the Wii U is too low.

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Why is local lekker?

There is a palpable sense of excitement that permeates the gaming world at this moment in time. The arrival of E3 2013, which no doubt will be plagued by the gainsayers once again as, "Not as good as last year". This of course has been the opinion I hear spouted by a variety of sources every year for as long as I can remember, but let's be honest, most of us don't get the opportunity to make that judgement first hand.

E3 is a long way away. An event on the other side of the world that so many of us gamers know about, but to which the opportunity to attend is rarely afforded. And it's not merely the costs that are prohibitive either.

What many gamers aren't aware of is the fact that that E3 is a trade show. This means it's closed to pretty much everyone except media, and even then you must be 18 to be considered for a pass. There are no queues of gamers standing in line waiting to get in, no tickets to be sold. This is not rAge, where the games are on show for everyone to come on and in and see. You need to book time. Attend press conferences. You need to be legit. Important. With a business card and everything. Or something like that anyway.

It doesn't make it any less exciting for the people attending, regardless of their occupation, but it lends a certain air of the forbidden to those who don't qualify, and a sense of exclusivity to the entire process for the people who do.

It also means that for those of us on the other side of the globe, it's equally important to know that we have local representation at what is one of the most well-known gaming exhibitions in the world. Knowing that our favourite game journals/publications are getting the low down for us on what is new, unseen, exclusive content gives us a thrill. South Africa represents – and the quality of the reporting is excellent. Yes, as gamers we can just download or stream the content from the variety of press conferences on the Internet, but knowing that we'll get a first-hand account at some point is exciting and indeed essential to the experience of E3.

And so we wait in anticipation of the online streams, staying up till the early hours of the morning, sneaking peeks at our news feeds at work – all to catch a glimpse of the latest and greatest games, the reveals, the new consoles, so we can ask our friends later on, "Did you see?" and gloat just a little when you're the bearer of good (or in some cases) bad news.

And then we wait some more for the web and social news feeds to become flooded with feedback from people we relate to, feel a report with, and whose opinions we know and respect.

I certainly feel this way. Perhaps it's because I know the local journalists fairly well, but I'm more inclined to think it's because I too like an opinion that is reflective of the South African market. I do know that regardless, just like you, I'll be looking forward to sharing thoughts on what is always a highlight of the gaming calendar.

E3 2013 is approaching. Where will you be? What feed will you be glued to? Which announcements are you itching to hear about? And whose opinions are the most important to you?

- Pippa Tshabalala -

Trouble on the high seas



Greenheart Games recently released their debut title on Windows, Mac and Linux. It's called *Game Dev Tycoon* and in it you're the head of a fledgling game development studio. In an effort to implement a more subtle approach to combating the whole piracy nuisance, Greenheart Games created and distributed their own "pirate" copy of the game online, quietly modifying the base game to include a bit of ironic justice.

For the first few hours, this pirate copy functions normally. It's not long before the player is confronted with a serious issue, however. "Boss, it seems that while many players play our new game, they steal it by downloading a cracked version rather than buying it legally" reads an in-game sales report presented to the pirate. "If players don't buy the games they like, we will sooner or later go bankrupt." Soon, all the games created by the pirate's studio suffer from their very own high piracy levels, inevitably forcing the closure of their studio.

Shortly after the game's release, Greenheart Games was inundated

with requests for help from pirates utterly floored by the situation. One pirate, with seemingly no sense of irony whatsoever, said this: "Why are there so many people that pirate? It ruins me!" While the developer is naturally amused by the response, there's a shameful truth to all of this: in its first day on sale, *Game Dev Tycoon* was only legitimately bought by 6.4 percent (214 people) of the people who played it, while the remaining 93.6 percent (3,104 people) played the cracked copy. In the wake of backlash from the pirate community, Greenheart attempted to appeal to illegitimate users with the human angle:

"When I was younger, downloading illegal copies was practically normal but this was mostly because global game distribution was in its infancy," writes co-creator Patrick Klug in a blog post. "We are not wealthy and it's unlikely that we will be any time soon, so stop pretending like we don't need your 8 dollars! We are just two guys working our butts off, trying to start our own game studio to create games which are fun to play."

"That was basically inexcusable, that you charge somebody \$60 for a game and they can't play it. I can understand the outrage. If I was a consumer buying the game and that happened to me, I'd feel the same."

– Will Wright, creator of The Sims and SimCity, discussing the SimCity reboot with GamesIndustry.biz. He feels bad for the team at Maxis, but sympathises with the response from players.

“Publishers are useful in the old physical distribution world, but the Internet is the great equalizer. Notch didn’t need a publisher to reach 20-million *Minecraft* fans. Riot games didn’t need a publisher to reach 30-million *League of Legends* players, and Wargaming.net didn’t need a publisher to reach 20-million *World of Tanks* gamers.”

– **Star Citizen** developer Cloud Imperium Games, singing the praises of post-publisher game development on their website.

Watch_Dogs’ release date comes bearing a zillion different special editions



Ubisoft’s much-anticipated open-world hack-a-thon *Watch_Dogs* now has a firm release date: 21 November 2013. Apparently it’ll be out on PC, PS3, Xbox 360 and Wii U. In addition we’re told it’ll be available “at the launch of” the Playstation 4, and it will similarly be arriving on “other next generation consoles”.

When the game releases in November, it’ll do so with four limited-edition options to choose from. Does having four special editions make each one less special? Or does it make the one at the top of the special-edition pile Even More Special? Either way, they’ve been named the Dedsec Edition, the Vigilante Edition, the Uplay Exclusive Edition and the plain old Special Edition.

The Dedsec Edition is the most grandiose, bundling a 23cm figurine of protagonist Aiden Pearce, a map of the game’s vision of Chicago, an art book, a bunch of digital content and more. The Vigilante Edition packs Aiden Pearce’s iconic cap and mask, the game’s soundtrack (which the Dedsec Edition also includes) and a code for digital goodies. The Uplay Exclusive Edition has a Steelbook case and a collection of them digital contents. The regular Special Edition is just the game with a code for a DLC bonus mission.

Eternal Darkness successor lunges at Kickstarter

If you played *Eternal Darkness* and found its sanity-reducing game mechanics mighty important, then you’ll be happy to learn that a successor is planned, and by the time you read this will still be in the process of possibly acquiring funding via Kickstarter. With original developer Silicon Knights now a motionless corpse, development of *Shadow of the Eternals* is being handled by Precursor Games, and former Silicon Knights head Denis Dyack is involved – which, if you know the tragic history of Silicon Knights, could be construed as either a great or horrible thing. They plan to release the game on PC and Wii U, spreading the game over 12 episodes and 2,500 years. Here’s the story pitch:

“When Detective Paul Becker is called to one of the bloodiest gang massacres in Louisiana State history, only two survivors remain from a brutal conflict between two rival cults. As Becker begins his interrogations of the suspects, their combined recollections will uncover the truth about the ‘Eternals’. Featuring an ensemble cast of heroes and villains, *Shadow of the Eternals* will span over 2500 years of history throughout Egypt, England, Hungary, and the United States. Players will question the perception of reality as they try to balance the mechanics of combat, magick, and sanity events to progress through the adventure.”



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Keeping control

Smooth and responsive controls are the unsung keystone of many good games. Sure, some titles like *QWOP* or *Surgeon Simulator 2013* excel because they own the difficulty of their movements. But when you're not having badgers fall into your car because you're a bear and you drove into a tree and you only have one hand and help-winter-is-in-five-minutes, it's a good idea to spend time making your controls as unobtrusive as possible, for the sake of everyone's sanity.

The hallmark of far too many prototypes (and the occasional, more developed project) is the inability for players to get into proper "flow" with them because the controls are shoddy as hell. The stuff affected is usually pretty core to the game – simple and oft-repeated action like character walking and button pushing.

It's the frequency of this bad rub that makes solid control a priority. An acceptable amount of stuff can break the smoothness of a new game – there will *always* be areas and jarring moments in early drafts – but if just one of those problems is enough to give out a constant, real-time reminder that your piece of digital clockwork is bust, you may not be putting your best foot forward.

Aside from overall enjoyment, superior control schemes can also be important for difficulty adjustment and player learning. Action platformers are a good example of this. If movement is responsive, intuitive and easy to perform, it goes without saying that the rest of the game becomes easier to play. If gamers don't have to spend five minutes just learning how to get around, they can spend that time instead figuring out more interesting and rewarding problems, such as the best way to avoid monsters. When players need to make constant decisions, they don't want the added burden of considering control lag or an unforgiving jump arc (unless the game rules really demand that type of precision). If the controls are bad in a game like this, they will feel bad all the time.

All. The. Time.

Contrast this with a bug where obstacles occasionally spawn in the wrong places, or enemies have inaccurate collision boxes. Both of these are problems themselves, but already get far more diluted in the basic game experience than your constant run 'n jump would.

The sort of game described is a particularly suitable example, but the idea of good controls can be carried over to all kinds of other projects (even if it's often to a lesser extent). If you're clicking and dragging cards in a deck-building game, make sure that drag code is solid. Make sure the click detection on your cards is solid. Make sure the frame rate is solid. Players are going to be performing this action over and over and over again – make it solid.

Finally, the development experience can become easier and more fun for *you* after improving the controls enough. Playtests will be faster and more relaxed, and you'll be better equipped to figure out flow problems in the rest of your project.

Even if you don't put any special focus on controls, you should start consciously identifying the most frequent and repetitive problems in a new project and work on them first. It's all about spending your time and energy as effectively as possible.

- Rodain Joubert -

Plants vs. Zombies 2 set to release soon

After, like, *four years* of waiting, the sequel to PopCap Games' gardening-based home-defence-from-zombies simulator *Plants vs. Zombies* will finally arrive on your lawn this July. Cleverly (and mysteriously) subtitled *It's About Time*, *Plants vs. Zombies 2* is already sprouting speculation that, beyond it being a self-referential quip about the game having taken practically forever to actually get here, it'll have some weird time-manipulation mechanics. Or something. The important thing is that it'll arrive soon, and that means July's worldwide office productivity will effectively grind to a screeching halt.



Star Citizen is up to \$9 million in crowd-funded cash



Cloud Imperium Games may have originally asked for the relatively paltry sum of \$500,000 to make *Star Citizen* – the space-faring MMO piloted by *Wing Commander* creator Chris Roberts – but with over \$9 million dollars raised for the project thus far, it's safe to call this an overwhelming victory for publisher-free game development. The original Kickstarter campaign was massively successful, raising over \$2 million dollars from 34,397 backers, and it was accompanied by a crowd-funding supplement on the

game's website which has at the time of writing gathered \$6,927,508 from 132,572 eager space-sim junkies.

Cloud Imperium Games recently opened new offices in Santa Monica and announced that they would be employing 20 new staff members. The game has easily surpassed its funding stretch goals, which means that you can look forward to a tablet companion app for *Star Citizen*, a free mission pack, celebrity voice acting and over 100 star systems to explore. The game is expected to enter alpha later this year.

Techland's next bash-'em-up is Hellraid



Techland, developer of *Dead Island* and *Call of Juarez*, has officially announced a new game going by the ominous moniker Hellraid. Formerly known as Project Hell, it's a first-person action RPG hack 'n' slash that seems to bear an uncanny resemblance to *Dead Island*. We'd even hazard calling it a first-person *Diablo*, as the game's website says you'll "fight, develop skills, collect loot and craft weapons while exploring a world devastated by demons".

As with *Dead Island*, the game will be playable cooperatively by up to four players, with different character classes on offer boasting – as you'd expect – different specialties. The warrior is a master of melee combat. The paladin can heal and buff allies. The mage can "burn, freeze and electrocute" enemies with magic. The rogue is proficient in ranged combat with a focus on crossbows and the like. There will be a competitive element to it all, however, with each player vying for top points, thereby receiving the greatest rewards in each game by getting kills and assists, and for completing quests and "system-generated online challenges".

The game promises an "immersive combat system with melee, ranged and magic weapons", while the "Game Master system" aims to improve replayability by randomising loot and enemy placement. *Hellraid* is due out later this year on PC, PS3 and Xbox 360.

Xbox-exclusive rumours for Respawn's long-awaited reveal

Respawn Entertainment, the studio founded by former Infinity Ward leads Jason West and Vince Zampella, may be exclusive to the next-generation Xbox – which will have already been revealed by the time you read this, because you live *in the future*. According to their anonymous sources, Kotaku is reporting that the game will be a multiplayer shooter, and that there will be an Xbox 360 version as well. The game's battles will also allegedly feature giant mechanical walkers called Titans.

In response to Kotaku's rumour-leak, Respawn tweeted this: "Wow! Lots of speculation tonight. Great to see excitement about our project but you'll all have to wait for E3 for details." Guess we'll find out what's been cooking at Respawn soon enough

European online retailers list GTA V for PC

A couple of months ago the mere mention of *GTA V* was a bit of a touchy subject thanks to Rockstar saying very little about a PC version. The *GTA* series has always had this tumultuous relationship with the PC Master Race, and that's probably because the series as we know it was skyrocketed to fame thanks to the PC. Once the PlayStation 2 hit and PC gaming wasn't the only viable platform, Rockstar began to turn their backs on the PC. Well, that's at least how many PC gamers feel about the situation. Still, you can't blame them when it takes months to get games ported to PC, which was the case with *GTA IV*.

When Rockstar unveiled *Grand Theft Auto V* and said that it was heading to PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, the PC community went crazy. A few weeks later and Rockstar made a passing comment that *GTA V* on other platforms was "up for consideration". Petitions were made and message boards were filled with expletives – by now you know how the Internet works when gamers are livid.

The good news is that two different German online retailers have listed *GTA V* for "Windows 7 / Vista". One of those retailers is Amazon.de – the German branch of the world's biggest online retailer. While the second online retailer (GamesOnly) has pulled the listing, Amazon.de still has it up for pre-order. No official word from Rockstar at time of writing, but this has to count for something, right?

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Miktari's Meanderings



I bet I can make you say Fahrvergnügen. I win.

Any reviewer who expresses rage and loathing for a novel is preposterous. He or she is like a person who has put on full armor and attacked a hot fudge sundae. - Kurt Vonnegut

Hello again, stranger! You probably don't know me. Something's been on my mind lately, I hope you don't mind if I bounce it off you.

There is an interesting phenomenon when it comes to reading the written word. Unless you, dear reader, know me personally or have over the years formed an image of me that is its entirely own entity, there is a good chance you're reading these words in your own voice. Think about it. In your head, right now, what do these words sound like? Wooooo, I'm inside your braaaaaain! And you can't stop me... Well, except if you stop reading.

You are, in a ways, writing this column yourself, as you read it.

It is this phenomenon of "hearing" a voice in your head (what some call "homunculus", Latin for "little man") that results in a lot of the friction one finds on the Internet, or in people who get very upset when they read something they disagree with. It's not that they're angry at the person who wrote it. Not always. Rather, they're upset at themselves for "saying" something they know is not true.

It's a kind of cognitive dissonance, and it's very uncomfortable for people who don't understand why it's happening. When you're chatting to a friend via text, be it email, instant messenger or whatnot, because you know them personally you've already set them up in their own "space" inside your head, regarding what you read they say as something apart from you. But when you come across something a complete stranger has written, that type of separation of self doesn't happen automatically, not without practice first.

The Russian psychologist Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896 - 1934) wrote an interesting book on the matter, titled *Thought and Language* (or more literally translated: *Thinking and Speaking*). Vygotsky examined what he believed to be the quantitative difference between normal external speech and that internal speech you're doing right now as you read this. Vygotsky of course is merely building upon what French mathematician and philosopher René Descartes (1596 -1650) examined much earlier, namely *Cogito ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am", which became a fundamental component of Western philosophy.

But what does this all have to do with reading stuff on the Internet? Well, it goes some distance towards explaining some of vexation expressed towards opinions, like say, video game reviews you find in this magazine. Everyone likes to *think* they're rational beings (myself included of course), but *honest* introspection is quick to dispel the notion. We're just not as rational as we'd like to think we are, even when we think we are. We've been wired by evolution to survive, not make perfectly rational decisions, although those do sometimes result from our need to survive. The problem is that the world in our heads is not an exact replica of reality. The internal models which we have built/grown to deal with in this strange place called "reality" since birth, are maps. And the map is not the territory.

By that same token, then me in your head, is not the same as the me in my head.

Hello again, stranger! Do you know me?

- Miktari Dracon -



Minecraft invades over 10 million pockets

We don't normally cover mobile gaming news, but news of ten million sales is huge no matter the platform. That's the case with *Minecraft: Pocket Edition*, and to celebrate the achievement, developer Mojang will be adding several major features to the game's portable variant. They range from players not having to exit to the

main menu to adjust game settings, to more significant, experimental, as-yet unnamed features specifically for players using high-end devices. They're also working on *Minecraft Realms*, a subscription-based, cloud-powered multiplayer service that allows players to work together on projects without needing to all be online simultaneously.

A new Wolfenstein for you

Bethesda Softworks has made the surprise announcement that a new title bearing the *Wolfenstein* logo will make it onto your PC, Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 sometime in the fourth quarter of this year. Its full name is *Wolfenstein: The New Order* and it promises to be a "reimagining of [the] franchise". It's in development at MachineGames – a studio comprised of former Starbreeze Studios (creators



of *The Darkness* and *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay*) veterans – and is apparently set during the 1960s in an alternate universe.

"As fans of the series, working on this game is an honor, and our team is driven to create an unforgettable action-adventure experience

that will make FPS fans proud," says Jens Matthies, MachineGames' creative director. We don't know much else about the game, other than it will forego any form of multiplayer.

Time to pay the piper?



Aliens: *Colonial Marines*. What a mess that was. Not only was the final release more disappointing than finding that a fly has converted your freshly made coffee into its own personal swimming pool, but the actual state of the game leading up to its release was grossly misrepresented in demos and trailers shown to gamers prior to the game's launch. Numerous comparisons of the demos and the finished product hit the Internet following the game's release earlier this year, and naturally, many people who purchased the game took major offense at the stark contrast in quality. Now, developer Gearbox Software and publisher SEGA are facing a class action lawsuit as a result of the whole debacle.

"Each of the 'actual gameplay' demonstrations purported to show consumers exactly what they would be buying: a cutting edge video game with very specific features and qualities," states the lawsuit. "Unfortunately for their fans, Defendants never told anyone — consumers, industry critics, reviewers, or reporters — that their 'actual gameplay' demonstration advertising campaign bore little resemblance to the retail product that would eventually be sold to a large community of unwitting purchasers."

Plaintiff Damion Perrine and law firm Edelson LLC are the ones leading the charge against the game's creators, with their lawsuit citing a tweet from Gearbox CEO Randy Pitchford, where he made it clear that complaints of the shocking quality disparity between the finished product and the demo were "understood and fair". The suit is seeking damages for people who pre-ordered *Colonial Marines* or bought it on its release date.

Silicon Knights is practically dead; assets sold to another company

Cast your minds back about a year ago and you'll recall reading about how *Too Human* developer Silicon Knights was utterly obliterated in court by Epic Games. Silicon Knights tried to sue Epic for using Unreal Engine 3 funds to develop *Gears of War* instead of using the funds to improve the widely used engine. Epic denied the misuse of funds and in return counter-sued Silicon Knights for breaching their UE3 licensing agreement and stealing Epic's trade secrets. Epic won the court case and Silicon Knights had to pay \$4.45 million.

As a result of the staggering financial loss, Silicon Knights has all but disintegrated, although the developer's chief financial officer Mike Mays insists that a core group of employees are still active and busy. Despite this, Silicon Knights founder Denis Dyack is no longer with the company. He's taken himself off and joined a new studio along with a handful of other ex-Silicon Knights employees. The new studio is called Precursor Games, and they've purchased a lot of assets from the now floundering Silicon Knights, including PCs, desks and chairs.

Interestingly, Precursor Games is working on a spiritual successor to Silicon Knights' GameCube survival horror game *Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem*. The new game, *Shadow of the Eternals*, requires \$1.5 million to make, which Precursor is trying to secure via crowd-funding.

It all sounds a little bit incestuous, but Precursor Games CEO Paul Caporicci insists that his studio has no relation to the now largely defunct Silicon Knights.

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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.

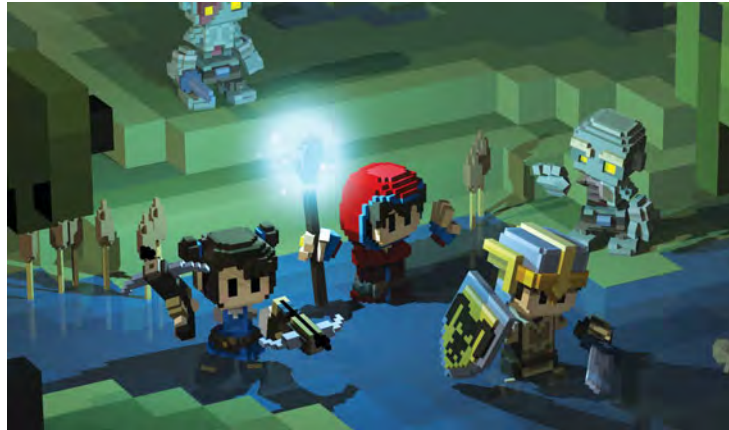
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PUBLISHERS Microsoft Xbox
NUMBER 0800 991 550

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts
E-MAIL zasupport@ea.com
TELEPHONE 0860 EAHELP/324357

Stonehearth set to offer adorable sandbox strategy. Also, blocky Cthulhu!



First-time game developer Radiant Entertainment has successfully Kickstarted *Stonehearth*. The small team (it's just two brothers really) describes the game as "real-time strategy survival", and it's sporting a cute, blocky aesthetic in a grandiose fantasy setting. It's up to you to manage and grow a fledgling settlement, nurturing the settlers within and protecting them from hostile invasion.

Each time you start a new game the landscape is randomly generated, dotting it with AI encounters and new opportunities for creative use of the game's "infinite building possibilities".

You'll decide the path your city will follow, and there's an RPG side to it all as well, with your settlers able to level up over time, improving their capabilities and unlocking entirely new jobs for your citizens. As your town grows in wealth and influence, you may draw the attention of the "Titans" – immense boss enemies who'll raise hell in your city. Moddability is a vastly important facet of the game, and the developers are keen to have the community drive much of the game's post-release content by giving them the tools to easily create everything from enemies to weapons to new scripted adventures.

Tiger Woods PGA Tour skipping a year?

According to anonymous sources close to EA's popular digital golfing franchise, Kotaku is reporting that *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 15* won't be something that sees the light of day. The game, which was originally meant to be outsourced, has allegedly been dropped entirely following EA CEO John Riccitiello's recent departure. Instead, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 16* will be developed in-house over the next two years to take full advantage of the next generation of gaming systems. EA responded to queries on the matter with this:

"We don't comment on speculation about our franchises. We have nothing to announce today about future games on the *Tiger Woods PGA Tour* franchise. *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 14* is now available on PS3 and Xbox 360." Bear in mind that this is merely a rumour, and should be taken with a pinch of salt.

The cat's out the (sanity) bag



Oh Internet – you so crazy. Kotaku reports that publisher Warner Bros. Interactive and developer 5th Cell are being sued over characters used in imagination-fuelled platforming puzzler *Scribblenauts*, and those two characters are Internet cat memes Nyan Cat and Keyboard Cat. Their respective creators – Christopher Orlando Torres and Charles Schmidt – have filed for trademark infringement over the misuse of their Internet felines.

This seems to be happening a bit late into the game, given that Nyan Cat and Keyboard Cat have been appearing in the *Scribblenauts* series for years. Eurogamer received a statement from Torres, in which he states that he and Schmidt have been "disrespected and snubbed each time as nothing more than nuisances for asking for fair compensation for our intellectual property." And so they opted to pursue a lawsuit.

Let's do this all together now: whaaaaaaat?

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NAUGHTY DOG

PlayStation Network

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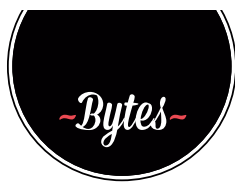
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There is to be a fourth Sims game



Electronic Arts has decreed it necessary that there be more money made off of simulating life by sending virtual people to poop, and thus has commissioned Maxis to construct a fourth game in the brilliantly successful *The Sims* series. Quaintly dubbed *The Sims 4*, it's due out sometime next year on PC and Mac.

"*The Sims* franchise is fueled by the passion and creativity of its millions of fans around the world," reads EA's announcement-bearing press release. "Their continued devotion to the franchise ignites the fire of creativity of the team at The Sims Studio, driving them to continually improve and innovate on one of the world's most successful simulation game that has sold more than 150 million copies worldwide."

And... well, at the time of writing, we've not got much else to tell you. Importantly, however, we've already been assured that the game is a single-player, offline experience, so with any luck there won't be any messy *SimCity*-style, online-only launch issues. There's also the promise of "new and intuitive tools" that'll help players engage with their Sims.

PC	
Remember Me	June
The Sims 3: Island Paradise	June
Batman: Arkham Origins	October
360	
Fuse	May 31st
Grand Theft Auto V	September 17th
Battlefield 4	TBA
PS3	
The Last of Us	June
Madden NFL 25	August 30th
Deadpool	August

"When we put our faith in Metacritic as an impartial, scientific measure of quality, we should probably ask ourselves whether the crowd - the crowd of journalists as well as players - is really wise or just mediocre, incapable of recognizing and rewarding the new and different."

- Warren Spector, speaking with GamesIndustry.biz

Another 1.3 million subscribers exit World of Warcraft



Blizzard's MMO megalith *World of Warcraft* is reporting that, as of March 31st, its subscriber base has dipped by 1.3 million. What this means is that over the past three months, subscriber numbers have dropped 14 percent. Subscriber numbers in the previous financial quarter sat at 9.6 million: which means there are

now around 8.3 million subscribers left in Azeroth. It's still a massive population, but Activision Blizzard actually seems a mite shaken by it.

"Though the majority of our subscriber decline occurred mainly in the East, where we have more subscribers and lower revenue per subscriber, we saw declines in

the West as well," said Activision-Blizzard CEO Bobby Kotick. "While we do believe further declines are likely and we expect to have fewer subscribers at year-end than we do today, *World of Warcraft* remains one of the most successful franchises in the history of entertainment," he continued.

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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 10th 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 with the subject line "June Roxy", and of course your contact details, and you could win a prize.

MAY WINNER



Joshua Heim, page 30

THIS MONTH'S LOOT

Xbox Quad Dock Pro valued at R399 Sponsored by dreamGEAR and Musica.



CAPTION OF THE MONTH



Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and

write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of **Ashes Cricket 2013** for PC, PS3 or 360 from Apex Interactive. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line "June caption".



NAG's lame attempt at humour
What do you mean "what else is pointy like my ears?"

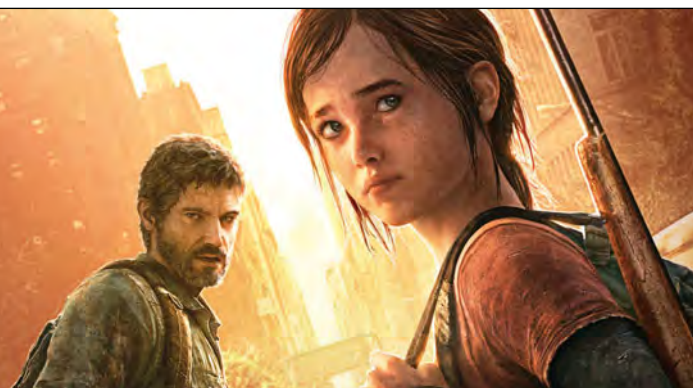


Last months winner
Honey that scale shows your weight.. not your score. - Clayton Maartens

THE LAST OF US



NAUGHTY DOG



EA scores exclusive license to develop and publish Star Wars games for Disney



In October last year, when The Walt Disney Company acquired LucasArts and LucasFilms in a multi-billion dollar deal, there was much speculation about the future of *Star Wars* games. At the time, Disney was reaffirming its commitment to creating family friendly gaming experiences. Furthermore, the House of Mouse's statement that they intended to produce "social and mobile" games based on the *Star Wars* series sent chills down many gamers' spines. A portion of that same statement was glossed over; the part that said they would likely license out development of *Star Wars* titles to other software companies. That's exactly what's happening here.

Electronic Arts has signed "multi-year exclusive license" to develop and publish *Star Wars* games for Disney. While the trendy, knee-jerk Internet reaction at the moment is to shriek in terror at everything EA does, this licensing deal is probably not such a bad thing considering the company's history with the IP, as well as the three development teams they have assigned development jobs to. BioWare, DICE and Visceral Games

will begin working on *Star Wars* games, but don't expect anything to ship before April 2014.

EA will be catering for "a core gaming audience", which is pretty much the exact opposite of what Disney is planning to do with the IP on tablets, mobile devices and social networks.

EA Labels president Frank Gibeau was understandably chuffed with the deal: "Every developer dreams of creating games for the *Star Wars* universe," he said via an official statement. "DICE and Visceral will produce new games, joining the BioWare team which continues to develop for the *Star Wars* franchise. The new experiences we create may borrow from films, but the games will be entirely original with all new stories and gameplay."

Numerous development teams fall under the BioWare label at EA, but Gibeau's statement could shed a bit of light on which BioWare. The fact that he said the chosen BioWare team "continue to develop for the *Star Wars* franchise" seems to indicate that EA has chosen the same team that's been working on games like *The Old Republic* MMO.

RELEASE LIST

Dates subject to change without notice

June week 1

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim Legendary Edition	360 / PC / PS3
Remember Me	360 / PC / PS3
Painkiller: Hell & Damnation	360 / PS3
Arkania: The Complete Tale	PS3

June week 2

The Last of Us	PS3
Animal Crossing: New Leaf	3DS

June week 3

Ashes Cricket 2013	360 / PC / PS3 / Wii U
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June week 4

Deadpool	360 / PS3
The Jak and Daxter Trilogy	Vita
Company of Heroes 2	PC
The Sims 3: Island Paradise	PC

Sony never even considered an "always online" PS4

There's been no shortage of speculation regarding whether or not the next generation of hardware will require a permanent Internet connection. At the recent PlayStation 4 reveal event, Sony didn't exactly provide a straight answer to this burning question. Heavy rumours regarding the likelihood of the next Xbox requiring a permanent Internet connection did little to quell fears about Sony's next console. Luckily, the company's President of Worldwide Studios, Shuhei Yoshida, has laid concerns to rest once and for all.

"Did we consider it? No, we didn't consider it. The main reason being that many countries don't have robust Internet connections. It makes sense for people to have Internet connections to play online games, but for offline games there are many countries that we saw [that] do not really have robust Internet."

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RELEASE DATE / November 5, 2013
PLATFORM / 360 / Next gen / PC / PS3 / Wii U
GENRE / First-person shooter
DEVELOPER / Infinity Ward / Neversoft / Raven Software
PUBLISHER / Activision

G

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Call of Duty: Ghosts

A new chapter for CALL OF DUTY?

"Everyone was expecting us to make *Modern Warfare 4*," says Mark Rubin, executive producer at Infinity Ward. In the back of my mind, I can't help but hear the inevitable "we wish you would!" from those vocal and eternally disenfranchised fans one finds on Internet forums.

"Which would have been the safe thing to do," continues Rubin. "But we're not resting on our laurels. We saw the console transition as the perfect opportunity to start a new chapter for *Call of Duty*. So we're building a new sub-brand, a new engine, with a lot of new ideas and experiences for our players. We can't wait to share them with our community."

This is big news indeed. *Call of Duty* has gotten much noise over the years for refurbishing the "same engine over and over", as some claim, or "reusing assets from previous entries". While a new engine built from scratch is unlikely to dissuade the stalwart naysayers, it'll at least give the franchise a much-needed injection of fresh pixels.

NEW ENGINE

We're not shown much, truth be told. A live demonstration of the new engine, running on "next generation spec machines" (which means a PC roughly the same specifications as the upcoming Xbox 360 successor), and a quick in-game sequence.

The engine demonstration focused entirely on what is possible now thanks to improved hardware. But be warned, graphics-junkies: the next generation of consoles, thanks to diminishing returns on hardware, brings refinement, not evolution. It's unlikely we'll ever see the kind of leap we did going from standard

definition to high definition, from PlayStation 2 to the 360. The *Ghosts* engine demonstration highlights this: everything looks exactly like a *Call of Duty* looks, but better, with smoother edges, higher resolution textures – all that jazz.

To their credit, Infinity Ward stresses that 60 frames per second is non-negotiable. A brave move, since it does limit what one can do visually. To accomplish a marked improvement in visuals without sacrificing that all-important feeling you only get at high frame rates, Infinity Ward incorporated a kind of tessellation technology into *Ghosts'* engine, which they call "Sub D". It literally subdivides the polygons on objects as you get closer to them, creating smooth curves where before there would have been blocky, hard edges. It's impressive in motion; you barely notice the effect as it happens,

"This is big news indeed. *Call of Duty* has gotten much noise over the years for refurbishing the "same engine over and over", as some claim, or "reusing assets from previous entries". While a new engine built from scratch is unlikely to dissuade the stalwart naysayers, it'll at least give the franchise a much-needed injection of fresh pixels."

only the end result. Previously, visual effects like depth of field would be used to cover up low-poly edges on things like gun sights. Now, as iron sight gets engaged, the sight presents smooth curves everywhere they need to be. Because the technology is dynamic and applied only where needed, determined via some hidden system we could only guess at, elements in the background still showed some pop-in as their level-of-detail changed.

There's a new lighting engine that simulates the human eye, adjusting contrast depending on where you're looking and how much light is hitting the camera (so, HDR then), and the engine can handle more particle effects. Pretty standard stuff and it all looks quite nice.

NEW STORY, NEW UNIVERSE, AND A DOG

The brief slice of gameplay we were shown, involving some covert underwater operations, was more impressive. Thousands of fish did fish-like things all around and the bump up in terms of granularity – things in the scene that move and react to the player and scripts – is a far better indication of what their next-gen engine is capable of. We're told that due to a new animation system, players will now be able to slide (on their backs), vault over chest-high walls while running, and lean around corners. Since the gameplay shown only involved swimming forward (and stopping when the person in front of you told you to – this is *Call of Duty* after all), we didn't get to see the new movement system in action.

Things happen; shots fired; much shouting and gunning down enemy scuba divers of unknown nationality.

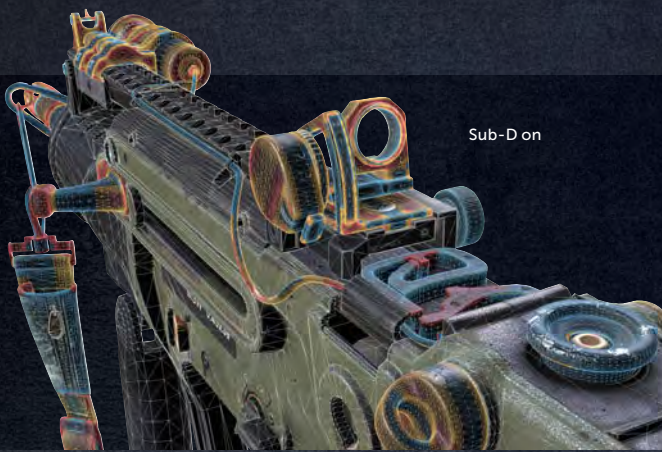
Everything leads up to taking out a giant submarine using a manually-guided torpedo, then the whole sunken lighthouse we're in starts to topple into an underwater chasm. Cut to black.

We sit down with Yale Miller, senior producer on *Ghosts*, and ask a whole lot of questions he's not allowed to answer at all. But we do discover that, unlike previous *Modern Warfare* games, this time you only play one character. "The story starts with a 'mass event' that I can't talk about," teases Miller. "It devastates a large portion of the United States, cripples the government, the economy, and brings the superpower to its knees. There's a new superpower rising up that encroaches in. You play as a character that's grown up in this world, and becomes part of a squad that hopefully... wait, that's as far as I can go."

Ghosts is not set in the *Modern Warfare* universe, but in the "near future", and attempts to flip a few series tropes. "This time, you're not the dominant force," says Miller. "In previous games, you had a lot of tech, large forces backing you up, and you were going after a small group of people. Now, you're a small squad,

"Thousands of fish did fish-like things all around and the bump up in terms of granularity – things in the scene that move and react to the player and scripts – is a far better indication of what their next-gen engine is capable of."





Sub-D on



Sub-D off



facing an overwhelming force. This gave us a lot of new scenario ideas, different dynamics the development team has played with, and that you'll see in the levels."

To bring up the quality of the script, Infinity Ward worked closely with screenwriter Stephen Gaghan, who won an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay in 2000 for the movie *Traffic*. "We're working with Gaghan because we can," beams Miller, "we want to tell the best story we can, *Traffic* was a great, gritty story, so we approached him and had the opportunity – he was excited to do it. Working with the best tends to bring out the best results. His approach not only to writing, but directing, bringing what's on the page to life, it's been awesome. I've never seen a writer so embedded in every level of the development process."

They can't talk about co-operative play or "the third mode". The core gameplay experience will be exactly the same across all systems, though Miller is quick to stress that "there's definitely tech that will not be on current gen, like 'Sub D' but since we've changed the pipeline around, and we build at way above next-gen, cinema quality really, then ratchet it down for the different systems, everything benefits from that."

We tried to confirm which systems *Ghosts* is for while PR wasn't looking, but Miller is well trained. So what about the dog we saw briefly in the opening trailer? "We worked with Seal

Team advisors and real military service dogs, to find out what they do in combat. How they use the dogs, what gear they carry, things like cameras, UAV stuff, ammo... there's all sorts of things they do in the real world. We've worked out how to make the dog a meaningful partner, and a real member of the Ghosts."

We're calling it now, spoiler alert: the dog's going to be awesome, and then die near the end, making us sad. Miller couldn't say more about how the dog plays into the story, or if you can command the perky-looking woof.

MULTIPLAYER

"The only thing I'm talking about for multiplayer is the dynamic maps and character customization," says Miller insistently. Multiplayer maps will now have "events" like earthquakes, or player-triggered sequences that dramatically change the flow of things. There might be something to shoot that creates a permanent pathway, or you can set a trap, closing down a path. "There's different things that we're doing, some are environmental and just happen, other things are player driven." That's pretty vague, but it's all we got. You'll now also be able to customize your character by "unlocking new head, body and clothing options", explains Miller. We ask if you'll be able to pick the gender of your multiplayer character. "We can't talk about that." **NAG**

- Miktar

DISCLOSURE

Activision paid for my flight, two nights in a hotel, and I received a backpack with a Ghosts-branded portable USB power charger, glass thermos and a Destiny T-shirt (XL).



RELEASE DATE / August 2013
 PLATFORM / 360 / PS3 / PC
 GENRE / Third-person shooter
 DEVELOPER / Spark Unlimited
 WEBSITE / www.capcom-europe.com/games/Lost-Planet-3
 PUBLISHER / Capcom



Lost Planet 3

Ice ice baby

True to its namesake, the *Lost Planet* series has always felt a little like it didn't know quite what it was. It knew what it wanted to be – a tech-leading third-person sci-fi shooter in the first romp and a squad-based arcade shooter in the sequel – but both times fell short of

expectations – especially in *Lost Planet 2*. So what do you do when you're lost? You break down, cry, and find a corner to huddle in while your folks drive out to pick you up – and you make damn sure you know where you're going the third time you attempt the same thing.

Despite its many technical flaws, *Lost Planet* always had a pretty neat, if utterly generic, sci-fi setting for the player to explore. The bug-infested surface and caves of E.D.N. III make for a great place to shoot aliens, and it's there where players will once-again return in this prequel to the first game. If you're familiar with the series, a prequel means that E.D.N. III is still a frozen planet (it thawed in the second game), and the NEVEC operations have only just begun. There's no military presence yet and those few engineers,

miners and colonists on the planet aren't equipped to deal with the hostile native species known as the Akrid.

One such colonist is the player character, Jim Peyton, who has come to E.D.N. III to earn a living and support his family back on Earth. Jim is no soldier – he's the space-faring

"While Jim himself is handy with the basic weaponry at his disposal, the Rig is not designed for battle."

equivalent of a truck driver who works wherever he can find a job and always brings his Utility Rig with him. Rigs are the mechs of *Lost Planet*: they're about three storeys tall and are highly capable mining machines. And, while Jim himself is handy with the basic weaponry at his disposal, the Rig is not designed for battle. It comes equipped with a claw arm and drill arm, which can be upgraded throughout the game, but don't expect rocket launchers and miniguns to make an appearance.

As a newcomer to the mining operation, Jim will be put through his paces by his superiors and colleagues in what we've seen to be a surprisingly humane story. You're not Warrior Beard Man: you're just Jim, and the sudden exposure to the harsh climate and dangerous wildlife on E.D.N. III are enough to give anyone cause for



Jim's Rig wasn't built for use in the extreme climate of E.D.N. III, and even with the quick spray-on thermal protection is prone to freezing up during particularly bad storms. When that happens, Jim will have to jump outside to break the ice that's formed on his Rig.



Thermal Energy, or T-Eng as it's more commonly known, is the primary resource mined on E.D.N. III. Jim can use any that he's gathered as currency, trading it for upgraded equipment and new weapons.

PLAY WITH ME

One part of *Lost Planet 3* that might feel more familiar to fans of the series will be its multiplayer component. Gone is the co-op campaign of *LP2*, however, but this new title will include four competitive team games that will bring with them many classic features like high-speed Vital Suits (militarised versions of *LP3*'s Rigs) and the war between NEVEC operatives and the Snow Pirates.

Two of the multiplayer modes have been revealed so far: Scenario Mode and Akrid Survival, both of which we can assure you are exactly what they sound like. Scenario Mode pits NEVEC against the Snow Pirates in a variety of preconfigured defensive or offensive challenges. Akrid Survival is a spin on the now well established horde defence modes found in many games, although this time you'll be in two teams of three as you survive wave after wave of Akrid, finally culminating in a PvP battle between the two factions.

Everything else you'd expect to find in a competitive multiplayer component will be present: players will be able to customise their character's looks and equipment loadout from a selection of unlockable goodies, and with the return of the Vital Suits we can imagine there's going to be plenty of high tech shenanigans for those who enjoyed this aspect of *Lost Planet 2*.



concern. During *Lost Planet 3*'s semi-linear hub-and-spoke campaign, you'll be free to move about the NEVEC base at your own pace, chat to your fellow techies, access side-missions for extra unlocks – mostly weapons and ammo types – and spend some time digging through the crust of the planet and into the deep storyline.

Depending on his current mission, Jim will switch between operating his Rig and going on foot. While on ground level, *LP3* plays out much like the first two games: you spend time exploring caves, shooting Akrid in their big squishy orange bits and engaging in the series' signature blend of arcade third-person shooting. In the Rig, things change quite a bit; these lumbering beasts of machines aren't the sleek militarised vehicles we're used to seeing. Instead, we're treated to an in-cockpit view of Jim's home-away-from-home (complete with family photographs), and forced to trudge about

the surface of E.D.N. III without the aid of rocket propulsion, giant swords or any of that other Japanese Mecha stuff. This change of pace brings with it a feeling of desperation – Jim and the other colonists on the planet have been forced to use what is essentially mining equipment to fight off the Akrid, and some of the bigger creatures make for some truly epic battles that play out like an inter-species boxing match, one with uppercuts, counters, jabs and drilling into those orange bits with mining-grade equipment.

The changes to this series have been numerous over the years, but *Lost Planet* finally looks like its settling down and might've just found its place in this world. We're sure that Capcom's decision to take the development outside of the company has a lot to do with this shift, and we're happy to report that these changes look to be headed in the right direction. **NAG**
- GeometriX

RELEASE DATE / June 2013
 PLATFORM / PS3
 GENRE / Action-adventure / Survival horror
 DEVELOPER / Naughty Dog
 WEBSITE / www.thelastofus.com
 PUBLISHER / Sony Computer Entertainment



The Last of Us

Wait, these aren't magic mushrooms

Damnit, Naughty Dog, are you doing it again? I have to admit that going in to our preview session with *The Last of Us*, I was apprehensive. Surely this studio that practically reinvented the third-person platformer genre twice won't have the ability to apply its expertise to survival horror games. Right? Wrong. So very wrong. After an hour or so with *The Last of Us*, I'm thoroughly intrigued – this feels like it has the potential to be something very special... and very creepy.

There's a lot in *The Last of Us* that'll be familiar to anyone who's picked up a video game in the last decade: it's got zombies, stealth sequences, some simple platform traversal, crafting, and a man with a beard in the lead role. This particular bearded chap is Joel, former black market dealer turned apocalypse survivor in a contemporary United States that has seen millions of people infected by a parasitic fungus. If you've ever seen those Nat Geo shows about insects that do stupid things because micro-fungi started controlling their little bug brains, it's the same idea, except instead of ants that stand on tall blades of grass to be eaten by predators, you've got humans sent into murderous rage while mushrooms sprout from every pore. Different stages of parasitic infestation result in progressively more deformed hosts, although all we've seen so far are the stage one Runners and the next level, blind as bats Clickers. The Clickers are horrific enough, and the thought of what's next down the

evolutionary trail fills us with dread and the acrid nudge of bile at the back of the throat. Seriously, those things are gross.

Our hands-on session saw us take control of Joel as he attempted to navigate the bombed out ruins of Detroit, along with the young Ellie and a character we hadn't heard of before known as Tess. Tess and Joel seem to

have some history, and she's just as capable with a handgun as he is, although the AI is smart enough to maintain weapon silence unless you take the first shot. Tess and Ellie will otherwise stay out of combat but will regularly converse with each other and Joel, hinting at nearby infected or possible ways through the often confined, twisted maze of toppled buildings and desolate streets. How you chose to deal with the many infected along the way is largely up to the player. Joel will find firearms including pistols, revolvers and shotguns throughout the journey, and one or two well-timed shots to the heads of the infected we faced brought them down easily. The issue is that ammunition is scarce: guns are best suited for emergency situations that demand instant death over the stealthier approaches. But there's even more at stake: sound plays a large role in combat and navigation in *The Last of Us*, both from the player's perspective and that of the infected. Cracking off a couple of shotgun shells might bring down any immediate threats, but there's almost always another infected around the corner. The Clickers, in particular,

"...the thought of what's next down the evolutionary trail fills us with dread and the acrid nudge of bile at the back of the throat."



Joel is limited in the number of weapons and items he can lug around at any one time. Choosing which weapons to bring with you into a fight could mean the difference between happily ever after and lying in a pool of your own blood while giant walking mushrooms gnaw at your face.





will flock to the sound of gunfire, homing in on Joel with their chilling echo-location clicks and groans until they find their target or you manage to sneak away.

Where sound comes in on the player's side is two-fold: audio cues are massively important if you want to stay alive, with each infected type generating their own distinctive noises as they prowl the streets and buildings for a quick snack. Joel can also tap into what's called Listen Mode, during which he crouches low and pays special attention to his immediate surroundings. In Listen Mode, grey-scale outlines of nearby infected appear through walls, allowing you to sneak into position for a silent take-down or simply avoid any trouble (which is sometimes the better choice).

Stealth is fine up until a point, but often times Joel will need to clear an area of infected to allow Ellie and Tess to safely pass through. This demands combat, often of the hand-to-hand variety, and it's here where *The Last of Us* borrows liberally from its older sibling *Uncharted*. Joel is a pretty capable fighter, both in the use of his fists as weapons of extreme face-bashing, and with anything else he can find lying around, really. Melee weapons are generally crude and will break after a few uses, but they can mean the quick elimination of enemies as opposed to duking it out with your fists – a preference that often comes down to trying to win fights before you get overrun, rather than feeling like a badass because you crushed someone's skull with a brick. Joel won't last long if he goes up against more than a couple of even the lowly Runners. **NAG**

- GeometriX



CHARACTER BUILDING

As most post-apocalyptic games like to remind us, modern manufacturing processes have ceased to exist, and those survivors who wish to stay as such need to learn to crawl around in the dirt in search of the vital bits and pieces needed to build the tools of their newfound trade. The system used here is vastly simplified compared to other games, but it works well in this action/horror context: Joel can gather base items that are collectively pooled into a number of categories: binding, blades, rags, alcohol, batteries (for the ever-important flashlight) and so on. As you progress you'll unlock new recipes to upgrade your existing weapons or craft new equipment, such as the simple combinations of binding and blades (a shiv for silent take downs), and alcohol and rags (a makeshift med kit).

This is the apocalypse, and you had better get a handle on rummaging around in your inventory while monsters lurk in the corners. That's right – the game won't pause while you're dicking around with the crafting system, so make it quick!

"Joel is a pretty capable fighter, both in the use of his fists as weapons of extreme face-bashing, and with anything else he can find lying around, really."



GRID 2

Back in action



RELEASE DATE / Q2 2013
 PLATFORM / 360 / PC / PS3
 GENRE / Racing
 DEVELOPER / Codemasters
 WEBSITE / www.gridgame.com
 PUBLISHER / Codemasters

When it comes to racing games, there are a few developers and publishers that create experiences that help them to stand out. Codemasters is such a company. Sure, they have had wobbles along the way, but for the most part, their offerings get petrol heads' motors running.

Included in that list was *Race Driver GRID*, first released in 2008. Also known as just plain GRID, it brought gamers a deep and engaging racing experience that netted it a Metacritic average of 87 – a pretty enticing score when considering just how picky people can be when it comes to racing titles. What helped *GRID* become so popular was the fact that it managed to bridge a gap between arcade racing and nuts-and-bolts technicality extremely well, and served this combination up in a

“This game is about having a longer love affair with fewer top notch vehicles, rather than having a virtual garage the size of a large parking garage, containing vehicles that will likely never be driven.”

package that was visually arresting.

And then the franchise – if one could call it that – all but disappeared. That was until last year, when Codemasters announced that they would be returning to the world of *GRID* with *GRID 2*.

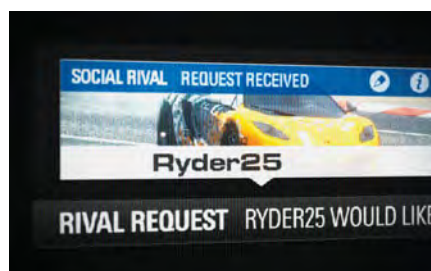
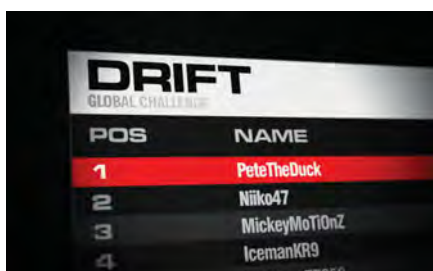
“*GRID*'s back and we're going to make street, track and road racing exciting again,” Clive Moody, Executive Producer, stated in an early press release. “The core design philosophy for *GRID*

2 is that we treat the race as a character, not a consequence of simply putting cars on tracks. Everything that goes into the game impacts on that second-to-second, in the moment, blockbuster drama – the feel and personality of the race.

“We're pushing boundaries once again with what can be accomplished in the genre via new tools, technology and innovations.



The LiveRoutes system will change tracks on the fly in *GRID 2*. Players racing through cities will never know what to expect next, as track layouts become dynamic rather than set in stone.



In single-player, split-screen and online, the next-generation of the EGO Game Technology Platform will power graphics, AI, handling and damage advancements that will immerse players in the racing experience like never before. Like its predecessor, *GRID 2* will put the sheer thrill and adrenaline rush of the race at the heart of the experience. It's what we call Total Race Day Immersion."

It sounds a lot like hype and PR-lingo, but trying out some hands-on code shows that it's not that far from the truth.

At the heart of *GRID 2* is an extensive career mode that is based on a new concept – a racing league that encompasses several different disciplines and spans the globe. This gives the game license to set races virtually anywhere, and in almost any kind of environment. Players will be able to take to street tracks, licensed race circuits and mountain tracks in a variety of carefully selected cars that span four decades.

Further, the game promises something of a unique multiplayer experience, with an original progression system, as well as deep customisation options and more.

Playing the code showed that the promises that have been made for the game, particularly in the statements made by Clive Moody, should hold true. First impressions are created by a slick interface and stylish introduction videos, leading into what has become the obligatory "local kid makes good" race that gets the player's character noticed by the powers that be.

Codemasters love their tracks as much



Unlike many racing titles out there, *GRID 2* will not feature a cockpit view. It seems that Codemasters are keen on us seeing the vehicles as well as driving them.

as their cars; this is evident in the lush, long videos that precede each race, showing off the tracks in painstaking detail. They may take things a little far, with the longer than usual videos and frankly over-dramatic music, but whether this will be the case in the final product remains to be seen.

The vehicle roster is also being kept rather quiet. One of the criticisms aimed at the original *GRID* was that it didn't feature a massive stable of cars for players to choose from. This may be the case again, but we're anticipating that, like the original, this game is about having a longer love affair with fewer top notch vehicles, rather than having a virtual garage the size of a large parking garage, containing vehicles that will likely never be driven.

While preview code is never the best way to judge an upcoming title – the best proof is always in the final pudding, after all, and not in sneaking tastes while the recipe is still being prepared – the *GRID 2* code manages to demonstrate the overhauled EGO engine's capabilities rather nicely. Aside from great graphics and audio, the game already possesses a damage model that is nothing short of dramatic, accompanied with physics

that not only feel rather real, but also allow for some spectacular smash ups.

It all adds up to a potentially impressive package. There were a few niggles that may obviously change before the final release – like the fact that difficulty levels are not quite as adjustable as they are in other driving games. As things stand, the player can really only tweak whether damage is purely visual, or has an actual impact on performance. In addition, they can set an overall difficulty level. Codemasters should really look at a few more tweak options there, particularly if they still want to bridge the gap between arcade and simulation.

It's being released during a slow period in the game industry schedule, but it certainly doesn't need to be; as things stand, *GRID 2* looks like it will be a driving game that can challenge well established franchises for dominance. Great graphics, excellent sound, decent controls and an overall feel that delivers pulse-pounding racing action are already on display in the preview code, so our hopes are quite high that this long awaited sequel will help establish the *GRID* franchise as a firm fan favourite. **NAG**

- Shryke

Soul Sacrifice

Would you sacrifice your wallet to save the Vita?

There's no denying that *Soul Sacrifice* looks unique. Right from the start, you're presented with a dark fantasy setting that would have easily found a home on the pages of *Heavy Metal* magazine. You play as a caged sorcerer, awaiting death at the hands of a strange necromancer. Your imprisonment acts as a clever pre-menu fiddly bit, letting you crawl around first-person in your cage and slap cockroaches by tapping the screen.

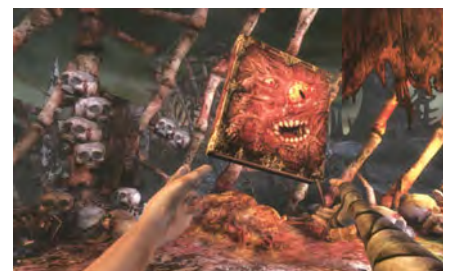
Through the demise of a fellow prisoner, you gain access to a Necronomicon-style book named Librom, who's more than happy to chat away about odd things. The voice acting isn't horrible, but Peter Dinklage would have been a better fit for the book's character. By accessing Librom's pages, you relive key battles in the life story of a powerful

mage, learning spells as you go. These battles, punctuated by narrative that splashes, slides and congeals on to the pages as it's told, are the meat of the game.

"By accessing Librom's pages, you relive key battles in the life story of a powerful mage, learning spells as you go."

Played out in third person, battles take place in a small-ish arena usually populated with a few basic monsters (fodder, really) and then a main goal in the form of a boss creature. The boss won't activate until you approach, giving you time to kill and decide to sacrifice or save the fodder. Depending on your choice, you change the alignment of your right arm towards Dark or Divine, which influences how much health or magic you have to work with. You can balance between both, but at the cost of more powerful abilities that require a maxed out alignment. You can reset your alignment, at the cost of some

Just like *Monster Hunter*, bosses have "weak points" you can break for additional rewards.



The concept comes from Keiji Inafune, best known for co-designing *Mega Man*/*Rockman*.



"Lacrima", which are literal tears you wipe from Librom's eye which peers out from the book's cover. By killing boss monsters, you're rewarded with specific spells. How well you do in battle determines the quality and quantity of spells you get. By fusing together spells, you create new types or upgrade existing ones.

If your partner falls in battle, dumb AI when playing solo or human if you're playing online/networked, you can save them to revive them or sacrifice them to deal direct damage to the boss. They don't get a say in the matter. When dead, you move around intangibly and are able to buff teammates or debuff the boss by tapping and holding on them. Learning the elemental weaknesses of bosses and equipping spells accordingly is vital to success. It's a smaller game in scope than it looks, meant to be regarded more as a quick battle-and-grind-for-loot game. In that respect, it works, thanks to the combat being solid and amusing (friendly fire is always on). Progress in the demo carries over into the retail game. **NAG**

- Miktar



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RELEASE DATE / Q2 2013
 PLATFORM / 360 / PC / PS3
 GENRE / First-person shooter / tower defence
 DEVELOPER / Coffee Stain Studios
 WEBSITE / www.coffeestainstudios.com
 PUBLISHER / Coffee Stain Studios

Sanctum 2

The best defence is a steaming ball of plasma. To the face.

The original *Sanctum* was an unexpected treat. Its first-person shooter take on the tower defence genre delivered a slice of tasty indie goodness, generously lathered with buckets of inventive creativity and high-quality polish. This sequel aims to build on everything that made the original such a fun distraction by cramming it full of as much more awesome stuff as possible. And that, kids, is how you pretty much guarantee automatic success.

The base of *Sanctum* is familiar tower defence gameplay. Your playtime is divided into waves, and at the start of each wave a number of enemies begin streaming in from predefined entry

points on each level. To stop them, you build platforms to funnel enemies through mazes of your design, and strategically place towers atop specific platforms so that they cause maximum

"...juggling between your own damage-dealing capabilities and that of your towers gives *Sanctum 2* loads of chaotic charm..."

possible damage to enemies that pass it. Each tower has a different purpose, and each one can be upgraded. One tower fires arcs of lightning that do loads of damage, which makes them perfect for obliterating heavier, tougher enemies – but it's got such a slow rate of fire that it's pretty crappy against smaller, faster, more numerous enemies. Upgrade it and the arcs of lightning will chain to nearby enemies, damaging multiple foes with each shot.

Between each wave, you collect the resources needed to construct platforms and towers, and upgrade the latter. Each wave gets progressively more difficult and its enemy composition differs from the last. The varied, often highly imaginative enemy types each provide a unique challenge, with powerful boss enemies occasionally showing face to ruin your best laid plans. This being a first-person game, you're also capable of dealing your own damage. There are four characters, each with their own weapon (you're also able to choose a secondary weapon) and specialty. At the end of each stage you're awarded experience points that go towards levelling up, and when this happens you'll unlock new weapons, perks and towers with which to equip



Sanctum 2 will already be available by the time you read this, with an attached price tag of \$14.99. While we didn't have enough time with the final build for a full review before the magazine was sent to the printers, we'll likely have a proper review of it in the July issue. In the meantime, know that if you liked *Sanctum*, chances are you'll enjoy its sequel.

characters. Perks modify your damage output and abilities: one provides the capability to double-jump, for example, while another makes every third weapon shot deal 100% bonus weapon damage. Often, if an enemy manages to evade your towers and exit your maze, you'll have to frantically chase them down yourself to kill them before they reach and proceed to damage the Core you're trying to protect. This juggling between your own damage-dealing capabilities and that of your towers gives *Sanctum 2* loads of chaotic charm. There's also four-player cooperative play to add to the chaos, and some of the maps are clearly designed for more than one player.

So what's different then? It's altered a few of *Sanctum's* tricks (like rather than choosing a weapon to use at the start of a level, you now choose a character) and added in a few new ones. Coffee Stain Studios has attempted to tack on a motivating story (told through a sort of in-game comic) to flesh out the experience, but based on what we've seen it'll be quite flimsy. Really though, it's basically *Sanctum* revisited – and that'll mean something different for everyone depending on whether or not they liked the first game. **NAG**

- Barksin





Call of Juarez: Gunslinger

A pair of six-shooters beats a pair of... anything.

After a brief (and unfortunately completely misguided) excursion into the modern era with *Call of Juarez: The Cartel*, Polish developer Techland is returning the *Call of Juarez* series to its roots, dragging it kicking and screaming behind a horse straight back into the Wild West where this series was born. It's a good thing too, because what originally set this series apart was its Old West setting and all the unique flavour said setting added to its otherwise fairly standard first-person shooter trappings. With no sign of the brothers McCall from previous titles in the series (although we'd not be surprised if they somehow squeeze in a cameo), *Call of Juarez: Gunslinger* casts players as Silas Greaves: evidently a semi-legendary bounty hunter turned eager storyteller.

The game's most interesting hook is in the way its narrative unfolds: as a first-hand bar-room retelling of Silas' previous exploits, narrated to anyone willing to

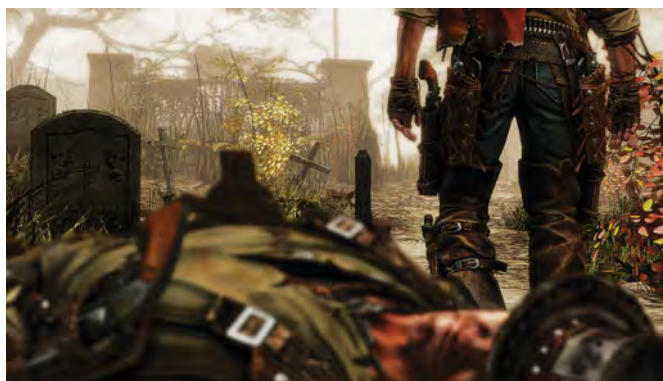
listen. As Silas shares his altered version of history's events (starring some of the Wild West's most revered personalities, like Billy the Kid, The Dalton Gang, Butch Cassidy and other such notable outlaws) with the patrons of an in-game saloon,

"...there's an addictive, compelling quality to its frenetic action..."

you'll be simultaneously playing through levels set in Silas' memory. It makes for an intriguingly effective dynamic at times, as details are added and removed on-the-fly to match the tale's fluidity. Silas will often point out details that'll affect the nature of situations; he may point out that the weather was shitty, for example, and things will adapt from being bright and sunny to appropriately gloomy. Similarly, new paths through the level will suddenly reveal themselves to match Silas' adaptive narration, or the game will rewind events if, say, Silas botches any of the story's finer details. It may sound a touch confusing, but it works in context.



The scoring system is put to more stringent use in Arcade Mode – an alternative to the Story Mode in which you're aiming for the highest possible scores in level segments designed for quick, chaotic sessions of frantic, combo-building action.



RELEASE DATE / Q2 year
PLATFORM / 360 / PC / PS3
GENRE / First-person shooter
DEVELOPER / Techland
WEBSITE / callofjuarez.ubi.com
PUBLISHER / Ubisoft



Beyond that, the game is a fairly standard arcade shooter, replete with combo mechanics that see you stringing together impressive kills to increase your score multiplier. Earning higher scores means you'll unlock skill points faster. Those points can then be pumped into three skill trees – one which handles close-quarter, shotgun-style combat, another for long-distance killing, and a third which will help turn you into an accomplished dual-wielding pistolero. As you skirmish with foes you'll also gradually activate two extra abilities: Concentration Mode and Sense of Death. The former slows time to a crawl and highlights enemies, letting you pick your shots and quickly take down groups of foes, while the latter lets you dodge left or right at the last second to evade any bullet that would otherwise spell certain death for you. The duelling system from previous *CoJ* games returns as well, with you focusing on your enemy, positioning your hand to increase drawing speed, and then quickly drawing your pistol when the time is right to end them before they end you.

Although the preview code we were provided ended too quickly for me to be completely sure whether or not *Gunslinger's* mechanics will eventually grow stale, there's an addictive, compelling quality to its frenetic action that's got me keen to spend more time with the final build. We'll know soon enough if the rest of the game manages to maintain that momentum. **NAG**

- Barkskin

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT
DATE: February 31, 1949

TO: DIRECTOR, FBI
FROM: SAC, SAN ANTONIO
SUBJECT: PROTECTION OF VITAL INSTALLATIONS
SARSU FILES # 65-30300

Handwritten notes: "asafael", "2020", "8/31/77", and initials.

No matter how hard we tried, we couldn't get anyone at 2K to confess to the presence of psychic powers or jetpacks in Declassified. There was, however, a lot of smirking, hand-waving and promises of "all will be revealed", so take that as you will.

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RELEASE DATE / August 2013
PLATFORM / 360 / PC / PS3
GENRE / Third-person tactical shooter
DEVELOPER / 2K Marin
WEBSITE / www.erasethetruth.com
PUBLISHER / 2K Games

THEY CAME FROM OUTER SPACE!

— The Bureau: XCOM Declassified —

2K's XCOM shooter is back and is looking better than ever before. Much has changed since its first reveal in 2011, so we hopped on a plane to give the The Bureau a whirl and let you know all about it.

TO: DIRECTOR, FBI
FROM: SAC, SAN ANTONIO
SUBJECT: PROTECTION OF VITAL INSTALLATIONS
BUREAU FILE # 65-50300

It's the year 1962. The Swinging '60s are underway and hippies in tie-dyed clothes sing about making love instead of war. The world is trying to get on with life while names like John F. Kennedy, Fidel Castro and Nikita Khrushchev are forever etched in the history books.

The Cold War enters its third phase following the Cuban Missile Crisis, and anyone with a brain not rotted by hallucinogens knows that there are serious threats that need to be dealt with. And so The Bureau is formed – a US government-sanctioned intelligence agency that is charged with the task of keeping an eye on any perceived threats against the United States. Only, when special agent William Carter bears witness to the beginning of the invasion by forces of an origin much more distant than across the pond, the organisation is forced to quickly remodel itself against a new antagonist.

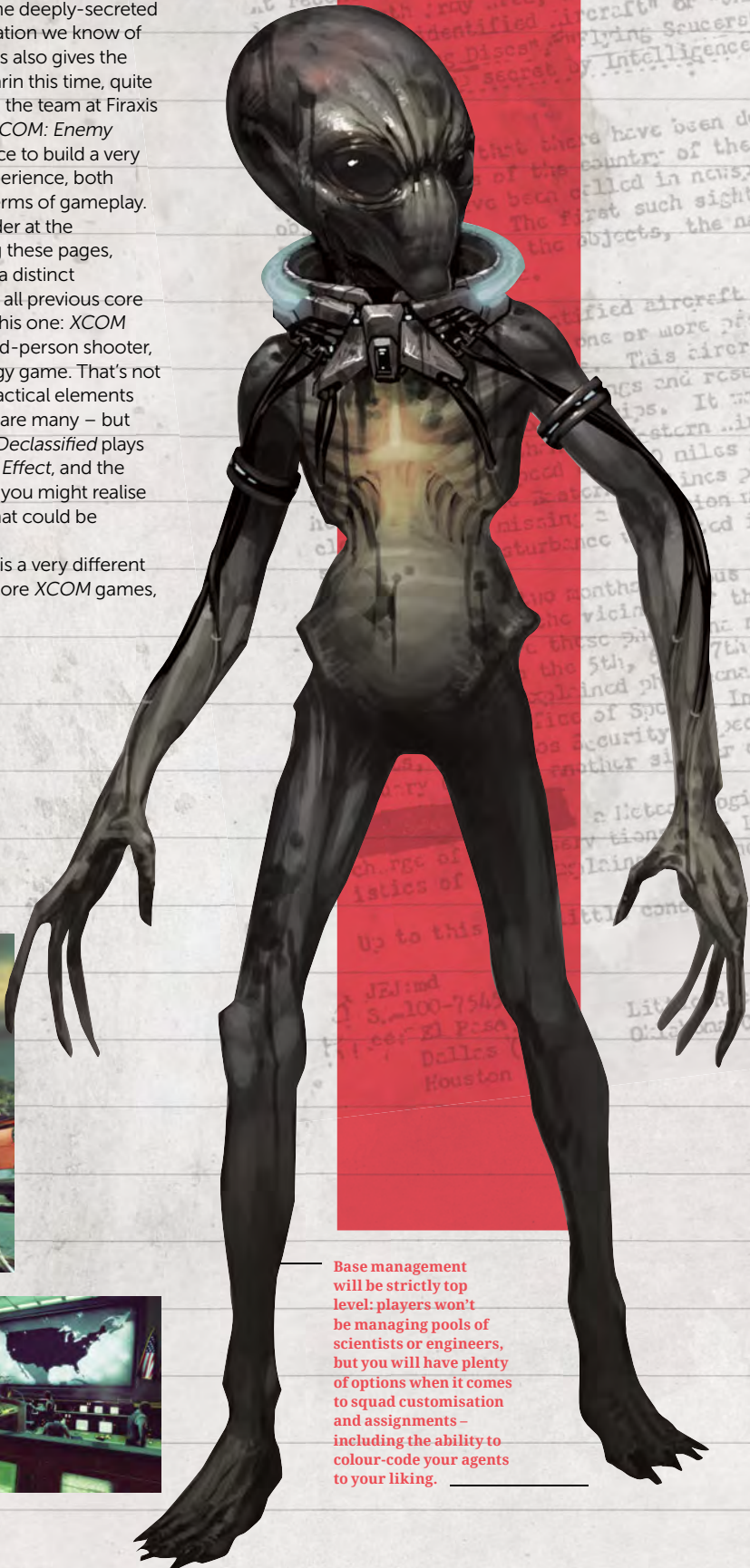
"I don't even have to guess – I know there was an organisation like The Bureau back then, if not dozens of them all over the place," says Nico Behari, senior producer on *The Bureau: XCOM Declassified*. While the *XCOM* series has always projected itself forwards in time – to a period during which mankind has come

to grips with the alien invasion and is making massive financial strides to counter this force – *Declassified* instead looks back to the moment it all began. This brings with it a few challenges and opportunities: players will get a chance to discover the origin story of the invasion – they'll be there as Carter and his agents see the first Outsider step foot on Earth's soil, and they'll take part in the deeply-secreted birth of the organisation we know of today as XCOM. This also gives the developers – 2K Marin this time, quite a different bunch to the team at Firaxis who put together *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* – a chance to build a very different XCOM experience, both stylistically and in terms of gameplay.

If you take a gander at the screenshots dotting these pages, you should pick up a distinct difference between all previous core XCOM games and this one: *XCOM Declassified* is a third-person shooter, not a tactical strategy game. That's not to say there aren't tactical elements here – in fact there are many – but rather, and bluntly, *Declassified* plays quite a lot like *Mass Effect*, and the astute ones among you might realise that this is a thing that could be absolutely fine.

Yes, *Declassified* is a very different beast to the other core XCOM games,

"This also gives the developers a chance to build a very different XCOM experience, both stylistically and in terms of gameplay."



Base management will be strictly top level: players won't be managing pools of scientists or engineers, but you will have plenty of options when it comes to squad customisation and assignments – including the ability to colour-code your agents to your liking.

January 31, 1949
DATE:

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LEFT FOR DEAD

One feature of the *XCOM* series that really forced players to move with deep tactical concern was the idea of permanent death, and *Declassified* will bring with it its own form of this concept. When one of your agents goes down to enemy fire, you'll have the opportunity to revive them before they bleed out. Of course, if they do run out of that useful red stuff, they'll die, and with them all the hard work and experience points you've invested in their career. Carter can also go down, and when he does you'll need to order your remaining agents to get him up as soon as possible. For those players who are happy on the gentler levels of difficulty, permadeath isn't a one-way ticket to failure: during missions you'll find resupply stations that top up your ammo and replenish any lost health, and it's at these stations where you can instantly swap in reserves or recruit new agents (starting at level 1) and change up your equipment selection. As it currently stands, the hardest difficulty level won't allow for these convenient changes in the middle of a mission.

but it borrows much that will make you feel a tingling sense of familiarity. Perhaps the most significant change from an overall "game" point of view is that you'll play as a single character – agent William Carter – which brings the opportunity to tell a story driven by more than just randomly assigned missions that sort-of chain together to form something cohesive. Every mission in *Declassified* is designed, right down to enemy positioning, and deliberately plotted along a narrative storyline, but you'll still have control over a number of factors like managing your squad's roster and equipment, as well as choosing missions from minor operations (optional side missions), dispatch missions (those which your inactive agents can be sent to handle without your supervision) and major operations, which form the bulk of the storyline.

Once you leave your base and head out into the field, it becomes clear that tactically, *Declassified* plays out very much like *Enemy Unknown*. You'll only be able to bring two other agents into missions with Carter (who you directly control at all times), and you can order those agents to perform

tasks including repositioning to cover, flanking opponents, marking enemy targets and using a number of skills and abilities tied to their class. Again we see a familiar feature: agents are divided into four classes: Commando, Recon, Support and Engineer. These classes, which are chosen at the agent recruitment stage instead of being randomly assigned, provide access to a skill tree that unlocks new active and passive abilities. Additionally, agents can be equipped with powerful salvaged alien technology in the form of backpacks, equipment and weapons, all of which collectively allow the player to create unique, highly customisable squads to deal with new threats as they appear.

During missions, players will generally move through a linear set of objectives, fighting a variety of both familiar and new Outsiders including Sectoids and Mutons, all of which have their own attacks, specialties and AI agendas. It's how you move through those objectives that determines whether you come back in a body bag or not: *Declassified* isn't your typical cover-shooter. Players will need to make use of Carter's abilities and those of his agents: leap-



frogging from cover to cover in the attempt to flank enemies or take the high ground. It's here where 2K Marin got rather clever: instead of relying on dice rolls to determine if the agents successfully land their shots (that'll be up to you and your steady hands), bonuses and penalties gained through positioning instead affect your damage output. Hard flanking means you can destroy your enemies within seconds, with whack-a-mole cover-shooting actually being the least effective way to engage them. To aid in this approach, you'll have access to a number of abilities, such as the scatter grenade which flushes out enemies from cover, a range-deployable proximity mine, the taunt ability which might lure out any weak-willed Outsiders, and a deployable turret which will help you to control your spaces a little easier. Carter himself has access to powerful alien technology through his wrist cuff, including the ability to levitate enemies out of cover. Counter to that, enemy Tech Commanders are powerful foes who possess similar abilities to those of Carter and his agents, and might be shielded from damage, forcing you to get sneaky and use ability combos to deliver the most damage.

All of these combat features would spiral into chaos if not for Battle Focus – a tactical mode which slows down

time to a crawl (it's not paused) while you make your decisions and plot out a queue of orders for your agents to follow. Pop out of Battle Focus and their orders will be executed, allowing Carter to fall in line with those orders to create a smooth, sweeping tactical advance or retreat. You'll also have the ability to break from direct vision to survey the nearby battlefield, although you won't know the positions of enemies until your agents have actually laid eyes on them. Lastly, for those who prefer to make quick, straightforward decisions, you'll be able to give one-button orders "advance to cover" or "retreat back to my position".

For a game that had been all-but cancelled in the public eye, *Declassified* now looks more promising than ever. It's not the turn-based, hardcore tactical strategy game of *Enemy Unknown*, but it's certainly deeper than most shooters out there. It walks a fine line, and from what we've experienced so far, it looks like it's actually quite comfortable doing so. *The Bureau: XCOM Declassified* might be just the thing for those hardened fans looking for a quick, action-oriented experience, or for those shooter veterans who have been lusty for something with a good bit of tactical depth.

- **GeometriX**

Minor operations are entirely optional, but they present the player with the chance to switch off from the main story and just shoot some aliens. As well as earning XP, you might also find otherwise unattainable alien schematics and intel while on these operations.



INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

The Outsiders, or Zudari as they're formally known, are a slaver species that moves from galaxy to galaxy, plundering and pillaging entire planets of their mineral and living resources, building an ever-expanding force that combines some of the most exotic technologies in the universe. Now, strange, massive towers of extra-terrestrial origin are appearing throughout the country, and it's up to The Bureau to investigate.

As a precursor to their attack, the Outsiders launched an as-yet unidentified substance that rendered much of the planet's population inert and incapable of retaliation. Those infected by this attack are called Sleepwalkers – zombie-like humans who roam the lands in a stupor and are incapable of human interaction or any form of combat. Some of these Sleepwalkers are in fact sleeper agents for the Outsiders, however, and during the campaign the player will have to face a number of difficult decisions that could free or damn these poor creatures.

INTERVIEW

with **Nico Behari**, senior producer at 2K Games

NAG: Quite a bit has changed from your reveal of the game in 2011 and now. What can you tell us about the shift from first- to third-person perspective?

Nico Behari: If you look at the presentation from 2011 the game has you in first-person view, but when you go into combat, the camera did pull back into a third-person perspective. There was Tac Mode, which is a less elegant, less refined version of Battle Focus. Shortly after 2011, the designers were constantly tinkering with "how do we communicate very clearly to the player what their spatial opportunities were; how can we alert them when they're in danger or in cover?" The game sort of spoke to us and said third-person was the proper perspective for this. So we removed the first-person and went right to third-person, but it wasn't a sweeping gesture, it was just a natural progression of game development. I've been doing this for a long time, and what's interesting is that every game goes through these iterations and some things rise to the top; there's always something we can point to and say "we need to make more of this and do more of that" and the third-person

perspective really sort-of sung in our game.

NAG: You've also gone and moved the game's setting to the '60s; what brought about that change?

Nico: The footage from 2011 has a softer colour palette – a kind of a Norman Rockwell colour scheme. Also, the thing that nobody really picks up is that there was a military presence, which you will not see in our game very early on. There was this feeling as you were navigating through the 2011 presentation that there was an occupation of military forces, but now we've removed that, where William Carter and his agents are the first line of defence. Also, the 60s which has a darker, grittier feel; there's a tone of the pressures between the Soviet Union and North America.

NAG: Could you tell us a bit about Carter – his history and how he came to join The Bureau?

Nico: Carter has been part of a CIA type agency, but he's also been battling his own demons and went through a bout of alcohol abuse and has climbed the rungs of the



*"It's how you move through those objectives that determines whether you come back in a body bag or not: **Declassified** isn't your typical cover-shooter."*



agency. So, Falk, who you saw earlier [in the demo], has command of the agency and has always ear-marked Carter as the go-to guy who has a lot of promise, and places Carter as Guy Number One as the Bureau transitions from this monitor of terrestrial threat to monitor of extra-terrestrial threat.

I say this often and to tell a really good story you need good conflict, and we've got obvious conflict of the alien invasion of North America, but we've also got this internal conflict of Carter that's going to be this strong driving force of the story.

NAG: We were pleasantly surprised to find during the playthrough that there were some interactive conversations. How important will dialogue be from a gameplay point of view?

Nico: You'll be able to influence the narrative, but we do have a story arc that we want



"Pop out of Battle Focus and their orders will be executed, allowing Carter to fall in line with those orders to create a smooth, sweeping tactical advance or retreat."



ALL YOUR BASE ARE BELONG TO US

Declassified might come across as more of an action game than its predecessors, but that won't prevent you from taking your time to explore the retro science-fiction world in which William Carter finds himself. Back at the base you're free to walk around, chat to your fellow agents and scientists and spend some time fine-tuning your squads before sending them out on operations. Those scientists will be only too happy to analyse any alien schematics or intel you might find out in the field, and it won't be long before The Bureau is producing its own futuristic weaponry based on the very technologies the Outsiders have brought to Earth.

You'll also be able to have conversations with some people you meet out in the field. These take the form of interactive dialogue trees in which you can probe for more information and make decisions that will have lasting repercussions further down the narrative chain.

you to follow; we do have a story to tell and while we want there to be a sense of player autonomy of what happens in the game, there is a story that you will follow. But relating to other characters in the environment and immersing yourself in this experience is something that's required if you really want someone to invest in what you're telling them, which is why we have a hustling and bustling base with people with whom you can interact.

NAG: We gather that with *The Bureau* you're attempting to strike a bigger target audience than just the run-and-gun fans or the hardened *XCOM* fans; where do you stand in the elusive hunt for a "mass market" game?

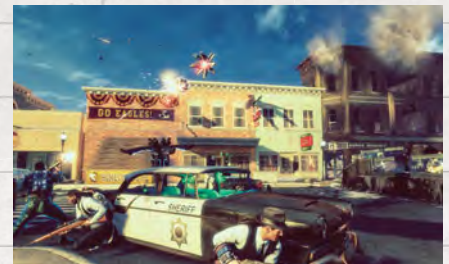
Nico: First and foremost, we're trying to make an *XCOM* game that we as fans would want. We're not divorced from being fans ourselves, so we look at what are the core pillars required to make an *XCOM* game, like the tools and putting together your team. You can look at *Enemy Unknown* and you can pull some pretty strong comparisons in terms of the game requirements when you engage the enemy, like the use of cover or flanking positions and being smart – not rushing in. That's stuff that we've brought over here and you'll see them as you play through the game. And when you switch to a third-person perspective there's more of a familiarity – people understand what cover shooters are – not that our game is a cover shooter – but that's what gets you in the door. That's the base mechanic – you being able to take cover or otherwise you're going to die. But on top of that we layer *Battle Focus* and this progression path, and that becomes a pretty rich experience that we

hope *XCOM* fans will appreciate.

Ideally we'd love it if everyone showed up in droves, but we're not making a game that's the most accessible game ever, right? This is not a run-and-gun shooter; you can't auto-pilot your way through the game. It's probably not for everyone – we hope it's for everyone – but we know it's certainly for *XCOM* fans.

NAG: We'd say the one thing that *XCOM* fans want is the opportunity for masochism – to challenge themselves. What can you tell me about the three difficulty levels you have in *The Bureau*? Will they scale in more than just hit points, and what's the biggest challenge you can throw at your players?

Nico: Starting with the biggest challenges, and what the goal is that you constantly want to be pressing down on the player from a gameplay perspective while empowering them to ride that flow – to be in the zone, if you will – to be extremely effective but still extremely challenged. It's a very sweet spot. So to differentiate like we do in hard is one of the key things in medium, for example, you can go to a resupply station if one of your guys kicked the bucket and restock with a new agent. In hard you won't be able to pull out an agent. Also things like your guys might bleed out faster so you can't stretch yourself as deep in the battlefield: or, well, you can, but there's the risk versus reward. The risk is that I can't get back to my guy in time to revive him [if he goes down], the reward is I get great flanking bonuses and a greater command of the battlefield. So there are some knobs that we can turn that are above just "I do less damage; I take more damage" which is just not very interesting. **NAG**



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Reviews Intro

NAG magazine – a place where the infinite monkey theory comes true every day. Meet your reviewers.

If you were looking for the perfect relationship partner as a gamer what would their top quality be and why?



RedTide

Unfortunately for me they don't make them yet. The science of subservient female robots is still a long way off.



Miktar

They must be able to grok the didactic power of games and their worth as a medium for self-actualization. Or just be able to put up with my shit. That's fine too.



Azimuth

Somebody who understands when I tell him, "Not tonight, honey, I've got a bunch of achievements to farm." Conveniently, I've already found him.



Mikit0707

Really? You really want me to answer a question like that? I thought this was a family magazine?



GeometriX

A penchant for Irish whiskey, good pizza and playing drunken strip *StarCraft*. I feel there is no need for explanation.



Barkskin

They'd have to be able to understand that 3am is a perfectly reasonable time of day to enjoy a good gaming binge. Sleeping is so overrated anyway. Except when I'm tired after the whole 3am thing, obviously.

Mini reviews

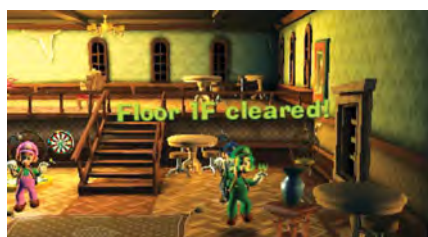
Kinda like regular reviews, only bite-sized and with less of those pesky words.

LUIGI'S MANSION 2: DARK MOON

Even though Luigi can jump higher than Mario (that's canonical, baby!), he prefers to just stay at home and chillax, watching some television. According to the intro cut scene, Luigi lives alone, in what appears to be a rather nice suburban home. What a playa.

Then Professor E. Gadd appears on the TV, the creepiest little young/old man in the universe, and sucks Luigi back into a life of ghost-busting, puzzle-solving and treasure hunting. Unlike the first game which only had one mansion, *Dark Moon* has five, each designed around a specific theme. Mansions are split up into multiple mission-based levels, and some are fiendishly tricky. Even though they're short, the lack of checkpoints can feel frustrating.

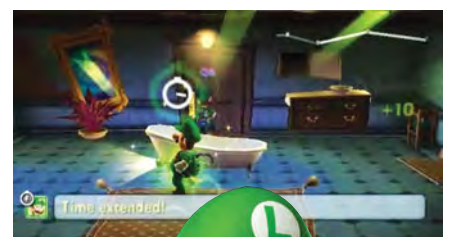
There are new gadgets to find, plenty of cunning puzzles to figure out, and the entertaining "fishing"-like ghost-reeling mechanic has been refined and improved. Ghosts may work together, some have a few tricks to foil the Poltergust 5000's suction like sunglasses that need to be removed before you can blind



them with the flashlight, and some ghosts use the environment against you as they drag you around.

There's never been a game quite like *Luigi's Mansion*, with a fresh blend of adventure and action, until now. *Dark Moon* takes the idea from the original, expands upon it, and packages it up nicely. This one's a keeper.

90



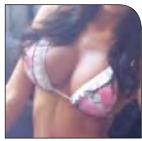
“I don't know what the hell is going on ever.”

- Michael



Ramjet

Being a good winner as well as a good loser. I suck at some games, and don't like having my nose rubbed in my defeats.



SAVAGE

Boobs.



ShockG

She would need to understand that it is no longer the '80s and button mashing's not how games work these days. Also, do not siphon my lives while we play Contra!

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

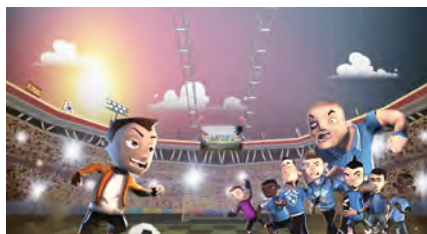
Exposure for South African indie developers...

Fuzzy Logic

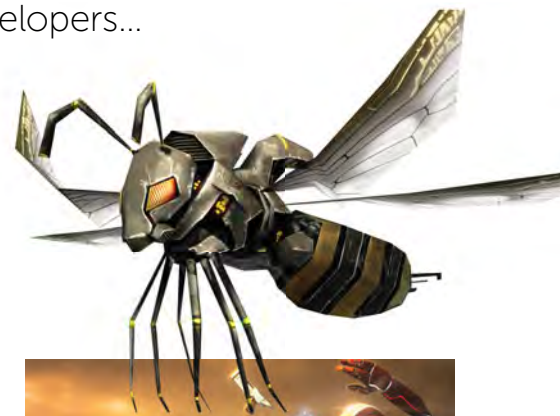
WWW.FUZZY-LOGIC.COM

You'd be forgiven for thinking that Cape Town and Jo'burg are the only two places in the country that are home to our local game development industry, but hidden away in the picturesque town of George lies Fuzzy Logic, which you may remember from *rAge* last year if you visited our little show.

Formed in 2011 by Jason Reid and Brad Hogan, Fuzzy Logic combines top international and local talent in one neat package that currently focuses on mobile games. Jason in particular brings with him an interesting history, having worked at Black Rock Studios on the arcade racer *Split/Second* (which we rather enjoyed) before the whole team was shut down by its publisher Disney. Tired of working with large, clunky teams on seemingly endless projects, Jason and the rest of the Fuzzy team has been tackling the mobile market, with a particular emphasis on augmented reality (AR) games, including their upcoming *Birthday Card AR*.
“Five years ago I would have thought it



insane to ever want to move from console to mobile, but things change so quickly,” said Reid, who tells us that, while he does see a future in which he returns to console/PC development, for now mobile is a strong bet for both Fuzzy and the rest of the local studios.
In his eyes, there's a wealth of talent in this



country and it's obvious that we're growing our game development resources into something formidable. All it will take is for a few local studios to really kick off, sparking a knock-on effect and hopefully causing a few of the big players (those companies with all of that rather important stuff we call money) sit up and take notice.



PLATFORMS
360 / PS3 / Wii U

REVIEWED ON
360

GENRE
Fighting

AGE RESTRICTION
16

MULTIPLAYER
Local
2 players
Online
2 players

DEVELOPER
NetherRealm Studios

WEBSITE
www.injustice.com

PUBLISHER
Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment

DISTRIBUTOR
SKG

YOU BET YOUR LIFE

Injustice's big claim to novelty mechanic fame is the Clash. Usable once per match, per character, Clash counters combos and forces each player to secretly "bet" a certain amount of super meter energy. The winner can gain health back or blow the opponent away with extra damage. Not as easily abused as it sounds, a series of mind games arise over how to use meter power.



While each match is only one round, both players have two health bars. When a health bar depletes, there is a short intermission – much like *Vampire Saviour* (1997).

Reviewed

Injustice: Gods Among Us

I'll make you a Superman

It feels as if the air should be cleared: NetherRealm Studios' *Injustice: Gods Among Us* is not *Mortal Kombat* with an exclusive cast of DC Comics characters. Ed Boon's house of pain turned heads by resurrecting one of the seminal brawling video game series from the death of mediocrity. The question of whether NetherRealm was a one-trick pony is settled: they aren't. It's getting a little difficult to approach fighting games at this point in a long video game console generation. The genre's revival has gone a bit overboard in quantity if not quality. But the first truly great DC Comics fighter steps up to make its case.

Everything good from *Mortal Kombat 9* is here. The best single player story campaign in its class, a large default cast of characters and a crazy amount of secondary game modes and content. What you won't find is pushing a button to block, a generic template for basic attack moves, and virtually none of *MK9's* play mechanics. *Injustice* devises a new system borrowing from a variety of genre brothers, along with one major new concept

to call its own. From *Street Fighter* we get the intuitive blocking and fully personalized fighting styles with no two characters sharing the same jab or kick. From *Tekken*, an expanded juggle system with ground-and-wall bounces. From more esoteric games like *BlazBlue*, a personalized character trait system that turns every hero and villain into something of their own game.

Each character possesses one unique "trait" assigned to its own button. Push it and anything can happen – Batman summons explosive orbiting bat drones. Wonder Woman switches between two complete fighting styles. The Joker laughs at pain and shrugs off a blow while stabbing in return with a switchblade. It's a bit confusing at first and the utility of some traits are not immediately obvious. In a fighting game, the strategy of match-ups is life. *Injustice* feels meaty here, in a way that is more clear and accessible than a lot of genre titles.

Combined with fully interactive stages the game feels rich. For the singular player, story mode is non-trivial. *Mortal Kombat* wowed

"The best single player story campaign in its class, a large default cast of characters and a crazy amount of secondary game modes and content."



Each stage has multiple tiers: by hitting a character hard enough in select places, the fight moves to a new location, complete with amusing and detailed transitions. The Arkham Asylum one especially deserves close examination; you might see a few familiar faces there.



TRICKS VS. POWER

Each of the 15 stages sports interactive features such as traps. The super folk are divided into two camps: some activate objects as power attacks, ripping up scenery to throw it. Others use the same object as a tool or evasive manoeuvre. These can be deactivated in multiplayer, but players should give them a shot before dismissing the idea.

everyone merely by showing up with a high production value campaign in the first place. It's an area where most fighting games have suffered a lack of evolution. *MK's* actual writing, well: great at emulating a '90s arcade game. By contrast *Injustice* is genuinely intriguing and would make a serviceable DC Comics tale. The premise is remarkably dark: Superman suffers a horrifying tragedy in both his personal life and for his city. The threat of a godlike hero going off the rails is taken to its logical and brutal conclusion. Not everyone has a happy ending, including some innocents. Batman does indeed show up with prep-time in tow, yet to say more would spoil some genuine surprises and subtle character moments. It's only disappointing that not every character has a turn at being playable, thus preventing the campaign from providing a quick preview of the complete roster.

Rounding out the package are the arcade modes (with character-specific endings) and Star Labs mode, the equivalent of *MK's* Tower of Trials. There are hundreds of clever missions, 10 per character. In an improvement over the challenge tower, regular rewards and unlocks give this mode a bit more meaning. Online play has been improved by at least a marginal degree compared to *MK9*, though it's always hard to predict how the network performance of a title will pan out over time. The great spectator battle rooms return though, along with the remarkably useful 100 person gathering channels.

What's wrong with it? Genre fatigue is unavoidable. Whether or not you need another fighter may depend on the novelty

of DC characters finally starring in a tight game. I won't even try to speak about game balance knowledgeably; the inevitable bug-and-balance patches have already begun as of this writing. For the pro-level player, there are a few rough edges to the presentation - the inability to toggle off some extraneous start-up cut-scenes for super moves and clash combo breaker sequences. While the 24 standard characters make for a good roster, the first four DLC characters on the way make it clear a few big names have been withheld, starting with Lobo.

There's a lot to like here, and going into a new generation other developers of fighting games could (and should) take a hard look at this package. *Mortal Kombat 9* raised many bars. *Injustice* puts in place a firm foundation to keep them there.

NAG

- Miktar



At the end of a generation crammed with fighting games, *Injustice* brings an appropriate feeling of completeness.

PLUS

Stupid amount of content with great campaign / Robust online features / Large, varied roster

MINUS

Presentation could be tighter / Improved netcode but not the best / A few fan favourite characters are DLC

PLATFORMS
360 / PC / PS3
REVIEWED ON
360
GENRE

Third-person shooter
AGE RESTRICTION
16

MULTIPLAYER
Local
2 players
Online
2 players

DEVELOPER
Digital Extremes

WEBSITE
www.startrekgame.com

PUBLISHER
Namco Bandai

DISTRIBUTOR
Megarom

1 Kirk and Spock, twin brothers from different mothers

2 Enemies so thick that they get killed while shooting fish in a barrel...

Reviewed

Star Trek

Klingons on the starboard bow

The world is full of missed opportunities. We can live with them, even if they do make us sad. But when an opportunity shifts from being missed to being wasted, well that's a different story entirely. And it gets worse when that wasted opportunity becomes something that costs a considerable amount of money and should, realistically, be better than what it is.

The video game released to accompany the latest *Star Trek* film is exactly that kind of wasted opportunity. In this day and age, when a developer has the tools, source material and voice actors to create something that could be great, it is inexcusable when they don't.

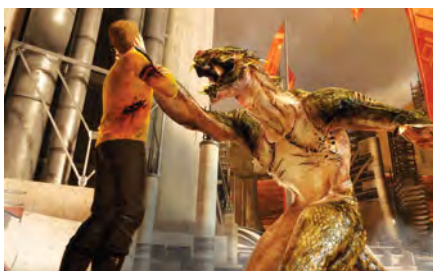
On paper, *Star Trek* (the video game) had everything going for it. Voices were provided by Chris Pine, Zachary Quinto, Simon Pegg... basically, the entire cast of the film. That could have created a wonderful kind of symmetry between the film and the video game. But the dialogue is mostly cheesy and the plot line that the game follows is pretty much puerile. Bad guys have stolen a super weapon, kill them and get it back. That is more or less the depth that the plot goes to, with no use of devices like twists or anything else that might have made it appear like it wasn't penned by an eight-year-old.

One saving grace here – in terms of presentation – is that the graphics and character models are pretty good, initially at least. It looks like Spock, and it sounds like Spock. The same can be said for almost every cast member, although there are a few that look more like caricatures of the actors than others. Still, it is easy to tell them apart, which is pretty cool.

Similarly, the inside of the Enterprise is crammed with detail and general good looks. In this sense, when combined with good character models and accurate voices, things get off to a good start. But the downhill track is not far off...

Star Trek attempts to address the third-person shooter market, with a dynamic that initially feels like a tip of the hat to *Mass Effect*, but turns into *Army of Two* in space before long. The two playable characters, Kirk and Spock, help each other through missions. The game is intended to take advantage of the co-op mechanics that the two characters offer, and is best played that way. But even co-op doesn't do much to save *Star Trek* from the black hole of issues that it is headed towards at warp factor seven, right from the opening credits.

First of all, the combat is repetitive, stilted





“On paper, Star Trek (the video game) had everything going for it. Voices were provided by Chris Pine, Zachary Quinto, Simon Pegg... basically, the entire cast of the film.”



Mitigating the problem by conning a friend into joining you for co-op is pretty pointless, because the enemy AI is just as thick. Taking on scores of enemies that have the mental capacity of a low-IQ brick doesn't help the game at all, and the obligatory AI tasks of boosting the other guy up to a ledge or hammer buttons together to open doors get old really quickly.

To break the pace, the player will have to use their tricorder to scan environments far more often than they should, and will also need to engage in mini-games. But these are only mildly amusing the first time you get to them. Before long they get not only tedious, but frustrating, too.

So, on the whole, it all works out to be less than disappointing. And that's particularly annoying, because the developers really had all the tools they could have asked for in the production of this particular title. Even if they didn't have the voice acting supplied by the movie cast and the thoroughly rich *Star Trek* universe to draw inspiration from, at very least they could still have come up with a plot that didn't feel like it was written in eight minutes, and a game dynamic that didn't feel like it was developed in four. Sadly, they wasted every opportunity. **NAG**

- Shryke



and often boring. It's simply a matter of getting to a particular area, killing everyone (or rather stunning everyone) in it, and then moving on. Over and over and over again, for the majority of the game's longer-than-usual-for-licensed-games ten-hour run. The player can, through the course of the game, acquire alien weapons to use, but they all feel more or less the same, and none of them really trump the player's upgradeable phaser pistol.

If you're flying solo, AI issues will start to crop up. The player can choose either Kirk or Spock (it makes no difference at all, really, which is another problem – the characters might as well be clones of each other in terms of abilities) and take to a number of visually

bland and messy alien ships, bases and other similar locations in order to get through the game's missions. But the partner AI is dumber than a bag of hammers. In fact, there are times when the AI character is required (opening doors, or entering elevators, for example) and will quite simply appear in the right spot after a few seconds – even when you know they were stuck on the other end of the level. Other instances aren't handled that delicately. When the partner AI goes down, they need to be revived, which entail heading over to where they are and helping them out. If the player's character goes down, they are revived as if by magic, whether the AI character is there or not.

45 What could have been at least a decent tribute to the new movie quickly devolves into tedious drudgery and AI idiocy. Still no hope for licensed games, it seems...

PLUS
Full voice cast / Some nice character models

MINUS
Awful AI / Repetitive action / You call that a plot?

PLATFORMS
PC
REVIEWED ON
PC
GENRE
Strategy
AGE RESTRICTION
12
MULTIPLAYER
Local
None
Online
4 players
DEVELOPER
Cyanide Montreal
WEBSITE
www.empiregame.com
PUBLISHER
Paradox Interactive
DISTRIBUTOR
Digital

Reviewed Empire

Looks like a *Dungeon Keeper*, but doesn't quack like one...

Not to put too fine a point on it, but there isn't enough *Dungeon Keeper* in the world. *Empire* looks like a decent-enough clone of *Dungeon Keeper*, but it is sufficiently unique in most respects to be its own game. This is both good, and bad.

The good side of things is how *Empire* handles dungeon management. By zooming out or pressing a hotkey, you're given a flat top-down view of your dungeon. Here, you can queue up units, build rooms, order upgrades and place traps. Units, like imps, warlocks and such, can be put into squads of six. Squads in turn can be moved around as a single unit, and coordinate their attacks. A well-formed squad of a tank, some ranged casters, a healer, and a general damage-dealer, is highly effective at handling almost



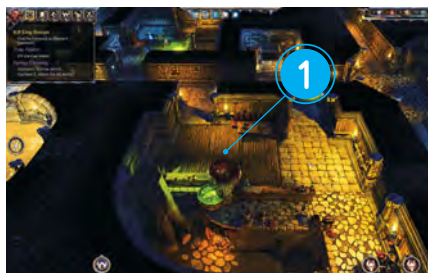
any situation. Ladders may randomly appear in your dungeon, bringing adventurers that'll try to destroy things.

You are limited in exactly what types of units and rooms you can build initially, and here is where things get idiosyncratic. As you complete set objectives removed from the main mission objectives, you earn DEM points which can be placed into a *Diablo* styled skill tree, which resets each mission. If you want minotaurs for this mission, you may have to sacrifice gaining some spells, or a type of room, etc. It gives the genre a kind of build-order strategy, which isn't bad, but it can rub you the wrong way. Squads can be sent off on raiding missions using an overworld map, which removes the squad from your dungeon for a time. If they succeed at the raid, you gain much-needed resources, as a dungeon is not entirely self-sufficient. There is no ore to mine, like in *Dungeon Keeper*.

The game can be played cooperatively over network or Internet, up to four players, or competitively if that's your thing. The cooperative mode works well enough, each player gets their own dungeon, and each dungeon has its own entrance into a kind of common battle area where mission objectives are usually located. The plot is amusing, in a '90s video game kind of way, and while it innovates where it counts, *Empire* fails in the areas it needs most. **NAG**
- Miktar

MY LIEGE! IS THIS MAJESTY'S ARDANIA?

You are correct, sire! *Empire* takes place in the fictional fantasy realm of Ardania of the *Majesty* series. Much of the design and how things look and act are nods to their counterparts in *Majesty*. The plot even involves you playing as a subservient demon in the employ of the son of a certain Scottish-sounding Advisor...



1 While in the zoomed-out Management Mode, if you mouse over a creature or room, you're shown a picture-in-picture live feed of what's going. It's a nice touch, but not really needed in any way.



67 For everything *Empire* does right, with its own spin on the dungeon management genre, it gets equal amounts wrong. This is the type of game that's best bought while on sale, and only if you really want this kind of thing.

PLUS

Scratches that *Dungeon Keeper* itch / Well-designed interface

MINUS

It's not *Dungeon Keeper* / Lack of mission variety / Dungeon size is very small

PLATFORMS
360 / PC / PS3
REVIEWED ON
360

GENRE

First-person
shooter

AGE RESTRICTION
18

MULTIPLAYER

Local

4 players

Online

4 players

DEVELOPER

Techland

WEBSITE

www.deadisland.
deepsilver.com

PUBLISHER

Deep Silver

DISTRIBUTOR

Apex Interactive

Reviewed

Dead Island: Riptide

Out of the frying pan...

Despite the fact that it was crammed with problems, Techland's *Dead Island* managed to gather a fair cult following, with many considering the game to be the definitive zombie-basher. As a result, a Game of the Year edition was released, and now the follow-up, *Dead Island: Riptide*, has hit retail shelves.

Riptide delivers exactly what one would expect: more tropical island zombie popping. With new weapon formulae and new zombie types to take on; the game really does deliver more of the same, with a few additional tweaks. There's a new playable character, too, in the form of John, who allows the player to take on a hand-to-hand combat specialist – something that was missing from the original cast. Those characters are playable, too, and the player can elect to bring in their *Dead Island* character for a bit more punch.

It seems, though, that Techland turned a deaf ear to complaints about the original when they made this sequel. Aside from the new characters and weapons, and a new plot (which is pretty much as weak as the first one) it really is just an extension of the original. That includes the bugs, quirks and annoyances of the first game, too; none of them appear to have been addressed. Regardless, it's still fun, if you're willing to look past all its issues.

NAG
- Shryke



70

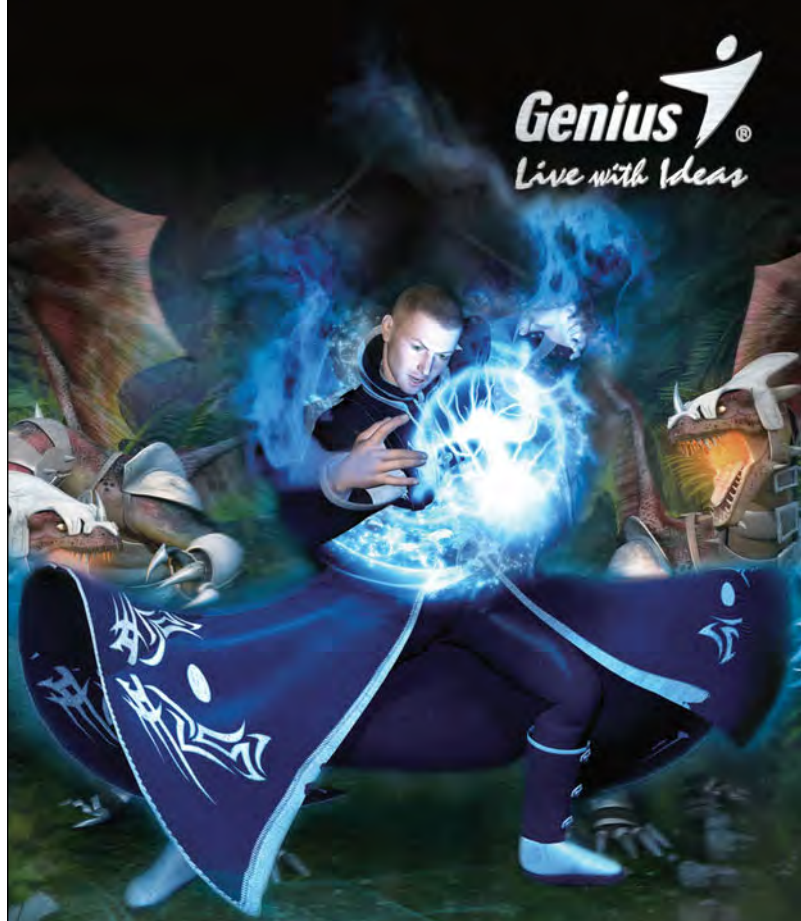
Techland delivered more of the same in *Dead Island: Riptide* (including the bugs)... forgiving zombie-clobberers may well enjoy it.

PLUS

Addictive / Fairly long

MINUS

The old bugs are all still there / Can get tedious



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Tel: +27 11 700 7188
E-mail: info@corex.co.za





PLATFORMS

360 / PS3

REVIEWED ON

360

GENRE

Action role-playing
game

AGE RESTRICTION

18

MULTIPLAYER

Local

None

Online

None

DEVELOPER

Capcom

WEBSITE

www.dragonsdogma.
com

PUBLISHER

Capcom

DISTRIBUTOR

SKG

Reviewed

Dragon's Dogma: Dark Arisen

The wind keeps pushing you...

The only thing better than a great game, is a great game getting a great expansion. *Dark Arisen* is the perfect companion to the already large experience present in *Dragon's Dogma*, arguably one of the finest fantasy action-RPGs of the decade. The 360 version comes on a two disc set, includes the full original game, and an entire island of new content.

The island itself, called Bitterblack Isle, looks and acts like a *Dungeons & Dragons* expansion module. It is its own self-contained story and location, but goes further by adding in new unique systems exclusive to its location. The most important of these new systems are "Cursed Items". Found randomly throughout the dungeon that snakes over and through the island, these items are a mystery until you have them purified by a specific NPC at the cost of Rift Crystals. Rift Crystals can be found in the dungeon, making them a vital currency compared to before. Purified items are often powerful and game-changing. Some alter/boost

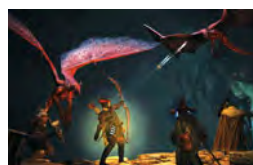
existing skills in new ways, others grant secret augments that help you survive the perils of Bitterblack, and most are just plain powerful weapons/armour. You can travel to and from the island at whim, bringing back spoils to the main game, or exploring its dangerous deeps to uncover secrets that pertain to the game's overall (and much underappreciated) story.

And perils there are, aplenty. Bitterblack Isle was designed to test the mettle of veteran players, so if you're only just starting to play *Dragon's Dogma* for the first time, we recommend finishing the main campaign (and very important post-campaign) at least once first before heading to the island. For contained within the labyrinthine halls and vast caverns of Bitterblack are beasts not found on the mainland. It's a proper expansion then, and then some.

All the vocations were given new skills, items can now be upgraded three tiers higher than before, and all the major changes added via patches over the last year have been folded in and tweaked further. Your "Pawn" AI partners are smarter, gabber less about how wolves hunt in packs, and have been retooled across the board in terms of balance and cost to hire.

The expansion adds in over 100 new pieces of equipment, many more character customization options, and if you already owned *Dragon's Dogma* you're given a truckload of Rift Crystals and an Eternal Ferrystone with infinite uses. It is a pity that *Dark Arisen* is a disc-only expansion and couldn't be sold as a DLC package due to how *Dragon's Dogma* was developed, but at least Capcom released it at a discounted price (and you can always sell your original *Dragon's Dogma* disc). **NAG**

- Miktar



Dark Arisen now includes the full Japanese language track, so you can easily learn how to say "they're masterworks all, you can't go wrong" in Japanese.



89

For the wealth of content, additional challenge, and numerous changes/fixes contained within, *Dark Arisen* is an expansion pack like how they used to be. Big, worthwhile, and full of things fans of *Dragon's Dogma* would want.

PLUS

Bitterblack Isle is a worthy dungeon / Challenging even for veterans / New augments and vocations

MINUS

360 version still has screen-tearing / Slight frame rate issues (less than before) / Original title song was removed



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MICRO ATX PC CASE



The Micro ATX case for high-performance system builds.

The Obsidian Series 350D Micro ATX PC case is designed for building compact high-performance systems with Micro ATX and Mini ITX motherboards. The compact size is ideal if your space is limited, but there's plenty of room inside for liquid CPU cooling, dual hard drives, dual SSDs, and dual full-length graphics cards.

Like all Obsidian cases, the 350D is designed for fast and neat builds, with tool-free access and drive installation. Smart features like a native 2.5" SSD cage make the most of its small size, and the cooling-focused interior has five fan mounting points, with room for two 240mm radiators.

Learn lots more at corsair.com/350D



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Well, almost everything.

EVERYTHING ELSE

Bits and bobs that can all be filed under gaming lifestyle

BUILD YOUR OWN ROBOT ARM

This text was originally written by Michael, and went something along the lines of "we were soooo busy that we didn't have time to build the robot arm, and here's a list of excuses..." but then Geoff swooped in, ever the hero, and liberated the contents of the box from its eternal purgatory. Then there was something about getting a free lunch, and Michael was sad that he missed out on the opportunity. Geoff is rather please with himself, and was genuinely surprised when it actually worked the first time.

In the box you'll find a

detailed manual on how to put the whole thing together as well as a few sealed bags containing all the parts you will need. Important: you will also need to bring a long nose pliers, a side cutter and a screwdriver set to the party. The arm is controlled using a control box (that you must also build). It's a great gift for aspiring engineers and a good idea for a last minute fix for an overdue science project – who doesn't love a robot? Oh, you will also need four D batteries.

Supplier: Mantality
Website: www.mantality.co.za
RRP: R950



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle and commemorative rAge coin not included.

POKÉMON TCG PLASMA SHADOW THEMED DECK

As the eighth expansion in the English run of the Black & White series, Plasma Storm marks the debut of Team Plasma, which introduces powerful Pokémon-EX such as Articuno-EX, Zapdos-EX and Lugia-EX. There are also new ACE SPEC cards, which we saw for the first time in the seventh expansion, to tip the balance of power within seconds, for those trainers who know how to play the field and bide their time. In this particular themed deck, we see the foiled Giratina take centre stage with its powerful Hex attack and menacing Shadow Claw ability, combined with 130HP – not bad for a basic card. The rest of the deck is balanced with a mix of quick damage-dealers, big-hitters and healing sponges to buy you the time needed to quickly flip the game on its head. This is one for strategic thinkers and combo-lovers.



Supplier: Core Group
Website: www.pokemon.com
RRP: R149.99 (themed deck); R49 (booster pack); R139.99 (three-pack boosters)

MAGIC: THE GATHERING DRAGON'S MAZE INTRO PACKS

Intro packs represent the middle of the road entry point for those looking to get stuck into Magic: The Gathering, either as a new player or a veteran who wants something playable right out of the box. Unlike the event decks, intro packs include just a single, 60-card prebuilt deck (a little lighter on the rares than the pricier event decks) and two booster packs instead of a prebuilt side board. While it might seem odd to include boosters and all the randomness they infer, this option is great for those players who want to take a gander into the other colours on offer, and could even be used for trading incentive to spark the social side of this fine game.

Supplier: Wizards of the Coast
Website: locator.wizards.com
RRP: TBA



BATMAN ARTFX+ STATUE

He might be a super-rich, self-made vigilante with a cool butler, but he doesn't have any points of articulation – this time around. Finally, after Superman, Green Lantern, Flash, Wonder Woman and Aquaman have all had their turn, it's time for the Dark Knight to pose in an intimidating way. The figurine captures the new look of the Justice League perfectly and the slick metallic grey paint works a charm. There is a decent Justice League base plate for Batman to stand on and he's got a nice weighty feel to him and don't forget that stunning floor swishing cape that simply steals the show. The figurine is just over 20cm tall and is apparently a 1/10 scale replica of the fictional hero. Goutaro Takeuchi is the sculptor and there is no word if Robin will also come out to play soon.

Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Website: www.cosmiccomics.co.za
RRP: R599



TECHNEWS

KNOW YOUR TECHNOLOGY

SSE (1-4)

Streaming SIMD Extensions are an extension to x86 architecture, designed by Intel and introduced with the Pentium III. We are at present up to iteration 4 in naming, but other revisions exist such as SSE4.1, 4.2 and SSE4a. Unlike with earlier versions, SSE4 contains instructions that execute operations which are not specific to multimedia applications. These may be used in speeding up more general compute calculations outside the scope of what typical multimedia workloads would need. Most modern desktop CPUs support at least the vast majority of these extensions.

AES/AES-NI

An extension to the x86 instruction set, supported by both Intel and AMD. This instruction set is for the sole purpose of improving the speed of applications performing encryption and decryption using the Advanced Encryption Standard. Hardware implementation is of little use for general desktop computing, but of paramount importance in professional environments or where data security is of utmost importance.

OPENCL

Open Computing Language is a framework for writing programs that execute across

heterogeneous platforms consisting of a CPU and a GPU. This can be extended towards DSPs and other processors as well. OpenCL supports parallel computing using task based and data based parallelism. OpenCL has proved to be specifically useful in allowing applications to access the GPU for non-graphics related computing, taking advantage of the parallelism offered by modern day GPUs.

FMA

FMA instruction set is the 128 and 256-bit SIMD extensions of the X86 CPU instruction set for performing fused multiply-add operations for both floating point and scalar operations. There are two different sets involved, FMA3 and FMA4. Current AMD CPUs (Vishera) support both, while Intel will add FMA3 in upcoming Haswell CPUs. FMA4 allows a 4-operand form for arguments with four different registers, while FMA3 requires that in a similar argument for example, two of the four registers must be the same. FMA4 is more complex to implement at a hardware level but allows programming flexibility, while FMA3 results in shorter code and easier hardware implementation.

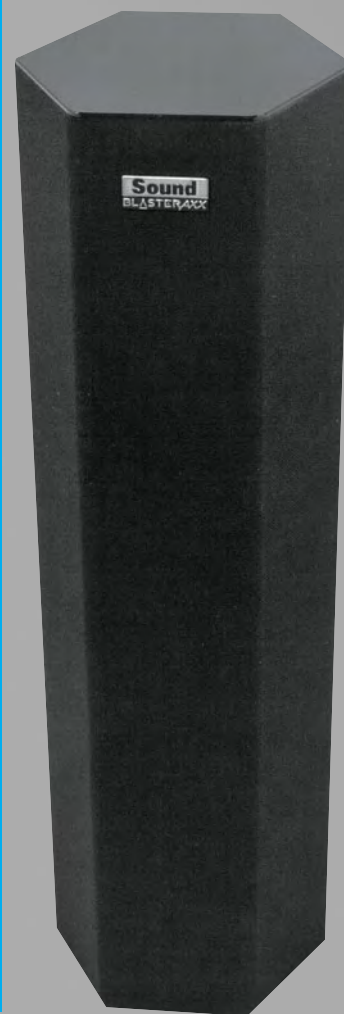
Corsair recently announced two new SSD related products: the SSD & Hard Disk Drive Cloning Kit, and the Corsair SSD Toolbox. The Cloning Kit, which includes a cable and software, will allow you to duplicate and transfer

DID YOU KNOW?

data between devices, so migrating your data to a newly installed SSD is now easier to do. The SSD Toolbox software utility, which is free to download, can be used to configure, optimise and monitor your Corsair SSD. www.corsair.com

CREATIVE SOUNDBLASTER[®] SBX10

Wirelessly stream music, movies, games and phonecalls from your PC, iPhone, iPad, Mac or Android phone/tablet. Connectivity options also include USB, headphone jack and aux/mic in. www.corex.co.za | R1,799



1.1.0

BY THE NUMBERS

Futuremark have updated their 3DMark benchmark suite to v1.1.0. This major update introduces Ice Storm extreme preset for the Windows version of the software, which was previously exclusive to the Android version. It also optimizes the software for four-GPU and three-GPU setups, which could improve your scores if you're running GeForce GTX 690 Quad-SLI or Radeon HD 7990 CrossFireX.

Mosh Pit

RAZER HYDRA

This motion sensing controller for PC features location-orientation tracking, said to be exact to the millimetre and degree. The Hydra has compatibility with over 125 games including *Portal 2*, *Left for Dead 2* and *World of Goo*.
www.razerzone.com | R999



STEELSERIES SPECTRUM 7XB WIRELESS HEADSET

Designed for use with the Xbox 360, this wireless headset can also operate as a headphone (meaning audio in only) with your PC, Mac, and any system that can connect through the RCA/USB cables on the wireless transmitter.
www.megarom.co.za
R1,299



SANDISK IMAGEMATE ALL-IN-ONE USB3.00 READER/WRITER

A handy to have USB 3.0 card reader that you can use to transfer photos and video to your PC. It reads a variety of cards: CompactFlash, microSDHC, MMC, Memory Stick PRO Duo, miniSD, etc.
www.sandisk.com | R549



PQI AIR BANK

Doubling as both a portable 2.5-inch hard drive and wireless access point, PQI's Air Bank is available in 500GB and 1TB variants. You're able to access the data stored on the drive via your Android or iOS devices by downloading the proprietary "Air Bank+" app. It holds a charge for up to eight hours and can be charged via USB 2.0/3.0.
www.corex.co.za | 500GB R1,999; 1TB R2,449



“If you crave the ultimate in PC gaming, the clear and commanding choice is the Radeon HD 7990 graphics card. No other graphics card on the market measures up to the unparalleled gaming experience it delivers, and it comes with eight AAA game titles optimized for AMD Radeon award-winning GCN architecture”

Matt Skynner, corporate vice president and general manager, Graphics Business Unit, AMD

DREAMMACHINE

In this month's Dream Machine we changed CPU coolers and got with the impressive **NZXT Kraken X60**. This should help keep both machines anywhere up to 10°C cooler when compared to the H100i. We're hoping that from next month onwards there will be some major changes in the Dream Machine in light of all the new CPUs, platforms and graphics cards scheduled for release at COMPUTEX 2013, which happens 4-8 June in Taipei.



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



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



KEYBOARD
GIGABYTE Aivia Osmium Mechanical Gaming Keyboard
R1,299 / www.rectron.co.za



SOUND
Creative Sound Blaster ZxR
R2,799 / www.corex.co.za



GRAPHICS
Gigabyte GV-NTITAN-6GD SLI
R14,899 each / www.gigabyte.com



CHASSIS
Corsair Obsidian 900D
R4,299 / www.corsair.com



COOLER
NZXT Kraken X60
R1,950 / www.nzxt.com



HEADPHONES
Creative Labs Sound Blaster Recon3D Omega
R2,995 / www.corex.co.za



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



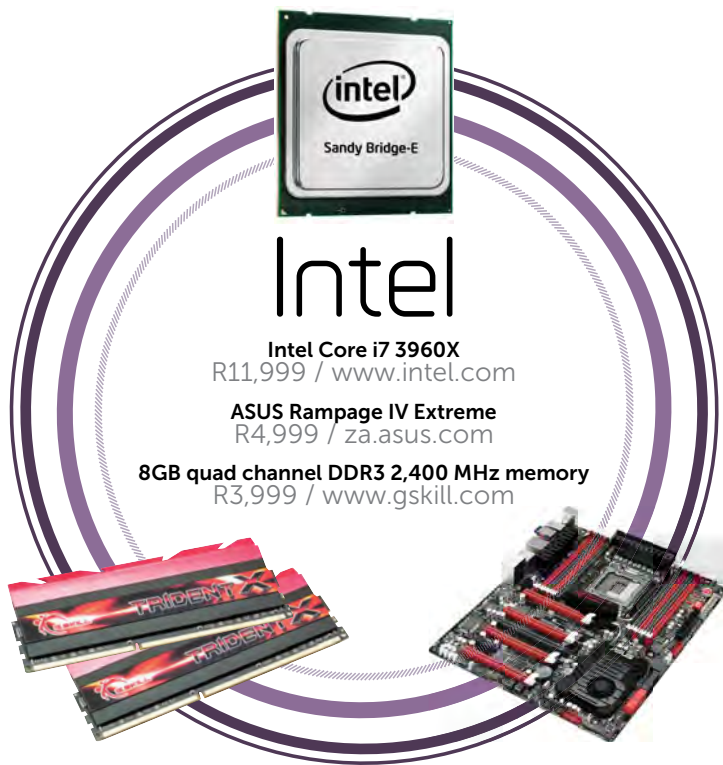
DISPLAY
ASUS VG248QE
R5,200 / za.asus.com



MOUSE
Razer Ouroboros mouse
R1,399 / www.corex.co.za



MOUSE MAT
Razer Ironclad mouse mat
R599 / www.corex.co.za



Intel

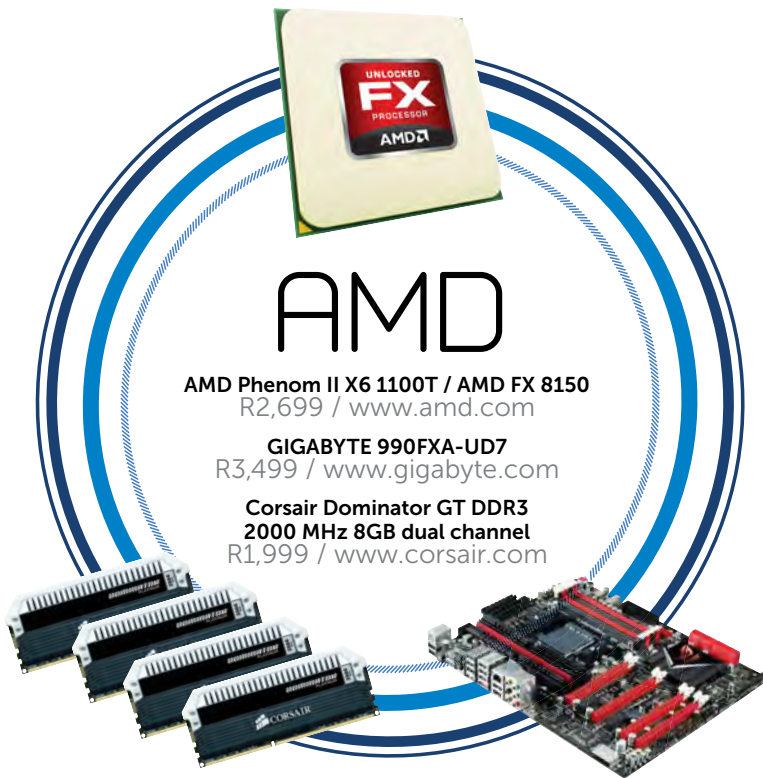
Intel Core i7 3960X
R11,999 / www.intel.com

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

8GB quad channel DDR3 2,400 MHz memory
R3,999 / www.gskill.com

Intel Dream Machine:

R79,434



AMD

AMD Phenom II X6 1100T / AMD FX 8150
R2,699 / www.amd.com

GIGABYTE 990FXA-UD7
R3,499 / www.gigabyte.com

Corsair Dominator GT DDR3
2000 MHz 8GB dual channel
R1,999 / www.corsair.com

AMD Dream Machine:

R66,634



HARDWIRED

Because I am special

Recently, after browsing several forums and websites, I asked myself why so called “core gamers” are so difficult? In general, these seem to a very difficult group of people to please. If there’s anything to be complained about, a complaint will be made, regardless of how trivial the matter is. Some may say it’s passion but I beg to differ. A passion is only valuable if expressed or formulated based on reliable information, objective analysis and a degree of knowledge about said subject. An ill-expressed and violent expression of one’s hatred for a concept or idea doesn’t warrant it being called passion.

I’ve seen some articles detailing just how much better gamers are in several things, like the much vaunted hand-eye coordination perk. This is great and I like the idea of having better hand-eye coordination, or rather better fine motor skills, than someone who doesn’t play video games. The odd thing about this however is that it is said as if something else was to be expected? Of course if you do something repeatedly you’ll be good at it. Ballet dancers and gymnasts in general have better balance than any other sports people; sprinters run faster than Joe Average and motorsport drivers generally handle a car better than most people. As a gamer, hardcore or otherwise, your hand-eye coordination should get better; it’s what you do more than anything else. It is how humans work; it does not in any way make you special.

There’s also the fallacy that gaming has grown purely because of the core gaming crowd. That is another argument that’s baseless and untrue. It’s not even possible for it to be true. Gaming has grown because it simply became more accessible to the general population. The influence of the core gamers is there in as much as swaying purchasing decisions, but not in determining if a purchase will be made or not. Your expert gamer will tell you which game to buy, but only after you’ve decided you will buy a game. Correlation and causality, those are not the same thing. A core gaming crowd, undefined as it may be, isn’t enough to sustain the industry at this size let alone grow it. It’s rudimentary arithmetic, yet this is somehow lost to many.

I recently watched a documentary themed around the impending collapse or demise of the gaming industry much like in ’83. This collapse was caused by unscrupulous publishers eager to cash in at any cost on the unsuspecting masses. It all sounds logical and reasonable at first (like most things on the internet consumed in the early hours of the morning), but it fails to realize that we are not in 1983. That was 30 years ago and virtually everything around and about the gaming industry has changed. The economics are different, the landscape has changed and even we as a society have changed in fundamental ways. At the time, the collapse of a massive publisher would be felt. This isn’t the case, now, far from it. I have no love for EA, but I would never say the publisher is responsible for the demise of gaming and is the great evil doer that I read it is virtually every day. Even if it is, it’ll shut down, then someone else will take over if there’s money to be made. It really is that simple, but I doubt if an entire industry will come to its knees because of it.

I consider myself a gamer; I’m neither proud nor ashamed of it. I play games, not cure diseases or contribute to our collective body of science. I simply have a hobby, like billions of others. I am anything but special. Something many of us should remember as well.

- Neo Sibeko

PASSIVE 3D

- There are several techniques on the market that fall under the passive stereoscopy umbrella. What we are concerned with however are the systems that are most compatible and widely used in our games. That comes down to polarization systems which use a low cost set of glasses with polarizing filters. The screens that support this kind of stereoscopy have filters with the opposite polarizing film that allows each lens of the glasses to receive the correct image.
- Passive 3D systems have a lower perceived resolution than active systems because, at any given time, the polarizing glasses block out half the lines (along the y-axis) for each eye. Hence you only see 540 lines per eye from a standard 1080p image. For 720p images, the resolution per eye is even less at 360 lines per eye.
- This kind of stereoscopy has no frame or scan rate issue, and it works equally well on 60Hz displays as well as the more expensive 120Hz panels.
- Passive 3D systems can be cheaply manufactured and therefore cheaply sold, and compatibility with a number of systems from consoles to computers is relatively easy.
- Image brightness is mostly preserved as the filters used hardly diminish the amount of light that each eye receives making for a comfortable viewing experience.
- Passive displays on the PC make use of anything from single link DVI to HDMI and DisplayPort. Most passive displays natively support Blu-ray players and consoles provided they have HDMI 1.3 support and higher.
- Glasses are cheap and need no maintenance. They are readily available and mostly interchangeable between brands that use passive systems.

Stereoscopic
imagery:

passive 3D

VS

active 3D



◀ "Active 3D systems in general have a better image quality because at any given time you get the full resolution per eye of whatever image you are viewing."

Active 3D
Samsung
Series 8 TV



“Passive 3D systems have a **>** lower perceived resolution than active systems because, at any given time, the polarizing glasses block out half the lines (along the y-axis) for each eye.”

Stereoscopic 3D is here to stay with us. The initial outings were nauseating but, over the years, they have steadily improved and found their way into homes. From PCs to mobile phones, there are at least several models in each ecosystem that support some version of stereoscopy. This issue we will take you through some of the differences between the two and hopefully, this information will help you decide which system you'd like to invest your cash into for your PC setup.

ACTIVE 3D

There's only one way to use an active 3D system and that is through shutter glasses. These glasses block the image at specific intervals (timed with the display) to create the illusion of depth perception. The screens, along with the glasses, need a relatively high refresh and scan rate for the illusion to work. For video, 100Hz or so is tolerable, but for gaming at least 120Hz and higher is needed, which will allow 60fps per eye.

- Active 3D systems in general have a better image quality because at any given time you get the full resolution per eye

of whatever image you are viewing, so the detail is better on active systems than it is on passive systems. This is the single biggest advantage to shutter glass solutions.

- Active 3D systems cost significantly more than the passive counterparts. The electronics needed to drive the displays at the high refresh rates along with the expensive shutter glasses make for a very high entry price by comparison.
- As the image on each lens is blocked in succession, active systems tend to

produce a much darker perceived image. Technologies such as LightBoost help alleviate this tremendously, but so far there are few displays that support such systems.

- Active 3D on the PC requires some hefty bandwidth and as a result only dual-link DVI connectivity is an option, so you miss the convenience of HDMI or DisplayPort.
- Monitors need an emitter either built-in or separate, the glasses also need batteries and will need recharging after twelve to fifteen hours of use.

The Lazy Gamer's Guide

Razer League of Legends collector's peripheral set

Website www.razerzone.com **RRP** Mouse Mat R199 | Mouse R999

Earlier this year Razer and Riot Games partnered to bring us a collector's edition peripheral set, based on the popular *League of Legends* PC game. If you spend the majority of your time playing *League of Legends* then it might be worth your while to invest in this set to enhance your gaming experience.

Razer Goliathus League of Legends Collector's Edition

TECHNICAL

SIZE
355mm (l) x 254mm
(w) x 3mm (h)

WEIGHT
188g

SLICK CLOTH WEAVE

The very taut weave on the screen-printed neoprene cloth mat ensures that the speed and precision with which your mouse runs over it is slick and seamless. The underside sports a rubber base so it will grip firmly on whichever surface it is placed.

ANTI-FRAYING STITCHED FRAME

This dense stitching trim that runs around the edges of the mouse pad not only looks good, but will also prevent fraying.



Razer Naga Hex League of Legends Collector's Edition



TECHNICAL

- Razer Synapse 2.0
- 5600dpi Razer Precision 3.5G Laser Sensor
- 1000Hz Ultrapolling/1ms response time

SIZE

116mm (l) x 78mm (w) x 42mm (h)

WEIGHT

134g

SYNAPSE 2.0

Razer's downloadable dashboard software lets you adjust the DPI sensitivity, tweak the mouse configuration, record macros and also select the pulsing frequency of the yellow lighting. All your settings are saved in the cloud so any PC or laptop that you sync with will automatically have those saved settings for you to use once you sign in.

6 MOBA/ACTION-RPG OPTIMIZED MECHANICAL THUMB BUTTONS

The six large mechanical buttons that are situated where your thumb would rest can be mapped to your favourite spells and abilities. If you've been using your keyboard up to now, this might take some getting used to initially, and it's worth noting that your experience may either be fantastic or less than ideal based entirely on the size of your own hand/thumb. It did feel a touch awkward when we first tried it out, but after a couple of days of play time our thumb had adjusted sufficiently.

11 PROGRAMMABLE BUTTONS

In total you can program up to 11 buttons on this mouse, almost eliminating the need for your keyboard. The Naga Hex has special switches that last up to 10 million clicks, registering 250 clicks per minute.

SUMMARY

PROS

- The matte finish on the mouse is a win

CONS

- Mouse may be too small for large hands
- Mouse shape and size does take some getting used to

ALTERNATIVES

- League of Legends Razer Sphex mouse surface
- Logitech G600

Intel **IDF**

2013 Beijing

All about 4th generation Core technology

Towards the end of April, we visited Intel's annual IDF conference over in Beijing China. Intel was all about bringing new computing platforms to the world during this two-day event, and better, more meaningful computing experiences for the future. The rise of social media has had a profound impact on society and business. At the core of what Intel was talking about throughout all the seminars was their 4th generation computing architecture. Haswell represents a "tock" in their "tick-tock" scheduling, as it ushers in a new microarchitecture on which future products from Intel will be based.

Represented at IDF was some information about future chipsets and computing platforms as well, including some minor information shared about Broadwell (2014, 14nm), Skylake (2015) and more cautiously Ivy Bridge-E (Q3 2013). There is no denying it, Haswell was the star of the show. In light of that we have brought you some information we gathered at the event which may help shed some light on the broader picture when analysing the new architecture.

With seminars taking place concurrently in several theatres and halls, it is simply not possible to cover them all, but we managed to get to the ones most relevant to us, and what we learned has proved to be fairly interesting and, if anything, eye opening.

4th GENERATION GRAPHICS

If you've not heard by now, Intel has taken a serious look at their integrated graphics processor and has overhauled it, not only by making it operate faster by ways of frequency enhancements, but the new GPU supports two DirectX 11.1 extensions, pixel sync for order independent transparency and Instant Access. Pixel sync essentially allows quick sorting of transparent pixels so they are rendered in the right order allowing for more realistic smoke and other neat features. It is, in more simple terms, enabling programmable blend operations without the massive amounts of memory and memory bandwidth traditionally required by current implementations. Instant Access essentially allows the GPU and the CPU to gain access to shared data directly without having to create a second independent copy. Only time will tell how impactful these two extensions prove to be, but what we did see looked impressive.

Of concern to perhaps the mobile market more than desktops is the eDRAM which is now on package with Haswell CPUs. This eDRAM will unlikely be on the desktop parts but certainly for the portable devices, as that's where it makes more sense. This 128MB allows the GPU access to a relatively large buffer which can be used for all kinds of processing. Its advantage though, besides being reduced latency (it's on the package), is the massive amounts of bandwidth it can provide the 4th generation GPU (GT3 series) with bandwidth upwards of 64GB/s, we've heard. Intel was not willing to give out specifics on this, but suffice to say it is orders of magnitude higher than what was previously available. Add 4K, DP1.2 and WiDi support and you have a GPU that is ready to leap frog what Ivy Bridge had, bringing the performance closer to what the competition has in their APUs.



POWER

On the power side, we usually concern ourselves with TDP (which is reduced) and power management when moving to a new process node, but Intel has worked on some truly innovative power saving features which allow the system to not only sleep and resume faster, but save battery life as well. A new S0ix idle state is in a way a hybrid state that allows very low power consumption, almost approaching that of tablet CPUs but keeps the system alive so it can receive new emails and such for example. Featured are deeper sleep states that turn off CPU blocks not required for even lower power consumption. These stop some clocks within the CPU and remove voltage completely from within majority of the CPU and, best of all, your display can stay active even with this new C7 mode engaged. Resuming from these states as well is much quicker, with Intel quoting numbers as high as 25% over Ivy Bridge.



4th GENERATION CPU PERFORMANCE

Performance, which is what most of you will be concerned with, has also increased respectably. It is worth keeping in mind that over the last few generations, performance increases have been relatively minor, being evolutionary instead of revolutionary. The days of 30% performance improvements one generation over the next are gone. As such Intel is bringing a level of refinement to Haswell that was previously not possible with Ivy Bridge.

The changes may not be extensive but they are many. What you should expect is anything between a 5% to 10% improvement depending on the workload. What is important to know is that Haswell essentially has fewer performance and overlocking restrictions than Ivy Bridge, and certainly none of the limitations of Sandy Bridge. Haswell borrows many great ideas from Sandy Bridge-E but improves upon them to offer a more well-rounded CPU family, barring the number of threads made available.

Haswell CPUs officially support DDR3 2,933MHz memory as well, so we are sure to receive a slew of high-speed DDR3 modules for the foreseeable future which should, at the very least, help boost the DRAM market, even if it's for a miniscule percentage of vendors. For us it just means even better performance, which is always a good thing.

There is literally far too much to go into regarding what was shown to us at IDF, but suffice to say the second part of 2013 is going to be very exciting indeed. Two new CPU families (Haswell and Ivy Bridge-E), new GPU options (integrated and otherwise), a new chipset and socket (Z87), and lighter, faster, longer lasting portable devices are sure to inject some enthusiasm into the market.

We'll be bringing you our first 4th generation Core i7 review hopefully in the next issue, assuming all that was promised at IDF materializes. Until then, rest assured that the immediate future of computing looks very bright courtesy of the many innovations that Intel has invested massively in. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko



BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: ASUS RAMPAGE IV GENE

3DMark Vantage CPU	33,289 46,760
Cinebench 11.5	9.39 13.43
AIDA 64 copy	28,590MB/s 20,396MB/s
3DMark03	118,818 127,025

SPECS

CHIPSET
Intel Z77
MEMORY
4x 240-Pin DDR3
CPU SUPPORT
LGA 1155
SLOTS
3x PCI-E 16X, 3x PCI-E 1X

MSI Z77A-GD65 GAMING

Supplier MSI Website www.corex.co.za RRP R2,399

MSI finally has a gaming line of products. It's taken a while but much like ASUS and GIGABYTE, MSI has joined in with a different family under the GAMING brand. We do commend this step by MSI and it is definitely something worth investing in, however the naming is somewhat dubious and the assonance is definitely not well conceived. For the same reason you wouldn't call a handset i9300-Calling, or a vehicle Porsche-Driving, to name the motherboard the Z77A-GD65 GAMING is, if anything, perplexing. With that, MSI is also very late to market with this board. It would have probably been better off to wait until the Z87 launched, but perhaps there are some business decisions behind it that had the first gaming board come out with the familiar Z77 chipset.

One of the highlight features for this board is the Sound Blaster Cinema audio solution. It sounds great in theory but unfortunately this is a software enhancement that is driven by the familiar ALC898 controller. A missed opportunity indeed, because in as far as sonic performance is concerned the ASUS Supreme-FX on the ROG boards is notably better and the hardware solution on the G1 line from GIGABYTE is vastly superior. As such the Sound Blaster Cinema leaves a lot to be desired.

Performance isn't a major issue these days when it comes to Z77 boards. For a gaming board in particular, efficiency is

arguably of very low importance as nobody is buying a gaming orientated board for overclocking endeavours. With that said, we did find this board to be slower in all tests compared to the MPower. and especially when compared to competing boards, as it showed peculiar results with a CineBench 11.5 score of 9.39. For comparison's sake, the Z77 MPower scores 9.79 in the very same test. This performance deficit was prevalent throughout all the tests. We will re-iterate however that this should not be a concern for a gaming machine whatsoever because these synthetic numbers don't translate into a frame rate or latency difference in games.

With all the above you'd think this board isn't worth the time of day but you'd be wrong. It's actually one of the better boards from MSI. It could do with some improvements, but overall it's not a bad entry into the gaming board market. The most compelling reason to buy this board other than the pricing may very well be something unrelated to gaming and rather more specifically to overclocking. This board is simple to overclock – you don't need OC-Genie at all to do it. You can reach your desired 4.6GHz and 2,600MHz memory in less than 60 seconds on your first boot up. It's simply amazing just how far MSI BIOS design and implementation has come. It may not have all the features that a Maximus V board has, but you can do a lot with what is on offer and you'll not lack for anything. It

is by far the most impressive BIOS interface we have ever come across. If this is a sign of things to come with the Z87 chipset and hopefully refreshed X79 boards, then we have a lot to get excited about from MSI.

The last feature on this board we will mention is the Killer E2200 processor. You should be familiar with this processor by now as it shapes network traffic for the most optimal gaming experience possible on your line. How effective this is is debatable, but it can't hurt to have it. In closing, the Z77A-GD65 GAMING is a good board; it's a first attempt by MSI, but a fine one at that. Do consider this if you're on a budget but want a competent gaming motherboard. **NAG**
- Neo Sibeko



MSI has done well with the Z77A-GD65 GAMING. It's late to market so probably not worth the bother, but definitely consider the Z87 version coming soon.

PLUS

Looks great / Incredible BIOS / Very easy board to overclock

MINUS

Very late to market / Somewhat misleading audio controller branding

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ARMOR DDR3 Overclocking Memory Modules are designed to meet the demands of hard-core gamers on high performance, gaming, overclocking, etc. Equipped with armor-like heat spreader, the ARMOR SERIES look like warriors who charge and break through enemy lines in the battlefield.

Date Rate	Model	Capacity	Configuration	Voltage	CL
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DDR3-2133	PC3-17000	8GB/16GB Kit (8GB x 2)	512Mb x 8	1.65V	11-11-11-30
DDR3-1866	PC3-15000	4GB/8GB Kit (4GB x 2)	256Mb x 8	1.5V	11-11-11-30
DDR3-1866	PC3-15000	8GB/16GB Kit (8GB x 2)	512Mb x 8	1.5V	11-11-11-30
DDR3-1600	PC3-12800	4GB/8GB Kit (4GB x 2)	256Mb x 8	1.5V	9-9-9-27
DDR3-1600	PC3-12800	8GB/16GB Kit (8GB x 2)	512Mb x 8	1.5V	10-10-10-28

* For more information, please visit at www.apacer.com / Contact: E-mail: sales_team2@apacer.com / TEL: +886-2-2698-2888

SPECS

- CPU**
INTEL Core i7 3630M
- MEMORY**
16GB DDR3 1,600MHz
- STORAGE**
128GB SSD + 750GB
storage drive
- OPTICAL DRIVE**
Blu-ray writer
- GPU**
NVIDIA GTX 675MX (4GB)

"Where build quality is concerned, it's not going to feel like a MacBook and some of the plastics do feel rather fragile, but it does look great in red."



MSI GT70 Dragon Edition Notebook

Supplier MSI Website www.corex.co.za RRP R25,999

BENCHMARKS

3DMARK - Fire-Strike 2,809 (3,235 overclocked)

Gaming notebooks have always been somewhat disappointing. Not only because they rarely deliver on performance promises, but they tend to have unbalanced configurations, are mostly bulky, heavy and supremely expensive. More times than not, you're better off buying a high-end desktop machine and an ultra-book to supplement it. You may even save some money that way.

If you can look past the price, then you just may have a notebook worthy of being called a desktop replacement in the GT70 Dragon Edition. What MSI offer with this package seems to depend on what country you're in, but on our shores you get a nifty package which includes an MSI carry case, a SteelSeries Siberia headset and a SteelSeries Kinzu Mouse.

As for the hardware, you have to keep in mind that notebooks are always going to be less powerful than the desktop alternative for several reasons including power limitations and real estate. In light of this, the GT70 Dragon Edition has a rather powerful CPU in the 3630QM, but that isn't what you should focus on. Instead, you should be concerned about the GTX 675MX. It has no desktop equivalent but the power you may extract from it is that which may be found in a GTX 650Ti BOOST. This isn't bad and may just

allow you to play all games on the market and in the near future at medium to high detail, provided you keep AA disabled. The notebook makes use of NVIDIA's Optimus switching technology, so when you're on the desktop you're making use of the integrated Intel GPU, but when you start a game with the power cord plugged in, you get to unleash the full power of the notebook.

Where build quality is concerned, it's not going to feel like a MacBook and some of the plastics do feel rather fragile, but it does look great in red. MSI has not spent much on the aesthetics here, but has managed to fit quite a lot into this price bracket with everything of value being on the inside. We do feel the Blu-ray writer isn't needed and a reader would be more than enough along with a 500GB drive instead of the 750. That way the price of the notebook could be lowered slightly or kept the same, then rather outfit the machine with the GTX 680M, which is significantly faster.

With all that said, the GT70 Dragon Edition does end up delivering a system that is easy to live with. Yes it's huge, but the weight is evenly distributed, the battery life impressive for a gaming notebook and the screen quality definitely above average. Windows 8 comes pre-installed with the machine as well so you do get the latest operating system with your purchase.

Once you add up everything MSI has put in this package you end up understanding why the retail price is that high. As stated in the beginning of this review, the notebook isn't a game changer, but it's enough of a compelling unit to keep us interested in desktop replacement machines. If you have the money for this, you should give this some serious consideration as you're not likely to find a much better alternative at this price. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko



The GT70 Dragon Edition notebook not only looks great but it packs a punch as well. A good desktop replacement machine if you can swallow that price.

PLUS

NVIDIA GTX 675MX GPU / 128GB SSD in RAID 0 / Looks good

MINUS

Somewhat cramped keyboard / Touchpad feels cheap / Like all such machines, it costs too much

CORSAIR VENGEANCE

DESIGNED for PERFORMANCE GAMING



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A high-resolution headset is just as essential to competitive gaming as a high-resolution monitor. Vengeance 2000 combines expertly-designed acoustics with the science of Dolby Headphone for accurate positional audio that gives you a competitive edge.



VENGEANCE K95 Fully Mechanical Gaming Keyboard

GREAT FEEL. GREAT CONTROL.
With Cherry MX Red switches under every key, you'll enjoy optimal tactile feedback and responsiveness wherever your fingers go. The 18 G-keys are programmable on the fly, so you can adapt and react, and key-by-key adjustable backlighting lets you set up unique lighting patterns for each game.



VENGEANCE M65 FPS Laser Gaming Mouse

DESIGNED FOR DEADLY ACCURACY.
The 8200DPI sensor and dedicated sniper button let you move with agility and deliver swift justice like never before. An adjustable weight system lets you adapt the M65 to your play style, and the soft touch surfaces help keep you sharp throughout the longest battles.



VENGEANCE MM600 Dual-Sided Gaming Mouse Mat

A METAL CORE AND DUAL SIDES FOR BETTER CONTROL.
The foundation of the MM600 is a solid piece of 3mm thick aircraft-grade aluminum for rigidity and durability. Each of the two high-quality polymer surfaces has been tuned to deliver distinct glide characteristics — the heavy-texture side produces exceptional high-speed glide, while the smooth-texture side delivers outstanding control.



Creative Sound Blaster Z

Supplier Corex
Website www.corex.co.za
RRP R1,395

Last month we pressed our ears against Creative's new Sound Blaster ZxR – and we were so impressed by the noise that came out of it that we crammed it into our Dream Machine. Now we've got our hands on its cheaper, less feature-rich sibling, and while it's obviously not quite as overwhelmingly dominant as the ZxR, the Sound Blaster Z remains an extremely capable sound card that'll greatly enhance audio performance relative to on-board sound.

First off, do not expect the audiophile-pleasing levels of hardware customisation offered by the higher-end cards and their switchable op-amps. You will, however, be privy to the same Sound Core3D chip that helps the Zx and ZxR process and output audio that is crisper, clearer and louder than anything you'll have heard before if motherboard audio has been the pinnacle of your past audio experiences. If you've got headphones

or speakers capable of testing its limits, you'll find that game audio is meatier, pinpointing directional audio is much more natural, music is clearer (and filled with subtle nuances you'd never noticed before) and tertiary stuff like movie dialogue is noticeably enhanced. Creative's software suite provides a range of tweaks and customisation options to tailor the audio as you see fit, and toying with all its options will alter your experience in delicate, but nonetheless substantial ways.

The software is a little less rosy in other areas, however. The CrystalVoice suite, which deals primarily with enhancing voice communication, is unfortunately a touch iffy in certain respects. The echo cancellation feature, for example, breaks pretty much everything. Thankfully CrystalVoice has a number of redeeming features elsewhere. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes



SPECS

AUDIO PROCESSOR Audio processor
AUDIO RESOLUTION 24-bit
SNR (20KHZ LOW-PASS FILTER) 116db
FREQUENCY RESPONSE (5.1 @ 96KHZ) 10Hz ~ 45kHz



8 The Sound Blaster Z is definitely worth considering if you're tired of motherboard audio.

PLUS
 Excellent sound production / Good software customisation

MINUS
 CrystalVoice stuff fails a bit

Razer Megalodon

Supplier Razer
Website www.razerzone.com
RRP R1,499

Designed for PC gamers, the Megalodon offers sound via its built-in audio virtual 7.1 surround processor. Setup is refreshingly quick and easy – connect it via a single USB cable and you're good to go. The simplicity of it is a bit of a double-edged sword, however, because it'd be nice to have other connectivity options beyond USB. Still, it's hardly a deal-breaker and there are many other reasons to love what the Megalodon has to offer.

While the set and its softly padded ear cups prove comfortable during extended use, adjusting the Megalodon's headband can be a minor irritation. Adjustment is controlled by moving the headband along metal sliders positioned on the ear cups, and while this makes it easy to quickly adjust the set, there's no way to lock your adjustment in place: this means they're prone to sliding out of place during use, requiring intermittent fiddling to keep

them resting comfortably on your noggin.

Sound quality is where the Megalodon shines, its in-line control box providing the opportunity to separately adjust the volume output of each of the set's channels and the bass level, as well as various settings relating to its boom microphone. You're also able to adjust the overall volume level, of course. They function equally well as virtual surround or stereo headphones (and you can switch between stereo and surround at the touch of a button on the control box), producing crisp audio that's satisfying across all frequencies. As a nice added touch, Razer bundles a handy zip-up travel case with the Megalodon so you can keep it safe on your LAN adventures. All in all, while the Megalodon is quite pricy, it's packing some cool features and its sound production is impressive enough to justify the cash. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes



SPECS

FREQUENCY RESPONSE 20Hz – 20kHz
IMPEDANCE 32 ohms
DRIVER UNITS 40mm with neodymium magnets
CABLE LENGTH 3.3 metres



9 Razer's Megalodon is an excellent PC gaming headset.

PLUS
 Fantastic sound quality / Simple setup / In-line control box

MINUS
 Headband adjustment is finicky / USB only



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FOR GAMERS. BY GAMERS.™

Epson EH-TW6100 3D projector



Supplier Epson
Website www.epson.co.za
RRP R22,302

If you've got the wall space to spare, projectors are no longer restricted to boardrooms and home theatres of the upper crust, and have become not only affordable as TV replacements, but highly capable of delivering quality HD visuals. This is very much the case with this Epson, which pumps out exceptionally bright, vivid colours to your projected screen (it supports either rear/flipped or regular front projection) with a crispness that will rival any TV, even with the afternoon sun streaming through into the living room. Sure, the price might seem a little high, but considering that this device supports up to 300" projection, and its excellent throw distance allows it to happily shrink down to 30", it suddenly becomes clear that the cost is well worth it.

Proving that it's suitable for games and movies, the

TW6100 includes 3D support for use with the rechargeable active shutter 3D glasses that come in the box (there's only one pair, though). Native 3D Blu-ray movies and games work perfectly, and there's also a function to convert 2D content to 3D. This works very well for games – surprisingly so – but the 3D effects in live-action films are a little muddled and difficult to watch for extended periods of time.

As large as this projector is, it's also suitable for temporary or portable use thanks to its built-in stereo speakers and overall relatively light weight. As expected, these speakers are fine but otherwise unexceptional, perhaps rivalling those of a mid-range TV. The size also means that it stays quiet thanks to its dual fan (intake/exhaust) system that pumps out hot air from the fiery high-power bulb. **NAG**

- Geoff Burrows

SPECS
BULB BRIGHTNESS
2,300 lumens
CONSTANT RATIO
40,000:1
INPUTS
2x HDMI,
composite,
component, VGA,
USB
BUILT-IN
SPEAKERS
2x 10W



9

If you've been on the hunt for a high-end projector to build your very own home cinema and gaming den, this is the one you want.

PLUS

3D support / Very bright, crisp visuals / Hassle-free setup / Easy daytime viewing

MINUS

3D conversion is imperfect / Built-in speakers are unexceptional

NZXT Kraken X60



Supplier NZXT
Website www.nzxt.com
RRP R1,950

In the quest for diversity, traditional case vendors have taken to manufacturing all kinds of devices and peripherals. The most natural fit for a company that started off making some of the best cases in the market, would be power supplies and CPU coolers. We've seen this before and given that those items are usually grouped together, it's no wonder that NZXT has taken a stab at the all-in-one liquid cooling system.

Right off the bat we must point out that the fans make an awful noise, and given that part of the appeal about liquid cooling is silent operation, we can't gloss over this fact. The NZXT Kraken is loud, especially with the fans set at maximum RPM. Consider getting two specialist 140mm fans to pair with the Kraken, or perhaps even four. They will not only offer similar if not better

performance, but will also alleviate the sonic stress that the bundled fans come with.

Other than that, the Kraken X60 is a peerless cooler in this market. Idle temperatures will not be much lower than what you already have them on currently should you be in possession of a somewhat decent aftermarket cooler. It is in the load temperatures however where the Kraken X60 will impress you the most. In our own testing, the Kraken X60 managed to shave off as much as 10°C when compared to our current Dream Machine CPU cooler. A direct comparison is obviously not fair given that the Kraken is a 280mm radiator vs. the 240mm one on the H100i. However, as it stands the Kraken is easily the best performing cooler we have tested to date. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

It is in the load temperatures however where the Kraken X60 will impress you the most.

SPECS
SIZE
312x138.4x27
(mm radiator)
COMPATIBILITY
2011/1366/775/
1156/1155/1150/
AM2/AM3+/FM2



9

The best all-in-one CPU cooler you can buy right now.

PLUS

Impeccable cooling performance / Very easy to install Rubberized pipes

MINUS

Back plate grommets susceptible to damage / Loud fans

Superheroes come in all
shapes and sizes

Let us be yours



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Moral panic

I like to think of myself as a good person. I don't shoplift or hit grannies with bricks or eat doughnuts for breakfast when I'm supposed to be on a diet¹, and I generally try to avoid being part of anything that might directly or indirectly contribute to any other bad things going on in the big world outside my own online shopping delivery zone.

As a gamer – or any sort of consumer, really, which includes everybody at some time or another, but while we're talking about gamers that definitely includes me and you right about now – this can occasionally present an ideological dilemma when simply buying a game or a particular brand of peanut butter means putting money in the bank accounts of people you might prefer not to support.

Consider pretty much any one of the blockbuster first-person shooter games on the market. Most of the weapons featured in these games are 100% authentic digital replicas of real life weapons, and the licensing rights to digitally reproduce those real life weapons were paid for with real life cash to real life arms dealers. So when you buy a copy of the latest Call of Battlefield: Sequential Number, some of that money is paying for the production of weapons that will

be used to shoot and kill real life people, everywhere from warzones to suburban shopping malls.

Tangentially, some of that money is also helping to finance controversial, on-going political agendas and conflicts – the Uzi submachine gun and TAR-21 assault rifle that appear on the gear lists of most military FPSes, for example, are manufactured by Israel Weapon Industries, a major supplier to the Israeli armed forces.

"Butbutbut," you might argue, before realising you're not immediately sure how to complete that sentence with a compelling counter-point².

But what does this mean for the person who just wants to play-play cops and robbers in the comfort and safety of their lounge, is perhaps a more thoughtful response. And this is the awkward moment when the person writing the opinion column about this very issue isn't entirely certain of their own opinion on the matter. Honestly, I just don't know, but it's something I'm thinking about anyway and that I'm hoping some of you might have a think about too³. Remember, you can find me on Twitter (@nxtirms) to exchange thoughts, insults, and cat photos. **NAG**
- Tarryn van der Byl

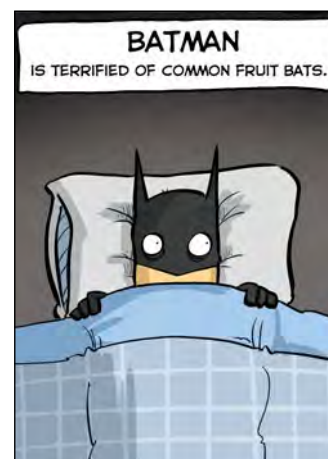
1 Except that one time, this morning, and even then I shoved half of it into my boyfriend's mouth and as any proper lawyer could tell you, having an accomplice makes you only half-guilty of the crime. It's true, you don't even have to ask a proper lawyer. Seriously, though, just don't.

2 Unless it's "I don't care, LOL", in which case, this probably isn't the thought experiment for you. It's also not really a compelling counter-point, but the sort of person who refutes an interesting hypothesis with "I don't care, LOL" is not usually the sort of person who, you know, cares that it isn't. It's one of those self-fulfilling things.

3 Okay, so maybe that's more or less the intellectual equivalent of clicking "Like" on one of those Facebook posts that promises to provide a kidney transplant for some fly-blown third-world toddler when 50 billion people have clicked "Like", but it's a start.

Extra Life

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



REMIX MEMORIES

CHANGE THE WORLD



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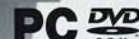
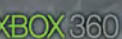
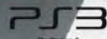
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GTX 770 LIGHTNING



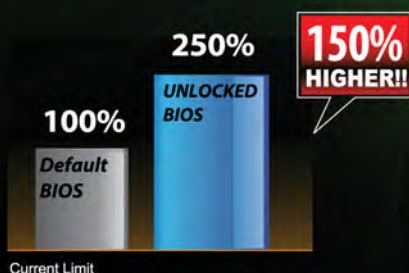
Breaking World Records with Unlocked Digital Power

Unlocked BIOS

One click to unlock all protections

- Disable APS (Active Phase Switching)
- Higher OCP (Over Current Protection)

◆ Comparison of Current Limit

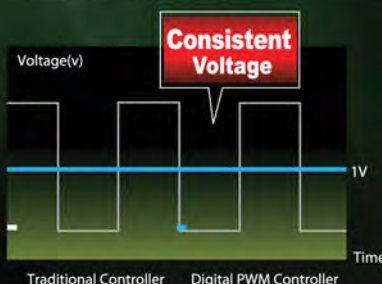


Digital PWM Controller

More stable and precise voltage by digital signal

- More precise voltage control
- Faster voltage response time
- Power/Voltage Control via Afterburner

◆ Voltage Comparison

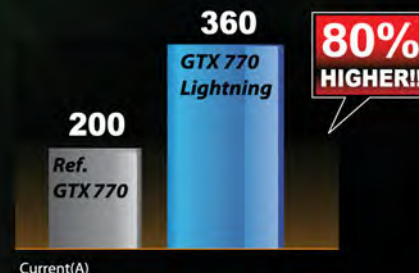


Enhanced Power Design

2X power output for maximum OC potential

- 12 Phase PWM Design
- Independent Memory Power
- LPL (Lightning Power Layer)

◆ Comparison of Current Output



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