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NAG

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Special Edition
COVER 1

Vol. 16
Issue
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THINGS COULD GET REALLY MESSY

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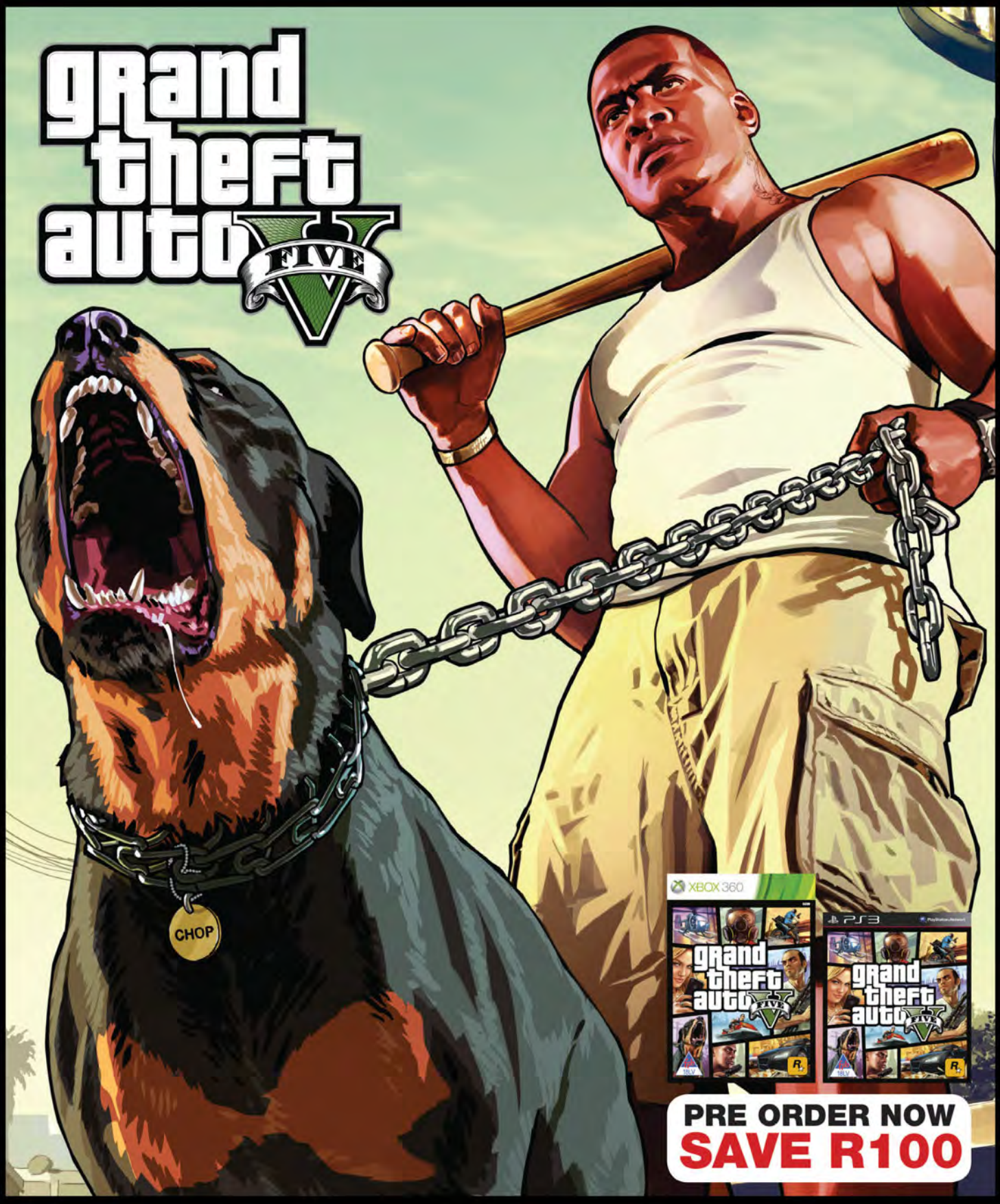

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MUSICA

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Features

30 GAME FOOD
+1 TO COOKING
...and now you're going to want to add a little rosemary to be sure that you get those flavours *just* ri– oh hi! Didn't see you there! Here at Fortress NAG we're all about adding sprinkles of appropriately nerdy diversity to this gaming life. That's why we've gone and cooked up a batch of gaming-themed treats for you to have a look at, and perhaps try for yourself. Because everybody needs to eat in between bouts of extensive fragging.

36 XBOX ONE
And then there were three. Microsoft's introduced their contender in the next-gen scramble for your attention (and money), and we've taken a look at the scant info that's been revealed for it thus far, breaking down the Xbox One so you've got all the knowledge you need when the time comes to make The Choice™.

46 GRAND THEFT AUTO V
Rockstar's deemed it time for your excitement to swell as we roll up on the fifth *Grand Theft Auto*'s release date. We pasted our eyeballs to a demo of the game that Rockstar led us through, and walked away starry-eyed. Three playable characters, the most expansive open-world sprawl yet and a million possibilities to go with it. Count us in.

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A prediction

I'm often asked (especially when rAge is on) what I think about the future of gaming. I'm asked to make grand, sweeping predictions about where all this craziness is headed. What I always say is that the industry, especially the hardware, changes so fast that predicting the future is impossible – next question. If pressed I tell them that what you see in *Star Trek*, specifically virtual holographic environments, is where it might go. The other (more likely) alternative to this is the simpler idea of just plugging "games" directly into the brain where everything is electrically, and in some cases chemically induced so you think you're actually there living the game. But that's all in the future (around 15-25 years) from now.

But now I do actually have a prediction, something I think we'll see in the next four years or maybe sooner. You should have already figured out that both the PS4 and the Xbox One are essentially computers inside – made up of the same stuff that runs your PC and/or notebook. They are of course more integrated to speed things up but this integration will become less of a selling point in the speed stakes as new generations of CPUs, GPUs and everything that surrounds them arrive. So what we've got here is console "exclusive" games that, with a bit of fiddling, can technically eventually maybe somehow work on a PC. Of course this will never be allowed by Microsoft and Sony because it's not their business and they need to protect and support their platforms exclusively. Imagine the chaos if all games work on all platforms it'd be madness.

In a few years you're going to be able to download an emulator for your PC that will run *Halo 5* or *Uncharted 4* (just speculating on these titles, remember as I write this I'm packing bags for E3). Soon a smart coder will put together an emulator for the new consoles and you'll be able to download *Halo 5* (illegally) and play it on your PC. I don't condone piracy because it's killing our industry; I'm speculating as to what will probably be the reality. Now if you add a Linux driven Steam Box into this mix you generate interesting branching scenarios. What Microsoft and Sony should do is have a plan in place to port all their exclusives to the PC legally and make even more money. So let's see.

I FEEL ALIVE, A COVER STORY...

Boy, do we have a story for you. I can't tell you the whole story because people who can't keep their mouths shut kind of caused this whole problem in the first place. So, a while ago there was a special "something" planned for our *GTA V* cover. All was well and we had plenty of time to write the feature, get the artwork and make it happen. Then things went pomegranate-shaped and the whole deal was cancelled with only a week to go before this issue had to leave for the printer and everyone leaves for E3. Panic! Thanks to Federico from Rockstar and of course the guys at Megarom. We were flown to London to the Rockstar offices to get the feature and then flown back the next day, one day before we went to print. Geoff stepped up to the plate and took one for the team by actually volunteering to go and then writing the feature in a hotel room when he should have been sampling the fine dining at Burger King and over spending on Regent Street. Don't worry folks, I gave him the whole of Saturday off. The side-benefit of all this chaos was me feeling really alive again for an issue of *NAG*. Some months they're just too easy to put together and you tend to get a little complacent. So besides thanking all the humans involved I must also thank the cosmic forces that conspired to screw me around this month.

July issue

August issue

September issue

October issue

ODD AND ENDS

Miklós and I are off to what promises to be an E3 to remember; full supplement and guide and so on in the August issue of *NAG* BTW. Don't miss it. We also have four *GTA V* covers this month and then from this issue onwards keep an eye out for these exclusive *GTA V* free collectible postcards. We're giving one away in every issue of *NAG* until October. Make sure you catch them all.

Ride hard and never look back

- RedTide
Editor

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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.

Letter of the Month July 2013

From: Paul
Subject: Why can't relationships be more like gaming?

"This aint a song for the broken hearted..." You know your heart had been ground into dog-food when Bon-Jovi starts making sense. However, having just gone through a bad break up with a truly wonderful girl, I decided to do as all gamers do in this situation, I sat down with my favourite game and proceeded to shoot my heartache in the face. It was during this session that a thought started to permeate in the void that is the gamers' mind... Why can't relationships be more like gaming?

Falling in love with a game for the first time is a truly special time in a young gamers' life. The moment when you call your best friend and say, with tears in your eyes "I found it man... I found the one." Falling in love with a game is easy, the game doesn't expect you to love it, the game does not judge you when you don't play it, and the game never rolls its eyes at you when you would rather hang out with your friends for like an hour on a Thursday even though you've been playing with your game for the last two weeks without... I digress. What I'm saying is, your games come with instructions – a booklet, a predetermined way of playing them and highlights on the back (This could be true for humans as well.) Relationships on the other hand, do not. But they damn well should.

Falling in love and being in a relationship should be, for the most part, fun. The trouble starts when your significant other feels more for you than you do for her or him. This isn't anyone's fault, people fall in love at different rates. Your games don't judge you if you don't love them, they are just happy that you're spending time with them. And no game has ever expected you to love it the moment you start... playing together. Honestly, how many times have you torn into that clear plastic with your teeth, cracked the box and stuck in that disk only to be slightly disappointed and a little embarrassed after? Not me that's for sure... the game... maybe.

The sad, but honest truth here is, the rules for gaming and relationships will never, can never, coexist. Your true life significant other comes with baggage. The person they were with before you might not have played with them as the retailer had specified. They may have been scratched, left out in the sun or have been neglected for days on end.

So what am I saying here? Why can't relationships be more like gaming? Because life sucks ass with a straw! So, as long as you have a couple o-games that you love and at least one hand, all your needs are taken care of.

Sigh... just got my head blown off by a reaper. Reload...

I'm not a relationship expert and the last agony aunt we hired left the building (on her first day) in a hurry and we never saw her again. I do agree with you to some extent however. Are games better than girls?! Can't really be sure myself, but the very fact that this question has come up at all should tell you a lot. Let's see what the NAG readers think – send mail to: letters@nag.co.za. Anyway, if you've given up on women you can always place an order for your very own pleasure robot. I hear they're going to be huge in 2043. Until then, get a cat. No wait – rather get a dog. I don't think you're ready for the stinging rejection only a cat can deliver. Ed.

From: Justin
Subject: Quite a Naughty Dog

I've been a fan of the Naughty Dog development team since the days of the original Play Station, and although I love all of their games and the developer is most likely in my top five of best developers ever, I have noticed something, nothing disturbing or anything, just odd.

As games get more and more technical, with blood splatter actually looking like blood splatter rather than a few lines of red stuff, the age restriction gradually increases. The original Play Station had few 18+ titles, the PS2 had more, and the PS3 has a hell of a lot more (about 80% of my PS3 collection is now 18+).

I have nothing against gratuitous violence, sex, drugs and rock 'n roll, but when I was a kid I played Crash Bandicoot (and Unreal Tournament/ Quake 3: Arena) and nowadays kids play Modern Warfare and Battlefield, maybe it's hypocritical of me to think less of what kids are playing these days since I started GTA in grade three and Unreal Tournament at age six, but anyway, my initial point that was lost in ramblings was that of Naughty Dog.

This developer started with a kid's game, Crash Bandicoot, and then they started with their slightly more mature series Jak & Daxter, which held a 12+ age restriction. Then they move onto Unchartered, which has a 16+ age restriction, and now it's The Last of Us with its nice 18+ sticker.

This is a developer that has treaded further and further into violence over the course of their career, so really this developer could be considered a bit of symbolism representing gaming as a whole. For once upon a time games were just for kids, and now very few are actually intended for them at all.

I don't know my own intentions for this letter, but it started with Naughty Dog and The Last of Us, and that got me thinking about how the gaming industry has changed since I was small and innocent or some nonsense like that. Kickass magazine by the way... and can't wait till The Last of Us.

This is a good observation. Is it us, is it them, or is it the onward march of technology driving up the age restriction? Think about a game like Crash Bandicoot *but a more modern*

version of it, one with realistic graphics and physics and perhaps even from a different perspective. If you brought all these elements up to date I wonder what age restriction it would get today. I do also think that because gaming was new media nobody took any notice of it and really didn't know what to do with it to be honest. Back in the old days developers and publishers got away with murder (virtually). We're also now living in a society where government types want to protect us. Add all these things together and boom here we are with everything getting a rating of 18+. Ed.

From: Sample
Subject: Kickstarter being overused?
Am I the only one who thinks maybe, just maybe videogame developers could be using Kickstarter a bit "too much." Sure, it's popular and has proven very successful, but doesn't it seem a bit like companies are kind of using people for money? Like "Hey I want to make a game, let's just ask these people for their money, they'll give it to us." I know they're offering incentives etc. But it just seems so many campaigns are happening. But my prediction is that the amount of Kickstarter campaigns will die down in the next year. Maybe...

I agree with that 100%. I think people should spend more time researching before spending their money. It's a great service but it's open to abuse. We're doing a feature on Kickstarter soon – we've all participated in a campaign and I even got my early adopter items (t-shirt, poster and so on). I'm still waiting for the actual game though. Bottom line, make sure the people behind the project are legitimate – you know – use your brain. ;) Ed.

From: Arno
Subject: Are our standards getting too high?
The other day I was at a friend's house and he wanted a new game, so he asked me to recommend a game for him. He was on his computer with Google ready to search for reviews (sorry we didn't use NAG, he doesn't read it). I recommended games like Far Cry 3, BioShock Infinite and a couple you would expect and then I came to God of War Ascension. He searched for the Metacritic review and the website said it got an 80 out of a possible 100. He looked at me and said "you recommend sh*t that only gets 80?".

This got me thinking. Are our standards getting too high? This has happened a couple of times in the past, if I was debating about games online or in person, that people think a game is bad unless it gets higher than 9/10. I myself play as much as I can, from new releases, to indie games, to games I still play on my PS2 and also, but unfortunately, games like Duke Nukem Forever. In my head anything above 7/10 should be played by most people if not everyone. People should lower their standards, sit back, relax and enjoy the good things in gaming and not look for tiny details to complain about.

You should probably think about finding better friends. The trick with these kinds of things is to find a source of reviews and opinions that you trust and agree with and stick with them. I don't feel aggregator sites are entirely reliable because they can be manipulated. Diablo III *is a great example of this. But then that's just my opinion. If you agree with it then keep buying* NAG *and read our reviews. We have the best people with a lot of experience and we always look for the silver lining and we're not interested in sensationalism. Ed.*

ON THE **FORUMS**

The NAG forums; there is some science here but we can't find it
www.nag.co.za/forums

Q: What are your greatest hopes, fears, and/or desires for this next generation of gaming?

"My biggest fear is that I won't be coming along for the ride. No backwards compatibility - even for your digital catalogue? - is a deal-breaker for me. "
nukehead

"Greatest desire is a Wii U. Greatest hope is GTA V with exclusive features aimed at the Wii-U. Greatest fear is that it won't happen."
ioiiooio

"My biggest fear is stifling DRM and having to jump through hoops to play games. Consoles were/are meant to be simple, accessible devices, not this. My biggest hope is that they're primarily still games machines, and that gamers are still their main target market."
.exe

"I just hope I can afford them."
Grasshopper

From: David
Subject: Thank you gamers
This is probably going to sound like an odd thing to write about, but I think it's a little overdue anyway. I would like to thank all the gamers who buy games when they are newly released, the gamers who pre-order and the gamers who happily pay full price for games, because these are the people that make games best sellers. It's is thanks to them that the best games eventually get released as bestseller editions, game of the year editions and other cheap alternatives. It is thanks to the many that gamers like my can afford to buy most of the games I want, at a fraction of the cost and often with all the expansions, patches and (sometimes) DLC, albeit several years later. Honestly, thank you to all those who pay full price; the limited budget gamers like me appreciate it.

And to all those who pirate games: you suck.

Dean: "Attached, is a bit of fan artwork that I have been working on, I am a very big fan of NAG and enjoy reading it with my friends, hope you find this very pleasing."

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.

PRIMA INTERACTIVE

This months Fan Art winner recieve Gears of War Judgment for Xbox 360 valued at R599. Sponsored by Prima Interactive.

Let's hear it for all the rich people <clapping>. Not odd at all. It is thanks to early adopters that technology moves along so quickly. If nobody bought these R120K+ televisions when they launched or took part in pre-order incentives this whole industry would look very different. Nice one! Ed.

From: Gustav
Subject: Xbox One

So the new Xbox has been revealed... and Sony's stock rises by 8% on the New York stock exchange. Why can boring guys in grey suites recognize the mistakes of the great reveal but Microsoft can't?

What did they show us on the 21st? An American Xbox made for the American people. We don't watch ESPN and half the other stuff they demo-ed. If I stream a movie and start to web browse at the same time my Telkom ADSL line might explode! Where was the great gameplay footage to rival Killzone on the PS4?

So you will have to be online and your R700-R800 copy of Forza won't work on a friend's console... unless he pays for the privilege or signs in as somebody else?! They have obviously given up the fight against the rampant copying of games... and who will pay for these losses in revenue? The honest, legitimate gamers again. A year after its release even more consoles will be hacked and modified to play copied games. Well done Microsoft!

Just to clarify, I own an Xbox 360 so I'm not some PlayStation fanboy but facts are facts. I have harped on about the Kinect since its release – the crappy games, the advertised "VOICE CONTROLS" that aren't supported in South Africa and other countries where the consoles are sold. What is going to be different with the Xbox One? I can tell you now; we will be sitting with the controller in hand while the rest of the world "talks" to their consoles.

The 21st was a very sad day for me after years of console gaming, it obvious that the end is nigh. It is not the PC graphics that is killing it but the makers themselves. Nintendo has no games; Microsoft turns its back on legitimate gamers and the rest of the world... and Sony? Well, at least they still have a gaming console... if they can stave off bankruptcy long enough, that will be my next and, most likely, last console I ever buy. The last console, not by choice. Just one gamer's opinion. Thanks for a great magazine.

I feel your pain and frustration. However, while Sony (right now) is trumping Microsoft by a large margin we still have a whole E3 to get through. I believe that Microsoft's reveal was in reaction to Sony's reveal and not what they might have originally planned. Sony was smart doing what they did and how they did it and because Xbox is reacting to them they're always going to have better PR throughout this period. My advice is to reserve final judgement until after the circus in Los Angeles. Then we'll have all the details and then we can make an educated decision based on the facts. Ed.

From: Jannie
Subject: Halo 4

We are a group of 3 people at work playing Halo 4; our rankings range from 40 – 60. I will appreciate it if you can clarify a couple of issues that has been the centre of some long discussions:

#Can you buy better guns/abilities, and if so where?

#Where has all the high rankings disappeared to, rankings of above 130 seem non-existent contrary to about 2 months ago.

#Ranking of 1 – 20 seem to have armour /abilities we never had.

#The American players seem to have a advantage over us, is this due to our slower internet?

Your opinion on these will be greatly appreciated...

From our Halo expert Tarryn:
1. Every time you rank up in Halo 4, you get a Spartan Point (SP). This is a sort of virtual currency used to unlock new weapons. Some weapons are only available at higher ranks, though.
2. Halo matchmaking algorithms put players of similar rank together. If you're rank 40, you're unlikely to be placed in a game with rank 130 players.
3. That's not possible. Make sure you're using your custom loadouts.
4. Not the slower Internet, but the latency (there's a difference). Your ping on an American server is probably in excess of 500 milliseconds in other words, it takes at least 500 ms between you firing a shot, the remote server registering the shot, and returning a result to your side (whether it's a hit or miss, for example). That puts you at a huge disadvantage in an FPS, where latency matters. Play with locals instead. Hope that helps, Ed.

THE SHORTS

Extracts of n00b from NAG letters

"Soon we will start getting the Assassins Creed dance off where you break out as much dance combo's while back flipping off a rooftop killing someone below."
- Ben

"It needs to connect to the Internet every 24 hours or else it just won't function. Jjidhejridisejjdsjnf bfgfidowiej. Sorry. I was banging my head on my keyboard out of rage."
- Nicholas

"I hope you find this point true, we (me and my nerd buddy) have brainstormed this point just by talking about my weekend, and now it is in the form if this letter
- Edmund

"Trust me... if we don't change this two dimensional view of the production of a game soon, then the video game industry is going down the toilet."
- Tariq

ON TWITTER

Quack like a duck @nagcoza

Helge Hoffmann
I haven't laughed so hard in days but I couldn't contain myself watching the Surgeon Simulator 2013 vid on this month's @ nagcoza cover dvd

mathew
@nagcoza YOLOOOOOO

BABU
@nagcoza got soo much school work can't even peep in my nag!

joan mashava
@nagcoza save the trees, read online... *hides*

Douw Kotzé
@nagcoza Mark Hamill not voice The Joker? That should be a crime or something... Mr Skywalker is Legendary my friend.

the rivalry returns. play it your way.

the official video game.

PS3 PlayStation Network XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE PC DVD ROM Wii U Investec ASHES 505 GAMES

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The great E3 adventure – Part 1

The Electronic Entertainment Expo – ever since I knew about the existence of E3 I've wanted to experience one of the shows. I'm not sure when it was that I learnt of this cornucopia of gaming, pizazz and unadulterated geekery, but E3 has been part of the international gaming landscape since 1996. As time went on E3 became the highlight of each year's gaming calendar, and no matter how many people tell you that Gamescom is better or that PAX is more sincere, E3 is still considered the "main event". How much longer that will last is up for debate.

> "Others will say that the journalists are to blame for allowing themselves to become jaded..."

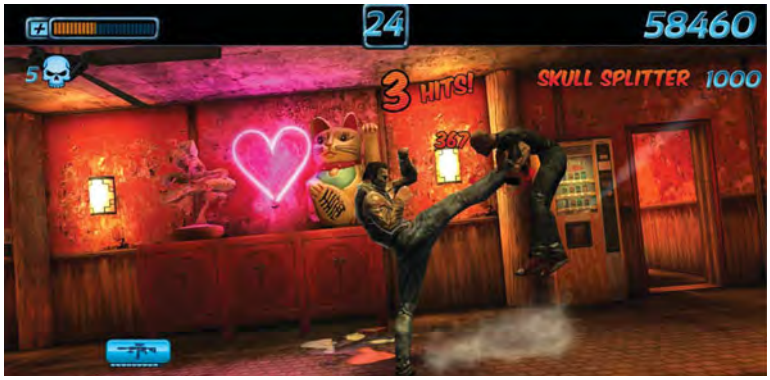
I'm pretty sure my fixation on one day attending doesn't date as far back as that inaugural year of 1996, but E3 has been on my "to-do" list for at least a decade. At time of writing, I have a week to go before I head off to Los Angeles – iPad, camera and frothy eagerness in hand. As I'm sure some of you can imagine I'm pretty damn excited right now, and I think that's a good thing. I realise that many people probably consider it quaint to be excited about something like E3. It seems that over the last few years, when it comes to gaming, the *modus operandi* is to be wary of the things that used to get people excited. Who exactly is to blame for this world-weary disposition will vary depending on who you're talking to. Some will say that the publishers are at fault because all the publishers care about is turning a profit and wringing all the cash out of the IPs they have at their disposal. As such we should be suspicious because they want our money, not our heartfelt gratitude for bringing us an awesome gaming experience. Others will say that the journalists are to blame for allowing themselves to become jaded, and for allowing that disillusionment to pervade their writing and filter down to the readers. I am also guilty of donning my grumpy pants from time to time in my writing. Should I be made to justify that cynicism, or is it safe to assume that there are readers who feel the same way about a particular game? Finally, there are those who will say that the gamers are to blame for this slump in excitement levels. The alleged evidence is varied: unrealistic expectations of developers, wanting sequels that don't change things too much, moaning when sequels don't change things enough, and the go-to argument levelled at every gamer with a dissenting opinion: entitlement issues.

I find it all rather depressing at times, which is why my excitement in anticipation of E3 is great. It's great for two reasons: first it's excitement, and that's an awesome emotion to feel; second, it's a reminder of why it is I got into gaming in the first place – it's exciting, and still is.

Having gone to Gamescom for the last two years, I think I have a reasonable idea of what to expect with E3: lots of running around to make back-to-back appointments, lots of preview sessions led by tired development teams, lots of waiting around, lots of games, lots of people and lots of frantically scribbled notes. All of that, just without the German precision and fastidious organisation. There'll probably be a lot less sausage and sauerkraut [*that all depends on where you stay, Ed*], and a lot more tacos and hamburgers. My excitement levels, however, will likely be the same, and that makes me pretty damn happy.

- Miklós Szecsei -

Time for some street justice



Hot off the recent *Devil May Cry* reboot, developers Ninja Theory felt the need to challenge themselves to build a mobile game. The result of that challenge is *Fightback*, which is currently in development by a small team within the studio and sees players take on the role of an '80s-inspired action hero who has to kick and punch his way through levels in a skyscraper to save his sister.

It might sound like a lark, but *Fightback* is more of a homage to the period than a parody of it. Creative director Luis Gigliotti explains that, as silly as these films seem today, their delivery was actually pretty smart.

"You could look at a character and go, 'I get them.' The anti-hero was born in the '80s, and that concept of the anti-hero wasn't done through clever dialogue — it was done through costuming and relational positioning within a scene and lighting. It was more theatrical."

The team is attempting to recreate that purity of action and visuals while building a fairly unique touch-based control system that combines swipes and gestures with predictive input. The game knows what you're going to do next based on your actions, and the result is a system that's surprisingly responsive for the platform.

If the idea of kicking bad guys in the face for maximum points appeals to you, then keep an eye out for the free-to-play *Fightback* on iOS and Android towards the end of the year.

The last of all of us

If leaked details on the multiplayer component of the upcoming *The Last of Us* turn out to be accurate, the game could well have a multiplayer mode that actually suits its setting, instead of the generic CTF/DM stuff many of us were expecting.

According to a massive text file hidden within the recently-released demo for the game, one possible multiplayer mode could have players enter into a twelve-week-long campaign to grow, train and defend a clan of survivors against waves of Infected. These AI-controlled NPCs seem to need a lot of taking care of but will otherwise go about their own business of eating, healing and fighting. It's not yet clear if this will play out as a Facebook-style game will little direct interaction with your clan members, or if you'll actually be on the battlefield as one of them. It's also possible that players will compete with other players and their clans in either a passive online leaderboard, or in direct combat.

However it actually turns out, we have to say that this is an interesting development. We had a hard time picturing an *Uncharted*-like multiplayer component in *The Last of Us*.

Titan takes a break

Whip out the tissues: Blizzard's as-yet unannounced MMO, codenamed Titan, could be at least another three years away. What was once a 100-strong team working on the project has reportedly been cut down to a mere 30, following Blizzard's decision to "make some large design and technology changes to the game," according to Blizz spokesperson Shon Damron.

"We're using this opportunity to shift some of our resources to assist with other projects while the core team adapts our technology and tools to accommodate these new changes," he explained. "We've always had a highly iterative development process, and the unannounced MMO is no exception."

Since this is Blizzard, we've always taken any info with a grain of salt, but there was quite a bit of info pointing to a release next year at the latest. This shift brings with it a concern for the project as a whole and edges it closer to the dreaded realm of "vapourware", along with its distant cousin *StarCraft: Ghost* that was eventually cancelled. Of course, *Ghost* was a side-project; Titan is something substantially more important and could well be a key product if the *WoW* subscriber numbers continue to drop at their current rate.

Shifting tides

Cross-media franchises are nothing new to the gaming industry. Heck, most developers have some sort of licensed game under their belt that came from a film, book or TV series, but every now and then the humble gaming industry influences someone on the outside.

In this case, that influence comes in the form of *Black Crown* – a free-to-play web-based online fiction written by Rob Sherman and published by Random House. You know, the company established in 1927 that is responsible for publishing more books than there are video games in existence.

"*Black Crown* represents Random House's ambition to push the boundaries in online storytelling, experiment with new business models and launch a debut author in a groundbreaking way," Random House digital publisher Dan Franklin said in the announcement of the project.

"More cloud processing BS. Someone please call their bluff on this. Someone please ask if these fabled 300,000 servers are real hardware, or just the total size of Windows Azure (which then implies XBL would only ever get a portion of that)."

– Developer Jonathan Blow on Microsoft's promise of high-powered cloud computing in Xbox One

The Game Stalker

Television and videogames

I realise I'm about a year too late for this, but I only recently watched Video Game High School, or VGHS. For those of you who haven't heard of it, it's an online series revolving around a high school for pro gamer wannabes. The series is set in the near future where pro gamers are elevated to stardom by their participation in one of the world's most competitive sports. This is a concept not too farfetched, but I'll get to that in a moment.

What was pleasantly surprising was not only the cast, which includes celebrity nerd Zachary Levi, but the production value, which is definitely of a standard of many broadcast television shows. Considering that I do actually work in broadcast television, it set me to wondering why this show isn't on air, especially since they've committed to a second season. In the case of VGHS, the choice was a conscious one because of the creator's belief in digital distribution and the concept of the web series, but I personally would be interested to see if a show such as this rated highly on a television network.

VGHS later became a movie, so if you're unfamiliar with the series, you might have heard of it in this format.

Getting back to the point I raised earlier, the concept of pro-gamers reaching the status of say, rugby and football players, might seem like pie in the sky, but if we consider the rate at which competitive gaming is growing, is it really such a farfetched idea? We already recognise certain video games as sports worthy of national colours, why not elevate the athletes (for this is indeed what they are even if it's not physical) to the same level as football players?

My next question is, "Why aren't there more shows like this?" I'm not talking about shows on videogames that showcase reviews and the like; I'm talking about sitcoms, or in this case, "action comedy" such as VGHS. I suppose there is *The Big Bang Theory*, but let's face it, much as I enjoy the show, it plays to the stereotypes of the gaming nerd.

VGHS attempts in many ways to make gaming "cool", by making the school itself prestigious and elite. Only the best of the best are admitted to the school, and the competition to make it in to the clans is stiff to say the least.

The show still showcases the school stereotypes as well. The cool kids/jocks are the FPS players (with the exception of the likeable but bumbling hero), the drift racers equate with the stoner crowd, and the rhythm game kids are study nerds. That said the entire show is so well thought out, with constant Internet meme references thrown so casually into conversation that you might miss them if you're not paying attention.

I was sad to discover that each episode does in many ways fall victim to the fact that it is a made for web series. There is no consistent length to each, meaning you'll get anywhere between ten to twenty six minutes of viewing per episode. They could have expanded on this significantly, through character development etc., but it was so good that I managed to watch the entire first season in a morning.

I was of course incredibly gratified to discover that funding for a second season has been raised (everything through Kickstarter), and I'm already waiting with almost as much anticipation as I would for a long awaited game.

- Pippa Tshabalala -

What's in the box?

Do you remember when industry veteran/lunatic Peter Molyneux started his studio 22 Cans with the promise of changing the industry forever, and then went on to make that weird game in which people chipped away at a giant cube to see what's inside? We have to admit, we kind of thought that the project was already concluded, whomever got to the juicy centre rewarded with a one-night stand with the 'Neux or something silly, but only now has someone finally broken through, and the life-changing something inside is... well it's pretty damn cool.

The winner, a chap by the name of Bryan Henderson, was rewarded with a video of Molyneux standing inside the echoing confines of a computer-generated cube. There, he spoke with Bryan and explained his prize: he will be the almighty deity in 22 Cans' upcoming god sim *Godus*. He will rule the virtual world, dictate the flow of the game, be a merciful or a murderous god, and generally lord about for as long as he feels like it. Oh, and he gets a cut of the profit made, which means it really is in his best interest to bring in the crowds.

On one hand, this is an incredible, unique prize that nobody but the insane mind of Peter Molyneux could concoct, but on the other hand, it's also really just an elaborate marketing campaign for *Godus*. Either way, it's a sweet deal, and we're all totally jealous of Bryan.

Metro: Last Light set to expand with buckets of single-player DLC

As you'll discover in our review in this issue, we quite like *Metro: Last Light* and its oppressive brand of first-person shooting and horror-ing. This means we're happy to report an incoming bevy of DLC that'll expand the experience offered by the game over the coming months in various ways. The first of these four DLC offerings is called the Faction Pack, and interestingly, developer 4A Games says it'll focus on "other characters with stories to tell". That one is due in June, so it should be out by the time you read this.

Following that, as with the Faction Pack, the Chronicles Pack aims to expand on *Last Light*'s story and universe. Then, the Tower Pack will "present a unique solo challenge to *Metro* veterans". Finally we'll be getting the Developer Pack, which will "give creative players some interesting tools with which to explore the world of *Metro*". The Developer Pack sounds mighty intriguing in particular, and we can only assume some sort of modding tools – but perhaps it's something more?

Let's play... print the money!

In an industry where personalities are born and honed on the Internet, gamers often turn to "Let's Play" videos as a source of information, education and entertainment, but it seems that Nintendo isn't entirely too happy with the distribution of funds earned through this process.

For those of you who are unaware, YouTubers like Husky Starcraft, Yogscast, TotalBiscuit and Day[9] make money from producing their videos thanks to YouTube's monetisation polices. They pull in viewers; those viewers watch the videos and also a couple of ads; the video producers earn a share of revenue from those ads. It's a simple, honest system that rewards the production of entertaining videos and simultaneously boosts public interest in whatever games are being covered.

This is where Nintendo has started to get nasty: the company has made claims of ownership against the use of select videos (mostly recent titles), but they're not pulling down the content due to copyright infringement. Instead, they have instructed YouTube to divert all advertising revenue directly into their pockets. So keep making those videos, everyone, but don't expect to earn a living doing so.

Not only is this approach petty, it's destructive, and even if this doesn't become a trend that other publishers follow (we sincerely hope this won't be the case), just these few claims have soured the industry and will likely put doubt into the minds of anyone who's considered doing their own videos.

Google catches up with online mobile services

While consoles and PCs have enjoyed cross-game connectivity, online leaderboards and unified multiplayer environments for years, the vast ocean that is mobile gaming is only now playing catch-up. Unsurprisingly, Apple has been a leader in this field, and introduced their Game Center service almost three years ago, but now Google has finally returned fire with their own service, tied into the stunted Google Plus social network, with the simple name of Google Play Game Services.

GPGS will give Android and iOS game developers access to online leaderboards (posted either publically or within the players' social networks), cloud-based save games, a unified achievement system and real-time match-making, although the latter is restricted to use in Android devices for the time being. Android Operating systems from as far back as version 2.2 (Froyo) will be supported by the service, as Google has reported that over 70% of Android devices are stuck with pre-Jellybean systems.

Stay a while and you know the rest by now

As cheesy at it was, we kind of enjoyed the story in *Diablo III*, and if you did too then you might be interested to know that Blizzard is preparing to release a 148-page hardcover book entitled *Diablo III: Book of Tyrael* that is dedicated to the events that took place in Sanctuary during the final act of the game. The story will follow the events through the Archangel Tyrael's perspective, and includes original artwork and writing from characters in the game including Leah and Deckard Cain.

You've gotta have Faith

Retailers have the nasty habit of breaking NDAs and accidentally (or "accidentally") posting products for pre-order that haven't actually been confirmed by the publisher. Such was/is the case with Amazon.de, which went and advertised *Mirror's Edge 2* for pre-order with a placeholder price of €99.99 following the Xbox One reveal. As expected, the Internet blew up with this news, and Amazon promptly reacted by taking down the listing, thereby further fuelling the panic. Whatever the reason behind this mistake, we all know that *Mirror's Edge 2* is a thing that will eventually happen, and given EA's demonstration of love for Microsoft at the XBO reveal, we wouldn't be surprised if the next-gen platform is the title's new home, temporarily or otherwise.

Become a broader gamer

Discussion about game development usually revolves around the process itself – thinking, creating and presenting your most badass piece of kicknutitude (not yet a real word) for your audience to absorb, enjoy and start flame wars on the Internet about.

Attention is only rarely paid to the preamble of that whole process: you started on game development because you grew up loving games (I hope this requires no justification!). If we take things one step further, it's usually safe to say that passionate game designers tend to make stuff that they're most comfortable or familiar with. An avid FPS player tends to develop shooters. A fan of puzzlers will make more puzzlers. In a nutshell, it's the game dev version of "you are what you eat".

> "Nobody says that you have to like every game you play. I stumble across lots of experimental indie games on a monthly basis which bore or confuse me."

I've probably touched on this idea before, as it first nested in my brain several years ago with Edmund McMillen's "Dos and Don'ts" indie manifesto (look it up, it's great). In this piece of writing, one of the ideas promoted is gaining outside experience to bring back to the game dev table. The first text adventure, for example, was inspired by the author's spelunking exploits as a child. *BioShock* was built on a passionate interest in philosophy, a thought experiment about the ultimate Ayn Rand-styled society. We wouldn't have had *Guitar Hero* if the devs didn't like that sort of music in the first place.

This is a great piece of general advice. Live life as fully as possible, and you'll return to make more creative and inspiring games. Instead of scraping the bottom of the barrel for cool ideas, you'll always have a wellspring of experiences to draw from when you want to make something new and thoughtful.

I feel that moderate attention can also be paid to experiences *inside* the realm of gaming. Going back to an earlier example – an FPS player tends to create FPS games because that's what they're familiar with. But is this an FPS player who does nothing but sit in front of *CS: GO* and *Modern Warfare* whenever they're in front of their gaming system? Or do they branch out and play RPGs, strategy and rhythm games as well? The former kind of developer will probably be doomed to a career of narrow and shallow development, drawing upon very few ideas and perspectives for their project. The latter will be capable of finding the strengths in multiple areas of play, able to splice and cut and customise to a far greater degree than they otherwise could. And through that, they can bring something genuinely new to the table and inspire players in the same way that their own gaming passions did for them.

Nobody says that you have to like every game you play. I stumble across lots of experimental indie games on a monthly basis which bore or confuse me. But I know that I can always *learn* from them, so I keep trying 'em out anyway. And when I come away from one of them thinking, "There were one or two lovely ideas there, but they'd work better in a different environment," I know that I've got a new prototype of my own to work on.

- Rodain Joubert -

So long, Online Pass

EA has killed off its controversial Online Pass for all future games. This was confirmed by the company's senior director of corporate communications John Reseburg during a recent interview with GamesBeat, and has been touted as a step forward for the publisher following the drastic step backwards that was the introduction of the system in the first place.

"Initially launched as an effort to package a full menu of online content and services, many players didn't respond to the format," explained Reseburg. "We've listened to the feedback and decided to do away with it moving forward."

As happy as we are to hear that EA will no longer clamp down on used game sales with its Online Pass, it does open up the question as to motive: the publisher is still in the business of making as much money as possible from each title, and they haven't necessarily changed their stance on used games. We suspect that this has a lot to do with pressure that's being put on next-gen console providers to combat the use of second-hand games. And, of course, EA isn't about to give up its other money-printing facilities: DLC. If anything, we expect to see an increase in post-release content in the attempt to maximise the dollars earned from each sale – no matter if they're new or used products.

Cars for the Car God

Sony and Polyphony Digital have announced that a sixth game will be added to the beloved *Gran Turismo* series of PlayStation-exclusive racing titles. Series creator Kazunori Yamauchi delivered the news at *Gran Turismo*'s 15th anniversary event – where it was also revealed that the franchise has sold 70 million copies to date, with 10 million of those sales attributed to *Gran Turismo 5*.

Strangely, the game is not coming to Sony's upcoming PlayStation 4. Instead, it's targeting the PS3.

Polyphony Digital have developed a new engine for the game, which "pushes the limits of the PS3" with its new rendering and physics engines (the latter of which includes new modelling for kinematics, aerodynamics, suspension and tyres). The game will launch with 1,200 cars, 33 locations (including all the ones from *GT5*, with seven new locations added) and 71 layouts. This sixth iteration of the "Real Driving Simulator" promises to "bring new levels of authenticity" and will also boast a revised user interface.

More claymation loveliness from The Neverhood veterans

If you have any undying fondness in your heart for obscure 1996 adventure game *The Neverhood*, you're going to want to pay attention to this. Creator Doug TenNapel (who also created *Earthworm Jim*) and Pencil Test Studios (which is comprised of a bunch of former *Neverhood* devs) are collaborating to create what they're calling the spiritual successor to *The Neverhood*. And they're calling this particular claymation point-and-click adventure *Armikrog*. The idea is to ensure that it "blurs the lines between art and technology, using stop-motion animation and sculpture to bring this project to life".

The game follows a space explorer named Tommynaut and his blind, talking alien dog Beak-Beak. The pair have crash-landed on a "weird planet" and end up locked in a mysterious fortress called Armikrog. It promises "mind-bending puzzles", "quirky and loveable characters", a "compelling story", "tons of clay" and more. The developers have managed to rope in the voice talents of Michael J. Nelson (*Mystery Science Theatre 3000*) Veronica Belmont (co-host of *Tekzilla*), Jon Heder (*Napoleon Dynamite, Blades of Glory*), Rob Paulsen (Pinky in *Pinky and the Brain*, Yakko in *Animaniacs*) and Scott Kurtz (creator of webcomic *Player vs. Player*).

They're seeking funding for the game via Kickstarter, and at the time of this writing they've raised nearly $400,000 of their $900,000 goal, with 24 days to go.

DICE brings the Force to LA

Following Disney's decision to assign exclusive rights to EA to develop and publish *Star Wars* games on their behalf, EA has gone ahead and formed an entirely new studio dedicated to just that.

Based in LA, the new EA-owned studio falls under the DICE banner, which will leave its safe haven in Sweden to neighbour up with its closest rivals – Infinity Ward and Treyarch. This also means there's potential for a lot of competition when it comes to filling the new studio's ranks, and DICE's CEO Karl-Magnus Troedsson that he plans to pull in at least 60 employees – many from the local area, and some supplied by EA from the *Medal of Honor* pool – by the end of the year.

eSports gets a little more super-heroic

Despite the fact that it's only in its first round of closed beta testing, Turbine Entertainment's DC-themed MOBA *Infinite Crisis* has been added to the official list of games in the Major League Gaming roster. This surprising partnership kicked off with *Infinite Crisis* matches being streamed live from the Warner Brothers booth at E3 2013.

Following the E3 kickoff, the game's competitive chops will be showcased at various MLG events leading up to its eventual release. Then, once it's been released, it'll be officially added to the rotation for MLG Pro Circuit tournaments – which includes the likes of *Call of Duty: Black Ops 2* and fellow MOBA *League of Legends*.

Generation Seven

Console Generation 7 is basically over. One of my shelves decided it has had enough and collapsed. This sudden lack of shelf space in an already tiny living space prompted a decision. All the disc-based console games would be put into CD binders and the plastic boxes put into storage.

This gave me time to tally up the scores for Gen 7, not counting PC (because Steam and sales and games bought-but-never-played would make it unfair) and digital downloads.

Xbox 360: 141 games, Wii: 63 games and PlayStation 3: 38 games.

It's important to note that these figures represent the games I kept after years of swapping, trading in, giving away, and so on. They are the "important ones" that I wouldn't part with, either because they represent repeatable experiences, or games so huge in scope I've yet to complete them to my satisfaction.

The Xbox 360 sits in the lead mostly due to it having been the primary development platform during Gen 7. So when a game came out that appeared on both PS3 and 360, it was likely I'd pick it up on 360. In case anyone is thinking it: no, Achievements had very little to do with my purchase choices. Unlike some of my peers, Achievements mean nothing to me, and have zero sway in any decisions I make regarding gaming.

The Wii ended up being a surprise. In spite of low third-party participation, by the end Nintendo still managed to fill out its library with what I consider must-play titles, and a few third-party publishers did step up eventually. The PlayStation 3 had its exclusives, but almost nothing else unless it was the only console you owned. In hindsight, I could have probably skipped the PlayStation 3, but I don't regret the purchase.

Moving forward into Generation 8, I've laid out my plans. Now that I have a decent PC (SLI GTX 560s), any games that are multiplatform and appear on PC, I'll likely get on PC (and only once they go on sale on Steam). Multiplatform games that appear on both PlayStation 4 and Wii U, I'll likely get on PS4. Unless the Wii U version sways me with a unique feature I like, or it's the type of game I'd want to play often so off-screen play would be optimal.

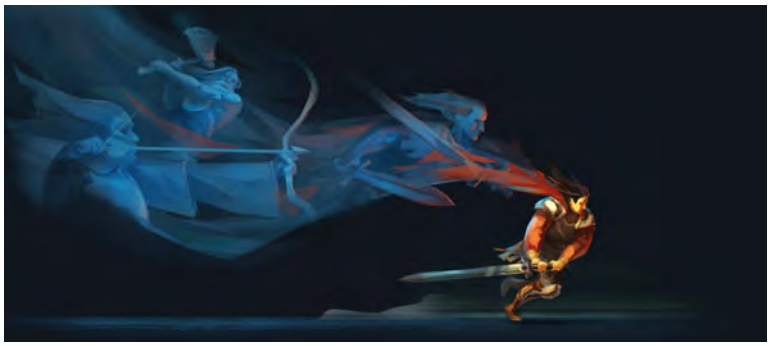
Then there's Xbox One. I had mentioned a while back that I was on the fence about Microsoft's next console. Now that they've revealed more about it (though not nearly enough), there is almost no chance I'll be getting it. I can appreciate what they're trying to do, but I don't want an "all in wonder" television box which seems primarily focused on sports and TV, with games being a cute by-product.

We all saw this coming, after all. If you look at the progression of the 360 dashboard over time, Microsoft slowly mutated it away from being entirely focused on launching your game, into something more resembling a giant advertisement for everything you could be doing instead of playing your game.

A pity, really. The 360 was this generation's PlayStation 2. A behemoth, with a giant library of amazing games. Games that won't work on the Xbox One. So unless I end up getting a One for free somehow, I see no reason to replace my 360 with one. A blessing in disguise, really: it'll cut costs, and I can focus more on the games I do get.

- Miktar Dracon -

Double Fine's double Kickstarter ambitions



Tim Schafer and co. kickstarted the Kickstarter revolution with their immensely successful first stab at crowd funding with *Broken Age* last year, and they're already keen for more player-backed game creation. They're seeking funding for a new fantasy-themed tactical strategy title – and at the time of writing they've raised $665,523 of their $725,000 goal with 25 days to go. Chances are, by the time you read this the project will have been successfully backed and already set on the path to release.

The game is called *Massive Chalice*. It's plucked from the imagination of project lead Brad Muir, creator of mech-based tower defence title *Iron Brigade*. Citing their inspiration as games like *X-COM* and *Final Fantasy Tactics*, the game sees you managing and creating a powerful dynasty of legendary heroes to fend off a demonic invasion. It's divided into two layers that sound similar to the *Total War* series, but on a more intimate scale: in the "strategy layer", you manage your kingdom, pursue research and even arrange marriages, while the "tactical layer" involves turn-based battles in which you manage small squads of customisable heroes.

As time passes in the game, your heroes will age and eventually perish. But they'll grow stronger along the way, learning a variety of skills across various disciplines. You'll have to choose between keeping your best heroes fighting on the battlefield, or back home makin' babies to ensure their bloodlines live on. When heroes die, they leave behind potent Bloodline Relics that can be passed on to future heroes. As you can imagine, it's designed to be highly replayable, and to that end each game's content is randomised. It's being built in Double Fine's proprietary Buddha engine, which has powered *Brütal Legend*, *The Cave*, *Stacking* and more, and promises "beautiful dynamic 3D battlefields" with line-of-sight and fog of war mechanics.

Naturally, with *Broken Age* still not even out the door, many have found it suspect that Double Fine are already requesting backing for another project – but they've explained that that game is only being handled by a third of the studio, and they're more than capable of taking on more than one project and ensuring each is done justice.

"The risk of complexity in the new console UI is real. Give us too much on the screen, and we'll never find our games."

- EA former CEO John Riccitiello on next-generation consoles

Call of Duty: Ghosts doesn't use a new engine after all

Following the inevitable announcement of a new, next-gen *Call of Duty*, Infinity Ward was eager to tout the engine running the game as "new" – and this excited a great many people given that the series has been operating on, *ahem*, venerable tech for a good long while despite the technological leaps its competitors have taken. While *Ghosts* certainly looks better than any *COD* that's come before, animation lead Zach Volker has revealed that calling the engine "new" isn't exactly accurate.

"When we're talking about a new engine, we're talking about upgrading significant systems within that engine – we're not talking about throwing it all away and saying we're starting from the ground up," said Volker to Official PlayStation Magazine UK. Volker reckons that creating a new engine from scratch with Infinity Ward's strict deadlines would require "an army of 200 engineers", so they're essentially calling this engine "new" judging by how significantly upgraded it is compared to the previous iteration.

"We say okay, what are the things that are significant, that are encompassing of the engine or its visual quality? Are those being upgraded in a significant way? Alright then, I think that warrants that we've got a new engine on our hands," he said.

To the Bat Cave!

Just when you thought *Scribblenauts* couldn't get any bigger, series creators 5th Cell have gone and teamed up with DC to bring a themed game based on DC's vast assortment of heroes and villains ranging back all the way to 1976.

Scribblenauts Unmasked, which will be out on 3DS and Wii U around Q3/Q4 this year, sees Maxwell and Lily travel to the DC universe through their magic notebook in search of the answer to the ultimate question: who would win between Batman and Superman?

There will be over 2,000 characters, vehicles and locations for you to tinker with in your adventures, and if that wasn't enough you can build your own super characters by mixing and matching parts and powers from the available selection. Along the way you'll be able to take on randomly generated Heroic Feats – or quests – in the form of puzzles to solve in exchange for Reputation Points which can be redeemed to unlock costumes, levels and more.

Guild Wars 1 development to be continued by ROBOTS!

Well, sort of. With *Guild Wars 2* now a successful thing that people are playing, its eight year-old predecessor is being led down a strange path by developer ArenaNet. Rather than leaving it to die by never updating it (and then inevitably shutting it down sometime in the future), they're setting up an automated infrastructure for the game. Tournaments, map rotations, in-game festivals, birthdays and weekend events will be managed and deployed by computers rather than the small human team left working on the game. Naturally, this means the game won't receive new content in the future – but for people still playing *Guild Wars 1*, we're sure the news that the game will still live on is most welcome.

Touchdown!

Tiny indie studio Mode 7 Games proved that there's still plenty of life left in the turn-based strategy genre with its vibrant and complex game *Frozen Synapse*, and now the team has started work on a new project that is both wildly different and quite similar. It's called *Frozen Endzone*, and, like the name suggests, is a take on American football from a turn-based perspective. Players will engage the opposition on randomly-generated fields complete with impassable terrain in the attempt to score touchdowns by claiming territory. Expect a release date next year only, on PC initially and later Mac and Linux.

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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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EA announces more Need for Speed

Fast cars! We're all at least a little bit obsessed with them, aren't we? EA knows this, and so they've announced a new title in the long-running *Need for Speed* franchise to appeal to that speed-obsessed part of all of us. Calling itself *Need for Speed RIvals*, it's being co-developed by Ghost Games (formerly EA Gothenburg) and Criterion Games, and the game's focus on next-gen platforms has led to it being powered by DICE's Frostbite 3 engine – which is an iterative enhancement on the Frostbite 2 engine. It'll be arriving on current-gen platforms as well.

The game places players in fictitious Redview County – an open-world playground in which you're free to roam as either a street racer or a police officer. While it's not a sequel to *Most Wanted*, its shares a few similarities. As a racer, you're vying to become the most infamous of Redview's drivers, taking risks and capturing them on video to help spread your reputation. Evade cops and you'll earn Speed Points, used to buy new cars and items. Raise the stakes after each race to increase your rewards, but get busted and you'll lose it all. As a cop you'll use teamwork to keep the dangerous racers off the road, rising through the ranks of the Police Force to unlock new cop cars and fancier technology with which to bust racers.

A new feature called AllDrive blurs the lines between solo play and multiplayer. "Players will have to keep one eye on their rearview mirror as friends will be able to enter and exit races on-the-fly, creating a world where no two events will ever be the same," says EA. The game will be out on November 19th on Xbox One, PS4, PC and other current-gen platforms.

A Hat in Time doffs itself at retro gaming

Developer Gears for Breakfast announced that they're working on N64 era-inspired platformer *A Hat in Time*, taking a campaign to Kickstarter to raise $30,000 in funding – a target which they managed to quickly reach, and at the time of writing they're sitting at $88,473 with 24 days to go. The game follows protagonist Hat Kid as she battles evil Mustache Girl. Hat Kid has a number of useful abilities, using her umbrella in numerous ways: as a pogo stick, for example, or as a grappling hook. Also, there'll be time travel!

Its release is planned for early 2014 on Mac and PC, and the developer is in talks over creating a Wii U version as well. Gears for Breakfast happily points out that they've drawn inspiration from the "collect-a-thon"-style platformers of a bygone era, calling it "*Banjo-Kazooie, The Legend of Zelda* and *Super Mario 64* all in one".

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic goes mobile

Just in case you'd not heard, if you own an iPad you may be interested to know that you can get BioWare's brilliant *Star Wars*-themed RPG *Knights of the Old Republic* on your iPad right now and take it with you everywhere you go. It'll cost you $9.99 (under R100) and the download is around 2GBs. Why is this important? Well, because *KotOR*'s galaxy-spanning lightsabers-'n'-Krayt Dragons antics are considered by many to amount to one of the finest RPGs of all time. The port was handled by Aspyr, who're credited with porting many a game to Apple's platforms. Check the App Store right now if you want in.

RIP Andrew Reisse

Andrew Reisse, one of the co-founders and chief engineers of Oculus Rift was killed in an alleged gang-related incident In Santa Ana, California, during which he was hit by a car fleeing the police in a high-speed chase. "Andrew was a brilliant computer graphics engineer, an avid photographer and hiker who loved nature, a true loyal friend, and a founding member of our close-knit Oculus family," reads a message from Oculus CEO Brenden Iribe. Reisse has been credited as a brilliant developer in the Oculus Rift project and in the many other projects in which he partook during his 33 years of life. He also spent many years at Gaikai, the game-streaming service purchased by PlayStation last year.

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Look & Listen

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Batman: Arkham Origins	October 25th
Watch_Dogs	November 22nd
Battlefield 4	TBA 2013

360	
Lost Planet 3	August 30th
Grand Theft Auto V	September 17th
Call of Duty: Ghosts	November 5th

PS3	
Deadpool	August
Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag	November 1st
FIFA 14	TBA 2013

"It was a lot more than a demo. *Prey 2* was a full game. And a crazy fun one. The team was small but you wouldn't have known it. What happened to *Prey 2*, from where I sat, was political. And petty. And potentially litigable. Human Head had a great game. I was heartbroken when *Prey 2* went into limbo. Human Head deserved to have that game released. Frankly, they needed it."

– Former Prey 2 *narrative designer/writer Jason L. Blair, speaking out on Twitter after rumours surfaced that development of* Prey 2 *was yanked out of Human Head's hands and given to* Dishonored *developer Arkane Studios*

When Dead Island isn't enough

Do you love zombies? We love zombies. Polish developer Techland seem keen to prove that they love zombies more than any other person on Earth by producing not one, but two IPs featuring the undead noggin-munchers. They've announced that they're developing *Dying Light*, which is not a part of the popular *Dead Island* series – although it does also take place on a picturesque tropical island. And, as if we've not already made it clear enough, it's got zombies in it.

The difference here is in the gameplay. It's designed to marry fast-paced parkour elements and fluid movement with *Minecraft*-style survival elements. The developers describe it best, so we'll leave it up to them:

"During the day, players will traverse an expansive urban environment overrun by a vicious outbreak, scavenging the world for supplies and crafting weapons to defend against the growing infected population. At night, the hunter becomes the hunted, as the infected become aggressive and more dangerous. Most frightening are the predators which only appear after sundown. Players must use everything in their power to survive until the morning's first light."

Electronic Arts gets its very own MOBA

It seems everyone on the planet has a MOBA of their own these days (we'll be getting ours next month, we're told), and EA wants in on that action as well. They've announced *Dawngate*, a fantasy themed *DotA*-like in development at game development newcomer Waystone Games. They plan to ensure that *Dawngate* offers its own unique take on the overwhelmingly popular genre by not only encasing every aspect of the game (even the environment itself) in its own rich lore, but actually running with its own riff on established MOBA gameplay.

For starters, the map is divided into just two lanes, with each lane acting as a "circuit" running between each team's base. There's a focus on point control, with teams fighting to capture and hold Spirit Wells, which will automatically generate workers that'll then proceed to gather a resource called Vim to buff your team's economy over time. Towers in *Dawngate* are called Bindings, and they're directly related to the strength of the Creeps your base spawns. When towers are destroyed, Creeps evolve to become more powerful and change the game's dynamic. Lost Bindings will eventually regenerate over time, giving players greater incentive to try to block pushes in a lost lane and hopefully ensuring constant shifts in momentum.

If the sound of all this intrigues you, head over to **www.waystonegames.com** to sign up for access to the beta.

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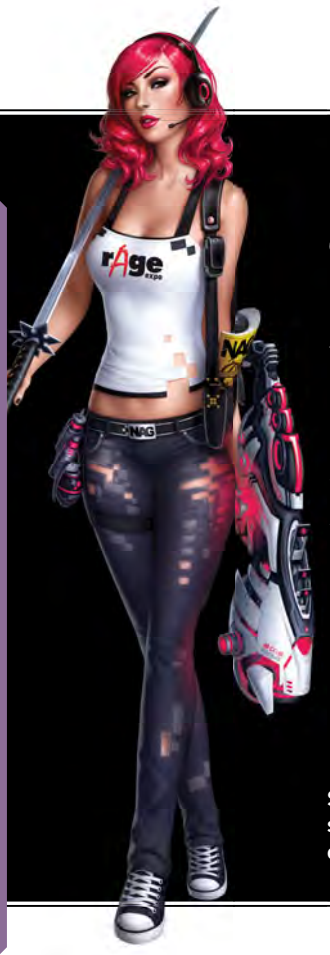

Foxy Roxy

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

JUNE WINNER

Johan Snyman, page 47

THIS MONTH'S LOOT

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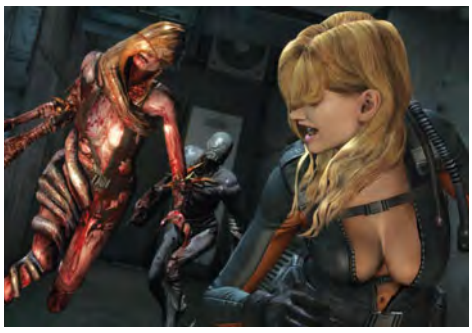
CAPTION OF THE MONTH

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 ***MotoGP 13*** for PS3 or 360 from Apex Interactive. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line "**July caption**".



NAG's lame attempt at humour
Grab some popcorn, throw in the baby oil, sit back and enjoy. It's a girl fight!

Last months winner
"Kirk,What does Sulu have that I don't ?"
- Christopher Strydom

Sonic and Nintendo seen holding hands at the supermarket, scandal ensues

There's not much of a scandal here (there's none at all really), but we're hoping that headline got your attention. It seems Nintendo and SEGA have engaged in a "worldwide partnership", having signed a three-game deal with SEGA's iconic blue hedgehog as the star attraction. The first game to be born of these dealings is platformer *Sonic: Lost World* – and it'll be exclusive to Nintendo's Wii U and 3DS.

The two versions of the game will each boast unique features. The Wii U version will offer off-screen play with the GamePad, as well as a "two player support mode". On 3DS the game will receive exclusive "Special Stages" and "Colour Powers" that'll set it apart. Both versions will include competitive multiplayer, although at the time of writing it's not clear what this entails. The game is due out later this year.

RELEASE LIST

Dates subject to change without notice

July week 2

Sid Meier's Civilization V: Brave New World	PC
Mario & Luigi: Dream Team	3DS

July week 3

The Smurfs 2	360 / 3DS / PS3 Wii / Wii U

July week 4

Magic: The Gathering M14 Core Set	Collectible card game
Pikmin 3	Wii U
New Super Luigi U	Wii U

July unconfirmed

Minecraft	360
New Skylanders: Giants characters	N/A

Wii U plays rebound, loves the attention

Microsoft's splash at the Xbox One reveal might've been a bit less impressive than they had hoped it'd be, but Nintendo is happy to soak up the attention they've suddenly garnered. In a move that tells us a lot of people were just sitting around with cash in hand, waiting to see if they should pre-order the next-generation Xbox, sales of the Wii U through Amazon UK skyrocketed following the XBO reveal. The black Premium Pack, which was previously ranked #243 on the site, suddenly spiked to the top 50 spot owing to a 386% increase in sales.

We experienced a similar flurry of sales on local soil, with the Wii U going for a song at just R999 at many retailers. Here's hoping that these fire sales and unexpected bumps go far enough to promote the release of more games for the platform.

GAME FOOD

+1 to cooking

That's right, this is a cooking feature in your favourite gaming magazine. Don't laugh. Okay, okay you can stop now. It's fine, we'll wait until you're done. Finished? Great – let's get on with things...

Yes, cooking – but this ain't your grandma's recipe book; we've chosen a selection of delicious food from some of our favourite games and made them real in our very own kitchens. We'd love it if you gave some of these a try or even attempted to make your own recipes. If you do go ahead with this challenge, be sure to tell us: you can either send Geoff an email **(geoff@nag.co.za)** or share your experiences with the rest of our fans on our Facebook page!

El Pollo Diablo

(The Curse of Monkey Island)

Some say the Giant Demon Chicken roams Plunder Island in search of small children and cowardly pirates to devour. He's as tall as a man (a particularly tall one, we presume) and twice as strong (again, no real measurement is given here but we're going with "pretty strong") and his blood-curdling squawk will chill you right down to the bones that hold you in place.

Then again, some say that chickens are just vegetables with faces, and we happen to think that no matter their demonic disposition they taste delicious in a jerk-inspired seasoning and served with our delicious home-made grog. It's for that reason that we went out into the night, slayed The Terror of Plunder Island and tried out a few recipes with its tasty flesh.

What you'll need:

- Half a chicken, not filleted
- 1 red onion
- 3 cloves garlic
- 2 tbsp. thyme and ground allspice, each
- A few jalapeno chillies with seeds (and extra chilli flakes if you're feeling brave)
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger and smoked paprika, each
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- Juice of one lime

How to make it

1. Roughly chop and blend up all of your ingredients (except the chicken, unless you're trying to make pate, which if you've been paying attention you'll see that this is not the case).
2. Cut and prepare your chicken into portions. Place the chicken together with the blended mixture into a bowl. Mix it all together until the chicken is evenly coated. Cover and leave in the fridge for at least three hours to marinade.
3. Once you're ready to start cooking, preheat an oven to 180° C. Remove the chicken pieces from the mixture and place them on a non-stick griddle pan or directly on the grill (ensure there's something underneath to catch any drippings) and cook for 25-30 minutes on each side, or until it's cooked – nobody likes raw chicken, except salmonella. Braaing your El Pollo Diablo is absolutely acceptable.
4. Use the spice mixture left in the bowl as basting during cooking, or pop it in a pan until it's cooked through (about 5-10 minutes on a medium-high heat) and use as a sauce to finish your chicken.
5. Serve with dirty rice or potato wedges and a mug of grog. Rusty cutlasses and fashionable pantaloons are optional but highly recommended.

Side-order: Grog

(Monkey Island series)

If sailing the seven seas, plundering villages and hunting for treasure are the things that collectively make a pirate what he (or she) is, then grog is the glue that holds everything together. And, even though our recipe won't melt through mugs faster than Cook can replace them, you can bet your deadly piranha poodles that it'll make you feel like a Caribbean adventurer in no time... or at least after you've had a couple.

Despite the original *Monkey Island* recipe suggesting that this drink could contain battery acid, red dye number 2 and all manner of carcinogens, we've decided to keep our version decidedly modern and non-fatal.

What you'll need

- A measure of rum equal to how drunk you feel like getting (or none if you're under 18 – hi mom!)
- A goodly sum of chilled lemonade
- A squeeze and a slice of fresh lemon
- A couple shakes of ground nutmeg and cinnamon

How to make it

1. Pour the rum into a suitably large mug, throw in the lemon juice, nutmeg and cinnamon. Give it a good stir.
2. Slowly pour in the lemonade until you get a decent head of foam. This stuff will froth over so try not to do this near your PC or anything equally expensive.
3. Pop in the slice of lemon.
4. Drink, enjoy and make all the pirate noises you want for the rest of the night.

Wasteland-style iguana-on-a-stick

(Fallout series)

Just like Mom used to make 'em! After the bombs dropped and she couldn't make double bacon and cheese burgers anymore, I mean.

POST-NUCLEAR HOLOCAUST COOK'S NOTE 1: Foodstuffs with a rad count of >100 are not recommended for human consumption without an additional dosage of Rad-X or RadAway. In the case of additional administration of RadAway, please note that any subsequent headaches, stomach pain, or hair loss are the result of the medication, and not the iguana-on-a-stick.

POST-NUCLEAR HOLOCAUST COOK'S NOTE 2: Rumours of human flesh being sold as iguana meat are nothing more than propagandist lies spread by the Enclave.

What you'll need

- 500g of fresh iguana meat. If iguana meat is not available, mole rat, brahmin, or chicken meat may be substituted. Human flesh may not be substituted.
- ½ cup ketchup
- ½ cup Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tbsp. hot pepper sauce
- 2 tbsp. mustard
- 1 tbsp crushed garlic
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Wooden skewers

How to make it

1. Using your RobCo Pip-Boy 3000's built-in Geiger counter function, scan the ingredients and preparation area for excessive levels of radiation.
2. Combine the ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, hot pepper sauce, mustard, garlic, salt, and pepper in a bowl.
3. Cut the meat into bite-sized chunks, and add to the sauce mixture. Cover the bowl with ClingWrap and put it in the fridge for 1-2 hours. If you don't have a fridge (or a home), try placing under a rock out of the sun but make sure to cover them up or the smell could attract nearby radscorpions.
4. Thread the marinated pieces of meat meat onto the wooden skewers and cook over a hot coal grill for 8-10 minutes. Turn the skewers frequently, and spoon any remaining sauce onto them.
5. Serve with InstaMash or BlamCo Mac & Cheese or anything else you can find that's less than 50 years after its expiration date.

Mordavian avocado and garlic sandwiches

(Quest for Glory: Shadows of Darkness)

As my Uncle Boris used to tell us, "if you're afraid of witches and vampire bunnies, don't go to the woods by yourself, especially at night, but if you really must, then make sure to take some of these Mordavian avocado and garlic sandwiches with you just in case you get a bit hungry or your Aunty Olga will have a leshy and nobody wants that to happen, especially me."

You can also use these sandwiches to trap baby antwerps, although you probably shouldn't be doing that because baby antwerps are dangerous and the last time Uncle Boris took us baby antwerp trapping, Aunty Olga had him sleeping on the couch downstairs with the domovoi for a week.

What you'll need

- 2 or more whole heads of garlic
- 1 large avocado
- 1 small red pepper
- 1 tsp. paprika (regular or smoked)
- 1 tbsp. lemon juice
- Salt and pepper to taste

How to make it

1. Cut off the tops of the garlic heads (leaving the cloves in their skins), then wrap them in foil and drizzle a small amount of olive oil over each one before closing them up. Place them on a baking tray and roast in a hot oven (around 200 degrees) for 30-40 minutes, or until soft.
2. While the garlic is roasting, cut the red pepper into thick slices and turn over on a hot griddle pan until the skins have blackened slightly.
3. When the roasted garlic heads have cooled, squeeze the cloves out of their skins, and use a fork to mash them with the avocado.
4. Add the grilled pepper, paprika, lemon juice, salt, and pepper and mix until smooth like a *rusalka*'s skin. Not that any of you should be going around touching *rusalki* or I'll tell Aunty Olga on you and you know what happened that time with Uncle Boris and the naughty paintings.
5. Serve on bread with cold meats and cheese, and a side of elderberry pie.

Health & mana potion... cupcakes

(almost every RPG)

The cornerstone to survival in every role-playing game on the planet, health and mana potions are practically synonymous with gaming. Blue ones go in, magic shooty stuff comes out; red ones go in, health gauges go up. You know how they go, but what you don't know is what goes into them – unless you're playing something like Skyrim; then it's a Blue Mountain Flower, Giant's Toe and an Imp Stool. Unfortunately that'd all taste pretty rubbish, so we decided to make health and mana cupcakes instead!

What you'll need

- Two boxes of vanilla cupcake mix (the Dovahkiin doesn't have time to make his own cupcakes from scratch!)
- Red food colouring
- Blue food colouring
- Strawberry jam
- Blueberry jam
- 2 eggs
- Half a cup of oil
- 200ml of milk
- Spray-and-Cook
- A whisk
- Two mixing bowls
- Two mini cupcake trays

How to make it

1. We're making mini cupcakes here because nobody has the patience to eat a regular sized one while you're slaughtering waves of demon hellspawns in *Diablo III*. That and if we had made regular sized cupcakes they wouldn't have fit into our potion bottles.
2. Pre-heat the oven to 180°C. Mix one egg with one of the vanilla cupcake mixes and 100mls of milk. Repeat with the second cupcake mix in your second mixing bowl. Once the mixtures are nice and smooth, add about five drops of blue food colouring to one mix and five drops of red colouring to the other – mix thoroughly.
3. Place a table spoon of the batter into each of the mini cupcake tray holes and place the trays into the oven for exactly 10 minutes.
4. To check whether the cupcakes are done, open the oven a crack and press lightly on one of the cupcakes; if your finger leaves a dent that doesn't rise, then the cupcakes need longer. If the dent immediately springs back into shape, then the cupcakes are done.
5. We're not going to ice these cupcakes, otherwise you won't be able to store them in a potion bottle/jar without the icing smearing all over. We want easy to scoff, bite-sized delicacies here. Once your cupcakes are cool, using a small paring knife, carve out a plug in the top of each cupcake. Carefully pour some strawberry jam into the red health potion cupcakes, and blueberry jam into the blue mana potion cupcakes. Replace each plug.
6. Full up your potion bottles with the cupcakes and keep both on hand for those sudden sweet cravings during your next marathon RPG session.

Beef stew

(The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (and probably a lot of other games, too))

Throughout our many, many, *many* hours playing *Skyrim*, one thing was a certainty: we'd always get hungry. There's food everywhere in that game, and a lot of it looks rather delicious. If you use one of the numerous cooking pots hanging above fires throughout the province of Skyrim, you can cook a lot of in-game food. Those food items have lists of ingredients, so when it came to ideas for this feature, attempting a *Skyrim* recipe was a no-brainer.

What you'll need

- *Skyrim*'s ingredient list for beef stew only requires four items:
- 300g of cubed beef (sadly the shops were all out of mammoth steaks so we had to go with the beef stew)
- 3 large carrots
- 1 whole head of garlic
- 1 "Salt Pile" (which we interpreted as "one massive handful of salt", but we used special black volcanic salt flakes because they have that whole "forged by the fiery breath of Alduin the World Eater" vibe. Also, we probably used about a table spoon if we're being honest.)

Extras

- 1 table spoon of olive oil
- 1 ~~Elf's Ear~~ bay leaf (which isn't really in the game's recipe, but honestly this needed a bit of spicing up and bay leaves totally look like *Skyrim* Elf's Ears anyway.)
- 1 cup of water
- 1 large pot

How to make it

Pay attention because this is a seriously complex recipe. (That's a joke; a monkey could make this meal).

1. Peel your head of garlic and chop each clove in order to let out the maximum amount of flavours; without the garlic this would be a pretty bland stew so clearly the *Skyrim* Nords are so hardy they don't even care if their food tastes good.
2. Wash and chop up your carrots. Add the garlic slices to the pot with the table spoon of olive oil and heat until the garlic begins to turn golden. Add the cubed beef as well as the salt pile; stir until all sides of the beef are seared but not cooked through.
3. Add the cup of water and bay leaf to the pot followed by the carrots. Bring the stew to the boil; once boiling, turn the stove down to a low heat and allow the stew to simmer for at least an hour. Stir occasionally.
4. Serve with chunky bread or garlic loaves – because you can never have too much garlic. NAG

XBOX ONE

YOUR CONSOLE, YOUR GAMES

Games can be bought either digitally or on a traditional disc, and as stated elsewhere you'll be able to access your entire games library from any Xbox One, without the need to have the game discs. If you're sharing your console with family members, friends or anyone else, everyone will be able to access the games on your console. Furthermore, you can share your entire games library with up to ten family members, so they can log in and play any of the games in your shared games library from any Xbox One. You're also able to give disc-based games to friends if the publisher allows it, but each game can only be given once, and the friend must have been on your friends list for at least 30 days.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Xbox One supports a new Achievement system. Achievements can be added dynamically at any time, and may not be confined to a single game (for example, there may be an Achievement that requires you to play multiple games in a franchise). Microsoft have confirmed that your Xbox 360 Gamerscore does carry over to Xbox One.

DIGITAL VIDEO RECORDER

Built-in system to record gameplay, which can then be edited and shared with friends through Xbox LIVE. You won't be able to record video from the various television feeds, like cable (which South Africa doesn't have anyway).

XBOX LIVE AVATARS & WARDROBE

The Xbox LIVE avatars won't be making a return on Xbox One. We hope you didn't buy too many sweaters for it.

ONE

Generation Seven has been a long console generation. The Xbox 360 was out first eight years ago, so for many this will be their first console upgrade. Microsoft now faces an issue of retention.

One cannot assume the Xbox 360 market are all lifelong gamers who are used to buying a new console every few years, so it is on Microsoft to come up with a sales pitch. Not just for the Xbox One, but to convince a lot of single-console, first-time gamers that they should buy into this hobby in the long-term, rather than just keeping their 360 for another few years until they lose interest in gaming altogether.

This is a unique situation, one that we've not seen since the early '90s when Nintendo faced the same dilemma with their jump from the Nintendo Entertainment System to the Super Nintendo.

HARDWARE

The Xbox One features an APU (Advanced Processing Unit, basically a CPU and GPU combined) with eight x86-64 cores. It's got 8GB of DDR3 RAM, but 3GB of that is dedicated to the operation system, leaving 5GB for games. The system comes with a 500GB non-replaceable hard drive, a Blu-ray Disc optical drive, and supports 7.1 surround sound.

The GPU is based on AMD GCN architecture with 768 cores, making it potentially equivalent to a custom-spec Radeon HD7790. While the Xbox One does support 4K resolution (3840x2160) and Microsoft claims there is no restriction on games using it, it's unlikely any will. It will primarily be used for 4K movies.

There are three USB 3.0 ports (one on the side and two in the back), and an HDMI port. There are no video outputs for either composite video *or* component video.

BACKWARDS COMPATIBILITY

The Xbox One is not backward compatible with Xbox 360 content, since it uses x86-based architecture while the Xbox 360 used PowerPC. However, this does not prevent developers from porting their Xbox 360 games, both disc-based and downloadable titles, to the Xbox One. And in the case of downloadable titles, it's very likely many developers will do just that, but you'll have to purchase the titles again as none of your digital content carries over.
In addition, none of the Xbox 360 peripherals, like controllers, joysticks and headsets, are compatible with the Xbox One.

NOT QUITE ALWAYS ONLINE

It's been confirmed that, while the console won't have to be permanently connected to the Internet to function, it will have to be able to "check-in" with Microsoft's servers once every 24 hours to apply updates and whatever else it needs to do. It means you can game offline for up to 24 hours on your primary console, or up to one hour if you're accessing your library on another Xbox one. After this, you'll have to get connected to actually use the gaming console for gaming – but you can still watch TV, Blu-rays and DVDs.

THE NEW CONTROLLER

It looks roughly like the original Xbox 360 controller (with a slimmer battery pack), with two new buttons for Menu and View replacing Start and Back. Each trigger now also has its own rumble motor, making them "Impulse Triggers" according to Microsoft. This allows developers to make triggers rumble individually.

Y

B

A

Each trigger now also has its own rumble motor, making them "Impulse Triggers"

FUNCTIONS AND FEATURES

You can suspend one game on Xbox One, and according to Microsoft, even resume it on another Xbox One. Presumably, your game suspend state is uploaded to Microsoft's cloud servers (along with your save games), so if you log in on another Xbox One, you have access to your saves and suspended game. Microsoft claims that their cloud computing can be used for "Living Games", games with "persistent" worlds, though that's mostly been marketing hyperbole so far with no real-world examples.

USED GAMES

Speculation that game trade-ins would be made impossible with Xbox One was eventually laid to rest, with Microsoft saying that if the publishers deem it acceptable, Xbox One's disc-based games can be traded in for credit at retailers. Microsoft doesn't charge any sort of fee to anyone for this transfer of used games, and it's entirely up to the publisher if there'll be some sort of fee atttached.

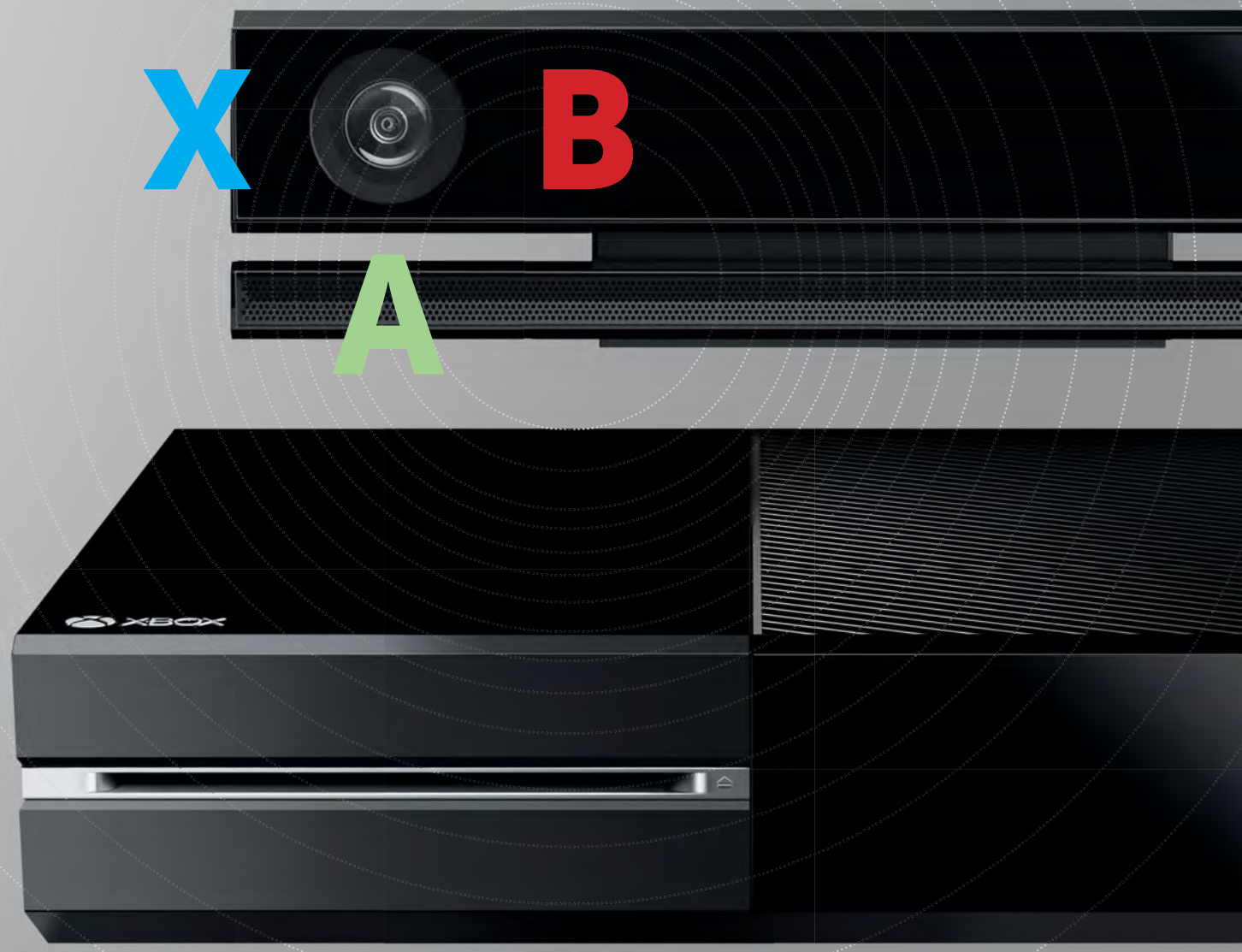
MEDIA

The Xbox One has a pass-through for television set-top boxes (like satellite TV), so you can watch TV through the console and access features like an electronic program guide. This functionality is primarily aimed at the United States and Europe, so it's unclear what benefit South Africans will get from it. The One uses a Windows kernel, and allows for the "Snap" functionality found in Windows 8. You can "snap" the movie or game you're watching to the side of the screen, and open up another application like Skype or Internet Explorer on the other side, for a kind of multi-tasking.

KINECT REDUX

Xbox One comes with an upgraded Kinect sensor, which now uses a 1080p wide-angle camera. Greater accuracy, and can apparently track up to six skeletons at once. Microsoft claims it can even check your heart rate. Kinect remains active if you sleep the system, so it can respond to voice-commands to turn it on. The Xbox One won't function at all if Kinect is not connected.
Following the reveal there were fears that Kinect would be able to "spy" on people while in standby mode, constantly watching your living room exploits like some sort of creepy electronic overseer. Microsoft has confirmed that this is not the case, and that while the device is in standby mode, it'll only be doing one thing: waiting to hear the phrase "Xbox On".

Microsoft claims the upgraded Kinect sensor, which now uses a 1080p wide-angle camera can track up to six skeletons at once, and even check your heart rate.



Skylanders: Swap Force

Heroes in halves sell, swap power!

HANDS ON TESTED

RELEASE DATE / Q3/Q4 2013
PLATFORM / 360 / 3DS / PS3 / Wii / Wii U
GENRE / Platformer
DEVELOPER / Vicarious Visions (PS3 / 360 / Wii U)
Beenox (Wii) / n-Space (3DS)
WEBSITE / www.skylanders.com/swapforce
PUBLISHER / Activision

It's a good thing I was not charmed by *Skylanders*, for if I had been, and knowing what I know now about the franchise, I might have ended up collecting all the damn characters.

When *Skylanders* was first revealed (as *Spyro's Kingdom - NAG* July 2010), I had easily dismissed it as a cute (but likely profitable) gimmick. I appreciated the idea: little figurines with Near Field Communication tags inside them that, when placed on the supplied "Portal of Power", would appear in the game as playable characters. But the design of the characters didn't appeal to me, so I didn't give the franchise much thought after that.

SKYLANDERS THE LIMIT

Chris Wilson, producer on *Skylanders: Swap Force*, is clearly a big fan of the franchise. Even though he's just spent the last six hours in interviews about the upcoming sequel, he's still bright-eyed and bushy-tailed when I sat down with him in Los Angeles for a few minutes.

"I have a six year old at home, and while I didn't work on *Skylanders* or *Giants*, I played them. Being able to work on *Swap Force* is awesome." he admits. "Even I was a skeptic at the beginning, to be honest with you. And then seeing my son and just, the wonder and excitement he had when he put Spyro on the Portal, and now he's able to play as Spyro. That sold me."

"You can combine the top half of pirate-squid guy Wash Buckler with the bottom half of magnet-centric Magna Charge, to create Wash Charge."

The Skylanders have a lot of charm and personality. When summoned, they quip cheesy puns often related to their names or functions, like Wrecking Ball's "Sure, I can roll with that!" But they're not just vehicles for cliché: *Skylanders* contains a surprising amount of depth gameplay systems that seem almost at odds with the child-focused nature of the franchise.

All characters have elemental alignments (Water, Life, Magic, Tech, Undead, Earth, Air and Fire), and do better or worse when summoned in areas of specific elemental alignment. Each has their own set of attacks and abilities, which can be upgraded as they level up. This information is stored in the physical figurine itself, so when you put your Spyro down on a Portal at a friend's house, it's the same character with the same upgrades as at home.

BRAVE NEW WORLD

With its new graphics engine, the team is able to put an impressive amount of animation into the game's cut-scenes. *Swap Force* takes place on Cloudbreak Islands, where a mystical volcano that replenishes magic erupts for unknown reasons, likely due to villainous plotting. A group of Skylanders caught in the explosion is blasted apart and (in accordance with franchise lore) sent to Earth.

Our brief hands-on with the game showed off the return of smooth drop-in drop-out cooperative play, and the game's really great *Ratchet & Clank* / *Jak & Daxter* vibe.

In the first *Skylanders*, when a *Skylanders* character enters an elemental zone not of their type, they groan in frustration. Except in the PS3 version, for some reason.

This is the first console *Skylanders* game that lets you jump.

FIGURINE IT OUT

Character figurines function as the gatekeepers of expanded content. Certain areas are locked out unless you have the figurine needed to unlock it. While this kind of "physical DLC" may give you a twinge in the wallet, Wilson feels they maintain a fair balance.

"Out of the box, you can play the entire core experience. We don't want anyone to feel like you *need* to go buy all the toys. But we do want it to be an expansive experience, so when you start to build your collection there is more of the world to see."

Completionists beware: right now, the franchise sits at over 70 figurines.

"What's also great, is my son, he can't always play on the console, right?" says Wilson. "Like if we're watching TV, he can still take the toys and use his imagination outside the game. It's kind of a win-win, and that's where I saw the magic, that it's something special."

It's easy to see how the franchise has as much appeal to the modern geek parent, as it does to kids.

SWAP & AWE

Swap Force will support all figurines released so far, complete with all their upgrades. In addition, over 50 new collectibles are being added: 16 new *Swap Force* characters, 16 new *Skylanders* characters, eight LightCore characters, and 16 new "variants" of fan-favourites new special abilities.

"When starting on *Swap Force*, the question was, how do we build on this? So the team came up with 'dynamic swapability'. It really gives kids this power of choice, a chance to experiment. Not only to see how the toys would look like physically, but what kind of abilities a combination would bring."

Swap Force figures can be separated and reattached at the waist. The top half tends to be the attacks, how the character fights. The bottom defines how they move. When a new character is created from two different halves, even its name is a combination of the two. You can combine the top half of pirate-squid guy Wash Buckler with the bottom half of magnet-centric Magna Charge, to create Wash Charge. The character now has Wash Buckler's unique water-element attacks, combined with the speed from Magna Charge's leg-wheel.

"We want it to be accessible, understandable and relatable to kids," says Wilson, fiddling with a figurine he found somewhere. "There are two *Swap Force* characters in the box, so you can see how it works right off the bat. We teach everything really clearly in the early levels. We do *a lot* of focus testing."

The bottom half of *Swap Force* characters have an icon, a little ladder, or shovel, or rocket, indicating their "Swap Force Zone" type. When you come across a gate with that icon, swapping to a character with that icon lets you explore new areas centred on their unique traversal abilities, like flying, climbing, digging, teleporting. For example, Wash Buckler can climb walls with his tentacle legs, so his Swap Force Zone has you ascending a vertical surface while things drop from above. **NAG**

- Miktar

RELEASE DATE / TBA 2013
PLATFORM / PS3 / PSV
GENRE / Action role-playing game / beat-'em-up
DEVELOPER / Vanillaware
WEBSITE / www.atlus.com/dragonscrown
PUBLISHER / Atlus

Dragon's Crown

It's dangerous to go alone, take these...

Dragon's Crown is the sequel to *Guardian Heroes* you always wanted, but you never dared dream it would be this... fleshed out. The game is an exercise in taking an old and venerable game design, direct in its arcade-style appeal, and retrofitting it to satisfy the expectation of a modern console experience. In spite of it looking on the surface like a '90s arcade side-scrolling brawler (akin to *Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow over Mystara* or the more modern *Castle Crashers*), a surprising amount of role-playing elements and game mechanics have been layered in without them getting in the way of the simple appeal.

Vanillaware have proven themselves well above competent at designing not only sound gameplay, but incredibly artistic and beautiful games to boot. You need only look at some screenshots from *Odin Sphere*, or *Muramasa: The Demon Blade*, both prime examples of the studio's unique approach to building characters and monsters out of many huge layered and high-quality pieces of hand-painted artwork. Art director George Kamitani, who previously worked with Capcom on *Dungeons & Dragons: Tower of Doom* (prequel to *Mystara*), brings a unique blend of high European fantasy with a Japanese twist. Characters are overly exaggerated, walking symbolism, iconic and utterly distinguishable in both form and function – vital, in a crazy four-player all-out slugfest like this.

> **"Characters are overly exaggerated, walking symbolism, iconic and utterly distinguishable in both form and function."**

The PS3 and Vita versions are identical, and can share the same save data.

This game is not related to the 1993 module of the same name for Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition.

Players prepare in town, buying/selling equipment, learning skills and forming a party (either single-player or local/online multiplayer). Then it's to the dungeons, following the game's plot and fully-voiced narrator, to slay monsters, amass gold and find loot. There are six classes – Fighter, Amazon, Elf, Sorceress, Wizard and Dwarf – each unique in how they play, and what skills they bring to the foray. Each class is its own system, with special considerations, strengths and weaknesses. For example, the Sorceress is mainly support, able to conjure food, summon skeleton warriors, or turn enemies into frogs. Don't let her buxom appearance, and giant assets, fool you. She's older than she looks. In contrast, the Dwarf can use most enemies as projectiles, tackling fights like a Turkish oil wrestler, chaining together complex grapples and throws.

Missions and dungeons may have branching paths depending on choices made during the course of the level. You might save an NPC, or opt to ignore their pleas for help. In town, you may get quests, requiring you to do certain things during a mission for bonus loot. During multiplayer, especially online, a quick pop-up communication menu lets you coordinate on the fly, while the Vita version uses the touchscreen for rapid item management. Altus have confirmed that there will be free post-launch DLC: replacement narration packs for the entire story mode, one for each of the six characters. **NAG**

- Miktar

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Tom Nook is now a real-estate agent instead of a mafia-esque shopkeeper.

RELEASE DATE / Out now
PLATFORM / 3DS
GENRE / Life simulation
DEVELOPER / Nintendo EAD Group No. 2
WEBSITE / www.nintendo.com
PUBLISHER / Nintendo

Animal Crossing: New Leaf

Your rural village getaway

The *Animal Crossing* series has a unique opening trope. You are on your way to your "new life", presumably you're on the run, perhaps from debt collectors. Upon arriving at a strange village populated by humanoid animals, you're told you need a house and get saddled with an expensive mortgage.

After the traditional opening, *New Leaf* doesn't deviate much from what came before. An open-ended "life simulation" with no set objective (other than paying off your debts), *Animal Crossing* is about making friends with the villagers, participating in activities (alone or via Wi-Fi), doing tasks, decorating your house, and watching the village change in real-time. Townsfolk come and go, seasons change, holidays happen as expected.

One main new feature: you're the mayor this time. You can now customize the town, deciding where new buildings should go, constructing public works, or setting town ordinances (which are like laws). Some examples of ordinances include "Beautiful Town" (villagers will water plants), "Early Bird Town" (villagers change their schedules, waking up and opening shops three hours earlier), and "Bell Boom Town" (higher tax on everything).

It's not unkind to consider *Animal Crossing* a very Nintendo take on *The Sims*, albeit smaller in scope and more personal. And like *The Sims*, it is entirely what you make of it. **NAG**

- Miktar

The musical dog K.K. Slider now DJs at "Club LOL".

This is the fourth game in the *Mario & Luigi* series.

RELEASE DATE / July 2013
PLATFORM / 3DS
GENRE / Role-playing game
DEVELOPER / AlphaDream
WEBSITE / www.nintendo.com
PUBLISHER / Nintendo

Mario & Luigi: Dream Team

You can touch him while he's sleeping...

AlphaDream's comedic role-playing take on the Super Bros continues. The series is quickly becoming a running "where can we insert the brothers next" gag. *Superstar Saga* sends Mario and Luigi to a new kingdom. *Partners in Time* transposes Mario and Weegie into a paradoxical time loop and *Bowser's Inside Story* places them in a gross misrepresentation of gastrointestinal anatomy.

This time, Luigi's dreams are the main conceit of the mechanics and the plot. The duo plus Plot Device Princess Peach are on vacation, visiting Pi'illo Island. It's a magical place where people can enter each other's dreams using special Pillow Portals. For reasons yet to be explained, Peach is pulled into Luigi's dream the first time he uses a Pillow Portal. And so, Mario and Luigi adventure off, exploring both Pi'illo Island and the world inside Luigi's dreams.

When exploring the island, finding quests and talking to its inhabitants, things play out in the 3D, top-down style the series is known for. Enter the Dream World, the view switches to side-scrolling and Mario is joined by Luigi's dream alter-ego, Dreamy Luigi. By manipulating the sleeping face of Luigi on the bottom screen, you can impact events in the dream world playing out on the top screen. Insert comparison to *Inception* here.

You can safely expect turn-based action combat, great writing, and inventive mechanics. **NAG**

- Miktar

So far, Bowser is nowhere to be seen...

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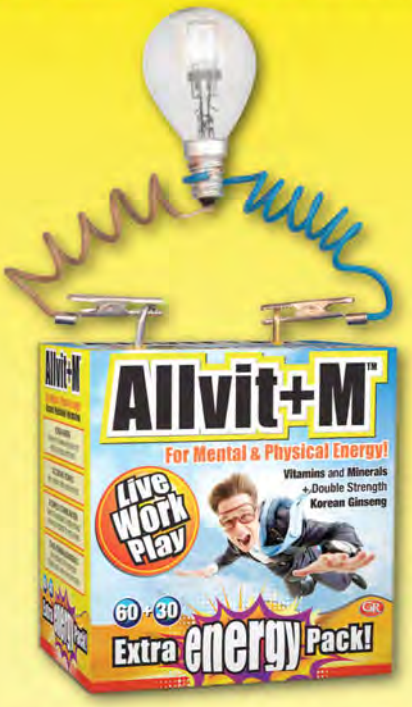

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION:

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Folic Acid	799 µg	399,5
Iron	10 mg	71,4
Lecithin	13,4 mg	*
Magnesium	10 mg	3,3
Manganese	1 mg	50
Niacin	15 mg	83,3
Phosphorus	70 mg	8,75
Potassium	8 mg	*
Rutin	20 mg	*
Vitamin A	4000 iu	150
Vitamin B1	2 mg	143
Vitamin B2	2 mg	125
Vitamin B5	10 mg	166
Vitamin B6	1mg	50
Vitamin B12	2 µg	200
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RELEASE DATE / September 17 2013
PLATFORM / 360 / PS3
GENRE / Action-adventure
DEVELOPER / Rockstar Games
WEBSITE / www.rockstargames.com
PUBLISHER / 2K Games

Three guys walk into a bank…

Every addition to the *GTA* series brings with it the promise to be bigger, better, more bad-ass. It's a trap that many developers fall into – attempting to assure their fans that the sequels are actually better than those games before them – but it often happens that the reality of the situation is quite the opposite. This is a pitfall that Rockstar is clearly aware of, and their approach with *GTA V* is to take everything you've ever enjoyed about any game in the series – whether it was the location or character or missions or all the fun stuff on the side – and roll them into one, gigantic, mega-*GTA*.

To simply call the game world of *GTA V* huge would be an injustice. It's as big as it needs to be to convey the sense that you have an entire county to explore, and that, it just so happens, makes it larger than the total world size of *GTA: San Andreas*, *Red Dead Redemption* and *GTA IV* combined. And everything is unlocked right from the beginning – there are no barricaded bridges or invisible walls to keep you from embracing your inner Edmund Hillary. The world is divided into two parts: the sprawling metropolis of Los Santos, and the vast expanse of Blaine County's countryside. Los Santos is modelled on Los Angeles, which means it brings with it everything you'd expect from the city: swaths of tourists fill the streets, paranoid celebrities hide from the prying camera lenses of the paparazzi, and would-be (or has-been) starlets attempt to make a name for themselves. Out in the countryside, things are more peaceful – or they seem that way, at least – hiking trails meander through forests and rolling hills; rivers, lakes and beaches provide for those looking for water sports or simply a fun place to relax with friends; and settlements are home to all manner of country folk from farmers to hillbillies, and biker gangs to meth dealers.

Along with this massive game world for you to explore comes a brave new angle from Rockstar: the game features three main playable protagonists, each with his own story, social connections and motive for getting up to the ridiculous things they inevitably will. When you're not in a mission, you'll be able to freely switch between each character, and they will behave completely independently while you're off doing other things. It won't be uncommon to pop back in control of one of them and experience the aftermath of some sort of shenanigans – they could get up to any mischief on their own, and you'll have to face the consequences of dealing with their actions even if you weren't directly responsible for them.

This approach to characterisation brings with it a ton of

" The game features three main playable protagonists, each with his own story, social connections and motive for getting up to the ridiculous things they inevitably will."

// Part of the reason why the game world is so vast is that underwater exploration is now much more viable. Certain boats come equipped with diving gear that you use to delve below the waves, where you'll find sunken whips and an entire ecosystem, including sharks that could cause you trouble if you linger for too long. //

to chaos

// Your upgraded mobile phone is now a highly-capable device, effectively replacing the functions of TW@ Café from *GTA IV*. Now you can browse the 'Net and peruse emails on the go, as well as take photos and share them with your social network within the game. //

The Los Santos job

One of the major plot points in any *GTA* was "the heist" – the big score that culminated the narrative – but for *GTA V*, Rockstar wants to spread out the love. At multiple points in the story, players will take part in multi-stage heists which could see two or even three of the main characters working together. Before the mission takes place you'll need to develop a plan of attack (such as stealth or brute force), organise and collect equipment including weapons and disguises, plant a getaway car in position, and even hire additional crew to help out. These crew come in a variety of skill levels and professions including hackers, snipers, drivers and gunmen, and, if they survive a heist, can be re-hired for later missions where their experience could boost your payout. There's a catch, though: with more crew and those of greater skill, you could effectively come out with less cash for the player characters, as each member of the team takes their own cut of the earnings based on their contribution.

Heists that involve multiple characters will usually play to the strengths of those characters. In the small heist mission we saw, Franklin was the driver, Trevor kept watch with his sniper rifle at the ready, and Michael created a distraction while the trio attempted to take down an armoured van loaded up with cash. The mission culminated in a shootout with the cops, and Trevor managed to find a rocket launcher somewhere which he used to shoot down a police helicopter.

Three's company

With three distinct characters to play, Rockstar was unbridled in their ability to create unique personalities that the player can bounce between, rather than attempt to shoehorn players into a fixed character or give them a blank canvas on which to paint their own personalities. The result is three incredibly interesting characters:

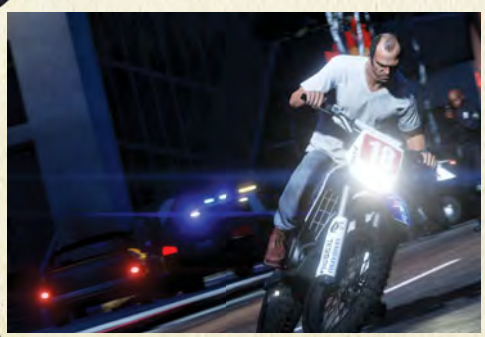
MICHAEL: Michael used to be a big-shot bank robber until he used his political connections to turn state witness and get set up with a cushy witness protection program. He's in a loveless marriage and has two children who he knows practically nothing about. Michael spends his free time watching old Vinewood action flicks, causing trouble or getting lost in a bottle, and could put his shrink's kids through college at the rate he's developing mental disorders.

FRANKLIN: Obsessed with cars, young, enthusiastic and determined to make a name for himself on the street, Franklin's ethics are flexible and he won't think twice about working on the wrong side of the law. He's also smart – or cunning, some people would say – and is always trying to find ways to raise himself out of ghetto life.

TREVOR: Most people would use a single word to describe Trevor – lunatic – and they wouldn't be wrong, either. Trevor spent some time in the army as a chopper pilot but has since fallen from whatever grace he might've had. He lives in a trailer park out in the countryside of Blaine County, where he uses his volatile approach to situations to deal with the many meth dealers and biker gang members with whom he often finds himself in trouble.

Franklin

// Music has always been an important part of the series, but *GTA V* will feature an original score that will change dynamically based on your current situation. //



implications and opportunities. This is more than an elaborate fast-travel system: each character has his own personal story in addition to the main over-arching plotline of *GTA V*, and you're free to probe or neglect those stories as much as you desire. Each man also has his own cash, weapons and statistics, the latter of which may or may not be a welcome return from *GTA: San Andreas* depending on your preference. These RPG elements have been handled in a way *SA* only briefly touched on, however: you won't have to pump iron to increase your strength rating: simply do the things that would naturally make you stronger and you'll see a passive benefit.

"These character skills aren't designed to replace or make up for the lack of player skills, but rather to complement them."

Currently there are nine character statistics that Rockstar is playing with, although these are still subject to change, even at this late stage in the development process. Either way, this will give you an idea of where they're headed: the stats are stamina, shooting, strength, stealth, flying, driving, mechanic, lung capacity and special. We were told that the only stat which is guaranteed to stay is special, which represents each character's unique ability that can have a profound effect on various situations, but can only be used once a long cooldown timer has expired. Franklin has the ability to slow down time while driving to help the player navigate tight turns and dense traffic while travelling at high speeds; Trevor can activate an ability that increases his damage output while reducing that which he receives; Michael can slow down time during a gunfight, which is testament to his love of action films and is no doubt a nod to *Max Payne*, too.

Since *GTA V* remains an action game above all else, these character skills aren't designed to replace or make up for the lack of player skills, but rather to complement them. The driving skill, for example, rewards players who enjoy the driving aspect of *GTA* and who spend much of their time manually navigating through the world instead of taking taxis or using other fast travel (like flying). The system also makes for an interesting choice: does the player spend their time maximising all stats of a single, preferred character, or would you rather have three all-rounders, or three specialists in their own fields? And, hey, there's no saying that you can't max out all of the characters if you invest enough time in the game.

A little walkin' around money

Another returning concept is that of purchasing property, and we've been told that money will play a far more important role in *GTA V* than it has in the past. We don't yet have any details on the types of property that can be purchased, but we do know that you'll also be able to buy and customise vehicles which can be stored at certain properties. We last saw the ability to customise vehicles in *GTA: San Andreas*, but that was mostly aesthetic and was more of a way of throwing away money than a meaningful feature. Now, you'll be able to poke around in the mechanics of your vehicles, improving brakes, engine power and all the bits and pieces that any petrol-head is sure to appreciate. And, yes, if you lose your precious seven-figure sports coupé, it will be infinitely respawned back at the garage. Don't ask us how; we can only assume there's some dark voodoo involved.

As well as vehicles, you'll also be able to customise weapons in a manner we're sure most of you will be familiar with. Scopes, silencers, extended mags, laser sights and more can be fitted to your favourite weapons, and the base selection of weapons is larger than any other game in the series.

// The combat system has been given an overhaul, with a tighter snap-to cover system as well as the ability to dive or roll to cover, blind-fire from cover, and jog with your weapon at the ready. //

Bring your friends

During our demo of the game, Rockstar confirmed that *GTA V* will feature a multiplayer component, although they declined to share with us any details beyond that. All we know is that they plan on making this aspect of the game significant. Sorry folks, but you'll have to stay tuned closer to release date for more info!

It wouldn't be a *GTA* without a ton of stuff to do outside of the main missions, and *GTA V* is no different, although the sheer scope of the game world brings an exponential increase in that stuff. *Red Dead Redemption* was obviously a positive influence on Rockstar when it came to learning how to populate a large organic world with content, and they're taking the lessons they learnt from *RDR* and applying them here. Within the city of Los Santos there's a bustling population that goes about its business in a manner you'd expect, but step beyond the city limits and you'll be treated to a wealth of life: hikers enjoy their time outdoors; fishermen travel to their favourite spot early in the morning; animals root in the ground or hunt for their next meal. And this rich, open world is your playground. Players can partake in all sorts of activities including base jumping, off-road racing and stunt jumping, or spend some time playing tennis or golf. You can keep fit with some yoga or enter a triathlon, and take to the skies to complete a flying challenge or two. And there's always the criminal element; players in search of a quick buck could consider the option to rob a few ATMs or hijack a security van when cash is tight or there's an expensive new car upgrade you've had your eye on.

"Players can partake in all sorts of activities including base jumping, off-road racing and stunt jumping, or spend some time playing tennis or golf."

Rockstar is also taking on the now quite popular idea of dynamic events. These could pop up at any time and can be simple tasks like helping an old woman across the road or rescuing a cornered celebrity from the paparazzi, or something a little more dangerous like robbing a liquor store. And if you're really stuck for things to keep you busy, you can always whip out your fancy new smartphone to call up a friend for a job. We just hope that there's an option to auto-ignore certain, rather needy characters in the game who for some reason can't get enough of bowling and playing darts. *Cough*.

It's obvious that just a couple of months away from launch, Rockstar is playing its cards close to its chest, but during our brief time in front of *GTA V* we saw so much that looked and felt like solid, meaningful additions to the series. Everything felt like it was just silly enough to avoid taking itself too seriously, with hammy dialogue playing on real human issues, and many nods to the silicone culture of Hollywood and the surrounding areas. The huge expanse of space to explore takes us back to *GTA: San Andreas*, and the dense metropolis of Los Santos looks like it's as full of sources of entertainment as Liberty City. Add to that new weapons, vehicles, combat improvements and a host of memorable characters and insane circumstances to bring everything together, and it looks like Rockstar could have another winning recipe on its hands. NAG

- GeometriX

// *GTA V* boasts an all-new dynamic weather system that can affect driving as well as navigation on the water, which will become rough and choppy during intense storms. //

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: ASUS RAMPAGE IV GENE

3DMark Vantage CPU	34,698	46,760
Cinebench 11.5	9.39	13.43
AIDA 64 copy	30157MB/s	20,396MB/s
3DMark03	118,211	127,025

SPECS

CHIPSET
Intel Z87
MEMORY
4x 240-pin DDR3
CPU SUPPORT
LGA 1150
SLOTS
3x PCI-E 16X,
4x PCI-E 1X

MSI Z87-GD65 GAMING

Supplier Corex **Website** www.msi.com **RRP** R2,999

We had planned to bring you an MSI Mpower Max motherboard review this month: MSI's crowning achievement in motherboard design; a board finally worthy of our full praise with no reservations. Alas this did not happen, as, at the very last minute, the MSI MPower MAX experienced a peculiar bug that rendered the board essentially dead. A specific sequence of events that won't be uncommon for anyone moving to the 4th generation Core platform.

Anyway, we'll leave that for that review next month, so for now we bring you the detuned version of that board. Unlike the MPower MAX it's not designed around record-breaking attempts. That doesn't mean that it isn't capable of overclocking though. In fact, the GAMING board is easily the simplest motherboard to overclock we've tested to date from MSI and, possibly from any other vendor.

If you remember everything we said last issue about the Z77-GD65 GAMING then you'll be familiar with its Z87 iteration. There are some key differences though which make this an entirely better board than what we saw last time around. Placed next to each other, the Z77-GD65 GAMING represents the MSI of old, while this model is a showing of what we term "the new MSI" is about. This board has improved sound via a shielded audio module which houses a newer and better ALC1150 audio codec. We can't stress enough how this was a much-needed improvement over the pedestrian controller featured on the previous generation board. Everything else as far as gaming enhancements are concerned is the same, so there are no surprises there.

Performance has always been a sore point for MSI and that's probably because even though you could tune your way into performance parity with competing boards, you didn't always have all the options at your disposal. This time MSI has seen to add some more settings for those of us who like to tinker under the bonnet. This may come purely because of the new CPU's handling power in a new way, we can't be sure. Whatever the reasons may be we are rather excited about what MSI has been able to deliver on this board. Out the box performance is great and getting even more from it is very easy. This is made even better by further refinement to what was already the slickest EUFI interface the industry has seen to date.

There really isn't anything wrong that we could see with the Z87-GD65 GAMING. A solid motherboard is as equally adept in the hands of an overclocking as it will be in a gaming machine. There can always be some improvements made, but this holds true for just about every motherboard on the planet. At the time of writing we did not have any retail pricing, but suffice to say that if it's priced anything like the previous motherboard in relation to the competition, this one will do very well. With this chipset MSI has hit the ground running. It's safe to say that the MSI motherboard quality has finally caught up to that of their graphics cards and between those two components they will pose a serious threat going forward.

It is also worth adding that the GAMING board is one of only two boards we are aware of currently outside of Intels's own that supports XTU this extensively. It's not 100% compliant, but its head and shoulders what what all other vendors are offering. It may not seem like a big deal right now, but it will be as XTU continues to be more important not only for overclockers but for gamers as well. This is one very impressive motherboard. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

9

This is easily the best MSI board we have tested to date, a great board all-around.

PLUS
Black and red looks great as usual / Marvellous BIOS / Good performance

MINUS
None

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Reviews Intro

Anyone can do this job, even you. The guys that work here were just in the right place at the right time and got very lucky.. Meet your reviewers.

Tell us something we don't know about you. Growths on your body are not allowed and no confessions to illegal stuff.

RedTide

I secretly (well not anymore) want to get stranded on a desert island for a couple of years, or maybe forever. I might go mad but it'll be less mad than I'll be if I stay here.

Miktar

I cried during the ending cut scene of the 1999 game *Outcast* by Infogrames, and don't care if you know it.

Azimuth

I have an identical twin sister. I'm also 30 seconds older than her, so she has to do everything I tell her to do or I'll tell Mom.

MikitO707

I sometimes cry myself to sleep wishing I had girl parts [*Miklós was in the Kruger Park on holiday so this is made up and probably not true, Ed*].

GeometriX

I was once a door-to-door salesman. A horrible one.

Barkskin

I can hold my breath underwater for ten minutes! Not really, but I did spend far too much time playing *Monkey Island* as a kid instead of doing seemingly more important things. Like becoming a child scientist.

Mini reviews

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

FAR CRY 3: BLOOD DRAGON

THIS SUMMER... MICHAEL BIEHN... IS MARK IV CYBER-COMMANDO SERGEANT REX POWER COLT... IN WHAT CRITICS ARE ALREADY CALLING... 1987'S MOST TOTALLY ****ING RADICAL... POST-POST-APOCALYPTIC SCI-FI ACTION DRAMA ROMANTIC COMEDY THRILLER... WITH DRAGONS THAT SHOOT LASERS OUT OF THEIR EYES... AND ROBOT SHARKS... AND SOME RIGHTEOUS LIGHTNING SPECIAL EFFECTS.

Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon is a standalone, downloadable expansion to *Far Cry 3*. It's also probably the only video game of this generation that's more '80s pop culture in-jokes than copy-pasted, super serious "Those Guys in the Terror-Turbans an' Trapper's Hats are Stealin' Our Freedoms" US military recruitment propaganda, which makes *Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon* the most innovative FPS since whatever came out before the first *Battlefield 1942*.

The game is a lovingly ludicrous megamix of straight-to-VHS B-grade movie tropes, swear words and sexual innuendos, big guns, and things blowing up, supported by an appropriately stupid and clichéd plot about an elite agent gone rogue and plotting to take over the world and revert it to a prehistoric state using Blood Dragon blood-rockets. And no, it doesn't make much more sense when you're actually playing it, either, but that's the whole point – it's bad for the sake of being bad, and that's why it's so good. NAG

85

"You know what they say: teach a guy how to bake bread and you won't have to send him a fish."

- Michael

Ramjet
I am a bigger geek than most people realise. I still play Dungeons & Dragons, for pity sake!

SAVAGE
I'm addicted to *Candy Crush Saga*, there I said it!

ShockG
Choir boy throughout school.

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...

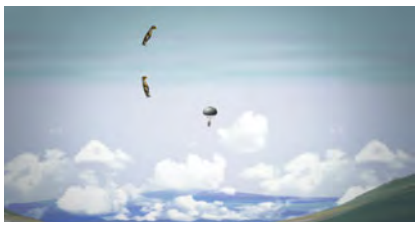
Red Dot Lab

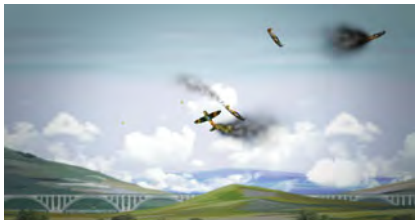
WWW.REDDOTLAB.COM

When it comes to developing our fledgling local game dev industry, Red Dot Lab founder Duncan Bell likes to take a double-sided approach. On the top end, he's working on a remake of his browser-based 2D shoot-'em-up *Blazin' Aces* (which will charm the pants off of any fans of the 1984 title *Sopwith*), and from the bottom end he runs a 20-hour Intro to Game Design course at Learn3D. Somewhere in the middle he tries to fit in a full-time job at a local ad agency.

The remake of *Blazin' Aces* (the original is available for free on Red Dot's website), is the studio's first foray into mobile, and also introduces some sophisticated new AI for enemy movement, as well as a rebuilt multiplayer component for those who enjoy a bit of dogfighting action with friends. The entire game is made in Game Maker Studio, which is where Duncan's passion lies due to its ease-of-access and versatility.

It's for that reason that he started to teach his game design course at Learn3D. Spread across five sessions of four hours each, the course covers the basics of Game Maker Studio, as well as more advanced functionality through GML, and is specifically designed for would-be game developers who are looking for a quick intro to the subject without the need to commit to full degree or even a year-long course.





If you're interested in signing up, be sure to head over to **www.learn3d.co.za** for more information. The course runs on Saturdays, so you've got no excuses.

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

PLATFORMS
360 / PS3 / PC
REVIEWED ON
PC
GENRE
First-person shooter / survival horror
AGE RESTRICTION
18
MULTIPLAYER
Local
None
Online
None
DEVELOPER
4A Games
WEBSITE
www.enterthemetro.com
PUBLISHER
Deep Silver
DISTRIBUTOR
Apex Interactive

Reviewed

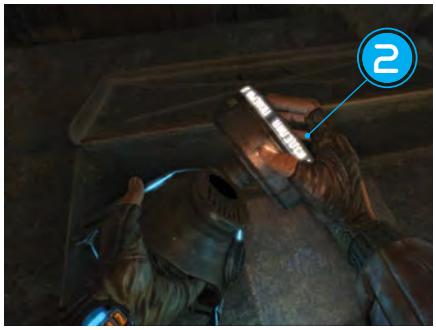
Metro: Last Light

We're not in Moscow anymore

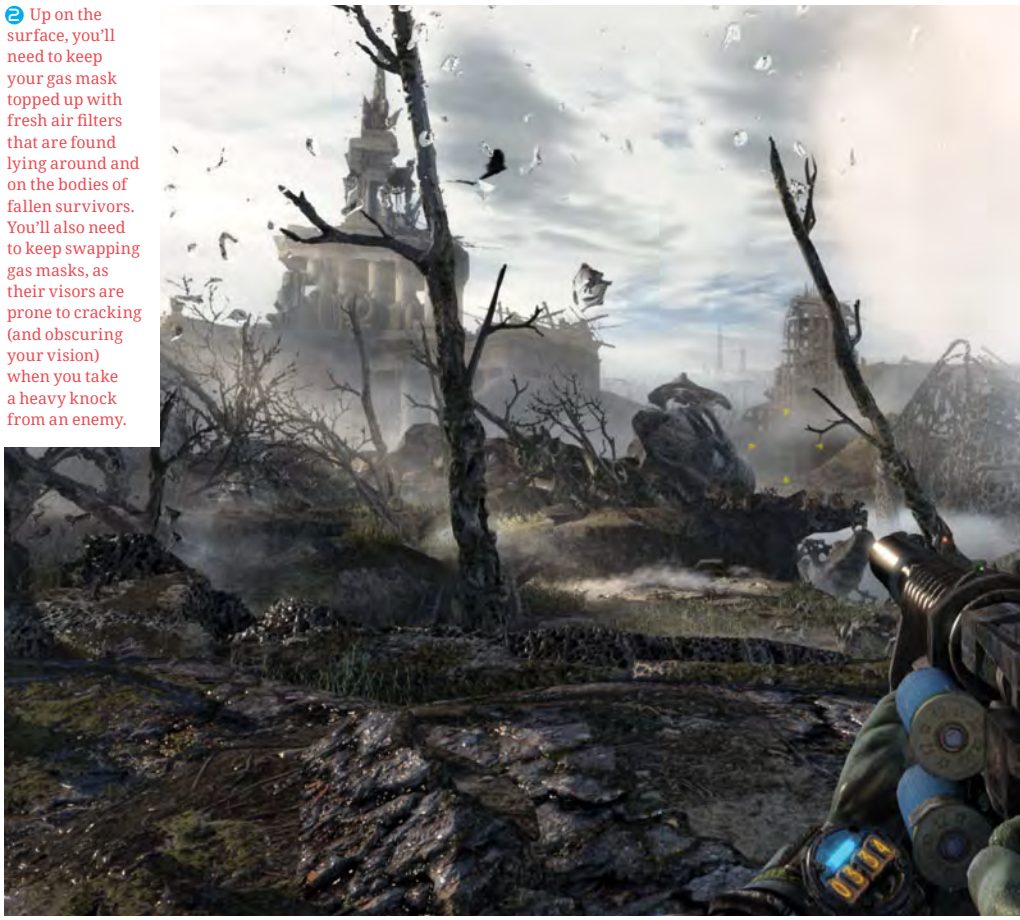
When does the post-apocalypse stop being the post-apocalypse and make way for the present? For the thousands of survivors living in the Moscow subways, that question – and the struggle that comes with it – defines their daily lives. Life for the civilians and soldiers alike within the Metro is about dealing with conflict, staying healthy enough to survive, and not going too far into the dark corners of the tunnel network. It's to this grim and excellently-realised world that we return as Artyom – the hero of *Metro 2033* – one year after the events of the first game. Things in the Metro are a little more technologically advanced; its people seem to have grown a little more content with their meagre lot in life; and Artyom is faced with the consequences of his actions in the first game.

If you enjoy a game with a real sense of heart and soul, *Metro: Last Light* will deliver. The confines of the Metro are highly detailed, and whenever you're out of the combat zones you're always treated to a new and interesting location. On that note, it's particularly impressive just how diverse the environments of *Last Light* are, considering that the vast majority of the game takes place underground. It's just a pity that so much of the game world and characters are non-interactive; more often than not Artyom feels like a visitor to a museum filled with detailed but ultimately fake dioramas of people going about their business. While the set pieces are so well

1 Just like in *Metro 2033*, you'll need to keep your headlamp and (later) night vision charged and ready for the extensive time you'll spend prowling around in the dark. Running out of batteries during a battle is a sure way to sign your own death warrant.



2 Up on the surface, you'll need to keep your gas mask topped up with fresh air filters that are found lying around and on the bodies of fallen survivors. You'll also need to keep swapping gas masks, as their visors are prone to cracking (and obscuring your vision) when you take a heavy knock from an enemy.



READ ME A STORY

Like any narrative-driven game, *Last Light* has a story to tell, and while that story is an interesting one laced with science-fiction and human drama, the method to convey it to the player is a tad unsophisticated. I'm not sure if we've just been spoiled by AAA Hollywood blockbuster-type games like *Call of Duty* and their mind-numbing but well-delivered narratives, or perhaps the Eastern European culture struggles to mingle with our Western sensibilities, but the story elements never quite manage to latch onto one's emotions for most of the game, only really coming together in the end (which, I suppose, is where it counts the most). The process leading up to the delightfully bizarre final act feels more like a set of individually attractive story elements that have been incoherently strung together, rather than ones that have been delicately crafted into an "experience".

GO GO POWER RANGERS!

Let's take a moment to tackle the controversy surrounding the Ranger Mode DLC, which you may have heard about. Briefly, Ranger Mode is an optional difficulty toggle that removes the heads-up display and crosshair, makes ammo and supply drops more scarce, and lowers player HP. It's a simple thing that amounts to just a few registry entries, but unless you pre-ordered *Last Light* or manage to snag a limited edition, you have to cough up $5 for access to this "extra content".

I won't comment on the ethical side of this, but from a gameplay point of view, *Last Light* is too easy without Ranger Mode. Playing on the hardest difficulty, I had 20 minutes of spare gas mask time and two of my three weapons were on full ammunition by the end of the game. I struggled for ammo once and for air once during my playthrough, and both times were owing to my own stupidity. If you're looking for that special challenge, *Last Light* does not deliver in its vanilla form, although it is still tough enough to keep you from running around with your guns blazing.

"Much like the duality of life within the Metro, the gameplay in Last Light frequently teeters between the placid and the downright horrifying."

crafted that they tell a story just by being observed, there's a strange disconnect between player and world that has the habit of breaking immersion, especially when you find yourself against an invisible wall that immediately puts an end to any exploration and thus curiosity.

Much like the duality of life within the Metro, the gameplay in *Last Light* frequently teeters between the placid and the downright horrifying. There are times when you feel quite at peace as you explore the rich history and dark secrets of post-apocalyptic Moscow, but at the drop of a hat you might find yourself afraid and very alone as the game tricks you into thinking there's danger around every corner. As part horror survival, part sneak-'em-up and part action shooter, *Last Light*'s combat makes for an interesting blend that is far more adaptive and dynamic than that of *2033*'s. Enemy AI has been addressed, and it's now possible to recover a botched stealth attempt without every enemy in the area magically knowing your exact location. Staying in the dark is vital if you want to stay alive, and the use of silenced weapons not only greatly reduces your noise footprint, but cuts muzzle flash to a minimum, which your enemies could otherwise use to spot you in the gloom. Sometimes the AI does feel a little stupid, though, and even on the game's hardest difficulty your enemies will struggle to flush you out of a good defensive position – there's never any attempt to flank or outsmart the player, and very often when a stealth sequence turns into an all-out fire fight, you can safely gun down your opponents as they come blithely stumbling in your general direction, provided you stay in the dark. And, even at the game's greatest level of challenge, almost all enemies can be insta-killed with a headshot or even a bodyshot from a throwing knife or one of the many stealth weapons on offer. **NAG**

- GeometriX

85

***Metro: Last Light* is a triumph for so many reasons, but falls short in its own ways. It feels too stodgy and lacks polish in terms of storytelling and some gameplay elements, but it's nonetheless an exciting game with the looks to match. It is, at least, an all-round improvement over its predecessor, and that alone is an accomplishment.**

PLUS

Cutting-edge visuals / Highly-detailed environments / Improved combat and stealth

MINUS

Easily confused AI / Lack of challenge at highest level / Lack of interactivity

PLATFORMS
360 / PC / PS3
REVIEWED ON
360
GENRE
Racing
AGE RESTRICTION
3
MULTIPLAYER
Local
2 players
Online
12 players
DEVELOPER
Codemasters
WEBSITE
www.gridgame.com
PUBLISHER
Codemasters
DISTRIBUTOR
Megarom

Reviewed

GRiD 2

The multi-format race league

It was some time ago that Codemasters released *Race Driver: GRID*, an entrant into the street racing genre. It moved away from the more technical, focussed racing titles like *F1* and *DiRT*, allowing players to experience a more arcade-style game that straddled the divide between technicality and simply racing for fun.

While the inevitable sequel to that game was expected, it didn't arrive... until now, five years later. *GRiD 2* once again returns the player to the world of street racing, and plays towards the less complicated, almost arcade-style racing of the previous title. And this time, the player has a mission...

Okay, so plots and racing games don't generally work too well (even in the *Need for Speed: Underground* series the plot was little more than window dressing) but the idea behind this one is simple enough to be effective. The player is approached by a sort-of mysterious benefactor who wants to start a new racing league, called World Series Racing. This set of events is intended to tie together a number of disparate racing disciplines, including point-to-point, touge, head-to-head, checkpoint races and drifting challenges. The player's job is to take part in all these kinds of events at club level, impressing drivers around the world enough so that they will join WSR.

It's a very simple premise, but who wants a complicated plot when it comes to racing games? Even *Forza Horizon* had a simplified concept behind it, and that worked well.

The player will get to use a small roster of cars (only a few dozen, really) in events around the world. These cars tend to be mostly muscle-bound rear-wheel-drive types, so you can expect a lot of sliding and drifting through corners. That's fine, because *GRiD 2* is all about action and looking good. In fact, the game does not have a financial model; the only "currency" here is fans that the player accumulates. Any cars that the player needs are graciously provided by the benefactor and upgrades... well, there aren't any. Aside from changing colours, you can't tweak the cars at all.

That little fact may not sit very well with those who like their racing games to be complicated. Jumping into a car and blasting through a race, without first tweaking gear ratios and the like, will probably leave the more hard-core petrol-heads cold. Even the difficulty levels are extremely simple. The player can choose between settings that range from very easy to very hard, and can set whether damage is cosmetic, or has an effect on the car's performance. That's it.

That said, the cars look really good, and the damage inflicted on them while racing

1 Going sideways is always a great option through corners.

2 Impressive visuals abound, but you may be going too fast to see them.

"The tracks, too, are good looking. Places like Dubai, Chicago and Hong Kong are all recreated in these complex environments."

is beautifully handled and very believable. Bits and pieces will come off of the cars (if the player manages to get them banged up) revealing even more detail in the models.

The tracks, too, are good looking. Places like Dubai, Chicago and Hong Kong are all recreated in these complex environments. But it's not just the overall effect that is impressive – Codemasters have built little details, like birds flying overhead or newspapers drifting in the breeze into the tracks, making them all the more believable. Even the crowds do not suffer from too much repetition.

Not that all of this is immediately noticeable; *GRiD 2* is all about driving fast, and the impression of speed the game creates is awesome. That means many of the finer details are lost in the blur of zooming past them, but aspects like famous landmarks add a more obvious level of impressiveness to the tracks.

The various types of race events will keep the player on their toes, as will the slightly unforgiving nature of the game's physics engine. And to make things even more exciting, Codemasters have built in a system called LiveRoutes. When racing along a LiveRoute course, the track will change periodically, meaning that the player needs to rely on instincts and quick reflexes, rather than prior knowledge of the course and a mini-map.

GRiD 2 offers pretty much everything a player could want in a more casual racing game. There is a lot to do, and a wide variety of cars to do it in. The different race events keep the challenges fresh, and decent opponent AI makes them exciting. The lack of customisation will certainly be touted as a weak-point for the game, and upcoming iterations in the franchise will need to address that. Sure, keeping things simple is all fine and dandy, but when you're up against the likes of *Forza* and *Gran Turismo* for pole position, you need to deliver a similar experience.

Then again, this game isn't necessarily aimed at the market that will obsessively play those titles. It fits a bit more into the *Need for Speed* mould and, considering that the EA series has produced more than a few disappointments recently, there certainly is a gap for a racing title that doesn't take things too seriously.

Ultimately, it will really come down to what the player wants from their racing experience. The lack of detail in some aspects doesn't make *GRiD 2* a bad game – it makes it more accessible. Not everyone wants to get their virtual hands dirty, and it is for those particular players that the impressive sights and sounds of *GRiD 2,* not to mention the fun events and cool cars, will hold the most appeal. **NAG**

- Shryke

80

***GRiD 2* straddles the divide between technical racing and simple vehicle set-up, and provides the player with a more realistic arcade-style racing experience.**

PLUS

Great visuals / Very accessible / Lots of event types

MINUS

Not a lot of cars / No tweaking / Not serious enough for some?

PLATFORMS
360 / PC
REVIEWED ON
PC
GENRE
Action/stealth
AGE RESTRICTION
12
MULTIPLAYER
Local
4 players
Online
4 players
DEVELOPER
Pocketwatch Games
WEBSITE
pocketwatchgames.com/Monaco
PUBLISHER
Pocketwatch Games
Majesco Entertainment (360 version)
DISTRIBUTOR
N/A

Reviewed

Monaco: What's Yours is Mine

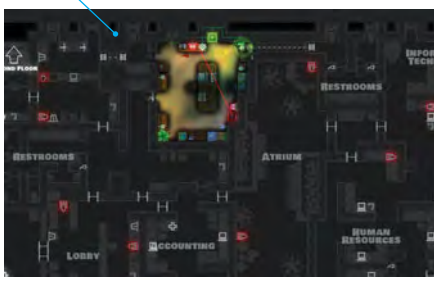
Caught, hand in the cookie jar. Over and over again.

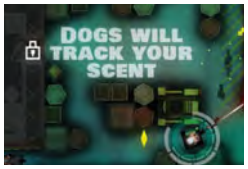
If I had to describe *Monaco: What's Yours is Mine* in as few words as possible, I'd call it a multiplayer *Pac-Man* sprinkled with *The Pink Panther* and daring thievery. I'd also say you should stop reading this review right now and just go buy it, because it'll make you happy. For those who need more than that, it's effectively a top-down heist simulator – a charming digital play on all the popular heist movies your memory's capable of conjuring. In it, you'll find eight playable characters, and each of them has a unique set of abilities and a specific role to play in each of the game's cunningly designed levels. The Locksmith, for example, is able to pick various locks faster than the rest of your crew; the Mole can noisily bash through walls to create impromptu new paths; and the Cleaner is able to knock unsuspecting foes unconscious.

At first, it's all quite simple. You'll find a few unarmed guards spread throughout levels (each of which is a sort of self-contained heist), who'll sluggishly pursue you if they spot your shifty shenanigans – but their pursuit is easily broken if you outrun them. In these early stages, you're free to collect the OCD-bothering coins scattered throughout each level without hindrance as you work towards whatever your current goal is before making a swift getaway. As you progress further through the game's story, however, it becomes incredibly difficult to evade all the machine gun-toting guards (and their angry canine chums), sweeping sentry turrets, alarm-raising cameras and more that'll make collecting those coins and completing those objectives increasingly difficult. Even pesky cats can be your worst enemy in Monaco, making an unholy racket that startles nearby NPCs when you're trying to sneakily slip by undetected.

As fun as it is during solo play, *Monaco* is at its best when played with up to three friends, each controlling a different character and using their skills to benefit the group. Often, your multiplayer exploits devolve into a comical string of increasingly grave errors with equally ludicrous reactions as you attempt to outsmart the obstacles the game puts in your way – or more likely puts in pursuit of you. With a machine gun. To help in this regard, you'll find a variety of useful items that you can find and equip – stuff like weapons, or EMPs that knock out cameras and other electrical equipment, or bandages that let you heal your teammates when they're looking a bit too full of bullets and tranquiliser darts. Naturally, there are online leaderboards that make completing missions as quickly as possible (and grabbing all the coins along the way) more of a social challenge. Really though, you'll keep playing *Monaco* not for fame and glory on the leaderboards, but because it's a wonderfully charismatic and overwhelmingly entertaining ride. **NAG - Barkskin**

1





1 Within levels, your vision is limited to your character's line of sight. Everything you don't currently have in your view (but have previously explored) becomes obscured by a blueprint of the level's layout. It's a nice touch.

88

A brilliant marriage of fun, frantic multiplayer and creatively stealthy top-down gameplay, *Monaco* is an indie treat that's well worth the $14.99 (around R150) you'll pay for it. Best played with friends, it's a witty, charming, excellently addictive outing that shows meticulous design in every respect. Most importantly, it's got a loot-grabbing monkey in it.

PLUS
Fantastic multiplayer / Inventive, smart gameplay and level design

MINUS
Nothing really springs to mind

Reviewed

Fast & Furious: Showdown

Get furious. Fast.

PLATFORMS
360 / 3DS
PS3 / Wii U
REVIEWED ON
360
GENRE
Driving
AGE RESTRICTION
12
MULTIPLAYER
Local
2 players
Online
None
DEVELOPER
Firebrand Games
WEBSITE
www.activision.com
PUBLISHER
Activision
DISTRIBUTOR
Megarom

Bad games based on movies are pretty much a given. There are very few that are released that live up to the films they are based on. *Fast & Furious: Showdown* does not disprove this; in fact, it reinforces the idea that licensed games suck... particularly if the movies they are based on weren't all that great to start with.

Rather than focussing on one film, this stinker gathers miniscule "plot" points from the entire series of *Fast & Furious* movies, and cobbles them together in a "game" that is an exercise in sadomasochism. Masochism if you play it... sadism if you get a friend to join you.

The game will have the player driving unwieldy cars around tracks that are full of unpredictable traffic, asking more of the player than the game dynamics allow for. The tracks are boring and repetitive, and the graphics are only just passable. The voice acting isn't passable at all... it is, with very few exceptions, awful.

This is a game that buys into the whole idea that the general public will allow their rabid love for poor cinema to overtake their common sense. Yes, people will buy this game because of its association, but you can probably count the number of people who will enjoy it on no hands. Really, steer clear of it. **NAG**
- Shryke

Wonder if they'll change the name to Suck & Spurious?

25

It's gratifying to see a major publisher release a game that does its utmost to reinforce that idea that games based on movies suck.

PLUS
Nice cover art / The disk is very shiny

MINUS
Everything about it / Based on sucky movies

PLATFORMS
PC
REVIEWED ON
PC
GENRE
Puzzle
AGE RESTRICTION
3
MULTIPLAYER
Local
None
Online
None
DEVELOPER
Abbey Games
WEBSITE
www.reusgame.com
PUBLISHER
Abbey Games
DISTRIBUTOR
N/A

Reviewed

Reus

Being a god shouldn't be this boring

A session of *Reus* goes like this: you pick how long you want to play: 30, 60 or 120 minutes. There is a non-time limited Freeplay, but you won't unlock any new technologies in that mode. As the game starts, you're presented with a flat, formless planet and four Giants. Each Giant represents a sort-of element: water, swamp, forest and rock. Each can terraform the landscape in their own way, and manipulate the ecosystem by creating creatures or plants. Casting these "spells" costs nothing, and often you'll have to overwrite previously placed elements as the situation changes.

Spells don't have any real logical match-up to their Giant, which can be very confusing until you have it all mapped out via rote memorization. After a terrain type has been made, such as forest, settlers will move in and set up a little camp. The way the Giants move around, the circular cut-away view of the planet, and all the little people doing their thing, is very charming. But underneath that charm is a very cold, soulless spread sheet that governs how the game plays out.

Reus is more of a puzzle game than a god simulator. Settlers will construct a "project", mostly at random, and you need to manage the landscape within a town's boundaries to meet the project's completion criteria. These range from having enough food, or tech, to more difficult ones like going to war with another settlement. Fauna and flora have "synergies", which unlock additional resources when things are placed a certain way. It's a house-of-cards balancing act, placing things next to other things in the most optimal way. When a project completes, you gain an Ambassador which when paired with a specific Giant unlocks more powers for that Giant. New projects start, and you need to rearrange things to meet the new criteria.

The foil to the system comes from greed. If a town grows too fast, or lacks sufficient threat from nearby predators, they'll stop fearing the Giants and may even start to attack them with arrows. Which is possibly the only real humanising moment to be found in the game, watching the Giants cower. When the time limit runs out, the Giants go to sleep, and you unlock new technologies to use in the next session, depending on how well you did.

I kept asking myself, "is *Reus* badly designed, or am I just bad at it?" It's a difficult question, made all the more vexing when you're aware of the Dunning–Kruger* effect [*Miktar is smarter than us, Ed*]. *Reus* is a badly designed game. But that doesn't mean it's a *bad* game. There just isn't much to it. NAG

- Miktar

> "Spells don't have any real logical match-up to their Giant, which can be very confusing until you have it all mapped out via rote memorization."

1 The Giants move ponderously across the landscape, so looking after things get, complex, and positioning becomes important.

68

There are two schools of game design. The first puts emphasis on how things "feel". The second tries to make all the numbers add up on a spread sheet. The first may not be all that balanced, but the second tends to be no fun at all. *Reus* leans too much towards the second.

PLUS
Charming cut-away visuals / Charming music / Charming idea

MINUS
Not much past the charm / Arbitrary resource hierarchy / Overly basic tutorial

* "A cognitive bias in which unskilled individuals suffer from illusory superiority, mistakenly rating their ability much higher than average." - Wikipedia

PLATFORMS
360 / 3DS / PC
PS3 / Wii U
REVIEWED ON
PS3
GENRE
Survival horror
AGE RESTRICTION
16
MULTIPLAYER
Local
None
Online
2 players
DEVELOPER
Capcom / Tose
WEBSITE
residentevil.com/revelations
PUBLISHER
Capcom
DISTRIBUTOR
Ster Kinekor

Reviewed

Resident Evil: Revelations

Under the sea

After the disappointment that was *Resident Evil 6, Revelations*' original outing on Nintendo's 3DS was a welcome return to what fans actually want from this long-running series: less of the typical action-obsessed third-person shooting inspired by the mainstream gaming industry, and more of the trademark survival horror that attracted fans to *Resi* in the first place. In this HD update you'll find more polished visuals, higher-resolution textures, better lighting and more to make it more attractive on bigger screens.

The majority of the game is a slow-paced, methodical crawl through BOW (Bio-Organic Weapon, i.e. scary monster) infested cruise ship, the *Queen Zenobia*. *Revelations* manages to maintain a disturbingly creepy atmosphere as you move through its storyline, and as with games in the series' past, it rewards careful exploration. There are throwaway, action-heavy bits as well, but they hurt the experience more than they enhance it. Raid Mode lets you tackle select sections of the game alone or online with a friend, unlocking weapons and gadgets for performing well. As rich as the overall experience is, it occasionally feels a bit bare compared to other console games. There's not much variety in the enemies, for example, and environments lack detail. This, along with excessive loading screens, often makes it obvious that it's a port of a handheld title. It's far cheaper than your average console game though, which compensates for that. **NAG**
- Barkskin

75

Despite sometimes betraying its origins as a portable title, the HD, home-console upgrade of *Revelations* is every bit as good as its 3DS sibling. It takes much-appreciated steps towards delivering actual *Resident Evil*-style survival horror rather than following the path of "generic action shooter with QTEs" that this celebrated series has become obsessed with of late.

PLUS
Closer to classic *Resident Evil* / Often chilling atmosphere / Cooperative Raid Mode is exciting

MINUS
Still feels like a handheld game in some respects / Sparse enemy variety

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EVERYTHING ELSE

Well, almost everything.

Bits and bobs that can all be filed under gaming lifestyle

PORTAL 2 COMPANION CUBE COOKIE JAR

Getting this one past mom and into the kitchen is your first challenge, second is filling it up with delicious cookies. Here's a poll around the office on the best types of cookies: Geoff: chocolate chip, Dane: Romany Creams, Chris: Oreos, Jacqui: Royal Creams, Cheryl: Tennis Biscuits, Michael: Bacon Kips (with tinned mussels). Wow, it's always interesting and frightening what people will put in their mouths. Anyway, the cookie jar is ceramic and officially licensed. It's pretty big at 19cm square which means it can hold <we didn't excel at mathematics> litres of cookies. In case you're wondering, it comes secured in polystyrene and some bubble wrap so it should make it to your house in two pieces (the jar and the lid, silly).

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

STARCRAFT II T-SHIRT

So you think you're a hotshot *StarCraft II* player, huh? Well you're not. You're nothing – a lowly Bronze League player who will never be anything more unless... unless you buy this T-shirt to show off your love of this game to the general public. Go on: be the nerd you want to see in the world.

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

SUPERMAN BATH ROBE

Getting out of the shower, mowing the lawn, sitting around on the couch and scaring your neighbour's kids has never been this fun – with the Superman bath robe you can turn the most mundane of activities into adventures of epic proportions. To be honest, that probably won't happen, and you'll instead spend most of your time admiring yourself in the mirror while attempting to master the spit-curl and steely gaze of America's second-favourite alien (after Cesar Millan), but you can dream, and this robe will take you one step closer to turning that dream into a reality.

Supplier: The Dark Carnival
Website: www.darkcarnival.co.za
RRP: TBA

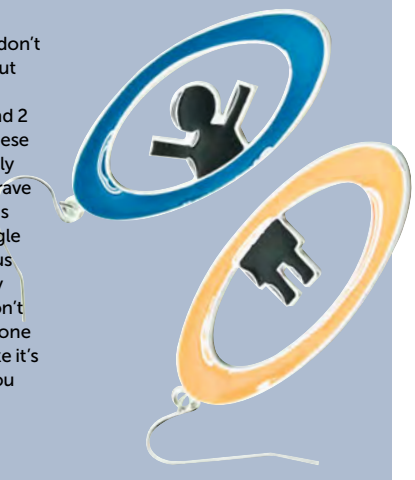
SUPERMAN APRON

It's a well-known fact by people who are smarter than you that Superman is a wiz in the kitchen. His paella is known all through the lands, and we have it on good authority that nobody dares challenge the Man of Steel to a bake-off. Nobody. Not even Batman. Whether you're a pro in front of an oven or are just looking for a way to elicit a few chuckles from your geekier friends around the braai, this is the perfect way to keep your nice clothes free of oil, flour and all the other things we've been told are associated with cooking.

Supplier: The Dark Carnival
Website: www.darkcarnival.co.za
RRP: TBA

PORTAL 2 INTER-SPATIAL PORTAL EARRINGS

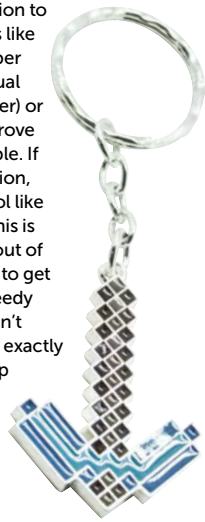
These earrings are exactly what you don't want if you're trying to be subtle about being a gamer chick. Out of the five girls we asked (3 in the NAG office and 2 visiting) none of them would wear these earrings. Of course we all immediately thought of Tarryn but nobody was brave enough to ask her personal questions about her earlobes. At R100 per dangle you're going to have to be one serious fan to be caught wearing these. They are official merchandise but sadly don't work as real portals unless you have one of those Halloween nails that look like it's stuck through your head and then you can make it look like... never mind.



Supplier: The Dark Carnival
Website: www.darkcarnival.co.za
RRP: R200

MINECRAFT PICK AXE KEY CHAIN

Some people overdo their dedication to video games by doing crazy things like spending money on game developer tattoos, getting married in the virtual game world (to a fictitious character) or going for cosmetic surgery to improve their cosplay. Don't be those people. If you want to show off your dedication, then get something subtle and cool like this Minecraft pickaxe keychain. This is official merchandise and is made out of real metal. Of course the only one to get is the diamond one, for proper speedy underground mining (sadly it doesn't come with any enchantments). It's exactly 4cm long and is guaranteed to chip through your friend's toilet paper fort in no time at all.



Supplier: The Dark Carnival
Website: www.darkcarnival.co.za
RRP: R120

TECHNEWS

KNOW YOUR TECHNOLOGY

VOICE COIL

A voice coil (consisting of a former, collar, and winding) is a coil of wire attached to the apex of a loudspeaker cone. It provides the motive force to the cone by the reaction of a magnetic field to the current passing through it. By driving a current through the voice coil, a magnetic field is produced. This magnetic field causes the voice coil to react to the magnetic field from a permanent magnet fixed to the speaker's frame, thereby moving the cone of the speaker. By applying an audio waveform to the voice coil, the cone will reproduce the sound pressure waves, corresponding to the original input signal.

MOVING COIL TRANSDUCER

These work by using a stationary magnetic element affixed to the frame of the headphones which setup a static magnetic field. Usually the element is made out of ferrite or neodymium with a diaphragm made from a lightweight cellulose material with a high stiffness-to-mass ratio that is attached to a voice coil. This is immersed in the static magnetic field so that when the diaphragm is actuated by the voicecoil, sound is produced.

DYNAMIC MICROPHONE

Dynamic microphones work via electromagnetic induction. They are robust, relatively inexpensive and resistant to moisture. This, coupled with their potentially high gain before feedback, makes them ideal for on-stage use. Moving-coil microphones use the same dynamic principle as in a loudspeaker, only reversed. A small movable induction coil, positioned in the magnetic field of a permanent magnet, is attached to the diaphragm. When sound enters through the windscreen of the microphone, the sound wave moves the diaphragm. When the diaphragm vibrates, the coil moves in the magnetic field, producing a varying current in the coil through electromagnetic induction.

CONDENSER MICROPHONE

Formerly known as capacitor microphones, unlike with dynamic microphones, here the diaphragm acts as one plate of a capacitor, and the vibrations produce changes in the distance between the plates. There are two types, depending on the method of extracting the audio signal from the transducer: DC-biased microphones, and radio frequency (RF) or high frequency (HF) condenser microphones. Condenser microphones tend to be more complicated to produce and thus more expensive. These are generally found in studios and other such environments where the highest audio fidelity / sensitivity is required.

WD GREEN HYBRID DRIVE 2TB

WD Green drives are all about being eco-conscious. They are manufactured with lead-free, conflict-free and halogen-free materials and also use less power.
TBA | www.westerndigital.com

PLEXTOR M5 PRO EXTREME 256GB SSD

Plextor introduced the M5 Pro not too long ago and now return with the Xtreme version. It's the same drive but with even more refined and tuned firmware.
R3,299 | www.goplextor.com

DID YOU KNOW?

According to www.techpowerup.com, there seems to be some confusion as to compatibility of PSUs with the recently launched line of 4th generation Intel processors. So they put together a quick fact list that should clarify things:

- Most power supplies don't support Haswell - **FALSE**
- I need a Haswell certified power supply to build a Haswell system - **FALSE**
- Haswell only works with DC-DC power supplies - **FALSE**
- Haswell only works with 80+ Gold and better power supplies - **FALSE**
- Haswell requires a second 12V rail and doesn't work with single rail power supplies - **FALSE**
- On some older power supplies, Haswell consumes 5W more in idle mode - **TRUE**

#4K BY THE NUMBERS

ASUS announced the PQ321 True 4K UHD Monitor at Computex in June. It's a desktop display with an Ultra HD 3840 x 2160 resolution, which is equivalent to four 1920 x 1080 Full HD displays stacked side-by-side. It will be available in two sizes, 39-inch and 31.5-inch.

Mosh Pit

E-TOUCH PEN

If you enjoy a touch-screen experience but don't actually have a touch-screen device, this e-Touch pen simply plugs into your laptop or PC and, after a quick calibration, will allow you to draw, write and even play games on your screen.
R799 | www.informedsa.co.za

BIGBEN INTERACTIVE CELLPHONE COVERS

If you want to bling your cellphone up with your favourite hobby then take a look at these phone covers. The three we were sent to look at were an iPhone 5 *Dead Space 3*, Samsung Galaxy SIII *Call of Duty Black Ops II*, and iPhone 4/4S *Army of Two devils Cartel*.
R199 | www.apexinteractive.co.za

PATRIOT VIPER DDR3 2133MHZ 2X8GB KIT

Designed for Intel 6/7 Series platforms, and AMD 9 and FM series, this kit sports an improved heatsink as well as a lifetime warranty.
R2,333 | www.syntech.co.za

"With the Razer Blade Pro, we've designed a gaming laptop for work and for play - appealing to on-the-go hardcore gamers, game developers, creative artists and aspiring video professionals"

Min-Liang Tan, Razer co-founder, CEO and creative director.

The 17-inch Blade Pro is powered by a 4th gen Intel Core processor, and next generation NVIDIA GeForce GTX 765M GPU

DREAMMACHINE

There's nothing new in the Dream machine this month because we've tested nothing worthy of replacing anything we have in the current machine. The GTX 780 would be a worthwhile replacement, but since we've not tested these in SLI we can't be sure how they will perform compared to the GTX TITANs we have in here at present. Next month there's likely to be some changes including a move to the Z87 platform that should not only boost gaming performance but reduce the pricing dramatically.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

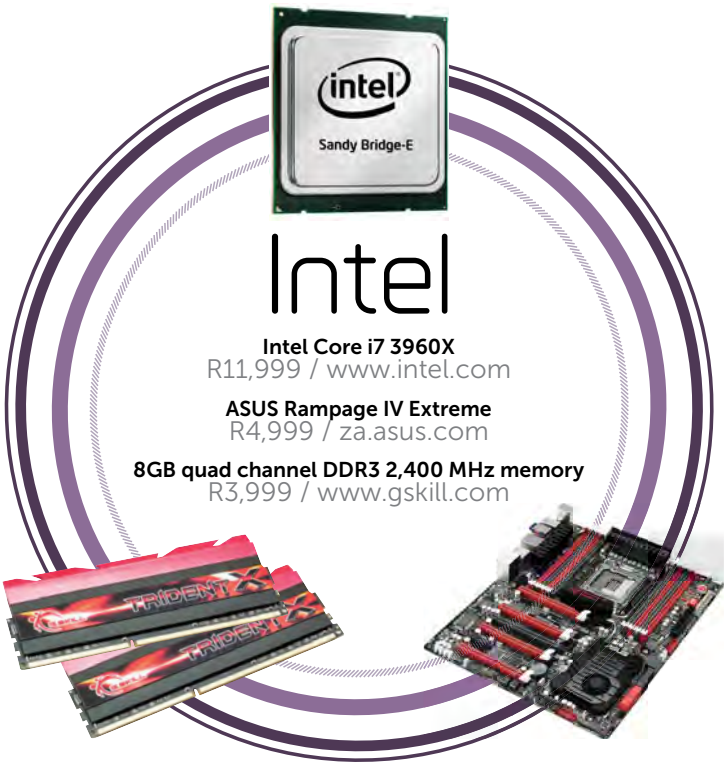
COOLER
NZXT Kraken X60
R1,950 / www.nzxt.com

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

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

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

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



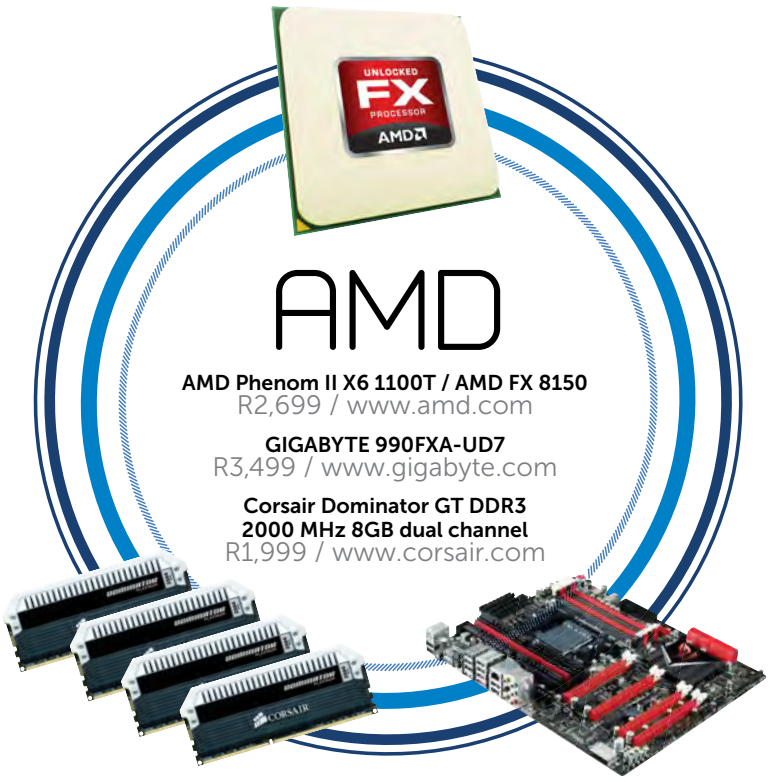
Intel

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



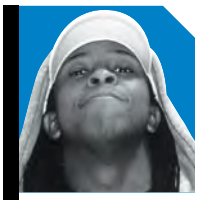
AMD

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
Let's just play games

I'm surprised at just how much Microsoft and Sony have made a big deal out of "re-inventing the living room". More so Microsoft than Sony, but it's perplexing to see both companies try so hard at something that I find essentially meaningless.

I'll explain what I mean as briefly as possible. A console's primary function is to play games. That's it, it's not an optional capability that we happen to enjoy, and it's the single most important function. Anything and everything else must be complementary to that and, at worst, not get in the way of that single function.

> "The social part of it doesn't interest me, but the richer more immersive gaming experience on new consoles does"

Social network interaction, TV and all kinds of things are on the periphery and the funny thing is that most of us already have devices for all those services. There's no incentive for me to have them housed in one box that doesn't really do any one of them better than the individual products.

Moreover, I've always been and continue to be a single-player focused gamer. The social part of it doesn't interest me, but the richer more immersive gaming experience on new consoles does, and this is where I found there to be almost no focus. Previously, the highlight reel for any of these console reveals was just how powerful the hardware was and everything it allowed the developers to do which was previously impossible. Suddenly this has changed and the focus is strangely about such things as TV and streaming services. I have to wonder if it's occurred to anyone if these services are perhaps best left as separate entities. For one, I don't watch TV but I do watch TV shows. If any of the shows I watch are not on any of the services offered by either console, then that part of the console is of no use to me and, once again, I'm back to using the services on other devices. It seems to be that the consoles are in desperate need to be everything to everyone at the same time. This inevitably means they'll not serve a single purpose as best as possible because of it.

Gaming has grown because of accessibility to the public, by way of better systems that are able to tell more compelling stories, or if you will, engage a larger audience than before. The rise of social media in all its forms isn't tied to this in any direct way and is a parallel phenomenon at most. That doesn't meant they need be joined at the hip and more over there's no implicit resonance between the two.

The games that I would play on a mobile device per say are necessarily different than those I would on a console. On a mobile device I play games for 10 minutes and don't mind sharing my score with everyone (*Line Bubble* for instance), but that doesn't mean I care to do the same on a console, or at least in a more elaborate way than I currently am able to. I'm not saying that all the innovations brought about by sharing content are bad; some of them are spectacular ideas in fact. It's just my feeling that we could be better served by the gaming practices we have already rather than seeking to have our consoles serve as forced entertainment hubs.

- Neo Sibeko

CPU

Both consoles share the same AMD 1.6GHz Jaguar APU. Despite the claims made, this processor does not house eight individual cores *per se*. There are four "Piledriver" modules each with two cores that share a single FPU, a single floating-point unit at the lowest level. So, while some instructions can be run across eight threads, many FP instructions can only be executed at a maximum of four per cycle. This CPU is obviously sufficient for the needs of both Microsoft and Sony. Therefore, there's nothing between these regarding performance.

MEMORY

The Xbox One has 8GB of DDR3 memory, much like the PS4. However, only 5GB of it is accessible to the operating system and the games. This is still plenty of memory considering that many gaming PCs make do with 4GB of RAM. Given all the inefficiencies of how resources are used on PC, the quantity of RAM available and its distribution is a moot point for now.

The PS4 also features 8GB of RAM; however this can be allocated as necessary for the desired task. There's obviously some memory reserved for system functions but for the most part, it is all available upon request by the application at any given time. This may perhaps be the reason why GDDR5 was chosen for the PS4 instead of the cheaper DDR3 of the Xbox One, as the RAM may be called upon for graphical purposes where very high bandwidth is a necessity always.

SYSTEM BANDWIDTH

This is inexplicably tied to memory, but it does deserve its own stub.

Xbox One claims to have over 200GB/s of memory bandwidth. An impressive number, but very misleading, as no one part of the

"PS4 has the better GPU outright here in every single respect, as it's based around the HD 7850 and spits out a healthy 1.78TFlops of compute performance..."

Microsoft Xbox One VS Sony PlayStation 4

This month we look at the general technical differences between these two recently announced next-gen consoles. They are largely very similar and, as far as instruction set and capabilities are concerned, they are identical. There are some differences in power however and, despite the very little information that has been made public by either company, we are confident in what we do know. What follows are basic hardware comparisons between the two.

"The Xbox One has 8GB of DDR3 memory, much like the PS4. However, only 5GB of it is accessible to the operating system and the games"

system can communicate with another at that speed. Main memory is limited to around 68GB/s (still massively impressive) while there's another 102GB/s available to and from the SRAM. Most interestingly though only 30GB/s is available between the CPU and the GPU, which is a rather important figure. All those combined help Microsoft with the 200GB/s bandwidth figure, but it isn't useful at all.

On the PS4, we have very little detail to go on, but what we do know is that the GDDR5 provides at least 176GB/s of bandwidth, which is plausible on a 256-bit bus using 5.5GHz memory. Given that both consoles are based around AMD's Jaguar, there's no reason to believe that this number is inferior to what Microsoft is touting for the Xbox One. If anything, the PS4 has significantly more memory bandwidth than the Xbox One with its DDR3 implementation and creative accounting of bandwidth.

GPU

Xbox One boasts a respectable GPU that achieves a peak single precision processing rate of 1.2TFLOPS, which makes it a slightly underpowered HD7770 GPU. It does however have the advantage of being in a closed system with access to very low latency memory. So despite the lower clock speeds, it is in practical terms as powerful as the desktop part and perhaps capable of even more.

PS4 has the better GPU outright here in every single respect, as it's based around the HD 7850 and spits out a healthy 1.78TFlops of compute performance, which is a 32% advantage at the very least. Factoring in all the other differences between these two GPUs such as texture units, ROPs tessellation engines and the like, the GPU advantage to the PS4 is greater than just the difference in compute performance. The PS4 is hands down the better of the two.

STORAGE

The Xbox One houses a 500GB mechanical drive for storage, nothing out of the ordinary. Storage is however expandable via the USB 3.0 port.

At present we know nothing about the PS4's storage capabilities other than that it also features USB 3.0 ports.

DISTRIBUTION MEDIUMS

Both consoles feature Blu-ray drives and obviously support online purchasing of games. **NAG**

Hardware Award

1

1 For some reason MSI uses two 8-pin power connectors on their GTX 770 GAMING card. Perhaps it's the reason why it overclocks so well.

MSI Twin Frozr 770 GAMING

Supplier Corex **Website** www.msi.com **RRP** R6,799

It had been rumoured for a while that NVIDIA was releasing a 700 series of graphics cards to follow on from the GTX TITAN. We weren't sure how true this would be given that the only new silicon to come from NVIDIA was GK110, and it was far too early to build an entirely new family around that when the competition was essentially going on two years with the same architecture.

Well, it turns out that NVIDIA was working on the 700 series, but the entire product family save for the GTX 780 (reviewed in this issue as well) was based on the existing GPUs. That may be disappointing to many, but there's some sensibility in this given that there really isn't a need to produce a new design (Maxwell) before it's actually necessary. It also means we get product refreshes with some minor improvements which eventually yield better performance at lower prices.

With us here is MSI's Twin Frozr (this is still not a name that rolls off the tongue) GTX 770 GAMING card. It is based on the GK104 GPU like the GTX680 and in fact, one could say it's the same graphics card we're familiar with that's decided to pull up its socks. We wrote several times before on just how dubious overclocking the NVIDIA 600 series had become. NVIDIA's GPU-Boost had essentially ruined what was always a straightforward process and had left us, the end users, with nothing to show for it other than headaches.

The GTX TITAN introduced GPU-Boost 2.0, a much better system of dealing with dynamic clocks, and it has made its way to the GTX 770. We suspect it will permeate its way across the entire 700 series as well. In short, GPU Boost 2.0 works by monitoring the total power draw, temperature or both. The user is able to specify the thresholds at which the GPU will throttle and subsequently shutdown. This however, isn't managed arbitrarily by the graphics card BIOS and driver as on the GTX 680, which made it near impossible to get consistent clock speeds across games and benchmarks. This is a much better way and essentially your graphics card will remain in Boost mode all the time while gaming.

Other than GPU Boost 2.0, what makes this particular card great is that, despite the relatively low overclock from the reference model, the memory is able to reach a screaming 8GHz. The fastest memory overclock we have ever achieved on air-cooling. On a 256-bit bus that makes for a nice 256GB/s of memory bandwidth, which is something no other GTX 680 could do regardless of how special it was. The reference speed may be 7GHz, but with the additional 1GHz clock speed, the MSI TF 770 was not only faster than the NGTX 680 Lightning (formerly of the Dream Machine), it was actually tied with the mighty HD 7970 GHz edition using the latest Catalyst drivers (13.5 beta). Nothing short of impressive, as it's something that the GTX 680 wasn't quite capable of doing consistently. The GTX 770, despite essentially being the same GPU, has managed this and, with further driver improvements, we've no doubt that this card will become a favourite amongst gamers and enthusiasts alike.

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: EVGA GTX TITAN

3DMARK - Fire-Strike	7,093 9,116
CATZILLA - Tiger	10,999 13,483
HITMAN - Absolution	(DX11 Ultra detail) 4xAA: 50.36 (DX11 Ultra detail) 4xAA: 68.97 fps

We aren't sure if MSI will release a HAWK or even a Lightning version of this card, but the GAMING edition is already so impressive that we are hard pressed to give it anything but our highest accolade and a near perfect score. NAG

- Neo Sibeko

8

This is essentially the GTX 680 re-imagined as the GTX 770, but because of that it's better in every single way.

PLUS

Incredible memory overclocking / Great performance / GPU Boost 2.0

MINUS

Somewhat misleading name

CORSAIR®

Designed for Enthusiasts.
Engineered for Performance.

Obsidian Series 350D

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

/corsair | @CorsairMemory

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SPECS

CORE
22nm Haswell
FREQUENCY
3,500MHz (3.9GHz Turbo)
CACHE
16.9MB Total (15MB L3)
TDP
84W
PLATFORM
LGA 1150 (Z87)

Hardware Award

Intel Core i7 4770K

Manufacturer Intel
Website www.intel.com
RRP R3,899

Usually with Intel's Tick-Tock strategy, we receive some sizeable performance gain with a new architecture. Mostly in raw computing power, which is what justifies the entire upgrade process for most.

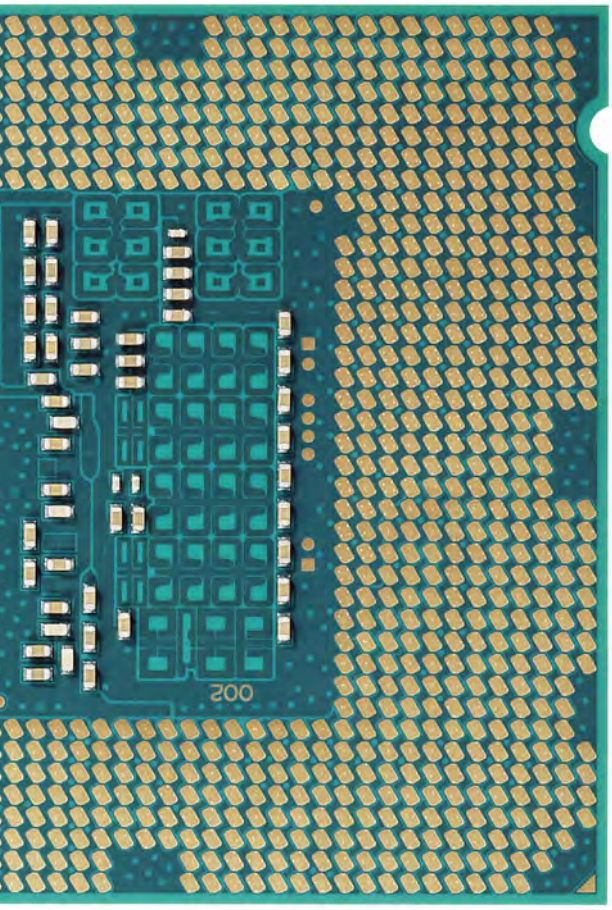
This time with Haswell, a Tock in the Intel cycle, we have all the usual platform changes apart from one fundamental difference. The performance in the context of raw computing power hasn't gone up by much at all. In fact, you'll be hard pressed to find any one test that shows gains greater than 3% – 5% (not counting special instruction sets that were added and their relevant tests). Looking at it from an IPC point of view you may wonder what it is then that Intel has introduced with Haswell, and if there's anything to get excited about, let alone warrant a motherboard upgrade.

Well, Haswell has changed the trajectory for Intel somewhat, where computing power is still important, but it's not the number one consideration above all. Compared to previous generation CPUs, Intel may not have done much at face value, but nothing could be further from the truth, and this is what makes Haswell so much more interesting than Sandy Bridge and Ivy Bridge before. Graphics, as AMD has been stating (for somewhat questionable reasons), is becoming a lot more important than outright CPU performance. This has traditionally been where AMD is strongest with their APUs while Intel has been particularly weak.

That has changed with Haswell as the 4th generation Core CPUs are bringing performance that's sometimes 100% faster than what we had on previous generations. Not only is this for the mobile platforms, but it's also true for desktop parts as well. In our testing we found that the regular synthetic benchmarks we go through have indeed, as per Intel's claims, doubled. Consider then, that the competing APUs were not offering double the performance of what we had with Ivy Bridge. Which means, for the first time ever, Intel graphics can match AMD and, in some cases, come out faster.

Since there's no CPU performance penalty on Intel's side, the chip giant has managed to address their weakness while making some measurable, even though marginal, gains where they were already far ahead. So if you take that into consideration it then becomes understandable why Intel has chosen to have Haswell be a Tock in their timeline even though CPU performance may not have gone up by much at all.

Since many of you reading this are not bothered by on-board graphics, you may be wondering what's in it for you? Well, it depends on how you use your current system. Those who use the IGP for Quick Sync and other encoding functionality will appreciate what the 4th generation core CPUs bring. As a direct result of the advancements made regarding the GPU side of things, encoding speed has almost doubled in some scenarios. So it has made what was an already blisteringly quick process on Intel CPUs even quicker. Right now the quickest way to encode high bit-rate video isn't by going with the X79 platform but by using AVX supporting software on the Z87 platform. The



BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: INTEL CORE I7 3930K

3DMark 11 physics	11316	11,154
Wprime 1024	186.045	160.885
Cinebench 11.5	8.63	11.5
AIDA 64 CPU Queen	49,819	55,214
AIDA 64 FPU VP8	6,347	3,774

"If you're moving from a very old generation such as X58, or even P55, then this change is definitely going to bring some major performance gains for you and you should automatically upgrade to this platform. "

additional threads on the SNB-E CPUs will still result in slower performance than what you can get with the right software and a 4770K on Z87.

For those who are not encoding video or anything of the sort, well there really isn't much for you. Intel officially supports much higher memory speeds now and you'll find that getting those troublesome 2,800MHz memory kits working is a lot easier than it used to be with Ivy Bridge. In fact almost all 4770K CPUs have better IMCs than the best 3770K CPUs you can find. We can confirm this not only through our testing, but the new memory frequency world record is north side of 4GHz on this platform. So memory overclocking has gone up dramatically. This is useful for the overclockers for sure but not much more than that for the regular gamer.

Does all this warrant a new motherboard? Well it depends on your upgrade cycle. The most obvious answer is no, but from the boards we have tested there are some real and tangible improvements all around which have made it to almost all motherboards. Sleep states are better, quicker to boot up from and the motherboards in general are significantly more refined and better spec'd as well.

If you're moving from a very old generation such as X58, or even P55, then this change is definitely going to bring some major performance gains for you and you should automatically upgrade to this platform. If however you're currently on a P67/Z68 and newer chipset, then you'll have to give this generation of CPUs some thought, because there is not likely to be any discernible difference in performance between what you're experiencing now and what Z87 has to offer.

For the overclockers and tweakers, the 4770K has some overclocking differences such as the VCCIN voltage, which is the primary input voltage for the entire CPU. Since this is a relatively high voltage at 1.8V it makes the CPUs even warmer than the ones before, so those who were hoping for that cool Sandy Bridge-like 5GHz overclock are in for a nasty surprise. They are just not going to happen. These CPUs are hotter by and large, but not so much that you have to get a better CPU cooler. You should however be aware that your previous 4.4GHz that you were so proud of may be a little more difficult to attain this time around.

Overclocking with the 4770K is inherently more technical, but we figure that is where the fun is anyway and it's something we have missed since the Core 2 Duo and possibly X58 days.

As the tech junkies that we are, we welcome any and all new platforms with open arms regardless of how minimal the gains may seem to be. Powering up a computer based on the latest and most advanced computing platform for the PC is always going to be something we look forward to. This is not a revolution of the computing space, but a more subtle evolution of it, only time will tell how fondly remembered this CPU will be. Right now, it's the best Intel has to offer and, from where we stand, it's rather impressive. NAG

- Neo Sibeko

The 4770K is marginally faster than the 3770K, but the changes it brings to the computing platform are worth the upgrade.

PLUS

Vastly improved memory overclocking / HD 4600 IGP / New active sleep states

MINUS

New motherboards required / Warmer than Ivy Bridge CPUs / Marginal raw CPU performance gains

Razer Orbweaver

Supplier Razer
Website www.razerzone.com
RRP R1,399

I don't really know how to feel about Razer's Orbweaver. It calls itself an "elite mechanical gaming keypad". In reality, it's just an extra slice of keyboard that takes up space on your desk and offers very little added functionality over, you know, your actual keyboard. I see it being used in two ways: as an extension to a more basic keyboard that doesn't sport its own macro keys and other such fancy features; or as an entirely new control mechanism that completely replaces your keyboard for gaming with its smaller form factor. To me, neither is particularly appealing.

It's outfitted with 20 expectedly noisy mechanical keys, all of which can be programmed to cater to different games. It defaults to a basic WASD-style key layout, which means that out-the-box it feels natural for use in an FPS. It can be configured to work in any genre though, and can store macros with custom delays, as you'd expect. Then there are two more programmable thumb keys and an eight-way directional thumb pad – which you can use to control movement, or for scrolling, or for whatever you deem necessary really.

The problem is that almost all of this functionality is offered by your average gaming keyboard, which will already have cost you a pretty penny – so why you'd feel the need to spend R1,399 for an extra quarter-keyboard is beyond me. Your existing keyboard also boasts the bonus of being a *full keyboard*, so it has uses beyond just gaming – like, say, the ability to type up reviews of redundant peripherals. The Orbweaver is the type of accessory that a select few gamers will swear by, and they'll defend its importance to their end of days – but to the rest of us, it's just a giant question mark. NAG

- Dane Remendes

SPECS

KEYS
20 programmable, backlit mechanical keys with 50g actuation force
THUMB PAD
Programmable, eight-way directional
MACROS
Unlimited lengths
ERGONOMICS
Adjustable hand, thumb and palm rests

7

It functions as advertised – but honestly, I can't imagine why anybody would need such an expensive, superfluous peripheral.

PLUS
Excellent construction quality

MINUS
What's the point really? / Gets uncomfortable / Ridiculous price

Samsung Galaxy Note 8.0

Supplier Samsung South Africa
Website www.samsung.co.za
RRP R7,199

The Galaxy Note II was a big phone, or a small tablet, or perhaps the horrible term "phablet" that people decided was hip – ugh. However you sliced it, the size of the thing was perhaps the worst part about it, but what happens when you go even bigger? Eight inches diagonally is what the Note 8.0's display boasts, putting it firmly into the "small tablet" segment where it's actually much better off: holding this tiny tab in your hands is easy thanks to its light if top-heavy weight, and the redesigned stylus is easy to hold and use. It terms of its overall aesthetic, we're much happier with the Note in this segment.

In terms of rather a lot else, things are a different story. The bump to tab form apparently means that the device doesn't get a decent camera, and we're instead lumped with a 5MP happy-snapper with no flash that produces grainy, low-quality images in even the best lighting conditions. Then on the other end of the transition to this format we have another disappointment: the screen resolution is stuck at the Note's old 1280x800. Despite its vibrancy and excellent colour reproduction, reading text (even with the "reading mode" enabled) is an uncomfortable practice due to the ultimately poor pixel density. At this price, the Note 8.0 should include a full 1080p display.

Despite the flaws caused by the Note's seemingly endless awkward straddling between the phone and tablet segments, there's no denying that this is a powerful, useful device. Just how useful it'll be if you already own a high-end smartphone or tablet remains to be seen, as it's not really good enough to beat out either dedicated device. Still, if you manage to fit into the niche that Samsung is targeting (i.e.: the stylus really matters to you), you'll be happy enough with the Note 8.0. NAG

- Geoff Burrows

SPECS

CHIPSET
Exynos 4412, quad-core 1.6GHz
STORAGE
16GB internal, up to 64GB microSD supported
DISPLAY
8" LED, 1280x800 resolution
OPERATING SYSTEM
Android v4.1.2

7

An awkward mix of design decisions owing to niche segment placement prevent the Note 8.0 from reaching greatness, but the underlying device is powerful and filled with useful features.

PLUS
Powerful hardware / Stylus improvements from previous generation

MINUS
Low pixel density / Poor camera / Uneven weight distribution

Cooler Master V1000

Supplier Sonic Informed
Website www.coolermaster.com
RRP R2,799

PSUs are so efficient these days, it's hard to find a bad one. With the certification system as a guide, you can pretty much pick whichever one that is within your budget and get a relatively good PSU.

The difference between these units then has to come down to more than just the electronics. It's in everything else including the noise levels, software (if any), warranty and just how many devices one can plug into it without the unit falling over.

In all the above the V1000 excels better than most. After the M2 Pro 1.5KW, we were convinced that there wasn't much that Cooler Master could improve upon. It turns out they did, even though the V1000 is, as the name suggests, a 1KW unit. It's arguably one of, if not *the* best unit they've produced. The Gold certification isn't all we're going by here, but just how robust the PSU is inside and how quiet it remains. In comparison to the M2 PRO which we said was quiet, this produces virtually no noise; just a silent hum to let you know the PSU is operating.

Testing the PSU by plugging a simple multi meter to all the rails showed that at idle or under load the power delivery is rock solid across all the rails. In earnest we weren't expecting any different because it's been so long since we found a PSU of such a class with fluctuations you could pick up with a multi-meter. The truly impressive thing here, other than the power delivery and internals, is the 83A 12V rail which is said to tolerate loads as high as 996W (higher than what the M2 1.5KW unit can). That alone should be enough to seal the deal if you're a power user. The V1000 is one of the best PSUs on the market for sure. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

SPECS

RATING 1000W
CERTIFICATION 80 plus Gold
COMBINED 12V OUTPUT 996W (83A)

8

The newest and quite possibly the greatest addition to the Cooler Master PSU family.

PLUS
Fully modular / Whisper quiet / Single 84A 12V

MINUS
Nothing

MSI GT70

Supplier Corex
Website www.corex.co.za
RRP R39,999

This doesn't happen often, but we've gotten our hands on some powerful future notebook tech, housed within the familiar shell of MSI's GT series of gaming notebooks. This latest iteration of the GT70 features two overwhelming trump cards that give it an edge over the existing competition: NVIDIA's new GTX 780M and Intel's Core i7-4930MX. At the time of this writing, these two components haven't been officially released – and as you'd expect, their performance puts every previously released desktop replacement offering to shame.

Let's back up for a bit. The design of this particular model GT70 is instantly familiar, with its Dynaudio-powered sound production, SteelSeries chiclet keyboard (with adjustable backlighting), cold metallic finish and bulky stature. It's not particularly pleasing to look at, but it doesn't really need to be. The usual row of touch-sensitive controls rests above the keyboard, giving you one-touch access to things like boosting fan speed – useful for if you use MSI's overclocking facilities and don't want to burn a hole in your desk in the process.

Where it's really impressive is in the numbers. Our usual gaming notebook benchmark – 3DMark's Fire Strike test – spat out a final score of 4,627. In comparison, last month's review of the previous GT70 Dragon Edition saw that notebook and its i7-3630QM / GTX 675MX combination score 2,809: nearly 2,000 points less. With a little tweaking (and as better drivers are released when the hardware is more readily available) you'll be able to extract even more power from it. You'll have no trouble playing the latest games with all the settings cranked up, and you'll be safe when the next generation of games comes knocking. The price you'll pay for it is staggering, which makes it impossible to recommend – but if you want the best, this is it. Honestly though, for that ridiculous price, I'd rather buy a desktop PC *and* a crappy car. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes

SPECS

CPU
Intel Core i7-4930MX (3GHz)
GPU
NVIDIA GeForce GTX 780M (4GB GDDR5) / Intel HD Graphics 4600
RAM
16GB DDR3
HDD
750GB HDD / 3x 128GB SSD configured in RAID 0

10

Easily the most powerful gaming notebook that's ever passed through our offices.

PLUS
Amazing performance / Alluring feature list

MINUS
That price

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: ASUS RAMPAGE IV GENE

3DMark Vantage CPU	34,698	46,760
Cinebench 11.5	9.39	13.43
AIDA 64 copy	30157MB/s	20,396MB/s
3DMark03	118,211	127,025

SPECS

CHIPSET
Intel Z87
MEMORY
4x 240-pin DDR3
CPU SUPPORT
LGA 1150
SLOTS
3x PCI-E 16X,
4x PCI-E 1X

MSI Z87-GD65 GAMING

Supplier Corex **Website** www.msi.com **RRP** R2,999

We had planned to bring you an MSI Mpower Max motherboard review this month: MSI's crowning achievement in motherboard design; a board finally worthy of our full praise with no reservations. Alas this did not happen, as, at the very last minute, the MSI MPower MAX experienced a peculiar bug that rendered the board essentially dead. A specific sequence of events that won't be uncommon for anyone moving to the 4th generation Core platform.

Anyway, we'll leave that for that review next month, so for now we bring you the detuned version of that board. Unlike the MPower MAX it's not designed around record-breaking attempts. That doesn't mean that it isn't capable of overclocking though. In fact, the GAMING board is easily the simplest motherboard to overclock we've tested to date from MSI and, possibly from any other vendor.

If you remember everything we said last issue about the Z77-GD65 GAMING then you'll be familiar with its Z87 iteration. There are some key differences though which make this an entirely better board than what we saw last time around. Placed next to each other, the Z77-GD65 GAMING represents the MSI of old, while this model is a showing of what we term "the new MSI" is about. This board has improved sound via a shielded audio module which houses a newer and better ALC1150 audio codec. We can't stress enough how this was a much-needed improvement over the pedestrian controller featured on the previous generation board. Everything else as far as gaming enhancements are concerned is the same, so there are no surprises there.

Performance has always been a sore point for MSI and that's probably because even though you could tune your way into performance parity with competing boards, you didn't always have all the options at your disposal. This time MSI has seen to add some more settings for those of us who like to tinker under the bonnet. This may come purely because of the new CPU's handling power in a new way, we can't be sure. Whatever the reasons may be we are rather excited about what MSI has been able to deliver on this board. Out the box performance is great and getting even more from it is very easy. This is made even better by further refinement to what was already the slickest EUFI interface the industry has seen to date.

There really isn't anything wrong that we could see with the Z87-GD65 GAMING. A solid motherboard is as equally adept in the hands of an overclocking as it will be in a gaming machine. There can always be some improvements made, but this holds true for just about every motherboard on the planet. At the time of writing we did not have any retail pricing, but suffice to say that if it's priced anything like the previous motherboard in relation to the competition, this one will do very well. With this chipset MSI has hit the ground running. It's safe to say that the MSI motherboard quality has finally caught up to that of their graphics cards and between those two components they will pose a serious threat going forward.

It is also worth adding that the GAMING board is one of only two boards we are aware of currently outside of Intels's own that supports XTU this extensively. It's not 100% compliant, but its head and shoulders what what all other vendors are offering. It may not seem like a big deal right now, but it will be as XTU continues to be more important not only for overclockers but for gamers as well. This is one very impressive motherboard. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

9

This is easily the best MSI board we have tested to date, a great board all-around.

PLUS
Black and red looks great as usual / Marvellous BIOS / Good performance

MINUS
None

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1 This cooler was first shown mounted on a GTX TITAN, and if it could cool that massive GPU it could definitely cool a de-tuned version of it. It can dissipate up to 450W of heat.

SPECS

CORE
GK110 (28nm)
PROCESSORS
2,304
RENDER OUTPUTS
40
MEMORY
3,072MB GDDR5
7.0GHz (288.38GB/sec)
API
DirectX 11
OpenGL 4.3
OpenCL 1.x
PhysX

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: EVGA GTX TITAN

3DMARK - Fire-Strike	8,966 9,116
CATZILLA - Tiger	12,281 13,483 (DX11 Ultra detail) 4xAA: 65.2
HITMAN - Absolution	(DX11 Ultra detail) 4xAA: 68.97 fps

GIGABYTE GV-N780OC-3GD

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

A few months ago we brought you reviews of NVIDIA's GTX TITAN graphics cards. If you go back to those reviews you'll find that despite our appreciation for the incredible performance that the TITAN could deliver, we were less than impressed by the price. With the GTX 780 we have here, we find that there's actually no need to own the GTX TITAN at all.

Simply put, the GTX 780 is a cut down TITAN. It only has 12 SMX units enabled out of the full 14. This cripples the GK110 by a full 384 CUDA cores, the relevant render outputs and texturing units at the basic level. Moreover you also get less compute performance down by the appropriate magnitude.

Do not let that discourage you however as that doesn't mean the GTX 780 isn't packing a punch. On the contrary, it'll be a sizeable upgrade from the GTX 680 and it won't cost much more than the GTX 680 when it made its debut. We had no local pricing at the time of writing but from the US MSRP it looks to be $600 USD, a good $100 more than the GTX 680 but $400 less than the asking price of the GTX TITAN.

As far as performance improvements over the GTX 680, this is where it gets exciting. You will receive 768 more CUDA cores, significantly more compute performance (more than double what was on the GTX 680 in certain contexts). 288GB/s of memory bandwidth versus the 192GB/s on the 680, more texturing units, more tessellation and geometry units and all of this makes for a graphics card that is about 20 to 25% faster than the GTX 680. By numbers alone this is a much better card for the asking price than the GTX 680.

With such performance figures it cements itself as the fastest graphics card around for "normal" people, as the GTX TITAN was simply out of reach for many, including the most dedicated competitive overclockers.

Even better is the fact that the strict controls on the GTX TITAN are not present on the GTX 780, for vendors such as GIGABYTE have taken to building custom PCBs, using advanced coolers and offering factory overclocks on their models. Something that was not possible with TITAN. Add to which, between the woeful GPU Boost 1.0 on the GTX 680 and the pitiful 6-phase PWM on the GTX TITAN, there wasn't much overclocking happening at a competitive level. With the GTX 780 however, the card benefits from the custom PCBs available for the GPU (think GTX 680 Super Overclock for example) and the improved GPU BOOST 2.0. Those two aspects alone mean that the GTX 780 is not only offering better performance than its predecessor, NVIDIA may once again gain favour amongst the enthusiast and overclocking community which they lost with both GTX TITAN and the GTX 680.

When it comes to the GIGABTE card specifically, it is also overclocked out the box, in fact by quite a respectable margin, so we couldn't get much more than what was already on offer. Adding another 100MHz to the core clock resulted in a lock up and we had to settle for speeds around the 1.22GHz mark. Less than what we could achieve with the GIGABYTE GTX TITAN cards. We aren't sure what was causing this but it definitely seemed like an early BIOS or perhaps even driver issue. By the time you read this, the overclocking should be improved. Overall this is a mighty fine showing from GIGABYTE of what the GTX 780 can do. NAG

- Neo Sibeko

9

The de-tuned GTX TITAN is close enough in performance to be impressive, but so much cheaper it makes the TITAN seem absurd.

PLUS
Runs very cool / Massive processing power / Almost GTX TITAN-like performance

MINUS
Very limited GPU overclocking

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SPECS

MATERIAL
SECC Steel / ABS Plastic
COLOUR
Matte black
SUPPORTED MOTHERBOARD TYPE
Micro-ATX/ATX/E-ATX/XL-ATX
FRONT PANEL
2x USB 3.0, 2x USB 2.0, 1x MMC reader

"Essentially, the NZXT of 2010 is not the same one of today, and the H630 is one such example of just how far the vendor has come. "

NZXT H630 Silent Chassis

Supplier NZXT **Website** www.nzxt.com **RRP** TBA

NZXT has been steadily improving on their products since they unleashed the original Phantom chassis several years back. At the time all the vendor had was a wonderful design language and that's about it. The minimalist approach helped separate them from the multitudes of case vendors who were all trying to target gamers and power users with some of the most absurd designs we had ever seen. NZXT was not a Cooler Master, Corsair or any of the other well represented and respected case manufacturers. To many, they were vying for market share against the likes of Aerocool and similar brands.

Fortunately, NZXT has moved on from those days and, not only has their reputation bettered immensely, it is built on the continued innovation in case, cooler and PSU design. Essentially, the NZXT of 2010 is not the same one of today, and the H630 is one such example of just how far the vendor has come. This would have been near impossible to imagine coming out of the minds there, but now in the middle of 2013, we'd expect nothing less and, in fact, we expected a little bit more.

Let's get to the Achilles Heel of this case first before we get into what it does so right to warrant such a high score. Given that this is supposed to be a silent chassis, one built for those sensitive to noise, but still catering for power users, it's amazing that the result is no quieter than a regular high-end case. NZXT doesn't use sound dampening foam that we are used to (as seen on the COSMOS 2 for example) but it relies on some padding, on the two sides and top of the chassis. We aren't convinced that this is better in any way than traditional sound dampening foam, but it does somewhat conceal the racket that NZXT fans make.

For some reason NZXT is incapable of making fans that are not offensive in their acoustic characteristics. This was forgivable years ago when they were relatively new, but as a vendor that deserves mention amongst the best in the industry, this is truly disappointing. Once again due to the nature of the magazine, we received this case well before it had any kind of availability on our shores, so no pricing was at hand. However this is a high-end case and you'll not be expecting to hear fans at all at this price.

Fortunately this is nothing that can't be sorted out with a fan controller or some better performing substitutions from fan specialists. That aside, this is one spectacularly simple chassis by NZXT standards but, even then, they have managed to make it very appealing. It is as well built as it looks with solid panels and a marvellous paint job. You'll not find tons of pop rivets here, a shortcoming of most cheap cases; no, instead you'll find screws for virtually every panel and structure. You can essentially disassemble the entire frame leaving but the bare minimum. There's quite a lot to this case that we can't cover here but suffice to say it's probably as impressive as the original Phantom, if not more so. Not for its aesthetics but for how it strikes the right balance between design and build quality. If not for the fan noise, this would have been a perfect scoring case, most probably. Regardless, this one is worth the purchase, just remember your fan controllers while you're at it. NAG

- Neo Sibeko

8

NZXT H630 is wonderfully designed, as with most of their cases, but it's a pity that it is not silent at all as the name suggests.

PLUS
Good build quality / Wonderful design
Multi-media card reader

MINUS
NZXT fans are disappointing / One-way hard drive mounting / Complex setup

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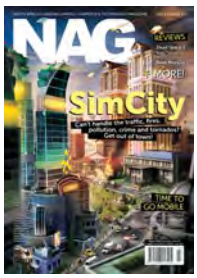


GG

Parlement of fooles

When I was a kid[1] I had a very special love for encyclopaedias. Back then, mind you, an encyclopaedia was pretty much the only source of compiled and sorted masses of information available outside of science fiction movie set props and my dad, and I suspect my dad made a lot of that stuff up. While other children played with their Castle Greyskull replicas in sandpits, I used to spend my weekends looking things up in encyclopaedias borrowed from the library, and not just because I never got one of those Castle Greyskull replicas for my birthday[2].

That's all completely different now, of course. With the advent of the Internet, all that same information is now available to around 40 percent of the world's total population[3], twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and you don't even have to get up out of your room to access it. With a modem and just the most basic know-how of search engines and browsing and spelling, you can find the answers to just about any questions you might have, and even the spelling is mostly optional. It's the Google-powered future in which Chaucer's dreamer would doubtless have found his "certeyn thing", because there's probably an entire block of Tumblr dedicated to whatever it might have been[4].

So why then, with the whole planet's collective masses of information compiled and sorted at your very fingertips for your unprecedented convenience, do so many people choose to persist instead in obdurate ignorance? And I don't mean hard subjects like particle physics, quantum electrodynamics, and how thunder works, but simple facts like, for example, the Xbox One's DRM and used games policy. Or, as the case might be, the lack of facts.

At the time of writing this, it's been about two weeks since the, uh, let's go with "controversial" Xbox One reveal event and a week still to go until E3, and as of this very moment, nothing about the Xbox One's DRM and used games policy has been officially confirmed by anybody important enough to listen to. Uninformed speculation about these things is quite beyond the scope of this month's back page, but that's also sort of the point – there is only uninformed speculation to be found, and you can get it everywhere else already, only most of it is being copy-pasted as fact.

It's not exactly difficult to distinguish between uninformed speculation and fact – keywords like "officially confirmed" conventionally accompany the latter – but it seems the overwhelming majority of people prefer to uncritically propagate misinformation because... actually, I'm not quite sure. Maybe because it's the easiest way to get a bunch of retweets or onto the front page of Reddit without putting in any real effort. You know, like making sure you've got all the *real* facts first. I can't believe I even have to use the additional qualifying adjective "real", but there it is.

Until next month then, don't be that guy. NAG

- Tarryn van der Byl

1 Post-dinosaurs, pre-lolcats.

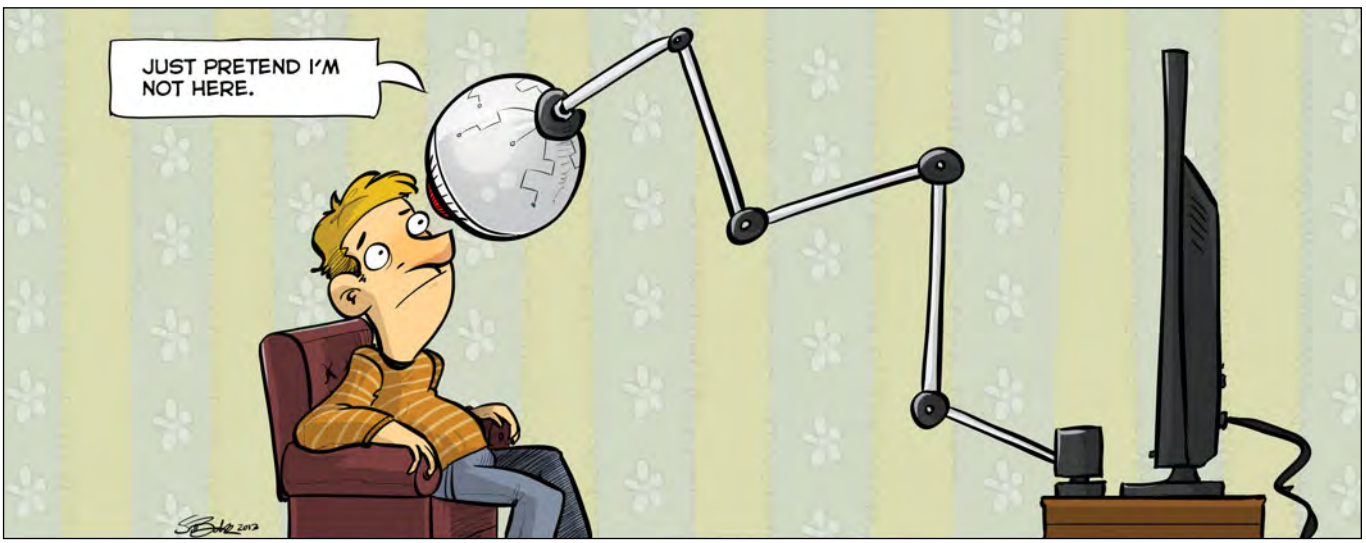
2 :(Besides, our sandpit was infested with lizards, and not even Battle-Cat was brave enough to get involved in that particular territorial war. And by Battle-Cat I mean Cringer. And by Cringer I mean me.

3 Almost 3 billion people in 2013, according to Wikipedia. You can even use the Internet to look up information about using the Internet.

4 And that's not even counting the inevitable Rule 34 content.

Extra Life

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



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