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NAG

Vol. 16
Issue
EIGHT

10 REVIEWS
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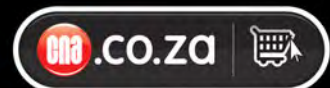
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Features

40 BATTLEFIELD 4 BIG THINKING SANDBOX MULTIPLAYER SHOOTER

It's kind of the same, but, like, *better*. We played the beta, amazing stuff happened, and it got us all excited to learn as much as we could about *Battlefield's* fourth numbered outing. So we travelled to the Himalayas, and found an elderly mystic who at first was all like "Um... what?" when we asked him about it. We showed him our NAG badges, and he wisened up and spilled the beans. Now, we're ready to share with you what we gleaned.



On the DVD

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THE START OF A NEW END BEGINNING AT THE END OF A NEW START

I'm leaving the editor's chair, desk, shackle, and this month is the last time I'm going to be "editing" NAG. Dane joked that nobody cares and I think he might be right. This kind of thing is always more impactful to the person leaving than the people left behind. I'm handing over the editor's role of NAG to Geoff, and my job title will change to that of publisher – whatever that means. For those of you that do care, I'm still going to be around keeping a close eye on NAG, and I'm still going to run rAge. This also means I can get back to writing which is why I started this in the first place, that and the free games and hardware and overseas trips of course. The reason for me moving on, or sideways if you like, is twofold. I've done everything I can with NAG, and I feel that the magazine needs some fresh blood and perspective. I've been lazy for the last few months and this deadline business has left me a little beat up. The other reason is that I'm going to be heading up something new and exciting that we'll be launching at the beginning of December, so we'll share that with you in the next issue. It's all very interesting and I can already feel my brain engaging again at its normal operating temperature.

I must thank everyone that's ever worked on NAG for me for the last million years. You all make this thing happen each month and above all, make me look good. Thanks must of course also go out to those clients that have supported us over the years and all the publishers and developers that have trusted us with their products.



The biggest thanks must go to you, our loyal crazy fans and readers. We do everything for you and it's always good to get feedback from you letting us know what you think. Many nights during deadline when all hope is lost (not that dramatic) I'll get a mail from a reader telling me how much he loves NAG or a picture of someone's cat sitting on a NAG. Those little messages keep us alive and focused. So make sure you let Geoff know what you think, good and bad.

To the universe and life and so on – thanks for the good ride and making a kid's dream a reality. My life really

has been a fairy tale of getting exactly what I've always wanted. I hope that I'm ready for the next chapter, even though it's not that different from what I'm doing now.

HOUSEKEEPING

So next month we're going to have a rAge follow-up feature and plenty of rAge stuff on the DVD. As for the rest of the December issue – I don't have a clue, that's Geoff's problem now, LOL. **NAG**

Farewell
- RedTide
Editor



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Letter of the Month November 2013

From: Ruan

Subject: Integrity

I have been pondering this for a while, so I thought it was time to ask. Being a gaming magazine obviously comes with a huge amount of responsibilities and challenges, but the one I don't think a lot of us actually pay heed to is trust. Trust to your readers is important but perhaps people don't realise the developer/publisher trust you have to earn and maintain. Whenever Miktar, Miklós or even you go somewhere for an interview for a new game or developer there are clearly things that you are not allowed knowing. The information that you receive and publish is agreed upon beforehand by the collective to ensure that nothing damaging is released to the general public. Even a small, supposedly inconsequential comment about a level or character that is not 'faithful to the series' can have a massive effect on sales, public opinion and even publisher backing. You must have a retarded amount of

pressure every month trying to make sure to tell us as much as you can without hurting the people who told it to you. Even if they were told what to say, they're human. At some point they will say something that is so incredibly amazing, that they weren't allowed to tell anyone at risk of ruining a game and losing their jobs. They ask you to keep it 'off the record', not to tell us and believe that you won't. Do you even discuss these things with the other people in the office who've signed NDA's? You could easily 'leak' these things anonymously on some gaming website and nobody would know. They probably let it slip to someone else so they wouldn't know it was you. You could make the readers so wet, with all the juice that trickles down to you every month. How do you garner the trust between publication and publisher? How do handle knowing what everyone else is begging you to tell them? Is your integrity worth more than what people would pay you to know the truth? I think people

would appreciate your hard work more if they understood.

We've been around for a long time and in that time we've only ever spilt one bean that we shouldn't have. That said, this bean spill wasn't technically our fault because the third party PR company had the wrong embargo dates on the cover letter we were sent. All was explained away and we came out of it clean and even managed to avoid getting the PR agency into big trouble. I've always held integrity above all else and over the years it's gotten to the point where we are told stuff ages before it becomes public knowledge. This kind of trust is hard to earn but once you've got it, critical to protect. All of our writers respect the code and therefore never have to worry about doing anything wrong. But yes, if you knew the things we know your mind would implode, so it's probably better that you let us handle the top secret stuff and you just play the games. :) Ed.

From: Geoff

Subject: Where's the innovation?

I picked up Kerbal Space Program a couple of months ago from the Steam store and was amazed. I would play it incessantly, building the biggest rockets my PC could handle and trying to reach the furthest of planets and then subsequently laughing as I ran out of fuel and decided to leave my kerbals to endlessly float around the solar system until the end of time.

Since then exams, new games and

other things have come and gone but today I thought I would return to my waiting space program. I found myself deciding to either just get a ship into a stable orbit around the home planet or at most go for the moon. This led me to a thought. Isn't this humanity's shortcoming? Fifty years ago we were sending men to the moon almost on a monthly basis. We were launching new telescopes and probes to the farthest reaches of space and creating unimaginable technology.

MEGAROM
LETTER OF THE MONTH




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 or cleverness. Note: You can't change the games or the platform they come on.

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Now things like space travel are essentially left in the hands of private companies. Innovation is so unimportant to most now that almost no one bats an eye when the Large Hadron Collider finds what it was looking for (99% chance). I'm not trying to lecture anyone, God knows I can be quite lazy and indifferent at times, but what happened to the glory days of science and progress? What's stopping us from turning games like Mass Effect into reality (minus the Reapers)? Who wouldn't like to work on the Normandy, hop into an Animus, have their own Nanosuit or upgrade themselves as in Deus Ex? Come on science! Make it happen!

But until I can find out whether one of my ancestors was an assassin, I think I'll enjoy the fictional worlds games give me and try to make a few scientific contributions of my own – edible tape to hold your burgers together anyone?

I think you should give NASA a break; they're busy all the time with very important science stuff – check their website (provided it's working). It's true that private companies are starting to spend money on space programs but this is a very good thing. Governments are good at wasting time and money and now with the move into the private sector it's become cheaper to get into space and that's good for everyone. We're still a long way from the stuff we see in science fiction but give it some time and anything you can imagine will one day be a reality – including lightsabers and FTL travel. Ed.

From: Eagan
Subject: Ultimate game

[I feel now is a good time to remind everyone that the letters we print are mostly unedited, Ed.] I have this idea that if I were a game maker I would make an ultimate game that has everything you want, it's basically a game where you can literally do anything. It's like this; you use Rockstar games as a base for the game because they basically specialize in free roam games like GTA but in GTA you can't talk to people so what do you do? You team up with Electronic Arts, who are the creators of The Sims, and make a game that's basically GTA but you can talk to people like on The Sims. But what about jobs? That's where you bring EA Sports, Ubisoft, Infinity ward and Activision into the mix. They can put all their sports that they make into this game so if you want to be a soccer, basketball or football player then you can do that or if you want to go to the army, be an assassin or a street racer or even do motorsport then you can do that. Basically be or do anything you want. Imagine the possibilities. But let's say you going out of the house that you just bought and you're on your way to play soccer for FC Barcelona, then when you get there and play, it will basically be like playing FIFA and the same with all their other sports. And let's say you go to the army then you would go into something like COD or Far Cry thanks to the Ubisoft, Activision and Infinity ward side of the game. And thanks to EA you can talk to people and have a family and maybe even grow old and live on through your children and stuff. But anyway that's my idea and I hope it makes sense. Love the magazine. I'm a big game head. You guys are awesome. Thank for reading.

It does make sense but it is pure madness. I get what you're saying – you want all the games in one big game. Ed.

From: Jay
Subject: Pen Pals

I've noticed something very different about today and yesterday... If you look at old magazines you see little, almost adverts on the side, with people's addresses in with you can write to them and become 'pals'. So my question to you is, why not have a little section where gamers can write to each other non-electronically. I personally think this would be a great idea. Think of all the things we could talk about. The head shots, the treasures, the fails and all that other stuff. But on a less serious note; want to be my pen pal?

You are aware that most people today can barely put together a proper

sentence when sending a SMS or mail electronically. Think about how popular Twitter is and that's primarily because it's a rather limiting way of communicating. I'm afraid your dreams of letter writing are a little far-fetched and as much as I'd love to champion the use of proper English and taking time when communicating I know I'll just be wasting my time. Ed.

From: Muhammad
Subject: September Letter of the month

Hello, I just wanted to enquire about the way one would win the letter of the month title and of course the games. Would it have to be written with sophistication or can slang be used. How do you decide who wins, do you get everyone at NAG that writes their own column in the magazine to read through your selection of the finest and then vote for who wins or do you take the best four and pick one out of a hat

ON THE FORUMS

The NAG forums are a happy place full of all the kinds of people you find on the Internet, tread lightly: www.nag.co.za/forums

Q: Which next-gen gaming platform(s) are you not going to buy, and what could that platform do to change your mind?

"I will buy neither. I have a huge backlog of games already for the 6 consoles I already own and I'm not all that keen on "Sports, TV, Sports, COD Dogs and Sports" anyway."

Goraan

"I'm not going to buy the Xbox One and by the way, there's basically nothing Microsoft can do to change my mind. Sony has outsmarted them in every possible way."

Sir-Ominous

"I almost decided on buying a PS4 when it releases, but my PC has been neglected for far too long now. So I'll be upgrading that first and then when the new consoles prices are a bit more in the affordable range in 1 or 2 years I'll probably buy one based on community feedback."

Incognito

"My first "next-gen" purchase is a shiny new GTX770 from NVIDIA. Not buying the others because reasons. Bonus only goes so far."

ToshZA

at random. Is it more likely that if you write about your personnel life and experiences rather than ask millions of questions (like I am doing right now) you will win? Also I really want to win this prize, because I have never won anything major before. I saw that this competition's prize is two PS3 games, so I'm giving it my all, because I'm hoping that when somebody asks me what was the one thing that you won that changed your life, I can say I won the NAG magazine letter of the month competition and I received two games, so prove all those that said gamers don't achieve anything wrong. (Not trying to sound desperate).

Well you are sounding a little desperate. There's no process, no trick and no way of bribing me (unless you're ludicrously rich but then why would you care about getting free games if you're a millionaire). It's all down to making a good point or

David Edwards, "I just took an iconic gaming image and gave it the NAG treatment. Enjoy."



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.



This month's fan art winner receives a Camo Controller for 360 valued at R649. Sponsored by the awesome people at Prima Interactive.



mind. First things first, it is definitely not weird playing as the opposite sex in games; I mean you want to escape your usual, everyday lives. Second I too enjoy playing as a female character in games, but I do change my mind after a while because I've noticed that they're considerably weaker than male characters... When I was younger, I had no problem playing as a girly girl, but now that I'm much older, it's starting to feel a bit weird... I definitely can't play Mass Effect as a Fem Shepard with a straight face, same with GoW and KoA. Then, on the other hand, there is my brother who loves playing as a female character; he loves it so much that I've rarely seen him play as his own gender. I think he may someday spontaneously grow a vagina. Don't tell him I said that... Anyway, it's perfectly normal to play opposites, just make sure you balance it out every now and then, otherwise it gets weird... By the way, I'm definitely looking for painted fingernails in Ghosts! You have provided yet another great issue of NAG with an article that has me pondering on a philosophical scale.

We're all a little stunned here at the office and we're keeping this letter away from Tarryn – you made us laugh and cry but not in a good way. Are you really trying to tell us that female characters in games perform worse than the exact same male characters? Ed.

talking about something fresh from a new perspective. It's easy to stand out if you have an imagination and some originality and can spell and grammar. Ed.

From: Guillaume
Subject: Game progression opposite of what you thought and sequels.
Have any of you guys at NAG ever played a game that as soon as you start it, found out that the game was the complete opposite of what you expected? I have, many times. Like when some of these AAA sequels come out - everybody goes crazy about its graphics, what add-ons are included and how amazing the last title in the franchise was. Yet nobody ever stops and thinks, what if the game isn't as good as you hope it is? For instance, I remember getting Dead Rising 2 because of its 80 and above review score. I started the game and I liked it, but as I started to progress in the game I began to feel forced to continue and complete the game. A newer title that I found was Amnesia: A Machine for Pigs. I completely thought that this was going to be one of the scariest games I have ever played - but after progressing to the middle of the game, the monsters started to get annoying and not at all scary. Some sequels just shouldn't be made. Also, most people that I know completely neglect games of past

generations. For instance, nobody will spend a cent on Call of Duty 4 because every year an even better sequel comes out. Sequels often give that feel of becoming better and better, yet some games just don't need sequels to be the better, they already are the best.

I have played many games that I ended up loving despite being sceptical about them when I first saw them. I think Minecraft is the best example of this. Dane introduced us to the game and I initially thought it was a bit silly and limited and I couldn't see the point of it all. Fast forward to today and I've got probably hundreds of hours logged and a magnificent house on a hill overlooking the ocean and I've finished the game on survival with monsters. It taught me to try before judging something like I used to do when I was younger. I think getting older on a diet of eye candy and performance dulled my indie senses. Thanks goodness I've stopped doing that and started enjoying games for being games again. Share your stories with us: letters@nag.co.za. Ed.

From: Anton
Subject: Female Characters
So I was reading the Ed's Note in the September issue of NAG, when I noticed a vaguely familiar subject I've had in my

THE SHORTS

Extracts of n00b from NAG letters

"Why not give us Freeze Rays and super powers?"
- Zayd

"What's that scary bony thing running at us?"
- Jacques

"I'm actually sending this email from an iPad, a device which, if you asked 20 years ago would be possible, would be burned at the stake for witchcraft. Silly 1940s people."
- Nicholas

"However I have come up with one major conclusion! I have no life!"
- Keaton

ON TWITTER

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うちはNadine鳥痛み
I'm going to do my Geography task for tomorrow. *half hour later* Finally done reading and sorting all my @nagcoza magazines! Oops...

Ashleigh Clarke
Thank you @nagcoza for making rAge 2013 so awesome, the NaG LAN was a blast! Loved every bit of it, can't wait for next years!

Rudolf Aerofare
Every time I see the #rAgeExpo logo somewhere, especially in @nagcoza, I feel desperate enough to walk from CPT to Joburg. :-O

Joshua van Roodt
RAGE QUITTERS be like: "URGH #*%& and %#&* and also *%&# @nagcoza

Christiaan
I wish there was Rage every weekend!! It was epic #that'swhaticallawesome @nagcoza





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The insurmountable hopelessness of *The Last of Us*

I haven't felt the need to unpack the ending of a video game since 2010's *Red Dead Redemption*. It's seldom that a game's narrative, let alone its ending, necessitates a critical analysis of sorts, but Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us* is one that warrants discussion. Needless to say, there are **MASSIVE PLOT SPOILERS AHEAD**.

Naughty Dog has created a bleak vision of our future. Within the game's opening fifteen minutes, the moment that first gunshot snuffs the life from Joel's daughter, it is clear that we're in for a harrowing ride. As the game progresses and Joel's relationship with Ellie becomes increasingly resolute, we're offered a glimpse of positivity in a game world that's increasingly hostile and void of any hope. It is that unnerving juxtaposition that creates almost unbearable trepidation as one approaches the game's ending. In a world that horrific, and with plot devices stacked the way they were, I was wholly expecting to be given a choice at the end: storm the operating room to save Ellie but die in the process, or allow the operation to commence, thereby killing Ellie but providing humanity with a vaccine against the virus. I had visions of myself being unable to choose the latter option and being forced to witness an ending with Ellie outliving the rest of humanity so as to become the titular *Last of Us*. I was so convinced that I would be forced to make that decision that I entered the final hour of the game with a considerable amount of anxiety – I was preparing to lose one of them.

Naughty Dog, however, had a far more depressing ending in store.

We all know that there is no choice at the end of *The Last of Us*: Joel rushes into the operating room, snatches up Ellie and flees the hospital. We're then witness to the game's most devastating occurrence when Joel lies to Ellie about what happened, telling her she wasn't the only one capable of curing mankind. Fade to black; credits role. At first I thought it an anticlimactic ending and it took me at least three days to mull it over.

Joel lied to Ellie because he lacked fortitude to give her up; and in that moment, the moment that lie came out of his mouth, I hated him. He instantaneously turned from flawed hero into the game's main villain. You play as the bad guy in *The Last of Us* – the Fireflies aren't the bad guys and neither are the Hunters, the Military or the infected. Joel is the bad guy, and by extension you are too.

Had Joel died protecting Ellie, Ellie would have been free from him and still alive, and Joel would have thereby vindicated himself of his past and wrongdoings. Alternatively, had Ellie died to save mankind, she would have died a martyr and Joel would have been vindicated for keeping her alive long enough to do so. More importantly he would have been vindicated through overcoming his feelings of protectiveness and sentimentality towards Ellie – feelings no doubt spurred on by the death of his daughter.

It's the bleakest possible outcome, and to make it worse, Ellie's broken innocence might still be enough to make her believe that lie. And with that, Naughty Dog extinguishes the one spark of positivity presented to us in the game: the supposed caring relationship between Joel and Ellie. Joel only ever cared about himself.

- Miklós Szecsei -

All aboard!

Steam's plans to hop, skip and jump into your living room



Valve might be terrible at keeping secrets (except for that particular one), but they sure do know how to build up hype. Following a long programme of dribbling information onto the Internet, the company has finally unveiled their three major entry points into the living room.

It starts with SteamOS – a Linux-based operating system that focuses on gaming. SteamOS has its sights set on two main features: native gaming on the platform for supported games, and streaming games over local LAN/Wi-Fi from your PC to your box running SteamOS. That first goal might sound like a no-brainer, but considering how deeply entrenched Microsoft's DirectX is, getting any game to work on a platform that can only run OpenGL (or perhaps even a new API) is not an easy task. Valve plans to have compatible games in its library running on the operating system from day one, and currently claims that "hundreds of great games are already running natively on SteamOS". Until something comes along that makes it easy (or viable) to port DX games to the system, players will be able to stream their games directly from their PCs in much the same way as NVIDIA's Shield, like a local OnLive service. SteamOS will be free.

Then there's Steam Machine, which is a concept rather than a product itself. Valve's plan is to have hardware manufacturers around the world

build PCs running SteamOS, and will unify these devices under the Steam Machine moniker. Presumably this means Valve will vet these devices to assure that there's a minimum level of compatibility, but there's nothing stopping you from building your own "Steam Machine" or simply installing SteamOS on your primary gaming PC.

The third piece of the puzzle is the Steam Controller, one of the most intriguing input devices we've seen. Its twin touchpads can be programmed to act as either traditional track pads (like the kind you'd find on a laptop) or as a replacement for analogue sticks or even buttons. It all depends on how the device has been set up by the game creators or, if you use the controller for games that are originally designed for keyboard and mouse input, how you've chosen to configure it. The big feature that Valve is touting here (and with SteamOS) is "hackability" – you've got the power to configure this hardware and software however you please. Between the dual touchpads, touch screen, triggers and face buttons, there's a lot of room for customisability.

Valve's current rollout plans have SteamOS making its first appearance "soon" (this year, we assume) and Steam Machines and Controllers hitting the market next year. The company will select a small beta team from public applicants who meet a few requirements; the current pool is closing on 400,000 people and there are just 300 beta machines available.



Diablo's Auction house gets fair warning

Love it or hate it (we suspect the latter), *Diablo III's* auction house is getting the boot. The move should come as no surprise, as a few key people at Blizzard have often stated the ongoing troubles they've had balancing the game since its launch – troubles which typically come back to the very existence of the Auction House that Blizz now says "undermines *Diablo's* core game play". Loot drops were constantly tweaked but anyone with enough gold or real world money could simply bypass one of the core elements of the game and buy the best stuff through the AH, which created a pretty nasty burr in the machinery that is supposed to make games like this fun.

This is no more evident than in the recent console port of the game, but sadly, Blizzard has stated that there are no plans to introduce the same offline play found in the TV-bound version to the PC.

"The game was built from the ground up to take full advantage of Battle.net," said a Blizzard rep to gaming website RockPaperShotgun, "which provides a number of important benefits, including persistent server-side character saves, a seamless PC multiplayer experience, cheat prevention, and Real ID and BattleTag social features."

But, hey, progress is progress, right? Expect the Auction House to come crumbling down on March 18, 2014. This may or may not indicate that *Reaper of Souls* is set for launch around that time, as frequent reference to the expansion's "Loot 2.0" system as a replacement of sorts for the AH certainly fits the bill.

Next generation won't be defined by Xbox One or PS4, says Cliff B

Cliff Bleszinski, creator of the mega-AAA *Gears of War* series, seems a bit tired of the AAA gaming experience. He's also one of many celebrated games industry veterans who are shying away from calling the next generation of consoles the true force to be reckoned with in gaming's future. Instead, Cliff's far more eager to bet all his cash on exciting new developments like Oculus Rift and Steam Box.

"Things like the Steam Box and the Oculus Rift, honestly," Cliff answered candidly when asked by the [a]llist daily what he thinks will define next-gen games. "I'm friends with a lot of folks in Microsoft. Microsoft has been very good to me throughout my career. I'm friends with the folks at Sony. But when I think about my gamer instincts and where I'm going to see a lot of the most disruptive and innovative gaming I don't see it in the \$250 million budgeted game that cost \$100 million to market. Because when you have that high of a budget the amount of risk being taken decreases exponentially."



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The Game Stalder



Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow...

I write this on the eve of a sad day. A day that we all knew would come, and yet we hoped desperately, somehow, we would be proven wrong. As I write, millions of gamers are crying into their coffee, their beer, their energy drinks, broken by the news...

The news that *Watch Dogs*... has been delayed...

Right, enough of that, let's get down to the real issue here – are we really surprised? We've seen the gameplay demos, we've spoken to the developers (I spoke to the lead game designer for *Watch Dogs* personally at rAge), but we've never been able to play it ourselves. Considering Ubisoft's normal hands on approach (I've played *Assassins Creed IV* demos a number of times already), it shouldn't really come as a shock.

So why are we all so cut up about it? Well, I think this is for two main reasons. Firstly, it's really close to release, and normally with just over a month to go, there aren't many publishers who would change the release date with such a narrow margin. Secondly, we're broken because it was one of the holiday titles that almost everyone was really, really, looking forward to.

Ubisoft have argued that, "We struggled with whether we would delay the game. But from the beginning, we have adopted the attitude that we will not compromise on quality... It became clear to us that we needed to take the extra time to polish and fine tune each detail so we can deliver a truly memorable and exceptional experience."

Well that's nice. So glad to see they were only thinking of our feelings.

Okay, but sarcasm aside, I was pleasantly surprised at the number of people who commented that at least it meant that they'll be able to save up for the game now, especially since so many good titles (and consoles, don't forget those) are releasing at the end of this year. I think as game journalists we often forget about the cost of games, since with the exception of collector's editions most of our games are review copies and hence we don't pay for them. When you think about how many games are being released in this period, you realise that for the average gaming consumer the holiday season is a very expensive one!

One of the major issues for many gamers, particularly internationally, is the pre-order bundles. *Watch Dogs* was slated to be a launch title for PS4 and Xbox One, and if the game is delayed then that will obviously affect their pre-orders. At the time of writing this, Ubisoft appear to have no plan in place to deal with this either, providing vague answers about the game to the questions directed at them.

It's disappointing, but if we're honest, games are delayed so often these days that it becomes one of those things we now tend to complain about then sigh and promptly forget.

Don't despair however, perhaps *Watch Dogs* won't be coming to your consoles (current or next gen) until 2014, but there's still a massive number of rather exciting titles on the horizon, enough so that they'll temporarily fill the gaping hole in your heart.

Batman: Arkham Origins, *Assassins Creed IV: Black Flag*, *Battlefield 4*, *Call of Duty: Ghosts*, *Need for Speed Rivals*, all making their way to our screens in the next couple of months, and those are just the ones I can think of off the top of my head. Don't worry darlings, you'll be fine.

- Pippa Tshalalala -

Gabriel Knight turns 20, celebrates with Anniversary Edition



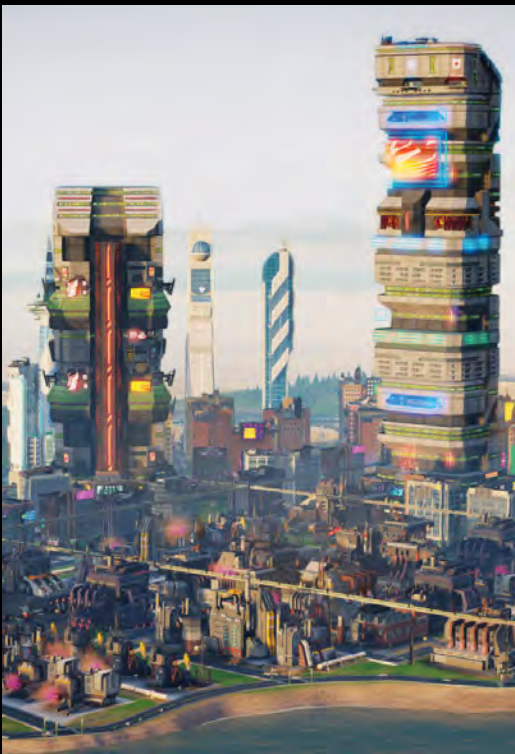
Stop the presses! We do so love saying that whenever we're given the opportunity. Our excuse to use it this time is that one of our favourite point-and-click adventures of yesteryear, *Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers*, is being dragged kicking and screaming straight out of 1993 and dumped into the distant future of 2014. Despite the fact that that technically brings it dangerously close to being its 21st anniversary, it's being called the *20th Anniversary Edition*.

It seems original creator Jane Jensen (who's currently working on Kickstarter-funded point-and-clicker *Moebius*, which many critics are eager to get their hands on after being wowed by pre-release gameplay) has wrestled the *Gabriel Knight* IP from the clutches of Activision, and that's the reason this remake is possible. Interestingly, despite approaching Activision several times over the years about reviving the beloved adventure franchise (and obviously repeatedly being shut down), it was Activision who approached Jensen this time after learning of her Kickstarter success, as well as the repeated success of old-school adventure

game revivals funded via the crowd-funding platform.

Anyway, developmental duties for the remake are being assumed by Phoenix Online Studios: they behind *The Silver Lining*, that awful series of *King's Quest* fan games. Before you throw your arms up in despair, know that they've since redeemed themselves with their creation of *Cognition: An Erica Reed Thriller* (which Jensen had a hand in creating), and they're actually the dev team behind *Moebius* as well, which Jane's studio Pinkerton Road is publishing. It's all very confusing, and we're not even sure ourselves if we've got all our development facts straight for this remake. But that doesn't make it any less exciting.

Apparently there'll be new content on offer in the remake, but all of the original stuff will be exactly as you remember it. It's also sticking to 2D for its perspective, although its high-res graphics will actually be all 3D-ified via the power of Unity. Sadly, the original voice recordings for *Sins of the Fathers* were lost, and so the team is rerecording all of the voices for the game using new actors.



SimCity goes back to the future

Despite its waning popularity and very bumpy start, *SimCity* continues to be a thing that Maxis will keep at until they get it right, and have dedicated teams of developers to working on some of those features that players have been clamouring for since its release.

One of those features is an offline mode, which looks to be something that could actually happen in the (hopefully not too distant) future.

"I can't make any promises on when we will have more information, but we know this is something that many of our players have been asking for," said Maxis Emeryville GM Patrick Buechner in a statement. "While the server connectivity issues are behind us, we would like to give our players the ability to play even if they choose not to connect."

If this has got your hopes up that we could possibly see other high-demand features like larger cities, then take a seat and listen up: that's not happening.

"We've tried a number of different approaches to bring performance into an acceptable range, but we just couldn't achieve it within the confines of the engine. We've chosen to cease work on bigger city sizes and put that effort into continuing to evolve the core game."

This news comes on the back of the confirmation that the game's first expansion, *Cities of Tomorrow*, is currently in development. *CoT* will include new technologies and city specialisations to bring your cities into the future, with massive high-rise buildings called MegaTowers, MagLev transportation on suspended roads, and even a new disaster – attack by a giant robot.

You'll never believe that *Universum: War Front* is made by one person

And yet it is! Cyril Megem is an industry veteran with ten years of development experience to his name. After deciding to venture out on his own to pursue his indie dreams, he returned a year later with *Universum: War Front* in tow – a MOBA/RTS/FPS/RPG hybrid set in a sci-fi universe. And it looks absolutely incredible, especially for a game made by one pair of hands.

The idea is that you'll engage in the sort of large-scale battles that you'd expect from any RTS/MOBA title, but with the added ability to assume direct control of any unit on the battlefield (including powerful, upgradable hero units) to take the fight to the enemy via a more hands-on approach. A wide range of infantry, vehicles and alien critters can be controlled in this way, and skirmishes can take place on the ground (or under it, apparently), in the air, out in space and even underwater, with many units able to transform on-the-fly to take advantage of varied terrain.

As you play you'll be able to customise your character and research new abilities. There's promise of a rich single-player campaign to complement the game's multiplayer features, which includes a sort of universal conquest mode where players vie for territory control. Cyril's company StarworksArt Studio has already achieved funding on Kickstarter, and *Universum* is due out towards the end of next year.

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The Indie Investigator



Is your game accessible?

I often speak at length about the merits of having a good tutorial system for one's games, even in the prototype stages, but now I'd like to talk about the approachability of a game *before* the player hits "Start".

The Make Games SA forums are a hive of activity nowadays, to the point where new topics or project posts can quickly fall down the page if left uncommented or unattended for too long. While members tend to check on most submissions from time to time, it's difficult for everyone to give every project constant attention.

So, how do you make sure that your project gets noticed, commented on and talked about? Well, earning attention in MGSA is a lot like earning attention anywhere else (albeit slightly easier), so you'd do well to remember these points:

1. People like previews. Even if your game doesn't have any gorgeous artwork to put on display (though it does help a lot – we're all human!) you should combine your project link with a screenshot or two of the experience. It immediately lends your project more personality and it can give players a great description of the game experience without relying on textwalls. Bonus points if you can put up a quick video, even if you're just using the ultra-free version of Crappy Visual Cap FX.

2. Don't obfuscate or lengthen the steps between clicking on your project link and getting the game to actually play. If a tester can go straight from your forum thread into a browser-playable build, they're in heaven. If they have to download and extract a zip, you'll lose 'em a little. If they have to go through a six-step installer and put invasive folders on their PC, they'll be unimpressed. And if they're required to download a custom compiler... well, tumbleweeds.

3. Describe your game carefully and with precision. Don't give people a textwall to read through when a single paragraph will suffice. Otherwise, you're draining your player's time and effort before they've even started. If your game is as awesome as you hope it to be, let them discover that for themselves. Don't rattle off a hypothetical features list. Put your most important stuff into your first build, point people in the right direction and just let them know what to look out for. Oh, and don't forget to mention the game controls.

4. Keep concepts simple. Can your game be enjoyed and resolved in a few minutes? Or does it require an intimidating level of time investment and careful thought to appreciate fully? People are more likely to give feedback on a project that they know they can evaluate over their lunch break. This is often why simpler offerings and proposition threads get a lot of discussion – it's easy for people to get involved and feel valuable! If your game really is complicated, try see about building a condensed or "light" version suitable for focused feedback.

Don't panic too much if your game falls down in one of these areas – the great thing about MGSA is the community's determination to help new members, and often you'll be given some bonus attention just for having your first project on the forums. That said, first impressions count, and following this advice will certainly help you put your best foot forward. Good luck, and avoid the tumbleweeds!

– Rodain Joubert –

GTA Online server woes necessitate in-game cash compensation



Grand Theft Auto V is a fantastic game! The completely separate multiplayer offering *Grand Theft Auto Online* is, at time of writing, still a little broken. We're pretty sure that a multitude of you darling NAG readers can commiserate when we pout and sulk about how we lost multiplayer characters and experienced server disconnects once *GTA Online* launched. Luckily, things are looking up thanks to some effective patching on Rockstar's behalf. Still, there is some good and bad news.

The bad news is that the characters that you may have lost during the initial weeks of *GTA Online*'s server woes will likely stay lost forever. A Rockstar representative has confirmed that "lost characters are indeed lost," so if you were holding on to some fragments of hope, then hold on no longer because you're wasting your time. Move on; we know a good shrink if you need one.

The good news, however, is that Rockstar is planning to compensate everyone who experienced these teething issues with *GTA Online*. If

you logged in (or rather *attempted* to log in, right?) during the month of October then you're eligible for a deposit of GTA\$500,000.00 – the game's in-game currency that grants you access to cars, weapons, property and clothing for your online persona. Rockstar has said that in order to keep the game's currency balanced, this "stimulus package" of funds will be split over two deposits of a quarter-of-a-million each. They expect each player to have received both deposits by the end of October.

What's that? You haven't tried the online portion yet because you're still too busy wading through the gargantuan single-player campaign? And you wanted to make sure Rockstar patched the servers before you tried *GTA Online*? And now you're worried you won't get the free cash as well? By the time you read this it may already be too late, but if it's still October then you're in luck as everyone who plays *GTA Online* before the end of October 2013 will receive the GTA\$500,000.00 into their in-game bank account. See? Throwing fake money at a problem also works!

"When we talk about Nintendo we cannot ignore [former Nintendo president] Hiroshi Yamauchi who just recently passed away. He always said that if you have failure, you don't need to be too concerned. You always have good things and bad, and this reflects the history of Nintendo. If you do the same thing as others, it will wear you out. Nintendo is not good at competing so we always have to challenge [the status quo] by making something new, rather than competing in an existing market."

– Nintendo president Satoru Iwata, speaking at the B Dash Camp start-up conference in Osaka (as translated by The Bridge) about why his company doesn't fear failure.

Local indie developer RuneStorm collaborates with Shadow Warrior team



RuneStorm, the local indie team behind the ingenious and ultimately rather mundane *Viscera Cleanup Detail*, has collaborated with publisher Devolver Digital (*Hotline Miami*) and developer Flying Wild Hog (*Hard Reset*). They've developed a crossover between *Viscera Cleanup Detail* and the newly released reboot of *Shadow Warrior*. Not only is the crossover a macabre and perfect fit, it's also really exciting to see local talent contributing to a cult classic IP.

For those unfamiliar with RuneStorm's *Viscera Cleanup Detail*, the game puts you in the space-boots of a janitor tasked with cleaning the space station after a particularly bloody and messy alien invasion. It's the game that answers the question that all of us have asked at least once during our gaming lives: "who is going to clean up this mess?"

Shadow Warrior is a particularly gory game, with over-the-top action pretty much guaranteeing fountains of blood and lots of dismemberment. Who is going to clean up that mess? Turns out you are, thanks to the crossover *Viscera Cleanup Detail: Shadow Warrior*. The add-on comes free with all purchases of *Shadow Warrior*, which is now available on Steam. Once you've played through "one of the most iconic katana battle scenes of the game" it's time to grab your mop and biohazard waste bucket, and get cleaning. The add-on comes with two new Steam achievements and "various little surprises" that should entertain fans of both *Shadow Warrior* and *VCD*.

We can think of a ton of other games we'd like to see *VCD* crossover with.

Angry Birds film bags Disney directors



Rovio Entertainment continues to print money by harnessing the power of the *Angry Birds* brand (which already has an animated television series to its name), and they've now revealed that they've signed two Disney directors to co-direct the upcoming *Angry Birds* movie. Fergal Reilly and Clay Kaytis collectively boast credits in films like *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs* and *Wreck-It Ralph*, and soon they'll add *Angry Birds* to that list. Rovio CEO Mikael Hed is clearly thrilled:

"They are two of the brightest rising talents in animation, and I'm confident we are building the right team to tell the story of *Angry Birds* and deliver an amazing movie experience to our fans."

Razer's products sell at a loss

This isn't necessarily gaming news so much as it's an excuse to sit back and go, "Wait... how even?" Min-Liang Tan, CEO of celebrated gaming hardware creator Razer, has said in an interview with VG247 that every single product made by his company is sold at a loss. Not only is that completely ridiculous, but it makes practically zero business sense. The subject was broached when Tan was asked about the sales of Razer's left-handed gaming mouse, which he admits sells "terribly". Tan is grateful for his company's unique approach, however, as he says they put the product first and profit second.

"We're not run like a real company, I know. It's insane, but every single product we ship, we're shipping at a loss. Life is short. And it's funny to see someone using a left-handed mouse," Tan said. "I have great investors. They're passionate about what they do. I tend to be able to deflect any questions like 'how are we doing on a business level? How profitable are we?' by going 'Look at this! Isn't it cool?' And they go 'Oh yes, it's cool,' and then I agree. Yet another board meeting saved."

"Our investors are genuine product people. I'm thankful for it. I cannot imagine if somebody's just interested in like, a bottom line or a profit. We've been able to make decisions that make absolutely no commercial sense whatsoever." Well Min-Liang, your company's still afloat, so you must be doing something right.



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Miktari's Meanderings



You spin me right round baby right round

There is a scene in the movie *Thank You for Smoking* where Nick Naylor, the chief spokesman for Big Tobacco, is trying to explain something to his twelve-year-old son, Joey. The two are arguing about ice cream, and the son asks Nick, "So, what happens when you're wrong?"

Nick explains that, when it's your job to be right, you can never be wrong. Obviously, Joey questions the logistics of that, since obviously depending on the topic, someone is right and someone is wrong. Nick proceeds to set up a situation in which clearly, if only looking at the facts, Joey is right about chocolate being the best flavour of ice cream, while Nick takes the side of vanilla. It's a scene you need to see for yourself to really get, but in the end Nick comes across as the one in the right.

"But, you didn't prove vanilla's the best," claims Joey in frustration. "I didn't have to. I proved that you're wrong, and if you're wrong, I'm right," says Nick with confidence. Confused, Joey admits, "But you still didn't convince me."

"Because I'm not after you," says Nick, leaning back and pointing at us, the viewers of the scene, but implying the audience listening in on the argument. "I'm after them."

And that's the secret of "spin", a kind of public relations propaganda that doesn't try to convince using the truth or facts, but instead uses disingenuous interpretation to bend public opinion for or against something. It's deceptive, and it's common practice. The very simple explanation is that spin doesn't try to convince the people it's arguing against. They can't be convinced, after all, since they "know" they're right. What spin attempts to do, is make it seem, *make it sound*, like the people doing the spin are right to the *observer*.

When dealing with public perception, nothing is off the table. SEGA springs to mind with their "blast processing" marketing for the Genesis back in 1990, which was meant to imply that the Genesis was far superior to the Super Nintendo, even though the term was mostly meaningless. Kids considered the Genesis the "cooler" console because of it, even though they had no idea what "Blast Processing" meant, or if it even meant anything. It just *sounded* cool.

Spin doesn't always work. Atari's spin for the Jaguar in 1993, using a "Do the Math" slogan to try and convince people that two disparate 32-bit processors somehow added up to the console being a 64-bit piece of hardware, couldn't overcome the high price and bad controller. Not all campaign slogans are pure spin however. The Dreamcast's "It's Thinking" campaign was more of a marketing gimmick, showing the lives of video game characters as if they existed inside the console. And then there's Sony's penchant for giving names to things as if it means something, like the hilariously named "Emotion Engine" processor of the PlayStation 2. Meaningless, but they sure tried to convince people that somehow that name implied great things.

Which brings me to Microsoft's current spin: Cloud Computing. The premise is sound: offloading some processing of certain things to a bank of virtualized servers stored somewhere at Microsoft, which crunch numbers and then return the result to your Xbox One. Cloud computing is nothing new, but to hear Microsoft it's like they invented it, and that's usually the first sign of spin. Is this "Blast Processing" all over again?

- Miktari Dracon -

Ouya liberates funding programme



As Ouya continues to scour the game development industry for those willing to put their games on the struggling platform, criticism has cropped up surrounding its "Free the Games" campaign.

The programme aimed to help indie developers on Kickstarter by matching their received pledges (effectively doubling the total funding received) in exchange for timed exclusivity on Ouya, but the company has decided to revamp their offering to expand it in some areas and restrict it in others.

The most critical change is the lowered entry requirement: studios now only need to pull in just \$10,000 from Kickstarter to be eligible (down from \$50K), but they will now be required to have 100 backers for every ten grand.

They've also loosened up the exclusivity requirements, which

remain at six months for all consoles but will now permit developers to release simultaneously on PC.

"We want your game on the TV, but we also want your audience to grow," said CEO Julie Uhrman. "So, if you want to build a PC version at the same time, go for it."

Finally, Ouya has put into place a number of clauses which relate to the "spirit of the fund" – a set of loose definitions that allow the company to pull funding should they deem that any studio is "gaming the system". In short, don't be an ass and the money will keep flowing.

According to predictions, Ouya's bankroll for the fund is set to last all the way through to August 2014, so if there's a game idea you're working on that you feel would be happy on the platform, be sure to give Ouya a shout when your Kickstarter launches.

Will Wright is at it again



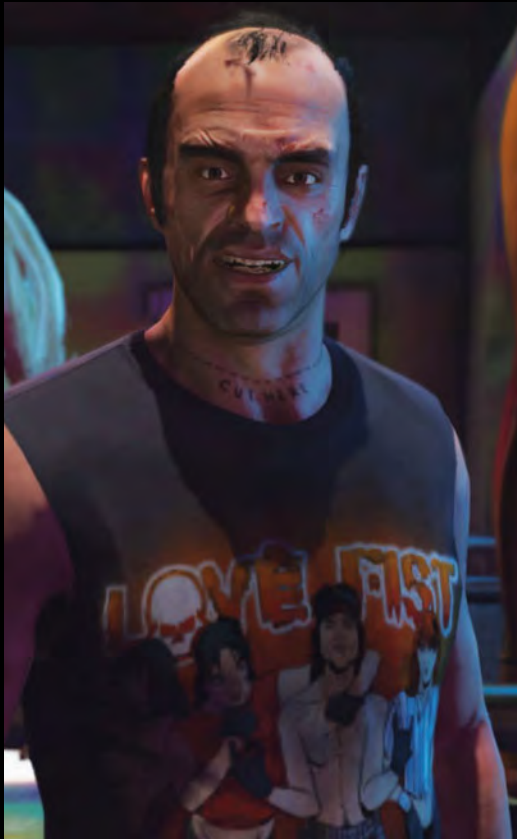
Ask any gamer to list a handful of renowned crackpots in this industry, and we're willing to bet that the name Will Wright will appear in that list. It's not that we disrespect the man – heck, he pioneered the *Sim* franchise, so he's a smart guy – but ever since his exodus from Maxis it seems that Wright just hasn't found that thing he's so desperately searching for.

Maybe third time's the charm though, eh? With his previous two start-ups Stupid Fun Club and Hive Mind both stuck in some sort of complex business limbo that produced

nothing but bad experiences (which we hope translate into lessons learned), Wright has now co-founded a company called Syntertainment, which will supposedly blend reality and entertainment in some form or another.

The details are scarce, but there's some money in there – \$5 million to be exact. Wright has partnered with tech expert Avi Bar-Zeev and former EA CEO John Riccitiello to bring in that funding, so let's hold thumbs and see if anything is actually produced by this powerful team.

GTA shakes its money-maker



It was recently established that *GTA V* was the most expensive video game ever produced (even more costly than most Hollywood blockbusters) – pushing a total of \$265 million – and now Rockstar's president Leslie Benzies has stated that the production team clocks in at over 1,000 individuals.

The number was revealed in an interview with game dev website Develop, in which Benzies explained the company's flexible development workflow that sounds somewhat similar to that of Valve. If you've got the time, you should head over to www.develop-online.net and dig up the whole interview.

"Now that it takes 1,000 people to make a game, that's a requirement. But we don't want 1,000 in one place," he explained.

"And that's because of the size of the thing, we are modelling at such a minute detail. Once upon a time the car models had four moving parts. Now there are 15 alone in a car's retractable roof. The detail is ten, twenty times greater than *GTA IV*, so it takes ten, twenty times more people."

It's a good thing, then, that *GTA V* has done as well as it has, reportedly recovering development costs in pre-orders alone, and climbing well beyond the \$1 billion mark after just a few days of being on sale.

This is big money, folks. If you ever needed something to convince any non-understanding family members that this industry is a legitimate one, the story of *GTA V* is (wonderfully ironically) your best bet.

Square Enix launches its own crowd-funding initiative

Publisher Square Enix has joined forces with Indiegogo to create a new crowd-funding program for aspiring game devs. It's called Collective, and Square Enix describes it as a "curated platform that enables creators to post ideas, and gamers to judge whether those ideas should become reality or not". While the inner workings of it are a tad muddy in certain respects, here's how they say it works:

For 28 days, developers can pitch their game ideas to the Collective community. Gamers can give feedback on the project and effectively let the creators know if it's a game they'd actually want to play. If the community gives the project the thumbs-up, Square Enix and the developers will enter full "due diligence" mode, during which Square Enix will vet developer pitches and ensure that they possess the skills and tools to make their proposed games, and will also assist them in forming a budget plan. Following this, the final Indiegogo campaign is launched.

Sounds a bit like Steam Greenlight, doesn't it? Square Enix says that Collective's pitch process is free, but that prospective developers will have to agree to an unspecified (at time of this writing at least) set of terms and conditions. Excitingly, certain Eidos intellectual properties that have long been in hibernation will be made available for Collective developers to potentially utilise.

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Wilson takes top spot at EA

Remember the Aussie bloke from those E3 press conferences, the one who couldn't stop talking about sports? He's EA's new CEO.

The 39 year-old, more commonly known as Andrew Wilson, now officially takes over from John Riccitiello and bumps temporary replacement Larry Probst out of the throne. Wilson was formally the VP of EA Sports and Origin, and posted an expectedly optimistic public letter in which he told everyone that things are going to be awesome moving forward.

"I also believe EA's strategy is sound," said Wilson. "Our focus

on our talent, our brands and our platform together with our investment in next-generation consoles, mobile and PC

free-to-play, as part of our ongoing transition to digital, is right. But we

have plenty of work ahead to ensure our collective success."

Of course, it's impossible to glean anything specific from the PR-bleached writing, but we're

willing to bet that not

much is going to change for the company in the next couple of years. EA's executives have long-ago decided that their current direction is the right one, so we don't imagine they'd put someone in charge who's opinion was contrary to that.



3D Realms back down from pointless legal battle

A few months back we reported that 3D Realms was suing current *Duke Nukem Forever* owners Gearbox Software for \$1.3 million in unpaid royalties for the infamous game.

Well, you can forget all about that brief interlude of insanity; 3D Realms' Scott Miller issued a statement recently explaining that the whole thing was a misunderstanding and that the suit has been withdrawn without any money exchanging hands.

"In all sincerity, we regret the misunderstanding that instigated our lawsuit," read the statement. "Now that we better understand – and appreciate – the actual nature of our business matters, we have voluntarily withdrawn our claims against Gearbox, with genuine apologies to Randy for any damage that our lawsuit may have caused to the relationship."

It sure does help when you read the fine print. Or the regular print. Just read, people – it's a useful way to avoid being the subject of embarrassing news pieces.

~ 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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NC-Soft / Namco-Bandai / Disney
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Number: 0861 987 363

PUBLISHERS Microsoft Xbox
NUMBER 0800 991 550

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

Firefall falls short in PvP

Red 5 Studio's free-to-play online shooter *Firefall* has had its ups and downs since the game's public beta phase began in April, and now studio head Mark Kern has announced that its PvP mode will be temporarily suspended.

Shutting down large parts of a game is never good news, but Kern told naysayers that this is a necessary, constructive decision, and pins the root of the cause of all the problems that have plagued this game mode as the studio's ill-conceived effort to break into the world of eSports. The studio reportedly spent a large chunk of its development resources on their eSports game mode known as Jetball, which is played by just 3% of the game's total player base. The remaining PvP systems were left riddled with bugs and incomplete.

"People want more content, fewer bugs, and more polish on these world systems," Kern said in a blog post. "For these reasons, we have made the tough decision to suspend PvP and take the system offline so that we can rethink it and relaunch it. PvP is an important part of our game, and we want to get it right."



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- Winners will be notified by SMS
- Judges decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into
- Competition closes 30 November 2013

SOUNDSelect

Dungeon Defenders II drops MOBA elements



The title of this bit o' news pretty much says it all, doesn't it? A while back, the sequel to colourful, cute and deceptively deep tower defence / third-person action game *Dungeon Defenders* was revealed to feature quite a few MOBA-style PvP elements. That was until Dave Loyd took over as studio director at developer Trendy Entertainment. Loyd took a long look at the direction the sequel needed to take – and it seems "like the original, but better and with more stuff" is where it's landed.

"The first thing we needed to do to steer us back

on course, was involve the whole crew," says Loyd on Trendy's website. "We started looking at *DD1* and brainstorming. What did we do well and want more of? What did we want to improve? What were the most exciting aspects of making a sequel to the original game? We generated tons of ideas and ultimately created The Five Pillars of *Dungeon Defenders II*."

Trendy plans to reveal those five pillars over the course of this renewed development, and we're excited to see how this all works out for *Dungeon Defenders II* – because we quite liked the first game.

SEGA adds another scoop to its cone

Apparently unsated with the purchase of Relic Entertainment, SEGA has now bought an entire publisher in the form of Japan-based Atlus, whose parent company Index has been fighting off the effects of bankruptcy since June. The purchase cost approximately \$140 million and will be concluded by the 1st of November.

Atlus, which has been kicking around for about as long as its new owner, has published a wide range of generally niche but still highly successful games in Japan and across the oceans, the likes of which include the *Persona* series and other *Shin Megami Tensei* games, and more recently the oddball adult adventure *Catherine*.

Just how drastically this change of ownership will affect Atlus' stable of games remains to be seen, but we wouldn't be surprised to find at least increased marketing for some of these little-known games over in the Western world.

PC	
Rambo: The Video Game	January
Thief	February
Diablo III: Reaper of Souls	2014

360	
Need for Speed: Rivals	November 22nd
Destiny	2014
Wolfenstein: The New Order	2014

PS3	
Rocksmith 2014 Edition	November 29th
Gran Turismo 6	December 6th
Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII	February

The legacy continues

Square Enix has finally confirmed that they are indeed working on a new game in the *Legacy of Kain* universe, but *sigh* it's a free-to-play multiplayer shooter. Sorry to interrupt you mid-air-pump there, but we thought it'd be best to be frank from the start.

The game will be called *Nosgoth*, and features humans fighting against vampires in a period of Nosgoth's history in which vampires have grown so numerous that they've formed their own cities. It's in development by the newly-formed Psyonix, which includes plenty of veteran developers whose shared experience includes work on *Gears of War*, *Unreal Tournament 3*, *Bulletstorm* and *Homefront*.

Wars rage on between the two factions, and the land has

been all-but destroyed from the years of fighting. Players can choose a character class, customise their weapons, spells and abilities, and go at each other in contained instance battles or those belonging to a greater persistent war.

The combat element in this third-person shooter looks reminiscent of that of *Savage*, with the two factions featuring vastly different abilities. The weak humans are forced to use powerful weapons to level the playing field, but the vampires have their natural magic and far greater speed and agility. This sort of asymmetrical combat leaves plenty of room for balance tweaking, so the team is eager to start their closed beta as soon as possible – if you're interested in signing up, visit www.nosgoth.com.



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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 letters@nag.co.za with the subject line "November Roxy", and of course your contact details, and you could win a prize.

OCTOBER WINNER



Samantha Metcalfe, page 15

THIS MONTH'S LOOT

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CAPTION OF THE MONTH



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

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Most guys when their girlfriend is checking their browsing history
- Trevor Rochat

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PULSAR: Lost Colony successfully Kickstarted



If you took the roguelike-inspired starship management simulator (and powerful frustration generator) *FTL: Faster Than Light*, adjusted its viewpoint to a first-person perspective, and added in five-player co-op, you'd have a basic idea of *PULSAR's* premise. Here's how developer Leafy Games describes it:

"*PULSAR: Lost Colony* is a cooperative starship simulator that takes you and your crew to the farthest corners of the universe on a mission to find the mysterious Lost Colony. It features a procedural galaxy generator so every journey will be unique and contain new challenges for you and your crew."

The idea is that you and four friends (or four AI-controlled companions) will manage the inner workings of one of more than twelve different starships, with each player taking on one of five different classes (Captain,

Scientist, Weapons Specialist, Pilot and Engineer), each with a specific role to play on the ship and throughout the journey. Permadeath is part of the experience, and if your whole crew dies and loses the ability to be revived, it's game over, and all your saves will be deleted.

Your starship isn't the only place you'll explore. You'll be able to travel to the surface of discovered planets at will (or toy around inside space stations), which will present all-new challenges, but could also reap massive rewards. Five playable factions will be present in the game, as will a plethora of challenge modes. It's a massively ambitious undertaking for a very small team – so much so that we wonder if their Kickstarter goal of just \$40,000 (which they've successfully reached at time of this writing) will prove to be enough – but we're cautiously optimistic about *PULSAR*.

"If you look at what we were doing at SEGA, that was, in some sense, I hate to say it, shovelware. It was one programmer, one designer, three months, and you just shipped it. And the quality was low and they didn't care. That is so far from what we call indie today, which is a labor of love and you never know when it will be done. It'll be done when it'll be done, when it achieves the creator's vision."

– PlayStation 4 system architect Mark Cerny explains to Game Informer that, even though team sizes are similar, today's indies are nothing like the smaller dev studios of the past.

RELEASE LIST

Dates subject to change without notice

November week 1

Angry Birds Star Wars	360 / 3DS / PS3 / PSV Wii / Wii U
Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag	360 / PS3 / Wii U
Batman: Arkham Origins	PC
Batman: Arkham Origins Blackgate	3DS
Battlefield 4	360 / PC / PS3
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	360 / 3DS / Wii
WWE 2K14	360 / PS3

November week 2

Call of Duty: Ghosts	360 / PC / PS3 / Wii U
Adventure Time: Explore the Dungeon Because I Don't Know!	360 / 3DS / PS3
Wonderbook: Book of Potions	PS3
Football Manager 2014	PC
Madagascar 3 & The Croods: Prehistoric Party Combo Pack	3DS
Wonderbook: Walking with Dinosaurs	PS3
Professor Layton and the Azran Legacy	3DS

November week 3

Batman: Arkham Origins	Wii U
LEGO Marvel Super Heroes: Universe in Peril	360 / 3DS / PC / PS3 PSV / Wii U
XCOM: Enemy Within	360 / PC / PS3

November week 4

Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag	PC
Ben 10: Omniverse 2	360 / 3DS / PS3 Wii / Wii U
Need for Speed: Rivals	360 / PC / PS3
Tearaway	PSV

November week 5

Don Bradman Cricket 14	360 / PC / PS3
Injustice: Gods Among Us	PSV
One Piece: Romance Dawn	3DS

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Sacred 3

But it's not really *Sacred*, is it?

When is a sequel not a sequel? With *Sacred 3*, we have a good case study for that exact question. The original two games were developed by Ascaron Entertainment, the first published by Encore / Koch Media and its sequel by cdv Software Entertainment / Deep Silver. When Ascaron went bankrupt in 2009, the licence was bought up by Deep Silver and the job of making a sequel was given to Keen Games. It's a pity about Ascaron; they were talented developers, responsible for the cult hit *Darkstar One* and the niche *Patrician* series.

Keen Games, a Dutch developer, doesn't have much of a history. Just a few bad licence games and a whole truckload of DS/Wii shovelware. So now we have *Sacred 3*,

in development by nobody involved in the previous two games, and making some big changes to what defined *Sacred* as a series. If you looked only at screenshots, *Sacred 3* has the style of *Torchlight II* crossed with *Diablo III*, both visually and in terms of how it appears to play. But screenshots don't tell the whole story. The previous *Sacred* games were straight-

up action RPGs like *Diablo*, with skill trees, loot and character building, playing out in a huge open world you could explore at your own discretion. *Sacred 3* is linear, with stages following each other according to the plot, and loot has been de-emphasized.

Creative producer Alex Toplansky sounds dismissive of the stat-based loot. "There is a fleeting sense of reward for, say, getting

"Sacred 3 is linear, with stages following each other according to the plot, and loot has been de-emphasized."



The first *Sacred* (2004) was a *Diablo*-styled diamond in the rough, with a huge open world to explore and lots of neat secrets.



RELEASE DATE / 2013
PLATFORM / 360 / PC / PS3
GENRE / Action role-playing game
DEVELOPER / Keen Games
WEBSITE / www.sacred-world.com
PUBLISHER / Deep Silver

Sacred 2 (2008) was a decent enough sequel but suffered from poor visuals and lots of technical glitches.



a new item. I'm going to take that new +6 sword into battle and see that the damage numbers have gone from 200 to 206. Wow, bravo to me right?" he jokes. Instead, *Sacred 3* has what he claims to be a "nuanced combat system" with heavy emphasis on cooperative moves that work together. There's four-player online cooperative play, the other three becoming A.I. driven allies if you're offline. No local co-op, unfortunately. Each character type, two of which revealed so far are the Safiri Warrior (a tank who calls upon the Sun) and Ancarian Lancer (a spear user with Earth powers), has their own abilities and skills.

Before a mission, you slot two abilities in to each character, and how they interact with the skills of other characters is where the depth is supposed to happen. The more co-op moves are used, like one character slamming the ground to stun enemies, and then another using a pushing ability to shove them off ledges, the more passive bonuses get awarded to the whole team. It doesn't look like a bad game, but it's evident they're only calling it *Sacred* to get some use out of the name.

NAG

- Miktar

WWE 2K14



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RELEASE DATE / 2014
 PLATFORM / 360 / PC / PS3
 GENRE / Action platformer
 DEVELOPER / Double Helix Games
 WEBSITE / www.doublehelixgames.com
 PUBLISHER / Capcom

Strider

The tender story of a ninja and his robot tiger

It's recommended to keep excitement regarding this quasi-remake of *Strider* provisional. Capcom doesn't have a great track record when using external developers on their franchises. We shall never forget the "triple-A" *Bionic Commando* reboot from GRIN. And it remains to be seen if they're enacting the same strict oversight on this as they did with *Ninja Theory's DmC*, which was likely the only reason that didn't end up a steaming pile.

The developer for *Strider*, Double Helix Games, doesn't inspire much confidence either. They're currently working on the dodgy-looking *Killer Instinct* for Microsoft, and before that, all their titles were super sub-par movie-license games and one divisive *Silent Hill Homecoming*. Double Helix was

formed from the 2009 remnants of Shiny Entertainment (*Earthworm Jim*, *MDK*, *Wild 9*, *Enter the Matrix*) and The Collective (*Marc Ecko's Getting Up*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*). So there's talent in there somewhere... we've

just not seen it for a while.

Misgivings aside, the trailers released for this new *Strider* look promising.

"There's a distinct *Shadow Complex* vibe here, and not just because of the side-scrolling view."

Super-agent awesome-ninja Hiryu glides into a fortified city and lands running, dispatching enemies with a single slice of his Cypher sword. Like the original game, there's sliding under objects, edge-grabbing, ledge-flipping, cartwheel jumping and shuriken throwing. Capcom confirms that the three classic robot assist "options" – two linked droids, a sabre-toothed tiger and a hawk – will return. There's a distinct *Shadow*

The first *Strider* (1989) was one of Capcom's biggest hits before *Street Fighter II*.



There was a *Strider* reboot being developed by GRIN in 2009, which got cancelled after their horrible *Bionic Commando* reboot tanked. We dodged a bullet there.



Complex vibe here, and not just because of the side-scrolling view. The game world is one giant, interconnected map that you're free to explore, providing you've found power ups that grant access to certain areas.

The plot is a single classic sentence: *The year is Meio: 048, and Hiryu, a young but deadly assassination expert is out to eliminate Grand Master Meio.* According to senior producer Andrew Szymanski, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. You'll always be using the same weapon, your sword, but can find Cypher upgrades to swap between. Shown thus far are a Reflect that lets you hit bullets back at enemies, and a Flame upgrade that sets foes on fire. Hiryu's signature red scarf changes colour depending on which upgrade is selected, apparently reflecting the ninja's "mind set" as he focuses his energy into his sword differently. Figuring out which power to use when, especially when fighting bosses, is integral.

The original *Strider* games were arcade coin-munches and super-hard NES titles, very short but very replayable. Taking that fast-paced gameplay, action and acrobatics, and marrying it to large-scale nonlinear environmental traversal – *Metroidvania* style, sounds like a perfect match. Being digital-download only does raise some questions about how serious Capcom is with this, but their reservations are understandable: their only real money-maker in the last decade was *Dragon's Dogma*.

- Miktar



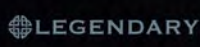
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Look & Listen

Not all items are available in all stores - please call your local store to enquire. Availability and prices subject to change at the discretion of the supplier. While stocks last.

RELEASE DATE / Q4 2013
 PLATFORM / Wii U
 GENRE / Platformer
 DEVELOPER / Nintendo EAD Tokyo
 WEBSITE / supermario3dworld.nintendo.com
 PUBLISHER / Nintendo

Super Mario 3D World

It's a me, Meow-rio!

These days, Bowser seems kind of over Princess Peach. He's kidnapping her less and less, and in *Super Mario 3D World* he doesn't even bother with her at all. Instead, Bowser nabs a new capturable (and no doubt quite sexistly so) Sprixie Princess. Mildly unsettling, the method by which he does so is akin to how Link captures a fairy in a bottle in the *Legend of Zelda* series. Bowser runs off with his Princess and the gang follows in pursuit, clearly not having any tennis, golf, or go-karting planned that day.

Fun fact: originally, Bowser didn't go after Princess Peach because he was enamoured with her. He just wanted to stop her from undoing the curse he placed on her Mushroom Kingdom. That sounds kind

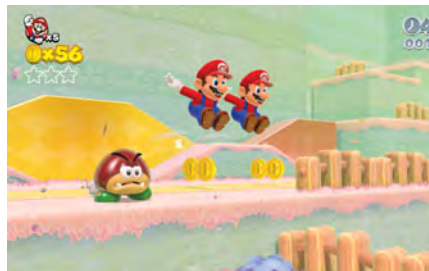
of dirty, in hindsight. Anyway, it was only in the later games that he became motivated by an unrequited crush he had developed on her. Not entirely his fault either, since Peach has been shown using sweet-talk and

"A new Cherry pickup is the most interesting of the bunch, causing your character to split into duplicates each time you touch one."

flirting to get Bowser to do what she wants, the hussy.

A clear continuation of the isometric side-scrolling yet 3D

platforming of the excellent *Super Mario 3D Land* on 3DS, there is a plethora of new pickups and gimmicks in *3D World*. Classics like the Fire Flower and Super Leaf return, while a new bell-looking pickup gives characters a Cat Suit. This lets you run up walls, lunge at enemies, climb to the top of level-end flagpoles, and make horrible jokes in poor taste while pretend-humping your



Each of the characters has a unique ability, bringing to mind *Super Mario Bros. 2*.



multiplayer partners. Keep it clean people, there are kids watching. A new Cherry pickup is the most interesting of the bunch, causing your character to split into duplicates each time you touch one. Any pickup you had is also duplicated, so you can become an army of fire-flinging crazies.

There is four-player local co-operative play (a first for any *3D Mario* game), letting you play as Mario, Luigi, Blue Toad or Princess Peach. It supports drop-in/drop-out at any time, and each character handles differently. Peach has her mid-air hover, Luigi jumps higher than his brother, and Blue Toad runs the fastest of them all. To complement the multiplayer, a new score system ranks each player at the end of a level based on their performance, the winner getting a crown that they wear in the next level. The crown can be stolen by other players, giving the wearer a bonus at the end of the level.

Everything's wrapped up in a jazzy soundtrack, giving the old tunes a fresh vibe, and players can find stamps hidden in each level, used to customize the messages you post to Miiverse.

NAG

- Miktar

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DDR3-2400	PC3-19200	8GB Kit/16GB Kit	1.65V	11-12-12-30	8 Layer
DDR3-2133	PC3-17000	8GB Kit/16GB Kit	1.65V	11-11-11-30	8 Layer
DDR3-1600	PC3-12800	8GB Kit/16GB Kit	1.5V	9-9-9-27/10-10-10-28	8 Layer

RELEASE DATE / 2014
 PLATFORM / PS3 / PSV
 GENRE / Role-playing game
 DEVELOPER / Square Enix
 WEBSITE / www.finalfantasyhd.com
 PUBLISHER / Square Enix

Final Fantasy X/X-2 HD Remaster

Square Enix made it nice and hopes you'll buy it twice

The first *Final Fantasy* with full voice acting and a direct sequel, and its sequel, are getting a fresh coat of paint so you can enjoy them all over again. *Final Fantasy X* introduced the Conditional Turn-Based Battle system, which let you alter when characters take their turns in battle in a variety of ways. *Final Fantasy X-2* had a unique job system centred around "dresspheres" that let you hot-swap a character's load outs and looks using a *Sailor Moon* style "magical girl" transformation sequence mid-battle. There are days when I worry about this franchise.

The *HD Remaster* of both titles improves the maps, character models (both geometry and textures), overhauls the lighting and shadowing systems, and uses higher-resolution versions of the pre-rendered movies. The soundtrack has been redone with 60 arranged tracks, both games now have full Trophy support, and 16:9 widescreen works out of the box. Every single monster and minor character has also had their textures tweaked to freshen them up a bit.

Both games will have improved voice audio, and a 30 minute audio drama at the end of the credits featuring new cast and character voices. The PS3 version will contain both games on a single disc, but the Vita versions will be sold separately. Save files will be transferrable between the PS3 and Vita versions. **NAG**

- Miktar



RELEASE DATE / November 2013
 PLATFORM / Android / iOS
 GENRE / Tactical strategy / sports / puzzle game
 DEVELOPER / Fuzzy Logic
 WEBSITE / www.fuzzy-logic.co.za
 PUBLISHER / Fuzzy Logic

Soccer Moves

Check, mate and laduuuummmaaaa!

Take a look at that genre listing in the info bar. Yeah, you read that right. Local studio Fuzzy Logic has come up with a very interesting interpretation of the sports simulation concept and wrapped it up as a tactical strategy game, but with mobile as their platform of choice they knew player attention spans would be low. The result is this puzzle game, which is built around the objective of scoring goals in over 90 different scenarios. You're not playing full matches, but will rather engage with predefined arrangements of defenders (which are themed on real-world players – there are eight types in total) and ultimately attempt to land the ball in the back of the net.

Players will be able to unlock new skills and powerups, including the ability to dribble, chip-shot, curve-shot and even perform a few unorthodox moves. There are plenty of unlockables such as new costumes for your footballers (including a zombie skin, of course), rewards for completing certain objectives, and a total of five unique locations in which to play.

As you advance through the game you'll encounter progressively more difficult challenges, many of which will require you to think in advance and coordinate multiple players in the attempt to score. But each turn you take is one the defenders have as well (using a similar system to chess piece movement), forcing you to be smart in your decisions if you want to stay on top of each challenge.

Soccer Moves should be available by time you read this, so if you're into puzzle, sports and/or tactical strategy games, and want to support a local studio, be sure to head onto your mobile digital store and grab up a copy! **NAG**

- GeometriX





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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.

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RELEASE DATE
29 October 2013
PLATFORMS
360 / PC / PS3
GENRE
First-person shooter
DEVELOPER
DICE
WEBSITE
www.battlefield.com
PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

BF4

BIG THINKING SANDBOX MULTIPLAYER SHOOTER

The time difference between *BF4* and *BF3* is a lot shorter than the one between *BF3* and *BF2*. The one is a six year gap and the more recent, a two year gap. This isn't a thing that everyone is happy about because many people saw the *Battlefield* series as something more than just another annual shooter. It's a special experience, a sandbox multiplayer shooter where you can be flying a helicopter one minute and then sticking C4 on a tank the next. Others don't mind so much and are ready and waiting to welcome the latest and greatest DICE has to offer in the first person shooter multiplayer arena. It doesn't really matter which tight little uncompromising box you fit into; the reality is that it's here and by the end of

the festive season you're either going to be playing and loving it all day every day or you'll be playing *Call of Duty: Ghosts*. The single player experience will be an epic showcase for EA DICE's Frostbite 3 engine, an engine that seems to love tearing up levels and destroying buildings to hammer home its point. We all know what to expect and let's hope that they give us a break before we start hearing about *Battlefield 5*. Some of us haven't even finished levelling up in *BF3*. What follows here is a snapshot of how the multiplayer works just before the game goes live. Everything Private Samuel Jenkins does below is possible in the multiplayer game. He misses his girlfriend and he's a bit of a nut job.



UNCLASSIFIED (civilian live chat)

PARTIES: Pvt. Jenkins. S (USMC 875-33-6798 B POS)

and sweet pea / baby / honey / peanut

REPORT NUMBER: November Alpha Golf 42

DATE: 3 October 2013 ■

Hey sweet pea, almost wrote sweat pea it's so damn hot here. LOL. To be honest with you I prefer the stink of the jungle to the stink of the city any damn day from Sunday. The heat is the same just different shapes and colours though – I think I just like jungle green and I don't like corner of building grey. The corner we're dug into here smells like piss and death. In the bushes it's just the ground rot and your own sweat. I could lie for hours

in the leaves under a log hoping that tickle on my calf wasn't a big spider, here in Shanghai you can lie down but it's on a pile of concrete and glass – not too comfy. Lay still for too long and the rats come sniffing. I hate the city fighting, can't blend in against a glass wall. Who wants to be easy meat for snipers?

This is day one here in sunny Shanghai; the Chinese are on the



other side of the water and we're going to take them down and control this place and kick their fat General all the way back home. We're pretty well armed: "to the teeth" is the saying. A few tanks and two choppers is the good stuff; should be easy they told us with all that armour. Not much resistance my butt. Whiskey Hotel said they spotted two snipers on the rooftops and a few tanks and choppers sniffing around at the Chinese base. This is going to be one hell of a full-on fight and the high ground looks like the place to be.

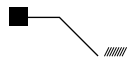
The plan today is to take a pair of jet skis across the bay inlet river thing (whatever it's called) and take a spot closest to their base, cause a little disruption right on their door step while Bravo and Charlie get into that tall skyscraper and bring down any choppers. Holding thumbs. I'll let you know how it goes. It helps this writing to you, helps me keep my head straight here. Love you.

Baby, wow! That was a riot. We took the spot – it was a parking garage, not too much of a fight, just a small patrol of newbies and their dead Corporal. The idiot bumped into a parked car and the alarm went off.

LOL. They went down easy and put up such a fight right until the end we didn't have any prisoners – it's much easier when they fight like that until the end – nobody wants guard duty. After the dust settled the other boys moved to the next location. Me and Denny stuck around to see if any other patrols were incoming to give our point boys a heads up. Next thing we hear a chopper thumping down low, you know when they come down in between the buildings. Looks like our boys in the tower have got those tools too scared to fly high. Ha, suckers. Anyway they came down real low, chopper packed full of fresh meat. Denny popped a rocket right inside the cabin and the whole thing came down in a burning heap. One guy jumped but his tuck-and-roll didn't save him, I got him with a few slugs to the chest – really messy. We wanted to put their heads on the bonnets of some cars at the entrance, you know, to spook their buddies but no time and besides I don't think they'll be coming back anytime soon. Denny fixed up a tank so we're going to roll out in style to the courtyard and hook up with the boys. Man that chopper just evaporated – wow, must have been juiced up to the brim. Boom. LOL. Goodnight honey, I'll talk to you tomorrow.



■ *Battlefield 1942* was released in 2002 and put DICE on the map by offering a different but stylish take on the multiplayer genre. Look up *Battlefield 1942* and Eminem on the Internets for a laugh.





ALL BY MYSELF

In case anyone's interested (and we'll forgive you if you aren't, because *Battlefield 3's* solo campaign was pretty rubbish), *Battlefield 4's* single-player campaign is set in the year 2020, six years after the end of the previous game. You are Sergeant Daniel Recker, member of an elite US spec ops squad known as Tombstone. Apparently the story hinges on the assassination of a prominent Chinese leader. When the US is implicated in said assassination, Russia, China and the US are pushed to the brink of World War III. We're assuming it'll be up to you to defuse that situation. We've been assured that the story this time will have much more of an emotional impact on the player. We'll have to see how that goes. To be fair, there are some pretty cool new solo features, like drivable vehicles to use in more open, sandbox-style levels, as well as various squad-based abilities that you and the rest of Tombstone can perform.



NEW GAME, NEW MODES

In addition to a bunch of familiar game modes from *Battlefield's* past, *Battlefield 4* boasts a few new excuses to shoot people in the face with angry guns. Team deathmatch, Conquest, Rush, Squad deathmatch and Domination make a welcome return, and are joined by all-new modes Obliteration and Defuse.

In Obliteration, each team controls three M-COM stations. You must defend yours while attempting to destroy the enemy's. The catch is that only one bomb is active on the map at any given time, and teams must battle for control of it and work together to successfully get it planted on the enemy targets. The bomb spawns in random locations, so you'll have to react quickly.

Defuse is designed for close-quarters action, with two teams of five players each battling to either kill all enemies on the opposing team, or destroy a specific objective that they own. Players only have one life to work with, and can only be revived once per round – so if you get taken out, you're left anxiously spectating while your team fights on without you.

Domination is a semi-new mode, first introduced in the *Close Quarters* expansion for *BF 3*. It's like an infantry-only variant of Conquest, with players fighting to drain enemy tickets by capping and holding flags. Flag captures are quicker and the ticket count is lower, so it's effectively designed to be faster, more frantic and more personal than Conquest.

Oh, we just got a new order now to get to the top of the buildings at the courtyard and cover the tanks. The Chinese are popping rockets from the rooftop and we're going to make sure they stop. That's tomorrow's problem now. Time for some grub. Goodnight for real this time. Sleep tight peanut.

Morning! Can you believe the lifts still work? Toilets won't flush but the lifts are just fine. Sergeant told us it must be because of some earthquake safety system still running. Me, I don't give a crap, just glad I don't need to run up 30 flights of stairs. Took my sniper rifle this morning and made a few heads go poof. LOL. At least it's quick for them; they don't even hear the shot you know – they just die – the wind was blowing a bit so that wasn't easy. We got six of the dicks – no more rockets coming out the sky. The guys at the tower aren't dealing with the choppers anymore. They must be down. We lost a few guys on the roof today. Damn choppers. If we can't take the tower tomorrow the whole thing is coming down.

Just got told the Chinese have set up a base or something there; killed all our guys. The demolition guys are grinning and it looks to me like they want to bring it down regardless. Crazy guys, the one dude is trying to mould a little triceratops out of C4 – he said Barney the dinosaur is taking down the town. Wasn't Barney a T-Rex? We're travelling in a tank

convoy so it'll be safer getting there, those choppers are still causing problems – we need better pilots. I need to keep these shorter. I got bust sending you the last message.

So the building assault didn't go well. All the lifts work like a charm but someone chucking C4 and grenades in the lobby when you get to the top isn't so charming. We lost a lot of guys up there. We heard a couple of guys tried jumping and deploying their parachutes at the top out of the chopper. There were just too many of them up there. We also got another problem: some jokers are taking a whole chopper to the top of the building over the water just to get a sweet sniper spot. Then they just leave the chopper up there. How is that helping anyone? Damn idiots.

So we took it down. The skyscraper had to come down. It was pretty easy really, just four pillars holding up that thing. The noise and mess and dust was something to behold, incredible. No survivors anywhere, not even leftovers. That's what Denny calls anything left after a big blast. Bit of a sicko. Now we're left fighting over a pile of rubble but Sergeant seems to think we've broken their hold over Shanghai, setting up their base in that building wasn't a smart move and now we've got them on the run.

See you soon.
- RedTide





INTERVIEW

In amongst all the madness and noise and excitement of rAge 2013, we had a quick chat with **DANIEL MATROS, PRODUCER ON BATTLEFIELD 4**. We'd actually previously spoken to Daniel at last year's rAge, when he was still community manager on *Battlefield 3*, and we're happy to report that even with his fancy new title of producer he's still the same incredibly nice guy. Read on!

NAG: Hi!
Daniel Matros: Hello!

NAG: So! Going into *Battlefield 4* from *Battlefield 3*, it's been a much quicker production cycle than you guys have ever had before. I mean, there's really only been two years between the two. Before that, the gap between *Battlefield 2* and *3* was comparatively massive. Has this proved to be a unique challenge for the team, pumping it out as quickly as you have?

DM: Coming out of *Battlefield 3*, we already had a good backbone to work with. We already had the next-gen engine, we already knew what we wanted to do post-launch, we already knew what we wanted to experiment with. All the stuff we added with the *BF3* expansion packs has just been elevated in *BF4*. *Levolution* was obviously the biggest new challenge for us, but a new game needs to come with new challenges. Commander Mode is a new challenge as well.

We worked a lot with how to "simplify" the usage of *BF4*, with things like the customisation menu, and we're looking to just make access much easier in general for players. We've added testing grounds where people can do stuff like fly helicopters around all alone to learn to use them. Single player is also a great way for players to learn the basics of *BF4* multiplayer, with stuff like squad customisation. All of that is in there. It wasn't a huge step for us to make *BF4*, because the backbone was there, but it was definitely a challenge with all the new stuff we've added and things we've tweaked.

NAG: For somebody who's just come out of *BF3*, what would you say is the biggest draw for them to play *BF4*? Why do you think *BF3* fans should hand over their cash for *BF4*?



DM: I would say it's the sandbox nature of it. You can do anything in *BF4*. You've got the dynamic maps as well, so no map really plays the same. *You can take down skyscrapers*. It's all player-triggered, so you decide what you want to do on the map. *Levolution* is our biggest feature. Then we're adding in a whole RTS element with Commander Mode.

NAG: What sort of options will players have in Commander Mode? What will they be able to do?

DM: You'll have operational assets and offensive assets at your disposal. Operational assets includes stuff like scanning the map for vehicles and infantry, putting up UAVs to see where the enemy is, and you can disturb the enemy commander with an EMP. You get offensive assets by capturing points on the map. Offensive assets include things like Tomahawk missiles, or AC-130s that can be called in to start raining down bullets.

Other than that, you also have a teamplay element which is not available all across the board for any of the other players, in that you

direct the combat. The more you direct squads to take capture points, the more commander points you get, which is how you call in abilities. If you're really good, you can drop supplies and vehicles on the battlefield for your team. It all ties into the squad mechanics we had in *BF3*. If you and your squad complete squad actions like squad heals or squad revives or capturing flags or squad resupplies, all these squad elements, your squad bar goes up. Then you have specialisations so you get to enjoy the other players' specialisations as well. Everything ties together in a way, and if you have a good commander and you have a good squad, you're going to be able to work wonders together.

NAG: In the beta, the Siege of Shanghai map has that toppling skyscraper that's part of your *Levolution* stuff. What other sort of devastating dynamic changes can we expect to see in maps?

DM: Every level has an element of huge potential *Levolution*. There's a levee in a map called *Flooded*, for example, and when it's destroyed

the map overflows with water. The tanks then change to boats and suddenly you're racing around on the water instead of on the ground. This obviously changes the way you play the map. Every map has its own big event that could happen. There are also smaller events that you can trigger yourself, like turning off the power to elevators, you have metal detectors, there are car alarms to set off, you can work with the environment and watch it adapt. *Battlefield 4* is as much about environment as it is about player versus player. You can use the environment to your advantage not only through destruction, but also by doing things like turning off those elevators so that enemies can't get to the capture point on top of the skyscraper.

NAG: With the squads, what sort of mechanics do you have in place to foster such close-knit teamwork, especially between strangers?

DM: Built-in voice over IP is obviously a factor, but also there's the incentive that working with your squad will always make it easier to work towards your goal. It's all about how you work

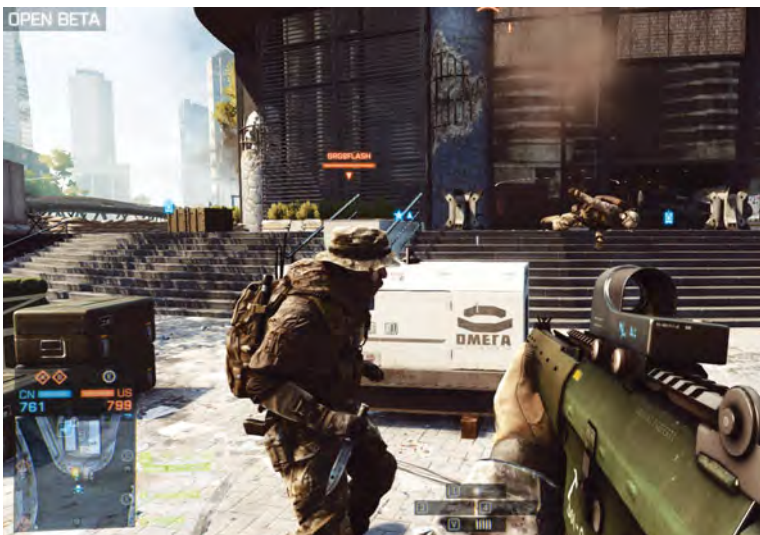
as a squad, because if you don't work together, if you don't spot and mark enemies so your squad shares total awareness, it becomes much more difficult to achieve your objectives. You also unlock special abilities the more you advance as a squad, things like squad ammo, squad suppression and more.

Then again, you can still always lone wolf it in *Battlefield*. There's no script on how to play *Battlefield*. You can play with two-man squads or whatever you want. Strong teamwork always seems to work best though.

NAG: When we spoke to you last year, you went into great detail about how you're constantly collecting data from players to learn how they're playing the game. Has this taught you anything useful for BF 4?

DM: We did collect a bunch of data with *BF3*. We saw that tight urban infantry maps are the go-to maps for us right now. That's what people really want to play. People played the *Close Quarters* maps a lot. However, looking at the really large Conquest maps like *Caspian Border*, people also seem to really love those. Our mission with *BF4* was to somehow cater to all of the

"If you and your squad complete squad actions like squad heals or squad revives or capturing flags or squad resupplies, all these squad elements, your squad bar goes up."



audience. I would say that if a person who is normally only an infantry player still has fun on the large Conquest maps with a really grand scale, then we've successfully done our jobs.

NAG: So you learnt a lot from those expansion packs post-release?

DM: Definitely! For the players it was a good experience, this much was clear, but for us it's also a learning process. I mean, just because we've done multiple *Battlefield* games, doesn't make us masters of game development. We're always learning. We're always going forward. We're always learning from everything.

NAG: What are you most proud of with BF4?

DM: I'm most proud of our teamplay mechanisms. I think we really got it right. Looking at *Battlefield* over the years, teamplay has always been the heart of *Battlefield*. That's been our number one equation we're always trying to crack, always keeping it with us wherever we go. I honestly think that for the first time we've come up with a formula that actually is really good for playing as a team. You feel connected to why you're supposed to function as one overwhelming force.

NAG: Thanks for your time! NAG

DICE has been around a long time, their first proper game was *Pinball Dreams* on the Commodore Amiga. DICE was formed by members of the Amiga Demo group The Silents. You can find some of their best work on www.youtube.com by doing a search for Amiga and The Silents. Remember, this was all done on a 16-bit computer

Reviews Intro

If they were tried in a court of law for their crimes against journalism they'd all get the death penalty. Meet the NAG review team.

You confused a sandbox game with reality and have done terrible things. You're now on death row and your execution is at 05h00 tomorrow. What is your last meal tonight?



RedTide

Do I just have tonight to eat? This is going to be a problem.



Miktar

Deep-dish hand-made pizza with BBQ sauce, feta, chicken, pineapple, and LSD. I may as well tune in before I drop out.



Azimuth

A chicken, so I can use the bones to lure the dog sitting nearby with the cell key in its mouth. I know it works, I played *Monkey Island 2*.



Mikit0707

Cheese Doritos and beer to start with. Then chicken fajitas with sour cream, guacamole, mature cheddar, Woolworths' Mexican salsa (better than Old El Paso), and refried beans. And Snickers bars.



GeometriX

I thought about this as much as possible and my brain keeps coming back to a cheese burger, chips and Coke. I try to be fancy, but really I'm not.



Barkskin

There's an awesome pizza place near where I live called Luigi's (obviously). Pretty much anything off their menu would potentially be worthy of pre-death food.

Mini reviews

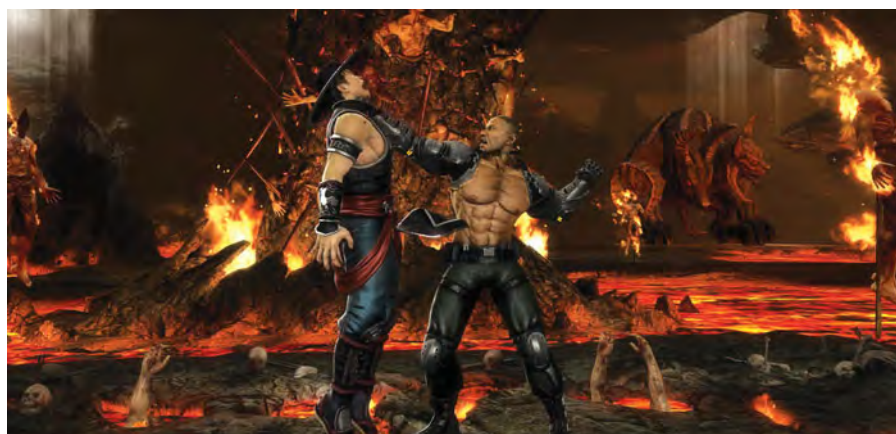
Kinda like regular reviews, only bite-sized and with less of those pesky words.

MORTAL KOMBAT COMPLETE EDITION

When it comes to fighting games, PC owners are usually screwed out of half the stuff that's out there. It might be because keyboards absolutely suck for these sorts of games, but with growing support for gamepads on PC (which is set to get huge in the coming years), here's hoping that this is a trend that's on its way out.

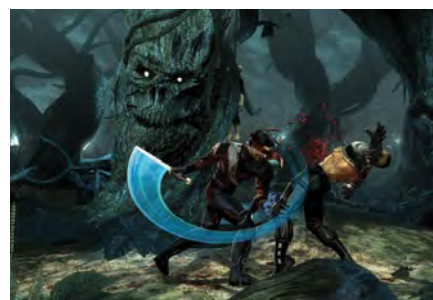
Mortal Kombat Complete Edition represents the first time the series has returned to the PC in retail packaging since *MK4* in 1997, and we'd be lying if we said it's a perfect port. Sure, having all the bonus content in one place is great, and there's nothing funny like graphical glitches to worry about, but performing combos and most moves is finicky with the keyboard; even navigating the menus is a pain in the arse. This is largely due to *MK's* generally bloated control scheme, so you'll definitely want a gamepad if you plan to pick up this game.

Otherwise, there's not much more to say: it's the same game your console-owning buddies have been playing for



the last couple of years – that is to say, it's buckets of fun. In addition to the story mode you've got the standard arcade tower, quick versus battles, tag fighting and four challenge modes. There's plenty of replayability here and some brutal AI to help sharpen your skills before you go online and get abused by 12 year-olds with nothing better to do than chain combo you into depression.

85



"I exploded inside him"

- RedTide, while discussing *BF4*.



Ramjet

Prawns. Like five kilos. That would break my previous record of 3.5 kilos, and I wouldn't have to worry about feeling like crap the next morning.



SAVAGE

A big juicy matured rump steak with pepper sauce, crispy onion rings and chips.



ShockG

Any meal I have is not going to go down well at all. However I guess I'll have what my Mom used to cook. Somp and chicken curry. Go out the way I came in.

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...

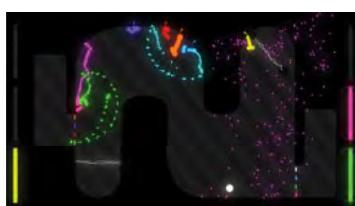
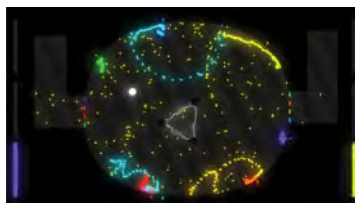
Deciduous Games

DECIDUOUSGAMES.BLOGSPOT.COM

Here's a funny thing: penis. No, not *your* penis (or maybe, whatever, we're not judging), but penises in general. It's so funny that I'm grinning while writing this, knowing that reading the word penis over and over again is making you slightly uncomfortable yet amused at the same time.

That's kind of the point of *Wang Commander*, a game by Free Lives developer Richard Pieterse. *Wang Commander* is a physics-based competitive co-op game for up to eight players, with each controlling a wobbly penis in the attempt to win each level by flopping about in strategic ways. While he works full-time on *Bro Force*, Richard uses any spare time he can muster to maintain *Wang Commander*, which he plans to ultimately sell once there's enough gameplay. He even has an idea to pitch it to Sexpo.

Perhaps the most interesting part of *Wang Commander* is the preferred input method:



eight players, four controllers, which means players are forced to share a controller, possibly staring into each other's eyes or catching a quick flirty glance once in a while. Or just being really awkward.

Wang Commander was on show at rAge



where it performed remarkably well with both the young and old crowd. Richard is working towards getting the game onto Steam Greenlight and possibly even consoles, which is ideal, since it's designed for use with gamepads.

PLATFORMS
360 / PS3
REVIEWED ON
360
GENRE
Action adventure
AGE RESTRICTION
18

MULTIPLAYER
Local
None
Online
16 players

DEVELOPER
Rockstar North / various other Rockstar studios

WEBSITE
www.rockstargames.com/v

PUBLISHER
Rockstar Games / Take-Two Interactive

DISTRIBUTOR
Megarom

Reviewed

Grand Theft Auto V

Workin' on our night moves

Reviewing *Grand Theft Auto V* is strangely overwhelming. Even though you'd think the game makes it easy by cramming in so much random stuff to discuss and point out and fawn over and laugh at, so much stuff that'll make you want to hug each and every member of the development team for creating it, it's really not that simple. It's as if it's just too much. It's too important of a game. It's outgrown the boundaries of video games and stepped into the realm of cultural phenomenon. Thankfully, it doesn't matter what I say about it, what *anyone* says about it. Provided you're not waiting for the PC version, you've already bought it. You've already played it. You're still playing it. And chances are, you're loving every second of it.

Anyone who's played a *GTA* game since it first ventured into 3D with *Grand Theft Auto III* should know what to expect by now. You're set free in an open-world playground packed to bursting with ludicrous attractions. Countless activities and distractions are presented to you, and you're free to ignore them if you so choose. Throngs of NPCs roam the game world, going about their daily (and nightly) business to enhance the illusion of hustle, bustle and dynamic artificial activity. The primary storyline unfurls

through a variety of missions, side-missions, odd jobs and wild encounters. Along the way you'll meet many unique characters, some semi-normal, some bat-shit crazy, but almost all of them immensely interesting. There are loads of things to do and loads of ways to do them – and the world reacts to everything you do in exciting, often completely unexpected ways.

For *GTA V*, Rockstar's gone and tried something different with its approach to protagonists, in that there are three of them. Michael, Franklin and Trevor are your playable characters, and bar a few circumstances where the game prohibits it, you're able to switch between the three of them at will. Rockstar's done a profound job on the trio, making them unique both in the context of *GTA V* and in terms of video game characters in general. Franklin's the gangbanger who finds himself drawn into a life of crime seemingly through a lack of any other meaningful opportunities. Michael's a criminal genius who cashed in early and bagged himself a particularly dysfunctional family, but has now been drawn out of his comfortable retirement by a distinctly uncomfortable mid-life crisis. And then there's Trevor. Trevor's a violent sociopath

1 *GTA V* is set in the city of Los Santos and surrounding Blaine County. Los Santos is effectively Los Angeles. Rockstar clearly channelled everything they learnt from *Red Dead Redemption* into the look and feel of the sparsely populated outlying desert areas.





MIKTAR'S OPINION

Now this is more like it. Well-designed missions, lots of offbeat wit, strange scenes, and no @!#?@! Niko Bellic or his shitty cousin Roman. *GTA V* has everything that was missing from the previous game: a huge world, meaningful things to do, and writing that doesn't make you want to strangle the people who thought it was acceptable.

Vehicle handling and gunplay are much improved, and you can clearly see the *Midnight Club: LA* and *Red Dead Redemption* influences everywhere. Having three lead characters (four if you count your *GTA Online* character) keeps one from becoming overbearing. The random events that might happen as you swap characters are particularly inspired. When it works, the online component of the game is an impressive feat.

You join a random instance of Los Santos (or one that has your friends in it), and you're free to do pretty much anything. Play tennis, rob a bank, team deathmatch, shoot newcomers as they spawn... This is *GTA* after all, don't expect people to play nice. When you talk over microphone, your character's mouth moves. Nice touch.

Personally, this is the closest

Rockstar has ever returned to the feel of *GTA 2* and *Vice City*. And it rocks.



with serious anger problems and a twisted sense of what could be called honour, if you were looking at it through a microscope from the moon. I imagine Trevor as being the digital embodiment of the person the mainstream media believes all gamers will inevitably become by playing far too much *GTA*. Either that, or he's the perfect pastiche of how a great many players play *GTA* in the first place.

I don't want to say any more than that about the three stars here, because discovering their traits and eccentricities is part of the fun, and so is seeing how Rockstar interweaves the narrative and superbly designed missions between them. They're not the only attention-grabbing characters in the game either. As with all of Rockstar's games, many of the NPCs (no matter how seemingly insignificant) are fascinating in their own ways. Outstanding writing makes everything in the game pop and the wonderful sense of humour that permeates this series is on full display here. In case nobody's told you yet (and I do wish somebody would tell this to mainstream critics of the game who've never actually



AZIMUTH'S OPINION

This one time, I swapped to Trevor and he was getting himself into a brawl with a bunch of 'roid-ragers out on the beach because, you know, Trevor is Trevor. This other time, he was finishing up doing something we can't even print in a family magazine. It's *GTA V*'s moments of funny unpredictability that make it so special. Except maybe the catastrophic launch of the multiplayer component, *GTA Online*, although that was probably never quite so unpredictable.

At the time of writing this, *GTAO* has been live for over a week, and it's still broken in lots of places. Last night, after installing the second update, I couldn't even get it to load. And that's after a server glitch wiped my character data over the weekend, undoing hours of terrorising the coastal shopping district on jet-skis.

It's a good thing I'm not actually Trevor, or I'd burn Rockstar's HQ to the ground.

On-going problems notwithstanding, however, *GTAO* is a phenomenal experience when it does work. Once you're through the tutorial, you're basically handed a gun and the entirety of Los Santos as your own personal shooting gallery. Of course, that's what everybody else gets too, so there's a whole lot of chaos and confusion that's how I totally accidentally shot you, promise. I also didn't mean to run over your bloodied corpse and pick up the cash you dropped, it just kind of happened.

Both times. Okay, maybe more than twice, but who's counting? Let's just go jack a chopper and forget about this.

93

Doing **E** crime and violence and generally making a mess still raises your Wanted level. As your escapades escalate, so too do the methods used to hunt you. Lose the cops and stay hidden, and you'll eventually shake off Wanted status.



E Each of the three characters has a limited-use special ability. Franklin slows time while driving to simulate enhanced reaction time. Trevor gets angry in combat, reducing damage sustained and increasing damage dealt. Michael transforms into Max Payne, slowing time to a crawl during shootouts.

played it), each *GTA* is a parody of this bizarre world we live in – as though somebody held contemporary society hostage with a pair of pink garden shears and made it dance for our amusement. The now-iconic radio stations are full of ridiculous ads and interviews and general LOL-ness in between playing real-world tunes. Vapid Hollywood celebrity culture is lampooned for all its easily lampoon-able idiocy. Fake social networks have been created in-game, where users “stalk” rather than follow each other, and where characters will often actually post remarks on your virtual exploits. Stumbling upon things like these is hilarious.

Speaking of all that tertiary stuff, I think Rockstar has actually packed more detail into *GTA V* than there is in the real world. This is very obviously a blatant lie, but it's not that far off, all things considered. Spend a few moments examining and experimenting with any aspect of the game, and I guarantee it'll surprise you just how much depth the developers have crammed into even its most minute aspects. As one of the more obvious examples, all you need to do is wait for the rain and watch the puddles form. There's also an astonishing breadth of fun stuff to do when you're not off doing crime, planning heists and arguing with yourself about whether or not it's time Trevor got a new haircut, or Franklin bought some new shoes. There's golf and tennis to play. There are various races in which to compete. Property can be bought and maintained for extra income. Cars can be customised. You can gamble all your cash on the in-game stock exchange. You can grab scuba gear and explore the ocean. This is the kind of game that you could be playing a year from

now and still be squeezing significant fun out of it. That's not even including the manic entertainment of *Grand Theft Auto Online*, which I've not played, but Tarryn is eager to talk about elsewhere on this page.

Thinking back, the only thing that perhaps bugs me about it is the ability stats, which determine how proficient each of your characters is at things like shooting, flying and holding their breath underwater. You increase these stats by performing associated actions – but I really didn't see much of a tangible benefit from improving some of these attributes. It's such a minor issue in the grand scheme of things though. There's so much more to say about *Grand Theft Auto V*, but really, stop reading this and try it for yourself. You'll have fun. Lots of it. **NAG**

- Barkskin

94

Grand Theft Auto V is every bit as good as you'd expect it to be. It's utterly absorbing in every way, with so much stuff to see and do and experience in Los

Santos and the surrounds of Blaine County. Its characters and narrative are interestingly exposed, and the intricacy in its design is astounding. Just play it.

PLUS

Meticulously detailed world / So. Much. To. Do. / Fancy three-way narrative

MINUS

I want to say nothing... but there's random, mostly inconsequential crap wrong with it

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PLATFORMS
PS3
REVIEWED ON
PS3
GENRE
Interactive drama
AGE RESTRICTION
18
MULTIPLAYER
Local
2 players
Online
None
DEVELOPER
Quantic Dream
WEBSITE
www.beyondps3.com
PUBLISHER
SCEE
DISTRIBUTOR
Ster Kinekor

Reviewed

Beyond: Two Souls

The third wheel

Quantic Dream makes games that aren't really games. Sounds like a strange statement, sure, but if you have played *Fahrenheit* or *Heavy Rain*, you will know that this company places narrative first and foremost on their priority list. The player in these titles is an active voyeur, able to influence elements of an unfolding story while relaxing and enjoying the plot. These are not sweaty-palmed action titles. They are pedantic, often moody cinematic pieces that allow the player to influence them. They are more along the line of an interactive movie than a game. While this makes Quantic Dream's games unique, it also pushes them into a niche, a zone between the passivity of watching movies and the activity of playing games that many find uncomfortable.

Beyond: Two Souls takes things even further. In this visually impressive latest outing from Quantic Dream, the player feels even more removed from Jodie Holmes, the central character. Unlike *Heavy Rain*, the player will only ever control Jodie. Actually, that's not true – the player will also control Aiden, a mysterious spirit that shares a seemingly unbreakable bond with Jodie. And as Aiden, the player feels much more connection to the game world, even if he is an otherworldly entity.

Beyond: Two Souls investigates key times

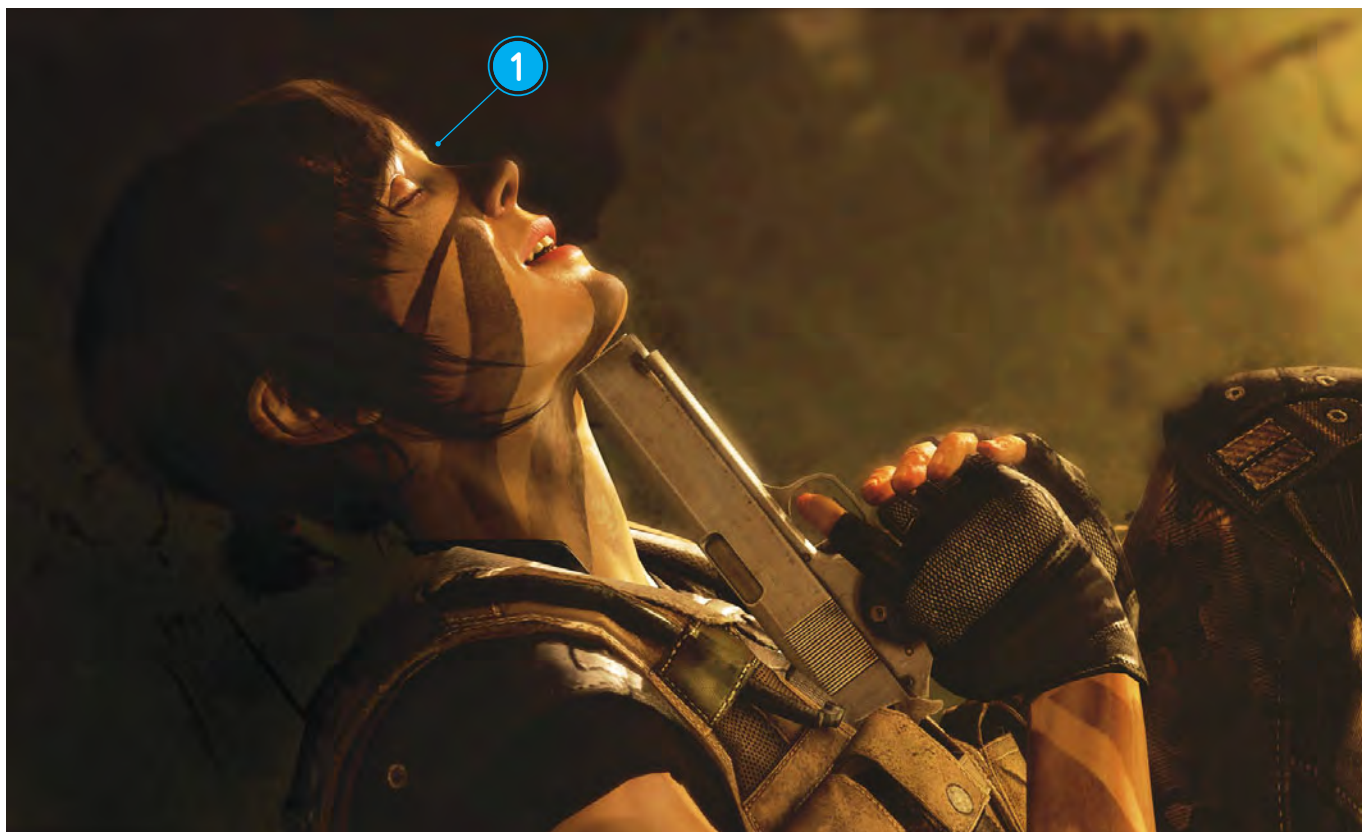
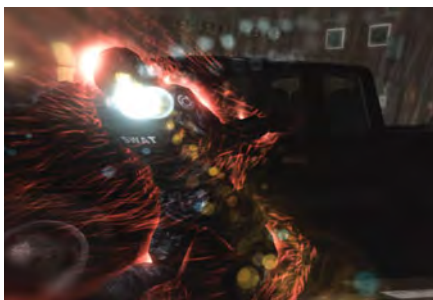
in Jodie's life, haphazardly leaping around a timeline to visit different situations. The player will find themselves seeing Jodie as a troubled young adult, then a confused child in the next scene, and a troubled teen in the next. This results in a somewhat confusing narrative as the player is forced to piece together the events in their own mind – but it does allow the game to keep the biggest twists and surprises for the end.

Still, the disjointed nature of the narrative keeps the player from ever becoming truly invested in *Beyond*. In *Heavy Rain*, you really cared about solving the life-and-death mystery. In *Beyond*, there's much more detachment. And this is exacerbated by the fact that, for the most part, the player's decisions don't really seem to have all that much impact. They do, because that's how Quantic Dream rolls, but it doesn't feel like it. In fact, the player is more likely to identify with Aiden, because the spirit allows the player more freedom and a much more discernible influence on the world.

That said, Aiden is limited. The game will allow players to, for example, possess or kill certain people, but not others. This is largely due, I assume, to the fact that the high end graphics and tight nature of the narrative demand it.

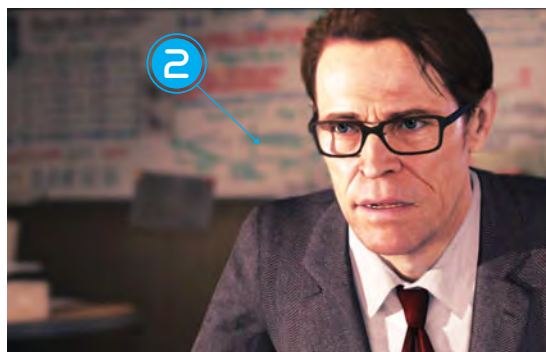
The overall effect feels as disjointed as the

1 High visual fidelity is the order of the day.

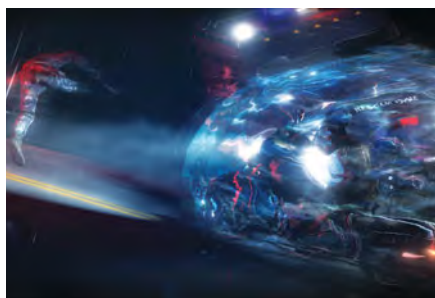
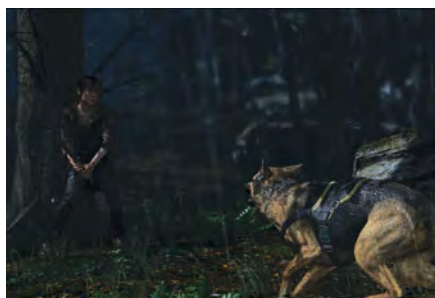




② It's a life-long love affair, and you're not invited.



“Beyond: Two Souls is one of the most visually striking titles you will see on the PS3, on par with the likes of The Last of Us.”



plot. The player will make more decisions on less important events, at times, while massively influential incidents may see the player as a pure spectator.

It is for all of these reasons that *Beyond: Two Souls* is not a very good game. The key word there, though, is game. And, quite honestly, it doesn't seem like Quantic Dream wanted it to be a game; rather, they wanted it to be more of an interactive movie. So many elements of the game's design point towards that. For example, using names like Ellen Page and Willem Dafoe to voice and act the parts of the main characters doesn't really lean towards gaming – at least not in this case. The great performances are paired with excellent visuals. *Beyond: Two Souls* is one of the most visually striking titles you will see on the PS3, on par with the likes of *The Last of Us*.

And then there is the control scheme. The often frantic quick time events of *Heavy Rain* are gone. Sure, the player will run in to some QTEs in *Beyond*, but they tend to be only when the action is high. For the rest of the time, the controls are context based; a prompt will show the player what can be interacted with, and a flick of the right analogue stick will make it happen. This idea translates into the fight scenes as well. The action will slow down, and the player will need to flick the stick in the direction of Jodie's motion. These scenes can be extremely deceptive, though, and you may well find yourself making the wrong choice more than a few times.

The punishment that those poor decisions should deliver never materialises. *Beyond: Two Souls* has a story to tell, and it is moderately linear. That means that even if

Jodie gets messed up in a fight, the outcome will likely be the same... even if it does take Aiden's powers to heal her.

If you put the narrative side by side with that of *Heavy Rain*, *Beyond* will prove to be a slower paced, more pedantic experience. It delves into the life and mind set of Jodie, which sometimes requires more mundane events. But while there are some emotionally powerful scenes, the overall disconnection with the character – the forced passivity of the player – means that they aren't as impactful as they might have been.

It sounds like a lot of doom and gloom. That's not the desired impression, though; *Beyond: Two Souls* will prove to be very satisfying for those that can sit back and have an entertainment title (because "game" is not really appropriate) take them places. If they want to be in the driver's seat, they're out of luck. *Beyond* is a powerful tale that drags the player along with it and, in those parameters, it does the job very well. **NAG**

- Shryke



It's a powerful interactive movie... that means a passive game experience that won't sit well with most gamers.

PLUS

Great graphics / Deep story / Excellent acting

MINUS

Playing feels passive / Lack of connection to character



infinity ward **ACTIVISION**

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PLATFORMS
360 / 3DS / PC / PS2 / PS3
PS4 / PSP / PSV / Wii / XBO

REVIEWED ON
360

GENRE
Sports

AGE RESTRICTION
3

MULTIPLAYER
Local

4 players

Online
22 players

DEVELOPER
EA SPORTS

WEBSITE
www.easports.com/uk/fifa

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DISTRIBUTOR
EA South Africa

Reviewed

FIFA 14

A more beautiful game

There are a number of reasons why releasing a game on a yearly basis can be quite the challenge. The biggest of these is keeping things fresh and, so doing, giving players a reason to fork out the cash it costs to buy a new iteration each and every year. In the past we have seen the *FIFA* franchise vary between years in which the changes have been vast and sweeping, through to years in which the tweaks have been more subtle. It's the *FIFA* process: in some years the developers take massive steps towards improving the game, and then spend time in subsequent years tweaking those changes and setting the stage for the next big change.

FIFA 14 is one a bit different. While it appears to be a tweak year, thanks to no real visual fidelity changes or overt reworking of any of the systems, there are a number of big changes that bubble along under the surface. It seems, to some, that this

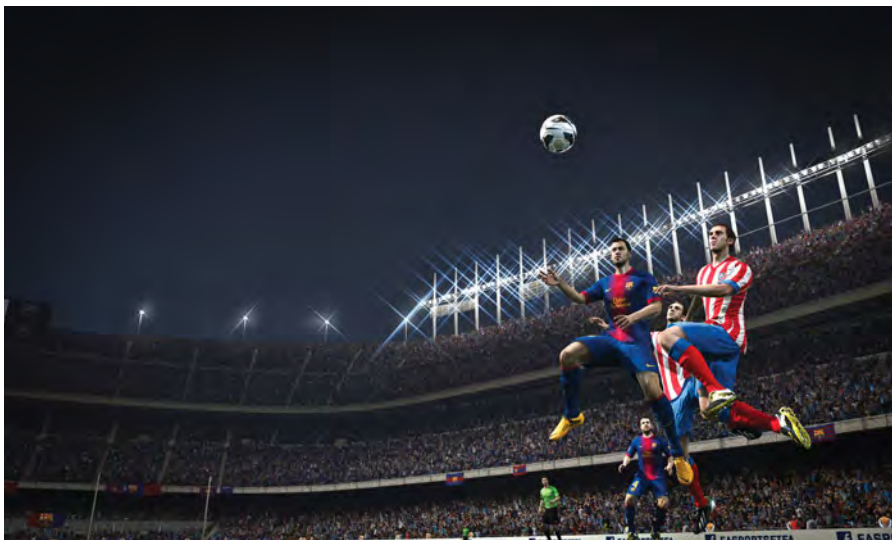


FIFA could have delivered more in terms of changes, but the developers were setting a whole different kind of stage in this iteration: the next generation of consoles. *FIFA 14* will be the first version of *FIFA* playable on PS4 and Xbox One, and those versions (when they become available) are likely to be very impressive, because the developers have a lot more power to make use of with those new machines.

For the current generation they have added in what they can from the list of impressive tweaks for the next-gen games. Due to hardware limitations, the developers haven't made those sweeping changes. But that doesn't mean that the changes aren't there... *FIFA 14* on current generation consoles looks and feels more realistic than ever, thanks to the new ways in which the on-screen players interact with their environment. They now have something that feels like real weight and actual momentum. Players cannot just perform a fast turn – their mass and movement affect how that turn will take place. This changes a lot of aspects within the game, and when improved ball control (particularly in terms of shots on goal) is added in to the mix, the whole affair takes a big step towards being more realistic than ever before.

And some people simply don't like it. With the added realism in the player's motion (so very obvious in the animations) comes an added level of challenge. While *FIFA 14* won't need you to get used to massive changes in dynamics and controls, it will require some adjustment in the actual playing of the game. The net result, though, is a version of *FIFA* that feels more real than any that have come before it. **NAG**

- Shryke



85 The changes are less obvious this time around, but they have a big impact on the game. It feels more real than any other soccer title.

PLUS

More realistic player movement / Organic feel / Better AI

MINUS

No big graphics quality change / Takes some getting used to

PLATFORMS
Wii U
REVIEWED ON
Wii U
GENRE
Action
AGE RESTRICTION
12
MULTIPLAYER

Local
5 players
Online
None

DEVELOPER
Platinum Games

WEBSITE
www.
thewonderful101.
nintendo.com

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DISTRIBUTOR
Nintendo eShop /
Core Games

Reviewed

The Wonderful 101

Controlling just one hero is easy, try managing one hundred!



If you want to experience the story within *The Wonderful 101* – a funny, quirky story about heroes, loss, space aliens and school teachers – you can select Easy difficulty and be on your way. Mash buttons and pretend to be a gamer, nothing will get in the way of seeing the next cut scene. You'll be able to finish the game and have some fun.

If you want to play a *game*, be challenged, learn to control a team of heroes in a unique way that rewards your efforts, scores creativity, and explodes with stunning combat sequences, don't pick easy. You won't just finish the game, you'll *beat* it. But mastery will take a lot more than reaching the end of the story.

There's so much going on in *The Wonderful 101* that talking about any of it would be spoilers. Not just story spoilers, but *mechanics* spoilers. Figuring out how something works, or how to apply what you've learned in new ways, that's part of the game. The glyph drawing system for forming your team into weapon shapes is not unlike fighting game commands. With practice, you learn how to input them quickly and accurately. And not since *Battletoads* (1991) on the NES, has a game's level design been this varied, or exotic. It's wonderful. **NAG**
- Miktar



91

Continuing Platinum's stellar performance at making rich gaming experiences that require time and effort to master, *The Wonderful 101* is everything you could want from a game. Provided what you want from games is challenge, interesting characters, lots of secrets to uncover, and a wonderful sense of fun.

PLUS

Wonderful visuals / Wonderful combat system / Wonderful fun

MINUS

Has a steep learning curve / Interface is a bit rough / Needs a better tutorial

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PLATFORMS
360 / PC / PS3
REVIEWED ON
PS3
GENRE
Sports
AGE RESTRICTION
3

MULTIPLAYER
Local
7 players
Online
2 players

DEVELOPER
Konami

WEBSITE
www.konami-europe.com/games

PUBLISHER
Konami

DISTRIBUTOR
Ster Kinekor

Reviewed

PES 2014

The right direction

The tussle between *Pro Evolution Soccer* (or *PES*, if you prefer) and EA's giant *FIFA* franchise continues this year. But while the latest *FIFA* title shows mostly tweaks as the developers gear up for the release of the next console generation, Konami have taken larger strides towards making *PES 2014* the simulator it should have always been. Capitalising on key improvements made in last year's instalment, *PES 2014* makes a few much needed moves forward. Strangely, though, certain aspects of the game have been left unchanged – the result is a game that feels much better on the pitch, but manages to lose depth outside of the actual contests.

On the field, *PES* is really starting to feel great. It certainly surpasses *FIFA 14* in terms of crisp passing, making it an exciting and

tactically challenging game. The players have more weight, too, thanks to new technologies and techniques incorporated into this iteration. But there are other areas, like the all-important shots at the goal mouth, which still lag behind.

Fans of the franchise will notice a big change in the way the game looks. The graphics are much improved, and the stadia in the game have suddenly become lively locations. On the down-side, the improvements to looks sometimes result in visual stutters. These aren't game killers, but they do tend to yank the player out of an experience that has become much more immersive than that offered by previous *PES* titles.

One of the big improvements that has been added to *PES* this year (and there are a few) is Combination Play, which allows the player to design and manually execute specific plays according to key areas of the pitch. The idea works really well, although it does remove notions of organic developments in the game. The net result is a less chaotic experience, though, with the player given a modicum of control over the rest of the team, and not just the player currently on the ball.

Another lack that has been addressed is the overall physicality of the game. The Motion Animation Stability System (or MASS) lends the players on the pitch a sense of solidity, and leads to improved interactions between players. Hand-in-hand with MASS comes TrueBall Tech, which improves ball control and dynamics.

While the matches themselves feel much better, *PES* still suffers from problems that have been around for a while. The menu system, for example, is clunky and even confusing. Managing teams outside of the game is once again *FIFA's* forté. And so are licences. *PES* once again only has a handful of "real" players this year.

PES fans and newcomers are in for an improved football experience this year. And with Konami keeping the improvements going year-on-year, it may soon start giving *FIFA* a much more serious run for its money. **NAG - Shryke**

1 *PES 2014* will provide the player with a much improved on-pitch experience.



80

The *PES* franchise continues its march to awesomeness with *PES 2014*. But the match improvements are let down by other lacklustre aspects of the title.

PLUS

Better ball physics / Improved player physicality / Much better graphics

MINUS

Dearth of licences / Inconsistent experience

PLATFORMS
360 / PS3 / PC
REVIEWED ON
360

GENRE

Management
simulation

AGE RESTRICTION
3

MULTIPLAYER

Local

None

Online

None

DEVELOPER

Giants Software

WEBSITE

www.farming-
simulator.com

PUBLISHER

Focus Home

Interactive

DISTRIBUTOR

Apex Interactive

Reviewed

Farming Simulator

An agricultural surprise

There are niche games, and then there are really niche games. *Farming Simulator* arguably falls into that latter category, but the truth is that this game is one that falls victim to the old adage of books being judged by their covers. In all honesty, I rolled my eyes when it landed on my desk. Now, several days later, I find that I am completely hooked... just one more canola crop, just one more harvester upgrade. *Farming Simulator* sinks under your skin and has you planning crop rotations and equipment upgrades even when you're not playing.

While that may seem odd for a game that doesn't have a gun in sight, the fact is that *Farming Simulator* offers one thing that management fans really look for; a sensible model. It's a supply and demand thing, really, and while it is quite simple, it is still robust and addictive.

It isn't a perfect game; it has more than a few bugs and issues and with slightly dated graphics and sound effects – not to mention its possibly limited appeal – it probably won't make it onto any best-seller lists. But it is a title that does deserve at least some investigation. Who knows... you might just be grabbed by its simple-yet effective dynamic and pedantic play style. Now, if you'll excuse me, I think it's time to bring in that barley crop. **NAG**

- Shryke

1 Driving tractors is more fun than you think.



79

This one might just take you by surprise – there will be those out there that find the pedantic nature and simple yet effective business model of *Farming Simulator* thoroughly addictive.

PLUS

Decent business model / Easy pace / Addictive

MINUS

Several bugs / Dated graphics

Genius
Live with Ideas



Energy Mouse

Wireless Mouse to Power up Smartphone



Taiwan Excellence
Silver Award

Taiwan Top 20
Global Brand

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Award

Red dot Design
Award

Good
Design

KYE SYSTEMS CORP.

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E-mail: info@corex.co.za

TVR Computer CC

Tel: +27 11 807 1390

www.tvr.co.za

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PLATFORMS
360 / PC / PS3
REVIEWED ON
360
GENRE

First-person shooter
AGE RESTRICTION
18

MULTIPLAYER
Local
None
Online
4 players

DEVELOPER
Overkill Software

WEBSITE
www.crimenet.info

PUBLISHER
505 Games

DISTRIBUTOR
Apex Interactive

Reviewed

Payday 2

It's dangerous to go alone

Pulling off that perfect job is something that gamers are familiar with. We've all dipped our toes into the world of virtual crime from the lowliest street muggings to nationwide heists, and *Payday 2* expects you to know what you're doing – this is definitely one for those who don't need a holding hand.

If you do feel that you'd like a little bit of guidance, there's a piddling attempt at a tutorial to walk you through the basics, but from that point on you're thrown out into the rain and forced to fend for yourself. You'll do this by taking on randomly-generated jobs from throughout the game's city, earning cash for successful heists and any bonus loot pilfered, as well as XP used to gain levels and unlock skills and new equipment. There's plenty of RPG stuff here, and that transfers through to the missions themselves in which your choice of skills and weapons greatly affects your options in each heist.

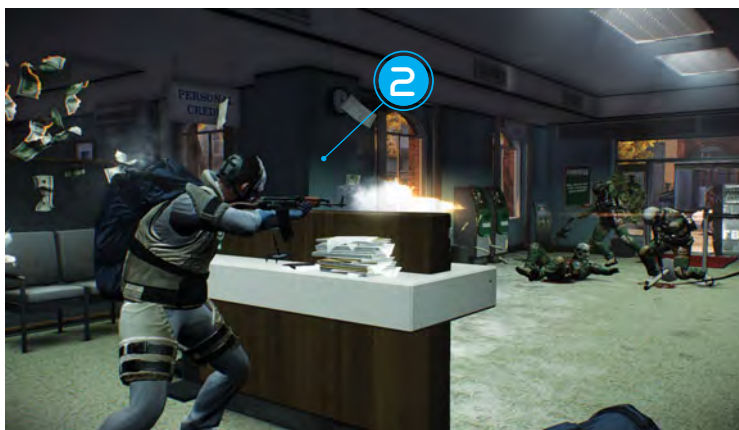
The sandbox format that *Payday 2* adopts brings with it a few pros on cons. The obvious benefit is replayability – you can go through the same heists over and over until you're satisfied – but this does tend to drag down the game in that it's very difficult to feel like you're actually getting anywhere. This is



1 Each heist can theoretically be done without tripping a single alarm or having it out with the cops, but most of the time you'll spend a good portion of missions engaged in wave-based combat until you reach your goal and escape with the goods.



2 Jobs are accessed through the Crime Net database, and are randomly generated and assigned difficulty levels. You're never forced to choose any particular job, though, so it's a simple matter of just waiting for the right job to eventually come along.



made especially true if you're trying to play on your own. *Payday 2* is billed as a co-op game, but for those of you without friends or online connectivity you're handed a pack of moronic AI-controlled sidekicks whose only skills seem to be gunning down the equally dense enemy law enforcement that will happily line up in front of a quartet of iron sights. And so that is your fate: you'll be doomed to grind low-level, painfully repetitive and artificially lengthened heists until you're well-equipped enough to tackle the bigger and more interesting challenges. There's a brutal learning curve here that will likely crack you if you go in alone, but if you've got a couple of mates then *Payday* can be a rewarding experience. Mind you, doing painfully repetitive things with friends is only as entertaining as those friends, so your mileage is bound to vary, and between the dated visuals and clunky controls there's very little that tries to compel you to break through to the juicy centre.

Payday 2 offers plenty of content, but that content isn't made particularly fun on its own. In that sense, it fails as a game, but as a platform for entertainment it could do well enough if you're willing to put in the effort and find the right people to party with, if you don't get snagged on all the rough edges. **NAG**
- GeometriX

65 *Payday 2* simply feels unfinished. It lacks polish, it's painful to get into and many of the gameplay mechanisms are just poorly conceived. If you manage to crack its tough exterior with the right group of friends, there's fun to be had here, but by then you could've found a hundred better games to play.

PLUS

Plenty of tactical variety later on / Deep character customisation

MINUS

Grind-heaving gameplay / Dated visuals / Worthless single-player content / Slow starter



Reviewed

PLATFORMS
Wii U

REVIEWED ON
Wii U

GENRE
Action adventure

AGE RESTRICTION
7

MULTIPLAYER
Local
None
Online
None

DEVELOPER
Nintendo EAD
Group No. 3 /
HexaDrive

WEBSITE
www.zelda.com/
windwaker/

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DISTRIBUTOR
Nintendo eShop /
Core Group

The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD

Go where you tell the wind to take you...

A flawed masterpiece with limited exposure thanks to the GameCube's lack of success, *The Wind Waker* has remained a widely underappreciated adventure. Thanks to this high-definition retool however, the experience is now available again, but better. The resolution is higher, the lighting and shadowing systems have been redone entirely, and every single texture has been repainted for the new resolution. All the music tracks now use higher-quality instrument samples, available in full digital surround through the HDMI port.

In terms of gameplay, nothing has gone untouched. Certain animations are quicker, Link is more responsive, and you can take self-portraits with the Picto Box camera. Pictures you take can be posted to MiiVerse or put in Tingle Bottles and thrown into the ocean where they'll show up in someone else's game. A Swift Sail item has been added that lets you sail much faster than was possible in the original, a result of the Wii U version loading the entire Great Sea at once (the GameCube only loaded a small "chunk" of the ocean as you sailed).

For returning veterans, Hero Mode is selectable at the start. This mode retunes the entire game for greater challenge. There are hundreds of not-insignificant changes, and the game can be played entirely on the GamePad if the TV needs to be used for something else.

NAG

- Miktar



93

An incredible retooling that polishes over many of the issues that marred the rushed original from 2003, while adding handfuls of small, welcome features to give it that slight modern touch. One of the more unique and memorable *Zelda* games, improved in every way.

PLUS

A grand adventure / Many improvements and fixes / Benefits greatly from new hardware

MINUS

Nothing

BEST OF RAGE EXPO 2013!



MSI recommends Windows® 8.

CRYSIS 3



GX70 Recommended for Crysis 3



GX70



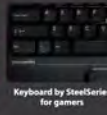
AMD's newest high-end HD 8970M discrete graphics card with amazing visuals



Cooler Boost Technology



Bigfoot Gaming LAN (Killer Gaming Networking) for priority online gaming



Keyboard by SteelSeries for gamers



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Well, almost everything.

EVERYTHING ELSE

Bits and bobs that can all be filed under gaming lifestyle

MARVEL IRON MAN 3: WAR MACHINE ARTFX STATUE

It's easy to assemble alright; a bright four-year old could handle the job with ease. It does however take two grown men and a screwdriver to figure out (after 20 head scratching minutes) that what the box depicts as shining, doesn't shine in real life – bummer. It looks like it should if you examine the statue carefully; it has what could be tiny little LED lights in a neat row with wires going in one side and out the other. It's all very convincing until you try finding the switch that turns it on – we even clapped thinking it was sound activated. The statue stands about 40cm tall and is cleverly posed next to a bit of red exploded gas pipe so it looks like War Machine is hovering and ready for a fight. It's a Kotobukiya import and makes a great looking addition to any man cave and if you're handy with a drill, LEDs, wires and a battery you could tinker until that reactor does light up – you know, like Tony would. If your engineering job goes badly you can always glue a big green fist coming out of the newly created chest cavity and make up your own cool version of the movie.

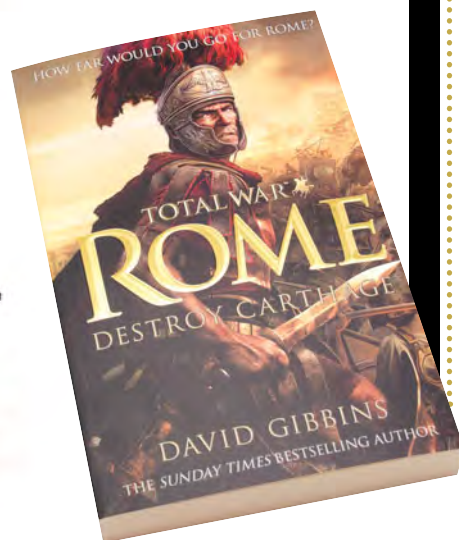
Supplier: Cosmic Comics
 Website: www.cosmiccomics.co.za
 RRP: R1,899



TOTAL WAR: ROME: DESTROY CARTHAGE (SC)

It's a book about the ancient Romans, written by a guy who knows a lot about ancient Romans, based on a game which takes itself rather seriously in this regard. Expect historically accurate battles and death and probably lots of slaves and stuff. It's like *Spartacus* but with fewer oiled-up men. You're welcome to use your imagination to add them in, if you'd like. This book magically appeared on Michael's desk one day so we're not sure who to credit as the distributor, but it's published by Pan Macmillan so there might be a good place to start.

ERP: R240



THE WITCHES

Usually we play these games thoroughly but rAge just happened so time is not really a thing that exists right now. Regardless, we took a quick look through the rules and flipped through the already bagged game tokens and playing cards, and we can tell that *The Witches* is set to be every bit as crazy and back-stabby as the previous Discworld game: *Ankh-Morpork* (which we did play, and loved) which is also from game designer Martin Wallace. You can't really go wrong here.

Supplier: Wizards Warehouse
 Website: www.wizardswarehouse.co.za
 RRP: R595



DC COMICS CATWOMAN ARTFX+ STATUE

This statue is one for the serious collector and we only say that because it's just not special enough to buy for any other reason other than to fill a missing spot on a shelf. Catwoman stands just under 20cm on a sturdy base and the kit in the box features a whip and two sets of interchangeable eyewear. Negatives aside the statue is well crafted with plenty of detail – even the claws are sharp and it's pretty reflective and looks like if you rub the suit it'll squeak.

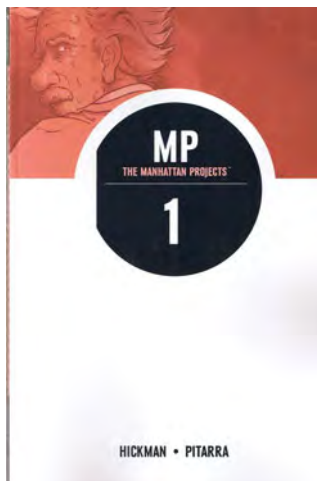
Supplier: Cosmic Comics
 Website: www.cosmiccomics.co.za
 RRP: R699



THE MANHATTAN PROJECTS VOLUME 1 (TPB)

If you haven't mumbled a rhetorical "what the..." to yourself at least seven times by the end of this book, you're not paying enough attention. Not that we'd blame you: *Manhattan Projects* is weird and a bit difficult to follow at times, but between its manic colour palette, almost immature (yet absolutely fitting) line work and creepy-as-hell storyline, there's some real magic at work here. Don't expect to come away with any sort of good feelings beyond the firm belief that this is going somewhere, but this is a must-read for anyone who's bored of the mainstream, mundane super-hero stuff.

Supplier: Cosmic Comics
 Website: www.cosmiccomics.co.za
 RRP: R199



THE SUPERIOR SPIDER-MAN (HC)

Spidey is one of those heroes that borders the irritating at times: he's a smart-ass, but there's always been a depth to the character that has made him intriguing. *Superior Spider-Man* takes that cheeky boy charm and concept of a heavily layered character and pushes both concepts to the extreme. It features a mix of classic comic book references and writing with a bold new take on the hero's journey, and is blissfully easy to recommend to anyone who's ever enjoyed a comic book.

Supplier: Cosmic Comics
 Website: www.cosmiccomics.co.za
 RRP: R399



TECHNEWS

KNOW YOUR TECHNOLOGY

OPENGL ES

A subset of the OpenGL API for rendering 2D and 3D computer graphics. It is designed for embedded systems like smartphones, computer tablets, video game consoles and PDAs. The API is cross-language and multi-platform. There is no equivalent to OpenGL libraries like GLUT or GLU for OpenGL ES. OpenGL ES is managed by the non-profit technology consortium Khronos Group.

RENDERMAN

Developed by Pixar Animation Studios to describe three-dimensional scenes and turn them into digital photorealistic images. It is Pixar's technical specification for a standard communications protocol between modelling programs and rendering programs capable of producing photorealistic-quality images. Similar in concept to PostScript but for describing 3D scenes rather than 2D page layouts, modelling programs which understand the RenderMan Interface protocol can send data to rendering software which implements the RenderMan Interface.

RENDERWARE

RenderWare is a 3D API and graphics-rendering engine used in video games, Active Worlds, and some VRML browsers. RW was developed by Criterion Software Limited (which used to be a wholly owned subsidiary of Canon but is now owned by Electronic Arts). It originated in the era of software rendering on PCs prior to the appearance of GPUs, competing with other libraries such as Argonaut's BRender and RenderMorphics' Reality Lab (the latter was acquired by Microsoft and became Direct3D).

WEBGL

A JavaScript API for rendering interactive 3D graphics and 2D graphics within any compatible web browser without the use of plug-ins. WebGL is integrated completely into all the web standards of the browser allowing GPU accelerated usage of physics, image processing and effects as part of the web page.

SAPPHIRE HD 7990

As AMD prepares to launch themselves into the next generation of video cards, now seems like a fitting time to bid farewell to the possibly ill-conceived but no-doubt extremely powerful HD 7990. With dual GPUs and a staggering 6GB of memory, there's very little that can stand against this gigantic video card.
www.corex.co.za | R11,999



PALIT GTX TITAN

NVIDIA's heavy-hitting single-GPU card marks the pinnacle of the 700-series, and is (currently, at least) the most powerful card from the green team. 6GB of 384-bit memory arm this card along with an impressive 2,688 CUDA cores.
www.tvr.co.za | R13,999



DID YOU KNOW?

Internet Solutions (IS) provided the Internet connectivity to the NAG LAN @ rAge, which was held in Johannesburg in October this year.

- A 1Gbps link was provided, and gaming traffic peaked at 975Mbps. The weekend's average was 890Mbps.
- The top sites breakdown of traffic included Steam, Microsoft Update, YouTube, and local gaming servers.
- Latency to South African gaming servers ranged between 4 and 10ms.
- The traffic per IP varied from 200Mbps at low demand times to approximately 7Mbps at peak load.

26TB

BY THE NUMBERS

The overall volume of Internet traffic served by IS during the NAG LAN @ rAge 2013 was 26TB, which consisted of 21.3TB downloaded, and 4.6TB uploaded.

Mash Pit

EMTEC DC COMICS 8GB FLASH DRIVES

If super heroes are your thing then you simply must have one of these flash drives. www.emtec-international.com | R299



RIKOMAGIC MINI PC MK802 IV

Turn your dumb TV into a smart one with this tiny Android PC. It's loaded up with a quad core cpu and 2GB of RAM, and features built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth. Use it to turn your PC into a media centre, stream from YouTube or Twitch.tv, browse the Web or even play a few games. This is a very slick piece of technology. www.rikomagic.co.za | R1,299



CAR CHARGER HUB

If you spend a lot of time in your car and you need to charge more than one electrical device at a time, then this USB and twin socket car accessory will solve all your problems. www.mantality.co.za | R105



"We must embrace the data explosion to ensure that our customers can embrace the latest that technology has to offer"

Ms Erna Korff, Telkom's Managing Executive for Consumer Marketing.

The do Gaming add-on, available for R49 per month, allows you to apply for uncapped data for 30 days to activate on major gaming platforms and servers such as PlayStation Network, Xbox LIVE, Battle.net, Steam, Origin and do Gaming servers. This offer can be used for online gaming, downloading a patch or downloading a game without the data being deducted from in-bundle data.

DREAMMACHINE

This month the Dream Machine returns to the X79 platform, because of the Intel Core i7 4960X CPU. It's overall the fastest CPU available on the market catering to the most extreme users. The motherboard therefore returns to our old favourite, the ASUS Rampage IV Extreme. That is, until we can get our hands on the Rampage IV Extreme Black Edition and see if it's any better. Other than that nothing else changes. The price of the Intel machine is higher, but the performance is better as well.



PSU
Cooler Master Silent Pro M2 1500Watt PSU
R3,499 / www.coolermaster.com



GRAPHICS
EVGA GTX 780 Lightning
R9,999 / www.evga.com



OS DRIVE
OCZ Vector 256GB SSD
R3,799 / www.ocz.com



STORAGE DRIVE
Seagate Barracuda 3TB
R1,699 / www.seagate.com



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



DISPLAY
ASUS VG248QE
R5,999 / 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
Plantronics GameCom Commander
R4,569 / www.gamersgear.co.za



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

New!

Intel

Intel Core i7 4960X
R13,999 / www.intel.com

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

16GB quad channel DDR3 2,666 MHz memory
R4,999 / www.corsair.com

New!

Intel Dream Machine:
R65,906

UNLOCKED FX PROCESSOR AMD

AMD

AMD FX 8350
R2,699 / www.amd.com

ASUS Crosshair V Formula-Z
R2,799 / www.asus.com

Corsair Vengeance Pro
2,666MHz C11 16GB Kit
R3,999 / www.corsair.com

AMD Dream Machine:
R51,406



HARDWIRED Fragment

AMD set the Internet on fire when it announced their new rendering API in the form of Mantle. Not since 3Dfx and GLIDE have we seen an API/ICD show up exclusively for an ASIC. Yet, almost 18 years later, this is exactly what we have. The reason for it are the same as before – performance.

Wanting more performance for the underlying silicon isn't bad in itself. In fact it's good, and both OpenGL and DirectX have some overheads that developers would rather not have. Mantle, while great in principle, could potentially divide the gaming community in half. As it is, the division in the industry has already begun. Soon after *Battlefield 4* was announced to take advantage of Mantle for AMD GPUs, NVIDIA followed suit with *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* and *Watch Dogs*. Having spent in the region of \$5 million USD for NVIDIA exclusive features, this is only an example of things to come.

If you think this is no different from before with PhysX, you'd be sadly mistaken. This is only the tip of the iceberg. It'll only get worse in future if Mantle proves to be a hit. It may even

“Wanting more performance for the underlying silicon isn't bad in itself. In fact it's good, and both OpenGL and DirectX have some overheads that developers would rather not have.”

lead to another API for the competition. In which case, we are back to the mid- to late-nineties with mini drivers. This isn't an ideal situation for anyone, and is the reason why OpenGL and DirectX were needed; a unified API that is agnostic of any hardware underneath it. Sure it's not as fast as it could be, but that's a sacrifice needed to make it as flexible as possible. It is this very high abstraction layer that affords it this usability.

When comparing DirectX 9 to DirectX 11.2 so much has changed and the performance is dramatically increased. These changes will continue to happen, but if we have a new API to contend with it just may splinter the progress that has been made by Microsoft, hardware vendors and developers in leveraging the API.

As always, if you have speed, instead of rendering 200fps as opposed to 70fps, you use the additional performance to add graphical features. Hence you still keep your 70fps, but the rendered image is much better with more polygons, better textures, lighting etc. This in turn would cause a graphics detail difference between any two vendors. The problem here is that it clearly makes it necessary to buy a specific graphics card to get the best experience out of a title.

In a single horse race, this may not be a problem, but for every developer that AMD pays, NVIDIA can pay as well. After all, they are the more cash rich company. Not only that, but this could apply to Intel as well. Therefore, it becomes a competition about who has the deepest pockets. In the end, we could end up with un-optimized games for a specific GPU and one overly hand-tuned for the competing hardware.

Once again, Mantle is potentially a great API. My qualm with it is not in its technical wizardry. It is however in what it may lead to. Only time will tell how this situation will play out, but thus far it has already shown signs of stress. Any technology that is completely closed within an open platform is more than likely to run into problems, or at least cause them. This one we will all have to watch with a close eye. The real effects of all this will be felt perhaps in the next generation of graphics cards. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

The Lazy Gamer's Guide

Gamedias gaming peripherals

Gamedias is a relatively unknown brand in the local scene, but they're entering this market with an impressive selection of gaming peripherals with aggressive styling and what looks to be a solid understanding of what gamers want. The cool ancient Greek names don't hurt, either.

Website www.esquire.co.za

RRP Hermes keyboard – R1,399 / Zeus mouse – R899
Nyx mouse mat – R249 / Eros headset – R749

NYX

The box claims that the Nyx Speed features a non-slip surface, but we found that despite its enthusiastically cross-hatched rubber under-surface, that wasn't exactly the case. Despite this little issue, the Nyx feels great. Its large surface area and thick padding make it comfortable to rest on and keeps your mouse moving freely. We did however find that the mat was rolled up perhaps a little too tightly in its packaging, which creates unwanted ripples across its surface when laid out flat.

ZEUS

The Zeus gaming mouse certainly looks the part, with about a million buttons and adjustable grips. We found the adjustments to be pretty ineffectual though, but at least there's a bit of tweaking available. Specs-wise, this is certainly an impressive piece with a resolution of up to 8,200 dpi and 1,000MHz polling rate. It features a braided cable for added longevity and overall feels pretty solid despite being built entirely of plastic.



SUMMARY

PROS

- Decent prices
- They look the part

CONS

- Inconsistent build quality

ALTERNATIVES

- Logitech peripherals
- Razer peripherals
- SteelSeries peripherals

EROS

If we had received the Eros headset five years ago we would've called it gaudy, but nowadays we think it's fair to say that it's just on the slightly loud side without being too flagrant. In terms of build quality we're a little concerned, as this set showed signs of sloppy machining with a few rough edges and misaligned contours. We'd like to think that these issues are purely cosmetic, as the rest of the unit seems pretty solid and well designed.

HERMES

If you've ever looked down at your keyboard and thought "damn, I need a bigger wrist rest" then the Hermes should be just what you need. This mammoth keyboard features a full set of Cherry MX mechanical keys as well as 13 additional programmable keys. It's solid but surprisingly not all that heavy, and includes full back-lighting and USB/audio inputs that run through its chunky braided cable.



INTEL X79

PRICE

On the X79 platform CPUs range in price between R3,999 to as much as R12,999. On the pricing front, the X79 platform doesn't offer much flexibility or choice as the price difference between the three available CPUs is massive. The 4930K sits neatly between the two SKUs at roughly R7,499.

MOTHERBOARDS

X79 motherboards are largely inferior and have been so since 2011 when the platform first debuted. The only viable options for gamers and power users are the boards from ASUS and a single one from EVGA (X79 Dark). The rest have peculiar issues that have plagued them since they first hit retail. Careful consideration and caution needs to be exercised here as

buying the wrong motherboard could lead to headaches and frustrations.

TECHNOLOGY

Both platforms offer 22nm CPUs. However, the X79 CPUs are a generation behind, so that means fewer native SATA 6Gbps connectors, no native USB 3.0 (all motherboards use a 3rd party controller) and for the most part spotty PCIe 3.0 support. Yes, all 3rd generation Core i7 CPUs support PCIe 3.0 but currently NVIDIA graphics cards will force PCIe 2.0 on the chipset. A future driver has been promised which will enable the 3.0 spec but thus far it has not materialized. With that said, the X79 platform has 40 PCIe lanes which means three-way and four-way graphics configurations do not need a multiplexing chip. Thus, multi-GPU

performance should be inherently faster, especially with three or more GPUs.

PERFORMANCE

Ivy Bridge-E CPUs may be a generation behind what Haswell offers, but that difference is, for the most part, academic, since these perform identically for the same clock speed. The miniscule deficit that Ivy Bridge-E suffers against Haswell is often only in the single threaded benchmarks or ones that rely heavily on cache and memory latency when you step into multi graphics performance scaling, multi-threaded workloads and where memory bandwidth is key. The advantage shifts dramatically to the Ivy Bridge CPUs, capable of handling significantly larger workloads than all CPUs available on the Z87 chipset.

Intel X79

VS

Intel Z87



"This chipset is backed up by the most advanced motherboards the industry has ever seen."



Intel X79

"Ivy Bridge-E CPUs may be a generation behind what Haswell offers, but that difference is, for the most part, academic..."

This month in Versus we are looking at Intel's newest platforms and CPUs. The slightly older but more mainstream Haswell (Z87), and the newest Ivy Bridge-E CPU (X79) and its related technologies. We'd normally not compare these two, but for the first time they do have a point of intersection between the Core i7 4770K and the Core i7 4820K. This crossover in pricing has made either platform a viable option for gamers and power users alike. We detail the differences between the two, which should help you make the best decision as to which direction to take. Whatever it is you buy, you'll have good performance and a lifespan that is about the same.

INTEL Z87

PRICE

CPUs on this platform start from R1,800 all the way to R4,200. The spread isn't too large by comparison, but it does offer far more options that cater to every single price point there could be within reason. For most power users who will not bother with overclocking the 4770 should do the trick, but since the price difference between this CPU and the K variant is about R300 at most, most people will opt for the 4770K which is for the most part on par or a little faster than the 4820K on the X79 platform.

MOTHERBOARDS

This chipset is backed up by the most advanced motherboards the industry has ever seen. The quality of products from just about every reputable vendor is amazing and you'll be hard pressed to find a bad motherboard. They are all better than their previous generation Z77 counterparts and the pricing has stayed about the same. Going

with any motherboard here should ensure you solid performance and reliability. The audio solutions on the latest boards are also remarkable.

TECHNOLOGY

These CPUs are built on a familiar 22nm tri-gate process. They are for the most part just as warm, if not more so, than their predecessors, despite the lower TDP. There isn't much added to these CPUs that makes them different save for a few power saving features that are not relevant for most desktop users, but have massive implications for mobile devices. What is worth noting however is that the integrated GPU on the Haswell CPUs is much faster than what Ivy Bridge offered before, in the order of 2x the speed in some instances. That doesn't mean you'll be able to play all your games using this GPU though, as it is nowhere near the needed performance to game comfortably with great

graphics quality. PCIe lanes are also limited to 20, so three-way graphics or more is always going to need a multiplexing chip which will rob you of performance because of the additional latency. It isn't much but that mixed in with only a dual channel controller means you should avoid three-way graphics on this platform where possible.

PERFORMANCE

You're looking at Ivy Bridge-like performance here, with 5% better numbers at the most. The changes in Haswell are more centred around economical use of space, (die space and external), manufacturing costs and the like. As such, if you're looking for a huge boost in performance (over the Z77 platform and its CPUs), it will not be there. The much improved memory controller will allow you much higher speeds than before, which will aid in synthetic tests. However, that's about the only place where such numbers are useful. **NAG**



SPECS

CORE
22nm Ivy Bridge-E

FREQUENCY
3600MHz (4GHz Turbo)

CACHE
16.9MB Total (15MB L3)

TDP
130W

PLATFORM
LGA 2011 (X79)



Intel Core i7 4960X

Manufacturer Intel **Website** www.intel.com **RRP** R13,999

Intel's Ivy Bridge-E has finally arrived after what seemed to be an eternity spent with SNB-E. With the recent Haswell launch in the middle of this year, not much was said or expected from Intel's last CPU family to run on the X79 platform. Fortunately though, it turns out that Ivy Bridge-E is actually a lot more interesting from a user point of view than Haswell.

Technically it isn't as complicated with an integrated voltage controller and the like, but it does benefit from all that was learned with the platform and CPUs since 2011 when the platform showed up initially.

Take for instance the improved Bclk capability. Previously, the ability to use the 1.25, 1.66 and 2.5X ratio on SNB-E was academic as it hardly ever worked on any motherboard. That meant it was a game of CPU multiplier overclocking and that was it. For all intents and purposes, it was confined to a 100MHz Bclk. This time around 1.25 and 1.66 work regularly and can be used for opening up a much wider range of memory overclocking frequencies that were previously unavailable.

This is important because the IMC within the new family of CPUs is much improved. Officially DDR3 frequencies of 1,867MHz are supported, but once again that is academic. Much like how the maximum officially supported frequency for Haswell CPUs is 1,333/1,600MHz yet we've seen validations past 4,200MHz. With the IB-E, Intel stipulates 1,867MHz which officially makes it the fastest IMC Intel has developed thus far. How this

relates to real memory speeds remains to be seen, but we've already seen validation results above 4GHz on this platform.

Needless to say, the IMC is clearly improved and borrows many advances from the Haswell silicon even though it's based on the older Ivy Bridge architecture.

You may be wondering why there's so much focus on memory controllers, base clocks and frequencies with this CPU, more so than with any other CPU before. The reason is quite simple really. For normal everyday use, there isn't going to be too much of a difference between the 3970X and the 4960X at all. In fact any performance differences are likely to be as a result of the 100MHz clock boost the 4960X has over its predecessor. Unless you're an ardent overclocker you'll be hard pressed to upgrade to the 4960X if you already own any of the previous CPUs.

However, for the enthusiast who will settle for nothing but the ultimate in performance, it makes for a worthwhile change. For several reasons, over and above the much improved IMC and Bclk tuning you should consider this CPU. PCIe certification and conformity is finally up to scratch with proper PCIe 3.0 support. Something that was always a hit and miss affair with the 3000 series CPUs. It may not seem important, but consider that many people who run multi-GPU setups, especially the high end configurations, would be limited to the 2.0 signaling scheme which would rob you of performance especially at high resolutions. (1440p and upwards.)

While the number of lanes does not increase from the normal 40, the effective bandwidth has been doubled with just this one change.

Back to memory again, the new CPU and the rest of the family support XMP 1.3 which brings the support in line with what Haswell CPUs support. Those 2,600MHz sets of memory begin to make sense on this platform unlike before. On our particular CPU we had a very good sample with what seemed to be an exceptional IMC that could reach speeds in excess of 3,000MHz with all channels occupied. Not all CPUs will be capable of this feat, but the CPUs you buy off the shelf should all be capable of at least 2,667MHz. The additional bandwidth provided by the memory not only decreases the latency for the 15MB L3 cache, but helps overall 3D performance as well. For the power users and obviously competitive overclockers, this would justify the purchase over the 2nd generation Core i7 CPUs.

TDP for the 4960X has decreased as one would imagine. No longer on the 32nm process, the new CPU uses the same 22nm tri-gate node that is present on Haswell CPUs. So TDP has gone from 150W to 130W, however that isn't entirely because of the node. What has happened with this



“You may be wondering why there’s so much focus on memory controllers, base clocks and frequencies with this CPU..”

generation of CPUs is that Intel is no longer harvesting 8-core Xeon silicon and fusing off two cores to make the desktop parts. This had been the practice for several generations but for the first time, these are made on separate 6-core silicon. While it’s true that the fused silicon drew almost no power, they still contributed to a larger die space and possibly higher temperatures and hence power draw. So even with a base clock that is 100MHz higher, (the Turbo frequency has not changed) the TDP is lower.

Clock frequency scaling is something that first appeared as an anomaly on these CPUs. Initial testing on early boards suggested that these CPUs were much warmer than their SNB-E counterparts. Not unexpected at first, but it was curious why a smaller node, smaller die and lower TDP in addition to operation VID would lead to a warmer CPU. Manufacturing technicalities aside, it seemed counterproductive for what it was Intel was trying to achieve.

Initial theories were that Intel had decided to use thermal paste between the core and the HIS instead of solder as is the case with Haswell CPUs. It turned out this was not the case and Intel has used solder as with the previous CPUs. The truth about the apparently high CPU temperatures is actually motherboard related. At this point, relatively early in this generation’s life span, motherboards are going to make a bigger difference than on any other platform. Most motherboard vendors failed to deliver functional X79 motherboards for the most part, in fact it was only ASUS that had a lineup of boards which could claim to have virtually no issues with their offerings and as such, if one inspects the overclocking record submissions, you’ll find that ASUS is ahead of

every other vendor by an order of magnitude.

With the release of the 4960X and its lesser brethren, there has come an opportunity for motherboard vendors to try and make competent motherboards for the platform. The 4960X and the 4930K (reviewed at a later date) in particular are more sensitive to motherboard differences than the 4820K. For instance, on a very good motherboard, the operating voltage for a CPU may be as low as 1.085V for the normal 3.6GHz operation, whereas on a lesser board it’s as high as 1.2V which obviously results in a warmer CPU.

Tests done on the second board and others of its caliber would lead one to think the 4960X is especially warm when that’s not entirely true. Having said that, all this relates to the enthusiast more than it does the regular user, but then again this is an enthusiast part above all else. We are impressed with the 4960X, more so than we have been by any CPU of late, including the 4770K and as such, we are making this our new Dream Machine CPU. This is undoubtedly the best CPU Intel has released in a long time.

- Neo Sibeko

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: INTEL CORE I7 3930K

3DMark 11 physics	13,208 11,154
Wprime 1024	137.827 160.885
Cinebench 11.5	10.89 11.5
AIDA 64 CPU Queen	62,675 55,214
AIDA 64 FPU VP8	5,916 3,774



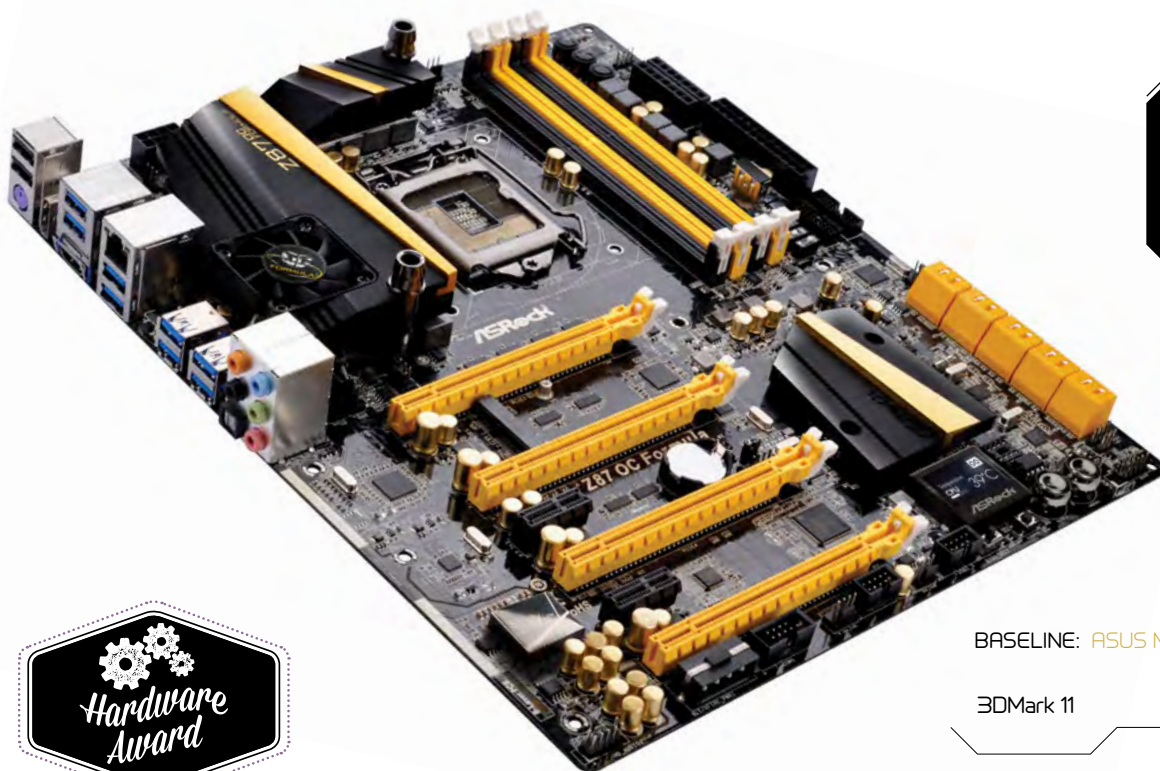
Intel once again makes the fastest desktop CPU ever built.

PLUS

Much improved IMC / Improved overclocking / More flexible tuning options

MINUS

Expensive / Not much faster than Sandy Bridge-E



SPECS

CHIPSET
Intel Z87

MEMORY
4x 240-pin DDR3

CPU SUPPORT
LGA 1150

EXPANSION
4x PCI-E 16X,
2x PCI-E 1X

SIZE
E-ATX



ASRock Z87 OC Formula

Supplier Compitum **Website** www.asrock.com **RRP** R4,399

In a market where good isn't good enough anymore, ASRock has found itself in a position where last year's Z77 OC Formula could have possibly set the bar too high for them. After all, this was ASRock's first real overclocking/enthusiast motherboard. The company executed exceptionally well and even today it remains a firm favourite amongst competitive overclockers.

So what would you offer in addition to great overclocking? Had ASRock produced an identical board with a different chipset, it would have been acceptable. However, at a time where it's increasingly if near impossible to set yourself apart, ASRock has managed to fit even more into the Formula series by completely re-designing the motherboard. What we end up with is a refined offering that certainly hit the ground running, offering blistering performance and features.

Starting with the BIOS, not much has changed. It's a little quicker to navigate and more responsive to keyboard input. The layout is still the same and you're dealing with identical features for the most part. The only distinction you'll find is where there are options to tune Haswell specific parameters such as VCCIN and the like. Other than that it's a BIOS you will be familiar with if you've used its predecessor. You'll be able to max out memory and CPU overclocking as you would on the Maximus VI Extreme or Z87X-OC. There may be a few MHz differences between all three boards, but essentially you'll not get better performance or a higher OC from purchasing the other two

motherboards. When you buy the Z87 OC Formula you're already experiencing the best that the platform can offer.

Physically, there are some nice changes to the board. Here, we must commend ASRock for daring to do what every other vendor said was unfeasible or impossible. Competitive overclockers have always asked for some kind of conformal coating on the motherboard and on graphics cards to help prevent condensation damage while overclocking. These suggestions were always met with one or several reasons as to why it would not happen. ASRock has shown that this is very much possible and has provided just that on the Z87 OC Formula. As always, all kinds of coatings are a second line of defence. Any overclocker worth their salt should seal their board for sub-zero cooling. The coating that ASRock has provided allows for quick binning of CPUs and perhaps overclocking with dry ice using quick and dirty preparation methods. This should keep you overclocking for an hour or two depending on how humid your environment is.

That aside, ASRock has included what they term Purity Sound. This hardware solution offers vastly superior audio via a familiar Realtek ALC1150 controller. It is supported by several components including, but not limited to a TI NE5532 600 ohm headphone amplifier and second one as well used as a differential amplifier. The audio circuitry is housed on a different PCB layer, so it's shielded from the rest of the component

noise. ASRock doesn't claim to offer the best audio solution on the market, that honour belongs to the GIGABYTE Sniper 5 boards, but those cost significantly more as well.

What ASRock offers you here, is better audio than most of their previous motherboards if not all, but with that, unsurpassed overclocking capabilities and potential. The Z87 OC Formula treads a fine line and does so exceptionally. It is without a doubt one of the three top Z87 boards on the market. This board fits perfectly between the Z87X-OC and the Maximus VI Extreme. In price it's in-between and offers a mix of what both boards have, with the additional conformal coating. Definitely consider this motherboard, it really is wonderful.

- Neo Sibeko

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: ASUS MAXIMUS VI EXTREME

3DMark 11 14,024
13,258

Cinebench 11.5 10.04
10.17

AIDA 64 copy 32,805MB/s
32,112MB/s



A near perfect motherboard from ASRock. If you're in the market, you should definitely buy this one.

PLUS

Build/component quality / Overclocking features / Looks great

MINUS

Costs more than the previous Z77 model / ASUS and GIGABYTE offer better alternatives



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SPECS

CORE
Tahiti XT (28nm)
1,000GHz

PROCESSORS
2,048

RENDER OUTPUTS
32

MEMORY
3,072MB GDDR5
6.0GHz
(288.4GB/sec)

API
DirectX 11
OpenGL 4.
OpenCL 1.x
Mantle

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: EVGA GTX TITAN

3DMARK - Fire-Strike **9,116**

CATZILLA - Tiger **13,483**

HITMAN - Absolution **55.84**
(DX11 ultra detail)
4xAA: **68.97 fps**

AMD R9 280X

Supplier AMD Website www.amd.com RRP TBA

AMD has taken a leaf from NVIDIA's playbook and re-used an existing core to flesh out a new family and several SKUs from within. Unlike the GTX 760 and GTX 770 though, what AMD has done with the R9 280X is a little different.

Different in that it's actually done nothing at all. That's right. The R9 280X is identical to the Radeon HD 7970 GHz edition. That's not to say that the Tahiti XT GPU isn't great – it is – however, what we are getting here is the same graphics card with a new driver. Not even a new device ID as the older driver picks up the R9 280X as the HD 7970. This is in contrast to the GTX 770 which not only had a new device ID, but a higher clock speed, Boost 2.0, much higher memory speed, a lower price and ends up being faster than the GTX 680 it replaces by some margin.

With the R9 280X, we have the HD 7970 GHz Edition under another name. It supports AMD's new Mantle API, but then again so does every GCN based GPU on the planet. So as to why this graphics card exists, it will remain a mystery. If you're wondering why we have not divulged some specifics for this card, it's solely because the reference model is actually slower than almost all partner HD 7970 GHz cards. In fact it's slower than all of the ones we've seen. So if you have an MSI R7970 Lightning for example, or one

from Sapphire, Club3D or any other vendor, your HD 7970 GE has better out the box performance than the R9 280X. We mention this because this isn't something that happened with the GTX 770 when it replaced the 680. To date, there's no GTX 680 that is faster than the GTX 770, regardless of which version it is. This is to be expected as there are enough changes in that graphics card to warrant a new name and price. However this isn't happening here. The R9 280X is simply a price reduction on what already could be had for this price.

It's truly mind boggling how this could have come about. AMD needed only to match or slightly exceed the clock speeds of the fastest HD 7970 GHz Edition card on the market (easily doable with a 1,120MHz core) to do it. Then follow on with some high-speed memory like that which is on the GTX 770. Just that alone would have made for an exciting graphics card, but alas we are left with what we've had for over a year. Unfortunately this isn't inspiring at all.

As for the gaming bundles, for this series of cards, it's not a guarantee that there will be any. At the time of writing there had been no indication of the Never Settle bundle making its way to R9 280X graphics cards. This is forgivable given the low MSRP of \$299 USD. Having said that, the pricing here is really

going to be an issue. As what AMD is mainly selling is a low price that undercuts the GTX 770. If it retails for anything higher than the cheapest HD 7970 (non-GHz Edition) locally, then it will be a pointless card indeed (at least for the local market). What vendors can do with their iterations remains to be seen and we do have some hope of some great offerings performance wise. Until then however, we remain not only uninspired by the R9 280X but rather disappointed, especially with just how incredible the R9 29X GPUs are. (Review next issue). **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko



This is the Radeon HD 7970 GHz Edition all over again, just with what we hope is a lower price.

PLUS
Potentially low price / Dual BIOS

MINUS
AMD have done nothing here

Cooler Master Cosmos SE

Supplier Sonic Informed
Website www.cooler-master.com
RRP R2,099

You can ignore the marketing claims and posturing from Cooler Master. You don't need any of it to appreciate the Cosmos SE. Much like the Cosmos II which was our previous Dream Machine case, the SE simply sells itself. We needed only to look at it to know it's a brilliant case.

Closely inspecting it and working within it only confirmed these suspicions. If Cooler Master stopped making all other cases and simply concentrated on the Cosmos line, that would be enough to catapult them (or keep them there depending on who you ask) to the top. The design, build quality and attention to detail are simply incredible on this one.

Think of it as a smaller Cosmos II, and you'll understand a little. Unlike the Cosmos II though, it's not as intimidating as its much smaller and half the weight. The front panel isn't

as elaborate, but it does offer the same 2-port USB 3.0 connectivity, so we'll not penalize it for not having 4 USB 2.0 ports like its bigger brother. The only downside to this case is that it doesn't support E-ATX motherboards. Therefore, you'll not be able to use the latest high-end boards which have forgone 4-way graphics in favour of 3-way solutions in an E-ATX form factor. Pity, given that it's just over R2,000, which is not cheap in comparison to other cases.

Other than that, we've nothing to fault the case on. The Cosmos SE is a wonderful chassis deserving of some serious consideration if you're in the market. It'll not only last you much longer than any other part of your PC, but after all this time we never tire of marvelling at its lines. Cooler Master has done well with this one and it's a definite winner for us. **NAG - Neo Sibeko**



SPECS

MATERIAL
 Polymer, steel/
 aluminium, mesh
 front bezel, rubber

COLOUR
 Midnight black

SUPPORTED MOTHERBOARD TYPE
 Micro-ATX/ATX/
 Mini-ITX

FRONT PANEL
 2x USB 3.0
 2x USB 2.0
 Audio I/O



The Cosmos SE is a small wonder from Cooler Master. It's a fantastic case, only suffering from a slightly high price.

PLUS
 Looks amazing / Incredible build quality

MINUS
 No E-ATX support / Slightly overpriced

GT60 20D 15.6" GAMING LAPTOP






R 29,999
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- Intel Core i7-4700MQ 2.4GHz CPU
- GeForce GTX 780M 4GB GDDR5 Graphics
- 15.6" Full HD (1920 x 1080) LED Screen
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- SteelSeries Keyboard ■ Windows 8 64bit

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- GeForce GTX 765M 2GB GDDR5 Graphics
- 17.3" Full HD (1920 x 1080) LED Screen
- 8GB DDR3 RAM ■ 750GB Hard Drive
- SteelSeries Keyboard ■ Windows 8 64bit

GE60 OND 15.6" GAMING LAPTOP






R 11,299
INCLUDING VAT

FREE RAZOR KRAKEN GAMING HEADSET

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- Intel Core i5 Quad Core 2.60GHz CPU
- GeForce GTX 660M 2GB GDDR5 Graphics
- 15.6" Full HD (1920 x 1080) LED Screen
- 8GB DDR3 RAM ■ 750GB Hard Drive
- SteelSeries Keyboard ■ Windows 8 64bit



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GIGABYTE Z87X-UD3H

Supplier Rectron
Website www.gigabyte.com
RRP R2,799

Last year we gave high praise to the GIGABYTE Z77X-UD3H. It was arguably the most well rounded board from GIGABYTE at the time (or at least for the chipset) even though it was amongst the cheapest. This year however, things are a little different. The successor to that board is largely unchanged. The UEFI has been updated, but mechanically it remains near identical. That isn't a bad thing because if it's working, then there's no valid reason to change it.

This year however, with Z87 GIGABYTE has executed near perfectly from the very beginning. With products like the Z87X-OC (reviewed last issue) there's not much that can be added or improved upon. With the Z77X-UD3H, it simplified what the UP7 tried to be and had great success with it. The price was low, performance was just as good and it was a great overclocker. All these are characteristics of the Z87X-UD3H as well and as such it's an easy board to recommend. The only think in its armour or in perhaps

all of the Z87 boards outside of the GAMING series is that the Z87X-OC is just so good, it makes it difficult to look at other offerings objectively. Such is the case with this board. It's typically what you'd expect from GIGABYTE and to that end it's good. However we've now come to expect the great and merely being good is no longer cause for us to celebrate any product from the outfit.

With that said and to the UD3H's gain, there's no reason why this shouldn't be the starting point of any serious Z87 motherboard purchasing consideration. The differences between this board and it's more expensive counterparts is negligible and as such this makes for fantastic value. You'll not get a Wi-Fi or Bluetooth dongle, but we'd argue that most people who may have need of these things would have already made a plan to buy the appropriate adapters. Therefore looking at the entire Ultra Durable range, we find that the UD3H offers by far the best value for money. **NAG**
- Neo Sibeko



The Z87X-UD3H is one of the best value for money Z87 boards in GIGABYTE's entire line-up. Well worth some serious consideration, if you're looking to buy into Z87.

PLUS

Switchable BIOS / Performs well / Good value

MINUS

Not as special as Z77X-UD3H

Logitech G500s

Supplier Logitech
Website gaming.logitech.com
RRP R899



I've always liked Logitech's G5, and the G500 which eventually served as its replacement. It's a robust model of mouse with a proven, comfortable design. To accompany the launch of Logitech's new gaming-centric range of products, the respected peripheral manufacturer has now released another evolution of the model's design in the form of the G500s, and it's every bit as desirable and well manufactured as its predecessors. It still doesn't cater to lefties though. Sad times.

It boasts the same shape and button placement of the G500. Two buttons used to adjust your DPI settings on the fly are located to the top-left of the left mouse button. Back and forward thumb buttons are accompanied by a third programmable thumb button. Blue LEDs on one side of the mouse indicate your chosen sensitivity setting at a glance. Below the scroll wheel is a

button that toggles the wheel between two modes: smooth free-scrolling or more precise click-to-click scrolling.

On the underside of the mouse is a slot for the weight cartridge. Up to 27 grams of weight can be added to the G500s, using 1.7-gram and 4.5-gram weights to adjust the weight, balance and centre of gravity of the mouse to your liking. The usefulness of this feature is, as always, debatable.

The Logitech Gaming Software that's used to customise the mouse is easy to use, allowing you to import and export profiles and apply game-specific settings to the G500s. It's all stored in memory on the mouse, in case you need such a feature. Perhaps the only complaint I have to level at the G500s is that it's not much of an upgrade over the G500, with only a raised DPI ceiling to mention. Nevertheless, its overall quality and features are outstanding. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes



SPECS

SENSOR
Up to 8,200 DPI

BUTTONS
10, programmable

ACCELERATION
30 G

REPORT RATE (USB)
Up to 1,000 reports per second



Like the G5 and G500 before it, the G500s is a fantastic gaming mouse.

PLUS

Comfortable / Nice feature set

MINUS

Not much of an upgrade from the G5/G500

Sharkoon X-Tatic Pro

Supplier Esquire Technologies
Website www.sharkoon.com
RRP R1,699

I'd never actually heard of Sharkoon before being handed the X-Tatic Pro. With no clue what to expect from them, it's a pleasant surprise that they're actually a good pair of headphones.

Getting them set up is a bit of a pain, because the box is full of various cables and connectors and extensions and what Sharkoon calls the "sound control unit" – an in-line control box from which you can adjust the volume and select your desired Dolby settings. The extensive connectivity options and excessive cabling is to be expected from a headset that supports so many devices, including PC, 360 and PS3.

The set certainly looks the part, boasting sturdy construction and green lighting on the cups. It's comfortably padded and graciously lightweight too, so it won't get awkward after hours of use. Obviously your experience may differ, depending on your noggin's unique characteristics.

In terms of audio quality, it's difficult to fault the X-Tatic Pro. It can't stand up to the highest-end gaming headset offerings, which is understandable given that it's about half the price of some of the sets at the top end, but it's nonetheless got plenty to offer. Gaming performance is great (there's a detachable microphone for voice chat as well), and it works similarly well for movies. Music can get a bit iffy at times, because depending on your Dolby settings and the volume at which you play your music, certain frequencies become muddled, tinny or disappointingly drowned out by everything else.

Overall, the X-Tatic Pro is a respectable sonic performer. I imagine that some people may prefer to stick to the more well-known brands out there, but if you can get the X-Tatic Pro at a decent price, it's definitely worth considering. **NAG**
- Dane Remendes



FREQUENCY RESPONSE

20Hz – 20kHz

IMPEDANCE

32 ohms

SPEAKERS

Eight (four in each earpiece)

CABLE LENGTH

4.1 metres

SPECS



The X-Tatic Pro is an excellent all-round headset.

PLUS

Clear sound / Comfortable / Lightweight

MINUS

Several thousand cables / Occasional dips in audio quality

astrum
 experience the difference

Feel The Power XSERIES MULTIMEDIA SPEAKERS

X-723U

2.1CH MULTIMEDIA SPEAKER



Total RMS Power: 80W | Subwoofer: 6.5" | S/N Ratio: 70db
 Supports AUX,USB, SD, MMC

X-523U

2.1CH MULTIMEDIA SPEAKER



Total RMS Power: 60W | Subwoofer: 5.25" | S/N Ratio: 65db
 Supports AUX,USB, SD, MMC

X-323U

2.1CH MULTIMEDIA SPEAKER



Total RMS Power: 29W | Subwoofer: 5" | S/N Ratio: 62db
 Supports AUX,USB, SD, MMC



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 Fax: (086) 510 5986
 email: dbn@astrum.co.za

www.astrum.co.za



Corsair Obsidian 750D

Supplier Rectron
Website www.corsair.com
RRP R1,899

Corsair's 750D, if you haven't figured it out, is a smaller version of the 900D. Perhaps the word "smaller" isn't appropriate here as the 750D is huge. In fact it's just as big as the largest cases that other vendors offer. It is similar to the 900D in many ways, but sacrifices some of the space for a more palatable price. It should be somewhere near half the price by the time it lands on our shores.

It may not be able to fit as many radiators or those giant 480mm units, but the 750D does well enough still. At the top you can install a single 360mm radiator, a 280mm in the front and a 240mm at the bottom. Where water-cooling capacity is concerned it has all its bases covered. Air-cooling is obviously plentiful as well, although Corsair doesn't include as many fans as we would have liked. In fact, it would have perhaps been better to have space for a large 200mm fan at the top

for exhausting hot air. The included 140mm exhaust fan, while adequate, will struggle to ventilate all the heat when the system is crammed with graphics cards and hard drives.

Internally, you'll get all the space you need to fit as many as eight hard drives which should be plenty for even the most demanding users. We would have appreciated a tool less design for all bays, but this is reserved only for the SSD cages. Still, it's better than not having anything at all. In comparison to the 900D, the 750D more easily justifies its price.

As with most cases, we lament the absence of 4x USB 3.0 ports but once again, this is forgivable because just about every other case on the market suffers from this. Overall, this is a respectable case. It's not as convincing as the 900D, but it is certainly a lot cheaper and well worth your consideration.

NAG
 - Neo Sibeko



SPECS

MATERIAL
 Brushed aluminium/Steel

COLOUR
 Black

SUPPORTED MOTHERBOARD TYPE
 Micro-ATX/ATX/E-ATX/XL-ATX

FRONT PANEL
 2xUSB3.0, 2xUSB 2.0

7 The 750D is a more affordable version of the 900D. It may not be as overwhelming, but it's a good chassis.

PLUS
 Very spacious / Pleasure to install a system into

MINUS
 Looks plain / Could do with more features

Skullcandy PLYR 1

Supplier Luksbrands
Website www.luksbrands.co.za
RRP R2,999

It's taken some time, but Skullcandy eventually realised that a lot of people like their headsets, and a lot of people play video games, so maybe it'd be a clever idea to design headsets specifically for gamers. The PLYR 1 represents the pinnacle of these efforts, adding in additional features on top the cheaper PLYR 2. For the asking price, it comes with everything you'd expect: 7.1 virtual surround, digital in/output, USB charging and even a handy place for the headset to hang out when it's not in use. Perhaps the only oversight is the lack of a 3.5mm analogue audio cable in the box, although there is support for that input.

The PLYR 1 is made entirely of plastic, which lends this set an overall cheapish look and feel. This construction also means the whole device is incredibly light, and soft foam

is thankfully used for both the ear cups and headband which means it's comfortable to wear during even extended gaming sessions. As a side-effect, there's very little in the way of isolation from outside noises, but this set's ample volume (which is especially impressive for a wireless unit) will ensure that this is seldom an issue.

On the device itself you have a few controls, including a slider to switch between three EQ presets (bass-heavy, treble-heavy and balanced) as well as a finicky four-way analogue rocker to adjust overall volume as well as voice/game audio balance. Two separate controls would be preferred. The package is completed with a folding boom mic that automatically mutes as it snaps into stowage position – a slick feature that we hope to see more of in the future.

NAG
 - Geoff Burrows



SPECS

INPUT
 Optical Toslink / 3.5mm analogue

DRIVER SIZE
 40mm

IMPEDANCE
 29 ohms

SPL
 104dB (+/- 5dB)

THD
 20hz-20khz

THD
 < 0.1%

8 The combination of solid performance and high levels of comfort make this pricey set worth the cost, but it's difficult to shake the feeling that this plastic headset looks a bit cheap.

PLUS
 Good performance / Very comfortable / Charging via USB

MINUS
 Looks cheap / No 3.5mm cable included

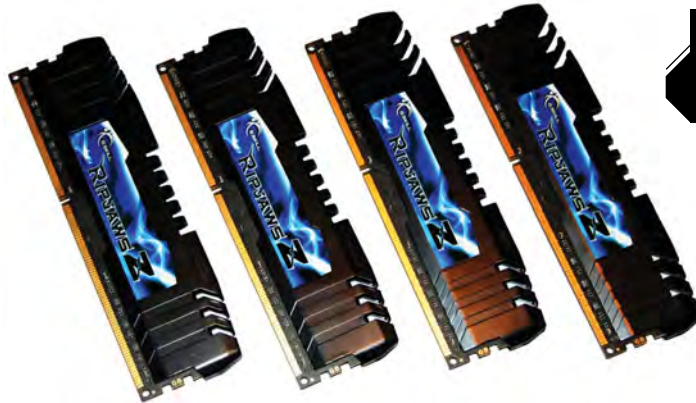
G.Skill RipjawsZ F3-19200CL9Q 16GBZMD

Supplier Compitum **Website** www.gskill.com **RRP** R2,450

G.Skill has re-released their quad channel kits with the introduction of Intel's new Ivy Bridge-E CPUs. Most of these kits are familiar much like this one. There are new memory modules in the form of the TridentX family, but those we will look at in future. Right now, the first quad channel kit that G.Skill provided us with is a familiar RipJawsZ set.

Configured as 4x4GB modules in a low profile heat sink, these are classic G.Skill DIMMs. The memory does get warm as it isn't using the more efficient cooler as present on the Trident kits, but given the lower operating speed this isn't an issue at all. When we overclocked the memory and fed 1.7V to it, it did heat up a little so some cooling is advised. Fortunately, G.Skill does provide two cooling fan assemblies with this kit and that will help keep temperatures low. We must express how disappointed we are in G.Skill's cooling solution though for the use of the old 4-pin Molex connector. It's unnecessary as a 3 or 4-pin fan head will do, as it means you have to use a legacy plug on your PSU. Often this will be the only component in your system that needs this connector.

Other than that it's your typical G.Skill affair. X.M.P works just fine and will configure you for the right speed, but we



FREQUENCY
2,400MHz
TIMINGS
9-11-11-31

SPECS

must advise you that it is perhaps best to tune this memory yourself. The default X.M.P settings are very relaxed and that may rob you of performance. By manually configuring our set, we were able to reach 2,600MHz at 10-12-12-35. Despite having to loosen the CAS latency, this setting will provide much better performance even at the reference voltage. Anything above that proved to need 1.7V and higher, but only yielding minimal gains. As such the sweet spot remains 2,600MHz at C10. Depending on price this may be a worthwhile kit to buy. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko



A decent set of memory that is better suited to optimized timings rather than frequency.

PLUS

Will run 2,600MHz with some adjustments / Will tighten down reasonably

MINUS

Not much frequency headroom / Trident kits are much better

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The gamer parent's guide to gaming

So I've reached that age / relationship status / sense of encroaching doom reminding me that I have a lot of stuff and nobody to deny it to after I'm dead when my boyfriend and I have started discussing hypothetical kids¹ [Let me jump in here and save you a lot of money, time and aggravation – don't do it, Ed]. Part of that inevitably also includes a lot of talking about responsible parenting, and part of that inevitably also includes a lot of talking about video games, impressionable preteens, and the implications of how these things intersect on a Venn diagram of responsible parenting.

Because, honestly, I'm not one of those people who read tabloid moral panic-generating headlines about games training children to be serial murderers and declare smugly that, "It's obviously rubbish because I grew up playing games, and I'm not a serial murderer". I mean, I did, but games back then were not as, let's say, ethically questionable as so many games are now².

It's not even that I have a real problem with those sorts of games – actually, the more ethically questionable, the more interesting they usually are, and

the more I like them – but I do think that 6-year olds who blame the missing biscuits on conveniently invisible friends shouldn't be making impulsive decisions about whether or not a hooker gets to live after she's done rendering her professional services in *GTA V*. The spectrum of make-believe is more expansive and complicated than some people might realise, and developmental psychology is more than a random accumulation of syllables.

A lot of gamers are quick to deny the possibility of any causal link between games and negative behaviour and it's a subject I've covered previously so I won't go into it again, but I think most of us can agree that exposing kids who've not yet worked out the subtleties of right and wrong to explicit depictions of gratuitous and consequence-free violence is a dubious proposition.

That said, I'm not convinced that completely banning mature content altogether is a realistic solution either, and not just because I was also once a kid who knew better than the grown-ups anyway. There's a lot of space between "yes" and "no", and it mostly involves supervision and an on-going dialogue about context – for example, explaining

1 Very hypothetical. On a baby readiness scale from 1 to 10, I'd rate myself somewhere around "It's like in that movie *Alien*, except you're supposed to like it and spend money on it after it explodes out of your chest. They do come out of your chest, right?"

2 Except *Bouncing Babies*. I'm still not entirely sure if babies can bounce, but just in case, I've completed my baby bouncing training with only a few hundred thousand casualties so that's something. Maybe I've underestimated my baby readiness³.

3 Maybe not.

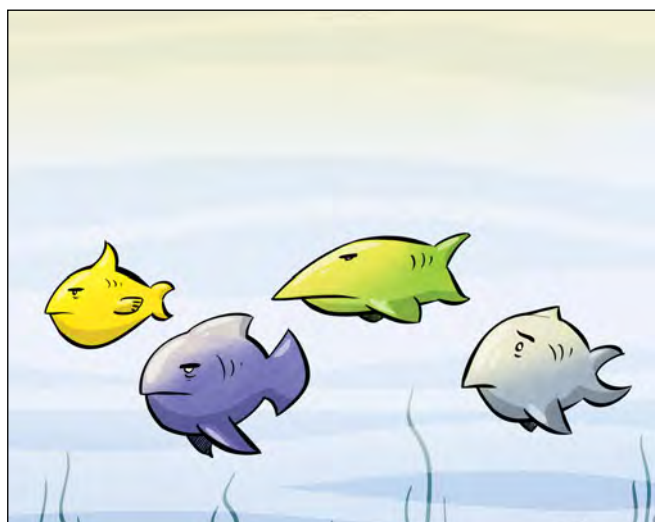
"A lot of gamers are quick to deny the possibility of any causal link between games and negative behaviour..."

that the nice lady is just doing her job and that those thugs down Grove Street are a much more sensible target because they're threatening Junior's meth business. Okay, I probably need to work on that explanation, but that's why I'm planning ahead.

The good news is that, as gamer parents, the supervision and on-going dialogue won't be quite the same dreary chore that it might have been if our kids were into sportsball or shoedancing or any of those other totally inscrutable hobbies. Unless they are, in which case, we'd have failed at responsible parenting. **NAG**
- Tarryn van der Byl

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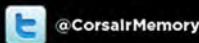
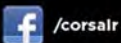
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