

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

NIAG

Vol. 16
Issue
TEN

PC / PLAYSTATION / XBOX / NINTENDO

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How Mario became the most famous character in video game history

What? You've never heard of Mario? *You lie.* Nintendo's mascot and part-time plumber is an intrinsic part of gaming. He's the butter to our bread, the cheese to our wine, the tomato sauce to our hotdog – and we thought we'd honour him by taking a look at his storied past.

32 IN SEARCH OF A HOMEWORLD

How one of the RTS genre's most beloved franchises survived multiple buyouts before finding its way back home.

You can't mention *Homeworld* to anyone at NAG without eliciting a deep, mournful sigh at the thought of how long it's been since we last had a new one. *Homeworld: Shipbreakers* aims to ease the pain. We'll explain why.

38 THE FUTURE IS NOW

Everything you need to know about the PlayStation 4. It's here! It's really here! The next generation! Can we still call it the next generation now that it's all current and stuff? Who cares – it's here!



On the DVD

DEMOS

Axis Game Factory / Chaos Domain / Goodbye Deponia
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DRIVERS

AMD Catalyst drivers 13.9 32/64-bit
NVIDIA ForceWare 331.82 WHQL 32/64-bit

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The more things change...

The next-generation has officially kicked off here in South Africa! You could argue (and I'm sure some of you will) that the Wii U did that first, but if we're talking in terms of sheer processing power then it's only just begun. Yes, PC gamers sitting there with smirks on your faces, we see you ;) Xbox One is still nowhere in sight but there's a good chance we'll see it sometime this year – hopefully in the next six months but that's just wishful thinking.

So what does this whole next-gen thing mean to you and me? For starters, we're going to see a choppy supply of games for probably this whole year while publishers figure out their stances on new IP, ports, legacy support, indie games and peripherals. At the time of writing (December 2013) there's also a distinct lack of big ticket current-gen games because everyone is so focused on the year ahead.

And, of course, the next generation brings with it a slew of rivalry nonsense from consumers and manufacturers, in which people attempt to justify their "side" in what I'm pretty sure is an industry built on having fun. Or at least, it should be. I get it: you dropped seven grand on a fancy piece of hardware and you need to justify it because there are very few noteworthy games right now, so you turn to your supposed rivals or fellow clan-mates to do just that. It's the same old story that's been going on since competing brands were first created, and it taps into a core part of human instinct in which we naturally fall into clan mentality with very little encouragement. I once read about a test in which people were simply told that they were in Team A or Team B, with absolutely no goals or objectives attached to the assignments, and



they formed competitive tendencies within minutes. We're all still a bunch of Neanderthals, really, but instead of sharpened stones and mammoth steaks, we've got iPads and PlayStations.

Regardless of your chosen camp (or camps, if you've got the dosh), I'm sure that you'll find our info-packed PS4 feature to be of interest. We've already covered the tech specs in the past so this is more of a look at the player-facing ecosystem from the controller to the games. Next month we'll kick off with a few full reviews of PS4 titles, and we'll get to the Xbox One stuff as soon as it makes sense to do so. We might even start reviewing Xbox One games before the console launches locally – not really sure yet. Feel free to drop me a mail and share your thoughts on anything and everything to do with this shift in the gaming industry.

IGN AFRICA

For those readers who haven't yet heard the news, Michael "RedTide" James, aka former editor of NAG, has launched IGN Africa. That's why he stepped out of the role of editor here and dropped me head-first in the deep end from which he emerged. This is a big deal for the whole local gaming industry, including NAG and rAge, and I'm sure you'll notice a few knock-on effects over the coming years. Our current web presence, NAG Online, will still very-much be a thing, so don't panic or think that we're shifting focus; we're merely expanding to give you even more awesome gaming content, and Michael has put the very capable Tarryn "Azimuth" van der Byl in charge of content on IGN, so you know you're in good hands.

Cheers everyone; have a great year ahead! **NAG**
-GeometriX

An advertisement for the GIGABYTE GV-N78TOC-3GD graphics card. The card is shown in a close-up, angled view, highlighting its three fans and the Windforce cooling system. The GIGABYTE logo is prominently displayed in the top left corner. Below the logo, the model number GV-N78TOC-3GD is listed, followed by the specifications WINDFORCE 3X 450W Gaming Graphics Card. The text "NAG Review Rigs Powered by GIGABYTE" is also present. The background features a stylized blue eye graphic and the word "electron" in the bottom right corner.

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***Disclaimer: Most of the letters sent to this fine publication are printed more or less verbatim (that means "we don't edit or fix them" for you slow kids at the back), so ignore any spelling or grammatical errors. It's not us... it's you.**

Letter of the Month January 2014

From: James Nevin
Subject: Ode To Gaming
Dear Ed,

Christmas day, twelve years ago: I awoke to find my first ever games console - a Sony PlayStation. Its rough gray exterior promised endless wonders and possibility. A batch of games accompanied it and I was immediately drawn to a 'Crash Team Racing'.

As I launched the game, I was transported to another world, a world where a motley array of eccentric characters fought for pole position in go-karts strapped with rockets. It was chaotic, violent and I loved it.

Gaming was with me through my entire schooling career. It granted me a premium ticket to events that could not be experienced any other way: Knight of the Old Republic let me live the life of a Jedi; Tomb Raider welcomed me to explore magnificent lost temples; Red Dead Redemption created in me sympathy for a violent criminal.

The platforms have changed, constantly evolving in an attempt to meet my insatiable desire for new and fresh

experiences. I no longer own that original PlayStation, and most of my gaming is now done with a keyboard and mouse.

I, too, have changed with the platforms. My voice dropped a few decibels, I have to shave and I now own a car. The physical and situational aging has been accompanied by emotional change: an increase in cynicism and a decrease in that childhood wonder.

In twelve days, my new PlayStation 4 is set to be delivered. Unlike with my original console, I now know all the details: what games I'm getting at launch (and for the next year), the technical specifications and what the user interface is to look like. Despite this, when I hear that classic PlayStation start-up tune...

... I didn't win that first race, not even close. I ended up driving the wrong way - I had no idea what I was doing. And I was laughing giddily the entire time.

It's always enjoyable to hear about somebody's "first time", or even an early memory of gaming that stands out for whatever reason. I fondly

remember playing Quest for Glory 1 (called Hero's Quest back then), getting lost in what seemed like a massive forest, fleeing from brigands and fighting the odd goblin I dared to engage. Then I ran into that huge bloody giant in front of the Kobold's cave. I didn't last long there but nothing beats the sheer exhilaration of discovering a whole new world - one that I was tasked to overcome - and knowing that I could overcome it eventually because that's what the game designers intended me to do.

Gaming can be a magical, wonderful thing, and sometimes it's difficult to stay focused on the good stuff, but it's really important to try not to give in to boring old life and all the cynicism it brings with.

Here's a challenge: buy the next game you see that you haven't heard of. Don't research it, don't read reviews - just dive in and discover it. Even if it's an utterly crap game you'll still be able to recapture that feeling of experiencing something with a completely fresh mind. Ed.

From: Dylan Warwick
Subject: Letter of the Month
December 2013

PS
First 'actual' email ever sent, so excuse me for whatever happens.

Firstly, best magazine ever. Keep up the amazing work and enjoy your holidays (also saying thank you to my uncle, for getting me a subscription to this amazing magazine).

Secondly, I am currently playing

games on my Playstation 2 (she's 9 years old), and I just found a nice R 430 in my game folder which I had forgotten about (this is besides writing an email on a computer that hardly runs paint (not mine (thank goodness))). So there comes GTA V or something.

Finally, another subject that can be intro-taught (grade 8 and 9 level) with gaming is IT. I mean, look at SpaceChem. It's actually a programming game. And then



LETTER OF THE MONTH

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

HARD TECHNICAL STUFF

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

obviously, with the Oculus Rift coming along, we will be able to actually go do those science lab experiments, even the dangerous ones involving Mercury (Hg) or Praseodymium (Pr) (virtually of course). Gaming could actually be a really good thing to happen in classrooms.

PS

Do you guys (and girls) know of any good RAM DIMM(s) for R 1000 - R 2000 and where to get said item(s) from? (good as in 50-50 mix of speed and capacity)

Hi Dylan,

I like that you called your email "Letter of the Month" - shows some real commitment to your self-belief. Unfortunately your letter hasn't been chosen, but you should never give up hope.

I can only assume that you didn't make a typo there... you're running a PS2 but you hope to get GTA V soon. Life will soon deliver you a disappointment. Take it on the chin and don't be sad when it happens.

You have impressed us with your ability to name chemicals. If ever you manage to build an Oculus Rift game in which you have to manufacturer pharmaceuticals, you'd make a killing. You'd probably also get arrested, but think of the publicity. Your parents would be ashamed but who needs them when you're Internet famous?

PS: Post-script only goes at the bottom of a letter, and having two is weird unless you call the second one "PPS". Ed.

From: Razarth Du Plessis
Subject: For the Greater Good
Greetings to everyone at NAG. Let me first start off with the norm by saying that I enjoy reading your magazine and have been a long time loyal, supporting and crazy fan. Keep up the good work. Now then, on to the reason why I'm writing this letter (I actually did write it first with pencil and paper before typing it). I recently went through my old NAGs (feeling nostalgic) and couldn't help but notice something. Warhammer 40K MMORPG disasters and failures. Honestly I couldn't count how many times they have tried to make it. I'm a huge fan of the Warhammer 40K universe, specifically the Dawn of War series. I have to say though that Dawn of War II suffers from the same compliant I'm about to make. Now I can already hear the reasons, replies and disagreements to my compliant, but I don't mind, so this is your forewarning. My compliant is that there is a large lack of Tau in latest Warhammer 40K games. In my opinion we got enough forms of "space marines" in games and don't need Warhammer 40K to also hammer on about it. The Imperial Guard, Tau, Elder, Dark Elder, Necrons are more than enough to make awesome stories. I think if the developers truly want a successful MMORPG Warhammer 40K, they should include all the races. People like choice and it is the first thing we crave for when looking at games. Specially if the game is of the MMORPG kind. I do want to point out as well that this criticism can be applied to a lot of new releases. This is not just me madly ranting about one game. It was however the last straw that broke my back. I'm a big time gamer and even studying to join the field. I have a little knowledge about the process. That being said however I still feel that the problem with a lot of games, specially well established franchises, make the problem of building a large cast of well loved, lore friendly and known characters and then forgetting about them when starting new endeavors. If the developers truly want to make money from their games. Then they should do the research, because furthermore I doubt there would be some many mods putting in beloved races or characters if the developers made the right choices. Thanks for you time. I know it's a bit late, but Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to NAG and the whole gaming industry as well as community.

While your lack of paragraph breaks saddens me, it's always good to encounter another 40K fan. Personally, I don't get the deal with the Tau. I stopped playing Warhammer

ON THE FORUMS

We might be cranky but we're all lovely people on the inside. You might need to dig pretty deep, though. www.nag.co.za/forums

Q: When is a game too hard, or too easy? What makes for a good challenge?

"As long as it doesn't feel like the game is cheating or just inflating numbers in order to up the difficulty I'm generally ok with whatever designers come up with."

Squirly

"Dark Souls was too easy"

tarisma

"I think it depends entirely on how much the game makes you use that brain of yours. If you have to use it a good amount (90% of the time), and using it gets you results, then the difficulty is about right. Not using that brain should get you killed. That'll show em."

ToshZA

"When it kicks your butt, it's a hard game, and if it's not because of control issues or whatever but when a game really let's you know that you suck at it from stage 1, then it's an intentionally hard game done right. Oh hi Dark Souls..."

Incognito

about ten years ago and back then we didn't have any of these fancy things you kids have nowadays like robot aliens and waterborne sewerage.

What are they, anyway? Aren't robot aliens just... robots? Does it matter where they come from? Why are they so angry?

Anyway, you've got a point, and I think a large part of what made World of Warcraft so successful in its early days was that it gave players the ability to play all the major races of Warcraft. The panda people came in later and whatever but the thing is, right from the start, you could play a Troll Shaman, or a Night Elf Druid, and having that choice made people feel like their needs were catered for and their favourite series was in good hands.

For all we complain that MMORPGs need to step away from the WoW mould, it's still a good idea for people to pay attention to it. Ed.

From: Dewan Brandt

Subject: What makes a "Gamer"?

Hi there PCF team, as always first things first, GREAT Mag. Best part of the month is riding to Spar on my bike and seeing the latest NAG sitting on the shelf (and thanks for Roxy's Quest, first platformer i have ever played).

Now on to the important stuff, can i haz money? Nope just kidding.

I was Pondering the other day and i hope you guys can help me out, What makes a "Gamer". If it's just somebody who enjoys games, well then my sister qualifies and believe you me, she's never played anything rated over 13, considering she's almost 18 she cant possibly be a gamer... right? Is it having the ability to speak "Gamer" and leave the rest of the group nodding and agreeing that Master Chief is a little cat from Portal (Silly silly humans)

Or do we measure a gamer by the mainstream idea of a "Gamer" (ugly, fat, couch potato, bad eye sight and

LeRoy Gumedde, "NAG Fan Artwork."



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 an Xbox 360 wireless headset with bluetooth, valued at R749. Sponsored by the awesome people at Prima Interactive.

so on and so forth) but judging by the reviews and monthly questions, I would make an educated guess and say most of you do not meet that criteria. Is it judged by the games you've played or the skill you have in games, or perhaps the achievements you have made (pulling an all nighter, playing without eating, playing while eating(much harder) getting yelled at by mom for playing "Too much") or catching all the Pokémon. Cause if that the case, I'm not a gamer *Cries a bit* cause i haven't even played Pokémon, and I'm not that good because i mostly play FPS'ers and only now have i begun to gain some skill there.

How do you know if YOU'RE a Gamer, is there some sort of monkey puzzle, blood test or physical?

Well anyway hope you guys can help me cause the last brain cell I had just got jumpscared away.

This is one of those arguments that happen between people who think labels are more important than actions. And even then we're talking about a fun pastime for most people, not a career or anything, so the concept of labelling someone as a "gamer" or "non-gamer" seems rather silly, don't you think?

If you insist on it, though, here's a really easy test: do you enjoy playing games of any genre across any medium? Yes – you're a gamer! No – you're not a gamer!

Don't worry so much about the stuff, and just play some games. You'll find yourself enjoying them far more if you're not concerned about what other people think. Protip: that lesson can be applied to almost everything in life where your job is not worrying

about what other people think.

Psychologists have it kind of rough.

PS: This is NAG, not PCF. You should really pay attention to these things next time. But we'll be sure to tell them how much you enjoy their mag. :) Ed.

From: Marcel
Subject: Storylines

Hey awesome people at NAG! Firstly, I want to tell you that you guys are amazing and I love NAG! OK, now that that's out of the way... I just want to say that I believe in the 'online gaming' era we are in now we tend to over look single player storylines. Most of the single player action games (mostly action LOL) I've played have storylines that are just as good (if not better) than big budget action movies. But I see a lot of people play single player games just for the game play and graphics, meanwhile the story is totally being overlooked. I think it's awesome when someone tells a great story, no matter in what form, and it sucks when people don't give a damn about the story, don't you think?

I guess it comes down to what you as an individual want out of a game. There are people out there who spend all their time gushing over visuals and to them, that's the most important thing. As this industry grows it's bound to spread out over the population, and with that we have groups developing who appreciate this industry for all its different facets. While I'm a sucker for a good story (heck, I still read books every day – I mean, come on), as long as someone derives enjoyment from a game then it's doing its job. Ed.

THE SHORTS

Extracts of n00b from NAG letters

"I'd like to think there's a reason you're the new editor. I'm pretty sure that you guys didn't just draw straws [you didn't... right?]"
- Kyu

"Games might be getting hotter, but Santa "NAG-olis" Clause didn't start the fire."
- Douw Kotzé

"It barely took her a minute to ask for my credit card details and I reluctantly handed them over. She said "I'll just download to your place, it'll only take a minute baby"."
- Justin

ON TWITTER

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kgosietsile

@nagcoza my ps3 just got hit by lightning.... it chose the worst time to die #someonekillme

Kihembo BMOC

@nagcoza kudos u guyz hve gotten your online page up to ths century NICE!!!

Joshua van Roodt

Someone please tell me, why on the hell would you purchase a "Next-Gen" Console, when nearly every title is on every Console @nagcoza

Diamond Llama

@nagcoza We have guildlets in NAG? *pleased*

Tank Muller

Will be meeting the entire @nagcoza team soon... I've never been this excited and piss-myself-scared in my entire life.

tristan klein

@nagcoza nag gives meaning to the word life! We should make a cult for them , yeah a cult sounds good...

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G, Gamer



Sense of humour failure

Microsoft's Xbox One is out in the US and Europe. In an attempt at some *different* marketing, Microsoft's Larry "Major Nelson" Hryb wrote a sick note for anyone to make use of in order to get out of work when the Xbox One launched. It's probably a safe assumption that nobody actually made use of it because 1) people generally try to keep their jobs and 2) no self-respecting business would have accepted it anyway. It was (and I'm certain I don't need to point this out) a spot of marketing fun; no harm done and at least it was a little different.

Towards the end of November, the Xbox One had been out for a few weeks when Microsoft decided to try its hand at another marketing letter. This time, however, the letter was meant to be given to a gamer's significant other in an attempt to persuade them that buying an Xbox One was the best idea ever. The letter, which was entitled "We Got Your Back" and made available on xbox.com, began as follows: "Not sure if you've heard, but Xbox One is now available. That means we can start playing games like *Dead Rising 3*. I know, I know. You'd rather do your taxes early than watch me slay zombies, but hear me out on this. Xbox One is actually for both of us."

The letter had numerous customisation options so you could, for example, switch *Dead Rising 3* for a different game, or change "do your taxes early" to something equally dull like "knit". The entire letter was gender neutral, however that didn't stop the righteous indignation and accusations of stereotyping. Microsoft was also accused of playing off a sexist and outdated scenario of a hen-pecked gamer guy needing to convince his overbearing woman that a gaming console is a good investment. The thing is, even with the letter's default customisation options, I couldn't see what the complainers were getting at. The only thing I can put the backlash down to is the predictable Internet over-reaction that is (alarmingly) becoming the norm.

I get that the gaming industry is under scrutiny for gender inequality, but I've repeatedly read this letter and cannot find any sexism that warrants the level of backlash Microsoft received. In fact, it's very easy to read it as if it was written by a female gamer and addressed to her non-gaming boyfriend/husband.

Media outlets like Eurogamer and Kotaku levelled your typical Internet storm in a teacup retaliations against Microsoft. Commenters followed suit and the handful of people who raised an eyebrow at all the ire were negged into submission. It's almost like everyone had suddenly forgotten the hilarious Xbox One TV advert called "His and Hers", which flawlessly upends all gender-based gaming stereotypes: female gamer boots sport-watching boyfriend out of his soccer match to play *Dead Rising 3*; "boyfriend, get me a beer," she commands using the same tone she just used to voice-control Kinect; "boyfriend, go to the store" she says with exasperation when her boyfriend returns empty-handed, whining about how she'd drunk all the beers the day before. It's a great advert.

The "We Got Your Back" letter has since been removed by Microsoft; if you look hard enough you'll still find copies online. I worry that we're reaching a level of industry scrutiny where a company isn't able to do *anything* without being keelhauled for some perceived indiscretion. Have we started taking ourselves *that* seriously?

- Miklós Szecsei -

Sony and MS show solid day-one sales

By time you read this the PS4 should have arrived on local shores and is probably sold out already, but down here the total number of consoles pale in comparison to what Sony managed to scoop up during its launch day in the US and Canada.

One million units of the PS4 were sold in its first day in those two countries, officially kicking off the "war" between Sony and Microsoft that so many will rally behind to confirm their purchases. Unperturbed (okay, possibly a bit perturbed), Microsoft's launch day went very well itself, with the company claiming it matched Sony's launch day with a million sales of its own, and that's at a retail price \$100 higher. These numbers mean very little on their own, however, as the Xbox One launched in 13 countries around the world, and both companies have been faced with huge supply shortages of their next-gen offerings. Knowing how difficult it'd be to nab a PS4 on launch day in the states, scumbags enterprising individuals have flooded eBay with price-inflated offerings by the tens of thousands, with most units



going for as much as \$200 on top of the recommended retail price. And people are buying them at that price.

While both teams' sales figures are nothing to be sniffed at, don't think that this is easy money for either organisation. The folks over at IHS iSuppli, who have been tearing down consoles for years in the name of curiosity, estimate that the PS4 costs \$381 to build, and the Xbox One, with its mandatory Kinect camera, costs Microsoft \$471 to put together. These numbers are scary, but consider that this is just an estimate, and they exclude R&D, shipping and retail markup. It's a likely bet that both companies are breaking even or even operating at a loss for each sale, but this is the standard way of doing business – their focus is on selling games, software and services, which is where the real money lies.

Turn to the light side

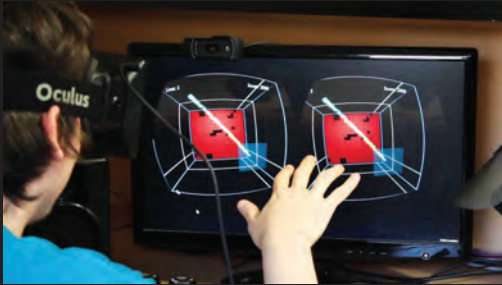


When *Worms* creators Team17 announced a few months ago that they were laying their beloved series to rest, they remained secretive about any plans moving forward. Now it's been revealed that the company is preparing to make a return to the world of third-party publishing that first put them on the map almost two decades ago.

Their first title will be the very quirky stealth/puzzle game *Light* from

Brighton-based developers Just a Pixel, the studio responsible for *The Last Hour* and *Flipper*. *Light* has been in development for some time already, with Team17 only recently coming in as a publishing partner. They'll bring with them financial support and their many years of expertise to ensure *Light* is as polished as possible when it releases. The game is currently ranked #47 on Steam Greenlight, so be sure to head over there, grab the demo and cast your vote.

Oculus Rift game, Diplopia, used to treat eyesight disorders



While the rest of the world waits patiently for a consumer version, hundreds of virtual reality enthusiasts already have access to development kits and are creating some incredible applications for the 3D enabled Oculus Rift. One such application is a game called *Diplopia*, which according to its creator James Blaha, can help treat visual disorders like Strabismus (crossed eye) and Amblyopia (lazy eye).

People suffering from those disorders battle to see in three dimensions, but as research has shown, a lot of this can be treated through training the damaged eye to work in conjunction with the good eye. Enter the Oculus Rift and *Diplopia*. Thanks to the fact that the Rift sends two different images into each eye, Blaha's *Diplopia* is able to send a distorted image to both eyes. The player has to force their eyes to work together in order for the image to become clear; after enough practise, the brain begins to do most of the hard work.

Diplopia is similar to *Breakout* – players control a paddle that deflects a continuously moving ball towards a wall of blocks; players have to get the ball to hit the blocks in order to break down the wall. *Diplopia* is in 3D, which obviously aids in the treatment process considering those affected with Strabismus and Amblyopia battle to see in 3D.

According to Blaha, all it takes is one to two hours a day for around three weeks for patients to experience "measurable improvements in their vision". Science!

“One platform that does seem to be going in the right direction is the Steam Box. If I was to make a bet, I'd say that the Steam Box has the capacity to disrupt the living room before mobile does.”

- Tameem Antionades, design chief at Ninja Games

Catacomb Kids is Spelunky with a twist

At first glance, *Catacomb Kids* could be easily dismissed as yet another roguelike platformer riding the seemingly endless wave of *Spelunky*'s overwhelming success – but that would be doing yourself a horrible disservice. Its Kickstarter page describes it as “a procedurally generated platformer, with an equal emphasis on quick reactions, tactical engagement and strategic character growth”. Wield a variety of weapons and magicks to overcome foes, all the while dodging deviously placed traps. So far, so *Spelunky*.

Where it sets itself apart (and where it's got us mighty intrigued) is in its dynamic interactions, which use seemingly basic elements to orchestrate complex results and solutions. You can lure enemies into combat with one another, for example, or trick them into death by deadly hazard. Or you could pick up a plain rock and lob it at a precariously placed candleholder, knocking it over and setting environmental elements – and enemies – on fire. Each time you play, it generates a random playable Kid that will grow in ability however you see fit.



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The Game Stalder



The dawn

And so dawns a new year. A new year of anticipated titles. Of saving up to buy consoles. A new year... of gaming. You all know what I'm talking about. You're gamers, of course you do.

2014 is looking to be, much like this year, a pretty solid one in terms of game line-ups and the like. Hot on the heels of the release of the PlayStation 4, there's the projected local release of the Xbox One at some as yet undetermined date. We're not only limited to consoles and gadgets however, there is also a solid game release list, and let's face it, 2013 will be a tough one to beat. It was an exceptionally strong year and so it excites me greatly to know that the titles coming up look like they're going to be stellar.

"Of course I'm writing this last year (time travelling deadlines are a funny thing), so I'm really just looking forward to a holiday."

Let's get a quick overview: kicking off the year in February we have *Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare*, which might sound lame to some of you but judging on what I saw at E3, this third-person action adventure game (yes, on Xbox, not a tablet game at all) looks like loads of fun, followed by a franchise I love – *Thief*. This reboot of the classic franchise has triggered a wave of nostalgia and I'm glad it's an early 2014 release.

March brings us *South Park: The Stick of Truth*, as well as *Dark Souls II* and *Titanfall* (am I allowed to make high pitched eeeeeeeeeeeeee! noises yet?) There's also *Infamous: Second Son* making an appearance and that's high on my list of wants, partly because I played the others and partly because it features an entirely new character.

Salivating yet? No? Well those are just the games that have a "fixed" (because we know they never really are fixed until they're actually in stores) release date. If we take a look at the "sometime in 2014" line up, my number of can't wait titles increases exponentially.

Bayonetta 2, *Destiny*, *Driveclub*, *Murdered: Soul Suspect*, *The Elder Scrolls Online*, *The Evil Within*, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, *Watch Dogs* (we won't go there). My thumbs and trigger fingers are actually shaking at the thought that these are just some of the games that will be on my screen in the next year.

Of course I'm writing this last year (time travelling deadlines are a funny thing), so I'm really just looking forward to a holiday. Not going away anywhere. Just lying back on my couch in front of my TV, and attempting to finish all the games that I have been juggling over the last couple of months. After all what are the December holidays for if not to attempt to spend every available moment playing games? Ok, perhaps not every available moment because there is Christmas (or whatever you celebrate) in between. And of course I have a toddler, who I have to fight with in order to be able to use the TV. And when I'm allowed to there's the fact that most of them are age restricted so I can't play them in front of him. Then there are the family functions that you're obliged to attend, making polite conversation with relatives you see once a year if you're lucky, all the while thinking that you'd much rather be sitting at home playing games.

Oh. Ok it seems like I might not get in quite as much gaming as I had hoped. Oh well, there's always next this year.

- Pippa Tshabalala -

Turn 10 tweaks Forza 5 economy in wake of fan displeasure



With the launch of Xbox One exclusive *Forza Motorsport 5*, Microsoft implemented a lot of microtransaction systems in order to further monetize the game. Instead of car unlocks happening as players rank up in career mode, Tokens are awarded for race victories, with certain optional requirements resulting in higher Token pay-outs. Each car in *Forza Motorsport 5* costs a specific amount of Tokens, with the most expensive vehicle costing in the region of 10,000 Tokens.

Shortly after the game was released, message boards like Reddit and NeoGAF lit up with gamers complaining that progression in *Forza 5* had been deliberately slowed in order to coerce players into spending real money to unlock cars at an acceptable rate. Many believed that this free-to-play approach is unfair considering *Forza 5* is a AAA retail title with a recommended retail price in the region of R700.

In response to this backlash, as well as their own in-game data that tracks player progression, *Forza 5* developer Turn 10 Studio has announced a suite of changes to the game's economy. These economy adjustments have, at time of writing, still not been finalised and deployed, but in the interim, Turn

10 initiated a collection of temporary tweaks to keep players happy and progressing at a better rate. For a start, the Token requirements for every vehicle in the game have been halved. What's more, those who opted to pay extra to buy the VIP version of *Forza 5* were given the most expensive vehicle in the game (the 2013 Lotus E21) for free.

It seems as if there were numerous blunders with the launch of *Forza 5*. A further issue with the *Forza Motorsport 5: Limited Edition* version of the game was also addressed by Turn 10. The *Limited Edition* was described as coming with 1,250 Tokens that would be enough to unlock any car in the game. Obviously that wasn't the case when the most expensive car in *Forza 5* costs nearly ten times that amount. In response to that, Turn 10 apologised and has notified *Limited Edition* owners that they can pick any car in the game to have it added to their in-game garage.

"Looking ahead," *Forza* community manager Brian Ekberg said, "we'll continue to make further adjustments to the *Forza Motorsport 5* economy when they're needed and I'll be sure to keep you informed as these changes are made."

Electronic Arts allegedly developing an open-world Star Wars game



Job postings discovered online indicate that Electronic Arts is preparing an open-world *Star Wars* game for next-gen platforms. EA Canada is allegedly the studio working on the game, and the development team has posted numerous job offerings via their website. One such job offering, for an animation director, described the project as "a major new next gen open world action game". Additionally, EA Canada's recruitment team promoted a position for a combat designer, and confirmed in that promotion that the game was indeed a *Star Wars* title.

This makes it the third *Star Wars* title to be in development under Electronic Arts. DICE is working on *Star Wars: Battlefront*, and EA Redwood Shores (also known as Visceral Games, the team behind *Dead Space*) is also working on a *Star Wars* game. It has been suggested, however, that the Visceral *Star Wars* game could be the same one that EA Canada is working on.

Wolf in XCOM's clothing

Upcoming free-to-play digital trading card game *Warhammer 40k: Space Wolf* has been given a bit of detail in the form of a brief but tantalising trailer. The video shows what looks much like a Warhammer-skinned version of *XCOM*, with grid-based movement and a definite air of a tactical strategy game. This will be the representation of the card game in which players activate cards that include power-ups and weapons. It's not yet clear if characters will be deployed before or during a match.

While the details are still lacking, we know that *Space Wolf* is set for a mid-2014 release on PC, Android and iOS; stay tuned for more info.

Want to be taken seriously? Make a console game

At least, that's how the president of indie developer Young Horses (they responsible for the creation of hilarious physics-a-thon *Octodad: Dadliest Catch*) feels about game development. "I feel like until you've made a console game, a lot of people don't take you seriously," is the exact statement Philip Tibitoski made to Polygon. "It's a weird thing, and I think it's because of what people know. Adults like, say, my parents, will say, 'Oh, you're putting a game out on the computer,' but then you're like, 'Oh we're working with Sony.' And Sony is a brand and a company that people see and say, 'Oh, you're doing something real.' It's weird."

It's part of the reason why Tibitoski's team decided to develop *Dadliest Catch* for PS4 as well as PC. That and the fact that Sony were apparently very supportive, supplying Young Horses with PS4 dev kits and letting them know that if they weren't happy developing for the console, they were free to just send them back, no hard feelings. After toying with the dev kits, they decided to develop their first console game. So, if Tibitoski's logic is correct, you're free to start taking Young Horses seriously now.

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The Indie Investigator



Writing and design

Sometimes you'll have cause to add a story to your game – regardless of whether it's a sprawling, narrative-driven RPG or an abstract, one-button puzzler. Stories give game sessions a quick dose of extra meaning, turning even the driest circles and triangles into emotionally engaging characters. Sort of.

While this idea is great (hey, even *Angry Birds* went for it), you can still bear a few things in mind to make sure the narrative enhances your game instead of doing horrible, bloaty stuff to it. A few suggestions:

(1) Keep it as simple as you can. Whether you're throwing in a plot as a light skeleton or hinging your entire game experience around conversations and story-heavy ideas, you'll actually do better if your script remains as concise as possible. Don't use a paragraph of character dialogue or backstory when a single sentence will do.

(2) Don't frontload all of your plot details. Related to point number one, going on an unnecessary narrative rampage before players have even made their first move will make them forget everything you've said. If they haven't had time to get invested in the game and interact with the world you've made, they'll probably be far less interested in hearing details that they'd otherwise be pretty cool with learning about later. Tell them about the quest of Knight Herp up front, sure – but don't go too far into explaining the Land of Derp until game progression makes that necessary.

(3) Make story segments and flavour text as optional as possible. Some players are going to click through your dialogue and rush to the gameplay experience no matter what. It's almost a fact of life. Make sure that all of your game's messages are either unimportant or repeatable, so that at the very least players can go back and review the major stuff. If you want your game to have more detailed plot elements, consider hiding them in entirely optional areas. Flavour text for items is always a nice sneaky one. Secret rooms, too. There are a lot of creative spaces that can accommodate these sorts of extras.

(4) Don't forget that your story is as subject to the prototyping and revision process as the rest of the game's design. While it's nice to have an overall theme decided upon from the beginning, you really don't need to sweat all of the details and lock in every story element. Revise, polish and even cut content where necessary. If it makes sense at the end, you should remind yourself to make changes wherever they're needed.

(5) Not all story elements are text-based! If you can adopt the "show not tell" approach to your story, you give players a more natural and entertaining way of developing the story for themselves. If you can make sure that such a story is introduced over the course of actual play – woven into the mechanics of the game itself – you've hit gold.

Story writing is an involved and tricky area to master, and not every game you make has to be a well-scripted masterwork. That said, even the slightest attention to detail will be obvious to players. It's worthwhile using those few extra few moments to make your writing more captivating.

- Rodain Joubert -

Double Fine raids Nordic offices



After the feeding frenzy that was the THQ dissolution auction, *Costume Quest* and *Stacking* from Tim Schafer's Double Fine Productions were lost to Nordic Games. It's been some time since that little fiasco has settled, and now, as the studio is in desperate need of reliable income to help get their far-too-costly *Broken Age* out the door, it seems like the best way to make a bit of money is by taking those titles to retail.

"I am pleased that we have regained full control over *Costume Quest* and *Stacking*, following a daring and top-secret midnight raid

on the Nordic Games headquarters in Vienna," said Schafer.

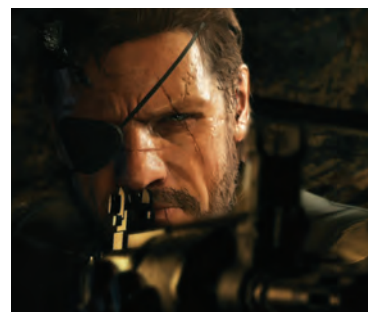
In case anyone mistook Schafer's humour for truth, Nordic Games has gone on record to state that they've actually partnered with Double Fine to bring those titles to retail, and they were "happy to transfer distribution rights for *Costume Quest* and *Stacking* back to Double Fine in an entirely non-secretive and heist-free manner." Spoil-sports.

The games will soon be available alongside Double Fine's cult platformer *Psychonauts*, for which Nordic will also assist with distribution.

Sounds like Metal Gear Solid V is still far away

When it comes to incredibly confusing game reveals, Hideo Kojima and *Metal Gear Solid V* set a new bar during 2013. Here's the skinny: *Metal Gear Solid V* is the same thing as *The Phantom Pain*. *Ground Zeroes* was originally supposed to be part of *The Phantom Pain*, but has now been split from the main game to form a prequel of sorts.

Ground Zeroes is coming out during our autumn 2014 here in South Africa, and it's meant to tide fans over until the main game, *MGSV: The Phantom Pain* hits. When that might be remains very vague. During a PlayStation 4 release event in New York, Kojima said that we can expect *The Phantom Pain* "around the time



that the PlayStation 4 becomes widely adapted".

Despite the fact that Kojima makes specific reference to the PlayStation 4 adoption rate, the game is also heading to Microsoft's consoles.

Warcraft film pushed back to 2016



In the previous issue of NAG Magazine, we provided some early details on the *Warcraft* movie that is in development with Universal Studios and Legendary Pictures. Originally scheduled for 18 December 2015, the film has now been pushed back to 11 March 2016. While no specific reason was given, it has been speculated that the film was delayed due to the fact that The Walt Disney Company has announced that *Star Wars: Episode VII* is due to release on 18 December 2015. No matter how much anticipation a *Warcraft* film could possibly muster, we think everyone knows that there's not much that could stand up against a new *Star Wars* film at the box office.

Rayman wall-jumps into next-gen

When *Rayman Legends* changed to a multi-platform release after its initial promise to be a Wii U exclusive, there's no doubt that most gamers out there figured this was a good decision. A larger potential player base means more people get to enjoy this wonderful game, and at the end of it all, this industry is about making people happy (right?).

To ensure that Ubisoft keeps delivering the joy, the publisher recently announced that *Legends* would make its way over to PS4 and Xbox One in February. Of course, the real driving force here is to pull in a bit more coin for the game. Although the publisher claims the title has sold over one million copies across all platforms, that figure is still below its initial forecast. If they can launch smoothly in Feb, the hope is that they can ride out the tail-end of the holiday spending frenzy.



Blizzard developer apologises after insensitive interview reaction

Heroes of the Storm game director Dustin Browder landed himself in a big ol' pot of controversy when he made thoughtlessly dismissive statements in response to a concerned question about super-sexualised characters in MOBAs like *HotS* during an interview with Rock, Paper, Shotgun.

"Well, I mean, some of these characters, I would argue, are already hyper-sexualised in a sense. I mean, Kerrigan is wearing heels, right? We're not sending a message to anybody. We're just making characters who look cool," said Browder. When pressed on the fact that perhaps that's a bit of a non-stance to take, Browder became intensely defensive and the interview was brought to a close on a horribly sour note. "We're not running for President," he said. "We're not sending a message. No one should look to our game for that."

Soon after, the Internet reacted, as it would. Browder quickly published an official apology for his handling of the matter, even thanking RPS for raising their concerns. "I responded poorly to a statement the interviewer made about over-sexualised character designs in games, and I want to apologise for that. This is a serious topic and I don't want anyone to think that I, or anyone else at Blizzard, is insensitive about how we portray our characters."

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Miktari's Meanderings



Black Friday

I didn't really want a PS4 yet. My gaming PC and Wii U (and handful of handhelds) are actually fine for my needs right now. And I'm not even done with this gen yet! Or is that "last gen", now that all three next gen consoles are out? Which would make them current gen consoles? I don't know what's real anymore.

But, my better half was like, "Hey, the PS4 will be much cheaper on Black Friday, so go to Walmart tomorrow and get one." I'd heard the horror stories of Black Friday at Walmart. Stampedes, trampling, death. But tomorrow was Thursday, not Friday? "Yeah, they start Black Friday on the Thursday now, so people aren't camping out overnight to get in on Friday morning."

In the US, Black Friday is the Friday following Thanksgiving Day. The holiday is often traced back to 1621, when the early Plymouth settlers in America held a harvest feast after a successful season. It is not without some small irony that, right on a holiday celebrating being thankful for what you have, the country has one of the most voracious consumer feeding frenzies in the world. That's the United States for you. Walmart is a large convenience store that's pretty much everywhere in the US. Like a Makro and a Pick 'n Pay Hypermarket smashed together.

In the US, Black Friday is the Friday following Thanksgiving Day. The holiday is often traced back to 1621, when the early Plymouth settlers in America held a harvest feast after a successful season.

Where I live is not a big place, with not that many people. It's a small town in the centre of Pennsylvania, which is a pretty big state (province), composed of not much of anything. Farming towns, a few cities, cows and trees. The only reason this town even has a Walmart is because of the I-80 interstate highway that runs down from New York, passing by here on the way to anywhere else. If the interstate didn't go past here, I doubt we'd have much of anything other than cows, Amish and a pretty decent movie theatre. State-of-the-art small town movie theatres are kind of a thing now.

So 3pm on Thursday, I'm inside Walmart. I'm standing in a line to get a wristband. They have a system set up for the "hot products" like PlayStation 4s and large flat-screen TVs at stupidly low prices. You stand in line, get a wristband (unless they run out), then you can come back at 6pm - that's when the event actually starts - to pick up your purchase. If you got a wristband, you're guaranteed to get it. People who arrive at 6 and don't have a wristband will have to fight to the death for the leftover stock. And they do. Heavens help us, they do.

I got my wristband (fifth in line!), and wandered about the store for the next three hours, bought some candy and a pair of headphones so I could listen to music on my cell phone. My last pair broke. People started filling up the store. By 5:45pm, I was hiding in the arts and crafts aisle, amidst the "fun scented" washable markers for kids. It was too dangerous to be anywhere else. People were ramming into each other with shopping carts (an accident, they swear), to try and get to the savings. Things were going feral fast.

When 6pm hit, I ran out, dodged through people like a ninja, grabbed my PS4 and made a break for the exit. Behind me, a fistfight had broken out over a super-cheap flat-screen TV.

- Miktari Dracon -

People do naughty things with The Playroom and Twitch streaming



The *Playroom* comes pre-installed on every PlayStation 4 console. The software features a suite of mini games that make use of the new PlayStation Camera and the console's fancy new controllers. Obviously, a lot of what the game entails involves augmented reality. Consequently, anyone streaming gameplay of *The Playroom* inevitably ends up streaming themselves sitting in front of the TV. This has led to some rather naughty antics being shared via game streaming website Twitch TV compatibility with which is baked into the PlayStation 4 system.

While there was potential for some amusing escapades via *The Playroom*, with some enterprising individuals starting a call-in chat show of sorts, it wasn't long before weird stuff started happening. At one point there was

a guy wearing a horse mask while motorboating a woman. Things got worse from there, with a couple sitting on a couch and drinking themselves into a stupor. Eventually the woman passed out and her male partner undressed her, leaving her naked on the couch for all the Internet to see. This is why we can't have nice things, people.

As can be expected, Twitch has taken the debacle very seriously. Citing their Terms of Use, which prohibits anything to be streamed that isn't of a gaming nature, the website has pulled *The Playroom* from its list of supported titles. A representative said that Twitch will keep *The Playroom* off their website until such time that "PS4 owners become more familiar with the games-only focus of Twitch content."



Gather no moss

John Gonzalez, former lead creative designer and lead writer on *Fallout: New Vegas* and current developer at WB Games, needs to get outside and stretch his legs a bit.

Gonzalez is leaving WB Games where he was working on an unannounced project. As often happens with these

sorts of things, having a senior developer leave in the middle of development of a game that nobody has heard about often implies that said game isn't doing terribly well. We may never know what becomes of that title, but for now, Gonzalez is making his way over to *Killzone* developers Guerrilla Games in Amsterdam.

Ghostcrawler hits the road



A game as long-running and popular as *World of Warcraft* is not a static entity. Since its launch nearly a decade ago, *WoW* has changed and shifted in both massive and minor ways, and along the journey the gameplay balance has needed constant nurturing and tweaking to ensure everyone has the most enjoyable experience possible. Now, the chap in charge of that bramble-infested job at Blizzard, Greg "Ghostcrawler" Street, has announced that he's leaving the company after six years of employment.

In his final farewell on the often ferocious *WoW* forums, Street reminds those 7+ million players still hooked on the MMORPG to keep doing what they've always done: complain. Or "provide feedback" if you want to be a little more politically correct.

"I have said a hundred times that having passionate gamers, including the angry ones, is a far better place to be than having a community that doesn't care," said Street. "You all care. Like us, you want the game to be the best that it can be."

It's not yet clear what Ghostcrawler will get up to with his newfound freedom from responding to ranting people, but we like to think that he'll take a few weeks to himself before he dives in. Perhaps a holiday on a remote island without an Internet connection would be a good idea.

Stasis is a go!

Good news, everyone! Local game *Stasis* by The Brotherhood has successfully been Kickstarted! At the time of writing, the campaign surpassed its \$100,000 goal by a cool \$11,000, and there are still another 56 hours to go. If it manages to climb up to the \$120k level, composer Mark Morgan will produce an extended soundtrack for the game (he's already on board for a regular length soundtrack as it stands).

The game has also been Greenlit on Steam, which means when it's complete you'll be able to purchase it through the digital distribution service, or keep it DRM-free and buy directly through the developers.

EA on the hunt for a new Command & Conquer developer

It's not been long since EA announced that they'd ceased all development on the free-to-play *Command & Conquer* semi-reboot, and shut down its developer EA Victory for good. The reasoning was that, after receiving player feedback during alpha testing, it was clear that EA Victory wasn't making the game that fans wanted to play. At the same time, EA suggested that they would continue searching for other ways to get the game out there.

As the headline suggests, it seems EA wasn't kidding with that. Blue's News has unearthed an EA support statement on refunds, which quietly indicates that players who were promised early access to the game's beta when they purchased the *Command & Conquer* Ultimate Collection will have their patience rewarded "once production of this title resumes under a new studio". EA then adds this: "We would like to thank you for your time and interest in *Command & Conquer*, and we look forward to sharing the news with you when production resumes on this title in the future."

It's obviously unclear if this means that EA won't be scrapping all of Victory's hard work, or if they mean to reboot the game's entire development. Regardless, the whole thing is a bit heartbreaking, isn't it? Why shutter an entire studio and immediately search for someone else to pick up where they left off, when surely that studio could've just repurposed their existing work? Anyway, at least we've got more C&C to look forward to.



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~ Support Lines ~



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

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Microsoft temp-banning Xbox One users who upload vulgar commentary



This generation of console gaming seems to be all about streaming and sharing your gaming experience. As such, both the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One have built-in game streaming options. In the case of the Xbox One, video captured during gameplay can be extensively edited using the console's Upload Studio app. This app, combined with Kinect's video and sound capture capabilities, means that Xbox One owners are able to put together and share all sorts of gaming videos. Because people are people, Microsoft has had to start temporarily banning Xbox LIVE accounts due to potty-mouthed individuals.

Anyone caught swearing in uploaded material on Xbox One is met with a 24 hour ban from Xbox LIVE. Those who are banned are met with a notification when they attempt to access features of the console that are restricted to Xbox LIVE accounts. The message reads: "Choose something else to play.

Because of your past behaviour, you can't Xbox LIVE Gold is [sic] required to use Skype for Xbox One." The typo is rather odd but has probably been fixed by now. Nevertheless, being blocked from Skype led many to believe that Microsoft is listening in on private Skype conversations – a misunderstanding that Microsoft quickly moved to dispel: "To be clear, the Xbox LIVE Policy & Enforcement team does not monitor direct peer-to-peer communications like Skype chats and calls. Also, we take Code of Conduct moderation via Upload Studio very seriously. We want a clean, safe and fun environment for all users. Excessive profanity as well as other Code of Conduct violations will be enforced upon and result in suspension of some or all privileges on Xbox LIVE."

So then, once the Xbox One hits South African shores, either swear in one of our official 11 languages other than English, or watch your tongue.

Game of Sacrifice: LISA is the weirdest RPG you'll see all day

"A game about survival, sacrifice and pervers." If that description of *LISA* doesn't automatically grab your attention, then we can't help you. It's a side-scrolling 2D indie RPG set in a seemingly typical post-apocalyptic wasteland. Except there are no women, anywhere. This violent, drug-ridden world is your rotten oyster, and as you explore it you'll find a ton of things to see and do. Play Russian roulette. Race shopping carts. Dabble in a bit of prostitution by selling your body for money.

Sole developer Austin Jorgensen wants sacrifice to be a key theme in *LISA*. He wants to make you uncomfortable. "I want the world of *LISA* to be hard on the player," he says. "I hate playing a game knowing that if I make a choice, it has to be the one I know the game wants me to do, or the 'safe' option, or the one that leads to the good ending. The choices you make will change the core mechanics of the game, it's not just superficial."

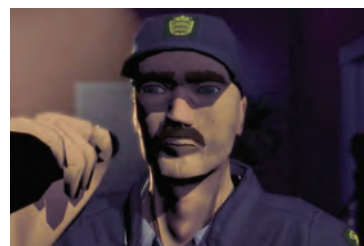
You'll have to trade your hard-won possessions for the lives of in-game friends. Part with limbs (which will affect your stats, and therefore your ability to survive) to keep your party members in one piece. Or you can play the game selfishly and watch everything around you die, which is often the only thing you can do if you hope to progress. It sounds awful, and that's the point. If you're intrigued, be sure to keep an eye on it.

The spy who loved me

Indie team Logic Artists, which previously released *Expeditions: Conquistador*, has just announced its next title, and it sure does look interesting.

Clandestine is an asymmetrical co-op stealth experience set in the year 1996. Players will take on the role of a field agent and a hacker as they attempt to infiltrate secure locations across the world in the attempt to shut down the mass assassinations of former Cold War operatives from both the Soviet Union and NATO.

The pair will attempt to get to the bottom of the mystery by working together on missions that will require their unique skills to be used



in tandem. There's no word yet on how exactly that will happen, but it's certainly an interesting idea, with puzzle, stealth and action elements working in unison for a common goal. The execution of that idea is ultimately going to be the deciding factor here.

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John Carmack leaves Id for good, now full-time with Oculus



At the beginning of August 2013, John Carmack announced that he'd joined the Oculus Rift team as their new chief technology officer. Carmack was one of the original proponents of the 3D virtual reality headset, so it wasn't a surprise when this move was announced. Initially Bethesda, id's parent company, ensured people that Carmack remained on-board with all current Id projects. Now, however, that seems to have changed. Tim Willits, id's studio director, has revealed that Carmack has indeed left the *Doom* development house for good.

Fortunately, Carmack's departure will not affect any projects at id. His work on the developer's Tech 5 engine and whatever game is currently in development at id (presumably the new *Doom* title) is complete.

Shortly after his departure, Carmack commented that he had "wanted to remain a technical adviser for id, but it just didn't work out. Probably for the best, as the divided focus was challenging."

PC	
Murdered: Soul Suspect	June
The Sims 4	2014
Diablo III: Reaper of Souls	2014

360	
Don Bradman Cricket 14	March
South Park: The Stick of Truth	March 7th
Watch_Dogs	May

PS3	
Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII	February 14th
Thief	February 28th
Dark Souls II	March 14th

“Our industry, our art, and our business stand to gain in every sense simply by holding a mirror up to our audience and reflecting their diversity in what we produce.”

– Tom Abernathy, narrative designer for Microsoft and Riot Games

Star Citizen swimming in even more cash

Wow. Chris Roberts' phenomenally popular space sim *Star Citizen* continues to rake in the crowd-funded dough, now having casually sailed well beyond the 33 million dollar mark at the time of this writing. Importantly, this means that Roberts and co. surpassed a stretch goal that will result in the single-player portion of *Star Citizen* (which they've dubbed Squadron 42) seeing significant upgrades, with Roberts explaining that they intend to make it a true spiritual successor to *Wing Commander*.

An expanded universe, better mission design, improved animation and tech, and seamlessly blended space combat and ship-boarding action are now all on the cards thanks to the increase in cash.

The Last Guardian misses an entire generation, creator Ueda is sorry

Fumito Ueda and his Team ICO were responsible for two of the most important titles to grace Sony's PlayStation 2 console. When the PlayStation 3 debuted back in November 2006, many Team ICO fans were eager to see what Ueda and his team would do with more powerful hardware. Then *The Last Guardian* was unveiled, unanimously wowing audiences across the globe before disappearing into development hell for eight years. The PlayStation 3 went through its entire life cycle and still *The Last Guardian* saw no release. Fumito Ueda even left Sony Computer Entertainment and Team ICO, choosing to continue consulting on *The Last Guardian* on a freelance basis.

"More than anything," Ueda recently admitted in an interview, "I feel terribly sorry that for various reasons I have kept my audience waiting for such a long time." Since *The Last Guardian* was introduced, it was made all the more conspicuous in its absence from

every major gaming convention each year. From E3 to Gamescom to the Tokyo Game Show, various media outlets would corner someone from Sony Computer Entertainment and ask them the same question: "Where is *The Last Guardian*?" Each time the news would be the same: Ueda's team continues work on the game, but there's little more to share.

You have to wonder how a group stays motivated for this long. Eight years working on the same game must start to get tedious. "Maintaining motivation is all about producing something great," Ueda said. "A hobby or alcohol might help to refresh you temporarily, but they won't motivate creativity. Also, the original staff members on *Ico* and *SOTC* [*Shadow of the Colossus*] are just as fussy over details as I am."

If *The Last Guardian* re-emerges, it'll be interesting to see where it ends up: on PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4 or both.



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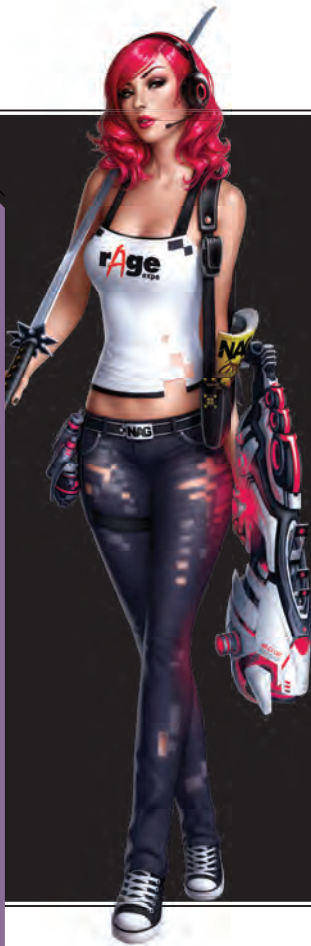
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Foxy Roxy

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

DECEMBER WINNER



Yuri Solomon, page 30

THIS MONTH'S LOOT

R100 gift voucher and *Small World* boardgame valued at R605 sponsored by Exclusive Books.



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CAPTION OF THE MONTH



Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it.

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NAG's lame attempt at humour
"I believe I can fly, I believe I can touch the sky, I think about it every night and day, spread my wings and fly away."



Last months winner
"That's it!! I'm putting a lock on the fridge!" - Alne Van der Walt

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EA will be making Star Wars games for the next decade



When EA signed that multi-year deal with Disney to continue producing *Star Wars* -flavoured games for the foreseeable future, we weren't told the expiration date. Now, we know that we can expect EA-branded *Star Wars* stuff to exist for at least the next ten years.

Aside from DICE Los Angeles' exciting reboot of *Battlefront*, the only game we currently know of that's being developed as part of this deal is *The Old Republic* - which, given that it's an MMO, is constantly being updated. Interestingly, none of EA's *Star Wars* games will be movie tie-ins to coincide with JJ Abrams' upcoming film, which is due in December 2015.

"The beauty of the *Star Wars* franchise is that it's so broad and so deep you don't have to do a movie

game - you can do a game that's very focused on the world that's been created around *Star Wars*," explained EA chief financial officer Blake Jorgensen at a UBS conference.

"We had a long relationship obviously with Lucas on the original *Star Wars*, and when Disney took over Lucas they really wanted to maintain a video game business around *Star Wars*," Jorgensen continued. "They felt it was very valuable and a lot of people loved the games historically. And so they came to us because of our partnership, and they knew that we could help them develop really great games, and we struck what we believe is a fantastic deal, which allows us to be able to build games in many different genres across multiple types of platforms over 10 years."

Skylanders: Collection Vault app out now; see how many you still need to buy your kids

Or perhaps you are a kid (or a big kid), in which case the *Skylanders: Collection Vault* app will tell you how much you have to suck up to your parents (or significant other). Available for free on iOS devices, the *Collection Vault* allows you to manage your figurine collection, see which ones you still need and see which ones come in special, limited editions. You can also create a wishlist that you can share so that people know which *Skylanders* toys you still require. There's also some special content hidden within the application that will allow you to unlock some exclusive goodies.

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January week 3

Rambo: The Video Game 360 / PC / PS3

January week 4

Dragon Ball Z: Battle of Z 360 / PC / PSV



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THE FACE OF FUN

HOW MARIO BECAME THE MOST FAMOUS CHARACTER IN VIDEO GAME HISTORY

Like Mattel's multitalented Barbie doll, Nintendo's mascot is whatever they need him to be. The Italian plumber Mario has also been a carpenter, doctor, factory worker, archaeologist, president of a toy company, athlete, dancer, kart racer, golfer, hero and superstar. Even after over 200 million sales across 116 distinct titles not including remakes/re-releases, Mario remains an endearing and popular character. The *Mario* series is the best-selling video game franchise of all time, and Mario himself is still considered the most recognizable figure in the gaming industry.

But what is it that makes Mario remain relevant – even after 30 years – when he's so unlike most things in the video game industry today?





HANDSOME MOUSTACHE MAN

Perhaps the secret to Mario's success lay in his simplicity. The "flatness" of his character beyond a few basic traits – his identifiable cap, red/blue colour scheme, and defining moustache – promotes accessibility. In the early days of Mario's appearance, when he was still known only as Jumpman, there was nothing to understand about the character beyond the situation he found himself in. It made him the perfect symbol, a representation of player agency.

From there, Mario has appeared in many situations where character-development and stories were bolted on, and yet in spite of all that Mario has never lost the ability to return to his fundamental "undeveloped" state. When "Mario Mania" hit in the late 1980s, when having a mania over a thing was much in vogue, Mario appealed for much the same reasons as Mickey Mouse. The character became an "actor", able to appear in a variety of content, adjusting to the needs of the story or situation, but never being permanently changed by it. Even after many roles, and having many different careers, Mario remained a symbol for fun, gameplay, and the act of playing. By the 1990s, Mario even surpassed Disney's breadwinning Mouse as the most recognizable children's character in America. And today, Mario's jump sound is still one of the most iconic sound effects in the world, second only to the sound of him collecting a Coin.



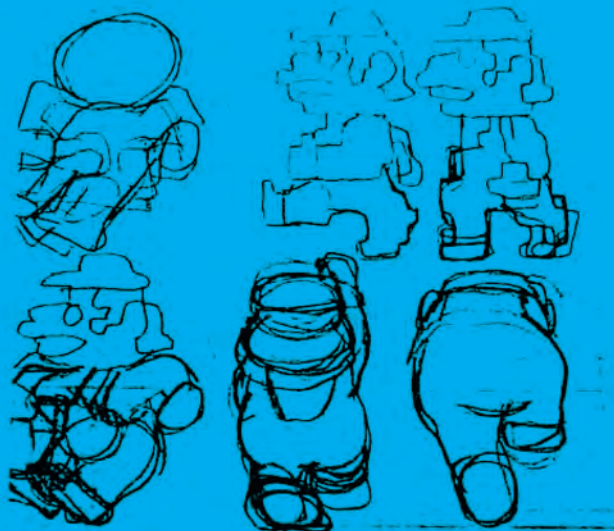
EARLY YEARS OF THE PARMESAN PLUMBER

Mario's journey from being a few pixels in a retroed arcade game, to featuring as a wax figure in the famous Hollywood Wax Museum, as well as having his own television shows, comics books, feature films, lunch boxes, board games, toys and candy, began in 1979.

Nintendo was having trouble competing against Konami, Namco and Activision in the arcades. While being very successful in Japan, Nintendo's efforts weren't having much luck up against the likes of *Pac-Man*. After *Radar Scope* (the first game that Shigeru Miyamoto helped develop) had lukewarm success, Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi tasked Miyamoto with converting unsold *Radar Scope* cabinets into something that would sell. Miyamoto's idea involved Popeye and the love triangle between the spinach-powered sailor, the big bully Bluto, and their mutual love interest Olive Oyl. But Nintendo could not acquire the licence for the characters, so Miyamoto changed them into the carpenter Jumpman, his pet ape Donkey Kong, and Jumpman's girlfriend originally known only as "the Lady" but later renamed to Pauline. Pauline would later be replaced by Princess Peach in *Super Mario Bros.*, with Pauline relegated to "Mario's friend" in later games.

Donkey Kong hit the arcades in 1981. Proto-Mario's design at the time was very constrained due to the technology of the time. The limited number of pixels and colours forced Miyamoto to give the character overalls so the arms wouldn't disappear while walking, and a moustache in place of a mouth because it was much easier to identify at a distance. Miyamoto admits that he found hair very difficult to draw, so they opted for a cap on the character's head. *Donkey Kong* was a huge success, very much an understatement. While developing the sequel, *Donkey Kong Junior*, Nintendo of America's warehouse landlord Mario Segale confronted the then president of Nintendo, demanding unpaid back rent. Jumpman was renamed to Mario, so the story goes, due to the character looking very similar to Nintendo's Italian landlord.





"PERHAPS THE SECRET TO MARIO'S SUCCESS LAY IN HIS SIMPLICITY. THE "FLATNESS" OF HIS CHARACTER BEYOND A FEW BASIC TRAITS – HIS IDENTIFIABLE CAP, RED/BLUE COLOUR SCHEME, AND DEFINING MOUSTACHE – PROMOTES ACCESSIBILITY. "



AND THEN THINGS GOT SUPER

After a brief stint as an antagonist in *Donkey Kong Jr*, Mario got a younger brother called Luigi and starred in his own 1983 arcade game *Mario Bros.*, battling creatures coming up through the New York sewers. Even though Nintendo claims there are "no last names" for the brothers, their surname was listed as "Mario" in the game, making them "Mario Mario" and "Luigi Mario".

Then *Super Mario Bros.* was released for the Nintendo Entertainment System in 1985. Arguably one of the most influential games in the history of the medium, it popularized the side-scrolling genre and functioned as one of the earliest narrative-driven games by having a clearly defined beginning, middle and end to its story. *Super Mario Bros.* is credited with the initial success of the NES, as well as reviving the American gaming industry after the video game crash of 1983.

Now, three decades later and practically unchanged from his original design, Mario continues to represent what may well be the fundamental ethos of Nintendo: accessible fun that isn't forced into one specific ideal. **NAG**
- Miktar



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IN SEARCH OF A HOMEWORLD

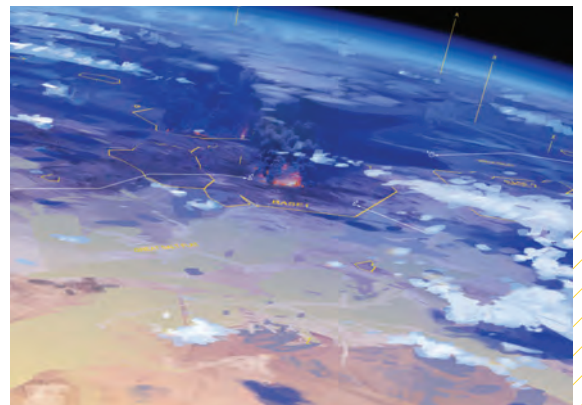
In 1997 a new game development studio opened up in Vancouver – they called themselves Relic Entertainment. Two years later, with the help of the now defunct publisher Sierra, Relic released a new IP into the real-time strategy genre: a space game called *Homeworld*. It was a critical and commercial success, netting a legion of devoted fans and catapulting the development team onto the industry's radar. In September 2003, Relic released *Homeworld 2*, a much needed success for the then struggling Sierra Entertainment. Less than a year later, however, financial issues with Sierra's parent company Vivendi Universal Games meant that Relic was sold off to THQ in April of 2004; the deal cost THQ around \$10 million. The *Homeworld* IP, however, stayed with Sierra.

It wasn't until November 2007 that THQ managed to obtain the rights to *Homeworld* from Sierra and Vivendi. Despite the highly rated IP finally finding its way home to its creator Relic, THQ kept Relic busy on other projects. But something else happened in 2007 – a group of original Relic members, including

co-founder Rob Cunningham and *Homeworld* lead artist Aaron Kambeitz, left the studio to forge their own path in the real-time strategy landscape. By 2010 they'd set up the then 32-strong Blackbird Interactive, and had begun work on a new real-time strategy game.

Relic continued to develop highly successful real-time strategy games for THQ. Series like *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War* and *Company of Heroes* served to drive the RTS genre forward and cement Relic's reputation as one of the best developers the genre had ever seen. To date, Relic holds the accolade of having developed history's most critically acclaimed real-time strategy game, *Company of Heroes*. While THQ ensured that Relic was kept busy on these two franchises, the *Homeworld* IP lay in storage and out of sight of the gaming public but, thanks to its cult status and active fan base, never out of mind.

In mid-2012, when THQ began its rapid descent into bankruptcy, the *Homeworld* IP's future started looking considerably depressing. With no new entries in the franchise for nearly 10 years, many were



preparing themselves for the IP to become one of the dying publisher's casualties. That, however, was not to be the case, as the closer THQ got to being shut down, the more interest there seemed to be in the *Homeworld* brand. Meanwhile, Rob Cunningham and Blackbird Interactive unveiled *Hardware: Shipbreakers* – a new free-to-play, real-time strategy game with a considerable amount of *Homeworld*'s DNA. Even without knowing Blackbird's pedigree, the similarities between *Homeworld* and *Hardware* were evident in everything from the style of narrative trailers, to the concept art and music (unsurprising considering *Homeworld* composer Paul Ruskay is on-board with Blackbird).

Once THQ began auctioning off developers and properties, the Internet was abuzz with speculation

"SERIES LIKE *WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR* AND *COMPANY OF HEROES* SERVED TO DRIVE THE RTS GENRE FORWARD AND CEMENT RELIC'S REPUTATION AS ONE OF THE BEST DEVELOPERS THE GENRE HAD EVER SEEN."



as to where Relic and, more importantly, *Homeworld* would end up. The prospect of Relic being separated (yet again) from their IP seemed too farfetched for many, but that would eventually turn out to be case. In the end, SEGA purchased Relic for \$26.6 million but *Homeworld's* fate wasn't to be known for some months more. Then on 15 April 2013, the *Homeworld* IP, along with a number of other legacy titles, was auctioned off. A month later, the most unlikely of companies announced that they had purchased the rights to *Homeworld*: Gearbox Software, the development team behind smash hit FPS *Borderlands*. The acquisition was spearheaded by Gearbox's chief creative officer Brian Martel, who would later admit to having a great love and respect for Relic's IP. The deal cost Gearbox around \$1.35 million.

Gearbox wasn't the only company at the auction that had attended with the sole purpose of acquiring the *Homeworld* IP: Rob Cunningham and Blackbird Interactive had also been present, but had lost to Gearbox. Despite the defeat, Cunningham approached Gearbox representatives and congratulated them on their purchase. Little did he know that that would kick-start the most interesting turn of events. In September 2013, at PAX Australia, Gearbox approached Blackbird and offered to share the *Homeworld* IP. Just like that, Blackbird's *Hardware: Shipbreakers* was reintroduced to the world as *Homeworld: Shipbreakers* – a new, prequel entry into the *Homeworld* series and one being funded and published by Gearbox.

Homeworld: Shipbreakers is sounding ambitious. The game will obviously undergo some changes

now that Gearbox has shared the *Homeworld* IP (for a start, it's no longer free-to-play), but what Blackbird has revealed so far is very appealing. Their aim is to produce a game that's played out on a single massive map that makes up an entire planet. Cunningham once illustrated the idea as "Google Earth meets RTS". Scale, as it was in *Homeworld*, remains important, and in *Shipbreakers* players will be controlling massive sci-fi trucks as they travel a desert planet looking for derelict space ships to salvage. With numerous competing salvage companies, conflict is inevitable. Multiple factions vying for control of the same resource, set on a desert planet? It sounds like *Dune* meets *Homeworld*, and for long-time fans of the RTS genre, that sounds magnificent **NAG.**
- Mikit0707

Night in the Woods

At the end of everything, hold on to anything

Mae is a troubled youth. And a cat, but that doesn't matter. An only child and born in a small coal mining town, her parents worked hard so she could go to college. But after only three semesters, Mae dropped out and moved back into her parent's attic. She has real anger issues and doesn't know what to do with herself. Her friends all changed while she was away, making them difficult to relate to. Her hometown of Possum Springs seems different too. And now she's developed inexplicable paranormal abilities too, which at least let her explore areas of the town she's never known. But behind the park at the edge of town, back in the trees by the old mine... there's something in the woods.

"There's a strong *Where the Wild Things Are* (the movie, not the book) vibe to *Night in the Woods*."

There's a strong *Where the Wild Things Are* (the movie, not the book) vibe to *Night in the Woods*. Both are heavy with legitimate character-driven issues, obscured behind a cunning shellac of aesthetics. But because

Night in the Woods is a game, Mae's problems become our problems, as our agency in Possum Springs is through

her. Possum Springs itself is a richly coloured place full of characters to meet and things to do. The developers promise "many activities to enjoy" and, secrets to uncover. The game is 2D, story-focused, and centres on exploration. Mae can run, jump and astral project. She can also swing a baseball bat, though it's unclear what else you'll get up to. Other than smashing mailboxes and exploring the woods as a ghost.

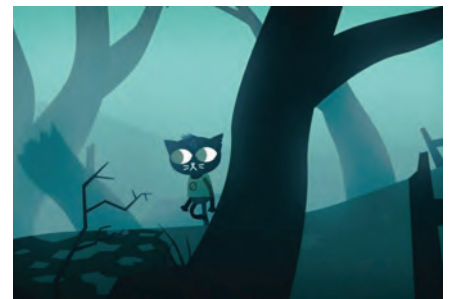
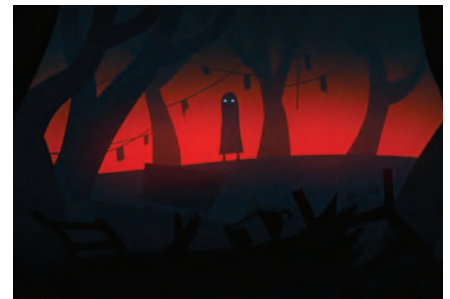


Night in the Woods is being developed by the talented team of Alec Holowka (*Aquaria*), and Scott Benson, a self-taught animator and illustrator who's produced various music videos.



RELEASE DATE / Q1 2015
PLATFORM / PC
GENRE / Adventure
DEVELOPER / Infinite Fall
WEBSITE / www.nightinthewoods.com
PUBLISHER / Infinite Fall

The Kickstarter for *Night in the Woods* asked for \$50,000 and got over \$200,000.



Mae's compadres are Bea (an alligator?), Gregg (a fox), Angus (a bear) and Germ (some kind of bird). Bea used to be Mae's best friend growing up, but the two drifted apart when she went to college. Valedictorian of her graduating class, Bea aced her college applications. But when her mother died, Bea stayed behind in Possum Springs to help her father and take over the family business. Gregg and Angus are a cute gay couple who have been together since high school, and both are working full time jobs to "get out of this crappy town, thank you very much". Germ... not much is said about Germ.

This early on, it's difficult to pin down a game like this into specifics. The basics of the gameplay sound straightforward: running around, doing tasks for people, enjoying the story and art, and exploring. But how it will all come together into a compelling experience that lingers with you long after you've stopped playing, that remains to be seen. **NAG**

- Miktar

RELEASE DATE / 2014
 PLATFORM / PS3
 GENRE / Action role-playing game
 DEVELOPER / Access Games
 WEBSITE / www.drakengardgame.com
 PUBLISHER / Square Enix

Drakengard 3

The strange prequel to a strange series.

An unnamed medieval world is in trouble. Aren't they always? The world is burning due to conflict between warring warlords of war. Suddenly, five mysterious scantily-clad figures descend from the heavens and using magic (through song no less) they defeat the warlords. There's scantily-clad peace, the people of unnamed medieval world start worshipping the five saviours, and all is well. The strongest of the five, called "One", wishes to unite the five, but suddenly a sixth appears. Called "Zero", she's determined to kill the other five. She's also the player character.

The *Drakengard* series (known as *Drag-On Dragoon* in Japan) is a strange series and difficult to approach. The third instalment

is actually a prequel to the first game, and retains the series' weird gameplay mix of *Dynasty Warriors* and *Panzer Dragoon*. On the ground, it's a hack-and-slash with *Devil May Cry* style combos and weapon-based attacks. Hop on your dragon Mikhail (who's a pacifist, for some reason) and you can clear the area with a tail sweep or take to the sky. While aloft, aerial combat involves multi-target lock-on beam attacks. Because that's what pacifist dragons do, we guess.

Travelling with Zero on her quest are the "Apostles", a group of sexy companions there to satisfy her sexual wants. Discovering each companion's motivations and quirks are, apparently, part of the appeal of the game. **NAG**

- Miktar



Drakengard's producer, Taro Yokom, considers *Nier* to be the true *Drakengard 3*.



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RELEASE DATE / Q1 2014
 PLATFORM / PS3
 GENRE / Role-playing game
 DEVELOPER / Namco Bandai Games
 WEBSITE / www.namcobandaigames.eu
 PUBLISHER / Namco Bandai Games

Tales of Symphonia Chronicles

The very best in JRPG comfort food, now in HD!

The *Tales* series has never been known for innovation. But what it lacks in variation from the genre's established tropes (in both gameplay and story), it makes up for by doing what it does extremely well. The series is a throwback to 16-bit RPGs, complete with overworld map, towns, dungeon maps and self-contained battle screens. There's even an airship.

There are a few things that make the series unique. While travelling, "skits" happen between the characters, little scenes that play out in dialogue and character portraits only. These are optional, contain character development and side details, and have minimal impact to the story. But they're interesting if you're invested in the world. The battle system is the "Multi-Line Linear Motion Battle System": four party members fight in real time, moving around in 3D, towards or away from targeted enemies, with the CPU handling characters you're not directly controlling. It sounds weird, but makes sense in practice. Skills are learned by equipping EX Gems, which impart their abilities to characters after a while. Attribute growth is determined by Titles, which are earned from story progression, side quests and other means. Setting a Title to a character adjusts which attributes raise first when levelling.

This HD remaster features dual audio tracks (English/Japanese), all textures and characters are improved, the framerate is better, and there are new side-quests and bosses. **NAG**

- Miktar



RELEASE DATE / 2014
 PLATFORM / PC
 GENRE / Role-playing game
 DEVELOPER / Trion Worlds
 WEBSITE / www.trovegame.com
 PUBLISHER / Trion Worlds

Trove

Little big infinite adventure

It looks like *Cube World* but quacks like *Minecraft*. In theory, anyway. *Trove* is an internal Trion Worlds pet project that's been uplifted to full product – currently in alpha – and hopes to provide endless fun in randomly generated voxel worlds. *Trove* has much in common with an MMO: character progression and persistence, many players in a world (up to 100 or more), and needs an Internet connection to play. But it's not a conventional MMO. Each time you log in, there is a chance the world will be randomly generated anew. The studio likens it to *Diablo*, how each time you play the maps are different.

Each world has a series of quests, randomly-generated dungeons, loot to find, and resources to harvest. You can make your own items and fully customize your "Cornerstone", a trans-dimensional home that persists with you when starting in a new world. Players will also be able to create structures and monsters that may be included in future worlds, though the exact nature of this system hasn't been detailed yet.

The world itself is malleable much like *Minecraft*. If a dungeon entrance was spawned under a hill, you can take a shovel and dig yourself a way in. Because each world may present different challenges, you'll be able to swap your character class and abilities on the fly. **NAG**

- Miktar



Trion Worlds is mostly known for their MMOs *Rift* and *Defiance*.



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EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE

PLAYSTATION 4

Wow, it's the next generation! Look at all those polygons and particle effects! The PS4 has finally landed on our fine local shores and we thought it'd be swell to take a look at absolutely everything to do with this fancy new console. We'll show you the hardware and the software, the controllers, the camera thingy, and the services. Let's get on with it then...



DUALSHOCK 4

We'll just come right out and say it, now that it's effectively a thing of the past and we (hopefully) can't get in trouble for admitting it anymore: we've always *despised* the PS3's controllers, both the original, rumble-free Sixaxis and the DualShock 3 that replaced it. They're antiquated, flimsy, cheap-feeling things that inevitably cause discomfort after sustained use due to a number of ill-conceived design decisions. Convex

analogue sticks that are too close together and shoulder triggers that aren't nicely concaved are two things that spring to mind.

The DualShock 4 aims to solve every problem we had with its predecessors. It's bigger. It's heavier. It's solid-er. The analogue sticks are not only further apart, but they're nicely concaved in the centre to more comfortably grip your thumbs. Concaved triggers are now a proud

feature. Beyond enhancing the comfort and improving the existing gyroscope- and accelerometer-powered motion capabilities, Sony's added a few new standout features to the DualShock 4.

Most obvious is the clickable touchpad toward the top of the controller. Launch titles have used it with varying success. *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* uses it as a pseudo-mouse for moving around the map screen. *Killzone: Shadow Fall* uses it

PS4



to let you select weapon modes. Perhaps most concerning is that they all give the sense that developers aren't quite sure what to do with the touchpad yet, which leaves it feeling like a bit of a gimmick at the moment.

The new "options" (which is a merger of the old "start" and "select" buttons) and "share" buttons are a bit awkwardly placed on either side of the touchpad, just a tad too far out of reach. The

PlayStation button, however, is now much more conveniently located between the analogue sticks. The beam of light at the top of the controller not only interacts with the PS4's camera, but it changes colour depending on how many controllers you have plugged in at any given time, each thereby easily identified by its unique colour. The colour can also be altered by players, and it lights up to indicate when the controller is charging.

On that note, you'll get around eight hours of wireless play from a single charge with DualShock 4 – which is significantly less than you got with DualShock 3. It's to be expected though, what with all the new features. PS4 allows you to charge controllers even when the console is in standby mode.

PLAYSTATION CAMERA

It may not be as supposedly integral a component to Sony's new console as Kinect is to Microsoft's Xbox One, but the PlayStation Camera still adds some nifty functionality to the PlayStation 4. It's a much less bulky device than Kinect, which works in its favour, but at the same time its overall functionality is less instantly imposing than that of the competition. Voice control is now possible, letting you activate certain console commands using your face instead of your hands. As it was with Kinect's original incarnation, however, voice commands can prove a bit iffy.

Working with the beam of light on the DualShock 4, the camera can determine controller movement and depth, effectively enabling similar functionality to PlayStation Move with DualShock 4 – but existing PS Move controllers will also work with PS4. You'll have to maintain a well-lit environment, however, since the camera has no infrared capabilities. This is particularly important with the facial recognition component, which sees the camera scanning the room to find people it recognises before letting them log in to their accounts by moving the controller to check an onscreen box. It's ultimately a redundant feature, because simply selecting your account using the controller is infinitely easier, although it's obviously not as cool of a party trick.

All things considered, it feels like the camera's present integration with PS4 is a bit hollow. Whether Sony aims to fix that by supporting it with meaningful software in the future remains to be seen, because at present all there is to justify its existence is the Playroom application that's bundled with the PS4 – a charming addition, but one without much substance.

THE INTERFACE

The PS4's UI is very clearly an evolution of the PS3's XrossMediaBar interface, despite now being called the PlayStation Dynamic Menu. Navigating the nested menus of the PS4 is buttery smooth on the new hardware, but as it was with its predecessor, finding your way around the plethora of options can be a daunting task until you're used to it. And because of the way everything is laid out, getting used to it could take a while.

Still, there are some really cool new features. Immediately enticing is the ability to slice up video footage or grab screenshots from your last 15 minutes of gaming, either to share your gaming exploits with the world via PSN (or supported social networks) or to store in your own personal archive of gaming memories. All you've got to do to access the functionality is hit the share button on the new controller. It's not nearly as good of a feature as it should be, however, with video seemingly being extensively compressed as it's captured, which means the resulting videos are grainy and low-res. It's nothing Sony can't work at improving though.

Strangely, there's no local media playback, which was possible on PS3. We particularly like the ability to switch between the game you're currently playing and active apps (like the Internet browser) with a quick double-tap of the controller's PlayStation button. There's also the ability to change console settings mid-game.





FUTURE-PROOF

Thanks to what we imagine are vastly complicated publisher deals, a few key games on PS3 can be upgraded to PS4 titles for a fee. This option is valid for both boxed and digital versions, but your upgraded next-gen version will only be available through PlayStation Network, so make sure you've got plenty of Internets left.

The games currently available through this offer are *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*, *Call of Duty: Ghosts*, *Battlefield 4*, *Injustice: Gods Among Us*, and *NBA 2K14*. The upgrade fees range from \$10 to \$15, and this service will only be valid for a limited time.

REMOTE PLAY

Similarly to the Wii U and its GamePad, the PS4 can interface with the PlayStation Vita via Remote Play – which lets you stream supported PS4 games to your PSV via Wi-Fi if you suddenly need to move away from your TV for whatever reason. As you'd expect, staying near to your router is a necessity in this case.

Some launch games (including *Battlefield 4*, *Knack*, *Killzone: Shadow Fall* and *Assassin's Creed IV*) have opted for more than just rudimentary support for Remote Play, taking full advantage of the fact that Sony allows developers to even set up custom Vita controls for games played via Remote Play.

Second-screen functionality goes beyond just the PSV, with Sony wisely releasing the PlayStation App for iOS and Android devices rather than forcing you to own a Vita to access such features. The companion app lets you fiddle with stuff like friends list management and remote purchasing/downloading of games, as well as augmented reality experiences if you elect to install it on your mobile device.

PLAYSTATION NETWORK

After lagging behind the competition for ages in terms of its online offering with the PS3, Sony has taken big steps to ensure that the service is up to par at launch. As you probably know, in order to play most multiplayer games on PS4, you'll have to pay to subscribe to Sony's PlayStation Plus service. Free-to-play multiplayer games like *PlanetSide 2* don't require a PS+ sub. Fortunately, your cash gets you more than just multiplayer access – as with PS+ on PS3, you get a regularly updated stream of free games, as well as access to digital discounts.

A neat addition is that you're able to download your PS account to any other PS4 as a guest account which will be deleted as soon as you log out. The PSN friends limit has been raised to 2,000, in case you somehow needed that to happen. The console's home screen now shows an activity feed of what your friends have been up to. It's really just a wall of information overload, and it could perhaps do with a bit of streamlining to show more meaningful data.

One thing we feel we need to mention is that there are still no plans to get excellent media services like Netflix localised, which continues to evoke a perpetual nationwide sigh, because such services really do add an extra layer of value to a console's existence.



INITIAL IMPRESSIONS – MIKTAR'S HANDS-ON

What a surprise the PS4 is, for me anyway. I was worried that Sony wouldn't learn anything from the initial floundering of the PS3. I was wrong.

The console itself is small, about the same size as the new slim PS3, but much more svelte. Setup was quick, barely a few screens of information to enter. The "crossbar" interface paradigm has been further refined, with an ever-present row of menu items up top, and a dynamic layout of panels below. When highlighting a game, these panels show a feed of what your friends are doing, important content you've installed for the game, and more. It's clean, there are no advertisements except in the "What's New" panel, and everything loads fast with only a minor stutter now and then as it polls PSN for data.

The DualShock 4 is a *huge* improvement over its predecessor. The top of the analogue sticks feel great, having ridges instead of the DS3's parabolic hat, and the triggers are now curve inwards instead of out. It's weighty, but not too heavy, and lacks that "cheap plastic feel" that plagued the DS3. The touchpad in the centre of the controller is okay, it can click down like a button, and isn't obtrusive. Though I'm not sold on it being there yet.

Remote Play using a Vita works, for the most part, though I've had trouble getting it to be consistent. Even connecting directly to the PS4, bypassing the wireless network, the stream occasionally stutters, breaks up or cuts out. Might be firmware issues. There are a few things that need some work: the sharing functionality is great, but still a little limited. You can only upload video to Facebook for now, and screenshots only to Twitter/Facebook. There's no way to edit captured video either yet. Streaming live to Twitch/ UStream works great.

Even this early on, the PlayStation 4 shows Sony is serious. It's powerful, well-designed, and entirely focused on games.



NOTEWORTHY UPCOMING TITLES

Infamous: Second Son
Diablo III Prepare for Hell Edition
Final Fantasy XV
The Order: 1886
Tom Clancy's The Division
Watch Dogs
Wolfenstein: The New Order
Dragon Age: Inquisition
Thief
Mad Max
The Witness

LAUNCH TITLES



ANGRY BIRDS: STAR WARS

Hey, it's that mobile game that usually costs a couple of dollars, now available on console for substantially more than that! Cynicism aside, it's *Angry Birds*, so it's sure to be a brilliant time-waster, and with all that *Star Wars* going on you just know you'll be in geek heaven.

ASSASSIN'S CREED IV: BLACK FLAG

Aaargh! Shiver me timbers! Parrot my cutlass and flagon my breeches, or something! If you haven't yet picked up this sea-faring addition to the *Assassin's Creed* universe, there's no time like right now to do just that, and get all those juicy next-generation visuals on your face while you're at it.

BATTLEFIELD 4

Another port of a current-generation title, *Battlefield 4* on PS4 is going to deliver exactly what you'd expect it to: guns, bros, bros with guns, guns with bros, and epic multiplayer with total player numbers your PC counterparts have been ragging you about for years.

BLACKLIGHT RETRIBUTION [CONSOLE EXCLUSIVE]

Blacklight has been out since 2012 on PC, but for those stoic console people out there, this is the only way you're going to get to play it. This game is free-to-play if you're a PS Plus member, so there's no excuse for you not to at least give it a whirl.

CALL OF DUTY: GHOSTS

Hey, it's that game with the dog! Now with super next-gen fur technology (we're not even kidding), *Call of Duty: Ghosts* is everything you'd ever want from a *Call of Duty* game. Just how much that means to you depends on what you want from *COD*, but this next-gen offering is sure to make all those visuals snap, crackle and pop with delight.

CONTRAST

This is one for those who like a bit of thinking in their gameplay. In this stark noir puzzle platformer, players take on the role of an imaginary friend named Dawn who can shift between 2D and 3D to traverse the shadows cast in the environment. It's a bit like an inside-out version of *Fez*, where the world's 3D structure hides a flat and dynamic game world within, one that those with a twisted way of looking at things are sure to love.

DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

Stepping up from its PS3 version, *DC Universe Online* joins its cousin *Planetside* in an adventure to the next generation. While the game will retain its freemium model, expect improved visuals and all that other lovely stuff borrowed from the PC version.

FIFA 14

It's that football action that you know and love, but fitted with an all-new engine especially for the next generation of consoles. With the new tech you can expect a far greater level of detail in both player models and their animations, and there's sure to be an all-round smoother experience throughout the whole game.

FLOWER

Wow, it's been a while since we've played this delightful little puzzle game. It's really more of a meditation device than anything, and it looked incredible on the PS3. This next-gen version takes those visuals even further and is a no-brainer if you enjoy a bit of down-time every now and then.

JUST DANCE 2014

Just dance, guys! Only do that! We enjoyed the current version of the game and there's every chance that this next-gen iteration is just as good, but with added PlayStation camera support that lets you ditch the Move controllers and rock out in the flesh. Maybe not just the flesh, hopefully you'll keep your clothes on. Or whatever, it's your house.

KILLZONE: SHADOW FALL [EXCLUSIVE]

This is the big one, folks. Sony's own shooter is all set to enter your living room alongside your brand-new PS4, and bring with it incredible visuals and a generally new approach to the gameplay. While this is the sixth game in the series overall, *Shadow Fall* is a direct sequel to the third game and is likely to spark a whole new trilogy on the next generation of Sony's home console.

While *Shadow Fall* remains an action game at its heart, there's a distinct openness to the game world and an emphasis on taking a stealthy approach. Players will have access to a number of familiar and new sci-fi weapons, as well as a neat little drone that protects you with limited firepower, defence shields and even an ability to deploy a zip-line.

KNACK [EXCLUSIVE]

We get the impression that *Knack* is Sony's new *Crash Bandicoot* or *Spyro the Dragon*. And, not coincidentally, the big chief from both of those series, Mark Cerny (who's been involved with the majority of Sony's first-party titles), has been on the development team. He joined SCE Japan for *Knack*, which developed the adorable *LocoRoco* and *Patapon*.

In the game, you'll take on the role of a three-foot creature called Knack as the Earth is invaded by goblins. To enable you to deal with the invading force, Knack can shift into a number of more powerful forms by absorbing from his surroundings. Cerny has been quoted as describing the gameplay as a mix of *Crash*, *Katamari Damacy* and a bit of *God of War*. Sounds alright!

LEGO MARVEL SUPER HEROES

While developers TT Games hadn't initially planned to bring *LEGO Marvel Super Heroes* to the next generation, they decided that doing so would be a great way to expand on the game with improved visuals and technical advancements. Load times, for example, have been cut down to practically zero, and there's extra lighting all over the place to make those little plastic super people appear more realistic.

MADDEN NFL 25

Touchdown! And with that, we're done. We know as much about American football as we

do about bacterial growth patterns in marine life, but there's no doubt that this jump to next-gen will bring with it technical and visual improvements across the board. Don't expect the game to change much, though, because that's not how sports works (duh!).

NBA 2K14

2K's foray into next-gen sportball games is nothing short of warmongering: they're out to prove a point and that point is a simple port is simply not worth doing. *NBA 2K14* on next-gen obviously improves the visuals, but it also brings with it a ton of gameplay tweaks and even additional commentary tracks.

NEED FOR SPEED RIVALS

Despite claims from the *NFS* team that developing across current- and next-gen held back some of the potential of the fancy version of *Rivals*, we still think it looks fantastic. This probably has a lot to do with the scalability of the Frostbite 3 engine, so those who do decide to pick up the PS4 version of *Rivals* will be treated to a ton of visual splendour and improved frame rates.

RESOGUN [EXCLUSIVE]

From the creators of *Super Stardust HD* comes *Resogun*, a bullet hell shooter that flips off your conventional idea of 3D space and takes you back to a time when games were simpler. If you enjoy arcade shooters and feel the need to test your reflexes and dexterity, or just want a chance to show off your high score to your mates, this is one for you.

SKYLANDERS: SWAP FORCE

Another straight-up port, *Skylanders Swap Force* brings improved visuals and all those shiny sparkly things that make next-gen games more pretty than their older, uglier siblings. The gameplay is sure to be much the same, though.

SOUND SHAPES

The quirky and delightful little musical platformer from Toronto-based Queasy Games makes its leap onto the PS4 along with a few of its (sort of) indie brethren.

SUPER MOTHERLOAD

This interesting little game sees players take on the role of Employee 1001, a miner on the planet Mars under the employ of the mega-greedy Solarus Corporation. You'll take to a digging machine that delves deep below the planet's surface, scoop up valuable metals and minerals, and return to the surface to sell them and upgrade your rig, all while uncovering the secrets that lie beneath.

TRINE 2: COMPLETE STORY

The gorgeous puzzle/adventure/platformer that charmed us all (twice) makes its way onto PS4 in the form of *Trine 2: Complete Story*. As you'd expect with a title like that, this version bundles in all the DLC to create an extensive experience filled with magic, intrigue and combat.

Reviews Intro

It's just the same jaded hacks that would be classified as retarded if it wasn't for Word spellchecker.. Meet your reviewers.

Not about gaming... What New Year's resolution do you most want to keep but know deep down inside you will ultimately break?



RedTide

Eating and the exercising, I can't seem to stick to something for longer than two weeks. I'm secretly praying I get stranded on a desert island for a few months with just bugs to eat and urine to drink.



Miktar

I'd really like to focus more on non-gaming stuff next year, perhaps find some other hobbies. But who am I kidding... I'll likely die playing a handheld.



Azimuth

To stop wasting so much time on Reddit. Oh wait, I broke that one last year already. And the year before that.



Mikit0707

Finding time for regular exercise. Seriously, it's a time thing, not a laziness thing. STOP JUDGING ME, ALRIGHT!



GeometriX

To actually stick to an exercise regime. I know I just need to get through the December holidays and I'll be safe – that's the real trick.



Barkskin

I resolve to build my own intergalactic brewery on the moon. Because if you're going to pre-emptively fail at fulfilling your yearly resolutions, you may as well dream big.

Mini reviews

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

THE RAVEN: LEGACY OF A MASTER THIEF

Set in the 1960s, *The Raven* is a three-part episodic point-and-click adventure that casts players as Anton Jakob Zellner – a venerable Swiss police constable who's nearing the end of his service. Unlike the characters in the murder mystery novels that he's so happy reading, Zellner hasn't seen much action over the years. But when *The Raven* – a master thief who captivated Europe with his spectacularly daring burglaries before being shot dead by a hotshot French inspector – seemingly returns from the grave, leaving a raven's feather calling card at a new crime scene, Zellner sees an opportunity to retire with a bang.

Zellner's convinced that this new crime is the work of a sloppy copycat thief. And so you and he must work to piece together the mystery and finally showcase Zellner's detective abilities. It's a calmly paced, relaxing adventure full of enjoyable sleuthing, with puzzles that actually make logical sense and a main character who's refreshingly more grounded than what you'll find



in most modern adventure games. It looks fantastic as well, with gorgeously rendered backdrops complementing its well-acted characters. The first episode is definitely the strongest of the three, but the whole adventure is serenely satisfying.

80



"All the perks sound like '80s action movies."

- Dane



Ramjet

I don't make New Year's resolutions. I am too old for pointless tomfoolery.



SAVAGE

Klapping gym boet.



ShockG

Thou shalt not consume any fried chicken under any circumstance! Noble in intent, but doomed by a genetic predisposition.

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...

Thoopid

WWW.THOOPID.COM

When Cape Town-based Thoopid got together to make a game, they knew that they'd have a few challenges ahead of them. While various members of this group of designers, developers and marketers had some experience in game creation outside of the team, as a group, *Snailboy* is their first endeavour – one that's proved to be quite successful.

You might think that a snail makes for a strange player character, but after extensive brainstorming it seemed like the best fit for the team's gameplay goals.

"Snails have long been labelled as slow or escargot, so we decided to turn that frown upside down and give snails a new look," Thoopid tells us.

The game plays out like a typical platformer, but its rich 3D visuals set it apart from most other indie mobile titles you find on mobile platforms. These visuals are



actually pre-rendered and the game was built in 2D using Adobe Flash and AIR, which Thoopid explains is a great solution for those looking to take their software to multiple platforms, and add in extra functionality through frameworks.

Once the team is done porting *Snailboy* to Android (which should be done by time you read this), the plan is to make a sequel to the game, so definitely stick around for more news on this front – there's bound to be plenty.

PLATFORMS
360 / PC / PS3
REVIEWED ON
360
GENRE

Turn-based strategy
AGE RESTRICTION
18

MULTIPLAYER
Local
None
Online
None

DEVELOPER
Firaxis Games

WEBSITE
www.xcom.com/enemywithin

PUBLISHER
2K Games

DISTRIBUTOR
Megarom

Reviewed

XCOM: Enemy Within

Not under the sea

When *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* launched at the end of 2012 it did more than deliver a compelling return to the venerable series, it proved that there's room for intelligent turn-based tactical strategy games in today's attention-deficit market. We loved it then so it's with high hopes that we jumped into this expansion.

Sorry for everyone who thought that we'd see *XCOM* take a dive into the oceans – *Enemy Within* opts to add stuff on top of the existing campaign and mission structure rather than taking players to wildly new places, and you might think at first that this expansion is rather on the safe side for it. When you get going, however, the changes become truly evident.

The biggest additions are powerful gene-mod and MEC soldiers: technologies stolen from the alien invaders and turned

against them. These two new types of troopers are potentially vastly different and offer new ways to engage enemies on the battlefield while giving you more to think about when you're back at base. Both of these technologies are supported by a new alien resource called Meld which is found in most engagements and can be collected by your units if you're fast enough – each Meld pickup will stick around for a limited number of turns. This initially seems counter-intuitive to the *XCOM* mandate of "slow and steady wins the race", but in truth the act of being gently coerced into taking risks encourages you to think with greater strategic scope than before. The result is a distinctly more challenging game (initially, at least), but one that plays to the series' strengths: risk vs. reward is more evident here than it's ever been; if you don't suck it up and grab some Meld once in a while,

ROOM FOR ACTIVITIES

There are a few more additions to the base game that are altogether significant enough to not just make this expansion worthwhile, but turn it into the definitive version of *XCOM*: 47 new maps join the fray; there's a force of militant alien sympathisers to contend with; there are two mini-campaigns added on top of the standard campaign (including the *Slingshot* DLC); base defence is in; there are plenty of new gadgets to play with.



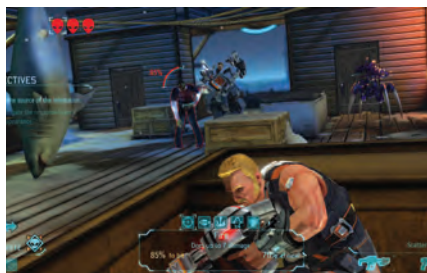
➤ The alien sympathisers go by the name of EXALT, and will attempt to fight you in the field of battle and hack into your systems to hamper your campaign. They're best dealt with as soon as possible, but can handle themselves in combat as well as your own troops.



Death by disco lasers



“The biggest additions are powerful gene-mod and MEC soldiers: technologies stolen from the alien invaders and turned against them”



When a soldier is converted to a MEC trooper, they're stripped of their current class (but not rank), as well as their flimsy human appendages. From there you can outfit them with customisable exoskeletons decked out with cool things like flamethrowers and Miniguns.



you stand the chance of having troopers that can't go toe-to-toe with some of the new and terrifying extra-terrestrial threats.

On top of the additional content you also get a generally tweaked experience: higher difficulty levels feel like they cater more towards the truly hardcore, leaving the standard level as an exciting strategy experience that will suit more casual tacticians, especially if you enjoy getting ballsy with the new high-tech troopers. There are a few niggles, however: the action camera is still a little too quirky for my liking, and the deployment method for this expansion on console leaves a lot to be desired: you need to buy *XCOM: EW* as a standalone title and can essentially throw away your old copy of *EU*. On PC it's a more traditional expansion (with a price to match). **NAG**
- GeometriX

92

This is 2012's *XCOM* with tons of new bells and whistles, turning the already stellar tactical strategy game into something truly exceptional.

PLUS

Plenty of new content / More replayability than ever / It's the same *XCOM*, but better

MINUS

Same technical quirks are still present / Console deployment method seems silly

PLATFORMS
360 / 3DS / DS / PC
PS3 / PS4 / PSV / Wii U / XBO

REVIEWED ON
360

GENRE
Action adventure
AGE RESTRICTION
7

MULTIPLAYER

Local

2 players

Online

None

DEVELOPER

TT Games

WEBSITE

videogames.lego.com

PUBLISHER

Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment

DISTRIBUTOR

Ster Kinekor

➤ Collected LEGO studs can be exchanged to activate a bunch of different gameplay tweaks. Visit Deadpool's room on the S.H.I.E.L.D. Helicarrier to make it happen.

Reviewed

LEGO Marvel Super Heroes

Once more, with Spider-Man

If you've grown increasingly tired of the *LEGO* video games and the iterative application of their formula to some of the world's most-loved franchises, perhaps you should stop reading this review now, because at its core *LEGO Marvel Super Heroes* is more of that same block-bashing, stud-collecting gameplay that's got your weary levels on the rise. You'd be unwittingly punishing yourself, however, because this is possibly the best game yet in the series, and an absolute treat for fans of both Marvel and the *LEGO* games.

Inside you'll find more than 100 blockified renditions of all your favourite Marvel superheroes and supervillains. There's *LEGO* Iron Man, sporting various versions of his metallic *LEGO* suit. *LEGO* Spider-Man swings from *LEGO* webs and uses his Spider-Sense to detect *LEGO* objects of interest. *LEGO* Hulk is a *LEGO* bigfig to all the other *LEGO* minifigs, a hulking *LEGO* brute who can

tear *LEGO* chunks from the ground and smash other *LEGO* stuff to bits with it. It's as adorable as it's ever been, and each of the characters obviously wields all the unique powers you'd expect. To make the roster even more ludicrous, you can combine the powers of different superheroes to create new hybrid superheroes with which to explore the world.

There's a ton to do in the game, as always. After completing missions in Story Mode, you can revisit them in Free Play with the ability to choose any unlocked character and use their abilities to access the plethora of secrets contained within each level. Magneto can manipulate magnetic items in the environment. Human Torch's beam of fire can destroy gold *LEGO* objects. Outside of the missions there's *LEGO* New York City – an enormous open-world playground that you're free to explore at will, charging through *LEGO* streets on foot or in vehicles, or soaring across the skies with flight-enabled characters like Iron Man. The city also holds a wealth of collectables, unlockable content and tertiary distractions, as do the other locations you're able to visit, like the X-Mansion or the S.H.I.E.L.D. Helicarrier. It'll take ridiculous amounts of time to unlock everything that's tucked away within this Marvel-themed world.

As always seems to be the case with the *LEGO* games, the developers continue to make the same mistakes with each new release. The camera, for example, is still a horribly uncooperative chore, often obscuring your character behind large chunks of environmental detail. Despite repeated niggles such as that, however, it remains a fun, light-hearted experience that's family-friendly – so you can teach your kids about all those Marvel characters you've grown up with. Local co-op is once again a fantastic way to play this game, letting you share its adorable humour with friends and family. **NAG**

- Barksin



83 It's ultimately more of the same gameplay you'd expect from this long-running series, but the Marvel licence is wonderfully handled and the open-world

LEGO playground you're free to roam between missions is a slice of brilliance. This is a must-have game if you're a fan of the *LEGO* franchise.

PLUS

Open world is brilliant / All your favourite Marvel characters / Same charming gameplay

MINUS

Camera still sucks

PLATFORMS

360 / PS3 / PS4

Wii / Wii U / XBO

REVIEWED ON

360

GENRE

Dancing

AGE RESTRICTION

3

MULTIPLAYER**Local**

4 players

Online

8 players

DEVELOPER

Ubisoft

WEBSITE

www.

justdancegame.

com

PUBLISHER

Ubisoft

DISTRIBUTOR

Megarom

*Reviewed***Just Dance 2014**

No shame here!

The *Just Dance* series has come a long way. From the early days in which the developers couldn't afford to pay royalties for original songs it has gone through several evolutionary steps, to the introduction of workout routines and steadily becoming more outlandish. One thing has always been core to the franchise, though: fun. It's never been a serious matter, playing *Just Dance*, and this latest instalment is the same. The name of the game says it all; don't worry about perfect choreography or timing... just have fun.

Which, inevitably, means that this game is going to be played by a bunch of people that are making total fools of themselves at parties. And that's OK, because that's what it is meant for. If you want perfection and a game that punishes you for doing stuff a little wrong, go elsewhere. But that also brings *Just Dance 2014's* scoring system into dispute. How exactly does it work? Then again, does anyone actually care?

They shouldn't. Aside from the fact that some game modes need to be unlocked, this title is more about fun than achievement, and it offers a selection of 47 tracks ranging from Abba to Lady Gaga to will.i.am. It's an eclectic mix of great dance tracks that suits the game's off-the-wall presentation perfectly. If you want to just have fun dancing, *Just Dance 2014* is a good option. **NAG**

- Shryke



78

If you're not into perfection and just want to have fun, *Just Dance 2014* offers all the right kinds of moves.

PLUS

Good fun at parties / More relaxed and forgiving

MINUS

Sometimes imprecise / How does the scoring work?

PLATFORMS

360 / PC

PS3 / PSV

REVIEWED ON

PS3

GENRE

Racing

AGE RESTRICTION

3

MULTIPLAYER**Local**

4 players

Online

16 players

DEVELOPER

Milestone

WEBSITE

www.wrcthegame.

com

PUBLISHER

Big Ben

DISTRIBUTOR

Apex Interactive

*Reviewed***WRC 4: FIA World Rally Championship**

Back in the mud

The racing game genre is always full of competition, but some of the sub-genres – often dedicated to simulating real sports – tend to be a little quieter. That doesn't mean that the market cannot be dominated... there may not be a lot of entrants, but struggling to get to number one is still a fight. And that's what Milestone are trying to do with their *WRC* series. Facing the stranglehold that *DiRT* has on the market, they are trying to unseat their rival with each new edition.

To this end *WRC 4* shows quite a few improvements over the last instalment, although these may not necessarily be in the right areas. The graphics, for example, have been ramped up, with courses having been given an overhaul, and even the lighting has been improved upon.

What hasn't seen enough of an overhaul is the all-important handling of the vehicles presented in the game. Varying road and weather conditions simply don't feel different enough for the game to be believable, which leads it down a path away from lofty simulation ideals and towards the realms of "arcade".

It is still a fun experience, mind you, with an enjoyable (and sometimes frustrating) career mode offering most of the challenge. It is an enjoyable title, if you're willing to forgive a few quirks. **NAG**

- Shryke

1 Good looks don't always equate to a great game...



70

WRC 4 is a decent game, but it doesn't come close to taking the pole position in the rally racing genre.

PLUS

Good looks, generally / Some improvements

MINUS

Still not where it should be / Conditions don't affect cars enough

PLATFORMS
360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / XBO

REVIEWED ON

PS3

GENRE

Racing

AGE RESTRICTION

7

MULTIPLAYER

Local

None

Online

6 players

DEVELOPER

Ghost

WEBSITE

www.needforspeed.com/rivals

PUBLISHER

Electronic Arts

DISTRIBUTOR

Apex Interactive

Reviewed

Need for Speed Rivals

The faster, the better

For some years now EA have been trying to rebuild the lost status of the *Need for Speed* franchise. Different developers, new approaches and ideas... but somehow it seems that the glory days of *Need for Speed* are a little lost.

The release of new gaming consoles, though, has allowed developers to breathe a lot of new life into flagging franchises. However, we're going to have to wait and see what the new developers on *Need for Speed Rivals* (an outfit called Ghost, apparently staffed by numerous ex-Criterion crew) have done with the PS4 version.

For now, at the time of writing, current gen consoles are all we can turn to, to see if Ghost has managed to raise the mark significantly

enough for *Need for Speed Rivals* to enter the upper echelon of racing games.

Rivals borrows heavily from the latest versions of *Hot Pursuit* and *Most Wanted* (thankfully seeming to ignore *The Run* completely). It presents the player with a massive free-roaming world full of racers, cops and opportunities for mischief. Players can take on the role of either a cop or a racer. Cops bust racers, racers run away from cops. It really is that simple. There are a variety of events, including point-to-point races, time trials and more, but even those that don't have a "get away from the cops" theme inevitably end up being a chase. And on the cop side of things, the event types are pretty similar, but have different names and goals. Time Trials, for example, are called Rapid Response for cops.

The currency in the game, which is earned by doing crazy stuff as a racer or busting racers as a cop, is in the form of speed points. These mean more to racers than cops, because racers have to purchase new vehicles and upgrades, while cops pretty much get given all of their cool toys.

The downside is that when a cop busts you (if you're playing as a racer) you lose all of your speed points. This can be frustrating when playing against the AI (which seems to have a bit of an advantage) and leads to grinding to get to the better vehicles and upgrades. That's one of the downfalls of *Rivals*, which features easier plateaus interspersed with steep difficulty curves.

The best way to play the game is online, with human beings filling the roles of cops and racers (or just acting as cannon fodder while you make your getaway). The single and multiplayer games are seamless, so going online doesn't mean starting a new career or game. There is a lot for players to do online, although the events do get a bit repetitive, as they do in single player. Still, it is a lot of fun, and the chases can turn into heart-stopping, protracted affairs that will leave players breathless. Doubtlessly, the next-gen consoles will deliver an even better experience. **NAG**

- Shryke



1 Good looks and vehicular grinding...



80 With seamless multiplayer integration, it's easy to take on friends or go solo in *Need for Speed Rivals*. But the game doesn't quite measure up to other racing titles.

PLUS

Seamless single and multiplayer / Tons of fun

MINUS

Repetitive events / Extremely frustrating moments

PLATFORMS
360 / 3DS / DS
PS3 / Wii / Wii U
REVIEWED ON
360

GENRE

Platformer

AGE RESTRICTION

7

MULTIPLAYER

Local

4 players

Online

4 players

DEVELOPER

Behaviour Interactive

WEBSITE

www.activision.com

PUBLISHER

Activision

DISTRIBUTOR

Megarom

Reviewed

SpongeBob SquarePants: Plankton's Robotic Revenge

Under the sea

I am going to start this off by making a statement that will have many people looking at me funny... I detest *SpongeBob SquarePants*. Maybe I am just too old, but I have never been anything but irritated by this cartoon series. So in all honesty I would rather have avoided playing *SpongeBob SquarePants: Plankton's Robotic Revenge*, at least initially. But as these things always seem to turn out, I ended up pouring hours into a game that is simple yet engrossing.

SpongeBob and his friends have to save the Krabby Patty formula after it was stolen by a vengeful Plankton, whose army of robots serve as the game's main antagonists.

Not that there is much depth here; this is a platformer made for youngsters, and it doesn't present much of a plot (like the cartoons) or much of a challenge. Still, there is something about the way the game plays that is really rather enjoyable, from various zany upgradeable weapons through to boss battles that are sometimes more protracted than necessary.

It is, in short, a great game for youngsters, who may be fans of the strange cartoon on which it is based. But adults may



also find the relaxed game dynamics and generally gentle challenge quite enjoyable. Just don't expect anything ground-breaking or deep... even if it is set under the sea.

- Shryke



If you're a fan of *SpongeBob*, you may get a kick out of the relaxed gameplay and gentle challenge this game has to offer.

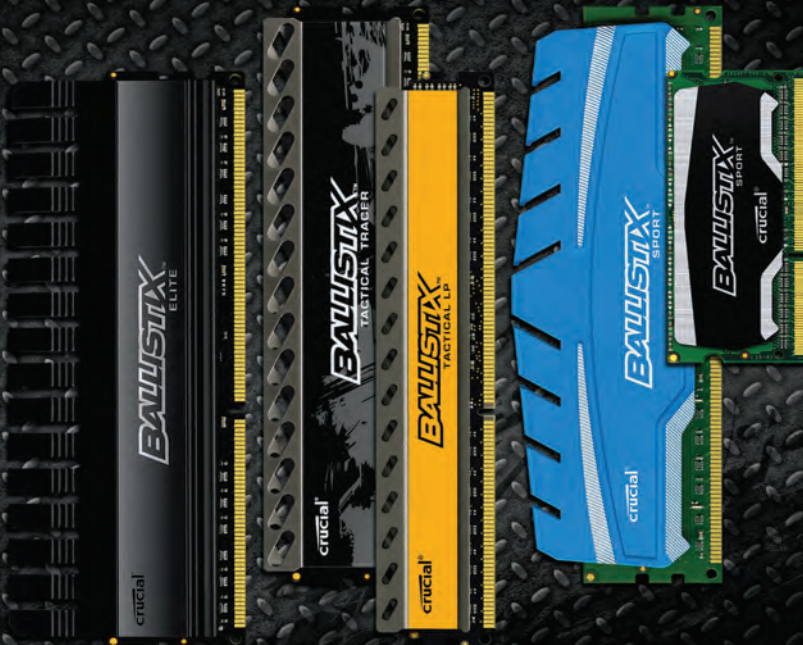
PLUS

Mindless fun / Great for the kids

MINUS

Not very challenging / Depth? What's that?

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PLATFORMS
Wii U

REVIEWED ON
Wii U

GENRE
Platformer

AGE RESTRICTION
3

MULTIPLAYER
Local
4 players
Online
None

DEVELOPER
Nintendo EAD Tokyo / 1-UP Studio

WEBSITE
supermario3dworld.nintendo.com

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DISTRIBUTOR
Core Gaming Group

Reviewed

Super Mario 3D World

A carnival of sights and sounds, fun and good times.

1 While Peach can float after a jump, Luigi jumps higher than most, and Toad runs really fast, Mario just Marios.

If one wanted to treat *Super Mario 3D World* like a regular iterative “look at me I’m like a movie” game, one would have to talk at length about rather boorish, technical details.

Like how it refines the player’s awareness of space and control that much more than previous entries. How the way it maintains visibility of your character has been perfected. How the tactile feedback of the platforming, detecting when your character is standing on edges, accounting for occlusion behind scenery, is just a little bit better. And the last game was *already* the best of its kind. That’s why *Super Mario* games are actually difficult to review. One wouldn’t think so, but they are. There just isn’t that much to say. You can’t waffle on about this year’s actors, or

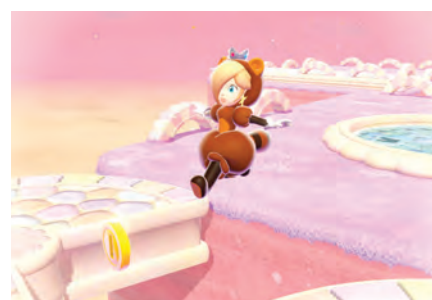
the impressive tech used to make their faces more realistic.

So this is what you’re left with, if one wanted to be straightforward about it: *Super Mario 3D World* is one of the best games in the series. Everyone who understands what a *Mario* game is should know what that means. Sure, one could argue the game lacks some dramatic sea change needed to “reinvent Mario” for “a new generation”, but that’s the dull tagline of a thousand other hyperbole pieces for games that are supposed to change the way we see games forever. *Super Mario 3D World* is just a video game, and doesn’t aim to be anything but.

3D World benefits heavily from the lessons Nintendo learned during past titles. It builds upon the exemplary level design of *Super Mario 3D Land*. The four-player multiplayer introduced in *New Super Mario Bros.* returns much refined and less aggravating, mostly because you no longer need someone else’s help to exit the bubble you’re placed in when you die. *Super Mario Galaxy* seems to be the base inspiration for how to string together the overworld map in a compelling way that doesn’t feel overly linear. Visually, *3D World* is now closest to that unified aesthetic for the Marioverse they’ve been working towards since the GameCube era.

The new power-ups are fun, especially the Bell that gives you a catsuit. Being able to scramble up the wall of a death pit after failing the jump is balm for those who aren’t so great at platformers. The “Adventures of Captain Toad” puzzle levels act as a great palate cleanser when you want to take a break from precision jumping. Seeing the Mii Ghosts of friends and strangers in a level with you (after clearing it once), helps with finding optimal routes or that one Green Star you still need. And Miiverse continues to be the Wii U’s surprise best feature, with near flawless integration into *3D World*. **NAG**

- Miktar



95 Whether you’re going it solo or playing with friends, *Super Mario 3D World* is a masterpiece. Every level brings unique challenges and replayability. The visuals really benefit from being less conservative compared to past titles. The amount of content is staggering, especially on the post-game side. The perfect blend of fun and challenge.

PLUS

Extensive post-game content / Excellent level design / Vibrant orchestrated music

MINUS

No online multiplayer

Alienware recommends Windows.

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- 3 Year Hardware Support

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4th gen
Intel® Core™
i7 processor.



PLATFORMS
360 / PS3
REVIEWED ON
360
GENRE
Fighting
AGE RESTRICTION
16
MULTIPLAYER
Local
None
Online
2 players
DEVELOPER
Yuke's
WEBSITE
www.2ksports.com
PUBLISHER
2K Sports
DISTRIBUTOR
Megarom

Reviewed

WWE 2K14

Strike, grapple, slam!

Calling *WWE 2K14* a "sports simulation" would imply that WWE is a sport. And while the following statement may get hordes of torch- and pitchfork-wielding rednecks baying for my blood, this multi-million dollar endeavour is not a sport at all; it is a muscle-bound soap opera – a well scripted and carefully performed piece of physical theatre that just keeps rolling on and on. And *WWE 2K14* does everything it can to deliver that kind of experience to the player.

Developed by Yuke's, this is the first game in a very long-running franchise to be published by 2K Sports (the company that snapped up the property when THQ went the way of the dodo). Hopes were, then, that Yukes would carry on with a trend that THQ had tried to implement in the franchise: simplifying controls. Anyone who has spent any time playing the finger bending previous games, or the likes of THQ's *MMA* games, knows that the controls of titles like this could be freakishly complex. The good news is that Yuke's have managed to make things a little simpler with *2K14*, and have improved a few other aspects of the game, too. But there are still problems that plague this new title.

The most important of those are the poor commenting, and a lacklustre AI. While the latter could be seen as a game-breaking element, fans of the franchise will still see



a few improvements there, even if it isn't fantastic overall.

That said, Yuke's have managed to create a game that is thrilling and tons of fun. The action in the ring is well paced and dynamic, and creates a believable virtual version of WWE. Tons of famous characters fill out the roster, and the player has the ability to create numerous custom wrestlers to pad the ranks.

And that's one aspect in which this particular game follows the antics of those larger than life superstars beautifully. It's not just a matter of putting together a wrestler, or it doesn't have to be. Here are literally thousands of possible permutations, and the player can even edit "plot" lines within the game, adding their own flair to the already over-the-top world of WWE. It's a massive toy box that gives the player huge amounts to do, and enthusiasts will love the fact that they can take control of the broader world of WWE, not just what happens in the ring. It's like *The Sims* with violence.

While there are a few game modes for the player to tackle, special mention needs to be made of the 30 Years of Wrestlemania mode. Taking players back to the heyday of WWE in the '80s and featuring names like Hulk Hogan and Ultimate Warrior, it really is a great tribute to this unusual entertainment medium... as is the game as a whole. **NAG**

- Shryke

79 Fans of the franchise will certainly like what 2K Sports have done with *WWE 2K14*, but it still remains slightly flawed in certain aspects.

PLUS

Great historic mode / Tons to do / Better controls

MINUS

Dodgy commentary / AI still weak



1 It's less about the violence and more about the show.



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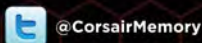
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Bits and bobs that can all be filed under gaming lifestyle



DEAD SPACE 3 PLAY ARTS KAI ACTION FIGURE ISAAC CLARKE

In space no one can smell you dropping a brown. Come on, we had to go somewhere there. Isaac Clarke stands 24cm and has those stiff clicking ball joint things for all the posing options most people will ever need. Unlike Shazam! (elsewhere on these pages) who cannot be posed at all. Based on his personal experiences, Geoff tried for hours to get them into some kind of funny man-on-man action pose with little success. *[It's all those videos Michael keeps sending me. Please stop. Ed]* Isaac Clarke is well made, well coloured and has plenty of detail, including the chest display from the game. He is also on full health and full stasis – an unlikely state for him to be in if you've played the game on any difficulty setting other than casual. The figure itself is rather heavy and some poses require the use of the supplied stand and stability arm and gripper. The 211-V Plasma Cutter and the SWS Motorized Pulse Rifle are included in the pack as well as two extra interchangeable hands (remember folks, thumbs go on top). If you have deep love for this game then getting the action figure makes perfect sense. He is ultra-cool.

Supplier: Cosmic Comics
Website: www.cosmiccomics.co.za
RRP: R1,499

BLACK SCIENCE #1

Grant McKay and his Anarchist League of Scientists enjoy dabbling in sciences far off the beaten track – into so-called Black Science. This first issue of what we just know is going to be a long-running and successful series is exciting and fresh, and drops the reader head-first into the deep end of some sort of adventure that's gone bad. There are frog people and fish people and bizarre worlds with little to explain how it all exists, all strung together with emotional narrative and built on vibrant, dynamic artwork that's not afraid to define its own style. This is the perfect way to kick off a new series.

Supplier: Cosmic Comics
 Website: www.cosmiccomics.co.za
 RRP: R49

CAPTAIN AMERICA: WINTER SOLDIER ULTIMATE COLLECTION

We've always found the ol' Cap to be a little on the naff side, with his boyish naivety and flopsy blonde hair, but *Winter Soldier* tells a darker, more mature story than what we're used to, and that's a very good thing. Every panel inside this gigantic graphic novel is expertly rendered to the level you'd expect from DC, and the writing is moody, setting a sombre pace for the story as a whole.

Supplier: Cosmic Comics
 Website: www.cosmiccomics.co.za
 RRP: R329



SHAZAM! ARTFX+ STATUE

So first things first, who the hell exactly is Shazam!? Initial thinking has him as the cocky lovechild of Superman and the Scarlet Speedster but no, three minutes of Google searching will tell you he is actually Captain Marvel; there are lightning bolts involved, him shouting, "Shazam!" and other important looking comic book lore. For our purposes here he stands firmly at around 19cm and by firmly we mean has magnets in his boots to stick on the provided stand. The figurine is a Kotobukiya Japanese import, based on the "New 52" version of the character and sculpted by Atelier Bamboo. He's glossy (in a metallic way), sports an epic cape and an attitude of note; one for the collector and Marvel comic book connoisseur.

Supplier: Cosmic Comics
 Website: www.cosmiccomics.co.za
 RRP: R799



GAME OF THRONES PUZZLE OF WESTEROS

Now here's something you don't see every day; a multi-layered 3D puzzle. Whatever will they think of next!? This is pretty amazing and works like this: first up is a regular 1000+ piece puzzle of the land of Westeros, next is a 200+ piece topographical map puzzle and finally the third part is populating the map with various landmarks from the series. The bottom layer is made out of your regular cut-out puzzle board, the second layer is a printed foam-based odd-shaped puzzle that adds some height, and the actual buildings are detailed plastic models. The whole thing builds out to 76cm across, 45cm down and 5cm tall. It also includes battle markers, flags to

mark famous landscapes, and a guide booklet. This whole set-up is great for some things. Like... one, it could be encased in wood and glass as a display (think coffee table); two, creating your own opening credits for *Game of Thrones* (minus the cool animations); three, teach you where everything is from the series. It's a stunning puzzle kit and you can almost imagine living there as a concubine and dragon mucker to Daenerys Targaryen. Isn't she just so dreamy and perfect?

Supplier: Wicked Warrior
 Website: www.wickedwarrior.co.za
 RRP: R725

TECHNEWS

KNOW YOUR TECHNOLOGY

GAIN

In audio or in electronics in general, gain is a measure of the ability of a circuit to increase the power or amplitude of a signal from the input to the output. This is done by adding energy to the signal converted from a power supply line or source. It is usually defined as the mean ratio of the signal output of a system to the signal input of the same system. It is often expressed using the logarithmic decibel "dB". In most mid- to high-end sound cards, gain can be controlled in software, usually as "+5, +10, +20dB".

dB

The decibel (dB) is a logarithmic unit used to express the ratio between two values of a physical quantity. One of these quantities is often a reference value and in this case the dB can be used to express the absolute level of the physical quantity. The decibel is also commonly used as a measure of gain or attenuation, the ratio of input and output powers of a system, or of individual factors that contribute to such ratios. In acoustics dB is a unit of sound pressure level, for a reference

pressure of 20 micropascals in air and 1 micropascal in water.

IMPEDANCE MATCHING

Impedance is the opposition by a system to the flow of energy from a source. For constant signals, this impedance can also be constant. For varying signals, it usually changes with frequency. In electronics, impedance matching is the practice of designing the input impedance of an electrical load (or the output impedance of its corresponding signal source) to maximize the power transfer or minimize reflections from the load. Impedance, like electrical resistance, is measured in ohms.

PEAK POWER

The maximum level of work or energy output measured during an observation period. Peak power refers to the maximum amount of power an electronic component can handle for an undetermined instant without damage. This is not a meaningful way to determine the power of any amplifier or loud speaker system, thus P.M.P.O and such values should not be used to determine the quality of any audio equipment.

OGIO GAMBIT

The Gambit is part of Ogio's range of tough lifestyle bags designed for gamers and techies on the move. It has no fewer than seven million pockets (slight exaggeration) for everything from stationery to tablets to mobile phones and notebooks, which means it's a perfect LAN bag or a great way to smuggle your gaming notebook on holiday. Ogio bags pack a three-year warranty and are available in a range of styles. www.luksbrands.co.za | R1,299



SKULLCANDY CRUSHER

If you like your bass on max then the CRUSHER is a must-have for listening to your music. It has a bass sensation slider on the left ear cup, leather ear pillows, a detachable cable, and a foldable hinge design for easy travel. www.luksbrands.co.za | R1,499



WD recently demonstrated its revolutionary heat assisted magnetic recording (HAMR) technology at the 2013 China (Ningbo) International Forum on Advanced Materials and Commercialization.

HAMR technology may offer a solution for increasing areal density (AD) by magnetically recording data on high-

**DID
YOU
KNOW?**

stability media using laser thermal assistance. The technology shrinks data bits in a stable manner by briefly heating the disk surface during magnetic head recording. The method can increase data density by a factor of more than five and ultimately results in storage capacities as great as 4 terabits per square inch.

2.5"

BY THE NUMBERS

WD recently announced the release of the WD Black dual drive, a unique storage innovation that fuses a 2.5-inch 120 GB solid state drive (SSD) with a 1TB hard disk drive (HDD) to offer a powerful dual drive solution. Look out for our review of the WD Black² in an upcoming issue.

Mosh Pit

HUNTKEY PIO

Sometimes all you want out of a home PC is a small form-factor and low power draw. If that's the case, then the Huntkey PIO should take care of your needs. With a dual-core Pentium G2020 @ 2.9Ghz, 4GB of RAM and Intel HD graphics, the PIO is suitable for office tasks and maybe even a bit of light gaming, and does it all without the bulk and hassle of a full desktop PC. The price here is with the device fitted with the above-mentioned components, but you're free to use any microATX board, CPU, RAM and hard drive.

www.tvr.co.za | R5,999



LOGITECH G230

There are some features that we consider to be essential in a gaming headset, and the G230 has them all plus more. Removable, washable sports cloth covered ear cups; a thin 2.3 metre long fabric cable; earpieces that can lay flat if you take them off your head and have them around your neck; and ultra-light earpieces so you don't end up with a raging headache or sore ears after a six hour gaming session.

www.logitech.com | R699



ASTRUM ELETE TPAD TOUCH KEYBOARD

The perfect accessory to control your smart TV from up to 6-10 meters away. The ELETE TPAD functions as an intelligent remote control, and features 61 keys which includes eight multimedia control keys.

www.astrum.co.za | R349



"Analysts predict 25 trillion gigabytes of new data will be generated by 2020 and that average household storage needs in the U.S. will require as much as 3.3 TB by 2016. This tremendous growth in data requires continued increases in storage capacity and performance for the cloud, big data and consumer technologies."

Dr. William Cain, WD's vice president of technology

DREAMMACHINE

This month we change no less than four components in the Dream Machine. For the Intel system we have changed our motherboard to the ASUS Rampage IV Extreme Black Edition. Simply the best motherboard money can buy. For the graphics card, we swop out the EVGA GTX 780 Classified in favour of the GIGABYTE GHz Edition 780 Ti, as it is the fastest graphics card on the market to date. We move away from the NZXT Kraken X60, to an equally effective but much quieter solution in the Cooler Master Nepton 280L AIO liquid Cooler. Finally, after an eternity, we change our mass storage to the fast, but massive WD Caviar Black 4TB drive. The fastest storage of this capacity in existence for the desktop. All four components are likely to not get replaced anytime soon as they really are the best at what they do. Four of the best just made it into our Dream Machine in a single month, all within a single issue. That's a cracking way to start 2014.



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

New!



GRAPHICS
GIGABYTE GV-N78TGHZ-3GD
R10,499 / www.gigabyte.com



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



STORAGE DRIVE
WD Black 4TB FZEX
R3,299 / www.wdc.com

New!



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



New!

COOLER
Cooler Master Nepton 280L
R1,499 / www.coolermaster.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



Intel

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

ASUS Rampage IV Extreme Black Edition
R6,999 / www.asus.com

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

New!

Intel Dream Machine:
R69,555



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:
R53,055



HARDWIRED

The greatest that ever did it

It's crazy to think that 2014 will make it exactly ten years since I started serious overclocking. By serious overclocking I mean at sub-zero degree temperatures. All inspired by the Mobile Athlon-XP2500+ with an unlocked multiplier. Good times indeed, however I'm not here to relive the "glory" days of overclocking. Truth was, they were not that glorious and it was significantly harder to get anywhere than it is now. You spent 80% of the time fighting the hardware and bug tracking rather than trying to achieve your goals. It's fun in retrospect, but I do know that it's only nostalgia talking, not the reality. This all changed because of two individuals, more specifically one.

Some time ago, as vendors got into overclocking, two names have stood out on the lips of overclockers all over the world, at least the ones who ever competed at the highest levels. For those that don't know these names, they are two most prolific, most competent and certainly most appreciated overclockers/engineers to ever compete. That is Oskar Wu of ABit and DFI fame and more recently and perhaps more influential, Peter

"two names have stood out on the lips of overclockers all over the world, at least the ones who ever competed at the highest levels."

"Shamino" Tan. From when he began work at Foxconn's Quantum Force team then to EVGA where he spawned the X58 Classified, right through to joining ASUS at the ROG team, wherever Shamino went, the products not only improved in leaps and bounds, but they became the best in the industry. That's three different vendors, across several generations. Every single board he touched, became the best one bar none.

Mind you, being an exceptional motherboard/BIOS engineer should not preclude you from thinking of him as a brilliant overclocker. In fact had it mattered to him to be number one, he would have been number one. No, that isn't correct. Shamino was number one for years on end, it just so happens that the scores were posted by and under Andre Yang. A good overclocker in his own right, but his job was made a walk in the park because he, while at ASUS, had the best person ever doing all the heavy lifting. To put this in context, how difficult would it be to out-drag any car in Sebastian Vettel's 2013 F1 vehicle, if all you had to do was accelerate? That's how he made every other vendor's products look pedestrian in comparison.

As the final product he was involved in, he brought us the Rampage IV Black Edition, better known as the "Rive Black" (reviewed in this issue). If there ever was a way to show just how incredibly gifted he is at designing motherboards and the greatest way to make an exit, this motherboard would be his crowning achievement. Not taking anything away from everybody else involved in the project, but this was his final platform, final motherboard, and it shows. While I marveled at the sheer brilliance of it, I was saddened at the same time to know that we may never see such proficiency, dedication and mastery ever again. The humble, soft spoken man whom I met six years ago and spoke to for hours on end about overclocking is still the same today. The greatest there ever was in my eyes, and this industry will never be the same again.

- Neo Sibeko

The Lazy Gamer's Guide

Skylanders: Swap Force Starter Pack*

Website www.skylanders.com **RRP** R899 | Swap Force characters R229 each

So, you know all about *Skylanders* right? No? Where have you been? No really, where exactly? Country bumpkins and new-borns gather round for a brief recap. The concept is simple: *Skylanders* is a jumpy-collect-things platform game, but the characters are real toys (plastic and metal) that only appear in the game when you place them on the supplied portal of power. It's such a smart idea that Disney has aped the concept with *Disney Infinity*. Since the first *Skylanders* game there have

been new characters, a whole new release with *Skylanders: Giants* and now *Skylanders: Swap Force* arrives on the scene just in time for the festive season. Take note however that this isn't some knock-off expansion rushed out the door in time to soak up Christmas cash, but rather an inventive take on the genre that comes with some great new software. That said, you will be spending more than ever before, but just think how happy the kids are going to be while you buy their affection and ease your guilt.



SOFTWARE

There's a new story to go along with this new *Skylanders* concept. The game takes place in a new location, Cloudbreak Islands, and involves a rare event, volcanic powers and all the usual collecting, battling and new on the scene – jumping. Yes, you can jump. This new "feature" means better level design, more dynamic combat and a feeling of overall freedom. The best part: you can bring your old *Skylanders* figurines into the game and see them engage in this new environment. If you or your children are fans of the franchise, *Swap Force* brings a whole lot more to the table. It's better in almost every way and it's good to see Activision innovating with this product. Can't wait to see what they have planned next.

SKYLANDERS SWAP FORCE CHARACTERS

There will be 16 new *Swap Force* characters in total and with all the swapping between them you should be able to create over 250 different combinations. They use the magical science of magnets to hold the two ends together and the magnets are secure so no need to worry about little Timmy sticking his intestines together. Each character features different powers and moves so mixing and matching is based on individual preferences. Blast Zone and Wash Buckler are included in the starter pack and feature fire/rockets and water/climb as their respective powers. Swapping them around creates Blast Buckler and Wash Zone – okay, it's doesn't always work out but it's still cool and the top and bottom halves snap together in a satisfying manner.



NINJA STEALTH ELF FIGURINE

This character is included in the starter pack and is a series 3 figurine. Compatible with the original game as well as *Skylanders Giants*, the Ninja Stealth Elf (who is a girl) is proficient in the art of stealth fighting. She has no idea where she comes from and is out in the game world looking for answers.

SUMMARY

PROS

- Great concept
- Jumping
- Fun game

CONS

- This is going to cost a bit
- Not all *Swap Force* characters are available initially

ALTERNATIVES

- *Disney Infinity*

TECHNICAL

360 / 3DS / PS3 / PS4 /
Wii / Wii U / XBO

PORTAL OF POWER

The portal of power is new, somewhat sleeker in design but still features rubber feet and a decent enough USB cable. It will recognise all existing types of Skylanders – the reverse isn't true.

The Lazy Gamer's Guide

SteelSeries Rival

Website www.steelseries.com RRP R699

Have you ever tried using a PC without a mouse? It's no fun being forced to wrestle with your keyboard every step of the way, clumsily navigating through an endless, hateful hierarchy of menus like a squirrel trying to crack open an acorn with an earbud. Normally

it'd be a totally painless exercise, but not in this hypothetical situation. And don't even get us started on gaming without a mouse. We're not in the '90s anymore. Arrow keys just don't cut it. SteelSeries knows this. And so they've manufactured a new mouse, just for you.



TECHNICAL

SENSOR
Up to 6,500 DPI

BUTTONS
6, programmable

ACCELERATION
50 G

RESPONSE RATE / POLLING RATE:
1ms / 1000Hz

SUMMARY

PROS

- Excellently comfortable
- Well-designed features

CONS

- SteelSeries software doesn't play nice with Windows 8

ALTERNATIVES

- Logitech G500S
- Razer DeathAdder
- Razer Imperator



COMFORTABLY COOL

Designed for right-handed gamers (sorry lefties), the Rival is characterised by smooth contours and nicely textured grip zones. It's comfortable in either palm or claw grip – although palm-grip gamers with smaller hands may find the Rival's lengthy form takes some getting used to. There's also anti-sweat coating, in case you're into that.

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

There are two zones of illumination on the Rival. They can be individually customised with 16.8-million colour options via the SteelSeries Engine 3 software, which is also where you'll find all the options for adjusting sensitivity settings and acceleration and whatnot. Unfortunately, SteelSeries' proprietary software seems to *really* hate Windows 8, and struggles to recognise the Rival at all at the time of this writing.

ONLY THE BEST

The Rival is built to reward you for buying it by featuring only the best components. Its Pixart PMW3310 optical sensor (which has a DPI ceiling of 6,500) forgoes hardware acceleration, promising true 1:1 tracking no matter how fast you move it, or how minor the movement. The Rival's button switches were engineered by SteelSeries, and boast a lifespan of 30 million clicks.

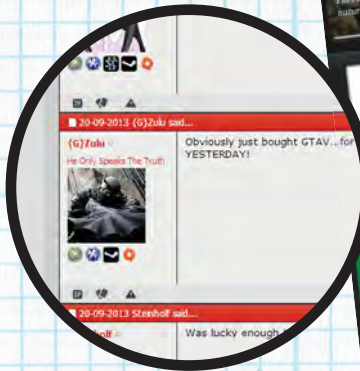
A RIVAL BY ANY OTHER NAME

A really nifty customisation option arrives in the form of a removable nameplate at the bottom of the mouse. The Rival ships with two of them, but if you happen to have access to a 3D printer, you can actually craft your own nameplates.

www.nag.co.za

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5.1

VS

7.1 Surround sound

5.1

CONFIGURATION: This is the most common six channel surround sound audio system. 5.1 is now the most commonly used layout in both commercial cinemas and home theatres. It uses five full bandwidth channels and one low-frequency effects channel. The configuration is always the same here making it much easier to set up regardless of the standard which will be employed to decode the source material. So that is two left and right speakers, two surround channels, a centre channel and a subwoofer. Despite gaining success only after the advent of the DVD, it is an old standard that dates back to the mid to late '70s. Its modern day layout however was only seen in the early '90s.

CINEMA: Very common in almost all modern day theatres, 5.1 surround is the default audio configuration for most theatres and thus one is almost guaranteed to be listening to this configuration at the cinema unless

stated otherwise. All movie theatres featuring SDDS (Sony Dynamic Digital Sound) use this configuration, along with any others that adhere to the Dolby Digital and Dolby Pro Logic II standard.

STANDARDS: As a result of this configuration's age and widespread use, home receivers, consoles and set top boxes support at least one if not all the output methods mentioned already. DTS, Dolby Digital, Pro Logic II and SDDS as used in theatres are common standards which are applicable both at home and at the cinema. Even some audio streams that do not adhere to any of these abovementioned standards output audio to discreet channels in exactly the same way. It is much easier to implement than eight-channel audio for instance, if only because of how long it has been around and how widespread it is. Variations of Dolby Digital such as EX, Live and Surround EX

add the possibility of outputting a signal to two additional channels (thus making it 7.1 in some ways) but they are at their core schemes dealing with 5.1 surround sound.

HOME USE: As the standard configuration for most DVD releases, concerts, music DVDs and movies (documentaries as well) are almost always encoded in 5.1 surround sound. The material is far more plentiful and as a result by and large costs less and there's a wider variety to choose from. There is however a difference between 5.1 channel surround sound use for music as opposed to that used for movies. In the context of music it is defined by the ITU that the five satellite speakers are of the same size. That is, the front left, right, centre and surround speakers are of equal size and perhaps capability. This is unlike with movies, where traditionally the centre speaker is smaller and almost used exclusively for dialogue.



Deciding on which configuration to go for as far as your audio needs are concerned can be a tricky undertaking. Do you go for more speakers and supposedly more immersion with 7.1 audio, or do you stick to the more traditional 5.1 surround sound? It isn't just a matter of adding speakers, but there are some serious considerations that one must examine before making the correct or most appropriate decision. Hopefully what follows will help you get a better grasp of which setup is correct for you.

7.1

CONFIGURATION: 7.1 surround, much like 5.1, offers one channel above what the name suggests. Thus, 7.1 is actually eight channels, however only seven are discreet as the LFE (subwoofer) and centre speaker share a channel, with only specific frequencies going to the centre speaker and others only to the subwoofer. By adding two speakers to the more conventional six-channel audio configuration, the system splits the surround and rear channel information into four distinct channels. Sound effects are directed to left and right surround channels, plus two rear surround channels. In a typical home theatre setup, the surround speakers are placed to the side of the listener's position and the rear speakers are placed behind the listener. With Dolby Pro Logic IIz and DTS Neo:X however, the two additional speakers may refer to two height channels positioned above the standard front left and right.

Alternatively these could be placed between the two front speakers.

CINEMA: 7.1 surround sound isn't actually common at the cinema and it is only the newest movies and theatres that can support and play such sound. That standard of choice for many of these movies is Dolby Surround 7.1 theatrical format, which is supported on some home receivers, but supporting material is far and few between.

STANDARDS: Audio signals, especially on Blu-ray material, are usually encoded in uncompressed PCM (Pulse Code Modulation), Dolby TrueHD or DTS-HD Master Audio. A 7.1 channel receiver with audio input and processing capability, (not pass-through only connections), can usually take advantage of some or all of these audio capabilities. However more standard 5.1 channel soundtracks can also be up-

mixed in a fairly convincing way via Dolby Pro Logic IIz, enabling the two additional surround sound channels. By and large however, these are the three primary ways of encoding all eight channels.

HOME USE: Blu-ray movies support up to eight channels of lossless 7.1 audio at various formats. Sony's PS3, PS4 and the Xbox One are able to output to as many speakers and in this configuration. Sadly, where music is concerned at least, on the vast majority of commercial material this configuration isn't supported. While recording of eight channels or sources is common, it is mostly down-mixed into stereo and at most 5.1 surround sound. Thus in the context of music, there is virtually no benefit to having a 7.1 channel setup, as most of the source material will at most up mix a stereo or traditional 5.1 signal for playback through all the channels.



GIGABYTE GV-N78TGHZ-3GD

Supplier Rectron

Website www.gigabyte.com

RRP R10,499



The release of AMD's R9 graphics cards in Q4 2013 caused quite a stir. Not only did it drop prices for the high-end graphics cards, but it also ushered in a new level of performance that would otherwise not have been experienced. Competition did exactly what it was supposed to do: produce better products at lower prices. The more that people are enticed by buying at the high-end, the more revenue each of these companies make and the better peoples' gaming experiences are by and large.

As great as it may be, the competition was short lived. Not because of performance but because AMD dropped the ball with their high-end GPUs. By producing a sub-standard cooler, not only did they manage to sway consumers into NVIDIA's hands, but the Never Settle bundle hit a kink by not offering the much hyped *Battlefield 4* for all 290 and 290X purchases as initially expected.

Why then have we spent so long talking about the industry rather than the card in question? Well, that's simply because despite its lamentable name, this here is the fastest graphics card money can buy. We aren't talking dual GPU solutions, but a single GPU with no scaling, micro-stuttering or frame pacing shenanigans. Simply put, how all graphics cards should

remain for the most part.

What you have here is a full complement of NVIDIA's GK110 core. This is the same core that we've seen in the GTX TITAN, GTX 780 and now in the GTX 780 Ti. This time around, NVIDIA has unleashed the full potential of the ASIC by enabling all SMX units for an impressive 2,880 CUDA cores. It features the same number of ROPs as the other cards using this GPU, but has a full 240 texture units. More than that, the memory bandwidth has been boosted significantly to a lofty 336GB/s courtesy of Hynix 7GHz GDDR5. That's a healthy 48GB/s more than what the GTX TITAN or the 780 could offer. All this bandwidth was made available for the sole purpose of eliminating any potential bandwidth bottlenecks, especially at the higher resolutions of 1440p and 4K resolutions.

It must be said that at the standard 1080p, a resolution that will hopefully leave us sooner rather than later, such a card is perhaps a waste. It is immensely powerful

and the only way you'll feel you've bought wisely is if you use 8x MSAA or some other needlessly high AA method. Short of that, you'll be limiting this card's capabilities, as it does not get to stand out as much as it could at 1440p, which is where its sweet spot is.

Producing a standard GTX 780 Ti is easy enough as you can simply buy a reference card. However, GIGABYTE has taken it upon itself to release a GHz version of this GPU. This is their second GHz product from the NVIDIA family, but only this one matters really. It's mighty fast and we aren't talking a few fps more than the regular edition. It is significantly faster than anything else we have tested and that is courtesy of the extraordinarily high overclock that GIGABYTE has employed.

In what can only be described as a ballsy move, the engineering efforts of GIGABYTE have seen to it that the base clock for this model is a fiery 1,085MHz. That makes it not only the highest clocked

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: EVGA GTX TITAN

3DMARK - Fire-Strike	11,691 9,116
CATZILLA - Tiger	15,690 13,483
HITMAN - Absolution	76.95 fps (DX11 ultra detail) 4x AA: 68.97 fps



SPECS	CORE
	GK110 (28nm)
	1,085MHz (1,150MHz Boost)
	PROCESSORS
	2,880
	RENDER OUTPUTS
	48
	MEMORY
	3,072MB GDDR5 7GHz (336GB/sec)
	API
DirectX 11.2 / OpenGL 4.4 / OpenCL / PhysX / CUDA	

"With a real clock of 1,215MHz it is exactly 287MHz higher in clock speed than what the standard model can offer you, and this is what makes it truly exciting."

GTX 780 Ti on the market, but also the fastest out the box. That 1,085MHz base clock pegs it at 210MHz higher than the reference model (875MHz). Yes, you can do that with a standard card and NVIDIA's impressive blower fan, but that takes effort on your part. It's not guaranteed to work and you'll have to do a lot of fiddling with BIOS tools, testing, temp profiles and all kinds of things. If however, 210MHz doesn't impress you, GIGABYTE guarantees a boost clock of 1,150MHz. That's 222MHz higher than what the reference model will achieve.

If it seems too good to be true, the GHz edition delivers even more by operating at a real clock (the frequency at which your games will run) of 1,215MHz. This clock speed isn't promised as it's determined by the GPU sample quality and that's the luck of the draw. However, do consider that the sample we received is one of the weaker ones with a reported ASIC quality of 66%. Typical ASIC quality levels for retail cards

is around the 70 to 75% mark and as such should clock a little higher than this card in its boost state. In other words, what we are reporting here is conservative performance and not the best of what the 780 Ti GHz Edition is capable of delivering.

With a real clock of 1,215MHz it is exactly 287MHz higher in clock speed than what the standard model can offer you, and this is what makes it truly exciting. At these clock speeds, the GHz Edition not only outpaces the dual GPU solutions like the GTX 690 and HD 7990, it also does so while drawing significantly less power. Furthermore, because of the fantastic Windforce 3X cooler and GHz Edition labelled back plate, this card runs cool peaking at 71°C after hours of looping stressful GPU tests. Not only is this card kept exceptionally cool, but it manages to be so quiet that it's virtually inaudible. It certainly won't be heard over your case fans even under load.

If there was anything we would have

liked to see on this card, it would have to be a dual BIOS option. If not for even more performance, at least as a backup option should anything happen to the primary BIOS. We aren't sure if the SuperOverclock series from GIGABYTE will ever come back, but even in its absence, the GHz cards make up for it by the bucket load. As such this is our new Dream Machine graphics card. It's not going to be cheap, but you're not going to find anything faster either, from any other vendor at the moment.

If you want to treat yourself to the fastest and probably the most impressive graphics card money can buy right now, then the GIGABYTE GTX 780 Ti GHz Edition should be an obvious choice. It really is a fantastic graphics card. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko



The fastest GPU we have tested to date, and the certainly the best from GIGABYTE.

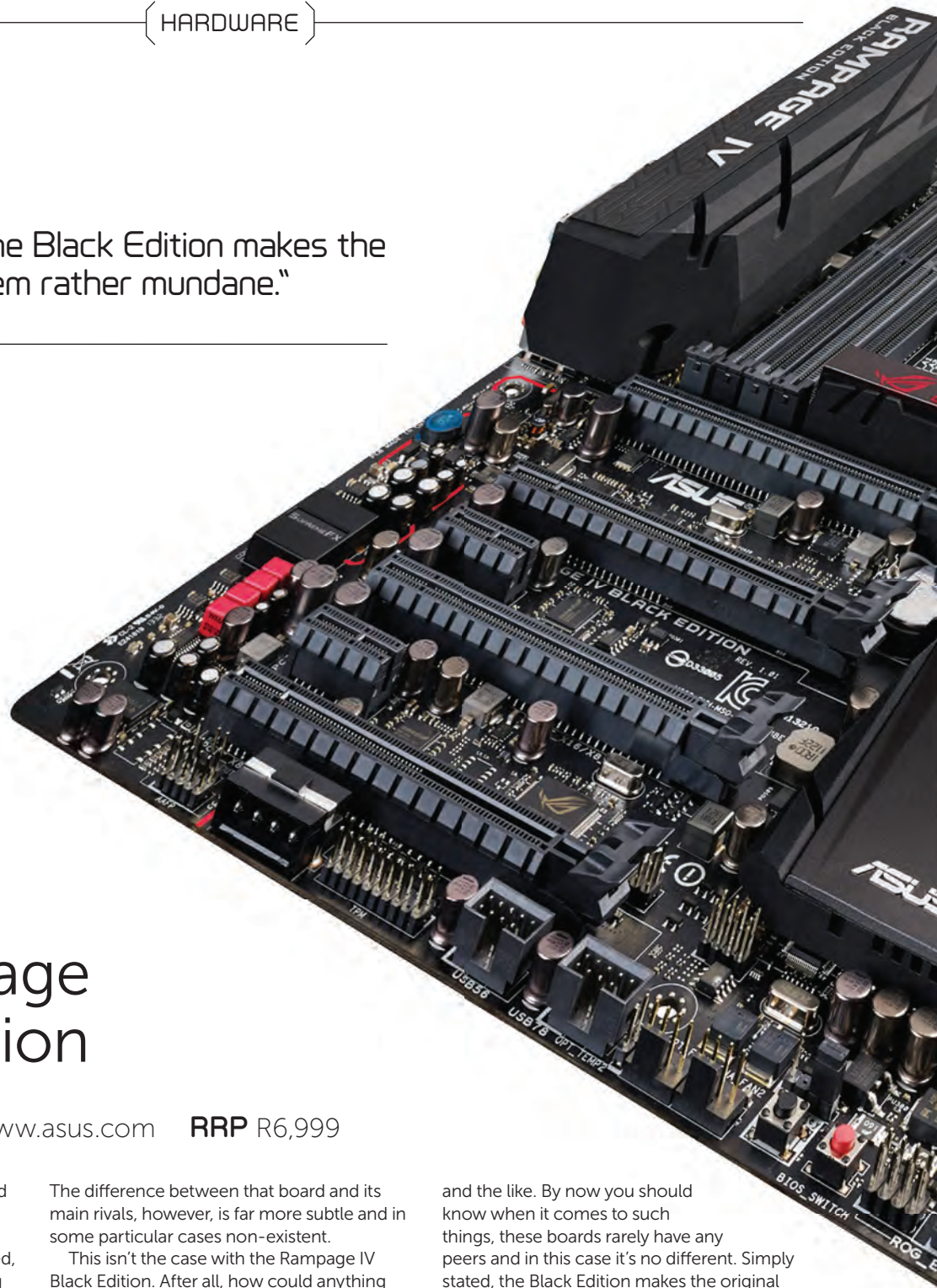
PLUS

Unmatched performance / Whisper quiet / Runs very cool

MINUS

Not much overclocking headroom

"Simply stated, the Black Edition makes the original board seem rather mundane."



ASUS Rampage IV Black Edition

Supplier ASUS Website www.asus.com RRP R6,999

Back in 2011, ASUS introduced the world to the definitive X79 motherboard in the form of the Rampage IV Extreme. Immediately when the board was introduced, it became clear which was the overclocking mainboard to buy. There were others from competitors also vying for the top spot but they all fell far from the mark, for the bar had been set and none other than ASUS' own offerings could come close to it.

For the most part though, it was a white wash and now into 2014, the Rampage IV Extreme remains the board of choice for the X79 platform. Simply stated, it was the best there ever was and likely ever to be until now. The Rampage IV Black Edition has existed in myth for several months. In fact from the first time we saw pictures to when these were available to buy, a good three months passed. The reasons for the delay or the long lead time may never be known, but it was worth it. Any number of reasons could have caused this but while we waited, we had the Maximus VI Extreme to keep us occupied. Yet another motherboard from ROG to set the bar higher than any has reached to date.

The difference between that board and its main rivals, however, is far more subtle and in some particular cases non-existent.

This isn't the case with the Rampage IV Black Edition. After all, how could anything be better than the best motherboard for the platform? It is not by mistake that we had the Rampage IV Extreme as the NAG Dream Machine motherboard for more than a year. It's not because there were no other X79 motherboards around, it was simply because they couldn't come close to competing with the Rampage IV Extreme.

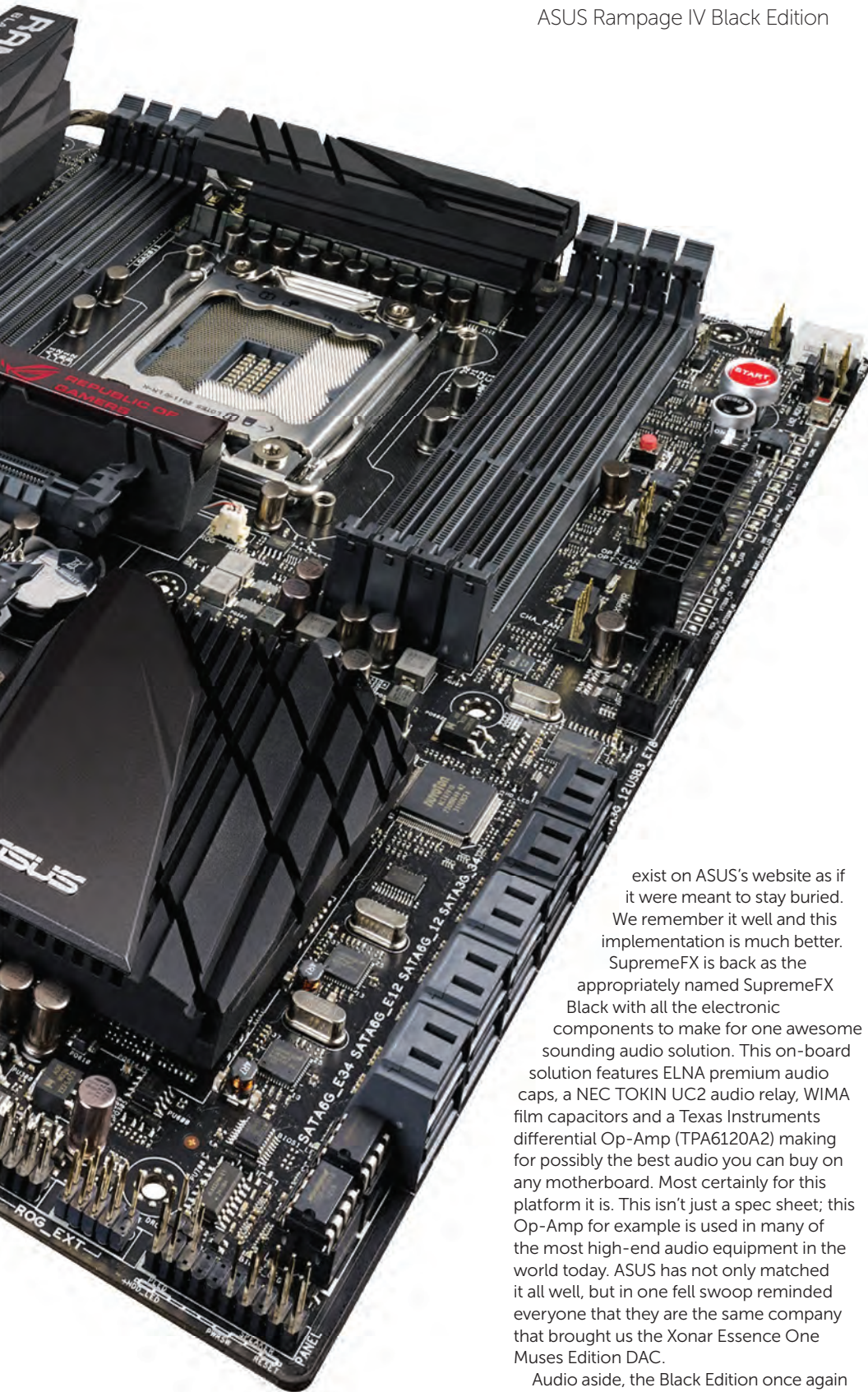
Why then the ROG team took it upon itself to make an ultra-high-end board when they were unchallenged is anyone's guess. We however are glad they undertook this project, especially since this was to be Shamino's last one with the team. It had to be more than good; it had to be brilliant and if possible it had to be perfect. Thus we have the Rampage IV Black Edition. It is everything the original board was and so much more.

There's always something different about writing about a board that comes from the ROG team. There is no need to list features

and the like. By now you should know when it comes to such things, these boards rarely have any peers and in this case it's no different. Simply stated, the Black Edition makes the original board seem rather mundane. Consider then the difference between that board and the rest. This should hopefully illustrate to you just how complete this motherboard is.

To run through all the options, from the BIOS, to the software and tweaks would be enough to fill up this entire issue. This isn't an exaggeration as the user manual really is more than 100 pages. Shamino has also written guides that are more than 100Mb in size!

Let us take for instance the audio capabilities of this board. ASUS engineers, whichever division they may be, are experts at audio. There's no questioning that as they've proved it time and time again with the Xonar line of audio equipment. They not only have the expertise, but the ability to surprise even the most discerning audiophiles. This expertise was previously not lent to their motherboards, or at least not in the capacity



SPECS

CHIPSET
Intel X79

MEMORY
8x 240-pin DDR3
LGA 2011

CPU SUPPORT
LGA 2011

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

SIZE
E-ATX

BENCHMARKS

BASELINE: **ASUS MAXIMUS VI EXTREME**

3DMark 11	17,190 13,258
Cinebench 11.5	14.11 10.17
AIDA 64 copy	72,249MB/s 32,112MB/s

exist on ASUS's website as if it were meant to stay buried. We remember it well and this implementation is much better. SupremeFX is back as the appropriately named SupremeFX Black with all the electronic components to make for one awesome sounding audio solution. This on-board solution features ELNA premium audio caps, a NEC TOKIN UC2 audio relay, WIMA film capacitors and a Texas Instruments differential Op-Amp (TPA6120A2) making for possibly the best audio you can buy on any motherboard. Most certainly for this platform it is. This isn't just a spec sheet; this Op-Amp for example is used in many of the most high-end audio equipment in the world today. ASUS has not only matched it all well, but in one fell swoop reminded everyone that they are the same company that brought us the Xonar Essence One Muses Edition DAC.

Audio aside, the Black Edition once again not only breaks records but sets a new standard. We have never come across an X79 motherboard that is this fast. The X79 Dark we reviewed recently seemed to be making some strides towards the original Rampage IV Extreme, but with the Black Edition, nothing comes close. The synthetic results attest to this. Should you not be convinced though, do consider that ASUS several months ago broke the 4GHz memory speed record with quad channel memory.

With such records, it is common to see every other vendor try and match it so they too may claim a world record as is the norm today. This time it didn't happen. If

the competitors couldn't match the original Rampage IV Extreme, there was no hope when it came to the Black Edition as such endeavours are guaranteed to end in failure.

We near the end of this review and we've thus far not managed to express everything that would make this motherboard special. There simply isn't enough room to write about it all, but we will state that this is the best one yet. There has never been a better motherboard regardless of the platform and ASUS has the honours of really being a leader of the motherboard manufacturing world. If not by numbers, in the quality of the boards they make.

This isn't going to be a cheap motherboard no matter where you buy it, but if you have the means to invest into the X79 platform, do your utmost to purchase this one. There's nothing else like it anywhere. The Rampage IV Black Edition is a sight to behold, it's unbelievably brilliant. **NAG**
- Neo Sibeko

one would have expected. SupremeFX was adequate, but it was never anything to truly get excited about. The honours of having the best on-board audio solution were given to another vendor.

With the Black Edition, all that has changed. If you remember the original Rampage III Black Edition, it came bundled with an audio riser card (Xonar) that also packaged a dedicated Killer NIC. That was an add-in solution though and as good as it was then, ASUS has done even better now. It will be hard to compare on paper alone as the Rampage III Black Edition has ceased to



The best motherboard ever produced.

PLUS

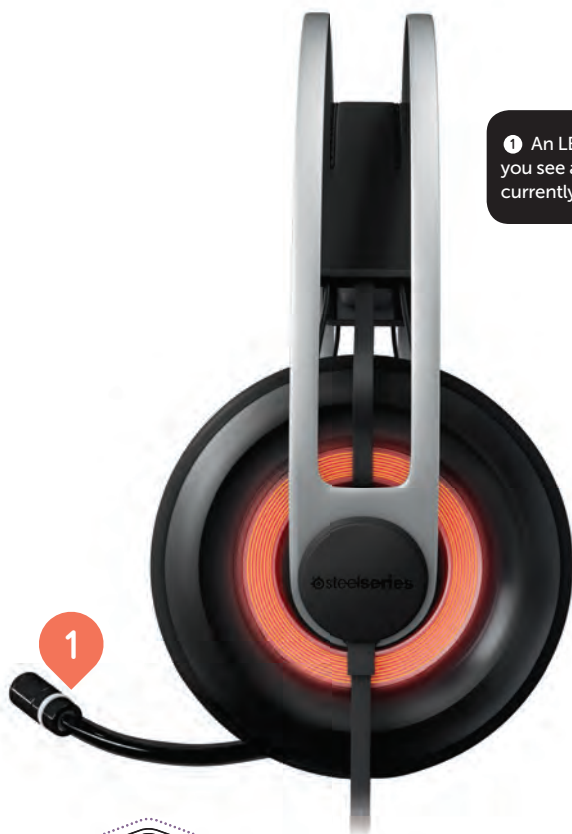
Performance / Features /
Overclocking / Aesthetics

MINUS

Nothing

FREQUENCY RESPONSE
16Hz – 28kHz
IMPEDANCE
32 ohms
MICROPHONE SENSITIVITY
-38db
CABLE LENGTH
1.2 metres + 2 metre extension cable

1 An LED indicator on the microphone lets you see at a glance whether or not the mic is currently muted.



SteelSeries Siberia Elite

Supplier Megarom Website www.steelseries.com RRP R2,495

SteelSeries' Siberia series of audio peripherals has proven to be incredibly popular. It's no surprise really, given that the Siberia name has become synonymous with dependable build and audio quality for people on the prowl for mid-range audio solutions. With the Siberia Elite, SteelSeries is edging the brand closer to the high-end of the headset spectrum – and the final result is plenty pleasing to the ear, but not so much to the wallet.

Remove it from its packaging and you'll find a headset that's vaguely similar to previous Siberia incarnations. It's got a nicely padded headband (surrounded by a metal outer frame) that'll automatically adjust to the shape and size of your head thanks to retractable wire pins that disappear into the sides of the headset when it's not in use. The driver units boast massive, soft pads that make the Siberia Elite pleasantly comfortable – but all that padding obviously promotes sweat when using the headset for extended periods of time, so keep that in mind before handing it over to other people to show off your fancy new headset. Because gross.

A really cool touch is that the volume control and microphone mute switch are

located on the outer sides of the ear cups – great big dials that are easy to find without needing to fumble with in-line controls or anything of the sort. The microphone retracts into the left ear cup when not in use, which is always useful. Given that the Siberia Elite can be used with your mobile devices, it also means you won't look silly listening to music with a microphone boom jutting out in front of your face. Interestingly, the Elite also enables you to share sound with another Siberia Elite headset if you ever find yourself in a situation to do so.

Another widely marketed feature of the Elite is its customisable coloured lighting, which bathes the Elite's cups in a colour of your choosing, with a range of 16.8 million colours from which to choose. Unfortunately, because Windows 8 seems to hate SteelSeries' proprietary software, I wasn't actually able to toy around with all the Elite's pretty lighting. I'm sure it's *just lovely* though.

The quality of sound you'll get with the Elite should be more than enough for most gamers – but it has to be said that there are superior headset offerings out there at a similar price point, or for just a few hundred rand more. Even the Plantronics RIG that

we reviewed last month (which retails for R1,000 less) will get you audible performance comparable to the Elite. That being said, the Elite is excellent across the spectrum of games, music and movies, delivering potent audio and pleasing clarity. Couple that with how comfortable they are, and with the quality of their construction, and the Siberia Elite is definitely worth considering if you're okay with its price tag.

- Dane Remendes



The Siberia Elite is a brilliant gaming headset, but its price is scary.

PLUS

Excellently comfortable / Audio production is great / Quality design

MINUS

Expensive

Tritton Kunai

Supplier Comet Computing

Website www.cometcomputing.co.za

RRP R899

Almost every time I put on a Tritton headset, I find myself thoroughly impressed by a few key attributes and disappointed by others. It seems that Tritton struggles to find a balance of features and performance, and the Kunai falls to that same trap.

The Kunai, for PS3, represents itself as a sleek device. The headset itself is lightweight and small, and is matched by a tiny control unit that connects the headset's 3.5mm cable to the unit's RCA adaptors. Sadly, that is the only way to use the Kunai. We've become so accustomed to headsets including every type of connector imaginable, but the Kunai is limited to RCA input from your console's component/composite cable, with no connectivity options for optical or 3.5, which means using this set with your PC as well is out of the question unless you buy an

extension cable.

With that little inconvenience out of the way, the headset itself performs well. Volume from these cans is surprisingly ample considering their size, and they managed to handle themselves well in frequency tests. While the lower end of the spectrum was held up fine, we found that higher-frequency audio sounded a little gritty. The removable microphone (which is always a welcome feature in itself) proved to do the job as well as one would expect.

As this headset is so light, it's very comfortable at first but unfortunately the ear cups are a tad too small and press against the sides of your ears, which means the soft-touch leather becomes a bit much after prolonged use. The headband is made of the same stuff but does its job of cushioning one's fragile cranium. **NAG**

- Geoff Burrows



SPEAKER DIAMETER

40mm

THD

<1%

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

20Hz-20kHz

RESISTANCE

16 ohms

SPECS



An all-round solid headset that performs as well as it looks, but is limited in terms of connectivity.

PLUS

Good performance / Light and generally comfortable

MINUS

Ear pads slightly too small / Lack of connectivity options

Don't worry... we got this





CHIPSET
Intel Z87
MEMORY
4x 240-pin DDR3
CPU SUPPORT
LGA 1150
EXPANSION
2x PCI-E 16X,
1x PCI-E 1X,
2x PCI
SIZE
ATX

SPECS



GIGABYTE G1.Sniper Z87

Supplier Rectron Website www.gigabyte.com RRP R2,999

GIGABYTE's G1 line of motherboards has grown in leaps and bounds since inception. There was a time when they offered exactly what was on their normal Ultra Durable range, except for a different colour scheme and very little else. With every board, improvements were made in making boards that were more in line with what gamers needed rather than what was a nice-to-have option.

All that has led us to today where all the Z87 boards have proved to be excellent with every offering. Most notably the audio solutions provided by this line of motherboards have been exceptional, leading in on-board sound systems and pressuring other vendors to re-evaluate their offerings. Thus far, none has been able to match GIGABYTE in this aspect save for a very specific motherboard.

However, to gain access to such audio from the competition you're looking at paying over R6,000, whereas with the G1.Sniper Z87, you're going to pay around R2,999 for what is arguably the purest motherboard from the entire G1 line to date.

The Sniper Z87 inherits all the core features of its more expensive counterparts but forgoes the optional extras like the Wi-Fi dongles and Bluetooth capability. You also forgo four-way SLI and CrossFire but instead are limited to the more useful two-way solutions. This is great because you have no PLX chip on the board that may

siphon performance. Moreover, the PCI root complex is simplified as all PCIe slots wire directly to the CPU. Not only does this guarantee optimum performance but it is part of the reason why such a board can come in at such a price. Indeed you can buy cheaper Z87 boards but none of them will offer you a full audio implementation like this one. Every audio related feature that is on the G1.Sniper 5, which we had as our Dream Machine board, is present on the Sniper Z87. So you'll not only get the most competent audio codec out right now, courtesy of Creative's Sound Core 3D chip, but it is physically isolated in both signalling and power routing from the rest of the motherboard. Not only that but you can also upgrade the operational amp on this board and change the tonal qualities of the audio signal to those that suit you best.

With that you'll find something that isn't on all the Sniper boards as well. That is two DIP-switches for gain. You can select between 2.5x and 6x amplification modes that are appropriate for your chosen output device. Thus, while every vendor has some kind of high imprudence amp for headphones, only this board allows you to configure the gain for headphones or speakers, while using the same output and not relying on just the volume setting, which is far from ideal. Add Nichicon high-end audio capacitors to it and you have an amazing audio experience from a rather affordable motherboard. As

BENCHMARKS	
BASELINE: ASUS MAXIMUS VI EXTREME	
3DMark 11	14070 13,258
Cinebench 11.5	10.16 10.17
AIDA 64 copy	31.098MB/s 32,112MB/s

an additional showing to the audio centric design of this motherboard, there's a feature called the USB DAC-Up. This is a gold plated USB 2.0 port that provides cleaner, noise free power delivery to your DAC by utilizing an isolated power source. GIGABYTE didn't stop there however, but the famed Killer E2200 NIC is included as well with traffic shaping and prioritization to round it all up.

Add all the BIOS features you find in all their other boards and you have a very attractive motherboard that is not only packed with the most relevant features of the lot, but also happens to be the fastest G1.Sniper board this generation.

This is one excellent motherboard, and definitely worth the purchase. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko



The purest G1 gaming board around.

PLUS
Performance / Audio solution / Pricing

MINUS
PCI slots are unnecessary

WD VelociRaptor 1TB

Supplier WD
Website www.wdc.com
RRP R3,250



For years, the Raptor brand stood as the pinnacle of performance hard drives for home users, but as SSDs entered the market and have continued to come down in price, one has to wonder if the current-day drives, these days going by the name VelociRaptors, still have a place.

It all comes down to a careful balancing act between price, performance and capacity – the last bit where SSDs struggle in particular. While it's possible to find a 1TB SSD, you'll spend as much as ten times the money on it than you would on a conventional HDD. The VelociRaptor steps in the middle of that choice and retains the platter concept of an HDD, but those high-density disks spin at 10,000rpm – an old trick to stay ahead of the performance of 7,200 or lower speeds of other drives.

For your pretty pennies you certainly get performance that beats back any other platter-based drive. CrystalDiskMark reported average

read/write speeds of 207.4/206.0MB/s when testing large sequential transfers. Random 512K pushed through 78.42/134.8MB/s. While these scores are certainly greater than anything a regular drive could achieve, the margin isn't as wide as the price difference would lead you to expect, however, with some far cheaper drives pulling in just 20MB/s slower in testing (WD's own 1TB Blue, for example). In terms of 4K read/write, the VR performed very well with scores of 1.049/3.072, which means streaming small chunks of data (say, in-game) should be nippy. With that said, it's worth considering that you can pick up a 240GB SSD at this same price point, however, so just how useful this drive will be will come down to your exact requirements. For those who use their gaming PCs for video editing, for example, the VelociRaptor is still the undisputed champion for single drive configurations.

- Geoff Burrows



SPECS

- CAPACITY** 1TB
- INTERFACE** SATA 6Gb/s
- ROTATIONAL SPEED** 10,000rpm (nominal)
- CACHE** 64MB
- FORM FACTOR** 3.5"

8 The numbers speak for themselves, but it's impossible to say outright that you should or shouldn't have a VelociRaptor in your gaming machine. At the very least, it's great to have another option that won't completely wreck your bank account.

- PLUS**
Best HDD performance you can get / Plenty of capacity
- MINUS**
Price difference doesn't match speed increase / Falls far behind SSD performance

astrum

experience the difference

HEAR THE SILENT ENEMY

SUPER BASS STEREO HEADSETS



MP-350

MP3 Player Headset + FM

- Micro SD player headset
 - High frequency FM stereo
- Type: Open air, dynamic
 Driver Unit: 40mm white driver
 Sensitivity: 108dB/mW



HS-217

Communicator Stereo Headset

- Foldable leather headrest
 - High Bass Stereo Sound
- Type: Open air, dynamic
 Driver Unit: 40mm white driver
 Sensitivity: 108dB/mW



HS-208

Twist Pro Headset

- 180 degree twistable earcups
 - Noise isolating ear canals
- Type: Open air, dynamic
 Driver Unit: 40mm white driver
 Sensitivity: 108dB/mW



RAGA BLAST

Dynamic Stereo Headset

- Stylish Red + Black ABS Cups
 - Foldable Leather Headrest
- Type: Open air, dynamic
 Driver Unit: 40mm white driver
 Sensitivity: 110dB+- 3d



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SPECS

CONTROLLER
Dual-Core 64-bit processor

PLATTER DENSITY
800GBx5

CACHE
64MB

ROTATIONAL SPEED
7,200rpm

FORMATTED CAPACITY
3.63TB

FORM FACTOR
3.5"

INTERFACE
SATA 6Gbps

"Regardless of how the performance has come about, the fact remains that this is the fastest mass storage drive we have tested."

WD Black 4TB FZEX

Supplier **WD** Website www.wdc.com RRP **R3,299**

We haven't had a magnetic drive review in NAG in what seems to be ages but in this issue we so happen to have two from the same vendor. In this day where SSDs are pervasive and have by and large taken over from HDDs as primary storage, most have all but forgotten how important our secondary or volume storage is. After all, you can't store all your games on your SSD and, even if you do, you're causing unnecessary wear on your SSD, as it does have a maximum number of write cycles.

For the purposes of storing your games and media then, you need a drive that will last, but one that has enough performance to not slow down your computing experience at all. To that end we have WD's latest 4TB drive. The 4TB Black isn't new, but it has been updated, hence the FZEX version over the older FAEX version. The main differences according to WD are that their dual-core processor has been upgraded from 32-bit to 64-bit and their data access algorithms have received much improvement. In addition to that, WD has added vibration control technology and data corruption protection, which is technology found in their enterprise drives. So along with being faster, the drives are more reliable than before.

How this would improve performance though is not clear. We do have a theory that is plausible which does explain how WD would manage this increase in speed. It is likely that this model, while using five platters

like the previous FAEX drive, is outfitted with 1TB platters. After all, the 1TB FZEX drive uses a single platter and if it had better areal density than this 4TB model it would be faster, but it isn't. This is despite being identical in specifications.

Compared to the old drive, we recorded sustained transfer speeds just above 190MB/s for both reads and writes. This is very good performance for a mechanical drive, especially because the older models managed around 150 to 155MB/s at most. 4K performance isn't something that you should expect to be very high with magnetic drives as they will always be several orders of magnitude slower than SSDs. However, between this FZEX and the FAEX version, 4K (QD32) performance has increased by around 30 to 37%. Again we can't see how this can come about by an improvement in processing capabilities as these numbers are primarily limited by rotational speed or at the very least, linear bit density (especially for the sequential data results). Instead, what is likely delivering this performance is that WD is actually using five 1TB platters and short stroking them to the desired 800GB to deliver 4TB of storage. The increased areal density of the platters along the short stroking (to avoid the slowest edges of the disk) would most certainly result in numbers similar to what we recorded.

Perhaps then a 5TB model will follow sooner rather than later, at which case we

will do performance comparisons and re-evaluate this theory.

Regardless of how the performance has come about, the fact remains that this is the fastest mass storage drive we have tested. You could invest in a WD 10K VelociRaptor drive instead, but the speed gained isn't enough to be meaningful and the drive is one quarter of the capacity of this one at best.

As such we have to award the WD Black 4TB FZEX drive our Dream Machine award. You'll struggle to find a better mechanical drive anywhere in the market if possible at all. Do consider this for your next storage upgrade.

NAG
- Neo Sibeko

9 Possibly the fastest mass storage drive for desktop computers on the market.

PLUS
Good performance / Lots of space
Data reliability technology

MINUS
Price could potentially be high

Which list will you be on
this Christmas?

Nice

Mario & Luigi

Link & Zelda

Herobrine

Imaginet

Naughty

Bowser

Ganondorf

Glados

Arthas Menethil

ADSL | HOSTING | DOMAINS | 3G

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ADATA DashDrive Choice HC630

Supplier ADATA Technology
Website www.adata-group.com
RRP R1,030



ADATA's perhaps most popularly known as a manufacturer of DRAM modules and flash memory solutions, but it seems the company's got a penchant for creating external hard drives as well. Case in point is the DashDrive Choice HC630, a portable drive that offers fantastic performance for anyone hunting for portable storage.

The particular model we received boasts 1TB of storage space, tucked away within a 2.5-inch SATA-powered HDD. Weighing just 160 grams, the HC630 is as light as it is small in stature, making for a conveniently portable device despite its ample storage capacity. While there's no software bundled on the drive, owners of the HC630 can visit ADATA's website for a free download of their HDDtoGO software,

which will let you encrypt your drive's data as well as set up synchronised backups.

The HC630's performance is its most impressive characteristic. Connect it to a USB 3.0 port and you'll get excellent sequential read/write performance of around 113MB/s, which is not only ridiculously speedy compared to USB 2.0, but is fast relative to other external USB 3.0 drives as well.

If I had to point out a niggle I have, it's that the USB 3.0 cable that's bundled with the drive is also needlessly short, forcing awkward placement when it's plugged into obscurely located USB ports. However, given that most drive manufacturers include pathetically short USB cables, you're not going to get much better elsewhere. **NAG**

- **Dane Remendes**



SPECS

CAPACITY
 500GB
 750GB
 1TB

WEIGHT
 160 grams

INTERFACE
 USB 3.0

DIMENSIONS
 115mm x 78mm x 15mm

9 The HC630 is a great external drive that delivers commendable performance.

PLUS
 Super-fast USB 3.0 performance / Small and light

MINUS
 Short USB cable

Thonet & Vander Rätzel

Supplier Bowline
Website www.bowline.co.za
RRP R1,899 (non Bluetooth unit)



The Rätzel is a nicely designed 2.1 speaker set from Thonet & Vander. They're not the most garishly eye-catching speakers out there, but they look plenty classy with their tall stature and straight lines.

They're sturdily built, and boast a useful central control box that lets you adjust the overall volume, as well as separately adjust the bass and treble values. The central volume knob also lets you select your audio source, and you'll find a handy mute button as well. A nice touch is the included 3.5mm stereo output, which lets you attach headphones directly to the control box – useful for if you're using the set with your TV and want to effortlessly switch over to a quieter option that won't disturb your home's peace when you're doing late-night gaming.

The audio produced by this set is fantastic. It

obviously can't match up to super high-end offerings, but their clarity and power is nonetheless remarkable. They do tend towards the higher frequencies, even with the bass dialled up all the way, but not in such a way that they're piercing or uncomfortable to listen to. The only real issue I have with the audio is that at very high volumes it begins to noticeably distort – but seeing as how this set is capable of reaching ridiculously high volumes, you'll never need to set it anywhere close to maximum and therefore won't need to worry about drops in quality.

Overall, the Rätzel is definitely worthwhile if you're a PC or console gamer looking for a sonic upgrade and don't want to hand over the cash for a full home theatre set. Whether you plan to use them for games, music or movies, this is a great 2.1 set. **NAG**

- **Dane Remendes**



SPECS

FREQUENCY RESPONSE 30HZ ~ 20KHZ
TOTAL RMS 66W
SUBWOOFER 6.5-inch, 30W RMS
SATELLITES 2x 3-inch mid-range + 0.5-inch tweeters, 18W RMS total each

9 There's a lot to like here, provided you don't insist on sound so loud it melts your brain.

PLUS
 Neat aesthetic / Control box / Powerful, clear sound production

MINUS
 Distorts at high volume

**#1 VIDEO GAME
ENTERTAINMENT
SITE**



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Cooler Master Nepton 280L

Supplier Cooler Master
Website www.cooler-master.com
RRP R1,499



After several attempts at liquid cooling systems, Cooler Master has finally delivered a CPU cooler worth comparing to the best. In fact, for the first time ever, Cooler Master has produced a unit worthy of the name that had, for so many years, dominated after-market cooling. If you do remember the X-Dream for the Socket A platform, then you'll know how sought after that cooler was, despite its insane noise levels at full rpm.

The Seidon series was okay, Eisburg we can't attest to, but all indications are that the Nepton is Cooler Master's finest work thus far. We observed this ourselves in our own testing where not only was this cooler better than a previous crowd favourite, the H100i, but it delivered performance of the much pricier and much louder NZXT Kraken X60. Not only did it match the Kraken to within a few degrees, but it did it with without the fan noise that the X60 brought with it.

When we swapped out the fans for the Corsair AF140s, all noise was virtually eliminated but temperature

did not suffer much. Unlike with the Kraken, this change in fans isn't necessary on the Nepton 280L, since you can install it with its shipping JetFlo and still have great cooling and very little noise. What does make a noise however is the pump which tends to have a whine of sorts, especially when you power on the system for the first time. This dies down however and you'll be hard pressed to hear it over all the other fans in your system. Testing on a toasty Intel Core i7 4960X we recorded a maximum temperature of 67°C with the system under full XTU load. This benchmark, based on Prime95, is particularly tough on CPUs and all other loads should be lighter. Hence the real life performance of the Nepton 280L is much better than that reading would suggest.

Given how it held the load temperatures, we have little choice but to award the Nepton 280L our Dream Machine award and it thus replaces the Kraken X60 as the liquid cooler to have. **NAG**
- Neo Sibeko



SPECS

SIZE 150X118X27MM (RADIATOR)

COMPATIBILITY 2011/1366/775/115X/AM2/AM3/FM1/FM2



The best performing Cooler Master liquid cooler we've ever come across.

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MINUS

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Meanwhile, behind the scenes

If you look at the we-made-this credits roll on the contents page of this magazine, you'll see that my name is now listed under the "Staff writer" category¹. Yes, after just over seven years of treading toilet water in the "Contributor" pool, I've been promoted to the exalted ranks of NAG's elite and allocated an extra ration of jelly beans at the end of every month. I've even got my own desk, although technically it's my same old desk because I'm still working in NAG's Cape Town division².

BUT NOT ON THIS DAY.

I've just arrived in Jo'burg for my semi-annual visit to the office³. It's one week to the magazine print deadline,

and most of the articles are due today (including this one, SHHHHHHH). It's also just three days to our IGN Africa launch and the website is still prominently featuring placeholder images of cats. You'd expect – and not unreasonably – that everybody in the office would be super busy with... whatever it is they're supposed to be super busy with around this time of the month⁴, but no – they're all playing *Call of Duty*. Those of you who have been reading my column long enough might remember that the last time I visited, they were all playing *Call of Duty* too. I'm not entirely sure now if they've ever actually stopped playing *Call*

"I'm also not entirely sure how anything ever gets finished in this place, so that hasn't changed either. Are they even still breathing? I'd hold up a mirror in front of Geoff's face to check, but I'm terrified of what might happen next."

1 Give yourself 50 XP if you noticed last month already.

2 It looks almost exactly like a spare bedroom in a suburban townhouse. Okay, not almost. But there is a piece of paper taped on the door with "NAG CAPE TOWN DIVISION" written on it in pink pencil crayon. Okay, there isn't but there should be.

3 Last time was about three or four years ago. We're pretty relaxed about attendance around here.

4 Gluing bits of dried pasta, string, and paper together? I don't know, I just work here.

5 Journalism occupies a uniquely turbulent place on the time-space continuum.

of Duty, except maybe for the bacon sandwiches that were delivered for lunch but I suspect there's some sort of feeding tube delivery system installed because they vanished, like, instantly.

I'm also not entirely sure how anything ever gets finished in this place, so that hasn't changed either. Are they even still breathing? I'd hold up a mirror in front of Geoff's face to check, but I'm terrified of what might happen next.

Back to IGN Africa, though, and it's a thing! Well, it's not a thing at the time of writing this (not publically, anyway), but it will be a thing by the time you read it⁵. You should definitely read IGN Africa because it's staffed by the kind of people who use placeholder images of cats, and because – unlike the IGN people over in America – we'll put the word "bru" in a feature title. Also, I spent six weeks adding paragraph breaks to the content we imported from IGN HQ, and if nobody reads any of it, all that tremendous effort will have been in vain. Think of the formatting, people.

Until then, though, have a brilliant holiday and I'll see you back here next year just in time to drop all of our New Year's resolutions. I won't tell if you don't. **NAG**

- Tarryn van der Byl

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