JULY **2014**

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❯CONTENTS

❯ REGULARS

❯ OPINION

❯ PREVIEWS

❯ REVIEWS

❯ HARDWARE

FEATURES

Straight on 'til morning

› At the time of writing, E3 is just about to hit full swing. It's the time of year when gamers get excited, disappointed and sometimes rapidly defensive (or offensive) about their favourite hobby. New games are announced to mixed reactions, old franchises are dragged up through the annals of history, and endless series are given another game with a number at the end. For publishers and media alike, E3 is the lynchpin that holds this industry together and lets us all know what to expect over the coming months.

In my time at NAG I've been fortunate enough to attend E3, and it's definitely everything that people dream it is, although personally, I prefer Gamescom. The German show is not only larger but caters more for the average gamer than E3 (which is closed to the public – only games industry people are allowed through its hallowed doors), which forces developers and publishers to show only the content about which they feel truly confident, and pay more attention to their customers. Also, since it's in Germany, you can totally get a beer at any hour. After five days of running around and squeezing through corridors filled with teenagers, cosplayers and pretzel vendors, it sounds a lot less alcoholic than you might think. Or maybe that's just me.

Despite beginning this week with the grumpy attitude of "I'm not really looking forward to anything at E3 this year," I've already been pleasantly surprised by a couple of games (*Grim Fandango* is at the top of my mind, and the goose bump-inducing *No Man's Sky* is now a little more fleshed out and looking gorgeous), and not miserably disappointed by anything yet. Even *Battlefield: Hardline*, which I initially thought looked as white bread as white bread can be, seems kinda neat. I hope to nab a beta key so I can spend some time with it as soon as this issue is wrapped up.

I suppose it just goes to show that it's impossible to predict anything in this industry. Just when one slips into a comfortable role of cantankerous old geezer, something comes along to replant that childish innocence and make the industry seem magical again.

LOOKING AHEAD

As things often happen in the world of print, the timing of E3 is such that we can only just fit in an overview of the new announcements (in the Bytes section) in this issue. Next month we're doing things a little different: in the past we've brought you a separate E3 supplement, but in the August issue we're bundling all 32 pages of that into the magazine itself, and in addition we'll have another 16 pages dedicated to the tech-head's dream that is Computex Taipei. The cover DVD will also be jam-packed with as many E3 videos as we can fit in. And that's all on top of our usual content, so expect a huge bumper August issue when it hits the shelves (always on the last Thursday of the month).

Keep warm and keep playing! **NAG**

-GeometriX

Inbox

letters@nag.co.za

Letter of the Month April 2014

From: Josh van Asten
Subject: Gaming in future generations

If one were to ask who controls the gaming industry many an answer would be similar to "the developers;" these faraway people who call the shots and dictate into what direction the industry must head. But that's not true. It's the players who control the industry, without the consumption base of players the industry would collapse.

For most of gaming's relatively brief history that consumption base has been of one demographic but, as the years wear on, that has inevitably started expanding. Take Mrs Tshabalala for example, who has her son. Soon, he shall get to the stage where he becomes interested in videogames - as many kids are in this age of their ubiquity (the games, not the kids... Although: China) - and I detect there will be a new phenomenon on the horizon.

It was my dad who first introduced me to videogames with his spur-of-the-moment purchase of Need For Speed: SE II and, in some ironic twist of fate, it eventually become he who was the biggest critic of my hobby. However when one (or both) of your parents are videogame enthusiasts that dynamic is going to play out differently.

In the start it will be great, your parents fuelling your habit will make videogames only easier to acquire and make the habit that much more acceptable as an excuse to your sympathetic parents. However as children slip into that awkward pre-teen/teen phase what will be the repercussions of their parents' patriotage to videogames? Will it been push factor to them as they will deem it "uncool" to be interested in what their parents are? Will they abandon the hobby now that their friends look on? How will this dynamic affect the next wave of future players who will dictate how the market behaves? Will it leave a giant age gap and break the gaming industry's previously unstoppable expansion?

I'm going to do you the favour of pretending that you meant "the publishers" instead of "the developers". They are the shot-callers in this industry. But, yes, I get your general idea.

I think you're on the money with this: it's going to be a weird time going ahead, as young gamers swoop in to replace their elders who do nothing but complain about CoD kiddies and the good old days of 64-bit gaming. Kids born today are going to have the strange experience of being raised in a world where gaming is considered pretty acceptable by most; it's less nerdy and niche than it used to be and that's great for many reasons. This is bound to create some strange effects that are impossible to predict.

But like every generation has done before it, this next bunch of attention-deficit, sideways-cap-wearing, online-obsessed youth is going to throw a spanner into the works and do whatever the hell it pleases, because that's what young people do. Damn kids, either get off my lawn, or mow it! Ed.

From: Zayne Rodel
Subject: Next gen?
Hi there guys. I would like to address the fact that we are slowly downgrading our gaming lives. why do I say this? Well, reason number 1: Indie Games are looking more and more familiar in our game collections, everyone can say they have played atleast one indie game. Big time game developers are leaving their companies to work on these projects. Look at ID for example. Is it coming to a stage where Indie games like Minecraft and Starbound are going to be more commonly spoken about than giants like watch dogs? Second reason: Kickstarters. Kickstarters are slowly but surely coming into play. One game sparked this revolution and could be the fall of gaming. Donating money to develop a game? To me that just seems desperate. Sure Games like Broken Age have turned out pretty good but that resorts back to my first reason I mentioned: Indie games. Soon we will end up forking out hard earned money to develop bigger games and then what are we, as gamers, achieving?

Not sure I agree that moving from AAA to indie could be considered "downgrading", but there is definitely a shift happening in the games industry — a few shifts, actually. The entire industry is maturing, and sometimes maturation means drastic changes. I think we're at that stage where the games business has moved out of home a few years ago and is starting to buy its own furniture. No more hand-me-downs; let's clear out the mis-matched crockery and maybe get a rug for the living room. Time to move on from the established norms, the comforts, the stuff we've all become a little bored with.

It's the future, and it's possibly scary. Embrace the weird stuff and maybe you'll learn to love it. Ed.

From: Marius Swanepoel
Subject: Where art thou NAG
I'm a 38 year old guy with a large collection of games but with an ever larger collection of NAG magazines.

I bought my first NAG back in 2004 and I still have most of my issues. Some of you might ask: "Why keep them?"

Well, they still have some life left in them. I like to open an old issue from time to time. It reminds me of how the gaming industry has grown over the years. There is nothing I enjoy more than reading my NAG every month.

I even read it in the shower. Some of you might ask again: "Shower?" Well Duh, that's what the sakkie is for.

Think of it as protective reading.

I'm reminded every day (shower again) that some thing gets smaller with age. But why the NAG?

In 2004 the magazine use to be the fat chick. Now it's the fat chick that lost 30kg after using some diet stuff.

Surely you should have more to write about seeing that we have more consoles these days.

I've had to trim off a bit from your letter, but I guess that could serve as a little metaphor for what we're going through at the moment. As the industry changes shape, we need to fit in with that shape, and right now that means producing a thinner magazine because, quite honestly, it costs a ridiculous amount of money to produce a thicker one. Money's tight for everyone, so this is us responding with the belt-tightening that usually follows. We could fill 200 pages a month with the amount of waffle that comes from this lot, but it's just not feasible to do so.

The good news is that the 80 page thing isn't a permanent fixture. Next month we're going to deliver a much larger issue, and hopefully we'll be able to put out a mix of thick and thin issues over the coming months. It all comes down to advertisements: those things that people so often complain about are the reason why we don't charge R150 (or more) for an issue of NAG. As people also say, money makes the world go round.

By the way, I also have all of my issues of NAG. I don't know what to do with them. I might have a problem. Ed.

From: Connor Daniels
Subject: Gaming is most rewarding
What's up ladies and genitals of nag. Me and my friend are always playing games like borderlands 2,skyrim etc. anyway so the past few months we were playing borderlands 2 and it has been a war zone spend every weekend looking for legendary weapons and stuff and every day of the week researching about the game and it is super annoying shooting one person over and over again but when you get that one thing you were looking for it is the best feeling ever. Like once he starting playing metal gear revengance on the highest difficulty

ON THE FORUMS

There are many sites on the Internet on which you can waste your time, but where else can you do so with such elegant, sophisticated company? **Join us at www.nag.co.za/forums.**

QUESTION / What announcement at E3 would utterly blow your mind?

EA drop Origin, Ubisoft drop uPlay, and all games digitally distributed through Steam so I can have a concise library of games.
- Azraphael

Valve to release a "DLC Season pass" which gives you access to all the DLC on their market for a reasonable fee.
- Nferno

A release date for The Last Guardian
- tarisma

A new Duke Nukem game: old school, politically incorrect, fun and with all legal issues resolved. OR a new Metroid game.
- LazyDemoni

Joanne Joan Henning, "Prepare To NAG... Limited Edition. Enjoy the 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 prize courtesy of Prima Interactive is a *PS3 Controller and PS3 Lego Star Wars the Complete Saga*, valued at R599.

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and so I went to him one day and asked him how far he was and he said the forth mission and I said how do you deal with it that and he said just finishing a mission on the hardest difficulty is the best feeling ever and that's what gaming is all about just accomplishing that one thing and that's why I think gaming is one of the most rewarding things ever and that's what keeps me playing.

Hehe, "genitals". Ed.

From: Jaco van Wyk
Subject: My Old Lady bought Reaper of Souls
I'm one of those lucky readers who's Mom is a Gamer. She is 62 this year and yes she plays games. Her first proper game was Diablo she played and finished all of them. To name a few on her hit list - Sacred, Warcraft, Fable, Settlers, Anno and all the Sims plus many more.

And my Old Man also recently started to play games and he is 65. He is into the Hidden Object Games and his collection is standing on 25+ games. So it shows you, you never to old to play games.

Ok down to the reason of my letter. She bought reaper of souls and asked me to install the game for her. We needed to do a 7.5gig download before installing the game, needles to say she was not a happy old Lady especially the part where you only need to enter the key after the download to activate the game.She then asked me why does she need to pay so much money for the game and the disc was only used

to start the installer and proceeded to the patch download. Yes we now it is to counter piracy and best possible performance bla bla bla, But seriously they need to look at DRM in whole new way.

Her words was "It was better in the old days where you popped the disc in the drive install and you can play."

I think "old lady" means a girlfriend or wife, at least that's what I've learnt from Sons of Anarchy *and all the biker gangs that I wish I was part of since watching it. Unless you're actually calling her an old lady, which I doubt she would approve of. Your dad plays hidden object games which are for old people anyway so I won't dispute that one.*

You're right about DRM. It sucks and does nothing but irritate the legitimate customers, but it has helped to connect people to online services that make it super handy to get into multiplayer games and ensure you always have updated versions of the game. Of course, on the flip side of that argument you could say that, without all of these crutches, developers would be forced to make games that don't need to be updated so damn often. I guess it's a matter of half-full/half-empty, depending on where you sit.

Regardless, I agree – I miss the old days sometimes, but I don't think we're going to get that back any time soon. Or maybe we'll see a resurgence of genuine retro gaming that thrives off of disk-based installations, boxed games and manuals, and resurrected DOS-based PCs. Ed.

THE SHORTS
[extracts of LOL from the NAG audience]

"Ps:Lauren,will you be my GF oh and hi Mom !"
– Zander Rautenbach

"once you've had the taste of the adrenaline that DayZ gives you, no other game can satisfy you as much"
– Mr_Beard

"I AM NOT A GAME HOARDER, I AM NOT A GAME HOARDER"
– Christo Liebenberg

www.facebook.com/ NAGMagazine

Xander van den Bergh
OMG! Guys I saw in you newest episode of nag you mentioned the new CoD Advanced Warfare can wait for it I'm a huge CoD fan!

Darren Hulley
Dude's I have an awesome idea for a game and Lifestyle.

Ivan Sadler
A big thanks to NAG Magazine - Godzilla was awesome!

Jan-Hendrik Redelinghuys
Hey guys I can still remember once one of my friends asked me: What is the best collection of anything you have? I replied sarcastically wow dude probably my condoms right next so my HUGE pile of NAG's.

Dzuni Cmom
Man I love your news.

Kakashi Dono
Do you want me to spend all my money? Coz THAT'S how you get me to spend all my money.

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Order & Chaos Online
Bigger and Better on the
Nokia Lumia 1520

XBOX

MixRadio

QUALCOMM
SNAPDRAGON 2.2.GHZ

6" SCREEN

Order & Chaos: Online,
the most acclaimed MMORPG on Smartphones

GAMELOFT   **NOKIA**   **Windows Phone**

MIKTAR'S MEANDERINGS

by Miktar Dracon

Infinite branches

Miktar once confessed to not being able to stop blast-finishing chaos fields just so he could make chaos bubbles. We tried it. Its ridiculously mesmerising.

Now I don't know if there is a term for my particular malfunction, but I do know this. For as long as I can remember, I've never had "heroes". Or "idols", if that makes more sense. I might have had thoughts of "wow, that person is good at that thing they do", but I've never really wanted to *be* them. Nor did I elevate them to some kind of hero status, the type which usually causes people to put posters of that person up on their walls.

But if I did have to pick a "hero", someone I look up to, it would be Saurian Dash. I know very little about Saur. He has a YouTube channel [www.youtube.com/user/Saur] with guide videos for games like *Soul Calibur, Bayonetta, Metal Gear Rising*, and *The Wonderful 101*. More recently, Saur was contracted to work on the official *Bayonetta* guide by Future Press, which is widely regarded as the platinum standard for both quality and skilled play. Basically, Saur knows his stuff when it comes to games. More specifically, game *mechanics*. Saur has used his knowledge to make tutorial videos that introduce fans to the genuine depth of a game's mechanics, helping them create and evolve their own skills.

It was during an interview on the Platinum Games blog [platinumgames.com/2014/05/19/interview-with-saurian-dash-part-1/] that Saur said something I found poignant. The whole interview is very interesting and I recommend it to anyone interested in game systems. But the bit that stood out for me was when he said this:

"However, I am seeing that time and time again really brilliant skill-focused games are completely misrepresented and misunderstood because they are being judged on the quality of their narrative experience instead of the quality of their skill-focused mechanics and how much scope these mechanics allow for creative challenges and player self-improvement. These days you will often hear the phrase 'This game is xx hours long.' The 'value' of a game is quantified based on the total length of its narrative, not on the depth of the game's mechanics or how long it holds the player's attention as they strive to perfect their skills. This, I believe, is an attitude which is very damaging to the gaming medium as a whole. **Games can be so much more than vehicles to tell stories.**"

Saur was talking specifically about how games can be vehicles for self-expression, realised through well-designed mechanics that allow a player to learn and grow in ways simply not found in other mediums. Like painting or songwriting, someone playing a game in their own unique way after having mastered its fundamentals is, in my opinion, *a work of art*. It might not be as widely acknowledged as a creative pursuit, but give it time. In the meantime, I like to add my own spin to the bolded part of Saur's statement, interpreting it a different way. I feel that games can be much, much more than just interactive stories. They can be infinite lives, tools to radically accelerate us as a species. But it's going to take some work, and a much broader view of what we call "games".
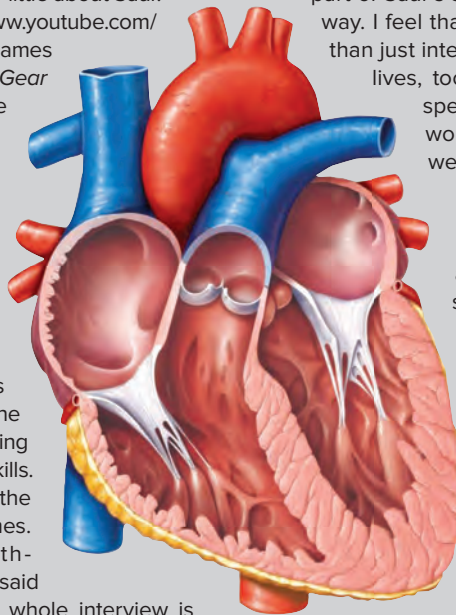
To illustrate my point, there is an ongoing manga that started in 2008 called *Saijou no Meii*. It follows the antics of a very skilled paediatric surgeon. It might sound like strange subject matter for a comic book, but it is surprisingly engrossing. While the story itself is fictional, the procedures done in the story are real. The comic author has a real paediatric surgeon advising on techniques, situations that might occur, and the actual mechanics of operating on the small internal organs of children. Their smaller size, compared to an adult, makes even simple procedures much more complicated. Adding to that, children's bodies grow. An operation done at age ten might rupture and cause complications a decade later.

There should be games that allow you to be a paediatric surgeon. There should be games that, even if they aren't 100% accurate or "realistic", let you try your hand at being a veterinarian. Or a marine biologist. Or an embalmer. Or perhaps an oil-rig dive technician, golf ball diver, or skyscraper window cleaner. Mundane tasks, exotic tasks… the more variety the better. If there's anything games like *SimCity, Theme Hospital, Railroad Tycoon* or *Trauma Center* have shown us, it's that people *want* to try new things. And games can be the perfect place to try. And try. *And try again.*

Off the beaten track

Forza Horizon impressed us when it released in 2012 with its strong mix of arcade racing and extensive upgrades system, so we're happy to announce that a sequel has been confirmed by Microsoft. *Forza Horizon 2* (no clever subtitle just yet) will once again be co-developed by Turn 10 Studios (the team behind the main *Forza* series) and Playground Games (who led the development of the first *Horizon*). Turn 10 will provide some of the fancy tech seen in the main series while Playground handles the primary development.

Horizon 2 aims to be bigger and better than its predecessor, and will take place across a number of real and inspired locations across Southern Europe to provide a mix of terrains and driving conditions, including dynamic weather. Players will be able to race through the open country-side and winding mountain passes, as well as the claustrophobic streets of Tuscany and wide boulevards of Côte d'Azur. There's also a promise of vastly improved off-road driving with as few artificial barriers as possible, which will allow you to complete the game's 700+ events in almost any way you choose.

Currently, *Horizon 2* is destined for Xbox One only, and should be available late September or early October on local shores, just in time for the launch of the XBO.

GTA *joins the next generation*

Don't act like you didn't expect this all along: Rockstar has confirmed that *GTA V* will be released later this year for Xbox One, PS4 and PC.

The next-gen update will feature plenty of visual improvements, increased traffic density and boosted draw distances, and the PC version will include an in-game video editor for every *Jackass* wannabe out there. We can't wait to see what people come up with. Current owners of the 360/PS3 versions will be able to migrate their GTA Online characters to the updated games should they wish, and all additional GTA Online content so far will be included.

Miklós uses lots of interesting Miklósisms when he communicates with the NAG staff like "mwazzies! xxx", "Peace and love and gibs", "super-duper-extra-mega-massively", and "VERY/GONE/AFTER". He's cool like that.

I, GAMER

by Miklós Szecsei

Pixel detox

've just spent the last two weeks sitting in a game reserve. As you can imagine, there's not much gaming to be done in a game reserve, which, now that I think about it, sounds a bit odd. Anyway, this two week downtime in the bush is becoming an annual affair, as this was the third year in a row that my family and I have swapped out the raucous bustle of Pietermaritzburg (ha!) for the tranquil tones of the savannah. Aside from it just being a holiday, I've also made this my time to deliberately unplug from all forms of gaming and social media — I've dubbed this two week phenomenon my "pixel detox" period. I think I did pretty well, as the only screens I looked at were on the back of a Nikon camera, or on my iPad while re-reading *The Hobbit*.

Why do I do this? I'm not sure, to be honest. It probably has something (everything) to do with the fact that gaming is part of my job and as such it consumes pretty much all my time outside of my regular day job (fun fact: I write for *NAG* in addition to having a normal day job) and changing dirty nappies. If it sounds like I'm complaining, I'm not: I consider myself exceedingly lucky to have suckered somebody into paying me to play and write about video games. Sometimes, however, it's good to take a step back and exist for a while without whatever it is that consumes your thoughts most often, which for me (and likely those of you reading this magazine) is pretty much gaming.

After enough time, it kind of feels like my head is going to burst from all the releases, news articles, conspiracies, bitching, press events and review sessions that occupy my thoughts. There's a saturation of gaming, and I'm pretty sure I'm not the only one who gets like this. As much as we *adore* this hobby of ours, some time to totally switch off is needed, if only to allow yourself to switch back on again with a renewed, obsessive fervour. There's something wildly appealing about knowing that gaming isn't going anywhere while you take a two week hiatus; I got a little excited to see what had happened while I'd been sitting on the banks of a river drinking gin and tonics and watching wildlife instead of sitting in a desk chair drinking coffee and watching pixels.

So what did happen while I was away? Well, *Watch Dogs* released and was met with the usual mix of reactions including outright dismissal as "overhyped rubbish", and lavish praise as Ubisoft's new defining IP. I also see that *The Last Guardian* was "cancelled" and then revived after the cancellation was dismissed as typical Internet pre-E3 jitters. Now that I think about it, the gaming industry is pretty much a soap opera: you can miss two weeks and slot straight back in without skipping a beat. Weirdly, I think I like that surety.

No such thing as a clean cop

EA announces the next game in the Battlefield series

Amidst complaints of a still troubled fourth iteration, the next title in the *Battlefield* series has been confirmed. It's called *Battlefield: Hardline*, implying that it's a spin-off from the main series in much the same as *Bad Company*. This not only gives it a chance to find a new audience, but to go off the path of its parent franchise by some margin.

Hardline is Cops and Robbers the video game. Players engage in urban conflict in the war on crime, taking to the streets as those who either serve to protect the innocent or take advantage of them. Visceral Games, the people behind the *Dead Space* series (and the less popular *Army of Two: The Devil's Cartel*) are handling the single-player campaign while DICE takes care of the multiplayer side of things. The campaign tells the story of a Miami detective who has to deal with crooked cops, gangs and the full depth of the criminal underworld, and will take place across the US.

Multiplayer modes include Heist, Rescue, Hotwire and Bloodmoney. Each mode is designed to appeal to different tastes, with Heist and Rescue modes playing out in a similar way to games like *Payday* (although with human players on both sides of the fight). Hotwire is still a little murky but will feature a lot of vehicular combat and chases in a large, open map, and Bloodmoney is a straight-up fight over a big ol' pile of money.

Both the SP and MP modes will see players having access to a number of cool gadgets like zip-lines and grappling guns, and will be highly tactical, team-based efforts. Vehicles span the range from civilian muscle cars and bikes to police-issue cruisers and even military vehicles like attack helicopters.

The final frontier

Good Old Games, more commonly known these days as GOG.com, has been holding high the DRM-free banner since its inception, but sometimes gamers actually want some of the useful features that come with always-online services like Origin and Steam. Their solution is GOG Galaxy.

Galaxy is a service much like Steam: it allows you to easily sort and download your games, keep them up to date, add friends and chat with them, and publicise your achievements. The key here is that everything is optional. If your Internet connection drops, no problem: you can always access offline content without needing to switch to a special mode.

While all of the above could be filed under "cool, but that's kind of what everyone else offers these days", GOG is promising a feature that could give it an edge: cross-platform play. Currently they claim that their service will support multiplayer between "services like Steam", whatever that means. The details are still a little flaky for now but more info will emerge in the coming months.

Halo: Master Chief Collection crams all four Halo games onto one Blu-ray

Microsoft and 343 Industries have announced a super-mega-bundle package for the *Halo* franchise. Subtitled the *Master Chief Collection*, the single disc packs in *Halo: Combat Evolved*, *Halo 2*, *Halo 3*, and *Halo 4* all running at 60fps in 1080p for the Xbox One. For super-fans or newcomers to the series, it doesn't get any better than this as the entire content of the disc will be open and unlocked right from the start. 343 Industries has built a new user interface that'll allow you to access any mission from any game at any time. You can also jump straight into any multiplayer mode from any of the four *Halo* games. All of the additional multiplayer levels that were released as DLC will be included in the collection.

With the exception of *Halo 2*, all the other *Halo* games in the collection will play on their original engines, albeit at a higher resolution and frame rate than when each game initially launched. *Halo 2* is getting a special HD facelift similar to what happened with *Halo: Combat Evolved*'s anniversary edition. The reason why *Halo 2* is getting an HD remake is because this *Master Chief Collection* launches on 11 November this year, which is the tenth anniversary of the original *Halo 2*.

THE GAME STALKER

by Pippa Tshabalala

Who watches the watchmen?

Who watches the watch... uh... dogs? Not quite as catchy as the phrase made famous by (although not coined incidentally) Alan Moore's *Watchmen* and known to comic book nerds everywhere, however Ubisoft's recently released *Watch Dogs* deals with concepts of privacy that sit uncomfortably close to the surface in contemporary society.

For those of you that haven't yet played it, you'll at least have seen the trailers (don't worry, no spoilers here), and you'll notice the digital profiler that overlays every scene, providing not just information such as banking details, criminal records and such, but also more personal information such as "illiterate", "attempted suicide" and even "denies evolution". Although you'll find a host of unique, sometimes amusing NPC character profiles in this game, it should raise some alarm bells in the back of your mind regarding the fact that it is entirely plausible that governments (and conversely those that wish to destabilise them) have access to this kind of information about you. About me. About all of us.

What is also quite disturbing is the ways in which gamers use some of the information presented to you within the game. Since its release, a number of articles have been written on the "moral" judgements and uses of the profiler within the game. Using it to identify which characters "deserved" to die based on their own moral judgements, and recently, a video which showed a gamer (playing as Aiden Pearce obviously) identifying, targeting and gunning down minority NPCs on the basis of race, sexual orientation and religion for example. There is debate of course as to whether or not this video is a serious reflection of the player's feelings towards society, or merely a joke akin to the satire present in *GTA*, however it represents a disturbing trend in the fact that our information is available to pretty much anyone who has the skills to access it.

Of course I'm not telling you anything new (or at least I shouldn't be), but *Watch Dogs* highlights the ease with which people with knowhow (and I suspect sometimes even those without much) can access the information we freely put out on the internet. When we connect our games to Facebook so we can save time signing in, or our Twitter profiles with a website because we're lazy and we want to avoid opening a new tab.

What's perhaps worse is that even if you're one of those people who shun social media sites, preferring to isolate themselves from Twitter, Facebook and so forth, your more private information such as banking, healthcare, insurance and the like can be accessed because the institutions that you place your trust in are all digitally connected.

Is the concept of the profiler in many ways offensive? It should be. In the context of *Watch Dogs*, sure it's just a game, (a game I loved by the way) but for the fact that our information is so freely available.

You know they're watching.

But who watches the watch dogs?

A little less island, a lot more dead

Grab your electrified shovel: Dead Island 2 is incoming

Hot on the heels of us revisiting the original *Dead Island* for last month's The Other Guys feature comes the announcement that the zombie-plagued action RPG is set to get a sequel to call its very own. Simply titled *Dead Island 2*, it trades the sun-kissed beaches of the island of Banoi for the sun-kissed beaches of California in the US. We'll let publisher Deep Silver describe it:

"Several months after the events on Banoi, the United States military has put the Golden State under full quarantine. Now a restricted zone, California has become a bloody paradise for those who refuse to leave their homes and an action-packed playground for renegades who seek adventure, glory and a fresh start."

"Combining the classic *Dead Island* elements of immersive close combat, action and role-playing, *Dead Island 2* features crazy, never-before-seen handcrafted weapons and over-the-top characters in taking players from the iconic Golden Gate to the celebrated beachfront boardwalk of southern California's Venice Beach."

Dead Island 2 is being built in Unreal Engine 4, and it'll once again feature its trademark cooperative (but accidentally competitive) multiplayer. This time up to eight players can exist within a single game world, and there'll be a variety of classes on offer with unique skills that'll cater to different play-styles. Perhaps the most exciting thing about this announcement is that development is being handled by Yager Development — the studio behind the excellently thoughtful, story-driven shooter *Spec Ops: The Line*. We're very interested to see what a studio boasting such a strong narrative drive can do with the zombie-slaying genre. Maybe they'll lend a powerfully human element to the bloody work of surviving the zombie apocalypse. The game is due out in the second quarter of next year.

Manny Calavera returns from the grave

For all the hubbub and sadness surrounding the struggled development of *Broken Age*, we accept deep in our hearts that Tim Schafer can do no wrong. And he knows it, which is probably why he felt comfortable enough to negotiate a deal with Sony and Disney to produce *Grim Fandango* for the PS4 and PSV. The announcement (which was followed by an expectedly elated reaction from the crowd at the Sony press conference at E3) confirms that the game will be remastered for the new platforms by Double Fine and an undisclosed third-party development company.

Schafer later took to Twitter to assure everyone that the game will make its way to other platforms at a later date, but Sony was a great help in getting the project done, so he's happy to work with them exclusively for the time being. There's no release date confirmed at present.

Crytek gears up for a spot of monster slaying

Crytek's shown that it's got more up its sleeve than a new *Homefront* with its announcement of *Hunt: Horrors of the Gilded Age*. The premise is brilliantly intriguing: it's a four-player cooperative monster-basher set in an eerie reimagining of America in the late 1800s, and you apparently play the part of both hunter and hunted as you fend off a variety of supernatural creatures. So picture cowboy hats and zombies and big boots and witches and a great many nasties all clamouring to eat your face, and you've got the general idea behind Hunt. It smacks a bit of *Left 4 Dead*, which can only mean good things.

It's being developed by Crytek USA, a studio formed from the ashes of *Darksiders* development studio Vigil Games. Environments are procedurally generated and enemy placement is randomised with each game, so expect to never play the same game twice. Players can customise their chosen characters and their weapons as they progress, and there'll be boss fights too. The game will be free-to-play as part of what Crytek calls its "Games-as-a-Service range", and it'll enter into closed beta on PC later this year.

United we stand

Assassin's Creed is officially one of those games we can expect a release from every year, and this year's offering comes in the form of *Assassin's Creed: Unity*. The name comes from the fact that the game will support up to four players in co-op, with each player taking on the role of an assassin during the French Revolution in Paris. Players will need to work together to negotiate their surroundings and hunt down targets in exotic locations like the Catacombs and the Notre Dame Cathedral. Extensive outdoors areas will be host to crowds that number in the thousands, and new technology strives to create more believable NPC behaviour to do the mob mentality of the revolution justice.

Unity will be released in October this year exclusively for next-gen consoles and PC.

Down, but never out: BioShock lives on

Before you get too excited, this isn't actually a game announcement. But it is a glimmer of hope for anyone who's worried that, following the demise of Irrational Games and Ken Levine moving onto smaller projects, the much-loved *BioShock* series will forever disappear. Take-Two CEO Strauss Zelnick beamed in to a recent analyst conference to assuage such fears, revealing that *BioShock* will live on in the care of 2K Marin.

Now, it's a bit odd considering that we were led to believe that 2K Marin had been pretty much shuttered shortly after the release of *The Bureau: XCOM Declassified*. Either Zelnick suffered a moment of confusion, or that's not the case. Either way, 2K Marin has experience with the *BioShock* series seeing as they made *BioShock 2*, which many fans actually consider to be the best in the series. Although, as was pointed out on Twitter by former 2K Games UI artist Pat Guarino, there are very few people left at 2K Marin who actually worked on *BioShock 2*.

No matter where this news leads, we're happy that a franchise as creatively powerful as *BioShock* has the chance to live on. In other 2K news, Zelnick also revealed that *Red Dead Redemption* is a "permanent franchise". Make of that what you will.

Nintendo unveils a new Legend of Zelda for Wii U

Everyone wonders if this new Link is male or female

During Nintendo's E3 Digital Presentation, series producer Eiji Aonuma unveiled a brand new *Legend of Zelda* game. It's entirely open world and we at NAG HQ are officially dubbing it *The Zelda Scrolls* because we can and we like being ridiculous.

During the reveal presentation, Aonuma stated that this new *Zelda* game actually has more in common with the original Nintendo Entertainment System title than more recent *Legend of Zelda* iterations. Those early games allowed the player to explore a very large (albeit simple) game world. "However," Aonuma explained, "after the game transitioned to 3D and the hardware continued to evolve, it became harder to create that feeling of being in a vast world." Aonuma continued and highlighted the fact that more recent games, like *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*, required the development team to create the illusion of a large world by sculpting smaller areas with
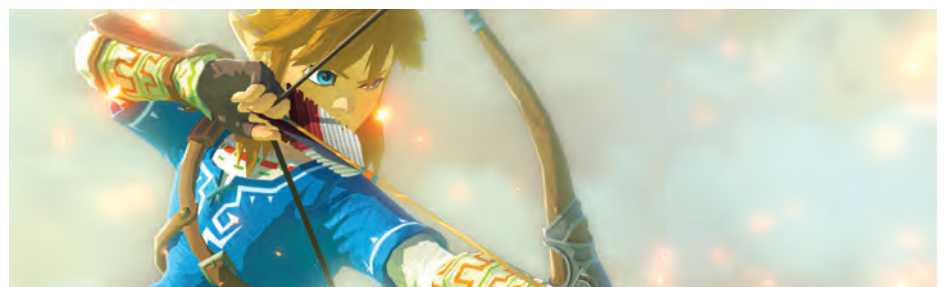
defined entries and exits. With the hardware inside the Wii U, technology limitations are no longer holding back Aonuma and his team. The result is a truly open world *Legend of Zelda* title.

During the presentation, Link was shown sitting on top of a horse in the middle of a lush green field with vast mountain ranges in the distance. Aonuma stated that players would be able to ride all the way to those mountains if they wished. The trailer culminated in a giant,

mechanical spider-like creature chasing Link and firing lasers. The creature created huge explosions that affected the surrounding terrain, causing grass patches to shudder from shockwaves and rocks and hillsides to crumble as the creature stumbled into them. The whole thing looks bright and colourful, and undeniably impressive.

This new Wii U *Legend of Zelda* still has much to reveal, but it's expected to hit sometime in 2015.

EA brings an end to Mythic

Hands up those of you who remember 2001's *Dark Age of Camelot*. DAoC was an incredibly important fixture in the early days of MMORPGs and one of the few true rivals to the original *EverQuest*. It was created by Mythic Entertainment, and they've continued to support it to this day. After the studio was acquired by EA, it went on to create the excellent (but recently shut down) MMO *Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning*.

With a pedigree like that, it's sad news indeed to learn that EA has decided to put an end to Mythic.

Then again, Mythic also developed the appalling mobile version of *Dungeon Keeper* that recently left a rancid taste in our mouths. Still, even though the studio didn't always hit all the right notes, and even though many of the most influential people at Mythic have since moved on to other pastures (including its founder Mark Jacobs, who's working on Kickstarted MMO *Camelot Unchained*), it's never pleasant to see a studio of this calibre disappear. Amazingly, *DAoC* will continue to be supported by ex-Mythic staff under a new studio.

Ms. Croft is back in Rise of the Tomb Raider

2013's *Tomb Raider* reboot is a shining example of how to revive a dying franchise. The game completely smashed expectations and gave us the best Lara Croft character the series has ever seen. In short, we could gush about the game all day. You can imagine how giddy we felt when *Rise of the Tomb Raider* made its debut appearance at E3.

What was shown off at E3 was simply a CG trailer that set the tone of the game. That has left the door wide open for speculating what the plot might entail. The main purpose of the

trailer, it would seem, was to give us a glimpse of Lara's state post the events of *Tomb Raider*. As you can imagine, our favourite heroine is still rather rattled by what she had to endure, and as a result she's in therapy. Her therapy sessions are punctuated by sequences of Lara fleeing from bears and tumbling down mountains. It's clear that the events of the previous game have shown Lara who she is meant to be, and as such she's developed a preoccupation for finding adventure. We'll gladly tag along for her next one even if it's only at the end of 2015.

FINISH HIM. Again.

After spending some time teasing fans with the possibility of a new *Mortal Kombat*, series co-creator Ed Boon finally revealed that one does exist, in development at NetherRealm Studios. It's called *Mortal Kombat X*, and it's due out in 2015 for 360, PC, PS3, PS4 and Xbox One.

"*Mortal Kombat* has always been about over-the-top, visceral fighting and with *Mortal Kombat X* we wanted to utilize the power of new-gen consoles to give players our most intense game yet," said Boon. "The team has worked hard to make sure *Mortal Kombat X* delivers everything fans expect along with new characters, new game modes and an all-new graphics engine."
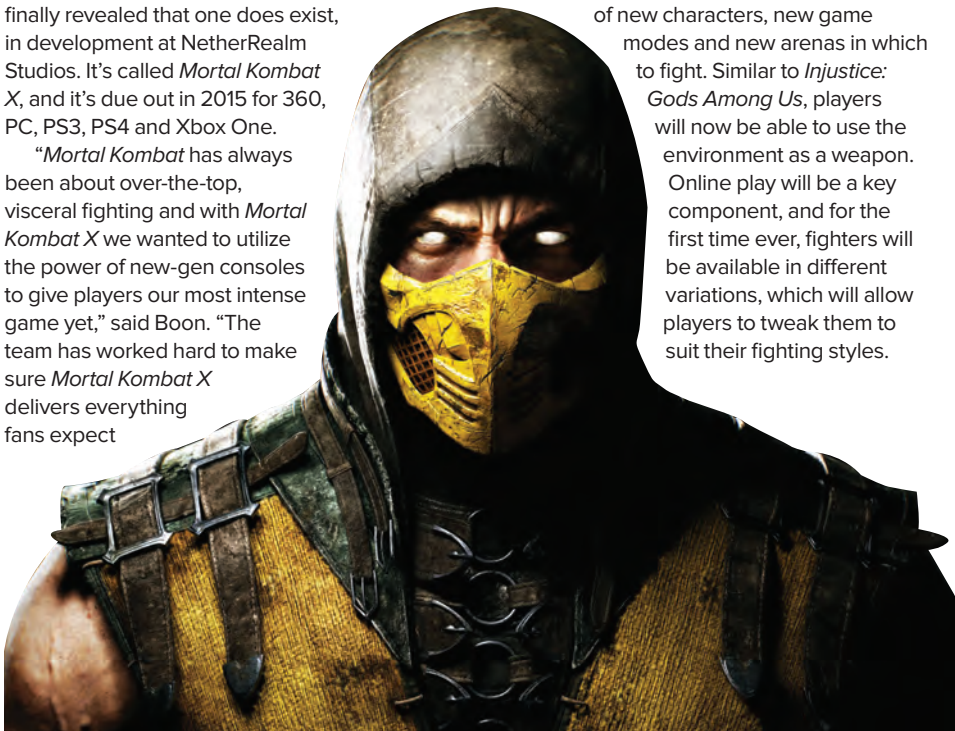
Naturally, you can expect a plethora of new characters, new game modes and new arenas in which to fight. Similar to *Injustice: Gods Among Us*, players will now be able to use the environment as a weapon. Online play will be a key component, and for the first time ever, fighters will be available in different variations, which will allow players to tweak them to suit their fighting styles.

Nintendo unleashes the Wii U floodgates at E3

Now's a great time to own a Wii U

Clearly all the moaning that people have being doing about the lack of Wii U games has sunk in with Nintendo. For the second year in a row, Nintendo opted out of an elaborate E3 press conference and chose to stream a pre-recorded Nintendo Direct briefing instead. During that briefing, the company showed off a bevy of new titles and provided updates on previously announced Wii U games. In short, it was the shot in the arm that the Wii U console drastically needed.

For a start, Nintendo unveiled their *Skylanders* / *Disney Infinity* clone that you might recall reading about in the June issue of *NAG*. The system is officially called Amiibo and the first game to make use of the toys will be *Super Smash Bros.* for Wii U. Nintendo's home console will make use of the NFC technology built into the Wii U GamePad, and a future NFC reader will be released so that the figurines can be used with the 3DS.

In addition to a new *Legend of Zelda* game (which you can read about elsewhere in this Bytes section) Nintendo revealed a new *Star Fox* title for Wii U. Fox McCloud is back in his Arwing, but Nintendo has swapped out the confined, trench-like levels of previous versions for a more open-world experience. You'll be using the Wii U GamePad's screen for a first-person view, and your TV for a third-person view.

Finally, Nintendo unveiled a new co-operative online shooter called *Splatoon*. This four-versus-four shooter swaps out bullets for paint. Each team has to cover the level in as much paint as possible, with both sides having a specific paint colour. You can also turn into a squid to swim through the paint you've sprayed. Colourful, fast and frantic sums this one up.

Head on a swivel

FranknJohn is an upcoming roguelike-like (yes, that) that transports you to "a fun-house full of B-Movie horrors". You're cast as titular hero FranknJohn, a failed experiment born of the work of Dr Harmin. Bursting out of a grave with no memory of how he got there, FranknJohn must traverse a number of environments and literally use his head (which is attached to his body with a chain) as a weapon against the myriad foes he'll face.

Levels will be randomly generated, and will be packed with opportunity to explore and discover secrets. While FranknJohn's head can be swung around his body like a weird human flail to vanquish foes, you'll also be able to collect a variety of Skullcaps that'll alter your attacks and change your abilities — one of them allows you to shoot fireballs, for example. Similarly, you'll also be able to find new body parts with which to replace your existing ones, such as a pair of bear claws that replace your hands and increase your damage output. It may sound gory, but it looks absolutely adorable.

Xbox One confirmed for this year

Microsoft South Africa has finally confirmed local availability and pricing for the Xbox One. As expected, South Africa was bundled in the third launch wave of the console, which means we'll see Microsoft's next-gen console on local shores from the 23rd of September 2014, almost a year since its release in the US and UK. The XBO will be available initially in two versions: one bundled with Kinect for a recommended retail price of R7,999, and one without Kinect for R6,299. Both versions will include a 500GB hard drive, Blu-ray player, built-in Wi-Fi, a single Xbox One controller, and 14 days of Xbox LIVE Gold for new members.

Maximum fronting

When Crytek acquired the *Homefront* licence during the great THQ Purge of 2013, gamers mumbled to one another "why would they do that?" It's not like the *Homefront* brand was worth much considering how poorly it performed, but perhaps Crytek saw potential there and figured the half a million dollars they dropped on the licence was worth it from a marketing perspective.

Whatever their thinking, the company has now confirmed that *Homefront 2: The Revolution* is in development. The game is set in North Korean-occupied Philadelphia and will reportedly feature more open-ended gameplay than the original experience. Crytek UK (co-developers on *Crysis 3*) are handling development, so expect some *Crysis*-inspired bits throughout.

The game is still a ways off: look forward to a launch in 2015 for XBO, PS4 and PC.

Sony unveils Uncharted 4: A Thief's End

Sony originally teased *Uncharted 4* on the day the PlayStation 4 launched in North America. During E3 the teasing continued, but at least Sony answered some of the questions that arose last November. For a start, we now know that the game will indeed star series protagonist Nathan Drake, even though he is much older and well into his forties. He's out to find a fabled pirate treasure in order to save those he loves.

Speaking on the PlayStation blog, Naughty Dog community strategist Eric Monacelli stated that Nathan Drake's *Uncharted 4* character model has more than double the polygons of Joel's model from *The Last of Us*.
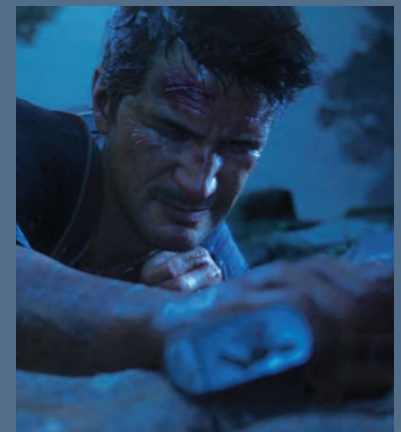
Microsoft revives Crackdown for Xbox One

During their E3 media event, Microsoft announced that the *Crackdown* series would be making a return on Xbox One. The original *Crackdown* was one of the early Xbox 360 titles that came out in 2007. Its sequel, *Crackdown 2*, didn't fare as well as its predecessor did with critics.

Series creator David Jones is at the helm once again for this new *Crackdown*. Some sort of co-operative mode was implied during the reveal trailer, but aside from the over-the-top action and super-powered Agents shown off, not much else was divulged.

Indie team Moon Studios unveils Ori and the Blind Forest

During Microsoft's E3 press event, the company showed off a new indie platforming game called *Ori and the Blind Forest*. The team behind the title, Moon Studios, says that their game was born out of gamer nostalgia and Internet forums like NeoGAF. "I grew up playing *Super Metroid* and I want games like that again," said game director Thomas Mahler. "I read NeoGAF and constantly read how they want games like this but it's not being done."

The game will feature extensive skill trees and numerous abilities for players to unlock. The game will be out in the next few weeks on PC and Xbox One.

Electronic Arts teases new Mass Effect at E3

During their E3 presentation, publisher Electronic Arts played a brief developer diary that served to remind people about what they already knew: that a new *Mass Effect* is being made. While the team at BioWare Montreal didn't show off much at all, they did allow people a glimpse at some early prototype footage for the engine powering this new *Mass Effect*. BioWare also stated that this game will move the story forward and that it will take place in an entirely new region of space. There was also a glimpse of a Krgoan, so... yay!

Build your own adventure in Northern Shadow

Oh boy. Sometimes we wonder how it's possible to brandish so much unbridled ambition. *Northern Shadow* is a new indie role-playing game that promises to merge the first-person adventuring of games like the *Elder Scrolls* series with the city-building mechanics of management sims. What it means is that not only will you be boldly adventuring throughout a vast fantasy landscape, but you'll also be building and managing your very own kingdom within it.

Northern Shadow's debut trailer shows an in-game map which you manipulate in order to place buildings and do important town planning-type stuff. The game begins with your kingdom being destroyed by some unknown foe, and that's why you'll be rebuilding everything from scratch and reclaiming your lost power. Expect to be granted control of many management options that'll let you gather resources, negotiate trade agreements with other factions and forge alliances in between

protecting your lands from invasion.

The role-playing side of things will offer an assortment of spells and weapons for you to use, and combat will apparently be more reliant on your personal skill than a wall of statistics. While you're adventuring, your city will be managed for you by an AI steward. There'll be dungeon crawling as well, letting you uncover precious resource deposits and powerful treasures. It sounds incredibly impressive, and we're hoping that its developers can successfully pull it off.

Nintendo digs up a dinosaur

Nintendo has had a hard time convincing Wii U owners that the GamePad is actually a thing that matters – creating the Pro controller (and even calling it that) probably didn't help their cause much, either. As it turns out, Nintendo players old enough to order a beer still enjoy ye olde GameCube controller so much that Nintendo has

bowed to apparent demand to support the old girl on the Wii U.

This magic comes in the form of a breakout box which connects to two front USB ports on the console and provides four GameCube controller ports. Currently, only the upcoming *Super Smash Bros.* for Wii U will support this new device, but we assume that additional games will roll out support in future.

Caption of the month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of **MXGP** for PC from Apex Interactive. Send your captions to **letters@nag. co.za** with the subject line "*July caption*".

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR
Help, I've fallen and I can't get up!

LAST MONTH'S WINNER
"What happens when Techland make a soccer game."
- Tristan Jacobs

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.

PUBLISHERS / Activision / Blizzard 2K Games Rockstar / Ubisoft /

Codemasters / NC-Soft / Namco-Bandai / Disney
e-mail / support@xtremems.co.za
Telephone / 0861 987 363

PUBLISHERS / Microsoft Xbox
Telephone / 0800 991 550

PUBLISHERS / Electronic Arts
e-mail / zasupport@ea.com
Telephone / 0860 EAHELP/324357

Roxy hunt

Send your sighting to **letters@nag.co.za** with the subject line "**July Roxy**", and of course your contact details, and you could win a prize. Feeling lucky punk?

"Sharp weapons are weirdly difficult to come by in Dead Island. I got the impression that someone kept stealing all the best sharp weapon drops. Bastard."
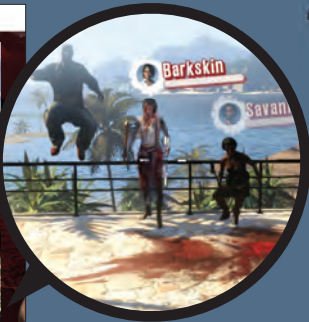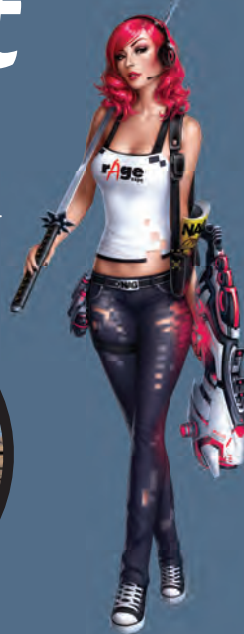
June winner

Ian Stamatiou, page 34

This month's prize

A Star Wars X-wing miniature game valued at R599.95. Sponsored by Skycastle Games.

home_coded

EXPOSURE FOR SOUTH AFRICAN INDIE DEVELOPERS

by Rodain Joubert

Rodain once apologised to a pigeon after nearly walking into it. By his own admission he is way too polite.

Montez – community in action

t's a charming story to brace the withered, grey heart.

A project arrived in the Make Games SA forums one dreary September evening. Many community members were away for a meetup at the time. The creature was a fragile prototype, held together by pluck, two weeks of keyboard-tapping and a coder's attempts at art.

Its bare-bones discussion thread remained quiet for a brief time, until the designer bumped it with screenshots and gameplay videos. Feedback and revisions came soon after. Erratic and experimental constructions were made. The foundation grew and moulded itself and the game assumed more gravity and promise. Then the project went quiet for a time.

A good six months later, development studio Celestial came out as the backers of *Montez*, a puzzle platformer using the control of two separate characters with the same keyboard inputs. Players navigated the perplexing and warped environments of their own minds, navigating environmental hazards and attempting to co-ordinate with their movement-duplicating "mirror" to overcome obstacles. By the end of May, they'd released a trailer for the game on Greenlight with a radically revised art style and emphasis on the game's potential narrative directions.

It was a surprising leap to many, and a fortunate one for creator Kobus van der Walt, who's still relatively new to the game development scene. "I made a web game called *Sarif* that was horrible," he quips. This is the first time he's taken his game project to such a broad platform, and his stories are full of nerves and excitement.

It seems like a very grand step for such a fresh face to take, but the entity that has him under its wing makes matters quite different. Celestial is the very definition of veteran: a fully-fledged game studio back in the '90s where developer support was practically non-existent and people presumably ate each other to survive. The fact that they're stepping in to help is very promising for any new developer.

Celestial's Travis Bulford clarifies: "Our backing has not simply been financial. It's been direction, design, narrative and some coding." The comprehensive support structure and marketing experience here are priceless for young Kobus, and this situation gives

> ## "It was a surprising leap to many, and a fortunate one for creator Kobus van der Walt, who's still relatively new to the game development scene."

the old studio a chance to experiment with new ideas in gameplay and marketing. It's a partnership which challenges and extends both parties.

And for a company like Celestial in particular, this feels like a welcome breath of fresh air. Their techniques, though successful, have remained conservative until recently, and this is a significant move away from established IP like *Toxic Bunny*.

As the next wave of incoming South African developers hits us full force, agreements like this are becoming more common. They're exciting indicators of the local community's development and represent a great wealth of opportunities available to new devs with potential. Established groups in South Africa are able to not only hire new people, but occasionally fund and support other projects that they like.

Although this practice has been in existence for some time, it has reached a new level of frequency as the number of studios with completed (often in-house) commercial games has increased drastically in recent years, while becoming collectively better at spotting promising new projects. Aside from the symbiosis mentioned earlier – support for the newbie, experimentation and growth for the giant – it's yet another indicator about game ideas and the importance of presenting them openly and clearly if you want to find support for them.

Regardless of how successful *Montez* will eventually be, its creator has earned a fantastic opportunity to implement his own ideas in a secure, funded environment and join the ranks of South Africa's professional game development force. In the big picture, that's some promising stuff. **NAG**

HOW THE IDEA GOT ATTENTION

If you're a new developer with hopes of getting your idea promptly plucked out of the ocean by some benevolent studio overlord, bear in mind that *Montez* is a best-case scenario – one can never account for the whims of individual developers, and it's always an easier choice to back someone who has been active and present in the community for a while. Celestial also felt inspired by Kobus's attitude and enthusiasm, so it's good to remember that in small indie environments, the people who are looking at recruiting you are also the people who will be working *with* you.

But beyond this, there was a lot of effort put in the right places: instead of a mere stated idea, there were downloadable prototypes, supporting media, gameplay videos and regular meaningful updates showing improvements and new ideas. Contacts and relevant links were always readily accessible. The game did a proper job of promotion, and since returning from its hiatus has resumed a similar level of enthusiasm and engagement on a much broader level.

COMPETITIVE GAMING: THE

M OBOOM BA

Competitive multiplayer gaming, also known as electronic sports (eSports), has been around since the early days of gaming. It involves kicking ass and taking names in your favourite game. What's there not to love?

Through honing their skills, players can compete at the highest level a game has to offer. Relevant stakeholders in the industry support these gamers to such an extent that we see massive annual eSports events with huge prizes. DreamHack, the largest computer festival in the world, is an example of this kind of event, which has hosted competitive events since 2010.

These events and competitions traditionally cater for popular titles in the real-time strategy (RTS) and first person shooter (FPS) genres, the most famous ones being *Counter-Strike, Starcraft*, and *Quake*, which have all set a high standard of competition

fashioned in their own style of play. However, the emergence and continual growth of the multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) genre has gradually eclipsed these other established genres on all counts. Of course, I am talking about the awesome success stories of the, somewhat recent, releases of Riot's *League of Legends* (*LoL*) in 2009 and Valve's *Dota 2* in 2013. Through these titles, the MOBA genre experienced a boom that has changed the face of eSports.

Although the MOBA genre has had major support from gamers for a long time now, it had not been commercialised in a sustained manner. What motivated this is probably the fact that the original titles were only modifications, or mods, of existing games. The original MOBA, Aeon of Strife (AoS),

functions on *Starcraft* and its successor, DOTA, works on *Warcraft III*.

From there on out, MOBA took a path of development that eventually resulted in its worldwide popularity by 2008. In this year, we saw the first attempt to commercialise the MOBA genre (*Demigod*). Neither of which established a support base nearly as massive as that which *DOTA* enjoyed at that stage. A reason for this could be that, unlike *DOTA*, these titles did not add any social or competitive aspect to the game, such as multiplayer servers or competitions.

A huge amount of enthusiasts supported *DOTA* casually as well as competitively and this gave it a continuity only rivalled by some of the most revered titles of gaming. However, the release of *LoL* in 2009 started a new

phase in the development of the MOBA genre into an eSports sensation.

Inspired by *DOTA*, Riot launched *LoL* with a free-to-play online business model, which means that it generates funding through microtransactions. It mimicked the mechanics and play-style that are custom to the MOBA genre but introduced tons of creative and entertaining features to attract more players and establish a reliable support base. Players had the opportunity to choose from a wide range of unique and customisable characters. Each week a different selection of characters is available and to access and customise a character outside of this selection a player has to spend points. Points are attainable in two ways, earning it by playing the game or paying for it. Riot provided players with regular content updates available for purchase, such as new characters, customisable appearances, and new game modes. This led to the establishment of a *LoL* gaming community. To cater for this community, the game has several social media features, such as stream integration and videos highlighting its best aspects. This allowed users to share their experiences as well as watch broadcasts of high profile matches commentated by renowned and exciting community personalities.

By 2012, *LoL* had become the most played PC game in the world. Now, in 2014, it boasts 67 million players per month and 7.5 million concurrent users in peak hours. Although in open beta since 2012, Valve officially released *Dota 2* in 2013 and it quickly became the most played game on the Steam platform with 700,000 concurrent users. It employed a similar business model to *LoL* with some exceptions, the *Dota 2* Store provides users with virtual goods available for purchase but this did not include any characters. Here, *Dota 2* stays faithful to its predecessor by only using original *DOTA* characters releasing neither their own variations nor new ones.

For the first time, the MOBA genre included two huge gaming powerhouses, each with their own unique style and massive player base. Each title brought its own approach to catering for their players with a major focus on playability and competition. Stream websites such as Twitch.tv grew with the massive numbers of eSports enthusiasts supporting MOBA and soon these streams became

regarded as a household name for all fans of competitive gaming.

Before *Dota 2* even released officially, Valve began hosting its own annual competition series in 2011 named The International. Hosted as an invitational event, the event saw 16 teams from all over the world compete for a $1 million grand prize. The Ukrainian team, Natus Vincere, smashed their opponents E-Home, from China, to take home the honour of being the very first champions for the title.

To showcase The International, Valve filmed a documentary called Free to Play. Here, we see the extreme support that the game has gathered. On top of showing off the behemoth of the event hosted, the film also followed three of the best players in the world to give the viewer a sense of the sacrifice and hard work necessary to become an eSports legend. Each player had personal challenges that stand in the way of their success and we are afforded a heart-touching picture of the competitive gamers struggling with either everyday hardships as well as the stigma associated with the obsession with video gaming, which is something that all of us can sympathise with, of course.

In the same year as The International, Riot established an integrated league system that allowed players to qualify for the Season 1 World Championships. Riot hosted the event at DreamHack and it featured $100,000 in prizes. Teams qualified for the event through a regional online tournament. This meant that the championship finale was a showdown between two teams who each had to qualify by defeating others teams from across the world. The European mix, Fnatic, won out against the French team, Against All Authority, to take the crown of the very first official *LoL* champions and $50,000.

The startling growth of these young eSports titles is clear when we consider their most recent and upcoming events. Riot's Season 3 World Championships featured a prize pool of a whopping $2 million. Even MORE notably, Valve's The International 2014 has reached an estimate amount of $9 million in prizes...so far! Holy sh*t, right? This amount is still increasing thanks to the developer's innovative efforts to enable players to contribute in the funding process of their

favourite game's ultimate annual showdown.

By purchasing The Compendium, an in-game item, players contribute $2.5 to the prize pool. As a bonus, it provides players with neat rewards that enhance their experience of the game. You can get additional rewards with compendium points earned by either playing during the build-up period or contributing to the hype when watching qualifier matches or making predictions. If a player chooses to upgrade the item with money, a portion of the fee will contribute to the prize pool. On top of it all, as the prize pool grows new rewards are unlocked and become accessible by all other players. Talk about compelling incentives! Any hardcore fan is sure to jump at the opportunity to be part of shaping their game and it seems that Valve has the guts to show the world the passion of its player base. Check out Valve's prize pool tracker and the associated rewards and benefits on The International homepage (www.dota2.com/international/compendium/). If you enjoy DOTA or just eSports carnage, be sure to check out The International 2014 from 18-21 July online on the homepage or twitch.tv.

In 2013, Riot worked with the US government to recognise eSports players as professional athletes. This has made it significantly easier for players from all over the world to acquire their Visas and enter the country to compete at massive events. This type of change in scenery is an indication of things to come, and things are looking BIG.

Even here in South Africa, we can see the stirrings of something great in our eSports scene. Telkom's DoGaming League has over 200 teams participating in *Dota 2* and nearly 100 for *LoL*. These numbers increase each year and outnumber any other title in South Africa. Watch out for the growing awareness of eSports locally, various organisations are working hard to build support and funding for local events and leagues, such as Orena.co.za, Libertylan.co.za and your very own NAG LAN hosted at rAge annually.

With the development of South African Internet, it is becoming possible for South Africans to join the rest of the eSports world online. This promises to broaden the horizons of our young gamers and in ten years time, who knows, our local gaming stars may achieve the kind of worldwide fame that many of our other national sports and athletic heroes already enjoy.

MOBA is here and, with the help of companies like Riot and Valve, is in it for the long run. Watch out world, the future of competitive gaming is here and it promises to involve tons of creeping, ganking, and straight-up ownage. Get keen fellow gamers, our time has come!   **NAG**

- Vindicator

Sid Meier's Civilization: Beyond Earth

One giant leap for gaming kind

Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri is one of those games you either love, or you haven't played. It's a cult hit amongst strategy gamers and is hailed as one of the most interesting 4X games to date, with its engaging sci-fi story and massive improvements over the *Civilization II* base on which it was built. *Civilization: Beyond Earth* is a spiritual successor to *Alpha Centauri*. It's Firaxis' way of returning to a classic and reintroducing it to a gaming industry that has changed massively in the last 15 years. Considering how well the studio did when they made the same attempt with the new *XCOM*, it'd be an understatement to say we're excited for *Beyond Earth*.

At first glance, *Beyond Earth* looks much like a reskinned *Civilization V*. It's a turn-based strategy game that requires the player to establish settlements, explore randomly-generated hex-tiled game worlds, ward off enemies and try to get along with your neighbours long enough to stab them in the back. But there's far more here than a simple paint job over the *Civ V* engine: the dedicated *Beyond Earth* team within Firaxis approached *Civilization* from a sceptical perspective. Everything was scrutinised, reworked, ditched or replaced to suit the far grander purpose that *Beyond Earth* has: to tell a story.

So how does a typically sandbox-based strategy game tell a story? Well, for one thing it needs a beginning, and that is the year 2600AD. Humanity is abandoning Earth: hundreds of ark-like ships have been sent into space to find new homes. After configuring your vessel from a selection of starting resources and equipment, and choosing a leader whose personality will help shape your settlement's future, you'll find yourself marooned on an alien world – one randomly generated based on an all-new system designed to create worlds very different to those of Civ. There you'll discover fellow human settlements, alien ruins and hostile life-forms, and strange new resource types.

That's about where the similarities end. The first 25-50 turns are meant to be familiar to *Civilization* veterans, but thereafter you should chuck out any notions that your favourite *Civ* strategies are going to see you to victory in *Beyond Earth*. One of the most significant changes comes in the form of quests and quest chains. Quests pop up either randomly or as a result of your actions, be they war-like, diplomatic or scientific. You'll be presented with a situation and will need to make a decision about how to react. For example, in our playthrough

> "*Beyond Earth*'s quest system is designed to test your morals and give you an opportunity to role-play your faction with far more depth than we usually see in strategy games."

› Above the regular game world exists the Orbital Layer, on which you can place certain units like tactical satellites to help you keep an eye on your untrustworthy neighbours.
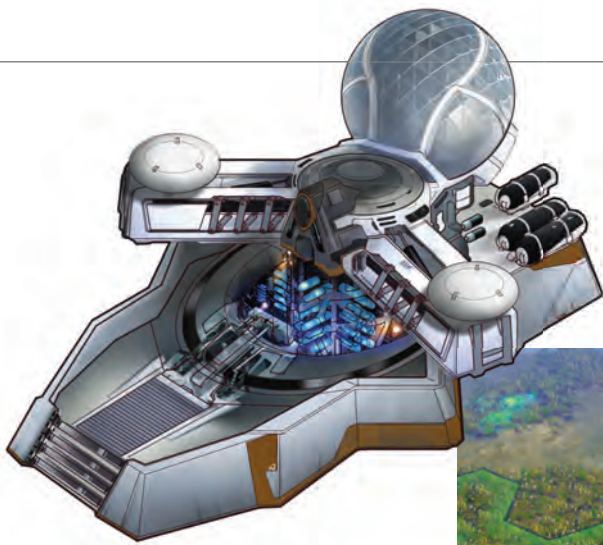
Hostile alien life-forms appear on the planets as a replacement for barbarians, but are a far more deadly and complex threat than a pack of guys with axes bashing at your city gates. Some technology even allows you to tame or genetically engineer these creatures.

we were presented with The Augmented: a race of human cyborgs who sought refuge in our capital city. We could throw them out or welcome them with open arms. If we allowed them in, we'd get an immediate boost in population size and research assistance from our new citizens (at the expense of some grumbling from our existing people), but kicking them to the curb would result in them establishing their own settlement, which could mean trouble for us later down the line. Or perhaps they'd be a future ally. *Beyond Earth*'s quest system is designed to test your morals and give you an opportunity to role-play your faction with far more depth than we usually see in strategy games. Every choice you make will have benefits and repercussions, and it'll be up to deal with the impact of your decisions in both the long and short term.

Serving as an overall guide to this infusion of morality is the concept of Affinities. Everything you do in *Beyond Earth*, whether it's research, exploration, production, conquest or making a choice in a quest, affects your standing in one of three Affinities: Supremacy, Harmony, or Purity. Supremacy is for those factions who wish to rise above every challenge: they'll engineer themselves to become the masters of their newfound alien home and crush every challenge

underfoot. Those who practise Harmony are the opposite: they wish to live as one with their new home and its inhabitants. Purity sits somewhere in the middle, focusing on humanity's attempt to transform alien worlds to be more like Earth through any means necessary. Each Affinity is linked to a unique victory condition (which is itself a long quest chain) and connects all aspects of the game from research to unit upgrades.

Speaking of research, *Civ*'s venerable tech tree has been given an overhaul for this trip to the future. The whole concept has been dismantled and reassembled as the Tech Web, which is an outwards-spanning series of inter-connected branch and leaf technologies, the whole of which is designed to increase replayability and kill that reliance on "the perfect strategy". The team's idea is that players will choose to research technologies based on their immediate surroundings and situations, instead of charging off towards *Beyond Earth*'s equivalents of Robotics or Gunpowder. This thinking is what courses through the game's design from top to bottom: adaptability. The devs want to empower the player to be able to react to the dynamic threats and situations that they'll be constantly bombarded with.

Beyond Earth is more than just a new *Civilization* game with loads of stuff added on top. It's a genuine attempt to try something new with the genre and the devs are confident that *Beyond Earth* and *Civ V* can live alongside one another as two unique offerings. After all, not everyone will appreciate the story-driven aspects of *Beyond Earth*, but with all the new goodies to play with we're sure you'll want to give it a try. **NAG**

- GeometriX

The Evil Within

I lived to tell the tale

Braving the contrary city of London where the beer is warm and the weather is cold, I got a chance to get a hands-on preview with Bethesda's ominous survival horror, *The Evil Within*.

I put on the headphones and sit in a room that's completely in the dark. As I pick up the controller, I'm hoping my expected bursts of f-bombs are under control. I guess that third cup of coffee earlier was a bad idea.

Damn. I didn't think this through.

There's moaning from the basement. I edge open the back door of a rickety shell of a house. As Castellanos enters a doorway the camera tightens just a little too close to the back of my head, blocking out the majority of my peripheral vision. The tension of entering any threshold in *The Evil Within* is unnerving. I'm waiting, just waiting, for

> "...with his pork sausage fingers digging in the chest cavity of a corpse and talking to it, stands a balding, chubby pale man, like a possessed Joshua Doore."

something to jump out. Nothing.

The moaning continues. There's ammo lying everywhere. As any gamer knows, this isn't a good omen. I stock up my inventory. The moans are getting louder as I walk down the stairs into the basement. I do the pre-eminent camera swivel into the part of the room where the noise is coming from. I refuse to be taken off-guard. On the far side of the room, with his pork sausage fingers digging in the chest cavity of a corpse and talking to it, stands a balding, chubby pale man, like a possessed Joshua Doore.

He's disgusting.

And he's noticed me. I react surprisingly fast, leaving a round in the back of his skull. I hope he's dead. Or at least more dead than he already was.

The corpse on the table in front of me is eerie. Lying with his sternum split, subtly contorted from rigor mortis.

On the table next to the corpse lies a map of his torso, highlighting the location of a door key around where I imagine his kidney to be. A knife next to the map pre-empts what I need to do next.

No, man. Gross.

COMBAT

The combat, when engaged, is reminiscent of *The Last of Us*. The focus is on three key areas:

WEAPON CRAFTING

Using the reclaimed material scavenged from planted mines and other objects in the environment, you can craft a variety of different arrowheads for your crossbow, ranging from an electrocuting head to a heavy explosive tip.

SCARCE MUNITIONS

Let's just say, count your bullets, *Resident Evil* style.

GET SNEAKY

You can turn the tide of a battle by getting a little creepy yourself (geddit?! Ah, shut up).

SCARE TACTICS

RUVIK

Ruvik is a hooded enemy whose mechanics are largely inspired by the likes of *Slender* and *Outlast*. While running around Ruvik's mansion, a fair amount of furniture is strategically placed that prompts you to either hide behind, underneath or in them. Ruvik appears at random, interrupting all your puzzle-solving and monster-slaying, throwing you off-kilter. Your only chance for survival: run and hide. It taps into your childhood nightmares. You can't kill him. Trust me, I tried.

BURN 'EM TO DEATH

Corpses come to life. That's right, just like in Doom 3, and every other horror video game, but instead of the famous double-tap-while-they're-down routine, you have to burn them. BURN THEM TO DEATH. But of course you have limited flaming resources. Great.

TRAPS

There are traps everywhere. You're not safe. If The Ring-inspired monsters aren't after you or Ruvik isn't getting up in your grill then it's the environment that wants a piece of your health bar. Tripwires activating falling sharp-objects and proximity mines are just a few of the obstacles you'll have to be on the lookout for.

> A departure from Bethesda's usual basket of successful RPGs and hardcore shooters, *The Evil Within* is under the direction of the legendary Shinji Mikami, most famous for spawning godfather of the genre, *Resident Evil*.
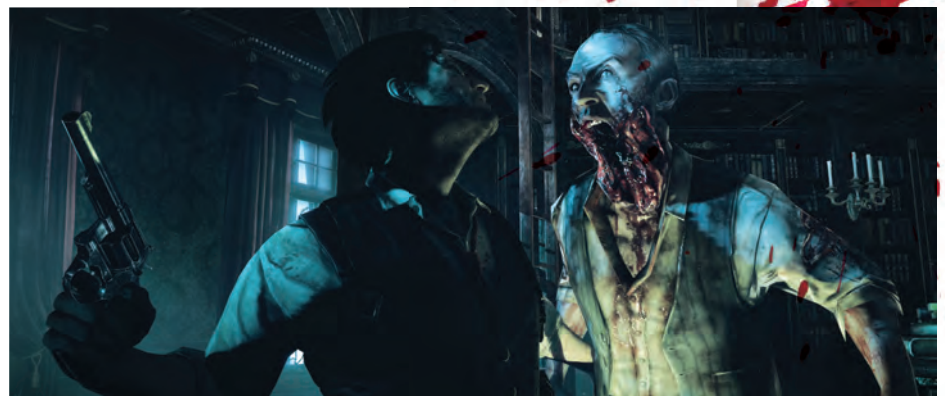
> You take on the role of Sebastian Castellanos, a detective who watches as his partners are systematically murdered at the scene of a disturbing crime. You slowly discover that things aren't what they seem, something supernatural is going down, or worse still, a product of your mind. Here's hoping the plot becomes braver than it's letting on.

Alright, so there's going to be a 'press X' and it's going to cue some horrifying cinematic. Wrong. It's a DIY job. I guide the knife over the reeled torso and begin to carve at the spot on the map. I retrieve the key.

One thing *The Evil Within* understands is that horror isn't just a series of jump-scares. It's the constant grooming of your psyche to anticipate the worst, and then when you least expect it, rub it slowly into eye sockets. You feel sickened. Although you don't get the *Wrong Turn* treatment, you feel ill. Solving puzzles can require you to manually lobotomise unfortunate decapitated okes, amongst other inharmonious activities.

I start up the next demo. At this point I've had to leave the room. Don't misunderstand me: *The Evil Within* isn't the scariest game I've played; on the contrary, so far I find it more action focussed than I initially expected, but it's the dreadfully twisted imagery that crawls into you. You're scared as to where it's going to take you next. The action acts as a welcomed reprieve from the constant nausea.

A room glows red ahead of me. It looks like a downtown-Joburg drug den. After hustling a panicked gentlemen out of the room, a hooded figure flashes before me. The figure quickly disappears but the lay of the room has changed and my demented friend has gone. A door lies ahead of me where there once was no door. I walk through it only to be in the same room again. Is my character hallucinating all of this? I open the door again. Suddenly I'm rushed by a flood of blood that breaches the door.

The world goes black and quiet.

I wake up in what appears to be a small genocide, dumped in the sewers. I'm covered in blood. In fact I'm wading in it. It's not the bright, crimson fake video gamey-blood either. It's dark and coagulated, an appearance of colloidal thickness.

Throughout the rest of the demo that we played, things got progressively darker, we got more acquainted with Ruvik (the grumpy hooded man) and visited his mansion. Then there were rainbows and sprinkled donuts and a thousand angora bunnies.

Only kidding, just more death. **NAG**
*- G-Man***

*When asked for his nick, Grant told us that it's the very imaginative "GrantHinds", and then gave us permission to make up a name for him. We could've been rude about it, but figured we'd take the moral high road instead.

NAG HANDS ON TESTED · SINCE 1998

❯ Sweden-based Stunlock Studios has released only one other game, *Bloodline Champions*.

Dead Island: Epidemic

Everyone wants to be a MOBA

Dead Island: Epidemic is based on the survival horror role-playing series by Techland. It shares the name, some characters, zombies, and uses the ending of *Dead Island: Riptide* as the setup for its plot. Beyond that, *Epidemic* has very little in common with *Dead Island*. *Epidemic* is an online-only, free-to-play multiplayer game viewed from a top-down perspective. It has two modes: a Player vs. Zombies mode where four players cooperate to take objectives and then kill a boss, and a three-teams-of-four Player vs. Player mode.

> "Because it's still early in development, I'm trying not to be too hard on *Epidemic.*"

We got some hands-on time with *Epidemic* through a closed beta. You pick an initial character to play (the rest need to be unlocked with real money), and by playing the two modes you level-up that character. The character gains access to new skills to use during play (which need to be unlocked again during the mission each time, *League of Legends* style), and combat is very similar to *League of Legends*. Except instead of clicking where you want to go, you have direct agency over your character using the WASD keys. Each time you finish a mission, you gain resources and blueprints which can be used to craft new weapons, either ranged (like shotguns) or melee (like axes). These weapons level-up as you use them, giving them passive bonuses to damage.

❯ *Dead Island: Epidemic* calls itself a "ZOMBA", a "Zombie Online Multiplayer Battle Arena". Groan.

Because it's still early in development, I'm trying not to be too hard on *Epidemic*. It's well-made, everything looks decent, and combat feels good. But the game just doesn't seem very good. The Player vs. Zombies mode is boring, always the same thing over and over. Capture a location by holding X near a flag, fight off waves of zombies, move to the next location, repeat until you finally reach the boss. The boss fights themselves are actually pretty good, but if any of your teammates disconnect, the match is ruined. It'll be very difficult, if not impossible, to kill the boss with just the remaining players, and if you disconnect early you get no rewards at all. I can't comment on the Player vs. Player mode, as during my time in the beta nobody seemed to be even playing it. I couldn't find a single match.

Epidemic reeks of "designed by committee". The way you have to pay real money to unlock characters (there seems to be no way to unlock them through regular play though that may change), leaves a bad taste in the mouth. It's not that I have anything against the free-to-play model, but it boils down to implementation. *Epidemic* is very heavy-handed in trying to push you to spend money on it, and I'm not convinced the game is good enough to merit that. **NAG**

- Miktar

Elite: Dangerous

The original open world

Back in the 1980s, *Elite* was a phenomenon. One of the earliest (if not the first) "open world" games, it allowed players to roam the galaxy in their space ship, trade with merchants, fight off pirates, engage in piracy of their own, and more. All in real, though rudimentary, full 3D. It became the template for almost all space trading and exploration games moving forward, and former DMA Design developer Gary Penne even called the first

Grand Theft Auto an "*Elite* set in a city".

A modern sequel to the series was planned but creator David Braben had trouble finding funding. He went to Kickstarter to ask fans for money and was met with resounding success. The result is *Elite: Dangerous*. Like its predecessors, *Elite: Dangerous* will start you off in a basic spaceship with just barely enough money for repairs. You'll have to make your own way in an open galaxy, funding your endeavours through legal activities like trading, or illegally through things like piracy and assassination. There will be an overarching plot to the universe, but following a storyline has never been the main focus of the series.

Dangerous will have multiplayer, but with

> "You'll have to make your own way in an open galaxy, funding your endeavours through legal activities like trading, or illegally through things like piracy and assassination."

❯ The first *Elite* (1984) for the BBC Micro became the inspiration for games like Eve *Online*, *Freelancer* and *Wing Commander*.
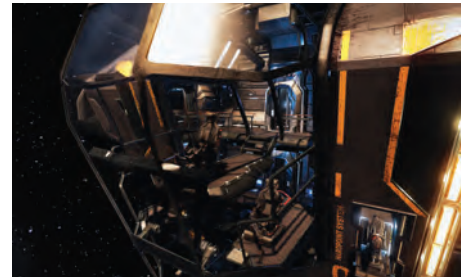
❯ *Elite: Dangerous* will be set around 50 years after the events of *Frontier: First Encounters.*

ELITE TIMELINE

1984: *Elite* by David Braben and Ian Bell released for the BBC Micro. One of the first genuine 3D games on home computers.

1993: *Frontier: Elite II* released for multiple platforms. One of the first games to have real-sized planets with cities that can be seen from orbit. The game actually attempts to simulate our entire galaxy.

1995: *Frontier: First Encounters* released (albeit prematurely), uses ground-breaking procedural texturing to cover planets with vegetation, snow, mountain ranges, cliffs and alien landscapes.

2012: *Elite: Dangerous* Kickstarter campaign is announced, raising over R28 million in funding.

controls to allow you to limit who can appear in your game. You can keep it single-player, let friends join at any time, or jump into a full massively multiplayer persistent universe hosted by the developer. There's a natural anti-griefing mechanic in place through bounties: if you go around attacking other players in protected space the authorities will engage you, but if you do it surreptitiously a bounty is placed on your head. Other players might want to cash in on that bounty and start hunting you down. The developer plans to add in planetary landings (like in past *Elite* games), as well as the ability to leave ships so you can explore space stations or board enemy vessels.

Elite: Dangerous is still in beta, which you can buy into right now at the insane price of $150 (R1,600). This does get you lifetime access to all future expansions, but it's still kind of crazy. **NAG**

- Miktar

NAG LAN AT RAGE

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EVOLVE

RELEASE DATE / October 2014
PLATFORMS / PC / PS4 / XBO
GENRE / First-person shooter
DEVELOPER / Turtle Rock Studios
PUBLISHER / 2K Games
WEBSITE / www.evolvegame.com

NAG HANDS ON TESTED • NAG HANDS ON TESTED
SINCE 1998

//////////////////////////////// HUNTER

It's been nearly three long minutes since we've seen the beast. Feels like hours. We're here to bring it down but we can't shake the feeling that *it's* hunting *us*. We can hear it sniffing around: it's nearby. My harpoon gun is loaded up. I hope the others are ready to react in those precious few seconds we'll have to catch it. There it is! We give chase and fire everything we've got. It's hooked! We've got it now. Or, has it got us?

HUNTED \\\

They're following me. Nowhere to hide. Nowhere to run. I eat, it heals me. They're here! I climb to get out of sight. It's too late. I turn on them. They don't expect it. I slam down on them, breathing fire, claws slashing. I am wild. They are panicked now. Suddenly, pain. I'm trapped! Their weapons pin me down. I lash out with fury as they close around me. They will know agony before I fall.

GOTTA CATCH 'EM ALL

A t a recent pre-E3 media event, we had the chance to sit in a thoroughly air-conditioned room in the middle of a Los Angeles heat wave, meet the *Evolve* team, and play the latest build of the game. Turtle Rock Studios sent their top-level, most bearded people to this event. TRS co-founders Chris Ashton and Phil Robb told us that everyone at the studio has pledged to not shave until the game ships, but I get the impression by the pervasive wise-old-man-beard-stroking that the barber's chair at their launch party will be empty for most of the night.

Evolve is something both very different and very familiar for the studio. This is the same bunch who brought us *Left 4 Dead* in 2008, so they're handy with the concept of asymmetrical multiplayer, but *Evolve* pushes the idea to its limits. Up to five players enter a game: four as hunters and one as the monster. The monster gets a thirty second head-start and needs to survive the full game length, ensure all hunters are dead at the same time (they respawn after a couple of minutes), or, once it's gained sufficient strength, destroy an objective. Conversely the hunters' goal is to kill the monster and prevent it from completing its mission. During each match, the monster can feast on the local neutral wildlife to earn evolution points and eventually evolve to increase its power and upgrade abilities. Games can last from as little as a few minutes to a solid half-hour. Regardless of game length, matches are intense, terrifying and action-packed.

The main reason behind the hands-on event was to showcase the four new hunters, and in doing so, explain a little better the studio's ethos behind *Evolve*: games of *Evolve* will vary greatly according to the characters that players choose. Each of the new hunters on show helped to create perspective for what Turtle Rock is trying to achieve, as each represented a new option for four classes (Medic, Assault, Support, and Trapper) but in ways unique enough to create a very different experience to what we had the first time we played the game a

month prior. This is part of Turtle Rock's modular design: it allows them to add substantial bulk to the game over the course of its lifetime in the form of new hunters, monsters, arenas and even entire game modes. Each new chunk of content will not only add breadth to the overall experience, but exponential depth to the existing content as well. And, no, this isn't me falling madly in love with the idea of bleeding the player dry with DLC until the end of time, but if a developer is going to succumb to additional paid-for content, I'm far more happy with it being in this form than that which only serves to alienate players who haven't coughed up the dosh for new things. Anyway... Evolve will ship with over a dozen maps at launch, as well as multiple monsters

"I'm fairly convinced now that there won't be such a thing as a typical match of *Evolve*."

HYDE

Hyde seems to adopt the approach that if the monster can breathe fire, he should be able to, too. Well, sort of: his flamethrower does massive damage at short range, which is handy, because his personal shield makes him invulnerable to the monster's attacks for a few seconds. If you see Hyde barrelling towards you with a mean look on his face, chances are that he's not coming in for a running high-five.

BUCKET

In a team of mercenary hunters that specialise in tracking down monsters ten times their size, you're bound to find a few nutjobs lying around. In Bucket's case, the term nutjob can be taken rather literally, as he (she? it?) is a robot. It's also a particularly odd robot that can detach its head to fly through the air and track down its prey with ease. Weaponry comes in the form of laser-guided rockets and deployable sentry guns. These little things don't do much damage on their own, but a handful of them makes for one hell of a no-entry sign.

" The main reason behind the hands-on event was to showcase the four new hunters..."

MAGGIE

Every hunter has their purpose, but the trapper is arguably the most important in a team. Maggie brings a couple of unique toys to the fight, most notably a pet Trapjaw by the name of Daisy, who can sniff out the monster better than the hunters simply following a path of footprints, and can even revive downed teammates. Maggie's primary weapon packs a decent punch, but it's her harpoon gun that really aids the hunting effort by hooking the monster and greatly slowing it down.

and hunters. The final numbers haven't been confirmed yet.

In the last issue of *NAG* I described what I thought would be a typical match of *Evolve*, but as it turns out, I knew nothing just a month ago. I'm fairly convinced now that there won't be such a thing as a typical match of *Evolve*, as the many games that I played and experienced during this latest event were so varied and nuanced that I see some real potential with this game for eSports-level play. Turtle Rock sees potential there, too: "it's on our radar," says Chris Ashton.

Nevertheless, in the game mode Hunt, there is a typical progression that most games will follow. Once everyone has selected their characters and the monster has chosen its starting attributes, the hunters begin their game in a dropship, flying over the landscape far below. By this time the monster is already on the ground. It leaves behind footprints when it walks on all surfaces (except when it's wading through water), so making use of the Goliath's ability to leap great distances is strongly advised. The Goliath represents the middle-of-the-road for the monsters: it's strong but not impossible to tackle head-on; it can sneak to prevent leaving behind footprints at the expense of movement speed; it can sniff out nearby hunters and wildlife without needing direct line-of-sight; and it's got a varied enough arsenal to suit both melee and ranged combat. *Evolve* is all about staying in charge of the situation: both the hunters and the monster are constantly
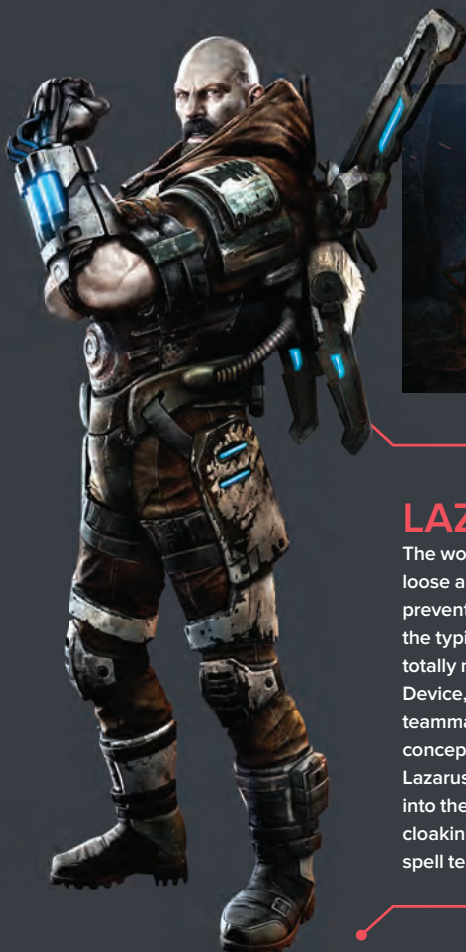
LAZARUS

The word "medic" has never had this loose a meaning. Typically their job is preventing death, but Lazarus forgoes the typical Medi Gun in favour of his totally not egotistically-named Lazarus Device, which instantly brings downed teammates back to life. To take the concept of One Man Team even further, Lazarus brings a silenced sniper rifle into the field, as well as a personal cloaking device. Remember, you can't spell team without M-E.

battling for dominance of the environment and the opposing team's mental state: not knowing where the opponent is can be terrifying, but knowing exactly where they are, safe in the knowledge that they're still trying to find you, is exhilarating.

Most matches will play out in a series of cat-and-mouse encounters that depend on quick thinking and a keen eye for an escape route should you need it. But at times you'll you need to knuckle down and deal with immediate threats (sometimes from the wildlife), like when a Trapper deploys their portable arena: when that happens the monster has very little space to hide and needs to reduce incoming damage until it's free. Usually the best way to do that is to kick ass.

Even with a number of play sessions behind me, it's still too early to tell if Turtle Rock will successfully strike the balance it needs to ensure *Evolve* is the game they envision. There's so much that needs to be tweaked and finalised in time for the rapidly-approaching launch date, but one thing is for sure: there's massive potential here. They're onto something, and that something is fun, intense and brutal. You only need to have one game where you emerge from a fugue-like state, palms dripping with sweat, to find a crowd of devs and journos gathered behind you, cheering and slapping you on the back for your hunter-smashing prowess, to realise how engaging *Evolve* can be.

INTER**V**IEW

with **Chris Ashton**,
co-founder of Turtle Rock Studios and design director on *Evolve*.

NAG: The idea of a modular game sounds great, but this could be very difficult to execute. How do you start that process to keep the game balanced?

Chris Ashton: It's not something that we start – it's something that we're always doing. The first time that we played the game there was one monster and four hunters, and every hunter had an assault rifle, and that was it. The monster only had melee. The first piece of gear that went to the hunters was a tracking dart, so you could shoot the monster and it would track his location. So then every hunter had an assault rifle and a tracking dart. So we had to readjust. So it's just, every time we add a new piece to the puzzle, we have to adjust. And it's taken us three and a half years up to this point to have everything that we have, and have those things adjusted and balanced, but it's an ongoing process.

NAG: The few times I've played the game I've noticed that the monster is the clincher: if you've got a good player then you'll have a great match, but if the player is crap then it'll be too easy. Are you targeting the monster role towards the more hardcore players?

Chris: We'll have a match-making system in there, which is something you're not getting right now – you're just going into a random game with a bunch of random people – we have no idea what their skill level is like. The match-making system will help us pair people who have more your level of experience and skill. That's going to make games less extreme as what you're experiencing right now.

NAG: With *Left 4 Dead* you guys did something quite different to what was available at the time and it seems like you're trying to do the same sort of thing again, but there appear to be elements from *L4D* on which you're building. Was that one of your goals going in?

Chris: Not consciously, anyway. The goal was to make *Evolve* and do whatever it took to see this game come to fruition, and make whatever adjustments needed to be made, but we learnt a lot of lessons about co-op on *Left 4 Dead* on what worked and what didn't work. A lot of the time it's

❯ Development of *Evolve* began under THQ, but when the publisher closed down, 2K picked up the game and development pretty-much carried on as it was.

easier to learn from the past and start there. But we've had situations where things that worked on *Left 4 Dead* didn't work here. For example, we had health kits in the beginning of *Evolve*, but it turns out that it just isn't right for this game. We had limited ammo in the beginning, but it's not right for *Evolve*. So some lessons we learnt from *Left 4 Dead* but we had to back away from them because Evolve is a whole different thing.

NAG: A game with this many variables is bound to result in a playerbase that's difficult to please. Are there any sacred cows in the game or are you open to any suggestions of changes that might come later down the line?

Chris: We're going to ship with what I feel is our best guess. There are a lot of smart people working on the game on 2K's side and TRS's side, and hundreds of people playing the game every day, trying to make it the best game they can possibly make when it launches. But we know we're not going to get everything right. In fact, I expect that we're not getting everything right. Fortunately on the new systems (the PS4 and Xbox One), we can patch on those systems a lot more often. So it's not as scary – I'm not that worried about what happens on Day 1 or two weeks or a month in, because we want that feedback. We'll adjust the game. So hopefully people have faith that we'll stay there and keep banging away on it. **NAG**

- GeometriX

Reviews **Intro**

It only takes one bad apple to spoil the whole barrel, but what if the barrel is already full of bad apples? What if it's a mix of fruit, like some sort of weird, rotting fruit salad? I guess we'll never know, because we're all perfect! Meet your reviewers...

Question / What do you want from E3? Do you think it's good as it is, or what would you like to see added/removed/changed about the show?

CHRIS "SAVAGE" SAVIDES
Batman. Just more Batman. Because he's Batman.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
StarCraft II, Diablo III, Mortal Kombat Komplete Edition

DANE "BARKSKIN" REMENDES
I'd love to see more monkeys. A few sloths would be cool too, maybe some red pandas. No sea urchins though. Imagine a sloth had announced *Battlefield: Hardline*. I'd have pre-ordered the game so hard.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Wolfenstein: The New Order, Tropico 5, Mortal Kombat, Injustice: Gods Among Us

DELANO "DELANO" CUZZUCOLI
Sorry, I didn't watch much E3. I was up late watching *Star Trek* reruns instead. I heard something about rideable elephants in *Far Cry 4*, so no further attention was needed.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
DLC Quest (trying to get all the achievements in Live Freemium or Die).

GEOFF "GEOMETRIX" BURROWS
A more honest approach to media briefings. Stop kidding yourselves (and us): most executives suck at presentations. So just get on with it and tell us about your game. We're all humans here.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
StarCraft II, Murdered: Soul Suspect, Wolfenstein: The New Order

MATT "SAND_STORM" FICK
I want more screw-ups! Remember all the fun we had laughing about laser tag, My Body is Ready, and the awkward Kinect showing? Things are too professional now.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Fallout: New Vegas and *Wildstar*

› **mini review**

Lemmings Touch

Lemmings Touch is the PS Vita touchscreen version of the 1991 genre defining puzzle romp. Your task is to guide up to 100 lemmings to safety by turning them into ladder builders, blockers, diggers and so on, and even sometimes by manipulating their environment (sliding platforms or lifting blocks). New to this touch version of the game are mischievous lemmings – these guys need to be stopped from entering the goal at the end. So make sure you squish them or simply get them to walk off the edge of a cliff. The lemmings can also be modified a little with different hair and body colours as well as fun stuff like monster feet or giving them pointy ears. The touch input mechanism is a radial menu with all the different abilities on it; the screen can be zoomed and it's possible to speed up or pause the action with the shoulder buttons; individual
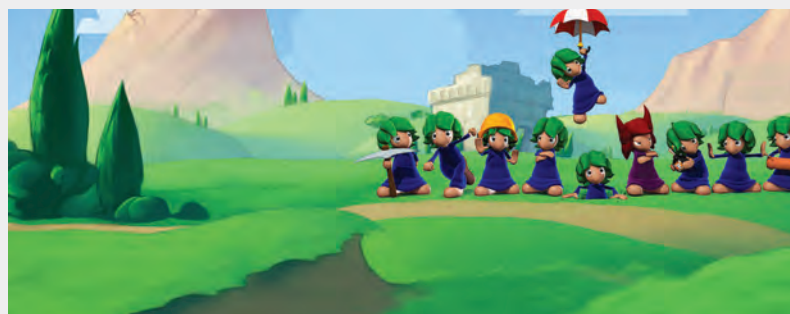
lemmings can be highlighted using the left and right directional buttons. The only issue is the level of finger dexterity required sometimes when the screen is packed full of bouncing, digging and of course dying lemmings.   **NAG**
- *RedTide*

80 *This is a great version of the classic* **Lemmings** *game and adds enough variety to the mix without taking anything away from the classic recipe.*

"So what's the hold-up?"
"This conversation."

- RedTide and GeometriX

MICHAEL "REDTIDE" JAMES
Since Michael is currently in LA attending E3, we figured it'd be okay to say something here like "E3 needs fewer people standing in my bloody way, and why are these people cosplaying? Aren't they professionals?"

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Battlefield 3, StarCraft II (but not for much longer if we keep losing)

MIKLOS "MIKIT0707" SZECSEI
I like E3, but would prefer it if the press events gagged their corporate, PR spewing CEOs and replaced them with honest, nerdy developers telling us in their own words what's been keeping them busy.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Infamous: Second Son, The Forest[*]

MIKTAR "MIKTAR" DRACON
I don't think one can really change the nature of E3. It exists as both an arm of marketing, and as a feel-good dog & pony show to appease investors who might be thinking they backed the wrong horse. I prefer rAge and PAX anyway.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Guild Wars 2, Defense Grid 2, Dawngate, Spacebase DF-9, Strike Suit Zero

NEO "SHOCKG" SIBEKO
I've never been to E3 nor watched a detailed video of it, so I'm not sure I have a relevant opinion at all on this. Maybe more indie developers showing what they are working on, help kick start their Kickstarter campaigns with working game code?

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Work... I'm currently playing work :(

TARRYN "AZIMUTH" VAN DER BYL
Alan Wake 2. This is the only correct answer. But no *Alan Wake 2* was announced, so I think E3 2015 should be cancelled in protest.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
It's E3 week. I don't have time for games.

› *mini review*

Antibody Boost

as kids, not many of us found biology classes particularly exciting. However, if the subject was presented as an *Asteroids*-style shooter, it would have surely interested us more. Well, we needn't lament our wasted youth any longer, because the hypothesis is now a reality with *Antibody Boost*.

The game casts players in the role of an antibody in what appears to be a Petri dish of some kind. Hordes of hostile microbes continuously spawn, and it's up to our hapless antigen to deal with the threat of infection. This isn't any ordinary antibody, mind you, but a rabid machine of destruction complete with a biological gun and hyperactive dashing speed.

Gameplay is simplicity itself. Players fire indiscriminately at anything that moves while occasionally dodging out of the path of wayward bullets and aggressive lifeforms. As time goes on, more

creatures appear and things will begin to approximate a bullet hell; survive for as long as you can and get your name on a scoreboard for bragging rights.

It has a very cool, microscope-esque look and is one of the finest examples of quick-action games available on mobile.

The single-hit deaths are a tad frustrating though, but it remains a challenging, absorbing and gorgeous little nugget of a game that is certainly worth a few minutes of your time. Just be sure to change the default control scheme.   **NAG**

- Delano

74 *A simple, frantic shooter with a slick look and theme.*

PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / XBO	REVIEWED ON / PC	GENRE / First-person shooter	DEVELOPER / MachineGames
AGE RATING / 18	MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None		PUBLISHER / Bethesda Softworks
WEBSITE / www.wolfenstein.com			DISTRIBUTOR / Ster Kinekor Entertainment

NAG FINEST QUALITY
**EDITORS CHOICE**
RARE COLLECTION
★ ★ ★
2014

Wolfenstein: The New Order

Einige zufällige Scheiße in Deutsch

I was always more of a *Doom* Guy. I can't really explain why that is. It just resonated with me more. Maybe Pinky Demons and Imps were more interesting to my youthful brain than screaming Nazis and mecha-Hitlers. Maybe it's because *Doom* was newer, and back then New Stuff was automatically better than Old Stuff. Maybe it's because hell on Mars appealed to me more than some blue-walled castle in Germany. I don't know. Still, *Wolfenstein 3D* was special. It is special. I can barely remember it, and yet what's left of its memory is so relentlessly cherished these many years later. With that in mind, I really enjoyed Raven Software's *Wolfenstein* from 2009. It was fun, and it did its heritage proud. But *Wolfenstein: The New Order* is something else entirely.

First, some narrative background. The game starts off with a World War II-era assault on recurring antagonist General Wilhelm Strasse's Nazi-riddled compound. You may know Strasse as Deathshead, and you may also know that he's serious business. Deathshead has developed some ridiculously advanced tech that makes short work of the majority of your assault force, and soon the
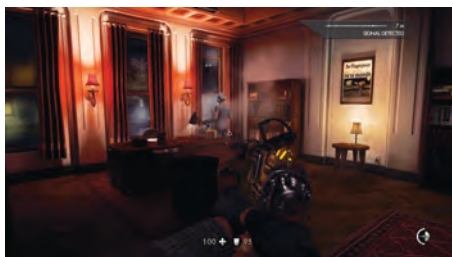
Silently disposing of enemy commanders like this one means that groups of enemies can't radio in reinforcements. We recommend wearing the pinkest slippers you can find for maximum sneakiness.
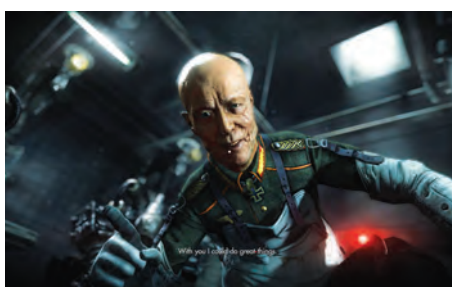
manly man-boots of returning hero William "B.J." Blazkowicz are drenched in Allied blood. Naturally, that doesn't stop him (and you) from fighting onward, restoring some balance by swiftly ruining many a Nazi day. But then everything goes to the giant robot dogs and a sneaky Swastika turns you into the world's most deadly vegetable for more than a decade.

Cue an alternate history where the Nazis used superior technology (and a liberal sprinkling of atomic bombs) to bring the world to its knees, and Blazkowicz eventually awakens to discover that things aren't quite so rosy in the land of tomorrow. Easily the most surprising thing about *The New Order* is its captivatingly charismatic narrative. I fully expected this silly, garish, mildly offensive thing, entirely devoid of any sense of meaning whatsoever. And it mostly is a silly, garish, mildly offensive thing — but it's also unexpectedly profound for such an obviously comical romp. The characterisation is excellent, particularly for Blazkowicz, which in itself is odd when you consider that he's always been not much more than a vehicle for mayhem. It's also been a while since I've hated a video-game enemy as much as I hate the key antagonists of *The New Order*.

Part of the allure of the narrative and the game's writing in general is that it's brilliantly self-aware. It knows what it is and where it comes from. It takes itself seriously, but it also knows that it's absurd, and it's full of cheeky references that only gamers who speak its language will appreciate. It's got everything you'd want: tension, horror, action, comedy, thoughtfulness, even tenderness. The point of all this gabber is that I really didn't anticipate enjoying the bits surrounding this new *Wolfenstein*'s meaty action as much as I did.

Then again, maybe you're just here for that meaty action. And it's meaty, that meaty action is. The weapons (the majority of which are grounded in reality, so expect assault rifles and pistols and the like) feel chunky and sound great, and as an added bonus any weapon can be dual-wielded if you pick up a duplicate. Dual-wielded shotguns are a favourite of mine. The action reminds me a bit of the original *F.E.A.R.* (minus the slow-motion shenanigans), because battles feel
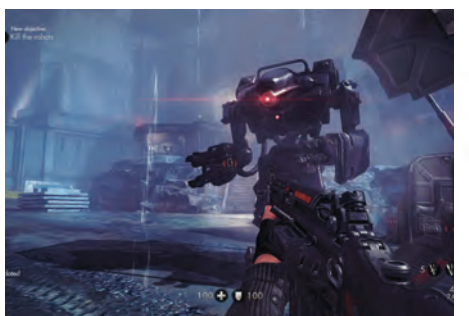
very kinetic, with dust and chunks of scenery being kicked up as your grenades and bullets and rockets leave their mark on the world. Living enemies explode in scarlet showers, and high-tech robotic foes spit sparks into the air. Combat areas within the levels are cleverly designed, often affording multiple ways to approach skirmishes with your Nazi foes.

There's a system in place for leaning around cover, in case you'd prefer to play the game more tactically and less run and gun. There's also loads of opportunity for stealthy play, letting you dispatch robo-dogs and patrolling guards quietly with your knife or silenced pistol without raising any alarms. Your preferred play style gradually unlocks perks that'll augment it — so focusing

Wolfenstein is powered by id Software's Tech 5 engine – the same engine that powers *Rage*. Like *Rage, Wolfenstein* looks and sounds incredible, and boasts an awesome level of detail.
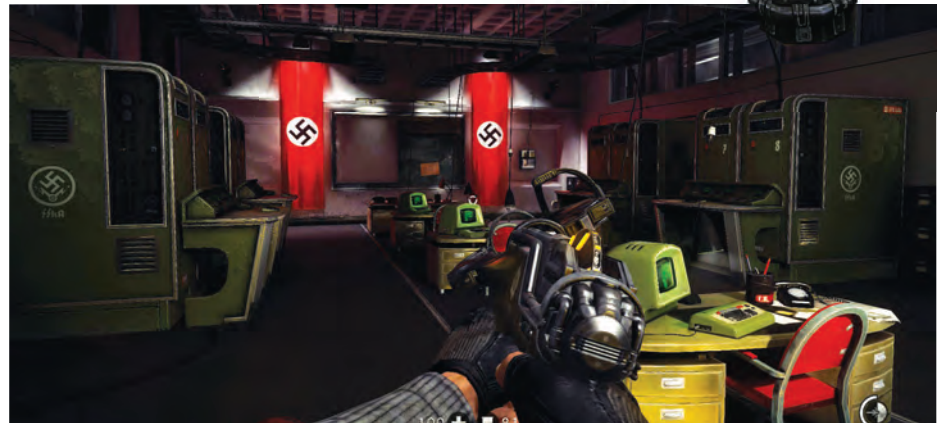
on stealth will unlock perks that let you throw your knives and move faster while crouching, for example. Worth mentioning is the upgradeable laser cutter thing that you eventually find as you venture deeper into the story. It allows you to cut chunks out of certain environmental objects and carve your way through metal grates and boxes. Later, it doubles as a rechargeable weapon. Mostly it's used for very, very light puzzle-solving, and while I feel like its inclusion could've been made far more interesting by using it in some clever puzzle design, I also know that adding in too much of a puzzle element would've annoyed those who came here looking for a more pure shooter.

There's a definite retro-inspired feel to the large, intricately designed levels, since they're often packed with secret paths that lead to areas filled with ammo, armour and the various collectibles employed by *The New Order*. Retro-inspired is a general theme throughout actually, because it comfortably mixes old-school shooter mechanisms (like being able to overcharge your hit points, or carry more than just two weapons at once) with more contemporary fixtures — like the aforementioned cover system. *The New Order* doesn't have a multiplayer component. And it doesn't need it either. I like to think that the solo experience is as good as it is because the developers didn't have to waste any time fiddling with persistent unlocks and other needless *COD*-inspired garbage.

I'm battling to find anything negative to say about this game. It's a fantastic first-person shooter, and an excellent first showing from MachineGames. It's odd to think that May seemed to unofficially be the month of *Watch Dogs* when *Wolfenstein* is, to me at least, a vastly superior video game. It's got me worried that it'll somehow become another *Bulletstorm* — an utterly excellent experience that's vacuumed into an empty void because everyone was too busy paying attention to lesser distractions. And it'd make me mighty sad if that were to happen. Because *The New Order* is easily my favourite game of the year so far. **NAG**

- *Barkskin*

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93 *It's always the best day ever when you're afforded the opportunity to play a first-person shooter that's actually interesting. Wolfenstein: The New Order is straightforward. It's brash. It's covered in gibs. On the surface it's a big, dumb shooter, but there's surprising intelligence and remarkable self-awareness coursing through its old-school veins. I've loved every second of it.*

PLUS / *Immensely gratifying action / Narrative is weirdly compelling / It's* Wolfenstein!

MINUS / *Nothing worth mentioning*

PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / XBO	REVIEWED ON / PS4	GENRE / Action adventure	DEVELOPER / Ubisoft Montreal
AGE RATING / 18	MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > 6 players		PUBLISHER / Ubisoft
WEBSITE / watchdogs.ubi.com			DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom Games

Watch Dogs
Your mom buy you a 'puter for Christmas?

When Ubisoft unveiled *Watch Dogs* two years ago at E3 2012, it quickly rose to be called the champion of next-gen gaming, the evolution of the open-world shooter, and, by the more cynical crowd – *Assassin's Creed* with hacking. Most reasonable people thought it looked cool but didn't expect *Watch Dogs* to be the sole herald of a new era, although we did think it'd be a little more than *Assassin's Creed* with hacking. Thankfully, it is a *little* more than that.

Gruff anti-hero Aiden Pearce takes us on this journey in a near-future Chicago that plays to Orwell's *1984* and contemporary technophobic predictions with equal measure. The city has been automated and networked under a single operating system, ctOS, but things are going bad and Pearce will need to dig himself into the mucky cobwebs of corporations, gangs and egos (including his own) before he can dig himself out. He perfectly fits the bill for generic master-of-all player character, and can slow-mo run-and-gun just as well as he can hack everything with a CPU, drive at high speeds, perform stealth take-downs and swear vengeance with a voice so gritty you'd think the Marlboro Man was trying a Dark Knight impression. The story gets the job done just as well as it needs to do in order to keep things moving along while giving the player more than enough breathing room to bugger about in side-quests and Easter egg hunts. If you've played *Assassin's Creed* or *Far Cry 3*, you know the drill by now:

a large open world is filled with activities, quests and mini-games for you to do; find more by unlocking a new area by completing a puzzle-like ascension to, in this case, a ctOS control tower, which will reveal more stuff in the game world to occupy your time between story missions. The mini-games serve as a light-hearted break from the main game; the side-quests can be quite challenging, often more so than the main plot quests, but they're very repetitive and don't feel like they fit in with the rest of the narrative in anything but the most basic of ways.

Watch Dogs is a game that gives the impression that it was rushed. So much of

The weak NPC AI extends to the citizens of Chicago as well. We've become accustomed to seeing funny and impressive situations that the people of sandbox cities get up to, but there's very little of that on hand here. If you want antics, you'll have to cause them yourself.

the high-level stuff is well conceived and sometimes even well executed, and the moment-to-moment gameplay is satisfying if a little uninspired, but everything in the middle feels short-changed. You'll do a lot of driving around the city of Chicago, and most of the vehicles suffer from feeling too soft on the road but overly tough in collisions – they're too easy to drive. It's as though Ubisoft thought at the last minute that they didn't want the player to be challenged by the driving, but had already committed to a free-roaming adventure game, so they made every car drive like a tank. As a result, the driving is a bit of a non-thing: it's well put together and pretty harmless, but one has to wonder why the feature is in the game for any reason other than to tick a box. And that's how much of *Watch Dogs* is.

The combat elements suffer the same fate. Melee combat comes at the press of a single button for an instant take-down, and ranged combat is little more than a shooting gallery with the occasional grenade. Enemies are dumb and predictable, but sometimes spawn in nearby flanking positions which means a fire-fight can go from a walk in the park to instant death. Unfortunately, instant death is

ABOVE / There are a few multiplayer modes available, the easiest to access being the spontaneous hacking of other players nearby. You need to sneak up on them, upload a virus to their phone, and then GTFO before they hunt you down. It's exhilarating, and makes for a fun break from the dark tones throughout the main game.

something that you'll come across a few times. The mission design often revolves around accomplishing an incredibly easy task in a ridiculously convoluted way, and sometimes that way isn't entirely obvious, gets you killed ("YOU WERE SPOTTED!!!"), and demands a frustrated reload to your previous game. If I was a hacker in near-future Chicago, I'd just carry around a pair of wire-cutters; almost every situation that Pearce overcomes with his elite hacking skills could be circumvented by snipping a hole in a chain-link fence.

The stealth side of the combat does a little better, but only if you put in the effort to ham up each situation. Since almost every encounter can be resolved with the application of a grenade launcher, you have to go out of your way to insist on being sneaky. When you do so, you'll find a competent if dated stealth system that does very little to innovate. For what it is, it's well handled and can make for some thrilling encounters at times.

Watch Dogs is far from a bad game. It's even a good game, but it's the sort of title that you'll probably forget about in a year's time, once all the DLC has done the rounds. There's plenty of potential here for Ubisoft to turn this into a series that has an impact on the gaming world, but they first need to find where *Watch Dogs* fits in. It simply fails to excel at anything and is beaten in every regard by the games from which it draws

inspiration: *Assassin's Creed* has better exploration and melee combat; *Far Cry* has better shooting and smarter enemies; *Splinter Cell* has better stealth mechanics. Outside of the sphere, *GTA* has better driving and more entertaining missions.

But maybe it's unfair to compare *Watch Dogs* with all of those other games. After all, those games have established themselves by now, sometimes with a bumpy start, and *Watch Dogs* is just beginning. It's got some nifty concepts and a few bits that really shine, so let's hope that this is the start of great things to come. For now, it's solid enough to be a worthwhile addition to your game collection. **NAG**

- GeometriX

76 *Watch Dogs could never live up to its hype, but it does deliver an overall solid experience despite being let down by a clear lack of time for polish and final tweaks.*

PLUS / *Conceptually strong / Nifty multiplayer / Looks pretty good*

MINUS / *Repetitive missions / Dated combat systems / Poor NPC AI*

PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS4	REVIEWED ON / PC	GENRE / Management simulation	DEVELOPER / Haemimont Games
AGE RATING / 16	MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > 4 players		PUBLISHER / Kalypso Media
WEBSITE / www.tropico5.com			DISTRIBUTOR / Silverscreen Trading

Tropico 5

All you need is love. And a palace full of armed guards

this is it. Freedom is near. I can almost taste its sweet, sweet reward. I'm ready to shake liberty's hand. Kiss its cheek. Make it my lifelong companion. For decades my people and I have been slaves to the whims of our colonial masters. "Oi! We're goin' ta need several thousand tons of cocoa over 'ere guv'nor, 'cause we've been 'aving trouble sleepin' an' the like," they'd demand, probably minus the needless cockney accent. "An' you'd do well to throw in a batch of freshly squeezed tears with that." But no more! We've worked hard to make our island prosperous enough to shake free these shackles. Just the other day, I saw one of my people wearing actual shoes. If that's not progress, nothing is. Or maybe he was secretly a member of the GLA. Shoes or no shoes, soon the revolution will release us from this invisible prison. All I have to do is sign this document declaring our glorious indepen... Hang on, are those pirates meant to be there? And what're they doing to those bananas on that farm? Is that tavern supposed to be on fire? I could've sworn that pile of rubble used to be a cow ranch. And... is

that a tornado? *Three* tornadoes? Right. Bring me my auto-saves!

That's generally how my games of *Tropico* inevitably seem to play out. Your perfect island paradise is always just one cruel random event away from spiralling into a sort of mini-apocalypse. And it's brilliant, because *Tropico*'s at its most interesting when you're attempting to walk that fine line between utter chaos and actually succeeding at not being the worst semi-dictator in the world. *Tropico 5* is no different, managing to be both weirdly relaxing and quietly stressful at the same time. Except when it isn't relaxing at all because that volcano you could've sworn looked totally benign just erupted and smashed half of your carefully planned city to bits using giant flaming boulders.

Anyway, full disclosure: I skipped *Tropico 4* because it seemed an awful lot like *Tropico 3*. It turned out that was a wise decision because the most prominent complaint surrounding the fourth game is that it was too much like the third. And now we have the fifth, which is still not all that different from *Tropico 3* (which

I loved), but changes things up just enough to make investing in it worthwhile.

If you've never played *Tropico*, here's what to expect: you are El Presidente, ruler of a burgeoning banana republic. You're tasked with ensuring the success (or not) of your beautiful (or not) island nation and keeping your tiny virtual citizens content (or not) by making smart choices (or not). You'll have to worry about things like unemployment rates and establishing a somewhat stable economy by building plantations and mines and factories to ensure you've got a steady stream of exportable goods. Or you could turn your island into a tourism hotspot, attracting all sorts of visitors eager to throw money at your tropical attractions.

Sadly, *Tropico 5* does not let you recreate Jurassic Park. But it does let you choose what kind of ruler you want to be. You can be a benevolent leader, putting the wellbeing of your people above all else by passing laws that improve their quality of life and allowing no room for political corruption. You can create a militarist dictatorship, keeping your people oppressed by virtue of that giant tank you drive through the streets surrounded by men with sunglasses and big guns. You can quietly siphon cash out of your economy and dump it straight into your own personal Swiss bank

Buildings can have managers assigned to them. Each manager boasts a unique role, and they'll enable various bonuses for the buildings to which they're paired.

As your settlement grows, characters representing different factions will often appear to request that you fulfil various tasks, like amassing a certain amount of cash or constructing specific buildings.

account. All the while you'll be researching new technologies and issuing edicts that support your approach to governance, finding ways to quell any would-be uprisings and rigging elections (should you even choose to allow them) such that the results fall ever in your favour.

New to this fifth game is the concept of eras. Beginning in the colonial era, you'll have to ensure that you keep a faceless, nameless king pleased enough to keep you on as governor until you're ready to declare your independence. During the World Wars, you'll have to balance favour between the Axis and Allies – unless you're suitably prepared for any invasions they may launch because they've come to find your face annoying. Speaking of invasions, combat in Tropico 5 is pretty ramshackle, not allowing you direct control over units which means that things can get awkwardly opaque as you try to understand the logic of how battles are decided.

Each of the game's eras presents unique challenges, adding another layer of strategic complexity to the management of your island. You've also now got a dynasty to manage, with each new member of your family possessing unique personality traits that could aid your cause slightly if used properly. Exporting and importing goods is now afforded greater

control, and you're able to send trade ships to buy and sell produce (often for a much tidier profit) when opportunities arise.

The most significant addition is a cooperative/competitive multiplayer component. It allows up to four players to share an island and its resources, either working together for the betterment of the whole island by sharing their spoils, or declaring war and forcefully stealing their neighbours' coffee by walloping them with unfriendly tropical bullets. I haven't had the chance to give the multiplayer a go, but the fact that it exists at all is important. Modern management games are few and far between, and multiplayer ones are even scarcer, so I love the idea of being able to enjoy the complexities of *Tropico* with friends.

Ultimately, *Tropico* is primarily a single-player experience, and there's tons of solo content to enjoy here. The campaign mode is entertaining enough, strung together by an appropriately silly but functional narrative, and the sandbox mode offers endless ways to test different approaches to virtual dictatorship. If you've played and loved *Tropico* in the past, you'll no doubt have a great time with this one. **NAG**

- Barkskin

80   *It's definitely* **Tropico**. *While the core game hasn't changed all that much since its three-dimensional reinvention with* Tropico 3, *the series' fifth title delivers more of the same addictively compelling management mechanics that make* Tropico *so appealing. Its new features stir the mix just enough to keep things interesting, and the addition of multiplayer is mighty welcome.*

PLUS / *Looks and sounds appropriately Caribbean-y / Satisfying array of management options / Multiplayer*

MINUS / *Not much has changed outside of multiplayer support*

PLATFORMS / PC / PS4 / XBO	REVIEWED ON / PC	GENRE / MMORPG	DEVELOPER / ZeniMax Online Studios
AGE RATING / 18	MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > (A LOT)		PUBLISHER / Bethesda Softworks
WEBSITE / www.elderscrollsonline.com			DISTRIBUTOR / Ster Kinekor Entertainment

The Elder Scrolls Online

Love The Elder Scrolls? MMORPGs leave you cold? Move along

full disclaimer: this is not a review for fans of the MMORPG genre. If you crave a MMORPG verdict then head onto *NAG Online* where Rick de Klerk has you covered. This is a review for fans of previous Elder Scrolls games like *Morrowind, Oblivion* and *Skyrim*.

Prior to the release of *The Elder Scrolls Online*, publisher Bethesda Softworks made a big deal about the game catering for long-time *Elder Scrolls* fans that perhaps aren't MMORPG junkies. I'm a *big* fan of *The Elder Scrolls*; I'm by no means a fan of MMORPGs — I'm basically who they had in mind when they said what they did.

There's really no way to sugar-coat this: I battled with this game. It's not because it's tough (although on occasion it throws in some quest-end bosses that you have to come back to after levelling-up) but rather because it's relentlessly boring. There were evenings when I had to force myself to play it, as the thought of endless fetch-quest derivatives and the same dull combat left me cold.

From the get-go, I wanted to approach *The Elder Scrolls Online* like I have previous *Elder Scrolls* games. I set out to create a wood elf archer with an emphasis on sneak, but soon realised that the game makes you pick one of four character classes. While that seems like a massive departure from other *Elder Scrolls* titles, it really just means you'll have a base set of three abilities that are unique to whichever class you ended up picking. I chose the Nightblade class because it seemed like the closest fit for my preference for stealthy archery. Irrespective of your class, you'll have abilities to unlock in further skill trees that cover Weapons, Armour, Racial perks and more. Each is broken into subcategories, so you'll find the Weapons tree unpacks further into Two Handed, One Handed and Shield, Destruction Staff, Bow etc. Each of *those* then opens further into Active Abilities and Passive Abilities. Confused yet? I don't blame you; it's very badly set out and menu systems are woefully convoluted and ugly.

Character progression retains elements of previous *Elder Scrolls* titles, like pumping points into Stamina, Health or Magicka. You'll

also earn a point to unlock a new ability providing you've gained access to the ability you want. For example: if you want a Bow ability then you'll have to use a bow for long enough to level-up your archery skill to 10. Don't expect skills and abilities to unlock as quickly as in previous *Elder Scrolls* games — *The Elder Scrolls Online* follows the typical MMORPG formula of painfully slow character progression.

The main quests of previous *Elder Scrolls* games have never been a series strongpoint, but it's good to see that *The Elder Scrolls Online* has at least maintained that tradition. It's long-winded and poorly explained, but eventually (around 10-15 hours in) you'll do a quest that provides some much-needed background so that you can begin to give a damn about what it is you're supposed to be doing. Certain plot devices are shamelessly shoe-horned in order to fit the MMORPG model — such as the races of Tamriel splitting themselves into three warring alliances so that players need to pick a faction to belong to for later PVP battles in Cyrodiil (accessible

There are moments when the game looks very pretty, and you can almost allow yourself to be immersed in the environments. Those moments are fleeting.

after you hit level 10). Most of the narrative is divulged through NPCs with appalling lip-syncing and who very often crop up at the most inexplicable moments to do pointless things. During one quest I had a familiar NPC suddenly arrive to tell me to follow him as he knew a shortcut. He then proceeded to lead me down the only pathway available anyway. There was no point in him being there; it was a really poor attempt to make the world feel "alive" with "meaningful" NPC interactions.

As for the game world itself, the Tamriel of *The Elder Scrolls* Online can look very pretty in its own right, but compared (inevitably) to its predecessors it feels empty. Whereas the world of *Skyrim* bristled with detail and opportunities for self-made adventures, the colossal game world of *The Elder Scrolls Online* feels sanitised for mass consumption and entirely soulless. Gone is any hope of meandering from the main roads and finding your own adventures or hidden areas. Instead, you'll be stuck to a beaten path and left unrewarded for exploring further. There's very little to "discover" that hasn't already been

overrun by other players. And you'll always know when you've reached a quest line target because inevitably it's *surrounded* by two dozen other players.

Playing *The Elder Scrolls Online* has shown me what a deeply personal experience it is playing through titles like *Skyrim* and *Oblivion*. Those games are able to conjure a feeling that you're the only person in a forest full of wild beasts, necromancers and Spriggans. In *The Elder Scrolls Online*, you'll never have that sense of solitude, that excitement of exploring the frontier, of traversing the unknown, because inevitably you'll come across an idiotic other player literally hopping across the landscape. This isn't just your Tamriel to explore: you're sharing it with thousands of other players.

The Elder Scrolls Online might have been special had it come out before *Skyrim* and around the same time as when *World of Warcraft* hit its peak. Now it just feels like a formulaic conversion of a much-loved role-playing series that's trying to cash-in on a genre that has long since begun to wane. I cannot recommend you buy this game, and then continue spending R190 every month to keep playing it. You're better off reinstalling *Skyrim* and adding a bunch of mods to spice things up. **NAG**

- Mikit0707

50 *If previous* **Elder Scrolls** *games are like a steak that you've flavoured yourself and braaied to perfection, then* **The Elder Scrolls Online** *is an overcrowded buffet where you have to search for the things you might want to eat, and put up with dozens of others eating from the same expired, stale offerings.*

PLUS / *Great character creator / Completely voiced NPCs / Can look pretty*

MINUS / *Dreadfully boring combat / Convoluted in almost everything / Generic / Server issues and disconnects*

PLATFORMS / Wii U	REVIEWED ON / Wii U	GENRE / Racing	DEVELOPER / Nintendo EAD Group No. 1
AGE RATING / 3	MULTIPLAYER / Local > 4 players Online > 12 players		PUBLISHER / Nintendo
WEBSITE / mariokart8.nintendo.com			DISTRIBUTOR / Core Group Africa

NAG MUST PLAY
SERIOUSLY, YOU SHOULD PLAY THIS

Mario Kart 8

Let the shell-based bloodsport begin again

f or over 20 years the *Mario Kart* series has been the go-to game for go-kart battle racing action. There have been a few decent competitors, with honourable mentions to *Crash Team Racing* (1999) and *Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed* (2012). But *Mario Kart* continues to own the racetrack with its solid design, carefully tuned items and inviting visuals.

Not that there isn't room for improvement. The eight cup campaign, each cup being four tracks, can feel a bit light on content even though it is 32 unique race tracks. Part of the problem with the campaign feeling short lies in an improvement made to how you progress. In past games you had to race through all eight cups (placing third or higher) in the lowest difficulty (50cc) to unlock the next tier, namely

100cc. Then once you finished all the cups again in 100cc, you unlocked 150cc (arguably the "real" game). This time however, you can start on 150cc out of the box, and your placement counts retroactively. If you get a three-star gold in 150cc, you then have it for 100cc and 50cc. So while that's much better in terms of not having to grind through the easier difficulties, it means you can "finish" the campaign rather quickly. There is extra content in the form of time trials, racing with no items (only boost mushrooms) against staff ghosts, ghosts of friends, or best-of online ghost times. VS Race lets you set up a custom-rules campaign with a variety of options, while Battle Mode is a kind-of deathmatch where you try to pop your opponent's balloons.

But the campaign has never been the

main draw of the *Mario Kart* series. The meat of the content lies in multiplayer, either local split-screen (up to four on one screen), or twelve-player online races. Oddly, Nintendo opted to use vertical split-screen on the TV for two-player games, instead of letting one player be on the GamePad and another on the TV. When the GamePad is not in use, it can be set to show a map of the race track. Online is where the real action is, and this is one area where Nintendo knocked it out of the park. Improving on the already impressive online mode of *Mario Kart Wii*, you can join a random race at any time (worldwide or regional), join on friends already racing, or join and participate in a user-created tournament. Anyone can set up a custom tournament, with custom rules, which then gets its own private Miiverse community where replays, screenshots and comments are posted.

To top it all off, the new anti-gravity sections of tracks where you race along walls and ceilings is actually more interesting than it might sound.   NAG

- Miktar

Mario Kart 8 benefits greatly from being high-definition, that is, being in a higher resolution than its predecessors. It's much easier to see the track and opponents.

89 *If you've never played a **Mario Kart** before or are looking for a fun four-player party game, you can't go wrong with **Mario Kart 8**. Fans of the series will find it a solid iteration with only a few flaws.*

PLUS / *Wonderful soundtrack / YouTube replay uploading / Totally fun*

MINUS / *Battle Mode lacking arenas / Campaign can feel short / Blue shells*

| PLATFORMS / PC		REVIEWED ON / PC
AGE RATING / 3		GENRE / Action platformer
MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None		
WEBSITE / www.playism-games.com/games/keroblaster/		
DEVELOPER / Pixel	PUBLISHER / Pixel	
DISTRIBUTOR / Pixel		

Kero Blaster
Frog-like platforming

It may not look like much, with retro-style graphics and a simple frog-like lead character. But *Kero Blaster* is from Daisuke "Pixel" Amaya, creator of the surprise cult hit *Cave Story* (2004). Unlike *Cave Story*, which was a big open-world "metroidvania" with plenty of gunplay and platforming, *Kero Blaster* is a more classically-styled run-and-gun like *Mega Man*.

You play as a frog who's tasked by his boss to clear out some nasty black creatures hanging around the company's teleporters. It's a simple plot that matches the straightforward nature of the game. Your little frog teleports into a level and fights from left to right until he reaches the big boss at the end. Along the way you collect coins, which can be used to upgrade your weapons at mid-mission checkpoints. If you die, you keep all your coins, so repeated failures do bring some form of progress. The game is pretty hard, but not unfair. As the story progresses, you'll gain new abilities. These, combined with weapon upgrades, can make a previously difficult scenario much easier.

The charm of *Kero Blaster* lies in how it all comes together: the simple but intriguing plot that goes unexpected places, the solid gameplay and level design, and the more contemporary weapon upgrade systems. Plus, the game is cheap (about R85), and you get more than what you pay for. **NAG**

- Miktar
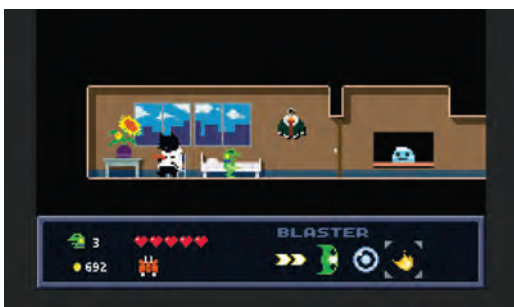
78 *For fans of* Cave Story's *sprawling exploration,* Kero Blaster's *linear run-and-gun gameplay might seem like a step backwards. But what it lacks in scope, it makes up for by having much tighter gameplay and very well designed boss encounters. Note: after the credits, you're still not done, but you need to answer a question correctly…*

PLUS / *Solid gameplay / Inventive levels / Charming*

MINUS / *Can get difficult / Unforgiving checkpoints / You really have to like retro stuff*

PLATFORMS / 3DS		REVIEWED ON / 3DS
GENRE / Sports		AGE RATING / 3
MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > 4 players		
WEBSITE / mariogolf.nintendo.com		
DEVELOPER / Camelot Software Planning	PUBLISHER / Nintendo	
DISTRIBUTOR / Core Group Africa		

Mario Golf: World Tour
Par for the course

Like the excellent *Hot Shots Golf / Everybody's Golf* series, the *Mario Golf* games focus on arcade-style fast-paced fun over the more simulator-style golfing games. It's very easy to learn how to play *Mario Golf*, and if you leave the controls set to "Automatic" (which will hit the "impact zone" on your swing for you) you can do just fine in most cases. This lets you relax and learn the layouts of the various courses, instead of worrying too much about wind direction, or the precision-timing needed for tricky shots out of sand bunkers.

There are two single-player campaigns in *World Tour*. The first is "Mario Golf", where you pick a character from the roster of Mushroom Kingdom inhabitants like Mario, Bowser, Boo, Donkey Kong, or you can pick your personal Mii. From there, you can play any number of basic golf modes, local or online, or try one of the various Challenges. These can range from objectives like collecting coins with your golf ball as you golf, getting a certain score, going one-on-one against another character, or using items to hit the ball through an oddly-placed ring. The second campaign is called Castle Club, and uses only your Mii to take on various tournaments. Using coins earned across all modes, you can buy stat-affecting equipment for your Mii, like golf clubs, clothing, and golf balls. Both modes have regular online tournaments, both regional and national, with varying rules and settings. Players can also make their own custom tournaments, either private for just friends, or public for anyone to join. **NAG**

- Miktar

79 *Being a golf game, it's pretty obvious what you're getting into when playing* World Tour. *What makes it* Mario Golf *however, are the crazy courses, physics-defying items, and a focus on fun over realism. The perpetual online tournaments with varying rules help keep it all fresh over and over again.*

PLUS / *Easy to play / Lots of content / Robust online mode*

MINUS / *Challenges can be crazy / Campaign can feel short*

› reviews

Endless Racer
A South African developer shows us how unsafe our roads can really be

endless Racer. The title won't win any awards for originality, but don't be fooled: there's a pretty decent nugget of gaming behind the unassuming title.

The game places you in the cockpit of one of several vehicles as you attempt to travel without a collision and score the most points. Naturally, your conduit of travel is also home to several other vehicles who serve as hinders to your success, so it's always in your best interest to avoid them with the utmost prejudice.

Scattered along the road are big dollar signs which beg to be collected without turning your mode of transport into a crumpled wreck of metal. This cash can then be spent on assorted upgrades, giving you an edge such as faster speed or better handling.

If you fancy more reward at the cost of higher risk, you can choose to opt for a two-laned highway and venture straight on into oncoming traffic for extra bonus scores. I personally found this mode the most fun, as it provided extra challenge and variation to the regular game modes, though honestly I believe there should be more vehicles and courses.

The biggest downfall is a single, uninspired music track that loops continuously, though it can be thankfully turned off. Otherwise *Endless Racer* is a superb, gorgeous-looking timewaster and a notable showcase of local developer potential.   **NAG**
- *Delano*

80 *A solid endless racer that's worth your time, despite the uninspired name.*

PLUS / *Has that "just-one-more-try" quality / Good-looking, clean interface*

MINUS / *Lags a bit at high speeds / Could use more variety in vehicles and tracks*

HARDWIRED

by Neo Sibeko

THE FALL: For a very long time, I've followed the GPU industry. More so than I have the CPU industry, partly because it was around long before I was born. Despite the fact that my first overclocking adventures began on an 80486SX 33MHz, It was only with the ill-fated and tragic S3 Virge SX 4MB accelerator that I began to understand what overclocking was really about, or at least its fundamentals.

n all that time I remember having a passionate following and liking for AMD. At the time it was led by Jerry Sanders, one of th Silicon Valley's pioneers. With every computer magazine my father brought home, I would search through it looking for AMD products and point out to him just how much better AMD was than their chief rival Intel in that they could provide similar technology with fewer resources. If anything they were the best of the rest (CyriX, NexGen, IBM etc.). This continued on throughout AMD's history, culminating in what was a personal victory to me with the Athlon line of CPUs, all the way from the Athlon Classic right through to the last meaningful AMD CPU the FX-62 (and that is stretching it).

Throughout the company's history, AMD had been involved in litigation with Intel. This was part and parcel of the relationship between these two companies. Compete in the market and in the courtroom as well. At AMD's peak, it was worth an impressive $10.5 Billion, not bad at all. This was around 2006. If you included Fabs and all kinds of IP the company had, its value was perhaps much more than that. However, that is the number that was on paper using the unscientific values of the stock market. Then in 2006, AMD made a bold move to purchase ATI, a company that AMD paid a hefty sum for in the region of $5.4 billion in total (in cash and stocks). Around that time many things took place with regards the value of both companies, but a year later, AMD and ATI together were roughly estimated to be worth $8.6 billion. Clearly something had gone wrong there. Unknown by many is that during that time, both Intel and NVIDIA's market value grew. NVIDIA more specifically because a year after that, its value more than doubled to $16.4 billion, up from the $6.2 billion just days before AMD purchased ATI. In the same time period, Intel's market cap grew from $99 Billion to $142 billion. In all of this, you can clearly see that AMD lost. Nothing was gained from this merger; however it seems as if AMD was fated to bet it all on a losing hand.

Prior to the discussions which led to the ATI purchase, AMD had approached NVIDIA with an offer to purchase. However as the story goes, Jen-Hsun-Huang would accept this provided that he would lead AMD as its CEO. When this was rejected, the deal fell through. Now keep in mind that NVIDIA only started in 1991, ATI is from 1985. By the time 2006 came around, NVIDIA was worth two thirds of AMD and had surpassed ATI. Moreover, said NVIDIA CEO is a former AMD employee. That alone speaks volumes about the leadership that AMD declined in favour of their own people.

Today, with the PC (ODM/OEM) market having taken a hit, NVIDIA's market cap is around $10.5 billion, not what it was at its highest of course, significantly less, but better than where AMD is at today at $3 billion. What of Intel? Intel also took a hit and today is valued at $133 billion, significantly more than NVIDIA and AMD, but still lower than where they been before. (Qualcomm and other mobile SOC providers have grown phenomenally because of a changing market.)

What is all this about? Well at every single turn, especially with AMD's campaign against Intel and NVIDIA, the firm has cited the un-open and unfair nature of doing business these two firms practise. However, the truth is, AMD has a history of making the worst possible decisions given any two choices, despite being a sound engineering company. The body of work AMD has produced and their contributions to things we take for granted in our daily lives are unspeakable. Their IP portfolio is incredible, yet at the business end, they have proved to be woefully inept, almost to the point where it's as if this company that I had such reverence for in my younger days is determined to ride itself into oblivion.

It is uncanny just how any single firm, being the only alternative in two separate markets, manages to virtually make itself irrelevant through deliberate and repeated actions that have proven time and time again to be detrimental. The real kicker though, is how the powers that be at this firm have continued to enjoy performance bonuses annually without fail. Much like it was a personal victory for me when AMD claimed the fastest microprocessor the world had ever seen, it is a personal tragedy for me to see it reduced to this. This AMD is not the AMD I used to know and have great respect for. **NAG**

Running his own online overclocking magazine, Neo is plugged directly into the hardware scene in Taiwan where he is permanently based. He knows more about hardware than hardware itself.

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Plantronics GameCom Commander
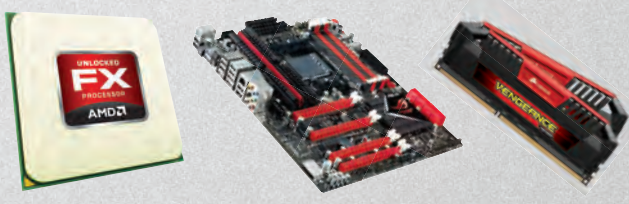**R4,569** / www.plantronics.com

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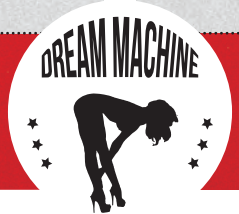### › AVEXIR BLITZ 1.1 DDR3 2,666MHZ
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DREAM MACHINE

AMD DREAM MACHINE
R60,165

ASRock Z97X Fatal1ty

VERSUS

MSI Z97 Gaming 7

In this edition of Versus, we look at two similarly priced motherboards from ASRock and MSI. They are both built around the updated Z97 chipset and have a slew of features common between them. Whichever board you decide upon, it will make for a good platform to build your gaming rig around. Depending on your needs and budget, either will be suitable for you and as such we have listed some aspects of each for you to consider before making your purchasing decision.

SPECS

CHIPSET / Intel Z97
MEMORY / 4x 240-pin DDR3
CPU SUPPORT / LGA 1150
EXPANSION / 3x PCIe 16X, 3x PCIe 1X
SIZE / ATX

7

ASROCK Z97X FATAL1TY
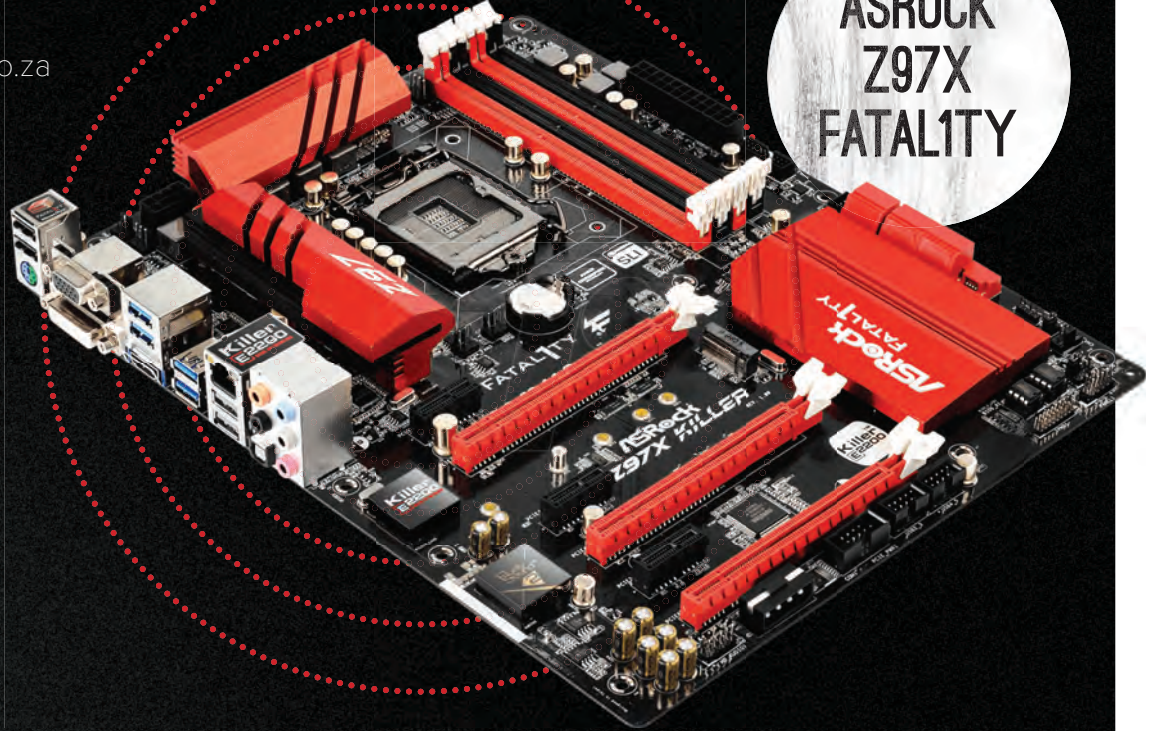
AUDIO

Audio on the ASRock board is courtesy of the vendor's second generation Purity Sound 2 audio hardware. At the heart of this is the popular ALC1150 Codec as found on many mid- to high-end motherboards. On this particular board, it is backed up by Nichicon Fine gold capacitors and a Texas instruments 600 ohm NE5532 headphone amplifier. It's typical these days but that doesn't mean its sub-standard at all. Compared to what the MSI board offers, the software is a little bland, albeit only in the visual department as it uses the standard Realtek Audio suite. In audio testing, this board had a lower noise level than the MSI GAMING 7 and a wider dynamic range. Stereo-crosstalk was measurably lower as well, although at -91db it is hardly going to be noticeable over another board. Overall a descent offering that is certainly better than ASRock's previous attempts, especially in the Z77 and earlier chipset motherboards. For gaming purposes, it is certainly good enough.

PERFORMANCE

This board, as typical of ASRock boards in the last couple of years, offers great memory performance. The options within the BIOS to tune memory settings are numerous and short of changing actual CPU speed, this is where most performance tuning is to be found. There can be no faulting this board as it has all the required settings and for the most part they are explained well. As is typical with trying to get the most out of any system you can spend hundreds of hours tuning memory or just load the X.M.P setting for your chosen memory kit and be assured of great performance. The only issue we had with this board was that PCIe performance in full-screen mode was limited to 4X. This is most certainly a BIOS issue but for some unknown reason 16X would not engage, try as we might. As a result the 3D benchmark and gamer performance figures were measurably lower than what we achieved on the MSI board. By the time you read this, it is likely there will be a BIOS update which addresses this, but it was a little surprising to see this anomaly as we've never experienced it before. In the *Resident Evil 6* benchmark, we found the ASRock board over 3,000 points lower than the competing MSI offering. In 3DMark Fire Strike the difference was less than 100 points, which would generally be within the margin of error. Ultimately it isn't going to prevent one from playing games at all, but it is something to be aware of at present.

FEATURES

This is a standard gaming board for the most part so that means it features the typical Atheros Killer E2200 NIC which supposedly improves online gaming performance. This is identical to what MSI offers on their board. Of particular interest on the Z97X Fatal1ty is the M.2 (NGFF) implementation which differs from other offerings on the market. ASRock has wired two PCIe Gen2 lanes to this interface, thus effectively doubling the available performance from 5Gbps to 10Gbps. In theory that allows for 1.25GB/s transfer speeds. There may not be many M.2 devices on the market as yet, but this should prove useful should this change in future as it will allow faster disk access than available on any SATA 6Gbps drive. With some other nifty software such as a 3-month Xsplit licence and Key Master (reduces mouse snapping), the Z97X Killer is truly geared at gaming before anything else. We do lament the absence of a POST LED, power and reset buttons on the board however. There's absolutely no reason why any motherboard in this day and age should not have these basic features. Other than that, this board is well featured.

ERP / R2,999

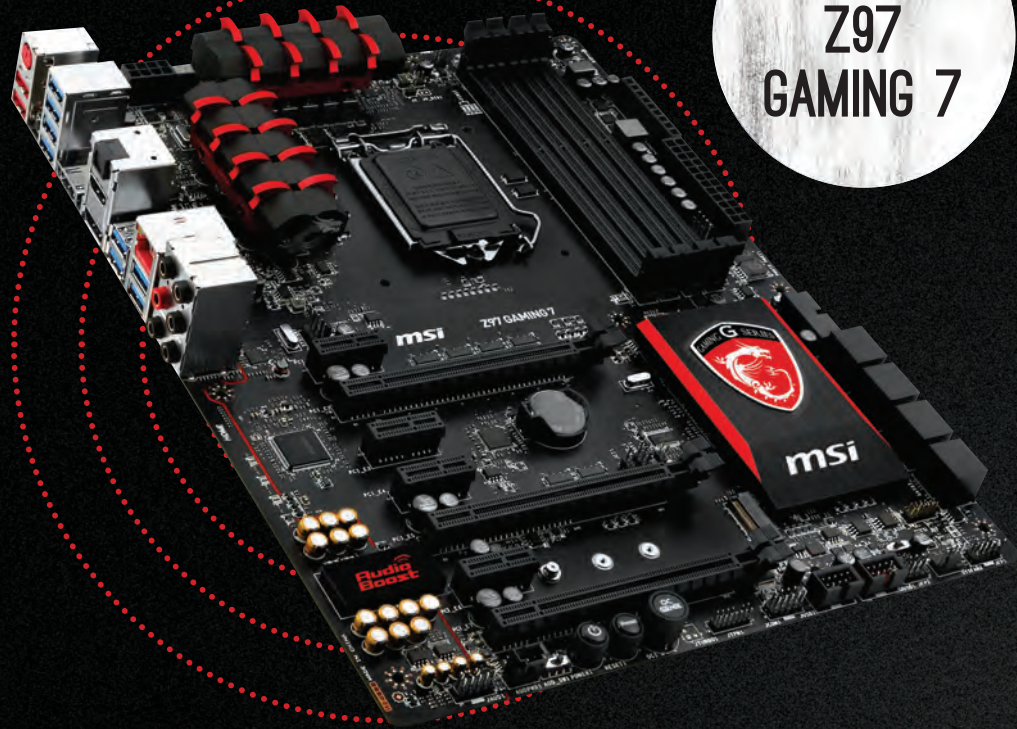WEBSITE / www.msi.com

SUPPLIER / Corex

SPECS

CHIPSET / Intel Z97
MEMORY / 4x 240-pin DDR3
CPU SUPPORT / LGA 1150
EXPANSION / 3x PCIe 16X, 4x PCIe 1X
SIZE / ATX

8

MSI Z97 GAMING 7

AUDIO

Audio on the MSI Z97 Gaming 7 is pretty similar to what the ASRock board offers with but a few exceptions. Like the competition, MSI makes use of the 10-channel ALC1150 codec. It is also powered by the Nichicon fine gold audio capacitors. However there are some differences here in the Op-amps used for the 600 ohm high-impedance headphone outputs. MSI doesn't use one but two TI (OP1652) headphone amps. One is routed to the output at the rear and the one for front audio output. That way, you don't have to reach to the back of the computer to use the amplifier. Moreover, the Gaming 7 has a dedicated 5V power signal for the USB ports, which are better suited for external USB DACs. This is a niche feature, but it doesn't hurt to have it. Audio testing results showed that the MSI solution was superior in some disciplines while coming up slightly short in others. Frequency response and stereo crosstalk levels were a little better, but that is against a higher noise floor and a narrower dynamic range. These are things that you'll hardly notice in gaming at all, and they are only really applicable to audiophiles. By the same token, if you're an audiophile you're likely be using a discrete card or a USB DAC, thus the testing is academic more than anything else. We had no problems gaming with the on-board audio on this motherboard.

PERFORMANCE

For some reason this keeps happening with MSI boards, but they are not tuned correctly out the box for memory performance. The overclocking options and capabilities are sufficient, but the out-the-box performance isn't stellar. In comparison to the ASRock board, some tests showed the Gaming 7 to be in excess of 10GB/s slower. Again this is something that can be remedied with extensive hours spent in the BIOS or alternatively a BIOS update. 3D or PCIe performance however was good, delivering more than what the ASRock offering was capable of. We can't complain about much here other than the memory tuning, which only makes a real difference in competitive overclocking and benchmarks. For gamers and normal users, there'll be no performance penalty in real world programs.

FEATURES

On the features side, the MSI board sports an XSplit Gamecaster subscription as well, along with dedicated gaming USB ports. These are supposed to have lower latency and allow for a higher polling rate. How much of an advantage this gives in competitive gaming will be hard to test but suffice to say at the worst they wouldn't hurt your gaming experience. Unlike the ASRock board, the MSI Z97 Gaming 7 sports a POST LED, clear CMOS, power and reset buttons. In addition to that, the board sports V-Check points, and a BIOS DIP switch (BIOS 1 and 2). Again this is supposed to be standard affair on any motherboard above the R2,000 price point and MSI does well by including these features on this model. Aesthetically this is also the better looking of the two. It is an entirely subjective matter, but it seems like a higher quality product even in its packaging and presentation.
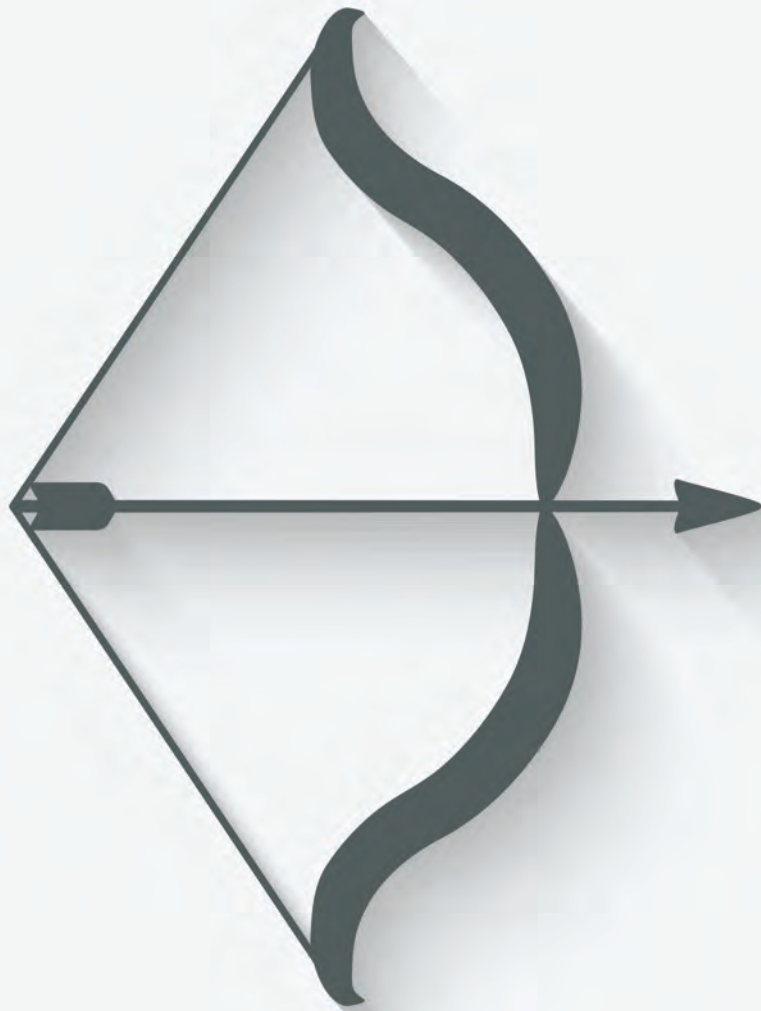
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OPINIONS, FEATURES, PREVIEWS

Corsair AX1500i PSU

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SPECS		
RATING	1500W	
CERTIFICATION	80 plus Titanium	
COMBINED 12V OUTPUT	1,500W (125A)	
SIZE	150mm x 225mm x 86mm	

Last issue we looked at the latest Cooler Master V1200 Platinum PSU, easily the most impressive PSU we had ever come across. Soon after that however, the Corsair AX1500i showed up. This PSU was first announced over half a year ago at CES 2014. Between then and now, there were some delays, and the unit only became available around the beginning of May. Between its announcement and availability numerous changes were made, or rather refinements were made to the PSU, and what we ended up with was worth the wait.

As a result, what we now have is the most impressive PSU on the market today. In all aspects there simply isn't a better PSU that has ever come from Corsair or any other vendor. So thoroughly efficient and incredible is this PSU that it has ousted the extreme overclocker's favourite AX1200i in every discipline.

The AX1500i has tighter voltage regulation at 0.12% deviation from 60W to above 1500W. 0.32% on the 5V line and 0.18% on the 3.3V for instance. This kind of regulation is not seen on even 500Watt units (the lower power PSU's are easier to make and tend to be better regulated and efficient). The AX1500i not only manages to be unmatched in these tests, but it has an even better hold up time than the V1200 Platinum it replaces, at 19.6ms. That is but the tip of the iceberg because this PSU not only delivers 90% and higher efficiency at all loads from 10% to 100%, it will continue this at 110% which is 1,650W. If that isn't impressive enough, all this it will do from a 115VAC. So, even with the often unpredictable power coming from our wall sockets, this PSU will deliver consistently and continuously without issue.

What of ripple and noise then? Well, the simple answer is that it's just not there. The ripple suppression on this unit is flawless. Technically the AX1500i not only raises the bar that was set by the AX1200i, but it puts it out of reach for all shipping units past and present. If this sounds like complete adoration for a PSU, it is, and it is justified because there is nothing else that delivers power like this. We have yet to test a PSU that manages to not spin up its fan even with 535W of load. The AX1500i managed to power a 4770K and a GTX 780Ti perfectly, under all loads without need for active cooling. Even in a sweltering environment.

There is so much more to the AX1500i that we do not have the space to go into detail about, but rest assured that all we have mentioned justifies the price, probably more so than any one graphics card, memory or CPU. That does not mean the price is easily digested as it is far from it. For the price of the AX1500i, one could easily buy a low-end gaming machine or any one or more combination of components. With that said, this PSU will outlast all other components in your system. With a seven year warranty you're looking at around R81pm to use this PSU in the same period. From that point of view it suddenly becomes a worthwhile investment especially because, as we mentioned earlier, there simply isn't anything else close to this money can buy.

Building the ultimate dream machine? This has to be the PSU you decide upon, be it you're a fan of Corsair or not, no other unit will deliver this kind of performance under any circumstances. You could easily power a 24 thread, four GPU configuration with this unit and it would last you years on end with continuous use. In short, Corsair has produced nothing short of a wonder with the AX1500i.

- Neo Sibeko

10 *There has never been a finer high-end PSU ever, the AX1500i is as close to perfection as it gets.*

PLUS / Unparalleled efficiency / Impeccable build quality / Surprisingly silent / Seven year warranty

MINUS / Eye wateringly pricey
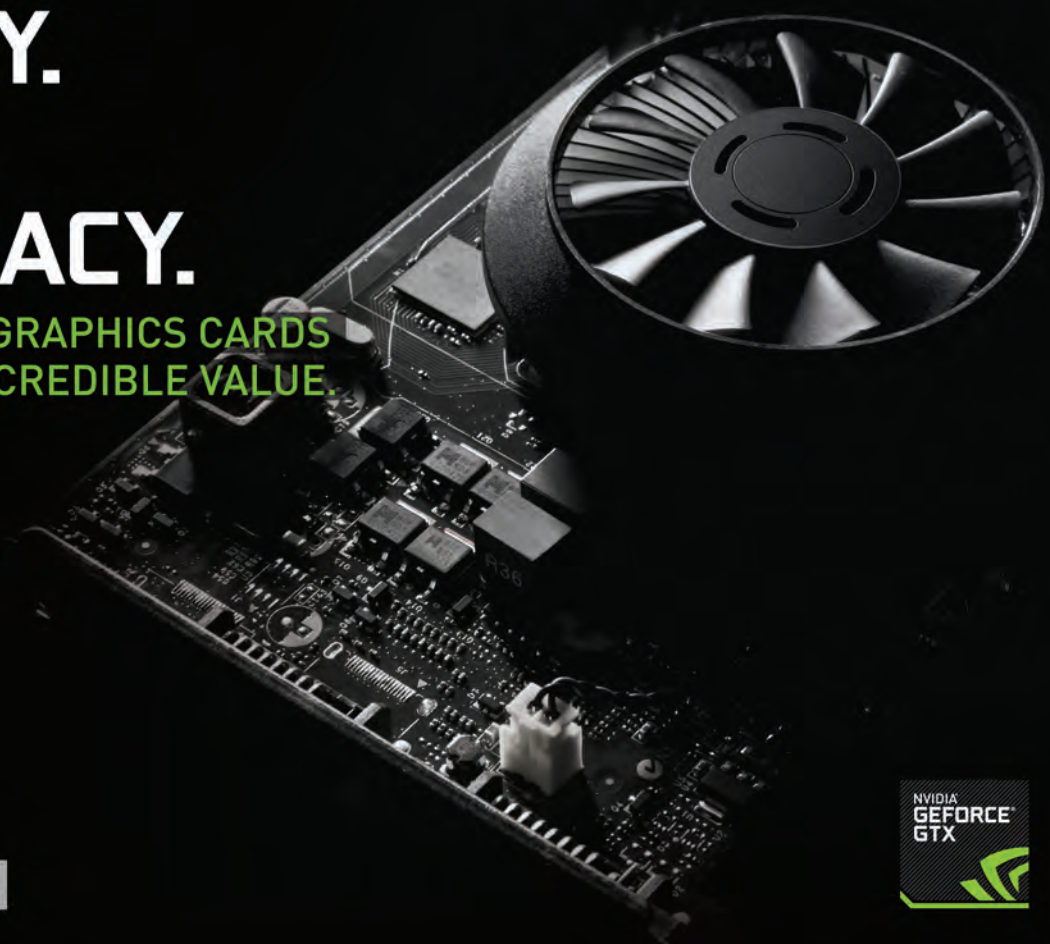
Razer Sabertooth
Xbox 360/PC Controller

› Website / www.razerzone.com   **›** ERP / R1,299.95   **›** Supplier / Musica

SPECS		
BUTTONS	25 total (6 programmable)	
INTERFACE	USB 2.0	
SIZE	110mm x 154mm x 57mm	

The original Xbox 360 controller is probably one of the most revered game controllers that's ever been realised. Even better was that the 360 controller worked on PCs as well and in fact as it is, it's the standard controller layout for many games on the PC that do support any other input method other than keyboard and mouse. Simply plug it in and you'll enjoy feedback support and an identical layout to that which you would have playing the same title on the console.

There are several other game controllers on the market (licensed or otherwise) which have attempted to improve upon this, but none had managed to thoroughly pull this off until the Razer Onza. We didn't review this in *NAG* at the time of its release, but we did manage to get a hold of the Razer Sabertooth, the successor to the Onza and arguably the best PC game controller you can buy.

It isn't cheap by any stretch of the imagination, but then again for its price you will get a controller that shouldn't need replacing for years on end. More than that, the build quality is exceptional or at the very least matching what Microsoft produced with the 360 controller. The Sabertooth may not be as heavy, but its weight distribution is as equally perfect, despite feeling a little smaller than the 360 controller. The rubberized non-slip plastic mould is fantastic and even with hours spent using it, it will never get sweaty and thus slippery.

The ergonomics are great, and it contours to the hands almost perfectly. Those with slightly bigger hands may find that they prefer the Microsoft controller because of its girth but the Razer should be easy to adjust to after an hour or so of using it.

As per Razer standards, what makes this a truly special controller is how it is designed to improve gameplay experiences, allowing you to improve your playing abilities. Whether you're playing a fighting game or a racing simulator you can easily shave off anywhere between three tenths of a second to a whole second, just by switching to this controller. Combos are made so much simpler to execute, because the face buttons have a very short travel. They activate with a deliberate but gentle press, yet they never feel mushy. There is a click behind them that lets you know you've pressed the button. The triggers and shoulder buttons have a uniform resistance throughout and offer a slightly shorter travel than the Microsoft controller. This doesn't rob you of precision though as sensitivity is one of the most impressive aspects of the Sabertooth. This is in particular when dealing with the analogue sticks which have a configurable sensitivity (0 – 10), thus capable of suiting any playing environment or game. Since this controller supports two profiles you could easily switch between the two sensitivity options when sniping and when running freely in the game world. Razer packages the Sabertooth in a slick carrying case, which houses a braided detachable USB 2.0 cable and also button covers in case you want to remove the four programmable buttons at the bottom and two rubber covers for additional grip on the thumb sticks.

The only gripe we have with the Sabertooth is that the additional buttons don't allow you to map more than any one of the normal Xbox 360 buttons to them, thus you can't assign B and X for instance to a single trigger button, but they will instead function as an additional B or X button just located elsewhere. This is a missed opportunity. We also feel that an additional two profiles would be great, but short of that, this controller is sublime. Controllers don't really get better than the Razer Sabertooth, so if you're looking to get a high quality controller you need look no further than here.   **NAG**
   - Neo Sibeko

9   *The Razer Sabertooth improves on an already fantastic Xbox 360 controller, making it arguably the best game controller available today.*

PLUS / *Build quality / Features / Looks fantastic*

MINUS / *Limited programmability / Two profiles only*

EVGA GTX 780 Ti Classified K|NGP|N Edition

› **Website** / www.evga.com › **ERP** / R13,999 › **Supplier** / EVGA

SPECS		
CORE	GK110B (28nm) 1,072MHz (1,137MHz Boost)
PROCESSORS	2,880
RENDER OUTPUTS	48/240
MEMORY	3,072MB GDDR5 7GHz (336GB/sec)
API	DirectX 11.2 / OpenGL 4.4 / OpenCL / PhysX / CUDA

NAG HARDWARE AWARD

W e've tested almost all worthwhile GTX 780 Ti GPUs here at NAG. All of them offer great performance and they are all capable of even better performance with some overclocking. Given that the 780 Ti is the fastest single GPU on the market, it is very difficult to improve upon that as a vendor. Through superior components and cooling, additional clock speeds can be obtained. For the most part however, overclocking limits come down to luck of the draw. At least this is true for regular overclocking where the standard shipping cooler is used.

Under more extreme conditions which extreme overclockers subject their cards to, the component selection, BIOS and general build of the card makes a huge difference. Again, for the determined competitive overclocker, a reference card built to NVIDIA standard spec will go the distance. This is provided you outfit it with an additional PWM board. That process unfortunately can be very daunting, even for the most experienced individuals. Thus, it is best or rather simplest to buy a card that is ready for such endeavours and only requires a GPU cooling pot to reach those speeds north of 1.6GHz.

Most vendors have their own designated overclocking iteration of the 780 Ti and almost all of them claim superior overclocking capabilities. However, what they don't tell the general user is that it will be near impossible for you to reach those record-breaking speeds unless you perform extensive modifications to the graphics card (which voids warranty mind you), and have access to a special privately held BIOS version or overclocking software.

In many cases you'll need a combination of all three things to get anywhere. We have seen this happen time and time again, thus we were not particularly moved initially by the K|NGP|N version of the GTX 780 Ti. After all, it could have easily turned out to be a marketing exercise where said EVGA employee and easily the most respected overclocker of all time would lend his name to a product that doesn't really differ from the rest. Fortunately this isn't the case and the

EVGA card is genuinely what it claims to be.

This is the only graphics card on the market where you literally need nothing but a GPU cooling pot and some liquid-nitrogen to reach speeds north of 1.5GHz.

It is made specifically for extreme overclockers. At the time of writing the cards were sold out and the only way to actually get one is to order from EVGA directly. Fortunately they will ship worldwide including to our shores, for the listed price or there about. As for how this compares with our current Dream Machine graphics card they deliver near identical performance. The difference in benchmark numbers is solely due to the numerous drive updates which have taken place since the introduction of the GPU. Both cards have a boost clock of 1,215MHz (real clock) and both have the memory clocked at 7GHz out the box. As a side note, it is worth mentioning that the K|NGP|N card makes use of Samsung GDDR5 memory so you're likely going to reach speeds of 1.9GHz (7.6GHz QDR) without hassle. Fantastic for those UHD resolutions and benchmark runs (provided

the core speed is sufficiently high). For normal and even very high-end titles it will not be necessary to overclock the memory at all, as there's more than enough memory bandwidth as it is. With all that said and despite the perfect score this card has achieved, we have not elected it as the new Dream Machine GPU simply because of the cost and availability here in South Africa. Other than that, it really is the most impressive GTX 780 Ti money can buy. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

10 *The best GTX 780 Ti money can buy.*

PLUS / *Build quality* / *Ready for extreme overclocking out the box* / *Performance*

MINUS / *Expensive* / *Limited availability locally*

CM Storm Sirus-C

> Website / www.gaming.coolermaster.com   > ERP / TBA   > Supplier / Coolermaster

SPECS		
FREQUENCY RESPONSE	20 ~ 20,000 Hz
IMPEDANCE	50 ohm
INPUT SENSITIVITY	~116dB
THD	< 1%

CM Storm has made some really fantastic headphones in the past, especially their first Sirus set, which was surprisingly good. In a market filled with gaming headsets and just about every vendor reproducing identical cans, the Sirus headphones from 2011 still manage to stand above the vast majority even today.

Back when we tested the headphones, we were impressed with their regular stereo signal performance but were unmoved by the 5.1 capabilities. Like most gaming sets that claim this feature, the surround effect was and remains mildly entertaining at best and all other times it just ruins the imaging and that's even with a surround sound signal going through them.

The Sirus-C then is exactly what we wanted from the beginning. Built around original set, because the Sirus-C does away with the surround support and instead focuses purely on a stereo signal that is however delivered via four drivers. On each side there are two, one 40mm and another slightly larger 44mm unit. The larger unit serves to deliver the LFE or bass if you will, while the smaller one deals with the mid-range and higher frequencies. As you may expect with such a configuration, there is going to be some frequency cross-over between the two drivers, which is a sure recipe for ghosting, however CM Storm has dealt with this pretty well. Each driver has different impedance, (30 and 50 ohms respectively) thus this artifact is for the most part absent. What you do get instead is a punchy, yet warm low to mid-range with fairly respectable highs.

To truly get the best from these you'll need a decent sound card; luckily these days most mid to high-end gaming motherboards have very good audio solutions, thus the Sirus-C ends up sounding even better than the original set. CM Storm has done it again with a wonderful set of cans that punches above its weight division. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

9

The Sirus-C is a better set than the original Sirus, without the gimmicky 5.1 and wonderful tonal balance for a gaming headset.

PLUS / *Comfort / Acoustics / Quick response driver*

MINUS / *Narrow sound stage / Low frequency can be overwhelming at times*

GIGABYTE Z97X GAMING-5

> **Website** / www.gigabyte.com   > **ERP** / R2,800   > **Supplier** / Rectron

SPECS		
CHIPSET	Intel Z97	
MEMORY	4x 240-pin DDR3	
CPU SUPPORT	LGA 1150	
EXPANSION	3xPCIe 16X, 3xPCIe 1X, PCI	
SIZE	ATX	

You're not reading the name of this motherboard incorrectly. It really does share an almost identical model number with the MSI motherboards. Why GIGABYTE decided to name their products after the third largest motherboard vendor when they have effectively become number one, is puzzling to say the least. Moreover, as we mentioned in the previous Z97X motherboard review, the colour scheme has changed to red and black. So with the GAMING-5 GIGABYTE motherboards share a colour scheme and model names with MSI.

That aside, with the GAMING-5, it is clear that GIGABYTE was going after the more budget conscious consumer. This isn't a bad thing; it means many more people have access to great motherboards. However it does mean that some features that were previously taken for granted are no longer with us, and instead we must make do with others which may or may not be worth the trade.

For instance, on the GAMING-5 you'll find no power, reset or POST LED anywhere. Simple features that were present even on the cheaper Z87X-UD3H are nowhere to be seen. So diagnosing potential compatibility issues could prove to be very frustrating. Fortunately however, the BIOS we received with this board is very thorough and we easily configured the system to our testing specification with no issue.

Performance wise, you'll find that the GAMING-5 is right up there with the best of them; in fact it delivered slightly better performance than the Z87-SOC, which still remains one of our favourite GIGABYTE boards of all time. The BIOS has all the same features (at least for memory tuning) and in that regard GIGABYTE has not short changed anyone despite the relatively low price of this board. Audio comes courtesy of the common ALC1150 codec, backed up with Nichicon fine gold capacitors and a 600 ohm headphone amplifier. This configuration is very common of late and so is the inclusion of the Killer E2200 NIC chip.

For a GIGABYTE board, this is a solid product that is mostly let down by an uncompetitive price. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

7 *By GIGABYTE's standards this board is average, but still worth your consideration if you can find it at a more reasonable price.*

PLUS / *Decent sound* / *Easy to overclock*

MINUS / *Missing, power, reset and post LED* / *Looks bland* / *Better featured and priced alternatives*

MSI GE70 Apache Pro Gaming Notebook

› **Website** / www.msi.com   **›** **ERP** / TBA   **›** **Supplier** / MSI

SPECS

CPU	Intel Core i7 4700MQ
GPU	NVIDIA GTX 860M 2GB
MEMORY	8GB DDR3 1,600MHz (single channel)
STORAGE	1TB HDD
OPTICAL DRIVE	None
WEIGHT	1.9kg

BENCHMARK RESULTS

PC Mark8 Creative Suite
(OpenCL Accelerated):
Battery time: 1H: **52m: 44s**
3DMark FireStrike: **3,601**
Catzilla 1080p: **4,290**

MSI has been churning out gaming notebooks at an unprecedented rate over the last couple of years. This year is no different with an entire line up of 2014 models that feature just about every mobile GPU you can think of, mostly from NVIDIA.

One of the key improvements on many of the previous models and perhaps the most important one is the replacing of the GTX 760M and GTX 765M with the GTX 860M. The 700 series GPUs in the mid-range were fairly underwhelming requiring some substantial sacrifices in graphics quality in games to maintain acceptable frame rates. With the GTX 860, performance has improved dramatically and for the most part, any notebook with this GPU (in particular the Maxwell based version) will perform admirably in all games and obviously the synthetic benchmarks.

The MSI GE70 Apache Pro is a more budget conscious notebook that is powered by the 4700MQ, instead of the HQ model. The difference here is not in CPU frequency, but that the HQ model has an IGP that can reach frequencies of up to 1.2GHz instead of the 1.15GHz on this model. In addition, the HQ has VT-d support, which is missing on the MQ. You may wonder then why MSI picked the lesser model especially since they cost the same. Well it could come down to socket choice, because these two CPUs, as similar as they are, are not socket compatible. Regardless of the reason, this is a potent CPU and as far as mobile processors go, you couldn't ask for better.

MSI chose to pair this CPU with a single 8GB DDR3 1,600MHz DIMM. This single-channel configuration robs the CPU of its full potential. There's no need for 16GB but at least a dual channel 2x4GB setup would improve performance throughout the entire system. This is especially true because the Apache Pro does not feature an SSD, but was sampled to us with a single 1TB mechanical drive. The difference in performance is obvious in most tasks. Once again a 64GB SSD with a 750GB hard drive would have done the trick and probably affected costs minimally.

In regards to the overall build quality, the screen is impressive as is the norm with MSI gaming notebooks, however the body that houses the components uses less than stellar plastics. This carries through to the keyboard that doesn't feel as good as the other "SteelSeries" keyboards in the range. All that is forgivable however when weighed against the track pad which has very deep and resistive buttons. Using the track pad becomes a pain as it requires a little too much force to make any selection and given that MSI doesn't include a mouse with this unit, this can be very frustrating.

Performance wise, this notebook is no slouch, once you're well into a game you'll suffer no slowdowns due to lack of performance. Sure there may be some longer load times initially because of the single mechanical drive, but after the level assets have been loaded its smooth sailing from there. The speakers are not fantastic, but they are helped by the Sound Blaster Cinema 2 software which gives some depth and added volume to the game sounds. With a few tweaks here and there, this could be the perfect notebook to game on the go without breaking the budget. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

7 *The Apache Pro is a solid offering from MSI.*

PLUS / GTX 860M offers acceptable / *performance* / *Backlit keyboard* / *Modest weight*

MINUS / *Not as stylish as the GS60 or as slim* / *No SSD provided* / *Tacky track pad*

AOC A2472PW4T mySmart All-in-One Android PC

❯ Website / www.aoc-europe.com ❯ RRP / R6,899 ❯ Supplier / Text 100

Do us a favour: take a quick look at your PC's monitor. Do you ever wonder what it does while it's turned off, when its display is devoid of life? Does it have a purpose when it's not serving as the visual gateway to your machine's innards? Most importantly, does it miss you when you're gone? Of course not, don't be silly. It's just a screen.

AOC's All-in-One Android PC would miss you though. Because it's smart. It has a brain. Sort of. It'll be your display whenever you need it to be, eagerly showing you whatever you want to see using any device you'd like. But even when there's no companion device nearby, it'll still operate as a fully functional Android PC, ready to do your bidding and serve you Internet coffee whenever you desire. The future was a week ago, and now your screen's a Droid. Mind blown.

NAILING THE BASICS
As a display, there's not much to fault this All-in-One on. The quality of the image produced isn't as sharp as we'd like, but it does the job admirably. It's also got a host of options for customising colour, brightness and more.

IT'S ALL IN THE TOUCH
Given that is has to function as an Android device on the side, the display is multi-touch capable, so you can use it with a Windows PC to access the full range of pinches and gestures and taps Microsoft offers, and there's an enormous on-screen keyboard if you need it. You can obviously still use a regular mouse and keyboard though.

YOU CAN DROID IF YOU WANT TO
The Android side of things boasts all the bells and whistles, running on 4.2 Jelly Bean and letting you read emails, browse the Internet, flip through photo galleries and access all your multimedia content without needing to boot up your PC. We did find the Android performance a bit sluggish, but not enough so to be a deal-breaker.

WORKS WITH EVERYTHING
HDMI and USB connectivity means you can use this All-in-One with a whole host of different companion devices, including your gaming consoles, amplifiers/receivers, mobile gadgets and more.

EXTRAS
It's outfitted with a pair of 2W speakers, which don't exactly deliver amazing sound but they'll do in a pinch. You'll also find a built-in webcam and microphone. Naturally, with Google's Play Store at your fingertips, there's a whole world of app-enabled possibilities to explore as well.

THE LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE

TECHNICAL
SoC: NVIDIA Tegra 3 T33 (quad-core, 1.6GHz)
RAM: 2GB DDR3
Flash storage: 8GB eMMC
Android OS: 4.2 Jelly Bean
Screen: 23.6-inch, 1920x1080, IPS
Inputs: 1 x VGA, 1 x HDMI, 2x USB 2.0, 1x Ethernet
Connectivity: Bluetooth, Wi-Fi 802.11 b/g/n

SUMMARY

PROS
Dual functionality is excellent

CONS
Android performance occasionally sluggish / Not the greatest display quality

ALTERNATIVES
• Acer TA272 HUL
• ASUS Transformer AiO P1801
• HP Slate 21 Pro AiO

La-Z-Boy Norman recliner

Website / www.la-z-boy.co.za   RRP / R10,600   Supplier / Alpine Lounge

THE LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE

sn't it incredible how often we manage to write about chairs in this gaming magazine? It makes a sort of twisted sense, given that right now, you're probably sitting on some form of chair. And later, when you're squeezing in a bit of quality gaming time, you'll also likely do it sitting on a chair. Unless you're weird. Or broken. Or something. Obviously. The point is, people love chairs. Gamers love chairs! We *love* chairs. The only thing that's better than a chair is a comfortable chair. And La-Z-Boy's Norman is one of the most comfy chairs out there.

TECHNICAL

Width:
870mm
Height:
1,100mm
Depth:
750mm
Full extension:
1,600mm

SUMMARY

PROS
Comfortable / Great quality

CONS
We tried to use it as a boat, but it didn't work

ALTERNATIVES
The floor / Other things that are also chairs

AWARDS
NAG Seal of Great Lumbar Support

LYING DOWN ON THE JOB
The Norman is a rocker recliner. Which means that not only does it rock back and forth at will, but it'll also recline on command. That's the closest thing to magic we've ever experienced.

THE SCIENCE OF SITTING
In order to correctly use the Norman, follow these steps carefully.

Step one: approach the chair in a non-aggressive manner.

Step two: rotate your body 180 degrees, such that your bum is facing the sitting apparatus.

Step three: fall backwards in a controlled fashion, bending your knees as you do so.

Step four: manoeuvre your buttocks and back into a comfortable position.

Step five: relax.

BUILT TO LAST
This hyper-fancy butt-holder is made of the sort of top-quality materials you'd expect from La-Z-Boy. The arms are available in either a wood or chrome finish, and it's covered in real leather, which looks great and is more durable than fabric. The Norman's frame and mechanism boasts a ten-year warranty as well.

MULTIFUNCTIONAL
Its footrest (operated using the giant lever on its side) is able to lock into three different positions so you can customise your comfort. From there, you can recline into any position you'd like, and the Norman will supposedly ensure lower-back support no matter how you choose to do your lazing around. Remember kids: take good care of your lumbar and your lumbar will take good care of you. **NAG**

MOSH*pit*

This month's hot list of cool stuff and everything else you simply must have. Well, almost everything.

❯ AOC E1659FWU LCD USB MONITOR

❯ **Supplier /** AOC
❯ **Website /** www.aoc.com
❯ **RRP /** R2,489

Powered by a single USB cable (and that same cable also provides the input signal), AOC's E1659FWU is a conveniently portable companion display. It supports USB 3.0 to provide high transfer rates and therefore the best possible image quality. A carry case is included, and it can even be wall-mounted if you so choose.

Its 15.6-inch viewable area can be utilised in both landscape and portrait mode by using the foldable, rotating stand. It'll automatically switch the display's orientation too, so you don't have to manually fiddle with settings. Built-in DisplayLink tech allows you to use more than one of these monitors with a laptop. Other useful stats include a 500:1 contrast ratio, native resolution of 1366x768 and 5ms response time.

❯ SANDISK EXTREME II SOLID STATE DRIVE

❯ **Supplier /** SanDisk
❯ **Website /** www.sandisk.com
❯ **RRP /** R3,499 (240GB)

If you want the fastest possible performance from a storage device, you've got to get yourself an SSD. File transfers are blazing fast, and the SanDisk Extreme II has been fine-tuned for maximum efficiency, ensuring excellent read/write performance. In real-world terms, it means that your productivity applications will be more responsive (applications will load faster and the like), and for gaming you'll see reduced loading times and, depending on the rest of your hardware, you may even see a slight boost in overall gaming performance.

The Extreme II is available in 120GB, 240GB and 500GB variants. It guarantees brilliant data reliability, so you're less likely to lose data due to drive failures. It also boasts various technologies that'll increase the lifespan of the drive.

❯ MSI NIGHTBLADE

❯ **Supplier** / Corex
❯ **Website** / www.corex.co.za
❯ **RRP** / R7,995

As Mini-ITX motherboards gain popularity in full-size gaming machine builds, we can't forget that their original purpose was to be squeezed into small cases like the MSI Nightblade chassis. This barebones system includes an MSI Z87I GAMING motherboard, 600W power supply, Super RAID chip, CPU cooler and all the cabling you need to get started. Inside the case there's room for a couple of SSDs, a slot-loading optical drive (or full-size HDD), and even a dual-slot video card. We should mention that the card must have a completely flush underside, otherwise it'll struggle to fit alongside a stock Intel HSF. And, while there is room for a watercooling system, you will need to make sure there's space for a video card in there as well.

This is a tiny case, so space is at a premium, but for most purposes there'll be enough room to fit in everything you need. Together with the built-in cable-management solutions and overall high quality of this case, there's no doubt that this is one of the best ways to start your LAN gaming build.

❯ KISAI X ACETATE WHITE LED WATCH

❯ **Supplier** / Tokyoflash Japan
❯ **Website** / www.tokyoflash.com
❯ **RRP** / $149

At first glance, the Kisai X appears to be a wristwatch. But then its face lights up with cryptically-arranged LEDs that make it seemingly impossible to glean the time without first obtaining a degree in cryptography. So then you start to doubt yourself, and begin questioning your ability to tell the difference between watches and everything else in the world that isn't a watch. You consider banishing yourself to a remote, deserted island, because what good are you to the human race if you can't tell a watch apart from a not-watch.

Thankfully, before any of that happens you look a little closer and realise that this watch simply displays the time all science fiction-like via specifically stylised numbers within a four-piece grid, and the universe returns to normal. Made from white acetate, the Kisai X oozes enough quality to make it stand out, even without its enigmatic time-telling abilities. It'll also tell you the date and allow you to set an alarm, if you're interested. The watch is recharged via USB, and a few hours of charging will get you around a month of use. It's available with blue, red or green LEDs.

❯ KOTOBUKIYA ARTFX DEATHSTROKE STATUE

❯ **Supplier /** Cosmic Comics
❯ **Website /** www.cosmiccomics.co.za
❯ **RRP /** R2,200

Deathstroke is the bad guy in Teen Titans and has many superhuman abilities, is proficient in combat and also can heal himself to a degree. The 30cm tall statue is solidly made, nicely coloured and ships with a detachable stand, unmasked face and two-part sword. Unlike some statues there's nowhere smart to store the unmasked face — so don't lose it. That said, you probably want to leave the mask attached otherwise you're left looking at a metal strip on his helmet that secures the mask by the powerful magic of magnets. This is a pity as his face is a real work of art, so angry and determined that he could even be used as motivation to study or whatever you need motivating in. At the price and relative obscurity of the character this is definitely one for the serious collector. It's a highly detailed classy statue but only for the right buyer.

❯ DARK SOULS II: WARRIOR KNIGHT STATUE

❯ **Supplier /** AWX
❯ **Website /** www.awx.co.za
❯ **RRP /** R800

This is the same dude, map and artwork book from the collector's edition of the game *Dark Souls II*. It's ideal if you somehow missed getting the collector's edition, or you didn't know at the time if you'd love the game enough to want a collector's edition or perhaps your significant other bought it for you because you never stop playing the game. Whatever the reason, this 30cm tall statue falls into that middle of the road category in terms of quality and feel and is priced accordingly. It's pretty well detailed and painted, but the ground is a bit rubbish. It's nice and heavy so be careful where you put it — those swords could take an eye out, Timmy. The statue is also permanently attached to the base and you can remove the swords by dismantling the pommels. As a bonus, and not something you see with statues, it comes with two extras. The included cloth game map is lovely to look at and hold and the artwork book is as impressive as it looks. A good buy if you fall into any other category discussed above.

❯ KOTOBUKIYA MARVEL BISHOUJO SPIDER-WOMAN STATUE

❯ **Supplier /** Cosmic Comics
❯ **Website /** www.cosmiccomics.co.za
❯ **RRP /** R999

When I was a kid I always thought that if a "Spider-man" met a "Spider-woman" they should immediately get married and make little spider babies. But that's not the case with Jessica Drew, daughter to researchers who accidentally irradiated her; she has no link to Spider-Man who was bitten by a spider. If only radiation worked like that instead of just killing you like it does outside of comic books. If you paid attention during recent Marvel movies you'll know all about HYDRA (plot thickening soon) and you'll be interested to know that Spider-Woman used to work for HYDRA where she learned her particular skill set. Now she's a goody two-shoes and works hard to save Earth and its miserable inhabitants. The petite statue looks great, is highly detailed and comes with an unmasked face (rather pretty too) — the hair is particularly well crafted and it looks like Spider-Woman is having a very busy hair day. She stands about 14cm tall and comes with a web-themed base that also doubles as a storage compartment for the face/mask you're not using. Spider-Woman is rather shiny, smooth and brightly coloured and arranged by Shunya Yamashita. It's lovely to look at and definitely a great buy.

❯ THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #1

❯ **Supplier** / Cosmic Comics
❯ **Website** / www.cosmiccomics.co.zam
❯ **RRP** / R79

The recent spin-off series *The Superior Spider-Man* did a few interesting things with the series, the most notable of which was switching the minds of Peter Parker and Otto Octavius (Doc Ock). It made for an interesting, gritty and very readable experience that spanned some 30 issues, ultimately ending in Peter reclaiming his body. It also made for a great place to start a new series of *The Amazing Spider-Man* (the core series), with this new #1.

Peter's back but Doc Ock has left his life in rather a different place. It makes for an exciting new beginning for the character and the series as a whole. With its wealth of contemporary pop culture references, it seems aimed at a younger crowd (you know, the original target for comics), but has enough classic stuff to keep the oldies among us interested. There's a ton of extra content in this comic so don't be too alarmed by the high price for a single issue, and the high quality of writing and art throughout should be enough to convince you that this is a serious new venture for Marvel.

❯ BATMAN VOLUME 3: DEATH OF THE FAMILY

❯ **Supplier** / Cosmic Comics
❯ **Website** / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
❯ **RRP** / R230

Batman has always represented the darker side of DC, and this volume, forming part of the publisher's New 52 series, is no different. What starts out very slowly eventually becomes one of the stranger Batman stories around, and, while it stays pretty sedate in the action department and can be a bit excessively wordy at times, is no slouch when it comes to the intriguing noire stuff that is common for the Dark Knight. It's a moody, gritty and disturbing story that has plenty of throwbacks, and will likely remind readers of Alan Moore's classic *The Killing Joke* more than a few times.
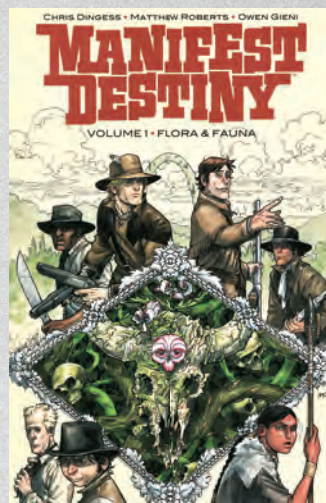
❯ MANIFEST DESTINY VOLUME 1: FLORA & FAUNA

❯ **Supplier** / Cosmic Comics
❯ **Website** / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
❯ **RRP** / R169

The Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804 saw two famous men and a number of less well-known chaps descend into darkest Northern America during a time when little was known about the locals other than their ferocity in battle. It makes for a fun setting, then, for the really unknown – plant zombies and buffalo-men being right up there. That's the idea behind *Manifest Destiny*, and from what we can tell in this explosive first book, its set to be a great adventure replete with stylish artwork that's never too fancy for its own good, and punchy writing that keeps a solid pace throughout.

❯ DIRECTORY

WHERE TO FIND ALL THE STUFF FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

GG

by Tarryn van der Byl

Tarryn is obsessed with cats, Gamerscore, Le Creuset, meatza and *Alan Wake 2*. There's a lot you can tell about someone by reading their Twitter feed.

Bad education

When I was about 10, I learned the word "glean" while playing *King's Quest I*. But even more significant, perhaps, was the context in which I learned it:

"Pardon me. This program is too stupid to glean your desire from such a wonderfully crafted sentence. Please try something else."

Determined that I should never fail to glean something with such egregious nonchalance (after somewhat surreptitiously looking up the word in a dictionary, anyway), I resolved to acquire all the knowledge in the whole universe, ever. Some 20 years later, this mission is obviously ongoing, but in the meantime, I've learned a lot more stuff – and one of the most important things I've learned is that I should never learn a thing without first making sure the thing I'm learning is actually a thing, and that's just the start of the learning process. Wait, let me explain.

I previously told you I'd learned the word "glean" in *King's Quest I*. I totally lied. That error message appeared only in *Space Quest III,* a fact quickly and easily verified with a Google search. Granted, it's not a fact that has any substantial impact on, say, major global events or what you're having for lunch or something else with immediate relevance to... anything whatsoever, but the point is to think critically about the information you're given.

In a letter printed in the June issue of *NAG*, reader Joshua Ellish mentioned a video he'd watched at school about the "hidden advantages of gaming" – including things like improving hand-eye coordination, language, and maths skills, helping with ADHD, and developing creativity. The video isn't wrong – multiple existing studies support these findings at one level or another – but Joshua's subsequent claim that games must therefore be "building the next-generation of all-star athletes and improving people on an academic level" isn't exactly accurate either.

I mean, winning 500 games of *Call of Duty* isn't going to adequately prepare you for a 5km run, and memorising the entire map of *Skyrim* won't help you pass geography – but you (and Joshua) know that already. The real problem is accepting and reiterating a "fact" – here, that gaming has some advantages – without ever questioning the reality and practical implications of it. In this case, a player who skips through dialogue is probably not going to improve their language skills, a player who consults a walkthrough isn't developing any sort of creativity, and a player with a short attention span can't finish their homework now, mom, because they have to beat this game first, and then this other game... and then I forgot what I was about to do so now I'm doing this instead. If we're honest, I'm sure we can all admit to guilt on each count, at one time or another. It's not that the argument's premise is false, but that the conclusion is subject to certain terms and conditions - and these must be considered too.

So in my own conclusion subject to terms and conditions, 10-year old me wanted to know everything, but older, wiser me knows that knowing is only half the job complete.

EXTRA LIFE

*By Scott Johnson / ©2014 All rights reserved / **myextralife.com***