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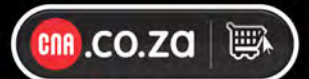
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Generation what?



▶ Since the Xbox One launched internationally and the PS4 did so locally, I've been tussling with people over the definition of "next generation" and "current generation". As a primarily PC gamer all I had to do was upgrade my video card to catch up, and now, finally, the Xbox One has arrived on local shores so we can all stop fighting about things. Or everyone else can stop trying to argue with me. I was right all along, of course.

Now that I have an Xbox One, PS4 and a current-spec gaming PC, it got me thinking: what am I supposed to do with my Xbox 360? As games journalists we tend to get flooded with new games, and I already have a stack of XBO titles waiting patiently to earn some living room time. The only game I still play on my 360 is *GTA V*, and with the current gen release on its way I don't see myself spending any time with the old console. That's kind of... sad. We've had some great times over the years and I don't know if I like the feeling of being forced into a new platform just to stay on top of things. On the bright side, we have a whole new generation of games to look forward to, so now that I've got my sob-story out of the way I can move forwards!

If you haven't followed the Xbox One's escapades over the last year, then we've got you covered with a tidy four-page feature in this issue: Tarryn will fill you in on the hardware, interface, and most importantly: the games.

COD OF DUTY

The new *COD* looks wicked cool, and after the let-down that was *Ghosts*, we can't wait

to see the finished product. Miklós spent a good bit of time with *Advanced Warfare* and its developers while in Cologne for this year's Gamescom, and has come back with all sorts of squishy feelings for the game which you can read in this issue.

DO IT YOURSELF

This month we've got a feature that's very close to my heart: a quick-start guide to getting started with game development in South Africa. It really is a quick-start guide: if I had a hundred pages I'd love to write more about it, but I tried to cram in as much information as possible without getting too many nasty looks from SAVAGE about going over word count limits. We also called in a few favours from a couple of established game developers to share their wisdom with you. This all forms part of our home_coded initiative which is rapidly gaining momentum, and will continue to grow as long as there are people out there interested in making their own games.

WHOOPIE!

Somewhere along the way, we made a small mistake in our Early Access feature in the August issue of *NAG*. We accidentally put down Double Fine as the developers of *Nuclear Throne* when in fact it's the excellent Vlambeer that's behind this gem. Sorry folks!

Here's to a great Q4 of gaming! **NAG**
-GeometriX

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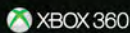
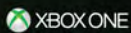


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letters@nag.co.za

Letter of the Month September 2014

From: Matthew R

Subject: Growing Up or Just Not as Interested as Before?

Salutations NAG and fellow NAG readers, I'm sure we can all agree that NAG is in fact the worlds best source of gaming news and for that, I thank you NAG team :)

I'd like to discuss something that's been weighing on my mind for a couple of days now: Do gamers ever "grow out of" gaming?

Is there a certain time in our live's when we just aren't interested in games anymore? (It's a bit ironic making a

statement like that in a magazine dedicated to people who's lives revolve around games for the most part but anyhoo) Is there time when we, completely against our own will, feel our passion for gaming slip away?

Some people do in fact grow out of it whilst other people like the NAG team pursue gaming to become fabled legends only to be read about in NAG. But I just got to thinking: Am I growing out of it completely or is it just not as important to me as it used to be?

I'm still a sucker for any sandbox, RPG with a good story don't get me wrong but I can't help but think that somewhere along the line something just clicked and now no matter how hard I try I can't unclick it.

Gaming has always defined me. Ever since I was a young lad and my dad would let me play what I think was a Nintendo of some description, I've been into games. But now that I'm not sure that its the most important thing anymore, what comes after gaming?

This is something that I think most gamers face in their lives, and it's often a cause of a lot of internal conflict. "Is this thing that I've done for my whole life pointless?" Eh, kind of. But that's the point of stuff that's fun, right? It's meant to have the option to be disposable. It's meant to say to you "hey, gamer person, here I am, feel

"Gaming has always defined me. Ever since I was a young lad and my dad would let me play what I think was a Nintendo of some description, I've been into games."

THIS MONTH'S PRIZE

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



megarom
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free to get as much or as little enjoyment from me as you'd like."

Some people turn games into something more than just a pastime, and that's awesome. I love that this industry has the depth to let this happen, but if it doesn't happen to you, or it's stopped happening to you, that's okay. Life pro tip: you define yourself and you're allowed to change that definition whenever the hell you feel like it.

If you're feeling lost then I suggest you take a step back, survey your surroundings and see how you feel after a week or two. Play games the way you want to play them, not how you're "supposed" to play them. Ed.



From: Kia Moeng

Subject: Innovation

Change is something we gamers want. We want it more than anything else. At least we say we do. We are all guilty of saying we want an innovative game yet we still go ahead and purchase COD 11. Or the 1 millionth sims game. But we shouldn't beat ourselves up too much. It's human instinct. Babies refuse to be separated from their mothers which is a change from always being around mommy. My question to you is: in your opinion, why do we always beat up developers about releasing something that isn't new and different but then go on to spend our money or parents money on ANOTHER sequel? Wouldn't this be encouragement to the developers to keep releasing sequels?

I'd love to say that gamers are some sort of being greater than the people who rush out to watch the latest Transformers movie, but really, we're all the same. You see, human beings are, for the most part, creatures of habit. This is why take-away places like Steers and Roman's Pizza do so well: because they offer consistent products. They get the same flak from their customers who demand innovation and change but who then go straight back to a King Steer burger when the option of a caramelised onion and feta rib burger pops up on the menu.

Maybe we're all still wild beasts inside: desperate for adventure and danger but really just content to sit on a warm couch and eat chips all day because it's safe. Damn our primitive brains. Ed.

From: Jodien Munnik

Subject: School helping my gaming experience

Salutations my dear magazine makers.... Or tipers.... Whatever. I am terribly, no infuriatingly mad at myself for my lack in gaming experience! Why? Good question! Our Afrikaans teacher gave us a task to write a four page essay on Electronic Sport (In Afrikaans of course). As he handed out the task I thought to myself ' Ugh! Steroids all over again!' So I got home started up my PC and guess what I found? Gaming competitions! I was shocked to see it is competitions for professional gamers! I started immediatly at about 2PM and ended sharply at about 11PM! It was the most knowledge I would take in for such a long time! The best part of this whole letter is the fact that school learned me something fun!

ON THE FORUMS

It's not accurate to say that we don't bite, but you probably won't get too much Rabies in the event that we do www.nag.co.za/forums

QUESTION / What gaming peripheral/device/component of yours do you absolutely love?

My Microsoft Mouse is an endangered species, I think, but in the end it has to be my 24" Samsung LCD.

- Squirly

My motherboard. Oh no wait, that died two weeks ago.

- Raedwulf

My fat old Logitech mouse. Been through hell and back with it and the day it departs me will be a sad one indeed.

- Shaderow

Would be a tough decision between my Corsair M65 mouse and my Crucial M500 SSD. Dem load times, daaaaaamn.

- Azraphael

Who knew, right? Now I'm practically still pledging suicide on GTA for not knowing any of this! Can you please send someone to kill me on Halo for this crucial mistake I've made? I feel like a disgrace to the gaming society and all nobles who have taught me what I know! But on the bright side, now I at least know what Dota 2 is... Right?

...right.

Well first off, yes, you should throw yourself upon your sword in disgrace. No, wait, that's terrible advice. Don't do that. Maybe throwing your GTA character into the ocean once or twice is fine. That's still kind of psychotic, though, so you should probably get your head checked by a professional when you get some time.

Otherwise, welcome to the exciting world of eSports! Yes, it's a thing – some people play video games for a living. It's not nearly as glamorous as you might imagine, but it's still a pretty cool thing. Ed.

From: Gabriel Innes

Subject: Letter of the month... no

I have noticed that there is a reoccurring theme in every edition

in both the reviews and the opinions. That theme is repetition. Repetition in the sequels, repetition in game play, and repetition in the fights that people have defending the repetition of their favorite game. I too have wondered about the merits of mmos. It is of course a waste of time to dwell on what other people find fun. Some people may find running through Skyrim repetitive whereas I love it.

What is the point of saying all this? Well I'm tired of reading the same tired old arguments, and lets face it we all have repetitive behaviors when it comes gaming. I for one play almost every game by sneaking around and silently taking everybody out. I do this every game I can; every game. So who am I to judge on generic game play or samey sequels. With the same logic I say please leave other people to enjoy their games and enjoy your own.

I know this may be as effective as asking the troll under the bridge to stop eating hobbits, but it was worth a shot right...right?

Wait, are you complaining about people who complain about repetition? If someone then comes along and complains about you, does



Tbone Mapukata, "Sent from my Vodafone Smart mini."*

*You are allowed to include a message, you know.

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 *World of Tanks* for 360, valued at R249 + An Xbox 360 Play & Charge Kit, valued at R299.



that make you wrong or just insane? Probably insane.

You've kind of countered your own argument by saying "hey, I do this thing, just chill and let me be" – you might want to think about applying that same thinking to your complaints. Some people love to argue and complain about the most trivial things. Have you considered that that's their way of playing? Yeah, some people are just like that.

In summary: games are made to be fun; everyone has their own kind of fun; some people are dicks. Ed.

From: Steynkie
Subject: THE SAD AND JADED FORUM STINKER

I have been a gamer for 20 odd years now, and it's still the best hobby ever. Over the years I've been spoilt with some excellent titles, and it does make you picky and finicky about the next game, but not to the extreme. One thing I've realised is that all games cannot be brilliant, and there will always be disappointments, so I pick my games carefully, and read a lot of reviews beforehand. (NAG reviews being the most trusted, of course).

When there's a new release I've been anticipating for a while, I usually hop onto the NAG forums to see what my fellow gamers have to say.... and that's where I met him.

[Snipped for brevity. Ed]

I really think this guy should give it up and go collect stamps or something. When gaming starts turning you into a negative, cynical turd, it's time for a drastic change. He should sell his gear, leave the forums, and go find a toilet. Please don't hang

around and stink it up for those who still enjoy the hobby.

Ah yes, the NAG forums. We're a funny bunch but despite our centuries-long arguments we're all there for the same reason, and that's gaming. Sometimes people voice their opinions, sometimes people shove their opinions down the throats of others, and sometimes people get kicked in the face for daring to mutter an opinion that's contrary to the norm.

I like to think of the NAG forums as a training ground for real life, but in a safe little bubble that has a report button in case things get out of hand. Try not to let anyone's negativity rub off on you too much, and remember to take a breather before you engage with people of turd-like nature. Ed.

From: Hannibal Bateman
Subject: Stereotypes and misconceptions about gamers

As a 21-year old individual that grew up to see the gaming industry change at a drastic pace over the last ten years, one would have thought that people would evolve and change along with the industry itself, gamers and non-gamers alike. I was in all camps once, PC, PS1 to PS3 and I was just as hard a fanboy as any other. But I evolved, and matured at long last. I don't tell the other guy his console sucks, and certainly don't spend all day on the couch either in front of my TV playing Xbox. I'm a responsible modern-day citizen that's also a student. I'm also a person that loves the gym, and not because I have fat to lose but a physique to maintain and build. I'm

THE SHORTS

[extracts of LOL from the NAG audience]

"Platform exclusive is truly driving me mad (Bruce Banner kind of mad)"
– Muzzleflash

"There's always a source that causes laziness-video game are just the release"
– Musa Ntshangase

"Of all the sports games I enjoy I find tennis to be the fat lazy one trailing behind"
– Ronaldo Badenhorst

someone who also has issues that needs to be remedied. But all these things will never change one thing: I'm a gamer.

Is your name really Hannibal Bateman? That's awesome. You should chat to your parents about their serial killer obsession though.

Also: nice. Remedy your issues, klap gym boet, and play a bunch of games. You're a real human! It's nice to know that there are some balanced people out there... sometimes I get the impression that we're all just a bunch of nuts in a giant nut house.

ON TWITTER

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odi Kan

@nagcoza Playing Dead Space 3 with the lights off #bliss

Wootware Computers

Wootware @DOTA2 team playing their 3rd match now in the ISGaming / @nagcoza Corporate Battle Tournament! GLHF! #ISGamingNAGCBT

kgosietsile

@Nagcoza brought a girl home we went to my room end up doing.... Read my old nag magazines #shithappens

Kristen

Thought my @nagcoza magazine didn't come only to find out that my family never told me it arrived last Thursday. #traitors

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MIKTAR'S MEANDERINGS

by Miktar Dracon

Three-dee by degrees

Miktar secretly hopes for the zombie apocalypse because it will mean nobody will try to get him to do a high five again. But he's forgotten about the other survivors and their high five ways.

A friend moved in with my neighbour recently. They're looking for work in this area, and my neighbour was nice enough to put them up rent-free for a while. He's just that kind of guy. The friend, let's call him Jeff, is absolutely cuckoo for 3D. The stereoscopy kind, y'know, like what you see at the movies when watching a 3D movie. He prefers the "active" stereoscopic system, over the "passive" kind the 3D movies use. He has an active 3D TV for watching 3D movies, an active 3D PC monitor for 3D gaming, and a Nintendo 3DS, and watches all movies in 3D where possible. Jeff likes things in 3D.

For reference, passive stereoscopy uses polarised lenses, which removes the need for power in the glasses. The movie projector displays two images on the screen at the same time, interlaced. Every alternating row is polarized to match either the left or right lenses. So you end up seeing both images at once, but a different angle in each eye. It really is just a fancier version of the red/blue anaglyph 3D glasses.

Active stereoscopy, the kind Jeff likes, uses a shutter system in the glasses. Each lens is a simple LCD screen which can be clear or darkened depending on if power is going to that lens or not. The system works by rapidly blocking the left eye, then the right, alternating at a high frequency. This frequency is timed to match the frames being shown on the screen. This requires the glasses to be both powered and synced to the refresh rate of the screen in some way, usually via an infrared beam. The benefit to this system is you don't have to interlace the stereo images row for row, you're literally just alternating between the left eye view and right eye view very fast, full frame. It's better this way, I'm told.

Active stereoscopic screens need to have a very high refresh rate to compensate for the fact that they're showing double the frames. One such screen is the Samsung Syncmaster 2233RZ. Jeff recently upgraded his 3D setup to a newer model, and gave me his Syncmaster to try. Along with it, the first-generation NVIDIA 3D Vision glasses and syncing device, which plugs into a USB port. I figured "why not?" – it should be interesting to see how the various games work with the setup. What I found was: very few games actually work with 3D Vision.

For a game to work with a 3D display, passive or active, the game's engine needs to be programmed just right. Elements in the scene need to be layered at the right depth to prevent weird overlaps or things popping out in the foreground when they should be in the distance. Games that have an "Excellent" rating with 3D Vision, were pretty great, but I found the effect to be quite a strain on the eyes. I would constantly try to focus near/far rapidly, because the brain is going "oh that thing is in the distance, let's focus on it" but



in reality, it's still just an arm's length from my face on the monitor. Our eyes don't see at a fixed depth, but games do.

Games that didn't have an "Excellent" rating, meaning the games that weren't tailored to work perfectly with the 3D Vision, weren't that great in 3D. NVIDIA's drivers try to fudge it by just using the Z-buffer (the rendering engine's depth calculations) as a measure for how far back or forward elements in the scene are. Many games do weird Z-buffer tricks, usually for optimisation, that when viewed through a basic 3D conversion result in strange things like shadows being in the foreground in front of the character, or HUD elements being in the distance. The drivers try to alleviate this problem somewhat by recommending what settings to turn off (usually shadows). Out of the twenty or so games I tried, everything from first-person shooters to role-playing games, less than a third worked "okay", and only three were "perfect". Add on to that, when you play a game in stereoscope, it has to render the scene twice (one for each eye), so your frame rate is half what it usually is.

I gave Jeff his screen and 3D Vision kit back. There's a serious lack of support by NVIDIA and game developers for 3D gaming. Perhaps the Oculus Rift will change that. **NAG**

An old friend

Activision resurrects Sierra to publish smaller games

When publishers try to tap into the lucrative indie market, we can't help but give a little derisive chortle, but at the same time we admit it's a good thing for small studios to get budgets and have the opportunity to make their dreams a reality. And so, with massive internal conflict, here's the future of Activision's "indie" wing: Sierra Entertainment.

Yup, Sierra. As in kings chatting with cabbages, cat people flying carpets in a desert, flipping on your sirens to drive through red robots Sierra. Activision has worked its strongest magic to resurrect this ancient force with a new purpose: to find indie developers, give them access to funds and some of the greatest properties in gaming history, and help them produce new games.

The new Sierra, which has a very loose blessing from founders Ken and Roberta Williams (but no involvement otherwise), has already signed on studios The Odd Gentlemen and Lucid Games to produce new *King's Quest* and *Geometry Wars* games, respectively.

While Sierra's first two games are based on existing IPs, the company is also interested in expanding into uncharted territory. The goal here is to not rely purely on tapping into the nostalgia of older gamers, but to bring in new fans as well.

At first, Sierra plans to release games through digital distribution on PC and console only. Mobile might come at a later stage. Pricing hasn't yet been confirmed but they've said that they'll examine their options on a case-by-case basis to ensure this isn't about pumping out endless \$10-15 titles: every level of game can find a place here.

twitch

Google gets twitchy with online streaming

Since Google purchased Twitch.tv in July (for a snazzy billion dollars), there's been mass speculation about how much the online streaming service is going to get "Google-fied". Now we have that answer.

Twitch recently announced that from now on, all recorded video (not the live streamed content) will be subject to probing under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), which means any video that contains copyrighted music will be muted partially or entirely. Like YouTube, this process is automated.

The effects that this will have on the huge back catalogue of recorded video on Twitch.tv is staggering. Most people who stream do so with music in the background – these videos will now be censored, effectively ruining them and dragging down not just broadcasters, but the usefulness of the service as a whole.



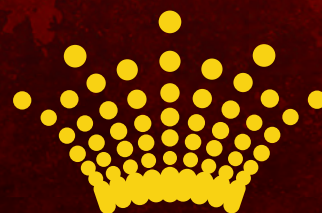
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I, GAMER

by Miklós Szecsei

Live from Gamescom 2014... kind of

There's a multi-storey, glass-fronted building outside my window that's branded with a big LANXESS logo. I have never heard of this company, but I'm staring at their building right now. There's a bright green tree in front of it and I think a seagull just flew past, which is odd because I'm sitting in Germany and the last I checked the coastline was quite far away. Or maybe it isn't? Geography was never my strong point. The Rhine is just there though, so perhaps it's some sort of weird, sea/river gull that can't quite make up its mind as to where it ought to live. Cologne is a nice place so it may as well stay here.

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I can tell you that tomorrow morning I'm seeing a highly secretive and embargoed presentation of the new *Skylanders* mobile offering. I can also tell you that I have a spot booked to attend the multiplayer debut for Sledgehammer Games' *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare*. (This is all embargoed and by even putting these words to digital paper I've broken about a gajillion NDA documents. But it doesn't matter because these words will only see some form of physical manifestation in a few weeks.) It's somewhat surreal because the cofounder of Sledgehammer LITERALLY JUST Tweeted a teaser image of the stage area for tomorrow's event; those geographical barriers that normally keep us South Africans separated from the internal goings-on of the gaming industry have been levelled for the next few days. The gaming world is looking here right this moment, and "here" is just starting to rev its engines.

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Crytek falling apart at the seams, closes UK and US development houses

Homefront: The Revolution picked up by Deep Silver



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Crytek development teams across the globe (from Shanghai to Nottingham to Austin) have had to deal with late salaries or no salaries at all. In some instances this has resulted in staff walking out. Sadly, two prominent Crytek development teams are no more: Crytek UK and Crytek USA.

Crytek UK was working on the *Homefront* reboot subtitled *The Revolution*. The entire *Homefront* IP has since been purchased by Deep Silver, who was originally going to co-publish *Homefront: The Revolution* with Crytek. They will now be publishing the game on their own. Insofar as continued development is concerned, the vast majority of Crytek UK staff members have moved to a new team called Deep Silver Dambuster Studios, so at least there's some good news for many Crytek UK staffers.

Crytek USA, on the other hand, is in a less cheery position. You may recall that the majority of Crytek USA is actually made up of Vigil Games members who were picked up by Crytek after THQ died. Unfortunately for Crytek USA the party is over, as Crytek has shut down the development side and is keeping a handful of staff around to provide CryEngine tech support for the USA. Crytek USA's upcoming game, *Hunt: Horrors of the Gilded Age* will now continue with Crytek Frankfurt.

Off the rails

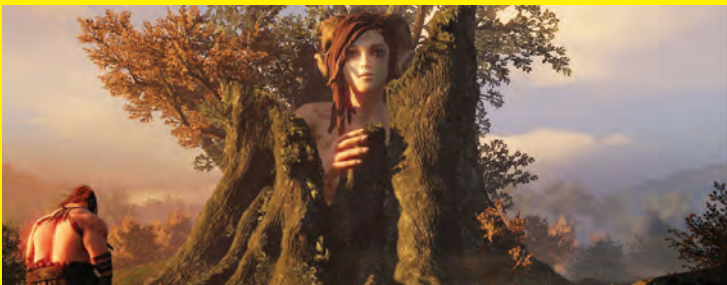
In the May issue of *NAG* we told you all about Atari's plans to release a mobile and desktop version of *RollerCoaster Tycoon 4*. Whether or not that plan remains in place is unclear, but Atari has now confirmed that a game entitled *RollerCoaster Tycoon World* is set for release in 2015.

As the name implies, *RollerCoaster Tycoon World* is an online-focused game in which players build, maintain and upgrade theme parks with a variety of stores and custom-built rides. Players can visit theme parks built by other players, and can share blueprints of their favourite creations. Perhaps encouraged by Microsoft's *Zoo Tycoon*, *RollerCoaster Tycoon World* will allow up to four players to cooperate simultaneously in the construction of a single, probably terrifying, theme park.

Atari has gone on record to state that the game will be "micro-transaction free", which is wonderful news, but it's a bit sad that these things need to be said in the first place.



Ancel travels (partially) into the wild



Michel Ancel, renowned game designer and creator of *Rayman* and *Beyond Good & Evil*, has co-founded a new independent development studio based in Montpellier, France called Wild Sheep Studio. Ancel won't be leaving Ubisoft, however, as Ubisoft says he'll continue to lead the development of exciting new projects, including "an extremely ambitious new title that is very close to his and the team's heart", which many believe to be *Beyond Good & Evil 2*.

Meanwhile, Wild Sheep has showed off its first game: a PS4 exclusive called *Wild*. The reveal trailer shows a beautiful, fantastical world full of strange creatures and untamed lands that look ripe for exploration. The intriguing 3D adventure will boast a game world that's "the size of Europe", complete with "dynamic weather and seasons".



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Pippa is terrified of button mushrooms. When she was young her teacher told her that if she didn't eat her vegetables a mushroom would grow out of her belly button.

by Pippa Tshabalala

THE GAME STALKER

The value of stuff

Occasionally I have serious stuff to say, so this is a warning – stop reading now if you want something light-hearted because this is not it.

I was recently the victim of an armed robbery. Five burglars armed with guns came into our house in the early hours of the morning, woke us up, threatened us, tied us up and stole our stuff. Yes, it was traumatic to say the least, but I'm not writing this looking for sympathy.

It did however make me realise the value of "stuff". These men stole my jewellery (including my wedding ring), my phones (personal and work), my husband's watch collection, any cash we had in the house, tablets and the like. In total they probably stole about R160,000 worth of goods and cash – small portable things that they could carry on foot and stuff that they'll probably resell for a fraction of their actual value. The fact that they left our flat-screen televisions, gaming consoles and larger valuables is really small consolation under the circumstances.

We should be grateful, right? And sure on some levels I am. But you know what? It's just stuff.

A travesty to say that, right?

What would you do without your PlayStation? Your Xbox? Your high-end PC? Your media player? Your flat-screen TV?

Chances are that a month ago I would have thought the same thing. I would have been outraged that someone had stolen my PS4, a machine that costs around R7,000, and knowing that they'll sell it for next to nothing. I would have been devastated that someone took my R30,000 computer. Having now been through something of this magnitude, I really wish they had rather taken the stuff and we had awoken in the morning to find our stuff gone, but ourselves and our sense of safety intact.

Stuff can be replaced, but your anxiety and anger over what was such a gross violation of your space, is much longer lasting. To know that not only did someone come into your house, but that they touched your stuff, and invaded your own personal space is that much more damaging.

Yes, luckily we were insured. But no, I'll never get my wedding ring back that matched my husband's (his escaped detection and wasn't stolen), and which contained a diamond given to me by my mother-in-law. I'll never get the diamond earrings back that were given to me by my mother when she was diagnosed with cancer earlier this year.

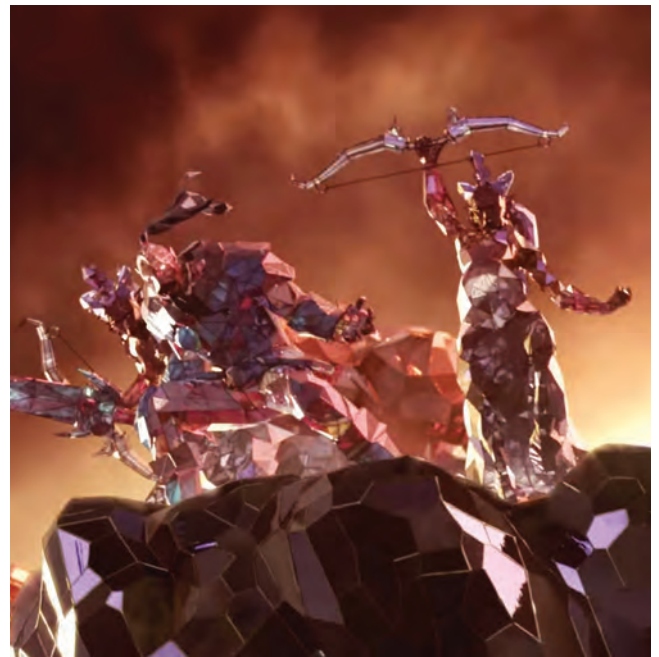
Sentimental as that "stuff" is, and depressed as I feel over its loss, I would trade all of it along with every high tech gaming and electrical appliance in my house for my sense of safety.

Those of you who have gone through something similar will probably know exactly how I feel, and those of you who haven't might still be thinking, "yeah whatever, I would be devastated without my brand new PS4".

But again, it's just stuff. **NAG**

We need a hero(es of might, magic, etc.)

More might, more magic, more turn-based strategising



The next journal entry in the life of the artist formerly known as *Heroes of Might & Magic* has officially been announced by publisher Ubisoft. Going by the name of *Might & Magic Heroes VII*, this newest instalment in the nearly 20 year-old franchise is in development at Limbic Entertainment – who recently did a damn fine job of reviving the original *Might & Magic*'s grid-based adventuring with *Might & Magic X: Legacy*.

Heroes VII promises to be a cunning mix of the best bits from the series' past and present, with Limbic aiming to maintain the *Heroes* legacy while introducing a slew of adventurous new features. Powered by Unreal Engine 3, the final game will feature six factions, and four have thus far been confirmed: Academy, Necropolis, Haven and Stronghold. The story is centred on a civil war that erupts following the murder of the Empress, after which six advisors must work to find a new heir and put a stop to the fighting. There's talk of player-created content, but the extent to which players can tinker is currently unknown.

The developers promise new interactions and encounters for the Adventure Map, opening up new strategies for players to pursue as they explore their surroundings, amass riches, build up an army and battle enemies. There's hot-seat multiplayer support, and multiplayer modes confirmed so far are Skirmish and Duel. The *Heroes VII* website allows players to sign up to become members of the Shadow Council, and members will be given access to a forum where they can suggest content for the game (including what the game's final two factions should be). It's due out for PC sometime in 2015.



SEGA buys a ticket out of Trouble Town

With *Alien: Isolation* right around the corner, publisher SEGA has made an attempt to distance itself from the catastrophically under-delivering *Aliens: Colonial Marines*. Following a messy and drawn-out class action lawsuit against both SEGA and the game's developers Gearbox Software, SEGA has agreed to pay out \$1.25 million to settle the case against them, effectively leaving Gearbox to fend for themselves. Ouch.

The pay-out will go into a managed fund to give refunds to eligible customers of the game after nearly half of that money has been siphoned off by attorney and admin fees.

Gearbox is fighting to have their name removed from the proceedings altogether – they've actually refused to take part in the case so far on the basis that they were simply contracted out to make the game and owe nothing to the general public, claiming that the plaintiff's claim against them is misplaced.

Quantum Break has a professional filmmaker in its ranks



In order to create the most authentic transmedia offering possible with their upcoming third-person action game *Quantum Break*, developer Remedy Entertainment hired a professional film director to serve as "cinematography director" and ensure that the game is consistently cinematic throughout. This director has been providing advice on camerawork, use of depth of field and other filmic techniques to provide the game's designers and animators with the insight that's needed to give the game the narrative look and feel Remedy is going for.

The game – which is described as a mix of *Alan Wake's* cinematic stylings with time manipulation in the same vein as *Max Payne* – is set to launch alongside a live-action TV series, which will feature alternate scenes to match player's individual choices throughout the game's key moments.



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Conflict, city-building and bread-baking

There's a new Settlers inbound



Ubisoft has announced a new title in the much-loved Settlers series. Called *The Settlers: Kingdoms of Anteria*, it'll once again see you creating bustling settlements and providing for the needs of their various inhabitants. "Players will work to build up, control and optimise their production chains and economy to unlock building upgrades and new sectors, resulting in kingdoms growing larger than ever before," says the press release.

Where things get interesting is with the introduction of playable Champions, with players able to choose from various classes and skill sets to match their chosen play style. You'll be using these champions to aid you in defeating dangerous foes and powerful bosses, which will grant you various rewards. And that's in-between

keeping your kingdom thriving and expanding your influence, with players deciding where they'd prefer to place the majority of their attention.

While the announcement has us pretty excited overall (we do love ourselves some calming Settlers city-building), there are a couple of reasons to take caution. Ubisoft has called it an "online" game, which could either mean that it'll be one of these free-to-play, online-only thingies, or it could just be packed with various pointless social features. Neither of those options would make us happy, but the latter would be far less offensive. Players will have the option to team up with friends to explore the world and take down tougher foes, or they can visit each other's kingdoms and trade resources. The game is due out this year.



Would you kindly buy BioShock again for iOS

The original 2007 *BioShock* is coming to iOS. If the thought of touchscreen controls for a first-person shooter doesn't send you screaming, then you'll be able to carry Rapture around in your pocket, ready to zap Big Daddies with a face-full of plasmid pain.

Publisher 2K Games has already had great success in porting *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* to iOS devices, but that game's turn-based strategy kind of lends itself a little more to touchscreen controls. We're not entirely sold on the idea of having virtual thumbsticks and separated weapon and plasmid buttons. Luckily there's controller support if you happen to own an iOS compatible controller that is. Speaking of compatibility, you'll need a pretty beefy iOS device in order to run this. Nothing less than an iPhone 5, 5S or 5C will cut it in the mobile phone area; insofar as tablets go, you'll need an iPad Air, iPad 4 or an iPad Mini 2.

No pricing other than "premium" has been released as yet.

The rise of exclusivity

One of the least popular announcements from Gamescom this year came from Crystal Dynamics: the studio announced that they've signed a deal with Microsoft to ensure that the upcoming *Rise of the Tomb Raider* is available exclusively on Xbox One and 360.

The deal is a timed exclusive, thankfully, which was only later clarified by Xbox head Phil Spencer in an interview with Kotaku.

Despite the expected outcry, Crystal

Dynamics head of studios Darrel Gallagher seems pretty chuffed with the deal, and explained that there's still love for the other platforms despite this little slap in the face.

"This doesn't mean that we're walking away from our fans who only play on PlayStation or on PC. Those are great systems, with great partners, and amazing communities. We have *Lara Croft and the Temple of Osiris* coming to those platforms this December, and *Tomb Raider: The Definitive Edition* is available on PS4."



Shadow Realms is what's next from BioWare



BioWare Austin (creator of *Star Wars: The Old Republic*) has announced that it's currently working on an action role-playing game called *Shadow Realms*. Inspired by ye olde pen-and-paper role-playing games, *Shadow Realms* is an online game designed to be played by five players. Four of those players cooperate to topple the terrible machinations of the fifth enemy player (ominously dubbed The Shadowlord), who BioWare says has complete control over "every aspect of the game". The Shadowlord will be able to summon monsters (and possess them), lay traps, alter the environment and cast spells to hinder the heroes' progress.

There's promise of a consistently updated story set in an "ever-changing world", which will ensure

that no two of your experiences with the game will be the same. BioWare plans to release episodic content that'll make the game feel a bit like a TV series, complete with cliffhanger endings to episodes. Combat and character progression (there'll be the usual assortment of character classes to choose from) is said to be deeply engaging, complementing what will apparently be a rich story worthy of BioWare's narrative pedigree.

The most obvious comparison is to upcoming *Fable Legends*, but where that game features traditional fantasy tropes, *Shadow Realms* is set in the real world, with the four human players being regular people who suddenly become embroiled in supernatural shenanigans and must adapt to survive.

RTS ain't dead



Eugen Systems most recently created the Wargame real-time strategy series, and prior to that they made the excellent deception-driven RTS *RUSE* for Ubisoft. Long before all that, however, they created a more traditional real-time strategy series called *Act of War*. Base-building and resource management were every bit as important as delivering tank shells to the faces of your enemies, and Eugen has now announced a spiritual successor to those games, which aims to uphold the mechanics of its predecessors.

Called *Act of Aggression*, it's set in the near future and will feature two single-player campaigns comprised of "traditional RTS storytelling". The developers promise a variety of units and strategies to employ, including vehicles, infantry, helicopters, planes, artillery and super weapons. As you play you'll earn experience that'll unlock new abilities and specialisations in battle.

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Cruel intentions

You had better have a change of pants handy, because Hideo Kojima (creator of the *Metal Gear* series) and Guillermo del Toro (scary movie director/writer extraordinaire) are teaming up on a new *Silent Hill*, simply called *Silent Hills*, and their intentions are clear.

"We don't care," Kojima said during a discussion at Gamescom. "We are aiming for a game that will make you shit your pants. So please make sure you have a [change of clothes]."



The confirmation of this new spooktacular experience came right after the release of a mysterious game demo called *PT*. It turns out that *PT* was an experiment by the studio to make a deliberately low-quality but utterly terrifying game that wouldn't give away their master plans. And it worked perfectly.

Kojima and his team are still finishing up work on *Metal Gear Solid 5: The Phantom Pain* while working on *Silent Hills*. We expect it'll be a while before we see more gameplay out of this studio.

Bubbles beat bullets: Toy Soldiers brings more toys



Toy Soldiers and its follow-up *Toy Soldiers: Cold War* took the concept of kids battling it out with miniature toy armies and ran with it, creating a brilliant tower defence title with a unique twist. Developer Signal Studios has now announced *Toy Soldiers: War Chest*, which broadens the concept by introducing even more fantastical plastic playthings to the mix.

This time around there'll be four factions, each led by a unique hero unit, two of which

have been announced so far: Kaiser and Starbright. Kaiser's faction is what you'd expect: a traditional toy army of dreary plastic riflemen and vicious artillery pieces and whatnot. On the flip side, Starbright's toy army is an explosion of pink unicorns and glitter bombs and bubble cannons. The adorably wacky contrast is an excellent fit for this playful series, and players will once again be able to take direct control of units to swing battles in their favour. It's out early next year.

Never Alone out in November



Puzzle platformer *Never Alone* is notable for more than just its charming visual style. It highlights the potential for games to shine a spotlight on the many lesser-known cultures of the world that threaten to perish in the face of westernisation, and to pass on the values and stories of those cultures to the younger generation via a medium with which they have a natural affinity: video games. In *Never Alone's* case, we'll be free to explore the fascinating folklore of the Iñupiaq people of Barrow, Alaska, through the eyes of young girl Nuna and her arctic fox companion.

"I think this should give them an insight as to the way Iñupiaq think," says Iñupiaq elder Ron Brower, who explains that, while his generation was taught the history of his people, it "has not bridged to the younger Xbox generation". "We think quite differently because of our isolation and the kind of beliefs and self-sufficiency that we develop. I think it's important: how to be independent, and how to think outside of the box, and how to be innovative."

If this tickles your interest the way it does ours, the game's out on November 4th.

Call of Duty developer Infinity Ward bags two Naughty Dog veterans

Infinity Ward has picked up two of Naughty Dog's top developers: Jacob Minkoff and Taylor Kurosaki. Minkoff has been the lead game designer on titles like *The Last of Us*, its DLC *Left Behind*, and *Uncharted 3*. Kurosaki held the position of narrative design lead at Naughty Dog; he worked on the cinematics and editing for *Uncharted 3* and *Uncharted 2* respectively. It's going to be interesting to see what both add to the next *Call of Duty*.



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Crytek development teams across the globe (from Shanghai to Nottingham to Austin) have had to deal with late salaries or no salaries at all. In some instances this has resulted in staff walking out. Sadly, two prominent Crytek development teams are no more: Crytek UK and Crytek USA.

Crytek UK was working on the *Homefront* reboot subtitled *The Revolution*. The entire *Homefront* IP has since been purchased by Deep Silver, who was originally going to co-publish *Homefront: The Revolution* with Crytek. They will now be publishing the game on their own. Insofar as continued development is concerned, the vast majority of Crytek UK staff members have moved to a new team called Deep Silver Dambuster Studios, so at least there's some good news for many Crytek UK staffers.

Crytek USA, on the other hand, is in a less cheery position. You may recall that the majority of Crytek USA is actually made up of Vigil Games members who were picked up by Crytek after THQ died. Unfortunately for Crytek USA the party is over, as Crytek has shut down the development side and is keeping a handful of staff around to provide CryEngine tech support for the USA. Crytek USA's upcoming game, *Hunt: Horrors of the Gilded Age* will now continue with Crytek Frankfurt.

Off the rails

In the May issue of *NAG* we told you all about Atari's plans to release a mobile and desktop version of *RollerCoaster Tycoon 4*. Whether or not that plan remains in place is unclear, but Atari has now confirmed that a game entitled *RollerCoaster Tycoon World* is set for release in 2015.

As the name implies, *RollerCoaster Tycoon World* is an online-focused game in which players build, maintain and upgrade theme parks with a variety of stores and custom-built rides. Players can visit theme parks built by other players, and can share blueprints of their favourite creations. Perhaps encouraged by Microsoft's *Zoo Tycoon*, *RollerCoaster Tycoon World* will allow up to four players to cooperate simultaneously in the construction of a single, probably terrifying, theme park.

Atari has gone on record to state that the game will be "micro-transaction free", which is wonderful news, but it's a bit sad that these things need to be said in the first place.



Ancel travels (partially) into the wild



Michel Ancel, renowned game designer and creator of *Rayman* and *Beyond Good & Evil*, has co-founded a new independent development studio based in Montpellier, France called Wild Sheep Studio. Ancel won't be leaving Ubisoft, however, as Ubisoft says he'll continue to lead the development of exciting new projects, including "an extremely ambitious new title that is very close to his and the team's heart", which many believe to be *Beyond Good & Evil 2*.

Meanwhile, Wild Sheep has showed off its first game: a PS4 exclusive called *Wild*. The reveal trailer shows a beautiful, fantastical world full of strange creatures and untamed lands that look ripe for exploration. The intriguing 3D adventure will boast a game world that's "the size of Europe", complete with "dynamic weather and seasons".



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Pippa is terrified of button mushrooms. When she was young her teacher told her that if she didn't eat her vegetables a mushroom would grow out of her belly button.

by Pippa Tshabalala

THE GAME STALKER

The value of stuff

Occasionally I have serious stuff to say, so this is a warning – stop reading now if you want something light-hearted because this is not it.

I was recently the victim of an armed robbery. Five burglars armed with guns came into our house in the early hours of the morning, woke us up, threatened us, tied us up and stole our stuff. Yes, it was traumatic to say the least, but I'm not writing this looking for sympathy.

It did however make me realise the value of "stuff". These men stole my jewellery (including my wedding ring), my phones (personal and work), my husband's watch collection, any cash we had in the house, tablets and the like. In total they probably stole about R160,000 worth of goods and cash – small portable things that they could carry on foot and stuff that they'll probably resell for a fraction of their actual value. The fact that they left our flat-screen televisions, gaming consoles and larger valuables is really small consolation under the circumstances.

We should be grateful, right? And sure on some levels I am. But you know what? It's just stuff.

A travesty to say that, right?

What would you do without your PlayStation? Your Xbox? Your high-end PC? Your media player? Your flat-screen TV?

Chances are that a month ago I would have thought the same thing. I would have been outraged that someone had stolen my PS4, a machine that costs around R7,000, and knowing that they'll sell it for next to nothing. I would have been devastated that someone took my R30,000 computer. Having now been through something of this magnitude, I really wish they had rather taken the stuff and we had awoken in the morning to find our stuff gone, but ourselves and our sense of safety intact.

Stuff can be replaced, but your anxiety and anger over what was such a gross violation of your space, is much longer lasting. To know that not only did someone come into your house, but that they touched your stuff, and invaded your own personal space is that much more damaging.

Yes, luckily we were insured. But no, I'll never get my wedding ring back that matched my husband's (his escaped detection and wasn't stolen), and which contained a diamond given to me by my mother-in-law. I'll never get the diamond earrings back that were given to me by my mother when she was diagnosed with cancer earlier this year.

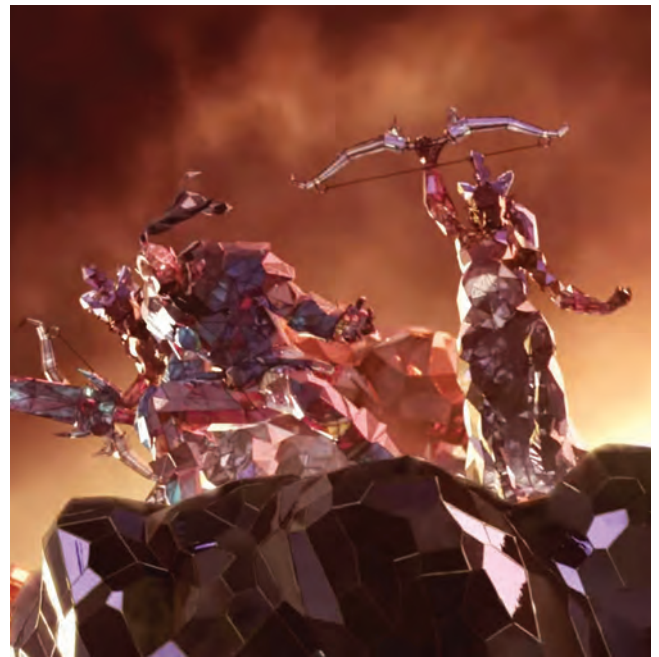
Sentimental as that "stuff" is, and depressed as I feel over its loss, I would trade all of it along with every high tech gaming and electrical appliance in my house for my sense of safety.

Those of you who have gone through something similar will probably know exactly how I feel, and those of you who haven't might still be thinking, "yeah whatever, I would be devastated without my brand new PS4".

But again, it's just stuff. **NAG**

We need a hero(es of might, magic, etc.)

More might, more magic, more turn-based strategising



The next journal entry in the life of the artist formerly known as *Heroes of Might & Magic* has officially been announced by publisher Ubisoft. Going by the name of *Might & Magic Heroes VII*, this newest instalment in the nearly 20 year-old franchise is in development at Limbic Entertainment – who recently did a damn fine job of reviving the original *Might & Magic*'s grid-based adventuring with *Might & Magic X: Legacy*.

Heroes VII promises to be a cunning mix of the best bits from the series' past and present, with Limbic aiming to maintain the *Heroes* legacy while introducing a slew of adventurous new features. Powered by Unreal Engine 3, the final game will feature six factions, and four have thus far been confirmed: Academy, Necropolis, Haven and Stronghold. The story is centred on a civil war that erupts following the murder of the Empress, after which six advisors must work to find a new heir and put a stop to the fighting. There's talk of player-created content, but the extent to which players can tinker is currently unknown.

The developers promise new interactions and encounters for the Adventure Map, opening up new strategies for players to pursue as they explore their surroundings, amass riches, build up an army and battle enemies. There's hot-seat multiplayer support, and multiplayer modes confirmed so far are Skirmish and Duel. The *Heroes VII* website allows players to sign up to become members of the Shadow Council, and members will be given access to a forum where they can suggest content for the game (including what the game's final two factions should be). It's due out for PC sometime in 2015.

SEGA buys a ticket out of Trouble Town

With *Alien: Isolation* right around the corner, publisher SEGA has made an attempt to distance itself from the catastrophically under-delivering *Aliens: Colonial Marines*. Following a messy and drawn-out class action lawsuit against both SEGA and the game's developers Gearbox Software, SEGA has agreed to pay out \$1.25 million to settle the case against them, effectively leaving Gearbox to fend for themselves. Ouch.

The pay-out will go into a managed fund to give refunds to eligible customers of the game after nearly half of that money has been siphoned off by attorney and admin fees.

Gearbox is fighting to have their name removed from the proceedings altogether – they've actually refused to take part in the case so far on the basis that they were simply contracted out to make the game and owe nothing to the general public, claiming that the plaintiff's claim against them is misplaced.

Quantum Break has a professional filmmaker in its ranks



In order to create the most authentic transmedia offering possible with their upcoming third-person action game *Quantum Break*, developer Remedy Entertainment hired a professional film director to serve as "cinematography director" and ensure that the game is consistently cinematic throughout. This director has been providing advice on camerawork, use of depth of field and other filmic techniques to provide the game's designers and animators with the insight that's needed to give the game the narrative look and feel Remedy is going for.

The game – which is described as a mix of *Alan Wake*'s cinematic stylings with time manipulation in the same vein as *Max Payne* – is set to launch alongside a live-action TV series, which will feature alternate scenes to match player's individual choices throughout the game's key moments.



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Conflict, city-building and bread-baking

There's a new Settlers inbound



Ubisoft has announced a new title in the much-loved Settlers series. Called *The Settlers: Kingdoms of Anteria*, it'll once again see you creating bustling settlements and providing for the needs of their various inhabitants. "Players will work to build up, control and optimise their production chains and economy to unlock building upgrades and new sectors, resulting in kingdoms growing larger than ever before," says the press release.

Where things get interesting is with the introduction of playable Champions, with players able to choose from various classes and skill sets to match their chosen play style. You'll be using these champions to aid you in defeating dangerous foes and powerful bosses, which will grant you various rewards. And that's in-between

keeping your kingdom thriving and expanding your influence, with players deciding where they'd prefer to place the majority of their attention.

While the announcement has us pretty excited overall (we do love ourselves some calming Settlers city-building), there are a couple of reasons to take caution. Ubisoft has called it an "online" game, which could either mean that it'll be one of these free-to-play, online-only thingies, or it could just be packed with various pointless social features. Neither of those options would make us happy, but the latter would be far less offensive. Players will have the option to team up with friends to explore the world and take down tougher foes, or they can visit each other's kingdoms and trade resources. The game is due out this year.



Would you kindly buy BioShock again for iOS

The original 2007 *BioShock* is coming to iOS. If the thought of touchscreen controls for a first-person shooter doesn't send you screaming, then you'll be able to carry Rapture around in your pocket, ready to zap Big Daddies with a face-full of plasmid pain.

Publisher 2K Games has already had great success in porting *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* to iOS devices, but that game's turn-based strategy kind of lends itself a little more to touchscreen controls. We're not entirely sold on the idea of having virtual thumbsticks and separated weapon and plasmid buttons. Luckily there's controller support if you happen to own an iOS compatible controller that is. Speaking of compatibility, you'll need a pretty beefy iOS device in order to run this. Nothing less than an iPhone 5, 5S or 5C will cut it in the mobile phone area; insofar as tablets go, you'll need an iPad Air, iPad 4 or an iPad Mini 2.

No pricing other than "premium" has been released as yet.

The rise of exclusivity

One of the least popular announcements from Gamescom this year came from Crystal Dynamics: the studio announced that they've signed a deal with Microsoft to ensure that the upcoming *Rise of the Tomb Raider* is available exclusively on Xbox One and 360.

The deal is a timed exclusive, thankfully, which was only later clarified by Xbox head Phil Spencer in an interview with Kotaku.

Despite the expected outcry, Crystal

Dynamics head of studios Darrel Gallagher seems pretty chuffed with the deal, and explained that there's still love for the other platforms despite this little slap in the face.

"This doesn't mean that we're walking away from our fans who only play on PlayStation or on PC. Those are great systems, with great partners, and amazing communities. We have *Lara Croft and the Temple of Osiris* coming to those platforms this December, and *Tomb Raider: The Definitive Edition* is available on PS4."



Shadow Realms is what's next from BioWare



BioWare Austin (creator of *Star Wars: The Old Republic*) has announced that it's currently working on an action role-playing game called *Shadow Realms*. Inspired by ye olde pen-and-paper role-playing games, *Shadow Realms* is an online game designed to be played by five players. Four of those players cooperate to topple the terrible machinations of the fifth enemy player (ominously dubbed The Shadowlord), who BioWare says has complete control over "every aspect of the game". The Shadowlord will be able to summon monsters (and possess them), lay traps, alter the environment and cast spells to hinder the heroes' progress.

There's promise of a consistently updated story set in an "ever-changing world", which will ensure

that no two of your experiences with the game will be the same. BioWare plans to release episodic content that'll make the game feel a bit like a TV series, complete with cliffhanger endings to episodes. Combat and character progression (there'll be the usual assortment of character classes to choose from) is said to be deeply engaging, complementing what will apparently be a rich story worthy of BioWare's narrative pedigree.

The most obvious comparison is to upcoming *Fable Legends*, but where that game features traditional fantasy tropes, *Shadow Realms* is set in the real world, with the four human players being regular people who suddenly become embroiled in supernatural shenanigans and must adapt to survive.

RTS ain't dead



Eugen Systems most recently created the Wargame real-time strategy series, and prior to that they made the excellent deception-driven RTS *RUSE* for Ubisoft. Long before all that, however, they created a more traditional real-time strategy series called *Act of War*. Base-building and resource management were every bit as important as delivering tank shells to the faces of your enemies, and Eugen has now announced a spiritual successor to those games, which aims to uphold the mechanics of its predecessors.

Called *Act of Aggression*, it's set in the near future and will feature two single-player campaigns comprised of "traditional RTS storytelling". The developers promise a variety of units and strategies to employ, including vehicles, infantry, helicopters, planes, artillery and super weapons. As you play you'll earn experience that'll unlock new abilities and specialisations in battle.

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Cruel intentions

You had better have a change of pants handy, because Hideo Kojima (creator of the *Metal Gear* series) and Guillermo del Toro (scary movie director/writer extraordinaire) are teaming up on a new *Silent Hill*, simply called *Silent Hills*, and their intentions are clear.

"We don't care," Kojima said during a discussion at Gamescom. "We are aiming for a game that will make you shit your pants. So please make sure you have a [change of clothes]."



The confirmation of this new spooktacular experience came right after the release of a mysterious game demo called *PT*. It turns out that *PT* was an experiment by the studio to make a deliberately low-quality but utterly terrifying game that wouldn't give away their master plans. And it worked perfectly.

Kojima and his team are still finishing up work on *Metal Gear Solid 5: The Phantom Pain* while working on *Silent Hills*. We expect it'll be a while before we see more gameplay out of this studio.

Bubbles beat bullets: Toy Soldiers brings more toys



Toy Soldiers and its follow-up *Toy Soldiers: Cold War* took the concept of kids battling it out with miniature toy armies and ran with it, creating a brilliant tower defence title with a unique twist. Developer Signal Studios has now announced *Toy Soldiers: War Chest*, which broadens the concept by introducing even more fantastical plastic playthings to the mix.

This time around there'll be four factions, each led by a unique hero unit, two of which

have been announced so far: Kaiser and Starbright. Kaiser's faction is what you'd expect: a traditional toy army of dreary plastic riflemen and vicious artillery pieces and whatnot. On the flip side, Starbright's toy army is an explosion of pink unicorns and glitter bombs and bubble cannons. The adorably wacky contrast is an excellent fit for this playful series, and players will once again be able to take direct control of units to swing battles in their favour. It's out early next year.

Never Alone out in November



Puzzle platformer *Never Alone* is notable for more than just its charming visual style. It highlights the potential for games to shine a spotlight on the many lesser-known cultures of the world that threaten to perish in the face of westernisation, and to pass on the values and stories of those cultures to the younger generation via a medium with which they have a natural affinity: video games. In *Never Alone's* case, we'll be free to explore the fascinating folklore of the Iñupiaq people of Barrow, Alaska, through the eyes of young girl Nuna and her arctic fox companion.

"I think this should give them an insight as to the way Iñupiaq think," says Iñupiaq elder Ron Brower, who explains that, while his generation was taught the history of his people, it "has not bridged to the younger Xbox generation". "We think quite differently because of our isolation and the kind of beliefs and self-sufficiency that we develop. I think it's important: how to be independent, and how to think outside of the box, and how to be innovative."

If this tickles your interest the way it does ours, the game's out on November 4th.

Call of Duty developer Infinity Ward bags two Naughty Dog veterans

Infinity Ward has picked up two of Naughty Dog's top developers: Jacob Minkoff and Taylor Kurosaki. Minkoff has been the lead game designer on titles like *The Last of Us*, its DLC *Left Behind*, and *Uncharted 3*. Kurosaki held the position of narrative design lead at Naughty Dog; he worked on the cinematics and editing for *Uncharted 3* and *Uncharted 2* respectively. It's going to be interesting to see what both add to the next *Call of Duty*.

No Man's Sky confirmed for PS4 and PC, but no news for XBO



Hello Games' ambitious *No Man's Sky* is the industry's poster-child for game developer fairy-tales at the moment. The tiny UK studio that brought us the unassuming *Joe Danger* has been thrust into the limelight thanks to their promise of an endless universe to explore in a seamless fashion. At E3 in June, Sony announced that *No Man's Sky* would be making its "console debut" on the PlayStation 4. No further news regarding other platforms was provided during the remainder of E3.

It has since been announced that the game will be heading to PC as well, although it sounds like the PC release will be a little bit behind the PlayStation 4 version. Not much else is known at the moment, and no word has been made about the game landing on Xbox One. It would be odd if it didn't, but some are pointing towards Microsoft's infamous "parity clause" as the reason for a delayed announcement. That clause dictates that indie games release on Xbox One before or on the same day as they do on other consoles.



Take another crack at it

The *Walking Dead* series has found a lot of love in the form of Telltale's misery-laden adventure games, and a whole lot of hate in the form of Terminal Reality's *Survival Instinct*, and now *Payday* creators Overkill Software are having a go at it.

The game is (tentatively?) entitled *Overkill's The Walking Dead* which is planned for release in 2016. It'll be a co-op first-person shooter "with elements of action, role-playing, survival horror, and stealth," according to a Q&A released from the studio. There's also the promise of "some unprecedented crossovers" between *Payday* and this new title – a new weapon has already been added to *Payday* called Lucille, the same barbed-wire-wrapped baseball bat used by *The Walking Dead's* Negan.

Ubisoft unveils Assassin's Creed Rogue for PS3 and X360

Ubisoft will release *Assassin's Creed Rogue* on the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 on 11 November. The game, which is exclusive to last-gen consoles, stars a new character called Shay Patrick Cormac. The Irishman is initially a member of the Assassin Brotherhood, but after a botched mission he chooses to leave the order. That prompts his one-time brothers to attempt to assassinate him, which (as one can imagine) Shay's not too chuffed about. This leads him to join the Assassins' mortal enemies, the Templars, and Shay becomes an Assassin Hunter.

The game is set in 18th century North America and will form the final part of the Kenway trilogy that began in *Assassin's Creed III* and continued with *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*. Ship combat makes a return, which will probably have a lot of people rather excited. The game's director, Martin Chapel, had this to say about the impending release:

"We know that there are many *Assassin's Creed* fans with Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 consoles who want to get their hands on a new *Assassin's Creed* game this year," said Martin Chapel, the game's director. Ubisoft's other *Assassin's Creed* release is the PC, PlayStation 4, and Xbox One exclusive, *Assassin's Creed Unity*.



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Capcom announced HD remake for Resident Evil

Remember the original PlayStation 1? Remember screaming in terror while playing arguably the greatest survival horror ever made, *Resident Evil*? Man, 1996 seems like a lifetime ago; it might even be a *literal* lifetime ago for some of you whippersnapper readers. Anyway, Capcom released a *Resident Evil* "REmake" exclusively on the Nintendo GameCube back in 2002. That "REmake" is now getting an HD remake and is being brought to PC, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360 and Xbox One sometime in early 2015 as a downloadable title.



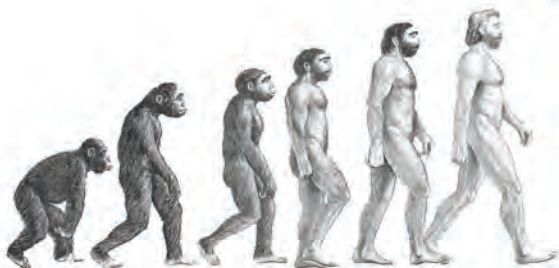
Caption of the month



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 *Sacred 3* for PS3 from Apex Interactive. Send your captions to letters@nag.co.za with the subject line "*September caption*".

Evolve slips back into 2015

Turtle Rock Studios' four-versus-one online shooter has been delayed. Originally slated for an October 2014 release, parent company Take-Two Interactive has pushed the title back to 10 February 2015 instead. The reason for the delay: "to allow enough time to fully realize the vision for *Evolve* and meet our collective standards of creative excellence." We're not complaining – October was looking really crowded with game releases.



NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR
"Excuse me, Superman, my eyes are up here."



LAST MONTH'S WINNER
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Roxy hunt

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Command & Conquer saved from GameSpy meltdown

Caption of the month

Every month we choose a screenshot from a PC system game and write about it for you. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of Sniper Elite III for PS3 from Apex Interactive. Send your captions to letters@nag.co.za. This month's August caption:

Civilization: Beyond Earth arrives in October, brings gifts

Next in line: August

Last month's winner

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August winner

Dylan Hobson, page 20

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EXPOSURE FOR SOUTH AFRICAN INDIE DEVELOPERS

by Rodain Joubert

THE ARCADE ITSELF

The Super Friendship Arcade has been hosted twice by Clarke's Bar in Cape Town and has been massively successful on both occasions. Set up inside a small skate park, the event features a mix of accessible party games from local and international developers, including recurring crowd favourites like *Johann Sebastian Joust* and *Nidhogg*. It's not yet known when the next SFA will take place, but in the meantime you can search for the event name on Facebook and see what it's about. Better still, check in at MakeGamesSA.com and you'll find threads set up there for SFA, its accompanying Jam and other countrywide events, workshops and social gatherings.

A batch of code working perfectly first time is something our freelance code monkey fears most. He just doesn't trust that any code will work properly the first time out and that has turned to fear.

Super friendship time

The Super Friendship Arcade, an experimental games party which brings booze and loud music to shake hands with arcade-style instalments, had its second successful run in Cape Town this past August. Fun, accessible gaming was the focus of the event, along with a purely multiplayer – and experimental – mind-set.

The event itself was a success (jolly good and all) but another point of interest was the jam session the weekend before. Even for those already familiar with the concept of game jams, 48 hour dev competitions and their ilk, this particular event had rather exotic goals.

The SFA Jam began like most weekend dev sessions: with a gathering of local game designers in acceptable proximity to a coffee source. After a round of introductions,

those attending were reminded of their brief: to create an experimental game that would work well in a social environment. If a particular project from the Jam tickled people's fancy, it would be featured in the Arcade itself.

This experimental nature went in a thorough variety of directions. While there were a few projects sticking to conventional, computer-based gameplay, a menagerie of exotic equipment and approaches were being attempted by those present. Board games and creative Kinect attempts reared their heads, but exoticism was pushed even further by foot pedals, Arduino devices, MIDI keyboard game controllers and a smattering of completely unidentifiable equipment.

Creative use of peripherals and a simple brief of social fun can create amazing things. It also does a fantastic job of reinforcing one vital game development skill: intuitive design. Building a party game is an exercise in minimalism and rapid learning. Players can't move to the front of a busy queue and expect to read a dictionary-sized rulebook for ten minutes.

This demands reduction: fewer core rules, more emergent gameplay, and simpler inputs. Many digital games from the jam featured only two buttons for input (two buttons *and* direction keys if they needed generous control), and at least one entry relied on only one button per player. Then, of course, there were the games where body movement mattered more than interfacing with a computer!

This mandatory simplicity may seem like quite a design restriction on the surface, but exotic controls and game environments can swoop in to be a great equaliser in your player base. Games which emerge from



these specs can easily test the sort of skills that hard-core gamers aren't necessarily used to exercising, and in the best case scenario you can create an experience which introduces *everyone* to something new.

This becomes especially important when one considers the other part of the SFA jam's brief: multiplayer. It's not too difficult to see why a level playing field would come in handy for competitive party experiences. Few people are satisfied losing a game they don't understand properly. But this works well for cooperative games too, where fun and chaos can meet in miscommunication and a frenzied lack of team co-ordination. When everybody is similarly new and bewildered, you can build a game that capitalises on general lack of skill and makes losing just as fun as winning.

Although most of the above describes a focus on game and input mechanics, there are other factors to consider for a party

game, particularly one in a busy, noisy or dim environment. Interactions and game elements need to be as visually clear as possible: bold colours, large objects and other tweaks to maximise visibility are really great (unless, of course, you manage to make visual obfuscation a part of your game, in which case you'd consider other things). Games based on PlayStation Move controllers work reliably in so many conditions partially because the controllers are reasonably robust and have a huge glowing ball at the end. If your games feature a sound element, you need to be similarly concerned about audio clarity.

Many developers at the Jam successfully exercised principles such as these, and three games were eventually marked for inclusion with the Arcade. This was a boon to the developers, as it provided them with a large, immediate audience of eager players just a week after creating these rough projects.

“Creative use of peripherals and a simple brief of social fun can create amazing things.”



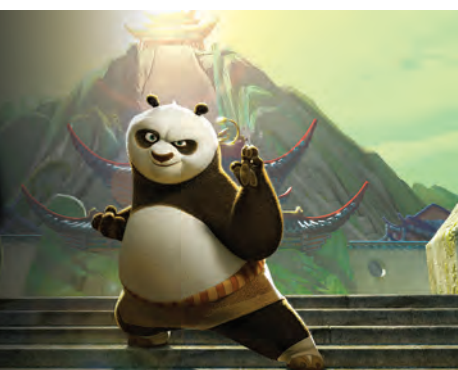
LOCAL SPOTLIGHT: KICK IN THE DOOR

One of the three Jam entries that made it to the Arcade (and one of two involving the work of Richard Baxter), *Kick In The Door* is a three-player co-op experience that relies on a trio of foot pedals and consistent teamwork to fight off sequences of colourful monsters. Similar to a team-based *Simon*, players are assigned one colour each and have to tap their pedals appropriately, though timing is sensitive enough to generate tension and the throwing of composite colours (demanding synchronised pedal pushes) quickly urges the game towards a frenzy of barked commands and general chaos. A natural and immediate fit for social gaming, *Kick In The Door* was the brainchild of developer Ben Rausch, who along with Baxter and musician Jason Sutherland made this as one of his first forays into the game development scene. Its huge success at the Arcade is a demonstration of the potential that new game creators can locally access.

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GETTING INTO SOUTH AFRICAN ESPORTS

FOUR BASIC STEPS TO BEING SERIOUS ABOUT YOUR GAMING

With the annual rAge expo almost on our doorstep, we thought it would be a fitting time to help all you gamers unfamiliar with eSports understand what it takes to compete at such an event.



In South Africa, competitive gaming is still a niche activity and getting into it can be a daunting venture. In order to rise to the level set by events such as Valve's The International, we must continually grow the support, size, and skill sets of our young local eSports communities.

So, if you enjoy watching the impressive displays of your local eSports heroes, and you fancy mind-melting plays and soul-destroying ownage, consider the following four steps to transform your favourite game into a skilful craft of humiliating opponents and topping scoreboards.

STEP 1 CHOOSE YOUR PLATFORM AND GAME GENRE

The first step to getting to the ass kicking is to settle on your favourite platform and genre of gaming. As with any mastery,

developing your skills takes dedication and time. Although still in the early stages of its development, South African eSports boasts an active community consisting of regular competitive matches and online tournament events, and there is significant support for each platform of gaming.

STEP 2 PRACTISE AND ALIGN YOURSELF WITH LIKE-MINDED INDIVIDUALS

OK, now that you have chosen a platform and supported genre, it is time to get busy. As with any craft, mastering your competitive title will be no easy feat. You will face off against many like-minded individuals also with their eyes on the prize. This brings us to step 2 of your competitive gaming dream: make friends.

Some genres and titles, such as RTS and *Quake*, offer the opportunity to compete by your lonesome. Although you will undoubtedly

be able to prove yourself a Class-A badass by venturing down this path, help from others can still be an invaluable way of improving.

The most obvious way is to compete with similarly skilled individuals. However, it may take some work before you are up to scratch to find these. So, consult the resources and expertise of others who know what it takes to play a given platform, genre, or title at the highest level of competition. Here, you must consider community-driven hubs or even YouTube channels – Google is your friend.

When consulting these kinds of resources, you will be provided with information, such as basic mechanics of gameplay, common strategies or mistakes, or in-depth analysis of decision-making under high-pressure conditions. This may be an intimidating or overwhelming experience at first as it takes a lot to

master a highly developed competitive title, but do not fret. Keep in mind that this is a unique type of homework that you could actually enjoy if you have the drive and willingness to compete and to improve as opposed to boring things like studying or pursuing a career. Who cares about these, right?

Of course, there are also team-based eSports titles where you will have to enlist the assistance of a team. Being part of a team is not easy and often involves dealing with issues ranging from difficult personalities to tight schedules. It takes compromise, planning, and respect to maintain a successful line-up and often it does not work out. Big ups to those individuals that create a team and stick to it – tell us your secrets!

STEP 3 PARTICIPATE IN ONLINE COMPETITIVE TOURNAMENTS

Now that you have chosen your platform, genre, title and have consulted the resources offered by the respective eSports community, you are ready to get dirty. Yes, that's right, it's officially time to kick ass. Step 3 will give you an idea of what opportunities there are in South Africa specifically.

For all platforms, the most prominent competitive brands in online South African eSports are Telkom's Do Gaming League and MWEB's GameZone ladders and tournaments. They host online leagues or ladders and, occasionally, online competitions. Although online competitions are often accompanied with small prize incentives, as a competitive gamer you will come to value the opportunity to match yourself against other competitors. For this reason, the Internet offers eSports enthusiasts a great chance to compete in a practical and convenient manner.

Do Gaming hosts online competitions for a large variety of titles, such as *Battlefield*, *Counter-Strike*, *Call of Duty*, *Dota 2*, *FIFA*, *Gran Turismo*, *Hearthstone*, *StarCraft*, *TrackMania*, *League of Legends*, *Osul*, and *Quake*. Although they mostly cater for PC gaming, Do Gaming is actively branching out to console titles.

GameZone has a smaller variety but nonetheless a substantial following, especially from console gamers, specialising in console titles such as *Battlefield* and *Call of Duty*.

On top of participating in these leagues, ladders, or tournaments, there are smaller alternative options for the South African competitive gamer.

Orena is a newly formed tournament organiser that hosts high-level short online competitions with cash prizes and other goodies for incentives. Signing up for one of their tournaments provides a solid opportunity to compete with South Africa's finest. At this stage, they specialise in the most popular PC titles, i.e. *Dota 2*, *Counter-Strike*, *Call of Duty*, and *League of Legends*.

IS Gaming recently launched their first online corporate battle-type competition for *Dota 2*, and will be adding online



ladders for a range of popular PC titles in upcoming months.

STEP 4 SHOW OFF ON LAN

So, you are ready for Step 4, or so you think. Well gamer, let's welcome you to the final frontier of eSports. From the very beginning of eSports, LAN has served as the ultimate testing ground. Competing at a high level online, from the comfort and familiarity of your home environment, pales in comparison to participating on LAN. This is in terms of the pressure, logistics, and prizes. Suffice to say, for any eSports veteran, success online has to be followed by success on LAN for it to hold lasting glory.

You have heeded the warnings, yet you are still here! You must truly be ready, young grasshopper. Let us talk options.

rAge traditionally boasts some of the biggest eSports competitive events in a LAN environment, and this year both the DGL and the NGL will be showcasing the best of South African eSports.

Do Gaming will be hosting their annual championship LAN event, presumably in the conference centre below the rAge expo. Here, we will see an epic battle between those who progressed through the online summer and winter legs for the most competitive collection of titles. Each title is backed up with an impressive array of big prizes provided by generous sponsors, such as Telkom, ASUS, MSI, SteelSeries, and Razer.

The NGL will be hosting a *Dota 2* eight-team double elimination tourney on the rAge expo floor, and there are some big prizes up for grabs there thanks to Rectron, Aorus, Corsair and GIGABYTE.

Another organisation looking to grow eSports in our country is Mind Sports South Africa. As an affiliate of the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC) and an organisation recognised by the Department of Sport and Recreation (SRSA), MSSA operates as the sole authority of appointing eSports representatives for South Africa. They offer opportunities to qualify, online or LAN, for numerous local and international events and ultimately the opportunity to represent your province and country.

MainGaming is a smaller organisation that focuses on hosting LAN competitive qualifiers for console gamers. Although they specialise in *FIFA*, and have sent gamers to international events such as ESWC, they are trying to branch out to other titles such as *Call of Duty*.

Zombiegamer is another organisation pushing the growth of eSports on console. They host a weekly LAN event where games are rotated each week, and also run a school gaming programme where they bring competitive gaming to schools.

All rightly then gamer, now that you have been informed about what it takes, the only remaining question is, do you have what it takes? Do you have a passionate love for a video game that transcends the usual casual connotations surrounding 'recreational activities'? Do you have the willingness to take it further than what is 'normal'? Well, then, do it justice and get productive. It is not work if it involves being the best, it's simply necessary.

NAG
- Steyn Grobler

XBOX ONE

THE NEXT GENERATION

The Xbox One is launching in South Africa on the 23rd of September. Here's everything you need to know about Microsoft's entry into the current generation of gaming consoles.

HELLO, DAVE

If you go with a console bundle that includes Kinect, you can talk to your Xbox One. If you're lucky (or perhaps suffering some undiagnosed mental affliction), it might even talk back to you. Packing a 1080p wide-angle camera, the next-gen Kinect can process up to 2 gigabits of data every second, and track up to six people simultaneously, including heart-rate and gesture monitoring. It's the Mars prison colony technology of the future, available in your own home today.



NEW! IMPROVED! NOW WITH 100% EXTRA MEGAQUARKS!

With dual 1.75GHz quad-core AMD APUs, 853MHz GPU, 8GB DDR3 RAM, 500GB built-in HDD, and a Blu-ray optical drive, the Xbox One console is already approximately a zillion times more impressive than its predecessor, but perhaps one of the most interesting changes is the move back to x86-based architecture – the same architecture used in most PCs as well as the PS4 – and a custom Windows system kernel. Although this effectively nukes backwards compatibility with Xbox 360 games (for now, anyway), its much closer parity with PC development has positive implications for cross-platform porting. Everybody wins.

GOTTA GET MYSELF CONNECTED

Coinciding with the launch of the Xbox One, Microsoft expanded its Xbox LIVE online service infrastructure to more than 300,000 servers – that's more servers than the whole Internet had in the late '90s. All user profile content (including friend lists, Gamerscore, and achievements) is stored in the cloud and consistent between both the Xbox One and 360 platforms, and your Xbox One profile and game saves are accessible on any Xbox One console connected to Xbox LIVE. Much like the 360, users on Xbox One require a premium Xbox LIVE Gold subscription for online multiplayer games. As an added extra, Microsoft also recently introduced its Games with Gold program on Xbox One, offering two free games on the console every month to Xbox LIVE Gold subscribers.

ASSUMING DIRECT CONTROL

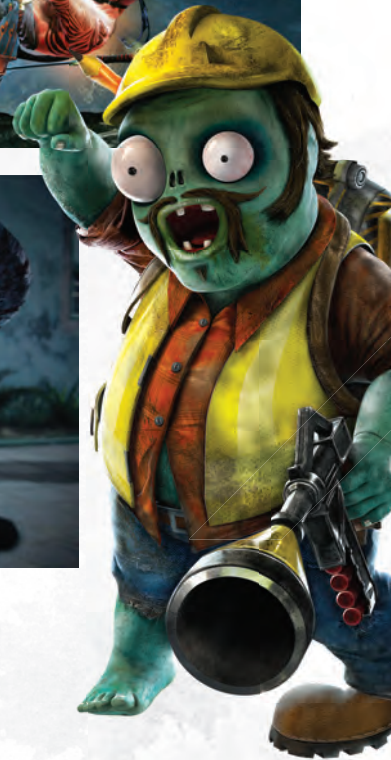
According to reports, Microsoft invested over \$100 million in improving the controller design for Xbox One. The differences are subtle, but significant – the 360's notoriously rubbish directional pad has been replaced with a more responsive, "clicky" mechanical pad, the triggers now have built-in rumble, and the battery compartment is integrated into the controller casing, entirely removing the bulky attachment on the last-gen controller.



SHOW OFF!

The Xbox One features a built-in digital video recorder (DVR) to record and save gameplay clips. The free Upload Studio app can be used to edit, combine, and share clips on Microsoft's OneDrive service, or you can DVR drop content straight into your YouTube channel via the YouTube app. Videos or it didn't happen, everybody.





WHAT TO GET NOW

RYSE: SON OF ROME

First revealed in 2010 as something called *Codename: Kingdoms* and again in 2011 as a Kinect exclusive for the Xbox 360 before vanishing altogether from reality, Crytek's *Ryse: Son of Rome* finally reappeared as a launch title for Xbox One. Despite a somewhat mixed reception from critics, there is simply no better looking game available on the console even almost a year later. Get this game to show off what the Xbox One can do, and totally justify the expense of a new console to your family who won't be getting Xmas presents this year. They'll *believe*.

KILLER INSTINCT

Almost 20 years after *Killer Instinct 2* forward-forward-punched its way into arcade cabinets around the planet, Microsoft rebooted the cult-popular franchise just in time for the Xbox One launch. It's available as a limited-feature free download, but for about R200 you can buy the Combo Breaker Edition, which includes eight characters, and for R400, the Ultra Edition which includes the Combo Breaker Edition content plus the original *Killer Instinct Classic* game. ULTRAAAAA COMBOOOOOOO!

DEAD RISING 3

It's basically in the rules that, with every new platform purchase, you are additionally required to buy a zombie game or risk a worldwide zombie apocalypse. Don't break the rules unless you actually want to experience a worldwide zombie apocalypse. Alternately, consider buying *Dead Rising 3*, and experience a simulated worldwide zombie apocalypse to make sure it's what you really want. Here at NAG, we like to help you make responsible decisions.

FORZA

Turn 10's *Forza* racing series made its next-gen debut with *Forza Motorsport 5* in 2013, ahead of *Forza Horizon 2*, which zooms out of the pit this September – just in time for the Xbox One launch in South Africa. Can't choose which one to buy? Get both. There's that responsible decisions thing again.

PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES: GARDEN WARFARE

Okay, this is cheating a bit because it's also already available on other platforms, but if for some totally inexplicable reason you haven't bought it yet, you've got one more chance to redeem your sins and restore balance to the universe. "One" more chance. One. Xbox One. It's obviously destiny at work here. If you missed the review in the April edition of *NAG*, *Garden Warfare* is a dazzlingly zany and instantly addictive class-based multiplayer shooter that plays like a mashup of *Team Fortress 2* and *Battlefield*. Plus there are already three drops of free DLC. Three divided by three is one. One. Xbox One. Fate is calling, people.



WHAT TO GET LATER

ALL THE HALO

Although *Halo 5: Guardians* is only scheduled to launch in 2015, *Halo: The Master Chief Collection* – out in November 2014 – should fill the otherwise interminable gap (and the inevitable *Halo 6* budget) between now and then rather nicely, we think. Including *Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary*, *Halo 2*, *Halo 3*, *Halo 4* (and more than 100 multiplayer maps spanning all titles), plus a *Halo 5* beta ticket, the compilation will be sold for the price of just a single game. More like *Halo: The Best Deal EVER*. Make sure to activate the Grunt Birthday Party skull.

CRACKDOWN

Keeping up with the trend of rebooting previous generation franchises for maximum consumer nostalgia, Microsoft announced a new *Crackdown* game for Xbox One at E3 this year. Emphasising that it's not *Crackdown 3*, it's *Crackdown*, but not a remake of the original *Crackdown* and instead more like a sequel but not a sequel to *Crackdown 2* (... don't overthink it), the game was described as "a new iteration of the groundbreaking open-world action series that features a whole new campaign", with drop-in, drop-out co-op. And probably orbs. Lots and lots of orbs.

GEARS OF WAR

We're not sure yet what exactly new *Gears of War* brand custodian Black Tusk Studio is planning to do with the next game, but it will most definitely include series woo-baby superstar Augustus "Cole Train" Cole, probably include chainsaws on guns, and hopefully include a relationship subplot involving a Berserker. Remember, gentlemen – sudden moves.

QUANTUM BREAK

There isn't much information available about this game from *Alan Wake* developer Remedy Entertainment, but the important thing is that it's from *Alan Wake* developer Remedy Entertainment, and *Alan Wake* was one of the best games of the last generation (FACT). We do know that it's about a time travel experiment gone wrong somehow (but, really, is there any other kind of time travel experiment?), so here's holding thumbs that there are dinosaurs and spaceships. Or, even better, dinosaur spaceships. Or what about- [Snip. Please get professional help. Tarryn.] [I'm pretty sure you're not allowed to write inline notes in your own text. Ed.]

SUNSET OVERDRIVE

It is the future. The world is controlled by a food and drink megacorporation called Fizzco, whose new premium product – OverCharge Delirium XT – is "guaranteed to unlock your wasted potential". Not entirely unsurprisingly, ingesting excessive quantities of OverCharge Delirium XP turns people into mutated monsters, and it's up to you – Sunset City Fizzco Employee of the Month contender – to clean up the ensuing mess. With exploding teddy bears. **NAG**

- Azimuth

NAG

MERCHANDISE

GET 'EM WHILE
THEY'RE HOT!

NAG ZOMBIE T-SHIRT



FRIDGE MAGNETS



NAG SHOPPING BAG



HEADSHOT CAP



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ZOMBIE T-SHIRT XL	<input type="text"/>	R120.00	<input type="text"/>
ZOMBIE T-SHIRT XXL	<input type="text"/>	R120.00	<input type="text"/>
FRIDGE MAGNET CLIP - YELLOW	<input type="text"/>	R30.00	<input type="text"/>
FRIDGE MAGNET CLIP - GREEN	<input type="text"/>	R30.00	<input type="text"/>
FRIDGE MAGNET CLIP - ORANGE	<input type="text"/>	R30.00	<input type="text"/>
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RELEASE DATE / 2015

PLATFORM / PC

GENRE / Online team action

DEVELOPER / Motiga

PUBLISHER / www.gogigantic.com

WEBSITE / Motiga

Gigantic

▶ Every hero will be unlockable by playing the game, with cosmetic skins likely requiring money to purchase.

Gorgeous Guardians

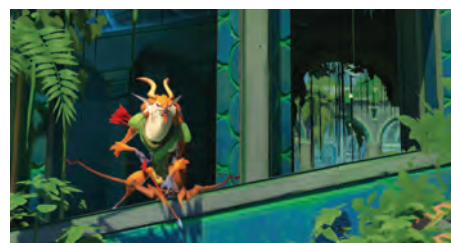
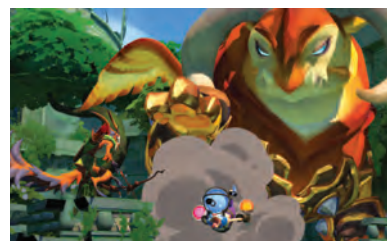
Remember when everyone was trying to make the next *Doom*? We got a lot of pretty bad knock-offs and wannabes, but now and then a really great game would arise out of the imitations, like *Strife* and *Duke Nukem 3D*. The same thing happened when *Quake* was the Big Thing to try and copy, and then *World of Warcraft*. Right now however, it seems everyone wants some of that sweet, sweet *League of Legends* money. There are so many MOBA-style games in production at the moment, it can be easy to dismiss anything that even remotely smells like it's trying to crib the *Defense of the Ancients* template. It's an issue that *Gigantic* will face, even though it doesn't really have that much in common with the conventional MOBA other than players picking from a roster of interesting heroes.

Gigantic will be a free-to-play 5v5 third-person action shooter, where two teams

try to escort their five-story tall monster to the enemy's base. The monster, called a Guardian, has its own attacks and behaviours. The behemoth has the power to alter the level as it moves forward, knocking over walls and creating new paths. Players choose from a colourful array of heroes, each sporting a unique set of physics-based abilities. As you play, you'll unlock more heroes – and of course you can buy heroes with real money if you're impatient. Some of the heroes include Knossos, a large bull-headed warrior that can stampede, the hawk-headed Tyto the Swift who uses a fencing sword, and crazy Uncle Sven who mixes potions on the battlefield depending on the flow of battle.

"The gameplay in *Gigantic* is about creating opportunities to be heroic," said James Phinney, vice president of product development at Motiga. "Whether you're rescuing an ally, sneaking behind enemy

"The behemoth has the power to alter the level as it moves forward, knocking over walls and creating new paths."



▶ *Gigantic* was conceived by James Phinney, previous lead designer on both *Guild Wars* and *StarCraft*.

lines or facing off solo against a towering Guardian, there are dramatic ways to turn the tide of battle."

During the match you'll gain experience and unlock new abilities, adapting to the battle on the fly. If your team manages to get your Guardian to the enemy Guardian and deal enough damage to it, the Guardian's heart will be exposed for a coup de grâce. But the Guardians will fight back, so five heroes alone aren't enough to take one down. It's not a bad mechanic on paper: defending your mobile Guardian while at the same time trying to ensure you're whittling down the opponent's Guardian enough so when the two meet, your side has the advantage.

With a lush Pixar-like art style and conventional WSAD shooter controls, *Gigantic* might find a space for itself in the growing "online battle arena" space, depending on how generous their "free-to-play" ends up being. **NAG**

-Miktar

RELEASE DATE / 9 December 2014
PLATFORM / PC / PS4 / XBO
GENRE / Action-adventure / platformer
DEVELOPER / Crystal Dynamics
PUBLISHER / Square Enix
WEBSITE / www.laracroft.com

Lara Croft and the Temple of Osiris

Actually contains tombs



This sequel to the often overlooked and underrated *Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light* sees Lara headed to Egypt. Like *Guardian of Light*, the view in *Temple of Osiris* is isometric and controls like a twin-stick shooter. There are four playable characters (two more than last time): the intrepid action-archaeologist Lara, her former rival treasure hunter turned frenemy Carter Bell, and the two Egyptian gods Horus and Isis.

It seems the god Set is up to dastardly deeds, so Lara and company decide to meddle. Through some plot related events, Lara and Carter become cursed and have to revive the god Osiris before they die. The cooperative story mode takes four players through Egyptian tombs and temples, fighting enemies and solving puzzles. Croft and Carter have the series' iconic dual pistols, great at taking out the hordes of mummies, scarab beetles and other properly themed enemies. They can use their grappling hooks to climb up walls, pull up partners and create makeshift tightropes to cross gaps. Horus and Isis, being gods, have a slightly different set of tools. They wield mystical staves that can direct powerful beams of light to disintegrate their foes (and friends... oops). The two gods can also shield themselves in a bubble, which can be used as a stepping stone for another player to reach higher places.

With an increased player count, some will have to defend while the others solve puzzles, taking turns depending on what task is required. Crystal Dynamics is promising no load times, much improved visuals and plenty of weapons and relics to find. Keeley Hawes is reprising her role as the voice for Lara, ensuring Lara's voice will sound like it does in *Legend*, *Anniversary* and *Underworld* (since *Temple* takes place in the *Legend* timeline). **NAG**

- Miktar



RELEASE DATE / Q1 2015
PLATFORM / Wii U
GENRE / Third-person shooter
DEVELOPER / Nintendo EAD Group No. 2
PUBLISHER / Nintendo
WEBSITE / e3.nintendo.com/games/wiiu/splatoon

Splatoon

Serious squid business



1 The idea for *Splatoon* came from a member of the *Animal Crossing* development team, who made a four-vs-four paint-based territory control prototype.



File under "nobody saw that coming": a 4v4 team-based third-person shooter from Nintendo... in which you play as an ink-throwing kid who can transform into a squid. That doesn't seem so out of place for Nintendo. It might not sound like much on paper, but *Splatoon* caused some waves at E3 this year by being, well, interesting.

The premise is very simple: both teams battle for territory. Your team's territory is defined by how much ink you've splattered across the floor and walls. Whichever side covers the most surface area once the timer runs out, wins. By holding a button you can turn into a squid and "dive" into the ink. This lets you swim fast and hide from the enemy, as well as replenish your ink supply, as long as you're on your team's ink. Kind of like reloading, going into cover and sprinting all at the same time. Some clever inking lets you flank opponents who explode into a giant burst of ink if you spray them enough. When you "die" you respawn at your base, but can instantly jump to any of your teammates by tapping on them on the GamePad touchscreen.

There are super weapon pickups like a giant paint roller, bazooka, grenades and a sniper rifle. Nintendo's still working out the fine print, but promises a full single-player campaign and online play. **NAG**

- Miktar

❶ In its competitive multiplayer, there is no permanent progression. Everyone starts on the same footing at the beginning of a match.

RELEASE DATE / 2015

PLATFORM / PC / PS4 / XBO

GENRE / First-person shooter

DEVELOPER / Gearbox Software

PUBLISHER / 2K

WEBSITE / www.battleborn.com

Battleborn

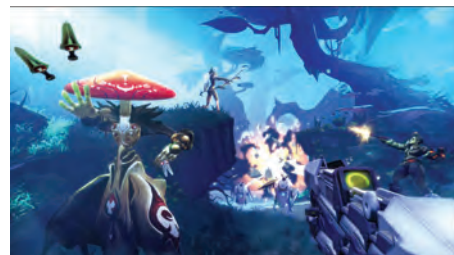
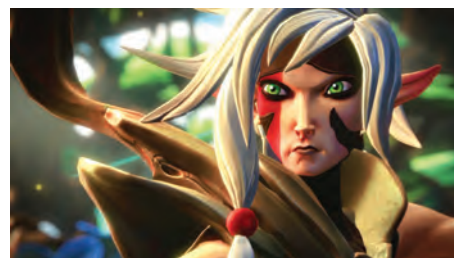
Inspired by MOBAs, but not a MOBA

Gearbox knows their first-person shooters. They got their start developing the *Half-Life* expansion pack *Blue Shift*, porting *Halo: Combat Evolved* to the PC for Microsoft, and creating the *Brothers in Arms* franchise. But it was *Borderlands* that really put them on the map: a breakout hit combining the loot-getting of *Diablo* with traditional first-person gunplay. That's not to say the studio hasn't managed a few duds: reviving *Duke Nukem Forever* might have been the charitable thing to do but it left a stain on the studio's record, along with the more recent *Aliens: Colonial Marines*. The final product, in this case, didn't quite live up to the promises.

Instead of jumping straight into *Borderlands 3*, Gearbox is opting to start fresh on an entirely new franchise. One that,

like *Borderlands*, blends several genres – hopefully the good bits from each. *Battleborn* stars a huge cast of playable characters who are fighting over the last habitable part in the universe. Using rifles, Gatling guns, bows and arrows, rifles, or telekinetic powers, players have to approach and destroy an enemy base. Along the way, giant spider sentries impede your progress, so you have to fight from behind the cover of robotic minions that flow out from your base. All the while, the enemy team will be trying to do the same to your base: get past your sentries, and destroy it (and you). Yup, *Battleborn* takes obvious inspiration from *League of Legends* and *Defense of the Ancients*. Except instead of playing with real-time strategy controls from a birds-eye view, *Battleborn* is a first-person shooter through and through.

“Instead of jumping straight into *Borderlands 3*, Gearbox is opting to start fresh on an entirely new franchise.”



❷ *Battleborn* is not *Borderlands 3*, nor is it set in the *Borderlands* universe. But Gearbox will make *Borderlands 3*, some day.



The only mode Gearbox has talked about so far is Incursion mode: a traditional five-on-five MOBA-like experience of picking from a roster of heroes, levelling-up during the match to unlock new powers and an ultimate attack, hiding behind your minions to assault the enemy towers and eventually their base. There will be around 20 characters: this is a full priced retail game, not free-to-play, so you won't have to buy any heroes. Characters will play very differently: some can jump up ledges and travel along paths that others can't, some can't fit under certain structures like bridges, and so on. During the battle, characters will quip at each other with dynamic dialogue depending on which characters are in the match, and who's killed who, bringing in some of that *Borderlands* wit.

For now, nothing is known about the single player campaign other than it will allow up to five players to play through cooperatively. Most likely it'll be more akin to an Incursion bot match, five players against five predetermined opponents, with a story that ties the matches together into a narrative structure. **NAG**

-Miktar

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RELEASE DATE / 2015

PLATFORM / 3DS

GENRE / Turn-based strategy

DEVELOPER / Intelligent Systems / Nintendo SPD

PUBLISHER / Nintendo

WEBSITE / e3.nintendo.com/games/3ds/codename-steam

Code Name: S.T.E.A.M.

XCOM meets Fire Emblem

Nintendo was full of surprises at this year's E3. A fresh new *Zelda* with an emphasis on open-world exploration, the oddly engaging team-based shooter *Splatoon*, and this: a surprise project by Intelligent Systems. Better known for their excellent but utterly punishing *Fire Emblem* series of turn-based strategy games, Intelligent Systems hopes *Code Name: S.T.E.A.M.* will usher new players into the genre. "S.T.E.A.M." stands for Strike Team Eliminating the Alien Menace, and it's every bit as cornball as it sounds. Set in a steampunk alternate universe, players control a squad of highly trained special operatives as they attempt to save the planet from H.P. Lovecraft-inspired aliens.



“Overwatch allows your unit to attack during the enemy’s turn if an enemy moves into your field of view.”

Visually, the cel-shaded comic-book style matches the tone of the story: an absurd setting with over-the-top special moves and cliché one-liners. The campaign is structured

into missions, each with multiple maps. Battles are turn-based and last until the enemy is defeated. Your turn lasts as long as you have “steam”, the resource used to power your units. When you pick a unit to move, it looks and plays like a third-person shooter, but moving forward drains steam

(backtracking recovers it). If you're spotted by the enemy while moving, you can no longer backtrack and you're stuck where you are. Using your weapons will also lock you into place; different weapon types use different amounts of steam. It's not unlike the underrated *Valkyria Chronicles*. Ideally you want to move into cover without being seen, then set that unit to Overwatch (which XCOM players are familiar with). Overwatch allows your unit to attack during the enemy's turn if an enemy moves into your field of view. It's a pretty important mechanic. Terrain plays a big part in combat as well, as units on higher ground can see more and shoot further.



1 The game takes place in a steampunk fantasy version of London, where you fight on a team founded by Abraham Lincoln.



There are checkpoints on the map that let you save your game and restart from that point, but saving uses up “medals”, a resource also used to get more powerful weapons or heal allies. So deciding when to save and when to be frugal with medals is a part of the gameplay. Each unit has their own special attack. One attack shown involves throwing golden mecha-eagles at enemies while a giant American flag waves in the background. The roster shown so far includes a big lion guy and a skinny nerd with glasses. There will be no permadeath, and only one difficulty level: the developers claim it will be challenging but not frustratingly so, since they want everyone to enjoy it. There's no cooperative mode, unfortunately, but the competitive mode will be playable locally and online. **NAG**

-Miktar

RELEASE DATE / 2015

PLATFORM / PS4

GENRE / Action role-playing game

DEVELOPER / From Software

PUBLISHER / Sony Computer Entertainment

WEBSITE / www.playstation.com/en-us/games/bloodborne-ps4

Bloodborne

A Souls by any other name...

Might as well just say it plain: *Bloodborne* is a *Demon's Souls* / *Dark Souls* game in everything but name. It plays the same (with a few differences we'll get into), has a lot of the same tropes and trimmings, and it punishes careless play or inattention ruthlessly. However, *Bloodborne* is not set in the *Souls* universe... that we're aware of, anyway. From Software loves to be cryptic and vague, and feign innocence on matters of lore and continuity. So for now: *Bloodborne* takes place in an ancient abandoned city called Yharnam, once known to house a potent cure-all remedy able to create miracles. Many people made pilgrimage to Yharnam

to be cured of whatever diseases or disaster befell them. When the player arrives in the city, looking for a cure for their own curse, they discover that it's in ruins and overrun with a violent and deranged population.

The game's visual window dressing is that of Victorian gothic horror, invoking the imagery of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Gloomy, monochrome environments punctuated by dark mansions and Eastern European horrors that lurk in the darkness. The game mechanics are firmly rooted in the style of the *Souls* games – stamina-based attacks where everything does tons of

damage – but with a much more aggressive take on combat. Evasion and timing are critical, and you can't just block everything until your stamina runs out, since there's no shield. Dodging enemy attacks

“Evasion and timing are critical, and you can't just block everything until your stamina runs out, since there's no shield.”



🕒 *Bloodborne* is being directed by Hidetaka Miyazaki, director of *Demon's Souls* and *Dark Souls*.

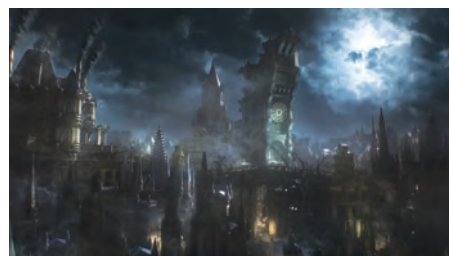
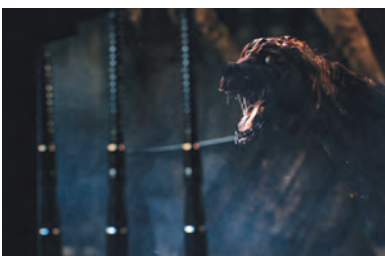


and keeping an eye on your stamina will be vital. There's also no magic: the various weapon types cover most of the styles of play. Some weapons shown so far include an extendable sawblade for close range melee, and a crowd-controlling blunderbuss. There will be multiple types of weapons to find, and you can mix and match left/right hand wielding. When you kill enemies, you gain a resource used to level-up and improve your character.

One new mechanic is that of conflicts between the various factions in the game. Townsfolk will attack beasts, so if you come across a brawl between men and monster you can opt to slip by unnoticed or use the distraction to pick off both sides slowly – but you might end up on the receiving end of both if you're not careful. Occasionally you'll come across NPC hunters who, if you help them in their tasks, will come to your aid during a boss battle, not unlike the Summoning Signs from *Dark Souls*.

There are more questions than answers when it comes to this PS4 exclusive. At the time of writing, Sony and From Software have been very tight-lipped, but promised to show plenty at Gamescom 2014, so we'll have more on it soon.

NAG
-Miktar





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- Reinforced rubber pads on both sides ensure higher stability and quick swipe control





RELEASE DATE / 4 November 2014

PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / XBO

GENRE / First-person shooter

DEVELOPER / Sledgehammer Games

PUBLISHER / Activision

WEBSITE / www.callofduty.com/advancedwarfare

CALL OF DUTY ADVANCED WARFARE

SPACEY-SHMACEY... WHERE'S THE MULTIPLAYER AT?

“How do you build something that over 100 million players have already enjoyed, and make it even better?” That is the question that Sledgehammer Games founders Glen Schofield and Michael Condrey asked themselves three years ago when they were given a shot at developing a *Call of Duty* for Activision. Sledgehammer aided Infinity Ward in the development of 2011's *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*, but *Advanced Warfare* is the team's first solo stab at the *Call of Duty* franchise. Sledgehammer is entering the fray at a potentially opportune time, as last year's *Call of Duty: Ghosts* was not all that well received and many saw the franchise's first “next-gen” outing as a bit of a disappointment. Depending on the

way you look at it, Sledgehammer stands to benefit from this by providing a fresh take on a well-established franchise. *Call of Duty* fans are perhaps eager to move on from *Ghosts*, and that anticipation, coupled with Sledgehammer bringing new blood into the series, creates a good combination for a game that has the potential to be very well received.

We've already seen quite a bit of the game's single-player direction. It has Kevin Spacey in it, which adds to the growing pantheon of actors who have played roles and have voiced various *Call of Duty* characters. It's 2054, and Spacey plays Jonathan Irons: the CEO of a private military company known as Atlas. When a global terrorist attack leaves the

• The Exo suit's new abilities run off a limited battery reserve, so monitoring your usage is key. Luckily, for those who love their Exo abilities, there's a perk called Overcharge that allows you to squeeze some extra juice out of your batteries.





IT'S GOT A LOT OF EXO-PEAL

The Exo suit is being billed as the biggest game-changer in *Advanced Warfare*. Sledgehammer co-founder Michael Condrey is calling the Exo "one of the biggest changes to the *Call of Duty* movement set that we've ever seen".

The biggest changes come in the form of your basic soldier movements. To those who have played *Titanfall* and earlier arena games like *Unreal Tournament*, the addition of a double-jump is perhaps nothing new. It is, however, new to *Call of Duty* and we're quite eager to see how the ardent *Call of Duty* masses take to it.

Your Exo suit allows you to Boost Jump, Boost Dodge (quick bursts of left, right and backwards movements; very useful to avoid incoming enemy fire but somewhat tricky to master because it requires a click of the directional stick), Boost Dash (basically instant, mid-air directional changes), and Boost Slam. This last Exo movement can be used offensively to smash into the ground with a melee attack, or it can be used defensively to pull you back to ground quickly if you need to find some cover in a hurry.

Your Exo suit gives you access to Exo abilities: features that you can choose prior to going into battle. Your suit has a battery that depletes whenever you activate an ability. Some of the Abilities are really good fun; our particular favourite was the Exo Shield ability, which allows you to pull up an arm-mounted, instant shield to block incoming enemy fire. The Exo abilities provide an array of defensive and utility driven features. There are seven in total, but some of the more interesting include: Exo Hover, which allows you to hover in mid-air after a Boost Jump; and the Exo Trophy System, which destroys incoming grenades and rockets.

Finally, your Exo suit now takes care of your grenades with the built-in Exo Launcher. Aside from your grenades now getting a range boost, this "Exo feature" does little more than change your grenade throwing animation. That being said, there are 10 grenade types (both offensive and utility driven) to add to your multiplayer arsenal. The usual suspects are accounted for like frag, smoke, and stun grenades, but then there are the more outlandish grenades making an appearance like the Threat Grenade (which highlights enemies through walls in the immediate vicinity) and the Tracking Drone (which will track and highlight an enemy). Oh yes, and the crowd favourite Semtex Grenade makes its triumphant return.



world's governments in a state of panic and ineptitude, Atlas steps in to fight the terrorist threat. Atlas has access to some seriously advanced technology, which means their Exo-suited super-soldiers are frighteningly effective at turning the tide of battle. This obviously leaves Irons with all the power in the world, and with that power he begins his own little global take-over. The game's tagline, "Power Changes Everything" therefore seems to have more than one way of being interpreted.

As everyone knows, *Call of Duty* is almost always all about the multiplayer mode; it's the game mode that provides the title with longevity and a solid platform for providing DLC. While the single-player outline promises typical *Call of Duty* action with massive set-pieces, futuristic technology and things going boom, it's the multiplayer that most people are interested in.

A few days prior to the start of Gamescom 2014, we attended a press event for the first ever hands-on

multiplayer session for *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare*. During our time with the game, we experienced many of the additions, tweaks and changes that Sledgehammer has brought to the table. The vast majority of those additions and changes come in the form of the Exo-Skeleton suits that each player's character wears into battle. With the Exo comes a new suite of customisation options, which gave rise to a motto that Sledgehammer used during their development of the multiplayer: "you play your way."

We played multiplayer matches for about three hours, and got to try out a variety of game modes spread across four different maps. In some regards it's a very different feeling *Call of Duty* multiplayer experience: less grounded in reality and more free to make frivolous additions based on future technology. There's an element of science-fiction in this multiplayer version, which is hardly ever seen in *Call of Duty* titles that strive for realism.



THE URBAN OUTFITTER

Creating a custom appearance for your multiplayer soldier has become increasingly popular as *Call of Duty* has progressed. In *Advanced Warfare* this feature has been expanded to include something called the Virtual Lobby. Instead of being dumped into a multiplayer lobby that lists the names of each player involved, the Virtual Lobby has every player's personalised soldier on display. The full 3D model is rendered, and you're free to pan around the lobby to inspect the load-outs and customisation options that each player has chosen for their soldier. With soldier customisation becoming a more serious feature thanks to equipment and weapon unlocks through Supply Drops, Sledgehammer is hoping that the Virtual Lobby is one of the new features that players really grow to love. The ton of weapon choices coupled with the myriad equipment unlocks means Sledgehammer is boasting that there are enough customisation options to render "billions" of different player characters.



"...it gives the Drone carrier a degree of lethality in spite of the fact that they technically have no weapons."



LOCK AND LOAD WITH PICK 13

Sledgehammer openly admitted to borrowing the Pick 10 feature from *Black Ops*, but for *Advanced Warfare* we're getting a Pick 13. This basically means that you have 13 slots to fill when it comes to outfitting your multiplayer character. A primary weapon and secondary weapon each take one slot of your 13. You can then pick up to three attachment slots for your primary and up to two for your secondary. Then you get two Exo slots (one for an ability and one for a grenade, although you can choose perks that allow you to choose two Exo abilities or two grenades instead of one of each), three perk slots, three Wildcard slots, and up to four Scorestreak slots. As with *Black Ops'* Pick 10 system, you can pick up to 13 loadout slots in any combination in order to customise your character as much as you want.

Once you've settled on a loadout, you can head into a virtual firing range at the press of a button. This holographic firing range loads instantly and you can even access it while you're sitting in a game lobby. It allows you to instantly test out weapon loadouts and attachments in order to find what suits you best.



SCORESTREAKS 2.0

What would a *Call of Duty* multiplayer mode be without Scorestreaks (or Killstreaks as they've been called in other iterations)? Pretty damn reserved we'd say. Good thing that Sledgehammer has brought them back. This time around they've been tweaked a little. For a start, you can now customise your Scorestreaks. For example: you might choose the Auto Turret Scorestreak ability, which costs 600 points. You could choose to turn that Auto Turret into a Rocket Turret for an additional 100 points. You could then pay an additional 100 points (making the Scorestreak cost a total of 800 points) to make the rocket launcher detachable, meaning you can deploy your Rocket Turret and then yank off the launcher and run around the map with it.

There are also co-op Scorestreaks, which means that a second player can join your activated Scorestreak ability. For example: you might be piloting a Warbird plane around the level while a second player spots and highlights enemies for you from the same viewpoint of the Warbird.

Finally, for those players who perhaps aren't too good and battle to accumulate points to activate Scorestreak abilities, Sledgehammer has introduced one-time use bonuses known as Reinforcements. How do you get these Reinforcements? Well, they're kind of rare and come via Supply Drops (see boxout), which are now like an RPG loot system in that you get three levels of rarity: Enlisted, Professional and Elite. You might get lucky and find a Reinforcement coupon which is then automatically equipped for your next match (so you can't accumulate them and break the game's balance) and will activate after a certain time. Once activated, a Care Package will drop in for you with a ready to use Scorestreak or bonus additional perks for your loadout. Now anyone can be "that guy" calling in artillery bombardments mid-match.

"Sledgehammer's sound team needs special mention because the weapon effects, future-tech sounds and explosions add a tremendous amount of impact to the game."

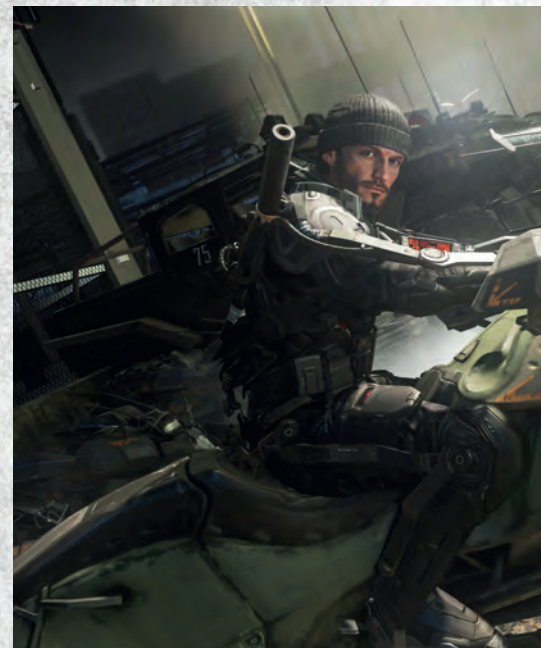
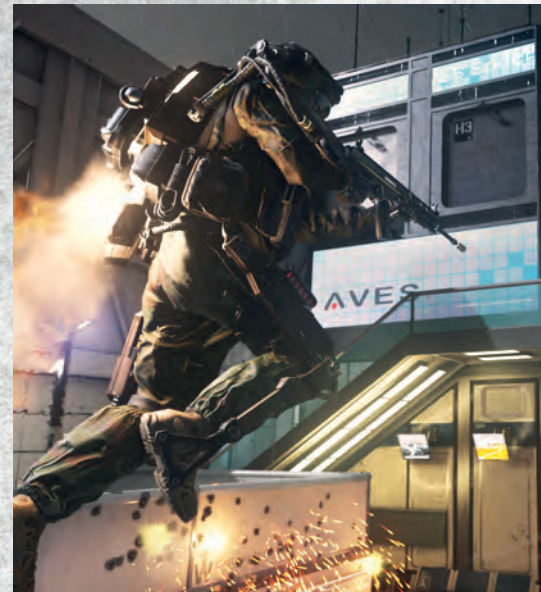
SUPPLY DROPS AND GUNS – LOTS OF GUNS

What *Call of Duty* has lacked in the past is a means of getting people hooked beyond just the multiplayer gameplay experience. The series has needed a carrot to dangle beyond that of the bog-standard XP gain and ranked progression system. Sledgehammer believes they've found that with Supply Drops.

Supply Drops are awarded based on time spent playing multiplayer. In the three hours that we played the game, we must have received close on 20 drops. Think of them as goody bags loaded with weapon and equipment unlocks that can be used straight away. They're completely random in their contents and you can get between one and three items per drop. They're also ranked into three levels of rarity: Enlisted, Professional and Elite. The more you play, the more likely it is you'll hit an Elite drop.

The guns of *Advanced Warfare* are numerous. There are about 35 in-game weapons, but each of those weapons has 10 custom weapon variations that modify their base stats. These custom weapons also look unique with custom decals and finishes that truly separate the variant from the vanilla weapon. Add in the fact that you can add up to three different attachments to each weapon, and you're left with a massive amount of possible combinations.

The Supply Drops reminded us a lot of the good old RPG mechanic of loot chests: you never know what you might get inside, and what you do could end up being exceptionally rare. The addition of rare custom weapons and vanity items for soldiers begged the question: will players be able to trade items? We asked Greg Reisdorf, the game's lead multiplayer designer, that exact question. His answer was somewhat coy and he said there was nothing to announce as yet, but the smile he had when he said so indicated that this might be a feature that's added later.





MULTIPLAYER GAME MODES

There will be 12 multiplayer game modes from day one, with many fan favourites making a return albeit with some slight adjustments and strategies thanks to the change in soldier movement sets via the Exo. You'll still be able to play classics like team deathmatch, Kill Confirmed, Search and Destroy, capture the flag, and Domination. However, some oft requested modes are making a comeback, the most exciting of which is Hardpoint. We literally couldn't get enough of Hardpoint during our time with the game.

New game modes include Momentum, which is a new take on the classic War mode. Then there's Uplink, which was quite tricky to get the hang of at first, but proved to be heaps of fun. In this game mode, each team has an Uplink portal hovering on a side of the map. A Satellite Drone is dumped into random locations of the map, and you have to retrieve it and throw it into the enemy's Uplink portal. It's somewhat like *Unreal Tournament's* Bombing Run, which is fine by us because it's good fun. The moment you pick up the Satellite Drone your gun disappears, which leaves you rather vulnerable. The flip side of this is that you can throw the drone at an enemy player, who will automatically catch it thereby making their weapon disappear and yours reappear. You're then free to gun them down and retrieve the drone to continue your rush towards the enemy Uplink. It's a neat twist because it gives the drone carrier a degree of lethality in spite of the fact that they technically have no weapons to use while holding the drone.



➔ For now, Sledgehammer is keeping quiet about the number of multiplayer maps that will ship with the game. We got to play on four different maps, but each map can accommodate all 12 of the multiplayer game modes.



The game's Exo suits are at the forefront of all of the changes, but those changes are in turn felt in other areas of the multiplayer. Levels had to be designed around increased verticality because your Exo allows you to Boost Jump (read: double jump) to get to much higher areas. Players are suddenly much faster and way more agile than they've ever been in a *Call of Duty*. The obvious comparison that people will make is with *Titanfall*, but we've sunk hundreds of hours into that game, and *Advanced Warfare* feels different. It's its own beast and comparing it to another game with future weaponry is probably doing it a disservice.

One of the most surprising elements we noticed during our time with the game was the sound effects. Sledgehammer's sound team needs special mention because the weapon effects, future-tech

sounds and explosions add a tremendous amount of impact to the game. Energy weapons, such as the EM-1 Direct Energy rifle (a heavy weapon that generates heat rather than consuming ammo, and literally microwaves enemies from afar) are guns that don't exist, but that have been shown such meticulous care in their sound effect design that it warrants specific mentioning. The sound in *Advanced Warfare* is amazing.

We're very keen to see how long-time *Call of Duty* fans are going to take to Sledgehammer's additions – they certainly add a new level to multiplayer confrontations but with most adjustments to longstanding IPs, there's no way of telling how the community will react until the game is in their hands. We're cautiously optimistic about this one. **NAG**

- Mikito707

Reviews *Intro*

A shrivelled old man with big ears once said that fear leads to the dark side, and if this lot are anything to go by then they're all well on their way to building their own Death Stars. Meet your reviewers...

Question / What's the scariest experience you've ever had in a video game?



BEN "BENSONANCE" MYRES
Weirdly enough, it was the *King Kong* game. The atmosphere was pretty creepy and it freaked me out – couldn't even finish the game.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Godus and *The Expendabros*



DANE "BARKSKIN" REMENDES
Pretty much any moment from *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* really, with the invisible water demon thing taking first prize. Also, memories of any Alma appearance from the original *F.E.A.R.* causes latent pants wetting.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
The Last of Us: Remastered,
Wolfenstein: The New Order (again)



DELANO "DELANO" CUZZUCOLI
As an impressionable 12 year old, it was walking in a room which goes dark in *Doom* and then being attacked blindly.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Freedom Planet



GEOFF "GEOMETRIX" BURROWS
That bit in *Resident Evil 2* where you're walking along, minding your own business, and those hands reach through those boarded-up windows.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Diablo III: Ultimate Evil Edition, *COD Zombies*, *Sims 4*
Create a Sim demo

▶ **mini review**

MXGP: The Official Motocross Videogame

m *MXGP* is completely different to other racing games. Most racing games are all about shiny cars, but *MXGP* is dirty, gritty and all about the racing.

Verticality is added to the mix. Each jump requires the decision between jumping high to avoid obstacles and jumping low to shorten the period until you can accelerate again. Even corners are more nuanced in *MXGP*: you have the option between braking with your front or rear brake and turning with either the handlebars or leaning with the body. Different combinations of these four options are vital for executing various types of corners correctly. I'm not afraid to say it bluntly: mechanically, *MXGP* may be one of the deepest racing games ever made.

All that depth doesn't come without

its negatives, though. It succeeds at the cost of a pleasant introduction to the game. It takes a while before you can make it a round even just half a track's corners without falling off your bike. The elegant cornering is a fun challenge once you've begun to get the hang of it, but for the first few hours it's a real frustration. This isn't helped by the lacklustre tutorial videos that explain the mechanics in a way that's only useful once you've figured out how to avoid falling off the bike anyway. **NAG**

- **Bensonance**



68 *MXGP* is a deep and fun to master racing game. The frustration early on makes it difficult to recommend to any except motocross and racing game fans.

HEARD AT THE OFFICE...

“Looking like I know what I’m talking about is one of my strongest stats.”

-Tarryn



MICHAEL “RETTIDE” JAMES
Minecraft, a creeper dropped behind me from above. I was low on health, lost in a cave, a million blocks away and loaded with diamonds. I’ve never been so scared running blind in the dark.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Sniper Elite III



MIKLOS “MIKIT0707” SZECSEI
Probably that moment in *Dead Space 3* (I skipped the second game) when Stalker necromorphs find you for the first time. When they peer at you from cover... Nope.gif.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Godus, Hohokum, and Gamescom Recovery Simulator 2014



MIKTAR “MIKTAR” DRACON
Clive Barker’s Undying. That game could really set the mood, and being first-person long before games like *Penumbra* and *Amnesia*, it had a great immersion to it.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Guild Wars 2, Star Trek Online, Warframe, Firefall, Minecraft, Persona 4: The Golden



NEO “SHOCKG” SIBEKO
Silent Hill 2: Director’s Cut – By far the most traumatising game experience I’ve ever had and will ever have!

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Heavily modified *Skyrim*



TARRYN “AZIMUTH” VAN DER BYL
Condemned 2. The bit with the mannequins. I won’t spoil the... surprise.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Diablo III: Ultimate Evil Edition

▶ **mini review**

The Last of Us Remastered

Iargely revered as one of the finest games of the previous console generation, *The Last of Us* proved to be the perfect swansong for the PlayStation 3. If you didn’t own a PS3 during its flagship years but find yourself in possession of a PS4, then you owe it to yourself to play *The Last of Us Remastered*. It’s the same game that PS3 owners lost their minds over last year, but has improved visuals (native 1080p at 60 frames per second) and audio, director commentary, and includes the *Left Behind* solo DLC alongside the multiplayer DLC packs. It’s a game that’s every bit as beautiful as it is horrific, following the journey of two unlikely companions as they trek across the United States 20 years after the world succumbs to a deadly fungus that infects most



of the population and turns them into bloodthirsty mutants. Joel – a smuggler in the new world – unwittingly discovers a chance at redemption from his tragic



past when he meets Ellie, a 14 year-old girl who was born into this world gone to hell. **NAG**
- *Barkskin*

96 *The gameplay is solid, with brutal combat, clever contextual cover mechanics and a crafting system. The real joy is in the powerfully emotional narrative, and in unfurling the complex, heart-warming relationship that Joel and Ellie share.*

PLATFORMS / PC	REVIEWED ON / PC	GENRE / Action RPG / top-down shooter	DEVELOPER / Giant Box Games
AGE RATING / N/A	MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None	PUBLISHER / Giant Box Games	
WEBSITE / www.pixelboygame.com			DISTRIBUTOR / Digital distribution

Pixel Boy and the Ever-Expanding Dungeon

Is this dungeon-crawler pixel-perfect, or just dead pixels?

Roguelikes. Roguelike-like. Dungeon-crawlers. Procedural generation. We're hearing these terms a lot these days. What happens, though, when local developers decide to take all the aforementioned concepts and mush them together into a colourful, blocky, meta-referential slice of indie pie? If you thought I was gonna say "*Pixel Boy*", then your powers of precognition are functioning correctly and you should probably play the lottery.

The game is a loving tribute to *Rogue* and dungeon crawlers of old, with an overhead view and a shooting mechanic slightly reminiscent of a twin-stick shoot-'em-up. The shtick is that the dungeons are randomly-generated, as are the enemies that inhabit them: before being fully loaded, each level will display an amusing slot machine showing the enemy roster. The bad guys themselves are fairly imaginative, embodying the inherent repulsiveness of scorpions and worms, but with an excellent neon colour scheme and blocky build that will mesmerize players. Be

warned, though, these guys are pretty brutal.

There is a requisite RPG element whereby players can upgrade their armour and stats, but what sets *Pixel Boy* apart is the fact that there are loads of ways to combine various weapons and power-ups. These may be purchased from the overworld town or found from the bodies of fallen enemies, and then applied into one of several available slots. Here, players can mix and match assorted weapon properties to create elaborate and ridiculous constructs. For example, it's possible to fuse homing shots with fire, creating enemy-seeking flame projectiles. Although some combinations work better than others, it opens up the door to a lot of creative experimentation; it is therein that the bulk of the game's fun factor lies.

However, all is not well in pixel land. There is a frustration factor that serves as a mild deterrent, especially in the first levels. The enemies are quite strong early on, ensuring that players are somewhat outmatched and have to resort to grinding in order to progress.

I said HERE. Shoot HERE, punk!



When in doubt, PRETTY COLOURS.



Once you have adequate stats, you'll fare much better, but getting to that point might give first-time players the wrong impression.

Another slight annoyance is the presence of a narrator armed with assorted humorous quips. Although thankfully his utterances are not overdone, the jokes he spews forth are flat and tired. It's an attempt at meta-humour that just has the feeling of being done before too many times.

If you're a fan of dungeon crawlers and you're itching for something slightly different, *Pixel Boy* is worth your time. Despite the initial difficulty, all the customisation options are truly enthralling. The game is still in active development and patches are released regularly, so there's still plenty of room for a good game to evolve into something great.

NAG
- Delano

79 A solid example of a dungeon crawler, but the difficulty may be off-putting for some.

PLUS / Bright and colourful / Random generation in levels and monsters ensures variety / Weapon combos are great

MINUS / Occasionally frustrating / Narrator can get annoying / Dungeons are visually-lacking

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PLATFORMS / PC	REVIEWED ON / PC	GENRE / Point-and-click adventure	DEVELOPER / Zojo!
AGE RATING / N/A	MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None	PUBLISHER / Reverb Triple XP	
WEBSITE / www.zojo!.com			DISTRIBUTOR / Digital distribution

Shadowgate

A quality remake for the thinking gamer

ah, *Shadowgate* – the old, friendly adversary from my generation’s youth. Many hours were devoted to solving your fiendish puzzles and unforgiving challenges. You’ve earned our respect time and again, and now, in 2014, you grace our screens once more in an updated form. It’s good to have you back.

The game casts you in the role of a certain Jair – a warrior, child of prophecy, and generally a ne’er-do-anything – who is tasked with infiltrating an ominous castle named Shadowgate. It’s here that our protagonist will have to match wits against an evil warlock who doesn’t take too kindly to trespassers, especially ones seeking to uncover relics that will banish their evil from the world. Luckily, at the very start, you get help from a guide in the form of a rotten skull who is amusingly named

Yorick. Yorick will show you the ropes, offer commentary on the locations or just make sarcastic quips.

Despite the light-hearted addition of Yorick, the game remains an elaborate, dark fantasy point-’n’-click affair with an extremely ominous tone. As our young protagonist, players will navigate the castle’s many locales with all their assorted traps, puzzles and hazards. Often there are several paths to take and before long you’ll find yourself in a labyrinth. Luckily, you’re armed with a map, so there’s more time devoted to problem-solving than merely trying to find your bearings.

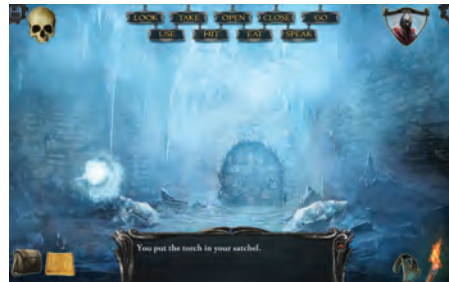
Players of old will appreciate the fact that a lot of the first game’s puzzles remain intact. But, there are a few new ones thrown into the mix, plus new twists to some oldies. While this may sound like cause for purists to go



I'm not too sure I want to take a skull's advice on the appropriate response to a dead body...



Yeah. "Placid". Right. Like we believe you...



up in arms, it actually works very well; the experience is not cheapened or made easier and veterans can find challenge once more in a game they mastered many years ago.

The old and new challenges come wrapped in a glorious package of refined visuals and an updated soundtrack. The whole affair has the same aesthetic as paintings from a high fantasy novel: liberal use of dark tones against bright colours give the impression of a traditional, hand-made work of art. On the audio side of things, everything works well; the sound effects are convincing and the voice-acting is believable. As for the music, it’s been given a classical treatment that could have easily been composed by John Williams, though if you’re like me, you might feel that the soundtrack from the NES version felt more appropriate. Lucky for us, it’s included part and parcel and may be selected from the options menu; I always have it enabled and suggest you do the same.

Shadowgate is a treat for everybody, especially if you loved the original and enjoy adventure games generally. Get it now, you won’t be sorry. **NAG**

- Delano

90 An example of a remake done right, *Shadowgate's* core mechanics have also aged well and it remains a seminal adventure title.

PLUS / Challenging / Beautiful artwork / Streamlined gameplay without sacrificing the original charm

MINUS / High difficulty and tough puzzles may be off-putting

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

REVIEWED ON / PS4

AGE RATING / 12

GENRE / Third-person shooter

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > 4 players

WEBSITE / transformersgame.com

DEVELOPER / Edge of Reality

PUBLISHER / Activision

DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom

Transformers: Rise of the Dark Spark

Dōmo arigatō for nothing, Mr Roboto

transformers: *Rise of the Dark Spark*'s story centres on the Dark Spark – a powerful artefact that has the power to tear holes in the space-fabric that binds dimensions. This is especially useful for creating a narrative bridge between the *Transformers* film universe and the separate video game universe in which *Transformers: War for Cybertron* and its sequel *Fall of Cybertron* exist, because that makes for a convenient reason to associate this game with the recently released *Age of Extinction* movie, which obviously equals greater profits for someone, somewhere.

With that in mind, the narrative is split between two dimensions and their respective settings: pre-*Fall* Cybertron from the previous games and the Autobot/Decepticon war on Earth in the films. The story is insignificant and tough to follow. At least most of the voice acting's spot-on and recognisable.

The game itself is really unexciting third-person shooter fare. You tediously mow down waves of samey enemies across environments that range from repetitive to downright ugly. There are weapons to unlock and upgrade, and each character has special abilities that can be employed. The cool transformations are intact, but the level design is too restrictive to really make the characters' vehicle modes useful – especially where flight is concerned. It's glaringly obvious that *Rise of the Dark Spark* was rushed to meet the release of *Age of Extinction* at the box office. Moments of enjoyment are very quickly replaced by the overbearing tedium that envelops them. **NAG**

- Barkskin



55

It's depressingly dull. That's Rise of the Dark Spark's greatest flaw. You'd think that it would follow War for Cybertron's lead, and that with all the weight of the Transformers brand behind it, it'd exude at least a tiny bit of enthusiasm. But it doesn't. Big sigh.

PLUS / Occasionally fun / It's got Transformers in it

MINUS / Deeply uninspired in almost every way

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PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / XBO

REVIEWED ON / PC

GENRE / Stealth shooter

DEVELOPER / Rebellion

AGE RATING / 16

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > 12 players

PUBLISHER / 505 Games

WEBSITE / www.sniperelite3.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Apex Interactive [console] / Silverscreen Trading [PC]

Sniper Elite III

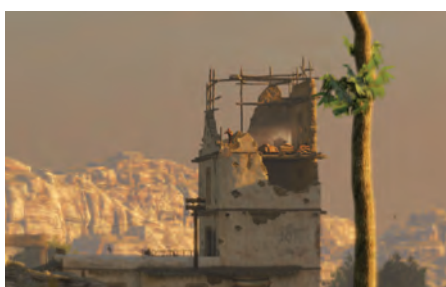
Nut shot

Sniper Elite III is a Second World War sneak and peak sniper-centric romp through Africa. Improved from the second game's rigid route through the story and game world, in this instalment you can approach objectives how you see fit. It's entirely possible to scout around to the opposite side of the map and kill enemies there that you might have had to face later. You can sneak up behind them for a silent end or find a sniper nest on a hill and take them out from afar or, if you're feeling brave, go loud. The game offers different levels of difficulty and on the toughest setting you're not going to last long running around guns blazing – as it should be. The enemy artificial intelligence is varied and good enough to keep players on their toes and if you're spotted you'll need to relocate quickly to avoid detection and ultimately death. This shooting and running does highlight a flaw in that the enemy soldiers simply forget about you and the fact that you just killed their guard buddy, provided you

move far enough away. The game features a cheesy story that involves disabling a German super weapon facility; there aren't too many maps to play through but each one takes a long time to complete. The maps are varied and look good despite the aging game engine and players can expect rocky outcrops, airfields and secret bases, all populated with annoyingly placed bad guys. There's an addictive quality to the action and plenty of satisfaction to be had when you clear an entire base of enemies without being spotted or fired at once. Improved from the second game, *Sniper Elite III* features a more detailed X-ray camera, showing players the kind of internal damage their rounds do to flesh, bones, eyeballs and yes, even testicles now. There's something hypnotic about following a bullet through the air and then watching it shatter bones and pop eyeballs. This X-ray action now includes vehicles, so firing a bullet into the gas tank can be seen in full detail before the vehicle goes boom.



Look at this dirty camper.



If you're spotted you need to get as far away from your last known position as possible.



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

The multiplayer is good enough to warrant a few lines of praise. There are a few modes to choose from including Distance King and No Cross, which is a mode where you're forced to snipe because you can't cross the middle of the level. Playing with a friend also becomes more fun in *Sniper Elite III* as one player can play the sniper and his friend an operative. It even has a mode where endless waves of enemies must be eliminated, not zombies but just regular bad guys. The team at Rebellion has upped the stakes with some inventive and fresh multiplayer modes to complement a fun single player experience. There isn't anything wrong with this third instalment in the series, it's improved on the previous games significantly and has plenty on offer. It's not perfect and the minor issues here and there prevent it from being great. **NAG**

- RedTide

81 It's a fun and engrossing addition to the series and takes the game and genre much further than most sequels usually do, with fewer issues than you'd expect. Play it on the hardest setting and it can eat up hours of your life. Great multiplayer options too.

PLUS / Satisfying & addictive / Fun multiplayer / Strategic freedom

MINUS / Easy to fool AI / Cheap deaths / Limited arsenal



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PLATFORMS / PC / PS4	REVIEWED ON / PC	GENRE / Third-person shooter	DEVELOPER / Digital Extremes
AGE RATING / 18	MULTIPLAYER / Local > None	Online > 4 players	PUBLISHER / Digital Extremes
WEBSITE / warframe.com			DISTRIBUTOR / Digital distribution

Warframe

Space ninjas of the future

Ever wonder what happened to Digital Extremes, the other half that worked with Epic Games on the *Unreal* franchise? They've been having a rough time of it, it seems. Their third-person shooter *Dark Sector* was met with mixed reviews and quickly forgotten. They helped 2K with the PS3 version of *BioShock*, and were then tasked with creating the tacked-on multiplayer portion of *BioShock 2*. From there, they helped develop the PC version of the ill-fated *Homefront*, the underappreciated *The Darkness II*, and then the rushed and buggy movie tie-in game *Star Trek: Into*

Darkness. After such a long and rocky road, it's no surprise to see them seek refuge in the frontier that is the free-to-play market.

Warframe is a kind of spiritual successor to *Dark Sector*. You play as a Tenno, an ancient warrior awoken from a very long cryo-sleep into a universe at war. The Grineer – humanoid clones with degenerate genes – want to rule it all. The Corpus, being a mega corporation with robots, wants to own it all. The Infested, infected with the “Technocyte” virus that turns them into biological weapons, want to be everything. So the Tenno are tasked with

saving the universe from this crapstorm.

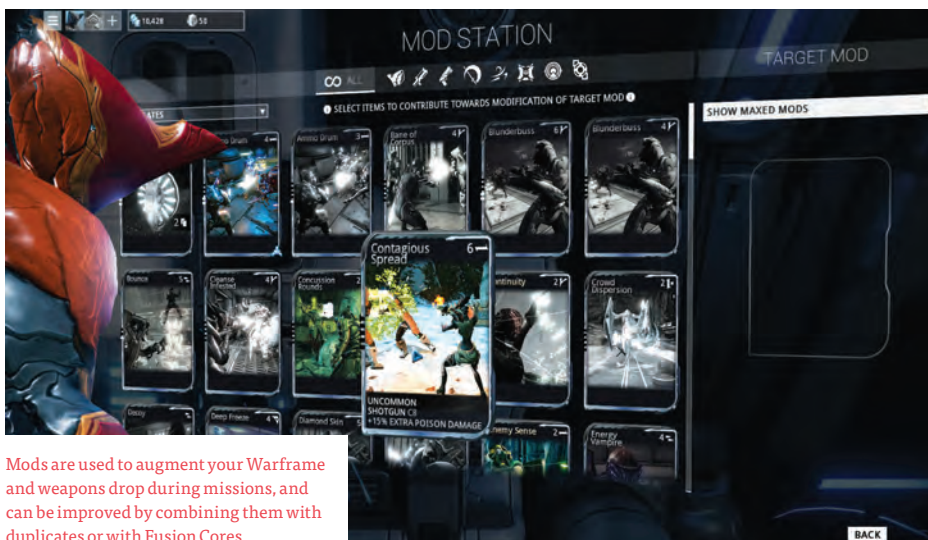
The game has been in open beta since early 2013, but Update 14 has finally brought it into what I consider a “reviewable” state. Keep in mind free-to-play games update frequently, and so dramatically change often. Update 14 brought a much-needed tutorial prologue chapter and the entire user interface has been overhauled. The core game is mostly unchanged, but there was very little wrong with it to begin with. After selecting a mission, you (and friends or strangers) are dropped into a procedurally generated map. There, it's all third-person action combat with wall-running, sliding, shooting while sliding, leaping, backflips and sweet melee combat. As you earn experience, your “frame”, weapons and companions (like a combat-capable space-dog pet you earn via a quest) level-up, gaining more slots for mods. Mods add various effects to your attacks, like fire damage and more ammo, or give you special moves.

There are many mission types, and missions may have random effects added to them like fire damage across the map, or a sudden Infested outbreak so you're fighting them along with whoever is supposed to be there. Special effects randomly trigger around the solar system, which give you an opportunity for bigger rewards at higher risk. *Warframe* follows the *Monster Hunter* formula of farming specific bosses for the plans to craft certain weapons or frames. You can buy frames or weapons with real money, but everything can be earned in-game if you're patient, except for fancy cosmetic items like space-scarves. **NAG**

- Miktar



"I see you guys have gold trim and fancy Warframes. You must play a lot."



Mods are used to augment your Warframe and weapons drop during missions, and can be improved by combining them with duplicates or with Fusion Cores.



79 There's an elegant simplicity to Warframe's genre-bending nature. It combines third-person shooting with random level generation and loot-finding in a way that's very appealing if you find the game fun to play. It's even better when playing with friends for the increased difficulty which brings better rewards. Being free-to-play doesn't hurt either.

PLUS / Looks amazing / Great combat / Free

MINUS / Lots of grinding / Still in beta



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PLATFORMS / 3DS / PC / Wii U	REVIEWED ON / Wii U	GENRE / Action / platformer	DEVELOPER / Yacht Club Games
AGE RATING / 12	MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None	PUBLISHER / Yacht Club Games	
WEBSITE / yachtclubgames.com/shovel-knight			DISTRIBUTOR / Digital distribution



Shovel Knight

You're gonna dig this

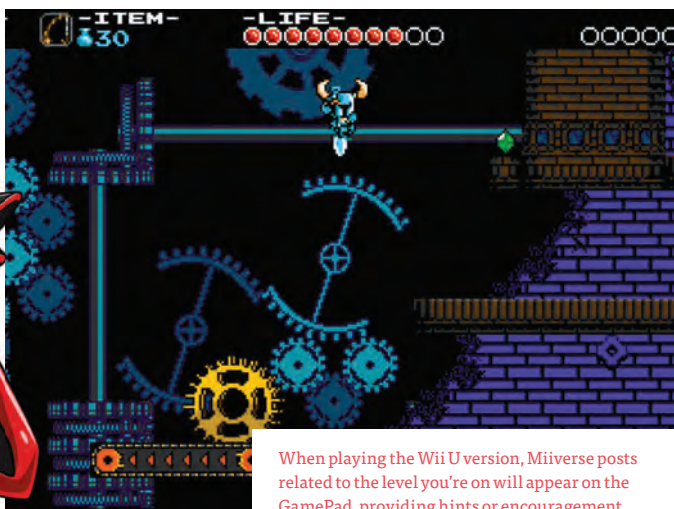
Time-travel back to the '80s when things were radical and games were tubular. Or something like that, my memory of that era is pretty hazy. Playing *Shovel Knight* might as well be like stepping into a DeLorean and going where we don't need roads (you have seen *Back to the Future* I hope, or that'd make no sense). The game is a side-scrolling platformer in the true 8-bit style, looking every bit like it's playing off a cartridge you just had to blow on to get working. Or at least, faking it pretty well. Even though *Shovel Knight* is made to invoke that "style" of game, in form and function, it does cheat around the edges quite a bit. There's no way it would actually run on an original Nintendo Entertainment System: there are too many sound channels, the screen is obviously way bigger thanks to high-

definition resolution, and not a single sprite will flicker. But if 8-bit games like *Castlevania III*, *Super Mario Bros. 3*, *Mega Man* and *DuckTales* were still made today they'd be like *Shovel Knight*, which draws much of its inspiration from the aforementioned classics.

Shovel Knight, a Knight with a Shovel, runs like Mario (with just the right "sticky friction" to feel good) but jumps like Uncle Scrooge. He can point his shovel down to pogo-jump off enemies, or use it to whack them away. There are special items, like magical attacks throwing anchors overhead in an arc, which evoke the secondary weapon mechanics of Simon Belmont. The campaign takes place across a world map with multiple levels connected via paths, ala the *Super Mario Bros. 3* overworld, and you decide which



Yacht Club Games went to great lengths to try and replicate the unique 8-bit Nintendo style, but does cheat in some places by having lots of parallax scrolling.



When playing the Wii U version, Miiverse posts related to the level you're on will appear on the GamePad, providing hints or encouragement.

bosses to take on in which order, just like *Mega Man*. But not everything is inspired by the old. There's a little *Dark Souls* in there, for when you die you drop a big chunk of your gold collected so far. Gold is a valuable currency used to get better weapons, armour or spells. You restart at the last checkpoint, and have to make your way back to where you died to collect what you dropped. If you die on the way, you drop your current gold and lose what you dropped before. To make things more interesting, there's a risk/reward to the checkpoints: you can smash them to get a big injection of gold, but then you will start back much further back if you die.

There's a lot of great humour in *Shovel Knight*, along with secrets to find, special challenge maps that alter the gameplay in some way, and plenty of replayability in the form of New Game Plus. The game plays to nostalgia, but it doesn't rely on it. **NAG**

- Miktar

87 Yes, it's another one of those "retro" inspired games that uses pixel art and chiptune music. It's also one of the most well-designed platformers out there, with great level design and inventive mechanics. Even if the art style might not be to everyone's taste, the quality of its gameplay has a universal appeal.

PLUS / Fun and catchy music / Solid gameplay / Lots of secrets

MINUS / Gets quite difficult

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PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / PSV

REVIEWED ON / PS4

AGE RATING / 3

GENRE / Racing simulation

MULTIPLAYER / Local > 2 players Online > 12 players

WEBSITE / www.motogpvideogame.com

DEVELOPER / Milestone S.r.l.

PUBLISHER / Milestone

DISTRIBUTOR / Ster Kinekor Entertainment

PLATFORMS / 360 / 3DS / Mobile / PS3 / PS4 / Wii U / Xbox 360 / XBO

REVIEWED ON / 360

GENRE / Action adventure

AGE RATING / 16

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None

WEBSITE / www.beenox.com

DEVELOPER / Beenox

PUBLISHER / Activision / Marvel

DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom Interactive

MotoGP 14

Oh, I'm last... again

I used to think I was pretty good at racing games, until I played *MotoGP 14*. It's not that it's that difficult (okay, it is), it's just I suck at racing games that don't let you drift around corners while burning nitro and flipping off the opponent you just drove off the track. *MotoGP 14* frowns upon such shenanigans, and it does so safe in the knowledge that everything it does, it does well enough to not warrant caring about you and your rubber-burning nonsense.

So, yes, *MotoGP 14* is for the fans; it's not for the rabble. I mean it's *really* not for the rabble: even on its easiest setting with all the hand-holding turned on, doing any better than a stone-last placement is a cause for celebration. This game is hard, but so very well balanced that you know it's your fault for not doing better. It's like the *Dark Souls* of racing games.

If you follow real-life MotoGP then this game has it all: it's flooded with well-executed game modes and all the bike settings you could ask for. It's got a ton of licensed track, sponsors and riders. Sadly it falls a little short when it comes to the bits in-between: the loading times suck; the menu music is lovely the first few times but gets repetitive quickly; there's no in-race music to help level out the longest races; the tracks lack visual detail. Luckily if you're the target market for this game, you probably don't care about these sorts of things. **NAG**

- GeometriX



78 *MotoGP 14 isn't for everyone, but for those who enjoy these sorts of games you'll feel right at home. It's filled with content to keep you coming back for more, and challenging enough to ensure a high skill ceiling.*

PLUS / Loads of authentic content / Highly customisable gameplay / Deep simulation elements

MINUS / Steep learning curve / Not much here for non-super-fans

The Amazing Spider-Man 2

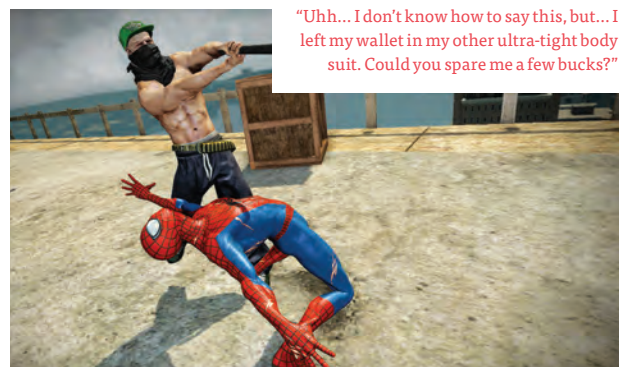
The original swinger

Adapting comic books to games requires more than just modelling a character in a spandex suit.

Moving around in *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* is a constant ambiguous mix of utterly confusing and completely empowering. Swinging around the city with your webs feels excellent and both Spidey and the New York citizens' comments keep it from being boring. In contrast, the game's camera focus is clearly allergic to walls. As soon as you crawl onto one, the camera squashes up against said wall and it becomes difficult to orient yourself and move around effectively. This is particularly problematic when you consider much of the main story line and several side missions take place inside and require you to frequently clamber up walls.

The open world of *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* doesn't feel too different or original from previous Spider-Man games: you swing around the map dealing with petty crimes; taking photos; collecting comic books; dealing with Russian mobsters' hideouts and other classic Spider-Man tasks. Spending too much time in the open world can be a bit frustrating, though. You have to resolve a certain number of petty crimes to ensure the New York public perceives you as more of a hero than a menace. It's an interesting idea, but the execution errs on the side of irritating rather than eliciting a continued urge to protect the citizens of New York. **NAG**

- Bensonance



78 *The game excellently portrays the world of Spider-Man. Unfortunately, its mechanics are generic and unoriginal. Recommended for players new to superhero games (for you, add 10-15 to the score).*

PLUS / Swinging around feels incredible / Dialogue writing is superb

MINUS / Wall climbing feels claustrophobic / Hero/menace system doesn't quite work

PLATFORMS / PC / PS4

REVIEWED ON / PC

AGE RATING / 12

GENRE / Fighting

MULTIPLAYER / Local > 2 players Online > 2 players

WEBSITE / www.nidhoggame.com

DEVELOPER / Messhof

PUBLISHER / Messhof

DISTRIBUTOR / Digital distribution

PLATFORMS / Wii U

REVIEWED ON / Wii U

GENRE / Puzzle

AGE RATING / 3

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None

WEBSITE / pushmoworld.nintendo.com

DEVELOPER / Intelligent Systems / Nintendo SPD

PUBLISHER / Nintendo

DISTRIBUTOR / Digital distribution

Nidhogg

The fine art of fighting

It might look like hot garbage, or art, depending on where you fall in terms of visual preference. It might be stupidly simple, or elegantly uncomplex, depending on how you feel about the gameplay. It might be the greatest fighting game ever made, or an overpriced hipster art project, depending on if you like the damn thing or not. In development since 2011, this side-scrolling two-player fighting game where you duel with swords, kicks, runs, jumps and punches has been turning heads. Either towards it, attracted to the bright Atari-style low-fi graphics and immediately comprehensible combat, or away from it in disgust because... reasons.

It's an incredible fast paced game when both players (or the player vs. AI) are reckless. Pixel blood flows down the walls as each fighter tries to get past the other. If you make it, you move to the next screen and your opponent is placed in front of you once more. It's a tug of war, in a sense. The victor not decided by who kills who the most, but by whichever side reaches their goal first: a giant flying worm on either end of the level. If you can get eaten by the Nidhogg, you have proven your prowess in combat.

But it can also be a slow, methodical and beautiful game of lethal chess. **NAG**

- Miktar



If you're prone to epilepsy, playing this game is a really bad idea.

78

If you need to settle an argument like gentlemen (or gentlewomen), Nidhogg is a great alternative to actually punching each other. A near perfect distillation of fighting game concepts that doesn't resort to tricky dexterity checks (like quarter-circle forward special moves), there's no better way to get to know someone than by putting a pixel sword through them.

PLUS / Great fun / Well designed / Intense

MINUS / Visuals won't be for everyone / Poor online performance / Light on content

Pushmo World

Yeah, you push that puzzle. Push it good

Like *Pushmo* and *Crashmo*, its little brothers on the Nintendo 3DS, *Pushmo World* is a straightforward puzzle game centred on a basic mechanic: to save children trapped in puzzles, the hero Mallo must push and pull structures to try and create a path to the top. There are a crazy number of puzzles to solve, most created in such a way that their structure and colours make them look like murals, real world objects, Nintendo characters and so on. While the early puzzles are, obviously, quite easy the later puzzles employ complex structures where moving a segment blocks off your path. Or they might contain things like timed blocks that will snap back after a while, or ladders that increase the topographical complexity.

Once you're done with the sizeable campaign, or if you're looking for a break, there is the Pushmo World Fair. You can create your own custom maps and upload them to the World Fair, where other players can download them, rate them, and leave comments. Maps can also be shared via QR codes, images that when scanned with the Wii U GamePad contain the full puzzle. This is a surprisingly nice feature, inherited from the 3DS version, since you can upload the tiny barcode-like images to a forum, or email them to friends. *Pushmo World* is a pretty simple game, but with no real flaws. **NAG**

- Miktar



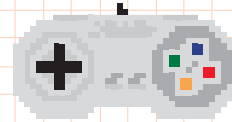
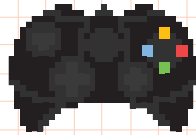
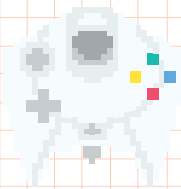
Puzzles are usually themed as pixel-art pictures, which often hides their cunning layout.

71

As a puzzler, *Pushmo World* is very uncomplicated. All you do is push and pull blocks, trying to make yourself a path to the top of the puzzle's structure. Sounds simple, but finding the right order in which to do things can become a remarkably complex logic puzzle. Making your own puzzles, little works of art, is quite fun..

PLUS / Cute / Lots of content

MINUS / Perhaps too cute / Difficulty can be random



home_coded presents

A QUICK-START GUIDE TO MAKING GAMES IN SOUTH AFRICA

The games industry is massive. Thousands upon thousands of programmers, artists, designers, writers and other content creators from around the world put in long hours every day to build the games that we love, and even the ones that we hate. Despite the trend of ever-increasing budgets and dev team sizes for those big AAA titles like *Call of Duty* and *Grand Theft Auto*, almost every day it gets easier for budding game creators to enter this industry. You just have to start somewhere, and that somewhere is right here...

NAG's home_coded initiative is all about putting game creation (and creators) within your reach. The next six pages are dedicated to doing exactly that – we've put together the ultimate quick-start guide to making games if you live in South Africa.

BRICK IN THE WALL

If you've got the time and funds necessary to sit in a classroom for the next few years, then there's no better way to get into game creation than with formal training. Currently there are just a few dedicated game creation degrees/courses, which we've listed below, but if you're not yet sold on the idea of doing a course dedicated to game creation, then any programming or art degree will help in some way. Just bear in mind that the reality of the indie games industry is that programming and artistic skills are the most sought-after. If you're a writer, composer or some other form of creative, then you'll either need to find a core skills team to work with, or learn those abilities yourself.

PS: If you're currently in university/college or are headed there next year, find a computer science lecturer and ask them if they run any game dev workshops or tutorials. Many schools have something on the side, even if it's not official.

**[JHB] University of the Witwatersrand:
BEngSC (Digital Art) or BA PVA
(Majoring in Game Design)**

WEBSITE: bit.ly/WitsGameDev

Wits offers two distinct degrees that cover the two sides of game creation: an engineering degree that's focused on the tech side of development, and an arts degree that caters more towards the creative side.

**[CPT] University of Cape Town:
BSc (Computer Game Design)**

WEBSITE: bit.ly/UCTGameDev

UCT's game design degree is focused on the technical aspects of game creation, and includes the likes of AI programming, C++, XNA and general game design principals.

**[JHB] Learn 3D: Game Development
with C# / Unity3D**

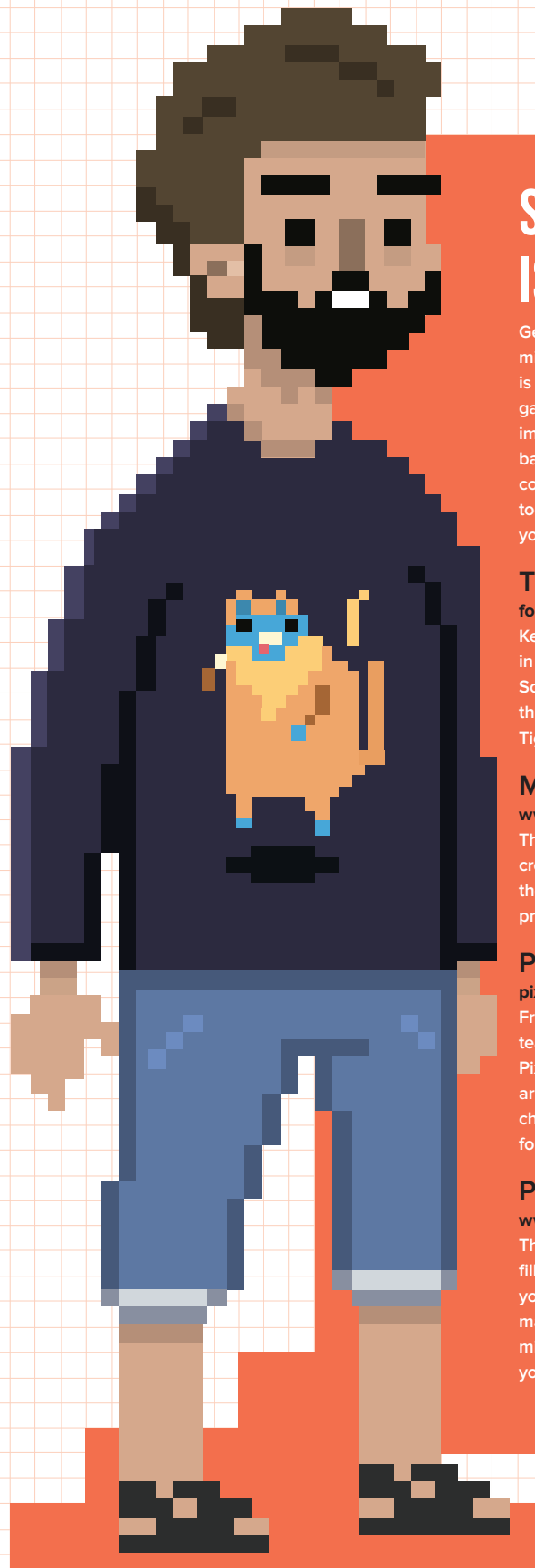
WEBSITE: bit.ly/Learn3DGameDev

Learn 3D offers both 2D and 3D animation courses, as well as a one-year game development course that focuses on Unity. The modular nature of their courses means that you can build your skills base however you see fit.

**[CPT] Friends of Design:
Game Graphics & Multimedia Entertainment**

WEBSITE: bit.ly/FriendsOfDesignGameDev

Friends of Design offers a one-year course that specialises in game creation, in addition to their regular digital design courses.



SHARING IS CARING

Getting feedback from like-minded people on the Internet is a great way to improve your game and, perhaps more importantly, learn how to handle basic PR. In addition to the communities dedicated to your tools of choice, here's where you need to be:

TIGSOURCE

forums.tigsource.com

Keep up to date with the latest in indie game development. Some of the biggest names in the industry found their feet at Tigsources.

MAKEGAMESA

www.makegamesa.com

The best place for local game creators to gather and share their thoughts, concepts and projects.

PIXEL JOINT

pixeljoint.com/forum

From complete beginners to tear-inducing professionals, Pixel Joint is one of the top pixel art forums. They run regular challenges, too, which are great for inspiring creativity.

POLYCOUNT

www.polycount.com/forum

This 3D-focused community is filled with people whose work you almost certainly know. Just make sure you keep an open mind and soak up the feedback you're bound to receive.

MAKING MAGIC

You've got a few options when it comes to actually building your dream game. You *could* build it from scratch – open up a development environment and start mashing out lines of code – but for anything other than academic reasons this doesn't make all that much sense. You'd spend time making the building blocks of your engine that could be spent designing

gameplay or art. For that reason, most people use a ready-to-go game engine or framework that handles the heavy lifting for them, while (ideally) still giving them room to dig around on the inside and custom-make any fancy stuff that's not supported out of the box.

Each of these programs have a free trial of some sort, so don't be shy – get out there and give them a go!

UNITY

www.unity3d.com

Billed as the most indie-friendly game engine, Unity is capable of producing 2D and 3D games for almost every platform. Its vast user-generated Unity Asset Store is filled with game-ready assets and components, which makes it an excellent system for the artistically-challenged.

UNREAL ENGINE

www.unrealengine.com

Unreal has been the go-to game creation engine for AAA developers for years, and has recently opened itself up to the indie crowd with its subscription-based licence and powerful Blueprint pseudo-programming language.

CRYENGINE

www.cryengine.com

Another AAA tool that's taken the leap into subscription-based, CryEngine 3 is very powerful but might present a challenge to anyone who's spent more time reading programming tutorials than actually putting together lines of code

TORQUE

www.garagegames.com

Torque has been around for ages, and while it might not be as hip as the other big 3D engines, it still packs a punch and is infinitely customisable thanks to its open-source nature.

GAMEMAKER

www.yoyogames.com

Arguably the most successful primarily 2D game creation engine (3D is possible with some extra effort), GameMaker has had a long road with a number of hit games released or prototyped with this software, but hits a pretty low ceiling if you're not keen to get messy with your own code.

CONSTRUCT

www.scirra.com

Now in its second iteration, Construct is a 2D engine for anyone who's terrified of code. Everything is achieved via its intuitive drag-and-drop interface, but it's highly extendable with a plugin SDK for those who like to get their hands dirty. [*Psst... this is NAG's go-to 2D game development software. Ed*].

STENCYL

www.stencyl.com

Stencyl allows users to build game logic by snapping together pieces of code based on different conditions or actions taken by the player, and can be extended by dropping in custom code to get the fiddly bits done.

CLICKTEAM FUSION

www.clickteam.com

Do you remember Klik & Play, that game-creation software from the '90s? This is the evolution of it, and with a pedigree like that you know you're in good hands.

RPG MAKER

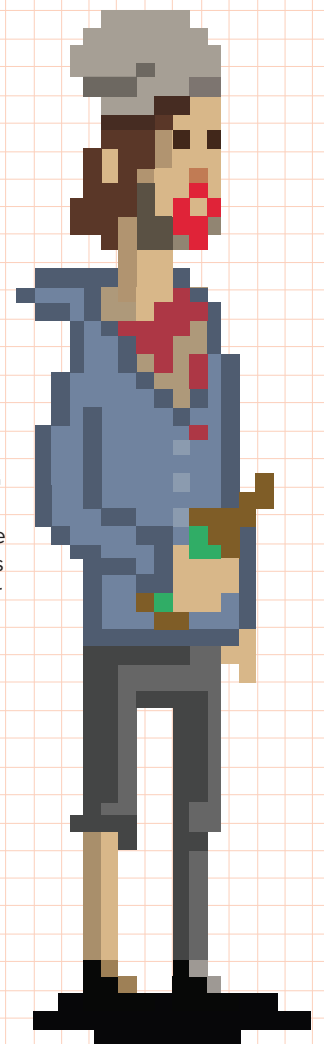
www.rpgmakerweb.com

One for the old-school RPG players out there, RPG Maker has been going for ages. It's dedicated to the creation of SNES-like role-playing games in the style of *Final Fantasy*, but supports high-res visuals (with many bundled) and an advanced script editor to add extra functionality to your game.

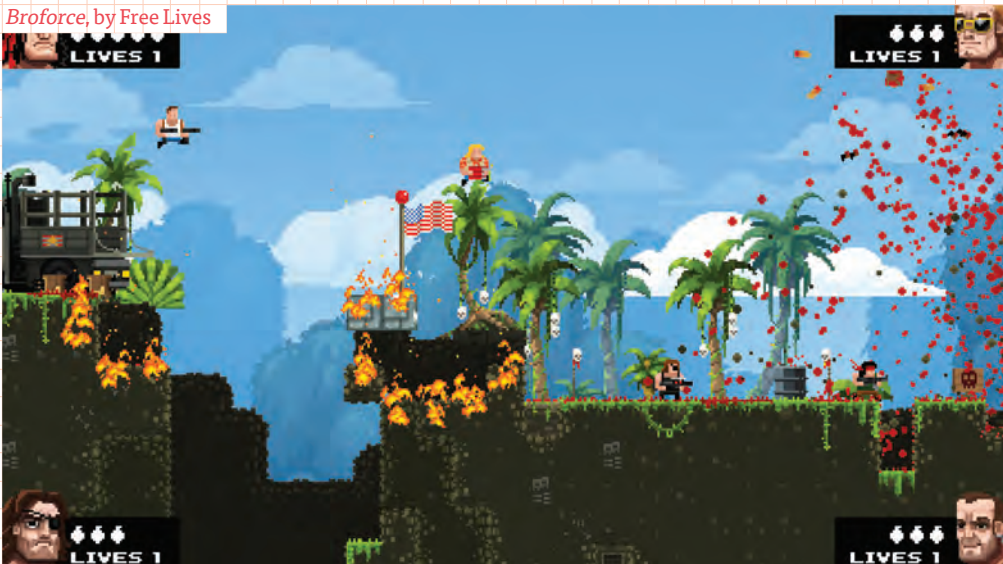
VISIONAIRE STUDIO

www.visionaire-studio.net

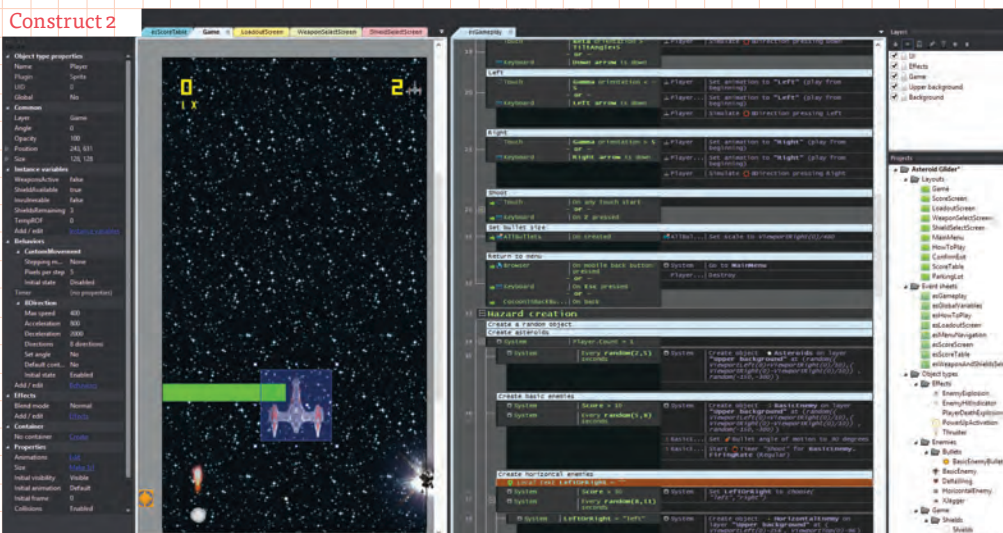
Another genre-specific game engine, Visionaire Studio is built for the creation of point-and-click adventure games. It's seen quite a bit of success lately with the likes of the *Deponia* series, which was created in Visionaire, as well as the upcoming horror adventure game *Stasis* from local studio The Brotherhood.



Broforce, by Free Lives



Construct 2



ONLINE LEARNING

Not everyone has the opportunity to sit in lectures for three years, and if you're the sort of person who prefers to learn online, then there are many free or cheap ways to learn the tools and skills needed to put together a game.

COURSERA

www.coursera.org

One of the most popular open course websites, Coursera features hundreds of free online courses that include a mix of video and written tutorials, tests, peer-review and community-driven discussion. It's a great place to pick up new skills at no cost.

CODE ACADEMY

www.codecademy.com

While not aimed at game development, Code Academy is a great starting point for learning JavaScript and other web-focused languages. If anything, it's useful as a launch pad for simply learning to code, if you've never touched the stuff before.

GAME INSTITUTE

www.gameinstitute.com

Purpose-built to teach you everything you need to know to make 3D games, Game Institute isn't free but it's very reasonably priced, and packed with enough assets and references to get you well on your way.

OPEN MIT

ocw.mit.edu

Many universities share their course material online, and MIT has an entire traditional game design course just waiting to be scooped up. For free, by the way.

CONCEPT ART

www.conceptart.org

Learn classic art skills while putting them to use every day. If you've got a game idea that's stuck in your head and won't come out because your little stick men don't cut it, you need to spend some time here.



MAKE IT SHINE

Unless you're making a text-based adventure (and there's nothing wrong with that!), your game is going to need some killer assets. If you're not the artsy type, this is where things get difficult, but thankfully it's not difficult to pick up some simple pixel or vector art skills to put you just one notch above the rank of "programmer art". If you can't find an artist to team up with and the free or premium assets that are out there don't suit your project, you're going to have to make them yourself.

3DS MAX / MAYA

www.autodesk.com

We've lumped them together because they're now both made by the same company, and they both effectively do the same thing. Don't shoot us, you know it's true. If you've got the budget then either piece of software is a no-brainer: there's a reason why they're the undisputed champions of 3D asset creation.

BLENDER

www.blender.org

If you're strapped for cash but absolutely need to have 3D assets, then Blender is your best bet. It's got quite a steep learning curve, but this free software is immensely powerful if you've got the patience for it.

PHOTOSHOP

www.adobe.com

Photoshop can do everything you need it to do, but it does come at a cost. It even includes some nifty animation tools if you know where to look.

GIMP

www.gimp.org

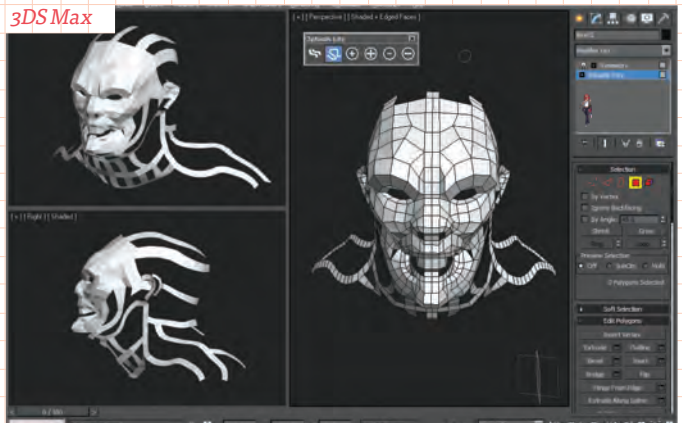
Money doesn't grow on trees, but thankfully open-source software seems to. GIMP has been around for years and is still the go-to free 2D graphics software for those who can't afford Photoshop.

INKSCAPE

www.inkscape.org

Vector drawing software that's designed to be easy to use, and it won't cost you a cent. Once you've downloaded it, head over to 2dgameartforprogrammers.blogspot.com for some great tutorials.

3DS Max



Blender



SPRITER

www.brashmonkey.com

Spriter is a 2D animation tool that's designed for use with game creation software. It features a basic bones and IK animation system as well as tools for those who like to go frame-by-frame.

PICKLE

www.pickleeditor.com

This tiny program is perfect for creating pixel art animations or tilesets for use in RPGs, side-scrolling platformers and any game with a retro feel.

AUDACITY

audacity.sourceforge.net

Chances are that your game is going to need audio, and Audacity is an excellent (and free!) tool to help you create and modify audio tracks to suit your game.

BFXR

www.bfxr.net

Perfect for retro-themed games, Bfxr is capable of generating a practically infinite number of effects with that distinct 8-bit sound.

ADVICE AND EXPERIENCES FROM A SOUTH AFRICAN VIDEO GAMES DESIGNER *By Venita Pereira*

As a fellow South African, avid gamer and NAG fan with experience in the gaming industry, I thought I would share my experiences and advice with you. Back before I was fortunate enough to enter the exciting games industry, I was always on the lookout for advice on the best way to possibly achieve my dream and now I hope to help others like me.

The games industry is an exciting one. You get to work with many talented, like-minded individuals from a range of disciplines and backgrounds on a variety of games of different genres and platforms. I'm truly living the dream! Every company is a different experience, ranging from the small companies to the massive, however, I have enjoyed each for a variety of reasons and you learn so many new things from each game and company.

My day to day work duties include agile scrum meetings to plan the project efficiently to deadlines, design meetings where all the designers discuss the overall vision and features of the project, creation of design documents, scripting levels, and working with artists, animators, programmers and testers. Duties depend on what stage the project is at (pre-production, production or post production), because if the project is at the latter phase then the team will concentrate more on bug fixing and polishing. Communication is essential since a game involves a huge team of people working on it and therefore everyone needs to have the same vision, otherwise the game will not come out as intended.

I have always had a passion for games, ever since the ripe young age of seven, and probably even earlier than that playing the beloved arcade machines at my parent's business and my treasured NES at home thereafter. I have owned practically every gaming platform and countless games.

It is this passion that helped me persevere, that and the support of my family and loved ones.

My advice for those looking to enter the industry is to feed the passion and continue playing many games, as you can

only create awesome games when you can truly appreciate and understand how they work. Play them to see which games are good and which are poorly done. You can learn so much from the ones that have failed.

If you are still at school, I recommend that you take maths and science. These subjects help for not only game development, but any future career.

It is not essential to have a games-related degree (many of my colleagues came from other industries), but it does help by preparing you, and it shows that you are focussed. I studied at the University of Pretoria and got a degree in BIS specializing in multimedia.

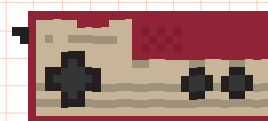
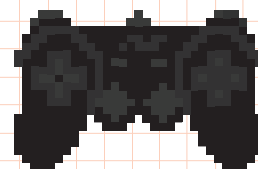
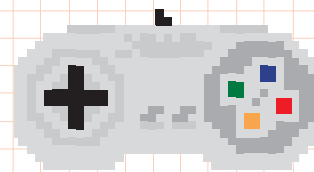
Note that studying does not end once you have your degree – the games industry is always rapidly evolving with better technology and as such one has to keep learning and practising to stay ahead.

Be proactive and persevere when looking and applying for jobs. When going for interviews you need to remember to always be professional, confident and friendly. You would be surprised how many interviewees we have that forget these simple rules and fail because of the lack thereof. Also, the more flexible you are at travelling, the more job opportunities available.

The final best piece of advice that I can give that got me into the games industry was networking and modding! Most of my colleagues started in the industry through the usual path of games tester (QA) and working their way up. Thanks to my experience in game modding, I was fortunate enough that my very first job was as a games designer, which is very rare.

You need to be actively involved in communities and most importantly you need experience, as employers want to know what you are capable of achieving. In addition to modding, you can get ahead of the competition by learning to use Unity, the most popular game engine right now. Most employers look for those familiar with Unity.

I wish you all the success in your future endeavours!



Venita Pereira is a game designer from South Africa who currently lives in the UK, where she's worked on many games including *King of the Course*, *Sonic Dash*, *Sonic Jump*, *Stellar Dawn MMO*, *Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light*, *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*, and *Alien Breed Trilogy*.

If you're looking to get started in game development with Unity, be sure to grab a copy of Venita's book *Unity 2D: Game Development by Example* (available in print or eBook) here: www.packtpub.com/unity-2d-game-development-by-example-beginners-guide/book



INTERVIEW WITH TRAVIS BULFORD

NAG: Once you first decided to go into game development professionally, what was your first year like?

Travis: When we started working on *Toxic Bunny* in 1994, the first year and a half was every weekend and every night working on the game while I held down a full time job. Fortunately during the last six months Visions Software funded myself and Caleb. It was hard but rewarding work.

NAG: What do you think is the most important skill that a game developer can possess?

Travis: Determination that's not hindered by challenge nor threatened by adversity. Not sure that ties down to a skill or a personality trait. That trait would allow you to grow your skills, and growth is paramount.

NAG: What advice do you have to up-and-coming game developers in terms of getting exposure for their games? How do you balance exposure with protecting your ideas?

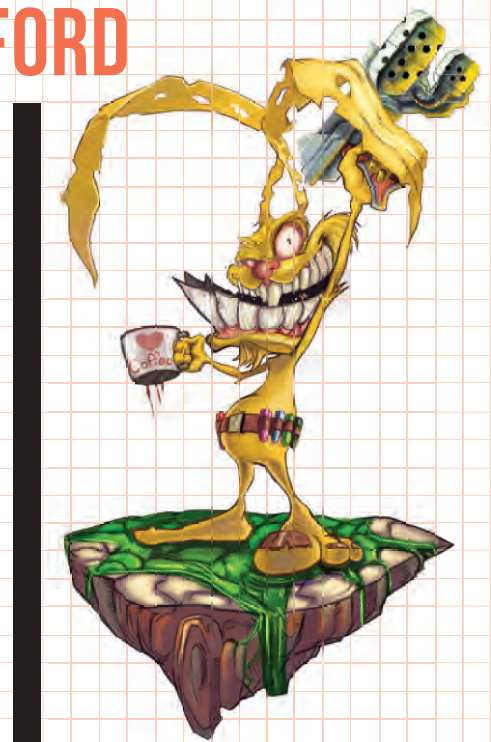
Travis: In my opinion protecting ideas is for the most part a waste of time. Execute your ideas, do it well and do it now. It's only when you do something you can truly learn how difficult it is and where your strengths are. Ideas are stagnant until you start executing and sharing them. Nothing grows in a vacuum.

NAG: If someone told you that they're about to drop everything and become a full-time game developer, what's the first thing you'd say to them?

Travis: "Let's have coffee!" But seriously, it's awesome to hear people that are willing to take that risk – there always needs to be a certain amount of belief in the outcome. That said it's good to know the person has a plan: where income will come from and how they will motivate themselves (do not underestimate this). Your first game is probably not going to do well and in most situations neither is your second. Work towards the best but be prepared for the worst.

NAG: What should someone do if they're looking to enter the game development industry but don't have programming skills – like artists or musicians?

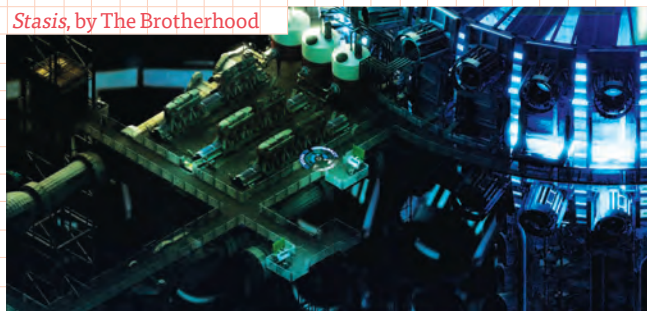
Travis: There are many people in the game industry that only do art or music. Of course with such a small industry people tend to cross-skill to a certain degree. Either way, networking with other game developers/artists/folks is critical. Come join us at makegamesa.com, come to the community nights, get involved online, and start making games with whatever tools you can. You would be surprised at the number of game dev tools that are very artist friendly. **NAG**



Travis Bulford is the co-founder and head of Celestial Games, the longest-running game development studio in South Africa. Celestial is the team behind *Toxic Bunny* and *The Tainted*, and more recently *Toxic Bunny HD*, and is helping bring to light a new puzzle platformer called *Montez*.



Stasis, by The Brotherhood

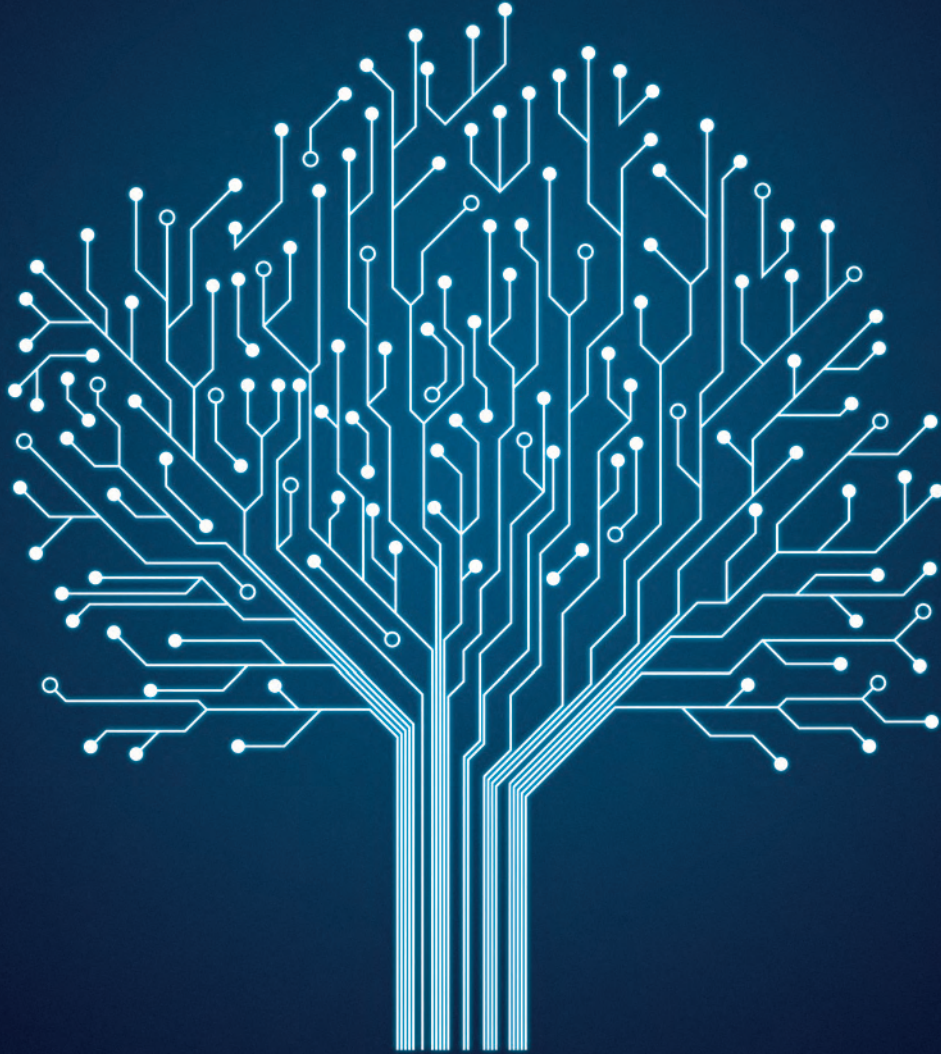


Toxic Bunny HD, by Celestial Games



home_coded

ANAG initiative that aims to showcase the very best in South African game development talent, and promote local growth in this exciting industry.



< Play local games! >
< Meet the developers! >
< Discover a world of high quality
entertainment made right here at home! >

Come and play the latest games from local studios in South Africa at the rAge Expo. Look out for us at Stand 30.

Sponsored by Learn 3D and Celestial Games





HARDWIRED

by Neo Sibeko

WHAT'S IN A MOUSE? In a recent effort to test five gaming mice, I took it upon myself to learn how to use a right-handed mouse more effectively (I'm left-handed). In the beginning this was a painful affair, as while I was competent in navigating Windows and productivity suites, gaming was a different animal entirely. My fine motor skills were far from adequate and quite frankly I was terrible at gaming.

I've recorded over 100 hours of gaming to become proficient at gaming this way. After committing to not touching a mouse with my left hand for an entire month, going back to my natural gaming setup feels weird to say the least.

In all that time something dawned upon me, as I was for the first time finally able to tell the subtle differences between these mice. For the most part, they do not vary in features, sensitivity or even in the software. It is in how comfortable each one is for the given user. That's about the only difference between them. The button layout, actuation force and so forth do make a difference but ultimately it's about how it fits in the hand. Something that I believe has not been developed far enough, despite how long gaming mice have been around. Many years after what many would consider the original competitive gaming mouse, the Razer Boomslang of 1998, not much has changed. Sure, the DPI has gone up to unusable/meaningless levels, we have weight systems, advanced processors and memory on the high-end offerings but we're essentially dealing with the same design concepts from over ten years ago.

I suspect there are many reasons for this, including that most vendors get into the peripheral business with the sole purpose of increasing their profits. It's a "me too" attitude and given the boom in gaming, I do not blame them. Some vendors have genuinely gone out and attempted different input methods and a total re-thinking of what a mouse is, but most of these efforts have gone unsupported or underutilized. Yes mice are better today than they were five years ago. However, above more buttons and unlimited macro configurations, there needs to be, I believe, a drive to make even more comfortable devices that really do fit like a glove. I've been able to try a few adjustable mice and I have to admit this is a step in the right direction. There's no way that a single mould would satisfy all users, so it makes sense to make them configurable, at least across the three axes. The obsession with increasing DPI, polling rates and programmability is appreciated, but only for a specific

part of the gaming community. I do appreciate that as far as gaming goes, if you look at numbers solely, nothing is played more than *WoW*, *LoL* and *Dota 2*, none of which are FPS games. However that is precisely the reason why there should be a dedicated effort to make even more comfortable FPS gaming mice. I can't see why there would be a need for more than five buttons on a mouse (excluding the scroll wheel and DPI adjustment) given that for the most part we have five digits on our hands.

Once again I do appreciate the need for far more buttons for RPGs and most MMOs but do consider that we played *Quake*, *Doom* and many other classic games with two button mice. Proficiently as well I might add. This is not saying the "old days" were better and that we should return to that. No, it's just an observation. More isn't always better and in fact one of my favourite mice at present would be helped by the reduction of mouse buttons and simplification. I also found that my second favourite mouse in this month-long research happened to be an ambidextrous mouse. I would have thought that this would be the least desirable mouse, yet it was the complete opposite giving me comfort levels on both hands I've rarely experienced in any mouse before. It also happened to be one of the simplest mice I've ever used, favouring symmetry over and above everything else. I can't help but think though that this came about unconsciously by said vendor and their following products, depending on the success of failure of this mouse, will differ radically. Perhaps this is an over analysis of a simple input device, but I do figure that in a very saturated market where just about everyone is selling the same "advantage" and feature sets, there's plenty of room for true innovation and all it takes is true research and financial commitment into designing the ideal mouse concerning comfort and customizable options.

I'm not sure if I'll go back to using my mouse on the left again given just how many more options there are for right-handed users, but if anything, this exercise has been very revealing in something I genuinely never gave much thought about. **NAG**

Neo has a deep and hidden (well not anymore) fear of tadpoles. His parents told us he once fell into their Koi pond at home and couldn't climb out until nightfall. He added a centimetre to the water level in tears.

PSU

Corsair AX1500i PSU
R6,499 / www.corsair.com



GRAPHICS

GIGABYTE GV-N78TGHZ-3GD
R10,999 / www.gigabyte.com



OS DRIVE

OCZ Vector Vector 150
R2,808 / www.ocz.com



STORAGE DRIVE

WD Black 4TB FZEX
R3,199 / www.wdc.com



CHASSIS

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



DISPLAY

ASUS VG248QE
R5,999 / www.asus.com



KEYBOARD

Razer BlackWidow Ultimate
R1,700 / www.razerzone.com



COOLER

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



MOUSE

GAMDIAS Zeus gaming mouse
R918 / www.gamdias.com



MOUSE MAT

Razer Ironclad
R599 / www.razerzone.com



SOUND

Creative Sound Blaster ZxR
R3,499 / www.soundblaster.com



HEADPHONES

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



INTEL

INTEL CORE I7 4960X
R13,799 / www.intel.com

ASUS RAMPAGE IV EXTREME BLACK EDITION
R7,799 / www.asus.com

AVEXIR BLITZ 1.1 DDR3 2,666MHZ
R4,799 / www.avexir.com

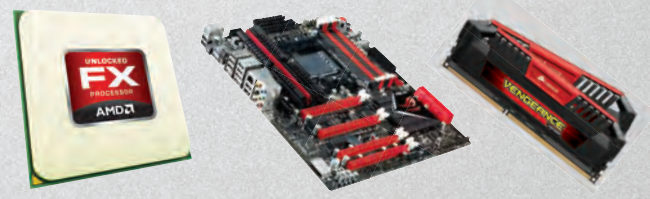


AMD

AMD FX 8350
R2,999 / www.amd.com

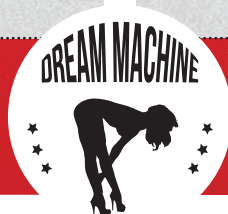
ASUS CROSSHAIR V FORMULA-Z
R3,999 / www.asus.com

CORSAIR VENGEANCE PRO 2,666MHZ C11 16GB KIT
R4,999 / www.corsair.com



INTEL DREAM MACHINE

R72,984



AMD DREAM MACHINE

R58,584

VERSUS

In this month's Versus we gathered two of the latest gaming mice specifically tailored for FPS gaming. We have the new Logitech G502 and EVGA's first entry into gaming peripherals, the Torq X10 Carbon. Both of these cater to the high-end and command prices well over the R1,000 mark. Given that this is a huge investment in a mouse, it was imperative that each mouse satisfies basic criteria such as complete customisability of every button and that the software was easy to use. Fortunately both of these meet and exceed these two basic mandates and what we have are two mice which between them should provide you with an option that fits your needs.

► SPECS

ERP / R1,499

WEBSITE / www.evga.com

SUPPLIER / EVGA

SENSOR / Avago 9800

WEIGHT / 121g (weight management system)

SIZE / 114.3 x 57.15 x 38.1mm (height management)

BUTTONS / 9

► SCORE

8



EVGA TORQ X10 CARBON

► SOFTWARE

For their first entry EVGA has surprisingly great software. Disregarding the shenanigans surrounding their Precision Tool, the Unleash software is very detailed, giving you control over every aspect of the mouse. The interface seems a little cluttered at first, but it takes only a few minutes to figure out where everything is. One peculiar setting that EVGA has is called Sensitivity, which is located just below the DPI setting. One would think that these control different aspects of the mouse, perhaps one controlling sampling speed and obviously DPI controlling the speed and sensitivity. This wasn't the case however, as these two seemed to override each other. On this mouse the Sensitivity setting represents fixed DPI settings from one to ten. Setting either one will override the previously set mouse tracking speed and thus this is a redundant feature at best and at worst can be very confusing. You're better off setting the DPI only and ignoring Sensitivity. Profiles are easy to manage and customizing the LED lights is straightforward. You only have the option of seven colours but that should more than cover most people's needs.

► COMFORT

This is without a doubt the most surprising aspect of the mouse. Being ambidextrous, you would be forgiven for thinking it doesn't suit left- or right-handed users adequately. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact this was perhaps the strongest aspect of the Torq X10. It is supremely comfortable on either hand and even exceeds the comfort levels of many better known competing mice which are built specifically for right-handed users. The mouse is perfectly symmetrical and there's no bias towards any side. The mouse height is adjustable with a torque screwdriver such that you may further refine the height as you deem appropriate. Where comfort is concerned we have nothing but high praise for the Torq X10 as it truly stands out as one of the most comfortable mice we've ever come across.

► GENERAL IMPRESSION

The Torq X10 is a hit and miss affair. As a result of its supreme comfort, any shortcomings become jarring and do take away from what is otherwise a sublime design. The side buttons are springy and thus you may not be able to press the inside button using the inner part of your thumb's

metacarpal joint or the outer button using the end of your thumb. You can however flick upwards to actuate these buttons which works surprisingly well. The travel length for these buttons is long but they are actuated very early so this not an issue. Perhaps one of the two most unfortunate aspects of this mouse is that the profile switch button is located at the bottom of the mouse. There's absolutely no sense in this as you'll literally need to lift the mouse, turn it over and recruit your other hand to switch profiles. There is absolutely no reason for this as this button could be located anywhere else on the top side of the mouse like the vast majority of gaming mice. Another unfortunate aspect of this mouse is the presentation and packaging. The box that it comes in is not deserving of the high price tag and given that this mouse costs more than the Logitech G502, it's hard to imagine why long time gamers and would-be faithful users of Logitech mice be convinced by the Torq X10. It is indeed a high-end mouse in every respect but the price is a tad too high and the packaging severely lacking. Other than that, this is a solid mouse that is an amazing offering from EVGA.



LOGITECH G502

▶ SPECS

ERP / R1,399

WEBSITE / www.gaming.logitech.com

SUPPLIER / Logitech

SENSOR / Custom Proteus 12,000 DPI sensor

WEIGHT / 121g (weight management system)

SIZE / 132 x 75 x 40mm

BUTTONS / 11 (Omron Switches)

▶ SCORE

8



▶ SOFTWARE

Logitech's software has gone through many changes in all the years the company has been building gaming peripherals. Much like the distilling and simplification of their product range, the Logitech gaming software is simple but very powerful. It essentially sticks to one uncluttered main window which highlights different parts of the mouse as you hover over them. The bottom of the window has various icons that allow you to change additional functionality, get help or connect with Logitech online. It's a wonderful and simple interface which works well once you get the hang of it. Programming buttons can seem a little tricky at first but again, within a few minutes you'll be well versed in it creating profiles and macros very quickly. It's minimalistic in approach but this is appreciated and it does speak of the many years Logitech has spent refining their software. We only wish more gaming peripheral vendors would follow suit. It's probably the most intuitive and perhaps most simplified interface we've come across with mice at this price point.

▶ COMFORT

The G502 is a sleek mouse that is designed to fit snugly into the hand for claw grips avoiding any drag that may come from

your thumb sliding across the mouse pad. Depending on the user, it is a medium-sized mouse which certainly fits more comfortably than say the alternatives from ROCCAT for example. The plastics used don't necessarily seem durable but they are very comfortable and look polished. On the inside left of the mouse where your thumb would rest, you'll find a grip pattern which helps secure your hand and prevents it from slipping. It's a small feature but one that certainly comes in handy after hours of gaming. This same pattern is on the outside edge as well but it isn't as critical there as it is on the inside. Reaching all the buttons on the mouse isn't as easy as it could be but given just how many buttons it has, there isn't really any place Logitech's designers could have put them. We would not expect any less from Logitech and the G502 delivers here, being one of the most comfortable gaming mice you can buy right now.

▶ GENERAL IMPRESSION

As a top tier brand and one of the two biggest gaming peripheral manufacturers in the world, we expect nothing but quality from Logitech. The packaging was adequate but not great, certainly nothing to suggest you're buying a product well worth over

R1,200. Having said that, we are impressed with just how smooth the entire process was from installation to first use. The software is simple enough and the mouse in general is very impressive. The scroll wheel will be a hit and miss affair for most people because it has two modes. There's free spinning wheel mode where it is notch-less and can spin freely on its axis and a second mode where each click and step is very much accentuated. There's no in between and this may be problematic for some, but once again it is something you can get used to. In its free spinning mode, we did find the wheel to rattle a little, almost as if it had suffered some wear and tear. This isn't the case though as this is a property or pitfall of all G502 mice. It's rather annoying but once again easily ignored given just how good the G502 is at everything else. There's room for improvement on this mouse but overall it is a class leading product that is in line with what you may expect from Logitech. Add to that the fact that it retails for a lower price than the competing Torq X10 Carbon, it gets the nod over the competition ever so slightly. The 12,000 DPI gimmick aside, this is a good mouse that does well in all disciplines only lacking here and there, which prevents it from being the definitive gaming mouse around. **NAG**

UHD AND YOU

TRUE NEXT GENERATION GAMING

If you're confused by acronyms like 4K, UHD, QHD, 2K, FHD, you're not alone. Tech terms like this get thrown about like poo in a monkey enclosure, and this is especially true for the "new" 4K standard that you may have heard about in the last 12 months.

Chances are you'll be hearing a lot more of this going forward, just like you did with 1080p, Full HD (FHD), and 720p. If you remember the confusion around these standards then you're well versed with how misleading many sources (TV vendors, mostly) can be. This can make it a nightmare navigating the new "4K" landscape. But it's not as complicated as it seems. Technically, it can get very detailed as all display standards and formats can be, but everything you'll need to know will be explained in these pages. So what follows isn't a technical explanation of UHD – there's little point going into the mathematics regarding colour spacing, signal transmission protocols, compression schemes, and encoding. But what we do have is a lot of useful data that should help you get a better understanding of what you're dealing with, and what you should look for when it comes to purchasing UHD hardware.

WHAT IS 4K?

4K is a generic term used for content with 4,000 or more pixels on the horizontal axis. That's it. In the context of digital cinema, 4K refers exclusively to video that is 4096x2160 pixels. There's also a 2K standard (2048x1080 pixels), which is likely what you watch when you view digital cinema at your local theatre. That doesn't mean it's just a few pixels wider than your home Blu-ray movie – there are other facets to this that define the standard, such as picture encoding (JPEG 2000/j2c) and colour space. 2K and 4K belong in the cinema and you'll not find many monitors or TVs anywhere of either standard. If you do, they are extremely expensive and are usually made for industrial/professional use.

When TV vendors label their LCDs 4K, that is actually UHD. This distinction is important because UHD is 3840x2160 pixels. The vertical pixel count is identical to 4K, but the width of the picture isn't, and thus the aspect ratio is different. Watching true 4K content on a UHD display will result in letterboxing (black bars at the top and bottom of the display). So again: 4K is a cinema display standard, and UHD is for home use. For the same reason we continue to buy FHD displays and not 2K displays, 4K in reference to TVs is pure marketing and nothing else. UHD is what you want to concern yourself with.

SO WHAT'S UHD?

This standard is simply twice the number of horizontal and vertical pixels of the current HD standard. If you double the pixel count in height and breadth, the aspect ratio stays the same. So UHD, like Full HD or regular HD (720p), has an aspect ratio of 16:9. As you may have guessed, doubling the pixel count along both axes means you multiply the requirements to drive such a picture by a factor of four. This number "4" keeps coming up and perhaps some vendors will use this "4" to justify calling their displays 4K. These are not the same things – this multiplication is just pure arithmetic. So remember this:

UHD is 3840x2160. Unlike with the HD standard, there's no partial HD and Full HD as in 720p and 1080p. It's just UHD, and that's it – either you have a compliant display or you do not. On top of all of that, you may have encountered a 2560x1440 display (or maybe you own one). That is WQHD; it has nothing to do with UHD at all.

WHAT DO I NEED FOR UHD?

To view UHD content, you need a monitor or TV capable of displaying the content, the source material (be it from your computer, Internet or disc) and the right cable to connect the two.

Right now we have several connection mechanisms, cables and protocols which we can use to display digital content. Most of us use HDMI or DVI on our computers. Some use DisplayPort and many TVs support all three as possible inputs. For our purposes we assume you're talking about your computer, and thus all these options are generally available to you. But they don't all fully support UHD. Care should be taken when deciding to buy that cheap "UHD" display you saw on special for a ridiculously low price. Chances are that screen will only allow 3840x2160 at 30Hz, perhaps even only 24Hz. This is obviously unusable for gaming on a PC, but for video that might be fine.

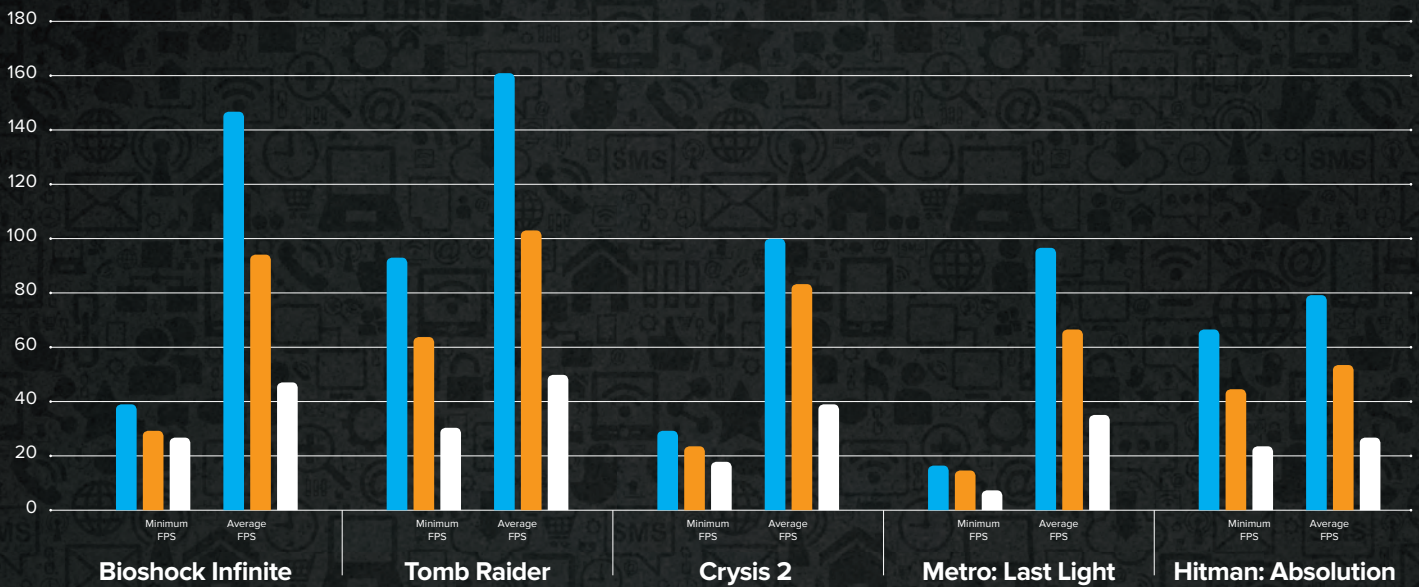
What you do want from a UHD display is one that can show the full resolution with a refresh rate of 60Hz, but these are still pretty expensive. Bear in mind that HDMI (1.4a) does not have the bandwidth required to display 3840x2160 pixels at 60Hz, so it's best to use DisplayPort if you've got it. HDMI 2.0 can achieve this (barely), but there are hardly any HDMI 2.0 compliant graphics cards or monitors on the market.

WHAT ABOUT DVI?

DVI (specifically dual-link DVI) is still a favourite amongst enthusiasts, especially those who have QHD or 120-144Hz screens, or use active 3D like 3D Vision. Technically dual-link DVI has the bandwidth for UHD as well; in fact, dual-link DVI has almost unlimited bandwidth, only determined by the source and its sync limitation with the display (if the display can handle the clock / pixel rate required). Dual-link DVI isn't noted as a practical way to display UHD because a single-link DVI connection and cable has a limitation of 165MHz, which translates roughly into 1920x1200 at 60Hz. Dual-link DVI specifies that a compliant cable need only be capable of twice this pixel rate, which is 330MHz. That goes for the source and destination/termination as well. Even though dual-link DVI can sync much faster than this, the minimum specification only called for "double" the pixel clock, or bandwidth. Therefore, all manufacturers have to assume the worst-case scenario which is 330MHz, and that amounts to a maximum of 2560x1440 at 60Hz. The pixel clock requirement for UHD is 497.66MHz.

These are the results we recorded with the EVGA GTX 780Ti Classified KINGPIN graphics card.

● 1920 x 1080 ● 2560 x 1440 ● 3840 x 2160



WHAT ABOUT CONTENT AND GAMES?

Games are pretty easy to migrate to UHD. In fact there really is no migration necessary, because as stated previously, the aspect ratio is the same. In theory any game that supports a 16:9 ratio should scale just fine with a UHD monitor. The problem arises with HUDs, text sizes and such which are sometimes fixed to a number of pixels depending on specific resolutions. For the most part though, game scaling to UHD should not be too complicated.

Movies on the other hand are a different ball game. Ignoring the bandwidth problem and having effectively solved it with the various connection methods such as DisplayPort, there is the sheer size of UHD content to take into account. To help illustrate this, consider the following: UHD has four times the number of pixels in comparison to FHD. Raw FHD content shot on high-end cameras (these would actually be shot on cinema 2K cameras) have some hefty data requirements. One hour of raw HD content is 500GB, assuming a fixed bit-rate (12-bit colour). A two hour movie is then 1TB. All this then gets compressed using some very advanced codecs (MPEG-2, MPEG4-AVC for example), which, using the same settings as a regular film but with only a higher resolution, results in a 200GB movie. Even with further compression it's unlikely to get much smaller than this for a while, and as such UHD is probably more relevant in practical terms to PC gaming than any other mainstream entertainment medium. Standard Blu-ray discs are 25 to 50GB (dual layer) and very few are 100GB (dual-layer double sided). As

a result we just don't yet have the capacity to roll out UHD content on a large scale.

WILL I NEED TO UPGRADE MY COMPUTER TO PLAY MY PC GAMES IN UHD?

This will depend on your current machine, but the short answer is yes. It has less to do with the amount of memory on your graphics card and more to do with the fill-rate (determined by the render outputs/texture samplers) and memory bandwidth you have at your disposal. Basically, the more of these you have, the better off you'll be when playing on a UHD monitor. Right now, you're not going to be able to play many games at all at this resolution if you own anything lower than a Radeon R9 290, or an NVIDIA GTX 780. Even with these, using anti-aliasing techniques like FXAA, MSAA and especially SSAA is out of the question. If you are fortunate enough to own two of these graphics cards, or more powerful ones, then you may be in luck and you can use these image enhancing features. Fortunately for us, anti-aliasing isn't needed at such a resolution with 28" displays or smaller, because at this size the pixel density is very high. For comparison, to get the same pixel granularity that you have on a 28" UHD monitor, you'd need to run a 14" screen at 1920x1080. In addition to this, unlike using anti-aliasing, regardless of its base pattern and algorithm, using such a high resolution avoids any artifacts associated with anti-aliasing. The image will always be sharp

(at reasonable distances and screen sizes). The clarity and precision of the image is only determined by the quality of the pixel rather than its position on screen.

To help you get a real grasp of how moving to UHD gaming will affect your games, we've tested several games at resolutions ranging from the normal 1920x1080 (FHD) all the way to 3840x2160 (UHD). We used a high-end factory overclocked GTX 780 Ti and the games were very playable across the board. Many even with AA, but seeing that not everyone is going to have the money for a R10,000 graphics card, keep in mind that the likes of a GTX 760 (Radeon 280 equivalent) will deliver around half the frame rates.

CONCLUSION

There you have it: a run-down of the next generation of gaming at UHD resolutions (or "4K" if you'd prefer). This isn't applicable to consoles yet as they don't have anywhere near the processing power to render such pixel densities, but most high-end PCs these days will do this just fine. Just remember that if you do buy a monitor, consider spending the cash on a decent one with all the inputs you will need and, if available, one that can future proof you as much as possible. After you've found what you need, double check that all your components are compatible and then go out and spend some money. The cost is continuously dropping, and you'll be surprised just how much better gaming is at this resolution.

NAG

- Neo Sibeko

Gioteck AX1-R gaming headset

Website / www.apexinteractive.co.za

ERP / TBA Supplier / Apex Interactive

If your budget is tight but you're getting sick of the continued disapproving looks from your parents/housemates/Chihuahua every time you fire up *Killzone* for a quick killing spree, then this is a headset you should pay attention to.

The AX1-A is a lightweight, no-frills headset that's designed with online communication in mind. It attaches directly to your PS4 controller, avoiding a mess of wires across your living room floor. A focus on communication means it's meant to be played with its stashed boom mic in the "in your face" position most of the time. The issue here is that when the mic is stowed in the vertical position, it blocks the adjustable positioning of the left ear cup, which causes a lopsided fit. It's a silly design flaw, but one that you'll barely notice if you're using this headset for hurling obscenities across the Internet as often as you receive them. Other than that, the headband is comfortable enough for mid-length gaming marathons, and the ear cups do a stellar job of blocking out ambient sounds that might otherwise ruin your gaming time. The overall feel is a tad on the cheap side, especially when you look at the cable and volume controller (there's no separate mic volume).

Performance-wise, everything is as you'd expect from a mid- to entry-level headset. The 40mm drivers deliver solid audio that's clear, if a little bass-heavy, and they're capable of putting out a decent level of volume – about on-par with an average wireless set, which is quite alright considering that this headset almost matches wireless sets in convenience.

NAG

- Geoff Burrows



8

A headset that delivers an overall decent level of quality, all wrapped up in a neat package that's quick and easy to set up.

PLUS / Good performance / Quite comfortable / Convenient cable solution

MINUS / Feels a bit cheap / Flawed microphone design

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GAMDIAS Zeus eSports Edition

Website / www.gamdias.com

ERP / R918

Supplier / GAMDIAS

SPECS	SENSOR	Avago 9800
	WEIGHT	154g (weigh management system)
	SIZE	127.14 x 84.46 x 43.2mm (dimension management)
	BUTTONS	11 (Omron switches)

With this mouse it's better to start with what is wrong with it and then tell you why it is so good despite its short comings. The Hermes software which GAMDIAS uses to configure all their peripherals is a mess. The interface is tacky and generally hard to navigate. It's easy to program all the mouse functions and buttons, but overall it's a woeful piece of software. It doesn't install on the system and merely runs out of a folder. This may be a good thing for some, but do remember that it deposits files elsewhere in your system, which you'll need to delete manually to uninstall the software.

However, the mouse itself is simply amazing. During the review period of the Zeus we spent some time using at least five other high-end mice from well-known vendors and none of them managed to leave the impression on us that this mouse did. Just from the packaging, it demands your attention. The box that the mouse comes in is thick and sturdy with plastic laminating. There's a magnetic flap which, when opened, reveals the mouse body encased in plastic underneath. The mouse rests on a carpet-like material and you'll not see a cable in sight. It's as if GAMDIAS were packaging an expensive Apple product.

More importantly is how this mouse feels in the hand. It's one of the larger mice on the market and it can be made even larger by expanding its width. You may choose to increase its size on the left or right independently using scroll wheels on the underside. These wheels only adjust the width where your thumb and pinky finger rest. For your ring finger there is another wheel that will dictate how far out that finger rests from the others. A passable feature it may seem but one that makes this mouse instantly the most configurable we've ever come across allowing it to be gripped by claw or palm style users of various hand sizes. It fits nearly perfectly in the hand and is without a doubt the most comfortable mouse we've ever reviewed.



"... the mouse itself is simply amazing."

The Zeus also features four rubber fittings which can be exchanged to allow for the optimum resting position of your hand. You may choose not to use them at all, further giving you control over the mouse's weight over and above the five 4.5g weights the mouse comes with. The rest of the features this mouse has is exhaustive and there's no possible way to list them all. The important thing here is that this mouse is incredible and it's one you should definitely try if you can. You're unlikely to be disappointed.

- Neo Sibeko

9

An incredible mouse that defies what you would expect from a relatively unknown vendor. Simply marvellous.

PLUS / Comfort / Build quality / Customization

MINUS / Hermes software

MSI AG270

Website / www.msi.com

ERP / R36,000 Supplier / Corex

SPECS

CPU	Intel Core i7 4860HQ
MEMORY	16GB DDR3 1600MHz
GPU	NVIDIA GeForce GTX 880M 8GB
STORAGE	2x 128G SSD (RAID) and 2TB 7,200rpm drive
LCD	27" LED backlit 1080p touch screen anti-glare display



All-in-One's popularity is on the rise and with products like the AG270 it's easy to see why. It's a powerful gaming computer housed in single package that while heavy, isn't as cumbersome as a traditional gaming computer.

The AG270 is a high-end model built for true home entertainment and thus it packs in just about as much as possible into its frame. R36,000 is a lot of money and you can most certainly build a better spec'd machine for that money yourself, but you'll not get this build quality and integration of functionality. Once you use the AG270 for even an hour it starts to grow on you, especially when outfitted with a keyboard and mouse. If you choose not to use these input methods, you'll find that the

touch screen is a lot more responsive than it used to be. If you're not looking to run productivity suites on this machine, then you're likely to only need a game controller as an additional means of input.

Audio is taken care of by two Yamaha speakers and we have to admit these are really loud but sound good as well given their enclosure and how little they have to work with. This is crucial because not only is the touch screen great, the display quality is fantastic. Playing Blu-ray movies on the built-in player/writer is a pleasure and having to return this unit after evaluation was unfortunate. The AG270 is a really powerful machine and this is not an empty claim, because the GTX 880M handles every single game flawlessly at the native

resolution. Other than the excessive weight of the machine, we struggled to find something to dislike about the AG270. If you have the money to spend, consider it an investment.

NAG
- Neo Sibeko

8 This is MSI's most impressive AIO PC to date and plays games really well to boot. The price is steep but it does have plenty of features.

PLUS / Plenty of features / Versatile display use

MINUS / Not cheap / No keyboard or mouse included

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MSI GS70 2PC

Website / www.msi.com

ERP / R25,999

Supplier / MSI

SPECS

CPU	Intel Core i7 4710HQ
GPU	NVIDIA GTX 860M 2GB
MEMORY	16GB DDR3 1,600MHz (dual channel)
STORAGE	384GB SSD / 1TB HDD
WEIGHT	1.9kg



Starting with the build quality and materials, MSI has paid particular detail to the aluminium framing on this 17" model which exudes quality. It's well-built all around using the finest trackpads we've ever come across. The keyboard is fully backlit with a myriad of backlighting options at your disposal via the SteelSeries software. There really isn't much that one could complain about here as it is right up there with the best built notebooks on the market, gaming or otherwise. In fact, given its dimensions this one could have the advantage over the high-end Dominator which, in retrospect, just doesn't feel as polished.

On to the more important bits however, which is how this notebook performs. Given that it uses the same GPU as the previous MSI notebook we tested, you'd think that the performance numbers should be identical where it counts, but the GS70 has a slight advantage courtesy of making use of dual channel DDR3 memory, three solid state raid systems, a better CPU and of course just newer drivers. Performance across the board was much improved and even though this uses a larger screen, it has amongst the best battery time results we've recorded to date at over two hours of battery time at maximum load.

We must make special mention of the crisp and detailed 17" screen as once again it stands out above many other notebooks we've tried including some from MSI as well. It's comfortable, with a wide viewing angle and accurate colour reproduction. It's particularly impressive for a TN panel. On the audio side of things, as usual we have the Dynaudio speaker system, fairly respectable loudness but nothing to write home about when it comes to bass reproduction or overall body of the audio. It's good enough to game and watch movies with but what makes the audio solution stand out here is through the headphones. If you use a decent set of cans, the Sound Blaster Cinema software along with the Audio



BENCHMARK RESULTS

PCMark 8 Creative Suite
(OpenCL accelerated): **3,736**
Battery time: **2h: 5m: 46s**
3DMark Fire Strike: **3,736**
Catzilla 1080p: **4,480**

Boost features really help deliver a much fuller sound experience with deep bass and warm mid-tones. This is definitely something to experience first-hand if you'll be primarily gaming with a set of cans.

If there is to be any downside to this notebook it would be the lengthy Windows restart cycle time. That is, how long it takes from when you hit restart to when the system is back on the desktop. We measured this at two minutes and thirty seconds which is far too slow and even slower than using a mechanical hard drive. Cold boots are blisteringly quick however. For some reason the notebook goes through a full power cycle when you click restart and it's not a soft reboot as you'd expect. Short of that there's not much we can fault this notebook on. We do wish we had the opportunity to test the GTX 870M based model, but even in this configuration this is a fine product that may

not be cheap but warrants its high price tag in every way. The GS70 is another fine notebook from MSI and one that we would not hesitate to recommend as it is one of the sleekest and most well-built 17" models money can buy. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

8

A great notebook that can do with some fine tuning, but overall offers very good performance in a sleek package.

PLUS / 3x 128GB SSDs / Great headphone audio output / Sleek design / Build quality

MINUS / On the heavier side of things / Particularly slow Windows 8 restart cycle time

GIGABYTE Z97X GAMING-3

Website / www.gigabyte.com ERP / R2,399

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

Supplier / Rectron

significantly fewer options and its tuning equally limited. This is unlikely to affect most users and since it's a GAMING board this will not matter. Having said that, do note that the audio on this motherboard is of a slightly inferior quality than what is on the GAMING-5. Specifications wise, there shouldn't be a difference as they both use the same CODEC and feature the same operational amplifier. It perhaps comes down to the electronic components as there were notable differences between the two.

You'd have to listen to each side by side to notice and more over it would have to be a high quality source that you're comparing with. Those who care about that sort of thing should perhaps look elsewhere. Other than that there isn't much to say about this motherboard, it's an entry that has to be there if only because there are those who prefer the aesthetic of the gaming boards at this price instead of the UD. For a budget gaming board you could do a lot worse, so do consider it if you're in the market.



Alternatively look to the competing MSI Z97 GAMING-3, we reckon whichever one is cheaper you should buy that one as they are very similarly spec'd. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

7 A budget Z97 board from GIGABYTE that covers all its bases at a reasonable price.

PLUS / Affordable / Aesthetics M2. 2280 Support

MINUS / Nothing special

Two months ago we reviewed the GAMING-5 and found it to be an average motherboard, especially by GIGABYTE's standards. After the incredible SOC boards and the premium WIFI Black Edition, we were expecting much more from the GAMING-5.

At the very low-end though we now have the GAMING-3. As you can imagine it has even less than the GAMING-5 but it does carry a much friendlier price tag. That is important though because pricing locally varies so you'll want to look for the cheapest price possible as at anything above R2,400 you may as well buy the GAMING-5.

The differences between these two are more than skin deep because even within the BIOS, the GAMING-3 has

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PHILIPS

MSI Z97 Gaming 9 AC

Website / www.msi.com

ERP / R3,899

Supplier / Corex

SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel Z97
MEMORY	4x240-Pin DDR3
CPU SUPPORT	LGA 1150
EXPANSION	3xPCIe 16X, 3x PCIe 1x
SIZE	ATX

What you are looking at here is MSI's premium gaming motherboard for the Z97 platform. If you want the best MSI can offer in their gaming line, this is it (barring whatever they have with the X99 chipset) and it is very impressive.

We can't in good faith however look at this board in isolation; in fact we can't even compare it with the GAMING 7. No, we have to look at it in comparison with the Sniper Z97 perhaps. Pricing wise, these are close to each other and given that MSI does not have a higher spec'd Z97 Gaming board, these two were bound to come to a head and they have with the GAMING 9 AC.

This motherboard is of particular interest to us because there is no other Z97 offering on the market that will give you this specific combination of features at this price. This delicate balance of tick box features and ones that you can actually use has been executed very well with the GAMING 9 AC. Yes you'll be missing some features such as 3- or 4-way SLI support but on the Z97 chipset, this is hardly worth perusing as there just isn't a capable enough CPU for this platform to drive that many graphics cards.

What MSI does provide you with however, is their best audio solution to date. Thinking outside of the box here, MSI has gone with the tried and tested C-Media CM6631A processor. Not only is it superior to the normal ALC1150 codec, it has some additional features that make it a worthwhile processor to use. Mainly it's ASIO 2.0 support and its ability to resolve 192 KHz/32-bit audio at 120dB SNR. That is comparable to what ASUS offers with their Supreme FX except that ASUS's solution is driven by the ALC1150 codec and has no ASIO support.

From an audio processor point of view, MSI's GAMING 9 AC has the advantage. To justify the use of such a controller, MSI has gone with the WOLFSON WM8741 DAC and Cirrus Logic CS5346 ADC. A feature that we've only seen on this MSI motherboard is an additional anti popcorn noise relay. It doesn't in anyway enhance sound but



prevents the popping that you would get when turning on or off the system through the headphones or speakers.

Where MSI may have dropped the ball however is in their choice of operational amplifiers. These are not bad by any measure, but we would have expected more than the OPA1652 amps which are on just about every motherboard and that's because they are cheap. In addition to that pair, or in contrast you'll find the TPA 6120A2 op amp which is actually very impressive as this is one of the newest high powered, Hi-Fi amplifiers from Texas Instruments. So how does it sound? Very good, in fact it's hard to tell the difference between the Sound Core 3D powered motherboards and this solution. The software tests via RMAA give the nod to the Sound Core 3D but in our own listening tests these have different characteristics rather than one being outright better than the other.

This may seem to be entirely focused on the audio part of the GAMING 9 AC, but that's precisely what this motherboard is about. Everything else you've probably seen on other MSI boards before. It will not have the detailed BIOS of the

MPOWER MAX or XPOWER, nor any of those overclocking features. By now there's unlikely to be anyone left that can be impressed by any KILLER E2200 NIC and thus it falls to the audio part of the motherboard to sell it all. In that regard MSI has done incredibly well and taken a bold leap forward where they previously have not been. For that and that alone this motherboard deserves your attention, as it really does offer a compelling package with a noteworthy audio solution.

- Neo Sibeko

9 The MSI Z97 GAMING 9 AC is perhaps undoubtedly the most impressive gaming motherboard MSI has ever built. At this price there aren't any motherboards that can claim to be better.

PLUS / Very good audio / Looks wonderful
Keen pricing

MINUS / Nothing

Zalman ZM-GM4

Website / www.pinnacle.co.za

ERP / R769 Supplier / Pinnacle Africa

SPECS	SENSOR	Laser
	NUMBER OF KEYS	8
	MAX RESOLUTION	8,200dpi
	POLLING RATE	1,000Hz

Adjustable mice haven't quite taken off like everyone had hoped they would, but there's no denying the convenience of being able to make a device fit perfectly into your hand. Well that's the idea, at least: the execution never quite matches the concept, but with the Zalman ZM-GM4 it certainly makes a good effort of it.

Ergonomics are clearly at the forefront of this mouse's design; you can adjust the left- and right-side width, as well as the height and rear-wards positioning of the palm rest, using the tiny and oh-so-fiddly included hex key. What this means is this Zalman is very well-suited for those who enjoy a palm-style grip (with your hand flat on the mouse), but if you have small hands or prefer a claw-style grip, I'd suggest you look elsewhere. The combination of highly uneven weight distribution and poorly-positioned thumb button means you're forced to adopt an uncomfortably rear-positioned pinch grip to get the mouse to do what you want. The presence of an adjustable weight system (also very fiddly) does help reduce this problem, but you'll struggle to find a configuration that's ideal.

On the inside, the Zalman ZM-GM4 has the necessary specs to compete in the lower high-end of the gaming mouse market. Included with the software is a macro manager, button reprogramming and a few configuration options to take this mouse up to an impressive 8,200dpi, but there's nothing in the way of LED colour adjustment, mouse mat setup or lift-off distance recognition. At this price, that's completely fine, though. **NAG**

- Geoff Burrows



7

The ZM-GM4 tries its best to compete at the high-end while maintaining a mid-range price, and for that you certainly get good value for money.

PLUS / Highly adjustable / Good internal specs / Value for money

MINUS / Not suitable for claw grip / Unbalanced weight distribution / Fiddly adjustment process

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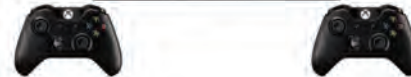
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Intel Core i7 4790K

Website / www.intel.com

ERP / R4,499

Supplier / Intel

S P E C S	CORE	22nm Haswell (Devil's Canyon)
	FREQUENCY	4000MHz (4.4GHz turbo)
	CACHE	9.47MB Total (8MB L3)
	TDP	88W
	PLATFORM	LGA 1150 (Z87/Z97)

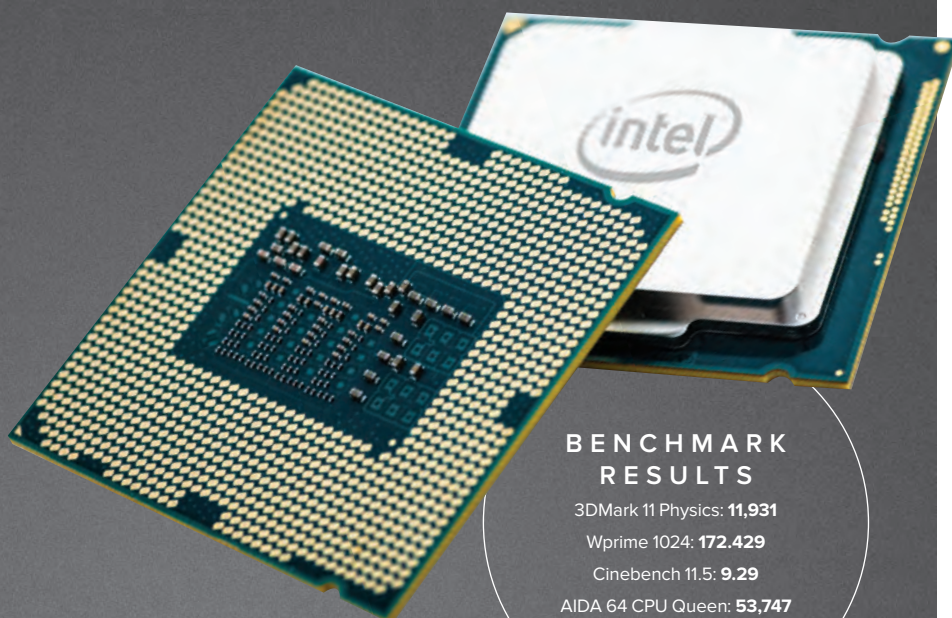
Intel has once again re-affirmed its position regarding overclocking and power users in general. We as a community have Intel's "blessing" so to speak. After overclockers and enthusiasts in general started giving feedback to Intel regarding their CPUs, changes were made in Haswell that allowed end users more control over their systems.

With all that said Intel told us they had been hard at work re-working their Haswell silicon seeking ways to increase performance and overclocking headroom from their performance CPUs. To that end, Intel gave their engineers in the region of 6 months to make improvements to the CPUs, which isn't a lot of time when dealing with roughly 1.4 billion transistors. There were also power changes to take into consideration along with keeping backwards compatibility with boards that, at the time of design, were never intended to support such changes to the CPU.

In all that time, Intel has managed to produce their highest operating frequency CPU of all time at 4GHz, which can attain frequencies as high as 4.4GHz where the TDP budget allows. This massive boost in maximum turbo frequencies versus the 4770K only increased the TDP by 4W which is impressive regardless of how Intel measures TDP (Intel along with AMD measure this very differently and more importantly creatively). Between the two CPUs, clock frequencies have increased by 500MHz at both nominal and turbo frequencies and that has obviously resulted in some very impressive gains in performance.

How does this affect your games? It doesn't at all. Essentially Intel has refined their 22nm process yet again and obviously with the changes in TIM (Intel calls the new material NGPTIM) and significantly more capacitors for smoother power delivery, has managed to secure these clock speeds. That does not translate into anything that you can appreciate in your games, but those who do heavy media encoding will benefit immensely as 500MHz is nothing to snigger at.

Where overclocking is concerned, there



BENCHMARK RESULTS

3DMark 11 Physics: **11,931**

Wprime 1024: **172.429**

Cinebench 11.5: **9.29**

AIDA 64 CPU Queen: **53,747**

AIDA 64 FPU VP8: **7,074**

really isn't a difference at all between the 4770K and the 4790K. In all the samples we tried, the overclocking headroom was sample dependent and thus we've no reason to believe there's any real benefit to be had with the 4790K. Should you find yourself faced with the question of which CPU to purchase between the two, you're better off with the 4790K. The discerning overclockers will notice that the wafers from which 4770Ks are made have improved in the last year and you could potentially end up with a better CPU than you otherwise would with a 4790K. There's no way of knowing this for sure, but thus far, a number of individuals at the elite levels of overclocking have shown that there are a number of very recent batches of 4770K CPUs that are clocking just as well as the best 4790K CPUs. The only difference being that they carry a lower price tag.

This is only for the competitive overclocker though and we would suggest that if you don't belong to this group then do insist on the 4790K as these are very fast CPUs that are for the most part on par with the more expensive 4820K, and in many gaming instances beat the 4930K when using one or even two graphics cards.

Intel has not turned the computing world

on its head with Devil's Canyon, but has done enough to warrant a new SKU. At the very least you'll appreciate the clock speed boost, especially since it will not cost you much more over the 4770K. For the fastest gaming CPU on the market you have little choice but to go for the 4790K as it does deliver some impressive performance even though we may have expected more from it. Overall a solid offering and one that will certainly tide us over until Broadwell CPUs are introduced next year around Computex time. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

8

The 4790K is obviously faster than the 4770K, but contrary to expectations, it doesn't overclock better or run cooler.

PLUS / 4GHz default clock / Better thermal interface material / Only 4W higher TDP than 4770K

MINUS / No difference in overclocking potential / Some CPUs have a very high VID

Gioteck EX-05s Wireless HD Stereo Headset

Website / www.apexinteractive.co.za

ERP / R1,259.95

Supplier / Apex Interactive

S P E C S	WORKS WITH	360 / PC / PS3
	FREQUENCY RESPONSE	20Hz – 20kHz
	MICROPHONE FREQUENCY RESPONSE	50Hz – 15kHz
	DRIVER UNITS	40mm
	WIRELESS RANGE	around 12 metres

I'd never used a Gioteck headset before being handed the EX-05s for review. Wielding a price tag of R1,259, this wireless gaming headset obviously leans towards the high-end of Gioteck's audio offerings. And it packs performance that can easily rival any of the more recognisable brands out there.

At first glance, the EX-05s appears as though it'll be hugely uncomfortable during use. Instead of sporting a single, heavily cushioned headband (as is the case with most headsets), here there are two very thin strips of padding between your head and a pair of stainless steel bands, and those strips of padding are in turn connected by a soft mesh weave. It's the sort of thing that initially looks a bit impractical, but the EX-05s actually proves to be a pleasantly comfortable headset, even when worn for long periods of time.

Of course, it also helps that it's incredibly light for a wireless set, and that the two huge ear cups boast super-soft, microfiber-infused padding. The cups are great at blocking out exterior noise, and seem to be pretty good at locking in sound as well so that you don't accidentally annoy anyone around you. Each cup also boasts a set of controls for changing chat and game volume independently, as well as for activating a virtual surround sound setting and for muting the set's microphone.

In use, the EX-05s sounds great. It produces rich audio across the spectrum, with just the right amount of bass and satisfyingly clear high- and mid-range tones. This really is a superb pair of headphones, packing plenty of punch and clarity in their delivery. On top of that they're conveniently wireless and exceptionally comfortable, and multi format compatible, which makes for a highly attractive overall package.

NAG

- Dane Remendes



9 The EX-05s is an outstanding wireless headset. It's comfortably lightweight and delivers excellent audio quality.

PLUS / Robust build / Lightweight / Great audio production

MINUS / Nothing



XBOX ONE

Available 23 September 2014

XBOX ONE



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THE LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE

X-Rocker Control gaming chair

› Website / www.xrocker.co.za

› RRP / R4,250 › Supplier / X-Rocker

Seeing as how chairs have proven to be all the rage in the NAG office, we thought it fitting to hunt down yet another brilliantly extravagant butt-holder to present before your judgemental eyes – and this time we really outdid ourselves, deftly nabbing (by the way, is theft still considered a crime?) one of those fancy X-Rocker gaming chairs that people seem to get uncomfortably hot and bothered about. It's got control panels and built-in speakers and wireless doohickies and IT VIBRATES. In many cultures, this chair is endearingly known as The End of the World. Here at NAG, we call it Mr Cuddlesbottom.



LIVING ON A PRAYER. AND A PEDESTAL.

X-Rocker sells a few different varieties of chair, such as recliners and floor-based chairs. The X-Rocker Control floats on a pedestal, as if by magic. Or as if perfected by thousands (tens, really) of years of office chair design. Like most other pedestal chairs out there, the Control can swivel through 360 degrees for that perfect evil-villain-stroking-cat reveal, and has a gas-lift mechanism for adjusting its height.

WHAT'S THAT NOISE?

The Control's built-in speakers make it especially fancy and give it a one-up over boring regular chairs. Audio is delivered by two satellite speakers and one subwoofer, with volume and bass controls situated

on a panel on the right-hand side of the Control's bum-cushion. If you're so inclined, your audio can also be transmitted wirelessly.

PRACTICALLY INVISIBLE

When you're not using the chair, the backrest can be conveniently folded flat – which may or may not turn it into an ottoman, or a spare coffee table, or an impractically small bed.

MORE, MERRIER

Multiple X-Rockers can be connected to one another to spread the love. This means you'll have to decide whether your need to not feel douche-y about being the only person in the room hogging the Future Chair outweighs your need to have a bank account that's not empty.

VIIIBRAAATIIIOON

Yes, the Control vibrates using sonic science. No, most chairs do not do this. Yes, this is quite a special thing. No, it's probably not a great idea to sell your three month-old baby to raise funds to buy this chair.

WORKS WITH

Well, everything really, provided it can be interfaced with via RCA cables. Handheld gaming consoles, Blu-ray players, mobile media players and almost every game console out there can be used with the X-Rocker, so you'll be able to play games, listen to music and watch movies from the comfort of this chair. **NAG**

- *Barkskin*

TECHNICAL

FEATURES

- 360-degree swivel pedestal with gas-lift mechanism.
- Built-in 2.1-channel audio.
- Vibration function.
- Wireless functionality.

SUMMARY

PROS

It's like a regular chair, but *better!*

CONS

Limited to RCA connectivity unless you buy adapters.

ALTERNATIVES

The floor / Other things that are also chairs, but without the bit where they're also speakers.

AWARDS

NAG's Future of Sitting Award

MOSH *pit*

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

► **ASTRUM LUXURY BASS BLUETOOTH SPEAKER**

- 1 Supplier / Astrum South Africa
- 2 Website / astrum.co.za
- 3 RRP / R499

This two-channel portable speaker can interface with your mobile devices via Bluetooth 3.0 or NFC (Near Field Communication) to handle all your audio needs. Whether you're using your phone or tablet to play music, or if you're watching movies on your laptop and are tired of its tinny built-in speakers, the Luxury Bass speaker will add a bit of sonic energy to the proceedings.

You're able to connect to the 5W RMS speaker via a standard 3.5mm

jack, and it also doubles as a power bank; you'll find a USB port on the unit (and the Luxury Bass actually comes bundled with a USB cable) which will allow you to charge your mobile devices while you use them. A flashing light lets you know when the speaker's 1,600mAh battery is running low, and a single charge will get you around eight hours of use. Along the top of the device you'll find playback and volume controls. Hands-free calls are also made possible via the Luxury Bass.



► **GOBII 4" SMARTPHONE IIP**

- 1 Supplier / Kalahari.com
- 2 Website / www.kalahari.com
- 3 RRP / R999

Gobii is likely a brand that you're not too familiar with, but if this phone's price is anything to go by, it won't be long before everyone is talking about it. For your mere thousand rand, you'll get this entry-level gobii smartphone (there's a higher-spec version available for R1,699) as well as 200MB of mobile data for 12 months. Sure, this phone can't compete with the likes of those that'll cost you ten times as much, but at this price it's a very impressive device. Smooth performance throughout the bloat-free operating system, expandable storage up to 36GB (there's 4GB on-board), and dual-SIM support add up to a neat little smartphone that's more than capable.



GIOTECK CONSOLE ACCESSORIES

1 Supplier / Apex Interactive

2 Website / www.apexinteractive.co.za

3 RRP / EX-03 for 360: R269.95 / EX-03 for PS3: R379.95 / XC-1: R149.95 / BP-2: R349.95

Gioteck offers a range of useful console accessories for both the current and previous generation of consoles. The EX-03 is an over-the-ear headset designed to enhance in-game chat. It's available for Xbox 360 and PS3, with the Xbox version boasting an anti-twist wire to get it connected, while the PS3 version interfaces via Bluetooth, which explains the R100 increase in price. Both feature easy to reach controls (the PS3 version places them on the earpiece, while the 360 has in-line controls) and flexible rubber ear-hooks. The rubber cushioning on the buds promises long-term comfort, and the microphone is designed to cancel out ambient noise.

Next up is the XC-1, which is available for Xbox One and PS4. It's a play and charge cable (USB 2.0 to Micro-USB) with a length of three metres, designed to ensure that your controller never dies mid-game. It also doubles as a transfer cable between other USB 2.0 to Micro-USB devices. The connectors are gold-plated and boast tinned copper conductors, for whatever that's worth. Finally, there's the Gioteck BP-2, which is a play and charge battery kit for Xbox One. It comes with a 1,200mA rechargeable battery that'll get you 15 hours of play off a single charge (a full charge takes about 3.5 hours). It comes with a three-metre long USB 2.0 to Micro-USB cable. It's bundled with a battery cover that allows simultaneous playing and charging.



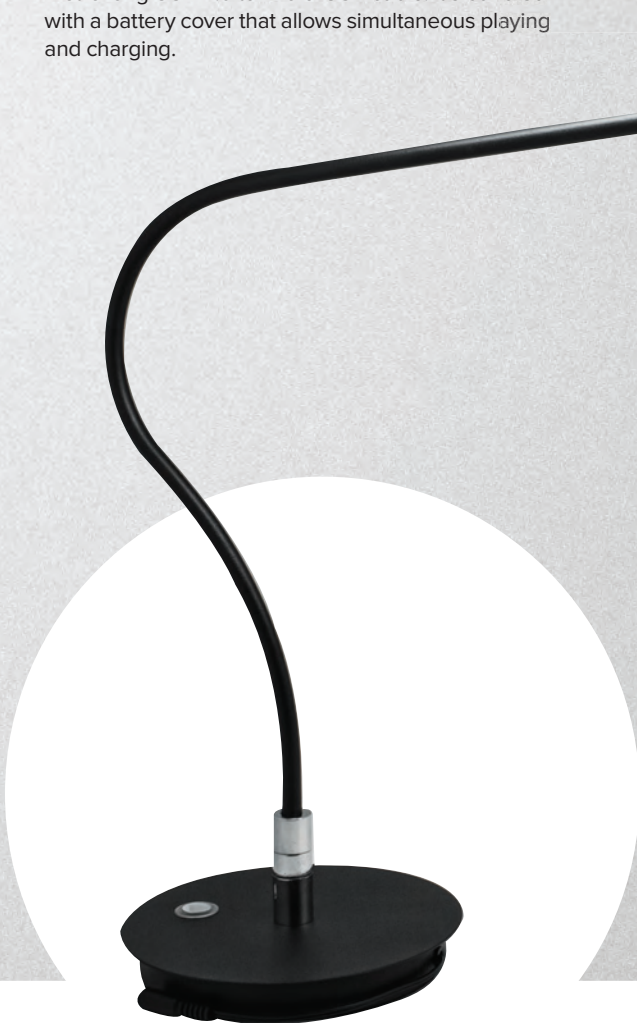
THE LIGHTING WAREHOUSE LED TOUCH DESK LAMP

1 Supplier / The Lighting Warehouse

2 Website / www.lightingwarehouse.co.za

3 RRP / R1,499.95

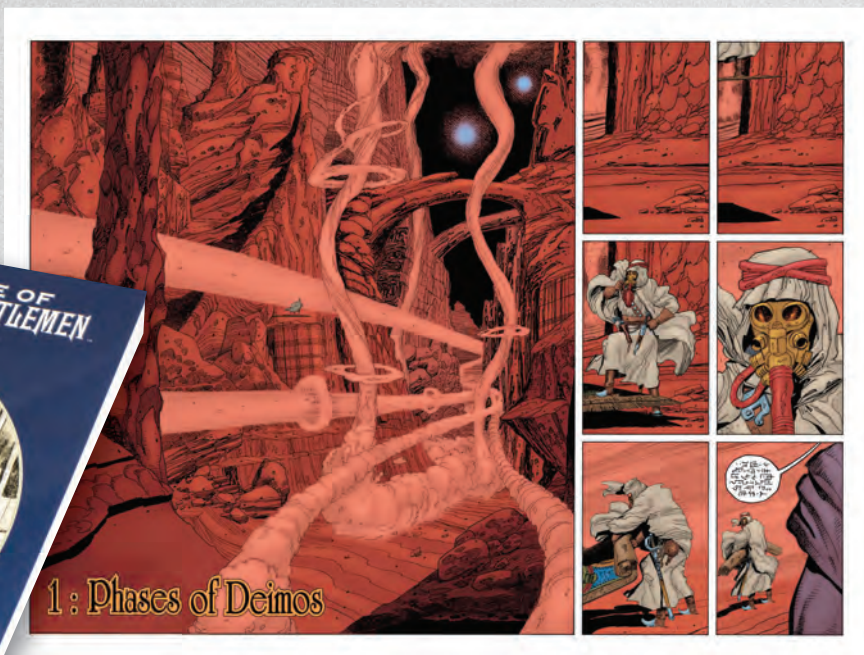
Lamps! They make light. Desk lamps! They make light at your desk. Science! This LED desk lamp is made from quality materials, sporting a hefty base and solid construction all over. It doesn't have any bendy bits, so you can't raise or lower the light, but it does rotate around the base. When it's off, a touch-activated power button glows blue so you can easily find it in the dark. Tap said button and the lamp turns on. Holding your finger on it will dim and brighten the powerful LEDs, letting you choose your desired lighting strength. It's a really nice desk lamp, provided the price doesn't scare you.



THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN: THE OMNIBUS EDITION (TPB)

- 1 Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- 2 Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- 3 RRP / R369

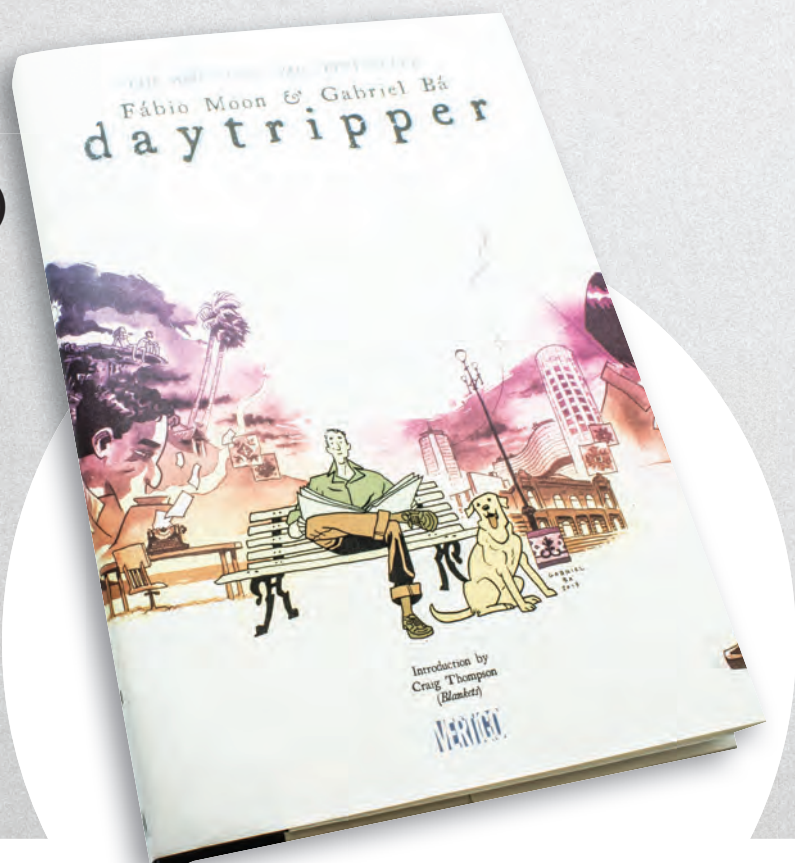
Like almost everything else that Alan Moore puts his pen to, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* is along the ranks of comics that everyone simply has to read. This omnibus collects the first two volumes of this classic story about an unlikely group of anti-heroes from the turn of the 19th century.



DAYTRIPPER: THE DELUXE EDITION (HC)

- 1 Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- 2 Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- 3 RRP / R419

Craig Thompson's foreword to *Daytripper* sums it up perfectly: some comics are about fantasy, others are about reality; *Daytripper* straddles that line. Writer Fábio Moon does this with a poetic sense of knowing what lies on the other side of life as we discover the sometimes mundane world of this book's main character. It's all accompanied by Gabriel Bá's often eerily well-portrayed human interactions and dreamlike art. Sombre and certainly not for everyone, *Daytripper* is the sort of book that's up there with the likes of *Maus* when it comes to must-reads if you've got the chops for it.



➤ MARVEL COMICS: 75 YEARS OF COVER ART / DC COMICS: A VISUAL HISTORY / SPIDER-MAN YEAR BY YEAR A VISUAL CHRONICLE

- ➊ Supplier / AWX
- ➋ Website / www.awx.co.za
- ➌ RRP / R745 (Marvel Comics) / R695 (DC Comics) / R695 (Spider-Man)

These are actually not books at all but instead the best spider killers available in the universe... from a height of around four feet. You really just need to display one of these on your bookshelf and every eight legged freak in your neighbourhood will steer well clear – even the big ones – like those ones in *The Lord of the Rings*. They come in hardcover slipcases and include two high quality original prints in a pull-out folder and weigh in at 300-350 pages each. For the money these are a must-buy essential don't-even-think-about-it instant purchase for fans of any of these franchises. Or even people just somewhat interested in comic book history. just magnificent...



➤ LOVE LETTER: LEGEND OF FIVE RINGS

- ➊ Supplier / AWX
- ➋ Website / www.awx.co.za
- ➌ RRP / R145

Finding a game simpler than Love Letter would be a challenge. Inside the game box you'll find 16 playing cards, a number of small wooden blocks, four reference cards, and a small rule book, all tucked away inside an embroidered velvet bag.

Love Letter, as the name implies, is a bit of a soppy affair, but the premise is solid enough that it makes for a fun time for anyone looking for a light-hearted experience. Games are played by picking up and discarding cards based on individual card abilities, and a winner is declared each round, adding to their collection of wooden blocks that could declare them the winner of a fair maiden's heart. We see plenty of potential for expansion packs and advanced rules, but on its own, Love Letter is gracefully simple and easy to get into.

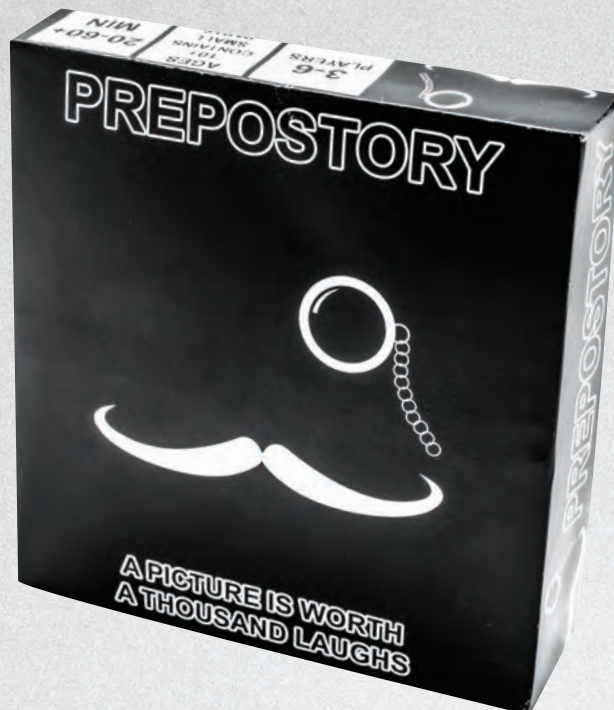


MARVEL DICE MASTERS: AVENGERS VS. X-MEN STARTER SET

- 1 Supplier / Skycastle Games
- 2 Website / www.skycastle.co.za
- 3 RRP / R225

Game creators seem to be on a mission to find new ways to deliver classic table top gameplay, and at the forefront of that effort is WizKids. You might recognise the name from HeroClix, and Marvel Dice Masters is a somewhat similar take on the idea of pitting superheroes against each other, with a number of differences.

Figures are out: heroes and abilities are represented in Dice Masters with a combination of cards and dice. This starter kit contains eight heroes with three variants each, as well as a collection of abilities and sidekicks. These are brought into play in the typical card game form of phase-based turns, and players use resources to summon heroes and use their abilities. It's an interesting mix of strategy and luck that's easy to transport and play, although it might take a bit of time to figure out the rules if you're just getting started – this is definitely more complex than the likes of Pokémon.



PREPOSTORY

- 1 Supplier / AWX
- 2 Website / www.awx.co.za
- 3 RRP / TBA

If story-telling (or BSing) is one of your strong points, then Prepostory is for you. Like a mashup of charades and Balderdash, Prepostory has players string together picture cards to tell a tall tale and earn points for doing so. This game comes from the local talents of Jacques du Preez and Tracy Clare Benson, and is currently in an advanced prototype phase. Be sure to speak to the fine folks at AWX for more info.



DIRECTORY

WHERE TO FIND ALL THE STUFF FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

Apex Interactive	011 796 5040
Astrum Peripherals	011 314 0400
AWX	011 789 8215
Corex	011 700 7188
Cosmic Comics	011 782 0819
Esquire Technologies	0861 700 000
Kalahari.com	0861 525 242
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GG

by Tarryn van der Byl

Tarryn fears the inky black void of space more than anything else in the world. This is why we made her watch *Gravity* and laughed and laughed and laughed.



For better or wurst¹

This isn't supposed to happen. I leave for Gamescom in three days, I have multiple deadline schedules blinking emergency red, there's about a zillion very important things I should be doing all at the same time, and... I'm sick. My face has apparently been transformed overnight into a mucosal geyser, my body is collapsing under the immense strain of sitting under a blanky in my pyjamas, and even the cats are maintaining a quarantine-safe distance. And on Sunday night, I'll be boarding a transcontinental plane with several hundred other passengers, and perhaps a thousand potential destinations, including Miklós' immune system².

This is exactly how *The Last of Us* started.

Except, of course, I don't have some sort of mutant *Cordyceps* fungus growing in my brain nor any sudden cannibalistic cravings (not yet, anyway). And I'm not going to America. And, when you think about it like that, the precise origin of that outbreak is never actually really explained. Okay, so maybe it's not necessarily how the game started, but it might have been and that's close enough. The point is that, unlike most

of the many other guy-with-a-gun-in-a-post-apocalyptic-wasteland games out there, *The Last of Us* is a game that is instantly believable to the player because it exploits our own fears – latent, hypochondriacal, or otherwise.

Pandemics are nothing new in books, movies, games, or even in real life for that matter – at the time of writing this, almost 1,000 people have died of Ebola in North Africa over the previous month or so. I won't pretend I haven't been checking my snotty tissues for trace evidence of organ rupture or bone fragments or Xenomorph gestation fluid or whatever else the CIA removed from the Wikipedia article about Ebola symptoms to preclude the development of an affordable homeopathic cure and reduce government-funded pharmaceutical industry profits by up to 0.2 percent³. Or, you know, whatever.

But back to *The Last of Us*, and it doesn't even matter what the origin of the outbreak is because you can fill that gap with something you read about on the news yesterday. That kind of subtle requisition to the player's own experience is an ongoing theme throughout the game, and a huge

part of what makes *The Last of Us* one of the most profoundly personal games ever made – it's not just the story Naughty Dog tells you, but the story you make up as you go. It's so much more than the guy with a gun in a post-apocalyptic wasteland – it's a story about you and me and hope and love and giraffes. If you haven't played it, you really should.

In the meantime, though, I think I'll pack a baseball bat, some nails, and a roll of strapping tape for Germany. Just in case.

- 1 I'm not even sorry.
- 2 We've always talked about doing a collaborative column one month, so to commemorate our first ever Gamescom trip together, we're trying out a Choose Your Own Adventure concept. If you want to infect Miklós, turn to page 16. If you don't want to infect Miklós, close the magazine and think about why you hate fun.
- 3 WAKE UP SHEEPLE, SOMETHING SOMETHING GMO, FLUORIDE, CONTRAILS, STARGATE, LIZARD PEOPLE, etc.

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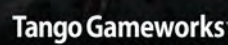
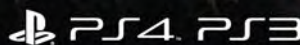
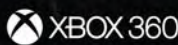
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