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2014

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FOR CHAOS COVERED.

FUTURE PROOF

The games are coming!
Let us guide you through
the next months.

8

EPIC REVIEWS
INCLUDING

Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel **8**

Forza Horizon 2 **8**

Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor **8**

Super Smash Bros. **8**



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GAMES

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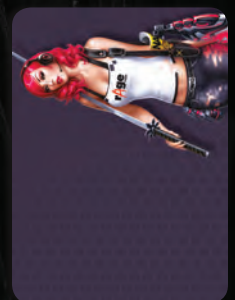
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FEATURES

30 RAGE 2014: OVERLOAD

Oh man, rAge! What a lovely weekend that was, full of loveliness and weekends. Also, games! Wait, you weren't there? Impossible. Everyone was there. But just in case you weren't, have a look at some of the glorious things you missed. LOOK AT THEM.

36 FUTURE PROOF

Not sure where to start with all the great games that are landing in the near future? Let us guide you through the best of what's coming.

52 FAR CRY 4

Guns, elephants, meat, wingsuits and more guns/meat! We've spent some time in *Far Cry 4*'s snowy mountainscape, and it's got us eager for more.

ON THE DVD

DEMOS

Dandelion / Depth Hunter 2: Deep Dive / Magicmaker / NASCAR '14 / Runers / Stained / The Maker's Eden

DRIVERS

AMD Catalyst Drivers 14.4 from last month are still current.
NVIDIA Forceware 344.16 WHQL 32-bit & 64-bit

EXTRAS

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FREE GAMES

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The future's eve

It's the Wednesday after rAge; this magazine goes to print in two days and Michael has just informed us that our print time has been moved forward to 2pm. Precious hours need to be shaved off our production schedule and yet somehow, we still find time to squeeze in a game or two of *StarCraft II*. And *Black Ops II Zombies*, which recently has seen a resurgence in popularity (much to the dismay of non-participants in the office, I'm sure).

This industry is an incredible one: although it's important to everyone to take home enough money to keep the lawyers from banging down the door, we're all in it because we love gaming, and we all want to help this industry grow. Supposed media rivals enjoy a beer together and chat about their efforts to maximise their reader base, ultimately trying to steal business from one another while genuinely enjoying each other's company at a rAge after-party at the Hogshead. (Hi!). In a business this small it's almost impossible to avoid running into familiar faces every week, or just once a year. The same can be said for the flourishing local

games development industry (which shares a few members from the gaming press). It reminds me that in this country we have the benefit of not being tangled up in the so-called progress of the first world: we've been allowed to sit back and observe, calculate and pounce only when the time is right. That time is now. It's happening. We're in the early days of exciting developments locally and it makes me proud to be a gamer in South Africa. I've seen so much progress in both local games media and development in the last year alone that trying to comprehend where we'll be in a decade is almost impossible. Suffice to say, wherever we are, it'll be awesome.

On the note of local gaming and how wonderful it is, this issue features our essential rAge follow-up feature, written by a few members of our NAG Online team to keep things interesting. If you didn't get a chance to attend, this is where you'll find a generous slice of the delicious gaming pie that was rAge 2014.

We also have a ton of other cool bits in this issue: a four-page feature about 11 games set to be released over the next 3-6 (or so) months; and some excellent reviews of equally excellent games, like the highly-anticipated *Alien: Isolation* that's kept Dane locked in the boardroom in terror for days on end.

And then there's our cover feature – *Far Cry 4*. *Far Cry* is a series that likes to dance a different jig to the rest of the first-person shooters out there, and that always makes for, at the very least, an interesting experience. And this next one looks like it's not scared of the legacy it has to live up to.

Please enjoy this slightly skinny issue of NAG as much as we've enjoyed putting it together. After rAge everyone seems to be on a diet! I can assure you that very little content was cut to make it this size: we just got rid of a few of those gosh-darn pesky ads. **NAG**

Stay happy!
-GeometriX

“This industry is an incredible one: although it's important to everyone to take home enough money to keep the lawyers from banging down the door, we're all in it because we love gaming, and we all want to help this industry grow.”

UNITY

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XBOX ONE



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Inbox

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

letters@nag.co.za

Letter of the Month November 2014

From: Connor Montague

Subject: Better worlds have a cost

Hi NAG, this is just something I was thinking about and thought it might be an interesting read. No doubt you've had similar letters before, but read on because I'm bound to differ in some way!

Anyway, I digress. To me, and I'm sure to most of us gaming opens up different worlds. The letter in the October edition described it as 'the perfect escape' and I agree completely. Personally, I enjoy fantasy RPG games with a sort of medieval setting (like Skyrim). My friend and I share the same thoughts on this - we would both rather live in a world like Skyrim. If you've seen the anime Sword Art Online, you'll know what I mean by true virtual reality (you know, minus the no logout part).

In this love for gaming and the worlds which gaming put you in, I find a core problem that many of us gamers experience: money. Ok, so maybe in some games its hard to get money, but in this game we call 'Real Life' its even harder to get money. This money quest is an ongoing process, and if you fail, you die once and there is no previous save or respawn. So let me link my earlier issue and this real life money issue.

We are forced to live in real life, and we can only live in worlds we seem to prefer

when we're gaming. But to have the best experience of these worlds, you need good equipment and that translates back to real life money. Which as I've stated, many of us lack.

So we have to work with what we have. I play all my PC games on a business laptop with an intel i3 and internal graphics, not the best experience but I do what I can.

But that's what keeps the game of Real Life interesting- the striving for better experiences, which we as gamers can translate into the best gaming experiences we can get.

Thanks for the awesome magazine, and for reading my little rant xD

Well you were right about the bit where your letter would be different. You've got a weird view on things: striving to earn money in life to feed into gaming so you have an escape from life is like working extra hours so you afford to go on holiday to get away from the daily grind for a week. But then you've brought the kids and the in-laws and before you know it you're longing to get back to the office so you can master your Angry Birds techniques during lunch.

But I suppose there's something very pure about your approach, and I remember doing the same thing when I

a game. The feeling of controlling a character that looks and feels more 'real' is awesome and addictive. Games like Assassins Creed Unity will teach us about the French Revolution in ways teachers only dream of. That's when I realised there's no better time to become a gamer because games are exactly where they're supposed to be. If you're not a gamer now, I strongly recommend you get a next gen console, its pricey but worth it...

Not to sound like a hipster, but you've got some catching up to do. Believe

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 or cleverness. **NOTE /** You can't change the games or the platform they come on.



megarom
interactive

was younger, and never thinking about doing it in any different way.

At least you know that within the next however many years we'll all be walking around in robot bodies while our frail meat sacks sit at home and relax. It'll be like a permanent holiday.

Have some free games for your letter. Hopefully they'll buy you some peace from your life! Ed.

From: Mawena

Subject: Games are the best storytellers

Games have always been storytellers from the start but recently they took a huge turn for the better. I recently became a gamer, 2012 to be exact. At first a compelling story would entice me and I'd love the game more but now with the introduction of PS4 and Xbox One they managed to suck us into the story even more. The emotions of the characters on screen looking devilishly realistic, you end up forgetting the fact that you're playing

it or not, a long time ago there were games that looked awful. I mean, they were UGLY - you had to use what was known then as imagination to "put yourself into the world" that it created. This process was aided by storytelling elements that weren't even voice-acted! It was truly a strange time but we got through it somehow.

But I am glad that you've caught on to our little secret: games can be educational and fun at the same time. The way students are taught in schools is so outdated that it's no

wonder why teachers are looking to this medium as a source of education. It'll just take a little while for the stoic oldies to figure out that there's more to learning than highlighting entire paragraphs in textbooks because it's all important.

Welcome to the club! Ed.

From: Werner Herrmannsen

Subject: RAGE

First off.. well done on rage 2014. It was a lot of fun and we got to play some awesome demos.

Looking back at the last few years, should we as the gaming community be concerned with rage and what is too come in the future?

Is it just me or are less and less stalls operating at rage? I remember that when walking through the door you would be welcomed by service providers and people handing out a ton of fliers and pamphlets and freebees. Aaah.. the good ole days.

I'm still surprised to see how many gamers attend the biggest LAN in Africa. I don't blame them it looks awesome. A mass of games come together as one and talk smack about moms all over.

Anyway when are we going to see a console LAN? Oh yes, now we're talking. How come there is only a LAN for PC gamers, the console market is quickly catching up with multiplayer gaming, online and LAN. My wife is also a gamer, so obviously we each have a console and we LAN when we game together or she plays her game and I play mine.

Can we put it up to a vote for the gaming community? RAGE 2015 console LAN Yes or No?

There are so many games out there that can team multiplayer and single player LAN... why not a console LAN party?

I figured that with so many pages dedicated to rAge coverage now and in the leading months, it'd only be fair to share a reader's opinion. Some bad with the good to keep us on our toes, and all that.

Were there fewer stalls at rAge? Nope. There are more. There were loads this year! We also had wider aisles and a much better use of the floor space so maybe it felt sparser to you. Also we had to put a stop to people standing right by the entrance handing out stuff (other than our approved bag-handing-out people) because a horde of excited gamers tends to trample anyone daft enough to stand in their way. Aside from the bad publicity it'd make a

ON THE FORUMS

Welcome to the NAG Forums, where everything is made up and the post counts don't matter. Join us for some fun and games at www.nag.co.za/forums

QUESTION / What is it about your favourite online game that keeps you coming back?

Friends. I often log on to games I have not played in a while just to keep in touch.

- Telur

I used to think I played online games cause of the sense of enjoyment that happens when a group of players work as a team, but then I played Dota 2, so now I believe its masochism instead.

- Demikid

Meeting new players and just the experience of playing the game.

- Infamous_Killer

Showing how skilful I am and being MVP all the time because i'm just naturally superior to everyone else playing.....bow to your king!

- ZA_VIRUS_69

real mess and nobody likes cleaning.

Console LAN! This comes up more and more often each year but we're yet to see people really commit to doing it. We're always considering all our options and a dedicated console LAN is right up there, but we do have a number of console gamers who join in the regular LAN every year. These things take months of planning and fussing so we can ensure that there's maximum happiness for everyone involved. But we always welcome input from the gaming masses, so let me know! Ed.

From: Jean-Pierre

Subject: Game reviews

Being a new buyer to NAG since I have no choice now that your competition has abandoned ship I though shame why not help NAG with some tips to make the mag better one thing I did notice Is the junk prizes to win come on who wants to win marvel dice masters that's not even a prize it's more like a freebee and can't you add an extra line to the game review as to if and how much data needs to be downloaded just to play the game that way you won't get

excited when you buy a game and

have to wait 5 days for it to download before you get to play and for R49 bucks can't you use a better quality paper then this slightly better then toilet paper, paper no wonder the art work is not as bright as it could be. The front cover of this months mag sucks as its too dark the pink was good how about a pc babe on the cover any way let me carry o reading this below average mag.

Thanks for your super valuable input! We spent massive amounts of money and assembled a dedicated team of experts in their fields to process and apply your demands. Here is a summary of their responses:

Steve (chief prizes guy): "I tested Marvel Dice Masters as a Frisbee and it went very poorly. I ended up hitting my poor dog Shnuggles right in the face and she was so pained that she growled at me and then I cried a little. I will be sending you a bill for our joint therapy session."

Olaf (download size expert): "Thank you for your input. I suggest being less excited. That way you will not be disappointed when you have to download a game. We apologise for writing in such a way that makes you excited, and will endeavour to no



Pieter de la Rey, "This is a drawing of Batman that I did using Photoshop, hope that you enjoy it and thanks for the awesome magazine."

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 *Sunset Overdrive* for Xbox One, valued at R799.95



longer do so."

April (toilet paper guru): "I conducted a detailed analysis of both the old and new magazine pages, as well as a selection of toilet papers ranging from no-name bog roll to the fancy stuff with bum-soothing aloe vera extract. The aloe was very necessary as, after wiping for a week with NAG mags with both the old and the new paper, I was in a great deal of pain. I would not recommend NAG Magazine for wiping-related activities at all. 0/10."

Arnold (cover babe specialist): "Hot chicks are lank kiff but I scheme that if okes (or chicks hey I'm not a judge) want to check these cherries with their boobs and stuff all like hanging out they should just buy magazines that like have that lank." Ed.

From: Michael De Beer
Subject: Too many games, too little time.

A few years back, when I had just gotten a PS2 and was gradually getting accustomed to gaming "on the couch" I had significantly less games than I have today, so I played everything to the fullest. Every game was a 20-50 hour escapade, partly because I had so few games to play, might as well play the ones I had, and partly because everything was so new and exciting. Take one game I hold dear; Star Wars: The Force Unleashed. I must've played that game 6 or 7 times. Another, the original Call of Duty and it's subsequent expansion pack, United Offensive. Every game I played was innovative. However, in the present, I have accumulated so many games it's ridiculous. I have unfinished games here, there and

everywhere, and still more on the way. Do you think it's possible to have too many games? Don't take me the wrong way, I still love games, however sometimes it's a little too much.

It's definitely possible to have too many games. I feel like I'm in that situation right now. I'm a sucker for a Humble Bundle or Steam sale, and I end up selling short those games that I buy because I don't spend nearly enough time with them. I have fond memories of staying up until the wee hours of the morning playing games that weren't even that great – they just hooked me for some reason.

And so many times I've tried to go through my Steam list, install old games and damn-well finish them. The trouble is that life (or more games) pops up and then I end up neglecting that poor old game even longer.

Balance is really important in everything, and gaming is no exception. Ed.

From: Lindelo Niyabo
Subject: Is it necessary to purchase/preorder video games or any other gadgets on the release date?

As an enthusiastic teenage casual gamer I sometimes find myself in desperate situations trying to reach an agreement with my sub-conscious, to buy/preorder or not to buy/preorder certain games on release dates.

Short and to the point: I like it. Except your heading. That was really long.

Pre-ordering is a dangerous habit to get into, because while it can be rewarding (cool DLC, extra swag, limited editions), you have limited ways of knowing before-

THE SHORTS

[extracts of LOL from the NAG audience]

"Wow, can't believe I sent such stupid emails to you before, sorry about that :P"
– James Tonjes

"You guys suck..... Why did my post not appear in the mag?"
– AD2666

"Duke Nukem Forever took, well FOREVER, to get released, and when it did, just thinking about it makes me ill"
– Quintin Mason

hand if the game is any good or not. I can't say specifically one way or the other if pre-ordering is a good or bad thing, because it depends entirely on a game. Often you can follow a game's development for years, watching interviews and gameplay videos and reading previews, and in those cases it might be a decent idea to pre-order and nab those goodies. But I'd be very weary of games that show nothing for years and then pop onto the scene with killer pre-order incentives. Ed.

ON TWITTER

@nagcoza

Nadine

I want to wear my @nagcoza shirt, but I also want to frame it and hang it on my wall...

Andre Odendaal

Big Thank You to @nagcoza @CelestialIndie & @Learn3D_SA for sponsoring the developers stand at @rAgeExpo this year!

SA Gamer

A massive "THANK YOU" to @nagcoza @IGNAfrica @rAgeExpo for an amazing weekend! You guys are phenomenal. #rAge2014

Luzanne Bothma

#rAge2014 amazing weekend* thanks @nagcoza for bringing such an awesome event! Can't wait till next year's lan!

nothanks

@nagcoza sooo who do I have to kill/kiss/ bribe for a ticket to the lan? I'll pay millions



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MIKTAR'S MEANDERINGS

by Miktar Dracon

End of line



Some say Miktar once picked Venus out of the sky and hurled it at the sun in a fit of rage. Others believe Miktar's toes were fashioned from jellyfish intestines. Nobody knows for sure.

Friends, colleagues, brothers and sisters,* This is my final column for NAG. Due to Stuff and Things and Life and Y'know, we're retiring this section. I'll still be contributing reviews, previews and features here and there.

Most people who know me know this story, but you might not. In 2003 I was working a soul-destroying job in a dead-end "career". My life was going nowhere, and it was all my fault. I regretted every life choice I had made up to that point. I was heartbroken, tired, and lost. During an instant messenger conversation with James Francis (former editor of NAG, at the time a staff writer) he suggested I come to Johannesburg and see what happens. "No promises," but it couldn't be worse than how things were now, right? At the time I was supporting my sister and my boyfriend by myself. And as much as I loved them, I needed a change (and they needed to go).

I agreed to James' proposal, threw caution to the wind and told my landlord goodbye. In spite of all the loud LAN parties I held in my little two-bedroom apartment, the neighbours told me I was the quietest tenant they'd ever lived next to. Perhaps they were being sarcastic, I'll never know. Everything I owned fit into a single car. So me and my meagre possessions left Pretoria and shacked up with James in Jo'burg. An aimless 24-year-old with no hope nor future, taking a chance. I had never even considered writing for a video game magazine for a living. To my surprise, things worked out rather well.

It was the beginning of the most wonderful professional experience of my life. The most fun, the most satisfying, the most intellectually and creatively challenging. And it all started with just four people, working out of a garage turned into a room. This magazine saved me. It made me. If you've ever suddenly found yourself with a purpose, you know what I mean. If you've never found a purpose (or had it find you), I hope you do. There is nothing like it, the universe changes form right before your eyes and makes a space shaped exactly like you.

There were a rough few years here and there, mainly because of our own ambitions. Trying to do too much at once. Truly crazy days, when we weren't just NAG, but SACM, Custom PC, bits of *The Citizen*, and even the car magazine *Drive*. We moved offices a few times. I'll never forget the spiral staircase of doom, especially when it came time to haul up several piles of printed magazines to the third floor. We had to share a bathroom with some kind of gospel church on the floor below us. The building had a tin roof, so it got stupid hot in the summer. The third office where we ended up (and where NAG still is to this day) was a massive



improvement, even if the ceiling did collapse that one time and nearly kill me.

There's not a person at the magazine, past and present, that I do not like, if not love. The magazine went from nothing, to greatness. In a climate of increasing jadedness against gaming "journalism", we did our best and were honest with you and ourselves. I'm proud that we were never corrupt, never corruptible. We had integrity from start to finish, even when that integrity made our lives more difficult. We did have our derp moments, everyone does. But we were, we are, enthusiasts, lovers of games and gaming culture, and we wanted to share that with you. We still do.

To the people who read the words I write and have written these past ten years, it's been my pleasure to try and entertain you. My column's always been a weird place, where I either say what's on my mind or I experiment with some idea. Sometimes to the chagrin of the editor, sometimes to the confusion of the reader. I'd give myself a C+ for my efforts over the years, which is a passing grade so I'm okay with that. So now, as an aimless 34 year old, all I can say to you all is:

Thank you, thank you, thank you. **NAG**

Sense of touch might be heading to virtual reality

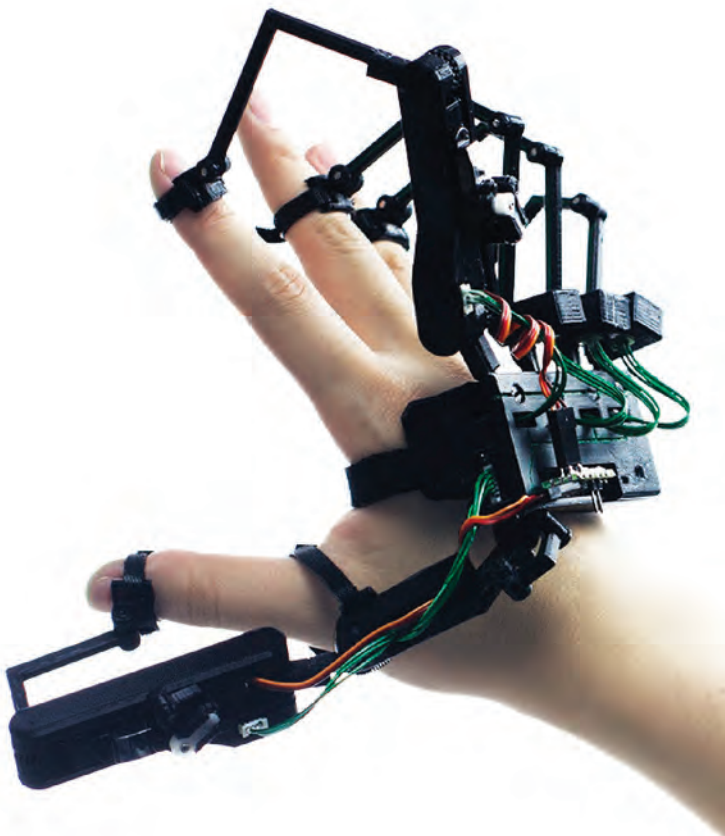
Robotics company developing glove-like exoskeleton to simulate touch

Virtual reality! It's all the rage at the moment thanks to companies like Oculus VR and Sony. While the whole virtual reality phenomenon is gaining momentum, many other companies are looking for a way to carve out their own niche in our new VR-enabled future. One such company is Dextra Robotics, which has just developed a prototype unit called the Dexmo F2 – it simulates the sense of touch in virtual reality.

The device looks kind of scary, but it has some clever ideas beneath its intimidating exterior. Tiny actuators and a mini braking system are built into the thumb and index finger slots. When you wear the Dexmo F2 and your in-game avatar touches something solid, the actuators and brakes in the thumb and index finger slots begin to lock, thereby preventing your hands from closing into a fist. That coupled with some force feedback in the tips of your fingers simulates the sense of touch.

In addition to providing feedback to the wearer, the Dexmo F2 also captures the player's finger movements to input into the virtual reality environment. That means that with the Dexmo F2 attached to your hands, you could potentially move your hands in the real world to grasp virtual items in-game; you'll be able to feel the grip of those items as well.

For now the company is in the early stages of testing the VR waters. They're planning a Kickstarter campaign which might even be live by the time you read this. If all goes well, Dextra Robotics plans to bring the product to market for around \$200, or about R2,200.



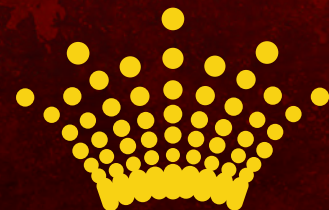
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You should never feed your Miklós after midnight. We made the terrible mistake of doing post-midnight feeding with ours once, and the ensuing carnage resulted in RedTide losing the ability to grow head-hair.

PIXEL FIX

by Miklós Szecsei

YouTube and Marketing 101

If you play video games and have an Internet connection, chances are you've watched Let's Play videos on YouTube. The rise of the video game YouTuber is something that is often greeted with much cheer from the game-playing masses, because these YouTubers were a part of that group to begin with. Video game YouTubers are seen, by many but not all, as the "voice of the common gamer". On the other hand, video game journalists (don't forget) are untrustworthy scum – that, of course, is what any GamerGate proponent would want you to believe. Because you're reading this magazine, I'm inclined to believe you think otherwise. If this is beginning to sound like an "us versus them" sort of column (where "us" are the games journalists and "them" the YouTubers) know that it isn't. I'm fascinated by the rise of video game YouTubers. I think it's another fantastic element of a multifaceted industry, but it is a facet that has garnered the attention of game marketing companies.

Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor managed to drum up negative press thanks to a marketing company called Plaid Social Labs. In the days leading up to the game's launch, PC review copies were withheld and only given to certain YouTubers who signed suspect contracts. Those contracts stipulated that the YouTuber in question "persuade viewers to purchase game [sic]"; not show any glitches or bugs; only talk positively about the game; etc. Basically, Plaid ensured that only positive sentiments and prompts to purchase the game made it onto YouTube prior to release. This, understandably, caused an outcry amongst other YouTubers, viewers, and traditional video game journalism outlets.

It shouldn't have.

What a lot of people fail to remember is that many YouTubers aren't video game critics and readily identify themselves as "video entertainers" instead. You know those adverts you see on TV where Victor Matfield or John Smit (you know, rugby players... yeah I had to look up their names) are promoting products? That is pretty much what video game marketers are getting video game YouTubers to do. Matfield and co. are not critiquing whatever it is they're using on TV, they're merely being shown using it. It's an implied endorsement, and sometimes the endorsements are more deliberately vocalised; it's essentially one of those "I'm commander Shepard, and this is my favourite store on the Citadel" scenarios.

The irony of all of this negative press for *Shadow of Mordor* is that the game is actually really, *really* good. In fact, it might be the game I've enjoyed the most this year. Marketers didn't need to contract YouTubers into talking about only positive things; YouTubers probably would have done that anyway. What this whole marketing balls-up does highlight is the fact that we all need to remember that many YouTubers are not game critics. Some of them are, but most of those are tied to game journalism channels anyway. YouTubers are entertainers and if they want to take these sorts of deals then they should be allowed to do so without the ire and criticism many faced in response. **NAG**

Gear VR will have a closed, Oculus-controlled store for games

Think of it as Steam for mobile virtual reality



In last month's issue of *NAG Magazine* we had an article on Oculus VR and Samsung's Gear VR. The virtual reality headset is designed to work in tandem with Samsung's Galaxy Note 4, and is completely mobile. A number of 3D movie trailers, 3D games and applications are planned for the device, but Oculus VR has now announced that they will be curating and controlling the only place Gear VR compatible games and apps will be found.

Max Cohen, Oculus VR's vice-president for mobile went on record to say, "On Gear VR, there will be an Oculus store, and that's how you'll get Gear VR applications. We'll have a lot more details about this later, but it's going to be something that's very developer friendly. Our goal is to be the platform, to provide the tools that developers need, and to bring the users in."

While the idea of a single, curated shopfront might sound draconian, it makes sense for technology as new as virtual reality. With Oculus VR in control of the Gear VR app store, they can ensure that only good quality virtual reality experiences become available. VR is poised to become a mass-market product for the first time in the technology's history, so ensuring that its wider public debut has maximum impact via solid VR experiences is a prudent plan.

Oculus VR has also hired Jason Holtman who used to work for Valve on their Steam distribution platform. Holtman has a lot of experience to draw from when it comes to developing a company-controlled distribution service. Much like Valve does with Steam, Oculus VR will take a cut from each sale made through the Gear VR shopfront.

Windows 10 announced



At a recent small-scale press event, Windows 10 was demoted for the first time. The new operating system seems to combine familiar elements of Windows 7 and 8 into a more user friendly package.

And in case you're wondering, "Windows 9" was skipped as the name for this new OS because any application compatible with Windows 95/98 refused to run on it. Or maybe it's because the machines are finally attacking.

A very welcome announcement is the return of the good old Start menu, although clicking it brings up a tile-based menu now. The search

function is built into the UI and allows users to search both their system as well as the web using Bing (now called MSN Search). In keeping with UI updates, "Metro" applications launch in a window, and other applications can be snapped to the side in a small overview mode. The OS is also being developed to be adaptable for many different Microsoft products, including tablets, smartphones and gaming consoles.

If you want to test out the new OS, it's available in something called Technical Preview over at insider.windows.com. There isn't a release date, but it's estimated to launch in late 2015.

The Banner Saga launches on iOS

First announced for mobile back in June, the Viking-themed tactical RPG has now made its way to a mobile device store near you. So far it's available on iPads, as well as modern iPhones, but an Android version is coming soon according to the developers. It seems the game has weathered the port, maintaining all PC content and adding in touch-optimised controls.

Considering the success of XCOM on mobile devices, it will be interesting to see how *The Banner Saga* handles the new platform.



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Microsoft Japan reflects on poor Xbox One launch

We already know that the Xbox One isn't doing too well in Japan; Microsoft's latest console only managed to sell 30,003 units during its first three weeks on sale. The Xbox 360 sold 62,135 units in its first weekend on sale in Japan. Microsoft's Japan Xbox boss Takashi Sensui has said that the Japanese team is not very happy with the poor performance. "It's not as though we're satisfied with the current sales state," he said. "We hope to continue through taking user feedback and improving [on the console] and offering content that everyone can enjoy."



Have you heard about the new Assassin's Creeds?

Hope you like spin-offs



Good news everyone! In an effort to achieve some unfathomable goal, Ubisoft has upped our yearly dose of *Assassin's Creed* from two to four. Two new spin-off games will be joining their bigger counterparts *Unity* and *Rogue*.

The first game announced is *Assassin's Creed Chronicles: China*, a name that pleases anyone paid by the word. It's set in 16th century China and casts players as Shao Jun, a female Chinese Assassin, and also a protégé of series veteran Ezio. *Chronicles* plays as a stealthy 2D

side-scroller, features new moves, gear, and techniques, as well as a gorgeous watercolour aesthetic on the backgrounds. As of now, *Chronicles* is only available as a part of *Unity*'s season pass and is set to launch early next year. China has been a long requested setting for an *AC* game, and if *Chronicles* is successful we may see more games of this sort popping up to deliver a smaller scale experience.

Next up is *AC: Identity*, a free-to-play iOS game. Set in 16th century Firenze (Ezio's hometown), *Identity* sees players tackle

bite-sized missions as multiple characters in a fully 3D world. Gameplay-wise, it seems to resemble *AC2* and graphically it looks roughly on par with *AC1*. The touch controls handle everything from running to combat, and the game is set to include RPG elements and customisations (which is where paid-for content enters the picture).

All in all, it's interesting to note that both of these spin-offs are connected to Ezio in some way, clearly proving Ubisoft knows how to capitalise on its strong characters.

Bugbear's new driving game gets a name

In a recent blog update, Bugbear Entertainment has officially unveiled the name of their next driving game as *Wreckfest*. Despite sounding like a late '90s punk band, a "wreckfest" is actually a racing term meaning a massive pile-up of race cars.

To those that don't know, *Wreckfest* is an Early Access demolition derby-style racing game, and features impressively detailed

car physics and destruction. This should appeal to anyone who spent time smashing LEGO cars against each other.

The name change came with an update too, introducing 18-player multiplayer to the title. Bugbear has said they want to go flat out and up the number of supported players to 24, but they need to solve some coding issues before that.



LittleBigPlanet 3 voice cast gets major additions

Sackboy and pals are back a little over half-way through this month, but they'll be returning with more than just narrator Stephen Fry in tow. *House M.D.* actor Hugh Laurie has joined the cast and will play the evil narrator opposed to Stephen Fry's. Also joining the cast is Tara Strong (who voices Harley Quinn in the *Batman: Arkham* series), actors Simon Greenall (from British comedy TV series *Alan Partridge*), and Peter Serafinowicz (*Guardians of the Galaxy*). Finally, everyone's favourite go-to video game voice-over guy, Nolan North rounds out the expanded voice cast. It's not a game unless Nolan is in it.



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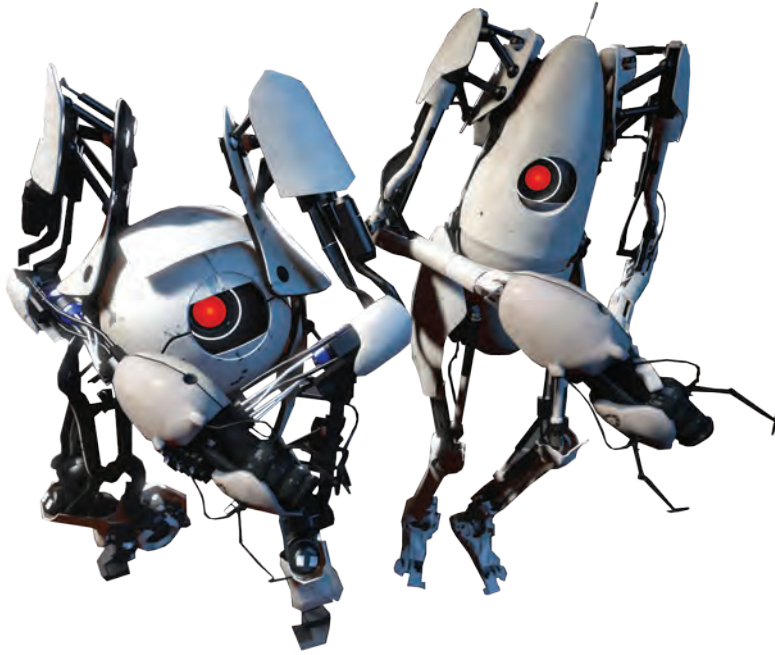
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Portal 2 trumps “brain-training” software at actual brain training



Are you about to write end-of-year exams? Quick, go play some *Portal 2*; science just proved that it's good for your brain. Well, it *kind of* proved it's good for your brain. Researcher Valerie Shute recently conducted an experiment at Florida State University to test the validity of so-called “brain-training” video games against other video games developed for entertainment.

Shute and her research colleagues took two groups of people and got the one group to play *Lumosity* (a typical brain-training video game) and the other group

to play *Portal 2*. Both groups played their games for eight hours, following which they were asked to complete a series of cognitive tasks. In all of the cognitive tasks, the *Portal 2* group outperformed the *Lumosity* group. Every time.

Alright, so we're not exactly Neuroplasticity experts, but we're pretty sure that this research isn't exactly scientific in its methods. Still, Shute's findings are interesting simply for highlighting what a great game *Portal 2* remains, and that we should be playing it all day every day. You know, for science.

World of Warcraft patch allows you to undelete your characters

A patch, which might even be live by the time you read this, is heading to *World of Warcraft* that will allow players to revive deleted characters ahead of November's *Warlords of Draenor* expansion pack. All undeleted heroes will return with all of their levels, skills, and items intact. Some exceptions: characters under level 10, and level 55 Death Knights cannot be undeleted. Characters between level 10 and 29 will be permanently deleted after 90 days; and characters between level 30 and 49 will be deleted after 120 days. Any characters level 50 and up can be undeleted whenever.



KICKSTARTER changes Terms of Use

In a surprising yet welcome move, Kickstarter has updated what is required from creators.

Trawling through the website's legal jargon reveals that creators are required to complete their projects in their stated time. Failure to do so is now considered a breach of the Terms of Use, and may make the

failed creator subject to legal action from jilted backers.

What this means is that if a Kickstarter project is successfully funded, it's up to the creators to deliver on their promises. If they can't, they need to explain to the backers why and either finish the project as much as

possible or pay back the backing money.

Given the spate of recent Kickstarter projects failing, such as *Clang* and *Yogventures*, it makes sense that Kickstarter is doing this. Hopefully it will encourage creators to be more efficient in delivering on their crowd-funded goals.

Tekken 7 enters testing

Now in a Japanese arcade near you!

The latest King of the Iron Fist tournament has entered the crucial stage in fighter-testing: trial by Japanese arcade. This is pretty standard fare for the series, as *Tekken 6* spent 11 months in arcades before seeing a home console launch.

That aside, some news about new features has begun to leak out. First of which is new challenger Claudio, who looks like he stepped off the pages of a shōnen manga and uses an unrecognisable fighting style. He joins Katarina as the new faces on the roster.

Besides them, some new mechanics have been introduced that shake up the old formula. The first are the "Rage Arts", which are only accessible when your fighter is

dangerously low on health and play like a last-ditch attempt at equalising the fight. If it succeeds, it'll inflict heavy damage and look damn good at the same time.

Also new is the "Power Crush". By gum, these sound more and more like Pokémon attacks. A Power Crush functions as an uninteruptable super attack. So while your Power Crushing character can still take damage, the move continues regardless.

So far Namco Bandai Games has promised more advancements to come, including enhanced graphics and fighter customisation. Settle in for a long haul though, because if previous games are any indication it'll be about a year before we get to play this.



Thomas Was Alone joining the current-gen

Solo indie-developer Mike Bithell has announced that his existentialist platformer *Thomas Was Alone* will be making the jump to PS4, Xbox One, and Wii U later in November.

A surprise hit, this quirky platformer used both its minimalist looks and witty narration to sell over a million units. Furthermore, in a generous move towards those who already own the game, it will be totally free for PS4 users who have already bought the game on the PS3 or PS Vita.



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coolermaster.com

Rovio unveils all-star voice cast for *Angry Birds* movie



The *Angry Birds* movie is moving along rapidly, and developer Rovio has announced a list of top Hollywood actors who will be voicing the cast of characters. Jason Sudeikis (*We're the Millers*, *Hall Pass*) has nabbed the leading role of Red, the quintessential Angry Bird. Joining him is Josh Gad who most recently voiced Olaf in Disney's hit movie *Frozen*; Gad will be voicing the part of yellow bird Chuck. Danny McBride (*This is the End*, *Eastbound & Down*) will voice the part of black bird

Bomb. Matilda, the white bird that lays bomb eggs, is being voiced by *Bridesmaids* actress Maya Rudolph. Finally, everyone's favourite diminutive *Game of Thrones* actor, Peter Dinklage, will be putting aside his role as the Ghost from *Destiny* to provide the voice for the Mighty Eagle.

We've got to admit, this is a surprisingly good cast. Then again, this is *Angry Birds* we're talking about – a game that has transcended gaming to become more of a cultural phenomenon.



Apparently *The Last Guardian* is still coming

We'll forgive you if you can't remember what *The Last Guardian* is; it's Team ICO's ill-fated third game that was supposed to launch on PlayStation 3. It ended up missing an entire console generation. Seriously, that's one intense delay.

The Tokyo Game Show came and went without a glimpse of *The Last Guardian*, and shortly after the show ended, Sony's Shuhei Yoshida said that the game was still alive: "Development couldn't be better," he chirped before rephrasing: "That might be a bit of an exaggeration. We continue to work diligently on the game, so please look forward to it."

The Division gets PvP details

At the recent EB Expo (think of it as Australian rAge), more light was shed on Ubisoft's highly anticipated new IP *The Division* by director Ryan Barnard.

The first of these is the implementation of a hub world called the Base of Operations. This is the place where missions are started, loot is traded, and where you can meet and interact with other people in the game world. It's also a place where you can team up with other players into groups to tackle the quarantined streets of New York.

Next up was some news about the PvP portion of the game, which is relegated to "Dark Zones". Inside these Dark Zones you can encounter other players and either befriend, ignore, or fight them. There is a similarity to *DayZ* there, and encountering another player could involve a very tense standoff. Outside of the Dark Zones,



you will never encounter another player outside of your group.

So far all these announcements seem to be steering *The Division* into the "shared world

shooter" genre, similar to *Destiny*. We'll have to wait until an unconfirmed time in 2015 to see if that's a good thing.

△OX□

EXCLUSIVE
FEATURE

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FARCRY 4

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Pillars of Eternity pushed back to 2015

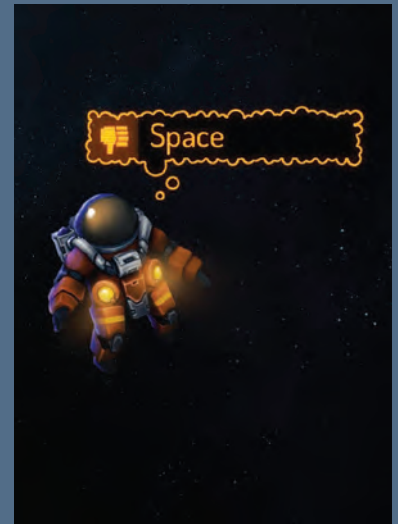
Bad news, old-school RPG nerds: Obsidian Entertainment has announced that *Pillars of Eternity* will miss its 2014 release date. The game will now be launching in “early 2015” but a more specific date hasn’t been provided.

Pillars of Eternity smashed its Kickstarter goal thanks to appealing to long-time role-playing game fans craving another isometric adventure in the vein of classics like *Icewind Dale* and *Baldur’s Gate*. Obsidian ended up with three times more than their asking amount to fund the project, and as a result the game’s scope was significantly increased. This

has obviously led to delays.

“Since the very beginning of this project,” Obsidian CEO Feargus Urquhart said in a statement, “we promised our fans and ourselves that we would release this game only when we knew it would be absolutely ready for the best experience possible. We’re very close to that point, but not quite there yet.”

The delay will allow Obsidian to garner further fan feedback, and “polish every nook and cranny of the game, and make sure we don’t ship a buggy game”. Our money is on this being totally worth the extra wait.



Spacebase DF-9 development shuts down

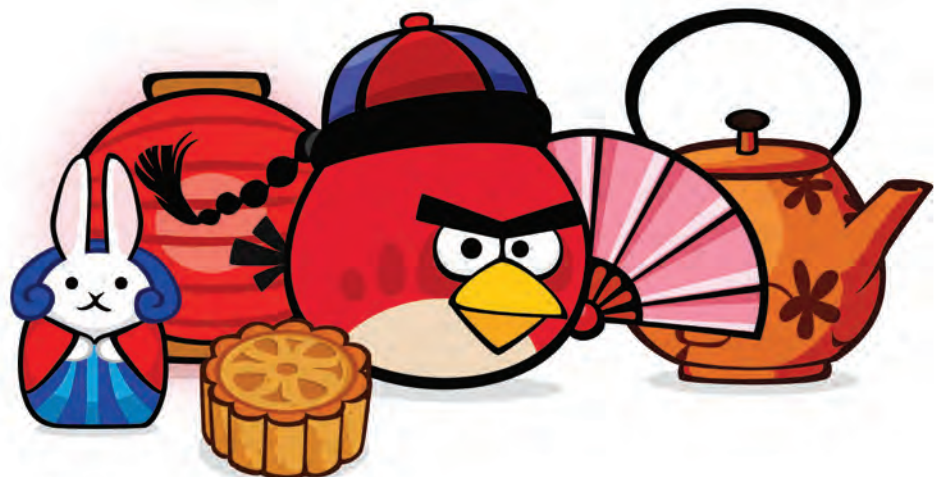
The next in a worryingly increasing number of cancelled Early Access games is Double Fine’s *Spacebase DF-9*. The interstellar management game had been earning a fair bit of goodwill and hype, but, according to Tim Schafer, not enough money.

Schafer said that “*Spacebase* spends more money than it brings in, and that’s just not something we can afford to do any more”.

The developers will stop officially supporting the game after it’s patched to version 1.0, and then the development keys will be handed to the modding community to support and complete it.

Rovio cuts 16% of workforce

Angry Birds creators Rovio has axed 16% of its workforce. This represents a job loss for around 130 of their Finland-based employees. The job cuts came in direct response to poor performance, and a need to evolve and streamline the company as a result. “We have been building our team on assumptions of faster growth than have materialized,” Rovio CEO Mikael Hed said in a statement. The company’s job cuts will affect their gaming, media and consumer products departments.



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Developers getting ripped off by fake YouTubers

Wasteland Interactive's boss man, Leszek Lisowski, recently found his development team on the losing end of a growing YouTuber scam tactic.

Lisowski found a Steam key for Wasteland Interactive's *Worlds of Magic* on a reselling website. The key was being sold for a much lower price than on Steam. He decided to purchase the key in an attempt to discover its origin. He soon found out that the key matched that of one he'd sent to a person who had requested one under the pretences of being a popular YouTuber.

What Lisowski discovered is that many of the YouTuber key request emails he'd

received were from addresses that had slightly different names to actual popular YouTube channels. He also found out that two out of the 20 subsequent requests from YouTubers were from legitimate YouTube channels. That means 10% of requests were from actual YouTubers and the rest were from scam artists. Furthermore, 70% of the keys he'd already given out had gone to fake YouTubers.

Curious, Lisowski tried the same tactic with other developers, and in the end procured 16 free Steam keys by posing as a YouTuber. He contacted the developers, returned the keys and told them to be more vigilant.

Marvel's female Thor to make gaming debut

We love the fact that Thor's hammer has been passed on to a female character for the first time ever. Thor, goddess of thunder, is now poised to make her video game debut, but it's in a rather unlikely place: *Marvel Puzzle Quest*.

The match-three, role-playing game hybrid recently got a Marvel hero themed spin-off. That spin-off is celebrating its first anniversary by adding female Thor as one of the game's Legendary characters. Because she'll be a four-star legendary character, she'll be pretty rare to unlock. Players will, however, get to try out her skills in player-versus-player matchups.



Caption of the month



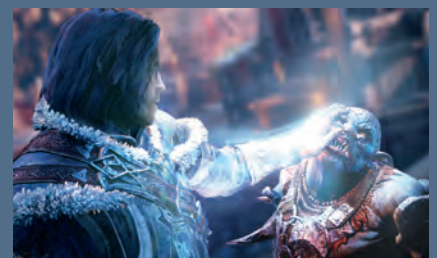
Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random

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 *Crimes and Punishments* for Xbox One from Apex Interactive. Send your captions to letters@nag.co.za with the subject line "**November caption**".



NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR

"That'll tech you not to steal office supplies!"



LAST MONTH'S WINNER

"Still a better love story than *Twilight*..."
- Connor



SUPPORT LINES

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

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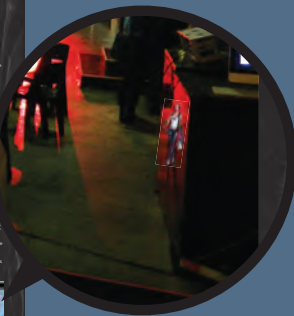
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Roxy hunt

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October winner

Alex Judeel, page 33

This month's prize

Marvel Dice Masters valued at R225. Sponsored by Skycastle Games.



SKYCASTLE

Evolve's new statue is goliath sized

Some people just have too much disposable income. Take this limited-edition *Evolve* statue for example, which was recently made available for sale by developers Turtle Rock and publishers 2K who teamed up with figure producers TriForce. Except you can't just take it, because the massive beast costs almost R8,000. It weighs about 15kg, and would look you eye-to-eye if you were 74cm tall. It also has glowing red LED eyes. Obviously it's of the Goliath monster from the game, because that makes for punnier headlines.

So far this beast of a talking point is only available in America, but it's worth talking about just because of its sheer scale.



First official Lovecraft game announced

While several games have stood at the mountains of madness or dealt with the Cthulhu mythos (like the original *Alone in the Dark*) there hasn't yet been a game officially based on Lovecraft writings.

Until now! Argentinean developer Sensescape is currently Kickstarting *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, based on the Lovecraft novel of the same name.

The game looks to be a gothic adventure-horror set in New England and follows the titular Charles Ward as he uncovers the dark secrets of his ancestry. Also Cthulhu is involved in some way, because of course.





home_coded

EXPOSURE FOR SOUTH AFRICAN INDIE DEVELOPERS

by Rodain Joubert

Rodain is feared for his ability to turn carpets into HOT LAVA. His imagination is the sort of weapon you get stopped at the airport for carrying. We've also seen him eat large pizzas alone.

BOARD GAMES AND KICKSTARTER

For those brave enough to try a completely self-published route, *Ancient Terrible Things* is a great example of the potential offered by crowdfunding sites like Kickstarter. Brewed locally by Pleasant Company Games, this pulp horror experience ran a successful campaign in June/July last year to raise an impressive \$27,000 (about R300,000) to make the game a commercial reality.

An increasing number of South Africans are turning to Kickstarter to fund game projects, the most prominent success being *Stasis* – an isometric point-and-click adventure that raised a whopping \$130,000 (R1.4 million) to fund its development.

Unfortunately, using this as a platform is not trivial by any means. According to most successful campaigners, running an effective Kickstarter requires at least two to three months of full-time work – and that's not considering the logistics of setting up an overseas business account and shipping system for physical backer rewards. Preparing for such a campaign warrants significant research, availability and consistent marketing.

More information on *Ancient Terrible Things* can be found online at www.ancientterriblethings.com.

Breaking into board games (part 1)

Board games are an interesting beast for new game developers. They're a great start when you don't have the specialised resources to make video games, and also happen to be good exercises in mechanical elegance. But are they a practical avenue to go down?

Recently, South African developers have been moving towards a local industry that's more inclusive of board game creators. It's a pursuit of extremes – anyone can get together some basic craft equipment and actually *make* something, but the challenges from there mount quite sharply: more effort needs to be put into gathering players and the benefits of digital distribution are (mostly) lost. Most importantly, the avenues for actually publishing a board game in South Africa are currently very limited.

But, as with all local game development, board games have their share of hopeful pioneers looking to change that.

Tsitsi Chiumya is a third year game design student from Wits. Two years ago, he prototyped a taxi-themed board game during a 48 hour jam for A MAZE Johannesburg 2012. Called *AfterRobot*, the game required players to move around a *Monopoly*-like board, collecting scrap to build and upgrade their taxis.

We've mentioned the game in these pages quite recently, but in the spirit of this column we'll be looking a little more at how it's been shaped and promoted, through both Chiumya's own efforts and the help of the local community.

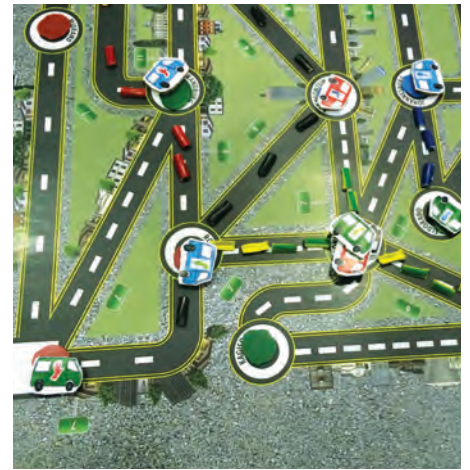
On top of approaching people directly for playtesting and feedback, a vital part of the game's exposure rests with local institutions. The game design department at Wits is one obvious avenue of support, giving Chiumya the opportunity and incentive to explore his talent. But this is only part of the picture. Like many other board game designers, Chiumya

has access to sympathetic developer communities such as Make Games SA – which provide regular, co-ordinated feedback sessions at events such as the monthly meetups.

The most noticeable step forward came when *AfterRobot* featured at A MAZE Johannesburg 2014, with a revised board and ruleset requiring players to compete against one another for desirable positions. In this, Chiumya tried to get much closer to the challenges and "feelings of frustration" encountered by real taxi bosses and drivers, as well as the more positive experiences of the industry. Even the game's dice system – one of its most oft-praised and promoted aspects – uses values based on actual taxi fares.

Importantly, A MAZE was attended by a variety of international developers – being a chapter of the annual festival in Berlin. The latest version of *AfterRobot* has been played (and promoted by) a startling variety of prominent designers from places like Poland, New Zealand and the UK, massively boosting the game's potential reach. On top of this, Chiumya has also been invited to talk on radio shows like *CliffCentral* and now enjoys regular press coverage generated by the game's marketing momentum.

Recreating the success of *AfterRobot* requires a lot of hard work, but as Chiumya himself points out, there's a rich board game culture in South African communities of all sizes, meaning that there are always people willing to play if you know where to look. Attending local board game gatherings is a fantastic way to start, as people are remarkably receptive to the novelty of trying "home-brewed" designs. It also provides an important foundation for further steps, such as setting up conversations with board game distributors (who, especially in South Africa, tend to have a very close relationship



with the community) and event co-ordinators such as those behind A MAZE.

Be prepared to move around a lot, and polish your game pitch until it shines. Even more so than digital games, creating and promoting a board game requires consistent social interaction. It's far easier to sell the concept in person than it is online – even if you approach a community of like-minded developers online with an easy-print version of your game, it will be difficult to find people willing to take the time to assemble it on their end (to say nothing of the fact that most board games are multiplayer, and therefore require organised testing).

AfterRobot is currently looking at the next step in the road to commercial viability, and Chiumya is well aware of how difficult this is going to be. That said, his success thus far has been inspiring and it's a great show of how locally-produced board games actually *can* get popular attention – long before specialised manufacturing and publishing deals come into the picture. Those interested in tracking the game's progress can check out its page on Facebook (www.facebook.com/AfterRobotGame) or follow @captain_SHAPA on Twitter.

Next month we'll check out another local favourite, *Worst Warriors*, and go into a little more detail about what South African devs are doing to get the ear of board game publishers and manufacturers.

3D PRINTING

In the past few years, 3D printing technology has made some phenomenal leaps in terms of flexibility and accessibility – ornaments which used to cost hundreds of rands to craft can be crafted much more cheaply nowadays, and companies like Rabbit in Cape Town (www.therealrabbit.com) have started specialising in quick and easy prototyping services for hundreds of units at a time.

Following A MAZE Johannesburg this year, Chiumya has co-ordinated with designer Rick Treweek to include 3D printed tokens for the game, giving it an even more professional – and customised – feel that would have been impractical just a few years ago. **NAG**

RAGE 2014

As the local game development industry dives into the fine art of board games creation, the gaming community as a whole continues to embrace this classic form of entertainment. And nowhere was this more obvious than the 140m² Table-Top Games stand at rAge 2014. Players from all over the country gathered together to play some of the top international board and card games, as well as a few local offerings. *Discworld: Ankh-Morpork*, *King of Tokyo*, *The Settlers of Catan* and many more games were played throughout the weekend.



RAGE
2014
OVERLOAD



IT WAS AN ESCAPIST'S DREAM

Over the course of a single three-day long crazy weekend, tens of thousands of eager visitors gathered within the Dome to soak up the latest and greatest in gadgets, and video gaming's many virtual worlds. It was a celebration of all our favourite diversions; a vibrant, living ode to geek lifestyle and all its wondrous trappings. Here is a snapshot from this year's really Awesome gaming expo.

COSPLAY

This year's rAge expo was chock-full of weird and wonderful characters. A record 97 cosplayers entered into the Legion Ink cosplay competition and many more people were walking around or working in booths at the Dome in full garb, including a very well done Lara Croft (Leigh Esterhuizen) and Jiraiya (Miguel Lima) at the ASUS booth.

Cosplay always takes a lot of effort and time to get right and many of the contestants poured their creative energies into their costumes, including some people custom-making weapons and armour (one *Skyrim* Dragon Armour wearer looked like he'd just popped out of the game!). Some of the impressive get-ups included a female Thor, Wonder Woman and Smaug from *The Hobbit*. Darren Bonthuys' Batman costume paired up really well with the many DC Comics villains that also made an appearance, which included Joker, Deadshot, Bane and Scarecrow. Anré van Rooyen's Harley Quinn cosplay and skit won first place in Western Pop and first for best skit, easily one of the best DC villain performances of the weekend. Well done to everyone who had the courage to cosplay and go up on the stage! You guys rocked!

eSPORTS

eSports competitions were a big highlight at rAge 2014, with both the Telkom Do Gaming Championship and the NGL AORUS Corsair *Dota 2* Clash happening at the same time.

The DGC was a success for all teams who participated in their respective disciplines. Bravado Gaming walked away with the *Counter-*

Strike: GO and *Dota 2* crowns. Team Aperture won the *Battlefield 4* on PC category and Team Adept won the *Call of Duty: Ghosts* category on Xbox 360; well-deserved wins for both teams.

Energy eSports came out strong this year, taking first place in *COD: Ghosts* for PC, first place for *League of Legends* and second place for *Dota 2*. David Peetham, Robin Van Merch and Suhail Dalvie all walked away winners for *Gran Turismo 6*, coming in first, second and third respectively. The NGL were on the Rectron stand hosting their *Dota 2* finals and had shoutcasters Hellbird, Congo and Profeci in the press room commenting on the games which were livestreamed and displayed on a massive 60-inch television mounted on the back of the stand. Eight teams competed for the top spot and that honour was taken up by Bravado Gaming, with Energy eSports and Team NewB taking second and third place respectively.

MEGAROM

When Megarom comes to an expo, it brings the thunder. This year was no exception.

Far Cry 4 was there for people to play, and dumped players right outside a guard outpost. The small demo let them play around with all sorts of toys to overthrow said guard post, using their choice of stealth or frontal attack. If you enjoyed the third game, you'll love this.

Another two sequels were *Assassin's Creed: Unity* and *Rogue*. Both let players roam free and tackle a few missions. *Unity* welcomes back some design elements from *AC1*, while *Rogue* feels like a re-skinned *AC4*. A good re-skin, and



definitely worth the time of last-gen gamers.

Also present was *Destiny* (in case you hadn't played it yet), *Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel* (shoot and loot IN SPACE), *Skylanders: Trap Team* (just say you're buying the figures for your kids), *The Crew*, and for sports fans were *NBA 2K15* and *WWE 2K15* (both proof that publishers love acronyms).

When the doors opened on Friday, almost immediately a massive line formed for Turtle Rock Studios' *Evolve*. The asymmetrical 4-versus-1 multiplayer game is proving itself to be a solid execution of an exciting concept. The game was playable on ten desktop computers set up with the option for players to use either a keyboard and mouse or wired Xbox One controller. The NAG Online Podcast team got to play a match after the expo closed, which ended in wildly varying brutal deaths for everyone while Delano chomped through the match as the monster. We can see this being very popular at the 2015 NAG LAN.

All in all, Megarom had a strong booth. None of its games felt like padding, and all of them gave a decent slice of gameplay to experiment with.

XBOX ONE

Despite only launching almost a year late in September 2014, the Xbox One looked like it had garnered a strong following at rAge 2014.

One highlight was *Sunset Overdrive*. If a skating game had guns and mutants, this would be it. Honestly, the fast pace of the game made aiming almost pointless/impossible, and the camera control wasn't great. But the guns were a blast (*hurr-hurr*) to play with and the propane tank gun was tremendously satisfying. This is an Xbox One exclusive that should be added to any library.

Another exclusive was *Forza Horizon 2*, demoed on an Xbox One with a full Thrustmaster pedal and steering wheel set on a racing frame that only had one way to exit it: ungracefully. The game plays beautifully and handles well with a steering wheel attached. Gameplay-wise, it feels like the lovechild of *Need for Speed: Most Wanted* and *Burnout Paradise*. If you liked

the original *Horizon* on the Xbox 360, you're going to love this.

The two other exclusives were *Dance Central: Spotlight* and *Ryse: Son of Rome*. *Dance Central* attracted a crowd at all times, and *Ryse* was clearly there to capitalise on the recent launch.

And then there was the rest. *FIFA 15* on ten systems, more *Assassin's Creed: Unity*, *Dying Light*, *Shadow of Mordor*, more *Alien: Isolation*, and *Minecraft*. Microsoft's Xbox One stand was never empty.

NAG LAN

The NAG LAN was in for a treat this year with Internet Solutions once again providing fibre connectivity to the dome. In 2013 this was at a phenomenal 1Gb/s, but IS promised to at least double that. Throughout the week leading up to the expo and during the weekend, they pushed the connection as fast as it could go, topping out at 5.2Gb/s.

In total, over 99.64 terabytes of data was download and 24.34TB was uploaded – a huge increase from 2013's 20TB down and 4TB up.

"It's not all torrents and illegal downloads, although there is some of that," said Internet Solutions' Sameer Parker. "What we mostly see from the traffic is Steam, Origin, Uplay and GOG downloads and a fair amount is also down to drivers and Windows updates and so on. It goes to show that many gamers are still restricted by bandwidth despite having an ADSL connection and this is the only time in the year when they don't have to worry about caps or speed or network contention."

The really fun part? If you were the only one downloading on the LAN directly from the fibre ring, you'd have topped almost 500MB/s. That is the Internet of the future.

HP was another integral component in making the NAG LAN possible, and this was their 5th year sponsoring all the switches needed to connect 2,370 gamers to each other.

"This network gets setup and configured in less than a week to provide connectivity to the users. Providing a total of 94 switches, at a value





of just over R2 000 000.00, to connect the users to one another. The LAN of 2014 was extremely stable with rarely an issue occurring,” said Martin Mohr, Solutions Architect, HP Networking.

NINTENDO

Nintendo has had a good year so far, and rAge 2014 was a playground for its new games.

Particularly popular was the 4v4 shooter *Splatoon*. This recently unveiled new IP sees two teams scrambling to coat the majority of the map in their team’s paint. The game was fun and unique, but it forced players to aim with the Wii U’s motion controls, which was jarring and unintuitive.

Then there was *Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker*, a puzzle-platformer starring the ever-overlooked Toad from the *Super Mario* franchise. Players guide Toad through fiendish levels, collecting coins and gems, while overcoming enemies. The big change is that Toad can’t jump, so enemies need to be dealt with in creative fashions. It was fun, humorous and well-made, as can be expected from a first-party Nintendo game.

Another popular spin-off was *Hyrule Warriors*, the lovechild of the *Dynasty Warriors* and *Zelda* franchises. Players guide familiar characters from the *Zelda* universe around a battleground jam-packed with hordes of enemies. The action gets crazy quickly, but there is a great sense of satisfaction to be had here and it will tide fans over until a proper sequel arrives.



Nintendo is known for sequels, but the only one playable was *Super Smash Bros.* for Wii U and 3DS. The handheld version had a confusing interface, but the console version proved popular and easily accessible.

OVERCLOCKING

Overclocking has always been a highlight of rAge Expo and this year three events were running at same time. Evetech had overclocker Goddy “ViVi” Roodt running the show at their stand, taking some very nice hardware for a spin under liquid nitrogen.

Titan-Ice had Warren “Tweak” Kramer running a bunch of hardware through some major overlocks and stress tests, even getting some

low-cost hardware like the Pentium G3258 up to near-breaking point past 5.0GHz on a budget motherboard, the ASRock B85M-HDS.

NAG’s own overclocking stand featured Neo “ShockG” Sibeko and Andrew “DrWeez” Roberts taking a Gigabyte Gaming Geforce GTX970 to the top spot on the leaderboards in 3D Mark 11 and 3DMark Fire Strike 11.

PLAYSTATION TV

Sony’s PlayStation TV was demoed at the Sony stand all weekend and it was interesting to see people react to it. The PS TV is a PS Vita without the controls, display, speakers and most of the shell and hardware, designed to hook up to your TV to function as a set-top box and budget

FEATURE / rAge 2014: Overload

gaming device. It is compatible with most Vita games through the use of a DualShock 3 or 4 controller, but games that rely on the rear touchpad need to have an optimised control set for the PS TV.

Aside from games and entertainment, it also functions as a streaming device for PS4 remote play. You can set up your PS4 in the lounge and have the PS TV in your bedroom streaming games from the PS4 over the local network. It's a unique feature that Microsoft hasn't matched yet on the Xbox One. PS TV launches in South Africa on 14 November 2014 for a recommended price of R1,500.

SNOOPEH

For rAge 2014 Stephen "Snoopeh" Ellis was flown down by Western Digital to talk about eSports, meet local fans, show gamers they can fit gaming into their own lifestyles, and chat about Evil Geniuses, the *League of Legends* team for which he plays.

Snoopeh was a very relaxed guest on our interview on NAG Online and he even noted how much he had enjoyed his stay in South Africa and how he wanted to return. With the rest of his team moving to the USA, Stephen was free to travel a bit to watch the *League of Legends* World Championship in Seoul, Korea and attend rAge.

Down on the show floor, several stage appearances were made by Snoopeh to give motivational talks to young gamers wishing to join eSports groups and play competitively. When he wasn't in interviews or on the main stage, he was on the show floor challenging youngsters to fitness contests, and greeting fans. Always eager to shake a hand and crack a smile, his presence at rAge Expo was overwhelmingly positive and surely led a lot of young gamers to consider



entering into eSports.

WARNER BROS.

Besides *Evolve*, easily the busiest stand at rAge was for *Mortal Kombat X*. Published by Warner Bros., the next in the iconic fighter series turned out to be insanely popular, great fun, and damn good-looking. Winning a fight of *MKX* awarded a special branded headband, which were worn like badges of honour by a select few.

Warner Bros. also brought *Shadows of Mordor*. Despite being on shelves at rAge time (and played by several people in the NAG LAN), *Shadows* maintained a steady stream of foot-traffic and enticed many with its gameplay and the excellent Nemesis system.

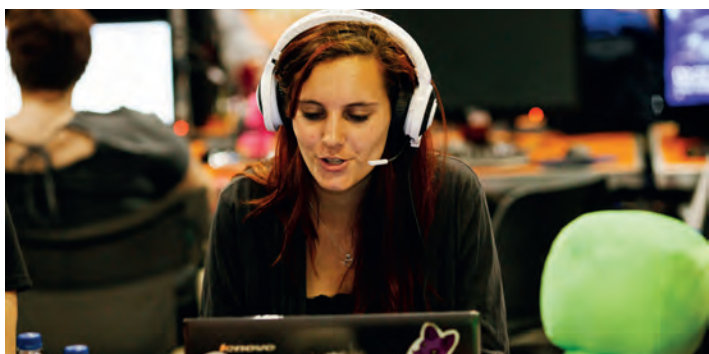
Dying Light was also available at rAge, and the game was demoed on a number of

PCs. The game shows great promise so far, especially with its seamless implementation of parkour and combat, leading to a great deal more excitement than your standard run-'n-gun.

Unfortunately, Warner Bros. also brought the biggest disappointment: *Batman: Arkham Knight* was neither playable nor visible at rAge, unless you were able to attend the media-only screening of some gameplay. That pre-recorded demo, however, looked great, and showed how tightly implemented the Batmobile will be in the finished game.

PLAYSTATION

Sony has done very well with the PS4 since its launch and there was fun to be had on their stand. *Bloodborne* was playable on three systems, and was definitely one of the show's highlights. The atmospheric and moody game





there was *Statis* by The Brotherhood Games. This one was just... wow. It's a point-and-click adventure game featuring horror elements and a setting not unlike something from *Aliens* or *Dead Space*. Next up was *Alien Lobotomy*, an entry from Ludum Dare 29 developed by Soup With Bits. Perhaps the most cerebral of the lot, it's a puzzler that can be best described as a mixture between *2048* and *node-connection*. Once again *Broforce* by Free Lives was on display, and it drew in considerable crowd attention with its zany, over-the-top carnage and multiplayer mayhem. Perhaps the most artistic of the lot is *Cadence*, a product of Made With Monster Love. You are presented with a series of nodes in a three-dimensional plane and have to construct a path between them in order to create a melody that loops infinitely. Rounding up the show was *Neon Shadow* by Tasty Poison. It's a beautiful, ambitious FPS and a spot-on attempt to make the shooter formula work properly on the mobile platform.



TECH

rAge has always been home to some smart tech, and a number of stands this year demonstrated new hardware and gadgets. By far the biggest trend, though, was 3D printing. Several stands including Evetech had a 3D printer setup to show off to the public. Though the technology has been around for several years now, 3D printing is still a revolution in the process of taking off. One day, some US-based experts predict, one in three households will have a 3D printer in daily use.

Computer-wise, new hardware was everywhere. Most of the gaming hardware vendors were present and showed off high-end Haswell-E hardware with DDR4 memory, SSD's, really cool cases, some sexy gaming laptops and some of them even had gorgeous monitors like the ASUS PB287Q, which boasts a 4K panel. Some attention was paid to high refresh-rate monitors, but there wasn't a single GSync monitor on display. Most of the new peripherals from all the top gaming brands had a good showing as well and there was plenty of new gaming gear to test-run and also spend your cash on. **NAG**

attracted droves, and proved to be a good mix of old and new that's sure to appeal to fans of the *Souls* series.

Also finally playable was *The Order: 1886*, Sony's next exclusive shooter. The demo was the same as the E3 2014 demo, and saw players fighting across a small section of a level. The game felt competent and very well-crafted, but not spectacular. Perhaps when more supernatural elements are revealed, this game will stand out more.

A big surprise was the new *Singstar*, now playable with a smartphone app, which attracted many socially-confident singers. *Driveclub* was also playable, and *Minecraft*, *Alien: Isolation*, *The Evil Within*, and some recent PS Plus games filled the rest of the slots.

HOME_CODED

rAge 2014 was host to yet another slew of home-coded showcases, each one demonstrating raw, local talent and reaffirming the fact that there's a lot to love in South Africa's indie scene. During rAge we sat down to chat with some of the developers (who, by the way, are all great guys) and of course, play their creations.

Agent Unseen, a stealthy endeavour by

Clockwork Acorn, is a top-down affair in which players must navigate a randomly-generated maze whilst completing arbitrary objectives and remaining invisible. *Dead Run* by Two Plus is a basic, gorgeous and addictive two-button runner game with a premise so simple that you can't help but love it. *Clutchfighter* is a highly-amusing top-down deathmatch game where players control shooting cars that wouldn't have been out of place in a *Mad Max* film. Bright and neon *zX: Hyperblast* is a 2D shooter that puts you in the cockpit of a space fighter with a formidable array of attacks and defences, such as a melee-style clamp and the ability to deflect projectiles back at enemies. *Snail Boy* by Thoopid was easily one of the most graphically-attractive games on show. Built with a touchscreen in mind, players guide a mollusc on his quest to retrieve his stolen shell. Fresh from their success with *Viscera Cleanup Detail*, Rune Storm was once again the focus of the crowd with *Rook's Keep*, an extremely violent, frantic and fast-paced deathmatch / hack 'n' slash hybrid featuring melee combat and nasty bots. Then



FUTURE PROOF

Summer is here! Be sure to go outside, get lots of sun, mow the lawn, braai, go for a swim and restock the snack fridge because with all these hot games coming out you won't be leaving the house for a while.

We've collected a sizzling list of big publisher blockbusters and tasty indie offerings that you can look forward to over the coming months. There's a lot to love on the horizon: parkour-powered zombie-survival horror, big-beast multiplayer hunting from the creators of *Left 4 Dead*, *Wing Commander*-style space combat and even something like *Dark Souls* but where you play a minstrel mouse.

So do the right thing, clear your backlog of games (spring cleaning is good for the body and soul). Give the ones you're never going to play again to a friend who'd appreciate them more, and get ready for an entirely new set of experiences.

MORTAL KOMBAT X

RELEASE DATE / Q2 2015

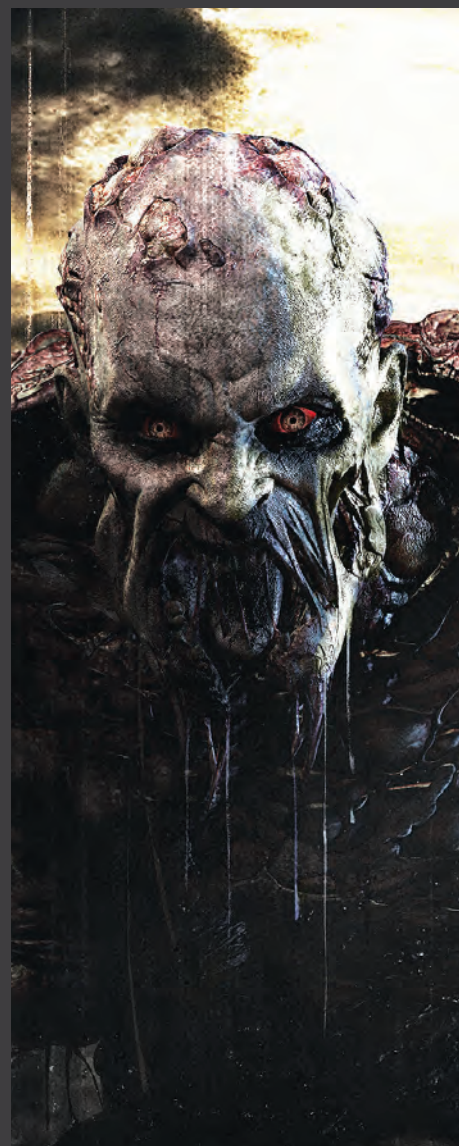
PLATFORMS / 360 - PS3 - PC - PS4 - XBO

DEVELOPER / NetherRealm Studios

PUBLISHER / WB Games



The classic fighting game series continues on after the resounding success of *Mortal Kombat 9*. Two fighters face off with attacks and special moves, and of course you can perform gruesome Fatalities to upset your grandparents. Why are you playing *Mortal Kombat* in front of your grandparents? That's just weird. X-Ray moves that show bones breaking inside the body are back, along with some elements from NetherRealm's other fighter *Injustice: Gods Among Us*. You can use the environment against each other, like picking up background elements to throw or hit with. Each fighter now has three different variations that change their attack styles. The story will begin right where the previous game's rather excellent story mode ended off. Spoiler alert: it was a kind of "reboot" of the universe. The story will jump ahead 25 years to showcase the aged veterans and offspring of the previous fighters, like Cassie Cage, daughter of Johnny Cage and Sonya Blade.



DYING LIGHT

RELEASE DATE / Q1 2015

PLATFORMS / 360 - PC - PS3 - PS4 - XBO

DEVELOPER / Techland

PUBLISHER / Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment

Dying Light was originally a sequel to *Dead Island*, but Techland felt it was different enough to merit its own franchise: a first-person zombie apocalypse in an open world, set in a South American style slum and city, quarantined off from the rest of the world. During the day you have to scavenge for supplies, set traps, help people you might come across, and race to the supply air drops before the local paramilitary grab it for themselves. You've got much more freedom of movement than usual for the genre, and are able to free-run, jumping between roofs, up walls and attacking from above. The "infected" are stupid during the day – slow, visible – but at night everything changes. They become fast, accurate, can sprint and follow you up buildings. Combat is mostly melee-based, though firearms do exist but make too much noise. It'll have four player online co-op, and a "be the zombie" multiplayer mode.

BLOODBORNE

RELEASE DATE / Q1 2015
PLATFORMS / PS4
DEVELOPER / From Software
PUBLISHER / SCEE

Directed by *Demon's Souls* and *Dark Souls* director Hidetaka Miyazaki, *Bloodborne* is very similar to his previous games but with quite a few changes as well. The combat is much faster paced, requires more offense and you're more agile. You can dash around enemies while locked on, using ranged attacks to stun or control while melee attacks dice and dismember. There's a risk vs. reward system built-in, where you can regain health lost from an enemy attack if you manage to strike back at just the right time. The window for this "regeneration" attack varies depending on the weight of your weapon. Taking place in a gothic, ruined city that might hold a cure for what ails your character, the environment is filled with an illness that transforms people into beasts that will attack you or other humans in the area.



GHOST OF A TALE

RELEASE DATE / Q2 2015
DEVELOPER / SeithCG
PLATFORMS / PC - XBO
PUBLISHER / SeithCG

It's not often you get to be a realistically sized mouse in an action adventure game. The setting is that of a medieval world with animals, created by Lionel Gallat (former Dreamworks animator). It's inspired by Disney's *Robin Hood*, the *Redwall* books, *The Secret of Nimh*, and games like *Zelda*, *Ico*, *Gothic* and *Dark Souls*. It's a dangerous world, with undead rats and more. You can explore, run, jump, read journals, find clues and fight melee or ranged – but ideally you'd want to avoid combat until you're ready. Attacks and movement use up a stamina bar, so you can hide in chests or holes to avoid patrols. Due to your little minstrel mouse's size, even a crab is a massive monster to be feared. There's treasure to find, along with the secret behind Periclave Island. The theme might look childlike, but the gameplay intones a pretty mature experience.



GHOST SONG: A JOURNEY OF HOPE

RELEASE DATE / Q2 2015
DEVELOPER / Matt White
PLATFORMS / PC
PUBLISHER / Matt White

There's a very specific kind of "exploration and discovery" implied when a developer calls its game a "metroidvania". *Ghost Song* aims to be true to the spirit of the genre, giving you a large open world to explore and "tough but fair" difficulty. Set on the moon of Lorian V, nobody that has ever explored it has survived. The dead are kept as "ghosts" who haunt the moon, and can only escape if their remains are destroyed. As you explore, you'll gain new powers and abilities, but might even miss some on your first playthrough. There are many strange creatures and characters to find in the lush, painterly art style of this 2D game. The dev promises an "emotionally powerful story" told not through exposition, but moment to moment in the game. Expect large and challenging bosses, and an atmospheric sense of isolation.

EVOLVE

RELEASE DATE / Q1 2015

PLATFORMS / PC - PS4 - XBO

DEVELOPER / Turtle Rock Studios, Inc.

PUBLISHER / Take-Two

Science-fiction big game hunting with friends, where you hunt a friend, from the creators of *Left 4 Dead*. The asymmetrical multiplayer of *Evolve* pits four players against a player-controlled alien monster. The monster can kill other smaller creatures to evolve and become stronger, but while evolving they're vulnerable for a while. There's a definite *Giants: Citizen Kabuto* vibe here. There will be a variety of maps, like a large jungle area with industrial sections. Hunters will need to level-up by killing smaller game, which gives them new power-ups and in the grander scheme of things, new character upgrades, skins and perks. While the Hunters only need to kill the Monster to win, the Monster can kill all four Hunters or complete a secondary objective like destroying a human base. Not much is known about the single-player campaign yet.



THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT

RELEASE DATE / Q1 2015

PLATFORMS / PC - PS4 - XBO

DEVELOPER / CD Projekt RED

PUBLISHER / 1C Company

Geralt of Rivia is back, now that those who sought to use him for their own ends are gone. The moody broody Witcher decides to embark on a new mission: checking out the army known as the Wild Hunt that are invading the Northern Kingdoms. Based on the series of Polish fantasy novels of the same name but taking place after them, *The Witcher 3* is the conclusion of the game trilogy. While similar to previous games in the series, this will have a much larger open world to explore, requiring both horseback and sailboat to navigate. There will be a fast-travel system, and the developers claim their world is 20% bigger than that of *Skyrim*. Quests will have multiple outcomes, the dynamic day and night will impact how monsters behave, and we're sure you'll get to make the sexytime with all the women, again.



WINGS OF SAINT NAZAIRE

RELEASE DATE / TBA

PLATFORMS / PC

DEVELOPER / Independent

PUBLISHER / Independent

A retro space combat simulator in the style of older *Wing Commander* and *X-Wing* games, *Wings of Saint Nazaire* looks like a true labour of love. It's going all-in on the retro style: while the game is 3D, enemy ships and your own cockpit are meticulously pre-rendered sprites, but lit and shaded with modern techniques in real-time. "We pre-render 2D images for every possible angle that you can see them from (544 for a normal fighter) and then display the right sprite. This is exactly what the early *Wing Commander* games did – we're doing it this way because we absolutely love the retro effect this has," writes the team. They claim the game will be easy to play, hard to master. Players will have to manage their energy flow, redirecting it to shields or afterburners depending on the situation. There is a pre-alpha demo you can try yourself at www.wingsofstnazaire.com.

HYPER LIGHT DRIFTER

RELEASE DATE / 2015

PLATFORMS / PC - PS4 - PSV - Wii U - XBO

DEVELOPER / Heart Machine

PUBLISHER / Heart Machine

This homage to early 8-bit, 16-bit and PC role-playing games like *Zelda* and *Diablo* was originally a Kickstarter project asking for a measly \$27,000. When the developers got given over \$600,000, they knew they were on to something. *Hyper Light Drifter* is a 2D action role playing game rendered in a pixel style with cool neon colours and distinct visuals that remind of *Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery*. You control the Drifter, a character with advanced hard-light technology that allows him to fight through the ruins of a lost civilisation. You'll explore giant forests, huge floating structures and take on massive hordes of enemies. Your energy sword will gain additional modules that expand its abilities, while the upgrade system lets you tailor your combat to taste. The music is being provided by Disasterpeace, known for the enchanting soundtrack to *Fez* and *Bit.Trip Runner 2*.



TOM CLANCY'S THE DIVISION

RELEASE DATE / 2015

PLATFORMS / PC - PS4 - XBO

DEVELOPER / Ubisoft Massive

PUBLISHER / Ubisoft Entertainment

Allegedly inspired by the real-world test that revealed just how vulnerable the United States is to a biological attack, *Tom Clancy's The Division* puts you in a world where the States fell to such an attack in just five days. You play as part of a Strategic Homeland Division tasked with managing the threat brought about by the outbreak, doing "whatever it takes" to "save what remains". The game takes place in New York, in a kind of massively-multiplayer online third-person shooter structure. There are AI-controlled factions you need to deal with, as well as other players working against you. As you progress you'll gain new skills, weapons and can team up with friends to fight together at any time. There will be player to player trading, enemies will drop important loot and you can even use a smartphone or tablet to join friends in real-time, controlling an aerial drone.



MIGHTY NO. 9

RELEASE DATE / 2015

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

DEVELOPER / Concept - Inti Creates

PUBLISHER / Concept

One of the fathers of *Mega Man* (or *Rockman* as we know him), Keiji Inafune, has always wanted to make a new game in the series. But Capcom said no, repeatedly, so Inafune went to Kickstarter to crowdfund a new game himself. It's not called "Mega Man" but it's not hard to see the Blue Bomber's lineage in *Mighty No. 9*. A 2D platformer where you run, jump and shoot, you'll fight through eight stages each with a unique boss. When you defeat a boss, lead protagonist Beck gains their abilities. You can also temporarily steal the abilities from regular enemies which gives you "Mighty Skills" like double jumps, boosts, punches and more. This makes the order in which you defeat enemies change how you approach a level. There's also an interesting dash mechanic that lets you stun regular enemies first, then dash through them for a chain-bonus to score. **NAG**

Reviews *Intro*

Thank goodness there's an industry where talking and writing about video games pays the bills, otherwise we'd all have to get real jobs and that's not nearly as fun. Meet your reviewers...

Question / What is your favourite apocalypse / doomsday / end of days scenario, and how would you survive it?



DANE "BARKSKIN" REMENDES

Any scenario wherein it transpires that the Drakensberg is actually home to thousands of dormant dragons eager to bring about the Dragonpocalypse is clearly the best scenario. I'd survive it by watching *How to Train Your Dragon*, obviously.

CURRENTLY PLAYING

Alien: Isolation, BattleBlock Theater



DELANO "DELANO" CUZZUCOLI

The best kind of doomsday scenarios are those prophesied in ancient cults. Y'know, the ones we're all fools for not believing. And the best way to survive them is to basically RTFS (read the friggin' scriptures).

CURRENTLY PLAYING

Terraria



GEOFF "GEOMETRIX" BURROWS

The Bananamuffinpocalypse. It's less well-known than some of the more established scenarios, but death by an eternal rain of banana muffins is a very real threat. I'd survive with a butter knife, some cream, and a jar of strawberry jam.

CURRENTLY PLAYING

Forza Horizon 2, Civilization: Beyond Earth, COD Black Ops 2 Zombies



MICHAEL "RETTIDE" JAMES

Anything that significantly thins the herd (humans), so like zombies or a proper plague. But only the slow moving zombies – if it's the fast ones we're all screwed. I'd survive it because I've been thinking about it off and on for years. I have a plan, what have you got?

CURRENTLY PLAYING

Borderlands: The Pre-sequel and Legend of Grimrock 2

mini review

Pretentious Game

Some games do indeed qualify as art. Others are merely feeble attempts at being *avant-garde*. *Pretentious Game* may at first seem like the latter, but it wears its pretentiousness on its sleeve in the name of non-derivative gameplay.

The game is a simplistic platformer which bears more than a passing resemblance to Mike Bithell's seminal *Thomas Was Alone*. Indeed, the characters are simple, single-coloured squares that move along an equally minimalistic plane.

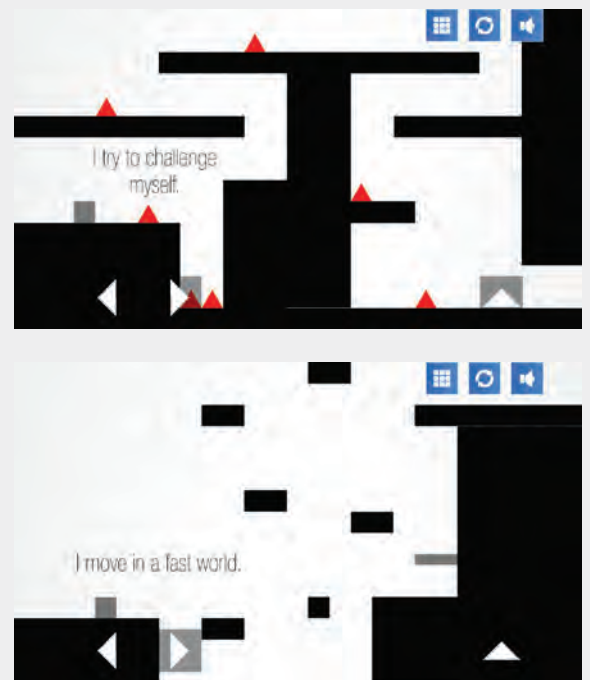
The initial shtick is that you're a cube locked in a sisyphian task of eloping with an elusive pink cube. Each level is a tiny arena whereby you have to figure out how to make contact with said pink cube, using written clues prominent on the screen.

These clues also happen to tell

an extremely vague story about love, loss and acceptance, but within are metaphors and allegory which help players figure out what to do next. For example, the text may be "I stand on her words", and the solution may involve literally standing on the words to get to the pink cube.

With loads of wordplay, the task remains interesting and players will be keen on seeing what comes next. The surreal experience is complemented by the simplistic sound and music and the overall tone is one which will leave you alternating between sadness and rolling your eyes. Get it! **NAG**

- Delano



87 A pretentious, corny, totally over-the-top platformer. What's not to love?

HEARD AT THE OFFICE...

“It's amazing how much work doesn't get done in the office.”

- Tarryn



MIKLOS "MIKITO707" SZECSEI
I'm in favour of being enslaved by an alien race that has the ability to weed out the worst of humanity in some sort of attempt to guide our crappy race. I'd survive because I like to think I'm not a crappy person.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor



MIKTAR "MIKTAR" DRACON
Technological Singularity. Not that hard to survive really, as long as you're on board with having omnipresent AI overlords.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Super Smash Bros., The Evil Within, Guild Wars 2 and Hyrule Warriors



NEO "SHOCKG" SIBEKO
I'd do everything that Chuck Norris did in all his movies. He's yet to die in any movie or series he's appeared in. This is fact! (*Way of the Dragon* doesn't count) :D

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Pac-Man Championship Edition



TARRYN "AZIMUTH" VAN DER BYL
A cat apocalypse, obviously. A kittypocalypse. I'd survive it with my stockpiles of catnip and belly rubs.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Nothing. I'm stuck in Pretoria until the weekend with an unopened copy of *Alien: Isolation*. THE HORROR IS REAL.

▶ **mini review**

KAMI

Well now, here's something a bit different. One meaning of "kami" in Japanese is "paper", and the developers of *KAMI* have built a colourful, vaguely origami-inspired puzzle game around the concept of paper-folding.

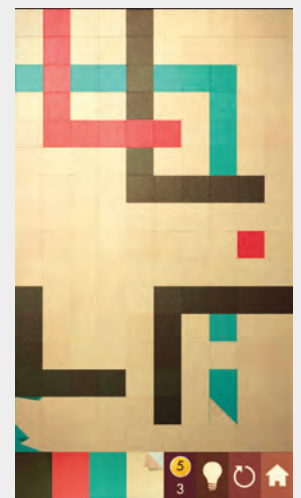
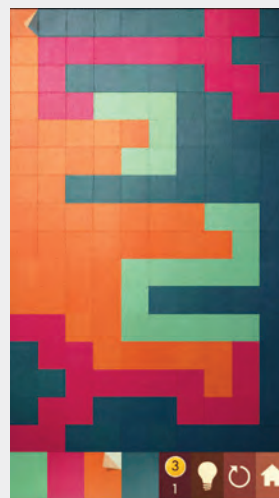
Anybody with a passing familiarity to painting programs will be right at home with the basic premise: players are given a grid of differing colours and are expected to convert the entire playing area into a single colour. This is achieved by selecting a pre-defined colour and allowing it to "bleed" into the assorted geometric shapes. Barriers exist between differing blocks of colours and the amount of moves is limited. Herein lies the strategy as players seek to find out solutions, both acceptable and preferred.

The gameplay itself is remarkably

relaxing, heightened by the simple hues and minimalistic, classic oriental music. It's a pretty experience, but don't expect it to last too long; there are six "chapters", each with nine puzzles, but completing them isn't exactly a chore. The only real point of contention is the lack of an undo button; mistakes require starting the puzzle over, which is a bit of a hindrance. There are also purchases in the form of tips and extra puzzles, but they're not necessary for the game's enjoyment.

If you like relaxing, artistic puzzle games, you need to check out *KAMI*, post-haste.

NAG
- Delano



78 *The most fun you can have with paper outside of a board game.*

Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor



This one *does* simply walk into Mordor

From the moment *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor* was unveiled, it was accused of being derivative. Onlookers smugly proclaimed that the game should have been renamed to *Middle-earth: Shadow of Arkham Creed* thanks to the aerial assassinations and combat mechanics that looked like they were cribbed from one of Rocksteady's games. There is no denying that *Shadow of Mordor* has unashamedly borrowed from both the *Assassin's Creed* and *Batman: Arkham* series, but when games do this it really only becomes a problem when the mechanics they borrow play worse than they did in the games they borrowed from in the first place. Luckily for *Shadow of Mordor*, this is not the case: what is borrowed works exceptionally well. Furthermore, they pale in significance next to the game's best feature: the Nemesis System and its horde of never-ending orcs.

The events of *Shadow of Mordor* take place between those of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. You play as Talion, a Ranger posted at the Black Gate on the borders of Mordor. After orcs invade and slaughter his family, Talion finds himself sharing his body with an elven wraith

whose family was also slaughtered by Sauron's forces some years ago. The wraith (called Celebrimbor) provides Talion with formidable new powers that unlock via XP and Power gain throughout the game. It's up to Talion and Celebrimbor to pursue Sauron's Black Hand and the rest of his corrupted inner circle so that both characters can find peace in the afterlife.

The story of *Shadow of Mordor* isn't terrible, but it does falter at times in its execution. Those familiar with Tolkien's work (either the books or Peter Jackson films) will find numerous nods and links to the original stories, as well as some familiar characters popping up. It all makes for a narrative that *Lord of the Rings* fans will likely enjoy, but some characters (like the dwarven hunter Torvin) feel out of place and too comical to fit with the overall tone of Tolkien's world.

At *Shadow of Mordor's* heart lies the Nemesis System: an intricate set of rules and links that govern how the more powerful orcs behave in Sauron's army. The orc armies of Mordor are always depicted in books and films as being rife with animosity and internal betrayal. The Nemesis System captures that brilliantly. Chugging quietly



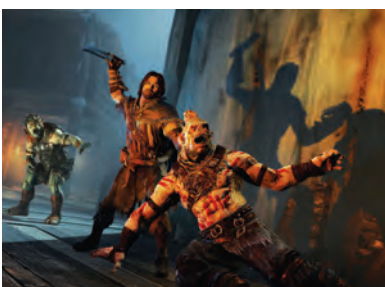
underneath this system is a suite of randomisation rules that ensure you'll never see the same captain or war chief during your game. Everything from their immediate appearance, mannerisms, voice, strengths and weaknesses are all generated by the game. The result is a seemingly infinite array of bosses for you tackle, but while they're all fairly unique in looks and mannerism (especially the top-level war chiefs), the way you deal with them often comes down to a handful of options based on their weaknesses. Some are afraid of fire, some are vulnerable to stealth kills, some are vulnerable to combat finishing moves, and so on. Furthermore, on a few occasions I had orcs inexplicably coming back from the dead and just refusing to die. The Nemesis System is monumentally ambitious and gets a lot of things right, but it's not without a few oddities. Luckily it's nothing game-breaking.

Thanks to Talion's new wraith powers, and the already brittle relationships between all of the orcs, you're able to manipulate the ranks and basically topple the army from within. In the later stages of the game you'll be able to brand orcs in order to get them to fight for you. This obviously plays an integral role in causing havoc and politics within the orc hierarchies. Branding a war chief's body guards, for example, is particularly effective. In the midst of your fight you can



The level of detail on the orcs is incredible. Each of the randomly generated orc captains or war chiefs is unique in their own way, with different skills and idiosyncrasies rounding out some truly grotesque and chilling creations.

BELOW / There is some stunning graphics tech to be found in this game. Rain effects are particularly effective as individual drops bounce and splash on the ground, and Talion's cloak becomes visibly drenched in the Mordor downpours.



activate the branded body guards, getting them to turn on their war chief, which makes your encounter a whole lot easier. It's a heck of a lot of fun pulling strings and ensuring certain orcs rise through the ranks, and Monolith has ensured that your tools of manipulation are varied. It's always amusing to see the ranks shuffle like pieces on a chess board once you've finished a particular bout of meddling in orc politics.

What this Nemesis system does do is force some prior planning before your war chief encounters. If you don't weaken the lower ranks and brand certain body guards, war chief encounters are tough. I died on numerous occasions because I underestimated my target. When you die, many of the captains you've already killed will be replaced by new orcs – it's a little disheartening to watch your progress being swallowed up as fresh and ambitious orc blood repopulates the ranks. It's also a very clever way of giving failure some meaning. For the first time in a long time, I've felt that dying in a game has had palpable consequences, and that's a great thing.

My one gripe with the game is that its weapon upgrade system isn't as exciting as it should be. Killing captains and war chiefs results in Rune drops which you can apply to your sword, dagger, and bow. These provide passive buffs and perks to other skills, but they never really feel like they're

making that much of an impact.

The combat, while borrowed, is fast, outrageously brutal, and always fun. You'll relish each encounter with an orc horde, and when followers start chanting their war chief's name as you enter combat with him, one cannot help but feel a jolt of exhilaration. **NAG**

- Mikito707

90

This is one of those surprise hits that we get every now and again. Shadow of Mordor was initially underestimated, but now that it's here, it makes for a compelling experience. While it borrows mechanics, it undoubtedly triumphs in the creation of the Nemesis System. Here's hoping this is the start of a new franchise, because this is some of the most fun I've had in a game this year.

PLUS / Occasional bug / A few repetitive main missions / Terrain gets dull / Limited weapon Rune upgrades

MINUS / Combat is visceral / Some amazing visuals / Nemesis System is outstanding / Lots of content

Alien: Isolation

I admire its purity

“Don't try to outrun the alien. You won't make it.” In the history of video games, has there ever been a more ominous loading-screen tip? The moment you see those words, you'll know you're playing the Alien game that Ridley Scott's original space-borne horror film rightfully deserves. The only thing it's missing is Sigourney Weaver's '70s hair, and even that can be had via the dubious wonders of DLC. If you love this franchise more for its horror roots than for its action-laden later years, you might as well stop reading this and buy *Alien: Isolation* right now. If you need a little more encouragement, follow me.

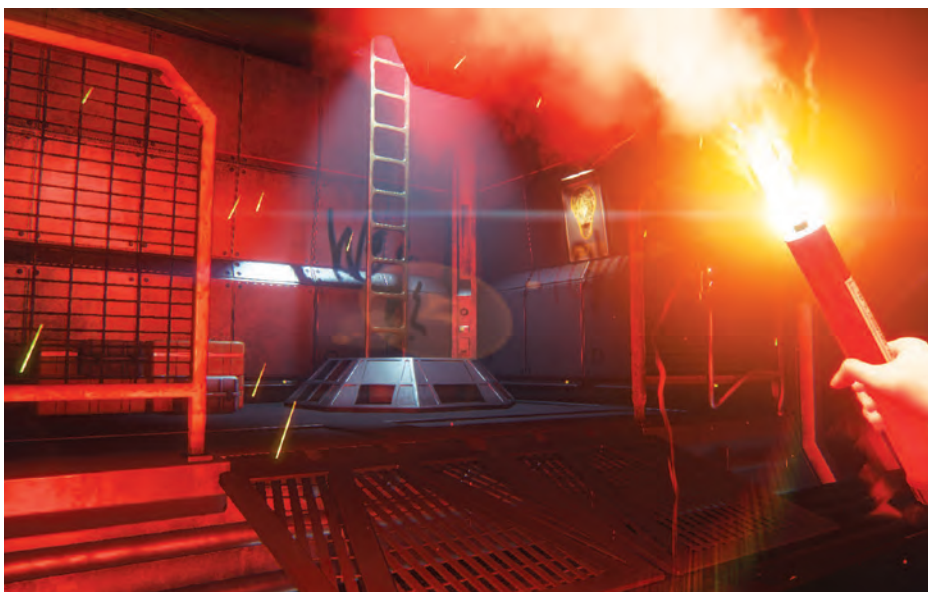
Nestled between the events that transpired aboard the *Nostromo* in *Alien* (singular) and those that took place in Hadley's Hope with *Aliens* (plural), *Isolation* casts you as Amanda Ripley, daughter of go-to xenomorph-basher Ellen Ripley. At the start of the game you travel to the space station *Sevastopol* in search of the *Nostromo*'s flight recorder, desperate to discover the truth behind your mother's disappearance. Obviously it isn't long before you discover that the truth doesn't involve free jellybeans and Jonesy the cat encountering a secret kitten civilisation that's built atop a glorious rainbow, and is instead full of death (mostly yours), rudely malfunctioning androids and an angry extra-terrestrial monster with a tail that's effectively a lightsaber.



Unlike the xenomorph-fuelled games that have come before it, *Isolation's* directive isn't centred on non-stop action, but on horror and survival. In the past, *Aliens* (again, plural) has been the focal point for video game adaptations, often seeing you mowing down hundreds of the titular beasts in a single sitting. The original *Aliens vs. Predator* and its sequel still stand as the finest examples of this, but even though they were supremely difficult games in their own right, they still managed to chip away at the xenomorph's fear factor, mostly because of the sheer number that you killed along the way. There's never been a game to honour the original *Alien* (again, singular),

in which you're contending against a lone, ever-present alien enemy that could drop by for a visit at any moment. That's changed with *Isolation*, and it is to *Alien* what *AvP* is to *Aliens*.

The Creative Assembly has done an exceptional job capturing the look and feel of the films. When you're not fighting to stay alive, exploring the *Sevastopol* is gratifying all on its own, a smorgasbord of iconic atmospheric elements and clever interactions. It's a stunning game visually, with impressive lighting and smoke effects being put to good use to enhance the game's grimy, overbearingly metallic environments. It's brilliant that they've preserved the lo-fi sci-fi approach, as though humanity was far too busy racing to reach the farthest corners of space to waste time inventing Blu-ray players or computers that ran on anything other than DOS. In reality it's just a view of the future from the '70s, but I love that it's intact.



LEFT / Many of the craft-able items can either be thrown or placed as proximity devices that trigger when enemies get close. You're able to spark quite a bit of mayhem with them.

EVERY SILVER LINING

I realise I've showered it with nothing but praise until now, but *Isolation* is filled with bizarre design choices that frustrate the experience. I'll rattle off a few of them here. As much as I appreciate the narrative-conscious conceit of scarcely-placed wall-mounted save panels, this is a difficult game, and you'll be dying and loading saves a lot. It often results in you replaying sections of the game over and over again, which means those sections inevitably lose their sheen. For some reason, holding your breath to prevent the alien from discovering you when you're hidden depletes your health bar. It makes me wonder how many years I shaved off my life seeing how long I could hold my breath underwater when I was a kid.

I understand that certain mechanical restrictions are necessary, but it's quite silly that Ripley can't hop over countertops to reach secrets, and that a row of toppled, ankle-high suitcases is effectively an impenetrable wall. Technical glitches often creep in, especially audio bugs (out-of-sync audio completely neuters the alien's first appearance). The alien AI sometimes goes haywire, and it seems as though certain alien interactions are canned to enhance drama (like how it tends to loiter around whatever container you're hiding in), but this becomes an aggravation when it persists for too long. Also, I can't speak to the other platforms, but the cut-scenes in the PS4 version are awfully laggy.



Yes, there is a motion tracker. You're not the only one who can hear its telling beeps, however, so you've got to be careful when you use it.



Everything about the game's core mechanics screams *System Shock* (and *BioShock* to a lesser extent, if you'd like a more recent comparison). You're obviously not alone on *Sevastopol*; the neglected station is still home to pockets of survivors, some hostile, some less so, but all of whom you'll need to figure out how best to deal with when encountered. The station's governing AI also happens to be malfunctioning, meaning that *Sevastopol*'s army of androids is often less than friendly. It's possible to pull out your revolver and settle things in direct combat, but it's never the ideal method because not only is ammo scarce, but guns tend to make loud bangs, and in this game loud bangs tend to attract things that make you dead. Stealth is always key, and you can hide in lockers when enemies are near or use the vent networks to get around semi-safely. Hackable security panels let you manipulate the environment to distract and confuse enemies, and there's a crafting system which sees you collecting bits and bobs in order to create things like noisemakers to redirect foes and pipe bombs for when subtlety is the last thing on your mind.

And then there's the alien. It's actually scary again, and that's perhaps the most significant triumph of *Isolation*. The xenomorph is a singular, unstoppable force of terror that could appear at any moment to rearrange your innards. The way it's been handled in the game's design is devious: the alien is rarely the central foe in any given scenario, but is instead a tertiary threat that could arise on a whim to complicate your objective. The tension

this creates is palpable; even when you're trying to outsmart four or five androids who clearly pose a more immediate peril, there's an inexorable fear that you could attract the alien's presence with your actions. Much of the endless dread that the game enforces can be attributed to meticulous sound design. The *Sevastopol*'s constant creaks and groans and bangs and hisses twist your perception. The sudden sound of doors and vents opening when you venture too close will make you jump in your seat. I won't ever forget the sound of the alien shuffling through the ducts and airways above and below me, always reminding me it's there but never showing itself until I least expected it. **NAG**

- Barkskin

91

There are moments when it stumbles and falls, but when all of its systems work in tandem *Alien: Isolation* is a wondrous thing. Not only is it the best *Alien* game in existence, but it's also an outstanding survival horror in general. If you like your xenomorphs a little more thoughtful, this is where you'll find them.

PLUS / So. Scary. / Looks and sounds incredible / Oppressive, immersive atmosphere

MINUS / Number of odd design choices / Immersion-breaking bugs

PLATFORMS / 360 / XBO

REVIEWED ON / XBO

GENRE / Arcade racing

DEVELOPER / Playground Games / Sumo Digital / Turn 10 Studios

AGE RATING / 3

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > 12 players

PUBLISHER / Microsoft Studios

WEBSITE / www.forzamotorsport.net

DISTRIBUTOR / Prima Interactive

Forza Horizon 2

Planes, trains and automobiles



The first *Forza Horizon* was a refreshing experience. Much like *Need for Speed: Shift*, *Horizon* took the clearly-defined line between simulation and arcade racing and smudged it up a bit. Although it swayed far more towards the side of arcade than simulation (the opposite of *Shift*), *Horizon* proved that cross-mixing pedigrees from developers is a brilliant way to break out of the stale moulds that were created over generations, and its sequel does even more.

Moving from the first game's setting of the Colorado countryside to the much larger "Southern Europe" (an exaggerated mishmash of bits of France and Italy) landscape brings a lot of changes. Where *Horizon* felt like a group of racers getting together for a party in the country, *Horizon 2*'s setting is one of a now established takeover of a much larger area. I can't shake the feeling that this robs *Horizon 2* of the unique charm that its prequel offered, but the increase in scale fits the "story" progression and allows for most of the gameplay to make as much sense as it can.

You know, for a game in which a bunch of jerks in sports cars tear up quaint Italian vineyards and golf estates.

Players traverse the large game world, driving to and from hub cities in road trips to compete in the next championship. Each location features a number of championships (for different classes of vehicle), and you can almost always find one that's suitable for your style of play and garage collection. This is just a small example of what makes *Horizon 2* one of the most customisable racing games out there: it really wants you to play it however you'd like. *Forza*'s now standard approach to difficulty level adjustments makes a return, allowing players to adjust vehicle assists, opponent AI levels (built from the "Drivatars" of real-world players) and other factors to increase the challenge and thus the rewards gained at the end of the race. I played with these settings for a while and found the game to be a thrill no matter which configuration was chosen: setting everything to its most difficult and switching to the in-cockpit camera view



Cross-country races are some of the most challenging events -- and the most exciting. You're forced to chase checkpoints across hills, valleys and waterways, with sometimes nary a road in sight. *Horizon 2* really comes into its own here: the sort of racing that is well executed in just a handful of games.



makes for an experience that comes close to pushing into simulation territory, especially when the storm clouds roll in and the track loosens up. You're forced to have a light foot on the gas and brakes alike, and pinballing around the tracks is a sure way to come stone last. It's clear that Turn 10's involvement in *Horizon 2*, and their tech that runs under the hood, is well used. But *Horizon* is an arcade racing series, and it is at its most entertaining when you've got at least most of the assists on and the AI cranked up only as far as you're comfortable. While we're sure that the game's engine is capable of being even more punishing, it's been so finely tuned that we couldn't ask for anything more in this segment.

One of the most common complaints about the first *Horizon* was its incessant need to barricade the game world, despite its free-roaming nature. *Horizon 2* throws those complaints in your face, constantly reminding you (sometimes forcing) that you can go almost anywhere. There are still a few barricades in some places, but they're far less common. This has resulted in the whopping 28 classes of vehicles – including classic sports, muscle, rally, SUV, and hot hatch – all finding



Race types are the usual assortment, all being variants of sprints or circuits. There's plenty to do outside of races, though, including hunting for rare cars, knocking down collectables and challenging the Drivatars cruising around the game world.



usefulness somewhere in the sprawling game world. The way that cars of varying classes handle is heavily emphasised, causing you to learn new skills and stay focused if you want to perform well. Rally cars love to drift; track toys can cruise to 300km/h but don't you dare think of taking that corner; classic sports cars take a while to get up to speed but once you figure them out, you can roll with some of the newer kids without too much trouble.

Visual fidelity is the sort of thing that matters very little in racing games: most of the time you're so focused on the cars and corners around you that that the pretty visuals are wasted, but it has to be said how good *Horizon 2* looks. On the Xbox One it purrs along at a smooth frame rate during races, but it does drop a few frames when switching back to the game from some menus. Likely this can be treated with more testing and some bug-hunting. The lighting is perhaps the most impressive part of *Horizon 2*'s visual arsenal, and you'll get to see the whole show thanks to the game's day/night cycle and dynamic weather system.

As with all games that rise to and above the 90 score mark, when the time comes that you need to look for the bad stuff, it takes a bit of digging. The biggest issue that I found with *Horizon 2* is the lack of feeling of progress. Sure, you earn money and buy more cars and keep racing – what else would you expect? – but the few ways that it tries to break the monotony of progress are hollow offerings.

Skill points translate to unlockable perks which feel meaningless and have little impact on the game. At least the multiplayer options are there to throw in infinite replayability once the main campaign's mandatory 15 challenges and finale are complete. I also found it odd that cars can be upgraded almost without limit: you can compete with any level of vehicle in the class – your opponents are simply auto-balanced to meet that level. This robs some classes of their purity (the classic and retro classes especially), so those petrol-heads looking for a game that respects the history of motorsports might feel a little short-changed. **NAG**

- GeometriX

92 An excellent arcade racer that shows it's got some simulation chops if you want them, *Forza Horizon 2* is packed with both technological accomplishments and improvements over its predecessor, and feels fun almost no matter what you want out of it.

PLUS / Huge roster of highly-upgradeable cars / Excellent visuals / Widely customisable gameplay

MINUS / Progress feels a bit hollow / Perks are mostly pointless

PLATFORMS / 3DS / Wii U	REVIEWED ON / 3DS	GENRE / Fighting	DEVELOPER / Sora Ltd / Bandai Namco Games
AGE RATING / 12	MULTIPLAYER / Local > 4 players	Online > 4 players	PUBLISHER / Nintendo
WEBSITE / www.smashbros.com			DISTRIBUTOR / Core Group



Super Smash Bros.

Settle the score anywhere, anytime

The best thing you can say about *Super Smash Bros.* is that it's fascinating how controversial it is. The argument over whether *Smash Bros.* is a party game for children or a stately competitive sport for the discerning e-athlete is over a decade old and shows no sign of slowing down. **[Spoiler alert: *Smash* is both of the things.]**

That a humble game about beating up tiny people until they fly off the screen can inspire such anxiety among game players is probably proof that *Smash* is in fact something very interesting. *Super Smash Bros. for 3DS and Wii U* – yes, that is the official, unwieldy title – is the 4th game in a series that began on the Nintendo 64. It is simultaneously the first *Smash* game in HD (on the Wii U) and portable (on 3DS). Each version shares the same roster of playable characters, but the battle stages differ. In the case of the 3DS edition, the stage selection is tilted towards representing games

with a Nintendo handheld pedigree.

Smash Bros. is very simple and that's the hook. Two to four players grab a famous Nintendo character (or one of a limited selection of 3rd-party guests) and run about a platform action stage trying to pummel one another. Unlike every other fighting game, hit points don't drain in *Smash*. Damage accumulates starting at zero percent. The higher a character's damage, the easier they fly when slammed with a powerful attack. An invisible border just off the screen's edge represents electronic death.

Smash 4 doesn't alter the staple mechanics: there is one attack button, and each character has four special attacks executed by pressing the special button and a direction. With an execution barrier so low – outside some fast-fingered advanced dashing and cancelling tactics – literally anyone can play. With optional power-up items turned



The more damage you do to an opponent, the further they fly when you hit them. The goal being to knock them off the screen.



on, *Smash* is pure chaos; from pixie sticks to nuclear bombs, anything is possible.

The word for how this all translates to Nintendo 3DS is: surprising. At 60fps even with 3D on, the only caveats are purely platform related: a portable sized screen makes the action very small at times, and the 3DS analogue slide pad – required, since *Smash* involves non-digital character movement – can be very hard on some players' thumbs. And, although the audio-visual fan service of *Smash Bros.* has shrunk down really well, limited storage space performs a hit on the variety of music showcased in the Wii U version. Track selections are fine, but there's only one or two per stage.

Yet it is *Smash*, real *Smash*, and can be taken anywhere. That counts for a lot, and makes for a novel experience. **NAG**

- Miktar



Every character plays differently and has their own unique traits that you need to master.



92 As a fighting game, *Smash* has always been unique, with easy controls and fun roster of Nintendo-related characters.

This new *Smash* aims to be the definitive entry, bringing back combination moves and removing the much-hated "tripping" introduced in *Brawl*. It's a great party game, but also entertaining solo due to a wealth of game types.

PLUS / Chock full of content / Amazing frame rate / Robust online play

MINUS / Harsh on your Circle Pad



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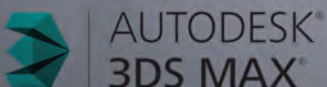
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PLATFORMS / Wii U

REVIEWED ON / Wii U

GENRE / Action / hack and slash

DEVELOPER / Omega Force / Team Ninja

AGE RATING / 12

MULTIPLAYER / Local > 2 players Online > None

PUBLISHER / Koei Tecmo / Nintendo

WEBSITE / zelda.com/hyrule-warriors

DISTRIBUTOR / Core Group

Hyrule Warriors

Overpowered heroes helping Hyrule



It's always risky breaking a known franchise out of its genre. It's likely for this reason that Nintendo opted out of putting "Zelda" anywhere in the title for this particular genre jump. It also highlights that while it is a *Zelda* game in terms of names, places, ideas and content, it is far more *Warriors* than it is *Zelda*.

Like the *Dynasty* or *Samurai Warriors* games that Omega Force is known for, *Hyrule Warriors* follows a specific template: You directly control a single unit on a massive battlefield, chosen from a large cast of powerful characters. Using this character you're in charge of completing objectives – escorting someone, taking a keep or location on the map, rescuing someone in time – all while mowing through hundreds of units using simple but effective combination moves. Characters level-up and get access to more powerful moves and weapons. The "trash" enemies on the field pose little threat

in spite of the numbers, but officers and boss enemies are a different story. Officers will block your attacks and break through your own guard, but usually have some kind of trick to defeating them easily. Huge boss enemies follow a more traditional *Zelda* game style, requiring the use of secondary weapons like bombs or boomerangs to expose their weakness.

On easy or normal difficulties, you can pretty much ignore the "meta game" of the battle, which involves taking keeps, wrestling them from enemy control so they'll spawn units for your side instead of enemies. On higher difficulty, it becomes a little like a single-player real-time strategy or MOBA. The order in which you take keeps, and who controls them when, can drastically alter your chances of success. Balancing where you spend your time, knowing when to fight and when to run, while keeping the enemy's tactics in mind, is part of what makes a



Massive *Zelda*-style bosses add welcome variety to missions, and require some thinking to take down effectively.



Warriors game so engrossing. Do you rush to take a fort deep in enemy territory, cutting off their reinforcements? Or do you methodically grind forward, hoping the enemy doesn't take any of the keeps behind you?

As an utterly unexpected collaboration between developers, the game does have its rough spots. The action can slow to a crawl when Things Get Real and the enemy count on screen hits ridiculous levels, but it's not actually the frame rate that dips. The game speed slows down to handle calculations, so it's more like bullet time. That aside, *Hyrule Warriors* is packed with content beyond the main story mode, giving it great longevity.

What's surprising is how natural it feels thematically. Clashing medieval armies are an obvious fit for the world of *Zelda*, while offering a glimpse at a crescendo of scale no one *Zelda* title has ever aimed for.

NAG
- Miktar



Battles are epic affairs, with hundreds of units to destroy or avoid depending on the situation.



89 More of a *Dynasty Warriors* in *Zelda* drag than a *Zelda* game with *Dynasty Warriors* style combat.

Even so, *Hyrule Warriors* combines many elements from both franchises into a single game that's a total blast to play. There's a lot here to love if you take the time to learn the nuances of the genre.

PLUS / Large playable roster / Overflowing with content / Goron genocide

MINUS / Niche appeal / Uneven difficulty / Disposable story



PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3	REVIEWED ON / PC	GENRE / FPS	DEVELOPER / 2K Australia / Gearbox Software
AGE RATING / 18	MULTIPLAYER / Local > None	Online > 4 players	PUBLISHER / 2K
WEBSITE / borderlandsthegame.com			DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom

Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel

That's no moon

borderlands: *The Pre-Sequel* tells the story of how Handsome Jack went from a somewhat dramatic Hyperion Corporation employee to the robot army wielding madman we loved to hate in *Borderlands 2*. The game is set on Elpis, a moon orbiting Pandora (the setting for the first two *Borderlands* games), and players will find themselves dipping in lava or frozen pools and exploring some very pretty and fresh lunar terrain. The moon is also inhabited by unfamiliar creatures; some float, others burrow but they all bite. Of course oxygen is lacking but don't worry, it's hardly tricky managing this resource as everywhere you look there's a way to get a refill. If failing at oxygen management was punished more harshly then this aspect of the game would have been more fun, but as it is now it's rather superfluous. The low gravity opens

up new ways to explore the landscape and taking wild leaps of faith to get to that small island in the middle of a lava flow is risky and fun. This leaping (and stomping) game mechanic tends to turn your usual plodding play style into something more graceful and elaborate. You're more likely to take risks and perform dramatic mid-air takedowns – it's more heroic somehow. All this leaping and bounding around the maps is fun, but sometimes the locations are confusing to navigate. What the map view really needs is a relief mode so you can see the places you can't jump over or get to.

Bottom line, this is really just an elaborate slice of full-priced DLC for *Borderlands 2*, but does offer a ton of things to do and see and play with to justify the price tag. There are new vehicles to try; you can now freeze



pieces; and there are even laser guns and an exciting way of getting around the levels. The four new characters all feature their own unlock tress with Claptrap being the most extravagant and bonkers character to play. So it's all great, there's even a new machine that will grind three guns of a similar class to make a better gun; much better if you add a few moonstones (a game currency) in the mix. This should all mean an easy high score if it wasn't for a few issues, some of which plagued *Borderlands 2*. Enemies repopulate areas after time, not usually a problem unless you have to return to these areas a few times to flip a switch. All the new toys, weapons and abilities have no dedicated missions that make use of these abilities or let you test them out which is a bit of a missed opportunity. It's really just more *Borderlands 2*, so if you loved that game this is an essential purchase, if there was anything you didn't like about it, then *The Pre-Sequel* will just amplify what you didn't like. **NAG**

- RedTide



Combat can be close and intimate (shotguns) or distant and impersonal (sniping).



Air domes provide an oxygen refill, and the landscape is littered with oxygen points, so don't stress.

80 If you love everything about the *Borderlands* series then you must buy this game. It's fun, loopy and adds more new stuff than you'd expect. The excellent humour and new features make up for series fatigue.

PLUS / Many, many new things / Story telling / Moon physics are awesome

MINUS / It's still the same *Borderlands* experience / Repetitive

FAR CRY 4



RELEASE DATE / 18 November 2014

PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / XBO

GENRE / First-person shooter

DEVELOPER / Ubisoft Montreal/Toronto

PUBLISHER / Ubisoft

WEBSITE / www.far-cry.ubi.com



The open-world playgrounds of the *Far Cry* series are about to return. With 2012's *Far Cry 3* proving to be a massive success for Ubisoft, a follow-up two years later seemed inevitable. Rather than a direct sequel to the island-based insanity that starred Jason Brody and deranged characters like Vaas, we're heading to an entirely new environment with a brand new cast of colourful characters.

During rAge 2014, we got to chat with Ubisoft's Ryan Boyer who took the time to spend the weekend in South Africa to engage with fans at the show. Boyer fills the position of narrative team production manager so he was able to provide a lot of insight into the story, characters and gameplay elements in the upcoming game. You can read our full interview with Boyer in the next few pages.



WELCOME TO KYRAT

The fictional Himalayan region of Kyrat provides the playground for this fourth outing in the series. With lofty, snow-capped mountains, lush tundra forests, and grasslands, Kyrat will offer a wider variety of environments than any of the previous *Far Cry* titles. The wildlife and plant life will change as you ascend and descend through the various biomes that make up the region of Kyrat.

With the mountainous region comes a new focus on "verticality" in the gameplay. You'll now be climbing cliff-faces with a grapple hook thanks to peg placements found scattered around the world. While there won't be free-form mountaineering, you will be required to navigate from grapple point to grapple point in order to scale some of the sheerer cliff faces. And with that height comes the need for getting to areas that vehicles can't reach. This means that the wingsuit is back from *Far Cry 3*, but you'll have access to it from much earlier on in the game when compared to previous outings. It's a good design move on Ubisoft's side, because getting from A to B in the mountainous region could have become a slog without the speed and versatility that the wingsuit provides.

When you're not flying through the air with a wingsuit, you might choose to fly with a gyrocopter instead. This small helicopter will allow you to ascend and descend the mountainous regions with ease. They're

also really useful when attempting to take over the various fortresses found throughout the region.

Then of course, there are the elephants, which caused quite a response when they were unveiled earlier in the year. You'll be able to ride these lumbering, breathing tanks right into the heat of battle. They'll prove worthy allies too as they bash their way through enemies and flip over vehicles.

If riding animals isn't your thing, then you can always exploit four-legged, furry friends in other ways. Bait is a new piece of equipment that you'll find in your grenade slot. Throwing out a hunk of meat may result in a mountain lion or bear wandering its way into enemy camps – useful for making diversions or calling in a razor-sharp ally in the midst of a fire fight.

"Throwing out a hunk of meat may result in a mountain lion or bear wandering its way into enemy camps."

● You'll be able to reset the fortresses much like you were able to reset the outposts in *Far Cry 3* once Ubisoft had patched in that feature. However, fortresses you control can be raided by the enemy, who will regain control unless you defend it in time.





OUT WITH THE DRUGS, IN WITH THE SPIRITUALITY

One of the more surprising additions to *Far Cry 3* was its series of drug-induced hallucination missions. These proved very popular among both players and critics, so it makes sense that Ubisoft would want to continue the tradition. This time, however, the offbeat side missions are taking on a much purer tone than the drug-addled insanity which pervaded that found in *Far Cry 3*.

Shangri-La is a separate set of missions that will allow you to play through portions of Kyrat's cultural and religious stories. In creating the fictional Kyrat, Ubisoft invested a lot of time and effort in creating backstory for the people of the region. This included social influences as well as numerous legends that the people perpetuate. Ubisoft wanted to give players the opportunity to explore these legends and so the Shangri-La mission set found its way into development.

In Shangri-La you will play as a completely different character – one that is tied into the creation legends of the region. The subset of missions has its own plot that's separate from the main story found in *Far Cry 4*. That being said, the stories will link up eventually "to give you a greater appreciation of what you're doing in the open world," Boyer informed us.

The missions make for a stark contrast to the rest of the open-world game as you're

limited to just a bow and arrows, as well as a knife. You also have a tiger companion who you can order to attack enemies. This tiger, known as The Protector, has spiritual and cultural links to the people of Kyrat, and is draped in jewels, chains, and armour befitting a religious symbol typical to an Eastern culture. Your tiger will be seen as the bigger threat by the enemies you encounter in Shangri-La. This affords you the opportunity for some stealth attacks as The Protector keeps the bulk of enemies pinned down and distracted.

Visually Shangri-La is very different, showing splashes of vivid colours with burnt oranges, pinks and purples. An intense, otherworldly feel permeates the locations of these missions. Enemies are also unique: you'll face invading demons rather than the gun-toting goons of Pagan Min's royal army. Why exactly demons are invading the Kyrat legends of Shangri-La is yet to be seen, but we have a feeling that one of Pagan Min's associates might have something to do with it.

You're free to approach the Shangri-La missions in any order you wish. Throughout your adventures in Kyrat, you'll come across trigger points for the subset of missions throughout the open-world map.



WHO'S WHO IN THIS LOFTY ZOO?

You play as Ajay Ghale. Born in Kyrat, Ajay moved to the US where he grew up. After the death of his mother, Ajay returns to his homeland to scatter her ashes. Unfortunately he crosses paths with Pagan Min: Kyrat's self-elected king and tyrant. Pagan shows a particular interest in Ajay thanks to some rather messy family history, and before Ajay knows it, he's caught up in a rebellion against Pagan Min and his royal army.

Pagan Min looks set to continue the tradition of memorable *Far Cry* villains. The Hong Kong born dictator grew up in a world of crime, as his father was a prominent crime lord in China. Pagan Min, however, was sent to England for his education, resulting in a dangerous mix of severe intelligence and ruthless, violent tendencies. Shortly after befriending the original Kyrat royal family, Pagan Min committed a coup and took control of the country for himself. This resulted in a rebel movement known as the Golden Path – a movement that Ajay Ghale (and you the player) finds himself caught up in.

Of course, Pagan Min keeps a retinue of generals and assistants in order to maintain his stranglehold over Kyrat. Yuma, for example, is one of Pagan Min's lieutenants who is often referred to as the despot king's right-hand woman. She oversees the correctional institutions that Min utilises to maintain control over the populace through fear. Yuma, Boyes informed us, was an orphan in Hong Kong until Pagan Min's family took

her in. She grew up with Pagan Min and can essentially be considered his sister. Yuma, however, has developed a fixation with the Himalayan religious stories and mysticisms surrounding Shangri-La. She's convinced herself that unlocking the secrets of Shangri-La is key to maintaining power, so she has committed herself to pursuing all knowledge of the legends. As a result of her obsession, Yuma has moved herself into the upper reaches of the mountains of Kyrat where she can hunt for temples and information surrounding Shangri-La. In a sense, she's filling a similar narrative role as Major Arnold Toht: the Nazi from the film *Raiders of the Lost Ark* who became obsessed with unlocking the power of the Arc of the Covenant so that the Nazi war machine could utilise it as a weapon.

Then there's Paul Depleur who leads Pagan Min's royal army. Depleur, we're told, is a complete psychopath who utilises torture and fear in order to maintain control over the populace of Kyrat. He also oversees Min's drug and tea plantations, which are used to finance the king's rule and supply his army with the weapons needed to keep control.

“Strategy #1 was the subtle approach: smashing an elephant through the massive double-doors and firing my sawn-off shotgun...”





RAGE 2014 HANDS-ON

For those who missed rAge 2014, *Far Cry 4* was available to play on the show floor. Ubisoft had one of the free-form fortress takeovers available. Much like *Far Cry 3*'s outpost missions, the fortresses will be found dotted all over the map, ripe for the invading. Be warned: they're much tougher than the outposts ever were in *Far Cry 3*. I had three attempts at subduing the enemies inside, but failed each time. "They're really souped-up versions of the outposts; you can't attack them at any 360° angle, so you need to come with some strategy," Ryan Boyer cautioned.

Strategy #1 was the subtle approach: smashing an elephant through the massive double-doors and firing my sawn-off shotgun from my lofty pachyderm perch. It worked spectacularly up until my poor rampaging buddy fell to the barrage of bullets. I was left hot-footing it between the cluster of wooden buildings, ramparts and walls that made up the fort. Unfortunately, during the elephant-induced commotion, a soldier had

triggered the alarm, and shortly after that I was facedown and dying thanks to a helicopter loaded with reinforcements.

Strategy #2 was the *actual* subtle approach: I found a grapple point and scaled a cliff-face to reach the top of one of the fortress walls. From there I was able to tag enemies and pick them off one-by-one with sneaky melee take-downs. This went well up until I was spotted and the alarm triggered, bringing in the aforementioned helicopter bristling with guns and more bad guys.

Strategy #3 was a mix of the two: I grappled to the top of the wall once again, but then happened upon a mortar nest on top of the gate area. With the guard dispatched as quietly as possible, I proceeded to wake up the rest with a liberal peppering of mortar fire. Vehicles were flipped and soldiers' corpses flew through the air as I rained down fiery vengeance upon enemies that scrambled for cover. I almost felt bad, but then that helicopter showed up once again. This time I managed to make it to one of the houses as cars and barrels exploded around me. Inside was a rocket launcher, and with my new weapon in hand I burst from the building and exacted my revenge on the pesky chopper. The explosion was extremely pleasing, but as I ogled my handiwork, a sniper shot made short work of my insurrection. So much for third time lucky.

Ubisoft has added co-op to *Far Cry 4*, so you and a buddy will be able to hop into each other's games to tear apart Kyrat together. We're really looking forward to fist-bumping our bros while riding elephants.

INTERVIEW WITH RYAN BOYER,

NARRATIVE TEAM **PRODUCTION MANAGER** FOR FAR CRY 4



NAG: Hi Ryan! Could you tell us what your role is in the production of Far Cry 4?

Ryan Boyer: I'm the production manager on the narrative team, and also lighting and visual effects. So I basically manage the teams that are responsible for everything from the writing to mo-cap for the actors, working with the animators to get it all integrated with the game, and then lighting and VFX [visual effects] for those cinematics in the game.

NAG: You've got Troy Baker who is playing Pagan Min, right? He's a busy guy! What was it like working with him?

Ryan: He seems to be in a lot of games! You know what, he obviously really connected with the character Pagan Min; we have a really talented team of writers and what they did with Pagan was amazing, and Troy really connected with that. You can see that in what we've already shown, and when you get to play the game and you see all the cinematics and all the work that Troy put into it, it's

fantastic. So he's a really talented actor and I think it was a great paring.

NAG: Tell us a little bit more about the character of Pagan Min.

Ryan: Pagan Min is actually from Hong Kong, and his father was a crime lord in Hong Kong. Pagan always felt that he had quite large shoes to fill, and he was always kind of searching for his own piece of the pie; his own thing. Basically he discovered Kyrat and, you know, he's an educated man as he was educated in England, and so he has that intelligence aspect with that ruthlessness that he's learnt from his father. He originally befriended the royal family in Kyrat to help and support them to regain control of Kyrat, and when that was done he committed a coup and made himself the king. And he's been sitting on the throne ever since.

NAG: Now there's a link between him and the main protagonist, Ajay Ghale, isn't there?

Ryan: Yes, so basically Ajay Ghale is the character that you play. His mother and father were responsible for starting the Golden Path Rebellion, which exists in the game and is what Ajay finds himself creating an alliance with when he arrives in Kyrat. So there's a history there of his parents going up against Pagan Min, and there's a big history between Pagan and his [Ajay's] family that you discover as you play through the game.


NAG: So it seems then that there's quite a personal story in there when compared to the previous Far Cry. Now there're all sorts of family histories and things.

Ryan: It is so interesting – I love the approach that the writers decided to take with this because you're in an unfamiliar place because Ajay left Kyrat at such a young age that he doesn't know the country that well. So he's rediscovering the country, but it's great to see all of the people that know you [Ajay] and who knew your parents. And they keep

giving you this insight and you find out things about your father and your mother that you had *no idea* about as you're playing through the game. So not only as a player are you discovering it, but as Ajay as well.

NAG: In the previous *Far Cry* we had unhinged characters like Vaas. This Pagan-Min guy doesn't seem to be all that stable either. So is this becoming a theme or trope that's going to continue running through the *Far Cry* series? Did this just happen or was it intentional?

Ryan: No I mean it's not like we set out to try and replicate Vaas or stick with a theme. Really we had an idea that we wanted to do and develop, and then Pagan Min's character kind of came out of that. The truth is, he took over [Kyrat] in a coup, so in a very smart and underhanded way; so he's really ruthless.



He's got that background coming from Hong Kong gang lords and family crime, and so it's just natural that his character is going to be somebody who is, on the one side, very sadistic, and on the other side, intelligent. I kind of liken Vas to the schoolyard bully, whereas Pagan is definitely more the kind who will have his arm around your shoulder, whispering in your ear. You know, he's going to manipulate you.

NAG: So we have moved to the Himalayas. How has the setting influenced narrative cues? Was there a lot of research done on the area?

Ryan: We actually sent members of the development team and the art director and a few others to Nepal and Kathmandu to explore that country; everything from studying the art and the architecture, to the culture, the religion and customs of the people. We really wanted to absorb as much as possible to feed that into Kyrat, which is our fictional place for the game. Obviously this area of the world gave us a great opportunity to play with verticality, so we've brought in the gyrocopter, the grapple hook, those types of things. The flora and the fauna, as you go up and down altitudes, will change with different biomes. As you travel you'll encounter new animals, new plant life, new people.

NAG: So it must have given the art guys a lot of scope to work with thanks to the different altitudes. You know, compared to just an island setting.

Ryan: Exactly. It was very challenging. We

have a team that is dedicated to the biomes. All they thought about was making plant life, making trees, and things that the player can interact with. They also created the collection systems. I mean, *Far Cry* is a massive world; it's huge, and we can't be placing individual trees everywhere, but we can create these realistic biomes and realistic mixtures of plant life that exist.

NAG: In the most recent weapons trailer you guys showed off wildlife hunting each other. We don't recall that being in *Far Cry 3*.

Ryan: No! So we've totally amped up what you can do with animals. You can weaponise them now: throw bate, which is now another piece of your arsenal, and obviously the different animals have different behaviours. Personally my favourite animal right now is probably the honey badger. I go crazy whenever I see one! Just run, get away from it, because it'll definitely mess stuff up.

NAG: What can people expect in terms of any extra features or graphics tweaks for the PC version?

Ryan: Basically, *Far Cry* the brand has always been known for pushing graphics tools, and has always been very popular on PC too. So you can expect that our teams have pushed really hard for each individual hardware system. We really spent a lot of time checking tools before we cranked up the development teams. So expect more of the same level of customisation that *Far Cry 3* had on PC. **NAG**

- Mikito707



HARDWIRED

by Neo Sibeko

MAXWELL EXCITEMENT! Some time ago I wrote about power consumption, silicon geometry progress and a host of other related topics. At the time the hardware didn't exist for me to make vivid what it was I was getting at. It was, for all intents and purposes, theory, no matter how grounded in reality and how much evidence I had. There were just no two products that existed concurrently that could highlight what it was I was talking about.

Fortunately with the new Maxwell GPUs, I have at my disposal precisely what I need. The importance of this GPU family cannot be understated. It's not performance but power efficiency where the real excitement is to be found. Being able to do more with less is always challenging especially when you're dealing with an already powerful ASIC from the Kepler series of GPUs.

It's a well-known fact in the high performance computing business that cooling is one of the most significant costs for any data center or HPC server. Cooling and power use easily dwarf the price of the actual hardware. Easy enough to understand because the hardware is a fixed cost and perhaps a one-time purchase that continues to pay for itself for years on end. This is not the case with cooling which is ongoing along with power. Thus, if any compute environment can keep the same level of output, but with reduced cost between these two, then it's worthwhile upgrading the system. This is true even if you don't increase compute power.

This is important because Maxwell, much like all the previous GPUs, will find itself in all kinds of environments dealing with diverse computing needs, from pixel pushing in our games to weather simulations, data analysis, and organic material synthesis. To prove that not all is just dependent on process geometry, utilising the same 28nm high performance process from TSMC, we have GPUs that are not only smaller physically and consume significantly less power, but deliver greater performance compared to their predecessors built on the same node. If there ever were to be a tri-factor in GPUs this would be it. It is rare to simultaneously achieve all of those using a node that's been around for over two years.

What that likely means for us the end user is that we will see Maxwell powered GPUs on the most powerful desktops to mobile, single digit TDP products. It's an evolution of GPUs in the right and most meaningful direction. After all, as far as brute power is concerned

we've covered a lot of ground since the invention of the GPU in 1999 (at least, that's what they were at the time). As we head towards two decades of GPUs we've had to adapt them to how we use our computing devices and what they are capable of doing. As such, it's better to call them massively parallel compute cores as they are comparable to what CPUs have become and their history. As I wrote in another issue, what took 65W in 2006 can be achieved today with as little as 10W and sometimes less. The same holds true for Maxwell. What was the bleeding edge GeForce 8 (NV50/G80) in 2007 at 175W (8800 Ultra) is eclipsed by the GTX980 at 165W today by a factor of eight. That means if you reduce the magnitude by which the GM204 is more powerful in single precision computational tasks proportionately or rather in a linear fashion, you'll find that you'd need roughly 20W to match 2007's performance echelon. Which in turn means you can put that kind of power into many more platforms than previously possible. One such device is the Tegra K1 based Shield tablet. The power consumption on the device is even lower than this 20W (for the GPU) figure, yet computational power is higher.

For Ultrabooks (assuming these things ever get off the ground into mass acceptance) but more especially notebooks, Maxwell GPUs can offer the kind of performance on the go that was previously only possible on the desktop. In practical terms it means that a GTX 980M based notebook could render better quality at a higher frame rate in its sub 100W budget than what a 195W GTX 770 could muster just a year ago. And your battery will last longer. If there was ever a time to buy a gaming notebook, this would probably be it. **NAG**

Neo's hair is made of pure adamantium, and he often uses it to cut perfect avocado slices. Unbeknownst to Neo, the great Avocado Empire has been plotting its revenge for centuries...

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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 5960X
R13,299 / www.intel.com

▼

MSI X99S XPOWER AC
R5,899 / www.msi.com

▼

CORSAIR VENGEANCE LPX DDR4 2,800MHZ 16GB KIT
R6,199 / www.corsair.com



AMD

▼

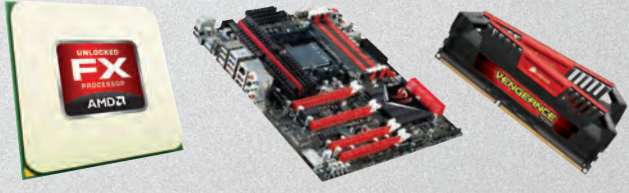
AMD FX 8350
R2,999 / www.amd.com

▼

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

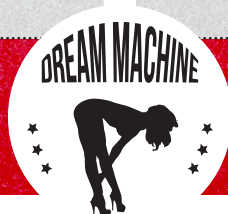
▼

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



INTEL DREAM MACHINE

R70,984



AMD DREAM MACHINE

R57,584

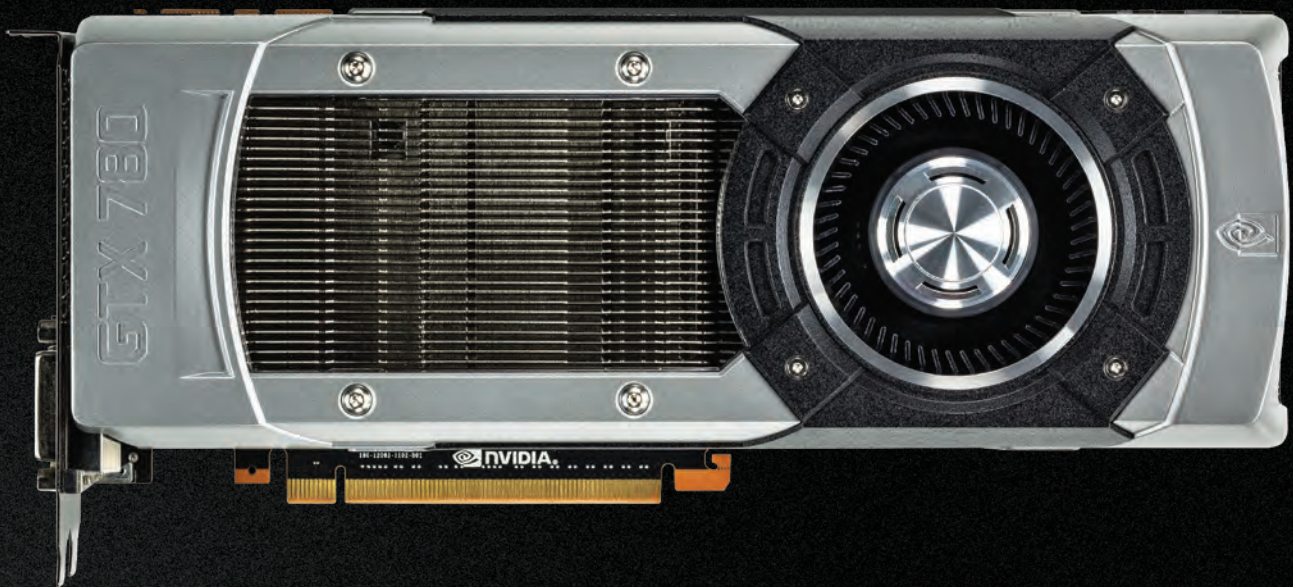
GEFORCE
GTX 980
(MAXWELL)

VERSUS

GEFORCE
GTX 780
(KEPLER)

If you hadn't noticed by now, we're here to keep you informed. Since 2010 NVIDIA has taken to naming their GPUs (internally) after some of the greatest physicists, mathematicians, astronomers and engineers to ever grace the planet. GPUs have been named after bright minds such as Enrico Fermi, Nikola Tesla, Johannes Kepler and James Maxwell. Future GPUs will include Pascal (due in 2016), Volta and many others. If this tells us anything about these GPUs it's that they are designed with far more than pixel processing as their primary purpose. In actuality, NVIDIA is more concerned with creating massively parallel processors that just so happen to be highly proficient in rendering computer imagery, largely because of the incredible parallel nature of raster based graphics rendering.

That aside, what we are looking at in this issue is a quick rundown between the outgoing GeForce Kepler (GK110) based GPU, particularly the NVIDIA GeForce GTX 780, and its commercial successor the GM204-based NVIDIA GeForce GTX 980. For those who care about such things, it's important to note this distinction between the silicon successor and its commercial successor. The predecessor of the new GM204 is actually the GK104 that powered the GeForce GTX 680 and GeForce GTX 770 GPUs. What replaces the GK110 silicon that powered the GeForce GTX 780 is the GM210 that will feature on the GeForce GTX 980 Ti. With that out the way here are some difference between the two GPUs which will hopefully expalin to you why you should be considering an upgrade if you were in the market for one in the first place.



KEPLER

▶ MEMORY

The GeForce 780 was released on the familiar, relatively wide 384-bit bus sporting GDDR5 memory at 6GHz. This instantly gave the 780 a fantastic 288GB/s memory bandwidth which at the time (May 2013) was the most bandwidth any GPU in history ever had. What this kind of bandwidth allowed and still enables is gaming at high resolutions or with high levels of anti-aliasing. Each of these require plenty of bandwidth and that the 780 has this much made it more than capable of levels of performance which were impossible for the GTX 680 and it's far narrower bandwidth. 3GB models were available initially, but at present you can find 6GB versions as well. The 6GB models however have not shown themselves to provide any tangible performance improvement at all.

▶ POWER AND HEAT

Officially, the TDP budget for the GeForce GTX 780 is 250W (identical to that of the GeForce GTX 780Ti and GeForce GTX TITAN and TITAN Black as they all use the same GK110 GPU) which is higher than what the GTX 680 required, but this increased TDP limit allowed for a much bigger die to deliver far better performance. The minimum PSU requirement for the GTX 780 is 600 watts. You may be able to get away with less,

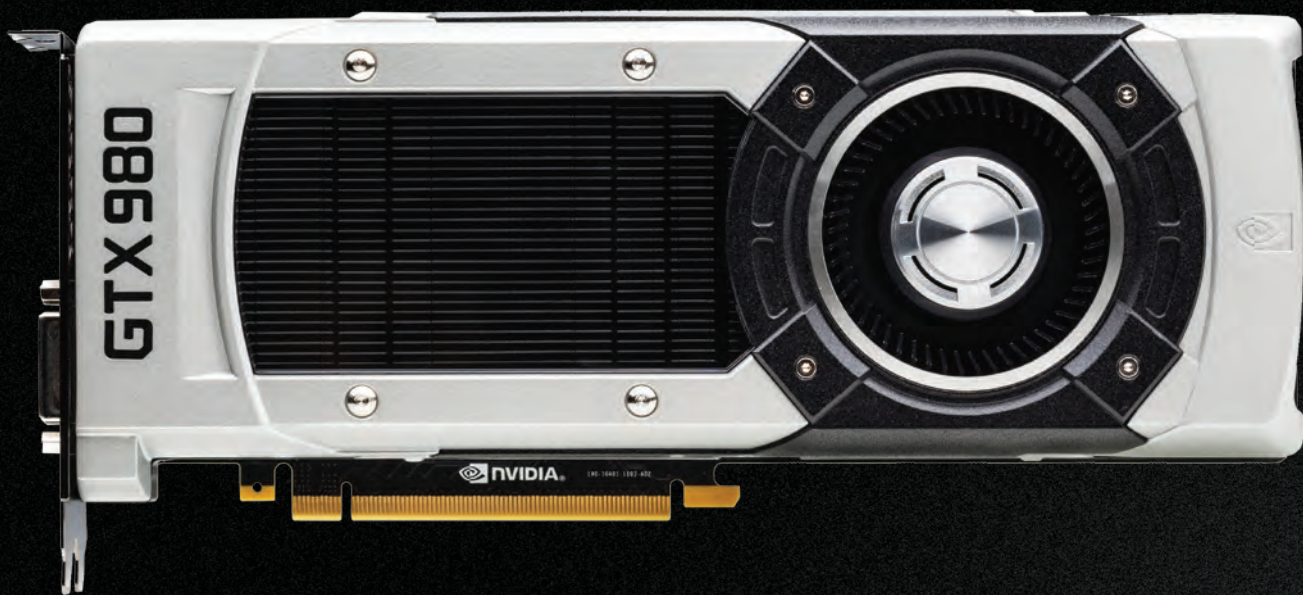
for example using a high quality Platinum certified 550W unit, but for the most part you're going to need a beefy PSU to power this GPU. Critical temperatures for the 780 are listed as 95°C as with all modern day graphics cards, but this is an academic number because the GPU will start to throttle once temperatures reach the 85°C mark. Given that the 780 is built upon a 7.2 billion gate core, reaching that temperature is not as difficult as it sounds. NVIDIA's reference cooler is a blower solution that uses a vapour chamber to facilitate rapid heat extraction from the core. From your wall socket, the 780 isn't always going to use all 250W of its budget, but this is more of a maximum power limit. Most of the time you're going to see the entire system drawing (depending on configuration, game loaded and scene stress on the GPU) anywhere between 300 to 400W of power. Normal gaming temperatures on the 780 typically have the GPU reach 81°C or so which, as high as it sounds, is more than fine for graphics cards and all involved components.

▶ PERFORMANCE

For the 780, performance was much higher than on the GTX 680 by way of having significantly more compute units.

The 680 had 1,536 while the GTX 780 has 2,330. Texture samplers are at 192 and raster outputs units top out at 48. This is a healthy boost in every aspect over the GTX 680 it replaced. Even though these were two different cores physically, the GTX 780 had an identical feature list and API support level as the GTX 680 which also meant crippled double precision performance (1/24th of single precision). This had and continues to have no relevance in gaming, but content creation that relies heavily on this data precision suffers on both cards in comparison to the GTX TITAN and TITAN Black for example, which has double precision performance only being one third of the single precision rate.

The 780 handled and continues to handle all titles today at the highest fidelity settings with comfort, apart from the few select titles which are compute bound for some reason or another. The ideal resolution for the 780 continues to be FHD or QHD (1440p). 4K is not viable unless you disable all anti-aliasing techniques and the texture buffer use stays below the 3GB mark. As a result of sharing the same silicon as the 780Ti and the even higher end models, the 780 delivers roughly the same performance at fill-rate limited tests or scenarios.



MAXWELL

▶ MEMORY

With the 980 NVIDIA has specified 7GHz memory much like it did with the highly impressive GTX 770 and TITAN Black. On a much narrower bus though, this 7GHz only gives 224GB/s or bandwidth which is lower than what's on offer with the GTX 780. NVIDIA has added some colour compressing techniques to the GPU thus the effective memory bandwidth is higher than the 224GB/s figure in many situations where this technique can be employed. In cases where this isn't possible the minimum transaction rate will be as stated above. What the 980 does have over the 780 though is 4GB of memory. Since it uses a 256-bit bus, there's no need to commit strange frame buffer numbers as is the case with 192 and 384-bit busses usually. 4GB gives the 980 a capacitive advantage over the 780.

▶ POWER AND HEAT

This is the area where the greatest gains have been made in comparison to what the 780 can muster. The maximum temperatures are listed at an even higher 98°C and the GPU will throttle at 85°C but the default operating frequency is much higher along with the voltage. Based on the same process geometry node as the GTX 780, the 980 manages to shave close to 2 billion cores off the GK110 die and those savings have partially turned into the 165W TDP of the 980. The cooler that NVIDIA uses is

simplified and thus cheaper as well. It will still allow the GPU to reach 81°C under intense and prolonged gaming sessions but this is also because the cooler does not use vapour chamber technology anymore. So the 980 uses a lesser cooler if only because there just isn't much to cool anymore. You'll be hard pressed to measure socket power draw at anything above 350W when using this GPU even with the minimum PSU requirements stated as 500W. The reason for the higher critical temperature is as a result of the cooler change and not because the GPU is running at a higher temperature. It is worth remembering that the GTX 980 is still manufactured on the same 28nm node as the GTX 780, so power savings are not as a result of a change in the manufacturing process, but come about by way of significant design optimizations and gate count savings as the GM204 cores has roughly 5.2 billion gates. 2 billion less than the GTX 780 but a whole 1.8 billion larger than its true silicon level predecessor the GK104 (GTX 680). Interestingly the 980 has a lower TDP than that of the GTX 680 which is capped at 195W.

▶ PERFORMANCE

This is a simple one for the GTX 980. It's just much faster than the 780 and

certainly a whole generation of performance ahead of the GeForce GTX 680. NVIDIA still caps the double precision performance to 1/24th of the single precision rate, but the single precision rate has gone up by a respectable margin. Computationally, the GTX 980 does far more with each compute unit than the GTX 780 could and as such the 980 only needs a hair over 2,000 compute cores to outdo 2,330 on the GTX 780. For interest's sake, the single precision performance of the GTX 980 eclipses that of the 780 Ti with 2,880 compute cores.

Game performance is still ideal at QHD resolutions as 4K is still too much to do with MSAA or some other heavy anti-aliasing techniques. However if you turn off AA, then most games are playable at their highest settings and they will on many occasions deliver better performance than what you could get on the GTX 780 and even on the 780Ti. The 64 raster outputs have more than off-set the decrease in texture samplers and much narrower memory bandwidth. If you look purely at fixed function specifications, the GTX 980 is not as impressive as the 780, but in practice it is a far more efficient and perhaps even elegant solution if you do not factor in the massive clock speed boost it has over the 780. **NAG**

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Some apps sold separately; vary by market.



AG220



AG240



GAMING AG240 / AG220

All-in-One PC

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gaming.msi.com

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GIGABYTE X99-UD7 WiFi

Website / www.gigabyte.com

ERP / TBA

Supplier / Rectron

SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel X99
MEMORY	8x 280-pin DDR4
CPU SUPPORT	LGA 2011-V3
EXPANSION	4x PCIe 16X, 3x PCIe 1X
SIZE	ATX



As every channel motherboard vendor rushes to promote their gaming orientated motherboards, we've been neglecting the mature and jack of all trades Ultra Durable series of boards. Not because they aren't capable of gaming or forming the underpinnings of a powerful machine, but simply because the gaming family has offered plenty of features along with a visual aesthetic that is usually absent from GIGABYTE's entire range.

With the X99 chipset, GIGABYTE may have produced an even more striking board than what is available within the gaming series. A bold statement to make, but with the numerous boards we've seen to date, the colour scheme has changed several times and in that period there hasn't been particularly appealing colour schemes save for the metallic green accents on the older boards. The more recent offerings are far from unsightly and perhaps the understated colour scheme is helping drive the massive sales boost, but in comparison, the new Ultra Durable boards are as appealing. If not all of them, at least this holds true for the X99-UD7 as it is most certainly the most stylized entry we've seen in the family's long history.

Ultra Durable may not receive as much attention comparatively, but boards such as this one offer close to everything the gaming series have other than the specialized NIC and Creative Labs powered audio scheme. Everything else looks to be present; we would have to confirm that at a later time but as it looks presently, the UD7 is deserving of being GIGABYTE's most high end SKU. Again, the gold, yellow and silver accents are distinct and unmistakable without looking tacky or juvenile. Add the illuminated back plate (a first for GIGABYTE) to it and we can certainly see the UD7 appealing to a much wider audience than it would have otherwise.

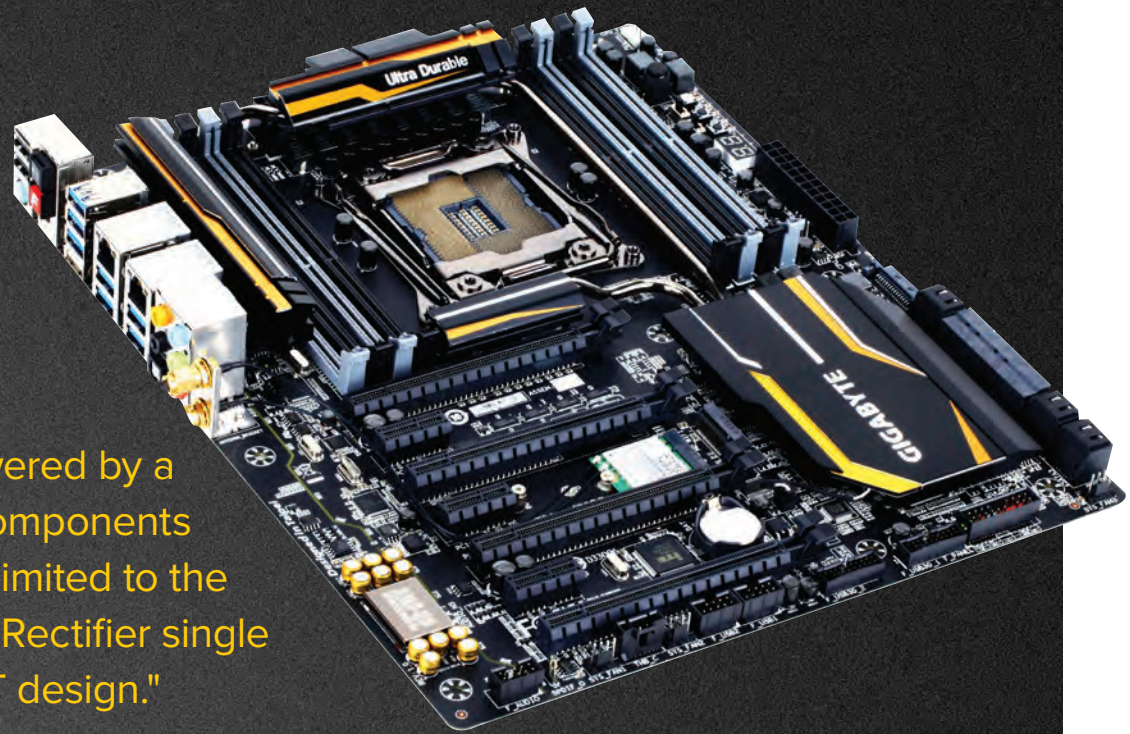
Visuals aside, the UD7 is powered by a list of the finest components including the new International Rectifier single



package MOSFET design. Basically this replaces the more traditional approach of having a single high and two low side MOSFETs on the board with a separate driver IC. Instead, this new package design integrates all of these components into a single SMD that drastically reduces the number of components on the motherboard thus reducing leakage as a result. This has no real effect on performance, but it does improve reliability

which, given how pricey the motherboard is, will be much appreciated. With the high-end ultra-durable boards, buyers tend to keep them much longer than those who buy the G1 or SOC (Super-Overclock) range of products. Thus, such advancements are welcomed and it should not come as a surprise to you that this motherboard is likely to last you much longer than the chipset's shelf life.

Kited with a wide variety of features,



"... the UD7 is powered by a list of the finest components including but not limited to the new International Rectifier single package MOSFET design."

this is always where the UD7 will either justify its pricing or fail miserably. Fortunately this model comes packed with support for every technology and connectivity option that you are likely to need or want. That is you'll not only get M.2 support but with it SATA-Express as well. 4-way SLI/CrossFire, dual gigabit LAN with teaming, Bluetooth 4.0 and 802.11ac capable Wi-Fi (hence the model name) and the familiar beefed up audio scheme which has the ALC1150 codec at its heart. With 10 SATA ports in total, there aren't many RAID configurations you can't have provided you have enough disks for them. Power users who build high-end workstations may want to consider this board for their builds as well. Do be advised however that not all ports will be available at the same time depending on if you've used the SATA-Express connection or not.

For those who like to dabble in overclocking, from the casual to even extreme, GIGABYTE has outfitted the UD7 with a BIOS mode switch, the usual on-board Power, Reset and ClearCMOS buttons and a POST LED. More over there's a Direct to BIOS button which is very convenient as it makes it unnecessary to keep hitting the "Del" key during the POST procedure in an attempt to boot into the UEFI. You'll also find voltage measuring points as well, which is sure to come in handy during

long overclocking sessions. If there's just one button we'd like to see and we keep harping on about, it is the memory safe button, which would make it easier to configure some sets of memory without having to clear the CMOS constantly. Other than that it provides everything you are ever going to need.

As for performance, when we initially received this motherboard, we had a few UEFI/BIOS troubles with Turbo speeds and so forth. The UEFI just wasn't as polished as it should have been, especially in comparison to competing motherboards. This is still the weakest link in all of GIGABYTE's motherboards. The transition to UEFI has not been kind to the vendor and years later, comparing it with the smooth interface that EVGA, ASUS, ASRock and MSI provide, GIGABYTE is lacking. The refinement just isn't there and the lack of information within the UEFI is disappointing. This is especially given that GIGABYTE boards use a 16MB (128Mbit) BIOS, yet for it being double the size of competitor's firmware images, it is the least informative and functional of them all. Electronically, the UD7 is sound and the specification, feature and component list speaks for itself. If there was anything that would detract from this motherboard it would be the high price on our shores in comparison to competing boards. However, even that

we could overlook because GIGABYTE has traditionally used only the finest components on the market and thus the motherboards are always going to cost a little more. The only part that's not living up to the rest of the motherboard is the UEFI/BIOS and it is a pity because this is a highly impressive motherboard that would make for a fantastic platform to build your ultimate workstation or gaming machine on.

Despite this Achilles Heel, the X99 UD7 still comes together in a way to speak volumes about itself and leaves us with a positive impression. It's not GIGABYTE's crowning achievement yet, but it is possibly the most well balanced motherboard they have produced thus far, at least in the series. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

8 *If money is no object and you're looking at buying the very high-end X99 motherboards, you should consider the X99-UD7. It just may be what you're looking for.*

PLUS / Feature-rich / Looks good

MINUS / Nothing special

MSI GeForce GTX 980 Gaming

Website / www.msi.com ERP / R9,999 Supplier / MSI

SPECS

CORE	GM204 (28nm) 1,178MHz (1,329MHz Boost)
PROCESSORS	1,660
RENDER OUTPUTS	64 / 104
MEMORY	4,096MB GDDR5 7GHz (224GB/sec)
API	DirectX 12 / OpenGL 4.5 / OpenCL / PhysX / CUDA



BENCHMARK RESULTS

3DMARK – Fire Strike: **10455**
 Catzilla – 1080p: **13758**
 Hitman: Absolution
 (DX11 ultra detail) 4x AA: **63.6**

MSI's gaming brand has, if anything, gained notoriety amongst enthusiasts for offering some of the best if not the most well-constructed graphics cards on the market. That has not changed with the GTX 980 and in fact MSI has, in our opinion, taken a step forward and produced their most impressive entry to date.

This is no Lightning product like what they've had before, but given that we're unlikely to ever see a GTX 980 Lightning, this is as close as we're going to get to such a product. Even though the GM204 core consumes very little power compared to any current high-end GPU, MSI have taken it upon themselves to outfit their GTX 980 with an impressive 10-phase PWM, which is significantly more than what NVIDIA offers on the reference card. Not that this will make a tremendous difference to most end-users, but if you ever doubted the component and build quality of the Gaming cards, rest assured that they are second to none.

In a very smart move, despite the GTX 980 featuring the new Twin Frozr V cooler, MSI has included a cooling plate for the VRM and memory. This not only makes sure that these areas are adequately cooled, but provide structural rigidity to the card. The way that this plate is designed also allows the more extreme users to mount cooling pots on the card without having to remove the plate and as such you can more easily keep the VRMs cool. We aren't sure if this was the intended use by MSI but it sure does help and we do wish more vendors would follow suit with the use of such cooling plates.

We have to state this again: MSI's graphics cards without fail have provided us with the highest overclocking memory consistently and it's no different with the GTX 980. While all vendors shipping GTX 970 and 980 graphics cards are using Samsung GDDR5, on the MSI GTX 980 we were able to clock an incredible 2.1GHz (that's 8.4GHz QDR) from 1.75GHz rated memory. That also happened to be the memory clock speed of the fastest GTX 980



on the planet at the time cooled with liquid nitrogen. Granted, memory speed is not in any way related to cooling, however, that record-setting graphics card has extensive modifications done to it including an FBVDD modification which allows increasing the GDDR5 voltage, which helps reach a higher frequency. On this GTX 980 we needed no such modification.

If you don't know it by now, the GTX 980 is fast. Clocked significantly higher than the outgoing GTX 780, it not only delivers better performance clock for clock, but does so while consuming less power and allowing for greater frequency tuning. Out the box the MSI GTX 980 Gaming delivers better performance than the reference GTX 780 Ti and it even manages to match or exceed the GTX TITAN Black Edition in some benchmarks. This is not where it's supposed to be competing, but it does manage to hold its own against these two which have yet to receive their equivalent Maxwell based replacement. Where you may suffer with all current Maxwell based graphics cards is in 4K gaming, where the number of texture units and comparatively narrow bus lead to a situation where the fill-rate just isn't enough to push that kind of pixel density. Both the GTX 780 Ti and the Titan Black can somewhat achieve this by having both a higher fill-rate and memory bandwidth, even if their solution is a brute force approach. That should not in any way deter you from the buying a GTX 980 especially the MSI Gaming edition. The situations where the previous generation

GPUs had an advantage were few and even then the difference in performance may be sizeable in percentage but meaningless in reality. 17fps vs. 20fps is academic rather than practical and both situations lead to an unplayable setting. Driver improvements will continue to increase performance and where the silicon isn't the limitation, this card is only going to get faster with each successive release.

Simply put, the MSI GTX 980 is the fastest graphics card we've ever tested here. It has some of the lowest power consumption figures we've seen on any graphics card, let alone a high-end one. It looks great, runs quiet and overclocks incredibly well. The MSI GeForce GTX 980 Gaming is thus our new Dream Machine graphics card of choice. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

9 The first GTX 980 we review also happens to be the most impressive graphics card we've come across thus far. The MSI GTX 980 Gaming deserves to be our Dream Machine GPU as it's just better than the GTX 780 Ti in every way.

PLUS / VRM and memory plate / Component quality / Memory overclocking and general performance

MINUS / Nothing

ASUS Essence One MKII MUSES Edition

▶ Website / www.asus.com/za/

▶ ERP / R14,500 ▶ Supplier / ASUS

SPECS

AUDIO PROCESSOR	C-Media CM6631A High-Definition Sound Processor
OUTPUT SNR RATIO	120 dB
FREQUENCY RESPONSE	10Hz to 48KHz

I know next to nothing about the science of sound or how to successfully amplify it or *do it better*, but I know I've never heard audio sound as lovely as it does when reproduced by the ASUS Essence One. Which is fortunate, because the thing costs R14,500.

First, take heed: this DAC (digital-to-analogue converter) / headphone amplifier is meant only for the most audio-obsessed individuals out there. If you plan to use it to boost the audio from your R1,000 gaming headphones so that you can listen to MP3s Really Loud, you're doing it wrong. The Essence One is for people who only speak FLAC, who've spent close on R10,000 on a set of 600 ohm headphones, and who've just bought mega-expensive tallboy speakers and are looking to get the absolute most out of them.

It's been designed with only the best of the best components in mind. Six MUSES O1 op-amps drive audio delivery, pumping out clean, powerful sound and greatly increasing the volume capacity of any device you've got connected (just be wary of this – you will break something (possibly yourself) if you toy around with the idea of full volume). There's also Direct-Stream Digital support and jitter-free delivery of audio from your PC via asynchronous USB.

Beyond the fact that it delivers fantastic audio, the entire device oozes quality. Sample-rate indicator LEDs adorn the front of the unit, letting you know at a glance the bitrate of whatever audio you're currently playing. There are separate volume dials for overall/headphone volume. Tap the upsampling button and it'll attempt to scrub low-quality audio, greatly improving the sample's fidelity so that even your regular MP3s sound better than you're used to. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes



10

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PLUS / Only the best components / Provides an incredible audio boost

MINUS / Will destroy your everything

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GS550 12cm Fan Power Supply

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APFC Max 600W Power Supply



APFC Max 700W Power Supply

X7 SERIES

X7 1200

1200W Modular Gaming Power Supply



X7 900

900W Modular Gaming Power Supply

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www.tvr.co.za

Corsair Graphite 780T

Website / www.corsair.com

ERP / R2,399

Supplier / Rectron

SPECS	MATERIAL	ABS plastic, steel and polycarbonate windows
	COLOUR	Black and white
	SUPPORTED MOTHERBOARD TYPE	Micro-ATX/ATX/E-ATX/XL-ATX/HTPX
	FRONT PANEL	2x USB3.0, 2x USB 2.0

When we first saw this case about five months ago at COMPUTEX in Taipei, it was easily the most impressive and memorable product Corsair had on display there. We do appreciate its smaller brother the 380T, but nothing is quite as captivating as this full size case, purely because of its visual splendour. In a way it is reminiscent of the original NZXT Phantom even though it may not come across as such on a page.

The paint job and finish on the 780T is immaculate and we can't fault Corsair there. The internal frame is rigid, devoid of any flexing or rattling and sharp edges, and accounts for most of the weight. Sadly the plastic panels are where it is let down. They just feel cheap, bordering on flimsy. You can't tell this by merely looking at them as once again the paint job gives the opposite impression. It's when you open it and discover that it's unusually light and seemingly vulnerable plastics where the illusion comes apart. The latches don't inspire confidence while the hinges are fairly loose. The panel gaps are inconsistent on both sides as well and cannot be locked to avoid intrusion. It's not something we would complain about from a lesser vendor but again, this is Corsair which predominantly sells to the high-end consumer and thus opens itself up to more criticisms than we otherwise would have for a lesser manufacturer.

Being the vendor of immaculate products such as the AX1500i for example doesn't help either, because such products only raise expectations to near impossible levels. With that said, the 780T still manages to impress despite it all. It may not be as big as the 900D but it will support all motherboards from Micro-ATX all the way to XL-ATX. Oddly, inside the case, there is no stand-off guide for that particular size. Rest assured however, such massive boards will fit just fine. Continuing with the ample space inside, the 780T has a generous amount of clearance for cable management. This is further enhanced by the bulge of the side panel. It has the most space out of any case we've ever tested thus far. If you're wondering about radiator support, the 780T has you covered as it can install anything from 120 to 360mm radiators. In fact you may install two 360mm radiators. Corsair



ships the case with two 140mm intake fans at the front (with LED lighting appropriate for the chassis colour) and a single 140mm exhaust fan at the rear. You may hook these up to the built-in 3-mode fan controller along with any other fans you may have in the system. In our test configuration we managed to add an additional three fans for a total of six and you could possibly add more with Y-splitters.

Drive support for 3.5 and 2.5" drives is plentiful. The 2.5" drives receive additional real estate as they can be mounted behind the motherboard out of sight. Great if you're going for that ultra-clean look or if you just want to keep prying eyes away from figuring out just what you have inside. The more traditional 3.5" cages use a toolless design which as you probably suspect, requires that you mount your drives into a plastic caddy before you may use the cage.

For those who still make use of the 5.25" bays, you may be disappointed as Corsair only provides space for two devices on the 780T. They may be toolless but if you have one of the advanced dual bay reservoirs or high-end fan controllers with a large LCD, you'll have no place to put in an optical drive. Should you need both of these devices, then the 780T will not do.

Earlier we mentioned that the 780T uses cheaper than expected plastics with inconsistent panel gaps which one would think allow plenty of noise to leak through the chassis. Surprisingly this isn't the case because the 780T managed to be the quietest case we've tested ever. It could possibly be because of the fan controller or just the combination of hardware we had in the machine. Whatever it was, even with the fan speeds set at maximum rotation, the

machine was much quieter than it was in the previous Obsidian 750D chassis.

Worthy of mentioning as well amongst the many things is that the 780T is one of the few cases with sensible USB port layout. The USB ports are lined up vertically next to each other, but with plenty of room between. Something that many would take for granted until faced with a situation where they need to occupy all four available ports (two of which are USB 3.0) but there's a device with thicker than normal casing thus rendering the adjacent port unusable. The odds of this happening on the 780T are slim at best and this small convenience is just another reason why we are able to forgive the 780T where it falls short. Had it not been for the plastics used, this would definitely be the case we would choose as an alternative to the 900D. Looks are always going to be subjective but the 780T does look incredible in person. For a company that seemed determined to avoid any angles that were not 90 degrees, Corsair has produced quite possibly the best looking chassis on the market in the Graphite 780T.

- Neo Sibeko

9 *The 780T is by far the most visually appealing case that has ever come from Corsair. With better materials it would possibly be their best ever.*

PLUS / Built-in fan controller / Fantastic design
Superb ventilation

MINUS / No hot swappable bays / Plastics feel cheap



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GIGABYTE G1 Gaming GeForce GTX 970

Website / www.gigabyte.com ERP / R6,699 Supplier / Rectron

SPECS

CORE	GM204 (28nm) 1,178MHz (1,329MHz Boost)
PROCESSORS	1,660
RENDER OUTPUTS	64 / 104
MEMORY	4,096MB GDDR5 7GHz (224GB/sec)
API	DirectX 12 / OpenGL 4.5 / OpenCL / PhysX / CUDA



BENCHMARK RESULTS

3DMARK – Fire Strike: **10,455**
 Catzilla – 1080p: **13,758**
 Hitman: Absolution
 (DX11 ultra detail) 4x AA: **63.6**



With the arrival of GeForce Maxwell GPUs, GIGABYTE has taken it upon itself to get a more consistent brand image and thus adopted the G1 Gaming brand as used by the motherboards. This little change in branding should hopefully make it easier to buy matching hardware (motherboard and graphics card) for those who care about such things. At worst it allows the same synergy between the components that MSI and ASUS have between their offerings.

Aesthetically the graphics cards don't change much except for the introduction of a further improved WindForce 3X cooler and a back plate. This plate covers the entire back of the card and while it doesn't necessarily help temperatures, it doesn't hurt them either and does make for an even better, more protected graphics card. At this price, we appreciate anything that'll help protect our investment and as such we have to commend GIGABYTE for going this route even if it's a small change. It is one we appreciate and it certainly helps make the card a little more enticing.

Even though NVIDIA has not issued a reference design GTX 970, the G1 Gaming GTX 970 can be used with NVIDIA's GeForce Experience to customise the lighting on the logo. On "reference" design cards (980 for example) this would be the GeForce GTX logo, but on this card it's the GIGABYTE logo, which may not have different colour options but does allow some custom strobe effects.

All that is good and well, but where GIGABYTE has one up on the competition is in their Flex display technology. Essentially this allows the GPU to output to four displays simultaneously. In total there are six display outputs configured as DVI-D/I, three DisplayPorts (1.2) and a single HDMI 2.0 output. This Flex technology allows you to build a 4K video wall of sorts with a maximum of four displays. However, it is worth keeping in mind that the sync rates for each four monitors will vary, at least for the DisplayPort connected screens as 4K resolutions are only supported at

60Hz on the DVI (dual link) and HDMI 2.0 connected monitors.

For multi-monitor gaming there isn't any other GTX 970 on the market that will give you this kind of flexibility in connected displays. Whether the GTX 970 is capable of UHD gaming or not is another story. Sadly we just don't have the space to go into detail about what makes this GM204 variant GPU that incredible (especially in comparison to the GTX770), but what we can tell you is that this is one very fast graphics card. Especially if you're gaming at QHD resolutions, there's plenty of horsepower here for even the most demanding games around.

With 4GB of memory, there are isolated situations where it delivers even more performance than the significantly more expensive GeForce GTX 780Ti.

As always with GIGABYTE, pre-overclocking their graphics cards is something the company has never been conservative about. With the G1 Gaming, it's no different as the core boost clock is an incredible 1.32GHz; however the real clock as we measured was a scorching 1.4GHz. Even more impressive is that there's room for further tuning as we eventually topped out at 1.5GHz, our highest GPU clock using the standard cooler on any graphics card to date.

We can't be sure what that says about

GIGABYTE's Gauntlet GPU sorting process, but based on the results it seems to be doing the job. In all our testing we couldn't find anything to complain about at all. Where there were some performance issues (4K testing) it was firmly driver related as when we did these reviews, there had been fewer than four drivers released for this GPU in total. As such, by the time you read this, the performance should be even better, further distancing itself from the previous GTX 770 card. Overall, this is an incredible GPU. Prices were high at the time of writing and that's why we didn't score it higher, but even with that, you're not going to easily find a better GeForce GTX 970 than the one on offer here.

- Neo Sibeko



The GIGABYTE GeForce GTX 970 Gaming G1 is an incredible graphics card that more than matches the outgoing GTX 780 Ti.

PLUS / Runs very cool / Very good performance out the box / Flex display

MINUS / Nothing

Delux M555 gaming mouse

› Website / www.crownhyperworld.co.za

› ERP / R159

› Supplier / Crown Hyper World

SPECS	SENSOR	Up to 2,400 DPI
	BUTTONS	7, programmable
	REPORT RATE (USB)	Up to 1,000 reports per second

Unless you happen upon some sort of magical transdimensional mega-sale, I doubt there are many gaming mice out there that can be had for R159. That's the price of the mouse under scrutiny here, and it'll no doubt make the Delux M555 impressively alluring to anyone on a very strict budget – but after spending some time with it I'd recommend that you take the time to save up more cash and buy a gaming mouse from one of the more recognisable brands.

There are a number of problems with the M555, almost all of them centred on the most important aspect of any gaming mouse: comfort. It's an unusually small mouse (although it's curiously heavy despite that), so I don't imagine palm grip will work well for people with bigger hands. It's not great for claw grip either, because the mouse's sharp angles and aggressive contours ensure that claw gripping sees your fingers resting in awkward positions.

Before long, your fingers will begin to cramp and you'll wish you'd put the R159 towards something more carefully designed. The cable is a tad shorter than I'd like, so unless your PC is especially close to your mouse, you may have issues. Other than that, the M555 is a capable gaming mouse. There's no way to customise sensitivity settings (you're only able to switch between 800, 1,600 and 2,400 DPI presets), so the bundled software doesn't have much to offer aside from an interface for programming buttons and macros.

Ultimately, unless my hand is just hugely incompatible with the shape of the M555, I can't imagine many gamers being happy with it. Its price is commendable, and I so wanted to like it – but all it did was make me pine for my own mouse. It might be more suited to entry-level and very young gamers. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes



5 As attractive as that super-low price tag is, the M555 is sadly too uncomfortable to recommend for long-time gamers.

PLUS / Really cheap

MINUS / Uncomfortable design

Turtle Beach Ear Force XO Seven

› Website / www.takealot.com

› ERP / R2,799.95

› Supplier / Apex Interactive

SPECS	DRIVERS	50mm
	CONFIGURATION	Stereo
	INPUT	3.5mm
	COMPATIBILITY	Xbox One, mobile

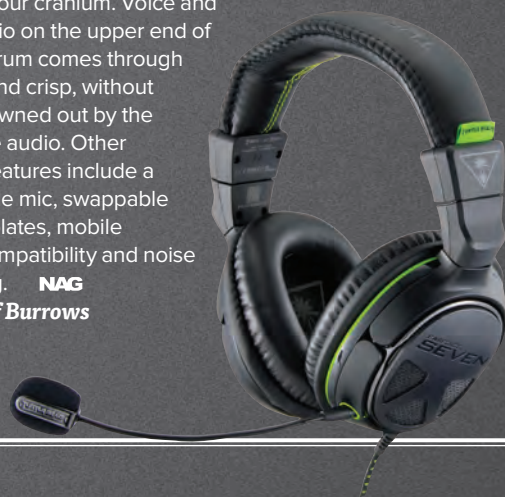


A good set of headphones can go a long way, and often console gamers are left with limited brands that manufacture devices for their chosen platform. Luckily, Turtle Beach is one such manufacturer, and they have a reputation for delivering solid products.

The XO Seven is everything you need from a headset designed for your Xbox One. It attaches to the controller via a dongle (into which you plug the included 3.5mm analogue cable), which means there's no messing about with cables strewn across your living room. Of course, this will drain your controller's batteries somewhat, but the effect is negligible enough to not make a big deal about it. The short cable length is also rather perfectly designed to discourage use with a PC, but it's still certainly possible to do so.

One thing that a headset needs above all else is a high level of comfort, and here the XO Seven shines. The soft-touch material on the cups and headband wrap around memory foam that offers enough support without putting too much pressure on your head, and everything flows and rotates to offer a snug fit to ensure as much ambient noise is removed as possible. On top of that, there's plenty of volume to go around and the levels across the range are finely balanced. The sound quality is excellent, with sufficiently bassy explosions that shake through your cranium. Voice and other audio on the upper end of the spectrum comes through as clear and crisp, without being drowned out by the rest of the audio. Other notable features include a detachable mic, swappable speaker plates, mobile device compatibility and noise cancelling. **NAG**

- Geoff Burrows



9 Combining extreme comfort with excellent performance, the XO Seven is one of the finest console headsets we've tested, and will suit you perfectly well if your needs follow exactly what's on offer.

PLUS / Great performance / Very comfortable / Quick and easy to set up

MINUS / No other input options

GAMDIAS Hermes Keyboard

Website / www.gamdias.com ERP / R1,399 Supplier / GAMDIAS



If there's anything that GAMDIAS has managed to impress upon us, is that they genuinely care about how their products are perceived, how they function and certainly build quality. Be it they produce near perfect products like the Zeus or highly inspired keyboards like the Hermes that we have here. GAMDIAS has set the bar very high and continues to live up to it with the Hermes. Once again the presentation was where it began, right through to the quality of the materials. What makes this keyboard different, over and above the host of programmable options is that it takes your standard Cherry MX Blue switches and wraps them in a dampener which GAMDIAS claims allows for up to 20% faster response time. Whatever that may mean remains to be seen. What is obvious though is that typing is much improved over competing keyboards that use the same switches. This is achieved via a rubber insert which eliminates some of the clicking associated with mechanical keys. You can still tell it's a mechanical keyboard, but instead of the loud clicking noise which is usually very disturbing to those around, you get a more subdued key press that is bearable. It doesn't impact the feel of the keys negatively at all.

The Hermes does just about everything right that a modern gaming keyboard should and even goes the extra mile in just how flexible it is in its programming elements.

The magnetic palm rest that also acts as a keyboard cover is a nice touch as well. It's not a major feature but it just goes to show how much thought went into designing this keyboard.

With everything that the Hermes does right however, not everything is as it should be. Function keys work well on a notebook or any other device where real estate is an issue. On a desktop keyboard however this makes less sense. In fact why include additional macro keys whose value is debatable according to the game and player, only to have the basic multimedia functions share keys? On the Hermes, the back, forward, play/pause, volume up and down keys are all secondary functions of the F keys. There's no need for this as they could have been given their dedicated location and keys anywhere else on the keyboard. For profile switching, adjusting backlight intensity etc. this is more than acceptable.

Another missed opportunity is the lack of an additional USB port to complement the one already there which you'll most likely use for connecting your mouse. Since the keyboard already makes use of two cables, why not have a two or even three port USB hub being fed by the additional cabling?

Other than this and the gaudy software, the Hermes is one fine keyboard. Typing on this is nothing short of pleasurable and the muted clicking and key press feels

wonderful. It's a gaming keyboard through and through and there's no denying that, but it goes about this in a very elegant way, just like the Zeus we reviewed a month ago. In a market that's literally saturated with gaming keyboards and vendors offering nothing but variations of uninspired products, GAMDIAS once again takes a different approach and delivers a product that while not perfect, is a standout example of just what can be achieved with some ingenuity and somewhat sensible design. We would not hesitate to recommend this one over many competing products especially given that the only real alternatives don't offer as much, suffer the same if not worse pitfalls and by and large cost much more. As such the GAMDIAS Hermes scores positively and comes recommended. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

8 A highly impressive keyboard that may not execute perfectly, but comes close enough to make it a more than worthwhile purchase.

PLUS / Programmability / Keys feel fantastic Build quality

MINUS / Unnecessary function key use / Single USB 2.0 port / Only available in a single colour



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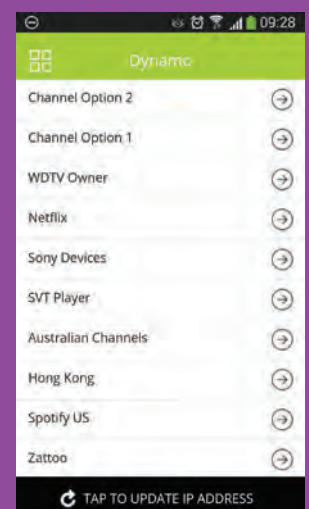
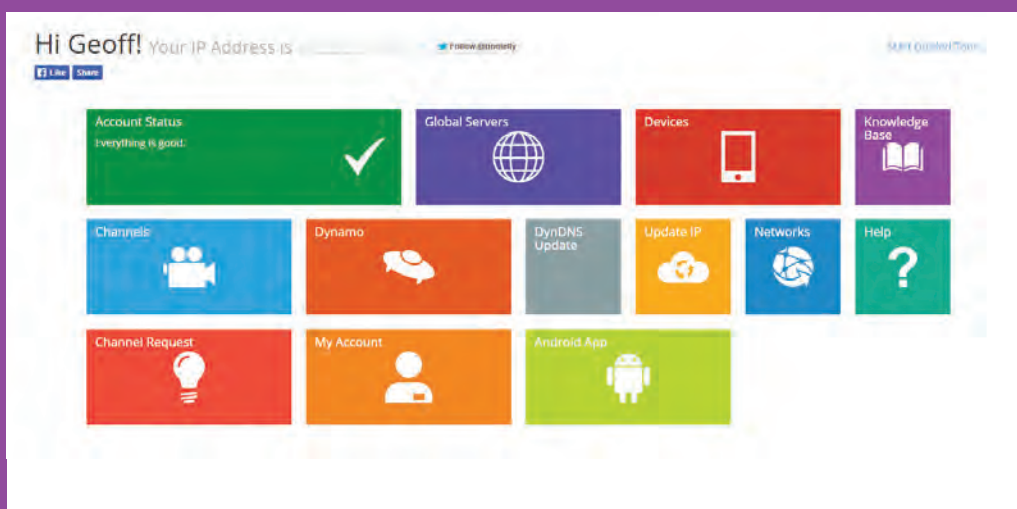
help desk
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info@imaginet.co.za
7 days a week

THE LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE

UnoTelly

Website / www.unotelly.com RRP / \$4.99 per month

Anyone who's hung around on the Internet long enough to know that there's more to life than LOLcats and *Farmville* is probably familiar with the concept of "geo-blocking", or has at least encountered it before. It's that annoying message that pops up with the words "Sorry, this content isn't available in your country". The accepted response to this is to stamp your feet on the floor, scream WHHHHYYYY, and raise a demanding fist to the heavens. Once you've cooled off, it's time to find a way around the problem of living in a country deemed unfit to receive the content you're after. UnoTelly lets you do exactly that.



House of Cards

★★★★★ 2013 TV-MA 1 Season HD 5.1

Sharks gliding ominously beneath the surface of the water? They're a lot less menacing than this Congressman.



This winner of three Emmys, including Outstanding Directing for David Fincher, stars Kevin Spacey and Robin Wright.



Because you watched Orange Is the New Black



Because you watched Red Lights



WHAT IT DOES

UnoTelly's primary service is UnoDNS. A DNS (Domain Name Server) is a list of website URLs and their corresponding IPs, and makes it easier for non-computers like us to navigate the Internet using words instead of numbers. When you connect to a DNS to visit, say, Netflix.com, the Netflix server checks which country you live in to make sure it's one which has been approved for receiving service. In a nutshell, UnoDNS lies to Netflix or whichever media-streaming service you're connecting to, telling it "hey guy, don't worry, this user is *totally* from the US... promise." And easy as that, you have access to all of that wonderful content.

CHANNEL SURFING

The main reason to use UnoTelly is to access services to stream media that is otherwise not accessible from South Africa. The current tally of available channels that are supported by UnoTelly is 295; here's a handful of them:

- Netflix
- Hulu
- BBC iPlayer
- BBC Sports
- Amazon Instant Video
- Adult Swim

THE WHERE

All modern gaming consoles can stream media through online services, and anything that can do so can benefit from UnoTelly's service. Other devices like Apple TV, Samsung Smart TV, Sony Blu-ray players and those neat little Android media players can also stream media, so your options are many. If you have a few devices on your home network, it's recommended that you configure your DNS settings in your router, so anything that connects through it will use UnoDNS.

THE HOW

The setup process for UnoDNS is surprisingly easy: it requires a quick sign-up and the verification of a

few details. UnoTelly has two local DNS servers (one in Jo'burg and another in Cape Town) to ensure that traffic that's meant to be local (like rofl-stomping noobs in *Battlefield*, or browsing *NAG Online*) stays local. As a DNS service, UnoDNS requires that you tell your PC where it needs to go to fetch the corresponding IP address when it tries to connect to a website or service online. This can be done per device or on your router itself. Since UnoDNS is a paid-for service, you'll have to register your device with them to permit that IP address through their system, but most of us have dynamic IPs (they change every day or so), which can complicate matters.

The easiest way around this issue for those of us who are on their PCs regularly is to download and install a small, simple application that runs in the background. This will poke UnoTelly every time your IP changes, letting it know that it should let all devices with the current address through your system. Alternatively, you can validate manually through the UnoTelly website, or with a handy Android app. Through any of these systems you can also change your spoofed location per service: for example you can tell BBC iPlayer that you live in the UK while telling Hulu that you're from the US. Finally, there's the DynDNS route for the more technically-minded.

COSTS AND DATA USAGE

The standard UnoTelly service costs just under \$5 (R56) a month; Netflix's HD offering is \$9 (R100) per month. Both services have free trials available so there's no excuse not to try them yourself. In our testing, we found that Netflix HD streams use about 1GB per hour, and we strongly recommend a minimum line speed of 4Mbps.

LEGAL WRANGLING

It's worth being up-front about this: using UnoTelly is perfectly legal, but using services outside of the regions in which they are licensed is copyright infringement. Just because you're paying for these services doesn't mean that you're entitled to them.

SUMMARY

PROS

- Cost effective
- Wide range of services supported

CONS

- Legal concerns
- High-end Internet required

ALTERNATIVES

- Satellite TV
- DVD rentals
- Bumping box-sets from your friends

MOSH *pit*

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

► **ULTI MATE ANDROID TABLET**

- **Supplier** / Drive Control Corporation
- **Website** / www.drivecon.net
- **RRP** / R2,825

In the world of 7" tablets there is no shortage of choice, and this affordable mid-range offering from DCC is sure to shake up the established pack. Boasting impressive specs like 2GB of RAM, a 1920x1200 resolution IPS display, and octa-core 1.7GHz CPU, as

well as dual SIM slots and 3G, this tablet is no shrimp when it comes to performance. Perhaps best of all, it runs a bog standard version of Android 4.4, ensuring that it's free from bloatware. Perfect for the technically minded and budget-conscious alike.



► **GIOTECK DC-1 DUALSHOCK 4 CHARGING DOCK**

- **Supplier** / Apex Interactive
- **Website** / www.apexinteractive.co.za
- **RRP** / R349.95

Gioteck's range of current-gen console accessories expands with the DC-1, a charging dock for your PlayStation's DualShock 4 controllers. The dock features a simple but effective cradle design and connects your controllers to your PlayStation via the supplied USB cable. Two controllers can be stored or charged simultaneously via the DC-1 in between gaming sessions, ensuring that you're never out of juice when the action starts.

▶ RAZER DEATHSTALKER EXPERT GAMING KEYBOARD

- ▶ Supplier / Musica
- ▶ Website / www.musica.co.za
- ▶ RRP / R1,299

Razer's Deathstalker Expert is a frills-free gaming keyboard. Unlike the Deathstalker Ultimate, there's no flashy LCD screen – but it's nevertheless outstanding at what it does. The 2mm chiclet keys are great for both typing and gaming, and there's ten-key rollover (which, not at all coincidentally, is the same number of fingers you have) when in gaming mode so that the Deathstalker registers any and all possible key presses without missing a beat. It's powered by Razer's robust Synapse 2.0 software, and there's appropriately Razer-ish green backlighting for all the keys. All the keys are programmable and macros can be recorded on the fly. There's a large fixed wrist rest, and it's a mighty comfortable keyboard even during long gaming binges. Also, there's 1,000Hz Ultrapolling, if that means anything to you.



▶ DELUX DLS-X503 2.1 SPEAKERS

- ▶ Supplier / Crown Hyper World
- ▶ Website / crownhyperworld.co.za
- ▶ RRP / R225



Like all of Delux's products, this 2.1 speaker set is built for anyone on a really tight budget. As such, you shouldn't expect mind-blowing audio – but they'll do in a pinch. The set consists of an 11-watt, 4-inch subwoofer complemented by a pair of 2-watt, 2-inch satellites. They're rated with a frequency response of 25Hz to 18KHz, and signal-to-noise ratio of 70dB. Included in the box is a small, wired control unit with volume controls, 3.5mm audio input (so you can connect mobile devices and the like) and a headphone jack.

KOTOBUKIYA FREDDY KRUEGER HORROR BISHOUJO STATUE

- Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- RRP / R1,100

In your dreams is where this lovely lass likes to play; it's a balmy but calm night, and all is quite in the house – except you (and that pesky mouse). You're having a brutal nightmare about being sad and poor, which will come true if you buy this statue. There's some nice detailing (material mesh) and plenty of skin if you're into that kind of thing. But this statue is unable to withstand even the slightest bump to your display cabinet – it's hard to get her to stand properly on the supplied magnetic base as it is, thereby hurting the purpose of owning a statue like this. It's also costs a fair bit for what is a relatively small and somewhat unknown character statue (around 22cm) – cute but too expensive.



KOTOBUKIYA STAR WARS: R2-D2 & C-3PO ARTFX+ STATUE TWO-PACK

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

These are 1/10 scale model pre-painted versions of the droids you're looking for. At around 17cm the excellently detailed C-3PO looks as shiny as you'd expect and very metallic; he ships with an alternate hand pose and a small (and easy to lose so be careful) comlink. R2-D2 ships with a third "foot" and his struts can be changed to suit his stance. Both come with separate bases that

feature the magic of magnets, the only thing missing is a little drawer or something in the bases to store the extra bits. Although expensive, it is for two characters and it is *Star Wars* after all, so pay up and in like 180 years they'll be super valuable. These two are just perfect: the right size and quality, and they look great – it's going to be difficult to send them back. Actually, I think we might have lost them, probably.

▶ MARVEL MUNNYWORLD POWER PACK

- ▶ Supplier / Wicked Warrior
- ▶ Website / www.wickedwarrior.co.za
- ▶ RRP / R699.99

Remember when a stick used to be a gun or sword and a dustbin lid used to be a shield? Gone are the days of playground improvised toys but here are the days of DIY toys. In the box you get four blank 11cm canvases in the shape of super heroes (Spider-Man, Wolverine, Iron Man and Venom), as well as accessories and sticker packs to decorate them. You can of course also draw on them or paint them or even stick other things onto them. Included is a second set of the exact same characters and gear but just smaller (6.5cm). This is really a great idea in a box but you're probably going to want to try one of them out first before buying the whole set for little Johnny. It just seems like a whole lot of box for what you get but the pricing feels right and the stuff is well made.



▶ PLAY ARTS RYU SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV ARCADE EDITION

- ▶ Supplier / Heroes of Games and Comics
- ▶ Website / www.heroesofgc.com
- ▶ RRP / R850

It's the kind of "heavy for its size" that feels like you've spent your money well – a good start for this Ryu action figure. Over 26 different points can be twisted, turned and bent to pose Ryu. Resultant blast of spirit energy from Ryu's Hadouken special move is represented by a blue plastic prop and a clear base and stand – rather clever. To back up the prop Ryu can be posed so it looks like he's just unleashed death upon his enemies (down, quarter circle towards the opponent and punch if you want to get technical). This solidly made Ryu stands around 24cm tall, is well detailed and features interchangeable hands and two different faces – one shouting and one looking stern.

GG

by Tarryn van der Byl

Back to the future

You know that tranquil moment that exists between a sudden inhale and the powerful sneeze that follows? Tarryn uses those moments to slip between cracks in the space-time continuum and rearrange all your furniture.



I know there's some sort of important rule about asking a lady her age – or, more properly, not asking – but I suppose telling is another thing altogether¹. Not that I'm telling. The point is, I'm approximately a million years old by any teenager's reckoning and old enough to start sentences with imperious exhortations to "my day", followed up by an anecdote that has no relevance to the discussion because I've forgotten what I was talking about between now and then. Like this one:

In my day, we didn't have gaming expos. This one time, my parents dropped off me and my sisters with friends of theirs for the evening while they went out somewhere, and I projectile vomited the whole way down the passage floor, and the walls, and my fuzzy-wuzzy brown pyjammies with the monkey on the top an hour or so later.

When I was a kid, gaming was a much more... conspiratorial hobby than it is now. Not because there was any real stigma against it – not at my school, anyway – but rather because being a gamer in the 1980s and '90s meant being part of a very exclusive club, albeit one that substituted secret

handshakes behind the bicycle shed with solemn exchanges of pirated floppy disks and grubby photocopies of copy protection documents instead². Most of my friends didn't play games. Most people didn't even own a computer. The PC my dad brought home sometime in 1986 – an IBM XT 286 with a 6MHz CPU, 640 KB RAM, and a COLOUR MONITOR, OMG, IT'S LIKE *STAR TREK* – cost him probably more than our house.

"I want our girls to learn how to use a computer," he told my mom, presumably dodging a barrage of frying pans. "Because one day, everybody will be using computers."

And so, standing on the balcony outside the press lounge at rAge this weekend, looking out over thousands of people cramming the expo stands, was both a kind of surreal experience and also entirely inevitable. Except maybe the part where it's actually my job, which even almost nine years later is still a bit amazing. Although, the first time I can remember being asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, I told my teacher I was going to be an ice-cream, so I guess *nobody* expected that. **NAG**

¹ Also, I'm not quite convinced "lady" is an appropriate word to describe me unless it's in the contexts of "crazy" and "cats".

² Except Gavin, who for some reason refused to share around his coveted copy of *Pool of Radiance*. Gavin was an asshole, and when I finally managed to play *Pool of Radiance* by inviting him over with it, the game was totally rubbish.

EXTRA LIFE

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



The Graphite Series, Evolved.

Graphite Series computer cases meet at the intersection of performance engineering and forward design: eye-catching shapes, materials that stimulate the senses, and state-of-the-art usability.



The mobile Mini-ITX case that's built for speed.

The Graphite Series 380T packs a powerful punch in a portable Mini-ITX PC case. A built-in carrying handle makes transport a breeze. It's easy to build the road-ready computer of your dreams within a spacious, easy to access interior with room for an extra-long graphics card. You can keep things cool with mounts for up to five fans and a convenient front panel three-speed fan controller.

Premium looks, premium space, premium cooling.

The stunning Graphite Series 780T Full-Tower PC case can satisfy the most hardcore gamer or overclocker with ample room for nine drives and nearly a dozen large cooling fans. Into water cooling? You'll appreciate the generous space for dual 360mm radiators. And, you'll get everything done faster: the 780T offers easy maintenance shortcuts like tool-free removal of side panels, hard drives, and graphics cards. A three-speed fan control button and generous options for peripheral connections make the front-panel a true time saver.

Alienware recommends Windows.

ALIENWARE
GAME VICTORIOUS™



UNCOMPROMISING PERFORMANCE.

(Adrenaline not included.)



ALIENWARE X51

R18,990 Each
Incl. VAT

- 4th Gen Intel® Core™ i7-4770 Processor (8MB Cache, up to 3.9GHz with Turbo Boost Technology)
- Windows 8 Pro (64BIT)
- 8GB (1600MHz) Dual Channel Memory
- 1TB (64MB Cache) 7200RPM SATA HDD
- NVIDIA GeForce GTX 660 with 1.5GB GDDR5 Graphics
- Internal High-Definition 7.1 Performance Audio
- Alienware Multimedia Keyboard
- Alienware Optical Mouse
- 3 Year On-site Hardware Support
- Display Not Included



ALIENWARE 14

R25,999 Each
Incl. VAT

- 4th Gen Intel® Core™ i7-4700MQ Processor (6MB Cache, up to 3.4GHz with Turbo Boost Technology)
- Windows 8 Pro (64BIT)
- 14.0" WLED FHD (1920 x 1080) Anti-Glare Display
- 16GB (1600MHz) Dual Channel DDR3L Memory
- 750GB (7,200RPM) SATA HDD + 64GB mSATA SSD
- NVIDIA GeForce GTX 765M with 2GB GDDR5 Graphics
- 5G WiFi Broadcom 4352 802.11n/ac & Bluetooth
- Full HD Camera
- Dual Layer Blu-ray Reader
- 3 Year On-site Hardware Support



ALIENWARE 17

R28,999 Each
Incl. VAT

- 4th Gen Intel® Core™ i7-4700MQ Processor (6MB Cache, up to 3.4GHz w/ Turbo Boost Technology)
- Windows 8 Pro (64BIT)
- 17.3" WLED HD+ (1600 x 900) Anti-Glare Display
- 8GB (1600MHz) Dual Channel DDR3L Memory
- TTB (5400RPM) SATA HDD + 80GB mSATA SSD
- NVIDIA GeForce GTX 860M with 2GB GDDR5 Graphics
- 5G WiFi Broadcom 4352 802.11n/ac & Bluetooth
- Full HD Camera
- Slot-Loading 8x SuperMulti Drive (DVDR/RW)
- 3 Year On-site Hardware Support

6338051/ANWS/14G



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4th gen
Intel® Core™
i7 processor.

