JANUARY **2015**

NAG

PC / PLAYSTATION / XBOX / NINTENDO / HARDWARE / LIFESTYLE

Inside!
Double-sided
poster/calendar

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INCLUDING

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YOU CAN RUN...
WE SHED SOME LIGHT ON TECHLAND'S NEW ZOMBIE BASHER

GAMING ON THE MOVE
What you need to know about mobile gaming

EVGA GTX 980 CLASSIFIED REVIEWED
The fastest graphics card in the world

15001

9 771028 053002

If your cover DVD is missing then tell someone who cares. And it's not that we don't care, but this is just a bit of text on a magazine cover, so technically we can't do anything about it. I'm sure a store assistant can help, though.

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From the creators of *Dead Island* comes a new breed of zombie-culling FPS. We braved our fear of the dark to bring back a full report on *Dying Light*'s delightfully deadly ambitions.

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Back to reality

Hi, welcome. Please come in and take a seat. Let's chat about the magazine you're holding in your hands.

By now I'm sure you've noticed that this issue of *NAG* is saddle-stitched, or "stapled" as normal people call it. We used to be perfect-bound, which gave us a nice little spine to hold together the magazine (and write silly messages on, more importantly). This change is based on a few things, but ultimately it comes down to the fact that perfect-binding an 84-page magazine (like this month's issue) was causing issues for our printing company due to how thin the magazine is at this page count.

So we made the call to change to saddle-stitching for the foreseeable future. Sure, we could go back to perfect-binding for the times when our magazine is more than 84 pages, but we're trying our best to deliver a consistent experience to you, our readers, and so from now on that experience will be held together with staples.

Funny thing: we started like this. The earliest copies of *NAG*, long before I joined the team, were 84 pages and saddle-stitched. I feel like this could be a metaphor for where the industry is these days: trying to find its feet as the world's perception of gaming and entertainment makes massive shifts on an almost daily basis.

Now that the sob-story is out of the way, there's one very positive effect that this move has: we can finally give you a pull-out poster (be gentle with the staples) in every issue. If you turn to the centre-fold you'll find Poster #1, which features everyone's favourite Necromorph-bashing space engineer Isaac Clarke looking as badass as he possibly could. We've got a ton of artwork from old games at the office, so this is a great opportunity for us to share some of that with you. Going forward, there'll be a poster in every issue of *NAG*, featuring whatever art we deem cool for the month, be it old or current.

This month we've also included a calendar on the back of the poster, which we encourage you to put up on your wall and cross off the days leading up to rAge this year (the date of which is still pending).

And let's not neglect some of the other awesome content in this month's issue of *NAG*: There's a huge *Dying Light* feature; big shout-out to Paul Milewski at Techland for all of his assistance in conscripting interview participants and gathering artwork for this upcoming title. We also have a feature on mobile gaming written by Miktar, who pointed out to me that our coverage of this side of gaming has been a bit lacking of late (aside from a review every now and then). Let me know what you think about this sort of stuff: it's good to get feedback from the readers when we run articles like this.

And of course there are all the fantastic reviews of the latest games and hardware. *Far Cry 4* currently stands out as the big hitter among the review team, but *Dragon Age: Inquisition* is certainly a must-play if you enjoy classic RPGs.

That's it from me. I hope you have a great 2015, and here's to a year filled with more games, more excitement, and more fun times than ever before!

Stay happy! **NAG**

-GeometriX

> "The earliest copies of *NAG*, long before I joined the team, were 84 pages and saddle-stitched."

Inbox letters@nag.co.za

Letter of the Month January 2015

From: Dillon Birns
Subject: Gaming Police

For the past year and a half, I've somewhat disregarded my studies and been engrossed in my favourite pass-time of Dota. There's nothing like playing with 4 mates until the sun comes up, crushing noobs and getting the critically-acclaimed title of 'God-like!' that brings a smile to my face.

However, recently my smile has turned into rage. Not because I'm "mad cause bad", but because of this newish breed of steam-cyber-stealers who hack into people's accounts, emptying them of their hard-earned items. I was recently the victim of one of these 'attacks'. Needless to say, I almost flipped a table. Not only have I lost all my items, but with Dota's new item drop system, I knew I would never be able to get them all back... I'm just glad I'm not one of those people who spends R1000s on new chests and sets.

I reported this thief (I actually found the **** and looked in his inventory) as well as alerting my fellow gamers on one of the group chats for South Africa.

Will I get my items back? I doubt it. Will Steam actually take action? I doubt it

With gaming becoming bigger and bigger each year, why hasn't anyone started an online anti-theft programme for Steam/Xbox Live/etc? I would rather fork out R1000 on that, than on buying my items again, and again, and again... It's either that, or the gaming community needs to come together for one huge witch-hunt and pop some kneecaps.

I would never have thought you were "mad cause bad". Is that a thing that young people say these days? I'm so out of touch. I wonder if that's why people have children...

So, you got screwed by some loser on the Internet. That's horrible news. I had a similar thing happen to me once (my Xbox LIVE account was hacked) and I was impressed by how quickly it was handled by both Microsoft and my bank, Nedbank. Of course losing in-game items is far more difficult to track than having money disappear from your bank account, and I think that makes this sort of theft extremely dangerous.

You should push Valve to take action, though. Seriously, nag them every day until you get a response – don't let them do nothing when they're the only people with the power to react.

Right, so let's look at the possibilities: 1) Steam deals with it, you get your stuff back and the perpetrator is banned from Steam. Great. First prize. 2) You form a witch hunt and go pop some kneecaps. Eventually the thief is located but things get out of hand when someone brings along a gun. Everyone goes to jail. Last prize. 3) You take the opportunity to tighten up your own security, pay extra special attention to phishing scams, and warn your friends (and now the readers of NAG) about threats like this. Second prize.

Since option 1 could still happen, I wouldn't lose faith just yet. For now though, assume that option 3 is a safe fall-back and start looking to the future. And, hey, you've already won two free games from us just for writing about this, so things are already starting to look up! Ed.

From: T-Man
Subject: None specified
Many gamers today think that the single-player portion of games are useless and that everything lies at multiplayer... But i beg to differ,okay so i don't have a high speed internet connection,but i have played online many times before and as fun and amazingly interactive as it is... There is quite nothing that can match a good written story line or a believable world where you can get yourself lost in for hours,getting emotionally attached to the characters,losing your breath with those amazing moments that leaves your jaws dropping to the floor... I mean look at The Last Of Us... That was the best game I've ever played,and i didn't even bother to touch its multiplayer portion... Although online gaming is fun and all,for me single-player is where its at! Btw,Great Magazine Guys,Keep It Up :)

*The Last of Us **is a great example of a single-player campaign done right! Multiplayer isn't for everyone; there's a certain ego and competitiveness that one has to have to really enjoy it for what it is, and if you don't have that streak in you, then that's probably a good thing! Ed.***

From: Thayin Govender
Subject: Is blaming lag now a legitimate and acceptable reason?
I recently picked up a copy of Advanced Warfare for Xbox One. I'm not normally an FPS gamer, so I didn't except to do well at all. After the mammoth install, I started playing the multiplayer, and was surprised because I had a decent K/D ratio. This continued for the rest of the evening. I also noticed that my ping was 2 bars. The next day, I played again,but was absolutely woeful and my K/D was too low to mention. But, one thing that stuck out was the 1 bar ping for the entire time.
Obviously, people who are good at FPS will probably not find this as such a big problem, but for new players like myself, does the fast pace of a game like AW make it almost impossible to succeed whilst experiencing lag? Has it become an acceptable problem to blame if you are not playing as well as usual?

*As someone who's been struggling with **Advanced Warfare's** online service (on PC, that is) since its release, I can't help but feel some compassion for those who complain about lag. But some people just make up excuses when*

ON THE FORUMS

Join your fellow gentle gamers at the NAG Forums. For at the NAG Forums we all are kind, well-meaning, patient with newcomers, and full of love. We're also a bunch of condescending know-it-alls. It's that special combination that makes it a truly special place. Join us. **www.nag.co.za/forums**

QUESTION / What game surprised you the most? Either in a good way or a bad way.

Luftrausers. I hadn't even heard of it. Next thing I know it's 2:00AM and I'm alone on the couch. Again.
- nukehead

Dota 2. I had played the original Dota and hated it, but once I got hooked on Dota 2 my fate was sealed. Have over 4000 hours in it now.
- Acinixys

Vanquish. The crappiest game I have ever played in my life! :(
- Infamous_Killer

I am continually surprised that people care about Minecraft. And crafting mechanics in general.
- Cleric

they're having a bad day and are clearly outplayed, and lag is an easy target for blame because it's so inconsistent and can sometimes be individual rather than server-wide.
But if someone is playing like a schmo, then that's their problem. Don't give in to their whining and just enjoy your newfound kickassery. Congratulations on being good at first-person shooters, now get back in there and hunt down some campers! Ed.

From: Phillip Barnard
Subject: Balance
I want to start off by saying that you guys have a great magazine! I'm pretty bummed that I missed the November issue ;-;. Anyways, gaming is love, gaming is life. Sometimes, however, that life will start eating you if you give it too much attention. Gaming is supposed to be fun, but without balance it can and will become an unhealthy obsession. This obsession deprives you of the fun you're supposed to be having killing dragons/ pwning n00bs/ or mucking about in whatever game you're playing. I know this because it has happened to me on several occasions. My family one

day decided to just drag me along with them for a week to some holiday resort. Of course I was mortified because all I wanted to do was collect the next collectible and attempt to slay the stronger dragons. In the end though, I ended up enjoying the fresh air. It did wonders for my gaming as well, I picked up the controller with a new found enthusiasm and I haven't had this much fun since I actually got the game. My point is, everyone needs a little break, even from all dat fun! And who knows, maybe you will even enjoy that time apart from your Precious.

*In our interview with **Dying Light's** producer in this issue, he touches on an idea in horror games where it's important to give the player enough breathing room to feel safe, and then throw a pack of screaming zombies at them to break that feeling. It's only by doing the one that the other has the weight that it does. I think the same thing applies to gaming.*
I had a family trip like yours once, except it was more about my dad wanting to go to a game reserve to look at stupid boring birds instead of wicked-cool animals. As it turned out, it was a hot day and most of the

This month's prize courtesy of Prima Interactive is *Halo Masterchief Collection on Xbox One,* valued at R699

Tbone Mapukata, "and here's a little Panda Samurai for everybody XD?!"

animals were hiding anyway, so at least the birds were something to look at. And then, while (I thought excessively) looking at some sort of egret that was perched on a rock, we discovered that the rock was in fact a rhino. Streams of cars drove past before then, each driver complaining about the lack of good animal sightings that day. If only they'd taken their eyes off the prize for a moment they might have actually seen it.

So yeah, you take those breaks. Take as many as you need: get out there and see what else life has in store for you. When you return, those games will still be there (although they'll probably need an update or ten), and they'll be all the more enjoyable because of it. Ed.

From: Tharin Pillay
Subject: Mortality & Gaming
Living in a place that constantly appears on lists of "The Top 10 Most Dangerous Countries!" inspires a certain amount of concern in the average citizen.

In a climate of such constant violence, i think the subject of our own mortality is one often near the top of our heads. It seems inevitable then, that such existential thoughts would surface during a play-through of a wonderfully violent game - in this case Far Cry 3.

I found myself wondering if the witless pirates i consistently slaughtered had families, friends, or plans that Friday night. I felt despair for them, and for the things i was making the main character do.

It seems to be common in games where characters fight desperately for their own survival, that they are

suspiciously uninterested in preserving the lives of others - i'm thinking specifically of Joel in The Last of Us.

Whether intentional or not, I think that games often provide a fast-track into the minds of killers, and in doing so grant us all insight into what it takes to take a life, and what circumstances could cause such things.

All this has led me to reevaluate the value of a human life, and fully appreciate the horror of the countless wars we've had - both fictional and real.

I write this because i think games could be powerful tools in coping with the fear of death (and perhaps fear in general) and i would be interested to hear your opinions of the subject.

We had a chat about this sort of thing on the NAG forums a little while ago, when the trailer for that awful-looking game Hatred *emerged. Sure, that game is focused on being a straight-up psycho killer who goes around executing ordinary people because they're not miserable like him (or something), but I suppose you're right in that lots of games involve killing of some kind, and each implies that there's a line that people can cross that allows them to do such things.*

Psychologists and those sorts of clever people have been using simulations and, more recently, Oculus VR, to help people cope with certain kinds of trauma, and it seems like adding a level of interactivity to those simulations in the form of gaming is a good way to increase the impact of that service or speed up recovery. I once saw a video for a simulation that helped people get over their fear of spiders. It grossed

me out though so I didn't watch the whole thing. Yuck.

It's good that games with some smarts to them (like The Last of Us*) are affecting you on a level that's deeper than the surface. Like Philip in the other letter, you're finding some balance in your life thanks to gaming, and that's rad. Ed.*

ON TWITTER
@nagcoza

Nico
@nagcoza hi guys #excellent Dec issue of NAG. I love the secret poster and I hope u wil put one in the next issue also please. :)

Marquard
@nagcoza well played with the secret kover edition

Warrior
You often hear that magazine publication is a dying art. NAG throws that myth in the dirt... Brilliant read @nagcoza

PoisonMule63103
@nagcoza do u think subzero ever used his powers to cool a beer on a hot day

Alex Judeel
@nagcoza can't wait for my prize that (supposed to get 1 month ago) who do I blame? Me for not living in Jo'burg and the dreaded Post Office

Nahuel Graziani
@nagcoza used to have funny videos on their discs. This was my Youtube before internet. God bless you, NAG.

DYING LIGHT

GOOD NIGHT GOOD LUCK

XBOX ONE   PS4   PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE   TECHLAND   WB GAMES

THE GAME STALKER

by Pippa Tshabalala

Memory loss

Pippa is a ninja. Before she was into games journalism she joined a secluded clan in the mountains of Japan, where she studied the teachings of an ancient sensei raised from the dead. The whole thing got very weird and eventually she left the clan, an outcast with a vicious roundhouse kick and a hankering for raw fish.

Ah, a new year! 2015. The beginning of the year for most people generally brings with it a sense of renewed energy. We look forward to good things on the horizon, be it a new job, or the idea that your current job might just get a bit better and bring with it a raise, or an appreciation for your role in the business by your colleagues. The possibility of a new and exciting relationship. The birth of a child.

For gamers this mainly means loads of new games. We have our priorities straight.

And of course that's not something unique to 2015 – it happens all the time, but somehow every time we hit a new year it's as if the gaming slate is wiped clean. All the major releases of the previous year, both good and bad, are forgotten and instead we focus on the here and now.

In some ways this is good – it heightens our anticipation of new titles, new franchises that excite us and like all good narrative fiction (yes I know not all video games fall into this category, but the majority have at the very least an attempt at a story) keep us interested long enough to see the story to its conclusion and in some cases, if it really resonates with us, replay it.

In other ways however, our sudden memory loss, the elimination of everything that happened prior to this year, speaks to our society's here and now instant gratification culture. Honestly, I can remember perhaps a handful of titles released in 2014, and most of those in the latter part of the year. Games like *Assassin's Creed Unity, Dragon Age: Inquisition* and *Far Cry 4* stand out for me immediately because they came out in November, the second last month of the year. The rest of them blur into a mass of memories in which it is almost impossible to distinguish things like release dates. Have I played *Dark Souls II*? Yes of course, but once the release date has passed and I've played the game, I couldn't for the life of me remember when it came out. (For the record I had to look up the release of *Dark Souls II* – it was March 2014).

It is indicative of the way we consume media. A topic that is pertinent this week, a game that is hot right now, is forgotten because that is the nature of our current society. We consume, and then we forget.

Very often the only way I remember a release date is through association. Of course this is nothing new – this is how we learn, through association – but for example, I remember the release date of *The Witcher 2*, because I sat and played it just after my eldest son was born and I was on maternity leave. I remember the release dates of the

FIFA series because it releases just before rAge every year. Unless we have these associations everything blurs into oblivion. Go back further than a year and my memory is even worse.

This doesn't lessen the anticipation of a new game in any way, no matter how cynical I might sound right about now. Knowing that I will likely forget the release date of *The Order: 1886* doesn't mean that I don't want to play it, and it's funny, because leading up to these new titles I know exactly when they're coming out (OK perhaps not the date, but the month to be sure). I know that *The Order* is scheduled for release in February, along with my most anticipated game of 2015, *The Witcher III: The Wild Hunt*. I know that *Battlefield Hardline* is coming out in March and *Batman Arkham Knight* is scheduled for June.

So why do you think this is? Why do our memories play such tricks on us? Why do I have such a great head for detail prior to a release, but post release I suddenly develop video game Alzheimer's?

I have no answers other than the points I've already discussed, but I like to ponder on the association aspect of this. What makes a game stand out for you? Are you one of those amazing people with a head for dates? Someone who remembers exactly what came out when? Or are you like me who can't remember what games even came out last year let alone what date?

Luckily the only game that matters for me this year is *The Witcher III* and that's not too far away, hooray!

Valve goes full steam ahead on gameplay streaming

We're not even sorry about the pun in that headline; it was pure gold. Valve has unveiled Steam Broadcasting – their answer to the Twitch streaming service. Steam Broadcasting is an in-house, Valve developed feature that is coming directly to the Steam client. There's no partnership with Twitch or any other streaming software; this is entirely Valve's new baby.

You'll be able to broadcast your gameplay or watch a friend's instead. By simply clicking on a friend who is currently in a game, you'll be able to watch their stream providing they accept your request to watch. Alternatively, users can set their Steam Broadcasting privacy settings to Public, which will make any game you play available to watch via that game's community hub. You only start broadcasting once somebody actually wants to watch, which might make building a public streaming channel a little difficult.

Steam Broadcasting is currently in open beta and you're free to opt in whenever you want to. If you haven't already chosen to participate in Steam beta programs, you can change that in the drop-down Settings menu and then select the Account option.

Total War: Attila ushers in the Dark Ages next year

Fans of the excellent *Total War* series of partly turn-based, partly real-time strategy games who're eagerly awaiting the next instalment will be happy to know that publisher SEGA has announced a release date: February 17th 2015. *Total War: Attila* (the ninth game in this popular series) transports players to the beginning of the Dark Ages and, as the name suggests, is centred on Attila the Hun.

Pre-ordering the game will bag you its day-one DLC (which ordinarily costs $7.99) for free. It's dubbed *The Viking Forefathers Culture Pack* and it adds three extra playable factions: the Danes, the Geats and the Jutes. There's set to be a special edition of the game as well, which includes the base game and DLC as well as a double-sided poster of the campaign map / faction reference guide and a 64-page biography of Attila the Hun.

Miklós is a space adventurer. Hailing from the distant planet of Zeeblorn Twelve, he travelled to Earth quite accidentally. Long ago he was tasked to hunt down an escaped convict on the planet Earth, but due to recent financial struggles his budget-level navigation droid misspelled the destination. He's actually still waiting for his lift home, but until then he's satisfied to write about video games.

PIXEL FIX *by Miklós Szecsei*

Sex, blue aliens, and space STDs

Let's have a discussion about sex, shall we? Well now, *that* got your attention, you salacious little minx you.

Video games and sex have always had a tumultuous relationship. Sex and video games go back as far as the early 1980s to text-based adventure games like the imaginatively named *Softporn Adventure*. However, it was the alleged rape scene in the 1982 Atari 2600 title *Custer's Revenge* that thrust gaming and fornication's coupling into a decidedly negative limelight. That was with good reason too: the game's *very* crude graphics depicted General Custer supposedly raping a Native American woman. Later iterations made the Native American woman beckon Custer to come closer, thereby obviating the accusations of rape. Still, the game set the tone for how many people would perceive sex in video games.

Not much has changed, and you don't have to look far to find people throwing their hands up in horror because there are pixels on screen bumping and grinding on top of each other. Remember when *Mass Effect* came out and the stir that was created because of the alien sex scene with Liara T'Soni? (Everyone seems to forget the *other* Asari sex scene with Sha'ira, the Consort on the Presidium – poor lass.) Indignant types were enraged by the notion of a human getting it on with a blue alien. Singapore even banned the game for a short while even though there really wasn't much of a sex scene to write home about. Fast forward seven years and BioWare is reliving history with *Dragon Age: Inquisition* – a game that has been banned in India because it features an optional sex scene with the Qunari party member Iron Bull.

It's always baffled me why people can be so uptight about depictions of sex in video games. The act is more natural than, say, killing a person, but games built around murder don't get nearly as much flak as games that depict sex seem to do. I've slutted my way through loads of role-playing games with "romance" sub-plots. I'm 99% sure that it was a space STD that killed my commander Shepard after three game's worth of casual sex with any character willing.

What I will concede though is that some games are vastly superior in their treatment of sex. *The Witcher* RPGs have some work to do. Sex in the first *Witcher* game amounted to little more than a card collecting mini-game that treated female NPCs as collectible objects. *The Witcher 2* was careful to show liberal amounts of female anatomy, but would always ensure that Geralt's bits remained out of view. After sex with the succubus in Act 2 of the game (it seems I am without moral scruples in RPGs), Geralt flops onto his back to reveal he still has pants on. I'm pretty sure that either the devs don't know how sex works, or they're deliberately protecting the male gamer demographics' delicate heterosexual sensibilities. It's a bit silly really, and I hope that sex is treated a little better in *The Witcher 3*. Not because I really want to see Geralt's bum, but rather because exclusively showing female anatomy while hiding male seems disingenuous and a little prudish. Plus sex scenes that exclusively cater for the male gaming demographic by now feel out of touch with the audience.

Australian retailers remove GTA V from shelves

The Australian branch of American retailer Target has removed all copies of *Grand Theft Auto V* from their shelves, and will no longer stock the game anywhere in the country. The decision to ban sales of *GTA V* came about in response to "a significant level of concern about the game's content" which was brought to the company's attention via their customers. According to Target's official press release on the matter, they have been inundated by angry customers saying that the content of *GTA V* is not something Target should knowingly sell to the public. This despite the game having an R18+ age restriction in Australia.

Less than 24 hours after Target announced the removal of *GTA V* from their shelves, the Australian wing of Kmart did the same thing.

It's a puzzling move especially considering *GTA V* has been available all over the world since September 2014. A group of Australian women who have survived sexual assault put together a petition to have the game banned; the petition collected more than 41,000 signatures. It's possible that the re-release on current generation platforms (PlayStation 4 and Xbox One) spurred a resurgence in public concern. It's also likely that the added first-person camera mode has exacerbated the situation.

How to date your dragon

Rémi
Well, the food is ready. Enjoy.

The "dating simulator" genre (gosh, it really has become a genre on its own now, hasn't it?) just continues to get weirder and weirder. We've already had pigeon dating simulator *Hatoful Boyfriend*, and now if a bunch of Austrian developers get their way on crowd funding website Indiegogo (spoiler: they're probably not going to judging by their pledges so far) we're going to get a dragon dating simulator.

A dragon. Dating. Simulator.

You with us again? Good; let's carry on then. It's called (surprisingly) *Dragon Dating Simulator* and it tells the story of how humanity discovers a portal to a different world populated by dragons. Only it turns out that dragons are much like humans and soon enough relationships form and sparks start flying. The "visual novel" will allow you to make decisions in order to woo the dragon of your affections.

Right, we're done here. If anyone needs us we'll be in our pillow forts trying to figure out when humanity went so drastically off-course.

Space pets coming to Star Citizen

Cloud Imperium Games continues to shovel piles of money. The crowd-funded development has recently cruised past its $64 million stretch goal, which means players will be getting space pets to keep them company as they zip around the universe in shiny, expensive space ships. "Expect traditional terrestrial options, plus anything exotic we can dream up in the *Star Citizen* universe," an update read on the official website. At time of writing, Cloud Imperium Games is sitting on top of $65,863,832 in crowd funding.

Creator of Maniac Mansion is making a retro point-and-click adventure

"...like finding an undiscovered LucasArts adventure game."

Legendary adventure game designers Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick have successfully acquired Kickstarter funding to create a brand new point-and-click adventure game called *Thimbleweed Park*. About a month ago you might have heard shrieks of utter delight echoing across the South African countryside. That was us here at NAG HQ when we first heard about the new project.

Gilbert and Winnick were the creative geniuses behind the original *Maniac Mansion* that catapulted then Lucasfilm Games into adventure game stardom. They would go on to create *Monkey Island* and *Sam & Max.*

Thimbleweed Park is being designed with all the retro appeal an aging adventure game groupie could possibly want. Pixelated graphics, limited animation, and a classic SCUMM-like interface will all combine to make Thimbleweed Park feel like you've just stepped out of a DeLorean and into 1990. Ron Gilbert is calling the game the "true successor to *Maniac Mansion* and *Monkey Island*".

The game will play out from the perspective of five different characters that you'll be able to switch between. Two of those characters are described as "washed up detectives" who are sent to investigate a dead body found in a river outside the town of Thimbleweed Park. A third character, Delores, is just outside of town and attending the reading of her rich uncle's will. The fourth character is Ransome the Clown, who lives in the long-abandoned circus grounds and who is cursed to be unable to remove his makeup. The fifth and final character is Franklin, who wakes up in a hotel room with no memory of how he got there. Franklin also happens to be dead, so there's that.
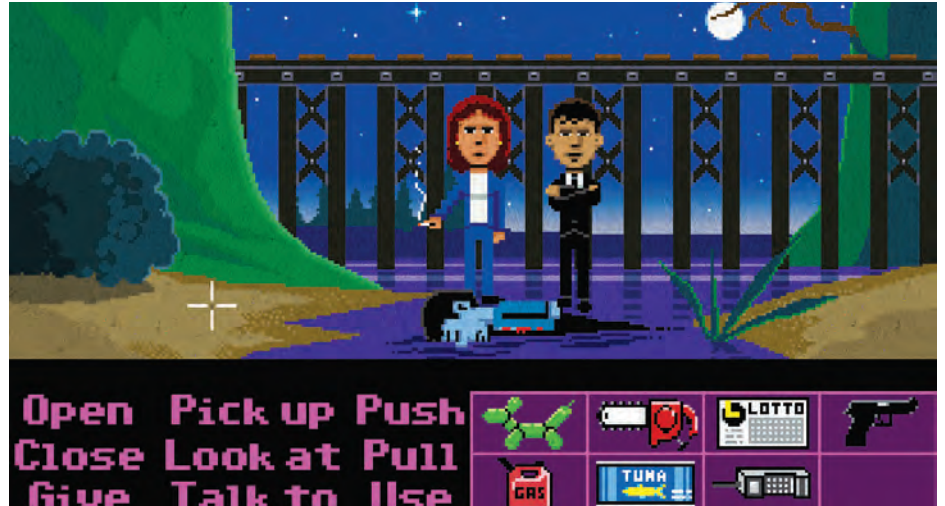
It also sounds so intriguing and positively dripping with retro appeal.

Irrational Games changes its mind, is hiring again

Earlier this year, Irrational Games (creators of the *BioShock* franchise) co-founder Ken Levine announced that the studio would be "winding down", by which he meant that all but himself and 15 other employees would be let go. The tighter team would focus on creating "narrative-driven games for the core gamer that are highly replayable". Said games would be smaller and distributed digitally. All in all, 70 permanent employees and five contractors were laid off as a result of this shift in focus, said an Irrational rep.

Recently, the studio's website posted a recruitment ad, stating that it's on the hunt for a senior programmer fluent in Unreal Engine 3 and 4, as well as multiplayer development. It doesn't really offer much in the way of clues as to Irrational's next project, and as strange as it seems that the studio would be hiring new talent after letting go so many experienced developers, it's not entirely unreasonable that there'd be a need to fill in gaps in the team's abilities as they push towards something new.

Dark Souls II coming to PS4 and XBO

Subtitled *Scholar of the First Sin*, this enhanced edition of the popular dungeon-crawling RPG will be hitting the PlayStation 4, Xbox One, and PC on April 7th, 2015. Besides updated graphics (of course), the game will also have all three of the previously released DLC areas bundled, and an increased multiplayer cap of at least four players in co-op.

Last-gen gamers also won't be left out of the loop, as an upcoming game update will add a host of new weapons, lore, enemies, and a new NPC. Whether you already own the DLC or not, the update will be completely free across all last-gen platforms. If you missed out on *Dark Souls II* the first time, or want to appreciate the UHD glory, then prepare to die. Again.

Ubisoft promises free DLC for broken Assassin's Creed Unity

Ubisoft's first current-gen outing for the *Assassin's Creed* franchise didn't exactly have the smoothest entry. The publisher has acknowledged the unhappiness and has promised to give all players the first portion of DLC (entitled *Dead Kings*) for free. Furthermore, those who have purchased the season pass will get a free Ubisoft game instead. Options include *Far Cry 4, The Crew, Rayman Legends, Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag*, *Just Dance 2015,* and *Watch Dogs*. Ubisoft has since stopped selling the season pass.

Assassin's Creed: Victory accidently announced

And blimey guv'nor, it's set in London!

Kotaku recently came into possession of a seven minute video containing "target gameplay footage" of *Assassin's Creed: Victory*, the next entry in Ubisoft's annual series. The video was created using the Anvil Engine (just like the recent *Unity*) and is in development at Ubisoft Quebec.

The new game is set in London during the 19th century, and stars a currently unnamed Assassin. Graphically it's a stark contrast to previous *AC* titles and looks far grittier. Some new gameplay elements include horse carriages, fighting on top of said carriages, an industrialised world complete with trains, and the ability to steal hats as disguises. A grappling hook was also shown off, which opens a world of gameplay and traversal options.

Bear in mind that this was not an official announcement. Ubisoft's expressed disappointment makes it clear that this was meant to be announced sometime in the future. In a statement, the company said: "It is always unfortunate when internal assets, not intended for public consumption, are leaked. The team in our Quebec studio has been hard at work on the particular game in question for the past few years, and we're excited to officially unveil what the studio has been working on at a later date." We can most likely expect more details in the new year, or at E3 2015.

EA scores well for LGBT equality

When EA gets an award, it's usually bad. But despite "winning" "Worst Company in America" several times, the company has now received a perfect score for Corporate Equality regarding treatment of its lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender workforce.

Thanks to their efforts to eliminate discrimination in the offices, show solidarity at pride parades, and sponsor events tailored for LGBT tech events, EA has been marked as one of the "Best Places to work for LGBT Equality" for its third year in a row.

DayZ standalone gets release window

Following several delays and a long Early Access status, *DayZ*'s future development has been detailed and launch windows revealed.

Developer Bohemia Interactive announced that the game will have a beta late in 2015, and that the complete game will be released into the wild in 2016. Pricing for the full game at release will be roughly $50 on Steam.

Before release, more features will be added such as animal companions, updated enemy AI, improved stealth mechanics, vehicles, and a console prototype in Q3 2015.

Double Fine cuts jobs

After an unannounced project in development at Double Fine was suddenly cancelled, the studio has been forced to let go of 12 of its staff members.

Despite the drop in workforce, studio head Tim Schafer has confirmed in an interview that their "remaining projects – *Broken Age*, *Massive Chalice*, and *Grim Fandango Remastered* – were unaffected".

In keeping with Double Fine news, the long-awaited *Broken Age* second act has been delayed to early 2015. Producer Greg Rice had the following to say: "The game is looking really good and the team is working super fast, but we just gotta give the game the time it needs to really deliver on everything we're hoping it will be."

Given the studio's recent release of the half-baked *Spacebase DF-9*, both of these stories indicate that Double Fine may be going through some troubles. Hopefully their current projects will restore their status somewhat.

Hatoful Boyfriend coming to PlayStation

In a move that's sure to please dating-sim fans, esteemed pigeon dating-simulator and visual novel *Hatoful Boyfriend* will soon be roosting on PS4 and PS Vita.

The game was first released as a joke on PC back in 2011, and has since attracted a cult following. Players are cast as a human girl attending an all-pigeon school several years after humanity was defeated by the birds in a war. Despite its quirky veneer, it actually contains surprisingly dark story elements. Pricing is not confirmed, but the launch window is set for Q2 2015.

Promises, promises

Valve updates Steam Early Access rules to prevent disappointment

Seemingly spurred on by the controversy surrounding a number of games that have launched via Steam Early Access, Valve has issued an updated set of rules to all developers looking to leverage the benefits of the Early Access system. In case you know nothing about it, Early Access is exactly what it says on the box: developers are able to release unfinished versions of in-development titles, as a way to more thoroughly test their products and fund development prior to launch.

There've been numerous games recently that have launched via Early Access and been nowhere near feature-complete enough to warrant players parting with their cash, while others have had to exit Early Access ahead of schedule due to a lack of funding. Most notably, Double Fine's *Spacebase DF-9* is guilty of the latter, with the studio running out of financial steam, leaving them unable to sustain development long before they'd fulfilled all the promises they'd made to early

adopters. Naturally, this sort of thing leads to overwhelming backlash and customers demanding refunds.

"Do not make specific promises about future events" is the most prominent of Valve's new guidelines. They advise not to set a concrete release date, nor to assure players of future updates. They even warn to not promise players that your game will ever be completed at all, that you should ensure that players are happy to pay for your game in its current state with no assurances of a future that may never be realised. Valve has previously issued other guidelines that certain developers have obviously ignored; "don't launch in Early Access if you can't afford to develop with very few or no sales" is one of them. As comforting as it is that the rules for Early Access are being more carefully defined, the very nature of the service means that players run the risk of regret whenever they part with cash in exchange for a semi-complete product.

Max Payne / Alan Wake creators Remedy Entertainment have confirmed via a sneaky tweet that their upcoming time-obsessed, Xbox One-exclusive third-person shooter *Quantum Break* is being bolstered by a pair of Hollywood actors you may recognise: Shawn Ashmore and Dominic Monaghan. Ashmore is perhaps best known (to us, anyway) as Iceman / Bobby Drake in the *X-Men* film series, while you may know Monaghan as Charlie Pace in *Lost* or Meriadoc Brandybuck in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings*.

Remedy tweeted a photo of the pair in full motion-capture gear. Ashmore and Monaghan have both dabbled in video game work before, with the former voicing Iceman back in a 2006 *X-Men* video game and the latter portraying agent Ennis Cole in a series of live-action trailers for *The Bureau: XCOM Declassified*. *Quantum Break* is set to launch next year and will be accompanied by a live-action TV show, the events of which will be altered by players' in-game choices.

PlayStation Experience wrap-up

The recent PlayStation Experience event opened the floodgates and a massive amount of news poured out. For one, gameplay footage for *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* was showed off, revealing South African enemies and a new grappling hook feature. Beloved developer Double Fine had some news, that, despite recent troubles, they are teaming up with Sony to remaster the classic *Day of the Tentacle*. Besides that, the complete *Broken Age* game will be released on PS4 and PS Vita on the same day as PC, January 14th, with *Grim Fandango: Remastered* coming out just eight days later.

In other PS4 news, *The Forest, Person 5*, and *Shovel Knight* (featuring Kratos) will all be coming to the console in 2015. PS Vita is getting *The Banner Saga, TowerFall Ascension, Octodad*, and the episodic *Resident Evil: Revelations 2*, also all in 2015.

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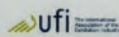
Resident Evil: Revelations 2 gets release date and details

Resident Evil's episodic spin-off *Revelations 2* is coming soon, according to a new trailer and blog post by Capcom. Launching locally on all platforms on February 18th, 2015, subsequent episodes are due to launch weekly afterwards.

Besides a launch date, more news was revealed. Each episode will be priced at $5.99, while the season pass will be $24.99 (roughly R70 and R280). A boxed copy is due for launch on March 13th, and will contain extra DLC, such as costumes and side-stories, and cost $39.99. Long-time *Resi* character Barry Burton was also announced as a playable character, and the story will be split between his campaign and Jill Valentine's. Barry will be joined by newcomer Natalia Korda, who has the ability of videogame-logic (can see hidden items and enemies).

Besides the characters, Capcom gave some more details about two of the game's enemies: The Revenent and The Rotten. Both sound like horrific and gruesome monsters, but sadly neither of these are actually zombies.

March of the undead

You can file this one under "ideas we're surprised it took this long to surface". *Zombie Night Terror* describes itself as *Lemmings* with zombies. It's a game in which you lead a zombie horde and ensure that they're the best zombie horde they can be – but you have no direct control over their actions. They march mindlessly onwards and you're forced to manipulate them in various indirect ways to ensure they successfully end up with some brains to munch.

You'll use mutations as your primary means of affecting zombie behaviour. You can have your zombies perform one-shot actions, like screaming to paralyze enemies with fear or even exploding to take out groups of foes. Other mutations give your zombies permanent abilities, like the ability to climb walls or mutate into "tank" zombies that are bigger, meaner and hardier than their brethren. Assigning mutations costs DNA, which you earn in a variety of ways, like by killing humans or sacrificing zombies. It sounds brilliantly compelling, and the package is wrapped in an adorably grotesque pixel art aesthetic, complete with lovely animations.

Prepare for six-legged heroics in Hollow Knight

t's difficult to feel instantly excited by every new indie 2D platformer that's announced these days, given that there are several thousand announced every five minutes. In spite of this, *Hollow Knight* manages to grab attention with its enchanting art style and interesting premise. In it, you play the titular tack-sized Hollow Knight, who must journey through a surreal insect world which the developers say is inspired by the likes of *Metroid* and *Faxanadu*.

The game promises to be mighty challenging, with "fluid and responsive action allowing you to flow through combat like water". You'll meet a variety of enigmatic characters, all given life by traditional 2D animation. As you adventure through the corrupted underground realm of Hallownest, you'll discover a huge, interconnected game world, which gradually becomes more accessible via Metroidvania-style progression. Different insectoid enemies will offer unique challenges, and you'll find new items that unlock various abilities – like a cyclone attack that strikes all surrounding enemies.

The developers promise that the world will be full of secrets and strange things to discover – like the ability to "dream dive" into the minds of friends and enemies. The game's Kickstarter will have run its course by the time you read this, and we're hoping it's successfully reached its goal.

SUPPORT LINES

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

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

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

PUBLISHERS / Microsoft Xbox
Telephone / 0800 991 550

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

Roxy hunt

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

July winner
Melvile Prodehl, page 43

This month's prize
Marvel Dice Masters valued at R225. Sponsored by Skycastle Games.

Time-travelling tomfoolery

Growing up, some of us at NAG were sustained by a diet of not much more than healthy doses of point-and-click adventuring. The zany LucasArts adventures were particularly nutritious, with their excellent humour and outrageous puzzle designs – so whenever an adventure game reminds us of those beloved adventures, we immediately take notice. *Kelvin and the Infamous Machine* is one such adventure, in which you play the eponymous Kelvin as he travels through time with the aim of preventing his scientist boss from stealing credit for some of humanity's greatest works.

With an eye-catching visual style that makes *KatIM* look like a hand-painted cartoon and humour that ticks all the right humour-boxes, the game promises the sort of bizarre puzzles (with even more bizarre solutions) that made the LucasArts adventures stand out. It's set to launch with three initial chapters (each themed on an important historical figure, like Beethoven) and will be available on PC, Mac, Linux, Android, and iOS.

Street Fighter V coming to PS4 and PC

Surprising news for fighting fans was revealed at the recent PlayStation Experience. The next entry in the legendary Capcom franchise *Street Fighter V* will be launching on PC, and console-exclusively on the PS4. Adam Boyes, SCEA VP of Publisher and Developer Relations, went on to specify that "PS4 will be the only console this game ever appears on."

This is obviously big news, as the *SF* franchise has been multi-console for a long time. The official reveal came after a trailer leaked detailing the big news, but Capcom brushed it off by confirming that PC-PS4 cross-platform play. No release date as of yet, but we can likely expect more details ahead of the EVO2015 Fighting Championship Series held in July.

home_coded

EXPOSURE FOR SOUTH AFRICAN INDIE DEVELOPERS

by Rodain Joubert

Rodain is a zombie. Reborn during a viral outbreak that nearly destroyed the world, scientists used his now mutated genetic composition to rebuild humanity as a hybrid species. He now lives on as the king of the zombies. We have to keep feeding him a supply of brains or he'll stop writing things for us.

Why so serious?

I decided that this month's column could take a dose of the good ol' first-person narrative, mainly because I internally cringe at the prospect of even accidentally hiding myself from a conversation about people I'm actively working with (this being the lovely crew at Formula D, who I'll come to in a moment). It's also because this piece scratches an itch I've had since realising that *Desktop Dungeons* was a great game which didn't matter as much as I originally thought it did.

By this, I mean that working as a game developer is a satisfying, dangerous, interesting, artsy kind of profession, yet occasionally subject to a hollow feeling of bourgeois indulgence. There's the unshakeable feeling that within the broader social context, we're just gathering crews of middle class developers to make a luxury experience for the world's economic elite.

And we cannot fool ourselves in this regard – the capacity to whip out a credit card and make a Steam sale purchase, even a careful and considered one, doesn't even begin to describe how well-off we are. Whatever other problems exist in a typical gamer's life (which can still have many of its own complications and day-to-day lows) we can definitely say that having access to this lifestyle in the first place is something to be grateful about.

And the art of game making itself is still so *separate*. Make Games SA remains extremely male and blindingly white – something that the community has become increasingly self-reflective on as it continues to grow. Talks about inclusiveness grow in their earnesty – and in the coming year I hope to see that translate to more action, because there's not enough attachment to the vast majority of our own population in what we do. Local games are built on ideas that came from – and are promptly returned to – the global West. Nowhere is this clearer than in the roaring success of *Broforce*, an entirely South African game built on an entirely foreign narrative. The Free Lives crew are ushered between overseas game conferences by some very loving publishers, adored by an international audience, while the local population mostly just shrugs and maybe asks if it's available on VHS.

This isn't an indictment against anyone, mind you – for the most part, local indies are acting from a survival drive, and games which pander to the outside market are better than no games at all. But that phase of survival is coming to a close, and we need to start thinking more broadly where we can.

I've thus found myself with a craving for projects which matter more – games that exist for more than gaming's sake – and that's how I got with Formula D interactive (**www. formula-d.com**), a Cape Town company which designs installation games for science centres, museums and other facilities. A lot of their work is based around touch tables and sophisticated technology, brought to sites where broad audiences – usually consisting of children – can interact and learn.

One of their most impressive projects since starting in 2007 is a five metre multi-touch table exhibit in the Museum of Science and Technology in Islam, based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. It details 1,500 years of Muslim contribution to the field. I'm told that, in 2010, it was the biggest touch table exhibit in the world.

But this is not what hooked me the most. The less renowned work that they do – beyond the flush of epic technological exhibits and creative peripheral games – happens to be the exactly the sort of stuff that really matters to me. They're involved in school projects which expose new kids to programming. They make mobile applications that support disadvantaged communities, improve service delivery and offer vital life skill and historical education. They're not nearly as detached from the South African

reality as their most "elite" projects may imply. There's meaningful and thoughtful work done towards the greater good.

The project for which they summoned me was one such effort. Currently codenamed GEFORCE (used only for development, I'm assured!), it involves creating a mobile game to link high-potential, disadvantaged South Africans with job recruiters from the call centre industry. I rapidly learned about many things which I'd been dismissive of before – the actual career and working conditions of a typical call agent, the staggering number of employment opportunities currently going to waste (mostly due to people simply being unaware of job opportunities), and the existence of local organisations like Harambee (**www.harambee.co.za**) who operate solely as a bridge between unemployed folk and companies looking for entry-level workers, providing training exposure, training courses and career guidance to those needing it.

Building career awareness and identifying talent are extremely resource-consuming activities (some of the most effective work Harambee currently does involves "on-foot" campaigns – intense door-to-door work in areas where people can't otherwise access information), and a strategy is being developed on all levels to make this work more smoothly – mobile gaming being one of them, as South Africa is fortunate enough to have extremely high phone penetration in places of need.

And this isn't hollow work. My primary liaison with Formula D, marketing director Marco Rosa, described to me his extensive career in local educational projects before joining the company. He strongly advocates for the development of the "serious games" industry in South Africa – a branch of game development which has formalised itself internationally, with regular specialised conferences and even dedicated streams at major industry events like the Game Developers Conference. He's told me about some of the local conferences that he's attended, too, such
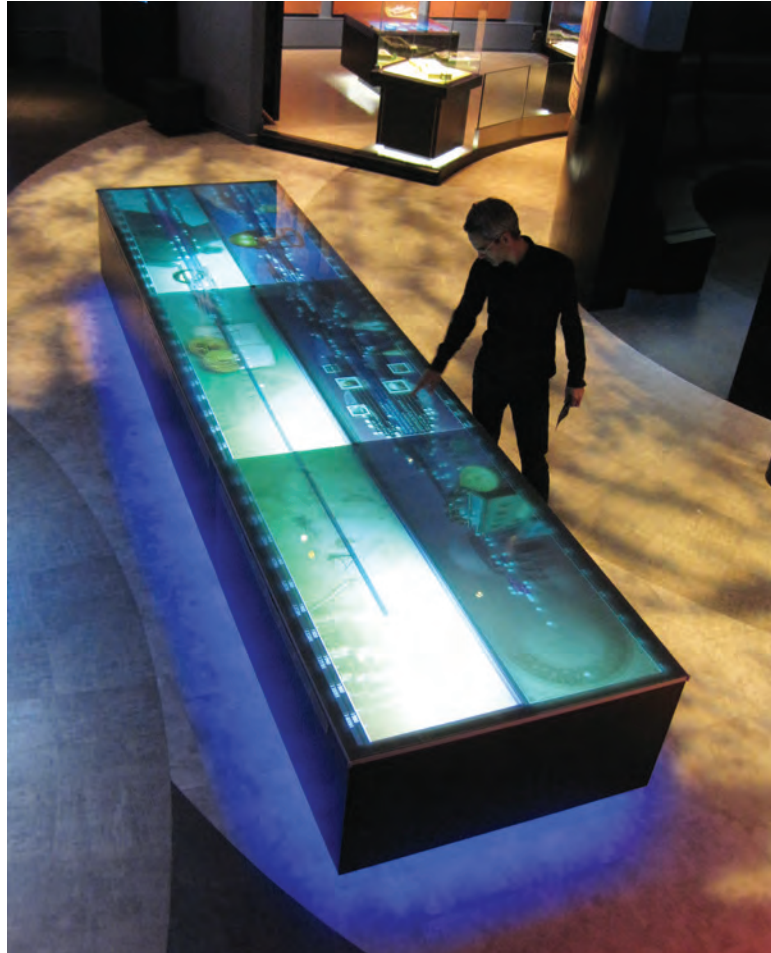
as the one hosted by the Serious Games Institute (**www.sgisa.co.za**).

Marco believes that there's "loads of opportunity" to use these serious games for some beneficial end, even in South Africa. "Aside from entertaining people, it provides opportunities and experience for developers, opportunities for job seekers, potentially improving and streamlining areas of life for everyone."

And, compared with independent game dev jobs, this field provides many more openings with stable work. Growing and legitimising this branch of South African game development checks a lot of winning boxes

and may be the best avenue for the industry to have a direct local impact instead of just generating international hype.

It just has to overcome a few more hurdles along the way. Primarily, Marco points to the lack of education about the effectiveness of serious games in contrast to classic "chalk-and-talk" teaching. He often comes across CEOs and specialised high-ups who are actually surprised, even amazed, to hear about the success of these projects. In this regard, it's the same challenge that faces regular game development in SA: people just don't *know* enough about it yet.

But if we want to reach more people locally – if we want electronic gaming to be a truly cosmopolitan and valuable opportunity that includes as many South Africans as possible – pushing towards serious gaming may well be one of the best routes to take. Instead of arguing vague economic incentives, moderate job creation and the idea of "putting our industry on the map", the pursuit of gaming for more than its own sake has the chance to include new developers, promote awareness and *immediately have a real and positive impact on other people's lives*.

If you're an avid game developer – new or experienced – but you've always been vaguely worried that it's a "useless" job, do everyone a service. Make 2015 the first new year you start taking games seriously. I know that's what I intend to do. **NAG**

"One of their most impressive projects since starting in 2007 is a five metre multi-touch table exhibit in the Museum of Science and Technology in Islam, based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia."

GAMING TO GO

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE MOBILE GAMING INDUSTRY

When referring to "mobile games", one could include dedicated handheld systems like the Nintendo 3DS or PlayStation Vita, or anything portable that plays games, like a PDA or tablet computer. The full mobile games industry is massive, and the line between "cell phone" and "handheld gaming console" is getting increasingly blurry. To keep things simple, we're going to focus on just the mobile games industry present on cell phones and tablets, and present an overview of how things have shaped up since the early days.

It took 20 years for the mobile gaming industry to explode. It went from non-existent to being a multi-billion-dollar-a-year industry worldwide. A large chunk of this phenomenal growth is thanks to "smartphones" – mobile phones sufficiently advanced enough to be considered a little personal computer in your pocket. The launch of the Apple iPhone in 2007 is generally regarded as the start of the smartphone era. The iPhone changed everything in terms of the mobile industry, its large touchscreen with multi-touch interface becoming the standard. Only a year later Google launched Android, which would go on to become the most widely-used mobile operating system in the world.

It's amazing how quickly things can move when tied to technology. To put things in perspective: Facebook is 10 years old. YouTube is only nine years old. Twitter is only eight years old. And in that time, we've gone from cell phones in 1994 that could only manage a very basic game of Tetris, to smartphones that have home-console quality graphics thanks to integrated graphics chipsets. Phones so powerful they can emulate even reasonably modern consoles like the PlayStation 2 at playable speeds.

SOME OF THE BIG PLAYERS

There are approximately a hundred thousand million billion (this is a real number, we did our research) games for cell phones. Stores like Google Play and iTunes are filled to the brim with productivity apps, music, and movies, but most importantly, games. Because there are so many games, there are always going to be "big names" that float to the top, even though people tend to try a wide variety. One of the (fortunate, or unfortunate) side-effects of things like "top free games" lists on these services, is the "bandwagon effect". This is a phenomenon where, and this might sound obvious, popular things get more popular, the more popular they are. So when a game is #1 on the "top free games" list, no matter how it got there (fluke, shady dealings, programming error), it's now the Biggest Thing Ever and will continue to be so for a while. Until the Next Big Thing anyway.

ANGRY BIRDS

Would you believe that *Angry Birds*, the hit sensation (and soon to be a major motion picture) by Rovio was their 52nd game? It only took the Finnish game developer (formerly known as Relude) 52 attempts until, for whatever reason, they struck gold. To their credit, they capitalised on the sudden success: there have been 11 *Angry Birds* games since (more than one a year), for multiple platforms, a cartoon series, many toys, a cookbook, comics, a theme park in Finland, and an upcoming computer-animated film.

CANDY CRUSH SAGA

King Digital Entertainment was founded in 2003, its owners using funds from selling the dating site uDate.com. Originally focused on making Facebook games, the company switched to mobile and released *Candy Crush Saga* in 2011. The match-three puzzler made it big (even though there is nothing unique or original to it, so don't ask us why), and the company got rich off the people who thought paying real money to beat a level was a good idea. Because of its cunning monetisation, a small section of the player-base (with more money than sense) reportedly spends anywhere up to R55,000 on the game. Remember, kids, "freemium isn't free".
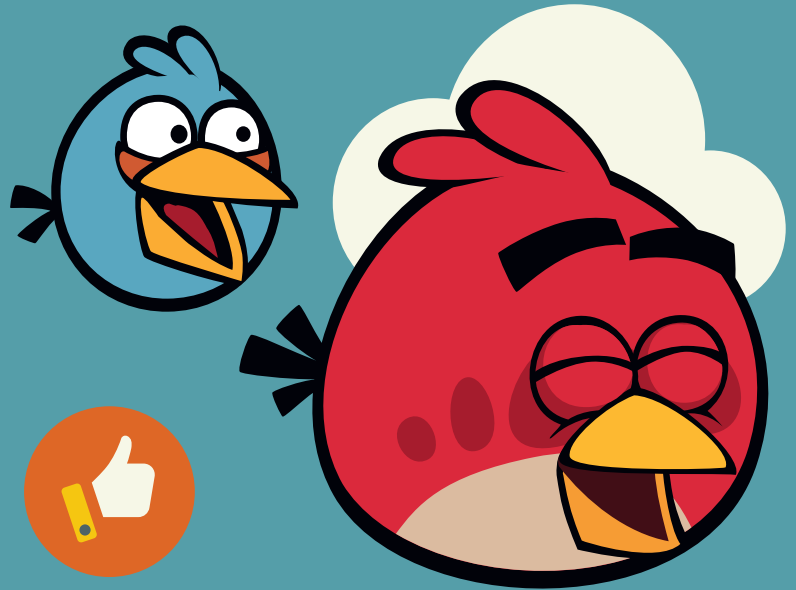
PUZZLE & DRAGONS

Unseating *Candy Crush Saga* from its "biggest money maker match-three" throne, *Puzzle & Dragons* from GungHo Online Entertainment has had unprecedented success in Japan. Its developer has been around since 1998, no newcomer to gaming. The game is still growing in popularity outside of Japan, but in April 2013 it held the spot for the highest grossing app in the world on both iOS and Android. It's earning the company nearly $4 billion a year, thanks to some rather advanced "coercive monetisation" tactics, methods by which players are lured into spending real money instead of losing progress.

CLASH OF CLANS

The current Big Thing, *Clash of Clans* released in 2012 but only became a mega-hit in 2014. Developed by Supercell (another company from Finland), this online multiplayer game has you building a base, training troops and attacking other players. It's been earning Supercell nearly $2.4 million a day, which might be why if you search for "Clash of" on any app store, you'll find hundreds of clones, games trying to act like they're "just like that popular thing you like". Most even mimic the screaming face icon, just because.

ATTACK OF THE CLONES

The instant a mobile game becomes a mega-sensation or reaches a certain level of popularity, uncreative money-chasing types start putting out "clones" of the popular game to try and trick people into playing their game instead. There is a pretty big difference between using a game as "inspiration", and making a *Flappy Bird* clone called *Flapping Bird* and trying to pretend you're the original developer. There is actually a thriving, underground clone market that consists of people downloading a popular game, decompiling it (taking it apart), and then offering to "re-skin" (give it new graphics) for the highest bidder, who then go and publish it with their own monetisation schemes embedded. It's remarkably slimy, and very well documented on this helpful website: **iwantaclone.tumblr.com**

BEFORE THE BIRDS AND CANDY

Long ago, on a Game Boy far away, *Tetris* ruled the roost. The popularity of the oddly-shaped brick-falling puzzle game was immense when it launched on Nintendo's handheld system in 1989. By the time 1994 rolled around, *Tetris* (or at least something that looked like it) would also be the first game on a mobile phone, the German-made Hagenuk MT-2000.

But the iconic bricks would not become the Palaeolithic face of mobile gaming. That title would instead go to a little nibbling snake. Back in 1976, an arcade game called Blockade became an overnight sensation. It had a great premise, simple and easy to understand. Two players, using four directional buttons each, had to steer a little block around the screen. Each block left a solid line behind it, the person with the longest line before hitting something wins. The idea in *Blockade* would quickly be cloned by Atari in 1978 and called *Surround*. After that, everyone wanted a piece of the action and the clones came fast, *Chase, Checkmate, Worm* and more. In 1982 the movie *Tron* popularised its own iconic rendition of the idea with *Lightcycles*, a fictional game inside the movie's universe.

People running the MS-DOS operating system in 1991 found a nice surprise hidden with the QBasic programing tool. They could compile and run a demonstration file called NIBBLES.BAS, which would allow them to play a basic *Blockade*-like game with a slight twist: you controlled a snake moving around a maze, eating numbers. Each time you consumed a number, from one through nine, your snake would get longer. Once the last number was eaten, you went to the next level which featured more a more complex course and increased speed.
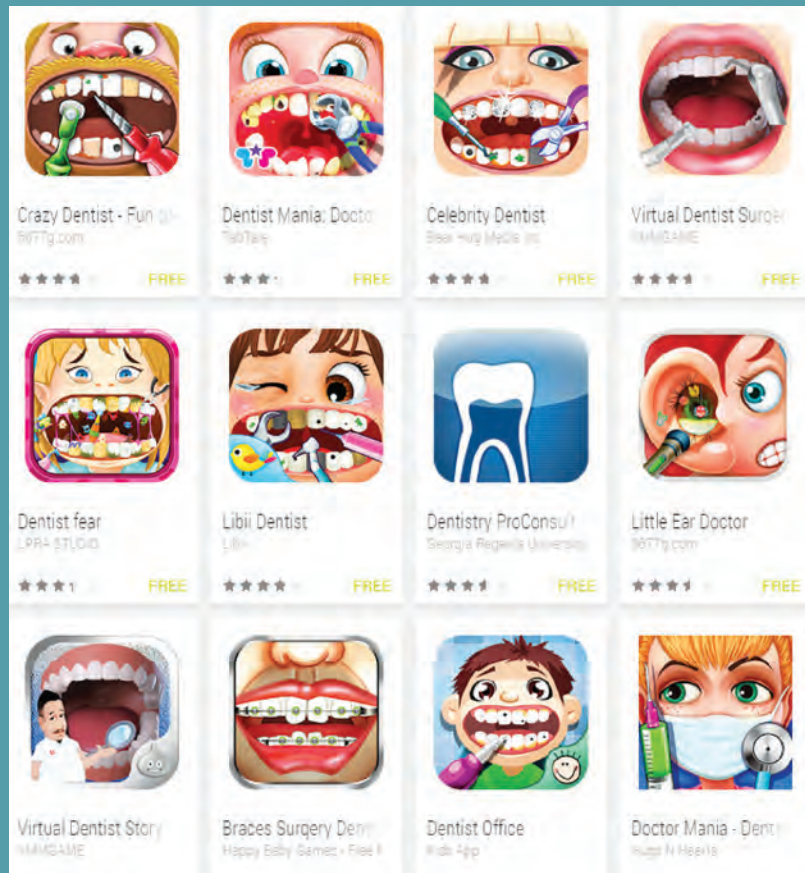
In 1997, Nokia released their Nokia 6110 cell phone which came pre-loaded with a game called *Snake*. Like *Nibbles*, *Snake* involved moving around a maze eating apples, your snake getting longer each time you did. The popularity of *Snake* led to it becoming the standard pre-loaded game on Nokia phones (and most competitors) for almost ten years.
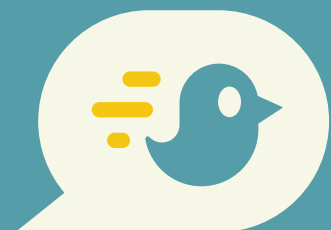
THE CURRENT CONTROLS

Cell phone games are huge business now, but most smartphones are limited in one way: their input method. Multi-touch screens work great for general tasks like checking email, browsing the web or playing games specifically designed for it. But when it comes to certain styles of games, like platformers that need a directional pad and some buttons, touch-screen interfaces don't always work out. Some games do manage really good controls by having on-screen interface elements that mimic a standard gamepad's layout, but then your fingers are covering portions of the screen. Some phones have really poor touch-screens, which makes these on-screen gamepad styles finicky to use.

One alternative that's become quite a big deal over the last five years is using a controller for gaming on your cell phone. There is a lot of variety out there, like the PowerA Moga. It's a basic console style gamepad, with a little bracket for holding your cell phone, turning the entire thing into a Frankensteined portable gaming system. Proprietary controllers like this tend to be a bit tricky, as they often don't work with all games due to using custom-made drivers for interfacing with the gamepad.

A surprisingly direct approach is just to use a regular gamepad with your phone, like a PlayStation 3 controller. Things like the GameKlip provide a bracket to hold the gamepad and phone together, but you still need an extra USB cable to make the phone see the gamepad. Some phones, or phones which have been rooted (their firmware changed to custom-written ones), can connect to the PlayStation 3 controller via its Bluetooth wirelessly, but it's a bit of a pain to get working. Your best bet remains connecting a regular old controller via a USB cable.

RETRO GAMING VIA EMULATION

An emulator, specifically those that play video games, is a piece of software that mimics the hardware of the platform it's trying to emulate. Take for example, the Nintendo Entertainment System. How the NES worked, on a hardware level, was generally a secret only Nintendo knew. But thanks to a lot of trial and error, very smart people managed to reverse-engineer what happens when a NES starts up and tries to play a game cartridge. It is through this reverse engineering that we get emulators. In the early days of emulators, they were far from perfect, full of errors when trying to replicate the experience of the console being emulated. By now, however, the older systems are so well known, we even get emulators on cell phones that are pretty accurate.

The exact legality of things like emulators is still being hashed out in courts. The general rule of thumb remains though: it's not legal to download a ROM (a file containing the "dumped" or copied contents of an original game cartridge or CD) and play it unless you own the original. But if you do own an original cartridge of *Super Mario Bros. 3*, and download the ROM file to play it on your cell phone, that's mostly okay.

There are many great emulators for smartphones. If you're on an Android phone, RetroArch is a multi-system emulator that doesn't require the BIOS files of any of the systems it emulates (it simulates the BIOS subroutines to avoid legal issues). For truly classic 8-bit gaming, Nostalia.NES is very fast, accurate, and has a rather good on-screen controller setup. It even lets you rewind the game a few seconds, if you don't mind cheating a little. **NAG**

-Miktar

Reviews *Intro*

Another year and the NAG reviews team is still ticking. Maybe our obsession with zombies speaks of something far deeper... Maybe we're the zombies! Or maybe we're just really good at taking our vitamins every day. Meet your reviewers...

Question / It's the zombie apocalypse! AAAAAHH! What one thing do you grab on your way out the house?

CHRIS "SAVAGE" SAVIDES
My dogs, undetected by zombies I'll train them to go on scouting and food runs.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare, StarCraft II

DANE "BARKSKIN" REMENDES
All the fresh undies I can carry. I don't expect I'll survive long, so I'd at least like to know I maintained an adequate level of nether-hygiene until the bitter end.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Far Cry 4, Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor

DELANO "DELANO" CUZZUCOLI
Wait, why would I be going OUT the house in the zombie apocalypse? I'll lock myself inside and live off noodles, thanks.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Insurgency

GEOFF "GEOMETRIX" BURROWS
My copy of John Seymour's *The New Complete Book of Self-Sufficiency*. Someone's going to need to keep people fed during the apocalypse.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Space Quest series, *StarCraft II, Far Cry 4*

MATT "SAND_STORM" FICK
Pfft, duh. My collection of 11+ years of *NAG* magazines. Everything else can be foraged for.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Far Cry 4, Dragon Age: Inquisition (If I get them for Christmas)

❯ *mini review*

Pac-Man and the Ghostly Adventures 2

Just when you thought spin-off games were getting better, games like *Pac-Man and the Ghostly Adventures 2* will come along and remind you that they are not. Don't let the name fool you: aside from a few recognisable elements, this has nothing to do with the arcade classic at all, and is based on the TV series of the same name.

If you are not a fan of the show, then the barrage of unrecognisable characters will only confuse you. The game plays as a platformer, with the control shifting from 2D to 3D in some levels. Gameplay is hollow, boring, and far too easy (the only challenge is battling the camera angles). The graphics are vibrant, and the music occasionally enjoyable, but the animations and storyline are atrocious. There are a few moments that

shine. The 2D platforming has some good ideas using various power-ups, and secret areas are strewn throughout each level. However, the overwhelming impression of the game is that it's a poorly-made knock-off of *Crash Bandicoot*, and any good done by this game has been done better by many other games. Fans of the show are clearly the target market, but that's all. **NAG**

- Sand_Storm

40 *Completely devoid of nostalgia, not even the decent music, 2D sections, or a stack of quarters can save this.*

"I don't want to see your f#*king arrows, show me a dinosaur."
- SAVAGE

MICHAEL "REDTIDE" JAMES
I've got this large bathmat towel thing that Sony gave me for the PlayStation 2 launch years ago. It's super absorbent, huge and fluffy – I can't be without it.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare, StarCraft II, and *Terraria*

MIKLOS "MIKIT0707" SZECSEI
My wedding album and probably my son's favourite soft toy (it's a rabbit).

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Dragon Age: Inquisition; Far Cry 4; Assassin's Creed Unity

MIKTAR "MIKTAR" DRACON
My 2-way radio. You can use it for silent communication, throw one handset as a distraction, or just chew on it.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Persona 4: The Golden, Persona Q, Guild Wars 2, Warframe, LittleBigPlanet 3

SARAH "BELLUM" BROWNE
Car keys (not my car, and not from my house – otherwise I'd be doomed).

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Diablo III, StarCraft II, PES 2015

TARRYN "AZIMUTH" VAN DER BYL
The cats. Their farts already smell like death, so they'd make decent camouflage.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Far Cry 4. All the *Far Cry 4.*

› mini review

Robotex

We all remember Wall-E: that lovable, hard-working droid left alone to clean up a severely polluted Earth while humanity relaxed in outer space. But how would it look if we inverted the premise? What if we sent a lone robot to find us a new home on another planet while recklessly destroying the environment in anticipation of our arrival? If *Robotex* by Brazilian developer YFYX GAMES is anything to go by, it'd kinda suck.

The game is an auto-scrolling runner/platformer hybrid. You take control of a single robot with a jetpack and a missile launcher. Dropped into a hostile ecosystem with poorly-indicated obstacles and enemies, our mechanical friend has to dodge assorted hazards and kill the local fauna.

Though appearing on the PC and Mac, the game is quite clearly designed with a touchscreen in mind: controls are a simplistic, two-button affair, of which giant indicators appear on the screen upon first play. They're also rather unwieldy; getting the robot to hover correctly and fire a steady, consistent stream of rockets seems to be more about chance than skill, and navigation soon becomes more of a chore than fun. This, coupled with the almost non-existent music and lacklustre, confusing visuals, makes *Robotex* one to avoid, even with an asking price of only $2.99. **NAG**

- Delano

60 *This awkward, unwieldy platform-runner is cheap, but still hardly worth your time.*

PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / XBO	REVIEWED ON / PC	GENRE / Role-playing game	DEVELOPER / BioWare
AGE RATING / 18	MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > 4 players		PUBLISHER / Electronic Arts
WEBSITE / www.dragonage.com			DISTRIBUTOR / Prima Interactive

Dragon Age: Inquisition

A new jewel in the RPG crown

NAG FINEST QUALITY
EDITORS CHOICE
RARE COLLECTION
★ ★ ★
2014

ever since *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* completely devoured hundreds of hours of my life, I've been hankering for another open-world RPG to reawaken the feelings of awe and excitement I felt when first looking out over the tundra of Whiterun. BioWare has given that to me in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, and I absolutely adore them for doing so.

Picking up almost exactly where *Dragon Age 2* left off, *Inquisition* begins with an explosion that tears a hole in the veil separating the physical world of Thedas and the demon world beyond. In case you cannot infer, that's a bad thing. Luckily your character is the sole survivor of the cataclysmic explosion, but when you awaken you discover a mark on your hand and onlookers proclaiming you the Herald of Andraste (the prophetess whose teachings led to the creation of the Chantry and the largest religion in Thedas). As for the mark, it grants you the power to close rifts like the one caused in the explosion. So then: most of the world thinks you're some highly important religious symbol, and you have the power to seal the tears threatening the world… talk about being thrown into the deep end.

And being in the deep end turns out to be a recurring theme: *Dragon Age: Inquisition* is lore heavy. The world has been built up around three separate entries in the IP, so by now the land of Thedas is absolutely stuffed with history and places. It's basically a fantasy dork's wet dream, and if previous RPGs (like *Skyrim*) left you feeling underwhelmed insofar as lore is concerned, know that *Inquisition* has it in droves. And it's *wonderful*. The last time I was this involved in a game world's lore was with the *Mass Effect* series, and *Inquisition* has
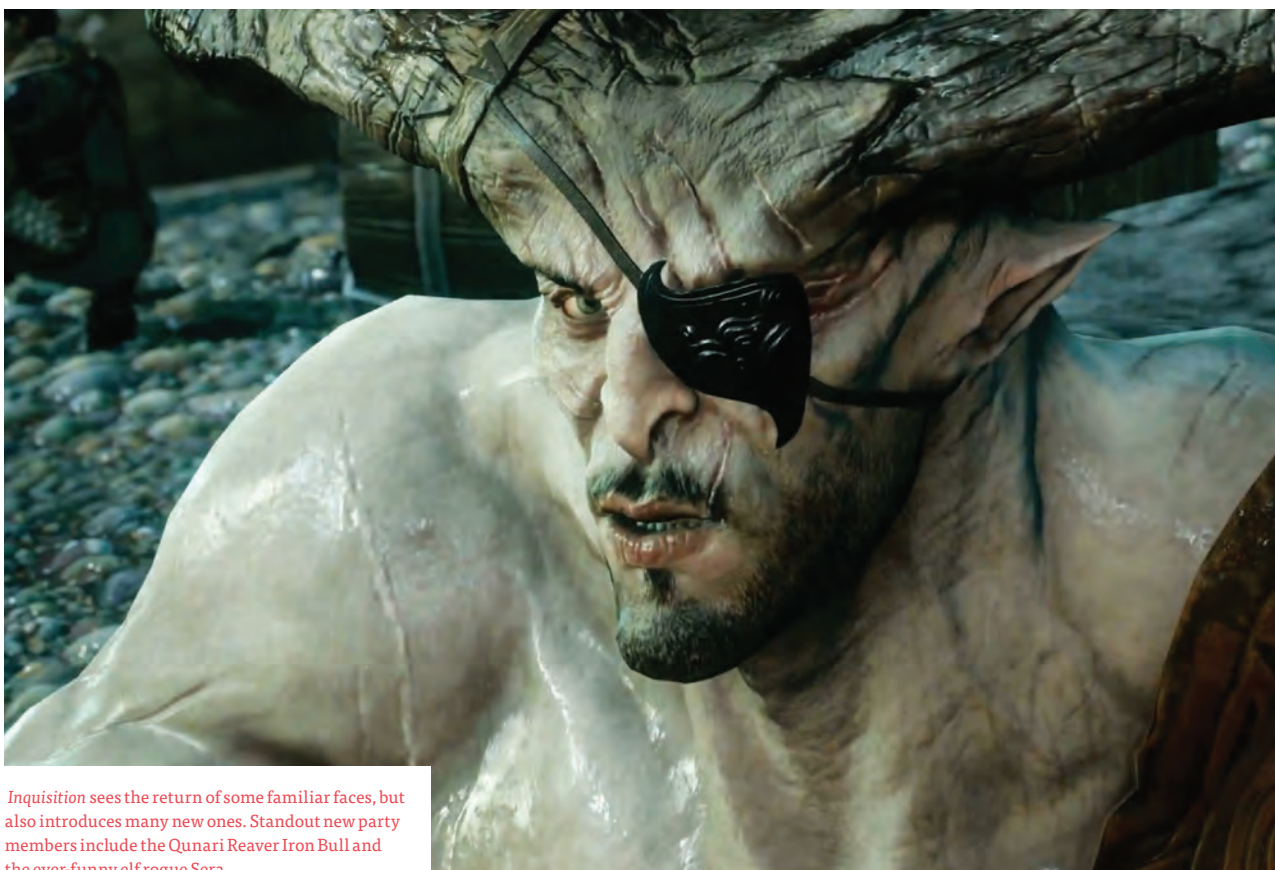
Inquisition sees the return of some familiar faces, but also introduces many new ones. Standout new party members include the Qunari Reaver Iron Bull and the ever-funny elf rogue Sera.

arguably ten times the amount of canonical depth. Throughout my time with Inquisition I was in awe of what BioWare has made. This is one of the most believable and engrossing game worlds I've ever encountered, and while it might seem terrifically overwhelming for newcomers to the series, it is not insurmountable and definitely shouldn't be seen as a deterrent. The weighty codex (which unlocks as you discover new people, places, enemies, etc.) provides all the information you could need for piecing together the world of Inquisition, and it's a world that will, if you let it, keep you enraptured.

This, of course, is the biggest new element introduced in this third instalment: the open-world. Don't, however, imagine an open-world like you'd find in a Bethesda RPG like *Skyrim* or *Fallout 3*. There are still loading screens and the world itself is divided into multiple regions that need to be unlocked. However, those regions are enormous in scale and absolutely jam-packed with content for you to sink your teeth into.

Other major series changes include the removal of healing spells and the introduction of limited healing potions (you can carry eight for your party of four). This was somewhat controversial for long-time *Dragon Age* fans, but it does mean you're essentially freeing up a party member slot that would have ordinarily been reserved for a mage who simply stood at the back casting healing spells. It's a big change but it works and makes party combinations a lot more varied. Being able to upgrade potions and discover new recipes allows you to customise potion, tonic, and grenade slots for each party member, thereby adding a further tactical element to your confrontations.

Insofar as combat goes, you're free to approach *Inquisition* as a light third-person action game, focusing on your own character and timing your abilities. Alternatively you can take full control of your entire party via the tactical camera. Unfortunately the tactical camera has a tendency to get lost in terrain and foliage, and even though the action is

GEOMETRIX'S OPINION

I once read a quote from a developer on *Inquisition* that the game feels like a *D&D* campaign. Or at least I think I read that. When I tried to find that quote it alluded me, so maybe I made it up. Either way it's an accurate comparison.

Inquisition proves that *Dragon Age* knows what it means to be an RPG with its roots deep in table-top gaming soil. It feels like the true sequel to *Origins*, only it's far more rich and lore-heavy, but it suffers somewhat when it comes to the combat. Sure, there's the tactical view that some gamers keep claiming that they need in their fantasy RPGs, but *Inquisition*'s combat feels far better when played like an action-RPG with just a few tactical elements thrown in. And the menus suck. *And* the helmets look stupid. Anyway, that's not important.

What is important is how *Dragon Age: Inquisition* makes me feel (or how it makes you feel, in your case), and I feel incredibly warm and squishy every time I sit down to play. It really does feel like a *D&D* campaign: not truly open world but open enough; filled with political intrigue and fascinating characters who behave in a way you'd expect (like regular people, just with pointy bits in different places); and loaded with things to do that feel important. The side-quests can be a bit of a grind occasionally, especially when you really want to see what the next main story thing is but you still need to collect twelve boar snouts to earn enough Power Points. But the whole mechanism behind Power Points makes sense in the long run, giving the player character a real sense of place and purpose in the game world. Aside from a few snags, this game will make you happy.

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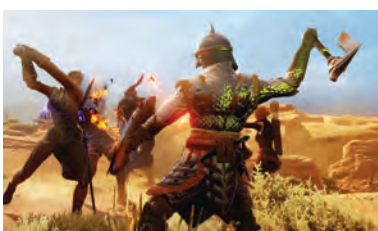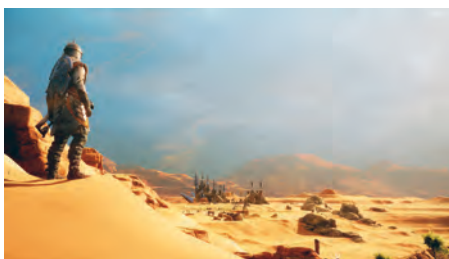
paused so you can line-up abilities for each party member, having to jostle the camera into position is a little jarring. Furthermore, mouse + keyboard controls aren't that comfortable; the PC version of *Inquisition* is a much better experience with a gamepad. While the PC release will benefit from higher frame rates and graphics features, it's also prone to a few bugs. I experienced one hard crash to desktop and on more than one occasion I'd have NPCs floating across the landscape. Cut-scenes, of which there are numerous, have this strange stuttering to them which is unsightly when compared to the rest of the game.

All of these bugs and glitches, however, are extremely easy to overlook when you stand back and take in *Inquisition* as a whole. This is BioWare at their best; it's a level of sheer immersion that harkens back to *Mass Effect 2*. Similarly to Shepard's second outing, *Inquisition* is festooned with incredibly detailed and fully realised supporting characters. I found myself growing very attached to certain party members purely thanks to the phenomenal voice acting and superlative script writing. Little touches (like Iron Bull taking you incognito into your army's camp so you can hear what your soldiers think of you) are dotted all over the game that all come together to create the most

compelling gaming experience you're likely to find in years. Just when you think you've seen all the game has to show, new features, skill trees, characters and gargantuan locations unlock 10, 20, and even 30 hours into the story. **NAG**

- Mikit0707

90 *This is gaming at its absolute best: detailed, lovingly sculpted, and brimming with content. While combat may feel a little light for more ardent RPG fans,* Inquisition *more than makes up for it by providing compelling narrative that's bolstered by some of BioWare's best writing and most memorable characters. Even if you've never played a Dragon Age, you need to play this.*

PLUS / *Visually stunning / Undeniably massive world / Memorable cast of characters / A meaty RPG classic*

MINUS / *Plot requires major concentration / Some wooden animations / The odd bug / Shoe-horned multiplayer*

PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / XBO	REVIEWED ON / PS4	GENRE / Sports	DEVELOPER / PES Productions
AGE RATING / 3	MULTIPLAYER / Local > 4 Online > 22		PUBLISHER / Konami
WEBSITE / pes.konami.com			DISTRIBUTOR / Ster Kinekor Entertainment

PES 2015: Pro Evolution Soccer

PES is back in the game!

a fter a number of years of accepting its place in *FIFA*'s shadow, *PES* has stepped forward into a more competitive light once again in its 2015 instalment. The competition between the year's two biggest soccer games is fierce, but rest assured, they definitely have their differences. *FIFA 15* is all about the flash, the big names, the excitement – you get to feel a bit like a hero; while *PES* is more about the serious side of the sport, the crafting of skill and a greater realism – you get to feel like a professional soccer player. It's a case of "the game of soccer" versus (the game of) "the sport of soccer."

While some have slated its interface and overall appearance for falling behind its competitor aesthetically, it really just serves to make the whole thing more user friendly, and a lot less slappable. The menus are exactly what you want them to be, logical and well labelled – you really shouldn't need a learning curve on game menus (I'm looking at you,

FIFA 15). This, and much else about the game, means that you can focus on playing soccer. You can save your frustration for the field, where narrow misses make sense and space is used realistically (and is therefore a pain in the ass for a newb).

Master League career mode is likely to be where you spend most of your time, but the new MyClub looks promising as an Ultimate Team kind of play mode. More interesting though is the middle ground option called Role Control which is also playable in multiplayer. This mode allows you to control entire units throughout a game instead of simply switching between players closest to the ball – the dynamics are quite different from anything else in the game and it really allows you to get to know the in-game dynamics of each player unit.

This is definitely the game for the real soccer nerd who likes a whole lot of detail in their tactics and want to take their mastery

Expect more realistic game scores. But not "2014 World Cup Germany – Brazil" realistic; really real, non-freakish realistic.

of the game seriously. Soccer *fans*, however, might find this game's offerings a bit underwhelming. Massive chunks of missing licensing mean that you will find Manchester Utd (the only real team in that league) playing against London FC instead of Chelsea. This can put a bit of a dampener on the overall hype of the experience, but on the upside you do get to edit your teams' uniforms and customise your players to within an inch of their lives. The real-world players themselves are still present, it's just a bit weird seeing Coutinho or Ozil's well-modelled faces in a completely foreign uniform. If you can put aside that sort of thing, it's certainly worth investing some time and moola in.   **NAG**

- Bellum

84 *This is a game for the serious sports nerd, the fan who scoffs at other fans who are more into the players' haircuts than the minutiae of their defence tactics. It's less about the excitement of a well-marketed game and more about taking the sport seriously.*

PLUS / *Gameplay is pretty realistic / Interfaces are sensible and humble*

MINUS / *It could be prettier / Lacks the "p-p-pow" factor*

NAG CALENDAR 2015

"Two possibilities exist: either we are alone in the Universe or we are not. Both are equally terrifying."
- Arthur C. Clarke

NAG

JANUARY

M	29	5	12	19	26	2
T	30	6	13	20	27	3
W	31	7	14	21	28	4
T	1	8	15	22	29	5
F	2	9	16	23	30	6
S	3	10	17	24	31	7
S	4	11	18	25	1	8

FEBRUARY

M	26	2	9	16	23	2
T	27	3	10	17	24	3
W	28	4	11	18	25	4
T	29	5	12	19	26	5
F	30	6	13	20	27	6
S	31	7	14	21	28	7
S	1	8	15	22	1	8

MARCH

M	23	2	9	16	23	30
T	24	3	10	17	24	31
W	25	4	11	18	25	1
T	26	5	12	19	26	2
F	27	6	13	20	27	3
S	28	7	14	21	28	4
S	1	8	15	22	29	5

APRIL

M	30	6	13	20	27	4
T	31	7	14	21	28	5
W	1	8	15	22	29	6
T	2	9	16	23	30	7
F	3	10	17	24	1	8
S	4	11	18	25	2	9
S	5	12	19	26	3	10

MAY

M	27	4	11	18	25	1
T	28	5	12	19	26	2
W	29	6	13	20	27	3
T	30	7	14	21	28	4
F	1	8	15	22	29	5
S	2	9	16	23	30	6
S	3	10	17	24	31	7

JUNE

M	1	8	15	22	29	6
T	2	9	16	23	30	7
W	3	10	17	24	1	8
T	4	11	18	25	2	9
F	5	12	19	26	3	10
S	6	13	20	27	4	11
S	7	14	21	28	5	12

JULY

M	29	6	13	20	27	3
T	30	7	14	21	28	4
W	1	8	15	22	29	5
T	2	9	16	23	30	6
F	3	10	17	24	31	7
S	4	11	18	25	1	8
S	5	12	19	26	2	9

AUGUST

M	27	3	10	17	24	31
T	28	4	11	18	25	1
W	29	5	12	19	26	2
T	30	6	13	20	27	3
F	31	7	14	21	28	4
S	1	8	15	22	29	5
S	2	9	16	23	30	6

SEPTEMBER

M	31	7	14	21	28	5
T	1	8	15	22	29	6
W	2	9	16	23	30	7
T	3	10	17	24	1	8
F	4	11	18	25	2	9
S	5	12	19	26	3	10
S	6	13	20	27	4	11

OCTOBER

M	12	5	12	19	26	2
T	29	6	13	20	27	3
W	30	7	14	21	28	4
T	1	8	15	22	29	5
F	2	9	16	23	30	6
S	3	10	17	24	31	7
S	4	11	18	25	1	8

NOVEMBER

M	9	2	9	16	23	30
T	27	3	10	17	24	1
W	28	4	11	18	25	2
T	29	5	12	19	26	3
F	30	6	13	20	27	4
S	31	7	14	21	28	5
S	1	8	15	22	29	6

DECEMBER

M	7	7	14	21	28	4
T	1	8	15	22	29	5
W	2	9	16	23	30	6
T	3	10	17	24	31	7
F	4	11	18	25	1	8
S	5	12	19	26	2	9
S	6	13	20	27	3	10

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PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / XBO	REVIEWED ON / PC	GENRE / First-person shooter	DEVELOPER / Ubisoft Montreal
AGE RATING / 18	MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > 10 players		PUBLISHER / Ubisoft
WEBSITE / far-cry.ubi.com			DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom

Far Cry 4

If it looks pretty, it's probably dangerous

far Cry 4 is great at crafting stories. Not in the traditional narrative sense, but the sort of mini-stories that stay with you long after you've forgotten why you were ever in Warzone X in the first place. Like that one time a pack of wild dogs gate-crashed your stealthy hostage rescue. Or when that demon fish bugged out and started dragging people out of boats. In essence, *Far Cry 4* is a great big funhouse, a violent theme park carefully designed to never stop giving its visitors exactly what they want, when they want it, delivering a gleeful surprise around every corner. On the surface, it's not much more than a mindless open-world shooter, in which you point your gun at things and click frantically until they die. But underneath, a complex series of systems and counter-systems (most of which are created with the specific purpose of murdering you) push and pull against one another, creating a dynamically chaotic playground. And you're thrust right in the middle of it.

Of course there's the actual overarching story as well, casting you as Ajay Ghale, who has returned to his homeland of Kyrat to honour the dying wish of his mother. As with everything in video games, that's easier said than done and you're quickly caught in the middle of a deadly civil war. This, however, is largely irrelevant. The narrative feels hugely inconsequential, particularly because Ajay's apparent reluctance to get involved in Kyrat's plight is quickly buried under a mountain of bullets and yak carcasses and squeals of manic delight, creating the sort of dissonance that makes the narrative feel like not much more than window dressing. As it was with Vaas, the maniacal exploits of 2014's headline villain Pagan Min are entertainingly macabre

Some missions are set in mystical Shangri-La. These missions are awesome to look at, but sadly not much fun to play. You do get a pet tiger though, so yay!

NAG MUST PLAY • SERIOUSLY, YOU SHOULD PLAY THIS •

and just the right amount of mad, but I'm not sure Ubisoft will be able to get much more mileage out of the "crazy for crazy's sake" approach to villainy. Beyond a semi-interesting power struggle between two leaders of the Golden Path (the rebel faction whose cause you join) which sees you having to make decisions that alter the course of the storyline and the missions within, there's little in the narrative that stands out.

That said, when the story melts away and you're free to generate your own narrative using the game's excellent mechanical diversity, that's when *Far Cry 4* truly shines. If you've played *Far Cry 3*, you'll be right at home here; the fourth game feels less like an evolution of its immediate predecessor and more like Ubisoft Montreal is still tinkering to find the right balance in all the systems at play. Some of their tinkering has worked, some of it hasn't. Certain side missions that have been inherited from the third game are fleshed out here to make their gameplay impact more meaningful, for example. Supply drops are


AZIMUTH'S OPINION

This trip to Kyrat is not going according to plan. It was supposed to be simple – get there, dump mom's ashes at Lakshmana, bang a gong or something, and get back home to America. Now, nobody even knows where Lakshmana is, and the country's murderous (... and sort of fabulous) dictator wants me dead. Or wants me to dance naked with a tiger for him. I'm not actually sure, but it's definitely the worst holiday, like, ever, and I don't even know how many times I've been mauled by eagles. Stupid eagles.

Far Cry 4 **is a gamer's game. It's got guns, about a zillion different things to kill, and an astoundingly spectacular Himalayan venue to host. The story is a somewhat drab but functional shoot-your-way-from-one-increasingly-absurd-plot-point-to-the-next madlib, plus one or two unexpected undulations, although glam supervillain Pagan Min makes up for it with some of the most outrageously (and hilariously) self-centred expository monologues this side of Handsome Jack. And besides, there's so much other stuff to do anyway – this is a game that's going to keep even the most attention-deficit-challenged player like me occupied for** *hours***, even if it's hunting fish with explosives or wingsuiting from one end of the map to the other, and the brilliantly integrated co-op is just another bumper sticker on the fun-bus through dystopia.**

Double-plus good and may Pagan's light shine upon you all.

88
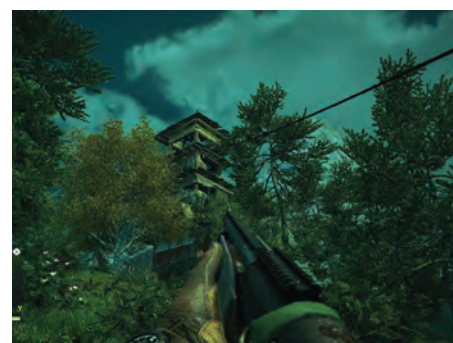
no longer simply a race from point A to point B – you now have to actually travel across the map in search of the supplies to be delivered. The user interface has been streamlined in some places but made annoyingly obtuse in others. Crafting doesn't feel quite so substantial here as it did before, even though it's largely the same system that sees you skinning ducks to make tighter underpants (and other such combinations). Perhaps it's because crafting has lost some of its novelty now that we've already experienced it before, but for whatever reason, it feels like ticking off items on a shopping list rather than an exciting and compelling reason to interact with Kyrat's menagerie of creatures. And by "interact with", I obviously mean "pretend it attacked you first and then turn it into a wallet".

The skill tree returns with many familiar skills intact. Crafting syringes that aid in hunting and survival is now linked to the skill tree, as fashioning advanced syringes requires that you unlock the requisite skills first. Weapon upgrading and customisation is fundamentally the same, with trading posts selling a variety of doodads to aid

Eagles are total dicks. They'll often swoop down and try to peck out your eyeballs at the worst of times, and you'll occasionally see them lifting wildlife high into the sky before dropping them to their doom.

you in your quest for lunacy. There's loads of stuff to see and do and unlock and fiddle with throughout the game, and when you're not doing prescribed missions and side missions there are bell towers to scale (which reveals sections of the map) and outposts to liberate. Once captured, outposts will now be attacked by Pagan Min's forces, meaning that liberated areas of the map are never truly safe this time around. The action is chunky and satisfying, and the harsh mountains and lush valleys of Kyrat make it a gorgeous location to visit/terrorise.

In the end, my mind always wanders to the bizarre, one-of-a-kind occurrences that permeate the game when I try to pick apart why it's so much fun to play, why I love roaming Kyrat as much as I do. This one time, I circled an outpost for about ten minutes, trying to decide on the best strategy for capturing it quickly and quietly. I fiddled with my camera, silently tagging enemies and wondering if it'd be best to use my hunting bow or a series of meticulously timed takedowns. Eventually, the game made my decision for me, and I heard a telling growl in the bushes to my right. Stealth isn't really an option when a Bengal tiger is chasing you through a heavily guarded outpost. Unfortunately, that same unpredictability carries over into the technical side of the game, with countless visual and

audio anomalies, UI glitches, teleporting enemies (and animals), and more plaguing *Far Cry 4*'s many joys. The bugs aren't what you'll remember though. You'll remember that time you ambushed one of Pagan's convoys with some crudely placed mines, and the resulting ruckus attracted a pair of angry rhinos who sent vehicles flying and you sprinting for the hills. It's glorious. **NAG**

- Barkskin

91 **Far Cry 4 is a jolly toy box full of unexpected delights and hilariously volatile encounters. From the moment you set foot on Kyrati soil the game scrambles to ensure that you're having as much fun as possible, delivering a constant stream of things to see and stuff to blow up. It's imperfect, but packed to bursting with frivolous entertainment.**

PLUS / *Fantastic sandbox world / Looks lovely / Battle elephants!*

MINUS / *Impressively buggy, borderline broken / Uplay is rubbish*

PLATFORMS / 360 / PS3	REVIEWED ON / 360	GENRE / Action adventure	DEVELOPER / Ubisoft Sofia
AGE RATING / 18	MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None		PUBLISHER / Ubisoft
WEBSITE / assassinscreed.ubi.com			DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom

Assassin's Creed Rogue

It's time to turncoat!

assassin's Creed Rogue is a weird filler game that is a direct sequel to Black Flag, however it still contains links to Assassin's Creed III and features appearances by Haytham Kenway and Adewale. It ties up the loose ends that fell between the cracks in these games, and although it was released at the same time as its big brother Unity, it links only loosely to it in terms of story.

You play as Shay Patrick Cormac, a younger member of the Brotherhood who, after making some startling discoveries, defects and joins the Templars. He then proceeds to hunt down and destroy his former Assassin brothers, becoming an "Assassin Hunter". Although there is a period specific character, in the modern day portion of this game you play as a new unnamed character working for Abstergo Entertainment. While investigating Cormac's memories, you inadvertently trigger a hidden memory that corrupts the Abstergo systems, and you have to continue to explore Cormac's memories in order to bring the system out of lockdown.

Because of its links to Black Flag, it's no surprise that you spend a large portion of the game captaining a ship, but the experience has been quite substantially improved since Black Flag, introducing new tactics and weapons, both for your ship and for your character. The air rifle in particular is a great addition, allowing you to take out enemies without getting too close. Perhaps for many that defeats the purpose, but there is nothing quite so satisfying as firing a Berserk Dart and watching the ensuing chaos as your enemies do your killing for you.

Hand-to-hand combat has been simplified a little, which honestly I'm not too pleased about, but in essence a Batman: Arkham series-type approach has been introduced, giving you cues as to when to counter your enemies. This takes some of the tactical approach out of the game, making it feel more like "combat by numbers".

The free-running system is present as always, but it does appear to be slightly broken. Shay will occasionally stop dead mid-run or jump in the wrong direction into nothingness. You get used to it after playing for long enough, however you get the feeling that Ubisoft tinkered with something best left alone. If it's not broke, don't fix it.

Honestly, I was pleasantly surprised by this game. It flew very much under the radar and I had all but forgotten about it until launch. If you're an Assassin's Creed fan who has moved on to the current generation but still own a previous-gen console, you should definitely pick up this title in addition to Unity as it rounds out the story and characters in the AC universe. **NAG**

- UnexpectedPippa

Shay's story introduces a number of new environments, namely the North Atlantic Ocean, The River Valley and most awesomely, New York City, which has been fully recreated in all its 18th century glory.

78 *Rogue is a surprising addition to the Assassin's Creed franchise and not only ties up many of the loose ends left by other games, but also provides a unique perspective on the war between the Assassins and the Templars.*

PLUS / *Fills in story gaps / Play as a Templar / Air rifle is a nice addition*

MINUS / *Parkour is a little broken / Story is somewhat disjointed*

PLATFORMS / PS4	REVIEWED ON / PS4	GENRE / Racing	DEVELOPER / Evolution Studios
AGE RATING / 3	MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > 16 Players		PUBLISHER / Sony Computer Entertainment Europe
WEBSITE / www.driveclub.com			DISTRIBUTOR / Ster Kinekor Entertainment

Driveclub

There was a problem connecting to the *Driveclub* servers...

every time I boot up *Driveclub*, I feel a strong sense of *déjà vu*, as if I've played this game before. That's probably because I did play a game that was largely similar – it was called *Need for Speed: ProStreet*. Though *Driveclub* seems to have no secret ambition to be a realistic driving simulator, it matches my experiences with *ProStreet* on almost every level.

In *Driveclub*, players are challenged to win races, complete objectives and beat the challenges that other players have put up for specific tracks. These challenges can require you to beat an average speed, rack up drift points, or hold to a racing line as close as possible. Beating these challenges in single-player gives you more XP to rank up your character, while doing the same for online races increases your club's XP score and pushes it up the leaderboard.

At the start, *Driveclub* puts you into the driver's seat in the first race of the game and does no hand-holding. There's no testing your skills, there are no racing lines to follow, no weak storyline, no grind for new cars to add to your garage. All you have to do is complete races and fulfil the objectives to gain stars to move to the next level of races. You don't even have to come in first place to progress through the game.

Driveclub is beautiful and alive with colour, even though it melts away the faster you drive. It shows off the PS4's power very well and I didn't notice any performance hiccups. Sound reproduction is very well done and all the cars have their own distinctive engine note. Evolution is so proud of their work that the in-game soundtrack is disabled by default.

Online multiplayer is also a different experience. Instead of hunting for online

The Sentralind, Norway track is pure nirvana and won't tolerate drivers with a heavy foot. One of my favourites.

lobbies, a queue of races currently being started by the *Driveclub* servers is offered to players. You can jump in to any session you like and wait for the race to start, or you can grab the first thing that appears on the list, pick a car and wait for the race to start. If you're part of a crew, you can join in to their lobby and stick together as a group.

Unfortunately, for now the online services are problematic and the offline AI is steadfastly dumb. Bugs such as 13,000km/h average speed challenges and regular session drops are all on the list of things for Evolution to fix, but they have been publicly transparent about them, along with making up for things by giving away free content. When things work, they work well and despite everything the game still manages to give me goosebumps. NAG

Cataclysm_ZA

Night racing in *Driveclub* is about as terrifying as it would be in real life.

75

Driveclub is a good alternative to today's arcade racers with action-packed multiplayer racing, but the server issues cause much frustration, leading players to deal with the lifeless AI in the relatively short single-player campaign.

PLUS / *Solid frame rate / Beautiful vistas / Good controller response / Awesome night races*

MINUS / *Boring AI / Limited replayability / No Japanese or American brands*

| PLATFORMS / PC / PS4 / XBO		REVIEWED ON / PS4
AGE RATING / 18		GENRE / Action adventure
MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > 30 players		
WEBSITE / rockstargames.com/v		
DEVELOPER / Rockstar North		PUBLISHER / Rockstar Games
DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom		

Grand Theft Auto V
Did someone say re-release?

When *GTA V* first launched in 2013, it redefined open-world gaming and multiplayer sandbox. It had a few issues, but the re-release addresses all of those and we are left with a game that is almost perfect.

The core of the game remains unchanged both offline and online. The story is still a meticulously told tale of greed and ambition, driven by three strong and varied characters. The online section gets a few updates, most notably more customisation options for character creation and an increased player cap of 30. The game also includes all of the previously released DLC, but the promised Heist missions still haven't been added yet.

The biggest change is the first-person mode. Without a doubt, this is the best reason to re-visit Los Santos, and experiencing the sprawling and detailed world with a fresh perspective really shows off all the detail Rockstar was able to cram in. There are also many small improvements that veterans of the game will notice: much more traffic, dramatically shorter loading times, and light filters when your character puts on sunglasses.

PS4 users also have added benefits. Swiping up on the touchpad while in first-person mode throws a grenade without needing to swap weapons, and swiping down will holster your gun. And in-game radio chatter and cell phone calls come through the controller speaker for extra immersion. **NAG**

- Sand_Storm
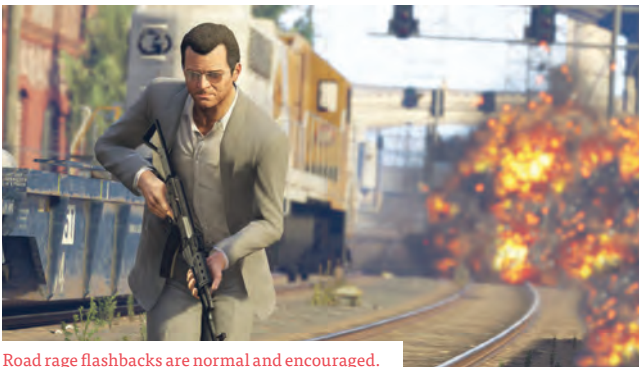
Road rage flashbacks are normal and encouraged.

95 *GTA V was an excellent experience, and the re-release has only improved it. Newcomers and regular players of the older versions have plenty of good reasons to pick this up, and it's a shining example of how a re-release should be done.*

PLUS / *First-person is a huge improvement / Updated features / Still the same great game*

MINUS / *Still full-priced / No new Heist missions / Not enough to complain about…*

PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / XBO		REVIEWED ON / PS4
GENRE / Sports		AGE RATING / 3
MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > 10 players		
WEBSITE / www.2k.com/games/nba-2k15		
DEVELOPER / Visual Concepts		PUBLISHER / 2K Sports
DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom		

NBA 2K15
2K Sports be ballin'

With an epic graphics update and 5,000 new animations, this next instalment in the series really earns a spot on your shelf. The gameplay itself has also seen some key improvements as motion, spacing on the court and reactions are all more natural. Defence can feel a little too much like hard work, but offence is mad fun. You get to feel super slick; faking here, cutting there, shooting like the pro you're pretending to be.

What's cool about this game is that the different modes really cater to different playing styles. As a player in MyCAREER, you can really get into the personality of the dude as you look for sponsors and market yourself on social media. You also get to customise your player through the face scan feature or the more conventional sliders – this would be more of a plus if the results were less creepy; still, if you have the patience (and YouTube videos) to get it right, it can be pretty impressive. The little touches in MyGM make this mode more compelling to the kind of player that likes to keep an eye on details – right down to controlling food prices in the stadium. If you're really into micro-management, though, go for MyLEAGUE (a new addition) first; where team rosters, salaries and more are left up to you. **NAG**

- Bellum

85 *Epic graphics, improved plays and fist bumps from Pharrell in that hideous hat make this a game well worth the purchase. The different game modes mean that you can play it in different ways, focussing on different things, so boredom need only become a factor by the time 2k16 is a thing. Don't bother with the face scan, you'll have nightmares.*

PLUS / *Impressive graphics / Fun offense playability / Dynamic playing styles*

MINUS / *Irksome defence playability / Creepy player customisation*

PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3		**REVIEWED ON** / PS3	
AGE RATING / 3		**GENRE** / Racing	
MULTIPLAYER / Local > 2 players		Online > 16 players	
WEBSITE / www.formula1-game.com			
DEVELOPER / Codemasters		**PUBLISHER** / Codemasters	
DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom			

PLATFORMS / PC / PS4 / XBO		**REVIEWED ON** / PS4	
GENRE / Action adventure		**AGE RATING** / 18	
MULTIPLAYER / Local > None		Online > None	
WEBSITE / www.unitedfrontgames.com			
DEVELOPER / United Front Games		**PUBLISHER** / Square-Enix	
DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom			

F1 2014
Slow in, fast out, now full throttle

C odemasters' *F1 2014* is another title worthy of the F1 licence and the last hurrah for the PS3 and Xbox 360. This time around, it's easier to jump into a career. Players now sign up to a team of their choice for a long or short season, instead of climbing the ladder to get to Ferrari or Mercedes AMG. There are also various challenges you can complete out of or in-season and if you're just looking for a race, that's still there too.

Like most yearly franchises, *F1* has legacy roots stretching back multiple games, but it's not yet past its prime. The graphics are good and the default controls are sensible. The physics engine does make using a controller easier, but unless you're a purist and turn off all the driver aids immediately, the action may feel a bit tame at first.

Fans of the series might be disappointed as some content found on older games has been cut out, like the super-scary classic F1 cars. One in-game gripe is the text is tiny on low-res TVs.

Overall, *F1 2014* is a good addition to a racing fan's collection. Add-ons like ERS, turbocharged engines, and the new regulations keep things fresh and different. If you've never played an *F1* game before, consider picking this up. **NAG**

- CataclysmZA

F1 cars now feature a hybrid energy recovery system and turbocharged V6 engines.

75 *F1 2014 is a decent entry for the series, with more emphasis on attracting new players and introducing fans to new rules, engines and better technology. Mastery of ERS will take some time.*

PLUS / *Good controls / Forgiving to newcomers*

MINUS / *No classic F1 cars / Default driver aids need adjustment / Limited commentary*

Sleeping Dogs: Definitive Edition
Kung fu your... Wei to justice!

S leeping Dogs: Definitive Edition is a re-release of the 2012 game, and in general adds a great deal more value to the package. The story follows Wei Shen, an undercover cop in Hong Kong as he infiltrates a triad and attempts to bring it down. The plot feels like it was ripped straight from Chinese action cinema, and tells a good story of lies, deceit, and justice delivered by jump-kicks.

The *Definitive Edition* includes numerous DLC items and presentation updates. The voice acting is superb (featuring talents like Emma Stone), and, while the cut-scenes look dated and ugly, the in-game graphics are richly detailed and gorgeous to behold. Three large DLC storylines are also included, and see you entering martial arts tournaments or battling the undead. Gameplay mixes exploration, driving, shooting, and a deep hand-to-hand combat system that will bring out your inner Jet Li. The missions are varied and see you working on both sides of the law, but the gameplay's craziness clashes with the harsh and serious tone of the storyline. One second you're slapping a triad goon with a fish, the next you're watching two characters die in each other's arms.

Sadly, the game has a few bugs. They come and go, but there are enough to keep you guessing about when they might return. **NAG**

- Sand_Storm

85 *Sleeping Dogs was and still is a great game. Enough has been added to increase its value, and the DLC makes it worthwhile for fans to return. Some bugs and contrasts in tone are overshadowed by the fun action, beautiful world and story ripped right out of a John Woo movie.*

PLUS / *Great presentation / Mission variety / Thrilling story / Relatively cheap*

MINUS / *A few bugs / Poor quality cut-scene graphics / Strange gameplay-story contrast*

DYING LIGHT

Anyone who enjoys zombie games has spent some time with *Dead Island*. When it was first shown in action, the game's brutal melee combat and starkly contrasted setting gave it instant appeal for those who like their games with a touch of darkness. While it wasn't without its share of problems, *Dead Island* did more for developers Techland than anything they had produced in the decade before (including the *Call of Juarez* series), and thanks to its successes, the team expanded over the years, eventually growing to almost three times the size.

Dying Light was originally intended to be the sequel to *Dead Island*, but once development got underway it became clear that there were simply too many differences, and so *Dying Light* was born. With the original *Dead Island* team at the helm this is an exciting prospect for the developers and players alike: improved technology, more intense combat, a move towards deeper role-playing and horror aspects. Lead producer Tymon Smektala tells it like it is: "*Dead Island*

helped us to make *Dying Light*, but *Dying Light* is a totally different beast."

The developers are keeping quiet on most of the story elements of *Dying Light*, but we do know that it takes place in a fictitious version of Istanbul called Harran, which has been quarantined following a zombie outbreak that's ravaged the world. Players take on the role of special operative Kyle Crane who's under the employ of an organisation called GRE. In the beginning of the game, Crane is tasked to parachute right into the middle of a Harran and locate a man who might hold the cure for the zombie virus. As expected, there are a few twists and turns along the way and before long Crane finds himself in the middle of trouble with more than just the undead. There are still a few living people in Harran, and as history has taught us, people tend to lose their cool during a zombie apocalypse.

Like *Dead Island, Dying Light* plays from a first-person perspective to get the player right up the noses of the shambling (or sprinting!) hordes. And you'll have to get right in there: most of the weapons available are

designed for melee use; hammers, cleavers, batons, bats, axes, sledgehammers, and even swords are up for grabs. Firearms like rifles, pistols and shotguns are also present, but ammunition is scarce. Besides that, firing off a rifle in the middle of the night in a city filled with creatures looking to snack on your grey matter is not a particularly smart thing to do unless you like playing the role of a worm on a hook. There's also a zombie breed that is extremely sensitive to noise, and likes to eliminate the source of it without asking too many questions.

But combat will be a far more complex matter than walking up to a zombie and pressing A to bash their lights out: target body parts to cripple, disarm (often literally), break bones, or even decapitate your would-be biters. You'll also have access to a wide variety of special manoeuvres that can be performed in combat, depending on whether you tend down the agility or power sides of the character skill tree. Agility moves are for those who like to keep going: don't slow down to engage those walking corpses when you can simply avoid fighting altogether; you can run past them, slide under them, or jump over them. Those who desire a more direct approach will have plenty of options as well:

"IF YOU'VE SEEN IT IN A PARKOUR VIDEO, IT'S PROBABLY ON THE LIST OF MOVES AVAILABLE."

CRAFTING

There's plenty about *Dying Light* that goes off the beaten path of sanity, and this applies especially to the weapons department. You'll be able to upgrade and customise your weapons from a pool of over 100 base items spread across the schools of slashing, stabbing, bashing, burning, electrocuting, and whatever else you'd like to use to deal with the undead. As you move through the game world, you'll have ample opportunities to loot bodies, car boots, luggage, and many more treasure chest variants to find the crafting components that you'll need to build your ultimate arsenal. It seems like weapons take damage during use, but it also appears as though you'll be able to perform quick repairs to keep them fighting fit.

Harran is divided into a number of districts that have their own unique look and gameplay challenges. For example, Old Town features a lot of vertical play thanks to its easily-accessed rooftops and narrow alleyways for you to jump across.

power moves like 360-degree spins, sweeps, jump-kicks, head-stomps, and all sorts of other icky flights of fancy are at your disposal. Techland have stated that there'll be over 50 abilities to unlock. Most of these abilities will be active rather than passive, and open up plenty of opportunities to find a play style that suits you; most of the missions in the game can be completed in multiple ways.

But there's far more to do in Harran than simply fight zombies. During the story you'll be required to move throughout the city, and with bus services likely not reliable, that means you'll be doing so on foot. *Dying Light* borrows much inspiration from *Mirror's Edge* when it comes to player movement, but instead uses a dynamic system called Natural Movement that permits players to go absolutely anywhere, provided they have the necessary skills and/ or equipment. Run up and along walls; vault across large distances; slide under obstacles; dive roll to break your fall; if you've seen it in a parkour video, it's probably on the list of

If you're stuck high on a rooftop somewhere, look around for a tent, awning, tarpaulin, or pile of trash to break your fall when you decide to go leaping off the edge.

"YOU'LL ALSO HAVE ACCESS TO A WIDE VARIETY OF SPECIAL MANOEUVRES THAT CAN BE PERFORMED IN COMBAT, DEPENDING ON WHETHER YOU TEND DOWN THE AGILITY OR POWER SIDES OF THE CHARACTER SKILL TREE."

CO-OP AND COMPETITIVE MULTIPLAYER

If it's fun by yourself, imagine doing it with three other people! This rule applies to so much in life, and *Dying Light* is no exception. Up to four players can join together to take on the challenges of the game world, either supporting each other in the completion of quests or simply banding together to go and bash in as many zombie heads as they can.

But Techland isn't happy to simply leave it at "there is co-op". During their play-testing, the developers found themselves competing with one another every now and then: racing to quest locations or having impromptu zombie-bashing contests. So they decided to implement this system officially. During your co-op adventures, you'll occasionally be presented with an optional challenge to test either agility or strength. The player who wins gets themselves a neat little XP bonus and, perhaps more importantly, bragging rights until the next challenge pops up.

There's also a purely competitive game mode called Be The Zombie which, as you might have guessed, lets you play as one of the undead. How it works is rather interesting: when you join in the BTZ mode, you'll be thrown into someone else's game. There you'll spawn as a Super Infected called the Night Hunter – an incredibly agile zombie who moves and fights in a way much like the Hunter from *Left 4 Dead*. The Night Hunter is tasked to hunt down the player(s), and if it kills everyone, it's declared the winner. The humans, on the other hand, must destroy a number of hives which were spawned in the area: if they do so before being eaten alive, then good for them!

While it's extremely powerful, the Night Hunter is a bit of a glass cannon; players must use their sneakiest tactics to break apart the players and take them down one at a time. The Hunter is also extremely sensitive to UV light, which makes those UV flashlights the players carry all the more pesky. Burning the Hunter with these lights will drain its power, buying the players more time to get to the hives and deal with them while the Infected recharges.

⌃ And this is why crystal meth is bad for you kids

moves available. Oh, and there's a grappling gun in case you're feeling lazy. But don't think that just because you can get to the rooftops you'll be safe from the clutches of undeath: the zombies might be slobbering fools during the day, but at night, everything changes...

Dying Light features a dynamic day/night cycle that you'll do well to keep an eye on. During the day you can move through the city in relative safety, dodging or engaging with small packs of zombies as necessary. But when the sun sets, the zombies become more powerful. Their glowing red eyes tell that they're more alert; their senses are keener. They also become smarter, capable of hunting down any intruders (that's you), and even laying ambushes for the unwise. They become more aware of each other as well, and will cooperate to bring you down. You will become the prey, and they'll make a meal of you if you're not extra careful. They also become more agile at night, and will chase you up walls and over gaps within their reach. Thankfully you do have a few tools at your disposal: it's possible to set traps to buy yourself a bit of time or knock off a few valuable hit-points from your pursuers. But really, it's best just to stay indoors. Find a good book and worry about the apocalypse in the morning.

Dying Light is a bold step for Techland. With the *Dead Island* series out of their hands (Deep Silver owns the rights to it), this is their chance to really show what they're capable of. Warner Bros. is simply there to help with distribution and marketing: this is Techland's game, and from what we've seen it's more than capable of surpassing its spiritual predecessor.

INTERVIEW

with Tymon Smektala, lead producer on *Dying Light*

NAG: What sort of challenges did you have in building an environment that's suitable for free-running, and how "contained" is the player character?

Tymon: The hardest thing for us to build in *Dying Light* was in fact the entire player movement system from the programming point of view. We started with an approach quite similar to what *Mirror's Edge* had – we've been placing objects in the game world that you could interact with (read: climb on). But even though at one point we had about 50 thousand of these interactive objects we still weren't satisfied with the freedom of movement offered. We still felt limited, or contained as you put it. And our approach of manually putting in these points was clearly unsustainable. The slightest level change and it became an absolute mess. So at one point we decided to scrap the old system and try to think of something else, and it was then that the Natural Movement system was born. Our programmers came up with an idea to analyse the geometry in front of the player in real-time to assess which edges the player character should be able to climb, and what animation should be played when that happens. One of our crazy programmers put this thing together on his own within a week. The initial prototype was rough looking, but it actually worked. It was a revelation, though it also produced a set of completely new challenges. For example we had to design all of our missions anew, because after the implementation of the Natural Movement system players were able to reach their objectives through unexpected, made up on the fly routes which were not possible in the old system. All of the level design tricks we used so far had to go out the window.

NAG: Just how difficult is the night-time play, and how are you attempting to balance the difficulty without making the player feel confined or even bored during the night?

Tymon: Believe me, you won't get bored during the night – there are freaks out there that will keep you busy but not to the point where you are forced to cower in a corner and wait till the sun rises. Based on play tests, we see the first nights are really terrifying, but once the player has developed a bit, they start to get a feel for what you can do in the night. What tactics work, where they can push it to scrape by etc. The important bit about our night time is that it completely changes the whole experience. We implement new gameplay mechanics, the AI switches its behaviour as well, so whatever you learned and got used to during the day may not totally suffice. The risk and reward mechanic is quite simple here though – whatever you do during the night, you get double bonus for it in Power and Agility points (and a thrill from doing something very dangerous and surviving it. Certain tasks can only be achieved at night and certain items can only be found at night too so there are enough incentives to ensure the player plays during the night. Our Natural Movement system helps ensure players don't feel confined.

NAG: *Dying Light* is billed as a mix of action, adventure, horror, and survival. What would you say is the biggest challenge in making (and keeping) interactive media genuinely scary?

Tymon: There are different approaches and there's no safe formula for video game scares. *Dying Light* is based on the usual tropes – the

> As you move and fight your way through the game, your character will earn XP towards either agility- or strength-based abilities. This "earn while you do" approach is designed to give players a natural-feeling system of progression that feeds back to their style of play.

feeling of facing an adversary who's stronger than you, the constant lack of resources, the unexpectedness of enemy behaviour, but we wind up the tempo a few times, so it's the same loop, but on a rollercoaster. And speaking of rollercoasters... You need to give players a time to breathe, a moment to get their act together — and then punish them even harder. We have a set of very complex AI mechanics that try to do just that.

NAG: The fairly recent decision to drop support for past-gen must have been a difficult one to make. Could you tell us more about the thoughts and processes behind that decision?

Tymon: Of course it was difficult. Even though the game is distributed by Warner Bros. we're still an independent studio, so it's extremely important to us to reach as broad an audience as possible. On the other hand though *Dying Light* is our most ambitious project yet, and we really do feel that we need to prove that we can create something on par with some of the biggest development studios in the world. If you strive for something like that you just can't compromise, I'm sure that the game will benefit from it. But you're right, it was a very tough thing to do, and it took us a few unslept nights to reach that decision. However, the decision was the right one. We put quality as the priority and trust fans will respond accordingly. At this point, gamers crave truly next-gen experiences, and this is what we're going to deliver. I believe releasing

a scaled down game with only profit in mind is not something we should do and hopefully gamers see that what we did was really first and foremost for them.

NAG: Techland seems to have a moderate but hopefully healthy obsession with pushing tech and graphics to its limits. Would you say that's what contributed the most to the initial delay of the game, or could that be attributed more on the gameplay side of things?

Tymon: I would say both actually. We had gameplay mechanics which we could improve and a lot of those improvements are built on pushing the tech side of the game. We simply wanted to refine the game and with the extra time we had we started unlocking more and more possibilities which have made it into the game. This time there are no excuses, people expect us to deliver a truly standout AAA project. We could have released the game in 2014 but it wouldn't be the same game. And even though it was a huge risk for us the feeling at the studio is that it was a risk worth taking. We're very proud of what we achieved with *Dying Light*, and I'm sure that for many of my colleagues, this will be the game that they will consider the best in their professional career. When you look at the now and the game from five months ago, it's so clear and in your face just how stark the differences are. You have those two pieces side by side and you can show everyone that it was the right call to delay. **NAG**

- GeometriX

> **hardware** / column

HARDWIRED

by Neo Sibeko

Making smarter buying decisions. Chances are by the time you read this, many of us will still be on holiday. Perhaps some of us may even have some money left over from the silly season. Last issue I wrote about making sensible purchases for your gaming machine beyond just "speed"-increasing upgrades. This issue I'm further compelled to speak on this because I've read on the web about people planning on SLI setups and gearing themselves up for 4K gaming going into 2015.

All these investments are based around the 900 series GeForce GPUs of course. As great as these GPUs are, and I'm a massive advocate for the entire series thus far, it is worth stating that they are not wise purchases in all contexts.

This is true for those looking at 4K gaming in *The Witcher 3, GTA V,* and a whole host of other genuinely demanding games. Short of the release of the TITAN II / 980 Ti or that piece of silicon, your best 4K gaming GPUs are still the 780 Ti and the Radeon 290X. That's simply because they have the memory bandwidth to pull it off. Even with the insanely high clock speeds of the GTX 980 and in particular the EVGA GTX 980 Classified (as reviewed in this issue), at best with a useable overclock, you'll be able to run a 2.1GHz memory clock. We are dealing with GDDR5 here so the effective transmission speed is x4 and thus you're at a scorching 8.4GHz. That figure over a 256-bit bus is a respectable 268.8GB/s up from the 228GB/s default value, impressive by any standard.

Unfortunately, for the Maxwell GPUs, this still isn't enough to match the 780 Ti's 336GB/s of bandwidth at the default frequency. Yes, the new GPUs are more efficient, they are clocked higher, consume much less power, run much cooler, and in comparison cost less. That's all good and well, but if you're concerned about power and cooling you shouldn't be investing in SLI or any multi-GPU setup for that matter.

If you're looking at a multi-GPU setup and you're not going to use a 4K display, then you've already made an error, as there's not a single game a GTX 970 or 980 cannot play well above 60fps with the maximum detail level. You may argue that you need more performance for those 120 and 144Hz screens and that's fine. Consider though that you're not ever going to get a perfect sync of frame rendering and display using SLI. You may disagree and ask what about those who want to make use of MSAA or any other anti-aliasing technique? Well, you'd have a point if only you were not looking to justify

the use of those techniques via the current 900 series GPUs. This applies to DSR (Dynamic Super Resolution) as well. All these techniques are fundamentally rendering more pixels than the ones you see on screen. DSR, SSAA, or rendering at 4K are analogous to each other and near identical in performance impact and visual fidelity depending on level. What it comes down to is that all these techniques and this resolution are bandwidth heavy. The very same bandwidth you do not have with the GTX 970 and 980.

The smart money is oddly enough still with the previous generation cards unless you happen to own one of these, then you're better off spending your money on a more meaningful upgrade or upgrades. For instance, the successive GPUs to the 290X and the 780 Ti are built to handle 4K much more efficiently if only by way of more processing power and memory bandwidth. Given that these are likely to cost upwards of R9,000 why not spend that money on a 4K screen right now if you have to buy anything? You could argue that you're waiting to get a 120Hz 4K screen, but sadly those will not be around anytime within the coming 12 months as those are the domain of monitors that support DisplayPort 1.3, which are not in existence today and likely won't be in the short term. By the time they are available, chances are there will be newer GPUs for you to spend your money on.

This is not to say you shouldn't buy GeForce 900 graphics card, you should for many reasons, but 4K gaming or DSR are not valid reasons at all. Drivers will improve performance on both GPUs indeed, but not much can be done about a bandwidth limited situation as that's akin to a "fixed" constraint. Research before you spend and you'll be happier for it. **NAG**

Neo is a pirate. With the peg leg and eye patch and everything. He tried to hide it but there's a distinct clunking noise every time he walks on the wooden deck of our frigate, and the eye he drew on his patch isn't done very well. Besides that, the squawking parrot he keeps on his shoulder is a dead giveaway.

PSU
Corsair AX1500i PSU
R5,799 / www.corsair.com

GRAPHICS
NEW
EVGA GTX 980 Classified
R11,999 / www.evga.com

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

STORAGE DRIVE
WD Black 4TB FZEX
R3,099 / www.wdc.com

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

DISPLAY
ASUS VG248QE
R5,999 / www.asus.com

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

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

MOUSE
GAMDIAS Zeus gaming mouse
R869 / www.gamdias.com

MOUSE MAT
Razer Ironclad
R599 / www.razerzone.com

SOUND
Creative Sound Blaster ZxR
R3,599 / www.soundblaster.com

HEADPHONES
NEW
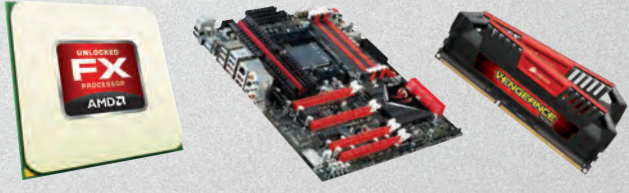HyperX Cloud
R1,099 / www.kingston.com

INTEL

INTEL CORE I7 5960X
R13,999 / www.intel.com

MSI X99S XPOWER AC
R6,069 / www.msi.com

CORSAIR VENGEANCE LPX DDR4 2,800MHZ 16GB KIT
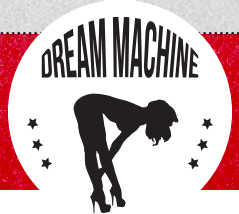R5,799 / www.corsair.com

AMD

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

ASUS CROSSHAIR V FORMULA-Z
R3,699 / www.asus.com

CORSAIR VENGEANCE PRO 2,666MHZ C11 16GB KIT
R3,899 / www.corsair.com

INTEL DREAM MACHINE
R69,265

DREAM MACHINE

AMD DREAM MACHINE
R53,365

HARD DISK DRIVES (HDD)

VS

SOLID STATE DRIVES (SSD)

VS

SOLID STATE HYBRID DRIVES (SSHD)

Right now is as good a time as any to make the jump to solid state storage if you have not already. Or purchase that large mechanical drive for all your media and games that you've been putting off. Both HDDs and SSDs have made some gains over the last couple of years which is why we've decided to revisit what you should be aware of when buying a new drive. Ideally, most systems would do well with a combination of both as one is geared towards performance (OS/primary drive – SSD) and the other towards providing capacity at a reasonable price (storage drive – HDD). Still, there's no reason that you should settle for a 32GB SSD with a 5,400RPM 1TB drive. Prices have dropped to the point where you could easily double the capacity of both and not pay a R1,000 more for either upgrade. Alternatively, if you do have the money, you could look at a hybrid drive which would give you the best of both worlds, namely SSD speed coupled with HDD capacity. Regardless of what you purchase in the near future, we've put together a few comparisons between these storage mediums that you should be mindful of before making your purchase.

HDD

❯ VALUE FOR MONEY AND STORAGE

Magnetic hard drives have a clear and irrefutable advantage when it comes to value for money. There's simply no comparing the price of drive capacities with anything else. At present you can purchase a 4TB WD Black FAEX drive (our current Dream Machine HDD) for just over R3,000, which is less than R1,000 a terabyte. This year, there's likely going to be a number of 6TB and perhaps even 8TB high performance drives, which will probably retail for the same price or a little more. For storing raw video footage, games, and just about anything else, hard drives are cheap and the clear choice for mass media of any kind.

❯ PERFORMANCE

Magnetic drive performance is largely determined by platter density and rotational speed. Both have increased significantly over the years, but there's a clear and physical limit to both of these properties. Right now it's possible to get a 10K RPM drive in a 2.5" form factor via the WD VelociRaptor drives. These are a representation of what the fastest magnetic storage has to offer. Outside of the normal desktop space you can purchase 15K RPM SAS drives of the more regular 3.5" size. These are even faster, with better controller logic, longer warranties, and increased platter densities. The performance is formidable and at the bleeding edge of what mechanical drives can provide. They are indeed fast, but compared to the low-end SSD of today they are staggeringly slow. This disadvantage is not in raw MB/S throughput, but in IOPS and 4K (small block) performance as these are the most deterministic properties of drive performance. It's still not wise to get a 5,400RPM drive though and you should always purchase 7,200RPM drives or higher if you can afford it.

❯ RELIABILITY

This is much harder to quantify because with each drive generation, the reliability is increased and imminent drive failure is detected earlier. However, there's nothing that can be done about a head that's collapsed onto the platter due to a failed drive arm, or platters that have somehow been exposed to dust. There are many reasons why drives fail and because we tend to store large volumes of data and information on magnetic drives, when they do fail it is catastrophic. This is obviously even worse if you use RAID 0 configurations that offer marginal performance gains in comparison to SSDs and against the increased risk of data loss. In general, however, HDDs are perhaps a little riskier if only because of the amount of data stored on them even outside of the tendency of mechanical parts to break down.

SSD

❯ VALUE FOR MONEY AND STORAGE

SSDs are much cheaper than they used to be five or six years ago. Consider that the original X-25M, which was many people's first foray into SSDs, was over R4,000 for 80GB of storage. Today a low-end 512GB SSD can be had for just over R3,000. That's over six times the capacity for R1,000 less. Still, compared to hard drives, SSDs are not there at all and may never be given the rapid storage capacity gains that magnetic drives are making. With that said, it is not unreasonable today to have a machine that has solid state drives as both primary and secondary storage. It does cost much more however and in terms of value for money, HDDs have the clear advantage.

❯ PERFORMANCE

The single biggest reason to have an SSD is performance. Even the slowest SSD you can buy today is faster than the fastest 15K RPM hard drive in IOPS, small block performance (4K) and sequential read and write speeds. In fact the advantage of SSDs is so great that even a RAID 0 configuration of the fastest 15K RPM drives will be slower than a single mid-range SSD. With performance displayed on a normalised graph, the bars that represent an HDD are not visible at all. Today an SSD still remains the best way to upgrade your PC's performance. It makes the largest difference out of all the components and if you're looking for a speed boost for your computer, consider an SSD. This is especially true for where your operating system will be installed.

❯ RELIABILITY

SSDs are reliable for the same reason that HDDs may not be, at least in part. The average user today has a 256GB SSD on a mid-range gaming PC. There's only so much data that can be stored there and with today's games spanning almost 50GB per install, there's not much to lose even if something were to go wrong. Thus, by virtue of offering limited capacities, you are at a reduced risk of losing data and/or information. SSDs do not have moving parts which also makes them less prone to mechanical failure. Cells do stop functioning, but high-end drives today are able to continue normal operation for at least five years with an estimated daily write capacity of 90GB/day. That is, they are guaranteed to work even after 164TB of data writes over the five year period. Thus reliability has been improving with each generation along with performance, so this is becoming less of an issue.

SSHD

❯ VALUE FOR MONEY AND STORAGE

Hybrid drives present a combination of NAND storage with traditional magnetic medium storage. In capacity they offer the same as normal HDDs but have the benefit of gaining anything from 4 to 8GB of solid state storage for the high-end drives. At present the largest drive in terms of total storage is the Seagate ST4000 DX. At around R2,499 for a drive, it costs more or less the same as a 240GB SSD so theoretically offers identical GB per rand ratio as normal magnetic storage. As NAND becomes cheaper, this cache size may increase proportionally to 16 and even 32GB. There are already 16GB NAND SSHDs but these are almost exclusively for OEM and not for the retail channel.

❯ PERFORMANCE

Hybrid drives are obviously faster than regular drives as they cache the most frequently used programs on the SSD/NAND portion of the drive. This means your frequently used programs will gain a massive increase in performance, but the disadvantage is that the programs you use infrequently will still be slower to access. Sometimes even slower than usual because several low-end hybrid drives resort to 5,400rpm platters which obviously result in lower performance than regular 7,200rpm drives. Excluding these few exceptions, performance gains of SSHDs increase over time and boot up times are dramatically reduced as a result of the caching. Overall these drives can provide negligible to significant performance gains for those who have very predictable usage patterns.

❯ RELIABILITY

Hybrid drives at present are not any more reliable than either drive type. Whatever weakness SSDs and HDDs have, the hybrid drive will suffer from both. Thus, when it comes to the reliability aspect, they do not fare better than either one. The only advantage over normal SSDs is that NAND is small and any damage it may incur is limited to 8GB of data loss at most. This data would most likely be cache and temporary program storage and not end user data. In many ways this is a 2nd level non-volatile cache and thus you're not likely to notice when it has failed, other than through slower performance in programs that were previously more responsive. **NAG**

HyperX SAVAGE DDR3 2133MHZ

› Website / www.kingston.com   › ERP / TBA   › Supplier / Kingston

SPECS		
FREQUENCY	2,133MHz	
TIMINGS	11-12-12-35 (XMP 2.0)	
VOLTAGE	1.6V	

Kingston, one of the largest if not the largest memory vendor, has been handling the HyperX brand with kid-gloves of late. There was a time when just about everything that wasn't generic from the company was branded HyperX, but that has all changed. HyperX has become a brand in itself and, as with many recent products, there's little to no mention of Kingston other than in the small print. As far as you and we are concerned, HyperX is for all intents and purposes a gaming brand that provides storage, memory and peripherals.

We had the opportunity to try out the new SAVAGE line of DDR3 memory. Normally there'd be no reason to get excited about a set of DDR3 memory. It's been eight years since we've had DDR3 and there's nothing more that can be said about it. That is true and very applicable to even this set of memory, apart from one thing though.

This memory may be sold as a 2,133MHz set, but with a little tuning you'll find that it is more than capable of 2,666MHz. In fact we were able to operate this memory at a healthy 2,800MHz. Even that was probably a limitation of the mainboard and BIOS we used. We have no doubt that with some proper tuning and even an hour spent you may be able to make this kit reach 2,933MHz. However, if you spend even five minutes manually adjusting the primary timings on this kit to, say, 12-14-14-35, you'll find that even at the given 1.6V, 2,800MHz is more than stable. It's literally that easy to gain yourself free performance from a budget gaming kit.

Why this matters is quite simple. Virtually every set of DDR3 memory you will be buying these days will be using Hynix MFR chips. As stated in previous reviews, these chips lend themselves very well to clock speed scaling but are very poor at low timings and latencies. To compensate for that you generally have to run high speeds, where the sheer bandwidth advantage offsets the inherent wait states and cycle delays when using such memory. As such to get the most out of your MFR based kit you literally have to see just how far it will overclock, and the SAVAGE kit does that exceptionally well.

We had to obviously loosen the timings a little to achieve these high speeds and that as always is best avoided as much as possible, but given that we were dealing with a set that is rated at 11-12-12-35 at a relatively low speed, loosening the timings has no real detrimental effect, but increasing the transaction speed by close to 700MT/s has a massive difference in performance. Not only is this easily appreciated when using a synthetic test like 3DMark 11's CPU/physics test, PCMark 8 responds to this change positively and general operating system responsiveness is improved.

Even with all the memory we test it's alarming to see just how much of a difference 667MHz makes to the system. Then again by numbers the change in available system bandwidth speaks volumes. By default the maximum bandwidth the system can provide via 2,133MHz memory is 34GB/s in dual-channel mode. This number grows to 44GB/s at 2,800MHz. Assuming that your efficiency drops from 74% at default settings to 70% (it's actually 69.4% as measured) your useable bandwidth is still increased from 25.6GB/s to just over 30GB/s. So the latency hit you take for increasing the timings is negligible.

Why this kit is sold as a 2,133MHz set instead of at least 2,400MHz we may never know. However we are glad that for likely just over R2,000 you can get a kit that can operate at frequencies and timings matching those of sets costing three to four times as much. There's nothing to dislike about this kit, it delivered far more than we expected and really it's a no brainer. If you can find this kit anywhere for a reasonable price, you should buy it. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

9   *The SAVAGE DDR3 2133MHz set is probably the most overclockable memory kit we've ever come across.*

PLUS / *Massive overclocking headroom / Potentially great performance / Looks fantastic*

MINUS / *Availability may be an issue*

EVGA GTX 980 Classified

> Website / www.evga.com   > ERP / R11,299   > Supplier / EVGA

	SPECS	
	CORE	GM204 (28nm) 1,291MHz (1,442MHz Boost)
	PROCESSORS	2,048
	RENDER OUTPUTS	64/128
	MEMORY	4,096MB GDDR5 7GHz (224GB/sec)
	API	DirectX 12 / OpenGL 4.5 / OpenCL / PhysX / CUDA

DREAM MACHINE
NAG DREAM MACHINE

This is one expensive graphics card. Let's get that out there before we go into the rest of this review. This graphics card is ridiculously priced and this isn't a South African economy issue. It is expensive everywhere else in the world as well commanding up to $200 over a reference GTX 980. We don't feel it is worth that much more but then again it is the best in the business. If you have the best in the business, you may charge what you want. That's how it works.

That aside, you should also know that this is the fastest GTX 980 on the market. Not by 10MHz, but something around 50MHz on the GPU clock. That is huge in today's market where vendors are outgunning each other with small and meaningless overclocking differences. This is not the case with the GTX 980 Classified. This one is almost over-engineered with a better power delivery system than what the GTX 780 Ti Classified had. Consider that for a moment, as that was a massive power hungry 7 billion gate GPU. It ran hot and had plenty of processors and was massive by all measurements.

One would imagine that EVGA would take the power efficiency of the Maxwell GPUs to make more cost effective, cheaper, and simpler GPUs. Instead they have gone the opposite direction. To illustrate to you how aggressive an overclock this GPU has, it was initially sold as a 1,404MHz clock speed GPU, however just before mass availability that changed to 1,393MHz. There's nothing that was discovered about the GPU at this clock speed to warrant the decrease in frequency. We suspect this has to do with NVIDIA's restrictions for partners or, if not, has everything to do with the competition not taking too kindly to EVGA marketing such ridiculously high clock speeds.

The surprising thing in all of this is that the GPU clock isn't that important when it comes to the GTX 980. It's already clocked very high, and yes, we can always use more performance, but in this particular case the limitation is in the memory bandwidth

afforded to the GPU. The biggest bottleneck is the memory bandwidth and this is where the EVGA engineering efforts become very apparent. It's no secret that every GTX 980 uses Samsung GDDR5 memory (we do wonder what will happen with that contract seeing as NVIDIA and Samsung are embroiled in several lawsuits against each other) at 7GHz. Any GPU that manages to clock that up to 8GHz even for the purposes of synthetic benchmark scores is considered impressive. If you're not sure what 8GHz translates into when you use your favourite overclocking program, it's "+500" in Afterburner or the like. On the EVGA card we could easily go to "+650" which means the clock speed was a sizzling 8.3GHz. If you plug in the EVGA EVBOT you can go even further.

In our case we reached an unprecedented "+1000" or if you will 9GHz. That is by far the highest memory clock speed we've ever seen and all this from a regular retail card.

If that doesn't speak to the engineering efforts of the EVGA card, then nothing else will. The GPU is undoubtedly the fastest and best made GTX 980 you can buy. Sure others may have "better" GPU coolers, but they aren't really beneficial because the GTX 980 GPU operates at relatively low

temperatures. Even if there are GPUs that supposedly have better coolers, they are only so by way of being quieter than what EVGA has produced. Temperature wise they are not likely to be any better as we recorded maximum temperatures of 78°C under maximum load with practically no air flow.

There's not much else we can say about the EVGA GTX 980. It is made for extreme overclocking as it's ready for this right out the box with not one but three BIOS settings. If that doesn't interest you in the least, you'll appreciate just how fast it is in games. There's nothing else that's faster. **NAG**
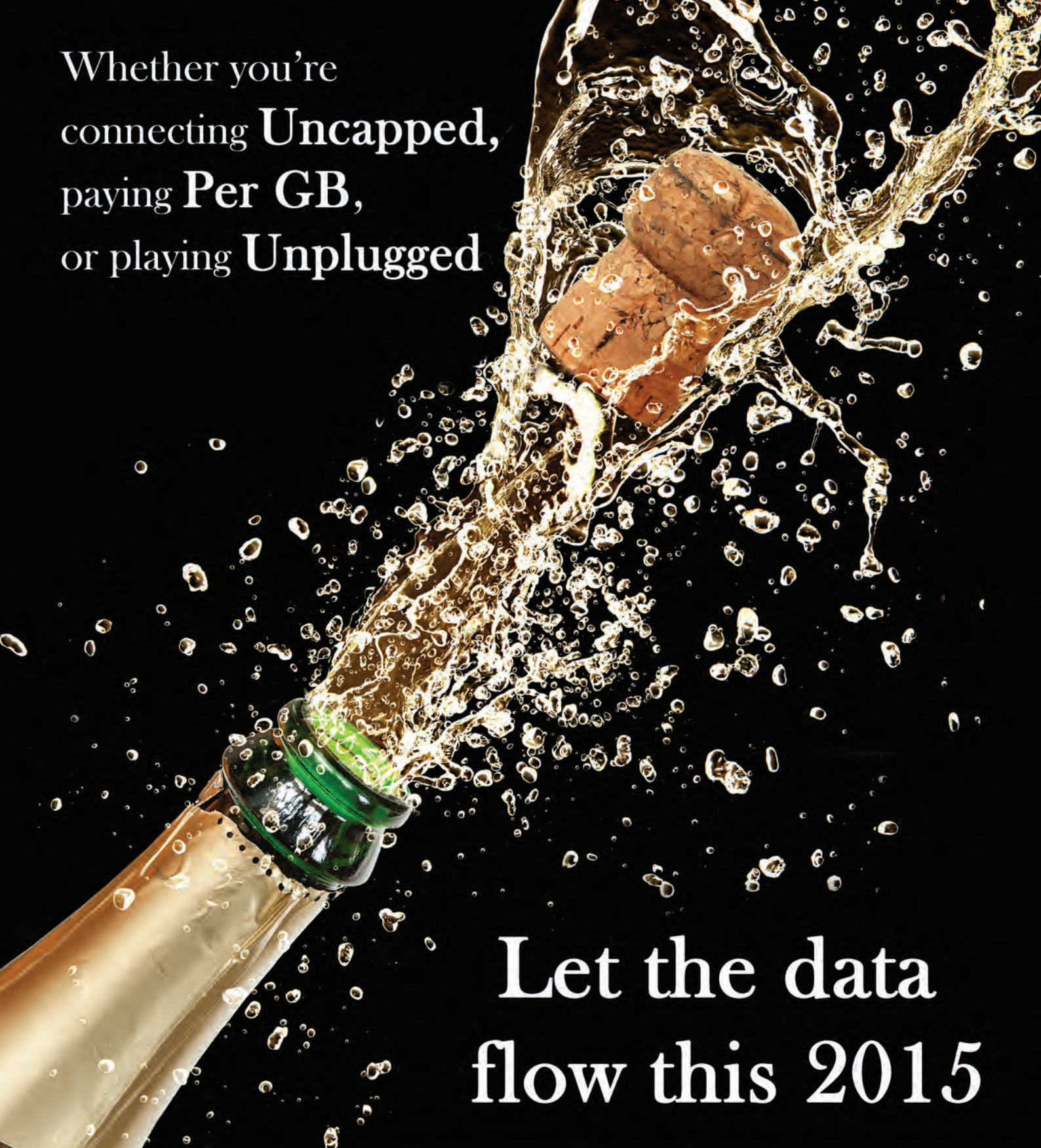- *Neo Sibeko*

BENCHMARK RESULTS

3DMark Fire Strike Ultra (4K): **3,437**

Metro: Last Light (4K very high): **3fps**

Hitman: Absolution (4K ultra detail): **46.2**

10 *EVGA has done it again and produced a peerless graphics card in the GTX 980, by some distance actually.*

PLUS / *Fastest GTX 980 around* / *Ready for extreme overclocking* / *Great memory overclocking potential*

MINUS / *Overpriced*

ASUS ROG Gladius

› **Website** / www.asus.com

› **ERP** / R999   › **Supplier** / ASUS

SPECS

SENSOR	6,400dpi optical sensor
WEIGHT	116g
SIZE	126x67x45mm
BUTTONS	6 (Omron D2F/Cswitches)

NAG HARDWARE AWARD

The ROG Gladius gaming mouse from ASUS is one more attempt by the vendor to win the hearts of gamers who primarily play FPS games. This isn't the first mouse to come from ASUS: there have been several others, each met with varying degrees of success. With the Gladius, it appears that ASUS is looking to strike the right cord with gamers by adding this to their ROG family which includes motherboards, gaming monitors, graphics cards etc.

The scroll wheel on our review sample was erratic to say the least. One moment it would register presses with but the slightest of touches then the next it would need an excessive amount of force. The scroll function is notched and rubbery which is fine, but using it as an actual button was a hit and miss affair. Again this could be isolated to this particular sample but if it's not, it may be something you'll need to be aware of before making a purchase.

The mouse design is simple; like other vendors ASUS claims that this mouse is suitable for all kinds of grips but in truth this works best if you palm it as it has plenty of support for even larger hands. It is quite tall and that lends itself to reduced movement at the base of the hand. It glides smoothly across most surfaces and being that it's an optical mouse it is a viable option for plenty of surfaces as well. In the Armoury software, you may select the mouse mat material type to better match the mouse behaviour in addition to configuring the lift-off sensitivity. Overall it is a comprehensive software suite that is elementary to navigate and configure. In this suite you may also control the polling rate from anywhere between 500Hz to 2,000Hz, which is a first in a commercially available gaming mouse. In addition to this, the Gladius allows you to adjust the degree with which angle snapping is allowed. While most mice allow you to turn it off or on, with this mouse you may control just how much of it you want, which is highly appreciated and makes the mouse far more configurable in reality than many others.

At just under R1,000 it's hard to pass up on a mouse like this. It's simple in design, execution and in the software suite. That simplicity ensures that the Gladius is a no-nonsense, virtually gimmick free, and highly effective FPS mouse. In a word it's "fantastic". **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

8   *This just may be the best mouse to ever come from ASUS. It's certainly amongst the best in the business.*

PLUS / *Armoury software* / *Comfort* / *Removable cable*

MINUS / *Scroll wheel button can be troublesome*

HyperX Cloud

› **Website** / www.computersonly.co.za

› **ERP** / R1,099   › **Supplier** / Computers Only

SPECS

WEIGHT	350g
FREQUENCY RESPONSE	15 ~ 25,000 Hz
IMPEDANCE	60 ohms
NOMINAL SPL	98dB

NAG DREAM MACHINE

Kingston has come out with their first true gaming peripheral and it is one impressive headset. Impressive isn't the word really because, despite a few misses here and there, acoustically there hasn't been a set to produce such a neutral and balanced sound. Coming from the plethora of headsets that are either bass heavy, have harsh high frequencies, narrow sound stages, muffled mids or all the above, the Cloud headset suffers the least in all of these. In fact, for the price there really isn't a better sounding set of cans.

You'll find no neodymium drivers here, and there's a relatively "narrow" frequency response range, even the signal to noise ratio by numbers isn't impressive. However, we'd implore you to put them on and listen with an unbiased ear. Initial impressions are jarring because it doesn't feature many of the artifacts that plague many of the gaming headsets, including excessive or boomy low frequencies. The Cloud isn't in any way attempting to rattle your skull or bludgeon you with volume across the entire frequency range. Its natural characteristics and wide sound stage make for some of the most pleasurable listening sessions we've experienced thus far. Audio is very personal and in the time I spent with the HyperX Cloud I grew to love the headset with each passing day. As with most headsets, the audio got better and each day I was moved by just how transparent these headphones are for the price.

However, if you plug these into your on-board audio controller, you may come away unimpressed. They will not under any circumstances make up for a substandard signal which other headphones can to some degree. Since we are appointing them as the new Dream Machine headphones it must be noted that our Dream Machine has a dedicated sound card, so there's no risk of experiencing anything but the best audio. If you're looking for a true and honest set of headphones for gaming, movies or just music appreciation, this is where you should start and possibly where you may stop. There's nothing better on the market for anywhere near this price. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

9   *The HyperX Cloud is easily the most impressive headset we've tested to date and at this price it just makes it that much more impressive.*

PLUS / *Acoustic performance* / *Build quality* / *Detachable mic and extra set of earcups*
MINUS / *None*

Sades A60 gaming headset

› Website / www.gamersgadgets.com

› ERP / R845 › Supplier / Gamers Gadgets

SPECS		
FREQUENCY RESPONSE	20Hz – 20kHz	
IMPEDANCE	16 ohms	
DRIVER UNITS	50mm	
CABLE LENGTH	2.2m	

Sades has proven repeatedly that they're able to deliver top-class gaming headsets at an alluringly low price point, despite what their packaging's terribly translated English may suggest. The USB-powered, PC-focused A60 isn't much different – but its slightly higher-than-expected price and a number of design stumbles tarnish what is otherwise an excellent headset.

The relatively flashy aesthetic is either going to attract your attention or immediately maim it, largely thanks to the bright blue padding on the cups and headrest, and ear cup LEDs that switch between blue, green and red lighting. While the materials used aren't of the highest quality, the A60 does feel sturdy enough that it'll survive many LANs without falling to pieces.

Comfort is where the A60's design suffers from a few flaws. The cups rest very loosely against your ears and they tend to move around quite a bit during use, which means that they let in far more ambient noise than I'd like. The material used on the cup padding isn't breathable enough either, so even after just a few minutes of use you'll find yourself sweating.

In contrast, the set's audio performance is fantastic. The audio produced by the A60 is lively and satisfying; rich bass doesn't overpower the mids and highs, and even though there's an impressive volume ceiling the audio doesn't distort much, even at extreme volume. There's virtual 7.1 surround sound and a foldaway mic built in, along with a vibration function that I'm not actually sure changes the audio in any way. Obviously there are in-line controls as well.

The high price of the A60 makes it difficult to recommend over its siblings, most notably the SA-902, which retails for a few hundred rand cheaper and arguably offers better value for money. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes

7 *Despite being hampered by a few minor issues, the Sades A60 is a worthy contender for your cash.*

PLUS / *Loads of volume / Excellent audio quality*

MINUS / *Fail at blocking ambient noise / Comfort isn't great*

Turtle Beach Ear Force XO Four

› Website / www.takealot.com

› ERP / R1,799 › Supplier / Apex Interactive

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

When we reviewed the Turtle Beach XO Seven (*NAG* November 2014), it blew us away with its performance and comfort. Going in to the review of the smaller and cheaper XO Four brings with it an expectation that we're going to take a decided step down from that point, but just how far down it comes is the key issue.

I must admit that I was immediately shocked with the XO Four as soon as I put it on. While its light weight and comfy headband go a long way to improve overall comfort, the immense lateral pressure completely undermines those achievements. This thing is tight. Obviously your mileage might vary, but considering how comfortable the XO7 was, I'm surprised by just how different the XO4 feels. At least this pressure ensures a solid fit around the ears (mercifully these aren't on-ear pads), which means excellent insulation from the nagging world beyond your Xbox or mobile device. Just be sure to take a few breaks every now and then should you feel the sides of your head caving in (we're kidding – hopefully!). And the ear cups fold sideways to increase comfort when you've got the headset resting on your shoulders.

On the performance front, everything is as expected. The headset connects directly to your Xbox One controller via the included adaptor, which makes for a convenient, "semi-wireless" solution. You'll get solid audio across the spectrum, although the mid-range is perhaps a little on the muddy side. Bass is delivered in sufficient amounts without causing any rattles; high-frequency and voice is crisp and clear. The maximum volume might disappoint you if you're used to a high level of output, but I found that around the 80% mark was sufficient. **NAG**

- Geoff Burrows

7 *A solid offering that's more affordable than its bigger sibling, the XO Four delivers quality audio, although some people might find it uncomfortable for long play sessions.*

PLUS / *Good performance / Excellent sound isolation*

MINUS / *Very tight fit / Max volume a tad on the low side*

THE LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE

PlayStation TV

❯ **Website /** www.playstation.com ❯ **RRP /** R1,499 (standard) / R2,199 (DualShock 4 bundle)

Putting the word "TV" at the end of a product name creates a certain expectation that it'll be a capable media device, but don't let that fool you: the PlayStation TV is a gaming machine first, and even then, it's one that might struggle to find its place.

WHAT IT IS

The PlayStation TV is a stripped-down PS Vita. All of the internals remain the same (GPU, RAM, etc.), but there's no controller, screen or touch input. Instead you get HDMI output, Ethernet, and a single USB port. In that sense, it's a tiny home console, much like the Ouya. It also includes a PS Vita game cart slot as well as a slot for Sony's proprietary memory card.

To operate the PSTV you need a PS3 or PS4 controller, or a TV and remote compatible with HDMI-CEC input (this would let you use a regular TV remote for basic navigation of the operating system and apps, but it's not suitable for gaming).

Since it has a cart slot and all the Vita internals, the PlayStation TV is designed for playing Vita games on a big screen, and most PSV games work well with a SIXAXIS or DualShock 4 controller. Touchscreen input can be emulated with the DualShock 4's touch pad.

WHAT IT ISN'T

It's not a media player. Despite its name suggesting otherwise, the PSTV is woefully inept at media playback, lacking any ability to stream media from an online source or even a local drive connected via USB. To play video or music, or view still images, you'll need to either copy them from a networked PC/PS3 or a USB-connected drive to your device, where it'll sit and take up space on your precious (and pricey) PSV memory card. Really the only streaming capability it has is that it can connect to a local DLNA server (usually a PC) and stream any shared content from there.

There is no Netflix, Hulu, BBC, YouTube, or Twitch.tv support for the PSTV, and from the looks of things, it doesn't seem like that support is coming any time soon (or at all, according to Netflix). You can use the system's built-in browser to view online videos, but that's about it.

INTERFACE

One of the PSTV's biggest weaknesses is that Sony simply took the PSV interface and dumped it on a TV. There's been no effort made to adapt the touch-based interface to one controlled via a gamepad, and the bulbous design looks childish and oversized

on any TV. Small tasks like app-switching and even navigating through the diagonally-aligned interface are a chore; there's nothing intuitive or easy-to-use about the OS design when it's presented in this format.

ITS COMPETITION

This is where we look at the real question: why would you buy a PSTV? Its price is the most attractive part, putting it in the same league as an entry-level Android mini-PC, although it's far more powerful and is more capable in terms of gaming. In terms of media playback, though, it falls behind by miles.

That starting price is deceptive, however. In order to use the PSTV for what it's truly designed (gaming), you will need a decent-sized memory card. Currently the 32GB card retails for about R700, which, together with the RRP of a PSTV/DualShock 4 bundle, amounts to R2,900. For another thousand rand (or less with some retail specials) you could buy a PS3 or a Wii U, both of which have equal or greater libraries

of games, more storage, and vastly superior media playback capabilities.

To make the PSTV an attractive buy, you'll either need to have a rock-hard budget, or a very specific need for its uses as a home gaming console.

ALL ABOUT THE GAMES

Since it's a PSV on the inside, the PSTV has access to the entire digital catalogue of PSOne and PSP classics, as well as all PSV digital downloads, which makes it a great choice for those who want a retro gaming console on the cheap. Just be aware that PSV games are not designed to be viewed at this size; many titles show their low-spec restrictions (especially when it comes to texture size) when viewed on a 32" or bigger TV.

Additionally, should you have a PS4 connected elsewhere in the house, you can use the PSTV for Remote Play. **NAG**

MOSH*pit*

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

> DEEPCOOL STEAM CASTLE

> **Supplier /** Rebel Tech
> **Website /** www.rebeltech.co.za
> **RRP /** R1,669

The apparently steampunk-inspired (it says so on the box, so it must be true) Steam Castle is a pretty unique-looking PC chassis. Its bold, curvy aesthetic is sure to garner attention. It supports microATX and mini-ITX motherboards, and can cater for dual installations of GPUs up to 320mm long, and it comes pre-installed with a 200mm fan on the front panel and a 120mm fan in the back. You're free to install a 240mm fan or radiator on the top of the chassis as well.

The tools-free design means you can quickly mount 2.5-inch/3.5-inch SSDs and HDDs (two of the former, three of the latter). There's also one 5.25-inch drive bay. You'll find four expansion slots within, and the case can accommodate CPU coolers up to 200mm high. The case fans have built-in LEDs, the colours of which can be flipped between red, green and blue – and you can also adjust the intensity of the lighting and set a breathing effect. A number of dust filters are scattered around the interior to help keep things spotless, and the bottom of the case rests 3cm off the ground to allow for better PSU ventilation.

> PC LED

> **Supplier /** Computers Only
> **Website /** www.computersonly.co.za
> **RRP /** R250

If you're looking to create some funky ambient lighting inside your gaming rig, then these 35cm flexible dual LED light strips are what you need. There are 21 LEDs per strip (two strips) attached to a 3m adhesive backing which clips into standard 4-pin Molex. It also has a removable switch terminal for when you want to manually turn off your lighting. Colour options are yellow, red, white and blue.
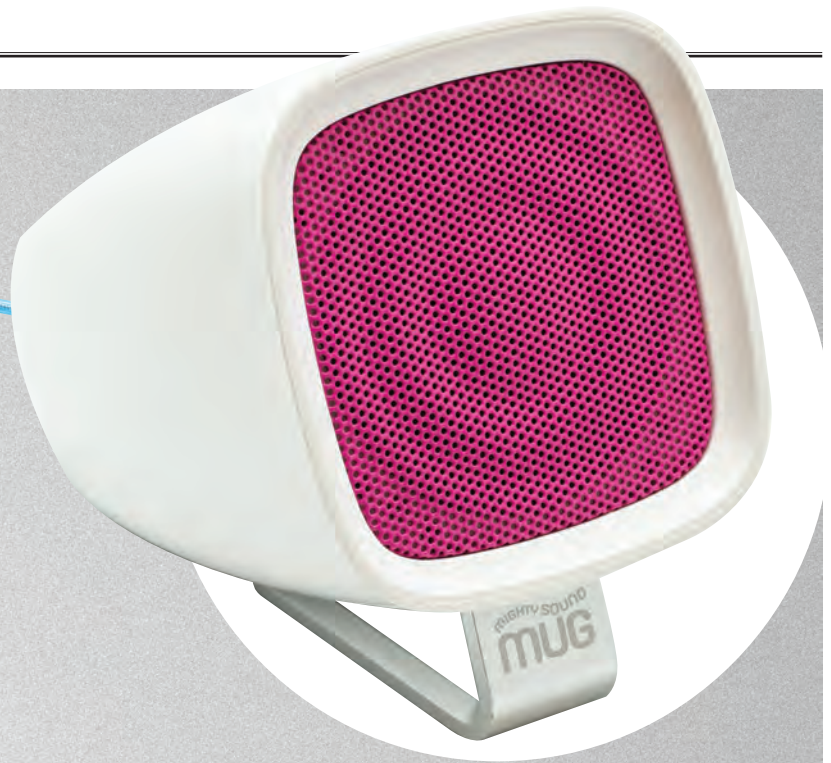
❯ WOWTHEM MIGHTY BUDS

❯ **Supplier /** Westcon
❯ **Website /** www.westcon.co.za
❯ **RRP /** R349.95

Mighty Buds earphones are guaranteed to make you look like you're from The Future. This is because while they're busy delivering funky tunes to your earholes, light courses up and down the cord in response to your music thanks to the power of electroluminescence. It's a miracle, basically.

There's also a built-in microphone and in-line controls so you can take hands-free calls and easily manage your music playback. They're available in various colours and come with three different sizes of cushion tips so that you can customise their fit to suit your ears. They connect to your media devices via a standard 3.5mm jack. Now for some technical info: the speakers have a frequency response of 20Hz-20kHz, are 10mm in diameter, and boast sensitivity of around 98dB.

❯ WOWTHEM MIGHTY SOUND MUG

❯ **Supplier /** Westcon
❯ **Website /** www.westcon.co.za
❯ **RRP /** R399.95

Look! On your desk! Is it a Bluetooth speaker? Is it a mug? It's at least one-and-a-half of those things! If you've got a fetish for audio equipment that could be mistaken for everyday objects, then this Bluetooth speaker that's shaped like an apparatus for storing and drinking hot beverages will be right up your alley.

The Mighty Sound Mug is obviously highly portable and promises up to six hours of use off a single charge.

It's got a wireless range of 10 metres via Bluetooth so you can play music from your smartphone or any other Bluetooth-enabled wotsit, and can be controlled either remotely or via the built-in controls on the bottom of the mug. The Mug's got a 3.5mm audio slot for wired functionality and a micro USB slot to keep it charged. It can be stood upright or on its side, but please don't put coffee in it. That'd be bad.

❯ TABZOO UNIVERSAL TABLET COVERS

❯ **Supplier /** Silverscreen Trading
❯ **Website /** www.silverscreenza.co.za
❯ **RRP /** R349.99

Cute and functional tablet protection for kids in the form of animal-themed sleeves. In addition to having an anti-shock EVA padded interior, they can also hold your tablet in place and function as a viewing stand by propping the tablet in between the "jaws" of your animal. The Tiger and Panda TabZoo 11" tablet sleeves are compatible with a Nexus 10, Samsung Galaxy Tab 2/3/10.1, Apple iPad 2/3/4, and other similar sized tablets.

❯ ROCKET RACOON #1

❯ **Supplier** / Cosmic Comics
❯ **Website** / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
❯ **RRP** / R49

The *Guardians of the Galaxy* film has come and gone, and depending on which side of madness you exist, has either wowed you or bored you. But no matter how you felt about the film, there's no way that you won't love the comics on which it was based. Especially *Rocket Racoon*. As it's both written and illustrated by Skottie Young, you might think that it lacks in one department or the other, but it certainly doesn't – it's filled with punchy dialogue and exciting modern artwork that will likely appeal to anyone who enjoys the work of Jhonen Vasquez. And the art inside the lines, from colourist Jean-Francois Beaulieu, goes a long way to improve the already expressive art.

❯ TRILLIUM (TP)

❯ **Supplier** / Cosmic Comics
❯ **Website** / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
❯ **RRP** / R229

Trillion is a classic science-fiction story. The sort of thing you'd call "hard sci-fi" if terms like that matter to you. It bends time and space and does what any good SF story does best: projects human drama way into the future (and even the past) to see how it plays out under radically different circumstances.

This is another book that's written and illustrated by one person, Jeff Lemire in this case, and while it's certainly a very strong story, written quite beautifully at times and filled with all that great sci-fi content that we all love, the art style takes some getting used to. Appearing rushed and inconsistent at times, it's at least certainly expressive, but this isn't the most accessible of art styles, especially when combined with water-colour. Not for everyone, but if this is your thing, you'll love it.

❯ THE NEW 52 LOBO #1

❯ **Supplier** / Cosmic Comics
❯ **Website** / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
❯ **RRP** / R49

Lobo is your perfect bad guy. He does what he needs to get by, and he gets more than a few kicks out of situations that turn nasty. So when this comic opens with the death of the classic Lobo, and the birth of a new one (with a not-insignificant nod to *Highlander*), you know you're in for a treat. But that's how DC's *New 52* comics go: out with the old and all that.

Lobo is a well-executed comic from all points of view. It's tough and gory and totally badass without missing a beat, and is expertly illustrated by Reilly Brown (whose work includes Cable and Deadpool). Don't expect anything terribly brainy from the writing or the plot, but then again, if you had, we'd question your sanity. Another unsurprisingly solid addition to DC's stable.

ATTACK ON TITAN COLOSSAL EDITION (TPB)

- **Supplier** / Heroes of Games and Comics
- **Website** / www.heroesofgc.com
- **RRP** / R865

Attack on Titan has long been regarded as one of the greatest manga out there, and this suitably huge collection is the perfect way to consume this epic tale. Collecting volumes 1-5 of the series, the Colossal Edition takes us right from the beginning of the story of a boy named Eren and his whole civilization that has to deal with the return of a world-stomping Titan. Gritty, horrific and intense – if you only ever buy one manga in your life, this should be it.

MAGIC: THE GATHERING: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION (HC)

- **Supplier** / Heroes of Games and Comics
- **Website** / www.heroesofgc.com
- **RRP** / R640

If you enjoy collectable card games and comics in equal quantities, then here's one for you. This Complete Collection of the *MtG* graphic novel series comprises all 17 issues of IDW's epic series. These pages are filled with sights that'll be familiar to anyone who spends enough time with the card game, and it's exceptionally fun to see how the world of *Magic* comes together in narrative form as we see the multiverse through the eyes of a thief named Dack Fayden.

EVANGELION: 2.22: YOU CAN (NOT) ADVANCE

- **Supplier** / Heroes of Games and Comics
- **Website** / www.heroesofgc.com
- **RRP** / R410

This is the second release of the second film (technically *Evangelion 2.02*), and comes with 40 minutes of bonus features in addition to the 112 minutes of the regular film, all in 1080p goodness. Audio is provided in both Japanese and English, with English subtitles for the purists. If you're not sure what to expect from a film with version numbers, then just know that it's about people in skin-tight suits piloting giant robots. It's anime bliss.

Extras include commentary from the US cast, the original Japanese trailer, deleted scenes, a remixed scene, and more.

❯ DC COLLECTIBLES BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY SET

❯ **Supplier** / Heroes of Games and Comics
❯ **Website** / www.heroesofgc.com
❯ **RRP** / R830

s there anyone on the planet who doesn't love the *Arkham* games? If there are, they are not welcome here. Shoo, you silly *Arkham*-haters! This set is based on *Batman: Arkham City* specifically, and comes with figures of Robin, Harley Quinn, Nightwing and Bats himself. They're all around six inches tall and feature multiple points of articulation. There are a number of accessories included, and as an added bonus it comes with a small Scarface figure. To be frank, some of the detailing isn't great (what's wrong with Harley's FACE?!), but this set is nevertheless a slick addition to any Dark Knight collection.

❯ SMALL WORLD

❯ **Supplier** / Boardgames.co.za
❯ **Website** / www.boardgames.co.za
❯ **RRP** / R639

A game of strategic expansion and indiscriminate genocide, *Small World* is played by 2-5 players on a game board (of which there are four) divided into a number of territories. Each player chooses from a variety of fantasy races and imbues them with a special attribute (you could create a race of Swamp Wizards, for example) that'll help you as you work to conquer territories and remove your opponents from the board. Eventually, your civilisation will overextend its reach, and you'll have to know when to send them into decline and found a new empire, ready to conquer more of the world and inch closer to victory. The caricature-like art style is lovely, and there's a surprising amount of strategic depth.

❯ NARUTO SHIPPUDEN MININJA BOX SET 2

❯ **Supplier** / Heroes of Games and Comics
❯ **Website** / www.heroesofgc.com
❯ **RRP** / R490

Not sure if you want an anime figure or a box set? Why not both?
This *Naruto Shippuden* box set bundles the uncut episodes 14-26 version of season 1 on three discs, one of four collectable figures (collect them all!), and an exclusive art card. This portion of season 1 runs approximately 325 minutes, and the figure is a somewhat chibi-style (dubbed "Mininja") Deidara.

Never miss an issue again!

(Post Office permitting, LOL)

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GG

Tarryn is a wizard. We found her while questing in an elaborate cave system in Borneo, where we discovered her rather embarrassingly trapped in a portal through time and space. Initially we weren't sure whether to push her through or pull her out, but when a dragon suddenly came along to see what all the fuss was about, we figured we'd need her level 7 fireball spell to help defeat the beast. In the end we all just sat down for a nice cup of tea.

by Tarryn van der Byl

And now for something completely different[1]

O kay, so maybe not *completely* different because it's not like I'm planning to dump everything and board an experimental spaceship to a supermassive black hole[2], but it's a new year and that means it's time to get started on that stuff I was supposed to do in 2014 which I should have done in 2013 because I pinky-promised I'd do it in 2012 after sort of forgetting about it in 2011 even though I was totally going to do it in 2010 already, and you know how it is. Actually, I'm not even sure now what it was, so it probably doesn't matter.

Also, I'm never going to finish *Skyrim*. There, it's in print so it's forever[3]. In fact, let's make that my first resolution for 2015.

1. DON'T FINISH SKYRIM
Achievement unlocked, and it's only January. Go me. Next!

2. STEP BACK FROM THE DRAMAPOCALYPSE
Somebody on Facebook recently posted a photo of a gaming tee, worn by a woman – typed out in order of relevance. The first comment? "I bet she doesn't play games." My reply? "I bet you wouldn't say that about a man wearing the same T-shirt." Aaaaaand cue instant controversy, even if it wasn't entirely unexpected... or unintended, for that matter, trollface.jpg. I think the best (worst) part was the original commentator turning up again later to explain that he's not sexist, it's just that – and I'm copy-pasting excerpts for super maximum WTF here - the tee "exaggerates her breasts", and women (sorry, that's "females", obviously) who play games know "how critical everyone is about sexism in the gaming community" and "seeing as the girl that wore this shirt probably didn't know about these issues", he "made an assumption that she probably doesn't play games".

Or, basically, "REAL GAMER ~~GIRLS~~ FEEEMALES WEAR BAGGY CLOTHES." I mean, that's his argument[4]. When challenged by other users, pointing out that the

wearer's gender was inconsequential in this context and it was just a photo of a gaming tee (because it was), he asked with absolutely zero irony "if this has nothing to do with her sexuality, why was I being criticised in the first place? Because I am a man making a comment?"

I couldn't make this stuff up, but I shouldn't even get involved. There just aren't enough cat GIFs on the internet to make up for that kind of gratuitously wasted time, Tarryn, and secretly editing the keyboard shortcuts on mom's phone so that commonly used words are autocorrected to lurid references to sexual anatomy is much more constructive anyway.

3. PLAY SOME OTHER GAMES
I've got *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor, Alien: Isolation, Lords of the Fallen, Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare, Far Cry 4*, and a heap of other new games on the shelf, but I can't stop playing *Destiny*. Help. **NAG**

EXTRA LIFE
*By Scott Johnson / ©2015. All rights reserved / **myextralife.com***