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FREE POSTER INSIDE!

REVIEWS INCLUDING
EVOLVE
ELITE: DANGEROUS
THE ORDER: 1886
RESIDENT EVIL: REVELATIONS 2

WE GO BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE NEXT GAME FROM THE CREATORS OF JUST CAUSE

MAD MAX
RIDE OF YOUR LIFE

Scrotus has taken your cover disc! Head out into the desert to construct a new one, be-friending the locals and gaining their favour. Or just ask a friendly staff member to do it for you. You probably won't even have to fight them.

HEARING IS BELIEVING

PEEK INSIDE THE WORLD OF MUSIC IN GAMES **PLUS** WE INTERVIEW MARK MORGAN

NAG DVD
APRIL 2015

DEMOS

VIDEOS

EXTRAS

grand theft auto V

FIVE

Contents

Regulars

Opinion

Reviews

Hardware

Demos

**Battle Ranch / BlastZone 2 / Crashed Lander
Forward to the Sky / Millie / Pitiri 1977 / Splatter:
Blood Red Edition / Starlaxis Supernova Edition /
Steam and Metal / Survivalist / Sym / Terra Lander**

Drivers

NVIDIA ForceWare 347.52 WHQL 32/64-bit

Extras

**Cheatbook Database + updates
36 wallpapers**

Videos

160 game trailers

FEATURES

MORTAL KOMBAT X ™
14.04.15

PS4   XBOX ONE   PC

Make a wish

Happy birthday to us! That means cake (really)! And presents (not really)! And a fresh design courtesy of a currently very stressed-looking art director (really really)! Every year Savage swears that he's not going to do a redesign and every year he does it anyway. What fun!

April is our birthday month and this year we're celebrating our 17th loop around that big ball of fire in the sky. Next year we'll be old enough to play *Mortal Kombat*. We've nipped and tucked a few things throughout the magazine, mostly in the form of a visual overhaul (including a snazzy super-legible font family that I'm told was very expensive – just look at those elegant serifs (I have no idea what I'm talking about)), but also in the form of a few changes in the content. Most are minor, but I do want to take this opportunity to point out the introduction of our guest column section, which we've kicked off with Graeme Selvan of Megarom because I knew I could convince him to write something within our ludicrous deadline. Thanks Graeme! Every month we'll go in search of someone within the gaming community to share their tales with you: developers, producers, artists, programmers...

really anyone who's interested and interesting. I'm sure it'll be a blast.

On top of our now even fancier-than-usual look this month, we've lined up some killer content for your eyes and brains to feast on. *Mad Max* is on our cover (we had to hold ourselves back from putting sand in the bag again), which is something we wanted to have ages ago. This game kept on slipping further and further out, but now finally has a release date, so we figured it's the perfect time to chat with the developers and tell you all about this upcoming treat from the team that brought you *Just Cause*.

And we've got something a little different for you: a feature on music in video games. This is also something that's been in the pipe for some time, but when I heard our resident home_coded writer Rodain was working on the audio-puzzle game *Cadence*, I knew we had to get him to share some of his wisdom with you. Included in that feature is an interview with the staggeringly talented US-based game soundtrack composer Mark Morgan; he's got some golden advice for anyone who's interested in music in games.

There's plenty that's happening in these pages, but I don't want to keep you from it any longer. There are awesome game reviews and spectacularly impressive hardware reviews and so much more. As always we've had a blast putting together this issue, and I hope you enjoy every word of it. **NAG**

Stay classy,
- GeometriX

> "April is our birthday month and this year we're celebrating our 17th loop around that big ball of fire in the sky."

THE CAKE IS REAL

It's so real, and it was incredibly delicious. Big shoutout to Dane' at Bake & Take for turning our bizarre gaming cake needs into a reality.

If you want your own gaming (or anything) baked goods, visit their website at **www.bakentake.co.za**. Tell them we sent you and maybe they'll treat you extra special.

WHO'S NEXT?

14.04.15

Inbox

letters@nag.co.za

Letter of the Month April 2015

From: Justin van Huyssteen
Subject: Not Gonna Pre-Order 1886

I have no idea why, but I seem to be the only person amongst a group of friends and other people (such as the wondrous writers of this here magazine) that is not excited about *The Order: 1886* in the slightest. There was never a single moment in time in which this game excited me; not since the first time I saw a video about it to the last thing I read about it (which concerned the supposed short length of it, although I don't care about that and don't count it against the game).

I see nothing more than a bland and very generic third person cover-based shooter that's had a dull steampunk coating splashed all over it for for no real reason. The guns that were showed off were all as generic as the shooting itself (even *Ratchet & Clank* levels of weapon ridiculousness feels generic nowadays seeing as it's been done so many times), and the overall gameplay looks extremely linear and QTE riddled. I mean sure, the visuals are gorgeous, but who the hell cares about that (well aside from the publishers)?!

I think that the bad taste in my mouth over this game began when I saw one particular video in which one of the developers was talking about this brand new and original idea that they had come up with which slowed down time all around your character so that you could take better aim and all that blah blah blah... I'm sorry Ready at Dawn, but I think that a chap named Max Payne got to that particular chestnut back in 2001.

I don't know why I have such distain for this game, but I just don't understand why people are interested in it at all, and just for the record, I absolutely love the steampunk genre... so that ain't the reason.

Why is a game that looks like a total bore, has unoriginal weapons, mechanics and overall gameplay become so hyped up? Is this the world we live in? Where games no longer have to innovate to become desirable? Where people will root for something repetitive and uninspired rather than for something fresh and intelligent? Maybe my standards are too high? Or maybe, just maybe, the world's standards are too low.

I realise that with the review of The Order *in this issue, this reply might seem a little late, but the point you've made is a good one and it deserves some attention nonetheless.*

It's important that you realise what goes on behind the scenes of some games (not necessarily this game; this is a generic example): usually a developer will pitch an idea to a publisher, or they'll be commissioned to make a game based on the publisher's requirements. They then work on that game for 2-5 years. It's probably the only thing that they see for that time, and a lot of studios get so bogged down by their own internal struggles that it becomes difficult to see the game from an "outsider's" perspective. This happens far more than it should, and it sucks when it does.

If you've identified something in a game as unoriginal, lame, boring, etc., there's a very good chance that the developers know about it too, but it might be out of their hands by that point. Then publishers come along with their deadlines and their money (and promises of more if a game succeeds, or mass-firings otherwise) and suddenly the developers realise they're in over their heads. By then it's probably too late: millions of dollars have been sunk into the game and its release is due in three months. Panic stations!

In swoops the marketing department: tell the world that this game is awesome, amazing, we're really looking forward to it! Get those sales whatever it takes.

That last bit happens to every product that's ever sold in the world. Companies want you to buy their stuff no matter what, because that's why they went into business. Various developers and publishers approach the marketing and sales side of things differently – some are more aggressive than others. A good rule to follow is: trust your instinct, and make a call from there. Pre-orders, like Kickstarter pledges, should come from a place of trust and understanding, so make sure that you do your best to know where your money is going before you part with it! Ed.

"If you've identified something in a game as unoriginal, lame, boring, etc., there's a very good chance that the developers know about it too..."

From: Kyle Le Roux
Subject: some WORLD championship

Hey people at NAG. i really need your opinion with regards to the hearthstone world championship.The last time i checked my world map was probably in grade 10 geography class and saw there are 7 continents in the WORLD and not only europe,north american,south america and asia, but maybe alot has change in 2 years that the second largest continent in the world just vanished into thin air(btw thats africa). so why is the hearthstone WORLD championship excluding africa from competing? is its cause we are a developing country?or are other countries saying we are not good enough to compete with americans? then they cant call it a WORLD championship if everyone cant compete!! hey i may not be a legendary hearthstone cardslinger but i atleast want a shot.

I obviously can't speak for Blizzard as to why they did this, but I'm willing to bet it's a matter of a contentious usefulness vs. pain-in-the-ass ratio. Setting up these sorts of tournaments (as well as things like competitions and giveaways) requires some legal wrangling, and when you're the size of Blizzard, wrangling at that scale costs a lot of time and money. Every country has laws regarding competitions and prizes, and it's most likely that they either don't know our laws, or figured it's a waste of resources to learn about and/or deal with them.

Of course, I disagree with this practice. It's alienating to their players because we shouldn't care what country we're in – we just want to play, dammit. I totally understand your frustration, and if I were you I'd send them a strongly worded email (not a glitter bomb) to let them know that you're feeling left out. Damn those logistics. Ed.

From: Josh Rees
Subject: Magazine content

I am an avid gamer and an even more avid "comic book'er" (if that's a real thing)

I have been reading your magazine for some years now (I remember my first issue was the one where you guys previewed Spec ops: The Line and thought it would be a good idea to put actual sand in the bag) I have noticed that recently In your march issue you've included some news relating to the new all female avengers team, please continue publishing more articles relating to the comic book industry (both local and abroad) in addition to gaming news as it speaks to two of my passions and makes your magazine that much more enjoyable.

Thanks a lot for the awesome mag and keep up the good work

ON THE FORUMS

If you're looking for deeper meaning in your life, join the NAG forums. If you want to meet new people, make friends, learn to love again and master the art of social interaction, join the NAG forums. If you're looking for healthy discussion, lifestyle tips, or anything at all ever in the world, join the NAG forums. Join us at **www.nag.co.za/forums/**

Q If you could live the life of a video game character, who would you choose?

Edward Kenway from AC4, He kinda had it all, the open water, the gold, the family, he had a happy ending and got what he wanted from life. **- Sylar_dl**

I'm going with Roger Wilco, because who has greater adventures than a space janitor that escapes death at every turn?! **- Gammaray**

Maxwell from Scribblenauts, a magical notebook which summons anything you write down, what could possibly be better. **- Demikid**

"Comic book'er" (with an apostrophe and everything) might just be the most grotesque thing I've read in ages, but we all have our share of language abuse guilt, so I won't hold it over your head for any longer. For the record, you can call yourself a comic book geek and we'll all understand where you're coming from.

Onto the useful stuff: thanks for the feedback! Truthfully I considered pulling that news piece when I read it because of how non-gamery (hehe) it was, but I'm glad that I held back on my Editor's Sheers of Nope +2 and let it through. A few of us here are well into our comic books and we do try to cover the gamut of geeky loves where it fits the best. Ed.

From: Erlo Grobler
Subject: Don't judge the game bro

So i recently decided to pick up Bioshock,which i was real sceptical about,the game just seemed "too crazy" to me. The idea of the little girl with the freaky eyes and the big guy in the metal suit covering her,so i was like "nah ah,not for me". But i gotta say,after playing it for a day or so now,im blown away,Rapture is the best gaming world i have ever visited,better than Los Santos *my opinion* LoL it felt like i was really part of the under water city,and might i add,shooting a swarm of beas from your hand is awesome!! There were also a lot of f**k me moments. Ok so there are a lot of demented and crazy moments

in the game,but i think it just adds to the games amazing world.. So what im actually trying to say is,don't judge a game if you havent tried it yet,you might be suprised ;)

Your letter caused me physical pain while I read it, but I'm glad that I soldiered through because the message beneath is quite a good one: diversifying your gaming habits is a great way to stay interested in this vast and fascinating industry. Sure, gunning down people in GTA is always fun, but sometimes you want to run screaming through a water-logged copper pipe while a big stompy dude in a metal suit chases you because you bothered his little sis'. Nice. I'm glad that you're branching out. Next stop: play a management game (start with a Theme anything)! That's a personal challenge – let me know how it goes. Ed.

From: Marceau
Subject: Thanks

Dear members of NAG would to like to thank you creating this awesome magazine every month, but that is besides the point of this email. This September my nag subscription ended and i had a very good intention to renew it and that is what i did, here comes a new month and no magazine, long story short the payment did not go through, so I (or should i say my mom) phoned the sales executive to sort things out. It took a while but the

Letters

Fan art

This is the best bit of fan created artwork we received at NAG this month. If you insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo you might also end up here for your three lines of fame. Just don't go and stick the NAG logo on a picture and send it in because that is dumb and dumb people don't win things.

ARMAND GOUWS, "Hi peeps At NAG did this one for you since i love FPS games and Nag needs a boom every now and again. Hope you like it."

This month's prize courtesy of Prima Interactive is *Need for Speed Rivals* for Xbox One.

issue was fixed. I was rejoiced to see my new magazine in the mail box the next month but it was the November issue, not the October one. Now after a lot of NAGing to Cheryl Harris (the sales executive) i finally got it today (as you might remember the post office was on strike, so i am guessing that is the reason why i did not receive it earlier). The whole point of this letter was to thank her for being patient with us and for tolerating our annoying voices, as i believe that every member of the NAG team deserves some respect for what they do to release this amazing magazine that we like to call NAG.

Cheryl is one of those essential cogs that ensures the NAG machine keeps turning while the rest of us goof off and play our fifth game of StarCraft in a row after shovelling a giant prego roll and chips into our faces. Just be sure to catch her on a good day: you don't want to know her on a bad one. I'll be sure to pass on your message! Ed.

From: Luke Neve
Subject: destiny gone boom????
  Alright so im going to start by saying im 14 I know you guys at nag are going to be like "his 14 but he is playing 16 and 18 rated games" and I do know about that   so lets start as you can see by the subject its about destiny....so I love the game I think its amazing only thing is there are too many network problems and I find it annoying because on the sword of crota raid I was about to pop crotas head with one more

hit then suddenly dun dun dun you guessed it I lagged out with a code name called baboon...I was raging for about 20 minutes before I came back on to finish the raid. And also I have noticed ever since the dark below came out the servers have no one in them but when destiny first came out everyone was dancing in the tower...I mean those were great times but now there gone . And crucible has become lonely as well because your lucky to even join a server these days...so what im trying to say is should I leave destiny alone..or keep on playing till bungie gets there finger out there ass..
  with lots of rage and confusion

I... er... That sounds... horrible? Oh wait there's your question. Phew, thought I was losing my mind for a second. Wouldn't that be a tragedy?
What I think you're describing is generally called "attrition". In medieval war times it meant people run out of food and other resources during a long campaign of rampaging through enemy territory. In modern gaming terms it means people get bored of playing the same game, and then some new DLC or whatever comes along that the devs and publishers think will revive the game, but all it does is serve to alienate the existing player base and push them away. It doesn't always work like that, but when it happens, it affects the remaining players the most (and the developers/publishers, obviously). I've lost count of the number of online games that I really enjoyed that people just seem to have drifted away from. Sometimes it feels that way with StarCraft II, but I find that

with that particular game, popularity comes and goes.
Hah, after mocking your rambling I've gone and done the same thing! I guess my point is: stick with it. There are enough people still playing Destiny that you should still be able to find a team, and when the masses come flooding back (it'll happen), you can stand proud that you've been there all along. And you'll have killer loot. Ed.

ON FACEBOOK
www.facebook.com/NAGMagazine

Jesse Green
Please don't stop adding posters in the NAG! They awesome!

Tyron Toejam Keys
I must say that My oldman and myself have been buying the magazine for years now, more issues than I can keep track of, and today Nag reaches out to me and is more than willing to help me find outlets on where to buy their copies from since I have been struggling to find the usual outlets. I seriously do appreciate it and I want to say thank you for looking out for your fans/readers. Just another reason why Nag has earned +1 respect from me to add to their already abundant attribute list. You guys are seriously amazing I seriously enjoy reading the replies on the questions by many in the mags the witty comments leave me with bodybuilder-like abs (just kidding too skinny for that nonsense xD)
Point is, I really look up to you people running the show, I know it's not easy getting things done with deadlines in place and still keeping your community happy, I might have no clue as to what happens behind the scenes but just the thought, tiring..

Local game developement

home_coded
EXPOSURE FOR SOUTH AFRICAN INDIE DEVELOPERS

BY RODAIN JOUBERT

When Rodain isn't writing about game development, he's *doing* it. With years of experience in the local community and the critically acclaimed *Desktop Dungeons* under his belt, he's at least 50% confident that he's not talking entirely out of his ass.

WHY YOU SHOULD BE INTERESTED IN KICKSTARTER

Last year, I covered a local project called *Cadence*. It's a lovely, minimalist audio puzzle game that has players making music while they play the game. Looks and sounds gorgeous, among other things.

Exposure to this game eventually inspired me to lend my own assistance a few months later, and I've generally avoided the idea of blowing my own horn in this column since. But as I write this, I realise I have something personally relevant to discuss with gamers and game developers alike: what it's like to have a Kickstarter campaign, through my experience of trying one with *Cadence*.

I usually write this column with a mind for interested developers, but this piece is broader. Some of you have already been scared off by the horror stories – cases of developers failing to deliver, projects evaporating after being backed. Spooky stuff. But Kickstarter is a far more reliable and vital platform than we usually give it credit for, and developers who've been through the ruthlessly competitive process know how seriously they have to take it. Committing yourself to a campaign with any chance of success requires between two to three months of full-time work.

Nobody who you're likely to back nowadays does anything half-arsed.

"Several South African developers have set up Kickstarter campaigns in the past, with various successes and failures."

Several South African developers have set up Kickstarter campaigns in the past, with various successes and failures. The most glowing case is point-and-click adventure epic *Stasis* (whose equally epic Kickstarter campaign, though long finished, can still be found and gawped at with a quick Google search), while smaller-scale campaigns like the one for the board game *Ancient Terrible Things* have also done well.

It's a humbling experience, going through a Kickstarter. Admittedly, *Cadence* seems likely to fail (you'll be able to check on that by the time this is printed) and with the sheer number of considerations one has to juggle, dropping just one of them can sometimes take the rest of the structure down. Thorough preparation is also vital.

Developers have to take the matter seriously. As the months and years pass, the platform itself develops, and the market becomes more saturated (complete with an audience that's used to high standards), they will have to take it even more seriously. When that happens, unreliable projects naturally get squeezed out of the running.

It's important, of course, to remember that there are never guarantees. Products can still go AWOL and you will always technically be taking a risk. But the overall rate of this problem tends to be remarkably low, and you gain much more than that risk entails.
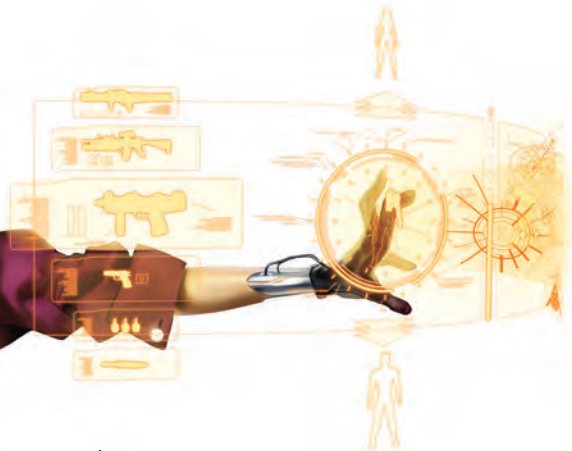
Browsing and backing on Kickstarter is like choosing to give birth to exactly the kind of game you want – an experience that wouldn't otherwise exist. And you don't have to pledge the Earth, either (a basic pledger who shares the campaign with friends is incredibly valuable to the developer, too). And the best part is that the right Kickstarter projects will be at a sweet spot in the game's lifetime – primed for beta access and open to player influence.

But also, if you're more altruistically inclined, or want to see local game development improve itself, **Kickstarter is the single most effective way of supporting worthy locals**.

To explain this, I need to tell you a Kickstarter secret: it thrives primarily on trust. It's all about the first few days, and it's all about the first 20%. Potential backers who come to a project page form an immediate impression based on how well the project is already doing. If, in its first few days of existence, a Kickstarter campaign reaches a critical funding threshold (as little as 15%), it actually creates a snowball of trust from later backers that often makes the difference between failure and wild success.

So how does this affect you, especially? In most scenarios, indie devs in South Africa tend to pay more attention to the global market than the local one. South African support is valued, but doesn't actually provide enough income for a studio to survive. The buyer base in stronger economies keeps us afloat.

Hypothetically, though, South African gamers actually do have a chance of single-handedly generating their own indie successes. In the *Cadence* Kickstarter campaign, South African support was a considerable chunk of the 10% it managed to reach in the first few days. Moreover, exposure in our country was great due to the friendliness of local press (fun fact: we didn't even make a wide press release in the first 24 hours – mistake. But online SA media picked up on our project anyway).

This much local faith can be a powerful proof for literally anybody else looking at a project. With a strong campaign (and the support of a few extra South Africans), reaching critical mass could be pretty much guaranteed.

I mention this now because, despite *Cadence*'s potential Kickstarter short-out (never underestimate the amount of work that takes, devs!), we saw for the first time in our careers a much more significant punch that South African backers were putting into the chances of a game's success. And this, in many ways, has been a local indie dream for a long time: an era where we can build careers on primary engagements with South African audiences.

If you're also looking to have the local game development scene forge more links with SA gamers, Kickstarter is a glorious way for you to not just support indies, but also bring your voice to the front.

There will be more South African Kickstarters after this. Other attempts. Some of them will fail. Others may succeed. And some of those successes could be driven by South African gamers. And that's what we'd like to tell future developers to watch out for, because it may well be the next big thing. And at the end of the day, for a crowd of indies who are sentimentally driven towards a local audience – especially when most of them are fellow gamers involved in the same communities – that's also a pretty *awesome* thing.

Best wishes to anybody else who wants to attempt a Kickstarter from here. It's a tough road, but one that's becoming increasingly viable for South Africans.

If anybody would like to learn more about our Kickstarter experience – and all the hidden considerations involved – you can ask after us on the Make Games SA forums (**www.makegamessa.com**). For a general check-up on the status of Cadence, visit **www.madewithmonsterlove.com**. **NAG**

Bytes

GUEST COLUMN

BY GRAEME SELVAN

MY JOURNEY INTO THE GAMING INDUSTRY

I consider myself to be a very fortunate person, video games have always played a major role in my life. From my early years, getting a new game was always a memorable occasion, and a special one at that. I often found myself checking my bag twice to make sure it was still there on my trip home, glancing over box artwork a few times also helped elevate my excitement to the next level. My passion for this industry has never let up. I remember my father telling me as a child to stop playing so many games as it won't take me anywhere. Well how wrong he was, it's because of video games I learnt how to program and design software; video games have taken me around the globe to attend events like E3 and Gamescom. I have sat in the hallowed halls of Xbox HQ and shared dinner and in-depth discussions with some of the top developers and figureheads in the world of video games. How did this all come into being you ask?

It started as a dream, seven years ago I was working for an online casino writing software that gave joy to only a few winners – for me it was the closest I could get to being in the "gaming" industry. I remember mailing Larry Hryb from Xbox, asking him for a job at Xbox. I knew there would be no reply but it served as a virtual peg in the ground for my attempt at breaking free of an industry I was never too fond of. After that mail two years went by. I landed myself a job at Kagiso Media as a tech director, writing web applications for an age old Microsoft system for MSN.

I thought this would be a great time to place that next virtual peg in the ground, Larry Hryb received yet another mail from me informing him that I now have a foot in the door at MSN and that the next time he heard from me I would work for Xbox. One fateful Sunday a year later I decided to send the head of Microsoft South Africa a direct message, informing him that he should hire me to work for Xbox locally as I have a wealth of skills and knowledge to offer the company. I never expected a reply but to my surprise he did and asked me to send off my CV. Five interviews later they created a role for me as PR manager for Xbox South Africa. It was a dream come true and something that I dreamed of as a child.

I met Larry Hryb that year at Gamescom. I shook his hand and told him that my journey was complete. He remembered all my mails. It was a very surreal experience for me and something I will remember until the day I die.

Even when your goals have been obtained you need to constantly look ahead and stay hungry for the next chapter in your life story, I have recently left Microsoft to join one of the biggest distributors of video games in the country, it's my next chapter and something I am incredibly excited about.

Now you are probably wondering why the life story? The point of this story from me to you is that if you have a dream and you want something bad enough it really can become a reality. You have to be hungry for it and set yourself goals to obtain your dreams. We as South Africans have a lot of different stories to tell, I always encourage people wanting to get into the gaming industry to study game development and make games. Telling stories to one another has been passed down since the dawn of time, don't you think it's time the world of video games heard our African stories?

New D&D announced: Sword Coast Legends

A re you in the mood for a PC exclusive *Baldur's Gate*-esque RPG? You are? Good.

Currently being co-developed by Digital Extremes and n-Space, *Sword Coast Legends* is billing itself as "the compelling and complex RPG you've been waiting for". Built around the 5th Edition *Dungeons & Dragons* rulebook, the game will let you create a character from five races and six classes.

Story details are still thin at the moment, and all that's been revealed is that the player will "explore and defend the Sword Coast", and that the game supports up to four player co-op. Another interesting feature is the Dungeon Master mode. It looks like a level editor, and will see a fifth player setting up traps and challenges for the other four to tackle.

No concrete release date has been revealed, but it has been confirmed for 2015.

Bytes

Miklós once at an entire wheel of cheese without telling anyone. He began in the morning with good intentions and a box of crackers, but by the end, there was nothing good left in him. Only cheese.

PIXEL FIX

BY MIKLÓS SZECSEI

I CAN'T STOP DRINKING THE VR KOOL-AID

The Game Developers Conference has just come and gone. In those few days, the future of the gaming scene was irrevocably changed. Virtual reality is coming this year, and it's going to be big. I've been waffling on about this topic since 2013 – since I first drank the Kool-Aid and got a chance to try out the initial Rift dev kit that Oculus produced. That was almost two years ago, and we *still* don't have a consumer version aside from the mobile-centric Gear VR.

Then something happened at GDC that had to have caused a twinge of panic among Oculus VR people: Valve and HTC exploded onto the virtual reality scene with their Vive headset. By the end of GDC, those journalists who had gotten hands-on time with the Vive were already calling it the best virtual reality experience available. That's amazing considering the head-start Oculus VR has had. The kicker: Valve's Vive headset will be released towards the end of this year. From the looks of things, we'll be purchasing it directly through Steam as well; you've probably noticed your Steam client has updated to include an entire hardware section.

But Valve and HTC's Vive doesn't stop with "just" a headset – you'll be able to stand up and walk around a VR environment (albeit a pretty small one) thanks to two small base stations that cast a web of lasers around your room. On top of that, the Vive works with two VR controllers that allow you to "pick up" and interact with VR objects. Valve and HTC changed the VR playing field during GDC, and I'm intrigued to see how the competition responds.

In a way, I almost feel a little bad for Oculus. I shouldn't at all, and chances are that Valve and Oculus are working relatively closely with each other to ensure a positive first wave of VR headsets for the public. Still, with Valve showing up and blowing away the VR competition, I initially felt guilty for how quickly my want for a Rift became a want for a Vive. Then I realised something: we're at an exciting time in the gaming industry because we're about to witness the start of a new era of interactive gaming. I kind of liken it to how the dawn of 3D graphics cards fundamentally changed the PC gaming scene. VR is going to cause a similar fundamental shift. With the birth of new technology with this much potential, I realised that holding some sort of allegiance to a company is silly; at this stage in the VR arms race, all bets should be off and all sentimentality should be left at the door. Our excitement should be about the technology, not the companies building the devices.

On a completely different and less enthusiastic topic: my grandmother, who I wrote about in a column a few issues ago, passed away. I got to see her a few days before she died; she gave me a copy of a book on cosmology by author Marcus Chown. It's called *The Never-Ending Days of Being Dead*, which I think under the circumstances she must have thought was pretty amusing – that's my nerdy gran for you.

Valve and HTC unveil the Vive VR headset

The house that Steam built is bringing stiff competition for Oculus VR

Valve has partnered with smartphone and tablet manufacturer HTC to bring the Vive virtual reality headset to market. The unit will be available to consumers by the end of this year, but no pricing has been announced as yet.

The Vive packs in two 1200x1080 displays capable of refreshing at 90Hz. The headset is speckled with numerous receptors designed to pick up a laser array that is cast across your room by two base stations. The result is a positional tracking setup that gives you a space of about 1.5 square metres to actually walk around in. Valve is calling the laser-based tracking system "Lighthouse". The base stations are a little larger than a Rubik's Cube and are designed to sit in opposite corners of your room. The lattice of lasers can then track the headset with millimetre precision and extremely low latency. In fact, the latency is so low that it's practically non-existent, which means that VR-induced motion-sickness is a thing of the past thanks to Valve and HTC. "Zero percent of people get motion sick [with Vive]," Valve boss Gabe Newell told attendees at the 2015 Game Developers Conference. That's a bold claim and one that rectifies one of the technology's most dangerous pitfalls insofar as a positive consumer experience is concerned. What's even better news is that Valve is making their Lighthouse tech available to other VR companies for free.

In addition to the headset, Valve has developed a pair of VR controllers with Lighthouse receptors. The two controllers sport the haptic feedback trackpads that Valve has included in their Steam Controller, so the level of VR control and user physical feedback is likely to be incredible. With the VR controllers in each hand you'll be able to interact with objects in the VR environments.

Suicide Squirrels? Love Pugs? Count us in!

Roll7, the creators of skateboarding-themed hit *OlliOlli*, continue to deliver updates on their upcoming side-scrolling destroy-'em-up *Not a Hero*. In the game, mayoral candidate BunnyLord (who happens to be an anthropomorphic rabbit from the future) tasks amateur campaign manager Steve (who was formerly a professional assassin) and his posse of not-heroes with cleaning up the city (by vanquishing crime through use of excessive force) in the lead-up to the elections, thereby persuading on-the-fence voters to bolster BunnyLord's cause. What that translates to in terms of gameplay is a 2D shooter/brawler that immediately smacks of *Hotline Miami*'s gratuitous bloodshed and outrageous sense of style.

Players assume control of one of nine heroes, each packing their own distinctly murderous flair and set of abilities. One of the characters has a shotgun that can be fired through doors, for example, while another can dash with her katana, swiftly slicing through enemies. There's a prevailing sense of manic momentum in the game, and players will be able to slide, dive, use cover, tackle enemies and perform brutal executions. Random events will spice up missions: SWAT teams, helicopters and even pandas (!) will appear to complicate your perfect run. The game's due out for PC, PS Vita and PS4 this year.

"By delivering the [Heroes of the Storm] tournament to an audience of gaming fans in the US and beyond, we are able to experiment with new formats and programming across our networks."

- Raphael Poplock, VP of games and partnerships at ESPN

By day a TV producer, by night a mom, a gamer, and a writer. In fact she does too many damn things for her own good.

THE GAME STALKER

BY PIPPA TSHABALALA

CHOOSE YOUR CHARACTER NAME

In the spirit of the annual birthday redesign, this month's column is about reinventing yourself.

This is really what most games are about, in their essence, so the link is quite obvious. One of the reasons I love RPGs as much as I do is because of the fact that they require you to create an entirely new character and personality. In fact if you really want to get the most out of any RPG, you normally need to complete multiple playthroughs of the game with multiple characters.

Feel like taking out your frustrations on the world, but your moral compass doesn't allow you to walk into your office and head butt the a-hole sitting behind you who consistently bumps into your chair every time he sits down? Well that's what a Chaotic Evil character is for! As you're strolling through Madeuplandia, on a quest to fetch some random person's lost heirloom that has been in their family for generations, some belligerent NPC inconsiderately bumps into you as you push your way through the throng. If this was the real world you'd loudly mutter something about people not watching where they're going and glare at them, but since this is a game you can draw your weapon (or ready your spell if you're prone to magic use) and cast the heathen unto the pits of hell for their insolence! Plus of course there's the added bonus of do-gooders trying to help out, thereby giving you more people on which to take out your frustrations.

I'm always interested in the characters people choose to identify with in a game. For example, it was only within the last five years or so that I began playing as a female character. Prior to this I almost always played as a male character, usually half elf, and generally a rogue class. For some reason I also can't manage to stick to an Evil alignment no matter how hard I try. I'm putting this down to the fact that I'm just naturally a good person who likes to push the boundaries, as I normally end up as Chaotic Good. My argument is that being Evil is a bit pointless – nobody gives you missions when they're dead.

I abhor playing as a magic user, unless it's a magic user that also carries a kickass weapon, because then if I run out of mana (which I usually do because I'm consistently bad at mana management) I can normally pull out a sword and bash someone over the head with it. The only time I've ever enjoyed playing what would constitute a magic user was in *Destiny*, for precisely the reason mentioned above. A big ass gun combined with fireballs. Or something along those lines.

Reinvention then, is the mother of... something. Freedom? Character development? Personal growth? Anyway, it's an absolute necessity when it comes to advancement through the ranks, both in RPGs as well as in real life.

Unreal 4, Unity 5, Source 2, now free

You get an engine! Everybody gets an engine!

In what may be remembered as the greatest week for budding indie developers, three large and prominent game development engines have been made free to download and use.

It started with Unreal Engine 4, which now ditches the previous $19 monthly fee. The engine is free in its entirety, with no features locked or restricted. While the engine and tools are free, there is a mandatory 5% royalty fee on any game or application that earns more than $3,000 per quarter. Royalties aside, the possibilities with Unreal are virtually limitless, and some of the most famous games of the previous and current generation were made with an Unreal engine.

Not to be outdone, Unity 5 launched on March 3rd with an option for free, no-royalty development. The free option is called "Personal" and remains free as long as you have less than $100,000 in funding. Both the paid ("Professional")

and free versions of Unity 5 offer the same development engine, but the paid version does include more features.

And then Valve tossed their hats into the ring with the long-speculated announcement of Source 2, closely followed by the confirmation that it would be totally free. Furthermore, while specifying that Source 2 games must be sold on Steam, they may also be sold elsewhere. Valve's Jay Stelly said "We will be making Source 2 available for free to content developers... enabling gamers themselves to participate in the creation and development of their favourite games".

At time of writing, Unreal 4 and Unity 5 are available for download, but no concrete release date exists for Source 2. The Steam website points to a November launch for Valve's Steam machines, so it is possible that Source 2 will launch in a similar window.

"We didn't just want to rehash Rock Band 3 for new consoles. We felt it was really important for us to evolve the gameplay in a way that would be interesting."
- Daniel Sussman, project manager on Rock Band 4

Mechanised mayhem in new MOBA Supernova

It seems a tad odd that it's taken them this long to jump on the free-to-play MOBA bandwagon, but publisher Bandai Namco Games has announced its first foray in this hotly contested genre. It's called *Supernova*, and rather than follow the MOBA formula to a tee, it's opting to make a few changes. The genre's basic structure is obviously intact, in that it sees two teams of five heroes vying to destroy a key structure in the opposing base – but there are some nifty changes in place that could potentially gain it a dedicated following.

Supernova's gone for a sci-fi aesthetic rather than following the more popular fantasy route, so expect mechs and tanks instead of bows and magic. There's no item shop, and players instead spend points levelling up specific attributes and buying masteries for their chosen character. The most significant deviation from the norm lies with your team's AI-controlled minions: they can be customised and upgraded over the course of the game, and while they can't be micromanaged, choosing the right minion composition can have a powerful impact on the course of a match. It lends the game a uniquely RTS-like flavour, and this intrigues us.

Bytes

Maxis HQ shut down by EA

Electronic Arts has shut down Maxis Emeryville, the developer's headquarters and home of franchises like *The Sims, SimCity* and *Spore*. "Well it was a fun 12 years, but it's time to turn off the lights and put the key under the door," lead game designer Guillaume Pierre said.

The closure is part of EA's consolidation of the Maxis stable of IPs. Numerous subdivisions of Maxis still exist so a number of Maxis Emeryville's employees will be relocated. Maxis Redwood Shores will continue to develop the *The Sims* series.

Elite: Dangerous is heading to consoles

Frontier Developments founder David Braben has revealed that *Elite: Dangerous* is heading to Xbox One. The news first hit during one of Microsoft's GDC presentations, where Phil Spencer made the reveal. Further details were provided on the official *Elite: Dangerous* forums where the news was received with mixed feelings. "When asked, I've said we'd be mad not to consider bringing *Elite: Dangerous* to console," said Braben. "Well, that madness is about to end!"

The game is a timed exclusive for Xbox One. Braben has since confirmed that *Elite: Dangerous* will head to the PlayStation 4 once it's arrived on Mac.

Warner Bros. cancels Mad Max for PS3 and Xbox 360

Publisher Warner Bros. and developer Avalanche Studios have cancelled the last-gen versions of upcoming game *Mad Max*. The decision was made to cease development on last-gen versions so that Avalanche can fully commit to creating the best possible game for PC, PlayStation 4 and Xbox One. They specifically wanted to fully realise the expansive open-world wasteland without the limitations of last-gen tech. "It's quite a daunting challenge to be handed a desert as your main location," the developers said. "I think what Avalanche has proved that we can do well has been to make an open world that you want to explore."

Mad Max hits on 4 September 2015.

Blizzard's games can pay for college tuition

Despite what naysayers claim, games can indeed be educational

T hink eSports is ready for more mainstream appeal? Industry titans Blizzard seem to think so, what with their endorsement of their upcoming MOBA *Heroes of the Storm* as a means to earn a college degree. A tournament aptly named Heroes of the Dorm will have begun on the 28th of March and continue until the end of April. It'll also go down in history as being the first collegiate eSports event to be televised live on the ESPN network.

"College sports do great things for student athletes – they help pay for schooling, build teamwork and communication skills, and create lasting memories. We believe eSports has the same kind of power, and this tournament aims to bring positive experiences like these to college gamers", said CEO Mike Morhaime. The winning team will receive a prize of up to $25,000 per year in college tuition, and the runners-up will score themselves a pretty slick gaming PC and assorted *Heroes of the Storm*-related merchandise and accessories.

Sadly, the tournament is only open to students in the USA and Canada, but hopefully similar events will spread to other countries in the foreseeable future. Either way, when a video game is played on one of the most-watched sports channels in America, it further enforces the fact that is no longer a small clique for antisocial nerds. Go us.

"This is my problem with middleware, and I know not everybody feels this way, but suddenly we're not gods any more. We don't have control over the universe. We don't care about how stuff works as much as we used to, and that makes me really sad. We don't feel we need to master the bits and the bytes. We just use what other people have written. There are gods, and now we just license their engines."

- Cliff Harris of Positech Games, lamenting the fact that developers rarely build their own game engines anymore.

# Getting the band back together: Rock Band 4 heading to PS4 and XBO

Harmonix has announced that they're reviving their *Rock Band* series; *Rock Band 4* will be hitting PlayStation 4 and Xbox One before the end of the year.

Harmonix has been toying with the idea of reviving *Rock Band* for some time now. A few months ago they released a poll in which they questioned audiences on how they felt about the series. Shortly after that they released four new DLC tracks to the *Rock Band* store. All of this was a way for them to test the waters, and what they learnt was that the rhythm genre market still exists, albeit in a smaller capacity than during the genre's heyday.

Rock Band 4 will be compatible with a range of original and third-party controllers from previous games. Harmonix and Mad Catz are, however, making a new set of controllers for those who have perhaps parted with their old plastic instruments. Furthermore, you will be able to import your entire DLC library from previous *Rock Band* titles.

Gfinity is hosting London's first stadium devoted to eSports
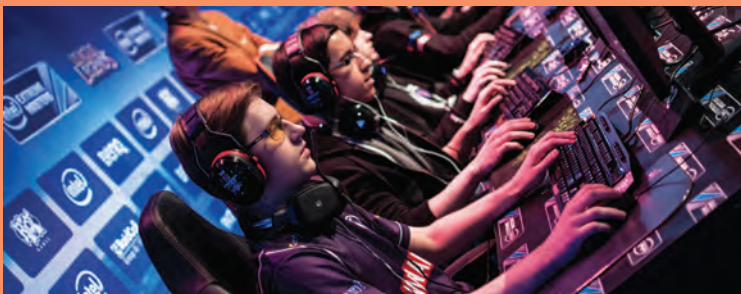
The Vue Fulham Broadway multiplex in London is hosting up to 500 spectators to watch players duke it out in various games including *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, Hearthstone, StarCraft II* and others. Scheduled to take place from March all the way up to September, the various events include prize money up to $50,000 depending on the type of tournament, and in total $500,000 will be given away over the course of the tournament, which amounts to nearly six million rand.

Gfinity has been sponsoring similar events since 2013, but this is the first time they'll have an entire arena devoted to it. 2015 is indeed shaping up to be the year of mainstream eSports coverage.

Bytes

Bioware's Shadow Realms is no more

BioWare's upcoming 4v1 dungeon crawler *Shadow Realms* has unfortunately been cancelled, despite good amounts of hype and a successful ad campaign.

BioWare Austin's Jeff Hickman had this to say: "While the team did amazing work on the game concept and we got lots of great feedback from our fans, right now there are other projects for the team to work on within the BioWare studios for the coming year and beyond". He went on to specify that the team would focus on the *Dragon Age, Mass Effect,* and *Star Wars: The Old Republic* games.

Hearthstone going mobile and expanding

The next expansion for online card game *Hearthstone* has been announced and detailed. Called *Blackrock Mountain*, the expansion will bring 31 new cards into play, as well as 17 boss characters, new challenges, and a new board.

Much like the first expansion, *Curse of Naxxramas*, the content will be divided into five wings, released weekly. Wings can be bought with in-game gold or real-world money. Blizzard also announced an iPhone version of *Hearthstone*, so you can tackle the daily challenges wherever you go.

Blackrock Mountain is set to launch sometime in the next few months simultaneously on all platforms.

Just Cause 3 announced

Avalanche Studios has officially unveiled the next in everyone's favourite regime-toppling simulator. *Just Cause 3* will follow series protagonist Rico Rodriguez in the fictional Mediterranean country of Medici as he attempts to overthrow its dictatorship. Returning from previous games are the grappling hook and parachute, and new to the series is a wing-suit for improved navigation. No release date yet, but the game is confirmed for PC, PS4, and Xbox One. Avalanche also confirmed that multiplayer will not be in the game at launch, but that they may consider adding it later.

Albion's borders opened, immigrants flood the streets

Fable Legends will be free for all

Lionhead Studios' upcoming 4v1 multiplayer title *Fable Legends* will officially be free to play when it lands on PC and Xbox One later this year. *Fable* fans will be able to play it "from beginning to end without spending a penny", report the many mouths of Microsoft. The role-playing game will use a similar F2P system to that of *Killer Instinct* (another of Microsoft's free-to-play games) and certain MOBA games, in that players will only have access to a small selection of the game's hero roster at any given time, and said selection will be rotated periodically, allowing players to try new characters and find ones that suit their individual play styles.

If you find a character you love, you can either spend silver (an in-game currency that's gathered as you play) or gold (which is purchased using real-world cash) to unlock it permanently. Players who choose to play as the villain can use silver and gold to unlock new creatures to summon and traps to lay. Lionhead has assured that it's not designed as a pay-to-win game, and accruing silver will get you access to all of the game's key items and heroes – but Lionhead has specified that there'll be certain (purely cosmetic) items that can only be purchased with gold.

In case you're unsure just what *Fable Legends* is, it sees four hero players tackling the devious machinations of a fifth villain player. Heroes have access to a range of unique abilities with which to vanquish foes, while villains control the nature of the quests that players experience, spawning enemies and obstacles to ensure that no two games are ever alike. If you're planning to play it on PC, you'll need Windows 10 installed to do so – but the trade-off is that there'll be cross-platform play with Xbox One.

Bytes

Capcom teases Street Fighter V at PAX East

The company responsible for the seminal fighting game series has largely been mum about the 5th instalment of the franchise, but at this year's PAX East showing, they let slip about selling *Street Fighter V* merchandise upon the game's launch "next spring". Despite the vague date being over a year away, Capcom were quick to cover up the blunder, but not before fans noticed and released evidence of the leak online. The only certainty right now is that the game will be available for PC and PS4, so stay tuned.

Wolfenstein: The Old Blood is a standalone prequel to The New Order

If you loved 2014's *Wolfenstein: The New Order* and want more of the same, you're in luck. Bethesda have announced that we'll be treated to *Wolfenstein: The Old Blood* as a standalone expansion. A prequel in two parts, the game will see our Nazi-slayer returning to Castle Wolfenstein – y'know, the castle whose name is in every Wolfenstein title? – to uncover the location of General Deathshead's compound and stop the Third Reich from uncovering artefacts with dangerously sorcerous potential. We'll be able to get in on the 1940s-style action on the 5th of May for PC, Xbox One and PS4.

Supernatural spookery abound in OXENFREE

A group of former Telltale Games and Disney developers have founded a new development outfit going by the name of Night School Studio. Their first project is called *OXENFREE*, and it bills itself as a "supernatural teen thriller about a group of friends who unwittingly open a ghostly rift". It casts players as Alex, who – along with her new stepbrother Jonas – joins her friends on a deserted island for an overnight party that inevitably suffers a collision with otherworldly phenomena.

An early trailer for the game exposes its very narrative-driven focus, with dialogue-driven gameplay that's immediately reminiscent of Telltale games like *The Walking Dead*. The gorgeous art style and spooky undertones are hugely alluring, and we're already excited to get our hands on it and unravel its paranormal storyline.

Sony wows GDC with updated Project Morpheus specs

The Morpheus headset has had its hardware updated. It now features a 5.7" OLED screen with a resolution of "1920 by RGB by 1080". What that means is that each pixel in the 1920x1080 OLED has three sub-pixels: one each for the colours red, green and blue. What's more, the display can refresh at 120Hz. According to Sony's Shuhei Yoshida the PlayStation 4 was actually designed to keep up with a refresh rate that high. This 120 frames per second ability will be added to the PS4 via a software update. However, that 120 fps will only make an appearance in VR games, so don't expect your *Call of Duty* titles to suddenly run at 120 fps.

Insofar as games go, Sony has tech demos so far but they're hoping to bring existing Oculus Rift developers to the PS4 ecosystem. "Some of the games made for Oculus and Gear VR are quite good, so we want them," said Yoshida. "Third-party developers are very important to us, and I think they want us to be there [in the VR market] so they can monetise their content on a new platform."

Project Morpheus will be out at some point in 2016; no pricing has been revealed.
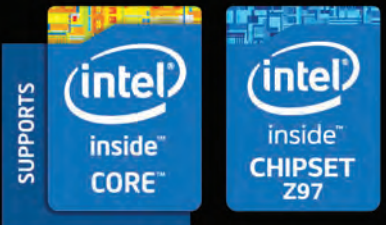

> ...each pixel in the 1920x1080 OLED has three sub-pixels: one each for the colours red, green and blue. What's more, the display can refresh at 120Hz.

The thieves' guild is under new management in Killers And Thieves

Killers And Thieves is the brainchild of Alex Thomas, who served as creative director on divisive indie strategy title *The Banner Saga*. In it, players must send teams of criminals into a medieval city, breaking into procedurally-generated buildings and escaping with mountains of loot. Your randomly-generated thieves and assassins will each have unique stats, traits and flaws that determine how well they can withstand specific situations. Death is permanent and characters who are caught will serve jail time, and there'll also be a home base to expand and manage as you gain funds and your influence grows. There's word of rival crews and other such features, and it sounds an awful lot like *X-Com*, which tickles us in all the right places. If all goes well it'll be out later this year.

We Happy Few reminds us why drugs are bad, mmkay

Compulsion Games, developer of interesting (but imperfect) shadow-driven platformer *Contrast*, has finally delivered more details on its upcoming title *We Happy Few*. They describe it as such:

"*We Happy Few* is the tale of a plucky bunch of moderately terrible people trying to escape from a lifetime of cheerful denial. Set in a drug-fuelled, retrofuturistic city in an alternative 1960s England, you'll have to blend in with its other inhabitants, who don't take kindly to people who don't abide by their not-so-normal rules."

Its first trailer is delightfully colourful but simultaneously disturbing, and its deranged dystopian society immediately drums up comparisons to *BioShock*. The developers have said that they'll be placing plenty of faith in community feedback for this title, so head on over to the game's website if you want to provide suggestions.

Steam Machines detailed

GDC 2015 has come and gone, and with it came details on many different kinds of Steam Machines from Valve's partners.

First announced way back in September 2013, Steam Machines will be pre-built gaming devices with Valve's own SteamOS installed.

Prices range from $460 (R5,600) to more than $2,000 (R24,000). For those prices you can expect graphics performance ranging from sub-Xbox One power, all the way up to the literal best that PC gaming can deliver.

Local online PC retailer Evetech has confirmed that they will stock Steam Machines in a dedicated section of their website, and hope to offer them for retail later this year.

Also shown off at GDC was the latest version of the Steam Controller, Valve's gamepad built specifically for Steam games. The model shown still looked unique, sporting two haptic feedback touchpads, a single analogue stick, two bumpers, two triggers, and four face buttons much like those of an Xbox controller.

Barring utter catastrophe, release dates seem set for some time this November

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> "I think that inside every adult is the heart of a child. We just gradually convince ourselves that we have to act more like adults."
> — *Shigeru Miyamoto, creator of Mario and The Legend of Zelda*

CAPTION OF THE MONTH

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of *Saints Row: Gat out of Hell* for PS4 from Apex Interactive. Send your captions to **letters@nag.co.za** with the subject line **"April caption"**.

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR

> These don't look like Ninja Turtles to me!
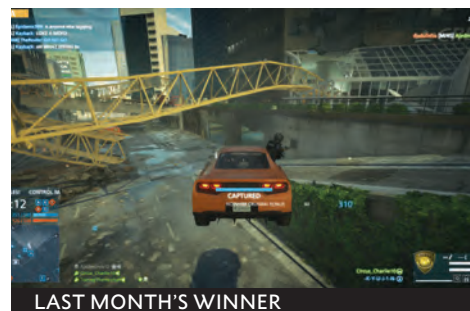
LAST MONTH'S WINNER

> "The helium in the tyres was worth the extra cost."
> — **Jason Hewer**

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 retro Roxy sighting to **letters@nag.co.za** with the subject line "**April Roxy**", and of course your contact details, and you could win a prize. To infinity!

April winner
Carmo Fernandes , page 48

This month's prize
Marvel Dicemasters, sponsored by Skycastle Games

Trine series set to become a trilogy

Trine, the hit indie series of gorgeous fantasy 2D platformers, will soon be getting its third iteration sometime later this year. Developers Frozenbyte have not released much in the way of details, apart from the fact that it'll be a PC exclusive for the time being and that it'll feature the same three characters as the previous titles, which means lots of sword-swinging, arrow-shooting and spell-casting. Visit their website at **www.frozenbyte.com** to check out the announcement trailer and gawk at the eye-poppingly beautiful screenshots.

New service promises to make physical versions of digital-only games

If you love content-delivery platforms like Steam but miss the touchy-feely goodness of boxed games and their associated peripherals, fret no more. A new service named Gamer's Edition will help developers release physical, packaged versions of their games, and even help produce superfluous extras such as statuettes and posters.

A similar service called IndieBox was launched last year, but while IndieBox is catered towards fans and asks for a subscription fee, Gamer's Edition is more geared towards developers themselves and is based on a crowdfunding system. If the requisite number of orders aren't reached by the end of a campaign, then no money changes hands, ensuring fair game for all involved. If you're interested, check out the site at **www.gamersedition. com**. There are already packages for *Hotline Miami 1* and *2* and *Papers, Please* available.

Celebrate our 17th
BY WINNING SOME

ASTRUM IS GIVING AWAY FOUR ALL-IN-ONE BLUETOOTH SPEAKERS VALUED AT R699 EACH!

To stand a chance of winning this prize, send an SMS to **33110** before 30 April 2015. Start your SMS with **NAGASTRUMSPEAKER**, followed by your name, surname, postal address and email address.

POLICE ACCESSORIES IS GIVING AWAY ONE NEW AVENUE WATCH VALUED AT R2,395!

To stand a chance of winning this prize, send an SMS to **33110** before 30 April 2015. Start your SMS with **NAGPOLICEWATCH**, followed by your name, surname, postal address and email address.

POLICE ACCESSORIES IS GIVING AWAY ONE ENERGY NECKLACE VALUED AT R695!

To stand a chance of winning this prize, send an SMS to **33110** before 30 April 2015. Start your SMS with **NAGPOLICENECKLACE**, followed by your name, surname, postal address and email address.

RAZER IS GIVING AWAY ONE SEIRĒN DIGITAL MICROPHONE VALUED AT R2,086!

To stand a chance of winning this prize, send an SMS to **33110** before 30 April 2015. Start your SMS with **NAGRAZERSEIREN**, followed by your name, surname, postal address and email address.

ADATA IS GIVING AWAY TWO PREMIER PRO SP920 125GB SSDs VALUED AT R1,250 EACH!

To stand a chance of winning this prize, send an SMS to **33110** before 30 April 2015. Start your SMS with **NAGADATASSD**, followed by your name, surname, postal address and email address.

NAG IS GIVING AWAY ONE SWAG HAMPER VALUED AT R1,500!

To stand a chance of winning this prize, send an SMS to **33110** before 30 April 2015. Start your SMS with **NAGSWAGHAMPER**, followed by your name, surname, postal address and email address.

Each SMS costs R1.50 (free SMS bundles don't apply). Winners will be notified by SMS. Judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.

birthday with us
AWESOME PRIZES!

SYNTECH IS GIVING AWAY ONE RAIDMAX HYPERION WBU102 GAMING CHASSIS VALUED AT R1,139!

To stand a chance of winning this prize, send an SMS to **33110** before 30 April 2015. Start your SMS with **NAGSYNTECHHYPERION**, followed by your name, surname, postal address and email address.

SYNTECH IS GIVING AWAY ONE ROMOSS SOFUN6 15600MAH POWER BANK VALUED AT R797!

To stand a chance of winning this prize, send an SMS to **33110** before 30 April 2015. Start your SMS with **NAGSYNTECHROMOSS**, followed by your name, surname, postal address and email address.

SYNTECH IS GIVING AWAY ONE SPEEDLINK BLACK WIDOW FLIGHTSTICK VALUED AT R1,139!

To stand a chance of winning this prize, send an SMS to **33110** before 30 April 2015. Start your SMS with **NAGSYNTECHBLACKWIDOW**, followed by your name, surname, postal address and email address.

SYNTECH IS GIVING AWAY ONE SPEEDLINK MEDUSA NX USB 5.1 HEADSET VALUED AT R1,367!

To stand a chance of winning this prize, send an SMS to **33110** before 30 April 2015. Start your SMS with **NAGSYNTECHMEDUSA**, followed by your name, surname, postal address and email address.

TIMES MEDIA FILMS IS GIVING AWAY A DVD HAMPER VALUED AT R850!

To stand a chance of winning this prize, send an SMS to **33110** before 30 April 2015. Start your SMS with **NAGTIMESMEDIAFILMS**, followed by your name, surname, postal address and email address.

TECHFIXPLAY IS GIVING AWAY TWO LEAGUE OF LEGENDS PLUSHIES AND AN IRON MAN MASK VALUED AT R1,210!

To stand a chance of winning this prize, send an SMS to **33110** before 30 April 2015. Start your SMS with **NAGPLAYTECH**, followed by your name, surname, postal address and email address.

HEARING IS BELIEVING

A silent game means one of two things: it's trying to create tension, or your speakers are broken. Audio in games is one of the least considered things but with the right soundtrack and sound effects, a game can go from good to perfect, or rubbish to at least moderately entertaining. Whether it's a full orchestral score or just a few computerised bleeps and bloops put together by someone who thinks the 8-bit generation is where gaming evolution peaked, game soundtracks push into our hearts and minds for the hours on end that we spend with them. If you're making your own games or fancy yourself a bit of a musician, or simply appreciate the stuff in games that you can hear as much as that which you can see, we've put together a quick guide for finding your perfect match.

You may have the sound chops to make a wicked audio track, but perhaps you don't have a foothold in the local game development community. Or maybe you're capable of coding, developing, and generally talking to your computer, but don't currently have any musical options more desirable than freeware sound loops and mismatched effects.

Well, the good news is that you may find yourself startlingly popular in local developer circles.

Over the past few years, online game development communities have gradually shifted from coder-dominated landscapes to more cosmopolitan places which include art and sound geeks. In the local space there's a great balance at the moment for developers in need of a musician, or vice versa, with a lot of conscious work put in place to promote cross-discipline co-operation and understanding. And although it is populated, the South African community is far from saturated – particularly if you're coming from the music side. Additional talent is genuinely welcome and easily matched with a team.

This also means an increase in game projects which are *driven* by people with an interest in these disciplines – I'm currently caught up working on the audio puzzle game *Cadence*, spearheaded by local programmer and sound guy Peter Cardwell-Gardner. He built its first prototype in just two days with the goal of making a new and interesting musical structure, and it's expanded into two years of work, a presence at international expos, and a Kickstarter campaign.

Of course, not every project needs this much time and investment. Some of the easiest segues into the local community are game jam events which take place throughout the year – opportunities like the Global Game Jam (**globalgamejam.org**) and Ludum Dare (**ludumdare.com**), the latter especially being the sort of competition that South Africans take part in both online and as participants at organised venues.

These jams often take place over the course of two days and involve the quick construction of a game from start to finish – they're rough works which try to emphasise a particular idea or style – or maybe just serve as random experiments in the mad scientist laboratory that is game development. The games covered in last month's home_coded column are a good example, and the audio is about as roughshod as everything else: soundcrafters fitting a lot of fun into a short time without much worry for putting out a masterpiece.

If you're not yet ready to dive into the stress of a game jam, a less formal method of approach could involve an offer on the Make Games SA forums, either with your own thread or by commenting on someone else's: let people know what you're interested in and share some of your musical creations!
Rodain

"Whether it's a full orchestral score or just a few computerised bleeps and bloops put together by someone who thinks the 8-bit generation is where gaming evolution peaked..."

GET YOUR HANDS DIRTY

If you intend on messing around with music production or sound effects, you're going to need some sort of DAW (Digital Audio Workstation). Some are free, others far from it, and there's always the infinitely tall mountain of cool audio equipment that you can buy, which we'll stay away from for now. But here's a brief list of software that's worth paying attention to:

Ableton Live (starts at €79)
Adobe Audition (starts at $20 per month)
Audacity (free)
GarageBand (OS X only) (free)
Imagine-Line FL Studio (starts at $99)
Propellerhead Reason (starts at $99)

FOR SOUNDFOLK HUNTING DEVFOLK

When pitching your ability to make noises work well together, developers (like anyone else, really) value some general samples of your work. This could be in the form of reworking the sound and music for a game trailer, but the opportunity you really want to look for is putting your sound into a live game.

If you're not a coder – but you're willing to move just slightly out of your comfort zone – you can pick up an accessible tool like Construct or Game Maker and make a simple prototype (perhaps a generic platformer) to attach your music to. An extra benefit to this is that you may discover your own knack for game development along the way.

Otherwise, you can just visit the project pages of other people and offer help. A savvy developer will ask specifically for sound help, which is always nice. But you can also find plenty of projects without any audio at all (or sound that's clearly lifted from freeware libraries), and sniffing around people's rough prototypes will offer you the most meaningful results.

Bear in mind that the development community consists of all kinds of projects – there are many serious commercial ventures around, but there's also a great deal of hobbyist work and small-scale passion present, too. If you typically offer services as a musical freelancer and are concerned about payment for your talent, just be attentive to the needs and position of any project you're proposing – don't expect money from three people working on a casual jam build, and don't let a commercial venture take you aboard for "exposure".

FOR DEVFOLK HUNTING SOUNDFOLK

Rule number one: carefully structure your project from "Hello World" onwards. Even if you're going to build a rough prototype with an awful mish-mash of free sounds to begin with, insert them in a way that lets external users modify them. Instead of compiling everything to one executable or otherwise baking in your audio, import your sounds at runtime from clearly marked files in a visible subfolder.

When you present your project and need to petition assistance, friendly sound wizards will be able to pitch themes for your game right away, with the added benefit of being able to revise and test their work *in situ* minus a cumbersome back-and-forth with you. It's a smooth and streamlined way of attracting talent and seeing what people are capable of offering you, and even became the premise at one point for an entire audio competition, where local devs Clockwork Acorn donated a build of their sneaky roguelike *Agent Unseen* for a sound makeover at the hands of the community.

As a general rule of thumb, potential team members find it *way* nicer to get on with their work without constantly waiting on you to plug in and test their edits. It improves their work and takes a maintenance load away from you. It's win-win from there.

"The whole theme musically was based around a simple lullaby that could be sung to a child, which then was arranged to fit different emotions in the game such as fear, friendship, hope, panic etc."

NOTABLE GAME SOUNDTRACKS

Arcanum
Bastion
Civilization IV
Deus Ex: Human Revolution
Diablo II
Final Fantasy VII
Hotline Miami
The Last of Us
Painkiller
Planescape: Torment
Quake

Interview with MARK MORGAN

Mark Morgan is a renowned musician living in California who has worked in the games industry since the 1990s. Some of his work includes the soundtracks for *Descent II, Fallout and Fallout 2, Giants: Citizen Kabuto, Planescape: Torment*, and more recently *Wasteland 2*, and the locally-developed *Stasis*.

NAG: What is the process like working remotely, as in the case of *Stasis*? Did you find it more challenging or, possibly in some way, easier than working face-to-face with game developers?

Mark: In the last few years, with the exception of the InXile games, most of my work has all been done remotely. Because of my proximity to their studios we did have face-to-face meetings in which work was accomplished, but to be honest most times we used it for hang time. It's cool because you're able to work with people that in the past would have been almost impossible. Working remotely on *Stasis* was very cool because Chris, being the artist he is, was able to convey his ideas without too much conversation. Because of his vision for his game we were able to have a sort of shorthand that made the process fun and productive.

NAG: Your music is always quite stirring, clearly emotionally fueled. From where/who/what do you draw inspiration when you compose a new piece?

Mark: I have always been attracted to music that conveyed a strong emotive feel. I remember listening as a kid to records and playing passages over and over because I was so moved by either the feel or the sonic quality of the music. Be it minimal or complex, I loved music that drew me in and took me somewhere which hopefully by osmosis has creeped into my music on some level.

The main inspiration for *Stasis* came from the story. The whole theme musically was based around a simple lullaby that could be sung to a child, which then was arranged to fit different emotions in the game such as fear, friendship, hope, panic etc.

Another huge inspiration in *Stasis* came from Chris' artwork. When I first saw it I was blown away by the sheer beauty and emotion it portrayed which basically told me what I needed to know.

NAG: What does the typical development process of a piece of music look like? Do you create "prototypes", or do you usually have an idea right from the start how a piece will sound?

Mark: I think for the most part I do have an idea initially of what the sound will be because the picture or story usually dictates that. I'm not really one for trying a million different ideas, I think in most cases that can be counterproductive and you can go past it. Initially I go with my instincts, start with a vibe and work on it till I find it, then hope everyone else feels the same.

NAG: Do you peruse any other creative endeavours, as hobbies or otherwise?

Mark: I'm a huge architecture fan and a fan of design in general so I spend time adding elements and detail to the house and studio to make them more livable and functional. I also surf which I've done since I was a kid.

NAG: Kickstarter has seen a huge range of successes and failures over the last couple of years, and obviously you've been involved in a few of those successes. Where do you see this phenomenon going over the next few years? Particularly with regards to games, but also music, film, or other productions.

Mark: I'm hoping that it's able to sustain its popularity. I love the idea that art can be made without the large studios and executive voices involved. As you alluded to, the three games I've done [last] year were all Kickstarters. I think they were successful because the people behind them were as passionate as you can be. They knew exactly what their game was and had the vision to know ultimately what it could be. All were very receptive to the people who contributed to their success and brought them along with them on the journey.

I'm hoping smaller independent films will be successful with this model as well, because some of the most creative work is coming from that genre and needs to be seen.

I'm hoping it can be successful with musicians as well. When I was involved in making records that were funded by large labels I believe the music at times suffered. The label's A&R guy had an idea of what your record should sound like which, in many cases, was quite different to what you envisioned. I'm all for putting creative endeavors in the hands of the people who get it.

NAG: What advice would you give musicians who would like to work in the games industry?

Mark: It's different with everyone but I guess it can be similar to film and TV in that it's all about the relationships or contacts you've established in your playing or composing career. As we discussed earlier I think Kickstarter is also a good place to start. In many cases the budgets are smaller and the developer is more likely to take a chance on someone who doesn't have a name yet.

NAG: Lastly, what advice would you give to game developers (i.e.: non-musicians) who want to make their own music for their games?

Mark: Interesting question. I haven't got this one before or even really thought about it. I'm perplexed, not for the question but why a developer would want to do it.

My guess is the reasons could be either budget or they think they are musicians. My advice would be to normally leave the music up to the music makers, but I guess you could make the point to the contrary. For the sake of argument, and I'm not trashing drummers, but just because someone is called a drummer it doesn't necessarily mean that he or she has good time.

I don't want to rain on their parade but over the years I have noticed that the reality is some people in the biz think they know their job and music too. Not sure why....

I suppose it's possible with limited musical technique and theory, with a computer you could get through it. Good luck! **NAG**

A QUICKIE WITH PAX EAST 2015

If you've been to a rAge Expo, you've been to a PAX East, held in Boston, USA. They are, in essence, the same thing. A kind of (and pardon my phrasing) "Mecca" for gamers of the region. The massive influx of like-minded (if not always of the same opinion) families brings with it fun, camaraderie, joy, affirmation and so... much... spending opportunity. I count myself sort-of lucky that I usually have no money when I attend things like PAX East. Melyne (and Felyne) Monster Hunter hoodies. Posters of All The Things. Games to buy, awesome T-shirts...

Waiting in line to try some upcoming games early is free, so that will do for me. I only had one day, even though PAX runs three. The lines this year were longer than last. I had to be very picky about what I stood in line for. In the end, I only got to play one game hands-on, but two others did strike me as rather important in their own way.

DEVELOPER >	Nintendo EAD Group No. 2
PUBLISHER >	Nintendo
PLATFORM >	Wii U
RELEASE DATE >	May 2015

HANDS ON TESTED

Splatoon

This game got a lot of "ink time" (geddit?) when it first appeared at last year's E3. Nintendo making a serious four-on-four shooter (with a full single-player campaign) is a pretty big deal. It looks a bit goofy, but I can appreciate the thematic dress. The squid-kids are kids who can turn into squids. Seems reasonable. The single-player campaign has some kind of plot involving taking on an army of robot octopi, I think. I'm trying not to spoil it for myself, to be honest. The hands-on at PAX was for two local four-on-four matches (the retail will have online play). While standing in the ridiculously long line waits longer than an hour, a trailer would loop showing off some of the campaign levels. Imagine *Mario Galaxy 2*'s levels (creative, with each level having its own unique mechanic), but for a third-person shooter.

The default gyro aiming using the Wii U GamePad is going to be divisive. I hope the retail version has regular twin-stick shooter controls too, but I managed okay with the gyro. Beyond that, the rest seems flawless. You are active the instant the match starts. The team that covers most of the environment with their ink wins. Very primal, really. You can hit an opponent with your ink to send them back to the spawn location, but they'll be able to jump from there to a teammate almost instantly. The way the kids move around the map, switching between two forms, and that movement is dictated by the sprayed ink, is all pretty clever. Nintendo has something here that's super fun, but not too silly.

| **DEVELOPER** > | Gamesbymo |
PUBLISHER >	Gamesbymo
PLATFORM >	PC / PS4 / Wii U
RELEASE DATE >	TBA 2016
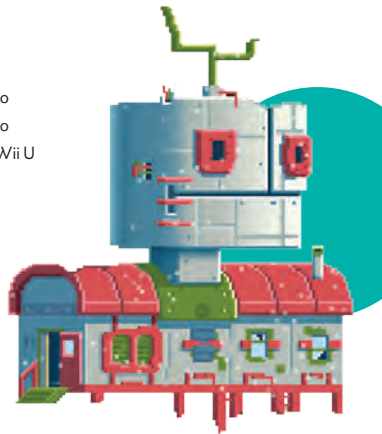
A.N.N.E.

I'm not sure what it is about *A.N.N.E.* that caught my eye. Out of the hundreds of games on display to play at PAX, this one left an impression. It has retro chiptunes with orchestral accompaniment, and stylistic visuals with some great sci-fi art. Also, plenty of graphical effects not possible back in the time period of gaming when the visual style was popular due to technological reasons. "Retro" as a genre may already be *passé* with some, but I can appreciate a game aiming to replicate not just the style, but the mood of an era. According to its creator Mo, the game is a "hybrid of a platformer and space shooter thrown into an open world with RPG elements". The map system is lifted straight out of *Super Metroid*, not even trying to hide it. It's coming to PC, Mac, Linux, Wii U and PS4 next year, which is not bad going for the game's one-man team. You can find out more about *A.N.N.E.* at **annethegame.blogspot.com**.

DEVELOPER >	Hi-Rez Studios
PUBLISHER >	Hi-Rez Studios
PLATFORM >	XBO
RELEASE DATE >	Q2 2015
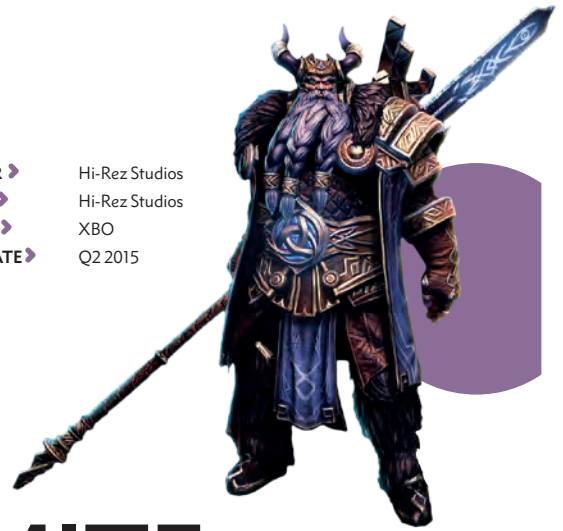
SMITE

Lastly, *SMITE* by Hi-Rez Studios for Xbox One. Out of all the "new kids on the block" MOBA and ARTS games on PC, *SMITE* has managed to outlast them all. *Guardians of Middle-Earth* was dead-on-arrival, EA's *Dawngate* never even made it out of beta, and *Infinite Crisis* is... there... I guess. I didn't make it past beta with it. So while *Heroes of the Storm* comes stomping in ready to wreck some stuff, Hi-Rez is porting *SMITE* to Xbox One. A place where, in spite of all this time and popularity of the genre, we've only seen one MOBA try it seriously on consoles, the still excellent '80s-inspired *Awesomenauts*. So *SMITE*, a rather good (if I may say) third-person MOBA (if touch more simplistic compared to, say *Dota 2*) will arrive uncontested on the Xbox One, where action-based combat (with skill shots), is better suited for the gamepad. Perhaps I'm overthinking it, but there is usually one game responsible for an explosion of interest in a genre. For first-person shooters on the console it was *Halo*. On PC, it was *Doom*, that beyond a doubt started the deathmatch craze, while *Quake* would go on to take it online in a serious way. I suspect *SMITE* might be huge in the same way, and Microsoft gets it first. There is no word yet on if it is coming to other consoles. **NAG**
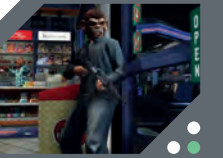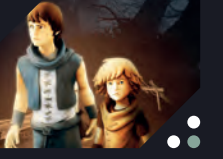
Miktar

Reviews INTRO

In a world where it's so incredibly easy to find like-minded people, it's sometimes tough to remember that you really are special. Super special, even. But nobody is as special as this lot. We're that extra special that your parents warned you about. Don't stray too close, you might get bitten. **Meet your reviewers...**

Q What game (new or old) do people need to play right now?

Dane "Barkskin" Remendes
Dungeon Keeper and its sequel. Mostly because they're fantastic games and everyone should play them, but also so anyone who doesn't get what all the fuss is about can understand exactly why Peter Molyneux's spectacularly saddening fall from grace is so tragic.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Evolve, Homeworld Remastered Collection, Heroes of the Storm, Oddworld: New 'n' Tasty

Delano "Delano" Cuzzucoli
Minecraft. Because it's a game you need to play once before you die, if you haven't already (played it, not died I mean). It's the best not-quite-game virtual LEGO survival simulator creativity tool time-waster ever created.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Project MD (the perpetually incomplete beta, alas)

Geoff "GeometriX" Burrows
The Last of Us. I know that I harp on about this game but it really is one of the finest titles of the previous generation, and a notable one of this generation. If you don't own a PS3 or PS4, find someone who does and make it yours for long enough to enjoy this gem.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Heroes of the Storm, Rocksmith 2014, Dying Light, Exo Zombies

Matt "SandStorm" Fick
GTA Online heist mode. On PS4. With me. We'll start our own virtual crime syndicate. Like, right now! Let's go steal things! Whooo!

CURRENTLY PLAYING
GTA Online, Farming Simulator 15

Michael "RedTide" James
Much like *Minecraft* I'd have to say *Terraria*. It'll teach you to enjoy a game for what it gives you over fancy graphics and fog effects. It'll show you how to make your own game experience in a vibrant world that is always being updated.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Terraria, Diablo III, Battlefield 4

Miklós "Mikit0707" Szecsei
Doom. Because the FPS genre is one of the biggest in the industry, and YOUTHS need to learn which game entrenched that genre in the gaming consciousness.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Elite: Dangerous

Miktar "Miktar" Dracon
Might be a bit on the nose, but *Homeworld Remastered Collection*. Still feels like a modern game after all this time.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Monster Hunter 4 Ultimate, Guild Wars 2, Diablo III

Sarah "Bellum" Browne
Sonic the Hedgehog 3. It's a throw-back to when games were really challenging and just pure fun. No fancy combos, crazy tech, or social media obligations. The replay value is totally insane too. You can pick it up and play it like the 21-year gap ain't no thang.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
The Order: 1886, Diablo III, Sonic the Hedgehog 3

Tarryn "Azimuth" van der Byl
Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons. It's probably the most interesting game ever made. It also made me cry, but don't tell anybody.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Ori and the Blind Forest. And *Destiny*, obviously.

Wesley "CataclysmZA" Fick
ARMA II DayZ mod, because emergent gameplay is an awesome idea and I hope that more games use this in conjunction with user-generated content to become another runaway success story.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Hawken, Civilization: Beyond Earth

"I've been burnt by this milk before"

Dane "Barkskin" Remendes

::: MINI **RE**VIEWS :::

Beatbuddy: Tale of the Guardians

Beatbuddy: Tale of the Guardians is a rather cute fusion of platformer, puzzler and rhythm game set in an underwater environment and featuring a hand-painted aesthetic mixed with a thumping dance soundtrack.

The game sees the titular Beatbuddy awaken from his slumber and burdened with defeating an evil prince who just wants to be a jerk and corrupt an underwater kingdom. Being aquatic, our hero can move in all directions and much of the game centres on freedom of movement. Music is the omnipresent driving force behind all life and motion in this world, and being tuned into its rhythm is not merely a matter of presentation, but also essential in the player's survival.

Spikes pop in and out, paths open and close and deadly aquatic creatures emerge from their shells, all according to the thunderous beat that accompanies you throughout the game. Even a vehicle that Beatbuddy commandeers moves rhythmically. Players need to take these movements into account as they solve the game's varied-though-simple puzzles, which usually involve slapping some hapless creature, carrying items or bouncing like a wayward pinball off plants in the correct sequence. Unfortunately, the experience is rather short and you'll be done before you know it. Still, it's worth a playthrough for the cute factor, fun puzzles and foot-stomping music. Get it now; the raver in you will love it.

Delano

SCORE :::

70

A lovable musical-game experience oozing with cuteness, marred only by short length.

OlliOlli 2: Welcome to Olliwood

It's good to play a new skateboarding game. The genre was really iconic of gaming, but it's been years since a noteworthy entry like OlliOlli 2 came along [besides OlliOlli 1, but hey. Ed].

The game is divided into side-scrolling levels, and tricks are pulled off using the left analogue stick. The 25 levels are highly varied and span five movie-themed worlds, like sci-fi and western. Each level also has a series of missions, and an unlockable Hard Mode to up the challenge. Daily events also feature, and let you try set a global high score for a level.

The presentation is excellent, replacing the predecessor's blocky looks with a much cleaner paper-like aesthetic. The visuals work nicely, and the animations are highly detailed. However, some important concepts are taught too late, and a prohibitive difficulty curve can be off-putting to newcomers.

OlliOlli 2 feels like an NES game. It's tough as nails and insults your failures, but it keeps challenging you to try it again and get better. This is a major part of the game's charm, and practising and re-trying a level until you hit every rail and rack up a massive combo will keep you invested in the game for a long time.

Sand_Storm

SCORE :::

83

If you enjoy skateboarding and a high degree of challenge, then you'll love this.
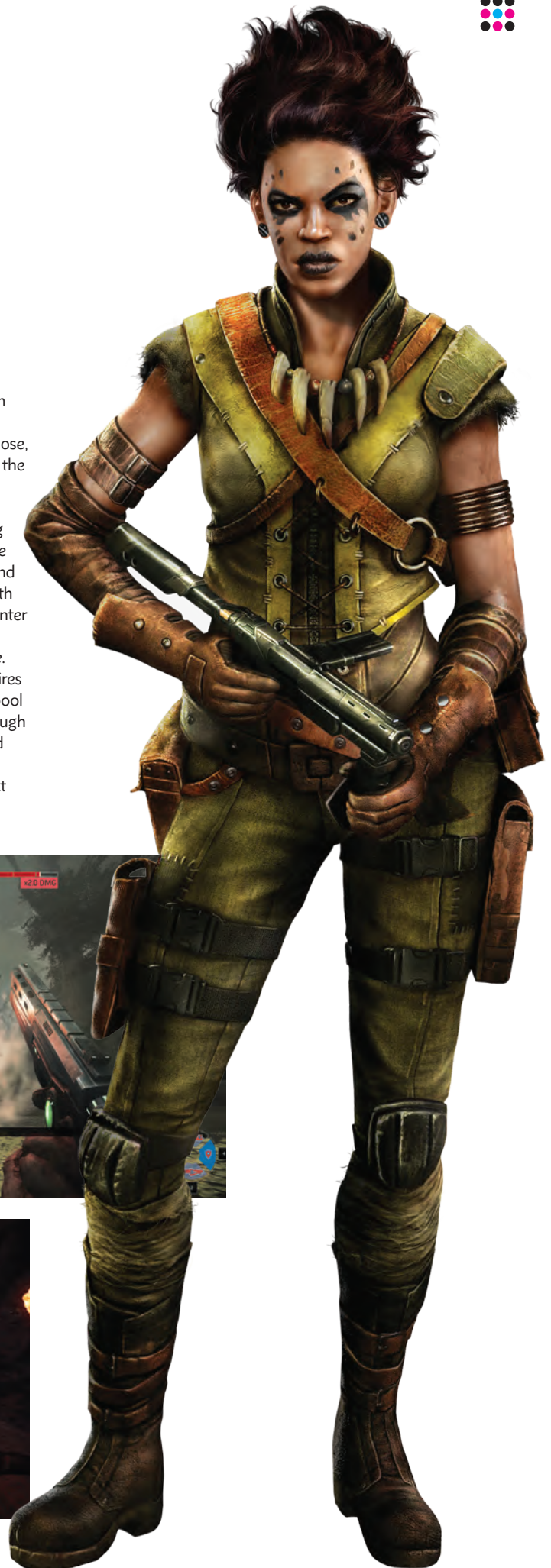
Evolve

Outnumbered, but never outgunned

I wasn't sure how to feel about *Evolve* at first. Ignoring the controversy that erupted prior to the game's launch surrounding its preposterously confusing pre-order incentives and plans for a flurry of expensive post-launch DLC, the actual game didn't grab me. It felt a bit lifeless, especially when played solo with bots (which is to be expected), a little less so when played with random humans on the Internet. Its silly system for unlocking content only made things worse, making me feel as though I was grudgingly grinding my way through the game to gain access to all its toys rather than enjoying myself experimenting with its rich network of systems. I'm not sure exactly when my perspective flipped, but at some point I realised I was hooked, and that I was having far more fun with *Evolve* than I ever thought I would.

Here's the basic premise: *Evolve* is an asymmetrical multiplayer game in which a team of four highly-specialised hunters attempt to track and kill an enormous, devastatingly powerful monster. Four players control the hunters, and a fifth controls the monster. The hunter team is comprised of four classes (assault, medic, support and trapper), and each class contains numerous characters that can be chosen prior to starting a match. Individual characters have their own unique abilities and weaponry, in addition to a class-wide ability that all characters share – like the trapper's arena dome, or the assault's personal shield. Each of

the different monster types has its own distinct combat style and set of ultra-destructive abilities from which to choose, and these are gradually improved over the course of each match.

Issues arise early in the form of the aforementioned system for unravelling the game's unlocks. The majority of the hunters and monsters are locked behind grind gates at the start of the game, with just one character from each of the hunter classes and one of the three monsters available when you first load up *Evolve*. Unlocking the restricted content requires that you spend time with this limited pool of possibilities, slogging your way through a set of prescribed challenges assigned to the available characters' weapons and abilities in order to unlock the next hunter/monster in the list.

GEOMETRIX'S OPINION

Evolve is a bit of a funny game. While it presents itself as something relatively simple – an asymmetrical multiplayer first-person shooter – there's a lot more to this game that becomes apparent once you've dug deep into it. And, while I haven't spent as much time with *Evolve* as Barkskin has (handy for me: I just get to spout a few choice words while he tackles the real review), I think the allure of discovering these complexities is what makes the game so appealing.

It's not unlike a strategy game in this way: only once you truly understand what everything does, how to deal with encounters (hint: your jetpack is more useful than most of the weapons), and how to read a situation can you really appreciate the delicate balancing act that's been put together by Turtle Rock.

It's a pity that the decision was made to implement a grind-heavy method of unlocking the monsters and hunters. Luckily I had access to a special build of the game that had everything unlocked from the start, which meant I was enjoying the full game right off the mark. That's how it should have been: leave the unlocks to weapon skins and hats, but for a full-price game to take this approach seems ridiculous.

That little hiccup aside, I really do believe that *Evolve* can find a future with a small but loyal playerbase, and even has a future in the eSports scene. It's such a fantastic spectator game that it'd be a shame to waste it on solo play.

▶ Killing certain neutral creatures provides bonuses to the hunters or the monster when consumed. They range from health regeneration to faster jetpack recharging. Snagging the right bonus can turn the tide of matches.

I appreciate that this adds to the longevity of the game and provides a set of immediate goals to maintain your drive to play, but it feels annoyingly restrictive in a game that's at its best when you're allowed to freely experiment with different hunter compositions and monster types. The unlocks also create a handful of bothersome side effects, like the fact that it makes you automatically assume that the hunters and monsters further up the unlock tree are superior to the ones at the bottom because of how hard you had to work for them, when in actual fact they simply provide additional options. It also encourages sloppy, unfocused play, since you'll be spending chunks of time employing potentially ineffective tactics purely because you're compelled to thoughtlessly spam specific weapons or abilities to unlock new doohickies. And in *Evolve*, sloppy, unfocused play is guaranteed to get you killed, whether you're hunter or monster.

Games of *Evolve* are thrilling. Its mechanics foster the sort of relentless tension that few video games ever manage to capture. Extremely clever design and nigh-perfect balancing make every match a brutally competitive showcase of brains versus brawn, where every conflict must be carefully weighed and measured. Playing as the hunters is pretty mundane in the sense that if you've played a first-person shooter before, you know what to expect – but it requires precise teamwork and creative use of a number of different methods for tracking the monster's position if you hope to survive, especially as the monster grows in power. Each hunter's role is supremely precise, and while they're all capable of dealing damage in various ways, the strength of each hunter lies in sticking to their core purpose. Trappers should be focused on keeping the monster locked down. Assaults must keep the monster's wrath trained on them for as long as possible, dishing out a constant stream of hurt. Sticking together is key, and facing the monster alone is a one-way ticket to Death City. Even the neutral critters that roam each map can prove hilariously fatal to a team of underperforming hunters, and it's always embarrassing when you lose your all-important medic to an accidental brush with a carnivorous plant.

Playing with a strong team of hunters is incredibly fun, but playing as the monster is the true joy of *Evolve* in my opinion.

This is RedTide. RedTide likes to trap the monster in arena domes when his team isn't around to help him. RedTide makes bad choices. RedTide is no longer with us.

Sneaking around the map, consuming everything in your path, doubling back to cover your tracks and stay one step ahead of the hunters is a one-of-a-kind experience, and when it comes time to stand your ground and hurl a bolt of lightning or two at your tiny foes, the sense of power is incredible. There's a careful balance in play between the hunters and the monster, and knowing when it's tipped in your favour, when to push the advantage is key to *Evolve*. A variety of game modes provide a number of ways to play, and matches can be played either one at a time, or in a five-game campaign mode called Evacuation – which also serves to expose the game's humdrum narrative.

REDTIDE'S OPINION

I'm not allowed to score this second opinion piece because the people in the office say I haven't played enough of the game to give it a proper score. It's a 79 in my opinion so let's hope Geoff doesn't actually check this text properly so I can slip it in [*So close. Ed*]. I played *Evolve* at E3 the one year, then at rAge last year and then again at a special event at Microsoft. So yes, I've done my time and what I think is this...

It's a great concept that has been executed in a very smart way but it's just not for me. Unless of course I'm playing the monster then it's exactly the kind of game I'll keep on playing. The problem with five player slots is that someone else usually ends up being the monster, then you're stuck playing one of the puny hunters, who must work in a team to get anything done and just for some background I don't play well with others. I'm more of a loner, happy to do my own thing and in moderately large multiplayer games like *Battlefield 4* for example, I enjoy getting on with my own projects. Being part of a 32 person team means nobody will miss me while I'm causing chaos near the enemy base. In *Evolve* if you're not on point and working together you let everyone down. So it gets full marks for what it's trying to do and full marks for how it does it. A few minus points for the way the game is sold – endless DLC is planned, not everything is in the box on launch and not all the boxes are the same, you need to buy monster packs and other tiresome money milking tactics ruin the experience. So yes, if it sounds like something you will enjoy then you're going to love it, if you aren't sure then give it a skip.

It's packed with smart design, and the entire package feels nicely polished, apart from a few rough edges. Monster melee attacks are unpredictable and sometimes don't register hits, and the slightest bit of lag can make sneak attacks almost impossible. The menu system is a convoluted labyrinth of options and XP meters, and it often feels as though there's far too much superfluous fluff in between you and actually playing the game. The matchmaking system occasionally breaks, leaving you stuck in loading screens or clumsily hopping from lobby to lobby because something's gone awry. In spite of its missteps, when all of its pieces slot together neatly, *Evolve* is a remarkably entertaining experience – especially when enjoyed with friends. Its highly competitive nature means it definitely won't be for everyone, but when you're looking out into the thick, dark jungle, eternally unable to decide if you're the hunter or the hunted, you'll know you're playing something special. **NAG**

Barkskin

SCORE

86 *Evolve is a fantastic multiplayer game. It's frustrating in myriad ways, but it provides an experience that's quite unlike anything else out there right now. Best played with friends,* **Evolve** *is a tense, intelligent, nail-biting game of cat and mouse, one that'll hopefully be played for years to come.*

➕ Extremely well balanced / Wonderfully tense / Tons of fun with friends

➖ Unlock system is lame / Occasionally breaks in odd ways
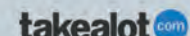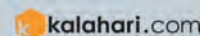
SLIME BALL VIVISECTION II

RETURN TO THE

OOZE

In a multiverse-bisecting time-travelling paradoxical adventure Roxy finds herself, or is that her younger self, fighting the evil oozing tentacle sprouting creatures on the distant planet of KJ463221 (or The Slime Ball as the locals call it). Many hundreds of light years from Earth, and who knows when in time, it's all or nothing for this enigmatic iteration of Roxy. Sporting twin *NAG* particle beam weapons and a flair for bisecting slimy translucent writhing appendages, Roxy is ready for anything in her class 2eDj space outfit. Oxygen and power are no problem for this girl on the dash as her signature backpack is loaded with exactly 287 different bits of kits that perform as well as a fully installed on-board ship computer… and check that exhaust port. These alien slugs are going to bite it hard as they've accidentally and foolishly latched onto her only copy of NAG for the journey back to Earth on the frigate UASF Titan-Shield. Hyper-sleep isn't for everyone after all and the streaming service beams flat a few light hours past Alpha Centauri. Catch Roxy soon in more interstellar adventures, but please don't mention the hair.

THE PROCESS

Every now and then we decide to reboot our rAge mascot Roxy and give her a new look and feel. 2015 is one of those years and this is how it happened – more or less. How we got to this particular image was a tipping of the hat to 1950s and '60s retro space adventure with the classic ray guns and bubble domes and impractical space outfits stretched too tight over the politically incorrect females of the time. This is a theme and style of science fiction that both Michael (NAG overlord) and Chris (art director) love, particularly the artwork and especially the ray guns. The idea we sent to the artist was based on Roxy suspended in space in a retro outfit with the moon backdrop fighting something with ray guns and must look cool. We also sent her some images to get the idea. If you do a Google search for things like "retro '50s science-fiction pin-up" you'll end up somewhere in the right place.

What we got back initially are these images detailing the pose and look and feel. [Fig 01]
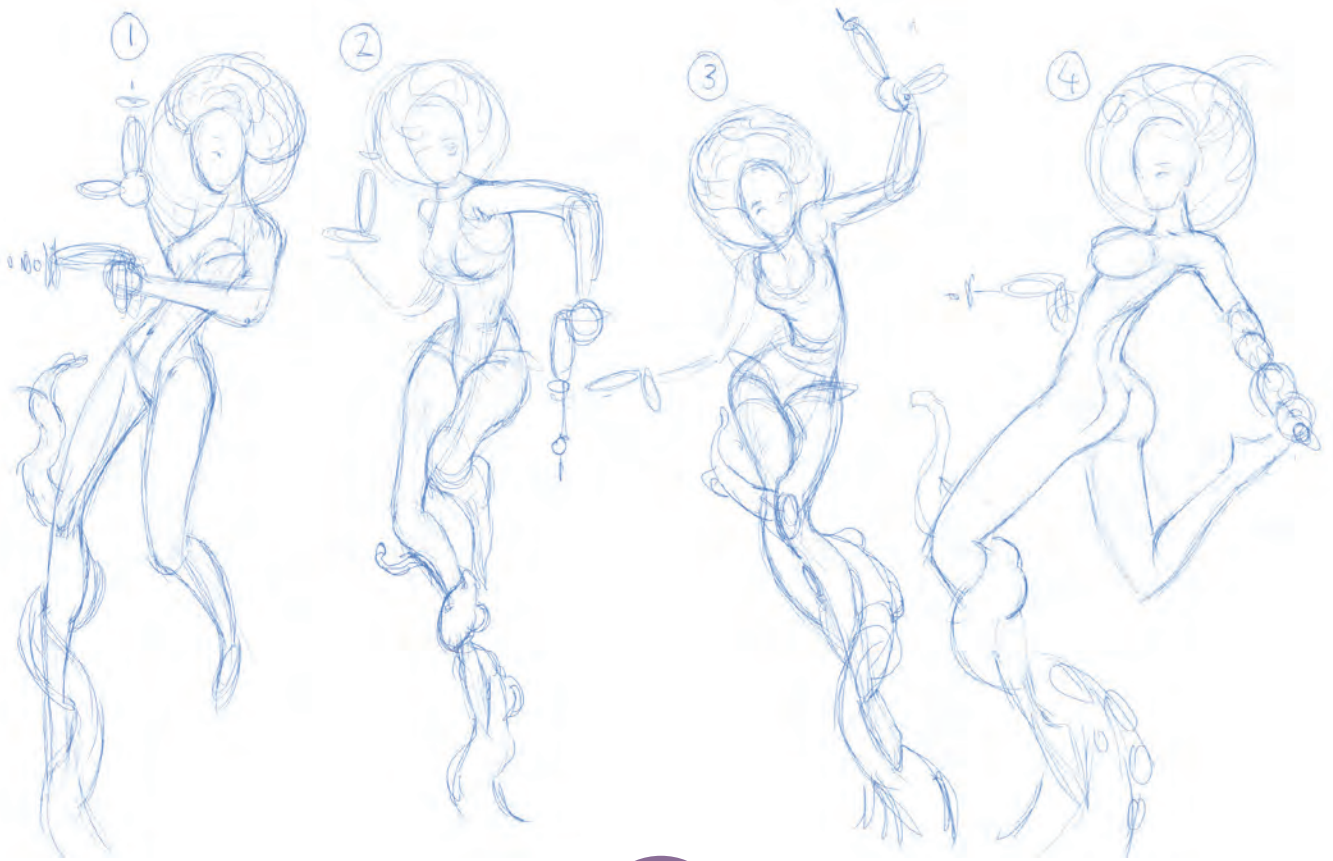
Next up we zoomed in a little and fleshed things out a little more. Still rough but you don't want to commit until everyone (Michael and Chris) is happy. [Fig 02]

Now for a little colour [Fig 03], again this is rough and many things were changed to get to the final image. [Fig 04]

The final image is this month's poster so have a look and let us know what you think. Prepare to see Roxy all over the place this year in and around rAge.

THE ARTIST

The highly talented and creatively flexible artist is Caroline Vos. You can see her work at **www.carolinevos.com**.

FIG 01

FIG 02

FIG 03
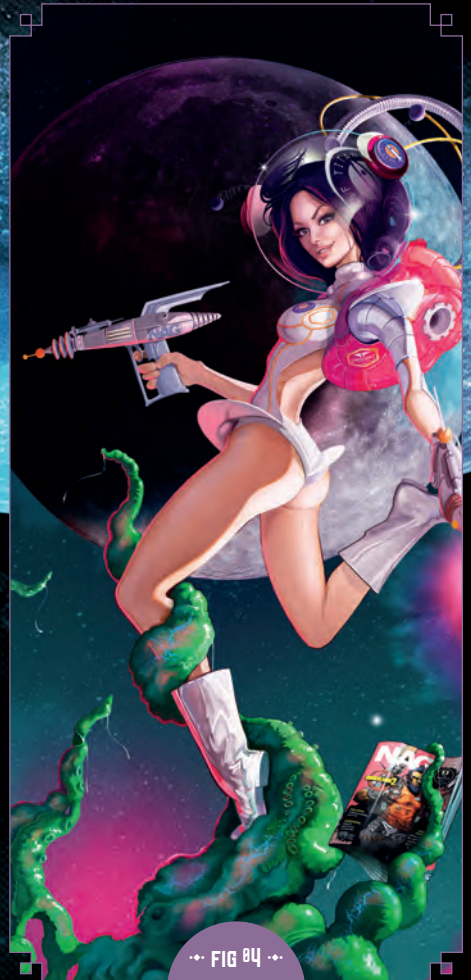

FIG 04

POSTER #4 / ROXY 2015

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Elite: Dangerous

Slow-paced but so very, very rewarding

"It's just you, your space ship, and the vast emptiness of space." I've used that line to describe *Elite: Dangerous* on more than one occasion as I gush about the game to anyone who will listen. With the dawn of crowd funding eliminating the need for overly-cautious publishers, niche appeal games are making a comeback, and *Elite: Dangerous* certainly fits the bill.

This game will not be everybody's idea of a good time. It requires patience in order to make any meaningful progress, and it requires that you actively sit down and learn how to play the game. You actually have to read a manual, or dive into lengthy Reddit and forum threads. That already creates a barrier to entry, especially in today's industry where hand-holding, mass-appeal titles are the norm. In *Elite: Dangerous* you're very much left to fend for yourself in a 1:1 scale reproduction of a galaxy that has perfected its total indifference towards you and your progress.

Have I put you off yet? Because that's not my intention: I absolutely love this game. I realise that makes me odd, or at the very least extremely dorky, because this is the kind of game that appeals to extremely dorky sci-fi nerds that obsess over minute details when it comes to space ships.

In *Elite: Dangerous* you play as, well, a nobody; unless of course you're really into role-playing, then you play whoever the hell you want to. You have a crummy ship and a pathetic 1,000 credits when

the game starts. And that's pretty much it. In a lot of ways it reminded me of *Minecraft*: you're just tossed into this expanse and left to figure things out. You can either become a trader, looking for courier jobs between systems or just watching the commodities markets to buy low and sell high at various space ports. You could be a bounty hunter, fulfilling specific kill requests or cruising systems in the attempt to locate wanted commanders. Perhaps you have a bit of Han Solo in you, and you rather fancy the idea of smuggling? What about mining dangerous asteroid belts for valuable metals? Want to join the navy? You get the idea: there are tons of ways to carve a

⬆ ABOVE / There is a persistent galaxy, the state of which you can contribute towards by doing missions for various factions. You could also ignore all of that and just do your own thing.

ALL HANDS ON DECK

Elite: Dangerous has a bunch of different control schemes to cater for people with various setups. You can play the game quite comfortably with a mouse and keyboard, but it's the worst of the three basic options. The next option is a combination of a game controller (I used an Xbox 360 controller) and keyboard. With this control scheme the majority of your actions are inputted via the controller, with minor actions like deploying landing gear and cargo scoops relegated to keyboard presses.

Eventually, the space sim genre bug had bitten me so hard that I ended up spending a considerable amount of cash on a H.O.T.A.S setup (Hands On Throttle And Stick). This is a flight stick setup that comes with a separate throttle lever. The moment I added that to my game, my *Elite: Dangerous* experience improved ten-fold. I was already 100% satisfied with what I was getting out of the game with a basic controller setup, but moving over to a H.O.T.A.S setup was revolutionary. Suddenly my level of control while landing and piloting improved tremendously; my combat prowess increased as well to such an extent that I switched career paths from trading to bounty hunting. Start the game with a basic controller setup, but if you find yourself falling in love with *Elite: Dangerous*, I recommend looking into a H.O.T.A.S setup. Then if you're feeling extra wealthy you can get an Oculus Rift to completely immerse yourself in that spaceship fantasy.

future for yourself among the stars, and you'll probably switch vocations on more than one occasion, so don't panic about making the "right" career decision.

One of the things I like most about *Elite: Dangerous* is that there are no skill trees, character levels or other quantified means to artificially increase player ability. The game requires skill; YOU need to be good at the core mechanics. Of course, your type of ship does help, and if you want to afford ships capable of being outfitted with bigger guns or cargo holds, then you need to pick one of those aforementioned jobs. Ships are either designed for combat, cargo hauling, deep space exploration, or mining. There are quite a few to choose from, and some are so ludicrously priced that you'd likely need to sink hundreds of hours into the game before you wrack up enough dough to afford them. I am, however, on my third ship already, and I've played for around 50 hours. There's no way to use real-world money to buy ships, so if you want something fancy, you're going to have to work for it. Is this a video game, or is this real life?

Naturally there are some setbacks. It is somewhat easy to get stuck in a rut, hopping the same trade routes and flogging the same job boards for high-paying missions. Your initial progress will also be so slow that you'll wonder if you're making any progress at all. There

are bugs when it comes to requesting docking clearance on smaller outposts that have limited landing platforms; this forces you to either leave the planetary system and re-enter into a new instance, or log out of the game entirely and log back in. It gets irritating. **NAG**

Mikit0707

SCORE

85

Elite: Dangerous is the kind of game that spawns an obsessive community. The type of community that creates its own enormous sub-Reddit; the kind of community that has individuals compiling 200+ page PDF documents to "ease" new players into the game and provide much-needed tips on how to progress. I soon found myself obsessing as well – and I loved it.

➕ Open-ended / Utterly massive / Surprisingly great soundtrack / Coming to consoles soon!

➖ Some bugs now & then / Little variation in space stations / No offline mode

The Order: 1886

Out of Order

I wanted so desperately to like this game. The graphics are amazing. Like, some seriously next-level stuff. The world they've created shows a lot of promise, because Arthurian legend and science is a combination that, just... *yes*. Knights are the new zombies. Everything is so beautiful in this game that you really want to be able to explore the enticing nooks and crannies; but all you can really do it pick a few things up and sometimes make something of what you find. This is true for the characters too. Including yours. Which kind of sucks. You don't know some pretty important things about your character and your world for quite some time. This is really odd, because there are a few "big reveals" where you're tempted to be a bit "woah, cool" about them until you realise that your character knew about them all along.

The writing as a whole is not great and they ran out of steam after only about seven hours of gameplay. The actual script, however, is pretty decent and the voice actors who pull it off are damn good. The

⌄ **BELOW /**
Examine certain objects from all angles, because we game in the freaking future now.

characters threaten to be interesting, but suffer from insufficient development. Your partner is even a pretty badass lady, but despite the storyline itself not precluding the option, you can't play her. It's also so frustratingly linear and your choices are more like inevitabilities, so the replay value of the game is basically non-existent.

The gameplay itself has some great features, like some good old cover-based shooting; but the nostalgic value of this wears thin when your targets are moving really fast towards you and your ability to switch firing tactics relies quite heavily on a vaguely instructed QTE (one of way too many) somewhere earlier in the game, and some frustratingly sensitive controls. If you're making a game purely for this platform, don't make your players wish they had a mouse and keyboard.

Many questions go unanswered, such as: why can't you interact with NPCs who clearly have things to say? Why can't you employ any significant tactics in your gameplay? Why does it take you half of such a very short game to even find out who you are? Why is staying alive largely a simple matter of ducking and covering until the screen stops being red at you? It makes you wonder what you are meant to be focussing on in this game, if not your character's development and

objectives, your own survival, the people and environment, or how well you fight the bad guys.

All this being said, however, I do hope that there is a sequel, it's the kind of game that you really want to see done right. **NAG**
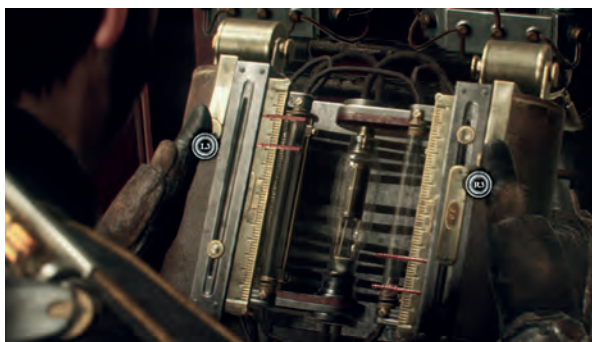
Bellum

SCORE ⣿

62

The beauty of this game is let down by brevity and disappointing plot and character development. Impressive technology and attention to detail do not quite make up for a bite-sized teaser made up of confusing choices on the part of the developers and lack of choices for the player.

➕ It's mad beautiful / Overarching concept shows promise / Cover-based shooting is fun

➖ Way too short / Stunted engagement with world and characters / Inconsistent gameplay dynamics

Resident Evil Revelations 2

Two-for-one special

Resident Evil has had its ups and downs over the years, but during its lowest point (just before the appalling *Operation Raccoon City*), a surprising champion emerged on the 3DS. *Revelations* proved to the world that Capcom can still make a *Resident Evil* with classic scares, and based on its positive reception, Capcom figured that that was the way forward for the series.

Resident Evil: Revelations 2 continues the story laid out by its predecessor: something vaguely related to a few key characters and plot points in the series, but otherwise doing well enough on its own. But with primary platforms moving away from handheld to the big consoles, the developers have clearly enjoyed the added breathing room they have to show off the game world, and add substantially to the gameplay.

The first *Revelations* worked as well as it did possibly because of the limitations imposed by the diminutive Nintendo, but now that the developers are able to spread their wings they've taken a step backwards when it comes to upholding *Resi* traditions. There's still plenty here that'll be familiar to series veterans, but it plays more like a very modern *Resident Evil* than the classic-styled game one might expect from something bearing the name *Revelations*. Luckily the result is actually pretty enjoyable, as the gameplay picks and mixes from the likes of *Alan Wake* and *The Last of Us* liberally, with elements of stealth and even offensive flashlight usage coming into play.

Revelations 2 sees the return of *Resi* staples Claire Redfield and Barry Burton,

and introduces two new characters: Barry's daughter Moira, and a girl called Natalia. As you play through the five episodes in this game (available separately, or as a single purchase), you'll experience the story from two unique perspectives, one after the other (each episode is split into two chapters): either as Claire and Moira, or Barry and Natalia. Each pair of characters presents a slightly different style of gameplay.

As has become the norm in the series, players can freely switch between the two active characters, using their unique abilities to deal with the various monstrous and environmental challenges they'll face along the way. There's no multiplayer on the PC version, though, despite a few mentions of it in the game. It's supposedly being added, however, and might even be available by the time you read this. Switching between characters can become a bit of a chore at times,

ABOVE / Child labour at its finest.

especially when hunting for hidden items, but once you've got the rhythm down it's a manageable nuisance. And some combat encounters require you to change frequently, so learning to do so in a quick manner is probably a good idea.

Revelations 2 continues to show that Capcom still has it in them. The *Resident Evil* series isn't lost yet. It's not as impressive as its predecessor, but this offering shows that there is a chance for this series to branch off and discover itself, yet still deserve the *Resident Evil* name. **NAG**

GeometriX

RIGHT / Nothing says "impending doom" like a red-lit room with a spikey ceiling.

SCORE

78

We're not there yet, but Revelations *proves that there's life left in the old girl yet. It's been a while since we've seen the* Resi *series successfully pull off new forms of gameplay, now all we need is a truly classic-styled game in the series and everything will be okay.*

+ Interesting setting and narrative style / New gameplay works well / Raid mode is as fun as ever

− Daft monster AI / Character switching can be a pain / No co-op on PC (yet)

Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers 20th Anniversary Edition

Who do you voodoo?

New Orleans. A murder cartel. A secret family legacy and a talisman of power. A hot socialite who's way out of your league, bro, and besides, she's possessed by some sort of demon. Gabriel should probably have binned his stupid novel and got a real job instead.

The first time I played *Gabriel Knight* was about 15 years ago, at a sleepover LAN party, when a bunch of us decided to race through the game. This was before proper Internet, so also before walkthroughs. I don't remember if anybody actually managed to finish it that night, but I've never forgotten the phrase "cabrit sans cor", so I totally learned something.

Anyway, as *Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers 20th Anniversary Edition* started up, there was something… eerily familiar about it. And I don't mean because I'd played it 15 years ago. No, I mean because the low-res logo on the launch page, the amateurish artwork, and the horrible mix of 2D and 3D in the intro sequence reminded me instantly of the unremittingly awful *King's Quest* fan game, *The Silver Lining*. And that's when Cesar Bittar's name turned up in the credits.

Now, Cesar and I have a bit of history. When I reviewed *The Silver Lining* for NAG Online in 2010, I gave it a (much too generous, in retrospect) 10/100.

Somehow, Cesar – who, surprise, also worked on that game – found my review and took offence. An email war ensued, during which it was explained to me that I'm not allowed to give indie games bad scores because, like, REASONS. It's about ethics in game journalism or something.

Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers 20th Anniversary Edition and I were off to an awkward start.

Besides some very clumsy character animation – seriously, it's like everybody is walking around with a snake slithering up their bum – and issues with dialogue skipping, though, this new version of *Gabriel Knight* isn't as dreadful as *The Silver Lining*, but it definitely does seem a bit unnecessary. While the graphics of the 1993 original are obviously somewhat dated, I'm not convinced that the *up*dated visuals are motivation

enough to buy and play this all over again. It's not like the game itself has been modernised in any meaningful way for a new generation of gamers who missed it the first time around, and those of you who remember some of Sierra's most infuriating inventory-mash puzzles should know exactly what I mean. They don't make games like they used to, and that's not always a bad thing – I loved the game back then, but now I'm questioning almost every design decision in it. **NAG**

Azimuth

▶ RIGHT / Some parts of the remake were altered from the original – a scene involving cops and doughnuts was removed entirely, for example, because creator Jane Jensen decided it was "too silly". But apparently the gross sexism was okay.

Gabriel: I can't help noticing that you're in incredible shape, Ms. Gedde. Your legs are so strong. Do you work out at one of the clubs by the lake?

SCORE ⣿

60

You know how you used to love going to the park when you were a kid? And then you grew up, and you realised the park is just some grass and trees and grotty swings that have been painted over a zillion times so you can't see the rust. It's kind of like that.

➕ Nostalgia! / Built-in hint system

➖ Nostalgia / Completely superfluous

Super Stardust Ultra

Space, space, you wanna go to space?

In space, no one can hear you rack up an insane high score before smashing into an asteroid and exploding into smithereens. Obligatory sci-fi reference behind us, *Super Stardust Ultra* is a slick and fun little dual-stick shooter. The main arcade mode sees players fending off waves of incoming asteroids and aliens while in a planet's orbit. Different levels revolve around different planets, and the difficulty curve starts high and stays there.

There are other game modes on offer, like one where your only weapons are bombs, and each has their own leaderboard. The arcade modes can be played in split-screen, which is always a blast, and there's a competitive multiplayer mode. The competitive maps randomise their layouts, but the aesthetic doesn't change. Seeing the same colours and layouts repeated quickly becomes a drag.

Presentation is flawless. The music is exhilarating and the graphics are excellent. Watching lasers rip a massive asteroid into hundreds of smaller chunks never gets old, and the frame rate remains at a constant 60fps.

And that's basically all there is to the game. If you're not chasing high scores, then the high difficulty barely justifies a solo-playthrough. It's fun with friends and in short bursts, but the game doesn't have enough to make it stand out or be compelling. **NAG**

Sand_Storm

SCORE

70

This is a fun, addictive, and quickly forgettable game. Stellar presentation and good gameplay isn't enough to set it apart from competitors. Keep it on your hard drive for when friends come over, but don't expect this game to hold your attention for too long.

➕ Gorgeous graphics / Enjoyable multiplayer / Addictive gameplay

➖ Not very compelling / Easily forgettable
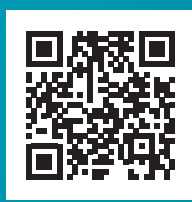
RELEASE DATE > September 2015
PLATFORMS > PC / PS4 / XBO
GENRE > Third-person action adventure
DEVELOPER > Avalanche Studios
WEBSITE > www.madmaxgame.com
PUBLISHER > Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment

MAD

WE DON'T NEED ANOTHER HERO

2015 is the year that the world rediscovers *Mad Max*. From its debut as a low-budget, obscure Aussie flick, what grew into a trilogy soon became a cult hit, and now, over three decades since Max first rode the harsh plains of the outback, he's set to return in a way only Avalanche knows how to deliver.

In the harsh post-apocalyptic wasteland, there are no friends, no allies, no heroes. There's only survival, and that comes at a price. Sometimes you need to work with those who you'd rather gun down, and other times it pays to be nice enough to help someone out of a bind. That's the law of the desert, and it's one that antihero Max Rockatansky

MAX

(truthfully, we had to look up that surname) knows all too well. You'll have to learn the ropes as well.
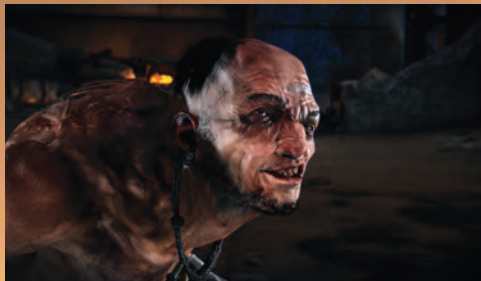
Mad Max kicks off with a likely furious Max losing his prized car, and the overarching goal of the game is to build up a new perfect ride, called the Magnum Opus. This will be your pride and joy, your salvation, your protector and the closest thing you have to safety in this hard world. Along for the ride is your mechanic, Chum Bucket, who will keep the Magnum Opus in good working order and fit any upgraded components you acquire during your journey.

How you acquire those components is up to you, and various opportunities will arise during the game, either in the form of story-driven missions or random encounters out in the Wasteland. Armoured convoys traverse the desert, practically waiting to be viciously attacked by a man just bonkers enough to do so. That's you, by the way. Chum will help too: he mans a harpoon gun that's capable of yanking off sheets of armour from enemy vehicles, or hauling entire occupants onto the sand for a quick takedown. Of course your own car acts as a combat participant, and for this Avalanche has taken great care in providing a driving experience that's both fun and physically accurate: plotting that perfect head-on or T-bone could be the beginning of a glorious victory; getting it wrong might see you limping home with your tail between your legs.

Not all combat in *Mad Max* takes behind the wheel, though. There's a hand-to-hand and ranged combat system that's likely to be familiar to anyone who's played anything from the *Batman: Arkham* series, with timed attacks and attention to the rhythm of combat being the

best way to keep your head from getting hacked off by an axe-wielding nutcase. The idea here is to create the impression that Max is a seasoned brawler; he's a tough bloke who's used to swinging his fists when the need arises, but fighting in the desert is thirsty work: there's an economy to his movement that shows his experience. And when fists and feet don't quite cut it, Max will be able to use his surrounding environment to bring the hurt.

There's also a wide variety of melee weapons, thrown "thundersticks", explosive fuel cans, and of course Max's signature shotgun. But bear in mind that ammunition is as scarce as a free favour in the Wasteland: you'll need to wait for the right moments to use your shotgun – when you do, the result will be worth it. Hitting the fuel tank of an escaping (or oncoming!) vehicle is a convenient way to create giant balls of flaming death.

Scavenging for car parts and ammo is important, but *Mad Max* will also feature elements of survival to ensure players don't go too far into the Wasteland without being properly prepared. Food, water and fuel are hard to come by, and even a lone wolf like Max will need to help the locals if he intends on surviving more than a couple of days. Out in the Wasteland Max will encounter (more-or-less) friendly strongholds that still hold out against the reign of terror brought on by a major hardass who goes by the name of Scrotus. He's the dude who stole Max's ride in the beginning of the game, so we imagine the two don't exactly get along. Max will be able to target Scrotus' convoys and outposts to open up areas of the map for safe travel, and in doing so he'll curry favour with local strongholds who can provide him the essential supplies he needs to keep going. There's also the matter of Scrotus' right-hand man, Stank Gum, who you'll encounter most often during your travels.

Managing your survival resources won't be as hardcore as in the likes of *DayZ* or *Minecraft*, but it'll definitely be something that you have to pay attention to. The last thing Avalanche wants is a bogged-down resource-management title when they're trying to create a gritty yet over-the-top action game. There's a careful balance to be reached here.

YOUR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT

Banging around the open world desert with miles and miles of sand, dust and bleached bones on foot isn't going to be much fun. With your Interceptor stolen by bandits it's up to you and your mechanic sidekick Chum Bucket to build a new car using scraps collected in the Wasteland or by destroying enemy cars. Seeing that the game has a lot of racing and driving and bashing into things, your car – the Magnum Opus – plays a vital role in how you interact with the game world. The engine, wheels, grills and weapons bolted in, on and around your car can be upgraded, and as you explore and kill and loot you'll find more toys for your ride – including an entire new body. Being an authentic *Mad Max* experience means armour with spikes, outlandish weapons and more "cosmetic" spikes and even a flame thrower bolted onto any and all dusty vehicle surfaces. Oh, don't forget ramming bumpers and improved gearboxes, and of course custom decoration jobs (it's like paint we're told, but not exactly).

The Magnum Opus is something that you'll make your own and like any good car if you don't look back at it when you park it somewhere then you're not doing it right. According to the developers your car build is less about just slapping upgrades onto it and more about tinkering and customising it carefully to suit your particular play style. If speed is your thing then strapping a fuel tank on the roof might not be the right way to go. So buy a lot of degreasing soap and get yourself some decent safety clothing – things might get messy.

MAD TO THE BONE

There have been three feature films and a single video game based on the exploits of Max Rockatansky, or Mad Max as he's more famously known. The first movie, *Mad Max* (1979, the one where Max's wife and infant son, Sprog, are killed) paints a bleak future apocalyptic backdrop where crime is rampant and bad things happen. Set in Australia, this super low budget action movie drew the crowds and became a huge record-setting success. It also launched the career of Mel Gibson who plays the titular character.

Next up was *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* (1981, the one with the weird feral kid and the gyrocopter dude), here Max helps the members of an isolated refinery outwit and eventually escape from under the nose of an evil bad guy hell bent on acquire

their precious fuel. Brutality, explosions and codpieces featured heavily.

The last movie, *Mad Max 3: Beyond Thunderdome* (1985, the one with Tina Turner and the song We Don't Need Another Hero) sees Max stumble out of the wasteland and into another gated and odd community. Cage fighting, methane producing pigs, and far too many children in the end made this last adventure with Mel Gibson something of a mixed goodbye to the franchise. Overall the three movies certainly left their mark on cinema history and will be discussed and spoken about pretty much forever.

In more recent news, George Miller (director of the previous films) has teamed up with Tom Hardy and our own Charlize

Theron in the series retooling *Mad Max: Fury Road*. It's been 30 years since we've seen Max on the big screen – the movie is out sometime in May 2015 and based on the trailers looks great. But enough about the movies and onto the single game ever.

The only *Mad Max* video game came out in 1990 on the NES and was based on *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior*. It was developed by Mindscape and was a post-apocalyptic top down driver with fake isometric bits here and there. It was mostly rubbish and saw Max drive his interceptor through the wastelands murdering bandits and bosses, attacking enemy cars and collecting fuel tanks. Running out of fuel meant game over. It's been 25 years since the last *Mad Max* game – no pressure, folks.

INTERVIEW with John Fuller, senior producer, and Magnus Nedfors, design director

NAG: There is plenty of _Mad Max_ content out there, but not so much in terms of video games. What are you drawing from with the game? Is there a Tina Turner Thunderdome or how is it all working?

John: When crafting the _Mad Max_ game, we tried to understand the heart of Max as a character and of the universe as a whole. The original films are obviously an enormous source of material, but even there different pictures emerge from one film to the next. There has also been a very active fan base and cult movement surrounding _Mad Max_ since the last film. All of this, including cosplay groups and events like Wasteland Weekend also contribute to fans' expectations of what a _Mad Max_ game should be about.

So, to answer the question, you will definitely recognise Max. He is the same tortured soul and unwilling hero as in previous stories. We present a completely new story, with an amazing antagonist (Scabrous Scrotus) and a host of other original characters, all unique and many grotesque. As for the setting, in true Avalanche style, we have created a huge open world from scratch. It's a Wasteland that we believe is true to the licence but is also something fresh.

As for the Thunderdome... well, you'll just have to buy the game! ;-)

NAG: The game world previously had garages scattered throughout, but those were removed because they stifled the gameplay; does this mean you're adopting a more free-form system for exploration other than the typical hub-and-spoke, or are there other settlements around which questions will be centred?

Magnus: Games development is an iterative process where you will change the game several times to provide the best possible experience to your players. How the garage and car upgrades work in _Mad Max_ is one example of that, as car upgrades and car combat is a huge part of the game we felt that it was wrong to force the player to go to a certain point in the world in order to change his car configuration. We want the player to be able to do this wherever he is without taking him away from the action he currently is engaged in. It might be somewhat unrealistic that you can change your car wherever and whenever you want but it is a better game experience overall.

When it comes to the game's structure, we are definitely going for more of a "you are free to go where you want" approach when it comes to the open world, it is an Avalanche game after all. Just by exploring different parts of the world you will find different activities to engage in, be it attacking Scrotus' forces, scavenging for resources like water, food and ammunition, finding out more of the history of the world through history relics, participating in death runs (Wasteland vehicle races) or "just" admiring the beautiful world that the wasteland actually has become. (And while you are looking at it, why don't you take a pretty picture with our photo mode and send off to your friends).

NAG: You seem to be taking a strong survival focus on _Mad Max_, requiring the character to eat maggots and rats (among other nasty things) for the sake of staying alive. Is there a hardcore mode planned to push this even further for those who want it?

John: It's funny but we have actually been discussing this within the team quite a lot. We have even done some prototypes. We're very aware that a hardcore mode would lend itself very well to our game and also appeal to a lot of hardcore gamers. I don't think it's ever going to be our default mode as it would put a lot of people off but it's definitely something we are considering.

NAG: Adding to that, is the idea to turn the Magnum Opus (or certain settlements?) into a one-stop survival shop over the course of the game, or will the player be forced to scavenge and scrounge right the way through?

Magnus: As in many other parts of the game we seek to find a nice balance between different ways to experience the game, when it comes to survival there are different ways for the player to find the resources needed. The player will always benefit from scrounging the wasteland for resources, but there will also be other ways to increase your chances of survival.

In the Wasteland, there are several strongholds ruled by warlords that used to be in control of this area of the world, but now Scrotus' reign of terror has caused these strongholds to falter. Although Max's primary goal never is to help others just for the sake of it, he needs to work together with the Stronghold leaders to be able to rebuild his Magnum Opus to get to the plains of silence. As Max fights and takes out Scrotus' instalments he will help the Strongholds to grow and this will cause them to be able to provide many different benefits for Max. Like providing fuel, food, ammo or help with finding his way to more locations in the world. The growth of the strongholds is fully realised in-game so the player will see how they change over time, how the inhabitants react to Max will also change over time, in the beginning they are suspicious and hostile, but the more you do to help they will start to treat Max in a friendlier way (well at least as friendly as it goes in the Wasteland). **NAG**

GeometriX

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HARDWIRED

BY NEO SIBEKO

Freedom of Expression

In this ever changing technological landscape, it's increasingly hard to project where we will be five years from now, let alone ten. Usually one can always give the same answer, with subtle changes here and there depending on what platform(s) one is talking about.

For a time, it seemed that with the advent of mobile platforms taking over the consumer space and disposal income of end users, all was tied exclusively to those models and ecosystems. So the consumption of media, music and gaming moved from Hi-Fi and stereo systems to portable players, then smartphones and now the cloud. Gaming also seemed set to follow the same path exclusively with free-to-play, freemium and pay-to-win, while TV series and movies saw a shift to services like Netflix.

Fortunately, most industries and consumers have sobered up, if only a little. Mobile technology, with regards to available processing power and what end users are doing with it, is hitting a plateau or a saturation point that computing reached years ago. That's not to say that progress isn't still taking place at an alarming pace.

Let's look at the Samsung Galaxy S6 for example. It is a much better device than the tragedy that was the Exynos version of the Galaxy S5. It has a 64-bit processor, high speed LPDDR4 and a host of other features including a QHD display for an eye popping 577PPI, and 128GiB of storage. Sadly though this means less than it would have before. It's not the specs that matter, it's the user experience, the software and the entire ecosystem. Most users will probably not need the vast amounts of space, because their music and videos are not stored locally anymore (LTE, 4G and even HSDPA have made this unnecessary).

It is no wonder that Apple has become the number one smartphone vendor in the world. What continues to matter to us, or at least for me, is the user experience much more so than the specs. Those are meaningless in the context of a mobile device because the core gaming I do is on consoles or, more recently, exclusively on the PC. The user experience on the PC has been getting better with each software update, be it drivers, the operating system or games in general, barring several lemons released in succession from you know who. Generally speaking, the process of purchasing a game, downloading it to your gaming device (whether you do it via another computer or smartphone even) is so simple that it's hard to imagine how we were gaming a mere ten years ago. At the time, I was thinking of larger mediums of storage (HD-DVD was still a thing then) and just getting into HDTVs and the shenanigans of HD-Ready TVs (I wonder how many got

> **"**
>
> *There was never a time before where every single tool you needed to create and ship a complete title could be had for free, including generating start-up capital for it.*

duped by this ridiculous marketing con?).

Even on the creative side, the tools and technology available to create are unprecedented. There was never a time before where every single tool you needed to create and ship a complete title could be had for free, including generating start-up capital for it. Crowd-sourcing has allowed so many developers that would otherwise not ever see the inside of a game studio to go and do well enough to make a living from their craft. It doesn't always work well (Greenlight for instance) but it's great that this avenue exists where ten or even five years ago it was unheard of. The barriers that were presented to would-be digital artists, programmers and the like were monumental. Today, between GIMP, Blender, Unreal Engine 4.7 or Source 2 and some rudimentary scripting and programming knowledge for instance, you can build an entire game from the ground up without having to pay a single cent to anyone. These are not inferior products to the commercially available ones – they could be considered amongst the best.

Considering that Unreal Engine 4.7 and subsequent updates are currently and will remain free, it's allowed access to the most advanced game engine on the market, one which will be able to push both the newest generation of smartphones, consoles and PCs to their limits. There's so much enabling technology on the market today, from hardware to software, that there are literally hundreds of things one can do with just a little bit of creativity and the vision to make it so. Innovation need not live only in the labs of big corporations, it can live and take place right in our homes and it genuinely is free. **NAG**

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NAG DREAM
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G-SYNC

VS

FREE-SYNC

With all the hype around variable frame syncing, questions about the differences and which is better, this month we will explain the basics of each so you are better able to figure out which of these two technologies, if any, your next gaming monitor should support.

Before we get to that though, let's take a quick look at what adaptive syncing is.

The basic refresh rate of your LCD monitor is 60Hz. What that means is the screen is refreshed every 16.667ms. That is, your entire screen is re-drawn in 16.667ms intervals. So if frame 1 is at 16.667, frame 2 can be displayed next at 33.334ms, frame 3 at 50ms and so on. The issue however is that the graphics card or system doesn't send frames to the display at those precise intervals. So for instance, if the graphics card renders frame 1 in 16.667ms, then frame 2 at 40ms, then frame 3 at 50ms, you can already see that these do not match the refresh rate intervals of the 60Hz screen. The frame rendering interval on the graphics card is not in consistent intervals, and even if it was, they do not match the screen's update intervals.

As you can imagine, in a situation where the graphics card takes longer than 16.667ms to generate any one frame (between frame 1 and 2 in the above example) the monitor is going to display frame 1 twice, then only part of frame 2, before displaying frame 3 at 50ms (matching the screen refresh). This causes the stutter, tearing and judder that you see. Adaptive display syncing at its basic level informs the display to only display ready and complete frames. So the rendering interval of the graphics card that we used earlier will be mimicked by the LCD. The refresh rate of the LCD matches the graphics card frame rate exactly, thus eliminating all the stutter etc.

Now that we have that covered, you will be able to better understand the mechanics at play with the two frame syncing technologies. Do remember that regardless of which technology you find more appealing, it's important to note that these monitors are usually premium gaming models and as such will cost more (sometimes much more) than their adaptive sync-free counterparts. Also worth noting is that both these technologies are mostly transparent to the games thus there should be no compatibility issue with using them with any games, old or new.

G-SYNC

FREE-SYNC

FEATURES

G-Sync is a hardware based solution from NVIDIA, which works via a DisplayPort only (DP1.2 and higher). It does exactly what we described in the introduction of this article, but it has the ability to do more as well where the panel supports it. Since this is specific dedicated hardware with a programmable chip on board, it can be used for a variety of things which may not have been revealed yet. Some of the features that can be used with the G-Sync module are NVIDIA's 3D VISION with LightBoost and Ultra Low Motion Blur (ULMB). This is essentially a backlight strobe technology that mimics the strobe light effect of a CRT that results in reduced motion blurring, and as a result a much clearer image in motion. At present however G-Sync can only be enabled exclusively with no other panel technology at the same time. That is, you're either using G-Sync or ULMB but not both. Which is a downside to the technology despite the fact that it offers a lot of flexibility in what it can do. This makes it hard for vendors to distinguish their products from each other, as all the technology they may have that goes into improving the image is nullified when G-Sync is enabled. Keep in mind as well that G-Sync is incompatible with FreeSync and as such, should you buy a G-Sync monitor, you are tied to NVIDIA powered GPUs.

COST

G-Sync monitors are expensive and in general cost over R2,000 more than an equivalent standard monitor. Sometimes this may be as high as R2,500 to R3,500 simply due to the additional hardware that it uses and NVIDIA's licensing fees. As a result of this, the cheapest monitor on the market with G-Sync is the AOC G2460PG (see page 77 in Mosh Pit this issue) which is a 24" 1080p, 144Hz monitor retailing at R9,895. Hardly what would be considered affordable for a 1080P monitor in any context. As a result of this, G-Sync remains a very niche product or feature.

FEATURES

FreeSync matches the display adapter's output frequency with that of the monitor connected to it. FreeSync does not support active stereoscopic and low motion blur technology, thus it has reduced functionality outside of frame syncing. FreeSync, much like G-Sync, also makes use of a scalar ASIC chip inside the monitor. What other functionality vendors add to their chips remains to be seen, but as it stands there's no support for the above-mentioned technologies. The upside of FreeSync is that it allows vendors to pair up any one of their pixel or panel driving technologies with it. Unlike G-Sync, it doesn't give you an either or scenario. So for instance you may use exclusive features of the monitor (Trace Free, AMA etc.) while using FreeSync as well. As this is supported on only AMD GPUs, you will be tied to AMD powered GPUs as well.

COST

Unlike the name suggests, FreeSync isn't free. What it does not have is licensing fees, but it certainly makes use of additional hardware (via a scalar chip) that may not be found on current or present day monitors. So in the same way that G-Sync adds a cost to the manufacturing of the monitor and ultimately the end-user price, the scalar chip adds a cost as well. As to how much the monitors cost over and above the regular models remains to be seen, but it would not be surprising to find that they too cost about R1,500 over and above a similar model without the feature. At present there aren't many monitors with FreeSync support on the market, but BenQ for example should have one released by the time you read this or soon after in the form of the XL2730Z.

NAG VALUE AWARD

HARDWARE AWARD

ASUS VX24AH QHD

SUPPLIER > ASUS **WEBSITE >** www.asus.com **ERP >** R6,250

I deally, we would all have low response time, high resolution monitors with professional grade image quality and high scan rates. Sadly this isn't going to happen because there are very few of those monitors capable of such and the ones that do exist cost a fortune.

So what do you do when you're looking for something better than full HD, want a better image than what TN panels can produce but aren't willing or perhaps are unable to afford these high-end gaming monitors? Well you could consider the ASUS VX24AH monitor. This is not a monitor that ASUS would promote for gaming and it figures, because it lacks many of the features that have become standard for any monitor that claims to cater for that demographic.

The VX24AH has dual HDMI inputs (MHL support) exclusively which is not an issue in itself, but they are not HDMI 2.0, only 1.4 compliant. There's no DisplayPort, or even DVI, but instead you'll find an analogue D-sub input. When it comes to the build quality the monitor isn't height adjustable, doesn't rotate, pivot or swivel at all. The only adjustment you have is tilt, and that is most unfortunate. It also doesn't have an extensive software suite, customisation options, and profiles.

Not all of us have the capability or skill to appreciate a low latency, high scan rate monitor. The difference in reaction speeds between professional gamers and the average user is staggering. Where the professional gamer would lose games purely because of this, the average user's skill level isn't capable of maximizing regular 60Hz monitors with relatively high response times. The VX24AH caters to the latter rather than the former.

Do not be discouraged however as, for the price, this is a great monitor, particularly in its key features, which is mainly the panel type. IPS monitors have gained tremendous popularity in recent times and there's a reason for that. The image reproduction is significantly better when compared to TN panels, offering richer colours, better saturation, a brighter image and better contrast levels. Obviously high-end TN panels can come close to this, but for the most part, a low-end IPS monitor is still better than the normal to good TN monitor in those disciplines. This advantage is carried over in games and other media, where the image is better so these panels lend themselves to richer game visuals.

With a 5ms response time and a 60Hz sync rate, the VX24AH is average by monitor standards. What it does do however, is give you this at QHD resolutions. So with the better panel technology and a higher than FHD resolution, the monitor justifies its existence in a market that's oversaturated with 1080p offerings. Best of all, it does this at a very reasonable price. R6,250 might seem like a lot of money to spend on a 24" monitor, especially one that isn't a 120Hz model, but do consider that it is offering a much higher resolution and, unlike all other gaming displays at a similar price, will produce better colours.

If that doesn't sway your opinion, perhaps the possibility of overclocking might. As with most monitors the VX24AH can be overclocked. 65Hz will not make a significant difference to your gaming, but 70Hz just might. Your own mileage will vary but on this model we were able to achieve a respectable 75Hz which makes gameplay much smoother. That additional headroom would allow you to turn off v-sync for example and result in reduced tearing and judder artefacts. The benefits of this are amplified when gaming at the native resolution as that is far more pixels for the graphics card to process than at 1920x1080. So frame rates are lower anyway and may very well hover around the 75fps mark as opposed to the 100fps or higher range with 1080p gaming.
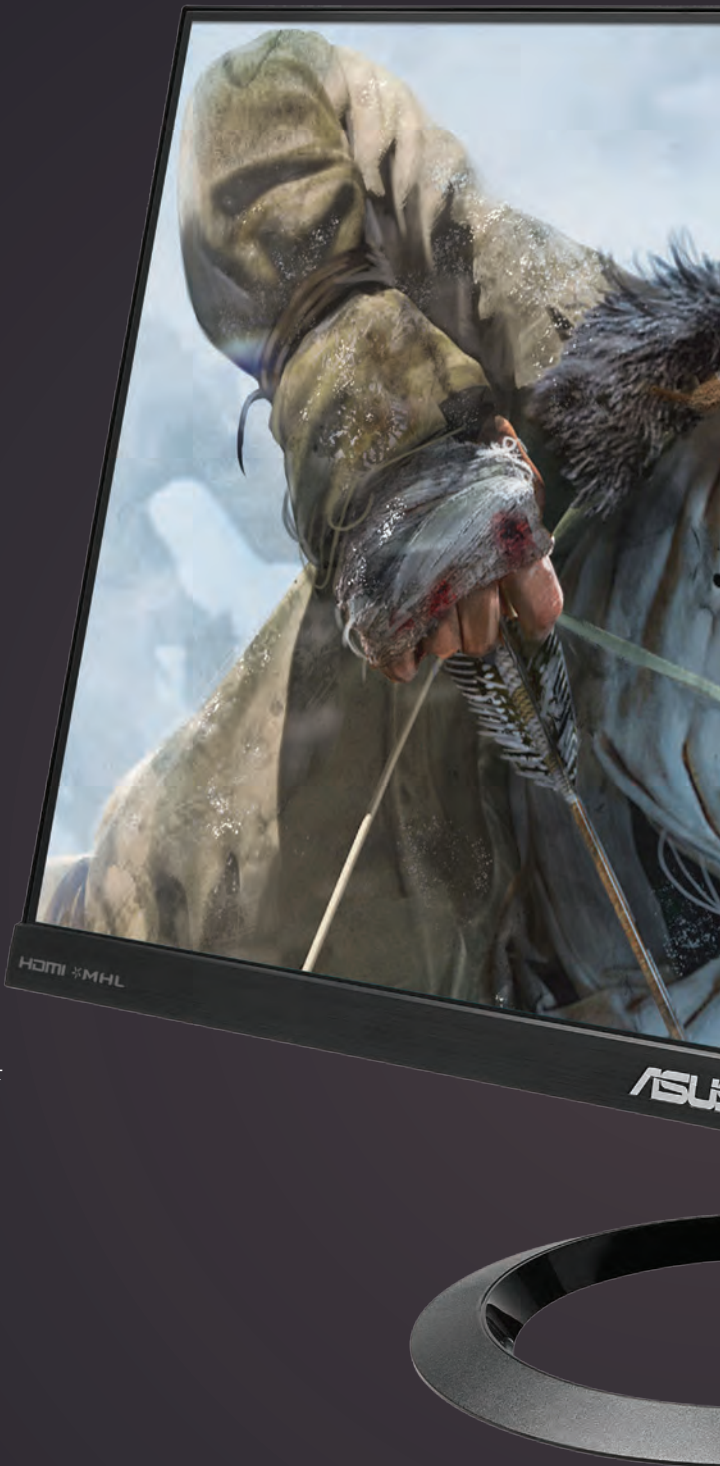
Image quality is good, with fine detailing on edges and because this is a 23.8" display at 2560x1440, the pixel density (123PPI) makes it possible to forgo anti-aliasing in a number of titles. Backlight bleed is an unfortunate downside to this monitor as it's prevalent at the four corners of the panel. You'll not notice it in a normally lit environment, but you will on the desktop or when playing darker games. However it is noticeable when looking at a completely black image and in some instances in movies where

HDMI ✳MHL

/ISUS

simultaneously and tile them side-by-side may in some cases eliminate the need for a second monitor. Obviously this is more obvious with a UHD/4K monitor, but that argument is valid for QHD displays as well.

If you have the GPU power to play games at 1440P then you should give this monitor some serious consideration. The temptation is there to purchase one of the Korean QHD monitors that are great alternatives that overclock even better, well past 85Hz usually. However some colour shifting is known to happen on several models, they are not guaranteed to be without any dead pixels upon delivery and there are SKUs that lack on-screen display controls for example. It's a luck of the draw purchase without a local warranty as well. Since monitors are purchases made for long term use, these are factors worth mulling over before deciding which direction to go. With the VX24AH you'll have none of these caveats to deal with.

The ASUS VX24AH is a wonderful monitor that doesn't get it all right, but it does just enough to warrant some serious consideration. With good panel technology delivering rich colours, a respectable native resolution, a high PPI and potential 75Hz refresh rate, it's hard to not recommend this monitor for those in the market. **NAG**
Neo Sibeko

SCORE ■

08

The VX24AH is one of the more affordable QHD monitors on the market, with good colour reproduction, a high resolution and decent image quality.

➕ 75Hz capable / Consistent colour reproduction / Light weight

➖ No DVI or DP inputs / Backlight bleed at the corners

"
With the potential price, resolution and panel type, the monitor more than makes up for what it lacks.

the image does tend to be particularly dark. It is not anywhere near the worst we've come across though and it certainly can be overlooked in light of everything else.

With the potential price, resolution and panel type, the monitor more than makes up for what it lacks. For many users, gaming isn't the only thing that a monitor is used for so if you're one of those people that also work on your PC, then the additional screen real estate is worth far more than a low response time, frame syncing or scan rate. The ability to open two programs

NAG VALUE AWARD

MSI 970 Gaming

SUPPLIER ❯ MSI   **WEBSITE** ❯ www.msi.com   **ERP** ❯ R1,499

There hasn't been anything meaningful taking place from AMD on the CPU front for years now, at least for the AM3+ platform. If you invested in a Vishera-based CPU and are looking for an affordable board to tide you over while you wait for next year's refresh, then the 970 Gaming is worth a look.

It isn't high-end by any means and it should not be compared to our current AMD Dream Machine board, but it is just under half the price. For the price you'll get support for all of AMD's AM3+ CPUs from the Phenom II X6 to the latest Vishera-based FX. Of course that means DDR3 2,133MHz support as well. That's great on paper, but you may want to look at slightly faster and better memory for this platform. There's no divider or multiplier for that frequency that's officially supported, but almost all AM3+ boards can reach that frequency. Given how starved for single thread performance AM3+ CPUs are, you'll want to maximise every performance tweak at your disposal.

Luckily this is done with relative ease, courtesy of the detailed MSI CLICK BIOS 4, so even if you're not well versed with the finer details of overclocking you should be able to reach 2,400MHz and perhaps higher with relative ease. Do be careful however as there isn't a BIOS or memory safe button on board, thus if you do take on an aggressive overclock, you'll have to short the CMOS clear pins and start all over again.

Talking about buttons, this board has no power, reset, clear CMOS buttons or POST CODE LED. You're working in the dark essentially which is why it'll be even more important to test the system outside your chassis before installation to make sure all is well. We can forgive the absence of the buttons, but a POST CODE LED would have been appreciated at the very least so if there's no display you can diagnose exactly what the issue is with the relevant CODE.

This chipset is old and MSI has had to add several third party chips to bring this board in line with what gamers may be expecting from a motherboard at this time. To that end you'll find two USB 3.0 ports at the rear of and an additional USB 3.0 header for the front panel USB ports on your chassis. The MSI 970 Gaming isn't short of USB 2.0 ports however as it features a surprising eight ports at the back with two made exclusively for your keyboard and mouse. These are the usual ports we've seen on MSI's other gaming motherboards that supposedly have a higher polling rate, three times the gold on the contacts and ten times the life expectancy. This doesn't mean much however in practice as it'll be near impossible to tell the difference between regular USB 2.0 ports and these ones. Still, perhaps it is better to have the feature there than not.

More important for gaming, MSI has included a Killer network NIC (E2200 model) and their usual audio grade capacitors and dual headphone amplifiers in tandem with the ALC1150 codec. As a software layer on that you'll receive the Sound Blaster Cinema Sound package which actually does help with the tonal clarity. As a final tick box feature, MSI has an SLI

licence for this motherboard, thus it supports both CrossFire and SLI. One would be hard pressed to try and save on a motherboard, then proceed to use a multi-GPU setup, but should you have that option available to you in the form of two GPUs then you can take advantage of the additional performance via this motherboard.

For the price, the 970 Gaming is near impossible to beat and should be on your purchase list whilst shopping on a tight budget. **NAG**
Neo Sibeko

SCORE

07 *The MSI 970 Gaming is unquestionably the best value for money motherboard you can buy for the AM3+ platform.*

➕ Very low price / SLI and CrossFire support

➖ Old AMD chipset / PCI Express 2.0 only / Will not support FX-9590/70

NAG DREAM MACHINE

ASUS ROG Sica & Whetstone

SUPPLIER › ASUS   **WEBSITE** › rog.asus.com   **ERP** › TBA

The ASUS ROG SICA gaming mouse and ROG Whetstone gaming mouse pad were sent to us as a combo, but can be purchased separately.

So let's take a look at the Sica mouse first. This is smaller than the Gladius and the most affordable in the trio of the new ROG gaming mice. ASUS has plenty of other gaming mice, but it's important to realize that the STRIX line of products does not fall under ROG, and are very separate product lines. The Sica is an ambidextrous mouse with basic functionality designed for use with MOBA games. It has only the primary two buttons and a clickable scroll wheel. It's an all plastic design with separate left and right mouse buttons from the rest of the body. The switches are changeable should you have better ones on hand or planning on purchasing them. This is done by undoing only a single screw on the underside of the mouse. It's a simple and quick process, which is just about the only customisation you'll be able to do for the mouse, software withstanding.

It is smaller than the Gladius and is better suited to gamers with smaller hands or a claw grip. It's both narrow and shallow compared to the Gladius as well as being much lighter at only 117g. It uses the same ROG Armory software but obviously with a much simpler interface and fewer options. There is some customisation that can be performed of course and it only has one profile loaded on the mouse at any given time. The profile options include the adjusting of the DPI (up to 5,000 DPI), the ROG light breathing pattern and the polling rate for the mouse. You apply these profiles by dragging them to the left of the window pane at which point this becomes the active profile. Here you can also save macro configurations as well for the mouse and apply them in the same manner. Since we aren't sure of the final price of the mouse on its own we will reserve judgment on its

value proposition, but suffice to say, at the right price it could be a decent mouse for affordable gaming.

On to the Whetstone, which is a silicone and fibre mouse pad that is not only washable but is actually water proof. Unlike most cloth mouse pads, this one doesn't have the obnoxious rubber odour that you get with some new pads since it's made out of silicone. It's flexible, but strong and because of the bonded material that it uses, ends up more robust than many other mouse pads. We also tested the Whetstone with the Gladius and found that it worked even better with the Gladius than the Sica. The rubberized Mayan pattern on the sides of the Gladius also match the identical textured surface of the mat. The combination just seems to work better, given that this is undoubtedly a high-end mouse pad.

As far as mouse pads go, the Whetstone is amongst one of the best we have used and certainly outdoes the ROCCAT Ravio for instance with just about every mouse we tested with it. Despite the texturing, the

mouse tracking is precise and smooth, offering just enough resistance without hindering motion.

As a combination the Sica and Whetstone work well, but individually they are even better especially when the Whetstone is paired with a higher-end mouse. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SCORE

10 *The ASUS Sica is a functional and basic MOBA mouse with the typical ASUS build quality we've come to expect, but the Whetstone takes the mantle as one of the best mouse mats money can buy.*

➕ Price seems reasonable / Ambidextrous mouse design / 5,000 DPI optical sensor

➖ No side buttons / Could do with a few more features

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NAG VALUE AWARD

Cooler Master SF-17 Notebook Cooler

SUPPLIER › Cooler Master
WEBSITE › www.coolermaster.com
ERP › R799

Standard cooling on your notebook is adequate for sure, but under some intense loads, the CPU and GPU could throttle to performance levels that are undesirable. If you're running a high-end or gaming notebook then you may need to look at a notebook cooler.

The SF-17 is built for units that have a 17" screen and smaller. It is made from plastic and rubber, and features a single 180mm configurable fan and four port USB hub. It has four angle/height adjustments, and power is drawn through your notebook's USB port. You lose one port but gain four. These additional USB ports ensure that you can leave your gaming keyboard and mouse permanently plugged in and just take the notebook when you're on the road. The SF-17 is fairly heavy at over 2kg so it's best you don't carry it around with you. Where cooling performance is concerned, even at the lowest setting it provides plenty of cool air and was able to keep our test notebook cool enough to not ramp up the fan curve on the internal fans. This will be especially handy for those who overclock their notebook GPUs, as you'll not only eliminate any potential noise from the small fans inside, but keep a consistent performance from the notebook (boost frequencies).

The amount of flexibility and convenience the SF-17 delivers is a bargain at this price and it's definitively worth the purchase. For those with performance notebooks, this is a must have: once you start using it, it's hard to do without. **NAG**
Neo Sibeko

SCORE ■

09
The SF-17 is exactly what one needs for extended hours of gaming on a notebook and desktop replacement machines.

➕ High performance cooling / 4-port USB hub / Height adjustable

➖ Heavier than it needs to be

SPECS

POLLING RATE / 1,000 Hz/1ms
MACRO KEYS / 15 in each profile
DIMENSIONS / 491.6x42x249mm

CM Storm Suppressor

SUPPLIER › Cooler Master
WEBSITE › www.gaming.coolermaster.com
ERP › R599

The CM Storm Suppressor is a decent membrane keyboard with backlighting and multimedia keys. It has a detachable wrist rest, (with height adjustment pegs), detachable cable and five macro key profiles. Furthermore you can store your macros on the keyboard, thus you need not worry about cloud services for profiles and such.

It is a robust keyboard and will take a fair bit of abuse from users. Aesthetically, since it's plastic, we did expect some creative mouldings and a housing which Cooler Master has delivered on. It looks good especially with the backlights on. With the lights off, it is far too dark and basically near impossible to use, but that shouldn't be too much of a problem as the brightness is adjustable should you want it dimmer but not completely off.

For a membrane keyboard, it does have a measure of resistance that is unusually high. That's because the membrane used is twice as thick as on regular keyboards, so you'll need that much more force to press the keys. Not a bad thing for those who find that even Cherry MX brown switches are too hard for them, preferring a membrane keyboard still with some form of added resistance instead. For R600 you can't fault the Suppressor. It ticks all the right boxes and brings competitive gaming features to a demographic that was previously alienated from them. **NAG**
Neo Sibeko

SCORE ■

07
The Suppressor is a middle of the road, affordable keyboard that more than warrants its price in today's world of ultra-expensive keyboards.

➕ On-board macro storage / Backlit keyboard / Price

➖ Plastic materials

TIDAL

NAG SOFTWARE AWARD

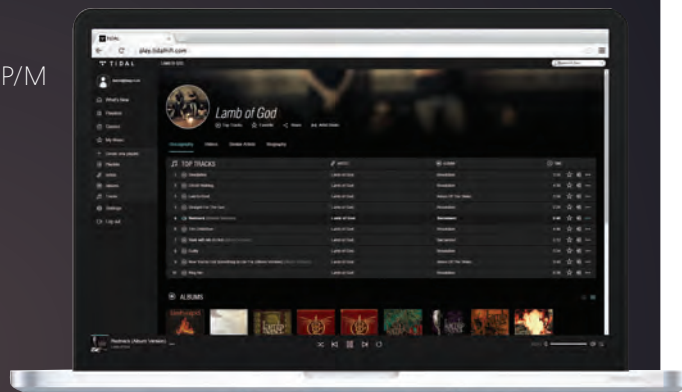**SUPPLIER ›** TIDAL   **WEBSITE ›** www.tidalhifi.com   **ERP ›** $9.99 P/M

For those who have been hiding away for the last few years, online streaming services are the cool new way to listen to music. They're convenient, affordable, and most services have huge repositories of music from all genres.

TIDAL is a relative newcomer to this space, but they've done the smart thing and carved out a niche for themselves as providers of high-quality audio above all else, and the results are impressive. The service is capable of streaming lossless audio at up to 1,411kbps in Hi-Fi mode. If that's a little much for your Internet to handle (it certainly proved to be the case for me more often than not), then you can switch to AAC 320kbps or even AAC+ 96kbps.

Music is organised in a number of ways, ensuring that you can always find what you're looking for or discover new artists. If you're in a particular mood, check out the curated playlists sorted along the lines of "workout", "love", "party", "relax", "focus" and so on. Individual artists always have a top tracks playlist that you can quickly jump on, and similar artists are recommended; you can also pop into a "radio station" which will play recommended songs based on an artist or particular track. You can create and share your own playlists as well, and those playlists (as well as other information like your favourite tracks) are automatically synchronised between all devices: web player, desktop player, or mobile. The mobile player boasts an extra feature of allowing you to store any songs offline for play at any time.

There's also some video content thrown in for good measure, but it's not nearly as easy to access and organise videos as it is with music.

Where the TIDAL subscription is concerned it's a tad pricier than its alternatives, but for the features it has and the incredibly impressive audio quality that's on offer, you'll never feel short-changed. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

SCORE ■

09

A premium product for a premium price. If you demand only the best audio quality then this is will be your ultimate online streaming service.

⊕ Very high quality audio / Lots of features / Video content

⊖ Video organisation is lacking / No offline on desktop app

ASUS ROG GR8

WEBSITE > www.asus.com   **ERP >** R14,200

Size usually doesn't matter much when it comes to gaming hardware, but modern consoles have proven that it's possible to fit PC-grade hardware into a small form-factor. So why not join in the fun with the ASUS ROG GR8? This small and quiet machine is built on a notebook platform but still packs enough of a punch to roll with the big boys.

TAKE IT TO GO
While it'll look smashing next to your 50" telly or even on the proudest of gaming battle stations, the GR8 is most at home at a LAN thanks to its light weight and high degree of portability at a total volume of just 2.5 litres.

NEED SOMETHING MORE POWERFUL?
Go for the ASUS ROG G20, which is built on a desktop PC platform but squeezes all of that power into a 12.5 litre chassis.

UPGRADE PATH
Pop off the side of the case to access an additional SSD/HDD bay, as well as the two RAM slots.

COOL AND QUIET
Power usage is likely to never exceed 70 watts, while noise levels will peak at 28dB.

ALSO IN THE BOX
Along for the ride is an ROG Gladius optical mouse and M801 mechanical keyboard, both with red backlighting.
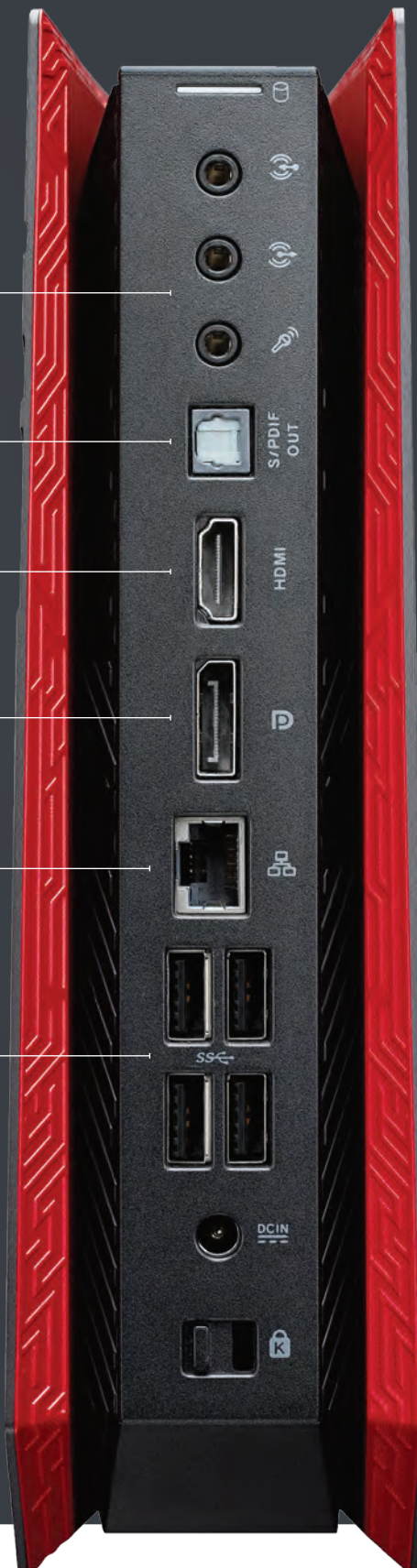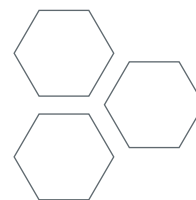
FRONT ●
1/ POWER BUTTON
2/ HEADSET AND MICROPHONE PORTS
3/ TWO USB 2.0 PORTS (ONE WITH FAST CHARGE)
4/ PULSATING ROG LOGO

BACK ●
5/ ANALOGUE AND OPTICAL AUDIO OUTPUTS
6/ HDMI
7/ DISPLAYPORT
8/ ETHERNET
9/ FOUR USB 3.0 PORTS

MOSH*Pit*

Want to expand your geek lifestyle with loads of cool stuff every month? Our Mosh Pit guide is all you need!

❯ Houdt Tsunami

- ❯ **SUPPLIER** Houdt
- ❯ **WEBSITE** www.houdt.co.za
- ❯ **RRP** R1,500

Green thinking is all the rage these days, but having a bit of oomph behind the movement never hurt anyone. Like all of Houdt's locally-designed products, these headphones are made with a combination of real wood and quality plastics. A split headband ensures maximum comfort while the powerful 50mm drivers take care of performance. This headset is perfect for use with mobile devices but an included 6.3mm adaptor means you can put them to the test with your high-end audio equipment as well.

❯ Speedlink Jugger 2.1 Subwoofer System

- ❯ **SUPPLIER** Syntech
- ❯ **WEBSITE** www.syntech.co.za
- ❯ **RRP** R999

If you're looking to add a funky sound system to your gaming rig that delivers some beefy bass but won't break your budget, then the Jugger could be right up your alley. It's not only compatible with your PC but can also be connected to a TV, PS3, Xbox 360 and MP3 player. Some of the inputs are located on the back of the subwoofer, while the master volume, bass control and headphone socket all reside on the round desktop remote.

AOC G2460PG

- **SUPPLIER** AOC
- **WEBSITE** www.aoc.com
- **RRP** R9,895

Gaming monitors are popping up all over the place, and AOC has thrown its hat in the ring with the 24-inch G2460PG. It's powered by NVIDIA's G-SYNC technology, which means that if you've got a G-SYNC-capable GPU the monitor will synchronise with its refresh rate, thereby eliminating display stutter and screen tearing, and ultimately producing the smoothest possible image. Other features include a 1ms GTG response time (which ensures zero ghosting), 80,000,000:1 dynamic contrast ratio and a 144Hz refresh rate, making the monitor 3D-capable. The high refresh rate also reduces blurring and tearing, so you'll never miss a frame during heated battles.

Video input is restricted to a single DisplayPort connection, so if you've not got a GPU that supports DisplayPort, now's the time to invest in an upgrade. There are four built-in USB outputs which let you connect peripherals directly to the monitor, which is in turn connected to your PC via USB. Two of these ports are high-speed USB 3.0 and one is a fast-charging port. The G2460PG's height and tilt are easily adjustable, and you're also able to pivot it to portrait position.

COUGAR MX300

- **SUPPLIER** COUGAR
- **WEBSITE** www.cougar-world.com
- **RRP** R530

If you're on a super-tight budget and are looking for a quality midi-ATX PC chassis, the COUGAR MX300 might just be the case for you. Sporting an eye-catching honeycomb aesthetic, it's rugged enough that you won't have to worry about it crumbling to pieces in the car on the way to your favourite LAN. The case supports up to seven 120mm fans (two front, two top, two side and one rear) and has toolless mounting mechanisms for two optical drives, three 3.5-inch HDDs and three 2.5-inch SSDs.

There are various nooks and crannies throughout the interior to aid in cable management, and there's a hole to allow easy access to the backplate of your chosen CPU cooler. It supports water cooling, and there are detachable filters on all the vents to prevent dust from ruining your fancy components. Multiple GPUs (up to 310mm in length) can be installed if you're so inclined, and the MX300 features built-in USB 3.0 for fast data transfers.

❯ The Amazing Spider-Man: Learning to Crawl

❯ **SUPPLIER** Cosmic Comics
❯ **WEBSITE** www.cosmiccomics.co.za
❯ **RRP** R199

It seems like *Spider-Man* is host to endless reboots, but this particular book is interesting in that it doesn't attempt to reboot the whole series, but rather it puts its own spin on the web-slinger's origin.

Learning to Crawl skips the bits we all know and takes that time to not just tell the story of an awkward boy who gains super-powers, but also gives significant time to another would-be hero, Clayton Cole aka Clash, and the struggle that the two boys share. There's a lot of metaphor play under the hood but on the surface this is a clever retelling of an origin story, complete with some delightfully old school art that contrasts sometimes wildly with its contemporary setting. This book won't be for everyone, but there's plenty of charm here to attract fans of an era of comics that's long gone.
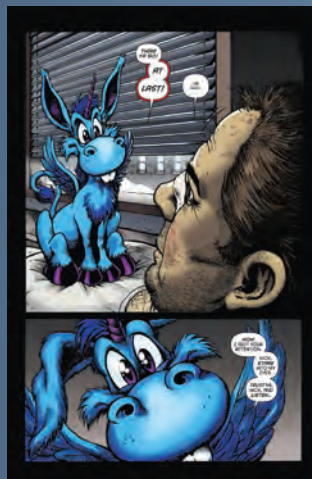
❯ Happy!

❯ **SUPPLIER** Cosmic Comics
❯ **WEBSITE** www.cosmiccomics.co.za
❯ **RRP** R239

Happy! is a standalone graphic novel from two of the greatest names in modern comic books: Grant Morrison (*New X-Men, Animal Man, Batman, JLA*) and Darick Robertson (*Transmetropolitan, The Boys*), and it shows its heritage with its mix of tough anti-hero tropes and oddball happenings. Particularly the bit where the anti-hero, a former cop turned hitman, finds himself the not-so-proud owner of an imaginary friend. It's a bizarre story but manages to throw in layers of narrative depth on top of the near excessive levels of violence. This is one for those of you who enjoy something that requires a bit of thinking – so it's definitely for fans of *Transmet*.

❯ Themed wallets

❯ **SUPPLIER** Heroes of Games and Comics
❯ **WEBSITE** www.heroesofgc.com
❯ **RRP** R250 (Shonen Jump Naruto Shippuden) / R300 (Marvel)

What better way to say you're a fan of something than to buy a themed wallet to put all your money in? Although, if you buy too many of these stylish carriers, you won't have anything left to put inside them. It's almost like buying hundreds of books on how to save money.

They're cheap enough to tell you they're not made of real leather – you can smell leather you know – but good looking enough to fool your friends and maybe even your senile grandfather.

Welcome to the world of airsoft guns, where very realistic and sometimes pricey guns fire plastic pellets at varying rates of speed. They're very accurate and do sting a bit (we shot a few rounds into each other in the office – just to see). Some of them are gas powered which provide a realistic kick and others are battery powered – no less effective, just lacking that real-world gun feel.

◆ Tokyo Marui HK416D Next Generation AEG

- ◆ **SUPPLIER** Airsoft HQ
- ◆ **WEBSITE** www.airsoft-hq.co.za
- ◆ **RRP** R8,094

It's heavy and amazing and looks just like the real thing. It's so realistic that you always do a double check and of course this isn't something you just carry around in public. It has that special quality that even if you only have a passing interest in shooting plastic pellets, you'll want one. This model features a realistic electric blowback and a barrel swapping system and more adjustment potential than we have space for. This really is something special and for the price you get pretty much exactly what you'd expect.

◆ Tokyo Marui Desert Eagle .50AE

- ◆ **SUPPLIER** Airsoft HQ
- ◆ **WEBSITE** www.airsoft-hq.co.za
- ◆ **RRP** R1,995

This faithfully recreated, famous and somewhat impractical Desert Eagle will strike terror into the hearts of our targets. It's weighty and made under licence so it looks and feels the part. Not only does it operate realistically with gas but also gives a nice kick when firing. Get two of them and go all Lara Croft akimbo when you're out of ammunition or just in a tight space.

◆ Tokyo Marui MP7A1

- ◆ **SUPPLIER** Airsoft HQ
- ◆ **WEBSITE** www.airsoft-hq.co.za
- ◆ **RRP** R4,100

Few things in life are as satisfying as holding an MP7 in your hands. Sadly we probably won't get to do that anytime soon, but until that day comes there's this incredibly detailed gas-powered airsoft gun. It includes a pull-out stock, vertical fore-grip and all the clicking and sliding bits you'd expect to find on the real deal. Only this one shoots plastic pellets and doesn't require a licence. Perfect for mowing down hordes of undead tin cans, homicidal glass jars, and paper targets with evil intent. Also neat for that badass selfie you'll be ashamed of in five years.

❯ Heroes of the DC universe: Blackest Night: Green Lantern Sinestro bust

- ❯ **SUPPLIER** Heroes of Games and Comics
- ❯ **WEBSITE** www.heroesofgc.com
- ❯ **RRP** R300

This is an expertly detailed (and hand-painted) cold-cast porcelain bust that stands around 15cm tall. This means it'll feel weighty in your hands and therefore valuable. As an expert touch, underneath, it has little pads to avoid damaging your highly polished geek cabinet – something that we'd like to see more of. The bust is sculpted by James Snoop and is a limited edition so remember that when paying for it. This was Sector 1417's finest before he went to pot.

❯ Batman: Arkham Deluxe Figure: Killer Croc

- ❯ **SUPPLIER** Heroes of Games and Comics
- ❯ **WEBSITE** www.heroesofgc.com
- ❯ **RRP** R750

If little Johnny gets hit on the head with this one we're talking hospital time – standing at around 25cm tall, it's very heavy but that also means it's worth the money because heavy things mean good presents on your birthday. Socks and ties don't weigh much, see? The cool thing here is that this is based on the video game developed by the stellar Rocksteady Studios so it's all in theme and relative. If you've got the Batman you can also buy Titan Joker and Solomon Grundy in the set and spend all day posing and fighting imaginary crime in your imaginary world. Just remember not to put this on a high shelf over your bed.

❯ Man of Steel Zod variant 1:6 scale icon statue

- ❯ **SUPPLIER** Heroes of Games and Comics
- ❯ **WEBSITE** www.heroesofgc.com
- ❯ **RRP** R650

Wasn't this movie just the best *Superman ever*?! Sure the old ones will always have their classic status and charm, but Henry Cavill and Zack Snyder really pulled this one out the bag in 2013.

This is a limited edition variant that stands over 32cm tall. It's well detailed and bears a similar but not exact resemblance to the character from the movie. It's a variant on the standard because it ships with an actual fur cape. Not something you *see* every day – just make sure you store it carefully because there are things that live in cupboards that like to eat fur. For the price this is an absolute steal and definitely one to add to the collection.

Game over

GG

BY TARRYN VAN DER BYL

Tarryn is writing about games until interstellar space travel is invented and she can pursue new career opportunities as a bounty hunter.

So sorry, not sorry

I cheated in *Destiny*. I'm a cheater. I'm also a massive hypocrite because I've always said that cheating in games is stupid and boring and super-mega lame[1]. The problem with *Destiny*, though, is that cheating – or the more euphemistic "cheesing", which is basically cheating but calling it something *else* so everybody can pretend they're not, you know, cheating – is probably the only way to finish the game's two raids without also breaking your controller, burning the house down, and signing up for the Mars colony program so you can die of exposure on a barren wasteland, gasping and terrified, as one of NASA's decommissioned rovers slowly rolls towards you from base camp, a big, blood-spattered specimen of tholeiitic basalt rock gripped in its robotic arm[3].

"Dear Bungie," you'll write in the red dust, a confession that the solar winds will pick up and carry around the galaxy for a billion years as a warning to others. "I should have cheated."

The raids in *Destiny* are *supposed* to be hard, that's kind of the whole point – each one is "the most challenging encounter we've ever created", according to the developer, meant for only the most hardcore of the hardcore players. But… why? It's not a clever or even meaningful separation in a game that's otherwise almost entirely made up of exactly the same, increasingly monotonous mission, over and over. It's not like the most hardcore of the hardcore players have distinguished themselves in some other important way besides playing the same, increasingly monotonous mission, over and over, more times than anybody else. Or those players who've managed to skip that, and gotten a lucky roll on the random number generator responsible for loot drops instead[4]. And even then, the raids are so difficult that most people cheat anyway.

1 Except looking at my fiancé's TV when we're playing *Call of Duty*. That's tactical recon, and it's totally different[2].

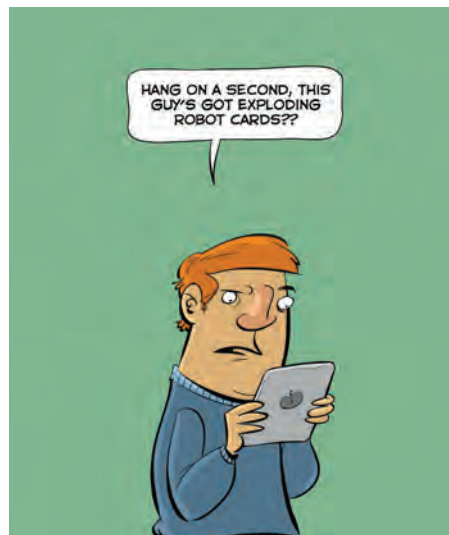**2** Except if he does it to me. That's espionage, and it's totally different.

3 Because you *know* that's going to happen.

4 I don't even.

So, is this a problem with people, or a problem with the game's design? Maybe it's a bit of both – I mean, some people will cheat in an easy game just because they can – but when cheating has become the default method to accomplish a task in a game, it's because playing by the rules isn't working out. And yes, I know, something something *Battletoads* and "casual" gamers and LOL CONSOLE SHOOTERS WHAT ARE YOU EVEN DOING, but meanwhile, back in the real world, a game can be hard without being maddeningly frustrating. It's a subtle difference, perhaps, but a significant one – and in the case of *Destiny*, a game that's already notoriously skimpy on content, shutting out players from some of its most magnificent parts with something as lazy and contextually inconsequential as inflated enemy hit points, one-hit kills and MOOOOORE THRALLS makes no sense whatsoever. **NAG**

EXTRA LIFE

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

Panel 1:
WHATCHA DOIN'?
GETTING BACK INTO HEARTHSTONE. IT'S BEEN ALMOST A YEA...

Panel 2:
HANG ON A SECOND, THIS GUY'S GOT EXPLODING ROBOT CARDS??

Panel 3:
WHATCHA DOIN' NOW?
GETTING BACK INTO CROSSY ROAD.