

THE FINAL ISSUE / JULY/AUGUST 2015

DOUBLE COVER
COLLECTOR'S EDITION

COVER 1

THE DARK KNIGHT



NAG

PC / PLAYSTATION

RDWARE / LIFESTYLE

WIN
ONE OF THREE
PLAYSTATION
HAMPER!

BATMAN ARKHAM KNIGHT

IN-DEPTH
REVIEW **PLUS**
DEVELOPER
INTERVIEW

ALSO REVIEWED
THE WITCHER 3
HEROES OF THE STORM
CITIES: SKYLINES
SPLATOON

**INSIDE
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2015**

ALL THE TECH, ALL THE
HARDWARE, AND ALL THE
NEWS YOU NEED TO KNOW

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COVER 2

THE FINAL ISSUE / JULY/AUGUST 2015

DOUBLE COVER
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COVER 2

THE ARKHAM KNIGHT



NAG

PC / PLAYSTATION 4 / XBOX ONE / SMARTPHONE / TABLET / SOFTWARE / LIFESTYLE



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PS4™

BATMAN

ARKHAM™ KNIGHT



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Game engines! They're kind of like car engines, in that they power the games you love playing, and there are many different shapes and sizes of them out there. Let's look at some of them together, and discover which games they empower.

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COMPUTEX TAIPEI 2015

Computex 2015 did not disappoint, delivering an early taste of all the hottest hardware, gadgets, peripherals, and assorted techie stuff that you can expect to see on store shelves in the coming months.

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FEATURE REVIEW: BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT

Rocksteady's ultimate entry in the *Arkham* series is finally here, and it's made us feel things. Powerful things. It's not just the fact that we got to legitimately call ourselves Batman for a week that's got us giddy. It's much more than that.



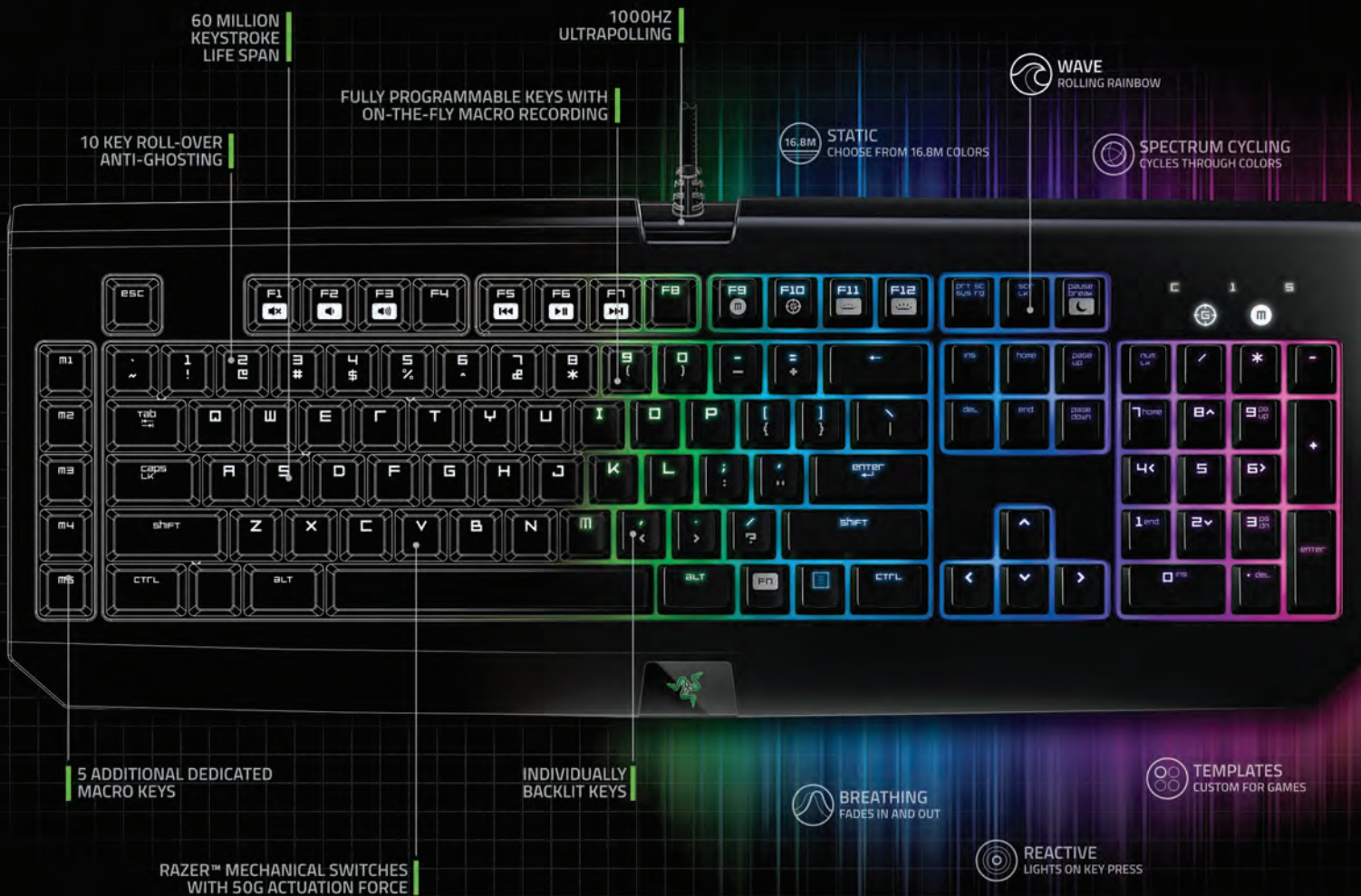
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Videos

112 game trailers

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Also available: the Razer Naga Epic Chroma, the Razer DeathAdder Chroma and Razer Kraken 7.1 Chroma. Sync your Chroma peripherals together for ultimate customization.

WWW.RAZERZONE.COM/CHROMA



This is not the end



This is the final issue of NAG magazine. Once this issue has left the shelves, you'll likely never again see NAG in stores.

The reasons are pretty straightforward: not enough ads, not enough sales, constantly climbing printing costs. These all add up to an impossible challenge in a world where being able to pay the bills matters more than most people care to admit.

It's not all doom and gloom, though; the end of NAG in print means we are now forced to fully embrace the world of online media in all its forms, and that's a good thing. We've been lax on that front for too long, and now it's time to take that NAG level of quality to the Internet. rAge is still on track though (plus some secret plans for more on that front), so don't worry about that! Everyone who currently contributes in NAG magazine will have a place at either NAG Online (www.nag.co.za) or IGN Africa (za.ign.com), although some of the positions are being shifted around.

In my case, that means I'm taking one large step back from NAG as a whole. I'm leaving as editor and a full-time employee to pursue a career in game development. If things go even somewhat according to plan I'll have a playable demo of my first game at the home_coded stand at rAge this year, so now you definitely have a reason to be there. I'll still work with NAG on a few things, namely some home_coded content, Mosh Pit, and a review here and there. Hey, after seven years with NAG it's tough to let go

completely! If you'd like to follow my exploits, you can find me on Twitter @geometrix_za.

It's been a fantastic experience working at NAG. I've grown from lowly staff writer to editor over the last seven years and it's been a ride that I'll never forget. I want to take this opportunity to thank every person that I've worked with over those years: fellow staff, freelancers, clients, developers, distributors, and publishers. And of course, you, the readers of this fine publication. If it wasn't for you I probably wouldn't have got out of bed most mornings. I sincerely hope that you continue to stay with NAG as it embraces its newfound future; I know that it's in good hands.

IN THIS ISSUE!

As you can see we've put Batman and his nemesis Arkham Knight on two covers this month. If you want to buy both versions, we won't stop you! This was originally going to be a preview but then deadlines changed in weird ways, so we hooked up Miklós to a caffeine drip and made him play through review code in record time. As it turns out, he needed little encouragement.

There's also a huge Computex feature written by our Taiwan-based hardware expert Neo, so be sure to check that out for an overview of all the latest and upcoming tech goodies.

There's so much to see in this issue that it's tough to list it all here. Thank goodness for our contents page! Just make sure that you check out our epic *The Witcher 3* review, and don't forget to read us gushing about our latest addiction, *Heroes of the Storm*!

So long, farewell, and thank you. **NAG**
- GeometriX

PS: Don't forget that NAG LAN @ rAge tickets go on sale on the 1st of August through Computicket.

"It's been a fantastic experience working at NAG. I've grown from lowly staff writer to editor over the last seven years and it's been a ride that I'll never forget."



TOGETHER, FOREVER

To celebrate the journey that NAG has taken since its inception, we've decided to digitally archive our entire catalogue of magazines and make it available for free online. At the time of writing, we haven't quite finished the process, but you can grab every issue of NAG and any supplements from 2003 onwards. We'll update with details as the earlier (1998-2002) issues become available.

View them online here: www.nag.co.za/nag-archive.



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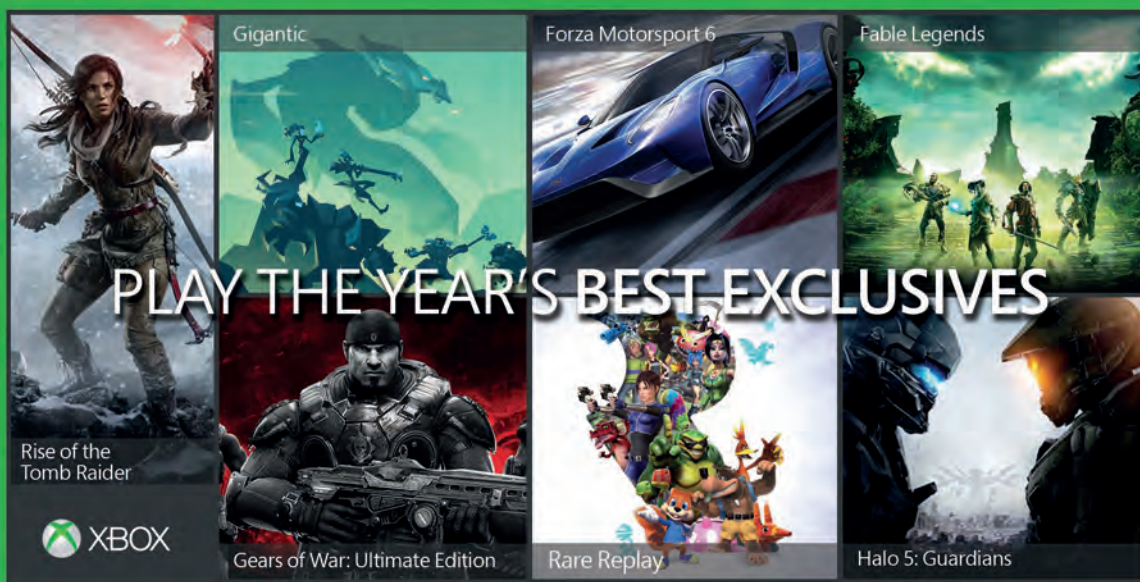
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Inbox

letters@nag.co.za

••• This month I've decided to do something a little different with the Inbox pages. Instead of answering each letter with some sort of cocky response, we're filling these pages with letters, comments and messages from our readers only. While I'd love to publicly respond to every letter on these pages, there simply isn't the space, and right now these pages are all about you, so please accept this universal reply: **Thank you. Ed.**

Letter of the Month *July/August 2015*

FROM: BASIL FRANK
SUBJECT: A LETTER FROM A FAN

As I sit here in front of my laptop, fingers aching from the cold, late night of E3 2015 and the smell of a freshly brewed pot of coffee – I ask myself, what does one say after 17 years?

Gaming has always been a massive part of my life. It is the reason I went into animation. I can recall the weekends in school where my friends didn't care what the weather man said. We would LAN, we would we wage war, we would game.

In 1998 my eyes glanced over a particular magazine, a magazine that would forever change my life. A magazine called New Age Gaming. Never have I seen such detail and care put into articles, the cover alone sold me on it. Asking my mom for R12, trying to explain to her why I need that magazine. She reluctantly gave me R12 but mostly due to the fact that it was a locally produced magazine.

Rushing home, opening that magazine, it was like opening a brand new game for the first time. That smell, that fresh paper smell pressed up against your nose. I know I'm not the only one

that does that. Before I had any form of Internet, NAG was the only way for me to really connect to the gaming world.

The day I saw a CD with that magazine, I knew I was making a great investment. Demos, game trailers, patches. It was the Internet on a disk. Eventually my parents realized that we'll need the Internet for email, little did they know what it would bring to me.

Upon discovering the NAG Forums, I met some incredible people. People that shared this passion for NAG, for gaming as much as I did. On that day, Bouncer was created. Not a month went by where I didn't buy a copy of NAG. Through sand and delays, I still received my copy.

Reading Letter of the Month was one of the most interesting things. Oddly enough, this is the first time ever that I wrote to NAG. You also introduced me to rAge. One of the best events I've ever experienced. I would never have imagined that 17 years after I picked up my first copy of NAG, I would be picking up my last.

When I was that young boy, seeing New Age Gaming for the first time, I knew that I wanted to be a part of that magazine. In a way, I was.

So what does one say after 17 years? How does one end such an incredible journey? Sitting at my desk, only one thing comes to mind.

Thank You.



"When I was that young boy, seeing New Age Gaming for the first time, I knew that I wanted to be a part of that magazine. In a way, I was."

FROM: MAWENA ATEKO
SUBJECT: APPRECIATION LETTER

My original plan this month really, was to win letter of the month (let's face it, I really want those games!), but my motives changed when I found out that this is the last edition of my favourite mag in the world. I firstly would like to thank the team at Nag for making my favourite activity, gaming, even more fun and humorous (You guys had me looking at the side of the mag for funny comments every month).

Secondly I'd like to thank you for what you did for gaming in SA, you have really pushed things forward for budding game dev tycoons and even the little things like informing us about local gaming competitions. You really brought gaming home to SA.

Lastly I just want to say you guys will be missed and I don't think you can be replaced all

Its a damn shame that you couldn't do this for longer.

I will surely miss running to the store to get

the latest edition.

To the team at Nag, I hope you continue to stay blessed wherever you go, it's been a great 17 years but now we say our goodbyes (or at least to the mag, not as a whole). Stay awesome and stay true! You shall forever be missed!

FROM: DEVRON HODSON
SUBJECT: MY HEART SADDENS

It came on a day like no other... I got my Witcher 3 ps4 copy at noon. (Which is a damn awesome game). Then later on. An article on an online gaming publication mention that NAG magazine was closing down. My cherish month's end would be less awesome as I wouldn't be able to go to the store to get my copy. That day I was a little sad. I always wanted to write to Nag and hope to win the monthly prize, Or just have my letter published for the whole country to see. Even picked topics like how publishers are

screwing the people around with there policies such as online only games (with the

new Need for speed and Sim city 4) messing things up. How dumb ass CEO's mess up companies (From EA to Konami). To even having discussed why pre ordering is useless (on Sony's front) as the games just come R300 cheaper 5 months later (Bloodborne was R500 on psn last week) and how its pointless to pre order some ... To how crappy DLC is and is a cash cow. Lastly how shops

should NOT allow games to played that is violent in front of youngsters no matter how much they want to sell there games). None the less. I love your magazine. (Don't have a pc and I got 4 years worth of discs still to be played and will... one day).... I wish the best for you guys and gals. I will visit your website more now and wish the best for all of you! Came on!



ON TWITTER @nagcoza

Johan Charlier

@nagcoza So, from July onwards you guys are going offline, well, offline. Love the editorial style, keep it up online! #BelgianReaderinSA

Keenen O'Brien

A salute to the best magazine that ever existed. The NAG. I'm gonna be in tears when I get the last mag. @nagcoza it has been an honour.

Matthew Arnold

Sad to see @nagcoza print coming to an end. A large influence on my love for gaming in the pre-adsl years. #RIPNAG #GameOver

Gareth Wilcock

So Godspeed, @nagcoza. You did this geeknerddorkwad a huge service above and beyond the reviews and cover disk. o7

Tarryn van der Byl

Working with @nagcoza has been like riding a dinosaur, wielding a laser blaster, and commanding an army of battle cats. It's been so rad. <3

Douw Kotzé

I gotta admit, @nagcoza printed editions has helped me embrace and let lose my inner geek to enjoy gaming a lot more than I would have.

Sanctum27

We grew up with u and u will forever live on in what we've learnt all those years. Our inspiration into gaming started becoz of u @nagcoza

Jonathan Pope

@nagcoza No! :(Sitting in the lounge with DVD game trailers set to playlist while reading the magazine is my favourite thing! I'm sad now.

Chris Bischoff

I'm pressing X to show my respects for @nagcoza . NAG Magazine has been a cornerstone of my gaming life. Thanks for all the fish!

Chantelle Alexander

My favourite NAG magazine to date has to be the issue with the free sand included... Can't do that ish online... @nagcoza

DM PUNK

GG @nagcoza 17 years is one hell of a run.

Nahuel Graziani

@nagcoza From New Age Gaming, to a new age of gaming news. Best of luck with the transition and here's hoping all the best for NAG.

ON THE FORUMS

With the magazine gone you're going to need somewhere to voice your problems... why not do so at the NAG forums? We're a welcoming bunch, always willing to greet newcomers with open arms and... oh who am I kidding? We're an all right bunch at the very least. Maybe not all the open arms stuff, but we probably won't bite your head off on your first day. Maybe. Join us at www.nag.co.za/forums

I always wondered how NAG managed to keep it going for quite so long when most of the other gaming and tech mags couldn't make. You guys did a brilliant job keeping it afloat.

- Zoop “

NAG is the only magazine ive ever bought consistently, and seeing it go breaks my heart.

- Acinixys “

So ends an era... Thank you guys for keeping me company from primary school, all the way through high school and university. I can honestly thank you guys for deciding to get in IT as not only a career, but also a passion. Long live New Age Gaming.

- TiNRiB “

It's sad when something you followed for so long simply just goes away. It shall be missed. This is just like when Nintendo Power stopped. Another hole in my life :(

- Incognito “

Thanks for everything, I guess, is a good place to start, but it's not quite enough.

- brazed “

NAG Mag was an institution. With content by people who should have probably been institutionalised.

- Q-Man “

FROM: MILA TUFEGDZIC
SUBJECT: SHUTTING DOWN

Hey. My brother just heard that NAG was shutting down and he cried (which was weird). But I just wanted to say thank you. If it weren't for this magazine my brother would never have realised what he wanted to with his life, a game designer or to work for NAG! So thank you

FROM: JUSTIN VAN HUYSTEEN
SUBJECT: FAREWELL

Well the end is nigh it would appear, and even though it is rather depressing I suppose that we must move with the times, and no I'm not talking about Konami buggering off out of real gaming,

and instead I speak of the sorrowful demise of the NAG magazine.

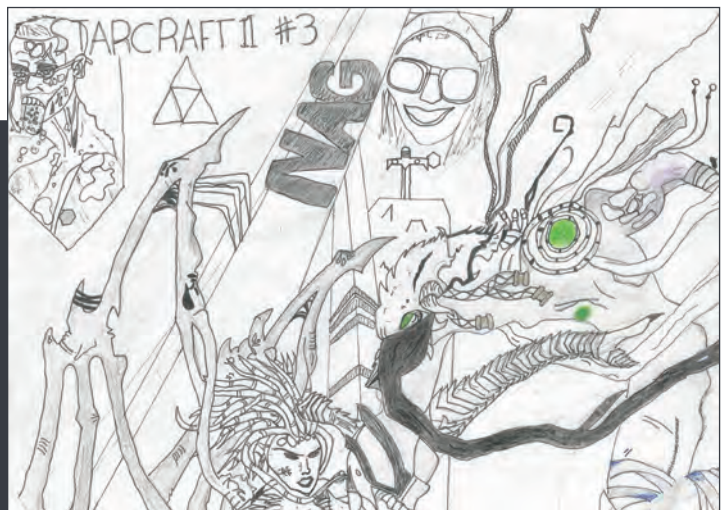
The realm of printed media is slowly drawing its few last breaths and seeing as gaming has always been at the forefront of technology and such I suppose that it was inevitable that magazines related to gaming would flee from the doomed medium before many of the others.

I only began reading NAG properly in 2010 (because I couldn't afford to buy something every month before that time) and it elevated my love of the artform and now I would proudly proclaim myself as a hardcore gamer, and it all started with NAG (and a little thing called Unreal Tournament

Fan art

This is the best bit of fan created artwork we received at NAG this month.

➤ MICHAEL G, "For NAG, the one magazine that helped me these years to grow in gaming knowledge. Spock, Lara, GLADOS and the gaming community salute you. o/"



back when I was five, but whatever, that's not important to my meaningful monologue here).

For so long I wished to one day find myself published in NAG, and indeed I did find a few of my letters tucked away inside there on a few occasions, but alas I shall never find my name alongside any of the real pieces that actually count for something... or at least not in a printed format (because there's no way I'm giving up on that front!).

South Africa is losing something with the issue that I hope this letter finds its way into (although this is for selfish reasons too seeing as having a letter in the last NAG would be pretty damn awesome) and I truly hope that the NAG company and website will flourish without being constrained to a printed format, and I would like to let all you guys and gals that I have come to read over the last few years know that you put on quite a show, and if it were a rock concert we'd all have died of starvation in the seventeen years that it took for you to finally stop playing.

New Age Gaming shall live on, and I shall continue to support it for as long as I draw breath. So good luck with all of your future endeavours, and one day this Capetonian hopes to be able to see rAge because apparently you can't bring the damn thing here! Okay... calm down, calm down... anyway... good luck y'all!

FROM: KYLE LE ROUX

SUBJECT: THIS BLOWS!!!!

So I recently heard that you are going to stop printing magazines!!! so i was abit depressed these few days hearing my favorite mag is dead! WTF!!!. But I cant say I blame you (still pissed off) since not many people still buy the mag due to it being accessible via internet. which probably makes your job alot easier but what about the people who dont have access they still need there dosage of kickass reviews of games they would like to play, you guys tell us in advance what the games all about and save us money not having to buy a crap game. And there's the awesome cd you guys put together every month, its got tons of awesome videos,ect, that you cant get via nag online!! I guess all i am really saying is that i am going to miss the mag. All good things must come to a end.

R.I.P NAG Magazine :(

ON FACEBOOK

www.facebook.com/NAGMagazine

Matthew De Bie

Over two and a half years I've spent 1550 rand on your magazines and to be honest I wouldn't change I thing. I know that my collection is nowhere near as big as those who have been there since the beginning but I feel proud to have been a consumer of your funny, consistent and sometimes brutally honest magazine. I'm sad to see NAG move online only but I do understand. Everything is moving that way books, movies and even our games will eventually become an online product. Thank you to everyone at NAG for keeping me entertained for the better part of my high school career. I will sorely miss your distinctive cover from the shelves but will never forget the laughs and smiles I cracked while reading.

Juan-Paul Oosthuizen

Hi all you guys at NAG it's really tough to see you guys go .. I mean it's not a final goodbye but it is a version of goodbye and that still sucks.. just remember haters gonna hate hahaha that's what they do but there is far more positive from your time with us J so thank you for all the effort you have put in over the years it's much appreciated.

Jan Adriaan Boshoff

Still can't believe the only magazine I buy each and every month is coming to an end, it's really sad to see you go, but at least you won't be gone forever, can still catch you guys online J" There there, Hagrid, It's not goodbye after all..."

Jaco BlignautN

This is such a sad day. I started buying NAG on October 2003 and haven't missed an issue since... I still have all of them and will keep them till they turn to dust. I will really miss you guys. Thanks for the years of awesomeness. ?

Han Cilliers

I haz a sad. NAG Magazine is an SA gaming legend. You will be missed.

Leto Du Plessis

Noooooooo *boohoo* *sniff*, anyway thanks for these past two years (only discovered Nag two years ago) I have enjoyed each and every page of your fantastic magazine every month since I discovered it, so very sad to see you guys go...good luck for the future.

Rudolf Aerofare

While it is sad, it's a necessary and unavoidable transition. Thank you, NAG, for top-quality and unprecedented print entertainment all these years. While we lose out on any future physical copies, we won't miss out on content, and the large stacks of magazines collected over the years will surely be revisited with fond memories as we sift through the pages.

Nic Hart

I'll miss ya. I too used to work with magazines. Have seen first hand the onslaught of closing titles.

Sarel Bosvark Steyn

Whoa, it's been an amazing run. Thank you NAG Magazine for fostering my love of games and giving me the ability to connect with fellow dungeons and dragons players in my town. Also thank you for teaching me how to do reviews. It helped me a lot with my school projects way back when, reviewing books, movies and games. In both Afrikaans and English! You rock!

Lloyd Mackenzie

Complete sad face. Reading NAG since 2004. I won't be able to replace it with anything else. My sidetable is going to be empty without you guys #Irreplaceable.

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ACTIVISION

Local game development

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.



SEXY PUNKS

I recently attended a game design salon that looked at a couple of topics relevant to local developers. One was the matter of inspiration for game ideas: brainstorm techniques, models of approach, and looking at designing feelings rather than mechanics. The other was the thought of classifying certain games as “punk”.

Punk games are a lot like punk music, or punk-anything-else. They're “bad”. They're made by people with no technical skills or very little experience. They focus on a strong message or feeling to carry them along. They're exploratory, relatable and powerful. They pull games back from the precipice of best practice, conservative mechanics and player expectations, and punch you in the face with art instead.

The homework reading for this salon was fascinating, taking me along a veritable article safari of what punk games represent for people and how it's been explored in the global community. An overwhelming number of punk games explore relationships and sexuality, typically in more nuanced and edgy ways than the mainstream (whose general boundary-breaking still hovers around the mark of “insert a token conversation about some trans character”), or focus on sentiments that aren't bound in Hollywood tropes. Punk games explore ten-second kisses at the end of the world, or what it's like to feel differently about violence (not near-constant glorification!), or focus a lens on all those things which make us queer, and kinky, and less “neat” than the easily digested tropes.

“ Massive revenue opportunities generally don't come from local audiences and there is little understanding of game development among our legislators, investors and other formality-types.”



Punk games, more than most, tend to challenge us emotionally, provide new experiences and break down assumptions about good game design.

PUNK AND INDIES

While independent game development is not strictly punk, it's easy to see the overlaps. One of the greatest benefits of going indie is the ability to take risks and explore – to essentially have things your own way. Rapid prototyping and experimenting are encouraged. Even eight-hour game jams are becoming more popular nowadays (their results are as messy as one would expect).

But some have decided to try distinguish punk from more “conservative” indie development. An indie is, after all, perfectly capable of making some uninspired match-3 clone hinged on cynical marketing. So the “altgame” label has been used for indies who want to produce that punkier stuff specifically. It's a label where artists accept that their work is perhaps not going to earn them a stable living, or a wide audience. It's about defying the expectations and good practice which keeps heads above the water in more practically-minded studios.

Punk games are less palatable – in terms of mechanics and subject matter – than other games. And while this can very easily generate something that's just kind of rubbish, this lack of chamfered edges on everything gives developers that chance of making something that's both rubbish *and* compelling! And while their commercial viability isn't the typical reason people go into punk, it's



becoming possible to get “more indie” nowadays with earning your crust: platforms like itch.io and Patreon have done a brilliant job at putting creatives in touch with niche audiences who are able to support their work, with few to no barriers.

PUNK IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

It's no coincidence that punk came up as a topic in the aforementioned salon, because it's becoming increasingly prevalent among local devs, fitting the South African “dev-olution” quite perfectly. Globally, games have had the opportunity to become extremely sophisticated and rigid. Economies and policies have shifted to include them, they're well-formalised and recognised as a major industry and all sorts of schools and colleges exist now to facilitate game creation according to these rules and learnings.

South Africa, in comparison, has almost nothing. Courses offered at institutions are younger, smaller and rarer. Our developers' association is still formalising. Massive revenue opportunities generally don't come from local audiences and there is little understanding of game development among our legislators, investors and other formality-types (and that's without mentioning the FPB's occasionally crazy attempts to regulate new media).

South African indies are in a bit of a “home alone” scenario, where our parents accidentally left us locked in the house for a weekend. It sucks because a lot of our options have been cut off – but it also means we're pretty much allowed to do whatever we want with what remains.

In this analogy, a lot of studios have survived by knotting together a bedsheet rope and climbing out through the window. But local punks are also realising that they've been left in control of a house full of cool stuff, and are starting to work with it. A lot of recent success stories have come from the punkish mindset – experimental parties like the Super Friendship Arcade, the very punk-driven A MAZE festival, and countless recent submissions

from new designers who transitioned from non-development backgrounds.

This leads us to fascinating and cheeky games which explore more interesting avenues. Studios such as Free Lives and Cool Your Jets embrace this wholeheartedly: years ago already, we had the tentative emergence of the competitive penis simulator *Wang Commander*, and since then have enjoyed a steady stream of fun or edgy works (some of them *not* involving penises).

There's *Bowl of Indignation*, described by its creators as “a game(?)... about a murderous toilet... with controls (sometimes)”. It's two minutes of grotty hilarity coded by artists. *Snow Cones* is a Ludum Dare 32 entry with minimal player interaction: you play through a handful of fairly linear (but remarkably sweet) scenes involving a sentient snow cone preparing for a date. Unfinished, but magical.

The community has also produced games which are actually pranks in disguise (such as the appropriately-titled *White Cats In The Snow*), competitive pleasure games like *Rule 34* (mentioned here before: and again, something you should *officially* never play) and many others which arise whenever developers are constrained by ridiculous resource pressure or just want to try something new. **NAG**



PUNK GAMES AND YOU

Are you new to game dev? A little intimidated? Not really interested in rehashing the experiences that others could do so much better already? Punk games could be for you. It's not about skill, it's not about polish: it's about your expression. Local sympathy towards punk games means you could get pretty far with just one burning idea and a handy tool like Twine or Scratch. Make your mark on the community with your very first project, as others have already (*Kick In The Door*, the popular foot-pedal expo game, was spearheaded by a complete game development newbie).

Or perhaps you're reading this with interest, thinking “that's nice, but I'm already kinda established with game development”. But punk games are valuable for veterans as well: even if you don't fancy making them, playing them regularly is a great way to expand your mind, think creatively and start developing more refined games that still push boundaries on occasion. That, and if you happen to design a punk game of your own, there's no reason why it can't be polished later to make something with more mass appeal.

Punk is special and engaging in a world where most game releases nowadays describe themselves as “Like X Game Title, but...” There's no butts in punk. There's no “like” in punk. There's just a game for its own sake, a new idea, a defiance of expectations, conventions and boxes.

It's the most damn creative part of the game development scene, and you can easily be a part of it.

So try it. Go. You've got ideas to share, now.

Michael came to planet Earth in 1972. He doesn't understand people and thinks there are too many of them clogging up the natural system. He waits for the shining return.

GUEST COLUMN

BY MICHAEL JAMES

THE FORCE AWAKENS

I've always tried to tie *Star Wars* movie titles to big moments in the magazine. When I took over from Warren early 1999 I titled my first Ed's Note "A New Hope", apt because I was bringing in a new era for the magazine (well in my mind anyway). When James Francis took over from me I called it "The Empire Strikes Back" because it felt like a dark time for me. I was giving up something I loved. When James left I called my returning Ed's Note "The Return of the Jedi" as I fancied myself a Jedi and I was returning. Then when I handed over to Geoff in December 2014 my last Ed's Note was titled "The Start of a New End Beginning at the End of a New Start"... it was a weird time for me and *The Force Awakens* didn't exist back then. Even though now I'm not changing seats, I feel compelled to theme this farewell around the new *Star Wars*. It's like one of those things you always do even though it doesn't really fit but you force it anyway. And this is just a tiny peek into my mind. Scary isn't it?

This is the last issue of the magazine. I did a press release on the web site about it which you can read at www.nag.co.za/2015/05/19/the-future-of-nag and yes, interestingly I chose Yoda to introduce the message. Maybe I'm a little obsessed. Anyway, print is a dead donkey these days because information and communication happens faster on the Internet. This fast access to gaming information and news and other like-minded people isn't something the printed format can compete with anymore. So this is the end but also the beginning of something new. I called the piece on NAG Online "The Future of NAG" because the Internet is where NAG is going to live from now on – just as a website. As a bonus we're in the process of archiving every single magazine we've ever done – all the NAGs from 1998 to date – as PDF files. Geoff will give you more details about that in the Ed's Note – enjoy it and marvel in this rather amazing body of work we've all sweated over for the last 17 years. We've come a long way – especially if you look at the earlier issues.

We're also going to do more events in different parts of the country (and JHB). Some long overdue, but now that I've got all this time on my hands and I'm not planning on retiring to some island somewhere (yet), I'm going to focus on the Internet and also real life gaming experiences you can all enjoy. Keep an eye out for announcements and news on our sites and remember to keep in touch so you don't miss anything. It's all very exciting and to be honest I'm glad the end has come. I've been doing this for a very long time and in the process of deadlines, recovery and then more deadlines, and then rAge, I've been slack here and there in getting new things off the ground. I'm very excited about the future and I'm not sure how to feel about not having to

work towards this deadline date each month. It controlled my life for such a long time I'm not sure I'm going to be able to switch it off – that island is starting to look good again.

To end off I want to say thank you to everyone that I (we) have touched over the years. I feel that everyone has had a hand in making this possible, from the companies that believed in us with NAG magazine and rAge, to those thousands of readers and visitors and fans that love what we do. It's very gratifying to know that we've touched so many lives over the years and will continue to do so but in different ways. The most important thanks must go to all the staff that have worked on the magazine over the years and have put this last one together. We've all played games and called each other names and hopefully had fun in the process. Pity it couldn't last forever. I've realised my dreams and fantasies in the gaming space so I consider myself very lucky – few people in life can follow their passion and be fortunate enough to make a living out of it.

So thanks for all the love and support and complaints and challenges over the years from everyone. You all helped make NAG what it is today and in the process also made me who I turned out to be – the good and the bad. I can't say thanks enough and there isn't a single thing I'd go back and change.

Love you guys!

RedTide
Publisher, NAG magazine



Dark Souls III confirmed

Prepare to die. Again. Again.



A short trailer at Microsoft's E3 press conference in June announced the next entry in the dark-fantasy RPG series. Uncreatively titled *Dark Souls III*, the announcement was met with mixed reactions.

Story-wise, the game takes place in a world suffering through an apocalypse. Ash storms tear away at existence, armoured giants roam the lands, and the usual mix of demons and dragons plague adventurers. A big focus is that of "withered beauty", so expect gorgeous visuals. Following the *Dark Souls* tradition, it seems like this does not have overt story ties to previous games.

While the E3 demo was shown behind closed doors, various interviews have sprung up detailing gameplay elements. A new addition to the combat is something called "sword-fighting arts": special moves that can be performed from a ready stance. The level design is aiming for a *Dark Souls* level of connectivity, all conjoined by a central base camp. In general, the gameplay is said to be faster than previous games. Only one boss was shown, called the Dancer of the Frigid Valley. This monster's attacks set the environment on fire as the battle went on, so hopefully that will be a mechanic.

Fans have been quick to voice their disappointment over the game, because games in the *Dark Souls* tradition seem to have become an annual franchise. Questions regarding quality can be brushed aside, because Hidetaka Miyazaki is back as the director. He helmed *Bloodborne*, *Dark Souls*, and *Demon's Souls*, and each had a high level of quality.

Dark Souls III will launch early 2016, most likely March, for PS4 and Xbox One. PC versions usually follow soon after, and more details have been promised soon.

"...based on what I've seen to date, it's not fun, and it's not social. It's just tech."

- Nintendo of America's Reggie Fils-Aime (speaking with Polygon) clearly isn't at all impressed by VR devices like Oculus Rift.



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Bytes

Miklós once ate 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

ONE LAST TIME

This is the 76th column I've written for *NAG* magazine. I'd always planned on making a big deal about my eventual 100th column, but that's not going to happen. I guess 76 is still a pretty good run.

"Sonder" is the name for that feeling you sometimes get when you realise that every random person is living their own life; even all of us writing this magazine. Because this is the last chance I'll get to share it with you, let me tell you how I got here.

My name is Miklós Szecsei; it's Hungarian and it's pronounced "Setchay". I'm married and I have one kid, with another due in August this year. I have the chicken pox virus to thank for my existence. My father and his family fled Hungary in 1956 when Russia invaded; he was two years old. They intended to leave for Australia, but were blocked because my father had caught chicken pox. As a result they were sent to South Africa where my dad grew up and eventually met my mother.

I was born in Johannesburg and went to St. Peter's Prep. The first video game I ever played was *Alley Cat* on my late uncle's PC with its low-fi RGBI monitor that only displayed magenta and cyan. We moved to Cape Town when I was 14; I did high school at Rondebosch Boys' High. I first encountered *NAG* magazine in standard seven (grade nine). I dreamt about one day writing about video games – so much so that I went to Rhodes University to study a Bachelor of Journalism. I lasted two years before realising Journalism was actually just Politics in disguise. I converted to BA and graduated with an English Literature Honours degree. In my third year I met my future wife on the steps of her res during her orientation week. Once we'd both finished varsity, we moved overseas; I planned to try to find a writing position with a gaming magazine in the UK.

After a year of getting nowhere we moved home and I relocated to KZN. I started buying *NAG* magazine once more and decided to send in a letter to the editor at the time, Michael James. My letter was published in the May 2008 edition as the Letter of the Moment. I sent in a second one that was also published as the Letter of the Moment in October 2008. This time, however, Michael's response contained an offer for a monthly column in the magazine; an offer I grabbed with both hands and never looked back.

If you've been reading this column over the last six years, then I hope that I managed to entertain, inform, or enrage you. It's been a privilege being able to call you, the *NAG* readership, my audience. I'm still on *NAG* Online, so be sure to check in each day. Alternatively, come and find me on Twitter (@Mikit0707) so we can talk about games together.

Thanks for reading, and thank you, *NAG*, for giving me a shot. I'm going to miss this magazine.

Fallout 4 is official

Collector's edition will come with a working Pip-Boy!



This wasn't exactly a massive surprise: the game's website went live a little prematurely, which let the three-headed, irradiated cat out of the bag, but Bethesda quickly took the site down so as to try to salvage some excitement ahead of the game's ACTUAL announcement.

Fallout 4 puts you in the shoes of a Vault Dweller in a post-apocalyptic Boston and its surrounds. You'll be able to play as either a male or female character, and this time around your character will be fully voiced and rather chatty if gameplay videos are anything to go by. Bethesda has also opted to record over 1,000 popular names, so you'll be able to hear NPCs addressing your character by name providing you don't choose something like "Mr. Mochi" or "Frikkie van Vuuren".

Further breaks with *Fallout* tradition include the fact that the game will start before any of the bombs are actually dropped; you'll get to experience the whole world going to wasteland-hell-in-a-hand-basket. Your character will then emerge from Vault 111 around

200 years later to find a familiar *Fallout* environment.

Crafting has been confirmed and was shown off during Bethesda's E3 press conference. You won't just be crafting weapons and armour though: you'll get to salvage materials from pretty much anything in the world, and then use those materials to build entire wasteland settlements and fortresses complete with turret defences and trade routes.

Further fantastic news is that the game will once again allow for mods, but those mods will be accessible by Xbox One and PlayStation 4 players as well! How exactly this will work is unknown for now, but we're guessing Bethesda will be making use of their newly announced digital distribution platform, Bethesda.net.

Fallout 4 will be out on 10 November on PC, PlayStation 4, and Xbox One. A collector's edition that comes with a working Pip-Boy has also been announced.

Team ICO's *The Last Guardian* is back on track and heading to PlayStation 4



Possibly the biggest announcement during Sony's E3 press conference was the re-reveal of the long-in-development Team ICO project, *The Last Guardian*. Originally revealed for the PlayStation 3 all the way back in 2009, the game's development experienced setback after setback, and there's a lengthy trail of news articles lamenting the project's continual delays, expo no-shows, and team member losses. The game's creator, Fumito Ueda, actually left his own company in the middle of development. The reasons behind his departure were never really made clear, but he did continue to work on the game in a freelance capacity.

Now *The Last Guardian* looks like it's finally going to happen, albeit on the PlayStation 4 instead. The jump to a more powerful hardware platform has meant that the team has been able to spruce up the visuals rather nicely. The game is looking stunning, as was seen during gameplay demonstrations that took place at E3 in mid-June.

Gameplay and plot haven't been changed at all, and traces of *ICO* and *Shadow of the Colossus* can still be seen all over the place. The relationship and teamwork between the player's character and the Trico (the large cat-bird-griffin... thing) remains front and centre. No release date has been discussed.

“Like any superhero story, we get into your backstory of why your butthole is so amazing. Deep into that butthole story.”

- *Trey Parker and Matt Stone, directors of South Park: The Fractured but Whole.*

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Bytes

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

FAREWELL ADIEU AUF WIEDERSEHEN GOODBYE

Tell me now you aren't singing that title in your head... And then mumbling the rest of the words because you don't know them.

I remember the first time I picked up a copy of *New Age Gaming*. I couldn't tell you exactly how old I was, or what issue it was, but I remember thinking, "damn, this is pretty awesome. There are people out there who play games and then write about them? I want to do that!"

Fast forward a few years (ok, quite a few), *New Age Gaming* became *NAG* and I was working in the gaming industry on *The Verge*, no longer just reading the reviews of others in that glorious publication but actually writing my own.

A couple more years and I was working alongside the *NAG* team as a freelancer, even when *The Verge* came to an end. People might not always like my opinions (you can't please all the people all the time), but I've always felt that *NAG* cultivated a feeling of camaraderie and encouraged different opinions and debate.

I would count most of the people who work here more than just acquaintances, I count them as friends.

As with any long-standing institution, its demise is met with a mixture of sadness, and hope for the things that are to come. *NAG* might be leaving us in its physical form, but it continues in the form of *NAG Online*, *IGN Africa*, and the *rAge Expo*.

Yes, many of the people that I count friends are moving on to other things, some within the gaming industry and some outside of it, but to quote *Casablanca*, "We'll always have Paris".

Because you know, that's where some of Ubisoft's offices are.

Ok, no that's not the reason, but you get my drift. We'll always have the memories and the feelings that reading a particularly good issue evoked in us. We'll always be able to look back and remember the anticipation of a new issue. Sure in later years we all could access other reviews earlier than in the magazine, but there was a sense of satisfaction to be gained by flipping through the pages, marveling at the artwork and layout, and (on a special month) the multiple covers. There is nothing quite like a physical copy of a book or a magazine, and in general this is something I mourn about the digital age. I like the feeling of the paper between my fingers. I like the feeling of flipping through pages. Of the glossy covers. Of the layout and the texture. This is something you can't get from an online experience, no matter how immersive it is.

I look forward to continuing the relationship I have with the *NAG* team, wherever they end up, but I'm sad. I'm sad to see a landmark of the South African gaming industry disappear. A publication that defined the childhood and then later made its mark on the adult life of so many of us; *NAG* you will be sorely missed.

"It's a form of art, the people outside don't think it's art, it's just stupid games. We're fighting against those people. And then when we're dealing with serious subjects suddenly we're treated as little kids that are just doing video games again. This whole thing is completely ridiculous."

- *Eidos Montreal's Jonathan Jacques-Belletete on Deus Ex: Mankind Divided's "mechanical apartheid" furore.*



Shadow Warrior 2 will mean double the Wang

Flying Wild Hog is pulling out all the stops



2013's reboot to the classic 1997 *Shadow Warrior* was quite a pleasant surprise, with great combat, an interesting story and a fresh spin on an old protagonist, warrior Lo Wang. Naturally, such successes scream "SEQUEL!", and it looks as if we'll be treated to another dose of Wang in the near future.

An early prototype was featured at E3 which indicates that the game is set five years after the events of the previous title. All is not right in Lo Wang's world, as the forces of darkness have soiled his name, and demons walk the Earth largely unchallenged. Still, some choose to fight the demonic hordes and Wang himself

will be able to rope in some comrades, which means multiplayer co-op that was missing from the 2013 game. The levels also promise to be massive, non-linear and open-ended, meaning that players will have to stick together to maximise their killing effectiveness. Over 70 different weapons are on the cards, and like before, there'll be upgrade options for the weapons as well as abilities. It'll also feature an extensive looting system a la *Borderlands* as well as many more enemies who are considerably smarter than your usual stock-and-standard cannon fodder.

Shadow Warrior 2 will be released for PC, Xbox One, and PS4 in 2016.

There will be no gunplay in *Mirror's Edge: Catalyst*



Upcoming *Mirror's Edge: Catalyst* (which was previously known as *Mirror's Edge 2*) will not feature any first-person shooting elements. DICE has decided to remove the option for player character Faith to even pick up a gun. "You won't be using any guns at all," the game's senior producer Sara Jansson said. "We've completely removed that aspect of the game. You can't even pick them up."

While Faith will still encounter enemies that will shoot at her, so long as she keeps moving and "stitching together move after move", she will be impervious to bullets. However, the moment your parkour flow breaks, and Faith comes to a halt, she'll start taking damage from enemy guns.

The original *Mirror's Edge* tried to get players to avoid having to resort to guns. The game even had an Achievement/Trophy for making it through the story without firing a weapon.

Mirror's Edge: Catalyst is out on 26 February 2016.

"We need a support system for prisoners once they are released, too. After they get out of prison, I hope they will take steps to continue to look after their [mental] health, such as using the DS."

- A Japanese prison warden on inmates using the Nintendo DS.



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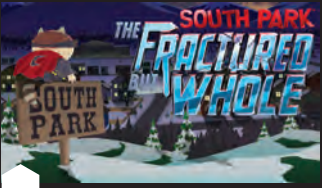


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South Park sequel announced

Ubisoft kicked off its recent E3 2015 press conference with the very surprising announcement of *South Park: The Fractured but Whole* (say it aloud to get the joke).

The announcement was delivered by *South Park* creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone, who previously stated that after *The Stick of Truth*, they would be done with video games.

The new game again follows The New Kid, but the children of South Park are finished LARPing and are now playing superheroes. It's up to The Coon, Mysterion, Tool-Shed, The Human Kite, and whatever you as The New Kid end up being to defeat the forces of Professor Chaos. Gameplay remains similar, with its RPG dynamics, and the graphics look unchanged.

South Park: The Fractured but Whole is set for launch on PC, PS4, and Xbox One at an unannounced date.



Twitch cracks down on adults-only

Popular online video game streaming service Twitch recently made news by outright banning the streaming of titles rated "adults only."

In a blog post, the company said: "Our goal at Twitch is to create a safe, welcoming, inclusive community platform where everyone can feel comfortable and have fun. From time to time, we update our Rules of Conduct (RoC) in pursuit of this goal and to match emerging issues in the video game industry. Today, we're updating the RoC with regard to Adult Only (AO) games. Simply put, AO games are not welcome on Twitch."

A quick look through an ESRB ratings list of AO games reveals some titles with extreme violence. However, most of them have some depiction of sex, or sexual content. Stand out examples include *Hatred*, *GTA: San Andreas*, *Fahrenheit: Director's Cut*, and *WET - The Sexy Empire* (kids, please don't Google that name).

Actually, it's "Honour"

Ubisoft announces medieval brawler *For Honor*



In development at Ubisoft Montreal, *For Honor* is probably best described as a big-budget take on *Chivalry: Medieval Warfare* or *War of the Roses*. In other words, it's like *Battlefield* wearing plate mail armour. Players will assume control of a Viking, Samurai or Knight (each packing their own unique abilities and fighting style), and charge around war-torn battlegrounds attempting to gain control of key areas by fighting both human and AI-controlled opponents.

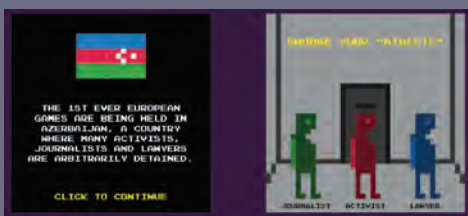
The game's combat is powered by a system they're calling Art of Battle, which gives you full control over the placement of your melee weapons and shields. You can choose to run around normally, attacking and moving as in any other action game, but lock onto a target and you enter a duelling mode. When this happens, the right stick of your controller no longer controls the camera, instead letting you fine-tune your stance; flicking the stick to the left will have

your character move to hold their shield/sword on their left side, for example.

Paying close attention to how your opponent uses this system is the only way to survive. Changing stances takes time, so you've got to plan your offensive and defensive moves ahead of time. There's a rock-paper-scissors setup in place where performing certain moves at the right time will leave your opponent vulnerable to an onslaught of attacks. "Defense beats attack. Guard break beats defense. Attack beats guard break," explains creative director Jason Vandenberghe.

Naturally, you'll be able to customise your warrior's appearance, so you can look all spiffy when marching into battle. Doing particularly well will earn you points that can be spent on support abilities called Feats – things like calling in arrow storms or catapult barrages. Expect to see a history-bending single-player campaign in there as well.

Social Justice game raises awareness of journalistic persecution



The city of Baku in the country of Azerbaijan is hosting the first European Games, which is similar to the Olympics but on a slightly

smaller scale. Unfortunately, Azerbaijan's human rights record is a bit sketchy and anyone critical of the government probably won't be having a very good day.

This has prompted FIDH, a human rights group, to bring these issues to the forefront with an online game. Titled *Real Baku 2015*, the game is styled as an 8-bit affair and features satirical representations of sporting events, played out by imprisoned activists.

Check out the game at www.realbakugam.es and see what you can do to spread the word.

Shenmue 3 fully funded in record time



PlayStation's E3 press conference was full of surprises, and one of their biggest was the announcement of the long awaited *Shenmue 3*. The game was announced by series creator Yu Suzuki, and the excitement of seeing news of this game promptly set the Internet on fire.

Also announced was the Kickstarter campaign to fund the game. Some Internet users have cried foul over using a game conference to announce a crowd-funding campaign, but that hasn't stopped it from shattering records held by *Yooka-Laylee* and *Bloodstained*. In 90 minutes the campaign raised \$1 million, and it hit its funding goal of \$2 million in less than nine hours. At time of writing, the campaign has raised more than \$3.5 million, although it's not moving at the blistering pace of before. New stretch goals are being added constantly, with the ultimate goal of turning *Shenmue 3* open-world if more than \$10 million is raised. It has also emerged that Sony is funding the project too, although details on that deal are not yet available.

Shenmue 3 is destined for PC and PS4, and there is no release date yet. Although, if you've waited 14 years since *Shenmue 2* then a little longer won't hurt.

CryEngine 3 is now Linux-friendly



Once it was the case that Linux was strictly off-limits to gamers, unless your cup of tea was endless amateurish clones of *Tetris*, *Solitaire* and half-finished '90s arena shooters. Lately however, the platform has grown considerably more friendly to gamers, thanks to ports of games and more supportive game creation tools. The latter has now expanded with the release of CryEngine 3.8.1, which brings OpenGL support and allows it to run Linux games natively. This also, in theory, means that developers may release Linux builds of older CryEngine games.

CryEngine 3 is gorgeous and a real treat for eye-candy fans, though it has suffered in popularity recently due to the fact that it's still subscription-based instead of offering a free alternative along the lines of Unity and Unreal Engine 4.

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More Uncharted for PS4

After a series of leaks and rumours, Sony took to their PlayStation Blog to confirm that *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, *Among Thieves*, and *Drake's Deception* will all be remastered for PlayStation 4. The bundle is called *Uncharted: The Nathan Drake Collection* and each game will be improved to run at a constant 60fps, at 1080p.

Other upgrades include lighting improvements, new Trophies, and a photo mode for all your Drake selfies.

Bear in mind, these are only the single-player versions of these games and multiplayer will not be brought along to PS4. Purchasing *The Nathan Drake Collection* will give gamers access to the *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* beta when it launches.

Uncharted: The Nathan Drake Collection is due for launch October 9th, 2015.



No Man's Sky will hit PC at the same time as PlayStation 4

This year, PC gaming had its very own E3 press conference. During that show, Hello Games was on-hand to talk about upcoming space exploration game *No Man's Sky*. The space sim was originally set to be a PlayStation 4 exclusive. That "exclusivity" turned into a timed exclusive. Now, Hello Games' Sean Murray has confirmed that *No Man's Sky* will hit PC on the same day that it releases on Sony's PlayStation 4.

It's still unknown when exactly the game will be out, but Hello Games has promised to reveal that soon; so far all we have to go on is "2015". It's also unclear as to whether or not the game will get a boxed, full retail release or if it will be a digital title.

Final version of Oculus Rift revealed alongside Oculus Touch VR controls



Oculus VR has shown off the final consumer version of the Oculus Rift. While the company was reluctant to reveal final hardware details, they did announce that the consumer version will make use of dual OLED screens, and the entire headset has been made extremely light weight. It'll be covered in a tight-fitting fabric, and Oculus VR likened it to wearing a baseball cap.

Oculus also revealed a partnership with Microsoft. The Rift will work natively with Windows 10, and all Rifts will ship with an Xbox One controller as standard. Additionally, Microsoft revealed that you'll

be able to stream Xbox One games to the Rift; you'll get to play your Xbox One titles in a virtual living room on a virtual large-screen TV. It sounds a little gimmicky but let's wait and see.

Finally, Oculus VR revealed the Oculus Touch controllers. The two hand-held controllers feature built-in hand tracking and a familiar suite of face buttons, triggers, and thumbsticks. The Oculus Touch will allow you to reach out and interact with virtual objects. These controllers will be sold separately sometime after the launch of the Oculus Rift, which is still only "Q1 2016". At time of writing, pricing has still not been revealed.

Avast me hearties! A new Rare game approaches!



Rare, who've developed more video games in the last 30 years than we have the collective fingers and toes to count them (including acclaimed classics like *Banjo-Kazooie*, *Project Dark* and *GoldenEye 007*), have announced a brand-new, Microsoft-exclusive IP going by the name of *Sea of Thieves*. It's essentially a pirate-themed first-person

online multiplayer experience with attractive cartoonish visuals, and early footage of the game is looking lovely.

You'll be able to grab your friends and sail the seas in search of treasure and adventure, with the trailer suggesting that individual players will be in charge of all your ship's workings. Managing sails, steering the ship and loosing cannon volleys will be up to the player-controlled crew. There'll be ship-to-ship combat, buried treasures guarded by long-dead skeletons, plank walking and hopefully everything else you'd expect to see in a game such as this. It's due out towards the end of next year on XBO and PC, but the PC version will be exclusive to Windows 10. There's no word yet on whether or not there'll be cross-platform play between PC and XBO.



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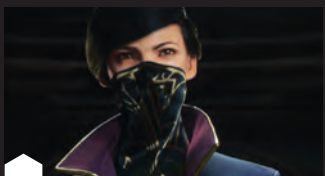
HEADSETS





Australia is super ban-happy

If you think our own country is a bit prudish about games, you ain't seen nothing yet. Since January of this year, more than 240 games have fallen under Australia's official ban hammer – a considerable increase from a mere 77 titles that were banned over a 20-year period prior. Although the vast majority of banned games are obscure, it includes some noteworthy titles such as *Hotline Miami 2*. Reactions to the banning are mixed, with some people congratulating the steps and others accusing the government of behaving like the Gestapo. This is the first step in their experimental rating system, set to become standard in a year's time.



Dishonored will return, promises more sneaky stabbing

Dishonored 2 is officially a thing that's happening, and this time it'll feature two playable characters: Corvo Attano, protagonist of the first game, and Emily Kaldwin, the young girl from the original. The sequel is set 15 years after *Dishonored*, when Emily receives a visit from the Outsider and is given magic powers of her own. The Rat Plague is no more, but an "otherworldly usurper" has seized the throne from Empress Emily.

Each of the two characters will have their own unique abilities, weapons and gadgetry. As with the first game, you'll be free to choose how to overcome any scenario, whether it's by employing stealth, careful agility or the wild swinging of melee weapons. You'll be travelling into the world beyond Dunwall to the once-great coastal city of Karnaca. *Dishonored 2* is scheduled for Q2 2016, and even if it's practically a carbon copy of the first game, we'll be happy.



ArmA 3's latest expansion revealed

Although the actual name is still a mystery, Bohemia have confirmed a new expansion for *ArmA 3*. Set in the South Pacific archipelago of Tanoa, the expansion will feature a beautiful and lush tropical setting not unlike something out of the *Crysis* or *Far Cry* games, though it's promised to be considerably more challenging. The expansion is set for release in the first half of 2016 and, according to developers, will feature new vehicles, more weapons, loads of attachments and gear, and a wealth of new characters and playable content.

Horizon: Zero Dawn lets you hunt robo-dinosaurs



Developer Guerrilla Games announced a new IP that looks like a wild departure from their standard *Killzone* fare. It's called *Horizon: Zero Dawn*, and it's a third-person action-adventure where you hunt robotic dinosaurs. Let's call them Robosaurs.

The game is set far into the future, after human society as we know it has died out and new clans of tribal nomads are all that's left of the race. This creates a wonderful aesthetic contrast of skyscrapers, Robosaurs, and technology juxtaposed with yurts, fur clothing, spears, and bows.

The protagonist is Aloy, a woman who

refreshingly does not look like an animated sex-toy, and Guerrilla Games has said that she will "explore a vibrant and lush world inhabited by mysterious mechanised creatures. Embark on a compelling, emotional journey and unravel mysteries of tribal societies, ancient artefacts and advanced technologies that will determine the fate of this planet, and of life itself."

E3 interviews confirmed that the levels would take place in large, sprawling levels, but not an actual open-world.

Horizon: Zero Dawn is exclusive to PS4, and the release date hasn't been revealed yet.

All hail the snake people: XCOM 2 incoming



Shortly before E3 2015, 2K Games saw fit to deliver news that a sequel to *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* is in the works at Firaxis and is due for release this November. Shock! Awe! Surprise! Simply called *XCOM 2*, it catapults the series 20 years into the future. Humanity ultimately lost the war against the alien threat, and the aliens quickly established a new world order. *XCOM* is all but completely forgotten, yet the organisation is Earth's last hope at a future free from alien rule.

Firaxis describes this as a role reversal, because our beloved *XCOM* is now the invading force. You'll

have to manage severely limited resources and ensure that your base is constantly kept mobile to evade being discovered by the aliens. Slowly you'll build a resistance network using a combination of brute force and guerrilla tactics, recruiting new soldiers and slowly revealing the truth of the alien agenda to the pacified human populace. New features include procedurally generated levels, better modding support, updated soldier classes (and increased soldier customisation), new enemy types and improved tactical combat. Also, Snakemen are back, and they've brought Snakewomen!

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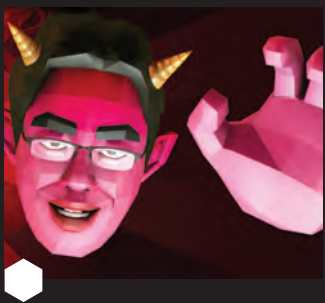
GAMING.MSI.COM



Lara raids your pants pocket in Lara Croft GO

With the success of *Hitman GO* proving that clever mobile iterations of popular franchises do indeed have a place in the market, Square Enix has announced *Lara Croft GO*. Coming sometime this year to smart phones and tablets, *Lara Croft GO* takes a leaf out of *Hitman GO*'s book and offers a simplistic, board game-like experience in the *Tomb Raider* world. While *Hitman GO* took the board game aesthetic to the extreme, *Lara Croft GO* utilises a little more in the animation department. Lara and the game world both have a cartoonish, solid colour aesthetic, but will be more animated than Agent 47 and co. were in their mobile offering.

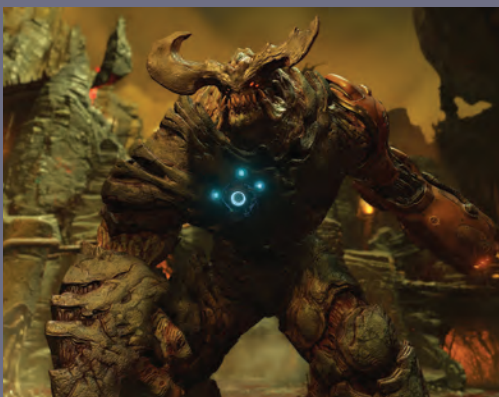
Puzzle solving, tomb navigation, item collection, and enemy evasion are all parts of the *Lara Croft GO* gameplay mechanic. The entire experience is designed for touch controls and should take between four to five hours to complete.



A Japanese prison helps inmates with the Nintendo DS

Japan's prison population is oddly skewed towards the elderly, with over 18% of the incarcerated belonging to the 65-and-over age group. Many suffer from physical and psychological problems, such as the onset of dementia, and now they're receiving help with the sanctioned use of Nintendo DS puzzle games. Oita Prison specifically uses the handheld gaming device in conjunction with yoga in order to keep prisoners fit and mentally sharp. Other prisons might eventually adopt the same strategy and continue to allow the use of the devices even after prisoners are released.

It's aliiiiive: DOOM finally revealed

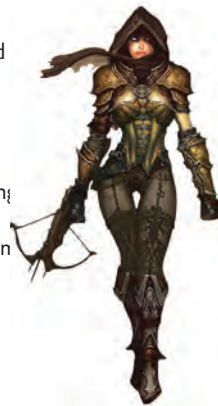


We've known that id Software has been hammering away at a new *DOOM* for ages now, but we've not been able to put a face to the name. That all changed at E3 2015, when Bethesda lifted the veil off the new entry in this immensely iconic franchise. In short, it looks exactly like you'd want *DOOM* to look: it moves at blistering pace, it's got an arsenal of outrageous weaponry, it's filled to the rafters with scary demons and it's sporting some of the goriest, bloodiest action we've ever seen in an FPS.

It feels very in-your-face, largely thanks to the addition of vicious melee attacks and finishers that see you stomping demon heads, chainsawing your way through limbs and just generally being a human shotgun in space marine armour. A particularly nifty new feature is Snapmap, a set of in-engine modding tools that lets you snap together pre-built level pieces, place hazards, objects and items within, and write your own game logic to create new modes and ways to play. There's no indication yet as to just how much depth Snapmod will have, but its proposed accessibility is nonetheless mighty exciting.

New content heading to Diablo III via update 2.3.0

Blizzard has provided a sneaky little glimpse at the new content and features that'll be heading to *Diablo III* via the upcoming patch 2.3.0. The patch is apparently days away from hitting the public testing realms, so once Blizzard has ascertained that 2.3.0 doesn't destroy the entire game, it'll be made available to everyone.



So what's coming in the new patch? For a start there's a new zone called Ruins of Sescheron. This will be a new, snowy area to explore that'll be steeped in Barbarian lore. Expect new enemies as well as the Tomb of King Kanai. Braving that tomb will get you an exceedingly powerful artefact: Kanai's Cube. And you're going to want to get that cube because it allows you to break down Legendary items so that their special effects can be equipped as new passive buffs to your character.

Patch 2.3.0 is heading to PC soon; consoles will have to wait longer.

CAPTION OF THE MONTH



NAG'S FINAL LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR

▶ This is why you should always wear a condom.



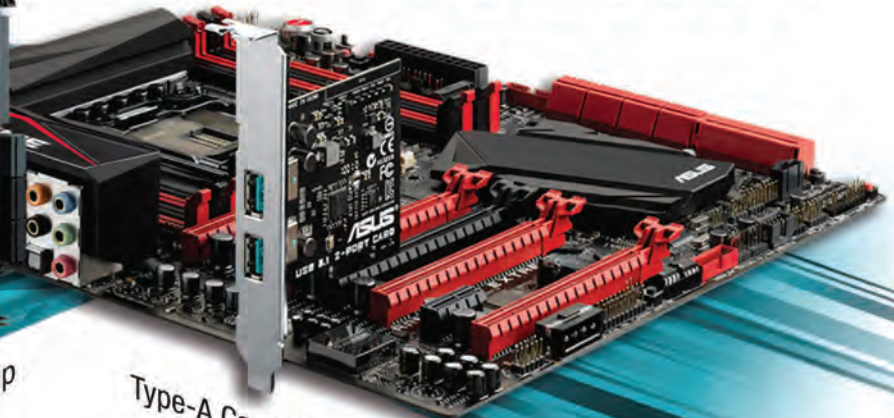
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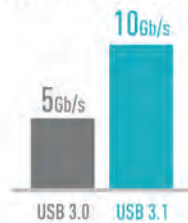
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PlatinumGames tackles Transformers

One of the most surprising reveals at E3 was that of *Transformers: Devastation*, a new action-packed brawler from PlatinumGames, who've previously developed much-loved, hyper-focused action games like *Bayonetta*, *Vanquish* and *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance*. It draws inspiration from what *Transformers* was back in the '80s, using a 3D cel-shaded look to give everything a cartoonish sheen.

It looks like exactly the sort of game anyone who loves the Transformers has always dreamt of. The story involves the Autobots fighting to thwart a Decepticon plot to terraform Earth to become more like Cybertron, and while the gameplay appears to be your usual brawler fare, it'll no doubt be tough to master and a ton of fun to play. You'll be able to transform between vehicle and robot form at will during combat, unleashing deadly combos and revealing a cunning twist to what already looks to be a satisfyingly complex combat system.

Anno 2205 takes to the moon

The *Anno* series of city-building simulations is moving even further away from its historical roots with newly announced *Anno 2205*, which promises to transport us to a future bristling with flying cars, robotic farmers and space travel. Players will be able to build sprawling cities on islands up to five times larger than those seen in previous games in the series.

Your cities will teem with life as you work to generate the resources necessary to send your thriving civilization into space. Eventually you'll be able to colonise the moon, sending resources back and forth between your Earth and moon colonies. You'll have to simultaneously manage multiple colonies, and while you manage a settlement time will still pass in all your others. Managing trade and resources between settlements will be a key feature, and as always, keeping your citizens happy is crucial to success. There'll be a military aspect to the proceedings, but it's not yet been shown. If all goes well, *Anno 2025* will be out this November.



SUPPORT LINES

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

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Roxy hunt

The final winner for the Roxy hunt is (drum roll please)...

"It's the sort of experience that absolutely devours your time and lets you enjoy everything that's great about CCGs before you even start to think about human opponents."

And our local game developers are right on board with that. Gareth Fouche is a Durban-based programmer working on *System Crash*, a digital cyberpunk CCG inspired by the likes of *Magic: The Gathering* and *Netrunner*. Nearly four years in development (with a full release coming soon), the game takes immediate and regular advantage of its own digital nature, pushing for something that's both familiar and different. Having already sunk considerable time into one of the earlier builds, I've found it to be a clever design which produces elegant "deck personalities". Optimising, building and experimenting feels great too, which is of course vital in any self-respecting game of its genre. But the whole shebang also has a pretty heavy focus on story-telling, with deep single-player experiences full of campaign missions and plots featuring the characters in your card decks.

Fouche explains that this separates it from most CCG giants, which tend to go in hard with instant multiplayer action – adding maybe a handful of training bots as a side thought. With *System Crash*, one finds an incredibly satisfying single-player aspect coming forward instead, featuring lots of carefully balanced (and narrated) AI encounters.

It's the sort of experience that absolutely devours your time and lets you enjoy everything that's great about CCGs before you even start to think about human opponents. And it's also indicative of Fouche's love for RPGs and storytelling in general. As he puts it, "My main goal for myself is to build a career that lets me spend my days thinking about and building fictional worlds."

His pie-in-the-sky game dev dream would be something of a mix between *Deus Ex*, *Morrowind* and *Baldur's Gate II*. The development process has not been an easy one, however. Originally setting aside resources for a full-time project, Fouche believed his ambitions to be relatively well-measured at the beginning. Building a card game felt much more feasible than a fully-realised RPG. But even with his experience in software development, he underestimated the time and effort that it would take and eventually moved to working on it in his spare time instead. In the meantime, he earns income from game development contracts with Luma Animation.

A passionate indie at heart, he's not easily deterred by slow progress. Years of professional development have taught him to see things through to the end, and *System Crash* is no exception. He shares thoughts of expansions and work after release, even as he discusses the financial and emotional difficulties of seeing this project through. He doesn't expect the game to take the world by storm – what he does hope for, however, is a modest success within the niche he's carving out, resonating with groups of players that value the same experiences as he does.

A little under four years ago, when his work started, this idea may have been very far away for a South African developer. But in the time since then, the local scene has grown phenomenally and includes several success stories relating to physical card and board games – so maybe now is the right time to see something like *System Crash* fringing up and hitting the market.

If you're interested in keeping track of the final development stages (and getting notified when the game comes out), you can swing by www.systemcrashgame.com for more information – when it's ready – a polished public demo.

Early test versions have been a delight to play, so if you're interested in CCGs – or just any well-crafted narrative married with smooth game design, loads of content and a fertile play space – you should definitely consider picking this one up. **NAG**



June winner
Shannondran Iyavoo,
page 13

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Automatically restarts when the block has been cleared

Hyper 212X

Hyper 212X introduces new features to the incredibly popular 212 series - New Smart Fan Engine, 4th Generation Bearing and the fin array with a new Tunnel Effect Technology. The redesigned fan-blades and aluminum fin-blades have both been optimized to create micro vortices that boost the airflow and circulate it around the heatpipes. Hyper 212X is compatible with all current socket types, including Intel LGA 2011 and FM1.

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Under the hood

Gamers! Start your engines!

Video gaming is unique as an art medium because of the large emphasis placed on the tools used during creation. Mainstream art consumers don't question what brushes painted a picture, or which microphones recorded a song, but we gamers tend to judge a game based on what engine was used to build it. Each engine has unique aspects that make its games distinct, usually to the point where an engine can become a vital part of the marketing process. So let's take a look at some of the more well-known engines and see what they each offer gamers.

Unreal Engine

If we're talking about engines, it's impossible not to mention the Unreal Engine. Let's throw some adjectives at it: game-changing, industry-leading, revolutionary. Needless to say, the various iterations of Unreal are pretty big deals.

The engine was created by Epic Games (then called "Epic MegaGames") and made its debut with 1998's *Unreal*, a first-person-shooter that went on to spawn a series you may have heard about. Over the course of the past 17 years and four versions of the engine, literally hundreds of games have been built using Unreal.

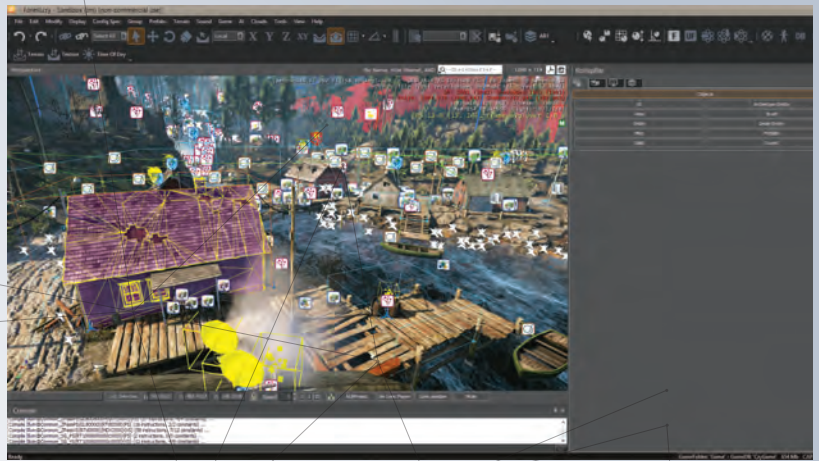
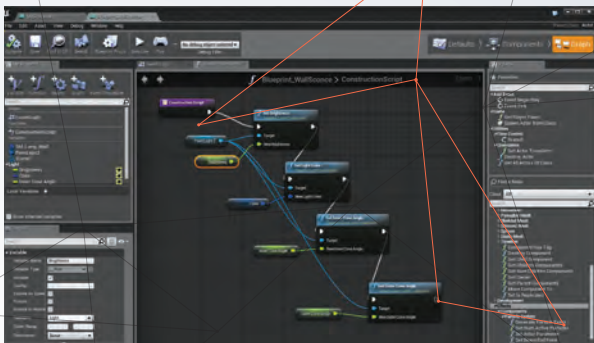
One of the biggest reasons for Unreal's success is its portability, which determines how easily a game can be ported or developed for multiple systems. Many of Unreal's most popular games have been multiplatform, which would clearly appeal to developers looking to release their games onto as many systems as possible. Since release, Unreal has powered games on nearly every major system, from PS2 to

3DS, and even iOS and Android mobile devices.

Another notable aspect of Unreal is how scalable it is. For example, Unreal Engine 2 first debuted in 2002 powering *America's Army*, and 11 years later it was still in use to power *Splinter Cell: Blacklist*. Recent games like *Killing Floor 2*, *Assassin's Creed Chronicles: China*, and *Batman: Arkham Knight* all run on *Unreal Engine 3*. Other notable games include the *BioShock* series, *Borderlands*, and the excellent *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* reboot.

Unreal Engine has also enjoyed popularity with indie developers, especially after its latest version (UE4) was made completely free to use during development. Prospective developers are able to download the engine and use it at no charge, but a 5% royalty is required if your sales exceed \$3,000.





CryEngine

Over the past few years, retro-styled gaming has become more popular. Gamers tend to respond well to these old styles of games with their chunky pixel graphics and low polygon counts. None of this applies to the CryEngine – that’s the engine you use if you want to make something that pushes technological limits.

CryEngine has developed a particular reputation for spectacular graphics ever since it first hit the scene in 2004, when it provided the horsepower for Crytek’s *Far Cry*. The CryEngine has gone through several versions and updates since, but each maintains that trademark visual style that leaves most of its games looking like tech demos. High-res textures and high polygon counts are not all CryEngine offers, and it is capable of delivering advanced lighting, particle effects, and physics. You might also notice that few corridor-shooters are made with CryEngine, as the toolset greatly favours large maps and open worlds.

Development in CryEngine began

relatively slowly, with the only noteworthy early games being *Far Cry* and the first *Crysis*. But since 2011 and the launch of CryEngine 3, nearly 50 different titles have been made using it, such as *State of Decay*, *Evolve*, *Ryse: Son of Rome*, and the rabidly-awaited space sim *Star Citizen*.

Indie developers are also taking to CryEngine, proving that the powerful toolkit can be applied to small-scale projects. One particularly exciting title is *Umbra*, currently in development at SolarFall Games. *Umbra* is an isometric action-RPG with innovative character levelling mechanics and an insane amount of realistic foliage.

Unlike Unreal Engine 4, CryEngine does cost money. Either as a monthly subscription (roughly R150) or a once-off licensing fee. Is it worth it? Well, Chris Roberts, CEO of the team behind *Star Citizen*, says “CryEngine is, for my money, the best looking and most full-featured engine currently available.”



Frostbite

Frostbite is an interesting engine. It powers some of the most prominent franchises on the market, across a broad range of genres, but it's only used by EA. Rather than limiting the engine, this seems to work in its favour.

Frostbite first blasted onto our screens powering 2008's *Battlefield: Bad Company*. The engine was developed by DICE, and was later updated and used for *Battlefield 1943* and *Bad Company 2*. A fully upgraded sequel in the form of Frostbite 2 later powered *Battlefield 3*, and the latest version (creatively titled Frostbite 3) launched with *Battlefield 4*.

Since then, the engine has been used by various subsidiaries of EA, such as PopCap Games, Black Box, and BioWare, to create games such as *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, *Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare*, and the recent *Need for Speed* titles. Upcoming games include titles like *Rory McIlroy PGA Tour*, *Star Wars: Battlefront*, *Mirror's Edge: Catalyst*, and the recently announced *Mass Effect: Andromeda*.

The Frostbite engine seems to be something of an anomaly. It's used exclusively by EA subsidiaries, and is not open to indie developers at all. The engine isn't even licensed out to non-EA groups. This makes it feel like a closely guarded industry secret, adding a little mystery to a market where information is so often taken for granted.

Mystery aside, Frostbite has proven to be a truly competitive engine. It's capable of producing highly realistic graphics, large open worlds, impressive environmental destruction, and scalability that allows EA to publish virtually the same game across multiple generations of console.

"Problem is, many indie developers end up using the same assets..."

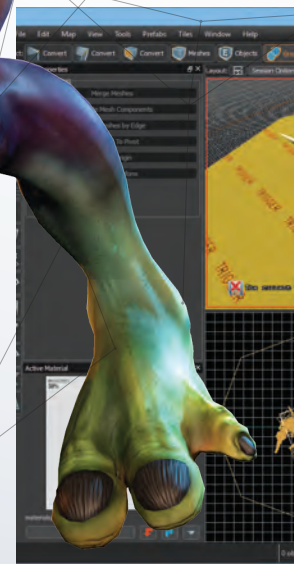
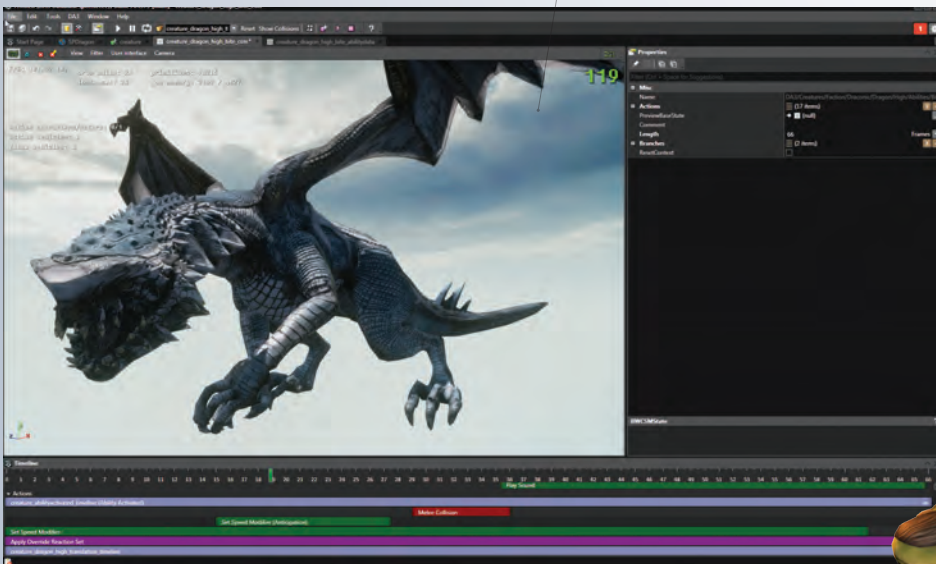
Unity

If you've ever harboured an interest for making games, any interest at all, then you have definitely heard of the Unity engine.

First released in 2005 by Unity Technologies, the game development engine has grown from being Mac exclusive to one of the most popular 2D and 3D development tools available. According to the Unity website, 47% of developers make use of their tools, with over 4.5 million registered users!

Most users approach Unity from a development perspective, and a massive community has grown around this. The Unity website is packed to the gills with tutorials, user-made videos, live lessons, and forums. It's got everything you could need to start putting together your own titles. Unity 5 (the latest version) is also available for free, providing you with the full engine and tools without making you pay a cent. Granted, the free version does strip away a few features present in the paid-for version, but this is an excellent try-before-you-buy scenario.

When it comes to actually playing a Unity game, it's a bit of a mixed bag. Unity users have access to something called





Other noteworthy mentions

Obviously, there are not just four game engines in the world, so here are a few others that you should know about...

Firstly, we have to mention the id Tech engines. Currently on their sixth version with a fifth planned to launch with the upcoming *Doom*, the id Tech engines used to be known as either the *Doom* engines or the *Quake* engines. Although not much has come from id Tech recently, its importance to PC gaming is quite obvious.

Dunia is an engine used exclusively by Ubisoft for *Far Cry 2*, *3*, and *4*. The engine is a heavily modified version of the CryEngine, and allows for many of the same benefits, such as dense vegetation and large map sizes. Another popular Ubisoft engine is the Anvil series. Across several iterations, this engine has powered every *Assassin's Creed* game, and will power the upcoming *Rainbow Six: Siege*.

Another venerable engine is Gamebryo, which has been powering games since 2001. Capable of a multitude of genres, titles using Gamebryo include *Fallout 3*, *Rocksmith*, and most of the *Elder Scrolls* games since *Morrowind*, dubbed "The Creation Engine" for *Skyrim*.

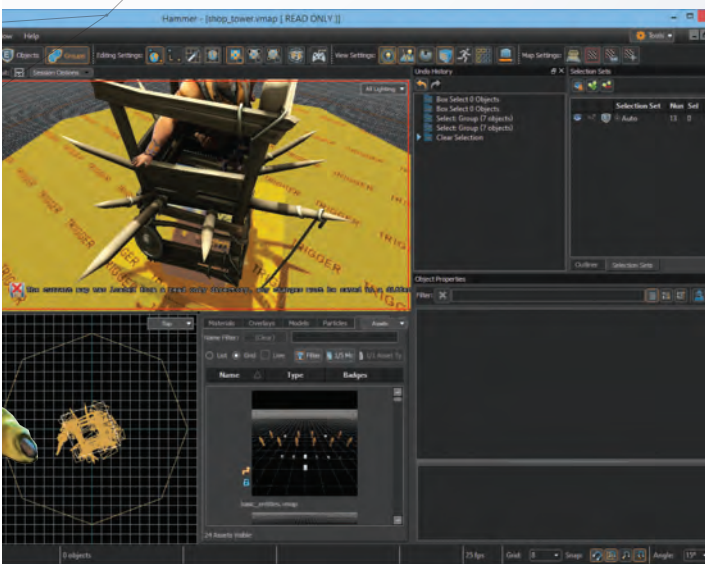
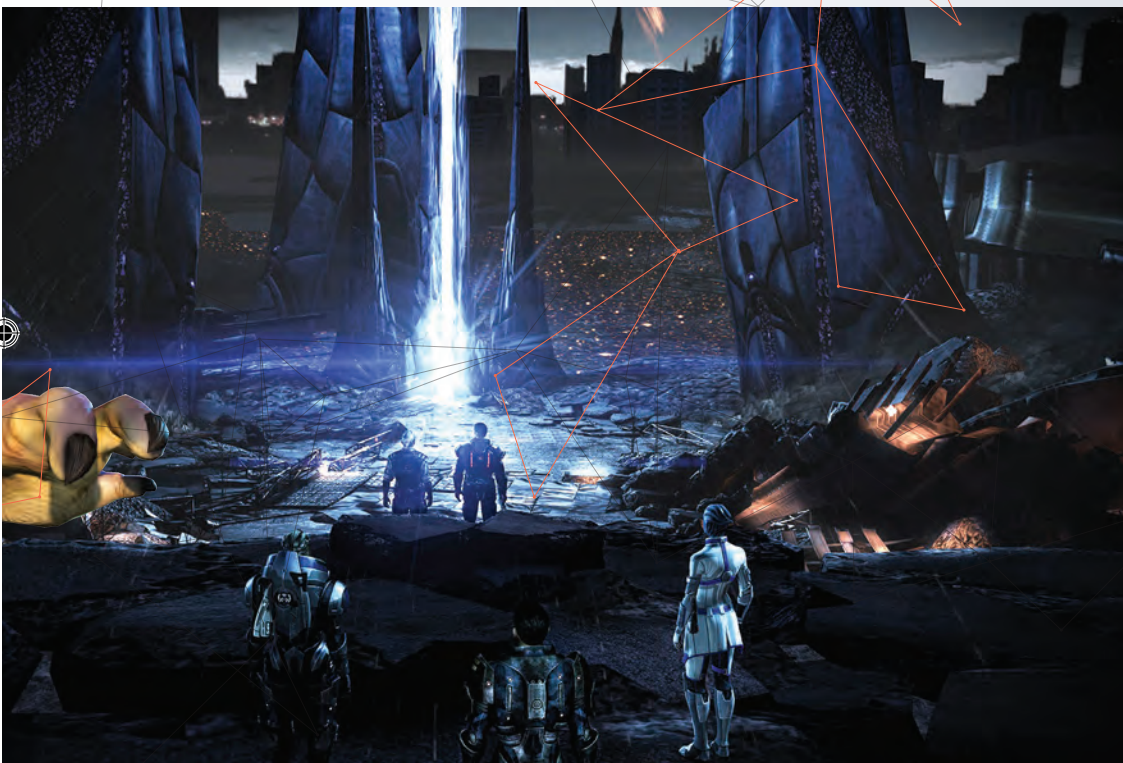
In recent years, MOBAs have captured an unprecedented market share and elevated eSports gaming as a sport unlike anything else. *DotA*, the MOBA that started it all, ran on the *Warcraft III* engine (which later evolved to the *StarCraft II* engine), while *Dota 2* uses the Source engine. Surprisingly, *League of Legends* runs on a proprietary engine. *Smite* went the completely mundane direction and uses Unreal Engine 3.

Speaking of Source, Valve's long-running engine has produced classics such as *Half-Life 2*, *Portal*, *Left 4 Dead*, and the more recent *Titanfall*. Source 2 was recently announced, along with the exciting news that it too will be free to use. **NAG**

Sand Storm

the "Asset Store", where other users sell pre-made items for use in games. These range from simple props to fully animated enemies to complex coding plugins that handle some of the legwork. Problem is, many indie developers end up using the same assets, so gamers may begin to see a lot of familiarity between Unity games.

Besides that, there is scope for massive versatility and creativity with Unity, evidenced by games such as *Slender: The Arrival*, *Gone Home*, *Shadowrun Returns*, *Rust*, *Hearthstone: Heroes of Warcraft*, and *Oddworld: New 'n' Tasty!* And it would be remiss of NAG not to mention *Broforce*, developed with Unity by South Africa's own Free Lives. [We've included Unity on the cover disc this month, so get in there and start making some games! Ed.]



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COMPUTEX TAIPEI 2015



The middle of the year always signals what is to follow for the next twelve months in the computing landscape. It is a time where virtually all hardware vendors release their product maps of upcoming technologies, and give us a clear signal of what it is they are about and where they are trying to go. And more importantly, where they are trying to take us. Computex brings together hundreds of vendors, from the small to the giants, and is a grueling six days of product showcases, presentations, goodie bags, demos, showrooms, and all sorts. It is larger than CES (USA) and CeBIT (Germany) and has been the show to go to for years.

As usual, Intel is one of the primary movers of technology and this year they were promoting the Internet of things and all related technology. The focus for Intel is was not on their desktop technologies, but in their mobile products that you will find in partner products. Intel is the semiconductor giant and the force that steadily moves others in the industry. Thus, if Intel doesn't unveil a new platform at Computex, things do tend to be slower than usual. There was no word on the Z170 chipset, but that didn't stop vendors from showing off the next desktop platform for the

14nm 6th generation Core CPUs. Some were truly innovative while others had more bling than bang. Regardless, this is set to be the platform that will thrust DDR4 into the mainstream. That will drive prices down, and capacities and performance up.

There was, as always, plenty to see, despite the absence of AMD's highly anticipated Fury X, and Intel's 100 chipset CPUs. All visitors to the expo were able to see a host of technologies that will be commonplace within the next twelve months. Through the crowds, the music, the shows and everything else, we survived and came away generally impressed with what we saw.

This year we took a different approach to our Computex experience so what follows is coverage of five of the best vendors at the show. The ones who had something to say, show and stories to tell. There are literally hundreds of products and vendors at Computex and it will be near impossible to get through all of them. Suffice to say, within the five we focused on we had the show covered with some of the best technology that 2015 has to offer.

We would like to thank all the vendors who sponsored our Computex 2015 coverage – ASUS, Cooler Master Corsair, GIGABYTE, and MSI.



As is the norm for ASUS, their Computex press event was presented by their vice president Jonney Shih. In his unique presentation method, he highlighted where ASUS was going, building on the philosophy of Zen across all their products. Not a single component was spoken of, but the more accessible mainstream tablets, phones, and all-in-one units that have more relevance to the public. It says a lot about ASUS and its ambitions outside of the PC. The success that the Zen products have had is easily dismissed in the world of rapid growth firms such as OPPO and Xioami, but ASUS is no stranger to shipping millions of units of their Zenfone. With the recently released Zenfone 2 and the consolidation of models, things can only get better.

At the expo itself however it was the typical exciting affair with the latest graphics cards, motherboards, gaming peripherals, and amazing gaming cases from the In-Win. Of particular interest was the new line of products to join the STRIX family, such as the RAID DLX and RAID PRO sound cards. These supposedly make use of a different codec to that which was on the Phoebus and Essence line of sound cards. The focus is strictly gaming, but for that, you have to make little to no discernible sacrifices to audio/signal quality. How well these perform in the market remains to be seen, but with the runaway success of the Xonar line for both audiophiles and gamers, there's little reason to doubt these new entries.

We had an opportunity to see the new ROG

certification components from several vendors at the ASUS booth. The program ensures compatibility between various system components and perhaps even peripherals from a host of complementary vendors. These could be DRAM kits, CPU coolers, GPU blocks, and other components. They all come together to deliver a guaranteed ROG PC building and gaming experience.

No ROG would be complete without a display of the ASUS gaming monitors. Of particular interest was the curved ultra wide QHD G-SYNC monitor. As you may have expected, an IPS panel not only offers a fantastic colour reproduction and resolution, but also most importantly has ULMB technology for the ultra-sensitive gamers. Perfect for racing

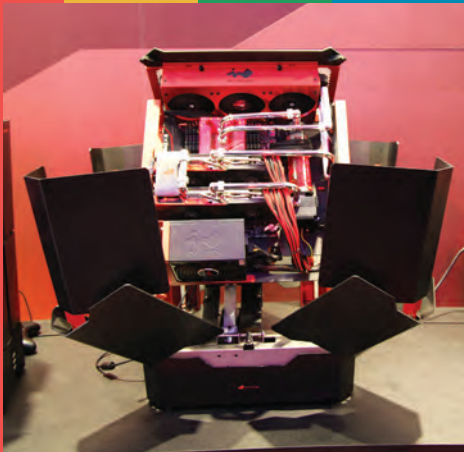
simulations and perhaps slower FPS games as well, recent triple-A RPGs such as *The Witcher 3* would look incredible on this display.

Overall there wasn't much on display that we didn't expect to see from ASUS. The firm brought out the best they had to offer and despite not being able to show any AMD Fury-based products or Intel 6th generation systems up and running, it was a booth well worth visiting. No other vendor has such a deep top to bottom line-up of components for gamers of all types. From MMOs or eSport gamers to the ultra high-end enthusiasts who are after only the pinnacle of PC gaming and entertainment, ASUS covers them all under a single banner.

We must thank everyone at ASUS, especially Adeline Larrouy, who helped us get in touch with the right people at the booth and was always there to help us navigate the many products and components that they had on display.

"We had an opportunity to see the new ROG certification components from several vendors at the ASUS booth."







Cooler Master by far had the most impressive showing at Computex this year. No other DIY firm has managed to re-invent itself and bring the brand into relevance as Cooler Master. The maker moniker on all their new and consolidated products has to be the most striking branding we've seen in years. Gone is the jack of all trades, instead we find a focused company that isn't about being everything to everyone, but providing the best experience for a core group of consumers. Unveiled in the VIP Room was the Master Concept chassis, likely the most expensive case ever put together by the minds at Cooler Master. No gimmicks, but pure engineering and an attention to detail that is unmatched by any vendor. It is gargantuan in size, but assembled with the best materials on the market to make for an incredible chassis.

It was still a design concept and the final product may look radically different, but the fact that Cooler Master was willing to design a once-off case if only to show just how committed they are to this new direction, is nothing short of commendable.

Everything at Cooler Master is about making it yours, from your chassis, your cooling, your peripherals and everything in between. Cooler Master seeks to empower end users with quality and uncompromising products. The firm has, from the outside, retired their old ways and instead found a direction and market for those who demand quality and functionality first above pricing and gimmicks. Cooler Master has changed the

conversation from cheap LEDs and all kinds of commoditised elements to true workmanship, design and aesthetics. Cooler Master is determined to make you the master of your PC and in turn establish itself as a master of all things DIY related. A lofty goal that, with their new trajectory, is definitely within reach.

Armed with the most prolific speaker at Computex this year (perhaps in years gone by as well), there is no denying that Cooler Master wholeheartedly believes in their Maker concept and has committed all its resources into forging a new direction for itself. Rarely does one look at pre-production, perhaps even design phase products and instantly make a commitment to whatever the final retail product may be. This was the case with

"...there was no denying that Cooler Master wholeheartedly believes in their Maker concept and has committed all its resources into forging a new direction for itself."

not only the liquid cooling components, the cases and PSUs, it was true of the gaming peripherals as well. In particular, the headphones with swappable drivers are simplistic in nature, but ooze luxury and quality. Cooler Master knows how to make headsets as we have previously established with the original Sirius. With what was on display, Cooler Master looks to exceed their greatest headset ever in every conceivable way. Cooler Master has had a renaissance if you will and the company is finally speaking the language, which is sure to resonate with the most passionate, the most discerning and certainly the highest spenders in the DIY market. This version of Cooler Master is the one that speaks with a conviction and passion few vendors, if any, can muster in the industry today. This was truly a fantastic showing and one that has re-invigorated our enthusiasm about all things Cooler Master.





CORSAIR

In typical Corsair fashion, no Computex is complete without the vendor hosting one of the better parties of the week. This is where Corsair unveiled several new products, including the new mini-ITX form factor Bulldog. This is the first all-in-one chassis which ships with not only a liquid cooler for the CPU, but for your GPU as well. You need not look for any special kind of GPU, since most high-end reference GPUs from 2015 are compatible with the built-in GPU cooling. In some territories the chassis will ship with a built-in mini-ITX motherboard, making it the easiest DIY system to build on the market. There was no word on pricing, but as with most products from Corsair, it is unlikely to be cheap. The Bulldog is also equipped with the smallest 600 watt PSU we have ever come across. This SF600 PSU will be available separately for those who have other mini-ITX ambitions. It's quite hard to explain how small this PSU is in words, but suffice to say it is by far the smallest PSU we have seen, fitting in most adult hands easily. If the Bulldog does not convince you, at the very least the SF-600 is a guaranteed winner.

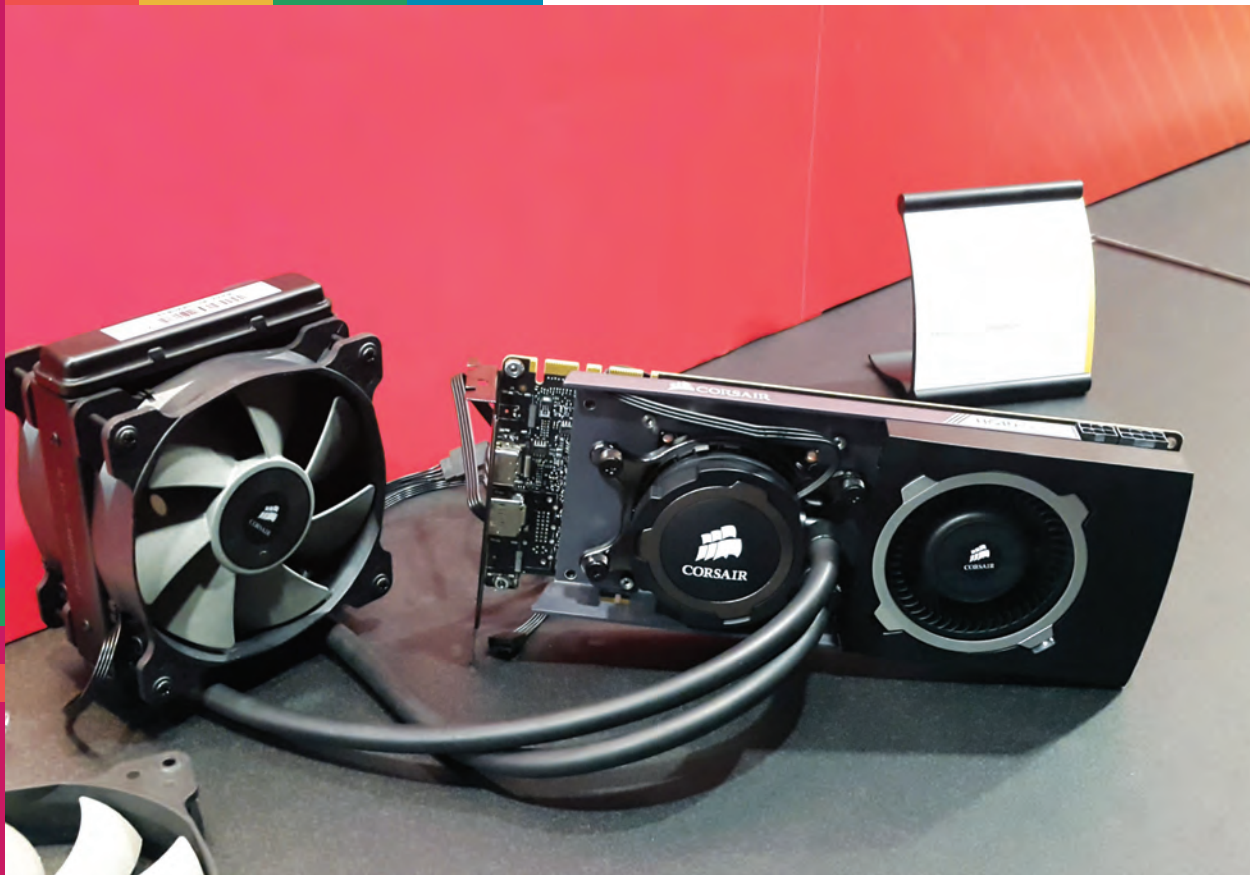
We had hoped to see the new line of Corsair gaming headsets to replace the ones that have been with us for years, but unfortunately these were earmarked for unveiling at E3 so we could not get a sneak peek. The headsets however should be all over the web by the time you read this. For those looking to cool their GPUs in the upcoming summer months, Corsair has an updated HG10 N980 GPU cooling solution. You may be familiar with this

"With the AX series, in particular the AX1500i PSU, Corsair had set the bar for high-end PSUs and they continue to do so with the addition of the RMi line."

all-in-one solution as presented for the Radeon R9 290 and R9 290X GPUs, but 2015 brings support of the latest Maxwell GPUs. There are two different models of course, one specifically for the GTX 970 and another for the GTX 980, 980 Ti and TITAN-X. This bracket not only cools the GPU, but the VRM as well via a heat plate and blower fan. As with the original Hydro series coolers, the HG10 continues to make GPU liquid cooling a simple process where beginners and experts alike may extract better performance, lower temperatures or both from their GPUs.

With the AX series, in particular the AX1500i PSU, Corsair had set the bar for high-end PSUs and they continue to do so with the addition of the RMi line. These complement the already existing RM family, filling the gap between the lower tier CS and the high-end HXi family. It's fully modular with a seven-year warranty, fluid dynamic bearing fans, zero rpm fan mode, GOLD certification and has support for the Corsair link software. It's a more affordable way to get into the high-end PSU arena without the financial outlay required by the HX and AX PSUs.

Finally, we come to memory, which may not be the core business for Corsair anymore, but that doesn't mean the firm isn't as capable of producing high performance, overclocking kits. 3,800MHz was the frequency and this ran on a retail motherboard and CPU. No other vendor has announced such high frequency DIMMs let alone shown them off in public in a form that's retail ready. No doubt, the kit will cost a fortune, but Corsair isn't opposed to charging high prices for what they can guarantee to be the best in the business. An understated but high quality showing by Corsair as we expected.



GIGABYTE™

GIGABYTE has had a stellar time in the last few years as the world's number one selling motherboard vendor, achieved in part with some great pricing across a wide range of motherboards and features. This success isn't limited to the motherboards only as graphics cards such as the G1.Gaming GTX 980 Ti, as shown off at Computex, proved. At roughly R600 above reference models, GIGABYTE showed the first non-reference GTX 980 Ti and it happened to be the highest clocked version at the time. Featuring the famed 600 watt GPU cooler and flex display technology, this was certainly one of the three highlights from GIGABYTE. The review of that card appears elsewhere in this issue of *NAG*.

The motherboard division had on display their newly designed Z170 Gaming GT motherboard decked out in white and red. It's yet another time where GIGABYTE re-invents its gaming range colours. We can only hope that this identity serves them longer than the numerous previous attempts. The high-end SKU is now named Gaming GT and amongst the many features it brings, is the tried and tested Sound Core 3D audio, the fastest M.2 connection speed on the market and the new ECO mode, available at the touch of a button. We will learn more about this motherboard just after Intel announces the 6th generation Core CPUs at Gamescom in August. What we can be sure of is that the Gaming GT will be the motherboard that will square off with the other vendors' high-end Z170 products. What GIGABYTE finally has going for

it, which was not the case before, is a matching GPU in the silver / frost white G1.Gaming GTX 980 Ti and this synergy should propel the company further than before, with a single or more aligned identity.

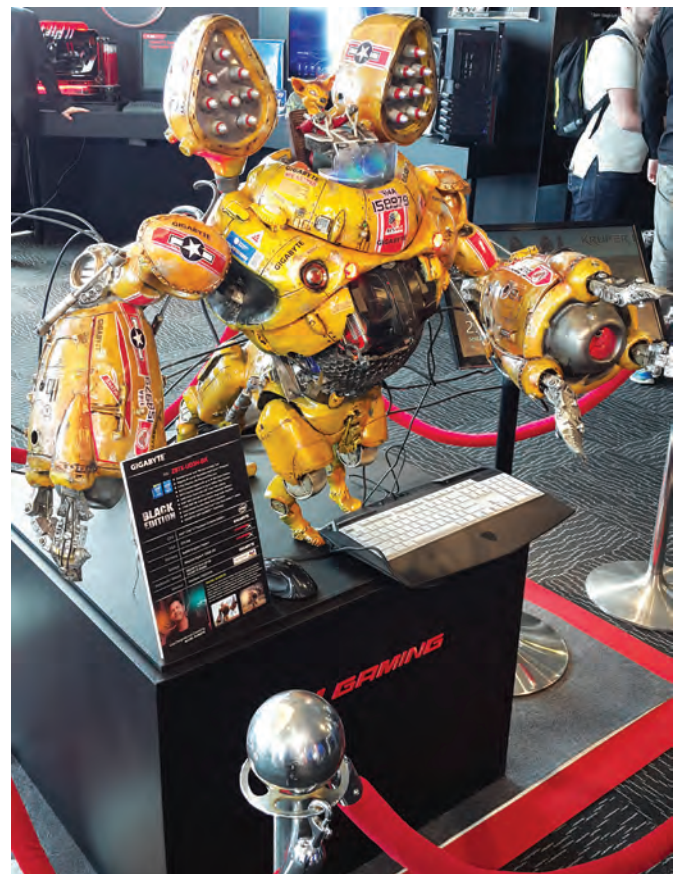
Notebooks have always been a hit and miss affair for GIGABYTE, but with the new P series, they are sure to make a massive dent in the gaming notebook scene. More subtle than the AORUS notebooks, but certainly as capable if not more so. The new P55K notebook and all its various SKUs feature the latest NVIDIA Maxwell GPUs, a 15.6" IPS display and a host of other features. There is no pricing yet, but these look phenomenal and walk a fine line between luxury and gaming design. These are certainly worth looking out for as they have improved over the previous generation products in every conceivable way.

If you were looking at the AORUS Thunder K7, but wanted something smaller, you'll be pleased to see that the K3 has arrived, featuring just about all the features of the K7 apart from the detachable numpad. This keyboard features Cherry MX mechanical switches, full anti-ghosting and has dedicated

LED and volume wheel control. There's no palm rest for this model but it is to be expected as this focuses on portability over and above all else. No word yet on a potential white LED, or RGB model but perhaps in future these may be available.

Finally, no GIGABYTE Computex showing would be complete without an overclocking demo at their VIP suite on the 36th floor of 101. The in-house overclockers in HiCookie and Sofos1990 were joined by veteran Dinos22 and prominent overclocker SniperOz. They managed to put on a good show, claiming the XTU 5960X top score in the process. Impressive but unsurprising given how incredible the X99-SOC Champion is. We have sung its praises many times and this new top score further proves just how thoroughly impressive the motherboard is.

"... no GIGABYTE Computex showing would be complete without an overclocking demo at their VIP suite..."





msi®

MSI is one seriously busy vendor in the component and notebook space. Say what you may about their PC components, but MSI without a doubt makes the best gaming notebooks on the market. With each generation, they push not only the boundaries in performance but in features and technology. The TITAN-SLI notebook may impress you with specifications, but it was adding Tobii's eye tracking to their high-end gaming notebook that was one of the more noteworthy technology demos at Computex. This technology at its core uses a set of cameras to track your eye movement with pinpoint accuracy, translating those movements into the 3D space within a game. Where you would normally use a mouse to look around, you merely focus your eyes where you would like the camera to be and the game moves accordingly. It is rather difficult to put into words, but it essentially uses your eyes as an input method. If we will ever see this in retail notebooks from MSI is unknown, but given just how well executed these notebooks tend to be, it wouldn't be surprising if this showed up in the next generation of ultra-high-end gaming products.

Moving on to components, MSI showed us the GODLIKE motherboard decked out in all kinds of colours. This motherboard has LEDs which, as you can imagine, are customisable using a smartphone app or a normal OS application. Revealed to us by one in the know, it turns out that the GODLIKE is the X99A XPower AC dressed in gaming colours with even more features crammed in and some additional modifications. When this board makes it out to market, there will not be a need for any enthusiast or overclocker to make compromises, bringing the best of both lines together to make what is shaping up to be the best motherboard ever from MSI and maybe even the best X99 motherboard in the industry. From 4-way SLI to a further enhanced audio solution with a deep specs sheet and more features than all



previous boards, we do understand where the name may come from; even if MSI wouldn't tell us, competitive gamers inspired this name.

Diversity is key at MSI and often overlooked but equally compelling visually is the Krait line of motherboards that complement the white TIGER themed graphics cards. These components decked in white and black look distinct in a market saturated by red and black products. MSI doesn't make much of a noise about these components but they are well worth your time and best of all have entry-level pricing.

Products and components aside, no Computex would be complete without MSI's gaming night where gaming notebooks, prizes, presentations, competitions and hands-on experience with the best products MSI has to offer take center stage. Nowhere else is MSI's heavy investment and commitment to gaming as evident. This commitment has paid dividends, as MSI was the only vendor at the show to announce an exclusive partnership with Blizzard Entertainment. We've no details on what the partnership entails but we will keep you posted as more details surface.

For the overclockers, it will be worth noting that MSI managed to break a few DDR4 overclocking records and the best part about it is that no liquid nitrogen was necessary as frequencies scaled above the 4GHz mark with mere air-cooling on the memory. Achieved on the very capable X99A XPower, it goes to show just how adept MSI has become at both gaming and overclocking components. Within the component and product ranges, it looks as if MSI has all their bases covered and it is possible to build an entire machine based solely of MSI components barring the CPU, memory and cooling. Everything else, they have taken care of.

Many thanks to the MSI reps and employees for giving us a guided tour, without whom it would have been impossible to cover it all. **NAG**

"... it will be worth noting that MSI managed to break a few DDR4 overclocking records..."




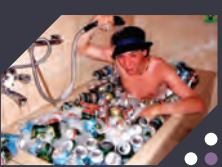

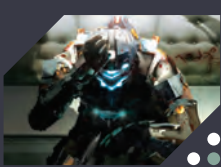





Reviews INTRO

When one door closes, another opens. In this case it's kind of the same door, because despite this being the end of NAG as a magazine, we're keeping all of our beloved writers and shipping them off to the Internet. We're not big on having lots of doors everywhere. Maybe a few windows to let in some sunlight though. For the last time here, but certainly not of all time, **meet your reviewers...**

Q What is your favourite NAG memory?

 <p>Dane "Barkskin" Remendes I have so many :(But my favourites are probably the memories of our interoffice <i>Quake III</i> CTF matches, and the many colourful insults we slung while playing <i>Call of Duty</i>. Such good times.</p> <p>CURRENTLY PLAYING <i>The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt, Brütal Legend, Heroes of the Storm</i></p>	 <p>Delano "Delano" Cuzzucoli My favourite NAG memory was coming to rAge as a member of the team, proudly representing the magazine and speaking to fans and developers. It was a sense of belonging that I've not often felt.</p> <p>CURRENTLY PLAYING <i>Kung Fury: Street Rage, Polarity, LEGO Worlds</i></p>	 <p>Geoff "GeometriX" Burrows My first trip to E3 in 2012. There were three of us on that trip (me, Lauren, and SAVAGE), and we had a blast from start to finish. Between gorging ourselves at Hooters to my terrifying time on the <i>Jurassic Park</i> ride at Universal Studios, I can barely remember what E3 itself was about.</p> <p>CURRENTLY PLAYING <i>Heroes of the Storm, Zombie Driver, GTA V</i></p>	 <p>Matt "SandStorm" Fick One favourite memory? Out of 12ish years of non-stop readership? There are just too many. Like the time I won a caption contest, or getting a free subscription because my mom wrote in a letter, or being published for the first time (a letter in 2005). So what's my favourite memory? My only answer is: "Yes".</p> <p>CURRENTLY PLAYING No time for playing, I'm teaching my mom <i>Skyrim</i></p>	 <p>Michael "RedTide" James For me it has always been getting letters from and meeting fans of the magazine (at rAge and other events). It's nice to know you've touched and changed someone's life in a meaningful way. Even if it's with a rocket launcher to the upper lip.</p> <p>CURRENTLY PLAYING <i>Call of Duty: Black Ops 2, Terraria, Cities: Skylines</i></p>
 <p>Miklós "Mikit0707" Szecsei A whole lot of firsts. First time seeing my name in the magazine; first review; first overseas trip for first cover feature; first Gamescom trip; first E3 trip. Firsts... just a bunch of 'em.</p> <p>CURRENTLY PLAYING <i>Batman: Arkham Knight, The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt.</i></p>	 <p>Miktar "Miktar" Dracon Every company Christmas function, especially the one where we just lazed around on a boat on a lake all day, eating cheese and getting drunk. It's the little things in life.</p> <p>CURRENTLY PLAYING <i>Clicker Heroes, Heroes of the Storm, Splatoon</i></p>	 <p>Sarah "Bellum" Browne The first time I told someone I wrote for NAG. That instant connection with another node in a uniquely important network is an electrifying feeling. NAG represents the nerve-centre of a community of social misfits (like me) who otherwise lack such a unifying space of acceptance and respect; being able to contribute to this cultural safe-haven has been an honour.</p> <p>CURRENTLY PLAYING <i>Diablo III, The Last of Us</i></p>	 <p>Tarryn "Azimuth" van der Byl <i>The Dead Space</i> review Michael and I did that was basically about a zillion Google Talk chats copy-pasted onto a page.</p> <p>CURRENTLY PLAYING <i>Destiny. It's Destiny, guys. I'm sorry, I can't stop.</i></p>	 <p>Wesley "CataclysmZA" Fick The first time I got paid writing for the website. I dreamed of writing as a career, but didn't think it would come that early. I still have the emails Geoff sent me telling me that I had a job writing for the site.</p> <p>CURRENTLY PLAYING <i>Infamous Second Son, Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel</i></p>

Hey guys, down here! It's me, SAVAGE. There's no space for me up there (or at NAG LOL), but I wanted to add in my memory too. Mine was going to E3 in 2012 and having the best time ever. Universal Studios, E3, American junk food and awesome people made it something I'll never forget. Along with making the magazine as pretty as I could each month of course. Catch ya'll on the flip side. **SAVAGE out.**

HEARD AT THE NAG OFFICE

“Dane, that is a fantastic piece of equipment.”

Michael “RedTide” James



MINI REVIEWS



Wolfenstein: The Old Blood

Hey, you know *Wolfenstein*, right? The titular castle whose name appears in almost every *Wolfenstein* game? Yeah, well, now you get to return there and shoot Nazis, cyborgs, and zombies. Just like old times!

Wolfenstein: The Old Blood is a stand-alone prequel to 2014's *Wolfenstein: The New Order*. In it, our tough-guy, square-jawed American hero B.J. Blazkowicz is summoned to break into the castle in question and prevent the Nazis from anachronistically obtaining the edge they need to win the war, which has dragged on longer than it did in actual history. Of course, we all know that he ultimately fails, leading up to the events of *The New Order*, but that's another story.

It's basically a simpler, more streamlined version of the 2014 game. The campaign is shorter, the story is lighter, and there aren't any choice-versus-predetermination scenarios which force you to live through a particular timeline. The gunplay is as fantastic as ever and this time you have a couple of new toys at your disposal. Lots of robotic augments, ugly-faced creeps, and heartless HitlerJugend graduates make up the bulk of the satisfying (if bullet-spongy) enemy roster.

It's a bit stealthier than the main game, and it's nothing we've not seen before in other titles, but *Wolfenstein* games don't generally falter – *The Old Blood* is no exception.

Delano

SCORE



78

It's more of the same as *Wolfenstein: The New Order*, but that's a good thing. If you enjoyed the original, then you need to get this too.



Heavenstrike Rivals (mobile)

Heavenstrike Rivals is a tactical-RPG from Square-Enix, where players take command of a new captain in charge of protecting a city from the monsters and in-fighting factions that threaten it. Honestly, this has the makings of a good anime or console RPG, and it's refreshing to see something with this scope on a mobile device.

With a gorgeous art style and character designs evocative of older *Final Fantasy* titles, *Heavenstrike* quickly immerses players in its story and world. Gameplay is turn-based, and you'll send units into three lanes. Each turn they advance, attacking opponents or the enemy hero. Deal enough damage to the hero, and you win. The level of tactical execution lies in building and selecting the order of your squad of units, rather than their placement or combat. This makes trial and error a factor, and sometimes you'll lose because your order is wrong. There are micro-transactions and new units for sale, but these never become essential. PvP combat is also possible, but tends to lag.

With a strong story and gorgeous art style, *Heavenstrike Rivals* is highly recommended.

Sand_Storm

SCORE



80

Although you'll wish it was a *Final Fantasy* game, *Heavenstrike* has a lot to offer mobile gamers.

PLATFORMS / PC 
 REVIEWED ON / PC 
 GENRE / Management simulation
 DEVELOPER / Colossal Order
 PUBLISHER / Paradox Interactive
 DISTRIBUTOR / Digital
 WEBSITE / www.citiesskylines.com

Cities: Skylines

A key to any city

You start with a four square kilometre patch of land; you can choose the type of land beforehand and what natural resources you'll have access to. You can buy more land as you progress, up to 36km² – more than adequate if you pack those slums in real tight. You start each game connected to a busy highway and must connect roads to the off- and on-ramps, zone in some residential, commercial and industrial and then start dealing with problems. You will need power and water and refuse removal and healthcare and policing and parks and so on.

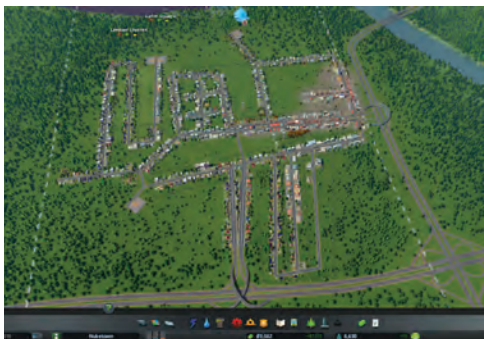
Besides their basic needs, your new residents don't like traffic, pollution and, surprisingly, piles of dead bodies. It's a love-hate relationship, so you put up with their whining and complaining as long as more of them come to your town. Each requirement, like schooling and education, has specific buildings, sometimes with their own pros and cons, on an easy to navigate menu bar. Understanding what is needed and providing it is a simple and intuitive click-and-place process. The larger your population the more buildings you can unlock and then those new buildings solve problems like more efficient electricity generation and capacity or a cleaner way of dealing with trash. The whole game dynamic really boils down to road placement and management and how much of what zone (residential, commercial, and industrial) you place where. Three coloured bars represent the need for the different zones and all you really need to do is make sure things are balanced: zones, taxes, and having enough fire stations. There's a lot to get



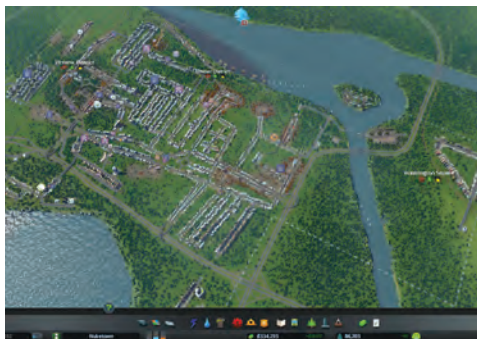
▶ This is the space elevator, a monument you can only build after reaching 80,000 residents and unlocking certain criteria.

done and very few lulls but if things aren't going fast enough for you, let's say you need more money to build an airport, you can always increase the game speed. Unique buildings are locked behind a system of milestones, so constructing the required number of service buildings will unlock a related building you can add to your growing city. The real serious construction projects become available after your population reaches 80,000, then you can build things like a particle collider. This 80K milestone is a bit of a double-edged sword because once your population gets you past this point your role in the game changes to that of a passive caretaker as you improve your existing city and see how big you can grow it. There are no disasters at all or specific challenges beyond this point that'll keep you busy, so the game ends up being what you make of it – pretty much what all virtual mayors want anyway.

A big bonus is that the game has



▶ This is a look at "Nuketown" at 6,630 residents and then again at 86,203 residents. The mud pit, cow carcass and tumbleweeds have been replaced by an airport, space elevator and solar power stations. Probably shouldn't have called it a town but hey who knew I'd be such a rocking mayor.




▶ BELOW / This is what the electricity grid looks like, the taller blue stacks are the power generators and the lighter blue areas around town show the coverage. Adjacent buildings supply power so there's no need to run power lines all over the map.



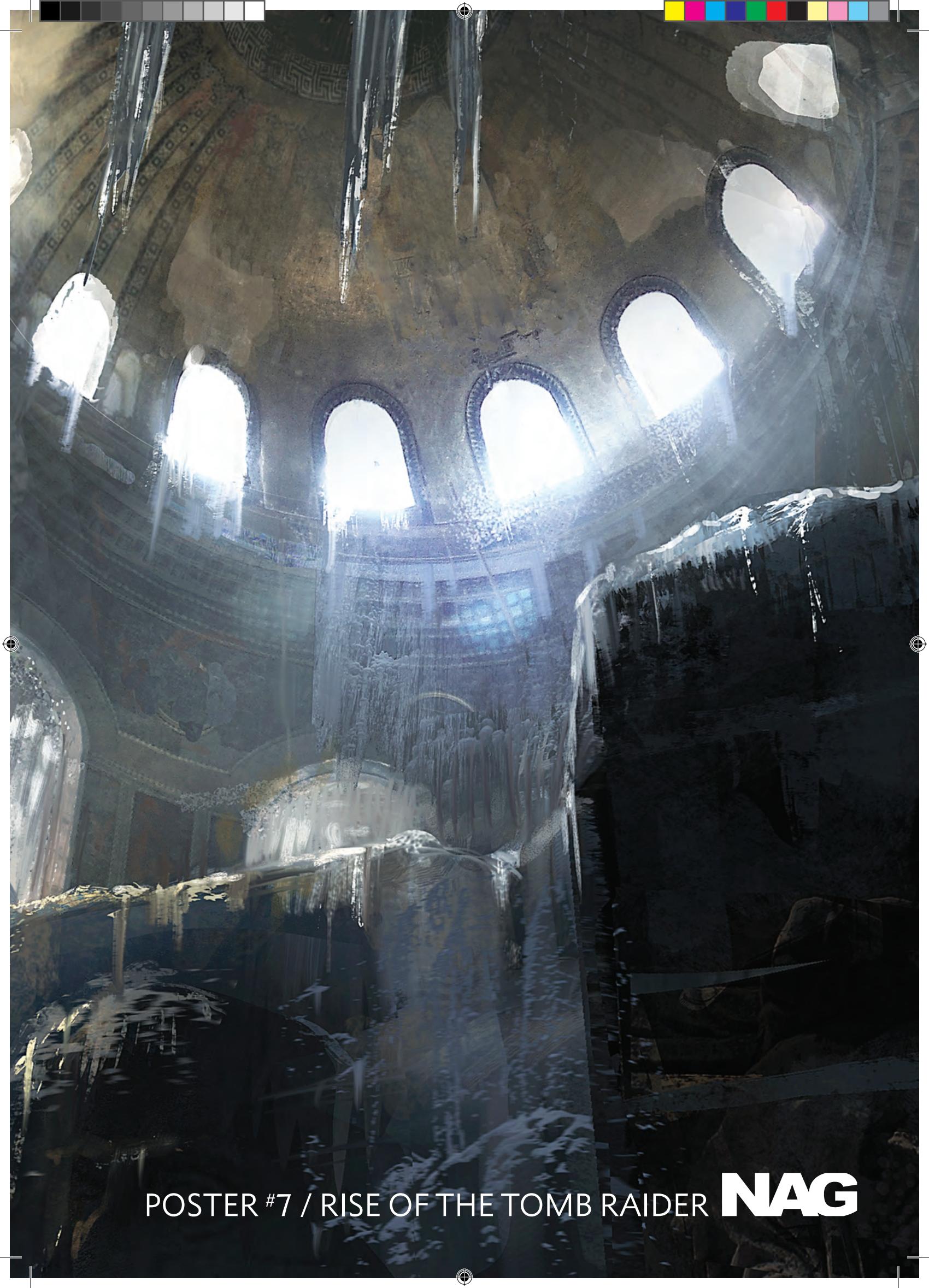
support for user-created extras and at last count there were 46,000 different things from the community that you can add to the game. These include everything from accurate real-world plots of land to elaborate highway interchanges and brand name vehicles to famous buildings – all at varying degrees of complexity. This active and passionate community will sustain your enjoyment of the game well beyond the artificial boundaries the developers have in place. *Cities: Skylines* isn't perfect, there are some annoying niggles and of course after a point there's no real challenge or things for you to do, but as a city building simulation there's nothing out there that beats it. This is what *SimCity* should have been. **NAG**
RedTide

SCORE

87 *For those disappointed by the mess that SimCity made in the genre, Cities: Skylines answers all the prayers and comes to the rescue. It's not perfect and tends to play predictable and run flat after all the milestones are achieved. The game's real success lies with the strong community support and the game you play in your head.*

 Fun / Large property expansion / Modding and community support

 No real challenge / Predictable / Repetitive



POSTER #7 / RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER **NAG**

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PLATFORMS / PC
 REVIEWED ON / PC
 GENRE / Multiplayer online battle arena
 DEVELOPER / Blizzard Entertainment
 PUBLISHER / Blizzard Entertainment
 DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom
 WEBSITE / eu.battle.net/heroes

Heroes of the Storm

Still doing those dailies!

We couldn't decide how to write the *Heroes of the Storm* review like professionals, so we wimped out and decided to instead give you three opinions. Sorry if this seems like a bit of a cop-out, but this is just detracting us from getting back to the game. Now leave us!

GEOMETRIX'S OPINION

I didn't like MOBAs. The genre itself is great: tactical, social, competitive – all the right ingredients are in place to make a compelling online game, but the small matter of having to play with human beings ruins it for me. For some reason, MOBAs bring about the worst in people, more so than the previous champion of vile behaviour, *Counter-Strike*. This is a genre that I've avoided for some time, but because I'm a sucker for Blizzard games, when *Heroes of the Storm* came along I was interested enough to jump in and play a few games. Then a few more. Then we formed a merry band of players in the office. Now we can't stop playing. Seriously, send help.

HotS (that's not *Heart of the Swarm*, by the way; sorry *StarCraft II*) simplifies much of the MOBA stuff that detracts from the action: it's a strategy-brawler, with less emphasis on big picture gameplay (at least at my lowly level of play), and more on getting into the fights and dominating your opponents on a moment-to-moment basis. The way XP is gained and distributed, map objectives, and the generally short games, all add up to a package where it takes a hell of an effort for a single player to be a detriment to their own team. The result is a *mostly* toxin-free online experience, although you do on occasion get one or two jerks who like to stir the pot.

It's not a perfect package, however. Even with the beta put to bed there are still frequent occurrences of connection issues, which can lead to frustratingly long loading times while you wait for a random player in rural Azerbaijan with yak-powered Internet to get their life together. Perhaps a few more servers around the world would aid this.



You can also customise and buy new mounts. Dane splurged on a rideable piggy bank that cost him 20,000 in-game gold.

GUARDI3N'S OPINION

WHAT I LOVE

Despite each game being an intense battle from almost start to finish, it's a huge amount of mindless fun. There is so much diversity and complexity on offer here that it's become my new casual addiction. On some days/weekends when I haven't been able to be by my PC (the horror!) I get a little anxious when I realise that I'm missing those daily quests.



Get used to seeing this screen a lot. Some of the characters thrive on death, and can use it to their advantage. Not in this instance, though. That was a regular bad death.

C H A N G E Y O U R G A M E

TURTLE BEACH



EAR FORCE
STEALTH
500P



100% WIRELESS
DIGITAL AUDIO



BUILT-IN
RECHARGEABLE BATTERY

TURTLE BEACH
ELITE
800



100% WIRELESS
GAME & CHAT



7.1 CHANNEL DTS
SURROUND SOUND

EAR FORCE
STEALTH
400



100% WIRELESS
DIGITAL AUDIO



GAME & CHAT
VOLUME CONTROLS

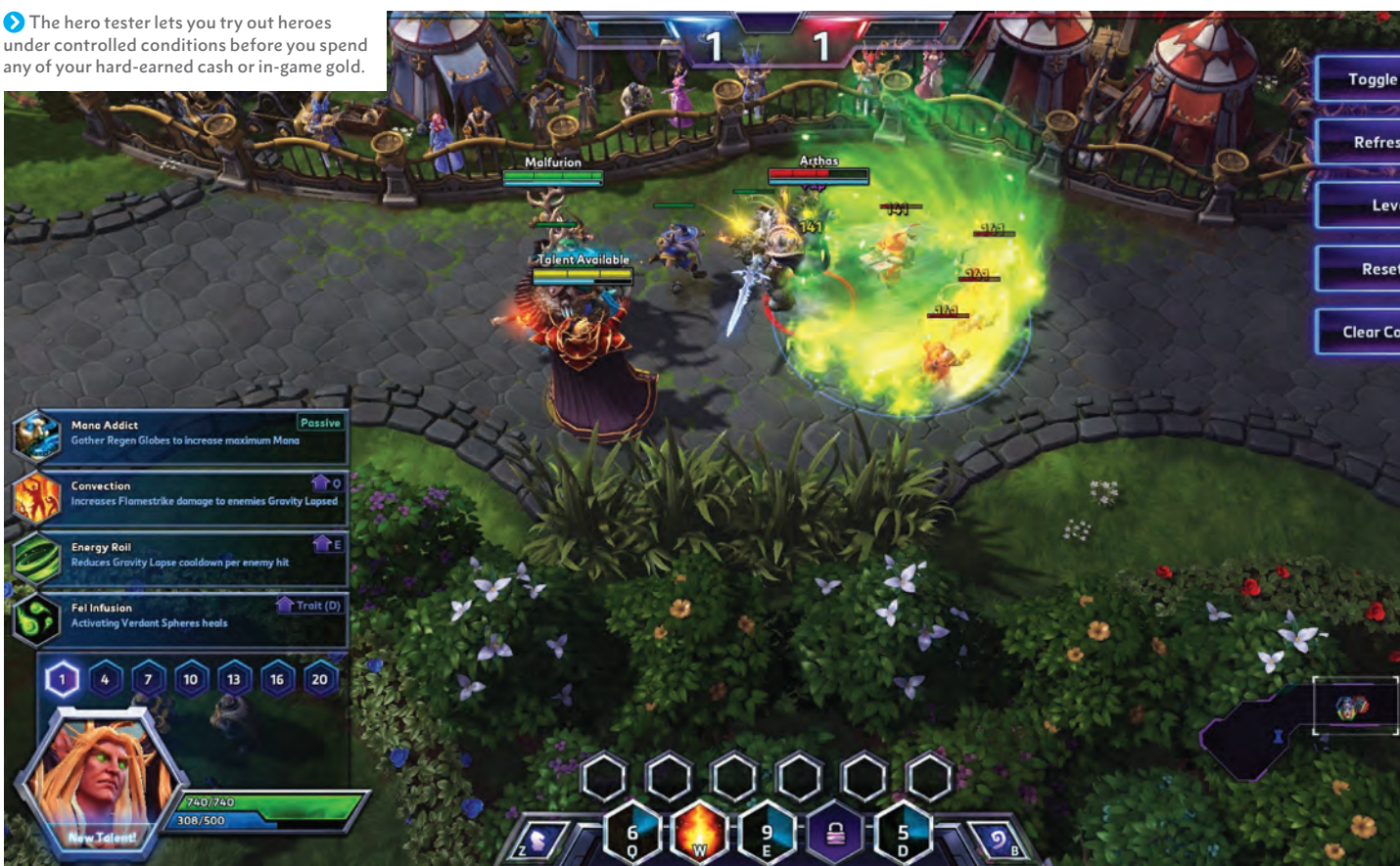
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The hero tester lets you try out heroes under controlled conditions before you spend any of your hard-earned cash or in-game gold.



WHAT I HATE

Nothing annoys me more than players in my team ignoring the map objectives. This is not *Dota 2* or *League of Legends* people – pushing a lane on your own and not helping the rest of us to secure an objective is not how we win the game. Unless you're a specialist, and the rest of us can hold it together without you. Oh, and pleeeeee stop typing in Russian, fellow European gamers. "Let's push their core" is far easier to react to than "нет я идти сверху".

MY FAVOURITE MAPS

Blackheart's Bay and Tomb of the Spider Queen. My brain simply can't say no to picking up shiny gold coins – send help!

MY FAVOURITE CHARACTERS

There are some iconic Blizzard characters on offer here, but my go-to one has always been Valla, a crossbow-wielding demon huntress from the *Diablo* universe. The sound that crossbow makes as her attack speed starts ramping up is just glorious.

MY GOAL THIS MONTH

I've been on a bit of a mission these past few weeks to get all my characters to level 7 so I can have access to the next skin colour palette. That, and the fact that I like to see all 7s on my screen when I'm in character select. Completed – tick! Now I start the grind to level 10.

BARKSKIN'S OPINION

I usually bounce right off of MOBAs. I've always understood the appeal of them, but aside from a few months wherein I spent a significant chunk of time playing *League of Legends*, I've always made a subconscious effort to stay away from them. Maybe it's because I don't enjoy spending 45 minutes to an hour being shouted at by four teammates who're perpetually upset with me. Whatever the reason, they're normally just not my bag – but *Heroes of the Storm* has got its hooks in me in a way that very few games manage to do.

That in itself probably says a lot about *HotS* – that it's a MOBA that can be enjoyed by people who don't enjoy MOBAs. Matches are generally far shorter, requiring significantly less of a commitment of precious time. It's got many diverse maps, each offering a unique objective that encourages both teams to do something other than push lanes all day, and generates opportunities for chaotic, exciting brawls. Rather than the outcome of a match being a foregone conclusion the moment one team pulls ahead by a certain number of kills, in *Heroes of the Storm* even the most battered and bloodied of teams can pull things together at the 11th hour for a remarkable, unexpected turnaround victory.

For these reasons and many more, I'd thoroughly recommend *Heroes of the*

Storm to anyone who curls their nose at *Dota 2* and its ilk. I do worry that, in the long term, its willingness to be everything to everyone by making the MOBA formula more accessible will result in its eventual downfall, but I doubt that'll be the case. It's excellently polished, bursting with tactical and strategic depth, and it's just an awful lot of fun to play, particularly with friends. The fact that it's free, and that it's stuffed with Blizzard's vast library of iconic characters, is the cherry on top of an already delicious game-cake. **NAG**

SCORE

84 *An action-packed approach to MOBAs that doesn't lack in strategy either. Heroes of the Storm is accessible, has an incredibly fair transaction model, and will hook you faster than cheap crack on a Monday morning.*

- + No need to spend any money / Fun (if you're not SAVAGE or RedTide) / Loads of depth
- Horrible load times / Battle.net occasionally breaks

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PLATFORMS / PC / PS4 / XBO
 REVIEWED ON / PC
 GENRE / Role-playing game
 DEVELOPER / CD Projekt RED
 PUBLISHER / Bandai Namco
 DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom
 WEBSITE / www.thewitcher.com

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

If you go down to the woods today...

Here we are. *The Witcher 3*. It's strange to think that this once-obscure series has become so effortlessly pervasive. What began in 2007 as a work of mad genius held together by bits of bubble gum and worn string, so emphatically broken that it required an almost complete overhaul to make its scrappy (but brilliantly lovable) visage more approachable, has culminated in this – a big-budget open-world role-playing game that not only competes with the best of the best in the RPG spectrum, but actually surpasses them in many ways. Make no mistake: *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* is a masterpiece, one of the finest role-playing experiences in existence. But it hasn't lost any of that batty charm, that unmistakable oddness that makes this series stand out like a man wearing a two-piece bikini in the Antarctic – and I love it for that.

Picking up from where *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* left off, it begins with Geralt of Rivia on the trail of his long-lost lover Yennefer, who eventually puts Geralt on the trail of his long-lost adoptive

daughter Cirilla, who's being hounded by a horde of horrible Bad People who collectively call themselves the Wild Hunt. That's really all you need to know about the story, I think. It's intensely compelling throughout, built on a foundation of solid writing and alluring twists, and it's the most relatable and personal of all the core storylines in this series. It's also incredibly long, and even if you don't bother with all the tertiary distractions in the game (in which case you're clearly a monster) it'll still keep you occupied for many happy hours on end.

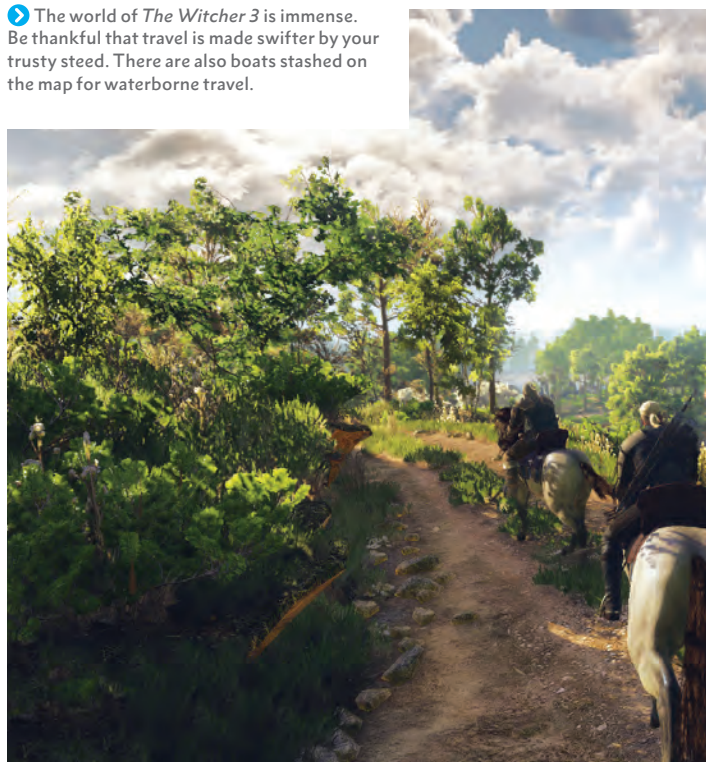
Assuming you're not a monster and that you do want to engage with everything this game has to offer, you'll quickly find there's more than enough stuff to keep you occupied for potentially hundreds of hours. The world is completely open for exploration, and it is enormous. Open up its numerous area maps, and once you've stopped gaping in awe at the scale of them, you'll see that they're also literally packed with question marks, each one highlighting a new place of interest for you to uncover. Some of these are the usual time-absorbing fluff activities that we've



The world of *The Witcher 3* is immense. Be thankful that travel is made swifter by your trusty steed. There are also boats stashed on the map for waterborne travel.



Special mention must be made of the game's facial animations, which are excellent.





come to expect from open-world games: horse races, fist-fighting arenas, treasures guarded by powerful foes, consumable shrines that grant ability points and temporarily buff your abilities. And while these are fun distractions, it's the meatier encounters, the side-quests and brushes with interesting characters and choices to be made (whose consequences reach far further than you'd anticipate) that make travelling to every corner of *Wild Hunt's* world fiercely absorbing.

Progressing through the game will introduce you to a dizzying variety of characters, some of them friendly, and many who would like nothing more than to mount your head on a spike in their garden. *The Witcher's* has always been a deeply unpleasant fantasy universe, the kind that draws disturbing parallels to our own in terms of the prejudice, violence and general depravity you'll encounter within, except here there are elves and dwarves and undead toddlers. It's a pretty lazy comparison to draw, but the quickest way to describe how it'll make you feel if you've never played any of these games

before is to liken it to an interactive *Game of Thrones*. You'll see and do horrible things, and you'll be forced to make hard choices, some of them blatantly ugly, while others only show the terrible depths of their consequence much, much later. If there's one thing this series is particularly good at, it's making you feel sick for the things that you've done, even the most seemingly insignificant of them. That said, it's not all grim: there are moments of genuine warmth and unexpected charm, and I often found myself laughing at the game's wry sense of humour.

The combat system is the most approachable of any in the series. Unlike in *The Witcher 2*, which in terms of difficulty goes from 0 to 100 faster than you can say "WAIT I DON'T UNDERSTA—" before exploding in a shower of dragon-roasted giblets, *The Witcher 3* is far more measured, more manageable. It's by no means easy; on the harder difficulties, proper preparation and strategy must be applied to practically every encounter if you're to survive with your innards neatly tucked away in their appropriate positions. Brew potions to boost your abilities, apply the recommended oils to your blades, and research which of your magical Signs will prove most effective on the foe you're about to face. Melee combat is fast, brutal and very gratifying – but it's let down a bit by slightly awkward controls. Movement is sometimes overly sensitive and unpredictable, which can lead to a few frustrating deaths when you're surrounded by enemies and the





PIPPA'S OPINION

To rush through *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* is to do yourself and the game a disservice. Sure, you can concentrate on the main quest, working your way through the story systematically in your quest to track down Ciri, but you will miss out on the rich, dynamic and oh so beautiful world that makes up *The Witcher 3*.

I have never denied that I am a pretty ardent fan of both the CD Projekt games as well as the books by Andrzej Sapkowski upon which the games are based. I read the books before I played the games (the English versions, I'm not completely crazy enough to have learned a new language just to read them!), and so I already had a sense of the world Geralt inhabits before I began playing.

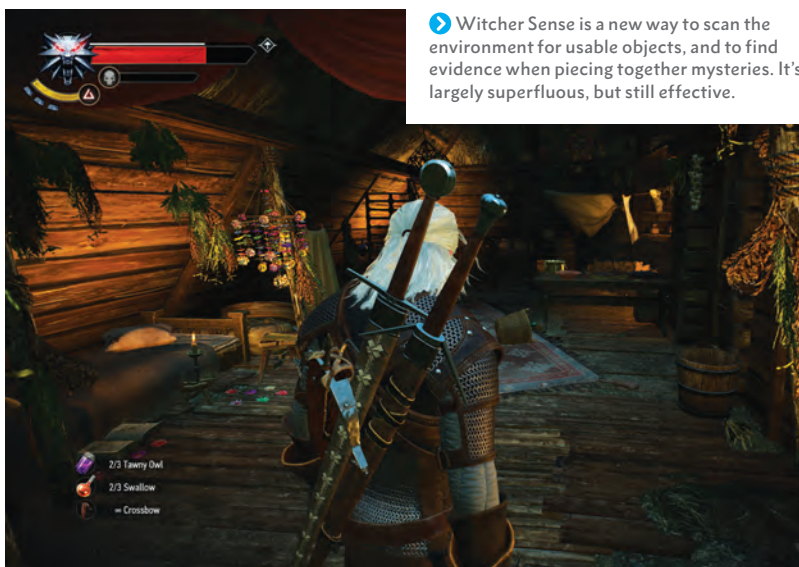
In many ways, *The Witcher* and *The Witcher 2* introduced us to this world, but *The Witcher 3* shows it to us in completely uninhibited glory. Every aspect of the world is detailed, meticulously crafted and inhabited not only by the usual NPCs, providing appropriate background chatter, but by an additional cast of characters with which to interact as well as a menagerie of "mythical" monsters, some of which those of you with a penchant for monsters and spooky stories will be familiar with, and others which prior to this will only have made an appearance in your nightmares.

The combat is as hard and as complex as ever. You can't rush into a battle situation, whether the foe be man or monster, without a certain amount of preparation. At times it is better to flee a fight and come back better prepared than to engage and know that you're headed for almost certain death. Brew your potions, sharpen and enhance your weapons and armour, brush up on your foe by reading your bestiary, and for goodness sake – SAVE before you go into battle!

The only aspect of the *Wild Hunt* on which I'm not entirely sold is the alchemy mechanism, which I find somewhat counter-intuitive in comparison to the previous games. That said, I'm uncertain as to whether this is because this is the first time I'm playing a *Witcher* game exclusively on console or if it's as a result of a design flaw. Either way, it's not a deal-breaker, and although it took a little getting used to, it hasn't lessened my experience of the game in any way.

Bottom line: *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* is as beautiful and satisfying as I imagined it would be when I first saw that trailer all those many months ago. If you're a fan of complex, challenging RPGs, I couldn't recommend it highly enough. If you're willing to take the plunge, try to surface for air at least once every couple of hours.

92



Witcher Sense is a new way to scan the environment for usable objects, and to find evidence when piecing together mysteries. It's largely superfluous, but still effective.

controls work against you. More than a few times I accidentally charged off a cliff to my death after realising that the game and I have differing opinions as to what a gentle tap on the analogue stick should translate to on-screen.

Elsewhere, it's got everything you'd expect from a modern RPG. There's a decent crafting system, whereby you pay craftspeople to fashion new armour and weaponry. Alchemy is still a process of collecting ingredients to brew potions and create bombs, but it's been streamlined a bit. Skills and abilities are now limited in that you can only have a handful of them active at a time and some of them have a complementary relationship with similar skills, so it's up to you to decide what combination of skills would be best for any given situation. I'm not sure I wholly agree with this system, but it works, so I won't complain.

The Witcher 3 is undoubtedly imperfect. Its menus are cluttered, and searching through things like your inventory is often a chore. It's hilariously buggy, ranging from visual glitches to enemies becoming trapped in geometry. The fall damage threshold is ludicrously low, and I once died falling off what amounted to not much more than a chest-high step. The swimming

is just awful. But for everything it does wrong, *Wild Hunt* does a hundred more things right. It's an elegant, interesting, thoroughly engrossing experience, and a triumphant final chapter for the series. It's finally reached the true heights of the massive potential it first showed all those years ago. **NAG**

Barkskin

SCORE

95 *Geralt's final adventure is utterly riveting. Its world is a sprawling expanse of glorious freedom, a lovingly crafted, richly populated fantasy setting that'll make you grimace almost as often as it makes you smile. It's a flawed gem, but its strategic combat, thoughtful character progression and beautifully complex narrative make this one of the most rewarding journeys you'll ever take.*

- + Impressively detailed open world / Satisfying combat and progression mechanics / Gripping narrative and writing
- Fiddly controls / Messy menus / So buggy

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PLATFORMS / Wii U 

REVIEWED ON / Wii U 

GENRE / Third-person shooter

DEVELOPER / Nintendo EAD Group No. 2

PUBLISHER / Nintendo

DISTRIBUTOR / Core Group

WEBSITE / splatoon.nintendo.com



NAG MUST
PLAY

Splatoon

So fresh, the paint is still wet

Nintendo finally has the traditional trifecta of online games: a racer (*Mario Kart*), a fighter (*Smash Bros.*) and now an online team-based shooter. Much like the other two games, *Splatoon* is a unique way of approaching the genre, bringing with it something quite fresh and appealing if you're a bit tired of the usual online shootbang. While *Splatoon* is primarily about the online multiplayer, it also has a meaty single-player campaign that clocks in at around six hours, longer if you go for all the hidden stuff. Everything is wrapped up in a kid-friendly neon 1990s aesthetic so painfully hip it actually pulls it off.

All of the game's modes and functions are accessible through its hub plaza, known as Booyah Base. It contains stores (for buying new fashion that impacts your playstyle), the sewer entrance to the single-player campaign, and a place for online lobbies. The stores change their

available stock every day, so you never know what you might find. You can skip to each store or function instantly using the GamePad's touchscreen, but walking around the hub area is charming. Inklings from around the Internet, and those of your friends, populate the plaza. Miiverse posts and drawings show up as speech bubbles, or (and this is cool) as graffiti on the walls. Miiverse posts also show up on billboards and as graffiti in multiplayer levels.

SINGLE SQUIDS

With inventive levels and a surprising amount of plot to unearth, the single-player part of *Splatoon* surprised me. I had expected something light and fluffy, perhaps mostly bot matches against AI opponents. But each level in

the campaign has more in common with the likes of *Mario Galaxy*.

It might not be as large in scope, but it still channels the same vibe.

▶ Paint colours are randomly assigned each match; your Inklings' hair colour will always match the paint colour of your team.





▶ The single-player campaign has a lot of variety in its levels and scenarios, and also acts as a good warm-up for multiplayer.



AMIIBO

There are three *Splatoon*-themed Amiibo (little plastic figures with NFC tags), acting as gatekeepers to a bunch of challenge mode variants of existing single-player missions. You're either racing against the clock in time trials, or attempting the missions using specific weapons like the Paint Roller. These challenge missions are optional, but reward you with unique-looking gear for your Inking, as well as unlocking three additional mini-games you can play on the GamePad while waiting for a multiplayer match to start.



MULTI SQUIDS

The online portion of *Splatoon* is incredibly fully-featured, lacking only (for now) the ability to form a party and go online as a team with your friends. Lobbies auto-shuffle teams so you're never on the same side. You can join in a friend's game easily enough, and since matches only last three minutes you never have to wait long to participate. There is no voice chat, but I don't see that as a negative personally. Kids play this game, and adults can Skype together if they want.

There is both ranked and unranked play, with different game modes for each. Generally, the goal is to cover the level with your team's paint colour, not just "splat" opponents by shooting them. You can leap to a teammate instantly at any time, so you're always able to get back to the frontlines fast. Nintendo will be adding more game types and maps for free as time goes on. **NAG**

-Miktar

Each "world" is a series of levels that can be attempted in any order. Once you've completed a required amount, the boss stage unlocks. There are multiple "hubs" in the main campaign hub area, each with its own set of levels. Getting to the level entrances is fun in its own way, since it requires understanding how your Inking moves and can interact with the environment.

The core of *Splatoon* is paint (or ink, whichever you prefer). You spray paint using a variety of weapons, and you can "dive" into the paint as a squid. Movement in paint is much faster than on foot, and you can swim up sheer walls (provided you remembered to paint yourself a path). Almost every level in the campaign introduces a new gimmick or mechanic, like sponges that expand as you shoot them, or dangerous opponents that need to be approached with specific tactics. This keeps the campaign engaging all the way to the end, where everything you've learned up to that point is tested.

SCORE

90

There is so much that makes Splatoon good. Quick matches, a focus on teamwork instead of killing, lots of gear-based abilities for tailoring your playstyle, and a large variety of weapons are just the basics. If you're looking for a fun and different team-based shooter, this is it.

- ⊕ Good single-player campaign / Lag-tolerant online play / Free content updates
- ⊖ Scant multiplayer maps at launch / No off-screen play / Only one-vs-one local play

PLATFORMS / PC 
 REVIEWED ON / PC 
 GENRE / Stealth 
 DEVELOPER / Minor Key Games
 PUBLISHER / Minor Key Games
 DISTRIBUTOR / Digital
 WEBSITE / neonstruct.com

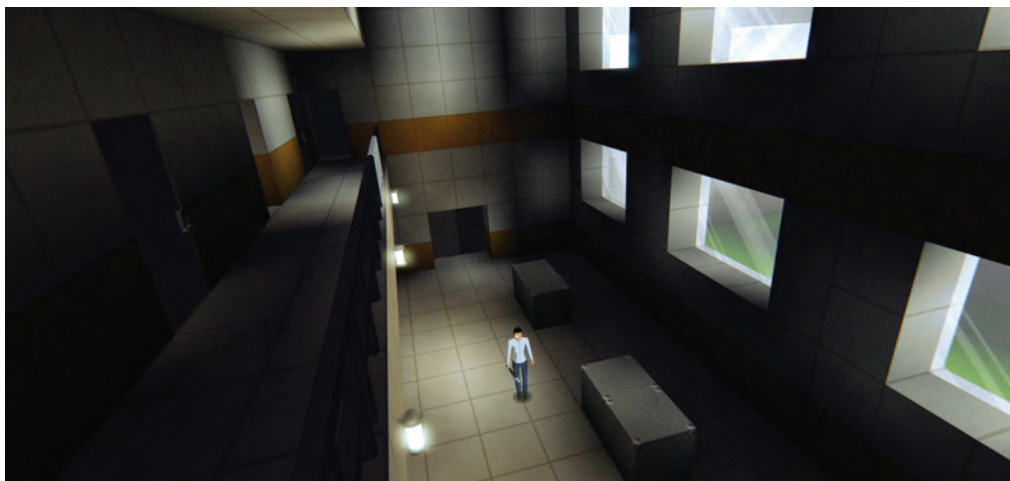
NEON STRUCT

The unknown sneaks in and surprises us all

Gamers are often a misunderstood lot. Those outside of our particular entertainment medium of choice tend to think of us as little more than trigger-happy, violence-loving sociopaths. They don't understand that more than a few games actually discourage direct confrontation, relying instead on stealth and puzzle-solving to overcome adversity. It is with this legacy in mind that we've been treated to a delightful nugget of sneaky goodness in the form of *NEON STRUCT*.

Set in the ever-popular "near future", players take on the role of Jillian Cleary, spy extraordinaire. However, being framed for treason will ruin anybody's day regardless of their spying skills, so our ever-resourceful Cleary goes on the run and attempts to find out who framed her and for what purpose.

Upon first glance and a cursory playthrough of a few minutes, you'd be forgiven for thinking this is a budget version of *Deus Ex* or *Thief*. However, such a classification hardly does it justice: *NEON STRUCT* is its own beast and takes delight in pushing stealth skills to the maximum. As our hapless ex-spy, players will be expected to sneak, duck, distract, hide in the shadows and cover their tracks like any good misanthrope. Missions can be completed in a number of ways, giving you the element of choice and a degree of replayability. There's an array of gadgets and tools to help you on your quest, and even a nod to the



BioShock games makes an appearance.

Unfortunately, however sturdy the game's core mechanics might be, it fails somewhat when it comes to presentation. True to its name, there's an abundance of neon-styled locations and eye-candy, but for the most part, the visuals are amateurish at best and downright crude at worst. It creates an uneasy juxtaposition when a sense of danger is presented but the threats hardly look or sound scary or intimidating. Developer David Pittman is to be commended for his mostly one-man development approach, but he would have done well to hire a proper artist. The same can't be said for the soundtrack, which is an excellent showcase of '80s-style alternative-electro and suits the mood and style of

ABOVE / I'll be seeing you. But with any luck, you won't be seeing me.

the game perfectly.



The only other issue I can single out is the price tag: \$17.99 for a six-hour indie stealth game seems a bit steep. If, however, you're feeling hesitant to part with your cash, there's a nifty demo you can check out.

NEON STRUCT is a fun and delightful little stealth romp whose biggest strength lies in rewarding the player for loyalty and a developer who understands what makes for a good gaming experience. Don't let the lack of polish fool you: this is quality stuff and it comes recommended. **NAG**

Delano

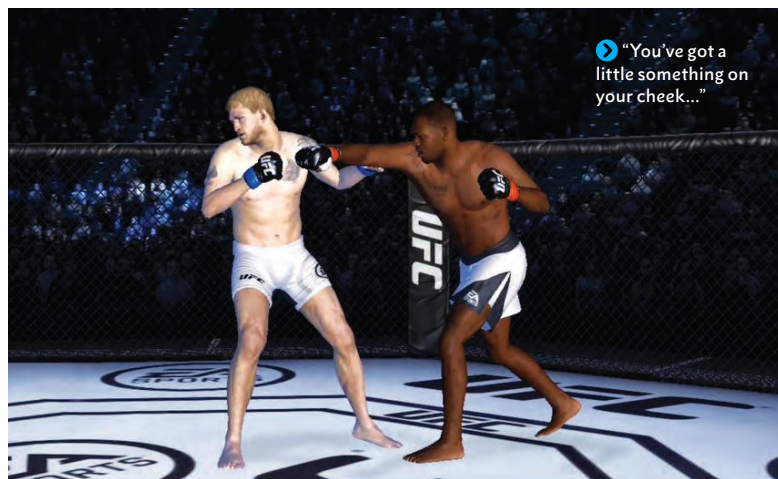
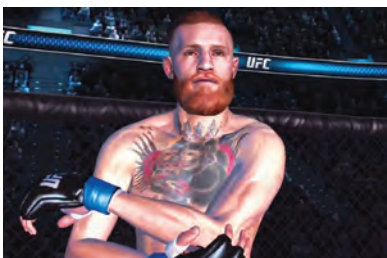
SCORE

80 *It may not be as polished as its AAA cousins, but NEON STRUCT is a fun, lovingly-crafted stealth game that rewards players who stick with it.*

-  Interesting, absorbing stealth mechanics / Story is surprisingly engrossing
-  Graphics and sound are a bit amateurish / A tad pricey for what you get



PLATFORMS / Android / iOS
REVIEWED ON / Android
GENRE / Sports
DEVELOPER / EA Canada
PUBLISHER / EA
DISTRIBUTOR / Digital
WEBSITE / easports.com/ufc



EA Sports UFC (mobile)

The Octagon, on the go

Over recent years, two markets have emerged and ascended to meteoric levels of popularity: mobile gaming, and the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC, for short). It was only a matter of time before developers at EA brought the two together.

Creatively titled *EA Sports UFC*, this mobile game is a free-to-play sports simulator. Players are given one fighter for free, currently rising star Alexander Gustafsson, and must climb the ranks through a series of progressively more difficult brawls. The graphics are decent – PS2 levels of quality – the animations are superb, and the controls are intuitive. However, there are practically no customisation options. Fighters' move-sets are predetermined, and their moves can only be upgraded by sacrificing other moves which are bought with in-game or real-world currency.

This is where the catch is. The first series of fights are easy, but sky-rocket in challenge after a certain point. It soon becomes unplayable unless you spend some cash for a set of quick upgrades, or you knuckle down to grind through the previous fights again and again.

Regardless, *UFC* has been growing since its release. It's now added the entire women's bantamweight division, and the opportunity to fight in live events, mirroring current fight cards, is possible. The ability to buy individual fighters gives the game a modular feel, and a system like this could easily work on home consoles if the difficulty curve was balanced.

NAG

Sand_Storm

SCORE



70 *For a mobile game, UFC is pretty good. There are plenty of characters and moves, and it's highly authentic to the source material. It's also constantly evolving, and adding new fighters or features. The only major complaint is the sudden difficulty curve, which is obviously an attempt to milk cash out of the player.*

+ Intuitive controls / Constantly expanding / Great for short sessions

- Sudden difficulty spike / Buy stuff, or grind endlessly

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Batman has his usual set of gadgets at his disposal, most of which are there for use right from the start. Previous *Arkham* games saw Batman's gadget collection slowly expand over the course of the game, but in *Arkham Knight* you're almost entirely kitted from the word go. There are one or two later equipment unlocks, but it's nothing like the gradual trickle found in previous titles.

There are also a number of upgrade categories tied to various items, and even the Batmobile gets a suite of unlocks that add numerous features and abilities. Likewise, the new Batsuit has its own set of upgrades that add to your movement and combat abilities. There is a lot to unlock and upgrade, but you'll only be able to maximise Batman's potential by completing all the game's side missions in order to gain upgrade points.



PLATFORMS / PC / PS4 / XBO
REVIEWED ON / PS4
GENRE / Action adventure
DEVELOPER / Rocksteady Studios
PUBLISHER / Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment
DISTRIBUTOR / Ster Kinekor Entertainment
WEBSITE / www.batmanarkhamknight.com



ONE LAST TIME TO BE THE BATMAN

Nearly six years ago, Rocksteady Entertainment did something extraordinary: they made a video game based on a comic book superhero, and that video game didn't suck. In fact, *Batman: Arkham Asylum* quickly became one of the greatest titles in the gaming industry's history. It was an anomaly; video games based on comic books and films are rarely any good, but Rocksteady had started down a path that would irrevocably alter the gaming world's perception of licensed video games. *Arkham Asylum* became a smash hit, winning Rocksteady numerous awards including "Studio of the Year" and multiple "Game of the Year" accolades. The success of *Arkham Asylum* was echoed by its sequel three years later. *Batman: Arkham City* continued Rocksteady's *Batman: Arkham* story arc, but shed the confines of *Arkham Asylum* and gave players a sprawling open-world city to explore. Despite its larger scope, *Arkham City* continued to move Rocksteady's vision and gameplay mechanics forward with exceptional results. It improved on *Arkham Asylum* in numerous areas, and for the first time, players were given glimpses of what it would be like to be a superhero facing seemingly insurmountable odds.

All of that, however, now seems like mere stepping stones to get to where we find ourselves today. If *Arkham Asylum* and *Arkham City* were excellent video games, then *Batman: Arkham Knight* is something else entirely. Rocksteady's latest and final offering in their *Arkham* trilogy is a masterpiece and a complete triumph in video game development.

You haven't truly been the Batman until now.

Arkham Knight begins on the streets of Gotham, months after the final events of *Arkham City*. Gotham

is, for the first time in a long time, experiencing a decline in crime, but that all changes the moment Scarecrow arises to turn Gotham into a "city of fear". Scarecrow has developed a new fear toxin and his minor demonstration during the opening minutes of the game causes city-wide panic. More than six million people are evacuated, leaving the streets and buildings of Gotham eerily devoid of civilian life. The only people who remain are the criminal elements that thrive in this sort of chaos. Standing between them and the city's complete destruction are the men and women of the GCPD and the Gotham Fire Department. And, of course, Batman.

It isn't long before Scarecrow's threats escalate thanks to his uniting of the remaining villains of Gotham towards one goal: the death of Batman. This time, however, there's one more villain who poses a considerable danger: the eponymous *Arkham Knight*. The *Arkham Knight* brings with him an entire army of soldiers and drone tanks in order to fulfil his obsession with killing Batman. Together with the henchmen belonging to various *Batman* villains like Two-Face, Penguin, Harley Quinn and Riddler, the streets of Gotham are turned into a veritable warzone.

While this plot doesn't sound all that exciting when taken at face value, it's the manner in which Rocksteady executes it that makes *Arkham Knight*'s story the best gaming narrative I've experienced in over 30 years of playing video games. I realise that that's quite a statement to make, but it's a conviction that steadily solidified the longer I spent playing through *Arkham Knight*. I'll readily admit to being overtly picky when it comes to how studios tell their stories in games, but Rocksteady has taken the concept of



NAG MUST
PLAY



"GOTHAM IS, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A LONG TIME, EXPERIENCING A DECLINE IN CRIME, BUT THAT ALL CHANGES THE MOMENT SCARECROW ARISES TO TURN GOTHAM INTO A "CITY OF FEAR". "

video game storytelling and elevated it to a level that I thought wouldn't possibly happen in this medium. Within the first five minutes of the game's opening, I was completely transfixed by what was unveiling before me. One could perhaps argue that the weight of the previous key plot points in *Arkham Asylum* and *Arkham City* lend gravitas to *Arkham Knight's* story, but what I think is more likely is one glaringly obvious fact: Rocksteady has gotten damn good at narrative and have perfected their storytelling. They've become considerably more adept at utilising techniques that are so often taken for granted. Things like: camera angles during cut-scenes; the use of first-person perspectives at key moments; and completely convincing voice acting really make the narrative

experience of *Arkham Knight* one that will likely be discussed and analysed for years to come.

The one downside of this is that it makes *Arkham Knight* extremely difficult to talk about without spoiling its best parts. It also means that in order for those best parts to be the best parts, you need to have played the previous games in the series. Numerous

goosebump-inducing moments would likely not hold as much significance if you are unfamiliar with the goings on in previous *Arkham* games. It also doesn't hurt to have at least some knowledge of the *Batman* franchise and its diverse cast of characters. If you can tick those two prerequisites for being able to fully revel in *Arkham Knight's* plot, then you're in for one hell of a treat.

But it isn't just narratively where *Arkham Knight* shines: this is the best looking game on contemporary systems bar none. The city of Gotham, with all of its oppressively wet and gloomy atmosphere, has been perfectly created. The city that Rocksteady's art team has worked so hard to bring to life feels like it has a soul, which is far more than could be said for the game world in *Arkham City*. Gotham, the so-called "city out of time", is magnificent to behold from the endless perches and viewpoints one can so effortlessly scale with Batman's equipment. The level of detail is also quite staggering, and you'll undoubtedly pick up minute little artistic flourishes in the most obscure corners of the city. There is never any duplication in buildings, street scenes, and roadways. Every corner feels uniquely crafted; as if each square inch of Gotham was meticulously tailored by individual members of Rocksteady's art team. While this might not be the largest open-world environment, it is certainly the most



▶ ABOVE / *Batman: Arkham Knight* is the best-looking game available today. Lighting, weather, water, and particle effects are brilliant and add a layer of realism to an unreal city

▶ Car chases with the *Arkham Knight's* captains are fast and frantic; the streets of Gotham will never be the same by the time you've stopped all of their APCs.



▶ RIGHT / Batman's tech is hidden throughout Gotham; you'll frequently find workshops like this that will add upgrades to the Batmobile.





High-calibre Vulcan gun capable of firing armour-piercing rounds.

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THE BATMOBILE

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Winch capable of grappling onto anchor points, supplying an electrical current, and uploading viruses to certain targets.



Rocksteady's classic combat mechanic is back, but more streamlined and much faster. The Arkham Knight brings with him numerous more foes for Batman to face.

detailed and its scale is implied in other ways. Cameras pan and swoop during in-engine cut-scenes, offering you a multitude of perspectives that frequently place Batman far off in the distance, only to be gradually zoomed towards. The effect is striking and does a superb job in conveying the towering height of Gotham's skyline. This is a game world that needs to be seen; it begs to be explored and absorbed in great big greedy chunks of extended play sessions. It's a visual buffet that never seems to run out of satisfying morsels to feast upon, whether it's the headlights of the Batmobile illuminating individual rain drops, or the sparks that fly from exploding drone tanks.

You'll often just stop to soak in the atmosphere of Batman's immediate surroundings, and if you're wearing headphones (or you have a really loud surround sound setup) you'll get aural effects that do a superb job of enhancing the feel of the city. The ambient noises are all made to sound like they're very distant; you'll hear traffic, car alarms, police sirens, and far away thunder if you just stop and listen hard

enough. It's remarkable how much atmosphere a few well-thought-out sound effects can create.

Front and centre of much of the game's new mechanics is the Batmobile. Rocksteady's desire to include the Batmobile in their final chapter of the *Arkham* trilogy actually dictated a number of things. For a start, open-world Gotham was a must in order to make the Batmobile meaningful. Furthermore, a villain capable of taking on a vehicle as powerful as the Batmobile was also needed – hence we have the Arkham Knight and his army of drones. At first I was concerned that the requirements brought to the table by the Batmobile would result in gameplay elements that felt contrived. Luckily that isn't the case in the final game. The Batmobile is a massive part of *Arkham Knight*, but it's been done so well that it truly feels like an extension of Batman. If anything, it makes the fantasy of "being the Batman" all the more realised. Most importantly, however, the Batmobile is fun. I relished every opportunity to hop inside and smash my way through the streets and underground tunnels of Gotham. It's a hulking, formidable piece of metal that causes



Firefly has taken it upon himself to burn Gotham's fire departments to the ground. Look for the smoke.



"...COMPLETELY CONVINCING VOICE ACTING REALLY MAKE THE NARRATIVE EXPERIENCE OF ARKHAM KNIGHT ONE THAT WILL LIKELY BE DISCUSSED AND ANALYSED FOR YEARS TO COME."



enemies to scurry and scatter as it shifts and morphs into its Battle Mode. It also handles extremely well once you're used to the controls. In fact, the precise controls you have with the Batmobile highlights two moments in the game when, for some inexplicable reason, the handling goes to pot. On both occasions this happens during a boss encounter chase scene, and the game's camera zooms out to, presumably, create a more theatrical effect. The actual effect, however, is that suddenly the Batmobile becomes very difficult to control, and slips and slides all over. The game also seems to introduce some dramatic slow-motion effect during these two sequences, which doesn't help the handling. Fortunately these two sequences are not long at all, but their botching of the ordinarily perfect Batmobile handling makes them all the more conspicuous. Incidentally, this is pretty much the only fault I could find with the entire game.

Batman: Arkham Knight is easily one of the best games I've ever played. Rocksteady always had something undeniably special in their *Arkham* series, and to see their trilogy coming to this sort of a close elevates this final chapter into the realms of a masterpiece. When looked at from afar, yes, *Arkham Knight* is a significant achievement that's brimming with ingenious design choices and gameplay mechanics that have been crafted by a team that has schooled the industry in how to do superhero games properly. But zooming in and looking more closely, *Arkham Knight* is a title that is made by its seemingly endless parade of tiny details. It's these brief moments of intricacy that linger with you way after the final villain has been apprehended and the credits have rolled. It's the moments that have GCPD cops taking selfies in front of the Batmobile; locations like the evidence lockup in the police HQ that displays items from pivotal moments in the *Arkham* series; the banter between henchman that sometimes even goes as far as referencing other DC superheroes and locations like Metropolis. It's the little things like that which accumulate to make the most believable superhero game world we've ever encountered in the medium of video games. The characters have never been this alive; the story has never been this well told; and the gameplay has never been this enjoyable. *Batman: Arkham Knight* is an instant classic and a game that will be referenced as one of the greats for years to come. 🦇

SCORE



99 *We've reached yet another turning point in video game entertainment with Batman: Arkham Knight. Rocksteady has raised the action adventure bar yet again and the fruits of their labour will echo through the gaming industry for years to come. This is the best game to grace this new generation of hardware so far. If you're looking for THE quintessential "next-gen" experience, look no further than this. Batman: Arkham Knight is an incredible spectacle from beginning to end.*

+ Perfect plot execution / Best looking game available / Voice-acting remains impeccable / Heaps of content

- PC port is currently very buggy

INTERVIEW

GAZ DEAVES, SOCIAL MARKETING MANAGER AT ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS



NAG: First of all, this *Batman* article will be the cover feature for the very last NAG magazine before we move everything online. There's a neat parallelism here because *Arkham Knight* is Rocksteady's final *Batman* game.

GAZ: Wow, so this is both of our swan songs! What a way to go out!

NAG: That's what we were thinking! Last *Batman: Arkham* game; last NAG magazine. So what's the current vibe like at Rocksteady?

GAZ: There is a great atmosphere in the studio. We wrapped up *Arkham Asylum* with 37 people; we finished *Arkham City* with 93; and we have 160 at Rocksteady now. Jamie Walker, who is our studio director, and Sefton Hill, who is our game director, started this company just over 10 years ago. So I think it is a good time for them to be reflecting on what they've done, and I think everyone is immensely proud of what we have achieved, not just on the *Arkham* trilogy as a whole, but on *Arkham Knight* particularly.

NAG: The shift to the new console hardware gave you guys more resources. Can you elaborate on whether there were any features the team had been wanting to implement since *Arkham Asylum* but couldn't due to hardware limitations?

GAZ: I think it's been enormously liberating to be honest, because we've always had these ideas of doing a big, open world Gotham City and giving players all of the city to just tear around in the Batmobile. Rocksteady has always been a studio that is about details. So when we say that the environment in *Batman: Arkham Knight* is five times the size of *Arkham City* for example, for other studios that might be the better indication of the kind of content you can expect in the game, but for us the new generations isn't just about scale, it's about detail... Switching to new gen allowed us to do that. We didn't just set

out to make a much bigger game; I think the size of the city came about really because we wanted the Batmobile in there, and we realised that if we were going to do that, then we would need to make it big enough so that the Batmobile feels meaningful and fun to drive. But really, the switch to new hardware has really been about us being able to craft that detail.

NAG: So it must have been really exciting though to be finally able to flesh-out the city's character.

GAZ: Our art director David Hego, who is an incredibly inspiring guy, he started off on the art design documents for *Arkham Asylum*, so he has been a lot of the brains behind the look and feel of our games since the very beginning. He calls Gotham a "city out of time" so we can create this sort of other-worldly feel by having the juxtaposition of things like LCD billboards and old, gothic structures; Batman's armour and 1950s cars. And that's all done to create this feel that you don't know exactly what time period this all happens in. Gotham kind of exists in this other-worldly space, and that's part of how we create the atmosphere of Gotham. I think the [environment] guys have absolutely hit that on the head.

NAG: Batman's "no kill" code has meant you guys have had to rethink a number of common gaming tropes and mechanics over the series. Was this natural in terms of the IP you were engaging with, or were there moments when you had to relook at things or discuss things internally?

GAZ: I think his code is a really important part of the character now; it's what separates him from the super-villains really, and it was one of the big wedges between him and Joker. [Arkham City spoilers coming up!] Before Joker was killed at the end of *Arkham City*, one of his things always was, "if you'd just kill me, this would all be over," but Batman never would. So bringing that into a gameplay thing has



A LITTLE ON THE SIDE

Arkham Knight has a vast collection of side missions collectively dubbed Gotham's Most Wanted. Various *Batman* villains lie at the centre of some of these side missions, but not all of them. They range in activities: from helping Nightwing eliminate Penguin's weapon caches, to locating and disarming the Arkham Knight's numerous bombs that can be found throughout Gotham. The further you progress through the main Scarecrow missions, the more side missions are unlocked. What's nice is that you're able to pick a set of missions to focus on whenever you want, so if you feel like taking a break from the main story, you can always spend a few hours attempting to take down the 21 Militia Towers that the Arkham Knight has setup throughout the city.

Some of the side mission sets are elaborate affairs and present their own contained plotlines and characters. The Riddler set of side missions sees you solving nine of his more elaborate puzzles in order to free Catwoman from an explosive cat collar she's had placed around her neck. As with the Nightwing set of missions, the Riddler/Catwoman set of missions allows for the new Dual Play mechanic to be utilised. You're able to switch between playing as Batman and playing as Catwoman or Nightwing in order to complete the quests. Dual Play with Robin appears later in the game during a set of side missions that contain arguably the greatest and most humorous moment in the entire *Arkham* series. The Dual Play features with Catwoman, however, are a little more intriguing as they offer more than just Dual Play combat scenarios, and mix things up with some puzzle solving as well. It all makes for some very detailed and elaborate side missions that aren't often seen in the open-world genre. All too frequently, open-world games are "padded" by mundane side missions, but Rocksteady has deliberately gone out of their way to create some of the game's best moments in the set of Gotham's Most Wanted side missions. What's nice is that once you finish the main Scarecrow plotline, you can go back and finish up any outstanding side missions. That or you can start a New Game Plus playthrough.



▶ LEFT / At key moments in the main story, you get a choice of two significant upgrades for the Batmobile. Here the Batwing installs some new toys.



always felt like a natural part of *Batman*, and once you've got that as one of your fundamentals, then the other things like the Detective Mode, combat, the navigation, and now the driving, they all come naturally off it. If you target a thug in Battle Mode [in the Batmobile] with your guns, it switches automatically to a non-lethal riot suppressor. If you are tearing down the street and there is a thug in the way, then he is going to get zapped out of the way by the electro-shock counter measure. In fact you can activate electroshock counter measures when the Batmobile is parked, so sometimes if you park the Batmobile and thugs start going for it, from a perch you can activate it and shock them away.

NAG: During the demo I loved how thugs would scatter the moment the Batmobile transforms into Battle Mode.

GAZ: I know, it's scary right! It's like a 20 ton tank has just turned up!

NAG: It's not every day a studio outside of DC gets to create a new character within a franchise as loved as *Batman*. What was it like being given that responsibility to add to the world of *Batman*, while making sure it felt authentic?

GAZ: It was absolutely incredible. There were kind of two reasons why we wanted to create the new character Arkham Knight: one was we were able to create a character who was exactly what we wanted to do narratively. He is this military commander, he is running an army of drone tanks, and he is kind of the apex of the escalation that *Batman* naturally produces. *Batman* gets good, the villains get better; *Batman* gets the Batmobile, villains bring an army of tanks into the city. So [narratively] he is very useful for that.

The second reason why we wanted to create a

new character for *Batman* is because IT'S A NEW CHARACTER FOR BATMAN! There was never any chance that we wouldn't have done it! The atmosphere in the studio was just that it happened all so fast. The designs, the "let's do this and this, and oh I've always wanted to do this with a villain!" The result is a really cool character.

NAG: So let's talk about the Dual Play feature. I'll be honest: when it was revealed I wondered how the logistics of it would work, especially with regard to the camera and how chaotic encounters can become.

GAZ: We wanted to capture that chaos. I think there is this idea of the iconic *Batman* fight with loads of thugs all around, *Batman* and an ally taking on all comers... I think dual play captures the essence of that really well. I love having Nightwing to control as well, and with Catwoman and Robin, they all have their own fighting styles to bring.

NAG: So how will the Dual Play fit with the rest of the narrative, because we're presuming we won't be switching between characters all the time.

GAZ: So from a narrative perspective, the Nightwing story line is contained. Nightwing is in charge of Blüdhaven, which is a city outside Gotham. After he stopped being Robin, Nightwing, or Dick Grayson, took Blüdhaven under his wing, but Penguin has been moving weapons through Blüdhaven, so Nightwing has come to Gotham to try to stop that from happening. So he and *Batman* are working together on that plotline, and what will happen is that Nightwing will contact you and say that he has a tip on another one of Penguin's cache locations, and you'll go off to meet him and kick ass. **NAG**

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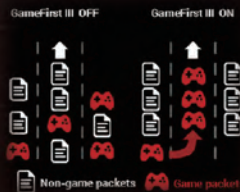
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HARDWIRED

BY NEO SIBEKO

Truth be told!

As you're all aware this is the last printed issue of *NAG* magazine, thus this will be my last Hardwired column that's in print.

One would assume that since it's the last one, I should write something somehow more meaningful than I have previously. Well, that would imply that I never cared about what has been written before and that would not be true. Therefore, you should then know that much like in all other columns before, I'll stick to what it is that occupies my mind and warrants these 800 or so words.

I was unsure if this should be a feature in this issue or keep it here, but then I finally decided it is best kept here. The rest of the magazine should be about what lifts spirits and instills faith going forward in the *NAG* ecosystem and the tech industry. What I will do though is tackle an issue I previously wrote at length about in this very column. That is, editorial reliability and fact checking.

You may not believe it, but when I initially started working here at *NAG* all of nine years ago, I was not comfortable with hardware reviews going through what was said to be "fact checking" by various parties before publishing. My position was that I'm well versed in what I write and I'd not ever make any factual mistakes or state something that was not true. In a way, I felt it was undermining and spoke to a mistrust the authorities had for my work, not within *NAG* perhaps but any distributor, retailer or vendor that had any dealings with *NAG*.

It dawned on me eventually that the reason I have such a reverence and respect for science as a whole, is precisely that. It is always subject to inquiry regardless of who is making the claim. It is an enterprise that aims to deal with only what is true, repeatable, verifiable, and coherent, and what matches with the observable universe. It is a method of probing and, as a tool, it is humanity's greatest achievement as it frees us of our own bias. What I had viewed as disrespect of some sort then changed to appreciation. It allowed me to question my own statements of facts, methodology and everything else I had otherwise taken for granted. It meant my results and my writing could stand on its own as the truth. Eventually that openness and transparency gave me a confidence that was previously unattainable. It meant that I was finally impervious to any attack in a personal capacity. Note that I do not mean individuals may not take issue with my reviews labelling me biased at any point, but one could, for the first time, use the data as an impenetrable shield. It is where any challenge, skepticism or doubt about my words may be met with reliable and repeatable results. After all, it is precisely why I had all the equipment at my disposal in the first place. So that I do not have to take any leap of faith regarding any piece of hardware, software or any technology for that matter. My personal beliefs, emotional state, and anything else would not compromise the results. This is where I am today and that I believe is unlikely to change.

Why I bring this all up is because it will be about a couple

of weeks from now perhaps when you finally read this. Yours truly experienced something contrary to the above at Guru3D. If you're not familiar with the site, it is one of the largest hardware publications on the web today and certainly amongst the oldest. Plainly put, the results of one specific piece of hardware, a component that we so happen to have reviewed in this issue of *NAG* as well, had certain fabricated results. Upon inquiry as to why the numbers were vastly different from those that I was recording for the *NAG* review, I received a lifetime ban from the forum, along with another individual who also sought an explanation. The mere inquiry into a set of results resulted in swift disciplinary action against those that probed the claims. As always upon further investigation by myself, it became clear that I too could produce those results and do so fraudulently. Since I could produce a near identical result, it became very clear that the review featured fabricated performance figures that, in absence of the actual hardware, had numbers tampered with. The reason why this happened is secondary to the fact that in my personal view, I too could have become a victim of my own ego. If you will, a Guru complex of sorts, where one introduces infallibility into a system where there is no space for that kind of thing. It is only through the silent but insistent "fact checking system" at *NAG* that I was saved from inevitably making the same mistakes and bringing not only myself, but also this magazine into disrepute. If you ever wanted to know why you read *NAG*, it is precisely because of such authenticity. As we move entirely into the digital space, you can be sure that this will remain so and if ever it seems we have erred, you should inquire, probe and challenge.

Until we meet again online, ShockG out! **NAG**

“

“What I had viewed as disrespect of some sort, then changed to appreciation ... as it meant my results and my writing could stand on its own as the truth.”



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HOLOLENS

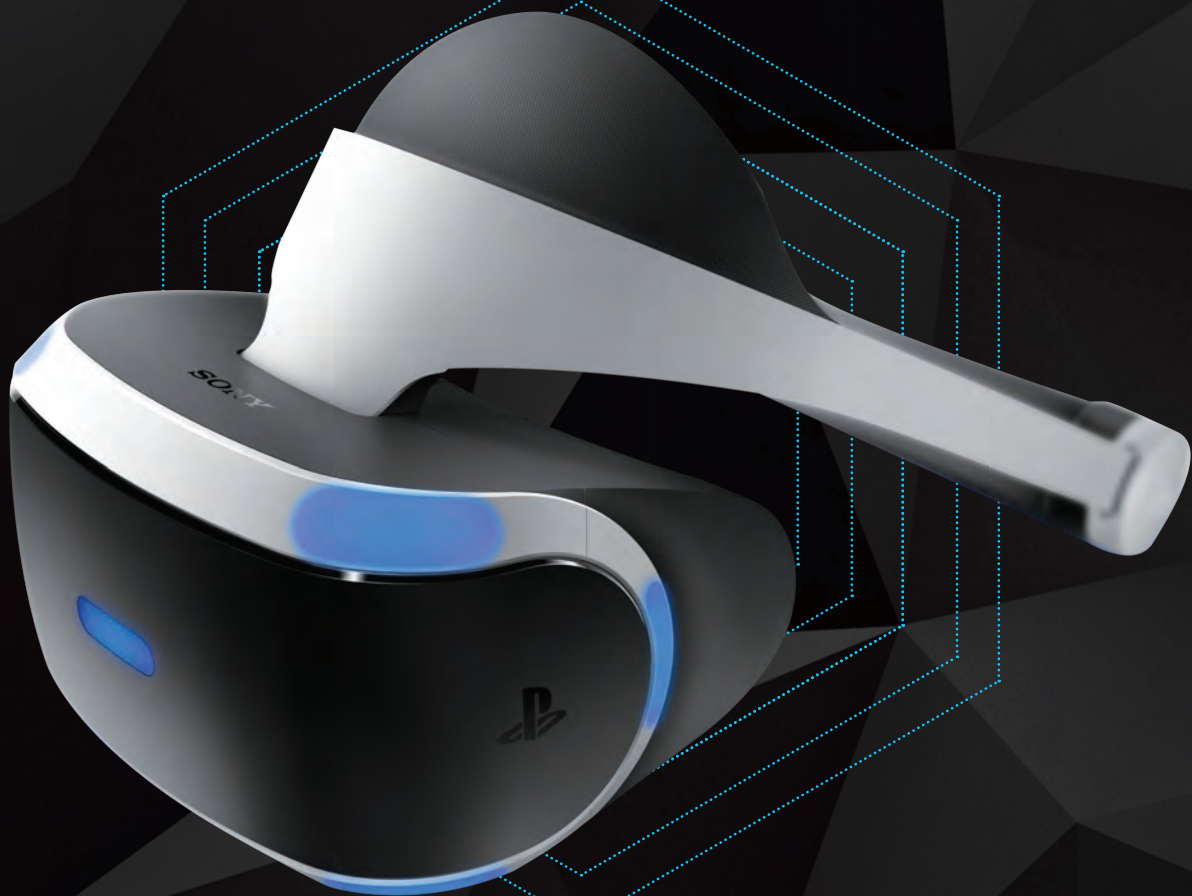
Unless you've been living under a rock for the last several years, you have likely come across the names Oculus, HoloLens, and perhaps to a lesser extent, Project Morpheus. These are product names or, in the case of Project Morpheus, development names for technologies that aim to alter the way in which one interacts with the material or digital environment. In a gaming context, these products will change the way you play games by providing visual stimuli directly to your eyes instead of exclusively relaying it on a screen. All three of these products are material applications of one or two underlying concepts, namely augmented reality and virtual reality.

Before we delve into what makes each product tick we must understand how augmented reality is functionally different from virtual reality. These do not have to be mutually exclusive, but because of the inherent way we interact with them, they do not usually exist in a single product, which would make use of both simultaneously. First, augmented reality, the newer of the two concepts, relies on a real-time live view of the physical world. It uses graphics and audio mainly, to alter what you see and hear within your immediate environment. It essentially enhances your perception of reality, for example giving you information about any

real world item that you would perhaps not have immediate access to, for example, its dimensions, the distance from you, manufacturer, price, history or a near infinite amount of information about the particular item or whatever may be in view. A real example is holding a soft-drink container in your hand and your augmented view of that beverage would allow you to see the breakdown in nutritional value, information about the brewery etc. In another context, you may be able to use your existing environment as a living game world where interactions with NPCs and other game mechanics are reliant on your real environment. On a wall or tabletop, entire worlds could potentially be overlaid.

Virtual reality completely replaces the real world with a simulated or virtual world that is computer generated. Virtual reality most often makes use of stereoscopic head mounted display units that relay the computer generated world to the user. Movement of the head and in modern instances the entire body, is translated into the virtual world. As such, virtual reality can provide a complete virtual world experience that mimics that of the material world.

With those basics covered let's look briefly at what each of these competing products will offer, hopefully within the next twelve months.



PROJECT MORPHEUS

Project Morpheus marks Sony's first foray into VR for consoles after the ill-fated Nintendo Virtual Boy. The difference this time is that the technology is actually there along with the processing power courtesy of the PS4.

One of the key selling points for Project Morpheus is that it, unlike the Oculus Rift, allows for a shared experience. That is, while you adorn the headset spectators are able to share that experience with you on a regular display. This allows them to see what you see, obviously barring the immersion, something that is currently unavailable on the other two reality platforms.

Specs are scant but confirmed is the use of OLED displays, which will result in some rich, vibrant colour reproduction and potentially unmatched brightness levels. Each eye will receive a 960x1080 image, lower in resolution than what the Oculus Rift offers. To offset that however, the refresh rate is at 120Hz, which will go a long way to reducing any motion sickness caused by the lower scan rates.

At 5.7", the display is large, allowing you to resolve fine details with reduced effort. Latency is 18ms, which is quite low, lending the system an almost instantaneous response to user input. This is significant because Sony claims full 360-degree head tracking freedom with matching 3D positional audio support. The PS Move controller will continue to work as a viable means for interacting with this virtual world and together should form a formidable playing experience that is competitive in some degree to what the Oculus Touch offers. A major advantage at present being that the PS Move is already on the market and usable today.

RIGS, a fast-paced 3v3 FPS, is one of the games that Sony used as a vehicle for promoting Project Morpheus and its eSports ambitions at E3 2015. However, more titles are sure to follow, and given the vast list of third party developers for the Sony ecosystem, title support may come quicker than it does for any other system.





OCULUS RIFT

Undoubtedly, the head mounted display that caused the re-emergence of virtual reality in the mainstream market. Initially started as a Kickstarter program, it is at present in the hands of Facebook as Oculus VR's parent company. This unit promised and still aims to campaign for a professional level VR experience on the PC. It makes use of a 2160x1200 resolution (1080x1200 per eye) with a 90Hz refresh rate. The field of view is particularly wide with a great reproduction of the normal field of vision that a human has. Spatial audio is via RealSpace3D technology delivered over the integrated headphones. The Oculus system is in two parts, with the positional tracking unit separate from the head mounted display. This unit, called Constellation, uses an infrared camera in conjunction with infrared LEDs on the head mounted display. Tracking is via monitoring the position of these LEDs and their blink pattern. All of which can be monitored to within sub-millimeter accuracy. Retail kits of the Oculus Rift will ship with a single Constellation tracking unit, but additional units

may be purchased for even finer movement tracking.

Input for the Oculus Rift is via a pair of controllers called the Oculus Touch. There are two such wireless controllers for each hand. One is for grabbing and one for shooting and both are fully tracked within the 3D space by the Constellation system. These controllers can be represented in the virtual world in a context appropriate form (be it a sword, a shield, etc.) as well. The Oculus Touch controllers in addition allow the system to detect finer details such as individual fingers. Unfortunately, Oculus Touch is not presently part of the retail Oculus Rift package. It will need to be purchased separately when it eventually makes its way to market.

Titles thus far which feature support for the Oculus Rift to different degrees include *Left 4 Dead*, *Skyrim*, *Half-Life 2*, and *Star Citizen* amongst others. This list will inevitably increase, as we get closer to the beginning of 2016, which is supposedly, when the retail version is to appear.



HOLOLENS

What Microsoft terms as a mixed reality-computing platform is in many ways an advanced version of Google Glass. It essentially functions the same way, but has the unique advantage of being a self-contained system that does not tether to any computer or device. It features a high power HPU (holographic processing unit) along with a CPU and GPU that integrates data from several sensors. It collates these into spatial mapping, gesture recognition, and voice and speech recognition as well. Since this is an AR system, the information is displayed on a visor. The HoloLens uses a tinted front visor enclosed in a transparent combiner lens in which the projected image is displayed. As such, only a specific part of the display is able to show AR content.

One major downside to HoloLens at present is that it features a very limited field of view at only 30 by 17.5 degrees (where the combiner lens is focused). Outside of this window, the system doesn't work at present. Within it however is where Microsoft has hedged its bets. For instance, applications that are marked as

universal Windows applications will function in a similar or at least familiar manner be it on your Windows phone, tablet, or desktop.

Unlike the other reality devices, HoloLens relies entirely on its built-in hardware capabilities to create the worlds that you would interact with in a game. There are no details on the hardware yet, but it hints at Intel's Cherry Trail chipset, four 1080p colour cameras and at least one infrared sensor. If indeed it's based on Cherry Trail, it will likely support wireless charging and several other yet announced features. HoloLens, as stated by Microsoft, is a platform and tool which may be leveraged for both productivity and entertainment. In the gaming context, we will have to see which titles support the device. Given a price said to be above \$400 USD, it may initially be only for the deep-pocketed gamers. Right now, *Minecraft* is the single biggest game with support for HoloLens. We will have to wait for future title support closer to the time of release that is said to be later this year. **NAG**

SPECS

KEYS / 104
 INPUTS / none
 MULTIMEDIA KEYS / yes



Canyon Hazard CNS-SKB7 keyboard

SUPPLIER > Livdigital
WEBSITE > www.asbis.co.za
ERP > R391

Canyon's Hazard is a bit of an odd keyboard. Its base is comprised of not much more than a thin, paint-covered layer of aluminium, which helps house the board's innards and gives it a very low profile. It lends the keyboard a strong, yet unconventional first impression, and makes its construction feel robust and able to take loads of punishment – but it's not enough to mask the fact that the board's design is intrinsically flawed.

When it comes to gaming, there's not much wrong with the Hazard. Aside from some iffy, semi-customisable backlighting (which isn't nearly as bright and effective as I'd like), the gaming experience with the board is perfectly fine. But for typing, things aren't quite so rosy. The low profile of the board's base makes typing on its high-resting keys a tad uncomfortable, especially since there's not much by way of a wrist rest on offer. In short bursts it's okay, but when typing for long periods of time, your wrists may begin to feel the sting of discomfort.

Still, at less than R400 it's not a bad choice if your budget's restricted. It's got nice features like a Windows key lock, multimedia keys and more. Obviously there's no competing with the more ostentatious keyboards out there, but I imagine the Hazard will nevertheless be a completely dependable, nicely affordable workhorse – provided you plan to use it more for gaming than for typing. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

SCORE ■

07 *The Hazard's worth considering if you're on a tight budget, but it's difficult to overlook some of its design flaws.*

- + Sturdy aluminium construction / Inexpensive
- Typing experience inevitably becomes uncomfortable / Weak backlighting

SPECS

DIMENSIONS / 322x271x4mm
 WATER RESISTANT / yes



NAG DREAM MACHINE

SteelSeries DeX gaming mouse pad

SUPPLIER > Megarom
WEBSITE > www.steelseries.com
ERP > R599

Now, I know what you're thinking. "R599 for a mouse pad? I could buy thousands of games with that sort of money! Or, you know, one AAA game. Three or four if they're indies. Games!" But hear me out, because the SteelSeries DeX is actually quite a nice thing, provided mouse pads are your luxury of choice and you wouldn't mind eating one when you run out of money mid-month because you spent it all on a fancy mousing surface.

Essentially what SteelSeries has done is pumped a bunch of science into the DeX, and what's popped out the other end is very fancy. Removing it from its packaging, it's obvious that it's a quality product. It's small, but unexpectedly heavy. Its underside is made of super-grippy bright orange silicone, which ensures that the mat doesn't move from where it's placed. The top surface, meanwhile, is specially textured in such a way that the mouse glides along its partially raised surface with minimal friction, simultaneously ensuring that your mouse's tracking capabilities aren't at all compromised.

The result is undeniably impressive. There's almost no friction with the DeX during use, and yet it picks up every movement with effortless precision. It's made to last: the DeX's heat-bonded edges promise to never fray or wear down, and it's water resistant as well, so you can wipe it and get it wet without fear of consequence. The only concerns I have lie in its small surface area and its price, because for R599 I'd expect a mouse pad a bit bigger than the DeX. Then again, this might be the last mouse mat you'll ever have to buy, so perhaps the price is justified. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

SCORE ■

09 *If you love mouse pads almost as much you hate money, this is probably the mouse pad for you.*

- + Surface generates almost no friction / All-round superior quality
- That price / Small surface area

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SPECS

MAX READ/WRITE / 540/480MB/s
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 NAND / Toshiba 19nm MLC NAND flash



Galax Gamer SSD 120GB

SUPPLIER > Rebel Tech
WEBSITE > www.rebeltech.co.za
ERP > R999

Every time we take a look at the entry-level SSD market, the prices are lower and the performance better. Galax is a brand that's no stranger to affordable gaming components, and it's great to see that they've decided to branch into the SSD market. And not just with an off-the-shelf controller, either, which shows a commitment to this market that has us very interested in what the company will produce in the future.

For now, Galax is happy to stick to a couple of basic options for consumers in the form of 120 and 240GB offerings. Both drives feature the same SATA controller (dubbed Heracles), which has been developed in partnership with JMicron. The result of this controller, at least in the 120GB drive which we tested, showed some solid speeds: average sequential read/write of 500/430MB/s (not too far from the manufacturer claimed 540/480MB/s), and random 4k read/writes of 32/105MB/s. These scores should be considered good in comparison to other entry-level drives, which is exactly what you want at this price point: value for money. With performance like this you'll have no trouble in smashing load times and reducing texture-streaming bottlenecks during gameplay.

I hope that we'll see larger drives from Galax soon, but this approach of starting small is probably a smart decision. Between the small drive sizes and brutally simple packaging (just the drive and a token SATA cable is included), this is certainly starting as small as you can possibly get. These days, 120GB is really too limiting to do much with, so the 240GB option (at R1,699) is better value, but at that price the competition becomes stiff. Galax is going to need to knuckle down if it intends to compete in this segment.

NAG
 Geoff Burrows

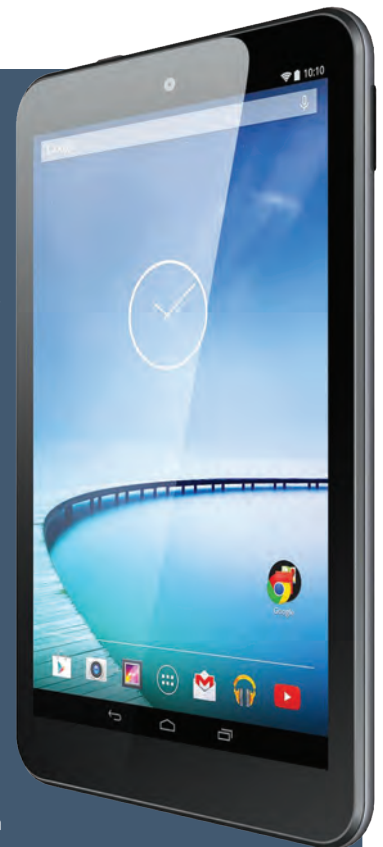
SCORE

08 This should be considered the entry-level point of SSDs: price vs. performance is very much in line.

- + Good performance / Fair pricing
- Limiting capacity / 240GB is better value for money

SPECS

CPU / Quad-core @ 1.8GHz
 RAM / 2GB
 DISPLAY / 8" @ 2048x1536
 STORAGE / 16GB on-board
 OPERATING SYSTEM / Android 4.4 Kitkat



Hisense Sero 8 Pro

SUPPLIER > Hisense South Africa
WEBSITE > www.hisense.co.za
ERP > R2,999

The Hisense brand is one you usually associate with TVs and refrigerators, but their line-up of portable smart devices is impressive these days, although not particularly vast. That lack of variety works for the best, though; with just a few tablets currently on offer – including the lower-spec Sero 7 – Hisense is clear about its target at the mid-range of tablets.

Despite its modest price, the Sero 8 Pro feels high-end. From the metal rear casing to the high-resolution screen, the Sero 8 Pro looks every bit as slick as tablets that cost twice this (or more). The tapered shape of the device combined with its light weight and thin profile makes holding it a pleasure, although the lack of hard buttons (besides the power switch) is something that I can never get used to. Under the hood is a quad-core CPU and 2GB of RAM, and while this device received decent benchmark scores (putting it about on par with the Google Nexus 5) and is likely to handle your most demanding games and apps with ease, task-switching surprises by being a bit laggy. Perhaps that's due to the large amount of preinstalled apps. Thankfully most of these can be removed so you'll have as close to a stock installation as possible with little effort.

Completing the offer is the expectedly low-quality camera, a good battery, and even stereo speakers, although the speakers are only on one side of the device, so the stereo effect is lost when used in landscape mode (an odd design decision, given stereo is most useful while watching movies).

NAG
 Geoff Burrows

SCORE

09 At this price-point, the Hisense Sero 8 Pro is practically unmatched. Aside from a couple of niggles, you won't be disappointed.

- + Good gaming performance / Great ergonomics / High quality look and feel
- Loads of bloatware preinstalled

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SPECS

SCREEN / 24-inch TN panel
 NATIVE RESOLUTION / 1920x1080
 MAXIMUM REFRESH RATE / 144Hz
 INPUT / D-Sub / DVI-D / 2x HDMI / DisplayPort
 OUTPUT / Headphone out



LG 24GM77 gaming monitor

SUPPLIER > Rebel Tech
 WEBSITE > www.rebeltech.co.za
 ERP > R4,699

Now that gaming monitors are officially a thing, LG's thrown its hat in the ring with a new range of gaming-driven displays, among which you'll find the 24GM77. LG's website claims that it's especially designed for FPS games, but that's typical marketing fluff. In reality it's just a superb monitor, and you'll be happy with it no matter how you choose to use it.

The 24GM77's screen can be raised, lowered, tilted and swivelled as needed – and in so doing you'll discover that viewing the display from almost any angle barely distorts the image it produces. Colours hardly warp at all, and despite a slight dip in brightness, the maximum viewing angle remains undeniably impressive, far better than that of most monitors on the market.

Its most important feature is its 144Hz refresh rate, which ensures that the image isn't at all blurred, even during extreme on-screen motion. Apparently this is what makes it great for FPS gaming (because you're less likely to miss minute details – like enemies moving in the distance – between frames), but honestly, my eyes can barely tell the difference between playing shooters at 60Hz and 144Hz. Even so, motion on the display is noticeably smoother, so it must be doing something useful.

During general use, the colour balance and brightness of the display are excellent, and there's a range of preset picture settings to choose from within the various menus. If you're specifically looking for a 4K monitor, this isn't the one for you, and anyone who's expecting proprietary tech designed to protect their eyes and keep them comfortable would be better off looking elsewhere. But if all you want is a high-quality monitor that's capable of 3D gaming at 60fps, or super-smooth non-3D gaming, this is definitely an option. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

SCORE

08

If you're on the hunt for a monitor specially geared for gaming, this is a worthy contender.

- + Incredible viewing angles / 144Hz refresh rate / Good colour balance
- Not capable of 4K resolutions / Lack of comfort-enhancing tech

SPECS

FREQUENCY RESPONSE / 10Hz – 28kHz
 DRIVER UNITS / 50mm
 IMPEDANCE / 35 ohms
 MICROPHONE SENSITIVITY / -42db



SteelSeries Siberia v3 Prism headset

SUPPLIER > Megarom
 WEBSITE > www.steelseries.com
 ERP > R1,999

The Siberia line of headsets has always been a winner for SteelSeries. Each new Siberia set that's released features a near-identical physical design to its predecessor, which is why they always boast exceptional comfort and noise-blocking capabilities. The Siberia v3 Prism follows the same trend, but adds a range of customisable colour options into the mix.

It's an attractive pair of headphones for many reasons, and comfort is chief among them. SteelSeries has opted for the same highly flexible, comfortably springy headband, which effortlessly adjusts to the shape and size of whatever head is currently donning it. The large round ear cups generate enough pressure to seal out background noise more effectively than most headsets out there, but are nicely padded and don't generate any noticeable discomfort, even during long gaming sessions.

Audio performance is excellent. It's at times a bit flatter than I'd like, and it lacks the overall clarity and low-range punch of certain other headsets, but you'd be hard pressed to find much that's technically wrong with the audio produced by the v3 no matter how you choose to use it. The SteelSeries Engine software does provide an equalizer as well, so you can easily adjust the audio balance to your liking. Said software is also where you'll find the options for customising the v3's various lighting doohickies – which are nice to have, but ultimately superfluous.

Given that so much thought has evidently gone into the v3's design, it's odd that SteelSeries hasn't included in-line mic and volume controls. Granted, volume can be adjusted via your keyboard's multimedia controls (if it has them), but it's still a glaring oversight in an otherwise impressive headset. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

SCORE

08

As with all their Siberia headsets, SteelSeries has done a great job with the v3 Prism.

- + Excellent audio performance / Comfortable / Great noise blocking
- No in-line controls

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GIGABYTE G1.Gaming GTX 980 Ti Super Overclock



NAG DREAM
MACHINE

SUPPLIER > Gigabyte WEBSITE > www.gigabyte.com ERP > R13,499

Half a year after the initial launch of the GM200-based GeForce GTX 980, NVIDIA unveiled the fully enabled Maxwell GM200 GPU in the form of the TITAN-X. A \$1,000 GPU, which on our shores is roughly R17,000. For that price, you receive plenty of pixel pushing and compute power within its 8 billion gates. The specifications briefly read as follows: 12GB of GDDR5 memory operating at 7GHz for an effective 336GB/s of memory bandwidth. 96 render outputs (this determines the number of pixels that can be displayed on your screen per cycle), 192 texture samplers, and 3,072 compute cores. All of that made the TITAN-X the fastest single GPU solution to date. Of course UHD/4K was and remains the target resolution for such a graphics card, but at that price it is out of reach for many consumers and if we must admit, borders on the ridiculous.

You may have expected that NVIDIA would release a cut-down version of the GM200 chip, and indeed the GTX 980 Ti is exactly that. Dubbed GM200-A310, it is an identical piece of silicon to that featured on the TITAN-X. The only difference is that it has reduced the number of compute cores by disabling two of the total 24 SMM units (each SMM unit houses 64 compute cores) and associated parts of the GPU. Unlike before with previous architectures where doing so would also affect the memory cross bar, render outputs, cache and of course texture samplers, with Maxwell GPUs NVIDIA has de-coupled many of those units. As a result the GTX 980 Ti, despite losing out on two SMM units, still retains the full 384-bit bus (unlike the GTX 970 which only has a 224/32-bit bus), 96 render outputs, and full complement cache, but has texture samplers reduced to 176.

If all this means nothing to you, it translates into the GTX 980 Ti offering performance that is on paper between

five to ten percent slower than that of the TITAN-X. However, you will find that the difference in performance is not that pronounced. In fact, because the GTX 980 Ti only houses 6GB of memory, its power draw is reduced from that of the TITAN-X and that reduction allows the GPU to reach a higher boost clock more often. As a result, the performance gap between the two GPUs is in reality four to five percent. Given the price differences, the GTX 980 Ti is definitely a better purchase for gamers and power users.

As if the standard GTX 980 Ti was not enough, GIGABYTE has customised their G1.Gaming model in a way that not only lowers temperatures and adds an aesthetic that is not available on the reference product, but most importantly it increases performance dramatically. In reverse order, we will look at performance first.

The standard base clock for the G1.Gaming is 1,152MHz, which means its base clock is higher than that of the standard GTX 980 Ti boost clock by 75MHz (1,075MHz). As you know, the boost clock that is stated is

always the minimum clock frequency that the GPU will operate at provided it is within the predefined thermal and power envelope. In reality, the operating frequency is much higher. For instance, the standard GTX 980 Ti will often reach clock speeds of up to 1.19GHz in games, which is precisely why it manages to close the gap to the TITAN-X, which may not reach 1,120MHz. On the G1.Gaming the boost clock stipulated is 1,279MHz, but it will often reach clock speeds as high as 1,392MHz. The lowest frequency we have recorded even with the GPU operating at 80°C (fan speed intentionally locked to 35%) is





SPECS

CORE / GM200-A310 (28nm) 1,190MHz (1,291MHz boost)
PROCESSORS / 2,816
RENDER OUTPUTS / 96/176
MEMORY / 6,144MB GDDR5 7GHz (4,46GB/sec)
API / DirectX 12 / OpenGL 4.5 / OpenCL / PhysX / CUDA

along with protecting components during handling. It is appreciated as always, but do be advised that this back plate will prove prohibitive to cooling in SLI configurations where the graphics cards are close together. On motherboards where there are several PCI Express slots between the two graphics cards, this poses less of a problem but be aware of this as it may need removal.

Other than that, this is identical to the previous G1.Gaming GTX 980, so it inherits the Flex display technology and you may use up to five displays simultaneously, each of them supporting resolutions as high as UHD. GIGABYTE includes no cables or any other accessories, but this is not an issue, as these accessories more often than not tend to be of little to no use.

As you may have gathered, this card packs in plenty of performance. It is the fastest graphics card we have tested and as such deserves a place in our Dream Machine. There are bound to be plenty of competing cards each with similar or even higher out the box overclocks, but thus far, none manages to bring together the cool operating temperatures, LED customisation, display flexibility and fantastic performance like the GIGABYTE solutions. The GIGABYTE G1.Gaming GTX 980 Ti is at present unmatched when it comes to offering the best gaming experience on the PC. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SCORE

09 *GIGABYTE has set the bar for GTX 980 Ti performance for competitors. Right now this is the fastest graphics card money can buy.*

+ Incredible performance / Runs relatively cool and quiet / Flex display technology

- No separate VRM cooling plate

BENCHMARKS

3DMARK Fire Strike Ultra	>	(4K): 4,512
METRO Last Light	>	(4K Very High): 40.96fps
Grand Theft Auto V	>	(4K Highest detail level): 46.48fps

1,300MHz. This difference is what makes the GIGABYTE G1.Gaming consistently faster than the GTX TITAN-X, in many situations it is considerably so. Thus with this card you are always guaranteed performance that exceeds that of the significantly more expensive GTX TITAN-X.

If you are concerned about the graphics card featuring only half the frame buffer, rest assured that there is not a single title at present that is capable of filling up the 6GB memory. There may be games that allocate the entire 6GB, however, these titles do so even with the TITAN-X as they merely reserve the space without using it. Thus, UHD/4K gaming is taken care of by 6GB of memory and any more is hardly necessary. Having said that, with titles such as *Metro: Last Light Redux* and *GTA V* you may still desire two GPUs for a consistent 60fps experience.

Titles such as *Dragon Age: Inquisition* at maximum graphics

fidelity, barring anti-aliasing manage frame rates that are only in the 20s at 3840x2160. Thus, we may not still be there when it comes to UHD gaming in every title as we are with FHD using a single GPU.

GIGABYTE has once again used a 600 watt-capable WindForce cooler. Updated for aesthetic purposes, it features the same WindForce LED, but this time the LED lighting is available in seven different colours. LED lighting is everywhere lately, even on motherboards so this is not surprising. It does not add much to the visual appeal of the graphics card, but if you have a themed case it will come in handy, as it will allow the GPU to match the rest of your components at least where coloured LED lighting is concerned.

As with the previous generation cards, GIGABYTE includes a back plate for the G1.Gaming GTX 980 Ti. This back plate serves the usual purpose of cooling PCB components while adding structural rigidity

MSI X99A XPOWER AC

SUPPLIER > MSI WEBSITE > www.msi.com ERP > R6,999

Since the original MSI XPOWER X99S motherboard, MSI has updated this high-end overclocking board and brought us the A revision. As with other vendors, barring ASUS, this is the second attempt at rectifying the problems presented by the initial outing, making this version the most refined X99 motherboard from MSI, barring the upcoming GODLIKE.

The S version in our current Dream Machine is being retired in favour of this updated model, with MSI updating the CPU socket and replacing it with their proprietary Turbo Socket. Basically what this means is that more pins (at least 50) will be added to the CPU socket. This change in socket allows the user to not only set higher uncore/cache line voltages, but it also helps with memory overclocking headroom.

Previously, attaining frequencies above 2,666MHz for DRAM was problematic, whereas with this model, memory kits with frequencies of up to 3,400MHz work with little to no trouble. These two changes are important as they unlock a new level of performance for systems, increasing memory bandwidth and internal CPU communication and transaction speed. All of which yield notable gains in competitive overclocking benchmarks. CPU sub-system dependant workloads and in some cases increase game performance, especially for multi-GPU systems.

As such this is an important change and one that serves to complete what was an otherwise sublime motherboard from MSI.

The Turbo Socket alone however would not be enough to move anyone to spend nearly R7,000 on a motherboard when there are significantly cheaper alternatives. For that kind of spend there has to be more than just an overclocking or performance centric change. To that end, MSI has added USB 3.1 connectivity, courtesy of the ASMedia ASM1142 controller. You

will find two of these ports on the rear IO with the rest of the connectivity options. These two ports plus another eight USB 3.0 and two USB 2.0 make it the most we have seen on any MSI IO panel thus far. In addition, two Intel gigabit LAN ports (I218-V and I210-AT) are available and they are complemented by an Intel dual-band wireless AC Wi-Fi plus Bluetooth 4.0 module. These should be familiar to most because they have been around for several generations. As you can tell, communications options are of the highest performance, latest standards and at maximum compatibility.

Ten SATA 6GBps ports are made available for you including two SATA Express ports in case you ever find such a drive. However we suspect many will be more interested in the M.2 connectivity which is wired to the CPU PCIe root complex for up to 32GB/s data transfers. This bandwidth of course depends on the CPU you're using, the number of graphics cards installed, and how many USB 3.0/3.1 devices are in use. All of these are reliant on the total PCIe bandwidth available, so those who would be using the Core i7 5820K for instance should be mindful of this potential limitation to available bandwidth.

Package wise, you'll find an OC fan stand for cooling memory, the VRM and all other components around the CPU socket. For competitive overclockers you can easily use this OC fan stand to blow cold air away from the CPU container and prevent rapid build-up of condensation.

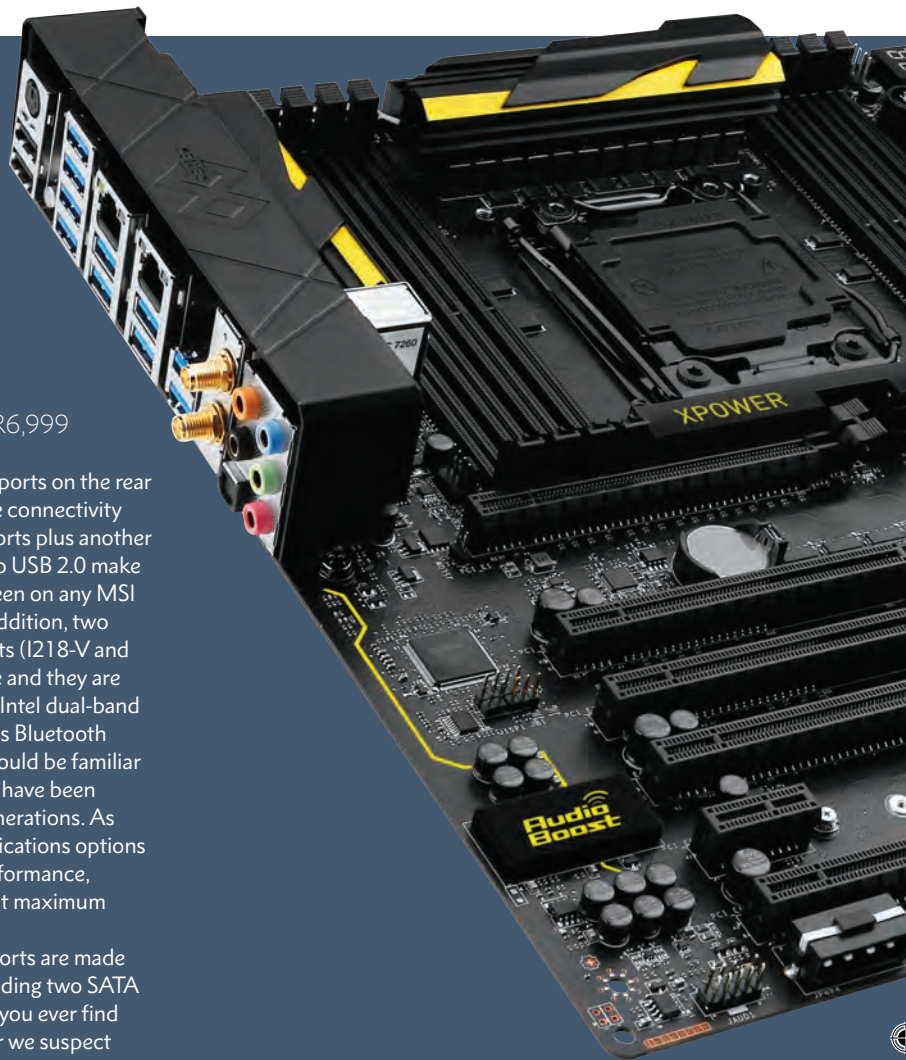
MSI's OC-Pen 8GB pen drive returns, which you can use to store benchmarks, drivers, BIOS profiles, and BIOS updates. It may only be 8GB but it is more than enough for all the above. The USB drive alone wouldn't be much of a feature, but it so happens that the board has a USB port mounted close to the SATA ports. So there's no need to reach all the way to the back of the motherboard to save validation

screenshots and the like when using an open test bench. It is in these little conveniences where MSI's package leaves a lasting impression.

Yes this board is pretty pricey but what you're getting is the most complete X99 overclocking motherboard. In a way, this is a special motherboard because it looks as if there just may not be many more dedicated overclocking motherboards going forward, from any vendor.

Where performance is concerned, the X99A XPOWER nails the efficiency, delivering predictable performance in every game or synthetic test you can throw at it. This speaks of highly refined firmware which should be expected given just how impressive the UEFI is on this motherboard. Where interfaces are concerned MSI has the best within the market and the easiest to navigate. Not only is it comprehensive, it is lightning quick and logically laid out. There simply isn't another interface that you'll find that will match this one. It is something other vendors could learn from.

Ultimately there isn't anything to dislike about the XPOWER. Yes it has some memory tuning challenges,



SPECS

CHIPSET / Intel X99
MEMORY / 8x 280-pin DDR4
CPU SUPPORT / LGA 2011-v3
EXPANSION / 3xPCIe x16, 1x PCIe x4, 1x PCIe x1
SIZE / E-ATX



NAG DREAM MACHINE

SPECS

WI-FI FREQUENCY / Dual-band 2.4 + 5GHz
PROTOCOL / IEEE 802.11ac
ETHERNET / 4x gigabit ports
ENCRYPTION / WPA/WPA2 with SPI
DLNA CERTIFIED / Yes



NAG HARDWARE AWARD



Linksys XAC1900

SUPPLIER > Linksys
WEBSITE > www.linksys.com
ERP > R4,999

A DSL routers are generally fairly straightforward devices, but you know you've got a fancy one when there are two devices in the box, and three aerials that need to be attached. Such is the case with the Linksys XAC1900, which builds on the manufacturer's previous AC1900 by throwing in a modem. That modem, curiously, takes the form of the afore-mentioned second device, a "power modem" as Linksys calls it, which doubles as the AC adaptor instead of the more conventional integrated approach. While this configuration is undoubtedly uncommon, it has the advantage of helping to keep down production costs and ensures that the already sizeable router doesn't take up any more desk space.

In action, this mammoth device performs well in most departments. Wi-Fi performance is stellar, permitting about as much throughput as your wireless device can handle, given the range and wall/obstacle configuration of your home or office. Where things are less impressive is within the web-based user interface, which is prone to lag, and I can't shake the feeling that visual bling was the trade-off for useful information readouts. If you're used to the likes of a WRT or similar, then the XAC1900 might come across as needlessly flashy. Thankfully there are some useful settings if you take the time to dig, like "media prioritisation", which is just another word for QoS (Quality of Service). Rounded off with two USB ports for quick network-attached storage or printers, the XAC1900 serves admirably and should be just the ticket for anyone looking for an easy yet powerful modem/router combo. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

but those are isolated. With each firmware update, these are ironed out and overclocking headroom is improved. This is not to say there is any set of memory we know of that won't work out the box, but it concerns the competitive overclocker mostly. For instance you'd not be able to operate some Hynix-based kits at 3,400MHz – C12. It's not an easy thing to do on any motherboard and there are no sets sold with such timings, thus it shouldn't be of concern to the vast majority of users. For those who would care for such things, hand tuning of all the available memory options is a necessity, a lengthy process but one that would be equally challenging on any other motherboard that doesn't have a built-in profile for that particular set.

The MSI X99A XPOWER AC took an already great motherboard and made it better. For the ultimate X99 powerhouse, you will not find a better motherboard than this one. This one comes highly recommended. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SCORE**09**

This is by far the best overclocking motherboard MSI has ever made, with great performance and an incredible number of features. It is, in a word, brilliant.

- +** Best UEFI interface in the business / Packed with value add features / USB 3.1 capability
- Memory compatibility still a little flaky / That price

SCORE**08**

If you're on the hunt for something to maximise your Wi-Fi performance and aren't too interested in getting techie with your router, the XAC1900 is a great choice.

- +** Great Wi-Fi performance / USB 3.0 NAS support / Easy-to-use interface / Optional mobile phone-based interface
- Interface might be too simple for some / Somewhat sluggish interface

ALIENWARE ALPHA STEAM MACHINE

WEBSITE > www.alienware.com/landings/alpha ERP > R12,500



Valve's Steam OS is so close around the corner we nearly bumped into it on the way to work this morning, and with each passing day, hardware manufacturers who long ago committed to building their own Steam Machines are rolling them out. This particular offering is from Alienware, and packs in some impressive specs to make it worthy of taking a place alongside your dedicated gaming consoles – that's the idea of Steam Machines.

CONTROL FREAK

Alienware has developed a custom user interface called Alpha UI. It's designed to be used with a game controller (although keyboard and mouse work fine too), and can be accessed through Windows by a separate user login. This means you can't quickly switch between Alpha UI and Windows desktop, which takes a bit of getting used to, but you can jump straight into Steam (in its controller-friendly Big Picture mode), as well as change a few basic settings like audio volume, Wi-Fi access, and the like. Of course you're free to disregard the Alpha UI and just

use Steam in Windows desktop mode, in Big Picture mode or not.

COLOUR ME IMPRESSED

While the Alpha UI can't be customised (you're stuck with a bold red colour scheme), the two LEDs on the front of the console itself can be changed with a variety of colour and brightness options.

UNDER THE HOOD

To ensure that the Alpha retains a small footprint, Alienware has opted to go for notebook hardware on the inside. Truthfully, this pushes up the

price to levels that are approaching unreasonable, and we'd much rather see hardware manufacturers adopt mini-ITX-based machines. Heck, if the Xbox One can get away with its current size, we see no reason why a Steam Machine actually *needs* to be this small. Still, at this size it's certainly a nifty device, and will be perfect for those who frequent LANs and are looking for something ultra-portable.

CHANGE COMES FROM WITHIN

While the Alienware Alpha isn't designed to be upgraded with the



same ease as ASUS's own Steam Machine, it's still possible to pop it open and change the memory, hard drive, and wireless card, provided you don't mind fiddling with a few screws.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

Steam Machine
Black Xbox 360 controller with wireless adaptor
Windows 8.1 recovery flash drive

IN AND OUT

4x USB (two rear, two front)
HDMI input and output
Optical output
Gigabit Ethernet
Built-in Wi-Fi

HOW DOES IT HANDLE?

In-game performance is about what one would expect from a high-end gaming notebook. That is: not bad. You'll be able to run most games at medium to high settings at the device's

native 1080p resolution. Very high or ultra settings are likely beyond the scope of this machine's hardware unless you're willing to drop the resolution to sub-HD levels.

KEEP YOUR OPTIONS OPEN

The machine we tested is the top-of-the-range Alpha, but Alienware has taken the reasonable approach of offering three other models: Core i3-based systems with either 4GB or 8GB of RAM, and an i5 system with 8GB. All models use a custom NVIDIA GPU which can be likened to a souped-up GTX 860M, and is equipped with its own 2GB of RAM. If cost is an important factor for you, then any of the lower-spec machines will probably be a good choice, and still be close enough competition to the dedicated gaming consoles with which they battle. **NAG**

SPECS

DIMENSIONS >

200x200x25mm

CPU >

Core i7 4765T @ 2GHz

RAM >

8GB DDR3L 1,600MHz

OS >

Windows 8.1 Pro

GPU >

Custom NVIDIA GTX 860M+ 2GB

STORAGE >

1TB HDD

SUMMARY

PROS >

Good performance
Tiny size
Bundled Xbox controller

CONS >

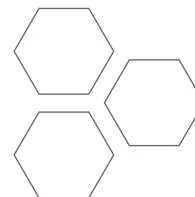
User switching

ALTERNATIVES >

ASUS GR8
Gigabyte Brix Pro



**NAG
HARDWARE
AWARD**



MOSH Pit

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

BRAVEN 805 BLUETOOTH WIRELESS SPEAKER

- ◆ **SUPPLIER** Above & Beyond Distributors
- ◆ **WEBSITE** www.above-beyond.co.za
- ◆ **RRP** R2,999

The Braven 805 is meticulously designed to offer an unrivalled pairing of exceptional sound quality with slick, clean aesthetics. Its high price tag is intimidating, but if you're on the hunt for one of the finest Bluetooth speakers that money can buy, this is definitely right up there with the best of them. It's got a wireless range of up to ten metres, promises up to 18 hours of continuous usage, and has a built-in 4,400mAh backup battery so you can charge your portable devices on the go.

In addition to Bluetooth 2.1 (with EDR) support, the 805 also features 3.5mm stereo input (so it'll work with pretty much any device), and if you have two 8-series Braven speakers, you can link them together wirelessly to produce even more punchy audio via a true stereo setup. The 805 charges via USB and features a noise-cancelling microphone and speakerphone that enable you to take hands-free calls while listening to your favourite tunes. There's also an "SRS WOW HD bass-enhanced music setting", which not only has a very fancy name, but also adjusts the texture of the audio output.



OLLOCLIP 4-IN-1 PHOTO LENS

- ◆ **SUPPLIER** Above & Beyond Distributors
- ◆ **WEBSITE** www.above-beyond.co.za
- ◆ **RRP** R999

Designed for use exclusively with Apple's iPhone 6 and iPhone 6 Plus, the olloclip 4-in-1 clips onto the top edge of your phone, aligns itself with the device's camera lens, and thereby allows you to have greater control over the photos you're able to snap with your iPhone 6's already impressive camera. It features four lenses in total, with the two defaults being fisheye and wide-angle lenses – but unscrew those and you'll find a pair of 10x and 15x macro lenses hidden beneath.

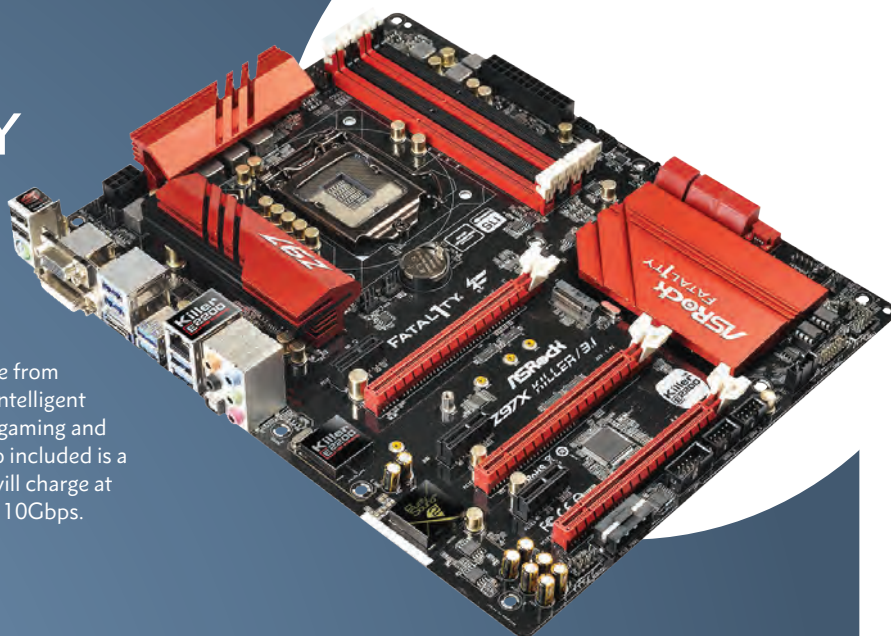
It'll work with both the front- and rear-facing cameras, and comes with a set of three detachable plastic "pendants" (in various colours) used for storing the olloclip on a lanyard or keyring when it's not in use.



ASROCK FATALITY Z97X KILLER/3.1

- **SUPPLIER** Rebel Tech
- **WEBSITE** www.rebeltech.co.za
- **RRP** R2,999

This gaming motherboard is part of the Killer series range from ASRock, so what you're getting here is the Killer E2200 Intelligent Networking Platform which will ensure that your online gaming and media streaming are always performing at optimum. Also included is a PCIe x4 add-on card for USB 3.1/A+C, so your devices will charge at twice the speed while data transfer rates can reach up to 10Gbps.



WHOOSH! SCREEN SHINE SCREEN CLEANER

- **SUPPLIER** Above & Beyond Distributors
- **WEBSITE** www.above-beyond.co.za
- **RRP** R99 (8ml) / R199 (30ml) / R349 (100ml + 8ml)



Anyone who's ever used anything that even remotely resembles a touchscreen knows that they tend to get terribly grubby, no matter how many layers of mittens you wear, or how many times you dip your hands in vats of bleach to keep them clean. Mercifully, we've got screen cleaners like Whoosh! Screen Shine to ensure that your screen-toting gadgets are kept fresh and smudge-free.

This screen-cleaning spray works with any

display, so your PC monitor or TV will benefit from it as well. The packaging suggests you'll get about 100 shots out of the 8ml canister before it runs dry. It's apparently non-toxic and free from ammonia and alcohol, so you can safely use it to pacify children when they're going Full Maniac. Each pack of Whoosh! comes with a handy anti-microbial cloth, and the spray will supposedly help your screens resist those pesky fingerprints.

CMSTORM SWIFT-RX XL

- **SUPPLIER** CoolerMaster
- **WEBSITE** www.coolermaster.com
- **RRP** R430

Have you ever wished for a humongous mouse pad? Have you ever looked at your piddly little mouse pad, and wiped away a tear of inadequacy while cautiously Googling for "big pads"? Well dry those eyes, little one, and cast them to this megalithic, gigantic, monstrously sized mouse pad (90x360x3mm) that will cover at least half your desk.

It's designed to sit under your mouse and keyboard, and provides a gentle resting place for your wrists as well. And it's super smooth, ensuring a near frictionless gliding action of your mouse across its surface. This one is for the hardcore gamers.



FURY

- ◆ **SUPPLIER** Times Media Films
- ◆ **WEBSITE** All leading retailers
- ◆ **RRP** R149

Probably one of the best war films since Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, *Fury* is now available to own on DVD. Directed by David Ayer and starring Brad Pitt, the film focuses on the end of World War II, following a battle-hardened troop of five soldiers in a Sherman tank on one last mission against overwhelming odds to strike at the Nazis one last time. The cast are excellent and the tank battles are amazing, don't miss out!

SPUD 3: LEARNING TO FLY

- ◆ **SUPPLIER** Times Media Films
- ◆ **WEBSITE** All leading retailers
- ◆ **RRP** R149

The third movie in the popular *Spud* series sees the return of Spud Milton, still coping with the same sh*t that he's been dealing with in the other films, namely girls, self-doubt and bullies. The film features a newcomer to the scene, Caspar Lee of YouTube fame, if anybody cares about that. Comedic genius John Cleeve returns as well. If you're a fan of Spud definitely check this out.



DC COLLECTIBLES BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT: SCARECROW

- ◆ **SUPPLIER** Cosmic Comics
- ◆ **WEBSITE** www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ◆ **RRP** R399

From the new Rocksteady Studios game, *Batman: Arkham Knight*, we have Scarecrow, admittedly a lesser known Batman villain, but still awesome nonetheless. He stands 18cm tall and features some of the best detailing you'll see on a figurine. From the stitched together clothing to the unlaced boots the whole package oozes quality and attention to detail. It's probably all just imported directly from the

3D model used in the game but the bottom line here is that someone somewhere put a lot of effort into the details and that's what stands out. Scarecrow ships with a different facemask that is a little fiddly to fit under the tight fitting material of his hood. This is a decent figurine for your collection and perhaps, if you're creative enough, the beginnings of a twisted version of the *Wizard of Oz*.

FUNKO FABRIKATIONS: STAR WARS: DARTH VADER SOFT SCULPTURE

- ◆ **SUPPLIER** Cosmic Comics
- ◆ **WEBSITE** www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ◆ **RRP** R379

This is a plush but the lightsaber might poke you in a soft place while you're sleeping, so make sure you suppress any dark thoughts before snuggling under that Luke Skywalker duvet. Other things that are important: the head rotates, the plush is 19cm tall and the feet are weighted so he can stand on your desk. However, plush isn't really the right word here because most of this Darth Vader caricature is made out of that leathery material you expect to find on very, very cheap lounge furniture – bad for sitting on but great for this application. He has a little cape and everything, bumping the cute rating for this plush slash figurine to a solid 10/10.

SECRET WARS #1

- ◆ SUPPLIER Cosmic Comics
- ◆ WEBSITE www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ◆ RRP R65

If you can get through issue #1 of Marvel's *Secret Wars* without muttering "what the hell is going on here?" fewer than ten times, Stan Lee will come to your house to feed you pizza while you watch *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* None of the above is true, but it has to be said that *Secret Wars* is a weird one. Perhaps if you've stayed on top of every single thing that's happened in the Marvel universe for the last couple of years you'll be able to keep it together, but even then the number of liberties taken to squash this storyline into existence are numerous. Once you push past this barrier and move on with subsequent issues of this eight-part series, things eventually start to fall in line, but getting to that point is nothing short of a chore.

CONVERGENCE #0

- ◆ SUPPLIER Cosmic Comics
- ◆ WEBSITE www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ◆ RRP R65

DC's *Convergence* series popped up just before Marvel's *Secret Wars*, and follows much the same idea: multiple universes colliding in some sort of spectacular fashion. DC's approach is a little different, and thankfully less convoluted, with things kicking off with our chap Superman finding himself in some sort of intergalactic prison planet. It's all very odd, of course, but DC's penchant for darkening their stories works well here: there's plenty of crazy stuff that happens, but it makes sense on a character level. The art isn't quite as slick as Marvel's offering, but its classic DC, which means clean lines and highly readable characters and action scenes.

FIGHT CLUB #1

- ◆ SUPPLIER Cosmic Comics
- ◆ WEBSITE www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ◆ RRP R55

Wake up, Tyler Durden, it's time to fight. Chuck Palahniuk's glorious book and film *Fight Club* has been forgotten by most people these days, but that hasn't stopped the writer from bouncing back from the brink of mainstream obscurity with this comic book sequel. It's his first foray into this medium and we're pleased to say that the transition is going very well so far. The edgy artwork from Cameron Stewart goes a long well to help this along, too.

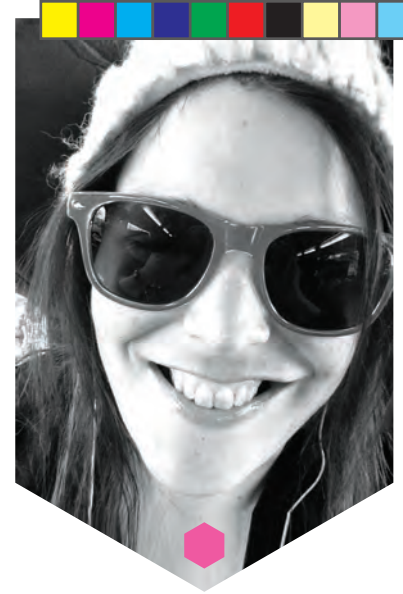


Game over

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.



Game over, man. Game over.

The clock has struck midnight. The rose has withered, its petals fallen to the mantelpiece. The last grain of sand in the hourglass has spilled through to its glassy sepulchre. The crones, hunched in the dark over their dusty loom, have cut the final, ragged threads of a black tapestry. The Shu-Glu Gnomes™ have perished of sudden catastrophic decompression, their frozen remains drifting among the broken girders and bulkheads of what's left of the USG Ishimura, somewhere in a lonely orbit around Titan.

It is the end of everything.

I mean, that's kind of what it felt like when Michael told me the magazine was shutting down, but about a week later I decided to stop eating carbs and THAT was the end of everything, and now my water treatment facility in *Fallout Shelter*

is infested with radroaches and THIS is the end of everything, and the point is that it probably isn't. Or at least, only until the next end of everything and then the one after it – because when you think about it like that, life is just a series of mostly inconsequential tragedies and then you die. And even that isn't the end of everything unless somebody has your Facebook password so they can disable your account, but that's not it either.

... Because that photo from that thing that happened that *one time* – I swear – is saved on some redundant server until the planet's atmosphere is wiped out by cow farts (or whatever), and the stars burn out, and the universe collapses, and it really is the end of everything. But, you know, that's only millions of years in the future¹.

So, it's not actually the end of everything (yet), and besides, most of

1 Or the nukes could drop tomorrow. I should start eating carbs again while I still can.

2 I'm missing out on my commemorative bag of jelly beans by only a few months. THIS IS THE END OF EVERYTHING.

the stuff that would have been in the magazine is now going to be on NAG Online instead and you won't have to wait around a whole month to read about it. That's, like, totally sci-fi. Okay, maybe not totally-totally sci-fi, but when I started writing for NAG about nine-and-something years back², I was on dial-up and the Internet was basically just some cats and MySpace. At this giddy rate of technological progress, we should be on colony ships to Andromeda by the end of next week, tops.

In the meantime, though, so long, farewell, *auf Wiedersehen*, and good night. It's been a trip, guys. The paper this is printed on will end up choking dolphins in the middle of the Atlantic, perhaps, but the *Dead Space* review that so many people hated will stay in my heart forever. <3 **NAG**

EXTRA LIFE

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