

# NAG

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING COMPUTER GAMING & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

- GUN REVIEW: NO JOKES ABOUT **GAY COWBOYS** HERE <<
- PUFFY PANTS, A DAGGER **AND** ACROBATICS - GUESS? <<
- WE LOOK AT THE NEW INTEL 955 **EXTREME** EDITION <<
- GET SOME **CULTURE**: CIVILIZATION IV REVIEW <<
- FORBIDDEN SIREN 2 **SCARES** US BAD <<
- POLYWOOD: MACHINIMA <<
- PUNCH **DRUNK** WITH FIGHT NIGHT: ROUND 3 <<
- FACES OF WAR <NEED A CLEVER QUIP HERE> <<
- Whoa!** THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO <<
- BUFF PRINCESS LEIA IN STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT II <<

PC XBOX 360 GBA DS MOBILE PSP PLAYSTATION 2

# LORD OF THE RINGS

## BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II



**COVER DVD**  
Trainz Railroad Simulator 2006

**4.5GB 8 demos + 18 movies + more**

COMP: Austin Chavira | Sarah Green | Mike Jones | Matt Truitt | Steve A. | Christopher York-Dunn | The Staff of Scribes | Brian Winstanley 2006  
 NORTH: The Matrix Revolutions | The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers | The Matrix Reloaded | The Matrix Revolutions | The Matrix Online  
 SOUTH: The Matrix Reloaded | The Matrix Revolutions | The Matrix Online | The Matrix Online | The Matrix Online | The Matrix Online | The Matrix Online  
 EAST: The Matrix Reloaded | The Matrix Revolutions | The Matrix Online | The Matrix Online | The Matrix Online | The Matrix Online | The Matrix Online  
 WEST: The Matrix Reloaded | The Matrix Revolutions | The Matrix Online | The Matrix Online | The Matrix Online | The Matrix Online | The Matrix Online

Active Section | Photos | Add-ons | Utilities | Full Screen | Extras

Minimum System Requirements: Processor: 2.0GHz CPU: 512MB RAM: 1GB Hard Drive Space: 4GB OS: Windows XP

c\ No DVD on the cover? You have every right to complain to someone about a missing DVD. Some other idiot stole it so it's not your fault, even though you picked this one up. The DVD should also work this month... for a change.

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THE BATTLE FOR  
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II

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THE WAR IN THE NORTH STARTS AT [BFME2.EA.COM](http://BFME2.EA.COM)



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S.W.I.N.E

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# Pushing the Limits

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- NVIDIA ActiveArmor™
- Powered Firewall
- Gigabit LAN
- 8-channel audio



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- 800/1066MHz FSB
- 2-CH DDR2 667
- NVIDIA SATA 3Gb/s with RAID
- NVIDIA ActiveArmor™
- Powered Firewall
- Gigabit LAN
- 8-channel audio



### Silent-Pipe II series

**GV-NX66T128D-SP** NVIDIA GeForce™ 6600GT

- Powered by NVIDIA GeForce™ 6600 GT GPU
- Supports PCI Express and 8 pipelines
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- Integrated with the industry's best 128MB GDDR3 memory and 128-bit memory interface
- Features DVI-I / D-sub / TV-OUT
- Supports HDTV function and HDTV cable enclosed
- Unique Silent-Pipe II design



# ED'S NOTE

## COVER STORY

**L**ORD OF THE RINGS: Battle for Middle-earth II is quite a mouthful, but that's where the excitement stops. This story isn't exactly riveting, but I'm going to tell it anyway. As you may have gathered, the February issue was put together under a lot of pressure because half the industry only gets back to work well into our deadline week. So we had no real cover until a week before the magazine went to print. Quite bizarrely we ended up with a mail from Electronic Arts about this title and then a few days later one of our overseas-based journalists sent in some exclusive information and the rest is history. Dull I know, but hopefully the next one will be more exciting.

## SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING BORROWED & SOMETHING BLUE

**N**O, YOU HAVEN'T BOUGHT Brides by accident. I'm just trying to be clever...

**Old:** we've dropped the Hardcor3 section this month due to timing – nobody was at work and nobody cared during December [on both sides of the equation]. But never fear, it will return next issue and will be big and bad because...

**New:** we've gone and hired a Hardware Editor for NAG [one of the best in the business]. NAG is growing at a phenomenal rate and one of our objectives this year was to increase and improve our hardware section to include things like proper awards, more in-depth coverage and distilled information you can actually use to make those important purchasing decisions. The rollout will primarily happen in the April issue [our redesign and birthday issue] and will include almost everything everyone's been asking us for regarding hardware since NAG started. So hands together everyone for Russell Bennett. I predict he'll crack under the pressure by the end of March, so be gentle.

**Borrowed:** time was a precious thing with this issue of NAG because there's so little of it. We rushed back to work after the December holidays right into a deadline and because [see above] everyone else was still foggy with holiday drink and sleep, we had to really work hard to get this issue wrapped up.

**Blue:** we're back at work and that sucks. Spending a few weeks just playing games for fun or roasting nuts on a beach just can't compare to 659 new e-mails, 49 telephone messages and tons of things you left until after the holiday. It's called post holiday blues. But don't worry, they usually melt away when someone shouts Diablo III is coming or have you heard about this new game from id Software. It's just so easy to love this job sometimes. Oh, the 'Diablo' thing is made up. We categorically deny having any artwork, news or screenshots for this game.

### Cover DVD

**T**HIS FEELS LIKE A bad dream I can't wake up from [I've tried the pinching myself a few times thing, even with pliers]. The Quake 4 demo on the January DVD was corrupt and this was our fault and we're sorry for any annoyances this caused. To remedy the problems you've been experiencing, we made a few changes

and these are what they are. We've allowed for an extra day to double-check the DVD. We've included a checksum utility on the DVD to check for mismatched bytes throughout the whole process. You can even run it yourself from the root of the final mass-produced DVD when you get it. We've bought a brand new NEC 3550 DVD writer that's compatible with the most brands of media you can find and has the lowest error rates, and after the burn process we test the DVD using the checksum mentioned above. We're packaging the masters we send to Singapore in a sturdier bag. We've instructed them to test the DVD using the checksum before and after the process. We're only using Verbatim DVD+R DVDs. We're also going to remove the artwork on the DVD from the March issue onwards and the actual DVD will be plain black with white writing to reduce any chance of the beam being disrupted, refracted or passing right through. We're also testing every single file, movie and image on the final master before we send it to make sure everything works perfectly. We take this issue very seriously as we recognise the DVD to be an integral part of why many readers buy the magazine. So it's imperative that this area of the magazine be as good as any other. Again, if you're experiencing problems in the future please first try all the fixes listed here [<http://www.nag.co.za/dvdfix.html>], because in many cases the problem can be with your machine [even though other DVDs work perfectly and this isn't an exact science thanks to a world with multiple configurations, drivers, different makes and models, scratches and even a simple thing like a dust particle]. If you've tried all the checks and obvious things then drop a mail to [subs@nag.co.za](mailto:subs@nag.co.za) and we'll replace the DVD for you at no cost. I believe we've done everything we possibly could to ensure this doesn't happen again and we're committed to refining the process all the time to ensure the issue of NAG that ends up in your hand each month is the best it can possibly be.

Well, I guess that's it for this one and make sure you keep reading because we've got some really big news [massive] and a few radical changes happening soon that I'm sure you're going to enjoy, or complain about. But that's up to you. **NAG**

**Michael James [Editor]**



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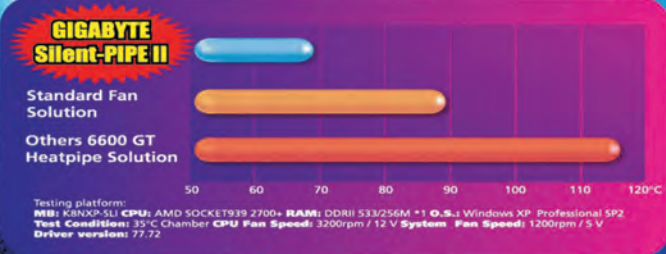
Intel P4 3.6GHz 2MB L2 Cache CPU | Gigabyte GA-8N-SLI Royal PCI-E MOBO  
Gigabyte GeForce 7800 GTX PCI-E Graphics Card  
Gigabyte 19" TFT LCD  
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Gigabyte DVD Dual DVD ±R/RW  
2 Seagate SATA 200GB 7200RPM 8M + NCQ  
Logitech MX 518 Optical Mouse & Media Keyboard  
Gigabyte 3D Aurora Chassis



# SILENT-PIPE II

## SOUNDLESS HEAT PIPE TECHNOLOGY II

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## GIGABYTE TECHNOLOGY



### Natural convection design

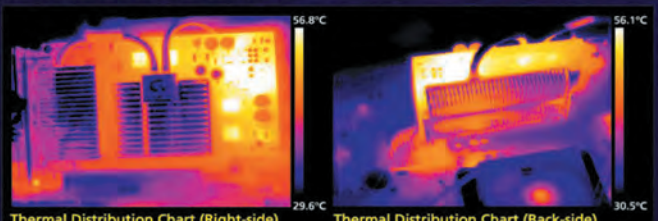
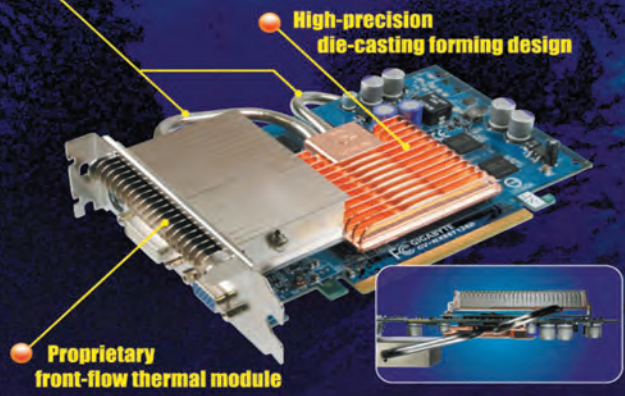
Silent-Pipe II Technology artfully uses the temperature difference between the inside and outside of chassis, creating a natural system convection.

### NX66T256DE/NX66T128D-SP

- Powered by NVIDIA GeForce 6600GT VPU
- Supports NVIDIA SLI Technology
- Supports PCI Express and 8 pipelines
- Microsoft DirectX 9.0C and OpenGL 1.5 support
- Integrated with 256MB DDR2 / 128MB GDDR3 memory and 128-bit memory interface
- Features DVI-I / D-sub / TV-OUT
- Supports HDTV function and HDTV cable enclosed
- Unique Silent-Pipe II design



- Natural convection design
- Design for heavy 3D performance loading
- Integrated architecture design
- SLI and soundless optimization
- High performance heatpipe with sintered powder wicks



Under the thermal cam system monitoring, purple color means lower temperature, and white color means higher temperature.

# BYTES

## NCSoft ANNOUNCES GUILD WARS: FACTIONS

NCsoft has announced Guild Wars: Factions, the next chapter in Guild Wars, which is a competitive online roleplaying game that rewards player skill more than time played. The Factions campaign will be released in the second quarter of 2006. It offers players an incredible gameplay experience with many new choices, including new regions, professions, skills, missions, and monsters, along with expanded options for both cooperative and Player-versus-Player (PvP) play, and enhanced features for guilds.

"We're excited to be offering Guild Wars: Factions to players throughout the world," said Patrick Wyatt, co-founder of ArenaNet. "Factions is a huge step in the continued evolution of the game, and I think gamers are really going to be excited about the new features they're going to see!"

[[www.guildwars.com](http://www.guildwars.com)]

## NINTENDO BROADENS MARKETING FOCUS

Completely unsurprisingly, Nintendo has revealed that its marketing strategy for its upcoming console, Revolution, will focus on targeting new market sectors, primarily casual gamers and women. The company has some recent experience with attracting alternative customers as demonstrated by Nintendogs, which has appealed to an audience of all ages, and has attracted an unusually high proportion of female players. The title has sold just under a million units in the US alone.



# HL2: AFTERMATH ALMOST READY

**D**OUGLOMBARDI, VALVE SOFTWARE'S director of marketing has confirmed that they are working towards an April 24 release for Half-Life 2: Aftermath. The expansion is said to focus more on some of the other major characters from the original Half-Life 2 and will include the

high-range dynamic lighting effects featured in the free Half-Life 2: Lost Coast bonus level. Half-Life 2: Aftermath will retail for \$19.99 and be available via Steam's download service or a boxed version distributed by Electronic Arts.

## ONLINE PSP MOVIE STORE OPENS IN US

29HD Network has launched 29MP4 Video Store Beta, an online service that allows Sony PSP owners to browse among and purchase full-length MP4-formatted films for the handheld. By mid-year, the store expects to be offering over 200 titles.

"With the right pricing and selection available through 29MP4VS, this service is laying the ground work for the PSP to emerge as a true multi-media portable platform, in the same vein as iTunes and the iPod," commented Bob Caird of 29HDN. [[www.29mp4.com](http://www.29mp4.com)]



### LOCAL GAME DEVELOPER LOOKING FOR NEW TALENT

Nanogames, a local game developer, will soon release two games, which will enter full production by the end of January, for release later this year. These titles are viewed as a pilot project to test both the local market and the viability of developing locally. Aspiring developers can e-mail their resumés to Johnathan@Nanotech.co.za.



### KING KONG EXTRA CONTENT

Peter Jackson's King Kong: The Official Game of the Movie has, Ubisoft recently revealed, a number of extra content features able to be unlocked. Most notably, by completing the game and then replaying certain sections, players can access an alternative ending.

"I wanted the game to be able to take the audience a bit further than what the film could," said Peter Jackson. "And the final climax of the game gave us an opportunity to do something that the film could not do, which was to have an alternate ending - obviously everybody pretty much knows how King Kong ends."

Other content includes Weta Digital concept art galleries, interviews with Peter Jackson and co-writer Phillipa Boyens, trailers and other goodies. The game is available on all major platforms: PC, PlayStation 2, Xbox, Xbox 360, GameCube, PSP and Nintendo DS. [[www.kingkonggame.com](http://www.kingkonggame.com)]



### NATIONAL YU-GI-OH! CHAMPIONSHIP

Great news for Yu-Gi-Oh! fans! The first official National Yu-Gi-Oh! Championship will be held in May / June this year. Qualifying tournaments for the event will be held throughout the country in February, March and April. Go to [www.yugioh.co.za](http://www.yugioh.co.za) or phone [011] 8050 678 for further details.



## PlayStation 2 TOP TWENTY



1. WWE SD vs Raw



2. Soul Calibur 3



3. Pro-Evolution Soccer 5



4. The Warriors



5. Gun



6. Zathura



7. SingStar 80s



8. Eye Toy Play 3



9. Buzz



10. Jak X



11. Call of Duty 2 BRO



12. The Incredibles: ROTU



13. Chicken Little



14. True Crime 2: NYC



15. Shrek: SuperSlam



16. Ratchet Gladiator



17. Codename: KND



18. Dora the Explorer



19. Dancing Stage Max



20. Narnia

## Intel updates its branding identity

Intel is in the process of trying to alter consumer perception of its brand. The outward changes involve alterations to the company's logo and a new tagline: "Intel. Leap ahead."

"Intel has one of the most valuable brands in the world, and we intend to grow the value of our brand as we evolve the company," said Eric Kim, Intel senior vice president and general manager of the Sales and Marketing Group. "This evolution will allow Intel to be better recognised for our contributions, establish a stronger emotional connection with our audiences, and strengthen our overall position in the marketplace."

"Intel. Leap ahead.' is a simple expression that declares who we are and what we do," said Kim. "This is part of our heritage. Our mission at Intel has always been to find and drive the next leap ahead - in technology, in education, social responsibility, manufacturing and more - to continuously challenge the status quo. It's about using Intel technology to make life better, richer and more convenient for everyone."

Intel is focusing its upcoming efforts predominantly on mobile computing, digital home, enterprise and health. Its new Viiv platform is aimed largely at the digital home.

# BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II COLLECTOR'S EDITION

**T**O BE RELEASED SIMULTANEOUSLY with the regular version of the game, this Collector's Edition looks to be one of the most worthwhile ever, if the list of content is anything to go by. In terms of media, this edition will provide the complete musical score and the in-game movies in high quality, as well as artwork and behind-the-scenes material. Exclusive game content will also be featured, including a special unit, exclusive maps and special graphic treatment of characters played by Collector's Edition owners.

"We believe we've created something very special with The Lord of the Rings, The Battle for Middle-earth II, and our team felt passionate about making a Collector's Edition that is truly special for the fans," said Mike Verdu, Executive Producer at EA Los Angeles. "The exclusive content including the behind-the-scenes footage, amazing concept art, cinematic paintings and sequences, the extensive soundtrack, and access to the unique dragon unit adds new dimension to the gaming experience."

Finally, posters and maps will also be included in the package. This is likely one of the most extensive special editions of a game to ever have been released!  
[[www.eagames.co.uk/thelordoftherings](http://www.eagames.co.uk/thelordoftherings)]

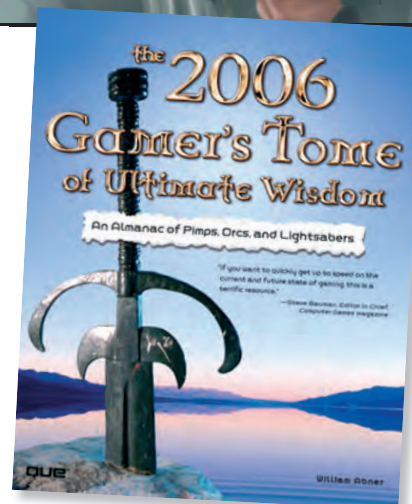


## THE HITCH-HIKER'S GUIDE TO GAMES...

ISBN: 0789734656

[www.quepublishing.com](http://www.quepublishing.com)

Que Publishing has released a book entitled The 2006 Gamer's Tome of Ultimate Wisdom: An Almanac of Pimps, Orcs and Lightsabers, written by William Abner. The book provides a month-by-month chronicle of last year's gaming industry, as well as sneak peeks at what this year holds in store. Furthermore, it includes topical essays about various aspects of gaming, ranging from practical considerations to social implications. The Gamer's Tome covers every genre from sports, shooters, platformers, adventure, role-playing, strategy, MMOGs, and more. Given this tome's scope, it is hardly surprising that it is 300 pages long.



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## THE DUNGEON MASTER'S GOLEM

MindGene, a software company founded by a group of D&D fans, has released d20pro, an application that ushers the venerable role-playing game of Dungeons & Dragons into the online world. The application is designed to facilitate just about every aspect of running a D&D campaign, even over the Internet. Dungeon Masters' aids help design adventures, while the rest of the package looks after the mechanics of the game, allowing players to focus on the gaming experience instead of becoming bogged down in technicalities. The software is expandable, allowing Dungeon Masters to add monsters, spells and the like to the existing libraries.

"The software is perfect for the gamer who is having trouble finding a regular game since they moved out of town and it allows you to connect with the other people in your group over the Internet and judge or play from the comfort of your own home. This way, gamers can play with friends who are out of town or still get together for a regular game when schedules are hard to coordinate. I think RPGA gamers, in particular, will benefit", said Mat Morton, President of MindGene. [www.d20pro.com]



## CONSOLE-CAR

Nissan in North America and Microsoft have teamed up to bring forth a unique concept car, the Nissan URGE. While in most regards a regular car, while parked its additional functionality can be accessed – a built-in Xbox 360 can be activated to allow the driver to play Project Gotham Racing 3, using the car's steering wheel, pedals and other controls. The image, however, is displayed on a flip-down LCD screen.

"Nissan conducted an Internet survey of 2,000 echo boomers, a majority of which said technology and gaming are among the most important attributes in their first car," said Bruce Campbell, vice president of design at Nissan Design America in La Jolla, California. "Xbox 360 offered the latest in technology and was already a favourite among this audience."

This innovative design marks a new level of blurring between fantasy and reality, with players controlling the game from an authentic seat and using real controls, rather than gaming steering wheel accessories.

## TAKE YOUR GAME FURTHER DON'T JUST CLOCK YOUR GAME, MASTER IT!



Tony Hawk's American Wasteland Strategy Guide



Smackdown vs Raw 2006 Strategy Guide



The Matrix: Path Of Neo Strategy Guide



Call Of Duty 2 Strategy Guide



Gun Strategy Guide

### What's In The Game:

50 Cent: Bulletproof  
50 Cent moves through the dark and dangerous underground drug world of New York. He comes face to face with the biggest crime families in the business, hooks up with some of the most unexpected allies and exposes an international conspiracy. The truth is somewhere on the bloody, drug-ridden streets of New York and 50 Cent is determined to expose it.



50 Cent: Bulletproof



The Incredible Hulk



Crash: Tag Team Racing



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## CONSOLES TO LEAD ONLINE GAMING?

A recent study conducted by a market research firm called In-Stat suggests that the future of online gaming will be charted by consoles rather than the PC. The prediction is based on recent growth figures for the industry, focusing primarily on the successes of the three console giants – Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft.

“Microsoft is the only console maker so far to launch a paid subscription service,” said Brian O’Rourke, In-Stat analyst. “And we expect the release of the Xbox 360 and additions to its subscription service to accelerate Microsoft to just under 50% annual subscriber growth between 2004 and 2009.”

Of course, it is easy to misinterpret such figures so early in the development of a market. After all, the Internet is a relatively new thing for consoles, while the PC has been there for quite some time, so it is only to be expected that console online gaming will experience an initial boom, before the market begins to saturate. Nevertheless, Nintendo’s efforts in terms of setting up wireless hot-spots in first-world territories are significant, as are the marketing thrusts of both Sony and Microsoft.

“Nintendo... is taking a very aggressive approach in handheld console gaming, setting up a network of Wi-Fi hotspots in Japan, North America and Europe to host its free DS online service. Sony has launched several networked gaming titles for its PSP handheld console in 2005. However, Sony has not been as active as Nintendo in setting up hot-spot networks or marketing the online service,” notes In-Stat.



## MOBILE GAMING ON AN UPSWING

Gaming on cellphones and other handheld devices has grown dramatically over the past year, according to a new report from Screen Digest. In 2004, the market was worth just under \$1 billion, with this figure doubling last year. Western markets are catching up with the East, and combined European and American markets now account for 52% of the global market. Major computer game publishers have failed to break into the market so far, with the exception of THQ, which has managed to entrench its THQ Wireless brand.

“As operator-voice revenues worldwide have slowed, the importance of mobile data has markedly increased, and games are delivering sizable revenues,” stated the report’s author and Screen Digest analyst David MacQueen. “The importance of this sector will continue to grow.”

## ELSPA TO TELL PARENTS

ELSPA has launched a new Website, Askaboutgames.com, which clearly outlines the meaning of the various ratings used on games. This is in order to clear up any confusion among parents regarding the suitability of various games for children of various ages, and to educate parents in safe gaming practices, such as maximum recommended playing times, safe viewing distances and the like.

“I am pleased that the industry is taking further steps to educate parents about videogame content.” ELSPA director general Roger Bennett added: “We believe that through the askaboutgames.com Website parents will see that the games industry is as well regulated as all other entertainment mediums.”

Other information provided by the site details career possibilities in the games industry. [www.askaboutgames.com]



PlayStation 2



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## ICE AGE 2: THE MELTDOWN

This April will see the release of the game adaptation of the upcoming film sequel to Ice Age. With the ice starting to melt, the heroes of the story undertake an adventure to get to safety, as their home is about to be flooded.

"We are excited to continue our successful partnership with Fox to create an extension of the Ice Age story in a fully engaging interactive entertainment experience," said Peter Della Penna, Chief Operating Officer, Product Development for VU Games. "Academy Award®-winning animation studio Blue Sky has contributed an impressive visual style and hilarious storyline for our development partners to turn into great family gaming."

The game, to be published by Vivendi, will be available on PC, PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, DS and GBA. [[www.iceage2.com](http://www.iceage2.com)]

## SOUTH KOREA'S GAME INDUSTRY BOOMING

In the late 1990s, the South Korean government invested in providing broadband Internet access to its population, reaching about 70% of its inhabitants to date. This move provided a rich environment for online software development, including games. Now over 40% of South Korea's entertainment and cultural exports are generated by its online games industry. Much of this is generated by royalties from massively multiplayer online role-playing games, and various commercial spin-offs thereof. Overall, the industry has grown by almost 40% since 2000.

## EA SPORTS RUGBY 06

Currently in development, Rugby 2006 will invite players to compete in virtual representations of tournaments such as the Six Nations, Tri-Nations, Guinness Premiership and Super 14. New moves have been added, as well as new set plays. Commentary is provided by the voices of Ian Robertson and Grant Fox.



### Tales of Eternia

Three childhood friends, Reid Hershel, Farah Oersted, and a mysterious purple-haired girl named Meredy with a boisterous pet named Quickie, must embark on a journey to learn the truth about the fate of their world. Meredy's planet is going to collide with that of Reid and Farah, and she sets out to find elements that can stop that from happening.

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# WEB SCORES

## Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones [PC]

NAG [100]	<b>85</b>	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	<b>4.0</b>	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	<b>8.6</b>	
IGN.COM [10]	<b>9.0</b>	

## Gun [PC]

NAG [100]	<b>85</b>	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	<b>3.5</b>	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	<b>7.4</b>	
IGN.COM [10]	<b>8.0</b>	

## Civilization IV [PC]

NAG [100]	<b>84</b>	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	<b>5.0</b>	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	<b>9.4</b>	
IGN.COM [10]	<b>9.4</b>	

## Blitzkrieg 2 [PC]

NAG [100]	<b>58</b>	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	<b>2.5</b>	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	<b>7.8</b>	
IGN.COM [10]	<b>8.4</b>	


## Shattered Union [PC]

NAG [100]	<b>57</b>	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	<b>3.5</b>	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	<b>7.9</b>	
IGN.COM [10]	<b>7.5</b>	

## The Matrix: Path of Neo [PS2]

NAG [100]	<b>79</b>	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	<b>2.0</b>	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	<b>7.3</b>	
IGN.COM [10]	<b>7.8</b>	

## Star Wars: Battlefront II [PSP]

NAG [100]	<b>79</b>	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	<b>4.5</b>	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	<b>8.1</b>	
IGN.COM [10]	<b>7.0</b>	

## Jak X [PSP]

NAG [100]	<b>70</b>	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	<b>4.0</b>	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	<b>7.9</b>	
IGN.COM [10]	<b>8.0</b>	

The ratings in this section, apart from the NAG ratings, are not the opinion of NAG Magazine. Duh.



# OVER FIVE MILLION CUSTOMERS! WoW!

Blizzard has announced that World of Warcraft, released about a year ago, now boasts a customer base of over five million currently active players.

"World of Warcraft's growth continues to exceed all our expectations," said Mike Morhaime, president and cofounder of Blizzard Entertainment. "We want to reiterate our thanks to the millions of players worldwide and to all the retailers who have enthusiastically supported the game over the past year. Our commitment to continue growing World of Warcraft is stronger than ever, with development on future content patches and on our 2006 expansion, World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade, well underway. We look forward to offering even more content for current customers in the months ahead and welcoming new players into the world."

World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade will add new lands, quests, monsters, magic items, spells and abilities, two new player races, a new player profession, and ten new levels of power for players to achieve, amongst other additions.

## 20 MILLION PSP UNITS IN 2006

Sony has allegedly told its manufacturing partners that it will ship 20 million units of the PlayStation Portable this year, according to Hwang Chang Gyu, head of the semiconductor business at South Korean electronics firm Samsung. Samsung supplies the NAND memory used by consumer electronics devices such as iPods and the PlayStation Portable, and Sony is one of the firm's biggest customers. Sony has declined to confirm Hwang's statement.

2006 will be the first year that the PSP has been available worldwide, as it didn't complete its global roll-out until 1 September when it finally arrived in European stores after a nine-month delay. Over ten million units of the PlayStation Portable shipped during 2005.







## PHILIPS ENTERTABLE

Its name [almost] says it all – the Entertaible. It is essentially a table, designed to entertain. A horizontally mounted LCD display acts as a playing field for a variety of games, with the initial emphasis being traditional board games.

The Philips Entertaible is based on a series of infrared LEDs and photodiodes discretely mounted around the perimeter of an LCD screen. It requires no special lighting conditions or other equipment and is entirely 'hand' operated by touch alone. Entertaible can simultaneously detect dozens of objects, including fingers through sensors mounted on the table-top. The Entertaible, which is currently in prototype testing stages, will be able to store a large number of different games, allowing for variety without the clutter of game boxes, and also reducing the chances of lost pieces and the like. It will also be able to store the progress of an uncompleted game, allowing players to return to it at a later stage.

"Entertaible offers the means to reinvigorate established board game classics," comments Gerard Hollemans of Philips Research in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, who leads the research team that developed Entertaible. "However, in the longer term, Entertaible could be used to invent brand new games offering unprecedented levels of user interaction – games that would never become predictable or ever quite 'feel' the same twice, however often you played them."

As well as an entertainment medium, Philips envisions other practical uses for the device, such as being a tool in group learning or business brainstorming.

"Perhaps most important of all, Entertaible will host electronics games that promote invaluable social interaction within groups and families," expresses Hollemans. "This contrasts completely to the solitary, isolated environment encouraged by some contemporary console-based electronic games."

## UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007

Epic Games recently announced that UT2007 will first appear on PC, and that the PlayStation 3 version will not make it in time for the console's launch. Any rumours to the contrary, the company said, are exactly that – rumours. The game will, however, eventually find its way to both the PS3 and Xbox 360.

"We're not scheduled to be a PS3 launch title, not certain where those news sites are getting that from. There will be a pre-release demo (on the PC at least)," stated producer Jeff Morris on Atari's community forums.



### Prince of Persia: Revelations

Enter the dark underworld of Prince of Persia. Hunted by the Dahaka, an immortal incarnation of Fate seeking divine retribution, the Prince embarks upon a path of carnage and mystery to defy his preordained death. His journey leads to the infernal core of a cursed island stronghold harbouring mankind's greatest fears.

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# ON THE HORIZON

US RELEASE DATES (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

RELEASE DATE	GAME	PLATFORMS	GENRE
1 February	.hack//G.U. Volume 1: RESURRECTION	PS2	RPG
1 February	Advent Shadow	PSP	Action
1 February	Black & White Creatures	DS	Simulation
1 February	Bounty Hounds	PSP	Action
1 February	Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth	PC	Adventure
1 February	Curious George	PS2	Action
1 February	Fear Factor: Unleashed	PC	Adventure
1 February	Free Running	PSP	Racing
1 February	Resonance	Xbox	Action
1 February	Stargate SG-1: The Alliance	PC, PS2	Adventure
1 February	The Apprentice	PC	Adventure
1 February	Tycoon City: New York	PC	Simulation
7 February	SnoCross 2 Featuring Blair Morgan	PS2	Racing
7 February	Tales of Legendia	PS2	RPG
7 February	Tokyo Xtreme Racer DRIFT	PS2	Racing
7 February	World Soccer Winning Eleven 9 International	PS2	Sports
14 February	EA Sports Fight Night Round 3	PS2, X360	Sports
14 February	EA Sports Rugby 06	PS2	Sports
14 February	Empire Earth II: The Art of Supremacy	PC	Strategy
14 February	Final Fight: Streetwise	Xbox	Fighting
14 February	Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	PS2	Action
14 February	Resident Evil: Deadly Silence	DS	Action
14 February	State of Emergency 2	PS2	Action
14 February	Teen Titans	PS2, Xbox	Action
15 February	Drakengard 2	PS2	Action
21 February	EverQuest II: Kingdom of Sky	PC	RPG
21 February	EverQuest: Prophecy of Ro	PC	RPG
21 February	Full Auto	X360	Racing
21 February	Sonic Riders	GCN, PS2	Racing
21 February	TOCA Race Driver 3	PS2	Racing
24 February	Extreme 4x4	Xbox	Racing
27 February	BLACK	PS2, Xbox	Shooter
28 February	24: The Game	PS2	Action
28 February	Anarchy Online: Lost Eden	PC	RPG
28 February	Command & Conquer The First Decade	PC	Compilation
28 February	Crashday	PC, PS2, Xbox	Racing
28 February	Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach	PC	RPG
28 February	FIFA Street 2	PS2	Sports
28 February	Ford Street Racing	PC, Xbox	Racing
28 February	Gods and Heroes	PC	RPG
28 February	Heart of Empire: Rome	PC	Simulation
28 February	Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	PC	Action
28 February	Richard Burns Rally	Xbox	Racing
28 February	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl	PC	Shooter
28 February	Star Wars: Empire at War	PC	Strategy
28 February	StarCraft: Ghost	Xbox	Shooter
28 February	The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II Collector's Edition	PC	Strategy
28 February	TOCA Race Driver 3	PC, Xbox	Racing
28 February	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	GCN	Shooter
28 February	Winter Sports	PC	Sports

## DS A RUNAWAY SUCCESS IN JAPAN

In barely more than a year, Nintendo has managed to sell five million DS units, outselling Sony's PSP by 2.5 to 1 [though it must be borne in mind that the sales period has not been the same for both handhelds]. Another astonishing figure is the number of Animal Crossing: Wild World copies sold - 1.27 million in less than a month! This even beats the wildly successful Nintendogs, which has sold 1.08 million copies in a significantly longer time period. According to Nintendo, the sales of the DS make it the fastest-selling console ever in Japan, with the GBA taking less than 14 months to reach the same target.

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## CHARTS

### PC Games

#	Title
1	Need For Speed: Most Wanted
2	Age Of Empires 3
3	Sims 2 Nightlife
4	Sims 2
5	Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones
6	Harry Potter & Goblet Of Fire
7	CSI Miami Exclusive
8	CSI Exclusive
9	Call Of Duty 2
10	Lock On Air Combat Exclusive
11	CSI Dark Motives Exclusive
12	The Matrix: Path Of Neo
13	Age Of Empires Gold Exclusive
14	Midtown Madness 2 Exclusive
15	Quake 4

### PlayStation 2

#	Title
1	Need For Speed: Most Wanted
2	WWE Smackdown vs Raw 2006
3	Need For Speed: Most Wanted Black Edition
4	Lord Of The Rings 3rd Age/Batman Begins Combo
5	Harry Potter & Goblet Of Fire
6	FIFA 2006
7	Sims 2
8	Batman Begins
9	Singstar 80's (No Microphone)
10	SSX3 Platinum
11	Matrix: Path of Neo
12	Buzz Music Quiz Show with Buzzers
13	SSX4 On Tour
14	Ratchet Gladiator
15	Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones

### PSP

#	Title
1	Need For Speed: Most Wanted
2	Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories
3	SSX4 On Tour
4	Harry Potter & Goblet Of Fire
5	FIFA 2006
6	Tiger Woods 2006
7	Medieval Resurrection
8	Pro Evolution Soccer 5
9	Burnout Legends
10	Star Wars: Battlefront II
11	Pursuit Force
12	Marvel Nemesis: Rise Of The Imperfects
13	NFL Street 2 Unleashed
14	Colin McRae Rally 2005
15	Mercury



## HIGH-DEFINITION CENTRAL TO MS STRATEGY

At the recent Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Bill Gates, Microsoft Corp. Chairman and Chief Software Architect, delivered his tenth annual keynote address. The focus of his speech this time was high-definition TV, and the Xbox 360's interaction with it. He promoted the console's role as the cornerstone of a digital home theatre, and announced the future advent of an external high-definition DVD drive for the unit, expanding the system's video handling capabilities. Xbox Live was also a topic of discussion, and it appears that promoting market penetration of the console appears to be the central strategy for invading the home market.

"Technology has revolutionised how we listen to music, watch TV, play games, communicate, and manage and share personal information," he said. "In the years ahead, further exciting innovations will unify the software, hardware and services in people's lives, offering them even richer, more engaging and deeply connected experiences."

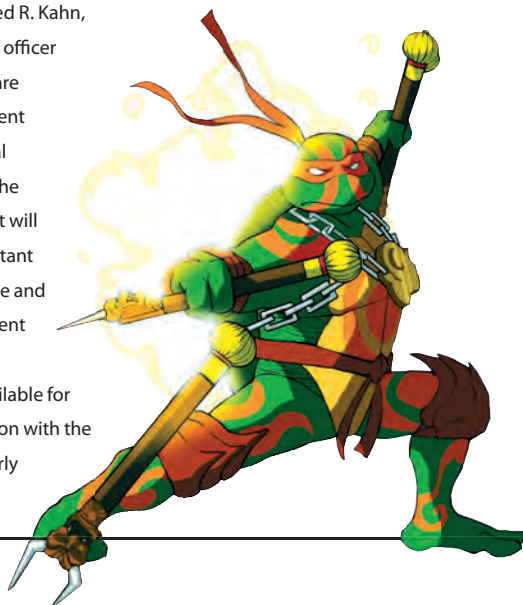
## TURTLES CRASH GAMING

Ubisoft has signed an exclusive worldwide license agreement to develop and publish Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, a videogame based on the new CG feature-length film.

The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles movie will be the first all CG animated movie in the history of the franchise. The PG-rated movie will derive its tone from the original comic-book series and will be grittier than the previous live action pictures.

"We are excited that the Turtles are returning to the big screen in 2007 and pleased to partner with Ubisoft for the creation of a new movie-based Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles videogame," said Alfred R. Kahn, chairman and chief executive officer of 4Kids Entertainment. "We are confident Ubisoft's commitment to quality, strong international distribution and presence in the worldwide videogame market will complement the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles movie experience and help generate added excitement for the Turtles brand."

The videogame will be available for gaming consoles in conjunction with the movie's planned release in early 2007.



### King Kong

Acclaimed game creator Michel Ancel and the Montpellier studio collaborate with triple Academy Award winning filmmaker Peter Jackson and visual-effects company Weta Ltd. to develop Peter Jackson's King Kong, a video game that will capture the imagination, vision and emotion of the epic film.

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# MULTIPLAYER

## MASSIVE CHANGES IN LOCAL COUNTER-STRIKE

**I**T HAPPENS EVERY YEAR. The New Year season break almost always brings new developments to the local gaming scene. The first week of 2006, however, has seen a shake-up in the rosters of South Africa's top Counter-Strike teams that dwarfs anything seen in past years. Not one, but both of the leading teams have announced their disbandment. Effective immediately, Identity Gaming and Team Evolve, as we know them, no longer exist.

At the heart of the matter is a man by the name of Andrew "Cent" Hadjipaschali. After joining Identity in June 2005, his team went on to win both the World Cyber Games qualifier and rAge, a feat never before accomplished in the same year. "It always seemed like our fifth spot was cursed," said Harry "Incin" Apostoleris, formerly a player for Identity. "But Cent filled the gap. He made a large contribution to the team, especially in the sniper role. And I mustn't forget to mention his strong desire to win."

What could possibly motivate someone to leave behind such a winning combination? Cent took some time to speak to NAG about his decision. "I wanted to reward the people who had originally helped me reach the top," he said. "It all had to do with returning favours. I wanted to pass on the knowledge I'd gained while a part of Identity to others with the potential to become the best, to create a bigger community."

Together with his brother Detrony, up-and-coming player Gazi and veterans Pure Energy and Lickwid Ice, Cent is reforming team Ace. "We're a bunch of experienced and determined players wanting to reach the top," he said. "The most important thing will be the development of teamwork, which has so far been lacking in South African gaming. I'm going to try to create a big mentality for the word." Starting over again might seem a daunting task, but Cent is confident that reaching the top again is not only possible, it's likely. "I just want to give South Africa a wake-up call,"

he continued. "It's not easy getting to the top, but it's not hard either. It's something in-between that requires a mixture of confidence and dedication. You want the top, go to the top. You're not getting stopped."

With Cent's departure, Identity was once more left without a fifth player. "It would definitely be a big task to fill his shoes," explained Incin, "which is why Identity Gaming is not replacing him. Instead a new team is being formed. This team will be composed of two pairs of brothers, Hellhound and Style from Evolve, Explicit and Apocalypse from Identity, as well as me. Raumas will take the role of coach, playing if he is needed. As it stands the team will be called J2g [Just 2 Good]."

At this point it is still uncertain what will happen to the remaining players of Evolve, but their experience will no doubt be in high demand. If they do not choose to stay together, we may also be seeing roster changes in the other top teams very soon. But does J2g simply have too much experience to be beaten? "No," said Incin. "You never can say that, especially in a game such as Counter-Strike. The South African CS community is going from strength to strength and today there are more teams that are capable of winning. However, I do believe J2g is the strongest team that I have played in to date."

One thing is certain; whoever wins the upcoming Electronic Sports World Cup Qualifier will be South Africa's most potent representatives yet. "We will practice as much as possible," said Incin. "Our aim is to progress past group stages if we go to ESWC. One of the reasons for deciding on this team was to try and improve our international performance."

Overall, the stage seems set for a superbly interesting 2006 in South African Counter-Strike. It's like Cent always says, "You can win soccer games, you can win baseball games, but there is no feeling like winning a CS tournament."

## PHANTOM THE HIGHLIGHT AT PROBLEMATIC RATANGA LAN

**L**AN2K IS A NAME that carries with it a fair degree of scepticism. After announcing a six thousand man LAN in January 2005, the organisation was forced to go back on its word, instead hosting an event with barely two hundred attendees. In subsequent Lan2k events during the year, prizes given out were consistently less than what had been promised, and the setups were plagued by a variety of technical problems. December 2005 saw yet another attempt, this time in partnership with the Ratanga Junction theme park. A total of R70,350 in prizes was promised on [www.pro2k.co.za](http://www.pro2k.co.za).

with tournaments offered for Quake 4, Counter-Strike, WarCraft III and the less typical Dota and Battlefield 2.

However, things did not run as smoothly as the community had hoped. "The gamers' attitudes were great but the management was terribly disorganised," said Matthew "Fieldy" Winder of Carnage LAN, who was contracted to set up the network. "On the first day the tournament started eleven hours behind schedule; equipment was late or did not arrive at all. They would've had to cancel the LAN if not for my network cables."

However, the lack of organisation did not seem to affect the quality of the tournament games. Quake 4 even saw the participation of the UK Painkiller player Gareth "Garpy" Marshall, who was in Cape Town on holiday. But the glory belonged to our very own Stephen "Phantom" Cloete, the Quake III legend with a seventh place WCG finish under his belt. He claimed victory without losing a map, surpassing the Quadrant 6 hopefuls Draven [second place], Kinetic [third] and Manic [fifth]. Garpy had to settle for fourth after losing to Kinetic in the lower bracket. Counter-Strike was won by the best-known

## EUROPEANS DOMINATE "MOST COMPETITIVE EVENT EVER"

**H**ELD FOR THE LAST time at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Dallas, Texas, CPL Winter put a final stamp on the international gaming calendar for 2005. The event rounded off an illustrious year for the Cyberathlete Professional League, which gave away close to two million US dollars in prize money. In addition to its inaugural world tour, both the summer and winter events proved to be major mainstream media successes.

Even though the winter tournament is the smaller occasion, it was graced by what many have called the most competitive field of players and teams ever to enter an international gaming competition. Hosting tournaments for Quake 4 and Counter-Strike 1.6, CPL Winter featured almost every top electronic sportsman for the last five years, and even a few from the golden days of Quake II and Heretic. It was the prestige of the event which accounted for such a diversity of talent, being the first major Quake 4 competition. A prize purse of \$100,000 didn't hurt either.

Despite a pre-tournament interview with the USA's Mark "clock" Mcgrail, who claimed that American players would show the best results, it was the Europeans who took top honours in both game types. In Quake 4, Anton "Cooler" Singov of Russia, winner of ESWC 2005 and the most successful Quake III player in history proved that old skill does carry over into the new game. His victory

came at the expense of runner-up Johan "Toxic" Quick [Sweden] and third place finisher Magnus "Fox" Olsson [Sweden]. Karl "Fooki" Johansson [Sweden] took fourth, with Painkiller star Alexander "Ztrider" Ingary [Sweden] just behind in fifth.

Counter-Strike was also led by the Swedes, with the legendary SK Gaming squad finishing in first place. But it wasn't an easy road. The team first had to overcome their arch-rivals Ninjas in Pyjamas, also from Sweden, and the WCG 2005 winners, Team 3D [USA]. In the grand final, they played against a constantly-improving Lunatic-Hai from South Korea, though in the end they pulled through with a reasonably comfortable win. The field after Lunatic's second place was completed by Jax Money Crew [USA] in third and the Ninjas in fourth. Both the highly-touted American all-star teams, Complexity Syndicate and Team 3D, failed to make top eight.

### Intel Counter-Strike 1.6 \$60,000

1. Sweden - SK Gaming - \$18,000
2. South Korea - Lunatic Hai - \$12,600
3. United States - JaX Money Crew - \$8,400

### Verizon Quake IV \$30,000

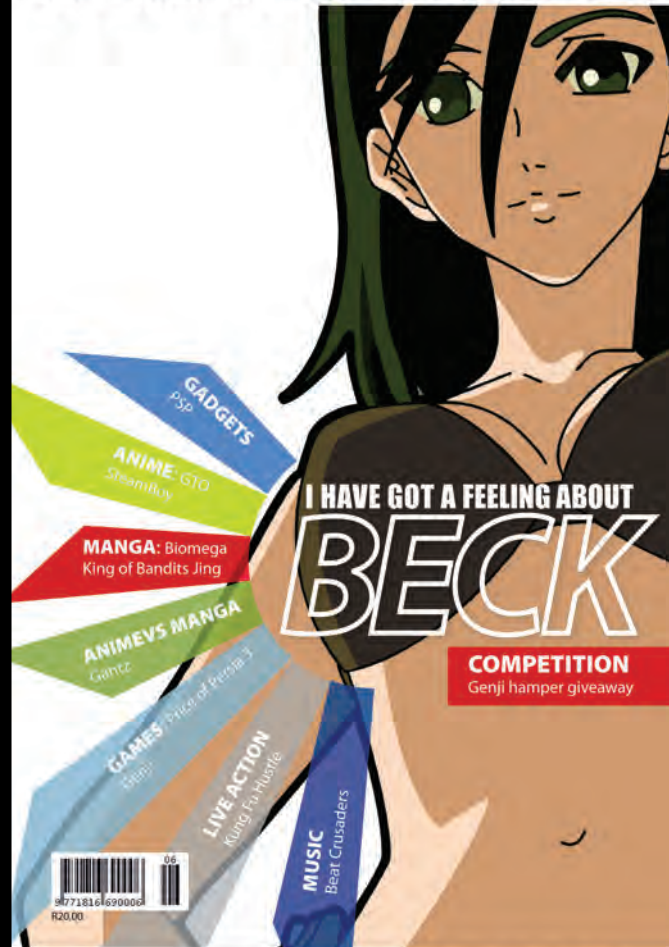
1. Russia - Anton Singov (cooler) - \$9,000
2. Sweden - Johan Quick (toxic) - \$5,700
3. Sweden - Magnus Olsson (fox) - \$3,600

of the Cape Town teams, Element, with Clan GP in second place. WarCraft III saw Travis "Shase" Weedon finally being overthrown by his clan-mate Caleb "Reaver" Ridley, with Valprax [also from Quadrant 6] in third.

But the greatest shadow over the event was the prize distribution, which again fell short of what had been advertised. "During the initial stages of the organising, we were told that we had R10,000 in cash for the Quake 4 tournament," said Jonathan "Manic" Bourne, leader of Quadrant 6. "This, however, was not what was actually handed out." Ph4ntom has so far only received R1,500 of the R4,000

first prize, and no cash was given to any of the other top finishers. The hardware prizes were less than half of what was laid out on the organisation's Website. In Counter-Strike, the winners were also short-changed, by R3,000. Across all game types, prizes were dismally lacking.

After this event, which was held over the Christmas weekend and so only managed to attract roughly a hundred gamers, the future of the Lan2k brand is in question. With such a rocky past, it seems unlikely that the organisation will be able to continue without some significant changes.



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**Diary:** In the January issue we documented 19 days spent using the DStv PVR.

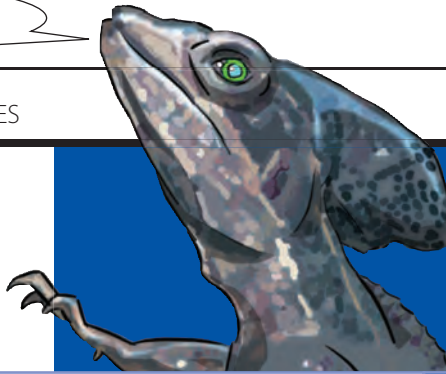


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# Breaking the Law! (Of Physics)

**W**ITH EACH YEAR THAT goes by I can't help but wonder when it was that technology went off the rails. Naturally I appreciate all the recent advances like vibrating razors and cars that drive themselves, but in all of those cases it's more an evolution of technology than a revolution. The last major scientific 'breakthrough' that had practical application in our lives was the personal computer, and since then nothing seems to have changed. But just when I was beginning to think we'd have to continue living as cavemen for decades to come, it seems the next, erm... quantum leap... might be just around the corner.

Quantum mechanics are the rules that govern the super-small in the universe, typically on the sub-atomic level, but the implications for computers are far greater than just producing really small processors. Not that this would be a small feat, mind you. Being able to fit hundreds or thousands more transistors on a single chip would effectively render Moore's law obsolete. The 'law', predicted by Intel co-founder Gordon Moore in 1965, states that the number of transistors on a single chip can double only every 18 months. The immediate result of breaking this? A dramatic overnight increase in brute-force processing power.

But quantum mechanics also allow for more complex developments that could rightly be called 'revolutions' in practical science. Today's digital computers function using Boolean algebra, where each variable has a value of either 0 or 1. Quantum processors, on the other hand, allow a variable to have both values at once. This means the same processor is capable of carrying out several calculations simultaneously, instead of the one-at-a-time method employed by digital processors. And once you add other bizarre properties of the quantum world, such as the ability of atoms to affect the states of others around them – sort of like a school of fish – you have processing power that is not only millions of times faster, but capable of carrying out calculations which literally crash conventional processors.

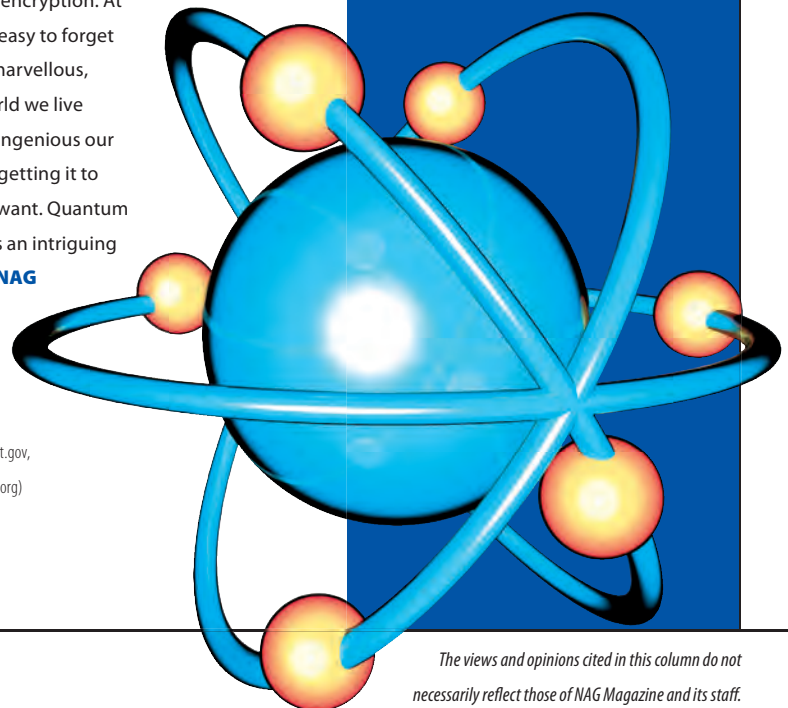
While this may still have sounded like science fiction at the beginning of 2005, two developments during the course of the year catapulted quantum computing into the practical realm. At Innsbruck University in Austria, Rainer Blatt and his colleagues succeeded in demonstrating the first actual calculation by a

quantum processor. Their experiment used a charged calcium atom to solve a problem known as the Deutsch-Josza algorithm, or in layman's terms, whether the two sides of an imaginary coin are identical or different. A conventional processor would first have to check the one side, then the other, but a quantum processor can do both at the same time. The second breakthrough came when the US National Institute of Standards and Technology announced it had managed to put six beryllium atoms into a 'cat state' of spinning two ways at the same time. The big news is that if the properties of one of these atoms are changed, it affects all the others 'entangled' with it. This is one of the most important preconditions for quantum processors.

Whether quantum processing will ever have any impact on gaming, aside from the increase in speed, is too early to tell. Its greatest predicted applications will be in solving quantum equations and in factorising the ridiculously large numbers used in data encryption. At any rate, it's easy to forget just what a marvellous, complex world we live in, and how ingenious our species is at getting it to do what we want. Quantum processing is an intriguing reminder. **NAG**

SOURCES: [www.nist.gov](http://www.nist.gov),  
[www.sciencenews.org](http://www.sciencenews.org)

“ Being able to fit hundreds or thousands more transistors on a single chip would effectively render Moore's law obsolete. The immediate result of breaking this? A dramatic overnight increase in brute-force processing power. ”





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## Lame of the Year

**WHEN THE YEAR ENDS** and a new one is gently ushered in, a few things happen. I'm not talking about the usual 'wake up with your face in the dog's water dish' post-New Year's party thing, I'm talking about the preening and posturing that gaming magazines and Websites go through in an attempt to succinctly turn the entire year's gaming into a 'best of' laundry list.

Thankfully for me [and for the purpose of this rant], NAG is excluded from this list as we are not the ones deciding what games triumph in our 'Game of the Year' list. It's your fault, you readers you, as you are the ones voting.

But I digress. Watching the gaming Websites and magazines shuffle their opinions around and around, filling up 'Top 25 games of the Year' lists with predictable and asinine choices is certainly not what I consider a joyous activity. It reaffirms just how insular and predictable the industry has become when several different Websites all have the exact same games on their lists, at almost the same positions. Now you may be thinking: "But if all those Websites say the same thing, it must be right?" If you're thinking that, go examine the eating habits of the common housefly, then factor in the number of houseflies doing the same activity, then consider "if 1,000,000 houseflies eat poop, should I?"

Just because 'everyone is doing it' doesn't mean they're right. Just because so many Websites put Game X as their 'Game of the Year' doesn't mean that game is the unequivocal game defining 2005's gaming achievements. It just means that a lot of people think the same [stupid] way, or actually don't have an original thought of their own, content to pick the 'safe' choices. After all, if you give the people what they want, they won't stop paying for your 'pay per month' gaming news. They won't assault you with

hate-mail, if you just bow down to the common denominator.

Well, I say fudge to that. If I may sound overly [and uncharacteristically] patriotic here, one of the reasons I love NAG as a gaming magazine, is that NAG doesn't pander to the common perception and denomination. When NAG has an opinion, it prints it even if that opinion flies directly in the face of whatever gamerankings.com or other tepid ranking site purports. That's because NAG values original thought, and I appreciate that.

It's in that spirit, that I hereby announce my own personal Game of the Year. My vote for Game of the Year goes to: *Whatever game you decided not to play because you thought it had 'bad graphics' or 'looked lame'.*

In similar vein, I hereby cast my vote for Lame of the Year, the game

that generated the most hype and certainly accrued high scores throughout the gaming metaverse, but was really a substance-less pile of drivel that panders to the masses. The not-so-sought-after Lame of the Year award goes to: *Metal Gear Solid 3.*

We will be presenting Hideo Kojima and his talented development team this wonderful trophy made from the tears of fan boys who secretly snuggle up to their posters of Solid Snake/Big Boss at night when they think their parents aren't watching, waiting for the day they can finally legally murder their own children. **NAG**



“Now you may be thinking: “But if all those Websites say the same thing, it must be right?” If you're thinking that, go examine the eating habits of the common housefly, then factor in the number of houseflies doing the same activity, then consider “if 1,000,000 houseflies eat poop, should I?””





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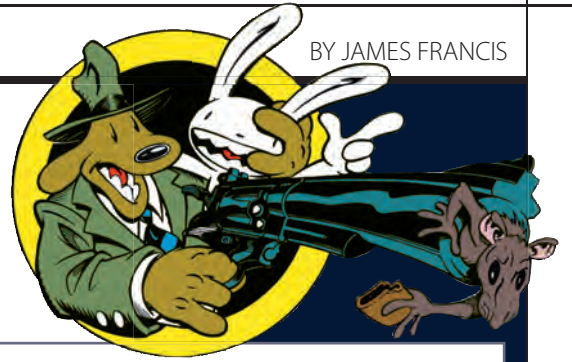
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# Why Pro Gamers aren't even Girly Girl Girls



**I** DON'T LIKE PROFESSIONAL GAMING. That's not a secret with people who know me [or at least know that, which makes this sentence rather nonsensical]. I don't dislike the concept and I have plenty of respect for top pro players like Fatal1ty. Actually, I pretty much respect Fatal1ty, because I don't know of any other pro players I respect. That's due to my lack of interest in the sport. I don't know any pro gamers who have had their picture and story in the San Francisco Chronicle or New York Times. I don't even know if Jonathan Wendel had his smug expression

in the NYT, but he likely did. He is actually that good and I had a brief moment of glee when he thoroughly and properly destroyed the local gamers at rAge.

But he had Painkiller! Who plays Painkiller? We could have had a chance! That rings a bit wrong for me. I thought this was a sport. Michael Schumacher can play football [and he's pretty good at it]. I frequently see coverage of local sports stars in rugby, cricket and soccer playing golf. Surely, if this is a sport, a potential pro player has enough ambition, talent and skill to play something other than his or her one specific game. In fact, the constant shift of games in the pro arena confuses me. I'll give Counter-Strike, Starcraft and such this much: they run on old machines.

That, though, doesn't gain much in my opinion about pro gamers in general. Firstly, there are very few pro gamers. Being pro suggests that you are doing it for a living. Last time I read, not that many sporting gamers were paying all the bills with their skills. So if we want to talk about 'pro gaming' perhaps we need a few more pros. I know all you kids really want to be the next ass-kicker in whatever takes your fancy, disposing of other gamers like mere peons in your glorious multiplayer kingdom. Not that I won't regard gaming as a sport – I think some games truly can be sports. I believe that the Mario time trials, the DDR show-offs and the international teams stirring fights in Street Fighter 2 are involved in some sport, not unlike dancing or playing chess. The same goes for any event gaming for that matter. Once you are facing off against someone, it's a sport. Ever notice that you rarely hear of the world Solitaire pro champion?

But let's not be pretentious here. Before you want to start throwing around the word

'pro gaming' you need to earn that badge. Do not think that you are part of a pro gaming community. I don't see you pulling cheques from sponsors to pay for tonight's dinner. Wendel and a few, they get to do that. Apparently South Korea has a lot of these guys, and the arcade game Golden Tee is a favourite for gamblers, complete with its own leagues. Those are pro gamers.

That's the single biggest problem with the local 'pro gamer' community. Nobody came close to beating Fatal1ty. The closest came with Basilisk, actually taking a moment to put his money where his mouth is. You might not like the guy, but most of the contestants couldn't even manage one frag. What's worse is the barrage of excuses from the so-called community top dogs. The Painkiller excuse was the most common, but that's as effective as saying "Something's wrong with my mouse." It's the world's best pro gamer, it's an opportunity that you won't often get and you will very likely get your ass whipped. SA's pro gamers, most of them, are wankers.

And they suck. South Africa finally managed to win gold at an international gaming event. Wait, we finally got a medal. Reliable sources inform me that no one from our shores ever made it past round one at a world pro gaming event. I might be wrong, but we sure never got a medal. That was until a 15-year-old girl from Paarl stepped up and took the top spot on a mobile phone. Yes, you South African 'pro gamers' got beaten by a girl with a phone. Meanwhile, another kid won the FIFA Interactive World Cup for England. He got quite a bit of press coverage in one go. Perhaps even more than Wendel. And he actually is a pro gamer. **NAG**

“It's the world's best pro gamer, it's an opportunity that you won't often get and you will very likely get your ass whipped. SA's pro gamers, most of them, are wankers.”





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# INBOX

## [LETTER OF THE MOMENT]

**FROM Karl**

**SUBJECT Where am I?**

Every month I think that your magazine could not possibly get bigger, better or filled more to the brim with exciting reviews, previews and stuff, but every month I'm proven wrong once again. How do you do this? But on a slightly less sucking-up note, have you noticed that in every single FPS game you can't see your feet? I know this may seem odd to you, but if they claim such a high 'attention to detail' why has this very important detail been overlooked?

*No feet in games – that's a good point. I can see hands, a shadow and weapons, but no feet. I think this might just be the next big wave in what separates the hardcore shooters from the pansy ones. To our readers: what other obvious things are missing from these 'realistic' shooters? I mean, if they can put pooh in bathrooms in games and working taps, why not feet?* **NAG Ed.**

The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by EA Africa. The winner receives 2 games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch



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**FROM Mark**

**SUBJECT Gamer fitness**

Some gamers are really unfit nowadays. They should get their butts in gear and burn off some of that extra blubber. Why not try to be a little like the guys [or girls if you must] in games? Take Prince of Persia for example. Sure, no one can run on a wall, but that's not my point. We should try to be a little like the super fit characters we play as. So go out there and get some exercise. You don't have to get a six-pack, but you'll feel like a whole new gamer after you've done your daily exercises.

*Thanks - very motivational.* **NAG Ed.**

**FROM Julian**

**SUBJECT Unreal**

I have the first Unreal Tournament from way back whenever and I didn't get any of the new ones, due to funding issues. Is a new one being made, or should I just get 2004? If they are making a new one, could I have the

release date please?

*The new one, Unreal Tournament 2007, will be released in 2007 [hopefully] and you'll probably have to buy a whole new PC just to run it. There'll be more exciting news from E3 on this game in the July issue of NAG. Get the 2004 version so long so you can practice. We spoke to the developers last year at E3 and they stated that the game dynamic, physics etc. will stay the same.* **NAG Ed.**

**FROM Frans**

**SUBJECT Correct E-mail**

If this is still your correct e-mail address, reply!

*It is.* **NAG Ed.**

**FROM Chinky Magic**

**SUBJECT The free DVD, or not**

Before I start I would like to just say what a great magazine NAG is. But I have a question. I was recently reading the November NAG and SACM and noticed that NAG is just about the same size but double the price. Up to now I thought it was the DVD, but then I noticed that the DVD clearly says 'Free DVD'. So what makes NAG more expensive than SACM? It's just as a matter of interest, because even though NAG's more expensive I still buy it and I would be stupid not to.

*It's just a blatant marketing line to get people to buy the magazine. I know it might be lame but there's nothing NAG won't do to bag another reader. Also, if we removed the word free we can legitimately up the price by 10 bucks - this is called screwing the consumer. If you really must know, SACM is 100 pages and NAG is 148 pages with a cover DVD, printed DVD sleeve and a transparent bag. It all adds up.* **NAG Ed.**

**FROM Jacques**

**SUBJECT Game design business**

I am looking to get into the Game Design and 3D Animation business, but I don't know where to go or what to do, and because I have been reading NAG [like forever] I thought that you could help. So anything will help me and do you know of jobs that pay while you learn.

*I'm sure there's a parallel universe out there somewhere where the other 'me' would be able to give the other 'you' a list of companies in South Africa that offered this kind of fantasy position, but here on this Earth we don't have anything like that at all. Sorry. Try posting your question on the Game.Dev forums on the NAG Website.* **NAG Ed.**

**FROM knox**

**SUBJECT More Gore**

I want to thank you for your awesome magazine and especially the cover DVD. Now to the point: age restrictions. Why do game companies bother with age restrictions? It's not like anyone

bothers with them. For example, when I received my latest NAG the first thing I did was install the <name removed> demo. The game asked me when I was born. I ignored it and continued. A window then popped up telling me the game might be unsuitable for me to play. What did I do? Did I bury the game in the garden and swear I wouldn't play it until I'm eighteen. No I quickly changed my age to twenty. Do the developers only do it as a formality to ensure they don't get sued, or do they really expect people to not play the best games because they're censored? Forcing age restrictions down on gamers will just give people more reason to pirate.

*There's a whole lot wrong with your thinking on this topic - please revise. Your parents clearly haven't completed training modules 9 through 12. I recommend a random and senseless beating once a day and no dinner. Developers usually tone down demos to prevent younger gamers turning into mindless killing machines and there's a good reason why young people need to be protected from graphical content. I'll give you an example. When I was inappropriately young I watched a movie about a giant crocodile [might have been an alligator] that ate teenagers resulting in me being too scared to sleep with both of my legs fully stretched out in case an imaginary crocodile [I was convinced would be coming down the passage and into my room] grabbed me and took me away to eat later. So to this day I sleep with one leg crossed under the other which has caused a circulation problem in my other leg resulting in one leg being shorter than the other and one foot being too big. I also have an irrational fear of oversized tadpoles and a small spiky-toothed albino creature that might be living in my cupboard right now. You can also stop trying to justify piracy with this argument.* **NAG Ed.**

**FROM dunjin**

**SUBJECT Voice acting in games**

A couple of months ago there was a news article about voice actors in games, going on strike because of low pay rates. To be honest with you, I don't know why some of these people get paid in the first place. I was playing Silent Hill 2 recently, and that game scared the c\*\*p out of me. No, it wasn't the eerie environments or the creepy monsters. It was the terrible voice acting. Truly horrible, even ridiculous at times - it shook me to my core. Surely a game focusing so much on creating a setting [in this case feeling of fear] should get the voice acting right. Then of course you get gems like Half-Life 2. *[Cut here for space, ED]*

*Voice actors need to be very good at their jobs when it comes to computer games because a lot of emotion is conveyed through the face, no matter how fake. If it's just your voice you really need to act it out properly and this makes all the difference. Perhaps when these voice actors stop sucking they'll be paid more?* **NAG Ed.**



**FROM Chris**

**SUBJECT Letter**

NAG is a very well-known magazine around gamers and you are also always talking about how great or how c\*\*p some games are. So why don't you develop your own games? Make a killing on that as well?

*For the exact same reason why car magazines don't manufacture cars and farming magazines don't produce milk. NAG Ed.*

**FROM Nos**

**SUBJECT NAG**

I would like to know what the required subjects to become an animator are and what the grades are for it.

*How the hell should I know? I'm going to take a stab at guessing of one requirement and I guess good marks in art. We're a gaming magazine, not a school. NAG Ed.*

**FROM Zac**

**SUBJECT So close, and yet so far**

You were so close. You came within an inch of perfection for a moment. Briefly, the hand reaching for that sought after perfection brushed against the door to it. [How dramatic, Ed]. But no! No. Now you have fallen back into the dank, dark pits of your old ways. In case you are confused, I refer to the matter of your cover DVD case. For months we've had to contend with the world's most annoying plastic covers. Our hands have been bruised and battered trying to open them, our minds clouded with moments of rage at them and our friends and family alarmed by sudden screaming outbursts of [you'd censor this anyway]. But in the November issue our spirits were restored, our faith reinforced, for NAG had finally gotten a real, decent, thick, no-sticky tape plastic CD sleeve. No longer would we fight with entraining sticky tape and no longer would we feel an urge to cry when we got the latest magazine. No! NAG had finally gotten rid of those [you'd censor this too] CD sleeves. The feelings of joy at this development are indescribable, and I won't try. But it seems the apex of this climb was reached in November, for lo and behold, came the December issue, the DVD was encased in another flimsy, sticky-tape-infested, hard-to-open-without-surgical-instruments CD sleeve! This terrible development has shaken my faith to its core and left me a broken man. I end with the common question of our times: 'What the hell?'

*I find it hard to comprehend that some humans are able to send a mission to Mars while others are baffled by a strip of glue and a flap of plastic. That aside, I have placed an order for the plain plastic envelopes without the sticky strip part, but we first have to get through about half a million annoying sticky sleeve ones before that shipment arrives. If it bothers you so much just ask someone else to open it for you. But I do really know how you feel. It's like milk cartons. I just don't buy the ones that are hard to open, but that's milk. A gaming magazine is an entirely different matter. NAG Ed.*

**FROM SoliTaRy SA**

**SUBJECT The Number pad replacement**

I think that the Z board has already used the idea of replacing the number pad, don't you agree? Read your own magazine advertisements and you'd see that the great idea Carol came up with has already come to fruition, in the form of a Gamer Control pad. Nothing says "I got rid of rubbish and replaced it with awesomeness" like the Z board's design. Furthermore, [this is for Ed] the idea of putting a coffee cup holder there would be completely and disastrously retarded. Who would make a coffee cup holder on the keyboard? If it gets knocked over [gamer frustration fit] or spilt, you just fried another keyboard and disabled another set of keys with sticky liquid... another bundle of hard earned cash gone. As for a mirror, that would be something a vain BMW driving Intel user like you would say. I like it though, even if it is a complete waste of space. Now my idea would be something like a miniature manual stick on the left-hand side of the keyboard, moving everything else left and replacing the area that the keypad took up. This could be a specialist keyboard for racing games for those who can't afford the full setup of a racing wheel. I'm still coming up with ideas on how to fix the change view and break problems you would have, but maybe there could be buttons on the stick or something? Hmm, come to think of it, maybe not... *Thanks for the ideas. The coffee cup holder would obviously have a knock over prevention ring barrier thing and as for the mirror - I was thinking more girl gamer here - I read in some men's magazine that some women like to put on lipstick etc. before going online to chat or play [makes them feel empowered or something]. NAG Ed.*

**FROM The\_h00ded1**

**SUBJECT Number pad alternative**

In response to last month's letter regarding replacing the number pad with something useful, I thought a mini hand spa would be helpful. The number pad is more or less the same size as a closed hand, so it would fit nicely. It would just have to be something you could slip your semi-numb, partially bendable fingers [from over-clicking on the end of a level boss that wouldn't die] into, and it would give them a gentle massage while you waited for the next level to load. They could even use the scroll lock key to switch it on and off and add a built-in manicure function for the girls and Miktar, although his simian fingers might not fit. *You forgot the knuckle popping attachment, the nail clipper and nail clippings storage tray in case you need a snack later. Oh, and the calloused thumb buffer. NAG Ed.*

**FROM Sketch**

**SUBJECT Number pad replacement**

Well, now this idea may be expensive but great [I think]. Why not put an LCD screen there that can tell you the date, time, how long you have played that certain game [probably needs drivers]. You can also

control your music from there - it will also display the song etc. Why not put an earphone and microphone jack on the side [it will connect to the two jacks at the back, just so you don't have to reach around the computer all the time]. Maybe it could also tell the temperatures of components - this idea wouldn't be complete without a slide out cup holder. Anyway, you guys and your magazine rock. I love reading about idiots complaining about silly things and you guys ripping them off. I must also say that this is by far the greatest magazine in the universe [say that in a loud, echoing manly voice].

*Nice idea. It could also double up as a mirror by connecting it to a small camera pointing at your mug. NAG Ed.*

**FROM Enjeru**

**SUBJECT The Number pad**

Though I suspect that you may have been sarcastic when responding to a reader's query about certain apparently useless keys on a computer keyboard by asking for input [pardon the pun ;) ] on the usefulness of the number pad, I could not be completely certain of your intended meaning, so here goes. As a data-capturer who keys in mostly numeric information, I find that I enter a sequence of numbers more quickly using the number pad than if I were to use the row of keys below the function keys. At home, I prefer using the number pad or the extra set of arrow keys beside it to the combination of 'WASD' keys for directional movement in conjunction with a mouse [of course] for gaming. In applications such as Blender 3D, the number pad is used for scene navigation. I hope this information is useful to your readers.

*Yes we know all that. I was looking for new and interesting ways to use the number pad. I think there are more other people around than data capturers and accountants, so no big loss if we loose the pad and replace the whole thing with something better, like a complicated bit of circuitry with flashing lights we can tell Aunt Mildred is for communicating with the mother ship. NAG Ed.*





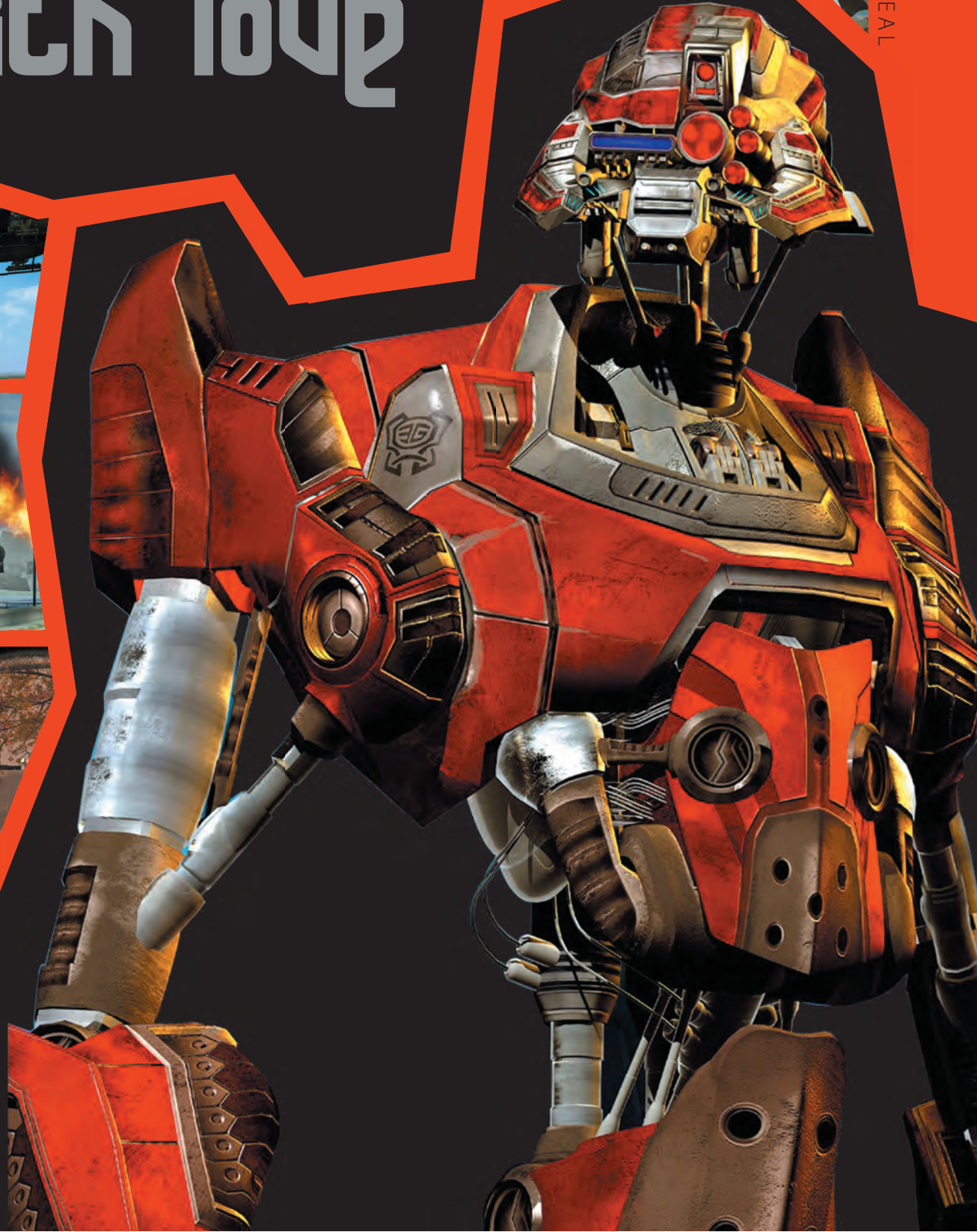
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# From Russia with love





## Vivisector

Lifting ideas from 'The Island of Dr. Moreau', players will find themselves on an island filled with humanoid animals, sporting guns, genetic modification and serious hardware. After experiments in the nineteenth century, a species of humanoid animals evolved and eventually killed their human masters. Many years later a ship arrives and its occupants soon meet the island's inhabitants. So you have lions, tigers, hyenas and some very nasty-looking things running amok, out for blood and armed to the teeth. Vivisector is looking good, but the real selling point is the intense gore system, which is the best since Soldier of Fortune 2. Targets can be dissected with accurate shots, which will rip chunks off their bodies. The effect works well, since Vivisector throws some tough opponents at players.

The game looks good, powered by a proprietary engine that provides impressive visuals, including nice fur effects for the monsters. Going for a horror theme, the early code we tried was dodgy but looked good. If Vivisector can sidestep the problems that kept games like Chrome down, it will do well.

IT'S NOT EASY BEING a gamer in this country. There are many reasons why it's great to be a gamer in South Africa and the situation has improved a lot over the years. We are certainly far ahead from where we were a few years ago. There are currently more publishers being represented and games being sold than ever before. The PlayStation and PlayStation 2, despite both selling at massive margins, proved popular, and console games do remarkably well when you consider that the average gamer spends less on food in a month than a new triple-A title will set you back. The market is growing and it certainly is the best time to be a gamer in SA.

But South Africa still suffers from the stigma of being one of 'those' countries. In terms of the gaming industry, South Africa barely registers on the radar. We are not alone. Practically any territory that doesn't fall in the US, UK, parts of Europe or Japan get generally apathetic responses. Some places like South Korea and Australia have gained reputations, but the same can't be said for the dozens of territories plagued by comparatively low sales and high piracy rates. And these territories also suffer from high game prices. South Africa has been fairly lucky in this regard. A major reason why the current market is so healthy is due to aggressive tactics some of the distributors adopted. Convincing publishers that South Africa's market will grow if the price is right, publishers took cuts and the price of games dropped locally. The same couldn't apply to console titles, apparently due to the royalties that go to hardware manufacturers Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft. But the price did drop and for a long time local gamers enjoyed a hiatus from price increases.

Over the past year or so the prices started to rise again. But it appears that some publishers want to consolidate their worldwide revenue and have thus decided to enforce one price across the board. Naturally that's bad news for us. And Russia. Yes, in some strange irony of capitalism putting one over the little guy, emerging territories like Russia and South Africa suffer under such decisions, since the cost of living is higher than in first tier gaming markets.

## PT Boats

During the interview, Megarom's CEO spoke enthusiastically about this game. "It creates wakes that you want to ski on!" he exclaimed. Judging by the demonstration footage we were shown, he wasn't kidding. Water has always been a static affair in games, with polygons just cutting more transparent polygons. In PT Boats, the developers are promising realistic boat physics in a sea that behaves realistically.

As part of a mosquito fleet, players are in charge of a boat and its crew. Jumping between the crewmembers, the boat can be controlled and used in battle. The game will feature German, Russian and Allied forces to join and since these fleets were used for a variety of missions, things are sure to remain interesting. As a perk, the airplane models from IL-2 Sturmovik will be used for some of the attacking aircraft.

Developer Akella has done a bit of work with boats, but mainly old ones: Pirates of the Caribbean and its prequel Sea Dogs. PT Boats is the first venture into modern naval warfare, and since we haven't played any working code yet, we don't expect an IL-2 for ships just yet. But it does look very impressive.

# Space Rangers 2

Space Rangers 2 is a big, pleasant surprise. Don't let its simple appearance fool you: it's a title that actually defies proper definition, as it embraces several different genres. Aspects of real-time strategy, role-playing, management and space faring are all present as players take on the universe of the game. In a move far too lacking in most large games, the universe is persistent. Nations and individuals go about their business as the game progresses. The constant movement means the galaxy's economy functions, which allows players a lot of ways to profit off areas.

Playing along the main story line, players can also influence where the game goes and how it branches.

There is a rich political landscape present in Space Rangers 2, so apart from the storyline and side-missions relations it also means that players will gather both friends and foes. Combat takes place both in space and on planet surfaces. This takes on an RTS style of gameplay, but robots can be built to handle surface combat for you.

The entirety of Space Rangers 2 is easiest explained in a final review, but it's a unique game that shouldn't be underestimated.



NEWS: 1C/MEGAROM DEAL

This creates a hotbed of piracy, which in turn makes the publishers very careful. Such an ugly catch-22 situation can be avoided, but that means that we should look elsewhere than the big markets for what's going on in gaming.

**T**HE RUSSIAN PC SCENE is a vibrant one. In fact, the whole of East Europe and the Russian homeland is abuzz with hackers, coders, pirates and gamers. It's not ideal and perhaps this image is what makes most people not take note of titles that emerge from this neck of the woods. But these countries have vibrant gaming communities – Kazakhstan recently took second place in Counter-Strike at the World Cyber Games Final. It's in this environment that 1C Company finds itself in. The Russian company is best known in the West for its development honours. Games like Heroes of World War II and IL-2 Sturmovik made a name for the company here and in Europe. But more observant gamers will also have seen its logo as publisher for other games like Blitzkrieg and Lock-On: Modern Combat. 1C Company is actually one of the largest software firms in Russia. There it is better known for its line of software applications, and its 1C: Enterprise office suite has held an overwhelming market share for over a decade. On the entertainment front, the company works with over thirty developers in the Russian and Balkan areas and represents publishers like Codemasters, Ubisoft, Atari and Activision there.

If that didn't sell it to you yet, they are the leading publisher and one of the leading developers in Russia, a country known for its PC gaming scene and hardcore games. Russian gamers like their shooters and simulators. So do South Africans, noted 1C's International Sales Director Nikolay Baryshnikov, on a recent visit to South Africa. "You guys here [in South Africa] play similar types of games we do in Russia, simulations, strategy and shooters. We know how to make those things, so we decided to match the markets and introduce more Russian games here." This is one of the reasons why local distributor



1-2  
1-2  
1-2

# Whirlwind of Vietnam



Megarom and 1C signed a deal that will bring the publisher's games directly into the country. "We've got a full license agreement with 1C on all their titles. So whenever one of their titles is signed to a publisher, it will simply exclude South Africa. Then we distribute it in sub-Saharan Africa. So we become a sort of publisher for 1C," said Megarom CEO, Clive Jandrell during an interview. Megarom is no stranger to games. Representing brands such as Activision, Ubisoft and Novalogic has given the company a large slice of the local market. But this agreement hands the company far more power than it had. The companies collaborate on which titles to release at what price point locally, with triple-A titles at a R299 price point and other games at R199. Nikolay explained the basis behind this approach: "When I see a passionate distributor and I give the right conditions, they teach me how to sell the game in their territory. I don't teach them. For example, in Russia if you put a naked woman on the box cover, the game will sell. In Poland if you do that, it looks lame and everyone there says 'The game sucks!' I have the games and now I have a local point into the market that also has a hundred percent understanding of what I need from the market for my products."

Early in 2006, gamers can expect some new titles to hit the shelves. Heavy simulation comes in Whirlwind of Vietnam, RPG fans will be interested in the rather unique Blood Magic, there's gore-a-plenty in the bloody FPS Vivisector and strategy fans are in for a treat with a regular price bundle featuring both Space Rangers and Space Rangers 2 [the second game's Beta code has been an office favourite since it arrived]. With over sixty-four games currently in development, most of which are for the PC, and with an attitude that will really help drive down prices and bring local gamers affordable games, this is definitely a big deal for the local gaming market. **NAG**

**After IL-2 Sturmovik, everyone is looking towards the East for another in-depth flight simulator. Whirlwind of Vietnam benefits from having the support of 1C, which developed IL-2, and looks like a game to be watched. Helicopters are rarely used in games other than arcade shooters. Then there is Vietnam, a war that has become almost mythical in popular culture and stands to be picked up as war games grow in popularity. In Whirlwind, players will take control of US Military helicopters and take them into famous and infamous missions. The game also tips its hat to movies that dove into the exploits of Airborne during the war, like Apocalypse Now, Hamburger Hill and We Were Soldiers.**

**In a change though, the helicopter physics can be set from arcade to very realistic, hopefully pleasing both sides of the gaming spectrum. The game will feature land and air-based forces in large conflicts and players will feel like they are actually flying into and out of war zones. Currently there's not a lot out to show off the action and what we can expect, but war game fans love choppers and the chance to fly one in the war that made them iconic would be great.**

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# PREVIEWS

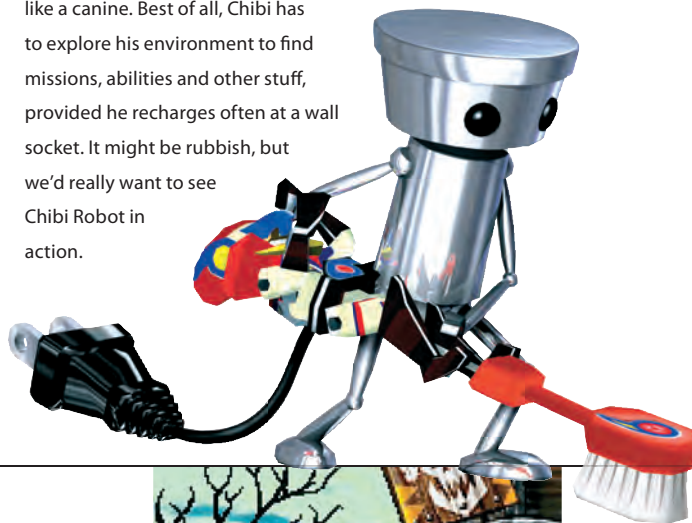


**W**E'RE A MONTH INTO the New Year by now and well past the massive game sales season. But with games showing a growing tendency to retail strongly across the year, there are more and more interesting titles right around the corner. Mobile and portable games have broadened the market and there simply isn't enough shelf space in the holiday retail season anymore. This is, of course, good news for gamers as they have long wanted something new to play after the Christmas glut. With the big FPS titles out of the way and Halo 3 probably being the most anticipated game of the year, there's a lot of room for new developments and hits in 2006.

## CHIBI ROBO

**DEVELOPER** Nintendo  
**PUBLISHER** Nintendo  
**PLATFORM** GCN  
**GENRE** Adventure  
**RELEASE DATE** Q1 2006

Let's look at the abandoned GameCube platform, slowly becoming a much sadder story than the silence of a thousand Dreamcasts. But the people at Nintendo still have a flair for making interesting games. Thus Chibi Robo will be vastly ignored expect for Nintendo fans and general hype around its product. As a gift to a little girl, Chibi Robo is three inches tall and likes to make people happy. He cleans, he finds lost toys and he battles nasty Spydorz. Apparently the little girl's dad likes to collect toys that come to life at night as well. In fact, Chibi can talk to the family dog if he dresses like a canine. Best of all, Chibi has to explore his environment to find missions, abilities and other stuff, provided he recharges often at a wall socket. It might be rubbish, but we'd really want to see Chibi Robot in action.



**DEVELOPER** THQ Wireless  
**PUBLISHER** Nokia  
**PLATFORM** N-Gage  
**GENRE** Strategy  
**RELEASE DATE** March

### WARHAMMER 40K: GLORY IN DEATH

Hold on, we thought the N-Gage was dead. At least, Nokia appears to be treating it more and more like a bad stepchild. But at the same time it has a fair amount of support from mobile gamers, perhaps the reason why THQ Wireless decided [or agreed] to bring Warhammer 40K to the platform. The press releases on it are vague, but it sounds interesting and looks really good [thanks to 2000AD artist Mike McMahon]. THQ Wireless has a hit-and-miss record, just like THQ, and the release doesn't note any Relic involvement. But it should be interesting when released, especially with the proposed wireless and Bluetooth multiplayer, provided, of course, you own an N-Gage.



**DEVELOPER** Mikoishi  
**PUBLISHER** THQ Wireless  
**PLATFORM** Mobile  
**GENRE** FPS  
**RELEASE DATE** TBA

### STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

Another THQ Wireless product coming soon is Battlefront, the Battlefield-styled multiplayer shooter. If you visit developers Mikoishi's site, they seem to be a notable multiplayer mobile developer. So the right guys were chosen. But does anyone want to play a multiplayer deathmatch on a phone? You'd be surprised. But will we see it here? An entry on Mikoishi's site suggests locals can connect to a global player network, but not specifically for this title, so there might be a chance. Regardless, an FPS on a phone is still a fairly new concept. Can Mikoishi make it fun, especially against other players?



**DEVELOPER** Capcom  
**PUBLISHER** Capcom  
**PLATFORM** PSP  
**GENRE** RPG  
**RELEASE DATE** Q2 2006

### BREATH OF FIRE III

This month's mini-previews are portable heavy, because the market for games-on-the-go is heating up. Breath of Fire III is Capcom unashamedly porting Breath of Fire III to the PSP. The original game seems to enjoy the FF XII quality of being fan loved, so it already appeared in 2001 on the PlayStation. Since then there have been two more, but the last, Dragon Quarter, was released in 2002. So this can be part of a Breath of Fire resurrection. Protagonist Ryu leads a carefree life of light crime, until an event splits his merry band and makes him want to discover his ancestry. Throw in a vanished clan, dragons, a new



multiplayer-based fishing mode and lots of adventuring, and you might just make RPG fans on the PSP happy.

**DEVELOPER** Capcom  
**PUBLISHER** Capcom  
**PLATFORM** PSP  
**GENRE** Action  
**RELEASE DATE** Q2 2006

### MONSTER HUNTER FREEDOM

While Breath of Fire doesn't seem to want to rock the series, Monster Hunter is taking the portable platform a bit more seriously, so it sounds more interesting. In the game players hunt monsters. It appears as simple as that: using a central hub town, players can customise their hunter and then sign up for missions to kill monsters, which in turn produces experience, cash and equipment. While the PSP takes the online focus of the previous game seriously with four-player hunting, a lot more work was apparently done to enhance the single-player experience. Some areas were also reworked to delight fans and mission support seems to be sizable.



**DEVELOPER** Eugen Systems  
**PUBLISHER** Atari  
**PLATFORM** PC  
**GENRE** RTS  
**RELEASE DATE** March

### ACT OF WAR: HIGH TREASON

Is Act of War a Command & Conquer clone? Does it matter? With its more realistic units combined with traditional RTS qualities, the game was a surprise hit last year, and as any hit RTS warrants, the expansion pack is on its way. High Treason brings the usual new bunch of stuff to the game, including the addition of naval units that include Tarawa class carriers, Harriers and other hardware that will make military geeks happy. But as a twist, instead of a fourth faction, mercenaries are included. These individuals can be hired at huge insurance deposits, a deposit you lose if the mercenary gets killed. The mercenaries have different strengths and each



can only be hired by one player at a time - thus no duplicates. There are the usual new units and game upgrades as well.

PLATFORMS: PC  
DEVELOPER: EA LA  
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts  
SUPPLIER: EA Africa [011] 516 8300  
GENRE: RTS  
RELEASE DATE: Q1 2006







# THE WARS OF MIDDANGEAR

## RETURNING TO THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

ONE DAY THERE WILL be a lot written about the Lord of the Rings games. At least, if game journalists are worth their salt, it will make a good case study for a lot of aspects in the whole game developing business. It makes for an interesting example of licenses in games: EA opted for New Line's rights to the movie, while Vivendi went for the book rights and the Tolkien Foundation's support. The latter made an utter mess of things and produced arguably the worst games developed on the Tolkien license. EA, on the other hand, didn't create outright masterpieces, but did a good job to deliver solid titles based on the movie franchise. Some of the games were obvious cash-in attempts to milk the license, as is the EA way of doing business, but history is written by the victor. The fans liked the games, so sequels are inevitable.

While we are still quietly joking about EA conning DICE into Battlefield: Middle-earth, the publisher has taken very good advantage of its Westwood purchase and what came out of that. The Sage engine, employed beautifully for the later Command & Conquer games and Battle for Middle-earth, powers the second chapter of the Lord of the Rings RTS games that seek to encompass both the scale and the mood of the movies. But Battle for Middle-earth was really still a movie game, although more ambitious than the usual fodder from licenses. Luckily Vivendi really dropped the ball, so much so that the Tolkien Foundation [The Saul Zaentz

Company] agreed to let EA use material from the books. Enter Battle for Middle-earth II, the game that EA hopes will draw the book fans into more sales for the franchise.

"In this game we're unlocking the world of Middle-earth," said producer Mike Verdu. Let's start with the most prominent example. Tom Bombadil, the jolly bearded stranger who saved the Hobbits from the barrow Wight, never appeared in the films [much to the dismay of fans], thus he appears to be the flagship character for EA in promoting Battle for Middle-earth II as much more than a sequel that hopes to strain more out of the ultimately thin movie canon. The books provide much richer detail into Middle-earth and EA's references include other material than the trilogy and The Hobbit, references it's sticking to for accuracy [which also allows it liberty in other parts of the game]. Hence Bombadil appears, complete with his trademark blue jacket and singing, to clear bad units en masse in front of him.

The addition of the book material has brought several key changes to the world. Developer EA Los Angeles used the opportunity to add the faction of dwarfs and elves. Both are on the side of good, but play very differently and subscribe to the detailed histories and information Tolkien provided in his books. To compensate for faction overkill, the human sides of Gondor and Rohan were consolidated into one force known as the Men of the West. The bad or Shadow side has been enhanced with more units

as well, with units from the movies and the books, including a curious new 'goblins and monsters' faction that consists of dangerous beasts that roam Middle-earth [including the Mirkwood Forest Spiders in *The Hobbit*]. Obviously, new locations from both will also appear and fans are once again enticed with the prospect of fighting through famous battles in the books as well as ones only mentioned. All of the content was created in cooperation with both New Line Cinema and The Tolkien Foundation. Alas, don't expect Tolkien's own dead, decayed hand to come and give a thumbs-up to this adaptation, but it should be a faithful game.

**B**UT YOU HAVE TO grant EALA some creative license as well. It appears that the team sought to expand and improve the game itself with the sequel. So instead of just taking advantage of the book material and justifying a sequel solely on that, the studio is reworking quite a bit of the original game to address past criticism and problems. Let's face it: not everyone liked *Battle for Middle-earth* and it didn't attain the cult-like status *Command & Conquer*, *Warcraft* or *Warhammer: Dawn of War* did. That is largely because it devolved to strategy for dummies. The game sought to bridge the divide between resource-management games and huge army simulators. There's a reason why *Total War* doesn't focus intently on real-time resources while *Generals* never boasted 10,000 units on-screen. They are two different sub-genres in the strategy genre, often enjoyed by two different types of fans. Then there's the third type of fan who isn't a hardcore RTS enthusiast. *Battle for Middle-earth* did well, but didn't please all of them. *Battle for Middle-earth II* isn't likely to do the same either, but it's more focused on the strategy enthusiast who likes to build. Gone are the predetermined locations of bases. Players can now set up shop in the traditional RTS manner – build it anywhere close to your citadel, with ways to create a new base elsewhere on the map as well. So it's stock-standard RTS base-building, something that will be welcomed. Resource gathering is now included as well, but harvesting units have been excluded in favour of types of buildings that generate basic resources instead.

Taking a leaf from *Stronghold's* book, bases can really be fortified. Players can construct walls to surround their keeps and equip the keeps with war weapons like trebuchets, boiling oil, archers with flaming arrows and a whole range of additions against those pesky armies on the other side of the hill. These improvements depend on the faction being played. Dwarves build far stronger fortresses since they are adept at working with stone, plus their mines can also be connected to allow quick movement across the map. Buildings can be upgraded and improved, thus all the hallmarks of classic RTS base-building, alongside a few new additions, are in place.

After addressing what was the biggest criticism about the game, EALA expanded the war side of the game. Special and hero units are now more abundant. The game now includes Arwen, Galadriel, Elrond, King Dain of the Dwarves, Glorfindel the Elf Lord and Sharku the Warg Rider for Isengard. Every unit in the game can be upgraded. Hero units obviously give players more advanced improvements. The infamous Ring now also plays a role in the game. Gollum has been introduced as a neutral character. In a twist, players can go out and kill him, seize the Ring and use it in battle. The Ring allows players to call a super unit like Sauron for the bad guys or the boogeyelf incarnation of Galadriel. These do devastating damage on the battlefield and controlling the Ring can swing the game. But once a player gets the Ring, all other players are aware of it and know where it is. Also, when a hero unit summoned with the Ring dies, he or she explodes in spectacular fashion, leaving a big circle of corpses lying around ground zero, along with the Ring. So when a player loses a super unit, he risks losing





*Battle for Middle-earth II uses both the movies and the books, which means new lands, new creatures and characters that didn't appear in the movie. The game system has also been overhauled for a more traditional RTS feel, including free-form base building.*





the Ring as well. Battles are more strategic as well. The AI has apparently been rebuilt from the ground up and the game boasts a new, smarter way to handle formations. Flanking also benefits Battle for Middle-earth II's gear shift. Units are much more vulnerable to attack from behind and they all now suffer from limited POV, thus sending guys around the back can do wonders for your chances in a battle. So will using the new spells, attack modifiers and other additions that the various factions in the game boast.

Another new addition that will impact many aspects of the game is the 'Create-A-Hero' feature. After choosing the faction and side, players can create a hero with special powers. This hero unit can become very powerful, learn new spells and seems aimed at becoming the central avatar for players. Hero characters can be taken into multiplayer as well, so expect some really stupid-sounding names inspired by the realms of Middle-earth.

**A**S EXPECTED, THE GAME is split into two campaigns, each with eight missions. Some of these will combine factions. For instance, in the later Good missions players will control both the Dwarven and Elven armies. Apart from the two traditional campaigns of Good and Evil there's a new freeform mode called War of the Ring. In this, players choose a side and faction, which determine which side of the Middle-earth map to start from. Armies move into areas to occupy the land, giving them access to the resources there. Controlling the lands, players build bigger armies and gather more material to support their war campaign. Eventually an army will start to move into

territory occupied by the enemy and the real fight starts. It's interesting that EALA included an automation feature for this part. So if your army is vastly more powerful than your opponent's, you can skip the formalities and let the game quickly play through the battle. But the focus will be on players fighting the battles themselves. This all takes place in a persistent Middle-earth, with the aim of conquering the entire world to win. Players can set up computer ally nations and use the controlled areas to train more units for larger armies. Thus, Battle for Middle-earth II will feature much larger armies, addressing another criticism around the original title.

Battle for Middle-earth II is not like its predecessor. EALA rethought a lot of the problems with it, tweaked the design, changed features for the more hardcore audience and took liberal advantage of the book deal to build a larger and more interesting world. Fans of Tolkien's work might not like all the liberties taken with the work, but the intention was to get both movie and book fans to enjoy a game about a world they like [or even love]. It's also a challenge for the publisher. After milking the movie franchise it needs to expand the universe to carry the series further. But with Peter Jackson occupying himself with monkeys and diets, it's up to EA to see if a much-loved book series can be translated into a living breathing world everyone will like. Sure, the puritans will complain, but it's best to ignore puritans as a rule. And it doesn't seem like another lacklustre sequel for the sheer sake of squeezing more value out of the IP. Goodness knows, EA has done that a few times - even with its RTS titles. **NAG**



stretch  
twist  
arch  
push  
squeeze  
bend

slap  
RUN  
SLAM

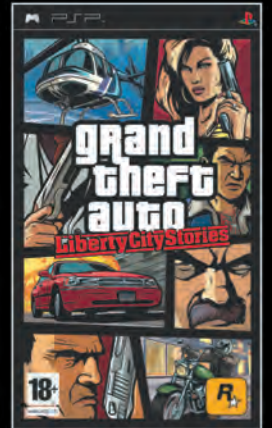
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# Behind Enemy Lines

COMMANDOS: STRIKE FORCE



**SOMETIMES A GAME SERIES JUST LOSES ITS CHARM. SOME IDEAS DON'T HAVE THAT MUCH TO OFFER OR CAN'T BE IMPLEMENTED EFFECTIVELY. SOMETIMES THE TIMES CAUSE THE CHANGE, WHERE A SERIES DOESN'T KEEP UP WITH THE DEMANDS OF THE GAMING AUDIENCE. AT THIS POINT THE PEOPLE IN CHARGE GET DESPERATE AND COME UP WITH DESPERATE IDEAS: LIKE CONVERTING COMMANDOS TO A FIRST-PERSON TACTICAL SHOOTER. SERIOUSLY, WAS ANYONE OUT THERE EXCITED ABOUT THIS? NAG CERTAINLY DIDN'T DON THE STRIKE FORCE HAT WHEN IT WAS FIRST ANNOUNCED. BUT A LITTLE BIT OF HANDS-ON TIME IN LONDON WITH THE GAME'S PRODUCER TO SEE WHAT IT'S REALLY ABOUT CAN DO A LOT. IT'S NOT MIND-BLOWING, BUT THE NEW COMMANDOS GAME HAS A LOT MORE POTENTIAL THAN ANYONE'S GIVING IT CREDIT FOR.**



EVERYONE LIKES SHOOTING NAZIS, and while calls for more balanced war titles are growing [seriously, we all wouldn't mind playing a few Wehrmacht campaigns every now and then], there's no shortage in playing through the conflict in some new manner. When *Commandos* was released in 1998 though, WW2 wasn't such a popular arena for developers. Neither was tactical squad strategy. Thus the isometric, turn-based gameplay quickly found appeal with TBS fans and new players who discovered that slipping into the game's paradigms was very easy. The second title was even more solid and kept gamers knee-deep in enemy-line missions. Using game-selected units in a squad, the trick was to coordinate the different squad mates around the map to finish the mission, using stealth-kill patrols, stealing officer uniforms and even hijacking tanks if the situation allowed for it. But eventually Pyro's series lost its appeal, perhaps because there wasn't that much innovation done or possible. *Commandos 3* failed to get the fans out in droves. But it remains a strong franchise and is an important asset to formerly embattled publisher Eidos [it likely also factored into SCI's purchase of the British company].

So you have a strong game title, but one that is stuck in the late nineties. *Commandos* neither fully embraced the 3D revolution [mainly because the series used more level detail than even today's machines could handle], nor did it interest the console crowds. How do you fix this problem? Apparently by throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

That's what a lot of fans think of *Strike Force*. When Eidos announced the FPS incarnation for the series, it was met with general disdain and apathy. In fact, the whole thing sounds like a desperate move to salvage the series and present it to the new, more demanding [for instant gratification] gaming audience. Maybe Pyro or Eidos had more holistic reasons for the change, but it smacks of an obvious and desperate move. And we'd still be thinking of it as that, if the publisher hadn't invited us to a hands-on demonstration of the game in the UK.

Sitting in a boardroom at their Wimbledon office, a representative fired up the PC version. At this point we were still musing about the exclusion of a co-op play multiplayer component. Honestly, how can you have a tactical action game without co-op? Multiplayer is definitely a feature publishers love to slap into the game features, even if it doesn't add much to the whole package at all. Still, single player emphasis is much more in the console arena. Only Microsoft's *Live* really carries the multiplayer torch for now. This will change in the future, but on a console you don't need multiplayer to make your game that touch more appealing. Pyro took this to heart and did the brave thing of not bringing more players into a game. That's because the studio was willing to rethink the entire series for a new generation.

*Strike Force* isn't meant for the old *Commandos* fans. It would definitely like to appeal to that demographic, but the game has changed completely. Co-op multiplayer doesn't feature because it won't work in *Strike Force* [rest assured, the game has a full deathmatch section]. Yes, it's that significant a departure, but a gamble that we think will pay off if you give the game a chance. Only three characters are in the squad now and selections are still determined by the game. The logic for the reduction is that, for instance, anyone can drive a truck, so why do you need a driver unit? Thus the team selected the sniper, Green Beret and spy as the group players will use to topple Hitler.

The game starts off with basic missions that delve into the skills of the three units. The Green Beret is your stock tough guy. He has more health and can dual-wield some firearms. In contrast, the spy is a much weaker character, but he can change uniforms with enemy soldiers, thus making him ideal for exploring levels and infiltrating dangerous areas. Finally there's the sniper, who does exactly what



the label says. The Green Beret is what you'd expect in a first-person shooter: he goes in guns blazing, does a lot of damage and let's God sort them out. But *Strike Force* isn't a standard FPS. Levels are designed to, like the original game, be open and non-linear. This eliminates the limitation of most action titles, where you start at spot A and shoot everything up to spot B. Following mission objectives, players swap dynamically between the various units in a squad. This varies from level to level and missions only use a maximum of two units. In the first level demonstrated, you had to stop German forces from taking a town you had just secured. With AI characters giving fire support, the Green Beret and sniper needed to stem the assault using guns and mines. Using the sniper, we took out some soldiers rushing in from the distance. With a tap of a key, we jumped to the Green Beret and laid down some heavy cover fire. The sniper stayed where we left him, continuing his sniper fire accurately. With the Green Beret in a good spot, we left him and jumped back to the sniper. Boats with enemy soldiers were crossing the river [the fight largely took place across a bridge]. They could be left unattended, but they would land and try to flank our forces, so a few careful shots on the outboard engines sent the boats up in flames. Some got through, though, thus we jumped back to the Green Beret and charged forward to take care of them. This was barely done when the call came through that tanks were moving towards the bridge. Luckily we saw some mines the Green Beret could use...

This is what *Strike Force* is: a high-octane, exciting combat game that uses

the original Commandos elements to great effect. Not every mission is about blowing away the bad guys as they storm at you. The next demonstration had us controlling the spy. Our two squad mates had been caught, but the spy used a German uniform to evade capture [There are four stages of uniforms in the game: lower ranks will ignore the spy, some ranks may get suspicious and higher ranks won't fall for it]. Thus the best strategy was to get to at least the third [officer] uniform. Playing as a spy, the options given by an open level are more obvious. At one point, a captured allied soldier was fighting a Nazi. You could help him by killing the enemy, thus gaining the soldier's support, but this could complicate things as you had to then escort an allied soldier around a German base. Exploring the base [and managing to get an officer's uniform], we discovered where our mates were being held, but there was a Gestapo officer [the highest rank in the game] who would eventually spot us. So, as a distraction, we flipped the air raid alarm. Suddenly most of the soldiers looked up and ran to man flak guns. It didn't fool everyone, but gave us enough cover to sneak through. Note that none of these things have to be done. A player can simply kill every soldier on the map in silence, if he's that good.

Leaving that behind, a more sniper-orientated level was loaded. Here the newer influences were more apparent. Actions in Strike Force will award points depending on what it is and how it's done. This point system is a way to unlock new content and determines your effectiveness in a level. Thus it also embraces another console staple: replaying levels to improve your score. It's most obvious with the sniper, who gets awarded according to whom he shoots and where. Hit an officer in the head and you get good marks. Hit his legs or Private Fritz next to him and you get less. To facilitate this, the sniper has a bullet-time effect when he holds his breath. The scope view slows down, allowing players to place deadly accurate shots at targets. This is useful as the enemy uses scouts and lookouts to spot snipers, and then send soldiers to your location. Avoiding these are important, so taking a shot quickly and accurately is important. So is moving around quickly to evade capture. In more action-packed missions, like the bridge defence, it's useful purely to pick off as many targets as possible. Obviously the sniper runs out of breath and the feature can't be used liberally, but it's a nice

touch that is seen in far too few games.

As mentioned, the levels have multiple objectives. Strike Force is pretty non-linear, so through the level players can discover additional objectives, like freeing captured troops or killing a certain amount of officers. This can really complicate a mission but gives players more points, more unlocks and definitely enriches the game's atmosphere. Graphically things might seem a bit standard because RenderWare has been employed as the engine. So don't expect a title that will rival F.E.A.R. or Call of Duty 2. But Strike Force is not ugly at all. In fact, it's very engrossing and there is a lot of attention to detail. Fans of Brothers in Arms will definitely like its look. Hardcore PC gamers might not approve of the kind auto-save feature, but we like it. In fact, this point has to come across: even though Strike Force is receiving a nice looking and accomplished PC version as well, the focus is definitely on the console market, more so than with any recent FPS. So fans of the series and PC gamers probably won't approve.

But that's just it. If we brought anything back from our time with the game, it's that it's not meant for PC audiences, at least not those who worshipped the original games. Fans might be converted. If you are willing to apply some flexibility to your faith, Strike Force has all the right elements to win you over. Elements, though, don't make a complete game and while what we experienced has us convinced, the game still seems a bit too comfortable with simplifying things. Will this ultimately ruin the experience? It might. There are definitely some parts of Strike Force that made us wonder if fans and new players will like the ideas. The game does risk not really making a specific statement about itself, unlike the former Commandos titles, and while it is being innovative, the mechanics are being treated so lightly that we'd rather call Strike Force inspired by Commandos instead as part of the series. But a game reaching out to different genres during its lifespan isn't odd: Jak & Daxter slipped over to sandbox world, while Warcraft became an MMO and Starcraft will soon have an action title. These remain tricky and make a call on Strike Force hard. Suffice to say then that the game surprised us and we are giving it a lot more credit than we ever would have before. That's because it actually looks good, works well and can be a big success. Just don't expect the original Commandos. That would suck as an FPS, anyway. **NAG**



PLATFORMS: PC, PS2, Xbox  
DEVELOPER: Pyro  
PUBLISHER: Eidos  
SUPPLIER: WWE [011] 462 0150  
GENRE: FPS  
RELEASE DATE: Q1 2006



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### VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC

■ Developer

Best Way

■ Publisher

TC Company

■ Supplier

MegaRom [011] 234 2680

■ Genre

Squad combat

■ Release Date

TBA

**Blow up everything in the level is just what the doctor ordered**

# FACES OF WAR

**W**ITH THE NEXT GENERATION of games, players will finally start seeing effects that have been long overdue.

Physics is certainly the next step in creating better games, but destructible environments are finally taking a big step forward as well. Back in the nineties, Magic Carpet allowed us to tear up the terrain and even later Red Faction pushed the envelope with destructible walls, though it turned out to be a bit of a gimmick.

As a result, the next step in games is finally arriving. On the 360 there is The Outfit, a squad-based World War 2 game that boasts completely destructible environments. Best Way has the same idea, but except being Russian the developer favours powerful PC architecture instead. Having already created the Outfront games and Soldiers: Heroes of World War 2, the studio has travelled down the World War 2 road several times. Thus players will have the opportunity to play with squads from all three sides of the war, including the oft-neglected German forces [alas, few developers include the Axis forces and the Japanese are probably featured least

as a playable side]. Taking a six man squad, players take on missions spread over various theatres and events in the conflict. Historical events [and mission designer favourites] like the Battle of the Bulge, the invasion of Normandy and the Battle of Berlin are the foundations for the missions.



Destroying everything is going to be the big selling point here. Best Way isn't new to the idea; Soldiers: Heroes of WW2 already featured a high level of destruction. It was perfectly feasible to blow away a wall or blow away a door with a grenade instead of storming it and risking casualties. Faces of War boasts total destruction, an element that works both for and against players. Just as it's possible to blow up a wall being used for enemy cover, the enemy can return the favour and things like tanks and mortar fire can change how the level is played. Basically it creates a far more dynamic game world, and the developer plans to make the levels completely open for exploration.

Players can control the squad by instructing soldiers where to go and what to do, but individual fighters can also be taken over and controlled directly. AI is boasted as a big feature and team players will apparently select the best route to an objective, as well as take cover and return fire as required. Soldiers won't simply go in the straight line that leads to their destination, but take care to flank enemy units and keep out of trouble. Similarly the enemy will flank squads and run for cover from grenades.

Graphically the game looks great, though one will no doubt need a powerful PC to get the most out of Faces of War. It will also appeal to more hardcore strategy enthusiasts: the WW2 titles from Best Way's stable have been demanding in strategy and patience. So the world of destroying a wall because someone is hiding behind it still sticks to the more strategic titles. But for what it is, Faces of War looks very good. **NAG**



*Apart from tanks, squads can take other vehicles or move on foot as well*



## VITAL INFO

Platforms



Developer

Tecmo

Publisher

Take 2

Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

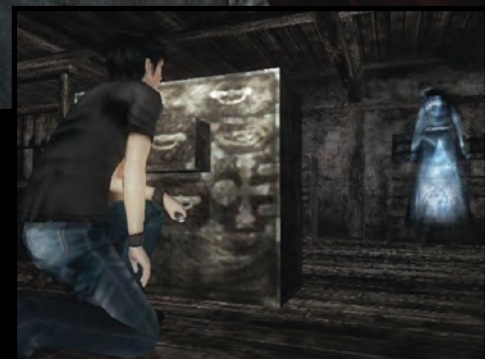
[011] 445 7900

Genre

Survival horror

Release Date

24 February 2006



*Scared of the dark? After this, you might be. But will it still be as scary the third time?*

# PROJECT ZERO 3: THE TORMENTED



IT'S INTERESTING TO NOTE how diverse survival horror series are in comparison to other genres. It seems to have relatively few titles, but most of them are fairly distinct. *Silent Hill*, *Resident Evil*, *Forbidden Siren* and other titles tend to try and deliver horror in their own way, creating a fairly creative pool of games. But this is actually reflective of a much larger culture for the genre in Japan, where dozens of horror games are produced [the West generally receives the best Japanese gamers play].

Three notable pedigree developers are active in survival horror: Konami, Capcom and Tecmo. While the other two fight each other, Tecmo took a more creative approach in its Project Zero series [*Zero* in Japan and *Fatal Frame* in the US]. Players are given no weapons except the mysterious Camera Obscura. Taking photos of ghosts with this camera will chase them away and even destroy them, but it requires a hair trigger and staring the ghost in the face while being completely on edge.

This dynamic, along with an intense atmosphere and creepy story have produced two games so far. The third, *Tormented*, is on its way to European shores after the US release late last year. It was received with generally favourable reviews and

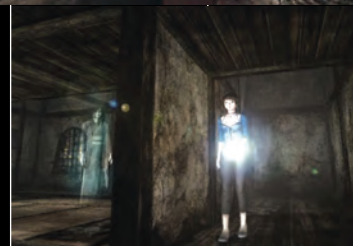


the PAL version isn't going to be any different. But it signals a new publishing deal between Take 2 and Tecmo in Europe. In the game, players assume the role of Rei Kurosawa, a photo-journalist who was in a car accident two months earlier in which her fiancée, Yuu Asou, was killed. Riddled with guilt, wondering why she didn't die as well, she is sent on an assignment to take photos of a supposedly haunted mansion. Called the 'House of Sleep', like any good horror location it screams to be avoided, especially since Rei started having dreams about the place after the accident. When she gets there, she sees the spectre of Yuu and follows him deep into the mansion, until she appears at a snowy graveyard and the mansion is nowhere in sight.

In Project Zero 3 the developers sought to change things a little. There are two worlds: the real and the nightmare, the latter portrayed by the haunted mansion. The story starts with Rei wanting to lift a curse that appeared around the time her fiancée died. But the action is stirred up with three playable characters. Rei is joined by series regular Mei Hinasaki as well as her friend Kei Amakura [who happens to be the uncle of the twins in the second game]. Each character has different

attributes: Kei is stronger while Mei has gained more mystical abilities thanks to her previous encounters, plus she can use the Camera Obscura at its full capacity from the start. Rei, being a photographer, has a larger capture circle, making her good for combat. If it isn't clear yet, the game is filled with benign and dangerous spirits. Progressing forward, the characters have to finish the story. Each has a unique way to playing the game; Kei has a stealth approach, while the women are more hands-on with ghost fighting. It will be interesting to see if this new dynamic disturbs the game's rhythm [Kei, for instance, is a very stealthy character].

Project Zero 3 is crossing familiar ground and starting to show its age. The new changes should appeal to fans and the game is apparently very polished. But the idea is old and after the massive progress Resident Evil 4 made, fans are looking at other horrors and wondering if they can do the same. It will be interesting to see what Project Zero 4 has in store for us, but with the third title just around the corner from release in PAL territories, horror fans still have something to keep them panicking. **NAG**



*The gloom and ghosts return to this intense series*



# FIGHT NIGHT: ROUND 3

## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PS2 PS3 Wii Xbox

### Developer

EA Chicago

### Publisher

EA Sports

### Supplier

EA Africa [011] 516 8300

### Genre

Boxing

### Release Date

2006

**With the next-generation, this game truly is about blood, sweat and tears**

**T**O CLEAR A NOTION before we proceed, boxing isn't exactly a sport the NAG staff knows much about. Enthusiasts of pugilism and its modern form can tell you a lot about fighters, styles and the meaning of the sport, but not everyone is Henry Conrad and not every gamer actually cares about the small details of the game being played beyond it being a solid game. For instance, not every player in an FPS complains about the weapon or weapon position, just the gun fanatics, and it doesn't really spoil the overall game. So as far as true boxing fans go, we can't speak with authority when it comes to Fight Night: Round 3, but as a game it looks spectacular.

Boxing titles have matured in recent years. The first title to take things more serious than the over-stated, arcade-like and often comical approach of earlier games was EA's Knockout Kings. But the Fight Night series took this up a few notches, especially with the innovative dual analogue control scheme. As with the Tiger Woods games, the developers found that a good control interface makes all the difference in a sports game, especially one where punching your opponent should really

demand more technique than simply pressing buttons.

Round 2 sorted out a lot of the elements that define the game and the third title seems to look more towards polish and correction. One complaint about earlier games was the powerful haymaker punch, which could be applied liberally and often decided a match. This has apparently been curbed back to allow for more strategy. On top of that EA Chicago added the Flash KO and Stun punches. The first is a powerful blow that will stun an opponent, giving players the opportunity to land a few more punches. The latter switches the target to first-person mode, where he has to block and dodge incoming punches from his opponent. Both are very powerful and can swing the match, but are also more complicated to execute.

Beyond that the developers sought to bring more depth and feeling to the Fight Night look. While the current generation versions of the game look impressive, complete with the expected motion capturing and slick production, the next generation is truly where the evolution is at. Both the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 versions forgo HUD displays for visual queues



instead. One dynamic that producer Kudo Tsunoda liked talking about was the eyes. Players will be able to gauge an opponent's condition by the focus of their eyes and their general composure. A rattled boxer will look more dazed and has a harder time keeping his eyes on what's important. The same effect counts to knowing your own status in the fight and whether you should back off. This suggests a much more intuitive feel to the Fight Night series and boxing games in general. But this shouldn't surprise anyone. As Tsunoda mused, the new generation of hardware allows for things not possible on current generation hardware.

A new deal with ESPN brings several elements from the famed sports channel to the game. This includes a classic mode where gamers can try out legendary fights from boxing's past, as well as elements from the broadcasts and voices of well-known ESPN boxing commentators. The realism is enhanced with a dynamic crowd model that will react to how the fight is going. The main game boasts over 30 known fighters, each with a different style and technique. This adds to the intuitive nature that the series is

going for, as each fighter plays differently. The new career mode should also get players closer to the bone, especially since it's even possible to take part in weigh-in brawls.

To fight the tendency of maxing out a character and taking him online, Round 3 has a style creator. As players progress through the career mode and beat famous boxers, the beaten opponents' signature moves are unlocked to be used. Thus players can create a boxer with a unique blend of styles, something the developers hope will reward players who actually take the time to learn the game instead of just creating the boxer with the highest stats. It also gives a big advantage to players who build a character through a career instead of just maxing one out for online events.

Fight Night: Round 3 is looking great and the extra detail in movement, facial expressions and general graphic improvement is obvious. If the game fixes the problems of the former title, which seems to be the aim here, it can be the best in the series and perhaps the best boxing game made. Is there perfection in a sports franchise? Watch Fight Night: Round 3 to find out. **NAG**

**Realistic expressions and movement hope to make this the best boxing game yet**

## VITAL INFO

## Platforms



## Developer

SCEJ

## Publisher

SCEI

## Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

## Genre

Survival Horror

## Release Date

Q2 2006



*This under-appreciated horror gets a well-deserved sequel that looks forboding*

# FORBIDDEN SIREN 2

**F**ORBIDDEN SIREN IS PERHAPS the most under-appreciated survival horror title released in the past five years. The game was a daring departure from the staples that Resident Evil and Silent Hill were filtering into the genre, but so much so that some players couldn't get their heads around it. It was also a truly unforgiving game, where mistakes had to be learned from

if players wanted to proceed. But the main reason, perhaps, why it failed to entice the masses was the sheer level of terror. While we still trump Silent Hill 2 as the scariest game yet made, Forbidden Siren gave a whole new side to horror, often creepier than anything else out there.

But the game definitely made an impact. At last year's Tokyo Game Show the title was playable and a long line quickly formed to get into the booth. A lot remains unsaid about Forbidden Siren 2. The interesting story mode from the first game, which involved playing different parts for different characters in a non-chronological order spread over a three day time line, hasn't been confirmed as back. But it was an interesting mechanic and a good way to encourage players to use nearly a dozen characters to complete the tale. The multitude of characters haven't been confirmed either, but there appears to be more than enough of a cast to keep things going this way.

The game takes place on the island of Yamijima. Twenty-nine years ago an underwater power cable snapped, plunging the island into darkness. That night all the inhabitants disappeared without a trace, spurning on a lot of stories about their fate. One of the game characters, a magazine editor called Mamoru Itsuki, goes to Yamijima to find out more about the legend. But there are other characters as well including a fugitive, two special servicemen forced to land their helicopter in a storm and a young girl named Yuri Kishida who is shrouded in mystery.





The game takes the familiar approach of the first, relying heavily on atmosphere and cunning. The Siren games enforce careful and tactical approaches to the horrors of the island more than other games in the genre and fans can likely expect the same level of creative puzzles that the first game had. Yamijima isn't a good place to be, especially since a so-called 'red tsunami' turned the sea into a blood colour during a storm. There are two threats on the island mentioned so far: the Shibito [living dead] and the creepy Yamibito [People of the Dark], plus a third force has been mentioned but remains unnamed.

Forbidden Siren 2 doesn't look terrific, but this is part of the series' charm, plus you have to grant some leniency for the aged PlayStation 2 architecture. Instead of pushing for more polished and realistic graphics, the game prefers a grittier look that emphasises the overall feel of the game world. It also strives to make it look good where it matters: the facial expressions of the characters are quite something, especially when they seem to be afraid. So you can't judge this book by its cover. If the second game keeps with the standards set by the first, it will be well worth playing and hopefully draw in the fan base it deserves. But the series definitely deserves to continue and the second Siren title could usher in a few more games based in dark and dangerous Japanese villages. **NAG**



*Grinning or not, the undead should be avoided at all costs*

**VITAL INFO**

- Platforms  
PSP
- Developer  
Capcom
- Publisher  
Capcom
- Supplier  
Ster Kinekor Games  
[011] 445 7900
- Genre  
Fighting
- Release Date  
TBA



# STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3 MAX

**O**NE MUST RESPECT THE Street Fighter series. First, it essentially revolves around Street Fighter 2, since no one seems to remember the first game. Then it survived what is one of the worst game movies ever made. Finally, it keeps the 2D sprite fighter name high in a world with increasing use of 3D graphics. The Street Fighter games remain as one of the stalwarts of old-school arcade beat-'em-ups. In other words, don't be surprised that it's still around. And don't be surprised that it's been ported to practically every platform out there. Next up: the PSP.

Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max [or Alpha 3 Double Upper] is a straight port of Street Fighter Alpha 3, considered by fans to be the best in the Alpha series and one of the best in the overall Street Fighter legacy. Capcom added a few extras to make the PSP port special, but the biggest addition is the wireless multiplayer, something bound to be very popular amongst fans. Everything is kept true to the console versions and the character roster exceeds 30. There are four new additions: Yun, Maki and Eagle return after appearing in the GBA version of Alpha 3, while Ingrid appears in her second game after appearing in Capcom Fighting Evolution last year.

There doesn't remain much else to be said. Graphically the game looks on par with the original and Capcom has learned enough lessons in the past not to mess with the Street Fighter

formula too much. Once again, though, PSP owners have to take on another port for the system, but this isn't unlike the GBA's initial flood of SNES ports. Besides, Street Fighter is one game that deserves to be lavished across as many platforms as it can manage and it is sure to sell well. One concern raised by fans is the lack of a segmented D-pad on Sony controllers, something that has left a lot of 2D fighters unresponsive on PlayStation hardware and definitely a factor that will break the game if not done well. Whether the final game will please the demanding Street Fighter crowd remains to be seen, but the pending release is creating a lot of excitement. And who knows? Maybe Marvel vs. Capcom is next... **NAG**

*The SF2 crew is back, portable and wireless on the PSP*





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BEEP, BEEP, BEEP, BEEP

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## AWARDS CRITERIA

*In case you didn't know yet...*

### Award of Merit

Any game scoring between 85 and 90 on our super tough scoring system gets this award. It's a mark of quality.



### Award of Excellence

91 and above in the score box gets a game this coveted and world famous accolade. Only the best of the best get this rare and sought after award.



### Editor's Choice

Once in a while, a game comes along that displays certain qualities which our editor likes. Pretty colours and loud noises help...



### Platform

Platforms are described using icons rather than just plain old words. For those of you who don't know [shame on you] they are, left to right, top to bottom: PC, PlayStation 2, GameCube, Xbox, PSP, Game Boy Advance, DS and mobile.



### Scoring

Our scores range from one to one hundred, with a score of fifty being considered average - because we can. Live with it.

KONAMI



# Castlevania® Curse of Darkness

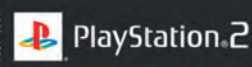


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It appears the series found its feet again

**VITAL INFO**

- **Platforms**
  - **Suggested Retail Price**  
R299
  - **Developer**  
Ubisoft
  - **Publisher**  
Ubisoft
  - **Supplier**  
MegaRom [011] 234 2680
  - **Genre**  
Action Platform
  - **Age Restriction**  
16+
  - **Minimum Specs**  
Pentium 3 800MHz  
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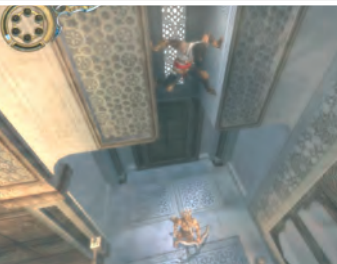


# PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES

IT'S BEEN A FEW years since the Prince of Persia resurrection. In what is perhaps a testament of how quickly long-demanded change takes hold, the fluid gameplay style Sands of Time brought to the platform arena has now become more of a standard, with a lot of games bringing in their own sensibilities to what a good 3D platform experience should be. So when Two Thrones was released, it wouldn't benefit from simply trying to clone Sands' movement. At the same time, the series lost its track with The Warrior Within. This might have been an ambitious stab at trying to find that niche that makes a game a lot more playable, but it left the third game in a strange position, one that caused a lot of gamers not to find much value in the pre-game hype.

Thankfully, somewhere down the line the series found its roots again. But it still maintained the lessons learned from the second title, which wasn't a terrible experience. Two Thrones appears to aim for bringing combat and acrobatics closer to each other, while at the same time not over-complicating combat [since the series is really about acrobatics] and putting in enough bounding and re-bounding to keep things in motion. It does this with a fairly fine blend and while it doesn't come across as perfect, it does signify a move forward for the series.

The prince returns to his home city of Babylon, along with his fling, expecting a warm welcome. But the top-notch CG





intro sequence sets the scene as your ship gets sunk and you soon find your darling taken by soldiers. This brings us into the game and in no time the prince is scuttling up walls and making basic navigation. Being the third in the series, the controls are introduced a bit more efficiently and there is a bit of assumption that you've played one of the games before. The story leans towards this as well and even though things will make sense to new players, they won't be nearly as intriguing.

Soon the navigation becomes steeper, though the initial levels are fairly easy. In fact, *Two Thrones* isn't extremely challenging in navigating the levels, but this is perhaps because of familiarity with the system. It's not easy, but somehow [and perhaps thankfully] the levels seem less daunting. Once the prince gains a weapon, players are introduced to the quick kill feature. Sneaking up behind an opponent, or finding a convenient spot on a perch above the target will brighten up the screen in a specific way and indicate that you can execute such a kill. Press the button and the prince leaps down onto the opponent. Then players have to click the attack button at specific intervals during the attack move. This varies depending on what is being attacked - miss a click and the opponent blocks the blow, leading the event into a normal fight.

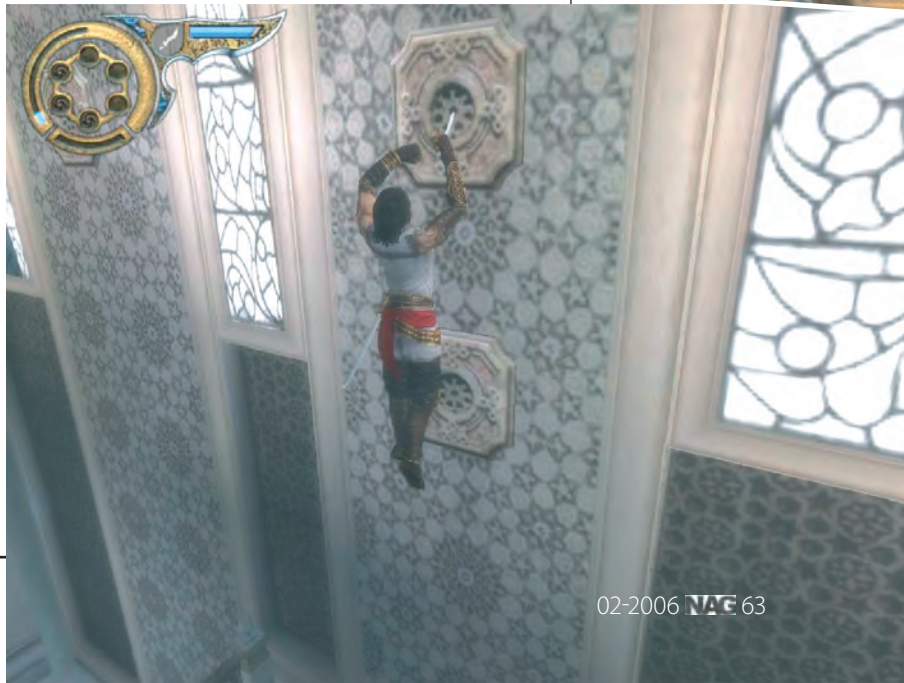
These stealth kills are very useful in taking out problems. If a soldier or creature isn't facing towards the action, you can even take out units behind them and then sneak up for another kill. That means, though, that the enemy AI is pretty slow, but this isn't a game in which high strategy is required. Loud noises and stupid mistakes will gain their attention, but in general the fights are straightforward and the usual rules of beat-'em-up apply as some monsters require specific types of attacks. Levels are designed to exploit some situations and sneak attacks are handed more to the player. Sometimes you just have to fight, but less often than one might be led to think.

Acrobatics are fun again. Panels that can launch the prince diagonally, spots where a knife can be wedged or close walls where the prince can wedge himself and move up and down all come from *Warrior Within* or are new innovations to the game. This diversity brings the life needed to the acrobatic element, making it fun. Where does that leave the combat? Here the

developers got innovative, or took an idea oft seen in the genre, and introduced an alter-ego.

The prince finally finds his kidnapped girl, along with the Frazier from the first game. Things get out of hand, people get killed and the prince ends up with a chain on his arm and the dagger that started all the nonsense in the first title. After navigating a few traps, the dark prince emerges. Thanks to the events that happened, the dark prince is an alter-ego caused by the Sands. It also goes a way into explaining why Babylon is at war and not peaceful, like the prince expected. Regardless of plot, the dark prince is obviously in the game to give more dimension to the combat. We could also cynically suggest that it was an apt opportunity to use the entertaining chain weapon from *God of War* [which, in turn, took a lot of inspiration from *Rygar*], but it's a nice gimmick that serves the game. It also introduces an annoying element to the game. While in the dark prince mode, the health gradually drops. To remedy this, you have to kill opponents, which leave sand. This in turn replenishes health. The concept is fine, but this renders one of the powers of the series, the time manipulation, impotent. It often doesn't help rewinding when dying in this mode, since you frequently die because you simply run

***It's the best looking title in the series yet, gone is the gothic dark of Warrior Within***





out of health. But the situations aren't impossible and the dark prince's chain weapon can be devastating if used right. Still, this is a combatant's dream and something that the acrobatically minded will abhor.

At this point you might want to get an analogue controller, because the keyboard/mouse combinations aren't ideal for the dark alter-ego of the prince. But the rest works like a charm and it is clear that most of the series' controller ideas have been refined to a nice degree. The third brings a return to the linear levels of the first, instead of the constant retracing in Warrior Within. Some might praise the second game's levels as innovative, but retracting steps is just a cheap way to lengthen a game. Two Thrones will once again take you to awesome sights and stunning moments that will take your breath away. Graphically things are crisp and exotic. Aurally the Arabian soundtrack is back after the out-of-place metal in number two. In fact, a lot of what was done wrong in the second game is right, while the good parts have been kept.

Fans will like it, since the game makes enough progress. New players will like it because it's a good blend of the two

former games. Sadly the dark prince isn't as big a deal as one would have liked and his combat-intensive nature takes things back a little. The prince also still rambles on like a prep-school dropout who sprained his wrist playing tennis at daddy's place. You'd think he'd be a bit tougher by now. Luckily he's a great fighter and nimble climber, so you tend to be patient. And the game interface isn't streamlined. You can't skip movies and every time the prince dies, players are treated with an annoying animated screen instead of popping back to the last save point. But frequent auto-save points mean the game is less frustrating and kept in motion.

Overall, Two Thrones is the best in the series. It's not the revolution that Sands of Time was, but Prince of Persia is stronger than ever in its third iteration. Is this the end of the series? Maybe, but it will be nice to see more games that employ this kind of gameplay. Until then, though, Two Thrones can keep you busy. **NAG**

*Traps, monster, women... for the prince who has it all*





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- Webstats
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- 25 Group mails

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Well done, but falls short in delivering more

**VITAL INFO**

- Platforms PC
- Suggested Retail Price R399
- Developer Neversoft
- Publisher Activision
- Supplier MegaRom [011] 234 2680
- Genre Action Western
- Age Restriction 18+
- Minimum Specs  
Pentium 3.800MHz  
256MB RAM  
4x CD-ROM  
NVIDIA GeForce 2™ Video Card  
2.7GB HDD



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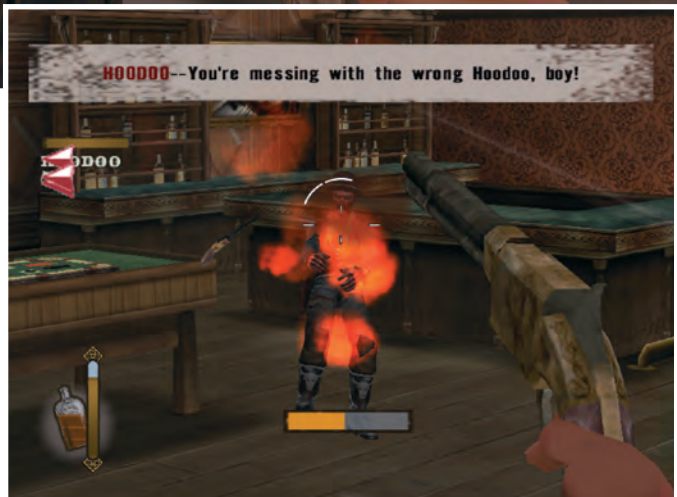
# GUN



IT'S NOT HARD to be disappointed in Gun in some way. The cowboy genre is well defined in the movie arena. When word first came out about Gun, ideas of Sergio Leone movies and cigar-chewing Mexicans came to mind. Vast open landscapes of arid lands, rough bandits, ravaging Indians and perhaps the ultimate poster child for the anti-hero: the cowboy. Romanticised to hell and back, but the cowboys we all know aren't the real frontiersmen of the American Midwest, instead they're the characters brought to us by John Wayne, Clint Eastwood and Robert Redford. Even James Bond is a pseudo part of cowboy lore with its lone gunman approach.

So it's easy to have high expectations from Gun, especially since it's the experienced Neversoft team at the development helm. That said, the studio's flair has been waning with its past games, so Gun also represents a fresh breath for the Tony Hawk-bound studio. But it also reveals some of its limitations.

Gun starts cinematically. While the general look of the game might not be that good, it's very deceptive. Gun captures quite a bit of the GTA: San Andreas graphical flair with a world that comes alive in motion. Players assume the role of Cole, the bush-dwelling hunter on the American frontier. You and your father are out hunting for the steamboats that pass via the nearby river.



This serves as an easy but painless tutorial, involving shooting some wildlife and fighting a bear as a boss character. Then you arrive on a steamboat. There is something rotten though, especially with a creepy preacher who might be from that cannibalism camp in Dead Man's Hand. Soon all hell breaks loose and you run around a burning steamboat, shooting crazed ghoul-like troopers and utilising your various shooting styles and attacks. But this doesn't last. Suffice to say, your dad doesn't survive the exploding steamboat, but not before he imparts that he actually isn't your dad and you should go to a whore in a nearby town to find out more.

Cole wakes up later and players learn he's the only survivor, but not before being treated with another scene where the said preacher gets his ear sliced off by a much meaner-looking



### GET THE STOLEN HORSE FROM SHIFTY



man with an eye patch. Gun deserves its 18 age restriction. The game has a gritty feel to it and generally brings across a very violent feel to the Wild West. It's 'The Good, The Bad and the Ugly' right down to a soundtrack that takes liberal inspiration from Ennio Morricone's score as well as other movies. But it's also 'Tombstone'. Gun blends the vast deserts of the spaghetti Western with the mainstay of American Midwestern Westerns. You get to explore this, since the game opted for the GTA-inspired sandbox game world. Once you have your horse and you do your bit in the first town, the world starts opening up. The story, while not extremely complex or perplexing, dodges and weaves enough to keep you going places and meeting people. Major progress in the storyline opens new areas, but each new section comes with new side missions. These largely involve bounty hunting, ranching tasks, Marshall duties and odds and ends. Some side missions are timed, while others send you across the map. Quite a few are horse-bound, so players spend a lot of time going through the various changing landscapes around Gun's world.

In GTA fashion, once again, the map is divided into many smaller areas with interesting names like Devil's Canyon. Rivers and railroads carve the landscape and cities bring more life to the large world Cole eventually finds himself in. Exploring is

a large part of it, since various missions are not on the beaten path. Some are quite unique, like the Indian hunters. This subset of missions takes you through hunting skills, handing Cole more skill-based improvements. Other side missions usually result in cash and a set awards system. Unlike San Andreas, Cole doesn't advance in skill as you simply just do stuff. This is perhaps the biggest disappointment with Gun, though a latent one at first. San Andreas ushered in a much more evolved and involved system for the sandbox mode, but Gun sticks to arcade dynamics. Regardless of how well you do on a mission, the scores are set and the character progress fairly controlled. Missions also pay cash, handing at least some control over. At town and Indian merchants Cole can purchase various upgrades that affect accuracy, horse speed, draw speed and more. After a while this becomes a primary motivation to do side missions – money to purchase upgrades. The main game story has a fairly steep learning curve, so spending time improving Cole pays off. There are more ways than just missions to make

*Blue skies, barren rock and distant gazes, perfect for a cowboy game*



### PROTECT CLAY





money - exploring the world is really the best way to get the most out of Gun.

The game adds a cherry on the top with a bit of Cowboy superhero stature. The Quick Draw mode allows Cole to take out multiple targets in one sweep. Swooping to a first-person bullet-time mode, you can tap between targets and put down accurate and deadly shots in a row. It's a great way to break up a crowd and get a handle on a situation. Quick Draw attacks also deal more damage, making it very useful for challenging boss fights. As usual, there is a charge bar involved that determines Quick Draw time, and this bar gets recharged with normal kills, plus the duration can be extended. But the mode doesn't dominate, since combat in Gun is fairly fluid. Well placed rifle or shotgun blasts can clear a crowd quickly, a nasty knife-wielding melee attack gut close encounters and horses are useful to skid or stomp on guys on the ground. The weapons upgrade, the enemies are diverse enough and you do a fair amount of travelling.

So where's the problem? Well, it depends what you want from Gun and clearly a lot of the signs say we wanted GTA with cowboys. Gun is still too tight around the collar for that. Neversoft's penchant for mission-driven games with touches of exploration, as opposed to GTA fuelling missions through exploration, comes through in what is too rigid a mission structure. The game really moves at the pace of the missions and your hand seems forced in a way, since the game seems to offer quite some freedom, but is really pretty insular. Gun sticks to the story and doesn't last long. While a GTA game will take

you months to finish, Gun is perhaps a week of intensive play at most. The lack of any real sub-stories or entwining plot lines keeps things to the point. On top of that, Gun doesn't have a seamless move from the world to missions and every event is punctuated with fade outs. There are some bandits and such on the open road, but all of the real action lies in the missions. This makes Gun an arcade shooter. With all the aspects of sandbox gaming that the game embraces, it is disappointing to find it coming across as a less involved action romp.

But the question is whether Gun actually did something wrong here. Neversoft served up more or less what it promised, if you ignore Activision's marketing that clearly wanted to siphon some Rockstar appeal. The game doesn't disappoint with a movie atmosphere and the world is certainly diverse, if a bit sparse. When you consider it at its merit, Gun is a good game and entertaining. But it is also limited. Still, with so few titles that take on the Wild West theme it is encouraging to see a game that does a good job with the theme. Even if Gun disappoints, it instils hope for a more diverse and elaborate Gun 2. Neversoft's heart is in the right place. It just remains to be seen if heads can be moved to the same place as well. **NAG**

*For its short lifespan Gun provides a rich world to leave dust trails in*



# ASUS ReverseCool Delivers Effective and Noiseless Cooling for High-Performance Graphics Cards

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X700, the Extreme AX700 Silencer / TD / 256M is a graphics powerhouse made for visual indulgence. It incorporated two pretty nice features found only in ASUS solutions.



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**VITAL INFO**

- **Platforms**
- **Suggested Retail Price**  
R310
- **Developer**  
Firaxis
- **Publisher**  
2K Games
- **Supplier**  
Ster Kinekor Games  
[011] 445 7900
- **Genre**  
Management
- **Age Restriction**  
12+
- **Minimum Specs**  
Pentium 4 1.2GHz  
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# CIVILIZATION IV

**Command & Conquer old school as you take an entire Civilization through the epochs**

**S**OME GAMES DEFY DEFINITION. Back when nearly every game could slip comfortably into a genre, there were already titles that broke the mould and presented a game that you described by naming it. Civilization became a culture upon its own, not slotting in comfortably with simple turn-based strategy, god game or management sim. It's been well over a decade since the first Civilization appeared in 1991. Through the years the game has seen a few changes here and there, but it is perhaps testament to Sid Meier's game design that the core title has remained unchanged for fifteen years. Civ 2 and 3 brought along their paradigms, mostly shifting the bar in the cosmetics department and introducing a few

units, plus the obligatory tweaks to the system. There have also been spin-offs with Call to Power and Civnet. Players could travel to the stars with Alpha Centauri. Fans have even created free versions, like the impressive Freeciv. But that was all before the fourth game.

Let's not call Civilization IV an evolution. In light of the series it's not even a revolution. But the game has definitely seen its largest shake-up since the first title appeared. Basically put, this is still Civilization, but with a far more accessible and interesting jacket to cloak it. One of the hallmarks, and problems, with the series has been its complexity. This comes part and parcel with anything where you are expected to



manage a Civilization from its stone-age beginnings to reaching Alpha Centauri. The usual game remains in place. You can win through diplomatic means, war or reaching the stars first. Players can now also dominate a game through culture.

With a tutorial mode intact, there are clear signs that this title hopes to bring a bit of new blood to the series. Die-hard Civ fans will definitely get it [and are not likely to be disappointed], but getting new gamers to try out this vast strategy title is another matter. The problem is Civilization's complexity. This is not a title that you'll have under your thumb by the day's end. Even in IV familiar concepts that have existed since the game started seem new because some of them players have never seen before or dealt with. It's a testament to the diverse world and system the game embraces, since there are many ways to beat your opponent and run to the top of the human race. With IV, apart from new additions and changes, the developers went further with what started in Civilization III. Existing parts of the game have been highlighted and made easier to work with. One area this stands out in is the cities. City management can be a nightmare if you don't know what you are doing or you simply don't have the interest. Often an empire will collapse under riots and unhappy civilians. Keeping the peace often involves a fine balance of luxury items, taxes and what you spend your money on. In IV, handling this aspect is a lot easier and the slots per city have been expanded for some more leeway in steering the course for the masses. But this can also be automated, leaving players to work on other aspects. In fact, with the CPU managing your cities [this can be set on a per-city basis], the settlements tend to behave and produce very well, if you don't do something foolish. This level of automation is evident throughout the game. Most of these aren't new introductions, but it works well in IV and you can actually now leave large aspects of your kingdom to the CPU [though some micro-management of workers is advisable].

Civ IV is both a big step for the series and a modest shuffle forward, because it manages to do quite a lot and pretty little at the same time. But if it isn't broken... The game has got performance issues, especially as your time line progresses, and even the toughest machines struggle after a while. So don't buy it for a medium spec machine. But it definitely is the best Civ game made yet; still, you can see things running out of steam and Firaxis have to take some time thinking about how to change the series with the next iteration. Perhaps more technologies? Either way, this will eat up your time like the previous games and if anything that's good enough for a Civ fan. **NAG**



*Civ IV is much easier to manage and more detailed. But it is still the same game in the end*



A nice try at something that may, in the end, not really be possible

**VITAL INFO**

- Platforms  
PC
- Suggested Retail Price  
R299
- Developer  
Eberron
- Publisher  
Atari
- Supplier  
MegaRom [011] 234 2680
- Genre  
RTS
- Age Restriction  
12+
- Minimum Specs  
Pentium 4 2.0Ghz  
512MB RAM  
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paladins does  
it take to storm  
an enemy  
encampment?*

*Too many heads,  
man – let's cut it  
down to size!*



# DRAGONSHARD

**D**UNGEONS & DRAGONS MEETS real-time strategy. If anything, it's surprising that it took so long to happen! After perusing the proclamations on the outside of the game's packaging, we dove into the interior while the game installed. We were impressed

by the thoroughness and presentation of the manual. The installation took a while, as the game is presented on DVD and occupies 2.5GB of hard drive space. This fact is a little puzzling, as the game features no video as such, rather making use of the





game engine to present the story, much as is the current fashion. Furthermore, although the campaigns take some time to complete, this is mainly due to the intricacy of the missions, not their number. But we're getting ahead of ourselves...

The game's front-end is typical Atari fare and anyone who has played, say *Magic the Gathering: Battlegrounds*, will know what we're talking about – the menus boast numerous animations, most suggestive of mechanisms at work. Quite pleasing, really. A tutorial explains various game elements, from basic real-time strategy concepts that veterans of the genre can safely ignore, to features specific to *Dragonshard*.

The game struck us as being a hybrid of *Warcraft III* and *Battle for Middle-earth*. The graphical style and unit abilities are reminiscent of the former, while the base-building model has been adapted from the latter. We found this approach rather bold, as it was *Battle for Middle-earth's* innovative base-building model that discouraged many of the more hidebound, traditional RTS players, leading to the game's success being rather limited. In *Dragonshard*, players' main bases are fortresses [variously named according to which of the three available factions you are playing] consisting of a central keep, surrounding walls and an array of building plots in-between. The plots are arranged in groups of four, and buildings erected in adjacent plots interact with each other. It is advisable to group buildings of a type together, as complexes of structures are required in order to advance the units produced therein. There are no 'tech buildings' and players aren't required to carry out researches of any kind. Instead, unit types can be levelled up, granting them improved characteristics and abilities. This is achieved by spending experience earned during play. Experience is one of the game's resources, the others being gold and dragon shards. Gold is acquired by looting treasure, cleaning up the corpses of slain enemies and by taxation, which is simply directly proportional to the number of structures one has in operation, and provides a steady, if slow, income. Dragon shards are collected from the countryside and are finite, but are replenished by periodic 'meteor showers' – dragon shards falling from the sky [and hurting when they land on your units' pips].

Units have a highly hierarchical structure. Several champions are available per faction, and act as heroes. Under them are the captains, which are trained at various buildings. Once they gain advancement levels, captains attract soldiers, which enhance the captains and form something of a 'meat shield'.

An innovative aspect of this title is the fact that, in order to reflect the nature of the *Dungeons & Dragons* game, the action takes place both above ground and in subterranean catacombs. Various stairwells and the like link the two, granting units access to 'the underworld'. Two mini-maps are constantly displayed, as units can be split between the surface and the dungeons. The underground realms contain many treasures to be looted, after their guardians are overcome. In single-player mode, players will also acquire numerous quests to complete, some compulsory



**TOP:** *What D&D player hasn't an unpleasant story about a gelatinous cube?*

**MIDDLE:** *Resting next to a newly built expansion*

**BOTTOM:** *The good guys' army dwarfed by a Horned Devil*

and others optional but beneficial in their completion.

Although this game makes a valiant attempt at marrying the concepts in *D&D* role-playing with the computerised action of RTS games, sadly it falls rather short of its goals. Yes, the graphics are rather pretty [though the limited mobility of the camera can be rather annoying when trying to manipulate units or objects that have become obstructed by terrain] and the sound effects, while in no way spectacular, are adequate. The overall game dynamic will likely frustrate RTS veterans in its shallowness and linear nature, while the oversimplification of *D&D* concepts may well incense role-players. To its credit, the game is fun [if somewhat too easy] in single-player mode, but even skirmishes are boring and multi-player is unsatisfactory. **NAG**

**VITAL INFO**

- Platforms
- Suggested Retail Price R299
- Developer 2K Games
- Publisher PopTop Software
- Supplier Ster Kinekor Games [011] 445 7900
- Genre Turn-based strategy
- Age Restriction 12+
- Minimum Specs Pentium 3 800MHz  
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*Left: Unit: building scale is non-existent!  
Bottom: The pre-combat screen shows where the attacker and defender will be allowed to deploy*



# SHATTERED UNION

**T**HE BACKGROUND STORY IS amusing, in an 'arcade' sort of way. An incompetent and corrupt American president results in mass public disapproval and, ultimately, open revolt. The government infrastructure is undermined to the point that the country ends up fragmenting, dissolving into a state of civil war, and several factions now wage open war across the continent, with European and Russian forces interfering here and there. This back-story has allowed the developers to create this game without needing to know much about military technology other than that of the US – all the factions are, basically, American and have identical hardware at their disposal.

Although we would have said that the days of turn-based strategy games played on hex-grids were over, we must admit that this one is put together rather well. The graphics are pretty advanced [though they cannot be compared to premium 3D games on the market today]. The main game

view is presented in 3D and can be scrolled, zoomed, rotated and tilted. Terrain and unit detail are reasonably good, but water effects are rudimentary. Given that the action isn't real-time, sound effects are also fairly basic. A pity that the music is downright dull – yes, WinAmp to the rescue!

During the course of a campaign, players will battle across a territory map of North

America, vying to take control of all territories. Each territory generates a certain amount of revenue, which accrues between battles, and is used to buy units. Players maintain an army, and decide which of their units to send into a battle. In the early game, it is often advisable to commit the whole army, even though that makes defending territories impossible, and count on being invaded at least once every campaign turn. Later in the game, once armies are not so evenly matched, it may become possible, and even necessary, to split the army into attack and defence elements. Once in a battle, the view changes to that of the territory, and the aggressor is sometimes given the option of attacking from a different side. The battles are totally objective-dependent, which allows players to make use of blitzkrieg tactics – dash in with fast units and take the key locations to win, minimising exposure time and overall risk to units. Alternatively, one can play with heavy units and go around stomping on the enemy. An impressive array of units is presented in Shattered Union, from infantry types through various light and heavy armoured vehicles through to aircraft and artillery. Each unit has differing capabilities against various unit types and this fact will weigh heavily in choosing which units to buy.

Although, as turn-based games go, Shattered Union impressed us somewhat, we found that it didn't hold our attention for long. Perhaps an older, more cerebral audience may appreciate this title, or very abstract thinkers, but the mainstream of gamers would most likely do best to try something else. **NAG**



**A-DATA**



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May appeal to WW2 scholars, but will bore RTS fans quite quickly

**VITAL INFO**

- Platforms
- PC
- Suggested Retail Price R299
- Developer Nival Interactive
- Publisher CDV
- Supplier WWE [011] 462 0150
- Genre RTS
- Age Restriction 12+
- Minimum Specs
- Pentium 4 1.0GHz
- 512MB RAM
- 4x DVD-ROM
- 64MB Video Card
- 2.5GB HDD



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# BLITZKRIEG 2

*The very attractive-looking mission briefing map*

AS IS THE CASE with most World War 2 games, Blitzkrieg 2 attempts to bear the mark of authenticity. Therefore, the damage model approaches something resembling realism. Furthermore, the campaigns are loosely based on historical events, and background information on various combat units is provided in an 'encyclopaedic' manner, much as is the case in the Panzers titles.

What immediately jumped out at us was what appeared to be a modified Age of Empires graphical engine presenting the action. Turning up detail levels improved the experience, but the game suffers from an annoying shortcoming: it is impossible to zoom in as close as one might wish, so units always appear very small and are often nigh-impossible to distinguish. In other regards, the graphics are rather pleasing with shadows being particularly detailed, lending the terrain a very realistic look. Lighting is also well executed, particularly in the way it interacts with architecture. However, just as is the case with Age of Empires, occluded units show up as brightly coloured outlines, and while this can be useful, it is also aesthetically lacking.

The audio experience is well handled, with highly authentic unit responses. In fact, speakers of German and Russian will enjoy the occasional comments passed by troops as they are selected or issued an order.

During the course of a mission, the player has at his or her disposal a limited number of reinforcements, which can be rallied to any location and which can be chosen from a range of available unit or squad types. The hardest decision in any game is when to summon reinforcements and when to hold back. Keeping at least one batch in reserve is advisable, as it may become necessary to summon specialists [such as mine-clearing infantry or engineers to repair vehicles]. Missions start off fairly short, quick and easy, but quickly escalate in difficulty.

Between missions, the player's character as well as his under-commander is awarded experience, which may result in promotion. Promotions result in new abilities being unlocked [such as the knowledge of how to entrench a position or set an ambush]. Three campaigns are available: American, German and Russian.

Fans of traditional-style real-time strategy games are unlikely to be gripped by this title. It is more likely to appeal to history buffs and serious war-gamers. However, even in this arena Blitzkrieg 2 suffers from the fact that other, similar titles on the market at the moment tend to offer rather more, particularly in terms of user interface and graphical splendour. We doubt Blitzkrieg 2 will successfully compete with, for instance the Panzers games [particularly Phase 2], even though in terms of historical content Blitzkrieg 2 is slightly more academically minded. **NAG**





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# Play King Kong the Way it Should Be Played

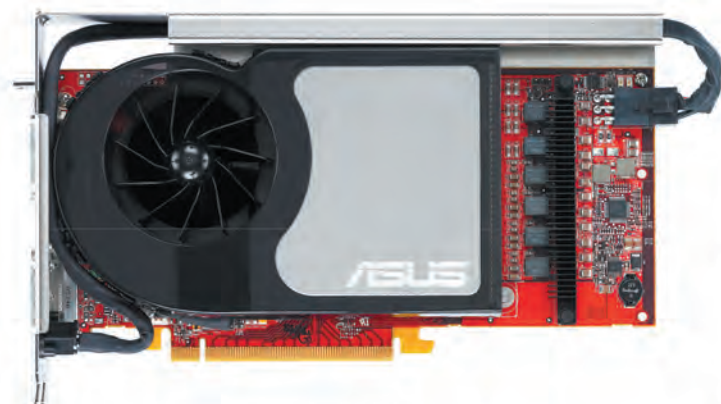
## Get ASUS EAX1800XT TOP and Official King Kong Game in 1 Package

**HEY GAMERS!!** You are in luck!!! From Peter Jackson, the director of the "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy, comes another blockbuster. "King Kong" will hit a theater near you this December and its official game is poised to shake up the gaming world. And this exciting game is now bundled with the ASUS EAX1800XT TOP graphics card.

The ASUS card, with exclusive features and video capability, has been selected as the official hardware for "King Kong" the game. To get the powerful graphics card, the hottest game in 2006 and the XitePad gamepad in one package, look no further than ASUS graphics solutions.

The EAX1800XT TOP graphics card, which incorporated ATI's flagship Radeon® X1800XT VPU (video processing unit), provides the video capability needed for robust PC video systems. Offering stable operation to go with powerful performance, the EAX1800XT TOP leveraged the innovative Arctic Cooling technology, bringing efficient heat dissipation to the world of high-quality visual enjoyment. With industry-leading graphics expertise and advanced technology, it offers a 10% performance enhancement compared to competing solutions.

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**ASUS OnScreen Display:** Have you ever adjusted your monitor's display settings during a game because it was too dark? I bet it was pretty annoying to have to exit the game, make all the changes and resume.



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▲ Too Bright



▲ ASUS OSD

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**GameFace Messenger:** It is a user-friendly interface similar to those of the most popular messenger services to simplify the process of inviting multiple players to a gameferences (game conferences). Register, log on and start the fun. GameFace Messenger is as easy as the free messengers currently in the market.

**Splendid Video Intelligence Technology:** Built into the driver of ASUS graphics cards, Splendid detects activation and usage of video applications and automatically optimizes image quality for the best visual results. Splendid further provides five modes for best visual results in different video applications (Standard, Game, Theater, Scenery and Night)

To truly experience the visual effects of the latest 3D games, a capable graphics card is a must. Combined with unique features that enhance player interaction during games, the EAX1800XT TOP is the ideal solution for the bundled official game of "King Kong".



## CITY OF VILLAINS

[www.cityofvillains.com](http://www.cityofvillains.com)

It's good to be Bad, but it's better to be Evil. With the unprecedented success of City of Heroes and its spandex clad do-gooders, it didn't come as a surprise to anyone when City of Villains was announced, a chance for gamers to exact villainous deeds on the innocent public as well as engage in epic battles against the righteous from City of Heroes.

### DAY 1 – INITIAL SETUP

City of Villains comes on four CDs, a rather large install but not uncharacteristic of the MMORPG genre. Once installed, the CD-key is added to your personal online PlayNC account, which registers the game to your account and lets you choose a payment method. As is standard with City of Heroes, City of Villains is \$14.99 a month which you can pay via a credit card. Alternatively you can purchase Timecards which allow for a certain period of play, though these Timecards are not sold in South Africa, so using a credit card is the only way to gain access to City of Villains. If you are already paying for a City of Heroes account however, you get access to City of Villains for free.

As with every MMORPG when freshly installed, there is a lengthy patching process. City of Villains is no different. At the time of writing, almost 100MB of patches had to download before the game would run.

### Evil has to look good

Once up and running, the process of creating an evil alter-ego starts. Much like with City of Heroes, the character creation in City of Villains is almost an entire game on its own. The sheer plethora of options available to you makes it possible to create almost any kind of villain, in any shape, size or form. One can spend hours designing your character visually, while the factors that influence the statistical development of your character are slightly more distilled.

First is the Archetype, which determines the nature of your powers and grants you access to a specific Primary Power Set. It is the single most defining choice you make in character creation. Each Archetype has its own unique powers, abilities as well as pros and cons. The Archetypes are Brute, Stalker, Mastermind, Dominator and Corruptor.

The second choice is that of your Origin. Your Origin determines what types of enhancements your villain has access to. It doesn't impact your power levels or abilities, but it does add flavour to your character since it determines what grants it the diabolical powers with which to be evil. Origin types are Science, Mutant, Magic, Technology and Natural.

Lastly and before creating the look of your character is the matter of Power Sets and Starting Powers. A Power Set is a group of nine related powers. Your level in the game determines which powers you have access to, thus you won't have access to the complex powers until later. The powers you begin with at earlier levels do not become useless as your character grows. In fact, they grow in power with you, and, with the addition of enhancements, they'll be useful throughout your entire crime spree.



### Free at least!

The game starts with an appropriately themed tutorial, modelled after a jailbreak. As you progress through your own escape from prison, each NPC you talk to explains how the game works and elaborates on the various nuances. As you meet key characters [characters that reappear throughout the game's 'plot'], they are actually accompanied by their own recognisable theme music, a nice atmospheric touch. It was at this point that the server was shut down, booting me out of the game. It seems that City of Villains has 'regular server maintenance' for two hours every week, something that might catch new players off guard.

### DAY 2 – DOING EVIL

Walking around inside the game is responsive even on slower connections. It seems that City of Villains is very lag tolerant. Unfortunately it is not very low-end system specification tolerant. You will need quite a powerful video card and processor to fully enjoy City of Villains, as the game is actually quite graphically intensive.

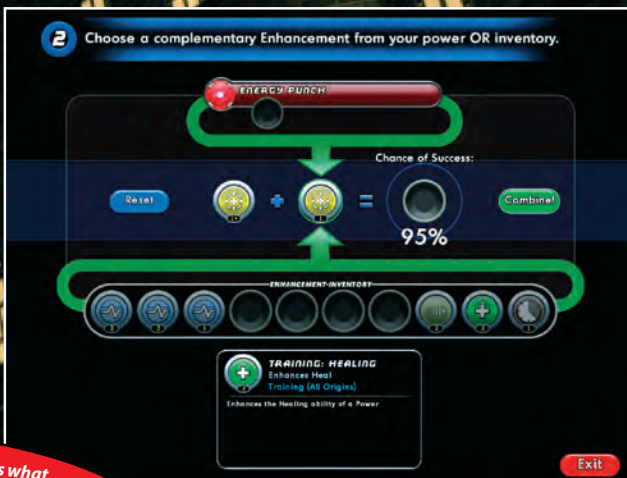
Missions are doled out to players via 'contacts', which you will make more of as you progress through the game's overlaid 'plot' of superheroes and super villains. As you gain levels by completing the themed missions, you gain access to new contacts that will then have you embark on more difficult missions.

It is very possible to go it alone in City of Villains, but as with most MMORPGs it's much better to team up with other players. I personally joined a super group of villains who had already started building their own base [which is possible in City of Heroes too, since the release of City of Villains].

Inside the base, one can create items for the base using crafting materials found in missions. The bigger and better your base, the less successful an invading superhero group might be. Superheroes can actually assault super villain bases and vice versa, though I've not yet seen this in practise myself.

### Of Plots and Ministrations

To keep players interested in the world of City of Villains and Heroes, Cryptic Studios often releases 'Chapters', additions to the game that not only add new content and missions but also expand and elaborate on the story elements that permeate the world. This helps keep things fresh as well as adding content to keep the higher-level players busy. As with any MMORPG where there is a monthly fee, this kind of support is frankly expected, and it's good to see Cryptic Studios so excitedly involved in its own project. **NAG**



**NEXT MONTH: Who knows what villainous deeds we're capable of? Perhaps it's time to go show the do-gooders what a real villain is made of!**

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VITAL INFO

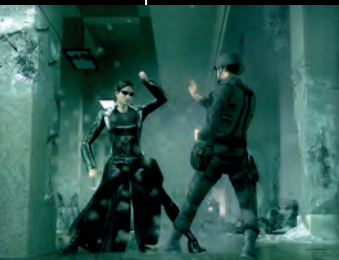
- Platforms
- Suggested Retail Price
- R299
- Developer
- Shiny Entertainment
- Publisher
- Atari
- Supplier
- WWE (011) 462 0150
- Genre
- Action
- Age Restriction
- 16+
- Specifications
- Players: 1
- Controllers: 1
- Multiplayer / Wi-Fi: No
- Memory: 200KB

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*Psheew...bwoom,  
slow-mo keeeek...*

# THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO



*I see code people, walking around like  
regular people...*

**T**HE MATRIX HAS ALWAYS been the perfect vehicle for gamers to live out their idyllic fantasy. Let's face it; the movie set the sombre scene so perfectly: A nerdy sunlight deprived geek got a fancy cellphone, hooked up with a hot girl and then proceeded to find out that he was 'The One', endeavouring to save the world, so forth and so on.

The first 'game of the movie' offering from Shiny was, well, quite terrible. It had the right idea, but simply couldn't deliver. Almost apologetically, Shiny has released Path of Neo promising that this time gamers will really get to be 'The One'. In this aspect, Shiny has indeed succeeded. Path of Neo contains every scene from the movie one would want to play, and then some. Neo himself has been flawlessly digitally recreated right down to the now iconic "Whoa" mutter from Mr. Reeves himself, along with a virtual cacophony of martial arts moves.

Path of Neo is essentially a 'Director's Cut' of original movie footage from all three films [as well as the Animatrix]; the footage used as cinematic sequences to progress the story as told from Neo's perspective. The game sequences between

the footage work well and sometimes even manage to throw an impressive curveball at the player. A good example of this is how the game expands on the original Neo/Morpheus dojo fight sequence by adding an entire extra section to it, rounding off Neo's training a bit.

Shiny just can't seem to get it all right, however. It has a wonderful game in Path of Neo, filled with enough fun and content to keep fans happy. What we could have done without are the terrible flaws in the game as well as the bugs that make the entire experience almost unpalatable. The camera will shake, shudder and lock onto the wrong things at the wrong time, while Neo himself might just fall through the level or get 'stuck' in various places.

It's a shame, because the problems mar an otherwise utterly enjoyable experience filled with wholesome fan-centric goodness. If you overlook the problems [or purchase the PC version instead and its expected patches], Path of Neo is an impressive kung-fu action extravaganza that brings the entire Matrix vision together. If you can't overlook the problems, then you're left with frustration in an overpriced box. **NAG**





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**VITAL INFO**

- Platforms
  - Price
  - Suggested Retail Price R361
  - Developer Pandemic Studios
  - Publisher Lucasarts
  - Supplier EA Africa [011] 516 8300
  - Genre FPS
  - Age Restriction 12+
  - Minimum Specs
- Players: 1-2  
 Analogue: Sticks only;  
 Vibration compatible  
 Memory: 205KB

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# STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT II

LAST YEAR'S STAR WARS: Battlefront, which allowed the player to take part in many of the famous battles from the film franchise, went on to become the best selling Star Wars game ever. Because of that, it is no surprise that a sequel has emerged, and quite quickly at that. Although the essence of the game remains the same as that of the original title, i.e. the recreation of famous film battles, a number of improvements have been made over its predecessor and the result is quite pleasing. Set across the entire Star Wars film timeline, battles are set across such varying locations as icy Hoth, the forest

planet Kashyyyk, Dagobah's swamps, and many other famous settings. The Galactic Conquest mode makes its return, with the objective once again being to conquer the galaxy one planet at a time. The difference this time around is that space-based battles also occur, allowing you to pilot X-Wings or TIE fighters, depending on your allegiance, whilst engaging in dog-fights and trying to knock out your opponent's capital ships. A new addition to the title

is the Rise of the Empire mode, which chronicles the exploits of the 501<sup>st</sup> division of the Clone army, as they tear through the universe and eventually become Darth Vader's elite Stormtroopers. The other major innovation is the inclusion of playable hero characters, which become available for a limited period of time when certain criteria are met in any particular mission. At last characters such as Han Solo, Luke Skywalker and Yoda have become playable, and they are every bit as exciting as one would expect them to be. The visuals in the title are impressive with well detailed characters, but there are a few instances of slowdown that occur when there's a lot of action onscreen. The sound effects and score are of the high quality that is typical of most Star Wars titles and complements the epic scale of the title perfectly. Ultimately, although this title will feel very familiar to anyone who owns the predecessor, the addition of space-combat and the playable hero characters, as well as the intriguing storyline might be enough to merit a purchase, despite any feelings of *déjà vu* this title may evoke. And, of course, there is no doubt that any Star Wars fans who are newcomers to the Battlefront series will certainly love it. **NAG**





**VITAL INFO**

- **Platforms**
- **Suggested Retail Price**  
R399
- **Developer**  
Naughty Dog
- **Publisher**  
SCEE
- **Supplier**  
Ster Kinekor Games  
[011] 445 7900
- **Genre**  
Racing
- **Age Restriction**  
12+
- **Specifications**  
Players: 1  
Controllers: 1  
Multiplayer / Wi-Fi: No  
Memory: N/A

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## JAK X

**A** SA DEVIATION FROM the platforming genre from which Jak and counterpart Dexter emerged, 'combat racing' Jak X is a fair excursion though not entirely comfortable out of the context of the series.

Plot-wise, Jak X tries to keep the same solidity and humour that made the series popular and manages it, for the most part. The in-game cut scenes are vibrant and animated, only let down by the rather asinine plot that fails to compel gamers into reaching the goal – getting the antidote to the poison Jak and Dexter [as well as the entire team Krew] drank.

The Adventure mode stretches across nearly a hundred races while the variety modes of Arena Death Match, Time Trial and head-to-head Death Race offer up some much needed variety. The racing dynamic itself is reasonably solid, the various power-ups and weapons beefy enough to make the combat enjoyable for a while before tedium sets in. The vehicles can be customised and multiple segment snap-ons allow players to create their own definitive style of vehicle, especially with the more fun add-ons such as decals, bobble heads and antenna flags. Jak X includes online and split-screen multiplayer, though the fun factor in this is determined entirely by those participating. It doesn't do anything new and comes off as highly repetitive, but Jak X still manages to make a welcome addition to this under-developed genre. **NAG**

*All the racing,  
none of the fun*



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**VITAL INFO**

- Platforms
- Suggested Retail Price  
R469
- Developer  
Konami
- Publisher  
Konami
- Supplier  
Ster Kinekor Games  
[011] 445 7900
- Genre  
Sport
- Age Restriction  
3+
- Minimum Specs  
Players: 1-8  
Memory: 1,284KB

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*Move over, FIFA, the Pro Evo series is taking its crown again*



# PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5

**A** WORK OF GENIUS IS something to behold. Art has the Mona Lisa, architecture the pyramids and Germany the songs of David Hasselhoff. Thankfully, when it comes to soccer games we can expect a work of genius bustling along once a year – and it's called Pro Evolution Soccer.

But just what makes the Pro Evo series, and Pro Evolution Soccer 5 in particular, so darn special? We think it comes down to the fact that in a climate where games have been increasingly oversimplified to appeal to the masses, Pro Evolution has steadfastly bucked the trend. Pro Evolution Soccer 5 is tough, hard and uncompromising – don't expect any favours. Fighting for mere possession is a struggle, let alone goals. But as you persist and get sucked in by the sheer brilliance of the title your mind is awakened to a cascade of enchanting details as you become aware of, and accordingly react to, things like player form and foot preference, likely runs and positioning. You slowly become adept at crossovers, dipping volleys and nutmegs. It's a perpetual learning curve but the more you learn the better the game gets, and the discoveries just keep coming amid ever-growing realism.

What blurs the lines of reality yet further are the accurate player dynamics. Taking the flawless team AI as a given, it's the individual characters that really catch the eye. True to life Beckham leans back precariously and loops beautiful crosses into the box. Gerrard bustles through crowds of lesser opponents and booms swerving shots into top-corners. Ronaldinho samba-sways and flick-flacks like a man

possessed. And Drogba dives a lot. It's great, it's compelling, it's accurate and it fully immerses the player within this virtual reality.

Improvements in Pro Evolution Soccer 5 see last year's pesky slowdown wiped-out and a decent increase in player and club licensing. The Master League has been suitably beefed up with more teams. Tackling, the one area in previous versions that proved somewhat farcical through its ease, is now a skill in itself and relies, realistically, on timing and intelligence.

Pro Evolution Soccer 5 is great in single-player and will hold you enraptured for hours, but we suggest getting a group of mates and going all out on multiplayer. The competitive edge, not to mention the whoops and hollers that the title generates is about as close as one can get to gaming heaven. There really is only one word needed to describe Pro Evolution Soccer 5: genius. **NAG**



Pimp my Ride gets what might pass as a game

46



**VITAL INFO**

- Platforms  
PC
- Suggested Retail Price  
R299
- Developer  
Midway
- Publisher  
Midway
- Supplier  
Ster Kinekor Games  
[011] 445 7900
- Genre  
Racing
- Age Restriction  
12+
- Specifications  
Players: 1  
Controllers: 1  
Multiplayer / Wi-Fi: No  
Memory: 120KB

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# LA RUSH

IT'S VERY SIMPLE. YOU had the bling, the babes and the cars. Now your cars have been stolen, you've lost your bling and your ho's [we mean babes] have left you because you're a total loser without the aforementioned gold chains and 'phat' rides.

As a shameless cash-in on the over-hyped hip-hop car modification culture, LA Rush is a runaway success. As a game however, LA Rush is nothing but a poor man's distilled Need for Speed without the Speed or even the Need for it. It contains a fully-open and recreated Los Angeles through Hollywood, Santa Monica, South Bay, South Central and Downtown. But what's the point if driving through these locations isn't fun?

Progression through the lacklustre missions rewards with money, with which you drive into a garage and upgrade your car. With a better car, you stand a better chance of winning back your 30 rides. Variation comes in the form of Retribution Damage missions where you go damage property, but aside from that LA Rush is as bland as it gets.

The only noteworthy aspect may actually be the most annoying part of the game – crashing. The game manages a rather spectacular blossom of destruction when you hit another car or wall, but this is something you try to avoid in the game as it only brings mission failure.

Overall, not recommended, even if found in the bargain bin. **NAG**

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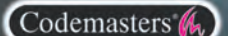
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As a game, not bad. As a gift to fans, unforgettable

80

**VITAL INFO**

- Platforms
- Suggested Retail Price R399
- Developer Cranky Pants Games
- Publisher THQ
- Supplier Ster Kinekor Games [011] 445 7900
- Genre Action
- Age Restriction 12+
- Specifications
- Players: 1
- Controllers: 1
- Multiplayer / Wi-Fi: No
- Memory: 200KB

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*Midget rights groups might not approve*

## EVIL DEAD REGENERATION

IF YOU'VE EVER "HAILED to the king", if you've ever "shopped smart, shop S-mart" or if you've ever proclaimed "this is my boom stick" then you will no doubt feel utterly at home with Evil Dead Regeneration. If those catchy phrases meant nothing to you, then it means you've not seen the utterly delectable Evil Dead set of movies and have deprived yourself of a wholesome dosage of Bruce Cambell.

In keeping canon, Regeneration falls squarely after Evil Dead 2 and sees Ash arrested, convicted of murder and sentenced to Sunny Meadows [the stereotypical institute for the criminally insane]. The Necronomicon returns, raising all-powerful Evil into the world – Deadites once again require

Ash to don his trusty shotgun and chainsaw.

Regeneration is completely camp and lovably so. Bruce Cambell voices his accurate in-game alter ego while the Devil May Cry-like combat does an amicable job of keeping things fun. The action is packed, the plotline hilarious and the inclusion of a new half-pint wiseass sidekick mixes things up nicely. The sidekick is actually a useful weapon; you can lob him into pits, spikes, fires or enemies to distract them. The combat itself has enough subtle nuances to elevate itself slightly above the standard button mashing fare, but for the most part the action is a frenzy of blood, guts and fun.

But, to reiterate, this one is solely for the fans. **NAG**

Sonic Mega Collection Plus was good enough

69

**VITAL INFO**

- Platforms
- Suggested Retail Price R299
- Developer SEGA
- Publisher SEGA Europe
- Supplier WWE [011] 462 0150
- Genre Platformer
- Age Restriction 3+
- Specifications
- Players: 1
- Controllers: 1
- Multiplayer / Wi-Fi: No
- Memory: N/A

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*It's as if SEGA didn't know what it was doing. How odd*

## SONIC GEMS COLLECTION

SONIC GEMS COLLECTION INCLUDES Sonic CD, but manages to fall flat in almost every other regard. Since all the good stuff is already on Mega Collection Plus, SEGA had to scrape the bottom of the barrel to fill the DVD with other Sonic games so as to not look as if they're trying to short-change fans.

Gems Collection includes the kludged Sonic The Fighters, which was never a hit in arcades despite what SEGA wanted, as well as the ill-fated racing game Sonic R along with a few other Game Gear Sonic titles such as Sonic Spinball, Sonic the Hedgehog 2 as well as Sonic Drift 2. Sonic CD was an incredible game for its time and is still considered a pinnacle in the series, but this doesn't mean it's worth the cost of a

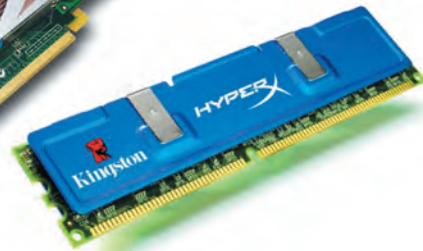
game today, for a game from yesteryear. Not without enough value-added content to make it worthwhile, which Gems Collection lacks.

Once Gems Collection becomes a bargain-bin title and can be picked up for a reasonably cheap price, it will be a much nicer addition to a fan's collection. Until then, Mega Collection Plus is a much more appealing bundle deal. **NAG**



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Fun but short-lived, best suited to bandicoot-enthusiasts and children

70

**VITAL INFO**

- Platforms
- Suggested Retail Price R249
- Developer Radical Entertainment
- Publisher Vivendi
- Supplier MiDigital [011] 723 1967
- Genre Racing/Platform
- Age Restriction 7+
- Specifications
- Players: 1-2
- Analogue: Sticks only;
- Vibration compatible
- Memory: 98KB

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*Yes, it's another racing game with cartoon characters. Blame Mario*

## CRASH TAG TEAM RACING

**A**LTHOUGH THE TITLE INDICATES that Crash Tag Team Racing is exclusively a platform-character crossover into the kart genre, be advised at the outset that this title is in fact a hybrid of the two genres, featuring generous servings of both types of play dynamic. Set in a giant amusement park run by a German cyborg, the aim of the title, put simply, is to collect coins which can be traded in for crystals, required to keep the amusement park running. You'll engage in much platform jumping [including many unsighted leaps of faith typical of the Crash series], a few weird but entertaining mini-games, including bowling and target shooting, as well as kart racing. Focussed more squarely on combat rather than the racing itself, the

game introduces a concept known as 'clashing', which allows you to combine with another racer by bumping into him or her – the two vehicles combine into a single, bigger and more powerful racer, with a turret capable of firing a variety of projectiles, including grand pianos and submarines, at your foes. It's an interesting new concept, albeit one that at times makes the game ridiculously easy. Split-screen multiplayer also proves entertaining, once you've blazed through the relatively short [unless you're determined to collect absolutely everything] single-player mode. On the whole, Crash Tag Team Racing makes for some light-hearted, frantic fun, but is perhaps lacking the depth to warrant a purchase. **NAG**



Visually impressive, but too flawed to be enjoyable

59

**VITAL INFO**

- Platforms
- Suggested Retail Price R480
- Developer Pivotal Games
- Publisher Eidos Interactive
- Supplier Ster Kinekor Games [011] 445 7900
- Genre Action
- Age Restriction 16+
- Specifications
- Players: 1-2
- Analogue: Sticks only;
- Vibration compatible
- Memory: 383KB

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*Real men don't take the stairs*

## CONFLICT: GLOBAL STORM

**G**LOBAL STORM IS THE fourth in the Conflict series of tactical squad-based shooters, though the game's description would perhaps be more apt were the word "tactical" omitted. Set across a number of locales, including snowy mountains, cities, and jungle settings, Global Storm is, for the most part, a sight to behold. Fantastic cut-scenes, exquisitely detailed environments, and realistic character models [if you'll forgive the terrible animation of enemy troops] make this a visually appealing title, but sadly this is close to all that Global Storm does right. The control scheme proves cumbersome as soon as you try to execute anything other than a basic technique and as such, issuing commands to your team-mates requires

the dexterity of a cat-burglar. This is less of an issue than it seems however, since your team-mates are effectively useless when you aren't directly controlling them anyway. The poor AI will usually see to it that they get stuck behind some or other object whilst unloading all their ammunition into inanimate objects, despite your orders. Enemy AI is equally poor. The game is challenging only in that it throws hordes of enemies at you at a time, with none of them possessing enough sense other than to charge at you with guns blazing, which usually makes dispensing of them a simple enough matter. It looks good, but that's where it ends. There are far better titles available in this genre. **NAG**







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Well-crafted World War 2 flight combat title – fun and deep, but not intimidating

76

**VITAL INFO**

- Platforms
- Suggested Retail Price R399
- Developer IRGurus
- Publisher Codemasters
- Supplier Ster Kinekor Games [011] 445 7900
- Genre Simulator
- Age Restriction 12+
- Specifications  
Players: 1-2  
Analogue: Sticks only;  
Vibration compatible  
Memory: 26KB

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*World War 2 wasn't this easy, but it wasn't fun either*

## HEROES OF THE PACIFIC

**H**EROES OF THE PACIFIC takes the World War 2 setting, currently very much in-vogue when it comes to historical shooters, and puts a different spin on things, using the events of the time as a backdrop for what proves to be an enjoyable, though not overly-complicated, combat flight title. Throughout the campaign you'll pilot a variety of craft, mostly comprising light and agile fighter craft, but you'll also fly torpedo and dive-bombers, and reconnaissance craft, adding variety to the play dynamic. In addition to typical dog-fighting, many missions have you taking on ground, or sea-based targets. A number of aircraft can be unlocked from the fleets of not only the American Air Force,

but also that of the German, Russian and Japanese, for use in the quick combat and multiplayer modes. Heroes of the Pacific manages to sit nicely in the area between arcade and simulation titles. It isn't quite as slack as a pure arcade title, but at the same time it's not as daunting as a true simulation. Although this may limit its appeal to true enthusiasts, it makes for a more playable and accessible title, especially for novices. Heroes of the Pacific comes recommended both to World War 2 junkies and any flight combat fans seeking something fun, accessible, and fairly realistic, without becoming bogged down in the over-complexity that is typical of the flight simulator genre. **NAG**

Old-fashioned, but stylish – an engrossing and entertaining romp

85

**VITAL INFO**

- Platforms
- Suggested Retail Price R499
- Developer Rockstar Games
- Publisher Rockstar Games
- Supplier Ster Kinekor Games [011] 445 7900
- Genre Fighting
- Age Restriction 18+
- Specifications  
Players: 1-2  
Analogue: Sticks only;  
Vibration compatible  
Memory: 90KB

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*In Rockstar tradition a lot of the characters are on their backs*

## THE WARRIORS

**R**OCKSTAR'S THE WARRIORS IS A 3D beat-'em-up, based on the 1979 movie of the same name, which told the story of a gang framed for the murder of one very powerful and respected gang-leader, and their eventual vindication. The game's opening sequence is practically identical to that of the movie, but after this introduction the game hops back in time to tell the story of how The Warriors were formed, and continues from this point, mission by mission, up to and including the events in the movie. Interestingly, Rockstar managed to convince many of the actors from the movie to reprise their roles for the voice acting in the game. Everything including score, dialogue, and fashion

sense feels authentic. Of course, the essence of the game is combat, and it's executed very well. There's a surprising variety of moves available, all of which are easily performed, as well as many instances where you can even use the environment to your advantage, either by smashing a foe's head into a wall, or by using any of the movable objects you'll encounter as a weapon. It's gritty and riveting and with level objectives that range from collecting protection money, to trashing rival gangs' headquarters. There's plenty to keep you entertained, as well as many rewards and bonus objectives that can be unlocked. It's nostalgic, fun, and immersive – a not to be missed old-school brawler. **NAG**





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## SIEGE

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### VITAL INFO

#### Platforms

MOB

#### Suggested Retail Price

R50

#### Developer

5th Cell

#### Publisher

THQ Wireless

#### Supplier

www.thumbtribe.co.za

[031] 202 4266

#### Genre

Action

#### Download Code

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Not bad if you have the phone for it

75

## PLATOON

DON'T SHOOT DOWN PLATOON because of its license. In fact, if anything, mobile games seem to be a good platform for licenses, as the games aren't that complicated. But not all of them are good and this title hits and misses quite often. Using a basic 3D engine, the game rotates the map around the player. Before a game starts, you select two soldiers, each with supposedly different skills. Then you head into a mission, switching between the soldiers as you play. It's not a bad experience, but you need a fairly powerful phone for the game graphics (it ran well on our V3), while the gameplay feels shallow. On top of that, not enough mission info is given out. Platoon isn't terrible and actually very playable once you get into it. But that will take some patience initially, something the developers could have addressed easily.

### VITAL INFO

#### Platforms

MOB

#### Suggested Retail Price

R50

#### Developer

Digital Bridges

#### Publisher

MGM Interactive

#### Supplier

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Polished and simple

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**VITAL INFO**

■ Platforms

MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

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■ Developer

Gameloft

■ Publisher

Gameloft

■ Supplier

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■ Genre

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■ Download Code

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### MIDNIGHT BOWLING

**B**OWLING AS A GAME never sounds like an enticing prospect, but once you have a good game, everyone wants to play. Midnight Bowling is no different, since it presents a great mobile bowling game with simple controls, nice visuals and a fair amount of challenge. Players can select one of several game modes, such as a quick game or playing a tournament. Match wins are rewarded with cash and playing well nets you more money. This in turn is used to buy more modes, as well as do some gambling on matches. The game isn't focused on ball physics, instead using a simple scheme in which you choose your lane position, determine the power and finally decide on an angle. Once you release the ball, spin can be applied as well. It's very easy but challenging and lasts longer than less complicated bowling games.



It feels bland and unfinished

65

**VITAL INFO**

■ Platforms

MOB

■ Suggested Retail Price

R50

■ Developer

Rockpool Games

■ Publisher

THQ Wireless

■ Supplier

www.thumbtribe.co.za

[031] 202 4266

■ Genre

Racing

■ Download Code

SMS: tribe xxxxx to 40014

NB: make sure you leave a space after the word **tribe**.

Check www.thumbtribe.co.za for phone compatibility and downloading instructions.

### MOTOGP 3

**T**HERE ARE LOTS OF reasons to play MotoGP 3. It has good tracks, a nice presentation and presents enough of a challenge to racing fans, including a multiplayer mode. But the game is lacklustre and feels incomplete. The biggest complaint is perhaps the controls. For a racing game things are kept fairly simple, but unlike titles like Colin McRae, the developers still sought to complicate things a bit. To accelerate you hold in the up key and to make turns you click to the side. But the directional keys aren't very responsive. Neither is the game in indicating exactly where a turn starts. An arrow warns you about this, but the rest of the track gives no indication. Since most turns require slacking down and taking the corner on the racing line, the controls hamper your ability. It's not unplayable, but rather unexciting with a tricky control system. Easy to master and forget.



# ZALMAN FATALITY

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# TECH NEWS

## Modine and Alienware team up – cool!

Alienware has enlisted the aid of cooling specialist, Modine, for cooling solutions for its systems. Patrick Cooper, Director of Product Management for Alienware said, "The new system provides a huge advantage over conventional cooling technologies by reducing maximum operating temperatures by 15-21 degrees."

Thermacore partnered with Alienware to develop the advanced liquid cooling system specifically for the high performance gaming, digital content creation, and multimedia platforms. Thermacore's high-performance liquid cooled system utilizes micro channel cold plate technology and a liquid-to-air heat exchanger with Modine's patented PF(TM) [parallel flow] technology. These components are combined into a unique system that provides a very compact and high-performance cooling system. By taking advantage of the improved thermal performance of the Thermacore advanced liquid cooling technology, Alienware systems can operate at cooler temperatures, even when running at maximum power, and with lower overall system noise levels.

[[www.modine.com](http://www.modine.com)]



## ROBOSAPIEN V2

Wowwee Robotics has released a 'sequel' to its Robosapien entertainment robot. Version 2 is larger, standing just over half a metre tall, and has been made more lifelike. The robot features infrared-based optics and can discern colours, even to the extent of being able to differentiate human skin tones. It also has stereo hearing and responds to auditory stimuli, as well as visual ones. Its behavioural programming allows it to recoil from sudden, very close movement, and it speaks various phrases in various situations. Most impressive are its kinetic capabilities. Robosapien V2 is capable of very lifelike movements which include walking, sitting down, standing up, manipulating objects, laying down and, rather impressively, getting up from a prone position. It can be programmed via remote control or by means of a method akin to macros – its limbs and other parts are manipulated into position and the robot records these motions, which can then be repeated. Amusingly, the package includes a miniature set of skittles and an appropriate bowling ball, and the robot can be made to bowl – very American! Fairly comic responses have been programmed for events like tripping and falling, and it can further be instructed to proceed to a destination by 'painting' it with a laser pointer, which is built into the remote control. Lastly, Robosapien V2 has been designed to be able to interact with other Wowwee robots such as Roboraptor and Robopet, allowing it to influence their behaviour!

## GIGABYTE'S VIIV MOTHERBOARD

Gigabyte is first to release a Viiv-capable motherboard. The GA-8I945GMH board is built on the Intel 945G Express chipset and is designed for Intel Pentium D dual core processors. This particular board features on-board graphics in the form of the Intel GMA 950, as it is intended primarily for use in media-managing PCs, which could be in living rooms and similar places, where noisy fans are to be avoided whenever possible. Other on-board features include 3Gbps Serial ATA (4 ports), Gigabit LAN, 8-channel High Definition Audio, three FireWire ports and eight USB 2.0 ports. Four gigabytes of memory can be handled, up to DDR2 667, and discrete graphics cards can be plugged into a PCI Express X16 slot and a PCI Express X1 slot. The board is available through Rectron. [[www.rectron.co.za](http://www.rectron.co.za)]



## DOCK-ABLE ENTERTAINMENT FEATURING GBA

This rather verbosely titled accessory is Visteon Corporation's in-car version of a digital home entertainment system. It provides a media player with a 10.2-inch screen, capable of playing back audio CDs, MP3/WMA audio and DVD video, and a docking facility for the Game Boy Advance. A wireless controller is provided in order to reduce in-vehicle clutter and optional wireless remote controls and headphones are available. A second, non-docked GBA can be linked in via a link cable, allowing multiplayer action. The media player component can be undocked and used elsewhere. [[www.visteon.com](http://www.visteon.com)]



## INVISIBLESHIELD FOR PSP

Protective Solutions has introduced a product that protects the entire upper side of a PSP by applying a durable film that vastly reduces scratching and chipping. This material was originally developed to protect the leading edges of helicopter blades, and has now found application in the consumer electronics market.

[www.theinvisibleshield.com]

## CREATIVE FATAL1TY 2020 MOUSE

Professional gamer, Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel, has co-developed a gaming mouse for competitive PC gaming. The 2,400dpi HD-Optix laser engine offers up to six times the resolution of standard optical mice, and the 5.8 megapixel sensor report rate allows it to work flawlessly on virtually any surface and to track up to 15G's of acceleration, to guarantee that even the shortest or widest hand and arm movements are tracked with the utmost precision.

"With the Fatal1ty 2020 Mouse, I hope to help gamers fulfill their dreams of competing at the professional level. But if they think they can beat me, they should know that I'll be using this mouse too," said Johnathan 'Fatal1ty' Wendel. "I had a vision of a mouse designed specifically for gaming, with every feature I would need to compete at the highest level. The Fatal1ty 2020 Mouse, which I designed with Creative, realises my vision and provides me the edge I need as a champion."

Creative will also release the Fatal1ty 1010 Mouse for casual gamers, featuring a 1,600dpi HD-Optix Engine in early 2006.



## WI-FI MAX

This package allows an Internet-connected PC to act as a Wi-Fi hotspot, providing Wireless G connectivity to the Internet for nearby wireless-enabled hardware, such as laptops, PDAs and handheld consoles. Up to five Nintendo DS units can connect at the same time, while PSP users can use it not only to access other gamers around the globe, but also to organise media files by means of MAX Media Server software. Datal's Wi-Fi MAX costs £29.99 (UK) or \$39.99 (USA).

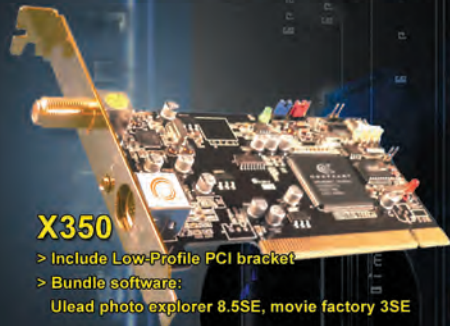


**COMPRO**  
TECHNOLOGY

## Never Miss The Big Game with COMPRO Power-UP Feature



**What is COMPRO Power-UP?**  
Wake up your PC from Shut Down or Sleep Mode, and automatically record your favorite programs as pre-scheduled by you into hard disk.



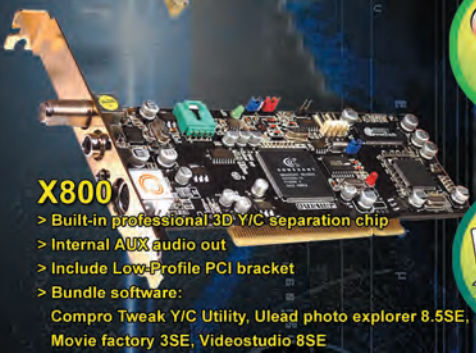
### X350

- > Include Low-Profile PCI bracket
- > Bundle software:  
Ulead photo explorer 8.5SE, movie factory 3SE



### M505

- > Internal AUX audio out
- > Bundle software:  
Ulead photo explorer 8.5SE, Movie factory 3SE, Videostudio 8SE



### X800

- > Built-in professional 3D Y/C separation chip
- > Internal AUX audio out
- > Include Low-Profile PCI bracket
- > Bundle software:  
Compro Tweak Y/C Utility, Ulead photo explorer 8.5SE, Movie factory 3SE, Videostudio 8SE



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**The ultimate processor for PC enthusiasts**

The new AMD Athlon 64 FX-60 dual core processor will allow enthusiasts to experience the next generation of multi-core supported games and applications using AMD's most powerful PC processor ever released.

"Those who crave ultimate performance on 3D games and intense digital media applications can experience realistic physics and lighting, advanced artificial intelligence and amazing performance on digital media applications with the first dual core AMD Athlon 64 FX processor. The AMD Athlon 64 FX-60 dual core processor is designed to deliver the ultimate in performance for our customers who demand nothing short of the best," said Bob Brewer, corporate vice president, Desktop Division, Microprocessor Solutions Sector, AMD.



**VIEWSONIC WIDENS ITS RANGE**

The computer screen giant recently unveiled a new range of LCD monitors. Available in a variety of sizes, these all sport a wide-screen format and an exceptionally fast response time of 1ms across the entire colour scale. In other respects, the screens offer a pleasing array of features, including tilting capabilities and multiple input formats. The flagship 23-inch model provides resolutions up to 1,920 x 1,200. To meet the growing demands of visual enthusiasts, such as avid PC gamers who want faster and larger screen formats, ViewSonic has added the 20-inch VX2025wm to its Xtreme LCD Series. The VX2025wm delivers brilliant colour rendition, crystal-clear moving images and photo-realistic image quality through a high resolution of 1,680x1,050, 300 nits of brightness and a 600:1 contrast ratio. All models carry a three-year warranty, and are becoming available as you read this. [www.ViewSonic.com]

**AMD LIVE!**

AMD has announced a new brand range 'AMD LIVE!' which revolves around digital media handling. Products will include desktop PCs and notebooks, with the stated intention, much like that of Microsoft's Media Center PC, to make digital media more easily accessible and easier to manipulate. All such systems will be powered by Athlon 64 X2 dual core processors or their mobile equivalents. A number of industry players have expressed their support for the programme including Alienware, ATI, Motorola, NVIDIA, Nero, and VIA Technologies.



**ASUS AND LAMBORGHINI MAKE NOTEBOOKS**

Asus and Automobili Lamborghini have teamed up to produce a line of notebooks that feature the Italian sport car manufacturer's distinctive styling. The systems will be available in black and yellow, traditional Lamborghini colours.

[www.asus.com]



**NVIDIA TO BE SEEN – EVERYWHERE!**

At the recent Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, NVIDIA demonstrated involvement in an impressive variety of areas in terms of digital video. The company's stand included home theatre applications, high-definition gaming, handheld graphics processing implementations including a host of handhelds and mobile phones, encoding and playback of video in several formats [some not yet commercially available] and demonstrations of visual enhancements to appear in Microsoft's next version of Windows.





## THEATRE EXPERIENCE FOR PSP

This device from Nyko serves several functions. It acts as a case, provides seven hours of additional battery power, and transforms the handheld into a portable home theatre system by providing a pair of speakers. Innovations Design & Engineering Awards has honoured Nyko Technologies for this useful accessory.

Another handy PSP accessory from Nyko Technologies is the snap-on Play on TV Adapter. This unit provides the connectivity required to output the image and sound from the handheld to a television set, allowing games to be played or UMD movies to be watched in this format. [www.nyko.com]



## EMAGIN Z800 3DVISOR AND OTHER PERSONAL VIEWERS

This head-worn video display is among the most advanced virtual reality renderers on the market at present. In addition to providing 3D imagery, it features technology that determines its facing, allowing players to look about in simulation software without having to use joystick buttons or the like. Ubisoft's Lock-On Modern Air Combat is among the first games to support this peripheral, and a downloadable patch has been made available. In addition, eMagin has also introduced a lower-cost visor, the X800, which is in most respects just like the Z800, on which it is based, except that it lacks the head-tracking capabilities. Power is drawn from a USB port. Lastly, the company also offers a monocular system called the Eyebud 800, which uses the same OLED technology to display an image close to the eye. It is intended primarily for use with portable media players with video output capabilities. In all cases, eMagin claims that the image provided is equivalent to a 2.6m screen viewed from a distance of 3.6 metres.

[www.3dvisor.com]

## SAMSUNG 900MHZ GDDR3 NOW AVAILABLE

Samsung's new high-speed 900MHz GDDR3 memory is now in full mass-production and being implemented in cutting-edge hardware.

"We are considerably upping the ante for enriching the imagery for gamers and professionals in the video and graphics industries," said Mueez Deen, Director of Marketing for Graphics, Mobile and Consumer DRAM, Samsung Semiconductor, Inc.

NVIDIA's latest GeForce 7800 GTX 512 graphics card makes use of it and many critics are lauding it as being the fastest card currently on the market, due at least in part to the fast memory it uses.

According to Mercury Research, a PC component market research firm, the market for high-end graphics memory is expected to grow by 42 percent this year, from \$1.1 billion in 2005 to \$1.5 billion in 2006.

# Tatu

## Flash with Style



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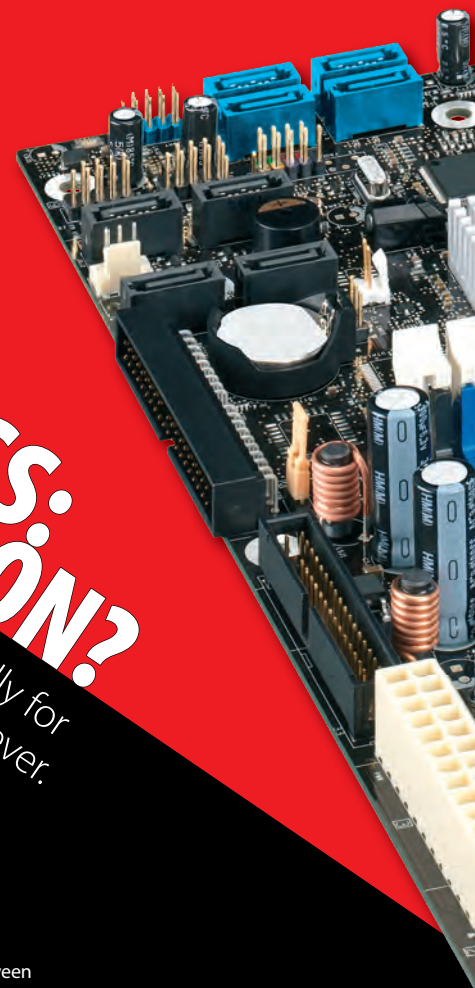
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# INTEL'S 65NM PROCESS: A CROSSFIRE REVOLUTION?



Intel's latest technology platform, the D975XBX, created specifically for the enthusiast market, promises to be its highest-performing CPU ever. Russell Bennett puts it through some vigorous testing, and achieves results any gamer would be most pleased with.

**T**HE GREAT INTEL VS. AMD performance battle has been pretty one-sided in the enthusiast and gaming market for some time now, and the Prescott line did little to help the larger organisation's cause. AMD has definitely been winning the gaming performance wars for some time now and to rub salt in the wounds was the first to get support for the gaming-focussed NVIDIA dual-GPU creation SLI, further entrenching the 'upstart' manufacturer in the hearts and minds of the high-end PC market.

This combination of leading performance processors, platform and graphics solutions from the formidable AMD and NVIDIA relationship is a thorn in the side of not only Intel, but ATI as well. Crossfire technology, ATI's answer to SLI, is only slowly gaining traction where SLI has already had a good start.

What does this GPU in-fight have to do with the largest chip manufacturer in the world and its latest offering however? Well, that's the really interesting bit you see...

## New 65nm process slips in along with new platform!

**D**URING THIS MONTH, INTEL will begin shipping its latest platform and processor. And not just any new solution either. This is a release focussed on the enthusiasts, the gamers and the power hungry. Not only does the all-new chipset sport a number of technology enhancements over the previous-generation high-end 955 Express on which it is based, it comes with a new flagship processor sporting some tweaks which could bring Intel back into the fray in sheer horsepower terms.

The D975XBX motherboard, given to us for testing by Intel, is surprising the moment you remove the anti-static wrapping. For a second it was like looking at a BTX board, where everything just seems to be in a very peculiar place, for it sports what appear to be three PEG [PCI Express Graphics] slots! In actual fact, the primary has 16 electrical PCI Express lanes, the secondary eight, and the third slot four, which means the third 'PEG' slot is actually not intended for multi-GPU applications scaling beyond two graphics cards at all, but for PCI Express components needing less than the headline 8GB/s throughput of an X16 PEG slot.

The remainder of the D975XBX package makes a strong case for itself in performance terms. The ICH7R Southbridge is maintained with features similar to what we are accustomed to on 955 chipsets: 300MB/s SATA, Intel Matrix Storage features, Hi-Definition audio and integrated Gigabit LAN. One new addition is the Intel Active Management function for easing the burden of IT administrators running large networks standardised on Intel technology.

The Northbridge has, clearly, been tweaked since the 955. In addition to

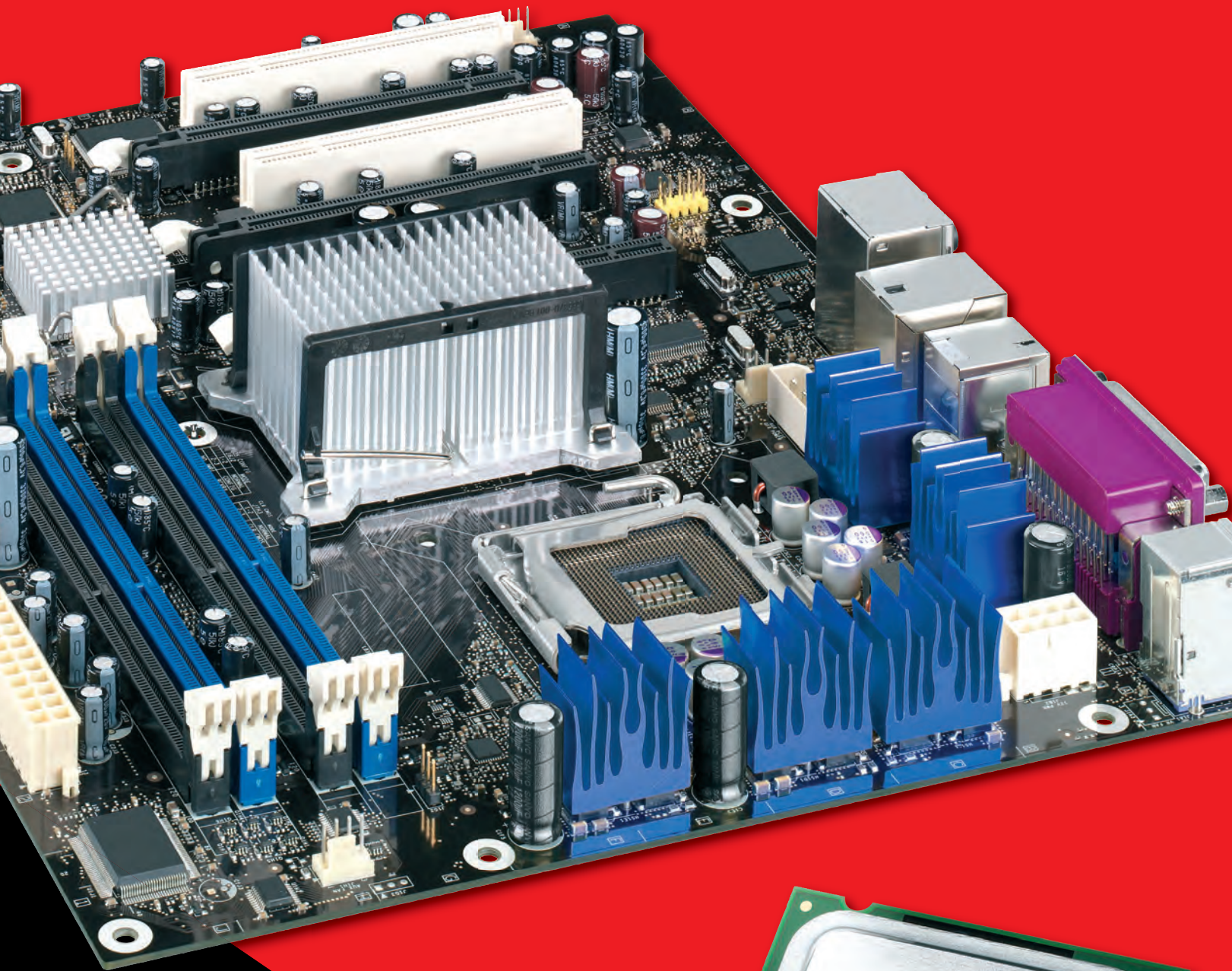
controlling the new PEG functionality, a new MCH incorporates enhanced Memory Pipelining Technology [MPT] for the fastest possible connection between processor and data residing in the DDR2 533MHz or 667MHz DIMMS for a theoretical maximum data throughput of 10.7GB/s.

## 955 no longer just a chipset designation

**A**ND NOW WE GET to the processor itself, the 955 Extreme Edition. The 955 is the leading Intel performance chipset in the current installed base. Now it's the name of the highest-performing desktop processor in the new line-up. Anyway, the 955 is not just another CPU either. It's the first of a new breed. Intel has progressed yet again, in keeping with Moore's Law, to a new manufacturing process. The new PXE is the first to be produced using a 65nm process, and this progress alone should make some fundamental changes to the performance, thermal and power-consumption characteristics of Intel's next-generation of processors.

Frankly it is about time. The Prescott bugbears of massive power consumption coupled with huge amounts of heat being generated have kept the Pentium from progressing further up the performance scale, and any new technology which can alleviate these problems is just about a given for the new range to have any success whatsoever in this critical sector.

This 955 PXE is built on a dual core version of the new, 65nm Cedar Mill core [Prescott replacement] called Presler. This core is pretty much two Cedar Mill processor dies on a single package, which, with the inclusion of Hyper-Threading capabilities, presents the operating system with four logical processors, therefore allowing four threads to be processed simultaneously. Each core also keeps its full 2MB of L2 cache this time, making the 955 PXE the first CPU to feature 4MB L2 cache.



Its clock and bus speeds are also the highest ever on a dual core CPU at 3.46GHz and 1,066MHz respectively. The previous dual core Extreme Edition part, the 840, had to make do with the more prevalent 800MHz bus, but with the 955 this high-frequency interconnect is back which ought to boost performance.

The processor also boasts EM64T extensions, an Execute Disable Bit feature for combating buffer overflows, and Intel Virtualisation Technology to allow the user to run multiple operating environments concurrently.

Markus Weingartner, Technical Press Programmes Manager for the EMEA region, explains further: "Intel Virtualisation Technology is expected to gain traction in both consumer and business segments. For the consumer, this capability can be deployed on a system with an inexperienced user to provide a separate OS instance, for instance for Internet usage, and another for more private PC operations like digital photography and working on documents. Should a virus catastrophically strike the machine then through the e-mail client, the user would still be able to perform day to day functions

as only the partition setup for Internet access would become corrupt.”

These improvements add up to the highest-performing Intel processor ever produced. But is it enough to catch and challenge the AMD Athlon X2 parts? Thanks to the new 65nm manufacturing process it manages to deliver this added grunt at lower power consumption levels, and therefore ought to generate less heat than previous incarnations to allow the headroom for even higher performance models which was denied Prescott-based parts.

### The dual-GPU debacle

**H**OWEVER, BEFORE WE GET into the performance and figures, let us at least get to the reason for our musing over ATI and its Crossfire woes right at the beginning of this feature. The Intel D975XBX, although originally announced as being both an SLI and Crossfire compatible solution, has ended up in a bit of a row resulting in NVIDIA refusing to license its proprietary dual-GPU technology for the double eight-lane setup of the 975 PEG platform, which in turn makes this latest full-bore Intel platform an exclusively ATI Crossfire rig.

Honestly, that's a bit of a shame. A cross-compatible platform would be of enormous value to the consumers who buy these products, and this smacks of greediness for a market it currently sees as largely sewn up by the GPU vendor. Sure, NVIDIA has invested substantial resources into SLI, but improving its compatibility surely only widens its relevance to the market? Nonetheless, there we have it. Intel's latest technology platform created for the enthusiast market and supported by the company's newest, highest-performing CPU ever is a Crossfire Edition solution.

### Meeting the promise

**R**IGHT LET'S GET SOME benchmarks running to see if this is as big of a loss to the SLI cause as it might be. The 955 PXE processor needs to be able to compete with AMD's storming X2 4800+ CPU if it is to even cause a stir in the gaming arena, so we tested the new Intel system using SiSoft Sandra 2005 and PCMark Pro 05 benchmark suites, and put it through its real-world paces with compression utility WinRAR and video encoding duties using Windows Media Encoder 9 codecs. Finally, an indication of gaming performance was obtained using the 3DMark05 CPU test component.

Beginning with SiSoft Sandra, the 955 got off to a really promising start. That new MCH implementation, with its enhanced RAM timing functions, is beginning to realise the benefits of DDR2 memory modules now, and at a bog-standard 667MHz clock the Corsair modules we used for testing were able to pass data at just over 6,200MB/s. This is higher than the average of high-5K scores for conventional DDR in Athlon X2 systems, which thanks to the integrated memory controller architecture of the solution is a pretty predictable result. So while the 975 MCH managed to beat this there still isn't any make-or-break performance differential between the newer DDR2 standard and older DDR parts married to an AMD platform. With AMD expected to have some news about new, faster RAM module support during the year ahead, it could be a short-lived RAM bandwidth advantage though.

The SiSoft CPU benchmarks continued to place the 955/975 combo in a good light. The multimedia benchmark run in particular, delivered staggering results for the 955 – 65,380 for integer calculations and 50,130 for floating point operations. AMD X2 4800+ results in the same test are shown as some 5,000 points behind in the latter category, and a whopping 15,000 points differential in CPU integer performance.

Whetstone and Dhrystone results were more conventional on this test, with the 955 managing 20,324 and 13,980 respectively. The first figure matches the

capabilities of the X2 competition, while the latter was around 3,000 points higher than AMD, which is a differential we've come to expect even of 6xx series Intel processors.

The synthetic benchmarks continued to show Intel setting the pace as this latest offering managed 63,14 points compared to sub-6K for the 4800+. Looking at the CPU score, the difference was even more marked, with AMD dropping to under 5,000 points while the PXE posted a score of 6,036. Futuremark's gaming-focussed synthetic benchmark 3DMark05 reinforced this result with a score 1,000 points ahead of the competition of 7,372.

We expected the Intel 955 PXE to continue the fine Intel tradition of outperforming everything in the multimedia encoding test batch, and this is precisely the result we saw. The delta between the manufacturers in this particular area has in fact shrunk over the years and the advantage enjoyed by Intel is no longer quite as marked as it was with previous generations of processors, but the larger vendor continues to dominate in heavy-duty video and audio encoding tasks.

### OC anyone?

**W**ITH THE 65NM MANUFACTURING technology promising lower heat generation and power consumption characteristics, the unlocked clock multiplier of the 955 is a real invite for overclocking. We were able to run the system at 4.00GHz without affecting stability or, for that matter, the temperature of the CPU. At 4.26GHz both became a problem, but a performance boost of over 500MHz is already a pretty impressive result. Running at this stable frequency, the 955 PXE delivered even more astounding performance numbers and racked up some killer results on both SiSoft and the 3DMark CPU test while demonstrating in the process that the clock frequency limitations of the Prescott core could well be a thing of the past.

### Intel versus AMD plus ATI versus NVIDIA?

**S**O, IN PURE PERFORMANCE terms, the 955 PXE with 975 chipset is certainly a force to be reckoned with. After the well-documented problems of Prescott and AMD capitalising on these architecture weaknesses to emphatically claim the processor performance crown during 2005, this launch holds some promise for the enthusiast market as Intel commits itself to taking up this fight with the advantages of its new 65nm manufacturing process.

However, supporting a dual-GPU solution which has as yet not gained much traction in the marketplace, while AMD processors evolve into new and enhanced versions of the more readily accepted NVIDIA SLI system, will make the contest even more interesting than it's already shaping up to be.

Concludes Weingartner: "The Intel dual PCI Express implementation is an open one, and any GPU vendor who chooses to validate their drivers for our platform are free to do so, or not, as they deem appropriate. The required tweaks to the driver software are minimal so it really comes down to their decision whether to support it or not." **NAG**



**Markus Weingartner**  
Intel Technical Press Programmes Manager for the EMEA region



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## EUROTEK MC ENTERTAINER

**T**HE DIGITAL HOME IS upon us, and yet many people still don't exactly know what that statement means. Even those who may have DStv's PVR are often oblivious to the PC-based hardware running beneath the glossy, consumer veneer.

That's the trick with the digital home. For the model to gain traction, as it rapidly is right now, it needs to offer the flexibility a PC-based system can offer without looking or feeling like a PC. Hence the creation of Microsoft's Media Center Edition, as seen here on this Eurotek MC Entertainer, supplied to us by Eurobyte.

The MC Entertainer is a custom-built, slim-line PC masquerading as a home entertainment appliance. The big difference is that this puppy literally does it all and then some.... It's a CD player, a radio, an MP3 player, a DVD player, a TV recording system, a digital photo viewer and a DVD creation station. It's a total home entertainment solution.

The system is composed of pretty conventional PC hardware. There's a 3.2GHz Intel Pentium 4 processor and 512MB DDR RAM on a 915-based motherboard. Video is displayed through a low-profile ATI X300 PCI Express graphics card and captured via a PVR-compatible TV tuner card. The audio system supports 7.1 channel surround sound, the DVD-drive is also a writer, and there's a 160GB SATA hard disk for recording live TV too. The MC Entertainer comes with a wireless keyboard as well as an RF remote control, to navigate through the options which the Entertainer presents you with.

The front of the unit has a very clean design with only the DVD-drive, LCD display and large rotary volume knob visible. Hidden beneath a pair of flip-down panels nestles additional

USB and FireWire ports and an 8-in-1 card reader for easy access to removable storage media.

The back of the unit sports a standard PC IO panel, a bank of audio outputs including RCA, coax, and optical, inputs for the FM radio antenna, coax TV, S-Video in, Composite video in and RCA audio in. And of course, the regular kettle-cord power jack.

This is the kind of home appliance that once you've used it for a little while, you can't recall how you did without it. It's very cool. Sitting on your couch with the wireless keyboard in hand you have access to the full range of home entertainment available to you through a very friendly and fully-featured GUI in the Media Center application itself. Connect the LAN jack to a router with a broadband connection and you have access to all the video and audio files stored on your home PC, as well as a vast array of additional content on the Web.

Recording TV works seamlessly and the quality is excellent – there's almost no noticeable difference between the image quality of a live broadcast and a recorded one. What's more, it's quick and easy to write this recorded video to DVD for long-term storage. And, unlike DStv's PVR, it's also easy to add more storage capacity for recording more video when your 160GB HDD is full.

And it does all the aforementioned without making any of the humming noises normally associated with a desktop PC.

The MC Entertainer is a fabulous device, and we're certain that within just a couple of years all homes will have devices like this in their lounges. The Media Center front-end is slick, user friendly and jam-packed with features. **NAG**

### VITAL INFO

#### ■ Pros

All you could need from a home entertainment unit and a whole bunch of extra digital capabilities

#### ■ Cons

Weighs a lot, potentially too much for a glass topped stand

#### ■ Supplier

Eurobyte [011] 234 0142

#### ■ Internet

[www.eurobyte.co.za](http://www.eurobyte.co.za)

#### ■ RRP

R9,999

#### ■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett

# LOGITECH G15

**L**OGITECH BUILT THE G15 keyboard specifically for the gaming market. And although gaming focused keyboards are not particularly new, this one incorporates a couple of unique ideas, most notably the flip-up LCD screen which unfolds into pride of place on the top centre of the unit.

Under normal PC operation, this display alternates between showing the time, date and number of unread e-mails in your Outlook Inbox, and displays system resource utilisation [RAM and CPU] in real-time. In gaming, it's meant to give vital statistics like health, armour and ammo.

Unfortunately the game developers have to write code to allow for this functionality, and at the time of writing only two titles, Brothers in Arms by Ubisoft and SiN Episodes by Ritual, actually supported this innovation, which is frankly something of a letdown.

However, that doesn't make the G15 irrelevant. This product has some other awesome features which gamers could rapidly find becoming indispensable if they get their hands on a G15.

The first is the Game Mode switch. Simply flick from 'Normal' to 'Game' and the clumsy gamer's biggest headaches, the Start and Shortcut Windows keys, are disabled! No more getting fragged because of an accidental tap on one of these annoying buttons at a crucial moment...

Then there are the game function keys, a full 18 of them, ranged along the left-hand side of the G15. These keys can be assigned to any in-game function you wish, including macros of keystrokes you may commonly use. What's more, recording the macro and assigning it to one of these keys is incredibly easy. Simply hit the MR key, choose the key you wish to assign to the Macro, then go through the keystrokes themselves and finally press the MR key to complete. Done.

Apart from these gaming-specific niceties there are the ubiquitous multimedia control functions beneath the LCD screen, great aesthetics, especially at night, thanks to the whole keyboard being backlit by pleasant blue mood-lighting and a first-class feel to the keys themselves which make using the G15 for work or play a pleasure. There are even two additional USB ports at the rear of the G15 for added peripheral connection convenience.

The G15, despite the limited game title support of the LCD display at this point, scores highly thanks to its obvious construction quality, the ease of using those dedicated macro keys and that very useful little switch to Game Mode. **NAG**



## VITAL INFO

### ■ Pros

Game Mode switch;  
The ease of creating and assigning macros;  
The feel of the keyboard

### ■ Cons

LCD needs to be supported by games to provide meaningful in-game info

### ■ Supplier

DCS (011) 466 5099

### ■ Internet

www.logitech.com

### ■ RRP

R799

### ■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett

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- HDD Anti-vibration kit included
- Size: w 280 x d 405 x h 260mm
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- Internal Bay: 3.5" x 2
- Motherboard: Flex ATX / Micro ATX
- Power Supply: ATX (12cm Fan Recommended)
- Front I/O: 2 USB / Ear-Phone / MIC / 1394



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## PLAYSEAT

**R**IGHT, YOU PROBABLY ALL know this already, but we'll restate for the cheap seats. We are a bunch of racing game nutters. In fact, it goes deeper than that, we are car fanatics. We know it's hardly fashionable to be 'into' cars anymore [hence the popularity of turbo-diesels], but damn it, once there's a mixture of oil and fuel in your blood, seductively sculpted sheet metal and the roar of a big-cube race-tuned engine will always make your knees go weak.

So in this context, is it any surprise that we were positively glowing when a Playseat turned up at the NAG office for review? What's a Playseat? Well, it's probably the last and most exorbitant toy a hardcore digital driving fan would splash out on in the pursuit of ultimate realism in this all-consuming pastime. It is, in fact, pure silliness, but at the same time oh so alluring... A seat dedicated for playing driving games fully immersed in even the physical feel of running a hot virtual car through the digital playground.

Okay, so it's not like it helps you feel the forces acting on your digital ride any better [for that kind of extravagance you're going to pay tens of thousands of rands], nor does it include the steering wheel you'll need to play, although if you're looking at a Playseat you without a doubt already have your FF wheel of choice.

But the attention to detail on the Playseat is just gob-smacking for sad old petrol heads like us. The seat itself has been designed to mimic pukka quality racing items - if you've

seen a Sparco bucket you'll know about the kind of thing we're talking about. Yet, despite the molded, figure-hugging shape, the Playseat is really comfy even for long periods thanks to pretty generous padding where it's needed.

The steel bars supporting the pedal box and steering column feature full adjustment for drivers of different sizes.

Mounting a Logitech wheel to the metal plate was pretty simple, but we were doubtful of the effectiveness of the Velcro mounting system in all-out racing. Once hooked up however, the Velcro strips held the wheel perfectly firm and we were never thrown off our stride by the mounting suddenly letting go.

That said, the cable-ties included for securing the cables of the wheel to the steering column are pretty cheap and nasty, and to remove the wheel from the Playseat requires cutting these plastic devices. We'd really have preferred something reusable, like plastic clips attached to the column itself, for this purpose.

However, the feeling you get racing in the Playseat truly is unsurpassed. It really takes any driving simulation you choose to play to a whole new level, and even improves how you drive through sheer comfort and ideal positioning of the major controls. It's too expensive and an absolute gimmick of course, but we want one, and we suspect the dedicated [and financially secure] racing fans among you will feel the same should you try one out. **NAG**



### VITAL INFO

#### ■ Pros

Great attention to detail on the seat makes for a really high-quality toy; Exceptional adjustability

#### ■ Cons

Cable-tie cable management rather poor

#### ■ Supplier

DCS [011] 466 5099

#### ■ Internet

[www.dcs.co.za](http://www.dcs.co.za)

#### ■ RRP

R1,999

#### ■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett



# ICEMAT SIBERIA HEADPHONES

**S**OUND IS, OF COURSE, an absolutely integral part of gaming. Audio can make the difference between fragging and being fragged in a 3D shooter, or make the rev-counter in driving games completely irrelevant.

Gamers will all know the limited love that other members of the household are sure to have at times [03:00 on a week night, for instance] for gunshots and explosions cracking through the still morning air. Enter Icemat with its range of high-end gaming headsets, like the Icemat Siberia on review here.

First impressions are very good. The Siberia is constructed of high-quality plastics and a very durable white coating. This makes the unit light but strong and the Siberia should last quite some time. There's a suspension strap which secures the unit against the top of your head extremely comfortably and combined with the soft felt around the inside of the speakers themselves, wearing the Siberia for long gaming stints is no hardship.

The Siberia is, in fact, a 'multi headset', which in ordinary English simply means that it incorporates a microphone for voice communication when gaming online. It isn't so much integrated as included however, as the microphone is a separate unit which can be used in complete isolation from the headset if need be. Icemat includes a screen-mounting unit for the microphone or you can attach it to your clothing using a standard crocodile clip.

Audio generated by the speakers is of high quality, but we were surprised that Icemat stuck to two-channel sound when all the other high-end gaming headsets have gone 5.1. Crank the built-in volume knob up to maximum however, and you probably wouldn't notice, as these headphones get seriously loud. Audio signals are kept crystal clear [except at maximum volume where there is bass distortion] thanks to Icemat gold plating all the connectors, which is a nice touch for the audiophiles.

The unidirectional microphone is also very high-quality, but we really prefer boom microphones, like those of the Steel Sound products.

If you're looking for a powerful, solidly built headphone set, the Icemat Siberia is well worth considering. However, there are better products on the market if you're looking for the best and they incorporate support for 5.1 channels and put the microphone on a boom to make it more practical. **NAG**



## VITAL INFO

### Pros

Aesthetically pleasing and well put together, complete with gold plating

### Cons

Separate microphone; No 5.1 channel

### Supplier

Soft Trading ApS  
082 561 9982

### Internet

[www.liquidgaming.co.za](http://www.liquidgaming.co.za)

### RRP

R720

### Reviewer

Russell Bennett

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COOL!! YOUR LIFE



## TR2 550W Power Supply

### Specifications:

- Complies with ATX 12V 2.0 Version.
- Supports 2 PCI-Express, 4 S-ATA, and 20+4 pin connector.
- **PFC function**, improved energy efficiency and reduced current load on AC delivery systems.
- Low noise 12cm fan and mirror effect housing.
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New 24(20) Main connector



12cm Fan - High thermal performance



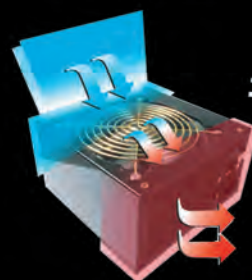
Intelligent cable management



Dual+ 12V Rails



5-pin PCI-Express Connector



**12cm Fan Design - Optimum Air Flow and Low Noise**



**COREX**

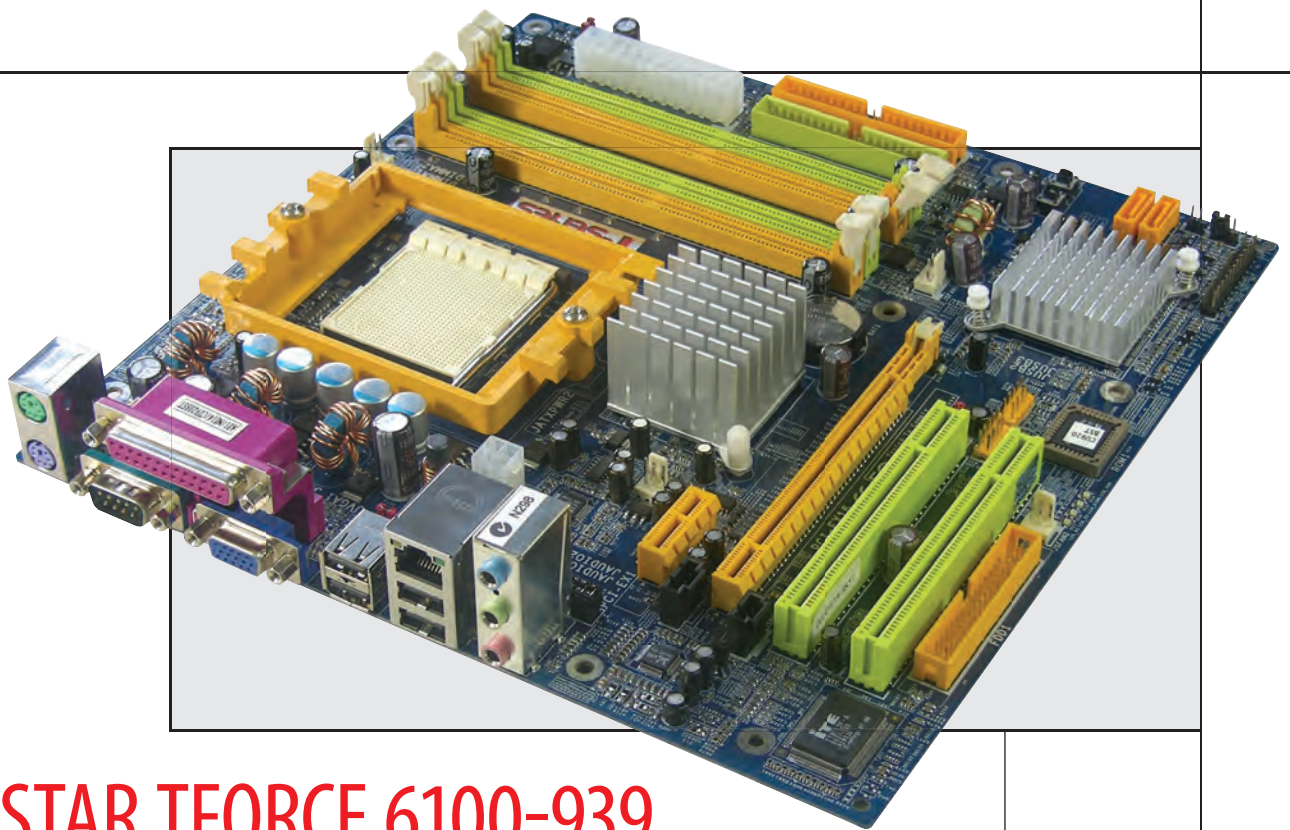
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WEB: WWW.COREX.CO.ZA

FAX: 011 707 5050



## BIOSTAR TFORCE 6100-939

**M**ICRO-ATX PLATFORMS USING INTEGRATED graphics solutions to keep both cost and heat to a minimum are not for gamers, right? They simply cannot offer the kind of performance that their full-blown, higher-end siblings can muster, while limited upgradeability makes it impossible to even build a decent FPS machine based on the micro-ATX platform.

ATI has been developing and delivering integrated graphics chipsets for this micro-crazy market for many years now, but it's an arena which perennial GPU competitor NVIDIA has just recently entered. Last year saw the launch of the NVIDIA 61xx-series of integrated solutions, underlining the company's clear intentions of taking ATI head-on in this space as well.

The Biostar T-series motherboard range was one of the first to adopt this new NVIDIA solution. The Biostar TForce 6100-939 first became available in the last quarter of 2005 and has since won some acclaim as a leading option for budget or physical space constrained systems.

The TForce 6100-939 supports all Socket 939 AMD processors including AMD64 and X2 dual core CPUs. It sports four DIMM slots for RAM upgrade potential [similar to a desktop counterpart], two PCI slots, one PEG and one two-lane PCI Express slot as well.

The integrated video component of this board is handled by the NVIDIA 6100 Southbridge, with an NVIDIA 410 Northbridge completing the package. This combination is at the bottom-end of the NVIDIA list of offerings. The higher-end 6150/430 offerings have more capacity for disk drives [the 6100 only supports two PATA and two SATA drives], a 50MHz higher GPU clock at 475MHz, and Gigabit Ethernet, whereas the TForce 6100-939 only incorporates 10/100Mbps Ethernet.

The Phoenix Award BIOS on this Biostar product is in fact surprisingly comprehensive, even for the enthusiast. There's

a full range of overclocking features including the ability to manipulate component voltages, which is pretty rare on a product which is expected to be more at home with the average consumer than the hardcore user. There's even a facility to flash a new BIOS from within the BIOS itself - no OS required.

With an AMD64 3200+ CPU and 1GB of PC3200 DDR installed, the Biostar motherboard returned decent test scores, if considered in context. Although 639 points in 3DMark05, at the standard resolution of 1,024 x 768 and with antialiasing turned off, is nothing for gamers to really take notice of, it is somewhat quicker than existing integrated solutions from ATI. The difference is really marginal, but it is there.

Perhaps more important to take note of is that the system was very stable and impressively quiet with a standard AMD64 cooling fan. It was able to run the entire range of current benchmark games including Quake 4, Half-Life 2, UT2004, Far Cry and F.E.A.R., albeit at the lowest possible resolution/quality settings, but this is nonetheless impressive for an integrated platform as these usually lack the horsepower to even launch such titles.

Fortunately you can install a high-end PCI Express graphics card in this Biostar if you want to use the system to play games. Without it, the integrated 6100 GPU makes a commendable stab at it and actually beats integrated solutions using the ATI RS480 setup, but it remains a lag nightmare at the end of the day.

The Biostar TForce 6100 is among the more powerful integrated solutions on offer today but it still lacks real grunt. The lack of Gigabit Ethernet is a bit of a disappointment considering higher-end versions of this same chipset combination offer this technology. It is very affordable though, and seems pretty robust to boot. It however remains rather too limited to appeal to gamers. **NAG**

### VITAL INFO

#### ■ Pros

Best integrated graphics micro-ATX solution available today

#### ■ Cons

Still not exactly a powerful graphics implementation

#### ■ Supplier

Sonic Informed  
[011] 880 2684

#### ■ Internet

[www.sonicinformed.co.za](http://www.sonicinformed.co.za)

#### ■ RRP

R749

#### ■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett

# LANMASSTER PC CARRY-BAG

**S**O YOU'RE AN AVID LAN gamer, well accustomed to rapidly breaking down, packing, transporting and then rebuilding your system wherever you travel for fragging fun. You've no doubt worked out a system for 'The Move', designed to be the most efficient while also being protective of your precious cargo. But it really still is quite a pain, isn't it?

In fact, pure laziness is one of the reasons why LANs are being rapidly superseded by online gaming. Sure, the atmosphere of a big LAN cannot be replicated online, particularly the social aspects, but the prospect of 'The Move' is not something even the most dedicated LAN-goer relishes.

LANMASS is a South African company formed in 2003 which focuses exclusively on providing products to improve the experience of this manner of highly social gaming events. To alleviate the difficulty of transporting your rig to the venue and help to protect the investment your gaming machine represents, the company has created the LANMASSTER carry-bag.

Simply slip the bag over the top of your case, run the two straps beneath the base and clip these securely on the other side and Voila! You're ready to roll.

The bag is nicely padded all around, removing the danger of bumps and scrapes wrecking your rig, and includes enough additional storage capacity for all the other essentials like cables, mice, keyboards and headphones. It is solidly constructed and according to LANMASS can easily handle a 40kg load with no adverse results.

Apart from the protective qualities, the LANMASSTER also makes transporting your system to the LAN venue a bit of a style thing. You can make a grand entrance unslashing the straps and revealing your system once you're there, and with the company planning on offering customisation of each individual bag in the near future, you could show some serious clan spirit with a range of LANMASSTERS proudly sporting your clan name and logo before so much as firing up your PC.

Expect this LANMASS product to start showing up at just about every SA LAN gaming event you attend from now on. It's practical, locally developed and manufactured, and stylish without costing the Earth, like some other offerings in this idiom can do... **NAG**



## VITAL INFO

### Pros

Excellent protection for your valuable gaming rig

### Cons

None

### Supplier

LANMASS  
084 889 9799

### Internet

www.lanmass.co.za

### RRP

R333

### Reviewer

Russell Bennett

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PORTABLE DVD PLAYER

RRP **R1999,00**



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# LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE

## CYBERSNIPA

**E**VER NEEDED A BIT more bang in the FPS arena? Maybe you just stink at the game. But a surprising amount of PC gamers have problems getting to grips with the 'WASD' controls, while others, well, don't. It's not that hard, so why would anyone want to do the same thing on a separate controller? Well, the Cybersnipa, despite its name and gimmicky appearance, is a well designed and solid peripheral that might just make your gaming that bit easier. Besides, the mouse and keyboard combo using 'WASD' works for more than just FPSs.

**Supplied by:** Conjoy FX

**Internet:** [www.conjoyfx.com](http://www.conjoyfx.com)

**RRP:** R450

### Layout

The keys are laid out a bit more spaciouly than on a keyboard, one of the reasons that make this a more appealing option. It's not that it innovates, it just makes things easier, if you are willing to pay for the privilege. There are also a few extra keys such as Voice for voice communication and a volume control. The controls cover most games and you'd be hard-pressed to find an FPS that won't work with this. But that doesn't mean it covers the keys for all types of FPS games.

### Design

The Cybersnipa is surprisingly solid and comes with a six month warranty. A wrist rest, which can be rotated or removed, makes for a more comfortable hand position than most keyboards can offer. The peripheral powers off USB (with a 1.8 meter cord) and requires no drivers on later Windows operating systems. The keys can be natively adjusted in a game since it mimics your keyboard, so all you need for this to work is the unit and a PC. The Cybersnipa can also light up the keys for dark rooms.

### Itchy Trigger Fingers

Would we get this for a game? It's hard to imagine something that wants to replace a keyboard function but essentially still is a keyboard. So mustering up reasons to buy one of these doesn't come as easily as for an analogue controller. But if the 'WASD' keys on your keyboard are always partially rubbed out and you want a more comfortable and functional way to get into the key configuration, this works really well. If you own a gaming laptop, or if you're left-handed, you should really consider it.



# Tenor

VB2000 Home Theatre Chassis

See the World in a different way!



- Thermally Advantaged Chassis-
- Prescott Ready
- Standard ATX & ATX PSII PSU
- Drive Bay Capacity : 3 x 5.25" & 5 x 3.5"
- Stylish front bezel : Aluminum made
- Reliable EMI Shielding
- Dual USB 2.0, IEEE 1394 Firewire, Audio & Speaker Ports
- Available in Black & Silver
- Microsoft MCE compatible



Top View

- **Dual Rear Exhaust Fans:**  
Dual 60 x 60 x 25mm Silent Fan, 2500 RPM 19dBa
- **Front Intake Fan:**  
80 x 80 x 25mm Silent Fan, 2000 RPM 19dBa



Install with VFD media kit (optional)



Aluminum Extrusion Case

### the Truly Liquid Cooling Case - Tai-Chi

- ATX / BTX form factor compatibility:  
fits Intel ATX(12"x9.6"), micro ATX(9.6"x9.6")  
fits Intel BTX (10.5" x12.8"), micro BTX(10.5" x10.4"), pico BTX(10.5" x8")
- BTX Upgrade Kit (Option) P/N: A9449
- Retaining holes for liquid cooling kits
- Optimize internal space for installing liquid cooling system



### Kandalf

A design so powerful, it will redefine the way you view a computer



- Air Cooling System liquid Cooling System - Best choice of liquid cooling case
- Fanless System:
- Optimized internal space and airflow
- Minimized noise level
- Ventilation opening on top (62% opening ratio)
- Totally Fanless thermal system validated
- Innovation Design- Compatible with ATX and BTX

Available in Black & Silver

### Armor - Super Tower Series

Optimized Thermal management



- Air Cooling System liquid Cooling System
- Optimize internal space for installing liquid cooling system
- Totally Fanless thermal system validated
- Optimized internal space and airflow
- Ventilation opening on top
- Dimension 530 x 220 x 560 mm (H\*W\*D)

Innovation Design- Compatible with ATX and BTX



## COREX

IT DISTRIBUTION DYNAMICS

Tel: +27 011 707 5000 / Fax: +27 011 707 5050 / www.corex.co.za

### Shark

- Removable motherboard tray
- Dual 12 cm fans in front & rear
- Fits Tt liquid cooling system (performance radiator with 12 cm fan) or any other specific brands
- See - through side panel with EMI shield
- Security lock in front bezel and side panel
- Retractable foot stand
- Ultra light: 6.8 kg (14 lbs)



• Available in Blk & Silver

### Tsunami Aluminum Case

- High Efficient ventilation:
- Dual 12cm silent fan in front & rear
- **Mirror coating**
- Dual USB 2.0, IEEE 1394 Firewire, Audio & Speaker ports
- Ultra light: 5.6 kg (12.3lbs)
- Lockable safety side-panel
- Retractable foot stand
- Highly flexible "Silent Purepower supply" unit supports PS/II for PC case (optional)



• Available in Blk & Silver

### Swing Middle Tower Case

- High efficiency ventilation; 12cm silent fan in rear
- Tool - Free when installing 5.25" & 3.5" device
- Dual USB 2.0, IEEE 1394 Firewire, Audio & Speaker ports
- Stylish streamline form design
- Thumb-screws for easy opening side panel
- EMI protection spring



### Mystic

#### Xaser Case Series

- Home theater style appearance
- Noble aluminum front door design
- Sound level indicator
- Fits standard motherboard and PSII power supply
- Performance-oriented
- Side I/O ports for easy access

ThermalRock  
a Division of Thermaltake



### Manbo

#### Advanced front panel design

- Advanced front panel design
- Fits standard ATX motherboard
- Dual 120mm front and rear fan
- Screw-less for easy installation
- Dual USB 2.0, Audio & Speaker ports
- Drive bays: 5.25" x 4, 3.5" x 2 (external), 3.5" x 5 (internal)



## PROPER PARENTING

**W**E TEND TO GET a lot of questions of the “How do I do ...?” variety, so this month we’ll take a look at one of the often overlooked features of Game Maker that can be used in many different ways to solve a lot of common problems: Parenting.

### Inheritance and Parents

**A**S WE’VE SAID BEFORE, Game Maker is an object-orientated system. One of the greatest benefits of object orientation in programming languages was the notion of inheritance. To put it simply: It is possible for objects to inherit actions and behaviours from other objects. The objects that are inherited from are called Parent objects and objects that do the inheriting are called Child objects.

The best way to understand this possibly confusing statement is with an example. Open up Game Maker and create two objects, each with different sprites. Give one object some sort of behaviour - make it move in a direction or set its gravity when it’s created or something similar. Place both objects in a room and run the game. Note how the objects behave: one does something while the other just sits there. Now go back and set the ‘empty’ object’s Parent field [underneath the Sprite and Solid information] to point to the object that does something and run the game again. Notice how this time both objects behave the same, and the empty one still has no code in it!

You have just witnessed inheritance. In Game Maker an object will perform the events and actions that its Parent object has code for. But that’s not all that we can do with Parenting, it’s an extremely useful method once you come to grips with it.

### Object Hierarchies

**A**S YOU’VE SEEN, AN object will perform events that are specified on its Parent, but this only happens when the Child object doesn’t have code in that event itself. For instance, when an object sets its speed in its creation event and its Parent sets the speed at creation in another direction, the Child object will only perform the code in its create event and not move the same way as its Parent. Try it with our example above and see what happens. To get around this there’s a ‘Perform Inherited Event’ action which will force the Child object to perform the actions that are specified by the same event on its Parent object.

This can lead to some interesting and efficient systems if you apply it in your games. For instance, if you want to have five or six enemies that all behave the same way and only

look slightly different, it’s possible to create a base Enemy object with all the behaviours that you want enemies to have and then simply create a lot of ‘empty’ objects with different sprites and set your Enemy object as their parent.

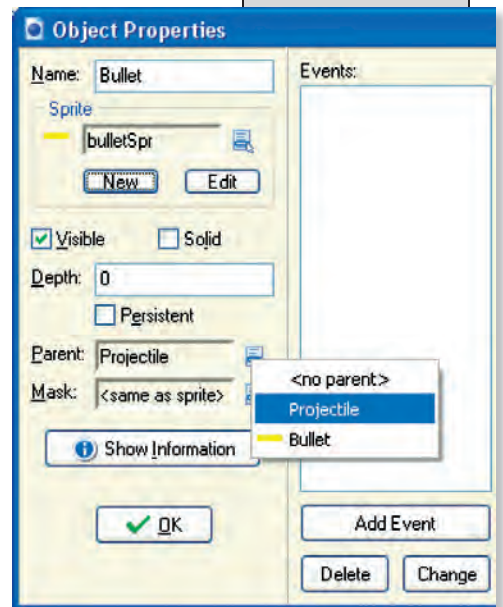
It is also possible to have different but similar behaviours inherited in this way. Imagine that you want to have a lot of different types of cars available for your player to drive, all with different accelerations, top speeds and handling characteristics. Instead of laboriously coding each car, it is possible to build a basic Car object which handles all the calculations that change the car’s current speed, turning angle and position, using the attributes you’d like to customise as variables. The trick is to set those variables in each Child car’s Creation event to give them different characteristics and rely on the Parent car’s Step event code to move the car properly.

Inheritance is a useful part of Parenting that can save you a lot of time and effort in your games, but there’s another, arguably more important side to using Parent objects that can have even more impact: Polymorphism.

### Polymorphism

**T**HIS INTERESTING-SOUNDING WORD REFERS to how it’s possible in object-orientated languages to refer to a Child as though it was the same as a Parent object. Confusing as that may initially sound, there’s a lot that this unlocks for us. Consider the case where you have many different types of enemies that can be hit by many different types of bullets. Without Parenting, you’d have to have collision events with each type of bullet on every enemy. Using inheritance it’s possible to have a base Enemy which does all the collisions with each type of bullet and the other enemies all inherit that behaviour. Unfortunately you’d still have to code the collisions with every type of bullet.

However, let’s create a base object that all the bullets inherit from - call it Projectile for the sake of argument. Now it’s possible for our Enemy object to have only one collision event for collisions with Projectile and, because of polymorphism, every single Child of Projectile will trigger



The objects that are inherited from are called Parent objects and objects that do the inheriting are called Child objects.

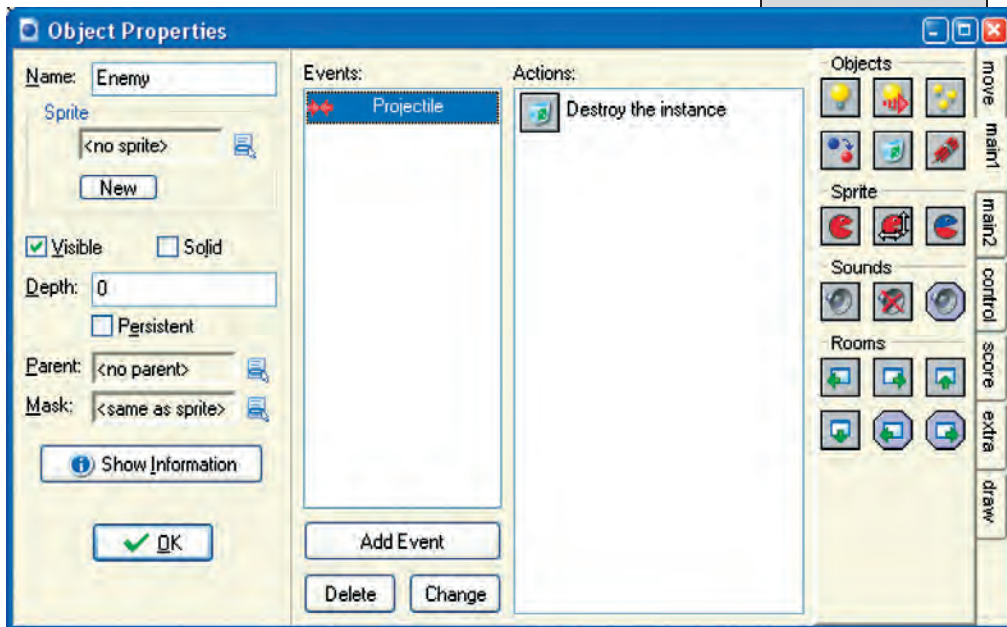
that collision! We've just gone from many events on many objects to many events on one object, to finally one event on one object. Talk about timesaving.

Of course it's possible to use good object-orientated programming techniques here to make each child of Projectile have a variable on it with the amount of damage it deals, and then subtract that damage during the single collision event with Projectile. You can do a huge amount of different things with general code that uses variables with different values per Child object.

This effect isn't just available with collision events though, it can be used in every event, action or function call that asks for an object type. That means it's possible to: (1) find the nearest Child of a Parent object; (2) use a with clause on an entire object hierarchy; (3) test to see if a specific object is part of a hierarchy; (4) keep track of total numbers of related objects for score or gameplay reasons and many other useful things too, all with as little actual code as possible.

### Things to look out for

WHILE IT IS POSSIBLE to create strings of Parent-Child relationships so that Projectile is the Parent of Missile which is the Parent of Homing Missile, Game Maker will not let you create loops in this way, so Homing Missile can't be the Parent of Projectile. It is also possible that sometimes inherited events may need to be triggered using the **'Perform Inherited Event'** action instead of relying on the normal inheritance system if the chain of Parents gets too long. Polymorphism works no matter how long the chain of inheritance is though, so feel free to create as many 'stub'



Parent objects as you need to make your life simpler.

In closing, Parenting gives you access to the powerful tools of inheritance and polymorphism, tools which can make your games much easier to build. It does take a certain type of thinking to solve game problems in an object-orientated way, but with practise this becomes easier and easier. It's also a great head start in the principles of OO programming.

### Game.Dev meets

IN DECEMBER LAST YEAR there was a spate of Game.Dev casual meetings for interested developers to swap ideas and spend some time talking about game development.

Meetings were held in Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town over the holiday period. The feedback has been very positive and more are scheduled for later in the year. If you're new to game development or an experienced developer looking to do some ranting with like-minded gamers, head on over to the Game.Dev forum on the NAG Website [[www.nag.co.za](http://www.nag.co.za)] to find out when and where the next meeting is taking place. **NAG**

### DESTROYING AN OBJECT FROM OUTSIDE

IT IS OFTEN NECESSARY in a game for one object to destroy another, particularly when they collide or interact in other ways. In a collision event this is easy: Simply use the **'Destroy the instance'** action and make it apply to the special object 'other', which in a collision event points to the object to collide with.

In non-collision events, this gets a little trickier as we don't have the 'other' object set to the right instance, so we can't change what the **'Destroy the instance'** action applies to... There is hope though: All you need to do is create

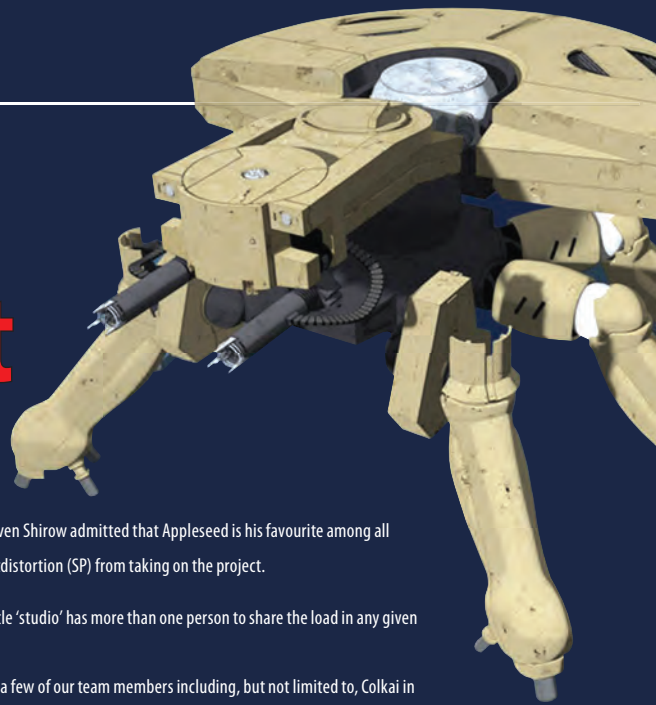
an **'Execute a piece of code'** action and plug in this code:

```
with (deadObject) instance_destroy();
```

Assuming that 'deadObject' is a variable that points to the object you want to destroy (which can be obtained from an `instance_position()` or similar function call), it will work perfectly.

# The Shirow Project

## Taking on the Appleaseed Universe



**O**F ALL MASAMUNE SHIROW'S work, the Appleaseed universe is one of the most amazingly detailed worlds ever created. Even Shirow admitted that Appleaseed is his favourite among all his manga. Just thinking about recreating the Appleaseed universe in 3D would be a daunting task, but it didn't stop softdistortion (SP) from taking on the project.

### What is the Shirow Project?

**SP:** That's a good question, especially since most people who see and hear about us don't seem to understand the project, or the story. I decided on using Appleaseed since I loved the art in my first Shirow art book, Appleaseed Book 3. I started by posting some Appleaseed panels in the CGTalk.com collaborative forum and just started modelling the panel elements in Lightwave 3D, while I also kept inviting other people to join. Eventually Shirowproject started to attract some help. It just kept growing from there. But that is basically how we ended up doing Shirow themed works.

Since we had people come and go and some not finish models etc., it seemed best to not write a story and then have to count on finding enough willing people to build the models required. So I decided to post a variety of reference drawings from Appleaseed and then write the story around whatever elements people actually got done in 3D. So the story developed as the models came in. This non-traditional work method has caused a fair bit of debate, especially when new members join and wonder what is going on. But I think it is part of what has helped us stay alive as a team for over two years.

We are not just about eye candy though. It's true we like our work to look great, but we have always tried to keep a down to earth attitude that has allowed people with little skill to grow and flourish. So I think the "I used to be a laugh and I was encouraged and commended, so I stuck to it" aspect of our work is very important.

### How many members are currently working on the project?

**SP:** We've had people come and go but our 'core' seems to stick at around four or five people. Who is 'in the studio' depends very much on our own day jobs and time constraints as we do this in what spare time life affords us. We try as much as possible to share our skills and keep each other

up to speed, so our little 'studio' has more than one person to share the load in any given situation if possible.

I'd like to mention a few of our team members including, but not limited to, Colkai in the UK, Aurora in the USA, Sllink in USA, Donshole in Africa, Dogma in the Netherlands, Jaques in Poland, Ace and the rest. These are the people who have made the whole thing possible and kept it alive.

### How long did it take you to finish the first 'Teaser Trailer'?

**SP:** Ah the 'Teaser clip'... oh that was fun. A huge amount of work went into it and we unfortunately got pretty minimal public response. I think it looks really cool. Although it's not cell-shaded it is a nice reproduction of some of Appleaseed's copbots in the cargo hold of the drop ship from Book 3.

Anyways, as for how long it took, once we made it a goal, it only took a couple months as I recall, but in reality we actually had another short clip of a copbot jumping out of the flying drop ship done much earlier, near the beginning of the project.

### Are you just using the Appleaseed 1-4 books as references or do you have other sources?

**SP:** We've branched out and are now using Ghost in the Shell and Stand Alone Complex for character motion references on the Tachikomas. My favourite is still Appleaseed though, and I think anyone who has the books will agree that neither of the movies based on that series did it justice. Shirow's original work is the source, and the rest are just copies really. One of the only things I like almost as much are the game cinematics that were done for the old PlayStation GITS game, which is also a great game by the way, even if the gameplay graphics are low resolution by today's standards.





by A.J. Kock

**Which part are you currently working on?**

**SP:** We're working on a cell-shaded clip that is more in the GITS universe and features Fuchikomasa modelled by Jaques along with the big R3000 he modelled. That's the huge tank that was in the GITS movie ending with Major Kusanagi trying to pull open the access door. Even with all the GITS characters, there are still elements from the Appleseed books in there. For instance, Dogma created an awesome and faithful reproduction of Appleseed's 'Ghost Dubbing' unit.

The clip should be amazing when it is done and we are well along and have some excellent model assets already in the cell-shading stage.

**Various people use different software packages to create models. How do you manage the compatibility issues?**

**SP:** We decided on one file format for models and also for animations and stuck with that. It's not perfect but it works and it's really the only way around that issue without spending more money on conversion software.

**On your Website you state that your core team are all in their 30s and 40s. What are your various occupations outside of this project?**

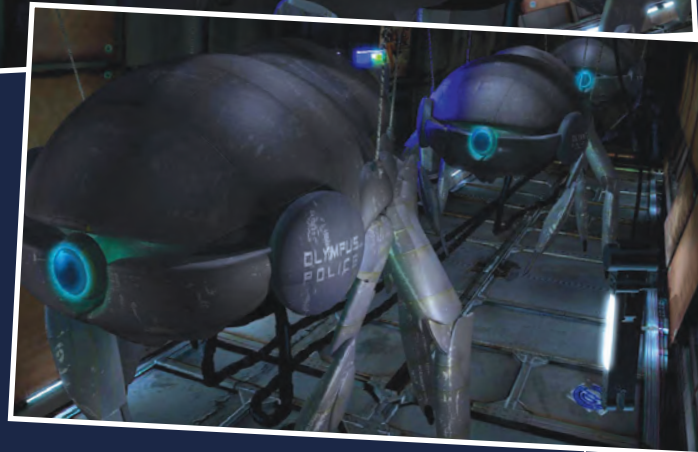
**SP:** Someone has actually been reading our bios? Cool! Well, I guess that info needs updating because we now have a wider age range from teens to 40s. We also have a global range: US, Europe, Asia, and Africa. There are also female members on the team now. Our professions are also all over the board, but some of us do work in the industry or around its edges.

**How did you get into 3D designing?**

**SP:** I studied design and art, but ended up in the music industry instead. I was continually drawn to visual art combined with music, and after some of my clients saw my work in Photoshop [back then it was hard to find cheap Photoshop talent], I started doing album cover art as an offshoot to the audio production/engineering I was involved in. Eventually I bought a copy of RayDream Designer3D and was introduced to the 3D process.

**Is your end-goal to recreate the Appleseed stories or are you just creating the Appleseed universe so that you can create your own stories?**

**SP:** For now we are content with doing still images and short clips. My ultimate dream goal would be to someday have a full-blown, interactive walkthrough of the Shirow universe. We've had some contact with a few mod teams and maybe someday we'll find one that is able to help us port our models into a game engine like Half-Life 2. The user would then be able to make their own movie as they walk through the environments and interact with the characters and vehicles.



From another perspective, Sllink says he hopes "... that some day we will be able to do both and in multiple universes. Meaning once our concept artist creates or those we'd like to share and tell a story about someday."

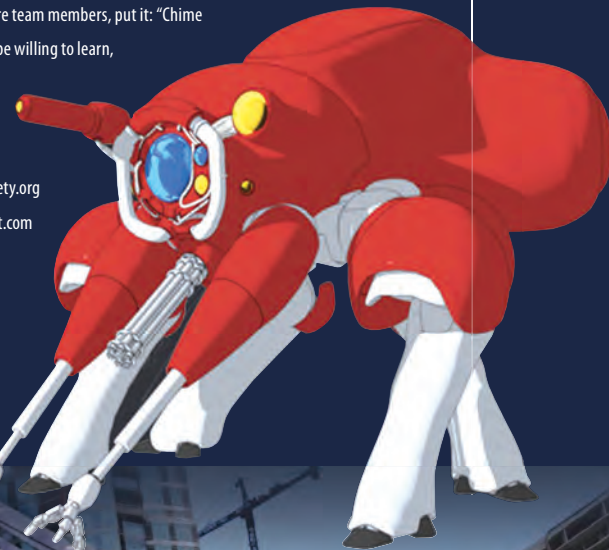
**What should people do if they would like to contribute to your project?**

**SP:** Basically just come to the forum and start posting some work. All the info and links you need are found there.

Like Sllink, one of our core team members, put it: "Chime in, provide capabilities and be willing to learn, give/make time and keep and open mind."

Forum: <http://forums.cgsociety.org>

Website: [www.shirowproject.com](http://www.shirowproject.com)





**Rammstein:  
Rosenrot**

**T**HE FIFTH ALBUM FROM Rammstein, 'Rosenrot', was released on Monday 31 October 2005, which incidentally was also Halloween. Rammstein coincidentally have a sense of evil-Halloween rage in their music, most people could relate to. Luckily, for this review, the reviewer understands German [quite important considering a lot of Rosenrot is in German - ein deutsches Wörterbuch, bitte]. Lyrics are after all an important factor in music, but most fans buy Rammstein's albums because they are unconventional and their music rocks.

'Rosenrot' 'grows' on you the more you listen to the album. Rosenrot [which, for those not in the know, means rose red] kicks off with the splendid 'Benzin', which sets an awesome pace and, to use a cliché, sets the scene for the rest of the album. The pace slows down after 'Benzin' and the tracks following it are more like those on 'Mutter', more laid back. Fans of Rammstein might complain at this point, expecting more of the heavy fast-paced stuff like 'Sensucht'. But, Rammstein's been slowly fine-tuning their music style since 'Mutter' and 'Reise, Reise', and 'Rosenrot' is a continuation of that fine-tuning.

On 'Rosenrot', Rammstein emphasise the point that they are true musicians and that they can be emotional, theatrical and immense, all at the same time. Their music speaks for itself.

'Rosenrot' gets two thumbs up from NAG and deservedly so. Achtung baby!

**Seether:  
Karma and Effect**

**H**AILING FROM SOUTH AFRICA, Seether was discovered by Wind Up Records and instantly pushed to great heights by the label because of Seether's music style - heavy metal associated with the post-grunge era of alternative music, complete with self-obsessed lyrics and a brooding, crunchy distorted sound [quite a mouthful].

Seether follows in the tough sensitive tradition of Staind, Nickelback and other grunge power ballad bands. 'Karma and Effect', Seether's second album, has finally arrived, after being put off quite long ['Disclaimer' was the group's first album].

After their success with 'Disclaimer' one would've thought that they'd take a different, softer approach, as most grunge bands do. But not Seether, they still seethe. 'Karma and Effect' is pure aggression and successfully infectious. 'Karma and Effect' has its softer, catchy side, like the radio friendly 'Remedy' and 'I'm The One', but the rest of the album and especially songs like 'Because Of Me' and 'Burrito' will fry your amp and speakers.

Other excellent songs sure to become classics are 'The Gift', 'Never Leave' and 'Tongue', to name a few. Those who listen with a trained ear [aka diligent listeners] will find a studio jam added as a bonus cut that shows a bit more depth to Seether. Oh, and the band uses Afrikaans to sing in some songs [local is lekker!].

'Karma and Effect' doesn't widen the scope of post grunge, but stands up well as a standard-bearer for modern hard rock. Fans of the band would be hard pressed to find something on 'Karma and Effect' they don't like, while all thirteen tracks on the album have the potential to be hits [according to those in the know]. Now that's hard to beat. Another two thumbs up here please!.

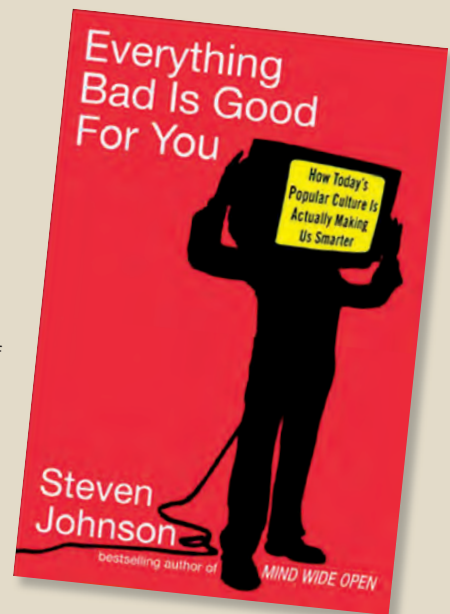
book

**Everything Bad is Good for you**

Steven Johnson

**T**HE BY-LINE FOR THIS book is "How popular Culture is making us Smarter". It's easy to accept the maxim that we are getting dumber. But are we? Johnson challenges the perception that modern television, movies and games are making us dumber. In fact, he found that the average IQ in First World countries is rising at a steady pace and he draws up a well-reasoned and substantiated argument that popular culture is at the route of this. Then he spends a large part of the book discussing how games, movies and television shows [like Lost and 24] are a lot more involved and complicated than we've ever experienced before. Finally he focuses the last part of the book on backing these assertions, demonstrating how culture has changed how we think, and how we're better-off for it.

This book is daring. It challenges conventional wisdom and does so very effectively. Johnson doesn't advocate that we should only watch television or play games, but he shows that these activities, performed in moderation, are actually good for us and enriches us intellectually. Hard to believe? Then you should really read this book.



## internet

### World of Warcraft movies

[www.warcraftmovies.com](http://www.warcraftmovies.com)

**B**LIZZARD'S ONLINE GAME HAS inspired tons of online movies, mainly involving online gamers doing stupid things. But there are also movies showing off parts of the game, demonstrating how to do things in WOW and even funny stories and shows that will keep fans entertained for hours.

### Samorost 2

[www.samorost2.com](http://www.samorost2.com)

**S**OME GAMES DEFY DEFINITION. Samorost 2 is a basic adventure/puzzle game, but its look and feel, not to mention puzzles, are quite unique. It's a commercial title, but the developers ported the entire first chapter into Flash for anyone to play online. Your character travels to another planet after his dog gets taken by aliens. But the entire visual style and approach is fresh, owing a lot to the cut-out animation style of Terry Gilliam. Just be warned: you might buy the game after playing this. We did.

### MP3 Tunes

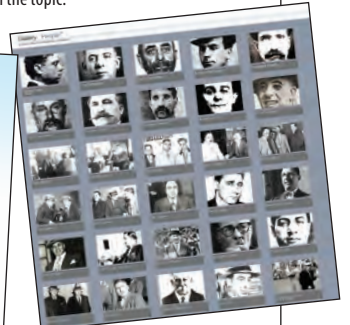
[www.mp3tunes.com](http://www.mp3tunes.com)

**F**ORGET DOWNLOADING THEM, STREAMING MP3s is the next big thing. You can even store and stream your collection from your Gmail account if you use Gookbox. But for a secure, more legal and flexible service, MP3 tunes is great for anyone who travels a lot, has regular Internet access and constantly wishes they had music with them that sits on the PC at home. Open an account, upload music and listen to it in streaming audio. Obviously this is a high bandwidth service, so South Africans probably won't have much use for it. But it is out there.

### Gangrule

[www.gangrule.com](http://www.gangrule.com)

**N**EXT TIME YOU HAVE an argument with someone over organised crime in the US, visit this site. It's a comprehensive database on the criminal families in the States, such as the Black Hand and the Morello gang. Browse through photos, histories and biographies. Crime figures and events are all detailed, making this an invaluable source on the topic.



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## Books of Doom

Marvel | R23.95

**E**VERYONE WHO HAS READ comics knows Dr. Doom, the evil man behind the suit of steel, with the intelligence to create scientific marvels used to hurt, rather than help his fellow man. In the Books of Doom we see behind the mask and learn, for the first time, why the gypsy boy known as Viktor von Doom grew up to be a monster with such a hatred of mankind.

This story is like Wuthering Heights without the love and tender bits - just violence and hatred. It will explain though how anyone of us could have wound up thinking and doing the same thing. We all have bad times in our lives, but sometimes we need to see them in context of how other people's lives can be so much worse. That and it's interesting reading for fans of the Marvel Universe.



## Land of the Dead

IDW | R36.95

**I**N HIS MOVIES 'Dawn of the Dead' and 'Day of the Dead', George Romero gave us insight into the lives of small groups of people fighting against family and friends who, thanks to errors of science, have become the living dead, intent on eating the brains of those who survived. In Land of the Dead, Romero has taken his story to a grander scale, looking not just at a local situation, but rather at a planetary whole.

How much better off are national armies when they come up against the Zombies? And what happens when those armies become brain eating fiends? This miniseries is based on the screenplay and presided over by Mr. Romero himself, ensuring that you get the most bang for your buck.



## Reload

Heavy Metal | R297.95

**F**OR NEARLY 30 YEARS, Heavy Metal magazine has been a favourite of readers who wanted to see what is on the cutting edge of British fantasy storytelling and artwork. One of the constants and firm favourites of these readers are the Gallery sections, which have been archived in another collection to celebrate a new generation of artists. Each gallery is accompanied by a biography of the artist as well as news on where their more recent work can be found.

For any would-be artists, this will give you something to challenge yourself against. For those who just appreciate a good picture, you will find more than you could ever want in this book. Please note that Reload is for mature audiences.



## Ray

ADV Manga | R81.95

**R**AY GREW UP AS a young girl in an institution. A place that bred young girls for the purpose of harvesting their internal organs for transplant into people whose bodies were failing, and had the money to do what needed to be done. The organisation never expected Ray to escape, especially with her enhanced eyes and her vast intelligence. Now she has become a doctor, performing operations that normal doctors can't, which leads to some bizarre medical cases.

While Ray is saving lives she is also trying to find records of the people from who she escaped. But this is complicated, as someone within the organisation keeps sending her gifts and calls - someone who is helping her, but seemingly only with the intention of watching her fail.

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## THE FRENCH DEMOCRACY

IN THE WORLD OF Machinima you can already find the weird and the wonderful alongside the clichéd and rubbish. There are many clones and many fans have jumped onto the Halo bandwagon to create their own shows inspired by 'Red vs. Blue' and 'That Spartan Life'. Others have pushed the technical excellence of the genre far and wide, sometimes creating movies that leave you guessing about the game used – or if a game was used at all.

But to start NAG's new Machinima section, it is perhaps better to look at something that breaks a lot of the conventions. The French Democracy wasn't created with modding tools or as a third-party project. Its creator, Koulamata, used Lionhead's *The Movies* to create the story, in which he discusses the events behind the French riots in 2005. When two teenagers died while hiding from police, events exploded into twenty days of rioting during which nearly nine thousand vehicles were destroyed, 126 police officers were injured and 2,888 people were arrested. While the French government explained the unrest as thankless and unlawful immigrant youths running amok, this Machinima tells the story from the other side.

It looks at a France which is discriminatory towards immigrants and xenophobic at large. The characters in the movie suffer from unfair treatment, enough so that when the straw that breaks the camel's back falls, it causes events that let the French government call for curfews and instate a three month state of emergency.

In terms of presentation, this is one of the best pieces to arrive out of *The Movies* since its release. The camera work and soundtrack might seem patchy, but considering the

game's limitations, this took a lot of work and definitely involved a bit of planning. It sets a good benchmark for aspirant Machinima artists, and shows that you don't need technical skill to create your own movie, just the right tools.

Was this an over-reaction? The French Democracy doesn't dig too deep into the details, but the work is a creative representation of what happened. This makes the Machinima pretty unique in its stable as other Machinima producers don't dabble with political themes. You could dissect it and find many flaws, but being groundbreaking for taking on a serious topic and at the same time creating a fine example of what can be achieved in *The Movies*, *The French Democracy* is a Machinima classic, even if you haven't heard of it yet. **NAG**

*Find the movie on the Cover DVD this month*



### Machinima?

Machinima is the art of creating movies out of game engines. This can be achieved in several ways. The most common is to record footage inside a game, with players acting with their models in various roles, and then edit the footage into a movie. Some studios use the modding tools of games to create new characters and environments, while others go even further and change the game world completely. There have also been projects that combine real world elements and game footage.

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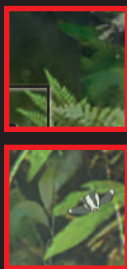
# GAME OVER



NAG is not available in large format print, brail or on audio tape.

## BADGER HUNT

WE ENDED UP WITH two badgers hiding in the January issue [both on the cover]. One in the original hiding place which we thought was too difficult to find – and then forgot to remove – and the other in an easier to find spot [see below]. Now, go find him in this month's issue. We'll announce a random winner and that person will get a cool prize sponsored by our new best friends [see above]. Send your badger spotting to this address [ed@nag.co.za] with the subject line [February Badger].



January winner: Liani Germishuyse

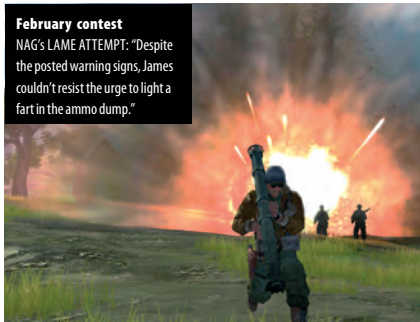
## CAPTION OF THE MONTH

EVERY MONTH we'll choose a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better [funny] caption. The winner will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to [ed@nag.co.za] with the subject [February Caption].

**RULES:** (1) If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. (2) If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things.

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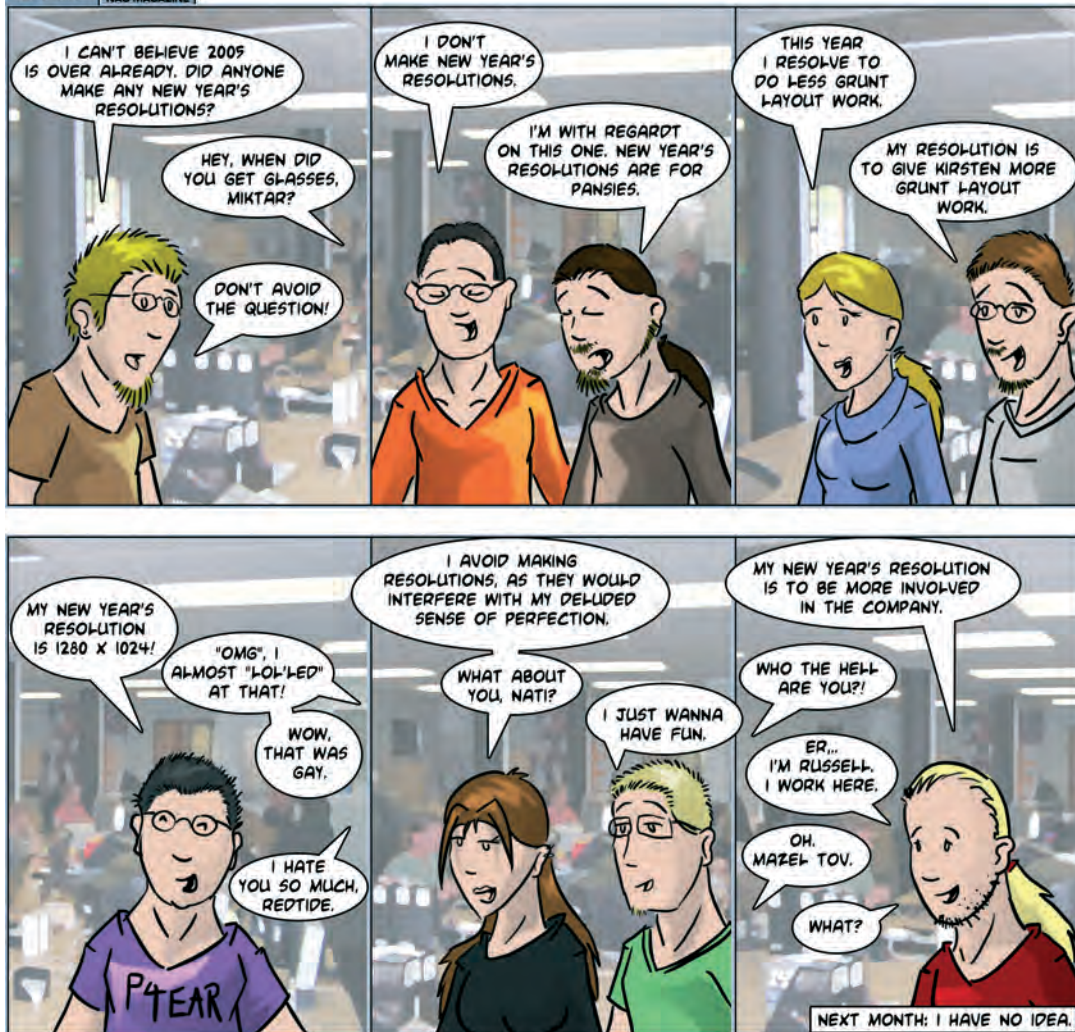
**February contest**  
NAG's LAME ATTEMPT: "Despite the posted warning signs, James couldn't resist the urge to light a fart in the ammo dump."



**January Winner**

"And that's how the Grinch stole Christmas" – Klavs Vaivars

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**publisher**  
tide media cc

**editor**  
michael james  
ed@nag.co.za  
+27 83 409 8220

**assistant editor**  
lauren das neves  
lauren@nag.co.za

**features editor**  
james francis  
james@nag.co.za

**hardware editor**  
russell bennett  
russell@nag.co.za

**senior technical writer**  
regardt van der berg  
regardt@nag.co.za

**staff writer**  
miktar dracon

**copy editor**  
nati de jager

**contributors**  
adam liebman  
alex jelagin  
anton lines  
danny day  
derek dela fuente  
grant charlton  
michael black  
pierre van dyk  
ryan kalis  
toby hudon  
victor moore

**sales and marketing big knob**  
len nery | len@nag.co.za  
+27 84 594 9909

**advertising sales**  
jacqui jacobs | jacqui@nag.co.za  
+27 82 778 8439  
dave gore | dave@nag.co.za  
+27 82 829 1392

**art director**  
chris bistline

**designer**  
kirsten alcock

**assistant to editor**  
cheryl bassett

**office assistant**  
paul ndebele

**nag magazine**  
p o box 237  
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south africa  
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